

# Trump's Iran Debacle: What Will Germany and Russia Do?

It falls to Germany to save the Iran nuclear deal and try to prevent a devastating new Middle East War, argues Daniel Lazare.

By **Daniel Lazare** *Special to Consortium News*



In the wake of Donald Trump's thoroughly unsurprising decision to scuttle the Iran nuclear accord, two countries that may be most in the hot seat are Germany and Russia. The big question now is whether their mutual discomfort leads them to find common cause.

Angela Merkel's plight is especially painful. Not only are Germany's extensive business links with Iran at risk thanks to Trump's decision to re-apply sanctions, but the German chancellor's political fortunes have taken a beating thanks to years of American incompetence in the Middle East.

In Libya, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton devoted two weeks during the 2011 Arab Spring to persuading Qatar to join the anti-Gaddafi coalition, only to stand by and watch as the oil-rich emirate seized the opportunity to distribute some \$400 million to murderous Salafist rebels spreading anarchy from one end of the country to the other. The result was a failed state that soon turned into a jumping-off point for hundreds of thousands of desperate refugees making their way to Germany and other parts of the European Union.

Remarkably, Clinton did the same thing a few months later in Syria by teaming up with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Arab gulf states to fund what would soon become a full-scale Islamist invasion. The upshot: more murder and mayhem, more refugees, and more terrorism when ISIS – funded by the Saudis and Qataris according to no less an authority than Clinton herself – decided to extend its jihad to Paris, Brussels, Nice, Manchester, Barcelona, and Berlin starting in November 2015. As if that weren't enough, Washington irritated its German partners by opposing the Nord Stream II natural gas pipeline, a Russo-German project headed by ex-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and then, under Trump, by pulling out of the Paris climate accords last June.

## Untutored Ambassador

A bruised and battered Merkel thus saw her share of the vote shrink by more than twenty percent in last September's German federal

election while the anti-immigrant Alternative für Deutschland saw its portion

more than double. Now, Trump's decision to dump the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the Iran nuclear agreement is formally known, is making matters much, much worse. First, Israel took advantage of the move to launch its biggest attack on Syria since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, raising prospects that Middle East chaos may be poised for yet another upsurge. Then US Ambassador Richard Grenell showed what America really thinks of its German partners by tweeting: "As @realDonaldTrump said, US sanctions will target critical sectors of Iran's economy. German companies doing business in Iran should wind down operations immediately."

Grenell, a former Fox News commentator, sounded like an all-too-typical American boss barking an order at an unpaid intern. Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn described the tweet as an "impertinence" while Andrea Nahles, leader of the center-left German Social Democrats, said: "It's not my task to teach people about the fine art of diplomacy, especially not the US ambassador. But he does appear to need some tutoring."

Quite right. But Germany is not the only one feeling the pain – Russia is too. It is allied with Iran in support of Syria's embattled president Bashar al-Assad, yet has somehow managed to maintain good relations with Israel. This is why Putin invited Benjamin Netanyahu to be his personal guest at this week's May 9 Victory Day celebrations in Moscow where the Israeli prime minister joined Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in laying a wreath on the Soviet Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. When Putin paid tribute to the Soviet troops "who saved Europe and the world from slavery, from the horrors of the Holocaust," by defeating Nazi Germany (quote begins at 2:00), there was no doubt as to whom he was addressing.

But the celebration also featured a traditional Red Square military parade featuring not only unmanned robo-tanks and Sukhoi Su-57 stealth fighters, but mobile batteries of anti-aircraft missiles. Less than twelve hours later, Netanyahu showed his thanks by destroying at least five Russian-made anti-aircraft batteries as part of the assault on Syria. According to the Israeli military, Israel notified Russia of the impending attack via "deconfliction" procedures in place since September 2015 – which means that Russia more or less assented to the destruction of its own defense systems.

### **It's Up to Germany**

This can't go on, especially with Israel intervening ever more heavily on the side of pro-Al Qaeda rebels whom Russia, Iran, and Syria are trying to repel. The more the battle intensifies, the more impossible Putin's position will become.

The man needs back-up, but from where? The answer lies in the other signatories to the JCPOA – China, the UK, France, and Germany. But the first is preoccupied with events in the Far East, the second is in political disarray, while the third is a joke thanks to the preening and arrogant Emmanuel Macron. That leaves Germany. If it provided Russia with even a modicum of support, the upshot could be a major shift in the way the deadly game of Middle East politics is played.

Germany has real clout with regard to the Jewish state. It is Israel's biggest trading partner in Europe and, after the US, its second largest trading partner overall. It is an important cultural and scientific partner, while Berlin, in one of history's more delectable ironies, is now home to one of Israel's largest expatriate communities, some 15,000 Jews and Arabs who find life in the German capital freer and more vibrant than back home and, as a consequence, have peppered it with Hebrew-language kindergartens, a Hebrew library, a Hebrew literary magazine, a Hanukkah market, and Iranian-Israeli techno parties.

The same goes for Germany and Iran. As Gary Leupp recently pointed out in *Counterpunch*, Germany comprises sixty percent of EU investment in the Islamic state where it sells machinery, metals, chemicals, and agricultural products. With Daimler recently signing an agreement with Iranian Khodro to produce Mercedes-Benz motor vehicles, its investments are currently increasing at a rate of around about twenty-five percent per year.

Amid inflation, a currency crisis, and a growing strike wave, Iran is grateful for such business and desperate for more. So when Germany talks, it listens. Syria, much of which resembles postwar Berlin after a half-dozen years of imperialist assault, would listen as well if Germany gave it half a chance. Indeed, it would be so grateful for the slightest olive branch that Damascenes would no doubt take to the streets in celebration.

### **Walking on *Eierschalen***

So a joint Russo-German diplomatic offensive could provide the basis for a genuine realignment. Needless to say, there are a thousand and one reasons why this won't occur. Germany walks on eggshells when it comes to Israel for obvious historical reasons and is therefore reluctant to do anything that might anger the Jewish state. It routinely defers to the US, which midwived the German Federal Republic in 1949 and provided it with a veneer of political legitimacy in the ensuing decades. Public intellectuals like Jürgen Habermas have made careers out of arguing that Germany's future lies in deeper and deeper integration with the liberal west, while NATO and the EU insure a deepening western orientation as well.

If Germany were to turn in the other direction, the protests would be deafening not only in Washington, Paris, and London, but in Berlin. They would be even more so in Poland, the Ukraine, and the Baltics where local nationalists, many leaning in an increasingly fascist direction, have come to rely on unbroken western support.

It would be a dangerous leap into the unknown on the part of a country that couldn't be more risk averse. But Germany may have no choice. Trump is nuts, American power is receding more rapidly than anyone would have thought possible two or three years ago, while western liberalism is crumbling as well. Hardliners are in control in Washington where Republicans and Democrats compete to see who can be more obsequious to Israel and more hostile to all things Russian. The same goes for Tel Aviv and Tehran where, thanks to Trump, the hardliners are equally in the saddle.

If there are two countries that know what can happen when the crazies are in control, it's Russia and Germany. But now that history has placed them in the same boat as it approaches the cataracts, Putin, for one, is rowing madly. Will Merkel lend a hand with the oars?

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## Erasing Obama's Iran Success

The nihilism of modern American politics extends globally with one side seeking to destroy any positive legacy of the other, as the Trump administration continues its drive to sabotage President Obama's successful Iran nuclear accord, reports ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Those wishing to kill the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement that restricts Iran's nuclear program, have never given up. The agreement's ever-lengthening successful record, now more than two years old, of keeping closed all possible pathways to an Iranian nuclear weapon ought to have discouraged would-be deal-slayers. But the slayers got a new lease on life with

the election of Donald Trump, who, as part of his program of opposing whatever Barack Obama favored and destroying whatever he accomplished, has consistently berated the JCPOA.

The themes that the agreement's opponents push are now familiar. One of those themes is that the Obama administration was over-eager to get the agreement and consequently gave up the store to conclude the accord. This argument never made sense, given the terms of the JCPOA. The asymmetries in the agreement go against the Iranians, who came under a more intrusive nuclear inspection arrangement than any other country has ever willingly accepted, and who had to fulfill almost all of their obligations to break down and set back their nuclear program before gaining an ounce of additional sanctions relief. But the argument has had the attraction for the opponents of not being directly disprovable as far as any mindset of former officials is concerned, and of jibing with the opponents' further theme of a mythical "better deal" that supposedly was there for the taking.

An additional theme from the opponents has been that the JCPOA fails to address other Iranian policies and actions that have ritualistically come to be labeled as nefarious, malign, destabilizing behavior (NMDB). This argument hasn't made sense either, given that it was clear from the outset of negotiations that no agreement restricting Iran's nuclear program would be possible if the parties negotiating the agreement dumped onto the table their other grievances against each other. Any such futile expansion of the negotiating agenda would have meant that the Iranian nuclear program would have advanced ever closer to the capability of making a bomb *and* there still would have been the NMDB.

Nonetheless, the theme has been a favorite of opponents because it distracts attention from the success of the JCPOA in preventing an Iranian nuke, because there always will be some sort of objectionable Iranian action that can be pointed out, and because the NMDB mantra has now been chanted so much that it has come to be accepted as an unquestioned given.

