

The Iran-Nuclear Choice

Many Republicans will oppose the Iran-nuclear deal to discredit President Obama and some Democrats will succumb to pressure from Israel, but the ultimate choice is whether politics and pressure will overrule the world's interest in constraining Iran's nuclear program, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Completion of the agreement to restrict the Iranian nuclear program puts into sharp relief the choice for anyone who weighs in on the topic and especially for the U.S. Congress, which will have an opportunity to accept or reject the deal.

Gone is any meaningful kibitzing on how well the negotiators are doing their jobs. Gone are endless speculative permutations of how different issues might be resolved. Gone is conjecturing about how the outline that was the framework agreement announced in April will be fleshed out with detailed terms. The question has been stripped down to a simple and easy-to-understand form: it is a choice between the agreement that has just been announced, and no agreement at all about the Iranian nuclear program.

We can finally get beyond the sterile rhetoric about good deals and bad deals and the vacuous cliché that no deal is better than a bad deal. Comparison between this agreement and no agreement is what determines whether the agreement is bad or good. A good deal is one that is better than no deal; a bad deal is one that is worse.

It has always been a fantasy that a "better deal" than what emerges from these negotiations would somehow be possible. The long, arduous, deadline-extending nature of the negotiations that ended in Vienna makes the notion that something "better" could have been wrung out of the Iranians seem all the more phantasmagorical. Awareness that five other countries besides the United States and Iran are parties to this agreement, and that some of the most recent hard negotiations have taken place within the P5+1, ought further to dispel this notion.

The alternative to the agreement, i.e., no agreement, would mean no restrictions on Iran's nuclear program beyond the basic obligations that apply to Iran as a party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. It would mean that Iran could spin as many centrifuges as it wanted. It would mean Iran would be free to enrich as much uranium as it wanted, to whatever level of enrichment it wanted. It would mean Iran could configure nuclear reactors however it wanted no matter how much plutonium this produced. It would mean an end to unprecedented levels of international monitoring and inspection. It would mean discarding the most

restrictive regimen that any state had ever negotiated to be placed on its own nuclear program.

It is remarkable how, on the very issues on which many opponents of any agreement with Iran claim to be focusing, matters would be much worse if they achieved their goal of killing the agreement. If a supposed problem is, for example, that Iran is being permitted to have too much enrichment infrastructure, it would be worse under the alternative of no agreement, in which Iran could expand that infrastructure without limit.

Or if it is a problem that certain restrictions would be binding for only ten years or so, it would be worse under the no-agreement alternative, in which there would be zero years of restrictions. And so forth.

As the inevitable obfuscation about this agreement ensues over the coming weeks, the public and the Congress need to be reminded of exactly what the choice is, and of how simple and clear that choice is notwithstanding the obfuscation.

And those who argue or vote against the agreement should be held to account for what they in effect are arguing or voting *for*. They should be made to explain to the rest of the country why, whatever may be the true reasons for their opposition, they are supporting a step that would not only kill the best chance for ensuring the Iranian nuclear program remains peaceful but also would *remove* the special restrictions and scrutiny to which that program is subject now. They should be made to explain why, after their endless alarms about Iran's nuclear activity, they are supporting a step that would unleash that activity.

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The Mess that Nuland Made

Exclusive: Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland engineered Ukraine's "regime change" in early 2014 without weighing the likely chaos and consequences. Now, as neo-Nazis turn their guns on the government, it's hard to see how anyone can clean up the mess that Nuland made, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As the Ukrainian army squares off against ultra-right and neo-Nazi militias in

the west and violence against ethnic Russians continues in the east, the obvious folly of the Obama administration's Ukraine policy has come into focus even for many who tried to ignore the facts, or what you might call "the mess that Victoria Nuland made."

Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs "Toria" Nuland was the "mastermind" behind the Feb. 22, 2014 "regime change" in Ukraine, plotting the overthrow of the democratically elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich while convincing the ever-gullible U.S. mainstream media that the coup wasn't really a coup but a victory for "democracy."

To sell this latest neocon-driven "regime change" to the American people, the ugliness of the coup-makers had to be systematically airbrushed, particularly the key role of neo-Nazis and other ultra-nationalists from the Right Sektor. For the U.S.-organized propaganda campaign to work, the coup-makers had to wear white hats, not brown shirts.

So, for nearly a year and a half, the West's mainstream media, especially The New York Times and The Washington Post, twisted their reporting into all kinds of contortions to avoid telling their readers that the new regime in Kiev was permeated by and dependent on neo-Nazi fighters and Ukrainian ultra-nationalists who wanted a pure-blood Ukraine, without ethnic Russians.

Any mention of that sordid reality was deemed "Russian propaganda" and anyone who spoke this inconvenient truth was a "stooge of Moscow." It wasn't until July 7 that the Times admitted the importance of the neo-Nazis and other ultra-nationalists in waging war against ethnic Russian rebels in the east. The Times also reported that these far-right forces had been joined by Islamic militants. Some of those jihadists have been called "brothers" of the hyper-brutal Islamic State.

Though the Times sought to spin this remarkable military alliance neo-Nazi militias and Islamic jihadists as a positive, the reality had to be jarring for readers who had bought into the Western propaganda about noble "pro-democracy" forces resisting evil "Russian aggression."

Perhaps the Times sensed that it could no longer keep the lid on the troubling truth in Ukraine. For weeks, the Right Sektor militias and the neo-Nazi Azov battalion have been warning the civilian government in Kiev that they might turn on it and create a new order more to their liking.

Clashes in the West

Then, on Saturday, violent clashes broke out in the western Ukrainian town of Mukachevo, allegedly over the control of cigarette-smuggling routes. Right

Sektor paramilitaries sprayed police officers with bullets from a belt-fed machinegun, and police backed by Ukrainian government troops returned fire. Several deaths and multiple injuries were reported.

Tensions escalated on Monday with President Petro Poroshenko ordering national security forces to disarm “armed cells” of political movements. Meanwhile, the Right Sektor dispatched reinforcements to the area while other militiamen converged on the capital of Kiev.

While President Poroshenko and Right Sektor leader Dmitry Yarosh may succeed in tamping down this latest flare-up of hostilities, they may be only postponing the inevitable: a conflict between the U.S.-backed authorities in Kiev and the neo-Nazis and other right-wing fighters who spearheaded last year’s coup and have been at the front lines of the fighting against ethnic Russian rebels in the east.

The Ukrainian right-wing extremists feel they have carried the heaviest burden in the war against the ethnic Russians and resent the politicians living in the relative safety and comfort of Kiev. In March, Poroshenko also fired thuggish oligarch Igor Kolomoisky as governor of the southeastern province of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Kolomoisky had been the primary benefactor of the Right Sektor militias.

So, as has become apparent across Europe and even in Washington, the Ukraine crisis is spinning out of control, making the State Department’s preferred narrative of the conflict that it’s all Russian President Vladimir Putin’s fault harder and harder to sell.

How Ukraine is supposed to pull itself out of what looks like a death spiral a possible two-front war in the east and the west along with a crashing economy is hard to comprehend. The European Union, confronting budgetary crises over Greece and other EU members, has little money or patience for Ukraine, its neo-Nazis and its socio-political chaos.

America’s neocons at The Washington Post and elsewhere still rant about the need for the Obama administration to sink more billions upon billions of dollars into post-coup Ukraine because it “shares our values.” But that argument, too, is collapsing as Americans see the heart of a racist nationalism beating inside Ukraine’s new order.

Another Neocon ‘Regime Change’

Much of what has happened, of course, was predictable and indeed was predicted, but neocon Nuland couldn’t resist the temptation to pull off a “regime change” that she could call her own.

