

UK Israel Lobby Adds Muscle as US Lobby Weakens

British politics are being plunged into a stifling silence on the longest example of mass human rights abuses sanctioned by the West in modern history, writes Jonathan Cook.

By [JonathanCook](#)

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For decades it was all but taboo to suggest that pro-Israel lobbies in the United States such as AIPAC used their money and influence to keep lawmakers firmly in check on Israel-related issues – even if one had to be blind not to notice that that was exactly what they were up to.

When back in February U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar pointed out the obvious – that U.S. lawmakers were routinely expected to submit to the lobby's dictates on Israel, a foreign country – her colleagues [clamored](#) to distance themselves from her, just as one might have expected were the pro-Israel lobby to wield the very power Omar claimed.

But surprisingly Omar did not – at least immediately – suffer the crushing fate of those who previously tried to raise this issue. Although she was [pressured into apologizing](#), she was not battered into complete submission for her honesty.

She received support on social media, as well as a wavering, [muted defense](#) from Democratic grandee Nancy Pelosi, and even a relatively [sympathetic hearing](#) from a few

prominent figures in the U.S. Jewish community.

The Benjamins Do Matter

Omar's comments have confronted – and started to expose – one of the most enduring absurdities in debates about U.S. politics. Traditionally it has been treated as anti-Semitic to argue that the pro-Israel lobby actually lobbies for its chosen cause – exactly as other major lobbies do, from the financial services industries to the health and gun lobbies – and that, as with other lobbies enjoying significant financial clout, it usually gets its way.

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erself in the firing line in February when she noted that what mattered in U.S. politics was “It’s all about the Benjamins” – an apparent reference to the 1997 [Puff Daddy song](#) of the same name in which Benjamins refer to \$100 bills. She later clarified that AIPAC leverages funds over congressional and presidential candidates.

The claim that the pro-Israel lobby isn’t really in the persuasion business can only be sustained on the preposterous basis that Israeli and U.S. interests are so in

tune that AIPAC and other organizations serve as little more than cheerleaders for the two countries' "unbreakable bond." Presumably on this view, the enormous sums of money raised are needed only to fund the celebrations.

Making the irrefutable observation that the pro-Israel lobby does actually lobby on Israel's behalf, and very successfully, is typically denounced as anti-Semitism. Omar's comments were perceived as anti-Semitic on the grounds that she pointed to the canard that Jews wield outsized influence using money to sway policymaking.

Allegations of anti-Semitism against her deepened days later when she gave a talk in Washington, D.C., and questioned why it was that she could talk about the influence of the National Rifle Association and Big Pharma but not the pro-Israel lobby – or "the political influence in this country that says it is OK for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country."

That pro-Israel lobbyists – as opposed to Jews generally – do have dual loyalty seems a peculiar thing to deny, given that the purpose of groups like AIPAC is to rally support for Israel in Congress.

Casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson, a key backer of Republican candidates for the presidency, has never hidden his passion not only for Israel but specifically for the ultra-nationalist governments of Benjamin Netanyahu.

In fact, he is so committed to Netanyahu's survival that he spent nearly \$200 million propping up an Israeli newspaper over its first seven years – all so he could assist the prime minister of a foreign country.

Similarly, Haim Saban, one of the main donors to Democratic presidential candidates, including Hillary Clinton, has made no secret of his commitment to Israel. He has said: “I’m a one-issue guy and my issue is Israel.”

Might Saban and Adelson’s “Benjamins” have influenced the very pro-Israel – and very anti-Palestinian – positions of Democratic and Republican presidential candidates? You would have to be supremely naïve or dishonest to claim not.

‘No Bernie-Like Approach’

This point really should be beyond doubt by now. This month *The New York Times* published an unprecedented essay in which author Nathan Thrall quoted political insiders and lobbyists making plain that, as one would expect, the pro-Israel lobby uses its money to pressure congressional candidates to toe the lobby’s line on Israel.

Some of the lobby’s power operates at the level of assumption about what Jewish donors expect in return for their money. According to the *Times*, some three-quarters of all donations over \$500,000 to the major political action committee supporting Democratic nominees for the U.S. Senate race in 2018 were made by Jews.

Though many of those donors may not rate Israel as their main cause, a former Clinton campaign aide noted that the recipients of this largesse necessarily tailor their foreign policy positions so as not to antagonize such donors. As a result, candidates avoid even the mild criticism of Israel adopted by Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Democratic party’s challenger to Clinton in the 2016 presidential race and a primary contender for 2020.

“There’s no major donor that I can think of who is looking for someone to take a Bernie-like approach,” said the aide. Sanders raised his campaign funds from small donations rather than these major funders, leaving him freer to speak openly about Israel.

Other insiders are more explicit still. Ben Rhodes, a former confidant of Barack Obama, says the lobby effectively tied Obama’s hands domestically on efforts to promote peace. “The Washington view of Israel-Palestine is still shaped by the donor class,” he told Thrall, adding: “The donor class is profoundly to the right of where the activists are, and frankly, where the majority of the Jewish community is.”

Joel Rubin, a former political director at lobby group J Street and a founding board member of the centrist Jewish Democratic Council of America, concurred: “The fight over Israel used to be about voters. It’s more about donors now.”

All of these insiders are stating that the expectations of major donors align candidates’ U.S. foreign policy positions with Israel’s interests, not necessarily those of the U.S. It is hard not to interpret that as reformulation of “dual loyalty.”

What’s so significant about the *Times* article is that it signals, as did the muted furor over Omar’s comments, that the pro-Israel lobby is weakening. No powerful lobby, including the Israel one, wants to be forced out of the shadows. It wants to remain in the darkness, where it can most comfortably exercise its influence without scrutiny or criticism.

The pro-Israel lobby’s loyalty to Israel is no longer

unmentionable. But it is also not unique.

As *Mondoweiss* recently noted, Hannah Arendt, the Jewish scholar and fugitive from Nazi Germany, pointed to the inevitability of the “double loyalty conflict” in her 1944 essay “Zionism Reconsidered,” where she foreshadowed the rise of a pro-Israel lobby and its potential negative impacts on American Jews. It was, she wrote, “an unavoidable problem of every national movement of a people living within the boundaries of other states and unwilling to resign their civil and political rights therein.”

For that reason, the U.S.-Cuban lobby has an obvious dual loyalty problem too. It’s just that, given the Cuban lobby’s priority is overthrowing the Cuban government – a desire shared in Washington – the issue is largely moot.

In Israel’s case, however, there is a big and growing gap between image and reality. On the one hand, Washington professes a commitment to peace-making and a promise to act as an honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians. And on the other, the reality is it has offered full-throated support for a series of ultra-nationalist Israeli governments determined to destroy any hope of peace and swallow up the last vestiges of a potential Palestinian state.

The Lord’s Work

It’s important to point out that advocates for Israel are not only Jews. While the pro-Israel lobby represents the views of a proportion of Jewish Americans, it is also significantly comprised of Christians, evangelicals in particular.

Millions of these Christians – including Vice-President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo – can be accused of dual loyalty too. They regard Israel’s role in Biblical prophecy as far more important than the future of the U.S., or mankind for that matter.

For many of these evangelicals, bringing about the end of the world by ensuring Jews return to their Biblical homeland – triggering a final reckoning at the Battle of Armageddon – is the fulfillment of God’s will. And if it’s a choice between support for Washington’s largely secular elites and support for God, they know very definitely where they stand.

Again, the *Times* has started to shine a light on the strange role of Israel in the U.S. political constellation. Another recent article reminded readers that in 2015 Pompeo spoke of the end-times struggle prophesied to take place in Israel, or what is often termed by evangelicals as “The Rapture.” He said: “We will continue to fight these battles.”

During his visit last month to Israel, he announced that the Trump administration’s work was “to make sure that this democracy in the Middle East, that this Jewish state, remains. I am confident that the Lord is at work here.”

Divorced from Reality

If the debate about the pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. is for the first time making a nod to truth, the conversation about the pro-Israel lobby in the U.K. is becoming more and more divorced from reality.

Part of the reason is the way the Israel lobby has recently emerged in the U.K. – hurriedly, and in a mix of panic and

damage-limitation mode.

Given that for decades European countries largely followed Washington's lead on Israel, pro-Israel lobbies outside the U.S. were much less organized and muscular. European leaders' unquestioning compliance was assured as long as Washington appeared to act as a disinterested broker overseeing a peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. As a result, Europe was in little need of vigorous pro-Israel lobbies.

But that illusion has now been shattered, first by the explicit Greater Israel ideology espoused by a series of Netanyahu governments, and latterly by Donald Trump's occupancy of the White House and his vehement backing of Israeli demands, however much they violate international law.

That has left European policy towards Israel – and its enabling by default of Netanyahu and Trump's efforts to crush Palestinian rights – dangerously exposed.

Popular backlashes have taken the form of a rapid growth in support for BDS, a grassroots, nonviolent movement promoting a boycott of Israel. But more specifically in Britain's case, it has resulted in the surprise election of Jeremy Corbyn, a well-known champion of Palestinian rights and anti-racism struggles generally, to lead the opposition Labour Party.

For that reason, Jewish leadership groups in the U.K. have had to reinvent themselves quickly, from organizations to promote the community's interests into vehicles to defend Israel. And to do that they have had to adopt a position

that was once closely identified with anti-Semitism: conflating Jews with Israel.

This, we should remember, was the view taken 100 years ago by arch anti-Semites in the British government. They regarded Jews as inherently “un-British,” as incapable of assimilation and therefore as naturally suspect.

Lord Balfour, before he made his abiding legacy the 1917 Declaration of a Jewish “national home” in Palestine, helped pass the Aliens Act to block entry to the U.K. of Jews fleeing pogroms in Eastern Europe. Balfour believed Jewish immigration had resulted in “undoubted evils.”

Lobby Cobbled Together

Also significantly, unlike the U.S., where the pro-Israel lobby has maintained fervent support for Israel as a bipartisan matter over decades, the need for an equivalent pro-Israel lobby in the U.K. has emerged chiefly in relation to Corbyn’s unexpected ascent to power in the Labour Party.

Rather than emerging slowly and organically, as was the case in the U.S., the British pro-Israel has had to be cobbled together hastily. Israel’s role in directing this immature lobby has been harder to hide.

Most of the U.K.’s Jewish leadership organizations have been poorly equipped for the task of tackling the new sympathy for Palestinian rights unleashed in the Labour Party by Corbyn’s rise. The Board of Deputies, for example, has enjoyed visible ties to the ruling Conservative Party. Any criticisms they make of the Labour leader are likely to be seen as having an air of partisanship and point-scoring.

So unusually in Britain's case, the chief pro-Israel lobby group against Corbyn has emerged from within his own party – in the form of the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM).

The JLM is trumpeted in the British media both as a venerable Jewish group, more than a century old, and as one that is widely representative of Jewish opinion. Neither claim is true.

The JLM likes to date its origins to the Poale Zion organization, which was founded in 1903. A socialist society, Poale Zion affiliated itself not only with the British Labour Party but also with a wide range of anti-Palestinian Zionist organizations such as the World Zionist Organisation and the Israeli Labour Party. The latter carried out the ethnic cleansing of the vast majority of Palestinians in 1948 and the party's leaders to this day publicly support the illegal settlement "blobs" that are displacing Palestinians and stealing their land.

But as the investigative journalist Asa Winstanley has shown, before the unexpected ascent of Corbyn to the Labour leadership in 2015, the JLM had largely fallen into dormancy.

It was briefly revived in 2004, when Israel was facing widespread criticism in Britain over its brutal efforts to crush a Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories. But the JLM only really became active again in 2015.

According to a covert recording of a private JLM event in late 2016, its then chair Jeremy Newmark said he and other activists had agreed to reform the group in September 2015

in response to “the rise of Jeremy Corbyn” and “Bernie Sanders in the States.” Corbyn has been elected Labour leader only days previously. According to the transcript, Newmark told the other activists that it would be the “start of a struggle and a battle we will all be engaged in for months and probably years ahead of us.” He added that the JLM would be a suitable vehicle for their work because of the “rights and privileges” it enjoyed as a Labour Party affiliate organization.

Front for Israeli Embassy

The motive behind the JLM’s resuscitation was also revealed by an undercover documentary made by *Al-Jazeera*, aired in early 2017. It showed that the JLM was acting as little more than a front for the Israeli embassy, and that the mission it set itself was to weaken Corbyn in the hope of removing him from the leadership.

Early on, the JLM and other pro-Israel lobbyists within the party realized the most effective way to damage Corbyn, and silence solidarity with the Palestinian cause, was to weaponize the charge of anti-Semitism.

Support for Palestinian rights necessarily requires severe criticism of Israel, whose popular, rightwing governments have shown no interest in making concessions to the Palestinians on self-determination. In fact, while Westerners have debated the need for urgent peacemaking, Israel has simply got on with grabbing vast tracts of Palestinian land as a way to destroy any hope of statehood.

But pro-Israel lobbyists in the U.K. have found that they

can very effectively turn this issue into a zero-sum game – one that, in the context of a British public conversation oblivious to Palestinian rights, inevitably favors Israel.

