

Trump and the Pain of Blue-Collar Whites

Exclusive: The plight of working-class white Americans, as their jobs have disappeared and self-destructive behavior has shortened their lives, helps explain Donald Trump's success, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

The shocking new report that U.S. life expectancy declined last year is not only a disturbing indicator of Americans' troubled physical health – our expected lifespan now ranks only 31st in the world – but of our troubled political health as well.

Social scientists and a few number-crunching journalists have uncovered surprising geographic correlations between white voters' propensity to support Donald Trump and rates of drug overdoses, suicide and morbid conditions like obesity, which are major contributors to the national decline in life expectancy. Some examples:

–A study published this December by sociologist Shannon Monnat at Penn State University, focusing on the industrial Midwest, Appalachia and New England, confirmed that Trump performed significantly better than Mitt Romney in counties with higher death rates from drugs, alcohol and suicide. In parts of the Midwest suffering from the worst death rates, Trump outperformed Romney by a remarkable 16.7 percent, more than double his edge in counties with lower mortality rates.

–Using county-level data from the University of Washington, *The Economist* found that rates of obesity, diabetes, heavy drinking, and lack of exercise were the single best predictor of the change in eligible voters who went Republican from 2012 to 2014, holding other factors like race, education, and income constant. According to its model, “if diabetes were just 7% less prevalent in Michigan, Mr. Trump would have gained 0.3 fewer percentage points there, enough to swing the state back to the Democrats. Similarly, if an additional 8% of people in Pennsylvania engaged in regular physical activity, and heavy drinking in Wisconsin were 5% lower, Mrs. Clinton would be set to enter the White House.”

–Similar factors also helped Trump against other Republican contenders. Analyzing the Super Tuesday primaries, the *Washington Post's* Jeff Guo concluded that “Donald Trump performed the best in places where middle-aged whites are dying the fastest.” Guo called it “striking that Trump's promise to ‘Make America Great Again’ has been most enthusiastically embraced by those who have

seen their own life's prospects diminish the most – not [only] in terms of material wealth, but in terms of literal chances of survival. . . . We still don't know what exactly is causing middle-aged white death rates to rise, but it seems that Donald Trump has adeptly channeled this white suffering into political support."

Penn State's Monnat cites the example of Scioto County in Ohio, a blue-collar region described eloquently by Sam Quinones in his book *Dreamland*.

Following the loss of its factories in the 1980s and 1990s, the county became "the pill-mill capital of America, with more prescription pain relievers per capita than any other place in the country. Today in Scioto County, incomes are lower than in the 1980s, and poverty, disability, and unemployment rates are high. Scioto County's drug, alcohol and suicide mortality rate more than doubled from 32.9 in 1999 to 74.8 in 2014, and Trump received 33 percent more of the county's vote than Romney."

Monnat concludes, "Ultimately, at the core of increasingly common 'deaths of despair' is a desire to escape – escape pain, stress, anxiety, shame, and hopelessness. These deaths represent only a tiny fraction of those suffering from substance abuse and mental health diseases and disorders, and the effects ripple beyond the individuals who die to include families, friends, first responders, service providers, and employers. Drug and alcohol disorders and suicides are occurring within a larger context of people and places desperate for change."

Although the causal links to national politics are complex, the rising physical distress of many white Americans is closely linked to their rising economic distress. Together, those conditions have fostered widespread anxiety and deep populist anger that Trump successfully exploited to win a majority of electoral votes. Those conditions are certain to continue long past the 2016 election.

Drugging and Dying of White America

Life expectancy is perhaps the single most telling summary measure of a society's well-being. Worldwide, the trend in most countries has long been upward, paralleled by improvements in education, income, nutrition, public health, and medicine. One prominent exception was the Russian Federation, where experts warned of a "peacetime demographic crisis" (as life expectancy plunged during the 1990s amid the "shock therapy" prescribed to transform the Soviet centralized economy to one dominated by neoliberal or "free market" capitalism).

Now it appears that serious ills afflict the United States as well. The National Center for Health Statistics reported last week that rising death rates for

heart disease and stroke, diabetes, drug overdoses, and accidents lowered the life expectancy of Americans in 2015.

Princeton economist Anne Case said, “I think we should be very concerned. This is singular. This doesn’t happen.”

Case was co-author, with Nobel laureate economist Angus Deaton, of a widely cited study last year that noted for the first time a rise in mortality among middle-aged white Americans from 1999 to 2013. It was big enough to cause half a million more deaths than if trends from previous years had continued.

“This increase for whites was largely accounted for by increasing death rates from drug and alcohol poisonings, suicide, and chronic liver diseases and cirrhosis,” they observed. “This change reversed decades of progress in mortality and was unique to the United States; no other rich country saw a similar turnaround.” It was also unique to non-Hispanic whites; death rates fell for middle-aged black and Hispanic Americans.

The numbers are stark: Over the past decade, some 400,000 Americans committed suicide, a similar number died of drug overdoses, and a quarter million died from alcohol-related diseases. The researchers also cited a significant rise in reports among the living of chronic pain, psychological distress, alcohol use, and general difficulty with “activities of daily living.” More than a third of middle aged whites reported suffering from chronic pain, a major risk factor for suicide, alcoholism, and drug abuse.

New figures released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that deaths from opioids – including hydrocodone, heroin, and synthetic fentanyl – reached a record 33,000 last year, a fourfold increase over 1999.

“In a grim milestone,” the *Washington Post* reported, “more people died from heroin-related causes than from gun homicides in 2015. As recently as 2007, gun homicides outnumbered heroin deaths by more than 5 to 1.”

Debate Over Causes

Conservative social theorists, who used to blame joblessness and family breakups among African-Americans on a “culture of poverty,” now lament that similar moral and culture failings afflict many white families and their communities.

Charles Murray, whose critique of African-American intelligence in *The Bell Curve* earned him a racist reputation in some circles, turned his attention to working-class whites in his 2012 book *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*. Citing rising rates of chronic joblessness, crime, divorce, and alienation from churches, Murray said discouraged whites had lost touch with the

“founding virtues” of America – industriousness, honesty, marriage, and religion. He blamed lax cultural standards rather than economic insecurity or deindustrialization for their woes, many of which he considers preventable and self-inflicted.

National Review contributor J. D. Vance similarly sees “a sense of learned helplessness” behind the travails of many white inhabitants of Greater Appalachia, whom he describes in *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. “There is a lack of agency here,” he writes, “. . . and a willingness to blame everyone but yourself.”

In contrast, liberal analysts – like those at the *Economic Policy Institute* – have for at least two decades called attention to the loss of factory jobs and falling real wages for less educated white men in this country. Today, an astonishing one of every eight men in the prime ages from 25 to 54 has left the job market entirely, more than three times the fraction in the 1960s. The causes include rising employer demand for college-level skills, foreign competition, and the demise of unions, but the result has been to marginalize traditional blue-collar workers and frustrate their attempts to achieve the American dream.

Such economic trends don’t explain everything. Case and Deaton point out that death rates have not risen in other countries with similar wage trends. One reason may be that they have tighter safety nets, which soften the blow to individuals, families and communities.

Some reverse causality may also be at work, from health to bad economic and social outcomes. For example, pain, substance abuse and severe obesity contribute to increased rates of disability and workers dropping out of the labor force. Princeton economist Alan Krueger recently reported that 40 percent of prime-aged men who aren’t employed or looking for work say pain prevents them from working at a full-time job. Most of them take potent prescription pain medications on a daily basis. They also report less happiness, more sadness and more stress than unemployed men.

Another contributor to the pain-and-disability epidemic may be America’s never-ending wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East. “A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that half of all troops who return from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from chronic pain,” writes libertarian critic Cathy Reisenwitz.

Reisenwitz and other analysts blame a crackdown by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) on painkiller prescriptions for increasing suffering among patients and leading many to turn to dangerous street drugs and alcohol for temporary relief. When vets and other pain sufferers do get addicted, she adds,

the DEA makes it tough for them to get methadone to manage their withdrawal symptoms.

“The DEA’s efforts to keep chronic pain sufferers from accessing prescription painkillers and methadone is literally killing them,” she writes. “The best thing the Trump administration could do to end the overdose epidemic is to stop the war on painkillers.”

Connecting the Dots

The physical and psychological distress experienced by many white Americans has generated angry resentment toward government and particularly toward America’s first black president.

As J. D. Vance put it, “We know we’re not doing well. We see it every day: in the obituaries for teenage kids that conspicuously omit the cause of death (reading between the lines: overdose), in the deadbeats we watch our daughters waste their time with. Barack Obama strikes at the heart of our deepest insecurities. He is a good father while many of us aren’t. He wears suits to his job while we wear overalls, if we’re lucky enough to have a job at all. His wife tells us that we shouldn’t be feeding our children certain foods, and we hate her for it – not because we think she’s wrong but because we know she’s right.”

Significantly, political scientists Michael Tesler and Philip Klinker found that Trump’s assault on “political correctness” won him overwhelming support from Republican voters who score highest on surveys of resentment toward minority groups. Citing the recent works of academic popularizers such as political scientist Kathy Cramer (*The Politics of Resentment*) and sociologist Arlie Hochschild (*Strangers in Their Own Land*), Jeff Guo argues that many white voters resented minorities and immigrants for supposedly moving ahead of them in economic opportunity, social status, and access to government programs. Adopting white identity politics, they lashed out at the Democratic Party for enabling what they viewed as an unfair distribution of power, money, and respect.

As Guo put it, “what Trump has taken a sadistic advantage of is not so much raw anger, but rather its more basic predicate: the shame of being lesser-than.”

Trump didn’t offer any meaningful prescriptions for the suffering of angry white people, but he did go out of his way to acknowledge their pain. He portrayed America as a train wreck, not a land of opportunity. He didn’t just hammer away at the loss of well-paying factory jobs; he promised as well to stop “drugs pouring into our country and destroying our youth.” And he made it clear by words and gestures that white America would come first in his White House.

The policies his team favors – cutting taxes for the rich, gutting the

Affordable Care Act, rolling back regulations against air and water pollution, freezing the minimum wage and favoring charter schools over public education – are unlikely to remedy the psychic and physical pain of many white Americans.

Soon their celebration of Trump's victory will fade. Their sense of loss may be compounded by a sense of betrayal as Washington once again fails to mitigate their plight. Where they choose to project their anger next will have a major impact on American politics over the next four years.

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Politicized Intelligence Kneecapping Trump

The back story behind the CIA's leaked claim of Russia helping Donald Trump is an attempt to hobble Trump's less-hawkish foreign policy before he even gets into the White House, says ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

It is not difficult to understand the dynamics of the recent U.S. presidential election. These same dynamics played a part in Brexit, and continue to unfold throughout Europe: there has been little or no real "growth" since 2005 – for many Americans and Europeans. Good quality jobs for native-born Americans and Europeans are rare, and those employment increases that have occurred, are mostly in the minimum wage sector – and have been filled by recent immigrants.

