

# Mother's Day: The Obscured Roots of a Global Peace Movement

Sam Hussein says the origin of Mother's Day has largely been obscured, helping pave the way for Trump's embrace of women warriors and bearers of "the next generation of American patriots," with a hint of the Nazi "Mother's Cross."

By Sam Hussein

Post Haven



In response to Georgia's new anti-abortion law, the actress Alyssa Milano ?on Friday tweeted: "Our reproductive rights are being erased. Until women have legal control over our own bodies we just cannot risk pregnancy. JOIN ME by not having sex until we get bodily autonomy back. I'm calling for a #SexStrike. Pass it on."

The same day, Donald and Melania Trump hosted a celebration of military mothers at the White House. Said Trump: "To the active-duty moms here today: We thank you for your courage, and we applaud your noble service. You have two of the most important jobs in the world: bravely defending America from our enemies and helping to raise the next generation of American patriots."

While Trump focuses on Mother's Day, Milano harkens back to the sex strike in the ancient Greek play *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes.

The original Mother's Day Proclamation, written by Julia Ward Howe in 1870, says:

"We will not have questions decided by irrelevant

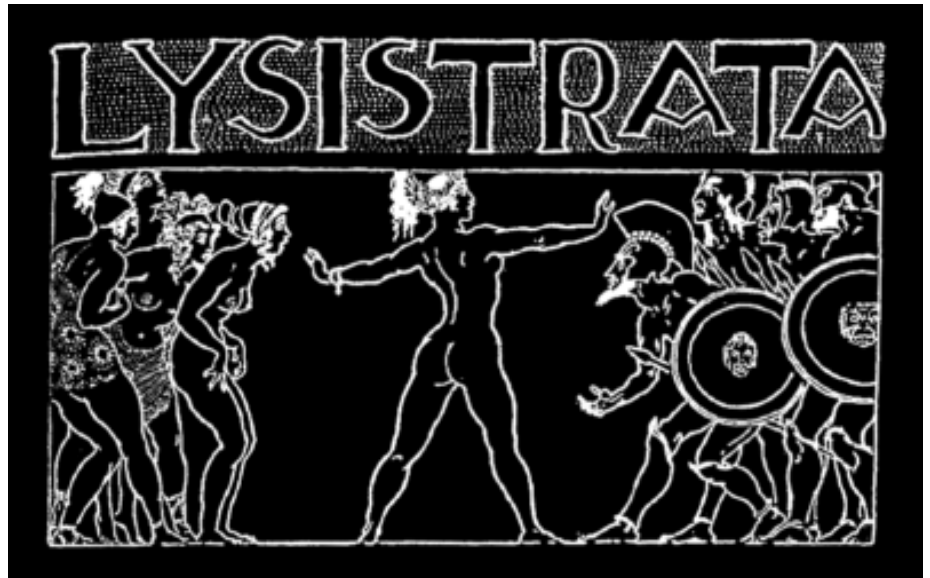
agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us reeking of carnage for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience. We women of one country will be too tender to those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of a devastated Earth a voice goes up with our own, it says 'Disarm! Disarm!' The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence indicate possession. ... "

Howe [references](#) Lysistrata in one of her [lectures](#):

"Barring the indecencies which belong to the common taste of the time, and which are largely omitted in translations, the Greek of Aristophanes does not appear to me very damaging to our position as advocates of the rights of women. In one of these plays, Lysistrata, the women of Athens, weary of the absence of their husbands in the Peloponnesian war, take the negotiation of the peace into their own hands. Lysistrata, the leading spirit among them, has summoned together the women from various parts of Greece, with the view of wresting the management of public affairs from the hands of the men entrusted with them and of putting an end to the sinuous and devastating war. Whether intentionally or not, Aristophanes puts very sensible reasoning into the mouth of this leader among the women."

Part of Lysistrata's genius is that she reached out to women of other city-states, including Athen's main rival, Sparta. The sex strike in Lysistrata targeted men on both sides of the war.

At one point in the play, Lysistrata leads a group of women to seize control of the Acropolis, which stores the financial reserves of the Athenian state. She and a government magistrate are in a stand off. He asks: “Is it money that’s the cause of war?”



Lysistrata avoided arguments which are now commonplace about government having “bungled” its way into war and instead escalates her accusations against the politicians:

“Yes, and all the rest of the corruption. Peisander [a leading Athenian politician, suspected of favoring the war for selfish reasons] and our leading politicians need a chance to steal. That’s the reason they’re always stirring up disturbances. Well, let the ones who wish to do this do what they want, but from this moment on they’ll get no more money.”

### **The Mothers’ Cross**

Valarie Ziegler, author of *Diva Julia: The Public Romance and Private Agony of Julia Ward Howe*, has **written:**

“Howe, now remembered for writing the words to ‘The Battle of the Hymn Republic,’ was absolutely committed to the Civil War. ... But by 1870, she began to look critically at

war, particularly at war between nations. By this time, she was also very interested in the women's movement and women's suffrage. So, she began thinking of what might be possible for women to do on behalf of humanity. ...

"She would in time hold peace conferences both in the United States and in Britain. ... And so, Mother's Day originally was not a day when dad cooked and you went to church, and the ladies got applause and everything. It was really a day for women to come together and to call men and the world to see the necessity for living in peace, rather than giving into the ravages and aggressions of war."

That origin of Mother's Day has largely been obscured, helping pave the way for Trump's pronouncements to embrace women as warriors – and as bearers of "the next generation of American patriots," with a just a hint of the Nazi "Mother's Cross."

Milano recently tweeted a 2017 article: "History shows that sex strikes are a surprisingly effective strategy for political change." The piece states: "Calls to end misogyny and sexism will always be necessary – especially while we have a self-admitted 'pussy grabber' in the Oval Office. But in order for a sex strike to succeed in the U.S., it must be inclusive, with a specific goal in mind. Otherwise, we'll just be treading water."

Treading water seems to be a specialty of politicians. The goal of much of the political establishment is to keep partisan hatred at a sufficiently high level. Among other things, it facilitates lesser-evilism, the dominant tactic

of ensuring the bases of each major political party ask preciously little from their party, since the other is deemed so awful. And it usually is.

## Defending Biden

Interestingly, Milano had just recently made headlines for defending Joe Biden from charges of sexual harassment. In the 1980's, Biden voted to let states overturn Roe v. Wade.

But that may seem as long ago as ancient Greece to some.

Certainly, both Mother's Day and Lysistrata can be criticized for appearing to depict women as wombs or vessels of pleasure. But they are largely about women asserting themselves in the formation of societies. A refrain in Lysistrata is the dumbfounded male reaction: How dare you women assert yourselves on this serious man's business of war?

The Mother's Day Proclamation outright challenges the legitimacy of institutions that enable war.

The power of Mother's Day and Lysistrata are their remarkable universal appeal and connection to the Feb. 15, 2003 global protests against the Iraq invasion – when the peace movement was viewed as the “second super power.” Indeed, Lysistrata was widely preformed widely during the buildup to the 2003 invasion.

The U.S. is at war in so many countries—Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, placing deadly sanctions on Venezuela and Iran and continuously backing Israel's ceaseless aggressions that it may be difficult to keep up.

It's like fish and water. You want to know about U.S. and war? You're swimming in it.

Traditions which might help lead us out of it – like Mother's Day and Lysistrata – are being obscured by those who would control the culture and, consciously or not, ensuring war's perpetuation.

Sam Hussein is an independent journalist, senior analyst at the Institute for Public Accuracy, and founder of [VotePact.org](http://VotePact.org), which encourages disenchanted Democrats and Republicans to pair up. Follow him on Twitter [@samhousseini](https://twitter.com/samhousseini).

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## Is Leaked Document Trump's 'Deal of the Century?'

If genuine, the report published by an Israeli newspaper widely seen as Netanyahu's mouthpiece offers a catastrophic vision of the Palestinians' future, writes Jonathan Cook.

By [Jonathan Cook](#)

[Jonathan-Cook.net](http://Jonathan-Cook.net)



A report published this week by the *Israel Hayom* newspaper apparently leaking details of President Donald Trump's "deal of the century" reads like the kind of peace plan that might be put together by an estate agent or car salesman.

But while the authenticity of the document is unproven and indeed contested, there are serious grounds for believing it paves the direction of any future declaration by the Trump administration.

Not least, it is a synthesis of most of the Israeli right's ambitions for the creation of a Greater Israel, with a few sops to the Palestinians – most of them related to partially relieving Israel's economic strangulation of the Palestinian economy.

This is exactly what Jared Kushner [told us](#) the "deal of the

century” would look like in his preview last month.

Also significant is the outlet that published the leak: *Israel Hayom*. The Israeli newspaper is owned by Sheldon Adelson, a U.S. casino billionaire who is one of the Republican Party’s chief donors and was a major contributor to Trump’s presidential election campaign funds.