Josh Meyer recently offered a variant on these themes with an extended [article](#) in *Politico* under the tantalizing title, "The secret backstory of how Obama let Hezbollah off the hook". The attention-getting theme that the author pushes is that a task force of the Drug Enforcement Administration investigating drug trafficking and other criminal activity of Lebanese Hezbollah was stymied by "the White House's desire for a nuclear deal with Iran". Unsurprisingly, this theme has been replayed by the usual players dedicated to bashing the JCPOA or anything Obama-related, such as the *Wall Street Journal* [editorial writers](#). Some [Republicans in Congress](#) and even [Eric Trump](#) have echoed the theme.

The 13,000-word article aims to overwhelm with detail. Through the sheer volume

of leads, tips, suspicions, and genuine facts, the reader gets the impression of a thoroughly reported piece. And Meyer clearly put a lot of work into it. But as Erik Wemple of the *Washington Post* points out in an [article](#) about the article, Meyer never produces any direct evidence that the White House intentionally impeded the task force's work, much less that any such interference had to do with the impending nuclear agreement. After wading through all the detail, the careful reader can see that the attention-getting thesis about the Obama administration supposedly sacrificing drug and crime enforcement on the altar of the nuclear agreement rests on suspicion and innuendo. It rests on statements such as that some decisions about the Hezbollah case "might have been influenced" by an inter-agency group's awareness of the nuclear negotiations—meaning that, as Wemple notes, the decisions just as easily might not have been influenced by such awareness.

There is ample evidence that the Obama administration took numerous tough sanctions and law enforcement actions against Hezbollah, both before and after conclusion of the JCPOA. Meyer includes in his article—and give Meyer credit for this inclusion—statements by former Obama administration officials alluding to those actions. The very separation of the nuclear file from other grievances by or against Iran—which, as noted above, was essential to concluding any nuclear agreement at all—implied that there would *not* be any moratorium on enforcement actions against Iran's Lebanese ally Hezbollah.

Meyer's piece suffers from a sourcing problem in that it relies heavily on just two sources who currently are employed by, or affiliated with, organizations in the forefront of opposing the JCPOA. One of those sources, David Asher, is on an advisory board of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, which has become mission control for undermining and trying to kill the nuclear agreement.

Whether or not such institutional connections affected what was told to Meyer, the account of a task force within DEA that felt frustrated that the rest of the government did not run fast and run automatically with whatever case it was building has the familiar ring of something that happens regularly, and quite properly and understandably, inside government. Such happening need not have anything to do with White House interference or with any pending international agreement such as the JCPOA. When a team of officials works hard on a project—as this team in DEA that was investigating some of Hezbollah's activities undoubtedly did—its members naturally will feel frustrated by any inter-agency review that keeps the government from acting fully and immediately on whatever the team came up with (by, say, quickly filing a criminal indictment in federal court). Such review is vital. Typically there are not just one but several important national interests and equities that need to be considered, and that go beyond what the more narrowly focused team members would have had in

mind.

In the case of Hezbollah and drug-running, those other considerations would have included such things as the possibility of violent responses, the cost of possibly losing sources of information on the group being investigated, and the legal soundness of any criminal case brought to court. Some of these considerations get misleadingly presented in Meyer's article as if they were part of some Obama administration effort to put brakes on legal actions against Hezbollah for the sake of preserving the nuclear agreement. For example, former counterterrorism adviser Lisa Monaco is said to have "expressed concerns about using RICO [Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act] laws against top Hezbollah leaders and about the possibility of reprisals". As the *Post's* Wemple observes, " 'Expressing concerns' about certain law enforcement strategies may have been Monaco's way of, like, using her governmental experience to sharpen U.S. policy, rather than working as the cog in an alleged plot to take it easy on Hezbollah."

Beyond the multiple severe weaknesses in Meyer's argument about what the Obama administration did or did not do are two important pieces of context that he never addresses. One concerns just what difference a more aggressive campaign against Hezbollah during the period in question, even if it were possible, would have made. Meyer makes it sound as if doing or not doing everything that this one task force in DEA wanted to do was the difference between crippling or not crippling a grave security threat. In an [interview on NPR](#), Meyer asserted that the Obama administration "did allow a group that was a regionally focused militia-slash-political organization with a terrorist wing to become a much more wealthy global criminal organization that has a lot of money that can now be used to bankroll terrorist and military actions around the world." No, it didn't. Even if one were to believe everything that Meyer's piece insinuates about an alleged White House obstructionist operation motivated by nuclear negotiations, this would not have made Hezbollah "a much more wealthy" organization, much less have made it more likely to conduct terrorist and military actions "around the world".

Hezbollah has been in existence for more than three decades. During that time it has grown into a strong and multifaceted organization, including being recognized as a major political movement, with seats in the Lebanese parliament and portfolios in the Lebanese government. Money-making criminal operations have long been a part of Hezbollah's activity, and investigations and legal action—through several U.S. administrations—have long been a part of the U.S. response to that activity. What one disgruntled team in DEA wanted to do during one administration was a minor episode in this story, not the make-or-break development that Meyer portrays it as.

Another piece of context applies to the whole theme, of which Meyer's article is one manifestation, about the Obama administration supposedly drooling over a prospective nuclear agreement with Iran and giving it priority over everything else. It wasn't Obama who gave the specter of an Iranian nuclear weapon overriding priority. It was other people who did that, and especially people who today lead the charge for aggressive confrontation with Iran and for killing the JCPOA. Well before the negotiations that would lead to the JCPOA ever began, the rallying cry of these forces was that an Iranian nuclear weapon would be one of the gravest dangers the United States ever faced. During the 2012 presidential campaign, Republican candidate Mitt Romney identified this possibility as the single most serious security threat against the United States. Most prominent among the alarmists was Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who made sure the whole world would understand his dumbed-down message by displaying a cartoon bomb before the United Nations General Assembly. It was only after the JCPOA closed all possible avenues to an Iranian nuclear weapon—and drained Netanyahu's Looney Tunes bomb in the process—that we started hearing from the same forces more about how the JCPOA supposedly is bad because it doesn't address other nefarious Iran-related activity. Activity such as drug-running by Hezbollah.

Imagine that everything Meyer's piece says or implies were true. Imagine that the Obama administration really did see a choice between getting the JCPOA and cracking down on Hezbollah's criminal activity. And imagine that the Obama administration said "yes" to everything that gung-ho team in DEA may have wanted to do. Then presumably the administration also would have to say, "Well, yes, we did have a chance to negotiate an agreement that would prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon, but we thought a drug bust was more important." How would the alarmists, who had been ringing the alarm bell so long and hard about an Iranian nuclear weapon, react to that? We can be confident the reaction would not be to express compliments to Mr. Obama.

The gross inconsistency of those opposing the JCPOA reflects how their real objectives have little to do with the terms of the agreement or how it was negotiated. Their objectives have more to do with not wanting anyone to have any agreement with Iran on anything (Netanyahu's objective, while he portrays Iran as the sole source of everything bad in the Middle East), or about staying in step with American supporters of Netanyahu's government, or about not wanting any of Barack Obama's accomplishments to survive.

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# Israeli-Saudi Tandem Adjusts to Syria Loss

Facing defeat in the proxy war in Syria, the Israeli-Saudi tandem is planning a new front against Hezbollah, presaged by Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri's sudden resignation, as ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke explains.

By Alastair Crooke

It seems that matters are coming to a head in the Middle East. For many states, the coming period will likely prove to be the moment in which they determine their futures – as well as that for the region as a whole.

The immediate peg for “crunch time” is Russia's fast-track proposal of a conference to be held in Sochi, with the near-full kaleidoscope of Syrian opposition invited, which, if all goes as planned, might mean 1,000 delegates arriving in Sochi as soon as Nov. 18.

The Syrian government has agreed to attend. Of course, when one hears of attendance in these numbers, it suggests that this is not intended as a “sleeves rolled-up” working session, but rather as a meeting in which Russian thoughts will be mooted on the constitution, the system of government, and the place of “minorities” – with a chaser that Russia wants fresh elections pretty darned quick: which is to say, in six months' time. In short, this is to be the “last chance saloon” for opposition figures: come aboard now, or be shut out, in the cold.

This initiative has plenty of push behind it, including President Putin's personal endorsement, but no guarantee of success. Both Iran and Turkey (the co-guarantors of Astana) privately may have reservations, not knowing precisely what Moscow might unveil. Iran is insistent on Syria retaining a strong centralized government, and Turkey is likely to worry about whether the Kurds might receive too much from Moscow; it will also have reservations about sitting down with the YPD (Syrian Kurds), which it views to be little more than a re-branded PKK, which Turkey regards as a terrorist organization. If Turkey does pull out, it will take an important slice of the opposition with it.

Critical moments in history, however, do have a habit of proving to be less critical than first imagined, but this one effectively marks the beginning of the winding up process of the Syrian war and of the 20-year “New Middle East” project (as devised by the U.S. and Israeli governments). How each state responds, will determine the Middle East landscape for the next years.