Many native-born Americans and Europeans are feeling the economic pips squeezed to the limit, at the same time that zero or negative interest rates has eviscerated savings income, and is threatening their pensions.

This is the economic malaise. And on top of this has been the political malaise and widespread reaction against the center-leftist "values-based," identity politics that stressed the rights and interests of a growing spectrum of "victims" in society: specifically defined in polar opposition to the mainstream American and European way-of-life.

The aggressiveness behind this polar oppositional positioning, intentionally demonizes and weakens the cultural mainstream: in effect, ordinary people who

worked, had loving wives or husbands and children, and attended church, became the “deplorables,” bigots or racists. It was against this supposed cultural “tyranny” that identity victims needed to be supported.

Gender relations were twisted as new genders proliferated, the propaganda of gender diversity exploded, and parent-children relations eroded. Indeed, “white,” “male” and “Christian” are the only identities you may freely and gratuitously abuse in the U.S. and Europe today. Many ordinary Americans and Europeans find this intolerable. They are pushing-back.

Nothing About Russia

None of these dynamics have anything at all to do with Russia or President Vladimir Putin – except that many Russians express bewilderment that Europe has become so embroiled in this gender politics, and in a war against traditional cultural and moral values.

But today, certain Western intelligence services – the CIA and MI6 – want to suggest that Putin had his “thumb on the scales” of the U.S. election, and “may manipulate a series of key elections [to be held] in Europe next year” too. The narrative has evolved from one of Russian influence in U.S. elections, to that of a *decisive* influence.

As one former CIA officer and U.S. national intelligence co-ordinator, Graham Fuller puts it: “And now, in perhaps the most volatile delegitimization gambit ever, Trump is now whispered to be ‘Putin’s candidate,’ a Russian pawn who has infiltrated the White House itself ...

“This is all very ugly stuff. Worse, it looks like questioning the electoral process and the legitimacy of the election itself may become a permanent feature of our domestic politics, inciting further divisiveness and bitterness on both sides of the political divide, rendering the country (even more) ungovernable.”

Indeed, it *is* ugly stuff. The politicization of intelligence has reached new heights. Russia is not responsible for the widespread opposition to globalization in the U.S. and Europe: simply, the original theory behind globalization (David Ricardo’s comparative advantage theory) no longer retains validity or meaning in the changed reality of today’s world (see here, for an explanation).

And economic growth is proving elusive for a number of reasons, which reflect deep-seated changes under way in the world today (aging demography, China’s stall, and more generally, the failure of debt-led growth policies to work any more, *inter alia*). For sure, the leadership of the CIA understands these longer-term dynamics at work in recent U.S. and European elections.

A recent *Pew* survey, for example, shows: “The Republican Party made deep inroads into America’s middle-class communities in 2016. Although many middle-class areas voted for Barack Obama in 2008, they overwhelmingly favored Donald Trump in 2016, a shift that was a key to his victory ... In 2016, Trump successfully defended all 27 middle-class areas won by Republicans in 2008. In a dramatic shift, however, Hillary Clinton lost in 18 of the 30 middle-class areas won by Democrats in 2008 ... Overall, Democrats experienced widespread erosion in support from 2008 to 2016. Their share of the vote fell in 196 of the 221 metropolitan areas examined. The loss in support was sufficiently large to move 37 areas from the Democratic column to the Republican column ...”.

A Charge Lacking Evidence

And, so far, the American officials have stated explicitly that there is no evidence to sustain their claim of Russian involvement – and National Security Agency, which, alone, might have such evidence – were it to exist – has not come forward to confirm the CIA “assessment.” Other American intelligence agencies have directly contested the leaked CIA “finding.”

In short, we are told that the CIA claims are based on “inference”: which is to say that the CIA officials are “confident,” based on their psychological profile of President Putin, that the latter would prefer Mr. Trump as President; that since it was the Democrats who experienced leaks – and not the Republicans – it may be *inferred* that a hostile power was behind the leaks; and since Putin lies at the apex of Russian power, it may “confidently” be inferred that he personally would have authorized and directed such leaks.

Of course, this is *not* intelligence. This is simply a given conceptual framework (or group think), which may be right or may be wrong, being played out. It is blatantly political – unless sustained by hard intelligence.

And it is pernicious. Regardless of what may be said officially, in due course, in respect to the CIA claims, a cloud of illegitimacy will hang over the Trump Administration, and, as Graham Fuller rightly observes, this supposed illegitimacy, derived from the *decisive* influence of Russia on the election, may not be ephemeral, but rather continue to haunt the President throughout his incumbency. (It is hard to lay to rest CIA *inferences* once made, beyond repeating that there is no definite evidence to support them.) Such a finding would hardly dissipate the smoldering antipathies.

The allegation of Russian malfeasance may also derail the confirmation of Rex Tillerson, official “friend of Russia,” as Secretary of State. It may thus hobble Trump’s ability to reach *détente* with Russia – and may taint any *détente* that subsequently may be reached with Russia.

It is likely too, to make President Putin more wary of reaching any accord with Tillerson – suspecting that any new *détente* with the U.S. will unleash a further torrent of abuse of Russia from a polarized America. Even were Putin personally to welcome a Trump political initiative, further abuse of Russia in America and Europe might not be judged by President Putin to be worth the candle. No people, and not least the Russian people, like to see their country traduced publicly, and at length, in the world press. The onslaught is already having its impact: Russians will be asking themselves can Trump command such a divided and soured country.

Delegitimizing a President

Can one conclude that this outcome (a delegitimized Presidency) was somehow other than that which the CIA intended? Pat Buchanan (himself a thrice-time U.S. Presidential candidate) has no doubts: “The [New York] Times editorial spoke of a ‘darkening cloud’ already over the Trump presidency, and warned that a failure to investigate and discover the full truth of Russia’s hacking could only ‘feed suspicion among millions of Americans that ... (t)he election was indeed rigged.’

“Behind the effort to smear Tillerson and delegitimize Trump lies a larger motive. Trump has antagonists in both parties who are alarmed at his triumph, because it imperils the foreign policy agenda that is their *raison d’être*, their reason ‘for being.’

These people do not want to lift sanctions on Moscow. They do not want an end to the confrontation with Russia. As is seen by their bringing in tiny Montenegro, they want to enlarge NATO to encompass Sweden, Finland, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

They have in mind the permanent U.S. encirclement of Russia ... Their goal is to bring down Putin and bring about ‘regime change’ in Moscow.”

In short, the Russia “hype” is about blocking Trump from making his foreshadowed shift away from the new Cold War, pursued by the present U.S. establishment, and towards initiating *détente* instead, and perhaps the playing up of the Russian “threat” extends even to hoping to frighten enough presidential electors to change their vote on Dec. 19 (though that prospect seems improbable).

If there are indeed foreign intelligence services with their “thumb” in the American election, arguably it is those European services that are feeding the “profound” propaganda threat from Russia meme – and thereby helping in the delegitimization of the U.S. President-elect, and to keeping the new Cold War alive. (There are European states deeply opposed to any rapprochement between the U.S. and Russia).

But this politicization of intelligence is pernicious in another way – to which Graham Fuller also alludes. The allegations that Trump is a knowing or unknowing pawn of Russia is explosive emotional material thrown into an already enflamed, splintered and embittered American national psyche. The “not my President” meme may make it impossible for Trump to operationalize his policies – as polarized government departments turn upon each other (as is already occurring amongst the intelligence agencies). In short, it can paralyze the very operationality of government.

Buchanan states the obvious conclusion, when he writes: “early in his presidency, if not before, Trump is going to have to impose his foreign policy upon his own party and, indeed, upon his own government. Or his presidency will be broken, as was Lyndon Johnson’s.”

Profound Polarization

But let us be clear: de-legitimation can be a two-edged sword. Were, by some pretty unimaginable event, Hillary Clinton to be enacted as President *vice* Trump, she would find her ability to command the authority of the state as hobbled by the bitterness and anger – as would a delegitimized Trump.

Politicization of intelligence services is not new, nor are “black” (i.e. false-flagged) information operations conducted by Western services, but the scale of the present assault on a U.S. President-elect marks, perhaps, a different order of potential consequences.

How can this have happened? The war in Syria has had, it seems, a hugely corrosive effect on services such as CIA and MI6. Firstly, there was the tension of contradiction: the deceit to be maintained of ostensibly fighting terrorism, while secretly supporting such bloody forces (in order to weaken President Bashar al-Assad and subsequently Russia).

Secondly, that of pretending to be pursuing a “principled” policy of off-shored “identity politics” (Sunnis as victims), while quietly accepting – and becoming dependent on – the “off-balance sheet” subventions flowing from the very patrons of such forces (shades of Clinton Foundation pay-to-play ethos).

And thirdly, by becoming the echo chamber of claims, however improbable, however false, thrown up by sundry armed movements and their paymasters – with the intent to force the hand of Western military intervention. In short, these services cease to be observers; they became investors. They become lost in a maze of contorted realities, false propaganda, and of acquired hubris. Like Prometheus, they think to secretly steal from Zeus, the god of war: they aspire to dictate war and peace.

Into this heady world of “strategic communication” warfare, has intruded Mr. Trump, spoiling their Syria gambit – and promising *détente* with Russia. It must indeed seem intolerable.

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Making Russia ‘The Enemy’

Exclusive: Despite conflicting accounts about who leaked the Democratic emails, the frenzy over an alleged Russian role is driving the U.S. deeper into a costly and dangerous New Cold War, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The rising hysteria about Russia is best understood as fulfilling two needs for Official Washington: the Military Industrial Complex’s transitioning from the “war on terror” to a more lucrative “new cold war” – and blunting the threat that a President Trump poses to the neoconservative/liberal-interventionist foreign-policy establishment.

By hyping the Russian “threat,” the neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks, who include much of the mainstream U.S. news media, can guarantee bigger military budgets from Congress. The hype also sets in motion a blocking maneuver to impinge on any significant change in direction for U.S. foreign policy under Trump.

Some Democrats even hope to stop Trump from ascending to the White House by having the Central Intelligence Agency, in effect, lobby the electors in the Electoral College with scary tales about Russia trying to fix the election for Trump.

The electors meet on Dec. 19 when they will formally cast their votes, supposedly reflecting the judgments of each state’s voters, but conceivably individual electors could switch their ballots from Trump to Hillary Clinton or someone else.

On Thursday, liberal columnist E.J. Dionne Jr. joined the call for electors to flip, writing: “The question is whether Trump, Vladimir Putin and, perhaps, Clinton’s popular-vote advantage give you sufficient reason to blow up the

system.”

That Democrats would want the CIA, which is forbidden to operate domestically in part because of its historic role in influencing elections in other countries, to play a similar role in the United States shows how desperate the Democratic Party has become.

And, even though The New York Times and other big news outlets are reporting as flat fact that Russia hacked the Democratic email accounts and gave the information to WikiLeaks, former British Ambassador Craig Murray, a close associate of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, told the London Daily Mail that he personally received the email data from a “disgusted” Democrat.

