

Democrats Trade Places on War and McCarthyism

Exclusive: The anti-Russia hysteria gripping the Democratic Party marks a “trading places” moment as the Democrats embrace the New Cold War and the New McCarthyism, flipping the script on Republicans, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Caught up in the frenzy to delegitimize Donald Trump by blaming his victory on Russian meddling, national Democrats are finishing the transformation of their party from one that was relatively supportive of peace to one pushing for war, including a confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

This “trading places” moment was obvious in watching the belligerent tone of Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee on Monday as they impugned the patriotism of any Trump adviser who may have communicated with anyone connected to Russia.

Ranking Democrat, Rep. Adam Schiff of California, acknowledged that there was no hard evidence of any Trump-Russia cabal, but he pressed ahead with what he called “circumstantial evidence of collusion,” a kind of guilt-by-association conspiracy theory that made him look like a mild-mannered version of Joe McCarthy.

Schiff cited by name a number of Trump’s aides and associates who – as The New York Times reported – were “believed to have some kind of contact or communications with Russians.” These Americans, whose patriotism was being questioned, included foreign policy adviser Carter Page, Trump’s second campaign manager Paul Manafort, political adviser Roger Stone and Trump’s first national security adviser retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn.

In a 15-minute opening statement, Schiff summed up his circumstantial case by asking: “Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated and nothing more than an entirely unhappy coincidence? Yes, it is possible. But it is also possible, maybe more than possible, that they are not coincidental, not disconnected and not unrelated.”

As an investigative journalist who has covered (and uncovered) national security scandals for several decades, I would never accuse people of something as serious as betraying their country based on nothing more than coincidences that, who knows, might not be coincidental.

Before we published anything on such topics, the news organizations that I worked for required multiple layers of information from a variety of sources including insiders who could describe what had happened and why. Such stories included Nicaraguan Contra cocaine smuggling, Oliver North's secret Contra supply operation, and the Reagan campaign's undermining of President Carter's Iran-hostage negotiations in 1980.

For breaking those stories, we still took enormous heat from Republicans, some Democrats who wanted to show how bipartisan they were, and many establishment-protecting journalists, but the stories contained strong evidence that misconduct occurred – and we were highly circumspect in how the allegations were framed.

Going Whole-Hog

By contrast, national Democrats, some super-hawk Republicans and the establishment media are going whole-hog on these vague suspicions of contacts between some Russians and some Americans who have provided some help or advice to Trump.

Given the paucity of evidence – both regarding the claims that Russia hacked Democratic emails and slipped them to WikiLeaks, and the allegations that somehow Trump's advisers colluded in that process – it would appear that what is happening is a political maneuver to damage Trump politically and possibly remove him from office.

But those machinations require the Democratic Party's continued demonization of Russia and implicitly put the Democrats on the side of escalating New Cold War tensions, such as military support for the fiercely anti-Russian regime in Ukraine which seized power in a 2014 U.S.-backed putsch overthrowing elected President Viktor Yanukovich.

One of the attack lines that Democrats have used against Trump is that his people toned down language in the Republican platform about shipping arms to the Ukrainian military, which includes battalions of neo-Nazi fighters and has killed thousands of ethnic Russian Ukrainians in the east in what is officially called an Anti-Terrorism Operation (or ATO).

The Democratic Party leaders have fully bought into the slanted Western narrative justifying the violent overthrow of Yanukovich. They also have ignored the human rights of Ukraine's ethnic Russian minorities, which voted overwhelmingly in Crimea and the Donbass to secede from post-coup Ukraine. The more complex reality is simply summed up as a "Russian invasion."

Key Democrats also have pressed for escalation of the U.S. military attacks

inside Syria to force “regime change” on Bashar al-Assad’s secular government even if that risks another military confrontation with Russia and a victory by Al Qaeda and other Sunni extremists.

In short, the national Democratic Party is turning itself into the more extreme war party. It’s not that the Republicans have become all that dovish; it’s just that the Democrats have become all that hawkish. The significance of this change can hardly be overstated.

Questioning War

Since late in the Vietnam War, the Democrats have acted as the more restrained of the two major parties on issues of war, with the Republicans associated with tough-guy rhetoric and higher military spending. By contrast, Democrats generally were more hesitant to rush into foreign wars and confrontations (although they were far from pacifists).

Especially after the revelations of the Pentagon Papers in the 1971 revealing the government deceptions used to pull the American people into the Vietnam War, Democrats questioned shady rationalizations for other wars.

Some Democratic skepticism continued into the 1980s as President Ronald Reagan was modernizing U.S. propaganda techniques to whitewash the gross human rights crimes of right-wing regimes in Central America and to blacken the reputations of Nicaragua’s Sandinistas and other leftists.

The Democratic resolve against war propaganda began to crack by the mid-to-late 1980s – around Reagan’s Grenada invasion and George H.W. Bush’s attack on Panama. By then, the Republicans had enjoyed nearly two decades of bashing the Democrats as “weak on defense” – from George McGovern to Jimmy Carter to Walter Mondale to Michael Dukakis.

But the Democratic Party’s resistance to dubious war rationalizations collapsed in 1991 over George H.W. Bush’s Persian Gulf War, in which the President rebuffed less violent solutions (even ones favored by the U.S. military) to assure a dramatic ground-war victory after which Bush declared, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all.”

Fearful of being labeled disloyal to “the troops” and “weak,” national Democrats scrambled to show their readiness to kill. In 1992, Gov. Bill Clinton left the campaign trail to return to Arkansas to oversee the execution of the mentally impaired Ricky Ray Rector.

During his presidency, Clinton deployed so-called “smart power” aggressively, including maintaining harsh sanctions on Iraq even as they led to the

unnecessary deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children. He also intervened in the Yugoslavian civil war by bombing civilian targets in Belgrade including the lethal destruction of the Serb TV station for the supposed offense of broadcasting “propaganda.”

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, many leading congressional Democrats – including presidential hopefuls John Kerry, Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton – voted to authorize President George W. Bush to invade Iraq. Though they offered various excuses (especially after the Iraq War went badly), the obvious real reason was their fear of being labeled “soft” in Republican attack ads.

The American public’s revulsion over the Iraq War and the resulting casualties contributed to Barack Obama’s election. But he, too, moved to protect his political flanks by staffing his young administration with hawks, such as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. (and later CIA Director) David Petraeus. Despite receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Obama also became comfortable with continuing Bush’s wars and starting some of his own, such as the bombing war against Libya and the violent subversion of Syria.

By nominating Hillary Clinton in 2016, the Democratic Party completed its transformation into the Party of War. Clinton not only ran as an unapologetic hawk in the Democratic primaries against Sen. Bernie Sanders – urging, for instance, a direct U.S. military invasion of Syria to create “no fly zones” – but positioned herself as a harsh critic of Trump’s hopes to reduce hostilities with Russia, deeming the Republican nominee Vladimir Putin’s “puppet.”

Ironically, Trump’s shocking victory served to solidify the Democratic Party’s interest in pushing for a military confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. After all, baiting Trump over his alleged “softness” toward Russia has become the centerpiece of Democratic hopes for somehow ousting Trump or at least crippling his presidency. Any efforts by Trump to ease those tensions will be cited as prima facie evidence that he is Putin’s “Manchurian candidate.”

Being Joe McCarthy

National Democrats and their media supporters don’t even seem troubled by the parallels between their smears of Americans for alleged contacts with Russians and Sen. Joe McCarthy’s guilt-by-association hearings of the early Cold War. Every link to Russia – no matter how tenuous or disconnected from Trump’s election – is trumpeted by Democrats and across the mainstream news media.

But it’s not even clear that this promotion of the New Cold War and the New McCarthyism will redound to the Democrats’ political advantage. Clinton

apparently thought that her embrace of a neoconservative foreign policy would bring in many “moderate” Republicans opposed to Trump’s criticism of the Bush-Obama wars, but exit polls showed Republicans largely rallying to their party’s nominee.

Meanwhile, there were many anti-war Democrats who have become deeply uncomfortable with the party’s new hawkish persona. In the 2016 election, some peace Democrats voted for third parties or didn’t vote at all for president, although it’s difficult to assess how instrumental those defections were in costing Clinton the key states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

More broadly, the Democratic obsession with Russia and the hopes for somehow exploiting those investigations in order to oust Trump have distracted the party from a necessary autopsy into why the Democrats have lost so much ground over the past decade.

While many Democratic leaders and activists are sliding into full-scale conspiracy-mode over the Russia-Trump story, they are not looking at the party’s many mistakes and failings, such as:

–Why did party leaders push so hard to run an unpopular establishment candidate in a strongly anti-establishment year? Was it the fact that many are beholden to the Clinton cash machine?

–How can Democrats justify the undemocratic use of “super-delegates” to make many rank-and-file voters feel that the process is rigged in favor of the establishment’s choice?

