

# Trump Escalates Anti-Leak Campaign

President Trump has made clear his anger about “leaks,” but he is far from alone among recent U.S. presidents waging war against whistleblowing, write Jesselyn Radack and Kathleen McClellan for ExposeFacts.

By Jesselyn Radack and Kathleen McClellan

The Trump administration has declared a war on media leaks and called for the U.S. federal workforce and contractors to receive “anti-leak” training. The centerpiece of Trump’s anti-leak campaign, aside from early morning tweet-storms railing against leakers and media, is the National Insider Threat Taskforce.

The Insider Threat Program is not a Trump-era creation. In then-secret testimony to Congress in 2012, Directorate of National Intelligence official Robert Litt touted the original Insider Threat Program as a highlight in administrative efforts to “sanction and deter” leaks. In the past, Insider Threat Program training has improperly included “WANTED”-style images of whistleblowers pictured alongside actual spies and mass murderers.

As recently as last month, the Department of Defense has developed training courses, toolkits, templates, posters, and videos, all aimed toward silencing and deterring anyone who would disclose to the press or the public information that the government wants kept secret for no legitimate reason and that the public has an interest in knowing. It is not only federal employees who receive these trainings, but tens of thousands of government contractors as well. Companies with any classified access are required to implement an “Insider Threat Program,” an insidious presumption that employees cannot be trusted.

Part of the “Unauthorized Disclosure” training includes watching a Fox News clip on the crackdown on leaks and Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s statement announcing an increase in criminal leak investigations. A student guide from the Insider Threat Awareness training includes the McCarthyesque request that employees report on each other for “general suspicious behaviors,” including “Questionable national loyalty” such as “Displaying questionable loyalty to U.S. government or company” or “Making anti-U.S. comments.” Never mind that the only oath government employees take is to the U.S. Constitution, not to any government official or the U.S. government itself and certainly not to a private company.

## Anti-Leak Posters

The many secrecy trainings come with promotional posters with unsophisticated

rhyming slogans cringe-worthy to First Amendment advocates and marketing professionals alike, such as "There no delete when you tweet" or "Tweets sink fleets." The poster with the slogan "Every Leak makes us weak" is accompanied by a melting American flag info-graphic. Then there's the most anti-press poster, a mock newspaper website with the slogan "Think before you click," complete with a red, Trumpian-style, all caps "IT'S A CRIME" at the bottom. The messaging is so heavy-handed it would be funny if the consequences weren't the freedoms of speech and the press.

Finally, there's the laughably inaccurate and awkward slogan "Free speech doesn't mean careless talk." Actually, it does. Free speech does not mean screaming "FIRE" in a crowded theater, but there is no Supreme Court ruling holding that "careless speech" is somehow exempt from First Amendment protections, lest our President's Twitter feed be censorable.

There is an "unauthorized disclosures" video training from September 2017 billed as "compliant with White House and Secretary of Defense Memoranda" that condemns leaks, points out punishment for leakers, and warns apocalyptically that when there are unauthorized leaks, "we all risk losing our way of life."

Another informational video includes a fictionalized news story about Americans dying in a terrorist attack because of a release of classified information. Such a story has never appeared in the actual news media because it has never happened. In Chelsea Manning's criminal case – worth mentioning since her leaks are consistently singled out in the videos – the government was unable to provide a finalized damage assessment, even though the leaks occurred years prior. (Curiously, Edward Snowden's even more-well known leaks are not mentioned by name in the videos.)

The trainings include little or no mention of whistleblowing, except to say that leaking to the media is not whistleblowing, and the First Amendment offers no protection to whistleblowers. This is chilling, but not accurate. The Supreme Court has recognized that the media is a legitimate outlet for whistleblowers. And, information that has been classified to cover up government wrongdoing or prevent embarrassment is not properly classified. In fact, whistleblowers leaking to the media is a time-honored tradition dating back, at least, to Daniel Ellsberg's leaking of the Pentagon Papers.

The Insider Threat Program trainings do not send a simple message against leaking properly classified information, such as nuclear launch codes or covert identities. Rather, the trainings send much more destructive messages against all leaks and speech the government does not like: do not criticize the government or you will be reported as an insider threat and keep *all* government secrets, even when the government breaks the law. These are messages contrary to

a free and open democratic society, especially one where the First Amendment protects freedoms of speech, association, and the press.

The training videos go beyond simply urging employees to keep quiet. Employees are instructed not to access or share information *already in the public sphere*. Considering that every major newspaper includes almost daily leaks of classified information, such an instruction is impossible to comply with, and will almost certainly be used, as it has in the past, to retaliate against whistleblowers. After all, the biggest leaker of classified information is the U.S. government itself.

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## Why the Vengeance Toward Sgt. Bergdahl

The angry politics around Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl's "desertion" in Afghanistan revolve around right-wing hatred for President Obama who engineered Bergdahl's freedom from the Taliban, as Matthew Hoh describes.

By Matthew Hoh

Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl's guilty plea begins the end of this phase of an embarrassing, sad and morally absurd saga of American history.

Sergeant Bergdahl was dismissed from the Coast Guard because of mental illness, was recruited into the Army in spite of such issues, and then was sent to the frontlines of Afghanistan where he walked away from his base and was captured, kept as a prisoner, and tortured by the Taliban for nearly five years. Yet, he has been offered almost no compassion, sympathy or forgiveness by large swaths of the American public, political classes, veterans and the media.

The shameful blood-crazed calls for vengeance against Sergeant Bergdahl, screamed across Fox News, talk radio and Twitter, by millions of right -wing Americans have begun again with Sergeant Bergdahl's guilty plea.

This hostility has resumed despite an Army investigation finding no Americans were killed by Sergeant Bergdahl's departure of his unit; despite the Pentagon admitting it was known that Sergeant Bergdahl was in Pakistan within a few days of his capture, thus negating the validity of the right-wing talking points of continuous search missions for Sergeant Bergdahl that jeopardized American lives; despite the general who led the investigation of Sergeant Bergdahl's disappearance stating Sergeant Bergdahl should not be punished and the colonel who led the Army's version of a grand jury trial recommending the same; despite the United States military's top prisoner of war expert testifying that Sergeant Bergdahl endured more torture at the hands of the Taliban than any American prisoner of war has endured since the Vietnam War, undoubtedly due to his multiple escape attempts and unwillingness to cooperate with his kidnappers; and despite repeated calls made by President Trump for Sergeant Bergdahl to be executed, as well as calls for retaliation against the military if Sergeant Bergdahl is not sent to jail by Senator John McCain, clear and blatant forms of wrongful and illegal command influence prohibited by military law against a defendant.

Despite all that, Sergeant Bergdahl finds himself having just entered a guilty plea and putting himself at the mercy of a U.S. Army judge.

In time, Sergeant Bergdahl may become just a footnote to America's wars in the Muslim world, wars that have killed well over a million people since 2001. But his individual story relays some fundamental truths of these American wars against Sunnis and Shias, and Arabs, Africans and Pashtuns, (it is a fact that nearly all the people we have killed, maimed and made homeless have been Muslim and dark skinned). One truth is that there is no logic to our violence, only the unending and insatiable requirement for more war and more destruction.

### **No Forgiveness**

There is also no forgiveness in this loudly and righteously proclaimed Christian nation, only the scapegoating of a young man and his family for the failures of immoral and unwinnable wars on the murderous altar of the twin godheads of American Exceptionalism and White Supremacy.

Sergeant Berghdal's story does not just inform us of the madness of our wars overseas, but highlights our wars here at home; for our wars abroad come from the same root causes as our wars at home.

It was Sergeant Bergdahl's parents standing outside the White House with President Obama that began the rage against him and his family. This was the treason that so angered and upset the white conservative audiences of Megyn Kelly and Rush Limbaugh. Sergeant Bergdahl's white parents standing at the White

House with *that black president* and thanking him for freeing their son began the scorn, the vitriol and the outrage against Sergeant Bergdahl, his mother and his father.

Jani and Bob Bergdahl, who were just released from the captivity of the unimaginable nightmare of the imprisonment and torture of their son for five years by the Taliban, had the audacity to stand with Barack *Hussein* Obama and to give him thanks. That was a betrayal to the usurped, rightful and white structures that underlie so many white Americans understanding of United States history and society.

