

Learning to Love the 'Drone War'

The mainstream U.S. news media is so in the tank on the "war on terror" that it ignores critical information that the American people should know, such as the public complaint from four former Air Force drone operators that the lethal program is killing innocents and creating terrorists, writes John Hanrahan.

By John Hanrahan

The polls show it and commentators of all political stripes often cite the figures: Killer drone attacks by the U.S. military and the CIA in the Greater Middle East and Africa have strong U.S. public support.

According to the Pew Research Center's most recent poll in May, 58 percent, up slightly from 56 percent in February 2013, approve of "missile strikes from drones to target extremists in such countries as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia." The numbers of Americans disapproving of drone attacks actually increased from 26 percent to 35 percent over that two-year period, a hopeful sign, but still very much a minority view.

But how well informed can U.S. citizens be on this subject when the major news media time and again ignore or under-report drone-strike stories, as we have discussed [here](#) and [here](#) in recent weeks? Stories, such as *The Intercept's* October series based on a trove of classified materials provided by a national security whistleblower, that would likely raise serious questions about the drone program in many more Americans' minds if they were actually given the information?

And now, in the latest example of journalistic negligence, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other mainstream news organizations in late November continued their apparent policy of no-bad-news-reporting-about-drones.

This time, the major media chose to ignore four former Air Force drone-war personnel who went public with an [open letter](#) to President Barack Obama. The letter urged the President to reconsider a program that killed "innocent civilians," and which "only fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like ISIS, while also serving as a fundamental recruiting tool [for extremists] similar to Guantanamo Bay."

In strong, dramatic language, the four men, in the letter and subsequent press appearances, challenged the official Obama White House/Pentagon/CIA public view that civilians are rarely killed by drones, and that drones make Americans safer and are helping defeat terrorists. Rather, they said that the U.S. drone war plays right into the hands of ISIS and other extremist groups by terrorizing

local populations and killing innocent civilians, resulting in heightened anti-U.S. feeling and more recruits for ISIS.

Now it's not every day that four former drone operators go public with their anguish-filled stories of the drone program killing innocent people and creating blowback against the United States.

In fact, there has not been any day like that. Until now, that has never happened. You would think that this would meet some textbook definition of news, something new, uncommon, dramatic and consequential. When President Obama or a proven liar about the drone program, CIA Director John Brennan, propagandize about drones and how wonderful and precise and well-nigh infallible they are in crushing extremists, not killing civilians and making us safe, that is what the mainstream media dutifully reports as news.

But when four drone whistleblowers, who sat at the very heart of the system guiding Hellfire missiles from Predator drones to human targets in Afghanistan and Iraq, come forward to undermine that tidy little story, those same news outlets turn their collective back.

Voicing such sharp criticism of a top-secret program with which they were all involved is an especially risky move given that the Obama administration has shown itself to be the most anti-whistleblower administration ever. Obama's Justice Department has prosecuted more than twice as many whistleblowers under the Espionage Act as all previous presidents combined since the passage of the law in 1917.

The letter to Obama, also addressed to Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter and CIA Director Brennan, said that the Bush and Obama administrations "have built a drone program that is one of the most devastating driving forces for terrorism and destabilization around the world." They expressed guilt, and are experiencing PTSD, as a result of "our roles in facilitating this systematic loss of innocent life."

In a pointed reference to the Obama administration's statements in support of the drone program, the letter stated: "We witnessed gross waste, mismanagement, abuses of power, and our country's leaders lying publicly about the effectiveness of the drone program."

And, drawing a link between the recent Paris attacks and drone killings creating more terrorists and blowback, the whistleblowers added: "We cannot sit silently by and witness tragedies like the attacks in Paris, knowing the devastating effects the drone program has overseas and at home. Such silence would violate the very oaths we took to support and defend the Constitution."

These former Air Force personnel, three former Predator sensor operators (Staff Sergeant Brandon Bryant, Senior Airman Stephen Lewis and Senior Airman Michael Haas), and one former drone program infrastructure technician (Senior Airman Cian Westmoreland), had a combined 20-plus years of remotely operating drone strikes in Afghanistan and Iraq from Creech Air Force Base, Nevada.

All had Afghanistan drone experience, and all but Westmoreland also had Iraq experience. This gave them special, first-hand insight into a program whose operators, in Haas's words, viewed targeted human beings as "ants just black blobs on a screen" and considered children who came into view on their screens as "fun-sized terrorists."

Haas and other whistleblowers expanded on the points in their letter in an interview with *Guardian* reporters, which resulted in two eye-opening articles by Ed Pilkington and Ewen MacAskill. This was followed by a lengthy appearance on *Democracy Now!* and a news conference in connection with the premiere in New York of a new documentary, "Drone," in which two of the whistleblowers (Bryant and Haas) make appearances. Agence France-Press (AFP), *Reuters* and Newsweek all carried stories, as did The Intercept, Shadowproof and other online news sites.

Did you read about any of that whistleblower criticism in *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, or see a segment about it on television news? No, you did not. If you know about it at all, it's probably because of *The Guardian*, *Democracy Now!*, and online political and progressive blogs and websites.

This marked the second time in just the last two months that mainstream news outlets have given a thumbs-down to a significant drone story. In October, *The Washington Post* ignored it and *The New York Times* ran two paragraphs at the end of a 25-paragraph piece about a series of significant drone articles posted in *The Intercept*. The articles were derived from documents, referred to as the "Drone Papers," that were provided to *The Intercept* by an anonymous intelligence whistleblower. (We wrote about that here.)

As ExposeFacts has previously noted, mainstream news organizations make only occasional forays once or twice a year into reporting that is critical of the drone program (for example, this *New York Times* article from 2012 and one earlier this year).

What many Americans see or hear most of the time from the self-censoring mainstream media is superficial reporting on the latest drone strike that killed a certain number of what are almost always described in sketchy news stories as militants of one type or another. They also get frequent doses of propaganda and

soothing assurances from the President and other Obama administration officials that the program of drones and other aerial bombardments is precise, takes special precaution not to kill civilians, but most importantly is making America safer by killing militants while keeping U.S. troops out of harm's way.

Typical was Obama's speech in May 2013 at the National Defense University, where he said this: "And before any [drone] strike is taken, there must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured the highest standard we can set." He said civilian deaths constituted "a risk that exists in all wars."

But as Commander-in-Chief, he went on, "I must weigh these heartbreaking tragedies against the alternatives. To do nothing in the face of terrorist networks would invite far more civilian casualties not just in our cities at home and facilities abroad, but also in the very places like Sana'a and Kabul and Mogadishu where terrorists seek a foothold."

And who, if they were paying attention at the time, can ever forget major-league truth abuser John Brennan, when he was Obama's top counterterrorism adviser, saying in June 2011 that for almost a year, "there hasn't been a single collateral death because of the exceptional proficiency, precision of the capabilities we've been able to develop."

In reporting that whopper, *The New York Times* in August 2011 further reported this: "Other officials say that [Brennan's] extraordinary claim still holds: since May 2010, C.I.A. officers believe, the drones have killed more than 600 militants including at least 20 in a strike reported Wednesday and not a single noncombatant."

Given the Obama administration's control of the drone narrative and the paucity of mainstream press coverage, the 35 percent opposition figure shown in the Pew Research Center's poll in May is a bit surprising for being as high as it is. Especially given that so many Americans buy into the notion that the nation is in a war against terrorism, that drones make us safe, and that killing remotely by drones is preferable to sending U.S. soldiers into combat areas and risking their lives.

Curiously, that same Pew Research Center poll, in addition to showing 35 percent opposition, found that 48 percent said "they are very concerned that U.S. drone strikes endanger the lives of innocent civilians." This higher figure suggests that even some Americans currently favoring drone attacks have doubts about how well civilians are protected, and thus might be open to opposing drone use if the mainstream media would let them know what the four whistleblowers said.

Or if the mainstream press would let them know what was contained in *The*

Intercept's "Drone Papers" articles, such as the revelation that during one five-month period of Operation Haymaker in northeastern Afghanistan, "nearly 90 percent of the people killed in airstrikes were not the intended targets. In Yemen and Somalia where the U.S. has far more limited intelligence capabilities to confirm the people killed are the intended targets, the equivalent ratios may well be much worse."

It's worth noting that *The Guardian*, *AFP* and *Reuters*, outlets that did cover the four drone whistleblowers, are all headquartered outside the United States and are not part of the inside-the-Beltway media crowd that influence what is and isn't news at the national and U.S. governmental level.

Also, because those news outlets all have high levels of newspaper and Internet-based circulation in numerous countries, what they report can make citizens of other countries better informed than Americans about certain aspects of U.S. life. This meant, for example, that Singapore readers of *The Straits Times* and the Dublin, Ireland readers of *TheJournal.ie* got to read about the four whistleblowers via an *AFP* article online. Meanwhile, sadly and ironically, readers of *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* were left in the dark.

Across the waters in the drone-deploying United Kingdom, public opinion on drone use appears to be the direct opposite of the United States. A Pew Research Center poll in July 2014 found that the U.K. public opposed the use of drones by a 59-33 percent margin.

With *The Guardian* and others providing more critical coverage of drones than U.S. mainstream media, and with the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism regularly pumping out information that challenges U.S. government claims about limited civilian drone-strike deaths, it's a good bet that U.K. citizens are more exposed to criticisms of the drone programs than are their U.S. counterparts.

Additionally, many members of Parliament are much more critical of Britain's drone policies than are members of Congress critical of U.S. policies, and they are often in the news with their criticisms and concerns. Not so in the United States where, with no serious congressional oversight or debate about drones, there is seldom any anti-drone news generated in the House or Senate, which means citizens hear nothing from the legislative branch to counter the White House views.

As long as major U.S. news organizations continue to ignore, downplay or under-report drone stories, much of the American public will remain under-informed or ill-informed about what our drone strikes are doing to the citizens of many other countries, while at the same time turning ever more people against the

United States.

[Disclosure: The four drone whistleblowers are represented by attorney Jesselyn Radack, who is national security and human rights director of the ExposeFacts WHISPeR program.]

John Hanrahan, currently on the editorial board of ExposeFacts where this article first appeared, is a former executive director of The Fund for Investigative Journalism and reporter for The Washington Post, The Washington Star, UPI and other news organizations. He also has extensive experience as a legal investigator. Hanrahan is the author *Government by Contract* and co-author of *Lost Frontier: The Marketing of Alaska*. He wrote extensively for NiemanWatchdog.org, a project of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University.

When Mass Killings Aren't 'News'

The 24/7 coverage of the San Bernardino mass killing, perpetrated by a Muslim husband and wife, has alarmed and frightened Americans, but there is next to no mainstream interest in disclosures about far worse mayhem carried out by the U.S. government's lethal drone program, writes David Swanson.