–What can the Democratic Party do to reengage with many working-class voters, especially downwardly mobile whites, to stop the defection of this former Democratic base to Trump’s populism?

–Do national Democrats understand how out of touch they are with the future as they insist that the United States must remain the sole military superpower in a uni-polar world when the world is rapidly shifting toward a multi-polar reality?

Yet, rather than come up with new strategies to address the future, Democratic leaders would rather pretend that Putin is at fault for the Trump presidency and hope that the U.S. intelligence community – with its fearsome surveillance powers – can come up with enough evidence to justify Trump’s impeachment.

Then, of course, the Democrats would be stuck with President Mike Pence, a more traditional Religious Right Republican whose first step on foreign policy would be to turn it over to neocon Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, a move that would likely mean a new wave of “regime change” wars.

At such a point, that might put the Democrats and Republicans in sync as two equally warmongering parties, but what good that would do for the American people and the world is hard to fathom.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon](#)" and "[Democrats Are Now the Aggressive War Party](#).]

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](#)).

Another GOP President Balloons the Deficit

Facing the Democratic “#Resistance,” President Trump has jumped into the arms of congressional Republicans and is following the old GOP pattern of tax cuts, military hikes and ballooning deficits, as Ivan Eland explains.

By Ivan Eland

The White House is now planning a humongous ten percent hike in defense spending, while making comparable deep cuts in domestic government programs—excluding big entitlement programs, such as Medicare and Social Security, which President Trump has promised not to touch.

During his campaign, the president also talked about a massive \$1 trillion infrastructure program and just recently pledged again to spend “big” on it. Finally, he plans to slash taxes significantly. Those who have been paying attention for a while could be excused for having a sense of Republican déjà vu—expanding government deficits leading to rapidly expanding national debt.

When Ronald Reagan came into office in 1981, his plan included the contradictory goals of massively increasing the Pentagon's budget, cutting income taxes substantially, and balancing the budget. However, his defense budget hikes and initial tax reductions ballooned the federal budget deficit so much, especially since proposed domestic spending cuts didn't work out so well, that he had to raise taxes six out of eight years as president.

Thus, contrary to popular belief, Reagan had the smallest net tax reduction during his presidency of any post-World War II Republican. In the end, despite

his reputation as an advocate for small government, his splurge in government spending increased the size of the federal government as a portion of GDP, and he was first among post-World War II presidents in debt accumulation as a percentage of GDP.

Similarly, George W. Bush racked up huge deficits and debt by following the Reagan precedent of instituting “fake tax cuts”—that is, tax cuts while increasing government spending, which leave budget deficits and debt for future generations to pay off with interest and may even require the inflationary printing of money to finance them.

Bush spent heavily by prosecuting two wars in the greater Middle East (Trump recently estimated the total money wasted so far in those long wars at \$6 trillion) and expanding the benefits of an already financially rickety Medicare program.

Ignoring the Deficit

When Bush’s powerful vice president, Dick Cheney, famously said “deficits don’t matter,” he must have meant politically – voters like their taxes reduced but not the government programs on which they have become dependent – rather than economically. Federal budget deficits and resulting expanding government debt can strangle economic growth by “crowding out private borrowing” and increasing inflation.

The only difference between President Trump and those other two big-spending Republican chief executives is that Trump hasn’t even really bothered to mouth the rhetoric of “small government.”

His massive infrastructure spending scheme and his promise not to cut politically popular mandatory spending programs (entitlements), which are projected by the conservative Heritage Foundation to represent 64 percent of the federal budget by the year 2020, are evidence of his profligate tendencies. Tax cuts are also always popular, especially with the Republican political base, and are fine if spending is cut first—so deficits and debt don’t rise.

If history is any guide (and it is), politicians likely will prove successful at cutting taxes and raising defense, law enforcement, and veterans spending, but will not be very adept at cutting other domestic spending (under Reagan and Bush it expanded substantially). Many of these programs have politically powerful constituencies, some of which are Republican, who will push back.

The area most puzzling is Trump’s dramatic proposal to increase the defense budget by a whopping 10 percent. Where’s the increase in foreign threat to justify such spending? The United States has been successful in constricting

ISIS in Iraq and Syria by cheaply funding and supporting local forces battling the group.

If, as Trump alleges, the most capable military in human history is “depleted,” which is seriously doubtful, it is because of long, costly, and futile wars in the greater Middle East that, during the campaign, he implied that he wanted to avoid in the future. If the military gets even more money from the president, there will be even more impetus to send it abroad to fight such counterproductive wars that generate more blowback terrorism at home – thereby lessening U.S. security.

The United States already spends more on defense than it did on average during the bad old days of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union could have plausibly posed an existential threat to the country. ISIS pales in comparison and certainly doesn’t pose such a potent threat. As for potentially hostile nations, the United States already spends on defense what the next seven countries do combined, including China and Russia.

Thus, if Trump’s huge increase in defense spending is combined with a massive hike in infrastructure spending, no reduction in entitlement programs, likely disappointing spending cuts in non-entitlement domestic programs, and a substantial tax cuts, then federal budget deficits and the resulting national debt will again balloon—likely leading to a considerable drag on the economic growth that Trump has promised.

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Trump Slips into ‘Endless War’ Cycle

Exclusive: President Trump’s foreign policy is falling into line behind continuing wars in the Middle East, a disappointment to supporters who hoped for a change in course, writes James W Carden.

By James W Carden

There was, during the course of the 2016 campaign, a small but vocal group of antiwar libertarians and conservatives who had convinced themselves that Donald Trump was preferable to Hillary Clinton because he, Trump, had made his

(fictitious) opposition to the Iraq War a cornerstone of his candidacy. Trump, some believed, was a Republican in the mold of Senator Robert Taft, someone who would turn away from neoconservative, interventionist orthodoxy.

If, as the adage suggests, we can judge a man by his enemies, a cursory look at Trump's most vocal Republican critics would seem to confirm this judgment. Why, here's Bill Kristol in January 2016, asking "Isn't Donald Trump the very epitome of vulgarity?" *Commentary's* John Podhoretz declared that Trump "would be, unquestionably, the worst thing to happen to the American common culture in my lifetime." Professor Eliot A. Cohen and his merry band of think tank militarists published an open letter in opposition to Trump's candidacy while *National Review* convened a symposium of anti-Trumpers for a special issue titled "Against Trump."

Perhaps, though, Kristol, Cohen, Podhoretz, *NR* and the rest needn't have worried so. Trump, it turns out, seems every bit as captive to the bipartisan foreign policy consensus as was his predecessor. Many supporters of Barack Obama held the errant hope that Obama would finally break the cycle of wars begun a quarter-century ago when George H.W. Bush launched Operation Desert Storm against Iraq and in defense of desert petro-states, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Trump partisans may object that he's only been in office for about two months. Give him time, they say. That's fair enough, but it is worth reviewing Trump's foreign policy record up to this point.

An administration's budget is generally a reliable indicator of its priorities. Here we find, in Trump's first budget proposal, nearly \$11 billion in cuts to the U.S. Department of State, a cut of roughly 29 percent, while the Pentagon is budgeted for an additional \$54 billion, an increase of 9 percent.

Afghanistan, where the U.S. has been at war for 15½ years, is by far American's longest and perhaps most futile overseas engagement. Here the Trump administration seems intent on ratcheting up airstrikes on the Taliban in a departure from the narrower focus on anti-terrorism that characterized the late Obama administration policy.

The head of U.S. Central Command, U.S. Army Gen. Joseph Votel, told the Senate Armed Services Committee last week that he will recommend an increase in troops in order "to make the advise-and-assist mission more effective." This comes on the heels of testimony by the top commander in Afghanistan, Army General John Nicholson telling Congress in February that he would need "a few thousand more" troops to carry out the mission.

More Troops

Meanwhile, more troops are being deployed to Kuwait. On March 9, the Army Times reported that the U.S. is sending “an additional 2,500 ground combat troops to a staging base in Kuwait from which they could be called upon to back up coalition forces battling the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.” This is in addition to the already roughly 6,000 American troops that are currently in Syria and Iraq assisting in the fight against the Islamic State. American units are now in the northern Syrian city of Manbij and on the outskirts on Raqqa.

The latter deployment of Marines from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit marks, according to the Washington Post, “a new escalation in the U.S. war in Syria, and puts more conventional U.S. troops in the battle.” The Post, like all other mainstream outlets, leaves out mention that this new deployment is illegal under international law, a point Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made in an interview with Chinese state media last weekend.

