

Israel's Dead-End Dilemma

President Trump says he's okay with a one- or two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – whatever the two parties want – but without forceful U.S. intervention, neither option is feasible, says John Chuckman.

By John Chuckman

With its steady encroachment on Palestinian lands, Israel has created a problem that it can't solve. That is why it has always been the case that the United States must pretty much dictate a solution, but it is unable to do so because it is paralyzed by the heavy influence of Israel on the U.S. political process and the power of America's own apologists for Israel.

Trump's suggestion of a one-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict is welcomed by some because Israel's settler policy is said to have made two states impossible, as it was most certainly intended to do. However, a little reflection on hard facts makes it clear that a one-state solution is just as near impossible as a two-state solution.

A single-state solution would be acceptable to all reasonable minds, but you only have to follow the news to know that Israel contains a good many unreasonable minds. Its early advocates and founders were, quite simply, fanatics, and its policies and attitudes were shaped by that fanaticism.

The Israeli establishment could simply not accept a Palestinian population with equal rights and the franchise as part of Israel. They could not do so because they have embraced an almost mystical concept of Israel as "the Jewish state." Of course, the de facto reality of today's combined population of Israel and its occupied territories is that Palestinians, who importantly include not just Muslims but many Christians, are already about half of the total.

And there are physical realities forming huge barriers against a single state, factors that many people don't know. Very importantly, fertility rates in Arab populations are considerably higher than in the European Ashkenazi population, which forms Israel's elite. That has nothing to do with ethnic characteristics. It is a result of much lower levels of affluence influencing the behavior of people having children. It is a universal reality we see.

That's why Arabic populations are such relatively young populations with a high proportion of children. When Israel bombs a place like Gaza or Lebanon, as it does periodically (in "mowing the grass operations"), it always kills many hundreds of children because they make a big share of the population. An

advanced country like Japan has low fertility and traditionally is averse to much migration. It faces a future with an aging and declining population.

All older European and North American countries have fertility rates too low to replace their otherwise declining populations. America, France, Israel or similar states simply do not have enough babies to replace their populations. That's a fundamental reality of advanced, affluent society. People in such societies know that their children have a much better chance to survive than children in poor countries.

That's the real reason behind most countries' immigration policies, not generosity or kindness. They need young workers to maintain strong levels of productivity. But, of course, Israel has a serious problem with immigration, too. As the "Jewish state" it is open to only one category of migrant, and that category of people makes a tiny fraction of the world's population. Further, most Jews live in comfortable, affluent places and enjoy easier lives than people in Israel do – places like America, Canada, Australia, Britain, France, etc.

Irrational Beliefs

So, a single-state Israel would combine low fertility Europeans with higher fertility Arabic people, thus creating a long-term trajectory for a minority-Jewish state, a reality which would be repellent to right-wing Jews and many others in light of the founding notion of Israel as a refuge from anti-Semitism, plus the vaguely-defined but emotionally-loaded notion of a "Jewish state" and the biblical myths of God's having given the land exclusively to Jews.

You simply cannot make rational sense out of that bundle of attitudes and prejudices, yet you cannot get a rational solution to a massive problem otherwise. It is also a problem of Israel's own deliberate making in the Six Day War. Likely, when Israel's leadership started that war, they calculated that Palestinians would come to feel so miserable under occupation that they'd just pick up and leave over time.

Moshe Dayan, one of the architects of the war, actually spoke along those very lines of keeping the Palestinians miserable so they would leave. But their calculations were wrong. Most people, anywhere, do not pick-up and leave their native place. Otherwise the world would be a constant whirlwind of migrations.

Although Israel does not discuss the issue of the relative population growth rates in public, authorities and experts there are keenly aware of the reality. It is difficult to imagine them ever embracing a single state for this reason. When you found a state on ideology and myths, as Israel was founded, you very

soon bump up against some unhappy realities.

So, if there is not to be a Palestinian state, what are Israel's other options? There seem to be only two.

One is to deport all or most Palestinians, an ugly idea which is probably also unworkable, although it has been seriously discussed among educated Israelis periodically. Apart from the Nazi-like connotations around such an act, there is the dilemma of who is going to take literally millions of people from Israel? In the past, Israeli ideologues have suggested the country of Jordan and parts of Egypt contiguous with Israel as possibilities.

But can any realistic person believe those states stand ready to take millions of people in? No, of course not, but that hasn't stopped the ideologues of Israel from going back to the idea again and again. Of course, there is the pure ethical problem of moving millions of people against their wills and seizing all their property, but ethics have never featured large in Israel's policies from the beginning.

The other solution is to re-create apartheid South Africa's Bantustans, little enclaves of land with often undesirable characteristics into which you crowd all the people that you don't want and declare that these are their new countries. We see this already in Israel, notably in Gaza, which really is a giant refugee camp resembling a concentration camp with high fences and automated machine-gun towers surrounding it. The residents are permitted almost no freedom of movement or even economic activity, as for example Gaza's fishermen being fired on by Israeli gunboats if they stray even slightly beyond tight boundaries in the sea.

The world would not long tolerate that approach no matter how much heavy-handed influence the United States might exert. After all, for a long time, the United States protected and cooperated with apartheid South Africa, always regarding it as an important bulwark against communism. At the time, anti-communism was the fervent secular religion of the day in America. This was so much the case that the U.S. even overlooked what it absolutely had to know about apartheid South Africa's acquisition of a small arsenal of nuclear weapons with the assistance of Israel. Israel always was keen to keep good access to South Africa's mineral wealth.

Clearly, those two options – ethnic cleansing and full-scale apartheid – are not solutions. Realities demand either a legitimate two-state solution, which Israel's leaders have never truly accepted while giving it time-buying lip-service, or a one-state solution that is probably even more unacceptable to Israel's leaders and much of its population, guaranteeing, as it does, the eventual minority status of Jews.

Israel has created this terrible problem and is incapable of solving it. That is why the United States would have to basically dictate a solution, but Israel and its American supporters have invested so heavily in lobbying and pressuring the U.S. political process that American leaders shy away from asserting such a role. So, in effect, the world just goes around and around never doing anything decisively.

The macabre dance of Israel and the United States that we've had for decades yields today's de facto reality of Israel existing as a protected American colony in the Middle East, one in which all kinds of international norms and laws are ignored or suspended, one where millions live with no rights and no citizenship.

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

Palestinians See More of the Same

President Trump has offered mixed signals about precisely what his attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be, but Palestinians see little prospects for meaningful improvement, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent visit to Washington reaffirmed one thing in terms of U.S./Israeli relations: that not much will change in the United States' massive one-sided support for Israel, says Palestinian author and activist Ramzy Baroud.

The U.S. will continue to support, arm and publicly defend the ongoing Israeli policy of ethnic cleansing, as things go from bad to worse, Baroud adds, noting that Israel – with U.S. support – has already reduced the Gaza Strip to a fenced-in prison, where well over a million Palestinians don't even have access to the basics such as food and clean water. Now, the Israeli government has turned its full attention to the West Bank, which is under siege with new Israeli settlements.

I spoke to Ramzy Baroud about the Netanyahu visit, the illegal settlement boom on the West Bank with its concurrent upsurge in settler violence, the implications of moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, and the general daily brutalities of living under the iron fist of Israeli occupation.

Baroud is an internationally-syndicated columnist, a media consultant, and the founder of PalestineChronicle.com. His latest book is *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story*.

Dennis Bernstein: It is good to speak with you on the heels of the visit to the U.S. by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. [...]

This is sort of how the visit, and, I guess, the story of Palestine and Israel, is being framed by the corporate press. This is coming off the BBC, but it's typical: U.S. President Donald Trump has asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "hold off on settlements" in a joint press conference.

Mr. Trump also promised to deliver "a great peace deal" but said Israel and the Palestinians must both compromise. So that's the BBC's characterization. How would you frame the current visit?

Ramzy Baroud: Well, the current visit, really, is a culmination of a whole bunch of events that have been taking place for months now prior to Trump coming to office, and the inauguration, and the aftermath. There's a great sense of euphoria, a great deal of euphoria, among the Israeli political elites. The whole two state solution enterprise is dead. The whole era of being told what to do, or being pressured in any way, or being censured, even in the slightest, most gentle way by previous administrations, that era is over, done with.

And now we are entering into a new era in which Israel single-handedly dictates everything it needs to dictate. Not just on Palestinians but on the United States, thus the so-called international community. So I see this kind of as a celebration of the Israeli political triumph, over the American foreign policy, and the balancing act that they have been playing in the Middle East for, really, in the last 25 years since the Madrid peace talks in '91, until today. It's the end of all of that, and it's ushered in our new era, and that's an Israeli era, for sure.

DB: Well, just to set the tone. You say that ...Trump's pick for the U.S. Ambassador to Israel [David Friedman], is to the right of Netanyahu. You want to say a little bit about that choice, and his desire to move the Embassy to Jerusalem?

RB: Well, that's right. There was a recent article by a Professor Rashid Khalidi in the New Yorker, in which he said this is the first time in the history of U.S./Israeli relations that you could actually swap both ambassadors, the Israeli and American ambassadors, back and forth and you can't even tell which one is there to defend Israel's interests, and which one is there for American interests. There is this cohesion that is happening at last. And it's a perfect

scenario for Israel.

The new pick for the ambassador [Friedman] is someone who is very much pro-settlements, does not even refer to the West Bank by its internationally recognized name. He refers to the occupied territories as Judea and Samaria. It's the land with the biblical reference, made by right-wing ultra-nationalists and religious Jewish politicians. So we are seeing something that's really unprecedented. The attempt at kind of dilly-dallying around this issue is over as far as American foreign policy is concerned.

American foreign policy, now, is exactly what Israel says it is. And I think it was really interesting what Trump said today in the press conference, when he said "I don't care, two states, one state, it's what you guys decide."

But the interesting part about it, is that when you have an occupier and an occupied, someone with powerful military and someone who's, you know, just in a constant state of self-defense, and someone that is commanding one of the Middle East's, the strongest economy, and others who are living in a South African apartheid-like Bantustan, well guess what? You can't really decide equally. One would have to impose his vision on the other.

And that is precisely what Trump is doing. He is giving Israel free hand to behave in any way that is consistent with its interests. And as you heard, what Netanyahu was saying was pretty dark and terrifying actually.

DB: Now, clearly Israel has always been given the gold from the United States. There's always been that kind of relationship. I guess Obama signed off on that deal for \$38 billion ... in aid—the most [to a foreign nation] ever. That certainly was a demonstration of U.S. friendship, if you will. But, how do you see this proceeding? If they go into Jerusalem, if they put the Embassy in Jerusalem, what happens next? How does that reverberate within the Palestinian community? Is it possible that they could just stand by?

RB: Of course not. They will not stand by. And that's what Trump does not understand. I think there's a couple of important points that will have to be stated. The first one is that the U.S. did not put any expectations on Israel, whatsoever.

The \$38 billion and whatever political support and financial backing that they have received through all these years, they haven't put any expectations, except one single expectation. And that is to allow the U.S. the prestige, the leadership, the ability to come and impose itself as the "honesty spokesman," if you will.

Because the peace process was essential for American foreign policy. It is more

important than we can possibly imagine. It is that kind of soaked power opportunity to impose themselves, not just on the Palestinians in the occupied territories, but on the rest of the Arabs. If you play along you're a moderate, if you are against us, you are a radical. That's all the United States expected from Israel. Just use the language of peace, just entertain this discourse and we will give you exactly what you want.