By David Swanson

We now know this. A young man who had successfully killed on a large scale went to his religious leader with doubts and was told that mass killing was part of God's plan. The young man continued killing until he had participated in killing sprees that took 1,626 lives – men, women, and children.

I repeat: his death count was not the 16 or 9 or 22 lives that make top news stories, but 1,626 dead and mutilated bodies. Do such things bother you?

What if you learned that this young man's name was Brandon Bryant, and that he killed as a drone pilot for the U.S. Air Force, and that he was presented with a certificate for his 1,626 kills and congratulated on a job well done by the United States of America? What if you learned that his religious leader was a Christian chaplain? Do such things still bother you?

What if you learned that most of the people killed by U.S. drones are civilians? That the pilots "double-tap," meaning that they send a missile into a wedding party or a house and then wait for people to try to help the injured and send a second missile into them? That as a result one hears the injured screaming for

hours until they die, as no one comes to help? That a drone pilot sent a missile into a group of children from which three children survived who recognized their dead brothers but had no idea that various pieces of flesh were what was left of their Mom and Dad and consequently cried out for those now gone-forever individuals? Is this troubling?

What if President Obama's claim of few or no civilian deaths was proven false by well-documented reporting? And by the fact that most victims are targeted without even knowing their names?

What if a leading candidate for president in the past week were to both declare that the way to win a war is to start killing whole families, and stage a public Christian prayer session in order to win over a certain demographic of voters? Is that bothering?

What if it became clear that police officers in the United States have been murdering people at a higher rate than drone pilots? Would you want to see police videos of their killings? Would you want to see drone videos of their killings? We have thus far gained limited access to the former and none to the latter.

What if it were discovered that gun murders in San Bernardino are almost routine. Would they all be equally tragic?

My point is not to cease caring about the tragedy that the television stations tell you to care about. I wish everyone would care 1,000 times more, and even better do something to take away the guns and the hatred and the culture of violence and the economic injustice and the alienation.

My point is that there are other tragedies that go unmentioned, including larger ones. And exploiting one tragedy to fuel hatred toward a large segment of the human population of earth is madness.

David Swanson is an author, activist, journalist, and radio host. He is director of WorldBeyondWar.org and campaign coordinator for RootsAction.org. Swanson's books include War Is A Lie. He blogs at DavidSwanson.org and WarIsACrime.org. He hosts Talk Nation Radio. He is a 2015 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee. You can follow him on Twitter: @davidcswanson and FaceBook. [This article first appeared at <http://warisacrime.org/content/do-mass-killings-bother-you>]

Obama Ignores Russian Terror Victims

Exclusive: President Obama has displayed a stunning lack of sympathy for the Russian civilians killed in an ISIS plane bombing in Egypt and for two Russian military men slain as victims of U.S. weapons systems in Syria, putting insults toward President Putin ahead of human decency, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Normally, when a country is hit by an act of terrorism, there is universal sympathy even if the country has engaged in actions that may have made it a target of the terrorists. After 9/11, for instance, any discussion of whether U.S. violent meddling in the Middle East may have precipitated the attack was ruled out of the public debate.

Similarly, the 7/7 attacks against London's Underground in 2005 were not excused because the United Kingdom had joined in President George W. Bush's aggressive war in Iraq. The same with the more recent terror strikes in Paris. No respectable politician or pundit gloated about the French getting what they deserved for their long history of imperialism in the Muslim world.

But a different set of rules apply to Russia. Along with other prominent Americans, President Barack Obama and New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman have expressed smug satisfaction over the murder of 224 people aboard a Russian charter flight blown up over the Sinai and in the slaying of a Russian pilot who had been shot down by a Turkish warplane and the killing of a Russian marine on a rescue mission.

Apparently, the political imperative to display disdain for Russian President Vladimir Putin trumps any normal sense of humanity. Both Obama on Tuesday and Friedman on Wednesday treated those Russian deaths at the hands of the Islamic State or other jihadists as Putin's comeuppance for intervening against terrorist/jihadist gains in Syria.

At [a news conference](#) in Paris, Obama expressed his lack of sympathy as part of a bizarre comment in which he faulted Putin for somehow not turning around the Syrian conflict during the past month when Obama and his allies have been floundering in their "war" against the Islamic State and its parent, Al Qaeda, for years, if not decades.

"The Russians now have been there for several weeks, over a month, and I think fair-minded reporters who looked at the situation would say that the situation hasn't changed significantly," Obama said. "In the interim, Russia has lost a commercial passenger jet. You've seen another jet shot down. There have been

losses in terms of Russian personnel. And I think Mr. Putin understands that, with Afghanistan fresh in the memory, for him to simply get bogged down in a inconclusive and paralyzing civil conflict is not the outcome that he's looking for."

In examining that one paragraph, a "fair-minded" reporter could find a great deal to dispute. Indeed, the comments suggest that President Obama has crossed some line into either believing his own propaganda or thinking that everyone who listens to him is an idiot and will believe whatever he says.

But what was perhaps most disturbing was Obama's graceless manner of discussing the tragedy of the Sinai bombing, followed by his seeming pleasure over Turkey shooting down a Russian SU-24 last week, leading to the killing of two Russian military men, one the pilot who was targeted while parachuting to the ground and the other a marine after his search-and-rescue helicopter was downed by a TOW missile.

Even more troubling, the key weapon systems used the Turkish F-16 fighter jet and the TOW missile were U.S.-manufactured and apparently U.S. supplied, in the case of the TOW missile either directly or indirectly to Sunni jihadists deemed "moderate" by the Obama administration.

The Ever-Smug Friedman

Columnist Friedman was equally unfeeling about the Russian deaths. In a column entitled "Putin's Great Syrian Adventure," Friedman offered a mocking assessment of Russia's intervention against Sunni jihadists and terrorists seeking to take control of Syria.

While ridiculing anyone who praised Putin's initiative or who just thought the Russian president was "crazy like a fox," Friedman wrote: "Some of us thought he was just crazy.

"Well, two months later, let's do the math: So far, Putin's Syrian adventure has resulted in a Russian civilian airliner carrying 224 people being blown up, apparently by pro-ISIS militants in Sinai. Turkey shot down a Russian bomber after it strayed into Turkish territory. And then Syrian rebels killed one of the pilots as he parachuted to earth and one of the Russian marines sent to rescue him."

Ha-ha, very funny! And, by the way, it has not been established that the Russian SU-24 did stray into Turkish air space but if it did, according to the Turkish account, it passed over a sliver of Turkish territory for all of 17 seconds.

The evidence is quite clear that the SU-24 was ambushed in a reckless act by

Turkey's autocratic President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who has been collaborating with Syrian and foreign jihadists for the past four years to overthrow Syria's secular government. And the murder of the pilot after he bailed out of the plane is not some reason to smirk; it is a war crime.

Even uglier is the lack of any sympathy or outrage over the terrorist bombing that killed 224 innocent people, mostly tourists, aboard a Russian charter flight in Egypt. If the victims had been American and a similar callous reaction had come from President Putin and a columnist for a major Russian newspaper, one can only imagine the outrage. However, in Official Washington, any recognition of a common humanity with Russians makes you a "Moscow stooge."

The other wacky part of both Obama's comments and Friedman's echoes of the same themes is this quick assessment that the Russian intervention in support of the Syrian government has been some abject failure as if the U.S.-led coalition has been doing so wonderfully.

First, as a "fair-minded" reporter, I would say that it appears the Russian-backed Syrian offensive has at least stopped the advances of the Islamic State, Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and its jihadist allies, including Ahrar al-Sham (which technically separates itself from Al Qaeda and thus qualifies for U.S.-supplied weaponry even though it fights side-by-side with Nusra in the Saudi-backed Army of Conquest).

The Afghan Memories

Obama's reference to Afghanistan was also startling. He was suggesting that Putin should have learned a lesson from Moscow's intervention in the 1980s in support of a secular, pro-Soviet regime in Kabul, which came under attack by CIA-organized-and-armed Islamic jihadists known then as mujahedeen.

Wielding sophisticated surface-to-air missiles and benefiting from \$1 billion a year in Saudi-U.S.-supplied weapons, the Afghan fundamentalist mujahedeen and their allies, including Saudi Osama bin Laden, eventually drove Soviet troops out in 1989 and several years later behind the Taliban completed the reversion of Afghanistan back to the Seventh Century. Women in Kabul went from dressing any way they liked in public, including wearing mini-skirts, to being covered in chadors and kept at home.

Obama's bringing up Afghanistan in the Syrian context and Putin's supposed one-month Syrian failure was ironic in another way. After Al Qaeda's 9/11 attacks, the United States invaded Afghanistan in pursuit of bin Laden and has been bogged down in a quagmire there for 14 years, including nearly seven years under Obama.

So, Obama may not be on the firmest ground when he suggests that Putin recall Moscow's experience in Afghanistan a few decades ago. After all, Obama has many more recent memories.

Further, what is different about Putin's Syrian strategy compared with Obama's is that the Russians are targeting all the terrorists and jihadists, not just the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh). While U.S. propaganda tries to present the non-ISIS jihadists as "moderates" (somehow pretending that Al Qaeda is no longer a terrorist organization), there is, in reality, very little distinction between ISIS and the alliance of Nusra/Ahrar al-Sham.

And, as for Official Washington's new "group think" about the Syrian government's lack of progress in the war, there is the discordant news that the last of rebel forces have agreed to abandon the central city of Homs, which had been dubbed the "capital of the revolution." The Associated Press reported on Tuesday that "thousands of insurgents will leave the last opposition-held neighborhood in" Homs, with the withdrawal beginning next week.

Al-Jazeera added the additional fact that the remaining 4,000 insurgents are "from al-Nusra Front, Ahrar al-Sham and the Free Syrian Army." In other words, the "moderate" Free Syrian Army was operating in collusion with Al Qaeda's affiliate and its major jihadist partner.

While it's hard to get reliable up-to-date information from inside Syria, one intelligence source familiar with the military situation told me that the Syrian government offensive, backed by Iranian troops and Russian air power, had been surprisingly successful in putting the jihadists, including ISIS and Nusra, on the defensive, with additional gains around the key city of Aleppo.

The Belated Oil Bombings

Also, in the past week, Putin shamed Obama into joining in a bombing operation to destroy hundreds of trucks carrying ISIS oil to Turkey. Why that valuable business was allowed to continue during the U.S.-led war on ISIS since summer 2014 has not been adequately explained. It apparently was being protected by Turkish President Erdogan.

