

Trump Resumes Abuse of 'Terror List'

The U.S. government has long abused its "terrorism list" by including disfavored nations while leaving off "allies" implicated in 9/11 and other terror attacks, a practice President Trump has resumed, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

President Trump's placement of North Korea on the official U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism continues a manipulation, by several administrations, of this list for reasons other than terrorism. Neither an earlier removal of North Korea from this list (by the George W. Bush administration in 2008) nor Trump's return of North Korea to the list this week had anything to do with any changes in North Korea's conduct as far as terrorism is concerned.

The Bush administration's delisting was part of an unsuccessful effort to do something about Pyongyang's nuclear program. The Trump administration has seized upon relisting is supposedly another form of pressure on North Korea, with the concern again centered on nuclear weapons.

Rationales being voiced for the newest move show what a stretch it is from what are supposed to be the criteria, defined by statute, for placement on the state sponsor list. Some defenders of the move refer to North Korean actions three decades ago.

Pyongyang really was doing international terrorism in the 1980s, mainly aimed against South Korea. It was responsible for a bomb in Rangoon that killed several visiting members of the South Korean cabinet in 1983. It planted a bomb in a Korean Air civilian airliner in 1987, killing more than a hundred. But North Korea got out of international terrorism in subsequent years, with the hope of gaining some degree of international political rehabilitation. In terms of the legal standards for remaining on the state sponsor list, the delisting of North Korea in 2008 was overdue.

A more recent North Korean-perpetrated incident was the assassination in Malaysia this February of Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korean ruler Kim Jong Un. This killing, being performed clandestinely on foreign soil, technically meets the definition of international terrorism. And it is yet another example of repugnant and brutal behavior by the Pyongyang regime. But it had nothing to do with any campaign of terrorism that poses a threat to anyone other than members of Kim Jong Un's own family or regime whom he perceives as a possible threat to his rule.

Past Practice

Other countries besides North Korea have been the subject of misuse of the state sponsor list. The Reagan administration took Iraq off the list as part of its tilt toward Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. The George H.W. Bush administration returned Iraq to the list after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Neither move had to do with any change in Iraqi behavior regarding international terrorism.

Cuba remained on the list, for reasons involving anti-Castro domestic U.S. politics, long after it had ceased doing anything that could be construed as international terrorism.

Barack Obama made more of an honest effort than most other U.S. presidents to respect the legal criteria associated with the state sponsor list. The belated removal of Cuba from the list was part of this. The Obama administration reportedly considered relisting North Korea but refrained because it could not identify a sound legal rationale for doing so.

Other administrations' misuse of the state sponsor list has been a sloppy way of expressing disapproval of regimes they didn't like. The sloppiness hides how such regimes may exhibit multiple forms of objectionable conduct, each posing its own problems and each of which can be addressed through different means. Blurring everything together into a miasma of undifferentiated rogue state behavior undermines the possibility of using diplomacy and carefully crafted incentives to ameliorate any one form of objectionable conduct, be it terrorism or weapons proliferation or something else, even if we can't solve every problem we have with a regime.

Misusing the list of state sponsors of terrorism sends the message that the United States does not care all that much about terrorism itself. It undermines the credibility of efforts that really are focused on countering terrorism. Most fundamentally, it diminishes the incentive of the targeted regime to get out or stay out of international terrorism. If the North Korean regime sees that it is going to be branded a state sponsor of terrorism regardless of what it is doing terrorism-wise, it has that much less disincentive against sliding back into the reprehensible things it was doing in the 1980s.

This is one form of poor statesmanship in which Trump is not alone. His move regarding the state sponsor list does indicate a shortfall in careful and creative thinking about ways to counter the North Korean nuclear challenge.

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The Lost Journalistic Standards of Russia-gate

Exclusive: The Russia-gate hysteria has witnessed a widespread collapse of journalistic standards as major U.S. news outlets ignore rules about how to treat evidence in dispute, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A danger in both journalism and intelligence is to allow an unproven or seriously disputed fact to become part of the accepted narrative where it gets widely repeated and thus misleads policymakers and citizens alike, such as happened during the run-up to war with Iraq and is now recurring amid the frenzy over Russia-gate.

For instance, in a Russia-gate story on Saturday, The New York Times reported as flat fact that a Kremlin intermediary “told a Trump campaign aide, George Papadopoulos, that the Russians had ‘dirt’ on Mr. Trump’s rival, Hillary Clinton, in the form of ‘thousands of emails.’” The Times apparently feels that this claim no longer needs attribution even though it apparently comes solely from the 32-year-old Papadopoulos as part of his plea bargain over lying to the FBI.

Beyond the question of trusting an admitted liar like Papadopoulos, his supposed Kremlin contact, professor Joseph Mifsud, a little-known academic associated with the University of Stirling in Scotland, denied knowing anything about Democratic emails.

In an interview with the U.K. Daily Telegraph, Mifsud acknowledged meeting with Papadopoulos but disputed having close ties to the Kremlin and rejected how Papadopoulos recounted their conversations. Specifically, he denied the claim that he mentioned emails containing “dirt” on Clinton.

Even New York Times correspondent Scott Shane noted late last month – after the criminal complaint against Papadopoulos was unsealed – that “A crucial detail is still missing: Whether and when Mr. Papadopoulos told senior Trump campaign officials about Russia’s possession of hacked emails. And it appears that the young aide’s quest for a deeper connection with Russian officials, while he aggressively pursued it, led nowhere.”

Shane added, “the court documents describe in detail how Mr. Papadopoulos continued to report to senior campaign officials on his efforts to arrange

meetings with Russian officials, ... the documents do not say explicitly whether, and to whom, he passed on his most explosive discovery – that the Russians had what they considered compromising emails on Mr. Trump's opponent.

"J.D. Gordon, a former Pentagon official who worked for the Trump campaign as a national security adviser [and who dealt directly with Papadopoulos] said he had known nothing about Mr. Papadopoulos' discovery that Russia had obtained Democratic emails or of his prolonged pursuit of meetings with Russians."

Missing Corroboration

But the journalistic question is somewhat different: why does the Times trust the uncorroborated assertion that Mifsud told Papadopoulos about the emails – and trust the claim to such a degree that the newspaper would treat it as flat fact? Absent corroborating evidence, isn't it just as likely (if not more likely) that Papadopoulos is telling the prosecutors what he thinks they want to hear?

If the prosecutors working for Russia-gate independent counsel Robert Mueller had direct evidence that Mifsud did tell Papadopoulos about the emails, you would assume that they would have included the proof in the criminal filing against Papadopoulos, which was made public on Oct. 30.

Further, since Papadopoulos was peppering the Trump campaign with news about his Russian outreach in 2016, you might have expected that he would include something about how helpful the Russians had been in obtaining and publicizing the Democratic emails.

But none of Papadopoulos's many emails to Trump campaign officials about his Russian contacts (as cited by the prosecutors) mentioned the hot news about "dirt" on Clinton or the Russians possessing "thousands of emails." This lack of back-up would normally raise serious doubts about Papadopoulos's claim, but – since Papadopoulos was claiming something that the prosecutors and the Times wanted to believe – reasonable skepticism was swept aside.

What the Times seems to have done is to accept a bald assertion by Mueller's prosecutors as sufficient basis for jumping to the conclusion that this disputed claim is undeniably true. But just because Papadopoulos, a confessed liar, and these self-interested prosecutors claim something is true doesn't make it true.

Careful journalists would wonder, as Shane did, why Papadopoulos who in 2016 was boasting of his Russian contacts to make himself appear more valuable to the Trump campaign wouldn't have informed someone about this juicy tidbit of information, that the Russians possessed "thousands of emails" on Clinton.

Yet, the prosecutors' statement regarding Papadopoulos's guilty plea is strikingly silent on corroborating evidence that could prove that, first, Russia did possess the Democratic emails (which Russian officials deny) and, second, the Trump campaign was at least knowledgeable about this core fact in the support of the theory about the campaign's collusion with the Russians (which President Trump and other campaign officials deny).

Of course, it could be that the prosecutors' "fact" will turn out to be a fact as more evidence emerges, but anyone who has covered court cases or served on a jury knows that prosecutors' criminal complaints and pre-trial statements should be taken with a large grain of salt. Prosecutors often make assertions based on the claim of a single witness whose credibility gets destroyed when subjected to cross-examination.

That is why reporters are usually careful to use words like "alleged" in dealing with prosecutors' claims that someone is guilty. However, in Russia-gate, all the usual standards of proof and logic have been jettisoned. If something serves the narrative, no matter how dubious, it is embraced by the U.S. mainstream media, which – for the past year – has taken a lead role in the anti-Trump "Resistance."

A History of Bias

This tendency to succumb to "confirmation bias," i.e., to believe the worst about some demonized figure, has inflicted grave damage in other recent situations as well.

One example is described in the Senate Intelligence Committee's 2006 study of the false intelligence that undergirded the case for invading Iraq in 2003. That inquiry discovered that previously discredited WMD claims kept reemerging in finished U.S. intelligence analyses as part of the case for believing that Iraq was hiding WMD.

In the years before the Iraq invasion, the U.S. government had provided tens of millions of dollars to Iraqi exiles in the Iraqi National Congress, and the INC, in turn, produced a steady stream of "walk-ins" who claimed to be Iraqi government "defectors" with knowledge about Saddam Hussein's secret WMD programs.

Some U.S. intelligence analysts – though faced with White House pressure to accept this "evidence" – did their jobs honestly and exposed a number of the "defectors" as paid liars, including one, who was identified in the Senate report as "Source Two," who talked about Iraq supposedly building mobile biological weapons labs.

CIA analysts caught Source Two in contradictions and issued a “fabrication notice” in May 2002, deeming him “a fabricator/provocateur” and asserting that he had “been coached by the Iraqi National Congress prior to his meeting with western intelligence services.”

But the Defense Intelligence Agency never repudiated the specific reports that were based on Source Two’s debriefings. Source Two also continued to be cited in five CIA intelligence assessments and the pivotal National Intelligence Estimate in October 2002, “as corroborating other source reporting about a mobile biological weapons program,” the Senate Intelligence Committee report said.

Thus, Source Two became one of four human sources referred to by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his United Nations speech on Feb. 5, 2003, making the case that Iraq was lying when it insisted that it had ended its WMD programs. (The infamous “Curve Ball” was another of these dishonest sources.)

Losing the Thread

After the U.S. invasion and the failure to find the WMD caches, a CIA analyst who worked on Powell’s speech was asked how a known “fabricator” (Source Two) could have been used for such an important address by a senior U.S. government official. The analyst responded, “we lost the thread of concern as time progressed I don’t think we remembered.”

A CIA supervisor added, “Clearly we had it at one point, we understood, we had concerns about the source, but over time it started getting used again and there really was a loss of corporate awareness that we had a problem with the source.”

In other words, like today’s Russia-gate hysteria, the Iraq-WMD groupthink had spread so widely across U.S. government agencies and the U.S. mainstream media that standard safeguards against fake evidence were discarded. People in Official Washington, for reasons of careerism and self-interest, saw advantages in running with the Iraq-WMD pack and recognized the dangers of jumping in front of the stampeding herd to raise doubts about Iraq’s WMD.

Back then, the personal risk to salary and status came from questioning the Iraq-WMD groupthink because there was always the possibility that Saddam Hussein indeed was hiding WMD and, if so, you’d be forever branded as a “Saddam apologist”; while there were few if any personal risks to agreeing with all those powerful people that Iraq had WMD, even if that judgment turned out to be disastrously wrong.

