

The Problems with Being Charlie

It's one thing to decry all terrorism and defend the principle of free expression; it's another to show disproportionate concern for some victims over others and to embrace offensive or irresponsible media content, troubling issues from the Charlie Hebdo case, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The responses, outside as well as inside France, to the recent attacks in Paris have become a bigger phenomenon, at least as worthy of analysis and explanation, as the attacks themselves. This pattern is hardly unprecedented regarding reactions, or overreactions, to terrorist incidents, but what has been going on over the past week exhibits several twists and dimensions that are especially misleading or misdirected.

—Scale of the attacks vs. scale of the reaction. Seventeen people, not counting the perpetrators, died in the Paris incidents. With the usual caveat that the death of even a single innocent as a result of malevolently applied violence is a tragedy and an outrage, the response has been far out of proportion to the stimulus.

The magnitude of what the Paris attackers did was modest by the standards even of international terrorism, let alone by the standards of all malevolently applied violence or of political violence in general. By way of comparison, about the same time as the Paris attacks the Nigerian extremist group Boko Haram conducted a massacre in a town in which probably several hundred, and possibly as many as 2,000, died. The international attention to this incident was minuscule compared to the Paris story.

Of course anything disturbing that happens in a major Western capital is bound to get more attention than an even bloodier happening in a remote part of an African country. Probably another reason why press coverage of the Paris story was enormous from the beginning was that the target of the first attack was part of the media, and that *ipso facto* makes the story of greater interest to the press itself.

But much of what we have been seeing over the past week is an example of how public and political attention to something, regardless of what that something is, tends to feed on itself. Once a certain level of salience is reached and enough people are talking and writing about a subject or an event, then for that very reason other people start talking and writing about it too.

As the attention snowballs, political leaders feel obligated to weigh in and to

appear responsive, regardless of their private assessment of whatever started the crescendo of public attention. Thus in the current instance even the White House feels obligated to answer for the President or Vice President of the United States not having flown off to join a crowd in Paris.

– *Consistency vs. inconsistency in upholding free speech.* With the initial attack being against the staff of a magazine, the whole story quickly became couched as one of upholding the right of free speech and freedom of the press (a particular reason for the interest of the press itself and thus the extensive coverage the press devoted to the story).

Lost sight of amid the swell of street-marching champions of such civil liberties is the inconsistency in getting so worked up about this one affront to free speech but not to others. Surely we ought to be worked up as much about other, comparable limitations on free expression, especially when the power of the state is used to enforce those limitations. In France itself the state enforces a variety of such limitations, some of which might be offensive to those who were offended by what the magazine published, and some of which are apt to be offensive to other groups, often with criminal penalties attached.

Of course, glaring examples become even easier to find outside Western liberal democracies. One thinks, for example, of the outrageous blasphemy laws in Pakistan. And last Friday Saudi Arabia administered the first 50 of 1,000 lashes as part of the punishment of a human rights advocate accused of “insulting Islam” because he established an online forum for discussing matters of faith. Some international protest was heard in response, but nothing remotely comparable to the outpouring in Paris.

– *Right to free speech vs. responsibility in exercising that right.* The exerciser of free speech in question in Paris was a satirical magazine that seems to specialize in cartoons that are bound to offend a lot of people. It is fair to say that in the centuries of struggles for civil liberties, this is probably not one of the nobler vehicles for the cause. We are not talking Thomas Paine here.

What is that “je suis Charlie” stuff supposed to mean? That we are all dedicated to putting down religious prophets? With most rights also go responsibilities, and prudence in the exercise of those rights, with an honest effort to bear in mind the consequences of what one does or says. Responsible, prudent exercise of a right does nothing to diminish or compromise that right.

We in the United States should have had occasion to think hard about such matters recently with the episode involving a comedic Hollywood movie that offended the North Koreans, and ordinary North Koreans, not only the regime,

were offended. If North Korea conducts computer sabotage against an American company, we certainly should strongly object to that. But we also might imagine how we would react if a North Korean film company, or any other film company for that matter, were to produce a movie with a plot centered around assassinating the President of the United States. We would understandably object, and it is unlikely that we would be discussing the issue primarily in terms of artistic freedom or a right of free speech.

– *Unity vs. disunity among world leaders.* That image of foreign leaders locking arms with French President Francois Hollande and each other suggests that they are of one mind about whatever they were marching down the avenue about. Don't believe it. It was a phony show of unity.

Each one of those leaders had his or her own reasons for being there, involving politics back home as well as international politics, and not just to show solidarity and good will toward the French. This may have been most apparent with the graceless Benjamin Netanyahu, who rebuffed the French government's request for him to stay away rather than inserting his own agenda, but he was not unique in having an agenda. (Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas initially acceded to a similar French request for him to stay away, before Netanyahu's decision to crash the event made it politically necessary for him to come as well.)

If President Obama had attended, it mainly would have been to avoid subsequent political criticism at home for not having attended. That is a bad basis for deciding how to apportion the President's time.

– *Debate about Islam.* The Paris events have rekindled an old debate about whether the seeds of violent Islamist extremism can be found in the content of Islam itself. That debate had a surge a couple of decades ago when Samuel Huntington was writing about a clash of civilizations and about how Islam has "bloody borders." The debate gets a renewed surge whenever, say, Congressman Peter King says something on the subject or events such as those in Paris transpire. The debate will never be resolved.

The debate as commonly framed is not very useful because even if those who argue that the content of Islam explains the motivations of those who commit violent acts in its name were right, and they are more wrong than right, that would not take us very far toward any implied policy recommendations.

There still would be the fact that the great majority of adherents to the same religion are not violent and are not terrorists. There still would be nonviolent Islamist parties, movements and regimes to deal with, and there still would be large Muslim populations whose emotions and preferences would have to be taken

into account.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt spoke the other day about the need for a reformation of Islam. Maybe he's right, but it certainly would not be up to Western governments to accomplish, push, or otherwise influence any such reformation. There probably isn't much else al-Sisi himself could do to accomplish it.

One of the essential policy-relevant points that Western governments do need to understand is that Islam provides a vocabulary for expressing a wide variety of ideologies (a fringe subset of which is used to justify violence).

Another essential point is that notwithstanding the very wide array of ideologies and objectives found under the banner of Islam, there is a widespread sense of a single Muslim community or *umma*; what happens to one part of that community can become a grievance or inspiration for actions of another part, including a violent part.

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A 'Free Press' and Double Standards

The Western reaction to last week's terror attacks in Paris has been rife with double standards as U.S. and European politicians and pundits reinvent themselves as purists on freedom of the press and compound the hypocrisy by ignoring the longstanding slaughter in the Middle East, John V. Walsh observes.

By John V. Walsh

To understand the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris last week, we need only invert George W. Bush's 2005 mantra that "We're taking the fight to the terrorists abroad, so we don't have to face them here at home", into the more truthful: "They will continue to attack us over here so long as we slaughter them by the millions over there."

In a word, this is one more instance of blowback, as Ron Paul tells us in his perceptive essay, "[Lessons From Paris.](#)" Among other things Paul points out: "The two Paris shooters had reportedly spent the summer in Syria fighting with the rebels seeking to overthrow Syrian President Assad. But France and the United

States have spent nearly four years training and equipping foreign fighters to infiltrate Syria and overthrow Assad! In other words, when it comes to Syria, the two Paris killers were on 'our' side. They may have even used French or US weapons while fighting in Syria."

To grasp the magnitude of the neocolonial savagery of the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East, a catalogue of the recent offenses is a necessary beginning. A partial accounting of Western barbarism is to be found in "Destructive Western Mideast Policy Makes Radicals" by Muhammad Sahimi.

Sahimi closes his essay by saying, "Indeed, so long as the abuses of the Western dominance of the Islamic world provides the fertile ground for extremist Muslim clerics and preachers to espouse their reactionary interpretations of Islam, a religion of peace and mercy, things will not get any better."

The killings in Paris, horrific as they are, are but pinpricks compared to the vast devastation visited by the West on the Muslim world and indeed on most of the planet over the last centuries of colonialism and neocolonialism which has brought humiliation, genocide and grinding poverty to entire continents and continues to do so.

What has been the response in the West to the attacks in Paris? On what do the apologists for Empire focus in the wake of this act of vengeance for the neocolonialism of the West against the Arab and Muslim world? With utter contempt for history and context, the pundits discuss freedom of speech as the central issue.

Freedom of speech in France where it is a criminal offense to "deny" the Holocaust of European Jews. Where an anti-Semitic remark, even one overheard in a bistro, can land one in considerable trouble, with loss of one's job and a fine. Where an offhanded comment cost a writer at *Charlie Hebdo* his job because it was deemed anti-Semitic.

Where the predecessor to *Charlie Hebdo*, *Hari-Kiri Hebdo*, was banned decades back when it took a swipe at Charles DeGaulle, just after his death, resulting in its rechristening itself as *Charlie Hebdo* on reopening. And where anti-Islamic insults in the mass media are just fine.

The most effective riposte to the canard that the attack on Charlie was an attack on freedom of the press has come from Glenn Greenwald in his piece entitled "In Solidarity With A Free Press. Some More Blasphemous Cartoons." It is illustrated with some of the anti-Islamic hate cartoons that graced the pages of *Charlie* along with a number of others whose publication would be a criminal offense in France and elsewhere in the West.

Be sure to scroll all the way down. The piece should go viral, because the cartoons alone taken in sequence expose the hypocrisy of the Western punditocracy and its masters. *They object to some of the cartoons but not others (the first two), whereas one should object to them all, except for the last eight by the Brazilian cartoonist Latuff.*

Read, look and think. There is genuine fear in the West when it comes to publishing this essay because its points are piercing indeed, imperiling the bubble of hypocrisy.

On then to the grand march on Sunday in Paris, a march which Justin Raimondo rightly calls "March of the Hypocrites." As Raimondo points out, there are many dimensions to this hypocrisy, but the most deserving of ridicule is perhaps the heinous record that most of the "world leaders" present have when it comes to freedom of the press.

A partial compilation of their abuses of the press has been assembled by Daniel Wickham, a student at the London School of Economics, titled "These 'staunch defenders' of the free press are attending today's solidarity rally in Paris."

The consequences of the *Charlie Hebdo* affair are all too certain. It will strengthen the hand of those who are clamoring for more military involvement by the Empire in the Middle East.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, in an interview reported on Fox, made it quite clear that "we" would have to do "more." He describes a great "arc" of terrorism running from Pakistan to Nigeria and perhaps beyond where the U.S. would have to increase its operations and vigilance.

He was almost smiling with satisfaction. More money will surely come his way and the way of the entire Military Industrial Congressional Complex. (Dempsey cautioned that "we" are already doing "a lot," but "more" is the order of the day.)

The head of the National Security Agency was also clamoring for "more," to spy on you and me, dear reader. When these imperial potentates spoke I could hear the anguished cries of the Muslim peoples to be submitted to more attacks and bloodshed in the great "arc" that Dempsey was drooling over "patrolling."