Another irony of Obama's (and Friedman's) critical assessment of Putin's one-month military campaign came in Obama's recounting of his meeting during the Paris climate summit with Erdogan. Obama said he was still appealing to Erdogan to close the Turkish-Syrian border although radical jihadists have been crossing it since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011.

"With respect to Turkey, I have had repeated conversations with President Erdogan about the need to close the border between Turkey and Syria," Obama

said. "We've seen some serious progress on that front, but there are still some gaps. In particular, there's about 98 kilometers that are still used as a transit point for foreign fighters, ISIL shipping out fuel for sale that helps finance their terrorist activities."

In other words, all these years into the conflict and about 1½ years since Obama specifically targeted ISIS Turkey has not closed its borders to prevent ISIS from reinforcing itself with foreign fighters and trafficking in illicit oil sales to fund its terror operations. One might suspect that Erdogan has no intention of really stopping the Sunni jihadists from ravaging Syria.

Erdogan still seems set on violent "regime change" in Syria after allowing his intelligence services to provide extensive help to ISIS, Al Qaeda's Nusra and other extremists. The Russians claim that politically well-connected Turkish businessmen also have been profiting off the ISIS oil sales.

But Obama's acknowledgement that he has not even been able to get NATO "ally" Turkey to seal its border and that ISIS still remains a potent fighting force makes a mockery of his mocking Putin for not "significantly" changing the situation on the ground in Syria in one month.

Obama also slid into propaganda speak when he blamed Assad for all the deaths that have occurred during the Syrian conflict. "I consider somebody who kills hundreds of thousands of his own people illegitimate," Obama said.

But again Obama is applying double standards. For instance, he would not blame President George W. Bush for the hundreds of thousands (possibly more than a million) dead Iraqis, yet Bush was arguably more responsible for those deaths by launching an unprovoked invasion of Iraq than Assad was in battling a jihadist-led insurgency.

Plus, the death toll of Syrians, estimated to exceed a quarter million, includes many soldiers and police as well as armed jihadists. That does not excuse Assad or his regime for excessively heavy-handed tactics that have inflicted civilian casualties, but Obama and his predecessor both have plenty of innocent blood on their hands, too.

After watching Obama's news conference, one perhaps can hope that he is just speaking out of multiple sides of his mouth as he is wont to do. Maybe, he's playing his usual game of "above-the-table/below-the-table," praising Erdogan above the table while chastising him below the table and disparaging Putin in public while cooperating with the Russian president in private.

Or maybe President Obama has simply lost touch with reality and with common human decency.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Global Angst over US Secrecy Fetish

With the reach of U.S. surveillance now global and with the U.S. military deployed all over the world anger at President Obama's unprecedented crackdown on whistleblowers who disclose the U.S. government's abuses and crimes has gone international, as this Norwegian opinion piece by Victor Wallis shows.

By Victor Wallis

The more extreme the crimes of state, the more the state seeks to shroud them in secrecy. The greater the secrecy and the accompanying lies, the more vital becomes the role of whistleblowers and the more vindictive becomes the state in its pursuit of them.

Whistleblowers are people who start out as loyal servants of the state. Their illusions about the state's supposed moral agenda and the wholeheartedness of their own patriotic commitment make them all the more shocked when they discover evidence of the state's wrongdoing.

Given the extreme concentration of weaponry (as well as surveillance capabilities) in the hands of the state, and given the disposition of the state to apply such resources even against nonviolent mass movements, the type of defection practiced by whistleblowers an option available to military and intelligence operatives at all levels is crucial to any eventual triumph of popular forces over the ruling class.

Whistleblowers thus not only embarrass the government, disrupt its policies, and (assuming adequate diffusion) educate the citizenry; they also are harbingers of a broader crumbling of the capitalist state and the order it defends. Acting largely in isolation and at great risk to themselves, they embody the conviction or at least the hope that basic decency has a more universal grounding than does any possible scheme of oppression.

Whistleblowing's principal near-term function is educational. It demonstrates the undemocratic character of the regime whose secrets it lets out; it is thus an essential ingredient of investigative journalism. The documents it brings to light reach the public through those who practice such journalism, whom the government then threatens with prosecution unless they disclose their sources.

The novelty of Wikileaks is that it provided a new form of protection for the anonymity of sources. This, together with the facility of electronic transmission, has made the potential for disclosure greater than ever before. It accounts for the extraordinary fact that the U.S. government has been pursuing draconian charges against someone who not merely is only the recipient rather than the "leaker" of sensitive information, but someone who is not even a citizen or resident of the United States Julian Assange.

Disclosure is particularly embarrassing when it documents the fact that government officials have lied. The Director of Central Intelligence lied under oath to the U.S. Congress a felony for which he was never prosecuted when he denied that the National Security Agency monitors the communications of the entire U.S. population.

This lie was the culminating event in Edward Snowden's decision to blow the whistle. As we all know, of course, it is Snowden who was then criminalized by the government. This parallels the experience of John Kiriakou, who publicly confirmed, on the basis of his first-hand knowledge, that the CIA practiced torture by waterboarding. Kiriakou then became the only government official to be prosecuted and imprisoned in connection with CIA and military practices of torture.

The debate over whistleblowers reached tens of millions of viewers when the presidential candidates of the Democratic Party were asked (on Oct. 13) their views about Snowden. Hillary Clinton falsely asserted that he could have used established channels to transmit his disclosures of excessive surveillance, presumably at no risk to himself.

This claim is refuted by the experience of previous whistleblowers who had taken just that approach. One of them, Thomas Drake, retold his story two days later, at a news conference ignored by most of the corporate media ([video](#)), which was organized on behalf of yet another whistleblower, Jeffrey Sterling, who recently began a 42-month prison term on a conviction of "espionage."

What Sterling had done was report to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence about a counterproductive CIA attempt (in 2000) to feed misleading technological data to Iranian scientists. What he was prosecuted for was his subsequent conversations with *New York Times* journalist James Risen, although no

evidence was available as to the content of those conversations, since Risen refused to testify.

Sterling's story is recounted in a letter from his wife, seeking presidential clemency from Obama. Sterling had been fired from the CIA in 2002 after filing a complaint against the agency for racial discrimination (an episode on which Risen wrote a news story). After Risen's book *State of War* (2006) came out, the FBI raided Sterling's home, but it was not until more than four years later under President Obama that he was arrested (2011).

The latest whistleblower, who documents the "normalization of assassination" via drone warfare, is wisely seeking to remain anonymous. The U.S. government will surely take all possible steps to track him down.

The work of whistleblowers, as well as their personal safety, is obviously an issue that cuts across national borders. Support for U.S. whistleblowers will need to be as global as the reach of the policies and the weapons that they expose.

Victor Wallis is managing editor of the journal Socialism and Democracy. [This is the original text of a column (written on Oct. 20) posted on the Norwegian website radikalportal.no.]

Obama Taunts Putin over Syria

President Obama mocked Russian President Putin for not fixing Syria during the past month and chided him about Moscow's Afghan quagmire in the 1980s, proving that Obama has either no self-awareness or no sense of irony given the U.S. misadventures in both countries, as Sam Hussein describes.

By Sam Hussein

President Barack Obama's remarks about Russian President Vladimir Putin's intervention in the Syria conflict were remarkably ironic: "The Russians now have been there for several weeks, over a month, and I think fair-minded reporters who have looked at the situation would say that the situation hasn't changed significantly.

"In the interim, Russia has lost a commercial passenger jet. You've seen another jet shot down. There have been losses in terms of Russian personnel. And I think Mr. Putin understands that with Afghanistan fresh in the memory, for him to simply get bogged down in an inconclusive and paralyzing civil conflict is not

the outcome that he's looking for."

In those remarks on Tuesday in Paris, Obama scrutinized the hard effects of Russian foreign policy, but not his own. "With Afghanistan fresh in the memory," said the U.S. President, presumably referring to the Russian intervention there that ended in 1989 – and not the 14-year U.S. intervention in the same country which is ongoing.

Obama can see the speck in Putin's eye, but not the log in his own. To say nothing of the fact that the U.S. started the modern movement of Islamic jihadists in the 1980s by organizing, funding and arming the Afghan mujahedeen to make the Russians bleed.

Gore Vidal called the USA the "United States of Amnesia" – but it's more like the USSA: The United States of Selective Amnesia.

The U.S. has been bombing the Mideast for decades now – not a month – and has yet to make a serious accounting of all the people killed, cities destroyed and hatred engendered. Would some "fair-minded" reporter look at the U.S. experience from Afghanistan since the 1980s to Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s to Libya and Syria this decade and judge that Washington has solved the problems or made them markedly worse?

A few hours after Obama made his remarks, Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced the U.S. was again expanding its military actions in Iraq.

Why Terrorism?

While it rarely occurs to anyone to question that the stated goals of the U.S. government might not be the actual goals, it's rarely thought to examine the stated goals of the 9/11 or Paris attackers. Many have rightly noted that the "terrorism" label is applied selectively, most recently regarding the shooting at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado, but beyond the use of the word "terrorism," the notion of explicitly articulating an attacker's motive is selective.

When talking about events like the Nov. 13 Paris attacks, "motive" doesn't enter into it; indeed, talk of "terrorism" or "war" is partly a substitute for thinking through a motive. In the case of the Planned Parenthood attack, it's seemingly taken for granted that someone can be opposed to abortion rights and be opposed to violent attacks on abortion clinics. But it's not a point taken to heart when examining U.S. – or French, or British – foreign policy.

One nation seems to have come to grips with this contradiction, at least to an extent: On March 11, 2004, a series of nearly simultaneous bombs exploded on

four commuter trains in Madrid. The blasts killed 191 people and wounded nearly 2,000.

That same day, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1530 that condemned in “the strongest terms the bomb attacks in Madrid, Spain, perpetrated by the terrorist group ETA.” Of course, it quickly became evident ETA – a Basque separatist group – had nothing to do with it.

This was a rare instance of officialdom not immediately trying to “blame the Muslims” after a bombing. And for good reason. The then right-wing ruling party in Spain, the inaptly named Peoples Party, had dragged the country into the Iraq War a year before and, with elections looming just three days later, there was fear that if the attack was shown to be Mideast-related, the public would be furious. In fact, the day of the election, Al Qaeda claimed responsibility.

Before the Madrid bombing, the Peoples Party led the polls by 5 percentage points, but the Socialist Party ended up winning by 5 percent. The victorious Socialist Party had called for the removal of Spanish troops from Iraq during the campaign.

Part of what was pivotal and crucial was that there were substantial protests in the immediate aftermath of the bombings. This included protests under the banner “No to Terrorism – No to War.” [See picture.]

The Socialist Party had promised to remove Spanish troops by June 30, 2004, and, after winning the election, the troops were withdrawn a month earlier than expected. I can’t find a record of any Mideast-related attacks in Spain since.

