

The Criminal 'Laws' of Counterinsurgency

A new book traces how the CIA and U.S. counterinsurgency warfare operatives adopted lessons from the Nazis' fight against the partisans and evolved into a dangerous law unto themselves, writes retired JAG Major Todd E. Pierce.

By Todd E. Pierce

Douglas Valentine has once again added to the store of knowledge necessary for American citizens to understand how the U.S. government actually works today, in his most recent book entitled *The CIA As Organized Crime*. (Valentine previously wrote *The Phoenix Program*, which should be read with the current book.)

The U.S. "deep state" – of which the CIA is an integral part – is an open secret now and the Phoenix Program (assassinations, death squads, torture, mass detentions, exploitation of information) has been its means of controlling populations. Consequently, knowing the deep state's methods is the only hope of building a democratic opposition to the deep state and to restore as much as possible the Constitutional system we had in previous centuries, as imperfect as it was.

Princeton University political theorist Sheldon Wolin described the U.S. political system in place by 2003 as "inverted totalitarianism." He reaffirmed that in 2009 after seeing a year of the Obama administration. Correctly identifying the threat against constitutional governance is the first step to restore it, and as Wolin understood, substantive constitutional government ended long before Donald Trump campaigned. He's just taking unconstitutional governance to the next level in following the same path as his recent predecessors. However, even as some elements of the "deep state" seek to remove Trump, the President now has many "deep state" instruments in his own hands to be used at his unreviewable discretion.

Many "never-Trumpers" of both parties see the deep state's national security bureaucracy as their best hope to destroy Trump and thus defend constitutional government, but those hopes are misguided. After all, the deep state's bureaucratic leadership has worked arduously for decades to subvert constitutional order.

As Michael Glennon, author of *National Security and Double Government*, pointed out in a June 2017 Harper's essay, if "the president maintains his attack, splintered and demoralized factions within the bureaucracy could actually support – not oppose – many potential Trump initiatives, such as stepped-up drone strikes, cyberattacks, covert action, immigration bans, and mass

surveillance.”

Glennon noted that the propensity of “security managers” to back policies which ratchet up levels of security “will play into Trump’s hands, so that if and when he finally does declare victory, a revamped security directorate could emerge more menacing than ever, with him its devoted new ally.” Before that happens, it is incumbent for Americans to understand what Valentine explains in his book of CIA methods of “population control” as first fully developed in the Vietnam War’s Phoenix Program.

Hating the U.S.

There also must be the realization that our “national security” apparatchiks – principally but not solely the CIA – have served to exponentially increase the numbers of those people who hate the U.S. Some of these people turn to terrorism as an expression of that hostility. Anyone who is at all familiar with the CIA and Al Qaeda knows that the CIA has been Al Qaeda’s most important “combat multiplier” since 9/11, and the CIA can be said to have birthed ISIS as well with the mistreatment of incarcerated Iraqi men in U.S. prisons in Iraq.

Indeed, by following the model of the Phoenix Program, the CIA must be seen in the Twenty-first Century as a combination of the ultimate “Murder, Inc.,” when judged by the CIA’s methods such as drone warfare and its victims; and the Keystone Kops, when the multiple failures of CIA policies are considered. This is not to make light of what the CIA does, but the CIA’s misguided policies and practices have served to generate wrath, hatred and violence against Americans, which we see manifested in cities such as San Bernardino, Orlando, New York and Boston.

Pointing out the harm to Americans is not to dismiss the havoc that Americans under the influence of the CIA have perpetrated on foreign populations. But “morality” seems a lost virtue today in the U.S., which is under the influence of so much militaristic war propaganda that morality no longer enters into the equation in determining foreign policy.

In addition to the harm the CIA has caused to people around the world, the CIA works tirelessly at subverting its own government at home, as was most visible in the spying on and subversion of the torture investigation by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. The subversion of democracy also includes the role the CIA plays in developing and disseminating war propaganda as “information warfare,” upon the American people. This is what the Rand Corporation under the editorship of Zalmay Khalilzad has described as “conditioning the battlefield,” which begins with the minds of the American population.

Douglas Valentine discusses and documents the role of the CIA in disseminating pro-war propaganda and disinformation as complementary to the violent tactics of the Phoenix Program in Vietnam. Valentine explains that “before Phoenix was adopted as the model for policing the American empire, many US military commanders in Vietnam resisted the Phoenix strategy of targeting civilians with Einsatzgruppen-style ‘special forces’ and Gestapo-style secret police.”

Military Commanders considered that type of program a flagrant violation of the Law of War. “Their main job is to zap the in-betweeners – you know, the people who aren’t all the way with the government and aren’t all the way with the Viet Cong either. They figure if you zap enough in-betweeners, people will begin to get the idea,” according to one quote from *The Phoenix Program* referring to the unit tasked with much of the Phoenix operations.

Nazi Influences

Comparing the Phoenix Program and its operatives to “Einsatzgruppen-style ‘special forces’ and Gestapo-style secret police” is not a distortion of the strategic understanding of each. Both programs were extreme forms of repression operating under martial law principles where the slightest form of dissent was deemed to represent the work of the “enemy.” Hitler’s *Bandit Hunters: The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe* by Philip W. Blood describes German “Security Warfare” as practiced in World War II, which can be seen as identical in form to the Phoenix Program as to how the enemy is defined as anyone who is “potentially” a threat, deemed either “partizans” or terrorists.

That the Germans included entire racial categories in that does not change the underlying logic, which was, anyone deemed an internal enemy in a territory in which their military operated had to be “neutralized” by any means necessary. The U.S. military and the South Vietnamese military governments operated under the same principles but not based on race, rather the perception that certain areas and villages were loyal to the Viet Cong.

This repressive doctrine was also not unique to the Nazis in Europe and the U.S. military in Vietnam. Similar though less sophisticated strategies were used against the American Indians and by the imperial powers of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, including by the U.S. in its newly acquired territories of the Philippines and in the Caribbean. This “imperial policing,” i.e., counter-insurgency, simply moved to more manipulative and, in ways, more violent levels.

That the U.S. drew upon German counter-insurgency doctrine, as brutal as it was, is well documented. This is shown explicitly in a 2011 article published in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* entitled *German Counterinsurgency*

Revisited by Charles D. Melson. He wrote that in 1942, Nazi commander Heinrich Himmler named a deputy for "anti-bandit warfare," (Bevollmächtigter für die Bandenkämpfung im Osten), SS-General von dem Bach, whose responsibilities expanded in 1943 to head all SS and police anti-bandit units and operations. He was one of the architects of the Einsatzgruppen "concept of anti-partisan warfare," a German predecessor to the "Phoenix Program."

'Anti-Partisan' Lessons

It wasn't a coincidence that this "anti-partisan" warfare concept should be adopted by U.S. forces in Vietnam and retained to the present day. Melson pointed out that a "post-war German special forces officer described hunter or ranger units as 'men who knew every possible ruse and tactic of guerrilla warfare. They had gone through the hell of combat against the crafty partisans in the endless swamps and forests of Russia.'"

Consequently, "The German special forces and reconnaissance school was a sought after posting for North Atlantic Treaty Organization special operations personnel," who presumably included members of the newly created U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers, which was in part headquartered at Bad Tölz in Germany, as well as CIA paramilitary officers.

Just as with the later Phoenix Program to the present-day U.S. global counterinsurgency, Melson wrote that the "attitude of the [local] population and the amount of assistance it was willing to give guerilla units was of great concern to the Germans. Different treatment was supposed to be accorded to affected populations, bandit supporters, and bandits, while so-called population and resource control measures for each were noted (but were in practice, treated apparently one and the same). 'Action against enemy agitation' was the psychological or information operations of the Nazi period. The Nazis believed that, 'Because of the close relationship of guerilla warfare and politics, actions against enemy agitation are a task that is just as important as interdiction and combat actions. All means must be used to ward off enemy influence and waken and maintain a clear political will.'"

This is typical of any totalitarian system – a movement or a government – whether the process is characterized as counterinsurgency or internal security. The idea of any civilian collaboration with the "enemy" is the basis for what the U.S. government charges as "conspiracy" in the Guantanamo Military Commissions.

Valentine explains the Phoenix program as having been developed by the CIA in 1967 to combine "existing counterinsurgency programs in a concerted effort to 'neutralize' the Vietcong infrastructure (VCI)." He explained further that

“neutralize” meant “to kill, capture, or make to defect.” “Infrastructure” meant civilians suspected of supporting North Vietnamese and Vietcong soldiers. Central to the Phoenix program was that its targets were civilians, making the operation a violation of the Geneva Conventions which guaranteed protection to civilians in time of war.

“The Vietnam’s War’s Silver Lining: A Bureaucratic Model for Population Control Emerges” is the title of Chapter 3. Valentine writes that the “CIA’s Phoenix program changed how America fights its wars and how the public views this new type of political and psychological warfare, in which civilian casualties are an explicit objective.” The intent of the Phoenix program evolved from “neutralizing” enemy leaders into “a program of systematic repression for the political control of the South Vietnamese people. It sought to accomplish this through a highly bureaucratized system of disposing of people who could not be ideologically assimilated.” The CIA claimed a legal basis for the program in “emergency decrees” and orders for “administrative detention.”

Lauding Petraeus

Valentine refers to a paper by David Kilcullen entitled Countering Global Insurgency. Kilcullen is one of the so-called “counter-insurgency experts” whom General David Petraeus gathered together in a cell to promote and refine “counter-insurgency,” or COIN, for the modern era. Fred Kaplan, who is considered a “liberal author and journalist” at Slate, wrote a panegyric to these cultists entitled, The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War. The purpose of this cell was to change the practices of the U.S. military into that of “imperial policing,” or COIN, as they preferred to call it.

But Kilcullen argued in his paper that “The ‘War on Terrorism’ is actually a campaign to counter a global insurgency. Therefore, Kilcullen argued, “we need a new paradigm, capable of addressing globalised insurgency.” His “disaggregation strategy” called for “actions to target the insurgent infrastructure that would resemble the unfairly maligned (but highly effective) Vietnam-era Phoenix program.”

He went on, “Contrary to popular mythology, this was largely a civilian aid and development program, supported by targeted military pacification operations and intelligence activity to disrupt the Viet Cong Infrastructure. A global Phoenix program (including the other key elements that formed part of the successful Vietnam CORDS system) would provide a useful start point to consider how Disaggregation would develop in practice.”

It is readily apparent that, in fact, a Phoenix-type program is now U.S. global

policy and – just like in Vietnam – it is applying “death squad” strategies that eliminate not only active combatants but also civilians who simply find themselves in the same vicinity, thus creating antagonisms that expand the number of fighters.