## **Military Mop-up**

Late last week, the Syrian army took the rest of Deir Ezzor city, and with it its rear now secure, the Syrian army is free to continue the 30 or so kilometers to reach Abu Kamal (al-Bukamal) – the last ISIS urban outpost – and the vital border crossing on the Euphrates with Iraq. It is estimated that there may be 3,500 Da'esh (another name for the Islamic State or ISIS) in Abu Kamal. But Abu Kamal's "twin" (on the Iraqi side of the border), al-Qaim, was taken by the Iraqi government's PMU militia forces on Friday. The Iraqi forces are now clearing the city of its estimated 1,500 Da'esh fighters.

The Syrian army, backed up by several thousand recently injected Hezbollah forces, is poised to enter Abu Kamal in the coming days from two directions – and from the south, a co-ordinated thrust north up and into Abu Kamal by the Iraqi Hash'd a- Sha'abi (PMU) militia, will form a pincer.

American-supported SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), however, are also trying to reach Abu Kamal from the east (the U.S., pressured by Israel, would like to seal and close the border crossing). U.S. allied forces can move more quickly, as U.S. officers are seeking to bribe local tribal leaders who formerly had sworn allegiance to ISIS (with Saudi money), to switch sides, or at least to allow the SDF forces to advance unhindered by ISIS (as happened in the environs of Deir Ezzor).

In short, the military outcome in Syria is done (after six years of war), and now comes the political bargaining. How this plays out will determine the relative strengths of the forces that will shape the Middle East in the coming years. The outcome will likely see whether Turkey can be bullied back towards NATO (by threats such as that by General Petr Pavel, head of NATO's military committee, warning of "consequences" for Turkey's attempts to buy Russian air defenses), or whether Turkey's determination to limit Kurdish aspirations will see Turkey position itself alongside Iran and Iraq (who share a common interest).

Turkey's role in Idlib, in overseeing the de-escalation zone there, remains opaque. Effectively, its forces are positioned more to control the Afrin Kurdish "canton" (rather than monitor the Idlib de-escalation zone). It is possible that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is hoping to use Turkish troops to carve out a buffer zone along the Turkish-Syrian border – in contravention to the Astana understandings. If so, this will place him at odds with both Moscow and Damascus (but will not necessarily imply a return to the NATO camp, either).

## **Syria's Future**

The bargaining at Sochi will also make clearer whether Syria will be a strong centralized state (as Iran prefers), or a looser federal state as America (and perhaps Russia) would prefer. Sochi will be something of a litmus for the extent to which American influence can shape outcomes in today's Middle East. At present, it looks as if there is co-ordination between Moscow and Washington for a speedy political settlement in Syria, a U.S. declaration of victory over ISIS, Syrian elections, and an American exit from the Syrian theatre.

The outcome of the conference will also perhaps clarify whether the Syrian Kurds finally will remain with the U.S. CentCom project for retaining a permanent U.S. presence in northeast Syria (as Israel wants), or whether the Syrian Kurds will cut a deal with Damascus (after witnessing the crushing of the Barzani Kurdish independence project by neighboring powers).

If the latter occurs, the argument for retaining a longer-term U.S. presence in northeast Syria would lose force. The Saudis will have either to accept defeat in Syria, or act the party-pooper (by trying to re-ignite the remaining proxy forces in Idlib) – but, for that, the kingdom would need Turkey's compliance, and that may not be forthcoming.

Iraq too, irked by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's comments suggesting that the PMU are Iranian – and must “go home” – has already shown signs of re-orientating towards Russia. (It has recently signed an expansive energy and economic protocol with Russia – after having reclaimed control of its borders and of Iraq's energy resources – and is procuring Russian arms). Evidence of Iraq's close connections with Syria, Turkey and Iran was very manifest in the quick execution of the put-down to the Kurdish independence gambit.

But the state facing the biggest dilemma in respect to the Syrian outcome is Israel. Alex Fishman, the doyen of Israeli defense columnists, has written that Israel simply has failed to adjust to strategic change, and is locked in a narrow “cold war” mentality:

“The Syrians fire rockets at open areas: Israel destroys Syrian cannons in response; the Iranians threaten to deploy Shiite forces in Syria: Israel announces ‘red lines’ and threatens a military conflict; Fatah and Hamas hold futile talks on a unity government: the prime minister declares Israel is suspending talks with the Palestinians – and everyone here applauds the security and political echelons: – ‘there, we showed them the meaning of deterrence’, [the Israeli leadership repeats].

“But what we are seeing here is a provincial defense policy, a false representation of a leadership that barely sees beyond the tip of its nose, and is busy putting out fires day and night.

“It’s a leadership that sees national security through a narrow regional viewpoint. It’s as if everything beyond Hezbollah, Hamas and Iran doesn’t exist. It’s as if the world around us hasn’t changed in the past decades, and we are stuck in the era of aggressive solutions in the form of reward and punishment as the main political-security activity. The current political-security echelon isn’t solving problems, isn’t dealing with problems, but simply postponing them, passing them on to the next generation”

### **Missing the Strategic Picture**

What Fishman is pointing to is profound: Israel has gained some tactical victories in the neighborhood (i.e. over the Palestinians generally, and in weakening Hamas), but it has lost sight of the wider strategic picture. In effect, Israel has lost its ability to dominate the region. It had wanted a weakened and fragmented Syria; it had wanted a Hezbollah mired in the Syrian mud, and an Iran circumscribed by Sunni sectarian antipathy towards the Shi’a generally. It is unlikely to get any of these.

Rather, Israel finds *itself being deterred* (rather than doing the deterring) by the knowledge that it cannot now overturn its strategic weakness (i.e. risk a three-front war) – unless, and only if, America will fully enter into any conflict, in support of Israel. And this is what worries the security and intelligence echelon: Would America now contemplate a decisive intervention on behalf of Israel – unless the latter’s very survival was at risk?

In 2006, Israeli officials recall, the U.S. did not enter Israel’s war against Hizbullah in Lebanon, and after 33 days, it was Israel that sought a ceasefire.

Fishman is right too that attacking Syrian factories and radar positions “out of old habit” solves nothing. It may be sold to the Israeli public as “deterrence,” but rather it is playing with fire. Syria has started to fire back with aged surface-to-air missiles (S200s) at Israeli aircraft. These missiles may not have hit an Israeli jet yet, and maybe were not even intended so to do. The Syrian message however, is clear: these missiles may be old, but they have a longer range than the newer S300: Potentially, their range is sufficient to reach Ben Gurion Airport outside Tel Aviv.

Are the Israelis sure that Syria and Hezbollah don’t have more modern missiles? Are they certain that Iran or Russia will not provide them such? The Russian defense minister was very angry on his visit to Tel Aviv to have been faced with an Israeli retaliatory air attack on a Syrian radar and missile position – as a welcome gift on landing in Israel. To his protests, his Israeli counterpart, Defense Minister Lieberman condescendingly said that Israel needed nobody’s advice in respect to Israel’s security. General Sergey Shoygu reportedly was not

amused.

Can Israel come to terms with its new strategic situation? It seems not. Ibrahim Karagul, a Turkish political commentator and an authoritative voice of President Erdogan, writing in *Yeni Safak*, notes that “the foundations of a new disintegration [and] division are being laid in our region. Saudi Arabia’s ‘We are switching to moderate Islam’ announcement contains a dangerous game. The U.S.-Israel axis is forming a new regional front line.”

Karagul continues: “We have been watching the strange developments in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Israel and the U.S. for some time now. There is a new situation in the region, which we know is [principally aimed] against Iran; but has recently taken an open anti-Turkey state, aimed at limiting Turkey’s influence in the region ... You will see, the ‘moderate Islam’ announcement will be immediately followed by a sudden and unexpected strengthening of Arab nationalism. This wave will not differentiate between Shiite or Sunni Arabs, but it will isolate the Muslim Arab world from the entire Muslim world.

“This separation will be felt most by the Shiite Arabs in Iraq. With this new block, Iraq and Iran are going to stage a new power showdown [i.e. will react forcefully to counter it]. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi’s future in power is also most likely going to [become contingent on the outcome to] this showdown.”

### **An American ‘Buy-in’**

To give this project American “buy-in,” Israel and Saudi Arabia are focusing it on Lebanese Hezbollah, which the U.S. has declared to be a terrorist entity though the movement was part of Lebanon’s government, which was headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri until he ominously resigned today in an announcement made in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (Hariri is a dual Saudi-Lebanese national.)

Saudi State Minister for Gulf Affairs Thamer al-Sabhan (in Beirut last week) called for “toppling Hezbollah” and promised “astonishing” developments in “the coming days. Those who believe that my tweets are a personal stance, are delusional ... the coming developments will definitely be astonishing.”

Al-Sabhan added that the kingdom’s escalation against Hezbollah could take several forms that would “definitely affect Lebanon. Politically, it might target the government’s relations with the world. At the economic and financial levels, it could target commercial exchange and funds, and militarily it might involve the possibility of a strike on Hizbullah by the U.S.-led coalition, which labels Hizbullah a terrorist organization.” (Comment: this latter point

probably was made more in hope, than in expectation. Europe and the U.S. set considerable store on maintaining Lebanon as stable).

