

NYT's 'Tinfoil Hat' Conspiracy Theory

Exclusive: There is a “tinfoil-hat” quality to The New York Times’ pushing its “Donald Trump Is Russia’s Manchurian Candidate” conspiracy theory as the newspaper sinks deeper into a New McCarthyism, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There are real reasons to worry about President Donald Trump’s foreign policy, including his casual belligerence toward Iran and North Korea and his failure to rethink U.S. alliances with Saudi Arabia and Israel, but The New York Times obsesses on Trump’s willingness to work with Russia.

On Saturday, the Times devoted most of its op-ed page to the Times’ favorite conspiracy theory, that Trump is Vladimir Putin’s “Manchurian candidate” though evidence continues to be lacking.

The op-ed package combined a “What to Ask About Russian Hacking” [article](#) by Louise Mensch, a former Conservative member of the British Parliament who now works for Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, and a connect-the-dots graphic that when filled out shows the Kremlin sitting atop the White House. But the featured article actually revealed how flimsy and wacky the Times’ conspiracy theory is.

Usually, an investigation doesn’t begin until there is specific evidence of a crime. For instance, the investigative articles that I have written over the years have always had information from insiders about how the misconduct had occurred before a single word was published.

In the early 1990s, for the investigation that I conducted for PBS “Frontline” into the so-called “October Surprise” case – whether Ronald Reagan’s campaign colluded with Iranians and others to sabotage President Jimmy Carter’s negotiations to free 52 American hostages in 1980 – we had some two dozen people providing information about those contacts from multiple perspectives – including from the U.S., Iran, Israel and Europe – before we aired the allegations.

We didn’t base our documentary on the suspicious circumstance that the Iranians held back the hostages until after Ronald Reagan was inaugurated President on Jan. 20, 1981, or on the point that Iran and the Republicans had motives to sandbag Carter. We didn’t casually throw out the names of a bunch of people who might have committed treason.

When we broadcast the documentary in April 1991, there was a strong evidentiary case of the Reagan’s campaign guilt – and even then we were highly circumspect

in how we presented the story.

Ultimately, the 1980 “October Surprise” case came down to whether you believed the Republican denials or the two dozen or so witnesses who described how this operation was carried out with the help of the Israeli government, French intelligence, and former and current CIA officers – along with former CIA Director George H.W. Bush and future CIA Director William Casey.

In the end, Official Washington was never willing to accept that the beloved Ronald Reagan could have done something as dastardly as conspire with Iranians to delay the release of 52 American hostages. It didn’t matter what the evidence was or that Reagan quickly approved arms shipments to Iran via Israel in 1981, a prequel to the later Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal of 1985-86.

No Direct Evidence

By contrast, what the current “Russia Owns Trump” allegations are completely lacking is an insider who describes any nefarious collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia to arrange the Kremlin’s help in defeating Hillary Clinton and electing Donald Trump.

What we do have is President Barack Obama’s outgoing intelligence chiefs putting out evidence-free “assessments” that Russia was responsible for the “hacking” and the publicizing of two batches of Democratic emails, one from the Democratic National Committee and one from Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta.

The DNC emails revealed that top Democratic Party officials had violated their duty to remain neutral during the primaries and instead tilted the playing field in favor of Hillary Clinton and against Sen. Bernie Sanders. The Podesta emails exposed the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from voters, as well as some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

When published by WikiLeaks last year, the emails embarrassed the Clinton campaign but were not regarded as a major factor in her defeat, which she blamed primarily on FBI Director James Comey’s decision to briefly reopen the investigation into whether she endangered national security by using a private email server while Secretary of State.

However, after the shock of Donald Trump’s election, Clinton supporters looked for reasons to block Trump’s inauguration or to set the stage for his impeachment. That was when Obama’s intelligence chiefs began circulating claims that Russia was behind the leaking of the Democratic emails as part of a scheme to put their favored candidate, Trump, in the White House.

The New York Times and other mainstream news outlets, which were strongly hostile to Trump, seized on the allegations, making them front-page news for the past several months despite the paucity of actual evidence that any collusion occurred or that the Russians were even the ones who obtained and distributed the emails.

WikiLeaks denied getting the material from the Russians, suggesting instead that two different American insiders were the sources.

A Witch Hunt?

How thin the Russia-Trump case is becomes evident in reading the Times' op-ed by Louise Mensch. After introducing herself as someone who has "followed the Russian hacking story closely," she lists 25 people by name, including various Trump advisers as well as Internet moguls Mark Zuckerberg and Peter Thiel, who should be hauled before the House Intelligence Committee for interrogation along with unnamed executives of several corporations and banks.

"There are many more who need to be called but these would be a first step," Mensch wrote. In reviewing Mensch's long article, it's unclear if she's proposing only a "fishing expedition" or would prefer a full-fledged "witch hunt."

At one point earlier in this process, I wrote an article warning that the "investigation" could become something of a "did-you-talk-to-a-Russian" inquisition. Some readers probably felt I was going too far, but that now appears to be exactly what is happening.

Many of Mensch's suggestions pertain to people associated with the Trump campaign who gave speeches in Moscow or otherwise communicated with Russians. It appears any contact with a Russian, any discussion of disagreements between the U.S. and Russia, or any political comment that in any way echoes what some Russian may have said becomes "evidence" of collusion and treason.

The extremism of Mensch's tendentious article is further illustrated by her suggestion that Trump should be impeached if there is any truth to his widely discredited tweet that Obama had ordered wiretaps on Trump Tower. She wrote:

"If ... the president tweeted real news, he revealed the existence of intercepts that cover members of his team in a continuing investigation. That would be obstruction of justice, potentially an impeachable offense."

Most of us who have reported on Trump's bizarre "tapp" tweet have criticized him for making a serious charge without evidence (as well as his poor spelling), but Mensch seems to believe that the more serious offense would be if Trump somehow

were telling the truth. She wants any truth-telling on this issue to be grounds for Trump's impeachment, even though he may have been referring, in part, to her November article reporting on the FISA warrant that supposedly granted permission for members of Trump's team to be put under electronic surveillance.

A Tinfoil Hat

To dramatize her arguments further, Mensch then demonstrates a thorough lack of knowledge about recent American history. She claims, "Never in American history has a president been suspected of collaborating with a hostile foreign power to win an election."

Whatever you want to think about the 1980 October Surprise case – and there is substantial evidence that it was real – it definitely constituted an example in American history when a president was "suspected of collaborating with a hostile foreign power to win an election."

Another case in 1968, which now even The New York Times grudgingly accepts, involved Richard Nixon colluding with the South Vietnamese government to torpedo President Lyndon Johnson's Paris peace talks to assure Nixon's election. Although South Vietnam was then an ally, the allegations about Nixon also included outreach to North Vietnam, although Hanoi ended up sending a delegation to Paris while Saigon did not.

Yet, what is perhaps most shocking about Mensch's op-ed and its prominent placement by the Times is that the story has all the elements of a "tinfoil-hat" conspiracy. It's the sort of wild-eyed smearing of American citizens that the Times would normally deride as an offensive fantasy that would be mentioned only to mock the conspiracists.

But the Times is now so deep into its campaign to demonize Russia and to destroy Trump that all normal journalistic standards have long ago been tossed out the window.

While there are many valid reasons to protest Trump and his policies, this descent into a New McCarthyism is both grotesque (because it impugns the patriotism of Americans without evidence, only breathless questions) and dangerous (because it escalates the New Cold War with Russia, a confrontation that could stumble into a nuclear holocaust).

At such moments, supposedly serious newspapers like The New York Times should show extraordinary caution and care, not a reckless disregard for truth and fairness. But no one in Official Washington seems willing to play the role of attorney Joseph Welch when he finally stood up to Sen. Joe McCarthy with the famous question, "At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"

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](#)).

Trump's Team Embraces Iranian Myths

Key players in the Trump administration have stuck to the neoconservative insistence on "regime change" in Iran rather than take a fresh look at the reality, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

Some hardline myths about Iran never seem to die. One myth especially pertinent to U.S. policy is that revolutionary regime change in Iran is a significant possibility in the near future and that with a bit more of a push from the outside, the Islamic Republic will collapse and be replaced by something much more to our liking.

This illusion was prevalent in much of the George W. Bush administration, which accordingly adhered to a policy of refusing to deal with Iran and instead of trying to isolate it and to inflict economic pain through sanctions. Several years of lack of results in the face of ever-increasing sanctions demonstrated the fecklessness of that policy. The sanctions became useful only when the next U.S. administration began to negotiate with Iran and sanctions were used as a bargaining chip to conclude an agreement that blocks all possible paths to an Iranian nuclear weapon.

The myth often is connected to a faith in exile groups as instruments for quick transition to a completely different type of regime. Many of those hoping for regime change in Iran look in this way to the Mujahedin-e Khalq, a cult-cum-terrorist group that actually has almost no popular support within Iran. Some of the same people had placed a similar faith in Iraqi exile Ahmed Chalabi, whose qualities as a huckster more than as someone who could father a new Iraqi republic became increasingly apparent after the U.S. invasion of 2003.

Today there evidently is another expression of the old myth about Iran, with talk about regime change, [among Trump loyalists](#) at the White House and National Security Council staff. According to these individuals, increased pressure and kicks from the outside can bring about positive results in Iran, rather than, as expert analysis both inside and outside the national security bureaucracy

explains, merely eliciting hostile responses from a firmly implanted Islamic Republic.

It is unclear whether holding of the myth represents genuine misbelief or instead is a rationalization covering other reasons the holders want to maintain Iran as a perpetually isolated *bête noire*. Either way, the myth leads to damaging and ineffective U.S. policy.

Iran is not at all close to any political upheaval that could be described as a new revolution or a counter-revolution, even with more pressure and pushes from the outside. Iranian politics certainly exhibits plenty of disagreement and controversy, with the possibility of significant policy change coming out of that political competition. Despite the substantial defects in the Iranian political system, there is a political robustness missing from, say, the Arab monarchies on the other side of the Persian Gulf. But most Iranians do not have an appetite for making a new revolution.

Both the regime and the people in Iran have demonstrated an ability to withstand hardship much greater than what U.S. sanctions can inflict. They did so during the extremely costly eight-year Iran-Iraq War, which Iran doggedly continued for some time even after Saddam – who started the war – began seeking an armistice. Certainly if pressure or punishment from an outside power is involved, both the regime and the people exhibit determined resistance.

Much Evolution

There already has been much evolution in the direction and nature of the Islamic Republic during its nearly four decades of existence, although probably not as much as there would have been without the ostracism. The large majority of Iranians today were born since the revolution. Hijabs have inched above hairlines, and domestic life has become looser and freer. Especially for the female half of the population, looking across the Gulf does not instill any ideas about better alternatives.

More important for U.S. and Western interests has been the evolution in Iran's external policies. Any hopes within the regime in the immediate aftermath of the revolution for like-minded revolutions elsewhere in the region have long ago been dispelled, as the realization sunk in that such revolutions were unlikely and that Iran's system would survive anyway. The most obvious form of Iranian state-conducted international terrorism – a campaign of assassinating exiled dissidents – effectively ended years ago, partly because of the regime's desire to have normal and fruitful relations with Europe.

Further evolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its policies in the years

ahead will correlate directly with the extent to which it has normal political and economic interaction with the rest of the world. Isolation and punishment would strengthen Iranian hardliners' arguments that there is neither a possibility of, nor a payoff to be expected from, such interaction. Bolstering of the hardline position in turn would mean diminished prospects for further liberalizing political change in Iran.