And then, perhaps worst of all, there is the ongoing American support for Saudi Arabia’s war on Yemen. As Council on Foreign Relations analyst Micah Zenko recently pointed out, Trump has already “approved at least 36 drone strikes or raids in 45 days – one every 1.25 days.” These include, according to Zenko, “three drone strikes in Yemen on January 20, 21, and 22; the January 28 Navy SEAL raid in Yemen; one reported strike in Pakistan on March 1; more than thirty strikes in Yemen on March 2 and 3; and at least one more on March 6.” The strikes, we are told, are a necessary part of the “global war on terror” and are portrayed by military and administration spokesmen as such.

A Pentagon spokesman told longtime CNN stenographer Barbara Starr that the wave of 30 strikes on March 2 and 3 were “precision strikes in Yemen against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula” in order to “maintain pressure against the terrorists’ network and infrastructure in the region.” The U.S.-Saudi war on Yemen has predictably resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe. According to the Brookings Institution’s Bruce Reidel, “a Yemeni child dies every 10 minutes from severe malnutrition and other problems linked to the war and the Saudi blockade of the north.”

All this on behalf of our old friends the Saudis. In the decade and a half after aiding the 9/11 hijackers, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has, with American acquiescence, embarked on a campaign to destroy Yemen because of an illusory threat posed by Iran. Yet the reason behind KSA’s aggression on the southern end of the Arabian peninsula has not a bit to do with “security” or Iranian “aggression” or fighting “terrorism”; it is a sectarian campaign waged by Saudi extremists, nothing more. What could possibly be America’s interest in assisting the Saudis in such an endeavor?

Yet, despite the heinous nature of Saudi Arabia’s anti-Houthi campaign in Yemen,

its mastermind, the young Saudi Defense Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was treated to lunch at the White House with the President this week. In an ominous sign of things to come, a statement from the Saudis noted that Trump and bin Salman “share the same views on the gravity of the Iranian expansionist moves in the region.”

And so, to sum up: President Trump, in the space of two months, has proposed a budget that slashes funding for diplomacy, spends lavishly on military, has committed thousands of troops, conducted dozens of airstrikes, and cemented the U.S. commitment to the wars in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, he and his team have signaled to the Saudis that they fully share the Kingdom’s obsession with Iranian “expansion.”

An Unending Cycle

What can be done to break the seemingly unending cycle of American intervention in the Middle East? What all the aforementioned interventions have in common is that they are, as the constitutional lawyer and former Justice Department official Bruce Fein has pointed out, presidential wars, which he defines as “wars in which the President decides to take the United States from a state of peace to a state of war.”

Fein, a founding member of the anti-interventionist Committee for The Republic, has written at length on what he views as the steady erosion of the congressional prerogative in matters of war and peace. Fein writes that the Founders “unanimously entrusted to Congress exclusive responsibility for taking the nation to war in Article I, section 8, clause 11 of the Constitution” because they understood “to a virtual certainty that Congress would only declare war in response to actual or perceived aggression against the United States, i.e., only in self-defense.”

Accordingly, the Committee for The Republic has embarked on a timely project aimed at having “the House pass a resolution that defines presidential wars under the Constitution going forward and declares them unconstitutional in violation of Article I, section 8, clause 11 (Declare War Clause).” Furthermore, the “End Presidential Wars” project seeks a further resolution, which would warn “the President that such wars will be deemed high crimes and misdemeanors under Article II, section 4 of the Constitution resulting in his or her impeachment, conviction, and removal from office.”

Fein points to Alexis de Tocqueville’s observation in *Democracy in America* that, “All those who seek to destroy the liberties of a democratic nation ought to know that war is the surest and shortest means to accomplish it.”

Unless we come to grips with our current mania for overseas intervention and find a remedy for Congress's abdication of its constitutional responsibilities, we are doomed to remain in the 25-year grip of endless, counterproductive and illegal military interventions in the Middle East and beyond.

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The Kagans Are Back; Wars to Follow

Exclusive: The neocon royalty Kagans are counting on Democrats and liberals to be the foot soldiers in the new neocon campaign to push Republicans and President Trump into more "regime change" wars, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Kagan family, America's neoconservative aristocracy, has reemerged having recovered from the letdown over not gaining its expected influence from the election of Hillary Clinton and from its loss of official power at the start of the Trump presidency.

Back pontificating on prominent op-ed pages, the Family Kagan now is pushing for an expanded U.S. military invasion of Syria and baiting Republicans for not joining more enthusiastically in the anti-Russian witch hunt over Moscow's alleged help in electing Donald Trump.

In a Washington Post op-ed on March 7, Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century and a key architect of the Iraq War, jabbed at Republicans for serving as "Russia's accomplices after the fact" by not investigating more aggressively.

Then, Frederick Kagan, director of the Critical Threats Project at the neocon American Enterprise Institute, and his wife, Kimberly Kagan, president of her own think tank, Institute for the Study of War, touted the idea of a bigger U.S. invasion of Syria in a Wall Street Journal op-ed on March 15.

Yet, as much standing as the Kagans retain in Official Washington's world of think tanks and op-ed placements, they remain mostly outside the new Trump-era power centers looking in, although they seem to have detected a door being

forced open.

Still, a year ago, their prospects looked much brighter. They could pick from a large field of neocon-oriented Republican presidential contenders or – like Robert Kagan – they could support the establishment Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, whose “liberal interventionism” matched closely with neoconservatism, differing only slightly in the rationalizations used for justifying wars and more wars.

There was also hope that a President Hillary Clinton would recognize how sympatico the liberal hawks and the neocons were by promoting Robert Kagan’s neocon wife, Victoria Nuland, from Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs to Secretary of State.

Then, there would have been a powerful momentum for both increasing the U.S. military intervention in Syria and escalating the New Cold War with Russia, putting “regime change” back on the agenda for those two countries. So, early last year, the possibilities seemed endless for the Family Kagan to flex their muscles and make lots of money.

A Family Business

As I noted two years ago in an article entitled “A Family Business of Perpetual War”: “Neoconservative pundit Robert Kagan and his wife, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, run a remarkable family business: she has sparked a hot war in Ukraine and helped launch Cold War II with Russia and he steps in to demand that Congress jack up military spending so America can meet these new security threats.

“This extraordinary husband-and-wife duo makes quite a one-two punch for the Military-Industrial Complex, an inside-outside team that creates the need for more military spending, applies political pressure to ensure higher appropriations, and watches as thankful weapons manufacturers lavish grants on like-minded hawkish Washington think tanks.

“Not only does the broader community of neoconservatives stand to benefit but so do other members of the Kagan clan, including Robert’s brother Frederick at the American Enterprise Institute and his wife Kimberly, who runs her own shop called the Institute for the Study of War.”

But things didn’t quite turn out as the Kagans had drawn them up. The neocon Republicans stumbled through the GOP primaries losing out to Donald Trump and then – after Hillary Clinton muscled aside Sen. Bernie Sanders to claim the Democratic nomination – she fumbled away the general election to Trump.

After his surprising victory, Trump – for all his many shortcomings – recognized that the neocons were not his friends and mostly left them out in the cold. Nuland not only lost her politically appointed job as Assistant Secretary but resigned from the Foreign Service, too.

With Trump in the White House, Official Washington's neocon-dominated foreign policy establishment was down but far from out. The neocons were tossed a lifeline by Democrats and liberals who detested Trump so much that they were happy to pick up Nuland's fallen banner of the New Cold War with Russia. As part of a dubious scheme to drive Trump from office, Democrats and liberals hyped evidence-free allegations that Russia had colluded with Trump's team to rig the U.S. election.

New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman spoke for many of this group when he compared Russia's alleged "meddling" to Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor and Al Qaeda's 9/11 terror attacks.

On MSNBC's "Morning Joe" show, Friedman demanded that the Russia hacking allegations be treated as a casus belli: "That was a 9/11 scale event. They attacked the core of our democracy. That was a Pearl Harbor scale event." Both Pearl Harbor and 9/11 led to wars.

So, with many liberals blinded by their hatred of Trump, the path was open for neocons to reassert themselves.

Baiting Republicans

Robert Kagan took to the high-profile op-ed page of The Washington Post to bait key Republicans, such as Rep. Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee who was pictured above the Post article and its headline, "Running interference for Russia."

Kagan wrote: "It would have been impossible to imagine a year ago that the Republican Party's leaders would be effectively serving as enablers of Russian interference in this country's political system. Yet, astonishingly, that is the role the Republican Party is playing."

Kagan then reprised Official Washington's groupthink that accepted without skepticism the claims from President Obama's outgoing intelligence chiefs that Russia had "hacked" Democratic emails and released them via WikiLeaks to embarrass the Clinton campaign.

Though Obama's intelligence officials offered no verifiable evidence to support the claims – and WikiLeaks denied getting the two batches of emails from the Russians – the allegations were widely accepted across Official Washington as

grounds for discrediting Trump and possibly seeking his removal from office.

