

MLK and the Curse of 'Moderation'

From the Archive: When Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. went to jail to focus national attention on the injustice of segregation, he was stung by criticism from Christian clergy who feared upsetting the status quo and urged "moderation," prompting his historic rejoinder from the Birmingham jail, as Rev. Howard Bess recalls.

By Rev. Howard Bess (Originally published Jan. 24, 2014)

Martin Luther King Jr. was my contemporary, a person whom I supported in his demand for full inclusion of people of color in the life of America. Yet, as that history played out, I did not fully realize the greatness of King and the significance of the events of the late Fifties and the early Sixties.

As we look back on those events, there are an endless number of reasons why Dr. King's statue stands on the Tidal Basin across from the Jefferson Memorial in Washington DC, and why King's birthday is a national holiday.

I have read his writings, and his "I Have a Dream" speech is etched on my heart and mind. But I believe his letter to clergy, "[Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)," is his greatest communication articulating his cause and one of the great documents of American history.

I marvel at the document because it was written from a jail cell where King had no access to reference materials. The date of the letter was April 16, 1963, when the modern civil rights movement for people of color was still relatively young, but the movement was becoming stronger and the opposition was becoming more entrenched.

The letter came from what was stored in King's maturing mind. He wrote on whatever scraps of paper he could find, addressing the letter to "My Dear Fellow Clergymen," a group of clergy who had written a letter to King to discourage his coming to Birmingham. These clergy counseled patience and moderation and questioned why King, as an "outsider" had come to their Alabama community.

In the letter, King wrote, "While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities 'unwise and untimely.'" Then, he responded by saying that Negroes had waited long enough and that "moderation" was not useful in righting wrongs of segregation that had been inflicted on African-Americans over generations:

"I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their 'thus saith the Lord'

far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.”

In the letter, King called not for moderation or patience but for non-violent and peaceful extremism, arguing that clergymen , the very people who should be at the forefront calling for justice in the name of Jesus, were betraying the Christian gospel by calling for moderation and gradualism. King wrote:

“We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was ‘well timed’ in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word ‘Wait!’ It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’ We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights.”

Disappointing Churches

King’s letter moves on to express his “disappointment with the churches.” King was an ordained Baptist minister, the son and grandson of Baptist ministers. He had been nurtured and educated by churches and their institutions. He loved the churches, knew church history, and knew that movements to reform society and to deliver society from injustice many times had come from churches and clergy. He wrote:

“I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action’; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a ‘more convenient season.’

“Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

"I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

"When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, a few years ago, I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows.

"In spite of my shattered dreams, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, would serve as the channel through which our just grievances could reach the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed.

"I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings.

"Over and over I have found myself asking: 'What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?'

"Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love."

Pinnacle of a Message

Most reviewers of the life of Martin Luther King Jr. see his "I Have a Dream" speech as the high point of his career. I beg to differ. Birmingham and the letter may have been the pinnacle of his career as he confronted not simply society but Christian churches and their clergy.

The Letter from Birmingham Jail was published in leading Christian publications and in the nation's most read newspapers. His confrontation with moderation was blunt yet gracious. Segregation and injustice were not his primary targets, rather he turned his searchlight of truth-telling on all those who took refuge in moderation.

Not many of those clergy in Birmingham may have understood the significance of King's rejoinder, but a large part of the nation took note. Many believe that it was the Letter from Birmingham Jail that pushed President John F. Kennedy to initiate civil rights legislation.

Moderation in the face of injustice has been the great disease of Christian churches. The vast majority of Christian clergy are hiding behind the mission of saving souls while ignoring the social teachings of Jesus, the one they claim to serve as their Lord. These clergymen play the game of advocating the cause of social justice but only with great moderation.

On a related front, I have been involved in the struggle for full acceptance of people who are gay for over 40 years. I have taken my lumps because of my outspoken insistence that gay people be fully accepted in the life of our churches and in American society.

I have been shunned, had employment disrupted and was dis-fellowshipped, not because I am gay but for speaking out about injustice toward gays. In recent years, however, full acceptance of gay people in America has made great progress, though we still have a long way to go.

Kind, loving, peaceful extremists for justice are in short supply in our nation and especially in our Christian churches.

