

Deep History of America's Deep State

Exclusive: The idea of an elitist Deep State – erasing a “mistake” by the people – pervades current efforts to remove buffoonish President Trump, but the concept has deep historical roots dating from the Founding, writes Jada Thacker.

By Jada Thacker

Everybody seems to be talking about the Deep State these days. Although the term appears to have entered the lexicon in the late 1990s, for years it referred only to shady foreign governments, certainly not to our own “indispensable nation.”

Does the sudden presence of an American Deep State – loosely defined as an unelected elite that manipulates the elected government to serve its own interests – pose a novel, even existential, threat to democracy?

Not exactly. The threat seems real enough, but it's nothing new. Consider these facts: 230 years ago, an unelected group of elite Americans held a secretive meeting with an undisclosed agenda. Their purpose was not merely to manipulate lawful government in their own interests, but to abolish it altogether. In its place, they would install a radically undemocratic government – a “more perfect” government, they said – better suited to their investment portfolios.

History does not identify these conspirators as the Deep State. It calls them the Founders. The Founders did not consider themselves conspirators, but “republicans” – not in reference to any political party, but rather to their economic station in society. But their devotion to “republicanism” was transparently self-serving. A current college text, *The American Journey: A History of the United States*, explains though does not explicate “republican ideology”:

“Their main bulwark against tyranny was civil liberty, or maintaining the right of the people to participate in government. The people who did so, however, had to demonstrate virtue. To eighteenth century republicans, virtuous citizens were those who were focused not on their private interests but rather on what was good for the public as a whole.

“They were necessarily property holders, since only those individuals could exercise an independence of judgment impossible for those dependent upon employers, landlords, masters, or (in the case of women and children) husbands and fathers.” [Emphasis supplied]

Republicanism was a handy idea if you happened to be a master or a landlord, who

were the only persons this ideology considered “virtuous” enough to vote or hold political office. Thus, “republicanism” – virtually indistinguishable from today’s “neoliberalism” – created the original Deep State in the image of the economic system it was designed to perpetuate.

How this was accomplished is not a comforting tale. But it cannot be related nor understood without an appreciation of the historical context in which it occurred.

Masters and Servants

Post-colonial America was predominantly agrarian, and about 90 percent of the population was farmers. (The largest city in 1790 was New York, with a whopping population of 33,000 residents.) There was a small middle class of artisans, shopkeepers, and even a handful of industrial workers, but the politically and economically powerful people were the relatively few big-time merchants and landowners – who also fulfilled the function of bankers.

America was not quite a feudal society, but it resembled one. Commoners did not call at the front doors of the rich, but were received around back. Most states had official religions, some with compulsory church attendance backed by fines. Commodity-barter was the currency of the day for the vast majority. Debtors were imprisoned. Parents sold their children into bondage. It wasn’t what most people think of when they hear “Yankee Doodle Dandy.”

All states restricted voting only to men who owned a requisite amount of property, while the majority: un-widowed women, servants, and tenants owned no property. Moreover, most states had property requirements for eligibility to elective office, some with the higher offices reserved for those with the most property. Such restrictions had discriminated against the urban underclass and farmers since the beginning of American colonization.

Nobody at the time characterized this land of masters and servants as a “democracy.” Indeed, the master class considered “democracy” synonymous with “mob rule.” But not everybody was happy with “republican virtue” in post-war America, least of all the slaves of the “virtuous.”

The Revolutionary War had stirred passions among the servant class for social and economic liberty, but when the war ended nothing much had changed. In fact, the war proved not to have been a revolution at all, but represented only a change from British overlords to American overlords. Edmund Morgan, considered the dean of American history in the colonial era, characterized the “non-Revolutionary War” this way:

“The fact the lower ranks were involved in the contest should not obscure the

fact that the contest itself was generally a struggle for office and power between members of an upper class: the new against the established.”

About 1 percent of the American population had died in a war fought, they had been told, for “liberty.” (Compare: if the U.S. lost the same proportion of its population in a war today, the result would be over *three million* dead Americans.) Yet after the war, economic liberty was nowhere in sight.

Moreover, the very concept of “liberty” meant one thing to a farmer and quite another to his rich landlord or merchant. Liberty for a common farmer – who was generally a subsistence farmer who did not farm to make money, but rather only to provide the necessities of life for his family – meant staying out of debt. Liberty for merchants and property owners – whose business it was to make monetary profits – meant retaining the ability to lend or rent to others and access to the power of government to enforce monetary repayment from debtors and tenants.

Much like the American Indians who had first communally owned the property now occupied by American subsistence farmers, agrarian debtors faced the unthinkable prospect of losing their ability to provide for their families (and their vote) if their land were confiscated for overdue taxes or debt. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“How Debt Conquered America.”](#)]

Loss of their land would doom a freeholder to a life of tenancy. And the servitude of tenants and slaves differed mainly as a function of iron and paper: slaves were shackled by iron, tenants were shackled by debt contracts. But iron and paper were both backed by law.

By the end of the Revolutionary War, as few as a third of American farmers owned their own land. When the urban elites began to foreclose on the debts and raise the taxes of subsistence farmers – many of whom had fought a long and excruciating war to secure their “liberty” – it amounted to a direct assault on the last bastion of Americans’ economic independence.

The Original Great Recession

After the war, British merchants and banks no longer extended credit to Americans. Moreover, Britain refused to allow Americans to trade with its West Indies possessions. And, to make matters worse, the British Navy no longer protected American ships from North African pirates, effectively closing off Mediterranean commerce. Meanwhile, the American navy could not protect American shipping, in the Mediterranean or elsewhere, because America did not happen to possess a navy.

In the past, American merchants had obtained trade goods from British suppliers

by “putting it on a tab” and paying for the goods later, after they had been sold. Too many Americans had reneged on those tabs after the Revolution, and the British now demanded “cash on the barrelhead” in the form of gold and silver coin before they would ship their goods to America.

As always, Americans had limited coin with which to make purchases. As the credit crunch cascaded downwards, wholesalers demanded cash payment from retailers, retailers demanded cash from customers. Merchants “called in” loans they had made to farmers, payable in coin. Farmers without coin were forced to sell off their hard-earned possessions, livestock, or land to raise the money, or risk court-enforced debt collection, which included not only the seizure and sale of their property but also imprisonment for debt.

The most prominent result of Americans’ war for “liberty” turned out to be a full-blown economic recession that lasted a decade. Even so, the recession would not have posed a life-threatening problem for land-owning subsistence farmers, who lived in materially self-sufficient, rural, communal societies. But when state governments began to raise taxes on farmers, payable only in unavailable gold and silver coin, even “self-sufficient” farmers found themselves at risk of losing their ability to feed their families.

Debt, Speculation, and the Deep State

The Continental Congress had attempted to pay for its war with Britain by printing paper money. The British undermined these so-called “Continental” dollars, not only by enticing American merchants with gold and silver, but by counterfeiting untold millions of Continental dollars and spending them into circulation. The aggregate result was the catastrophic devaluation of the Continental dollar, which by war’s end was worthless.

In the meantime, both Congress and state governments had borrowed to pay for “liberty.” By war’s end, war debt stood at \$73 million, \$60 million of which was owed to domestic creditors. It was a staggering sum of money. In his now studiously ignored masterpiece, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, historian Charles A. Beard showed that domestically-held war debt was equivalent to 10 percent of the value of all the surveyed land holdings (including houses) in the entire United States at the time.

The war debt carried interest, of course – which is a problem with debt if you owe it, but is a feature of debt if it is owed to you. Not only was “freedom not free” – it came with dividends attached for Deep State investors. This should sound at least vaguely familiar today.

As Continental paper money lost its value, Congress and state governments

continued to pay for “liberty” with coin borrowed at interest. When that ran short, government paid only with *promises to pay* at a later date – merely pieces of paper that promised to pay coin (or land) at some indeterminate time after the war was won.

This was how the government supplied the troops (whenever it managed to do so) and also how it paid its troops. In actual practice, however, Congress often did not pay the troops anything, not even with paper promises, offering only verbal promises to pay them at the end of the war.

But war is never a money-making enterprise for government, and when it ended, the government was as broke as ever. So, it wrote its verbal promises on pieces of paper, and handed them to its discharged troops with a hearty *Good Luck with That!* Even so, Congress paid the soldiers in bonds worth only a fraction of the amount of time most had served, promising (again!) to pay the balance later – which it never did.

Thousands of steadfast, longsuffering troops were abandoned this way. Most had not been paid any money in years (if ever), and many were hundreds of miles from their homes – ill, injured, and starving – as they had been for months and years. Others literally were dressed only in rags or pieces of rags. Some carried paper promises of money; some carried paper promises of geographically distant land – none of which would be available until years in the future, if at all.

Seven-year Revolutionary War veteran Philip Mead described his plight in a bitter memoir entitled *A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*: “We were absolutely, literally starved. I do solemnly declare that I did not put a single morsel of victuals in my mouth for four days and as many nights, except a little black birch bark which I gnawed off a stick of wood, if that can be called victuals. I saw several of the men roast their old shoes and eat them...”

“When the country had drained the last drop of service it could screw out of the poor soldiers, they were turned adrift like old worn-out horses, and nothing said about land to pasture them on.”

Was this *liberty*? To impoverished veterans, “liberty” looked bleak, indeed. To speculators in government bonds, liberty looked like a golden opportunity, quite literally so.

Vultures possessed of coin swooped in and bought a dollar’s worth of government promises for a dime, and sometimes for just a nickel. Speculators wheedled promises not only from desperate veterans (many of whom sold their promises

merely to obtain food and clothes on their long trudge home), but from a host of people whose goods or services had been paid with IOUs.

Optimistic speculators cadged bonds from pessimistic speculators. The more desperate people became during the recession, the more cheaply they sold their promises to those who were not.

Speculators expected their investments, even those made with now-worthless paper money, to be paid in gold or silver coin. What's more, "insiders" expected all those various government promises would eventually be converted – quietly, if possible – into interest-bearing bonds backed by a single, powerful taxing authority. All the Deep State needed now was a national government to secure the investment scheme. A man named Daniel Shays unwittingly helped to fulfil that need.

Rebellion and Backlash

Thomas Jefferson penned the famous sentence: "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." He was not referring to heroic American Patriots charging up Bunker Hill against British bayonets. He was referring instead to American farmers – many of whom had been the starving soldiers in a war for forsaken liberty – taking their lives into their hands to oppose the tax policies of the government of Massachusetts in 1787. The principal leader of this revolt was a farmer and war veteran Daniel Shays.

In a sense, the most interesting thing about Shays's Rebellion is that it was not a unique event.

The first notable example of agrarian revolt had been Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 Virginia, when frontier farmers marched on the rich plantation owners of Jamestown, burned it to the ground, published their democratic "Declaration of the People," and threatened to hang every elite "tyrant" on their list – which included some of the forefathers of America's patriot Founders.

Historian Gary Nash reminds us Bacon's Rebellion had echoes across early American history: "Outbreaks of disorder punctuated the last quarter of the 17th century, toppling established governments in Massachusetts, New York, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina." Jimmy Carter, in *The Hornet's Nest*, the only novel ever published by an American president, tells a similar story of the agony of dispossessed farmers in Georgia a century later.

Other farmers had rebelled in New Jersey in the 1740s; in the New York Hudson Valley rent wars in the 1750s and 1760s and concurrently in Vermont by Ethan Allen's Green Mountain Boys; for a decade in North Carolina in the 1760s, where

vigilantes called Regulators battled the government of the urban elite; and in Virginia in the 1770s. Likewise, American cities had been scenes of labor unrest, riots, and strikes for a century. American class rebellion, apparently unbeknownst to most history teachers in America, was closer to the rule than the exception.

Victory in the war against England only intensified the conflict between those who considered "liberty" as a necessary condition to live without debt, against those who considered "liberty" to be their class privilege to grow rich from the debts others owed them. Howard Zinn, in his *A People's History of the United States* describes the economic realities of Eighteenth Century America:

"The colonies, it seems, were societies of contending classes – a fact obscured by the emphasis, in traditional histories, on the external struggle against England, the unity of colonists in the Revolution. The country therefore was not 'born free' but born slave and free, servant and master, tenant and landlord, poor and rich."

Although Shays's Rebellion was not unique, it was a huge event, coming at a time when the rich were owed a great deal of money by impoverished governments. Pressured by rich bondholders and speculators, the government of Massachusetts duly raised taxes on farmers. To make matters far worse, the taxes were to be paid only in gold or silver – which was completely out of the question for most western farmers, who had no way to obtain coined money.

When the farmers complained, their complaints were ignored. When farmers petitioned the government to issue paper money and accept it as payment of debts and taxes, the government refused their petitions. When the farmers pleaded for the passage of "legal tender laws" that would allow them to settle their debts or taxes with their labor, they were rebuffed.

But when farmers could not pay what they did not have, the Massachusetts's courts ordered their land seized and auctioned. At last, the farmers understood the practical effect, if not the specific intent, of the tax: confiscation of their property and its transfer to the rich, to whom the government owed its interest-bearing debt. Government had become an armed collection agency.