Adelson is also a stalwart ally of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. His newspaper has served as little more than a mouthpiece for Netanyahu’s ultra-nationalist governments over the past decade.

### **Netanyahu Leak?**

Adelson and *Israel Hayom* have ready access to key figures in both the U.S. and Israeli administrations. And it has been widely reported that little of significance gets into print there unless it has first been approved by Netanyahu or its overseas owner.

The newspaper questioned the authenticity and credibility of the document, which has spread across social media platforms, even suggesting “it is quite possible the document is fake” and that the Israeli foreign ministry was looking into it.

The White House had already indicated that, after long delays, it intended to finally unveil the “deal of the century” next month, after the holy Muslim month of Ramadan finishes.

An unnamed White House official told the paper the leak was “speculative” and “inaccurate” – the kind of lackluster denial that might equally mean the report is, in fact,

largely accurate.

If the document is genuine, Netanyahu looks to be the most likely culprit behind the leak. He has overseen the foreign ministry for years and *Israel Hayom* is widely referred to by Israelis as “Bibiton,” or Bibi’s newspaper, employing the prime minister’s nickname.

### **Testing the Waters**

The alleged document, as published in *Israel Hayom*, would be catastrophically bad for the Palestinians. Assuming Netanyahu approved the document’s leaking, his motives might not be too difficult to discern.

On one view, leaking it might be an effective way for Netanyahu and the Trump administration to test the waters, to fly a trial balloon to see whether they dare publish the document as it is, or need to make modifications.

But another possibility is that Netanyahu may have concluded that there could be an unwelcome price in publicly achieving most of what he is already gaining by stealth – a price he may prefer to avoid for the time being.

Is the leak designed to foment pre-emptive opposition to the plan, both from within Israel and from the Palestinians and the Arab world, in the hope of stymieing its release?

The hope may be that the leak, and the reaction it elicits, forces Trump’s Middle East team to postpone yet again the plan’s publication, or even foils its release entirely.

Nonetheless, whether or not the “deal of the century” is unveiled soon, the leaked document – if true – offers a



plausible glimpse into the Trump administration's thinking.

Given that Trump's Middle East team appear to have begun implementing the plan over the past 18 months even without its publication – from moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem to the recognition of Israel's illegal annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights – the leak helps to shed light on how a U.S.-Israeli “resolution” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is likely to unfold.

### **Annexing the West Bank**

The proposed Palestinian entity would be named “New Palestine” – apparently taking a page out of the playbook of Tony Blair, Britain's former prime minister who became the international community's Middle East envoy from 2007 to 2015.

Back in the 1990s, Blair filleted his own political party, Labour, of its socialist heritage and then rebranded the resulting corporation-friendly party, a pale shadow of its former self, as “New Labour.”

The name “New Palestine” helpfully obscures the fact that this de-militarized entity would lack the features and powers normally associated with a state. According to the leak, New Palestine would exist on only a tiny fraction of historic Palestine.

All illegal settlements in the West Bank would be annexed to Israel – satisfying a pledge Netanyahu made shortly before last month's general election. If the territory annexed includes most of Area C, the 62 percent of the West Bank Israel was given temporary control over under the Oslo

accords, and which the Israeli right urgently wants to annex, that would leave New Palestine nominally in charge of about 12 percent of historic Palestine.

Or put another way, the Trump administration appears to be ready to give its blessing to a Greater Israel comprising 88 percent of the land stolen from Palestinians over the past seven decades.

But it is far worse than that. New Palestine would exist as a series of discrete cantons, or Bantustans, surrounded by a sea of Israeli settlements – now to be declared part of Israel. The entity would be chopped and diced in a way that is true of no other state in the world.

New Palestine would have no army, just a lightly armed police force. It would be able to act only as a series of disconnected municipalities.

In fact, it is hard to imagine how “New Palestine” would fundamentally change the current, dismal reality for Palestinians. They would be able to move between these cantons only using lengthy detours, bypass roads and tunnels. Much like now.

### **Glorified Municipalities**

The only silver lining offered in the alleged document is a proposed bribe from the U.S., Europe, other developed states, though mostly financed by the oil-rich Gulf states, to salve their consciences for defrauding the Palestinians of their land and sovereignty.

These states will provide \$30 billion over five years to help New Palestine set up and run its glorified

municipalities. If that sounds like a lot of money, remember it is \$8 billion less than the decade-long aid the U.S. is currently giving Israel to buy arms and fighter jets.

What happens to New Palestine after that five-year period is unclear in the document. But given that the 12 percent of historic Palestine awarded to the Palestinians is the region's most resource-poor territory – stripped by Israel of water sources, economic coherence, and key exploitable resources like the West Bank's quarries – it is hard not to see the entity sinking rather swimming after the initial influx of money dries up.

Even if the international community agrees to stump up more money, New Palestine would be entirely aid dependent in perpetuity.

The U.S. and others would be able to turn on and off the spigot based on the Palestinians' "good behavior" – just as occurs now.

Palestinians would live permanently in fear of the repercussions for criticizing their prison warders. In keeping with his vow to make Mexico pay for the wall to be built along the southern U.S. border, Trump apparently wants the Palestinian entity to pay Israel to provide it with military security. In other words, much of that \$30 billion in aid to the Palestinians would probably end up in the Israeli military's pockets.

Interestingly, the leaked report argues that oil-producing states, not the Palestinians, would be the "main beneficiaries" of the agreement. This hints at how the Trump deal is being sold to the Gulf states: as an opportunity for

them to fully embrace Israel, its technology and military prowess, so that the Middle East can follow in the footsteps of Asia's "tiger economies."

### **Ethnic Cleansing in Jerusalem**

Jerusalem is described as a "shared capital," but the small print reads rather differently. Jerusalem would not be divided into a Palestinian east and an Israeli west, as most had envisaged. Instead, the city will be run by a unified Israeli-run municipality. Just as happens now.

The only meaningful concession to the Palestinians would be that Israelis would not be allowed to buy Palestinian homes, preventing – in theory, at least – a further takeover of East Jerusalem by Jewish settlers.

But given that in return Palestinians would not be allowed to buy Israeli homes, and that the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem already suffers massive housing shortages and that an Israeli municipality would have the power to decide where homes are built and for whom, it is easy to imagine that the current situation – of Israel exploiting planning controls to drive Palestinians out of Jerusalem – would simply continue.

Also, given that Palestinians in Jerusalem would be citizens of New Palestine, not Israel, those unable to find a home in Israeli-ruled Jerusalem would have no choice but to emigrate into the West Bank. That would be exactly the same form of bureaucratic ethnic cleansing that Palestinians in Jerusalem experience now.

### **Gaza Open to Sinai**

Echoing recent comments from Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and Middle East adviser, the plan's benefits for Palestinians all relate to potential economic dividends, not political ones.

Palestinians will be allowed to labor in Israel, as was the norm before Oslo – and presumably, as before, only in the most poorly paid and precarious jobs, on building sites and agricultural land.

A land corridor, doubtlessly overseen by Israeli military contractors the Palestinians must pay for, is supposed to connect Gaza to the West Bank. Confirming earlier reports of the Trump administration's plans, Gaza would be opened up to the world, and an industrial zone and airport created in the neighboring territory of Sinai.

The land – its extent to be decided in negotiations – would be leased from Egypt.

Helpfully for Israel, as has previously been pointed out, such a move risks gradually encouraging Palestinians to view Sinai as the center of their lives rather than Gaza – another way to slowly ethnically cleanse them.

Meanwhile, the West Bank would be connected to Jordan by two border crossings – probably via land corridors through the Jordan Valley, which itself is to be annexed to Israel. Again, with Palestinians squeezed into disconnected cantons surrounded by Israeli territory, the assumption must be that over time many would seek a new life in Jordan.

Palestinian political prisoners would be released from Israeli jails to the authority of New Palestine over three

years. But the plan says nothing about a right of return for millions of Palestinian refugees – descended from those who were expelled from their homes in the 1948 and 1967 wars.

### **Gun to Their Heads**

Don Corleone-style, the Trump administration appears ready to hold a gun to the head of the Palestinian leaderships to force them to sign up to the deal.

The U.S., the leaked report states, would cut off all money transfers to the Palestinians if they dissent, in an attempt to batter them into submission.

The alleged plan would demand that Hamas and Islamic Jihad disarm, handing their weapons over to Egypt. Should they reject the deal, the report says the U.S. would authorize Israel to “personally harm” the leadership – through extrajudicial assassinations that have long been a mainstay of Israeli policy towards the two groups.

Rather less credibly, the alleged document suggests that the White House is prepared to get tough with Israel too, cutting off U.S. aid if Israel fails to abide by the terms of the agreement.

