

Enforcing the Ukraine 'Group Think'

Exclusive: U.S.-taxpayer-funded Radio Liberty has a checkered history that includes hiring Nazi sympathizers as Cold War commentators. Now, one of its current writers has used the platform to bash an American scholar who won't join Official Washington's "group think" on Ukraine, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

It may be fitting that the U.S.-funded Radio Liberty would be the latest media outlet to join in the bashing of an American academic who dares to disagree with U.S. policies on Ukraine, which have included supporting a 2014 coup that ousted the elected president and installing a new regime in which neo-Nazis play a prominent role. After all, Radio Liberty has a history of cuddling up to Nazis.

On May 6, a Radio Liberty pundit named Carl Schreck joined the Official Washington herd in demeaning Russian scholar Stephen Cohen as "a Putin apologist" who, Schreck said, was once "widely seen as one of the preeminent scholars in the generation of Sovietologists who rose to prominence in the 1970s, [but] Cohen these days is routinely derided as Putin's 'toady' and 'useful idiot.'"

While hurling insults, Schreck did little to evaluate the merits of Cohen's arguments, beyond consulting with neoconservatives and anti-Moscow activists. Cohen's daring to dissent from Official Washington's conventional wisdom was treated as proof of his erroneous ways.

In that sense, Schreck's reliance on vitriol rather than reason was typical of the "group think" prevalent across the U.S. mainstream media. But Radio Liberty does have a special history regarding Ukraine, including the use of Nazi sympathizers during the ramping up of the Cold War propaganda by Ronald Reagan's administration in the 1980s.

In early 2014, when I was reviewing files at the Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, California, I stumbled onto an internal controversy over Radio Liberty's broadcasts of commentaries into Ukraine from right-wing exiles. Some of those commentaries praised Ukrainian nationalists who sided with the Nazis in World War II as the SS pursued its "final solution" against European Jews, including the infamous Babi Yar massacre in a ravine outside Kiev.

These RL propaganda broadcasts provoked outrage from some Jewish organizations, such as B'nai B'rith, and individuals including conservative academic Richard Pipes, prompting an internal review. According to a memo dated May 4, 1984, and written by James Critchlow, a research officer at the Board of International

Broadcasting, which managed Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, one RL broadcast in particular was viewed as “defending Ukrainians who fought in the ranks of the SS.”

Critchlow wrote, “An RL Ukrainian broadcast of Feb. 12, 1984 contains references to the Nazi-oriented Ukrainian-manned SS ‘Galicia’ Division of World War II which may have damaged RL’s reputation with Soviet listeners. The memoirs of a German diplomat are quoted in a way that seems to constitute endorsement by RL of praise for Ukrainian volunteers in the SS division, which during its existence fought side by side with the Germans against the Red Army.”

Harvard Professor Pipes, who was an adviser to the Reagan administration, also inveighed against the RL broadcasts, writing on Dec. 3, 1984 “the Russian and Ukrainian services of RL have been transmitting this year blatantly anti-Semitic material to the Soviet Union which may cause the whole enterprise irreparable harm.”

Though the Reagan administration publicly defended RL against criticism, privately some senior officials agreed with the critics, according to the documents. For instance, in a Jan. 4, 1985, memo, Walter Raymond Jr., a top official on the National Security Council, told his boss, National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, that “I would believe much of what Dick [Pipes] says is right.”

That three-decade-old dispute over U.S.-sponsored radio broadcasts underscored the troubling political reality of Ukraine, which straddles a dividing line between people with cultural ties oriented toward the West and those with a cultural heritage more attuned to Russia. Since the Feb. 22, 2014 coup that ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, some of the old Nazi sympathies have resurfaced.

For instance, on May 2, 2014, when right-wing hooligans chased ethnic Russian protesters into the Trade Union Building in Odessa and then set it on fire killing scores of people inside, the burnt-out building was then defaced with pro-Nazi graffiti hailing “the Galician SS” spray-painted onto the charred walls.

Later, some of Ukraine’s right-wing “volunteer” battalions sent to eastern Ukraine to crush the ethnic Russian resistance sported neo-Nazi and Nazi emblems, including Swastikas and SS markings on their helmets. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Seeing No Neo-Nazi Militias in Ukraine.”](#)]

Targeting Cohen

But anyone who detects this reality can expect to confront insults from the

mainstream U.S. media and U.S. government propagandists. Professor Cohen, 76, has borne the brunt of these ad hominem attacks.

One of the ugliest episodes came when the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies joined the bash-Cohen mob. The academic group spurned a fellowship program, which it had solicited from Cohen's wife, The Nation's editor Katrina vanden Heuvel, because the program's title included Cohen's name.

"It's no secret that there were swirling controversies surrounding Professor Cohen," Stephen Hanson, the group's president, told the New York Times.

In a protest letter to the group, Cohen called this action "a political decision that creates serious doubts about the organization's commitment to First Amendment rights and academic freedom." He also noted that young scholars in the field have expressed fear for their professional futures if they break from the herd. Cohen mentioned the story of one young woman scholar who dropped off a panel to avoid risking her career in case she said something that could be deemed sympathetic to Russia.

Cohen noted, too, that even established foreign policy figures, ex-National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, have been accused in the Washington Post of "advocating that the West appease Russia," with the notion of "appeasement" meant "to be disqualifying, chilling, censorious." (Kissinger had objected to the comparison of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Adolf Hitler as unfounded.)

So, as the United States rushes into a new Cold War with Russia, we are seeing the makings of a new McCarthyism, challenging the patriotism of anyone who doesn't get in line. But this conformity presents a serious threat to U.S. national security and even the future of the planet. We saw a similar pattern with the rush to war in Iraq, but a military clash with nuclear-armed Russia is a crisis of a much greater magnitude.

One of Professor Cohen's key points has been that Official Washington's "group think" about post-Soviet Russia has been misguided from the start, laying the groundwork for today's confrontation. In Cohen's view, to understand why Russians are so alarmed by U.S. and NATO meddling in Ukraine, you have to go back to those days after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Instead of working with the Russians to transition carefully from a communist system to a pluralistic, capitalist one, the U.S. prescription was "shock therapy."

As American "free market" experts descended on Moscow during the pliant regime of Boris Yeltsin, well-connected Russian thieves and their U.S. compatriots plundered the country's wealth, creating a handful of billionaire

“oligarchs” and leaving millions upon millions of Russians in a state of near starvation, with a collapse in life expectancy rarely seen in a country not at war.

Yet, despite the desperation of the masses, American journalists and pundits hailed the “democratic reform” underway in Russia with glowing accounts of how glittering life could be in the shiny new hotels, restaurants and bars of Moscow. Complaints about the suffering of average Russians were dismissed as the grumblings of losers who failed to appreciate the economic wonders that lay ahead.

As recounted in his 2001 book, *Failed Crusade*, Cohen correctly describes this fantastical reporting as journalistic “malpractice” that left the American people misinformed about the on-the-ground reality in Russia. The widespread suffering led Putin, who succeeded Yeltsin, to pull back on the wholesale privatization, to punish some oligarchs and to restore some of the social safety net.

Though the U.S. mainstream media portrays Putin as essentially a tyrant, his elections and approval numbers indicate that he commands broad popular support, in part, because he stood up to some oligarchs (though he still worked with others). Yet, Official Washington continues to portray oligarchs whom Putin jailed as innocent victims of a tyrant’s revenge.

After Putin pardoned jailed oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the neocon Freedom House sponsored a Washington dinner in Khordorkovsky’s honor, hailing him as one of Russia’s political heroes. “I have to say I’m impressed by him,” declared Freedom House President David Kramer. “But he’s still figuring out how he can make a difference.”

New York Times writer Peter Baker fairly swooned at Khodorkovsky’s presence. “If anything, he seemed stronger and deeper than before” prison, Baker wrote. “The notion of prison as cleansing the soul and ennobling the spirit is a powerful motif in Russian literature.”

Yet, even Khodorkovsky, who is now in his early 50s, acknowledged that he “grew up in Russia’s emerging Wild West capitalism to take advantage of what he now says was a corrupt privatization system,” Baker reported. In other words, Khodorkovsky was admitting that he obtained his vast wealth through a corrupt process, though by referring to it as the “Wild West” Baker made the adventure seem quite dashing and even admirable when, in reality, Khodorkovsky was a key figure in the plunder of Russia that impoverished millions of his countrymen and sent many to early graves.

In the 1990s, Professor Cohen was one of the few scholars with the courage to challenge the prevailing boosterism for Russia's "shock therapy." He noted even then the danger of mistaken "conventional wisdom" and how it strangles original thought and necessary skepticism.

"Much as Russia scholars prefer consensus, even orthodoxy, to dissent, most journalists, one of them tells us, are 'devoted to group-think' and 'see the world through a set of standard templates,'" wrote Cohen. "For them to break with 'standard templates' requires not only introspection but retrospection, which also is not a characteristic of either profession."

Nor is it characteristic of U.S.-taxpayer-funded Radio Liberty, which has gone from promoting the views of Nazi sympathizers in the 1980s to pushing the propaganda of a new Ukrainian government that cozies up to modern-day neo-Nazis.

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](#).

The Reasons for Urban Rioting

Urban rioting has a long history in the United States, often with one ethnic group turning on another. But modern history is more about oppressed racial communities lashing out at police brutality and government injustice, a phenomenon that requires a new national effort to resolve, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

If one goes to Wikipedia under [the subject](#) of "mass racial violence in the United States," one will find a "timeline of events" running from 1829 to 2015. There are so many race-related riots listed for these 186 years that, from a historical point of view, rioting appears almost normal.

Prior to World War II, these outbreaks mostly involved ethnic, racial or religious groups going after each other: Germans, Italians, Poles, Jews, Hispanics, African-Americans, Chinese, Catholics, Protestants were all involved in these set-tos. Often the causes were economic with a territorial overtone –

one group moving into the neighborhood of another group and/or taking their jobs. When the violence came, it was group against group.

In the post-World War II era, the nature of the still numerous instances of rioting changed. The group-versus-group scenario gave way to group-versus-state. Most of the categories listed above had successfully assimilated under the heading "Caucasian," and religious affiliations no longer seemed worth bloody murder. The arrival of new immigrants could/can still instill anger in citizens who mistake foreigners for the cause of problems they themselves have caused, but the result of late has rarely been rioting.