To the utter dismay of the erstwhile proudly tax-rebellious Patriots, the farmers too rebelled. Shaysites forcibly shut down the tax courts that were condemning them to servitude. The rich responded by loaning the destitute government more money (at interest!) to pay a militia force to oppose Shays's rebels.

At this point, tax rebels abandoned reform for radical revolution and – in a

resounding echo of Nathaniel Bacon's century-old Declaration of the People – pledged to march on Boston and burn it to the ground. This was no Tea Party vandalism, stage-managed by well-to-do Bostonians like Samuel Adams. It was a full-blown, grassroots agrarian revolution a century in the making.

The urban bond-holding merchant-class in Boston and elsewhere panicked. And none panicked more than bond speculators, who intimately understood the rebels threatened their "virtuous" republican "liberty" to extract profit from others. Historian Woody Holton exposes the astonishing callousness of one of America's major bond speculators in his nationally acclaimed *Unruly Americans and the Origin of the Constitution*:

"As a bondholder, Abigail Adams would benefit immensely if her fellow Massachusetts citizens [paid the tax] levied by the legislature in March 1786, but she also saw compliance as a sacred duty. If Massachusetts taxpayers were 'harder-pressed by public burdens than formerly,' she wrote, 'they should consider it as the price of their freedom'."

Future First Lady Abigail Adams was not alone in thinking freedom came with dividends payable to her account. Historian David Szatmari reminds us in his *Shays Rebellion; The Makings of an Agrarian Insurrection* that the former Patriot leadership, especially those in the merchant class, were among the first to advocate violence against democratic rebellion.

Said a published opinion piece at the time: "When we had other *rulers*, committees and conventions of the people were lawful – they were then necessary; but since I *myself* became a ruler, they cease to be lawful – the people have no right to examine my conduct."

Showboat Patriot and bond speculator Samuel Adams –former mastermind of the Boston Tea Party and erstwhile propagandist against unfair British taxes (as well as cousin to Abigail's husband John Adams) – sponsored a Massachusetts law that allowed sheriffs to kill tax protesters outright.

Another rich bondholder and speculator, ex-Revolutionary War General Henry Knox (the fitting namesake of Fort Knox, the famous repository of gold bullion) wrote an alarming letter to his former commander George Washington, accusing the Shays's rebels of being "levelers" (which was the closest term to "communists" then in existence). He informed Washington that the country needed a much stronger government (and military) to prevent any riffraff challenge to the elite. His message was not wasted on General Washington, America's richest slave owner.

In the end, the Congress, under the Articles of Confederation, could raise no

money from the states to provide an army, but the privately-financed, for-profit Massachusetts militia successfully defeated Shays's rebels. Still, the nearly hysterical fear of democratic economic revolution had been planted in the minds of the masters. Shays's Rebellion proved to be the last straw for bond speculators whose profits were jeopardized by democracy.

Worse even, the governments of many other states were beginning to cave under intense democratic pressure from rebellious debtors. Some states were entertaining laws that prevented the seizure of property for debt; others were creating paper money in order to break the gold and silver monopoly. Rhode Island not only voted in a paper money system, but threatened to socialize all commercial business enterprises in the state.

In response to the threat of populism, the "virtuous" elite reacted decisively – not to remedy the plight of debtors, of course – but to secure their own profits from them. Accordingly, in 1786, five states sent delegates to meet at Annapolis, Maryland, just as Shays's Rebellion veered into revolution. This unelected minority called for Congress to authorize a convention to be held in Philadelphia the next year "for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation." The Articles were never to be "revised." They were to be scrapped altogether by the Deep State.

The Deep State Conspires

Thanks to Charles A. Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, we know quite a lot about the status of the 55 men who conspired to draft the Constitution. But the very first thing we need to know is that they were not authorized by "We the People" simply because nobody had voted for them; all were political appointees.

Nor were they even a representative *sample* of the people. Not a single person in the Convention hall "worked for a living," nor was female, nor was a person of color. Only one claimed to be a "farmer," the current occupation of about 90 percent of the population. Most were lawyers. Go figure.

If the delegates represented anybody at all, it was the economic elite: 80 percent were bondholders; 44 percent were money-lenders; 27 percent were slave owners; and 25 percent were real estate speculators. Demographically, the 39 who finally signed the final draft of the Constitution constituted .001 percent of the American population reported in the 1790 census. George Washington, who presided, was arguably the wealthiest man in the country. Deep State gamblers all.

And the stakes were high. Recall that the face value of outstanding domestic

government bonds in 1787 was \$60 million, equivalent to 10 percent of the total improved land value of the country. But these bonds, for the most part, had been obtained by speculators at a fraction of face value. Beard very conservatively estimated the profit of speculators – if the bond were redeemed at face value – would have been some \$40 million. Expressed as the same proportion of total improved land value at the time of the Founding, the expected profit from government bonds held then would equal at least \$3 trillion today. Tax free.

We still do not know everything that transpired at the convention. No one was assigned to keep a record of what was discussed. Reportedly, even the windows to the meeting hall were nailed shut to prevent eavesdropping – though there would be “leaks.” Because of its secrecy and its unauthorized nature, some historians have called the convention “the second American Revolution.” But revolutions are public, hugely participatory events. This was a *coup d'état* behind locked doors.

Most delegates presumably understood their undisclosed purpose was to dump the whole system of confederated government (which had cost 25,000 American lives to secure) into a dustbin. They evidently did not intend to obey their instructions “solely to revise” the Articles because a number of them showed up at the convention with drafts for a new constitution in hand.

The conspirators’ ultimate goal was to replace the Confederation with what they later euphemized as “a more perfect Union” – designed from the outset to protect their class interests and to ensure the new government possessed all the power necessary to perpetuate the existing oligarchy.

At the Convention, Alexander Hamilton captured the prevailing sentiment: “All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well-born; the other the mass of the people ... turbulent and changing, they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the Government. ... Nothing but a permanent body can check the imprudence of democracy.”

Hamilton further proposed that both the President and the Senate be appointed (not elected) *for life*. His vision was but half a step removed from monarchy. Though not a Convention delegate, John Jay, Hamilton’s political ally, slaveowner, and the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, stated the purpose of “republicanism” with brutal brevity: “The people who own the country ought to govern it.”

The Founders never once envisioned any such a thing as “limited government” – unless perhaps in the sense that the power of government was to be *limited to* their own economic class. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Right’s Made-up Constitution.”](#)]

In *Towards an American Revolution: Exposing the Constitution & Other Illusions*, historian Jerry Fresia sums the Founders' views succinctly: "The vision of the Framers, even for Franklin and Jefferson who were less fearful of the politics of the common people than most, was that of a strong centralized state, a nation whose commerce and trade stretched around the world. In a word, the vision was one of empire *where property owners would govern themselves.*" [Emphasis supplied]

Self-government *by the people* was to remain permanently out of the question. The Deep State was to govern itself. "We the People," a phrase hypocritically coined by the ultra-aristocrat Gouverneur Morris, would stand forever after as an Orwellian hoax.

The tricky task of the hand-picked delegates was to hammer out a radical new system of government that would superficially resemble a democratic republic, but function as an oligarchy.

William Hogeland's excellent *Founding Finance*, recounts the anti-democratic vehemence expressed at the Convention: "On the first day of the meeting that would become known as the United States Constitutional Convention, Edmund Randolph of Virginia kicked off the proceedings [...] 'Our chief danger,' Randolph announced, 'arises from the democratic parts of our constitutions. ... None of the constitutions' – he meant those of the states' governments – 'have provided sufficient checks against the democracy.'"

No wonder they nailed the windows shut. It should be no surprise that the word "democracy" does not appear once in the entire U.S. Constitution, or any of its Amendments, including the Bill of Rights. Accordingly, the Constitution does not once refer to the popular vote, and it did not guarantee a single person or group suffrage until the adoption of the 15th Amendment in 1870, over 80 years after ratification. The Preamble aside, the Founders used the phrase "the People" only a single time (Art. I, Sec. 2).

It has been suggested the word "democracy" had a different meaning then than it has now. It did not. "Democracy" to the Convention delegates meant the same thing as it does today: "rule by the people." That's why they detested it. The delegates considered themselves the patriarchs of "republicanism," the ideology that rejected participation in government by people like their wives, servants, tenants, slaves, and other non-propertyed inferiors. No doubt, the delegates passionately disagreed on many things, but the "fear and loathing" of democracy was not one of them. Then or now.

The Deep State's Specific Goals

Embedded within the Founders' broadly anti-democratic agenda were four specific goals. These were not a list of items jotted down in advance, but were derived by group consensus as the minimum requirements necessary to achieve the Deep State's ultimate agenda.

To camouflage the stark oligarchic nationalism the measures intended, the Founders disingenuously styled themselves "Federalists." But nothing about these measures concerned a "federation" of sovereign states; taken together, they were intended to demolish the existing "perpetual" confederation, not to re-create it more effectively.

National government with limited citizen participation. Of all the measures required to achieve a national oligarchy, this was the most daunting. It was achieved by a wide array of provisions.

The Electoral College. The President and Vice President are not elected by popular vote, but by electors – then and now. For example, when George Washington was first elected President, the American population was 3.9 million. How many of those folks voted for George? Exactly 69 persons – which was the total number of electors voting at the time. (Art. I, Sec. 3)

Bi-Cameral Congress. Congress is bi-cameral, composed of two "houses" – the House of Representatives and the Senate. Under the original Constitution, the House members represented the people who vote for them, while the Senate represented states, not persons, and was therefore not a democratic body, at all. It was generally expected that the Senate would "check" the democratic House. Indeed, this was the entire purpose of bi-cameralism wherever it has existed. (Art. I, Secs. 1 and 2)

State Appointment of Senators. Senators were originally appointed by state legislatures (until the 17th Amendment in 1913). It was expected that the Senate would function in Congress as the House of Lords functioned in Parliament: the voice of the aristocracy. Even though Senators are now popularly elected, it is far more difficult to challenge an incumbent because of the prohibitive expense of running a state-wide campaign. (Art. I, Sec. 3)

Appointment of the Judiciary. All federal judges are appointed for life terms by the President and confirmed by the (originally undemocratic) Senate. (Art. III, Sec. 1)

Paucity of Representation. Most undemocratic of all was the extreme paucity of the total number of House members. The House originally was composed of only 65 members, or one member per 60,000 persons. Today, there are 435 members, each representing about 700,000 persons. Thus, current House representation of the

public is 12 times less democratic than when the Constitution was written – and it was poor (at best) then.

Compare: The day before the Constitution was ratified, the people of the 13 United States were represented by about 2,000 democratically elected representatives in their various state legislatures (1:1950 ratio); the day after ratification, the same number of people were to be represented by only 65 representatives in the national government (1:60000). In quantitative terms, this represents more than a 3,000 percent *reduction* of democratic representation for the American people. (Art. I, Sec. 2)

Absence of Congressional Districts. Although House members now run for election in equal-populated districts, the districts were created by Congress, not the Constitution. Until the 1960s, some House members were elected at-large (like Senators). This disadvantaged all but the richest and best-known candidates from winning. (Not referenced in Constitution)

Absence of Recall, Initiative and Referendum. The Constitution does not allow the people to vote to recall (un-elect) a Congress member, demand a Congressional vote on any issue (propose an initiative) or vote directly in a referendum on any issue (direct democracy). (Not referenced in Constitution)

Absence of Independent Amendment Process. One of the reasons Americans now have professional politicians is that the Constitution does not provide a way for “the people” to amend it without the required cooperation of a sitting Congress. At the Constitutional convention, Edmund Randolph of Virginia (surprisingly) proposed that the people be afforded a way to amend the Constitution without the participation of Congress. This excellent idea, however, was not adopted. (Art. V)

National authority to tax citizens directly. (Art. I, Sec. 8; 16th Amendment)

National monopolization of military power. (Art. I, Sec.8, clauses 12, 13, 14, 15, 16)

Denial of states’ power to issue paper money or provide debtor relief. (Art. I, Sec.10; Art. I Sec.8, clause 4)

All of these provisions were completely new in the American experience. For 150 years or more, citizen participation in government, independent militias, and the issuance of paper money had been the prerogative of the several, independent colonies/states – while direct external taxation had been universally and strenuously resisted. When the British Crown had threatened to curtail colonial prerogatives, the very men who now conspired for national power had risen in armed rebellion. The hypocrisy was stunning. And people took note of the fact.

Consent of the Minority

One of the note-takers was Robert Yates, a New York delegate to the Convention, who had walked out in protest. Not long afterwards, Yates (who owned no government bonds) stated his objection to the new Constitution: "This government is to possess absolute and uncontrollable power, legislative, executive and judicial, with respect to every object to which it extends. ...

"The government then, so far as it extends, is a complete one. ... It has the authority to make laws which will affect the lives, the liberty, and the property of every man in the United States; nor can the constitution or the laws of any state, in any way prevent or impede the full and complete execution of every power given."