Given that Israel has regularly broken the Oslo accords – and international law – without paying any serious penalty for doing so, it is easy to imagine that in practice the U.S. would find work-arounds to ensure Israel was not harmed for any violations of the deal.

### **U.S. Imprimatur**

The alleged document has all the hallmarks of being the

Trump plan, or at least a recent draft of it, because it sets out in black and white the reality Israel has been crafting for Palestinians over the past two decades.

It simply gives Israel's mass theft of land and cantonization of the Palestinians an official U.S. imprimatur.

So, if it offers the Israeli right most of what it wants, what interest would *Israel Hayom*— Netanyahu's mouthpiece — have in jeopardizing its success by leaking it?

A couple of reasons suggest themselves.

Israel is already achieving all these goals — stealing land, annexing the settlements, cementing its exclusive control over Jerusalem, putting pressure on the Palestinians to move off their land and into neighboring states — without formally declaring that this is its game plan.

It has been making great progress in all its aims without having to admit publicly that statehood for the Palestinians is an illusion. For Netanyahu, the question must be why go public with Israel's over-arching vision when it can be achieved by stealth.

But even worse for Israel, once the Palestinians and the watching world understand that the current, catastrophic reality for Palestinians is as good as it is going to get, there is likely to be a backlash.

The Palestinian Authority could collapse, the Palestinian populace launch a new uprising, the so-called "Arab street" may be far less accepting of the plan than their rulers or Trump might hope, and solidarity activists in the West,

including the boycott movement, would get a massive shot in the arm for their cause.

Equally, it would be impossible for Israel's apologists to continue denying that Israel is carrying out what the late Israeli academic Baruch Kimmerling called "politicide" – the destruction of the Palestinians' future, their right to self-determination and their integrity as a single people.

If this is Trump's version of Middle East peace, he is playing a game of Russian roulette – and Netanyahu may be reluctant to let him pull the trigger.

**Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at [Jonathan Cook.net](http://JonathanCook.net).**

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## Stefania Maurizi on How Julian Assange Changed Journalism

The Italian journalist and longtime media partner of *WikiLeaks* speaks with Dennis J. Bernstein and Randy Credico about the implications of Assange's struggle against U.S. extradition.

**By [Dennis J Bernstein](#) and [Randy Credico](#)**

*[KPFA Flashpoints](#)*



**J**ulian Assange was back in court twice last week, and will return to a high British court next



month for the major legal battle of his life. It will determine whether the U.S. is allowed to extradite the *WikiLeaks* publisher to the U.S. for prosecution.

In the first of a series of extradition hearings on May 2, [Assange appeared](#) in court via video screen. He seemed composed and focused and ready to fight. He told the British High Court: "I do not wish to surrender for extradition. I'm a journalist winning many, many awards and protecting many people." The next procedural hearing is scheduled for May 30 and another substantive hearing for early June.

Stefania Maurizi is an investigative journalist for the Italian daily *la Repubblica* and the author of two books; "Dossier WikiLeaks: Segreti Italiani" and "Una Bomba, Dieci Storie." She has for years worked closely with Assange on some of the most significant *WikiLeaks* releases including ["Collateral Murder."](#) Maurizi also worked closely with Glenn Greenwald on the files about Italy of Edward Snowden, who blew the whistle on National Security Agency surveillance.

On May 2, right after Assange's high court appearance, [Maurizi told us](#) that she fears for the health and welfare of Assange. She said she also fears for what it might mean to other journalists and whistleblowers if Assange is convicted in a U.S. court for his crucial work with whistleblowers, which has been used widely by news organizations.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Stefania Maurizi, I'd like you to start by giving us your gut reaction to what we have seen so far in terms of the treatment of Julian in recent days.

**Stefania Maurizi:** For me it has been really shocking to witness how Julian Assange has declined in the last nine years. I have been able to see changes in Julian's health and psychology. It was so

sad, and no one could do anything. I could report on it and expose it but the other media and public opinion did absolutely nothing to make the government understand how terrible his treatment was. And all this is happening not in Russia, not in North Korea, this is happening in London, in the heart of Europe. I now realize how little we can do in our democracy. If you look at what has happened to high-profile whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, and an important publisher like Assange, who had the courage to publish these important revelations, what did your democracy do to save them, to treat them in a human way? Chelsea Manning was put in prison for seven years, where she tried to commit suicide twice. Now she is back in prison. Edward Snowden was forced to leave the U.S. Julian Assange has spent nine years in detainment and no one did anything. We were reporting, we were denouncing, we were exposing how seriously his health was declining. Nothing happened.

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**Dennis Bernstein:** You've worked very closely with Julian Assange in Italy. You were in a sense a co-publisher in getting out crucial documentation. Could you talk about why you consider Assange not only a publisher, but one of the most important publishers of our time?

**Stefania Maurizi:** I started working with *WikiLeaks* in 2009 when very few people knew about them. They hadn't yet published important documents like "Collateral Murder" or the "War Logs." I immediately saw that they were going to start a revolution. And that is what has happened: They have changed journalism. Their model of journalism spread and we see now leaks everywhere. We see this model of collaborative media partnership used by many media, like the Panama Papers Consortium. In addition, you have to realize the importance of what they have revealed. They have revealed the

true face of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. They have revealed the inner working of U.S. diplomacy, for example, how they put pressure on Italian prosecutors who were trying to convict 23 Americans, almost all CIA agents, responsible for the extraordinary renditions here in Italy. Or they published revelations of how the U.S. forced the Italian government to purchase a Lockheed jet fighter. This information is now available to everyone. You can see how *The Washington Post* used emails to investigate the [Jamal] Khashoggi murder and they were able to do so because they had the courage to publish these files. Even in the case of the Panama Papers, only the journalists inside the partnership can access the original files. *WikiLeaks* made these files fully accessible to everyone, so that every journalist, ever activist, every scholar, every citizen can be empowered by this information free of charge. That is the revolution.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Chelsea Manning is now in jail, refusing to cooperate with the grand jury. This is someone who spent so much time in solitary confinement. One of the key collaborations had to do with the activities of the U.S. government in Central America, destabilizing, undermining governments. Now they say they never get involved. If you look at the documentation in the context of the current attempt by [U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela] Elliot Abrams to destabilize Venezuela, here comes *WikiLeaks* again.

**Stefania Maurizi:** Absolutely. Whenever we have a scandal, we can go to the *WikiLeaks* website and search for any pertinent information. The information they publish continues to inform the public. They are now paying a huge price. I myself feel guilty because I was able throughout the past 10 years to work on all these documents, to verify them and publish them without any risk. Julian and *WikiLeaks* are paying a huge price and all the editors

are silent. People accuse me of acting as an activist. I am not acting as an activist, I am speaking out because I feel uncomfortable when I see how professional journalists have all sorts of protection and are not facing imprisonment or extradition.

**Randy Credico:** The last time I saw you was in December of 2017. I had seen Julian three months earlier and his health had declined noticeably in those few months. Now that he is in jail, is he able to see doctors? What is his physical health like at this point?

**Stefania Maurizi:** I am not sure whether he is able to see visitors. It is a very strict regime, there are very strict rules for suspected terrorists. He spends most of his time completely alone. This comes after spending the last seven years at the embassy almost entirely alone, apart from occasional visits. So you can imagine how his forced isolation is affecting his health.

**Randy Credico:** I look at the sentence that judge Deborah Taylor handed down: a year in jail for allegedly skipping bail. Can you go into the bogus charges that were never filed against Julian, and how they were perpetuated with the assistance of the Crown Prosecution Service?

**Stefania Maurizio:** Three years had passed since the Swedish case was closed. No journalistic organization had ever tried to access these documents. Thousands of journalists had covered the case but no one had the facts clear. At that point I realized that it was important from a journalistic point of view to try to access the documentation. These documents allow us to establish important facts, such as that it was the U.K. that advised the Swedish prosecutors against questioning Assange in London. The whole case began with this refusal by the Swedish prosecutor. Now we know that behind this decision there was the Crown Prosecution Service. Let's not forget that this agency is the very same agency which is in charge of deciding whether to extradite Julian Assange to the

U.S. now. The Crown Prosecution Service entered the case at the very beginning and they advised the Swedish prosecutor against questioning Assange in London. Julian Assange never refused to be questioned, he refused to be extradited because he was convinced that the extradition to Sweden could pave the way for his extradition to the U.S.

Now we see that he was right.

And it was the Crown Prosecution Service which advised the Swedish prosecutor against dropping the case in 2013. At that time the Swedish prosecutor considered to drop the case but the Crown Prosecution Service was against this possibility.