Ignoring the political conflict of interest for Obama's appointees, Kagan judged that "given the significance of this particular finding [about Russian meddling], the evidence must be compelling" and justified "a serious, wide-ranging and open investigation."

But Kagan also must have recognized the potential for the neocons to claw their way back to power behind the smokescreen of a New Cold War with Russia.

He declared: "The most important question concerns Russia's ability to manipulate U.S. elections. That is not a political issue. It is a national security issue. If the Russian government did interfere in the United States' electoral processes last year, then it has the capacity to do so in every election going forward. This is a powerful and dangerous weapon, more than warships or tanks or bombers.

"Neither Russia nor any potential adversary has the power to damage the U.S. political system with weapons of war. But by creating doubts about the validity, integrity and reliability of U.S. elections, it can shake that system to its foundations."

A Different Reality

As alarmist as Kagan's op-ed was, the reality was far different. Even if the Russians did hack the Democratic emails and somehow slipped the information to WikiLeaks – an unsubstantiated and disputed contention – those two rounds of email disclosures were not that significant to the election's outcome.

Hillary Clinton blamed her surprise defeat on FBI Director James Comey briefly reopening the investigation into her use of a private email server while serving as Secretary of State.

Further, by all accounts, the WikiLeaks-released emails were real and revealed wrongdoing by leading Democrats, such as the Democratic National Committee's tilting of the primaries against Sen. Bernie Sanders and in favor of Clinton. The emails of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta disclosed the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from voters, as well as some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

In other words, the WikiLeaks' releases helped inform American voters about abuses to the U.S. democratic process. The emails were not "disinformation" or "fake news." They were real news.

A similar disclosure occurred both before the election and this week when

someone leaked details about Trump's tax returns, which are protected by law. However, except for the Trump camp, almost no one thought that this illegal act of releasing a citizen's tax returns was somehow a threat to American democracy.

The general feeling was that Americans have a right to know such details about someone seeking the White House. I agree, but doesn't it equally follow that we had a right to know about the DNC abusing its power to grease the skids for Clinton's nomination, about the contents of Clinton's speeches to Wall Street bankers, and about foreign governments seeking pay-to-play influence by contributing to the Clinton Foundation?

Yet, because Obama's political appointees in the U.S. intelligence community "assess" that Russia was the source of the WikiLeaks emails, the assault on U.S. democracy is a reason for World War III.

More Loose Talk

But Kagan was not satisfied with unsubstantiated accusations regarding Russia undermining U.S. democracy. He asserted as "fact" – although again without presenting evidence – that Russia is "interfering in the coming elections in France and Germany, and it has already interfered in Italy's recent referendum and in numerous other elections across Europe. Russia is deploying this weapon against as many democracies as it can to sap public confidence in democratic institutions."

There's been a lot of handwringing in Official Washington and across the Mainstream Media about the "post-truth" era, but these supposed avatars for truth are as guilty as anyone, acting as if constantly repeating a fact-free claim is the same as proving it.

But it's clear what Kagan and other neocons have in mind, an escalation of hostilities with Russia and a substantial increase in spending on U.S. military hardware and on Western propaganda to "counter" what is deemed "Russian propaganda."

Kagan recognizes that he already has many key Democrats and liberals on his side. So he is taking aim at Republicans to force them to join in the full-throated Russia-bashing, writing:

"But it is the Republicans who are covering up. The party's current leader, the president, questions the intelligence community's findings, motives and integrity. Republican leaders in Congress have opposed the creation of any special investigating committee, either inside or outside Congress. They have insisted that inquiries be conducted by the two intelligence committees.

“Yet the Republican chairman of the committee in the House has indicated that he sees no great urgency to the investigation and has even questioned the seriousness and validity of the accusations. The Republican chairman of the committee in the Senate has approached the task grudgingly.

“The result is that the investigations seem destined to move slowly, produce little information and provide even less to the public. It is hard not to conclude that this is precisely the intent of the Republican Party’s leadership, both in the White House and Congress. ...

“When Republicans stand in the way of thorough, open and immediate investigations, they become Russia’s accomplices after the fact.”

Lying with the Neocons

Many Democrats and liberals may find it encouraging that a leading neocon who helped pave the road to war in Iraq is now by their side in running down Republicans for not enthusiastically joining the latest Russian witch hunt. But they also might pause to ask themselves how they let their hatred of Trump get them into an alliance with the neocons.

On Wednesday in The Wall Street Journal, Robert Kagan’s brother Frederick and his wife Kimberly dropped the other shoe, laying out the neocons’ long-held dream of a full-scale U.S. invasion of Syria, a project that was put on hold in 2004 because of U.S. military reversals in Iraq.

But the neocons have long lusted for “regime change” in Syria and were not satisfied with Obama’s arming of anti-government rebels and the limited infiltration of U.S. Special Forces into northern Syria to assist in the retaking of the Islamic State’s “capital” of Raqqa.

In the Journal op-ed, Frederick and Kimberly Kagan call for opening a new military front in southeastern Syria:

“American military forces will be necessary. But the U.S. can recruit new Sunni Arab partners by fighting alongside them in their land. The goal in the beginning must be against ISIS because it controls the last areas in Syria where the U.S. can reasonably hope to find Sunni allies not yet under the influence of al Qaeda. But the aim after evicting ISIS must be to raise a Sunni Arab army that can ultimately defeat al Qaeda and help negotiate a settlement of the war.

“The U.S. will have to pressure the Assad regime, Iran and Russia to end the conflict on terms that the Sunni Arabs will accept. That will be easier to do with the independence and leverage of a secure base inside Syria. ... President Trump should break through the flawed logic and poor planning that he inherited

from his predecessor. He can transform this struggle, but only by transforming America's approach to it."

A New Scheme on Syria

In other words, the neocons are back to their clever word games and their strategic maneuverings to entice the U.S. military into a "regime change" project in Syria.

The neocons thought they had almost pulled off that goal by pinning a mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, on the Syrian government and mousetrapping Obama into launching a major U.S. air assault on the Syrian military.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin stepped in to arrange for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to surrender all his chemical weapons even as Assad continued to deny any role in the sarin attack.

Putin's interference in thwarting the neocons' dream of a Syrian "regime change" war moved Putin to the top of their enemies' list. Soon key neocons, such as National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman, were taking aim at Ukraine, which Gershman deemed "the biggest prize" and a steppingstone toward eventually ousting Putin in Moscow.

It fell to Assistant Secretary Victoria "Toria" Nuland to oversee the "regime change" in Ukraine. She was caught on an unsecured phone line in late January or early February 2014 discussing with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt how "to glue" or "to midwife" a change in Ukraine's elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

Several weeks later, neo-Nazi and ultranationalist street fighters spearheaded a violent assault on government buildings forcing Yanukovich and other officials to flee for their lives, with the U.S. government quickly hailing the coup regime as "legitimate."

But the Ukraine putsch led to the secession of Crimea and a bloody civil war in eastern Ukraine with ethnic Russians, events that the State Department and the mainstream Western media deemed "Russian aggression" or a "Russian invasion."

So, by the last years of the Obama administration, the stage was set for the neocons and the Family Kagan to lead the next stage of the strategy of cornering Russia and instituting a "regime change" in Syria.

All that was needed was for Hillary Clinton to be elected president. But these best-laid plans surprisingly went astray. Despite his overall unfitness for the

presidency, Trump defeated Clinton, a bitter disappointment for the neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks.

Yet, the so-called “#Resistance” to Trump’s presidency and President Obama’s unprecedented use of his intelligence agencies to paint Trump as a Russian “Manchurian candidate” gave new hope to the neocons and their agenda.

It has taken them a few months to reorganize and regroup but they now see hope in pressuring Trump so hard regarding Russia that he will have little choice but to buy into their belligerent schemes.

As often is the case, the Family Kagan has charted the course of action – batter Republicans into joining the all-out Russia-bashing and then persuade a softened Trump to launch a full-scale invasion of Syria. In this endeavor, the Kagans have Democrats and liberals as the foot soldiers.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

America First or Saudi Arabia First?

Saudi Arabia is testing President Trump’s “America First” promise by demanding U.S. alignment with Saudi interests in the Mideast, a betrayal that Trump should reject, says 9/11 widow Kristen Breitweiser in a letter to the President.

By Kristen Breitweiser

Dear President Trump,

This week you are scheduled to meet with Saudi [Deputy Crown Prince](#) Mohammed Bin Salman. As a 9/11 widow who has fought for more than 15 years for truth, justice, accountability and transparency with regard to the murder of my husband, Ron, I have a considerable interest in your upcoming meeting with the Deputy Crown Prince.

First, foremost and for good reason, I fear that the Deputy Crown Prince will not be forthright with you about his Kingdom’s role in the 9/11 attacks and global terrorism.