Even that proved to be too much for Israel. They don't want that, and Trump is willing to completely move away from that entire discourse. I think this is really interesting, and I think, eventually, it's going to alter America's standing in the Middle East altogether. What Trump doesn't understand, he is... it's all about making the deal... it's all about business, it's all about looking at who is the powerful party? Who is the weaker party? And he is just thinking of it in terms of dollars and cents. Now, it doesn't work that way in the Middle East.

Even the supposedly powerless and unarmed Palestinians could actually prove to be... their reaction could prove to be truly consequential, as far as American foreign policy is concerned. Palestinians are most likely to react, to mobilize. There are a great deal of efforts at forging a new Palestinian political outlook. They are looking for alternative leadership. They have their alternative allies. They had a meeting in Moscow, between Hamas and Fatah recently.

But also, you could see that entire region as far as destabilizing against the Americans, who are trying to, kind of, maintain their status and their influence in Syria, and Libya, over the Gulf, and so forth. And they find themselves in this huge anti-American backlash, as a result of their blatant support for Israel. Then Trump is going to actually realize, "Okay, this is not as straightforward as I thought it would be." What works in business might not actually work in politics, after all.

DB: What are the realities, at this time, in terms of settlement buildings? How much has been built? How does that look at this point?

RB: Actually, it was interesting what Trump said to Netanyahu when he kind of leaned, you know, sideways and he said very gently, "If you could just hold off on the settlements, just a little bit." The problem is they have already issued approval of 6,000 settlement units throughout Jerusalem and the West Bank. And this number of units goes beyond any assumption of natural growth of settlements. It's way beyond that. It means that they are really now looking into expanding settlements beyond the fast streak it has experienced in the last eight years.

Not just that: they are now talking about legalizing all the illegal settlement outposts, which range from anywhere from 100 to 200 outposts, even more. If you are going to legalize these illegal outposts, it also means... and, of course, by saying legalize, I mean from an Israeli government, from an Israeli officials point of view, as you know, all Israeli settlements are illegal under international law... But if they are to do so, it means that they would have to provide protection. The army would have to be deployed. There would have to be expansion. There would have to be fortification of these settlements.

So we are really talking about an unprecedented land grab here, on the West Bank. It doesn't matter what happens to the Palestinians in the process. Let's take as much as we can, and let's do that fast because this is the perfect opportunity to do so.

The last point I want to make is, for the first time in 20 years there was a brand new settlement, that has been approved. This is also new, in the sense that Israel has been justifying the expansion of the growth of settlements based on what they call natural expansion. But if they are issuing orders for new settlements, it means they are going back to the 1967 mentality of "This is part of the land of Israel. This is part of Yehudi and Santa Maria. It's our biblical land, and therefore Palestinians have no rights in this land anymore." So, not only the language itself is changing, but there are actually parts on the ground that prove that the action itself is also fundamentally being altered.

DB: Can I ask you to say a little bit about the relationship between the settlements and the military? How the military, if they do use the settlements... because we hear a lot about torture. You reported in your service, in the palestinechronicle.com, you are reporting about the torture of Palestinian teens. How does the settler movement play into this, sort of, growing use of torture, which, obviously, Trump thinks works.

RB: That's right. Well, I think it's important that we delineate this. There are no separate enterprises, the army enterprise and the settlement enterprise. Sometimes the media makes the mistakes of trying to make it look like the settlements are, kind of, behaving at odds with Israeli official policy. They actually don't. And we actually have been saying this from the very, very beginning, that this is a charade in Israel's name. And, the fact that they have just approved and legalized right after... all the settlements that have been built supposedly illegally... the fact that they have done so, it's an indication that this has all been part of the Israeli official program, all along. So, this is really important that we remember.

And also, we need to remember that in 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, there were two settlement movements happening. One that

was commissioned by the government, as for some strategic reason. And the other one was the religious settlements, that were built for spiritual reasons. At the end of the day, as far as Palestinians are concerned, it makes no difference whatsoever. This is land grab, our land, private property, lands being confiscated, whether for spiritual reasons or whether for strategic political reasons, it makes no difference. So as far as Palestinians are concerned, they are all working together, it's all one and the same.

The issue of torture, this is related to Gaza, Dennis. In order for anyone from Gaza to leave to Israel, to be treated in Israeli hospitals, or West Bank hospitals, or Jerusalem hospitals, they have to go through the Israeli border area, which is the Arab checkpoint. The Arab checkpoint means they have to meet the intelligence, the Shin Bet, the Israeli internal intelligence, which is equivalent to the FBI. And quite often they are bargain. If you want to get through, you have to divulge information, you have to give us names. Many people refuse to do so, many people get tortured in the process, and many people actually go home, and die as a result.

DB: I think one of the things that isn't at all reported through the corporate press, in any way, shape or form, rarely even a mention... doesn't get into the New York Times, or anywhere. But the way in which... it sort of, you know, you've got the wall, right? That is so tall, you can see it from space, as sort of the anvil. And then you've got the expanding settler movement, as the hammer.

And I say that in the context of thinking about the violence imposed by the settlers, on the peoples whose land they are stealing. That story, which is a continual drumbeat of violence beyond the torture of children, which we... there's a peek through every once in awhile, in a human rights report. Could you talk about that?

RB: That's right. And it is sad that we never hear about it. I just feel like, I've been doing this for a long time, Dennis. And I know you have been doing it for a long time, as well. And we are yet to register any fundamental shift in how mainstream media really perceives the situation in Palestine/Israel. To the contrary, I think it's becoming even more consolidated behind Israel, which is entirely immoral and inexcusable, especially at a time when that country is now really ruled by ultra-nationalists and some, even, fascists like Avigdor Lieberman and others.

And by any political standards these men are fascists. And yet they rarely get any serious criticism in American media. While the settlement movement, I think this is really interesting, Dennis, is the fact that we are... we have seen how the settlers change their political position within Israeli politics from being on the margins, many years ago, in the post-1967, to becoming the center, most

important component in the formulation of Israeli...

DB: ... the soul. The soul of the future of Israel.

RB: Absolutely. No question about it. And they have a great deal of influence in the army. They can actually sway Israeli politics, altogether. In some strange way, the life of Netanyahu, as right-wing as he is, he's actually on the left side of those who are truly capable of destroying his coalition at any given moment. They don't care about politics anymore. They are not the savvy Zionists of the past. They are right and they take exactly what we want.

That's why the settlers are being empowered, at this point. They are empowered in the sense that they are getting exactly what they want ... and the Palestinians are paying the price for it.

So, Palestinians are falling victim, not just for Israeli army violence but for settler violence as well. The land that the settlers are usurping from Palestinians, well it has owners and sometimes these owners try to defend their land, and they pay the price for it. And, I don't know if your audience is aware of ... the whole process of how a settlement is even constructed in the first place. But it is a very, very simple process.

The settlers come and they push the people out of the area. And then they claim it as their own, the army is involved. They make it a military zone, they fence it, starts growing, we see caravans moving in, trailers moving in, fences going higher and higher. And eventually it becomes a settlement. Well, Palestinians usually fight back for their land, their olive groves, the schools, for the roads, for the villages. And they pay a very heavy price.

DB: Yes, they do. That's sort of the front line of the suffering. We mentioned the word Gaza. Your most recent book *My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story*, and again when you... it must be absolutely maddening, I know it is, to see what's happening on the ground in Gaza, and hear the way in which, the character of this story, that these are a bunch of fenced-in terrorists, that we have to go to war against to defend Israel's right to exist. That is the theme, that still reverberates in the press.

And with Trump coming in... and I can imagine him using Israel as a model, "See I told you torture works, and the Israelis prove it time and again. It works, that's where they use it. That's why they're so effective blah, blah." Have you been thinking about that?

RB: It is sad to see that the United States at this point in its history, where they really need to have as much sensible policies at home and abroad as possible to stave off various crisis, they actually look at Israel for

inspiration. And this is what Trump said today. "Israel is absolutely the most inspiring model." I mean, this is a crisis. It's a moral crisis, but it's political as well.

A place like Gaza has been under siege since 2006. Of course, it has been under occupation since 1967, but under a hermetic siege, for ten years. People are malnourished, people are suffering, they are digging tunnels under various fences in order for them to get food and supplies. Egypt is part of the siege, not just Israel. And not just the siege alone. But there are these intermittent wars that have been taking place in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014.

Thousands of Palestinians perished, tens of thousands have been wounded. Nearly a quarter of the Gaza Strip has been destroyed. And yet we didn't hear anything of that, yesterday. There's no humanitarian process throughout. If this happened in any other part of the world it would really be the headline in every newspaper. But, in Gaza, somehow, this is so irrelevant, so unimportant.

And the one that really need protection is the one whose imposing destruction on other people. It's Israel that needs our protection. It's Israel's security that really matters. Not the security of those desperate, poor souls that have been suffering year after year after year, crying for help, and getting very little, of it. And this is why we really need to keep the focus on this issue, Dennis. Gaza is a central piece to this discussion, and the suffering of the people there is getting worse with time.

DB: People have trouble getting clean, clear water, fresh water. Kids are sick because of that.

RB: The United Nations has decided... rendered Gaza, it's not suitable for human habitation in 2020. Others have actually said it is already not suitable ... because of the issue of the polluted water, and the depleted uranium, as a result of the war, the fact that 100,000 people are still homeless, the fact that half of the population is unemployed, and so forth. With no political horizon, and no respite, whatsoever.

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Trump's One-State Openness on Israel

The ugly reality in Israel/Palestine is that the Zionist leaders are engaging in

a slow-walk ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, a crime that can only be averted now by a secular singular state, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

Just because Donald Trump said it doesn't mean it has to be wrong. During the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington, President Trump publicly stated he is not necessarily wedded to a "two-state solution" in Palestine.

He is the first U.S. president to commit the heresy of questioning that sacred article of faith in U.S.-Middle East policy. Indeed, a serious rethink is long overdue in recognizing the bankruptcy – indeed the cruel cynicism – of the defunct two-state scheme.

Many honorable people have dedicated the bulk of their professional lives to the tedious minutiae and sad diplomatic history of the Palestinian-Israeli morass. Sadly, none of those efforts have brought any resolution whatsoever to a gangrenous issue – in many respects the granddaddy of so many of the Middle East's contemporary ills.

Trouble is, apart from a few dedicated diplomats and scholars who had hopes of one day truly accomplishing something, the two-state solution in practice is by now revealed as essentially a fraud. Yes, a few wiser Israeli leaders in the past just possibly might have believed in that ideal, but for decades now the "two-state scheme" has simply been cynically exploited by newer Israeli leaders, especially by Bibi Netanyahu – the long-serving and most right-wing Prime Minister in Israel's history.

Netanyahu has been backed by a formidable and wealthy pro-Zionist cheering section in the U.S. The goal is to conceal their true agenda – the ultimate Israeli annexation of all of Palestine. They themselves have been subtly but systematically torpedoing the "two-state solution" behind the scenes to that end.

None of my observations here on the hoax of the two-state solution are new or original. Many liberal Israeli observers have been stating the self-evident for years now. But those voices never get heard in the U.S. where it constitutes an unmentionable. But there should be no doubt: the concept of a "two-state solution" – a Palestinian and an Israeli state sharing historical Palestine and living side by side in sovereignty and dignity – is dead. It is almost inconceivable that it can now ever be resuscitated: nearly all the operative forces within Israel are systematically working to prevent it from ever coming about.

Facts on the Ground

The harsh reality is that Israel, through a relentless process of “creating facts on the ground,” is now decades deep into the process of taking over illegally, step-by-step, the totality of Palestine. Israel has scant regard for any international law in this respect, and never has had.

Washington, apart from a few periodic pathetic bleats, has ended up functionally supporting this cynical scheme all the way, perhaps unwilling to confront the painful reality of what is really taking place, along with its dangerous political repercussions at home.