Her husband (and arch-neocon) Robert Kagan had co-founded the Project for the New American Century in 1998 around a demand for “regime change” in Iraq, a project that was accomplished in 2003 with President George W. Bush’s invasion.

As with Nuland in Ukraine, Kagan and his fellow neocons thought they could engineer an easy invasion of Iraq, oust Saddam Hussein and install some hand-picked client in Iraq, Ahmed Chalabi was to be “the guy.” But they failed to take into account the harsh realities of Iraq, such as the fissures between Sunnis and Shiites, exposed by the U.S.-led invasion and occupation.

In Ukraine, Nuland and her neocon and liberal-interventionist friends saw the chance to poke Putin in the eye by encouraging violent protests to overthrow Russia-friendly President Yanukovych and put in place a new regime hostile to Moscow.

Carl Gershman, the neocon president of the U.S.-taxpayer-funded National Endowment for Democracy, explained the plan in a Post op-ed on Sept. 26, 2013. Gershman called Ukraine “the biggest prize” and an important interim step toward toppling Putin, who “may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

For her part, Nuland passed out cookies to anti-Yanukovych demonstrators at the Maidan square, reminded Ukrainian business leaders that the U.S. had invested \$5 billion in their “European aspirations,” declared “fuck the EU” for its less aggressive approach, and discussed with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt who the new leaders of Ukraine should be. “Yats is the guy,” she said, referring to Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

Nuland saw her big chance on Feb. 20, 2014, when a mysterious sniper apparently firing from a building controlled by the Right Sektor shot and killed both police and protesters, escalating the crisis. On Feb. 21, in a desperate bid to avert more violence, Yanukovych agreed to a European-guaranteed plan in which he accepted reduced powers and called for early elections so he could be voted out of office.

But that wasn’t enough for the anti-Yanukovych forces who led by Right Sektor and neo-Nazi militias overran government buildings on Feb. 22, forcing Yanukovych and many of his officials to flee for their lives. With armed thugs patrolling the corridors of power, the final path to “regime change” was clear.

Instead of trying to salvage the Feb. 21 agreement, Nuland and European officials arranged for an unconstitutional procedure to strip Yanukovych of the presidency and declared the new regime “legitimate.” Nuland’s “guy” Yatsenyuk became prime minister.

While Nuland and her neocon cohorts celebrated, their “regime change” prompted an obvious reaction from Putin, who recognized the strategic threat that this hostile new regime posed to the historic Russian naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea. On Feb. 23, he began to take steps to protect those Russian interests.

Ethnic Hatreds

What the coup also did was revive long pent-up antagonisms between the ethnic Ukrainians in the west, including elements that had supported Adolf Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union during World War Two, and ethnic Russians in the south and east who feared the anti-Russian sentiments emanating from Kiev.

First, in Crimea and then in the so-called Donbas region, these ethnic Russians, who had been Yanukovych’s political base, resisted what they viewed as the illegitimate overthrow of their elected president. Both areas held referenda seeking separation from Ukraine, a move that Russia accepted in Crimea but resisted with the Donbas.

However, when the Kiev regime announced an “anti-terrorism operation” against the Donbas and dispatched neo-Nazi and other extremist militias to be the tip of the spear, Moscow began quietly assisting the embattled ethnic Russian rebels, a move that Nuland, the Obama administration and the mainstream news media called “Russian aggression.”

Amid the Western hysteria over Russia’s supposedly “imperial designs” and the thorough demonizing of Putin, President Barack Obama essentially authorized a new Cold War against Russia, reflected now in new U.S. strategic planning that could cost the U.S. taxpayers trillions of dollars and risk a possible nuclear confrontation.

Yet, despite the extraordinary costs and dangers, Nuland failed to appreciate the practical on-the-ground realities, much as her husband and other neocons did in Iraq. While Nuland got her hand-picked client Yatsenyuk installed and he did oversee a U.S.-demanded “neo-liberal” economic plan slashing pensions, heating assistance and other social programs the chaos that her “regime change” unleashed transformed Ukraine into a financial black hole.

With few prospects for a clear-cut victory over the ethnic Russian resistance in the east and with the neo-Nazi/Islamist militias increasingly restless over the stalemate the chances to restore any meaningful sense of order in the country appear remote. Unemployment is soaring and the government is essentially bankrupt.

The last best hope for some stability may have been the Minsk-2 agreement in February 2015, calling for a federalized system to give the Donbas more

autonomy, but Nuland's Prime Minister Yatsenyuk sabotaged the deal in March by inserting a poison pill that essentially demanded that the ethnic Russian rebels first surrender.

Now, the Ukraine chaos threatens to spiral even further out of control with the neo-Nazis and other right-wing militias supplied with a bounty of weapons to kill ethnic Russians in the east turning on the political leadership in Kiev.

In other words, the neocons have struck again, dreaming up a "regime change" scheme that ignored practical realities, such as ethnic and religious fissures. Then, as the blood flowed and the suffering worsened, the neocons just sought out someone else to blame.

Thus, it seems unlikely that Nuland, regarded by some in Washington as the new "star" in U.S. foreign policy, will be fired for her dangerous incompetence, just as most neocons who authored the Iraq disaster remain "respected" experts employed by major think tanks, given prized space on op-ed pages, and consulted at the highest levels of the U.S. government.

[For more on these topics, see Consortiumnews.com's "Obama's True Foreign Policy Weakness" and "A Family Business of Perpetual War."]

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.

Fallout from Reagan's Afghan War

In the 1980s, President Reagan funded and armed Islamic fundamentalists to defeat a Soviet-backed secular regime in Afghanistan. Now, one of those ex-U.S. clients is throwing his support behind the brutal Islamic State, a lesson about geopolitical expediency, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

In a blast from the past in Afghanistan, a warlord who became a model for combining ruthless ambition and destructive methods with radical ideology, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, has advised his followers to support the so-called Islamic

State or ISIS in fighting against the Afghan Taliban.

While some in the West might see this as one more indication of ISIS spreading its tentacles with an ever-widening reach, a better lesson flows from observing that this is another instance of ISIS being invoked by a protagonist in a local conflict with local objectives. Hekmatyar's game has always been about seeking power in Afghanistan and bashing opponents of his efforts to do so.

A further lesson comes from noting that it is the Taliban that Hekmatyar finds to be either too moderate or too inconvenient for him right now. It probably is not coincidental that this statement by Hekmatyar comes just as the Afghan government and representatives of the Taliban have concluded what may be the most promising peace negotiations so far that are aimed at resolution of the long-running conflict in Afghanistan.

All of these players, the government, the Taliban, and Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami, are focused on struggles for power in their own country and not on transnational causes. Afghanistan is a nation in which politics and policy largely rest on ad hoc deals among various local power-holders, which are struck in ways that do not correspond to what might make sense to Westerners in terms of recognizable left-right, radical-moderate, or religious-secular dimensions.

The outcome of the current multidimensional conflict in Afghanistan will depend on such deals. This ought to call into question the wisdom of calls to extend what has already been a 14-year U.S. military operation in the interests of beating back what gets portrayed as an undifferentiated set of bad guys.

Yet another lesson comes from reflecting on Hekmatyar's four decades as a major player in turmoil in Afghanistan. Although it is not true, as is sometimes alleged, that the United States once aided Osama bin Laden, it is true that a single-minded U.S. focus on defeating the Soviets in Afghanistan and their client regime under Najibullah led the United States to bestow its favors on some seedy characters.

U.S. aid aimed at beating the Soviets was given, through the intermediary of Pakistan, to seven Afghan resistance organizations. Hekmatyar's group was probably the most radical of these but also, because it was a favorite of the Pakistanis, probably received as much of the U.S. aid as any other.