The thrust of the lobby's argument is that almost all Jews identify with Israel, which means that attacks on Israel are also attacks on Jewish identity. That, they claim, is a modern form of anti-Semitism.

This argument, if it were true, has an obvious retort: if Jews really do identify with Israel to the extent that they are prepared to ignore its systematic abuse of Palestinians, then that would make most British Jews anti-Arab racists.

Further, if Jewish identity really is deeply enmeshed in the state of Israel, that would place a moral obligation on Jews to denounce any behavior by Israel towards Palestinians that violates human rights and international law.

And yet the very Jewish leaders claiming that Israel is at the core of their identity are also the ones who demand that Jews not be expected to take responsibility for Israel's actions – and that to demand as much is anti-Semitic.

Could there be a clearer example of having your cake and eating it?

Nonetheless, the JLM has very successfully hijacked the debate within Labour of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to silence criticism. It has worked hard to impose a highly controversial new definition of anti-Semitism that conflates it with criticism of Israel. Seven of the 11 examples of anti-Semitism used to illustrate the new definition relate to Israel.

Arguing, for example, that Israel is a “racist endeavor,” the view of many in the growing BDS movement and among Corbyn supporters, is now being treated as evidence of anti-Semitism.

For this reason, the JLM has been able to file a complaint against Labour with the Equality and Human Rights Commission arguing that the party is “institutionally anti-Semitic.”

Labour is only the second political party after the neo-Nazi British National Party to have been subjected to an investigation by the equality watchdog.

Despite its claims, the JLM does not represent Jewish opinion in the Labour Party. The JLM says it has 2,000 members, though that figure – if accurate – includes non-Jews. Attendance at its annual general meeting this month could be measured in the dozens.

As one Jewish critic observed: “There are some 300,000 Jews in Britain. The Jewish Labour Movement claims to represent us all. So why were there fewer people at their AGM [annual general meeting] than at my Labour Party branch AGM?”

Many Jews in the Labour Party have chosen not to join the JLM, preferring instead to act as a counterweight by creating a new Jewish pressure group that backs Corbyn called Jewish Voice for Labour.

Even a new JLM membership drive publicized by former Labour leader Gordon Brown reportedly brought only a small influx of new members, suggesting that support for the JLM’s anti-Corbyn, pro-Israel agenda is very limited inside

Labour.

Speaking for 'the Jews'

The re-establishment of the JLM has one very transparent aim in mind: to push out Corbyn, using any means at its disposal. At its annual general meeting, the JLM unanimously passed a motion of no confidence in Corbyn, describing him as "unfit to be Prime Minister." The resolution declared that "a Labour Government led by (Corbyn) would not be in the interests of British Jews."

One Jewish commentator derisively noted the JLM's arrogance in speaking for all British Jews at a time of Conservative government-imposed austerity: "I would not presume to proclaim what is in the interests of 'the Jews', but I really cannot imagine that the person who drafted this resolution had any real experience of meeting unemployed Jews, Jewish pensioners and single mothers just scraping by, or Jews who are struggling as they use under-resourced mental health services."

In other circumstances, a group of people operating inside a major political party using underhand methods to disrupt its democratic processes would be described as entryists. Some 2,000 pro-Israel fanatics within Labour are trying to overturn the overwhelming wishes, twice expressed at the ballot box, of the Labour membership, now numbering more than 500,000.

Nonetheless, last week the JLM started to show its hand more publicly. It has been noisily threatening to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. In the circumstances that would at least be an honorable – if very unlikely – thing for it to

do.

Instead it announced that it would begin scoring local and national Labour politicians based on their record on anti-Semitism. After the JLM's frantic lobbying for the adoption of the new anti-Semitism definition, it seems clear that such scores will relate to the vehemence of a candidate's criticism of Israel, or possibly their ideological sympathy with Corbyn, more than overt bigotry towards Jews.

That was underscored this week when a senior Labour politician, Richard Burgon, the shadow justice secretary, came under fire from the JLM and Board of Deputies for comments he made in 2014, during Israel's attack on Gaza, that only recently came to light. He was recorded saying: "The enemy of the Palestinian people is not the Jewish people, the enemy of the Palestinian people are Zionists." He had previously denied making any such comment.

Mike Katz, the JLM's new chair, responded: "Insulting a core part of their [Jewish people's] identity and then dissembling about it is shameful behaviour from a senior frontbencher in our party, let alone someone who aspires to administer our justice system."

According to the Labour Party's own figures, actual anti-Jewish prejudice – as opposed to criticism of Israel – is extremely marginal in its ranks, amounting to some 0.08 percent of members. It is presumably even less common among those selected to run as candidates in local and national elections.

The JLM has nonetheless prioritized this issue, threatening that the scores may be used to decide whether activists will

campaign for a candidate. One might surmise that the scores could also be serve as the basis for seeking to deselect candidates and replace them with politicians more to the JLM's liking.

"We have got elections coming up but we are not going to put that effort in unless we know people are standing shoulder to shoulder with us," said Katz.

Need for Vigorous Debate

Paradoxically, the JLM appears to be preparing to do openly what pro-Israel lobbyists in the U.S. deny they do covertly: use their money and influence to harm candidates who are not seen as sympathetic enough to Israel.

Despite claims from both U.S. and U.K. pro-Israel lobby groups that they speak for their own domestic Jewish populations, they clearly don't. Individuals within Jewish communities are divided over whether they identify with Israel or not. And certainly, their identification with Israel should not be a reason to curtail vigorous debates about U.S. and U.K. foreign policy and Israeli influence domestically.

Even if the vast majority of Jews in the U.S. and U.K. do support Israel – not just in a symbolic or abstract way, but the actual far-right governments that now permanently rule Israel – that does not make them right about Israel or make it anti-Semitic for others to be highly critical of Israel.

The overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews support a narrow spectrum of politicians, from the militaristic right to religious fundamentalists and fascists. They view

Palestinians as less deserving, less human even, than Jews and as an obstacle to the realization of Jewish rights in the whole of the "Land of Israel," including the Palestinian territories. Does that make them right? Does their numerical dominance excuse their ugly bigotry towards Palestinians? Of course not.

And so it would be the same even were it true that most Jewish members of the Labour Party supported a state that proudly upholds Jewish supremacism as its national ideology. Their sensitivities should count for nothing if they simply mask ugly racist attitudes towards Palestinians.

Lobbies of all kinds thrive in the dark, growing more powerful and less accountable when they are out of view and immune from scrutiny.

By refusing to talk frankly about the role of pro-Israel lobbies in the U.K. and the U.S., or by submitting to their intimidation, we simply invite Israel's supporters and anti-Palestinian racists to flex their muscles more aggressively and chip away at the democratic fabric of our societies.

There are signs that insurgency politicians in the U.S. are ready for the first time to shine a light into the recesses of a political system deeply corrupted by money. That will inevitably make life much harder for the pro-Israel lobby.

But paradoxically, it is happening just as the U.K.'s Israel lobby is pushing in exactly the opposite direction. British politics is being plunged into a stifling, unhealthy silence on the longest example of mass human rights abuses, sanctioned by the west, in modern history.

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Special Counsel Mueller: Disingenuous and Dishonest

Larry C. Johnson sees real meat on the bone for Barr's upcoming investigation of spying by law enforcement and intelligence on the Trump campaign. And Trump has tweeted about it.

On Wednesday Donald Trump tweeted:

"Former CIA analyst Larry Johnson accuses United Kingdom Intelligence of helping Obama Administration Spy on the 2016 Trump Presidential Campaign."
[@OANN](#) WOW! It is now just a question of time before the truth comes out, and when it does, it will be a beauty!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [April 24, 2019](#)

A spokesperson for the GCHQ, Britain's electronic spying agency, reacted in a statement: "As we have previously stated, the allegations that GCHQ was asked to conduct 'wire tapping' against the then-president elect are nonsense. They are utterly ridiculous and should be ignored."

Johnson developed his theory on his blog, republished here.

By [Larry C Johnson](#)

Sic Semper Tyrannis



While President Donald Trump is correct to celebrate the Mueller report's conclusion that no one on Trump's side of the ledger attempted to or succeeded in collaborating or colluding with the Russian government or Russian spies, there remains a dark cloud behind the silver lining. And I am not referring to the claims of alleged obstruction of justice.

A careful reading of the report reveals that Mueller has issued findings that are both disingenuous and dishonest. The report is a failed hatchet job. Part of the failure can be attributed to the amount of material that Attorney General William Barr allowed to be released. It appears that Bill Barr's light editing may have been intended to expose the bias and sloppiness of Special Counsel Robert Mueller and his team.

Let us start with the case of trying to build a Trump Tower in Moscow. If you were to believe that the Steele Dossier accurately reported Russian President Vladimir Putin's attitude towards Trump, then a Trump real estate deal in Moscow was a slam dunk. According to one of Christopher Steele's breathless reports:

"The Kremlin's cultivation operation on TRUMP also had comprised offering him various lucrative real estate development business deals in Russia, especially in relation to the ongoing 2018 World Cup soccer tournament. However, so far, for reasons unknown, TRUMP had not taken up any of these."

Then there is reality. The impetus, the encouragement for

the Moscow project came from one man – Felix Sater. Here from page 69 of the Mueller Report:

In the late summer of 2015, the Trump Organization received a new inquiry about pursuing a Trump Tower project in Moscow. In approximately September 2015, Felix Sater . . . contacted Cohen on behalf of I.C. Expert Investment Company (I.C. Expert), a Russian real-estate development corporation controlled by Andrei Vladimirovich Rozov.¹⁰⁷ Sater had known Rozov since approximately 2007 and, in 2014, had served as an agent on behalf of Rozov during Rozov's purchase of a building in New York City.³⁰⁵ Sater later contacted Rozov and proposed that I.C. Expert pursue a Trump Tower Moscow project in which I.C. Expert would license the name and brand from the Trump Organization but construct the building on its own. Sater worked on the deal with Rozov and another employee of I.C. Expert.

To reiterate – if the Steele Dossier were based on truthful intelligence then the Trump Organization only had to sit back, stretch out its hands and seize the moment. Instead, little Felix Sater keeps coming back to the well. In January 2016, according to the Mueller report:

Sater then sent a draft invitation for Cohen to visit Moscow to discuss the Trump Moscow project, along with a note to “[t]ell me if the letter is good as amended by me or make whatever changes you want and send it back to me.”

After a further round of edits, on January 25, 2016, Sater sent Cohen an invitation- signed by Andrey Ryabinskiy of

the company MHJ-to travel to "Moscow for a working visit" about the "prospects of development and the construction business in Russia," "the various land plots available suited for construction of this enormous Tower," and "the opportunity to co-ordinate a follow up visit to Moscow by Mr. Donald Trump.

This produced nothing. No deal, no trip. But Sater persisted, targeting Michael Cohen, Trump's personal lawyer and an executive in the Trump Organization:

Beginning in late 2015, Sater repeatedly tried to arrange for Cohen and candidate Trump, as representatives of the Trump Organization, to travel to Russia to meet with Russian government officials and possible financing partners. . . .

Into the spring of 2016, Sater and Cohen continued to discuss a trip to Moscow in connection with the Trump Moscow project. On April 20, 2016, Sater wrote Cohen, "[t]he People wanted to know when you are coming?"

On May 4, 2016, Sater followed up:

"I had a chat with Moscow. ASSUMING the trip does happen the question is before or after the convention. I said I believe, but don't know for sure, that's it's probably after the convention. Obviously the pre-meeting trip (you only) can happen anytime you want but he 2 big guys where [sic) the question. I said I would confirm and revert."

On May 5, 2016, Sater wrote to Cohen:

"Peskov would like to invite you as his guest to the St.

Petersburg Forum which is Russia's Davos it's June 16-19. He wants to meet there with you and possibly introduce you to either Putin or Medvedev, as they are not sure if 1 or both will be there. This is perfect. The entire business class of Russia will be there as well."

On June 14, 2016, Cohen met Sater in the lobby of the Trump Tower in New York and informed him that he would not be traveling at that time.

Why was Felix Sater the one repeatedly identified pushing to arrange deals with the Russians and yet did not face any subsequent charges by the Mueller team? Sater had been working as part of the Trump team since 2003. Why is it that the proposed deals and travel to Moscow came predominantly from Felix Sater? As I noted in my previous piece – [The FBI Tried and Failed to Entrap Trump](#) – Sater was an active FBI undercover informant. He had been working with the FBI since 1998. When he agreed to start working as an undercover informant aka cooperator in December 1998 guess who signed off on the deal? Andrew Weissman, a member of Mueller's special counsel team. You can see the [deal here](#). It was signed Dec. 10, 1998.

An honest prosecutor would have and should have disclosed this fact. He, Sater, was the one encouraging the Trump team to cozy up to Russia. Mueller does not disclose one single instance of Trump or Cohen or any of the Trump kids calling Sater on the carpet and chewing his ass for not bringing them deals and not opening doors in Russia. Omitting this key fact goes beyond simple disingenuity. It is a conscious lie.

The circumstantial evidence indicates that Sater was doing this at the behest of FBI handlers. We do not yet know who they are.