At least half of the American population (collectively called "Anti-federalists") thought the Constitution was a terrible idea. To be sure, well-to-do Anti-federalists like Yates were not overtaxed farmers, and their objections were often based upon the defense of states' rights, not peoples' economic rights. Most Anti-federalists, however, seemed alarmed that the Constitution contained no guarantee of the basic political rights they had enjoyed under the British Empire, such as freedom of speech or trial by jury.

The debate between supporters and critics of the Constitution raged for a year, while partisan newspapers published articles both pro and con. A collection of 85 "pro" articles is known now as *The Federalist Papers*, which were written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay. Although these articles have been studied almost as religious relicts by historians, they do not tell us "what the Constitution really means."

The Constitution means what it says. *The Federalist Papers* are sales brochures, written by lawyers trying to get others to "buy" the Constitution. The same can be said about a similar collection of "Anti-federalist Papers," from which Yates's quote above was taken. In any event, it is up to the courts to interpret the Constitution, not lawyers with vested interests.

In due course, the Anti-federalists put their collective foot down. There would be no hope of ratification without amendments guaranteeing fundamental political – *but not economic* – rights. Although Hamilton argued a guarantee of rights would be "dangerous," James Madison convinced the Federalists that agreeing to guarantee a *future* Bill of Rights would be much safer than meddling with the text of the current document, which might entail unraveling its core nationalist, anti-democratic agenda. And so, a deal was struck.

Even so, the battle over the ratification of the Constitution was not ultimately

decided by the people of the nation. Although the people of the several states had not voted to authorize the Convention, or the document it had produced, the Founders had been incredibly arrogant, not to mention sly. Not only had they presented the unauthorized document to the states as a take-it-or-leave-it proposition (no changes allowed), but the document itself demanded that only special state “conventions” could ratify it – not the majority popular vote of the people.

Specifying ratification by conventions meant the people would be voting for convention delegates, who would in turn vote for ratification. This was tantamount to turning ratification into a popularity contest between convention delegates, rather than a democratically direct vote on the document, itself. Moreover, ratification by convention would present the possibility that a minority of the people in a state (those in favor of the Constitution) might “pack” a convention with delegates, who would then approve of a document establishing a government for all.

Electoral shenanigans were not just hypothetical possibilities. In Philadelphia, for example, a mob kidnapped elected legislators who were boycotting a convention vote, physically dragged them into the state house, and tied them to their chairs in order to force a convention vote. Other, more subtle methods of manipulation occurred elsewhere, notably the disenfranchisement of voters through property qualifications.

Over a hundred years ago, Charles A. Beard completed his exhaustive study of the Constitution and confirmed that it most likely was ratified by a majority – *of a minority of the people*.

Among Beard’s final conclusions were these: “The Constitution was ratified by a vote of probably not more than one-sixth of the adult males....The leaders who supported the Constitution in the ratifying conventions represented the same economic groups as the members of the Philadelphia Convention....The Constitution was not created by ‘the whole people’ as the jurists [judges] have said; neither was it created by ‘the states’ as Southern nullifiers long contended; but it was the work of a consolidated group whose interests knew no state boundaries and were truly national in their scope.”

The Deep State, in other words. It was darkly appropriate that a document whose primary purpose was to defeat democratic rule was, itself, brought into force without a majoritarian vote.

In 1788, nine of the 13 states’ conventions ratified the Constitution (as specified in the Constitution’s own Article VII) and the document became the supreme law of the land for those nine states. By 1789, even the democratic

holdout Rhode Island had followed suit. And America's schoolchildren have been led to believe ever since that the Constitution is a sacred document, inspired and ordained by the public-spirited benevolence of Founding Fathers.



But this had been predicted. It had seemed painfully obvious to Eighteenth Century Genevan political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau that constitutional government was the invention of the Deep State, its designated beneficiary.

Dripping with sarcasm, his virtuoso *Discourse on Inequality* explained the process: “[T]he rich man ... at last conceived the deepest project that ever entered the human mind: this was to employ in his favour the very forces that attacked him, to make allies of his enemies...

“In a word, instead of turning our forces against ourselves, let us collect them into a sovereign power, which may govern us by wise laws, may protect and defend all the members of the association, repel common enemies, and maintain a perpetual concord and harmony among us.”

Rousseau penned these words in 1754, 33 years before Gouverneur Morris oversaw the drafting of the identical sales pitch that constitutes the Preamble to the United States Constitution: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

Rousseau concludes: “All offered their necks to the yoke in hopes of securing their liberty; for though they had sense enough to perceive the advantages of a political constitution, they had not experience enough to see beforehand the dangers of it; *those among them, who were best qualified to foresee abuses, were*

precisely those who expected to benefit by them..." [Emphasis added]

Does the Deep State pose an existential threat to American democracy today? Move along, folks – nothing new to see here.

Jada Thacker, Ed. D, is the author of *Dissecting American History: A Theme-Based Narrative*. He teaches History and Government at a college in Texas. Contact: jadathacker@sbcglobal.net

How America Armed Terrorists in Syria

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard's "Stop Arming Terrorists Act" to curb weapons going to Al Qaeda-linked jihadists in Syria, has attracted only 14 co-sponsors pointing to hypocrisy in the "war on terror," as Gareth Porter explained at The American Conservative.

By Gareth Porter

Three-term Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, a member of both the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs committees, has proposed legislation that would prohibit any U.S. assistance to terrorist organizations in Syria as well as to any organization working directly with them. Equally important, it would prohibit U.S. military sales and other forms of military cooperation with other countries that provide arms or financing to those terrorists and their collaborators.

Gabbard's "Stop Arming Terrorists Act" challenges for the first time in Congress a U.S. policy toward the conflict in the Syrian civil war that should have set off alarm bells long ago: in 2012-13 the Obama administration helped its Sunni allies Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar provide arms to Syrian and non-Syrian armed groups to force President Bashar al-Assad out of power. And in 2013 the administration began to provide arms to what the CIA judged to be "relatively moderate" anti-Assad groups – meaning they incorporated various degrees of Islamic extremism.

That policy, ostensibly aimed at helping replace the Assad regime with a more democratic alternative, has actually helped build up al Qaeda's Syrian franchise al Nusra Front into the dominant threat to Assad.

The supporters of this arms-supply policy believe it is necessary as pushback against Iranian influence in Syria. But that argument skirts the real issue

raised by the policy's history. The Obama administration's Syria policy effectively sold out the U.S. interest that was supposed to be the touchstone of the "Global War on Terrorism" – the eradication of al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates. The United States has instead subordinated that U.S. interest in counter-terrorism to the interests of its Sunni allies. In doing so it has helped create a new terrorist threat in the heart of the Middle East.

The policy of arming military groups committed to overthrowing the government of President Bashar al-Assad began in September 2011, when President Barack Obama was pressed by his Sunni allies – Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar – to supply heavy weapons to a military opposition to Assad they were determined to establish. Turkey and the Gulf regimes wanted the United States to provide anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to the rebels, according to a former Obama administration official involved in Middle East issues.

Obama refused to provide arms to the opposition, but he agreed to provide covert U.S. logistical help in carrying out a campaign of military assistance to arm opposition groups. CIA involvement in the arming of anti-Assad forces began with arranging for the shipment of weapons from the stocks of the Gaddafi regime that had been stored in Benghazi.

Shipments from Benghazi

CIA-controlled firms shipped the weapons from the military port of Benghazi to two small ports in Syria using former U.S. military personnel to manage the logistics, as investigative reporter Sy Hersh detailed in 2014. The funding for the program came mainly from the Saudis.

A declassified October 2012 Defense Intelligence Agency report revealed that the shipment in late August 2012 had included 500 sniper rifles, 100 RPG (rocket propelled grenade launchers) along with 300 RPG rounds and 400 howitzers. Each arms shipment encompassed as many as ten shipping containers, it reported, each of which held about 48,000 pounds of cargo.

That suggests a total payload of up to 250 tons of weapons per shipment. Even if the CIA had organized only one shipment per month, the arms shipments would have totaled 2,750 tons of arms bound ultimately for Syria from October 2011 through August 2012. More likely it was a multiple of that figure.

The CIA's covert arms shipments from Libya came to an abrupt halt in September 2012 when Libyan militants attacked and burned the embassy annex in Benghazi that had been used to support the operation. By then, however, a much larger channel for arming anti-government forces was opening up.

The CIA put the Saudis in touch with a senior Croatian official who had offered

to sell large quantities of arms left over from the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. And the CIA helped them shop for weapons from arms dealers and governments in several other former Soviet bloc countries.

Flush with weapons acquired from both the CIA's Libya program and from the Croatians, the Saudis and Qataris dramatically increased the number of flights by military cargo planes to Turkey in December 2012 and continued that intensive pace for the next two and a half months.

The *New York Times* reported a total 160 such flights through mid-March 2013. The most common cargo plane in use in the Gulf, the Ilyushin IL-76, can carry roughly 50 tons of cargo on a flight, which would indicate that as much as 8,000 tons of weapons poured across the Turkish border into Syria just in late 2012 and in 2013.

One U.S. official called the new level of arms deliveries to Syrian rebels a "cataract of weaponry." And a year-long investigation by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project revealed that the Saudis were intent on building up a powerful conventional army in Syria.

A Flood of Weapons

The "end-use certificate" for weapons purchased from an arms company in Belgrade, Serbia, in May 2013 includes 500 Soviet-designed PG-7VR rocket launchers that can penetrate even heavily-armored tanks, along with two million rounds; 50 Konkurs anti-tank missile launchers and 500 missiles, 50 anti-aircraft guns mounted on armored vehicles, 10,000 fragmentation rounds for OG-7 rocket launchers capable of piercing heavy body armor; four truck-mounted BM-21 GRAD multiple rocket launchers, each of which fires 40 rockets at a time with a range of 12 to 19 miles, along with 20,000 GRAD rockets.

The end-user document for another Saudi order from the same Serbian company listed 300 tanks, 2,000 RPG launchers, and 16,500 other rocket launchers, one million rounds for ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft guns, and 315 million cartridges for various other guns.

Those two purchases were only a fraction of the totality of the arms obtained by the Saudis over the next few years from eight Balkan nations. Investigators found that the Saudis made their biggest arms deals with former Soviet bloc states in 2015, and that the weapons included many that had just come off factory production lines.

Nearly 40 percent of the arms the Saudis purchased from those countries, moreover, still had not been delivered by early 2017. So the Saudis had already

contracted for enough weaponry to keep a large-scale conventional war in Syria going for several more years.

By far the most consequential single Saudi arms purchase was not from the Balkans, however, but from the United States. It was the December 2013 U.S. sale of 15,000 TOW anti-tank missiles to the Saudis at a cost of about \$1 billion – the result of Obama’s decision earlier that year to reverse his ban on lethal assistance to anti-Assad armed groups.

The Saudis had agreed, moreover, that those anti-tank missiles would be doled out to Syrian groups only at U.S. discretion. The TOW missiles began to arrive in Syria in 2014 and soon had a major impact on the military balance.

This flood of weapons into Syria, along with the entry of 20,000 foreign fighters into the country – primarily through Turkey – largely defined the nature of the conflict. These armaments helped make al Qaeda’s Syrian franchise, al Nusra Front (now renamed Tahrir al-Sham or Levant Liberation Organization) and its close allies by far the most powerful anti-Assad forces in Syria – and gave rise to the Islamic State.

Al Qaeda’s Benefit

By late 2012, it became clear to U.S. officials that the largest share of the arms that began flowing into Syria early in the year were going to the rapidly growing al Qaeda presence in the country. In October 2012, U.S. officials acknowledged off the record for the first time to the *New York Times* that “most” of the arms that had been shipped to armed opposition groups in Syria with U.S. logistical assistance during the previous year had gone to “hardline Islamic jihadists” – obviously meaning al Qaeda’s Syrian franchise, al Nusra.

Al Nusra Front and its allies became the main recipients of the weapons because the Saudis, Turks, and Qataris wanted the arms to go to the military units that were most successful in attacking government targets. And by the summer of 2012, al Nusra Front, buttressed by the thousands of foreign jihadists pouring into the country across the Turkish border, was already taking the lead in attacks on the Syrian government in coordination with “Free Syrian Army” brigades.

In November and December 2012, al Nusra Front began establishing formal “joint operations rooms” with those calling themselves “Free Syrian Army” on several battlefronts, as Charles Lister chronicles in his book *The Syrian Jihad*. One such commander favored by Washington was Col. Abdul Jabbar al-Oqaidi, a former Syrian army officer who headed something called the Aleppo Revolutionary Military Council. Ambassador Robert Ford, who continued to hold that position even after he had been withdrawn from Syria, publicly visited Oqaidi in May 2013

to express U.S. support for him and the FSA.

But Oqaidi and his troops were junior partners in a coalition in Aleppo in which al Nusra was by far the strongest element. That reality is clearly reflected in a video in which Oqaidi describes his good relations with officials of the “Islamic State” and is shown joining the main jihadist commander in the Aleppo region celebrating the capture of the Syrian government’s Menagh Air Base in September 2013.

By early 2013, in fact, the “Free Syrian Army,” which had never actually been a military organization with any troops, had ceased to have any real significance in the Syria conflict. New anti-Assad armed groups had stopped using the name even as a “brand” to identify themselves, as a leading specialist on the conflict observed.