Sure, American soldiers and the people of Iraq would pay a terrible price, but your career likely would be safe, a calculation that proved true for people like Fred Hiatt, the editorial-page editor of The Washington Post who repeatedly

reported Iraq's WMD as flat fact and today remains the editorial-page editor of The Washington Post.

Similarly, Official Washington's judgment now is that there is no real downside to joining the Resistance to Trump, who is widely viewed as a buffoon, unfit to be President of the United States. So, any means to remove him are seen by many Important People as justified – and the Russian allegations seem to be the weightiest rationale for his impeachment or forced resignation.

Professionally, it is much riskier to insist on unbiased standards of evidence regarding Trump and Russia. You'll just stir up a lot of angry questions about why are you "defending Trump." You'll be called a "Trump enabler" and/or a "Kremlin stooge."

However, basing decisions on dubious information carries its own dangers for the nation and the world. Not only do the targets end up with legitimate grievances about being railroaded – and not only does this prejudicial treatment undermine faith in the fairness of democratic institutions – but falsehoods can become the basis for wider policies that can unleash wars and devastation.

We saw the horrific outcome of the Iraq War, but the risks of hostilities with nuclear-armed Russia are far graver; indeed, billions of people could die and human civilization end. With stakes so high, The New York Times and Mueller's prosecutors owe the public better than treating questionable accusations as flat fact.

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](#)).

How Syrian-Nuke Evidence Was Faked

Exclusive: In joining Israel and the White House selling military intervention in Syria, the CIA and international inspectors hid key evidence that would undermine the case, says Gareth Porter in a second part of [a two-part series](#).

By Gareth Porter

When Yousry Abushady studied the highly unusual May 2008 CIA video on a Syrian nuclear reactor that was allegedly under construction when Israeli jet destroyed

it seven months earlier, the senior specialist on North Korean nuclear reactors on the International Atomic Energy Agency's staff knew that something was very wrong.



Abushady quickly determined that the CIA had been seriously misled by Israeli intelligence and immediately informed the two highest officials of the Vienna-based IAEA, Director General Mohamed ElBaradei and Deputy Director for Safeguards, Olli Heinonen, that the CIA's conclusions were not consistent with the most basic technical requirements for such a reactor.

But it did not take long for Abushady to realize that the top IAEA officials were not interested in drawing on his expertise in regard to the alleged Syrian reactor. In fact, the IAEA cited nonexistent evidence linking the site to a Syrian nuclear program while covering up real evidence that would have clearly refuted such a claim, according to Abushady and other former senior IAEA officials.

When Abudhsady met with Heinonen to discuss his analysis of the CIA's case in May 2008, Abushady asked to be included on the team for the anticipated inspection of the al-Kibar site because of his unique knowledge of that type reactor.

But Heinonen refused his request, citing an unwritten IAEA rule that inspectors are not allowed to carry out inspections in their countries of origin. Abushady objected, pointing out that he is Egyptian, not Syrian, to which Heinonen responded, "But you are an Arab and a Muslim!" according to Abushady. Heinonen declined a request for his comment on Abushady's account of the conversation.

A Curious Inspection

In June 2008, an IAEA team consisting of Heinonen and two other inspectors took

environmental samples at the al-Kibar site. In November 2008, the IAEA issued a report saying that laboratory analysis of a number of natural uranium particles collected at the site "indicates that the uranium is anthropogenic," meaning that it had been processed by humans.

The implication was clearly that this was a reason to believe that the site had been connected with a nuclear program. But former IAEA officials have raised serious questions about Heinonen's handling of the physical evidence gathered from the Syrian site as well as his characterization of the evidence in that and other IAEA reports.

Tariq Rauf who headed the IAEA's Verification and Security Policy Coordination Office until 2011, has pointed out that one of the IAEA protocols applicable to these environmental samples is that "the results from all three or four labs to have analyzed the sample must match to give a positive or negative finding on the presence and isotopics of uranium and/or plutonium."

However, in the Syrian case the laboratories to which the samples had been sent had found no evidence of such man-made uranium in the samples they had tested. ElBaradei himself had announced in late September, three months after the samples had originally been taken but weeks before the report was issued, "So far, we have found no indication of any nuclear material." So the November 2008 IAEA report claiming a positive finding was not consistent with its protocols.

But the samples had been sent to yet another laboratory, which had come up with a positive test result for a sample, which had then touted as evidence that the site had held a nuclear reactor. That in itself is an indication that a fundamental IAEA protocol had been violated in the handling of the samples from Syria.

One of the inspectors involved in the IAEA inspection at al-Kibar later revealed to a fellow IAEA inspector what actually happened in the sample collection there. Former senior IAEA inspector Robert Kelley recalled in an interview that, after the last results of the samples from the al-Kibar inspection had come back from all the laboratories, the inspector, Mongolian national Orlokh Dorjkhaidav, came to see him because he was troubled by the results and wanted to tell someone he trusted.

Negative Results

Dorjkhaidav told Kelley that all the samples taken from the ground in the vicinity of the bombed building had tested negative for man-made uranium and that the only sample that had tested positive had been taken in the toilet of the support building.

Dorjkhaidav later left the IAEA and returned to Mongolia, where he died in December 2015. A [video obituary for Dorjkhaidav](#) confirmed his participation in the inspection in Syria. Kelley revealed the former inspector's account to this writer only after Dorjkhaidav's death.

In an e-mail response to a request for his comment on Kelley's account of the Syrian environmental samples, Heinonen would neither confirm nor deny that the swipe sample described by Dorjkhaidav had been taken inside the support building. But in January 2013, [David Albright](#), Director of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, D.C., who has co-authored several articles with Heinonen, acknowledged in a commentary on his think tank's website that the al-Kibar uranium particles had been "found in a changing room in a building associated with the reactor."

Given the dispersal of any nuclear material around the site by the Israeli bombing, if man-made uranium was present at the site, it should not have shown up only inside the support facility but should have been present in the samples taken from the ground outside.

Former IAEA senior inspector Kelley said in an e-mail that a "very likely explanation" for this anomaly is that it was a case of "cross contamination" from the inspector's own clothing. Such cross contamination had occurred in IAEA inspections on a number of occasions, according to both Kelley and Rauf.

Kelley, who had been in charge of inspections in Iraq in the early 1990s, recalled that a set of environmental swipes taken from nuclear facilities that the United States had bombed in Iraq had appeared to show that that Iraq had enriched uranium to 90 percent. But it turned out that they had been taken with swipe paper that had been contaminated accidentally by particles from the IAEA laboratory.

But what bothered Abushady the most was that the IAEA report on Syria had remained silent on the crucial fact that none of the sample results had shown any trace of nuclear-grade graphite.

Abushady recalled that when he challenged Heinonen on the absence of any mention of the nuclear graphite issue in the draft report in a Nov. 13, 2008 meeting, Heinonen said the inspectors had found evidence of graphite but added, "We haven't confirmed that it was nuclear-grade."

Abushady retorted, "Do you know what nuclear-grade graphite is? If you found it you would know it immediately."

Heinonen was invited to comment on Abushady's account of that meeting for this article but declined to do so.

After learning that the report scheduled to be released in November would be silent on the absence of nuclear graphite, Abushady sent a letter to ElBaradei asking him not to release the report on Syria as it was currently written. Abushady protested the report's presentation of the environmental sampling results, especially in regard to nuclear-grade graphite.

"In my technical view," Abushady wrote, "these results are the basis to confirm the contrary, that the site cannot [have been] actually a nuclear reactor."

But the report was published anyway, and a few days later, ElBaradei's Special Assistant Graham Andrew responded to Abushady's message by ordering him to "stop sending e-mails on this subject" and to "respect established lines of responsibility, management and communication."

A Clear Message

The message was clear: the agency was not interested in his information despite the fact that he knew more about the issue than anyone else in the organization.

At a briefing for Member States on the Syria reactor issue on Feb. 26, 2009, the Egyptian representative to the IAEA confronted Heinonen on the absence of nuclear-grade graphite in the environmental samples. This time, Heinonen had a different explanation for the failure to find any such graphite. He responded that it was "not known whether the graphite was in the building at the time of the destruction," according to the diplomatic cable reporting on the briefing that was later released by WikiLeaks.

But that response, too, was disingenuous, according to Abushady. "Graphite is a structural part of the reactor core in the gas-cooled reactor," he explained. "It is not something you add at the end."

The IAEA remained silent on the question of graphite in nine more reports issued over more than two years. When the IAEA finally mentioned the issue for the first time officially in a May 2011 report, it claimed that the graphite particles were "too small to permit an analysis of the purity compared to that normally required for use in a reactor."

But American nuclear engineer Behrad Nakhai, who worked at Oak National Laboratories for many years, said an interview that the laboratories definitely have the ability to determine whether the particles were nuclear grade or not, so the claim "doesn't make sense."

News outlets have never reported on the IAEA's role in helping to cover up the false CIA claim of a North-Korean-style nuclear reactor in the desert by a misleading portrayal of the physical evidence collected in Syria and suppressing

the evidence that would have made that role clear.

Heinonen, who was directly responsible for the IAEA's role in the Syria cover-up, left the IAEA in August 2010 and within a month was given a position at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He has continued to take positions on the Iran nuclear negotiations that were indistinguishable from those of the Netanyahu government. And he is now senior adviser on science and non-proliferation at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a think tank whose positions on the Iran nuclear issues have closely followed those of the Likud governments in Israel.

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<https://consortiumnews.com/2017/11/18/israels-ploy-selling-a-syrian-nuke-strike/>]

Undercounting the Civilian Dead

During the "war on terror," the U.S. government has understated the number of civilians killed (all the better to manage positive perceptions back home). But a new report underscores the truth, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Anyone willing to think carefully and critically about the use of armed force against a target such as Islamic State (ISIS) would do well to read the intensively researched piece in the *New York Times* by investigative journalist Azmat Khan and Arizona State professor Anand Gopal about civilian casualties from the air war waged by the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. The key conclusion is that those casualties are far higher – probably many times higher – than what the U.S. military acknowledges.

Such a discrepancy has been suspected for some time, based on earlier work by private organizations that comb press reports and other publicly available information from afar. Khan and Gopal went beyond that work by selecting three areas in Nineveh province as samples in which they performed an exhaustive on-the-ground investigation, interviewing hundreds of residents and sifting through the rubble of bombed structures. They compared such direct evidence, incident by

incident, with what the responsible U.S. military command said it had in its records about airstrikes it had conducted in the area and the results of those airstrikes.

The authors were given access to the operations center at a U.S. airbase in Qatar that has directed the air war, and their article includes the U.S. military's side of this story, with a description of the procedures used to select targets and assess damage, including civilian casualties. The impression left is not one of willful deception or malfeasance. Rather, the problem is partly a matter of lacking the time and personnel to do the sort of detailed after-the-fact, on-the-ground investigation for every target that Khan and Gopal did with their sample.

It is partly a matter of deficient record-keeping. It is in large part a matter of the fog of this kind of war making much faulty and woefully incomplete information almost inevitable. Although some of the civilian casualties represent collateral damage in the form of people who were in the vicinity of bona fide ISIS targets, others were in places that the targeteers mistakenly identified as having an ISIS connection.

