

Telling Only Part of the Story of Jihad

A CNN star reporter should not be shocked to learn that U.S. allies are consorting with Yemeni terrorists, writes Daniel Lazare.

By **Daniel Lazare**

Special to Consortium News



A recent *CNN* report about U.S. military materiel finding its way into Al Qaeda hands in Yemen might have been a valuable addition to Americans' knowledge of terrorism.

Entitled "**Sold to an ally, lost to an enemy,**" the 10-minute segment, broadcast on Feb. 4, featured rising *CNN* star **Nima Elbagir** cruising past sand-colored "Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected" armored vehicles, or MRAPs, lining a Yemeni highway.

"It's absolutely incredible," she says. "And this is not under the control of [Saudi-led] coalition forces. This is in the command of militias, which is expressly forbidden by the arms sales agreements with the U.S."

“That’s just the tip of the iceberg,” she adds.

“CNN was told by coalition sources that a deadlier U.S. weapons system, the

TOW missile, was airdropped in 2015 by Saudi Arabia to Yemeni fighters, an air drop that was proudly proclaimed across Saudi backed media channels.” The TOWs were dropped into Al Qaeda-controlled territory, according to CNN. But when Elbagir tries to find out more, the local coalition-backed government chases her and her crew out of town.

U.S.-made TOWs in the hands of Al Qaeda? Elbagir is an effective on-screen presence. But this is an old story, which the cable network has long soft-pedaled.

In the early days of the Syrian War, Western media was reluctant to acknowledge that the forces arrayed against the Assad regime included Al Qaeda. In those days, the opposition was widely portrayed as a belated ripple effect of the Arab Spring pro-democracy uprisings elsewhere in the region.

However, in April-May 2015, right around the time that the Saudis were air-dropping TOWs into Yemen, they were also supplying the same optically-guided, high-tech missiles to pro-Al Qaeda forces in Syria’s northern Idlib province. Rebel leaders were exultant as they drove back Syrian



government troops. TOWs “flipped the balance,” one said, while another declared: “I would put the advances down to one word – TOW.”

CNN reported that story very differently. From rebel-held territory, *CNN*'s Nick Paton Walsh described the missiles as a “possible game-changer ... that may finally be wearing down the less popular side of the Shia-Sunni divide.” He conceded it wasn't all good news: “A major downside for Washington at least, is that the often-victorious rebels, the Nusra Front, are Al Qaeda. But while the winners for now are America's enemies, the fast-changing ground in Syria may cause to happen what the Obama administration has long sought and preached, and that's changing the calculus of the Assad regime.”

Foreign Policy, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times* all reacted the same way, frowning their brows at the news that Al Qaeda was gaining, but expressing measured relief that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was at last on the ropes.

But now that Elbagir is sounding the alarm about TOWs in Yemen, *CNN* would do well to acknowledge that it has been distinctly more blasé in the past about TOWs in the hands of al Qaeda.

The network appears unwilling to go where Washington's pro-war foreign-policy establishment doesn't want it to go. Elbagir shouldn't be shocked to learn that U.S. allies are consorting with Yemeni terrorists.

U.S. History with Holy Warriors

What *CNN* producers and correspondents either don't know or fail to mention is that Washington has a long history of supporting jihad. As Ian Johnson notes in "[A Mosque in Munich](#)" (2010), the policy was mentioned by President Dwight Eisenhower, who was eager, according to White House memos, "to stress the 'holy war' aspect" in his talks with Muslim leaders about the Cold War Communist menace." [See "[How U.S. Allies Aid Al Qaeda in Syria](#)," Consortium News, Aug. 4, 2015.]

Britain had been involved with Islamists at least as far back as 1925 when it helped establish the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and both the U.S. and Britain worked with Islamists in the 1953 coup in Iran, according to Robert Dreyfus in "[Devil's Game](#)" (2006).

By the 1980s a growing Islamist revolt against a left-leaning, pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan brought U.S. support. In mid-1979, President Jimmy Carter and his national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, armed the Afghan mujahideen – not at first to [drive](#) the Soviets out, but to lure them in. Brzezinski intended to deal Moscow a Vietnam-sized blow, as he [put it](#) in a 1998 interview.

Meanwhile, a few months after the U.S. armed the mujahideen, the Saudis were deeply shaken when Islamist extremists seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca and called for the overthrow of the royal family. While Saudi Arabia has been keen to repress jihadism at home, it has been a major supporter of Sunni extremists in the region, particularly to battle the Shi'ite regime that came to power in Tehran, also in 1979.