In the Jan. 13, 2014 edition of Sports Illustrated, columnist Phil Taylor took on the National Football League for its tolerance of homophobia in the league. He cited the case of punter Chris Kluwe, formerly of the Minnesota Vikings. No one was suggesting that Kluwe is gay. He is, however, a vocal advocate of gay marriage and full rights for LGBT persons. His coach counseled him toward moderation. Even though he was identified as one of the league's best punters, Kluwe is now unemployed, a free agent.

Taylor's column makes the case that the National Football League is homophobic from headquarters to owners, to coaches, to the locker room. Gay players (there are believed to be many) in the NFL will remain tightly closeted.

Justice was a centerpiece of the life work of Jesus. As Americans we confess that justice is for all, even in the NFL. Yet, "moderates" will never make the dream of justice-for-all a reality. It turns out that the path to hell is not

paved with good intentions; it is paved with moderation.

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Cameron Calls Out Iran-Talk Saboteurs

As U.S. neocons and other hardliners keep trying to sabotage Iranian nuclear talks, British Prime Minister Cameron is the latest world leader to call them out on their sophistry about how threatening additional pain on Iran would help negotiations, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar describes.

By Paul R. Pillar

Those who want to maintain endless tension and animosity between the United States and Iran, and who thus have been endeavoring to kill any diplomatic agreement between the two countries, are racing ahead with their latest project and will be very busy during the week ahead. That project, the AIPAC-promoted Kirk-Menendez sanctions bill, will be the subject of a Senate Banking Committee hearing, with only anti-agreement witnesses so far announced, on Tuesday, to be followed by the committee's mark-up of the bill on Thursday.

Promoters of the bill are racing to beat two things. One, and worst from the promoters' point of view, would be completion of the international negotiations (which also are due to resume in plenary session this coming week) to limit Iran's nuclear program and announcement of an agreement.

Even before any agreement is reached, those pushing the bill also have to worry about losing the support of those who may have originally believed the cover story that the legislation is intended to strengthen the hand of U.S. negotiators but who come to realize that the legislation is instead about spoiling the negotiations and killing a deal. Key among this group are Senate Democrats, including some who in the last Congress signed on as co-sponsors of an earlier version of the Kirk-Menendez bill.

Those in this group, and anyone else who might genuinely but mistakenly believe that passage of this bill would aid negotiations, would do well to pay close attention to the comments on this subject from British Prime Minister David Cameron, in a joint press conference with President Barack Obama at the White House on Friday.

"On Iran," said Cameron, "we remain absolutely committed to ensuring that Iran

cannot develop a nuclear weapon. The best way to achieve that now is to create the space for negotiations to succeed. We should not impose further sanctions now; that would be counterproductive and it could put at risk the valuable international unity that has been so crucial to our approach.”

The Prime Minister further commented on how those who had predicted that the sky would fall with the reaching 14 months ago of a preliminary agreement, which already has placed the most important restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program to ensure that it stays peaceful, have been proven wrong.

“To those who said,” stated Cameron, that “if you do an interim deal, if you even start discussing with the Iranians any of these things, the sanctions will fall apart, the pressure will dissipate, no one will be able to stick at it, that has demonstrably been shown not to be true.”

Some background to these remarks from the British leader are useful to keep in mind. The United Kingdom is a full participant in the nuclear negotiations with Iran, as part of the P5+1 (or EU3+3, as they prefer to say on the other side of the Atlantic). It is not an interloper in someone else’s diplomatic business, and British diplomats and leaders have at least as much basis as anyone else for knowing what is working and what is not in the negotiations.

Britain also is a country that, like the United States, has historically had some really bad relations with Iran. In Britain’s case this experience dates back to a British and Soviet invasion of Iran during World War II, beginning an occupation that extended until almost a year after the end of the war.

Today, the United Kingdom, unlike certain other countries that would like to influence the fate of the nuclear negotiations, has no significant interests in the Middle East that are discernibly at odds with those of the United States. And the comments on Friday came not from some soft post-conflict European liberal, but instead from the leader of the Conservative Party in the country that is still in many respects America’s most important ally.

There are two major takeaways from Cameron’s comments. One is to provide further confirmation that the myth that something like the sanctions bill before the Senate would facilitate negotiations and hasten an agreement is exactly that: a myth. When people actually doing the negotiating say something would weaken rather than strengthen their negotiating hand, that’s a good indication that it indeed would not strengthen their hand.