Murray said he flew from London to Washington for a clandestine handoff from one of the email sources in September, receiving the package in a wooded area near American University.

“Neither of [the leaks, from the Democratic National Committee or Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta] came from the Russians,” Murray said, adding: “the source had legal access to the information. The documents came from inside leaks, not hacks.”

Murray said the insider felt “disgust at the corruption of the Clinton Foundation and the tilting of the primary election playing field against Bernie Sanders.” Murray added that his meeting was with an intermediary for the Democratic leaker, not the leaker directly.

[**Update:** Murray subsequently said his contact with the intermediary at American University was not for the purpose of obtaining a batch of the purloined emails, as the Daily Mail reported, since WikiLeaks already had them. He said the Mail simply added that detail to the story, but Murray declined to explain why he had the meeting at A.U. with the whistleblower or an associate.]

If Murray’s story is true, it raises several alternative scenarios: that the U.S. intelligence community’s claims about a Russian hack are false; that Russians hacked the Democrats’ emails for their own intelligence gathering without giving the material to WikiLeaks; or that Murray was deceived about the identity of the original leaker.

But the uncertainty creates the possibility that the Democrats are using a dubious CIA assessment to reverse the outcome of an American presidential election, in effect, making the CIA party to a preemptive domestic “regime change.”

Delayed Autopsy

All of this maneuvering also is delaying the Democratic Party's self-examination into why it lost so many white working-class voters in normally Democratic strongholds, such as Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

Rather than national party leaders taking the blame for pre-selecting a very flawed candidate and ignoring all the warning signs about the public's resistance to this establishment choice, Democrats have pointed fingers at almost everyone else – from FBI Director James Comey for briefly reviving Clinton's email investigation, to third-party candidates who siphoned off votes, to the archaic Electoral College which negates the fact that Clinton did win the national popular vote – and now to the Russians.

While there may be some validity to these various complaints, the excessive frenzy that has surrounded the still-unproven claims that the Russian government surreptitiously tilted the election in Trump's favor creates an especially dangerous dynamic.

On one level, it has led Democrats to support Orwellian/ McCarthyistic concepts, such as establishing "black lists" for Internet sites that question Official Washington's "conventional wisdom" and thus are deemed purveyors of "Russian propaganda" or "fake news."

On another level, it cements the Democratic Party as America's preeminent "war party," favoring an escalating New Cold War with Russia by ratcheting up economic sanctions against Moscow, and even seeking military challenges to Russia in conflict zones such as Syria and Ukraine.

One of the most dangerous aspects of a prospective Hillary Clinton presidency was that she would have appointed neocons, such as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and her husband, Project for the New American Century co-founder Robert Kagan, to high-level foreign policy positions.

Though that risk may have passed assuming Clinton's Electoral College defeat on Monday, Democrats now are excitedly joining the bash-Russia movement, making it harder to envision how the party can transition back into its more recent role as the "peace party" (at least relative to the extremely hawkish Republicans).

Trading Places

The potential trading places of the two parties in that regard – with Trump favoring geopolitical détente and the Democrats beating the drums for more military confrontations – augurs poorly for the Democrats regaining their political footing anytime soon.

If Democratic leaders press ahead, in alliance with neoconservative Republicans, on demands for escalating the New Cold War with Russia, they could precipitate a party split between Democratic hawks and doves, a schism that likely would have occurred if Clinton had been elected but now may happen anyway, albeit without the benefit of the party holding the White House.

The first test of this emerging Democratic-neocon alliance may come over Trump's choice for Secretary of State, Exxon-Mobil's chief executive Rex Tillerson, who doesn't exhibit the visceral hatred of Russian President Vladimir Putin that Democrats are encouraging.

As an international business executive, Tillerson appears to share Trump's realpolitik take on the world, the idea that doing business with rivals makes more sense than conspiring to force "regime change" after "regime change."

Over the past several decades, the "regime change" approach has been embraced by both neocons and liberal interventionists and has been implemented by both Republican and Democratic administrations. Sometimes, it's done through war and other times through "color revolutions" – always under the idealistic guise of "democracy promotion" or "protecting human rights."

But the problem with this neo-imperialist strategy has been that it has failed miserably to improve the lives of the people living in the "regime-changed" countries. Instead, it has spread chaos across wide swaths of the globe and has now even destabilized Europe.

Yet, the solution, as envisioned by the neocons and their liberal-hawk understudies, is simply to force more "regime change" medicine down the throats of the world's population. The new "great" idea is to destabilize nuclear-armed Russia by making its economy scream and by funding as many anti-Putin elements as possible to create the nucleus for a "color revolution" in Moscow.

To justify that risky scheme, there has been a broad expansion of anti-Russian propaganda now being funded with tens of millions of dollars in taxpayer money as well as being pushed by government officials giving off-the-record briefings to mainstream media outlets.

However, as with earlier "regime change" plans, the neocons and liberal hawks never think through the scenario to the end. They always assume that everything is going to work out fine and some well-dressed "opposition leader" who has been to their think-tank conferences will simply ascend to the top job.

Remember, in Iraq, it was going to be Ahmed Chalabi who was beloved in Official Washington but broadly rejected by the Iraqi people. In Libya, there has been a parade of U.S.-approved "unity" leaders who have failed to pull that country

together.

In Ukraine, Nuland's choice – Arseniy “Yats is the guy” Yatsenyuk – resigned amid broad public disapproval earlier this year after pushing through harsh cuts in social programs, even as the U.S.-backed regime officials in Kiev continued to plunder Ukraine's treasury and misappropriate Western economic aid.

Nuclear-Armed Destabilization

But the notion of destabilizing nuclear-armed Russia is even more hare-brained than those other fiascos. The neocon/liberal-hawk assumption is that Russians – pushed to the brink of starvation by crippling Western sanctions – will overthrow Putin and install a new version of Boris Yeltsin who would then let U.S. financial advisers return with their neoliberal “shock therapy” of the 1990s and again exploit Russia's vast resources.

Indeed, it was the Yeltsin era and its Western-beloved “shock therapy” that created the desperate conditions before the rise of Putin with his autocratic nationalism, which, for all its faults, has dramatically improved the lives of most Russians.

So, the more likely result from the neocon/liberal-hawk “regime change” plans for Moscow would be the emergence of someone even more nationalistic – and likely far less stable – than Putin, who is regarded even by his critics as cold and calculating.

The prospect of an extreme Russian nationalist getting his or her hands on the Kremlin's nuclear codes should send chills up and down the spines of every American, indeed every human being on the planet. But it is the course that key national Democrats appear to be on with their increasingly hysterical comments about Russia.

The Democratic National Committee issued a statement on Wednesday accusing Trump of giving Russia “an early holiday gift that smells like a payoff. ... It's rather easy to connect the dots. Russia meddled in the U.S. election in order to benefit Trump and now he's repaying Vladimir Putin by nominating Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson as secretary of state.”

Besides delaying a desperately needed autopsy on why Democrats did so badly in an election against the also-widely-disliked Donald Trump, the new blame-Russia gambit threatens to hurt the Democrats and their preferred policies in another way.

If Democrats vote in bloc against Tillerson or other Trump foreign-policy nominees – demanding that he appoint people acceptable to the neocons and the

liberal hawks – Trump might well be pushed deeper into the arms of right-wing Republicans, giving them more on domestic issues to solidify their support on his foreign-policy goals.

That could end up redounding against the Democrats as they watch important social programs gutted in exchange for their own dubious Democratic alliance with the neocons.

Since the presidency of Bill Clinton, the Democrats have courted factions of the neocons, apparently thinking they are influential because they dominate many mainstream op-ed pages and Washington think tanks. In 1993, as a thank-you gift to the neocon editors of *The New Republic* for endorsing him, Clinton appointed neocon ideologue James Woolsey as head of the CIA, one of Clinton's more disastrous personnel decisions.

But the truth appears to be that the neocons have much less influence across the U.S. electoral map than the Clintons think. Arguably, their pandering to a clique of Washington insiders who are viewed as warmongers by many peace-oriented Democrats may even represent a net negative when it comes to winning votes.

I've communicated with a number of traditional Democrats who didn't vote for Hillary Clinton because they feared she would pursue a dangerous neocon foreign policy. Obviously, that's not a scientific survey, but the anecdotal evidence suggests that Clinton's neocon connections could have been another drag on her campaign.

Assessing Russia

I also undertook a limited personal test regarding whether Russia is the police state that U.S. propaganda depicts, a country yearning to break free from the harsh grip of Vladimir Putin (although he registers 80 or so percent approval in polls).

During my trip last week to Europe, which included stops in Brussels and Copenhagen, I decided to take a side trip to Moscow, which I had never visited before. What I encountered was an impressive, surprisingly (to me at least) Westernized city with plenty of American and European franchises, including the ubiquitous McDonald's and Starbucks. (Russians serve the Starbucks gingerbread latte with a small ginger cookie.)

Though senior Russian officials proved unwilling to meet with me, an American reporter, at this time of tensions, Russia had little appearance of a harshly repressive society. In my years covering U.S. policies in El Salvador in the 1980s and Haiti in the 1990s, I have experienced what police states look and

feel like, where death squads dump bodies in the streets. That was not what I sensed in Moscow, just a modern city with people bustling about their business under early December snowfalls.

The police presence in Red Square near the Kremlin was not even as heavy-handed as it is near the government buildings of Washington. Instead, there was a pre-Christmas festive air to the brightly lit Red Square, featuring a large skating rink surrounded by small stands selling hot chocolate, toys, warm clothing and other goods.

Granted, my time and contact with Russians were limited – since I don't speak Russian and most of them don't speak English – but I was struck by the contrast between the grim images created by Western media and the Russia that I saw.

It reminded me of how President Ronald Reagan depicted Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua as a “totalitarian dungeon” with a militarized state ready to march on Texas, but what I found when I traveled to Managua was a third-world country still recovering from an earthquake and with a weak security structure despite the Contra war that Reagan had unleashed against Nicaragua.

In other words, “perception management” remains the guiding principle of how the U.S. government deals with the American people, scaring us with exaggerated tales of foreign threats and then manipulating our fears and our misperceptions.

As dangerous as that can be when we're talking about Nicaragua or Iraq or Libya, the risks are exponentially higher regarding Russia. If the American people are stampeded into a New Cold War based more on myths than reality, the minimal cost could be the trillions of dollars diverted from domestic needs into the Military Industrial Complex. The far-greater cost could be some miscalculation by either side that could end life on the planet.

So, as the Democrats chart their future, they need to decide if they want to leapfrog the Republicans as America's “war party” or whether they want to pull back from the escalation of tensions with Russia and start addressing the pressing needs of the American people.

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

American Martyr to Right-Wing Repression

In 1981, Ronald Reagan signaled Guatemala's right-wing regime to escalate its death-squad operations, a decision that led to the murder of American priest Stanley Rother, now a candidate for sainthood, writes Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

While *Time* magazine has named Donald Trump its "person of the year" for 2016, the Roman Catholic Church has honored a very different American by nominating Father Stanley Rother for sainthood.