Corroborative evidence of Valentine’s thesis is, perhaps surprisingly, provided by the CIA’s own website where a number of redacted historical documents have been published. Presumably, they are documents first revealed under the Freedom of Information Act. A few however are copies of news articles once available to the public but now archived by the CIA which has blacked-out portions of the articles.

The Bloody Reality

One “sanitized” article – approved for release in 2011 – is a partially redacted New Times article of Aug. 22, 1975, by Michael Drosnin. The article recounts a story of a U.S. Army counter-intelligence officer “who directed a small part of a secret war aimed not at the enemy’s soldiers but at its civilian leaders.” He describes how a CIA-directed Phoenix operative dumped a bag of “eleven bloody ears” as proof of six people killed.

The officer, who recalled this incident in 1971, said, “It made me sick. ... I couldn’t go on with what I was doing in Vietnam. . . . It was an assassination campaign . . . my job was to identify and eliminate VCI, the Viet Cong ‘infrastructure’ – the communist’s shadow government. I worked directly with two Vietnamese units, very tough guys who didn’t wear uniforms . . . In the beginning they brought back about 10 percent alive. By the end they had stopped taking prisoners. ...

“How many VC they got I don’t know. I saw a hell of a lot of dead bodies. We’d put a tag on saying VCI, but no one really knew – it was just some native in black pajamas with 16 bullet holes.”

This led to an investigation by New Times in a day when there were still “investigative reporters,” and not the government sycophants of today. Based on first-hand accounts, their investigation concluded that Operation Phoenix was the “only systematized kidnapping, torture and assassination program ever sponsored by the United States government. . . . Its victims were noncombatants.” At least 40,000 were murdered, with “only” about 8,000 supposed Viet Cong political cadres targeted for execution, with the rest civilians (including women and children) killed and “later conveniently labeled VCI. Hundreds of thousands were jailed without trial, often after sadistic abuse.” The article notes that Phoenix was conceived, financed, and directed by the Central Intelligence Agency, as Mr. Valentine writes.

A second article archived by the CIA was by the Christian Science Monitor, dated Jan. 5, 1971, describing how the Saigon government was “taking steps ... that could help eliminate one of the most glaring abuses of its controversial Phoenix program, which is aimed against the Viet Cong political and administrative apparatus.” Note how the Monitor shifted blame away from the CIA and onto the South Vietnamese government.

But the article noted that one of the most persistent criticisms of Phoenix was that it resulted “in the arrest and imprisonment of many innocent civilians.” These were called “Class C Communist offenders,” some of whom may actually have been forced to commit such “belligerent acts” as digging trenches or carrying rice. It was those alleged as the “hard core, full-time cadre” who were deemed to make up the “shadow government” designated as Class A and B Viet Cong.

Yet “security committees” throughout South Vietnam, under the direction of the CIA, sentenced at least 10,000 “Class C civilians” to prison each year, far more than Class A and B combined. The article stated, “Thousands of these prisoners are never brought to court trial, and thousands of other have never been sentenced.” The latter statement would mean they were just held in “indefinite detention,” like the prisoners held at Guantanamo and other U.S. detention centers with high levels of CIA involvement.

Not surprisingly to someone not affiliated with the CIA, the article found as well that “Individual case histories indicate that many who have gone to prison as active supporters of neither the government nor the Viet Cong come out as active backers of the Viet Cong and with an implacable hatred of the government.” In other words, the CIA and the COIN enthusiasts are achieving the same results today with the prisons they set up in Iraq and Afghanistan.

CIA Crimes

Valentine broadly covers the illegalities of the CIA over the years, including its well-documented role in facilitating the drug trade over the years. But, in this reviewer’s opinion, his most valuable contribution is his description of the CIA’s participation going back at least to the Vietnam War in the treatment of what the U.S. government today calls “unlawful combatants.”

“Unlawful combatants” is a descriptive term made up by the Bush administration to remove people whom U.S. officials alleged were “terrorists” from the legal protections of the Geneva Conventions and Human Rights Law and thus to justify their capture or killing in the so-called “Global War on Terror.” Since the U.S. government deems them “unlawful” – because they do not belong to an organized military structure and do not wear insignia – they are denied the “privilege” of belligerency that applies to traditional soldiers. But – unless they take a

“direct part in hostilities” – they would still maintain their civilian status under the law of war and thus not lose the legal protection due to civilians even if they exhibit sympathy or support to one side in a conflict.

Ironically, by the Bush administration’s broad definition of “unlawful combatants,” CIA officers and their support structure also would fit the category. But the American public is generally forgiving of its own war criminals though most self-righteous and hypocritical in judging foreign war criminals. But perhaps given sufficient evidence, the American public could begin to see both the immorality of this behavior and its counterproductive consequences.

This is not to condemn all CIA officers, some of whom acted in good faith that they were actually defending the United States by acquiring information on a professed enemy in the tradition of Nathan Hale. But it is to harshly condemn those CIA officials and officers who betrayed the United States by subverting its Constitution, including waging secret wars against foreign countries without a declaration of war by Congress. And it decidedly condemns the CIA war criminals who acted as a law unto themselves in the torture and murder of foreign nationals, as Valentine’s book describes.

Talleyrand is credited with saying, “They have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.” Reportedly, that was borrowed from a 1796 letter by a French naval officer, which stated, in the original language: *Personne n’est corrigé; personne n’a su ni rien oublier ni rien apprendre.* In English: “Nobody has been corrected; no one has known to forget, nor yet to learn anything.” That sums up the CIA leadership entirely.

Douglas Valentine’s book is a thorough documentation of that fact and it is essential reading for all Americans if we are to have any hope for salvaging a remnant of representative government.

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At FBI, Mueller Oversaw Post-9/11 Abuses

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media gushes over Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller as an upright man of the Establishment, ignoring how he oversaw abuses of innocent Arabs after 9/11, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Robert Mueller III, the former FBI director who now heads the wide-ranging investigation into alleged misdeeds by President Trump and his associates, just dodged a major legal bullet himself. On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court gave him and other former senior Bush administration officials legal immunity for the vicious abuses committed against more than 700 foreigners who were rounded up with little or no cause after the 9/11 attacks.

The court ruled 4-2, nearly 16 years after the fact, that “national security” trumps civil liberties and that however unfounded the arrests, or intolerable their treatment, the detainees had no right to sue senior federal officials for damages.

Punting to Congress, a branch of government rarely known for its defense of individual rights, the court declared, “The proper balance in situations like this, between deterring constitutional violations and freeing high officials to make the lawful decisions necessary to protect the Nation in times of great peril, is one for the Congress to undertake, not the Judiciary.”

Although the climate of fear that followed 9/11 has eased a bit, the decision is highly relevant in the Trump era because the abused victims were all immigrants who had overstayed their visas. If the FBI had any question about the arrestees, it designated them “of interest” and ordered them held until cleared – in other words, guilty until proven innocent.

Dozens of the hapless victims were held at the Administrative Maximum Special Housing Unit in Brooklyn’s Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC), which was the subject of two scathing reports by the Bush Justice Department’s own Inspector General in 2003. Besides documenting a wide range of abuses, the reports concluded that staff members brazenly lied about the rough treatment they meted out.

Appalling Abuses

News accounts of the Supreme Court decision made only brief reference to that treatment. Yet the appalling story can be glimpsed from this summary of facts provided in 2013 by U.S. District Judge John Gleeson:

“The harsh confinement policy was expressly directed at Arab and Muslim noncitizens who had violated immigration laws . . . In other words, it was discriminatory on its face. . .

“They were confined in tiny cells for over 23 hours a day, provided with meager and barely edible food, and prohibited from moving around the unit . . . (or)

keeping any property, including personal hygiene items like toilet paper and soap, in their cells. Whenever they left their cells, they were handcuffed and shackled. . . (D)etainees . . . were often physically abused along the way, and were sometimes left for hours in the cold recreation cell, over their protests, as a form of punishment. . . .

“Detainees also were denied sleep. Bright lights were kept on . . . for 24 hours a day . . . and staff at the MDC made a practice of banging on the MDC Detainees’ cell doors and engaging in other conduct designed to keep them from sleeping. They also conducted inmate ‘counts’ at midnight, 3:00 a.m., and 5:00 a.m. . . . One of the officers walked by about every 15 minutes throughout the night, kicked the doors to wake up the detainees, and yelled things such as, ‘Motherfuckers,’ ‘Assholes,’ and ‘Welcome to America.’

“The MDC Detainees also were subjected to frequent physical and verbal abuse The physical abuse included slamming the MDC Detainees into walls; bending or twisting their arms, hands, wrists, and fingers; lifting them off the ground by their arms; pulling on their arms and handcuffs; stepping on their leg restraints; restraining them with handcuffs and/or shackles even while in their cells; and handling them in other rough and inappropriate ways. The use of such force was unnecessary because the MDC Detainees were always fully compliant with orders The verbal abuse included referring to the MDC Detainees as ‘terrorists’ and other offensive names, threatening them with violence, cursing at them, (and) insulting their religion

“(Detainees) . . . were subjected to unreasonable and punitive strip-searches. . . . Female officers were often present during the strip-searches; the strip-searches were regularly videotaped in their entirety . . . and MDC officers routinely laughed and made inappropriate sexual comments during the strip-searches.

“Officers at the MDC . . . also interfered with the Detainees’ ability to practice and observe their Muslim faith. . . . In addition, most of the MDC Detainees were held incommunicado during the first weeks of their detention. MDC staff repeatedly turned away everyone, including lawyers and relatives, who came to the MDC looking for the MDC Detainees, and thus the MDC Detainees had neither legal nor social visits during this period.”

An Abu Ghraib in Brooklyn

Though not at the level of brutality of water boarding and some of the beatings associated with secret CIA detention centers, these MDC abuses had some similarities to the humiliation and mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq – and the abuses were taking place right in the heart of New York City.

Plus, unlike some of the CIA's torture victims, these detainees had nothing to do with terrorist plots; some were never even questioned by the FBI after their arrest.

Yet senior FBI and Justice Department officials were complicit in the abuse. The 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals, in a 2015 ruling that the lawsuit could proceed, cited evidence that two of the defendants, Attorney General John Ashcroft and FBI Director Mueller, "met regularly with a small group of government officials in Washington, D.C., and mapped out ways to exert maximum pressure on the individuals arrested in connection with the terrorism investigation."

They "discussed and decided upon a strategy to restrict the 9/11 detainees' ability to contact the outside world and delay their immigration hearings. The group also decided to spread the word among law enforcement personnel that the 9/11 detainees were suspected terrorists[] . . . and that they needed to be encouraged in any way possible to cooperate." And it was the FBI that recommended housing the detainees in the maximum security facility where their rights were sure to be abused.