Finally, it was the Crown Prosecution Service who destroyed crucial emails about the case, even though the case is still ongoing. I am still fighting in the U.K. tribunal because I want to access these documents and fill in the gaps. Now the Swedish prosecutor is evaluating whether to open this case once again. The statute of limitations is in August 2020. There is a massive campaign about Julian being a rapist. After one or two years of this campaign, who will care about Julian Assange being extradited to the U.S.? That is a possible scenario.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Again, Julian had his first hearing today [May 2, 2019] regarding extradition to the United States. He looked okay but he is definitely in danger. Stefania, what responsibility do we have as journalists to stand up? According to Daniel Ellsberg, if they go after Julian and Chelsea the way they want to in the United States, it is the end of journalism.

**Stefania Maurizi:** Absolutely. This case is about whether the press is allowed to publish documents like the video "Collateral Murder," which records war crimes and whether the press is allowed to publish documents about the NSA spying on world leaders, whether

the press is allowed to publish documents on Guantanamo Bay. We saw what happened after 9/11: habeas corpus came to an end with Guantanamo, the Fourth Amendment [of the U.S. Constitution] was trampled by the NSA. Now they want to destroy the First Amendment and they will do it using Julian Assange. They will not go after *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Wouldn't you say that part of the genius of *WikiLeaks* was the ability to guarantee anonymity? The reason why Assange has been successful and all these major journalistic organizations were willing to work with him is because of this process he created to guarantee anonymity.



**Stefania Maurizi:** Julian Assange understands technology and he understands the nature of power. Most geeks know very little about power, about empire. Thanks to his knowledge in the technology field, we have this platform. But let's not forget that *WikiLeaks* is in trouble now not because they have this platform, but because they have the courage to publish. It is not enough to get the documents. Most newsrooms hide such documents. One of the journalists at *The Washington Post* had the video "Collateral Murder" and he didn't publish it. *WikiLeaks* did. It is not enough to have the platform: you have to have the integrity and the courage to publish. *The New York Times* didn't publish the important story that the NSA was intercepting the communications of U.S. citizens for more than a year. For years *The New York Times* didn't want to use the word "torture," preferring instead "enhanced interrogation." The reason the U.S. authorities are hostile toward *WikiLeaks* and Julian Assange is because they publish what the U.S. media and many other

media don't want to publish.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Would you like to do a shout-out from one courageous woman there in Italy to a woman who became a woman in solitary confinement and was arrested again on International Women's Day?

**Stefania Maurizi:** I feel a huge debt of gratitude because I have worked on Chelsea Manning's documents for years. I supported her defense fund, I wrote to her in prison. I have tried to explain to my readers why she is tremendously courageous. I really would like to see her go free because I cannot accept that one of the most important journalistic sources of all time is again in prison.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Both Randy and I are extremely grateful for your work, Stefania Maurizi, investigative journalist for *la Repubblica* and author of "[Dossier WikiLeaks](#)," which describes the power of a courageous publisher like Julian Assange, who has worked with extraordinary sources to get information out which we would otherwise never have heard.

[Listen](#) to the interview on KPFA.

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 [Flashpoint](#). You can get in touch with the author at [dbernstein@igc.org](mailto:dbernstein@igc.org).

Randy Credico is an American perennial political candidate, comedian, radio host, activist and the former director of the William Moses Kunstler Fund for Racial Justice.

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### US Executive Power and the ‘State of Exception’

After decades of global integration, Dan Steinbock sees imperial presidential policies based on “national security interests” producing majestic mistakes.

## How Carl Schmitt Took Over the White House

By [Dan Steinbock](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



As the controversial German jurist [Carl Schmitt](#) saw it in the interwar Third Reich, legal order ultimately rests upon the decisions of the sovereign, who alone can meet the needs of an “exceptional” time, transcending the law so that order can then be reestablished. “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception,” [he wrote](#). “All law is situational law.”

In post-Weimar Germany, such ideas contributed to the eclipse of liberal democracy. Following Sept. 11, 2001, similar arguments renewed neoconservative interest in Schmitt and the “state of exception.” In this world the status quo is in a permanent state of exception, as enemies – “adversaries, others and strangers” – will unite “us” against “them.”



In this view, the U.S. response to 9/11 was not unusual because liberal wars are “exceptional.” Rather, it was a manifestation of ever-more violent types of war within the very attempt to fight wars that would end “war” as such.

Similarly, it is politically expedient to legitimize a trade war and other political battles in the name of “national security,” which allows the sovereign to redefine a new order on the basis of a state of exception. Subsequently, a new national security strategy redefines “friends” as “enemies” and “us” as victims who are thus justified to seek justice from our “adversaries” – “them.”

The logic of the state of exception leaves open the question how the White House could establish such a trade war as a sovereign, when such trade wars have not been supported by most of President Donald Trump’s constituencies and have been opposed by much of the Congress and by most Americans.

### **Unitary Executive Theory**

What looms behind the Schmittian White House is a tradition of conservative thought relying on the unitary executive theory in American constitutional law, which deems that the president possesses the power to control the entire executive branch.

The first administration to make explicit reference to the “unitary executive” was the Reagan administration. Typically, the practice has evolved since the 1970s, when President Richard Nixon decoupled the U.S. dollar from the Bretton Woods gold standard and trade deficits began to rise.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 allowed the George W. Bush administration to make the unitary executive theory a common feature of signing statements, particularly in the execution of national-security decisions, which divided Capitol Hill and were opposed by most Americans.

In the case of Trump, the need for inflated unitary executive power arose with Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, which restricted the president's strategic maneuverability to operate with the Republican Congress in 2017-18 but permitted actions that required only executive power, typically in tax and trade policy.

In this view, efforts at a U.S.-Sino trade compromise may prove more challenging than anticipated, as evidenced by the extended truce talks. Even a trade compromise may prove unlikely to deter subsequent bilateral technology wars, which have been heralded by U.S. actions in the case of Huawei and longstanding efforts to sustain American primacy in 5G technologies. As U.S. production capacity has been offshored since the 1980s, such efforts rely on national security considerations.

If the trade war is less about trade than about a U.S. effort at economic and strategic primacy, no "concession" may prove enough for the Trump White House, which may be more likely to re-define the status quo on the basis of a national emergency.

### **'Costly, Mysterious Wars'**

The idea of the "imperial presidency" in America is hardly new, as historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. demonstrated in the Nixon era:

“The weight of messianic globalism was indeed proving too much for the American Constitution ... In fact, the policy of indiscriminate global intervention, far from strengthening American security, seemed rather to weaken it by involving the United States in remote, costly and mysterious wars.”

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Ostensibly moderate administrations, including that of President Barack Obama, have conformed to this rule. During Obama’s first term in office, America expanded its military presence in Afghanistan and increased drone missile strikes across Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. The administration also deployed the military to combat piracy in the Indian Ocean, engaged in a sustained bombing operation in Libya, and deployed U.S. Special Forces in Central Africa. In these cases, Obama decided to use force without congressional approval.

During the past half century, amid a series of asset bubbles, a slate of new foreign interventions, the Iraq War debacle and the \$22 trillion U.S. sovereign debt, the imperial presidency has become a target of broader criticism. But why has it grown even harder to challenge?

Certainly, one critical force has been campaign finance and the increasing role of “big money” in American politics. In particular, the Supreme Court’s 5-4 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which struck down a federal prohibition on independent corporate campaign

expenditures, paved the way for corporate power to override democratic power in the White House.

At the same time, the ultra-rich have begun to play a more active part in politics, with serious consequences for American democracy, as many American political scientists have warned.

In the new status quo, neither 20<sup>th</sup> century American Empire nor 21<sup>st</sup> century Third Reich is needed for majestic policy mistakes. Imperial Presidency will do. Indeed, even the sovereign's executive power may suffice.

### **Emergency Powers in Time of Peace**

The uses of executive power are likely to go far beyond the current rivalry for artificial intelligence (AI), as evidenced by Trump's efforts to re-define, re-negotiate or reject major U.S. trade deals on the basis of national security. By the same token, foreign investment reviews will be overshadowed by national security considerations.

As postwar multilateralism has been replaced with unilateralism, the White House sees itself in international strategic competition with other great powers, particularly Russia and China, yet old allies – including Europe and Japan – are not excluded.

Since the U.S. Constitution ensures the president a relatively broad scope of emergency powers that may be exercised in the event of crisis, exigency or emergency circumstances (other than natural disasters, war, or near-war situations), it matters *how* the White House chooses to apply its definition of a "state of exception."

Under the current, wide definition, it is prudent to expect escalated international trade disputes between the U.S. and other members of the World Trade Organization, even against the WTO itself. Citing diffuse national security reasons, the White House defends its tariffs under the GATT Article XXI; the so-called national security exception.

There is a big difference between the repercussions of such executive decisions in the postwar era and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the past, policy mistakes could penalize the U.S. economy and democracy. After half a century of increasing global interdependency, they can derail global economic prospects.

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This commentary draws in part from his new analysis, “U.S.-Sino Futures,” released by Chinese Quarterly of International Studies (CQISS).