Actually it should not even be necessary to get independent confirmation of this from someone like Cameron. Even if one were to assume the very worst about Barack Obama’s objectives, such as that he were willing to give up the store

solely to claim a foreign policy achievement or to burnish his legacy, there would be no conceivable reason for him to oppose any measure that really did strengthen his bargaining hand rather than weaken it.

The other takeaway to be had from the comments of an allied leader concerns the likely fallout if the deal-killers succeed in their effort through something like the sanctions bill. The most direct consequence would involve the responses of Iran.

In the best, or least bad, case it would mean greater Iranian reluctance to make concessions because Iranian confidence in Washington's ability and willingness to live up to its end of a deal would be shaken even more than it already is. In a worse case it would mean an Iranian conclusion that the Congressional action is so counter to the spirit if not the letter of the interim agreement that the only alternative is to leave the negotiating table and go home.

But the further consequences concern the responses of the rest of the international community. Cameron indirectly reminded us of that by saying that he was commenting as "someone who played quite, I think, a strong role in getting Europe to sign up to the very tough sanctions, including oil sanctions, in the first place."

The interim agreement did not cause the beloved sanctions regime to unravel. But if the U.S. Congress wanders so far away from an international consensus and off into right field that it is seen as the main impediment to an agreement, unraveling is likely to begin.

Good, reliable allies have several uses, and not just in providing more warplanes to fight someplace. Helping to protect ourselves from our own solipsistic tendencies is another thing they can do for us.

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Neocons: The 'Anti-Realists'

Special Report: America's neocons, who wield great power inside the U.S. government and media, endanger the planet by concocting strategies inside their heads that ignore real-world consequences. Thus, their "regime changes" have unleashed ancient hatreds and spread chaos across the globe, as Robert Parry

explains.

By Robert Parry

Historically, one of the main threads of U.S. foreign policy was called “realism,” that is the measured application of American power on behalf of definable national interests, with U.S. principles preached to others but not imposed.

This approach traced back to the early days of the Republic when the first presidents warned of foreign “entangling alliances” and President John Quincy Adams, who was with his father at the nation’s dawning, explained in 1821 that while America speaks on behalf of liberty, “she has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings, as to the last vital drop that visits the heart.

“Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.”

However, in modern times, foreign policy “realism” slid into an association with a cold calculation of power, no longer a defense of the Republic and broader national interests but of narrow, well-connected economic interests. The language of freedom was woven into a banner for greed and plunder. Liberty justified the imposition of dictatorships on troublesome populations. Instead of searching for monsters to destroy, U.S. policy often searched for monsters to install.

In the wake of such heartless actions like imposing pliable “pro-business” dictatorships on countries such as Iran, Guatemala, Congo, Indonesia, Chile and engaging in the bloodbath of Vietnam “realism” developed a deservedly negative reputation as other supposedly more idealistic foreign policy strategies gained preeminence.

Some of those approaches essentially turned John Quincy Adams’s admonition on its head by asserting that it *is* America’s duty to search out foreign monsters to destroy. Whether called “neoconservatism” or “liberal interventionism,” this approach openly advocated U.S. interference in the affairs of other nations and took the sides of people who at least presented themselves as “pro-democracy.”

In recent years, as the ranks of the “realists” the likes of George Kennan, Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft have aged and thinned, the ranks of the neocons and their junior partners, the liberal interventionists, swelled. Indeed, these “anti-realists” have now grown dominant, touting themselves as morally superior because they don’t just call for human rights, they take out

governments that don't measure up.

The primary distinction between the neocons and the liberal interventionists has been the centrality of Israel in the neocons' thinking while their liberal sidekicks put "humanitarianism" at the core of their world view. But these differences are insignificant, in practice, since the liberal hawks are politically savvy enough not to hold Israel accountable for its human rights crimes and clever enough to join with the neocons in easy-to-sell "regime change" strategies toward targeted countries with weak lobbies in Washington.

In those "regime change" cases, there is also a consensus on how to handle the targeted countries: start with "soft power" from anti-regime propaganda to funding internal opposition groups to economic sanctions to political destabilization campaigns and, then if operationally necessary and politically feasible, move to overt military interventions, applying America's extraordinary military clout.

Moral Crusades

These interventions are always dressed up as moral crusades the need to free some population from the clutches of a U.S.-defined "monster." There usually is some "crisis" in which the "monster" is threatening "innocent life" and triggering a "responsibility to protect" with the catchy acronym, "R2P."