The attitude within the Reagan administration toward the question of what further consequences would flow from aiding such radicalism was one of "we'll cross that bridge when we come to it." The later chapters of the Hekmatyar story involved fierce fighting against the other resistance groups once Najibullah fell, with Hekmatyar's forces shelling Kabul even as he was supposed to be the

prime minister, and later his group making common cause with the Taliban before the most recent falling out.

A moral of this story is: don't put off thinking about those future bridge-crossings. In focusing on defeating whoever the enemy of the moment may be, worry also about how our intervention in a conflict may be sustaining others who can spell trouble. That's always been true in Afghanistan and is true in other places as well, such as Syria.

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

Obama's Posturing Risks Iran-Nuke Deal

The Obama administration is risking the success of the Iran nuclear negotiations by playing some political theater to appear tough to its Republican and neocon critics in Official Washington, write Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett.

By Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett

As nuclear talks between the P5+1 and Iran in Vienna extend past yet another (largely U.S.-imposed) deadline, the dysfunctionality of the Obama administration's approach becomes increasingly apparent.

Since April, when the parties announced a set of "[parameters](#)" for a final deal, senior administration officials have staked out public positions on the most important unresolved issues that, frankly, are inconsistent with what was agreed in April. These include a U.S. demand for open-ended retention of a conventional arms embargo and other aspects of the United Nations Security Council-authorized sanctions regime.

There has never been any serious prospect that these U.S. positions could actually provide bases for negotiated outcomes. Take, for example, the Obama administration's demand for open-ended retention of a conventional arms embargo and other aspects of the United Nations Security Council-authorized sanctions regime against Iran. Not only does Tehran object to this demand; Russia and China, like the United States, veto-wielding permanent members of the Security Council, do, too.

The Obama administration defined stark stances on the future of UN sanctions and

some of the other outstanding issues ostensibly to rebut charges of “weakness” from domestic opponents and to deflect criticism from traditional U.S. allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, that it is “appeasing” Iran.

But, if Obama and his team ultimately want to conclude a deal, they will, at some point, have to retreat from the diplomatically untenable positions they have so publicly assumed, thereby exposing themselves to even stronger political attacks.

This is the (entirely self-generated) dilemma currently looming over the Obama administration. Going into this week, relative optimism was rising that the Vienna talks might be on the verge of producing a final deal. Officials from participating governments say that compromises have been found over previously disputed aspects of lifting U.S., European, and most UN sanctions against Iran.

U.S. and Iranian negotiators have also been making progress toward resolving differences over the kinds of nuclear research that Iran will conduct while a final agreement is in effect.

Against this backdrop, the most difficult challenges facing the seven delegations in Vienna pertain to the drafting of a prospective UN Security Council resolution that would nullify previous resolutions authorizing international sanctions against Iran and formally start implementation of a final deal. It is in this context that unrealistic U.S. demands to keep in place an open-ended arms embargo against Iran have become the main obstacle blocking conclusion of a comprehensive nuclear agreement.

There was considerable speculation, in Washington as well as in Vienna, that the Obama administration would be eager to finish negotiations before July 9. (According to recently enacted U.S. law, if the administration had presented the text of a final nuclear agreement to Congress by July 9, Congress would have had 30 days to review it; from July 9 until Sept. 7, the law gives Congress 60 days.)

Such speculation, however, overlooked the White House’s real calculation: that, by modifying U.S. negotiating positions to permit agreement on terms of a new Security Council resolution, thus setting the stage to conclude a final deal this weak, the administration would receive more political criticism than if it appeared to “hang tough” and let July 9 pass.

This calculation explains why, according to officials from participating governments, the U.S. position regarding the terms of a new Security Council resolution has, over the last few days, become *less conducive* to reaching a final agreement. Moreover, the United States appears to be encouraging its

British and French partners in the talks to define their own increasingly individuated positions on the issue.

As a result, P5+1 delegations are now spending more time in Vienna negotiating among themselves than with their Iranian counterparts. When they do interact with Iranian representatives, their dialogue becomes, in effect, ever less a multilateral negotiation between the P5+1 and Iran and ever more a series of bilateral negotiations between Iran and various P5+1 states.

The Obama administration appears to calculate that it can posture in this way for some as yet unspecified period time, after which it can then quietly modify U.S. negotiating positions and reach a final agreement, claiming all the while that, by "hanging tough," Washington persuaded Tehran and Moscow to take more "reasonable" stances. This will be political theater with little connection to diplomatic reality. But it is the narrative that Obama and company want to craft.

No doubt, Obama and his White House advisers think they are handling difficult domestic political dynamics with admirable adroitness. But, in diplomatic terms, their approach assumes that other key players, including Iran, will wait indefinitely for Washington to get serious about closing a deal. It also assumes that, if the process breaks down due to a U.S.-induced impasse over terms for a new Security Council resolution, the rest of the world will buy the Obama administration's narrative that this is Iran and Russia's fault.

Odds that these assumptions will prove false are greater than Obama and his team are ready to acknowledge, a reality that makes their course strategically irresponsible. Fundamentally, this irresponsibility stems from failure to appreciate the full importance of an Iran nuclear deal, and, beyond that, of a broader realignment of U.S. relations with Tehran, to American interests, in the Middle East and globally.

The Obama administration continues to treat a prospective nuclear deal as what might be described as an asymmetric arms control agreement, whereby Iran gives up ambitions, regularly alleged by American politicians and just as regularly denied by Tehran, to develop nuclear weapons, and the United States gives up well, not very much.

The administration has yet to treat a potential nuclear deal as American interests actually require: that is, as a critical initial step in a broader process of rapprochement with the Islamic Republic of Iran, rapprochement as profound as the realignment of U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China in the 1970s.

Hopefully, the Obama administration will get through its political theater over a new Security Council resolution over the next few days and close a final nuclear agreement with Iran. But it would be far better if the administration renounced this kind of theater entirely, and got down to the serious business of reformulating U.S.-Iranian relations.

Flynt Leverett served as a Middle East expert on George W. Bush's National Security Council staff until the Iraq War and worked previously at the State Department and at the Central Intelligence Agency. Hillary Mann Leverett was the NSC expert on Iran and from 2001 to 2003 was one of only a few U.S. diplomats authorized to negotiate with the Iranians over Afghanistan, al-Qaeda and Iraq. They are authors of *Going to Tehran*. [This story first appeared as [a blog post](#) at HuffingtonPost.]

The Iran Deal's Strategic Payoff

A successful nuclear deal with Iran could mean an expanded Iranian role in blocking Islamic State advances in Iraq and Syria, but the potential U.S.-Iran cooperation alarms Israel and Saudi Arabia which may explain President Obama's silence on the topic, examined by Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett.

By Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett

The Iran nuclear talks may be getting close to some sort of conclusion in Vienna, but American political and policy elites remain, to an appallingly large extent, clueless as to what is really at stake in the negotiations. (This was a significant theme in Hillary's appearance on CNN, see [here](#), and in Flynt's appearance on CNBC, see [here](#), to discuss the Vienna talks.)

And, while the headline from a recent NBC News [poll](#) notes that Americans favor an Iran nuclear deal by a "2 to 1" margin, in fact, the polls shows that a plurality of Americans say they don't know what to think about a possible Iran nuclear deal.

These observations underscore a point that we have been making for some time: President Barack Obama has yet to make the case to his fellow Americans for why an Iran nuclear deal, and, beyond that, a potential realignment of U.S. relations with the Islamic Republic, is not just profoundly in American interests, but is strategically imperative for the United States.

This failure will almost certainly make it more difficult for Obama (and his

successor) to implement a deal. Furthermore, this failure will severely circumscribe the strategic benefits that the United States can accrue from a deal.