Actually, in the present era, the cause of rioting has mostly been black resentment over prevailing inequality: why the distribution of wealth seems never to work to satisfy the needs of African-American poor. Thus, all too many African-Americans, particularly men, have little opportunity for a decent life, while simultaneously having every opportunity to end up in confrontations with the police and then land in prison.

It is these ubiquitous confrontations with agents of the state that are now the standard trigger to the phenomenon of modern American rioting.

Inadequacies of the Civil Rights Acts

The ongoing phenomenon of urban riots involving African-Americans suggests that the civil rights acts that followed the widespread unrest of the mid-1960s have proved inadequate. In part this is so because their enforcement, such as it has been, was restricted to the public realm. That is, the effort to do away with discrimination went no further than preventing such acts within institutions serving the public: public schools and housing, restaurants, hotels, theaters and the like.

There were other aspects to the civil rights acts – grants to minority businesses, for instance – but they all just scratched the surface. As a result, the number of African-Americans made upwardly mobile by this legislation was less than optimal. A black middle class did emerge, but it was small relative to the numbers who needed help.

To say that the civil rights acts proved inadequate in the fight against nationwide discrimination is to say that they proved unable to reorient America's discriminatory cultural mindset. That mindset was the product of, among other things, nearly 300 years of institutional racism.

To change things was going to take the consistent reinforcement of the idea of

racial equality over at least three or four generations. This would have to be done mainly through the educational system, yet no specific efforts were made to this end. Indeed, even attempting to integrate the public school systems could provoke their own riots, as the "Boston busing crisis" of 1974 proved.

Another sign of this problematic cultural mindset is that, as far as I know, there is nowhere in the U.S. where one can find serious empathy for the fate of the inner cities amongst the vast, mostly white, population of the suburbs.

For instance, in the wake of the recent riots in Baltimore, the mayor of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter, commented, "local government cannot itself fix problems of violence and unemployment."

This is absolutely true, but Nutter has looked in vain for any meaningful help from a state legislature controlled by a hinterland of conservative whites who may not feel they belong to the same species, much less the same broader community, as those in the inner cities. The suggestion that they should send their tax money to help the residents of Philadelphia appears to be beyond their understanding. I doubt very much if it is different elsewhere in the country.

The Police

The police, of course, cannot stand outside the general discriminatory orientation of the culture. So the limited impact of the civil rights acts meant that the police were not reeducated to the new standards of public behavior now sanctioned by law.

To do so would have required more than simply increasing the number of black officers to at least match the racial demographics of American cities. It would have required extensive retraining and testing of those who sought to be part of law enforcement.

There is an entire industry out there to train and test people to safely drive cars. I know of nothing beyond piecemeal efforts to train police to act in an equitable and lawful manner toward all the different sorts of people they come into contact with (plus to handle other problems that seem to affect the police as a group, such as stress and anger management).

Nor are standardized ways of testing candidates applied so as to make sure that only the trustworthy in this regard are on the street. Because we do not do this, we risk having police who themselves may act in a criminal manner toward economically disadvantaged classes, thus expressing discrimination in a way that is violent enough to trigger mass unrest.

Indeed, as of now the preferred personality type for the position of police

officer seems to be the same as that for professional soldier, which may be why it has been so easy to “militarize” American police forces. This effort, along with the “home security” business, has become a multibillion-dollar industry (major players in which are Israel companies, which now train an increasing number of U.S. police departments in techniques developed while enforcing the occupation of Palestine).

Police departments and their suppliers have teamed up to lobby cash-poor municipalities for all manner of lethal gewgaws ranging from automatic weapons to armored cars. Military-grade riot-control equipment is now de rigueur for most large police departments. So great is the demand for these deadly toys that the Defense Department now has a committee appointed by the president to look into what constitutes appropriate equipment to hand out to the cop on the beat.

What Can Be Done?

What this sad story tells us is that the United States has a very big problem of discrimination and exploitation of the urban poor that goes beyond the ideologically induced greed of a capitalist class. That is not to say that the capitalist structure of the American economy hasn't played havoc with the aspirations of poor blacks to get out of poverty. There is a very good essay by Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute that provides insight into the government's role in this aspect of the problem.

However, it is wrong to believe that after 300 years of racist acculturation the problem of endemic discrimination would disappear if, however unlikely, the nation was to move in another economic direction. Americans would still have retrain themselves in order to overcome the racist cultural addictions acquired over their history.

It is relatively easy to write down some of the things that would have to be done to break these addictions. For instance:

– Tolerance and an attitude of community inclusiveness have to be taught to American children and done so consistently for multiple generations. This has to be done with consistency and not interpreted by the political efforts of those who believe teaching kids tolerance of other racial, ethnic and religious groups is doing the work of the Devil.

– The educational opportunities (including affirmative action programs), job training and meaningful low-cost housing programs that have been implemented piecemeal for the last 50 years have to be seriously revived, and seriously funded by taxing the wealthy upper 20 percent of the population. Alternatively, the money can be taken from the bloated defense budget.

– No one should become a police officer (and while we are at it, a prison guard) without undergoing rigorous screening. And that screening should look to eliminate all those who have authoritarian personalities underlain with problems of impulsive anger. This is such a no-brainer that one wonders why it is not already being done. Perhaps part of the problem is that, in most cases, the police set their own criteria for admission into what has become a trade organization with the characteristics of a college fraternity.

Cultures can be both wonderful and horrible things. They tell us who we are and how we should act. To exercise some control over cultural evolution to accentuate commonsense beneficial ends such as tolerance and community inclusiveness is a worthwhile undertaking. But isn't it a restraint on individual freedom to insist that people not behave in racist and intolerant ways?

Sorry, that sort of "freedom" has already been made illegal at the institutional level within the public sphere. But it is not enough. We must insist that the effort go further until the culture is wholly transformed.

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America as Dangerous Flailing Beast

Despite pretty talk about "democracy" and "human rights," U.S. leaders have become the world's chief purveyors of chaos and death from Vietnam through Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and many other unfortunate nations, a dangerous dilemma addressed by John Chuckman.

By John Chuckman

When I think of America's place in the world today, the image that comes to mind is of a very large animal, perhaps a huge bull elephant or even prehistoric mammoth, which long roamed as the unchallenged king of its domain but has become trapped by its own missteps, as caught in a tar pit or some quicksand, and it is violently flailing about, making a terrifying noises in its effort to free itself and re-establish its authority.

Any observer immediately knows the animal ultimately cannot succeed but certainly is frightened by the noise and crashing that it can sustain for a

considerable time.

I think that is the pretty accurate metaphor for the situation of the United States today, still a terribly large and powerful society but one finding itself trapped after a long series of its own blunders and errors, a society certain ultimately to become diminished in its prestige and relative power with all the difficulties which that will entail for an arrogant people having a blind faith in their own rightness.

America simply cannot accept its mistakes or that it was ever wrong, for Americanism much resembles a fundamentalist religion whose members are incapable of recognizing or admitting they ever followed anything but the divine plan.

America has made a costly series of errors over the last half century, demonstrating to others that the America they may have been in awe of in, say, 1950, and may have considered almost godlike and incapable of mistakes, has now proved itself indisputably, in field after field, as often not even capable of governing itself. The irony of a people who are seen as often unable to govern themselves advising others how to govern themselves brings a distinct note of absurdity to American foreign policy.

America's establishment, feeling its old easy superiority in the world beginning to slip away in a hundred different ways, seems determined to show everyone it still has what it takes, determined to make others feel its strength, determined to weaken others abroad who do not accept its natural superiority, determined to seize by brute force and dirty tricks advantages which no longer come to it by simply superior performance.

Rather than learn from its errors and adjust its delusional assumptions, America is determined to push and bend people all over the world to its will and acceptance of its leadership. But you cannot reclaim genuine leadership once you have been exposed enough times in your bad judgment, and it is clear you are on the decline, just as you cannot once others realize that they can do many things as well or better than you.

In the end, policies which do not recognize scientific facts are doomed. Policies based on wishes and ideology do not succeed over the long run, unless, of course, you are willing to suppress everyone who disagrees with you and demand their compliance under threat. The requirement for an imperial state in such a situation is international behavior which resembles the internal behavior of an autocratic leader such as Stalin, and right now that is precisely where the United States is headed.

Stalin's personality had a fair degree of paranoia and no patience for the views

of others. He felt constantly threatened by potential competitors and he used systematic terror to keep everyone intimidated and unified under him.

Stalin's sincere belief in a faulty economic system that was doomed from its birth put him in a position similar to that of America's oligarchs today. They have a world imperial system that is coming under increasing strain and challenge because others are growing and have their own needs and America simply does not have the flexibility to accommodate them.

America's oligarchs are not used to listening to the views of others. Stalin's belief in a system that was more an ideology than a coherent economic model is paralleled by the quasi-religious tenets of Americanism, a set of beliefs which holds that America is especially blessed by the Creator and all things good and great are simply its due.

Dominion over the Earth?

Americanism blurrily assumes that God's promise in the Old Testament that man should have dominion over the earth's creatures applies now uniquely to Americans. Such thinking arose during many years of easy superiority, a superiority that was less owing to intrinsic merits of American society than to a set of fortuitous circumstances, many of which are now gone.

In Vietnam, America squandered countless resources chasing after a chimera its ideologues insisted was deadly important, never once acknowledging the fatal weaknesses built right into communism from its birth. Communism was certain eventually to fail because of economic falsehoods which were part of its conception, much as a child born with certain genetic flaws is destined for eventual death.

America's mad rush to fight communism on all fronts was in keeping with the zealotry of America's Civic Religion, but it was a huge and foolish practical judgment which wasted colossal resources.

In Vietnam, America ended in something close to total shame literally defeated on the battlefield by what seemed an inconsequential opponent, having also cast aside traditional ethical values in murdering great masses of people who never threatened the United States, murder on a scale (3 million) comparable to the Holocaust.

The United States used weapons and techniques of a savage character: napalm, cluster bombs, and secret mass terror programs. The savagery ripped into the fabric of America's own society, dividing the nation almost as badly as its Civil War once had. America ended reduced and depleted in many respects and paid its huge bills with devalued currency.