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## In Upcoming Elections EU Parliament Faces a Long List of Enemies

Attilio Moro explains why the EU's only directly elected

legislative body is mounting such an energetic voter-turnout campaign.

By **Attilio Moro**

in Brussels

*Special to Consortium News*



**A**s the EU approaches what are considered to be the most important elections in the history of its parliament – **between May 22 and 26** – the EU has never had so many enemies.

The list starts with U.S. President Donald Trump and extends to the Brexiters in the UK. It goes from Andrzej Duda, the Polish premier, to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán; from the Czech Republic's Prime Minister Andrej Babiš to the Romanian government.

Italy also makes the list. Its unofficial prime minister, Matteo Salvini, has been advocating, until he took office, the exit from the euro and possibly from the EU altogether. Other anti-EU leaders include Austrian Prime Minister Norbert Hofer, who assumed office on an anti-European platform, and France's Marine Le Pen.

There is also the AfD Party in Germany and a score of sizable anti-EU minorities in almost all European countries.

The most aggressive of all has been Donald Trump, who went well beyond his "American First" slogan in calling EU countries the trade "enemy" of the U.S. Under his watch, EU-U.S. relations have never been so bad.

**Divisions with EU**

The Trump administration's divisions with the EU seem to involve everything, from NATO (Europeans have to pay more, Trump keeps saying) to Iran (Washington trying to block Europe from dealing with Teheran); from trade (too many German cars in the U.S.) to the environment (Trump backed out of the collective reduction of Co2, as internationally agreed in Paris).

Trump has given confidence and strength to Brexiteers and every possible type of EU dissident, to the point that Poland's Duda has openly defied the EU Commission's demand to abolish the illiberal law allowing his government to appoint the justices of the Supreme Court.

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Hungary's Orban could defy the European immigration policy by refusing to take in one single migrant (Trump is building a wall, after all). And, contrary to the "European spirit of openness" (and against the wishes of many of George Soros's friends in Brussels) – Orban in 2018 managed to force most of operations of the private university in Budapest funded by the Hungarian-born billionaire philanthropist to move to Vienna.

The Czech Republic's Babis, the richest man in the country, continues to flout warnings from Brussels about his violations of press freedom and the independence of the judiciary.

Romania is displaying the most conspicuous insubordination in the case of Laura Kovesi, its former chief prosecutor,

who oversaw the convictions of thousands of politicians, officials and businesspeople. Now Bucharest, which is holding the rotating presidency of the EU until the end of June, is trying to prevent Kovesi from leading the new European Public Prosecutor's Office, which will begin functioning in 2020. Romania's justice minister has been smearing her in letters to his EU counterparts and the government briefly subjected her to a travel ban. The only government that opposes her nomination is her own.

## **Sovereignism**

The ideology that unifies most of the European "enemies" of the EU is sovereignism, the idea that national interests should come before those of Europe and that sharing wealth doesn't imply sharing policies and values.

In line with Trump, Sovereignists don't believe that the problems of the modern world can be dealt with through a multilateral approach. They will win, according to most estimates, a sizeable share of the seats in the EU Parliament later this month.

They will be supported by a substantial share of the European public opinion (mainly right-wing) which is at odds with what they consider to be an EU immigration policy that is too permissive.

They will also be supported by plenty who feel that the EU institutions, including the EU Parliament, are bureaucratic and remote from ordinary people, while too close to the lobbies. They have a point. Around 15 thousand lobbyists are active in Brussels. It is not a mystery that they are very influential in the EU Parliament.



Recently, it turned out that the EU's liberal party, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, or ALDE, received hundreds of thousands of euros in donations from Google, Bayer, Microsoft, Uber, Syngenta and Deloitte.

The leftists of the GUE/NGL and the Greens both fiercely oppose corporate lobbying. But with those two exceptions, there is good reason to believe that all the other major political groups have received this much money and more.

One of the most striking cases of EU corporate influence is that of Bayer-Monsanto, which managed last year to renew its European license for the weed killer, Roundup, which has been defined by leading research institutions as an endocrine disrupter with links to cancer.

In addition to corporate corruption, anti-EU sentiment includes those opposed to the neoliberal economic policies (privatizations of public companies, cuts in social spending, deregulation) imposed in the last 20 years by the EU institutions, which not only failed to revive the economy but brought southern European countries to the brink of bankruptcy.

Despite the widespread frustrations, most European citizens consider the EU as vital in the era of globalization. And a reasonable percentage of the European constituency will turn out to elect their delegates to Brussels.

But the EU Parliament senses the threat it is facing and is running an unprecedented voter turnout campaign. In every European airport now, huge (and very expensive) billboards inform travelers of what the EU has done for their country.

Had parliamentarians arranged more transparency in the way they do business, or had they passed a proposal that has been languishing for decades for passage – which would oblige lobbies to register – that might have been more effective than billboards.

**Attilio Moro is a veteran Italian journalist who was a correspondent for the daily Il Giorno from New York and worked earlier in both radio (Italia Radio) and TV. He has travelled extensively, covering the first Iraq war, the first elections in Cambodia and South Africa, and has reported from Pakistan, Lebanon, Jordan and several Latin American countries, including Cuba, Ecuador and Argentina. Presently, he is a correspondent on European affairs based in Brussels.**

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## Orwellian Cloud Hovers Over Russia-gate

Ray McGovern calls out the void of evidence at the heart of the Senate hearing with Attorney General Barr on Wednesday.

By **Ray McGovern**

*Special to Consortium News*



**G**eorge Orwell would have been in stitches Wednesday watching Attorney General William Barr and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee spar on Russia-gate. The hearing had the hallmarks of the intentionally or naively blind leading the

blind with political shamelessness.

From time to time the discussion turned to the absence of a legal “predicate” to investigate President Donald Trump for colluding with Russia. That is, of course, important; and we can expect to hear a lot more about that in coming months.

More important: what remains unacknowledged is the absence of an evidence-based major premise that should have been in place to anchor the rhetoric and accusations about Russia-gate over the past three years. With a lack of evidence sufficient to support a major premise, any syllogism falls of its own weight.

The major premise that Russia hacked into the Democratic National Committee and gave *WikiLeaks* highly embarrassing emails cannot bear close scrutiny. Yes, former CIA Director John Brennan has told Congress he does not “do evidence.” In the same odd vein, Brennan’s former FBI counterpart James Comey chose not to “do evidence” when he failed to seize and inspect the DNC computers that a contractor-of-ill-repute working for the DNC claimed were hacked by Russia.

Call us old fashioned, but we Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) still “do evidence” – and, in the case at hand, forensic investigation. For those who “can handle the truth,” the two former NSA technical directors in VIPS can readily explain how the DNC emails were not hacked – by Russia or anyone else – but rather were copied and leaked by someone with physical access to the DNC computers.

We first reported hard forensic evidence to support that

judgment in a July 2017 memorandum for the president. Substantial evidence that has accumulated since then strengthens our confidence in that and in related conclusions. Our conclusions are not based on squishy “assessments,” but rather on empirical, forensic investigations – evidence based on fundamental principles of science and the scientific method.

### **Bizarre, Medieval**

All “serious” members of the establishment, including Barr, his Senate interrogators, and the “mainstream media” feel required to accept as dogma the evidence-free conventional wisdom that Russia hacked into the DNC. If you question it, you are, *ipso facto*, a heretic – and a “conspiracy theorist,” to boot.

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Again, shades of Orwell and his famous “two plus two equals five.” Orwell’s protagonist in “1984,” Winston Smith, imagines that the State might proclaim that “two plus two equals five” is fact. Smith wonders whether, if everybody believes it, does that make it true?

Actually, the end goal is not to get you to parrot that two plus two equals five. The end goal is to make it so you’d never even consider that two plus two could equal anything other than five.

During the entire Barr testimony Wednesday, no one departed from the safe, conventional wisdom about Russian hacking. We in VIPS, at least, resist the notion that this makes it

true. We shall continue to insist that two and two is four, and point out the flaws in any squishy “Intelligence Community Assessment” that concludes, even “with high confidence,” that the required answer is “five.”

## **Doubtful Dogma**

Wednesday’s Senate hearing brought a painful flashback to a similarly widely-held, but evidence-free dogma – that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction before the U.S. attacked that country. It gets worse: Many of the same people who promoted the spurious claims about WMD are responsible for developing and proclaiming the dogma about Russian hacking into the DNC. The Oscar for his performance in the role of misleader goes, once again, to former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, whose “credits” go back to the WMD fiasco in which he played a central role.