At the moment, many American elites convey particular distress over the Obama administration's inability simply to dictate the terms of a prospective United Nations Security Council resolution that would endorse a final nuclear agreement and, to help implement such an agreement, remove international sanctions previously authorized by the Council against the Islamic Republic.

In its approach to drafting a new Security Council resolution, the Obama administration has been demanding that previously authorized limits on exports of conventional weapons and missile-related technology remain in place. Iran, for its part, resists any text that would imply its "acceptance" of continuing international sanctions. Moreover, Russia and China are not going along.

Likewise, Moscow and Beijing have rejected the Obama administration's demand that UN sanctions be lifted only for six months at a time, subject to renewal, renewal which the United States, on its own, could veto, thus realizing U.S. ambitions to be able to "snap" sanctions back into place without being blocked by Russia and China.

That the Obama administration has been pushing these positions reveals much of what is so fundamentally wrong with the U.S. approach to diplomacy with Iran. As Flynt pointed out on CNBC, "This was an approach that not only were the Iranians going to object to it, but I don't think the administration ever had a serious chance of getting consensus within the P5+1, among the permanent members of the Security Council. It was foolish, really, for the administration to take those positions on those issues."

Yet these are the positions the administration took, and now it must either find a way to walk back from them or (foolishly) embrace a diplomatic impasse. Of course, this reflects weakness on Obama's part, but not the sort of weakness for which neoconservatives and others constantly lambaste him.

As Hillary noted on CNN, "We have tried [the interventionists'] version of strength, invading Iraq; invading Libya; occupying Afghanistan for more than a decade; arming, training, and funding various *jihadis* in Syria and all across the Middle East. And all it has brought us is damage to ourselves.

"The real strength would be, just like Nixon and Kissinger went to China and accepted the People's Republic of China, we need to go to Tehran, as we wrote in our book, and make our peace with Iran. It will help us. It will resurrect our position in the Middle East and around the world. And if we don't, we will see

ourselves continue to flail across the Middle East and around the world

“The Islamic Republic of Iran is here to stay, like the People’s Republic of China. What we need to recognize is that rising Iran, just like rising China, is a strong, independent power. And we need to work with them, not constantly try to bring them down and align with other countries like Saudi Arabia that get us into strategic disaster after strategic disaster.”

But that is precisely what Obama has been *unwilling* to do. Could the United States still “walk away” from the process?

As Hillary said on CNN, “A decision by the United States to ‘walk away,’ to cut off talks with Iran would be just as strategically damaging, if not more so, to the United States than the decision to invade Iraq. It would have enormously devastating consequences for the United States in the Middle East, keep us on a trajectory to get into one never-ending, unwinnable war after another. And it would have repercussions for us globally, in economic terms and military terms.”

Flynt Leverett served as a Middle East expert on George W. Bush’s National Security Council staff until the Iraq War and worked previously at the State Department and at the Central Intelligence Agency. Hillary Mann Leverett was the NSC expert on Iran and from 2001 to 2003 was one of only a few U.S. diplomats authorized to negotiate with the Iranians over Afghanistan, al-Qaeda and Iraq. They are authors of *Going to Tehran*. [This story first appeared at <http://goingtotehran.com/obamas-failure-to-make-the-strategic-case-for-an-iran-nuclear-deal-the-leveretts-on-cnn-and-cnbc>]

The 51-Day Genocide

There’s palpable fear in Official Washington whenever anyone dares suggest holding Israel accountable for its crimes against the Palestinians. Instead there’s a rush to make excuses and to deny reality, a pattern challenged by a book by Max Blumenthal, reviewed by David Swanson.

By David Swanson

Max Blumenthal’s latest book, [*The 51 Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza*](#), tells a powerful story powerfully well. I can think of a few other terms that accurately characterize the 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza in addition to “war.” Among them are “occupation,” “murder-spree” and “genocide.” Each serves a different valuable purpose. Each is correct.

The images people bring to mind with the term “war,” universally outdated, are grotesquely outdated in a case like this one. There is no pair of armies on a battlefield. There is no battlefield. There is no aim to conquer, dispossess or rob. The people of Gaza are already pre-defeated, conquered, imprisoned, and under siege – permanently overseen by military drones and remote-control machine-guns atop prison-camp walls.

In dropping bombs on houses, the Israeli government is not trying to defeat another army on a battlefield, is not trying to gain possession of territory, is not trying to steal resources from a foreign power, and is not trying to hold off a foreign army’s attempt to conquer Israel.

Yes, of course, Israel ultimately wants Gaza’s land incorporated into Israel, but not with non-Jewish people living on it. (Eighty percent of Gaza’s residents are refugees from Israel, families ethnically cleansed in 1947-1948.)

Yes, of course, Israel wants the fossil fuels off the Gazan coast. But it already has them. No, the immediate goal of the Israeli war on Gaza last year, like the one two years before, and like the one four years before that, would perfectly fit a name like “The 51 Day Genocide.” The purpose was to kill. The end was nothing other than the means.

In 2014, as in 2012 and 2008, Israel again attacked the people of Gaza, using weapons provided for free by the U.S. government, which could be counted on, even standing completely alone, to defend Israel’s crimes at the United Nations. Practicing what’s been called the Dahiya Doctrine, Israel’s policy was one of collective punishment.

The stories in the U.S. media focused on Israelis’ fears. The deaths of Gazans were explained as intentional sacrifices by a people with a “culture of martyrdom” who sometimes choose to die because it makes good video footage. After all, Israel was phoning people’s houses and giving them five-minute warnings before blowing them up. The fact that it was also blowing up shelters and hospitals they might flee to was glossed over or explained as somehow involving military targets.

But the Israeli media and internet were full of open advocacy by top Israeli officials of genocide. On Aug. 1, 2014, the Deputy Speaker of Israel’s Parliament posted on his Facebook page a plan for the complete elimination of the Gazan people using concentration camps, to take one of dozens of examples.

And the whole thing was kicked off when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lied that three murder victims might be still alive, falsely blamed their kidnapping on Hamas, and began raiding houses and mass-arresting Gazans. Once Israel and

the United States had rejected out-of-hand quite reasonable ceasefire demands from Hamas, the war/genocide was on for 51 days – with great popular support in Israel. Some 2,200 Gazan people were killed, over 10,000 injured, and 100,000 made homeless by a very one-sided “war.”

Here’s a taste of how Blumenthal describes what happened:

“The two Red Crescent volunteers told me they later found a man in Khuza’a with rigor mortis, holding both hands over his head in surrender, his body filled with bullets. Deeper in the town, they discovered an entire family so badly decomposed they had to be shoveled with a bulldozer into a mass grave. In a field on the other side of town, Awad and Alkusofi found a shell-shocked woman at least eighty years of age hiding in a chicken coop. She had taken shelter there for nine days during the siege, living off of nothing but chicken feed and rain water.”

While every bombed school and hospital was explained with the assertion that Gazan fighters were hiding among “human shields,” we meet Gazan people in Blumenthal’s book who were literally held up as shields by Israeli soldiers who shot at Gazans from over their shoulders. People also had new nasty weapons tested on them, including Dense Inert Metal Explosives (DIME).

The people of Israel generally went along with this war (with many admirable exceptions), and later reelected its architects. Protests against the war were banned, and various lies (including those about the three murder victims that kicked it all off) were exposed in a matter of days or weeks. No matter, the point was to kill people, and people were killed. And no matter in Washington, either, which kept the weapons flowing, quite illegally.

Gaza launched some 4,000 rockets into Israel, to little apparent effect – rockets whose total combined payload roughly equaled that of just 12 of the missiles Israel was sending into Gaza from its F-16s courtesy of the Land of the Free.

The “international community” gathered in Cairo on Oct. 12, and diplomats “discussed the destruction of Gaza as though it were the result of a natural disaster – as though the missiles that reduced the strip’s border areas to rubble were meteors that descended from outer space.”