The ‘Moderate’ Fiction

So, when weapons from Turkey arrived at the various battlefronts, it was understood by all the non-jihadist groups that they would be shared with al Nusra Front and its close allies. A report by McClatchy in early 2013, on a town in north central Syria, showed how the military arrangements between al Nusra and those brigades calling themselves “Free Syrian Army” governed the distribution of weapons.

One of those units, the Victory Brigade, had participated in a “joint operations room” with al Qaeda’s most important military ally, Ahrar al Sham, in a successful attack on a strategic town a few weeks earlier. A visiting reporter watched that brigade and Ahrar al Sham show off new sophisticated weapons that included Russian-made RPG27 shoulder-fired rocket-propelled anti-tank grenades and RG6 grenade launchers.

When asked if the Victory Brigade had shared its new weapons with Ahrar al Sham, the latter’s spokesman responded, “Of course they share their weapons with us. We fight together.”

Turkey and Qatar consciously chose al Qaeda and its closest ally, Ahrar al Sham, as the recipients of weapons systems. In late 2013 and early 2014, several truckloads of arms bound for the province of Hatay, just south of the Turkish border, were intercepted by Turkish police. They had Turkish intelligence personnel on board, according to later Turkish police court testimony.

The province was controlled by Ahrar al Sham. In fact Turkey soon began to treat Ahrar al Sham as its primary client in Syria, according to Faysal Itani, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East.

A Qatari intelligence operative who had been involved in shipping arms to extremist groups in Libya was a key figure in directing the flow of arms from Turkey into Syria. An Arab intelligence source familiar with the discussions among the external suppliers near the Syrian border in Turkey during those years told the *Washington Post's* David Ignatius that when one of the participants warned that the outside powers were building up the jihadists while the non-Islamist groups were withering away, the Qatari operative responded, "I will send weapons to al Qaeda if it will help."

The Qataris did funnel arms to both al Nusra Front and Ahrar al Sham, according to a Middle Eastern diplomatic source. The Obama administration's National Security Council staff proposed in 2013 that the United States signal U.S. displeasure with Qatar over its arming of extremists in both Syria and Libya by withdrawing a squadron of fighter planes from the U.S. airbase at al-Udeid, Qatar. The Pentagon vetoed that mild form of pressure, however, to protect its access to its bases in Qatar.

Turkey's Game

President Obama himself confronted Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan over his government's support for the jihadists at a private White House dinner in May 2013, as recounted by Hersh. "We know what you're doing with the radicals in Syria," he quotes Obama as saying to Erdogan.

The administration addressed Turkey's cooperation with the al Nusra publicly, however, only fleetingly in late 2014. Shortly after leaving Ankara, Francis Ricciardone, the U.S. ambassador to Turkey from 2011 through mid-2014, told *The Daily Telegraph* of London that Turkey had "worked with groups, frankly, for a period, including al Nusra."

The closest Washington came to a public reprimand of its allies over the arming of terrorists in Syria was when Vice President Joe Biden criticized their role in October 2014. In impromptu remarks at Harvard University's Kennedy School, Biden complained that "our biggest problem is our allies." The forces they had supplied with arms, he said, were "al Nusra and al Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world."

Biden quickly apologized for the remarks, explaining that he didn't mean that U.S. allies had deliberately helped the jihadists. But Ambassador Ford confirmed his complaint, telling BBC, "What Biden said about the allies aggravating the problem of extremism is true."

In June 2013, Obama approved the first direct U.S. lethal military aid to rebel brigades that had been vetted by the CIA. By spring 2014, the U.S.-made BGM-71E

anti-tank missiles from the 15,000 transferred to the Saudis began to appear in the hands of selected anti-Assad groups. But the CIA imposed the condition that the group receiving them would not cooperate with the al Nusra Front or its allies.

That condition implied that Washington was supplying military groups that were strong enough to maintain their independence from al Nusra Front. But the groups on the CIA's list of vetted "relatively moderate" armed groups were all highly vulnerable to takeover by the al Qaeda affiliate.

In November 2014, al Nusra Front troops struck the two strongest CIA-supported armed groups, Harakat Hazm and the Syrian Revolutionary Front on successive days and seized their heavy weapons, including both TOW anti-tank missiles and GRAD rockets.

In early March 2015, the Harakat Hazm Aleppo branch dissolved itself, and al Nusra Front promptly showed off photos of the TOW missiles and other equipment they had captured from it. And in March 2016, al Nusra Front troops attacked the headquarters of the 13th Division in northwestern Idlib province and seized all of its TOW missiles. Later that month, al Nusra Front released a video of its troops using the TOW missiles it had captured.

CIA's Largesse

But that wasn't the only way for al Nusra Front to benefit from the CIA's largesse. Along with its close ally Ahrar al Sham, the terrorist organization began planning for a campaign to take complete control of Idlib province in the winter of 2014-15.

Abandoning any pretense of distance from al Qaeda, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar worked with al Nusra on the creation of a new military formation for Idlib called the "Army of Conquest," consisting of the al Qaeda affiliate and its closest allies. Saudi Arabia and Qatar provided more weapons for the campaign, while Turkey facilitated their passage. On March 28, just four days after launching the campaign, the Army of Conquest successfully gained control of Idlib City.

The non-jihadist armed groups getting advanced weapons from the CIA assistance were not part of the initial assault on Idlib City. After the capture of Idlib the U.S.-led operations room for Syria in southern Turkey signaled to the CIA-supported groups in Idlib that they could now participate in the campaign to consolidate control over the rest of the province.

According to Lister, the British researcher on jihadists in Syria who maintains contacts with both jihadist and other armed groups, recipients of CIA weapons,

such as the Fursan al haq brigade and Division 13, did join the Idlib campaign alongside al Nusra Front without any move by the CIA to cut them off.

As the Idlib offensive began, the CIA-supported groups were getting TOW missiles in larger numbers, and they now used them with great effectiveness against the Syrian army tanks. That was the beginning of a new phase of the war, in which U.S. policy was to support an alliance between “relatively moderate” groups and the al Nusra Front.

The new alliance was carried over to Aleppo, where jihadist groups close to Nusra Front formed a new command called Fateh Halab (“Aleppo Conquest”) with nine armed groups in Aleppo province, which were getting CIA assistance. The CIA-supported groups could claim that they weren’t cooperating with al Nusra Front because the al Qaeda franchise was not officially on the list of participants in the command. But as the report on the new command clearly implied, this was merely a way of allowing the CIA to continue providing weapons to its clients, despite their de facto alliance with al Qaeda.

The significance of all this is clear: by helping its Sunni allies provide weapons to al Nusra Front and its allies and by funneling into the war zone sophisticated weapons that were bound to fall into al Nusra hands or strengthen their overall military position, U.S. policy has been largely responsible for having extended al Qaeda’s power across a significant part of Syrian territory.

The CIA and the Pentagon appear to be ready to tolerate such a betrayal of America’s stated counter-terrorism mission. Unless either Congress or the White House confronts that betrayal explicitly, as Tulsi Gabbard’s legislation would force them to do, U.S. policy will continue to be complicit in the consolidation of power by al Qaeda in Syria, even if the Islamic State is defeated there.

Gareth Porter is an independent journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of numerous books, including *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare* (Just World Books, 2014).

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The Criminal ‘Laws’ of Counterinsurgency

A new book traces how the CIA and U.S. counterinsurgency warfare operatives adopted lessons from the Nazis’ fight against the partisans and evolved into a

dangerous law onto themselves, writes retired JAG Major Todd E. Pierce.

By Todd E. Pierce

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

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

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

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

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

Glennon noted that the propensity of “security managers” to back policies which ratchet up levels of security “will play into Trump’s hands, so that if and when he finally does declare victory, a revamped security directorate could emerge

more menacing than ever, with him its devoted new ally." Before that happens, it is incumbent for Americans to understand what Valentine explains in his book of CIA methods of "population control" as first fully developed in the Vietnam War's Phoenix Program.

Hating the U.S.

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

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

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

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

Douglas Valentine discusses and documents the role of the CIA in disseminating pro-war propaganda and disinformation as complementary to the violent tactics of the Phoenix Program in Vietnam. Valentine explains that "before Phoenix was adopted as the model for policing the American empire, many US military

commanders in Vietnam resisted the Phoenix strategy of targeting civilians with Einsatzgruppen-style 'special forces' and Gestapo-style secret police."

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

Nazi Influences

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

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

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

That the U.S. drew upon German counter-insurgency doctrine, as brutal as it was, is well documented. This is shown explicitly in a 2011 article published in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* entitled *German Counterinsurgency Revisited* by Charles D. Melson. He wrote that in 1942, Nazi commander Heinrich Himmler named a deputy for "anti-bandit warfare," (Bevollmächtigter für die Bandenkämpfung im Osten), SS-General von dem Bach, whose responsibilities expanded in 1943 to head all SS and police anti-bandit units and operations. He

was one of the architects of the Einsatzgruppen “concept of anti-partisan warfare,” a German predecessor to the “Phoenix Program.”

‘Anti-Partisan’ Lessons

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

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

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

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

Valentine explains the Phoenix program as having been developed by the CIA in 1967 to combine “existing counterinsurgency programs in a concerted effort to ‘neutralize’ the Vietcong infrastructure (VCI).” He explained further that “neutralize” meant “to kill, capture, or make to defect.” “Infrastructure” meant civilians suspected of supporting North Vietnamese and Vietcong soldiers. Central to the Phoenix program was that its targets were civilians, making the operation a violation of the Geneva Conventions which guaranteed protection to

civilians in time of war.

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

Lauding Petraeus

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

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

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

It is readily apparent that, in fact, a Phoenix-type program is now U.S. global policy and – just like in Vietnam – it is applying “death squad” strategies that eliminate not only active combatants but also civilians who simply find themselves in the same vicinity, thus creating antagonisms that expand the number of fighters.

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

The Bloody Reality

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

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

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

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

A second article archived by the CIA was by the Christian Science Monitor, dated Jan. 5, 1971, describing how the Saigon government was "taking steps ... that could help eliminate one of the most glaring abuses of its controversial Phoenix program, which is aimed against the Viet Cong political and administrative

apparatus." Note how the Monitor shifted blame away from the CIA and onto the South Vietnamese government.

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

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

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

CIA Crimes

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

"Unlawful combatants" is a descriptive term made up by the Bush administration to remove people whom U.S. officials alleged were "terrorists" from the legal protections of the Geneva Conventions and Human Rights Law and thus to justify their capture or killing in the so-called "Global War on Terror." Since the U.S. government deems them "unlawful" – because they do not belong to an organized military structure and do not wear insignia – they are denied the "privilege" of belligerency that applies to traditional soldiers. But – unless they take a "direct part in hostilities" – they would still maintain their civilian status under the law of war and thus not lose the legal protection due to civilians even if they exhibit sympathy or support to one side in a conflict.

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

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

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

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

Todd E. Pierce retired as a Major in the US Army Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps in November 2012. His most recent assignment was defense counsel in the Office of Chief Defense Counsel, Office of Military Commissions.

Potential Chaos in the Kingdom

President Trump has made the "alliance" with troublemaking Saudi Arabia a centerpiece of his chaotic foreign policy, but the latest jockeying for power in Riyadh may portend unexpected trouble, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A foreign country may be a problematic partner for the United States for two

basic types of reasons, both of which apply to Saudi Arabia. First, the partner's foreign policies may range from misguided to immoral, or risk sucking the United States into conflicts in which it is not, or should not be, a party.

Saudi Arabia's calamitous war in Yemen is currently the leading example of this sort of problem. More recently has come the economic and diplomatic offensive against Qatar, which threw a wrench into the Trump administration's aspirations regarding regional security, and in response to which the State Department this week delivered a bemused scolding.

Second, internal fragility may risk having the foreign regime suddenly come apart. This not only would mean that the partnership with the United States also would come apart. It also could mean that close association of the United States with the old regime earns it lasting animosity from the new rulers and from the discontented foreign populace that supported political change.

For an example of this dynamic, one need look only to the other side of the Persian Gulf. The close association of the United States with the Shah of Iran became a major ingredient in post-revolutionary anti-Americanism in Iran. Even after the Shah had been deposed, his admission to the United States for medical treatment was the immediate trigger for seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and a hostage crisis that lasted more than a year.

The association of the United States with the Saudi regime, which has endured so long and has become so taken for granted that it routinely gets referred to as an "alliance," makes it easy to overlook what an anachronism that regime is and how fragile is such a medieval configuration within the context of the Twenty-first Century. An extended royal family, whose name is part of the country's name (imagine if the United Kingdom were instead called "Windsor Britannia"), benefits from enormous but publicly uncounted rake-offs from the country's oil wealth. That wealth has for many years been critical to buying subservience and complacency from the general population, although now and then indications emerge – such as the Saudi origins of most of the 9/11 hijackers – that not all is well beneath the surface complacency.

Besides relying on what the oil money can buy, the regime also has relied heavily on religious sanction to sustain its legitimacy. As part of that reliance, the deals struck with the ulema or clergy have sustained some of the anachronistic features of the country, such as women not being allowed to drive.