Karagul reflects further on this U.S.-Gulf-Israeli initiative:

“The moderate Islam project was tried the most in Turkey. We always said this is ‘American Islam’ and opposed it. The February 28 military intervention is the product of such a project. It was implemented by the U.S./Israel extreme right-wing and their partners on the inside. The Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) is the product of such a project, and the Dec. 17/25 and July 15 attacks were made for this very reason. They were all aimed at trapping Turkey within the U.S./Israel axis.

“But Turkey’s local and national resistance has overcome them all. Now they are burdening Saudi Arabia with the same mission. That is how they are making it appear. I do not think that it is possible for Saudi Arabia to undertake such a mission. This is impossible both in terms of the regime’s character and its social structure. This is impossible because of the ‘Israel/U.S. sauce’.

“The discourse of making the switch to moderate Islam will cause serious confusion in the Saudi administration and grave social reactions. The actual conflict is going to take place within Saudi Arabia. Also, the Riyadh administration has no chance of exporting something to the region or setting an example.

“Especially once it is further revealed that the project is security-based, that a new front line has been formed, that it is all planned by the U.S.-Israel, it will result in a fiasco. This project is suicide for Saudi Arabia, it is a destruction plan; it is a plan that will destroy it unless it comes to its senses.”

Karagul makes the point well: the attempt to make Islam in the Christian “Westphalian” image has a disastrous history. The metaphysics of Islam are not those of Christianity. And Saudi Arabia cannot be made “moderate” by Mohammad bin Salman just ordering it. It would entail a veritable cultural revolution to shift the basis of the kingdom, away from the rigors of Wahhabism to some secularized Islam.

### **More War?**

Where is this taking the Middle East: to conflict? Maybe. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not noted for his audacity: he is noted more for rhetoric which often has proved empty; and Israeli security officials are being cautious, but both sides *are* preparing against the possibility of what Karagul calls a “great power showdown.” It looks, though – from this and other Turkish

statements – as if Turkey will be with Iran and Iraq, and standing against America and Saudi Arabia.

And President Trump? He is wholly (and understandably) preoccupied with the low-intensity war being waged against him at home. He probably tells Netanyahu whatever it is that might advance his domestic battles (in Congress, where Netanyahu has influence). If Bibi wants a fiery speech at the U.N. berating Iran, then, why not? Trump can then call on the trifecta of White House generals to “fix it” (just as he did with JCPOA, passing it to Congress “to fix”), knowing that the generals do not want a war with Iran.

The danger is a “black swan.” What happens if Israel goes on attacking the Syrian army and industrial premises in Syria (which is happening almost daily) – and Syria *does* shoot down an Israeli jet?

**Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.**

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## Recalling Japan’s ‘Comfort Women’ Rapes

Japan’s current nationalist leadership downplays and denies many crimes from World War II, but a global movement continues to press for a recognition of the mass rapes and murders of so-called “comfort women,” reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

On Sept. 22, a global campaign demanding justice and reparations for the Japanese military’s “Comfort Women” unveiled a bronze statue in San Francisco memorializing the Korean and other Asian women who were sexually abused by Japan’s soldiers during World War II.

The statue, erected by a coalition of local groups led by the Comfort Women Justice Coalition, shows three young women, holding hands in a circle, facing outwards, as an old woman looks on.

I spoke with retired San Francisco Superior Court Judges Lillian K. Sing and Julie Tang, leaders of the movement of the Comfort Women Justice Coalition, and Flashpoints correspondent K.J. Noh, about the war crime in which as many as 400,000 women were mass raped and often murdered by the Japanese.

Dennis Bernstein: K.J., lay out a brief background on the so-called “comfort

women.” When did this mass kidnapping and rape take place...and basically who was responsible?

K.J. Noh: The term “Comfort Women” is a euphemism for the young women and girls forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military between 1932 and 1945 throughout the Asia Pacific region of Japan’s colonial “co-prosperity sphere.”

It’s estimated that approximately between 200,000-400,000 women and girls, some as young as thirteen, were forced into an industrialized system of rape, “servicing” up to 60 soldiers a day. Scholars estimate that this resulted in a fatality rate of up to 90%. The system has been described as “considered unprecedented in its cruelty and magnitude,” and survivors have referred to “comfort stations” as “a living hell”, “a slaughter house”.

The Empire of Japan was a theocratic military dictatorship at that time, and its military government systematically planned, implemented, trafficked, transported, enslaved and, towards the end of war, slaughtered these women. This crime against humanity has still not been officially acknowledged by the Japanese government.

Dennis Bernstein: The prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, apparently does not believe that these World War II Comfort Women deserve anything.

K.J. Noh: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is the grandson of Japan’s postwar Prime Minister, Nobusuke Kishi, a class-A war criminal, and is the figurehead of the hyper-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party faction that would like to see Japan restored as a global imperial superpower. Because of this, Abe has made Japanese historical denialism official government policy, launching a massive global PR campaign to “correct” the world’s understanding of Japan’s colonial and WWII history.

Abe has also come out with some very bellicose statements against North Korea and is a big proponent of military action. Recently he wrote an op-ed for The New York Times in which he misrepresented the history of nuclear negotiations with North Korea, arguing that diplomacy will not work. He writes that, “Prioritizing diplomacy and emphasizing the importance of dialogue will not work with North Korea.”

In order to back up his argument, he lies about the breakdown of the 1994 agreed framework, which effectively stopped the North Korean nuclear program until 2002. He fails to mention that the framework contained promises to normalize relations with North Korea, to remove trade barriers, and to enact a non-aggression pact, and that none of these conditions were upheld by the US. He glosses this over and then makes the argument that there is no possibility of



dialogue.

Interestingly, in this op-ed, Abe mentions the abduction of a young Japanese girl by the North Koreans as proof of how immoral and unethical they are. What is interesting is that the North Koreans have acknowledged abducting between thirteen and seventeen Japanese citizens and condemned those actions, although they have not given formal reparations yet. But to this day, Abe has not even acknowledged the abduction of between 200,000 and 400,000 young women and girls from Korea and the colonies.

Dennis Bernstein: Last week a memorial was unveiled in San Francisco to the Comfort Women, over the vehement opposition of the Japanese government.

Lillian Sing: I was born in Shanghai, China, where over 200,000 girls and women were kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery. As an Asian-American woman, I will not be silenced. How can I not get involved, when my sisters were kidnapped and raped over and over again—sometimes over eighty times a day?! What is most heinous is that the Japanese government has refused to recognize their role in these crimes. Justice delayed is justice denied. Over 400,000 Comfort Women were kidnapped, and now there are only a few dozen left.

Julie Tang: I grew up learning about the Japanese atrocities committed during World War II. In 1991 these now elderly women told the world what had happened to them. But it was really the Japanese government denial of what had happened that drove me to become involved. The Japanese government has done everything it could to prevent this memorial from being built, but we have been able to overcome all the hurdles.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you describe the multiple struggles you faced getting this memorial constructed?

Lillian Sing: Japan is very afraid of the truth. It even went before the US Supreme Court to block a memorial in Glendale of a little girl sitting on a chair. It feared that that memorial would interfere with Japanese/US relations. Now the mayor of Osaka has threatened to break off its sister-city relationship with San Francisco if a memorial is erected there. The Japanese government is now accusing China of being behind this, of trying to drive a wedge between South Korea and Japan over this memorial.

Julie Tang: I think it is extremely insulting to the victims for the Japanese leadership to be blaming everybody but themselves. First it claimed that these women were willing prostitutes. Now they are pointing fingers at China. They are saying that Judge Sing and I are essentially puppets of the Chinese government, that we are attempting to drive a wedge between South Korea and Japan in their

efforts to contain North Korea.

K.J. Noh: The key thing to re-emphasize is that Japan was a fascist military dictatorship with a wartime command economy that controlled every aspect of procurement, distribution and recruitment of all material, including human labor.

We know for a fact that these women were trafficked over thousands of miles, all over the colonies. There are documents that requisition thousands of girls, who were often procured and delivered in short periods of time. These actions would not have been possible without coordinated government actions.

Another point to highlight is that this was not simply the largest case of sexual trafficking, it was also an unprecedented femicide. Between 75-90% percent of these women died during their sexual enslavement. That makes it a modern femicidal holocaust.

The Japanese government has never taken any responsibility for this. From time to time they make generic statements of remorse which mean nothing. They refuse to recognize, take responsibility, and to make any reasonable official reparations. And they have refused to ratify any of their apologies in the Japanese Diet, which is what would be necessary for a state apology.

A memorial is actually a poor substitute for what is really needed, which is justice, reparations, education and apology. A monument is just a small symbolic gesture against a backdrop of one of the most extraordinary cases of silencing in modern history.

The Western human rights complex has had a very selective attention, including in the case of the Comfort Women. That is because it is largely driven by imperial geopolitical design. We see that with the statements of the State Department, of Wendy Sherman in particular, who poo-pooed the whole Comfort Women issue, saying they needed to get over it and it shouldn't be used for nationalistic purposes, and the statements of Anthony Blinken, who urged that South Korea get behind the absurd, fraudulent 2015 "agreement", the written text of which can be found nowhere. The memory of the Comfort Women is something that needs to be highlighted but is being erased.