Indeed, many in the Kingdom refuse to tell the truth about their continued,

long-standing, and well-documented clandestine, logistical and financial support of radical Islamist terrorist groups that target and kill innocent Americans.

For example, last summer when the infamous 2002 Joint Inquiry of Congress' "28 pages" were finally released, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al Jubeir claimed that the Saudis were exonerated and that the matter surrounding the Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks was "now finished."

In reality, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its role in facilitating the 9/11 attacks is far from over. And, in truth, the "28 pages" – actually 29 pages of the 832-page report – prove to be quite illuminating, devastating and damning towards that end:

On page 415: "While in the United States, some of the September 11 hijackers were in contact with, and received support and assistance from, individuals who may be connected to the Saudi Government... [A]t least two of those individuals were alleged by some to be Saudi intelligence officers."

On page 417: One of the individuals identified in the pages as a financial supporter of two of the 9/11 hijackers, Osama Bassnan, later received a "significant amount of cash" from "a member of the Saudi Royal Family" during a 2002 trip to Houston.

On page 418: "Another Saudi national with close ties to the Saudi Royal Family, [deleted], is the subject of FBI counterterrorism investigations."

On pages 418 and 419: Detained al Qaeda leader Abu Zubaida had in his phone book the unlisted number for the security company that managed the Colorado residence of the then-Saudi ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan.

On page 421: "a [deleted], dated July 2, 2002, [indicates] 'incontrovertible evidence that there is support for these terrorists inside the Saudi Government.'"

On page 426: Bassnan's wife was receiving money "from Princess Haifa Bint Sultan," the wife of the Saudi ambassador. (Her correct name is actually Princess Haifa bin Faisal.)

On page 436: The general counsel of the U.S. Treasury Department, David Aufhauser, testified that "offices [of the Saudi charity al-Haramain] have significant contacts with extremists, Islamic extremists." CIA officials also testified "that they were making progress on their investigations of al-Haramain... [T]he head of the central office is complicit in supporting terrorism, and it also raised questions about [then-Saudi Interior Minister] Prince Nayef."

Holding the Saudis Accountable

Fortunately, as you know President Trump, JASTA (Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act) was enacted into law – overriding President Obama’s veto – on Sept. 28, 2016 and the 9/11 Families were given the right to hold the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accountable in a court of law for its alleged role in the 9/11 attacks.

Thanks to discovery and subpoena power, the 9/11 families hope to unearth and reveal a panoply of compelling information surrounding the Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks. Suffice it to say, we do not believe the Saudis should be considered an ally of America.

Unsurprisingly, the Saudis continue to wage war against the 9/11 Families and JASTA by paying millions to their 14 powerful, insider Washington DC lobbying firms, like the Podesta Group, to repeal JASTA and rob us of our day in court.

In addition, some of the Saudis’ key legislative supporters who threaten to repeal JASTA are Senators Lindsey Graham and John McCain. Sadly, McCain and Graham choose to protect the Saudis rather than American victims of terrorism.

Quite horrifically, one of the Saudi lobbyists – Qorvis – was recently caught trying to dupe, manipulate, and pit U.S. veterans against the 9/11 families. According to media reports, Qorvis offered vets an all-expense-paid trip to Washington (staying at the Trump Hotel) to lobby against JASTA without telling the vets that it was Saudi money funding their trip. Given that many of these vets had joined the military in the wake of 9/11, the discovery that they were now being duped into “working” for the enemy they enlisted and risked their lives to fight against, was extremely upsetting. Pitting American veterans against American victims is the lowest of the low – yet, there seems to be no lengths that the Saudis will not go.

Which brings me to my last point – the Saudi Aramco IPO on Wall Street. Mr. President, my husband was burnt to death on September 11th. The remains I received included his two arms, a few fingers, and his wedding band.

Thousands of innocent people were brutally slaughtered and turned to ash in broad daylight on that horrific day, now more than 15 years ago. The notion that the Saudis – whom the 9/11 Families are currently trying to hold accountable in a court of law for their role in the murder of our loved ones – want to return to the scene of their own alleged crime to make billions of dollars is immoral and simply untenable.

As my fellow 9/11 widows and I have repeatedly said—not over our husbands’ dead bodies.

President Trump, you have structured your campaign and current policies around being for America First. The 9/11 Families certainly hope that you remain steadfast in your belief that Americans must be protected, supported, and heard, first and foremost above all others—particularly those like the Saudis who fund radical Islamic terrorists that target and kill Americans.

Kristen Breitweiser is a 9/11 widow and activist who – working with other 9/11 widows known collectively as the “Jersey Girls” – pressured the U.S. government to conduct a formal investigation into the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Follow Kristen Breitweiser on Twitter: www.twitter.com/kdbreitweiser. [This article originally appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost.]

Restoring a Responsible ‘Conservatism’

As much as “liberal” has become a dirty word in U.S. politics, the word “conservative” has been ripped from all its honorable traditions and redefined as a dangerous form of radicalism, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

What is it about the U.S. that makes it virtually the only country in the world where a political Left scarcely exists? We have a center Right – the Democratic Party. And we have a far Right – the Republican Party. In fact, just invoking the L-word “Liberal” can inflict quick political death. Yes, we’re safe from the Left here in America.

Having such a stunted political spectrum is bad enough in itself. Still worse is the utter corruption of the word *conservative*. U.S. society has allowed the Republican Party to hijack the word, distort it and redefine it to its own ends, against its real meaning.

Isn’t it time for progressives to stop bashing their heads against the “liberalism” wall? Even the Democratic Party machine itself has barred the gates against progressive Democratic candidates. At this point, we need a rethink.

Wouldn’t it make more sense simply to yield up the term *Liberal* to all its many enemies? Put it in the cold freeze? In a doggedly right-of-center country, it might instead be smarter to seize back the term *conservatism* out of Republican hands, re-own it, and restore it to its true meaning.

Conservatism has a venerable history. The very word says a lot. It seeks to

preserve and conserve fundamental human institutions, values, and lives in a precarious world.

Such as, for example, conserving the planet we live on, its forests, its water, its creatures, its bounty. It's our only home. In fact, preserving and conserving the earth really is the ultimate conservative agenda. We have been given a stewardship over this unique and precious blue orb in the cosmos upon which all life depends.

Indeed, it's the Republicans who are False Conservatives. They place the interests of the corporate world, profit and the welfare of a minority above all else. Their agenda is clear: generating ever more corporate business, clearing more land for "development," installing more robots to make production more efficient – this is a conservative agenda?

Actually it sounds like a very aggressive revolutionary approach to reshaping our entire earthly domicile in economic terms. It risks all in the name of production and profit. What true conservative could buy into that?

What of the preservation of life? Wouldn't prioritizing the preservation of human life over death represent a true conservative agenda as well? How much good does war do for people actually living it on the ground? Nobody is saying that one should never fight in true self-defense, but in the end, it's hard to make the case that war has done a lot of good for most human beings involved.

Can Peace Be 'Conservative'?

Might one even say that almost *any* peace that spares human lives is better than almost *any* war? Might not that be a conservative value? In the U.S. we're used to thinking about fighting wars *over there*. We are spared the need to conceive of war at home. So who among us actually ends up better off as a result of war? Our families? Our streets, our infrastructure, our loyalties, our institutions, our civilities, in the violence and anarchy of war? Yet our nation has been at almost non-stop war since the collapse of the USSR – following "conservative" values.

Republicans tend to believe that war is heroic, glorious, "our finest fighting men," pride of the nation, anything to keep our nation safe, huge budget expenditures at the cost of almost everything else. Here's what founding father James Madison had to say about it:

"Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes ... known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few.... No nation could preserve its freedom in

the midst of continual warfare.”

So is it a “conservative value” to arm the nation to the teeth and lead the world in arms sales to others? “Conservatives” want to “protect freedom” by advocating the greatest and most intrusive national security surveillance state in history?

When it comes to “national security,” how much do our own communities genuinely benefit from U.S. military encirclement of China and Russia – an incredibly costly, provocative, never-ending undertaking that gins up increased international tensions? For that matter, would the U.S. ever tolerate for one second efforts by Russia or China to “encircle the U.S.” militarily? Is it “conservative” to “go abroad to seek monsters to slay,” as John Quincy Adams warned?

And what of the civilian sciences and exploration of space? NASA and non-military scientific research have grown impoverished. Education, surely a prime conservative value, languishes underfunded.

And then there’s the economy. Republicans generally believe that the number one policy goal of the nation is *first and foremost* the health of the economy – read the health of our corporations.

President Calvin Coolidge before the Great Depression famously said, “The chief business of the American people is business.” Republicans have even since managed to persuade faux Democrats to adopt this position. (Remember Bill Clinton – it’s the economy stupid!) But prioritizing the health of the economy gets the priorities wrong: for a genuine conservative the first priority is the health and welfare of our communities and our people.