The Succession Risk

The large size of the royal family means not only large rake-offs but also substantial potential for divisions within the family. One of the biggest, and

surely one of the touchiest, issues, has been leadership succession. The founder of the Saudi kingdom, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, bequeathed an odd succession plan with the throne first passing to one of his oldest sons but then going, brother to brother (or half-brother) through other sons of Abdulaziz.

Because he had more than three dozen sons, this arrangement could persist for a long time. But everyone knew that eventually the kingdom would run out of sons of even the unusually fecund Abdulaziz, and the throne would have to pass to the next generation. The sons and grandsons of Abdulaziz surely have had different preferences and views as to who in that next generation should get the top job. Latent instability can become overt conflict if discontented members of the ruling clan look for ways to exploit discontent in the wider population.

The aged King Salman, with visibly declining faculties, has made a singularly audacious move that, combined with some of his earlier moves over the past couple of years, sets up his favorite son, Muhammad bin Salman (MbS) to succeed him on the throne.

This is the second time Salman has sidelined a crown prince to move MbS up in the line of succession. The first victim was Salman's half-brother Muqrin. The second was his nephew Muhammad bin Nayef (MbN), who also lost his job as interior minister.

With much of what Salman had done earlier in his career – most of which was spent as governor of Riyadh, with a further informal role as a sort of family disciplinarian – he could benefit from the strength that came from being one of the Sudairi Seven, an alliance of full brothers that also included King Fahd, defense minister Sultan, and MbN's father and predecessor as interior minister, Nayef, all three now deceased. But this latest move was Salman acting on his own; MbN is also part of the Sudairi wing of the family.

Showing Unity

The regime has made a show of unity, announcing that 31 of 34 members of the Allegiance Council, a family organ that is supposed to deliberate on succession matters, approved of the latest change. An image was released of MbS kissing the hand of MbN, who reportedly pledged loyalty to the new crown prince. Family members continue to share an interest in not making any moves that could jeopardize their enormous privilege and personal wealth.

But surely there must be many royal family minds asking: with all the sons and all the grandsons of Abdulaziz to choose from, why should Salman be the one who gets to take it on himself to make *his* favorite son the designated successor?

It is not as if the 31-year-old MbS had a record that, before his father started

catapulting him, made him stand out from the royal crowd. The most distinctive and consequential initiative associated with MbS since he began gaining extraordinary power – the war in Yemen – has been a disaster. The bellicosity and aggressiveness that MbS has displayed toward Iran, and now Qatar, have the makings of additional costly regional misadventures.

MbS talks a good game regarding internal reform with his “Vision 2030” program, but it remains to be seen whether he has better ideas than his elders and predecessors for how to reconcile modernity with the non-modern demands of the religious establishment on which the House of Saud’s legitimacy rests. It also remains to be seen whether he will offer effective ways of weaning a sinecure-ridden society off oil and of handling the discontent that accompanies such dislocation. MbS’s father may have set him up for – when the father is no longer around – failures great enough to rend even the fabric of the royal family’s shared interests.

The downside for the United States is not just in losing a respected and experienced security manager and counterpart in the person of MbN. And it is not only in the prospect, serious though this is, of being involved in more Yemen-like destructive mistakes. It is in how Salman’s power play on behalf of his nuclear family has done nothing to reduce, and may even have increased, the risk that we will awake one day to discover that Saudi Arabia is not the stable partner in the Persian Gulf region that we thought it was. We thought that about the Shah’s Iran, too.

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

Institutional Factors in US Violence

The pervasive violence in American society is driven by many factors, including easy access to firearms and Hollywood’s glorification of killing, but there are also institutional factors, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is a lot of violence in the United States, and if you look at the news it appears that things are getting worse. The nation is armed to the teeth, which means that any out-of-control angry person can vent in lethal fashion. Or, maybe

they can choose to vent in the European style by using their car as a battering ram.

There is much head shaking about this nationwide violence and much wondering about its sources. The usual explanation assigns blame to the “bad apples.” That is, all these people acting out violently are somehow unstable. The fault lies with the individual, and this can be seen in their inability to contain their rage. If there is a broader influence it has to be some foreign agency (this used to be Communism but now is said to be Islam) urging them on through a subtle process of radicalization. This is thought to be one way good apples go bad.

But why limit blame to unstable personalities or shadowy alien forces? Our homebred culture acts as the context for a citizen’s behavior, suggesting to them what is allowable and what is not. In the U.S., with its almost nonexistent gun laws, its fundamentalist religious ideas, its rampant Islamophobia, its prevailing white-backlash politics, and its media entertainment industry heavily reliant on virtual violence, there is apparently some confusion as to what is and isn’t permissible.

Under these circumstances it is quite possible that at least some manifestations of our own culture have the potential of serving as contaminating agents for otherwise upright citizens. Contamination here means turning those citizens into violent agents – little ticking time bombs.

Cultural Corruption

What aspects of U.S. culture could serve this corrupting function? Well there are those mentioned above plus the superheated patriotic environments of thousands of VFW lodges, defensive attitudes and behavior of police fraternal leagues, the motorcycle clubs where flying three-foot-long American flags from your fender is de rigueur, and last but not least the environment of your typical Trump rally.

However, these cultural centers of resentment and anger are only occasional producers of public violence. There are other very common culturally contaminating sources that actually supply consistent venues for bringing out the worst in many of us.

These are institutions that are hardly noticed by the public and yet are turning thousands of American citizens (mostly young men) into battered, harassed, and humiliated individuals, some of whom will then turn into batterers, harassers and humiliators themselves. Some of them will make this corrupting experience the basis for lifelong friendships. Some will see these activities as integral

to their “glory days.”

Here are two examples, and ironically, both are part of institutions that purport to be a source of the nation’s highest values – educational institutions and military institutions

The Campus-Based Fraternity

In the region of the United States where I live, one of the largest universities is called Penn State. “Penn” stands for Pennsylvania, and it is among this state’s oldest and most respected institutions. Like many other universities and colleges, though, Penn State is a home to a large number of fraternities. Fraternities are largely self-governing male clubs or associations that are supposed to provide camaraderie for their members. Originally, they were seen as organizations that “ennobled” their members and aided in their education.

Today, most fraternities are boys clubs that all too often operate as if the fraternal group is bound only by its own traditions rather than societal norms. Among those traditions are regularly drinking oneself into a stupor and emotionally and sometimes physically “hazing” those “pledging” the fraternity.

Pledging means going through the process prescribed for membership. At the core of this process is the systematic demeaning or embarrassing of the pledges for set period of time. The rationale behind this behavior is that “hazing” transforms the “pledge class” into a unified “band of brothers.” Overall the process weakens individuality and independent judgment.

Most members of fraternities range from 17 to 21 years of age. At this point I would remind the reader that the frontal cortex, that part of the brain that provides “executive function” or control for behavior, does not fully mature until one’s mid-twenties.

What are you likely to get when you put together an immature constituency and the sort of organizational traditions described above? Well, on Feb. 4 at the Penn State fraternity Beta Theta Pi, you got the wrongful death of a 19-year-old pledge.

Many men whose own youth have been tied to fraternities dismiss such an event as too rare to be significant. But is that so? Between the year 2000 and December 2014 there were 57 deaths due to hazing at U.S. colleges. This activity is prevalent enough, and dangerous enough, that presently 44 states have enacted some form of anti-hazing statutes.

Under the circumstances, Jason Brennan, professor of ethics and public policy at Georgetown University, is right when he observes that “as a matter of fact

fraternities don't educate and ennoble; they stultify and corrupt." How so? They allow you to see cruelty as an important and functional part of a "normal" social process. They allow you the opportunity to decide if you like being cruel or not.

The Military's "Basic Training"

In what other major organization do you find hazing? The answer is in the U.S. military. It is used during basic training. According to a study appearing in the American Medical Association's Journal of Ethics appearing March 2014, "there is a long history of *sanctioned abuse* of new recruits by their drill instructors during entry training." Such behavior is particularly characteristic of the Army and the Marines. Officially, the military now regards this form of hazing as "cruel and unnecessary" and "inconsistent with its core institutional values." However, this is probably more recruiting propaganda rather than a statement of real change.

According to the military-associated website Task and Purpose, recruits are still subject to periodic "shark attacks," which means being "harassed and harangued" and having instilled in them "the fear factor." These are still the means by which "the whole discipline process" is created.

Traditionally, the military sees hazing as serving three purposes: (1) it weeds out those "unfit or unwilling to serve"; (2) it allegedly destroys the civilian "principles and norms" of the new recruits so that they can be replaced by those of the military organization; and (3) it allegedly builds "cohesion" among the recruits. Numbers 1 and 3 also apply to the hazing process of fraternities.

Hazing and Cultural Deterioration

The rationale behind hazing is to destroy pre-existing "values and habits" through a process of abuse so that they can be replaced by new "values and habits." For fraternities the new value structure is relatively benign, going little beyond a sense of "brotherhood" and "old boy'" camaraderie that is supposed to last well beyond one's college years. It is an elitist message but not one that risks widespread cultural deterioration.

For the military the goal is not benign at all. It is no less than the destruction of the recruit's individuality and habit of independent thinking. The desired restructured individual is one that takes orders unquestioningly and functions as part of a cadre rather than an individual. This is an undeniably anti-democratic process, the effectiveness of which contributes to the difficulty of many veterans to reintegrate back into civilian life. At the same time, "boot camp" seeks to raise the violence potential of the recruit.

We cannot overemphasize the fact that in both cases the institutionalized methodology for the development of an alleged new outlook among millions of citizens is harassment and abuse. No society that allows such processes to go on in some of its most important culture-shaping institutions can hope to remain mentally healthy.

In today's America, there seems to be a deep-seated restlessness. With a nearly open access to all manner of weapons and a history of racial discrimination, labor exploitation, and external aggression, what passes for cultural normality is continuously punctuated by episodes of violence. When considering this, one must face up to the fact that it is to violence that millions of citizens are being acculturated in both college fraternities and military training. These experiences must be judged as contributing factors to a process of cultural deterioration.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.

Russia-gate Flops as Democrats' Golden Ticket

Exclusive: The national Democrats saw Russia-gate and the drive to impeach President Trump as their golden ticket back to power, but so far the ticket seems to be made of fool's gold, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The national Democratic Party and many liberals have bet heavily on the Russia-gate investigation as a way to oust President Trump from office and to catapult Democrats to victories this year and in 2018, but the gamble appears not to be paying off.

The Democrats' disappointing loss in a special election to fill a congressional seat in an affluent Atlanta suburb is just the latest indication that the strategy of demonizing Trump and blaming Russia for Hillary Clinton's 2016 defeat may not be the golden ticket that some Democrats had hoped.

Though it's still early to draw conclusive lessons from Karen Handel's victory

over Jon Ossoff – despite his raising \$25 million – one lesson may be that a Middle America backlash is forming against the over-the-top quality of the Trump-accusations and the Russia-bashing, with Republicans rallying against the image of Official Washington’s “deep state” collaborating with Democrats and the mainstream news media to reverse a presidential election.

Indeed, the Democrats may be digging a deeper hole for themselves in terms of reaching out to white working-class voters who abandoned the party in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin to put Trump over the top in the Electoral College even though Clinton’s landslide win in California gave her almost three million more votes nationwide.

Clinton’s popular-vote plurality and the #Resistance, which manifested itself in massive protests against Trump’s presidency, gave hope to the Democrats that they didn’t need to undertake a serious self-examination into why the party is in decline across the nation’s heartland. Instead, they decided to stoke the hysteria over alleged Russian “meddling” in the election as the short-cut to bring down Trump and his populist movement.

A Party of Snobs?

From conversations that I’ve had with some Trump voters in recent weeks, I was struck by how they viewed the Democratic Party as snobbish, elitist and looking down its nose at “average Americans.” And in conversations with some Clinton voters, I found confirmation for that view in the open disdain that the Clinton backers expressed toward the stupidity of anyone who voted for Trump. In other words, the Trump voters were not wrong to feel “dissed.”

It seems the Republicans – and Trump in particular – have done a better job in presenting themselves to these Middle Americans as respecting their opinions and representing their fears, even though the policies being pushed by Trump and the GOP still favor the rich and will do little good – and significant harm – to the middle and working classes.

By contrast, many of Hillary Clinton’s domestic proposals might well have benefited average Americans but she alienated many of them by telling a group of her supporters that half of Trump’s backers belonged in a “basket of deplorables.” Although she later reduced the percentage, she had committed a cardinal political sin: she had put the liberal disdain for millions of Americans into words – and easily remembered words at that.

By insisting that Hillary Clinton be the Democratic nominee – after leftist populist Bernie Sanders was pushed aside – the party also ignored the fact that many Americans, including many Democrats, viewed Clinton as the perfectly

imperfect candidate for an anti-Establishment year with many Americans still fuming over the Wall Street bailouts and amid the growing sense that the system was rigged for the well-connected and against the average guy or gal.

In the face of those sentiments, the Democrats nominated a candidate who personified how a relatively small number of lucky Americans can play the system and make tons of money while the masses have seen their dreams crushed and their bank accounts drained. And Clinton apparently still hasn't learned that lesson.

