

# A Rare Defeat for the Israel Lobby

In a rare rebuke to the powerful Israel Lobby, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a congressional encroachment on presidential powers regarding the official status of Jerusalem. Even some right-wing justices turned on each other, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The Supreme Court's decision this month in Zivotofsky v. Kerry was not only the correct outcome of the case at hand and of the specific issues it raised but also an important statement about the need for consistency and coherence in the administration of U.S. foreign policy. The Court's majority scrupulously avoided wading into the politics underneath the case, but its decision has helped to minimize the extent to which political undercurrents make for incoherence in foreign policy.

The decision struck down, as an unconstitutional Congressional encroachment on Executive Branch powers, the portion of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for 2003 that would have required the State Department to indicate on passports issued to U.S. citizens born in Jerusalem that the place of birth was "Israel" if the individual requested that designation.

This requirement contradicted the longstanding U.S. position that the sovereignty of Jerusalem is a matter yet to be decided by international negotiation. That position also is consistent with the policies and practices of every other country besides Israel itself.

Justice Anthony Kennedy's majority opinion was firmly rooted in the concept that in foreign relations, the United States must speak with one voice. Recognition of foreign states, and the terms under which recognition is extended, as was true with the Carter administration's recognition of Communist China and the related special status of Taiwan, has always been a presidential prerogative.

Even when Congress also has played a role, as was true with legislation relating to relations with Taiwan, presidential primacy on this subject has not been seriously challenged. And according to the majority opinion, what is said on a passport is inseparable from the broader issue of recognition.

Chief Justice John Roberts, in a dissent joined by Justice Samuel Alito, questioned that last connection, contending that only a "perception" of recognition was involved, and that the majority was in effect submitting to an "international heckler's veto." But there is no doubt that recognition was what Congress was attempting to deal with in the nullified section of the

legislation, the title of which is "United States Policy with Respect to Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel."

Roberts's further argument that Congress is constitutionally empowered to do all sorts of things contrary to a president's policy toward a foreign government, including declaring war or establishing an embargo, is off the mark, since even a war or embargo does not necessarily speak to recognition of the foreign state in question. (E.g., the United States currently is sanctioning Russia but still recognizes it as a sovereign state.)

A separate dissent by Justice Antonin Scalia, joined by Roberts and Alito, is best read in conjunction with a concurring opinion by Clarence Thomas, who, in a rare break with Scalia, agreed with the majority regarding the key question concerning passports.

Thomas points out how loosely and expansively Scalia tries to apply the Necessary and Proper Clause of Article I of the Constitution in arguing for a Congressional role regarding the birthplace box on passports, far more loosely and expansively than is Scalia's custom in addressing many other issues. Thomas quotes back some of what Scalia has said on other cases and concludes that his conservative colleague's opinion in the present case represents a "dubious way to undertake constitutional analysis."

Strictly maintaining the policy that sovereignty over Jerusalem is yet to be settled through negotiation is essential if the United States is to have any hope of maintaining (or rather, salvaging) a useful role in attaining a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Going beyond the Jerusalem matter, the issue that first comes to mind as involving similar political dynamics is the impending nuclear agreement with Iran. As with the Jerusalem question, this is another instance of members of Congress marching to the Israeli government drummer and taking actions that contradict and undermine the Executive Branch's execution of an important element of U.S. foreign policy.

The Iran issue has already demonstrated the chaotic result when Congress (or more precisely, what happens to be the current majority party in Congress) tries to conduct its own foreign relations at odds with the official policy that the Executive Branch is running.

The chaos has included the notorious letter of Republican senators to the leadership of Iran and the uncoordinated invitation to the Israeli prime minister to address Congress for the purpose of denouncing U.S. diplomacy. The Supreme Court's decision represents at least a modest backtracking from this

sort of damage.

More generally and more broadly, the Court's majority has reaffirmed that there is such a thing as the pursuit of national interests in the international arena that is distinct from domestic politics. In this regard it is worth noting that the U.S. policy regarding Jerusalem has been maintained by every U.S. administration, Republican and Democratic, ever since the United States recognized the new State of Israel during Harry Truman's presidency.

The domestic political process, including actions by the U.S. Congress, does play an important role in determining U.S. national interests, though more as a matter of broad objectives and values than as tactics and administrative details. That process is essential in addressing unavoidable trade-offs involving major decisions and major interests, such as weighing expected gains versus likely costs in any resort to warfare.

That is why Congress ought to devote more of its energies to efforts such as enacting an authorization specifying objectives and limits for the current use of military force than to telling the State Department what it ought to write in a box on someone's passport.

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## U.S. House Admits Nazi Role in Ukraine

**Exclusive:** The U.S. House of Representatives has admitted an ugly truth that the U.S. mainstream media has tried to hide from the American people that the post-coup regime in Ukraine has relied heavily on Nazi storm troopers to carry out its bloody war against ethnic Russians, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Last February, when ethnic Russian rebels were closing in on the Ukrainian port of Mariupol, the New York Times rhapsodically described the heroes defending the city and indeed Western civilization the courageous Azov battalion facing down barbarians at the gate. What the Times didn't tell its readers was that these "heroes" were Nazis, some of them even wearing Swastikas and SS symbols.

The long Times article by Rick Lyman fit with the sorry performance of America's "paper of record" as it has descended into outright propaganda hiding the dark side of the post-coup regime in Kiev. But what makes Lyman's sadly typical story noteworthy today is that the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives has just voted unanimously to bar U.S. assistance going to the Azov battalion because of its Nazi ties.

When even the hawkish House of Representatives can't stomach these Nazi storm troopers who have served as Kiev's tip of the spear against the ethnic Russian population of eastern Ukraine, what does that say about the honesty and integrity of the New York Times when it finds these same Nazis so admirable?

And it wasn't like the Times didn't have space to mention the Nazi taint. The article provided much color and detail quoting an Azov leader prominently but just couldn't find room to mention the inconvenient truth about how these Nazis had played a key role in the ongoing civil war on the U.S. side. The Times simply referred to Azov as a "volunteer unit."

Yet, on June 10, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a bipartisan amendment to the Defense Appropriations Act from Reps. John Conyers Jr., D-Michigan, and Ted Yoho, R-Florida that would block U.S. training of the Azov battalion and would prevent transfer of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles to fighters in Iraq and Ukraine.

"I am grateful that the House of Representatives unanimously passed my amendments last night to ensure that our military does not train members of the repulsive neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, along with my measures to keep the dangerous and easily trafficked MANPADs out of these unstable regions," said Conyers on Thursday.

He described Ukraine's Azov Battalion as a 1,000-man volunteer militia of the Ukrainian National Guard that Foreign Policy Magazine has characterized as "openly neo-Nazi" and "fascist." And Azov is not some obscure force. Ukraine's Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, who oversees Ukraine's armed militias, announced that Azov troops would be among the first units to be trained by the 300 U.S. military advisers who have been dispatched to Ukraine in a training mission codenamed "Fearless Guardian."

### **White Supremacy**

On Friday, a Bloomberg News article by Leonid Bershidsky noted that "it's easy to see why" Conyers "would have a problem with the military unit commanded by Ukrainian legislator Andriy Biletsky: Conyers is a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, Biletsky is a white supremacist."

“Biletsky had run Patriot of Ukraine [the precursor of the Azov battalion] since 2005. In a 2010 interview he described the organization as nationalist ‘storm troops’ ... The group’s ideology was ‘social nationalism’ – a term Biletsky, a historian, knew would deceive no one.

“In 2007, Biletsky railed against a government decision to introduce fines for racist remarks: ‘So why the “Negro-love” on a legislative level? They want to break everyone who has risen to defend themselves, their family, their right to be masters of their own land! They want to destroy the Nation’s biological resistance to everything alien and do to us what happened to Old Europe, where the immigrant hordes are a nightmare for the French, Germans and Belgians, where cities are “blackening” fast and crime and the drug trade are invading even the remotest corners.’”

The Bloomberg article continued, “Biletsky landed in prison in 2011, after his organization took part in a series of shootouts and fights. Following Ukraine’s so-called revolution of dignity last year, he was freed as a political prisoner; right-wing organizations, with their paramilitary training, played an important part in the violent phase of the uprising against former President Viktor Yanukovich. The new authorities – which included the ultra-nationalist party Svoboda – wanted to show their gratitude.

“The war in the east gave Biletsky’s storm troopers a chance at a higher status than they could ever have hoped to achieve. They fought fiercely, and last fall, the 400-strong Azov Battalion became part of the National Guard, receiving permission to expand to 2,000 fighters and gaining access to heavy weaponry. So what if some of its members had Nazi symbols tattooed on their bodies and the unit’s banner bore the Wolfsangel, used widely by the Nazis during World War II?

“In an interview with Ukraine’s Focus magazine last September, Avakov, responsible for the National Guard, was protective of his heroes. He said of the Wolfsangel: ‘In many European cities it is part of the city emblem. Yes, most of the guys who assembled in Azov have a particular worldview. But who told you you could judge them? Don’t forget what the Azov Battalion did for the country. Remember the liberation of Mariupol, the fighting at Ilovaysk, the latest attacks near the Sea of Azov. May God allow anyone who criticizes them to do 10 percent of what they’ve done. And anyone who’s going to tell me that these guys preach Nazi views, wear the swastika and so on, are bare-faced liars and fools.’”

Though the House vote on June 10 may have shined a spotlight into this dark corner of the U.S.-embraced Kiev regime, the reality has been well-known for many months though played down in most of the Western news media, often dismissed as “Russian propaganda.”

Even the Times has included at least one brief reference to this reality, though buried deep inside an article. On Aug. 10, 2014, a Times' [article](#) mentioned the Nazi taint of the Azov battalion in the last three paragraphs of a lengthy story on another topic.

"The fighting for Donetsk has taken on a lethal pattern: The regular army bombards separatist positions from afar, followed by chaotic, violent assaults by some of the half-dozen or so paramilitary groups surrounding Donetsk who are willing to plunge into urban combat," the Times reported.

"Officials in Kiev say the militias and the army coordinate their actions, but the militias, which count about 7,000 fighters, are angry and, at times, uncontrollable. One known as Azov, which took over the village of Marinka, flies a neo-Nazi symbol resembling a Swastika as its flag." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[NYT Discovers Ukraine's Neo-Nazis at War.](#)"]

### **A Shiver Down the Spine**

The conservative London Telegraph offered more details about the Azov battalion in [an article](#) by correspondent Tom Parfitt, who wrote: "Kiev's use of volunteer paramilitaries to stamp out the Russian-backed Donetsk and Luhansk 'people's republics' should send a shiver down Europe's spine.

"Recently formed battalions such as Donbas, Dnipro and Azov, with several thousand men under their command, are officially under the control of the interior ministry but their financing is murky, their training inadequate and their ideology often alarming. The Azov men use the neo-Nazi Wolfsangel (Wolf's Hook) symbol on their banner and members of the battalion are openly white supremacists, or anti-Semites."

Based on interviews with militia members, the Telegraph reported that some of the fighters doubted the reality of the Holocaust, expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler and acknowledged that they are indeed Nazis.

Biletsky, the Azov commander, "is also head of an extremist Ukrainian group called the Social National Assembly," according to the Telegraph article which quoted a commentary by Biletsky as declaring: "The historic mission of our nation in this critical moment is to lead the White Races of the world in a final crusade for their survival. A crusade against the Semite-led Untermenschen."