Conversely, increased commerce, foreign investment, and the economic development that go with them would strengthen the political position of those favoring normality in foreign relations, would increase the Iranian stake in even more peaceful normality, would loosen the grip of those in Iran whose economic and political power depend on isolation, and would increase Iranian exposure to ideas and examples of still more change.

One of the next big potential turning points in Iranian politics will be the selection of a new supreme leader; the current leader, Ali Khamenei, is 77 and not in the best of health. There is talk in Tehran about how this transition may well entail not just the picking of Khamenei's successor but also redefining the role of supreme leader. Specifically, the thinking points to a role somewhat closer to that played by the senior Shia cleric in Iraq, Ali al-Sistani. This would mark a further significant move away from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's concept of the clerical jurist.

Those in the United States seeking, or at least talking about, regime change in Iran should face up to how the best way to achieve such change is to let these processes that already are in train play out, and to encourage them with increased interaction and commerce between Iran and the West. The change may not be sudden enough or violent enough to be described as a revolution with a capital R, but the change is even more likely than anything sudden or violent to be in a direction favorable for Western interests.

This will be the course of Iranian history as long as we do not screw up the process with mindlessly applied isolation, economic punishment, and attempted subversion.

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Letting Russia Be Russia

Political philosophers stressing Traditionalist values have influenced the thinking of Presidents Putin and Trump, but that may offer a path for Russia and the U.S. to coexist, explains ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

Many in the West have purported to find Candidate, and now President, Trump's insistence that détente with Russia is a "good thing" to be troubling. Some suggest that the President's insistence on this is somehow sinister – worse even than troubling. But perhaps Trump and his chief strategist Steve Bannon's sense that détente may be possible is not so much "sinister," but has more to do paradoxically with a particular coincidence – a confluence of intellectual thinking, a confluence that has been taking shape, almost unnoticed over recent years, but which nonetheless is becoming more significant, and which posits a profound foreign policy potential.

Much has been read (most of it hostile) into Steve Bannon's comment, via the internet, at a 2014 Vatican conference, during which he said that many of Vladimir Putin's views were underpinned by eurasianism: "He's got an adviser who harkens back to Julius Evola and different writers of the early 20th century, who are really the supporters of what's called the Traditionalist Movement ... We, the Judeo-Christian West," continued Bannon, "really have to look at what [Putin]'s talking about as far as Traditionalism goes – particularly the sense of where it supports the underpinnings of nationalism."

Here lies one immediate problem. It is presumed in the Western media, that the unnamed Putin adviser who harkens back to Julius Evola is Professor Alexander Dugin. And here, precisely is the first difficulty: both philosophers have a rare quality of intellectual brilliance, a command of the literature that is encyclopedic, but they are *radical* – radical way beyond, and at odds with, today's secular, and uniform tastes. Indeed, even today in Italy, it is best to read Julius Evola, a prolific Italian philosopher and writer, with some discretion, or at least to hold such a book within nondescript, concealing covers, if one is to avoid hostile glares, or even physical abuse.

And the second difficulty? Alexander Dugin has been described as Putin's "Rasputin" – a "mad mystic." And Julius Evola was charged in 1951, with others, with the crime of promoting the Fascist Party, and of promoting ideas proper to fascism. Both philosophers, in short, are controversial and have proved hugely vulnerable to sometimes quite wild misrepresentations. Evola was acquitted on both charges of promoting fascism (though he is popularly still viewed as linked

to post-war Italian neo-fascism), and Dugin, from 1998 to 2003, was a geopolitics counselor of the Duma's Chairman (Gennadiy Selezvov) – but was not adviser to Vladimir Putin.

In fact, as Professor Bertonneau has written: “Evola condemns with equal fervour Muscovite communism and American money-democracy, as representing, the both of them, the mechanization and dehumanization of life. Unlike the Marxists – and unlike the Fascists and National Socialists – Evola saw the only hope for Western Civilization as lying in a revival of what he liked to capitalize, on the one hand, as Tradition and, on the other, as transcendence [personal transformation]; he thus rejected all materialism and instrumentalism as crude reductions of reality for coarse minds and, so too, as symptoms of a prevailing and altogether repugnant decadence.”

Delicate Ground

So why raise these controversial figures? Particularly, as in raising them we tread delicate ground. Well, it is because of that interesting coincidence to which we earlier alluded. Here is one aspect, as Professor Dugin himself notes:

“Julius Evola's works were discovered in the 1960s [in Russia] by the very esoteric group of anti-communist intellectual thinkers known as ‘the Dissidents of the Right’. They were a small circle of people who had conscientiously refused to participate in the ‘cultural life’ of the USSR, and who had instead chosen an underground existence for themselves. The disparity between the presented Soviet culture and the actual Soviet reality was almost entirely what made them seek out the fundamental principles that could explain the origins of that evil, absolutist idea. It was through their refusal of communism that they discovered certain works by anti-modernist and traditionalist authors: above all, the books by René Guénon, and by Julius Evola.”

And, in America: “Sometime around the year 2000, the work of Julius Evola reached [the American] public consciousness, and thanks to writers like Bill White, Radical Traditionalism entered the [American] right-wing lexicon. This is a philosophy more than a political view, but fits neatly into the New Right idea that culture must be the generative actor for change which will manifest in politics and other areas ... It is concerned with two fronts: first, arresting the decline of the West by crushing the Left by any means necessary; and second, a zeal for restoring the greatness of Western Civilization at its height, and [even] surpassing it.”

And here lies the third “difficulty” (or perhaps not a difficulty, but its particular merit, in the eyes of many): in a secular, liberal age, Evola's philosophy is anti-modernist, anti-secularist and anti-Liberal. It harks back

to *philosophia perennis*, and in American terms, to Aldous Huxley's definitions of Perennial Philosophy. (In France, the Nouvelle Droite has a different, but parallel, ontological basis, i.e. with such as Alain de Benoist). More confusingly, though it is called Traditionalism, it is really a traditionalism that has no defined tradition.

Of course, this is not to suggest that Julius Evola was the only writer in this radical traditionalist vein. There was René Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, and many others. But, as the *New York Times* acknowledges (in a typically hostile piece): "More important for the current American administration, Evola also caught on in the United States with leaders of the alt-right movement, which Mr. Bannon nurtured as the head of Breitbart News, and then helped harness for Mr. Trump. 'Julius Evola is one of the most fascinating men of the 20th century', said Richard Spencer, the white nationalist leader, who is a top figure in the alt-right movement."

Just to be clear, that the widely-read Steve Bannon made mention of Evola does not, of course, make him an Evolista. And nor does Putin's embrace of Eurasianism, make him a Duginista. "But," as the *Times* quotes one specialist, "the fact that Bannon even knows Evola is significant."

Radical Traditionalists

In fact, what we seem to be witnessing is that just as the Russian philosopher, Dugin, draws on Radical Traditionalist thinking and then tries to apply it to the Russian situation, so too, the Alt-Right in the U.S. seems to be doing something similar: drawing on Evola and other Traditionalist sources, while distilling their ideas into an American cultural perspective (linking back to Huxley and Edmund Burke).

In this respect, Trump and Bannon may indeed find much in common with Mr. Putin (though it would be a mistake, I believe, to read the Russian President through the prism of Professor Dugin). Where there is common ground between the latter (Putin and Dugin) is the sense that the West has never made a satisfactory attempt to try to understand Russia as distinct, and of worth, in its own right.

So the West has always tried to change Russia into something that it isn't – has always tried to make it more like the West: more liberal, more democratic, more "diversity"-orientated – always assuming that that's how it somehow *has to be*, and is *the best way* for it to "be." But Russia is a thousand-year civilization; it has its own religious sites and its own particular civilizational code. Russia's leaders do not want to let the West dictate to it how to interpret Russia's history, or its present – and, certainly not its future.

Dugin unquestionably does share Evola's unyielding disdain for liberalism, liberal modernity and liberal democracy. And moreover, he also intensely dislikes how the West tries to force this liberalism upon others – in ugly ways – as an “universal value.” This attitude has led him to be cast as fiercely anti-American and a Russian imperialist to boot, who yearns to re-establish the Soviet Empire.

It is possibly Dugin's polemical video *In Trump We Trust* that contributed to the (unwarranted) U.S. inference that President Putin too, favored Trump in the U.S. Presidential election. To read Putin in this way, would be wrong. He likely does have empathy for the Traditionalist leaning toward differentiation (national as well as personal, in the Evola sense of *becoming*: of becoming oneself, of a return to origins). President Putin frequently makes this very point about Russia having its own essential essence and having, too, every right to that differentiation and cultural particular (as do other nation-states).

Evola *does* refer to Empire, but this has to be understood in a very different way from our contemporary understanding. And Dugin reflects this explicitly:

“One particular layer of Evola's thoughts is felt by the Russians to be of imminent and extreme importance: his praise for the Imperial Ideal. Rome represents the focal point of Evola's worldview. This sacred living power which had manifested itself all across the Empire was to Evola the very essence of the West's traditional heritage ... But a similar line of thought is seemingly naturally felt by the Russians, whose historical destiny has always been profoundly tied to that of Imperium ... [that is to say], Moscow as the ‘Third Rome’: It should be noted that the ‘First Rome’ in this cyclic orthodox interpretation, was not Christian Rome, but rather Imperial Rome, because the Second Rome (or the ‘New Rome’) was Constantinople, the capital of the Christian Empire.

“Thus the idea of ‘Rome’ held by the Orthodox Russians corresponds to the understanding of ... the inseparable ‘symphony’ between the spiritual authority and the temporal realm. For traditional orthodoxy, the catholic separation between the King and the Pope is simply unimaginable and close to blasphemy; and this very concept is actually called the ‘Latin heresy.’ Again, one can see the perfect convergence between Evola's dogma and the commonplace mindset of Russian conservative thought.”

In his book on Evola, Paul Furlong describes it thus: “Evola sees nationalism as, in essence, the offspring of liberalism, modernity and bourgeois subversion, which announced the arrival of the fourth state that destroyed the traditional order of empire. Within the empire, nations find a just hierarchical order; [whereas] outside of it, they are mere tools of chauvinistic nationalisms, and

of regimes interested only in material conquest in the name of contingent realities such as fatherlands.”

Misreading Philosophy

It is not hard to see how Dugin might be misread (and therefore perhaps project a false reading on to President Putin of Imperial revanchism rather than, as Dugin intends, of the hoped-for co-joining of the spiritual with the secular). This, despite President Putin having been at some pains to distance his own notion of eurasianism (communal psychology and a single geo-geographic and civilizational unity as a firm basis for state solidarity) from the more (literal) nationalist currents in Russia today.

The point here is that Dugin’s (and Evola’s) thinking is novel, and can give rise to wrong assumptions about what some Russian philosophers mean when they talk about “Empire” – a terminology which is translated in the West to imply Russia as being a potential “aggressor.”

But, if we turn to Steve Bannon and his 2010 film *Generation Zero*, which narrates America’s decline into crisis, it is not hard to detect some Evola resonances – albeit ones tailored to the distinct American cultural code:

Firstly, there is the idea of virile America (as it used to be) as the traditional, just, order of American society – a sort of “New Imperial Rome” perhaps, rather than a “New Jerusalem.”

Secondly, Bannon – like Evola – traces the beginning of the American slide towards decadence to the narcissistic, self-indulgent 1960s (to the Woodstock era, in Bannon’s narrative). Ditto for Europe, in Evola’s view.

Thirdly, Bannon – like Evola – disdains the undifferentiated, materialist and uniform bureaucratic modernity, to which this decadence has given rise. Evola admires ancient and historical societies for the virility of their structures – and not as tools of power (or of chauvinistic nationalism).