There was no way to discuss damage to both sides in a manner that would make Israel’s actions seem legitimate, even by the standards of the “international community,” so they discussed the one-sided damage as if nobody were responsible.

Is this where the United States is headed culturally and with its own wars? One

reason to hope not is that opposing Israel's wars is one of the few places where U.S. youth are engaged in antiwar activism. Nonetheless, there is reason for concern. The U.S. has followed the Israeli model of domestic policing, of drone use, of assassination, and of propaganda, and the Israeli lead in relation to Iraq, Syria and Iran.

As the U.S. military moves more and more toward treating the world as Israel treats Gaza, the world's future comes more and more into doubt. And there's little to suggest that Americans will oppose actions by their own government simply because they've previously opposed those same actions by the government of Israel.

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Inching Toward an Iran-Nuke Deal

Brushing aside political obstacles and applying creative diplomacy, Iran and six world powers appear to be closing in on a historic agreement constraining Iran's nuclear program and lifting economic sanctions, writes Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

As the U.S. and Iranian negotiators move toward completion of a historic deal in Vienna, the lifting of sanctions against Iran – which is the most difficult outstanding issue in the talks – is on its way to being resolved, Western and Iranian sources close to the nuclear negotiations told the Middle East Eye.

With talks being extended until July 10 and Iranian sources suggesting that a deal could be penned as early as the evening of July 9, it appears that the United States and Iran have agreed on most of the provisions in the agreement governing the lifting of unilateral and UN Security Council sanctions.

The one sanctions issue that has remained as a stumbling block in the past few days involves the text of the UN Security Council resolution that both sides have agreed will replace a series of resolutions passed between 2006 and 2010.

Until now, the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) have insisted that the text of the new resolution include a

continuation of the conventional arms embargo that was imposed by a 2007 Security Council resolution. But Iran has been objecting strenuously.

An Iranian official, who could not be identified under the rules of his briefing to the press on Monday, revealed the Iranian negotiation position on the issue. The arms embargo should not be part of the comprehensive plan, the official said. There is no evidence that the arms embargo had any relation to the nuclear issue.□

However, the Iranian position appears to have been strengthened by deep divisions over the issue among the six powers. The P5+1 minus Germany – which is not a permanent member of the Security Council – met on Monday night to review their negotiating position on the arms embargo, according to a senior European diplomat who asked not to be identified, because of the extreme sensitivity of the discussions.

At the talks, the Russians and Chinese were firmly opposed to its inclusion, and France was wavering, the European diplomat added. The absence of a consensus for the position taken by the six powers up to now suggests that the last major issue relating to sanctions removal will now be resolved.

Eliminating the ‘PMD’ Obstacle

Another potential stumbling block to an agreement was eliminated during the early days of the Vienna round of talks. That diplomatic leap forward was suggested by the surprise announcement by International Atomic Energy Agency director-general Yukiya Amano on Saturday that the experts, with Iranian cooperation, will be able to complete his report on the “Possible Military Dimensions” (PMD) issue by December.

The P5+1 has taken the position in past negotiating rounds that UN Security Council sanctions would be lifted only after Iran cooperated fully with the IAEA on resolving the PMD issue. Western diplomats had even suggested to news media that the P5+1 would delay the resolution of the PMD issue in order to maintain leverage on Iran for years to come.

The Iranians, meanwhile, objected to any attempt by the six powers to stretch out the process of resolving the PMD issue, calling it an endless game that would allow the United States and its allies to hold on to some sanctions.

Despite their objections, the Lausanne framework included the PMD issue as one of the conditions that Iran was required to meet in order to lift the UN sanctions and it remained unclear how Iran would avoid a crisis in the implementation over that issue.

But the Obama administration was determined to eliminate the chances of such a crisis. Less than two weeks before they started, Secretary of State John Kerry signaled in a press briefing that the PMD issue would not be allowed to interfere with an agreement. Then in the first days of the Vienna talks, Amano had a meeting with Kerry and two meetings with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. That was followed by a quick Amano trip to Tehran to meet with President Hassan Rouhani and Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani.

The result of the meetings with Amano, according to two Iranian officials who insisted on anonymity to discuss these sensitive negotiations, was an agreement between Amano and Iran that his final report would reflect two narratives on the issue of whether Iran had sought nuclear weapons.

One of the Iranian officials told Middle East Eye that Amano had assured the Iranians that the Iranian case against the intelligence that the IAEA has touted in the past would be reflected in his report along with his anticipated repetition of the line taken by the IAEA in past reports.

The sequence of events clearly indicates that Kerry made it clear to Amano that the United States wants him to issue a report that will contribute to the implementation of the agreement rather than becoming a stumbling block to it.

Creative Diplomacy

An even more important diplomatic success on the problem is a detailed plan on the timing of sanction removal that was hammered out by technical experts last week and is to be submitted to political directors of the P5+1 and Iran for approval. A second Iranian official who also insisted that he not be identified outlined the plan to Middle East Eye last week.

According to the official, the plan, which had not yet been approved by political directors of the six powers negotiating with Iran, reconciles U.S. and Iranian positions on the issue that had seemed earlier this year to be so sharply contradictory as to rule out any diplomatic compromise.

U.S. officials had said repeatedly that sanctions on Iran could only be lifted after the IAEA had verified Iran's implementation of its nuclear commitments and then would be lifted only in a phased manner. Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, however, had demanded that the sanctions were to be lifted immediately on the agreement going into effect.

The solution to that apparently intractable problem was first presented by the U.S. delegation to the Iranians, according to an Iranian official involved in

the negotiations who spoke on condition that he not be identified. It was based on two crucial ideas in which each side agreed to reinterpret central elements in the plan.

The United States accepted for the first time that, realistically, lifting the sanctions would be far more complex and time consuming than simply signing a legal document. It acknowledged that lifting sanctions would require a whole series of actions that would make the commitment by the P5+1 to end sanctions truly effective.

Iran, for its part, agreed to interpret its demand for the sanctions relief from the very first day of implementation to mean that the United States would guarantee the sanctions relief on the first day of implementation and complete the work necessary during the same time period in which Iran was carrying out its part of the deal.

Those mutual concessions are the basis for what would be called the “operationalisation phase” of the agreement. In that phase, the actions of the two sides to carry out their obligations would be “simultaneous and parallel.” That crucial phrase would allow Iran to sell the deal within Iran as consistent with Khamenei’s demand that the lifting of sanctions would take place on the first day of implementation.

Iran’s commitments to reduce its nuclear program were already agreed in detail in the Lausanne framework agreement reached on April 2. What the final agreement will do is spell out in a technical annex exactly what the United States and the European allies – who imposed sanctions on Iran in 2012 – will do to make the lifting of those sanctions truly effective and how the timing of implementation will be synchronized.

The first step in the process detailed in the annex – to be taken immediately at the beginning – is what the Iranians view as the “guarantee” that the United States and its European allies will carry out the sanctions removal. The “guarantee” would take the form of a pledge to take specific legal steps necessary to suspend U.S. sanctions and terminate the EU sanctions upon IAEA verification of the Iranian implementation measures, according to the Iranian official.

Equally important to assure Iran that the sanctions will actually be lifted effectively is a series of steps the Western allies would be required to take in the months that followed the initial commitment to educate the global business and financial community about the implications of the agreement to end sanctions.

“They need to do preparatory work to change the culture of sanctions,” the Iranian official explained. That will entail informing major financial institutions and business associations that they will no longer be subject to the extraterritorial sanctions against companies that do business with Iranian banks once the operationalization phase is completed.