In other words, for the first time since World War II, a government had dispatched Nazi storm troopers to attack a European population and officials in Kiev knew what they were doing. The Telegraph questioned Ukrainian authorities in Kiev who acknowledged that they were aware of the extremist ideologies of

some militias but insisted that the higher priority was having troops who were strongly motivated to fight. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Ignoring Ukraine's Neo-Nazi Storm Troopers.](#)"]

But a rebel counteroffensive led by ethnic Russians last August reversed many of Kiev's gains and drove the Azov and other government forces back to the port city of Mariupol, where Foreign Policy's reporter Alec Luhn also encountered the Nazis. He wrote:

"Blue and yellow Ukrainian flags fly over Mariupol's burned-out city administration building and at military checkpoints around the city, but at a sport school near a huge metallurgical plant, another symbol is just as prominent: the wolfsangel ('wolf trap') symbol that was widely used in the Third Reich and has been adopted by neo-Nazi groups.

"Pro-Russian forces have said they are fighting against Ukrainian nationalists and 'fascists' in the conflict, and in the case of Azov and other battalions, these claims are essentially true."

## **SS Helmets**

More evidence continued to emerge about the presence of Nazis in the ranks of Ukrainian government fighters. Germans were shocked to see video of Azov militia soldiers decorating their gear with the Swastika and the "SS rune." NBC News reported: "Germans were confronted with images of their country's dark past when German public broadcaster ZDF showed video of Ukrainian soldiers with Nazi symbols on their helmets in its evening newscast.

"The video was shot in Ukraine by a camera team from Norwegian broadcaster TV2. 'We were filming a report about Ukraine's AZOV battalion in the eastern city of Urzuf, when we came across these soldiers,' Oysten Bogen, a correspondent for the private television station, told NBC News. "Minutes before the images were taped, Bogen said he had asked a spokesperson whether the battalion had fascist tendencies. 'The reply was: absolutely not, we are just Ukrainian nationalists,' Bogen said."

Despite the newsworthiness of a U.S.-backed government dispatching Nazi storm troopers to attack Ukrainian cities, the major U.S. news outlets have gone to extraordinary lengths to excuse this behavior, with the Washington Post publishing a rationalization that Azov's use of the Swastika was merely "romantic."

This curious description of the symbol most associated with the depravity of the Holocaust and the devastation of World War II can be found in the last three paragraphs of [a Post lead story](#) published in September 2014. Post correspondent

Anthony Faiola portrayed the Azov fighters as “battle-scarred patriots” nobly resisting “Russian aggression” and willing to resort to “guerrilla war” if necessary.

The article found nothing objectionable about Azov’s plans for “sabotage, targeted assassinations and other insurgent tactics” against Russians, although such actions in other contexts are regarded as terrorism. The extremists even extended their threats to the government of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko if he agrees to a peace deal with the ethnic Russian east that is not to the militia’s liking.

“If Kiev reaches a deal with rebels that they don’t support, paramilitary fighters say they could potentially strike pro-Russian targets on their own, or even turn on the government itself,” the article stated.

The Post article like almost all of its coverage of Ukraine was laudatory about the Kiev forces fighting ethnic Russians in the east, but the newspaper did have to do some quick thinking to explain a photograph of a Swastika gracing an Azov brigade barracks. So, in the last three paragraphs of the story, Faiola reported: “One platoon leader, who called himself Kirt, conceded that the group’s far right views had attracted about two dozen foreign fighters from around Europe.

“In one room, a recruit had emblazoned a swastika above his bed. But Kirt dismissed questions of ideology, saying that the volunteers, many of them still teenagers, embrace symbols and espouse extremist notions as part of some kind of ‘romantic’ idea.”

Despite these well-documented facts, the New York Times excised this reality from its article about the Azov battalion’s defense of Mariupol last February. But isn’t the role of Nazis newsworthy? In other contexts, the Times is quick to note and condemn any sign of a Nazi resurgence in Europe. However, in Ukraine, where neo-Nazis, such as Andriy Parubiy served as the coup regime’s first national security chief and Nazi militias are at the center of regime’s military operations, the Times goes silent on the subject.

Rather than fully inform its readers about a crisis that has the potential of becoming a nuclear showdown between the United States and Russia, the Times has chosen to simply be a fount of State Department propaganda, often terming any reference to Kiev’s Nazi storm troopers to be “Russian propaganda.” Now, however, a unanimous U.S. House of Representatives – of all things – has acknowledged the unpleasant truth.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for**



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

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## The Bush Family 'Oligarchy'

**From the Archive:** The past often is prologue – making it especially important to know how a politician built his career and who helped him. In 2000, too little attention was paid to George W. Bush's personal history and how it might shape his disastrous presidency, a void that Sam Parry tried to fill.

By Sam Parry (Originally published on Aug. 15 and 19, 2000, as Parts 2 and 3 of a series)

At times grudgingly, George W. Bush traced virtually every early step his father took. Like his father, George W. went to both Andover Academy and Yale and joined the secretive Yale fraternity Skull and Bones. Like his father, George W. joined the armed forces. Like his father, George W. benefited from wealthy family connections while starting out on his own.

But the most important similarity between the careers of George W. and his father is the link between oil and politics. Like his father, George W. made his first business investments in West Texas oil ventures in Midland. Like his father, George W. sought to establish his political career by seeking elected office in Texas, where he ran for Congress at an early age.

While the cadence and direction of his steps match, George W.'s early record seems like a child walking around in his father's oversized shoes. In school, George W. was a C student, while his father graduated Phi Beta Kappa. In sports, George the father was captain of the Yale baseball team while George the son was captain of the cheerleading squad. In the oil business and politics, too, George W.'s early record was eclipsed by his father's.

But what George W. may have lacked in accomplishments, he made up for in ambition and charm, two traits that served him well in both oil and politics. In 1978, this ambition led George W. to embrace both family legacies, oil and politics. To some, this decision to pursue both goals at the same time might smack of bravado or even cockiness. But George W. was eager to try.

## **George W.'s Drive**

With practically no political experience of his own, George W. launched an unsuccessful bid for U.S. Congress. He lost badly to the Democratic incumbent. George W. later said that his biggest mistake that year was running a race "he couldn't win." The loss still gave George W. a taste of politics he would never lose.

That same year, he incorporated his own oil-drilling venture, Arbusto (Spanish for bush) Energy. Both his race for Congress and his oil business were based in Midland, his father's old stomping grounds. In fact, George W. opened an office in Midland's Petroleum Building, the same office building where his father started out more than 25 years before. [See the *Washington Post's* profile, "The Turning Point After Coming Up Dry, Financial Resources," by George Lardner Jr. and Lois Romano, July 30, 1999, and *Harper's Magazine's* "The George W. Bush Success Story: A heartwarming tale about baseball, \$1.7 billion, and a lot of swell friends," by Joe Conason, February 2000.]

While his run for Congress fell short, his oil business venture seemed promising at first. Just as his father had done nearly 30 years prior, George W. Bush sought financial assistance from his uncle, Jonathan Bush, a Wall Street financier. Jonathan Bush pulled together two dozen investors to raise \$3 million to help launch Arbusto. Among the investors was Dorothy Bush, George W.'s grandmother. At the same time, Jonathan Bush was lining up investors for Arbusto, he also was raising money for George H.W. Bush's presidential explorations. Many of the funders were the same. [Washington Post, July 30, 1999]

Unfortunately for George W., 1978 was not the best time to start up an oil-drilling company in West Texas. After a brief price spike in the late 1970s, the price for a barrel of oil dropped throughout the 1980s to less than \$10, which in turn sank many small businesses in the West Texas oil industry.

Still, while other oil ventures failed, George W. kept his afloat in the 1980s thanks to family connections and international financiers attempting to build and nurture relationships with his father, who was elected vice president in 1980.

## **The Lifelines**

The first of three major bailouts occurred in 1982. That year, despite the millions already pumped into Arbusto, George W. faced a crisis. His balance sheet read \$48,000 in the bank and \$400,000 owed to banks and other creditors. George W. realized that he had to raise additional cash. He decided to take

Arbusto public. [Washington Post, July 30, 1999.]

With the company so deeply in debt, however, George W. would need a new infusion of money to clear the books. In stepped Philip Uzielli, a New York investor and friend of James Baker III from their Princeton days. According to George W., Uzielli was introduced by George Ohrstrom, one of the original Arbusto investors and Uzielli's business partner.

Ohrstrom and Uzielli had, three years before in 1979, purchased a building products firm, Leigh Products Inc. by buying all common shares for \$25 per share. At the time, Baker was a director of Leigh Products.

Uzielli worked out a deal with George W. to purchase a 10 percent stake in Arbusto for \$1 million. The entire company was valued at less than \$400,000. In a 1991 interview, Uzielli recalled the investment as a major money loser. "Things were terrible," he said. [Washington Post, July 30, 1999.]

As bad as Uzielli's investment turned out, George W. now had enough money to take his company public. Not, however, before he made one more change. In April 1982, perhaps realizing the negative connotation of "bust," George W. changed the name of his company to Bush Exploration. The name change also may have had something to do with the fact that George W.'s father at the time was the Vice President of the United States. In June, George W. issued a prospectus.

George W. sought \$6 million in the public offering, but only managed to raise \$1.14 million. The shortfall was due in large part to the waning interest in the oil industry among investors. The price for a barrel of oil was falling and special tax breaks for losses incurred in oil investments had been slashed. [Washington Post, July 30, 1999.]

Within two years, it was clear that Bush Exploration was in trouble again. Michael Conaway, George W.'s chief financial officer, told the *Washington Post*, "We didn't find much oil and gas. We weren't raising any money." Something had to be done.

In walked bailout number two in the persons of Cincinnati investors, William DeWitt Jr. and Mercer Reynolds III. Heading up an oil exploration company called Spectrum 7, DeWitt and Mercer contacted George W. about a merger with Bush Exploration. For Bush and his struggling company, the decision wasn't a hard one to make.

In February 1984, George W. agreed to a merger with Spectrum 7 in which DeWitt and Reynolds would each control 20.1 percent and George W. would own 16.3 percent. George W. was named chairman and CEO of Spectrum 7, which brought him an annual salary of \$75,000. [*Harper's Magazine*, February 2000.]

DeWitt, whose father had owned the St. Louis Browns baseball team and later the Cincinnati Reds, would become a useful partner for George W. a few years later when he made his move to pull a group of investors together to buy the Texas Rangers.

Even though the merged companies still failed to make any money, the pieces were finally starting to fall into place for George W. A chief asset was that George W. brought connections and name recognition to the enterprise. Paul Rea, president of Spectrum 7, remembers Bush's name as a definite "drawing card" for investors. [Washington Post, July 30, 1999.]

With oil prices collapsing in the mid-1980s, however, it became clear that George W.'s name alone would not save the company. In a six-month period in 1986, Spectrum 7 lost \$400,000 and owed more than \$3 million with no hope of paying those debts off. Once more, the situation was growing desperate. [Harper's Magazine, February 2000.]

In September 1986, George W. was given his third lifeline.

Harken Energy Corp. was a medium-sized, diversified corporation that had been purchased in 1983 by a New York lawyer, Alan Quasha. Quasha seemed interested in acquiring not just an oil company, but the son of the Vice President. Harken agreed to acquire Spectrum 7 in a deal that handed over one share of publicly traded stock for five shares of Spectrum, which at the time were practically worthless. [Washington Post, July 30, 1999.]

### **George W. Strikes Success**

After the acquisition, George W. was named to the Harken board of directors. He was given \$600,000 worth of Harken stock options and landed a job as a consultant that paid him \$120,000 a year. By any account, this was not bad for an oilman who had never made any money in the oil business and had lost investors fortunes, large and small. [Harper's Magazine, February 2000.]