But the reality about these "anti-realists" is that their actions, in real life, almost always inflict severe harm on the country being "rescued." The crusade kills many people innocent and guilty and the resulting disorder can spread far and wide, like some contagion that cannot be contained. The neocons and the liberal interventionists have become, in effect, carriers of the deadly disease called chaos.

And, it has become a very lucrative chaos for the well-connected by advancing the "dark side" of U.S. foreign policy where lots of money can be made while government secrecy prevents public scrutiny.

As author James Risen describes in his new book, *Pay Any Price*, a new caste of "oligarchs" has emerged from the 9/11 "war on terror" – and the various regional wars that it has unpacked – to amass vast fortunes. He writes: "There is an entire class of wealthy company owners, corporate executives, and investors who have gotten rich by enabling the American government to turn to the dark side. The new quiet oligarchs just keep making money. They are the beneficiaries of one of the largest transfers of wealth from public to private hands in American history." [p. 56]

And the consolidation of this wealth has further cemented the political/media

influence of the “anti-realists,” as the new “oligarchs” kick back portions of their taxpayer largesse into think tanks, political campaigns and media outlets. The neocons and their liberal interventionist pals now fully dominate the U.S. opinion centers, from the right-wing media to the editorial pages (and the foreign desks) of many establishment publications, including the Washington Post and the New York Times.

By contrast, the voices of the remaining “realists” and their current unlikely allies, the anti-war activists, are rarely heard in the mainstream U.S. media anymore. To the extent that these dissidents do get to criticize U.S. meddling abroad, they are dismissed as “apologists” for whatever “monster” is currently in line for the slaughter. And, to the extent they criticize Israel, they are smeared as “anti-Semitic” and thus banished from respectable society.

Thus, being a “realist” in today’s Official Washington requires hiding one’s true feelings, much as was once the case if you were a gay man and you had little choice but to keep your sexual orientation in the closet by behaving publicly like a heterosexual and surrounding yourself with straight friends.

In many ways, that’s what President Barack Obama has done. Though arguably a “closet realist,” Obama staffed his original administration with foreign policy officials acceptable to the neocons and the liberal interventionists, such as Robert Gates at Defense, Hillary Clinton at State, Gen. David Petraeus as a top commander in the field.

Even in his second term, the foreign-policy hawks have remained dominant, with people like neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland enflaming the crisis in Ukraine and UN Ambassador Samantha Power, an R2Per, pushing U.S. military intervention in Syria.

A Slow-Motion Catastrophe

I have personally watched today’s foreign-policy pattern evolve during my 37 years in Washington – and it began innocently enough. After the Vietnam War and the disclosures about bloody CIA coups around the globe, President Jimmy Carter called for human rights to be put at the center of U.S. foreign policy. His successor, Ronald Reagan, then hijacked the human rights rhetoric while adapting to it to his anticommunist cause.

Because Reagan’s usurpation of human rights language involved support for brutal right-wing forces, such as the Guatemalan military and the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, the process required an Orwellian change in what words meant. “Pro-democracy” had to become synonymous with the rights and profits of business owners, not its traditional meaning of making government work for the common

people.

But this perversion of language was not as much meant to fool the average Guatemalan or Nicaraguan, who was more likely to grasp the reality behind the word games since he or she saw the cruel facts up close; it was mostly to control the American people who, in the lexicon of Reagan's propagandists, needed to have their perceptions managed. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Victory of Perception Management](#)."]]

The goal of the young neocons inside the Reagan administration the likes of Elliott Abrams and Robert Kagan (now Victoria Nuland's husband) was to line up the American public behind Reagan's aggressive foreign policy, or as the phrase of that time went, to "kick the Vietnam Syndrome," meaning to end the popular post-Vietnam resistance to more foreign wars.

President George H.W. Bush pronounced this mission accomplished in 1991 after the end of the well-sold Persian Gulf War, declaring "we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all."

By then, the propaganda process had fallen into a predictable pattern. You pick out a target country; you demonize its leadership; you develop some "themes" that are sure to push American hot buttons, maybe fictional stories about "throwing babies out of incubators" or the terrifying prospect of "a mushroom cloud"; and it's always smart to highlight a leader's personal corruption, maybe his "designer glasses" or "a sauna in his palace."

The point is not that the targeted leader may not be an unsavory character. Frankly, most political leaders are. Many Western leaders and their Third World allies both historically and currently have much more blood on their hands than some of the designated "monsters" that the U.S. government has detected around the world. The key is the image-making.