Fourthly, Bannon – like Evola – extols the symphony between the spiritual (Judeo Christian) and temporal authority.

Fifth, both see history as cyclical: the fourth turning in Bannon’s narrative versus the fourth stage in Evola’s.

Sixth, both believe that if you are a traditionalist, you must challenge “decadence” by all means.

I do not know whether Bannon or Trump have read Evola, but his spirit, and that of other Radical Traditionalists, has certainly permeated the thinking of the

Alt-Right circles in which both men have been moving.

The important point here, is not to draw out all the parallels in order to assert a literary lineage. That does not matter. But rather, to point to something far more substantive: their foreign policy implications. The concinnity of thinking – albeit one refined through different cultural optics – is there.

Trump and Putin do indeed have something in common. If both parties – as it seems they do – concur that differentiated, individuated (but not individualist) states, are legitimate and appropriate to their separate and particular, cultural codes – what then, is there to fight about?

If America and the West now can disavow the need to remake Russia in the Western, diversity-centric, individualist, liberal-democratic image, and agree to accept Russia simply for what it, and its culture, “is,” then this would amount to a shift in Western policy of tectonic import. It would indeed be paradoxical if a figure, such as Evola, somehow might have contributed to such an event.

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Trump Slips into ‘Endless War’ Cycle

Exclusive: President Trump’s foreign policy is falling into line behind continuing wars in the Middle East, a disappointment to supporters who hoped for a change in course, writes James W Carden.

By James W Carden

There was, during the course of the 2016 campaign, a small but vocal group of antiwar libertarians and conservatives who had convinced themselves that Donald Trump was preferable to Hillary Clinton because he, Trump, had made his (fictitious) opposition to the Iraq War a cornerstone of his candidacy. Trump, some believed, was a Republican in the mold of Senator Robert Taft, someone who would turn away from neoconservative, interventionist orthodoxy.

If, as the adage suggests, we can judge a man by his enemies, a cursory look at Trump’s most vocal Republican critics would seem to confirm this judgment. Why,

here's Bill Kristol in January 2016, asking "Isn't Donald Trump the very epitome of vulgarity?" *Commentary's* John Podhoretz declared that Trump "would be, unquestionably, the worst thing to happen to the American common culture in my lifetime." Professor Eliot A. Cohen and his merry band of think tank militarists published an open letter in opposition to Trump's candidacy while *National Review* convened a symposium of anti-Trumpers for a special issue titled "Against Trump."

Perhaps, though, Kristol, Cohen, Podhoretz, *NR* and the rest needn't have worried so. Trump, it turns out, seems every bit as captive to the bipartisan foreign policy consensus as was his predecessor. Many supporters of Barack Obama held the errant hope that Obama would finally break the cycle of wars begun a quarter-century ago when George H.W. Bush launched Operation Desert Storm against Iraq and in defense of desert petro-states, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Trump partisans may object that he's only been in office for about two months. Give him time, they say. That's fair enough, but it is worth reviewing Trump's foreign policy record up to this point.

An administration's budget is generally a reliable indicator of its priorities. Here we find, in Trump's first budget proposal, nearly \$11 billion in cuts to the U.S. Department of State, a cut of roughly 29 percent, while the Pentagon is budgeted for an additional \$54 billion, an increase of 9 percent.

Afghanistan, where the U.S. has been at war for 15½ years, is by far American's longest and perhaps most futile overseas engagement. Here the Trump administration seems intent on ratcheting up airstrikes on the Taliban in a departure from the narrower focus on anti-terrorism that characterized the late Obama administration policy.

The head of U.S. Central Command, U.S. Army Gen. Joseph Votel, told the Senate Armed Services Committee last week that he will recommend an increase in troops in order "to make the advise-and-assist mission more effective." This comes on the heels of testimony by the top commander in Afghanistan, Army General John Nicholson telling Congress in February that he would need "a few thousand more" troops to carry out the mission.

More Troops

Meanwhile, more troops are being deployed to Kuwait. On March 9, the Army Times reported that the U.S. is sending "an additional 2,500 ground combat troops to a staging base in Kuwait from which they could be called upon to back up coalition forces battling the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria." This is in addition to the already roughly 6,000 American troops that are currently in Syria and Iraq

assisting in the fight against the Islamic State. American units are now in the northern Syrian city of Manbij and on the outskirts on Raqqa.

The latter deployment of Marines from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit marks, according to the Washington Post, “a new escalation in the U.S. war in Syria, and puts more conventional U.S. troops in the battle.” The Post, like all other mainstream outlets, leaves out mention that this new deployment is illegal under international law, a point Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made in an interview with Chinese state media last weekend.

And then, perhaps worst of all, there is the ongoing American support for Saudi Arabia’s war on Yemen. As Council on Foreign Relations analyst Micah Zenko recently pointed out, Trump has already “approved at least 36 drone strikes or raids in 45 days – one every 1.25 days.” These include, according to Zenko, “three drone strikes in Yemen on January 20, 21, and 22; the January 28 Navy SEAL raid in Yemen; one reported strike in Pakistan on March 1; more than thirty strikes in Yemen on March 2 and 3; and at least one more on March 6.” The strikes, we are told, are a necessary part of the “global war on terror” and are portrayed by military and administration spokesmen as such.

A Pentagon spokesman told longtime CNN stenographer Barbara Starr that the wave of 30 strikes on March 2 and 3 were “precision strikes in Yemen against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula” in order to “maintain pressure against the terrorists’ network and infrastructure in the region.” The U.S.-Saudi war on Yemen has predictably resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe. According to the Brookings Institution’s Bruce Reidel, “a Yemeni child dies every 10 minutes from severe malnutrition and other problems linked to the war and the Saudi blockade of the north.”

All this on behalf of our old friends the Saudis. In the decade and a half after aiding the 9/11 hijackers, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has, with American acquiescence, embarked on a campaign to destroy Yemen because of an illusory threat posed by Iran. Yet the reason behind KSA’s aggression on the southern end of the Arabian peninsula has not a bit to do with “security” or Iranian “aggression” or fighting “terrorism”; it is a sectarian campaign waged by Saudi extremists, nothing more. What could possibly be America’s interest in assisting the Saudis in such an endeavor?

Yet, despite the heinous nature of Saudi Arabia’s anti-Houthi campaign in Yemen, its mastermind, the young Saudi Defense Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was treated to lunch at the White House with the President this week. In an ominous sign of things to come, a statement from the Saudis noted that Trump and bin Salman “share the same views on the gravity of the Iranian expansionist moves in the region.”

And so, to sum up: President Trump, in the space of two months, has proposed a budget that slashes funding for diplomacy, spends lavishly on military, has committed thousands of troops, conducted dozens of airstrikes, and cemented the U.S. commitment to the wars in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, he and his team have signaled to the Saudis that they fully share the Kingdom's obsession with Iranian "expansion."

An Unending Cycle

What can be done to break the seemingly unending cycle of American intervention in the Middle East? What all the aforementioned interventions have in common is that they are, as the constitutional lawyer and former Justice Department official Bruce Fein has pointed out, presidential wars, which he defines as "wars in which the President decides to take the United States from a state of peace to a state of war."

Fein, a founding member of the anti-interventionist Committee for The Republic, has written at length on what he views as the steady erosion of the congressional prerogative in matters of war and peace. Fein writes that the Founders "unanimously entrusted to Congress exclusive responsibility for taking the nation to war in Article I, section 8, clause 11 of the Constitution" because they understood "to a virtual certainty that Congress would only declare war in response to actual or perceived aggression against the United States, i.e., only in self-defense."

Accordingly, the Committee for The Republic has embarked on a timely project aimed at having "the House pass a resolution that defines presidential wars under the Constitution going forward and declares them unconstitutional in violation of Article I, section 8, clause 11 (Declare War Clause)." Furthermore, the "End Presidential Wars" project seeks a further resolution, which would warn "the President that such wars will be deemed high crimes and misdemeanors under Article II, section 4 of the Constitution resulting in his or her impeachment, conviction, and removal from office."

Fein points to Alexis de Tocqueville's observation in *Democracy in America* that, "All those who seek to destroy the liberties of a democratic nation ought to know that war is the surest and shortest means to accomplish it."

Unless we come to grips with our current mania for overseas intervention and find a remedy for Congress's abdication of its constitutional responsibilities, we are doomed to remain in the 25-year grip of endless, counterproductive and illegal military interventions in the Middle East and beyond.

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The Kagans Are Back; Wars to Follow

Exclusive: The neocon royalty Kagans are counting on Democrats and liberals to be the foot soldiers in the new neocon campaign to push Republicans and President Trump into more “regime change” wars, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Kagan family, America's neoconservative aristocracy, has reemerged having recovered from the letdown over not gaining its expected influence from the election of Hillary Clinton and from its loss of official power at the start of the Trump presidency.

Back pontificating on prominent op-ed pages, the Family Kagan now is pushing for an expanded U.S. military invasion of Syria and baiting Republicans for not joining more enthusiastically in the anti-Russian witch hunt over Moscow's alleged help in electing Donald Trump.

In a Washington Post op-ed on March 7, Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century and a key architect of the Iraq War, jabbed at Republicans for serving as “Russia's accomplices after the fact” by not investigating more aggressively.

Then, Frederick Kagan, director of the Critical Threats Project at the neocon American Enterprise Institute, and his wife, Kimberly Kagan, president of her own think tank, Institute for the Study of War, touted the idea of a bigger U.S. invasion of Syria in a Wall Street Journal op-ed on March 15.

Yet, as much standing as the Kagans retain in Official Washington's world of think tanks and op-ed placements, they remain mostly outside the new Trump-era power centers looking in, although they seem to have detected a door being forced open.

Still, a year ago, their prospects looked much brighter. They could pick from a large field of neocon-oriented Republican presidential contenders or – like Robert Kagan – they could support the establishment Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, whose “liberal interventionism” matched closely with

neoconservatism, differing only slightly in the rationalizations used for justifying wars and more wars.

There was also hope that a President Hillary Clinton would recognize how sympathetic the liberal hawks and the neocons were by promoting Robert Kagan's neocon wife, Victoria Nuland, from Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs to Secretary of State.

Then, there would have been a powerful momentum for both increasing the U.S. military intervention in Syria and escalating the New Cold War with Russia, putting "regime change" back on the agenda for those two countries. So, early last year, the possibilities seemed endless for the Family Kagan to flex their muscles and make lots of money.

A Family Business

As I noted two years ago in an article entitled "A Family Business of Perpetual War": "Neoconservative pundit Robert Kagan and his wife, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, run a remarkable family business: she has sparked a hot war in Ukraine and helped launch Cold War II with Russia and he steps in to demand that Congress jack up military spending so America can meet these new security threats.

"This extraordinary husband-and-wife duo makes quite a one-two punch for the Military-Industrial Complex, an inside-outside team that creates the need for more military spending, applies political pressure to ensure higher appropriations, and watches as thankful weapons manufacturers lavish grants on like-minded hawkish Washington think tanks.

"Not only does the broader community of neoconservatives stand to benefit but so do other members of the Kagan clan, including Robert's brother Frederick at the American Enterprise Institute and his wife Kimberly, who runs her own shop called the Institute for the Study of War."

But things didn't quite turn out as the Kagans had drawn them up. The neocon Republicans stumbled through the GOP primaries losing out to Donald Trump and then – after Hillary Clinton muscled aside Sen. Bernie Sanders to claim the Democratic nomination – she fumbled away the general election to Trump.