But Harken's investment in George W. appreciated. In 1986, the company had acquired the son of a vice president. By 1989, it had in its camp the son of a president. Harken began looking for oil investments in the Middle East where business and family connections also are very important.

In 1989, the government of Bahrain was in the middle of negotiations with Amoco for an agreement to drill for offshore oil. Negotiations were progressing until the Bahrainis suddenly changed direction.

Michael Ameen, who was serving as a State Department consultant assigned to brief Charles Hostler, the newly confirmed U.S. ambassador to Bahrain, put the

Bahraini government in touch with Harken Energy. In January 1990, in a decision that shocked oil-industry analysts, Bahrain granted exclusive oil drilling rights to Harken, a company that had never before drilled outside Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma and that had never before drilled offshore. [*Harper's Magazine*, February 2000.]

In a matter of weeks, the stock of Harken Energy shot up more than 22 percent from \$4.50 to \$5.50.

While George W. was finally finding some success in the oil business, President George H.W. Bush was experiencing the high point of his presidency. In August 1990, the forces of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded the oil-rich sheikhdom of Kuwait, choosing to settle a simmering border dispute over oil lands by force. President Bush responded with a denunciation of Saddam for violating international law, though Bush himself had ordered the invasion of Panama less than a year earlier to capture Panamanian Gen. Manuel Noriega on drug charges.

Yet, with the Middle East's vast oil reserves at risk, international law gained new respect as an inviolable principle. President Bush vowed that the Iraqi invasion "will not stand" and dispatched 500,000 U.S. troops as part of an international force to drive Iraqi forces from Kuwait. In the early months of 1991, the United States led first an aerial assault on Iraqi military and civilian targets, followed by a 100-hour land assault that routed the overmatched Iraqi army and restored the Kuwaiti royal family to power. Bush saw his popularity ratings soar above 90 percent among the American people.

### **Public Face for the Texas Rangers**

Back in Texas, George W. was winning acclaim himself as the popular new owner of the Texas Rangers. The beginning of that deal traced back to an idea of George W.'s Spectrum 7 partner, Bill DeWitt, who wanted to make a play for the purchase of the baseball team.

DeWitt understood that he needed a native Texan in his group of investors. George W. fit the bill. George W. also brought with him family connections to the owner of the Rangers, Eddie Chiles. An aging Midland oilman, Chiles's ties to the Bushes dated back to George W.'s father's days in the Midland oil business. [*Harper's Magazine*, February 2000.]

George W., who had never given up his political aspirations, recognized at once the opportunity this would bring. He could establish his name in his own right and do so as part owner of a highly visible organization. What story line could be better for an aspiring politician than to be part of the old American pastime, baseball?

The group of investors was missing only one thing money. To address this need, George W. tapped a Yale fraternity brother, Roland Betts, who brought with him a partner from a film-investment firm, Tom Bernstein. Betts and Bernstein were from New York, which became a problem when Major League Baseball Commissioner Peter Ueberroth insisted on more financial backing from Texas-based investors.

Commissioner Ueberroth, eager to put together a deal for the son of the President, brought in a second investment group headed by Richard Rainwater, who had made much of his fortunes working for the Bass family of Fort Worth. From 1970 to 1986, Rainwater had turned a modest family fortune of nearly \$50 million into a stunning \$4 billion empire.

Rainwater agreed to join Betts, Bernstein, and George W., who borrowed \$600,000 for his share of the \$86 million purchase. But Rainwater did not join without imposing a strict limitation on George W.'s role. George W. was granted 2 percent ownership of the Rangers and was named one of two "managing partners." But George W. would have effectively no say in running the team. He would be the handsome public face. Rainwater and his lieutenant Rusty Rose would be the brains. [*Harper's Magazine*, February 2000.]

George W.'s connections to Harken and his investment in the Rangers which had been made possible by his ties to the oil industry soon made him a millionaire. At last, he had a record of accomplishment to point to. George W. finally was ready to make the leap he had been waiting for. In 1994, George W. ran for and won the governorship of Texas.

### **The Oil Connection**

The oil money connections that had served George W. Bush so well in private life would, like his father before him, continue to serve George W. very well in political life. And, like his father before him, George W. would reward his oilmen benefactors once in office.

During his nearly six years in the governor's mansion, George W. has presided over what widely regarded as the most polluted state in the country. It ranks first in the amount of cancer-causing chemicals pumped annually into the air and water, first in the number of hazardous-waste incinerators, first in the total toxic releases to the environment, and first in carbon dioxide and mercury emissions from industry. [See "The Polluters' President," by Ken Silverstein, *Sierra Magazine*, Nov/Dec 1999.]

The air quality is arguably the darkest blot on Texas's environmental record. A majority of Texans live in areas that either flunk federal ozone standards or are in danger of flunking, a shocking statistic in a state of nearly 20 million

people. Houston, the nation's oil- and petrochemical-industry headquarters, has been called an ecological disaster zone. Chemical spills slick its coastal waters and its air quality earned the dubious honor of being the most polluted in the country, eclipsing Los Angeles.

Water quality in Texas isn't any better. More than 4,400 miles of Texas rivers, roughly one-third of Texas's waterways, don't meet basic federal standards set for recreational and other uses. They are unswimmable, unfishable, and, for the most part, undrinkable.

Despite this abysmal record, the state has cut water-testing programs to the bare bones. Between 1985 and 1997, the number of stations monitoring for pesticides in Texas waterways fell from 27 to two. The lack of attention given to these problems is further evidenced by the fact that the state of Texas ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in spending on environmental clean up. [*Sierra Magazine*, Nov/Dec 1999]

While missing in action on environmental protection, Gov. Bush jumped into the trenches when the oil industry was threatened. In 1999, when international oil prices collapsed, Gov. Bush pushed for and won a \$45 million tax break for the state's oil-and-natural-gas producers. [AP, April 3, 2000]

To get a sense of Gov. Bush's priorities, it is worth examining an initiative he promoted that he now widely cites as a successful environmental policy reform. In the Texas Clean Air Act of 1971, 828 industrial plants enjoyed a grandfather loophole that allowed them to operate without obtaining a permit. In 1997, Gov. Bush announced a plan to "close the loophole" for these factories. But the plan was strictly voluntary and carried no penalties for industries that didn't seek a permit.

Such a plan could have been written by the industries themselves. And as it turned out, it was. In confidential memos obtained by the Sustainable Energy and Economic Development Coalition (SEED) under the state's Freedom of Information Act, it was shown that Gov. Bush's administration worked closely with the companies as they were crafting the proposal. [*Sierra Magazine*, Nov/Dec 1999]

Gov. Bush also found appointees who pleased the oil industry when he was filling seats on the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC), the Texas equivalent of the Environmental Protection Agency. His first choice, Barry McBee, came from a Dallas law firm where he served as an oil specialist. McBee was former deputy commissioner at the Texas Department of Agriculture where he led a drive to gut "right to know" laws that protected farmworkers from unannounced aerial pesticide spraying.

Gov. Bush's second choice, Robert Huston, was even more fondly thought of by the

oil industry. Huston came from the industry consulting firm Espey, Huston & Associates, whose clients included Exxon, Chevron and Shell. Another of Gov. Bush's appointees to the TNRCC was Ralph Marquez, former vice chair of the Texas Chemical Council's environmental committee and a 30-year veteran of Monsanto. [*Sierra Magazine*, Nov/Dec 1999]

It is likely that a President George W. Bush would appoint people from this same mold to serve in environmental and industry oversight positions. For one, McBee is regarded as a leading candidate to head the EPA.

As has been widely reported, Bush has expressed a "kinship" with those in the oil industry. Craig McDonald, Director of Texans for Public Justice, a campaign finance group, summed up the bond between Bush and the oil industry this way: "He's been friendly to that sector, policy-wise, and they've been good to him in return. He rewarded them with tax breaks when they cried that they weren't making enough money." [AP, April 3, 2000]

This affinity between Bush and the oil industry and how it might affect a potential Bush presidency has raised alarm bells within the environmental community. At a time when scientists warn of the dire environmental consequences caused by global warming, which in turn is caused by burning oil and other fossil fuels at high rates, environmentalists fear that a George W. Bush White House, closely aligned with the oil industry, would ignore these scientific warnings.

Among other controversial energy topics on which Bush sides with the oil industry are suspending 4.3 cents-per-gallon of the federal gasoline tax, a move that could lead to more gasoline use. He also favored opening up Alaska's Arctic Wilderness to oil drilling. These initiatives would have strong chances of passage with Bush in the White House and Congress under the leadership of Sen. Trent Lott, R-Mississippi., and Rep. Tom DeLay, R-Texas.

George W.'s support for the Alaskan oil ventures is underscored by the men he chose to serve as his Alaska state campaign co-chairmen, Bob Malone and Bill Allen. From 1995-2000, Malone served as president, chief executive and chief operating officer of the Alyeska Pipeline Services Co., a consortium owned by major oil companies active in the North Slope of Alaska.

Alyeska Pipeline manages the 800-mile Alaskan pipeline, which delivers more than 20 percent of America's domestic oil production. Before joining Alyeska, Malone served as president of BP Amoco's Pipelines (Alaska) Inc. [See *The Public I*, Feb. 28, 2000]

The other Bush co-chair in Alaska, Bill Allen, is the chairman of VECO Corp.,



which was formed to support offshore oil production in Alaska. VECO now has 4,000 employees and has offices in Alaska, Colorado, Washington State, India, Cyprus and Houston.

### **Big Oil Pumps in Money**

In return for George W.'s continued political support, the oil industry has played a prominent role in funding Bush's two gubernatorial races and his presidential candidacy. Of the \$41 million Bush raised in two gubernatorial races, \$5.6 million (14 percent) came from the energy and natural resources industries. [AP, April 3, 2000]

The oil and gas industry has extended its support for the Texas governor to his presidential bid, donating 15 times more money to Bush than to his Democratic opponent, Al Gore. As of June 20, Bush had raised \$1,463,799 from the oil industry to Gore's \$95,460, according to [opensecrets.org](http://opensecrets.org) [July 26, 2000]. Of the top-ten lifetime contributors to George W.'s political war chests, six either are in the oil business or have ties to it. [See George W. Bush: Top 25 Career Patrons, *The Buying of the President 2000*, Center for Public Integrity.]

George W.'s chairman of his campaign's finance committee was Donald Evans. According to *The Austin Chronicle*, Evans is "perhaps the governor's closest friend" and has known George W. for three decades since their Midland days together. Evans is also CEO of Tom Brown Inc., an oil and gas company with the bulk of its production in Wyoming. Evans helped pioneer the Pioneers, a group of Bush financial supporters who have each raised at least \$100,000.

In 1995, Bush rewarded Evans by appointing him to the University of Texas Board of Regents, one of the most "powerful patronage" jobs in Texas. Evans rose to chairman of the board. With an annual budget of \$5.4 billion and more than 76,000 employees, the Texas university system is one of the largest in the country. The Texas University Board of Regents also manages an investment portfolio of more than \$14 billion. [*The Austin Chronicle*, March 17, 2000]

George W., like his father before him, also brought his Texas oil financial connections to Washington to help national Republican fundraising efforts. In May 2000, Ray Hunt, chairman and CEO of Hunt Oil Co., was named finance chairman of the Republican National Committee's Victory 2000 Committee. Based in Dallas, Hunt Oil is an independent, private company that is among the top dozen independent oil companies in the United States. [Cox News, May 10, 2000]

Richard Kinder and Kenneth Lay, the former and current CEOs of Houston-based Enron Corp., also rank as two of Bush's top contributors. Both are members of Bush's Pioneers and have been longstanding financial benefactors behind Bush's

political career. By the end of 1999, funders connected to Enron had contributed \$90,000 to the Bush presidential campaign, the fourth largest bundle at the time. [*Boston Globe*, Oct. 3, 1999]

Enron, a company worth \$61.5 billion, is the No. 1 buyer and seller of natural gas and the top wholesale power marketer in the United States. As governor, George W. has embraced energy deregulation, an initiative on which Enron has led the field of competitors.