The conditions in which civilians were living when under ISIS control worked against accurate analysis by the military of potential targets, which relied heavily on aerial observation. The observing of people going in and out of buildings in what looked like normal everyday activity was taken as a sign either that the building itself was a normal civilian structure or that there were too many innocent people in the immediate vicinity to hit it.

The absence of such innocent-looking activity tended to be taken as confirmation of any other reason to suspect that malevolent ISIS operations were going on inside. But in the so-called caliphate of ISIS, many people who otherwise would have been moving around freely tended instead to stay indoors at home. They in effect had the choice of increasing their exposure to the vagaries and brutality of ISIS or of raising suspicion at that airbase in Qatar that their home had something to do with ISIS.

Khan and Gopal are unable to extrapolate from their data, being only a sample, to any comprehensive number of innocent civilians killed and wounded in this air war. They note, however, that the concentration of civilian casualties is likely to be even higher in some areas, such as the western part of Mosul, where ISIS held out longer against coalition bombardment than it did in the areas that the authors investigated.

Values and Morality

These findings provide disturbing food for thought in at least three respects. One concerns the values and morality involved in a U.S. military operation in which so many innocents suffer so much. The human faces that Khan and Gopal attach to some of the specific cases of suffering they have investigated underscore the fundamental wrongness of what has been occurring.

A second concerns the counterproductive aspects of an offensive that is supposed to be a combating of terrorism. The Donald Rumsfeld question – are we creating more terrorists than we are killing? – is still quite pertinent. The unsurprising resentment against the United States that results from U.S. aircraft killing and maiming innocent people, or destroying their homes, tends to create more terrorists. At a minimum, it fosters the sort of sentiment that existing terrorists exploit and win them support.

A third implication involves the ability of the American public and political class to assess adequately what is going on with a military campaign of this sort. The biggest problem as always is an unwillingness to pay adequate attention to information at our disposal.

But in this case there is the added problem of bum information. Khan and Gopal write that the huge disparity between official numbers and probable actual figures of civilian casualties means this aerial offensive “may be the least transparent war in recent American history.”

There are important policy decisions ahead about a continued U.S. military role, if any, in the areas where the ISIS caliphate once stood. Civilian casualties, and the importance of having an accurate sense of the extent of casualties that our own forces cause, need to be part of any debate about those decisions. But probably the lessons of the anti-ISIS air war apply at least as much to other states and regions where the United States has assumed the role of aerial gendarme, using either manned or unmanned means, against groups such as ISIS or al-Qaeda.

One thinks in particular of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but in the absence of any geographically defined Congressional authorization for such use of force, there is no limit to where the United States will bombard from the sky and where, given the intrinsic difficulties in assembling accurate targeting information against such shadowy adversaries, more innocent civilians will die. This is one of the continuing dark sides of a “war on terror” that has been militarized to the extent that ill-chosen metaphor implies.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is author most recently of [Why America Misunderstands the World](#). (This article first appeared as a [blog post](#) at The

Israel's Ploy Selling a Syrian Nuke Strike

Exclusive: The Iraq WMD fiasco wasn't the only time political pressure twisted U.S. intelligence judgments. In 2007, Israel sold the CIA on a dubious claim about a North Korean nuclear reactor in the Syrian desert, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

In September 2007, Israeli warplanes bombed a building in eastern Syria that the Israelis claimed held a covert nuclear reactor that had been built with North Korean assistance. Seven months later, the CIA released an extraordinary 11-minute video and mounted press and Congressional briefings that supported that claim.

But nothing about that alleged reactor in the Syrian desert turns out to be what it appeared at the time. The evidence now available shows that there was no such nuclear reactor, and that the Israelis had misled George W. Bush's administration into believing that it was in order to draw the United States into bombing missile storage sites in Syria. Other evidence now suggests, moreover, that the Syrian government had led the Israelis to believe wrongly that it was a key storage site for Hezbollah missiles and rockets.

The International Atomic Agency's top specialist on North Korean reactors, Egyptian national Yousry Abushady, warned top IAEA officials in 2008 that the published CIA claims about the alleged reactor in the Syrian desert could not possibly have been true. In a series of interviews in Vienna and by phone and e-mail exchanges over several months Abushady detailed the technical evidence that led him to issue that warning and to be even more confident about that judgment later on. And a retired nuclear engineer and research scientist with many years of experience at Oak Ridge National Laboratory has confirmed a crucial element of that technical evidence.

Published revelations by senior Bush administration officials show, moreover, that principal U.S. figures in the story all had their own political motives for supporting the Israeli claim of a Syrian reactor being built with North Korean help.

Vice President Dick Cheney hoped to use the alleged reactor to get President George W. Bush to initiate U.S. airstrikes in Syria in the hope of shaking the Syrian-Iranian alliance. And both Cheney and then CIA Director Michael Hayden also hoped to use the story of a North Korean-built nuclear reactor in Syria to kill a deal that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was negotiating with North Korea on its nuclear weapons program in 2007-08.

Mossad Chief's Dramatic Evidence

In April 2007 the chief of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence agency, Meir Dagan, presented Cheney, Hayden and National Security Adviser Steven Hadley with evidence of what he said was a nuclear reactor being constructed in eastern Syria with the help of the North Koreans. Dagan showed them nearly a hundred hand-held photographs of the site revealing what he described as the preparation for the installation of a North Korean reactor and claimed that it was only a few months from being operational.

The Israelis made no secret of their desire to have a U.S. airstrike destroy the alleged nuclear facility. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called President Bush immediately after that briefing and said, "George, I'm asking you to bomb the compound," according to the account in Bush's memoirs.

Cheney, who was known to be a personal friend of Olmert, wanted to go further. At White House meetings in subsequent weeks, Cheney argued forcefully for a U.S. attack not only on the purported reactor building but on Hezbollah weapons storage depots in Syria. Then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who participated in those meetings, recalled in his own memoirs that Cheney, who was also looking for an opportunity to provoke a war with Iran, hoped to "rattle Assad sufficiently so as to end his close relationship with Iran" and "send a powerful warning to the Iranians to abandon their nuclear ambitions."

CIA Director Hayden aligned the agency clearly with Cheney on the issue, not because of Syria or Iran but because of North Korea. In his book, *Playing to the Edge*, published last year, Hayden recalls that, at a White House meeting to brief President Bush the day after Dagan's visit, he whispered in Cheney's ear, "You were right, Mr. Vice-President."

Hayden was referring to the fierce political struggle within the Bush administration over North Korea policy that had been underway ever since Condoleezza Rice had become Secretary of State in early 2005. Rice had argued that diplomacy was the only realistic way to get Pyongyang to retreat from its nuclear weapons program. But Cheney and his administration allies John Bolton and Robert Joseph (who succeeded Bolton as the key State Department policymaker on North Korea after Bolton became U.N. Ambassador in 2005) were determined to

end the diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang.

Cheney was still maneuvering to find a way to prevent the successful completion of the negotiations, and he saw the story of a Syrian nuclear reactor built secretly in the desert with help from the North Koreans as bolstering his case. Cheney reveals in his own memoirs that in January 2008, he sought to sandbag Rice's North Korea nuclear deal by getting her to agree that a failure by North Korea to "admit they've proliferating to the Syrians would be a deal killer."

Three months later, the CIA released its unprecedented 11-minute video supporting the entire Israeli case for a North-Korean-style nuclear reactor that was nearly completed. Hayden recalls that his decision to release the video on the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor in April 2008 was "to avoid a North Korean nuclear deal being sold to a Congress and a public ignorant of this very pertinent and very recent episode."

The video, complete with computer reconstructions of the building and photographs from the Israelis made a big splash in the news media. But one specialist on nuclear reactors who examined the video closely found abundant reason to conclude that the CIA's case was not based on real evidence.

Technical Evidence against a Reactor

Egyptian national Yousry Abushady was a PhD in nuclear engineering and 23-year veteran of the IAEA who had been promoted to section head for Western Europe in the operations division of agency's Safeguards Department, meaning that he was in charge of all inspections of nuclear facilities in the region. He had been a trusted adviser to Bruno Pellaud, IAEA Deputy Director General for Safeguards from 1993 to 1999, who told this writer in an interview that he had "relied on Abushady frequently."

Abushady recalled in an interview that, after spending many hours reviewing the video released by the CIA in April 2008 frame by frame, he was certain that the CIA case for a nuclear reactor at al-Kibar in the desert in eastern Syria was not plausible for multiple technical reasons. The Israelis and the CIA had claimed the alleged reactor was modeled on the type of reactor the North Koreans had installed at Yongbyon called a gas-cooled graphite-moderated (GCGM) reactor.

But Abushady knew that kind of reactor better than anyone else at the IAEA. He had designed a GCGM reactor for his doctoral student in nuclear engineering, had begun evaluating the Yongbyon reactor in 1993, and from 1999 to 2003 had headed the Safeguards Department unit responsible for North Korea.

Abushady had traveled to North Korea 15 times and conducted extensive technical discussions with the North Korean nuclear engineers who had designed and

operated the Yongbyon reactor. And the evidence he saw in the video convinced him that no such reactor could have been under construction at al-Kibar.

On April 26, 2008, Abushady sent a "preliminary technical assessment" of the video to IAEA Deputy Director General for Safeguards Olli Heinonen, with a copy to Director General Mohamed ElBaradei. Abushady observed in his memorandum that the person responsible for assembling the CIA video was obviously unfamiliar with either the North Korean reactor or with GCGM reactors in general.

The first thing that struck Abushady about the CIA's claims was that the building was too short to hold a reactor like the one in Yongbyon, North Korea.

"It is obvious," he wrote in his "technical assessment" memo to Heinonen, "that the Syrian building with no UG [underground] construction, can not hold a [reactor] similar [to] NK GCR [North Korean gas-cooled reactor]."

Abushady estimated the height of the North Korean reactor building in Yongbyon at a 50 meters (165 feet) and estimated that the building at al-Kibar at a little more than a third as tall.

Abushady also found the observable characteristics of the al-Kibar site inconsistent with the most basic technical requirements for a GCGM reactor. He pointed out that the Yongbyon reactor had no less than 20 supporting buildings on the site, whereas the satellite imagery shows that the Syrian site did not have a single significant supporting structure.

The most telling indication of all for Abushady that the building could not have been a GCGM reactor was the absence of a cooling tower to reduce the temperature of the carbon dioxide gas coolant in such a reactor.

"How can you work a gas-cooled reactor in a desert without a cooling tower?" Abushady asked in an interview.

IAEA Deputy Director Heinonen claimed in an IAEA report that the site had sufficient pumping power to get river water from a pump house on the nearby Euphrates River to the site. But Abushady recalls asking Heinonen, "How could this water be transferred for about 1,000 meters and continue to the heat exchangers for cooling with the same power?"

Robert Kelley, a former head of the U.S. Department of Energy's Remote Sensing Laboratory and former senior IAEA inspector in Iraq, noticed another fundamental problem with Heinonen's claim: the site had no facility for treating the river water before it reached the alleged reactor building.

"That river water would have been carrying debris and silt into the reactor heat exchangers," Kelley said in an interview, making it highly questionable that a reactor could have operated there.

Yet another critical piece that Abushady found missing from the site was a cooling pond facility for spent fuel. The CIA had theorized that the reactor building itself contained a "spent fuel pond," based on nothing more than an ambiguous shape in an aerial photograph of the bombed building.