Following Vietnam, it has just been one calamity after another revealing the same destructive inability to govern, the same thought governed by zealotry, right down to the 2008 financial collapse which was caused by ignoring sound financial management and basically instituting a system of unlimited greed. The entire world was jolted and hurt by this stupidity whose full consequences are not nearly played out.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were completely unnecessary, cost vast sums, caused immense misery, and achieved nothing worth achieving. We now know what was kept hidden, that more than one million Iraqis died in an invasion based entirely on lies. These wars also set in motion changes whose long-term effects have yet to be felt. Iraq, for example, has just about had its Kurdish, oil-producing region hived off as a separate state.

Mishandling Russia

America's primitive approach to the Soviet Union's collapse, its sheer triumphalism and failure to regard Russia as important enough to help or with which to cooperate, ignored America's own long-term interests. After all, the Russians are a great people with many gifts, and it was inevitable that they would come back from a post-collapse depression to claim their place in the world.

So how do the people running the United States now deal with a prosperous and growing Russia, a Russia which reaches out in the soundest traditional economic fashion for cooperation and partnership in trade and projects? Russia has embraced free trade, a concept Americans trumpeted for years whenever it was to their advantage, but now for Russia is treated as dark and sinister.

Here America fights the inevitable power of economic forces, something akin to fighting the tide or the wind, and only for the sake of its continued dominance of another continent. Americans desperately try to stop what can only be called natural economic arrangements between Russia and Europe, natural because both sides have many services, goods, and commodities to trade for the benefit of all. America's establishment wants to cut off healthy new growth and permanently to establish its primacy in Europe even though it has nothing new to offer.

America's deliberately dishonest interpretation of Russia's measured response to an induced coup in Ukraine is used to generate an artificial sense of crisis, but despite the pressures that America is capable of exerting on Europe, we sense Europe only goes along to avoid a public squabble and only for so long as the costs are not too high.

The most intelligent leaders in Europe recognize what the United States is doing

but do not want to clash openly, although the creation of the Minsk Agreement came pretty close to a polite rejection of America's demand for hardline tactics.

The coup in Ukraine was intended to put a hostile government in control of a long stretch of Russian border, a government which might cooperate in American military matters and which would serve as an irritant to Russia. But you don't get good results with malicious policy.

So far the coup has served only to hurt Ukraine's economy, security and long-term interests. It has a government which is seen widely as incompetent, a government which fomented unnecessary civil war, a government which may have shot down a civilian airliner, and a government in which no one, including in the West, has much faith.

Its finances are in turmoil, many important former economic connections are severed, and there is no great willingness by Europe, especially an economically-troubled Europe, to assist it. It is not an advanced or stable enough place to join the EU because that would just mean gigantic subsidies being directed to it from an already troubled Europe.

And the idea of its joining NATO is absolutely a non-starter both because it can't carry its own weight in such an organization and because that act would cross a dangerous red line for Russia.

Kiev is having immense problems even holding the country together as it fights autonomous right-wing outfits like the Azov Battalion in the southeast who threaten the Minsk Agreement, as the regime tries to implement military recruiting in western Ukraine with more people running away than joining up, as it finds it must protect its own President with a Praetorian Guard of Americans from some serious threats by right-wing militias unhappy with Kiev's failures, as it must reckon with the de facto secession of Donetsk and the permanent loss of Crimea all this as it struggles with huge debts and an economy in a nosedive.

America is in no position to give serious assistance to Ukraine, just plenty of shop-worn slogans about freedom and democracy. These events provide a perfect example of the damage America inflicts on a people with malicious policy intended only to use them to hurt others.

There is such a record of this kind of thing by America that I am always surprised when there are any takers out there for the newest scheme. One remembers Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1975 encouraging the Iraqi Kurds to revolt against Saddam Hussein and then leaving them in the lurch when the dictator launched a merciless suppression.

I also think of the scenes at the end of the Vietnam War as American helicopters took off in cowardly fashion from the roof of the embassy leaving their Vietnamese co-workers, tears streaming down their faces, vainly grasping for the undercarriages of helicopters, a fitting and shameful end to a truly brainless crusade.

Messing up Ukraine

I don't know but I very much doubt that the present government of Ukraine can endure, and it is always possible that it will slip into an even more serious civil war with factions fighting on all sides, something resembling the murderous mess America created in Libya. Of course, such a war on Russia's borders would come with tremendous risks.

The American aristocracy doesn't become concerned about disasters into which they themselves are not thrust, but a war in Ukraine could easily do just that. In ironic fashion, heightened conflict could mark the beginning of the end of the era of European subservience to America. Chaos in Ukraine could provide exactly the shock Europe needs to stop supporting American schemes before the entire continent or even the world is threatened.

I remind readers that while Russia's economy is not as large as America's, it is a country with a strong history in engineering and science, and no one on the planet shares its terrifying experiences with foreign invasion. So it has developed and maintains a number of weapons systems that are second to none. Each one of its new class of ballistic missile submarines, and Russia is building a number of them, is capable of hitting 96 separate targets with thermo-nuclear warheads, and that capability is apart from rail-mounted ICBMs, hard-site ICBMs, truck-mounted missiles, air-launched cruise missiles, sea-launched cruise missiles, and a variety of other fearsome weapons.

Modern Russia does not make threats with this awesome power, and you might say Putin follows the advice of Theodore Roosevelt as he walks softly but carries a big stick, but I do think it wise for all of us to keep these things in mind as America taunts Russia and literally play a game of chicken with Armageddon.

I don't believe America has a legitimate mandate from anyone to behave in this dangerous way. Europe's smartest leaders, having lived at the very center of the Cold War and survived two world wars, do understand this and are trying very carefully not to allow things to go too far, but America has some highly irresponsible and dangerous people working hard on the Ukraine file, and accidents do happen when you push things too hard.

The Israel Obsession

In another sphere of now constant engagement, instead of sponsoring and promoting fair arrangements in the Middle East, America has carried on a bizarre relationship with Israel, a relationship which is certainly against the America's own long term interests, although individual American politicians benefit with streams of special interests payments – America's self-imposed, utterly corrupt campaign financing system being ultimately responsible – in exchange for blindly insisting Israel is always right, which it most certainly is not.

An important segment of Israel's population is American, and they just carried over to Israel the same short-sightedness, arrogance and belligerence which characterize America, so much so, Israel may legitimately be viewed as an American colony in the Middle East rather than a genuinely independent state.

Its lack of genuine independence is reflected also in its constant dependence on huge subsidies, on its need for heavily-biased American diplomacy to protect it in many forums including the United Nations, and on its dependence upon American arm-twisting and bribes in any number of places, Egypt's generous annual American pension requiring certain behaviors being one of the largest examples.

Here, too, inevitability has been foolishly ignored. The Palestinians are not going anywhere, and they have demonstrated the most remarkable endurance, yet almost every act of Israel since its inception, each supported by America, has been an effort to make them go away through extreme hardship and abuse and violence, looking towards the creation of Greater Israel, a dangerous fantasy idea which cannot succeed but it will fail only after it has taken an immense toll.

Despite America's constant diplomatic and financial pressure on other states to support its one-sided policy here, there are finally a number of signs that views are turning away from the preposterous notion that Israel is always right and that it can continue indefinitely with its savage behavior.

Recently, we have had a great last effort by America and covert partners to secure Israel's absolute pre-eminence in the Middle East through a whole series of destructive intrusions in the region the "Arab Spring," the reverse-revolution in Egypt, the smashing and now dismemberment of Iraq, the smashing and effective dismemberment of Libya, and the horrible, artificially-induced civil war in Syria which employs some of the most violent and lunatic people on earth from outside and gives them weapons, money and refuge in an effort to destroy a stable and relatively peaceful state.

I could go on, but I think the picture is clear: in almost every sphere of American governance, internally and abroad, America's poor political

institutions have yielded the poorest decisions. America has over-extended itself on every front, has served myths rather than facts, has let greed run its governing of almost everything, and has squandered resources on achieving nothing of worth.

I view America's present posture in the world supporting dirty wars and coups in many places at the same time and treating others as game pieces to be moved rather than partners as a desperate attempt to shake the world to gain advantages it couldn't secure through accepted means of governance and policy.

America is that great beast, bellowing and shaking the ground, and for that reason, it is extremely dangerous.

John Chuckman is former chief economist for a large Canadian oil company.

Obama's Petulant WWII Snub of Russia

Exclusive: Russia will celebrate the Allied victory over Nazism on Saturday without U.S. President Obama and other Western leaders present, as they demean the extraordinary sacrifice of the Russian people in winning World War II a gesture intended to humiliate President Putin, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

President Barack Obama's decision to join other Western leaders in snubbing Russia's weekend celebration of the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe looks more like pouting than statesmanship, especially in the context of the U.S. mainstream media's recent anti-historical effort to downplay Russia's crucial role in defeating Nazism.

Though designed to isolate Russia because it had the audacity to object to the Western-engineered coup d'État in Ukraine on Feb. 22, 2014, this snub of Russia's President Vladimir Putin like the economic sanctions against Russia is likely to backfire on the U.S. and its European allies by strengthening ties between Russia and the emerging Asian giants of China and India.

Notably, the dignitaries who will show up at this important commemoration include the presidents of China and India, representing a huge chunk of humanity, who came to show respect for the time seven decades ago when the inhumanity of the Nazi regime was defeated largely by Russia's stanching the advance of Hitler's armies, at a cost of 20 to 30 million lives.

Obama's boycott is part of a crass attempt to belittle Russia and to cram history itself into an anti-Putin, anti-Russian alternative narrative. It is difficult to see how Obama and his friends could have come up with a pettier and more gratuitous insult to the Russian people.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel caught between Washington's demand to "isolate" Russia over the Ukraine crisis and her country's historic guilt in the slaughter of so many Russians plans to show up a day late to place a wreath at a memorial for the war dead.

But Obama, in his childish display of temper, will look rather small to those who know the history of the Allied victory in World War II. If it were not for the Red Army's costly victories against the German invaders, particularly the tide-turning battle at Stalingrad in 1943-1944, the prospects for the later D-Day victory in Normandy in June 1944 and the subsequent defeat of Adolf Hitler would have been much more difficult if not impossible.