What makes the process work is the application and amplification of double standards through the propaganda organs available to the U.S. government. The compliant mainstream American media can be counted on to look harshly at the behavior of some U.S. "enemy" in Venezuela, Iran, Russia or eastern Ukraine, but to take a much more kindly view of a U.S.-favored leader from Colombia, Saudi Arabia, Georgia or western Ukraine.

While it's easy and safe career-wise for a mainstream journalist to accuse a Chavez, an Ahmadinejad, a Putin or a Yanukovych of pretty much anything, the levels of proof get ratcheted up when it's a Uribe, a Saudi King Abdullah, a Saakashvili or a Yatsenyuk not to mention a Netanyahu.

The True Dark Side

But here is the dark truth about this “humanitarian” interventionism: it is spinning the world into an endless cycle of violence. Rather than improving the prospects for human rights and democracy, it is destroying those goals. While the interventionist strategies have made huge fortunes for well-connected government contractors and well-placed speculators who profit off chaos, the neocons and their “human rights” buddies are creating a hell on earth for billions of others, spreading death and destitution.

Take, for example, the beginnings of the Afghan War in the 1980s after the Soviet Union invaded to protect a communist-led regime that had sought to pull Afghanistan out of the middle ages, including granting equal rights to women. The United States responded by encouraging Islamic fundamentalism and arming the barbaric mujahedeen.

At the time, that was considered the smart play because Islamic fundamentalism was seen as a force that could counter atheistic communism. So, starting with the Carter administration but getting dramatically ramped up by the Reagan administration, the United States threw in its lot with the extremist Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia to invest billions of dollars in supporting these Islamist militants who included one wealthy Saudi named Osama bin Laden.

At the time, with Great Communicator Ronald Reagan leading the way, virtually the entire U.S. mainstream media and nearly every national politician hailed the mujahedeen as noble “freedom fighters” but the reality was always much different. [See, for instance, Consortiumnews.com’s [“How US Hubris Baited Afghan Trap.”](#)]

By the end of the 1980s, the U.S.-Saudi “covert operation” had “succeeded” in driving the Soviet army out of Afghanistan with Kabul’s communist regime ultimately overthrown and replaced by the fundamentalist Taliban, who stripped women of their rights and covered up their bodies. The Taliban also provided safe haven for bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorist band, which by the 1990s had shifted its sights from Moscow to Washington and New York.

Even though the Saudis officially broke with bin Laden after he declared his intentions to attack the United States, some wealthy Saudis and other Persian Gulf multi-millionaires, who shared bin Laden’s violent form of Islamic fundamentalism, continued to fund him and his terrorists right up to and beyond al-Qaeda’s attacks on 9/11.

Then, America’s fear and fury over 9/11 opened the path for the neocons to activate one of their longstanding plans, to invade and occupy Iraq, though it had nothing to do with 9/11. The propaganda machinery was cranked up and again all the “smart” people fell in line. Dissenters were dismissed as “Saddam

apologists” or called “traitors.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Mysterious Why of the Iraq War.”](#)]

By fall 2002, the idea of invading Iraq and removing “monster” Saddam Hussein was not just a neocon goal, it was embraced by nearly ever prominent “liberal interventionist” in the United States, including editors and columnists of the New Yorker, the New York Times and virtually every major news outlet.

At this point, the “realists” were in near total eclipse, left to grumble futilely or grasp onto some remaining “relevance” by joining the pack, as Henry Kissinger did. The illegal U.S.-led invasion of Iraq also brushed aside the “legal internationalists” who believed that global agreements, especially prohibitions on aggressive war, were vital to building a less violent planet.

An Expanding Bloodbath

In the rush to war in Iraq, the neocons and the liberal interventionists won hands down in 2002-2003 but ended up causing a bloodbath for the people of Iraq, with estimates of those killed ranging from hundreds of thousands to more than a million. But the U.S. invaders did more than that. They destabilized the entire Middle East by disturbing the fragile fault lines between Sunni and Shiite.

With Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein ousted and hanged, Iraq’s vengeful Shiite politicians established their own authoritarian state under the military wing of the U.S. and British armies. Neocon hubris made matters worse when many former Sunni officials and officers were cashiered and marginalized, creating fertile ground for al-Qaeda to put down roots among Iraqi Sunnis, planting a particularly brutal strain nourished by Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Zarqawi’s Al-Qaeda in Iraq attracted thousands of foreign Sunni jihadists eager to fight both the Westerners and the Shiites. Others went to Yemen to join Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Trained in the brutal methods of these Iraqi and Yemeni insurgencies, hardened jihadists returned to their homes in Libya, Syria, Europe and elsewhere.

