

Start of a New World War

Propaganda about Russian and Chinese “aggression” has cloaked the reality of the U.S. and the West moving aggressively to encircle both countries, the start of a new world war, says John Pilger.

By John Pilger

I have been filming in the Marshall Islands, which lie north of Australia, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Whenever I tell people where I have been, they ask, “Where is that?” If I offer a clue by referring to “Bikini,” they say, “You mean the swimsuit.”

Few seem aware that the bikini swimsuit was named to celebrate the nuclear explosions that destroyed Bikini island. Sixty-six nuclear devices were exploded by the United States in the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1958 – the equivalent of 1.6 Hiroshima bombs every day for 12 years.

Bikini is silent today, mutated and contaminated. Palm trees grow in a strange grid formation. Nothing moves. There are no birds. The headstones in the old cemetery are alive with radiation. My shoes registered “unsafe” on a Geiger counter.

Standing on the beach, I watched the emerald green of the Pacific fall away into a vast black hole. This was the crater left by the hydrogen bomb they called “Bravo.” The explosion poisoned people and their environment for hundreds of miles, perhaps forever.

On my return journey, I stopped at Honolulu airport and noticed an American magazine called *Women’s Health*. On the cover was a smiling woman in a bikini swimsuit, and the headline: “You, too, can have a bikini body.” A few days earlier, in the Marshall Islands, I had interviewed women who had very different “bikini bodies”; each had suffered thyroid cancer and other life-threatening cancers.

Unlike the smiling woman in the magazine, all of them were impoverished: the victims and guinea pigs of a rapacious superpower that is today more dangerous than ever.

I relate this experience as a warning and to interrupt a distraction that has consumed so many of us. The founder of modern propaganda, Edward Bernays, described this phenomenon as “the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the habits and opinions” of democratic societies. He called it an “invisible government”.

How many people are aware that a world war has begun? At present, it is a war of propaganda, of lies and distraction, but this can change instantaneously with the first mistaken order, the first missile.

In 2009, President Obama stood before an adoring crowd in the centre of Prague, in the heart of Europe. He pledged himself to make “the world free from nuclear weapons.” People cheered and some cried. A torrent of platitudes flowed from the media. Obama was subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It was all fake. He was lying.

The Obama administration has built more nuclear weapons, more nuclear warheads, more nuclear delivery systems, more nuclear factories. Nuclear warhead spending alone rose higher under Obama than under any American president. The cost over 30 years is more than \$1 trillion.

A mini nuclear bomb is planned. It is known as the B61 Model 12. There has never been anything like it. General James Cartwright, a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said, “Going smaller [makes using this nuclear] weapon more thinkable.”

In the last 18 months, the greatest build-up of military forces since World War Two – led by the United States – is taking place along Russia’s western frontier. Not since Hitler invaded the Soviet Union have foreign troops presented such a demonstrable threat to Russia.

Ukraine – once part of the Soviet Union – has become a CIA theme park. Having orchestrated a coup in Kiev, Washington effectively controls a regime that is next door and hostile to Russia: a regime rotten with Nazis, literally. Prominent parliamentary figures in Ukraine are the political descendants of the notorious OUN and UPA fascists. They openly praise Hitler and call for the persecution and expulsion of the Russian-speaking minority.

This is seldom news in the West, or it is inverted to suppress the truth.

In Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – next door to Russia – the U.S. military is deploying combat troops, tanks, heavy weapons. This extreme provocation of the world’s second nuclear power is met with silence in the West.

What makes the prospect of nuclear war even *more* dangerous is a parallel campaign against China. Seldom a day passes when China is not elevated to the status of a “threat.” According to Admiral Harry Harris, the U.S. Pacific commander, China is “building a great wall of sand in the South China Sea.”

What he is referring to is China building airstrips in the Spratly Islands, which are the subject of a dispute with the Philippines – a dispute without

priority until Washington pressured and bribed the government in Manila and the Pentagon launched a propaganda campaign called “freedom of navigation.”

What does this really mean? It means freedom for American warships to patrol and dominate the coastal waters of China. Try to imagine the American reaction if Chinese warships did the same off the coast of California.

I made a film called *The War You Don't See*, in which I interviewed distinguished journalists in America and Britain: reporters such as Dan Rather of CBS, Rageh Omar of the BBC, David Rose of the *Observer*.

All of them said that had journalists and broadcasters done their job and questioned the propaganda that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction; had the lies of George W. Bush and Tony Blair not been amplified and echoed by journalists, the 2003 invasion of Iraq might not have happened, and hundreds of thousands of men, women and children would be alive today.

The propaganda laying the ground for a war against Russia and/or China is no different in principle. To my knowledge, no journalist in the Western “mainstream” – a Dan Rather equivalent, say – asks *why* China is building airstrips in the South China Sea.

The answer ought to be glaringly obvious. The United States is encircling China with a network of bases, with ballistic missiles, battle groups, nuclear-armed bombers.

This lethal arc extends from Australia to the islands of the Pacific, the Marianas and the Marshalls and Guam, to the Philippines, Thailand, Okinawa, Korea and across Eurasia to Afghanistan and India. America has hung a noose around the neck of China. This is not news. Silence by media; war by media.

In 2015, in high secrecy, the U.S. and Australia staged the biggest single air-sea military exercise in recent history, known as Talisman Sabre. Its aim was to rehearse an Air-Sea Battle Plan, blocking sea lanes, such as the Straits of Malacca and the Lombok Straits, that cut off China's access to oil, gas and other vital raw materials from the Middle East and Africa.

In the circus known as the American presidential campaign, Donald Trump is being presented as a lunatic, a fascist. He is certainly odious; but he is also a media-hate figure. That alone should arouse our skepticism. Trump's views on migration are grotesque, but no more grotesque than those of British Prime Minister David Cameron. It is not Trump who is the Great Deporter from the United States, but the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Barack Obama.

According to one prodigious liberal commentator, Trump is “unleashing the dark

forces of violence" in the United States. *Unleashing* them?

This is the country where toddlers shoot their mothers and the police wage a murderous war against black Americans. This is the country that has attacked and sought to overthrow more than 50 governments, many of them democracies, and bombed from Asia to the Middle East, causing the deaths and dispossession of millions of people.

No country can equal this systemic record of violence. Most of America's wars (almost all of them against defenseless countries) have been launched not by Republican presidents but by liberal Democrats: Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Clinton, Obama.

In 1947, a series of National Security Council directives described the paramount aim of American foreign policy as "a world substantially made over in [America's] own image." The ideology was messianic Americanism. We were all Americans. Or else. Heretics would be converted, subverted, bribed, smeared or crushed.

Donald Trump is a symptom of this, but he is also a maverick. He says the invasion of Iraq was a crime; he doesn't want to go to war with Russia and China. The danger to the rest of us is not Trump, but Hillary Clinton. She is no maverick. She embodies the resilience and violence of a *system* whose vaunted "exceptionalism" is totalitarian with an occasional liberal face.

As presidential Election Day draws near, Clinton will be hailed as the first female president, regardless of her crimes and lies – just as Barack Obama was lauded as the first black president and liberals swallowed his nonsense about "hope." And the drool goes on.

Described by the *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones as "funny, charming, with a coolness that eludes practically every other politician," Obama the other day sent drones to slaughter 150 people in Somalia. He kills people usually on Tuesdays, according to the *New York Times*, when he is handed a list of candidates for death by drone. So cool.

In the 2008 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton threatened to "totally obliterate" Iran with nuclear weapons. As Secretary of State under Obama, she participated in the overthrow of the democratic government of Honduras. Her contribution to the destruction of Libya in 2011 was almost gleeful. When the Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, was publicly sodomized with a knife – a murder made possible by American logistics – Clinton gloated over his death: "We came, we saw, he died."

One of Clinton's closest allies is Madeleine Albright, the former Secretary of

State, who has attacked young women for not supporting “Hillary.” This is the same Madeleine Albright who infamously celebrated on TV the death of half a million Iraqi children as “worth it”.

Among Clinton’s biggest backers are the Israel lobby and the arms companies that fuel the violence in the Middle East. She and her husband have received a fortune from Wall Street. And yet, she is about to be ordained the women’s candidate, to see off the evil Trump, the official demon. Her supporters include distinguished feminists: the likes of Gloria Steinem in the U.S. and Anne Summers in Australia.

A generation ago, a post-modern cult now known as “identity politics” stopped many intelligent, liberal-minded people examining the causes and individuals they supported – such as the fakery of Obama and Clinton; such as bogus progressive movements like Syriza in Greece, which betrayed the people of that country and allied with their enemies.

Self-absorption, a kind of “me-ism,” became the new Zeitgeist in privileged Western societies and signaled the demise of great collective movements against war, social injustice, inequality, racism and sexism.

Today, the long sleep may be over. The young are stirring again. Gradually. The thousands in Britain who supported Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader are part of this awakening – as are those who rallied to support Sen. Bernie Sanders.

In Britain last week, Jeremy Corbyn’s closest ally, his shadow treasurer John McDonnell, committed a Labour government to pay off the debts of piratical banks and, in effect, to continue so-called austerity.

In the U.S., Bernie Sanders has promised to support Clinton if or when she’s nominated. He, too, has voted for America’s use of violence against countries when he thinks it’s “right.” He says Obama has done “a great job.”

In Australia, there is a kind of mortuary politics, in which tedious parliamentary games are played out in the media while refugees and Indigenous people are persecuted and inequality grows, along with the danger of war. The government of Malcolm Turnbull has just announced a so-called defense budget of \$195 billion that is a drive to war. There was no debate. Silence.

What has happened to the great tradition of popular direct action, unfettered to parties? Where is the courage, the imagination and the commitment required to begin the long journey to a better, just and peaceful world? Where are the dissidents in art, film, the theatre, literature?

Where are those who will shatter the silence? Or do we wait until the first

nuclear missile is fired?

This is an edited version of an address by John Pilger at the University of Sydney, entitled "A World War Has Begun." JohnPilger.com – [the films and journalism of John Pilger](#).

Censoring Palestinian Maps

When Zionists denounced a text book with maps showing historical Palestine, McGraw-Hill quickly caved, even destroying the copies in inventory, a victory for ideological censorship, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

What is the difference between a textbook publisher giving into pressure from Christian fundamentalists seeking to censor the teaching of evolution, and a publisher giving into Zionists seeking to censor awareness of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine? Neither phenomenon is a matter of opinion or perspective.

One act of censorship denies facts established by scientific research. The other denies the documented violation of international law (for instance, the Fourth Geneva Convention) and multiple United Nations resolutions. So the answer to the question just asked is – there is no difference.

In early March 2016, executives at McGraw-Hill took the extreme step of [withdrawing from the market](#) a published text, *Global Politics: Engaging a Complex World*, and then proceeded to destroy all the remaining books held in inventory. (Did they burn them?)

Global Politics, which had been on the market since 2012, was a text designed by its authors to "offer students a number of lenses through which to view the world around them." Why did McGraw-Hill do this?

Apparently the book was obliterated (this seems to be an accurate description of the publisher's actions) because, like a biology text that describes the established facts of evolution, *Global Politics* offered a "lens to view the world" that was judged blasphemous by a powerful, influential and ideologically driven element of the community.

Of course, that is not how McGraw-Hill rationalized its action. Instead, the publisher claimed that a serious inaccuracy in the text was belatedly

discovered. This took the form of a series of four maps that show “Palestinian loss of land from 1946 to 2000.” The maps (see also attachment) are the first set which can be seen at the following link:

<http://www.thetower.org/3027ez-mcgraw-hill-publishes-college-textbook-with-mendacious-anti-israel-maps/>

The maps in question are not new or novel. Nor are they historically inaccurate, despite Zionists’ claims to the contrary. They can be seen individually and in different forms on websites of the BBC and Mondoweiss and are published in a number of history books, such as Mark Tessler’s well-received *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Perhaps what the Zionists can’t abide is lining up the maps together in chronological order.

In truth, the objections reported to have been used by those who pressured McGraw-Hill are historically perverse – the sort of grasping at straws that reflects a biased and strained rewriting of history. For instance, an objection was made to the labeling of public land in pre-1948 Palestine as “Palestinian.” Why? Because the Zionist claim is that Palestine before 1948 was a British mandate and so the land was British and not Palestinian.

As their argument goes, “no one called the Arabs [of this area] Palestinians.” Of course, prior to 1948, no one called the East European Jews pouring in at this time “Israelis.” Further, according to those taking these maps to task, the West Bank at this time was controlled by Jordan and so it too was not Palestinian.

Obviously, no one brought up the fact that in September of 1922 the British had divided Palestine in two in order to artificially create what is now Jordan. The period after World War I was one of territorial transition, however, in Palestine, the one constant was the persistent presence of the Arab Palestinians.