### **Military Mythology**

The grand mythology of American militarism, a key pillar of both American Exceptionalism and White Supremacy, does not allow for figures such as Sergeant Bergdahl. *The greatest military in the history of the world* is a required statement of faith for all American politicians and public persons, even though the American military has not achieved victory in war in over 70 years, so an explanation of collusion and cooperation with anti-American and anti-white forces is necessary to provide the causation of such an undermining.

Of course, once Bob and Jani Bergdahl stood with President Obama, the racially fueled reactionary political anger appeared in Facebook posts and twitter rants and the lies needed to sustain that anger and turn it into a useful political tool arrived: Sergeant Bergdahl attempted to join the Taliban, Sergeant Bergdahl gave information to the enemy, Sergeant Bergdahl got Americans killed, Sergeant Bergdahl had anti-American beliefs, Sergeant Bergdahl's father is a Muslim...all claims that were untrue and disproved over time, but such a straightening of facts is almost always inconsequential to those whose identity is an abominable mix of race, right-wing politics and nationalism.

People of such a type as those who believe Jesus would be okay with them carrying handguns into church, demand that Santa Claus can only be white, and that the Confederate flag is a symbol of a proud heritage, have little time or consideration for the particulars of anything that triggers the base tribalism that dominates and informs their lives.

The fundamental aspects of Sergeant Bergdahl's disappearance were well known and documented years prior to that White House announcement of his release. Veterans' organizations called for his rescue and return at rallies and Republican senators enacted legislation to help release him "Bring Him Home" and "No Man Left Behind" were echoed repeatedly by Republican politicians and pundits, and even Ronald Reagan's most famed acolyte and Fox News hero, Oliver North, wore a Bowe Bergdahl POW bracelet.

However, to be white and to stand tearfully and gratefully alongside *that black president* is unconscionable and unforgivable to many “true Americans” and so the parents’ sins became the son’s and Sergeant Bergdahl’s treason was a dog whistle to those who believe anti-whiteness and anti-Americanism are inseparable.

For the man who used race so overtly and effectively to become President of the United States, calling during his campaign for a traitor like Sergeant Bergdahl to face the firing squad, or be thrown out of a plane without a parachute, was a rudimentary requirement in order to Make America Great Again. Even General James Mattis, who hung outside his office a horseshoe that had belonged to Sergeant Bergdahl and had been given to the general by the sergeant’s father, understands the political importance of Bergdahl’s treason.

General Mattis who previously had supported the soldier and given great comfort to the family, now, as Secretary of Defense, is silent. I believe Secretary Mattis to have higher ambitions than simply running the Pentagon and keeping that white base of support in his favor is not anything such a savvy and cunning careerist, such as James Mattis, would imperil.

We will soon know what, if any punishment Sergeant Bergdahl is to receive. Hopefully, he and his family will be spared further pain and they can begin rebuilding lives that were shattered by the unending war in Afghanistan and then shattered again by the race-fueled partisan politics of the unending war against people of color in the United States.

For Bowe Bergdahl, a young man who never should have been inducted into the Army to begin with, his suffering is testament to the viciousness, callousness and hate that dominates American actions both at home and abroad. We deserve no forgiveness for what has been done, and may still be done, to him and his family.

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## The Thwarted Dreams of Kurdistan

Almost a century ago, European powers promised the Kurds a state but soon

renege on the deal, leaving Kurdish nationalists to fume for generations and leading to Iraq's recent military capture of Kirkuk, reports Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

It was in 1916, in the midst of World War I, that Britain and France (pitted against the Germans, Austrians and Ottoman Turks) made their infamous Sykes-Picot agreement. In grand imperial style, they used this agreement to divide up the Middle East between them.

It was a daring move, considering that the war was at a stalemate and the two allies did not know if they were going to win the struggle. Nonetheless, they went ahead with the agreement and in doing so made a number of decisions that continue to shape the region to this day.

Besides bringing traditional European imperialism forward into the Twentieth Century, what made Sykes-Picot infamous was the fact that it broke a significant previous promise made to the Arabs. By 1916 the Arabs had taken to the battlefield against the Turks. For their doing so, the British had promised to support the creation of a large Arab state.

But this promise had always clashed with the imperial ambitions of Britain and France, and so, in the end, they secretly conspired to betray their non-Western ally. Among the eventual consequences of this betrayal, the "Arab state" was confined to what is, today, Saudi Arabia; Palestine (which originally was to be part of the Arab state) would become a "national home for the Jews"; Syria went to the French, and much of the rest of the region was given over to the British.

The Sykes-Picot agreement allowed for one further change. It made possible a state for the Kurds – a people who constituted the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East. This state, known as Kurdistan, was to be carved out of territory within the eventually defeated Ottoman Empire. This intent was publicly confirmed in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920.

The Kurdish leaders, who by this time must have been aware of the Western powers' betrayal of the Arabs, therefore should not have been surprised when, despite the treaty, the British and French betrayed them as well. The 1923 Treaty of Lucerne amended the Treaty of Sevres, and sure enough, the state of Kurdistan was omitted. The lands that would have made up the Kurdish nation instead become parts of Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Thus, the Kurds remained stateless. However, they never gave up statehood as a goal.

Now we can fast-forward to March 19, 2003, the date that President George W. Bush took the fateful step of invading Iraq. Bush had an array of flimsy excuses

for doing this: Saddam Hussein's non-existent nuclear weapons and other WMD, Saddam's alleged plot to assassinate Bush's father, the dream (really the nightmare) of forceable "regime change" as a way of making the Middle East safe for the U.S. and Israel, or perhaps just the cutting loose of neoconservative bellicosity. Whatever the President's depth of ignorance led him to anticipate, the invasion set loose forces that Bush and his White House successors have been unable to control. Among these are the consequences that followed the falling apart of Iraq.

### **Kurdish Issue Resurfaces**

Like the destruction of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the destruction of Iraq that resulted from the 2003 U.S. invasion opened up a Pandora's Box of potential territorial changes. Not the least of these was the possible creation of the state of Kurdistan.

Like the Arabs in World War I, the Kurds became a fighting ally of the West in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent Syrian civil war. The region's chaos allowed for the emergence of the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (aka ISIS, ISIL, and Daesh). ISIS turned out to be a grim and brutal manifestation of religious fanaticism run amok. Its growth threatened just about every state in the region, as well as the citizens of the European Union and the U.S.

If stability was to eventually prevail, ISIS had to be defeated, and the Kurds played (and continue to play) a notable role in this fight. There is little doubt that one of their goals in doing so is to create favorable conditions for a Kurdish state.

For all those regional powers (Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq) seeking to reestablish the status quo ante, the prospect of an independent Kurdish state is anathema. Each state has Kurdish minorities and is afraid that an independent Kurdistan, even one carved out of another state's territory, would lead to or exacerbate Kurdish insurgencies in their own countries. The possibility that such a state might instead cause a *lessening* of minority Kurdish restiveness through voluntary immigration seems not to have occurred to the leaders of Iran, Turkey and Syria.

As Jonathan Cook has recently made clear, the question of Kurdish independence has been complicated by Israeli influence in this matter. The Israelis have long been keen on an independent Kurdistan not because, as some of their politicians disingenuously claim, the Kurds have a "moral right" to a state (so do the Palestinians). Rather, the Israelis have an undeclared but official policy aimed at "Balkanizing" the Arab states. They have been encouraging "sectarian and



ethnic discord" in order to destabilize their neighbors. In other words, Israeli support of the Kurds is an effort to weaken primarily Iraq, and secondarily, Syria and Iran (Turkey is just "collateral damage" in this process).

### **The Best Option**

One can hardly blame the Kurds for taking help where they can get it – in this case from Israel – in a fight for independence that has been going on for centuries. Nonetheless, one can also understand that Israeli meddling seriously frightens the other states affected.

Leaving aside the Israeli issue for a moment, the question that should guide policy here is: can Iraq be reestablished as a viable state? Putting the question more informally, in 2003 a rather stupid American president – working under the influence of Zionists, witless neoconservatives, and Iraqi nationalists bearing false witness – knocked the Iraqi Humpty Dumpty off its precarious wall. Can it be put back together again? The answer is, well, maybe – but there seems to be only two ways to do this. One is a near-genocidal war waged by regional powers against the Kurds. Alternatively, Iraq might be resurrected if the Kurds are willing to settle for half a loaf in the form of being an autonomous part of a confederated state.