Father Stanley was a parish priest in Santiago Atitlan in Guatemala, from 1968 until a U.S.-backed death squad assassinated him in 1981. The inspiring life and tragic death of Father Stanley offer a counterpoint to the soulless, materialistic life of Donald Trump, and a life-affirming example of how an American can meet our country's international brutality head-on in his own life and respond with grace, humanity and extraordinary courage.

Stanley is the first person born in the United States that the Catholic Church has recognized as a martyr. That he was killed by forces that his own government trained and supported, and that they killed him for the very qualities that make him a saint in the eyes of the Church, should spur Americans to reflect on the untenable moral position of our country in the world.

Father Stanley arrived in Guatemala 14 years after the CIA overthrew its democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. After the coup, U.S.-backed military governments reversed Arbenz's modest land reforms and reinforced an economic and political power structure in which the descendants of 10 colonial families still own nearly all the productive land in Guatemala and rule over millions of poor indigenous people who they provide with only the barest minimum of healthcare, education and other public services.

A failed uprising by left-wing junior military officers at Guatemala's national military academy in 1960 marked the beginning of 36 years of civil war, in which at least 200,000 people were killed. A U.N.-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission identified 93 percent of the dead and disappeared as victims of the U.S.-backed Guatemalan army, police and death squads, while only 3 percent were killed by guerrillas fighting the government and the killers of the other 4 percent were unknown.

Because the war devolved into a genocide against the Mayan indigenous population, who were sympathetic to the rebels, 83 percent of all the victims of

the war were indigenous people. Since the peace agreement that ended the civil war in 1996, there have been modest improvements in public services in many indigenous communities: the meager fruits of decades of armed resistance that were only the latest chapter in a 500-year struggle for dignity and self-determination in the face of invasion, occupation, colonialism, slavery and brutality.

U.S. Role in Guatemala's Civil War

Guatemala's civil war was characterized by successive waves of brutal government repression and the emergence of new armed resistance groups in different parts of the country.

The survivors of the 1960 uprising worked with the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT) and student groups to launch armed resistance in three different regions, but they numbered no more than 500 men under arms. In the mid 1960s, they were largely suppressed in Zacapa and Izabal provinces by the small 5,000-strong Guatemalan Army, supported by 2,000 paramilitaries and 1,000 U.S. special forces.

In Zacapa, the army's scorched earth policy killed an estimated 15,000 people, 50 times more than were active in the armed resistance. Meanwhile, U.S.-trained urban death squads headed by Colonel Rafael Arriaga abducted, tortured and killed PGT members in Guatemala City, notably 28 prominent labor leaders who were abducted and disappeared in March 1966.

After the first wave of armed resistance was already largely suppressed, the government set out to compile more extensive lists of "subversives." The model of "Committees Against Communism" set up by the CIA to kill thousands of Guatemalans after the 1954 coup was enhanced by a new telecommunications center and a new intelligence agency based in the presidential palace. The government compiled a database of people across the country, including leaders of farming co-ops and labor, student and indigenous activists, to provide ever-growing target lists for its death squads.

The CIA and the U.S. School of the Americas (SOA) have trained generations of U.S.-backed forces across Latin America and the world in this model of state terrorism, which is also still the model for U.S. special forces operations in Afghanistan and wherever U.S. occupation forces face resistance across the world.

Major Joseph Blair, the former director of instruction at the School of the Americas, described its training program to John Pilger in his film, The War You Don't See: "The doctrine that was taught was that, if you want information, you

use physical abuse, false imprisonment, threats to family members, and killing. If you can't get the information you want, if you can't get the person to shut up or stop what they're doing, you assassinate them – and you assassinate them with one of your death squads.”

The SOA moved from Panama to Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1984, and was rebranded as the “Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation” (WHINSEC) in 2001. U.S. officials have claimed that it no longer trains Latin American military officers in the use of torture and death squads, but Joe Blair has insisted that nothing really changed.

Testifying at a trial of SOA Watch protesters in 2002, Blair said, “There are no substantive changes besides the name. They teach the identical courses that I taught, and changed the course names, and use the same manuals.”

Another element of public deception in such U.S. “counterinsurgency” programs is the notion that the targets are actual guerrillas. In reality, because guerrillas are elusive by definition, these programs really target civilian populations to make them “pay a price” for giving material and moral support to armed resistance groups.

As the U.S. was unleashing newly trained death squads to counter growing resistance in Iraq in January 2005 in what *Newsweek* called the “Salvador option,” – but might equally have called the “Guatemala option” – a U.S. officer was unusually candid about the real purpose of the campaign.

“The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving the terrorists,” he told *Newsweek*, “From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.” The unintended but unavoidable consequence of such a brutal strategy against civilian populations is to put them in a position where they have nothing left to lose by joining armed resistance groups, driving many to do so.

As Albert Camus wrote in *Combat*, the underground French Resistance newspaper that he edited in 1944 “you will be killed, deported, or tortured as a sympathizer just as easily as if you were a militant. Act: your risk will be no greater, and you will at least share in the peace at heart that the best of us take with them into the prisons.”

From Guatemala to Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. government has not yet found an effective response to Camus's appeal. The only real solution would be to not put people in such an intolerable position in the first place, but that would conflict with the intractable “institutional myopia” that is endemic in U.S. official circles, under which, as historian Gabriel Kolko wrote in

1994, "options and decisions that are intrinsically dangerous and irrational become not merely plausible but the only form of reasoning about war and diplomacy that is possible in official circles."

Father Stanley in Santiago Atitlan

Soon after Father Stanley arrived in Guatemala in 1968, Colonel Manuel Arana Ossorio was elected president in a far from democratic election in 1970. Arana declared a "state of siege" in the country. In one speech, he said he would "not hesitate to turn the country into a cemetery in order to pacify it."

Arana's four-year reign of terror killed another 20,000 people across the country and provoked the formation of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) among the Ixil people in the northern highlands, where the Army's brutal counter-insurgency strategy escalated to genocide in the 1980s.

In Santiago, Father Stanley drew on his own background in rural Oklahoma to establish a farmers' cooperative, a school, a hospital and a radio station, and he shared the hard life and conditions of his parishioners in the spirit of "liberation theology," like many other Catholic priests in Latin America at the time. He fell in love with the local Tz'utujil people and culture, and learned their language well enough to conduct church services in Tz'utujil and to translate the New Testament of the Bible into Tz'utujil.

In the mid-1970s, a new labor movement in Guatemala united indigenous farmers with other workers in new labor unions and rural farming co-ops like the one that Father Stanley helped to organize in Santiago. The new co-ops and labor organizing saved hundreds of thousands of indigenous people in the highlands from a way of life in which they had been forced to abandon their own land and crops to spend months of each year working in near-slavery conditions on coffee plantations along the Pacific coast.

In the late 1970s, Rodrigo Asturias, the eldest son of the Nobel-prize winning Guatemalan novelist Miguel Angel Asturias, returned from exile in Mexico and launched a new armed resistance group called the Revolutionary Organization of Armed People (ORPA). It was based in the Western highlands around Xela (Quetzaltenango), and also in the mountains and cloud forest above Father Stanley's parish in Santiago Atitlan.

The government saw the cooperatives and the Catholic Church as part of the civilian base of support for the EGP, ORPA and other armed groups, and so co-op leaders and Catholic activists became prime targets for the death squads. In Ixil, 163 village and co-op leaders and 143 Catholic activists were assassinated or disappeared between 1976 and 1978.

U.S. Support For Genocide in Ixil

The election of General Romeo Lucas Garcia as president in 1978 unleashed a new escalation of death squad violence in both Guatemala City and in the highlands. Once President Ronald Reagan restored U.S. support to the Guatemalan army in 1981, Lucas unleashed the genocide in Ixil for which senior Guatemalan officials are now being prosecuted.

Consortiumnews has reported extensively on declassified CIA documents that reveal how much the new Reagan administration knew of the atrocities being committed in Guatemala when it restored U.S. military aid and support, only months before Father Stanley was assassinated. The Carter administration had partially cut off military aid to Guatemala in response to the crimes of its military rulers, so the CIA prepared extensive reviews of the situation in the country to justify the U.S. policy change that would unleash genocide in Ixil and tacitly approve death squad murders like Father Stanley's in Santiago.

In April 1981, Vernon Walters, the former Deputy Director of the CIA and Reagan's special envoy in the region, met with President Lucas in Guatemala. Walters's talking points for the meeting included the approval of \$3 million worth of military trucks and jeeps for the Guatemalan army. The U.S. also provided \$2 million in covert CIA funding for Guatemala that year and eventually delivered military transport planes and helicopters worth another \$45 million and 10 M41 tanks worth \$34 million.

As Walters told Lucas in April, "We wish to reestablish our traditional military supply and training relationship as soon as possible."

Walters' talking points to President Lucas continued, "If you could give me your assurance that you will take steps to halt official involvement in the killing of persons not involved with the guerrilla forces or their civilian support mechanism we would be in a much stronger position to defend successfully with the Congress a decision to begin to resume our military supply relationship with your government."

In this carefully worded statement, as *Consortiumnews* noted, the U.S. tacitly approved the killing, not just of people "involved with the guerrilla forces," but also of people involved with their "civilian support mechanism."

Other CIA documents detail the massacre and destruction of entire villages in Ixil, and acknowledge that the army treated the entire indigenous population as the "civilian support mechanism" of the guerrillas. One CIA report concluded, "The well documented belief by the army that the entire Ixil Indian population is pro-EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) has created a situation in which the

army can be expected to give no quarter to combatants and non-combatants alike.”

But the Reagan administration made a deliberate decision to increase U.S. military aid and moral and logistical support for these systematic war crimes, up to and including genocide.

Once the “traditional military supply and training relationship” was restored, Lieutenant Colonel George Maynes, the senior U.S. military adviser in Guatemala, sat down with General Benedicto Lucas, the president’s brother, to plan “Operation Ash,” in which 15,000 army troops swept through Ixil massacring indigenous people and burning hundreds of villages to ashes.

Death Squads In Santiago Atitlan

After the ORPA guerrillas began openly recruiting in Santiago Atitlan, the army set up a camp on the outskirts of the town in October 1980, from where it dispatched death squads to kill local leaders and activists. Ten people were killed or disappeared in the first two months.

At Christmas, Father Stanley wrote a public letter to fellow Catholics in Oklahoma: “The reality is that we are in danger. But we don’t know when or what form the government will use to further repress the Church... Given the situation, I am not ready to leave here just yet... But if it is my destiny that I should give my life here, then so be it... I don’t want to desert these people, and that is what will be said, even after all these years. There is still a lot of good that can be done under the circumstances. The shepherd cannot run at the first sign of danger.”

On Jan. 7, 1981, Father Stanley wrote again, to a friend in Oklahoma City, and described how a parishioner was abducted by four armed men just 15 feet from the door of the church as he tried to reach sanctuary.