Such official misconduct and brutality constitutes a stain on this nation's honor. Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority, said "Nothing in this opinion should be read to condone the treatment to which the (plaintiffs) contend they were subjected."

A Terrible Precedent

But the court's decision to protect high-level federal officials who made that treatment possible sets a terrible precedent. As the American Civil Liberties Union warned, it "would effectively immunize tens of thousands of federal officers . . . from damages, no matter how egregious the officers' conduct. Indeed, [it] would effectively immunize federal officers from damages liability even for torture, so long as the torture arises in a context involving national security or noncitizens."

Citing such egregious precedents as the Alien and Sedition Acts, the wholesale suppression of civil liberties during World War I, and the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II, a dissenting Justice Stephen Breyer insisted that the Court had an obligation to defend "fundamental constitutional rights."

"History tells us of far too many instances where the Executive or Legislative Branch took actions during time of war that, on later examination, turned out unnecessarily and unreasonably to have deprived American citizens of basic constitutional rights," he wrote. With the latest court ruling, that dark

history is sure to be repeated.

[For more on the real Robert Mueller, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Russia-gate's Mythical Heroes](#)."]

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Spoiling for a Wider War in Syria

Exclusive: America's neocons are back pounding the war drums, urging President Trump to escalate U.S. military attacks inside Syria even if that means hitting Russian targets and risking a new world war, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. mainstream media's near universal demonization of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin – along with similar hatred directed toward Iran and Hezbollah – has put the world on a path toward World War III.

Ironically, the best hope for averting a dangerous escalation into a global conflict is to rely on Assad, Putin, Iran and Hezbollah to show restraint in the face of illegal military attacks by the United States and its Mideast allies inside Syria.

In other words, after the U.S. military has bombed Syrian government forces on their own territory and shot down a Syrian warplane on Sunday – and after Israel has launched its own strikes inside Syria and after Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies have financed and armed jihadists to overthrow Assad – it is now up to the Syrian government and its allies to turn the other cheek.

Of course, there is also a danger that comes from such self-control, in that it may encourage the aggressors to test the limits even further, seeing restraint as an acceptance of their impunity and a reason to ignore whatever warnings are issued and red lines drawn.

Indeed, if you follow The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and other big U.S. news outlets, perhaps the most striking groupthink that they all share is that the U.S. government and its allies have the right to intervene militarily anywhere in the world. Their slogan could be summed up as: "International law – that's for the other guy!"

In this upside-down world of American hegemony, Assad becomes the “aggressor” when he seeks to regain control of Syrian territory against armed insurgents, dominated by Al Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS), or when he protests the invasion of Syrian territory by foreign forces.

When Assad legally seeks help from Russia and Iran to defeat these foreign-armed and foreign-backed jihadists, the U.S. mainstream media and politicians treat his alliances as improper and troublemaking. Yet, the uninvited interventions into Syria by the United States and its various allies, including Turkey and Israel, are treated as normal and expected.

Demanding Escalation

The preponderance of U.S. media criticism about U.S. policy in Syria comes from neoconservatives and liberal interventionists who have favored a much more ambitious and vigorous “regime change” war, albeit cloaked in prettier phrases such as “safe zones” and “no-fly zones.”

So, you have Tuesday’s Wall Street Journal editorial, which praises Sunday’s U.S. shoot-down of a Syrian military plane because it allegedly was dropping bombs “near” one of the U.S.-backed rebel groups – though the Syrians say they were targeting an Islamic State position.

Although it was the U.S. that shot down the Syrian plane over Syria, the Journal’s editorial portrays the Russians and Syrians as the hotheads for denouncing the U.S. attack as a provocation and warning that similar air strikes will not be tolerated.

In response, the Journal’s neocon editors called for more U.S. military might hurled against Syria and Russia: “The risk of escalation is real, but this isn’t a skirmish the U.S. can easily avoid. Mr. Assad and his allies in Moscow and Tehran know that ISIS’s days are numbered. They want to assert control over as much territory as possible in the interim, and that means crushing the SDF [the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces].

“The Russian threat on Monday to target with anti-aircraft missiles any U.S. aircraft flying west of the Euphrates River in Syria is part of the same intimidation strategy. Russia also suspended a hotline between the two armed forces designed to reduce the risk of a military mistake. Iran, which arms and assists Mr. Assad on the ground, vowed further Syrian regime attacks against SDF, all but daring U.S. planes to respond amid the Russian threat.

“The White House and Pentagon reacted with restraint on Monday, calling for a de-escalation and open lines of communication. But if Syria and its allies are determined to escalate, the U.S. will either have to back down or prepare a more

concerted effort to protect its allies and now U.S. aircraft.

“This is a predicament President Obama put the U.S. in when his Syrian abdication created an opening for Vladimir Putin to intervene. Had the U.S. established a no-fly or other safe zone to protect refugees, the Kremlin might have been more cautious.”

As senior U.S. commanders have explained, however, the notion of a sweet-sounding “no-fly or other safe zone” would require a massive U.S. military campaign inside Syria that would devastate government forces and result in thousands of civilian deaths because many air defenses are located in urban areas. It also could lead to a victory for Al Qaeda and/or its spinoff, Islamic State, a grisly fate for most Syrians.

Propaganda Value

But the “safe zone” illusion has great propaganda value, essentially a new packaging for another “regime change” war, which the neocons lusted for in Syria as the follow-on to the Iraq invasion in 2003 but couldn’t achieve immediately because the Iraq War turned into a bloody disaster.

Instead, the neocons had to settle for a proxy war on Syria, funded and armed by the U.S. government and its regional allies, relying on violent jihadists to carry out the brunt of the fighting and killing. When Assad’s government reacted clumsily to this challenge, the U.S. mainstream media depicted Assad as the villain and the “rebels” as the heroes.

In 2012, the Defense Intelligence Agency, then under the direction of Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, warned that the U.S. strategy would give rise to “a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria.”

Flynn went further in a 2015 interview when he said the intelligence was “very clear” that the Obama administration made a “willful decision” to back these jihadists in league with Middle East allies. (Flynn briefly served as President Trump’s national security adviser but was ousted amid the growing Russia-gate “scandal.”)

Only in 2014, when Islamic State militants began decapitating American hostages and capturing cities in Iraq, did the Obama administration reverse course and begin attacking ISIS while continuing to turn a blind-eye to the havoc caused by other rebel groups allied with Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front, including many outfits deemed “moderate” in the U.S. lexicon.

But the problem is that almost none of this history exists within the U.S. mainstream narrative, which – as the Journal’s neocon editors did on Tuesday –

simply depicts Obama as weak and then baits President Trump to show more military muscle.

What U.S. National Interests?

The Journal editorial criticized Trump for having no strategy beyond eradicating ISIS and adding: "Now is the time for thinking through such a strategy because Syria, Russia and Iran know what they want. Mr. Assad wants to reassert control over all of Syria, not a country divided into Alawite, Sunni and Kurdish parts. Iran wants a Shiite arc of influence from Tehran to Beirut. Mr. Putin will settle for a Mediterranean port and a demonstration that Russia can be trusted to stand by its allies, while America is unreliable. None of this is in the U.S. national interests."

But why isn't this in U.S. national interests? What's wrong with a unified secular Syria that can begin to rebuild its shattered infrastructure and repatriate refugees who have fled into Europe, destabilizing the Continent?

What's the big problem with "a Shiite arc of influence"? The Shiites aren't a threat to the United States or the West. The principal terror groups – Al Qaeda and ISIS – spring from the extremist Saudi version of Sunni Islam, known as Wahhabism. I realize that Israel and Saudi Arabia took aim at Syria in part to shatter "the Shiite arc," but we have seen the horrific consequences of that strategy. How has the chaos that the Syrian war has unleashed benefited U.S. national interests?

And so what that Russia has a naval base on the Mediterranean Sea? That is no threat to the United States, either.

But what is the alternative prescription from the Journal's neocon editors? The editorial concludes: "The alternative would be to demonstrate that Mr. Assad, Iran and Russia will pay a higher price for their ambitions. This means refusing to back down from defending U.S. allies on the ground and responding if Russia aircraft or missiles attempt to take down U.S. planes. Our guess is that Russia doesn't want a military engagement with the U.S. any more than the U.S. wants one with Russia, but Russia will keep pressing for advantage unless President Trump shows more firmness than his predecessor."

So, rather than allow the Syrian government to restore some form of order across Syria, the neocons want the Trump administration to continue violating international law, which forbids military invasions of sovereign countries, and keep the bloodshed flowing. Beyond that, the neocons want the U.S. military to play chicken with the other nuclear-armed superpower on the assumption that Russia will back down.

As usual, the neocon armchair warriors don't reflect much on what could happen if U.S. warplanes attacking inside Syria are shot down. One supposes that would require President Trump to authorize a powerful counterstrike against Russian targets with the possibility of these escalations spinning out of control. But such craziness is where a steady diet of neocon/liberal-hawk propaganda has taken America.

We are ready to risk nuclear war and end all life on the planet, so Israel and Saudi Arabia can shatter a "Shiite arc of influence" and so American politicians don't have to feel the rhetorical lash of the neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks.

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](#)).

Trump Complies with War-Hawk Wishes

President Trump is plunging ahead with expanded Mideast wars, with emerging escalations in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere, building on the bloody policies of his predecessors, as retired Col. Ann Wright explains.

By Ann Wright

The militarization of U.S. foreign policy certainly didn't start with President Donald J. Trump; in fact, it goes back several decades. However, if Trump's first 100 days in office are any indication, he has no intention of slowing down the trend.

During a single week in April, the Trump administration fired 59 Tomahawk missiles into a Syrian airfield, and dropped the largest bomb in the U.S. arsenal on suspected ISIS tunnels in Afghanistan. This 21,600-pound incendiary percussion device that had never been used in combat – the Massive Ordnance Air Blast or MOAB, colloquially known as the "Mother of All Bombs"—was used in the Achin district of Afghanistan, where Special Forces Staff Sergeant Mark De Alencar had been killed a week earlier. (The bomb was tested only twice, at Elgin Air Base, Florida, in 2003.)

To underscore the new administration's preference for force over diplomacy, the decision to experiment with the explosive power of the mega-bomb was taken

unilaterally by General John Nicholson, the commanding general of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. In praising that decision, President Trump declared that he had given “total authorization” to the U.S. military to conduct whatever missions they wanted, anywhere in the world – which presumably means without consulting the interagency national security committee.

It is also telling that President Trump chose generals for two key national security positions traditionally filled by civilians: the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Advisor. Yet three months into his administration, he has left unfilled hundreds of senior civilian governmental positions at State, Defense and elsewhere.