Right now the future is uncertain. One has the impression that the Turks and Iraqis (whose forces assaulted the Kurdish claimed city of Kirkuk on Oct. 16) are quite willing to try to solve the matter by prolonged war. This would be a big mistake. It would lead to an Iraq that may be technically united but in truth would be even weaker than it is now, and not really independent at all.

Its northern region would probably be under the de facto control of Turkey and Iran, and the rest of the country would continue to be in a decentralized mess experiencing an ongoing sectarian civil war. On the other hand, a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue could lead to the stabilization of the rest of Iraq as a confederated state. Also, as part of a confederated Iraq, Kurdistan's autonomy can preclude an independent foreign policy, thus minimizing Israeli influence.

Despite the recent Kurdish vote for independence, their leaders must know this can only be made real if they can win a prolonged war against Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Israel is not in a geographical position to effectively help them do this. And so, the Kurds probably cannot endure such a struggle. That leaves them with only one rational choice.

The Kurds are now closer to independent status than at any time since the near-miss days of World War I. Their best strategy is to make the best (if not the

most) of that status within a confederated Iraq and end their interaction with Israel. This has to be better than a near-genocidal war in which they would be the victims. However – and this is the usual question in such situations – will the emotions roiling on all sides allow sanity to prevail?

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## Busting Upward the Military Budget

The Trump administration and Congress are in accord on one thing: the budget constraints on military spending must be busted to sustain overseas bases and to fund local pork projects, writes Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

Although the Senate and House of Representatives have both passed the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2018 at the gargantuan sum of \$700 billion, most of the largesse has little to do with defending the United States and much to do with policing the informal American overseas empire. Thus, at least some trimming to the huge amount is possible.

Of the \$700 billion, about \$640 billion is the Pentagon's base budget and another \$60 billion dollars is allocated to fight simultaneous wars in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. This whopping amount exceeds last year's \$619 billion, thus flouting the "sequestration" spending caps in the 2011 Budget Control Act. Trump and the Republicans want to use budget savings from domestic spending to finance the defense spending increases. However, they will need Democratic votes to break the sequestration caps; the Democrats' price for doing so is a logrolling that would also require increases in domestic spending.

Yet the Budget Control Act has helped control federal spending, budget deficits, and debt accumulation and should be retained. Apparently, when conservatives tout slimming down government, they don't seem to think the Defense Department is part of the federal bureaucracy.

The idea is preposterous that a country which alone accounts for about half the world's defense budget needs more money to keep the readiness of its forces high

and to rebuild a military that has been depleted by long, senseless wars in the Middle East and South Asia. The Defense Department is already slathered with over \$600 billion a year and just needs to reallocate some of its funds to improve readiness and conduct rebuilding.

Yet members of Congress always propose amendments adding extra weapons systems, such as ships and aircraft, to the budget that the Defense Department doesn't request. Not coincidentally, all this wasteful and unneeded pork spending just happens to be in these members' home states. Such pork is a regular occurrence in defense budgeting and explains why the Defense budget is so massive, yet force readiness and equipment depletion remain problems.

Other wasteful spending perennially occurs on stateside military bases that even DoD would like to close, but members of Congress like to keep open because it subsidizes local economies they represent. The Pentagon offered a useful proposal that would have opened another round of base closures to save money. These savings could have been put toward readiness and rebuilding. Both the House and Senate rejected it for the aforementioned parochial reason.

### **Overseas Bases**

To save even more money, the United States should close some overseas bases and decommission military units at those bases. Essentially, the military is like a fleet of expensive sports cars that is short on money for gas, repair, and maintenance. The overseas bases and forces need to be pruned so that the remaining forces at home have enough money for operations and support. With a \$20 trillion debt, the United States is overextended in the world; the U.S. half of global defense spending is paid for out less than a quarter of the world's GDP. Pruning the U.S. overseas footprint will help reduce the overextension.

Another way to save money would be to end unneeded and counterproductive wars in the Middle East and South Asia, which lead to increased blowback anti-U.S. terrorism. Sen. Rand Paul, R- Kentucky, laudably proposed repealing outdated congressional authorizations for the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, passed in 2001 and 2002. Congress was so scared of the proposal that it didn't even get a vote.

These two authorizations for the use of force should have been terminated. Going even further, one could question counterproductive (for the same reason as the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars), congressionally unapproved, and therefore unconstitutional air and drone wars in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, and Libya. Lives and even more money could be saved if they were also ended.

Therefore, eliminating pork spending, unneeded and counterproductive wars overseas, and excessive bases and forces at home and around the world could free

up more money for military readiness and any post-war rebuilding necessary without ending the sequestration limits on defense spending needed to control budget deficits and debt accumulation, which are dragging the U.S. economy and preventing higher economic growth rates.

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## Human Anxiety in Late-Stage Capitalism

Superficial explanations for today's social anxiety and political discontent miss the underlying reality: the crisis of late-stage capitalism in its frantic death throes, explains poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

A number of recent press articles, including an over 8,000-word feature piece in The New York Times have asked, to quote the Times' headline, "Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?"

Although the question was proffered, the reporters and editors responsible for the articles remain resolutely obtuse to the obvious: The bughouse crazy environment of late-stage capitalist culture evokes classic fight-or-flight responses attendant to episodes of severe anxiety and panic attacks.

The word panic has its derivation in reference to Pan, the Greek god of wilderness and wildness, of the animal body encoded within human beings and its attendant animalistic imperatives. To wit, deracinate an animal from its natural habitat and it will evince, on an instinctual basis, a fight-or-flight response.

If caged, the unfortunate creature will pace the confines of its imprisonment, chew and tear at its fur and flesh, become irritable, enervated, languish and even die from the deprivation of the environment it was born to inhabit. A caged animal, even if the unfortunate creature endures captivity, is not the entity nature conceived; the living being has been reduced to A Thing That Waits For Lunch.

Human beings, animals that we are, respond in a similar fashion. Experiencing anxiety is among the ways our innate animal spirits react to the capitalist cage. Inundate a teenager with the soul-defying criteria of the

corporate/consumer state, with its overbearing, pre-careerist pressures, its paucity of communal eros, its demands, overt and implicit, to conform to a shallow, manic, nebulously defined yet oppressive societal order, and insist that those who cannot adapt, much less excel, are “losers” who are fated to become “basement dwellers” in their parents’ homes or, for those who lack the privilege, be cast into homelessness, then the minds of the young or old alike are apt to be inundated with feelings of angst and dread.

Worse, if teenagers are culturally conditioned to believe said feelings and responses are exclusively experienced by weaklings, parasites, and losers then their suffering might fester to the point of emotional paralysis and suicidal inclinations.

### **No Real Remedies**

What does the capitalist state offer as remedy? Obscenely profitable, corporately manufactured and widely prescribed psychoactive medications. Treatment, which, at best, merely masks symptoms and bestows the illusion of recovery.

As R. D. Laing observed: “What we call ‘normal’ is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being.”

In short, it is insanity to be expected to adapt to socially acceptable insanity. Yet we are pressured to adapt to, thus internalize odious, groupthink concepts and tenets. To cite one such groupthink example: homelessness is natural to the human condition and is a communally acceptable situation.

Closer to fact: The problem of homelessness is the result of a societal-wide perception problem – the phenomenon is the very emblem of the scrambling, twisting, dissociating, and displacing of perception that capitalist propagandists specialize in. Homelessness would be considered a relic of a barbaric past if this very simple principle was applied: Having access to permanent shelter is a human right and not a privilege.

What kind of a vile, vicious people would deny that simple proposition? Those conditioned by a lingering Puritan/Calvinist mindset to believe: Punishment for resisting the usurpation of the fleeting hours of one’s finite life must be severe. If the over-class can no longer get away with, as was once common practice in the Puritan/Calvinist tradition, public floggings to whip the labor force into line, then those who will not or cannot comply will be cast onto the cold, unforgiving concrete of a soulless cityscape.

It comes down to this, societies that are ridden with vast wealth inequity, due

to the machinations of a rapacious over-class, create the obscenity known as homelessness. Moreover, the situation is only one of the numerous obscenities inherent to state capitalism. Obscenities that include, events that are dominating the present news cycle, e.g., the predations of a lecherous movie mogul, to the sub-cretinous doings and pronouncements of a Chief of State who is a bloated, bloviating, two-legged toxic waste dump.