In 1997, one Enron facility in Pasadena, Texas, released 274,361 pounds of toxic waste. In many states, this would rank as one of the top toxic pollution emitters, but not in Texas, where nearly 262 million pounds of toxic waste were released into the environment in 1997, the most in the country. [EPA TRI data, 1997]

Sam Parry is co-author of *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.*

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## WPost Plays Ukraine's Lapdog

**Exclusive:** Ukraine's Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and Finance Minister Jaresko are on a U.S. trip to drum up weapons and money to crush the ethnic Russian resistance in the east and they are finding a lapdog U.S. press that won't ask them tough questions, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There once was a time when the U.S. news media investigated U.S. imperial adventures overseas, such as Washington-sponsored coups. Journalists also asked tough questions to officials implicated in corruption even if those queries were inconvenient to the desired propaganda themes. But those days are long gone, as the Washington Post demonstrated again this week.

On Wednesday, the Post's editorial board had a chance to press Ukraine's Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk about the U.S. government's role in the Feb. 22, 2014 coup that elevated him to his current post after he was handpicked by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who declared "Yats is the guy" in a pre-coup intercepted phone call.

Wouldn't it have been interesting to ask Yatsenyuk about his pre-coup contacts

with Nuland and U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt and what their role was in fomenting the “regime change” that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich and hurtled Ukraine into a civil war? Sure, Yatsenyuk might have ducked the questions, but isn’t that the role that journalists are supposed to play, at least ask? [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis.”](#)]

Or why not question Yatsenyuk about the presence of neo-Nazis and other right-wing extremists who spearheaded the violent coup and then were deployed as the shock troops in Ukraine’s “anti-terrorism operation” that has slaughtered thousands of ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine? Wouldn’t that question have spiced up the interview? [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Wretched US Journalism on Ukraine.”](#)]

And, since Ukraine’s Finance Minister Natalie Jaresko was at the editorial board meeting as well, wouldn’t it have made sense to ask her about the propriety of her enriching herself while managing a \$150 million U.S.-taxpayer-financed investment fund for Ukraine over the past decade? What kind of message does her prior work send to the people of Ukraine as they’re asked to tighten their belts even more, with cuts to pensions, reduction of worker protections, and elimination of heating subsidies?

How would Jaresko justify her various schemes to increase her compensation beyond the \$150,000 limit set by the U.S. Agency for International Development and her decision to take court action to gag her ex-husband when he tried to blow the whistle on some improprieties? Wouldn’t such an exchange enlighten the Post’s readers about the complexities of the crisis? [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Ukraine Finance Minister’s American ‘Values.’”](#)]

Yet, based on what the Post decided to report to its readers, the editorial board simply performed the stenographic task of taking down whatever Yatsenyuk and Jaresko wanted to say. There was no indication of any probing question or even the slightest skepticism toward their assertions.

On Thursday, the Post combined [a news article](#) on the visit with [an editorial](#) that repeated pretty much as flat fact what Yatsenyuk and Jaresko had said. So, after Yatsenyuk alleged that Russia had 10,000 troops on the ground inside Ukraine, the Post’s editorial writers simply asserted the same number as a fact in its lead editorial, which stated: “Russia has deployed an estimated 10,000 troops to eastern Ukraine and, with its local proxies, attacks Ukrainian forces on a near-daily basis.”

Though both assertions are in dispute with many of the cease-fire violations resulting from Ukrainian government assaults around the rebel-controlled Donetsk Airport the Post had no interest in showing any skepticism, arguably one of the

consequences from the failure to impose any accountability for the Post's similarly biased writing prior to the Iraq War.

In 2002-03, editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt repeatedly declared as flat fact that Saddam Hussein possessed stockpiles of WMDs, thus supposedly justifying the U.S.-led invasion. After the invasion failed to locate these WMD stockpiles, Hiatt was asked about his editorials and responded:

"If you look at the editorials we write running up [to the war], we state as flat fact that he [Saddam Hussein] has weapons of mass destruction," Hiatt said. "If that's not true, it would have been better not to say it." [CJR, March/April 2004]

Yes, journalists generally aren't supposed to say something is a fact when it isn't and when a news executive oversees such a catastrophic error, which contributed to the deaths of nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, you might expect him to be fired.

Yet, Hiatt remains the Post's editorial-page editor today, continuing to push neoconservative propaganda themes, now including equally one-sided accounts of dangerous crises in Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Why WPost's Hiatt Should Be Fired.](#)"]

On Ukraine although the risks of neocon "tough-guy-ism" against nuclear-armed Russia could mean extermination of life on the planet the Post refuses to present any kind of balanced reporting. Nor apparently will the Post even direct newsworthy questions to Ukrainian officials.

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

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## Barack Obama: No Jack Kennedy

**Exclusive:** A half century ago at the peak of the Cold War President Kennedy appealed to humankind's better nature in a daring overture to Soviet leaders, a gamble that brought bans on nuclear testing and a safer world, a bravery that President Obama can't seem to muster, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Democratic Sen. Lloyd Bentsen's "you're no Jack Kennedy" put-down of Republican Sen. Dan Quayle in the 1988 vice presidential debate springs to mind on a day on which I cannot help but compare the character of President Barack Obama to that of John Kennedy, the first President under whom I served in the Army and CIA.

On this day 52 years ago, President John Kennedy gave a landmark speech at American University, appealing for cooperation instead of confrontation with the Soviet Union. Kennedy knew all too well that he was breaking the omerta-like code that dictated demonization of the Soviet leaders. But the stakes could not have been higher a choice of an endless arms race (with the attendant risk of nuclear conflagration) or bilateral cooperation to curb the most dangerous weapons that jeopardized the future of humankind.

Forgoing the anti-Soviet rhetoric that was *de rigueur* at the time, Kennedy made an urgent appeal to slow down the arms race, and then backed up the rhetoric with a surprise announcement that the U.S. was halting nuclear testing. This daring step terrified those sitting atop the military-industrial complex and, in my opinion, was among the main reasons behind Kennedy's assassination some five months later.

At American University, John Kennedy broke new ground in telling the world in no uncertain terms that he would strive to work out a genuine, lasting peace with the Soviet Union. And to underscore his seriousness, Kennedy announced a unilateral cessation of nuclear testing, but also the beginning of high-level discussions in Moscow aimed at concluding a comprehensive test ban treaty.

In tightly held conversations with speechwriter Ted Sorensen and a handful of other clued-in advisers, Kennedy labeled his address "the peace speech." He managed to hide it from the military advisers who just eight months before had pressed hard for an attack on the Soviet nuclear missiles sent to Cuba in 1962.

It was then that Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, his Soviet counterpart, stood on the brink of ordering the incineration of possibly hundreds of millions of people, before the two worked out a face-saving compromise and thus thwarted the generals of both sides who were pressing for Armageddon.

Kennedy's resistance to relentless pressure from military and civilian advisers alike for a military strike, combined with Khrushchev's understanding of the stakes involved, saved perhaps the very life of the planet. And here's the kicker: What neither Kennedy nor his advisers knew at the time was that on Oct. 26, 1962, just one day before the U.S.-Soviet compromise was reached, the nuclear warheads on the missiles in Cuba had been readied for launch.

This alarming fact was learned only 30 years later, prompting Robert McNamara, Kennedy's defense secretary to write: "Clearly there was a high risk that, in the face of a U.S. attack which, as I have said, many were prepared to recommend to President Kennedy the Soviet forces in Cuba would have decided to use their nuclear weapons rather than lose them.

"We need not speculate about what would have happened in that event. We can predict the results with certainty. ... And where would it have ended? In utter disaster."

It was that searing experience and the confidential exchange of letters between Kennedy and Khrushchev that convinced them both that they needed to commit to working out ways to lessen the chance of another such near-catastrophe in the future.

### **American University Speech**

Kennedy's "peace speech" was a definitive break with the past. Saturday Review editor Norman Cousins wrote simply: "At American University on June 10, 1963, President Kennedy proposed an end to the Cold War."

Kennedy told those assembled that he had chosen "this time and this place to discuss a topic on which ignorance too often abounds and the truth is too rarely perceived ... world peace."

"What kind of peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. ... I am talking about genuine peace the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living the kind that enables man and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women not merely peace in our time but peace for all time. ...

"Today the expenditure of billions of dollars every year on weapons acquired for the purpose of making sure we never need to use them is essential to keeping the peace. But surely the acquisition of such idle stockpiles which can only destroy and never create is not the only, much less the most efficient, means of assuring peace. ...

"So let us persevere. Peace need not be impracticable and war need not be inevitable. ... No government or social system is so evil that its people must be considered as lacking in virtue. ... We can still hail the Russian people for their many achievements in science and space, in economic and industrial growth, in culture and in acts of courage.

"Among the many traits the peoples of our two countries have in common, none is

stronger than our mutual abhorrence of war. Almost unique among the major world powers, we have never been at war with each other. And no nation in the history of battle ever suffered more than the Soviet Union suffered in the course of the Second World War. At least 20 million lost their lives. Countless millions of homes and farms were burned or sacked. A third of the nation's territory ... was turned into a wasteland a loss equivalent to the devastation of this country east of Chicago.

"Today, should total war ever break out again ... all we have built, all we have worked for, would be destroyed in the first 24 hours. And even in the Cold War ... our two countries ... are both devoting massive sums of money to weapons, which could be better devoted to combating ignorance, poverty, and disease.

"So, let us not be blind to our differences but let us direct attention to our common interests and to means by which those differences can be resolved. ... For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal. ...

"Above all, while defending our vital interest, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy or of a collective death wish for the world. ...

"Finally, let us examine our attitude toward peace and freedom here at home. ... In too many of our cities today, the peace is not secure because freedom is incomplete. ... We shall do our part to build a world of peace, where the weak are safe and the strong are just. We are not helpless before that task or hopeless of its success. Confident and unafraid, we labor on ... toward a strategy of peace."

As mentioned above, Kennedy backed up his words by announcing the unilateral halt to nuclear testing and the start of negotiations on a comprehensive test ban treaty. In a sharp break from precedent, the Soviets published the full text of Kennedy's speech and let it be broadcast throughout the U.S.S.R. without the usual jamming.

Khrushchev told test-ban negotiator Averell Harriman that Kennedy had given "the greatest speech by any American president since Roosevelt." The Soviet leader responded by proposing to Kennedy that they consider a limited test ban encompassing the atmosphere, outer space and water, as a way to get around the thorny issue of inspections.

In contrast, Kennedy's AU speech was greeted with condescension and skepticism by the New York Times, which reported: "Generally there was not much optimism in official Washington that the President's conciliation address at American University would produce agreement on a test ban treaty or anything else."

### A 'Complex'

In giving pride of place to his rejection of "Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war," Kennedy threw down the gauntlet to the "military-industrial complex" against which President Dwight Eisenhower had pointedly warned in his Farewell Address:

"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, but the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

Ike got that right. Then, as now, the military-industrial complex was totally dependent on a "Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war." It was policed by the Pentagon and was/is a hugely profitable enterprise.