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Ukraine Merges Nazis and Islamists

Exclusive: Ukraine’s post-coup regime is now melding neo-Nazi storm troopers with Islamic militants called “brothers” of the hyper-violent Islamic State stirring up a hellish “death squad” brew to kill ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine, on Russia’s border, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In a curiously upbeat account, The New York Times reports that Islamic militants have joined with Ukraine’s far-right and neo-Nazi battalions to fight ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. It appears that no combination of violent extremists is too wretched to celebrate as long as they’re killing Russ-kies.

The [article](#) by Andrew E. Kramer reports that there are now three Islamic battalions “deployed to the hottest zones,” such as around the port city of Mariupol. One of the battalions is headed by a former Chechen warlord who goes by the name “Muslim,” Kramer wrote, adding:

“The Chechen commands the Sheikh Mansur group, named for an 18th-century Chechen resistance figure. It is subordinate to the nationalist Right Sector, a Ukrainian militia. Right Sector formed during last year’s street protests in Kiev from a half-dozen fringe Ukrainian nationalist groups like White Hammer and the [Trident of Stepan Bandera](#).

“Another, the [Azov](#) group, is openly neo-Nazi, using the ‘[Wolf’s Hook](#)’ symbol associated with the [Nazi] SS. Without addressing the issue of the Nazi symbol, the Chechen said he got along well with the nationalists because, like him, they loved their homeland and hated the Russians.”

As casually as Kramer acknowledges the key front-line role of neo-Nazis and

white supremacists fighting for the U.S.-backed Kiev regime, his article does mark an aberration for the Times and the rest of the mainstream U.S. news media, which usually dismiss any mention of this Nazi taint as “Russian propaganda.”

During the February 2014 coup that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich, the late fascist Stepan Bandera was one of the Ukrainian icons celebrated by the Maidan protesters. During World War II, Bandera headed the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists-B, a radical paramilitary movement that sought to transform Ukraine into a racially pure state. At times coordinating with Adolf Hitler’s SS, OUN-B took part in the expulsion and extermination of tens of thousands of Jews and Poles.

Though most of the Maidan protesters in 2013-14 appeared motivated by anger over political corruption and by a desire to join the European Union, neo-Nazis made up a significant number and spearheaded much of the violence against the police. Storm troopers from the Right Sektor and Svoboda party seized government buildings and decked them out with Nazi insignias and a Confederate battle flag, the universal symbol of white supremacy.

Then, as the protests turned bloodier from Feb. 20-22, the neo-Nazis surged to the forefront. Their well-trained militias, organized in 100-man brigades called “sotins” or “the hundreds,” led the final assaults against police and forced Yanukovich and many of his officials to flee for their lives.

In the days after the coup, as the neo-Nazi militias effectively controlled the government, European and U.S. diplomats scrambled to help the shaken parliament put together the semblance of a respectable regime, although four ministries, including national security, were awarded to the right-wing extremists in recognition of their crucial role in ousting Yanukovich.

At that point, virtually the entire U.S. news media put on blinders about the neo-Nazi role, all the better to sell the coup to the American public as an inspirational story of reform-minded “freedom fighters” standing up to “Russian aggression.” The U.S. media delicately stepped around the neo-Nazi reality by keeping out relevant context, such as the background of national security chief Andriy Parubiy, who founded the Social-National Party of Ukraine in 1991, blending radical Ukrainian nationalism with neo-Nazi symbols. Parubiy was commandant of the Maidan’s “self-defense forces.”

Barbarians at the Gate

At times, the mainstream media’s black-out of the brown shirts was almost comical. Last February, almost a year after the coup, a New York Times article about the government’s defenders of Mariupol hailed the crucial role played by

the Azov battalion but managed to avoid noting its well-documented Nazi connections.

That article by Rick Lyman presented the situation in Mariupol as if the advance by ethnic Russian rebels amounted to the barbarians at the gate while the inhabitants were being bravely defended by the forces of civilization, the Azov battalion. In such an inspirational context, it presumably wasn't considered appropriate to mention the Swastikas and SS markings.

Now, the Kiev regime has added to those "forces of civilization" – resisting the Russ-kie barbarians – Islamic militants with ties to terrorism. Last September, Marcin Mamon, a reporter for the Intercept, reached a vanguard group of these Islamic fighters in Ukraine through the help of his "contact in Turkey with the Islamic State [who] had told me his 'brothers' were in Ukraine, and I could trust them."

The new Times article avoids delving into the terrorist connections of these Islamist fighters. But Kramer does bluntly acknowledge the Nazi truth about the Azov fighters. He also notes that American military advisers in Ukraine "are specifically prohibited from giving instruction to members of the Azov group."

While the U.S. advisers are under orders to keep their distance from the neo-Nazis, the Kiev regime is quite open about its approval of the central military role played by these extremists whether neo-Nazis, white supremacists or Islamic militants. These extremists are considered very aggressive and effective in killing ethnic Russians.

The regime has shown little concern about widespread reports of "death squad" operations targeting suspected pro-Russian sympathizers in government-controlled towns. But such human rights violations should come as no surprise given the Nazi heritage of these units and the connection of the Islamic militants to hyper-violent terrorist movements in the Middle East.

But the Times treats this lethal mixture of neo-Nazis and Islamic extremists as a good thing. After all, they are targeting opponents of the "white-hatted" Kiev regime, while the ethnic Russian rebels and the Russian government wear the "black hats."

As an example of that tone, Kramer wrote: "Even for Ukrainians hardened by more than a year of war here against Russian-backed separatists, the appearance of Islamic combatants, mostly Chechens, in towns near the front lines comes as something of a surprise, and for many of the Ukrainians, a welcome one. Anticipating an attack in the coming months, the Ukrainians are happy for all the help they can get."

So, the underlying message seems to be that it's time for the American people and the European public to step up their financial and military support for a Ukrainian regime that has unleashed on ethnic Russians a combined force of Nazis, white supremacists and Islamic militants (considered "brothers" of the Islamic State).

[For more on the Azov battalion, see Consortiumnews.com's "[US House Admits Nazi Role in Ukraine.](#)"]

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](#).

Greek 'No' Vote Spurs Wider Resistance

Exclusive: Greek voters rebelled against Germany and the dominant powers of Europe by rejecting demands for more austerity, but the Greek resistance also is resonating across the Continent, emboldening other hard-pressed countries tired of Depression-like conditions, says Andrés Cala.

By Andrés Cala

Despite an unprecedented fear campaign, brave Greeks plunged the European Union into a moment of reckoning with a deafening "no" to "bullying," "terrorism," and "humiliation" or more precisely, 61 percent voted against and 39 percent for creditors' terms that would have condemned not just Greeks, but millions of other Europeans to another decade of austerity and hardship.

"You made a very brave choice," Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said in a televised address after the referendum on Sunday. He called the mandate one that will "strengthen our negotiating position to seek a viable solution," not a "rupture with Europe."

But whatever Tsipras's hopes and intent, the Greek referendum already has reverberated across the Continent inspiring many other Europeans tired of the German-led austerity policies that followed the financial crash of 2007-2008. Already the people of struggling economies, such as Spain and Portugal, are seeing the Greek resistance as an example to follow.

Emboldened, too, are the people of France and Italy, who are not in as desperate shape as Spain and Portugal, but are also chafing under the rigid spending constraints imposed by Germany and other leaders of northern European countries. Across the so-called periphery of Europe from Greece through Spain and Portugal to Ireland more and more voters are defying establishment leaders who accept austerity as the only economic recipe.

And like Greece, this new wave of voters will likely make itself heard in upcoming elections, transforming the next year or so into a “do or die” moment for the European project. It’s not that the European Union will split up entirely, but it risks becoming a club where countries increasingly opt out to seek their own well-being.