While President Trump has not yet enunciated a policy on the subject of political assassinations, there has so far been no indication that he plans to change the practice of relying on drone killings established by his recent predecessors.

Back in 1976, however, President Gerald Ford set a very different example when he issued his Executive Order 11095. This proclaimed that “No employee of the United States government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, political assassination.”

President Ford instituted this prohibition after investigations by the Church Committee (the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, chaired by Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho) and the Pike Committee (its House counterpart, chaired by Rep. Otis G. Pike, D-New York) had revealed the extent of the Central Intelligence Agency’s assassination operations against foreign leaders in the 1960s and 1970s.

Permitting Assassinations

With a few exceptions, the next several presidents upheld the ban. But in 1986, President Ronald Reagan ordered an attack on Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi’s home in Tripoli, in retaliation for the bombing of a nightclub in Berlin that killed a U.S. serviceman and two German citizens and injured 229. In just 12 minutes, American planes dropped 60 tons of U.S. bombs on the house, though they failed to kill Gaddafi.

Twelve years later, in 1998, President Bill Clinton ordered the firing of 80 cruise missiles on al-Qaida facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan, in retaliation for the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The Clinton administration justified the action by asserting that the proscription against assassination did not cover individuals whom the U.S. government had determined were connected to terrorism.

Days after al-Qaida carried out its Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush signed an intelligence "finding" allowing the Central Intelligence Agency to engage in "lethal covert operations" to kill Osama bin Laden and destroy his terrorist network. White House and CIA lawyers argued that this order was constitutional on two grounds. First, they embraced the Clinton administration's position that E.O. 11905 did not preclude the United States' taking action against terrorists. More sweepingly, they declared that the ban on political assassination did not apply during wartime.

The Bush administration's wholesale rejection of the ban on targeted killing or political assassinations reversed a quarter-century of bipartisan U.S. foreign policy. It also opened the door to the use of unmanned aerial vehicles to conduct targeted killings (a euphemism for assassinations).

The U.S. Air Force had been flying unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), since the 1960s, but only as unmanned surveillance platforms. Following 9/11, however, the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency weaponized "drones" (as they were quickly dubbed) to kill both leaders and foot soldiers of al-Qaida and the Taliban.

The United States set up bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan for that purpose, but after a series of drone attacks that killed civilians, including a large group gathered for a wedding, the Pakistani government ordered in 2011 that the U.S. drones and U.S. military personnel be removed from its Shamsi Air Base. However, targeted assassinations continued to be conducted in Pakistan by drones based outside the country.

The Obama Approach

In 2009, President Barack Obama picked up where his predecessor had left off. As public and congressional concern increased about the use of aircraft controlled by CIA and military operators located 10,000 miles away from the people they were ordered to kill, the White House was forced to officially acknowledge the targeted killing program and to describe how persons became targets of the program.

Instead of scaling the program back, however, the Obama administration doubled down. It essentially designated all military-age males in a foreign strike zone as combatants, and therefore potential targets of what it termed "signature strikes." Even more disturbing, it declared that strikes aimed at specific, high-value terrorists, known as "personality strikes," could include American citizens.

That theoretical possibility soon became a grim reality. In April 2010,

President Obama authorized the CIA to “target” Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen and a former imam at a Virginia mosque, for assassination. Less than a decade before, the Office of the Secretary of the Army had invited the imam to participate in an interfaith service following 9/11. But al-Awlaki later became an outspoken critic of the “war on terror,” moved to his father’s homeland of Yemen, and helped al-Qaida recruit members.

On Sept. 30, 2011, a drone strike killed al-Awlaki and another American, Samir Khan – who was traveling with him in Yemen. U.S. drones killed al-Awlaki’s 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, an American citizen, 10 days later in an attack on a group of young men around a campfire. The Obama administration never made clear whether the 16-year-old son was targeted individually because he was al-Awlaki’s son or if he was the victim of a “signature” strike, fitting the description of a young military-age male. However, during a White House press conference, a reporter asked Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs how he could defend the killings, and especially the death of a U.S.-citizen minor who was “targeted without due process, without trial.”

Gibbs’s response did nothing to help the U.S. image in the Muslim world: “I would suggest that you should have had a far more responsible father if they are truly concerned about the well-being of their children. I don’t think becoming an al-Qaida jihadist terrorist is the best way to go about doing your business.”

On Jan. 29, 2017, al-Awlaki’s 8-year-old daughter, Nawar al-Awlaki, was killed in a U.S. commando attack in Yemen ordered by Obama’s successor, Donald Trump.

Weddings and Funerals

Meanwhile, the media continued to report incidents of civilians being killed in drone strikes across the region, which frequently target wedding parties and funerals. Many inhabitants of the region along the Afghan-Pakistan border could hear the buzz of drones circling their area around the clock, causing psychological trauma for all those who live in the area, especially children.

The Obama administration was strongly criticized for the tactic of “double-tap” – hitting a target home or vehicle with a Hellfire missile, and then firing a second missile into the group that came to the aid of those who had been wounded in the first attack. Many times, those who ran to help rescue persons trapped inside collapsed buildings or flaming cars were local citizens, not militants.

The rationale traditionally offered for using drones is that they eliminate the need for “boots on the ground” – whether members of the armed forces or CIA paramilitary personnel – in dangerous environments, thereby preventing loss of U.S. lives. U.S. officials also claim that the intelligence UAVs gather through

lengthy surveillance makes their strikes more precise, reducing the number of civilian casualties. (Left unsaid, but almost certainly another powerful motivator, is the fact that the use of drones means that no suspected militants would be taken alive, thus avoiding the political and other complications of detention.)

Even if these claims are true, however, they do not address the impact of the tactic on U.S. foreign policy. Of broadest concern is the fact that drones allow presidents to punt on questions of war and peace by choosing an option that appears to offer a middle course, but actually has a variety of long-term consequences for U.S. policy, as well as for the communities on the receiving end.

By taking the risk of loss of U.S. personnel out of the picture, Washington policymakers may be tempted to use force to resolve a security dilemma rather than negotiating with the parties involved. Moreover, by their very nature, UAVs may be more likely to provoke retaliation against America than conventional weapons systems. To many in the Middle East and South Asia, drones represent a weakness of the U.S. government and its military, not a strength. Shouldn't brave warriors fight on the ground, they ask, instead of hiding behind a faceless drone in the sky, operated by a young person in a chair many thousands of miles away?

Insider Attacks

Since 2007, at least 150 NATO personnel have been the victims of "insider attacks" by members of the Afghan military and national police forces being trained by the coalition. Many of the Afghans who commit such "green on blue" killings of American personnel, both uniformed and civilian, are from the tribal regions on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan where U.S. drone strikes have focused. They take revenge for the deaths of their families and friends by killing their U.S. military trainers.

Anger against drones has surfaced in the United States as well. On May 1, 2010, Pakistani-American Faisal Shahzad attempted to set off a car bomb in Times Square. In his guilty plea, Shahzad justified targeting civilians by telling the judge, "When the drone hits in Afghanistan and Iraq, they don't see children, they don't see anybody. They kill women, children; they kill everybody. They're killing all Muslims."

As of 2012 the U.S. Air Force was recruiting more drone pilots than pilots for traditional aircraft – between 2012 and 2014, they planned to add 2,500 pilots and support people to the drone program. That is nearly twice the number of diplomats the State Department hires in a two-year period.

Congressional and media concern over the program led to the Obama administration's acknowledgment of the regular Tuesday meetings led by the President to identify targets for the assassination list. In the international media, "Terror Tuesdays" became an expression of U.S. foreign policy.

To many around the world, U.S. foreign policy has been dominated for the past 16 years by military actions in the Middle East and South Asia, and large land and sea military exercises in Northeast Asia. On the world stage, American efforts in the areas of economics, trade, cultural issues and human rights appear to have taken a back seat to the waging of continuous wars.

Continuing the use of drone warfare to carry out assassinations will only exacerbate foreign distrust of American intentions and trustworthiness. It thereby plays into the hands of the very opponents we are trying to defeat.

During his campaign, Donald Trump pledged he would always put "America First," and said he wanted to get out of the business of regime change. It is not too late for him to keep that promise by learning from his predecessors' mistakes and reversing the continued militarization of U.S. foreign policy.

Ann Wright spent 29 years in the U.S. Army and Army Reserves, retiring as a colonel. She served 16 years in the Foreign Service in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia and Mongolia, and led the small team that reopened the U.S. embassy in Kabul in December 2001. She resigned in March 2003 in opposition to the war on Iraq, and is co-author of the book *Dissent: Voices of Conscience* (Koa, 2008). She speaks around the world about the militarization of U.S. foreign policy and is an active participant in the U.S. anti-war movement. [This story first appeared at The Foreign Service Journal at <http://www.afsa.org/killer-drones-and-militarization-us-foreign-policy>]

The Arab Struggle Against Bigotry

For decades, Arabs in the United States have been the focus of bigotry that spikes after incidents of violence and its exploitation by politicians, including President Trump, writes Marjorie Cohn at Truthdig.

By Marjorie Cohn

President Donald Trump has twice tried to institute a travel ban on all refugees from six or seven Muslim-majority countries. During the presidential campaign, Trump called for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” slated to last “until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on.” His Muslim ban has been struck down by two courts of appeals and may be headed to the Supreme Court.

With his mean-spirited bans, Trump aimed to capitalize on fear of Muslims fueled by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and exacerbated since by the U.S. government and the corporate media.

This anti-Muslim sentiment is a continuation of long-standing prejudice against Arabs that reached its zenith during the last third of the 20th century. In her provocative book, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight Against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s-1980s*, Pamela Pennock traces the trajectory of Arab-American leftist activism in the United States over a series of key decades.

Pennock writes about the enduring portrayal of “Arabs as variously exotic, erotic, savage, uncivilized, and incapable of autonomy.”

Indeed, media critic Jack Shaheen’s book and 2007 film, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, document negative stereotypes of Arabs depicted in American movies. “All aspects of our culture project the Arab as villain,” Shaheen says in the film.

He includes lyrics from the opening music of the Disney film “Aladdin”: “Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place, where the caravan camels grow, where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face. It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” “Aladdin” has been seen by millions of children around the world.

Anti-Arab prejudice has also been fueled by Hollywood’s depictions of Arab women as “highly sexualized belly dancer[s] ... inspired by early images of the Orient as the place of exoticism, intrigue and passion,” Shaheen notes. More recently, however, “this image has dramatically changed: The Arab woman is now projected as a bomber, a terrorist.”