After his surprising victory, Trump – for all his many shortcomings – recognized that the neocons were not his friends and mostly left them out in the cold. Nuland not only lost her politically appointed job as Assistant Secretary but resigned from the Foreign Service, too.

With Trump in the White House, Official Washington's neocon-dominated foreign

policy establishment was down but far from out. The neocons were tossed a lifeline by Democrats and liberals who detested Trump so much that they were happy to pick up Nuland's fallen banner of the New Cold War with Russia. As part of a dubious scheme to drive Trump from office, Democrats and liberals hyped evidence-free allegations that Russia had colluded with Trump's team to rig the U.S. election.

New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman spoke for many of this group when he compared Russia's alleged "meddling" to Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor and Al Qaeda's 9/11 terror attacks.

On MSNBC's "Morning Joe" show, Friedman demanded that the Russia hacking allegations be treated as a casus belli: "That was a 9/11 scale event. They attacked the core of our democracy. That was a Pearl Harbor scale event." Both Pearl Harbor and 9/11 led to wars.

So, with many liberals blinded by their hatred of Trump, the path was open for neocons to reassert themselves.

Baiting Republicans

Robert Kagan took to the high-profile op-ed page of The Washington Post to bait key Republicans, such as Rep. Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee who was pictured above the Post article and its headline, "Running interference for Russia."

Kagan wrote: "It would have been impossible to imagine a year ago that the Republican Party's leaders would be effectively serving as enablers of Russian interference in this country's political system. Yet, astonishingly, that is the role the Republican Party is playing."

Kagan then reprised Official Washington's groupthink that accepted without skepticism the claims from President Obama's outgoing intelligence chiefs that Russia had "hacked" Democratic emails and released them via WikiLeaks to embarrass the Clinton campaign.

Though Obama's intelligence officials offered no verifiable evidence to support the claims – and WikiLeaks denied getting the two batches of emails from the Russians – the allegations were widely accepted across Official Washington as grounds for discrediting Trump and possibly seeking his removal from office.

Ignoring the political conflict of interest for Obama's appointees, Kagan judged that "given the significance of this particular finding [about Russian meddling], the evidence must be compelling" and justified "a serious, wide-ranging and open investigation."

But Kagan also must have recognized the potential for the neocons to claw their way back to power behind the smokescreen of a New Cold War with Russia.

He declared: "The most important question concerns Russia's ability to manipulate U.S. elections. That is not a political issue. It is a national security issue. If the Russian government did interfere in the United States' electoral processes last year, then it has the capacity to do so in every election going forward. This is a powerful and dangerous weapon, more than warships or tanks or bombers.

"Neither Russia nor any potential adversary has the power to damage the U.S. political system with weapons of war. But by creating doubts about the validity, integrity and reliability of U.S. elections, it can shake that system to its foundations."

A Different Reality

As alarmist as Kagan's op-ed was, the reality was far different. Even if the Russians did hack the Democratic emails and somehow slipped the information to WikiLeaks – an unsubstantiated and disputed contention – those two rounds of email disclosures were not that significant to the election's outcome.

Hillary Clinton blamed her surprise defeat on FBI Director James Comey briefly reopening the investigation into her use of a private email server while serving as Secretary of State.

Further, by all accounts, the WikiLeaks-released emails were real and revealed wrongdoing by leading Democrats, such as the Democratic National Committee's tilting of the primaries against Sen. Bernie Sanders and in favor of Clinton. The emails of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta disclosed the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from voters, as well as some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

In other words, the WikiLeaks' releases helped inform American voters about abuses to the U.S. democratic process. The emails were not "disinformation" or "fake news." They were real news.

A similar disclosure occurred both before the election and this week when someone leaked details about Trump's tax returns, which are protected by law. However, except for the Trump camp, almost no one thought that this illegal act of releasing a citizen's tax returns was somehow a threat to American democracy.

The general feeling was that Americans have a right to know such details about someone seeking the White House. I agree, but doesn't it equally follow that we had a right to know about the DNC abusing its power to grease the skids for

Clinton's nomination, about the contents of Clinton's speeches to Wall Street bankers, and about foreign governments seeking pay-to-play influence by contributing to the Clinton Foundation?

Yet, because Obama's political appointees in the U.S. intelligence community "assess" that Russia was the source of the WikiLeaks emails, the assault on U.S. democracy is a reason for World War III.

More Loose Talk

But Kagan was not satisfied with unsubstantiated accusations regarding Russia undermining U.S. democracy. He asserted as "fact" – although again without presenting evidence – that Russia is "interfering in the coming elections in France and Germany, and it has already interfered in Italy's recent referendum and in numerous other elections across Europe. Russia is deploying this weapon against as many democracies as it can to sap public confidence in democratic institutions."

There's been a lot of handwringing in Official Washington and across the Mainstream Media about the "post-truth" era, but these supposed avatars for truth are as guilty as anyone, acting as if constantly repeating a fact-free claim is the same as proving it.

But it's clear what Kagan and other neocons have in mind, an escalation of hostilities with Russia and a substantial increase in spending on U.S. military hardware and on Western propaganda to "counter" what is deemed "Russian propaganda."

Kagan recognizes that he already has many key Democrats and liberals on his side. So he is taking aim at Republicans to force them to join in the full-throated Russia-bashing, writing:

"But it is the Republicans who are covering up. The party's current leader, the president, questions the intelligence community's findings, motives and integrity. Republican leaders in Congress have opposed the creation of any special investigating committee, either inside or outside Congress. They have insisted that inquiries be conducted by the two intelligence committees.

"Yet the Republican chairman of the committee in the House has indicated that he sees no great urgency to the investigation and has even questioned the seriousness and validity of the accusations. The Republican chairman of the committee in the Senate has approached the task grudgingly.

"The result is that the investigations seem destined to move slowly, produce little information and provide even less to the public. It is hard not to

conclude that this is precisely the intent of the Republican Party's leadership, both in the White House and Congress. ...

"When Republicans stand in the way of thorough, open and immediate investigations, they become Russia's accomplices after the fact."

Lying with the Neocons

Many Democrats and liberals may find it encouraging that a leading neocon who helped pave the road to war in Iraq is now by their side in running down Republicans for not enthusiastically joining the latest Russian witch hunt. But they also might pause to ask themselves how they let their hatred of Trump get them into an alliance with the neocons.

On Wednesday in The Wall Street Journal, Robert Kagan's brother Frederick and his wife Kimberly dropped the other shoe, laying out the neocons' long-held dream of a full-scale U.S. invasion of Syria, a project that was put on hold in 2004 because of U.S. military reversals in Iraq.

But the neocons have long lusted for "regime change" in Syria and were not satisfied with Obama's arming of anti-government rebels and the limited infiltration of U.S. Special Forces into northern Syria to assist in the retaking of the Islamic State's "capital" of Raqqa.

In the Journal op-ed, Frederick and Kimberly Kagan call for opening a new military front in southeastern Syria:

"American military forces will be necessary. But the U.S. can recruit new Sunni Arab partners by fighting alongside them in their land. The goal in the beginning must be against ISIS because it controls the last areas in Syria where the U.S. can reasonably hope to find Sunni allies not yet under the influence of al Qaeda. But the aim after evicting ISIS must be to raise a Sunni Arab army that can ultimately defeat al Qaeda and help negotiate a settlement of the war.

"The U.S. will have to pressure the Assad regime, Iran and Russia to end the conflict on terms that the Sunni Arabs will accept. That will be easier to do with the independence and leverage of a secure base inside Syria. ... President Trump should break through the flawed logic and poor planning that he inherited from his predecessor. He can transform this struggle, but only by transforming America's approach to it."

A New Scheme on Syria

In other words, the neocons are back to their clever word games and their strategic maneuverings to entice the U.S. military into a "regime change"

project in Syria.

The neocons thought they had almost pulled off that goal by pinning a mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, on the Syrian government and mousetrapping Obama into launching a major U.S. air assault on the Syrian military.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin stepped in to arrange for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to surrender all his chemical weapons even as Assad continued to deny any role in the sarin attack.

Putin's interference in thwarting the neocons' dream of a Syrian "regime change" war moved Putin to the top of their enemies' list. Soon key neocons, such as National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman, were taking aim at Ukraine, which Gershman deemed "the biggest prize" and a steppingstone toward eventually ousting Putin in Moscow.

It fell to Assistant Secretary Victoria "Toria" Nuland to oversee the "regime change" in Ukraine. She was caught on an unsecured phone line in late January or early February 2014 discussing with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt how "to glue" or "to midwife" a change in Ukraine's elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

Several weeks later, neo-Nazi and ultranationalist street fighters spearheaded a violent assault on government buildings forcing Yanukovich and other officials to flee for their lives, with the U.S. government quickly hailing the coup regime as "legitimate."

But the Ukraine putsch led to the secession of Crimea and a bloody civil war in eastern Ukraine with ethnic Russians, events that the State Department and the mainstream Western media deemed "Russian aggression" or a "Russian invasion."

So, by the last years of the Obama administration, the stage was set for the neocons and the Family Kagan to lead the next stage of the strategy of cornering Russia and instituting a "regime change" in Syria.

All that was needed was for Hillary Clinton to be elected president. But these best-laid plans surprisingly went astray. Despite his overall unfitness for the presidency, Trump defeated Clinton, a bitter disappointment for the neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks.

Yet, the so-called "#Resistance" to Trump's presidency and President Obama's unprecedented use of his intelligence agencies to paint Trump as a Russian "Manchurian candidate" gave new hope to the neocons and their agenda.

It has taken them a few months to reorganize and regroup but they now see hope in pressuring Trump so hard regarding Russia that he will have little choice but to buy into their belligerent schemes.

As often is the case, the Family Kagan has charted the course of action – batter Republicans into joining the all-out Russia-bashing and then persuade a softened Trump to launch a full-scale invasion of Syria. In this endeavor, the Kagans have Democrats and liberals as the foot soldiers.

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](#)).

Reasons for Rise in Anti-Semitism

Anti-Jewish vandals have defaced cemeteries and other Jewish targets, raising the question of whether anti-Semitism is on the rise in the Age of Trump, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

There is an upsurge in anti-Jewish hatred in America. It has manifested itself in criminal and violent acts and threats of still more violence. Jewish cemeteries have been vandalized, and Jewish educational and cultural institutions have received death threats.

The obvious increase in such incidents leaves no doubt about the existence of intense anti-Semitism, and about how it persists in the United States and not just elsewhere. This hatred and prejudice should be vigorously condemned. All Americans should realize that while Jewish citizens are those most directly vulnerable to harm, such hatred and prejudice offends American values that benefit everyone.

We must ask about the hatred: why? Not just why in general, but why now. The correlation that immediately comes to mind regarding the rise of this vile phenomenon is with the political rise of Donald Trump, through the time of his candidacy and campaign and now the opening weeks of his presidency. We must be careful with any correlation not to be hasty in attributing cause and effect.

In this case, we should be aware of two ways of looking at Trump regarding this

entire issue. On one hand is his strategy of appealing to the prejudices of a white nationalism in which anti-Semitism is not far below the surface, and sometimes visible on the surface. Trump relies on, as his most influential adviser, Stephen Bannon, whose Breitbart News has provided a forum for anti-Semitic sentiment.

Another senior appointee in the Trump White House proudly wears a medal associated with the wartime Hungarian regime that collaborated with the Nazis. Trump himself has come close to denying that the cemetery attacks were a manifestation of anti-Semitism by suggesting that they were false flag operations.