But Sater's behavior and status as an FBI Informant was not an isolated incident. We also have the case of Michael Caputo and Roger Stone being approached by a Russian gangster named Henry Greenberg. According to democratdossier.com:

Greenberg's birth name is Gennady Vasilievich Vostretsov, the son of Yekatrina Vostretsova and Vasliy Vostretsov. He later adopted new names twice as a result of two different marriages and became Gennady V. Arzhanik and later Henry Oknyansky. Henry Greenberg is not a legal alias, but he uses it quite commonly in recent years.

But you would not know this from reading the Mueller report. Mr. Disingenuous strikes again:

In the spring of 2016, Trump campaign advisor Michael Caputo learned through a Florida-based Russian business partner that another Florida-based Russian, Henry Oknyansky (who also went by the name Henry Greenberg), claimed to have information pertaining to Hillary Clinton. Caputo notified Roger Stone and brokered communication between Stone and Oknyansky.

Oknyansky and Stone set up a May 2016 in-person meeting.²⁶⁰ Oknyansky was accompanied to the meeting by Alexei Rasin, a Ukrainian associate involved in Florida real estate. At the meeting, Rasin offered to sell Stone

derogatory information on Clinton that Rasin claimed to have obtained while working for Clinton. Rasin claimed to possess financial statements demonstrating Clinton's involvement in money laundering with Rasin's companies. According to Oknyansky, Stone asked if the amounts in question totaled millions of dollars but was told it was closer to hundreds of thousands. Stone refused the offer, stating that Trump would not pay for opposition research.

How does a guy like Vorkretsov/Greenberg, with an extensive criminal record and circumstantial ties to the Russian mob gain entrance into the United States? Very simple answer. He too was an FBI informant, according to the democrat dossier:

In an affidavit, Vostretsov explained to an immigration judge he worked for the FBI for 17 years throughout the world, including in the US, Iran and North Korea. He explained in the same paperwork the FBI granted him several temporary visas to visit the US in exchange for information about criminal activities.

Please take time to read the full dossier at democrat dossier.

This is more than an odd coincidence. This is a pattern. The FBI was targeting the Trump campaign and personnel in a deliberate effort to implicate them in wanting to work with Russians.

And there is more. George Papodopoulos, a member of the Trump campaign, was entrapped by individuals linked to British MI-6 and the CIA with offers to provide meetings

with Russians and Putin. The Mueller account is a lie. Here is another section of it:

In late April 2016, Papadopoulos was told by London-based professor Joseph Mifsud, immediately after Mifsud 's return from a trip to Moscow, that the Russian government had obtained "dirt" on candidate Clinton in the form of thousands of emails. One week later, on May 6, 2016, Papadopoulos suggested to a representative of a foreign government that the Trump Campaign had received indications from the Russian government that it could assist the Campaign through the anonymous release of information that would be damaging to candidate Clinton.

Papadopoulos shared information about Russian "dirt " with people outside of the Campaign, and the Office investigated whether he also provided it to a Campaign official. Papadopoulos and the Campaign officials with whom he interacted told the Office that they did not recall that Papadopoulos passed them the information. Throughout the relevant period of time and for several months thereafter, Papadopoulos worked with Mifsud and two Russian nationals to arrange a meeting between the Campaign and the Russian government. That meeting never came to pass.

Once again, the Mueller team treats the provocateur – i.e., Joseph Mifsud – as some simple guy with ties to Russia's political elites. Another egregious lie. Mifsud was not working on behalf of Russia. He was deployed by MI-6. *Disobedient Media* has been on the forefront of exposing Mifsud's ties to Western intelligence in general and the

Brits in particular. Quoting now from *Disobedient Media*:

Mifsud's alleged links to Russian intelligence are summarily debunked by his close working relationship with Claire Smith, a major figure in the upper echelons of British intelligence. A number of Twitter users recently observed that Joseph Mifsud had been photographed standing next to Claire Smith of the U.K. Joint Intelligence Committee at Mifsud's LINK campus in Rome. *Newsman* and *Buzzed* later reported that the professor's name and biography had been removed from the campus website, writing that the mysterious removal took place after Mifsud had served the institution for "years."

WikiLeaks Editor-in-Chief Julian Assange likewise noted the connection between Mifsud and Smith in a Twitter thread, additionally pointing out his connections with Saudi intelligence: "[Mifsud] and Claire Smith of the UK Joint Intelligence Committee and eight-year member of the UK Security Vetting panel both trained Italian security services at the Link University in Rome and appear to both be present in this [photo]."

The photograph in question originated on Geodiplomatics.com, where it specified that Joseph Mifsud is indeed standing next to Claire Smith, who was attending a: "...Training program on International Security which was organised by Link Campus University and London Academy of Diplomacy." The event is listed as taking place in October 2012.

This is not a mere matter of Mueller and his team "failing" to disclose some important facts. If they were operating honestly, they should have investigated Mifsud, Greenberg

and Sater. But they did not. Two of the three alleged Russian stooges – Sater and Greenberg – have ties to the FBI. And Mifsud has been living and working in the belly of the intelligence community.

When you put these facts together it is clear that there is real meat on the bone for Barr's upcoming investigation of the "spying" that was being done on the Trump campaign by law enforcement and intelligence. These facts must become a part of the public consciousness. The foreign country that worked feverishly to meddle in the 2016 presidential election and the subsequent rule of Donald Trump is the United Kingdom. Russia is the patsy.

Larry C. Johnson is a former CIA analyst and counterterrorism official at the State Department. This article first appeared on [*Sic Semper Tyrannis*](#).

PEPE ESCOBAR: War on Iran & Calling America's Bluff

Vast swathes of the West seem not to realize that if the Strait of Hormuz is shut down a global depression will follow, writes Pepe Escobar.

By [**Pepe Escobar**](#)

Special to Consortium News



The Trump administration once again has graphically demonstrated that in the young, turbulent 21st century, "international law" and "national sovereignty" already belong to the

Realm of the Walking Dead.

As if a deluge of sanctions against a great deal of the planet was not enough, the latest “offer you can’t refuse” conveyed by a gangster posing as diplomat, Consul Minimus Mike Pompeo, now essentially orders the whole planet to submit to the one and only arbiter of world trade: Washington.

First the Trump administration unilaterally smashed a multinational, UN-endorsed agreement, the JCPOA, or Iran nuclear deal. Now the waivers that magnanimously allowed eight nations to import oil from Iran without incurring imperial wrath in the form of sanctions will expire on May 2 and won’t be renewed.

President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Iran deal upheld his highest obligation: to protect the safety and security of the American people.

Why Iran sanctions are necessary: <https://t.co/YQtmSA9hZX>
[pic.twitter.com/n5r8mhZTl5](https://t.co/n5r8mhZTl5)

– The White House (@WhiteHouse) [August 6, 2018](#)

The eight nations are a mix of Eurasian powers: China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece.

Apart from the trademark toxic cocktail of hubris, illegality, arrogance/ignorance and geopolitical/geo-economic infantilism inbuilt in this foreign policy decision, the notion that Washington can decide who’s allowed to be an energy provider to emerging superpower China does not even qualify as laughable. Much more alarming is the fact that imposing a total embargo of Iranian oil exports is no less than an act of war.

Ultimate Neocon Wet Dream

Those subscribing to the ultimate U.S, neocon and Zionist wet dream – regime change in Iran – may rejoice at this declaration of war. But as Professor Mohammad Marandi of the University of Tehran has elegantly argued, “If the Trump regime miscalculates, the house can easily come crashing down on its head.”

Reflecting the fact Tehran seems to have no illusions regarding the utter folly ahead, the Iranian leadership – if provoked to a point of no return, Marandi additionally told me – can get as far as “destroying everything on the other side of the Persian Gulf and chasing the U.S. out of Iraq and Afghanistan. When the U.S. escalates, Iran escalates. Now it depends on the U.S. how far things go.”

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This red alert from a sensible academic perfectly dovetails with what’s happening with the structure of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – recently branded a “terrorist organization” by the United States. In perfect symmetry, Iran’s Supreme National Security Council also branded the U.S. Central Command – CENTCOM – and “all the forces connected to it” as a terrorist group.

The new IRGC commander-in-chief is Brigadier General Hossein Salami, 58. Since 2009 he was the deputy of previous commander Mohamad al-Jafari, a soft spoken but tough as nails gentleman I met in Tehran two years ago. Salami, as well as Jafari, is a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war; that is,

he has actual combat experience. And Tehran sources assure me that he can be even tougher than Jafari.



In tandem, IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri has evoked the unthinkable in terms of what might develop out

of the U.S. total embargo on Iran oil exports; Tehran could block the Strait of Hormuz.

Western Oblivion

Vast swathes of the ruling classes across the West seem to be oblivious to the reality that if Hormuz is shut down, the result will be an absolutely cataclysmic global economic depression.

Warren Buffett, among other investors, has routinely qualified the 2.5 quadrillion derivatives market as a weapon of financial mass destruction. As it stands, these derivatives are used – illegally – to drain no less than a trillion U.S. dollars a year out of the market in manipulated profits.

Considering historical precedents, Washington may eventually be able to set up a Persian Gulf of Tonkin false flag. But what next?

If Tehran were totally cornered by Washington, with no way out, the de facto nuclear option of shutting down the Strait of Hormuz would instantly cut off 25 percent of the global oil supply. Oil prices could rise to over \$500 a barrel, to even \$1000 a barrel. The 2.5 quadrillion of derivatives would start a chain reaction of destruction.

Unlike the shortage of credit during the 2008 financial crisis, the shortage of oil could not be made up by fiat instruments. Simply because the oil is not there. Not even Russia would be able to re-stabilize the market.

It's an open secret in private conversations at the Harvard Club – or at Pentagon war-games for that matter – that in case of a war on Iran, the U.S. Navy would not be able to keep the Strait of Hormuz open.

Russian [SS-NX-26 Yakhont](#) missiles – with a top speed of Mach 2.9 – are lining up the Iranian northern shore of the Strait of Hormuz. There's no way U.S. aircraft carriers can defend a barrage of Yakhont missiles.

Then there are the [SS-N-22 Sunburn](#) supersonic anti-ship missiles – already exported to China and India – flying ultra-low at 1,500 miles an hour with dodging capacity, and extremely mobile; they can be fired from a flatbed truck, and were designed to defeat the U.S. Aegis radar defense system.

What Will China Do?

The full-frontal attack on Iran reveals how the Trump administration bets on breaking Eurasia integration via what would be its weakest node; the three key nodes are China,

Russia and Iran. These three actors interconnect the whole spectrum; Belt and Road Initiative; the Eurasia Economic Union; the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; the International North-South Transportation Corridor; the expansion of BRICS Plus.

So there's no question the Russia-China strategic partnership will be watching Iran's back. It's no accident that the trio is among the top existential "threats" to the U.S., according to the Pentagon. Beijing knows how the U.S. Navy is able to cut it off from its energy sources. And that's why Beijing is strategically increasing imports of oil and natural gas from Russia; engineering the "escape from Malacca" also must take into account a hypothetical U.S. takeover of the Strait of Hormuz.

A plausible scenario involves Moscow acting to defuse the extremely volatile U.S.-Iran confrontation, with the Kremlin and the Ministry of Defense trying to persuade President Donald Trump and the Pentagon from any direct attack against the IRGC. The inevitable counterpart is the rise of covert ops, the possible staging of false flags and all manner of shady Hybrid War techniques deployed not only against the IRGC, directly and indirectly, but against Iranian interests everywhere. For all practical purposes, the U.S. and Iran are at war.

Within the framework of the larger Eurasia break-up scenario, the Trump administration does profit from Wahhabi and Zionist psychopathic hatred of Shi'ites. The "maximum pressure" on Iran counts on Jared of Arabia Kushner's close WhatsApp pal Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) in Riyadh and MbS's mentor in Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed, to replace the shortfall

of Iranian oil in the market. But that's nonsense – as quite a few wily Persian Gulf traders are adamant Riyadh won't "absorb Iran's market share" because the extra oil is not there.

Much of what lies ahead in the oil embargo saga depends on the reaction of assorted vassals and semi-vassals. Japan won't have the guts to go against Washington. Turkey will put up a fight. Italy, via Salvini, will lobby for a waiver. India is very complicated; New Delhi is investing in Iran's Chabahar port as the key hub of its own Silk Road, and closely cooperates with Tehran within the INSTC framework. Would a shameful betrayal be in the cards?

China, it goes without saying, will simply ignore Washington.

Iran will find ways to get the oil flowing because the demand won't simply vanish with a magic wave of an American hand. It's time for creative solutions. Why not, for instance, refuel ships in international waters, accepting gold, all sorts of cash, debit cards, bank transfers in rubles, yuan, rupees and rials – and everything bookable on a website?

Now that's a way Iran can use its tanker fleet to make a killing. Some of the tankers could be parked in – you got it – the Strait of Hormuz, with an eye on the price at Jebel Ali in the UAE to make sure this is the real deal. Add to it a duty free for the ships crews. What's not to like? Ship owners will save fortunes on fuel bills, and crews will get all sorts of stuff at 90 percent discount in the duty free.

And let's see whether the EU has grown a spine – and really

turbo-charge their [Special Purpose Vehicle \(SPV\)](#) alternative payment network conceived after the Trump administration ditched the JCP0A. Because more than breaking up Eurasia integration and implementing neocon regime change, this is about the ultimate anathema; Iran is being mercilessly punished because it has bypassed the U.S. dollar on energy trade.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is ["2030."](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).