Before the war on Iraq, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld put Clapper in charge of analysis of satellite imagery, the most definitive collection system for information on WMD. In his memoir, Clapper admits, with stomach-churning nonchalance, that *“intelligence officers, including me, were so eager to help [spread the Cheney/Bush claim that Iraq had a ‘rogue WMD program’] that we found what wasn’t really there.”* [Emphasis added]

Last November as Clapper was hawking his memoir at the Carnegie Endowment I had a chance during the Q and A to pursue him on that and on Russia-gate. I began:

“You confess [in Clapper’s book] to having been shocked that no weapons of mass destruction were found. And then, to your credit, you admit, as you say here [quoting from the

book], 'the blame is due to intelligence officers, including me, who were so eager to help [the administration make war on Iraq] that we found what wasn't really there.'"

"Now fast forward to two years ago. Your superiors were hell bent on finding ways to blame Trump's victory on the Russians. Do you think that your efforts were guilty of the same sin here? Do you think that you found a lot of things that weren't really there? Because that's what our conclusion is, especially from the technical end. There was no hacking of the DNC; it was leaked, and you know that because you talked to NSA."

## **Evidence**

Back to the Senate hearing on Wednesday: Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA), during a line of questioning about evidence of obstruction of justice, asked the attorney general if he personally reviewed the underlying evidence in the Mueller report.

"No," said Barr, "We accepted the statements in the report as factual record. We did not go underneath it to see whether or not they were accurate. We accepted it as accurate."

**Harris:** You accepted the report as evidence? You did not question or look at the underlying evidence?

**Barr:** We accepted the statements in the report and the characterization of the evidence as true."

**Harris:** "You have made it clear that you did not look at the evidence."

It was crystal clear on Wednesday that Barr had bigger fish to fry, as well as protective nets to deflect incoming shells. He is likely to be preoccupied for weeks answering endless questions about his handling of the Mueller report. It is altogether possible, though, that in due course he plans to look into the origins of Russia-gate and the role of Clapper, Brennan and Comey in creating and promoting the evidence-free dogma that Russia hacked into the DNC – and, more broadly, that, absent Russia's support, Trump would not be president.

For the moment, however, we shall have to live with “The Russians Still Did It, Whether Trump Colluded or Not.” There remains an outside chance, however, that the truth will emerge, perhaps even before November 2020, and that, this time, the Democrats will be shown to have shot themselves in *both* feet.

For further background, please see:

[VIPS Fault Mueller Probe, Criticize Refusal to Interview Assange](#)

[VIPS: Mueller's Forensics-Free Findings](#)

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years, with special expertise on Russia, and prepared *The President's Daily Brief* for Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

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### First-Hand Account of Protecting the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington

Kevin Zeese, co-founder of the Venezuelan Embassy Protection Collective, described the situation inside the embassy on Wednesday.

## ‘Focused on Sovereignty and Peace’

By [Dennis J. Bernstein](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



On May 1, I conducted this phone interview with Kevin Zeese, co-director of Popular Resistance, and co-founder of the [Venezuelan Embassy Protection Collective](#), about the occupation of the embassy.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Where exactly are you now Kevin Zeese?

**Kevin Zeese:** I’m talking to you from the Venezuelan embassy in Washington, D.C., as part of the Embassy Protection Collective, a group of organizations and individuals who are standing in solidarity with the Venezuelan people to protect their embassy from takeover by the Trump administration and the state government they have picked for Venezuela, which just had a failed coup yesterday. I am co-director of Popular Resistance.org, which grew out of the Occupy movement and is a daily movement and organizing site which carries on the issues which were raised by the Occupy



movement. We are one of the initiators of this collective at the embassy, along with Code Pink, the Answer Coalition, Black Alliance for Peace, and other organizations.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Tell us exactly what you are doing there in the embassy and what people in Washington, D.C., are trying to do in the context of what appears to be a U.S.-supported coup and advanced destabilization.

**Kevin Zeese:** We have upwards of 50 people living here every night. We began on April 10 and it is ongoing. We work here, we sleep here, we cook here. This has become our home and we see ourselves as tenants of the Venezuelan government. We live here with the permission of the elected Venezuelan government. There was no unlawful entry, there is no trespass. We see ourselves as interim protectors because the U.S. embassy in Caracas is vacant and the U.S. wants to have Switzerland serve as a protectorate for that embassy. Venezuela is negotiating with other countries to be a protectorate for this embassy. We are hoping that the two countries will mutually agree to having protectorates and that way both embassies will remain sovereign. Once that is negotiated, we hope that will begin an ongoing dialogue that can resolve a lot of the disputes between the U.S. and Venezuela.

I know that Venezuela wants to have a good relationship with the United States and does not see the United States as an enemy. They want peace, but they will protect their sovereignty and independence and they are prepared to do so with their military as well as their civilian militia. We hope to avoid such a conflict and use this embassy dispute as a way to open up diplomatic relations and end the

economic attack as well as the threats of military force.



**Dennis Bernstein:** What confirms this to be a coup, an overthrow of the government there?

**Kevin Zeese:** There is no question that this is a coup. This was discussed by the OAS [Organization of American States] in January and February by the U.S. and its allies. They picked [National Assembly President Juan] Guaidó to be their puppet president, someone who had never run for presidency and had come from the second smallest state with 24 percent of the vote, which was enough to get into the national legislature. By appointing himself interim president he violated the Venezuelan constitution in a multitude of ways.

The coup tried yesterday to conduct a takeover of the country and failed miserably. Guaidó – along with the leader of the opposition, Leopoldo Lopez, who has been convicted of inciting violence that killed more than 140 people – fled and are hiding in the Spanish embassy. So our understanding of the reality of the coup is not just that it was discussed at the OAS but also that the night before the coup [Vice President] Michael Pence called Guaidó and said that he has the full support of the U.S. government. As soon as he was

self-appointed, Trump called him and recognized him and got the right-wing Lima Group countries to go along with that as well as many Western European countries. One hundred and fifty nations have not recognized Guaidó, neither has the United Nations. The OAS, which has always been under the thumb of the United States, had to change its rules because they could not get the two-thirds vote required to recognize Guaidó, and then they barely got the majority. That has resulted in the OAS ambassadors from Venezuela leaving. The Caracas embassy has been used as a place for organizing opposition for many years. They worked very hard to undermine the 2018 reelection of President [Nicolás] Maduro. There were more than 150 election observers from around the world and they unanimously found that the election met international standards and was free of fraud.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Meanwhile we have the Trump administration trying to install part of the coup leadership that apparently failed in a coup attempt yesterday. It was an amazing day for U.S. intelligence when they were talking about this plane, all the leaders agreed to go and something had to be done. It was right out of the textbook of CIA destabilization and overthrow. It is a throwback but is extremely disturbing. What are those who support the government saying to you inside the embassy? Are they willing to fight all the way?

**Kevin Zeese:** If you go to our website, you can read the declaration of our collective, which lays out how Maduro was reelected legitimately, how the Vienna Convention requires the U.S. government to protect the embassy and not turn it over to a fake government, and how Guide's election violated

the Venezuelan constitution.

Of course, there are many people from Venezuela here who take a very different position. Maduro's supporters are for the most part in Venezuela, which is why they keep winning elections and defeating these coups. The people who fled Venezuela, the business people and government people from the pre-Chavez era, are forming a violent mob outside the embassy. Yesterday they were abusing us with sound cannons and racist slurs. Today an opposition person snuck into the basement, got to the third floor and locked himself in a room and we had to negotiate with the secret service to remove him. Unfortunately, the secret service removed the police barriers and told us we were on our own. So, we now feel that we are under siege. But people are confident. We know we are acting lawfully, that we are on the right side of history. We are standing against a U.S. coup, a U.S. military threat, and with the Venezuelan people.

**Dennis Bernstein:** [President Donald] Trump, [National Security Advisor John] Bolton and others at the top are calling for a coup. They said they were ready to fly to Havana but, according to Bolton, that plan broke down at the last minute, they chickened out.

**Kevin Zeese:** John Bolton is a known liar. He was convicted of lying to Congress. He is a known war criminal who has been involved in genocide in Central America during the Iran/Contra era. He was pardoned by [President] George H. W. Bush. Everything he is saying about Venezuela is a lie. I am sure that Maduro never planned to leave the

country. Bolton made another false statement about us at the Atlantic Council when he said that we were here in violation of the law. He said that we have been asked to leave, which is not true. I have absolutely no doubt that there was never any plan by the Venezuelan government to leave the country. I was in Venezuela a few weeks ago and we actually ended up meeting with President Maduro after American Airlines cancelled all flights out of the country on the false claim that there was widespread civil unrest, when there was none at all. We went out and filmed the streets to show that there was no unrest. But that day President Maduro asked to meet with us. We were there for 90 minutes and he talked about how he was willing to put his life on the line to protect Venezuela's independence.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Would you say a little bit more about the Embassy Protection Collective?

**Kevin Zeese:** We are a collection of organizations and individuals. Our declaration has been signed by about 1,500 people and organizations. You can support us through [Popular Resistance](#) or through [Code Pink](#) or the [Black Alliance for Peace](#).