The Zionists offered many other dubious objections to the maps, which seem to have sent the publisher into something of a panic. It would certainly appear that no one at McGraw-Hill knew enough relevant history to make an accurate judgment on the complaints.

Running Scared

McGraw-Hill’s response was to “immediately initiate an academic review,” which determined that the maps in question “did not meet our academic standards.” Who carried out the review? Well, McGraw-Hill won’t say, but insists those who did so were “independent academics.” Just what are McGraw-Hill’s “academic standards”? Well, those haven’t been articulated either. The publisher’s

reluctance to elaborate its claims makes their actions suspicious at best.

As Rania Khalek noted in an March 11 article on the incident in *Electronic Intifada*, these particular maps, showing the loss of Palestinian land over decades of Israeli expansion, “have the ability to cut through Israeli propaganda that portrays Palestinian anger and violence as rooted in religious intolerance and irrational hatred rather than a natural reaction to Israel’s colonial expansionism, land theft and ethnic cleansing, all of which continue today.”

This gives insight into the strenuous efforts made by Zionists to keep the sequenced maps away from any mass market distribution. As it is, they seem to have overlooked this textbook source for some four years. However, once they spotted it, and began “flooding” McGraw-Hill with complaints from “multiple sources,” it took the publisher only about a week to suspend sales of the book.

The next obvious question is why didn’t McGraw-Hill move to change the maps or just remove them? Why destroy the entire inventory? The extreme nature of the publisher’s response remains unexplained but may stand as a testimony to the fact that the Zionist lobby has the same power within the corporate ranks of this textbook publisher as the anti-evolution fundamentalists have over most biology textbooks.

The Zionists’ Maps

The Zionists who made the claim that the *Global Politics* maps are “mendacious” do so from a starting assumption that all the land from the Suez Canal to Golan Heights and Jordan River has always been Hebrew-Israeli.

On this basis they posit their own maps (see also attachment) to make the claim that modern Israel, at least since 1967 and “in the pursuit of peace,” has voluntarily relinquished land rather than illegally taken it. These maps are the second set seen

at <http://www.thetower.org/3027ez-mcgraw-hill-publishes-college-textbook-with-mendacious-anti-israel-maps/>

It is significant that the Zionist maps begin in 1967, a year of major Israeli expansion through conquest. And, of course, the only land concession of any consequence since then is the Sinai Desert. The Zionist cartographical suggestion that Israel has given up Gaza and West Bank land is just a sleight of hand, given Israel’s use of Gaza as a prison colony and continued military control of every inch of the West Bank.

Finally, it is important to note that Israeli school maps are often pure propaganda. For instance, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz recently carried a story

about a map used to teach seventh graders about the country's geography. The map omits the "green line," which is recognized internationally as Israel's eastern border, as well as the majority of the nation's Arab-Israeli communities. Maybe the Israeli Ministry of Education used McGraw-Hill's "academic standards" to create this map.

Within academia there is the belief that textbooks are not to be subject to ideological censorship. This is a rather naive, but important, ideal. If such texts cannot maintain this level of integrity, the entire educational exercise becomes open to propaganda.

Unless McGraw-Hill becomes transparent about its "independent academic review" and offers an explanation as to why it went to the extreme of destroying its inventory of *Global Politics*, one can only assume that the publisher has no objection to censoring its products in the face of pressure from an ideologically driven group.

No doubt the motivation here is fear of controversy and subsequent market losses. In the absence of substantiating information, the whole story of an independent review and academic standards must be dismissed as a cover-up.

The sad truth is that the suborning of textbooks addressing culturally sensitive subjects has become a standard practice. Thus, the process of education is indeed threatened by incessant propaganda. This includes the culture war that swirls around American biology textbooks. It also includes the powerful Zionist drive to literally wipe the Palestinians off the map.

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Will We Miss President Obama?

Exclusive: President Obama doesn't take on Official Washington's powerful neocons head-on, but he does drag his heels on some of their crazy schemes, which is better than America can expect from Hillary Clinton, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

From a “realist” perspective, there are plenty of reasons to criticize President Barack Obama’s foreign policy, particularly his timidity in facing down Official Washington’s dominant neoconservatives and liberal interventionists on Afghanistan, Libya, Ukraine and even Syria – but he also has done more to steer the country away from additional military disasters than other establishment politicians would have.

That is especially true as the Democratic Party prepares to nominate former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as its choice to replace Obama. Throughout her public life, Clinton has demonstrated a pedestrian understanding of foreign policy and has consistently bowed to neocon/liberal-hawk orthodoxy, seeming to learn nothing from the Iraq War and other failures of military interventions.

In a recent interview with MSNBC’s Chris Matthews, Clinton scolded him for “conflating” her support for the catastrophic “regime change” war in Iraq with her insistence on the disastrous “regime change” war in Libya. In effect, she was saying that just because both decisions led to significant loss of life, failed states and terrorist control of large swaths of territory, the wars shouldn’t be viewed as her failure to apply the lessons of Iraq to a similar situation in Libya. No “conflating” allowed.

By contrast, at several key moments, Obama has risen to the occasion, challenging some of the most dangerous “group thinks” of the foreign policy establishment, such as when he resisted the rush to judgment blaming Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin gas attack outside Damascus. Obama rejected neocon/liberal-hawk demands for a punitive military assault on Assad’s troops for supposedly crossing Obama’s “red line.”

Nearly all the Smart People of Washington wanted that bombing campaign even though the U.S. intelligence community did not have the evidence of Assad’s guilt. The “group think” was that even if it wasn’t clear that Assad and his military were responsible – even if the attack was a provocation by jihadist rebels trying to trick the United States into joining the war on their side – Obama should have hit Assad’s forces anyway to maintain U.S. “credibility.”

Bashing Obama

This know-nothingism of the Smart People – this disdain for empiricism and realism – was expressed on Friday by New York Times columnist Roger Cohen who castigated Obama for failing to launch U.S. airstrikes against the Syrian military in August 2013. Citing a series of interviews that Obama gave The Atlantic’s Jeffrey Goldberg, Cohen suggested that nearly every bad thing since then can be blamed on Obama’s inaction in Syria:

"Above all, did his decision in August 2013 not to uphold with force his 'red line' on the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons sound the death knell of American credibility, consolidate President Bashar al-Assad and empower [Russian] President [Vladimir] Putin? 'I'm very proud of this moment,' Obama insists. Proud?

"It is possible to believe that the situation in Syria would be worse if Obama had followed through with punitive strikes. It is possible to believe that ISIS would have emerged, seized vast territory, beheaded Americans, rattled Paris and struck through sympathizers in San Bernardino anyway. It is possible to believe that Putin would have annexed Crimea anyway. It is possible to believe that Putin would have started a war in eastern Ukraine anyway. It is possible to believe that Assad would be stronger as a result of Russia's military intervention anyway. It is possible to believe that Saudi 'Obama-is-a-Shiite-in-the-pocket-of-Iran' derangement syndrome and Saudi war in Yemen would have occurred anyway. It is possible to believe that more than a million Syrian refugees would have shaken Europe anyway.

"It is possible to believe the moon is a balloon."

Ha-ha! "The moon is a balloon!" How clever! In other words, Cohen, someone so esteemed that he is awarded regular space on The New York Times op-ed page, someone who has suffered not one iota for supporting the Iraq War which arguably contributed much more to the world's disorders than anything Obama has or hasn't done, is pretending that all would have been set right if only Obama had ordered airstrikes on the Syrian military despite the lack of U.S. evidence that Assad and his forces were actually guilty.

Cohen must have missed – or ignored – the section of Goldberg's article citing how Obama was told by Director of National Intelligence James Clapper that the U.S. intelligence community lacked "slam dunk" evidence confirming Assad's guilt, with Clapper choosing the phrase "slam dunk" to remind Obama of CIA Director George Tenet's "slam dunk" assurance to President George W. Bush that the intelligence community could back up his claims about Iraq's WMD, which, of course, turned out not to exist.

In other words, Clapper told Obama that the U.S. intelligence community didn't know who had carried out the sarin attack – and subsequent evidence has pointed to a "false-flag" operation by rebel jihadists – but the Smart People of Washington all wanted to launch a military strike anyway. It doesn't even matter to them that we now know that Obama's destruction of Assad's military could have opened the gates of Damascus to the forces of Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and/or the Islamic State.

And now that Obama says he is “proud” of his decision not to bomb first and get the facts later – or as the President put it, to break with the “Washington playbook” of always relying on military force – Cohen and other members of the foreign policy elite berate and ridicule him.

An Insane Asylum?

Based on their cavalier view that facts don’t matter even on life-and-death issues like war or peace, one might argue that people like Cohen should be dispatched to the International Criminal Court or committed to an insane asylum instead of being treated as “Wise Men” and “Wise Women” whose pearls of wisdom fill the pages of The New York Times, The Washington Post and other establishment publications – and are thus read by millions of Americans.

Has it reached the point that mainstream journalists and policymakers in Washington care not one hoot for the truth? Do they simply push propaganda to enforce public support for their ideological fantasies, the bloodier the better? Or do they actually believe their own propaganda and have crossed over into complete madness?

This disdain for empirical evidence has become a hallmark of the American political-media establishment, most notoriously displayed in the overwhelming support for the WMD lies that justified the invasion of Iraq but now present in almost every major international crisis, such as the unsupported charges that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi planned genocide in 2011 and the wildly one-sided coverage of Ukraine, which ignores the U.S. hand in the 2014 coup that ousted an elected president.

Regarding Syria, Cohen is far from alone in reporting as flat fact that Assad crossed Obama’s “red line” against using chemical weapons and that the “feckless” Obama blinked – just as in 2002-03, many of the same Smart People reported as flat fact that Iraq was hiding stockpiles of WMD. In neither case are these brilliant know-nothings punished for getting the facts wrong, even if lots of people die.

In “the old days,” when I was working at The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1970s and 1980s, there was much more professional pride among journalists about getting the facts right, even if that meant challenging the spin coming from the White House and State Department.

Sure, back then, there were already signs of the profession’s decline but it was nothing like it is today when the most “esteemed” journalists and columnists are contemptuous of anyone who shows skepticism toward the official line or the conventional wisdom. Today’s goal for the Smart People is to establish your

“credibility” by writing what Everyone Knows to Be True.

Goldberg’s Contradiction

Goldberg’s opus is schizophrenic in its own right because it makes no effort to reconcile Clapper’s warning to Obama about the lack of evidence against Assad and Goldberg’s matter-of-fact acceptance of Assad’s guilt. Goldberg, a neocon himself who supported the Iraq War, simply can’t break from the “group think” even when it conflicts with his own reporting.

Shouldn’t Goldberg, Cohen and others first try to determine what the reality actually was or at least acknowledge the evidence raising doubts about the conventional wisdom? Since August 2013, there has been substantial investigative work showing that the sarin attack was most likely carried out by radical jihadists possibly with the support of Turkish intelligence, including reporting by legendary investigative journalist Seymour Hersh. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Was Turkey Behind Syrian Sarin Attack.”]

In addition, the only rocket that United Nations inspectors recovered, which was found to carry sarin, was a home-made contraption that aeronautical experts calculated could travel only about two kilometers, not the nine kilometers that the “bomb-bomb-bomb Assad” advocates were citing as the Syrian military’s launch point for the attack.

It also had made no sense for Assad to have launched the sarin attack outside Damascus just as U.N. inspectors were unpacking their bags at a Damascus hotel to begin investigating chemical attacks that Assad was blaming on the rebels. Assad would have known that a chemical attack would have diverted the inspectors (as it did) and would force President Obama to declare that his “red line” had been crossed, possibly prompting a massive U.S. retaliatory strike (as it almost did). [See Consortiumnews.com’s “The Collapsing Syria-Sarin Case.”]

But facts and logic no longer matter to Official Washington’s foreign-policy elite. What matters is what the latest “group think” is and – since Assad has been so thoroughly demonized – virtually no one dares contradict the “group think” because to do so you would risk being deemed an “Assad apologist.”

However, to Obama’s credit, he pulled back at the last minute after hearing from the U.S. intelligence community that the case against Assad was dubious at best. Inside the U.S. foreign-policy establishment, Obama was almost alone in resisting demands for “action.”

Chickening Out

As for Goldberg, he conveniently forgot what he had just reported about

Clapper's "no slam dunk" warning to Obama. Instead, Goldberg simply reverted to the "group think," which holds that Assad did it and that Obama chickened out.

Goldberg wrote, "The moment Obama decided not to enforce his red line and bomb Syria, he broke with what he calls, derisively, 'the Washington playbook.' This was his liberation day."

Goldberg's cognitive dissonance can't seem to reconcile that there was no reason "to enforce his red line and bomb Syria" if Assad's forces didn't cross the red line in the first place. You might think that a political leader who demands facts before going to war and killing lots of possibly innocent people would be praised, not treated like a coward and a pariah.