Citing Women's Rights

Last month, when asked why she accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars for speaking to Goldman Sachs, Clinton rationalized her greed as a women's rights issue, saying: "you know, men got paid for the speeches they made. I got paid for the speeches I made."

Her excuse captured much of what has gone wrong with the Democratic Party as it moved from its working-class roots and New Deal traditions to becoming a party that places "identity politics" ahead of a duty to fight for the common men and women of America.

Demonstrating her political cluelessness, Clinton used the serious issue of women not getting fair treatment in the workplace to justify taking her turn at the Wall Street money trough, gobbling up in one half-hour speech what it would take many American families a decade to earn.

While it's a bit unfair to personalize the Democratic Party's problems, Hillary and Bill Clinton have come to represent how the party is viewed by many Americans. Instead of the FDR Democrats, we have the Davos Democrats, the Wall Street Democrats, the Hollywood Democrats, the Silicon Valley Democrats, and now increasingly the Military-Industrial Complex Democrats.

To many Americans struggling to make ends meet, the national Democrats seem committed to the interests of the worldwide elites: global trade, financialization of the economy, robotization of the workplace, and endless war against endless enemies.

Now, the national Democrats are clambering onto the bandwagon for a costly and dangerous New Cold War with nuclear-armed Russia. Indeed, it is hard to distinguish their foreign policy from that of neoconservatives, although these Democrats view themselves as liberal interventionists citing humanitarian impulses to justify the endless slaughter.

Earlier this year, a Washington Post/ABC News poll found only 28 percent of Americans saying that the Democrats were "in touch with the concerns of most

people” – an astounding result given the Democrats’ long tradition as the party of the American working class and the party’s post-Vietnam War reputation as favoring butter over guns.

Yet rather than rethink the recent policies, the Democrats prefer to fantasize about impeaching President Trump and continuing a blame-game about who – other than Hillary Clinton, her campaign and the Democratic National Committee – is responsible for Trump’s election. Of course, it’s the Russians, Russians, Russians!

A Problem’s Deep Roots

Without doubt, some of the party’s problems have deep roots that correspond to the shrinking of the labor movement since the 1970s and the growing reliance on big-money donors to finance expensive television-ad-driven campaigns. Over the years, the Democrats also got pounded for being “weak” on national security.

Further, faced with Republican “weaponization” of attack ads in the 1980s, many old-time Democrats lost out to the Reagan Revolution, clearing the way for a new breed of Democrats who realized that they could compete for a slice of the big money by cultivating the emerging coastal elites: Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Hollywood and even elements of the National Security State.

By the 1990s, President Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council defined this New Democrat, politicians who reflected the interests of well-heeled coastal elites, especially on free trade; streamlined financial regulations; commitment to technology; and an activist foreign policy built around spreading “liberal values” across the globe.

Mixed in was a commitment to the rights of various identity groups, a worthy goal although this tolerance paradoxically contributed to a new form of prejudice among some liberals who came to view many white working-class people as fat, stupid and bigoted, society’s “losers.”

So, while President Clinton hobnobbed with the modern economy’s “winners” – with sleepovers in the Lincoln bedroom and parties in the Hamptons – much of Middle America felt neglected if not disdained. The “losers” were left to rot in “flyover America” with towns and cities that had lost their manufacturing base and, with it, their vitality and even their purpose for existing.

Republican Fraud

It wasn’t as if the Republicans were offering anything better. True, they were more comfortable talking to these “forgotten Americans” – advocating “gun rights” and “traditional values” and playing on white resentments over racial

integration and civil rights – but, in office, the Republicans aggressively favored the interests of the rich, cutting their taxes and slashing regulations even more than the Democrats.

The Republicans paid lip service to the struggling blue-collar workers but control of GOP policies was left in the hands of corporations and their lobbyists.

Though the election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president, raised hopes that the nation might finally bind its deep racial wounds, it turned out to have a nearly opposite effect. Tea Party Republicans rallied many white working-class Americans to resist Obama and the hip urban future that he represented. They found an unlikely champion in real-estate mogul and reality TV star Donald Trump, who sensed how to tap into their fears and anger with his demagogic appeals and false populism.

Meanwhile, the national Democrats were falling in love with data predicting that demographics would magically turn Republican red states blue. So the party blithely ignored the warning signs of a cataclysmic break with the Democrats' old-time base.

Despite all the data on opioid addiction and declining life expectancy among the white working class, Hillary Clinton was politically tone-deaf to the rumbles of discontent echoing across the Rust Belt. She assumed the traditionally Democratic white working-class precincts would stick with her and she tried to appeal to the “security moms” in typically Republican suburbs by touting her neoconservative foreign policy thinking. And she ran a relentlessly negative campaign against Trump while offering voters few positive reasons to vote for her.

Ignoring Reality

When her stunning loss became clear on Election Night – as the crude and unqualified Trump pocketed the electoral votes of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin – the Democrats refused to recognize what the elections results were telling them, that they had lost touch with a still important voting bloc, working-class whites.

Rather than face these facts, the national Democrats – led by President Obama and his intelligence chiefs – decided on a different approach, to seek to reverse the election by blaming the result on the Russians. Obama, his intelligence chiefs and a collaborative mainstream media insisted without presenting any real evidence that the Russians had hacked into Democratic emails and released them to the devastating advantage of Trump, as if the minor

controversies from leaked emails of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta explained Trump's surprising victory.

As part of this strategy, any Trump link to Russia – no matter how inconsequential, whether from his businesses or through his advisers – became the focus of Woodward-and-Bernstein/Watergate-style investigations. The obvious goal was to impeach Trump and ride the wave of Trump-hating enthusiasm to a Democratic political revival.

In other words, there was no reason to look in the mirror and rethink how the Democratic Party might begin rebuilding its relationships with the white working-class, just hold hearings featuring Obama's intelligence chieftains and leak damaging Russia-gate stuff to the media.

But the result of this strategy has been to deepen the Democratic Party's reliance on the elites, particularly the self-reverential mavens of the mainstream media and the denizens of the so-called "deep state." From my conversations with Trump voters, they "get" what's going on, how the powers-that-be are trying to negate the 63 million Americans who voted for Trump by reversing a presidential election carried out under the U.S. constitutional process.

A Letter from 'Deplorable' Land

Some Trump supporters are even making this point publicly. Earlier this month, a "proud deplorable" named Kenton Woodhead from Brunswick, Ohio, wrote to The New York Times informing the "newspaper of record" that he and other "deplorables" were onto the scheme.

"I wanted to provide you with an unsophisticated synopsis of The New York Times and the media's quest for the implosion of Donald Trump's presidency from out here in the real world, in 'deplorable' country. ... Every time you and your brethren at other news organizations dream up a new scheme to get Mr. Trump, we out here in deplorable land increase our support for him. ...

"Regardless of what you dream up every day, we refuse to be sucked into your narrative. And even more humorously, there isn't anything you can do about it! And I love it that you are having the exact opposite effect on those of us you are trying to persuade to think otherwise.

"I mean it is seriously an enjoyable part of my day knowing you are failing. And badly! I haven't had this much fun watching the media stumble, bumble and fumble in years. I wonder what will happen on the day you wake up and realize how disconnected you've become."

So, despite Trump's narcissism and incompetence – and despite how his policies will surely hurt many of his working-class supporters – the national Democrats are further driving a wedge between themselves and this crucial voting bloc. By whipping up a New Cold War with Russia and hurling McCarthistic slurs at people who won't join in the Russia-bashing, the Democratic Party's tactics also are alienating many peace voters who view both the Republicans and Democrats as warmongers of almost equal measures of guilt.

While it's certainly not my job to give advice to the Democrats – or any other political group – I can't help but thinking that this Russia-gate “scandal” is not only lacking in logic and evidence, but it doesn't even make any long-term political sense.

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](#)).

At FBI, Mueller Oversaw Post-9/11 Abuses

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

By Jonathan Marshall

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

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

Punting to Congress, a branch of government rarely known for its defense of individual rights, the court declared, “The proper balance in situations like this, between deterring constitutional violations and freeing high officials to

make the lawful decisions necessary to protect the Nation in times of great peril, is one for the Congress to undertake, not the Judiciary.”

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

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

Appalling Abuses

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

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

“They were confined in tiny cells for over 23 hours a day, provided with meager and barely edible food, and prohibited from moving around the unit . . . (or) keeping any property, including personal hygiene items like toilet paper and soap, in their cells. Whenever they left their cells, they were handcuffed and shackled. . . (D)etainees . . . were often physically abused along the way, and were sometimes left for hours in the cold recreation cell, over their protests, as a form of punishment. . . .

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

“The MDC Detainees also were subjected to frequent physical and verbal abuse . . . The physical abuse included slamming the MDC Detainees into walls; bending or twisting their arms, hands, wrists, and fingers; lifting them off the ground by

their arms; pulling on their arms and handcuffs; stepping on their leg restraints; restraining them with handcuffs and/or shackles even while in their cells; and handling them in other rough and inappropriate ways. The use of such force was unnecessary because the MDC Detainees were always fully compliant with orders . . . The verbal abuse included referring to the MDC Detainees as 'terrorists' and other offensive names, threatening them with violence, cursing at them, (and) insulting their religion . . .

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

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

An Abu Ghraib in Brooklyn

Though not at the level of brutality of water boarding and some of the beatings associated with secret CIA detention centers, these MDC abuses had some similarities to the humiliation and mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq – and the abuses were taking place right in the heart of New York City. Plus, unlike some of the CIA's torture victims, these detainees had nothing to do with terrorist plots; some were never even questioned by the FBI after their arrest.

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

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

rights were sure to be abused.

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

A Terrible Precedent

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

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

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

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

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.

Iran's Missile Strike Adds to Syrian Crisis

For the first time in 30 years, Iran fired missiles from its territory – in a strike against ISIS in Syria, putting down a marker that Iran won't tolerate more terror attacks against Tehran, Patrick Henningsen explained at 21st Century Wire.

By Patrick Henningsen

On June 19, Iran's Revolutionary Guard announced that it had fired several missiles at ISIS positions in the Deir Az Zor province in Syria. The reason given for this unprecedented military strike was retaliation for double terrorist attacks which struck Tehran two weeks ago. Readers should not underestimate the significance of this event.

According to a statement issued by the news agency for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Sepahnews, "Multiple medium-range missiles were fired from the Iranian provinces of Kermanshah and Kurdistan, and a large number of terrorists were killed and their weapons were destroyed."

Regarding the alleged ISIS attack, which killed 13 people and wounded 50 others, the Revolutionary Guard added, "The spilling of any pure blood will not go unanswered."

Make no mistake about it – this was a major media event. It's been 30 years since Iran has fired missiles at targets outside of its own borders. Iranian television featured images of the IRGC missiles being launched at night.

The IRGC has also warned that more missile strikes will follow should ISIS militants plot any future attacks on Iran. "If they carry out a specific action to violate our security, definitely there will be more launches, with intensified strength," said General Ramazan Sharif of the IRGC (also cited by AP).

Fars News Agency added, "The IRGC warns the Takfiri terrorists and their regional and trans-regional supporters that they would be engulfed by its revolutionary wrath and flames of the fire of its revenge in case they repeat any such devilish and dirty move in future."

This latest move by Iran is worrying for a number of reasons. Justified or not, Iran's launch from its western provinces, over Iraqi airspace and into Syria will most certainly heighten tensions in an already tense Syrian theatre. If the situation escalates, the question of who has the upper hand may not matter should the situation descend into all-out war involving the U.S.

Syria: A Crowded Theatre

Iran's missile strike took place on June 18, targeting an ISIS command center located near the embattled city of Deir Az Zor, a key choke point on the road to the ISIS-held city Raqqa in northeastern Syria. This area is currently a hive of international military activity featuring a host of players – the Syrian Army, Russia, Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah militia and opposing U.S., U.K., Australia,

France, Turkish and German forces positioned alongside numerous U.S.-allied (and paid for) militias like the Kurdish SDF, YPG militias – all presumably camped in the region to “defeat ISIS.”

Add to this the problem of U.S. having repeatedly attacked Syrian military forces in a manner that has aided the strategic advances of ISIS. Following from this point, it should be well-known by now, based on successive U.S. aggressions inside Syria, that the Pentagon is probing both Syrian and Russian defenses, testing their level of patience, perhaps in the hope that either Syria or Russia might retaliate against a U.S. aircraft or U.S. support positions on the ground.

In the event that the U.S. loses a single aircraft, or loses one member of its combat team to the hands of a Syrian or Russian military asset, then Washington will no doubt seize on this event as an “act of aggression,” initiate its media machine to begin consensus-building internationally, ramping-up military operations on par with Iraq in 2003. This would be the excuse that the U.S.-led Coalition has been needing in order to blow the Syrian theatre open into a wide regional or possibly, *world-wide war*.

The missile strike by Iran could be a mid-term game changer in the sense that it places Iran squarely into the frame of fighting international terrorism, and ISIS. Up until this point, parties in the U.S. led by the neoconservative right, the Trump White House, and the sister lobbies of Israel and Saudi Arabia – have tried hard to enforce a strict party line that Iran is somehow, “The number one state sponsor of terror on the planet,” despite the fact that no evidence is ever presented to back-up this sensational geopolitical plank.

