

# 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 detente is as essential to Trump for the sake of his domestic programs as detente 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.

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## 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 Yanukovich 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 Yanukovich 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).**

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# 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).**

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## 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.**

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## '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**

## 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.

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## 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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# Toxic Policies of 'President Agent Orange'

**Exclusive:** President Trump's early hard-right actions and hirings threaten some of America's most vulnerable people and the environment, with his policies even compared to the poison Agent Orange, writes Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

Rapper Busta Rhymes pegged it at the Grammy Awards when he referred to Donald Trump as "President Agent Orange." While performing with A Tribe Called Quest and Anderson Paak, Rhymes used the opportunity to call out Trump for his Muslim ban and "all of the evil" Trump has perpetrated since assuming the presidency three weeks ago.

Rhymes said, "I just wanna thank President Agent Orange for perpetuating all of the evil that you've been perpetrating throughout the United States," adding, "I wanna thank President Agent Orange for your unsuccessful attempt at the Muslim ban. Now we come together! We the people! We the people! We the people!"

For some younger readers who may not be familiar with the term, Agent Orange was an herbicidal chemical weapon sprayed over 12 percent of Vietnam by the U.S. military from 1961 to 1971. The dioxin present in Agent Orange is one of the most toxic chemicals known to humankind.

Those exposed to Agent Orange often have children and grandchildren born with serious illnesses and disabilities. The international scientific community has identified an association between exposure to Agent Orange and some forms of cancers, reproductive abnormalities, immune and endocrine deficiencies, and nervous system damage. Second- and third-generation victims continue to be born in Vietnam, as well as to U.S. veterans and Vietnamese-Americans in this country.

The use of dioxin, a poisoned weapon, was a war crime in violation of the Hague Convention. It also constituted a crime against humanity because it was an inhuman act perpetrated against a civilian population. Despite all that, the U.S. government has given only small amounts of money to address the human victims of Agent Orange/dioxin. Much of the money has not reached the victims who need it so much, and the amounts allocated cannot make much of a dent in addressing the tremendous human suffering.

Second and third generation children of American Vietnam veterans face the same problems as do exposed Vietnamese-Americans. That is why Rep. Barbara Lee, D-

California, introduced H.R. 334, the Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2017.

The bill, which currently has 23 co-sponsors, would provide health care and social services for affected Vietnamese; medical assistance and disability benefits to affected children of U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War; and health assessment, counseling and treatment for affected Vietnamese-Americans and their offspring. It would also clean up the lands and restore ecosystems contaminated by Agent Orange/dioxin in Vietnam.

### **The Trump Comparison**

Though some might view the comparison between President Trump and poisonous dioxin sprayed indiscriminately on living things a bit hyperbolic, many of Trump's early actions and proposals – like Agent Orange – may inflict devastation for years to come.

Since taking office, Trump has moved systematically to unravel protections for immigrants, workers, the environment, Native Americans and other people of color, as well as the right to healthcare. He has moved to deregulate Wall Street, incurring a real risk of another financial meltdown. And his Muslim ban created worldwide chaos, pain and insecurity for untold numbers of people. The courts have halted the ban – for now.

Moreover, Trump has already committed a war crime in Yemen, ordering a raid that killed at least 25 civilians, nine of them children, including a three-month-old baby and a pregnant woman. Mobsina Mabkhout al Ameri lost her brother, nephew and his three children in the attack.

"They killed men, children and women and destroyed houses," she told the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. "We are normal people and have nothing to do with al-Qaeda or the Houthis or anyone. The men came from America, got off the planes and the planes bombed us," she added.

Nevertheless, the Trump administration proclaimed the raid "absolutely a success." Trump called it a "winning mission." Trump also favors torture and waterboarding and has pledged to continue drone strikes. He has already begun deporting DREAMers. And if he has his way, his administration will exclude large numbers of refugees fleeing war and persecution.

Under a President Trump, we can expect a continual, persistent assault on civil rights and human rights, and increasing heartache both in the United States and abroad. This is why Busta Rhymes called Trump's actions "evil." At the end of the rap performance, Muslim women wearing headscarves and others joined the musicians onstage. They all raised their fists, repeatedly chanting, "Resist!"