Israel is extending day-by-day its control – indeed ownership – of Palestinian lands through expansion of illegal Jewish settlements and the dispossession of the rightful owners of these Palestinian lands. Put simply, there is little left of Palestinian land out of which ever to fashion a “two-state solution.” That leaves us with only one alternative: the “one-state solution.” Indeed, Israel’s actions have already created the preconditions that make the “one-state solution” an unacknowledged but virtual fait accompli.

Honest observers know full well that the mantra of preserving “the peace process” for the two-state solution is now little more than a cover for full Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands. The sooner we all acknowledge this ugly reality, the better. That will then require Israel, the Palestinians, and the world to get on with dealing with the complex challenge of crafting the bi-national state – the one-state solution.

The calculations of the hard-line Zionists – who are now largely in control of Israeli state mechanisms – are unyielding.

1) Israel should functionally take over all of Palestinian territory and permit full Jewish settlement therein. 2) Israel should still play the “two-state solution” game with visiting foreign diplomats to reduce pressure on Israel, to play for time while it quietly establishes the irreversible facts on the ground that shut out any possible viable Palestinian state.

3) Make life harsh enough for Palestinians that, bit by bit, they will grow bitter and weary, give up and go elsewhere, leaving all the land for Zionist settlers. 4) If Palestinians “stubbornly” resist, predictable periodic military and security crises in Palestine over the longer run will enable Israel to rid Palestine of all Palestinians – a gradual process of ethnic cleansing that returns all the land promised by God to the Jews.

A Secular State?

Some liberal Israelis actually do accept the idea of a “one-state solution” in their own liberal vision of a future Israel – one in which Israelis and Palestinians live as equal citizens in a secular, democratic, binational, multi-cultural state enjoying equal rights, rather than the increasingly religiously dominated state that it is. And the liberal ideal makes sense: the country is already well on the way to becoming bi-lingual – and Hebrew and Arabic are closely-related languages. Both are Semitic peoples with ancient ties to the same land.

The problem is, ardent Zionists don’t want a binational Palestinian-Jewish state. They want a “Jewish state” and demand that the world accept that term. Yet, in today’s world isn’t the term “Jewish state” strikingly discordant? Who speaks of an “English” or “French” state? The world would freak out if tomorrow Berlin started calling itself “the German State.” Or Spain a “Christian state.”

So what do we make of a state that is dedicated solely to Jews and Judaism? Such concepts are remnants of Nineteenth Century movements that promoted the creation of ethnically and/or religiously pure states. Indeed it was precisely that kind of ugly religious and ethnic nationalism that caused Jews to flee from Eastern Europe in the first place to find their own homeland.

The true historical task of Israel, with the support of the world, is now to begin the challenging work of introducing the range of major reforms that will transform Israel into just such a multi-ethnic and bi-lingual state of equal citizens enjoying equal rights under secular law. It is not a question of “allowing Palestinians” into Israel, they are already there and have been for millennia, in far greater numbers than Jews. Palestinians now seek full legal equality of treatment under secular law in Israel.

So let’s acknowledge the useful truth that Trump has blundered onto. Let’s abandon the naive and cynical rhetoric about the “two-state solution” that will never come about – in any just and acceptable form. Half of Israel never believed in it in the first place. It has served only as a cover for building an apartheid Jewish state – a term used frequently by liberal Israeli commentators.

Netanyahu and the right-wing Zionists clearly want all of Palestine. But they’re not ready yet to admit it. They want all the land, but without any of its people. But despite Zionist hopes, the Palestinians aren’t going to abandon their lands. And so the logical outcome of Israel’s take-over all of Palestine leads by definition to an ultimate single binational state.

The challenge to Israelis and Palestinians is huge. It entails a deep Palestinian rethink of their options and their future destiny in a new order, and the need to fight for those democratic rights in a binational state. It

involves Israeli evolution away from “God-given rights” in a state solely for Jews and Judaism that can only be forever oppressive and undemocratic as it now stands. The process will be a slow and difficult one. But it also represents an evolution consonant with emerging contemporary global values.

We expect a democratic multi-cultural state from Germany and France, or from Britain, Canada and the United States – why not from Israel?

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Trump's Foreign Policy: Retreat or Rout?

With President Trump's foreign-policy team sounding a lot like President Obama's, the new question is whether Trump has caved in to Official Washington's powers-that-be or is biding his time for a big move, asks Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

After President Trump abruptly fired National Security Advisor Michael Flynn a week ago and senior Trump officials flew to Europe to unveil a foreign-policy agenda that sounded a lot like President Obama's, even some Trump supporters wondered if Washington's “shadow government” or “deep state” had triumphed over their hero.

But another interpretation is possible, that Trump understands that he first must gain control of the national-security and foreign-policy bureaucracies before he can press ahead with plans for détente with Russia and downsizing America's vast web of military bases and geopolitical commitments. In other words, what we're seeing may be a tactical retreat rather than a wholesale rout.

The latest crisis to hit the young Trump administration began on Feb. 13 with Trump's firing of Flynn, a move that Trump seemed to regret almost immediately as he assessed how Flynn's ouster had been engineered.

The orchestration of Flynn's removal entailed illegal use of his wiretapped conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak on Dec. 29 at a time when Flynn was still a private citizen and government rules require “minimization” (or redaction) of an American's intercepted communications.

Holdovers from President Obama's Justice Department then concocted a pretext for

an FBI investigation based on the Logan Act, a dusty relic from 1799 that has never been used to prosecute anyone. Flynn was further tripped up because he didn't have total recall of what was said in the conversation and then details of the case were selectively leaked to the press to buttress the narrative of illicit ties between Trump and Moscow.

But what was perhaps even more remarkable about this ambush of Flynn, who had made powerful enemies as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency overseeing its criticism of Obama's Syrian war policies, was the collusion between U.S. intelligence agencies and a mainstream media intent on bringing down President Trump – or at least preventing him from redirecting U.S. foreign policy away from “regime change” wars in the Middle East and toward a détente with Russia.

When Trump hastily demanded Flynn's resignation – at least in part to appease Vice President Mike Pence who complained that Flynn hadn't been fully forthcoming with him – a media feeding frenzy followed. Even Hillary Clinton came out of hiding to radiate pleasure at the announcement of Flynn's firing. (At the Republican National Convention, he had joined chants of “lock her up.”) We heard similar delight from media standard-bearers of the “dump Trump” movement – CNN and *The New York Times* – as well as among Trump's former rivals in the Republican primaries who continue to hold key positions on Capitol Hill.

The Early Roll-Out

Next came a stunning about-face in the early roll-out of Donald Trump's new foreign policy, which looked a lot like Barack Obama's old foreign policy. We heard presidential press secretary Sean Spicer say Trump “expected the Russian government to ... return Crimea” to Ukraine.

Then we heard Defense Secretary James Mattis in Brussels (NATO headquarters), Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in Bonn (G20 Foreign Ministers meeting) and Vice President Pence in Munich (Security Conference) collectively pledge unswerving loyalty to the NATO alliance, insist that any new talks with Russia must be conducted from “a position of strength,” and vow to hold Russia accountable for the full implementation of the Minsk Accords, meaning all sanctions stay in place pending that achievement which the Ukrainian government has consistently blocked while blaming Moscow.

Amid these signals of surrender from the Trump Administration – suggesting continuation of the disastrous foreign policy of the last 25 years – the newly revived enemies of détente on Capitol Hill added more anti-Russian sanctions and threats. In response to alleged violations by the Kremlin of the Treaty on Intermediate and Short-range Missiles (INF) dating back to 1987, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Arkansas, introduced a bill enabling the re-installation of American

nuclear-tipped cruise missiles in Europe. If enacted, this would undo the main achievements of disarmament from the Reagan years and bring us back to a full-blown Cold War.

These developments have unnerved even Trump's long-time loyalists. Some friendly pundits have claimed that Flynn was the sole adviser to Donald Trump urging accommodation with the Russians and that his departure dealt a fatal blow to détente. Others have urged the President to reconsider what they see as a collapse of will under intense pressure from the powerful neoconservatives and their liberal-hawk allies. Trump's backers reminded him of the disasters that the policies of American global hegemony have created in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Implicit in this well-meaning and sometimes condescending advice is a failure to understand the political acumen of Donald Trump and his entourage. He did not win the election on Nov. 8 by chance. It was the fruit of a more sophisticated calculation of voter support and Electoral College arithmetic than anyone else could muster. Trump also did not get his most contentious cabinet appointments – Rex Tillerson at State, Betsy DeVos at Education and Jeff Sessions as Attorney General – through the Senate confirmation hearings by luck. It was the fruit of hard work and brains in striking “deals” with political friends and foes.

No White Flag

Consequently, I view the present backtracking on Russia and retreat on a new foreign policy as a tactical repositioning, not the waving of a white flag. It is obvious that no progress on Trump's less-interventionist foreign policy is possible until the subversive plotters in the State Department, the Justice Department, the National Security Agency, the CIA and the FBI are sent packing. Arguably, some who broke the law in their haste to hobble Trump's presidency should be held legally accountable. Only if and when his back is secure can Trump begin changing policy.

With the end of the Obama presidency on Jan. 20, there was what might be called addition by subtraction at the State Department with the departures of political appointees who favored the neoconservative/liberal-hawk agenda, people such as Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, a key architect of the Ukraine crisis, and Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, a chief advocate for the “regime change” war in Syria.

During Secretary Tillerson's maiden diplomatic voyage to Europe, more pink slips have been passed out to high-level officials on the State Department's “seventh floor,” home to the post-9/11 “shadow government” first put in place by Vice President Dick Cheney and then more deeply entrenched during Hillary Clinton's

stint as Secretary of State. On a related front, The New York Times has reported that Trump plans to appoint businessman Stephen Feinberg to evaluate and recommend reorganization of the intelligence agencies, viewed as a shake-up to restore order and loyalty to the Chief Executive.

At the same time, we may expect President Trump to rally public opinion around his administration and its policies, both domestic and foreign. His appearance at the Melbourne, Florida airport this weekend where thousands gathered to hear Trump is surely only the first of many such public demonstrations by his supporters.

Donald Trump remains in close contact with his supporter base across the country not only via social media but using weekly, at times daily questionnaires delivered by email and asking the respondents to prioritize his next possible moves. Surely, this grassroots support gives him the confidence to wage battles against the Establishment in a bold manner.

It also must be emphasized that Trump's pre-electoral and post-electoral commitment to détente is not an aberration in his political thinking. What so many people, including supporters, fail to understand is that détente is as essential to Trump for the sake of his domestic programs as détente was critical for Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to implement his new thinking domestically in the 1980s.

Only via détente – meaning an end to the permanent wars abroad with their heavy operational costs and the dismantling of the vast global network of U.S. military bases – can Trump free up budgetary resources to finance his plans for massive U.S. infrastructure investments, modernizing the military, and addressing the needs of veterans. The sums involved are on the order of \$600 billion annually which presently go to maintain some 800 military bases in 70 countries, bases which generate much anti-Americanism and entangle the U.S. in regional conflicts.

Gorbachev ultimately failed, squeezed between Moscow's own "deep state" resisting change and a "new order" of greedy opportunists who saw a chance to plunder Russia's riches. For Trump to succeed, he must not only overcome Washington's "deep state" with its vested interests in protecting the status quo but he must enlist the capitalist world's best minds to rebuild America's infrastructure and restore a more broad-based prosperity.

Whether Trump can accomplish such a daunting task is debatable, but he has shown over a long business career the ability to attract and motivate a small team of not more than a dozen devoted assistants to run a multi-billion-dollar real estate empire. Obviously running an enterprise as large and complex as the U.S.

government – and its interconnections with the domestic and global economies – is far more difficult. But if he is to succeed, Trump will have to press ahead with his earlier plans for a new and less costly foreign and defense policy.