The story has been different with Great Britain and France, which took more prominent roles in interventions in their former colonies, Iraq and Syria, respectively. British Prime Minister Tony Blair was President George W. Bush’s principal sidekick during the invasion and occupation of Iraq, while French President Francois Hollande has joined Obama as leading voices in demanding “regime change” in Syria and in escalating war talk about the Islamic State.

There’s been much made in some circles about the French, who were derided in the U.S. for not supporting the 2003 Iraq invasion, now leading the fight in Syria and Hollande’s pro-war rhetoric. But Syria was a former French colony.

Yet, the fact that the interventionist dynamics line up with the imperial histories is damning to the Western powers by playing into the anti-Western narrative that today’s interventions are just modern versions of the Christian world’s war on and exploitation of the Muslim world dating back to the Crusades.

This Western imperial mindset toward the Mideast is evident, including the case

of Israel's active settler colonial project against the Palestinians. It's also evident in the alliance between the U.S. establishment and the Western-installed monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other regimes.

And the mindset is even evident in the case of Iran, as former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated after the nuclear agreement with Iran earlier this year at the Brookings Institution: "I don't see Iran as the partner in this agreement, I see Iran as the subject of this agreement."

The imperial legacy is shown in restrictions to domestic freedoms as well. There's the rhetoric of "liberté" in France, but the state of emergency in France and prohibition of protests has its roots in laws enacted from France's colonial war with Algeria. (Many in France also seem to be letting "the terrorists win" by abrogating their own freedoms.)

A Pressing Need

The proclaimed motives of those claiming responsibility for attacks like 9/11 were never meaningfully discussed. They should be now, especially given the widespread sense that ISIS is now adopting Al Qaeda's tactic of striking at the West, rather than simply focusing on constructing its own Mideast caliphate.

Al Qaeda's leader Osama bin Laden addressed the U.S. public just before the 2004 election thus: "Contrary to Bush's claim that we hate freedom – if so, then let him explain to us why we don't strike for example – Sweden? ... But I am amazed at you. Even though we are in the fourth year after the events of September 11th, Bush is still engaged in distortion, deception and hiding from you the real causes. And thus, the reasons are still there for a repeat of what occurred."

Around the same time, said bin Laden: "When I saw those destroyed towers in Lebanon it sparked in my mind that the oppressors should be punished in the same way and that we should destroy towers in America so that they can taste what we tasted and so they will stop killing our women and children." (See my piece "U.S. Policy: 'Putting out the fire with gasoline?'" based on interviews with Lee Hamilton and Thomas Kean.)

This passage is almost never cited, and its context was outright falsified by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in his book, where he claims Bin Laden was "referring to the destruction of the Marine barracks and the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut." Robin Wright correctly notes in her book the context was that bin Laden was referring to "Israeli's 1982 invasion of Lebanon with American arms."

Paris and London should be looking toward Madrid's example in taking steps toward shedding their imperial mindsets in stopping their war-obsessed elites.

You can either be an emissary of empire or a decent democracy, but not both.

Hollande is clearly escalating the bombing that France has been conducting in Syria for over a year – now calling for “merciless” bombing. British Prime Minister David Cameron is pushing for Britain to join the bombing in Syria – in effect adopting a U.S. style of ecumenical imperialism – and not just in Britain’s traditional domains like Iraq.

It doesn’t have to be this way. History can change. And the fact is that there is a great legacy of anti-imperialism in the U.S. that’s continually overlooked. Mark Twain the pen name of author Samuel Clemens is revered now, but what’s typically ignored is Twain’s opposition to the U.S. becoming a global imperial power.

In 1898, he helped found the Anti-Imperialist League and wrote in 1900: “I have read carefully the Treaty of Paris [between the United States and Spain], and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem. ... And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.”

Of course, U.S. colonialism actually goes back to its own roots as a settler colonial state against the native peoples of North America.

Though Spain is still a NATO member and gave NATO support during the 2011 bombing of Libya (which has led to a massive disaster there), Madrid at least took a step away from the abyss with some positive results. This is in contrast to “leaders” in Paris, London, Washington and elsewhere who are plunging headlong into it.

In 2013, a British soldier was killed in the English town of Woolwich, a southeast part of London. Michael Adebolajo, one of the killers, explained his aim in vivid terms – literally with blood and knives in hand:

“Remove your governments, they don’t care about you. You think David Cameron is going to get caught in the street when we start busting our guns? You think politicians are going to die? No, it’s going to be the average guy, like you and your children. So get rid of them. Tell them to bring our troops back so can all live in peace. So leave our lands and we can all live in peace. That’s all I have to say.” [[transcript and video](#)]

People should listen closely for motive to better understand the choices before us.

Sam Hussein is communications director for the **Institute for Public Accuracy**.

Follow him on twitter: [@samhusseini](#). Research assistance: Michael Getzler.

The Collision Course in Syria

Exclusive: President Obama's continued insistence on "regime change" in Syria and his support for Sunni jihadists not called ISIS have escalated tensions with Moscow, especially after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane along the Syrian border. This division may help only the extremists, writes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

With Turkey downing a Russian Su-24 warplane along the Turkish-Syrian border this week, dire predictions about the dangers of escalation in the Syrian conflict are coming true. Events are spinning out of control as Syria turns into a happy hunting ground for military forces locked on a mutual collision course.

Up to 50 U.S. Special Operations troops are due to enter Syria shortly in support of a hastily assembled Arab-Kurdish coalition that could easily come under Russian or Turkish attack. The U.S. is stepping up its bombing raids, destroying another 238 ISIS fuel trucks in eastern Syria last weekend. Russia is targeting tankers plus an ISIS training camp in Idlib in Syria's far north, while France has also upped its bombing campaign since Nov. 13 in response to ISIS claiming credit for the terror attacks in Paris.

If Turkey seemed to be holding back from joining the fight against ISIS, the fact that ethnically-related Syrian Turkmen villagers have come into Russia's line of fire as part of Moscow's broader attack on Islamic militants seeking to overthrow the Syrian government may have been a significant factor in persuading Turkey to enter the fray by shooting down the Russian plane.

So, Turkey is fighting the Russians and Kurds, who are fighting ISIS, which is fighting the Syrian government plus Hezbollah and Iranian forces. ISIS has also blown up a Russian tourist flight over the Sinai, set off suicide bombs in Beirut and shot up civilians in Paris. It's a three- or four-way brawl that grows more chaotic by the week.

The day before the Paris attacks, President Barack Obama told ABC *This Week's* George Stephanopoulos that ISIS has been "contained" in its caliphate in northern Syria and Iraq. But now it is clear that ISIS has not been contained at all. Along with Al Qaeda, which claimed credit for a bloody assault on an upscale hotel in Bamako, Mali, ISIS is metastasizing across half the globe while many of the world's leading powers throw themselves into the maelstrom.

A lot of people have had a hand in creating this perfect storm, but there is no question who has played the leading role, i.e. the United States. From the moment Obama declared in August 2011 that “the time has come for President Assad to step aside,” the “indispensable nation” has played an indispensable part in helping Turkey and the Arab Gulf states turn Syria into a bleeding wound.

Obama claimed to be seeking a democratic solution to Syria’s growing civil war, and initially the claim did not seem implausible. After all, he had a lot of important forces on his side. One was Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, hailed by not only the White House but the Washington Post and New York Times as living proof that Islamism and democracy could be successfully combined.

Another was Saudi Arabia, a country synonymous with “moderation” as far as official Washington is concerned, plus the other Gulf states as well. Economically flush after oil had stabilized at \$100 a barrel, the petro-sheiks promised to help with “regime change” in Syria, so how could Obama go wrong?

One Wrench?

From this viewpoint, there was one wrench in the works Iran. A key backer of the Assad government, it was a regional threat that many Western experts agreed had to be put in its place. Never mind that these same experts had almost unanimously backed George W. Bush’s disastrous invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq – their arguments carried the day regardless.

Thus, Obama’s Syria policy all but wrote itself. Overthrowing Assad in order to curtail Iranian influence would be the chief goal, while funding would come from the Gulf states. Working with Syrian exiles in southern Turkey, the C.I.A. would see to it that the arms and money reached the right rebel groups.

It all seemed so simple. Tinkers to Evers to Chance: with so many “moderates” playing ball, “moderation” would surely emerge triumphant.

But the effort soon encountered bumps in the road. With mobs chanting “Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the coffin,” Syrian opponents of Assad soon turned out to be less democratic than previously believed. With Syrian minorities not just Alawites, but Christians, Druze, Yazidis, and others huddling in fear over the prospect of a militant Sunni victory, growing numbers threw their support behind Assad. So did Sunnis appalled at the prospect of returning to a mullah dictatorship that the Baathist government had successfully overthrown.

The local forces working with the C.I.A. in Turkey turned out to be members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the militant fundamentalist outfit whose longtime slogan declares: “Allah is our objective; the Qur’an is the Constitution; the prophet

is our leader; jihad is our way; death for the sake of Allah is our wish.” Erdoğan turned out to be an authoritarian drawn to ever more extreme forms of Sunni Islam while the Gulf states turned out to be autocratic, no surprise for anyone remotely familiar with their political structures. Instead of democrats, they therefore channeled money to Sunni extremists eager to drown Shi’ite resistance in blood.

Although the White House did its best to avert its eyes, Al Qaeda was also a growing force among the rebels, as was ISIS (also known as Islamic State, ISIL or Daesh). Rather than “moderation,” such forces stood for sectarianism, bigotry and jihad.

Massive Miscalculation

A quarter of a million people would eventually die as a consequence of Obama’s miscalculation, 7.6 million would be displaced, and another four million would be driven abroad, all this in a country of just 22 million prior to the onset of civil war.

To put this in perspective, it is as if 3.6 million Americans had died as a result of a foreign-financed civil war, 110 million had been driven out of their homes, and another 58 million had been forced to flee abroad to Canada, Mexico or whatever other country would take them, where they would have no choice but to beg or perhaps sell ballpoint pens to passers-by in hopes of scratching out a living.

Instead of democracy, the U.S.-led push to overthrow Assad put Syria on the path to catastrophe. Obama could have hit the pause button at any point once it became clear where the effort was going.

The period following the August 2013 Ghouta poison gas attack, when it became clear that the rush to blame Assad had nearly led to an all-out NATO assault, would have been a good moment for a reappraisal. But the timing was wrong. The Saudis, Turks, and Israelis were all uneasy that Obama was seeking a rapprochement with Iran, and they would have been doubly spooked if Obama had backed off from his vow to overthrow Assad. Hence, Obama felt he had no choice but to double down. Destroying Syria was easier than disrupting key Middle Eastern alliances.