Yet, the current Russia-bashing in Washington and the mainstream U.S. media overrides these historical truths. For instance, a New York Times article by Neil MacFarquhar on Friday begins: "The Russian version of Hitler's defeat emphasizes the enormous, unrivaled sacrifices made by the Soviet people to end World War II ..." But that's not the "Russian version"; that's the history.

For its part, the Washington Post chose to run an Associated Press story out of Moscow reporting: "A state-of-the-art Russian tank ... on Thursday ground to a halt during the final Victory Day rehearsal. ... After an attempt to tow it failed, the T-14 rolled away under its own steam 15 minutes later." (Subtext: Ha, ha! Russia's newest tank gets stuck on Red Square! Ha, ha!).

This juvenile approach to pretty much everything that's important – not just U.S.-Russia relations – has now become the rule. From the U.S. government to the major U.S. media, it's as if the "cool kids" line up in matching fashions creating a gauntlet to demean and ridicule whoever the outcast of the day is. And anyone who doesn't go along becomes an additional target of abuse.

That has been the storyline for the Ukraine crisis throughout 2014 and into 2015. Everyone must agree that Putin provoked all the trouble as part of some Hitler-like ambition to conquer much of eastern Europe and rebuild a Russian empire. If you don't make the obligatory denunciations of "Russian aggression," you are called a "Putin apologist" or "Putin bootlicker."

Distorting the History

So, the evidence-based history of the Western-sponsored coup in Kiev on Feb. 22, 2014, must be forgotten or covered up. Indeed, about a year after the events,

the New York Times published a major “investigative” article that ignored all the facts of a U.S.-backed coup in declaring there was no coup.

The Times didn’t even mention the notorious, intercepted phone call between Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt in early February 2014 in which Nuland was handpicking the future leaders, including her remark “Yats is the guy,” a reference to Arseniy Yatsenyuk who after the coup quickly became prime minister. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “NYT Still Pretends No Coup in Ukraine.”]

Even George Friedman, the president of the Washington-Establishment-friendly think-tank STRATFOR, has said publicly in late 2014: “Russia calls the events that took place at the beginning of this year a coup d’État organized by the United States. And it truly was the most blatant coup in history.”

Beyond simply ignoring facts, the U.S. mainstream media has juggled the time line to make Putin’s reaction to the coup and the threat it posed to the Russian naval base in Crimea appear to be, instead, evidence of his instigation of the already unfolding conflict.

For example, in a “we-told-you-so” headline on March 9, the Washington Post declared: “Putin had early plan to annex Crimea.” Then, quoting AP, the Post reported that Putin himself had just disclosed “a secret meeting with officials in February 2014 ... Putin said that after the meeting he told the security chiefs that they would be ‘obliged to start working to return Crimea to Russia.’ He said the meeting was held Feb. 23, 2014, almost a month before a referendum in Crimea that Moscow has said was the basis for annexing the region.”

So there! Gotcha! Russian aggression! But what the Post neglected to remind readers was that the U.S.-backed coup had occurred on Feb. 22 and that Putin has consistently said that a key factor in his actions toward Crimea came from Russian fears that NATO would claim the historic naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea, representing a strategic threat to his country.

Putin also knew from opinion polls that most of the people of Crimea favored reunification with Russia, a reality that was underscored by the March referendum in which some 96 percent voted to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia.

But there was not one scintilla of reliable evidence that Putin intended to annex Crimea before he felt his hand forced by the putsch in Kiev. The political reality was that no Russian leader could afford to take the risk that Russia’s only warm-water naval base might switch to new NATO management. If top U.S. officials did not realize that when they were pushing the coup in early 2014, they know little about Russian strategic concerns or simply didn’t care.

Last fall, John Mearsheimer, a pre-eminent political science professor at the University of Chicago, stunned those who had been misled by the anti-Russian propaganda when he placed an article in the Very-Establishment journal *Foreign Affairs* entitled "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault."

You did not know that such an article was published? Chalk that up to the fact that the mainstream media pretty much ignored it. Mearsheimer said this was the first time he encountered such widespread media silence on an article of such importance.

The Sole Indispensable Country

Much of this American tendency to disdain other nations' concerns, fears and points of pride go back to the Washington Establishment's dogma that special rules or (perhaps more accurately) no rules govern U.S. behavior abroad American exceptionalism. This arrogant concept, which puts the United States above all other nations like some Olympian god looking down on mere mortals, is often invoked by Obama and other leading U.S. politicians.

That off-putting point has not been missed by Putin even as he has sought to cooperate with Obama and the United States. On Sept. 11, 2013, a week after Putin bailed Obama out, enabling him to avoid a new war on Syria by persuading Syria to surrender its chemical weapons, Putin wrote in an op-ed published by the *New York Times* that he appreciated the fact that "My working and personal relationship with President Obama is marked by growing trust."

Putin added, though, "I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism," adding: "It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. ... We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal."

More recently, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov drove home this point in the context of World War II. This week, addressing a meeting to mark the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe, Lavrov included a pointed warning: "Today as never before it is important not to forget the lessons of that catastrophe and the terrible consequences that spring from faith in one's own exceptionalism."

The irony is that as the cameras pan the various world leaders in the Red Square reviewing stand on Saturday, Obama's absence will send a message that the United States has little appreciation for the sacrifice of the Russian people in bearing the brunt and breaking the back of Hitler's conquering armies. It is as if Obama is saying that the "exceptional" United States didn't need anyone's

help to win World War II.

President Franklin Roosevelt was much wiser, understanding that it took extraordinary teamwork to defeat Nazism in the 1940s, which is why he considered the Soviet Union a most important military ally. President Obama is sending a very different message, a haughty disdain for the kind of global cooperation which succeeded in ridding the world of Adolf Hitler.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A specialist on Russia, he served as chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch during his 27 years as a CIA analyst. He now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

The Danger of Resurgent Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism ranks as one of the vilest of bigotries, especially considering the West's disgraceful history of persecuting and killing Jews. Any resurgence deserves full-throated condemnation. But the current danger is that Israel's mistreatment of the Palestinians is fueling an ugly comeback, warns Alon Ben-Meir.

By Alon Ben-Meir

Horrific outbursts against the Jews are on the rise all over Europe exclamations like "gas the Jews" and "Jews burn best" are being heard at soccer games and similar social gatherings. While there is nothing to excuse or justify such hateful speech, some effort still needs to be made to understand why this is taking place now, and to such a degree that has not been seen for decades.

That means coming to grips with the ways in which Israeli leaders have directly, and Jews in general inadvertently, contributed to this alarming development.

Although the term anti-Semitism did not become commonly used until the end of the 19th century when Germany popularized it as a scientific-sounding name for Judenhass (Jew-hatred) in a sense, Jews have been experiencing it at least as early as the 3rd century BC. The current rise of anti-Semitism across much of Western Europe, and to a lesser extent in the Americas, cannot be explained, however, by merely referencing its historical persistence.

It is tempting to revert to ready and familiar explanations for anti-Semitism. One such hypothesis which astonishingly is still entertained is the "scapegoat

theory," according to which the Jews have always been a convenient group to blame for the intractable social/political conflicts of the time.

In her seminal study *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt points out the obvious problem with this view namely, that it "implies that the scapegoat might have been anyone else as well" and as soon as we begin to "explain why a specific scapegoat was so well suited to his role," we have to put the theory aside and get "involved in the usual historical research where nothing is ever discovered except that history is made by many groups and that for certain reasons one group was singled out."

The opposite, but no less popular, theory is the doctrine of "eternal antisemitism," where "Jew-hatred is a normal and natural reaction to which history gives only more or less opportunity." That is, the surge of anti-Semitism is not instigated by a special occurrence or event because it is a natural outcome of an undying phenomenon.

What is surprising is that even Jews themselves share this notion; just as the anti-Semite does not want to take responsibility for his actions, many Jews understandably do not want to consider or "discuss their share of responsibility."

What has added potency to the substantial rise in anti-Semitism in recent years is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel's defiance of international norms of conduct, its leaders' sense of righteousness and arrogance, and the image they project to the outside world.

The philosopher Slavoj Žižek has observed how, in order to justify its expansionist policies, Israel has been playing a dangerous game with potentially catastrophic consequences. Radical Zionists claim that a multi-culturalist Israel cannot survive that apartheid, or something like it, is the only viable alternative essentially acknowledging the argument which was used in earlier European history against the Jews themselves.

It suggests that Israeli extremists on the Right are ready to ignore Western European intolerance towards the influx of other cultures, such as Islam, if their prerogative not to tolerate Palestinians is accepted. We might add that Israeli discrimination is not confined to the Palestinians, but extends even to Middle Eastern and Ethiopian Jews as well.

Žižek is right to point out that Israel is making a tragic miscalculation in deciding "to downplay the so-called 'old' (traditional European) anti-Semitism when the old anti-Semitism is returning all around Europe."

It is in this light that we can also understand the strange alliance between the

radical Israeli Right and U.S. Christian fundamentalists, who are historically anti-Semitic but passionately support Israel's expansionistic politics: "Jewish critics of the State of Israel are regularly dismissed as self-hating Jews; however, the true self-hating Jews, those who secretly hate the true greatness of the Jewish nation [are] precisely the Zionists making a pact with [Western conservative] anti-Semites."

Many Jews still believe that they are the "chosen people," chosen to be in a covenant with God. But what does "chosenness" signify?

The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas described it most aptly: "The chosenness of the Jewish people is always considered as a surplus of responsibility very often it takes on an attitude of excellence, a pretension to aristocracy in the bad sense of the term, the right to privileges. In authentic thinking, however, it means a surplus of obligations."

This idea that one is chosen places an extraordinary moral responsibility on the individual. Israel failed miserably as it did not attempt to reconcile between its moral obligation toward the Palestinians and the Jews' presumed sense of "chosenness."

Israel's political leadership has managed to feed the flames of anti-Semitism through obnoxious and irresponsible statements, race-baiting, etc. Such leadership provokes more hatred; Israeli leaders continue to use clichés and stale talking points that their enemies reject and their friends no longer respect.

Using national security to justify its racist policies, including the mistreatment of the Palestinians and the expansion of settlements, became the mantra of Israel's domestic policy and provided anti-Semites with a daily dose of venom against Israel and its people.

One would think that those who suffered persecution as much as the Jews would treat others with care and sensitivity. That the victim can become a victimizer is painful to face, but it is a reality nonetheless. It is as if having suffered so much gives one the license to do things he would not have done otherwise.