Gilbert Doctorow is a Brussels-based political analyst. His latest book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015.

The Did-You-Talk-to-Russians Witch Hunt

Exclusive: Democrats, liberals and media pundits – in their rush to take down President Trump – are pushing a New McCarthyism aimed at Americans who have talked to Russians, risking a new witch hunt, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In the anti-Russian frenzy sweeping American politics and media, Democrats, liberals and mainstream pundits are calling for an investigative body that could become a new kind of House Un-American Activities Committee to hunt down Americans who have communicated with Russians.

The proposed commission would have broad subpoena powers to investigate alleged connections between Trump's supporters and the Russian government with the apparent goal of asking if they now have or have ever talked to a Russian who might have some tie to the Kremlin or its intelligence agencies.

Such an admission apparently would be prima facie evidence of disloyalty, a guilt-by-association "crime" on par with Sen. Joe McCarthy's Cold War pursuit of "communists" who supposedly had infiltrated the U.S. government, the film industry and other American institutions on behalf of an international communist conspiracy.

Operating parallel to McCarthy's Red Scare hearings was the House Un-American Activities Committee (or HUAC), a standing congressional panel from 1945-1975 when it was best known for investigating alleged communist subversion and propaganda. One of its top achievements was the blacklisting of the "Hollywood Ten" whose careers in the movie industry were damaged or destroyed.

Although the Cold War has long been over – and Russia has often cooperated with the U.S. government, especially on national security issues such as supplying U.S. troops in Afghanistan – Democrats and liberals seem ready to force Americans to again prove their loyalty if they engaged in conversations with

Russians.

Or perhaps these “witnesses” can be entrapped into perjury charges if their recollections of conversations with Russians don’t match up with transcripts of their intercepted communications, a tactic similar to ones used by Sen. McCarthy and HUAC to trip up and imprison targets over such secondary charges.

Ousted National Security Advisor Michael Flynn has already encountered such a predicament because he couldn’t recall all the details of a phone conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak on Dec. 29, 2016, after Flynn took the call while vacationing in the Dominican Republic.

When Obama administration holdovers at the Justice Department decided to gin up a legal premise to go after Flynn, they cited the Logan Act, a law enacted in 1799 to prohibit private citizens from negotiating with foreign adversaries but never used to convict anyone. The law also is of dubious constitutionality and was surely never intended to apply to a president-elect’s advisers.

However, based on that flimsy pretext, FBI agents – with a transcript of the electronic intercept of the Kislyak-Flynn phone call in hand – tested Flynn’s memory of the conversation and found his recollections incomplete. Gotcha – lying to the FBI!

Under mounting media and political pressure, President Trump fired Flynn, apparently hoping that tossing Flynn overboard to the circling sharks would somehow calm the sharks down. Instead, blood in the water added to the frenzy.

Iran-Contra Comparison

Some prominent Democrats and liberals have compared Trump-connected contacts with Russians to President Richard Nixon’s Watergate scandal or President Reagan’s Iran-Contra Affair, an issue that I know a great deal about having helped expose it as a reporter for The Associated Press in the 1980s.

The key difference is that Iran-Contra was an unconstitutional effort by the Reagan administration to finance an illegal war against Nicaragua’s Sandinista government in defiance of a congressional ban. The Trump-connected communications with Russians – to the degree they have occurred – appear to have been aimed at preventing a new and dangerous Cold War that could lead to a nuclear holocaust.

In other words, Iran-Contra was about enabling a paramilitary force to continue its brutal marauding inside a country that was no threat to the United States while the current “scandal” is about people trying to avoid hostilities between two nuclear superpowers, an existential threat that many mainstream and liberal

pundits don't want to recognize.

Indeed, there is a troubling denial-ism about the risks of an accidental or intentional war with Russia as the U.S. media and much of Official Washington's establishment have lots of fun demonizing Russian President Vladimir Putin and jabbing the Russians by shoving NATO troops up to their borders and deploying anti-ballistic missiles in Eastern Europe. For some crazy reason, the Russians feel threatened.

False Narratives

This Russia-bashing and Russia-baiting have been accompanied by false narratives presented in the major U.S. newspapers, including The New York Times and The Washington Post, to justify increased tensions.

For instance, the Post's senior foreign affairs writer Karen DeYoung on Friday described the civil war in Ukraine this way: "That conflict began when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014, then backed separatists in eastern Ukraine in what has become a grinding war, despite a deal to end it, called the Minsk agreement, negotiated with Putin by the leaders of France and Germany."

But DeYoung's synopsis is simply not true. The crisis began in the fall of 2013 when Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich backed out of what he regarded as a costly and unacceptable association agreement with the European Union, a move which prompted protests by Ukrainians in Kiev's Maidan square.

The Obama administration's State Department, U.S. neocon politicians such as Sen. John McCain, and various U.S.-backed "non-governmental organizations" then stoked those protests against Yanukovich, which grew violent as trained ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi street fighters poured in from western Ukraine.

In early 2014, a coup to overthrow the democratically elected Yanukovich took shape under the guidance of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt who were caught in a phone call in late January or early February 2014 conspiring to impose new leadership inside Ukraine.

Nuland disparaged a less extreme strategy favored by European diplomats with the pithy remark: "Fuck the E.U." and went on to declare "Yats is the guy," favoring Arseniy Yatsenyuk as the new leader. Nuland then pondered how to "glue this thing" while Pyatt ruminated about how to "midwife this thing."

On Feb. 20, 2014, a mysterious sniper apparently firing from a building controlled by the ultranationalist Right Sektor killed both police and protesters, setting off a day of violence that left about 70 people dead

including more than a dozen police.

The next day, three European governments struck a deal with Yanukovych in which he agreed to early elections and accepted reduced powers. But that political settlement wasn't enough for the U.S.-backed militants who stormed government buildings on Feb. 22, forcing Yanukovych and his officials to flee for their lives.

Instead of standing by the Feb. 21 agreement, which the European nations had "guaranteed," Nuland pushed for and got U.S. allies to accept the new post-coup regime as "legitimate," with Yatsenyuk becoming prime minister and several top government posts given to the ultranationalists and neo-Nazis.

Spreading Violence

In the ensuing days, the right-wing violence spread beyond Kiev, prompting Crimea's legislature to propose secession from Ukraine and readmission to Russia, whose relationship to the peninsula dated back to Catherine the Great.

Crimea scheduled a referendum that was opposed by the new regime in Kiev. Russian troops did not "invade" Crimea because some 20,000 were already stationed there as part of a basing agreement at the Black Sea port of Sevastopol. The Russians did provide security for the referendum but there was no evidence of intimidation as the citizens of Crimea voted by 96 percent to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a move that Putin and the Russian duma accepted.

Eastern Ukrainians tried to follow Crimea's lead with their own referendum, but Putin and Russia rejected their appeals to secede. However, when the Kiev regime launched an "Anti-Terrorism Operation" against the so-called Donbass region – spearheaded by ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi militias – Russia provided military assistance so these ethnic Russians would not be annihilated.

Karen DeYoung also framed the Minsk agreement as if it were imposed on Putin when he was one of its principal proponents and architects, winning its approval in early 2015 at a time when the Ukrainian military was facing battlefield reversals.

But Assistant Secretary Nuland, working with Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and the Ukrainian parliament, sabotaged the agreement by requiring the Donbass rebels to first surrender which they were unwilling to do, having no faith in the sincerity of the Kiev regime to live up to its commitment to grant limited autonomy to the Donbass.

In other words, Kiev inserted a poison pill to prevent a peaceful resolution,

but the Western media and governments always blame the Minsk failure on Putin.

If Karen DeYoung wanted to boil all this history down to one paragraph, it might go: "The Ukraine conflict began when U.S. officials supported the violent overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich, prompting Crimea to rejoin Russia and causing ethnic Russians in the east to rise up against the U.S.-backed coup regime in Kiev, which then sought to crush the rebellion. The Kiev regime later torpedoed a peace deal that had been hammered out by Russian, Ukrainian and European negotiators in Minsk."

But such a summary would not have the desired propaganda effect on the American people. It would not present the U.S.-backed side as the "white hats" and the pro-Russia side as the "black hats."

The simple truth is that the story of Ukraine is far more complex and multi-sided than The Washington Post, The New York Times and most mainstream U.S. news outlets want to admit. They simply start the clock at the point of Crimea's rejection of the post-coup regime and distort those facts to present the situation simply as a "Russian invasion."

A Whipped-Up Hysteria

The major media's distortion is so egregious that you could call it a lie, but it is a lie that has proved very useful in whipping up the current anti-Russian hysteria that is sweeping Official Washington and that has given birth to a New Cold War, now accompanied by a New McCarthyism that deems anyone who doesn't accept the "groupthink" a "Russian apologist" or a "Moscow stooge."

Since last November's election, this New McCarthyism has merged with hatred toward Donald Trump, especially after the outgoing Obama administration lodged unproven accusations that Russia undercut Hillary Clinton's campaign by hacking into the emails of the Democratic National Committee and those of her campaign chairman John Podesta – and slipped that information to WikiLeaks.

Those emails showed how the DNC undercut the rival campaign of Sen. Bernie Sanders and revealed the contents of Clinton's speeches to Wall Street banks as well as pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton Foundation, information that Clinton wanted to keep from the voters.

But no one thought the emails were a major factor in the Clinton-Trump race; indeed, Clinton blamed her stunning defeat on FBI Director James Comey's last-minute decision to reopen and then re-close his investigation into security concerns about her use of a private email server as Secretary of State.

But the script on how Clinton lost was flipped during the Trump transition as

President Obama's intelligence agencies floated the Russia-hacked-the-election scenario although presenting no public evidence to support the claims. WikiLeaks representatives also denied getting the material from Russia, suggesting instead that it was leaked by two different American insiders.

A Ministry of Truth

Still, during the post-election period, the anti-Russian hysteria continued to build. In November, The Washington Post highlighted claims by an anonymous group called PropOrNot accusing some 200 Web sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other major independent media outlets, of disseminating Russian "propaganda."

The New York Times joined in the frenzy by calling for leading technology companies to marginalize Web sites that are deemed to be publishing "fake news," a vague term that was applied not just to intentionally false stories but to information that questioned official narratives, no matter how dubious those narratives were. The New McCarthyism was morphing into a New Orwellianism.

The movement toward a Ministry of Truth gained further momentum in December when Congress passed and President Obama signed a military authorization bill that included a new \$160 million bureaucracy to identify and counter alleged "Russian propaganda."

The anger of Democrats and liberals toward President Trump in his first month has added more fuel to the Russia-bashing with some Democrats and liberals seeing it as a possible route toward neutralizing or impeaching Trump. Thus, the calls for a full-scale investigation with subpoena power to demand documents and compel testimony.

While the idea of getting to the full truth has a superficial appeal, it also carries dangers of launching a witch hunt that would drag American citizens before inquisitors asking about any contacts – no matter how innocuous – with Russians.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, HUAC also claimed that all it wanted was the truth about whether some Americans were allied with or sympathetic to Moscow. Sen. Joe McCarthy offered a similar rationale when he was trying to root out "disloyal" Americans with the question, "are you now or have you ever been a communist?"

That Democrats and liberals who hold the McCarthy era in understandable disdain would now seek to rekindle something similar reeks of rank opportunism and gross hypocrisy – doing whatever it takes to "get Trump" and build an activist movement that can revive the Democratic Party's flagging political hopes.