But this reaction may yet prove the undoing of the Empire. For the U.S., already gone mad with imperial arrogance and overreach, is being goaded to further frenzy by its client, the apartheid state of Israel, a European colonial settler state itself. Hence the U.S. is becoming ever more stuck to the Middle Eastern tar baby.

That gives breathing room for Russia and China and the rest of the developing world to grow and assert their independence from the Empire. The great crime is that the peoples of the Middle East are absorbing the lion's share of the blows dealt by the Empire. Our job in the West is to get the U.S. out of the Middle East and to end the perpetual economic and military wars of the Empire across the planet.

As Mikhail Gorbachev and others have pointed out, the alternative is surely WWIII.

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NYC's Riptides of Free Speech

Amid Western government's sudden enthusiasm for free speech, no matter how offensive, there is the angry police reaction in New York City to protests against some police officers killing an unarmed black man by blaming the protesters for a deranged man's shooting of two policemen, as Michael Winship describes.

By Michael Winship

Here in New York City, the past few weeks have been fraught. First, in early December, protesters took to the streets to protest a Staten Island grand jury's decision not to indict a policeman involved in the choking death of African-American Eric Garner. The police were attempting to place Garner under arrest for selling loose cigarettes.

The protests made cops angry, especially because of certain anti-police chants and an assault during one of the demonstrations against two police lieutenants on the Brooklyn Bridge. But their anger escalated into fury on Dec. 20 when two officers were gunned down in their patrol car by a deranged assailant from out-of-town who may have thought he was exacting revenge for police killings of African-American men.

The police response has been a work slowdown although they've denied it that's just beginning to end, and acts of disrespect directed against New York's Mayor Bill de Blasio. He was booed by spectators at a recent police academy graduation, but the main gesture of contempt has been police turning their backs to the mayor at the funerals of the two murdered officers, Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu.

Such actions began the night of the killings when de Blasio and Police Commissioner William Bratton entered a media briefing at the Brooklyn hospital where the two policemen had been brought after the shootings, but really, they were the latest in a series of attacks on the liberal Democratic mayor that began during his election campaign in 2013. Some have alleged that the latest of these are being orchestrated by police union officials coordinating with Republican allies.

At his own press conference outside the hospital, Patrick Lynch, the man who organized the back-turning, president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA), the largest of the city's police unions, blamed the deaths on the mayor and on demonstrators who had been protesting the grand jury decision not to indict the policeman involved in the death of Eric Garner.

Lynch referred to them as "Those that incited violence on the street, under the guise of protest," and those "that tried to tear down what New York City police officers did every day." He continued, "That blood on the hands starts on the steps of City Hall, in the office of the mayor."

The homicides and the Brooklyn Bridge assault are serious crimes. But here's the thing: the right of free speech the police are angry about when it comes to the demonstrators is precisely the same right of free speech they're using to harass de Blasio. And it's that same ideal of free speech, no matter how noxious it might seem, for which those police in Paris died last week.

Noxious is just what Patrick Lynch's talk of blood-covered hands was, demagoguery to exploit what he saw as an opportunity to rally public sentiment on behalf of the police and against the protesters.

Counter to his spurious accusations are the simple facts about race and the police that so many journalists and non-partisan investigators have uncovered. For example, ProPublica reported, "Young black males in recent years were at a far greater risk of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts 21 times greater." A Reuters survey of 25 current and retired black NYPD officers found, "All but one said that, when off duty and out of uniform, they had been victims of racial profiling."

"The officers said this included being pulled over for no reason, having their heads slammed against their cars, getting guns brandished in their faces, being thrown into prison vans and experiencing stop and frisks while shopping. The majority of the officers said they had been pulled over multiple times while driving. Five had had guns pulled on them."

How further to explain Lynch's bombastic rhetoric? Well, for one thing, it

conveniently comes as the city and the PBA remain at a negotiating impasse, both sides without a contract since 2010 and binding arbitration soon to begin.

"Continents Apart on Pay Issues" that was the headline in the civil employees weekly newspaper *The Chief* on Dec. 22.

Mention this coincidence, however, and Lynch and his associates tend to scream bloody murder, quite literally it seems. For another, Lynch's polarizing polemics come as he prepares to run for reelection this spring to what would be his fifth consecutive term. No one is likely to successfully take him on now; as Kenneth Sherrill, an emeritus political science professor, told *New York Metro*, "A challenger saying he'll be nicer to the mayor can't get him very far."

Some perspective is helpful, too. David Firestone at *The Guardian* writes, "Only New York City has ever experienced decades of sustained militancy by its police unions." And as Commissioner Bratton asked *Bloomberg News*, "Can you point out to me one mayor that has not been battling with the police unions in the last 50 years? It's nothing new, it's part of life and it's part of politics and it is what it is. This is New York City. We voice our concerns and we voice our opinions."

We do indeed, which makes Lynch's bullying complaints and accusations about the anti-police protests all the more vexing, especially as all members of the police force take an oath when they are sworn in to uphold the Constitution of the United States, freedom of speech included, no matter which side of an issue any individual cop is on and no matter how obnoxious he or she may think the opposing viewpoint is.

I have lived in New York City for more than 40 years. We have an extraordinary police force facing extraordinary pressures and danger. They always have come running when I needed them.

On 9/11, two policemen from my neighborhood precinct died trying to save lives at the World Trade Center: Officer James Leahy and Detective Danny Richards, a member of the Bomb Squad. Another, Sergeant Edward Thompson died in March 2008 of lung cancer, very possibly contracted from the weeks he spent working on The Pile, the mountain of debris at Ground Zero so carefully sifted for remains.

Over more than four decades in the city, my interactions with police have been routine. But I also know that because I am white, I am nowhere near as likely to be challenged or harassed as others are; nor have I had the conversation that Mayor de Blasio had with his mixed-race son, "The Talk" that so many men and women of color have with their kids about how to behave around police.

So we live a world of conundrum. We expect the police to protect and not harm

us; in return, they expect our respect regardless of any transgressions. Satirists like the cartoonists of *Charlie Hebdo* actively seek to offend the core beliefs of others, sometimes just for the hell of it, sometimes with or without common sense, but we defend their freedom to make us mad or laugh.

World leaders descend on Paris to decry the suppression of speech while committing that very same sin in their own backyards. As the sign of one of those in Sunday's Paris demonstrations read: "I'm marching but I'm conscious of the confusion and hypocrisy of the situation."

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The Sorry Record of a Muslim-Basher

Exclusive: Jumping on the Muslim-bashing bandwagon, Fox News' commentator Steven Emerson claimed Muslims have seized control of parts of London and all of Birmingham, terrorizing non-Muslims to flee, claims so absurd that even he was forced to back-track, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Supposed "terrorism expert" Steven Emerson has admitted to making a slur against British Muslims, claiming on Fox News that Birmingham, England, is now a "Muslim-only city" and that in parts of London "Muslim religious police beat and actually wound seriously anyone who doesn't dress according to religious Muslim attire."

Emerson was asserting that Muslim areas have become "no-go zones" for non-Muslims and cited as an example "actual cities like Birmingham that are totally Muslim, where non-Muslims just simply don't go in." Yet, Birmingham, Great Britain's second-largest city of more than one million people, is nearly half Christian, with the Muslim population less than one-quarter and with significant numbers of Sikhs, Hindus, Jews and non-religious.

As Emerson's Muslim-bashing remarks drew criticism from the media watchdog group FAIR and ridicule across the United Kingdom, he acknowledged that his "comments about Birmingham were totally in error" and vowed not to blame someone else for his slander.

"I do not intend to justify or mitigate my mistake by stating that I had relied

on other sources because I should have been much more careful," Emerson said in an apparent attempt to do exactly that, shift the blame to some unnamed source for supposedly misleading him.

That ploy of palming off his falsehoods on others is typical of Emerson when he gets caught in a deception. In the early 1990s, when Emerson was riding high as "an award-winning journalist" and took aim at me by falsely claiming that I had lied in a PBS documentary, he responded to my protest to his editors by threatening a lawsuit against me.

Only after I was able to prove that it was Emerson who was lying did he grudgingly back down and blamed one of his researchers for the falsehood. The context of that fabrication was Emerson's attempt to debunk allegations that Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign had colluded with Iranian officials to sabotage President Jimmy Carter's negotiations to free 52 American hostages then being held in Iran, a crisis that effectively sank Carter's reelection.

For a PBS "Frontline" documentary on the controversy, I had noted that the Secret Service had released only redacted copies of its records regarding the whereabouts of then vice presidential candidate George H.W. Bush on days when he was alleged to have traveled secretly to Paris. Writing for The New Republic, Emerson claimed that he had received copies of the Secret Service records under a Freedom of Information Act request without any redactions, suggesting that I had lied.

After talking to the Secret Service and being told that Emerson's records had redactions like everyone else's even Congress and federal prosecutors received redacted versions I challenged Emerson's account in letters to his editors, including one to CNN where he had been hired as an investigative reporter.

Emerson was subsequently dumped by CNN and I was promptly threatened by one of his law firms with a libel suit for having criticized him in letters to his editors. Apparently, I was supposed to apologize for saying that Emerson was lying when he claimed to have Bush's unredacted Secret Service records.

Faced with this legal threat, I had to dig into my children's college fund and hire a lawyer, who frankly seemed to doubt that the well-regarded Emerson could be in the wrong. My response was that if Emerson actually had the unredacted records, he could simply present them, but his lawyer said that would only be done in the midst of a costly trial.

As the abusive and threatening letters from Emerson's lawyers mounted, I decided to submit a FOIA to the Secret Service for Emerson's FOIA, i.e., I demanded exactly the same documents that the Secret Service had released to him. When

those records arrived, they showed that Emerson indeed had been lying. His copies of the Secret Service records were redacted, just like those released to me and other investigators.

Finally, the threatened lawsuit went away, and Emerson was forced to admit in an interview with the media watchdog group FAIR that he never had the records he claimed. He blamed a research assistant, but never apologized for the bullying legal strategy designed to financially bleed a journalist (myself) into confirming a lie as the truth. [For more details, see [a report](#) in FAIR's "Extra!," November-December 1993.]

Since then, Emerson has amassed a checkered record as a "terrorism expert," routinely blaming the wrong ethnic groups for various terrorism incidents. [For a brief recounting, see FAIR's ["For Fox News' Steve Emerson, Fact-checking Seems to Be a No-Go Zone."](#)]

Muslim-Bashing Career

Most significantly, Emerson has made a lucrative career out of decrying Muslims. In a 2011 report, entitled ["Fear, Inc.,"](#) by the Center for American Progress, he was identified as one of five "scholars" who act as "misinformation experts" to "generate the false facts and materials" that are then exploited by politicians and pundits to frighten Americans about the supposed threat posed by Muslims.

The report offered a rare glimpse into the right-wing propaganda network that has exploited America's post-9/11 hysteria and transformed those fears into a powerful political movement to get millions of Christians and Jews to support legislation and policies that target Muslims and their communities.