On the other hand is the Donald Trump who talks about his Jewish son-in-law, his daughter who converted to Judaism, and the Jewish grandchildren they have given him. This Donald Trump also gets the endorsement of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said when visiting the White House last month, "There is no greater supporter of the Jewish people and the Jewish state than President Donald Trump."

One always needs to approach the subject of anti-Semitism gingerly. Let us approach it by disaggregating the two subjects the Prime Minister mentioned – a people and a state – and note how different folks have responded differently to the dichotomous Donald Trump described above. Some are sufficiently and appropriately offended by the anti-Semitic connections to condemn them, regardless of whatever else they may like about Trump and his policies.

The Anti-Defamation League, for example, has, to its credit, spoken out forcefully against the Bannon appointment. Some others, however, including some groups that might be expected to be especially disturbed by any indications of anti-Semitism, have given Trump a pass on the issue because they give overriding priority to Trump's support of the Israeli government and its policies. They only seem to care about Trump being less on that government's case about the occupation of Palestinian territories and the continuing Israeli colonization of the territories than the Obama administration was, and about how Trump has appointed a far-right ambassador to Israel who is in bed with the settlement movement and how Trump makes other supportive noises such as talk about moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

Giving Trump a Pass

Netanyahu himself, during his recent visit, gave Trump a pass by not speaking out about the upsurge in anti-Semitism in the United States even after Trump, in his joint press conference with the prime minister, indecorously swatted aside a straightforward question from an Israeli journalist about the rash of incidents.

Still others recognize the dichotomy explicitly and express conflicted feelings. Samuel G. Freedman writes of an “anguishing reality” for “the vast majority of American Jews”: “To support Israel when it is cross-branded with Trump’s intolerance is to avert their eyes from a threat right here at home.”

Similar anguished dissonance about Trump coming to power is expressed by many observers in Israel. The conflicted feelings arise because a couple of false equations are being made by those having the feelings. One is to equate the well-being of Jewish people with the standing of a particular state. Even some movements within Judaism don’t agree with that, and the two subjects involved are in fact two different things.

Even more damaging and disorientating is to equate either the well-being of Jewish people, or the standing and strength of Israel, with the policies of the government that is currently in power in Israel and that is a coalition of right-wing parties that have dominated Israeli politics in recent years. There is no more validity to that equation than there would be in equating criticism of Trump and his policies with being anti-American, or being prejudiced against white Protestants or any other ethnic or religious identity associated with America. Although Netanyahu spoke of support for the “Jewish state,” he really meant support for “my government.”

What most obviously and saliently identifies that government, as distinct from other strands in Israeli politics, is what most identifies it in the eyes of the international community and accounts for nearly all the tensions with that community. This is the policy of holding on to territory conquered in war a half century ago that was long inhabited by another people, a people who have since been in a subjugated state and denied self-determination. The combination of colonization of the conquered territory through construction of settlements, and repression of Palestinian life through demolitions of homes and countless other measures, yields a combination of apartheid and ethnic cleansing. It is, in short, a major program of forceful discrimination against an entire people identified by their ethnic or religious identity.

Many of the official policies and practices in the territories exhibit an attitude toward the subjugated community that is one of disdain for people of that ethnicity and treatment of their lives as having much less value than those of the dominant ethnicity.

Unofficial actions, including violent actions, by members of the dominant ethnicity against the subjugated community embrace similar attitudes. The official policies and the vigilante activity both play upon and stoke broader attitudes of Jews toward Arabs that feature not just bias and disdain but hatred. Visceral hatred of Arabs has visibly risen among Jewish Israelis in

recent times, coincident with the political rise of the right-wingers who now control the government.

Here is where we cannot only see that there is not really a tension in how to regard Donald Trump but also understand the basis of anti-Semitism in the United States and its recent surge. Any form of hateful prejudice says much more about the bigot than about the target of the prejudice. Through the centuries, Jews have disproportionately suffered as targets of hateful prejudice for reasons that can be analyzed in terms of such historical factors as demographic patterns, envy of success, and why certain stereotypes and scapegoats have been popular at certain times.

Much Broader Targets

But the drivers of this specific manifestation of prejudicial hatred are essentially the same as those that have driven other forms of it. In the United States, anti-Semitism is tapping some of the same roots of fear, resentment, and ignorance that also have underlain waves of prejudice against Irish-, Chinese-, Japanese-, and African-Americans.

The contemporary Trumpian version highlights Muslims and Mexicans, but that's not because they both start with M or for any other reason that sets them apart from other groups that can be, or have been, targets of prejudice and hatred. They happen to be convenient targets because of perceived connections to certain other salient issues of the day, but the underlying attitudes can be directed just as easily at Jews or other targets defined in terms of religion or ethnicity.

The number of active hate groups in the United States has risen markedly since the beginning of the Twenty-first Century. The numbers dropped for a while during Barack Obama's second term, but in the last two years the numbers have increased significantly again. Anti-Jewish incidents are part of an overall rise in prejudicial hatred. Anti-Jew has gone hand-in-hand with anti-black, anti-Muslim, and anti-whomever.

The coincidence of timing between this trend and the political phenomenon of Donald Trump is not merely coincidence. The political themes that Trump has ridden to the White House play directly upon, and stoke further, the sorts of prejudices that can take violent forms and that may be manifested in overturned gravestones in a cemetery.

This pattern parallels the pattern in Israel. The details about the target groups are different, of course, and for obvious reasons, Jews are not the prime target of those who support the people with political power (although it is easy

to find anti-Jewish hatred among Palestinians). But the basic dynamics involving ignorance, fear, rhetoric, political power, and hateful prejudice are essentially the same.

We should have gotten a clue about this from the vocabulary used. Although the term *anti-Semitism* long ago became equated with anti-Jewish prejudice, Arabs are Semites, too. It is highly likely that those responsible for desecrating cemeteries and sending threatening message to Jewish institutions would not be nice to Arabs, either.

So there should be no conflicting feelings in thinking about Donald Trump in connection with these issues. His bromance with Netanyahu is one founded on a common approach to fear and prejudicial policies. The parallels between their policies, along with the foundations of fear and prejudice, extend even to wall-building. The shared political strategy of the two governments promotes the sort of bias and hatred that is bad for Jews, bad for Israel, and bad for the values of tolerance and fairness that the vast majority of American Jews embrace.

The false equations may have contributed to this problem from another angle. The alacrity with which some defenders of the rightist government of Israel whip out the anti-Semitism card as a response to criticism of that government's policies not only represents a grossly inaccurate characterization of much criticism that has nothing to do with anti-Semitism and is offered in the best interests of Israel.

It also complicates efforts to counter real anti-Semitism. For one thing, it means taking our eyes off the ball that is the real thing while holding debates about the false version. For another, it cheapens the currency. If observers in the United States perceive that anti-Semitism is something that involves policy wonks arguing over what is going on in the West Bank, most observers are not apt to conclude that it is something worth spending their time and attention worrying about.

They *should* worry about it. It has been said, with good reason, that Jews are the canary in the coal mine as far as prejudice and sometimes lethal hatred are concerned, because they often have been the first to suffer from it. But if the cause of the suffering remains, others will suffer as well.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of Why America Misunderstands the World. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Testing the Principle of Free Speech

A surge in hateful speech toward minorities in the Age of Trump has been met by a pushback from angry activists, sometimes trampling the vital principle of free and open debate, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

At the risk of sounding like a geezer complaining about “these kids today,” back in my college days, when it came to points of view we were unhesitatingly exposed to literature, teachers and on-campus speakers covering the ideological waterfront.

In one instance, the student body was addressed by civil rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory, radical Irish activist Bernadette Devlin and the conservative writer and critic Russell Kirk – all in the course of a week or so.

Such variety was a common occurrence, and freewheeling, open discussion was encouraged. We didn’t always like or agree with a lot of what we heard or read – from time to time there were vehement protests – but all of it was invaluable. None of us were harmed in the making of our education.

So I was appalled other day when I read about the [attempt by Republican Arkansas legislator Kim Hendren](#) to ban from that state’s public schools all books written by the great radical historian Howard Zinn, including his seminal [A People’s History of the United States](#), a truthful, lacerating look at the heroes and villains of America – especially the oligarchs and kleptocrats who once again have their heels on the necks of the poor and middle class.

But I also was deeply troubled by the incident at Vermont’s Middlebury College on March 2, when controversial social scientist Charles Murray was invited by a conservative student group and attempted to speak on campus. Here’s what happened, [according to the Associated Press](#):

“Hundreds of students chanted as Murray began to speak Thursday, forcing the college to move the lecture to an undisclosed location. Murray’s talk was live-streamed to the original venue, but protesters drowned it out. The topic, he said, was the divergence of the country’s culture into a new upper class separated from mainstream America.

“Afterward, a group of protesters surrounded Murray, professor Allison Stanger and college administrator Bill Burger as they were leaving, he said. The protesters became violent, with one pulling Stanger’s hair, twisting her neck,

the college said.

“After Murray and the two Middlebury staff members got into a car to leave, protesters banged on the windows, climbed onto the hood and rocked the vehicle, the college and Murray said.”

Professor Stanger, by the way, went to the ER and was subsequently diagnosed with concussion. She’s a respected political scientist at Middlebury and a fellow at the progressive New America, and was there the other night because the conservative student group had asked her to provide a counterpoint to Murray’s speech, to interview him from the stage after his prepared remarks. She had prepared some tough, challenging questions.

Odious Opinions

Many of Charles Murray’s opinions are indeed odious and his research highly questionable, He was co-author of The Bell Curve, a notorious book that seemed to link race and IQ. He describes himself as a libertarian, but the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) calls him a white nationalist and reports:

“According to Murray, the relative differences between the white and black populations of the United States, as well as those between men and women, have nothing to do with discrimination or historical and structural disadvantages, but rather stem from genetic differences between the groups... Murray’s attempts to link social inequality to genes are based on the work of explicitly racist scientists.”

At the beginning of Murray’s attempt to speak at Middlebury, students turned their backs to him and chanted in protest. I probably would have done the same. But to not let him speak and to allow the protests to lead to violence is inexcusable.

I realize that this raises all sorts of questions about freedom of speech and academic liberty, the nature of dissent and when and if political violence is ever justified, but looking at what happened coolly – and admittedly, from a distance – it seems clear that this went far beyond the boundaries of civil discourse that especially today must be defended against the barbarians who already have run roughshod, pushing through the gates and seizing the reins of power and governance.

Professor Stanger said it best herself. She wrote:

“To people who wish to spin this story as one about what’s wrong with elite colleges and universities, you are mistaken. Please instead consider this as a metaphor for what is wrong with our country, and on that, Charles Murray and I

would agree. This was the saddest day of my life. We have got to do better by those who feel and are marginalized. Our 230-year constitutional democracy depends on it, especially when our current President is blind to the evils he has unleashed. We must all realize the precious inheritance we have as fellow Americans and defend the Constitution against all its enemies, both foreign and domestic. That is why I do not regret my involvement in the event with Dr. Murray.”

And then she quoted James Baldwin: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

I can be as guilty as the next person about tuning out and trying to ignore the voice of someone with whom I vehemently disagree. I know, too, that this indeed is a time to speak out against the ignorance and despotism sweeping our nation. Further, I realize that the religious, racial and homophobic hate crimes that have been on the upswing since Donald Trump’s candidacy and election – and increased in 2016 for the second year in a row according to the Southern Poverty Law Center – far exceed in numbers and intensity any violence or brutishness that has occurred on college campuses. No question that they’re more frightening and dangerous.

But, in the words of Andrew Sullivan, “Universities are the sanctuary cities of reason. If reason must be subordinate to ideology even there, our experiment in self-government is over.”