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New CN Series: The Revelations of WikiLeaks: No. 1—The Video that Put Assange in US Crosshairs

["Collateral Murder"](#) created a media sensation in 2010 and led to Chelsea Manning's imprisonment and to a DOJ investigation of Julian Assange, reports Elizabeth Vos. But the war crimes the video exposed got no one else in trouble.

Consortium News today begins a series of articles, *"The Revelations of WikiLeaks,"* that will look back on the major works of the publication that have altered the world since its founding in 2006. This series is an effort to counter mainstream media coverage, which is ignoring WikiLeaks' work, and instead is focusing on Julian Assange's personality. It is the uncovering by WikiLeaks of

governments' crimes and corruption that set the U.S. after Assange and which ultimately led to his arrest on April 11. The "Collateral Murder" video was just the first of many major WikiLeaks revelations that made the journalist one of the world's most wanted men, simply for the act of publishing.

The Video that Put Julian Assange in the Crosshairs of the United States

By [Elizabeth Vos](#)

Special to Consortium News



WikiLeaks was founded in 2006, but it was the April 5, 2010, publication of "[Collateral Murder](#)" that made the whistleblower-publisher a world-wide phenomenon, attracting admirers and enemies.

[WikiLeaks](#) wrote of the film: "The video, shot from an Apache helicopter gun-sight, clearly shows the unprovoked slaying of a wounded Reuters employee and his rescuers. Two young children involved in the rescue were also seriously wounded."

WikiLeaks noted that Reuters had unsuccessfully attempted to gain access to the video through the Freedom of Information Act in the years after the strike.

The day after the release of the footage, [The New York Times](#) described *WikiLeaks* as a once-fringe website that had moved into the big time. "The site has become a thorn in the

side of authorities in the United States and abroad,” it said. “With the Iraq attack video, the clearinghouse for sensitive documents is edging closer toward a form of investigative journalism and to advocacy.”

Before 2010 *WikiLeaks* received a few high-profile journalism awards. But in the years since the publication of the video, it has received a slew of honors, including The Sam Adams Award for Integrity.

On April 16, *WikiLeaks* announced a fresh award for its founder, Julian Assange, even as he remains isolated in a London prison.

The Sydney Morning Herald: Julian Assange wins EU journalism award established in honour of an assassinated journalist.<https://t.co/FlA6DpNzc9?pic.twitter.com/y0pda8pgwR>

– WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) April 16, 2019

Chelsea Manning

“Collateral Murder” was one of the most prominent releases sourced from then-Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, who served seven years in a military prison as a result.

Manning, who had access to the video, having a Top Secret clearance, first offered the video to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, which both turned her down. Manning then turned to *WikiLeaks*.

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Manning described the events that led up to her decision to

submit the footage to the press in leaked audio of her testimony during her 2013 court-martial.

She said Reuters' inability to get the footage via a freedom-of-information request contributed to her decision to leak it. "The most alarming aspect of the video for me, was the seemingly delight of bloodlust they [the pilots] appeared to have. They dehumanized the individuals they were engaging with, and seemed to not value human life in referring to them as 'dead bastards,' and congratulating each other on the ability to kill in large numbers."

Marjorie Cohn, a legal analyst, is one of those who has described the contents of the footage as evidence of U.S. war crimes. As such she argues that Manning was legally obligated to expose such information. In a 2013 column for *Truthout*, she cites the Geneva Conventions, the Army Field Manual and the Uniform Code of Military Justice as all setting forth the duty of a service member to disobey unlawful orders.

None of the pilots, military officials nor policy-makers have ever been charged or otherwise held responsible for the events shown in the video.

U.S. Army 2007 Apache Helicopter Attack

The film depicts the July 12, 2007, shooting of over a dozen Iraqis by U.S. Army Apache helicopters armed with 30mm cannons in the Al-Amin al-Thaniyah neighborhood of New Baghdad, a district of Iraq's capital city. The dead included Reuters' photographer Namir Noor-Eldeen and his assistant, Saeed Chmagh. *WikiLeaks* has said as many as 25 people were killed as a result of the incident.

After the initial attack, the helicopters fired on and killed people who stopped to try to rescue the wounded. A U.S. tank reportedly drove over a body, cutting it in half. Assange identified the individual run over by the tank as Namir Noor-Eldeen in an [interview](#) with Al Jazeera days after the publication of “Collateral Murder.”

After receiving the encrypted footage, Assange and his associates spent a [week working non-stop](#) in Reykjavik, Iceland, to break the U.S. military’s [encryption](#) of the video.

Kristinn Hrafnsson, who now serves as editor-in-chief of *WikiLeaks*, went to Iraq as an investigative journalist to locate victims’ families and confirm details of the event prior to the film’s publication. [The New Yorker](#) reported:

“He [Hrafnsson] claims to have found the owner of the building, an old man named Jabbar Abid Rady, born in 1941, a retired English teacher. Abid Rady told Hrafnsson that his wife and daughter had died in the attack. He said that five other people who had been living in the building died, too. Buildings under construction often serve as housing in war-ravaged places; people live in the lower floors, which are often built first and are inhabitable before construction ends. Abid Rady told Hrafnsson that three families had been living in this particular structure.”

Assange noted how the moving images had stirred public attention far more than any printed matter. “It’s very easy

for people to see what's going on," he is quoted as saying in the April 2010 video interview with [Al Jazeera](#). "It's not too complex, there's no language barriers with visual material. We released the policies behind this material as far back as 2007, classified US military policies."

At one point in the video, American personnel can be heard laughing, saying: "The tank just drove over a body." Assange commented on that, saying, "That was Namir's body."

Military's Response

Shortly after the 2007 killings – and three years before the video was released – the U.S. military was [quoted](#) as underreporting the death toll and context of the incident.

Assange argued that the military's reports of a "firefight" preceding the events shown on tape had been [misrepresented](#) in order to justify the killings.

After *WikiLeaks'* release of "Collateral Murder," the Pentagon acknowledged the authenticity of the video but said it did not contradict the official finding that the helicopters' crew acted within the rules of engagement," [The Daily Telegraph](#) reported.

The U.S. military rejected calls to discipline the crew for the deaths of the Reuters journalists because it said the men could not be distinguished from suspected insurgents. "The RPG in the video is real," *The Telegraph* quoted a Pentagon spokesman as saying. "We had insurgents and reporters in an area where U.S. forces were about to be ambushed. At the time we weren't able to discern whether

(Reuters employees) were carrying cameras or weapons.”

Retired Lieutenant Colonel Chris Walach, commander of the Apache helicopter pilots, in 2013, spoke with [Democracy Now](#) about the footage. “In Iraq, you can’t put pink gloves on Apache helicopter pilots and send them into the Ultimate Fighting ring and ask them to take a knee,” he said. “These are attack pilots wearing gloves of steel, and they go into the ring throwing powerful punches of explosive steel. They are there to win, and they will win.”

Shortly after “Collateral Murder’s” publication, Assange appeared on the [“Colbert Report.”](#) At one point, host Stephen Colbert joked that Assange is “a dead man.” Colbert asked Assange about allegations of a firefight preceding the events shown on the tape. “That’s a lie,” Assange responded. [05.20/11:39] He said that 28 minutes earlier there had been a report of small arms fire and that the Apache helicopters circling New Baghdad “came across these men and killed them.”

The Politicians React

On April 11, 2019, the day Assange was arrested, Reuters’ reporter Alistair Smout wrote in hindsight: “*WikiLeaks* incensed Washington by publishing hundreds of thousands of secret U.S. diplomatic cables, and in 2010 a classified U.S. military video showing a helicopter attack in Baghdad in 2007 that killed a dozen people, including two Reuters news staff.”

Within days of the publication of “Collateral Murder,” Obama Whitehouse Press Secretary Robert Gibbs [answered questions](#)

from reporters on the contents of the video. When asked whether the actions of the U.S. personnel were “appropriate,” Gibbs said that he was not sure whether then-President Barack Obama had seen the video, adding:

“Many of you all have traveled with the President – this President or other Presidents in war zones. Many of you know colleagues that have reported from exceedingly dangerous places in the world. Our military will take every precaution necessary to ensure the safety and security of civilians, and particularly those that report in those dangerous places on behalf of news organizations. I honestly do not know enough about what was done previous, which is why I’d point you to the Department of Defense.”

Then U.S. Defense Secretary [Robert Gates](#) blasted *WikiLeaks* for not providing context for the video. “These people can put out anything they want, and they’re never held accountable for it. There’s no before and there’s no after,” Gates said, likening the video as seeing warfare “through a soda straw.”

Gates said: “They’re in a combat situation. The video doesn’t show the broader picture of the firing that was going on at American troops. It’s obviously a hard thing to see. It’s painful to see, especially when you learn after the fact what was going on. But you—you talked about the fog of war. These people were operating in split second situations.”

The strongest response to the video came in the form of a

U.S. Department of Justice investigation of Assange, by at most six months after “Collateral Murder,” and subsequent releases of the Afghan and Iraq War Logs, the next subject of CN’s series, that ultimately culminated in his arrest on April 11, 2019.

“The investigation has been quietly gathering material since at least October 2010, six months after the arrest of Pfc. Bradley Manning, the army enlistee who is accused of providing the bulk of the leaks,” *The New York Times* reported in June 2013.

The FBI had begun investigating Assange and *WikiLeaks* as early as 2009, according to an affidavit given by Assange in September 2013.

While the Obama DOJ stopped short of crossing a red line to criminalize journalism, the Trump DOJ has stomped over it using the same evidence abandoned by the previous administration.

Media Response

“Collateral Murder” was unveiled at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington on April 5, 2010. *The New York Times* reported:

“There is no question that coalition forces were clearly engaged in combat operations against a hostile force,” Lt. Col. Scott Bleichwehl, a spokesman for the multinational forces in Baghdad, said then.

But the video does not show hostile action. Instead, it begins with a group of people milling around on a street,

among them, according to WikiLeaks, Mr. Noor-Eldeen and Mr. Chmagh. The pilots believe them to be insurgents, and mistake Mr. Noor-Eldeen's camera for a weapon. They aim and fire at the group, then revel in their kills."

The media's reaction to the video's release was mixed. The day after it was published, the *Times* ran a [report](#), titled: "Iraq Video Brings Notice to a Web Site." It described criticism *WikiLeaks* received for publishing an edited version of the footage:

"Critics contend that the shorter video was misleading because it did not make clear that the attacks took place amid clashes in the neighborhood and that one of the men was carrying a rocket-propelled grenade."

Within months of the video's release, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation [noted](#) the sentiments of journalist David Finkel of *The Washington Post*: "They [WikiLeaks] provided artificial agenda driven context. There was an operation underway in reaction to an ongoing war. Not that apache helicopters were circling looking for a bunch of guys to just shoot up and kill." Finkel was stationed in Iraq in 2007 when the incident occurred and included the event in his book, "The Good Soldiers."

In response to such criticism, Assange told [Al Jazeera](#) that the decision to give the film its title hinged on the moment where the Apache helicopter pilots shot at the van and individuals who had stopped to aid the wounded. He said:

"This is why we called it 'Collateral Murder.' In the

first example, maybe it's a collateral exaggeration or incompetence, when they strafe this initial gathering. This was recklessness bordering on murder, but we couldn't say for sure that was murder. But this particular event, this is clearly murder."

Media that have since turned on Assange, at the time praised him and *WikiLeaks*.

On the day the video was released, *The Guardian*, which has lately been on an anti-Assange campaign, was quick to write an article that referred to the problems the video posed for military authorities: "[The release of the video from Baghdad](#) also comes shortly after the US military admitted that its special forces attempted to cover up the killings of three Afghan women in a raid in February by digging the bullets out of their bodies."

Two days after "Collateral Murder's" publication, *The Guardian*, then under editor [Alan Rusbridger](#), published an opinion piece saying the footage was "heralded by some as the [most important revelation since Abu Ghraib](#), and challenges not only the effectiveness of the US military's rules of engagement policy, but also the integrity of the mainstream media's coverage of [similar incidents](#)."

James Fallows of [The Atlantic](#) called "Collateral Murder" the "most damaging documentation of abuse since the Abu Ghraib prison-torture photos" 12 hours after the video's release.

"The Collateral Murder video is one of the best known and most widely recognized results of the ongoing WikiLeaks project," [Christian Christensen](#), a University of Stockholm journalism professor wrote in 2014. "These particular images

were, in many ways, the crystallization of the horrors of war.”

Within days of the video’s publication, Haifa Zangana, a novelist and former prisoner of Saddam Hussein’s regime, wrote an op-ed for *The Guardian*, saying her family lived in the area where the events took place, which she described as having previously been “safe for children to play outdoors.”

Zangana continued:

“Witnesses to the slaughter reported the harrowing details in 2007, but they had to wait for a western whistleblower to hand over a video before anyone listened. Watching the video, my first impression was, I have no impression. But the total numbness gradually grows into a now familiar anger. I listen to the excited voices of death coming from the sky, enjoying the chase and killing. I whisper: do they think they are God?”