But the historical significance of noting Emerson's role in this "Islamophobia network" is that he was revealed to be a propagandist willing to distort information for ideological ends, not the serious journalist that he successfully posed as during the 1980s and 1990s.

In more recent years, followers of Emerson's work have come to understand that he has very close ties to Israeli right-wingers in the Likud Party and that his "journalism" often has reflected their political needs and interests.

However, in the 1990s, Emerson was amassing journalism awards for his work targeting American Muslims as a particularly dangerous lot and he was raising large sums of money to support his work from sources, such as right-wing mogul Richard Mellon Scaife. Emerson's documentary, "Jihad in America," was broadcast by PBS.

Only gradually did a few brave reporters begin criticizing Emerson and his cozy

ties to right-wing Israeli officials, including Israeli intelligence officers. Typically, Emerson would hit back by issuing legal threats from his vast stable of high-priced lawyers.

Emerson's use of lawyers to bully other journalists, which I had witnessed firsthand, became part of his modus operandi, as Nation reporter Robert I. Friedman discovered in 1995 after criticizing Emerson's "Jihad in America."

"Intellectual terrorism seems to be part of Emerson's standard repertoire," Friedman wrote. "So is his penchant for papering his critics with threatening lawyers' letters."

Friedman also reported that Emerson hosted right-wing Israeli intelligence officials when they were in Washington. "[Yigal] Carmon, who was Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's adviser on terrorism, and [Yoram] Ettinger, who was Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu's man in the Israeli Embassy, stay in Emerson's apartment on their frequent visits to Washington," Friedman wrote.

In 1999, a study of Emerson's history by John F. Sugg for FAIR's magazine "Extra!" quoted an Associated Press reporter who had worked with Emerson on a project as saying of Emerson and Carmon: "I have no doubt these guys are working together."

The Jerusalem Post reported that Emerson has "close ties to Israeli intelligence," and "Victor Ostrovsky, who defected from Israel's Mossad intelligence agency and has written books disclosing its secrets, calls Emerson 'the horn', because he trumpets Mossad claims," Sugg reported.

Hammering Away

Over time, Emerson grew notorious for his Islamophobia and his "investigative journalism" that hammered away at purported dangers from "radicalized" American Muslims. In 2010, Emerson went on a national radio program and claimed that Islamic cleric Feisal Abdul Rauf, an American citizen of New York, would likely not "survive" Emerson's disclosure of supposedly radical comments that Rauf made a half decade earlier.

Although acknowledging that his "investigation" was incomplete, Emerson offered the listeners to Bill Bennett's right-wing radio show "a little preview" of the allegedly offensive comments by Rauf, the cleric behind a planned community center in Lower Manhattan near the site of 9/11's "ground zero":

"We have found audiotapes of Imam Rauf defending Wahhabism, the puritanical version of Islam that governs Saudi Arabia; we have found him calling for the elimination of the state of Israel by claiming he wants a one-nation state

meaning no more Jewish state; we found him defending [Osama] bin Laden violence.”

However, when Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT) released its evidence several days later, it fell far short of Emerson’s lurid descriptions. Rauf actually made points that are shared by many mainstream analysts and none of the excerpted comments involved “defending Wahhabism.”

As for Rauf “defending bin Laden violence,” Emerson apparently was referring to remarks that Rauf made to an audience in Australia in 2005 about the history of U.S. and Western mistreatment of people in the Middle East. “We tend to forget, in the West, that the United States has more Muslim blood on its hands than al-Qaeda has on its hands of innocent non-Muslims,” Rauf said.

“You may remember that the U.S.-led sanctions against Iraq led to the death of over half a million Iraqi children. This has been documented by the United Nations. And when Madeleine Albright, who has become a friend of mine over the last couple of years, when she was Secretary of State and was asked whether this was worth it, [she] said it was worth it.”

Emerson purported to “fact check” Rauf’s statement on the death toll from the Iraq sanctions by claiming “a report by the British government said at most only 50,000 deaths could be attributed to the sanctions, which were brought on by the actions by former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.”

What Emerson’s “fact check” ignored, however, was that Rauf was accurately recounting Leslie Stahl’s questioning of Albright on CBS “60 Minutes” in 1996. Emerson also left out the fact that United Nations studies did conclude that those U.S.-led sanctions caused the deaths of more than 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five.

In the 1996 interview, Stahl told Albright regarding the sanctions, “We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?”

Albright responded, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price we think the price is worth it.”

Emerson didn’t identify the specific British report that contains the lower figure, although even that number “only 50,000” represented a stunning death toll and doesn’t contradict Rauf’s chief point, that U.S.-British actions have killed many innocent Muslims over the years.

Also, by 2005, when Rauf made his remarks in Australia, the United States and Great Britain had invaded and occupied Iraq, with a death toll spiraling from

tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands with some estimates of war-related deaths in Iraq exceeding one million.

Far from “defending bin Laden violence,” Rauf’s comments simply reflected the truth about the indiscriminate killing inflicted on the Muslim world by U.S.-British military might over the years. Indeed, British imperialism in the region dates back several centuries, a point that Emerson also ignored. Other of Emerson’s criticisms of Rauf were equally tendentious. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Islam Basher Claims to Unmask Cleric.”](#)]

In 2011, amid the furor over Rauf’s project, Emerson took credit for helping to organize controversial hearings by Rep. Peter King, R-New York, on the alleged radicalization of domestic Muslims. Emerson boasted about his role but also lashed out at King for not including him on the witness list for his hearings. In a particularly bizarre letter to King, Emerson vowed to withhold further assistance as retaliation for the snub.

“I was even going to bring in a special guest today and a VERY informed and connected source, who could have been very useful, possibly even critical to your hearing, but he too will not attend unless I do,” Emerson wrote. “You have caved in to the demands of radical Islamists in removing me as a witness.”

In another weird twist, Emerson somehow envisioned himself as the victim of McCarthyism because he wasn’t being allowed to go before the House Homeland Security Committee and accuse large segments of the American-Muslim community of being un-American. [[Politico, Jan. 19, 2011](#)]

Then, in summer of 2011, the Center for American Progress sponsored a report on Emerson and other Muslim-bashers. The context was the murderous rampage in Norway by Christian terrorist Anders Breivik, who cited their writings in a manifesto justifying his killing of 76 people on July 22, 2011, as the beginning of a war against “multiculturalists” who preach tolerance of Muslims.

CAP’s report, “Fear, Inc.,” noted a number of Emerson’s falsehoods and exaggerations about American Muslims and examined the convoluted financing of Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism, which has drawn substantial support from right-wing foundations and funders whose political interests have benefited from a surging right-wing campaign against Muslims.

“Emerson’s nonprofit organization IPT received a total of \$400,000 from Donors Capital Fund in 2007 and 2008, as well as \$100,000 from the Becker Foundation, and \$250,000 from Daniel Pipes’ Middle East Forum, according to our research,” the report said.

“Emerson’s nonprofit organization, in turn, helps fund his for-profit company,

SAE Productions. IPT paid SAE Productions \$3.33 million to enable the company to 'study alleged ties between American Muslims and overseas terrorism.' Emerson is SAE's sole employee. This kind of action enrages Ken Berger, president of Charity Navigator, a nonprofit watchdog group. He argued that 'basically, you have a nonprofit acting as a front organization, and all that money going to a for-profit.'"

Emerson's combination of ideological journalism and loose handling of the facts also should raise questions about his previous work as he sought to discredit serious investigations into the Republican-Israeli role in the Iran-Contra scandal, dating back to its apparent origins in the alleged sabotage of President Carter's 1980 hostage negotiations. [For more on that, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Unmasking an October Surprise 'Debunker'.](#)"]

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](#).

Twisting the Iran-Nuke Intelligence

Since the Reagan administration [broke the back](#) of professionalism at the CIA's analytical division, U.S. intelligence has regularly been twisted for geopolitical purposes, including the case made over Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, as Gareth Porter explains.

By Gareth Porter

For more than three decades, the United States and its European allies have committed one fundamental error after another in the process of creating a commonly held narrative that Iran was secretly pursuing a nuclear weapons program. The story of how suspicions of the Iranian program hardened into convictions is a cautionary tale of political and institutional interests systematically distorting the judgments of both policymakers and intelligence analysts.

Too many of these basic errors have been committed along the way to cover them all in a single article. But four major failures of policymaking and

intelligence represent the broad outlines of this systematic problem.

1. Denial of Iranian rights, followed by denial of the truth

The first failure, which set in train all the others, involved the U.S. trying to strangle the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic in its cradle and then blithely acting as though it bore no responsibility for the resulting shift in Iranian nuclear policy. It all started with a decision by the Reagan administration early in the Iran-Iraq war in 1983 to put diplomatic pressure on its allies to stop all nuclear cooperation with Iran. France was pressed to forbid a French-based multilateral consortium from providing the nuclear fuel that Iran had counted on for its lone nuclear reactor at Bushehr.

The U.S. State Department acknowledged at the time that it had no evidence that Iran was working on or even wanted nuclear weapons. That U.S. effort to choke off any nuclear assistance to Iran thus represented an extremely serious violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which guaranteed Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology.

Not surprisingly Iran responded to that U.S. denial of its nuclear rights by defying U.S. wishes and acquiring the technology to enrich uranium for nuclear fuel itself on the black market and later through negotiations with China and Russia. U.S. aggressiveness toward Iran's nuclear program had backfired.

But instead of recognizing that it had made a serious error, Washington compounded the original policy blunder by treating the Iranian response as prima facie evidence of nuclear weapons intent. In 1995, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, in the course of explaining an order by President Bill Clinton banning all U.S. trade and investment in Iran, accused Iran of having an "organized structure dedicated to acquiring and developing nuclear weapons."

That was an obvious reference to the Iranian efforts to acquire centrifuge and other enrichment technology. The Clinton administration thus acted as though there was no relationship between Iran's interest in obtaining gas centrifuge technology and the U.S. denial policy that preceded it.

2. The intelligence goes wrong

The CIA and other Western intelligence agencies began to drift away from reality on the Iran nuclear issue in the early 1990s, when Western intelligence agencies were gleefully poring over intercepted telexes from Sharif University in Tehran seeking various "dual use" technologies – those that could be used either for a nuclear program or for non-nuclear applications. They had found that the telex number on many of the messages was that of the Physics Research Centre, which

was known to do research for the Iranian defense ministry. That was enough to convince them that Iran was pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program.

The telexes ultimately turned out to be false positives, however. In late 2007 and early 2008, Iran turned over detailed documentation showing that every one of the “dual use” procurement items sought in those telexes had been requested by various faculties of Sharif University for faculty and student research. And the Physics Research Centre’s telex number was on the telexes because the former head of the organization was teaching at the university and had been asked to help in the procurement of the items. The intelligence analysts had wrongly interpreted the inherently ambiguous “dual use” evidence as confirming pre-existing suspicions of Iran’s intentions.