Though the disaster in Iraq should have been a powerful cautionary tale, the neocons and the liberal interventionists proved to be much more adept at playing the political-propaganda games of Washington than in prevailing in the complex societies of the Middle East.

Instead of being purge en masse, the Iraq War instigators faced minimal career accountability. They managed to spin the Iraq “surge” as “victory at last” and maintained their influence over Washington even under President Obama, who may have been a “closet realist” but who kept neocons in key posts and surrounded

himself with liberal interventionists. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Surge Myth's Deadly Result.](#)"]

Thus, Obama grudgingly was enlisted into the next neocon-liberal-interventionist crusades in 2011: the military intervention to overthrow Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and the covert operation to remove Syria's Bashar al-Assad. In both cases, the propaganda was ramped up again, presenting the opposition groups as "pro-democracy moderates" who were peacefully facing down brutal dictators.

In reality, the oppositions were more a mixed bag of some actual moderates and Islamist extremists. When Gaddafi and Assad emphasizing the presence of terrorists struck back brutally, the "R2P" crowd demanded U.S. military intervention, either directly in Libya or indirectly in Syria. With the U.S. mainstream media onboard, nearly every occurrence was put through the propaganda filter that made the regimes all dark and the oppositions bathed in a rosy glow.

After the U.S.-led air war destroyed Gaddafi's military and opened the way for an opposition victory, Gaddafi was captured and brutally murdered. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who might be called a "neocon-lite," joked: "We came, we saw, he died."

But the chaos that followed Gaddafi's death was not so funny, contributing to the killing of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other American diplomatic personnel in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, and to the spreading of terrorism and violence across northern Africa. By July 2014, the U.S. and other Western nations had abandoned their embassies in Tripoli as all political order broke down.

Syrian Madness

In Syria, which had long been near the top of the neocon/Israeli hit list for "regime change," U.S., Western and Sunni support for another "moderate opposition" led to a civil war. Soon, what "moderates" there were blended into the ranks of Islamic extremists, either the Nusra Front, the al-Qaeda affiliate, or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or simply the Islamic State, which evolved from Zarqawi's Al-Qaeda in Iraq, continuing Zarqawi's hyper-brutality even after his death.

Though the mainstream U.S. media blamed almost everything on Syrian President Assad, many Syrians recognized that the Sunni extremists who emerged as the power behind the opposition were a grave threat to other Syrian religious groups, including the Shiites, Alawites and Christians – and that Assad's authoritarian but secular regime represented their best hope for survival. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Syrian Rebels Embrace al-Qaeda.](#)"]

But instead of looking for a realistic political solution, the neocons and the liberal interventionists insisted on a U.S. military intervention, either covertly by arming the opposition or overtly by mounting a Libyan-style bombing campaign to destroy Assad's armed forces and open the gates of Damascus to the rebels. Under pressure from the likes of Ambassador Power and Secretary of State Clinton, Obama bowed to the demand to ship weapons to the rebels, although the CIA later discovered that many U.S. weapons ended up in extremist hands.

Still, with Obama dragging his feet on a larger-scale commitment, the neocon/liberal-interventionist coalition saw a great chance to push Obama into a bombing campaign after a Sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013. The war hawks and the U.S. media immediately blamed Assad despite doubts among some U.S. intelligence analysts who suspected a provocation by the rebels.

Those doubts and Obama's fear of an extremist victory led him to call off the planned bombing at the last minute, and he accepted a deal brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin to arrange for Assad to surrender all Syria's chemical weapons, while Assad continued to deny any role in the Sarin attack. The neocons and liberal interventionists were furious at both Obama and Putin.

Alarmed about this "realist" Obama-Putin collaboration, the "anti-realists" turned to demonizing the Russian president and driving a wedge between him and Obama. The place to splinter that relationship turned out to be Ukraine, where neocon Assistant Secretary of State Nuland was perfectly positioned to push for the ouster of elected pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich.