Politicized Arab-Americans

These stereotypes are racist, sexist and patently false. Many Arabs came to the United States to study. Once here, they were moved to activism primarily by Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

As Pennock observes, the single biggest factor that galvanized Arab-Americans was the dispossession of Palestinian Arabs occasioned by the creation of the

state of Israel and its occupation of Palestinian territories.

In order to establish Israel as a Jewish state in 1948, nearly 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were expelled from their homes and their land. They call it the *Nakba*, which means "catastrophe" in Arabic.

A second catalyzing event occurred in June 1967, 50 years ago this month. Israel, with help from the United States, invaded Egypt, Jordan and Syria and seized the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula.

Later that year, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242, which refers to "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war" and calls for "withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict." Nevertheless, Israel continues to occupy Palestinian territories it acquired in 1967.

In addition, the 1967 war stoked anti-Arab sentiment in the United States. "While anti-Arab prejudice became especially pervasive and damaging after September 11, 2001, the stigmatization heightened in the aftermath of the 1967 war when many Americans increasingly grouped people of Arab heritage together, regardless of their citizenship or whether they resided in Arab nations or in the United States, and viewed them as threatening and suspicious," Pennock writes.

One event intensified anti-Arab prejudice in the United States and made it difficult for Arab Americans to "dissociate from stereotypes of terrorists," according to Pennock: the 1968 assassination of Robert F. Kennedy by Palestinian-American Sirhan Sirhan.

Sirhan was 4 years old when he and his family were forced by the Israeli military to flee their home in Jerusalem. That trauma informed his perception of Israel. Sirhan was disturbed by U.S. support for Israeli policies. During the presidential campaign, Kennedy vociferously backed Israel. For the 24-year-old Sirhan, who suffered from mental illness, Kennedy's words intensified his pain.

Attorney Abdeen Jabara, a member of Sirhan's defense team, told Pennock that this confluence of events supported a diminished-capacity defense to the murder charge. Sirhan ultimately was convicted of murdering Kennedy and condemned to death. His sentence was later converted to life without possibility of parole when the law changed in California.

Munich Olympics murders

Four years later, in an attempt to free Palestinian prisoners from Israeli

jails, the Black September faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization murdered Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics.

As a result of the 1972 massacre, the Nixon administration increased surveillance and investigation of Arab-Americans, in a program called "Operation Boulder."

"[B]ecause the Arab visa checks and investigations of Arab Americans were publicized in the American media as constituting the U.S. government's reaction to the Munich massacre," Pennock observes, "the government had in effect stigmatized all Arabs as suspect in the public's mind."

But the investigations "never detected a single case of terrorist or espionage activity among Arabs living in the United States," she reports. Operation Boulder, which officially ended in 1975, lasted only two years. But the U.S. government continued to monitor Arab-Americans for many years thereafter.

Many leaders in the Arab-American community thought the real aim of Operation Boulder was "to suppress Arab Americans' legal political expression, particularly their pro-Palestinian activism ... it was a program of political intimidation" that "also sought to 'divide and conquer' Arab American communities by making them suspicious of one another," Pennock writes.

Jabara, one of those investigated during Operation Boulder, later wrote that the program could "only be understood against the background of the definite pressure that [has] been brought to bear by Israel and its supporters in the U.S."

Jabara told Truthdig, "The matrix of the prejudice was part and parcel of the 'unswerving commitment' by the U.S. and its allies to Israel despite its gross violation of Palestinian rights. In short, there was an organic connection between the prejudice that was promoted in American popular culture as a support mechanism to a foreign policy that enabled Israeli aggression and colonization. Both the Americans and Israelis wanted to crush any resistance, regardless of what forms it took."

In the wake of 9/11, in another racist operation, the George W. Bush administration rounded up and incarcerated hundreds of Arab-Americans who had committed no crime. Bush also instituted his Terrorist Surveillance Program to spy on people without judicial review. That program was codified by Congress and continued during the Obama administration.

In 2011, Wired uncovered FBI training materials that described how agents were taught to consider "mainstream" Muslims as supporters of terrorism.

The Intercept reported in 2014 that documents leaked by whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that the FBI and the National Security Agency covertly read emails of prominent Muslim-Americans, including lawyers, academics, civil rights activists and a political candidate.

Arab-American Activism

Jabara was a founder and past president of the Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG), the first national organization of Arab-American peace and civil rights activists. Founded in 1967, AAUG was the most visible and active Arab-American organization in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It had chapters in most U.S. cities and universities.

AAUG was “a select group of Arab Americans [college graduates] who formulated a sense of ethnic identity, fostered community solidarity, and practiced progressive and transnational politics,” Pennock writes.

This group was committed “to an anti-racist, anti-imperialist analysis of Arab world problems” and was ideologically aligned with the global left. It aimed to demonstrate to Americans that “Zionism was a form of colonialism rather than a legitimate expression of Jewish nationalism.”

Significantly, AAUG “helped elevate the Palestinian struggle to the status of a premier universal human rights issue,” AAUG member Ghada Hasem Talhami later observed.

AAUG’s scholarly analysis, published in the Arab Studies Quarterly and other papers and monographs, “was usually critical not only of Israel and U.S. policy in the Middle East but also of conservative Arab states,” Pennock notes. Following the 1967 war, Egypt and Syria had “demonstrably retreated from their commitment to pan-Arabism and Palestinian independence,” she adds.

Thus, Jabara notes, AAUG provided a forum for Arab intellectuals, artists, activists and political figures who may not have had such opportunities to meet in their home countries.

Jabara saw a natural alliance between the issues facing Arab-Americans and the struggles of “Black Americans, Chicanos, Oriental Americans, young people and civil libertarians,” all of whom were “excluded from any meaningful participation in the American decision process.”

Most in the African-American community had traditionally formed alliances with Jews. But by the 1980s, many became increasingly critical of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, which they equated with South African apartheid.

The most significant factor driving U.S. foreign policy, according to Jabara, was not the Zionist lobby, but rather “America’s definition and pursuit of its economic interests in the region.”

Arab students, many of them members of the Organization of Arab Students (OAS), likened the struggle of the Palestinians to the Vietnamese fight for self-determination.

By the 1980s, the Muslim Student Organization supplanted OAS as the leading organization of Arab-American students, who were increasingly becoming Muslims.

In 1980, Jabara helped form the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) with former Sen. James Abourezk and Arab American Institute founder James Zogby. Jabara also served as president of ADC, which is still a significant organization.

Jabara told Truthdig that the 1973 oil embargo by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries led to an “uptick” in prejudice against Arab Americans. “That led to the creation of the ADC in 1980,” he added.

The National Lawyers Guild (NLG), the nation’s oldest and largest progressive bar association, was the first in the United States to be racially integrated. From the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, Jabara played the central role in convincing NLG to take up the issue of Palestine and the rights of Palestinians to self-determination. No issue has ever been as divisive in NLG. Some Jewish members left the organization, but it continues to oppose the Israeli occupation.

In 1977, Jabara led the first NLG delegation to Israel, Palestine, Syria and Jordan, and contributed to the delegation’s groundbreaking 1977 report on conditions in the occupied territories. That report was widely circulated within the then-young human rights network and is largely credited with paving the way for other organizations to break with the pro-Israeli orthodoxy and issue their own reports critical of Israeli human rights abuses.

Jabara was also a key participant in the lawsuit filed by NLG and the Center for Constitutional Rights against the FBI and the Anti-Defamation League of the B’nai B’rith for spying on NLG and other Arab-American and progressive groups.

Anti-Zionism vs. Anti-Semitism

In 1975, the U.N. General Assembly, by a 2-to-1 margin, passed a resolution equating Zionism with racism. It drew parallels between Israeli Zionism and apartheid South Africa. The United States voted against the resolution.

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1960s, people critical of Israel's policies were accused of anti-Semitism, a characterization that persists to this day. Indeed, those who support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement are often labeled anti-Semitic.

Following in the tradition of the Arab-American call for the United Auto Workers to divest its Israeli bonds in the early 1970s, the BDS movement was launched by representatives of Palestinian civil society in 2005. They appealed to "international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era ... [including] embargoes and sanctions against Israel."

This call for BDS specified that "these nonviolent punitive measures" should last until Israel fully complies with international law by 1) ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the barrier wall; 2) recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and 3) respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their land as stipulated in General Assembly Resolution 194.

Students for Justice in Palestine, which focuses predominantly on the BDS movement, has been tarred as anti-Semitic by Zionist groups on campuses throughout the country.

But Rafeef Ziadah, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee, says, "The BDS movement is opposed, as a matter of principle, to all forms of discrimination, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia."

In 2014, Palestinian human rights activist Omar Barghouti wrote in The New York Times, "Arguing that boycotting Israel is intrinsically anti-Semitic is not only false, but it also presumes that Israel and 'the Jews' are one and the same. This is as absurd and bigoted as claiming that a boycott of a self-defined Islamic state like Saudi Arabia, say, because of its horrific human rights record, would of necessity be Islamophobic."

Any criticism of Israeli policy is labeled anti-Semitism, even though many Jews – including members of Jewish Voice for Peace, Jewish Center for Nonviolence and IfNotNow – oppose the occupation.

Israel has invaded Gaza three times in the last seven years, killing thousands of Palestinians, including large numbers of women and children. The Black Lives Matter movement sees similarities between the police killings of African-

Americans in the U.S. and Israel's oppression of Palestinians, particularly in Gaza.

As the struggle against the Israeli occupation continues, Pennock's compelling book is a must-read for progressives and all interested in a comprehensive history of Arab-American activism. The parallels it draws with current events will inform today's activists in our struggles for freedom and equality.

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and a member of Jewish Voice for Peace. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*. Visit her website at <http://marjoriecohn.com/> and follow her on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/marjoriecohn>. [This story originally appeared at Truthdig at http://www.truthdig.com/arts_culture/item/the_arab_american_left_and_palestine_the_untold_story_20170605]

Settling for a No-Win in Syria

President Trump likes to talk about "winning" but some situations, like the Syrian war, offer only no-win outcomes, but that can be better than some alternatives, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Six years into one of the most complex, many-sided civil wars in modern times, Syria has almost no chance of being made whole any time in the foreseeable future. The Assad regime, aided by allies, has pushed back from the brink of what many had thought, just a couple of years ago, would be its extinction. But although the regime is not going to expire, neither can it – despite bravado assertions by President Bashar Assad – recapture the significant amount of territory held by diverse opposition elements.

Syria appears stuck with the variegated map that has become familiar to followers of the war, in which the regime controls the heavily populated western spine of the country, including its largest cities, while assorted others control the remainder.

The interests of the Syrian regime's most important ally – Russia – are a key determinant of this stalemate. Russia has succeeded, at a cost acceptable to it, in achieving its objectives of shoring up its only client regime in the Middle

East, securing its modest naval and air presence in the country, and demonstrating that it still is a player to be reckoned with in that part of the world.