That analytical failure was a template for a series of four intelligence assessments of the Iranian nuclear program by the CIA’s Nonproliferation Center and later by the U.S. intelligence community as a whole that falsely concluded that Iran had an active nuclear weapons development program as of the time of the assessment. That string of false positives raises serious questions about the 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate by a team of analysts that had just repeated the same mistake in a draft estimate only a few months earlier.

3. Ignoring the Fatwa against chemical weapons

The belief of Western governments that Iran must have pursued nuclear weapons has been based on their ignorance of a pivotal historical episode that should have caused them to question that belief. During the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, Saddam’s troops attacked Iran with chemical weapons many times, killing 20,000 Iranians and severely injuring 100,000. Yet Iran never retaliated with its own chemical weapons, as Joost Hiltermann’s *A Poisonous Affair*, the authoritative source on chemical attacks in that war, has documented.

That fact poses a fundamental challenge to the Western narrative on the Iran nuclear issue, because there is no credible explanation for the Iranian failure to retaliate with chemical weapons other than the fact that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had forbidden the possession and use of all weapons of mass destruction as illicit in Islam.

The Revolutionary Guards acted on their own to acquire the capability to produce mustard gas weapons, as the wartime Iranian Minister for military procurement has confirmed in a recent interview. But his account of his meetings with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini also confirms that Khomeini pronounced a *fatwa* against such weapons early in the war and repeated it in 1987.

The implications of that historical episode for an understanding of the politics

of WMD policy in Iran are obviously far-reaching. It lends strong credibility to the Iranian claim that the current supreme leader's fatwa against nuclear weapons is an absolute bar to Iran possessing such weapons. But the news media has continued to dismiss the problem by clinging to an old narrative, which was based on false information that Iran not only had possessed chemical weapons but also had used them.

4. Refusing to acknowledge the weaponization evidence is tainted

For nearly a decade, the international politics of the Iran nuclear issue have revolved around intelligence documents and reports of Iran nuclear weapons work. A 1,000-page cache of documents that surfaced in 2004 showed the redesign of Iran's Shahab-3 missile to accommodate a nuclear weapon and high explosives experiments that could only be used for nuclear weapons. More incriminating intelligence documents followed in 2008-09. The IAEA has now been investigating them for nine years.

But Western governments, abetted by compliant news media coverage, have chosen to ignore the considerable evidence that these documents were of very dubious origins. Contrary to the cover story that the documents were passed on to Western intelligence by a participant in a covert Iranian program or by a German spy, a former senior German foreign office official has now revealed that the German intelligence agency, the *Bundesnachrichtendienst*, obtained them from a sometime source who was a member of the Iranian exile terrorist organization Mujahedeen E-Khalq (MEK). The MEK was then -serving Israel's Mossad as a means of laundering alleged intelligence, so it is safe to assume that the documents came from Israel.

IAEA Director General Mohamed El Baradei (1997-2009), who insisted that the documents had not been authenticated, recalled in his memoirs, "No-one knew if any of this was real." Against the wishes of the Bush administration, he refused to use them as evidence against Iran.

Major contradictions between information in the papers and the independently verifiable timelines of Iran's missile and nuclear programs indicated that the authors were not Iranian specialists. The re-entry vehicle depicted in the studies, for example, was not the one that Iran was redesigning at the time and that was revealed to the world only after the documents were handed over.

El Baradei also revealed that a subsequent series of intelligence documents, which included the claim that Iran had installed a large cylinder at Parchin to test atomic weapons designs, had been passed on to the IAEA directly by Israel. That intelligence proved to be equally problematic: former IAEA nuclear weapons expert Robert Kelley found the Parchin cylinder claim technically implausible.

The U.S. government and its Western allies have all closed their eyes, however, to the evidence that these documents were designed to justify U.S. action by the United States against the Islamic republic. The political convenience of the accepted narrative of the Iran nuclear issue has continued to suppress any active interest in learning the truth.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian writing on U.S. national security policy. His latest book is *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*. [This article first appeared in the Middle East Eye.]

A Possible Israeli Turning Point

The upcoming Israeli elections mark a possible turning point in the Mideast with more moderate Israelis challenging Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line land grab of Palestinian territory. But Netanyahu's approach is not the deviation from Israel's history that some claim, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is trepidation in the Zionist ranks over the March 2015 elections for a new Knesset or parliament. It seems that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu got angry at his more "liberal" coalition partners Tzipi Livni and Yair Lapid because of their opposition to the proposed Israel-equals-a-Jewish-state bill.

In essence, Netanyahu fired them, sacrificing the government's majority in the Knesset and necessitating the upcoming elections. Some observers believe that the election represents something of a crossroads for the Jewish state.

Roger Cohen, a New York Times columnist wrote a headline piece in the Sunday Review section of the newspaper on Dec. 21, 2014. It was entitled "What Will Israel Become?" and tells us that "uneasiness inhabits Israel."

Quoting the Israeli writer Amos Oz, Cohen explains further, "there is a growing sense that Israel is becoming an isolated ghetto, which is exactly what the founding fathers and mothers hoped to leave behind them forever when they created the state of Israel."

Cohen believes that it is Netanyahu's settlement policy in the West Bank and East Jerusalem that is driving Israeli isolation

Cohen hopes that the upcoming elections will turn out Netanyahu and his allies,

all of whom want to expand settlements. What he wants in their place is a coalition of more “moderate” parties which will halt expansion and revive the possibility of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr. Cohen isn't alone. He quotes Ofer Kenig, an Israeli political analyst with the Israel Democracy Institute, as declaring “this [upcoming] election is a critical juncture. We have to choose between being a Zionist and liberal nation or turning into an ethnocentric, nationalist country. I am concerned about the direction in which this delicate democracy is heading.”

Recasting Israeli History

There is something decidedly odd about these concerns. They're odd because they recast Israel as having originally been something other than “ethnocentric and nationalist.” Or, to put it another way, that most of those founding “fathers and mothers” were something other than the recognizable historical precursors of Benjamin Netanyahu and his expansionist passions.

Liberal Zionists who claim otherwise are essentially ignoring the sort of racist nationalist worldview they are affiliated with. However, Zionist history is too well documented to escape the truth. This is particularly the case in the recorded attitudes that launched the Israeli settlement of the Occupied Territories (OT).

In 1967, just after conquering the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights, it was not just the rightwing Likudniks who were mad for expansion. It was also the allegedly moderate leftwing Laborites.

Indeed, the great majority of Israeli Jews, regardless of political orientation or level of religiosity, considered the conquest of the OT as a positive historic achievement. Then as now, for the more strident of them, retaining the territories was seen as synonymous with patriotism.

Tom Segev, in his book *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East* (from which the following quotes and data are taken), gives many of the details. In a post-war 1967 poll “nine out of ten [Israelis] replied that the Old City [of Jerusalem] should not be given back; 85 percent said the Golan Heights should not be returned; 73 percent thought that Gaza should not be relinquished; 71 percent said the West Bank should not be given back a smaller majority, 52 percent, said the Sinai Peninsula should not be given back either. Labor Party member Levi Eshkol, who was the prime minister at that time, described the conquests as a “miracle on top of a miracle.”

On a post-conquest tour of the Jordan Valley, Eshkol stopped repeatedly to examine the soil, to “feel it, smell it, taste it,” so enamored was he of being

in possession of the area. A group of prominent Israeli writers of the day, representing both the political right and the left, published “a proclamation for a Greater Israel” and declared that “we are bound to loyalty, to the integrity of our land and no government in Israel has the right to give up this integrity.”

As we will see, this is the sentiment that now holds the future of all Israelis hostage.

It was in this national frame of mind that the settlement movement began, launched by what longtime Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Abba Eban described as a reborn Israel – a better place than had existed before the 1967 war. So convinced were the Israelis (and Zionists generally) that a new and greater era had begun that almost no one foresaw the dire consequences of “loyalty” to the land.

And those who did see problems never really considered reversing course because of them. For instance, Theodor Meron, the Israeli foreign ministry’s legal counsel in 1967, told the government that settlement of the conquered lands was illegal under international law. He then suggested that settlement go ahead anyway, but disguised as military encampments.

As usual, the Zionists did not care that they were “liberating” someone else’s property and that there was bound to be strong objections. When the Palestinian resistance came, the Israelis reacted with resentment and a rambling list of grievances: decrying that they were hated by the Arabs and by most non-Jews in general and that going back to the 1967 borders would invite a new Holocaust.

When in 2002 the Arab League offered Israel genuine peace with all its commercial benefits in exchange for withdrawing from the Occupied Territories, the Israelis turned them down flat.

Though they did not say so, they simply did not want peace. They wanted the land just as their “founding fathers and mothers” had. Now they have had the land for nearly 50 years and, like a poisoned chalice, it has sickened them. What was considered a “miracle” was really a prelude to disaster and led to a downward spiral into barbarism and growing isolation.

Come the March Elections

But what if Cohen and Kenig get their wish and the March elections remove the Netanyahu government and replace it with one seemingly less dedicated to a maximalist settlement program? Will that lead Israel to reverse course enough to gain peace and worldwide acceptance? Not likely.

A new, more “moderate” government would be restrained by the still prevailing historical sentiment that to give up the West Bank would be an act of treason. They might try to exercise more flexibility in any future negotiations, but there would be a limit to how far they could go.

Therefore, for the Palestinians the result of the upcoming election will determine no more than the size of the Bantustans that will be ultimately offered to them. If Netanyahu wins, they can expect enclaves of minimal size and utility.

From some other government – perhaps led by the Labor Party leader Isaac Herzog – there might be some improvement on this package but, once more, we can be sure that it will fall short of a viable and truly sovereign Palestinian state.

The logic of Zionism has always aimed for a Jewish state in all of “Greater Israel,” and the resulting ideological dedication has been strong enough to prevent any significant change of course. Even the withdrawal from Gaza was a tactical maneuver to contain Palestinian resistance and better secure the West Bank. This dedication is also deadly as is attested to by the strength of the present settler movement: organized, armed to the teeth, and with roots in the military and police. Just how will this group react to any government that even marginally tries to rein them in? There is a good chance they will react with violence. Remember the fate of Yitzhak Rabin. Under such circumstances, it is going to take a lot of leverage, coming from both inside and outside of Israel, to bring about serious change. It is also clear that the Palestinians alone do not have the capacity to apply this leverage.

Thanks to the United States and its special interest-dominated political system, the Palestinians are thoroughly outgunned by a Zionist state that is willing to ethnically cleanse them at every opportunity. That is why to bring about the necessary change in Israeli behavior, episodes of Palestinian resistance must be accompanied by international efforts to isolate Israel economically and socially. The boycott effort is a long-range one. Nonetheless, it is Palestine’s best hope. Regardless of the outcome of the March elections, Israel’s habitual violence and its ongoing violation of international laws and the standards of human rights will not change. However, sooner or later the boycott, allied to ongoing episodes of Palestinian resistance, will bring Israel to a real crossroads and then difficult choices will have to be made.