I maintain that the continuing occupation remains the single most potent cause behind the rise of anti-Semitism. There is a common failing shared between anti-Semites, Islamic militants, and radical Zionists; namely, an epistemic failure a belief in their own moral infallibility, which leads to arrogance, indifference, complacency, and a sense that one does not need to provide a justification for one's words and deeds. It also can lead to ruthless acts of violence.

H. L. Mencken wisely stated that "Moral certainty is always a sign of cultural

inferiority All human progress, even in morals, has been the work of men who have doubted the current moral values, not of men who have whooped them up and tried to enforce them.”

It is unlikely that anti-Semitism will be eradicated someday, as there will always be bigots who derive perverse satisfaction in divesting themselves of moral responsibility, for whom hatred of the Jews has an almost intoxicating, delirious effect. However, the current rise of anti-Semitism can be curbed.

Israeli leaders and the public must return and recommit themselves to the moral principles that gave birth to the state of Israel. They must begin by engaging in an honest public narrative based on the reality of coexistence with the Palestinians in which Israel finds itself, and not a fictional, self-indulgent narrative that distorts the truth about the rights of the Palestinians which even a fool can discern.

Israel's poor public relations projects the country as conceited, and the old and tired talking points are dismissed as empty, self-convincing gospel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim that he represents world Jewry is a false claim and only implicates the Jews as partners to the repugnant occupation and the ill treatment of the Palestinians.

Israel's provocative actions need to be curtailed first and foremost by ending the expansion of settlements and halting the annexation of yet more land. Israel's conduct in the territories does nothing but add fuel to the expanding fire of anti-Semitism.

Israel is the only country that has maintained a military occupation for nearly 50 years, in defiance of the international community. The Holocaust, incomparable to any catastrophic event in human history, must not be used to justify oppression of the Palestinians.

The Israelis' complacency about the occupation damns Jews all over the world and as long as the occupation lingers, anti-Semitism will continue to rise. Israeli leaders and the public in particular must look inward. The Zionist dream of creating a vibrant, just, moral, and caring Jewish state is quickly fading.

Today's Israel is consumed by corruption at the top; the poor are becoming poorer and the country's wealth is concentrated in the hands of a handful of families. Hundreds of millions of dollars are siphoned off to spend on illegal settlements, while impoverished towns with mostly Middle Eastern Jews are left to rot.

The discrimination against Sephardic Jews is still present four generations after the establishment of the State of Israel. The recent violent clashes with

Jews of Ethiopian origin only reveal the depth of Israel's social dislocation.

Israel's President could not have put it more succinctly and painfully than when he stated that "Protesters in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv revealed an open and bloody wound in the heart of Israeli society. This is a wound of a community sounding the alarm at what they feel is discrimination, racism and disregard of their needs. We must take a good hard look at this wound."

The same can be said about the racist policies directed against Israeli Arabs, whose loyalty to the state is ironically questioned, when in fact the government's policy of deliberate discrimination only galvanizes anti-Jewish sentiments among Israeli Arabs, who constitute 20 percent of the population. Israel has no friends left and it can no longer rely even on the U.S. to provide it with the political cover it has been accustomed to.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise not only in Europe but in the U.S. as well, which provides the last bastion of public support for Israel. Israel must not conveniently dismiss anti-Semitism simply as an incurable disease when in reality it is practicing "anti-Semitism" against a large segment of its own population.

The responsibility of diminishing anti-Semitism falls squarely on the shoulders of the Israeli political leaders and the public. Israel must embrace the moral values on which it was founded; its future, if not its very survival, may well depend on it.

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Entangled in Sunni-Shiite Wars

Early U.S. presidents warned against "entangling" foreign alliances, but they never suspected America might be drawn into squabbles between Sunnis and Shiites dating back to the Seventh Century succession of Prophet Muhammad. But that now seems to be the case, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar describes.

By Paul R. Pillar

Sometimes it seems that a major part of the U.S. role in the world is to assuage the anxieties, fears, and hurt feelings of other nations. Parents do this with

children, and clinical psychologists do this with patients; should the world's superpower be expected to do this with foreign states? Evidently it is.

This month, for example, there will be a summit meeting at Camp David with Gulf Arab states, and the purpose is summed up in the headline of a newspaper [article](#) about preparations for the meeting: the gathering is intended to "ease fears" of Arabs in connection with the agreement on limiting Iran's nuclear program. Such U.S. hand-holding with putative allies in the Middle East is not limited to matters related to the Iranian nuclear deal, and such salving of feelings is not limited to the Middle East.

The question arises: why should we care about someone else's apparent angst? And why should the United States devote any resources, including the scarce resource of its leaders' time and attention, to doing something about it?

There are a couple of legitimate reasons it might make sense for the United States to be responsive to such foreign anxiety. One is that, if the foreign emotions are being expressed in the context of interests shared with the United States, such expression might be a useful indicator that something about the course of U.S. policy warrants rethinking.

Such rethinking is certainly better than the sort of dismissive unilateralism that has helped to get the United States in trouble in the past. But shared interest is not the context for much of the angst being expressed toward the United States, including the current feelings of the Gulf Arabs related to Iran. Those "fears", as well as similar expressions from Israel, have to do mainly with intra-regional contests for influence, often with a sectarian or ethnic coloration, that do not involve interests the United States shares.

Another possible reason to be responsive is that unassuaged anxiety might lead the anxious foreign state to do something damaging to our own interests. A classic worry of this type is that an ally of ours might become so disaffected that it decides to become an ally of someone else instead. This type of worrying is not necessarily good for international peace and stability, as some pre-World War I history demonstrated.

Anyway, that's not the kind of situation we have in the Middle East today. Those who say they are fearful of Iran are not going to become allies of Iran (although if they move toward tension-reducing rapprochement with Tehran, so much the better for peace and stability in the Persian Gulf region)

Or maybe a fear-ridden state might lash out, like a threatened animal, and do something more damaging and destructive than merely switching alliances. Amid those fears being voiced in the Middle East today, probably the most destructive

such reaction one can think of would be Israel starting a war with Iran.

But the prospective nuclear agreement that supposedly is the basis of the fears would make such an attack less, not more, likely, because the attack would be all the more blatantly a destructive and unnecessary action.

Expressions of fear and anxiety will continue, and so will the presumed need for the United States to respond to them, for two basic reasons. One is that ostensibly fearful states have every reason to milk those emotions for all the arms sales, security guarantees, economic aid, and superpower attention they can get. Why wouldn't they, regardless of how sincere or insincere the emotions may be?

The other reason is that displeased allies constitute a convenient theme that domestic opponents can use to criticize foreign policy. Never mind that such criticism may be inconsistent, with some of the same folks wringing hands over professed nervousness among Gulf Arabs or Israel apparently not caring about what America's major European allies, who actually have been party to the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear agreement, feel about it. (Some of the same people dismissed the views of Old Europe at the time the Iraq War was launched.)

Foreign nations often have genuine and well-founded fears, and it behooves us to try hard to understand those fears. Such understanding does not come easily to Americans, whose situation of power and geographic separation is quite different from the more vulnerable circumstances that most nations have faced. But understanding of this type is much different from catering to whatever anxieties someone claims to have, and makes a claim on the United States to relieve.

Sometimes the best U.S. response would be a diplomatic version of, "Tough. Not our problem."

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Gifts to Russia 'Free-Market' Extremism

Exclusive: Official Washington's Putin-bashing knows no bounds as the Russian president's understandable complaints about U.S. triumphalism and NATO expansion, after the Soviet collapse in the 1990s, are dismissed as signs of his "paranoia" and "revisionism," writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If the Washington Post's clueless editorial page editor Fred Hiatt had been around during the genocidal wars against Native Americans in the 1870s, he probably would have accused Sitting Bull and other Indian leaders of "paranoia" and historical "revisionism" for not recognizing the beneficent intentions of the Europeans when they landed in the New World.

The Europeans, after all, were bringing the "savages" Christianity's promise of eternal life and introducing them to the wonders of the Old World, like guns and cannons, not to mention the value that "civilized" people place on owning land and possessing gold. Why did these Indian leaders insist on seeing the Europeans as their enemies?

But Hiatt wasn't around in the 1870s so at least the Native Americans were spared his condescension about the kindness and exceptionalism of the United States as it sent armies to herd the "redskins" onto reservations and slaughter those who wouldn't go along with this solution to the "Indian problem."

However, those of us living in the Twenty-first Century can't say we're as lucky. In 2002-03, we got to read Hiatt's self-assured Washington Post editorials informing us about Iraq's dangerous stockpiles of WMD that were threatening our very existence and giving us no choice but to liberate the Iraqi people and bring peace and stability to the Middle East.

Though Hiatt reported these WMD caches as "flat-fact" when that turned out to be fact-free, there was, of course, no accountability for him and his fellow pundits. After all, who would suggest that such well-meaning people should be punished for America's generous endeavor to deliver joy and happiness to the Iraqi people who instead chose to die by the hundreds of thousands?

Because Hiatt and his fellow deep-thinkers didn't get canned, we still have them around opening our eyes to Vladimir Putin's historical "revisionism" and his rampaging "paranoia" as he fails to see the philanthropic motives of the U.S. free-market economists who descended on Russia after the end of the Soviet Union in the 1990s to share their wisdom about the unbounded bounty that comes from unrestrained capitalism.

That many of these "Harvard boys" succumbed to the temptation of Russian girls desperate for some hard currency shouldn't be held against these selfless business "experts." Nor should the reality that they sometimes shared in the plundering of Russia's assets by helping a few friendly "oligarchs" become billionaires. Nor should the "experts" be blamed for the many Russians who

starved, froze or suffered early death after their pensions were slashed, medical care was defunded, and their factories were shuttered. Just the necessary “growing pains” toward a “modern economy.”

And, while these U.S. economic advisers helped put Russia onto its back, there was also the expansion of NATO despite some verbal promises from George H.W. Bush’s administration that the anti-Russian alliance would not be pushed east of Germany. Instead, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush shoved NATO right up to Russia’s border and touched a raw Russian nerve by taking aim at Ukraine, too.