Moscow has an interest in not having those accomplishments erased. To try to do more than that, with a sweeping rollback of remaining opposition positions in Syria, would start to entail unacceptable costs to the Russians. Attempting to own all of Syria, à la Afghanistan in the 1980s, is not in Russia's interest.

Similar calculations apply to the Assad regime's other external backer, Iran. The Iranian-Syrian alliance never was a marriage of love but instead began as a response to the antagonism of their mutual adversary in between: the Iraqi Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. Iran's interests in maintaining a position in this part of the Levant have outlasted Saddam's regime, but those interests do not imply a need for an ally that controls all of Syria. As with Russia, the costs needed to sustain more of a rollback of the Syrian opposition would soon become unacceptably high.

From the perspective of the United States, there are no attractive players in this conflict, only degrees of unattractiveness. There never was any significant liberal democratic opposition in Syria, nor a basis for one. The notion that chances were lost for developing such an opposition is a myth of hypothetical history. The real history of many protracted, brutal internal wars demonstrates that the upper hand is gained by those with an appetite for brutality rather than moderation.

External Players

As for the external players, besides Russia and Iran those players include regimes that, although they may nominally be friends or allies of the United States, have involved themselves in the Syrian conflict for mostly unlaudable reasons. These include the sectarian prejudices and tolerance for Sunni extremism of the Saudi regime, and the paranoiac Kurd-bashing inclinations of the Erdogan government in Turkey.

Recalcitrance that keeps this war going and has so far prevented a negotiated resolution of it is not to be found only on one side of the conflict. It is a mistake to assert that a key to resolution is to gain leverage over the Assad regime by punishing it further. Recalcitrance among internal opposition groups has been a match for recalcitrance on the part of the regime.

Nor does whatever can be described as destabilizing behavior exist only in one place, especially the place where discourse in the United States most likes to place it. Russia and Iran are supporting the incumbent regime – a regime that,

counting Hafez as well as Bashir Assad, has been in power for 47 years. It is other players who have been attempting to upset a longstanding status quo.

Even if clearer identifications of good guys and bad could be made, the intersecting lines of conflict in Syria are so complex that it is almost impossible to pursue one objective without running afoul of another. The main quandary in this respect right now for the United States involves how to enlist the war-fighting prowess of a Kurdish militia to reduce further the territorial enclave of the so-called Islamic State or ISIS without worsening relations with Turkey, which regards that militia as an arm of an anti-Turkish terrorist group.

Reduction of the ISIS mini-state is where the familiar battle map of Syria is most likely to undergo change in the weeks ahead. The central focus has been capture of the de facto ISIS capital of Raqqa. But when – and it's when, not if – Raqqa falls is less important than what is left behind after it falls. The importance of a distant territorial enclave to terrorist threats in the West has always been overstated, and ISIS, even before losing Raqqa, already appears to be placing greater emphasis on violent clandestine operations abroad that do not depend on possession of any such enclave.

How much unsettled conflict and chaos is left behind in that part of Syria after Raqqa falls will determine how fertile a field it will be for breeding additional extremism, whether under the ISIS label or some other label.

The makers of U.S. policy should bear in mind how little stake the United States has in specific outcomes in Syria, beyond the concern with exportable extremism and political violence (and they should remember that even ISIS was exported from Iraq, where it was born under a different name as a consequence of the U.S. invasion and occupation).

Avoidance of situations that risk sucking the United States into a larger military clash will be important. A sample of the risks of such escalation recently occurred when U.S. forces attacked a pro-regime militia, said to be supported by Iran, when it got what the U.S. military regarded as uncomfortably close to an installation that U.S. forces use in southern Syria.

No Good Case

There is no good case for U.S. escalation in Syria. It would increase the danger of further, unwanted, escalation. Given the nature of the current stalemate in the main part of the civil war, such escalation would be unlikely to move the needle regarding the shape of an eventual political settlement. And U.S. interests would be little affected even if the needle did move.

Right now, U.S. policy should focus more on post-Raqqa than on the capture of

Raqqa. The minimization of chaos and conflict in the space vacated by ISIS is partly a matter of carefully shaping military activity on the ground and partly a matter of making full use of the available diplomatic channels, as disjointed as those channels may seem.

The U.N.-sponsored Geneva process has been unproductive so far in terms of yielding any agreements with lasting effect, but it is the forum where any real peace agreement will have to be signed. Russia, Turkey and Iran have had a parallel process at Astana that produced an agreement on “de-escalation zones,” which left many unanswered questions, especially regarding the posture of the internal Syrian opposition toward such zones. But it is worthwhile for the United States to explore, as it may already be doing with the Russians, how this plan might be used as a basis for further de-escalation.

The United States should accept a fractured Syria for an indefinite future. Frozen conflicts aren’t always bad, and in this case frozen would be better than unfrozen. Such a preliminary outcome could bring some relief from the suffering in Syria without the parties having to relinquish formally their farther-reaching aspirations. It also could be a way station to an eventual settlement that involves a highly decentralized Syria in which different communities would feel more confident about controlling their own affairs.

Meanwhile the Trump administration needs to discard its penchant for regarding every outcome in terms of wins and losses. So regarded, when you have a no-win situation such as Syria, that means the only possible outcome is a loss. And even when parties we don’t like suffer a loss, that does not necessarily help U.S. interests.

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 National Interest’s Web site](#). Reprinted with author’s permission.)

ISIS Attack Exposes Anti-Iran Propaganda

An ISIS-claimed terror attack in Iran killing a dozen people shows how dishonest the U.S. government has been in lumping Iran in with terror groups that it has aggressively fought, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

For Americans fed a diet of rhetoric about Iran that constantly links it to the sending, not the receiving, end of terrorism – in which “the leading state sponsor of terrorism” is the adjectival phrase routinely affixed to Iran, and in which official rhetoric such as President Trump’s speech in Riyadh mashes Iran together with Sunni Islamist terrorism of the ISIS variety into one undifferentiated blob of evil – the deadly attacks today in Tehran generate much cognitive dissonance.

But however disorienting this news may have been, it is true. An obviously well-planned operation struck at the heart of Iran, at its parliament and the monument to the Islamic Republic’s founder. At least a dozen people were killed and dozens more injured. The credibility of the claim of responsibility by ISIS is enhanced by the group’s posting of video footage from the attack.

For anyone looking beyond rhetoric and at reality, the attack is no surprise. Iran has been one of the staunchest and most active foes of ISIS. Probably the main reason an attack like this had not happened any earlier is the difficulty that ISIS has had in finding recruits among Iranians.

Iran has, partly with its own personnel but mainly through material support of clients and allies, been a leader in combating ISIS, especially in Iraq and to a lesser extent in Syria. Many Iraqis give Iran, with good reason, the main credit for saving Baghdad from ISIS when the group was making its dramatic territorial gains in northern and western Iraq in 2014.

If the United States could overcome its current hang-up about doing any business with Iran, it would find a worthwhile partner in many aspects of counterterrorism, especially as far as the fight against ISIS is concerned.

There has long been a willingness, and a necessary awareness of shared interest, on the Iranian side.

In September 2001, immediately after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, both Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and then-President Mohamed Khatami strongly condemned the attacks. Expressions of sympathy in Iran for the American victims included candlelight vigils and observing a minute of silence by tens of thousands of people at a sporting event.

Two weeks after the attack, Khatami stated, “Iran fully understands the feelings of the Americans about the attacks in New York and Washington.” Khatami correctly noted that American administrations had been at best indifferent about terrorist attacks in Iran since the revolution of 1979, but that Iranians felt differently and were expressing their sympathies accordingly.

Condolences or Sanctions?

We wait to hear from the Trump administration the kind of expression of sympathy and solidarity that commonly is offered to foreign nations that have become victims of major terrorist attacks. We should not hold our breath while waiting.

The Iranians certainly aren't. They have experienced a long history of American postures toward Iran, in the context of a common terrorist threat, that have ranged from indifference at best to door-slamming at worst. In the first few months after 9/11, Iranian officials worked cooperatively and effectively with U.S. officials to midwife a new regime in Afghanistan to replace the Taliban.

The Iranians thought this could be the beginning of further cooperation against a common threat. But then the United States slammed the door shut, as George W. Bush declared an "axis of evil" in which Iran was lumped together with North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

The principal perpetrator of terrorism in Iran over the past four decades has been the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), the Marxist/Islamist cult/terrorist group that prior to the revolution had claimed Americans among its victims. Thanks largely to the MEK's activity, Iran necessarily has had much experience in countering terrorism. Khamenei lost the use of his right arm when he was injured by an MEK bomb in an assassination attempt in 1981.

The U.S. handling of the MEK in recent years has seen the U.S. Government succumbing to a well-financed lobbying campaign on behalf of the group, with that campaign winning much support for the group in the U.S. Congress and the group eventually being removed from the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. If the crippled Khamenei exhibits some reflexive anti-U.S. sentiments, do you suppose this history has something to do with it?

Right now, on the very day of the terrorist attacks in Tehran, the United States Senate is scheduled to take its first vote on a bill that would impose still more sanctions on Iran. It appears the most immediate American response to the attacks will be sanctions on, not sympathy for, the victim.

In the months ahead, Iran may take actions outside its borders in response to the attacks. The United States, ever since 9/11, has claimed a right for itself to be ruthlessly aggressive in the name of responding to terrorism, lashing out with force while sometimes being little restrained by collateral damage or international law (not to mention its own constitutional requirements).

Iran may see a need to be more aggressive in places such as Iraq or Syria in the interest of fighting back against ISIS. Will the United States grant Iran the same kind of slack it grants itself? Or, as has been customary in opposing anything Iran does and taking no account of exactly what interests are being

advanced or threatened, will the Iranian responses be denounced as more “nefarious,” “malign,” and “destabilizing” behavior?

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 National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)

Russia-gate’s Mythical ‘Heroes’

The mainstream U.S. media sells the mythical integrity of fired FBI Director Comey and special Russia-gate prosecutor Mueller, but the truth is they have long histories as pliable political operatives, writes ex-FBI official Coleen Rowley.

By Coleen Rowley

Mainstream commentators display amnesia when they describe former FBI Directors Robert Mueller and James Comey as stellar and credible law enforcement figures. Perhaps if they included J. Edgar Hoover, such fulsome praise could be put into proper perspective.

Although these Hoover successors, now occupying center stage in the investigation of President Trump, have been hailed for their impeccable character by much of Official Washington, the truth is, as top law enforcement officials of the George W. Bush Administration (Mueller as FBI Director and James Comey as Deputy Attorney General), both presided over post-9/11 cover-ups and secret abuses of the Constitution, enabled Bush-Cheney fabrications used to launch wrongful wars, and exhibited plain vanilla incompetence.