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. In 2009, she served as one of seven judges from three continents who heard two days of testimony from 27 witnesses at the International People's Tribunal of Conscience in Support of the Vietnamese Victims of Agent Orange in Paris. She is a member of the national advisory board of Veterans for Peace and co-coordinator of Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign [<http://www.vn-agentorange.org/> ]. Visit her website at <http://marjoriecohn.com> and follow her on Twitter @MarjorieCohn.

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## Trump's Dysfunctional White House

In less than a month, President Trump has proven many of his critics right when they warned that his erratic temperament would be a poor fit for his White House responsibilities, notes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is something both horrifying and fascinating about the behavior of President Trump, as we watch him fail to cope with – or perhaps even recognize – the differences between the no-holds-barred world he created for his campaign and the much more polite and temperate world expected of leaders of a constitutional government.

As a result, the present White House appears to be a dysfunctional place. Apparently neither President Trump nor most of his staff have considered that there are real differences, different rules of behavior, between private and public life. Maintaining the model of the abusive boss, the know-it-all CEO (Trump's preferred modus operandi), has, in quick order, proved both inappropriate and self-defeating. Here then are some of the consequences:

–The President has refused to stop being the avaricious businessman and relinquish control of his assets. As a result he will soon be facing an increasing number of lawsuits brought by various ethics organizations charging that his refusal to place his holdings in a blind trust violates the “emoluments clause” of the Constitution. The contention is that this can only lead to “scandal, corruption and illegitimacy.”

–The rush to impose a ban on immigration into the United States from seven predominantly Muslim countries – imposed by executive order within ten days of inauguration – proved a sloppy piece of work. Trump simply assumed public

opinion to be on his side and that this opinion could stand in for legal legitimacy. It didn't work. The ban caused chaos and hardship, and quickly the courts temporarily set it aside as unconstitutional. The Justice Department lawyers, who had largely been kept out of the loop by the White House, did not have evidence that there was any real danger, historically or immediate, from immigrants of the countries cited in the ban. Pending a "total rewrite" or an appeal to the Supreme Court, Trump's immigration ban is at a dead end.

—In the meantime, Trump has, in a manner that has become typical for him, attempted to delegitimize judicial opposition — opposition that anyone who is constitutionally savvy knows is solidly lawful. Thus, his "so-called judge" statement. It may be an indication of the President's enduring immaturity that he believes that anyone who stands in his way is a target for bullying and slander. And, indeed, in the private sphere where Donald Trump has been able to use his money to make his own rules, this tactic apparently did sometimes work.

So, as if by habit, he has carried it over to the public sphere, where it is completely out of place and only makes him look childish. Except to those adoring fans who were so visible on the campaign trail, his loose verbiage also makes Trump look like a "loser." Trump's own nominee for the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch, has described the President's bad-mouthing the federal judge who suspended the immigration ban as "disheartening" and "discouraging."

There is one other point that is to be made about this "so-called judge" episode. It has turned the judge, James Robart (who is a "mainstream" Republican), into a potential target for violence. Having used abusive language throughout his campaign and seen the emotions it aroused, Trump is very likely to be aware that he is risking incitement to violence.

—There are many other moments of Trumpian bluster, such as his yelling at the Australian prime minister during an official phone call, or his threatening to send troops across the Mexican border during a call to the president of Mexico. All of this might reinforce his image as a tough guy, but in the political and diplomatic world that now holds him in a spotlight, he starts to remind people of other past cases of bullies in power, most of whom happen to be fascists of the 1920s and 1930s.

### **A Shift in Protest Personnel**

As a result of Trump's bravado, there has been a rapid shift in public activism from the Right to what in the U.S. passes for the Left. Just as is the case with the populist Republicans, there is a segment of the Democratic Party base that feels disenfranchised. Some of them tried to do something about this by backing Bernie Sanders. But that was unsuccessful. However, with Trump's victory,

rightwing populism abated, and almost immediately, it was replaced by the inchoate mass of “Left” populists you see hitting the streets today.

It is the Sanders folks plus a whole array of special interest groups who feel very threatened by an empowered Right. There is no reason to believe that the anti-Trump array is going to be intimidated and give up. Indeed, the Left activists’ challenge is to coalesce into a real united front.