But that is the core contradiction within today's Official Washington where truth has become fully subordinated to ideological goals of the neocons and their "liberal interventionist" sidekicks. "Facts" are only valued if they can be twisted into generating public support for the neocons' "regime change" agendas.

To the neocons and liberal hawks, it really didn't matter that Iraq didn't possess WMD, nor that Iraq wasn't sharing its non-existent WMD with Al Qaeda. What mattered was that all the Smart People of Washington had decided that these fantasies were true or at least were needed to scare the American people into line.

If you cared about your career, you ran with the stampeding herd, knowing that there really is safety in numbers. Since all the Smart People were wrong, that meant that almost no one would be punished. The ultimate price for the cowardly journalism about Iraq's WMD would be paid by the people of Iraq and the U.S. soldiers dispatched to kill and be killed.

In Jeffrey Goldberg's case, he even got rewarded with extraordinary access to President Obama and his inner circle. Roger Cohen, Thomas Friedman, David Ignatius, Fred Hiatt, Charles Krauthammer and a long list of other Iraq War cheerleaders got to pontificate on and on in elite publications as if nothing untoward had happened.

Although Obama deserves credit for resisting "the Washington playbook" on bombing Syria, he can fairly be criticized for ceding to other neocon/liberal-hawk schemes, such as escalating the Afghan War in 2009, recklessly supporting "regime change" in Libya in 2011, and turning another "regime change" in Ukraine in 2014 into the start of a new Cold War with Russia.

Accepting Disinformation

Obama also has allowed neocon/liberal-hawk disinformation to continue cycling and recycling through the American political belief system without challenge. For instance, even though he was told by U.S. intelligence analysts that the Syria-sarin case was weak or bogus, he didn't share that information with the American people.

If he had, Obama could have underscored the dangerous delusions of the neocons and liberal hawks. Obama could have enlisted the American people on his side by arming them with facts. But there is something in Obama's personality that prevents him from engaging in that kind of democratic populism.

As either an elitist himself or a guy who wants approval of the elites, Obama acts as if he must protect the secrets even when his own interests – as well as the public interest – would be served by sharing the facts with the people.

Similarly, Obama knows how distorted much of the case against Russia is regarding Ukraine. He knows the reality about the U.S.-backed coup overthrowing Ukraine's elected government; he knows that the infamous sniper attacks on Feb. 20, 2014, leading to the putsch two days later were probably a provocation by extremist anti-government operatives; he knows that the Crimean referendum on leaving Ukraine and rejoining Russia was a legitimate expression of popular will, not the "sham" that his foreign policy officials still assert; he received intelligence briefings on who was really at fault for the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014; and he knows about the pervasive corruption and the neo-Nazi taint inside the U.S.-backed post-coup regime.

But Obama won't share those facts with the American people, either. Despite his early promises of running a transparent administration, he has instead operated one of the most opaque and propagandistic in modern times. What is particularly strange is that he does so often to his own disadvantage. By hiding the reality, he plays into the hands of neocons and liberal hawks who rely on propaganda to manipulate the public – as they make him appear "feckless."

If the Smart People had had their way in Syria – and if Obama had ordered a severe bombing campaign against Assad's military – it would have possibly and perhaps probably cleared the path for an Al Qaeda and/or Islamic State victory, since they represented the most effective elements of the Syrian rebel movement.

Similarly, if Obama had followed Official Washington's "group think" about establishing the sweet-sounding "no-fly zones" or "safe zones" inside Syria, the U.S. military would have had to destroy Syria's air force and air defenses, again creating a security vacuum that Al Qaeda and/or the Islamic State could have filled.

It should be noted that Hillary Clinton has been a top advocate for these neocon/liberal-hawk “regime change” schemes, as she was in pushing Obama into the military intervention in Libya in 2011, overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi’s regime and leaving behind a failed state where the Islamic State now operates, including its mass beheading of Coptic Christians.

But none of this ugly reality impacts the Smart People of Washington. Instead, the likes of Roger Cohen blame everything on Obama’s failure to bomb Assad.

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](#)).

The Catch-22 of Closing Gitmo

President Obama’s plan to close Guantanamo – even if it could be implemented – would still leave several dozen detainees in the legal limbo as “non-releasable,” albeit inside U.S. prisons, as Helen Schietinger explains.

By Helen Schietinger

The lineup of presenters at Human Rights First’s Closing Guantanamo [event](#) earlier this month promised to provide the inside scoop on how Obama is going to close the Guantanamo Bay prison and what the key roadblocks might be. But what I heard did nothing to allay my alarm that the Obama administration will continue the policy of indefinite detention of many “war on terror” detainees and will do nothing to hold accountable those who orchestrated and oversaw the torture of Muslim men in U.S. custody.

The two administration special envoys to close Guantanamo (the Pentagon’s Paul Lewis and Lee Wolosky of the State Department) and their predecessor, State’s Clifford Sloan, laid out the President’s plan for dealing with the remaining 91 detainees. Wolosky explained that the plan’s key objective is to complete the Periodic Review Board reviews and whittle down the number of “non-releasable” prisoners to a “mere” 30 or 40, thus making the job of dealing with a smaller group much easier.

Sloan added that sending those 30 prisoners elsewhere won’t be a problem after all those cleared for release are expeditiously transferred to other

countries. The options for the ones to be prosecuted (perhaps 14 of the 30 or 40) include transfer for prosecution in a third country, trial by Military Commissions or trial in federal courts in the U.S.

The plan for prisoners who are not released or charged is to hold them in indefinite detention inside the U.S. Wolosky asserted that under no circumstances will the detainees being held under law of war authorities be released. He insisted that they are not entitled to more or fewer legal rights than other law of war detainees and would not have more rights if transferred to the U.S. than they now enjoy in Guantanamo, including habeas corpus rights.

Never mind that this seems to be in conflict with the concerns of Gregory G Garre, U.S. Solicitor General when he argued in 2008 that the Uighur detainees should not be brought into the United States to allow their habeas petitions to be heard in U.S. court.

The other two speakers, U.S. Marine Major General Michael Lehnert – who initially set up the prison – and Alberto J Mora – who as General Counsel for the Navy early on opposed the use of torture at Guantanamo prisoners – both challenged the legality of indefinite detention.

Lehnert said it was a grave mistake not to have applied an appropriate judicial process as soon as the prison was opened as demanded by the Geneva Convention and that this has fed into the narrative that we're not a nation of the rule of law. He asserted that the prisoners' extralegal status is inconsistent with U.S. law.

Lehnert also told us that the military at Guantanamo swore an oath to uphold the Constitution, not the bidding of the president. Allowing enhanced interrogation, which he called a euphemism for torture, was beneath us and is a blight on the United States.

Mora listed mistakes committed by the George W. Bush administration, including establishing indefinite detention, using torture as a weapon of war, opening Guantanamo to detain prisoners beyond the protection of U.S. law, treating officials as though they are above the law, and using a judicial process lacking in independence and due process. He added that Obama's decision to hold no one accountable for torture is largely responsible for the sad fact that 58 percent of Americans believe that torture is acceptable.

Mora's and Lehnert's counterpoints to administration policies were reinforced by the retired generals who attended the forum. There was a complex discussion about the number and fate of prisoners who were deemed too dangerous to release but for whom there is no good evidence with which to prosecute, either

because the men were tortured or there is no evidence of wrongdoing.

U.S. Army Brigadier General Stephen N Xenakis, a psychiatrist, challenged the validity of attempts to predict detainees' "dangerousness" and said that predicting such future behavior is no better than the flip of a coin. In response, Lewis defended the criteria the government uses to determine how much of a threat a given detainee poses and claimed the U.S. has a right to keep enemies off the battlefield.

U.S. Army Lt. General Robert G Gard strongly challenged the use of Guantanamo to lock up a handful of prisoners indefinitely because they might be dangerous: "Looking at the broad security challenge of there being 25,000 to 30,000 radicals in ISIL, what possible marginal impact would there be to releasing these men, whom the U.S. cannot try because of its own misbehavior?"

Gard added that he deeply resents the holding of prisoners deemed too dangerous to release but who cannot be prosecuted because of tainted evidence, pointing out that every day prisoners in the U.S. are released for precisely that reason.

Moderator Elisa Massimino, president of Human Rights First, noted that some criticize the closing of Guantanamo because "high value" terrorist suspects who might have valuable information are being killed by drone strikes rather than being captured and interrogated. She added that a suspected senior-level terrorist was recently captured in Iraq and is now being interrogated; so, what is the policy?

Lewis asserted that we need a detention policy going forward and that using Article III interrogations on a case-by-case basis without torture can be very effective, there being lots of incentives that can be used to extract intelligence.

Moderator Carol Rosenberg, Military Affairs Correspondent of The Miami Herald, pushed the question of why accountability was not being pursued. Journalist Charles Savage of The New York Times pointed out that we came close to establishing a means of accountability after the Senate Torture Report was published, when a truth and reconciliation process was explored, but that the idea never made it beyond the Justice Department.

Mora maintained that even if individuals are not prosecuted some form of accountability is needed, such as a U.S. admission of wrongdoing and compensation of victims, as with the Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps during World War II. However, he also said, "It is legally unthinkable that there won't be accountability, but it's politically unthinkable that there will be [accountability]." This speaks volumes coming from Mora, who was in the

forefront of those few lawyers resisting the use of torture.

My interpretation of the President's plan is that in essence the U.S. will continue to indefinitely detain suspected terrorists (mostly Muslim men) based on an assessment of their future dangerousness and that this is considered justified under the law of war.

Somehow this has been expanded to cover persons who 1) have been captured under circumstances not defined by the agreed-upon laws of war (including that soldiers wear uniforms, represent and claim allegiance to a nation-state, fight on a battlefield or at least in a war zone); and 2) have been held at great distance from the conflict where they happened to be captured (Guantanamo for prisoners from Afghanistan, for example). The law of war is meaningless if it is arbitrarily amended to suit the State's purposes.

But now, in this presidential election year, when bigots are whipping up racist hatred and fear with the help of mainstream media, I can fast-forward in my mind to a time when those same unconstitutional precedents are the basis for concentration camps for much larger groups of people than are presently locked up in Guantanamo.

Remember: the German people elected Hitler. Laws were passed to protect the German way of life from the likes of Jews, homosexuals and gypsies and those laws incrementally reinforced the xenophobic mentality instilled in the general population. In a remarkably short period of time, Germany went from being an open democratic society to one in which people who did speak out against the state lost their jobs, were rounded up, and some of them ultimately executed. And the lawyers, and the generals, and even the churches acquiesced.

I am more afraid of those in power who erode the rule of law in the name of state security than I am of "suspected terrorists." I am watching the U.S. become a state in which police who gun down unarmed black people continue to go free, Muslim communities are surveilled, individuals are recruited to spy on one another, and innocent young Muslims who are entrapped by the FBI accept guilty convictions rather than risk serving life sentences for crimes they did not commit.

To those colleagues who say I'm being alarmist, I suggest that you start reading what Muslim communities and communities of color reveal is happening to them. Start listening to people who have resigned from military and government posts so that they can speak out about what they have witnessed. Question the truth of the state's slander of whistleblowers, as well as how it is played up in the mainstream media.

Too many remain silent regarding the fact that Obama's plan not only perpetuates but strengthens the mechanisms by which basic Constitutional protections are being circumvented. The very existence of Guantanamo represents the flouting of basic legal standards our nation is founded on. Closing the prison will be worse than meaningless if we simply import into the U.S. the practice of indefinite detention without charge, while refusing to hold accountable those responsible for torture.

Helen Schietinger, a retired RN, is an organizer with Witness Against Torture, a grassroots organization calling for an end to torture, the prosecution of those responsible for torture by the U.S. and the closing of Guantanamo Bay Prison.

How Propaganda Feeds War on Syria

Western propaganda against countries targeted for "regime change" can be especially insidious because mainstream journalists abandon skepticism and go with the flow, such as the case of Syrian "torture" photos, writes Rick Sterling.

There has been a pattern of sensational but untrue reports that lead to public acceptance of U.S. and Western military intervention in countries around the world.

For instance, in Gulf War 1 (1990-91), there were reports of Iraqi troops stealing incubators from Kuwait, leaving babies to die on the cold floor. Relying on the testimony of a Red Crescent doctor, Amnesty International 'verified' the false claims.

Ten years later, there were reports of yellow cake uranium going to Iraq for development of weapons of mass destruction.

One decade later, there were reports of Libyan soldiers drugged on viagra and raping women as they advanced.

In 2012, NBC broadcaster Richard Engel was supposedly kidnapped by a pro-Assad Syrian militia but luckily freed by Syrian opposition fighters, the "Free Syrian Army."