Elizabeth Vos is a freelance reporter and regular contributor to *Consortium News*. She co-hosts the #Unity4J online vigil.

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The Buried Maidan Massacre and Its
Misrepresentation by the West

The new Ukrainian government is faced with reopening an inquiry into evidence of an organized mass killing in Kiev that Poroshenko stonewalled. Ivan Katchanovski investigates.

By **Ivan Katchanovski**

Special to Consortium News



Five years ago, the Maidan massacre in Kiev, Ukraine, of Feb. 18-20, 2014, was a watershed event, not only for the politics and history of Ukraine but also for world politics generally. This mass killing in downtown Kyiv set the stage for the violent overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine and a new Cold War between Washington and Moscow.

Therefore, it is remarkable that five years after this massacre shook the world, no one has been sentenced for any of the Maidan killings. This was the best documented case of mass killing in history, broadcast live on TV and the internet, in presence of thousands of eyewitnesses. It was filmed by hundreds of journalists from major media in the West, Ukraine, Russia, and many other countries as well as by numerous social media users. Yet, to this day, no one has been brought to justice for this major and consequential crime.

From the start, the dominant narrative promoted by the Ukrainian and Western governments and mainstream media has placed the blame for this tragedy firmly on the Yanukovich government. It contends that forces loyal to former President Victor Yanukovich— either snipers and/or the Berkut, a special anti-riot police— massacred peaceful Maidan protesters on the direct orders of Yanukovich

himself. Such charges against Yanukovych, his ministers and commanders and a special Berkut unit—whose five ex-members were tried for the murder of 48 Maidan protesters on Feb. 20, 2014 – are generally taken at face value. With some limited exceptions, challenges to this narrative are treated dismissively.

For the most part, mainstream news media in the U.S. and other Western countries ignored trial evidence, public statements by officials and politicians and scholarly studies that put the standard narrative under question. This includes non-reporting about my own academic studies of the Maidan massacre.

Killing Protesters and Police

My work found that this was an organized mass killing of both protesters and the police, with the goal of delegitimizing the Yanukovych government and its forces and seizing power in Ukraine. Oligarchic and far right elements of the Maidan movement were involved in this massacre. For this reason, the official investigation was fabricated and stonewalled. I presented studies to support this as well as several [online video appendixes](#) with various evidence at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association in [San Francisco in 2015](#) and [Boston in 2018](#), the 2017 World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities in [New York in 2017](#), and a joint conference by the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University and the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies in 2018, and published their summary in an [academic press volume](#).

The prosecutor general of Ukraine recently announced that the investigation of the Maidan massacre is complete. He cited reconstructions of the Maidan massacre by a New York architecture company, working with a team of Ukrainian “volunteers” to provide a 3D model, as definite evidence that the Maidan protesters were massacred by the Berkut police and that snipers did not massacre the protesters.

This model was featured by *The New York Times*, in its May 30, 2018, report [“Who Killed the Kiev Protesters?”](#) as a proof that the Berkut police massacred Maidan protesters.

However, no expert knowledge or familiarity with the Maidan massacre or Ukraine is needed to see blatant misrepresentation of elementary data in that 3D model.

The wound locations of the killed Maidan protesters in [the 3D model](#) do not match the wound locations in the forensic medical examinations of the bodies. The reports of those examinations were used in this simulation to determine the locations of the shooters. They are published in Ukrainian and English on the linked website. According to one such [report](#), Ihor Dmytriv was shot in the “right side surface” and the “left side surface” of the torso “from the right to the left, from the top to the bottom, and a little from the front to the back” with the entry wound 20.5cm (8 inches) higher than the exit wound. However, in the simulation, his wounds have been moved to the front and the back and made nearly horizontal.

A Maidan lawyer [visually confirmed](#) at the Maidan massacre trial that these wounds locations of were in the right and left sides. In the [video](#) of their examination of Dmytriv

right after his shooting, Maidan medics also indicate such locations of his wounds with no wounds visible in the front area, contrary to the 3D model. The forensic medical [reports](#) also state that Dmytriv was wounded in his right shoulder from bottom to top direction, with this entry wound 5 cm lower, but the 3D animation also misrepresents this direction.

The wound locations of the other two victims have been similarly altered. The 3D model moved the exit wound location from around the middle line of the back of Andriy Dyhdalovych's body in [forensic medical and clothing examinations](#) significantly to the right. It also changed a similar large vertical angle from a top and bottom direction and 17 cm difference in height of entry and exit wounds to nearly horizontal level.

In the case of Yuriy Parashchuk, [forensic medical examinations](#) found that his entry and exit wounds were in the back of his head on the left side. But the 3D analysis moved the entry wound location to the front area and changed its somewhat top-to-bottom direction to nearly horizontal. Frames from a [video](#) by a French photographer shows a large bullet hole in the back of Parashchuk's red helmet. How can he be shot in the back of his head by the Berkut police on a nearly similar horizontal level?

Changing the wound locations invalidates the entire reconstruction and, therefore, the conclusions of the SITU analysis and *The New York Times* article, that these and other Maidan protesters were shot from the Berkut positions.

One does not need to be a ballistic expert to see that

locations of wounds in the back and on the sides and top-to-bottom directions of wounds specified in forensic medical reports and positions of these three killed protesters facing the Berkut in the videos cannot physically match with Berkut police positions located on a similar horizontal level on the ground in front of them. The forensic medical examinations conducted for the government investigation and made public at the Maidan massacre trial revealed that the absolute majority of the protesters were shot not in front and not from horizontal or near horizontal directions that are consistent with police positions. Rather, they were shot from a top-to-bottom direction and in sides or the back that are consistent with shooting from the Maidan-controlled buildings.

Government Investigation

The government investigation, conducted after the Maidan government came to power after this massacre, and which charged the Berkut police behind the barricades with killing these three protesters, raises the same concerns.

The complex medical examinations, which were published on the SITU website and which are presented by the government investigation in Ukraine as a key evidence that the Berkut police massacred the protesters, showed the same bullet trajectories as the 3D model. The text of these examinations, which are available in Ukrainian and in English translations, shows that these bullet trajectories were determined not by ballistic experts but by medical experts without any calculations or explanations.

Synchronized videos, which were used by the SITU to

determine that the Berkut police behind a truck barricade killed Parashchuk, actually show that he and other protesters were in a blind spot below the line of police fire from behind a truck. It was physically impossible for the police behind the wide and tall truck to shoot at him below over the top of this truck. Dozens of other Maidan protesters who were killed and wounded around the same spot were in the same situation.

The locations of the forces of the Yanukovych government during the massacre are well known, and they are identified in my [studies](#), the government investigation charges, numerous videos, and in the SITU 3D model.

At the time of the killings of these three protesters, Berkut policemen were behind the barricades on Instytutska Street on the government side, while the protesters who were killed were in between Berkut and the Hotel Ukraina.

Forensic examinations of bullet holes by government experts described numerous bullet holes on the second, third, and higher floors and the roof of the Hotel Ukraina on the side that faced the government forces. But they did not identify a single bullet hole on the first floor on the Berkut facing side of the hotel behind these protesters. Simple [positioning](#) of the bullet hole locations described in these forensic reports clearly shows that almost all bullets from the Berkut and other positions flew above the heads of the protesters there or targeted poles, trees, and a flower box. This is also shown in vide and photos – including some I took there after the massacre – and in [videos and reports](#) of shooting at journalists in the hotel with a Google Street View image from the first Berkut barricade.

This confirms my study findings that the special Berkut police unit and the Omega unit of snipers of Internal Troops were shooting at snipers in the Hotel Ukraina.

After five long years, the failure by the Poroshenko government's investigation to determine bullet trajectories by ballistic experts or conduct on-site investigative experiments for the same purpose – even after the Maidan massacre trial judges ordered them two years ago to do so – is therefore hardly surprising. It is impossible to bend physical reality. In a literal cover-up, large fences were recently erected on the crime scene for the construction of the Maidan massacre memorial, which would completely alter the landscape. The fences and the memorial would make it impossible to determine bullet trajectories on-site, which still has not been done by the investigation for five years after this mass killing.

The SITU reconstruction also missed bullet holes that appeared in Dmytriv's shield and in a shield of another protester in front of Dyhdalovych in videos of their shooting that were used in the reconstruction. The locations of these bullet holes are inconsistent with shooting from the Berkut barricades.

But these shields with clear locations of the bullet holes, like the helmet of Parashchuk and almost all the shields and helmets of protesters who were killed or wounded, mysteriously disappeared after the massacre, along with a lot of other crucial evidence, such as bullets and security-camera footage.

Similarly, crucial testimonies of Maidan protesters, who

witnessed the killings of Dyhdalovych and Dmytriv, are ignored by the *Times'* report, SITU and the official Ukrainian investigation. Dyhdalovych's wife stated in her Ukrainian media [interview](#) that another protester told her that he saw that Dyhdalovych was killed by a sniper on the roof of the Bank Arkada. This protester was [filmed](#) following Dyhdalovych when they both went to evacuate Dmytriv after he was shot. The Bank Arkada is a tall green building in the front and to the right of both Dyhdalovych and Dmytriv, and it appears to match the apparent directions of their wounds. My Maidan massacre studies video appendices showed that it was in the Maidan-controlled area and that snipers on its roof during the massacre were reported by both numerous Maidan protesters, including [many wounded](#) who spoke at the Maidan massacre trial and investigation, and by Security Service of Ukraine commanders and snipers.

A female Maidan medic during the massacre was pointing to the top of this green building and shouting about snipers. But her words were translated in [a BBC report](#) as referring to six protesters killed by the snipers in that area. A [Maidan protester](#) and another [Maidan medic](#), who were wounded near the same spot where these two protesters were killed, both testified at the Maidan massacre trial that they were shot from this building. Government ballistic experts confirmed this during on-site investigative experiments.

Western Press Silence

These revelations were not reported by any Western media. This includes *The New York Times*, which on April 5, 2014, [profiled](#) this wounded protester against the backdrop of an unquestioned report by the acting government in Kiev that

blaming “former President Viktor F. Yanukovich, his riot police and their suspected Russian assistants for the violence that killed more than 100 people in Kiev in February.”

It also includes CNN, which filmed the shooting of this medic and attributed it to the government forces.

The government investigation simply denies that there were any snipers there and in other Maidan-controlled buildings, and refuses to investigate them. This is done despite videos of such snipers and testimonies of the absolute majority of wounded protesters at the trial and investigation and more than 150 other witnesses about snipers in these locations.

The assumption in the 3D model that Dmytriv was shot by the single bullet is also contradicted by testimony of another protester who saw that Dmytriv was shot by “a sniper” from the Hotel Ukraina. My Maidan massacre studies and their video appendices showed that this hotel was then controlled by the Maidan forces.

The New York Times article described collaboration of the New York architecture firm with a Ukrainian “volunteer” in creating the 3D model. It did not report 2017 admissions by the prosecutor general of Ukraine on *Facebook* that his government agency funded the work of a group of anonymous “volunteers,” including this Ukrainian graduate student, in compiling and synchronizing various videos of the Maidan massacre in collaboration with a People’s Front party outlet.

Some of the People’s Front party leaders were accused by various Ukrainian politicians and Maidan activists, such as

Nadia Savchenko, and by five ex-Georgian ex-military members in Italian and Israeli TV documentaries, of direct involvement in this massacre. Meanwhile, the *Times* lauds the Ukrainian government's investigation and Maidan lawyers for drawing on such analyses by these "citizen investigators" and treats a New York architect firm as providing key evidence in the Maidan massacre trial.

Brad Samuels is a founding partner of Situ Research, the New York architecture company that produced the 3D model of the killing of three protesters, which was presented by the *Times* as proof that such snipers did not exist and that 49 protesters were massacred by the Berkut police.

Samuels said in a video [start at 55:16] that "...eventually, there is a consensus that there was a third party acting. It is clear from forensic evidence that people were shot in the back. Somebody was shooting from rooftops." His striking observation was not included anywhere in the SITU 3D model report that he produced. Nor was it reported by the *Times*.

Cases of protesters, who were shot in the back, were omitted from the SITU model. But even in the deliberately selected cases of the three protesters, who were presented by this simulation as shot in front, their actual wound locations suggest that they were also shot from a Maidan-controlled building, which was located in front and to the right of them.

There was not a single report in English-language media concerning testimonies at the Maidan massacre trial where 25 wounded Maidan protesters, with whose shootings Berkut policemen are charged, who stated that they were shot from

Maidan-controlled buildings or areas.

Major outlets likewise neglected to cover the testimonies by 30 wounded protesters who said they witnessed snipers in those locations or were told about them by other protesters. This is stunning since these testimonies are publicly available in live online recordings of the Maidan massacre trial and they are complied with English-language subtitles into an [online video appendix](#) to my study. These testimonies represent the majority of wounded protesters with whose shooting Berkut was charged. They are consistent with video testimonies by about 100 witnesses in the [media and social media](#) and at the [trial and the investigation](#). But the official investigation in Ukraine simply denies that there were any such snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings, even though the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine previously [stated](#) that snipers massacred many protesters from the Hotel Ukraina and other buildings.