Something similar would later occur in Yemen. As U.S. and Iranian negotiators edged closer and closer to a deal on Iran’s nuclear program, the Obama administration had to be ever more sensitive to its allies’ concerns. This was especially the case with Saudi Arabia, the dominant power in the region, which was alert for the slightest indication that Washington was tipping in favor of

its archenemy.

After pouring “hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of military weapons” into the anti-Shi’ite struggle in Syria, as Joe Biden would put it; sending troops to put an end to democratic demonstrations into Shi’ite-majority Bahrain, and then savagely repressing Shi’ite protests in their own Eastern Province, the Saudis decided that the time had come to suppress yet another Shi’ite force.

This was the Shi’ite Houthi tribesmen in Yemen who had risen in revolt against a rising tide of Saudi-funded Sunni-Wahhabist radicalism. Claiming that the Houthis were nothing more than a cat’s paw for Iran, the Saudis, backed by most of the other Gulf states, commenced nightly bomb raids that quickly reduced the already impoverished country to ruin.

This would have been another appropriate time to hit the pause button. After signing on to the anti-Shi’ite crusade in Syria, Obama might have decided that one jihad was enough. But instead he ordered the Pentagon to provide technical backup for the Saudi war machine, selling the kingdom \$1.29 billion worth of smart bombs to replace those used to flatten Yemeni neighborhoods and sending airborne tankers to refuel Saudi fighters in mid-flight so they could reach their targets.

By Nov. 13, U.S. tankers had flown some 471 refueling sorties, delivering more than 17 million pounds of fuel. As a result, more than 2,500 civilians have died, according to UN estimates, while health, water, and sanitation services have all been brought to the brink of collapse.

“The reason the Saudis are there conducting these airstrikes,” State Department spokesman Mark Toner said earlier this month, “is because of the ongoing violence stoked by Houthi rebels.” If translated into straight talk, he was saying that the Saudi Wahhabists are right because they are an essential ally of the United States while Shi’ites are wrong because they are not. The importance of maintaining the Washington-Riyadh axis trumps all other considerations.

Worsening Violence

The upshot has been widening waves of sectarianism and violence. Although few Western observers will admit it, Assad has done the world a service simply by hanging on. If he hadn’t, a path would have been cleared for an ISIS takeover in Damascus, the consequences of which are all but incalculable.

With Islamic State’s black banners flying from the presidential palace, there would not be a million refugees pounding on European doors, but three, four or maybe five times that number. Instead of 130 dead in Paris, there would be

thousands as ISIS used its control of an entire nation-state to launch more and more attacks.

The Saudis wouldn't care since they have all but closed their doors to the refugees, few of whom want to live in bizarre and brutal theocracy in the first place. But the resultant tidal wave would all but swamp Europe, pumping up xenophobia to ever higher levels.

Since the Paris attacks, the ultra-right has been on the march from one end of the Continent to the other. In France, where Marine Le Pen is surging in the polls, the possibility of a National Front victory in the 2017 presidential elections can no longer be dismissed. In Germany, the anti-immigrant Pegida movement is drawing record crowds. In Prague, Czech President MiloÅi Zeman recently addressed an anti-Muslim rally.

In the Polish city of Wroclaw, nationalists chanting "God, honor, and Fatherland" recently burned an orthodox Jew in effigy at an anti-immigrant demonstration in the Polish city of WrocÅ,aw. (Go to 3:30 for footage of the burning.) The twisted thinking apparently is that since international forces are seemingly flooding Poland with refugees, Jews must somehow be responsible.

In Ukraine, ultra-rightists told a crowd of 500 people in Kiev that their country was in the "grip of the world Zionist conspiracy."

All this is without ISIS seizing state power in Syria, so imagine what would happen if it did. Obama should be careful what he wishes for since he just might get it.

Turkey's downing of a Russian Su-24 is yet more good news for ISIS. All at once, French President FranÅois Hollande's dreams of a united front with Russia against Al Qaeda and ISIS have been dashed. Obama's told-you-so tone at his press conference with Hollande on Nov. 24 was revealing.

The incident, Obama told reporters, "points to an ongoing problem with the Russian operations in the sense that they are operating very close to a Turkish border, and they are going after a moderate opposition that are supported by not only Turkey but a wide range of countries. And if Russia is directing its energies towards Daesh and ISIL, some of those conflicts, or potentials for mistakes or escalation, are less likely to occur."

In other words, if Russia doesn't want to lose more planes, it should cooperate with the West's strategy of avoiding attacks on Sunni jihadists not directly connected to ISIS.

"The challenge," Obama went on, "has been Russia's focus on propping up Assad

rather than focusing on ISIL. It's difficult because if their priority is attacking the moderate opposition that might be future members of an inclusive Syrian government, Russia is not going to get the support of us or a range of other members of the coalition."

This is the "moderate" opposition that on Monday appealed to Al Nusra to sever ties with Al Qaeda and cooperate with the rest of the rebel movement. "I call on the honorable Syrian revolutionaries in this group" said Khaled Khoja, leader of the Syrian National Coalition, the main opposition body, "to return to the broad umbrella of the Syrian revolution and spare the country further destruction."

If Khoja regards the head-choppers of Al Nusra as honorable revolutionaries, then what does it say about the rebel opposition as a whole? Isn't it yet another example of expanding the definition of "moderate" to include Sunni sectarians who want to turn Syria into an Islamic state?

Patrick Cockburn, the London *Independent's* estimable Middle East correspondent, recently pointed out that ISIS can only be defeated "when its many enemies are more united." But with Turkey shooting down a Russian plane and Obama refusing to cooperate with Russia as long as it cooperates with Assad, those claiming to oppose ISIS have never been more splintered.

Thanks to this continued U.S. insistence on "regime change," extremist prospects are looking up.

Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).

In the Dark on the 'Dark Side'

The "War on Terror" now more than 14 years long has trapped the U.S. and other nations in the "dark side" of human behavior, a dilemma that is both moral and practical because the continued use of brutal methods has only made the crisis worse, as Nicolas J S Davies explains.

By Nicolas J S Davies

France and Russia's military responses to mass murders in Paris and Egypt echo the United States' response to mass murders in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania in 2001. As Oxford University researcher Lydia Wilson told Democracy Now on Nov. 17, Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh) is

“seemingly delighted” by this warlike response to its latest atrocities.

In several interviews, Lydia Wilson has cited Abu Bakr Naji’s *The Management of Savagery* as a “playbook” that ISIS appears to be following closely. Naji called for mass murders in foreign cities and tourist destinations as part of a strategy to draw foreign powers into unwinnable wars that would spread chaos, fuel jihadism and leave Muslim fundamentalist groups in control of more and more of the Muslim world.

This builds on Al Qaeda’s original strategy, which counted on an aggressive response to the 9/11 attacks to expose the iron fist inside the velvet glove of U.S. “soft power” and the hollowness of the U.S. government’s commitment to civil liberties, human rights and the rule of law. Al Qaeda astutely turned its enemy’s military superiority into a liability by provoking the U.S. to unleash disastrous wars on Muslim countries.

The U.S. invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and the concentration camp at Guantanamo became the most valuable assets in Al Qaeda’s propaganda and recruiting campaigns, now complemented by the terror of drone strikes and bombing campaigns in Syria and Iraq.

As the UN Human Rights Commissioner, Prince Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein of Jordan, told the Council on Foreign Relations on Nov. 16, “it seems that the defenses against chaos and bloodshed that states erected at the close of the Second World War, the laws they wrote and swore to abide by, the agreements and treaties they signed, are giving way to increasing action bound by no principle or any foresight. ... Much of the Middle East and North Africa is gripped in deadly conflict with constant, now almost routine, violations of the norms that should protect civilians, and even proxy warfare with greater powers engaged in combat rather than in making peace.”

To briefly take stock of 14 years of war, which our leaders launched and continue to justify as a response to terrorism:

–The U.S. and its allies have conducted over 120,000 air strikes against seven countries, exploding fundamentalist jihadism from its original base in Afghanistan to an active presence in all seven countries and beyond.

–The U.S. and its allies have invaded and occupied Afghanistan for 14 years, Iraq for over eight years, and destroyed Libya, Syria and Yemen for good measure.

–By conservative estimates, U.S.-led wars have killed about 1.6 million people, mostly civilians. That is 500 times the number of people killed by the original crimes in the United States. Disproportionate use of force and geographic

expansion of the conflict by our side has ensured an endless proliferation of violence on all sides.

–War, occupation and human rights abuses have driven 59.5 million people from their homes, more than at any time since the Second World War.

–Since 2001, the U.S. has borrowed and spent \$3.3 trillion in additional military spending to pay for the largest unilateral military build-up in history, but less than half the extra funding has been spent on current wars. (See Carl Conetta’s 2010 paper, “An Undisciplined Defense”, for more analysis of the Pentagon’s “spending surge.”)

When U.S. support for Muslim fundamentalist jihadis in Afghanistan led to the most catastrophic blowback in our history on Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. government declared a “global war on terror” against them. But less than a decade later, it once again began recruiting, training and arming Muslim fundamentalists to fight in Libya and Syria.

The U.S. also made the largest arms sale in history to Saudi Arabia, which is already ruled by a dynasty of Muslim fundamentalists whose role in the 9/11 crimes remains a closely guarded secret. It was only when ISIS invaded Iraq in 2014 that the U.S. government was finally forced to rethink its covert support for such groups in Syria. It has yet to seriously reconsider its alliances with their state sponsors: Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar and other Arab monarchies.

Throughout the past 14 years, whenever the fear of terrorism has temporarily receded, the U.S. government has quickly redirected its threats and uses of military force, covert operations and propaganda to a completely different purpose: destabilizing and overthrowing a laundry-list of internationally recognized governments, in Venezuela, Iraq, Honduras, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and around the world.

In these operations, the U.S. government has never balked at allying with violent groups whom it would be quick to condemn as “terrorists” if they were on the other side. The American people are being treated to a new version of President Ronald Reagan’s comical division of violent groups into “terrorists” and “freedom fighters” based on their relationship to U.S. policy.

In more recent years, patriotic Iraqis who resisted the illegal invasion of their country were “terrorists” and armed neo-Nazis in Ukraine were first noble “protesters” and are now part of a new “National Guard.”

Each new U.S. military operation is justified as a response to some new crisis, while the U.S. role in creating these crises in the first place is obscured (with increasing difficulty) behind funhouse mirrors of secrecy and propaganda.

This pattern of opportunistic uses of force was exactly the strategy outlined by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld within hours of the mass murders on Sept. 11, 2001. CBS News obtained a copy of Undersecretary Stephen Cambone's notes from a meeting amid the ruins of the Pentagon at 2:40 p.m. that day. Cambone quoted Rumsfeld saying, "Judge whether good enough hit S.H. (Saddam Hussein) at same time – not only UBL (Usama Bin Laden) ... Go massive. Sweep it all up. Things related and not."