Two sides of the same coin: whether the Trump White House or those who would physically attack a college professor. Their unthinking, unyielding enslavement to a single viewpoint is fatal.

Ignorance begets ignorance and hate begets hate. And like a virus, each can infect without regard to race, gender, creed or political perspective. At a time when those in charge are fueling a pandemic of intolerance we must make sure not to succumb ourselves.

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Restoring a Responsible ‘Conservatism’

As much as “liberal” has become a dirty word in U.S. politics, the word

“conservative” has been ripped from all its honorable traditions and redefined as a dangerous form of radicalism, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

What is it about the U.S. that makes it virtually the only country in the world where a political Left scarcely exists? We have a center Right – the Democratic Party. And we have a far Right – the Republican Party. In fact, just invoking the L-word “Liberal” can inflict quick political death. Yes, we’re safe from the Left here in America.

Having such a stunted political spectrum is bad enough in itself. Still worse is the utter corruption of the word *conservative*. U.S. society has allowed the Republican Party to hijack the word, distort it and redefine it to its own ends, against its real meaning.

Isn’t it time for progressives to stop bashing their heads against the “liberalism” wall? Even the Democratic Party machine itself has barred the gates against progressive Democratic candidates. At this point, we need a rethink.

Wouldn’t it make more sense simply to yield up the term *Liberal* to all its many enemies? Put it in the cold freeze? In a doggedly right-of-center country, it might instead be smarter to seize back the term *conservatism* out of Republican hands, re-own it, and restore it to its true meaning.

Conservatism has a venerable history. The very word says a lot. It seeks to *preserve and conserve* fundamental human institutions, values, and lives in a precarious world.

Such as, for example, conserving the planet we live on, its forests, its water, its creatures, its bounty. It’s our only home. In fact, preserving and conserving the earth really is the ultimate conservative agenda. We have been given a stewardship over this unique and precious blue orb in the cosmos upon which all life depends.

Indeed, it’s the Republicans who are False Conservatives. They place the interests of the corporate world, profit and the welfare of a minority above all else. Their agenda is clear: generating ever more corporate business, clearing more land for “development,” installing more robots to make production more efficient – this is a conservative agenda?

Actually it sounds like a very aggressive revolutionary approach to reshaping our entire earthly domicile in economic terms. It risks all in the name of production and profit. What true conservative could buy into that?

What of the preservation of life? Wouldn't prioritizing the preservation of human life over death represent a true conservative agenda as well? How much good does war do for people actually living it on the ground? Nobody is saying that one should never fight in true self-defense, but in the end, it's hard to make the case that war has done a lot of good for most human beings involved.

Can Peace Be 'Conservative'?

Might one even say that almost *any* peace that spares human lives is better than almost *any* war? Might not that be a conservative value? In the U.S. we're used to thinking about fighting wars *over there*. We are spared the need to conceive of war at home. So who among us actually ends up better off as a result of war? Our families? Our streets, our infrastructure, our loyalties, our institutions, our civilities, in the violence and anarchy of war? Yet our nation has been at almost non-stop war since the collapse of the USSR – following “conservative” values.

Republicans tend to believe that war is heroic, glorious, “our finest fighting men,” pride of the nation, anything to keep our nation safe, huge budget expenditures at the cost of almost everything else. Here's what founding father James Madison had to say about it:

“Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes ... known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few.... No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.”

So is it a “conservative value” to arm the nation to the teeth and lead the world in arms sales to others? “Conservatives” want to “protect freedom” by advocating the greatest and most intrusive national security surveillance state in history?

When it comes to “national security,” how much do our own communities genuinely benefit from U.S. military encirclement of China and Russia – an incredibly costly, provocative, never-ending undertaking that gins up increased international tensions? For that matter, would the U.S. ever tolerate for one second efforts by Russia or China to “encircle the U.S.” militarily? Is it ““conservative”” to “go abroad to seek monsters to slay,” as John Quincy Adams warned?

And what of the civilian sciences and exploration of space? NASA and non-military scientific research have grown impoverished. Education, surely a prime conservative value, languishes underfunded.

And then there's the economy. Republicans generally believe that the number one policy goal of the nation is *first and foremost* the health of the economy – read the health of our corporations.

President Calvin Coolidge before the Great Depression famously said, “The chief business of the American people is business.” Republicans have even since managed to persuade faux Democrats to adopt this position. (Remember Bill Clinton – it's the economy stupid!) But prioritizing the health of the economy gets the priorities wrong: for a genuine conservative the first priority is the health and welfare of our communities and our people.

Now, there is undeniably a relationship between the health of the economy and the general welfare, but they are not one and the same thing at all. Human welfare must be the end goal; a healthy economy, however interpreted, represents the *means* and says nothing of equitable distribution.) This is another issue that should be denied to the False Conservatism of the Republicans.

Making Progress Work

Preserving our communities should be among the highest conservative priorities. But it's going to be increasingly hard to preserve jobs at home. Robotics above all is seeing to that. And it is more efficient to ship most jobs off to China, Vietnam or Bangladesh.

That's why many creative Western thinkers are now seriously examining the concept of a guaranteed national income for all. Once a wildly radical idea maybe, but it's time is coming. Because capitalism *by definition* sends jobs to where they can be most cheaply performed – and it's not in the USA. Sending jobs abroad is not “conservatism.”

Keeping people alive, healthy, and engaged – not alienated or resentful – is the most important social task we face.

Remember, that while capitalism is a powerful productive engine it has no *direct* interest in community welfare. It's not that capitalism is immoral; morality is just outside capitalism's functional purview. Capitalism by definition is about maximizing profit; that's what capitalism does. Yet today most Republicans enshrine free-market capitalism as the Holy Grail over the welfare of the community. They don't worry about poverty and domestic despair. Or even the need to spread profits if society is to function.

Nor is *efficiency* a prime conservative value. Human welfare is. If we pay a dollar more for a loaf of bread that is largely locally produced, don't we all gain in the community?

France, for example, has always sought to keep some elements of small-scale domestic agriculture alive rather than yielding it all to agro-business. They perceive some absolute social good in preserving this way of life, even if it raises costs. Japan does the same thing on growing (expensive) domestic rice that most Japanese support on social grounds. It's kind of a tax for local benefit and welfare, to conserve the community.

Yes, the benefits of globalization can be real, but they need to be viewed in terms of the welfare of all, and not as an absolute ideological good. What good is a cheaper I-Phone when the rest of our standards of human welfare are dropping?

But where do our budget priorities now lie with most members of both parties in the U.S.? Cutting taxes. Yet what of the huge tax levied upon our families by a U.S. defense budget that is greater than the next *seven* most powerful nations put together? And going up. Have we become safer in a more stable world as a result?

Healthy communities also reflect a pride and exercise of artistic accomplishment. Is it *conservative* to dismiss cultural resources such as the Public Broadcasting System or the National Endowment for the Arts as economically without value? Or local arts?

Do you think the French or the Russians or Canadians don't place high community and national value on preservation of their national arts – which is unprofitable from a business perspective but central to national pride and cohesiveness?

And what of privatization of public lands? How do Republicans get away with calling that “conservative?” Doesn't “public” mean for the *community*? Is there no longer such a thing as the “public good?”

So let's maybe give up the “L-word” as a hopeless cause and instead work to restore the real meaning of what conservatism should be. This has been the colossal hoax the Republican Party (and some faux Democrats) have perpetrated upon this nation – utterly twisting and redefining conservatism to their own ends. We must take the word back.

It is unconscionable – and incomprehensible – that conservatism today has come to stand for profit, the welfare of the military-security-industrial complex, and the massive corruption of our political order through their “political contributions.” Or that Republicanism should celebrate conservatism by throwing away social safety nets and sowing religious and ethnic fears.

And in the end there just might be some gain for the embattled progressive

community in reclaiming the word: it could do better at the polls.

Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is *Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American's crisis of conscience in Pakistan*. (Amazon, Kindle) grahamefuller.com

America's Anti-Immigrant 'Atmosphere'

A hostile U.S. "atmosphere" toward a wide range of immigrants, not just Muslims, has followed President Trump's travel ban aimed at six mostly Muslim countries, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

Dennis J Bernstein

Beyond the specific language of President Trump's revised travel ban aimed at six predominantly Muslim countries, the executive order creates a climate of hostility toward a much larger number of immigrants, says Indian historian Vijay Prashad.

Following the roll-out of Trump's executive order, I spoke with Professor Prashad, author of more than 15 books and nine anthologies, including most recently *The Death of the Nation and the Future of the Arab Revolution* and *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter*.

We also spoke about allegations of Russian interference in the U.S. elections, and what a Trump presidency might mean for US-Israeli-Palestinian policies.

Dennis Bernstein: Let's talk about some of Trump's opening salvos and let's come in through the travel door. You've been doing a lot of traveling lately.

Vijay Prashad: Well, you know, the new travel ban is out and I suppose narrower in its scope than the January 27th order. But it's nonetheless quite significant, in that he has, President Trump has, decided that six countries, not seven—he's removed Iraq from the list—must have its citizens be under further scrutiny if they want to come to the United States. And I think what people need to understand is that the actual letter of the travel ban, of the executive order, is less important than the atmosphere that such executive orders create.

The atmosphere of this executive order, for instance, has already created a great deal of sensitivity...shall I put it like that? Sensitivity among people who work for the Customs and Border service, at the border. And we've had, already, dozens of stories of people who come from none of these countries, none of these six named countries, people who are in fact nationals of countries such as

Canada, being not only stopped at the border, but turned away.

So, I think it's important to see the language of this particular executive order, not for itself—it shouldn't be studied just for itself—but also the kind of atmosphere created. It's almost anti... not only immigrant but xenophobic atmosphere. Hatred of strangers, hatred of different people, that seems to have entered quite publicly into American political discussion.

DB: And, we are, of course, now seeing some of the things that many of us feared in terms of the expanding sweeps, by the Department of Homeland Security, what's taking place at the border. This is something that has changed, if you will, the character, the intensity, of life now at a certain point, in a certain way.

VP: Yes, and you are in California, where there is a preponderance of people who will easily be mistaken, let us say, by federal officials for being immigrants. An attitude has returned to the United States that there is something called "an American." Somebody who is white, somebody who is perhaps, let's even put it in a more narrow way, Dennis, somebody who is Anglo-Saxon, somebody who is, perhaps even narrower, Protestant. And this person has once again emerged as the actual, kind of, muscle of what it means to be an American. And everybody else is, in a sense, has to be considered outside that definition. I think this is very disturbing.

This is after a generation and a half of what was known as multiculturalism, an attempt to expand the concept of "American," to be more inclusive. To allow, for instance, one's imagination to accept that people who migrate to this country have title to it, they're likely to feel comfortable in it. And, I think that the Trump movement, the very cruel populism of the Trump movement, has once more suffocated the idea of "American."

It's taken the idea of "American" by the throat and it has garroted it. And it's said that only a very narrow interpretation should be allowed. So, when one sees pictures of ICE agents at the jet-way as people are getting off domestic planes, asking to check out identification. This smells like this suffocated idea of "American."

And I'm afraid the price for this is on the one side going to be paid, of course, by those who don't look like "Americans," but really the price for this is going to be paid by the United States in general, as people from around the world decide that they are not really looking forward to a holiday in the United States, and as people outside the country think, "I don't want to go study there."

And it's almost as if Donald Trump has had kind of a syllable error. And rather

than conducted a war against terrorism, he has decided to conduct a war against tourism. And the effects of that are going to be quite catastrophic.