That should be made easier if Trump stays true to form, lurching from one outrageous move to another. And all the signs point down that road. The “so-called president” has ratcheted up his deportation efforts, allowing individual immigration officials discretion to go after any immigrant without proper documentation no matter of what age or the length of time they have been here. This is the equivalent of giving an army open-ended marching orders, and it is bound to result in abuses of power. He has begun his wall project for the southern border – an effort modeled after Israel’s infamous and illegal “separation (aka apartheid) wall.”

He has begun the gutting of environmental and consumer safety regulations, a move which will poison the air and water for the sake of greater corporate profit. He has started to deregulate the banks – a strategy that, historically, has always eventually led to economic crisis. And, of course, attacking abortion and LGBT rights is also on his agenda. There is enough here to keep millions agitated for at least the next four years.

### **Opportunities and Risks**

Thus, even though we are still early in his administration, there is no sign that anyone can control the President’s addiction to gaffes. He is an immature, thin-skinned egotist, and in the end, this may well cost the Republicans dearly.

However, one does have to give President Trump his due. He has a really exceptional ability to stir up the American political scene. For progressives such agitation creates opportunities and risks. There is now an opportunity for a truly united front of progressives that can reform the Democratic Party and give us, in the near term, a viable alternative to the manic CEO and rightwing radicals now occupying the White House.

On the other hand, there is the risk that the apparatchiks who now control the Democratic Party will misread their situation. They might well fail to understand the meaning of the Tea Party movement’s capture of the Republican Party, and resist meaningful reform of their own party. If they can get away with this, it will leave the progressives without a political home. That will make reclaiming a progressive future much harder and the reign of the Right much

longer. We will have to wait and see.

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

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## A Documentary You'll Likely Never See

**Exclusive:** *Ukraine on Fire*, a new documentary about the Ukraine crisis, might change how people in the West perceive the conflict, but it's unlikely to get much distribution since it contests the prevailing narrative, writes James DiEugenio.

By James DiEugenio

It is not very often that a documentary film can set a new paradigm about a recent event, let alone, one that is still in progress. But the new film *Ukraine on Fire* has the potential to do so – assuming that many people get to see it.



Usually, documentaries – even good ones – repackage familiar information in a different aesthetic form. If that form is skillfully done, then the information can move us in a different way than just reading about it.

A good example of this would be Peter Davis's powerful documentary about U.S. involvement in Vietnam, *Hearts and Minds*. By 1974, most Americans understood just how bad the Vietnam War was, but through the combination of sounds and images, which could only have been done through film, that documentary created a sensation, which removed the last obstacles to America leaving Indochina.



*Ukraine on Fire* has the same potential and could make a contribution that even goes beyond what the Davis film did because there was very little new information in *Hearts and Minds*. Especially for American and Western European audiences, *Ukraine on Fire* could be revelatory in that it offers a historical explanation for the deep divisions within Ukraine and presents information about the current crisis that challenges the mainstream media's paradigm, which blames the conflict almost exclusively on Russia.

Key people in the film's production are director Igor Lopatonok, editor Alex Chavez, and writer Vanessa Dean, whose screenplay contains a large amount of historical as well as current material exploring how Ukraine became such a cauldron of violence and hate. Oliver Stone served as executive producer and conducted some high-profile interviews with Russian President Vladimir Putin and ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich.

The film begins with gripping images of the violence that ripped through the capital city of Kiev during both the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2014 removal of Yanukovich. It then travels back in time to provide a perspective that has been missing from mainstream versions of these events and even in many alternative media renditions.

### **A Longtime Pawn**

Historically, Ukraine has been treated as a pawn since the late Seventeenth Century. In 1918, Ukraine was made a German protectorate by the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. Ukraine was also a part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 signed between Germany and Russia, but violated by Adolf Hitler when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941.

The reaction of many in Ukraine to Hitler's aggression was not the same as it was in the rest of the Soviet Union. Some Ukrainians welcomed the Nazis. The most significant Ukrainian nationalist group, Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), had been established in 1929. Many of its members cooperated with the Nazis, some even enlisted in the Waffen SS and Ukrainian nationalists participated in the massacre of more than 33,000 Jews at Babi Yar ravine in Kiev in September 1941. According to scholar Pers Anders Rudling, the number of Ukrainian nationalists involved in the slaughter outnumbered the Germans by a factor of 4 to 1.