In a recent article about the record U.S. military budget, I explained that President Obama's annual military budgets have (on average and after adjusting for inflation) been higher than George W. Bush's, 60 percent higher than President Bill Clinton's and 2½ times what bipartisan experts recommended to the Senate Budget Committee at the end of the Cold War. The U.S. military is now more generously funded than the rest of the ten largest militaries in the world combined.

Investing our nation's wealth in military forces and deadly weapons and deploying them all over the world is not just a tragic waste in terms of all the unmet human needs in our country and the world. It's dangerous. By building a global war machine designed to fight anybody anywhere, while rejecting all legal and political constraints on how it may be used, U.S. leaders have set the stage for endless, unwinnable, global war.

As Prince Zeid suggested, the U.S. government has turned its back on the legitimate infrastructure of collective security enshrined in the UN Charter and international law, and reverted to something more primitive: the law of the jungle or "might makes right."

By fostering the dangerous illusion that illegal threats and uses of U.S. military force can replace the collective will of humanity and the rule of international law as the ultimate arbiter of international affairs, U.S. leaders have set us on a collision course with history.

When the U.S. invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia and China remained on the sidelines. Their oil companies even bid for contracts on new oilfields in Iraq, and Russia allowed the U.S. to ship war supplies through its territory to Afghanistan. In 2011, Russia and China both abstained from a UN Security Council resolution for a "no fly zone" supposedly to protect civilians in Libya when they could have simply vetoed it.

But when the U.S. and its allies abused that resolution to depose and butcher Muammar Gaddafi and plunge Libya into chaos, then transitioned quickly to launch an even bloodier proxy war in Syria, China and Russia finally accepted that the U.S. war machine was really out of control. The U.S. was treating their efforts

at appeasement as a green light for aggression that would sooner or later threaten them directly.

In 2012, Russia increased its military budget by 15 percent, the largest annual increase since Vladimir Putin was elected President in 2000. After the destruction of Libya, Russia concluded that it was essential to face down U.S. aggression and that the catastrophic failures of U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya provided an opening for Russian diplomacy to start pushing back.

The U.S. responded to Russia's support for the Syrian government by engineering a coup against an even more strategic Russian ally in Ukraine. The Western-backed coup threatened to roll NATO expansion right up to Russia's border and sail NATO warships into its most strategic naval base at Sevastopol.

Russia responded by accepting Crimea's request to restore its 230-year-old ties with Russia (94 percent of Crimeans had already voted for independence from Ukraine in 1991). Russia also supported the "Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics" in their resistance to the new Western-backed government in Kiev.

U.S. allies in Europe initially supported the U.S. campaign to isolate and sanction Russia over the chaos in Ukraine, but now France and Germany are working with Russia and Ukraine to implement the Minsk agreements, which are gradually restoring peace to Ukraine.

Until recently, Russia played a deft diplomatic hand without being directly drawn into combat in Syria or Ukraine. But now Russia has joined the free-for-all bombing of Syria. ISIS has responded by blowing up a Russian airliner over Egypt's Sinai. Russia has in turn escalated its aerial bombardment of jihadist targets inside Syria. Last week, Turkey shot down an Su-24 warplane along the Syrian border.

It seems that Russia is being drawn into the same escalating cycle of violence as the U.S. and its allies. Much depends on the results of the diplomatic process in Vienna and on the willingness of all the external powers involved in the war in Syria to allow the people of Syria to decide their own political future. That includes the U.S. and its allies just as much as Russia and Iran.

On a larger scale, it is vital for us to recognize that the United States, by authorizing the use of military force in 2001, became a party to this open-ended conflict and shares the responsibility for escalating or resolving it. Demonizing America's "enemies" is not a responsible or legitimate pretext for endlessly escalating an ill-defined war that has killed far more civilians than combatants.

But by declaring that we are at war with "terror," "Muslim extremism,"

“associated forces” or whoever our leaders decide we’re at war with from one week to the next, the U.S. government has foreclosed many of the ways that wars are usually brought to an end. We cannot meet “terror” at the negotiating table.

The international military competition to “destroy” ISIS at whatever cost in civilian death and destruction, is an irresistible chance for the U.S., Russia, France and the U.K. to display and market their latest weapons technology. But it will not end the “war on terror.” Even a superficially successful military campaign against ISIS in Syria and Iraq will instead hasten the next mutation of jihadism and drive even more Muslims from around the world into its ranks.

Even President Obama has acknowledged that there is no military way out of the trap that he and other U.S. officials have unwittingly collaborated with the “terrorists” to set for us. Yet he still soldiers on blindly as if there are no non-military alternatives either.

But there are and always have been specific policy changes that the U.S. government could make if it were serious about ending this horrific cycle of violence:

–Repeal the 2001 and 2002 Congressional Authorizations for the Use of Military Force, which have become blank checks for endless war. Reps. Lee (D), Amash (R) and Massie (R) have introduced bills in Congress to do that: HR 1303 (to repeal the 2001 AUMF) and HR 1304 (to repeal the 2002 AUMF).

–Close the U.S. concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Every prisoner must either be released or be granted a free and fair trial in a real court.

–Stop threatening, bombing and attacking Muslim countries – and other ones too.

–Stop destabilizing and overthrowing internationally-recognized governments.

–End drone strikes and comply with long-standing executive orders prohibiting assassination as an instrument of U.S. policy.

–Shut down the “rat-line” of U.S. weapons to jihadi groups everywhere.

–Enforce existing U.S. laws that prohibit arms sales to governments that commit war crimes or human rights abuses, with no exceptions for U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia, Israel or Iraq.

–Stop using the U.S. veto to block majority decisions of the UN Security Council on Israel and Palestine.

–Publicly recommit to full compliance with the UN Charter, the Geneva

Conventions and the rule of international law.

–Restore command accountability under U.S. law for war crimes ordered or sanctioned by senior U.S. military and civilian officials.

If these steps seem radical or “politically impossible,” that is only a measure of how far the United States has strayed from the basic standards of international behavior that we and other countries are committed to. But if the U.S. government refuses to take such steps, then we must recognize that we share the responsibility for perpetuating the horrors of this conflict.

As the late historian and former U.S. Air Force bombardier Howard Zinn wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* in 2007, “The terrorism of the suicide bomber and the terrorism of aerial bombardment are indeed morally equivalent. To say otherwise (as either side might) is to give one moral superiority over the other, and thus serve to perpetuate the horrors of our time.”

On the other hand, if we can restore some legitimacy to U.S. policy, we can begin to regain the moral and legal ground from which to respond effectively to terrorism. If or when there is another mass murder like the ones in the U.S. in 2001 or the recent ones in Egypt, Lebanon and France, we must respond to it as a heinous crime rather than as an act of war, as former Nuremberg prosecutor Benjamin Ferencz insisted in the aftermath of 9/11.

Those responsible must be identified, pursued, arrested and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, with only as much help from the military as is needed to bring them to justice. But as Ferencz warned in 2001, their crimes must not be allowed to become a pretext for wreaking misdirected vengeance on other countries and innocent lives.

This is how we will defeat terrorism – theirs and ours.

Nicolas J S Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapters on “Obama at War” in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader*.

Turkey Provokes Russia with Shoot-down

Exclusive: Turkey appears to have deliberately shot down a Russian warplane as a provocation designed to escalate tensions between NATO and Russia, a ploy that seems to have sucked in President Obama as he tries to look tough against Russia

to appease his neocon critics, writes Robert Parry. (Update: Russia says one airman saved.)

By Robert Parry

President Barack Obama always sensitive to neocon criticism that he's "weak" continues to edge the world closer to a nuclear confrontation with Russia as he talks tough and tolerates more provocations against Moscow, now including Turkey's intentional shoot-down of a Russian warplane along the Turkish-Syrian border.

Rather than rebuke Turkey, a NATO member, for its reckless behavior or express sympathy to the Russians Obama instead asserted that "Turkey, like every country, has a right to defend its territory and its airspace."

It was another one of Obama's breathtaking moments of hypocrisy, since he has repeatedly violated the territorial integrity of various countries, including in Syria where he has authorized bombing without the government's permission and has armed rebels fighting to overthrow Syria's secular regime.

Obama's comment on Turkey's right to shoot down planes – made during a joint press conference with French President Francois Hollande on Tuesday – was jarring, too, because there was no suggestion that even if the SU-24 jetfighter had strayed briefly into Turkish territory, which the Russians deny, that it was threatening Turkish targets.

Russian President Vladimir Putin angrily called the Turkish attack a "stab in the back delivered by the accomplices of terrorists." He warned of "serious consequences for Russian-Turkish relations."

Further provoking the Russians, Turkish-backed Syrian rebels then killed the Russian pilot riddling his body with bullets as he and the navigator parachuted from the doomed plane and were floating toward the ground. (Update: On Wednesday, the Russian defense minister said the navigator was alive and was rescued by Syrian and Russian special forces.)

Another Russian soldier was killed when a U.S.-supplied TOW missile brought down a Russian helicopter on a search-and-rescue mission, according to reports.

But Obama, during the news conference, seemed more interested in demonstrating his disdain for Putin, referring to him at one point by his last name only, without the usual use of a courtesy title, and demeaning the size of Putin's coalition in helping Syria battle the jihadist rebels.

"We've got a coalition of 65 countries who have been active in pushing back

against ISIL for quite some time,” Obama said, citing the involvement of countries around the world. “Russia right now is a coalition of two, Iran and Russia, supporting [Syrian President Bashar al-] Assad.”

However, there have been doubts about the seriousness of Obama’s coalition, which includes Sunni countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which have been covertly supporting some of the jihadist elements, including Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front and its ally, Ahrar al-Sham.

Syrian rebels, including jihadists fighting with Ahrar al-Sham, have received hundreds of U.S. TOW anti-tank missiles, apparently through Sunni regional powers with what I’ve been told was Obama’s direct approval. The jihadists have celebrated their use of TOWs to kill tank crews of the Syrian army. Yet Obama talks about every country’s right to defend its territory.

Obama and the U.S. mainstream media also have pretended that the only terrorists that need to be fought in Syria are those belonging to the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh), but Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front and its ally, Ahrar al-Sham, which was founded in part by Al Qaeda veterans, make up the bulk of the Turkish-and-Saudi-backed Army of Conquest which was gaining ground with the help of those American TOW missiles until Russia intervened with air power at the request of Syrian President Assad in late September.