Opposition coalesced around the negotiations toward a test ban treaty, with strong opponents in Congress, the media, and (surprise, surprise!) the military-industrial complex. Kennedy courageously kept his warmongering senior military out of the loop, and rushed Harriman through the talks in Moscow.

On July 25, 1963, Harriman initialed the final text of a Limited Test Ban Treaty outlawing nuclear tests "in the atmosphere, beyond its limits, including outer space, or under water, including territorial waters or high seas."

The next evening, Kennedy went on TV, using his bully pulpit to appeal for support for ratification of the treaty. In a swipe at the various players in the formidable anti-treaty lobby, the President stressed that the vulnerability of children was a strong impetus to his determination to fight against all odds: "This is for our children and our grandchildren, and they have no lobby here in Washington."

But the Establishment was not moved; and seldom have its anxieties been more transparent. It is axiomatic that peace is not good for business, but seldom do you see that in a headline. But the plaintive title of a U.S. News and World Report on Aug. 12, 1963, was "If Peace Does Come What Happens to Business?" The article asked, "Will the bottom drop out if defense spending is cut?"

Kennedy circumvented the military-industrial complex by enlisting the Citizens Committee led by Norman Cousins, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, and



prominent religious leaders among others to appeal for ratification. In early August, Kennedy told his advisers he believed it would take a near-miracle to get the two-thirds Senate vote needed. On Sept. 24, the Senate ratified the treaty by a vote of 80 to 19.

I am indebted to James Douglass and his masterful *JFK and the Unspeakable; Why He Died & Why It Matters*, for much of the play-by-play in that whirlwind rush to ratification. Douglass argues persuasively, in my view, that Kennedy's bold move toward carving out a more peaceful strategic relationship with the Soviet Union, first announced on June 10 at American University, was one of the main factors that sealed his fate.

### **An Obama Complex**

While it's true that comparisons can be invidious, they can also be instructive. Will President Obama ever be able to summon the courage to face down the military-industrial complex and other powerful Establishment forces? Or is it simply (and sadly) the case that he simply does not have it in him?

Referring to Obama's anemic flip-flopping on Ukraine, journalist Robert Parry wrote that Obama's policy on Ukraine suggests that he (1) believes his own propaganda, (2) is a conscious liar, or (3) has completely lost his bearings, and simply adopts the position of the last person he talks to.

I see as the primary factor a toxic, enervating mix of fear and cowardice. Former Air Force Col. Morris Davis, who quit his job as chief prosecutor at Guantanamo when ordered to accept testimony based on waterboarding under the Bush administration, may have come close with his unusual burst of military-style candor.

Davis told an interviewer: "There's a pair of testicles somewhere between the Capitol Building and the White House that fell off the President after Election Day [2008]."

Shortly before his re-election in 2012, Obama reportedly was braced at a small dinner party by wealthy donors who wanted to know whatever happened to the "progressive Obama." The President did not take kindly to the criticism, rose from the table, and said, "Don't you remember what happened to Dr. King?"

It is, of course, a fair question as to whether Obama should have run for President if he knew such fears might impinge on his freedom of decision. But let's ask the other question: What did happen to Martin Luther King Jr.? Would you believe that the vast majority of Americans know only that he was killed and have no idea as to who killed him and why?

In late 1999, a trial took place in Memphis not far from where King was murdered. In a wrongful death lawsuit initiated by the King family, 70 witnesses testified over a six-week period. They described a sophisticated government plot that involved the FBI, the CIA, the Memphis Police, Mafia intermediaries, and an Army Special Forces sniper team. The 12 jurors, six black and six white, returned after 2 ½ hours of deliberation with a verdict that Dr. King has been assassinated by a conspiracy that included agencies of his own government.

My hunch is that Obama walks around afraid, and that this helps explain why he feels he has to kowtow to the worst kind of thugs and liars lingering in his own administration the torturers, the perjurers, and the legerdemain lawyers who can even make waterboarding, which Obama publicly condemned as torture, magically legal. So far at least, Obama has been no profile in courage and he's nearly 6 ½ years into his presidency.

I have two suggestions for him today. Let him take a few minutes to read and reflect on President Kennedy's American University speech of 52 years ago. And let him also reflect on the words of Fannie Lou Hamer the diminutive but gutsy civil rights organizer of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and of Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964:

"Sometimes it seems like to tell the truth today is to run the risk of being killed. But if I fall, I'll fall five feet four inches forward in the fight for freedom."

Obama has a nine-inch height advantage over Fannie Lou Hamer; he needs somehow to assimilate a bit of her courage.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Can Obama Speak Strongly for Peace?](#)"]

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an Army Infantry/Intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for 30 years from the administration of John Kennedy to that of George H. W. Bush.**

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## The Saudi Finger-pointing at Iran

Parroting Israel and Saudi Arabia, much of Official Washington blames Iran for the current instability across the Mideast, but that may rank as one of the most inside-out explanations imaginable, as Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett explain.

By Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett

Riyadh's increasingly destructive war in Yemen has sparked overripe discussion in Western capitals about Iran's use of "proxies" to subvert otherwise "legitimate" Middle Eastern governments. Driving such discussion is a self-serving narrative, promoted by Israel as well as by Saudi Arabia, about Tehran's purported quest to "destabilize" and, ultimately, "take over" the region.

Assessments of this sort have, of course, been invoked to justify, and elicit Western support for, Saudi intervention in Yemen. More broadly, the Israeli-Saudi narrative about Iranian ambitions is framed to prevent the United States from concluding a nuclear deal with Tehran, or, failing that, to keep Washington from using a deal as a springboard for comprehensively realigning U.S.-Iranian relations.

Determination to forestall Iran's international normalization by hyping its "hegemonic" regional agenda was on lurid display in Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's much-watched [March 3, 2015 address](#) to the U.S. Congress. As Netanyahu warned his audience, "Backed by Iran, Shiite militias are rampaging through Iraq. Backed by Iran, Houthis are seizing Yemen, threatening the strategic straits at the mouth of the Red Sea. Iran is busy gobbling up the Middle East."

Two days after Netanyahu spoke in Washington, then-Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal [offered](#) Riyadh's version of this narrative, stressing Iran's "interference in affairs of Arab countries." With U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry beside him, Saud recapitulated a reading of Tehran's regional strategy regularly expounded by Saudi elites:

"We are, of course, worried about atomic energy and atomic bombs. But we're equally concerned about nature of action and hegemonistic tendencies that Iran has in the region. These elements are the elements of instability in the region. We see Iran involved in Syria and Lebanon and Yemen and Iraq. Iran is taking over [Iraq]. It promotes terrorism and occupies lands. These are not the features of countries which want peace and seek to improve relations with neighboring countries."

Given all that is at stake in the Middle East, it is important to look soberly at claims by Israel, Saudi Arabia and their surrogates about Iran "gobbling up" the region. Sober evaluation starts by thinking through, in a fact-based way, how Iranian strategy, including its "proxy" component, actually works. It also entails dispassionate examination of what really concerns Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states about Iran's regional role.

## Playing Defense

Since the 1979 revolution that ended monarchical rule in Iran and created the Islamic Republic, Iranian strategy has been fundamentally defensive. Unlike other Middle Eastern powers, or the United States, for that matter, the Islamic Republic has never attacked another state or even threatened to do so.

The revolutionaries who ousted the last shah promised to restore Iran's real sovereignty after a century and a half of rule by puppet regimes beholden to external powers. From the Islamic Republic's founding, its leaders have viewed the United States, the world's superpower, whose ambitions to consolidate a highly militarized, pro-American political and security order in the Middle East condition it to oppose independent power centers there, as the biggest threat to fulfilling this revolutionary commitment.

After the United States, Iranian policymakers have seen Israel, a U.S. ally with aspirations to military dominance in its neighborhood, as a serious threat to the Islamic Republic's security and strategic position.

Tehran has also been deeply concerned about Saudi Arabia leveraging its ties to Washington to advance its intensely anti-Iranian agenda, including the arming and funding of violently anti-Shi'a groups like al-Qa'ida and the Taliban.

The Islamic Republic's leaders have designed its foreign policy and national security strategy to preserve Iran's territorial and political integrity in the face of these threats. The aim is not to establish Iran's regional hegemony; it is to prevent any other regional or extra-regional power from attaining hegemony over Iran's strategic environment.

Even the U.S. Defense Department acknowledges the defensive character of Iranian strategy; as a recent Pentagon report puts it, "Iran's military doctrine is defensive. It is designed to deter an attack, survive an initial strike, retaliate against an aggressor, and force a diplomatic solution to hostilities while avoiding any concessions that challenge its core interests."

Leaving aside intentions, there is the more objective matter of the Islamic Republic's capabilities to perpetrate aggression in its regional neighborhood. Simply put, Iran today has effectively no capacity to project significant conventional military power beyond its borders.

To be sure, the revolutionaries who took power in 1979 inherited the last shah's U.S.-built military. But Washington cut off logistical and technical support shortly after the revolution, a debilitating measure exacerbated by an embargo on military transfers from most other countries as the fledgling Islamic Republic fought off, from 1980 to 1988, a (U.S.-and Saudi-backed) war of

aggression by Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

After the war, Iran shifted resources from the military into reconstruction and development, reducing its conventional military capabilities to marginal levels. Today, the United States spends almost 70 times more on its military than Iran does. Saudi Arabia, with one-quarter Iran's population, spends over five times as much; the GCC collectively spends eight times as much.

### **Cultivating "Proxies"**

Given these realities, assertions that the Islamic Republic poses an offensive threat to its neighbors are baseless; to borrow a phrase from the U.S. Army, Iran won't be parking its tanks in anybody's front yard anytime soon.

To protect Iran's territorial and political integrity, the Islamic Republic has developed increasingly robust capabilities for asymmetric defense and deterrence that it can credibly threaten to use in response to aggression against it. Among these capabilities are ballistic missiles armed with conventional explosives and a range of interrelated systems, anti-ship missiles, submarines, mine-laying systems, and large numbers of small "fast attack" boats, to disrupt Persian Gulf shipping, including both U.S. warships and vessels transporting oil.

Even with such capabilities, threats to the Islamic Republic's security and independence are magnified by what military planners call "lack of strategic depth." Iran today has land, maritime and littoral borders with 15 states. None is a natural ally; most have been hostile to the idea of an Islamic republic in Iran.

Many of the Islamic Republic's neighbors and other states in its regional environment are also susceptible to co-optation as anti-Iranian platforms by America, Israel and/or Saudi Arabia. To compensate, Tehran has cultivated ties to sympathetic constituencies in other states open to cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

The Islamic Republic has made a point of aligning with constituencies systematically marginalized by their countries' existing power structures: Shi'a majorities in Iraq and Bahrain; Lebanon's Shi'a plurality; Shi'a and anti-Taliban Sunnis in Afghanistan; Zaidis in Yemen; Iraqi Kurds; occupied Palestinians.

By helping such communities organize to press their grievances more effectively, Tehran creates options for influencing on-the-ground developments in contested venues across the Islamic Republic's strategic environment.

For more than three decades, Tehran's proxy partnerships have helped it push

back against hostile initiatives, e.g., U.S. military intervention in Lebanon, Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon, Saudi-backed expansion of Taliban control in Afghanistan, Saddam's antagonism toward the Islamic Republic, U.S. occupation of Iraq, that threatened Iran's strategic position.

They have also enabled Tehran to reduce the chances that nearby states, Lebanon, Afghanistan, post-Saddam Iraq, Bahrain (where America's Fifth Fleet is based), will again be used as platforms to attack the Islamic Republic or otherwise undermine its security and independence.