But Russian President Putin simply doesn’t appreciate the generosity of the United States in making these sacrifices. The “paranoid” Putin with his historical “revisionism” insists on seeing these acts of charity as uncharitable acts.

‘Mr. Putin’s Revisionism’

In Tuesday’s Post, Hiatt and his team laid out this new line of attack on the black-hatted Putin in an editorial that was headlined, in print editions, “Mr. Putin’s revisionism: His paranoia shouldn’t blot out the good the West tried to offer,” and online as “After the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. tried to help Russians.” The editorial began:

“President Vladimir Putin recently was interviewed for a fawning Russian television documentary on his decade and a half in power. Putin expressed the view that the West would like Russia to be down at the heels. He said, ‘I sometimes I get the impression that they love us when they need to send us humanitarian aid. [T]he so-called ruling circles, elites, political and economic, of those countries, they love us when we are impoverished, poor and when we come hat in hand. As soon as we start declaring some interests of our own, they feel that there is some element of geopolitical rivalry.’”

“Earlier, in March, speaking to leaders of the Federal Security Service, which he once led, Mr. Putin warned that ‘Western special services continue their attempts at using public, nongovernmental and politicized organizations to pursue their own objectives, primarily to discredit the authorities and destabilize the internal situation in Russia.’”

That was an apparent reference to the aggressive use of U.S.-funded NGOs to achieve “regime change” in Ukraine in 2014 and similar plans for “regime change” in Moscow, a goal openly discussed by prominent neocons, including National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman who gets \$100 million a year from Congress to finance these NGOs.

But none of that reality is cited in the Post’s editorial, which simply

continues: “Mr. Putin’s remarks reflect a deep-seated paranoia. Mr. Putin’s assertion that the West has been acting out of a desire to sunder Russia’s power and influence is a willful untruth. The fact is that thousands of Americans went to Russia hoping to help its people attain a better life. It was not about conquering Russia but rather about saving it, offering the proven tools of market capitalism and democracy, which were not imposed but welcomed. The Americans came for the best of reasons.”

Hiatt and his cohorts do acknowledge that not everything worked out as peachy as predicted. There were, for instance, a few bumps in the road like the unprecedented collapse in life expectancy for a developed country not at war. Plus, there were the glaring disparities between the shiny and lascivious nightlife of Moscow’s upscale enclaves, frequented by American businessmen and journalists, and the savage and depressing poverty that gripped and crushed much of the country.

Or, as the Post’s editorial antiseptically describes these shortcomings: “Certainly, the Western effort was flawed. Markets were distorted by crony and oligarchic capitalism; democratic practice often faltered; many Russians genuinely felt a sense of defeat, humiliation and exhaustion. There’s much to regret but not the central fact that a generous hand was extended to post-Soviet Russia, offering the best of Western values and know-how.

“The Russian people benefit from this benevolence even now, and, above Mr. Putin’s self-serving hysterics, they ought to hear the truth: The United States did not come to bury you.”

Or, as a Fred Hiatt of the 1870s might have commented about Native Americans who resisted the well-intentioned Bureau of Indian Affairs and didn’t appreciate the gentleness of the U.S. Army or the benevolence of life on the reservations: “Above Sitting Bull’s self-serving hysterics, Indians ought to hear the truth: The white man did not come to exterminate you.”

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](#).

US Media Shields Saudi War on Yemen

The U.S. news media always seems to have an excuse for the actions of the Saudi-Israeli alliance, now trivializing Saudi Arabia's open aggression against Yemen as simply one side of a "proxy war" with Iran, a misleading depiction, says Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

The term "proxy war" has experienced a new popularity in stories on the Middle East. Various news sources began using the term to describe the conflict in Yemen immediately, as if on cue, after Saudi Arabia launched its bombing campaign against Houthi targets in Yemen on March 25.

"The Yemen Conflict Devolves into Proxy War," The Wall Street Journal headlined the following day. "Who's fighting whom in Yemen's proxy war?" a blogger for Reuters asked on March 27. And on the same day the Journal pronounced Yemen a proxy war, NBC News declared that the entire Middle East was now engulfed in a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

It is certainly time to discuss the problem of proxy war in the Middle East, because a series of such wars are the heart of the destabilization and chaos engulfing the region. The problem with the recent stories featuring the term is that it is being used in a way that obscures some basic realities that some news media are apparently not comfortable acknowledging.

The real problem of proxy war must begin with the fact that the United States and its NATO allies opened the floodgates for regional proxy wars by the two major wars for regime change in Iraq and Libya. Those two profoundly destabilizing wars provided obvious opportunities and motives for Sunni states across the Middle East to pursue their own sectarian and political power objectives through proxy war.

Prominent Twentieth Century political scientist Karl Deutsch defined "proxy war" as "an international conflict between two foreign powers, fought out on the soil of a third country, disguised as a conflict over an internal issue of the country and using some of that country's manpower, resources and territory as a means of achieving preponderantly foreign goals and foreign strategies".

Deutsch's definition makes it clear that proxy war involves the use of another country's fighters rather than the direct use of force by the foreign power or powers. So it is obvious that the Saudi bombing in Yemen, which has killed mostly civilians and used cluster bombs that have been outlawed by much of the

world, is no proxy war but a straightforward external military aggression.

The fact that the news media began labeling Yemen a proxy war in response to the Saudi bombing strongly suggests that the term was a way of softening the harsh reality of Saudi aggression.

The assumption underlying that application of “proxy war” is, of course, that Iran had already turned Yemen into such a war by its support for the Houthis. But it ignores the crucial question of whether the Houthis had been carrying out “preponderantly foreign goals and foreign strategies.” Although Iran has certainly had ties with the Houthis, the Saudi propaganda line that the Houthis have long been Iranian proxies is not supported by the evidence.

Far from proving the Iranian proxy argument, the Houthi takeover of Sanaa last year has actually provided definitive evidence to the contrary. U.S. intelligence sources recently told the Huffington Post that before the Houthis entered the capital, the Iranians had advised against such a move, but that the Houthis ignored that advice.

Gabriele vom Bruck, a leading academic specialist on Yemen at the School of Oriental and African Studies, said in an e-mail to this writer that senior Yemeni officials with links to intelligence had told her the same thing weeks before the story was leaked.

The Houthis rejected the Iranian caution, vom Bruck believes, because former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his son Ahmed Ali Saleh (the former commander of the Republican Guard) had indicated to them that troops that were still loyal to them would not resist the Houthi units advancing on the capital unless the Houthis attacked them.

So the Houthis clearly don't intend to serve an Iranian strategy for Yemen. “Certainly the Houthis do not want to replace the Saudis with the Iranians,” says vom Bruck, even though they still employ slogans borrowed from Iran.

Regional Proxy War?

The NBC story on a “regional proxy war” completely misses the seriousness of the problem. It turns its proxy war concept into an abstract and virtually antiseptic problem of limiting Iranian influence in the region through the U.S. bombing Iraq. It ignores the fact that the regional actors behind the wars in Syria, Iraq and Libya are pulling the region into a new era of unbridled sectarian violence and instability.

The crimes committed by the Syrian regime in the war are unconscionable, but the policies of external countries pursuing a proxy war to overthrow the existing

regime have created a far more ominous threat to the entire region.

Washington Post columnist David Ignatius has detailed the process by which Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar competed with one another to create proxy forces with which to overthrow the Assad regime.

Such an unbridled competition in the creation of armies for regime change was by its very essence a reckless and cynical use of power that carried the obvious risk of even worse chaos and violence of the war in Syria. But they have made the costs of proxy war far greater by targeting the most aggressive armed groups they could find as their clients, and their weapons soon “made their way to the terrorist groups,” wrote Ignatius, to which the Turks and Qataris “turned a blind eye”.

Once it became clear that Sunni states were creating a proxy war in Syria that could tip the balance against the Syrian regime, Iran and Hezbollah intervened in support of the regime.

But what the conventional view of the Syrian proxy war leaves out is the linkage between Syria in Iran’s deterrence strategy. Iran is militarily weak in relation with Israel and U.S. military power in the Middle East, and has been the target of U.S. and Israeli military threats going back to the 1990s.

Iran’s deterrent to such attacks has depended on the threat of retaliatory rocket attacks against Israel by Hezbollah from Southern Lebanon – destroying the ability of Hezbollah to retaliate for an attack was the single biggest reason for Israel’s 2006 war against Hezbollah.

The Assad regime was part of the Iranian deterrent as well. Not only did Syria have a force of several hundred missiles that Israel would have to take into account but also, Syrian territory is the shortest route for Iranian resupply of Hezbollah.

The Saudi fixation with bringing down today’s Iraqi Shi’a regime appears to reflect the sentiment that Prince Bandar bin Sultan expressed to Richard Dearlove, then head MI6, before 9/11. “The time is not far off in the Middle East, Richard,” said Bandar, “when it will be literally ‘God help the Shia’. More than a billion Sunnis have simply had enough of them.”

The Saudis have never been reconciled to the establishment of a Shiite regime in Iraq since the United States occupied the country and set up a Shia-dominated government. They began facilitating the dispatch of Sunni extremists to Iraq to overthrow the Shiite regime early in the U.S. war.

After the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, the funding from the Saudis and other Gulf

Sheikhdoms for Sunni fighters in Iraq and arms moved toward the best organized forces, which ultimately meant ISIS, also known as the Islamic State.

The NATO war for regime change in Libya, like the U.S. occupation of Iraq, opened a path for the regional proxy war that followed. That war took the form of competitive intervention by regional actors leading to worsening violence. This time Qatar and the UAE were competing for power through their support for Libyan expatriates in their own countries.

The Qataris steered their support to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which the U.S. State Department had identified as a terrorist organization as early as 2004. The Sisi regime in Egypt joined the proxy war as the chief sponsor of counter-terrorism. The UAE aligned with that position, while Qatar remained in opposition. The regional proxy war has led to a longer-term structure of conflict.

The recent media stories have offered only anodyne references to the problem of proxy war. What is needed in media coverage is a focus on the nasty realities of proxy war and their origins.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*. [This story first appeared at Middle East Eye.]

The War over the Vietnam War

Exclusive: The Pentagon has retreated somewhat from its recent campaign to rewrite the Vietnam War history to push the discredited theory that the military strategy was sound, just undercut by disloyal war reporters and a misled public, a modest victory for truth, as war correspondent Don North describes.