The SU-24 Shoot-down

As for the circumstances surrounding the Turkish shoot-down of the Russian SU-24, Turkey claimed to have radioed ten warnings over five minutes to the Russian pilots but without getting a response. However, the New York Times reported that a diplomat who attended a NATO meeting in which Turkey laid out its account said “the Russian SU-24 plane was over the Hatay region of Turkey for about 17 seconds when it was struck.”

How those two contradictory time frames matched up was not explained. However, if the 17-second time frame is correct, it appears that Turkey intended to shoot down a Russian plane whether over its territory or not to send a message that it would not permit Russia to continue attacking Turkish-backed rebels in Syria.

After shooting down the plane, Turkey sought an emergency NATO meeting to support its attack. Though some NATO members reportedly consider Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan a loose cannon, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg declared that the allies “stand in solidarity with Turkey.”

Further increasing the prospect of a dangerous escalation, NATO has been conducting large-scale military exercises near the Russian border in response to the Ukraine crisis.

Erdogan's government also appears to have dabbled in dangerous provocations before, including the alleged role of Turkish intelligence in helping jihadist rebels stage a lethal sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, with the goal of blaming Assad's military and tricking Obama into launching punitive airstrikes that would have helped clear the way for a jihadist victory.

Obama only pulled back at the last minute amid doubts among U.S. intelligence analysts about who was responsible for the sarin attack. Later evidence pointed to a jihadist provocation with possible Turkish assistance, but the Obama administration has never formally retracted its allegations blaming Assad's forces.

One motive for Erdogan to go along with the sarin "false flag" attack in 2013 would have been that his two-year campaign to overthrow the Assad government was sputtering, a situation similar to today with the Russian military intervention hammering jihadist positions and putting the Syrian army back on the offensive.

By shooting down a Russian plane and then rushing to NATO with demands for retaliation against Russia, Erdogan is arguably playing a similar game, trying to push the United States and European countries into a direct confrontation with Russia while also sabotaging Syrian peace talks in Vienna all the better to advance his goal of violently ousting Assad from power.

The Neocon Agenda

Escalating tensions with Russia also plays into the hands of America's neoconservatives who have viewed past cooperation between Putin and Obama as a threat to the neocon agenda of "regime change," which began in Iraq in 2003 and was supposed to continue into Syria and Iran with the goal of removing governments deemed hostile to Israel.

After the sarin gas attack in 2013, the prospect for the U.S. bombing Syria and paving the way for Assad's military defeat looked bright, but Putin and Obama cooperated to defuse the sarin gas crisis. The two teamed up again to advance negotiations to constrain Iran's nuclear program an impediment to neocon hopes for bombing Iran, too.

However, in late 2013 and early 2014, that promising Putin-Obama collaboration was blasted apart in Ukraine with American neocons playing key roles, including National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman, Sen. John McCain and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland.

The neocons targeted the elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich, recognizing how sensitive Ukraine was to Russia. The Feb. 22, 2014 coup, which was spearheaded by neo-Nazis and other extreme Ukrainian nationalists,

established a fiercely anti-Russian regime in Kiev and provoked what quickly took on the look of a new Cold War.

When the heavily ethnic Russian population of Crimea, which had voted overwhelmingly for Yanukovich, reacted to the coup by voting 96 percent to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia, the neocon-dominated U.S. mainstream media pronounced the referendum a “sham” and the secession a Russian “invasion.” Cold War hysteria followed.

However, in the nearly two years since the Ukraine coup, it has become increasingly clear that the new regime in Kiev is not the shining light that the neocons and the mainstream media pretended it was. It appears to be as corrupt as the old one, if not more so. Plus, living standards of average Ukrainians have plunged.

The recent flooding of Europe with Syrian refugees over the summer and this month’s Paris terror attacks by Islamic State jihadists also have forced European officials to take events in Syria more seriously, prompting a growing interest in a renewed cooperation with Russia’s Putin.

That did not sit well with ultranationalist Ukrainians angered at the reduced interest in the Ukraine crisis. These activists have forced their dispute with Russia back into the newspapers by destroying power lines supplying electricity to Crimea, throwing much of the peninsula into darkness. Their goal seems to be to ratchet up tensions again between Russia and the West.

Now, Turkey’s shoot-down of the SU-24 and the deliberate murder of the two Russian pilots have driven another wedge between NATO countries and Russia, especially if President Obama and other NATO leaders continue taking Turkey’s side in the incident.

But the larger question indeed the existential question is whether Obama will continue bowing to neocon demands for tough talk against Putin even if doing so risks pushing tensions to a level that could spill over into a nuclear confrontation.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Going Nativist on Syrian Refugees

The political opportunism over Syrian refugees from Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and other GOP presidential candidates is one of the uglier features of the growing hysteria over terrorism. It also reflects a recurring strain of nativism that has infected the U.S. public at times of stress, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar recalls.

By Paul R. Pillar

A couple of days ago, President Barack Obama made an appropriate refinement to how he describes the discriminatory and xenophobic tendencies that have become all too obvious in debate and posturing in the United States on issues related to Syria, ISIS, the Paris attacks, and refugees.

A week earlier at [a press conference](#) in Turkey, in expressing dismay at how “those who have taken on leadership” in the party of George W. Bush ignore how Mr. Bush had made clear that counterterrorism was not a war on Islam, Mr. Obama said, “That’s not who we are.”

This past weekend, in [remarks in Malaysia](#), the President said that some of the excuses being made for Americans to reject Syrian refugees are “not representative of the best of who we are.” Inclusion of the qualifier *the best* is important. Although American history has featured the concept of the melting pot and the idea of a new people being created and enriched by the inclusion of diverse other peoples without regard to ethnicity or religion, the United States also has had an ignoble strain of bias and nativism.

That strain has repeatedly surfaced throughout the nation’s history, stimulated at different times by different fears and issues. Sometimes such prejudice has been targeted narrowly at some groups and in favor of others, which, in a sense, is the only kind of racial or ethnic bias one should be able to find in a nation of immigrants.

This is true of the “Cubans si, Syrians no” approach to the admission of refugees that has become [a sore point](#) for certain presidential candidates who have been challenged about it. But underlying the specific manifestations has been a primitive, fearful way of looking at one’s circumstances and at the world that says much more about the looker than about the target of the bias. It is a state of mind that involves prejudice against everyone not entirely like oneself. It is a state of mind that [Mel Brooks satirized](#) four decades ago in

Blazing Saddles.

One of the most politically significant past manifestations of the nativist strain was the Know-Nothing Party (officially, the American Party), which enjoyed some electoral success in the 1850s. The Know-Nothing platform centered around opposition to immigrants and especially to Catholic immigrants from Ireland and Germany (although the party sought the support of native-born Catholics in the South).

The party reached the peak of its strength in 1854, when it won 52 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives (more than one-fifth of the chamber) and won control of several large northern cities and the Massachusetts legislature. In the presidential election of 1856 the Know-Nothing ticket (led by former President Millard Fillmore, who did not seek the nomination) won 22 percent of the popular vote nationwide and carried the state of Maryland.

Later upsurges of nativism were mixed with other forms of bias, such as in the heyday of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. Repeatedly there has been a reluctance to welcome foreign refugees, including Jews fleeing Nazism in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, despite America being a nation of immigrants. Fear of terrorism also has gotten mixed into issues of immigration, as when activity of Lebanese Hezbollah in South America led to imaginary scenarios of terrorists wading into the United States across the Rio Grande.

Now fear of terrorism is again getting infused into issues of immigration and asylum for refugees. Such infusion has little or no merit. It is questionable whether it has merit even in Europe, where the attacks in Paris, accompanied by reports of some of the perpetrators having gotten into the flow of refugees from the Middle East, have fed similar fears on that side of the Atlantic. All of the attackers identified so far are nationals of European Union countries, and the reports of infiltration of refugee flows may be false.

Even assuming the worst as it applies to Europe, the situation in the United States is far different from that in Europe, with its huge numbers of refugees walking across the Balkans and some of them squeezing through border fences. Any sophisticated and reasonably well-heeled terrorist group would be stupid to rely on a U.S. refugee program to move operatives into the United States, given the very time-consuming and detailed vetting process involved. It would be quicker and easier to do so with tourist or business visas, as the 9/11 hijackers did.

The refugee asylum issue is being treated as it is in U.S. political debate because of the same sort of nativist inclinations that have repeatedly surfaced in the past. One indication of this is how big a role anti-immigrant themes had played in the contest for the Republican presidential nomination even before the

events in Paris.

The Republican campaign also demonstrates how much the whole set of attitudes involved has become another of the multitude of issues and attitudes in this country that demonstrate a marked partisan split. The split is not total and clean, and it never has been with American nativism.

The mayor of Roanoke, Virginia who approvingly referred to the internment of Japanese Americans (whom he mistakenly described as “Japanese foreign nationals”) during World War II is a Democrat. And 47 of the 188 Democrats in the House of Representatives voted in favor of the recent bill that would curtail even the current small numbers of grants of asylum to Syrian refugees. But Republican support in the House for the same bill was a near-unanimous 242 votes.

The leading Republican candidate for the presidential nomination has indicated he would support establishment of a registry of Muslim Americans, although he later maybe backed off a bit, blaming loud music for the way he had answered a question on that subject. His opponents for the nomination have tried to match his appeal to the sentiments involved by advancing ideas such as that only Christians and not Muslims should be admitted as refugees from deadly turmoil in the Middle East.

Islamophobia has been the dominant sub-thread in the most recent manifestation of the longstanding nativist, prejudicial thread in American attitudes. It too, demonstrates a marked partisan difference. Given the way Americans take many of their cues from leaders of whichever party they identify with, it is hard to say which came first, the demos or the demagogue.

What can be said is that themes along this line in the Republican primary campaign are appeals to attitudes that opinion polling confirms exist in the party base. In a recent Bloomberg poll, a large majority of Republicans, 69 percent, versus only 36 percent of Democrats, opposed admitting any Syrian refugees to the United States.

This finding is very likely related to attitudes uncovered by the question that the pollsters asked immediately before that and gets closer to tapping Islamophobia. Nearly twice as many Republicans as Democrats (32 percent to 17 percent), believed that “Islam is an inherently violent religion, which leads its followers to violent acts” rather than being a peaceful religion with “some who twist its teachings to justify violence.”

There are respectable ways to debate related questions about a religion that expanded in large part by the sword, but it is a safe bet that the answers of

the vast majority of respondents in this poll were not based on a study of Islamic history or exegesis of the Koran.

The rise and decline of the Know-Nothings occurred in a period of much flux in the American party system. The Know-Nothings benefited from the decline of the Whig Party. But then they themselves were hurt by the same intense divisions over slavery that helped to disable the Whigs. A new party, the Republican Party, emerged and quickly ascended by being clearly and firmly on the right side of the slavery issue.