All these reports were later confirmed to be fabrications and lies. They all had the goal of manipulating public opinion and they all succeeded in one way or another. Despite the consequences, which were often disastrous, none of the

perpetrators were punished or paid any price.

It has been famously said, "Those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it." This report is a critical review of the so-called "Caesar Torture Photos" story. As will be shown, there is strong evidence the accusations are entirely or substantially false.

Overview of 'Caesar Torture Photos'

On Jan. 20, 2014, two days before negotiations about the Syrian conflict were scheduled to begin in Switzerland, a sensational report burst onto television and front pages around the world. The story was that a former Syrian army photographer had 55,000 photographs documenting the torture and killing of 11,000 detainees by the Syrian security establishment.

The Syrian photographer was given the code-name "Caesar." The story became known as the "Caesar Torture Photos." A team of lawyers plus digital and forensic experts were hired by the Carter-Ruck law firm, on contract to Qatar, to go to the Middle East and check the veracity of "Caesar" and his story. They concluded that "Caesar" was truthful and the photographs indicated "industrial scale killing."

CNN, London's Guardian and LeMonde broke the story which was subsequently broadcast in news reports around the world. The Caesar photo accusations were announced as negotiations began in Switzerland. With the opposition demanding the resignation of the Syrian government, negotiations quickly broke down.

For the past two years the story has been preserved with occasional bursts of publicity and supposedly corroborating reports. Most recently, in December 2015 Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report titled "If the Dead Could Speak" with significant focus on the Caesar accusations.

Following are 12 significant problems with the "Caesar torture photos" story:

- 1. Almost half the photos show the opposite of the allegations.**

The Carter Ruck Inquiry Team claimed there were about 55,000 photos total with about half of them taken by "Caesar" and the other half by other photographers. The Carter Ruck team claimed the photos were all "similar." Together they are all known as "Caesar's Torture Photos."

The photographs are in the custody of an opposition organization called the Syrian Association for Missing and Conscience Detainees (SAFMCD). In 2015, they allowed Human Rights Watch (HRW) to study all the photographs which have otherwise been secret. In December 2015, HRW released their report titled "If

the Dead Could Speak.”

The biggest revelation is that over 46 percent of the photographs (24,568) do not show people “tortured to death” by the Syrian government. On the contrary, they show dead Syrian soldiers and victims of car bombs and other violence (HRW pp 2-3). Thus, nearly half the photos show the opposite of what was alleged. These photos, never revealed to the public, confirm that the opposition is violent and has killed large numbers of Syrian security forces and civilians.

2. The claim that other photos only show “tortured detainees” is exaggerated or false.

The Carter Ruck report says “Caesar” only photographed bodies brought from Syrian government detention centers. In its December 2015 report, HRW said, “The largest category of photographs, 28,707 images, are photographs Human Rights Watch understands to have died in government custody, either in one of several detention facilities or after being transferred to a military hospital.” They estimate 6,786 dead individuals in the set.

The photos and the deceased are real, but how they died and the circumstances are unclear. There is strong evidence some died in conflict. Others died in the hospital. Others died and their bodies were decomposing before they were picked up. These photographs seem to document a war-time situation where many combatants and civilians are killed.

It seems the military hospital was doing what it had always done: maintaining a photographic and documentary record of the deceased. Bodies were picked up by different military or intelligence branches. While some may have died in detention; the big majority probably died in the conflict zones. The accusations by “Caesar.” the Carter Ruck report and HRW that these are all victims of “death in detention” or “death by torture” or death in “government custody” are almost certainly false.

3. The true identity of “Caesar” is probably not as claimed.

The Carter Ruck Report says “This witness who defected from Syria and who had been working for the Syrian government was given the code-name ‘Caesar’ by the inquiry team to protect the witness and members of his family.” (CRR p12)

However if his story is true, it would be easy for the Syrian government to determine who he really is. After all, how many military photographers took photos at Tishreen and Military 601 Hospitals during those years and then disappeared? According to the Carter Ruck report, Caesar’s family left Syria around the same time. Considering this, why is “Caesar” keeping his identity secret from the Western audience? Why does “Caesar” refuse to meet even with

highly sympathetic journalists or researchers?

The fact that 46 percent of the total photographic set is substantially the opposite of what was claimed indicates two possibilities: Caesar and his promoters knew the contents but lied about them expecting nobody to look. Or, Caesar and his promoters did not know the contents and falsely assumed they were like the others. The latter seems more likely which supports the theory that Caesar is not who he claims to be.

4. The Carter Ruck Inquiry was faulty, rushed and politically biased.

The credibility of the “Caesar” story has been substantially based on the Carter-Ruck Inquiry Team which “verified” the defecting photographer and his photographs. The following facts suggest the team was biased with a political motive:

–The investigation was financed by the government of Qatar which is a major supporter of the armed opposition.

–The contracted law firm, Carter Ruck and Co, has previously represented Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, also known for his avid support of the armed opposition.

–The American on the legal inquiry team, Professor David M. Crane, has a long history working for the U.S. Defense Department and Defense Intelligence Agency. The U.S. government has been deeply involved in the attempt at “regime change” with demands that President Bashar “Assad must go” beginning in summer 2011 and continuing until recently.

–Crane is personally partisan in the conflict. He has campaigned for a Syrian War Crimes Tribunal and testified before Congress in October 2013, three months before the Caesar revelations.

–By their own admission, the inquiry team was under “time constraints” (CRR, p11).

–By their own admission, the inquiry team did not even survey most of the photographs

–The inquiry team was either ignorant of the content or intentionally lied about the 46 percent showing dead Syrian soldiers and attack victims.

–The inquiry team did its last interview with “Caesar” on Jan. 18, 2014, quickly finalized a report and rushed it into the media on Jan. 20, two days prior to the start of United Nations-sponsored negotiations.

The self-proclaimed “rigor” of the Carter Ruck investigation is without foundation. The claims to a “scientific” investigation are similarly without substance and verging on the ludicrous.

5. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is involved.

In an interview on France24, David Crane of the inquiry team describes how “Caesar” was brought to meet them by “his handler, his case officer.” The expression “case officer” usually refers to the CIA. This would be a common expression for Professor Crane who previously worked in the Defense Intelligence Agency. The involvement of the CIA additionally makes sense since there was a CIA budget of \$1 billion for Syria operations in 2013. Crane’s “Syria Accountability Project” is based at Syracuse University where the CIA actively recruits new officers despite student resistance.

Why does it matter if the CIA is connected to the “Caesar” story? Because the CIA has a long history of disinformation campaigns. In 2011, false reports of viagra fueled rape by Libyan soldiers were widely broadcast in Western media as the U.S. pushed for a military mandate. Decades earlier, the world was shocked to hear about Cuban troops fighting in Angola raping Angolan women. The CIA chief of station for Angola, John Stockwell, later described how they invented the false report and spread it around the world. The CIA was very proud of that disinformation achievement. Stockwell’s book, *In Search of Enemies*, is still relevant.

6. The accusers portray simple administrative procedures as mysterious and sinister.

The Carter Ruck inquiry team falsely claimed there were about 11,000 tortured and killed detainees. They then posed the question: Why would the Syrian government photograph and document the people they just killed? The Carter Ruck Report speculates that the military hospital photographed the dead to prove that the “orders to kill” had been followed. The “orders to kill” are assumed.

A more logical explanation is that dead bodies were photographed as part of normal hospital / morgue procedure to maintain a file of the deceased who were received or treated at the hospital. The same applies to the body labeling / numbering system. The Carter Ruck report suggests there is something mysterious and possibly sinister in the coded tagging system. But all morgues need to have a tagging and identification system.

7. The photos have been manipulated.

Many of the photos at the SAFMCD website have been manipulated. The information card and tape identity are covered over and sections of documents are obscured.

It must have been very time-consuming to do this for thousands of photos. The explanation that they are doing this to “protect identity” is not credible since the faces of victims are visible. What are they hiding?

8. The Photo Catalog has duplicates and other errors.

There are numerous errors and anomalies in the photo catalog as presented at the SAFMCD website. For example, some deceased persons are shown twice with different case numbers and dates. There are other errors where different individuals are given the same identity number.

Researcher Adam Larson at A Closer Look at Syria website has done detailed investigation which reveals more errors and curious error patterns in the SAFMCD photo catalog.

9. With few exceptions, Western media uncritically accepted and promoted the story.

The Carter Ruck report was labeled “Confidential” but distributed to CNN, the Guardian and LeMonde. CNN’s Christiane Amanpour gushed over the story as she interviewed three of the inquiry team under the headline “EXCLUSIVE: Gruesome Syria photos may prove torture by Assad regime.” Critical journalism was replaced by leading questions and affirmation. David Crane said “This is a smoking gun.” Desmond de Silva “likened the images to those of holocaust survivors.”

The Guardian report was titled “Syrian regime document trove shows evidence of ‘industrial scale’ killing of detainees” with the subtitle, “Senior war crimes prosecutors say photographs and documents provide ‘clear evidence’ of systematic killing of 11,000 detainees”

One of the very few skeptical reports was by Dan Murphy in the Christian Science Monitor. Murphy echoed standard accusations about Syria but went on to say incisively, “the report itself is nowhere near as credible as it makes out and should be viewed for what it is: A well-timed propaganda exercise funded by Qatar, a regime opponent who has funded rebels fighting Assad who have committed war crimes of their own.”

Unfortunately that was one of very few critical reports in the mainstream media. In 2012, foreign affairs journalist Jonathan Steele wrote an article describing the overall media bias on Syria. His article was titled “Most Syrians back Assad but you’d never know from western media.” The media campaign and propaganda has continued without stop. It was in this context that the Carter Ruck Report was delivered and widely accepted without question.

10. Politicians have used the Caesar story to push for more US/NATO aggression.

Politicians seeking direct U.S. intervention for “regime change” in Syria were quick to accept and broadcast the “Caesar” story. They used it to demonize the Assad government and argue that the U.S. must act so as to prevent “another holocaust,” “another Rwanda,” “another Cambodia.”

When Caesar’s photos were displayed at the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Congress, Chairman Ed Royce said “It is far past time that the world act... It is far past time for the United States to say there is going to be a safe zone across this area in northern Syria.”

The top-ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee is Eliot Engel. In November 2015 he said, “We’re reminded of the photographer, known as Caesar, who sat in this room a year ago, showing us in searing, graphic detail what Assad has done to his own people.” Engel went on to advocate for a new authorization for the use of military force.

Rep. Adam Kinzinger is another advocate for aggression against Syria. At an event at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in July 2015, he said, “If we want to destroy ISIS we have to destroy the incubator of ISIS, Bashar al-Assad.”

The irony and hypocrisy is doubly profound since Rep. Kinzinger has met and coordinated with opposition leader Okaidi who is a confirmed ally of ISIS. In contrast with Kinzinger’s false claims, it is widely known that ISIS ideology and initial funding came from Saudi Arabia and much of its recent wealth from oil sales via Turkey. The Syrian Army has fought huge battles against ISIS, winning some but losing others with horrific scenes of mass beheading carried out by ISIS.

11. The Human Rights Watch assessment is biased.

HRW has been very active around Syria. After the chemical attacks in greater Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, HRW rushed a report which concluded that, based on a vector analysis of incoming projectiles, the source of the sarin carrying rockets must have been Syrian government territory. This analysis was later debunked as a “junk heap of bad evidence” by highly respected investigative journalist Robert Parry.

HRW’s assumption about the chemical weapon rocket flight distance was faulty. Additionally it was unrealistic to think you could determine rocket trajectory with 1 percent accuracy from a canister on the ground, especially from a canister on the ground that had deflected off a building wall.

In spite of this, HRW stuck by its analysis which blamed the Assad government. HRW Director Ken Roth publicly indicated dissatisfaction when an agreement to remove Syrian chemical weapons was reached. Roth wanted more than a “symbolic” attack on Syrian government forces.

Regarding the claims of “Caesar,” HRW seems to be the only non-governmental organization to receive the full set of photo files from the custodian. To its credit, HRW acknowledged that nearly half the photos do not show what has been claimed for two years: they show dead Syrian soldiers and militia along with scenes from crime scenes, car bombings, etc.

But HRW’s bias is clearly shown in how it handles this huge contradiction. Amazingly, HRW suggests the incorrectly identified photographs support the overall claim. They say, “This report focuses on deaths in detention. However other types of photographs are also important. From an evidentiary perspective, they reinforce the credibility of the claims of Caesar about his role as a forensic photographer of the Syrian security forces or at least with someone who has access to their photographs.” (HRW, p31) This seems like saying if someone lies to you half the time that proves they are truthful.