Father Stanley wrote: “by the time I ... got outside, they had taken him down the front steps of the church and were putting him in a waiting car. ... I just stood there wanting to jump down to help, but knowing that I would be killed or taken along also. The car sped off with him yelling for help, but no one was able to help him.”

“Then I realized that I had just witnessed a kidnapping of someone that we had gotten to know and love and were unable to do anything about it. They had his mouth covered, but I can still hear his muffled screams for help. As I got back in the rectory I got a cramp in my back from the anger I felt that this friend was being taken off to be tortured for a day or two and then brutally murdered for wanting a better life and more justice for his pueblo. He had told me before, ‘I have never stolen, have never hurt anyone, have never eaten someone

else's food, why then do they want to hurt and kill me?' He was 30 years old, left a wife and two boys, ages 3 and 1."

Father Stanley added a postscript to the letter. In retaliation for a guerrilla ambush of an army convoy, the army had now abducted and killed another 17 people from Santiago. "[They] were not involved in anything," he wrote, "Their bodies were found in different parts of the country. They, these bodies, were badly tortured, e.g. skin peeled off their faces, etc." He added that two schoolteachers were also shot and killed the same day at an army roadblock.

A week or two later, Father Stanley was warned that his name was also on a death list, and he returned to Oklahoma for a few months. But he very bravely decided to go back to Santiago to celebrate Easter with his parishioners, and he was still there when the death squad came for him on July 28, 1981. He resisted going with them to be disappeared, but he didn't call out for help for fear that anyone who came to help him would be killed too. His killers eventually shot him in his office.

Today in the church in Santiago, visitors can still see the office where Father Stanley was killed and a beautiful memorial to everyone killed or disappeared in Santiago, a sculpture of a white swan on an altar in a side-chapel. There are always local people of all ages praying at the memorial, from elderly widows of men long dead or disappeared to grandchildren who never met their grandfathers.

The last time I was there, there was also a group of children with guitars rehearsing Bob Dylan's "Blowing In the Wind" in Spanish. If Father Stanley had lived a bit longer, he might well have translated that into Tz'utujil too.

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

The Rise of White Racial Nationalism

While there were many reasons for Donald Trump's surprise victory, a particularly ugly one was his success in touching the raw nerve of white racial animosities, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is little doubt that white racism played a role in the U.S. presidential election of 2016. As Zach Beauchamp demonstrates in a Nov. 10 article at Vox.com, enthusiastic support for Donald Trump – 10 on a scale of 10 – among white voters in mostly white geographic areas was about 25 percent. However, in areas of growing ethnic and racial diversity, the percentage of all-in Trump support goes way up.

Beauchamp quotes the research of the University of London scholar Eric Kaufmann, who surveyed Trump's white supporters. Kaufmann's original findings are reported in the policy blog of the London School of Economics. One result was that in areas that had experienced a 30 percent rise in Latino population, the number of whites who enthusiastically supported Trump rose to 70 percent.

Trump's own racism had been on public display during his entire campaign and often (although erroneously) merged the phenomena of immigration and violence. Here he found a ready and responsive audience. Beauchamp goes on to demonstrate that white supporters of Donald Trump saw immigration and terrorism as the country's major problems.

Moreover, they connected these two issues to their fear of the country's growing diversity. Of course, economic woes were also a concern, but they too were exacerbated by fear of the fact that the country was under the leadership of a black man, Barack Obama.

Then, to broaden their outlook of the xenophobic and sectarian impact on politics, both Beauchamp and Kaufmann point out that the racist underpinning of Trump's electoral success parallels the Brexit voting patterns in the United Kingdom in June 2016. There too, ethnocentric "anxiety over a changing society" appears to have spurred on the vote to leave the European Union.

Racism and Netanyahu's 2015 Victory

Brexit is not the only telling parallel to a Trump-style popular racist appeal. Indeed, if you are looking for someone whose bigoted outlook and unethical political practice comes close to Donald Trump's, you can go to Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu stood for reelection in March 2015. His main opponent was Labor Party leader Isaac Herzog. During the election campaign, one of Herzog's consultants was the American political adviser Paul Begala – a longtime political ally of the Clintons. Soon after Netanyahu's reelection Begala explained how Netanyahu had won: "He won because of race. ... In the U.S. you could never get away with those kind of racist appeals. But, man, did it work [in Israel]."

He went on, "I have never seen anything like Bibi's furious surge to the right

in the last four days [of the campaign]. He had robo-calls calling the [U.S.] President 'Hussein Obama, the Muslim,' he had ads saying the Arabs will vote in droves. He accused Herzog of wanting to divide Jerusalem."

The fact that "man, did it [this racist approach] work" in Israel should have been no surprise. A year later, in March 2016, a Pew Research Center survey of Israeli society reported "that nearly half of Jews in the country [48 percent] say they support the ethnic cleansing of Arabs." The Israeli Prime Minister and fellow travelers certainly knew this ahead of the Pew report.

As it turned out, Netanyahu's appeal to fear of the Arabs was roughly equivalent to Trump's appeal to fear of immigrants in the United States. Begala readily recognized the importance of the racist factor in Netanyahu's success. Where he was wrong was to think that "in the U.S. you could never get away with those kind of racist appeals." It turned out that many white U.S. voters were as receptive to such a race-based fear campaign as were Israeli Jews. As with Netanyahu, racism helped Trump win.

A Broader Phenomenon

Taking a broader view, we can see that the racism manifesting itself in Israel and the United States is part of a general phenomenon of reactionary populism spreading throughout the West. This fact has been recognized by the venerable and progressive Israeli commentator Uri Avnery.

In a recent column entitled "The Call of the Nation," Avnery observes, "a DARK wave is submerging democracies all over the Western world. ... fascism and populism are gaining ground all around" and doing so in the name of old-fashioned ethnocentric nationalism. After all, "for most people, the need to belong to a nation is a profound psychological need. People create a national culture, often speak a national language. People are ready to die for their nation."

In the end, Avnery concludes that "What we are witnessing now is a rebellion of nationalism against the trend towards ... a globalist world."

The globalist trend Avnery speaks of showed its disruptive potential soon after World War II. It was then that there began a large-scale movement of peoples from poorer countries and regions into richer ones. This was often supported by Western elites because of pressing, if temporary, post-war labor needs. This was later joined by the creation of larger trans-national economic units, which saw the movement of not people, but jobs, flowing from richer to poorer countries and regions. The motive here was a search for cheaper labor markets.

For the average Western citizen it was all very confusing and frightening.

Almost simultaneously they saw what appeared to be alien groups invading their local environments while, a bit later, their traditional job base was swept away to some foreign land. It was inevitable that all of this would, sooner or later, cause a backlash. In the West, this backlash would merge racism with economics – suggesting to many that economic rivalry was another form of racial competition.

The backlash has also, as Avnery suggests, released a wave of nationalist populism, with its strong ethnocentric undertones. While this movement will create a context for racist and tribalistic venting, it will not be able to do more than momentarily slow economic globalization. That will continue as long as capitalism rules our commercial, fiscal and industrial lives. So, economically, it is one world in the long run.

Seeing these two – racist nationalism and economic globalism – in juxtaposition is important. Racist nationalism as it now expresses itself in the U.S., Israel, the United Kingdom and the European continent has the ability to make a profound mess of local politics. It can, and no doubt will, undermine democratic virtues such as civil and human rights. It will probably undermine the rule of law itself.

Yet, the very thing it fears the most, the one-world economic process, will certainly go on apace. And, because of the weakening of political and legal rights at the hands of racist and authoritarian governments, in the long run we will all end up more exposed to economic exploitation than we ought to be.

That will prove to be a very high price for whatever emotional satisfaction your stalwart white nationalist may now feel.

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

How America Disgraces Itself

The ugly spectacle of the U.S. election is spilling over into the transition with new conspiracy theories about Russia and Donald Trump, as the world looks on in shock and dismay, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

It had been an exhausting, interminable 18-20 months of presidential campaigning during which much of the business of thoughtful American governance had to yield space to the riveting follies of politics. Yet most other countries in the world, not locked into dictators or kings for life, conduct their elections far more briskly and get on with business.

Canada with its parliamentary system extended its last federal election campaign to 11 weeks; many were angered that the campaign had been extended even that far beyond the more traditional seven or eight weeks it takes to hold a federal election.

One might have hoped too, that whatever the electoral cost and fatigue had been in the U.S., the process would at least eventually distill it all down to the finest of candidates, tempered and honed in the exhausting demands of the campaign, to now represent America's best. Instead we got what was demonstrably far from America's finest – two candidates competing for the honor of who was hated the least. Election night left almost no one truly inspired, enriched or empowered by the outcome.

One might also have expected that by now, hallelujah, it would at least be all over, leaving nothing but a few sober post-mortem analyses of events. But even here the agony is exquisitely drawn out in a two-month interregnum, closer to purgatory, between the election and the inauguration.

The campaign indeed now seems far from over as we enter a new, extended, and possibly uglier period of speculation and spectacle in the parade of contestants now modeling for high office. Here again this interregnum seems unduly prolonged and messy compared to a parliamentary system where a back-bench opposition steps in ready to take over within days after election results are in.

Indeed, the circus now shifts to the very nature of the Electoral College system itself, exciting partisan passions further as to who the "legitimate" victor is. The challenging of the very legitimacy of winners seems now to have become part of the system – most vividly begun with George W. Bush's appointment as president by the Supreme Court in 2000, followed eight years later with significant parts of the nation questioning Barack Obama's legitimacy – even his very citizenship.

Eyes on Russia

Conspiracy theories (and yes, in theory conspiracies can exist) continue to flow about what might have been, including whether the FBI had intervened improperly and deliberately to swing the election to Trump. And now it is all eyes on

Russia.

The handwriting is on the wall. The specter of Russia has likely now become a permanent beast lurking behind the scenes in the Trump era.

The Russians may well have had a hand in helping hack the Republican and Democratic National Committees. But these WikiLeaks also revealed how a corrupted Democratic National Committee contributed heavily to skewing the Democratic Party nomination process against Bernie Sanders. If the Russians were involved – and we have not yet had an official pronouncement on that, only leaks – such interference is unacceptable and must be fully and publicly investigated. But such investigation should neither distract from nor delegitimize the content of the specific WikiLeaks information on the DNC, which should also be the object of outrage.

And now, in perhaps the most volatile delegitimization gambit ever, Trump is now whispered to be “Putin’s candidate,” a Russian pawn who has infiltrated the White House itself. The witch hunt on Russia conveniently displaces the entire substance of critically needed electoral and policy reform.

This is all very ugly stuff. Worse, it looks like questioning the electoral process and the legitimacy of the election itself may become a permanent feature of our domestic politics, inciting further divisiveness and bitterness on both sides of the political divide, rendering the country (even more) ungovernable. The bread and circuses of the interminable campaign extravaganza now seamlessly transition into the background noise of the entire Trump presidency itself.