But the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon and all 28 other GCGM reactors that had been built in the world all have the spent fuel pond in a separate building, Abushady said. The reason, he explained, was that the magnox cladding surrounding the fuel rods would react to any contact with moisture to produce hydrogen that could explode.

But the definitive and irrefutable proof that no GCGM reactor had been present at al-Kibar came from the environmental samples taken by the IAEA at the site in June 2008. Such a reactor would have contained nuclear-grade graphite, Abushady explained, and if the Israelis had actually bombed a GCGM reactor, it would have spread particles of nuclear-grade graphite all over the site.

Behrad Nakhai, a nuclear engineer at Oak Ridge National Laboratory for many years, confirmed Abushady's observation in an interview. "You would have had hundreds of tons of nuclear-grade graphite scattered around the site," he said, "and it would have been impossible to clean it up."

IAEA reports remained silent for more than two years about what the samples showed about nuclear-grade graphite, then claimed in a May 2011 report that the graphite particles were "too small to permit an analysis of the purity compared to that normally required for use in a reactor." But given the tools available to laboratories, the IAEA claim that they couldn't determine whether the particles were nuclear grade or not "doesn't make sense," Nakhai said.

Hayden acknowledged in his 2016 account that "key components" of a nuclear reactor site for nuclear weapons were "still missing." The CIA had tried to find evidence of a reprocessing facility in Syria that could be used to obtain the plutonium for a nuclear bomb but had been unable to find any trace of one.

The CIA also had found no evidence of a fuel fabrication facility, without which a reactor could not have gotten the fuel rods to be reprocessed. Syria could not have gotten them from North Korea, because the fuel fabrication plant at Yongbyon had produced no fuel rods since 1994 and was known to have fallen into serious disrepair after the regime had agreed to scrap its own plutonium reactor program.

Manipulated and Misleading Photographs

Hayden's account shows that he was ready to give the CIA's stamp of approval to the Israeli photographs even before the agency's analysts had even begun

analyzing them. He admits that when he met Dagan face-to-face he didn't ask how and when Mossad had obtained the photographs, citing "espionage protocol" among cooperating intelligence partners. Such a protocol would hardly apply, however, to a government sharing intelligence in order to get the United States to carry out an act of war on its behalf.

The CIA video relied heavily on the photographs that Mossad had given to Bush administration in making its case. Hayden writes that it was "pretty convincing stuff, if we could be confident that the pictures hadn't been altered." But by his own account Hayden knew Mossad had engaged in at least one deception. He writes that when CIA experts reviewed the photographs from Mossad, they found that one of them had been photo-shopped to remove the writing on the side of a truck.

Hayden professes to have had no concern about that photo-shopped picture. But after this writer asked how CIA analysts interpreted Mossad's photo shopping of the picture as one of the questions his staff requested in advance of a possible interview with Hayden, he declined the interview.

Abushady points out that the main issues with the photographs the CIA released publicly are whether they were actually taken at the al-Kibar site and whether they were consistent with a GCGM reactor. One of the photographs showed what the CIA video called "the steel liner for the reinforced-concrete reactor vessel before it was installed." Abushady noticed immediately, however, that nothing in the picture links the steel liner to the al-Kibar site.

Both the video and CIA's press briefing explained that the network of small pipes on the outside of the structure was for "cooling water to protect the concrete against the reactor's intense heat and radiation."

But Abushady, who specializes in such technology, pointed out that the structure in the picture bore no resemblance to a Gas-Cooled Reactor vessel. "This vessel cannot be for a Gas-Cooled Reactor," Abushady explained, "based on its dimensions, its thickness and the pipes shown on the side of the vessel."

The CIA video's explanation that the network of pipes was necessary for "cooling water" made no sense, Abushady said, because gas-cooled reactors use only carbon dioxide gas – not water – as a coolant. Any contact between water and the Magnox-cladding used in that type of reactor, Abushady explained, could cause an explosion.

A second Mossad photograph showed what the CIA said were the "exit points" for the reactor's control rods and fuel rods. The CIA juxtaposed that photograph with a photograph of the tops of the control rods and fuel rods of the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon and claimed a "very close resemblance" between the

two.

Abushady found major differences between the two pictures, however. The North Korean reactor had a total of 97 ports, but the picture allegedly taken at al-Kibar shows only 52 ports. Abushady was certain that the reactor shown in the photograph could not have been based on the Yongbyon reactor. He also noted that the picture had a pronounced sepia tone, suggesting that it was taken quite a few years earlier.

Abushady warned Heinson and ElBaradei in his initial assessment that the photo presented as taken from inside the reactor building appeared to an old photo of a small gas-cooled reactor, most likely an early such reactor built in the U.K.

A Double Deception

Many observers have suggested that Syria's failure to protest the strike in the desert loudly suggests that it was indeed a reactor. Information provided by a former Syrian air force major who defected to an anti-Assad military command in Aleppo and by the head of Syria's atomic energy program helps unlock the mystery of what was really in the building at al-Kibar.

The Syrian major, "Abu Mohammed," told The Guardian in February 2013 that he was serving in the air defense station at Deir Azzor, the city nearest to al-Kibar, when he got a phone call from a Brigadier General at the Strategic Air Command in Damascus just after midnight on Sept. 6, 2007. Enemy planes were approaching his area, the general said, but "you are to do nothing."

The major was confused. He wondered why the Syrian command would want to let Israeli fighter planes approach Deir Azzor unhindered. The only logical reason for such an otherwise inexplicable order would be that, instead of wanting to keep the Israelis away from the building at al-Kibar, the Syrian government actually wanted the Israelis to attack it. In the aftermath of the strike, the Damascus issued only an opaque statement claiming that the Israeli jets had been driven away and remaining silent on the airstrike at al-Kibar.

Abushady told this writer he learned from meetings with Syrian officials during his final year at the IAEA that the Syrian government had indeed originally built the structure at al-Kibar for the storage of missiles as well as for a fixed firing position for them. And he said Ibrahim Othman, the head of Syria's Atomic Energy Commission, had confirmed that point in a private meeting with him in Vienna in September 2015.

Othman also confirmed Abushady's suspicion from viewing satellite photographs that the roof over the central room in the building had been made with two movable light plates that could be opened to allow the firing of a missile. And

he told Abushady that he had been correct in believing that what had appeared in a satellite image immediately after the bombing to be two semi-circular shapes was what had remained of the original concrete launching silo for missiles.

In the wake of the Israel's 2006 invasion of Southern Lebanon, the Israelis were searching intensively for Hezbollah missiles and rockets that could reach Israel and they believed many of those Hezbollah weapons were being stored in Syria. If they wished to draw the attention of the Israelis away from actual missile storage sites, the Syrians would have had good reason to want to convince the Israelis that this was one of their major storage sites.

Othman told Abushady that the building had been abandoned in 2002, after the construction had been completed. The Israelis had acquired ground-level pictures from 2001-02 showing the construction of outer walls that would hide the central hall of the building. The Israelis and the CIA both insisted in 2007-08 that this new construction indicated that it had to be a reactor building, but it is equally consistent with a building designed to hide missile storage and a missile-firing position.

Although Mossad went to great lengths to convince the Bush administration that the site was a nuclear reactor, what the Israelis really wanted was for the Bush administration to launch U.S. airstrikes against Hezbollah and Syrian missile storage sites. Senior officials of the Bush administration didn't buy the Israeli bid to get the United States do the bombing, but none of them ever raised questions about the Israeli ruse.

So both the Assad regime and the Israeli government appear to have succeeded in carrying out their own parts in a double deception in the Syrian desert.

[A second part of this two part-series can be [read here](#).]

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Russia-gate Spreads to Europe

Exclusive: The Russia-gate hysteria has jumped the Atlantic with Europeans blaming Russia for Brexit and Catalanian discontent. But what about Israeli influence operations or, for that matter, American ones, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Ever since the U.S. government dangled \$160 million last December to combat Russian propaganda and disinformation, obscure academics and eager think tanks have been lining up for a shot at the loot, an unseemly rush to profit that is spreading the Russia-gate hysteria beyond the United States to Europe.

Now, it seems that every development, which is unwelcomed by the Establishment – from Brexit to the Catalonia independence referendum – gets blamed on Russia! Russia! Russia!

The methodology of these “studies” is to find some Twitter accounts or Facebook pages somehow “linked” to Russia (although it’s never exactly clear how that is determined) and complain about the “Russian-linked” comments on political developments in the West. The assumption is that the gullible people of the United States, United Kingdom and Catalonia were either waiting for some secret Kremlin guidance to decide how to vote or were easily duped.

Oddly, however, most of this alleged “interference” seems to have come *after* the event in question. For instance, more than half (56 percent) of the famous \$100,000 in Facebook ads in 2015-2017 supposedly to help elect Donald Trump came *after* last year’s U.S. election (and the total sum compares to Facebook’s annual revenue of \$27 billion).

Similarly, a new British study at the University of Edinburgh blaming the Brexit vote on Russia discovered that more than 70 percent of the Brexit-related tweets from allegedly Russian-linked sites came after the referendum on whether the U.K. should leave the European Union. But, hey, don’t let facts and logic get in the way of a useful narrative to suggest that anyone who voted for Trump or favored Brexit or wants independence for Catalonia is Moscow’s “useful idiot”!

This week, British Prime Minister Theresa May accused Russia of seeking to “undermine free societies” and to “sow discord in the West.”

What About Israel?

Yet, another core problem with these “studies” is that they don’t come with any “controls,” i.e., what is used in science to test a hypothesis against some base line to determine if you are finding something unusual or just some normal occurrence.

In this case, for instance, it would be useful to find some other country that, like Russia, has a significant number of English speakers but where English is not the native language – and that has a significant interest in foreign affairs – and then see whether people from that country weigh in on social media with

their opinions and perspectives about political events in the U.S., U.K., etc.

Perhaps, the U.S. government could devote some of that \$160 million to, say, a study of the Twitter/Facebook behavior of Israelis and whether they jump in on U.S./U.K. controversies that might directly or indirectly affect Israel. We could see how many Twitter/Facebook accounts are “linked” to Israel; we could study whether any Israeli “trolls” harass journalists and news sites that oppose neoconservative policies and politicians in the West; we could check on whether Israel does anything to undermine candidates who are viewed as hostile to Israeli interests; if so, we could calculate how much money these “Israeli-linked” activists and bloggers invest in Facebook ads; and we could track any Twitter bots that might be reinforcing the Israeli-favored message.

No Chance

If we had this Israeli baseline, then perhaps we could judge how unusual it is for Russians to voice their opinions about controversies in the West. It’s true that Israel is a much smaller country with 8.5 million people compared to Russia’s 144 million, but you could adjust for those per capita numbers – and even if you didn’t, it wouldn’t be surprising to find that Israel’s interference in U.S. policymaking still exceeds Russian influence.

It’s also true that Israeli leaders have often advocated policies that have proved disastrous for the United States, such as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s encouragement of the Iraq War, which Russia opposed. Indeed, although Russia is now regularly called an American enemy, it’s hard to think of any policy that President Vladimir Putin has pushed on the U.S. that is even a fraction as harmful to U.S. interests as the Iraq War has been.

And, while we’re at it, maybe we could have an accounting of how much “U.S.-linked” entities have spent to influence politics and policies in Russia, Ukraine, Syria and other international hot spots.