The files disprove the assertion that the files all show people who were tortured and killed. The photographs show a wide range of deceased persons, from Syrian soldiers to Syrian militia members to opposition fighters to civilians trapped in conflict zones to regular deaths in the military hospital. There may be some photos of detainees who died in custody after being tortured, or who were simply executed. We know that this happened in Iraqi detention centers under U.S. occupation. Ugly and brutal things happen in war times. But the facts strongly suggest that the “Caesar” account is basically untrue or a gross exaggeration.

It is striking that the HRW report has no acknowledgment of the war conditions and circumstances in Syria. There is no acknowledgment that the government and Syrian Arab Army have been under attack by tens of thousands of weaponized fighters openly funded and supported by many of the wealthiest countries in the world.

There is no hint at the huge loss of life suffered by the Syrian army and supporters defending their country. The current estimates indicate from 80,000 to 120,000 Syrian soldiers, militia and allies having died in the conflict. During the three years 2011-2013, including the period covered by the “Caesar” photos, it is estimated that over 52,000 Syrian soldiers and civilian militia died versus 29,000 anti-government forces.

HRW had access to the full set of photographs including the Syrian army and

civilian militia members killed in the conflict. Why did they not list the number of Syrian soldiers and security forces they identified? Why did they not show a single image of those victims?

HRW goes beyond endorsing the falsehoods in the “Caesar story”; HRW suggests the cataloguing is only a partial listing. On page 5, the report says, “Therefore, the number of bodies from detention facilities that appear in the Caesar photographs represent only a part of those who died in detention in Damascus.”

On the contrary, the Caesar photographs seem to mostly show victims who died in a variety of ways in the armed conflict. The HRW assertions seem to be biased and inaccurate.

12. The legal accusations are biased and ignore the supreme crime of aggression.

The Christian Science Monitor journalist Dan Murphy gave an apt warning in his article on the Carter Ruck report about “Caesar.” While many journalists treated the prosecutors with uncritical deference, he said, “Association with war crime prosecutions is no guarantor of credibility – far from it. Just consider Luis Moreno Ocampo’s absurd claims about Viagra and mass rape in Muammar Qaddafi’s Libya in 2011. War crimes prosecutors have, unsurprisingly, a bias towards wanting to bolster cases against people they consider war criminals (like Assad or Qaddafi) and so should be treated with caution. They also frequently favor, as a class, humanitarian interventions.”

The Carter Ruck legal team demonstrated how accurate Murphy’s cautions could be. The legal team was eager to accuse the Syrian government of “crimes against humanity” but the evidence of “industrial killing,” “mass killing,” “torturing to kill” is dubious and much of the hard evidence shows something else.

In contrast, there is clear and solid evidence that a “Crime against Peace” is being committed against Syria. It is public knowledge that the “armed opposition” in Syria has been funded, supplied and supported in myriad ways by various outside governments. Most of the fighters, both Syrian and foreign, receive salaries from one or another outside power. Their supplies, weapons and necessary equipment are all supplied to them. Like the “Contras” in Nicaragua in the 1980’s, the use of such proxy armies is a violation of customary international law.

It is also a violation of the UN Charter which says “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other matter inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations”.

The government of Qatar has been a major supporter of the mercenaries and fanatics attacking the sovereign state of Syria. Given that fact, isn't it hugely ironic to hear the legal contractors for Qatar accusing the Syrian government of "crimes against humanity"?

Isn't it time for the United Nations to make reforms so that it can start living up to its purposes? That will require demanding and enforcing compliance with the UN Charter and International Law.

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The Ever-Curiously MH-17 Case

Exclusive: The shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine has served as a potent propaganda club against Russia but the U.S. government is hiding key evidence that could solve the mystery, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The curious mystery surrounding the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, gets more curious and more curious as the U.S. government and Dutch investigators balk at giving straightforward answers to the simplest of questions even when asked by the families of the victims.

Adding to the mystery Dutch investigators have indicated that the Dutch Safety Board did not request radar information from the United States, even though Secretary of State John Kerry indicated just three days after the crash that the U.S. government possessed data that pinpointed the location of the suspected missile launch that allegedly downed the airliner, killing all 298 people onboard.

Although Kerry claimed that the U.S. government knew the location almost immediately, Dutch investigators now say they hope to identify the spot sometime "in the second half of the year," meaning that something as basic as the missile-launch site might remain unknown to the public more than two years after the tragedy.

The families of the Dutch victims, including the father of a Dutch-American citizen, have been pressing for an explanation about the slow pace of the

investigation and the apparent failure to obtain relevant data from the U.S. and other governments.

I spent time with the family members in early February at the Dutch parliament in The Hague as opposition parliamentarians, led by Christian Democrat Pieter Omtzigt, unsuccessfully sought answers from the government about the absence of radar data and other basic facts.

When answers have been provided to the families and the public, they are often hard to understand, as if to obfuscate what information the investigation possesses or doesn't possess. For instance, when I asked the U.S. State Department whether the U.S. government had supplied the Dutch with radar data and satellite images, I received the following response, attributable to "a State Department spokesperson": "While I won't go into the details of our law enforcement cooperation in the investigation, I would note that Dutch officials said March 8 that all information asked of the United States has been shared."

I wrote back thanking the spokesperson for the response, but adding: "I must say it seems unnecessarily fuzzy. Why can't you just say that the U.S. government has provided the radar data cited by Secretary Kerry immediately after the tragedy? Or the U.S. government has provided satellite imagery before and after the shutdown? Why the indirect and imprecise phrasing? ..."

"I've spent time with the Dutch families of the victims, including the father of a U.S.-Dutch citizen, and I can tell you that they are quite disturbed by what they regard as double-talk and stalling. I would like to tell them that my government has provided all relevant data in a cooperative and timely fashion. But all I get is this indirect and imprecise word-smithing."

The State Department spokesperson wrote back, "I understand your questions, and also the importance of the view of these families so devastated by this tragedy. However, I am going to have to leave our comments as below."

Propaganda Value

This lack of transparency, of course, has a propaganda value since it leaves in place the widespread public impression that ethnic Russian rebels and Russian President Vladimir Putin were responsible for the 298 deaths, a rush to judgment that Secretary Kerry and other senior U.S. officials (and the Western news media) encouraged in July 2014.

Once that impression took hold there has been little interest in Official Washington to clarify the mystery especially as evidence has emerged implicating elements of the Ukrainian military. For instance, Dutch intelligence has reported (and U.S. intelligence has implicitly confirmed) that the only

operational Buk anti-aircraft missile systems in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, were under the control of the Ukrainian military.

In [a Dutch report](#) released last October, the Netherlands' Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) reported that the only anti-aircraft weapons in eastern Ukraine capable of bringing down MH-17 at 33,000 feet belonged to the Ukrainian government.

MIVD made that assessment in the context of explaining why commercial aircraft continued to fly over the eastern Ukrainian battle zone in summer 2014. MIVD said that based on "state secret" information, it was known that Ukraine possessed some older but "powerful anti-aircraft systems" and "a number of these systems were located in the eastern part of the country."

The intelligence agency added that the rebels lacked that capability: "Prior to the crash, the MIVD knew that, in addition to light aircraft artillery, the Separatists also possessed short-range portable air defence systems (man-portable air-defence systems; MANPADS) and that they possibly possessed short-range vehicle-borne air-defence systems. Both types of systems are considered surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). Due to their limited range they do not constitute a danger to civil aviation at cruising altitude."

One could infer a similar finding by reading a U.S. "Government Assessment" released by the Director of National Intelligence on July 22, 2014, five days after the crash, seeking to cast suspicion on the ethnic Russian rebels and Putin by noting military equipment that Moscow had provided the rebels. But most tellingly the list did not include Buk anti-aircraft missiles. In other words, in the context of trying to blame the rebels and Putin, U.S. intelligence could not put an operational Buk system in the rebels' hands.

So, perhaps the most logical suspicion would be that the Ukrainian military, then engaged in an offensive in the east and fearing a possible Russian invasion, moved its Buk missile systems up to the front and an undisciplined crew fired a missile at a suspected Russian aircraft, bringing down MH-17 by accident.

That was essentially what I was told by a source who had been briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts in July and August 2014. [See, for instance, Consortiumnews.com's "[Flight 17 Shoot-Down Scenario Shifts](#)" and "[The Danger of an MH-17 Cold Case.](#)"]

But Ukraine is a principal participant in the Dutch-led Joint Investigation Team (JIT), which has been probing the MH-17 case, and thus the investigation suffers from a possible conflict of interest since Ukraine would prefer that the world's

public perception of the MH-17 case continue to blame Putin. Under the JIT's terms, any of the five key participants (The Netherlands, Ukraine, Australia, Belgium and Malaysia) can block release of information.

The interest in keeping Putin on the propaganda defensive is shared by the Obama administration which used the furor over the MH-17 deaths to spur the European Union into imposing economic sanctions on Russia.

In contrast, clearing the Russians and blaming the Ukrainians would destroy a carefully constructed propaganda narrative which has stuck black hats on Putin and the ethnic Russian rebels and white hats on the U.S.-backed government of Ukraine, which seized power after a putsch that overthrew elected pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich on Feb. 22, 2014.

Accusations against Russia have also been fanned by propaganda outlets, such as the British-based Bellingcat site, which has collaborated with Western mainstream media to continue pointing the finger of blame at Moscow and Putin – as the Dutch investigators drag their heels and refuse to divulge any information that would clarify the case.

Letter to the Families

Perhaps the most detailed – although still hazy – status report on the investigation came in a recent letter from JIT chief prosecutor Fred Westerbeke to the Dutch family members. The letter acknowledged that the investigators lacked “primary raw radar images” which could have revealed a missile or a military aircraft in the vicinity of MH-17.

Ukrainian authorities said all their primary radar facilities were shut down for maintenance and only secondary radar, which would show commercial aircraft, was available. Russian officials have said their radar data suggest that a Ukrainian warplane might have fired on MH-17 with an air-to-air missile, a possibility that is difficult to rule out without examining primary radar which has so far not been available. Primary radar data also might have picked up a ground-fired missile, Westerbeke wrote.

“Raw primary radar data could provide information on the rocket trajectory,” Westerbeke's letter said. “The JIT does not have that information yet. JIT has questioned a member of the Ukrainian air traffic control and a Ukrainian radar specialist. They explained why no primary radar images were saved in Ukraine.” Westerbeke said investigators are also asking Russia about its data.

Westerbeke added that the JIT had “no video or film of the launch or the trajectory of the rocket.” Nor, he said, do the investigators have satellite photos of the rocket launch.

“The clouds on the part of the day of the downing of MH17 prevented usable pictures of the launch site from being available,” he wrote. “There are pictures from just before and just after July 17th and they are an asset in the investigation.” According to intelligence sources, the satellite photos show several Ukrainian military Buk missile systems in the area.

Why the investigation’s data is so uncertain has become a secondary mystery in the MH-17 whodunit. During an appearance on NBC’s “Meet the Press” on July 20, 2014, three days after the crash, Secretary Kerry declared, “we picked up the imagery of this launch. We know the trajectory. We know where it came from. We know the timing. And it was exactly at the time that this aircraft disappeared from the radar.”

But this U.S. data has never been made public. In the letter, Westerbeke wrote, “The American authorities have data, that come from their own secret services, which could provide information on the trajectory of the rocket. This information was shared in secret with the [Dutch] MIVD.” Westerbeke added that the information may be made available as proof in a criminal case as an “amtsbericht” or “official statement.”

Yet, despite the U.S. data, Westerbeke said the location of the launch site remains uncertain. Last October, the Dutch Safety Board placed the likely firing location within a 320-square-kilometer area that covered territory both under government and rebel control. (The safety board did not seek to identify which side fired the fateful missile.)

By contrast, Almaz-Antey, the Russian arms manufacturer of the Buk systems, conducted its own experiments to determine the likely firing location and placed it in a much smaller area near the village of Zaroshchenskoye, about 20 kilometers west of the Dutch Safety Board’s zone and in an area under Ukrainian government control.

Westerbeke wrote, “Raw primary radar data and the American secret information are only two sources of information for the determination of the launch site. There is more. JIT collects evidence on the basis of telephone taps, locations of telephones, pictures, witness statements and technical calculations of the trajectory of the rocket. The calculations are made by the national air and space laboratory on the basis of the location of MH17, the damage pattern on the wreckage and the special characteristics of the rockets. JIT does extra research on top of the [Dutch Safety Board] research. On the basis of these sources, JIT gets ever more clarity on the exact launch site. In the second half of the year we expect exact results.”

Meanwhile, the U.S. government continues to stonewall a request from Thomas J.

Schansman, the father of Quinn Schansman, the only American citizen to die aboard MH-17, to Secretary Kerry to release the U.S. data that Kerry has publicly cited.