The questionable claim that Israel unites all the Jewish people will not survive these choices. At that point the Israelis, and perhaps the Jewish people worldwide, will divide between those who cling to racially based past hopes and those who see survival as possible only if such hopes are abandoned.

It is an unfortunate fact that the same road that leads to Palestinian liberation may simultaneously lead to dangerous Jewish factionalism. But that is the price the Zionists seem destined to pay for having sold their national soul to a racist ideology.

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

Is a Clinton Revival Timed-Out?

There may not be a big demand for 1990s nostalgia, but the 2016 presidential race could offer one more contest involving a Clinton and a Bush. Yet, some Democrats fear Hillary Clinton could ultimately fail because she lacks a vision for addressing today's problems, says Beverly Bandler.

By Beverly Bandler

During the 1992 campaign, while facing criticism for her legal work on behalf of a failed savings and loan, Hillary Clinton remarked: "For goodness' sake, you can't be a lawyer if you don't represent banks."

For goodness' sake, can you be president of the United States if you don't understand the role the banks played in the 2008 Financial Crisis? Can you be president if you are oblivious to the real condition of the nation?

It may be difficult to see just how far the U.S. has fallen if you have two expensive and grand homes in two of the best postal zips to which you are driven in a limousine, dine and dish with multi-millionaires and billionaires, and require presidential suites for high-paying speech events.

Both Clintons give evidence that they have become detached from the realities of most Americans. "We are in the best shape of any big country in the world in the next 20 years," Bill Clinton said recently. Perhaps Bill, who has rightly been called "the architect and primary spokesperson for the corporatist and pro-Wall Street wing of his party," should have said: "We Clintons are in the best shape."

It turns out that some of the primary beneficiaries of Clintonism and the "Third Way" concept of the so-called "pro-growth progressive" movement ended up being the Clintons, their cronies, the financial establishment and the other members

of “the 1 percent”, including, of course, the Republicans who never pretended to be other than corporatists intent on destroying the parts of government they couldn’t own.

New Zeitgeist

“Hillary Clinton is dangerously out of step with ‘the new *zeitgeist*’ with her finance-friendly politics that supported her rise to power,” says prominent political journalist William Greider.

“Beyond recession and financial crisis,” notes Greider, “we are in much deeper trouble than many people suppose or the authorities want to acknowledge.”

Despite the recent economic uptick, many Americans subsist on inadequate pay while working long hours, sometimes needing multiple jobs to pay the bills. For the bottom 80 percent, livelihoods are fragile.

“Four out of five Americans will live near poverty, without work, or relying on welfare at least once during their lives, according to a recent survey from the Associated Press,” reports Journalist Jane C. Timm.

The number of Americans living in poverty hovers just below 50 million. According to the latest Census, 46.2 million Americans, 15 percent of the country, are “officially” poor. A supplemental Census estimate that attempts to ascertain poverty levels based on measurements that are considered better than those used for decades, puts the number of Americans in poverty in 2013 at 48.7 million.

But those figures only tell part of the story: “The Associated Press/GFK survey notes that Census figures are a snapshot, they don’t account for those who shift in and out of near-poverty, welfare reliance, or unemployment. When those numbers are accounted for, the number of Americans who face such hardships surges to 79%.”

While most Americans live paycheck to paycheck with fear that the next paycheck might not be coming the relative handful at the top continue to amass wealth beyond the imagination of the vast majority of their countrymen and women.

“America’s wealth distribution now looks like a lopsided ladder: The bottom 40% of the population owns just 0.3% of the nation’s wealth,” writes Timm, “while the top 20% has 84% of the nation’s wealth, according to a 2010 study on wealth distribution and balance.”

Is America ‘Awesome’?

As for America being “awesome,” as a Fox News host gushed recently, historian

Lawrence Wittner points out that the United States is now “tops” only in violence and weapons exports. A close look at the social, economic and environmental statistics makes the United States look more like a Third World nation with a classic oligarchy and an endangered middle class, with powerful corporations treated better than people.

Yet, the word “corporation” does not appear in the Constitution. The word “people” does. The government was not designed to serve as the Protector of Wall Street. Government is supposed to serve all the people, to “provide for the general Welfare.” That was the design of the U.S. Constitution when the Framers replaced the non-functional Articles of Confederation.

It was also the idea reflected in the modern Democratic Party that Franklin Delano Roosevelt created in the 1930s. It is a fundamental concept that seems to elude both current main political parties in Gilded Age II.

Hillary Clinton, one half of the Ultimate Power Couple, is on course to run for president of a nation in crisis in 2016. But who is she? What does she believe? What is her worldview? Does she share her husband’s perspective that treats the role of government as some kind of Job Mart, lining up compliant workers to benefit the well-heeled and well-connected.

Indeed, what are Hillary Clinton’s positions: On the financialization of the economy and the power of the banks? Corporatism? Corporate welfare? Jobs? Poverty? Inequality? Education? Climate change? Environmental quality? On the austerity budget? The Middle Class? Militarism?

What does she believe is the role of government? What does she believe was the legacy of the New Deal? What does she believe the Democratic Party stands for? How does she define Fascism and Democracy? Is she still really a Goldwater Girl in Democratic camouflage? Is she still in the embrace of 1990s Clintonism, “New Democrats” centrism? Not only are her stated positions crucial but the *basis for them*, how she understands the world today and the history that has brought us here.

On foreign policy, is she a Neocon Lite who will support every militaristic call for interventionism around the world? What lessons has she learned, if any, from her vote for the Iraq War and her instigation of the “regime change” in Libya, two decisions that have contributed to chaos across the Middle East and North Africa.

Rebranded and Retrenched

As columnist Doug Henwood notes, “Hillary (and she has clearly rebranded herself as just a first name) embodies the ‘New Democrat’ politics of the 1990s

that now seem hopelessly obsolete, no match for a world of chronic economic stagnation, polarization and climate catastrophe.

“She was very much a partner in inventing that ideology, business-friendly, hawkish, tough on unions and the poor, with her husband. The Clintonites purged the Democrats of their social-democratic wing, consolidating the victories of the Reagan Revolution. At this point, it’s hard to say what Hillary or the Democrats stand for, other than being protectors of the status quo.

“What is the case for Hillary? . . . She has experience, she’s a woman, and it’s her turn. It’s hard to find any substantive political argument in her favor. During her career as New York’s junior senator and as secretary of state, she has scarcely budged from the centrist sweet spot, and has become increasingly hawkish on foreign policy.”

Some Democrats like to compare the Clintons glowingly to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, but others see the Byzantine power couple Justinian and Theodora, who brutally put down a popular revolt and made senators prostrate themselves when they entered the royal couple’s presence.

Yet, as Washington-based writer Rich Yeselson observes, “How you feel about Hillary Clinton’s inevitability depends a lot upon how alarmed you are that the GOP, the most radically extreme major party formation since the Southern ‘Slave Democrats’ of the 1850s, might take full control of the federal government in 2016

“Clinton is exactly the kind of candidate one would expect the Democrats to nominate in 2016. She has the typical political credentials of a modern presidential candidate: eight years in the Senate, followed by a high cabinet post. She has 100 percent name recognition. She has a powerful fundraising apparatus. And her policy positions are broadly aligned with the vast majority of Democratic Party elites and much of its electorate, too. In this, she is the embodiment of what, in a useful phrase, [former] *New Republic*’s Noam Scheiber has described as ‘boardroom liberalism.’”

The Clinton Years

Hillary’s political fortunes are bound up with Bill’s eight years in office, since she was an integral part of his administration. And, though the economy performed better than under the two Bushes who sandwiched the Clinton years, Democrats should reflect carefully on those years.

Robert Borosage, co-director of *Campaign for America’s Future*, points out that “Democrats understandably feast on the comparison between the salad days of the Clinton presidency and the Bush debacle. Twenty-two million new jobs under

Clinton; the worst jobs record since the Great Depression under Bush. The longest period of growth in U.S. history under Clinton; the weakest recovery and biggest bust under Bush. Budget surpluses under Clinton; deficits as far as the eye could see under Bush.”

But Borosage, nonetheless, says, “The [Democratic] party must free itself from the legacy of former President Bill Clinton and the centrism of his New Democrats. Clinton’s successes in office have little relevance for Democrats today. The 1990s were a very different time both politically and economically. In fact, many of Clinton’s policies led to the travails now facing Americans. They are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

“And Clinton’s strategy of co-opting conservative themes offers no way out. As leader of the New Democrats, Clinton tacked to the prevailing winds of that conservative time. On the economy, Clinton’s New Democrats scorned old ‘tax and spend’ liberals. They boasted that they understood markets, were skeptical of big government and disdained the outmoded social welfare policies of the New Deal and Great Society. The promise of America, they argued, was ‘equal opportunity, not equal outcomes.’

“After taking office, Clinton shelved most of his populist promises. In today’s political environment, Clinton’s retreats and concessions on social issues are embarrassing anachronisms.”

Borosage continues, “On economic issues, Clinton’s Rubinomics contributed directly to digging the hole we are in. Deregulation helped unleash the ‘financial wilding’ that eventually blew up the economy. The celebration of deficit reduction bolstered the illusory belief in ‘expansionary austerity’ that has driven Europe back into recession and sabotaged any chance of getting a sufficient stimulus here at home.

“Austerity continues to starve public investments vital to our future. The banks emerged from the crisis bigger and more concentrated than ever

“No matter how repellant Republicans may look to [the young, people of color, single women] voters, they are unlikely to turn out in large numbers for a party whose policies have failed them. Democrats and the country have to move beyond the old economy and the old arguments. Obama had it right: We need a new foundation for growth one that embraces the need for dynamic and activist government.”

Yet, it was President Barack Obama who called on Bill Clinton to make the case for his re-election at the 2012 Democratic convention. But what positives remain of the Clinton years?

Fearing the 'Third Way'

In the 1990s, there were many progressive/liberal Democrats who were alarmed by the Clinton policies and what they would portend for the future, particularly the deals he struck once the Republicans gained control of Congress in 1994.

Comparing the Democratic Party's resistance to imposing a work requirement on women with children in the 1970s, lawyer Carol Lipton noted that "no Democrat at the time would have envisioned a Democratic president less than 20 years later, [dismantling] the ideological core of welfare, maintaining and supporting families, and substituting the Clintonian neoliberal vision of the undeserved poor having to make efforts to look for jobs that were menial, low-paying, and engaging in time-sucking job hunting efforts."

It's fair to say that many of us ordinary rank-and-file Democrats were uncomfortable with some Clinton policies back then, but the economy was relatively strong and thus few could envision the future consequences of Clintonism when the good times stopped rolling.

The last 15 years have revealed the painful downside of those "reforms" as millions of American families fell from their disappearing middle-class jobs through the shredded safety net into poverty. For those reasons, some progressives view Bill Clinton's legacy as a surrender to the greed of corporatism that felt good at the moment only because of the inflated stock market bubble of the 1990s that burst in the ensuing decade.