Apart from the damage to the moral fiber of the nation and its divisive recriminations, the business of governance continues to be indefinitely sidetracked by such circuses. It blocks sober debate about the sad plight of so many aspects of the nation – erratic foreign policy, runaway military spending, non-stop wars, the failing education system, the degradation of the national infrastructure, the decline of health care and rise of mortality rates, the ignoring of the environment, the need to treat broad ethnic injustices, myths about immigration, the movement of American jobs overseas (as the very essence of how capitalism is *supposed* to work) – these hard questions all lie unaddressed. And they are much less fun or telegenic than hurling charges about foreign conspiracies and presidential legitimacy.

Who Trump really is remains a major question. While his earlier utterances have been all over the map, his appointments provide more concrete indicators. And so far it doesn’t look pretty. We seem poised to enter a period of extreme retrogression and reaction across the board, a massive setback on nearly all fronts – unless some welcome surprises are in store from the very people who we

wouldn't expect them from. That cannot be utterly ruled out.

The American Outlier

But it is no wonder that the U.S. for all its massive military power and huge economy, is increasingly becoming an outlier on the international scene. Foreign statesmen both good and bad simply shake their heads in incredulous dismay at the decline of U.S. rationality, prestige and steadiness. But who can avert one's eyes from a train wreck?

Yet this isn't new. It's not as if the U.S. has suddenly turned a corner with this election. U.S. foreign policy has grown ever more isolated from the world and from reality since at least 9/11. Life in this world of denial may even date from the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. That was when the U.S. received what must now be seen as palpably a curse – the transient domination of the entire global scene, when we trumpeted ourselves as the “sole global superpower.” We assumed that such was the new permanent order of the world. We've never gotten over it. We're still trying to maintain that fiction and it's not working. Trump will find that out painfully soon.

Our domestic political antics exclude us ever further from the ranks of more responsible, sober and clear-sighted states. The rest of the world is simply going to have to go on working around us in damage limitation mode as it has been doing since 9/11. Are we capable of limiting the long-standing damage to ourselves at home? The necessary very heavy lifting seems now almost a bridge too far.

Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is *Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American's crisis of conscience in Pakistan*. (Amazon, Kindle) grahamefuller.com

The Never-ending 'War on Terror'

The Constitution granted war-making powers to Congress, but President Obama, like his post-World War II predecessors, has trampled on that provision with open-ended executive wars, writes Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

The Obama administration has decided to stretch the 15-year-old congressional authorization for war against the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, or those

harboring them, to include an illegal war against a group in Somalia – al-Shabab – that wasn't even in existence at the time of the attacks in 2001.

In fact, as with many of its Islamist terrorist opponents worldwide – including the original Al Qaeda, the perpetrator of 9/11 that arose from U.S. arming of mujahedeen guerrillas against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Al Qaeda in Iraq, which arose to combat the U.S. invasion there and morphed into ISIS – the United States inadvertently helped create al-Shabab in the first place. Al-Shabab did not arise until after 2007, long after 9/11, when the U.S. sponsored an Ethiopian invasion of Somalia to wrest control of the country from a milder Islamist council. The more virulent al-Shabab rose to attempt to repel this foreign invasion.

More generally, after 9/11, rather than following the congressional authorization and focusing like a laser beam on countering the original Al Qaeda group and their patrons, the Afghan Taliban, the George W. Bush administration launched a general “war on terror,” which covered all terrorist groups of international scope, regardless of whether or not they focused on attacking U.S. targets.

In the end, this massive Bush administration violation of the narrow 2001 authorization led to illegal U.S. drone wars and airstrikes in countries all over the Middle East and Southwest Asia – Somalia (against al-Shabab), Yemen (against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), Pakistan (against the Pakistani Taliban), and Iraq, Syria, and Libya (against ISIS). The Obama administration then accelerated all these unconstitutional wars.

Now Obama is trying shore up the already thin legal fig leaf, so that it can pass such travesties – which actually make Islamist groups more rabid each time the U.S. intervenes – onto the incoming Trump administration. When Obama took office, he complained that he inherited from the Bush administration an economic meltdown and a military quagmire in Iraq, but he in turn is bequeathing a legal quagmire to his successor.

No Ambiguity

Ambiguities in the U.S. Constitution do exist, but which branch of government was given the war power is not one of them. In Eighteenth Century Britain, the prerogative of deciding to go to war was the king's. Having been a victim of this prerogative, debates at the American Constitutional Convention of 1787, the Constitution that resulted, and actual practice in the republic for almost two centuries until the Korean War in 1950 demonstrate conclusively that Congress – the people's branch – gets to initiate war, not the executive.

The Constitution specifically gives Congress the power to commence war; the debates at the Constitutional Convention indicate that the only exception is for urgent self-defense – that is, when U.S. territory is under sustained attack, thus preventing the Congress from convening. Even then, the Congress should meet at the earliest possible time to ratify any moves in self-defense made by the president, as commander in chief. Very early in American history, even in the informal and sporadic war at sea with France (the Quasi-War) in the last few years of the Eighteenth Century, the Congress was in the driver's seat in conducting the war and President John Adams complied with its desires.

And in contrast to presidential claims of an expansive commander-in-chief role since the Korean War, the Constitution's framers intended, and normal practice until 1950 confirmed, that the president's role in that capacity was taken narrowly to mean only commanding troops on the battlefield after war had already been initiated by Congress – not commanding the entire nation, in times of crises or otherwise.

Yet since 1950, presidents have claimed powers to start wars even without any authorization from Congress – either getting none (for example, Bill Clinton in his war to separate Kosovo from Serbia in 1999 or Barack Obama in overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011) or claiming that they needed to do so only as a courtesy, which was primarily a gambit to win increased political support for their military escapades (for example, both Bushes in each of their misadventures in Iraq).

The Drone War Deception

Another trick is what Bush and Obama have done with the aforementioned drone wars – trying to blatantly fold wars against other only tangentially-related “Islamist” groups in countries far from Afghanistan into the congressional authorization for war against the perpetrators of 9/11 – the original Al Qaeda group and their hosts, the Afghan Taliban. Such legal gymnastics must stop.

During the Trump administration, the many drone wars either must be made legally legitimate, with specific approval for each of them from the people's houses of Congress, or they must be stopped. The latter solution would be preferred – because those counterproductive foibles are making the threat from Islamist terrorism more virulent with each U.S. military intervention – but even the former option would at least put the wars on a much sounder constitutional footing.

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from George Washington University. He spent 15 years working for Congress on national security issues, including stints as an investigator for the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Principal Defense Analyst at the Congressional Budget Office. [This article first appeared as a blog post at Huffington Post.]

Hypocrisy Behind the Russian-Election Frenzy

Exclusive: The madness sweeping Official Washington and the mainstream media about alleged Russian interference in the U.S. election is pervaded by breathtaking hypocrisy, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As Democrats, the Obama administration and some neocon Republicans slide deeper into conspiracy theories about how Russia somehow handed the presidency to Donald Trump, they are behaving as they accused Trump of planning to behave if he had lost, questioning the legitimacy of the electoral process and sowing doubts about American democracy.

The thinking then was that if Trump had lost, he would have cited suspicions of voter fraud – possibly claiming that illegal Mexican immigrants had snuck into the polls to tip the election to Hillary Clinton – and Trump was widely condemned for even discussing the possibility of challenging the election's outcome.

His refusal to commit to accepting the results was front-page news for days with leading editorialists declaring that his failure to announce that he would abide by the outcome disqualified him from the presidency.

But now the defeated Democrats and some anti-Trump neoconservatives in the Republican Party are jumping up and down about how Russia supposedly tainted the election by revealing information about the Democrats and the Clinton campaign.

Though there appears to be no hard evidence that the Russians did any such thing, the Obama administration's CIA has thrown its weight behind the suspicions, basing its conclusions on "circumstantial evidence," according to a [report](#) in The New York Times.

The Times reported: "The C.I.A.'s conclusion does not appear to be the product of specific new intelligence obtained since the election, several American

officials, including some who had read the agency's briefing, said on Sunday. Rather, it was an analysis of what many believe is overwhelming circumstantial evidence – evidence that others feel does not support firm judgments – that the Russians put a thumb on the scale for Mr. Trump, and got their desired outcome.”

In other words, the CIA apparently lacks direct reporting from a source inside the Kremlin or an electronic intercept in which Russian President Vladimir Putin or another senior official orders Russian operatives to tilt the U.S. election in favor of Trump.

More 'Group Thinking'?

The absence of such hard evidence opens the door to what is called “confirmation bias” or analytical “group think” in which the CIA's institutional animosity toward Russia and Trump could influence how analysts read otherwise innocent developments.

For instance, Russian news agencies RT or Sputnik reported critically at times about Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, a complaint that has been raised repeatedly in U.S. press accounts arguing that Russia interfered in the U.S. election. But that charge assumes two things: that Clinton did not deserve critical coverage and that Americans – in any significant numbers – watch Russian networks.

Similarly, the yet-unproven charge that Russia organized the hacking of Democratic National Committee emails and the private email account of Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta assumes that the Russian government was responsible and that it then selectively leaked the material to WikiLeaks while withholding damaging information from hacked Republican accounts.

Here the suspicions also seem to extend far beyond what the CIA actually knows. First, the Republican National Committee denies that its email accounts were hacked, and even if they were hacked, there's no evidence that they contained any information that was particularly newsworthy. Nor is there any evidence that – if the GOP accounts were hacked – they were hacked by the same group that hacked the Democratic Party emails, i.e., that the two hacks were part of the same operation.

That suspicion assumes a tightly controlled operation at the highest levels of the Russian government, but the CIA – with its intensive electronic surveillance of the Russian government and human sources inside the Kremlin – appears to lack any evidence of such a top-down operation.

Second, WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange directly denies that he received the Democratic leaked emails from the Russian government and one of his associates,

former British Ambassador Craig Murray, told the U.K. Guardian that he knows who “leaked” the Democratic emails and that there never was a “hack,” i.e. an outside electronic penetration of an email account.

Murray said, “I’ve met the person who leaked them, and they are certainly not Russian and it’s an insider. It’s a leak, not a hack; the two are different things.”

‘Real News’

But even if Assange did get the data from the Russians, it’s important to remember that nothing in the material has been identified as false. It all appears to be truthful and none of it represented an egregious violation of privacy with some salacious or sensational angle.

The only reason the emails were newsworthy at all was that the documents revealed information that the DNC and the Clinton campaign were trying to keep secret from the American voters.

For instance, some emails confirmed Sen. Bernie Sanders’s suspicions that the DNC was improperly tilting the nomination race in favor of Clinton. The DNC was lying when it denied having an institutional thumb on the scales for Clinton. Thus, even if the Russians did uncover this evidence and did leak it to WikiLeaks, they would only have been informing the American people about the DNC’s abuse of the democratic process, something Democratic voters in particular had a right to know.

And, regarding Podesta’s emails, their most important revelation related to the partial transcripts of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street banks, the contents of which Clinton had chosen to hide from the American people. So, again, if the Russians were involved in the leak, they would only have been giving to the voters information that Clinton should have released on her own. In other words, these disclosures are clearly not “fake news” – the other hysteria now sweeping Official Washington.