Quinn Schansman, who had dual U.S.-Dutch citizenship, boarded MH-17 along with 297 other people for a flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on July 17, 2014. The 19-year-old was planning to join his family for a vacation in Indonesia.

In [a letter](#) to Kerry dated Jan. 5, 2016, Thomas J. Schansman noted Kerry's remarks at a press conference on Aug. 12, 2014, when the Secretary of State said about the Buk anti-aircraft missile suspected of downing the plane: "We saw the take-off. We saw the trajectory. We saw the hit. We saw this aeroplane disappear from the radar screens. So there is really no mystery about where it came from and where these weapons have come from."

Although U.S. consular officials in the Netherlands indicated that Kerry would respond personally to the request, Schansman told me this week that he had not yet received a reply from Kerry.

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](#))

Kerry's Secret War Plan for Syria

Secretary of State Kerry urged President Obama to launch secret missile attacks inside Syria without admitting the U.S. role, a plan that Obama rejected, according to a new report cited by Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

Jeffrey Goldberg's newly published [book-length article](#) on Barack Obama and the Middle East includes a major revelation that brings Secretary of State John Kerry's Syrian diplomacy into sharper focus: it reports that Kerry has sought on several occasions without success over the past several months to get Obama's approval for cruise missile strikes against the Syrian government.

That revelation shows that Kerry's strategy in promoting the Syrian peace negotiations in recent months was based on much heavier pressure on the Assad regime to agree that President Bashar al-Assad must step down than was apparent. It also completes a larger story of Kerry as the primary advocate in the

administration of war in Syria ever since he became Secretary of State in early 2013.

Goldberg reports that “on several occasions” Kerry requested that Obama approve missile strikes at “specific regime targets,” in order to “send a message” to Assad – and his international allies – to “negotiate peace.” Kerry suggested to Obama that the U.S. wouldn’t have to acknowledge the attacks publicly, according to Goldberg, because Assad “would surely know the missiles’ return address.”

Goldberg reports that Kerry had “recently” submitted a “written outline of new steps to bring more pressure on Assad.” That is obviously a reference to what Kerry referred to in Senate testimony in February as “significant discussions” within the Obama administration on a “Plan B” to support the opposition that would be more “confrontational.” Kerry made no effort in his testimony to hide the fact that he was the chief advocate of such a policy initiative.

But Goldberg’s account makes it clear that Obama not only repeatedly rejected Kerry’s requests for the use of force, but also decreed at a National Security Council meeting in December that any request for the use of military force must come from his military advisers in an obvious rebuff to Kerry. Immediately after Kerry had suggested that a “Plan B” was under discussion in the administration, it was a senior Pentagon official who dismissed the idea that any confrontational move was under consideration, including the well-worn idea of a “no-fly zone.”

Kerry’s campaign for cruise missile strikes actually began soon after he became secretary in February 2013. At that point Assad was consolidating his military position, while al-Nusra Front (Al Qaeda’s affiliate⁰ and its extremist allies were already in a dominant position within the armed opposition, according to U.S. intelligence. It was hardly a favorable situation for trying to build an opposition force that could be the instrument of the negotiated settlement he had in mind.

At Kerry’s urging Obama signed a secret presidential “finding” in May 2013 for a covert CIA operation the objective of which was to provide enough support to the rebels so they wouldn’t lose, but not enough so they would win. But that was a compromise measure that Kerry believed would be inadequate to support a negotiated settlement.

He wanted much more, an urgent program of aid to the opposition, and he resorted to a shady bureaucratic tactic to advance his aim. Beginning in March 2013 and throughout that spring, the armed opposition accused the Assad regime of using Sarin gas against opposition population centers on several occasions. The evidence for those accusations was highly doubtful in every case, but Kerry

seized on them as a way of putting pressure on Obama.

In June 2013, he went to the White House with a paper assuming the truth of the accusations and arguing that, if the United States did not “impose consequences” on Assad over his supposed use of chemical weapons, he would view it as “green light” to continue using them. At a National Security Council meeting that month, Kerry urged shipments of heavy weapons to the rebels as well as U.S. military strikes, but Obama still said no.

After the Aug. 21, 2013 Sarin attack in the Damascus area, Kerry was the leading figure on Obama’s national security team arguing that Obama had to respond militarily. But after initially agreeing to a set of U.S. missile strikes on regime targets, Obama decided against it. One of the reasons was that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper acknowledged to him privately that the intelligence was not a “slam dunk,” according to Goldberg’s account.

In lieu of a missile strike, however, Obama agreed in October 2013 to a very risky major escalation of military assistance to the Syrian opposition. That fall the Pentagon sold 15,000 U.S. TOW anti-tank missiles to the Saudis, and throughout 2014, the Saudis doled them out to armed groups approved by the United States. Dispensing anti-tank missiles was a reckless policy, because it was recognized by then that many of the groups being armed were already fighting alongside Nusra Front in the northwest. The missiles were crucial to the capture of all of Idlib province by the Nusra-led “Army of Conquest” in April 2015.

Kerry was ready to take a risk on Nusra Front and its allies becoming unstoppable in order to jump-start his strategy of diplomatic pressure on Assad. But Kerry overplayed his hand. The Assad regime and Iran feared that the newly strengthened military force under Nusra Front control might break through to take over the Alawite stronghold of Latakia province. They prevailed on Russian President Vladimir Putin to intervene with Russian airpower.

As the Russian campaign of airstrikes began to push back the extremist-led military forces and even threaten their lines of supply, Kerry’s strategy to pressure the Assad regime to make a major diplomatic concession became irrelevant.

Kerry’s demands for U.S. cruise missile strikes became even more insistent. Without them, he argued, he couldn’t get the Russians to cooperate with his peace negotiations plan. Goldberg quotes a “senior administration official” as saying, “Kerry’s looking like a chump with the Russians, because he has no leverage.”

Obama, who had already succumbed in 2014 to domestic political pressure to begin

bombing the Islamic State, saw no reason to get into even deeper war in Syria in support of Kerry's plan – especially under the new circumstances. Assad was not likely to step down, and in case, the war would only end if Nusra Front and its Salafist-jihadi allies were no longer able to get the heavy weapons they need to fight the regime.

The real origin of the present Syrian peace negotiations is thus Kerry's ambition to pursue the illusory aim of winning a diplomatic victory in Syria by much greater pressure on the Assad regime. Ironically, in setting in motion the military build-up of an Al-Qaeda-dominated armed opposition, Kerry sowed the seeds of the military reversal that ensured the failure of his endeavor. As a result he became the rather pathetic figure shown in Goldberg's account pleading in vain for yet another US war in Syria.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*. [This article originally appeared in Middle East Eye at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/kerry-sought-missile-strikes-force-syrias-assad-step-down-1087172884#sthash.oK5k5IX9.dpuf>]

What's the Matter with John Kerry?

From the Archive: As a young warrior and senator, John Kerry stood up to politicians who spread propaganda that got people killed. But, as a Secretary of State in his 70s, Kerry has become what he once challenged, Robert Parry reported in 2014.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on April 14, 2014)

On Feb. 1, 2013, when John Kerry replaced Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, there might have been some reason to hope that the former Vietnam veteran against the war and the man who conducted serious investigations of U.S. national security crimes in the 1980s would bring some integrity and maturity to U.S. foreign policy, especially the need to avoid exaggerations and deceptions in pursuit of American interests.

After all, Kerry personally experienced the horrors of a war fought on false pretenses as a young Navy officer patrolling the rivers of South Vietnam. After winning the Silver Star, he returned home from the war and spoke eloquently against it, making his first significant mark as a public figure.

I got to know Kerry when I was an Associated Press reporter covering President Ronald Reagan's secret operations in Central America and found Kerry to be one of the few members of Congress with the courage to follow the facts into some very dark corners of U.S. government actions, including complicity with death squads, terrorists and drug traffickers.

But Kerry soon learned there was a political price to pay for courage and honesty. For his efforts to get at hard truths, such as Reagan's tolerance for cocaine smugglers in his beloved Nicaraguan Contra operation, Kerry was targeted by the right-wing press, especially The Washington Times, but also by smug mainstream outlets. For his investigative efforts, Newsweek's Conventional Wisdom Watch dubbed Kerry a "randy conspiracy buff." [For details, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

So, when Kerry was eyeing a run for the White House in 2002, his political handlers persuaded him to vote to give President George W. Bush the authority to invade Iraq. And, after Kerry won the Democratic nomination in 2004, he chose to airbrush out of his résumé all his honorable actions against the Vietnam War and in standing up to Reagan's crimes. When he accepted the nomination, he snapped off a corny salute and declared, "reporting for duty."

After losing to Bush partly because Kerry shied away from confronting the ugly smears against his war record, including Republicans passing out "Purple Heart Band-Aids" to mock his war wounds Kerry retreated back to the Senate where he repackaged himself as a bipartisan figure who cultivated Republican friends, such as neocon Sen. John McCain, a fellow Vietnam vet and – after 2008 – another failed nominee for President.

Which Kerry?

So, it wasn't clear which John Kerry would be "reporting for duty" when he got his "dream job" as Secretary of State. Would we see a return of the brave and honest John Kerry of the 1970s and 1980s, or would it be the political weather vane that swung to the prevailing winds as we saw since the 1990s?

When Kerry took over at Foggy Bottom, there was a desperate need for adult supervision of U.S. diplomacy globally. President Barack Obama's disastrous decision to staff much of his national security team with "a team of rivals" including Bush holdover Robert Gates at Defense, Hillary Clinton (a neocon-lite) at State and military officers like neocon-favorite Gen. David Petraeus meant that U.S. foreign policy deviated little from the broad outlines of Bush's neocon interventionism.

Though some of the big-name neocons had left government to work at influential

think tanks or write op-ed articles for the Washington Post, there was a substantial stay-behind force, especially at State where Hillary Clinton shielded them and even promoted some, like Victoria Nuland who became department spokesperson.

The rhetoric changed a bit. The phrase “war on terror” was “out,” but much of its substance remained “in,” including drone killings. There was also a subtle change in how to justify “regime change” wars. It would be “democracy promotion” and “responsibility to protect,” not “preemptive wars” and claims about WMD.

Indeed, perhaps the most significant evolution in U.S. foreign policy in Obama’s first term was the merger between the neocons and the liberal “humanitarian” interventionists. In effect, the ever-skillful neocons forged an alliance with these liberal hawks, the likes of Samantha Power and Susan Rice who were key advisers to Obama.

The chief tactical change was to rely on U.S.-funded “non-governmental organizations” to stir up disruptive protests against a target government. Then, when security forces struck back often clumsily and even brutally the “regime changers” could assert a “responsibility to protect” or “R2P.”

The new battlefield of this global propaganda warfare would be the release of YouTube videos showing (or purporting to show) atrocities committed by some embattled government against “innocent civilians.” The competition was to make these videos “go viral” and stir up emotional reactions that would prompt demands from average people to “do something.”

Hawkish Clinton

Clinton’s State Department had been unapologetically hawkish. In 2009, Clinton joined with Gates and Petraeus to mousetrap Obama into a “surge” of 30,000 troops for Afghanistan, what turned out to be a pointless “counterinsurgency” campaign that got about 1,000 more U.S. troops killed without changing the conflict’s strategic arc toward failure.

In 2009-2010, Clinton also joined in ratcheting up the confrontation with Iran in line with the interests of Israel and the neocons. Clinton’s aggressiveness was encouraged, in part, by her State Department secretly engineering the elevation of Japanese diplomat Yukiya Amano to head the International Atomic Energy Agency. The malleable Amano was in the U.S. government’s back pocket, ready to be pulled out as necessary to “prove” Iran’s bad faith regarding its nuclear program.

With Amano securely in place, Clinton spiked a solution to the Iranian nuclear dispute that had been arranged by the leaders of Brazil and Turkey at Obama’s

urging. Instead of that deal which called for Iran surrendering most of its nuclear material in exchange for processed nuclear plates for medical research, Clinton opted for more sanctions against – and more tensions with – Iran, just as the neocons wanted.

But the clearest example of this new strategy was Libya where the forces of Muammar Gaddafi responded to violent protests, spearheaded by Islamic extremists based in the east around Benghazi, by launching a counteroffensive aimed at eliminating the “terrorist” threat.

However, guided by Secretary of State Clinton and foreign policy advisers Power and Rice, Obama was persuaded to commit U.S. and European forces supposedly to protect the civilian population in eastern Libya. But this “R2P” became just another excuse to undertake “regime change” against Gaddafi.

The West’s widespread bombing campaign, combined with covert military support for the rebels, devastated Gaddafi’s military and paved the way for a rebel victory. After being captured, Gaddafi was tortured and murdered, while Secretary Clinton was caught on video happily receiving the news of Gaddafi’s demise.