While disintegration is a possibility, Greece’s left-wing Syriza party and other southern European political newcomers don’t want the EU to shatter or the euro zone to shrink. But they are demanding a different future than the current upstairs-downstairs arrangement with a relatively well-to-do north and a down-in-the-mouth south.

In that sense, the Greek vote was a cry of anger and frustration over Europe’s economic disparities, which were smoothed over during the easy-money days before 2007 but reemerged with sharp, ragged edges during the global recession that followed the Wall Street crash.

Neoliberal Technocrats

The response of the EU’s neoliberal technocrats was harsh austerity to pay down debt, a policy that tended to benefit the stronger economies, such as Germany, at the expense of weaker ones, like Greece. Across Europe, the new divide put creditor nations on one side and debtor nations on the other.

Indeed, today’s emerging existential question for the EU was essentially German engineered. It was Berlin that insisted on the austerity-heavy response to protect its national interests. Periphery countries were coerced to accept unenviable and unviable terms, which slowed economic growth by forcing countries to cut their deficits at the expense of public spending, dismantling welfare states, and sending unemployment to record highs unprecedented since the Second World War.

With no spare money or jobs, southern European economies entered a vicious cycle of economic contraction and more debt, without any reprieve for the hardest-hit people. It wasn’t, as Germany proposed, a matter of tightening the belt temporarily.

Instead, even as economic growth returned through headline macroeconomic

figures, the situation for the majority of Europeans has worsened. Unemployment has become a structural problem that the Continent will have to deal with for generations, further eroding public finances and tax revenue, all while corporate profits improve.

The Greek example, while perhaps the most extreme, spoke for much of the Continent. For five years the country has signed onto austerity-based agreements with Europe and the International Monetary Fund. But those schemes have not worked. In the process, Greece lost a quarter of its economy, a quarter of its population is unemployed (including half of young Greeks), and its debt has only climbed to about 180 percent of its gross domestic product.

As austerity failed to heal the sick economies of Europe, establishment leaders of the weaker nations who had agreed to swallow the harsh medicine of austerity lost credibility and support. The suffering populations began looking to more radical alternatives, such as Tsipras's new Syriza party in Greece.

The latest showdown started in January when Syriza came to power with a democratic mandate to defy the austerity imposed by the "troika" composed of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The "troika" refused multiple offers made by the Greek government that involved restructuring the debt and providing access to fresh money to slowly spur economic growth, enabling the country to pay back its debts over time, albeit a long time.

Instead, the troika insisted that Greece honor conditions that would involve ultimately more austerity. Syriza's government said the plan was not viable in part because it would expire in five months and the cycle of negotiations would have to be resumed. Greek counteroffers involved concessions as well but mostly targeting the wealthy, while sparing the already drained population.

Austerity v. Growth

Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis explained, "Greeks want to pay back our debts. But we can't if the debt just keeps increasing while income keeps shrinking. To pay we first need to fix the economy and the way to do it is to end austerity, for the simple reasons that austerity reduces our income, which is not just ineffective but detrimental. That's why we need to restructure our debt."

Varoufakis added, "We can't accept what's related to financing and debt for the simple reason that it's not supported mathematically. If we accepted it, in a few weeks that program would prove itself absolutely unviable."

Ironically, an IMF assessment, which European powers had sought to delay, was

published last week confirming Syriza's assessment of the Greek predicament. Since the 2010 package, which Greece was seeking to renegotiate, the country has been in recession with the economy contracting three times more than the IMF had expected.

The Greek debt is "unsustainable," the IMF acknowledged, adding that Greece would need 50 billion euros (or about \$55 billion) in fresh funds over the next three years, on top of restructuring its debt. That was pretty much in line with Greek government demands.

Still, Germany and the EU bureaucrats thought they could crush the upstarts by virtually shutting down Greek banks and pressuring the Greek voters to repudiate Tsipras and Syriza in Sunday's referendum. The German axis backed by business and other mainstream media unleashed a propaganda campaign to paint the Greek government as radical and irresponsible.

But the Greek voters instead voted overwhelmingly to support Tsipras and Syriza, shaking the EU structure to its foundation.

"The campaign of bullying, the attempt to terrify Greeks by cutting off bank financing and threatening general chaos, all with the almost open goal of pushing the current leftist government out of office, was a shameful moment in a Europe that claims to believe in democratic principles," wrote Nobel economy laureate and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman. "It would have set a terrible precedent if that campaign had succeeded, even if the creditors were making sense."

He went on to describe "Europe's self-styled technocrats" as "medieval doctors who insisted on bleeding their patients, and when their treatment made the patients sicker, demanded even more bleeding." The European answer would not have worked, he said, because "austerity probably shrinks the economy faster than it reduces debt, so that all the suffering serves no purpose."

A Growing Resistance

The troika's hardball strategy with Greece may have emboldened other struggling European countries to follow the Greek example. Spain and Portugal are up next with Italy and France to eventually follow along with Ireland and Eastern European countries. Russia and China may get into the game, too, by offering more favorable economic terms and cooperating on major infrastructure projects.

But there is little sign that Germany, as Europe's principal creditor nation, will accept write-downs that would cost its own taxpayers money. Though Tsipras is presenting a new offer to the 19-member euro-zone leaders on Tuesday, Germany has already refused to restructure the debt or support a new rescue.

As for Greece, in the near term at least, the economic situation is bound to worsen. Greek banks, which imposed capital controls after the ECB last week cut their emergency funding, will run out of cash within days without a new deal. While a compromise is still possible, a painful “Grexit” or Greek exit from the use of the euro currency could be just days away if Greece’s European partners choose to ignore the democratic will of the Greek voters.

Without emergency ECB support, Greece will have no choice but to fall back on another currency, the previous drachma presumably. “Grexit” will then be complete. The currency will be devalued and the economy will suffer for years, but at least under its own terms.

“There is now a strong argument that Greek exit from the euro is the best of bad options,” wrote Krugman. “If they can’t make a go of Europe’s common currency, it’s because that common currency offers no respite for countries in trouble.”

Varoufakis, who resigned as Finance Minister on Monday to remove himself as an irritation to the EU technocrats and thus improve chances for a compromise, said there is no choice but to broker a deal, adding: “There is too much at stake, for Greece and Europe, that’s why I’m certain.” Many in Europe agree, including French and Italian leaders, but without Germany there is little that can be done.

Meanwhile, the political fallout in Europe is just beginning. The Syriza-like party in Spain has become a serious contender, tied in third place with the two other traditional parties. No formal anti-establishment party has risen in Portugal, but the Socialist opposition, which is almost sure to win the upcoming election, promises to stand against austerity.

And it will not stop there. If Germany and its northern European allies don’t offer a respite, the anti-austerity political contagion will spread across the Continent because a new generation is slowly taking over and it wants a brighter future than the drab predictability of never-ending sacrifice. Old technocrats will eventually be replaced.

Greeks have defied the attempts to repress their democratic will. Welcome to the new Europe, for better or worse.

Andrés Cala is an award-winning Colombian journalist, columnist and analyst specializing in geopolitics and energy. He is the lead author of *America’s Blind Spot: Chávez, Energy, and US Security.*

Whining White Southerners

Exclusive: Some brave white Southerners, including the son of segregationist Strom Thurmond, have spoken out against Confederate symbols like the battle flag, but many whites still react with fury at calls for retiring those symbols and other honors bestowed on Confederate leaders, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Whenever there's a suggestion that the Confederate battle flag should be retired to museums or that the name of Confederate President Jefferson Davis should be removed from major highways, there comes the predictable accusation that such moves amount to "rewriting our history" but nothing could be further from the truth. It's a case of recognizing the real history.