Political columnist Matt Bai says, "Clinton tried gamely to leave behind lasting change, and he failed. In many more areas, though, the progress that was made under Clinton, almost 23 million new jobs, reductions in poverty, lower crime and higher wages, [was] reversed or wiped away entirely in a remarkably short time.

"Clinton's presidency seems now to have been oddly ephemeral, his record etched in chalk and left out in the rain. George W. and his Republican Party [undertook] a ferocious and unbending assault on Clinton's progressive legacy. As Clinton points out in his speeches, Bush and the Republicans abandoned balanced budgets to fight the war in Iraq, widened income inequality by cutting taxes on the wealthy and scaled back social programs.

"Some Democrats, though, and especially those who are apt to call themselves 'progressives,' offer a more complicated and less charitable explanation. In their view, Clinton failed to seize his moment and create a more enduring, more progressive legacy, not just because of the personal travails and Republican attacks that hobbled his presidency, but because his centrist, 'third way'

political strategy, his strategy of 'triangulating' to find some middle point in every argument, sapped the party of its core principles

"They say, he was less a victim of Bush's radicalism than he was its enabler. Ideologically Clinton's presidency fit snugly into the era of Reagan and Bush. Faced with ascendant conservatism Clinton saw his job, in a sense, as getting the Democratic Party to adjust to it, rather than to resist it."

Hillary's Coronation?

Hillary Clinton's expected presidential candidacy should be seen in the context of this recent past. She should not presume a "coronation" and a possible rematch with the Bush dynasty, if Jeb Bush wins the Republican nomination.

Americans are angry and a good number of them are "real" Democrats, who have the perception that the charismatic and smart neoliberal Clintons empowered themselves as they helped to enfeeble the Democratic Party. Unquestionably that was not their intention, but that is what happened.

The Clintonian version of the "Best and the Brightest" told fellow Democrats in the 1990s that they should "do more than just defend old programs." Yet those sooooo smart, highly educated people failed to do the basic homework to learn the purpose of those programs, the context in which they were initiated, the principles they represented, and the national needs they met.

As professor Lawrence Davidson posits, the Clinton and their fellow corporate Democrats forgot the "why" of the New Deal.

Yet, just as the Clintons' New Democrats of the 1990s viewed the New Deal Democrats as yesterday's news, so do many of today's Democrats view Hillary Clinton as out of touch with this decade's problems.

As R.J. Eskow from Campaign for America's Future comments, "'Clintonism,' the Wall Street-friendly economic ideology of a bygone era, has passed its sell-by date."

Today's America is different from the 1990s politically and economically, and it is also not 2008. In many ways the situation is comparable to the 1920s when another Gilded Age was roaring for the lucky few but not for the fragile middle class and surely not for the struggling working and lower classes. Such imbalanced socio-economic structures are inherently unstable as well as intensely unfair.

Looking out over today's national landscape of struggling communities, desperate families and decaying infrastructure, Noam Chomsky has commented that America is

“not a pretty sight.”

The challenge for Hillary Clinton is whether she can demonstrate that she has a vision big enough to detect ways for addressing the multitude of problems or whether she can only see the comforts of the well-heeled friends who surround her.

Americans deserve clear answers to hard questions, not campaign bromides and reminiscences of a time gone by. Clintonism, however well intentioned it may have been, turns out to have been an illusion cloaked by a brief period of boom that did not survive the inevitable bust.

A Downward Trend

As progressive media critic Jeff Cohen has written, “Despite gains on issues like gay rights and pot legalization, the trend since the 1980s has been economic/environmental decline alongside the solidification of corporate power and economic inequality a long-term downward trend that has persisted through the Bill Clinton and Obama years, though at a slower rate than with the GOP in the White House.

“The only way to reverse this dangerous trend is to tell the truth about and challenge corporate Democrats. As much as I’d like to see a woman president (I have two daughters), a good place for that challenge to happen would be through a progressive candidate taking on Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic primaries, if she runs. Without that battle and many others, the corporatization of the Democratic Party and our government will continue to threaten all our futures.”

As hard as it may be for some Democrats to accept, the reality is that Clintonism helped Reaganism break the country.

Andrew Levine of the Institute of Policy Studies says: “Bill Clinton was the best Reaganite president ever not the most visionary, not the one with the most competent subordinates, but the most effective. No one, certainly not Reagan himself, did more to privatize and deregulate, and to undo government programs that perform worthwhile functions. Reagan famously proposed ‘starving the monster.’ This is what Bill Clinton did.”

Now the Clintons expect to be further rewarded with the presidency of Hillary Clinton – “Eight years for Bill! Eight years for Hill!”

Should they be rewarded? Can Hillary Clinton be expected to fix what her husband’s presidency helped break? Would she? Would they?

As Slate's Jamelle Bouie writes, "Hillary Clinton is a triangulating corporate Democrat who forged her political identity against a relentless, ideologically driven GOP and built her core support among the wealthy elites of the Democratic Party. The former makes her suspicious of (if not hostile to) the left on foreign and domestic policy, while the latter, coupled with her time as New York senator, makes her receptive to the failed ideas and expertise of Wall Street."

Bouie adds, "The task for liberals, and the left more broadly, is to correct that blind spot in the party and, in the process, force [Hillary] Clinton to see that the 1990s are over, and the public is more than primed for a big swing."

Hillary Clinton is a woman of accomplishment and one has to respect her remarkable political journey, her notable skills, her toughness, and the rich experience upon which she can draw. But if Hillary wants to return to where her husband "left off," the nation is in for even bigger trouble than we have now. She will offer progressives and Americans with common sense no choice but to try and stop her.

Perhaps Hillary Clinton can find the imagination, intellectual integrity, political courage and maturity for another option.

Beverly Bandler's public affairs career spans some 40 years. Her credentials include serving as president of the state-level League of Women Voters of the Virgin Islands and extensive public education efforts in the Washington, D.C. area for 16 years. She writes from Mexico.

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New Trick for Sinking Iran-Nuke Talks

Neocons and other U.S. hardliners, who want to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran, never stop scheming up ways to torpedo a deal that would constrain but not eliminate Iran's nuclear program, with the latest idea a threat to impose new sanctions if Iran doesn't capitulate, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

Notwithstanding the obvious asymmetries in soon-to-resume nuclear negotiations with Iran (it's Iran's nuclear program, not the U.S. one, that is being restricted; it's the United States, not Iran, that is sanctioning someone else's economy) the perceptual and political similarities that Americans and Iranians have brought to this encounter are striking to anyone who has been following the subject closely.

To begin with, the chief policy-makers in each country clearly want to reach an agreement. On the Iranian side this includes not only the foreign minister who has been conducting the negotiations and the president who has been directly overseeing them but also the Iranian policy-maker who matters most: the supreme leader. It is almost inconceivable that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei would have made it possible for President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif to have gone as far as they have already gone, and to sign Iran up to the commitments they already have made in the preliminary agreement reached in late 2013, if he did not genuinely share the objective of completing the negotiations and reaching a final agreement.

Both the U.S. president and the Iranian supreme leader have publicly voiced skepticism, however, as to whether the negotiations will in fact succeed. Probably the expressed doubts are in each case partly tactical, to limit the perceived political damage to each leader should the negotiations fail. But the doubts probably also reflect genuine assessments of the challenges that each side faces in reaching, and securing domestic support for, an agreement.

That gets to one of the clearest elements of symmetry between the two sides. Each government is burdened with substantial opposition from domestic elements that oppose any U.S.-Iranian accord. The hardline opponents on each side act and sound remarkably alike. Each is embedded in a broader domestic political opposition to the incumbent presidential administration and is quick to exploit any setback to that administration for political advantage (and each realizes that if the nuclear negotiations can be torpedoed that would be a significant setback for the president they oppose).

Each never tires of demonizing the other country and attributes the most malevolent intentions to it. Each fulminates about how its own country's leaders are supposedly conceding too much and giving away the store. Each couches its opposition in terms of getting a better agreement, when in fact it does not want any agreement at all.

A reminder of how much of a factor is hardline opposition in Iran came the other day when hardliners in the Iranian parliament forced a sort of no-confidence vote over how Zarif has been handling the negotiations. Zarif prevailed, but just barely. Only 125 of the 229 legislators present voted in his favor, with 86 voting against.

The next big ploy of hardline opponents in the United States will be to push a new version of sanctions legislation similar to what Senators Mark Kirk and Robert Menendez introduced in the previous Congress. The new version is still being written, but the previous version contained elements that might well have constituted a violation of the preliminary agreement, and if it had been enacted an unsurprising Iranian reaction, one that Iranian hardliners probably would have demanded, would have been to declare Iran's commitments under that agreement to be null and void and to walk away from the negotiating table.

But let us assume, in line with what we have heard lately from the American hardliners, that the new version to be voted on as early as this month would not be a blatant violation of the existing agreement but instead would be a "conditional" measure that would impose additional sanctions on Iran if a final agreement were not reached by the deadlines that the negotiators had previously announced (March for a political agreement, and June for a full document with all technical details).

Now let us perform a thought experiment in which we imagine Iranian hardliners doing what would be their closest possible equivalent to what the American hardliners are trying to do. Imagine that the Iranian majlis, or parliament, enacts legislation that commits Iran to taking certain steps if agreement is not reached by the announced deadlines.

Specifically, if there is no agreement, Iran would resume building up a stockpile of low-enriched uranium. It would resume enrichment of uranium to the 20 percent level. It would resume development of the nuclear reactor at Arak in ways that would facilitate use of it to produce plutonium. It would rescind the additional special access given to international inspectors and revert to the lesser level of inspection consistent with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and prior agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In other words, the Iranian hardliners' legislation, just like the American hardliners' legislation, would undo the commitments that each side made in the preliminary agreement of November 2013. And just like the American hardliners, the Iranian hardliners would justify their legislation as a conditional measure that would help to provide an incentive to the other side to negotiate seriously and not to drag out the talks indefinitely. As such, the measure would be portrayed as an aid to negotiations rather than an undermining of them.

What would the U.S. reaction be to such an action in the majlis? Would the legislation, as claimed, make the U.S. administration more inclined than before to make concessions, increasing the likelihood that an agreement would be reached on the announced schedule? Of course not.

Americans of various political stripes would denounce the action of the majlis as a major show of Iranian bad faith. The talk in Washington would not be about making more U.S. concessions but instead about what the United States could do to pressure Iran in return. Those who had openly questioned Iran's seriousness about wanting an agreement would say, "We told you so."

Even those in the U.S. administration with high confidence in the good will of Rouhani would have their faith shaken in his ability to implement the terms of an agreement. And American hardliners would voice the most outrage of all (however much they would privately welcome this boost to their own deal-killing endeavors).

What works in one direction works in the other. The responses to the imaginary legislation of Iranian hardliners point to the likely responses to the (unfortunately real) legislation being cooked up by American hardliners. Iranians of various stripes would see it as a major show of American bad faith. It would amplify the already considerable doubts in Tehran about true American intentions and about the ability of even a well-intentioned Barack Obama to make good on the U.S. side of a deal in the face of resistance by a Republican Congress.