Benefiting Saudi Arabia

One of the main beneficiaries of this talking point is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which gains on two fronts; the “Iranian terror” line deflects from Saudi Arabia’s own sordid role in supporting and funding armed militants, terrorist groups (including active factions in Syria) and radical mosques worldwide. This dovetails well with the Trump Administration’s current embrace of Saudi Arabia as an ally in the “War on Terror” and the simultaneous casting-out of Gulf state Qatar from the U.S.-led Coalition’s inner circle in Middle East military and diplomatic affairs.

But that has provoked counter-moves. This week, Turkish troops were deployed to Qatar in a show of support for Qatar by Ankara. This is just another signal that the geopolitics of the region and around Syria, is getting more complicated by the day.

However, Washington and Riyadh’s efforts to bracket Qatar with “state sponsor of

terror” Iran will be even more difficult following the twin-terror attacks against Tehran and Sunday’s retaliatory missile strike. For this reason, the IRGC believes that Saudi and the U.S. are linked to the Tehran attacks.

The *FT* explains: “However a statement from the Revolutionary Guards linked the ‘brutal attack’ [on Tehran] to Donald Trump’s visit last month to Riyadh, where the US president singled out Iran for fuelling ‘the fires of sectarian conflict and terror’.

“‘This terrorist act took place a week after a joint meeting between the US president and head of a reactionary regional country [Saudi Arabia] which has been a constant supporter of terrorism,’ the statement said. ‘The fact Isis claimed responsibility proves that they [Saudi Arabia] were involved in the brutal attack.’”

Despite all of this, Trump has placed all his chips on Saudi Arabia as Washington’s only major Arab partner in the region. Does Washington really think Saudi Arabia is of high moral standing in the region? You can blame the Saudi decline in popularity for a number of reasons – supporting Wahhabi extremism, beheading Shia clerics, or Saudi’s ability to buy their seat at the head of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, or cynically *acquiring* the U.N. Women’s Rights chair. Perhaps Washington is over-estimating Saudi Arabia’s position in the Middle East.

Tehran Attack: Who Did It?

Another interesting but under-reported component of this story has to do with the reason for Iran’s missile retaliation. Although ISIS apparently claimed credit for the Tehran attacks on June 6, other evidence suggests that another well-known international terrorist entity might have been involved.

After events in Tehran, the U.S.-backed regime change terrorist proxy, the MEK (Mojahedin-e Khalq) was named by senior Iranian politician Mr. Hamid-Reza Taraghi, as a partner in the terrorist attacks. This theory gains a bit more credence following a statement from former member of the MEK, Massoud Khodabandeh, who has stated that ISIS drew on MEK “expertise” for the terror attacks on Tehran. Certainly, the MEK have been active in carrying out operations inside of Iran for decades now, while ISIS has not. Massoud Khodabandeh’s analysis of the attacks is stunning, and raises two essential points:

“The targets selected by ISIS were sites constantly targeted by the MEK. The Iranian Parliament and its members had always been primary targets for the MEK since the 1980s. The group had managed to assassinate several members of the

Parliament and tried to plant a bomb there at one point. They were unsuccessful and some members were killed by security forces while other terrorist teams were arrested. Similarly, after Ayatollah Khomeini's shrine was created, Massoud Rajavi, the late MEK leader, announced that 'Khomeini's grave must be exploded'. It became a mantra among MEK members which they would chant in indoctrination sessions. The MEK tried unsuccessfully to send terrorist teams there in 1991 and 2002."

"While ISIS and the MEK have the same interests in attacking Iran, ISIS could have caused much greater anti-government fear and hatred among the civilian population in line with its regime change agenda if they had bombed a civilian target like transport infrastructure or a shopping mall. They could have done more damage by targeting the Revolutionary Guards whose forces are in Syria. Instead, the ISIS targets matched those which had been constantly under attack by the MEK for thirty years."

The MEK factor is extremely worrying because it signals a new leg in Washington's asymmetric war in the region. History shows us that when great powers sow this level of chaos, the chances for a multi-country conflagration becomes more likely.

Apportioning Blame

Regardless of where blame is apportioned in this case, Iran seems to have accepted the claim by ISIS for these attacks on Iranian soil, effectively giving Tehran an internationally recognized green light to act unilaterally against ISIS assets inside Syria.

For those who subscribe to the school of thought that implicates Saudi Arabia and the U.S. for aiding and supporting ISIS covertly, then Iran has not only called their bluff, but co-opted their own "anti-ISIS" narrative too.

Presently, Iran has military assets deployed in Syria at the invitation of the government in Damascus, so it's certain that both Damascus and Moscow were aware of Iran's missile strike in advance, but not the U.S. – once again demonstrating that without significant ground assets deployed in the region the U.S. cannot really control the situation around Raqqa. This means that Washington, no matter how hard its media machine can spin, are simply not able to dictate facts on the ground in Syria.

Clearly, Iran seized an advantage here, but how this plays out in terms of increased tensions with the U.S.-led Coalition in Syria remains to be seen.

The most worrying aspect of this development is the timing. On the same day as Iran fired missiles into Deir Az Zor province in Syria, a U.S. F/A-18E Super

Hornet shot down a Syrian SU-22 fighter jet near Raqqa. Washington claimed it as an act of “collective self-defense” as the Syrian jet had dropped bombs “near US-backed forces.” As a result of this overt act of aggression by the U.S., the Russian Defense Ministry announced that it is halting its “Deconfliction” cooperation with its U.S. counterparts set out in their bilateral Memorandum on the Prevention of Incidents and Ensuring Air Safety in Syria.

Add to this the fact that each day the U.S. continue to kill more Syrian civilians during their supposed “anti-ISIS” strikes in Raqqa, and it’s not difficult to see that the U.S. position is becoming increasingly isolated in the Middle Eastern theatre, leaving its only two remaining solid partners as a pair who themselves are now widely regarded as rogue states in the region: Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The scene has now been set for a wider war. All it will take is a small spark between the two major opposing geopolitical forces or their allies.

Patrick Henningsen is an American-born writer and global affairs analyst and founder of independent news and analysis site 21st Century Wire and host of the SUNDAY WIRE weekly radio show broadcast globally over the Alternate Current Radio Network (ACR). [This article first appeared at <http://21stcenturywire.com/2017/06/20/dangerous-development-iranian-missile-launch-into-syria-against-isis-places-the-us-in-a-precarious-position/>]

The Price that Julian Assange Pays

People who challenge power are often viewed by their supporters as more icons than human beings thus missing the personal costs of their actions, a reality that Julian Assange’s mother revealed to Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

June 19 marked the fifth full year that Wikileaks founder Julian Assange spent at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he was given asylum against the threat of arrest from a Swedish prosecutor pursuing a sex-abuse investigation (since dropped) and possible extradition to the United States for a potential espionage charge related to publication of U.S. secrets.

To gain insights into what this long ordeal has meant to Assange, an Australian native, Randy Credico of WBAI’s “On the Fly” and Dennis Bernstein of “Flashpoints” on Pacifica Radio interviewed Assange’s mother, Christine Assange.

The interview also explored the deep history that led her son to found Wikileaks and to challenge the enormous powers of the U.S. and British governments by exposing the truth about their dangerous, deadly and often illegal policies.

Randy Credico: I guess I should begin by asking, how long has it been since you've seen your son Julian?

Christine Assange: A number of years, but we communicate.

RC: Yes, you communicate, but it's not the same, so far away. It must be difficult. I mean he's not in prison, but it may as well be prison. I know for a mother to be separated from her son like this, it must be grueling, and a difficult row to hoe on a daily basis.

CA: It is. It's very hard to put into words this experience that we're going through over the last seven years. There have been periods where I've coped and periods where I haven't. It tends to go up and down, as I guess Julian does as well. And it's very hard to communicate with your son when you know that every phone call that you're making, every text that you're sending, is being listened to. Or even a letter that you write. You end up feeling that it's almost useless trying to communicate anything real.

RC: That must really take its toll. So it will be five years [on June 19th]. Five years! Can you believe that he's been there for five years at this point in time?

CA: No, the idea is horrifying to me actually. I mean we know that he's been detained for seven years without charge, but five of those have been in the Ecuadorian Embassy [in London], and we thank the people of Ecuador for their protection.

But during those five years, Randy, the U.K. government and the Swedish government have refused all of Julian's requests for the normal one hour a day of life-giving fresh air, exercise and sunshine. It's a human right abuse of the grandest order.

Anyone who is involved with rights of refugees around the world should be highlighting his case. Here we are in the Western supposedly free world, interning someone without charge, and then denying them the rights that even people in Third World prisons get, including the right to have medical tests. He had a very bad shoulder with bad chronic pain for years, and they refused to allow him to have an MRI test.

Dennis Bernstein: Let me just ask you this question: do you remember the last time you were able to give your son a nice big hug?

CA: Yes, four years ago.

DB: Could you tell us what you remember about it?

CA: It's hard keeping up with all the fighting, Dennis. It's very hard to explain. But I got a big hug when I left. I was only there for a few weeks. I've actually got a few things here that I've got to look after. But probably the best time I remember him is the one with the picture you've got on your show, of me and him with his arm around me. That was when he'd just gotten out of prison, and I'd gone over there to campaign for him.

And we were out in the snow, at about 3 o'clock on the morning, outside of the place that he was staying. And that was with an Australian television crew and we were all Aussies together in that moment. And I was giving him a big hug, and they were cheering, and it was a really good moment. It all feels so far away, and so foreign for us all to be there together. And for me to hold Julian, with his countrymen around giving support, was a really good moment.

DB: And now that we've got Julian's mom on the phone, could you talk a little bit about ... the first clue that he was going to be perhaps an interesting person, a troublemaker, or somebody who was really interested in public affairs? How do you remember that beginning?

CA: Well I don't think there was any one point at which it happened. Julian had always been an incredibly curious child, and always wanted to know why – wanted to know how things worked. And I actually encouraged that in him as a child. He would ask how something would work, and rather than say, this is how it works, I would ask him, how do you think it works?

And then we would explore theories at his age level about how something would work, and he was very turned on by all that. I also read him a lot of books. From the time he was a baby, he was read books every day, from fairy tales, to Greek legends, to the adventure heroic classics – Tarzan, for example, where good was trouncing evil, and there were heroic adventures.

The justice part of it was not to any form of ideology, it was just about showing empathy and fairness in everyday life. So I think all those things together – and he came from a creative background – all that enabled him to sort of explore justice, and the power to change.

Then he wanted to know how the world worked. He wanted to be a physicist because he wanted to get to the bottom of it. And he went to university for physics and was disappointed that most of the job opportunities involved working for the US government, developing weapons, etc., and so he wasn't very happy with that.

And then the next thing I remember, we were having a discussion about the ills of the world and what could make a change in the world and I asked him, what do you think would lead to a change? And he said he thought there are two possibilities: one was a cataclysmic event that knocked some sense into people because they'd have to really look at their environment.

The other one was technology. And I think Wikileaks was the result of the technology that he saw would change the world.

DB: You said something very interesting: that it wasn't about grand things, but about fairness in everyday life. Can you think of one of those everyday examples that sort of blossomed into the Julian Assange that we know in terms of his vision now for information?

CA: Well not anything specific in terms of day-to-day life, but just in general with people we were dealing with in the family or with neighbors: we wouldn't walk past somebody who was lying in the street, for example. If there was someone lying in the street, whether they were drunk or if it was a drug overdose, or if they were sick – we would stop and ask them if they were alright. And Julian would continue that. We were in a situation where we were helping some people involved in a justice situation that had to do with the court system, and Julian was boots and all defending people.

But also when he was a young teenager, he was very into computers. So I bought him a computer, and he went exploring on it, and later on he joined up with some other young people. And there was not a lot available in terms of being challenging and adventuring in the suburbs, but these bright young friends of his were challenging themselves on computers, and one of the ways they were doing it was to what they called "look-see" hacking, which was where they'd break in and they'd look at things, they wouldn't damage anything, but let people know their system was insecure.

Now, in the process of doing that, I remember during the Gulf War that he got in and had a look, and he told me, "There's stuff going on here that's not right, there are people doing things that are not right here, and we're not being told about it – it's not coming out in the media."

And I think that also galvanized him into his concept of Wikileaks, which was basically a concept around really good media. And that is that the media hold the governments and the corporations through, basically the truth, responsible to the people.

RC: He has done an incredible job. We are much better off – we are more knowledgeable about our government's evil actions around the world, and

obviously he's being penalized for that. First of all, he's been vilified by these phony allegations. How did you react when these allegations came out of the Swedish government prosecutor's office?

CA: Well I remember the time exactly. It was about 11 o'clock at night when I got a phone call, and the person didn't even introduce themselves, they just said, "Mrs. Assange, how does it feel to have your son accused of a double rape?"

And straight from my solar plexus I just said, "He didn't do it." Because I know my son, and I know that Julian wouldn't do it. But then I had to go through the whole process of investigating the case because, to defend him, I had to know exactly what was going on.