But, of course, neither of those things will happen. If you even tried to gauge the role of “Israeli-linked” operations in influencing Western decision-making, you’d be accused of anti-Semitism. And if that didn’t stop you, there would be furious editorials in The New York Times, The Washington Post and the rest of the U.S. mainstream media denouncing you as a “conspiracy theorist.” Who could possibly think that Israel would do anything underhanded to shape Western attitudes?

And, if you sought the comparative figures for the West interfering in the affairs of other nations, you’d be faulted for engaging in “false moral equivalence.” After all, whatever the U.S. government and its allies do is good

for the world; whereas Russia is the fount of evil.

So, let's just get back to developing those algorithms to sniff out, isolate and eradicate "Russian propaganda" or other deviant points of view, all the better to make sure that Americans, Britons and Catalonians vote the right way.

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).

America's Renegade Warfare

Exclusive: Claiming the right to launch preemptive wars and fighting an ill-defined "global war on terror," the U.S. government has slaughtered vast numbers of civilians in defiance of international law, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

Seventy-seven million people in North and South Korea find themselves directly in the line of fire from the threat of a Second Korean War. The rest of the world is recoiling in horror from the scale of civilian casualties such a war would cause and the unthinkable prospect that either side might actually use nuclear weapons.

Since the first Korean War killed at least 20 percent of North Korea's population and left the country in ruins, the U.S. has repeatedly failed to follow through on diplomacy to establish a lasting peace in Korea and has instead kept reverting to illegal and terrifying threats of war. Most significantly, the U.S. has waged a relentless propaganda campaign to discount North Korea's legitimate defense concerns as it confronts the threat of a U.S. war machine that has only grown more dangerous since the last time it destroyed North Korea.

The North has lived under this threat for 65 years and has watched Iraq and Libya destroyed after they gave up their nuclear weapons programs. When North Korea discovered a U.S. plan for a Second Korean War on South Korea's military computer network in September 2016, its leaders quite rationally concluded that a viable nuclear deterrent is the only way to guarantee their country's safety.

What does it say about the role the U.S. is playing in the world that the only

way North Korea's leaders believe they can keep their own people safe is to develop weapons that could kill millions of Americans?

The Changing Face of War

The Second World War was the deadliest war ever fought, with at least 75 million people killed, about five times as many as in the First World War. When the slaughter ended in 1945, world leaders signed the United Nations Charter to try to ensure that that scale of mass killing and destruction would never happen again. The U.N. Charter is still in force, and it explicitly prohibits the threat or use of military force by any nation.

It was not just the scale of the slaughter that shocked the world's leaders into that brief moment of sanity in 1945. It was also the identities of the dead. Two-thirds of the people killed in the Second World War were civilians, a drastic change from the First World War, only a few decades earlier, when an estimated 86 percent of the people killed were uniformed combatants. The use of nuclear weapons by the United States raised the specter that future wars could kill an exponentially greater numbers of civilians, or even end human civilization altogether.

War had become "total war," no longer fought only on battlefields between soldiers, but between entire societies with ordinary people, their homes and their lives now on the front line. In the Second World War:

–Fleets of warplanes deliberately bombed cities to "dehouse" civilian populations, as British officials described their own bombing of Germany. "As I write this," George Orwell wrote from London in 1941, "Highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me."

–Submarines sank hundreds of merchant ships in an effort to starve their enemies into submission. General Carter Clarke, who was in charge of interpreting Japanese intelligence for President Truman, said in a 1959 interview that Japan surrendered because it faced mass starvation due to the sinking of its merchant shipping, not because of the gratuitous U.S. nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was estimated that 7 million more civilians would die of starvation if Japan fought on until 1946.

–Genocidal mass extermination campaigns killed civilians based only on their political affiliation or ethnicity. Under cross-examination by a young American prosecutor, Benjamin Ferencz, SS Gruppenfuhrer Dr. Otto Ohlendorf explained patiently to a courtroom in Nuremberg why he found it necessary for the "preemptive defense" of Germany to order the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians. He explained that even children had to be killed to prevent them too

becoming enemies of Germany when they grew up and found out what happened to their parents.

Despite the U.N. Charter and international efforts to prevent war, people in countries afflicted by war today still face the kind of total war that horrified world leaders in 1945. The main victims of total war in our “modern” world have been civilians in countries far removed from the safe havens of power and privilege where their fates are debated and decided: Yugoslavia; Afghanistan; Iraq; Somalia; Pakistan; Yemen; Libya; Syria; Ukraine. There has been no legal or political accountability for the mass destruction of their cities, their homes or their lives. Total war has not been prevented, or even punished, just externalized.

But thanks to billions of dollars invested in military propaganda and public relations and the corrupt nature of for-profit media systems, citizens of the countries responsible for the killing of millions of their fellow human beings live in near-total ignorance of the mass killing carried out in their name in these “red zones” around the world.

People in ever-spreading war zones are living under the very conditions of total war that the world recoiled from at the end of the Second World War. Like Orwell in London in 1941, they hear highly civilized human beings flying overhead trying to kill them, human beings who know nothing about them beyond the name of the city where they live and its strategic value in wars that offer them, the victims, nothing but death or destitution.

In the case of drones, the human beings trying to kill them from the other side of the world are so highly civilized that they can hop into cars and drive home to have dinner with their families at the end of their shifts, while another “team member” efficiently takes over the “joy-stick” and carries on killing.

People in Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Libya have been subjected to hunger and starvation under sieges and naval blockades that are as brutally effective as German and American submarines were in World War Two. Millions of people in Yemen face an imminent danger of starvation under the U.S.-backed naval blockade and Saudi and Emirati bombing of Yemeni ports.

In retaliation for one missile fired at Riyadh, the Saudi capital, last week, the U.S.-backed coalition completely closed all Yemen’s ports, tightening the blockade on millions of starving people. The requirements of necessity and proportionality, which have been basic principles of customary international law since the Nineteenth Century, lie buried in the graveyards of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Is the U.S. Guilty of Genocide?

The U.S. military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq quickly adopted “divide and rule” strategies that targeted Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Sunni Arabs in Iraq. When I pointed this out to a friend who teaches military history in 2005, he asked only, “How else can you do it?” I reminded him that “you” don’t have to “do it” at all.

U.S. and allied forces in Iraq have killed at least 10-15 percent of Iraq’s Sunni Arabs and displaced about half of them. Sunni Arabs have been relentlessly targeted for detention, torture and summary execution since 2004, when ex-Drug Enforcement Administration intelligence chief Steven Casteel, retired Colonel James Steele and a CIA team reportedly based on the eighth floor of the Iraqi Interior Ministry recruited, trained and equipped “Special Police” death squads to conduct a reign of terror that tortured and killed tens of thousands of men and boys in Baghdad and elsewhere.

After training by James Steele’s Special Police Training Teams, each Iraqi Special Police unit worked closely with a U.S. Special Police Transition Team (SPTT), and their operations were commanded and controlled from a high-tech command center staffed by U.S. and Iraqi personnel. An SPTT assigned to the notorious Wolf Brigade in Baghdad was from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, the “Nightstalkers,” who usually provide helicopter transport for U.S. special operations but in this case appear to have used their helicopters mainly to fly detainees to their deaths.

After the exposure of their Al Jadiriyah torture prison in November 2005, the Special Police were rebranded as the National Police (and the Wolf Brigade, incongruously, as the Freedom Brigade). But their torture and killing raged on, under cover of an official narrative of “sectarian violence” which scrupulously ignored the command and control of these forces by the Iraqi Interior Ministry, the CIA and the U.S. military.

At the peak of this campaign in July-October 2006, supported by the U.S. Operations Together Forward I & II, National Police death squads flooded the main morgue in Baghdad with up to 1,600 bodies per month. Thousands more Iraqis were killed and buried elsewhere or just disappeared, while 2 million people were displaced inside Iraq and another 2 million fled the country.

This ethnic cleansing campaign has continued under the U.S.-backed Shiite government and has kept driving Sunni Arab Iraqis into armed resistance groups, of which Islamic State is only the latest, creating pretexts for endless violence against them. Kurdish military intelligence reports have estimated that 40,000 civilians were killed in the recent U.S.-led assault on

Mosul, by tens of thousands of bombs and missiles dropped by U.S. and “coalition” warplanes, U.S. Marine 220-lb HiMARS rockets and U.S., French and Iraqi heavy artillery. This is still only an estimate, and the true number of civilians killed in Mosul was probably higher.

From 2004 on, the ethnic cleansing of Iraq’s Sunni Arabs has been a deliberate, calculated element of the U.S.’s “divide and rule” policy in Iraq, with the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” That is the legal definition of genocide in Article II of the 1948 Genocide Convention. The working title of my book about the U.S. invasion and destruction of Iraq was *From Aggression to Genocide*.

As for the killing of “enemy” children, President Obama justified the murder of 16-year-old American Abdulrahman al-Awlaki in Yemen in October 2011, two weeks after the assassination of his father, the Yemeni-American preacher Anwar al-Awlaki. In one of Donald Trump’s first acts as president, he authorized a U.S. special operations attack that killed Abdulrahman’s 8-year old sister Nawar and other family members in January 2017 – after Trump, on the campaign trail, had vowed to kill the families of suspected terrorists.

Benjamin Ferencz, the by then 81-year-old American lawyer who prosecuted SS Gruppenfuhrer Ohlendorf and his accomplices at Nuremberg, was interviewed by NPR eight days after the mass murders of Sept. 11, 2001.

“It is never a legitimate response to punish people who are not responsible for the wrong done,” Ferencz insisted. “We must make a distinction between punishing the guilty and punishing others. If you simply retaliate en masse by bombing Afghanistan, let us say, or the Taliban, you will kill many people who don’t approve of what has happened... I say to the skeptics, ‘Follow your procedure and you will see what happens.’ ... We will have more fanatics and more zealots deciding to come and kill the evil, the United States.”

But in the courtroom of American politics, hopelessly corrupted by the CIA’s politicized intelligence and manufactured crises and the “unwarranted influence” of the Military Industrial Complex, our leaders chose Ohlendorf’s logic over Ferencz’s. Neither the millions of people killed in 16 years of war, nor its legacy of ruin and chaos in country after country, nor the utter failure of the “war on terror” on its own terms have led to any change in this illegitimate, criminal and, in the case of Sunni Arabs in Iraq, genocidal U.S. policy.

The Geneva Conventions

As well as the unfulfilled promise of peace in the U.N. Charter, the post-World War II effort to prevent the future mass slaughter of civilians led to a major

revision of the Geneva Conventions in 1949. That included a brand new convention, the Fourth Geneva Convention, dedicated entirely to the protection of civilians in wartime or under military occupation.

Two additional protocols were added to the Geneva Conventions in 1977, to adapt them to the changing nature of war and to provide even greater protections to civilians. The First Additional Protocol has been signed and ratified by 174 countries and the Second by 168 countries. The United States has not ratified either of the Additional Protocols, but it is legally bound by them because treaties that have been ratified by large majorities of countries automatically become part of customary international law, which is universally binding.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the 1949 Conventions in 1999, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) conducted a survey of 17,000 people in 17 countries to see how well people around the world understood “the rules and limits of what is permissible in war” under the Geneva Conventions. The study was titled People on War – Civilians in the Line of Fire.