DB: Let's go to "the Russians are coming" again. Now ... if you read it from the sort of corporate press and the Washington elite, and the intelligence community, it's "Donald Trump is on the strings of Vladimir Putin." In fact, through Donald Trump, Putin crashed the U.S. elections and made it possible for him to be the president. Do you buy that scenario?

VP: Well, let's first say that if you were asleep for the last 40 years—[if] you were the 20th century Rip Van Winkle, and you woke up yesterday, or this month—you'd think that the Soviet Union had won the Cold War, and that the United States had been defeated. It's extraordinary that there is this kind of paranoia about the reach of Russian power. It tells you a great deal, in a sense, about the anxiety inside the American ruling elites, that they believe that the Russians have such immense capacity, and that their capacity, therefore, is not as immense.

This is something that people should consider, particularly when you look, for instance, at the defense budget of the United States, now with a \$54 billion increase by Donald Trump. Most likely the defense budget will go up to about \$700 billion a year. By the way, that \$54 billion increase of the U.S. budget, it's the increase of the budget, that's almost the total annual Russian military budget.

So Russia is actually a fragment, has a fragment of the power of the United States. And yet, the United States is somehow hyperventilating about Russia's influence inside the United States. I think people really need to take a step back and consider this. Now, whether the Russians actually influenced the elections, that's a separate matter. And, of course, that will require perhaps some kind of investigation of e-mail servers and things that are beyond my capacity.

But, clearly, there are some problems in American elections. And those problems may not have everything to do with the Russians. They may have to do with the desiccated nature of American politics in the first place.

Look at what the American electorate was offered. On the one side Hillary Clinton, who was carrying the flag of the status quo, and on the other side Donald Trump, with incredibly dangerous words coming out of his lips. That was hardly a choice for people. So there is a kind of very desiccated political environment. I think that's one of the things that people need to take seriously about this election.

The second thing they need to take seriously is this is the first presidential election after the withdrawal of the Voting Rights Act. So a very large numbers of people around the country were disenfranchised from the ballot box. I think that—the removal of the Voting Rights Act—is probably more consequential for the election results than any Russian meddling.

DB: And, of course, you have, added on to that, the elevation of Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III to be the attorney general, who has spent a lifetime trying to disenfranchise black people from voting, if not actually supporting terrorism against them. It doesn't look good at that level.

VP: Well, it's an incredible moment, that he actually gave us. First, his entire name, a confederate name, if there ever was one. Jeff Sessions has, as you said rightly, spent his life suppressing not only the black vote, but the black imagination. At least trying to suppress the black imagination. And being largely unsuccessful because of the push back of the forces of black liberation movements, civil rights groups, etc.

But now, as those groups also have been largely atomized, broken up, or have become incorporated into the ruling structure, the power of those groups has been weakened. And it has allowed this kind of "revenge politics" of Mr. Session to be an important part of the coalition of Donald Trump.

Who would have imagined from, let's say, the 1990's that the American fascist movement, the Ku Klux Klan and others, would have representatives inside the White House? It was thought in the 1990's that that kind of neoliberal[ism] didn't require that kind of constituency to maintain their policy in this country. But, of course, now they are back in the guise of people like Steve Bannon.

And, by the way, these killings, and this is me just speaking personally now, these killings of South Asians, whether in Kansas or in South Carolina, people might say, "Well, these are just one-off incidents." It's very important to remember that Bannon has a very special antipathy to Asian workers in the high tech industry. And people in your listening area who work in the high tech industry should pay attention to this. In 2015 he wanted to scrap the H-1B visa. This is a visa for high tech workers.

And in an interview with then-candidate Donald Trump, when Bannon said this, Trump cautioned him and said "No, no, we want talented people inside the United States." But it was Bannon's views which prevailed. And then during the election campaign Trump campaigned repeatedly for the withdrawal of H1B, that is, for allowing high tech workers to enter the country. And it was Bannon who, in another interview in 2016, in talking about migration, said that these migrants

shouldn't be allowed in because, as he put it, "Jeffersonian democracy is not in their DNA." This is very harsh language against sections of the population, very racialized language. And this is, of course, front and center now, in the White House.

DB: And, do you want to just say a word or two about this idea of putting in charge of each agency somebody who is there to dismantle the agency, and ... that's the structural program that's being unfolded under Steve Bannon and Trump, right? This is to dismantle any attempt at regulation of corporate power.

VP: One of the interesting features of this Trump movement from what you're bringing up in terms of deregulation, is that there is an internal problem in this movement. This movement has promised people economic sovereignty. In other words, it said that we'll put America first. Americans should get jobs first, etc... and by the way, again, that word "American" as the modifier is very important. It refers back to what I said earlier. What do they mean by American?

So, at any rate, this idea of economic sovereignty has been the main plank. They've been banging on this plank saying they're going to make sure Americans get jobs, etc. But they're banking on the fact that if they both cut tax rates and they allow for massive deregulation this will somehow spur on American capitalists to invest money inside the United States.

There's no evidence, in the last twenty years, that this sector of the American population is interested in massive investment inside the United States. In fact, I would argue that this section of the population has essentially gone on tax strike, and has withdrawn this massive amount of capital either overseas, or into Wall Street. It's not been interested in making the kind of investments that create jobs.

But because, I think, Bannon and Trump recognize—they're not stupid people—I think they recognize that the demand for economic sovereignty is not going to be met. In other words, they're not going to be able to create the millions of jobs necessary to counter what they call "American carnage," the destruction of the jobs in America. Because they won't be able to do that, then they argue very quickly, from economic sovereignty, they argue for cultural sovereignty.

And that is why issues such as build a wall against Mexico, get Mexico to pay for it, stop the Muslims from coming into the country, stop H1B workers from coming in. These elements of so-called cultural sovereignty become more important for them. And these are going to create massive social strife in the country that is along so-called race lines.

What we're going to get, instead of a class war to create economic sovereignty

in the country, is a race war. It is going to target certain minorities for punishment. Whether it's going to be people who look like Mexicans, who'll be targeted by ICE agents, or it will be vigilante groups out there shooting Indians, going after Muslims, etc. I think we are on the precipice of some kind of race war. And I'm not sure the great resistance that is building up in the country recognizes this fully, and confronts it fully. I think this could be a very dangerous period for the United States.

DB: Let me focus you a bit on the Middle East, just two more areas there. Let's start with, I guess you could call it, Trump's new peace team for Israel. He's got his son-in-law, who is a real Jew, we've been told that, excuse me. And we've got, well, the implications of moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. Your thoughts on this?

VP: Well, look, Dennis, this is an interesting moment. On the one side you have Trump moving with his very harsh, well-known position, "let's go in and move the embassy, the U.S. embassy, to Jerusalem, and let's ... stick our finger in the face of the international consensus." You have that on the one side.

On the other side, you have a very curious moment when Benjamin Netanyahu came to the United States. When Trump, in his very casual, folksy way... and I think he disarmed Netanyahu in this, [when he] said "You know, I don't care what you do, one state, two state, as long as everybody is agreed, we're behind it." I mean, this is a curious moment. And Netanyahu sort of giggled his way out of it. I think he was really quite surprised to hear that.

DB: Yeah!

VP: And this idea of walking away from the two-state solution, which he proposed, within twelve hours his ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, had to quickly say that "No, no we're still committed to the two-state solution."

I think there is a great deal of incoherence and chaos in the Trump White House as far as foreign policy is concerned. I honestly don't think they know what they are doing when they make some of their pronouncements. They've had to pull back on a number of them, including Trump's statement about "Let's go in there and take the oil," as he was talking about Iraq. Then, quickly, his defense secretary had to come in and say "No, no he didn't mean that." So, I think there's a great deal of incoherence in terms of world affairs. I really don't think they know what they're talking about.

I think that Trump's statement that the United States needs to build twelve aircraft carriers... these are kind of the ramblings of somebody who doesn't

understand how the world works. At this point the United States has about one hundred times greater military power than any other country in the world. Russia barely has one aircraft carrier, China has one aircraft carrier, the United States has several. Why build six more aircraft carriers? [It would be an] enormous waste of the public resources that could be used towards schools, parks, etc. So, I think there's a great deal of incoherence.

I think Trump likes an attitude of belligerence around foreign policy. But I think here the establishment that surrounds him is going to coax him through the consensus. This, of course, doesn't mean, Dennis, that the consensus is good. The consensus is often terrible. So it's not clear that this is a good thing.

For instance, the one area where I think some modulation is necessary as far as U.S. policy is concerned, is with regard to the great hostility against Russia. The attempt to engage Russia and China is not going to produce good dividends for the United States.

And you don't have to take it from me. People can go and read Henry Kissinger, who, as you well know, is still alive. Henry Kissinger has been saying the same thing, that this kind of intensified rhetoric against China and Russia is really not productive. And even this strategy, of trying to separate out China and Russia, is not going to work. For in this one small area where Trump was saying a few interesting things, he was immediately closed down. So, I think that the establishment is going to prevail on foreign policy. And I think, of course, that is never a good idea.

DB: And, just to be clear, the point is that the bit of light coming through Trump policies was that, unlike Clinton, he wasn't convinced that we needed a no-fly zone, all-out war [in Syria], we needed to push NATO onto the border of Russia, and that there might be another way. This is really what got him into trouble, right? Taking this on, and the sort of the... the permanent state, the neocons, and the new, hawk liberals just couldn't put up with this.

VP: Well, exactly. Look, what did Obama's policy of trying to isolate Russia... if you extrapolate from the elements of Obama's Eurasia policy... the policy regarding Russia, Europe and China, what you can assume is Mr. Obama was attempting to isolate Russia, and somehow break its ties to China. You can extrapolate that from the kinds of things that they were doing. The Ukraine policy, the Syria policy to some extent, mainly the Ukraine policy.

So, if that was the case, it didn't work. Because over the course of the Obama presidency, as Russia was further isolated out of Europe, it strengthened its ties with China. And, for instance, the Russians decided to pivot the economic, kind of, relationship, from trying to sell their natural gas and oil to Europe,

to doing so with China. So, military ties increased between China and Russia, strategic ties increased, and economic ties increased.

So here comes Mr. Trump, and perhaps he was trying a newer strategy: befriend Russia and try to attack China. Once again, to break the link between the two. But if that was the game he was playing, it would not necessarily have worked. Because, by now, the Russians and the Chinese are quite integrated, in at least the strategic and military aspects, if not also the economic aspects.

But still, the kind of dialing down of the tension around Eurasia would have helped everybody, including the Europeans. But I think there is a sort of an old Cold War mentality that still strikes at the heart of the American establishment which is why it was so easy to conjure it up, around this thing that Russians are interfering in the United States.

It's old Cold War feuds that have emerged in a new generation, not just in people who experienced and grew up in that era. So, yes, I think that there would have been something quite refreshing ... with a rethinking about Russia-China-United States relations. It would have been good for the world to have had a dialing down of tensions. But, of course, that was not to be.

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

Steve Bannon's Apocalyptic 'Unravelling'

Donald Trump's upbeat slogan is "Make America Great Again," but his chief strategist Steve Bannon sees apocalyptic days ahead, a harsh winter before society's renewal, writes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

Steve Bannon is accustomed to start many of his talks to activists and Tea Party gatherings in the following way: "At 11 o'clock on 18 September 2008, Hank Paulson and Ben Bernanke told the U.S. President that they had already stove-piped \$500 billions of liquidity into the financial system during the previous 24 hours – but needed a further one Trillion dollars, *that same day*."