Now, there is undeniably a relationship between the health of the economy and the general welfare, but they are not one and the same thing at all. Human welfare must be the end goal; a healthy economy, however interpreted, represents the *means* and says nothing of equitable distribution.) This is another issue that should be denied to the False Conservatism of the Republicans.

Making Progress Work

Preserving our communities should be among the highest conservative priorities. But it’s going to be increasingly hard to preserve jobs at home. Robotics above all is seeing to that. And it is more efficient to ship most jobs off to China, Vietnam or Bangladesh.

That’s why many creative Western thinkers are now seriously examining the concept of a guaranteed national income for all. Once a wildly radical idea

maybe, but it's time is coming. Because capitalism *by definition* sends jobs to where they can be most cheaply performed – and it's not in the USA. Sending jobs abroad is not “conservatism.”

Keeping people alive, healthy, and engaged – not alienated or resentful – is the most important social task we face.

Remember, that while capitalism is a powerful productive engine it has no *direct* interest in community welfare. It's not that capitalism is immoral; morality is just outside capitalism's functional purview. Capitalism by definition is about maximizing profit; that's what capitalism does. Yet today most Republicans enshrine free-market capitalism as the Holy Grail over the welfare of the community. They don't worry about poverty and domestic despair. Or even the need to spread profits if society is to function.

Nor is *efficiency* a prime conservative value. Human welfare is. If we pay a dollar more for a loaf of bread that is largely locally produced, don't we all gain in the community?

France, for example, has always sought to keep some elements of small-scale domestic agriculture alive rather than yielding it all to agro-business. They perceive some absolute social good in preserving this way of life, even if it raises costs. Japan does the same thing on growing (expensive) domestic rice that most Japanese support on social grounds. It's kind of a tax for local benefit and welfare, to conserve the community.

Yes, the benefits of globalization can be real, but they need to be viewed in terms of the welfare of all, and not as an absolute ideological good. What good is a cheaper I-Phone when the rest of our standards of human welfare are dropping?

But where do our budget priorities now lie with most members of both parties in the U.S.? Cutting taxes. Yet what of the huge tax levied upon our families by a U.S. defense budget that is greater than the next *seven* most powerful nations put together? And going up. Have we become safer in a more stable world as a result?

Healthy communities also reflect a pride and exercise of artistic accomplishment. Is it *conservative* to dismiss cultural resources such as the Public Broadcasting System or the National Endowment for the Arts as economically without value? Or local arts?

Do you think the French or the Russians or Canadians don't place high community and national value on preservation of their national arts – which is unprofitable from a business perspective but central to national pride and

cohesiveness?

And what of privatization of public lands? How do Republicans get away with calling that “conservative?” Doesn’t “public” mean for the *community*? Is there no longer such a thing as the “public good?”

So let’s maybe give up the “L-word” as a hopeless cause and instead work to restore the real meaning of what conservatism should be. This has been the colossal hoax the Republican Party (and some faux Democrats) have perpetrated upon this nation – utterly twisting and redefining conservatism to their own ends. We must take the word back.

It is unconscionable – and incomprehensible – that conservatism today has come to stand for profit, the welfare of the military-security-industrial complex, and the massive corruption of our political order through their “political contributions.” Or that Republicanism should celebrate conservatism by throwing away social safety nets and sowing religious and ethnic fears.

And in the end there just might be some gain for the embattled progressive community in reclaiming the word: it could do better at the polls.

Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is *Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American’s crisis of conscience in Pakistan*. (Amazon, Kindle) grahamefuller.com

Democrats and Trump Bid Up Militarism

With Democrats lusting for a new and costly Cold War with Russia – and President Trump countering by hiring generals and shoveling more money into the Pentagon – the prospects for peace and rationality are dim, notes William Blum.

By William Blum

Conservatives have had a very hard time getting over President Trump’s much-repeated response to *Fox News* anchor Bill O’Reilly’s calling Russian president Vladimir Putin “a killer.” Replied Trump: “There are a lot of killers. We have a lot of killers. You think our country is so innocent?”

One could almost feel a bit sorry for O’Reilly as he struggled to regain his composure in the face of such blasphemy. Had any American establishment media star ever heard such a thought coming from the mouth of an American president? From someone on the radical left, yes, but from the President?

Senator John McCain on the floor of Congress, referring to Putin, tore into attempts to draw “moral equivalency between that butcher and thug and KGB colonel and the United States of America.”

Ah yes, the infamous KGB. Can anything good be said about a person associated with such an organization? We wouldn't like it if a U.S. president had a background with anything like that. Oh, wait, a president of the United States was not merely a CIA “colonel”, but was the Director of the CIA! I of course speak of George Herbert Walker Bush. And as far as butchery and thuggery ... How many Americans remember the December 1989 bombing and invasion of the people of Panama carried out by the same Mr. Bush? Many thousands killed or wounded; thousands more left homeless. Try and match that, Vladimir!

And in case you're wondering for what good reason all this was perpetrated? Officially, to arrest dictator Manuel Noriega on drug charges. How is that for a rationalization for widespread devastation and slaughter? It should surprise no one that only shortly before the invasion Noriega had been on the CIA payroll.

It's the “moral equivalency” that's so tough to swallow for proud Americans like O'Reilly and McCain. Republican Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell also chipped in with: “And no, I don't think there's any equivalency between the way the Russians conduct themselves and the way the United States does.” Other Senators echoed the same theme, all inspired by good ol' “American exceptionalism”, drilled into the mind of every decent American from childhood on ... Who would dare to compare the morals of (ugh!) Russia with those of God's chosen land, even in Moscow's current non-communist form?

The communist form began of course with the October 1917 Russian Revolution. By the summer of 1918, some 13,000 American troops could be found in the newly born state, the future Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Two years and thousands of casualties later, the American troops left, having failed in their mission to “strangle at its birth” the Bolshevik state, as Winston Churchill so charmingly put it.

A Historical Summary

U.S. foreign policy has not been much more noble-minded since then. I think, dear students, it's time for me to once again present my concise historical summary:

Since the end of World War 2, the United States has:

–Attempted to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments most of which were democratically-elected.

-Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.

-Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.

-Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.

-Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.

-Though not as easy to quantify, has also led the world in torture; not only the torture performed directly by Americans upon foreigners, but providing torture equipment, torture manuals, lists of people to be tortured, and in-person guidance by American instructors.

Where does the United States get the nerve to moralize about Russia? Same place they get the nerve to label Putin a "killer" ... a "butcher" ... a "thug". It would be difficult to name a world-renowned killer, butcher, or thug – not to mention dictator, mass murderer, or torturer – of the past 75 years who was not a close ally of Washington.

So why then does the American power elite hate Putin so? It can be dated back to the period of Boris Yeltsin.

During the Western financial looting of the dying Soviet Union, the U.S. could be found meddling in favor of Yeltsin in the election held in 1996. Under Yeltsin's reign, poverty exploded and life expectancy for men actually decreased by five years, all in the name of "shock therapy." The U.S./Western-backed destabilization of the Soviet Union allowed global capitalism to spread its misery unfettered by any inconvenient socialism. Russia came under the control of oligarchs concerned only for their own enrichment and that of their billionaire partners in the West.

The transition of power to Vladimir Putin in the Twenty-first Century led to a number of reforms that curbed the disastrous looting of the nation by the oligarchic bandits. Putin and his allies vowed to build an independent, capitalist Russia that was capable of determining its own affairs free from U.S. and Western domination. Such an orientation placed Putin in direct confrontation with U.S. imperialism's plans for unipolar global hegemony.

Washington's disdain for Putin increased when he derided U.S. war propaganda leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Then, the Russian leader played a crucial role in getting Iran to curtail its nuclear program and arranging for Syria to surrender its stockpiles of chemical weapons. Washington's powerful neoconservatives had been lusting for direct U.S. military strikes against those two countries, leading to regime change, not diplomatic agreements that left the governments in place.

Lastly, after the United States overthrew the Ukrainian government in 2014, Putin was obliged to intervene on behalf of threatened ethnic Russians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. That, in turn, was transformed by the Western media into a "Russian invasion".

Who Murders Journalists?

The same Western media has routinely charged Putin with murdering journalists but doesn't remind its audience of the American record in this regard. The American military, in the course of its wars in recent decades, has been responsible for the deliberate deaths of many journalists.

In Iraq, for example, there's the WikiLeaks 2007 video, exposed by Chelsea Manning, of the cold-blooded murder of two Reuters journalists; the 2003 U.S. air-to-surface missile attack on the offices of Al Jazeera in Baghdad that left three journalists dead and four wounded; and the American firing on Baghdad's Hotel Palestine, a known journalist residence, the same year that killed two foreign news cameramen.