TIME Magazine would probably have not called my own disclosures a “bombshell memo” to the Joint Intelligence Committee Inquiry in May 2002 if it had not been for Mueller’s having so misled everyone after 9/11. Although he bore no personal responsibility for intelligence failures before the attack, since he only became FBI Director a week before, Mueller denied or downplayed the significance of warnings that had poured in yet were all ignored or mishandled during the Spring and Summer of 2001.

Bush Administration officials had circled the wagons and refused to publicly own up to what the 9/11 Commission eventually concluded, “that the system had been blinking red.” Failures to read, share or act upon important intelligence, which

a FBI agent witness termed “criminal negligence” in later trial testimony, were therefore not fixed in a timely manner. (Some failures were never fixed at all.)

Worse, Bush and Cheney used that post 9/11 period of obfuscation to “roll out” their misbegotten “war on terror,” which only served to exponentially increase worldwide terrorism.

Unfulfilled Promise

I wanted to believe Director Mueller when he expressed some regret in our personal meeting the night before we both testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee. He told me he was seeking improvements and that I should not hesitate to contact him if I ever witnessed a similar situation to what was behind the FBI’s pre 9/11 failures.

A few months later, when it appeared he was acceding to Bush-Cheney’s ginning up intelligence to launch the unjustified, counterproductive and illegal war on Iraq, I took Mueller up on his offer, emailing him my concerns in late February 2003. Mueller knew, for instance, that Vice President Dick Cheney’s claims connecting 9/11 to Iraq were bogus yet he remained quiet. He also never responded to my email.

Beyond ignoring politicized intelligence, Mueller bent to other political pressures. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Mueller directed the “post 9/11 round-up” of about 1,000 immigrants who mostly happened to be in the wrong place (the New York City area) at the wrong time. FBI Headquarters encouraged more and more detentions for what seemed to be essentially P.R. purposes. Field offices were required to report daily the number of detentions in order to supply grist for FBI press releases about FBI “progress” in fighting terrorism. Consequently, some of the detainees were brutalized and jailed for up to a year despite the fact that none turned out to be terrorists.

A History of Failure

Long before he became FBI Director, serious questions existed about Mueller’s role as Acting U.S. Attorney in Boston in effectively enabling decades of corruption and covering up of the FBI’s illicit deals with mobster Whitey Bulger and other “top echelon” informants who committed numerous murders and crimes. When the truth was finally uncovered through intrepid investigative reporting and persistent, honest judges, U.S. taxpayers footed a \$100 million court award to the four men framed for murders committed by (the FBI-operated) Bulger gang.

Current media applause omits the fact that former FBI Director Mueller was the top official in charge of the Anthrax terror fiasco investigation into those 2001 murders, which targeted an innocent man (Steven Hatfill) whose lawsuit

eventually forced the FBI to pay \$5 million in compensation. Mueller's FBI was also severely criticized by Department of Justice Inspector Generals finding the FBI overstepped the law improperly serving hundreds of thousands of "national security letters" to obtain private (and irrelevant) metadata on citizens, and for infiltrating nonviolent anti-war groups under the guise of investigating "terrorism."

For his part, Deputy Attorney General James Comey, too, went along with the abuses of Bush and Cheney after 9/11 and signed off on a number of highly illegal programs including warrantless surveillance of Americans and torture of captives. Comey also defended the Bush Administration's three-year-long detention of an American citizen without charges or right to counsel.

Up to the March 2004 night in Attorney General John Ashcroft's hospital room, both Comey and Mueller were complicit with implementing a form of martial law, perpetrated via secret Office of Legal Counsel memos mainly written by John Yoo and predicated upon Yoo's singular theories of absolute "imperial" or "war presidency" powers, and requiring Ashcroft every 90 days to renew certification of a "state of emergency."

The Comey/Mueller Myth

What's not well understood is that Comey's and Mueller's joint intervention to stop Bush's men from forcing the sick Attorney General to sign the certification that night was a short-lived moment. A few days later, they all simply went back to the drawing board to draft new legal loopholes to continue the same (unconstitutional) surveillance of Americans.

The mythology of this episode, repeated endlessly throughout the press, is that Comey and Mueller did something significant and lasting in that hospital room. They didn't. Only the legal rationale for their unconstitutional actions was tweaked.

Mueller was even okay with the CIA conducting torture programs after his own agents warned against participation. Agents were simply instructed not to document such torture, and any "war crimes files" were made to disappear. Not only did "collect it all" surveillance and torture programs continue, but Mueller's (and then Comey's) FBI later worked to prosecute NSA and CIA whistleblowers who revealed these illegalities.

Neither Comey nor Mueller – who are reported to be "joined at the hip" – deserve their current lionization among politicians and mainstream media. Instead of Jimmy Stewart-like "G-men" with reputations for principled integrity, the two close confidants and collaborators merely proved themselves, along with former

CIA Director George “Slam Dunk” Tenet, reliably politicized sycophants, enmeshing themselves in a series of wrongful abuses of power along with official incompetence.

It seems clear that based on his history and close “partnership” with Comey, called “one of the closest working relationships the top ranks of the Justice Department have ever seen,” Mueller was chosen as Special Counsel not because he has integrity but because he will do what the powerful want him to do.

Mueller didn’t speak the truth about a war he knew to be unjustified. He didn’t speak out against torture. He didn’t speak out against unconstitutional surveillance. And he didn’t tell the truth about 9/11. He is just “their man.”

Coleen Rowley, a retired FBI special agent and division legal counsel whose May 2002 memo to then-FBI Director Robert Mueller exposed some of the FBI’s pre-9/11 failures, was named one of TIME magazine’s “Persons of the Year” in 2002. Her 2003 letter to Robert Mueller in opposition to launching the Iraq War is archived in full text on the NYT and her 2013 op-ed entitled “Questions for the FBI Nominee” was published on the day of James Comey’s confirmation hearing. This piece will also be cross-posted on Rowley’s Huffington Post page.)

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McMaster Urges Another Afghan ‘Surge’

Exclusive: The failure to hold the Iraq War perpetrators accountable has led to false narratives about “successful surges” that never really succeeded – and now may allow the Afghan slaughter to escalate, reports James W Carden.

By James W Carden

Over the weekend, the *New York Times* reported that President Trump’s National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster will soon be proposing yet another troop increase in Afghanistan. According to the Times, “The White House shelved the deliberations over Afghanistan three weeks ago, after an initial Pentagon proposal to deploy up to 5,000 additional American troops ran into fierce resistance” from White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon and other advisers.

But McMaster, reports the *Times*, is “undeterred” and “plans to bring the debate back to the front burner this coming week,” according to an anonymous U.S. official.

The current debate recalls the early days of the Obama administration when President Obama was basically railroaded by Secretary of Defense Bob Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Generals David Petraeus and Stanley McChrystal into sending over 30,000 U.S. troops in an ill-fated “surge” that was

advertised by its supporters as the answer to the Afghan quagmire. But the “surge,” rather than resulting in victory, produced a rash of “green on blue” attacks by our alleged Afghan allies upon U.S. troops.

It is worth recalling that the Afghan “surge” was a policy that was enthusiastically endorsed by the U.S. Establishment. As the editorial board of the New York Times wrote in May 2009: “We hope... that the president and his team have come up with a strategy that will combine aggressive counterinsurgency tactics with economic development.” Washington think tanks, such as the Center for a New American Security and the Brookings Institution, also lined up in support. Yet the results were abysmal: more U.S. troops died in Afghanistan under Obama than under George W. Bush. Overall, the war in Afghanistan, which is now in its 16th year, has taken the lives of over 31,000 Afghani civilians – and by some estimates perhaps 10 times over – and over 3,500 members of the U.S.-led coalition at a cost of over \$1 trillion.

But never mind this uncomfortable and tragic history. For the *Times*, what’s important is that Trump’s Defense Secretary James Mattis and H.R. McMaster “are steeped in counterinsurgency doctrine – the strategy that helped lead Mr. Obama to order a deployment of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan in 2009.” And judging by much of the literature and reportage on the decade-and-a-half-long war in Afghanistan, counterinsurgency doctrine (or COIN) has, despite zero success, never lost its luster inside the Beltway.

Bad Habits

When it comes to COIN, old habits die hard. The Brookings Institution’s Michael O’Hanlon, a stalwart supporter of counterinsurgency doctrine in Iraq and a cheerleader for the 2009 Afghan “surge,” is now calling for a “mini-surge” in Afghanistan. According to Hanlon, the war may not end anytime soon, “**but maybe that’s okay**, given how relatively modest in scale and risk the mission has become, and how modest it will remain even if President Trump adds several thousand more troops to the mix.” [Emphasis mine].

“An increase of several thousand U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan,” says O’Hanlon, “has a sound logic behind it.”

The misplaced enthusiasm for sending evermore troops to Afghanistan is predicated in large part by an almost religious faith in counterinsurgency doctrine, which is often cited as the key to General David Petraeus’s (allegedly) “successful surge” in Iraq in 2007.

Yet as the historian and retired Army colonel Andrew Bacevich has pointed out, COIN has “enabled senior civilian and military officials to sustain the pretense

of having reasserted a measure of control over a situation in which they have exercised next to none.” [For why the “successful surge” myth has been so popular in Official Washington, [click here.](#)]

Having failed on its own terms, that is, to bring a measure of political stability to Iraq and Afghanistan, COIN’s proponents nevertheless persist. Indeed, counterinsurgency expert and former president of CNAS John Nagl [was quoted in the Times asking](#) “what is the alternative?” to McMaster’s proposed troop increase.

Actually, there *are* alternatives (there always are). It’s just that these tend not to have the institutional backing of Washington’s policy/think tank community which, because it is [deeply compromised](#) by its defense industry funders, rarely given them voice or consideration.

For example, Professors Stephen Walt and John J. Mearsheimer [have proposed](#) an eminently sensible strategy of “offshore balancing” which would forgo the use of U.S. ground forces and instead rely on an “over the horizon” force that would serve as a deterrent to the rise of potential regional hegemony while “eschewing social engineering and minimizing the United States’ military footprint.”

According to Walt and Mearsheimer, the U.S. is currently committed to “spreading democracy in unfamiliar places, which sometimes requires military occupation and always involves interfering with local political arrangements.”

Fresh Thinking

The problem with this approach – which, as it happens, is the most serious objection to McMaster’s plan – is that ever greater number of boots on the ground “invariably foster nationalist resentment.”

“In addition to inspiring terrorists,” write Walt and Mearsheimer, “using regime change to spread American values undermines local institutions and creates ungoverned spaces where violent extremists can flourish.”