What we are seeing now is the remilitarization of Japan as a key factor in waging war against China, the rising regional hegemon. The issue of Japanese colonization ties in intimately, is an impediment to the legitimacy of Japanese remilitarization.

Lillian Sing: San Francisco is being threatened not to accept this memorial. We want to make sure that San Francisco does not allow itself to be threatened in

this way by its Japanese counterpart. Mr. Abe makes annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine to honor class-A war criminals. We in San Francisco would like to have a memorial to honor the war victims. Our memorial is for peace, not war. And there will be no peace in Asia without Japan apologizing.

Julie Tang: I'd like to invite people to visit the memorial. Actually, it is not yet open to the public but we hope it will be soon, with the help of the mayor and the board of supervisors.

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

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## Hurricanes Blow Away Climate Change Denial

The startling landfall of two giant hurricanes – feasting on especially warm water off Texas and Florida – crashes into the climate change denialism that has been politically popular on the Right, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The loss of respect for truth is one of the most consequential features of public affairs in America today. The roots and causes of this tragic development are multiple. The spread of social media and the related ability to spread untruths cheaply at the speed of electrons are parts of the story. Another part is the phenomenon of fake news (real fake news, that is, not alleged fake news that is really real news that the allegor doesn't welcome).

The advent of Donald Trump's presidency has taken this sad story to new depths. The President lies copiously, flagrantly, unashamedly, and far beyond what had been the norm for political fibbing. He has shown how a political career, rising even to the highest office of the land, can be built on lying.

Correctives to this awful trend are difficult to identify. The tribal belief system that prevails in most of the American population, in which people chiefly listen to and believe sources they identify with politically or socially and had already been telling them what they want to hear, is so well entrenched it seems almost impossible to overcome. Many people reject factual corrections as a form of bias and unfair treatment by sources (such as the "left-wing media") with which they do not identify politically or socially.

The epistemological rut in which the nation currently is mired is captured by a cartoon in which a man wearing a Trump shirt comments on how the President has lied about jobs, health care, and other topics. When asked by the person on the next barstool why he nonetheless supports Trump, the man replies, "cuz he tells it like it is."

Combating lies with counter-lies would not be wise. However much it might help to arrive at any one decision or policy that is better than the alternative, the larger effect would be to prolong and deepen the damaging disrespect for truth. One can shape arguments, however, in ways that, while still truthful, are better able to get through to lie-besotted masses than the most thoughtful and disinterested analysis would.

In that regard, the United States getting hit with two major hurricanes in rapid succession provides a teaching opportunity regarding the critical issue of climate change. Thoughtful leaders such as former President Barack Obama habitually issue the standard disclaimer that no one weather event can be attributed to manmade climate change. This sort of caution, while intellectually admirable, represents excessive reticence when considering what it takes to get through skulls and through information filters in the post-truth epoch.

### **Like Smoking and Cancer**

Christine Todd Whitman, a Republican who ran the Environmental Protection Agency under George W. Bush, notes not only that the basic physical links involving global warming, greenhouse gases, and burning of fossil fuels are "as certain as the link between smoking and cancer." She further observes that "a broad consensus of scientists also warn of the influence of the warming climate on extreme weather events."

The overall connections, in other words, in terms of cause, effect, and degree of risk are unquestionable, even if no one case of lung cancer can be blamed on any one pack of cigarettes.

Focusing on the most recent tropical cyclones would not necessarily be the way a completely objective analysis in some other epoch would shape a disquisition on climate change. And focusing on Harvey and Irma would partly play to the otherwise unfortunate tendency to treat one data point as an event but two data points as a trend.

Politically, however, seizing such a teaching opportunity, in which there is an immediate physical impact even on many people who get their news from Rush Limbaugh, is a necessary while still truthful way to battle untruths.

Such a moment also places in especially stark relief the dishonesty, and related

hypocrisy, of leading climate change skeptics. These include Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and other legislators on the right from his part of the country, who voted against relief for victims of Hurricane Sandy but now look to the federal government for help to victims of Hurricane Harvey, while trying to rationalize their inconsistency with the lie that most of the Sandy relief was not related to damage from the storm.

They include Florida Governor Rick Scott, who has used the standard cop-out of “I am not a scientist” to explain his failure to acknowledge manmade climate change, and whose lackadaisical policies in preparing for effects of climate change will mean additional suffering by the citizens of his state from the storm that is hitting them now. They include President Trump, whose EPA has put a former campaign aide with no scientific expertise to work in eliminating grants with the “double-C” term to ensure that climate change does not get studied with agency funds.

Without diminishing any immediate sympathy and support for those whose lives the hurricanes have upended, this is the time to shout from rooftops that dishonest climate-change-denying politicians are causing more such suffering in the future for Americans as well as others. And when Trump’s EPA destroyer (a.k.a. administrator) Scott Pruitt says that now is not the time to talk about climate change, the proper response is that now is an excellent time to talk about it.

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

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## A Victory Seen Over ‘State-Sponsored Racism’

The restoration of a Mexican-American studies program in Tucson, Arizona public schools is being hailed as an important step in telling the more complex history of the American West, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Advocates of Mexican-American studies are celebrating a federal court ruling restoring one of the most successful programs in Arizona public schools as a victory against “state-sponsored racism.”

Nolan Cabrera, associate professor at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona, has been involved from the beginning in resisting the controversial removal of ethnic studies from the Tucson Unified School District. I spoke to Cabrera on Aug. 26, after a U.S. District Court judge's decision in favor of the restoration of the program.

Cabrera is a recipient of the prestigious education early-career award the National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral fellowship and is a fellow for the American Association for Hispanics in Higher Education.

Dennis Bernstein: Nolan Cabrera, you created an ethnic studies program at the University of Arizona that provided the informational background for the students who fought the effort to shut down ethnic studies in Tucson. How did you get involved?

Dr. Nolan Cabrera: I became involved in the struggle around Mexican American studies running statistical analyses on the efficacy of the program. Interestingly, I was doing this for the desegregation case, which was a separate issue from House Bill 2281, that banned ethnic studies. But then that became the basis for the other statistical analyses, which demonstrated the program's remarkable achievements in terms of student development over the years.

DB: Could you talk about the pressure that is building in Arizona right now? President Trump just made a kind of campaign stop in Phoenix, praising Sheriff Joe [Arpaio] and saying that he plans to pardon him. What does it mean for Trump to be there?

NC: When ethnic studies was banned in 2010, there was also a massive anti-immigrant bill and a move to eliminate affirmative action. We had border militias, there was the shooting of Rep. Gabby Giffords. It is almost as if the rest of America has become like what Arizona was at that time. So, while it is important that the president is here in Arizona, in terms of emboldening white supremacists and those advocating for regressive social policies, it is very much par for the course. We have been dealing with this for the better part of a decade in Arizona.

DB: When Trump praises Sheriff Joe, in spite of the fact that he has been convicted of breaking the law, what message is he sending and how does that reverberate with white supremacists?

NC: Firstly, there is this whole macho bravado that really resonates with a lot of Trump supporters, of which Sheriff Joe is a classic example. He likes to call himself "the toughest sheriff in the country." Actually, he was picking on poor undocumented migrants, subjecting them to inhumane conditions. That's not

toughness, that's not strength. It is just bullying, cowardice and racism.

If he is pardoned, it will send a clear message that racial profiling, hunting down Mexicans, etc. is acceptable. As a colleague of mine in Colorado, Susana Munoz, says, "Dehumanizing policies give a license to dehumanize."

In Arizona, it has had a twofold effect: It is emboldening racist action and, at the same time, it is sending up a flag welcoming new membership. The Southern Poverty Law Center is currently tracking 18 substantiated hate groups in the state of Arizona. One of my friends remarked that he didn't realize the number was so low. And when rhetoric from the top draws false equivalencies between neo-Nazis and Black Lives Matter, it allows the white supremacists to feel vindicated and it justifies violence against civil rights organizations.

I am glad that a lot of the people who have been playing overt racist politics have been voted out of office in Arizona: Russell Pierce, John Huppenthal, Tom Horne and Joe Arpaio. In some respects, the voting populace as a whole is pushing back on this politics of racism and division. This is an incredibly important symbolic act.

DB: You were a key witness in the recent case in Tucson regarding the attempt by certain legislators to end the ethnic studies program there, which was proven to be incredibly successful. Could you remind people exactly what the case was about? And didn't the judge rule that ethnic studies was a positive part of the educational system in Tucson?

NC: Back in 2006, superintendent of public education Tom Horne had an ax to grind with Mexican American studies. He worked three times to get a bill passed to allow him to eliminate the program.

In 2010, he was finally successful and that is when we got House Bill 2281, which allowed Horne to withhold ten percent of state funding for any district that had any class found to promote racial antagonism or treat students as representatives of their race. And it was up to Horne to determine what constituted a violation. So if students are reading a well-known book such as Rudi Acuña's *Occupied America* or Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, according to the state superintendent of public instruction, that constitutes a violation.

What came out in the federal lawsuit was that Horne had found the district out of compliance before the law had even gone into effect, so it was a predetermined outcome to eliminate the Mexican American studies program, and that Horne and Huppenthal acted out of racial animus.

Actually, John Huppenthal was caught anonymously blogging that he thought the

Mexican American studies program was the KKK by another name. When he ran for state superintendent of public instruction, he ran a radio ad saying that, if elected, he would stop La Raza.