The Libyan “victory” was short-lived, however, as the country fell into chaos and under the sway of extremists. On Sept. 11, 2012, Islamic terrorists overran the U.S. consulate in Benghazi (housing a large CIA station) and killed four Americans including Ambassador Christopher Stevens. Clinton called the incident her worst moment as Secretary of State.

Kerry: Old vs. New

So, when John Kerry replaced Hillary Clinton on Feb. 1, 2013, the State Department was in need of a responsible adult who would rein in the department’s penchant for stirring up trouble and then looking on helplessly as the chaos spun out of control.

But which Kerry would show up? The young Kerry who recognized how belligerent talk and playing with facts could end up getting lots of innocent people killed or the older Kerry who had trimmed his sails and learned to go with the prevailing winds, regardless of the dangers to the world?

There are times at the end of a politician’s career when the person reverts back to an earlier, more idealistic self, though more often a deeply compromised politician just continues doing what’s been learned over the decades of political survival.

It’s now clear that John Kerry fell into the latter approach. He did undertake a

quixotic pursuit of an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, perhaps hoping that success in such an impossible undertaking would be the “crown jewel” of his career, compensating for his 2004 defeat.

But Kerry also let himself be turned into a hand puppet for the neocons and R2Pers who had gained bureaucratic control of State and were set on escalating confrontations with Syria and Iran by essentially following the “regime change” blueprint designed by Vice President Dick Cheney and the neocons in the Bush-43 administration.

Influential neocons and R2Pers took command of key positions in 2013, as Kerry moved from Capitol Hill to Foggy Bottom and Obama entered his second term. Neocon Victoria Nuland was promoted from State Department spokesperson to Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. Susan Rice became National Security Adviser, and Samantha Power took over as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

The Sarin Attack

So, when a mysterious Sarin attack occurred outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, the State Department was eager to jump to the conclusion that the Syrian government was responsible. Despite doubts among U.S. intelligence analysts, Kerry chose not to ask too many questions or press for hard evidence.

Like a replay of the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident that gave President Lyndon Johnson an excuse to escalate the war in Vietnam which a few years later put Kerry on a Swift Boat in rivers slicing through Vietnamese jungles Kerry hyped the case against Syria.

Kerry’s Aug. 30 speech bordered on the hysterical in its tone as he repeatedly insisted that “we know” the Syrian government was responsible for the Sarin attack, though he refused to release any evidence that could be independently evaluated.

His speech was accompanied by a four-page “Government Assessment” that also offered no verifiable proof and looked to be an attempt to evade a more formal National Intelligence Estimate, a consensus view of the U.S. intelligence community which would have had to reveal any dissents from analysts. The “Government Assessment” simply ignored any challenges to the emerging “group think.”

Kerry then took his belligerent message to Congress, where at one hearing his wife, heiress Teresa Heinz, sat behind him as he urged a military assault on Syria. Accompaniment by a spouse is usually reserved for confirmation hearings and is virtually unheard of when an official is seeking something as grave as

launching a war.

Yet, while Kerry's wife was there, no one from the U.S. intelligence community was sitting near Kerry, presumably because a senior intelligence representative might have drawn a question about whether all U.S. analysts were onboard in blaming the Syrian government for the attack. The inconvenient answer would have been no.

Such a presence also might have stirred memories of CIA Director George Tenet sitting behind Secretary of State Colin Powell on Feb. 5, 2003, as Powell delivered his deceptive speech on Iraq's WMD.

While Kerry pounded the war drums, the two other witnesses at the table with him, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey, were much more circumspect and somber. The tableau suggested that the Pentagon was less enthusiastic about war than Kerry and his diplomats.

Putin's Interference

The U.S. bombing campaign against Syria was finally averted when President Obama accepted a deal proposed by Russian President Vladimir Putin that called for Syria surrendering its chemical weapons even as President Bashar al-Assad continued to deny any involvement in the Aug. 21 attack.

Obama's decision not to bomb Syria was treated as a betrayal by the neocons and the R2Pers. The editorial pages of the Washington Post and other leading newspapers were filled with criticism of Obama's lack of resolve.

But Obama seemed, briefly at least, to be working cooperatively with Putin to resolve some dangerous crises in the Middle East. Putin also helped arrange an interim agreement with Iran to impose constraints on its nuclear program but not eliminate its ability to use nuclear technological for peaceful purposes.

That move, too, infuriated the American neocons as well as Saudi Arabia and Israel which have long been trying to enlist the U.S. military in a massive bombing campaign against Iran, with hopes that the devastation could lead to more "regime change."

In November 2013, Kerry again showed up as an abettor of more confrontation with Iran. Dispatched to Geneva to sign the interim accord, Kerry consulted with the French, who were carrying water for their wealthy patrons in Saudi Arabia, and inserted some last-minute language which derailed the signing agreement. I'm told Obama then instructed Kerry to return to Geneva and sign the deal, which Kerry finally did.

These twin defeats infuriated the neocons who escalated their op-ed campaign against Obama's foreign policy of "appeasement." Key neocons also took aim at Putin by putting in their sights a country of particular sensitivity to Russia, neighboring Ukraine.

Aiming at Ukraine

In late September, as the neocon drive for bombing Syria was petering out, neocon Carl Gershman, president of the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED), penned a Washington Post op-ed that called Ukraine "the biggest prize" and expressed hope that "Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself."

NED was founded in 1983 essentially to carry out the sorts of activities that traditionally were done by the CIA, i.e., supporting activists, "journalists" and other operatives who would be useful in destabilization campaigns against troublesome governments, all in the name of "democracy promotion." NED's annual report listed a staggering 65 projects in Ukraine.

By fall 2013, Kerry's State Department was committed to prying Ukraine loose from Russia's orbit, all the better to weaken Putin (and drive a wedge between him and Obama). At the forefront of this effort was Victoria Nuland, the wife of prominent neocon Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century which famously pushed the case for invading Iraq.

The Kagans are not just neocons but neocon royalty who can place op-eds in major newspapers at the snap of a finger. I've known Robert Kagan since he headed the Reagan administration's State Department propaganda office on Central America. He was the guy who told me that my skeptical reporting on the Reagan administration's claims could lead to me being "controversialized."

Robert's brother, Frederick, was an architect of both the Iraq War "surge" and the Afghan War "surge." Indeed, in his memoir, *Duty*, former Defense Secretary Gates says Frederick Kagan was the one who sold him on the Afghan "surge," which was then essentially imposed on Obama by his willful "team of rivals" Gates, Clinton and Petraeus in 2009.

By late 2013, Nuland, aided and abetted by Kerry's chum Sen. John McCain, was encouraging western Ukrainian protesters to challenge Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich over his refusal to sign a deal with Europe that would have included harsh austerity imposed by the International Monetary Fund. Yanukovich had opted for a more generous \$15 billion aid package from Moscow.

Stirring Up Discontent

On Dec. 13 in a speech at the National Press Club, Nuland reminded Ukrainian business leaders that the United States had invested more than \$5 billion in Ukraine's "European aspirations" with the goal of taking "Ukraine into the future that it deserves," i.e., out of the Russian orbit and into a Western one.

Why the United States should be spending such large sums of money to create political turmoil in Ukraine has never been fully explained, short of the emotional appeals based on YouTube videos of attractive young people who took part in mass and sometimes violent demonstrations in Kiev's Maidan square against Yanukovich.

Clearly, it is true that all the Ukrainian governments that have held power since the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 have been marred by corruption, but much of that was driven by the U.S.-prescribed "shock therapy" of "free market" extremism that allowed a handful of well-connected "oligarchs" to plunder the nation's wealth.

Yet, the U.S. policy prescription is to apply IMF "austerity," which further punishes the average citizen while leaving the "oligarchs" largely untouched.

As Nuland, McCain and other neocons stoked the fires of protest against Yanukovich, Ukrainian neo-Nazis moved to the front of the demonstrations, engaging in increasingly violent clashes with police. On Feb. 20, another murky incident occurred in which snipers opened fire and killed a number of protesters and police. The U.S. government and Western media immediately put the blame on Yanukovich although he denied giving such an order.

The Coup

On Feb. 21, Yanukovich sought to tamp down the violence by agreeing to an accord brokered by three European countries in which he agreed to reduce his powers, accept an early election so he could be voted out of office, and withdraw police forces. That last concession, however, prompted the neo-Nazi militias to overrun government buildings and force Yanukovich to flee for his life.

Then, without following constitutional procedures and with neo-Nazi storm troopers patrolling the buildings a rump parliament immediately "impeached" Yanukovich and elected Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who had been Nuland's choice to run the country. Far-right parties also were given four ministries in recognition of their crucial role in providing the armed militias who carried out the coup.

Rather than provide any objective coverage of events, the U.S. news media, led by the New York Times and Washington Post, behaved more as state propaganda organs, pushing the U.S. government's version and especially playing down the

role of the neo-Nazis from Svoboda and the Right Sektor. Since the presence of swaggering neo-Nazis in the Maidan clashed with the preferred image of idealistic democratic youth, the brown shirts were essentially whited-out of the picture.

Only occasionally, in passing, do the major U.S. newspapers find themselves forced to mention the neo-Nazis: either while mocking “Russian propaganda” or when interviewing some of these rightists in other context. For instance, on April 6, the New York Times published a human-interest profile of a Ukrainian hero named Yuri Marchuk who was wounded in clashes around Kiev’s Maidan square in February.

If you read deep into the story, you learn that Marchuk was a Svoboda leader from Lviv, which if you did your own research you would discover is a neo-Nazi stronghold where Ukrainian nationalists hold torch-light parades in honor of World War II Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera. Without providing that context, the Times does mention that Lviv militants plundered a government arsenal and dispatched 600 militants a day to do battle in Kiev.

Marchuk also described how these well-organized militants, consisting of paramilitary brigades of 100 fighters each, launched the fateful attack against the police on Feb. 20, the battle where Marchuk was wounded and where the death toll suddenly spiked into scores of protesters and about a dozen police.

Marchuk later said he visited his comrades at the occupied City Hall. What the Times doesn’t mention is that City Hall was festooned with Nazi banners and even a Confederate battle flag as a tribute to white supremacy.

The Times touched on the inconvenient truth of the neo-Nazis again on April 12 in an article about the mysterious death of neo-Nazi leader Oleksandr Muzychko, who was killed during a shootout with police on March 24. The article quoted a local Right Sektor leader, Roman Koval, explaining the crucial role of his organization in carrying out the anti-Yanukovych coup.

“Ukraine’s February revolution, said Mr. Koval, would never have happened without Right Sektor and other militant groups,” the Times wrote. Yet, whenever that reality is mentioned by independent journalists it is denounced as “Russian propaganda.”

New Cold War?

As tensions ratcheted up between the United States and Russia amid talk of a new Cold War there was a desperate need for a mature voice on the American side who would acknowledge some of the legitimate concerns of Moscow and the Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the east and south who had just witnessed neo-Nazis

spearhead a coup against a democratically elected president from their region.

Kerry – who witnessed first-hand in Vietnam the kind of bloodbath that can result when the United States locks itself in to a one-sided propagandistic view of another country's complex reality – could have been that person. Instead, Kerry behaved like a neocon adolescent.

When the people of Crimea voted understandably and overwhelmingly to bail out of the failed Ukrainian state and rejoin Russia, Kerry insisted that it was a case of Russian aggression, declaring “you just don't in the 21st Century behave in 19th Century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped-up pretext.”

Kerry, of course, voted in 2002 to authorize the U.S. invasion of Iraq in pursuit of hidden WMD stockpiles that didn't exist, but the mainstream U.S. press corps politely left out that troubling fact while reporting Kerry's denunciation of Russia.

President Obama joined in with a slap at the Crimean referendum, calling it “sloppily organized.” But he made no mention of the “sloppily organized” impeachment of Yanukovich, which is what precipitated the secession by the people of Crimea.

Also not surprisingly, with the coup regime in Kiev nearly bankrupt and unable to fund pensions and other social services, Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the Donetsk area have begun to mount their own resistance to the imposition of undemocratic authority from Kiev. Of course, in this case, the U.S. news media treats the protesters as either delusional clowns or puppets of Moscow.

Again, someone like the young Kerry might have spoken up about the danger from unintended consequences when arrogant U.S. officials interfere in the internal affairs of another country. The young Kerry might have pondered how the Nuland-Gershman strategy of destabilizing Ukraine actually helps either the Ukrainians or the American people.

So far, the scheme holds the possibility of civil war in Ukraine, disastrous economic trouble for Europe (with fallout for the U.S. economy, too) and another splurge of U.S. military spending as bellicose politicians cut back even more on domestic priorities.