What America needs perhaps now more than ever is a serious reexamination of its true history, not the pleasant palliatives offered in textbooks approved by Southern-dominated boards appointed by right-wing politicians. Under such benighted tutelage, popular U.S. history as taught in public schools has become primarily a brainwashing exercise, an ideological foundation for "American exceptionalism," the jumping-off point for today's endless wars.

Plus, given America's continuing racial tensions, it's particularly important to throw away the rose-colored glasses used to view the issues of slavery and the *antebellum* South, happy scenes of elegantly dressed white people lounging on the veranda of a stately plantation house, sipping mint juleps while being cooled by fans waved by contented and placid Negroes, a white supremacist's happiest dream.

A June 24 column by Harold Meyerson cited a recent book, *The Half Has Never Been Told* by Cornell University history professor Edward Baptist, that explodes the enduring white Southern myth of the kindly and beneficent plantation. Baptist argues that even the word "plantation" should be tossed into the trash bin of historical euphemisms, replaced by the more accurate phrase "slave labor camp," albeit one with a large, pretty house in the center.

"Torture" is also a word that should apply, Baptist argues, with African-American slaves routinely whipped for falling short of their production quotas. This behavior was not just common among the most ignorant of Southern slaveholders but was a practice employed even by Thomas Jefferson.

According to documents at Monticello, Jefferson had slave boys as young as 10 whipped. In another important book that strips away the excuses employed to

ameliorate the evils of slavery, *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves* by historian Henry Wiencek disclosed a plantation report to Jefferson explaining that his nail factory was doing well because “the small ones” ages 10, 11 and 12 were being whipped by overseer, Gabriel Lilly, “for truancy.”

Jefferson and other slaveholders in the older slave states like Virginia, where the soil had become over-farmed and depleted, also found financial salvation in breeding slaves for the newer (and even more brutal) slave states of Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi.

Jefferson even calculated that a fertile female had a higher financial value than a strapping male in the fields, all the better to help him pay for his extravagant lifestyle and cover his mounting debts. (According to Wiencek’s book and many other accounts, Jefferson also personally contributed to the breeding process by imposing himself sexually on his female property.)

The Deep South

Baptist’s book provides an overview of the slave economy as more than 800,000 slaves from the Mid-Atlantic region were sold to the Deep South’s cotton planters who employed even a crueler system than in Virginia and Maryland. Slaves often were forced to travel by foot and in chains and worked under the constant “threat of torture.”

Even after slavery was outlawed by the Thirteenth Amendment at the end of the Civil War, Southern whites refused to accept their guilt in the atrocities inflicted on African-Americans. Many whites fancied themselves the victims of “Yankee aggression” as they replaced slavery with another grotesque system, Jim Crow segregation often enforced by lynching blacks.

Around 1920, at the height of Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan, the Daughters of the Confederacy honored Confederate President Jefferson Davis, who before the war had been a prominent Mississippi slaveholder, by naming major roadways in the South after him, including stretches of Route 1 in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C.

That roadway skirted some historic African-American neighborhoods settled by slaves freed by President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Many ex-slaves escaping the Confederacy ended up in a refugee camp called Freedman’s Village not far from the current site of the Pentagon.

During the Civil War, the area also was the location of Camp Casey, a training base for U.S. Colored Troops who then marched south to fight to end slavery. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Mystery of the Civil War’s Camp Casey.”](#)]

Under orders of Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his War Department, captured black Union troops were not to be treated as soldiers but rather as slaves in insurrection, meaning that they could be executed or put into slavery regardless of their pre-war status. In several battles late in the Civil War, surrendering USCT soldiers were murdered, apparently including some of the soldiers from Camp Casey at the Battle of the Crater.

So, the message of Jefferson Davis Highway was always a warning to African-Americans that they were never too far from the hand of white power. The message of Southern white defiance was repeated in 1964 when Jefferson Davis's name was added to a stretch of Route 110 near the Pentagon as a Virginian riposte to the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

This fury of white victimhood has been on display again in recent years with the hysterical conspiracy-mongering about President Barack Obama's birthplace, the Republican Party's assault on voting rights, the examples of police brutality targeting blacks, and the resurfacing of violent white supremacy as in the nine murders at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Some Brave Southerners

After the Charleston church massacre on June 17, some white politicians did step forward and renounce the South's long history of racism, slavery and segregation. State Sen. Paul Thurmond, son of longtime segregationist Gov. and Sen. Strom Thurmond, joined in calling for the removal of the Confederate battle flag from South Carolina's Statehouse grounds.

"I am aware of my heritage, but my appreciation for the things my forebears accomplished to make my life better does not mean that I must believe that they always made the right decisions," Thurmond said. "And for the life of me, I will never understand how anyone could fight a civil war based in part on the desire to continue the practice of slavery."

But other white Southerners continued to play the "we're the real victims here" card or to make up endless excuses for slavery and segregation. Some claimed to be simply standing up for "history" by defending the symbols of the slave South. [For a sample of these attitudes, see comments to Consortiumnews.com's "Confronting Southern 'Victimhood.'"]

In Arlington, where I had urged the County Board to petition the state legislature to remove Jefferson Davis's name from Route 1 and Route 110, there was an angry backlash to the idea from some county residents as well as support from others. One group recommended that, in Virginia, Davis's name be replaced

by the name of African-American tennis player Arthur Ashe, who unlike Davis actually came from Virginia.

But resistance to the idea continued. On July 2, Consortiumnews.com's assistant editor Chelsea Gilmour, who was the author of the article about the training of U.S. Colored Troops at Camp Casey, posted [an online petition](#) to change the name of Jefferson Davis Highway to a Facebook group page, "I grew up in Arlington, VA," which has nearly 13,600 members who mostly share old pictures of Arlington, talk about shops that used to exist, and share memories from their time in Arlington.

However, when the petition was posted, Gilmour said, "Within seconds, a tidal wave of comments began appearing, generally along the lines of: 'Are you kidding?!', 'I will not sign this,' 'Why are you trying to rewrite history?!', 'This is the history of Arlington and the South and we can't change it.' Additionally, a number of personal insults were directed towards me. When [one commenter who had responded 'Idiot!' was] asked by another commentor why his previous comments had been so personally disrespectful towards me, he replied, 'This is an attack on my Arlington, my Virginia, my South!'"

Taking Down a Petition

Then, there were demands that the petition be removed from the Facebook page. "Within 45 minutes of posting the petition, it had been removed by the administrator of the page," Gilmour said. "The hateful reaction from a county which has always prided itself on being 'liberal' and 'open to diversity' was surprising and disheartening."

When another person posted the petition separately, it was immediately removed again.

This hostility and close-mindedness have been characteristics of many white Southerners for generations. Rather than acknowledge the historic evils of slavery and segregation and do whatever they could to make amends to African-Americans too many white Southerners and racists from other parts of the United States have wallowed in their own delusional victimhood.

Instead of confronting the real and ugly history, they have devised a fictional one that is reinforced by the many symbols of the Confederacy, from the many statues of Confederate generals to the Confederate battle flag (now waved as an international symbol of white supremacy) to the honors given to Confederate President (and Mississippi slaveholder) Jefferson Davis.

It is also not an affront to history to recognize the evil realities of history. Even in the Soviet Union after the crimes of Josef Stalin were exposed the

government stripped his name from the city of Stalingrad, despite that city's enormous historical importance as a turning point of World War II. The renaming of the city was an acknowledgement of a very dark history. But, so too, is the history of American slavery.

When President Barack Obama went to Charleston on June 26 to deliver [the eulogy](#) for one of the massacre victims, State Sen. Clementa Pinckney, Obama read and then sang words from the hymn "Amazing Grace." Why his choice was so appropriate was that the lyrics were written by Englishman John Newton, an Eighteenth Century slave trader – "a wretch like me" – who repented for the evil that he had helped inflict.

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](#).