Students were only able to take Mexican American studies in their junior and senior years of high school. I started looking at the academic achievement of students prior to taking Mexican American studies and I found that they were abysmally low. These same students, after taking Mexican American studies, had some of the highest graduation rates in the entire district.

It was such an amazing accomplishment that the state, as it was trying to defend HB 2281, made the case that there was no way these statistics could be credible. The judge ruled that the law did harm to these students because it stripped them of this very promising educational opportunity. He also found that representatives of the state were using coded racist language for partisan purposes.

DB: There was strong support for these programs from the students, who knew how crucial they were to their own lives.

NC: Every time that Mexican American studies would come as an issue before the school board, the room would be packed with students. And then when the board was going to unilaterally destroy the program in April, 2011, a group of student activists chained themselves to the diocese before the school board was able to convene.

So much of the commentary at the time was, "Oh, these kids are throwing a temper tantrum, the adults need to reassert themselves." But the students explained that they had studied civil disobedience and the actions of the '60s. This was an intentional political act and they knew that they could get arrested. A lot of them were applying to colleges but they were willing to take this risk if it meant saving their studies. The level of personal risk these students were taking, as well as the sophistication of political strategy, was phenomenal.

This is what participatory democracy is supposed to look like. All too often, we have ignored the roles of the students in these important social movements and forget that it is their education that is at stake. These students continually reminded folks of that. So, you had multiple student-led demonstrations, students speaking at board meetings, students working with the media.

In fact, when they finally succeeded in eliminating the Mexican American studies program, the student group UNIDOS actually created a School of Ethnic Studies, a one-day event where people could come and learn from the curriculum that Arizona had outlawed.



Dennis J Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net).

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## President Trump’s ‘White Blindness’

**Exclusive:** By defending “beautiful” Confederate statues, President Trump shows how little he understands about the evils of slavery and the cruelty on lynchings and segregation, but he is by no means alone, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The blindness of President Trump regarding racial bigotry – and indeed that of many white Americans – is that whatever they say to the contrary, they really don’t appreciate the evils of slavery or the ensuing century of lynchings and segregation.

And, much of that ignorance comes from the systematic rationalizing and romanticizing of the ante-bellum South while shielding from criticism many of slavery’s historical apologists, including both Confederate “heroes” and earlier icons such as Thomas Jefferson who became a staunch advocate for expanding slavery all the better to increase his financial bottom line.

Although I grew up in Massachusetts in the 1950s and 1960s, our “history” textbooks could easily have passed muster in the Deep South. They treated slavery as an unfortunate feature of America’s past but not really all that bad, an institution in which most slave owners were kindly masters but a few employed cruel overseers who committed some isolated abuses like whippings.

And, if that recollection of my grade-school experience sounds hard to believe, just watch the 1939 movie classic “Gone with the Wind,” which presents Tara’s plantation slaves as mostly content with their enslavement and loyal to their masters. That was pretty much what Americans were taught for generations and explains why the 1977 TV miniseries “Roots” was such a shocking event, because it showed the systematic cruelty of slavery from the perspective of the slaves.

By 1980, the decades-old “conventional wisdom” about the quaint-and-misguided-but-mostly-okay institution of human bondage was shattered not only by TV’s dramatic portrayal of slavery but also by sound historic scholarship, which gained greater attention due to the Civil Rights Movement and growing popular resistance to “patriotic” propaganda.

## **Reagan's Dog Whistle**

Still, many white Americans rejected the notion of white guilt for those past crimes and rallied to Ronald Reagan's crude caricatures about "welfare queens" and people who used food stamps to buy vodka and other luxuries. While Reagan was careful not to say outright that he was referring to blacks, he didn't have to because his listeners understood the coded messages.

Similarly, when Reagan's Vice President George H.W. Bush ran for and won the presidency in 1988, he exploited the story of Willie Horton, a black convict who raped a white woman while on a Massachusetts prison furlough that Bush blamed on his Democratic rival, Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis.

Indeed, the Republican Party had been playing the race card since Richard Nixon's Southern Strategy of 1968. It's not a coincidence that this racial messaging swung the Democrats' once-solid South overwhelmingly into the Republican electoral column.

So, it's a bit ironic when the U.S. mainstream media cites Republicans who have benefited from these race-baiting dog whistles as responsible leaders when they decry Trump's slightly more overt appeals to white nationalists and other racists. On the immediate issue of Confederate statues and other honors, the Republicans have long led the way in protecting these tributes to white supremacy under the guise of "defending history."

On Thursday, Trump retreated to that safer GOP position after days of criticism for his rhetorical excuse-making and moral equivalence following last Saturday's violent rally by neo-Nazis, the KKK and white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, in defense of a Confederate monument to Gen. Robert E. Lee, which the local government had voted to remove.

Trump tweeted: "Sad to see the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart with the removal of our beautiful statues and monuments. You can't change history, but you can learn from it. Robert E Lee, Stonewall Jackson – who's next, Washington, Jefferson? So foolish!"

## **Neo-Confederate Thinking**

But that is the classic defense of neo-Confederate racist thinking. The pretense is that these monuments and other honors are simply a recognition of history when they were clearly intended to glorify the Confederacy and its rebellion against the United States over the Southern fear that slavery would be abolished and the wealth of plantation owners effectively negated.

Most of these monuments were erected in the Twentieth Century, often as symbolic

rebukes to progress being made by the descendants of African-American slaves. These were monuments to white supremacy – and for Trump and other white Americans to pretend otherwise is anti-historical nonsense.

Beyond monuments, other public spaces were named after Confederate leaders. For instance, in the 1920s – at the height of the Jim Crow era as lynchings were used to terrorize black communities energized by the return of African-American soldiers from World War I – the Daughters of the Confederacy succeeded in attaching the name of Confederate President Jefferson Davis to sections of Route 1, including in Arlington County, Virginia, near predominately black neighborhoods.

In 1964, as Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement gained passage of a landmark civil rights law, the Virginia legislature added Jefferson Davis's name to a section of Route 110 that passed by the Pentagon and near Arlington National Cemetery, which was begun in the Civil War to bury dead Union soldiers, including black troops who joined the Army to fight for their freedom.

On Jefferson Davis's authority, Confederate soldiers were permitted to summarily execute African-American Union soldiers upon their surrender, a practice that was carried out in several notorious massacres, such as at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, on April 12, 1864; the Battle of Poison Springs, Arkansas, in April 1864; and the Battle of the Crater in Virginia. Scores of black prisoners were executed in Saltville, Virginia, on Oct. 2, 1864. It should be noted that the Confederate troops of Virginia were under the command of the esteemed Gen. Robert E. Lee.

### **Democratic Cowardice**

A few years back, I wrote to the five members of the Arlington County Board and urged them to rename Jefferson Davis Highway. When my letter went public, it was treated with some amusement by the local paper, the Sun-Gazette, which described me as "rankled," and prompted some hate mail.

One angry letter from an Arlington resident declared that it was now her turn to be "RANKLED by outsiders like Mr. Parry who want to change history because it is not to his liking. I am very proud of my Commonwealth's history, but not of the current times, as I'm sure many others are." Those current times included the election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president.

I was even confronted by a senior Democratic county official at a meeting about a different topic and urged to desist in my proposal to give the highway a new name because the idea would alienate state politicians in Richmond who would think that "liberal" Arlington County had gone crazy.

However, since a number of Arlington residents apparently shared my disgust over Jefferson Davis Highway, the county board eventually agreed to send a request to the state legislature that the road's name be changed, but it was clearly not a priority for the board or for other Virginia Democratic officials who feared offending pro-Confederate voters (although in the wake of the bloody Charlottesville riot, Gov. Terry McAuliffe has finally come out in favor of removing the monuments honoring the Confederacy).

### **Honoring Treason**

The dishonesty of Trump's "history" argument – and its well-worn use by Confederate apologists – is underscored by the obvious fact that statues and other honors are meant to transform historical figures into icons to be emulated. Governments do not bestow these honors on criminals or traitors just because they are historical figures.

You don't see many government statues to Al Capone or Benedict Arnold. And, Americans would be rightly alarmed if Germany began erecting statues to Adolf Hitler and his Nazi henchmen. So, to pretend that these Confederate statues are not meant to glorify the South's battle to protect the institution (or industry) of slavery is simply a lie.

Arguably, Trump does have a point about the historical ambiguity surrounding the nation's Founders, many of whom owned slaves although Trump's argument amounts to another rhetorical dodge. There is a distinct difference between George Washington who led the War for Independence, presided at the Constitutional Convention and served as the first President (and who grew increasingly uncomfortable with slavery) and the Confederates who turned their guns against the United States in a disastrous war to protect the interests of slaveholders.

In any evaluation of history, distinctions must be made. Nobody is perfect. Even Founders who were opposed to slavery, such as Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, can be rightly criticized for other political positions that they took as the United States sought to find its footing in its early years.

### **Jefferson's Hypocrisy**

More troubling is the legacy of Thomas Jefferson, who is hailed for penning the Declaration of Independence and its noble words that "all men are created equal" – although Jefferson in his other writings, such as *Notes on the State of Virginia*, made clear that he did not believe that at all. Jefferson was a hypocrite of the first order.