But this particular opportunism and hypocrisy also carries with it the prospect of blindly ramping up tensions with Russia, diverting more taxpayer money into the Military-Industrial Complex and conceivably sparking – whether planned or unplanned – a nuclear Armageddon that could eliminate life on the planet. Perhaps this anti-Trump strategy should be rethought.

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](#)).

Democrats, Liberals Catch McCarthyistic Fever

Exclusive: Democrats and liberals are so angry about President Trump that they are turning to McCarthyistic tactics without regard to basic fairness or the need to avoid a costly and dangerous New Cold War, notes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

America is a strange place and the blow-up over Mike Flynn's conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak is making it even stranger. Liberals are sounding like conservatives, and conservatives like liberals.

Rep. Steve King, an Iowa Republican who serves on the House Judiciary Committee, made perfect sense when he [remarked on CNN](#) concerning the intelligence leaks that are now turning into a flood: "We've got to have some facts to work with here. And what troubles me is that ... there are people within the intelligence community that disagree with President Trump [and] that don't want to see his administration succeed. ... General Flynn has been subject to a political assassination here regardless of what he did or didn't say to President Trump or Vice President Pence."

Quite right. Breitbart News' Joel B. Pollak [sounded similarly sensible](#) in asking "whether our nation's intelligence services were involved in what amounts to political espionage against the newly-elected government." So did right-wing talk-show host Michael Savage in [describing](#) "the demonization of Putin, Russia, and Flynn" on the part of "neocons, the intel community, and Democrats who want constant antagonism with Russia."

Considering the craziness we usually get from such sources, it was all

disconcertingly ... sane. On the liberal side, however, the hysteria has been non-stop. In full prosecutorial mode, *The New Yorker's* Ryan Lizza demanded to know:

"Did Trump instruct Flynn to discuss a potential easing of sanctions with Russia? Did Flynn update Trump on his calls with the Russian Ambassador? Did Trump know that Flynn lied to Pence about those contacts? What did the White House counsel do with the information that he received from [Acting Attorney General Sally] Yates about Flynn being vulnerable to blackmail?"

At *The Nation*, Joan Walsh was thrilled to hear the media asking "the old Watergate question about what the president knew and when."

"We've said it before and we'll say it again," declared Bill Moyers and Michael Winship at Alternet: "there MUST be an investigation by an independent, bipartisan commission of Russia's ties to Donald Trump and his associates and that nation's interference in our elections."

At *The Intercept*, the perennially self-righteous Glenn Greenwald said intelligence agents are "wholly justified" in leaking inside information because "[a]ny leak that results in the exposure of high-level wrongdoing – as this one did – should be praised, not scorned and punished."

Over the Top

Finally, there was *The New York Times*, which, in Thursday's lead editorial, compared the Flynn contretemps to Watergate and Iran-Contra, expressed "shock and incredulity that members of Mr. Trump's campaign and inner circle were in repeated contact with Russian intelligence officials," and called for a congressional investigation into whether the White House has been taken over by Moscow:

"Coming on top of credible information from America's intelligence agencies that Russia tried to destabilize and influence the 2016 presidential campaign, these latest revelations are more than sufficient reason for Congress to investigate what Moscow has been up to and whether people at the highest levels of the United States government have aided and abetted the interests of a nation that has tried to thwart American foreign policy since the Cold War."

High-level wrongdoing! Colluding with the enemy! Shock and incredulity! It's enough to make a concerned citizen reach for the nearest bottle of 151-proof rum. But it's all nonsense. Liberals are working themselves into a crisis mode on the basis of zero evidence.

Let's begin with what *The Nation's* Joan Walsh regards as the key issue: what do we know and when did we know it?

Well, we know that on Thursday, Dec. 29, Barack Obama expelled 35 suspected Russian intelligence operatives for allegedly interfering with the presidential election and imposed sanctions on Russia's two leading intelligence services. We also know that Flynn had called the Russian ambassador a day earlier to discuss sanctions in general and that although he "never made explicit promises of sanctions relief," according to unnamed government officials cited by the *Times*, he "appeared to leave the impression it would be possible."

In *Times*-speak, "appeared to leave the impression" means that the paper is unable to pin down anything that Flynn did that was specifically wrong, but still believes that the conversation was somehow unseemly.

According to *The Washington Post*, the key phone call came after Obama's Dec. 29 decision to expel the Russian diplomats when Kislyak reached Flynn by phone while the national security advisor-designate and his wife were vacationing at a beachside resort in the Dominican Republic. "As a veteran intelligence officer," *The Post* said, "...Flynn must have known that a call with a Russian official in Washington would be intercepted by the U.S. government, pored over by FBI analysts and possibly even shared with the White House."

In any event, whatever he told Kislyak must have been reassuring since Vladimir Putin announced later that day that he would not engage in a tit-for-tat retaliation by expelling U.S. diplomats.

Getting Payback

Irritated by such maturity, the American "state security organs," as the KGB and other Soviet intelligence services were once called, pounced. Having intercepted the Russian ambassador's phone call, the FBI relayed the contents to Obama's Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates, who authorized it to interrogate Flynn about the conversation. Flynn may have lied or not given a complete account or forgotten some of the details about what he and Kislyak discussed. He also may have given a similarly incomplete account to Vice President Mike Pence, which apparently upset Pence and led to Flynn being tossed overboard.

But if Trump and his team thought that would satisfy the sharks, they were wrong. The press went into a feeding frenzy. But the substance of the complaint against Flynn adds up to very little.

As Obama administration holdovers in the Justice Department searched for a legal justification with which to accuse Flynn of wrongdoing, the only thing they could come up with was the Logan Act of 1799 forbidding private citizens from negotiating with a foreign government that is in dispute with the United States. Adopted during the presidency of John Adams, the law was prompted by Dr.

George Logan's unauthorized negotiations with France, contacts that were praised by the Jeffersonians but anathema to the Federalists.

But invoking the Logan Act in any instance is a stretch, much less this one. It has never been used to prosecute anyone; it has never been tested in a court of law; and its constitutionality couldn't be more questionable. Moreover, if the law is dubious when used to threaten a private citizen engaged in unauthorized diplomacy, then using it to go after a designated official of an incoming presidential administration that has been duly elected is many times more so.

As journalist Robert Parry points out, the Logan Act has mainly been "exploited in a McCarthyistic fashion to bait or discredit peace advocates" such as Jesse Jackson for visiting Cuba or House Speaker Jim Wright for trying to end the Contra war in Nicaragua. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Trump Caves on Flynn's Resignation.](#)"]

Of course, the Obama holdovers at Justice also said that Flynn might be vulnerable to Russian blackmail. But if Flynn assumed that the U.S. intelligence was listening in, then the Russians probably did also, which means that both sides knew that there was no secret dirt to be used against him.

In other words, there's no there there. Yet anti-Trump liberals are trying to convince the public that it's all "worse than Watergate."

Strangelovian Flynn

This is not to make Flynn into a martyr of some sort. To the contrary, the man is every bit as nutty as critics say. [The Field of Fight: How to Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies](#), the book he co-wrote last year with neocon "intellectual" Michael Ledeen, is a paranoid fantasy about Muslim extremists ganging up with North Korea, Russia, China, Cuba and Venezuela to bring down the United States and Israel.

Flynn's appearance at a Feb. 7 White House press briefing in which he announced that "we are officially putting Iran on notice" over a missile test – and then stalked off without taking a single question – was so bizarre as to be positively Strangelovian.

But whether Flynn is a criminal is another matter. As Ronn Blitzer [observed](#) in a smart article at Lawnewz.com: "Between the details of the communications being unclear and the complete lack of historical guidance for prosecutors to work off of, chances are slim that he'll face any legal repercussions."

Lying to the FBI is another matter, of course. But grilling someone about whether he violated a moldy old law that should have been repealed centuries ago

is the equivalent of giving someone the third degree over whether he washed his hands after using a public restroom. It raises questions about civil liberties and prosecutorial abuse that used to concern liberals – before, that is, they went bonkers over Russia.

Moreover, taking a call from the Russian ambassador is not only legal but, with the inauguration only three weeks away, precisely what one would expect a newly designated national security advisor to do. If the call indeed happened while Flynn was on vacation – and hence without the usual staff support – it's not that surprising that he might not have had total recall of what was discussed. For FBI agents to question him weeks later and test his memory against their transcript of the conversation seems closer to entrapment than a fair-minded inquiry.

The whole area is a gray zone regarding what is and isn't proper for a candidate or an incoming administration to do. Eight years earlier, Barack Obama reached out to foreign leaders to discuss policy changes before he was even elected.

In July 2008, candidate Obama visited Paris to confer with then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy about Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan and NATO. In late November – after the election, that is, but before the oath of office – he telephoned Afghan President Hamid Karzai to discuss how his country might achieve greater stability.

Yet as Robert Charles notes at the conservative Townhall.com website, no one thought to mention the Logan Act or accuse Obama of overstepping his bounds by engaging in private diplomacy.

As to whether it was Trump who instructed Flynn to talk to the Russian ambassador – what Politico calls “the key question” and what *Times* columnist Gail Collins says would be “super-illegal” if true – that is also standard operating procedure.

Poor Donald Trump is getting it from both sides, from those who claim that he was unprepared for his new responsibilities (which he was) and from those who claim that he was too “pro-active” in reaching out to key international players before taking office.

The Crime of Peace

As to Glenn Greenwald's charge that what Flynn did was not only illegal but wrong, all one can say is: what on earth is so terrible about trying to reduce U.S.-Russian tensions? Of all the things that Trump said on the campaign trail, one of the few that was not completely stupid was his call for better relations with Moscow.

After all, Obama had gotten himself into a serious pickle by the end of his administration in the “intermarium” between the Baltic and the Black Sea. This is where Obama found himself beholden to dangerous nationalist provocateurs from Estonia to Ukraine, where a major NATO arms build-up was making observers increasingly nervous and where serious fighting is now underway. But while one would think that liberals would approve of attempts to defuse a dangerous confrontation, Flynn is under assault for merely giving it a try.

(And what about Greenwald’s usual concern about intrusive electronic surveillance? Isn’t the Flynn case a classic example of law-enforcement agencies using powers to entrap an individual into a possible criminal violation by seeing if his recollection diverges from the official transcript of a wire-tapped conversation?)

Finally there is the *New York Times* editorial, a farrago of half-truths and unsubstantiated assertions. For instance:

–No matter how many times the “paper of record” insists that “Russia tried to destabilize and influence the 2016 presidential campaign,” **it** should realize that saying something doesn’t make it so. In fact, the Director of National Intelligence’s Jan. 6 report on the alleged hacking was so skimpy that even the *Times* conceded that it “contained no information about how the agencies had collected their data or had come to their conclusions” and was therefore “bound to be attacked by skeptics.”

–The charge of “repeated contact with Russian intelligence officials” is similarly evidence-free. The *Times* made the charge in a front-page exposé on Tuesday that was heavy on innuendo but short on facts. It said that Trump associates had “repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officials” without saying what those contacts were or whether the individuals in question were even aware of whom they were talking to. It added, moreover, that there was “no evidence of ... cooperation” with Russian intelligence and that it was “unclear whether the conversations had anything to do with Mr. Trump himself.” There’s no there there as well.

–As for aiding and abetting “a nation that has tried to thwart American foreign policy since the Cold War,” all one can say is that the *Times* is engaging in classic McCarthyism by crying treason with zero data to back it up.

Opportunism and Confusion

So, what’s going on? The simple answer is that Democrats are seizing on Russia because it’s an easy target in a capital city where war fever is already rising precipitously. Little thought seems to have been given to where this hysteria

might lead. What if Dems get their way by forcing the administration to adopt a tougher policy on Russia? What if something horrendous occurs as a consequence such as a real live shooting exchange between U.S. and Russian troops? Will that make Democrats happy? Is that really what they want?