By Don North

Wars are fought twice, once on the battlefield and later in the remembering. In that way, the Vietnam War though it ended on the battlefield four decades ago continues as a battle of memory, history and truth. And the stakes are still high. Honest narratives about important past events can shape our destinies, helping to determine whether there will be more wars or maybe peace.

A few years ago, I was pleased to hear that the Pentagon would be funding a committee for the commemoration of the Vietnam War. I thought maybe, finally,

we'll get the record straight. But I didn't have to read further than the keynote quote at the top of the new website to realize it was not to be.

Quoting President Richard Nixon, it read: "No event in history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam war. It was misrepresented then and is misunderstood now."

I belong to the dwindling ranks of journalists who covered the war. We call ourselves "the Vietnam old hacks" and we got pretty exercised about this quote since it perpetuates the myth that the war would have worked out just fine if not for the discouraging words of some reporters. I wrote a letter to the chief of the commemoration committee, retired Lieutenant General Claude Kicklighter, protesting this slur on the thousands of journalists who tried to honestly cover the war, a slur coming from a U.S. president who was one of the most responsible for misleading the public about the war.

I badgered the committee for months but they were reluctant to take the quote down. I enlisted friends at the U.S. Army Center for History who strongly suggested to the committee that the quote was inappropriate. After six months through clenched teeth, they finally took it down. But many of the myths and falsehoods of the Vietnam War remain on the website.

So what went wrong in Vietnam? One of the prevailing and persistent myths is that the United States was betrayed by disloyal journalists. Even the U.S. Army commander in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, subscribed to that old saw.

It doesn't seem to matter how many times historians even Army historians challenge this myth, noting that the U.S. press on balance did a pretty good job covering a complex and dangerous conflict. The myth of the disloyal journalists who supposedly sabotaged what would have otherwise been an American victory just keeps coming back.

My Life in Vietnam

I landed in Vietnam in May of 1965, an eager and enterprising young reporter from Canada. I was like hundreds of other would-be-journalists going into the field to report the war as freelancers, arriving as this counter-insurgency conflict grew into a full-blown Asian war. And like so many of us I initially bought Washington's rationale for the war to save this little democracy from a Communist takeover and the start of falling dominoes in Asia.

The truth however didn't take long to learn. At that time, the United States had the benefit of some brilliant journalists who took their craft seriously – and many were on the front lines of reporting about the gaps between the glowing PR and the grim reality.

For example, my late friend David Halberstam of the New York Times told me about an historic battle down in the Mekong Delta in late 1962 when the reality of the conflict was becoming evident. Hundreds of American helicopters had arrived in Vietnam promising great new technological advantages to defeat the Viet Cong.

On the first day of the battle, a few Viet Cong were killed. On the second day, an enormous helicopter assault was launched but nothing happened. On the third day, the same thing happened, no enemy, no battle.

On the way back to Saigon, Neil Sheehan, then with UPI, muttered about the waste of his time. Homer Bigart, an experienced World War II reporter for the New York Times, said, "What's the matter Mister Sheehan?" Sheehan grumbled about three days spent tramping the paddy fields and no story to write.

"No story," remarked Bigart, slightly surprised. "But there is a story. It doesn't work. That's your story, Mr. Sheehan. "

Indeed, the U.S. strategy in Vietnam didn't work. It never worked. Not then, not ever. But the price for the folly was staggeringly high. The Vietnamese suffered some two million civilian dead, many killed by the heaviest aerial bombing in history.

In many ways, the young American soldiers, who were dropped into Vietnam, were victims, too, as they found themselves woefully ill-prepared for the rigors and cruelty of counter-insurgency warfare, often fought in villages packed with women and children. Some 58,000 U.S. soldiers died in the conflict and many more were scarred either physically or psychologically.

Nick Turse, who wrote *Kill Anything that Moves*, recently noted: "Civilian suffering in Vietnam was the essence of a war caused by America's callous use of power. I question whether the Henry Kissinger's of today, Washington's latest coterie of war managers, are any more willing to consider this than Kissinger was."

Going Back

I have just returned from a three-week tour of Vietnam and Cambodia and found that there are those in Vietnam as well as in America who are still unwilling to hear honest voices about the war. Yet, returning to Vietnam for the fortieth anniversary of the war's end with the Vietnam old hacks we journalists who covered that lost war was a moving experience and brought back many memories of the war years.

In a war full of surprises, there was no greater surprise for us than the Tet offensive attack on the U.S. Embassy on Jan. 31, 1968. Military analysts say one

way to achieve decisive surprise in warfare is to do something truly stupid and the 15 Viet Cong sappers who carried out the daring embassy attack were poorly trained and unprepared, but its effects marked a turning point in the war and earned a curious entry in the annals of military history.

Today the imposing U.S. Embassy that withstood the attack has been torn down and replaced by a modest U.S. Consulate. A small marker stone in a garden, closed to the public, records the names of the seven American Marines and Military Police who died there. Outside the Consulate gates on the sidewalk is a brick monument engraved with names of Viet Cong sappers and agents who also died.

I couldn't help imagining the scene if somehow U.S. Army PFC Bill Sebast and Viet Cong sapper Nguyen Van Sau, two soldiers who died on opposite sides of the Embassy wall, could return today to marvel at Saigon's economic progress, with Vietnam and the U.S. having put aside old animosities to become valuable trading partners.

For the first time, the Vietnam Foreign Ministry treated us old hacks like people worth knowing, interested in our knowledge about the bloody war that we once covered. The truth is Vietnam is more concerned these days about its giant neighbor to the north, China, and even looks to the United States as a possible counterweight to China's tendency to throw its significant weight around.

Judging the Journalists

So what about the recent Pentagon suggestion that we journalists "misreported the war?" Am I satisfied with my own coverage of the Vietnam war? No, I'm not. I think ignorance of Vietnam history and culture at first and the limitations of TV news sometimes made the truth suffer. A minute and a half was about max for an evening news report. Not nearly enough time to describe the complex events of the Vietnam War.

I also found my ABC News editors in New York reluctant to sound negative about the war. Critical stories got brutally edited or just mysteriously disappeared before air time.

The only censorship that I experienced was from my own news company. At the U.S. Embassy when the last Vietcong sapper was killed or captured, I quickly filmed a "standupper." To conclude my report, I said, "Since the Lunar New Year, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese have proved they are capable of bold and impressive military moves that Americans never dreamed could be achieved. Whether they can sustain this onslaught for long remains to be seen.

"But whatever turn the war now takes, the capture of the U.S. Embassy here for seven hours is a psychological victory that will rally and inspire the Viet

Cong. Don North ABC News Saigon.”

But my instant analysis never made it to the air on ABC News. I was accused of “editorializing” and the standupper was killed by some producer on the evening news. Ironically, however, the standupper with other out-takes ended up in the “ABC Simon Grinberg Library” where it was later found by producer Peter Davis and used in his Academy Award winning film, “Hearts and Minds.”

So it’s true that the truth about the Vietnam War often suffered, but not in the way Nixon’s quote suggested. Much of the U.S. media reporting put the war in too rosy not too harsh a light. More accurate journalism would have more consistently challenged what Neil Sheehan later called “A Bright Shining Lie,” the upbeat PR for a misguided war.

And the lessons of Vietnam fruitlessly discussed over the past half century have taught Washington so little that today’s war hawks replicated many of the same Vietnam mistakes in Afghanistan and Iraq – the same hubris, the same over-reliance on technology and propaganda, the same ignorance of complicated foreign cultures.

So what were the real lessons learned about journalism in the Vietnam War? In spite of difficulties, censorship and the fog of war, I believe much of our Vietnam reporting was accurate and has withstood the scrutiny of time. However, has U.S. war reporting today improved any more than American foreign policies?

Mark Twain once wrote of what I think is a major dilemma of our age. He said, “If you don’t read the newspapers you are uninformed. If you do read the newspapers you are misinformed.”

The great reporter A.J. Liebling of the Baltimore Sun once observed, “The Press is the weak slat under the bed of democracy.”

Recently Bill Moyers while at PBS picked up on Liebling’s observations when he wrote: “After the invasion of Iraq, the slat in the bed broke and some strange bedfellows fell to the floor the establishment journalists, neo-con polemicists, beltway pundits, right-wing warmongers flying the skull and crossbones of the ‘balanced and fair brigade.’ And administration flaks whose classified leaks were manufactured lies all romping on the same mattress in the foreplay to disaster. Thousands of casualties and billions of dollars later, most of the media co-conspirators caught in ‘flagrante delicto’ are still prominent, still celebrated, and still holding forth with no more contrition than a weathercaster who made the wrong prediction as to the next day’s temperature.”

And the same sort of “group think” and hostility to dissent that proved so disastrous in Vietnam a half century ago and Iraq a decade ago is ascendant

again in Washington today.

The New York Times and Washington Post land on my doorstep every day and I'm appalled to read how "neocon ideology" appears to have seized control of the editorial pages, a development that should concern every American. Inevitably military power is recommended as a first, not a last resort.

Suggestions about seeing a conflict from the other side's perspective is dismissed as soft-headed and un-American. Instead, it's easier to talk tough and wave the flag, while squandering the nation's tax dollars on military hardware and military adventures, even as millions of American families slip beneath the poverty line.

At West Point last May, President Obama observed, "Some of our most costly mistakes come from, not our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences. Just because we have the best hammer, does not mean that every problem is a nail."

Don North is a veteran war correspondent who covered the Vietnam War and many other conflicts around the world. He is the author of a new book, *Inappropriate Conduct*, the story of a World War II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he uncovered.

Papering Over Extra-Judicial Killings

The Obama administration, like its predecessor, holds that the "exceptional" U.S. has the right to enter other countries to kill "terrorists," but it would never tolerate, say, Cuba targeting CIA-trained terrorists harbored in Miami, one of many double standards posing as international law, as Coleen Rowley notes.

By Coleen Rowley

Law professor Harold Koh, a former Yale Law School Dean and former Legal Adviser to Hillary Clinton's State Department, hired by New York University to teach human rights and international law, recently found himself in the crosshairs when NYU law students posted a "statement of no confidence" in him based on the prior actions he undertook to justify, enable and expand the use of Obama's "extrajudicial killing program."

A harsh critic of the Bush Administration, Koh is obviously well liked among those who consider themselves in the liberal legal intelligentsia.