In Iranian eyes it would make any further Iranian concessions seem less apt to bring desirable results, thus more risky politically for any Iranian leader to

offer, and thus less likely to be offered. Consequently the negotiations would be more likely to fail. U.S. officials conducting the negotiations know what, which is why they oppose the legislation. Those pushing the legislation know that, too, which is why they are pushing it.

It is usually only when speaking in private or when too inexperienced or naive to disguise true intentions that the pushers acknowledge their objective. More often they promote the idea that what they are doing will provide the United States with useful leverage and induce Iran to make still more concessions. And some people genuinely believe that.

This is one of several respects in which Americans tend to believe that bargaining with another state works in an asymmetric, exceptionalist way, in which other humans respond to pressures and inducements in a fundamentally different manner from how Americans themselves respond, when in fact there is far more symmetry.

Thinking in role-reversal terms might help to correct that mistaken belief.

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Will France Repeat US Mistakes after 9/11?

Exclusive: As three suspects in the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre die in a shootout with French police, the cycle of violence that has engulfed the Mideast again reaches into the West, but the challenge is to learn from U.S. mistakes after 9/11 and address root causes, not react with another round of mindless violence, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

First, a hat tip to Elias Groll, assistant editor at *Foreign Policy*, whose report just a few hours after the killings on Wednesday at the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, included this key piece of background on the younger of the two brother suspects:

“Carif Kouachi was previously known to the authorities, as he was convicted by a French court in 2008 of trying to travel to Iraq to fight in that country’s

insurgent movement. Kouachi told the court that he wished to fight the American occupation after viewing images of detainee abuse at Abu Ghraib prison.”

The next morning, Amy Goodman of Democracynow.org and Juan Cole (in his blog) also carried this highly instructive aspect of the story of the unconscionable terrorist attack, noting that the brothers were well known to French intelligence; that the younger brother, Cherif, had been sentenced to three years in prison for his role in a network involved in sending volunteer fighters to Iraq to fight alongside al-Qaeda; and that he said he had been motivated by seeing the images of atrocities by U.S. troops at Abu Ghraib.

An article in the *Christian Science Monitor* added: “During Cherif Kouachi’s 2008 trial, he told the court, ‘I really believed in the idea’ of fighting the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq.” But one would look in vain for any allusion to Abu Ghraib or U.S. torture in coverage by the Wall Street Journal or Washington Post. If you read to the end of a New York Times article, you would find in paragraph 10 of 10 a brief (CYA?) reference to Abu Ghraib.

So I guess we’ll have to try to do their work for them. Would it be unpatriotic to suggest that a war of aggression and part of its “accumulated evil” torture as well as other kinds of state terrorism like drone killings are principal catalysts for this kind of non-state terrorism? Do any Parisians yet see blowback from France’s Siamese-twin relationship with the U.S. on war in the Middle East and the Mahgreb, together with their government’s failure to speak out against torture by Americans? Might this fit some sort of pattern?

Well, duh. Not that this realization should be anything new. In an interview on Dec. 3, 2008, Amy Goodman posed some highly relevant questions to a former U.S. Air Force Major who uses the pseudonym Matthew Alexander, who personally conducted more than 300 interrogations in Iraq and supervised more than a thousand.

AMY GOODMAN: “I want to go to some larger issues, this very important point that you make that you believe that more than 3,000 U.S. soldiers were killed in Iraq, I mean, this is a huge number, because of torture, because of U.S. practices of torture. Explain what you mean.”

MATTHEW ALEXANDER: “Well, you know, when I was in Iraq, we routinely handled foreign fighters, who we would capture. Many of, several of them had been scheduled to be suicide bombers, and we had captured them before they carried out their missions.

“They came from all over the area. They came from Yemen. They came from northern Africa. They came from Saudi. All over the place. And the number one reason

these foreign fighters gave for coming to Iraq was routinely because of Abu Ghraib, because of Guantanamo Bay, because of torture practices.

“In their eyes, they see us as not living up to the ideals that we have subscribed to. You know, we say that we represent freedom, liberty and justice. But when we torture people, we’re not living up to those ideals. And it’s a huge incentive for them to join al-Qaeda.

“You also have to kind of put this in the context of Arab culture and Muslim culture and how important shame, the role of shame in that culture. And when we torture people, we bring a tremendous amount of shame on them. And so, it is a huge motivator for these people to join al-Qaeda and come to Iraq.”

However, if you listen to the corporate media, there is almost no discussion about why so many people in the Muslim world object to U.S. policies so strongly that they resist violently and even resort to suicide attacks. The average consumer of this thin gruel of “information” might come away thinking that Muslims are hard-wired to despise Westerners or they might recall President George W. Bush’s favorite explanation, “they hate our freedoms.”

One has to go back five years to find a White House correspondent worth his or her salt who bluntly raised this central question. In early January 2010, after President Barack Obama gave a flaccid account of the intelligence screw-up that almost downed an airliner over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, the late Helen Thomas asked why the culprit, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, did what he did.

Like Carif Kouachi, he had trained in Yemen; like Carif Kouachi, he had slipped through the U.S. counter-terrorist security sieve despite intelligence that should have nailed him and despite the billions of dollars frivolously spent on eavesdropping on virtually everyone in the world. (The eavesdropping had created such a giant haystack of data that intelligence analysts couldn’t locate the crucial needle even when Abdulmutallab’s father called to warn U.S. officials about his son’s dangerous radicalization.)

Here’s the revealing exchange between Thomas and John Brennan, who was then White House counterterrorism adviser and is now CIA director:

Thomas: “And what is the motivation? We never hear what you find out on why.”

Brennan: “Al Qaeda is an organization that is dedicated to murder and wanton slaughter of innocents They attract individuals like Mr. Abdulmutallab and use them for these types of attacks. He was motivated by a sense of religious sort of drive. Unfortunately, al Qaeda has perverted Islam, and has corrupted the concept of Islam, so that he’s (sic) able to attract these individuals. But al Qaeda has the agenda of destruction and death.”

Thomas: "And you're saying it's because of religion?"

Brennan: "I'm saying it's because of an al Qaeda organization that used the banner of religion in a very perverse and corrupt way."

Thomas: "Why?"

Brennan: "I think this is a, long issue, but al Qaeda is just determined to carry out attacks here against the homeland."

Thomas: "But you haven't explained why."

Neither did President Obama, nor anyone else in the U.S. political/media hierarchy. All the American public gets is the boilerplate about how al-Qaeda evildoers are perverting a religion and exploiting impressionable young men.

Palace Pundits Make It Worse

The intelligence tradecraft term of art for a "cooperating" journalist, businessperson or academic is "agent of influence." Some housebroken journalists take such scrupulous notes that they end up sounding dangerously close to their confidential government sources. Some have gone even further and actually worked for the CIA.

For a recent example of the housebroken variety, count the number of cooperating journalists who repeated the CIA and Republican line that the Senate Intelligence Committee report on torture released last month was "flawed and partisan," even though it was based on CIA cables and other original documents.

Or think further back to those vengeful days in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the macho pose taken by President George W. Bush, who won oohs and aahs for posturing with a bullhorn and throwing an opening pitch at a Yankees game (and later for dressing up in a flight suit as he arrived to deliver his "Mission Accomplished" speech).

CIA operative Gary Schroen told National Public Radio that, just days after 9/11, Counterterrorist chief Cofer Black sent him to Afghanistan with orders to "Capture bin Laden, kill him, and bring his head back in a box on dry ice." As for other al-Qaeda leaders, Black reportedly said, "I want their heads up on pikes."

This bloodthirsty tone reverberated among Bush-friendly pundits who sought to out-macho each other. One consummate insider, *Washington Post* veteran Jim Hoagland went so far as to publish a letter to President Bush on Oct. 31, 2001, that was no Halloween prank. Rather, Hoagland strongly endorsed what he termed the "wish" for "Osama bin Laden's head on a pike," which he claimed was the

objective of Bush's "generals and diplomats."

In his open letter to Bush, Hoagland also lifted the curtain on the actual neoconservative game plan by giving Bush the following ordering of priorities: "The need to deal with Iraq's continuing accumulation of biological and chemical weapons and the technology to build a nuclear bomb can in no way be lessened by the demands of the Afghan campaign. You must conduct that campaign so that you can pivot quickly from it to end the threat Saddam Hussein's regime poses."

Thus, Hoagland had the "pivot" idea three weeks before Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called Gen. Tommy Franks to tell him the President wanted the military to shift focus to Iraq. Franks and his senior aides had been working on plans for attacks on Tora Bora where bin Laden was believed hiding but attention, planning and resources were abruptly diverted toward Iraq. And Osama bin Laden, of course, walked out of Tora Bora through the mountain passes to Pakistan.

The point here is that some media favorites are extremely well briefed partly because they are willing to promote what the powerful want to do and because they are careful not to bite the hands that feed them by criticizing the CIA or other national security agencies. Still fewer are inclined to point out basic structural faults, not to mention the crimes of recent years.

So it is up to those of us who know something of intelligence and how structural faults, above-the-law mentality and flexible consciences can spell disaster – how reckless reactions to terrorist provocations can make matters worse by accelerating a truly vicious cycle and doing nothing to address the underlying causes that prompted the violence in the first place.

Because of the refusal to seriously address the question of **why** that Helen Thomas posed to John Brennan or to do more than compete like bodybuilders adopting the most muscular poses disaster after disaster is what the West is in for, if it does not come to its senses.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years, and now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Obama's Narrative of Deceits

Though President Obama promised "transparency" and "openness," he has slipped so

far from those goals that some wonder how many sides of his mouth he can speak through. He has surely not broken from the longstanding pattern of presidential deceits that have eroded the Republic, as Jason Hirthler writes.

By Jason Hirthler

If the American public knew what was being perpetrated in its name, it might put an end to the slow-motion coup d'État of the United States by corporate wealth. But it is kept in the shadows, pinioned by a harness of half-truths that underwrite its ignorance and enable its indifference.

The public will likely remain in this state until it hears the whole truth, and not the abridged version peddled by an unscrupulous administration, its Pavlovian Cabinet, our obsequious Congress, and the sycophant media (those dutiful court stenographers of state power). Until this confederacy of knaves is exposed at scale, the Janus-faced narrative streaming from the lips of the Commander-in-Chief, whomever he or she may be, will neither change nor falter. Ringing in a New Year will not matter.

Let's take a look at a few of the key storylines in foreign policy. Note how each is fundamentally incomplete. Key facts are elided. Context is erased. Ulterior motives buried. American action is thus cast in the lambent light of good intentions. From the administration's standpoint, the fundamental goal of selective storytelling is to portray offensive acts of aggression as defensive acts of nobility, the backbone of the myth of American exceptionalism.