The 17 countries surveyed included 12 where wars had recently been fought, four of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, and Switzerland, where the ICRC is based. The introduction to the *People on War* report noted that 90 percent of the people killed in recent wars were civilians and that, in today’s world, “war is war on civilians.” But the report went on:

“...the more these conflicts have degenerated into wars on civilians, the more people have reacted by reaffirming the norms, traditions, conventions and rules that seek to create a barrier between those who carry arms into battle and the civilian population... Large majorities in every war-torn country reject attacks on civilians in general and a wide range of actions that by design or default could harm the innocent.”

People interviewed in Switzerland and the four Security Council permanent member countries were asked to choose between a firm statement that armed forces “must attack only other combatants and leave civilians alone,” and a weaker statement that, “combatants should avoid civilians as much as possible.” About three-quarters of respondents in the U.K., Russia, France and Switzerland chose the first statement, which correctly summarizes the rules of the Fourth Geneva Convention, while 26 percent in the U.K. and 16-17 percent in Russia, France and Switzerland chose the weaker one.

When it came to the United States, though, a very different pattern emerged. Only 52 percent of Americans understood that attacking civilians is strictly prohibited, while 42 percent chose the weaker option, twice as many as in the other four countries. The ICRC report noted that, “Across a wide range of

questions, in fact, American attitudes towards attacks on civilians were much more lax.”

The survey also asked whether it is lawful to attack “enemy combatants in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing that many civilians would be killed.” Once again, while only 20-29 percent of people in the other four countries thought this was allowed, that increased to 38 percent among Americans. Since 1999, this question has arisen again and again across America’s war zones, most recently in the U.S.-led massacres of Iraqi and Syrian civilians in Mosul and Raqqa.

During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, U.N. human rights reports repeatedly reminded U.S. officials of their duty as an occupying power to protect civilians, and notified them that U.S. military operations in civilian areas were routinely violating international humanitarian law. John Pace, who headed the U.N. Assistance Mission to Iraq during the U.S. occupation, compared U.S. efforts to police Iraq by military force to “trying to swat a fly with a bomb,” a fitting metaphor for the entire “war on terror.”

The *People on War* survey also found large discrepancies in attitudes to the Geneva Conventions themselves. In countries that had recently experienced war, only 28 percent of people agreed with a statement that the Conventions “make no real difference” to the brutality of war. But in the U.S. (57 percent) and U.K. (55 percent), twice as many people agreed with that statement.

U.S. War Crimes

We could speculate on why Americans are so exceptionally “lax” in their attitudes toward protecting civilians in wartime. But in practice, the real-world impact of these exceptional attitudes could be overcome if Americans who joined the armed forces received serious training in their responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Tragically, they do not.

U.S. military recruits receive only a 50-minute class on the laws of war, focused mainly on the Third Geneva Convention and the rights of POWs, and a refresher of the same 50-minute class before deployment. A retired JAG officer who taught law of war classes and veterans who have sat through them have all told me that the Fourth Geneva Convention and the rights of civilians as “protected persons” were barely mentioned, if at all.

The lax attitude of Americans toward the killing of civilians and the poor training of U.S. troops in their responsibilities under the Geneva Conventions have combined to make invasion and occupation by *American* forces especially deadly, dangerous and terrifying for civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq and wherever

U.S. forces are deployed.

In practice, U.S. forces operate under much lower standards than those of the Geneva Conventions, and civilians whose countries have fallen prey to U.S. aggression do not enjoy the protections guaranteed to them under the laws of war. As I wrote in an article in 2016, this is a classic case of the "normalization of deviance," a sociological term for the way that powerful institutions like the U.S. military tend to develop weaker, looser norms of conduct than the formal or legal rules that officially apply to them.

Illegal U.S. rules of engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan have included: systematic, theater-wide use of torture; orders to "dead-check" or kill wounded enemy combatants; orders to "kill all military-age males" during certain operations; and "weapons-free" zones that mirror Vietnam-era "free-fire" zones. A U.S. Marine corporal told a court martial prosecuting one of his men for "dead-checking" a wounded Iraqi civilian that "Marines consider all Iraqi men part of the insurgency," nullifying the critical distinction between combatants and civilians that is the very basis of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

When junior officers or enlisted troops have been charged with war crimes against civilians, they have often been exonerated or given light sentences because courts martial have found that they were acting on orders from more senior officers. But the senior officers implicated in these crimes have been allowed to testify in secret or not to appear in court at all, and have almost never been charged.

To make matters even worse for civilians in Iraq, U.S. military and civilian officials, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, misled the troops they sent to kill and die in Iraq with lies about shadowy connections between the people of Iraq and the young Saudis who committed the crimes of September 11th. In 2006, three years into the war, a Zogby poll of U.S. troops in Iraq found that 85 percent of them still believed that their mission in Iraq was to "retaliate for Saddam's role in the 9/11 attacks."

A million Iraqis have paid with their lives for these American lies and the war crimes they have served to justify, while the U.S. officials involved are still walking free, and in many cases still climbing the twisted ladder of success inside the U.S. Military Industrial Complex. Colonel Jeffrey Buchanan, who headed a Special Police Transition Team in Iraq at the time of the exposure of the Al Jadiriyah torture prison in 2005, has been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and is currently in charge of hurricane relief to Puerto Rico.

A New Body of Research

After 16 years of ever-spreading and intractable war, a significant body of research is finally emerging to clarify who exactly the U.S. is fighting in its ever-expanding war zones and what drives civilians to join armed groups like the Taliban, Al Qaeda or Islamic State.

In the looking-glass world of U.S. propaganda, U.S. forces are “fighting them there” so that we don’t have to “fight them here.” But researchers are learning that, like the Iraqis who rose up to resist the illegal U.S. invasion and occupation of their country, most of the people joining armed groups across Africa and the Middle East are only fighting at all because U.S. and allied forces are “fighting them there,” in their countries, cities, villages and homes.

Researchers have interviewed people who have joined armed resistance groups in countries across the world to ask them about what drove them to join an armed group and take part in guerrilla warfare or terrorism. In 2015, the Center for Civilians in Conflict published the results of interviews with 250 people who joined armed groups in Bosnia, Somalia, Gaza and Libya in a report titled, *The People’s Perspective: Civilian Involvement in Armed Conflict*. One of its main findings was that, “The most common motivation for involvement, described by interviewees in all four case studies, was the protection of self or family.”

If most of the people fighting U.S. forces and their allies across the world, from Niger to Ukraine to the Philippines, are just trying to defend themselves and their families against our “counterterrorism” operations, that turns the whole basis of the U.S. “war on terror” on its head. The most effective way to reduce violence and terrorism would obviously be to stop putting them in such an intolerable position in the first place.

Also in 2015, Lydia Wilson, a researcher for the Center for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at Oxford University, was allowed to interview a number of captured Islamic State fighters in Kirkuk, Iraq. Wilson’s fellow researchers included retired U.S. Major General Doug Stone, who managed U.S. military prisons in Iraq during the U.S. occupation and did some of the first serious Western research into the motivations of Iraqi resistance fighters.

It was hard for Wilson to find captured Islamic State fighters to interview, because Kurdish and U.S.-backed Iraqi government forces summarily execute Islamic State fighters that they capture. But the police in Kirkuk were at least putting prisoners on trial before killing them, so Wilson got permission from the police chief to talk to some prisoners who were awaiting execution.

The first prisoner Lydia Wilson interviewed was captured, tried and sentenced to death for exploding at least four car-bombs and a scooter-bomb in Kirkuk. But

his interview was not exceptional – Wilson found that his account of his motivations was repeated by every other prisoner. He explained that his first loyalty was to his wife and two children, and that he joined ISIS (as Islamic State is commonly known) to support his family. He told Wilson, “We need the war to be over, we need security, we are tired of so much war... all I want is to be with my family, my children.”

At the end of the interview, Wilson asked the prisoner if he had any questions. By then he knew that General Stone, one of Wilson’s colleagues, was ex-U.S. military, and, instead of asking a question, he just exploded in anger at him, “The Americans came. They took away Saddam but they also took away our security. I didn’t like Saddam, we were starving then, but at least we didn’t have war. When you came here, the civil war started.”

General Stone was not surprised. This was the same outraged speech he had heard from nearly every prisoner since he started interviewing his own prisoners in Iraq in 2007, identifying the poisonous and blood-soaked legacy of the U.S. invasion and occupation as the driving force behind their actions.

Lydia Wilson summarized what she learned about the prisoners in Kirkuk in [an article for *The Nation*](#): “They are children of the occupation, many with missing fathers at crucial periods (through jail, death by execution or fighting in the insurgency), filled with rage against America and their own government. They are not fueled by the idea of an Islamic caliphate without borders; rather, ISIS is the first group since the crushed Al Qaeda to offer these humiliated and enraged young men a way to defend their dignity, family and tribe. This is not radicalization to the ISIS way of life, but the promise of a way out of their insecure and undignified lives; the promise of living in pride as Iraqi Sunni Arabs, which is not just a religious identity, but cultural, tribal and land-based, too.”

The recent killing of four U.S. soldiers in Niger surprised many Americans, but the U.S. has [6,000 troops in 53 countries in Africa](#), so we should be ready to welcome home flag-draped coffins from seemingly random countries across the continent. But before our deluded leaders reduce the entire continent of Africa to a new U.S. “battlefield,” Americans should take note of a new report published by the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), titled [Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment](#).

This report is based on 500 interviews with militants from across Africa. As its title suggests, the interviewers questioned the militants specifically about the “tipping point” that decided each of them to actually join an armed group such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabab or Al Qaeda. By far the largest number (71 percent) said that some kind of “government action,” such as “killing of a family member

or friend” or “arrest of a family member or friend,” was the final straw that pushed them over the red line from civilian life to guerrilla war. By contrast, religious ideology was generally not a decisive factor in that decision.

The report concluded, “State security-actor conduct is revealed as a prominent accelerator of recruitment, rather than the reverse.” In its section on “Policy Implications,” it added, “The *Journey to Extremism* research provides startling new evidence of just how directly counter-productive security-driven responses can be when conducted insensitively.”

Across the world, it is obvious, and now well-documented, that U.S. aggression and militarism are causing the very problems they claim to be trying to solve. By design or default, U.S. policy is confusing cause and effect to justify military operations that turn civilians into combatants, fueling an ever-escalating, ever-spreading cycle of increasingly global violence and chaos.

As the world confronts critical problems and demands on its resources, from climate change to poverty and inequality, it can no longer afford to follow the pied piper of American “leadership” that leads only to war and chaos.

U.S. leaders often raise the specter of “appeasement” to guilt-trip reluctant allies into supporting U.S.-led wars. But maybe it is time for world leaders to recognize that the real appeasement they have been engaged in is the appeasement of the United States, by actively or tacitly encouraging it in an illegal policy of militarism and serial aggression that is spreading violence and chaos across the world.

Surely the real lesson of the 1930s and the Second World War, now reinforced by the experience of the past 20 years, is that it is not enough to simply sign treaties that prohibit aggression and war crimes. The world must be ready to actually enforce the prohibition against the threat or use of military force in customary international law, the 1928 Kellogg Brand Pact and the U.N. Charter – by uniting peacefully and diplomatically to stand up to U.S. aggression and militarism before they lead to a cataclysmic total war that will kill tens or even hundreds of millions of civilians, in Korea or somewhere else.