### **Trump, No Aberration**

How is it then, liberals fail to grasp the fact that the Trump presidency is not an aberration; rather, his ascension to power should be regarded as being among the high probability variables of late-stage capitalism and empire building? The psychopathic, tangerine-tinged clown Trump is the embodiment of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, a development that is concomitant to over-expanded empires. Thus he will continue to flounce deeper into the quagmire of crash-engendering, economic legerdemain and perpetual war.

Empires are death cults, and death cults, on a subliminal basis, long for their own demise. Paradoxically, the collective mindset of imperium, even as it thrusts across the expanse of the world, renders itself insular, cut off from culturally enhancing novelty, as all the while, the homeland descends into a psychical swamp of churning madness.

A draining of the swamp of the collective mind cannot come to pass, for the swamp and citizenry are one. Withal, the likes of leaders such as Trump rise from and are made manifest by the morass of the culture itself. In a swamp, the gospel of rebirth and redemption is heard in the song of humus. New life rises from its compost.

In the presence of Trump's debased mind and tombified carcass, one is privy to arias of rot. While Hillary Clinton's monotonous tempo was the dirge of a taxidermist – cold, desiccated of heart, and devoid of life's numinous spark – Trump's voice carries the depraved cacophony of a Célinean fool's parade ... its trajectory trudging towards the end of empire.

As liberals new BFFL (Best Friend for Life) George W. Bush might ask, "Is our liberals learning."

In a word, no. For example, the collective psyche of U.S. culture as been enflamed by the revelations that actresses were coerced into sexual encounters with a movie mogul whose power in the industry was only matched, even enhanced, by his sadistic nature. The staff of his company assisted, was complicit in, or remained silent about his lechery, as did the whole of the movie industry and the entertainment press. All as NFL athletes are being threatened with expulsion

from the League if they kneel during the national anthem.

### The Great Unspoken

Yet the great unspoken remains: The enabling of and submission to the degradation, exploitation and tyranny, and the lack of resistance thereof share a common and singular factor: The careerism of all concerned. The cultural milieu concomitant to capitalism is at the rotten root and noxious blossoming of the situation.



Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 cinematic barnburner "Two or Three Things I Know About Her" should be required viewing for those unaware or in denial of the acuity of the film's theme i.e., becoming enmeshed within the psychological landscape of dominance, degradation, and submission inherent to and inseparable from capitalist/consumer culture will cause one to become party to societal sanctioned prostitution. When life is negotiated within a collective value system that devalues and deadens the individual's inner life thus warps every human transaction, anomie descends, the worst among a people ascend to positions of power.

"Panic is the sudden realization that everything around you is alive." – William S. Burroughs, from Ghost of Chance

When friends visited me in New York, where I lived for decades, I would take them on walking tours through the city. We would cross the Westside Highway and stroll the pedestrian walk along the Hudson River, or cross the East River by walking across the Brooklyn Bridge.

The effect of these excursions on people was often profound ... the combined elements of the elemental beauty of the rivers and vastness of the city's architecture and scope, clamor, and the dense interweaving of traditional ethnic

customs and ad hoc social codes of New Yorkers often would heighten the visitors' senses and open them to larger, more intricate awareness of themselves and extant reality ... the freeways of the contemporary mind (conditioned to be constantly engaged in manic motion, with one's mind either frenzied by an obsession with performing (ultimately futile) maneuvers directed to saving time – or stalled at a frustration inducing standstill) were replaced by the exigencies of life at street level, i.e., novel situations that had to be apprehended and negotiated.

The possibilities of life seemed greater. The crimped eros of insular suburban thought became loosened before the city's intricacies and expansiveness. Although: Not all, or even a scant few, New Yorkers can maintain the state of being. Few of us can live by Rilke's resolve to "make every moment holy." Life, in the city, becomes grotesquely distorted ... High rents, inflicted by hyper-gentrification, in combination with the deification of success and its cult of careerism overwhelm one's psyche ... There is so far to fall.

Angst (the word originally can be traced to the ancient Greek deity Ananke, the immovable by prayer and offering bitch Goddess of Necessity and the root word of anxiety) clamps down one's sense of awareness. Ananke dominates the lives of the non-privileged citizenry while Narcissus, Trump's, the Clintons', et.al. and their financial and cultural elitists' patron God rules the day. The pantheon of possibility has been decimated, a cultural cleansing has been perpetrated, by the egoist caprice of the beneficiaries of the late capitalist dictatorship of money.

Hence, we arrive at the primal wisdom tacitly conveyed by anxiety-borne states of fight or flight. Due to the reality that capitalism, on both an individual and collective basis, drives individuals into madness, all as the system destroys forest and field, ocean and sea and the soul-scape of all who live under its rapacious dominion, our plight comes down to this: We either struggle and strive, by and any and all means, to end the system – or it will end us.

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## Understanding the 'Fake News' Hysteria

The mainstream media's hysteria over "fake news" is aimed less at the few instances of intentionally fabricated stories than at well-reported articles



that challenge the U.S. government's dubious official narratives, says David P. Hamilton.

By David P. Hamilton

For the most part, "fake news" is a fake concept designed by the corporate news media to discredit those who challenge the official U.S. hegemonic narrative. The typical MSM fake news accusation starts with some egregious fictionalization and then morphs over to the real targets: the subversives, those who would dispute foundational elements of the official history or its recent approved updates.

These subversive elements are likely to question important myths, such as the necessity of the nuclear incineration of Hiroshima or – before the Iraq War – Saddam Hussein possessing WMD, and hence must be silenced.

There are people in this world who write what they know to be fiction and try to pass it off as fact. Many of them work for the CIA and related institutions. Then, there are satirists like The Onion who write fictionalized truth. These professional prevaricators are not what draws the ire of the corporate "news."

The approved rendition of U.S. history is a composite of lies, euphemisms and dubious rationales taught in schools, public and private, since the nation's founding. It is continuously updated by the corporate news media. There is an army of PR types and psy-op warriors working constantly on this project; some private sector, some public, who often switch roles and sectors, but work hand-in-glove regardless.

The real fake news is the fake narrative that flows perpetually forth from these functionaries of the MSM to dominate the discourse which the billionaire owners allow voiced via their facilities. In this manner, we are all being played, all the time, and have been since birth.

For the record, the official narrative follows certain principles. Among them are:

1. The U.S. is never wrong in any conflict with other nations.
2. If the U.S. ever happens to be wrong, it was a reasonable mistake.
3. U.S. intentions are always benign and honorable.
4. U.S. judgment is always objective and fair.
5. The U.S. is a democracy and always supports democracy.
6. Americans are a peaceful people.
7. Americans are a superior people, so American lives matter more.

8. Americans are always on the high moral ground because God is on our side.
9. The word of our leaders is sufficient proof of any assertion.
10. The U.S. is the greatest nation in history.
11. Private is always better than public.
12. Individualism is always better than collectivism.

### **One-Sided 'News'**

In application of these principles, NPR's "All Things Considered" never considers the Maduro government's position in Venezuela, nor is Noam Chomsky, often voted the world's foremost public intellectual, to be heard on this "public" radio. Nor will North Korea's negotiating position relative to their nuclear weapons program be explained. It requires the U.S. military to refrain from conducting war games on North Korea's border in exchange for freezing their weapons program; unmentionable because the U.S. militaristic leadership is unwilling to consider the proposal and because it sounds too rational.

You will hear from the world's greatest exporter of terrorism that Iran, which hasn't invaded a neighbor since Darius I in 500 BCE, is the world's greatest exporter of terrorism. And that apartheid Israel is a democracy. And that the Saudis are jolly guys in silk robes you want to hold hands and dance with.

Are the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, et al, lying knowingly? Not exactly. The news media doesn't have to invent the lies, only repeat them. They are mainly the stenographers of governmental agencies that provide the raw material to be quoted, invariably substantiating the validity of the official position. The owners of those news outlets likely believe that narrative, but mainly they want you to believe it.

The pundits and talking heads of those news media, the on-camera personalities, must think within the parameters the official narrative or they wouldn't have been hired to the position of highly paid spokesperson for it. Wolf Blitzer is a Zionist true believer who used to do P.R. for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Anderson Cooper is a Vanderbilt heir worth \$100 million.