In the mainstream news media, there has been a clumsy effort to conflate these parallel frenzies, the leak of “real news” and the invention of “fake news.” But investigations of so-called “fake news” have revealed that these operations were run mostly by young entrepreneurs in places like Macedonia or Georgia who realized they could make advertising dollars by creating outlandish “click bait” stories that Trump partisans were particularly eager to read.

According to a New York Times investigation into one of the “fake news” sites, a college student in Tbilisi, Georgia, first tried to create a pro-Clinton “click bait” Web site but found that a pro-Trump operation was vastly more lucrative.

This and other investigations did not trace the “fake news” sites back to Russia or any other government.

So, what’s perhaps most telling about the information that the CIA has accused Russia of sharing with the American people is that it was all “real news” about newsworthy topics.

What Threat to Democracy?

So, how does giving the American people truthful and relevant information undermine American democracy, which is the claim that is reverberating throughout the mainstream media and across Official Washington?

Presumably, the thinking is that it would have been better for the American people to have been kept in the dark about these secret maneuverings by the DNC and the Clinton campaign and, by keeping the public ignorant, that would have ensured Clinton’s election, the preferred outcome of the major U.S. news media.

There’s another double standard here. For instance, when a hack of – or a leak from – a Panamanian law firm exposed the personal finances of thousands of clients, including political figures in Iceland, Ukraine, Russia and other nations, there was widespread applause across the Western media for this example of journalism at its best.

The applause was deafening despite the fact that at least one of the principal “news agencies” involved was partly funded by the U.S. government. The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), a USAID-backed non-governmental organization, also was earlier involved in efforts to destabilize and delegitimize the elected Ukrainian government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

“Corruption” allegations against Yanukovich – pushed by OCCRP – were integral to the U.S.-supported effort to organize a violent putsch that drove Yanukovich from office on Feb. 22, 2014, touching off the Ukrainian civil war and – on a global scale – the New Cold War with Russia.

Yet, in the case of the “Panama Papers” or other leaks about “corruption” in governments targeted by U.S. officials for “regime change,” there are no frenzied investigations into where the information originated. Regarding the “Panama Papers,” there was simply back-slapping for the organizations that invested time and money in analyzing the volumes of material. And there were cheers when implicated officials were punished or forced to step down.

So, why are some leaks “good” and others “bad”? Why do we hail the “Panama Papers” or OCCRP’s “corruption evidence” that damaged Yanukovich – and ask no questions about where the material came from and how it was selectively used –

yet we condemn the Democratic email leaks and undertake investigations into the source of the information?

In both the “Panama Papers” case and the “Democratic Party leaks,” the material appeared to be real. There was no evidence of disinformation or “black propaganda.” But, apparently, it’s okay to disrupt the politics of Iceland, Ukraine, Russia and other countries, but it is called a potential “act of war” – by neocon Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona – to reveal evidence of wrongdoing or excessive secrecy on the part of the Democratic Party in the United States.

Shoe on the Other Foot

Russian President Putin, while denying any Russian government attempt to tilt the election to Trump, recently commented on the American hypocrisy about interfering in other nations’ elections while complaining about alleged interference in its own or those of its allies. He described a conversation with an unnamed Western “colleague.”

Putin said, “I recently had a conversation with one of my colleagues. We touched upon our [Russian] alleged influence on some political processes abroad. I told him: ‘And what are you doing? You have been constantly interfering in our political life.’ And he replied: ‘It’s not us, it’s the NGOs’. I said: ‘Oh? But you pay them and write instructions for them.’ He said: ‘What kind of instructions?’ I said: ‘I have been reading them.’”

Whatever one thinks of Putin, he is not wrong in describing how various U.S.-funded NGOs, in the name of “democracy promotion,” seek to undermine governments that have ended up on Official Washington’s target list.

And another aspect of the hypocrisy permeating Official Washington’s belligerent rhetoric directed toward Russia: Aren’t the Democrats doing exactly what they accused Trump of planning to do if he had lost the Nov. 8 election, i.e., question the legitimacy of the results and thus undermine the faith of the American people in their democratic system?

For days, Trump’s unwillingness to accept, presumptively, the results of the election earned him front-page denunciations from many of the same mainstream newspapers and TV networks that are now trumpeting the unproven claims by the CIA that the Russians somehow influenced the election’s outcome by presenting some Democratic hidden facts to the American people.

Yet, this anti-Russian accusation not only undermines the American people’s faith in the election’s outcome but also represents a reckless last-ditch gamble to block Trump’s inauguration – or at least discredit him before he takes office – while using belligerent rhetoric that could push Russia and the United States

closer to nuclear war.

Wouldn't it be a good idea for the CIA to at least have hard evidence before the spy agency precipitated such a crisis?

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

US Intel Vets Dispute Russia Hacking Claims

As the hysteria about Russia's alleged interference in the U.S. election grows, a key mystery is why U.S. intelligence would rely on "circumstantial evidence" when it has the capability for hard evidence, say U.S. intelligence veterans.

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

MEMORANDUM

Allegations of Hacking Election Are Baseless

A *New York Times* report on Monday alluding to "overwhelming circumstantial evidence" leading the CIA to believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin "deployed computer hackers with the goal of tipping the election to Donald J. Trump" is, sadly, evidence-free. This is no surprise, because harder evidence of a technical nature points to an inside leak, not hacking – by Russians or anyone else.

Monday's *Washington Post* reports that Sen. James Lankford, R-Oklahoma, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has joined other senators in calling for a bipartisan investigation of suspected cyber-intrusion by Russia. Reading our short memo could save the Senate from endemic partisanship, expense and unnecessary delay.

In what follows, we draw on decades of senior-level experience – with emphasis on cyber-intelligence and security – to cut through uninformed, largely partisan fog. Far from hiding behind anonymity, we are proud to speak out with the hope of gaining an audience appropriate to what we merit – given our long labors in government and other areas of technology. And corny though it may sound these

days, our ethos as intelligence professionals remains, simply, to tell it like it is – without fear or favor.

We have gone through the various claims about hacking. For us, it is child's play to dismiss them. The email disclosures in question are the result of a leak, not a hack. Here's the difference between leaking and hacking:

Leak: When someone physically takes data out of an organization and gives it to some other person or organization, as Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning did.

Hack: When someone in a remote location electronically penetrates operating systems, firewalls or any other cyber-protection system and then extracts data.

All signs point to leaking, not hacking. If hacking were involved, the National Security Agency would know it – and know both sender and recipient.

In short, since leaking requires physically removing data – on a thumb drive, for example – the only way such data can be copied and removed, with no electronic trace of what has left the server, is via a physical storage device.

Awesome Technical Capabilities

Again, NSA is able to identify both the sender and recipient when hacking is involved. Thanks largely to the material released by Edward Snowden, we can provide a full picture of NSA's extensive domestic data-collection network including Upstream programs like Fairview, Stormbrew and Blarney. These include at least 30 companies in the U.S. operating the fiber networks that carry the Public Switched Telephone Network as well as the World Wide Web. This gives NSA unparalleled access to data flowing within the U.S. and data going out to the rest of the world, as well as data transiting the U.S.

In other words, any data that is passed from the servers of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) or of Hillary Rodham Clinton (HRC) – or any other server in the U.S. – is collected by the NSA. These data transfers carry destination addresses in what are called packets, which enable the transfer to be traced and followed through the network.

Packets: Emails being passed across the World Wide Web are broken down into smaller segments called packets. These packets are passed into the network to be delivered to a recipient. This means the packets need to be reassembled at the receiving end.

To accomplish this, all the packets that form a message are assigned an identifying number that enables the receiving end to collect them for reassembly. Moreover, each packet carries the originator and ultimate receiver

Internet protocol number (either IPV4 or IPV6) that enables the network to route data.

When email packets leave the U.S., the other “Five Eyes” countries (the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and the seven or eight additional countries participating with the U.S. in bulk-collection of everything on the planet would also have a record of where those email packets went after leaving the U.S.

These collection resources are extensive [see attached NSA slides [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]; they include hundreds of trace route programs that trace the path of packets going across the network and tens of thousands of hardware and software implants in switches and servers that manage the network. Any emails being extracted from one server going to another would be, at least in part, recognizable and traceable by all these resources.

The bottom line is that the NSA would know where and how any “hacked” emails from the DNC, HRC or any other servers were routed through the network. This process can sometimes require a closer look into the routing to sort out intermediate clients, but in the end sender and recipient can be traced across the network.

The various ways in which usually anonymous spokespeople for U.S. intelligence agencies are equivocating – saying things like “our best guess” or “our opinion” or “our estimate” etc. – shows that the emails alleged to have been “hacked” cannot be traced across the network. Given NSA’s extensive trace capability, we conclude that DNC and HRC servers alleged to have been hacked were, in fact, not hacked.

The evidence that should be there is absent; otherwise, it would surely be brought forward, since this could be done without any danger to sources and methods. Thus, we conclude that the emails were *leaked by an insider* – as was the case with Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning. Such an insider could be anyone in a government department or agency with access to NSA databases, or perhaps someone within the DNC.

As for the comments to the media as to what the CIA believes, the reality is that CIA is almost totally dependent on NSA for ground truth in the communications arena. Thus, it remains something of a mystery why the media is being fed strange stories about hacking that have no basis in fact. In sum, given what we know of NSA’s existing capabilities, it beggars belief that NSA would be unable to identify anyone – Russian or not – attempting to interfere in a U.S. election by hacking.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Mike Gravel, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

Larry Johnson, former CIA Intelligence Officer & former State Department Counter-Terrorism Official

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Middle East, CIA (ret.)

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The Syrian-Sarin ‘False Flag’ Lesson

Exclusive: Amid Official Washington’s desire to censor non-official news on the Internet, it’s worth remembering how the lack of mainstream skepticism almost led the U.S. into a war on Syria, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

A review of events leading to the very edge of full-blown U.S. shock-and-awe on Syria three years ago provides a case study with important lessons for new policymakers as they begin to arrive in Washington.

It is high time to expose the whys and wherefores of the almost-successful attempt to mousetrap President Barack Obama into an open attack on Syria three years ago. Little-known and still less appreciated is the last-minute intervention of Russian President Vladimir Putin as *deus ex machina* rescuing Obama from the corner into which he had let himself be painted.

Accumulating evidence offers persuasive proof that Syrian rebels supported by Turkish intelligence – not Syrian Army troops – bear responsibility for the infamous sarin nerve-gas attack killing hundreds of people on Aug. 21, 2013 in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus. The incident bears all the earmarks of a false-flag attack.

But U.S. and other “rebel-friendly” media outlets wasted no time in offering

“compelling” evidence from “social media” – which Secretary of State John Kerry described as an “extraordinary tool” – to place the onus on the Syrian government.

However, as the war juggernaut started rolling toward war, enter Putin from stage right with an offer difficult for Obama to refuse – guaranteed destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons on a U.S. ship outfitted for such purpose. This cheated Washington’s neocon mousetrap-setters out of their war on Syria. They would get back at Putin six months later by orchestrating an anti-Russian coup in Kiev.