As Nuland noted in one speech, the U.S. government had invested \$5 billion in the "European aspirations" of the western Ukrainians, including funding for political activists, journalists and various business groups. The time to collect on that investment came in February 2014 when violent demonstrations in Kiev, with well-organized neo-Nazi militias supplying the muscle, drove Yanukovich from power. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Neocons' Ukraine-Syria-Iran Gambit."]

The Ukraine coup played out along another historic fault line, between European-oriented western Ukraine, where Adolf Hitler's SS had gained significant support during World War II, and eastern Ukraine with its ethnic Russian population and close business ties to Russia.

After the U.S. State Department rushed to embrace the coup regime as "legitimate" and as the U.S. media dished out anti-Yanukovich propaganda, such as citing a sauna in his home, Obama tagged along, falling into the neocon trap, again. U.S.-Russian relations spiraled into a hostility not seen since the Cold War. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Obama's True Foreign Policy Weakness."]

Shattering Ukraine

Yet, while the neocons and their liberal allies had “won” again, what did that winning mean for the people of Ukraine? Their country, already teetering on the status of failed state, slid into deeper economic chaos and civil war. With neo-Nazis and other extremists appointed to key national security positions, the new regime began lashing out at ethnic Russians who were resisting Yanukovich's ouster.

Crimea voted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a move that Western government's denounced as an illegal “annexation” and the major U.S. media termed an “invasion,” although the Russian troops involved were already stationed in Crimea under an agreement to maintain the Russian naval base at Sevastopol.

Ukraine's eastern provinces also sought secession, prompting military clashes that inflicted some of the worst bloodshed seen on the European continent in decades. Thousands died and millions fled.

Of course, the standard line in the U.S. media was that it was all Putin's fault, even as the Kiev regime shelled eastern cities and unleashed brutal neo-Nazi militias to engage in street fighting, the first time storm troopers emblazoned with Nazi insignias had been deployed in Europe since World War II. Yet, buoyed by how easily the anti-Putin propaganda had prevailed, some neocons even began fantasizing about “regime change” in Moscow.

Yet, if you were to step back for a minute and look at the history of the past 35 years from the Afghan covert op through the Iraq War and the U.S. interventions in Libya, Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere what you would see is the neocons and their liberal sidekicks behaving like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, stirring up troubles that soon spun out of control.

Just look at the chaos that has been unleashed by these reckless neocon and liberal interventionist policies from encouraging the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and facilitating the formation of al-Qaeda via the covert war in Afghanistan, from creating a hotbed for attracting and training jihadists during the Iraq War, from undermining regimes in Libya and Syria that for all their faults were trying to contain this spread of terrorism, and from provoking a new Cold War in Ukraine that risks bringing nuclear weapons into play in a showdown with Russia.

The latest outgrowth of all this trouble was the terror attack in Paris this month, with some European hotheads now calling for another neocon favorite idea, “a war of civilizations,” pitting Christian societies against Islam in some

modern version of the actual Crusades.

Yes, I know we're not supposed to talk about root causes of this chaos "at a time like this," and we are surely not supposed to blame the neocons and their liberal interventionist chums. Instead, we're supposed to escalate the conflicts and the chaos.

We're supposed to continue the neocon "tough-guy-ism" – by repressing Muslims in the West, by ousting Assad in Syria, by crushing the ethnic Russian resistance in Ukraine, by destabilizing Russia, and by forsaking negotiations with Iran over its nuclear facilities in favor of more sanctions and maybe more bombing. All somehow in the name of "democracy" and "human rights" and "security."

As we gaze out upon this mad house built by the neocons, we are witnessing on a grand scale the old adage about the inmates running the asylum, except that this asylum possesses the world's most sophisticated weapons including a massive nuclear arsenal.

What the neocons have constructed through their skilled propaganda is a grim wonderland where no one foresees the dangers of encouraging Islamist fundamentalism as a geopolitical ploy, where no one takes heed of the historic hatreds of Sunni and Shiite, where no one suspects that the U.S. military slaughtering thousands upon thousands of Muslims might provoke a backlash, where no one thinks about the consequences of overthrowing regimes in unstable regions, where no one bothers to study the bitter history of a place like Ukraine, and where no one worries about spreading turmoil to nuclear-armed Russia.

Yet, this neocon madness this "anti-realism" has been playing out in the real world on a grand scale, destroying real lives and endangering the real future of the planet.