The younger Kerry might have been wise enough to cool the rhetoric and redirect the narrative into a realistic discussion that could resolve the crisis. For instance, it wouldn't have been very hard to insist that the Feb. 21 agreement be enforced with Yanukovich possibly serving in a ceremonial capacity until new elections could select a new president, rather than the U.S. and the EU

immediately embracing a neo-Nazi-led coup.

But the older Kerry is behaving much like the older generation of Cold Warriors did in the 1960s when they insisted that there was no choice other than a U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, that the lives of tens of thousands of young American men and millions of Vietnamese was a small price to pay to stop some imaginary dominoes from toppling. South Vietnam had to be kept in the “free world.”

Yet, rather than the dovish warrior of his youth, Kerry has become a hawkish diplomat in his old age, refusing to see the other side’s case and eager to take extreme positions that are sure to get more young people killed. John Kerry in his 20s was a much wiser man than John Kerry in his 70s.

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](#)).

Clinton’s Email Hypocrisy

Hillary Clinton imposed a double-standard on emails as Secretary of State, one for her underlings and one for herself, and now she’s using double-talk to excuse her behavior, writes Bart Gruzalski.

By Bart Gruzalski

Hillary Clinton’s smooth-talking subterfuges about her email server continued in the debate on March 9. Univision’s Jorge Ramos raised the issue: “When you were Secretary of State you wrote 104 emails in your private server that the government now says contained classified information according to the Washington Post and others. That goes against a memo you personally sent to employees in 2011 directing all of them to use official email precisely because of security concerns. So it seems that you issued one set of rules for yourself and a different set of rules for employees at the State Department.”

After asking who approved her private server, Ramos asked the memorable question: “If you get indicted will you drop out?”

The key line in Clinton’s response: “Here’s the cut-to-the-chase fact: I did not send any emails marked ‘classified’ at the time.” We’ve heard that line over and over again the past weeks. Ramos asked his question again: “If you get

indicted would you drop out?" Hillary: "Oh, for goodness, it's not gonna happen. I'm not even going to answer that question."

By continually claiming that none of her emails were marked "classified," Clinton has convinced many of her supporters that she is innocent of putting classified information at risk: Her parsing of words – "marked classified" rather than simply "classified" – continues to work for her.

We have excellent reasons for doubting that Hillary "never sent classified emails." Hillary stated clearly that she was "well aware of the classification requirements." The Washington Post discovered the email equivalent of a "smoking gun" when it reported that Clinton had written three-quarters of the classified emails herself. That undermined her defense that they weren't "marked" classified. If any should have been marked "classified," It was her job to label them.

Under pressure by Fox host Bret Baier on March 7, Hillary added that it was the State Department's job to classify the emails she sent out. The suggestion that it was the State Department's job to classify her outgoing emails is ludicrous. No one else had the access to her private server. In her 2011 email to State Department employees, she shows that she is aware of the dangers of using a private server.

Hillary will undoubtedly continue to dance around questions involving her email. Even if she is forced to testify before a grand jury, her grand jury testimony will remain sealed. Those who are asking her the hard questions in public need to ask very simple and direct questions that leave her no wiggle room. One such question: "Did you ever originate emails containing top secret information?"

Clinton has tried to sidestep the email brouhaha by pointing out that Colin Powell, who was Secretary of State under President George W. Bush, used a private email address. The critical difference is that Powell did not use a home server. The potential security breach is not created by using a private email address, but by sending and keeping emails on a private home server.

Hillary will have to become an unparalleled Clintonesque wordsmith to keep the waters muddied. She may wave off a direct question, saying she's answered it already (she hasn't answered the one above) and asking for the "next question." That response is already losing its effectiveness.

Regardless of what the FBI and Justice Department do, it's hard to imagine what will protect Hillary from being indicted in the forum of public opinion. Hillary did send classified emails. That was part of her job as Secretary of State. She should not have used a home server which allowed classified information to be

hacked. That too was her responsibility as Secretary of State.

Professor Emeritus Bart Gruzalski specialized in ethics, has published three books and over fifty articles, including online publications at Consortiumnews, Truthout's Speakout, Counterpunch, and PolicyMic. EMAIL ADDRESS: bartgruzalski@gmail.com

Trump's Fear of a 'Brokered' Convention

Exclusive: The Republican establishment's last-ditch battle to stop Donald Trump may come down to whether convention rules can be rewritten, as ex-CIA analyst Peter W. Dickson explains.

By Peter W. Dickson

The spectacle of a deadlocked Republican convention and perhaps a nomination "bought" or brokered in Cleveland in July is a prospect that pundits have begun to take seriously as the primary and caucus contests have unfolded over the past month.

It is a scenario that particularly threatens front-runner Donald Trump, who has acknowledged that if he doesn't wrap up a majority of the delegates before the convention, he will be at "a disadvantage." And there is little doubt that the GOP power-brokers who see him as not electable (as well as a threat to the party establishment) are exploring ways to stop him at the convention and, if necessary, to "steal" the nomination from him.

Since the 11 state contests on Super Tuesday (March 1) were not winner-take-all contests, Trump was unable to drive his chief competitors, Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, out of the race. With pluralities in seven states, Trump won 240 delegates, far short of the 300 delegates that pundits had predicted before the fury over Trump's evasive remarks about an endorsement from white nationalist David Duke and the Ku Klux Klan.

Trump's main rivals were able to meet minimum thresholds to collect delegates in many of the Super Tuesday contests. But Trump regained his momentum in the March 8 contests, winning three – Michigan, Mississippi and Hawaii – while Cruz prevailed in Idaho.

Yet there is a key Republican convention rule, known as Rule 40, which could hand Trump the nomination on a silver platter because it limits the number of nominees while prohibiting certain attempts to steal the nomination away from a

front runner.

The purpose of this rule was to help ensure the coronation of a clear front runner and to give a presumptive nominee a celebratory sendoff into the general election. Prior to the 2012 convention, this rule required a candidate to have won a **plurality** of delegates in at least five states to have his or her name put into nomination at the convention.

However, once Mitt Romney secured enough delegates to win the 2012 nomination, his supporters (especially key adviser-operative Ben Ginsburg) got this rule revised to block any person from being nominated at the convention unless he or she had won a **majority** of delegates in at least eight states. (Part of Romney's reasoning was to freeze out a major floor demonstration of support for libertarian Rep. Ron Paul of Texas and thus to present to the nation watching on TV a united party rallying behind the former Massachusetts governor.)

In addition to prohibiting the recording of any delegates won by candidates who failed to meet the eight-state threshold, Rule 40 barred delegates from promoting a groundswell on the convention floor for any person who did not participate in the state contests. Thus, the rule prevents a modern-day replay of the "We Want Willkie" selection of Wendell Willkie at the 1940 Republican convention. (Ironically, that would now rule out a stealth establishment strategy to mount a "Romney, Romney" uprising at the convention in Cleveland.)

It remains to be seen if and when Trump and his rivals can secure majorities of the delegates in eight states. Trump has met that threshold in seven of the 15 states in which he has won the most votes, meaning he is just one state short of the threshold.

Cruz has won the most votes in seven states and secured a majority of delegates in four states: Idaho, Kansas, Maine and Texas. In other words, the Texas senator is halfway there. But Rubio and Kasich have made little or no progress thus far, with the former only getting a majority of delegates for Puerto Rico.

The opportunity to secure a majority of a state's delegates becomes easier after March 15 when states can conduct "winner-take-all" primaries. That means the candidates will only need **pluralities** to win the 20 winner-take-all contests (all outside the South except Florida) to be held on or after March 15. (Another five states will give the top vote-getter a majority of their delegates.)

The number of delegates to be awarded under those rules total 960 which are almost 40 percent of all the delegates at the convention. The current situation would seem to favor Trump and Cruz as the ones most likely to exceed the eight-state threshold.

Even if Rubio and Kasich win their winner-take-all home states of Florida and Ohio, respectively, on March 15, it will be a formidable challenge in a four-man race for them to win a majority of delegates in eight states without a strong swing of support in their favor. So, it is not entirely out of the question that Trump alone or perhaps Trump and Cruz could end up being the only nominees at the convention, with all the Rubio and Kasich delegates effectively set to the side uncounted.

This outcome would mean that the magic figure – a simple majority – to win the nomination would drop below the stated requirement of 1,237 delegates. The practical effect of Rule 40, in wiping out the delegates won by candidates who cannot meet the threshold, makes a first-ballot victory a virtual certainty if there are only one or two candidates who are able to get their names placed in nomination.

Of course, there is the possibility that Republican Party leaders, who are mounting a frantic stop-Trump movement, might move to modify Rule 40 before the convention. North Dakota National Committeeman Curly Haugland, a member of the RNC Rules Committee, told The Daily Caller on Tuesday that there will be an attempt to change Rule 40 to open the convention to any candidate who has won any delegates.

Such a rule change, however, would have to be placed before the convention, meaning that it would need a majority of the delegates to pass, a difficult hurdle if Trump controls most of the votes. But if he doesn't, the maneuver could open a path for denying him the nomination on the first ballot and then steering the prize to another candidate on subsequent ballots, i.e., a "brokered" convention.

If a last-minute rule change is engineered to block Trump – or even just proposed for a vote on the convention floor – Trump and his supporters might throw the proceedings into chaos reminiscent of the Democratic convention in Chicago in 1968. Or Trump could decide to run as an independent as he has suggested he would do if he is "not treated fairly."

Historical Precedents

Though there are few recent historical examples of a brokered GOP convention – the last seriously contested Republican convention was in 1976 when California Gov. Ronald Reagan challenged but lost to sitting President Gerald Ford – floor fights were far more common in earlier eras when the party bosses held sway.

In that context, it's well worth revisiting a pivotal, even iconic moment in the Republican Party's long history when the young party held its second national

convention in 1860, at “the Wigwam” in Chicago. Arguably, it was the most consequential presidential convention of all time, resulting in the dramatic nomination of a “dark horse” candidate named Abraham Lincoln whose nomination was undeniably “bought” via a pivotal bargain reached in a smoke-filled hotel room well past midnight, only hours before the balloting began.

Lincoln’s campaign manager David Davis “stole” the Republican nomination away from the icon of the Eastern Establishment, the famous New York Sen. William Seward. Defying the fastidious Lincoln’s repeated instructions from his home in Springfield, Illinois, not to cut any “bargains” or make “any contracts that will bind me,” Davis did just that and more, such as packing the arena with supporters given unauthorized tickets.

The turning point came when Davis made promises to the Pennsylvania delegation to get it to dump its favorite-son candidate (Simon Cameron) and flip to Lincoln on the second ballot. This stalled Seward’s powerful surge toward a majority of the delegates and brought an end to his anticipated coronation before the start of the fourth ballot.

The Seward supporters were livid. For Lincoln’s physical safety, Davis and his team fired off eight telegrams (preserved in the Lincoln papers at the Library of Congress) begging him to spurn numerous pleas that he come to Chicago to accept the nomination.

Despite his dismay over the wheeling and dealing, Lincoln suggested to Sen. Joshua Giddings any “conditions” (i.e. deals or promises) made at the convention were “honorable ones.” But Lincoln did make some appointments in line with Davis’s promises. For the sake of party unity, Lincoln appointed Cameron as Secretary of War, although he was sacked after nine months and replaced by Davis’s former Kenyon College classmate, Edwin Stanton.

Lincoln scholars, especially biographers, have long steered attention away from what happened at the Chicago convention. The revelation that Lincoln – a Christ-like figure after his assassination on Good Friday 1865 – needed a “kingmaker” like Davis takes away from the majestic trajectory of Lincoln’s life from humble origins to his martyrdom for a just cause: the salvation of the Union and the abolition of slavery.

Obviously, the nomination rules have changed dramatically from Lincoln’s days or even Willkie’s days – with party primaries and caucuses giving a much more prominent say to rank-and-file Republicans. This “democratizing” of the selection process has allowed a wealthy outsider like Trump to charge to the front of the race, running against the party insiders and spurning the financial backing of the powerful GOP “donor class.”

Now, the Republican establishment is hurling millions of dollars into anti-Trump campaign advertising to blunt Trump's popular appeal while counting on his three remaining challengers to block Trump's path to a clear majority of the delegates. That would make possible a convention scenario in which rules might be rewritten to open the floor to more choices.

Besides the delegates selected by voters, the GOP establishment will have 168 non-elected delegates, primarily members of the Republican National Committee (RNC) who can vote. But unlike the 712 "super-delegates" at the Democratic convention, they will not be free to vote as they wish to thwart a particular nominee and are supposed to support the candidate who won the most votes in their state.

Still, the key fight at the Republican convention beginning July 18 may be over the rules governing who is eligible to be nominated and what might happen if no one can win on the first ballot.

Peter W. Dickson is a retired CIA political-military analyst and the author of *Old Kenyon and Lincoln's Kenyon Men*. Copyright © Peter W. Dickson, 2016