The truth is that America is in disarray not only politically but ideologically. Once Sen. Bernie Sanders dropped out of the race last summer, voters were faced with a choice between two right-of-center candidates, one (Hillary Clinton) seemingly bent on a pro-war policy regardless of the consequences and another (Donald Trump) who uttered isolationist inanities but nonetheless seemed to sense that a course change was in order with regard to Russia, Syria, and perhaps one or two other hot spots.

Since the election, both parties have responded by going even farther to the right, Trump by surrounding himself with billionaires and ultra-right fanatics and the Democrats by trying to out-hawk the GOP.

Sanity is in such short supply that the voices of reason now belong to Republicans like Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, who told the *Washington Post*, "The big problem I see here is that you have an American citizen who had his phone calls recorded," or House Speaker Paul Ryan who says that reaching out to the Russian ambassador was "entirely appropriate."

Even Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, seems oddly rational in indicating that he will block legislation seeking to prevent Trump from rolling back anti-Russian sanctions.

All in all, it's the worst Democratic performance since the *Washington Post* complained in 1901 that Teddy Roosevelt had "fanned the flames of negro aspiration" by inviting Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House. What's the point of an opposition when it's even more irresponsible than the party in power?

As Phil Ochs sang about unprincipled liberals back in the 1960s:

Once I was young and impulsive

I wore every conceivable pin

Even went to the socialist meetings

Learned all the old union hymns

But I've grown older and wiser

And that's why I'm turning you in

So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal.

Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).

Jeff Sessions's Dubious Refugee Math

A rational approach to life cannot eliminate all risk – and trying to creates its own dangers – a reality many Americans forgot post-9/11 and that runs counter to President Trump's Muslim-targeting entry ban, as Arnold R. Isaacs describes.

By Arnold R. Isaacs

How frightened should Americans be of refugees, and how much safer will they be under President Trump's more restrictive refugee policy? If Americans are concerned about actual attacks involving committed terrorists sneaking through the vetting process with the intent to kill or maim Americans, the answer – based on statistics developed by Trump's Attorney General Jeff Sessions – appears, for all practical purposes, to be virtually zero.

Of course, Sessions doesn't frame his statistics that way. He agrees with Trump that existing screening procedures are inadequate and don't do enough to keep terrorists from posing as refugees. But the evidence he has offered to support that position – and remember, this is from a vehement supporter of Trump's immigration views, not a critic or a neutral researcher – showed exactly the opposite.

Sessions's analysis of refugee-terrorism links was in a statement he issued last August, when he was still a senator from Alabama. In the statement, titled "Refugee Terrorism Increases While Obama Administration Increases Flow," Sessions alleged that "top officials" had admitted "their inability to properly vet refugees," and called for "analyzing the immigration histories of recent terrorists so that we can more effectively safeguard our immigration system from being infiltrated."

Offering just such an analysis, Sessions presented a list of 20 refugees who were "convicted for, or implicated in, terrorism or terrorism-related offenses" after being admitted to the United States.

Here are some of the facts about those 20 cases:

– No American was killed or injured by any of those subjects. Not one of the 20 was charged for a violent act of any kind in the United States, or had any concrete or credible plan for one. (In November 2016, after Sessions’s list was released, a Somali refugee injured 11 people on the Ohio State University campus, but none of the victims died.)

– No one on Sessions’s list came from Syria. Six came from Iraq and six from Somalia (one of those born in a Somali refugee family in Kenya). Seven are Bosnian Americans, all involved in the same case, and one was from Uzbekistan. No one on the list was from Iran, Sudan, Libya, or Yemen – meaning that Sessions identified no cases from five of the seven countries whose citizens in all visa categories, not just refugees, were banned from entry for 90 days under Trump’s immigration order.

– Of the 20 names on the list, 11 have been found guilty, six are still awaiting trial, and one case had already been dismissed when Sessions released his list. (That defendant agreed to leave the United States when the charge was dropped, so it may not quite count as an entirely clear-cut exoneration. On the other hand, the prosecutors’ agreement to that deal is a pretty strong sign that they did not consider him a real threat.) Of the remaining two, one was killed in Syria and never charged with a criminal offense, and one, named in an arrest warrant issued by federal prosecutors in Virginia, is apparently in Somalia.

– Of six Iraqis on the list, four have been convicted, one is still awaiting trial, and charges against the sixth were dropped. Two of those found guilty were involved in what Trump aide Kellyanne Conway incorrectly called a “massacre” in Bowling Green, Kentucky; in fact there was no attack there, and charges against the two had nothing to do with any act in the United States but were related to support for “terrorists” in Iraq. (The conspiracy they were convicted for, by the way, was one of a fairly long list of plots that were not initiated by defendants but invented as sting operations by undercover FBI agents.)

– At least two of the Somali refugees came to the United States as young children, so obviously could not have been identified as threats by any security vetting procedure, however strong or weak. A number of others on the list came as teenagers or had been in the United States for a substantial number of years before their offenses took place. (Altogether Sessions’ list identifies eight of his 20 subjects as U.S. citizens, meaning they would have spent a minimum of five years as permanent residents plus additional time – often one or even several years – to complete the naturalization process.) In those cases the strong probability is that their terrorist leanings developed after they were screened for refugee status and admitted, not before.

An Overestimate

From all available information, it is highly unlikely that most of these cases match the model Sessions and Trump have promoted, in which a violent radical pretends to be a refugee, manages to sneak through the security vetting, and enters the United States with the intent of committing terrorist acts. If we assume that half of Sessions's 20 examples fit that script – almost certainly an overestimate – and if we assume that the list represents the best case a strong advocate could make for that scenario, the following arithmetic applies:

Ten terrorists are approximately one of every 80,000 refugees who have come to this country since 2001. If refugee admissions are capped at 50,000 instead of the 110,000 President Obama announced for 2017 – a provision of Trump's executive order that has gotten less attention than its impact on refugees and other immigrants already approved for admission – and if the percentage of potential terrorists eluding detection remains the same as Sessions's list indicates, letting in 60,000 fewer refugees a year will keep out at most one might-be terrorist.

Here are a couple of other calculations:

By Sessions's count, one Iraqi has been convicted of a terror offense for every 30,000-plus Iraqi refugees in this country, or nearly twice the number of Iraqis admitted annually in recent years. If that statistic remains valid, we would have to ban all Iraqi refugees for two years to keep out one possible terrorist.

Blocking Syrian refugees, for whatever period, will keep out *no* terrorists, based on past experience, since none of the 18,000 Syrians admitted as refugees have been involved in terror. That's right. Syrian refugees, despite being singled out in Trump's immigration order for even more restrictive procedures than other refugees, have not been implicated in any terrorist case at all.

So, if you extrapolate from Sessions's analysis, the restrictions Trump advocates might keep *one* potentially dangerous person out of this country every year. That's right, one less possible terrorist in a year (to be precise, a year and four months). Moreover, again extrapolating from Sessions's data, that one person will be statistically unlikely to commit a violent act in the United States.

To be clear, this analysis is specifically about people admitted as refugees, not other immigrants. Terror crimes by foreign-born persons in all categories have been rare, but the incidence among refugees is even lower.

Regarding Sessions's statement of last August, his list included only half of the "at least 40 individuals" who the statement said were involved in terrorism

after coming to this country as refugees since September 11, 2001. That is two or three times more than most studies have reported, though still a tiny fraction of the more than three-quarters of a million refugees, more than one-third of them Muslims, who have been resettled in this country during that period.

Sessions did not say why only 20 of those 40 subjects were identified, or how he chose which cases to include. Since he presumably wanted to make the most persuasive possible argument for restrictions, it does not seem logical that he would have omitted any examples that clearly support his criticism of the refugee screening process. One can't be certain of that, without knowing which cases were left off the list.

So, did Sessions' examples illustrate that present rules for admitting refugees are too loose and pose too great a risk that terrorists will come here and harm Americans? To put it mildly, the evidence is less than convincing.

The conclusion is inescapable: Sessions's evidence did not demonstrate that refugee screening has been ineffective. It did not even come close. It does not support any argument that more restrictive refugee procedures will make Americans safer. It makes exactly the opposite case, and shows that he and the President he now serves are stoking public fear with falsehoods, not facts.

Arnold R. Isaacs is a writer and journalist based in Maryland. He is the author of *From Troubled Lands: Listening to Pakistani Americans and Afghan Americans in post-9/11 America* and two books relating to the Vietnam war.

'Deep State' Has Trump on the Menu

Whether President Trump knows it or not, he is in a battle with a powerful 'Deep State' that wants to suck him into its neocon foreign policy orthodoxy or destroy him politically, as ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke explains.

By Alastair Crooke

Beware ego, well two egos actually. Jared Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law who seems to believe that he can solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and who is trying to persuade his father-in-law that "a foreign policy coup" can be his.

Behind the scenes, stand the dubious former British Prime Minister Tony Blair (lobbying via media baron Rupert Murdoch's former wife Wendy Deng, who

reportedly reconciled Kushner and Ivanka Trump after their 2008 split) and the equally dubious gambling magnate Sheldon Adelson, plus the Israeli Ambassador, Ron Dermer (who is a Bibi Netanyahu confidant, reportedly).

Trump would not be the first U.S. President to be glamour-struck by the prospect of being the one to solve the Palestinian conflict, if he should take the bait. He would be one of many. Yet it has proved to be a prize for none of these former Presidents, but rather has proved itself to be a poisoned chalice, time after time.

For Trump however, it would not be the standard hemlock imbibed by his predecessors, but more a case of welcoming into his Administration a Trojan Horse. It is, as journalist Robert Parry rightly asserts, a Trojan Horse carrying the neocons right back into the heart of foreign policy. It would result in "President Trump's foreign policy sliding toward neoconservative orthodoxy on the Middle East ...".

What is "the bait" this time? Something very simple. Instead of Israel making peace with the Palestinians, leading to peace with the surrounding world, it would be the other way round: Israel would befriend the Arab world, which would then agree on some "solution" with Israel and *impose* it on the Palestinians.

This plan has been given a catchy sound-bite by Netanyahu: "Outside" (i.e. the Arab world), "in" (imposition on Palestinians), instead of "inside out." The selling point is that the Palestinians are now so weak and divided, it is claimed, they have not the strength to object.

Leaving aside the fact that if the Israeli government had *actually wanted* a negotiated solution – the premise on which the 1993 Oslo Accords was founded (that it was in both parties' interests to agree on a compromise) – there have been any number of occasions over the last quarter century, when Israel could have had one. History shows that Israel has always preferred continuing the (so-called) Peace *Process* to actually *concluding* peace. This understanding of the situation is common ground for both American and European officials, who have been part of "the process" over the years, (of which I was one).

The Wrong Starting Point

But for Trump, it is not the probability of failure in this venture that makes the Israeli initiative potentially so damaging, but rather that to launch his foreign policy from this platform may well prove lethal to his wider aims. Where you start matters. It matters a lot. It dictates the subsequent alignment of alliances.

Initially (and perhaps it still is so), Trump's start point was détente with

Russia. In terms of his aim to transform America's foreign policy, that made sense. And one can understand why President Trump might be treading somewhat slowly on Russia, in the wake of the Deep State *coup* against Trump's National Security Advisor Michael Flynn and the continuing attrition aimed against the President, but simply, were he to pursue his son-in-law's plan, Trump will be handing over his foreign policy to the neocons.