How objective can you be about issues of income inequality when you've been the top .0001% for six or seven generations? And if one dare to go off the reservation, the next thing you know you'll be working for RT for a lot less money like Ed Schultz.

This process of narrative creation is principally a matter of focus, parameters and interpretation. On major U.S. cable news channels, the great bulk of coverage involves domestic politics, mass murders and "natural" disasters. In Europe, the focus is far more on international relationships.

The spectrum of opinion allowed in the U.S. is limited to the point that Hillary Clinton is considered “the left” and the anti-capitalist left might as well not exist. The range of permissible opinion typically stretches from pro-capitalist social liberals to pro-capitalist social conservatives. This is hardly surprising if one considers that billionaire investors own the controlling interest in all major U.S. news media. One outcome is that the U.S. is the only major industrial nation without a significant socialist political party.

The private interests that own the news media don't have to get together and compare notes because they all have a high level of ruling-class consciousness that includes shared economic fundamentals, e.g., socialize debts and privatize profits. Their message control is described far more clearly by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman in *Manufacturing Consent*, chapter 1 on “the propaganda model”.

### **Dubious Conformity**

It is generally accurate to assume that there is an entirely reasonable interpretation of news events that contradicts what you are being told to believe by the corporate news media. Cases of official duplicity are notorious and legion: the Gulf of Tonkin, WMD in Iraq, the black kid killed by the police had a gun, etc.

Central among the American myths is that the myth surrounding the origins of the Cold War. This myth would have you believe that the Soviet Union in 1945, despite having lost over 30 million of its citizens during two German invasions in less than 30 years and with a devastated infrastructure, would suddenly decide to invade Western Europe, into the teeth of the world's sole nuclear armed military power, the USA, and its various formidable allies.

Furthermore, that the Soviets would do this despite having achieved their major war aims, a divided and demilitarized Germany and a “sphere of influence” between themselves and Germany, an arrangement agreed upon by Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt at Yalta. This Cold War creation myth of Soviet aggressive intent is essentially a U.S. cover story to mask U.S. aggression disguised as defensive.

Like Germans in 1939 believing the Polish horse cavalry was about to attack their tanks, Americans bought this spurious interpretation. These steady U.S. “defensive” efforts have now brought NATO, essentially an agency of U.S. foreign policy, to Russia's very doorstep in the Baltic states, with Ukraine up next for NATO membership. Who is the aggressor?

Every other late Twentieth Century storyline of official U.S. history had to conform to the basic foundational concept of the U.S. defending freedom against

an expansionist Soviet Union/Russia bent on destroying us. And so, today, we have thousands of NATO troops, innumerable missile batteries and nuclear-armed aircraft carrier-led naval battle groups patrolling Russia's borders and shorelines, including the Black Sea, because "THEY are the aggressor."

Try to imagine the U.S. reaction to a Russian fleet cruising the Gulf of Mexico, although that might be difficult given that 11 of the world's 17 aircraft carriers, a uniquely aggressive weapon, belong to the U.S., all with unlimited range, and Russia's only puny little single carrier rarely leaves Russian territorial waters and doesn't have enough range to get to the U.S. and back.

The U.S. has an estimated 800 foreign military bases in well over 100 countries while Russia has three in two countries. U.S. military budget is at least ten times that of Russia's and was just increased by 10 percent while the Russians just reduced theirs by 7 percent. Who is the aggressor?

**David P. Hamilton is a long-time Austin activist and writer. An archive of his other articles can be found at <http://www.theragblog.com/tag/david-p-hamilton/>. His Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/david.hamilton.71066700>.**

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## Iraqi Forces Clash with Kurdish Militia

Iraqi military forces have seized strategic positions around the oil-rich city of Kirkuk as a showdown over Kurdish calls for independence enters a dangerous new phase, writes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

Overreaction in Baghdad, Ankara and Tehran to what in essence was a symbolic vote for independence by Iraqi Kurds last month has brought the Iraqi government to the brink of full-scale war with Kurdish authorities over the disputed, oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

According to the latest reports, the Iraqi army on Sunday night launched a military operation to take back the city and its environs. So far it has seized a military base occupied by Kurdish forces as well as Kirkuk airport.

The Iraqi army had built up its forces outside the oil-producing city over the past several days while the Kurdish peshmerga militia re-enforced the town with 6,000 fighters. According to peshmerga intelligence, the Iranian army, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and Shi'ite militias joined Iraq's military build-

up.

Some peshmerga units fled from advancing Iraqi forces on Monday, while others have stood their ground and engaged in clashes. The long dispute between Baghdad and the Kurds over control of Kirkuk may well come to a head if the Iraqi army enters the city, where fighting could be intense.

All this came about because of a referendum for independence held on Sept. 25, in which 93 percent of Kurds voted to leave Iraq. However, Kurdish leaders repeatedly made clear they would not declare independence, despite their overwhelming mandate. Instead they want a one- to two-year negotiation with Baghdad to achieve sovereignty.

That has been flatly rejected by the central government, which asserted that there would be no negotiations for independence. Regionally, the Kurds also are isolated. Only one country openly supported the referendum and said it would recognize Kurdish independence – Israel.

Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed quasi-independence since the 2003 U.S. invasion. It has its own flag, army, and government ministries, and issues its own visas to foreign visitors. It has a robust oil industry, selling petroleum illegally through Turkey. Massive corruption and mismanagement however has not allowed the Kurds to build a modern state. It has no railroad, only one stretch of a highway inside the Kurdish capital city Erbil; government workers go months without pay; and the regional government cannot provide electricity without frequent power cuts throughout the day.

### **A Risky Fantasy**

Despite a legitimate argument to be a sovereign state, the idea of independence in the current political climate was a fantasy.

Except for the Kurds, it was a meaningless referendum. The vote was also a political move to build support for the ruling Kurdish Democratic Party in presidential and parliamentary elections in two weeks, on Nov. 1. Otherwise, this referendum was not unlike a 2005 independence vote, which also garnered more than 90 percent in favor, but which also went nowhere.

The Kurdish vote has made negotiations with Baghdad over oil, Kirkuk and other disputed territories virtually impossible, as the central government demanded Erbil first cancel the referendum's results. A planned 2007 referendum for the people of Kirkuk to decide whether they wanted to belong to Baghdad or Erbil was never held. Instead the fate of the city appears set to be decided by force of arms.

Given the tense, but stable situation, last month's referendum could have been simply ignored by its opponents. It would have died of its own accord. Instead the governments of Iraq, Turkey and Iran have severely overreacted, giving it more legitimacy than it had on its own.

Turkey and Iran feared the vote could stir up their own restive Kurdish populations who already have been agitating for years. Turkey has fought a 30-year insurgency against its Kurds, and Iran periodically puts down uprisings. Turkish and Iranian Kurds did not need an Iraqi Kurdish referendum to continue pursuing their separatist aims.

For Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, however, the overly strong reaction to the vote bolsters his domestic political support ahead of parliamentary elections next April. It is a reckless electioneering strategy risking bloodshed.

On Sept. 29, Baghdad imposed an international flight ban on the Kurdish region. On Sunday, Iran closed its three border crossings with the Kurdish region and has cut off all trade.

Border crossings from Turkey have been taken over inside Turkish territory by the central government. But so far Turkey has not cut off billions of dollars of exports to the landlocked Iraqi Kurds. Ankara is still importing the banned Kurdish oil, which Baghdad has demanded be sold through the central government.

The Iraqi military has been conducting joint exercises with Turkish and Iranian troops just kilometers from the Kurdish borders with those countries. Baghdad gave Erbil a 2 a.m. Sunday deadline to cancel the referendum and pull the peshmerga out of Kirkuk.

According to a local media report, Baghdad's other demands were to turn over Kirkuk airport; return an Iraqi military base; give back all oil fields; hand over ISIS prisoners held by the peshmerga; permit the Iraqi army to return to positions it vacated when ISIS attacked the city in 2014, which allowed the peshmerga to take control of the city; and remove the Kurdish governor of Kirkuk governorate, who was fired by the Iraqi parliament but who has refused to step down. The Iraqi army now has enforced the first three demands.

Like the rest of the world, the U.S. opposed the referendum and urged negotiations. On Friday, Secretary of Defense James Mattis said: "We can't turn on each other right now. We don't want this to go to a shooting situation. These are issues that are longstanding in some cases ... We're going to have to recalibrate and move these back to a way (in which) we solve them politically and work them out with compromised solutions."