Over time, these payoffs from the proxy component of the Islamic Republic's regional strategy are amplified by Iranian allies' political gains. Given the chance, Iran's partners have repeatedly shown themselves capable of winning elections in their local settings, and winning them for the right reasons: because they represent unavoidable constituencies with legitimate grievances.

Tehran doesn't manufacture its partners by paying people as mercenaries. It didn't create Iraq's Shi'a majority, or Bahrain's; it didn't create Lebanon's Shi'a plurality, occupied Palestinians, or the Zaidis in Yemen. But Iranian support for these communities means that any expansion in political participation in their countries empowers Tehran's allies.

### **A New Middle Eastern "Cold War"**

It is this aspect of Iranian strategy that most alarms Saudi Arabia, some other GCC states, and Israel. Today, neither Saudi Arabia nor Israel truly represents most of those it governs. Neither can endorse more participatory politics in the region; neither can endorse proliferation of regional states genuinely committed to foreign policy independence.

This also means that neither can exercise positive political influence to facilitate conflict resolution in contested regional arenas; on their own, Israel and Saudi Arabia can only make things worse.

This is why, when U.S. forces invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam in 2003, Saudi Arabia played a critical role in funding and organizing Sunni insurgents there, in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to forestall a more representative political order which Iraq's Shi'a majority would inevitably dominate.

This is also why Riyadh viewed the outbreak of the Arab Awakening in late 2010, which Tehran welcomed, as a mortal threat. The Saudi response has been:

to undermine Sunni movements, like the Muslim Brotherhood, prepared to compete for power in elections;

to build up violent jihadi groups, including groups that have aligned with al-Qa'ida and coalesced into the Islamic State, as alternatives to the Brotherhood; and

to co-opt popular demands for reform by coercively intervening, including through jihadi proxies, in Libya, Syria, and now Yemen, with disastrous humanitarian and political consequences.

As it has done these things, Riyadh has reframed political struggles around the region in starkly sectarian, anti-Iranian/anti-Shi'a terms. This is especially striking *vis-à-vis* the Syrian conflict. Saudi intervention in Syria ensured that jihadis, many non-Syrian, dominate opposition ranks, killing any potential Brotherhood role in leading anti-Assad forces.

It also turned what began as indigenous protests over particular grievances into a heavily militarized (and illegal) campaign against a UN member state's recognized government, but with a popular base too small either to bring down that government or to negotiate a settlement with it.

In the process, Saudi Arabia has exploited Tehran's support for Syria's government to swing the balance of opinion in Sunni publics, which had increasingly seen the Islamic Republic as championing more participatory politics and resistance to U.S. and Israeli hegemony, against Iran.

The turn in Sunni attitudes gives Riyadh political cover to double down on supporting violent jihadis, as with Saudi backing for a new "Conflict Army," organized around the al-Qa'ida-affiliated Jabhat an-Nusra, that recently captured a major Syrian city.

### **Deconstructing the Yemen War**

These dynamics are fueling a new Saudi-Iranian/Sunni-Shi'a "Cold War" in the Middle East; Saudi military action has made Yemen an important battleground in this wider contest.

In Yemen, Tehran has followed its established strategic template of helping an unavoidable constituency with legitimate grievances, the Houthis and Ansar Allah, based in the country's non-Sunni Zaidi community, organize to press for a meaningful share of power. And the roots of Riyadh's current campaign against the Houthis go back to the Arab Awakening's early days.

Following the ouster of Tunisian's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, peaceful mass protests calling for the removal of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh broke out in Sana'a and other Yemeni cities. Ansar Allah, which had been prosecuting a relatively successful revolt in north Yemen against Saleh's rule

before agreeing to a ceasefire in 2010, endorsed the demonstrations; it also joined other anti-Saleh groups in a so-called National Dialogue, set up to lay the foundations for a more representative and regionally federalized political order.

As pressure for change mounted, Saudi Arabia, determined to perpetuate the Zaidis' marginalization, set out to thwart Yemenis' manifest desire to replace Saleh's autocracy with more representative and participatory political structures.

In particular, Riyadh worked to block implementation of the National Dialogue agenda by engineering Saleh's replacement by his then-vice president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. To this end, the Saudis upped financial support to intensely sectarian Sunni salafi groups while undercutting the more moderate, Muslim Brotherhood-related Islah party, including by designating Islah as a terrorist group.

These steps ensured that no Sunni party was empowered to work with Ansar Allah and the Houthis to stand up a new, more representative political order; in the end, Hadi was the only candidate on the ballot for Yemen's February 2012 presidential election. Riyadh also worked to exclude Iran from the group of regional states ostensibly set up to help Yemen chart its political future.

Faced with these provocations, Ansar Allah and the Houthis renewed their military campaign against the central government in late 2011; their military gains accelerated over the next two-and-a-half years. Hadi's provisional term expired in 2014, two years after his February 2012 election.

By that point, support for Hadi had crumbled, in no small part because of popular perceptions that he was a U.S. puppet collaborating with America's ongoing "counter-terrorism" campaign in Yemen, including high-profile drone strikes killing large numbers of civilians.

In early 2015, Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia. Left with no political options for imposing its preferences on Yemen, Riyadh launched military operations in March 2015, appealing not only to its Western backers for support but also to Sunni publics to back its leadership of a millennial holy war against infidel Shi'a.

### **Defusing Crises**

Ansar Allah says it wants to realize the vision of the National Dialogue, but lacks sufficient support across Yemen to do this on its own. Tehran, for its part, has long recognized that there ultimately has to be a political solution in Yemen, based on a negotiated settlement among the country's disparate regional, tribal, and sectarian elements.



Since the start of the Saudi military campaign, the Islamic Republic has stressed the need for a negotiated resolution to the conflict, just as it has consistently held that a political settlement is the only way to end the conflict in Syria. It is Riyadh that rejects negotiation, regarding Yemen or Syria, unless it can, in effect, dictate outcomes in advance. In Yemen, as in Syria, Saudi actions are now enabling al-Qa'ida to make territorial gains.

Looking ahead, creating a genuinely more stable Middle East will require wider recognition of how dangerous the Saudi-stoked "Cold War" really is, and how much more damage it could do to an already severely stressed region. It will also require deeper appreciation of Iran's regional importance, and of the indispensability of its influence to putting the Middle East on a more positive long-term trajectory.

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## Israel Seeks to Criminalize Criticism

Facing growing condemnation for anti-Palestinian racism, Israel has gone from accusing its critics of anti-Semitism to exploring ways to criminalize a boycott movement intended to create a real democracy for Jews and Arabs, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

From the 1920s on into the 1990s, the Zionists controlled the storyline in the West on the Israel-Palestine conflict. This meant that their version of history was the only version as far as most of the people in the West were concerned.

Consequentially, they had an uncontested media field to label the Palestinians and their supporters as "terrorists" – the charge of anti-Semitism was not yet widely used. Also, as a consequence of their monopoly, the Zionists did not bother to engage in public debate.

Then, over the last 20 years the Zionists slowly lost their monopoly. In part this was due to the fact that in 1993 the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist and renounced terrorism, and in the following years many of the Arab states made or offered peace. However, the Israelis did not respond in kind. In particular they failed to respond in a fair and just way to U.S.-sponsored peace efforts. Why so?

The answer to why the Israelis did not, in good faith, take up multiple historic opportunities to make peace with the Palestinians lies in the very nature of the Zionist movement. From its beginning, and certainly from the establishment of the State of Israel, Zionism has been driven by dreams of colonial expansion and religious exclusiveness.

Each of these goals is seen as part of Zionism's God-given mission, and they still prevail.

Professor David Schulman of Hebrew University, writing in the *New York Review of Books* (April 23, 2015), describes the consequences of this situation, "the Israeli electorate is still dominated by hyper-nationalist, in some cases proto-fascist, figures. It is no way inclined to make peace. It has given a clear mandate for policies that will further deepen Israel's colonial venture."

As a consequence, Israel's credibility with an increasing number of people in the West has eroded. This erosion led to a relatively short period of time in the early 2000s when the Zionists attempted to counter the situation by engaging with their critics in public debate. However, the majority of time they lost.

Israel's barbarous behavior on the ground, combined with the fact that their historical version of events was shown to be full of holes, condemned them to an increasingly weak defensive position. This proved to be intolerable to the Zionists, so they withdrew from the debating field.

And, as they did, they began to level charges of anti-Semitism against their critics, even those who are Jewish. These accusations of the worst sort of racism have been with us ever since – which is really ironic because much of what Israel is being criticized for is its own racist, apartheid nature.

This was an important change in tactics for Israel because it opened the way to misusing Western laws to Israel's advantage. Just as the charge of terrorism has often been misused in a broad and sweeping manner (for instance, leveled against non-violent supporters of Palestinian charitable organizations), so the charge of anti-Semitism can potentially be used in an almost unlimited fashion by over-aggressive, pro-Zionist Western prosecutors against any critic of Israeli behavior.

## The Boycott Movement

In the West, much of the organized criticism of Israel now comes from campaigns aimed at promoting Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) of the Zionist state.

So robust has the BDS movement grown that Gilad Erdan, Israel's newly appointed Minister of Public Security, Strategic Affairs, and Public Diplomacy, has described it as one of the most "urgent issues" facing Israel. Israel's president, Reuven Rivlin, has described the developing academic boycott, just one part of BDS, as a "strategic threat of the first order."

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has taken it upon himself to set the tone of Israel's counter-attack on BDS. He has declared that there is an "international campaign to blacken Israel's name" and he alleges that it is not motivated by Israel's policies toward the Palestinians but rather seeks to "delegitimize Israel and deny our very right to live here."

In other words, he is claiming that present criticism of Israel is really an attack on its existence, and not on its behavior. For Netanyahu this has to be a form of anti-Semitism.

As Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the PLO executive committee, describes Netanyahu's argument, "If you criticize me you are anti-Semitic. If you accept any kind of punitive measure or sanctions against Israel, you want to destroy Israel." That is how the prime minister avoids confronting the facts.

As bad as this is, it gets even worse. Declaring the goal of BDS to be the elimination of Israel allows the Zionists to use their influence with Western legislators to make cooperation with the boycott subject to penalties.

In the United States, AIPAC, the most powerful of the Zionist lobbies, is working on legislation similar to that used against Iran and also the Arab boycott of Israel in the 1970s. This legislation would penalize businesses, both at home and abroad, that favorably respond to calls for boycott.

If this works we can expect the Zionists to go further and try to subvert the U.S. Constitution's free speech provisions and then go after individuals as well as businesses. In this regard, efforts are also under way in Canada and France.

## Money Magic

Finally, there is the assumption that money can destroy Israel's critics. This is a special belief of Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire casino magnate and enthusiastic backer of Netanyahu.

Adelson has taken aim at activity critical of Israel on U.S. college campuses. In the first week of June 2015, he and his supporters convened a "Campus Maccabees Summit," the purpose of which was "to develop the conceptual framework for the anti-BDS action plan [on college campuses], assign roles and responsibilities to pro-Israel organizations, and create the appropriate command-and-control system to implement it."

Fifty activist Zionist organizations attended the conference, as did 20 donors, each of whom pledged \$1 million to the cause over the next two years.

Prime Minister Netanyahu personifies the problem with Zionist thinking. He is wholly self-centered and seemingly incapable of recognizing, much less taking responsibility for, Israel's racist behavior. Thus, with the Zionists having spent the last 100 years planning and then actually doing what was needed to deny as many non-Jews as possible the "very right to live in" Palestine, Netanyahu now accuses others of doing the same thing to him and his kin – and labels it a criminal act.