But the play-by-play in U.S.-Russian relations in summer 2013 arguably surpasses in importance even the avoidance of an overt U.S. assault on Syria. Thus, it is important to appreciate the lessons drawn by Russian leaders from the entire experience.

Putting Cheese in the Mousetrap

So, let us recall that on Dec. 10, 2015, just over one year ago, Turkish Member of Parliament Eren Erdem testified about how Turkey’s intelligence service helped deliver sarin precursors to rebels in Syria.

The Official Story blaming Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was already collapsing – largely discredited by reports in independent media and by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh – though it remained widely accepted in the U.S. mainstream media which repeatedly cited the case as the moment when Assad crossed Obama’s “red line” against using chemical weapons and Obama had failed to back up his threat.

But Erdem took the debunking of the “official” tale to a public and official level. Based on government documents from a Turkish court, which he waved before his MP colleagues, Erdem poured ice water on the West’s long-running excited belief that Assad had “gassed his own people.”

But, alas, if you do not understand Turkish, or if you missed this story in the *Belfast Telegraph* of Dec. 14 or if you don’t read some independent Web sites or if you believe that RT publishes only Russian “propaganda,” this development may still come as a huge surprise, for Erdem’s revelations appeared in no other English-language newspaper.

So, those malnourished by “mainstream media” may be clueless about the scary reality that Obama came within inches of letting himself be mousetrapped into ordering U.S. armed forces to mount a shock-and-awe-type attack on Syria in late summer 2013.

Turkish MP Testimony

Addressing fellow members of the Turkish Parliament, Turkish MP Erdem from the opposition Republican People's Party directly confronted his government on this key issue. Waving a copy of "Criminal Case Number 2013/120," Erdem described official Turkish reports and electronic evidence documenting a smuggling operation with Turkish government complicity.

In an interview with RT four days later, Erdem said Turkish authorities had evidence of sarin gas-related shipments to anti-government rebels in Syria, and did nothing to stop them.

The General Prosecutor in the Turkish city of Adana opened a criminal case and an indictment stated "chemical weapons components" from Europe "were to be seamlessly shipped via a designated route through Turkey to militant labs in Syria."

Erdem cited evidence implicating the Turkish Minister of Justice and the Turkish Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation in the smuggling of sarin. Small wonder that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan immediately accused Erdem of "treason."

Erdem testified that the 13 suspects, who had been arrested in police raids on the plotters, were released just a week after they were indicted. The case was shut down abruptly by higher authority.

Erdem told RT that the sarin attack at Ghouta took place shortly after the criminal case was closed and that the attack probably was carried out by jihadists with sarin gas smuggled through Turkey.

Erdem's disclosures were not entirely new. More than two years before Erdem's brave actions, in a Memorandum for the President by the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity of Sept. 6, 2013, we had reported that coordination meetings had taken place just weeks before the sarin attack at a Turkish military garrison in Antakya, some 15 miles from the border with Syria.

In Antakya, senior Turkish, Qatari and U.S. intelligence officials were said to be coordinating plans with Western-sponsored rebels who were told to expect an imminent escalation in the fighting due to "a war-changing development." This, in turn, would lead to a U.S.-led bombing of Syria, and rebel commanders were ordered to prepare their forces quickly to exploit the bombing, march into Damascus, and remove the Assad government.

A year earlier, The New York Times reported that the Antakya area had become a "magnet for foreign jihadis, who are flocking into Turkey to fight holy war in

Syria.” The Times quoted a Syrian opposition member based in Antakya, saying the Turkish police were patrolling this border area “with their eyes closed.”

Kerry Dancing

It is a safe bet that Secretary of State John Kerry’s aides briefed him in timely fashion on Erdem’s revelations. This may account for why, on a visit to Moscow on Dec. 15, 2015 (four days after Erdem’s testimony), Kerry chose to repeat the meme that Assad “gassed his people; I mean, gas hasn’t been used in warfare formally for years and gas is outlawed, but Assad used it.”

Three days later, The Washington Post dutifully echoed Kerry, charging that Assad had killed “his own people with chemical weapons.” And this charge remains a staple in U.S. corporate media, where Erdem’s testimony is still nowhere to be found.

Kerry also didn’t want to admit that he had grossly misled the American people on an issue of war and peace. Just days after the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin attack at Ghouta, Kerry and his neocon allies displayed their acumen in following George W. Bush’s dictum: “You got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda.”

On Aug. 30, Kerry solemnly claimed, no fewer than 35 times, “We know” the Assad government was responsible for the sarin deaths, finally giving Kerry and the neocons their *casus belli*.

But on Aug. 31, with U.S. intelligence analysts expressing their own doubts that Assad’s forces were responsible, Obama put the brakes on the juggernaut toward war, saying he would first seek approval from Congress. Kerry, undaunted, wasted no time in lobbying Congress for war.

On Sept. 1, Kerry told ABC’s George Stephanopoulos that briefings in Congress had already begun and that “we are not going to lose this vote.” On Sept. 3, Kerry was back at it with a bravura performance before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, whose leaders showed in their own remarks the degree to which they were lusting for an attack on Syria.

The following offers a taste for Kerry’s “protest-too-much” testimony: “the Assad regime, and only, undeniably, the Assad regime, unleashed an outrageous chemical attack against its own citizens. ... In their lust to hold on to power, [they] were willing to infect the air of Damascus with a poison that killed innocent mothers and fathers and hundreds of their children, their lives all snuffed out by gas in the early morning of August 21st.

“Now, some people here and there, amazingly, have questioned the evidence of

this assault on conscience. I repeat here again today that only the most willful desire to avoid reality can assert that this did not occur as described or that the regime did not do it. It did happen, and the Assad regime did it.

“Within minutes of the attack, the social media exploded with horrific images of men and women, the elderly, and children sprawled on a hospital floor with no wounds, no blood, but all dead. Those scenes of human chaos and desperation were not contrived. They were real. No one could contrive such a scene. ...

“And as we debate, the world wonders, not whether Assad’s regime executed the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21st century – that fact I think is now beyond question – the world wonders whether the United States of America will consent through silence to standing aside while this kind of brutality is allowed to happen without consequence.”

Kerry’s added a credulity-stretching attempt to play down the role and effectiveness of Al Qaeda in Syria, and exaggerated the strength of the “moderate” rebels there. This drew unusually prompt and personal criticism from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Putin: “Kerry Lies”

Rarely does it happen that a president of a major country calls the head diplomat of a rival state a “liar,” but that is the label Russian President Putin chose for Kerry on the day after his congressional testimony. Referring to Kerry during a televised meeting of the Russian Presidential Human Rights Council on Sept. 4, Putin addressed the sarin issue in these words:

“It is simply absurd to imagine that Assad used chemical weapons, given that he is gaining ground. After all, this is a weapon of last resort.” Putin claimed, correctly, that Assad had “encircled his adversaries in some places and was finishing them off.”

Putin continued: “I watched the congressional debates. A congressman asked Mr. Kerry, ‘Is Al Qaeda present there? I’ve heard they have gained momentum.’ He replied, ‘No. I can tell you earnestly, they are not.’”

Putin continued, “The main combat unit, the so-called Al-Nusra, is an Al-Qaeda subdivision. They [the Americans] know about this. This was very unpleasant and surprising for me. After all ... we talk with them, and we assume they are decent people. But he is lying, and he knows he is lying. That is sad. ...

“We are currently focused on the fact that the U.S. Congress and Senate are discussing authorization for use of force. ... As you know, Syria is not attacking the U.S., so there is no question of self-defense; and anything else, lacking

U.N. authorization, is an act of aggression. ... we are all glued to our televisions, waiting to see if they will get the approval of Congress.”

On the following day, Sept. 5, Obama arrived in St. Petersburg for a G-20 summit, with ample reason to suspect that Putin was right about Kerry lying about the sarin attack – the President having been warned the previous week by National Intelligence Director James Clapper that there was no “slam-dunk” evidence against the Assad regime. So, Obama agreed to Putin’s offer to get Syria to surrender its chemical weapons for destruction, and the war fever began to abate.

Curiously, Kerry himself was kept in the dark about the Putin-Obama agreement and was still making the case for war on Sept. 9. At the very end of a press conference that day in London, Kerry was asked whether there was anything Assad could do to prevent a U.S. attack. Kerry answered that Assad could give up every one of his chemical weapons, but “he isn’t about to do that; it can’t be done.”

Still later on Sept. 9, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Syrian counterpart announced that Syria had agreed to allow all its chemical weapons to be removed and destroyed. As soon as Kerry arrived back in Washington, he was sent off to Geneva to sign the deal that Obama had cut directly with Putin. (All Syria’s chemical weapons have now been destroyed.)

Yet, two weeks later, Obama was still reading from the neocon teleprompter. In his formal address to the UN General Assembly on Sept. 24, 2013, he declared, “It’s an insult to human reason and to the legitimacy of this institution to suggest that anyone other than the [Syrian] regime carried out this [sarin] attack.”

More Candor With Goldberg

Earlier this year, though, Obama was bragging to his informal biographer, Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic*, about having thwarted planning for open war on Syria, even though that required disregarding the advice of virtually all his foreign-policy advisers.

One gem fished out by Goldberg was Obama’s admission that DNI Clapper had warned him in late August (a week before he went to St. Petersburg and a month before his U.N. speech) that the evidence pinning blame on Damascus for the sarin attack was hardly airtight.

Goldberg wrote that Clapper interrupted the President’s morning intelligence briefing “to make clear that the intelligence on Syria’s use of sarin gas, while robust, was not a ‘slam dunk.’” Clapper chose his words carefully, echoing the language that CIA Director George Tenet used to falsely assure President George

W. Bush that the case could be made to convince the American people that Iraq was hiding WMDs.

Even though Obama continued to dissemble and the mainstream U.S. news media has continued to treat Syria's "guilt" in the sarin attack as "flat fact," the neocons did not get their war on Syria. I describe an unusually up-front-and-personal experience of their chagrin under the subtitle "Morose at CNN" in "How War on Syria Lost Its Way."

Nor did neocon disappointment subside in subsequent years. Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tennessee, Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, has remained among the most outspoken critics of Obama's decision to cancel the attack on Syria in 2013.

On Dec. 3, 2014, Corker complained that, while the U.S. military was poised to launch a "very targeted, very brief" operation against the Syrian government for using chemical weapons, Obama called off the attack at the last minute.

Corker's criticism was scathing: "I think the worst moment in U.S. foreign policy since I've been here, as far as signaling to the world where we were as a nation, was August a year ago when we had a 10-hour operation that was getting ready to take place in Syria but it didn't happen. ... In essence and – I'm sorry to be slightly rhetorical – we jumped in Putin's lap."

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. A CIA analyst for 27 years, he has experience recognizing false-flag attacks when he sees them. Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, which he co-founded, has published several memoranda on the sarin attack.