Recent historical revelations also reveal Jefferson to have been a much more ruthless slave master than his admirers have wanted to believe. He countenanced

the whipping of boys, calculated the financial value of child-bearing females, and apparently helped the “breeding” along by imposing himself sexually on one and likely more of his slave girls.

Also, left out of many Jefferson biographies is why he established the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. It wasn't simply his devotion to learning; he feared that young Southern aristocrats going north to school would be contaminated by the arguments against slavery and in favor of a strong national government, twin evils that the erudite Jefferson called “‘anti-Missourism,’” and “Consolidationism.”

Further contributing to the nation's divisions, Jefferson propounded theories about state secession and pushed for expansion of slavery throughout the Louisiana Territories. In his later years, he became what you might call a pre-Confederate. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Thomas Jefferson: America's Founding Sociopath.](#)"]

Still, even in his hypocrisy, Jefferson deserves credit for enunciating what would become an important American contribution to global human rights, the proposition that governments should treat all citizens equally, a principle that Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders wielded in their own battles against racial injustice.

Despite their faults, to put Washington and Jefferson on the same historical plane as Jefferson Davis and the Confederates makes a mockery of historical distinctions.

That the United States would honor people responsible for a horrific war designed to perpetuate slavery – leaders who authorized the outright murder of unarmed soldiers just because of the color of their skin – should shock the conscience of any moral human being although apparently not President Trump.

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

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## Photographing a White-Supremacist Attack

Some of the most dramatic scenes from last weekend's neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville – images of white extremists beating a black man in a parking lot – were captured by photographer Zach Roberts who talked with Dennis J

Bernstein.

Dennis J Bernstein

While many images of neo-Nazi violence from last Saturday's riots in Charlottesville, Virginia, have gone viral around the world, the photographs taken by Zach Roberts, a fellow at [GregPalast.com](http://GregPalast.com), are particularly shocking in their documentation of the brutal beating of a young black special-education teacher in a parking garage about 50 feet from where police park their patrol cars.

At one point during the beating, one of the neo-Nazis pulled out what appeared to be a Glock 9 and brandished it, threatening Roberts and others who came rushing on the scene to rescue their friend from being beaten to death.

Dennis Bernstein: Thanks for joining us, Zach Roberts. Where were you Saturday as the white supremacists began to expand out over the city? You took some photography that might mean a lot to law enforcement if they planned to file charges in this case.

Zach Roberts: After the breakdown of the rally in Emancipation Park, formerly known as Lee Park, the marchers started to take to the streets around 11:30. I ended up following them as they marched down Market Street. There were people on the sidewalks with signs saying "You're not welcome here," "Charlottesville is against white supremacy," and so on.

The white supremacists were yelling back racial slurs. Some of them were geared up with one-inch thick wooden dowels, with Confederate and Nazi-esque flags, helmets on, gas masks around their necks.

They were tooled up for violence. So when you hear people saying that this wasn't supposed to be a violent rally, I'm sorry, but you don't show up for a peaceful rally wearing combat gear. They were expecting violence and they got it, because they caused it.

A friend of mine, a female photographer named Stephanie Keith, was deeply affected by the sexist comments directed at her. She covered Standing Rock and other difficult assignments but I have never seen her affected that way.

DB: Tell us in detail about the beating that you witnessed.

ZR: We were marching down a commercial/residential street, small businesses along the way, almost everything closed down because they expected bad things to happen. I was walking alongside one of the more combat-ready groups of marchers.

As we got closer to the parking garage, all I saw was a young black man running and about a dozen white supremacists chasing after him with long poles and clubs. Someone with a shield pushed him into a parking arm. That broke and the young black man fell to the ground and was unconscious. They started beating him with their clubs, they picked up the parking arm

and started hitting him with that.

This went on for about thirty seconds. They scattered when some of the African American man's friends showed up. His friends picked him up and helped him walk to the garage staircase. He was bleeding profusely from the head and knees and an elbow where he fell. As I was walking to the staircase, I saw that one of the supremacists was pointing a gun at us.

A single African-American police officer finally showed up. This is thirty feet away from the police station. The police actually keep a lot of their cars in this same parking garage. Five minutes later, an ambulance still hadn't shown up. When more officers showed up about ten minutes later, all they did was stop journalists from taking photographs of the beaten man.

An ambulance finally did appear and took the man to a hospital. He had multiple stitches and a broken wrist. I'm sure people online are trying to come up with justifications for why this man was beaten. By the way, he is an assistant special education teacher in the local school system.

DB: It seems to me that the people who attacked him need some special education. Or maybe they have already been specially educated.

ZR: Yes, by people like Richard Spencer and other white supremacists.

DB: In various instances, the police seemed to turn a blind eye. There were plenty of cops around, except when violence broke out and then they seemed to disappear. The same thing happened when the car ran into the crowd. There was plenty of room for this car to come out of this blind alley and then even drive away before he was finally stopped. It really does seem that the police were somehow complicit in what was going on.

ZR: My understanding is that the police were basically issued a stand-down order to allow the protest to happen. Don't arrest people unless they are doing something that is endangering lives. Keep everyone safe but don't try to confront.

But in this case the police seemed to refuse to do anything at all. They seemed to consciously put themselves in places where nothing was happening. A colleague of mine fell and had a gash in her head. I waited beside her for ten minutes and

none of the police officers called an ambulance.

DB: I saw on one of the cable stations a white guy pushing a cop in SWAT gear and nothing happened to him. Can you imagine somebody from Black Lives Matter shoving into a group of cops in riot gear and not being taken down?

ZR: When I cover protests, I purposely wear a polo shirt and khakis and try to look like the whitest guy in the room so I don't get harassed by the police in any way. In this case it was easier to blend in with the white supremacists and they were comfortable talking to me. Some of them were complaining about the police, saying "Look, they let Black Lives Matter march down the middle of the street." Well, if members of Black Lives Matter had AR-15's and were marching with full combat gear, something tells me it would be a different scene.

DB: We saw that in the Sixties with the Panthers when they decided to exercise their Second Amendment rights. They were slaughtered.

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

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in July focused on the first meeting between Presidents Trump and Putin, the growing chaos surrounding the Trump administration, and the ongoing violence in the Middle East.

**"Trump Takes Aim at Energy R&D Funds"** by Jonathan Marshall, Jul. 1, 2017

**"What Trump Can Expect from Putin"** by Ray McGovern, Jul. 1, 2017

**"Foisting Blame for Cyber-hacking on Russia"** by Gareth Porter, Jul. 2, 2017

**"The Democratic Party's Deadly Dead-End"** by Nicolas J S Davies, Jul. 3, 2017

**"Russia-China Tandem Shifts Global Power"** by Ray McGovern, Jul. 3, 2017

**"Grim Lessons from a Faraway War"** by Don North, Jul. 4, 2017

**"The Price of America's Endless Wars"** by Kathy Kelly, Jul. 4, 2017

**"The Fight over Mexican-American Books"** by Dennis J Bernstein, Jul. 6, 2017



["MSM, Still Living in Propaganda-ville"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 6, 2017

["Macron Cracks Down on French Liberty"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jul. 7, 2017

["Hiding US Lies About Libyan Invasion"](#) by Joe Lauria, Jul. 7, 2017

["Risk of Unleashing 'Mad Dog' Mattis"](#) by David Marks, Jul. 8, 2017

["The Syrian Test of Trump-Putin Accord"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jul. 8, 2017

["Ten Problems with Anti-Russian Obsession"](#) by Rick Sterling, Jul. 9, 2017

["Trump and the New Mideast Paradox"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Jul. 10, 2017

["The Enduring Injustice of Palestine"](#) by John Pilger, Jul. 10, 2017

["Forgetting the 'Dirty Dossier' on Trump"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 10, 2017

["Ignoring the Human Disaster in Yemen"](#) by Alon Ben-Meir, Jul. 12, 2017

["How Russia-gate Met the Magnitsky Myth"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 13, 2017

["Rising Budget Stakes for Space Warfare"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jul. 14, 2017

["Neocons Enlist in Anti-Trump #Resistance"](#) by James W Carden, Jul. 15, 2017

["Moral Corrosion of Drone Warfare"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jul. 16, 2017

["The Logic in North Korean 'Madness'"](#) by Col. Ann Wright, Jul. 17, 2017

["Netanyahu Pushes Trump Toward Wider Wars"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 18, 2017

["The Right's Long War on Media"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jul. 20, 2017

["How Trump Defines the Future"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Jul. 20, 2017

["Holding onto Nuclear Weapons"](#) by Dennis J Bernstein, Jul. 21, 2017

["The Bloody 'Liberation' of Mosul"](#) by Dennis J Bernstein, Jul. 23, 2017

["The Unending Failure of the Afghan War"](#) by Alon Ben-Meir, Jul. 23, 2017

["Intel Vets Challenge 'Russia Hack' Evidence"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Jul. 24, 2017

["Pitching the 'Forever War' in Afghanistan"](#) by James W Carden, Jul. 25, 2017

["House GOP Seeks to Curb Yemen War"](#) by Dennis J Bernstein, Jul. 26, 2017

["PBS' Anti-Russia Propaganda Series"](#) by Rick Sterling, Jul. 27, 2017

["The World's Shift to Electric Cars"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jul. 28, 2017

["The Dawn of an Orwellian Future"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 28, 2017

["An Interview with WikiLeaks' Assange"](#) by Randy Credico & Dennis J Bernstein, Jul. 29, 2017

["Jerry Meldon's Passion for History"](#), Jul. 29, 2017

["Can Trump Find the 'Great' Path?"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 30, 2017

["Shielding Israel from Popular Outrage"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Jul. 31, 2017

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## Behind Trump's Trip to Poland

Before visiting many key U.S. allies, including either Mexico or Canada, President Trump traveled to Poland last week, getting a friendly reception from another nationalist politician, President Andrzej Duda, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Perhaps the most overlooked part of President Donald Trump's trip to Europe last week was his 18-hour visit to Poland as the guest of political ally and fellow nationalist, President Andrzej Duda.