And so, like those who defended him with knowledge, we had to troll through all the documents, to find out the basis of the allegations, and then what we found was a complete and utter set up. And that was a horrifying feeling to find out that your son would actually be set up on something as serious as a rape allegation, purely because he published the truth about corrupt power.

DB: Where exactly are you right now?

CA: I'm in Australia.

DB: Oh, you're in Australia! You're very far away, but you're very close to us here, and we're really appreciating the kind of material that you're sharing about Julian Assange on this, his fifth year of his being held captive, really you have to say by threats of the United States government, who has a special penchant for hurting whistleblowers.

I'm thinking of this carpenter – this illiterate carpenter – who actually fled from fascist Italy and ended up in fascist Argentina. And he used to spout these phrases, and one of the things he used to say is, "Truth has few friends, and those few are suicides" [Antonio Porchia]. Now that's a very dark comment, but it does seem, if you think about Julian Assange or other great truth tellers, what was waiting for them was a jail cell, or a bullet. Your thoughts on that – that courage that it takes to go forward?

CA: Well the original truth teller was Jesus Christ, wasn't he? He was throwing the money changers out of the temple. And now 2,000 years later we've got defense contractors, the oil industry and Wall Street. And he said, "And you shall know the truth and it shall set you free."

And nothing has really changed since then. We still have corrupt power consolidating itself, and really destroying the world, and not working on the

behalf of people. And it sort of brings me back to what we should be doing, as people. What should we do? Our leaders let us down again and again. They say they're going to do something and when they get in power they're either bad leaders who were leading us on, or they're good leaders who are under pressure themselves. And they're fighting each other and name-calling, but it's still not working, is it?

So I see Wikileaks as a uniting point for everybody – from the Left and the Right and everything in between – uniting around the First Amendment, which is what you call it in America, or the free press around the world, to hold our leaders in the business world and in the government accountable through transparency and truth.

And good leaders are actually supported by Wikileaks because if they are indeed under pressure from the Deep State – for example, supposing we assume that Donald Trump is a good guy, and does want to, as he says, “drain the swamp”, which is the Deep State, then he's going to need Wikileaks – not just during the campaign, when Wikileaks was wonderful and he loved Wikileaks, but even more so now, when the Deep State is going to try to prevent his campaign.

Now if he's not in fact a good guy, but a bad guy all along, then of course he's going to want to suppress Wikileaks. And our assessment of Donald Trump very much hinges on whether he is going to protect Wikileaks and Julian.

DB: We were just speaking with one of the attorneys, Jesselyn Radack, who has worked with Julian Assange, and we were talking about the message that might be being sent now by the very strong crackdown and arrest of the most recent whistleblower coming out of the National Security Agency [Reality Winner]. Does that give you pause or concern that Julian might have a tough row ahead?

CA: Oh, I've always known he's going to have a tough row ahead, you only have to look at the way they've treated their own whistleblowers, as you said, in their own CIA and NSA. The Obama administration arrested and prosecuted more whistleblowers than all other presidents combined, so things were certainly not looking good, even before this change of administration.

I'm not talking about Reality Winner. I'm not sure where she's coming from but, even so, wherever she's coming from, the protocol should still be the same. And I don't know if that's the case. If you are a whistleblower there should be protections for you and then it should be investigated and authenticated. And there should be a transparent legal process, and your rights should be protected during that time period. The reason I say I don't know where she's coming from, is because they've been talking about so-called leaks about Russians, and all the rest of it, and we know that they've been set up, that the Russians didn't

hack the DNC.

They're going to say that there were leaks and they're not leaks, but because we don't know who, that's the reason why we need to protect all whistleblowers, including her, and why it should go through due process, the same as for any other citizen.

DB: We know that Julian was pretty troubled by the way in which *The Intercept* blew their source in this context. He seems to have been a lot more careful in his work in terms of protecting sources. I'm wondering if you noted that.

CA: Oh, absolutely. I remember when Wikileaks was being set up, that Julian was saying to me, "We're going to spend two years with the best minds in the world, to create an anonymous drop box, so that nobody can crack it, because we want to protect our sources. And we want people to feel so comfortable in leaking to us and not to feel frightened that they're going to be revealed". So he's kept to that, even to the risk to his own life and liberty.

Wikileaks has never revealed a source – no source has been exposed by Wikileaks. Chelsea Manning exposed herself on the Internet. And very few other media have been willing to rise to that challenge. So it's best to leak to Wikileaks if you're going to leak. It's a pity that she [Reality Winner] didn't leak to Wikileaks.

RC: Yes. I must say, he really is a remarkable individual. I am not a techie, but he really knows all of this stuff really well, he's brilliant, but he comes off so genuine. It's really amazing to see him on all of these talk shows, on radio – how well he comes off. And he's got a great sense of humor, he's got an incredible education, he's so well-spoken, so dignified when he's on. Does that amaze you?

CA: Yes... well yes and no... because he's grown up with me, and I've seen him, and he's always been a refined person. He's never been a crude person. He's been an honest person and an empathetic person, and he's always been very bright, so that he got to where he is on the world stage doesn't surprise me.

Though of course in another way it does, and I'm in awe of him as well – not in any kind of demigod way, but just as a human being with such resilience and courage, and so strong in the truth. And taking the most incredible amount of attacks, not just from governments and corporations, and what they're getting up to behind the scenes, but trolls.

I mean the thing that probably hurt me the most when watching him stand up for his work, was seeing other journalists, particularly UK journalists, trolling him on Wikileaks with the most vile, immature, picky, vicious comments. I

couldn't believe that this was coming out of the mouths of so-called journalists! And he's resilient, and the ability to rise above it is quite awe-inspiring, isn't it?

DB: And he continues on despite it all. He certainly has a resolve and a focus that borders on super-human. He has not been distracted from the work, in fact he has managed to expand it. It's sort of a bit of a miracle.

CA: Well, Julian is very grounded. His convictions come out of critical analysis, they don't come out of an easy path of jumping on some ideological bandwagon, so that when the going gets tough, he's grounded in where he's coming from. Because he drove himself, he's not easily shaken by attacks, by ideological attacks, for example, or personal attacks. I think they've called him every "ist" there is – narcissist, racist, marxist, capitalist – and on and on it goes. But he knows that the reason he's doing this is about media truth and justice, and government transparency, and he's grounded in that reality, and that's why he's not so easily shaken.

RC: He is the most fearless individual. I mean he's got the entire Intelligence Community, the Military Community [against him] – not just here in the U.S. but in Britain – even your own government.

What is your own government doing to protect one of their citizens? Under Prime Minister Turnbull?

CA: They've never done anything under any of them! The Labor government under Julia Gillard called what he did illegal and wanted to take his passport away, and she actually said she was quite happy to hand him over to the U.S. and change our extradition laws specifically to make it easier for him to be handed over.

Basically we don't have a real government, we've got a puppet government – it's just a U.S. puppet, and they're constantly auditioning through the US Embassy for a place in the spotlight. Prime Minister Turnbull was an ex-Director of Goldman Sachs Australia. Not sure if you're familiar with the term "government sets"? That's where big US banks put their people in governments around the world.

So basically it would appear that in the Australian political landscape, if you want a promotion, you will swear on your credentials that you're willing to tow the line on Assange.

DB: And finally, we've got Julian's mom here, and I have to end this way – forgive me, Mom, but what are you most proud of in terms of your son? What part of his actions, his work, makes you the most proud as his mom?

CA: That he's standing ethically in truth for justice, with courage. That he's willing to risk his life and his liberty for his fellow man, basically. And that's what he's doing – he's risking his health, his liberty and even his life, because we've heard all the horrible stuff coming out of various commentators: things like "We're gonna shoot the son of a bitch" coming from Bob Beckel, a Democratic strategist.

And all the horrible things that Mike Pompeo said about him being a demon and "an unsafe intelligence actor." And nonsense stuff about him being involved in child pornography from both sides, trying to set him up. I mean most people would have fallen over by now. But I think that because Julian is standing for something that's good and right and correct, I think that's where he derives his strength.

RC: He does have a lot of support, and I've been getting a lot of support from his supporters for this show, on Twitter and social media.

[...] What can people do? What do you recommend people do to help out Julian?

CA: [...] Some of the American supporters have been very busy lately. They've organized the Boycott UK and it's under the hashtag #BoycottUK and also the hashtag #FreeAssangeNOW .

This is a very good idea because we all know that money makes the world go round and in fact some are saying that a lot of the opposition to Julian is from greedy corporations because he exposes things like some of the reasons for war, and some of them profit from defense contracts. They also know that by reducing profits for major corporations, they will lean on government to change their policy. So boycotting big UK businesses until they free Julian – all big businesses that are operating in the UK.

Another California supporter ... has put up a campaign called "5 dollars for 5 years" and that is about how Julian spent five years in the Ecuadorian Embassy giving the truth, fighting for us, for our right to know. How about if we donate five dollars – a dollar for each year that he spent there? And that will go to top up the Julian Assange Defense fund which is at justice4assange.com. And you can donate your five dollars there.

Also on that site there's a lot of information – it's the best site in the world for finding out the facts about what's been happening to Julian Assange for the last seven years. And let me tell you, it reads like The Bourne Conspiracy – what the government's been up to to try to shut my son up is criminal and unbelievable.

So, just in America, just these last few weeks, American citizens have been

standing up to fight.

But what you're doing is also incredibly important, Randy. We find that when people are apprised of the facts about Wikileaks, and the facts about Julian, that most come onboard to support him, and some even come onboard as very active supporters. So it's about getting out the facts, because there's an awful lot of propaganda and lies. But once people know the facts they are supportive, so that's also very important that people talk to each other about the facts, find out the facts. And there's a very good FAQ at justice4assange.com.

So getting out the facts is really important, boycotting is very important, and funding Julian and funding Wikileaks is also important. We often feel very alone and powerless in the world at the moment, but we do have two things that we can still do.

One thing is where we spend our consumer dollar. It might only be five dollars, but if a million people donate five dollars, that's really putting Julian and Wikileaks in a strong position to fight.

The other thing is the vote: keep your politician on speed dial and yank his or her chain every so often to remind them that we actually pay their wages, and we expect them to stand up for truth and government accountability, we expect them to not get in bed with corruption, and we are not impressed with them persecuting truth-telling media.

So there are just three things you can do straightaway. And of course you can always form your own Free Assange group – it can be a group of one or two or more. And this is what some ladies have done in America and around the world – nice people who have formed Free Assange groups. They are just ordinary people – they're not actually highly political people, they're often mothers who want to see the world protected for their children, and they often have no political experience, but a lot of heart and drive and creativity. And they often make the best advocates.

RC: Well, Ms. Christine Assange, I really appreciate you being part of this show. You are welcome back anytime. You are really doing an incredible job on behalf of your son, who is a hero. And I would like to give you the last word. If there's something you want to convey to Julian and his supporters there in London, I'm going to give you the last word.

CA: Well, firstly, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all the supporters around the world who have stood up and fought to protect and defend Wikileaks and Julian. Sometimes you've only done one action, sometimes you've done more – it doesn't matter, you did something.

The people in London at the Ecuadorian Embassy have just been troopers. Both Ecuador and its embassy staff and the people of Ecuador and the people from the Julian Assange Defense Fund and Wise Up Action – those guys who stood outside that embassy, day-in, day-out – in the rain, hail, snow and sun – to support my son and protect him. And at one stage, when they tried to raid the embassy illegally and grab Julian, these people were his protectors. And I would encourage anybody who is visiting London anytime to drop into the embassy and stand outside the embassy and join these historic groups.

Show Julian that you care. Show the powers that be that the people care and they're not going away. Wikileaks, after all, is supplied by the people, with information for the people, for their protection. It's 100% funded by the people, and it's defended and protected by the people, including our lawyers. This is a people's publisher, and it just goes to show you what the people can achieve when they get together. Wikileaks is rocking the halls of power, and they're terrified. And they have come back as bad as IS [Islamic State] terrorists against the truth, but the people are standing firm.

And to my son, I love you, I'm still here, I'm still fighting, I'm incredibly proud of your work. You're a terrific human being, and we're all standing here and we will keep fighting until we get you out of there.

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

Spoiling for a Wider War in Syria

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

By Robert Parry

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

Ironically, the best hope for averting a dangerous escalation into a global conflict is to rely on Assad, Putin, Iran and Hezbollah to show restraint in the

face of illegal military attacks by the United States and its Mideast allies inside Syria.

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

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

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

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

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

Demanding Escalation

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

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

Although it was the U.S. that shot down the Syrian plane over Syria, the Journal’s editorial portrays the Russians and Syrians as the hotheads for

denouncing the U.S. attack as a provocation and warning that similar air strikes will not be tolerated.

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

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

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

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

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

Propaganda Value

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

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

villain and the “rebels” as the heroes.

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

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

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

But the problem is that almost none of this history exists within the U.S. mainstream narrative, which – as the Journal’s neocon editors did on Tuesday – simply depicts Obama as weak and then baits President Trump to show more military muscle.

What U.S. National Interests?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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