But it wasn't just the Jews that the Ukrainian nationalists slaughtered. They also participated in massacres of Poles in the western Ukrainian region of Galicia from March 1943 until the end of 1944. Again, the main perpetrators were not Germans, but Ukrainians.

According to author Ryazard Szawlowksi, the Ukrainian nationalists first lulled the Poles into thinking they were their friends, then turned on them with a barbarity and ferocity that not even the Nazis could match, torturing their victims with saws and axes. The documentary places the number of dead at 36,750, but Szawłowski estimates it may be two or three times higher.

OUN members participated in these slaughters for the purpose of ethnic cleansing, wanting Ukraine to be preserved for what OUN regarded as native Ukrainians. They also expected Ukraine to be independent by the end of the war, free from both German and Russian domination. The two main leaders in OUN who participated in the Nazi collaboration were Stepan Bandera and Mykola Lebed. Bandera was a virulent anti-Semite, and Lebed was rabidly against the Poles, participating in their slaughter.

After the war, both Bandera and Lebed were protected by American intelligence, which spared them from the Nuremberg tribunals. The immediate antecedent of the CIA, Central Intelligence Group, wanted to use both men for information gathering and operations against the Soviet Union. England's MI6 used Bandera even more than the CIA did, but the KGB eventually hunted down Bandera and assassinated him in Munich in 1959. Lebed was brought to America and addressed anti-communist Ukrainian organizations in the U.S. and Canada. The CIA protected him from immigration authorities who might otherwise have deported him as a war criminal.

The history of the Cold War was never too far in the background of Ukrainian politics, including within the diaspora that fled to the West after the Red Army defeated the Nazis and many of their Ukrainian collaborators emigrated to the United States and Canada. In the West, they formed a fierce anti-communist lobby that gained greater influence after Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980.

### **Important History**

This history is an important part of Dean's prologue to the main body of *Ukraine on Fire* and is essential for anyone trying to understand what has happened there since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. For instance, the U.S.-backed candidate for president of Ukraine in 2004 – Viktor Yushchenko – decreed both Bandera and his military assistant Roman Shukhevych, who was also involved in atrocities, were both named national heroes by Yushchenko.

Bandera, in particular, has become an icon for post-World War II Ukrainian nationalists. One of his followers was Dmytro Dontsov, who called for the birth of a "new man" who would mercilessly destroy Ukraine's ethnic enemies.

Bandera's movement was also kept alive by Yaroslav Stetsko, Bandera's premier in

exile. Stetsko fully endorsed Bandera's anti-Semitism and also the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe. Stetsko, too, was used by the CIA during the Cold War and was honored by Yushchenko, who placed a plaque in his honor at the home where he died in Munich in 1986. Stetsko's wife, Slava, returned to Ukraine in 1991 and ran for parliament in 2002 on the slate of Yushchenko's Our Ukraine party.

Stetsko's book, entitled *Two Revolutions*, has become the ideological cornerstone for the modern Ukrainian political party Svoboda, founded by Oleh Tyahnybok, who is pictured in the film calling Jews "kikes" in public, which is one reason the Simon Wiesenthal Center has ranked him as one of the most dangerous anti-Semites in the world.

Another follower of Bandera is Dymytro Yarosh, who reputedly leads the paramilitary arm of an even more powerful political organization in Ukraine called Right Sektor. Yarosh once said he controls a paramilitary force of about 7,000 men who were reportedly used in both the overthrow of Yanukovych in Kiev in February 2014 and the suppression of the rebellion in Odessa a few months later, which are both fully depicted in the film.

This historical prelude and its merging with the current civil war is eye-opening background that has been largely hidden by the mainstream Western media, which has downplayed or ignored the troubling links between these racist Ukrainian nationalists and the U.S.-backed political forces that vied for power after Ukraine became independent in 1991.