**Dennis Bernstein:** So just to be clear, you are saying that you and the folks in this collective feel under siege now. The police have told you they would not protect you until after you are hurt or wounded. There are a series of anti-government protests supported by the U.S. government outside the embassy.

**Kevin Zeese:** We have agreed to withdraw inside the embassy while these rallies go on.

**Dennis Bernstein:** By the way, what did you talk about all night? I'm sure you didn't sleep all that well.

**Kevin Zeese:** We discussed the day's events and how we responded. It was a very tense situation. We reviewed what we had done and what we could do better. We discussed what was expected the coming day. And we were able to get online through social media so that more people can get involved and support our actions.

**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.](http://www.flashpoints.net) You can get in touch with him at [dbernstein@igc.org.](mailto:dbernstein@igc.org)

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## Venezuela: Failed Coup Argues for New Approach

The Trump administration should set aside its disinformation campaign and start looking at reality, says Fulton Armstrong.

By **Fulton Armstrong**

*Special to Consortium News*



The Trump administration's approach to Venezuela have both policy and intelligence failure written all over them. But its spokesmen continue to think that louder condemnations of President Nicolás Maduro and macho threats will somehow work. They can huff and puff as furiously as they want, but some houses –

even houses run by less-than-competent authoritarian leaders – aren't so easily blown down.

Venezuelan National Assembly President Juan Guaidó's coup attempt on Tuesday was doomed from the start. Whether he and his Washington backers were simply deluding themselves, or whether Maduro's guys masterfully tricked them, they naively thought the military high command would hoist Guaidó on their shoulders and carry him to Miraflores Palace as president.

What happened instead was a huge – potentially fatal in political terms – embarrassment for Guaidó and the U.S. government.

For Guaidó's Venezuelan mentor, Leopoldo López – founder of the "Popular Will" party – the escapade ended with an ignominious run into the Chilean Embassy (and later to the Spanish embassy) with his wife and daughter, after having been freed from house arrest by Guaidó's forces. López is young and still has many political lives ahead of him but, for the man who has directed the violent protests to oust Maduro beginning in 2013, dinner conversation Tuesday night could not have been pleasant.

This is yet another U.S. intelligence failure. Secretary of State (and former CIA Director) Mike Pompeo's statements to the media that, "We had the most senior leader come across yesterday and leave Maduro" and "We had dozens of others, military, depart Maduro's forces" – appears to confirm that the coup was, as many suspect, a U.S. operation.

But the analytical foundation of this covert action was so shaky that even Pompeo's defectors couldn't make a whit of

difference. Was the U.S. intelligence community enthralled by the putschists, or was this a case, yet again, such as in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, of the agencies contorting its "analysis" to please the policymakers? Instead of telling "truth to power," as intel types claim they do, did they just capitulate again?

## **Cuban Capers**

The administration's intelligence on Cuba's role in Venezuela also appears to be deeply flawed. Senior officials make wild allegations about the number and role of Cuban advisors in the country without a shred of evidence. It's difficult to hide 25,000 Cuban military "goons" in a freewheeling country like Venezuela for 20 years, as the administration claims.

I was U.S. national intelligence officer for Latin America when all (repeat: all) 15 intelligence agencies resisted the efforts of John Bolton, now U.S. national security advisor, to manipulate intelligence on Cuba with allegations (still unfounded 17 years later) that the island had a biological weapons program. I've witnessed Bolton's ire. I fear for those Venezuelans who've frustrated his grand schemes for their country.

After failing to overthrow the Venezuelan government in "*Operación Libertad*," as they named this coup attempt, Pompeo did at least succeed in overthrowing some of the truth. He alleged that Maduro tried to leave the country and had to be persuaded by Russia to stay, which Maduro denied. Maybe this sort of disinformation worked for him at CIA. But Pompeo sullied the office of secretary of state



with it – even for a department that brands senior Venezuelan officials with such middle-school epithets as “lackeys” and “thugs.” Vice President Mike Pence’s ending to his Tweet endorsing the coup – “*Vayan con Dios*”– seems based on bad intelligence about Venezuela’s mindset as well. Saying “Go with God” doesn’t exactly work with people who’re suffering from, among other things, U.S. sanctions.

### **Is the Intelligence Community the Enabler?**

Serious analysts surely know that the failed coup comes on the heels of a long string of failed attempts to provoke Maduro into doing something so horrific that either the military ousts him or the administration gets its pretext for its oft-threatened military action. The U.S. dared Maduro to harm U.S. diplomats and, after he didn’t, the State Department withdrew the potential martyrs from Caracas. The administration dared him to attack a humanitarian shipment entering from Colombia in February, but again he let the U.S. down. (The only danger resulted from a Molotov cocktail, thrown by “opposition” gangs that set a truck full of food on fire.) Washington dared Maduro to arrest Guaidó after he returned from that debacle, but he didn’t.

But the Trump administration’s red-line is the survival itself of the “ex-Maduro Regime” (as the administration calls it). For a White House that made a huge deal over President Barack Obama’s failure to act when his red-line in Syria was crossed, Maduro remaining in power is infuriating (and embarrassing). That fury is compounded by the administration’s inability to retaliate against China, Russia, North Korea, and others for supporting Maduro. These

are countries that can fight back.

Whether the U.S. decides to launch military attacks of any nature against Venezuela is the big question. Based on the administration's frustration and bad intelligence it appears to be going down that road. If U.S. officials were to let precedent (such as the thousands of innocent people killed in Panama in 1989 to remove one drug-dealer, Manuel Noriega) and common sense guide them (instead of installing an untested oppositionist with a checkered past like Guaidó to replace Maduro), they'd focus instead on diplomatic efforts to start a negotiation aimed at finding a peaceful outcome.

But the Trump administration has worked hard to block negotiations. It has directed Guaidó to reject any form of talks, and it has discouraged U.S. allies in Europe and Latin America from supporting them. It added Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza to a sanctions list usually reserved for narco-traffickers, serial human rights violators, and truly odious types because, it seems, he was making progress channeling energies toward a diplomatic, negotiated solution.

The U.S. military can destroy the "ex-Maduro regime" with its high-tech weaponry, and the Venezuelan High Command would come out with its hands up. Many people would rush toward U.S. vehicles full of food and goodies. But no gun is going to resolve the Venezuelan mess.

### **An Internal Matter**

Venezuela has a Venezuelan problem, of which former President Hugo Chávez and Maduro are symptoms. Their predecessors were not the democrats that the Trump team

would have us believe they were – another intelligence failure – and Juan Guaidó and Leopoldo López are not the moral equivalents of our Founding Fathers as the Trump people claim.

Unfortunately, there are no white hats in Venezuela, just varying shades of dark gray. That's why the U.S. position should focus on process – negotiations, compromise, institution-building – rather than foregone results such as the installation of someone like Guaidó.

For analysts a tenet of faith is that good analysis will contribute to good policy. The Trump administration should set aside its disinformation campaign and start looking at reality, even if the intelligence community is no longer free to do so.

Negotiations are absolutely essential to achieving an outcome less catastrophic than U.S. policy is currently taking us toward.

**Fulton Armstrong is a former U.S. national intelligence officer for Latin America, and a former staff member of the National Security Council and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.**

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## Dear Social Media Judges: Don't Forget the Fundamentals of a Fair Trial

Julian Assange's Australian lawyer and his EU advisor say the publisher should not be tried in social media and must be given a fair hearing in court.

By **Greg Barns** and **Lisanne Adam**

*Special to Consortium News*

On Thursday this week *WikiLeaks* founder Julian Assange will face a London court. This hearing relates to the request by the United States to extradite Assange to that country to face a computer hacking charge carrying a maximum penalty of five years. No doubt social media will be alive with commentary, support, abuse and everything in between concerning Assange's plight.

When, after almost seven years, on April 11, 2019, Assange was arrested on Ecuadorian soil and taken into custody by U.K. police, social media exploded with the pro- and anti-Assange forces countering each other, and there has been a deluge of commentary about *WikiLeaks* and Assange the man. But much of what passes for comment about Assange on social media outlets like Twitter and Facebook ignores some fundamental issues and facts about this extraordinary case. It is important to restate them in the hope, vain though it may be, that social media comment about Assange and *WikiLeaks* is at least well informed and deals with what is actually at stake in his case.

There is firstly the issue of Assange's breaching bail in 2012 and seeking asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. This was never a case of an individual seeking to flee from justice. To see Assange's actions in this light is to ignore the fundamental right every person has to seek asylum if they have a well-founded fear of persecution based on political opinion. In his case the fear was Sweden would

detain him and then hand him over to the United States. Sweden refused to assure him it would not. We must also remember that Assange did not “hide” in the embassy, like a fugitive. He was detained because he had no choice – leave and be arrested was not a viable option.