Similarly, not a single media outlet reported segments of the *Belgian VRT News* video that showed Maidan protesters shouting during the massacre that they saw snipers in the Maidan-controlled Hotel Ukraina shooting Maidan protesters, pointing towards them, and asking them not to shoot. These segments were only shown to a small number of people at the Maidan massacre trial and are included in my [online video appendix](#) on *YouTube*. Other segments from this same video, however, were broadcast to some several hundred million viewers by major television networks in the U.S., U.K., Canada, Germany, France, Poland, Italy, and Ukraine, and many other countries as evidence that the government forces massacred the Maidan protesters.

With the notable exception of an Associated Press story quoting the charismatic politician Nadia Savchenko, news agencies have ignored the public remarks of several Maidan politicians and activists who said that they witnessed the involvement of specific top Maidan leaders in the massacre.

Testimonies by five Georgian ex-military members in Italian, Israeli, Macedonian and Russian media and their published depositions to Berkut lawyers for the Maidan massacre trial have also been ignored. They stated that their groups received weapons, payments, and orders to massacre both police and protesters from specific Maidan and Georgian politicians.

They also said that they received instructions from a far-right linked ex-U.S. Army sniper and then saw Georgian, Baltic States, and Right Sector-linked snipers shooting from specific Maidan-controlled buildings.

Western media silence also greeted a recent statement by Anatolii Hrytsenko, one of the top Ukrainian presidential candidates, who was also a Maidan politician and minister of defense, that the investigation of the massacre has been stonewalled because of the involvement of someone from the current leadership of Ukraine in this mass killing.

In contrast, there were no such testimonies admitting involvement in the massacre or knowledge of such involvement by the Berkut policemen, ex-police and security services commanders; nor by ex-Yanukovych government officials. No specific evidence of orders by then-president Yanukovych or his ministers and commanders to massacre unarmed protesters has been revealed by the trials, investigations or news

reporting. Nonetheless, the Western mainstream media report existence of such orders as a matter of a fact.

Not a single major Western media reported that a forensic ballistic examination, conducted by government institute experts on the prosecution request with use of an automatic computer-based IBIS-TAIS system, determined that bullets extracted from killed protesters did not match a police database of bullet samples from Kalashnikov assault rifles of members of the entire Kyiv Berkut regiment. The latter included the special Berkut company charged with the massacre of the protesters. The same concerns the forensic examination findings that many protesters were killed with hunting bullets and pellets.

There are no Western media reports, at least in English, concerning the investigation by the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine. This investigation determined, based on protester's testimonies and investigative experiments, that almost half of the protesters (77 out of 157) were wounded on Feb. 20 from other sectors than the Berkut police and that no one was charged with their shooting.

A female Maidan medic, whose wounding on the Maidan was highly publicized by Western and Ukrainian media and politicians and attributed to government snipers, is one of them. Since the official investigation determined that government snipers did not massacre the Maidan protesters, with a single implausible exception announced recently, this implies that these protesters were wounded from the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas.

There was Western media silence, including from the *BBC*,

about revelations by the Prosecutor General Office that one of the leaders of far right party Svoboda, who was also a member of the Ukrainian parliament at the time of the massacre, occupied a Hotel Ukraina room from which a sniper in Maidan-style green helmet was filmed by the *BBC* shooting in the direction of the Maidan protesters and the *BBC's* own journalists.

Similarly, there are no mainstream media reports of the visual examinations of bullet holes and their impact points by the government investigators that determined that one German ARD television room at the Hotel Ukraina was shot from the direction of the Main Post Office, which was at the time the headquarters of the Right Sector. The latter far-right group included radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations and football ultras. This bullet just narrowly missed a German *ARD TV* female producer. The government investigators also determined that another *ARD* room in the same hotel was shot at from the Music Conservatory building, which was then the headquarters of the Right-Sector-linked special armed Maidan Self-Defense company.

Likewise, nothing was reported about a forensic ballistic examination made public at the trial that revealed that an ABC News producer was shot in his Hotel Ukraina room by a Winchester caliber hunting soft-point bullet that did not match a caliber of Berkut Kalashnikovs.

Misrepresentation of the Maidan massacre and its investigation by Western media and governments is puzzling.

American independence leader John Adams once defended the British soldiers charged with the Boston massacre in 1770.

He regarded this defense as important for the rule of law to prevail over politics. He famously stated at the Boston massacre trial that “facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.” He not only won this politically charged case of a crucial massacre in U.S. politics and history but became U.S. president afterwards. The question is why this dictum is not heeded almost 250 years later in the case of the Maidan massacre in Ukraine.

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From Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, a Talk on Assange

Consortium News Editor Joe Lauria on Sunday delivered this talk about the Assange case to a group of activists who are living inside the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington to stop the illegitimate government of Venezuela from taking it over.

Video by Ford Fischer of News2Share.

The US Should Get Ready for King Mohammed bin Salman

Riyadh finds it outrageous that American lawmakers are trying to meddle in Saudi Arabia's succession, writes Giorgio Cafiero.

By Giorgio Cafiero

Special to Consortium News



Since the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on Oct. 2, some American lawmakers have assumed the right and moral authority to dictate the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's succession line-up. In November, Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham accused Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) of being "crazy" and asserted that "he needs to go." Such rhetoric is significant given that the U.S. has not meddled in the Al Saud family's internal power struggles since the 1960s. But regardless of the preferences that some politicians in Washington may have regarding Saudi Arabia's succession, the U.S. will likely have to accept dealing with a King Mohammed.

MbS's ascendancy, which began in 2015, has transformed Saudi Arabia. Gone is Saudi Arabia's traditional model of leadership of the pre-MbS era that was based on collective decision-making and consensus building among a large group of princes. By virtue of how much power MbS possesses, it is difficult to imagine any credible challenge to his rule, or position in the succession lineup, no matter the pressure Washington might try to impose.

Even before the Khashoggi affair, MbS's power in Riyadh was so consolidated that the millennial prince faced virtually no constraints from other members of the Al Saud family. In recent months, MbS has only further consolidated his power in the Kingdom despite all the criticisms that MbS has received from lawmakers in the U.S. following the CIA's conclusion that he ordered Khashoggi's murder. Not even the political fallout of the journalist's slaying last year has caused MbS to ease his internal crackdown, or even his targeting of Saudi dissidents overseas with efforts to lure them back to the Kingdom.

Thus, given that the Saudi security apparatus and all the dominant state institutions are under MbS's consolidated control, it is extremely difficult to imagine any successful opposition to the millennial prince from within. While many in the House of Saud dislike MbS, they lack the ability to collectively stop him.

As the Kingdom is an absolute monarchy, the decision to change the succession order can only be made by King Salman. Although Salman, since he became the Saudi monarch in January 2015, has twice dismissed/forced out two other crown princes – Prince Muqrin (in April 2015) and Prince Mohammed bin Nayef (in June 2017) – he has shown no signs of removing his son from succession.

Riyadh: Butt Out

From Riyadh's perspective, foreign powers need to butt out and stop naively pretending they can influence the process. Furthermore, outside pressure on King Salman to fire his son could backfire and give the Saudi leadership more interest

in standing by MbS. As Prince Turki al-Faisal, a former chief of Saudi intelligence and a former ambassador to Washington, put it: “The more [foreign] criticism there is of the crown prince, the more popular he is in the kingdom.”

Indeed, officials in Riyadh find it outrageous that American lawmakers are trying to weigh in on Saudi Arabia’s succession question – a redline for the Kingdom’s leadership. For Saudi Arabia’s ruling family, changing the succession lineup under pressure from the U.S. government would signal weakness and subservience to the world’s superpower at a time when Riyadh is working to project Saudi dominance in the Middle East and greater autonomy from the West as the world becomes more multipolar.

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Such pressure from the U.S. would likely accelerate Riyadh’s eastward geopolitical pivot which has led to Saudi Arabia investing in deeper ties with China, India, Pakistan, and Russia. With the Saudi leadership questioning the long-term commitment of the U.S. to the Kingdom’s security, Riyadh is attempting to diversify its global alliances and partnerships in order to gain greater geopolitical independence from Saudi Arabia’s traditional Western allies. The silence from these non-Western governments on the Khashoggi file underscores such non-Western states’ keenness to avoid criticizing Saudi Arabia on human rights grounds—a factor that has earned them goodwill with MbS—in order to capitalize on all that deeper ties with Riyadh can offer. In the case of both China and Russia, the Khashoggi case has

provided an opportunity to drive a greater wedge between the U.S. and its main ally in the Persian Gulf.

Bilateral Risk

If Trump's successor shares Sen. Graham's view that MbS should never become the King of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh's alliance with Washington could face an unprecedented bilateral crisis. Already, with MbS' reputation among American lawmakers and members of the DC establishment having suffered immense damage following Khashoggi's killing, the Crown Prince simply cannot make a visit to Washington. While for the time being MbS can continue working with a U.S. president whose administration has taken pains to give the crown prince the benefit of the doubt on the Khashoggi file, questions about Saudi-U.S. relations in the post-Trump era must unsettle the Saudi leadership. Given the rhetoric about Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-U.S. alliance coming from some Democratic presidential hopefuls, such as Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) and Rep. [Tulsi Gabbard](#), such concerns cannot be dismissed by MbS.

Of course, there is a potential scenario whereby MbS is targeted internally, possibly meeting the same fate as Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president who was assassinated. This would prevent the crown prince from becoming custodian of the two holy mosques (the Saudi king's official title since 1986). But such a scenario appears unlikely. What is far more probable is that MbS will become Saudi Arabia's next king, even if this fuels rage in the U.S. Senate. As much as many officials in Washington take major issue with MbS, accepting the unacceptable will likely be necessary. The U.S. will have to contend, one way or another, with a King

Mohammed ruling Washington's most important Arab ally and the country that leads globally in oil production and exports.

Doubtless, the implications of MbS becoming the next Saudi king will be felt across the greater MENA region and beyond. As evidenced by the war in Yemen, the blockade of Qatar, the Saudi-Canadian diplomatic spat of August 2018, the Ritz Carlton arrests and Saad Hariri saga of 2017, the millennial prince has made foreign policy decisions that reflect his brashness and impulsive thinking. If MbS has already created such crises for Saudi Arabia and its relationship with Washington over the course of the past four years, it is truly mind boggling to think about what he, as the next king of Saudi Arabia, could do to change the Kingdom and the greater Middle East during the upcoming four or five decades if he rules until his natural death.

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UK Blurring Two Very Different Extradition Claims

The Swedish and U.S. claims are vastly different, writes Jonathan Cook. But the public conversation in the U.K. is simply about which has first dibs on Assange.

By **JonathanCook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



In a previous blog post, I warned that the media and political class would continue with their long-running deceptions about Julian Assange now that he has been dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy. They have wasted no time in proving me right.

The first thrust in their campaign of deceit was set out on *The Guardian's* front page on Friday, April 12, the day after Assange was imprisoned.

There should have been wall-to-wall outrage from public figures in the U.K. at the United States creating a new crime of “doing journalism” and a new means of arrest for those committing this “crime” overseas, what I have termed “media rendition.”

Remember that all of the information contained in the U.S. charge sheet against Assange – the supposed grounds for his extradition – were known to the previous Obama administration as far back as 2010. But President Barack Obama never dared approve the current charges against Assange because legally there was no way to stop them being turned against “respectable” journalists, like those at *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*.

This was the same Obama administration that had the worst record on prosecuting whistleblowers. Obama was no friend to investigative journalism but he understood that it would be unwise to so overtly subvert the notion of a free western press.

That the Trump administration has cast all this aside to get Assange behind bars should have every journalist in the world quaking in their boots, and loudly decrying what the U.S. is seeking to do.

And yet the reaction has been either quiet acceptance of the U.S. extradition request as a simple law enforcement measure or gentle mockery of Assange – that the scruffy outlaw dragged from the embassy was looking even scruffier after seven years of extreme house arrest and “arbitrary detention.” What a laugh!

Narrative Collusion

Now we can see how the media is going to collude in a narrative crafted by the political class to legitimize what the Trump administration is doing.

Rather than focus on the gross violation of Assange’s fundamental human rights, the wider assault on press freedoms and the attack on Americans’ First Amendment Rights, U.K. politicians are “debating” whether the U.S. extradition claim on Assange should take priority over earlier Swedish extradition proceedings for a sexual-assault investigation that was publicly dropped back in 2017.

In other words, the public conversation in the U.K., sympathetically reported by *The Guardian*, supposedly Britain’s only major liberal news outlet, is going to be about who has first dibs on Assange.

Here’s the first paragraph of *The Guardian’s* front-page article:



“Political pressure is mounting on [Home Secretary] Sajid Javid to prioritise action that would allow Julian Assange to be extradited to Sweden, amid concerns that US charges relating to Wikileaks’ activities risked overshadowing longstanding allegations of rape.”

So, the concern is not that Assange is facing rendition to the U.S. It is that the U.S. claim might “overshadow” an outstanding legal case in Sweden.

The 70 MPs who signed the letter to Javid hope to kill two birds with one stone.

First, they are legitimizing the discourse of the Trump administration. This is no longer about an illegitimate U.S. extradition request on Assange we should all be loudly protesting. It is a competition between two legal claims, and a debate about which one should find legal remedy first.