(It's also worth remembering how President Bill Clinton authorized the deliberate bombing of the Serb TV station in Belgrade during NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999, killing at least 16 people and wounding many others. The rationalization was that NATO considered the Serb TV broadcasts to be "propaganda.")

The Trump honeymoon is over for me. It was never actually love; hardly more than an intriguing curiosity; mainly that he wasn't Hillary Clinton; that he was unlikely to start a war with Russia or close down the *Russia Today* (RT) TV station in the U.S., which I and many others depend on daily; and that he was not politically correct when it came to fighting the Islamic State.

Trump's "moral equivalency" remark above gave me some hope. But this all vanished with his appointment to high office of one war-loving, bemedalled general after another, intermingled with one billionaire Goldman-Sachs official after another; his apparent confirmation of his Mexican Wall; and, worst of all, his increasing the military budget by \$54 billion (sic, sick) ... this will certainly be at the expense of human life and health and the environment. What manner of man is this who walks amongst us?

The word is "narcissism." *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni (Feb. 28) captures this well: "Why do I get the sense that fighter jets are Donald Trump's biceps, warships are his pectorals and what he's doing with his proposed \$54 billion increase for the Pentagon is flexing?"

Will there ever be an end to the never-ending American wars?

William Blum is an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <http://williamblum.org/> .]

Mainstream Media's 'Victimhood'

Exclusive: Just weeks ago, mainstream U.S. media decried “fake news” and backed a blacklist of independent news sites over “Russian propaganda.” Now, under fire from President Trump, the MSM loves a free press, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It's heartwarming that The New York Times and The Washington Post are troubled that President Trump is loosely throwing around accusations of “fake news.” It's nice that they now realize that truth does not reliably come from the mouth of every senior government official or from every official report.

The Times is even taking out full-page ads in its own pages to offer truisms about truth: “The truth is hard. The truth is hidden. The truth must be pursued. The truth is hard to hear. The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn't so obvious. ...” On Sunday, those truth truisms ran opposite an alarmist column by Jim Rutenberg entitled, “Will the Real Democracy Lovers Please Stand Up?” Meanwhile, The Washington Post launched its own melodramatic slogan, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.”

Yet, it was only weeks ago when the Post and Times were eagerly promoting plans for silencing or blacklisting independent news sites that didn't toe the line on what the U.S. government and its allies were claiming was true.

On Nov. 20, the Times published a lead editorial calling on Facebook and other technology giants to devise algorithms that could eliminate stories that the Times deemed to be “fake.” The Times and other mainstream news outlets – along with a few favored Internet sites – joined a special Google-sponsored task force, called the First Draft Coalition, to decide what is true and what is not. If the Times' editorial recommendations were followed, the disfavored stories and the sites publishing them would no longer be accessible through popular search engines and platforms, essentially blocking the public's access to them. [See Consortiumnews.com's “What to Do About 'Fake News.'”]

On Thanksgiving Day, the Post ran a front-page story citing an anonymous group,

called PropOrNot, blacklisting 200 Web sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other important sources of independent journalism, because we supposedly promoted “Russian propaganda.”

Although PropOrNot and the Post didn’t bother to cite any actual examples or to ask the accused for comment, the point was clear: If you didn’t march in lockstep behind the Official Narrative on, say, the Ukraine crisis or the war in Syria, you were to be isolated, demonized and effectively silenced. In the article, the Post blurred the lines between “fake news” – stories that are simply made up – and what was deemed “propaganda,” in effect, information that didn’t jibe with what the U.S. State Department was saying.

Back then, in November, the big newspapers believed that the truth was easy, simple, obvious, requiring only access to some well-placed government official or a quick reading of the executive summary from some official report. Over the last quarter century or so, the Times, in particular, has made a fetish out of embracing pretty much whatever Officialdom declared to be true. After all, such well-

dressed folks with those important-sounding titles couldn’t possibly be lying.

That gullibility went from the serious, such as rejecting overwhelming evidence that Ronald Reagan’s Nicaraguan Contra rebels were deeply involved in drug trafficking, to the silly, trusting the NFL’s absurd Deflategate allegations against Tom Brady. In those “old” days, which apparently ended a few weeks ago, the Times could have run full-page ads, saying “Truth is whatever those in authority say it is.”

In 2002, when the George W. Bush administration was vouching for a motley crew of Iraqi “defectors” describing Saddam Hussein’s hidden WMDs, Iraq’s purchase of some “aluminum tubes” must have been for building nuclear bombs. In 2003, when Secretary of State Colin Powell showed some artist drawings of “mobile chemical weapons labs,” they must really exist – and anyone who doubted Powell’s “slam-dunk” testimony deserved only contempt and ridicule.

When the Obama administration issued a “government assessment” blaming the Syrian military for the sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, there was no need to scrutinize its dubious assertions or ask for actual proof. To do so made you an “Assad apologist.”

When a bunch of U.S. allies under the effective control of Ukraine’s unsavory SBU intelligence service presented some videos with computer-generated graphics showing Russians supplying the Buk missile that shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, there was no need to examine

the holes in the evidence or note that the realistic-looking graphics were fictional and based on dubious assumptions. To do so made you a “Moscow stooge.”

In other words, when the U.S. government was gluing black hats on an “enemy” and white hats on a U.S. “ally,” the Times never seemed to object. Nor did pretty much anyone else in the mainstream media. No one seemed to note that both sides usually deserved gray hats. With very few exceptions – when the State Department or other U.S. agencies were making the charges – the Times and its cohorts simply stopped applying responsible journalistic skepticism.

Of course, there is a problem with “fake news,” i.e., stories that are consciously made up for the purpose of making money from lots of clicks. There are also fact-free conspiracy theories that operate without evidence or in defiance of it. No one hates such bogus stories more than I do – and they have long been a bane of serious journalism, dating back centuries, not just to the last election.

But what the Times, the Post and the rest of the mainstream media have typically ignored is that there are many situations in which the facts are not clear or when there are alternative explanations that could reasonably explain a set of facts. There are even times when the evidence goes firmly against what the U.S. government is claiming. At those moments, skepticism and courage are necessary to challenge false or dubious Official Narratives. You might even say, “The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn’t so obvious...”

A Tough Transition

During the transition from the Obama administration to the Trump team, the Times, the Post and other mainstream media outlets got caught in their own transition from trusting whatever the outgoing officials said to distrusting whatever the incoming officials said. In those final days, big media accepted what President Obama’s intelligence agencies asserted about Russia supposedly interfering in the U.S. election despite the lack of publicly available evidence that could be scrutinized and tested.

Even something as squirrely as the attack on Trump’s National Security Adviser Michael Flynn – with Obama holdovers citing the never-prosecuted Logan Act from 1799 as the pretext for ginning up some kind of criminal-sounding case that scared Trump into firing Flynn – was treated as legitimate, without serious questions asked. Since Obama officials were doing the feeding, the no-skepticism rule applied to the eating. But whatever statements came from Trump, even his few lucid moments explaining why war with nuclear-armed Russia wasn’t such a great idea, were treated as dangerous nonsense.

When Trump scolded the mainstream press for engaging in “fake news” and then applied the phrase “enemy of the people,” the Times, the Post and the rest went into full victimization-mode. When a few news companies were excluded from a White House news briefing, they all rushed to the barricades to defend freedom of the press. Then, Trump went even further – he rejected his invitation to the White House Correspondents Dinner, the black-tie/evening-gown event where mainstream media stars compete to attract the hottest celebrity guests and hobnob with important government officials, a walking-talking conflict-of-interest-filled evening, an orgy of self-importance.

So, the Times, the Post and their mainstream-media friends now feel under attack. Whereas just weeks ago they were demanding that Google, Facebook and other powerful information platforms throttle those of us who showed professional skepticism toward dubious claims from the U.S. government, now the Times, the Post and the others are insisting that we all rally around them, to defend their journalistic freedom. In another full-page ad on Sunday, the Times wrote: “Truth. It’s more important now than ever.”

I would argue that truth is always important, but especially so when government officials are leading countries toward war, when lives are at stake, whether in Iraq or Syria or Ukraine or the many other global hotspots. At those moments in the recent past, the Times did not treat truth – in all its subtlety and nuance – as important at all.

I would argue, too, that the stakes are raised even higher when propagandists and ideologues are risking the prospect of nuclear war that could kill billions and effectively end human civilization. However, in that case, the American people have seen little truly professional journalism nor a real commitment to the truth. Instead, it’s been much more fun to demonize Russian President Vladimir Putin and paint black-and-white pictures of the evil Russians.

At such moments, those New York Times’ truisms about truth are forgotten: “The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn’t so obvious. ...”

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](#)).