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

The Integrity of Ambassador Robert White

At the start of the Reagan administration, Ambassador Robert White refused to cover up the rape-murders of four American churchwomen in El Salvador and paid for his integrity with the end of his career. His death last Tuesday at age 88 marked the passing of a courageous diplomat, writes ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

By Melvin A. Goodman

The death of Ambassador Robert E. White is a reminder of what an American envoy can do to advance our principles and to guide our foreign policy. As an ambassador to Paraguay and El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s, White demonstrated a commitment to social justice and human rights. Sadly, he was dismissed from the Foreign Service by Secretary of State Alexander Haig because the Reagan administration had decided on a policy of militarism in Central America.

Bob White was the ambassador in El Salvador in December 1980 when four American churchwomen were raped and murdered by the armed forces of the U.S.-backed Salvadoran government. The evening before their murders, two of the women had dinner at White's home to discuss the problems that relief workers were having in El Salvador. At the grave site for two of the women, White repeated over and over again that "This time they are not going to get away with it."

White took what started as a clandestine assassination attempt and turned it into a full-fledged international incident. He filed cables to the State Department and testified to the Congress. Secretary of State Haig suppressed White's cables from El Salvador, and FBI Director William Webster refused to release any documents related to the murders.

The Reagan administration made sure that the efforts of the families of the murdered women could get no access to documents from the State Department, the FBI, and the CIA. In 1989, the CIA even relocated to Miami the Salvadoran defense minister complicit in the murder of the American nuns.

Until very recently, White was active in testifying in Florida in the trials of those involved in the murders.

Nine months before the murder of the nuns, Ambassador White informed the State Department that El Salvador's leading right-wing politician, Robert D'Aubuisson had ordered the assassination of the Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Arnulfo Romero. In this case, the CIA knew exactly who pulled the trigger to kill Romero, but failed to inform the congressional intelligence committees.

The CIA's deputy director for intelligence, Robert Gates, suppressed all intelligence on the killing, part of the Agency's effort to bury many of the truths of American policy toward Latin America in the 1980s.

White was obviously aware of these truths, and in 1980 forwarded a series of sensitive cables condemning the extreme forces on the Right made up of the rich landowners, their private armies, and high-ranking military officers. He warned that there would be no end to the violence against the clergy and the disadvantaged unless the United States used its influence with the uniformed military.

Unfortunately, Secretary Haig and CIA Director William Casey had other ideas that involved a massive paramilitary program to protect the right wing in El Salvador and to train and arm the Nicaraguans in Honduras the Contras to overthrow the Sandinistas. This marked the beginning of Iran-Contra, which Ambassador White would never have tolerated.

In challenging Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Elliott Abrams, White tried to get a replacement for the CIA station chief in San Salvador, who was forwarding politicized intelligence to justify continued military support for the government. White also took issue with a State Department "white paper," drafted by CIA analysts on instructions from Gates, that falsely pictured a "flood of arms" from such Soviet allies as Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Bulgaria to Central America.

The directorate of operations of the CIA was particularly opposed to the role of Bob White because of his opposition to its program to develop secret police forces throughout Central America. The CIA stations in Central America were at odds with the embassies because of the close collaboration between the CIA and the ministries of the interior as well as the police. White knew that the violence that ensued from this collaboration was responsible for the wave of emigration to the United States as people were fleeing from instability.

Ultimately, White was punished because he would not repeat the official lie that there was a "serious investigation" of the murders in El Salvador. Instead, he pointed out that there was "no reason to believe the government of El Salvador is conducting a serious investigation."

As a result, he was summarily dismissed as ambassador and was told that the only job available to him was in the Foreign Service Inspection Corps, a traditional dumping ground for career officers singled out for retribution. When Bob White declined this assignment, he was dismissed from the Foreign Service.

Once again, a serious whistleblower was totally vindicated by the events that

took place in Central America in the 1980s. White warned the Reagan administration against a policy of militarism, but the neoconservatives of the time led by Haig, Casey, Gates, and Abrams got their policy and the violence that accompanied it. The United States would clearly benefit by having more diplomats like Bob White.

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy in Washington, DC and adjunct professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of [The Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA and National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#) as well as the forthcoming [The Path to Dissent: The Story of a Whistleblower at the CIA](#) (City Lights Publishers, 2015). Goodman is the national security and intelligence columnist for [counterpunch.org](#), where this story first appeared.)

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.

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

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."

Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of *Moyers & Company* and *BillMoyers.com*, and a senior writing fellow at the policy and advocacy group *Demos*.

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*.