It weighs a woman’s sexual assault allegation against Assange and *WikiLeaks*’ exposure of war crimes committed by the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan. It suggests that both are in the same category, that they are similar potential crimes.

Unequivocal Response



But there should only be one response to the U.S.

extradition claim on Assange: It is entirely illegitimate. No debate. Anything less, any equivocation is to collude in the Trump administration's narrative.

The Swedish claim, if it is revived, is an entirely separate matter.

That *The Guardian* and the MPs are connecting the two should come as no surprise.

In another article on Assange last Friday, the *The Guardian*—echoing a common media refrain — reported as fact a demonstrably false claim: “Assange initially took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden.”

Assange and *WikiLeaks* always said that he entered the embassy to claim *political* asylum so as to avoid extradition to the U.S.

There could be no possible reason for its reporters to make this elementary mistake other than that *The Guardian* is still waging its long-running campaign against Assange, the information revolution he represents and the challenge he poses to the corporate media of which *The Guardian* is a key part.

Seven Years of Derision

For seven years the political and media establishments have been deriding the suggestion that Assange faced any threat from the U.S., despite the mounting private and public evidence that he did. Assange again has been proved conclusively right by current events, and they decisively wrong.

The Guardian knows that Assange did not need political asylum

to avoid a sex case. So reporting this not as a *claim* by his detractors but as an indisputable *fact* is simple, Trump-supporting propaganda meant to discredit Assange – propaganda that happily treats any damage to the cause of journalism as collateral damage.

Second, the only major politicians prepared to highlight the threats to Assange's personal rights and wider press freedoms posed by the U.S. extradition request are opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his ally, Diane Abbott, the Labour shadow home secretary. They have rightly noted that the U.S. is using the extradition demand to silence Assange and intimidate any other journalists who might think about digging up evidence of the crimes committed by the U.S. national security state.

Abbott commented last Friday that Assange's current arrest was not about "the rape charges, serious as they are, it is about *WikiLeaks* and all of that embarrassing information about the activities of the American military and security services that was made public."

Abbott has faced a storm of criticism for her statement, accused of not giving enough weight to the Swedish case. In fact, her only mistake was to give it more weight than it currently deserves. She spoke of "rape charges," but there are in fact no such charges. (Additionally, although the case is classed broadly as a rape allegation in Sweden, in the U.K. it would be classed at most as sexual assault. Forgotten too is that the evidence was considered too weak by the original prosecutor to bring any charges, Assange was allowed to leave Sweden and the investigation was dropped.)

Assange Did Not Flee Questioning

Rather, Assange was previously wanted for questioning, and has never been charged with anything. If the Swedish extradition request is revived, it will be so that he can be questioned about those allegations. I should also point out, as almost no one else is, that Assange did not “flee” questioning. He offered Swedish prosecutors to question him at the embassy.

Even though questioning overseas in extradition cases is common – Sweden has done it dozens of times – Sweden repeatedly refused in Assange’s case, leading the Swedish appeal court to criticize the prosecutors. When he was finally questioned after four years of delays, Swedish prosecutors violated his rights by refusing access to his Swedish lawyer.

Further, the MPs and media getting exercised that Assange “took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden” are forgetting that he did not object to extradition as long as he received a promise that he would not then be extradited on to the U.S. Sweden refused to offer such assurances. We can now see only too clearly that Assange had every reason to insist on such assurances.

I don’t have space here to analyze the Swedish case on this occasion (that’s maybe for another time), though it is worth briefly noting that most of the problematic details of the case have been disappeared down the memory hole.

Given that the political and media class are still speaking in terms of “charges,” rather than questions about allegations, we should recall that there were glaring

problems with the evidence in the Swedish case. Not least, the key piece of evidence against Assange – a torn condom produced by the woman – was found to contain not a trace of DNA from either Assange or from her.

Those at the forefront of the attacks on Abbott and Corbyn, echoed by *The Guardian*, are the same Blairite Labour MPs who have been trying to oust Corbyn as Labour party leader, despite his twice being elected overwhelmingly by the membership.

These MPs, who dominate the Labour parliamentary party, have spent the past four years focusing on smears that Labour is “institutionally anti-Semitic” in an obvious effort to terminally wound Corbyn. Now they have found another possible route to achieve the same end.

They are suggesting that Corbyn and Abbott are disregarding the Swedish woman’s right to justice. The clear subtext of their arguments is that the pair are rape apologists.

As I have pointed out, Abbott has actually overstated the current status of the Swedish case, not sidelined it at all.

But what Corbyn and Abbott have done is to make a clear political, legal and moral demarcation between the Swedish case, which must be resolved according to accepted legal principles, and the U.S. extradition, which has no legal or moral merit whatsoever.

What these U.K. MPs and *The Guardian* have done in this front-page story is muddy the waters yet further, with enthusiastic disregard for the damage it might do to Assange’s rights, to Corbyn’s leadership and to the future

of truth-telling journalism.

Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>.

Behind the Omar Outrage: Suppressed History of 9/11

Trump's demagogic ploy with the freshman lawmaker raises the more serious question of who and what led to the "Day of Planes," writes Max Blumenthal.

By [Max Blumenthal](#)

Special to Consortium News



As Donald Trump sharpens his re-election messaging, he has sought to make a foil out of freshman Democrat Rep. Ilhan Omar, homing in on her identity as a black Muslim immigrant and her brazen defiance of what was once a bipartisan pro-Israel consensus. Trump's most recent attack was the most inflammatory to date, implying through a characteristically dishonest Twitter video that Omar had played some role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Trump was referencing comments Omar made this month during a banquet of the Los Angeles chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR): "CAIR was founded after 9/11, because they recognized that some people did something and that all of us were starting to lose access to our civil liberties," Omar said during a [20-minute-long denunciation](#) of public bullying and violent attacks against Muslims

living in the West. (CAIR was founded in 1994, contrary to Omar's claim).

As innocuous as Omar's comments might have seemed, they were easily spun by a right-wing bigot-sphere seeking to portray her as not merely insensitive to the deep wound Americans suffered on 9/11, but as a possible terror-sympathizer. As Bernard Kerik, the disgraced former NYPD commissioner and convicted felon, said of Omar on Fox News, "she's infatuated with Al Qaeda, with Hamas, with Hezbollah."

For Trump, the manufactured outrage offered yet another opportunity to advance his rebranded version of the Southern Strategy, painting Omar as the face of a Democratic Party overrun by socialists, Muslims, MS13 and trans radicals – as a clear and present danger to the reactionary white exurbanites commonly referred to in mainstream media as "swing voters."

Amid an onslaught of menacing condemnations and online death threats triggered by Trump's tweet, prominent Democrats mobilized to defend Omar. However, many were too timid to mention her by name, apparently fearing that doing so would play into Trump's cynical strategy. Some refused to defend her at all. And among those willing to speak up, most felt compelled to lead their defense by reinforcing the quasi-theological understanding of 9/11 that leaves anti-Muslim narratives unchallenged. "The memory of 9/11 is sacred ground, and any discussion of it must be done with reverence," insisted House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

In Washington, 9/11 is understood as an act of inexplicable evil that materialized out of a clear blue sky. "They hate

us because we're free," Americans are still told in a semi-official drone, conveniently excising the attacks that took place on 9/11 from their historical context. This ruthlessly enforced interpretation has had the effect of displacing blame from those who bear direct or indirect responsibility for the attacks onto much more convenient scapegoats like the Islamic faith and its diverse mass of adherents.

In my new book, "The Management of Savagery," I explain which people did what things to lay the groundwork for the worst terror attack on U.S. soil. Not all of those people were Muslim, and few have faced the kind of scrutiny Omar has for her seemingly benign comment about 9/11. As I illustrate, many of them maintained lustrous reputations well after the ash was cleared from Ground Zero. Today, some of their names – Zbigniew Brzezinski, Ronald Reagan, H.W. Bush – are prominently engraved on airports, federal offices, and library halls around the country. Others became the subject of rowdy bestsellers such as "Charlie Wilson's War," or saw their exploits dramatized in Cold War kitsch productions like "Rambo III." And then there were those who waged America's dirty wars from the shadows, and whose names will scarcely ever be known.

While these figures lay claim to the mantle of "national security," their true legacy was the callous abandonment of that concept in order to advance imperial objectives. During the Cold War, they forged partnerships with theocratic monarchies and armed Islamist militants, even distributing jihadist textbooks to children in the name of defeating the Soviet scourge. Today, as Rep. Tulsi Gabbard – the lone foreign policy dissenter within the Democratic presidential

field – pointed out, they are doing it all over again through their protection of the world's largest Al Qaeda franchise in Syria's Idlib province, which came into being thanks in large part to U.S. intervention in the country.

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To effectively puncture Trump's demagogic ploys, the discussion of 9/11 must move beyond a superficial defense of Omar and into an exploration of a critical history that has been suppressed. This history begins at least 20 years before the attacks occurred, when "some people did something." Many of those people served at the highest levels of U.S. government, and the things they did led to the establishment of Al Qaeda as an international network – and ultimately, to 9/11 itself.

Taliban 'Unimportant'

Back in 1979, some people initiated a multi-billion-dollar covert operation to trap the Red Army in Afghanistan and bleed the Soviet Union at its soft underbelly. They put heavy weapons in the hands of Islamist warlords such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, dispatched Salafi clerics such as "Blind Sheikh" Omar Abdel Rahman to the battlefield, and printed millions of dollars worth of textbooks for Afghan children that contained math equations encouraging them to commit acts of violent martyrdom against Soviet soldiers. They did anything they could to wreak havoc on the Soviet-backed government in Kabul.

These people were so hellbent on smashing the Soviet Union

that they made common cause with the Islamist dictatorship of Pakistan's Zia-ul-Haq and the House of Saud. With direct assistance from the intelligence services of these U.S. allies, Osama bin Laden, the scion of Saudi wealth, set up his Services Bureau on the Afghan border as a waystation for foreign Islamist fighters.

These people even channeled funding to bin Laden so he could build training camps along the Afghan-Pakistan border for the so-called freedom fighters of the mujahideen. And they kept watch over a ratline that shepherded young Muslim men from the West to the front lines of the Afghan proxy war, using them as cannon fodder for a cold-blooded, imperial operation marketed by the Wahhabi clergy in Saudi Arabia as a holy obligation.

These people were in the CIA, USAID, and the National Security Council. Others, with names like Charlie Wilson, Jesse Helms, Jack Murtha, and Joe Biden, held seats on both sides of the aisle in Congress.

When they finally got what they wanted, dislodging a secular government that had provided Afghan women with unprecedented access to education, their proxies plunged Afghanistan into a war of the warlords that saw half of Kabul turned to rubble, paving the way for the rise of the Taliban. And these people remained totally unrepentant about the monster they had created.

"Can you imagine what the world would be like today if there was still a Soviet Union?" remarked Zbigniew Bzezinski, the former NSC director who sold President Jimmy Carter on the Afghan proxy war. "So yes, compared to the Soviet Union, and

to its collapse, the Taliban were unimportant.”

To some in Washington, the Taliban were a historical footnote. To others, they were allies of convenience. As a top State Department diplomat commented to journalist Ahmed Rashid in February 1997, “The Taliban will probably develop like Saudi Arabia. There be [the Saudi-owned oil company] Aramco, pipelines, an emir, no parliament and lots of Sharia law. We can live with that.”

CIA Cover-ups and Blowback

Back in the U.S., some people fueled the blowback from the Afghan proxy war. The Blind Sheikh was given a special entry visa by the CIA as payback for the services he provided in Afghanistan, allowing him to take over the al-Kifah Center in New York City, which had functioned as the de facto U.S. arm of Al Qaeda’s Services Bureau. Under his watch and with help from bin Laden, some people and lots of aid were shuttled to the front lines of U.S. proxy wars in Bosnia and Chechnya while the Clinton administration generally looked the other way.

Though the Blind Sheikh was eventually convicted in a terror plot contrived by a paid informant for the FBI, some people in federal law enforcement had been reluctant to indict him. “There was a whole issue about [Abdel-Rahman] being given a visa to come into this country and what the circumstances were around that,” one of his defense lawyers, Abdeed Jabara told me. “The issue related to how much the government was involved with the jihadist enterprise when it suited their purposes in Afghanistan and whether or not they were afraid there would be exposure of that. Because there’s no question

that the jihadists were using the Americans and the Americans were using the jihadists. There's a symbiotic relationship."

During the 1995 trial of members of the Blind Sheikh's New York-based cell, another defense lawyer, Roger Stavis, referred to his clients before the jury as "Team America," emphasizing the role they had played as proxy fighters for the U.S. in Afghanistan. When Stavis attempted to summon to the witness stand a jihadist operative named Ali Abdelsauod Mohammed who had trained his clients in firearms and combat, some people ordered Mohammed to refuse his subpoena. Those people, according to journalist Peter Lance, were federal prosecutors Andrew McCarthy and Patrick Fitzgerald.

The government lawyers were apparently fretting that Mohammed would be exposed as an active asset of both the CIA and FBI, and as a former Army sergeant who had spirited training manuals out of Fort Bragg while stationed there during the 1980s. So Mohammed remained a free man, helping Al Qaeda plan attacks on American consular facilities in Tanzania and Kenya while the "Day of the Planes" plot began to take form.