Risks in Rush to Crush ISIS

President Trump's vow to crush the Islamic State quickly may lead to hasty actions that could compound the problem rather than solve it, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A couple of tendencies that are all too common in policymaking and policy debate tend to make for unwise foreign commitments or overextended foreign expeditions. One is to treat a goal that is at most an intermediate objective as if it were an end in itself. Doing so obfuscates clear analysis of means and ends, overlooks other ways to achieve the same ends, and distorts perception of the costs and benefits associated with achieving the immediate objective.

The other tendency is to give insufficient attention to what comes after achieving the immediate objective. One only has to recall the example of insufficient attention given to what would come after the objective of overthrowing Saddam Hussein to appreciate the problems involved.

One could add a third phenomenon, which is less common but sometimes arises, which is to try to fulfill a campaign promise for the sake of fulfilling a campaign promise.

All three factors appear to be present now with the issue of next steps for the U.S. military in Syria in going after ISIS. The head of U.S. Central Command is saying, "It could be that we take on a larger burden ourselves." His comment comes amid the Department of Defense coming up with a plan requested by President Trump, who promised during the campaign to hasten the defeat of ISIS.

Of course ISIS is a horrible group, and everyone not in it agrees that the world will be better off without it. But before U.S. forces take up any larger share of the burden of fighting it, three realities ought to be carefully considered.

One is that the ISIS mini-state in Syria and Iraq already is well on the way to being extinguished, at the hands of the forces already engaging it. This should not be surprising, given the group's lack of external support and the way its brutal methods lose it any support among the populations with which it has come into contact. The issue involved in considering any escalation with U.S. forces is not whether the mini-state will be killed off, but only how quickly it will be.

Second, if our main concern is with how ISIS could endanger American lives through acts of terrorism, we should realize that the connection between that

danger and the fate of the mini-state in Syria and Iraq has always been tenuous at best, and less than is commonly supposed. There has been more of a tension than a direct connection between ISIS fomenting terrorism in the West on one hand, and on the other hand the group using its available resources to defend and shore up the mini-state. To the extent the overseas terrorist threat has materialized, it has been far more a matter of inspiration and ideology than of organizational dependence on a piece of real estate in the Middle East.

Third, the ISIS problem will not go away when the mini-state is extinguished. The problem will continue in the form of the ideology and the inspiration, and probably also in the form of insurgency in the lands in which the mini-state has existed.

This last point leads to the further observation that as far as not only anti-Western terrorism but also instability in the Middle East are concerned, what matters most is not how hastily the ISIS mini-state is crushed but rather what arrangements are left on the ground after the crushing.

Fertile Climate

The more that chaos, disputes, and uncertainty prevail there, the more that ground will remain fertile for violent extremism, whether under the ISIS label or some other brand. The rest of the political, diplomatic, and military story of conflict in Syria still has a good way to go before providing a more promising and stable alternative for what comes after ISIS. It would not be advantageous for the anti-ISIS military campaign to get ahead of that story. Speed in this case is not necessarily good.

All of this is in addition to one of the biggest downsides of U.S. forces assuming more of a military role: playing into the ideology and propaganda of ISIS and similar extremists, who appeal for support with a message about how the United States uses its armed might to intervene in Muslim lands and to kill Muslims.

This set of issues will be an early test for new national security adviser H. R. McMaster. He is a highly regarded military officer whose professional focus, from study of war in Vietnam to the practice of war in Iraq, has been on what use of force and how much force are needed to achieve an objective of military victory. His natural inclination, as much as of others, may be to take the swift extinguishing of the ISIS mini-state as such an objective and to treat it more as an end than a means. A more thorough and careful performance as national security adviser would instead broaden the policy question and take into account the considerations mentioned above.

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.)

How Trump Could Be a Truth-teller

Exclusive: Viewed as uncaring about facts, President Trump could change his image by releasing important information about recent turning-point moments that President Obama chose to hide from the people, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

One positive thing about a change in party control of the White House is that the new occupants sometimes release information that the old residents kept hidden because the facts were politically embarrassing or did not support some favored policy.

We saw this in the first days of the Obama administration when President Barack Obama declassified some documents relating to President George W. Bush's internal policy debates about torture and other abuses from the "war on terror."

However, as yet, we have seen nothing similar from the Trump administration even though some truth-telling might work very well for President Donald Trump, especially given his reputation for getting facts wrong. A commitment to transparency – giving some truth to the American people on important topics – could change Trump's image for the better.

Plus, by releasing information that was unjustifiably kept hidden during Obama's second term, Trump could underscore how Obama grew increasingly obsessive about secrecy the longer he remained in the White House, treating the American people as objects to be manipulated rather than citizens to be informed.

For instance, Obama kept the clamps on CIA analyses relating to the Ukrainian crisis, even regarding the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, killing 298 people and leading to a dangerous escalation in the New Cold War with Russia.

After the crash, the Obama administration quickly steered the Western media toward blaming President Vladimir Putin and got the European Union to join in economic sanctions against Russia.

However, after exploiting the rush to judgment against Putin, the Obama administration went silent, withholding U.S. intelligence evidence even from the official crash investigators. The more the administration learned about the tragic event and who was responsible the less it wanted to say.

At the time, I was told that the reason was that some senior CIA analysts were uncovering evidence that went in an inconvenient direction, suggesting a rogue Ukrainian operation connected to a hardline oligarch with the intent of shooting down a Russian jetliner, possibly even the one carrying Putin back from a state visit in South America, but instead brought down MH-17, which had similar markings.

To spread confusion and create some deniability for the attack, the scheme supposedly called for launching the missile from as deep inside “rebel-controlled” territory as possible.

A Closed File

The source described getting this briefing from U.S. intelligence analysts, but I was unable to get the CIA or the Office of Director of National Intelligence to provide any guidance. Instead, they clammed up, claiming that they didn't want to “prejudice” the official Dutch-led investigation (although I pointed out that the hasty U.S. finger-pointing at Russia had already done that).

The refusal of the Obama administration to open its MH-17 files allowed the “Dutch-led” Joint Investigation Team (JIT) to be effectively taken over by Ukraine's unsavory SBU intelligence agency, which oversaw the care and feeding of Dutch and Australian investigators who decamped for long periods in Kiev.

The SBU's “evidence” became central to the JIT's investigation although the SBU was deeply involved in the war against the ethnic-Russian Ukrainian rebels and was even denounced by United Nations investigators for blocking access to alleged SBU torture centers. Beyond that, part of the SBU's mandate was to protect Ukrainian government secrets, so the SBU had obvious conflicts of interest.

Nevertheless, the JIT relied on SBU-provided telephone “intercepts” of cryptic Russian-language conversations to base its conclusion that Russia provided the rebels a Buk missile system on the night of July 16, 2014, which was then taken on a strangely circuitous route far to the west before circling back to the east to a location far from the battlefield where it shot down MH-17 on July 17 and then was driven back to Russia that evening, again taking an unnecessarily long way home.

Though there were numerous holes in the SBU's evidence and serious questions

about why the Buk would have taken its bizarrely long ride – when a much more direct and discreet route was available – the Western media again showed no skepticism, simply accepting Russian guilt as established fact and dismissing any alternative explanation as “fanciful.”

The Value of Truth

However, whatever the truth is – whether the Russians and their rebel allies were responsible for the tragedy or whether a rogue Ukrainian operation brought down MH-17 – there is no reason why President Trump shouldn't instruct CIA Director Mike Pompeo to release as much of the U.S. intelligence analysis as possible.

First, the families of the dead deserve all the help that the U.S. government can provide to identify the killers and bring them to justice. Second, by releasing the MH-17 file, President Trump can demonstrate that he does care about truth in contrast to President Obama who mysteriously withheld this information for 2½ years and thus gave the culprits, whoever they are, time to escape and cover their tracks.

Further, if the file blames the Russians, releasing it would show that Trump is not in Putin's pocket, as many people in Official Washington claim. And, if the file implicates an element of the Ukrainian government – even a rogue faction – that might relieve geopolitical tensions with Russia and open possible paths for resolving the Ukrainian crisis.

The Trump administration also could consider other topics for declassification, such as the circumstances surrounding the U.S.-backed coup that ousted elected Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich on Feb. 22, 2014. U.S. intelligence surely was following those events closely and could clarify the roles of Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt and Sen. John McCain, who all cheered on and encouraged violent protests that preceded the coup.

Obama also hid the intelligence regarding the mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus, Syria, on Aug. 21, 2013, which Secretary of State John Kerry and others blamed on the Syrian government although later evidence seemed to implicate jihadist rebels who wanted to trick the U.S. military into intervening directly in the war on their side.

Given the importance of those turning-point moments – and the Obama administration's attempts to exploit them for geopolitical ends – the American people deserve to know what the U.S. intelligence analysts ultimately concluded and whether President Obama's team was telling the truth or had gotten lost in

the Orwellian idea of “perception management.”

President Trump might find that he can begin to turn around his reputation as a person who doesn't care about the truth by becoming a truth-teller.

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](#)).