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It is also essential that Assange’s right to a fair trial be respected. The opinions on his arrests, his alleged (mis-)conduct and his persona has essentially involved many on social media engaging in the classic “trial by media.” The ongoing discussions about this on media platforms got divided in two camps: Assange is either a villain who deserves what he got or a hero who disclosed information that the public had a right to know.

### **Trial by Twitter**

Assange’s case has, and is being decided upon by millions of social media judges around the world who are finding him guilty of hacking, espionage and sexual misconduct. And many of these same social media judges are deliberating on Assange’s extradition fight and the role of Sweden and the United States. Moreover, his trial on social media leads inevitably to the persecution by non-state actors in the form of harassment to *WikiLeaks*, Assange and to those close to him.

One issue is of particular concern. It is particularly troubling that many on social media are misleading others into thinking that there are legal proceedings afoot in

Sweden today. This assertion is simply wrong. Assange has never been charged in Sweden, the investigation into the alleged sexual misconduct was closed, twice. There are only two live issues before the courts, leaving aside the sentencing for breach of bail. They are, the extradition request and the accompanying charges brought by the U.S. in respect of which there is a real possibility that once on U.S. soil, Assange will face an inhumane and degrading treatment, torture and an unfair trial. It is to be expected Assange will receive a similar treatment as his collaborator, Chelsea Manning, who is currently detained due to her unwillingness to testify to a grand jury investigation into *WikiLeaks*.

We simply say this to social media participants. Don't judge Assange's case on its presentation in the political arena, in the news or in the analysis of others on social media. Moreover, don't let the procedure in Assange's trial set a dangerous precedent for future, similar cases. The legal proceedings involving him must be decided by an impartial judge respecting and following the rule of law. His case has to be judged fairly on the merits and on actual evidence rather than on conspiracy theories or political games. The right to a fair trial entails the right to defend oneself, access to a lawyer, a hearing with an impartial judge and the respect to all the procedural requirements to minimize the risk on other potential breaches of fundamental rights. There is no exception to these fundamental rights in Assange's case. Respecting Assange's fair trial and the rule of law, will benefit justice.

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## PATRICK LAWRENCE: The US Moves on Iran's Oil Market as an Expression of an Irrational Foreign Policy

Patrick Lawrence gauges the backfiring potential of Pompeo's withdrawal on Thursday of U.S. sanction waivers from eight major importers.

# A Decisive Defeat in Long-Running Battle with Foreign Policy Minders

By Patrick Lawrence

*Special to Consortium News*



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement last week that no importer of Iranian oil will henceforth be exempt from U.S. sanctions is as risky as it is misguided. The withdrawal of waivers as of this Thursday effectively gives eight importers dependent on Iranian crude – India, Japan, South Korea, China, Turkey, Taiwan, Italy, and Greece – 10 days' notice to adjust their petroleum purchases. This is now a full-court press: The intent is to cut off Iran's access to any oil market anywhere as part of the administration's

“maximum pressure” campaign against Tehran. “We are going to zero,” Pompeo said as he disclosed the new policy.

Nobody is going to zero. The administration’s move will further damage the Iranian economy, certainly, but few outside the administration think it is possible to isolate Iran as comprehensively as Pompeo seems to expect. Turkey immediately rejected “unilateral sanctions and impositions on how to conduct relations with neighbors,” as Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavusoglu put it in a Twitter message. China could do the same, if less bluntly. Other oil importers are likely to consider barter deals, local-currency transactions, and similar “workarounds.” In the immediate neighborhood, Iraq is so far ignoring U.S. demands that it cease purchasing natural gas and electricity from Iran.

### **Insights on Overreach**

There are a couple of insights to be gleaned from this unusually aggressive case of policy overreach.

First, the new turn in the administration’s Iran policy appears to mark a decisive defeat for President Donald Trump in his long-running battle with his foreign policy minders. It is now very unlikely Trump will achieve any of his policy objectives, a number of which represent useful alternatives to the stunningly shambolic strategies advanced by Pompeo, National Security Advisor John Bolton, and other zealots in the administration.

Weakened by relentless “Russia-gate” investigations, for instance, the president has little chance now of improving ties with Moscow or negotiating with adversaries such as Iran and North Korea, as he has long advocated.



In a *Face the Nation* interview Sunday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Tehran would be open to bilateral talks under the right conditions. It was the second time in a week that Zarif made this point. But those around Trump, not least Bolton and Pompeo, are sure to block any such prospect—or sabotage talks if they do take place, as they did Trump's second summit with Kim Jong-un, North Korea's leader, in late February.

Second, this administration's foreign policy has steadily assumed an irrational character that may be unprecedented in U.S. history. This is perilous. The administration's near-paranoiac hostility toward Pyongyang and Moscow are cases in point. So is its evident indifference to alienating longstanding allies across the Atlantic and in Asia. As of this week, however, Pompeo's "down to zero" policy makes Iran the most immediate danger.

### **Persian Gulf Chokepoint**

Iranian officials, including Zarif, now threaten to close the Strait of Hormuz, chokepoint of the Persian Gulf, if Iranian tankers are prevented from passing through it. This is an indirect warning that the Iranian military could confront the U.S. Fifth Fleet, which operates in the Gulf and adjacent waters.

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A sharp spike in oil prices is another danger with which the administration now lands itself. Taken together, U.S. sanctions against Venezuela and Iran are intended to take

roughly 2 million barrels of oil a day out of the market.

Saudi Arabia has pledged to make up the lost supply, but many analysts question its ability to sustain an increase in output given the advancing depletion of its long-productive Ghawar field. Spare capacity among producers is already wafer-thin. Do we need to risk another oil crisis, given the flagging global economy?

Trump's foreign policy minders also risk alienating allies – South Korea, Japan, India, the Europeans – whose cooperation the U.S. needs on numerous other policy questions. In the case of China, the administration puts progress on a nearly complete trade deal and Beijing's leverage with North Korea in jeopardy.

There are other cases demonstrating the Trump administration's apparently thorough indifference to collateral damage and the animosity of allies. Since the U.S. abandoned the Paris climate pact and the 2015 accord governing Iran's nuclear program, the Europeans have hardly contained their anger; they are openly furious now about the tightened sanctions against Iran. The South Koreans, frustrated with Washington's intransigent stance toward Pyongyang, now search for ways to engage the North despite many layers of UN and U.S.-imposed sanctions.

The question is why this administration's foreign policies are so amateurish and discombobulated. Corollary question: Why is the president surrounded by policy advisers so thoroughly at odds with those of his objectives that are worthwhile?

Trump arrived in Washington an outsider: This is where

answers to these questions begin. This limited the New York dealmaker to a shallow pool from which to build his administration. His never-ending Russia-gate problem further handicaps him. This administration is among the most opaque in recent history, so certainties as to its internal workings are hard to come by. But Trump may not have chosen his foreign policy team so much as its members have been imposed upon him.

However his advisers arrived in the administration, they are a toxic combination of neoconservatives, many drawn from the Heritage Foundation, and evangelical Christians. Bolton is emblematic of the former, Pompeo of the latter. This is the current complexion of American foreign policy.

## **Zealots and Crusaders**

Both camps are populated with zealots and crusaders; both cultivate irrational world views rooted in extremist ideology and sentiment. Bolton's obsession is the restoration of unchallenged U.S. supremacy. Pompeo is said to view adversaries such as North Korea and Iran as George W. Bush did: The U.S. is in an "end times" war with Gog and Magog, biblical manifestations of the evil abroad in the world.

To be clear, there is more wrong than right in the president's foreign policy thinking. He was self-evidently behind the decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem and the announcement in March that Washington recognizes Israeli jurisdiction over the Golan Heights.

"This is very important strategically for victory, heights, because you're up high, very important," Trump said over the

weekend. “Fifty-two years ago this started [when Israel captured Golan from Syria in the 1967 war] and I did it quickly. Done. It’s all done.”

It is unlikely anything is all done in connection with the embassy move and the Golan Heights decision. Both run diametrically counter to international law and both have significantly damaged U.S. credibility in the Middle East. Trump, in short, makes his own miscalculations, and they are as grave as any made by the Pompeo–Bolton axis. There are few wise heads in this administration.

At the same time, Trump’s desire to negotiate with adversaries – Russia, Iran, North Korea – is entirely defensible. But the “down to zero” Iran policy to take effect this week can be read as a signal of the president’s failure to counter the foreign policy Manicheans who surround him.

There may be skirmishes to come, but the battle is over. We must now watch as extremist ideologues accelerate America’s already evident decline as a global power – along with its increasing isolation.

**Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the *International Herald Tribune*, is a columnist, essayist, author, and lecturer. His most recent book is “Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century” (Yale). Follow him @thefloutist. His web site is [www.patricklawrence.us](http://www.patricklawrence.us). Support his work via [www.patreon.com/thefloutist](https://www.patreon.com/thefloutist).**

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