Yet Washington was unable to stop the Iraqi army's advance on Kirkuk and the possibility of a new conflict breaking out in the Middle East.

Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist. He has written for the Boston Globe, the Sunday Times of London and the Wall Street Journal among other newspapers. He is the author of *How I Lost By Hillary Clinton* published by OR Books. He can be reached at joelauria@gmail.com and followed on Twitter at @unjoe.

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## How Netanyahu Pulls Trump's Strings

**Special Report:** It turns out that Hillary Clinton was partly correct: President Trump is a "puppet," but his puppet master isn't Russian President Putin but Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In the final presidential debate of 2016, Hillary Clinton famously called Donald Trump the "puppet" of Russian President Vladimir Putin. But what's increasingly clear is that Trump has a more typical puppet master for a U.S. politician – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Since Sept. 18, when the two men met in New York around the United Nations General Assembly, Netanyahu has been pulling Trump's strings on almost every foreign policy issue. Arguably, the puppet/puppeteer relationship began much earlier, but I've been told that Trump bridled early on at Netanyahu's control and even showed a few signs of rebellion.

For instance, Trump initially resisted Netanyahu's demand for a deeper U.S. commitment in Syria by ordering the shutdown of the CIA operation supporting anti-government rebels, along with the Trump administration's statement that U.S. policy no longer sought "regime change" in Damascus.

Immediately after that announcement, Netanyahu had some success in getting Trump to reverse direction and fire 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian air base on April 6. The attack followed what one intelligence source told me was a staged chemical weapons incident by Al Qaeda operatives in the rebel-controlled town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province, possibly using sarin delivered via drone from a Saudi/Israeli special operations base in Jordan. Yet, although apparently

duped by the subterfuge into the missile strike, Trump still balked at a complete reversal of his Syrian policy.

Then, in May, Trump picked Saudi Arabia and Israel as his first overseas trip as president – essentially following the advice of his son-in-law Jared Kushner – but I’m told he came away feeling somewhat humiliated by the over-the-top treatment that involved him getting pulled into a ceremonial sword dance in Saudi Arabia and facing condescension from Netanyahu.

So, over the summer, Trump listened to advice about a possible major overhaul of U.S. foreign policy that would have checked Israeli/Saudi regional ambitions, opened diplomatic doors to Iran, and addressed the Korean crisis by brokering negotiations between the North and the South over some form of loose confederation.

There was even the possibility of a Nixon-goes-to-China moment with tough-guy Trump meeting with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and the two countries restoring diplomatic ties, a process that could have given U.S. companies a better chance to compete in the Iranian market.

Those proposed moves had the advantage of reducing international tensions, saving the U.S. government money on future military adventures, and freeing U.S. corporations from the tangle of economic sanctions – exactly the “America First” strategy that Trump had promised his working-class base.

However, instead Netanyahu succeeded in pulling Trump’s strings during their conversations on Sept. 18 in New York, although exactly how is still a mystery to some people close to these developments. One source said the Kushner family real-estate company has exposure to substantial Israeli financing that could be yanked, although Jared Kushner’s financial disclosure form only lists a \$5 million unsecured line of credit, held jointly with his father, from the Israel Discount Bank.

Trump also has major pro-Netanyahu donors to his political war chest and his legal defense fund who are strong advocates for war with Iran, including casino tycoon Sheldon Adelson, who has plowed \$35 million into the pro-Trump Super PAC Future 45 and has publicly called for dropping a nuclear bomb on Iran as a negotiating tactic. So, Netanyahu had a number of potential strings to pull.

### **Going on Rants**

Whatever the precise reasons, on Sept. 19, Trump turned his maiden speech to the U.N. General Assembly into a war-like rant, personally insulting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as “Rocket Man,” threatening to “totally destroy” his nation of 25 million people, and parroting Netanyahu’s calls for another regime change



project aimed at Iran.

Most diplomats in the audience sat in stunned silence as Trump threatened aggressive war from the podium of an organization created to prevent the scourge of war. The one notable exception was Netanyahu who enthusiastically applauded his success in jerking Trump into the neocon camp.

So, rather than shift U.S. policy away from confrontation, Trump jettisoned the diplomatic strategy although it already had dispatched intermediaries to make contacts with the Iranians and North Koreans. Instead, Trump opted for the classic neocon approach favored by Netanyahu, albeit with Trump dressing up his neocon surrender in some "America First" rhetoric.

The U.N. speech left some of the U.S. intermediaries scrambling to explain to their contacts in Iran and North Korea why Trump had repudiated the messages that they had been carrying. Privately, Trump explained to one that he just liked to "zigzag" and that the intended end point hadn't change.

Some of these tensions surfaced in late September when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took the extraordinary step of announcing the behind-the-scenes contacts with North Korea during a state visit to China.

"We are probing, so stay tuned," Tillerson said. "We ask, 'Would you like to talk?' We have lines of communications to Pyongyang – we're not in a dark situation, a blackout." Tillerson added, "We have a couple, three channels open to Pyongyang ... We do talk to them. , , , Directly. We have our own channels."

In reaction to Tillerson's efforts to salvage the backchannel initiatives, Trump showed that his obeisance to Netanyahu and the neocons outweighed loyalty to either his Secretary of State or the intermediaries who had ventured into dicey situations on Trump's behalf.

In Twitter messages, Trump belittled the idea of a dialogue with North Korea, tweeting: "I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man."

"Save your energy Rex," Trump added, before slipping in another thinly veiled threat of a military strike: "we'll do what has to be done!"

While on the surface, Trump's repudiation of Tillerson might have been viewed as another "zigzag," it is now clear that Trump's "zigzag" explanation was just another lie. Rather than zigzagging, he is instead following a straight line marked out by Netanyahu.

Meanwhile, in Syria, Netanyahu seems to have won more concessions from Trump.

The U.S. military appears to be helping the remnants of Islamist forces still fighting the government, according to Russian officials. Their accusation is that the U.S. is secretly aiding the Islamist terror groups with weapons, tactical advice and aerial reconnaissance.

In other words, Trump appears to be continuing U.S. military intervention in Syria – just as Netanyahu desires.

### **Falling in Line**

Trump further showed that he is following Netanyahu's marching orders with the extremist speech about Iran on Friday, essentially repeating all the Israeli propaganda lines against Iran and burning whatever bridges remained toward a meaningful diplomatic approach.

Trump's Iran speech was so ludicrous it almost defies serious analysis. It ranks with the reckless rhetoric of President George W. Bush when he pronounced an "axis of evil," with the incongruous linking of Iraq and Iran (two bitter enemies) and North Korea accompanied by Bush's bogus claims about Iraq's WMD and Iraq's alleged collaboration with Al Qaeda.

In Friday's speech, which looked like the handiwork of John Bolton, one of Bush's neocon advisers who was seen entering the White House last week, Trump repeated all the nonsense tying Iran to Al Qaeda, presumably thinking that the American people still don't understand that Al Qaeda is a fanatical Sunni terror group that targets both the West and Shiites, the dominant Muslim faith in Iran, as heretics deserving death.

The inconvenient truth is that Al Qaeda has long been connected to Saudi Arabia, which has supported these fanatics since the 1980s when Saudi citizen Osama bin Laden was supported in his jihad against Soviet troops in Afghanistan, who were there trying to protect a secular regime.

Though officially the Saudi monarchy insists that it is opposed to Al Qaeda, Saudi intelligence has used Al Qaeda as essentially an unconventional fighting force deployed to destabilize and terrorize adversaries in the region and around the world. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "The Need to Hold Saudi Arabia Accountable."]

As the Israelis have developed a de facto alliance with Saudi Arabia in recent years, they also have expressed a preference for an Al Qaeda victory in Syria if necessary to destroy what Michael Oren, former Ambassador to the U.S. and now a deputy minister under Netanyahu, has described as the Shiite "strategic arc" running from Tehran through Damascus to Beirut.

One of the frequent Israeli complaints about Iran is that it has assisted the sovereign government of Syria in defeating Al Qaeda and its militant allies (as well as Al Qaeda's spinoff Islamic State), which should tell you a lot about where Netanyahu's loyalties lie.