Why? Because if Trump wants the Arab world (and Saudi Arabia in particular), to help Israel impose a settlement on the Palestinians, Trump will have to embrace Israel's false narrative that Iran is the chief sponsor of terror in the Middle East. And, Trump equally will have to pay court to the equally false Israeli narrative of the threat of the Iranian "nuclear bomb." He already has, at his meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu. It has never been Iran's non-existent "bomb" that has concerned Israeli security officials: It has been Iran's conventional military power and even more so, its soft, revolutionary power.

It is precisely this back-to-front neocon world view that has so corrupted American foreign policy: America, for decades now, has aligned itself with Saudi Arabia and Gulf States who finance, arm and support terrorist movements (such as Al Qaeda), while labeling Iran, which actually fights and defeats these "jihadists," as the chief sponsor of terror in the Middle East. One really cannot get it more back-to-front. This is now more widely understood by the American public, yet the neocons never pull back; they never desist in trying to tie America to the Saudi Arabia-Israeli axis and to promote phobia towards Iran.

Will President Trump see the danger? His vaunted "war" on radical Islam will be laughed off the stage in the Middle East – as was Obama's – if he is seen to have aligned himself this way: with Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. It will be viewed in the Middle East as another round of America "at war" with terrorism, and tucked up "in bed" with it, too.

Russian Doubts

And in Moscow, eyebrows too, will be raised at such a strategic alignment: Will Trump be any more serious than Obama in defeating radical jihadists, policy-makers in Russia may be asking? It will be yet another question mark to put beside the bigger question mark arising from President Trump's acceptance of General Flynn's resignation.

Journalist Pepe Escobar notes that "even before Flynn's fall, Russian analysts had been avidly discussing whether President Trump is the new Victor Yanukovich – [the Ukrainian President] who failed to stop a color revolution on his doorstep."

This has become a key question. Flynn's conversation with the Russian Ambassador over an open telephone line (which he will have known to be routinely monitored by the security services), broke no rules: He spoke, as any diplomat about to assume office might. There was nothing improper in his conduct.

A British Shadow Foreign Secretary would be constantly in touch with foreign Ambassadors. It is expected, and required of him or her. If there were any breaking of rules, it would seem to have occurred elsewhere: in the intelligence services perhaps, or in the Department of Justice. The rules *are* that you *do not* intentionally tap your own officials (or about to be officials), and should this occur inadvertently, their identity and their contribution to the conversation should be minimized, i.e., redacted under privacy rules. Never should it leak.

And if there is a puzzle to this episode, it lies not so much in Flynn's conduct, but in the response by the President. So, Vice President Mike Pence was miffed that General Flynn had been economical with his account of events to him. Why not call them both in: tell Flynn to apologize and Pence to accept the apology? End it there. Why give a scalp to Deep State opponents?

A puzzle it remains. Eli Lake on *Bloomberg View* draws out the wider implications: "...unanswered questions. It's possible that Flynn has more ties to Russia that he had kept from the public and his colleagues. It's also possible that a group of national security bureaucrats and former Obama officials are selectively leaking highly sensitive law enforcement information to undermine the elected government.

"Flynn was a fat target for the national security state. He has cultivated a reputation as a reformer and a fierce critic of the intelligence community leaders he once served with when he was the director the Defense Intelligence Agency under President Barack Obama. Flynn was working to reform the intelligence-industrial complex, something that threatened the bureaucratic prerogatives of his rivals.

"He was also a fat target for Democrats. Remember Flynn's breakout national moment last summer was when he joined the crowd at the Republican National Convention from the dais calling for Hillary Clinton to be jailed.

"In normal times, the idea that U.S. officials entrusted with our most sensitive secrets would selectively disclose them to undermine the White House would alarm those worried about creeping authoritarianism. Imagine if intercepts of a call between Obama's incoming national security adviser and Iran's foreign minister leaked to the press before the nuclear negotiations began? The howls of indignation would be deafening.

“In the end, it was Trump’s decision to cut Flynn loose. In doing this he caved in to his political and bureaucratic opposition. [Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Devin] Nunes told me Monday night, that this will not end well. ‘First it’s Flynn, next it will be Kellyanne Conway, then it will be Steve Bannon, then it will be Reince Priebus,’ he said. Put another way, Flynn is only the appetizer. Trump is the entrée.”

Neutering Trump

So this is the question: Has the Deep State already neutered Trump’s foreign policy? It is too early to tell, but there are straws in the wind suggesting that Trump’s policy might be sliding towards neocon orthodoxy on Russia (as well as on Palestine), as Moon of Alabama web site observed:

“[On Feb. 14] the White House spokesperson said: President Trump has made it very clear that he expects the Russian government to deescalate violence in the Ukraine and return Crimea.

“[On Feb. 15] Trump tweeted: Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump
Crimea was TAKEN by Russia during the Obama Administration. Was Obama too soft on Russia?

4:42 AM – 15 Feb 2017

“That is a position Trump had not previously taken. ‘Return Crimea’ is a no-no to any current and future Russian government. If Trump insists on this, the prospective détente is already dead.”

Flynn’s sacrifice does not allow a final judgment to be made. On the bigger chessboard, Trump has decided that “a pawn” can be sacrificed. The General had certain qualities (the ruthlessness perhaps necessary to wield an axe to the intelligence agencies), but also he had displayed a lack of political “nous” and basic understanding in Flynn’s book, *The Field of Fight*, (that unwisely he had co-authored with neocon Michael Leeden). Trump chose not to risk a more important piece to defend a pawn (especially as one more important “piece” (Bannon) reportedly was calling for this pawn to be sacrificed).

The question, finally, is about Trump’s character: Has he the “steel” to “drain the swamp”? Can he recruit tough-minded allies within the Deep State, ready to conduct a vicious internal war and to purge it thoroughly? Can he eliminate the sleeper cells from within his own administration? Tweets will not be enough. He will have to act soon.

Or else, will he “slide” (towards the neocons), and take the Netanyahu bait. And

fall into the embrace of the neocon alignment with the Saudi-Israeli axis – and, having absorbed the basic hook of Iranophobia, go on to try to split President Putin from Iran (and China), in true neocon style?

This portends a vicious internal war within the U.S. – for even were the Deep State “color revolution” to succeed, it would not represent the end of the war, but perhaps the loss of a major battle within the wider war.

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.

Making Puppy Mills Great Again

Many Americans applauded President Trump’s vow to slash government regulations – that always sounds great in the abstract – but it may be less popular when it means gutting rules that addressed puppy mill abuses, says JP Sottile.

By JP Sottile

Is Donald Trump trying to make puppy mills great again? Actually, that’s a trick question because puppy mills were never great. In fact, puppy mills are one of the uglier bits of scumbaggery to emerge from a burgeoning pet industry that has, according to the American Pet Products Association, ballooned from \$17 billion in 1994 to nearly \$63 billion in 2016.

About \$2.1 billion of that total is “live animal purchases,” and the people who butter their bread by breeding animals fall under the regulatory purview of the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

Right now, there are an estimated 10,000 dog breeders nationwide, and the USDA’s minuscule budget of \$28 million annually means they only keep tabs on a small fraction of them. As a result, there are fewer than 3,000 officially “regulated” breeders. Falling into that sizable gap between “regulated” and “unregulated” are thousands of facilities ignominiously known as “puppy mills.”

Factory Farms for Dogs

If you haven’t seen video footage of a puppy mill, you might not be aware of just how sadly appropriate that moniker is for these fetid factories of fecundity. Unregulated breeders run Dickensian “mills” filled with malnourished, poorly-groomed, and chronically infirm dogs that are all-too-

often crammed into cages throughout the entirety of their utterly bereft lives.

Each of these captive canines produces an average of nearly ten puppies per year in operations that amount to the factory farming of dogs. The puppies are sold in retail stores for a tidy profit to customers who often find their newest member of the family is sick or overbred or worse.

For those seeking compensation for their “defective product,” tracking back to the breeders is a daunting task. Even if they’ve been inspected and accumulated numerous violations, the USDA rarely revokes licenses or even enforces minimum compliance with the law. Amazingly, it has collected less than \$4 million in fines over the last two years, according to a shocking investigative report published in a recent issue of *Rolling Stone*.

But now the difficult task of keeping tabs on sleazy breeders who refuse to comply with even the meager, decrepit standards of the anachronistic Animal Welfare Act (AWA) just got a whole lot harder.

That’s thanks in part to the Trump Administration’s “delete first ... so we won’t have to ask questions later” approach to everything related to science, public health, safety, or anything that might crimp the money-making style of Trump’s corporate supporters.

Draining the Swamp?

In the spirit of gag orders imposed on a number of science-dependent agencies, the USDA abruptly “purged” its online database of “inspection reports and other information from its website about the treatment of animals at thousands of research laboratories, zoos, dog breeding operations and other facilities,” according to a story first reported by the Washington Post.

“Going forward, APHIS will remove from its website inspection reports, regulatory correspondence, research facility annual reports, and enforcement records that have not received final adjudication. APHIS will also review and redact, as necessary, the lists of licensees and registrants under the AWA, as well as lists of designated qualified persons (DQPs) licensed by USDA-certified horse industry organizations,” the USDA said on its website.

And it’s that last bit about “USDA-certified horse industry organizations” that might be the key to unraveling a move that has outraged animal welfare activists, journalists, and even a few conservative commentators like Laura Ingraham and Tammy Bruce. Writing in the Washington Times, Ms. Bruce questioned the move as a “disturbing” and “odd” move for an “administration to be committed to transparency, draining the swamp and ending lobbyist control of policy.”

Of course, it's hard to tell whether the Trump Administration wants to drain the swamp or to swamp the drain with crony capitalists in an attempt to flood the already financially fertile plains of Washington, D.C., with the loamy, rich monetary manure spread so profitably by key industries.

Who Benefits?

So, who benefits from a widely unpopular decision that generated angry hashtags like #USDABlackout and #NoUSDABlackout ... and the filing of a new lawsuit claiming the blackout illegally obstructs the application of the Animal Welfare Act?

New reporting by the Washington Post indicates senior staffers within the USDA advocated the purge in response to a lawsuit over the controversial practice of "soring" the legs of walking horses with harsh chemicals that inflict enough pain to cause the animal's "high-stepping" gait to rise just a little bit higher. That, in turn, makes them more successful in competitions and raises their value as a commodity. In other words, no pain means less financial gain.

Ironically, the USDA recently banned soring ... but suddenly decided to implement the data purge despite the decision to prohibit the very practice that sparked the lawsuit that supposedly led to the purge.

Perhaps it's not coincidental that the ban came after the national Humane Society conducted its own investigations into horse soring or that their investigation would've relied in part on the exactly the type of data collected by USDA inspectors. But now, just like it will with profligate puppy millers, the purge effectively hides the identity of "horse industry organizations" with a documented history of soring and gives them new room to run roughshod on animal welfare protections.

And Who Decided?

So, who made this perplexing, politically unpopular decision?

Although he wasn't necessarily opposed to the purge when it was first proposed, outgoing Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack told the Post that he refused to sign-off on the new, information-obscuring rule because "there was not enough time for us to properly vet the recommendation, and I was concerned about transparency."

But that was then and this is now. And now there is a new sheriff in town who has said regulations must go the way of the dying bumblebee his administration doesn't want to list as an endangered species.

To wit, the prime mover behind the purge might be one of Trump's lesser-known deputies – a guy name Brian Klippenstein of the industry-aligned Protect the Harvest. He was the head of Trump's USDA transition team. And the “harvest” he and his barely-known advocacy group want to protect is the unchecked right of human beings to harvest animals for profit.

Mostly, they want to do so without any meddling by the Humane Society or even the barest protections for the welfare of animals. Klippenstein – who is something of a puppy mill enthusiast – is no doubt pleased with a purge that will make it easier to profit off of mistreating animals again.