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Mocking Trump Doesn't Prove Russia's Guilt

Exclusive: President Trump is getting mocked for “trusting” Vladimir Putin’s denial about “meddling” in U.S. politics – and not accepting Official Washington’s groupthink – but ridicule isn’t evidence, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

If the bloody debacle in Iraq should have taught Americans anything, it is that endorsements by lots of important people who think something is true don’t amount to evidence that it actually is true. If endorsements were the same as evidence, U.S. troops would have found tons of WMD in Iraq, rather than come up empty.

So, when it comes to whether or not Russia “hacked” Democratic emails last year and slipped them to WikiLeaks, just because a bunch of people with fancy titles think the Russians are guilty doesn’t compensate for the lack of evidence so far evinced to support this core charge.

But the reaction of Official Washington and the U.S. mainstream media to President Trump saying that Russian President Vladimir Putin seemed sincere in denying Russian “meddling” was sputtering outrage: How could Trump doubt what so many important people think is true?

Yet, if the case were all that strong that Russia did “hack” the emails, you would have expected a straightforward explication of the evidence rather than a demonstration of a full-blown groupthink, but what we got this weekend was all groupthink and no evidence.

For instance, on Saturday, CNN responded to Trump’s comment that Putin seems to “mean it” when he denied meddling by running a list of important Americans who had endorsed the Russian-guilt verdict. Other U.S. news outlets and politicians followed the same pattern.

Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee and a big promoter of the Russia-gate allegations, scoffed at what Trump said: “You believe a foreign adversary over your own intelligence agencies?”

The Washington Post’s headline sitting atop Sunday’s lede article read: “Trump says Putin sincere in denial of Russian meddling: Critics call that

‘unconscionable.’”

Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee and another Russia-gate sparkplug, said he was left “completely speechless” by Trump’s willingness to take Putin’s word “over the conclusions of our own combined intelligence community.”

Which gets us back to the Jan. 6 “Intelligence Community Assessment” and its stunning lack of evidence in support of its Russian guilty verdict. The ICA even admitted as much, that it wasn’t asserting Russian guilt as fact but rather as opinion:

“Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Even The New York Times, which has led the media groupthink on Russian guilt, initially published the surprised reaction from correspondent Scott Shane who wrote: “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

In other words, the ICA was not a disposition of fact; it was guesswork, possibly understandable guesswork, but guesswork nonetheless. And guesswork should be open to debate.

Shutting Down Debate

But the debate was shut down earlier this year by the oft-repeated claim that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the assessment and how could anyone question what all 17 intelligence agencies concluded!

However, that canard was finally knocked down by President Obama’s own Director of National Intelligence James Clapper who acknowledged in sworn congressional testimony that the ICA was the product of “handpicked” analysts from only three agencies – the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

In other words, not only did the full intelligence community not participate in the ICA but only analysts “handpicked” by Obama’s intelligence chiefs conducted the analysis – and as we intelligence veterans know well, if you handpick the analysts, you are handpicking the conclusions.

For instance, put a group of analysts known for their hardline views on Russia in a room for a few weeks, prevent analysts with dissenting viewpoints from

weighing in, don't require any actual evidence, and you are pretty sure to get the Russia-bashing result that you wanted.

So why do you think Clapper and Obama's CIA Director John Brennan put up the no-entry sign that kept out analysts from the State Department and Defense Intelligence Agency, two entities that might have significant insights into Russian intentions? By all rights, they should have been included. But, clearly, no dissenting footnotes or wider-perspective views were desired.

If you remember back to the Iraq WMD intelligence estimate, analysts from the State Department's intelligence bureau, known as INR, offered unwelcome dissenting views about the pace of Iraq's supposed nuclear program, inserting a footnote saying they found it too difficult to predict the fruition of a program when there was no reliable evidence as to when – not to mention if – it had started.

DIA also was demonstrating an unusually independent streak, displaying a willingness to give due consideration to Russia's perspective. Here's the heterodox line DIA took in a major report published in December 2015:

“The Kremlin is convinced the United States is laying the groundwork for regime change in Russia, a conviction further reinforced by the events in Ukraine. Moscow views the United States as the critical driver behind the crisis in Ukraine and the Arab Spring and believes that the overthrow of former Ukrainian President Yanukovich is the latest move in a long-established pattern of U.S.-orchestrated regime change efforts.”

So, not only did the Jan. 6 report exclude input from INR and DIA and the other dozen or so intelligence agencies but it even avoided a fully diverse set of opinions from inside the CIA, FBI and NSA. The assessment – or guesswork – came only from those “hand-picked” analysts.

It's also worth noting that not only does Putin deny that Russia was behind the publication of the Democratic emails but so too does WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange who has insisted repeatedly that the material did not come from the Russians. He and others around WikiLeaks have strongly suggested that the emails came as leaks from Democratic insiders.

Seeking Real Answers

In the face of Official Washington's evidence-free groupthink, what some of us former U.S. intelligence analysts have been trying to do is provide both a fuller understanding of Russian behavior and whatever scientific analysis can be applied to the alleged “hacks.”

Forensic investigations and testing of relevant download speeds, reported by members of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), have undermined the Russia-did-it groupthink. But this attempt to engage in actual evaluation of evidence has been either ignored or mocked by mainstream news outlets.

Still, the suggestion in our July 24 VIPS memo that President Trump ask current CIA Director Mike Pompeo to take a fresh look at the issue recently had some consequence when Pompeo contacted VIPS member William Binney, a former NSA Technical Director, and invited him to explain his latest research on the impossibility of the Russians extracting the Democratic emails via an Internet hack based on known download speeds.

In typically candid terms, Binney explained to Pompeo why VIPS had concluded that the intelligence analysts behind the Jan. 6 report had been making stuff up about Russian “hacking.”

When news of the Binney-Pompeo meeting broke last week, the U.S. mainstream media again rejected the opportunity to rethink the Russia-did-it groupthink and instead treated Binney as some sort of “conspiracy theorist” with a “disputed” theory, while attacking Pompeo’s willingness to discuss Binney’s findings as “politicizing intelligence.”

Despite the smearing of Binney, President Trump appears to have taken some of this new evidence to heart, explaining his dispute with open-mouthed White House reporters on Air Force One who baited Trump with various forms of the same question: “Do you believe Putin?” amid the new jeering about Trump “getting played” by Putin.

Trump’s demeanor, however, suggested increased confidence that the Russian “hacking” allegations were the “witch hunt” that he has decried for months.

Trump also jabbed the press over its earlier false claims that “all 17 intelligence agencies” concurred on the Russian “hack.” And Trump introduced the idea of a different kind of “hack,” i.e., Obama’s political appointees at the heads of the agencies behind the Jan. 6 report.

Trump said, “You hear it’s 17 agencies. Well it’s three. And one is Brennan ... give me a break. They’re political hacks. ... I mean, you have Brennan, you have Clapper, you have [FBI Director James] Comey. Comey is proven to be a liar and he’s proven to be a leaker.”

Later, in deference to those still at work in intelligence, Trump said, “I’m with our [intelligence] agencies as currently constituted.”

While Trump surely has a dismal record of his own regarding truth-telling, he’s

not wrong about the checkered record of the triumvirate of Clapper, Brennan and Comey.

Clapper played a key role in the bogus Iraq-WMD intelligence when he was head of the National Geo-spatial Agency and hid the fact that there was zero evidence in satellite imagery of any weapons of mass destruction before the Iraq invasion. When no WMDs were found, Clapper told the media that he thought they were shipped off to Syria.

In 2013, Clapper perjured himself before Congress by denying NSA's unconstitutional blanket surveillance of Americans. After evidence emerged revealing the falsity of Clapper's testimony, he wrote a letter to Congress admitting, "My response was clearly erroneous – for which I apologize." Despite the deception, he was allowed to stay as Obama's most senior intelligence officer for almost four more years.

Clapper also has demonstrated an ugly bias about Russians. On May 28, as a former DNI, Clapper explained Russian "interference" in the U.S. election to NBC's Chuck Todd on May 28 with a tutorial on what everyone should know about "the historical practices of the Russians." Clapper said, "the Russians, typically, are almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique."

Brennan, who had previously defended torture as having been an effective way to gain intelligence, was CIA director when agency operatives broke into the computers of the Senate Intelligence Committee when it was investigating CIA torture.

Former FBI Director Comey is infamous for letting the Democratic National Committee arrange its own investigation of the "hacking" that was then blamed on Russia, a development that led some members of Congress to call the supposed "hack" an "act of war." Despite the risk of nuclear conflagration, the FBI didn't bother to do its own forensics.

And, by his own admission, Comey arranged a leak to The New York Times that was specifically designed to get a Special Prosecutor appointed to investigate Russia-gate, a job that fell to his old friend Robert Mueller, who has had his own mixed record as the previous FBI director in mishandling the 9/11 investigation.

There are plenty of reasons to want Trump out of the White House, but there also should be respect for facts and due process. So far, the powers-that-be in Washington – in politics, the media and other dominant institutions, what some call the Deep State – have shown little regard for fairness in the Russia-gate

“scandal.”

The goal seems to be to remove the President or at least emasculate him on a bum rap, giving him the bum’s rush, so to speak, while also further demonizing Russia and exacerbating an already dangerous New Cold War.

The truth should still count for something. No one’s character should be assassinated, as Bill Binney’s is being now, for running afoul of the conventional wisdom that Trump – like bête noire Putin – never tells the truth, and that to believe either is, well, “unconscionable,” as The Washington Post warns.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA intelligence analyst for 27 years and is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity.

The Politics of Sexual Harassment and War

The Harvey Weinstein scandal has forced the ugly practice of sexual harassment into the public square, where private companies have proven to be more responsive than the political world, reports David Marks.

By David Marks

The multiple sexual-harassment allegations against movie producer Harvey Weinstein have sent tremors around the world with newly expressed outrage toward the machismo atmosphere of the film industry and other work environments, including the news business and politics.

Clearly, the problem reaches far beyond Weinstein. Allegations and lawsuits filed against Donald Trump mirror the worst of Weinstein’s behavior. Trump’s hot-mic 2004 interview with “Access Hollywood” surfaced during last year’s campaign, with him bragging about his ability to get away with aggressively kissing women and grabbing their genitals: “When you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. ... Grab ’em by the pussy. You can do anything.”

But even that wasn’t enough to keep 63 million Americans from voting for Trump and putting him in the White House, although that was in part because many voters saw no moral superiority in Hillary Clinton, who not only disparaged women who complained about sexual harassment by her husband but who

enthusiastically embraced war as a ready option for U.S. foreign policy.

Yet, while the political careers of Donald Trump and Bill Clinton survived disclosures of their predatory behavior, Weinstein's movie empire quickly crumbled after a number of women came forward with accounts of how he used his power to gain sexual favors. Several prominent news personalities, from Bill O'Reilly at Fox to Michael Oreskes at NPR, have lost their jobs, too, amid other sexual harassment complaints.

Oddly, it seems that private industry is now more sensitive to allegations of this kind of sexual misconduct than the American political process, possibly because of the potential legal liabilities for companies as well as the organized partisan defenses that are immediately raised around the highest-level national leaders even when there's clear evidence of their predatory behavior. While it's true that some members of Congress have lost seats because of sexual misconduct, the situation has been different at the presidential level.

After Trump's "grab 'em by the pussy" boast became public, his Republican "base" rallied around him and prevented the expected collapse of his poll numbers. Similarly, in the 1990s, when Democratic presidential candidate (and later President) Bill Clinton was accused of predatory sexual activity with female subordinates and other vulnerable women, loyal Democrats sprang to his defense and challenged the veracity of the accusers. The Clinton team complained about "cash for trash."