### **A Compromised Media**

Yet, as dishonest as Trump's Iran speech was, the U.S. mainstream media won't criticize it as harshly as it deserves because virtually all the important journalists and talking heads have swallowed Israel's anti-Iran propaganda whole. They have frequently repeated the canard about Iran as "the world's chief sponsor of terrorism" when that title clearly should go to the Saudis and the Qataris if not others.

The West's major news outlets also have ingested all the sophisticated propaganda against the Assad government in Syria, particularly the claims about chemical weapons attacks while ignoring evidence that Al Qaeda's operatives and their "civil defense" collaborators have staged attacks with the goal of provoking a direct U.S. military intervention. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[A New Hole in Syria-Sarin Certainty.](#)"]

In his Friday speech, Trump also touted one of the [earliest canards about Iranian "terrorism,"](#) the attack by Lebanese Shiite militants on the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 killing 241 Americans.

When that attack happened, I was working at The Associated Press as an investigative reporter specializing in national security issues. While the precise Iranian role was not clear, what should have been obvious was that the attack was not "terrorism," which is classically defined as violence toward civilians to achieve a political goal.

Not only were the Marines not civilians but the Reagan administration had made them belligerents in the Lebanese war by the decision to order the USS New Jersey to shell Muslim villages. Reagan's National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, who [often represented Israel's interests](#) inside the administration, was the spark plug for this mission creep, which killed Lebanese civilians and convinced Shiite militants that the United States had joined the war against them.

Shiite militants struck back, sending a suicide truck bomber through U.S. security positions, demolishing the high-rise Marine barracks in Beirut. Reagan soon repositioned the surviving U.S. forces offshore. At the AP, I unsuccessfully argued against calling the Beirut attack "terrorism," a word that other news organizations also sloppily applied. But even senior Reagan officials

recognized the truth.

“When the shells started falling on the Shiites, they assumed the American ‘referee’ had taken sides,” Gen. Colin Powell wrote in his memoir, *My American Journey*. In other words, Powell, who was then military adviser to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, recognized that the actions of the U.S. military had altered the status of the Marines in the eyes of the Shiites.

(Although this “terrorism” is always blamed on Hezbollah, the group did not officially come into existence until 1985 as a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon which did not end until 2000.)

### **Opposed to Putin**

So, Trump is now on the path to wars with both North Korea and Iran, neither of which Russian President Putin favors. Putin, who played a key role in helping President Obama achieve the Iran-nuclear agreement, now sides with the Europeans in opposition to Trump’s decertification.

Putin also favors a prompt end to the Syrian conflict with the defeat of Al Qaeda and its allies, and he wants peaceful negotiations with North Korea over its desire for security against threatened American aggression. Trump is on the opposite side of all these Putin priorities.

In other words, not only does the Russia-gate hysteria have core evidentiary problems – both on the issues of “hacking” Democratic emails and claims about suspected “Russia-linked” entities paying for an infinitesimal number of ads on social media (including some about puppies and another promoting a critical documentary about Donald Trump’s golf course in Scotland) – but Trump is behaving in ways that are directly contrary to Putin’s desires and interests.

If indeed Clinton were right that Trump was Putin’s “puppet,” then he would have agreed to negotiations to address the North Korean crisis; would have accepted constructive diplomacy toward Iran; and would have ended all U.S. support for the Syrian militants and encouraged a quick end to the bloodletting.

Instead, Trump is moving in opposite directions, lining up with Netanyahu and the neocons, whom some European allies refer to as “America’s Israeli agents.” Although dressing up his capitulation to Netanyahu in tough-guy phrasing, Trump is doing what most U.S. politicians do – they grovel before Bibi Netanyahu.

And, if you have any doubts about that reality, you can watch how often both Republicans and Democrats jump to their feet when Netanyahu addresses a joint session of Congress, an honor that he has received three times, tying him with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Those moments of American humiliation – as almost all 535 members of Congress act like puppets on invisible strings – represent the actual subservience of the U.S. government to a foreign power. And that power is not Russia.

President Trump is just the latest American politician to have his strings yanked by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

**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).**

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## Trump Ignores Israeli/Saudi Abuses

By offering a propagandistic tirade on Iran's role in the Mideast – a classic neocon screed – President Trump has demonstrated his inability to bring any fresh or honest thinking to the regional crises, as Kathy Kelly explains.

By Kathy Kelly

Mordechai Vanunu was imprisoned in Israel for 18 years because he blew the whistle on Israel's secret nuclear weapons program. He felt he had "an obligation to tell the people of Israel what was going on behind their backs" at a supposed nuclear research facility which was actually producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. His punishment for breaking the silence about Israel's capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons included 11 years of solitary confinement.

On Friday, reading about President Donald Trump's new strategy on Iran, Vanunu's long isolation and sacrificial commitment to truth-telling came to mind. Donald Trump promised to "deny the Iranian regime all paths to a nuclear weapon." But it is Israel, which possesses an estimated 80 nuclear warheads, with fissile material for up to 200, which poses the major nuclear threat in the region. And Israel is allied to the nation with the world's largest nuclear arsenal: the United States.

Israel doesn't acknowledge its nuclear arsenal publicly, nor does Israel allow weapons inspectors into its nuclear weapons facilities. Along with India and Pakistan, Israel refuses to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. And it has used conventional weapons in numerous destabilizing wars, which include aerial bombing of Gaza, Lebanon and the West Bank.

Vanunu, designated by Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg as the “the pre-eminent hero of the nuclear era,” helped many people envision nations in the region making progress toward a nuclear weapons-free Middle East.

In fact, Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jawad Zarif, spoke eloquently about just that possibility, in 2015, holding that “if the Vienna deal is to mean anything, the whole of the Middle East must rid itself of weapons of mass destruction.”

“Iran,” he added, “is prepared to work with the international community to achieve these goals, knowing full well that, along the way, it will probably run into many hurdles raised by the skeptics of peace and diplomacy.”

Significantly, since the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” pact with Iran was concluded in 2015, the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) has steadily verified Iran’s compliance with inspections. Iran has accepted around-the-clock supervision by IAEA officials.

What’s more, “Iran has gotten rid of all of its highly enriched uranium,” according to Jessica Matthews, writing for the New York Review of Books. Matthews continues:

“It has also eliminated 98 percent of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium, leaving only three hundred kilograms, less than the amount needed to fuel one weapon if taken to high enrichment. The number of centrifuges maintained for uranium enrichment is down from 19,000 to 6,000. The rest have been dismantled and put into storage under tight international monitoring.

“Continuing enrichment is limited to 3.67 percent, the accepted level for reactor fuel. All enrichment has been shut down at the once-secret, fortified, underground facility at Fordow, south of Tehran. Iran has disabled and poured concrete into the core of its plutonium reactor – thus shutting down the plutonium as well as the uranium route to nuclear weapons. It has provided adequate answers to the IAEA’s long-standing list of questions regarding past weapons-related activities.”

### **U.S. Government’s Sabotage**

What do the Iranians think of the U.S. government? Ordinary Iranians might well think that whatever discontent they have with their own government the U.S. is their most implacable and most immediate enemy. Invective like Trump’s recent words could be a precursor of disastrous invasion. Many Iranians remember the U.S.-backed coup that ended their democracy in 1953, and they remember the fierce U.S. support given to Saddam Hussein in the brutal eight years of the Iran-Iraq war.

Noam Chomsky rightly names the U.S. “shock and awe” attack against Iraq as the greatest destabilizing force at work in the Middle East. “Thanks to that invasion,” writes Chomsky, “hundreds of thousands were killed and millions of refugees generated, barbarous acts of torture were committed – Iraqis have compared the destruction to the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century – leaving Iraq the unhappiest country in the world according to WIN/Gallup polls. Meanwhile, sectarian conflict was ignited, tearing the region to shreds and laying the basis for the creation of the monstrosity that is ISIS. And all of that is called ‘stabilization.’”

Trump’s record of statements and of cabinet appointments suggests that regime change in Iran is a long-term goal. Despite his close Saudi ally’s massive involvement in funding and fomenting terrorism, Trump’s evolving strategy for the Middle East strangely emphasizes Iranian impacts on the region, particularly regarding the conflict in Yemen.

Yemen is entering conflict-driven famine, with a correspondingly lethal cholera outbreak, making it the worst of the region’s “Four Famines,” now widely recognized as collectively the worst starvation crisis in the 72-year history of the United Nations.