The truth is that most Western critics, including supporters of BDS, are not trying to kick the Jews out of Israel. They are trying to bring maximum pressure on the Israeli government to stop kicking non-Jews out, to stop territorial expansion in violation of international law, and to start acting like the democratic state it so questionably claims to be.

Speaking strictly for myself, I don't believe any of these goals are possible unless Zionism is in fact kicked out of what is now Israel. That is, the ideology that drives Israeli racism and colonial expansion must be done away with, in the same way that apartheid was brought down in South Africa. That did not result in South Africa being destroyed or all white South Africans being deported. But it did result in a democracy being imported. The same scenario is necessary for Israel.

No doubt many Israelis and their supporters would equate this goal of extirpating Zionism with promoting another Holocaust. This is not so, but they are scared enough to label the effort of bringing a real democracy to Israel as anti-Semitic, and to try to get it declared illegal in the West.

Finally, besides the public outcry over anti-Semitism, the Zionists are working behind closed doors – the closed doors of American state and federal legislatures and university board rooms – where they do not have to face serious debate. This might prove the most dangerous of their maneuvers. For behind closed doors the Zionist monopoly resurfaces and truth is all the easier to suppress.

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## The Demonization of Iran

Ever since Iran made it on to the neocon "regime change" list, its actions have been put through the special prism of demonization that is reserved for U.S. "enemies." Now, those exaggerations and distortions are obstructing an agreement to constrain Iran's nuclear program, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

As the nuclear negotiations with Iran enter what may be their final lap, diehard opponents of any agreement with Tehran have been leaning more heavily than ever on the theme that Iran is a nasty actor in the Middle East intent on doing all manner of nefarious things in the region.

Insofar as the theme is not just an effort to generate distaste for having any dealings with the Iranian regime and purports to have a connection with the nuclear agreement, the idea is that the sanctions relief that will be part of the agreement will give Iran more resources to do still more nefarious stuff in the region.

Several considerations invalidate this notion, just on the face of it, as a reason to oppose the nuclear agreement. The chief one is that if Iran really were intent on doing awful, destructive things in its neighborhood, that would be all the more reason to ensure it does not build a nuclear weapon, which is what the agreement being negotiated is all about.

Another consideration is that if the United States were to leave in place economic sanctions that supposedly were erected for reasons related to Iran's nuclear program, and to leave them in place to deny Iran resources to do other things, the United States would be telling not only Iran but also the rest of the world that the United States is a liar.

The United States would have lied when it said that it had imposed these sanctions for the purpose of inducing concessions regarding Iran's nuclear policy. The damage to U.S. credibility whenever the United States attempts in the future to use sanctions to induce policy change should be obvious.

Interestingly, calls to keep current sanctions in place to deny funding for Iranian regional activities are coming from some of the same quarters that call for putting even more of an economic squeeze on Iran to get a “better deal.” This position is contradictory.

If the United States were to demonstrate that it is not going to remove existing sanctions in return for Iran’s concessions on its nuclear program, the Iranians would have no reason to believe that still more concessions on their part would bring the removal of still more sanctions, and thus they would not make any more concessions.

An invalid assumption underlying the argument about freeing up resources is that the Iranians’ regional policy is narrowly determined by how many rials they have in their bank account. This assumption contradicts, by the way, the assertion commonly made, again by some of the same quarters, that Iranian leaders are far from being green eyeshade types who do such careful calculations and instead are irrational religious fanatics who cannot be trusted with advanced technology let alone with a nuclear weapon.

In any case, with Iran just as with other states, foreign policy is a function of many calculations of what is or is not in their national interest, and not just a matter of the available financial resources.

A related unwarranted assumption is each additional rial that does become available to the Iranians they will spend on regional shenanigans that we won’t like. That assumption is never supported by any analysis; it just gets tossed into discussion to be taken for granted.

If analysis is instead applied to the topic, a much different conclusion is reached; that Iran is far more likely to apply freed resources to domestic needs. This is a straightforward matter of political calculations and political survival, not only for President Hassan Rouhani but for other Iranian leaders who are acutely aware of the demands and expectations of the Iranian people in this regard.

But set aside for the moment all the logical inconsistencies and other reasons to reject the notion of an Iranian regional marauder as a reason to oppose the nuclear agreement. Focus instead on the image of an Iran whose current regional policy supposedly is already an assortment of destructive activities. This image has become the kind of conventional wisdom that repeatedly gets invoked (even, in this instance, by supporters of the nuclear agreement) without any felt need by those who invoke it to provide any supporting facts or analysis because it is taken for granted that everyone “knows” it to be true.

The references to the image are almost always vague and general, couched in terms of Iran supposedly “destabilizing” the Middle East or seeking to “dominate” it or exercise “hegemony” over it, or that it is “on the march” to take over the region. Often there are references to “terrorism” and “subversion” without anything more specific being offered. Often the names of conflict-ridden countries in the region are recited, but again without any specifics as to who is doing what in those countries.

To get away from such uselessly general accusations, ask: (1) what *exactly* is Iran doing in the Middle East that is of concern; and (2) how does what Iran is doing differ from what other states are doing in the same places? A careful comparison of this sort leads to the conclusion that Iran, contrary to the conventional wisdom, does not stand out in doing aggressive, destabilizing or hegemonic things.

Iran is one of the largest states in the Middle East and naturally, as with any such state, competes for influence in its region. To try to keep any such state, be it Iran or any other, from competing for such influence would be futile and damaging in its own right.

To label Iranian policy as seeking “hegemony” or “domination” is only that, i.e., applying a label, when others are using more forceful and destructive ways of trying to extend their own influence in the same places. Iran, unlike others, has not launched wars or invaded neighboring territory (except in counterattacking during the war with Iraq that Saddam Hussein started). Nor has Iran drawn, China-like, any nine-dash lines and asserted unsupported domination over swaths of its own region.

The assumption that just about anything Iran does in the Middle East is contrary to U.S. interests keeps getting made despite what should be the glaringly obvious counterexample of the war in Iraq. Iran and the United States are on the same side there. They both are supporting the government of Iraq in trying to push back the radical group generally known as ISIS.

Why should Iran’s part of this effort be called part of regional trouble-making, while the U.S. part of it is given some more benign description? Those in the United States who would rather not face that counterexample are usually quick to mutter something like, “Yes, but the Iranians are doing this for their own malign purposes of spreading their influence in Iraq.”

The first thing to note in response to such muttering is that if we are worried about increased Iranian influence in Iraq, that increase is due chiefly not to anything the Iranians have done but rather to a war of choice that the United States initiated.

The next thing is to ask on behalf of what interests the Iranians would use their influence in Iraq, and how that relates to U.S. interests. The preeminent Iranian objective regarding Iraq is to avoid anything resembling the incredibly costly Iran-Iraq War, and to have a regime in Baghdad, preferably friendly to Iran, but at least not hostile to it, that would not launch such a conflict again.

Iran also does not want endless instability along its long western border, and its leaders are smart enough to realize that narrowly prejudicial sectarian politics are not a prescription for stability. These lines of thinking are consistent with U.S. interests; it is not only in the current fight against ISIS that U.S. and Iranian interests converge.

Look carefully also at another conflict-ridden Middle Eastern state whose name often gets casually invoked: Yemen. Iran and the United States are not on the same side of this civil war, although the United States probably has as much explaining to do as to why it has taken the side it has, the same side as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the most capable and threatening Al-Qaeda branch operating today, as Iran does.

Iran has become identified with the side of the rebellious Houthi movement, although the most prominent Yemeni leader on the same side as the Houthis is Ali Abdullah Saleh, who as the Yemeni president for more than 30 years was seen as *our* guy in Yemen, not the Iranians' guy.

Iran did not instigate the Houthi rebellion, nor are the Houthis accurately described as "clients" of Iran much less "proxies," as they often inaccurately are. Instead Iran was probably a source of restraint in advising the Houthis not to capture the capital of Sanaa, although the Houthis went ahead and did it anyway.

The Iranians probably are glad to see the Saudis bleed some in Yemen, and whatever aid Tehran has given to the Houthis was given with that in mind. But any such aid pales in comparison to the extent and destructiveness of the Saudis' intervention in Yemen, which has included aerial assaults that have caused many hundreds of civilian casualties.

In the same vein consider Bahrain, which is an interesting case given historical Iranian claims to Bahrain and past Iranian activity there. Despite that background and despite Bahraini government accusations, there is an absence of reliable evidence of anything in recent years that could accurately be described as Iranian subversion in Bahrain.

Instead it is again the Saudis who have used forceful methods to exert their



influence on a neighbor, and in this case to prop up an unpopular Sunni regime in a Shia majority country. The principal Saudi military intervention in Bahrain came a few years ago, but it was an early shot in a campaign that has taken fuller shape under King Salman to use any available means, including military force, to expand Saudi influence in the region.

If there is a Persian Gulf power that has been using damaging methods to try to become a regional hegemon, it is Saudi Arabia, not Iran.

The Saudis could claim to be acting on behalf of a status quo in Bahrain and Yemen, but then what about Syria, where it is Iran that is backing the existing regime? And as perhaps the most germane question, how can any one of the outside players that have mucked into that incredibly complicated civil war be singled out as a destabilizing regional marauder while the others (some of whom, such as the United States and Israel, have conducted their own airstrikes in the country) be given the benefit of more benign labeling?

Iran did not start the Syrian war. And each of the most significant sides fighting that war are dominated by what we normally would consider certifiable bad guys: the Assad regime, ISIS, and an Islamist coalition led by the local Al-Qaeda branch. It is hard to see a clear and convincing basis for parceling out benign and malign labeling here when it comes to the outside players.

Then of course there is the rest of the Levantine part of the region, including Palestine; the aid relationships that Iran has had with the H groups, Hezbollah and Hamas, are continually invoked in any litany of Iranian regional activity. Lebanese Hezbollah certainly is still an important ally of Iran, although it has long since become strong enough to outgrow any Iranian hand-holding.

We should never forget that prior to 9/11 Hezbollah was the group that had more U.S. blood on its hands through terrorism than any other group. We also should understand that Hezbollah has become a major player in Lebanese politics in a way in which many in the region, including its immediate political opponents, accept it as a legitimate political actor. Right now as a military actor it is deeply involved in the effort to support the Syrian regime, and it is not looking to stir up any new wars or instability anywhere else.

Hamas has never been anything remotely resembling a proxy of Iran, although it has accepted, somewhat reluctantly, Iranian aid in the absence of other help. To Iran, Hamas represents Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation of (or blockading and subjugation of) Palestinian territory, without being an accessory to that occupation, which is how the Palestinian Authority is widely seen.

Hamas is the winner of the last free Palestinian election, and it has repeatedly

made clear that its ambition is to hold political power among Palestinians and that it is willing to maintain a long-term truce with Israel. Right now Hamas is trying, unfortunately with only partial success, to keep small groups from overturning the current cease-fire with rocket firings into Israel.

Again, none of this is a conflict that Iran has instigated or that Iran is stirring up or escalating. Iran is not the cause of the instability that already reigns. And the broader opposition to continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory is opposition that Iran shares with many others, including the whole Arab world.

As long as we are looking at this part of the region, it is impossible to escape notice that Iran does not hold a candle to Israel when it comes to forcefully throwing weight around in the neighborhood in damaging and destabilizing ways, even without considering the occupation of the West Bank. This has included multiple armed invasions of neighboring territory as well as other actions, such as the attack on Iraq years ago that stimulated Iraq to speed up its program to develop nuclear weapons.