"The pair said that if they did not get it immediately, the U.S. financial system would implode within 72 hours; the world's financial system, within three

weeks; and that social unrest and political chaos could ensue within the month.” (In the end, Bannon notes, it was more like \$5 trillion that was required, though no one really knows how much, as there has been no accounting for all these trillions).

“We (the U.S.) have”, he continues, “in the wake of the bailouts that ensued, liabilities of \$200 trillions, but net assets – including everything – of some \$50-60 trillion.” (Recall that Bannon is himself a former Goldman Sachs banker).

“We are upside down; the industrial democracies today have a problem we have never had before; we are over-leveraged (we have to go through a massive de-leveraging); and we have built a welfare state which is completely and totally unsupportable.

“And why this is a crisis ... the problem ... is that the numbers have become so esoteric that even the guys on Wall Street, at Goldman Sachs, the guys I work with, and the Treasury guys ... It’s so tough to get this together ... Trillion dollar deficits ... etcetera.”

But, Bannon says – in spite of all these esoteric, unimaginable numbers wafting about – the Tea Party women (and it is mainly led by women, he points out) get it. They *know* a different reality: they know what groceries now cost, they know their kids have \$50,000 in college debt, are still living at home, and see no jobs in prospect: “The reason I called the film *Generation Zero* is because this generation, the guys in their 20s and 30s: We’ve wiped them out.”

And it’s not just Bannon. A decade earlier, in 2000, Donald Trump was writing in a very similar vein in a pamphlet that marked his first toying with the prospect of becoming a Presidential candidate: “My third reason for wanting to speak out is that I see not only incredible prosperity ... but also the possibility of economic and social upheaval ... Look towards the future, and if you are like me, you will see storm clouds brewing. Big Trouble. I hope I am wrong, but I think we may be facing an economic crash like we’ve never seen before.”

And before the recent presidential election, Donald Trump kept to this same narrative: the stock market was dangerously inflated. In an interview on CNBC, he said, “I hope I’m wrong, but I think we’re in a big, fat, juicy bubble,” adding that conditions were so perilous that the country was headed for a “very massive recession” and that “if you raise interest rates even a little bit, (everything’s) going to come crashing down.”

The Paradox

And here, precisely, is the paradox: Why – if Trump and Bannon view the economy as already over-leveraged, excess-bubbled, and far too fragile to accommodate

even a small interest rate rise – has Trump (in Mike Whitney’s words) “promised ... more treats and less rules for Wall Street ... tax cuts, massive government spending, and fewer regulations ... \$1 trillion in fiscal stimulus to rev up consumer spending and beef up corporate profits ... to slash corporate tax rates and fatten the bottom line for America’s biggest businesses. And he’s going to gut Dodd-Frank, the ‘onerous’ regulations that were put in place following the 2008 financial implosion, to prevent another economy-decimating cataclysm.”

Does President Trump see the world differently, now that he is President? Or has he parted company with Bannon’s vision?

Though Bannon is often credited – though most often, by a hostile press, aiming to present Trump (falsely) as the “accidental President” who never really expected to win – as the intellectual force behind President Trump. In fact, Trump’s current main domestic and foreign policies were all presaged, and entirely present, in Trump’s 2000 pamphlet.

In 2000, Bannon was less political, screenwriter Julia Jones, a long-time Bannon collaborator, notes. “But the Sept. 11 attacks,” Ms. Jones says, “changed him” and their Hollywood collaboration did not survive his growing engagement with politics.

Bannon himself pins his political radicalization to his experience of the 2008 Great Financial Crisis. He detested how his Goldman colleagues mocked the Tea Party’s “forgotten” ones. As Ms. Jones sees it, a more reliable key to Bannon’s worldview lies in his military service.

“He has a respect for duty,” she said in early February. “The word he has used a lot is ‘dharma.’” Mr. Bannon found the concept of dharma in the Bhagavad Gita, she recalls. It can describe one’s path in life or one’s place in the universe.

There is no evidence, however, that President Trump either has changed his economic views or that he has diverged in his understanding of the nature of the crisis facing America (and Europe).

Tests Ahead

Both men are very smart. Trump understands business, and Bannon finance. They surely know the headwinds they face: the looming prospect of a wrangle to increase the American \$20 trillion “debt ceiling” (which begins to bite on March 15), amid a factious Republican Party, the improbability of the President’s tax or fiscal proposals being enacted quickly, and the likelihood that the Federal Reserve will hike interest rates, “until something breaks.” If they are so smart, what then is going on?

What Bannon has brought to the partnership however, is a clear articulation of the nature of this “crisis” in his Generation Zero film, which explicitly is built around the framework of a book called *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, written in 1997 by Neil Howe and William Strauss.

In the words of one of the co-authors, the analysis “rejects the deep premise of modern Western historians that social time is either linear (continuous progress or decline) or chaotic (too complex to reveal any direction). Instead we adopt the insight of nearly all traditional societies: that social time is a recurring cycle in which events become meaningful only to the extent that they are what philosopher Mircea Eliade calls ‘reenactments.’ In cyclical space, once you strip away the extraneous accidents and technology, you are left with only a limited number of social moods, which tend to recur in a fixed order.”

Howe and Strauss write: “The cycle begins with the First Turning, a ‘High’ which comes after a crisis era. In a High, institutions are strong and individualism is weak. Society is confident about where it wants to go collectively, even if many feel stifled by the prevailing conformity.

“The Second Turning is an ‘Awakening,’ when institutions are attacked in the name of higher principles and deeper values. Just when society is hitting its high tide of public progress, people suddenly tire of all the social discipline and want to recapture a sense of personal authenticity.

“The Third Turning is an ‘Unravelling,’ in many ways the opposite of the High. Institutions are weak and distrusted, while individualism is strong and flourishing.

“Finally, the Fourth Turning is a ‘Crisis’ period. This is when our institutional life is reconstructed from the ground up, always in response to a perceived threat to the nation’s very survival. If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action. Civic authority revives, and people and groups begin to pitch in as participants in a larger community. As these Promethean bursts of civic effort reach their resolution, Fourth Turnings refresh and redefine our national identity.” (Emphasis added).

Woodstock Generation

Bannon’s film focuses principally on the causes of the 2008 financial crisis, and on the “ideas” that arose amongst the “Woodstock generation” (the Woodstock musical festival occurred in 1969), that permeated, in one way or another, throughout American and European society.

The narrator calls the Woodstock generation the “Children of Plenty.” It was a

point of inflection: a second turning “Awakening”; a discontinuity in culture and values. The older generation (that is, anyone over 30) was viewed as having nothing to say, nor any experience to contribute. It was the elevation of the “pleasure principle” (as a “new” phenomenon, as “their” discovery), over the puritan ethic; It celebrated doing one’s own thing; it was about “Self” and narcissism.

The “Unravelling” followed in the form of government and institutional weakness: the “system” lacked the courage to take difficult decisions. The easy choices invariably were taken: the élites absorbed the self-centered, spoilt-child, ethos of the “me” generation. The 1980s and 1990s become the era of “casino capitalism” and the “Davos man.”

The lavish taxpayer bailouts of the U.S. banks after the Mexican, Russian, Asian and Argentinian defaults and crises washed away the bankers’ costly mistakes. The 2004 Bear Stearns exemption which allowed the big five banks to leverage their lending above 12:1 – and, which quickly extended to become 25:1, 30:1 and even 40:1 –permitted the irresponsible risk-taking and the billions in profit-making. The “Dot Com” bubble was accommodated by monetary policy – and then the massive 2008 bailouts accommodated the banks, yet again.

The “Unravelling” was essentially a cultural failure: a failure of responsibility, of courage to face hard choices – it was, in short, the film suggests, an era of spoilt institutions, compromised politicians and irresponsible Wall Streeters – the incumbent class – *indulging themselves, and “abdicating responsibility.”*

Now we have entered the “Fourth Turning”: “All the easy choices are back of us.” The “system” still lacks courage. Bannon says this period will be the “nastiest, ugliest in history.” It will be brutal, and “we” (by which he means the Trump Tea Party activists) will be “vilified.” This phase may last 15 – 20 years, he predicts.

Greek Tragedy

The key to this Fourth Turning is “character.” It is about values. What Bannon means by “our crisis” is perhaps best expressed when the narrator says: “the essence of Greek tragedy is that it is not like a traffic accident, where somebody dies [i.e. the great financial crises didn’t just arise by mischance].

The Greek sense is that tragedy is where something happens because it has to happen, because of the nature of the participants. Because the people involved, make it happen. And they have no choice to make it happen, because that’s their nature.”

This is the deeper implication of what transpired from Woodstock: the nature of people changed. The “pleasure principle,” the narcissism, had displaced the “higher” values that had made America what it was. The generation that believed that there was “no risk, no mountain they could not climb” brought this crisis upon themselves. They wiped out 200 years of financial responsibility in about 20 years. This, it appears, captures the essence of Bannon’s thinking.

That is where we *are*, Bannon asserts: Stark winter inevitably follows, after a warm, lazy summer. It becomes a time of testing, of adversity. Each season in nature has its vital function. Fourth turnings are necessary: they a part of the cycle of renewal.

Bannon’s film concludes with author Howe declaring: “history is seasonal and winter is coming,”

And, what is the immediate political message? It is simple, the narrator of Bannon’s film says: “STOP”: stop doing what you were doing. Stop spending like before. Stop taking on spending commitments that cannot be afforded. Stop mortgaging your children’s future with debt. Stop trying to manipulate the banking system. It is a time for tough thinking, for saying “no” to bailouts, for changing the culture, and re-constructing institutional life.

Cultural Legacy

And how do you re-construct civic life? You look to those who still possess a sense of duty and responsibility – who have retained a cultural legacy of values. It is noticeable that when Bannon addresses the activists, almost the first thing he does is to salute the veterans and serving officers, and praise their qualities, their sense of duty.

It is no surprise then that President Trump wants to increase both the veterans’ and the military’s budget. It is not so much a portent of U.S. military belligerence, but more that he sees them as warriors for the coming “winter” of testing and adversity. Then, and only then does Bannon speak to the “thin blue line” of activists who still have strength of character, a sense of responsibility, of duty. He tells them that the future rests in their hands, alone.

Does this sound like men – Bannon and Trump – who want to ramp up a fresh financial bubble, to indulge the Wall Street casino (in their words)? No? So, what is going on?

They know “the crisis” is coming. Let us recall what Neil Howe wrote in the *Washington Post* concerning the “Fourth Turning”:

“This is when our institutional life is reconstructed from the ground up, always in response to a perceived threat to the nation’s very survival. If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action. Civic authority revives, and people and groups begin to pitch in as participants in a larger community. As these Promethean bursts of civic effort reach their resolution, Fourth Turnings refresh and redefine our national identity.”

Trump has no need to “fabricate” a financial crisis. It will happen “because it has to happen, because of the nature of the participants (in the current ‘system’). Because the people involved, make it happen. And they have no choice to make it happen, because that’s their nature.”

It is not even President Obama’s or Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson’s *fault*, per se. They are just who they are.

Trump and Bannon therefore are *not* likely trying to ignite the “animal spirits” of the players in the financial “casino” (as many in the financial sphere seem to assume). If Bannon’s film and Trump’s articulation of crisis mean anything, it is that their aim is to ignite the “animal spirits” of “the working-class casualties and those forgotten Americans” of the Midwest, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

At that point, they hope that the “thin blue line” of activists will “pitch in” with a Promethean burst of civic effort which will reconstruct America’s institutional and economic life.

If this is so, the Trump/Bannon vision both is audacious – and quite an extraordinary gamble ...

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