In early 2000, some people gathered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to prepare the most daring Al Qaeda operation to date. Two figures at the meeting, Saudi citizens named Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Midhar, were on their way to the United States. While in Kuala Lumpur, the duo's hotel room was broken into by CIA agents, their passports were photographed, and their communications were recorded. And yet the pair of Al Qaeda operatives was able to travel together with multiple-entry visas on a direct flight from

Kuala Lumpur to Los Angeles. That's because for some reason, some people from the CIA failed to notify any people at the FBI about the terror summit that had just taken place. The "Day of Planes" plot was moving forward without a kink.

In Los Angeles, some people met Hazmi and Midhar at the airport, provided the two non-English speakers with a personal caretaker and rented them apartments, where neighbors said they were routinely visited each night by unknown figures in expensive cars with darkened windows. Those people were Saudi Arabian intelligence agents named Omar Bayoumi and Khaled al-Thumairy.

Crawford, Texas

It was not until August 2001 that Midhar was placed on a terrorist watch list. That month, some people met at a ranch in Crawford, Texas, and reviewed a classified document headlined, "Bin Laden Determined to Strike Inside the US." The bulletin was a page-and-a-half long, with detailed intelligence on the "Day of Planes" plot provided by Ali Mohammed, the Al Qaeda-FBI-CIA triple agent now registered as "John Doe" and disappeared somewhere in the federal prison system. Those people reviewed the document for a few minutes before their boss, President George W. Bush, moved on to other matters.

According to *The Washington Post*, Bush exhibited an "expansive mood" that day, taking in a round of golf. "We are going to be struck soon, many Americans are going to die, and it could be in the U.S.," CIA counterterrorism chief Cofer Black warned days later. Bush did not meet with his cabinet heads again to discuss terrorism until Sept. 4.

A week later, on Sept. 11, some people did something.

They hijacked four civilian airliners and changed the course of American history with little more than box cutter blades in their hands. Fifteen of those 19 people, including Hazmi and Midhar, were citizens of Saudi Arabia. They were products of a Wahhabi school system and a politically stultifying society that had thrived under the protection of a special relationship with the U.S. Indeed, the U.S. had showered theocratic allies like Saudi Arabia with aid and weapons while threatening secular Arab states that resisted its hegemony with sanctions and invasion. The Saudis were the favorite Muslims of America's national security elite not because they were moderate, which they absolutely were not, but because they were useful.

In the days after 9/11, the FBI organized several flights to evacuate prominent Saudi families from the U.S., including relatives of Osama bin Laden. Meanwhile, Islamophobia erupted across the country, with even mainstream personalities such as TV news anchor Dan Rather taking to the airwaves to claim without evidence that Arab-Americans had celebrated the 9/11 attacks.

Unable to find a single operational Al Qaeda cell in the country, the FBI turned to an army of paid snitches to haul in mentally unstable Muslims, dupes and idlers like the Lackawanna 6 in manufactured plots. Desperate for a high-profile bust to reinforce the "war on terror" narrative, the bureau hounded Palestinian Muslim activists and persecuted prominent Islamic charities like the Holy Land Foundation, sending its directors to prison for decades for the crime of sending aid to NGOs in the occupied Gaza Strip.

As America's national security state cracked down on Muslim civil society at home, it turned to fanatical Islamist proxies abroad to bring down secular and politically independent Arab states. In Libya, the U.S. and UK helped arm the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, a longtime affiliate of Al Qaeda, using it as a proxy to depose and murder Muammar Gaddafi. As that country transformed from a stable, prosperous state into an Afghanistan-style playground for rival militias, including a chapter of the Islamic State, the Obama administration moved to do the same to Damascus.

In Syria, the CIA armed an outfit of supposedly "moderate rebels" called the Free Syrian Army that turned out to be nothing more than a political front and weapons farm for an array of extremist insurgent factions including Al Qaeda's local affiliate and the Islamic State. The latter two groups were, of course, products of the sectarian chaos of Iraq, which had been ruled by a secular government until the U.S. came knocking after 9/11.

The blowback from Iraq, Libya and Syria arrived in the form of the worst refugee crises the world has experienced since World War II. And then came the bloodiest terror attack to hit the UK in history – in Manchester. There, the son of a Libyan Islamic Fighting Group member, who traveled to Libya and Syria on an MI6 ratline, slaughtered concert-goers with a nail bomb.

Cataclysmic social disruptions like these were like steroids for right-wing Islamophobes, electrifying Trump's victorious 2016 presidential campaign, a wing of the Brexit "Leave" campaign in the UK, and far-right parties across Europe. But as I explain in "The Management of Savagery," these

terrifying trends were byproducts of decisions undertaken by national security elites more closely aligned with the political center – figures who today attempt to position themselves as leaders of the anti-Trump resistance.

Which people did which things to drag us into the political nightmare we're living through? For those willing to cut through the campaign season bluster, Ilhan Omar's comments dare us to name names.

Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of books including best-selling [“Republican Gomorrah,”](#) [“Goliath,”](#) [“The Fifty One Day War”](#) and [“The Management of Savagery,”](#) published in March 2019 by Verso. He has also produced numerous print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries including [“Killing Gaza”](#) and [“Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie.”](#) Blumenthal founded the [Grayzone](#) in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America's state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions.

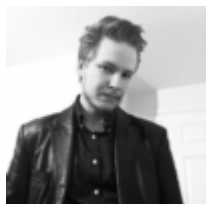
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How Ecuador's President Gave Up Assange

Lenin Moreno was desperate to ingratiate his government with Washington and distract the public from his mounting scandals, writes the *Grayzone's* Denis Rogatyuk.

By **Denis Rogatyuk**

Grayzone



The images of six Metropolitan police officers dragging Julian Assange out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London have enraged citizens around the world. Many have warned that if he is extradited to the U.S. for trial on conspiracy charges – and possibly much more if federal prosecutors have their way – it will lead to the criminalization of many standard journalistic practices. These scenes were only possible thanks to the transformation of Ecuador’s government under the watch of President Lenin Moreno.

Since at least December 2018, Moreno has been working towards expelling the *Wikileaks* publisher from the embassy. The Ecuadorian president’s behavior represents a stunning reversal of the policies of his predecessor, Rafael Correa, the defiantly progressive leader who authorized Assange’s asylum back in 2012, and who now lives in exile.

While Ecuador’s Foreign Minister Jose Valencia blamed his government’s expulsion of Assange on the Australian journalist’s “rudeness,” the sellout is clearly a byproduct of Moreno’s right-leaning agenda.

Political instability has swept across Ecuador since revelations of widespread corruption in Moreno’s inner circle emerged. The scandal coincided with Moreno’s turn towards neoliberal economic reforms, from implementing a massive IMF loan package to the gradual and total embrace and support for U.S. foreign policy in the region. In his bid to satisfy Washington and deflect from his own problems, Moreno was all too eager to sacrifice Assange.

INA Papers Scandal

WikiLeaks's decision to re-publish the details of Moreno's use of off-shore bank accounts in Panama, titled "INA Papers" after the name of the shell corporation at the center of the scandal (INA Investment Corporation), appear to be the main cause for the president's decision to expel Assange from the embassy.

Ecuadorian Communications Minister Andrés Michelena went as far as claiming that the INA Papers were a conspiracy plot between Julian Assange, the former President Rafael Correa and the current Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

The INA Papers scandal has cast a long shadow on Moreno's regime and shattered its pledge to fight against institutional corruption. The scandal reveals that a close associate of Moreno, Xavier Macias, lobbied for the contract of the Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric power plant (valued at \$2.8 billion) as well as the ZAMORA 3000 MW plant to be awarded Sinohydro, a Chinese state-owned construction company.

The financial trail from the Chinese corporation passed through bank accounts in Panama belonging to INA Investment Corporation – a shell company originally founded in Belize, a notable tax haven, by Edwin Moreno Garcés, the brother of the current president. The most crucial pieces of evidence indicate that the INA Investment funds were used to purchase a large apartment in Alicante, Spain, and a number of luxury items for Moreno and his family in Geneva, during his time as a special envoy on disability rights for the United Nations.

As the pressure mounted on Moreno, the attorney general of Ecuador issued a statement on March 19th, indicating that it had commenced an investigation into the INA Papers scandal involving the president and his family. Next, [on March 27th](#), the National Assembly of Ecuador approved a vote in favor of investigating Moreno's alleged off-shore bank dealings in Panama. According to [Ecuador Inmediato](#), 153 public service officials, along with all members of the National Assembly, were also included in the initial public hearing scheduled for April 1st.

The corruption scandal came amid a number of other prominent crises disrupting both the Moreno administration and the Ecuadorian economy. The local and regional elections of March 24th, as well as the election to the Council of Citizens' Participation and Social Control (CPCCS) on March 24th, have been riddled with a series of controversies and irregularities with regards to vote counts and [allegations](#) of fraud, including the attempts to invalidate null votes, disqualify and smear the candidates endorsed by ex-President Rafael Correa. The stunning lack of transparency and legitimacy was highlighted by a report of the mission of electoral observers of the [Organisation of American States](#).

In an unusual twist, the U.S. ambassador, Todd Chapman, was spotted visiting the headquarters of Ecuador's National Electoral Council during the March 24th elections and [allegedly participated](#) as an official electoral observer in the elections. This display of interference was widely condemned on social media as illegal under the current electoral rules, which forbid foreign powers from playing

any active role in the electoral process. But in Moreno's Ecuador, it was a perfect symbol of the new status quo.

IMF Deal

During the recent meeting of the executive board of the IMF, the financial body approved a loan package of \$4.2 billion to the government of Lenin Moreno for what it called a "more dynamic, sustainable, and inclusive economy for the benefit of all Ecuadorians." The agreement coincided with layoffs of over 10,000 public sector workers, in addition to the ongoing policy of slashing in public and social spending, a decrease in the minimum wage and the removal of secure work protections that marked the sharp neoliberal turn of the Ecuadorian government under Moreno.

The IMF deal coincided with the intensifying attempts by the Ecuadorian government to proceed with the expulsion of Julian Assange from its London embassy. His arrest therefore stands as a sign that Moreno is willing to give up any part of his country's sovereignty – political, diplomatic, or economic – to comply with the demands of international finance.

The same pattern has been seen in Moreno's increasing level of collaboration with the Trump administration and its foreign policy in Latin America. From holding private meetings with former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort, to publicly hosting Vice President Mike Pence in the Ecuadorian presidential palace, to authorizing the opening of a new "Security Cooperation Office" in place of the old U.S. military base in Manta, Moreno's embrace of Trump's "Monroeist" policy towards Latin America has become

all too apparent.

At the same time, Moreno has gone to great lengths to undo the progress of Latin American unity and integration initiated by his predecessor and other progressive leaders in the region.

On March 13th, Moreno announced that Ecuador would leave the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), founded in 2008 by leaders of South America's so-called pink tide: Nestor Kirchner of Argentina, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Lula Da Silva of Brazil. The project was inspired by the long-standing vision of Simon Bolivar who envisaged South America as a federation of republics. UNASUR was meant to consolidate the growing economic and political integration among the increasingly progressive governments across the region, ultimately emulating the current structure of the European Union.

Moreno complained in his press release that UNASUR has been compromised by the lack of participation of the right-leaning governments in the region, as well as what he called, "irresponsible actions of certain leaders that replicated the worst vices of socialism of the 21st Century."

In a manner similar to Francisco Santander and the project of Gran Colombia during the 1820s, Moreno has opted for a pro-U.S. foreign policy and commercial relations based on free trade and economic liberalization. He has also followed the path of other right-wing leaders in the region such as Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Argentina's Mauricio Macri in officially recognizing Juan Guaidó as the president of Venezuela. Moreno was even among the attendees of the

founding summit of Prosur, a newly convened regional bloc of U.S.-aligned neoliberal governments.

Moreno's decision to silence Julian Assange and expel him enabled the president to gain the trust of the Trump administration while distracting the Ecuadorian public and international media from his mounting crises at home. From corrupt dealing in off-shore bank accounts, the fraudulent elections of March 24th and his mishandling of the Ecuadorian economy, Moreno is in a world of trouble.

This has not escaped the notice of Correa, Ecuador's former president. After having his page blocked on Facebook, Correa stated that "In his hatred, because Wikileaks published corruption of INA papers, Moreno wanted to destroy Assange's life. He probably did it, but he has also done a huge damage to the country. Who will trust in ECUADOR again?"

Overall, Ecuador has come to resemble the neoliberal regimes of the 1990s across the continent, with IMF-sanctioned austerity, increasingly unstable state institutions and an almost complete obedience to the U.S. foreign policy in the region becoming the new policy standard. Handing Assange over for possible extradition to the U.S. was the inevitable result of Moreno's turn to the right, but it is hardly the end of his sell out.

Denis Rogatyuk is a Russian-Australian freelance writer, journalist and researcher. His articles, interviews and analysis have been published in a variety of media sources around the world including *Jacobin*, *Le Vent Se Lève*, *Sputnik*, *Green Left Weekly*, *Links International Journal*,

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