“In Yemen,” says Trump, “the IRGC, (the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp), has attempted to use the Houthis as puppets to hide Iran’s role in using sophisticated missiles and explosive boats to attack innocent civilians in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as to restrict freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.”

But it is Saudi Arabia and its UAE ally, with crucial U.S. backing, that have been intensely bombing Yemen since 2015 and maintaining a punishing Red Sea blockade against shipments often vital to famine relief.

“The Saudi-led coalition’s ships are preventing essential supplies from entering Yemen,” according to an Oct. 11, 2017 Reuters report. The report goes on to assess the dire consequences, for Yemen, caused by blocking and delaying ships carrying food and medicine. It documents many cases in which vessels were thoroughly searched, certified not to be carrying weapons, and still not allowed to enter Yemen.

In a time when 20 million people face starvation, it’s particularly obscene for any country to pour resources into nuclear weaponry. Mordechai Vanunu took extraordinary risks and endured incredible suffering to rescue the human species from the foolhardiness of building and maintaining nuclear arsenals.

I wonder if people worldwide can rise to a level of courage and seriousness

needed to simply recognize, and then, where possible, act in response to the world's real threats. Within the U.S., can several decades of U.S. government bipartisan lying about Iran be overcome with saner, more humane narratives?

Can the threat of U.S. invasion be lifted long enough to allow Iran's people a window for once again considering democratic reforms? Silence about these issues seems ominous. But silence can be broken. We have Vanunu's courageous example. Let's not waste the precious time we have in which to follow it.

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## Fueling More Bloodshed in Ukraine

**Exclusive:** In the U.S., Russia-hating liberals are joining the neocons in seeking more war in Ukraine, as the prospects for a rational and peaceful resolution to the crisis continue to fade, explains James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

Last January, Sen. John McCain led a delegation along with his longtime sidekick, Sen. Lindsey Graham, to a contingent of Ukrainian troops not far from the front line in eastern Ukraine. In the presence of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Graham told the soldiers: "Your fight is our fight ... 2017 will be the year of offense. All of us will go back to Washington and we will push the case against Russia."

McCain promised the assembled troops, "we will do everything we can to provide you with what you need to win."

When contemplating the long careers of the two Republican senators, it is hard to escape the conclusion that McGeorge Bundy's quip about the famed Cold War columnist Joe Alsop – that he had "never known him to go to any area where blood could be spilled that he didn't come back and say more blood" – applies equally to McCain and Graham.

Indeed, last month's National Defense Authorization Act shows that – if nothing else – McCain and Graham are as good as their word: the recently passed defense appropriations bill provides for \$500 million, including "defensive lethal assistance" to Kiev, as part of a \$640 billion overall spending package.

The aid comes at a good time for the embattled Ukrainian President Poroshenko,



whose approval rating hovers around 16 percent. In a bid to stave off the possibility of a far-right *coup d'état*, Poroshenko is back to banging the war drums, promising, well, more blood.

In a little covered speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on Sept. 19, Poroshenko promised that “American weapons will help us liberate the Donbas and return Ukrainian territories.” He also noted that Ukraine spends roughly 6 percent of its GDP on defense, “a figure,” he observed, “much bigger than the obligation for the NATO members.”

Clearly Washington’s condemnation of governments that wage war “against their own people” remains selective, contingent upon who is doing the killing and who is doing the dying. In this case, it would seem that Russian-speaking Ukrainians simply don’t rate.

In addition to promising a wider war in the Donbas, Poroshenko has repeatedly promised that he will seek NATO membership. In August, during a visit by U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis, Poroshenko declared: “Our Ukrainian caravan is on a roll and we have one road to travel upon – a wide Euro-Atlantic highway, leading to membership in the European Union and NATO.”

### **Ukraine’s Human Rights Abuses**

There are a number of objections to yet another round of NATO expansion. As I reported in February 2015: “The current [Ukrainian] government has, according to organizations that could hardly be described as Kremlin friendly (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), committed war crimes in its attempt to defeat the Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas. ... NATO’s principal consideration should not be whether NATO will make Ukraine more secure, but whether Ukraine will make NATO more secure. The answer is self-evident.”

It is true that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, as recently as this month, insisted to Russian state media that NATO is not contemplating Ukrainian membership, telling Sputnik that “There is no MAP [membership action plan] on the agenda.” Yet Stoltenberg has also said, as he did in a speech to the Ukrainian parliament in July, that he believes Ukraine “has the right to choose its own security arrangements” further noting that “last month, NATO welcomed Montenegro as the 29th member of our Alliance. This shows that NATO’s door remains open.”

So the issue doesn’t seem to be going away.

Poroshenko’s push to join NATO, which is being made against the backdrop of ever-worsening relations between the U.S. and Russia, ignores, perhaps

purposefully, one of the principal causes of the morass in which Kiev and Moscow find themselves. It was Moscow's not unfounded fear that Ukraine might join NATO that helped spark the Ukrainian crisis in early 2014.

In the weeks prior to Russia's annexation of Crimea (and just over a month before the outbreak of full hostilities in the Donbas), three former presidents of Ukraine (Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yushchenko) called on the post-Maidan regime to renounce the 2010 Kharkiv agreement which allowed for Russia to base its Black Sea naval fleet in Crimea (in return for discounted prices on Russian natural gas).

It is perhaps not unreasonable that this last move, in addition to the foreign policy and security protocols embedded within the European Union Association agreement (which Poroshenko signed in June 2014), would cause the Russian government to at the very least suspect that NATO was setting the stage for Ukraine's eventual absorption into the alliance.

Indeed, Kiev's launch of its violent and indiscriminate "Anti-Terrorist Operation" against the Donbas – with the effect of intimidating and alienating otherwise loyal Russian-speaking citizens in the eastern part of the country – surely played a role in the Kremlin's decision to come to the aid of the rebels later in the summer of 2014 and again at Debaltseve early the following year.

### **Less Dangerous Options**

One reasonable alternative to NATO membership would be a treaty along the lines of the 1955 Austrian State Treaty, which was an agreement reached between the four post-World War II occupying powers (U.S., USSR, Great Britain and France) that granted Austria its independence "with the understanding," according to the U.S. State Department, "that the newly independent state of Austria would declare its neutrality, creating a buffer zone between the East and the West," meaning it would join neither NATO nor the Soviet-run Warsaw Pact.

Charles Bohlen, the legendary American diplomat who served as ambassador to Moscow from 1953-57, recalled in his memoir *Witness To History* that, with regard to the Austrian State Treaty, he believed "that the Kremlin leaders, and probably the Soviet military chiefs, decided that a genuinely neutral Austria was of more value to Soviet Russia than the maintenance of a divided country where the Red Army would occupy only the poorer half."

The situation in postwar Austria – occupied by East and West – is not perfectly analogous to the situation that obtains in Ukraine today, but there seem to be lessons from what Bohlen intuited were the Kremlin's motives that might be drawn upon to inform Western diplomacy.

But instead of trying to implement the Minsk peace agreement (which calls for the Donbas to remain as part of Ukraine but with more autonomy from Kiev) or search for a reasonable alternative to what are indeed perplexing and pressing matters of national security, Poroshenko has continued to ring the alarm over the another, this time illusory, Russian invasion.

In a recent speech before the Ukrainian parliament, Poroshenko claimed “there is more and more evidence for [Russia’s] preparations for an offensive war of continental proportions.”

Yet perhaps the danger isn’t as clear and present as Poroshenko portrayed it. As Mary Dejevesky of the U.K.’s Independent has observed: “Nato itself had held exercises in the Black Sea and before that in and around the western borderlands of Ukraine. Who, it has to be asked here, is threatening whom?”

Indeed, if Russia was on the precipice of launching a land war in Eastern Europe, would it have cut its defense budget by 25 percent to \$48 billion a year, as was recently announced by the Kremlin?

As difficult as it might be for our hearty band on new cold warriors to believe (some of whom have scant knowledge about the topic of U.S.-Russia relations on which they so frequently choose to declaim), the push for a peaceable settlement in Ukraine is coming not from Washington, but from Moscow and Berlin.

Nevertheless, the stalemate continues: a resolution to the Ukrainian conflict – through the implementation of the Minsk agreements, as well as a settlement of the outstanding security concerns of *all* parties to the conflict – seems to remain tragically out of reach.

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