### **The Rise of a Violent Right**

That same year, Tyahnybok formed Svoboda. Three years later, Yarosh founded Trident, an offshoot of Svoboda that eventually evolved into Right Sektor. In other words, the followers of Bandera and Lebed began organizing themselves immediately after the Soviet collapse.

In this time period, Ukraine had two Russian-oriented leaders who were elected in 1991 and 1994, Leonid Kravchuk, and Leonid Kuchma. But the hasty transition to a "free-market" economy didn't go well for most Ukrainians or Russians as well-connected oligarchs seized much of the wealth and came to dominate the political process through massive corruption and purchase of news media outlets. However, for average citizens, living standards went down drastically, opening the door for the far-right parties and for foreign meddling.

In 2004, Viktor Yanukovych, whose political base was strongest among ethnic Russians in the east and south, won the presidential election by three percentage points over the U.S.-favored Viktor Yushchenko, whose base was mostly

in the country's west where the Ukrainian nationalists are strongest.

Immediately, Yushchenko's backers claimed fraud citing exit polls that had been organized by a group of eight Western nations and four non-governmental organizations or NGOs, including the Renaissance Foundation founded by billionaire financial speculator George Soros. Dick Morris, former President Bill Clinton's political adviser, clandestinely met with Yushchenko's team and advised them that the exit polls would not just help in accusations of fraud, but would bring protesters out into the streets. (*Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 19, Number 1, p. 26)

Freedom House, another prominent NGO that receives substantial financing from the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED), provided training to young activists who then rallied protesters in what became known as the Orange Revolution, one of the so-called "color revolutions" that the West's mainstream media fell in love with. It forced an election rerun that Yushchenko won.

But Yushchenko's presidency failed to do much to improve the lot of the Ukrainian people and he grew increasingly unpopular. In 2010, Yushchenko failed to make it out of the first round of balloting and his rival Yanukovych was elected president in balloting that outside observers judged free and fair.

### **Big-Power Games**

If this all had occurred due to indigenous factors within Ukraine, it could have been glossed over as a young nation going through some painful growing pains. But as the film points out, this was not the case. Ukraine continued to be a pawn in big-power games with many Western officials hoping to draw the country away from Russian influence and into the orbit of NATO and the European Union.

In one of the interviews in *Ukraine on Fire*, journalist and author Robert Parry explains how the National Endowment for Democracy and many subsidized political NGOs emerged in the 1980s to replace or supplement what the CIA had traditionally done in terms of influencing the direction of targeted countries.

During the investigations of the Church Committee in the 1970s, the CIA's "political action" apparatus for removing foreign leaders was exposed. So, to disguise these efforts, CIA Director William Casey, Reagan's White House and allies in Congress created the NED to finance an array of political and media NGOs.

As Parry noted in the documentary, many traditional NGOs do valuable work in helping impoverished and developing countries, but this activist/propaganda breed of NGOs promoted U.S. geopolitical objectives abroad – and NED funded

scores of such projects inside Ukraine in the run-up to the 2014 crisis.

*Ukraine on Fire* goes into high gear when it chronicles the events that occurred in 2014, resulting in the violent overthrow of President Yanukovich and sparking the civil war that still rages. In the 2010 election, when Yushchenko couldn't even tally in the double-digits, Yanukovich faced off against and defeated Yulia Tymoshenko, a wealthy oligarch who had served as Yushchenko's prime minister.

After his election, Yanukovich repealed Bandera's title as a national hero. However, because of festering economic problems, the new president began to search for an economic partner who could provide a large loan. He first negotiated with the European Union, but these negotiations bogged down due to the usual draconian demands made by the International Monetary Fund.

So, in November 2013, Yanukovich began to negotiate with Russian President Putin who offered more generous terms. But Yanukovich's decision to delay the association agreement with the E.U. provoked street protests in Kiev especially from the people of western Ukraine.

As *Ukraine on Fire* points out, other unusual occurrences also occurred, including the emergence of three new TV channels – Spilno TV, Espresso TV, and Hromadske TV – going on the air between Nov. 21 and 24, with partial funding from the U.S. Embassy and George Soros.