MIT’s Barry Posen has proposed a strategy along similar lines. In his 2014 book *Restraint: A New Foundation for US Strategy*, Posen correctly observes that U.S. objectives in Afghanistan are “probably unachievable.” After all, “despite much US and NATO instruction” Afghanistan’s “military, and police remain poorly trained, inadequately armed, sometimes corrupt, and only intermittently motivated.”

What to do? Send in more troops, as per Mattis and McMaster? No: the wisest course of action would be for the U.S. to moderate its goals, which, according to Posen, “means ratcheting down the US counterinsurgency, nation-building

project in Afghanistan at the earliest possible time.”

As the latest iteration of the counterinsurgency debate kicks off this week, the time to consider serious alternatives to America’s current (and failed) strategy in Afghanistan is now.

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Trump and the American Decline

The fury over President Trump’s behavior and the hysteria over Russia are concealing the more significant long-term erosion of U.S. global influence from endless wars in the Mideast, observes ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

President Trump’s ignorant, oafish and crude foreign policy style rivets our attention, arouses our indignation. But the drama of the diplomatic mayhem he wreaks while traveling abroad also distracts from recognizing more serious underlying problems of U.S. policy – deep negative trends that predate Trump.

Focusing on Trump’s latest crude pronouncements encourages the soothing belief that these current dilemmas are all his doing. In other words, if we didn’t have Trump, the U.S. would be back in the comfortable saddle as world’s acknowledged, respected, indispensable leader.

The sad fact is, we can vent our anger as we like, but the old days just aren’t coming back. It would indeed be a huge relief to be able to attribute our current foreign policy mess to the incompetence of one individual.

President Obama posed the reverse problem: his intelligent, gracious, sophisticated and knowledgeable style lulled us into believing that all should be well on the foreign policy front with the right guy in charge. But in reality the gratifying nature of Obama’s style too, concealed on numerous fronts the critical issues he failed to address or incorrectly addressed.

Trump’s outrages are too numerous to deal with in one piece; here I’d like to focus specifically on the recent brouhaha over NATO and questions about Trump’s alleged destruction of America’s “reliability” as a partner in Europe. Let me

suggest a few key, perhaps contrarian, propositions of my own, drawn from my perspective as a former “sovietologist,” and student of Russian culture and affairs.

I write this too, with overwhelming concern for the unprecedented binge of American hysteria – there is no other word for it – over Putin and Russia’s place in the world.

The words of Soviet expert on American foreign policy, Georgi Arbatov, to an American diplomat upon the collapse of the USSR, come back to haunt: “We are going to do a terrible thing to you, we are going to deprive you of your enemy.” Indeed the U.S. has been thrashing around ever since.

So, Trump has bluntly called upon the E.U. to shoulder a greater share of the burden in NATO’s upkeep. He is not wrong. Indeed, the E.U. very much should take far more responsibility on issues of global security – but not so much financially, but by determining, on its own for a change, what it perceives to be its own security problems and how to manage them.

Europe’s View

In today’s post-Soviet world the reality is that most of European political culture no longer instinctively shares the American perspective on global affairs. The U.S. is increasingly driven by a security- and military-dominated approach to handling international crises. This trend towards the militarization of American foreign policy has been growing by leaps and bounds, particularly since 9/11. America excels at “threat perception,” it’s what keeps U.S. think tanks and arms industries in business.

Let’s take the proposition one step farther. Despite the many shrill voices in Washington, Russia simply cannot be taken as “the greatest threat to American security and welfare.” Non-stop American wars and their consequences are the greatest threat.

Washington’s choice of primarily military means to handle contemporary radical trends in Muslim societies has not only failed to solve them, but has demonstrably exacerbated them. We are fighting on more fronts against radicalized Muslims than ever before.

Yet these multiple simultaneous American wars bleed the budget, usurp funding for social infrastructure, maintain a culture of fear, and stimulate the growth of the security state. And yes, it’s gotten worse under Trump.

Just look at the costs. The U.S. suffers from the most massive gap between rich and poor of any country in the developed world. This gap not only produces

economic hardship, but corrodes social unity, stimulates anger, bitterness, divisiveness and feeds the paranoid attitudes that are directly responsible for electing Trump in the first place.

There is no sign that the insatiable American embrace of non-stop war is slackening – on the contrary. New crises emerge everywhere; there is virtually no area of the world left that does not at some point require “urgent American leadership” to preserve American “vital interests.”

But this perspective of what constitutes the “vital interests” of the West is no longer widely shared in Europe. And it is simply extraordinary that there is *zero* discussion anywhere in U.S. election campaigns or in the MSM to challenge the military budget.

Nor for most of Europe is Russia anywhere remotely the greatest challenge to their security and welfare. Massive refugee flows, immigration and their resulting domestic tensions, costs of refugee absorption, and even Muslim extremism are the true challenges.

Can we really believe that American military intervention in the Muslim world over the past few decades – resulting in the killing of at least *two million* Muslims – has not created profound ground for the ongoing backlash?

E.U. Priorities

Beyond security issues, the E.U. also urgently faces the need to reform its economic bureaucracy to more fairly and equitably address the economic and social problems of Europe. Here the E.U. places the highest priority on preserving domestic tranquility, even while the U.S. does not.

Starving Europe’s social and economic budgets to support greater military expenditures is not productive. Europe knows that. Global security is better served by preserving Europe’s own economic and social order than by spending money on arming itself up at U.S. behest for some putative Russian military threat.

Let’s consider the Russian military threat. The U.S. military budget alone is greater than the combined budgets of the next eight military budgets combined (including Russia and China.) Russia is a poor country with a modest military budget. Numbers aren’t everything of course, and U.S. think tanks work overtime forging creative scenarios about how Russia can still actually defeat the U.S. in a European conflict – justifying ever greater U.S. military budgets.

But what do we think Russia is actually going to do? Invade Europe? In reality Russia does not threaten the E.U. in any serious respect, as most balanced

European observers will admit. It's interesting here to look at how many times Russia has actually invaded the West. Looks like twice in two centuries – and both times in direct response to *European invasions* of the Russian heartland.

The first occurred under the Napoleonic Wars in the early 1800s. Napoleon, as part of his campaigns to conquer most of Europe, foolishly invaded Russia in 1812. As the French were unable to get the strategically retreating Russian army to seriously engage militarily, even at the gates of Moscow, the Russians, aided by “General Winter” as Tolstoy puts it, chased Napoleon all the way back into Central Europe.

At that point the Russian army joined the grand European coalition against Napoleon in Europe. Indeed, Napoleon's disaster in Russia was a turning point for the European war against Napoleon. The Russian army soon thereafter went back home.

The second Russian invasion of the West was in the late days of World War II. Here, as we know, Hitler fatally decided to invade Russia, where he spread destruction, starvation and death. The Soviet Union, at the staggering costs of upwards of 25 million Russians dead in the long war, eventually drove Hitler back into Germany.

Defeating the Nazis

Russia was more responsible than any other country for the devastation of Hitler's Wehrmacht. And Western allies gave maximum support to the Red Army's offensive against Hitler. Trouble was, after driving the Germans back to Germany, Soviet forces didn't go back home. Stalin occupied all of Eastern Europe (and Karelia) subjecting it to harsh Russian communist control and ideology for over 40 years.

These events represent the two extraordinary circumstances of Russian invasion of the West. These conditions are not readily replicated.

For sure, Russia has played its part over the past two centuries in numerous small military engagements around its periphery as part of the endless European Great Power struggles for spheres of influence. But the same has been true of every single major Western power fighting battles in its periphery over the years, including the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Austria, Turkey and others. It is never comfortable for a small state to live next to a great power anywhere.

Europe, by dint of proximity and experience, knows and understands Russia well. Germany above all is the one major power that will always bear the primary responsibility for handling the Russian account in Europe; Russia and Germany

after all are the two major powers of Central and Eastern Europe. Here Germany remains knowledgeable and sober-minded.

Since the fall of the ideological empire of the Soviet Union large segments of German public opinion are uncomfortable with American policies designed to push NATO up to the very gates of Russia. Such acts are viewed as highly provocative intrusion into an area of traditional Russian sphere of influence.

Indeed, Germany's last Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier recently spoke out against what he saw as "provocative" NATO exercises near the Russian border in the Baltics.

Yet Washington seems hard-wired to deprive Russia of its sphere of influence anywhere it can, all the while finding it unacceptable that any power should challenge, anywhere, the American sphere of interest. Indeed, the U.S. has been obsessed with Russia for over two centuries, especially on the religious, cultural and ideological level. (See the NYT book review of a deeply insightful book *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'* by David S. Foglesong.)

Holding Down Russia

Thus Washington persists in its own strategic view in which there can be no win-win with Russia. (Trump actually spoke of trying to improve relations, only to unleash the full wrath of the U.S. security establishment upon his head. Trump's own unorthodox approach has not helped.)

Maintenance of overwhelming U.S. power and strategic global reach – "full-spectrum dominance" in Pentagonese – is the American strategic goal. But that is not the European goal or the European perception of a future world order.

Europe is far more readily willing to deal seriously, for example with Cuba, Iran, Palestine, China and Russia, among others. And Europe has been severely damaged by U.S.-sponsored regime change wars in the Middle East – witness Muslim terrorism and refugees.

Europe is also well aware of how the balance of world influence has gradually been shifting against the U.S. (although certainly not in military terms). Europeans do not applaud this change as such, but understand that the rise of other world powers represents future geopolitical reality.

Thus, Europe, from its own perspective, is ironically in a much healthier position if it now does assume primary responsibility for its own security in managing the European political, economic, and social relationship with Russia.

Once the Cold War was over NATO essentially had become Washington's chief

instrument for exerting dominant control over European security policy. That situation increasingly tallies less with European strategic perceptions.

Trump's crudeness thus finally provided the tipping point for new and long overdue E.U. thinking about the European-Russian relationship under the new world realities. NATO officials of course will never see it that way. But this European reality will not likely be reversed by any U.S. president.

And Europe is acutely aware that Putin's policies in Europe will directly reflect U.S. policy steps against him. Russia is Russia; neocon fantasies about "solving the problem" by getting rid of Putin is bereft of any geostrategic or historical understanding of reality. In a similar vein Europe does not wish to buy into a confrontational position with China in Asia.

This is not to say that there will not be occasions for some kind of joint Western military presence to possibly bolster unstable situations in different parts of the world down the road. But if Europe is to be enlisted into military operations elsewhere in the world, Europe will have to decide independently where and how its interests dictate.

America's genius has always lain in its soft power, a commodity that sadly seems in increasingly short supply.

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