So, with a tidy little bit of doublespeak, the USDA website replaced the database with a message explaining that the records were removed “based on our commitment to being transparent, remaining responsive to our stakeholders’ informational needs, and maintaining the privacy rights of individuals.”

Red Tape and Paperwork

It's the needs of those “stakeholders” – the breeders and businesses and big agricultural interests – that will predictably win out in this crony-laden administration. But wait ... maybe this was just part of Team Trump's war on the onerous, freedom-killing regulatory state ... right? Hardly.

According to a fact sheet from the HSUS, these anything-but-onerous USDA ‘regulations’ make it perfectly legal to “keep dozens or even hundreds of breeding dogs in small wire cages for their entire lives with only the basics of food, water and rudimentary shelter.”

Despite that, many of the licensed breeders violate these comically inadequate standards in their never-ending quest to cruelly cut corners and squeeze a little more profit out of the cramped lives of dogs trapped in a perpetual cycle of insemination, pregnancy, and birth.

And that's to say nothing of the thousands of unlicensed puppy mills whose only oversight comes from activists, nonprofits, journalists, and the occasional whistleblower ... and whose operations only come to an end when these non-governmental do-gooders do the kind of good that one might expect from an agency tasked with the duty of ensuring a basic level of animal welfare.

As a result of the move, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), along with ASPCA, PETA, and hundreds of other smaller non-profit and volunteer animal welfare organizations around the country, will be tied up in red tape and tortuous FOIA paperwork if they want to access heretofore public information on zoos, laboratories, roadside attractions and, of course, puppy mills.

That matters because those organizations fill the gaping hole left by the sparsely funded, severely understaffed, and seemingly overmatched USDA.

The Humane Society is one of many non-government watchdogs that watch out for dogs by funding their own investigations and by even staging raids on puppy mills in concert with local law enforcement. The USDA's now-purged database was often a roadmap leading the HSUS, ASPCA, and hundreds of local watchdogs to serial violators.

Scarce Enforcement

The simple fact is that little is done even when the USDA is on the case, which is not that surprising for an agency with a well-greased revolving door between itself and the businesses it regulates.

Even Ringling Bros – whose violation data would be purged along with puppy millers – was able to get someone placed at the USDA back in 2011. Perhaps that helps explain why, as the HSUS points out, “there are hundreds of USDA-licensed puppy mills in operation that have a history of documented animal care violations that are still licensed.”

But that's just one part of why access to the records accumulated by the USDA is so important. Natasha Daly of *National Geographic* wrote:

“These records have revealed many cases of abuse and mistreatment of animals, incidents that, if the reports had not been publicly posted, would likely have remained hidden. This action plunges journalists, animal welfare organizations, and the public at large into the dark about animal welfare at facilities across the country.”

As *One Green Planet* reported, it's the same database that helped *Boston Globe* reporter Carolyn Johnson expose a “federally-funded primate testing facility” at Harvard University that mistreated thousands of monkeys despite repeated violations and \$24,000 in fines ... until it was ignominiously closed in 2015.

It was whistleblowers and journalists who used shocking footage to expose the cruelty that halted the captive breeding program at SeaWorld, ended years of torture and sickness for Ringling Brothers' elephants, and sparked a wholesale revolution in the production of eggs when Mercy for Animals revealed the deplorable conditions of egg-laying chickens.

It was surreptitiously filmed videos that eventually led to McDonald's, Walmart, and other major companies forcing their suppliers to adopt new welfare standards for the chickens they quite literally bank on to bring home the bacon.

The same has been happening with puppy mills, too. Increased awareness of the deplorable conditions – thanks in part to activists and journalists using the now deleted data – has led to a number of anti-puppy mill laws around the country.

Those efforts, along with campaigns to convince dog enthusiasts to adopt a soon-to-be-euthanized shelter dog over a costly retail puppy, have the pet industry mounting a counter-campaign of alternative facts designed to convince Americans that there is a puppy shortage in spite of the daunting facts.

Of course, the dog breeding industry is there to help re-puppy America – for a price. And their bottom line is that the less you know about the way those puppies are produced, the better it is for the conscience of consumers and the breeders' bank accounts. Frankly, that's really what this purge portends ... a wider crackdown on transparency and information in the USDA, which, along with the FDA, oversees the nation's gargantuan factory farming industry.

The fact that Trump tapped former Georgia Governor Sonny Purdue to run the Department of Agriculture is the clearest signal yet that years of hard-won, incremental progress on animal welfare and increased safety in the food supply are likely to go the way of the dodo bird under factory farm-friendly Purdue.

Remember that time then-candidate Trump floated the idea of eliminating the FDA's "food police" who make sure there isn't too much feces in the meat or too little safety in the nation's vast, complicated food system?

Now, with Brian Klippenstein planting the seeds of profitability for factory farmers, horse sorers and, alas, puppy millers, Trump's vision of "unchecked everything" is coming into focus. Thanks to the purge, it just got harder for activists, journalists and whistleblowers to do what the USDA wasn't capable of doing.

And it also became a little easier to be an animal-abusing ingrate again.

JP Sottile is a freelance journalist, published historian, radio co-host and documentary filmmaker (The Warning, 2008). His credits include a stint on the Newshour news desk, C-SPAN and as newsmagazine producer for ABC affiliate WJLA in Washington. His weekly show 'Inside the Headlines With The Newsvandal' co-hosted by James Moore airs every Friday on KRUU-FM in Fairfield, Iowa. He blogs at Newsvandal and tweets ?@newsvandal. This article was originally published on AntiMedia (Creative Commons).

Netanyahu's No-Way to a Peace Deal

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu tried to sound reasonable in his first meeting with President Trump, but he will never agree to a reasonable peace deal with the Palestinians, says Alon Ben-Meir.

By Alon Ben-Meir

President Trump should not be swayed by Netanyahu's duplicitous argument, however convincing it might sound, that he is committed to a two-state solution when in fact he has opposed and will continue to reject in principle the creation of an independent Palestinian state under any circumstances.

Netanyahu's repeated assertions that he is ready to negotiate with the Palestinians unconditionally is hollow because he knows that Palestinian President Abbas will not enter into negotiations unless Israel suspends the continuing expansion of settlements and the creeping annexation of Palestinian land, which prevents the Palestinians from establishing their own viable state.

To establish Netanyahu's lack of commitment, one has to simply observe his actions in the occupied territories and listen to his public narrative, which squarely contradicts his presumed willingness to negotiate an end to the conflict. Netanyahu's objections in words and deeds to the creation of a Palestinian state are undisputedly manifested in the following:

First, Netanyahu's insistence that he is ready to negotiate unconditionally is in and of itself a precondition. Suppose President Abbas agrees to negotiate on that basis – there is simply no avoiding the requirement to first agree on rules of engagement, including the venue, makeup of the negotiating teams, their mandate, etc. Most importantly, they must agree on which of the main conflicting issues to tackle first that could facilitate negotiations on other critical issues.

Netanyahu has all along refused to commence negotiations by first meeting the Palestinians' demand to establish the contours of their future state. Instead, he kept insisting that Israel must first negotiate the mechanism that would ensure its national security. The fact, however, that he always sought "secure borders" would have made it reasonable and practical to negotiate borders first.

This would not only establish what constitutes (from his perspective) secure borders, but it would have also met the Palestinians' demands and given them the confidence that a future state will eventually be created. In conjunction with that, the future of many of the settlements could have also been settled.

Netanyahu's insistence, however, on negotiating national security first was nothing but a ploy designed to play for time as previous negotiations have clearly shown.

Second, Netanyahu presides over a coalition government that includes, other than his own right-of-center Likud party, two other extremely right-wing parties – Yisrael Beiteinu and Jewish Home, led by Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Education Minister Naftali Bennett, respectively, who are both committed and subservient to the settlement movement. Bennett in particular openly calls for the annexation of much of the West Bank, especially Area C, which constitutes 61 percent of the Palestinian territory.

Political Impossibility

If Netanyahu were to embark in earnest on negotiating a two-state solution, this would immediately unravel his government, as these two parties (along with many members of his own Likud party) have threatened to leave the government if he were to take such a step. Thus, as long as he maintains the present make-up of the current government, there is absolutely no prospect of reaching a peace agreement that would grant the Palestinians a state of their own.

Following his 2015 campaign for reelection, Netanyahu clearly stated "I think that anyone who moves to establish a Palestinian state today, and evacuate areas, is giving radical Islam an area from which to attack the State of Israel. The left has buried its head in the sand time and after time and ignores this..." When asked whether a Palestinian state would not be created under his leadership, the prime minister said "Indeed." What he said then he still means today; anything he says to the contrary is for show.

Third, the unabated expansion of existing settlements and the passage of the recent law that authorizes the government to retroactively legalize scores of illegal settlements unambiguously suggests that he has no intention whatsoever of allowing the Palestinians to establish a state of their own. This systematic annexation of Palestinian land makes it impossible for them to maintain land contiguity.

To suggest, as he claims, that the settlements are not an obstacle to peace is disingenuous at best and he knows it. Under Netanyahu's watch, the government has built a major network of roads crisscrossing the West Bank exclusively designated for the settlers, while confining the Palestinians to cantons with the intention of making the current status quo permanent.

Fourth, his objective is to settle at least one million Israelis throughout the West Bank and create irreversible facts on the ground. Currently, there are

nearly 650,000 settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, making the removal of any significant number of settlers simply impossible. The lesson that Netanyahu's father, Benzion Netanyahu, who was a staunch revisionist Zionist, ingrained in his son was the belief that all of the biblical "land of Israel" belongs to the Jews in perpetuity.

In a 2009 interview, Benzion stated "The two-state solution doesn't exist. ...There is no Palestinian people, so you don't create a state for an imaginary nation." That lesson was not lost on Netanyahu.

Not surprisingly, whenever Israel's Supreme Court orders the removal of a certain illegal settlement built on private Palestinian land, such as the recent dismantling of Amona with roughly 250 settlers, Netanyahu immediately announces plans to build new units. He is determined that the number of settlers continues to grow to reach the milestone of one million, regardless of what the Israeli courts decide or the international community demands – including the U.S., Israel's closest ally.

Fifth, if Netanyahu were to truly opt to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution, he could disband his current and establish a new coalition government composed of several centrist and left-of-center parties, including the Zionist Union, Yesh Atid, Kulanu, Meretz, and Netanyahu's own Likud party, which would provide him a decisive majority of 80 out of 120 seats in the parliament, versus the current government of Likud, Kulanu, Shas, Jewish Home, Yisrael Beiteinu, and UTJ, a very slim majority of 67 out of 120 seats. Although some members of his own party will defect, he will still have a significant majority that reflects the aspiration of the Israelis who want to end the conflict. It should be noted that with a new government, the 13 members of the Arab List would support any initiative towards a two-state solution.

Such a coalition can certainly agree on an equitable peace with the Palestinians that would entail some land swaps if only Netanyahu wills it. Sadly, however, Netanyahu simply will not entertain such a peace agreement because he is ideologically committed to control in perpetuity all of what he terms the "Land of Israel," while accusing the Palestinians of wanting to destroy rather than make peace with Israel.

To be sure, Netanyahu is not and has never been a proponent of creating a Palestinian state. Hence, President Trump will be wise not to engage him in a futile discussion searching for an agreement based on a two-state solution. This outcome cannot and will not happen as long as Netanyahu is in power.

If Trump is serious about his desire to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for Israel's own sake, he must demand that Netanyahu commit himself to create a

Palestinian state not by simply stating so, but by taking concrete steps to form a new government composed of the left, center, and his own party, hold a new election, or resign.

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