And before we leave the Middle East as a whole, it also is impossible to escape notice that the single most destabilizing action in the region over the past couple of decades was the U.S. launch of a war of aggression in Iraq in 2003. Iran certainly has done nothing like that.

The ritualistically repeated notion that Iran is wreaking instability all over the region is a badly mistaken myth. There are important respects in which Iranian policies and actions do offend U.S. interests, but protection of those interests is not helped by perpetuating myths.

Perpetuation of this particular myth has several deleterious effects. The most immediate and obvious one is to corrupt debate over the nuclear deal. Another is to foster broader misunderstanding about Iranian behavior and intentions that threatens to corrupt debate over other issues as well.

Yet another consequence involves a failure to understand fully that every state competes for influence. Such efforts to compete are called *foreign policy*. It would be in our own interests for other states to wage that competition through peaceful and legitimate means.

By misrepresenting who is doing what, and through what means, in the Middle East today, the myth about Iranian behavior maintains a constituency for isolating and ostracizing Iran, which makes it less, not more, likely that Iran, so ostracized, will use peaceful and legitimate means to pursue its interests in the future.

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## Cold War II to McCarthyism II

**Exclusive:** With Cold War II in full swing, the New York Times is dusting off what might be called McCarthyism II, the suggestion that anyone who doesn't get in line with U.S. propaganda must be working for Moscow, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Perhaps it's no surprise that the U.S. government's plunge into Cold War II would bring back the one-sided propaganda themes that dominated Cold War I, but it's still unsettling to see how quickly the major U.S. news media has returned to the old ways, especially the New York Times, which has emerged as Official Washington's propaganda vehicle of choice.

What has been most striking in the behavior of the Times and most other U.S. mainstream media outlets is their utter lack of self-awareness, for instance, accusing Russia of engaging in propaganda and alliance-building that are a pale shadow of what the U.S. government routinely does. Yet, the Times and the rest of the MSM act as if these actions are unique to Moscow.

A case in point is Monday's front-page story in the Times entitled "Russia Wields Aid and Ideology Against West to Fight Sanctions," which warns: "Moscow has brought to bear different kinds of weapons, according to American and European officials: money, ideology and disinformation."

The [article](#) by Peter Baker and Steven Erlanger portrays the U.S. government as largely defenseless in the face of this unprincipled Russian onslaught: "Even as the Obama administration and its European allies try to counter Russia's military intervention across its border, they have found themselves struggling at home against what they see as a concerted drive by Moscow to leverage its economic power, finance European political parties and movements, and spread alternative accounts of the conflict."

Like many of the Times' [recent articles](#), this one relies on one-sided accusations from U.S. and European officials and is short on both hard evidence of actual Russian payments and a response from the Russian government to the charges. At the end of the long story, the writers do include one comment from

Brookings Institution scholar, Fiona Hill, a former U.S. national intelligence officer on Russia, noting the shortage of proof.

“The question is how much hard evidence does anyone have?” she asked. But that’s about all a Times’ reader will get if he or she is looking for some balanced reporting.

### **Missing the Obvious**

Still, the more remarkable aspect of the article is how it ignores the much more substantial evidence of the U.S. government and its allies themselves financing propaganda operations and supporting “non-governmental organizations” that promote the favored U.S. policies in countries around the world.

Plus, there’s the failure to recognize that many of Official Washington’s own accounts of global problems have been riddled with propaganda and outright disinformation.

For instance, much of the State Department’s account of the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin attack in Syria turned out to be false or misleading. United Nations inspectors discovered only one rocket carrying sarin not the barrage that U.S. officials had originally alleged and the rocket had a much shorter range than the U.S. government (and the New York Times) claimed. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“NYT Backs Off Its Syria-Sarin Analysis.”](#)]

Then, after the Feb. 22, 2014 U.S.-backed coup in Ukraine, the U.S. government and the Times became veritable founts of propaganda and disinformation. Beyond refusing to acknowledge the key role played by neo-Nazi and other right-wing militias in the coup and subsequent violence, the State Department disseminated information to the Times that later was acknowledged to be false.

In April 2014, the Times published a lead story based on photographs of purported Russian soldiers in Ukraine but had to retract it two days later because it turned out that the State Department had misrepresented where a key photo was taken, destroying the premise of the article. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“NYT Retracts Ukraine Photo Scoop.”](#)]

And sometimes the propaganda came directly from senior U.S. government officials. For instance, on April 29, 2014, Richard Stengel, under secretary of state for public diplomacy, issued a [“Dipnote”](#) that leveled accusations that the Russian network RT was painting “a dangerous and false picture of Ukraine’s legitimate government,” i.e., the post-coup regime that took power after elected President Viktor Yanukovich was driven from office. In this context, Stengel denounced RT as “a distortion machine, not a news organization.”

Though he offered no specific dates and times for the offending RT programs, Stengel did complain about “the unquestioning repetition of the ludicrous assertion that the United States has invested \$5 billion in regime change in Ukraine. These are not facts, and they are not opinions. They are false claims, and when propaganda poses as news it creates real dangers and gives a green light to violence.”

However, RT’s “ludicrous assertion” about the U.S. investing \$5 billion was a clear reference to a public speech by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland to U.S. and Ukrainian business leaders on Dec. 13, 2013, in which she told them that “we have invested more than \$5 billion” in what was needed for Ukraine to achieve its “European aspirations.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Who’s the Propagandist: US or RT?”]

One could go on and on about the U.S. government making false or misleading claims about these and other international crises. But it should be clear that Official Washington doesn’t have clean hands when it comes to propaganda mud-slinging, though you wouldn’t know that from the Times’ article on Monday.

### **Funding Cut-outs**

And, beyond the U.S. government’s direct dissemination of disinformation, the U.S. government also has spread around hundreds of millions of dollars to finance “journalism” organizations, political activists and “non-governmental organizations” that promote U.S. policy goals inside targeted countries. Before the Feb. 22, 2014 coup in Ukraine, there were scores of such operations in the country financed by the National Endowment for Democracy. NED’s budget from Congress exceeds \$100 million a year.

But NED, which has been run by neocon Carl Gershman since its founding in 1983, is only part of the picture. You have many other propaganda fronts operating under the umbrella of the U.S. State Department and its U.S. Agency for International Development. Last May 1, USAID issued a fact sheet summarizing its work financing friendly journalists around the world, including “journalism education, media business development, capacity building for supportive institutions, and strengthening legal-regulatory environments for free media.”

USAID estimated its budget for “media strengthening programs in over 30 countries” at \$40 million annually, including aiding “independent media organizations and bloggers in over a dozen countries,” In Ukraine before the coup, USAID offered training in “mobile phone and website security.”

USAID, working with billionaire George Soros’s Open Society, also funds the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, which engages in

“investigative journalism” that usually goes after governments that have fallen into disfavor with the United States and then are singled out for accusations of corruption. The USAID-funded OCCRP also collaborates with Bellingcat, an online investigative website founded by blogger Eliot Higgins.

Higgins has spread misinformation on the Internet, including discredited claims implicating the Syrian government in the sarin attack in 2013 and directing an Australian TV news crew to what appeared to be the wrong location for a video of a BUK anti-aircraft battery as it supposedly made its getaway to Russia after the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014.

Despite his dubious record of accuracy, Higgins has gained mainstream acclaim, in part, because his “findings” always match up with the propaganda theme that the U.S. government and its Western allies are peddling. Though most genuinely independent bloggers are ignored by the mainstream media, Higgins has found his work touted.

In other words, whatever Russia is doing to promote its side of the story in Europe and elsewhere is more than matched by the U.S. government through its direct and indirect agents of influence. Indeed, during the original Cold War, the CIA and the old U.S. Information Agency refined the art of “information warfare,” including pioneering some of its current features like having ostensibly “independent” entities and cut-outs present the propaganda to a cynical public that rejects much of what it hears from government but may trust “citizen journalists” and “bloggers.”

To top off this modern propaganda structure, we now have the paper-of-record New York Times coming along to suggest that anyone who isn’t disseminating U.S. propaganda must be in Moscow’s pocket. The implication is that now that we have Cold War II, we can expect to have McCarthyism II as well.

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

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## Israel’s ‘Legitimacy’ War

There are legitimate questions about the legitimacy of Israel's endless repression of the Palestinian people, but Israel and its backers have now declared such questions illegitimate as they mount a new propaganda war against Israel's "delegitimization," says John V. Whitbeck.

By John V. Whitbeck

June 5 marked the 48th anniversary of the "preemptive" attack on Egypt with which Israel launched the fateful "Six-Day War" that permitted the Zionist movement to complete its conquest of historical Palestine.

As the "State of Palestine" (the legal designation for the 22 percent of historical Palestine conquered in 1967, which is now recognized as a state by 136 other states and the United Nations) enters its 49th year of an apparently perpetual occupation by the State of Israel, the Israeli government and its friends in the United States are mobilizing to fight a new war a "Legitimacy War" against the "delegitimization" of "Israel."

The quotation marks around "Israel" are intended to emphasize a fundamental point: When Israelis and their friends speak of the "delegitimization" of Israel or of Israel's "right to exist," they are not referring to the legitimacy or continued existence of any physical territory or of any group of people. They are referring to the legitimacy or continued existence of the particular ethno-religious-supremacist political system established in 1948 on the territory previously named Palestine, a territory in which the current population is roughly 50 percent Jewish and 50 percent Palestinian.

Why has "delegitimization" suddenly become such an existential threat to "Israel"?

Until relatively recently, very few people seriously questioned the continued existence of "Israel" either because they considered the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the dispossession and dispersal of the Palestinian people to make room for a "Jewish State" to be a good thing or because they considered it, like the genocide of the indigenous peoples of North America to make room for European colonists and their African slaves, to be a irreversible injustice, not worth thinking about any more.

Until relatively recently, the world's attention has been focused on ending the occupation of the portion of Palestine conquered in 1967, in large part because that more recent injustice was assumed to be reversible through a "two-state solution."

However, as Israeli leaders have become more honest and explicit about the perpetual nature of their occupation of the State of Palestine and about their

deeply held belief that there is no difference between the portion of Palestine conquered in 1948 and the portion of Palestine conquered in 1967, both being their god's gift to them and to them alone, the world's attention has begun to broaden, both regarding the possibilities of the future and regarding the realities of the past.

In the face of the clear Israeli intention to maintain the current undemocratic and discriminatory system of "one state with two systems," many people have started to look again at the seminal injustice, the original sin, of 1948 and at the inherent nature of political Zionism and to think seriously about the desirability of reforming and transforming ethno-religious-supremacist "Israel" into a fully democratic state with equal rights and human dignity for all who live there the same political system which Western governments profess and proclaim to be the ideal form of government for all other states.

Of course, nothing would be more likely to make Israelis question the sustainability of their very comfortable status quo and become seriously interested in actually achieving a decent "two-state solution" than a realization that both Western public opinion and Western governments are starting to question both the "rightness" of how "Israel" came into existence and the legitimacy in the 21st century of an ethno-religious-supremacist regime, whether it calls itself "the Jewish State" or "the Islamic State."

Hence the sudden rise of the existential threat of the "delegitimization" of "Israel." Yet, no one has done more to delegitimize "Israel" in the eyes of the world than Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Perhaps those who seek equal rights, equal human dignity and some measure of justice, whether in two states or in one, should hope that Mr. Netanyahu keeps up his good work in the "Legitimacy War."

**John V. Whitbeck is an international lawyer who as advised the Palestinian negotiating team in negotiations with Israel.**

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