Pro-E.U. protests in the Maidan square in central Kiev also grew more violent as ultra-nationalist street fighters from Lviv and other western areas began to pour in and engage in provocations, many of which were sponsored by Yarosh's Right Sektor. The attacks escalated from torch marches similar to Nazi days to hurling Molotov cocktails at police to driving large tractors into police lines – all visually depicted in the film. As Yanukovich tells Stone, when this escalation happened, it made it impossible for him to negotiate with the Maidan crowd.

One of the film's most interesting interviews is with Vitaliy Zakharchenko, who was Minister of the Interior at the time responsible for law enforcement and the conduct of the police. He traces the escalation of the attacks from Nov. 24 to 30, culminating with a clash between police and protesters over the transport of a giant Christmas tree into the Maidan. Zakharchenko said he now believes this confrontation was secretly approved by Serhiy Lyovochkin, a close friend of U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, as a pretext to escalate the violence.

At this point, the film addresses the direct involvement of U.S. politicians and diplomats. Throughout the crisis, American politicians visited Maidan, as both Republicans and Democrats, such as Senators John McCain, R-Arizona, and Chris

Murphy, D-Connecticut. stirred up the crowds. Yanukovych also said he was in phone contact with Vice President Joe Biden, who he claims was misleading him about how to handle the crisis.

The film points out that the real center of American influence in the Kiev demonstrations was with Ambassador Pyatt and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland. As Parry points out, although Nuland was serving under President Obama, her allegiances were really with the neoconservative movement, most associated with the Republican Party.

Her husband is Robert Kagan, who worked as a State Department propagandist on the Central American wars in the 1980s and was the co-founder of the Project for the New American Century in the 1990s, the group that organized political and media pressure for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Kagan also was McCain's foreign policy adviser in the 2008 presidential election (although he threw his support behind Hillary Clinton in the 2016 race).

### **Adept Manipulators**

As Parry explained, the neoconservatives have become quite adept at disguising their true aims and have powerful allies in the mainstream press. This combination has allowed them to push the foreign policy debate to such extremes that, when anyone objects, they can be branded a Putin or Yanukovych "apologist."

Thus, Pyatt's frequent meetings with the demonstrators in the embassy and Nuland's handing out cookies to protesters in the Maidan were not criticized as American interference in a sovereign state, but were praised as "promoting democracy" abroad. However, as the Maidan crisis escalated, Ukrainian ultra-nationalists moved to the front, intensifying their attacks on police. Many of these extremists were disciples of Bandera and Lebed. By February 2014, they were armed with shotguns and rapid-fire handguns.

On Feb. 20, 2014, a mysterious sniper, apparently firing from a building controlled by the Right Sektor, shot both police and protesters, touching off a day of violence that left about 14 police and some 70 protesters dead.

With Kiev slipping out of control, Yanukovich was forced to negotiate with representatives from France, Poland and Germany. On Feb. 21, he agreed to schedule early elections and to accept reduced powers. At the urging of Vice President Biden, Yanukovych also pulled back the police.

But the agreement – though guaranteed by the European nations – was quickly negated by renewed attacks from the Right Sektor and its street fighters who seized government buildings. Russian intelligence services got word that an

assassination plot was in the works against Yanukovych, who fled for his life.

On Feb. 24, Yanukovych asked permission to enter Russia for his safety and the Ukrainian parliament (or Rada), effectively under the control of the armed extremists, voted to remove Yanukovych from office in an unconstitutional manner because the courts were not involved and the vote to impeach him did not reach the mandatory threshold. Despite these irregularities, the U.S. and its European allies quickly recognized the new government as “legitimate.”

### **Calling a Coup a Coup**

But the ouster of Yanukovych had all the earmarks of a coup. An intercepted phone call, apparently in early February, between Nuland and Pyatt revealed that they were directly involved in displacing Yanukovych and choosing his successor. The pair reviewed the field of candidates with Nuland favoring Arseniy Yatsenyuk, declaring “Yats is the guy” and discussing with Pyatt how to “glue this thing.” Pyatt wondered about how to “midwife this thing.” They sounded like Gilded Age millionaires in New York deciding who should become the next U.S. president. On Feb. 27, Yatsenyuk became Prime Minister of Ukraine.