The Republican Party has performed a great reversal with regard to issues of inclusiveness or exclusiveness and the attitudes to be applied to those with characteristics or backgrounds different from one's own. From the inclusiveness of the anti-slavery cause, it now has come to fill the role of the Know-Nothings.

Unlike the Know-Nothings, it is not going away. There is no current issue comparable to slavery that has the same capacity to reshuffle the party system. And by amalgamating an issue such as immigration or asylum for refugees with issues of terrorism and security, it can present at least a verisimilitude of consistency and of having worthy reasons for its candidates to appeal to sentiments that represent not the best of who we are but rather something else.

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

Hitting Saudi Arabia Where It Hurts

Exclusive: Though faced with a global terrorism crisis, Official Washington can't get beyond its neocon-led "tough-guy-gal" rhetoric. But another option financial sanctions on Saudi Arabia might help finally shut down the covert supply of money and arms to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As the Islamic State and Al Qaeda enter a grim competition to see who can kill more civilians around the world, the fate of Western Civilization as we've known it arguably hangs in the balance. It will not take much more terror for the European Union to begin cracking up and for the United States to transform itself into a full-scale surveillance state.

Yet, in the face of this crisis, many of the same people who set us on this road to destruction continue to dominate and indeed frame the public debate. For instance, Official Washington's neocons still insist on their recipe for "regime change" in countries that they targeted 20 years ago. They also demand a new Cold War with Russia in defense of a corrupt right-wing regime in Ukraine, further destabilizing Europe and disrupting U.S.-Russian cooperation in Syria.

Given the stakes, you might think that someone in a position of power or one of the many candidates for U.S. president would offer some pragmatic and realistic ideas for addressing this extraordinary threat. But most Republicans from Marco Rubio to Carly Fiorina to Ted Cruz only offer more of "more of the same," i.e. neocon belligerence on steroids. Arguably, Donald Trump and Rand Paul are exceptions to this particular hysteria, but neither has offered a coherent and comprehensive counter-analysis.

On the Democratic side, frontrunner Hillary Clinton wins praise from the neocon editors of The Washington Post for breaking with President Barack Obama's hesitancy to fully invade Syria. Former Secretary of State Clinton wants an invasion to occupy parts of Syria as a "safe area" and to destroy Syrian (and presumably Russian) planes if they violate her "no-fly zone."

Much like the disastrous U.S. invasions of Iraq and Libya, Clinton and her neocon allies are pitching the invasion of Syria as a humanitarian venture to remove a "brutal dictator" in this case, President Bashar al-Assad as well as to "destroy" the Islamic State, which Assad's army and its Iranian-Russian allies have also been fighting. Assad's military, Iranian troops and Russian planes have hit other jihadist groups, too, such as Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham, which receives U.S. weapons as it fights side-by-side with Nusra in the Army of Conquest.

Clinton's strategy likely would protect jihadists except for the Islamic State – and thus keep hope alive for "regime change" – explaining why the Post's neocon editors, who were enthusiastic boosters of the Iraq War in 2003, hailed her hawkish approach toward Syria as "laudable."

To Clinton's left, Sen. Bernie Sanders has punted on the issue of what to do in either Syria or the Middle East, failing to offer any thoughtful ideas about what can be done to stabilize the region. He opted instead for a clever but vacuous talking point, arguing that the Saudis and other rich oil sheiks of the Persian Gulf should use their wealth and militaries to bring order to the region, to "get their hands dirty."

The problem is that the Saudis, the Qataris and the Kuwaitis along with the Turks are a big part of the problem. They have used their considerable wealth to

finance and arm Al Qaeda and its various allies and spinoffs, including the Islamic State. Their hands are already very dirty.

Saudi 'Hard Power'

What we have seen in the Middle East since the 1980s is Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states creating "hard power" for their regional ambitions by assembling paramilitary forces that are willing and even eager to lash out at "enemies," whether against Shiite rivals or Western powers.

While the wealthy Saudis, Qataris and other pampered princes don't want to become soldiers themselves, they're more than happy to exploit disaffected young Sunnis, turn them into jihadists and unleash them. Al Qaeda (dating back to the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s) and the Islamic State (emerging in resistance to the U.S.-installed Shiite regime in Iraq after 2003) are Saudi Arabia's foot soldiers.

This reality is similar to how the Reagan administration supported right-wing paramilitary forces in Central America during the 1980s, including "death squads" in El Salvador and Guatemala and the drug-tainted "Contras" in Nicaragua. These extremists were willing to do the "dirty work" that Reagan's CIA considered necessary to reverse the tide of leftist revolution in the region, but with "deniability" built in so Official Washington couldn't be directly blamed for the slaughters.

Also, in the 1980s, the Reagan administration's hardliners, including CIA Director William J. Casey, saw the value of using Islamic extremism to undermine the Soviet Union, with its official position of atheism. The CIA and the Saudis worked hand in hand in building the Afghan mujahedeen an Islamic fundamentalist movement to overthrow the Soviet-backed secular government in Kabul.

The "success" of that strategy included severe harm dealt to the struggling Soviet economy and the eventual ouster (and murder) of the Moscow-backed president, Najibullah. But the strategy also gave rise to the Taliban, which took power and installed a medieval regime, and Al Qaeda, which evolved from the Saudi and other foreign fighters (including Saudi Osama bin Laden) who had flocked to the Afghan jihad.

In effect, the Afghan experience created the modern jihadist movement and the Saudis, in particular, understood the value of this paramilitary force to punish governments and political groups that the Saudis and their oil-rich friends considered threats. Officially, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Sunni oil states could claim that they weren't behind the terrorists while letting money and arms slip through.

Though Al Qaeda and the other jihadists had their own agendas and could take independent action the Saudis and other sheiks could direct these paramilitary forces against the so-called "Shiite crescent," from Iran through Syria to Lebanon (and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, against Iraq's Shiite government as well).

At times, the jihadists also proved useful for the United States and Israel, striking at Hezbollah in Lebanon, fighting for "regime change" in Syria, collaborating in the 2011 ouster (and murder) of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, even joining forces with the U.S.-backed Ukrainian government to kill ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine.

Israeli Role

Since these Sunni jihadists were most adept at killing Shiites, they endeared themselves not only to their Saudi, Qatari and Kuwaiti benefactors, but also to Israel, which has identified Shiite-ruled Iran as its greatest strategic threat. Thus, the American neocons, who collaborate closely with Israel's right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, had mixed attitudes toward the Sunni jihadists, too.

Plus, high-profile terrorism, including the 9/11 attacks, enabled the tough-talking neocons to consolidate their control over U.S. foreign policy, diverting American fury over Al Qaeda's killing nearly 3,000 people in New York and Washington to implement the neocons' "regime change" agenda, first in Iraq though it had nothing to do with 9/11, with plans to move on to Syria and Iran.

As the Military-Industrial Complex made out like bandits with billions upon billions of dollars thrown at the "War on Terror," grateful military contractors kicked back some profits to major think tanks where neocon thinkers were employed to develop more militaristic plans. [See Consortiumnews.com's "A Family Business of Perpetual War."]

But the downside of this coziness with the Sunni jihadists has been that Al Qaeda and its spinoff, the Islamic State, perceive the West as their ultimate enemy, drawing from both historic and current injustices inflicted on the Islamic world by Europe and the United States. The terrorist leaders cite this mistreatment to recruit young people from impoverished areas of the Middle East and the urban slums of Europe and get them to strap on suicide-belts.

Thus, Al Qaeda and now the Islamic State not only advance the neocon/Israeli/Saudi agenda by launching terror attacks in Syria against Assad's government and in Lebanon against Hezbollah, but they strike out on their own against U.S. and European targets, even in Africa where Al Qaeda claimed

responsibility for last week's murderous assault on an upscale Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali.

It also appears that Al Qaeda and the Islamic State have entered into a competition over who can stage the bloodiest attacks against Westerners as a way to bolster recruitment. The Bamako attack was an attempt by Al Qaeda to regain the spotlight from the Islamic State which boasted of a vicious string of attacks on Paris, Beirut and a Russian tourist flight in the Sinai.

The consequence of these murderous rampages has been to threaten the political and economic cohesion of Europe and to increase pressures for a strengthened surveillance state inside the United States. In other words, some of the most treasured features of Western civilization personal liberty and relative affluence are being endangered.

Yet, rather than explain the real reasons for this crisis and what the possible solutions might be no one in the U.S. mainstream political world or the major media seems able or willing to talk straight to the American people about how we got here.

Sanders's Lost Opportunity

While you might have expected as much from most Republicans (who have surrounded themselves with neocon advisers) and from Hillary Clinton (who has cultivated her own ties to the neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks), you might have hoped that Sanders would have adopted a thoughtful critique of Official Washington's neocon-dominated "group think."

But instead he offers a simplistic and nonsensical prescription of demanding the Saudis do more when that would only inflict more death and destruction on the region and beyond. Arguably, the opposite would make much more sense impose tough financial sanctions against Saudi Arabia as punishment for its continued support for Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Freezing or confiscating Saudi bank accounts around the world might finally impress on the spoiled princes of the Persian Gulf oil states that there is a real price to pay for dabbling in terrorism. Such an action against Saudi Arabia also would send a message to smaller Sunni sheikdoms that they could be next. Other pressures, including possible expulsion from NATO, could be brought to bear on Turkey.

If the West finally got serious about stopping this financial and military support for Al Qaeda, the Islamic State and their jihadist allies in Syria, the violence might finally abate. And, if the United States and Europe put pressure on the "moderate" Syrian opposition whatever there is of it to compromise, a

political solution might be possible, too.

Right now, the biggest obstacle to a political agreement appears to be the U.S. insistence that President Assad be barred from elections once Syria achieves some stability. Yet, if President Obama is so certain that the Syrian people hate Assad, it seems crazy to let Assad's presumed defeat at the polls obstruct such a crucial deal.

The only explanation for this U.S. stubbornness is that the neocons and the liberal hawks have made "regime change" in Syria such a key part of their agenda that they would lose face if Assad's departure was not mandated. However, with the future of Western civilization in the balance, such obstinate behavior seems not only feckless but reckless.

From understanding how this mess was made, some U.S. politician could fashion an appeal that might have broad popular support across the political spectrum. If Sanders took up this torch for a rational plan for bringing relative peace to the Middle East, he also might shift the dynamics of the Democratic race.

Of course, to challenge Official Washington's "group think" is always dangerous. If compromise and cooperation suddenly replaced "regime change" as the U.S. goal, the neocons and liberal hawks would flip out. But the stakes are extremely high for the planet's future. Maybe saving Western civilization is worth the risk of facing down a neocon/liberal-hawk temper tantrum.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