'David Cop-a-Feel'

Even earlier, rumors about President George H.W. Bush's extramarital activities and a fondness for groping unsuspecting women were brushed aside as yellow journalism that should not be taken seriously about so honorable a man. Only recently – in the wake of the Weinstein scandal and more women denouncing boorish male behavior – was Bush pushed into apologizing for inappropriately grabbing women as the punch line to a joke about who his favorite magician is: "David Cop-a-Feel!"

It seems that the most powerful leaders, both in industry and government, are often the most aggressive predators; both on a personal level and with how they affect the social fabric of the country through their professional actions. There are parallels between the pattern of sexual harassment, in which the historical tendency was for women to stay silent, and the U.S. government's military assaults abroad, which most Americans tolerate as somehow necessary or inevitable.

President George W. Bush inflicted "shock and awe" on Iraq, touching off the

slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and the destabilization of the entire region yet he is now treated as a respected elder statesman when he criticizes Trump's behavior. President Barack Obama said he authorized military operations in seven countries, including interventions in Libya and Syria that contributed to other humanitarian disasters, but Obama faced little public outrage among the American people for these actions.

President Trump appears to have learned from his predecessors that he can boost his sagging poll numbers by threatening and launching military strikes. He'll also win some grudging acceptance from the elites of Official Washington who never seem to see a potential war that they don't want to send the U.S. military to fight. In April, Trump got some brief relief from the Russia-gate "scandal" after he ordered the firing of 59 Tomahawk missiles at Syria in a hasty reaction to a dubious chemical weapons incident that he blamed on the Syrian government.

Trump played the tough-guy again on Sept. 19 with a bellicose speech to the United Nations General Assembly, threatening hostilities against North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Venezuela and boasting about his plan to escalate the 16-year-old war in Afghanistan. Despite America's recent history of aggressive war – not to mention historical crimes of genocide, slavery and imperialism – many Americans still profess how morally superior we are to other people.

Any American who dares challenge this "American exceptionalism" can expect to face ostracism much as women who complained about unwanted sexual advances by male bosses in years past could expect to be categorized as troublesome and unfit for professional advancement. That could be especially true in a highly subjective profession like acting.

Yet, whether it's Hollywood's "casting couch" or Official Washington's actions on the international "stage," it remains difficult to stop predatory behavior. When a culture of male dominance looms in every direction, it is a rare individual who will defy convention – even a morally bereft convention – and do what's right. That's especially true when the almost certain result will be loss of friends and loss of income. We have seen plenty of cases in which even women will make excuses for male misconduct, whether involving sex or war, as Hillary Clinton has shown.

But a culture that tolerates various forms of abusive and predatory behavior, whether it's silence amid a culture of sexual harassment or blind patriotism toward dubiously justified wars, has lost its moral compass. A democracy that in principle embraces the equality of all with everyone possessing unalienable rights, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, would have no tolerance for predators of any kind, whether at home, in the workplace or in warfare across the globe.

David Marks is a veteran documentary filmmaker and investigative reporter. His work includes films for the BBC, including *Nazi Gold*, on the role of Switzerland in WWII and biographies of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Sinatra.

Trump and the NAFTA Effect

President Trump has blamed NAFTA for eliminating manufacturing jobs for U.S. workers but it also caused economic dislocation in Mexico, driving some desperate Mexicans northward to the U.S., as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

During his campaign and his presidency, Donald Trump has threatened to withdraw from the North American Free Trade Agreement if Canada and Mexico refused to renegotiate a “much better deal.”

“A Trump administration will renegotiate NAFTA,” Candidate Trump declared at one campaign stop after another, “and if we don’t get the deal we want, we will terminate NAFTA and get a much better deal for our workers and our companies; 100 percent.”

But as with many issues, the reality of Trump often doesn’t measure up to the rhetoric. I spoke to noted labor journalist and photographer David Bacon about the prospects for NAFTA and free trade under Trump, and the devastating impacts that such policies have had and will continue to have on workers and undocumented workers in particular.

Bacon’s books include *The Right to Stay Home: How U.S. Policy Drives Mexican Migration*. I spoke to him on Nov. 1, 2017 for Flashpoints on Pacifica Radio.

Dennis Bernstein: During the campaign, Trump talked about getting rid of NAFTA. Where are we now in “free trade land”?

David Bacon: Trump promised that he would renegotiate NAFTA, but, after all, Obama made the same promise when he was running for office. They were appealing for the votes of people who were hurt by the agreement here. NAFTA did have an enormous impact on working people in this country.

The Economic Policy Institute says that NAFTA cost the jobs of about 680,000 people in the US. The Department of Labor used to keep track of job losses because people who could show that they lost their job because it was moved to Mexico were entitled to get extended unemployment benefits. By the time Bush

became president, that number had already reached about half a million people and Bush told the Department of Labor to stop counting because it was becoming politically embarrassing for all the politicians who had voted for the treaty.

There is no question that NAFTA did have an impact on people here and in many ways it led to a kind of displacement here that was similar to what we saw during the Depression, with people coming from the Dustbowl, but also what we are seeing with people coming here from Mexico.

Although the rhetoric of Trump and the Republican Party pits workers in this country against workers in Mexico—because we lost jobs, Mexicans must have gained those jobs—the reality is that Mexico lost many more jobs than they gained. But one of the things that did happen to people in this country is the migration of people internally in the United States.

When the Green Giant plant shut down here in Watsonville and moved operations to Mexico, a thousand immigrant Mexican women lost those jobs so that Green Giant could then pay women in Mexico one-tenth the wage to do the same work. Many of the women who lost their jobs had to go somewhere else to find work, the same way that people had to who lost their jobs in auto plants.

We also saw the same thing happen with people coming here from Mexico. About 3 million farmers in southern Mexico lost their jobs because of corn dumping by big US agricultural corporations like Archer Daniels Midland, and many of those people ended up coming here to the United States. One thing that progressive unions are trying to do is point out to people the similarity of experiences on either side of the border and that the only way to deal with the impact of treaties like NAFTA is by reaching across the border in solidarity. The idea that the Trump administration is going to force General Motors to bring jobs back to the United States is just ridiculous.

Dennis Bernstein: So Trump hasn't brought back thousands of jobs yet?

David Bacon: No, and he's not going to.

Dennis Bernstein: What has been the trend with NAFTA, where do you see this going?

David Bacon: Trade policies are very much bipartisan. NAFTA was negotiated under the [George HW] Bush administration, the Clinton administration pushed it through Congress, then we saw the Bush II administration follow the same policies. These are all trade policies designed to enhance the profits of corporations and that is not going to change. So long as both parties are serving those interests, nothing is going to change.

The only person in the political establishment who has had anything different to say is Bernie Sanders. He said that a corporation that was responsible for relocating jobs should not be entitled to bid on federal contracts. That would obviously have an enormous impact on a company like General Motors.

Dennis Bernstein: How does forced migration happen? In the corporate media it is portrayed as all these people wanting to get the good life in the United States. But this is not really going on.

David Bacon: Let's take the corn farmers in Mexico as an example. When NAFTA was passed it pulled down the barriers that had been in place to prevent US corporations from dumping produce in Mexico. So Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland and the Continental Grain Company took subsidies that Congress gave them in the Farm Bill and used them to subsidize their sale of corn in Mexico. They were selling corn at 19% below their own cost of production. They were trying to drive Mexican producers out of the market.

Remember that the cultivation of corn started in Oaxaca. The first domesticated corn was found in a cave outside Oaxaca City. So we owe the fact that we are able to eat corn at all to these communities.

Under NAFTA, 3 million farmers had to leave home and look for work elsewhere. They went to Mexico City, they became workers in *maquiladoras* [manufacturing operations], in the export farms in Baja, California, and here in the United States. The number of farm workers in California rose from about 20,000 to about 165,000 during the period of NAFTA. In fact, they have become an enormous part of the farm labor workforce all along the Pacific Coast.

In many ways, this is a very sad story. These communities were the ones who started corn cultivation. These are very stable communities going back many thousands of years. People don't get up and move for the fun of it. It takes the forces of survival to get people to leave.

Not all the consequences for us in the United States have been bad. For instance, workers coming from Oaxaca have been the source of a movement to organize farm workers. We now have a union of farmworkers in Washington state that was formed by workers from Oaxaca. Here in California at a blueberry farm near Delano about 500 workers organized themselves into a union. The reason is that people are coming from communities with a very stable culture of mutual support.

A demographer named Rick Mines did a survey of indigenous farm workers in California and found that a third of workers he interviewed reported earning wages that were less than minimum wage. Clearly people are not happy about the

situation and try to organize to change it.

So this massive movement of people as a result of NAFTA is also leading to a rebirth of union organizing among farm workers in California. But while this has had a very positive impact on working class life here, it has come at a terrible cost. The uprooting of communities of people forced people to make some terrible choices.

A friend of mine is a high school teacher in Oaxaca. He says that it is very difficult to stand up in front of his class and urge his students to get an education in Oaxaca when the students themselves have family members and friends working in the United States making more in real wages than he is making as a teacher.

This process of forced migration is robbing people of a future in the communities where they live. This has terrible consequences for these communities. There are towns in Oaxaca now where most of the working age population is living in the United States and the people who remain are surviving on the remittances being sent home by their family members here in California. That is not a very stable situation and doesn't promise much for the future.

That is what *The Right to Stay Home* is about. People in Oaxaca are saying that there is nothing wrong with migration but it should be a voluntary choice. The choice of whether to leave home and come to the United States should be voluntary, not something that is forced on people by hunger.

What has to change in order for that to happen? The trade agreements must be changed to eliminate the dumping that leads to forced migration. We need political change in both countries to give people the freedom to migrate, equality and decent jobs. But we also need to ensure that the towns that people are coming from are places that are able to offer a future to their young people as they are growing up.

Dennis Bernstein: Has the situation gotten appreciably worse under Trump?

David Bacon: Unquestionably, the Obama administration did do terrible things. We saw the deportation of 300,000 to 400,000 people a year, the growth of these privatized detention centers. But the rhetoric of the administration and the ability of people to pressure the government is different.

The whole reason we have DACA to begin with is because young undocumented people organized themselves against deportation and were able, through action, to get people out of detention, finally sitting in in Obama's campaign office in Chicago in 2012 and getting them to issue an executive order that gave legal

immigration status to about 800,000 young people.

Now we have people in power like Jeff Sessions and Jim Kelly who are saying they are going to undo the kinds of advances that people made in the last eight years. A lot of what Trump is talking about is undoing what immigrant rights activists and unions and progressive people have fought for over the last eight years.

Another thing is reinstating these cooperation programs between the police and the immigration authorities that we were able to get rid of in California and New York. Now here comes Trump and Sessions saying that they are going to reinstate it.

In fact, the rate of deportations in the first months of the Trump administration have been much higher than in the last part of the Obama administration, when popular pressure was able to force the administration to stop this kind of cooperation between the police and immigration authorities.

Dennis Bernstein: In the 45 seconds remaining, what is your version of humane immigration reform?

David Bacon: It means that everybody has a legal status here in the United States. We need to decriminalize migration and get rid of the detention centers. We need to demilitarize the border. And we need to stop the process by which people are being forced to migrate in order to survive. Changing the trade agreements, including NAFTA, is another crucial part of humane immigration reform.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