Not everyone in Ukraine agreed with the new regime, however. Crimea, which had voted heavily for Yanukovych, decided to hold a referendum on whether to split from Ukraine and become a part of Russia. The results of the referendum were overwhelming. Some 96 percent of Crimeans voted to unite with Russia. Russian troops – previously stationed in Crimea under the Sevastopol naval base agreement – provided security against Right Sektor and other Ukrainian forces moving against the Crimean secession, but there was no evidence of Russian troops intimidating voters or controlling the elections. The Russian government then accepted the reunification with Crimea, which had historically been part of Russia dating back hundreds of years.

Two eastern provinces, Donetsk and Lugansk, also wanted to split off from Ukraine and also conducted a referendum in support of that move. But Putin would not agree to the request from the two provinces, which instead declared their own independence, a move that the new government in Kiev denounced as illegal. The Kiev regime also deemed the insurgents “terrorists” and launched an “anti-terrorism operation” to crush the resistance. Ultra-nationalist and even neo-Nazi militias, such as the Azov Battalion, took the lead in the bloody fighting.

Anti-coup demonstrations also broke out in the city of Odessa to the south. Ukrainian nationalist leader Andrei Parubiy went to Odessa, and two days later, on May 2, 2014, his street fighters attacked the demonstrators, driving them into the Trade Union building, which was then set on fire. Forty-two people were killed, some of whom jumped to their deaths.

## 'Other Side of the Story'

If the film just got across this "other side of the story," it would provide a valuable contribution since most of this information has been ignored or distorted by the West's mainstream media, which simply blames the Ukraine crisis on Vladimir Putin. But in addition to the fine work by scenarist Vanessa Dean, the direction by Igor Lopatonok and the editing by Alexis Chavez are extraordinarily skillful and supple.

The 15-minute prologue, where the information about the Nazi collaboration by Bandera and Lebed is introduced, is an exceptional piece of filmmaking. It moves at a quick pace, utilizing rapid cutting and also split screens to depict photographs and statistics simultaneously. Lopatonok also uses interactive graphics throughout to transmit information in a visual and demonstrative manner.

Stone's interviews with Putin and Yanukovych are also quite newsworthy, presenting a side of these demonized foreign leaders that has been absent in the propagandistic Western media.

Though about two hours long, the picture has a headlong tempo to it. If anything, it needed to slow down at points since such a large amount of information is being communicated. On the other hand, it's a pleasure to watch a documentary that is so intelligently written, and yet so remarkably well made.

When the film ends, the enduring message is similar to those posed by the American interventions in Vietnam and Iraq. How could the State Department know so little about what it was about to unleash, given Ukraine's deep historical divisions and the risk of an escalating conflict with nuclear-armed Russia?

In Vietnam, Americans knew little about the country's decades-long struggle of the peasantry to be free from French and Japanese colonialism. Somehow, America was going to win their hearts and minds and create a Western-style "democracy" when many Vietnamese simply saw the extension of foreign imperialism.

In Iraq, President George W. Bush and his coterie of neocons was going to oust Saddam Hussein and create a Western-style democracy in the Middle East, except that Bush didn't know the difference between Sunni and Shiite Moslems and how Iraq was likely to split over sectarian rivalries and screw up his expectations.

Similarly, the message of *Ukraine on Fire* is that short-sighted, ambitious and ideological officials – unchecked by their superiors – created something even worse than what existed. While high-level corruption persists today in Ukraine and may be even worse than before, the conditions of average Ukrainians have deteriorated.



And, the Ukraine conflict has reignited the Cold War by moving Western geopolitical forces onto Russia's most sensitive frontier, which, as scholar Joshua Shiffrin has noted, violates a pledge made by Secretary of State James Baker in February 1990 as the Soviet Union peacefully accepted the collapse of its military influence in East Germany and eastern Europe. (*Los Angeles Times*, 5/30/ 2016)

This film also reminds us that what happened in Ukraine was a bipartisan effort. It was begun under George W. Bush and completed under Barack Obama. As Oliver Stone noted in the discussion that followed the film's premiere in Los Angeles, the U.S. painfully needs some new leadership reminiscent of Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy, people who understand how America's geopolitical ambitions must be tempered by on-the-ground realities and the broader needs of humanity to be freed from the dangers of all-out war.

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is *Reclaiming Parkland*.**

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