Defending Ukrainian Sovereignty

Perhaps the story of the year in 2014 was Ukraine. President Barack Obama has roamed the world declaiming on the sacred rights of our dear Ukrainian friends in Kiev. As Obama has it, these freedom-loving patriots have suffered multiple injustices this past year: When their former Crimean province endured the indignity of annexation by the Russian bear. When they were forced to bravely face down a savage uprising in the East, where Moscow infected the people with failed ideas and false hopes.

These poor Kiev allies, who overturned a corrupt government and instilled the leaders it wanted, still hopes in the humblest of terms to integrate with Europe. We must stand beside it, support its dreams, and defend its fledgling liberty from those who would usurp it.

Most of this is fog-addled dissembling from the estimable firm of Balder and Dash, recently retained by the White House. But a few facts persist. There was a coup, but America facilitated it. A new government did take office, but it was comprised not of democrats but fascist sympathizers and neoliberal technocrats.

There was an uprising in the East, but it was led by ethnic Russians who rejected the Kiev putsch. There was a plebiscite, in which Crimeans overwhelmingly opted to join the Russian Federation rather than sign up for ECB-style austerity and a phalanx of NATO bases.

Notice how Obama's version casts the conflict as a defensive one. It employs the threadbare rationale that America is the noble enforcer of democratic values the world over. Here it is defending defenseless borderland Slavs from unquenchable imperialist thirst of Moscow. In truth, Russia has always indicated that interventions in its border states would be considered provocations, just as the U.S. nearly went nuclear when the Soviets deployed missiles in Cuba.

Despite promises from the first Bush administration, successive administrations have moved shamelessly to the east, absorbing new states into NATO and slowly working to marginalize Russian influence from its eastern border to the Atlantic. An aggressive posture if there ever was one.

Iran and the Persian Threat

The President has told us that the "international community" has made tremendous progress in eliminating Iran's capacity to "breakout" and "sprint" to a nuclear weapon, as it most assuredly hopes to do in its endless quest for apocalypse. But while he warns that nations with honest intentions must be wary of scheming nations, the supporting evidence for the madness of the mullahs is sketchy and ignores Tehran's IAEA right to pursue civilian nuclear energy.

But the President won't mention the Ayatollah's *fatwa* against nuclear devices. Nor will he remind you that our dangerous sanctions, notoriously killing 500,000 Iraqi children in the 1990s, have significantly damaged the Iranian medical industry and restricted healthcare for the gravely ill.

He might tell you, quite rightly, how naive Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was to think that making nuclear concessions, softening Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's provocative language, and glad-handing a few dignitaries would make the slightest difference to the U.S. perception of Tehran. But he won't ask you any hypotheticals either, such as how you might feel were you watching a hyper-nuclear aggressor run roughshod over your largely defenseless neighbors? If the U.S. really believes Iran is chasing a nuke, then why not quit giving them a reason to?

ISIS and the Long War

President Obama quite rightly expressed his contempt for ISIS and their unconscionable acts of decapitation of captives and discriminatory slaughter of

Shiites. The revolting behavior of ISIS is plain to see. But the President will not summon the image of our own allies, Wahhabi autocrats that savagely behead their own for the sin of sorcery and other fiendish behaviors.

What Obama will also not do is move to end the brutal actions of the U.S. military. He does not mention the drone strikes that slaughter suspected plotters and their families, drawing diabolical schemes in the dirt behind their village hovels. The evidence against them, mind you, is buried in clandestine bureaucratic enclaves, unfit for untrained eyes. And still, village Arabs are nothing more than illuminated targets on a heat map.

Obama will not mention our own sordid history of malevolence. For instance, what we backed in Central America throughout the presidency of his political hero, Ronald Reagan, including brutality through our proxy forces in Nicaragua and El Salvador, which the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) found to be unique in the hemisphere because they “abducted, killed, and tortured political opponents on a systematic and widespread basis.” Torture techniques were said to have been learnt at American counter-insurgency schools and overseen by the CIA. And yes, these atrocities included decapitations.

If you’re looking for evidence that American troops performed these deeds themselves, look no further than Iraq. Or into the annals of American history. During the Wilson administration, for example, marines invaded the Dominican Republic and leading a criminal and savage repression in order to secure a profitable market for U.S. sugar concerns. At the time, the advantages of outsourcing were little known.

False Flags and a Paranoid Pyongyang

The President will publicly affect a grandiose outrage and claim that invidious rogue state North Korea has hacked Sony Corporation and leaked millions of files, an act of war under international law. What kind of barbaric society would think to conduct such outlandish cyber attacks on a harmless corporation, our flabbergasted White House spokesmen and press flacks ask us in disbelief?

But what our great leader will not tell you is that we have no firm evidence that North Korea is behind the attack. Much like the United States affected certainty when assessing the Damascus chemical attack in 2013, the degree of certainty rises in inverse proportion to the paucity of proof. The FBI released a bantamweight statement suggesting codes, IP addresses, and other surface indicators pointed to North Korea. These claims have been met with derision by those familiar with digital hacking.

Nor has the President bothered to note that his administration has largely

pioneered the art of the cyber-attack by smuggling sinister viruses into the Iranian grid hoping to infect and destroy its nuclear capacities and undermine its feverish obsession with a bomb (again, sans evidence). This is not to mention the heroic efforts of the National Security Agency to hack into and imbed trackers in millions of domestic computers.

A Tortured Exception

At all times, the President poses as a man who cherishes justice, peace, and the sovereignty of nations. He will tell you as much. He claims Iraq was a “strategic blunder”; he plaintively concedes that “we tortured some folks” and behaved in a manner not in keeping with “who we really are.”

But perhaps the best way to prevent future torture is first, to quit practicing it, and second, to punish those that did it in the past, even if they are members of your own clan. Neither has been comprehensively achieved.

The President claims to have banned torture. But he hasn’t banned the practice of outsourcing it via rendition. And he has evidently only banned it for the interrogation of prisoners (“detainees”) captured in “armed conflict,” which leaves a broad loophole concerning noncombatant detainees.

As for the authors of our elaborate torture of Arabs across the Muslim world in infamous Bagram and Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and in anonymous black sites where the gloves truly come off, well, let’s put that behind us. He has also decided that to prosecute the war crimes of administrations past would simply be unhelpful, and that we ought to look forward and not into the (unhelpful) past.

Yet his elegies to lawfulness include his steadfast defense of CIA Director John Brennan, who himself had the audacity to defend CIA war crimes before the press from Langley, in which he repeatedly claimed, once more without evidence, that torture works. Not surprising from a CIA director. But Obama will always take a more nuanced view, insisting that these minor missteps are not in keeping with “our values.”

Turning a Blind Eye to Tel Aviv

Whenever an exchange of fire occurs between Palestine and Israel, Obama is swift to commandeer the nearest microphone, only to remind us that Israel has a right to defend itself. This is not only a prejudiced view, but it isn’t actually true. Under international law, occupying powers don’t have the right to attack the populations they occupy, let alone to collectively punish them for the crimes of their leadership, which in this case are resistance to occupation.

Obama will also forget to mention that the Palestinian occupied territories

represent the world's most salient example of persistent state terror. He will instead authorize yet more money and munitions and gunships to be quietly shipped to Tel Aviv, trumpeting Israeli democracy. Before the ink dries on these forms of Israeli welfare, the President will reject U.N. resolutions that acknowledge Palestinians' right to be free. To live unoccupied. To escape the grinding gears of racism that have transformed Israel into the South Africa of its day, a nation purblind to its own fascism.

The Energy Subtext

Of course, Obama has never acknowledged that the rise of ISIS, Iranian fundamentalism, Palestinian oppression, and North Korean isolationism are partially creditable to U.S. policies and interventions. We exacerbate the things we claim to deplore. We commit the behaviors we hope to curtail. The reason why is the nasty little secret at the heart of the American empire: the profits of the few trump the prosperity of the many.

The fact is that Russia, Syria and Iran are the West's three great nemeses in the contest for control of the earth's resources. All three have variously conspired to build pipelines across their nations and others, such as Ukraine, that lead to Europe, where these Slav and Shiite alliances hope to supply oil and gas to the lucrative EU market. But this cannot happen.

This is the silent meta-narrative lurking beneath Obama's patriotic vagaries, that these are proactive resource wars. Pipeline conflict that will benefit defense contractors (Raytheon) and energy companies (Exxon). They are also wars over market access through "free trade" agreements that will privilege Western industry (agribusiness) and finance (IMF).

Victory in these conflicts will keep America's dollar hegemony intact, forcing energy purchases to be denominated in dollars, which will be used to buy U.S. debt and thus help fund the next energy conflict. But these delicate facts are left out of the final draft of the President's talking points. Nobody in the government believes Americans would back wars perpetrated for control of fossil fuels, guaranteed markets for GMO seeds, and globalized serfdom via compound-interest debt regimes.

Paul Wolfowitz, while a senior Pentagon official, made it plain enough in his 1992 defense policy paper for the first Bush administration: in the post-Soviet world America would permit no rivals to materialize on any front, the better to achieve "full spectrum superiority," that dreamy Elysium that sends chills down the spines of the habitués of the Bilderberg Group. Military superiority as a guarantor of market dominance and profit optimization. Simple as that.

As William Hartung, Director for the Center for International Policy, has said, "War is good business for those in the business of war." If these are the businesses that put candidates in the White House, does it not stand to reason that administration policy reflect their interests? Energy conflicts obviously do.

By lining the Eastern front with NATO troops and the peripheries of the Persian Gulf with U.S. bases; and by controlling all government concessions in Kiev and Damascus, the United States can ensure that no Slavic Islamic pipelines will cross either nation, and that Europe will be nearly severed from its umbilical dependence on Russian energy.

But this is not part of the story. Our dutiful press assures us that Vlad the Conqueror now rabidly seeks regional hegemony and unchecked sway over befuddled but peaceable Europeans. Again we are forced into the fray.

Promoting the Ideal, Demoting the Reality

In his book *The Purpose of American Politics*, author and authority on the realist school of foreign policy Hans Morgenthau claimed America had "a transcendent purpose to uphold equality and freedom." As Noam Chomsky has said, Morgenthau believed that to deny the validity of our national purpose was to "confound the abuse of reality with reality itself." Thus the ideal is more real than the reality of history. It seems President Obama is of the same mind as Morgenthau.

It is time someone informed our arch idealist that values are distilled from actions, not homilies. In the arena of action, we are an empire created by genocide, built on slavery, and maintained by violence.

As Abraham Lincoln once said, America is "a nation dedicated to a proposition," that all men are created equal. But the wattage of that lovely conceit has dimmed with time. If there is anything exceptional about America, it is the abyss that yawns between the eloquent phrases of the Constitution and the barbaric actions that defy its every word.

Maybe our values were once noble, and perhaps those of the average American still are, but the government has long veered off on a path of its own, its habits corrupted by the clichés of power, empowering cronies for all manner of criminality. For peace, they've substituted violence. For transparency, intrigue. For economic equality, lawful pillage. For consensus, conclave. For participation, exclusion. For representation, a price tag.

Our flight path may once have aimed at popular rule, but that was a long time ago.

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