Unfortunately, instead of defending Koh's legal rationales for drone killing on the merits, a number of the pro-Koh law professors, led by Koh's cronies at the State Department, pilloried the NYU students. His backers chose to defend and praise Koh on mostly personal grounds, or for his other legal contributions, almost entirely avoiding discussion of the issues surrounding U.S. high-tech targeted killing.

However, at least two respected law professors, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin (at University of Minnesota Law School) and Philip Alston (Professor of Law at NYU's Law School, and former UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, 2004-10) criticized their fellow academics' glossing-over approach since "one can reasonably take the position that the US government and its targeted killing programs breach international and human rights law standards."

Both lamented their fellow professors' avoidance of discussing the important issues and sending "a real chill to an important open debate."

In our op-ed (below) published on April 29, 2015 by the *Brainerd Dispatch* newspaper (which built upon a related one we wrote in 2012), Robin Hensel and I decided, by contrast, to focus on the illegality of the U.S. high-tech "warfare." Brainerd, Minnesota, is not far from the Camp Ripley National Guard base that trains military personnel on the "Shadow" and other smaller drones that started out being used for surveillance but have now become weaponized.

Naturally our comments attracted some dissent, a substantive critique coming from Attorney Larry Frost of Paladin Law PLLC, Bloomington, Minnesota, which in furtherance of a robust debate, I'm reposting directly below our piece with Mr. Frost's permission:

Guest Opinion: The illegality of high tech war

By Robin Hensel and Coleen Rowley on April 29, 2015

Why has the United Nations Special Rapporteur called drone strikes extrajudicial killing?

Why has a Pakistani judge recently filed criminal charges against a former top CIA lawyer who oversaw its drone program and a former station chief in Islamabad over a 2009 strike that killed two people? The Islamabad High Court ruled CIA officials must face charges including murder, conspiracy, waging war against Pakistan and terrorism.

Why is a case being heard in May against the German government on behalf of three Yemeni survivors of a U.S. drone strike? The lawsuit argues it is illegal

for the German government to allow the U.S. air base at Ramstein to be used for drone murders abroad, especially after the passage of a resolution in the European Parliament in February 2014 urging European nations to “oppose and ban the practice of extrajudicial targeted killings” and to “ensure that Member States, in conformity with their legal obligations, do not perpetrate unlawful targeted killings or facilitate such killings by other states.”

Why have Sicilians been protesting construction – which in 2013 led to the President of the Region of Sicily temporarily revoking construction authorization – of a US Navy base in their desert which would house Lockheed Martin’s new satellite communications system? Part of the effort to automate war, to entrust the choice of targets to machines, a principal function of the system would be to remotely pilot drones all over the world, ultimately reaching the North Pole.

Closer to home, why have protests arisen of Camp Ripley’s drone training? When Col. St. Sauver, the commander at Camp Ripley, weighed in on the beginning controversy in September 2012, he lauded unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) as being used “to increase efficiency, save money, enhance safety and even save lives.” He hit all the Pentagon talking points. The smaller “Shadow” drones at Camp Ripley were initially used to conduct surveillance and identify people (targets) for the lethal punch of the larger “Reaper” and “Predators.” The smaller drones then served merely as an accomplice in the illegal drone assassination program, also termed President Obama’s “Disposition Matrix” kill list.

The goal of the U.S. State Department was, however, to arm the Shadows with guided bombs weighing under 25 pounds. Cleared for treaty compliance in 2011, Raytheon successfully tested a new 5 pound warhead developed for the Shadow that same year and in 2012, tested a 13 pound warhead. The Marine Corps thereafter sent armed Shadows to Afghanistan as a combat demonstration program.

As a result of this high tech trend, some military officials have become even more effusive in their praise of “federated airpower as small UAVs (like the Shadow) can be bought and operated in numbers that provide far wider battlefield coverage. ... When smart networks communicate, almost brain-like systems will emerge.”

Down on earth, however, the short answer to all the questions posed above is that the law may be catching up with the stars in militarists’ eyes. While commentators generally agree UAS technology is not illegal per se (which people often confuse the drone debate as being), when and how it’s being used to extrajudicially kill in our self-declared “global war” is another story.

The following constitutes a consensus of legal opinion:

Outside a war zone, a State can legally kill only where (1) necessary to save a life, and no other option is available, or alternatively (2) it's the result of fair judicial process [e.g., death penalty after decent adjudication].

So drones – at least those used for targeting killing – are basically not legal unless the looser “law of armed conflicts” (aka international humanitarian law, IHL) applies. IHL only governs in unique, geographically constrained and limited situations, not in a “war of choice” or a “global war.” Even under IHL, you can't kill civilians (those not operating as forces of a warring State) unless they're directly participating in hostilities, or in a “continuous combat function.” This may explain why the U.S. has thus far refused to provide information about its strikes. Lastly, under IHL, even if you have a valid target, you still can't kill that target if the civilian casualties would be disproportionate to the particular objective.

A final problem with how we use our drones is more a problem of angering other nations, increasing enemies and setting bad precedent. Obviously, a foreign country does not have the right to come into the United States and kill people. The guiding document is the U.N. Charter, which doesn't allow force against a State unless it's self-defense, or the Security Council authorizes it. So consider if a country, take China for example, decided to someday post drones over U.S. cities and execute people when it determined that people here were fighting against it, knowing civilian casualties are to be accepted, as long as China doesn't consider our casualties disproportionate to its military objectives.

You don't have to be a legal expert to understand the terrifying precedent the U.S. is setting.

Robin Hensel is a free speech and peace activist in Little Falls who organizes the annual “Peace Fair” and anti-drone warfare protests there.

Coleen Rowley is a retired FBI agent in Apple Valley who served as Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel from 1990 to 2003.

Counter-argument by Attorney Larry Frost, Paladin Law PLLC, Bloomington, MN

What one ‘spikes’ – leaves out or does not report – is usually far more important than what one says. Colleen Rowley left out two very significant legal points without which the debate is not complete. That leaves us as far or farther from the truth than a complete exposition would.

First, any nation "A" that harbors forces "F" which attack state "B" has an obligation under traditional international law to stop such attacks. If it cannot, or will not stop "F", then state B may choose either to declare war on state A, or to enter state A's territory to attack and destroy the hostile forces "F". The normal rules of war apply (except with respect to the forces of F, more on which in a moment).

That means that if citizens of A are killed during operations against hostile forces F, nation B is not legally in the wrong (if the general rules of due care, proportionality etc are observed). So in many cases, drone attacks are legally justified. Note, state A does not have to know specifically that the target hit was there – it is enough that A knows that forces F are there and is not stopping them. If A even allows F to recruit in its territory, this law applies. This is not new law; it is in fact very old customary international law. A simplified but readable explanation can be found at <http://www.aware.org/legal-articles/11-karen-macnutt/78-the-law-of-war>.

Second, Rowley uses the term 'war zone'. The problem is that legal definitions of war, and 'war zone', arose in the context of war between states. War between a state and a non-state actor (in our case terrorists, 'terrs') is utterly different, and very poorly covered by either traditional international law. For the terrs, the 'war zone' is everywhere their targets exist. If their targets are citizens of a certain state, then the terrs will attack them even in the territory of other nations. The traditional notion of 'war zone' simply does not even address the reality of the situation of a war against terrs.

Failing to address this issue – to change the traditional definitions of war to fit a war against global terrs – would be fatal to the civilized West if we followed traditional international law. That is unacceptable. The flip side is that mis-applying traditional law of war concepts leads to declaring the whole world a war zone – and that leads to results we don't want.

For example, establishing a precedent that China could use to attack targets in the United States – if China decided we were ideologically hostile to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in China, for example (we are) and that constituted valid cause to attack us. In fact, China is attacking us – by computer – so this is not a foolish example.

Technical war – internet attacks and others, including EMP attacks which can be carried out by detonating high-yield nuclear weapons outside the territory of the target – also fall outside the competence of traditional and current treaty international law. When terrorists are driven by the savage, uncivilized doctrines of a seventh-century mentality, doctrine has to change to deal with that reality. And yes, current US practice is generating ill-will, and that too

is a factor to consider in reshaping our policy and the law which governs it.

End of Exchange

Attorney Frost and I actually share some agreement that U.S. drone strikes are generating both bad politics and bad precedent internationally and that the law has not caught up with development of high-tech modes of warfare. I will note, however, that following the McNutt interpretation, outlined by Frost, would allow Cuba to “legally” drone bomb Miami to target for killing those CIA-supported “Bay of Pigs” Cuban-American survivors and other anti-Castro terrorists.

Cuba’s “legal” targets would certainly include Miami resident Luis Clemente Faustino Posada Carriles, a well-known terrorist and former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent who was convicted in absentia of various terrorist attacks and of having brought down a Cuban airliner killing 73 innocent civilians. The bottom line is that all law, but most importantly international law, which is sometimes called “soft law” due to its lack of formalized international police enforcement, derives its legitimacy and power from principles of reciprocity and equality, not from the double standards that Harold Koh, John Yoo and other war enablers have worked at legalizing inside and outside our government.

International legal principles must therefore not only be rooted in universal Kantian ethics but must also be efficacious and pragmatic, not counterproductive as more and more research is showing is the case with U.S. drone assassination policy that serves to promote and increase terrorism worldwide. To stand the test of time regardless of evolving technology, international law must “work” from all participants’ standpoints, not just those nations which view themselves as most militarily powerful at the moment.

Unfortunately the Nuremberg Principle has largely been forgotten that wars of aggression, aka wars of choice, are the supreme crime because they encompass and lead to all other war crimes, regardless of whether utilizing low-end box cutters or high-end drone and satellite technology.

That is why, when examining how to fix our mistakes, as President Obama rightly urged in recently acknowledging and apologizing for the mistaken drone killing of American and Italian aid workers, he was wrong to call attention, in the same breath, to America’s exceptionalism. Setting ourselves above the law, as Nixon believed he was entitled to do domestically, will only open Pandora’s Box and establish bad legal precedents that will come back to haunt the U.S.

Coleen Rowley is a retired FBI agent and former chief division counsel in

Minneapolis. She's now a dedicated peace and justice activist and board member of the Women Against Military Madness and works with the Veterans for Peace chapter in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