I interviewed Ronald Cox, a professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Florida International University, about the significance of Trump's decision to make an early visit to Poland. Cox is author or editor of numerous books including *Corporate Power and Globalization in US Foreign Policy*. I spoke to Cox on July 6.

Dennis Bernstein: Why did Trump go to Poland? What's your overview? And then let's talk about what we understand might have happened.

Ronald Cox: Trump is essentially continuing in Poland what he's already doing in the United States. He's extending militarization, and support for those countries that are thoroughly militarizing their economy, as well as political parties that are in favor of unleashing a further militarization and policing of the domestic population, which Trump approves of, not only at home but in a country like Poland.

DB: Say a little bit more about that, doing the same thing there as he's doing here? Give us a few more details on that.

RC: Okay, so the first two aspects of Trump's speech are worthy of note. The first aspect is the support for Poland's increased military spending toward NATO. Poland has been one of five countries that have surpassed a 2% threshold, that Trump was urging all NATO member countries to pass regarding 2% of military spending... 2% of GDP. So Trump celebrated that aspect.

The second aspect that Trump celebrated was this particular attitude of a political party – the Law and Justice Party in Poland – which is engaged in a militarization campaign, a policing campaign inside Poland that has strong consequences domestically. Because one of its targets is Muslims. And one of the targets is what is labelled Islamic Extremists, but oftentimes with a broad brush is simply painted – the Muslim population. So there's been increased harassment of Muslims, increased attacks against Muslims that have been, essentially, endorsed by this government.

And it's a mistake to consider the Law and Justice Party a new development in Poland. They've actually been a dominant opposition party for some time. They were previously in a position of power, in Poland. So they have a lengthy history that coincides nicely with what the Polish state has done over the past 15 years, which essentially is to implement a set of neo-liberal policies which includes privatization, which includes deregulation.

In fact, aspects of their program are quite compatible with what is typically labelled neo-liberal economic policy, even though they're often referred to as a far-right, nationalist party. But in this case, nationalism is being geared towards supporting a further emboldening of the private sector, a further emboldening of the security forces, the police and the military, as a way to protect a defined population in Poland.

If you note an important aspect of Trump's speech, he talked about the importance of defending civilization. He didn't talk about the importance of

defending democracy. He didn't talk about the importance of popular participation, other than equating popular will with a vision of civilization. This is sort of straight out of the Steve Bannon playbook, which pits white civilization, particularly white Christian civilization, against other types of civilization.

So, in that sense, Trump in his speech was directly, sort of, calling forth this clash of civilizations narrative. Which, I think, feeds into his administration's support for far-right regimes.

DB: And it did appear, at least it appeared that he had strong support from the folks on the street. That these were very strong and powerful supporters of the government of Poland and of Trump, in this context. Would that be a proper perception?

RC: Yes, except I would qualify it in the following sense. What helped catapult this party to power is the fact that the neo-liberal policies have come with a growing problem in Poland, as elsewhere. You have a massive gap between rich and poor. You have one-fifth of the country which is in poverty. And this is particularly true in the eastern part of the country. So you see workers there, you see small farmers there who gravitated towards the Law and Justice Party because, frankly, there's no left alternative in Poland.

So the Law and Justice Party was able to drive a wedge between popular frustration at not having a better social page, or better access to welfare, that we protect them from declining income, and declining access to good jobs, and anger at the state itself. So, they're redirecting that anger towards immigrant populations, in particular the Muslim population.

DB: And there would be, in the context of the forced migrations coming out of the wars in the Middle East, where Poland is much more on the front line. And they've had a rather militant response, wouldn't you say?

RC: Exactly. Poland has announced, this is not just a Law and Justice Party but this is other major parties in Poland, have announced that they're simply not going to accept the European Union's stipulation that countries take in a certain percentage of refugees, corresponding to their population and their status. Poland has basically said "We're not going to do it." They're not the only country that has taken that position. Certainly Hungary took a very strong position. They also are led now by a far-right government.

DB: And how have they actually treated... it's been pretty violent treatment of the refugees....

RC: Yes.

DB: ...those fleeing war. Could you talk about that?

RC: Yeah. Sure. So, what you have in Poland is, and this is not only the tacit, but the rather open and blatant acceptance by the dominant political parties in Poland, in targeting refugees immigrants, you know, quite openly, as enemies of civilization. The term civilization that Trump invoked is broadly used to suggest, "Well, we are at war with people different than ourselves." It's interesting how the Law and Justice Party if you read them carefully, they actually deny that they're nationalists. They say "No, nationalism is not a good thing." They don't have the leaders in the party on record as saying this.

And I think if we're going to translate what they've been saying into a sort of larger framework for what they believe, they really do believe, "Well, it's not strictly a nationalist Poland that is reacting against foreign threats, but it's a broader sort of Catholic Church Christianity which embodies a certain set of values, that are reacting against threats that are different."

DB: Trump is supposedly going to sit down with Putin during the G20 meetings. How would you say Putin and the Russians would evaluate Trump's policy and stance towards Poland? How would that work?

RC: One of the interesting developments that took place just today [July 6], just about 12 hours ago, as a matter of fact, is that Trump officially approved the sale of a Patriot Missile System to Poland. Which indicates Trump's close ties to our own military industrial complex, and essentially a continuity of a policy that the Obama administration had already started. The Obama administration had already facilitated the delivery of the beginnings of a kind of defense missile system in Poland. So Trump is essentially continuing and expanding upon that policy.

So, that brings me to Putin, because Putin is not happy about that. He's already indicated that he's unhappy about this sale. He was unhappy about the expansion of NATO, obviously, to the Russian border. Which in my view, he has every right to be unhappy, because the expansion of NATO is very much an unprovoked expansion. In fact, it was the West that actually expanded NATO before Russia did really much of anything. Trump actually mentioned what Russia is doing in the Ukraine, which fits into a dominant sort of establishment narrative.

Which, I think, brings me back to my first point that there is a tendency to exaggerate the difference between Trump and the establishment. And that certainly is true in some areas. But I think in the case of foreign policy, it's interesting to see the extent to which Trump has embodied a lot of establishment orthodox, in terms of announcing his support for NATO, announcing his support for further missile protection for Poland, announcing his support for further

militarization of Poland in relationship to what's perceived to be a Russian threat.

DB: And Trump is a... you would say a real strong representative in this context of corporate power in American foreign policy, and military policy?

RC: Yes, I think that's definitely true. If you look at his campaign, the single biggest benefactor for Trump at a key moment, strategically, in his campaign, when his campaign was really threatening to sort of go off the edge, so to speak, was Robert Mercer, who is a well-known Libertarian multi-billionaire who made his money on the hedge fund circuit.

And this guy, basically, has a radical idea about deconstructing not only the United States government, but deconstructing, as Steve Bannon also puts it, other governments. And participating in a broad sort of alliance with the far-right. Which I think Mercer sees as complementary to wealth accumulation. Because wealth accumulation, from this perspective, comes through stripping the states of assets that are public assets, selling those off to the private sector. Which, of course, the government in Poland certainly endorses this despite their, sort of, nationalist label.

DB: So, I guess you can bet that in one way or another, Putin is going to raise these issues in this meeting with Trump? Or at least hint at what's in it for the Russians versus this stance.

RC: Exactly. I think Putin certainly liked the fact, it's been pretty well documented, that Putin hoped that Trump would come into power within the U.S. presidency. But he may have gotten a bit more than he bargained for, in terms of the continuity of U.S. policy.

However, what he also got, which I think he was also counting on, is someone who's terribly inexperienced, who is not simply a president in the mold of previous presidents, but one who really doesn't seem to have the first clue about how the office actually operates: how to conduct foreign affairs, or how to read signals from foreign leaders, or how to conduct diplomacy. So, all of these things have to be taught to Trump.

And, basically, from what we've seen so far, people are not having much success controlling him and controlling his impulses that brought him to such trouble in certain aspects of the campaign despite the fact that he won the election. So, I think Putin and Trump meeting together is going to be interesting to see.

Trump has been more heavily scripted on recent foreign trips. The Poland speech was effective by his standards, to the extent that he didn't make any gaffes. And he read from a speech that was very scripted and very polished. So I suspect

that we'll see that same kind of script in his meeting with Putin.

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

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