Since then, the U.S. has made use of jihad, either directly or indirectly, with the Gulf oil monarchies or Pakistan's notoriously pro-Islamist Inter-Services Intelligence agency. U.S. backing for the Afghan mujahideen helped turn Osama bin Laden into a hero for some young Saudis and other Sunnis, while the training camp he established in the Afghan countryside drew jihadists from across the region.

U.S. backing for Alija Izetbegovic's Islamist government in Bosnia-Herzegovina brought al-Qaeda to the Balkans, while U.S.-Saudi support for Islamist militants in the Second Chechen War of 1999-2000 enabled it to establish a base of operations there.

Downplaying Al Qaeda

Just six years after 9/11, according to investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, the U.S. downplayed the fight against Al Qaeda to rein in Iran – a policy, Hersh wrote, that had the effect of “bolstering ... Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.”

Under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, policy toward Al-Qaeda turned even more curious. In March 2011, she devoted nearly two weeks to persuading Qatar, the UAE and Jordan to join the air war against Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, only to stand by and watch as Qatar then poured hundreds of millions of dollars of aid into the hands of Islamist militias that were spreading anarchy from one end of the country to the other. The Obama administration thought of remonstrating with Qatar, but didn't in the end.

Much the same happened in Syria where, by early 2012,

Clinton was organizing a “Friends of Syria” group that soon began channeling military aid to Islamist forces waging war against Christians, Alawites, secularists and others backing Assad. By August 2012, the Defense Intelligence Agency reported that “the Salafist, the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI [Al Qaeda in Iraq] are the major forces driving the [anti-Assad] insurgency”; that the West, Turkey, and the Gulf states supported it regardless; that the rebels’ goal was to establish “a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria,” and that “this is exactly what the supporting powers want in order to isolate the Syrian regime...”

Biden Speaks Out

Two years after that, Vice President Joe Biden declared at Harvard’s Kennedy School:

“Our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria. ... The Saudis, the Emiratis, etc. what were they doing? They were so determined to take down Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, what did they do? They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of military weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad, except the people who were being supplied were al Nusra and al Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world.” (Quote starts at 53:25.)

The fact that Obama ordered the vice president to apologize to the Saudis, the UAE and Turkey for his comments provided back-handed confirmation that they were true. When TOWs

turned up in the hands of pro-Qaeda rebels in Syria the following spring, all a senior administration official would say was: “It’s not something we would refrain from raising with our partners.”

It was obvious that Al Qaeda would be a prime beneficiary of Saudi intervention in Yemen from the start. Tying down the Houthis – “Al Qaeda’s most determined foe,” according to the [Times](#) – gave it space to blossom and grow. Where the State Department [said](#) it had up to 4,000 members as of 2015, a [UN report](#) put its membership at between 6,000 and 7,000 three years later, an increase of 50 to 75 percent or more.

In early 2017, the International Crisis Group [found](#) that Al Qaeda was “thriving in an environment of state collapse, growing sectarianism, shifting alliances, security vacuums and a burgeoning war economy.”

In Yemen, Al Qaeda “has regularly fought alongside Saudi-led coalition forces in ... Aden and other parts of the south, including Taiz, indirectly obtaining weapons from them,” the ICG added. “...In northern Yemen ... the [Saudi-led] coalition has engaged in tacit alliances with AQAP fighters, or at least turned a blind eye to them, as long as they have assisted in attacking the common enemy.”

In May 2016, a [PBS documentary](#) showed Al Qaeda members fighting side by side with UAE forces near Taiz. (See [“The Secret Behind the Yemen War,” Consortium News](#), May 7, 2016.)

Last August, an *Associated Press* investigative team [found](#) that the Saudi-led coalition had cut secret deals with Al Qaeda fighters, “paying some to leave key cities and towns

and letting others retreat with weapons, equipment, and wads of looted cash.” Saudi-backed militias “actively recruit Al Qaeda militants,” the *AP* team added, “...because they’re considered exceptional fighters” and also supply them with armored trucks.

If it’s not news that U.S. allies are providing pro-Al Qaeda forces with U.S.-made equipment, why is *CNN* pretending that it is? One reason is that it feels free to criticize the war and all that goes with it now that the growing human catastrophe in Yemen is turning into a major embarrassment for the U.S. Another is that criticizing the U.S. for failing to rein in its allies earns it points with viewers by making it seem tough and independent, even though the opposite is the case.

Then there’s Trump, with whom *CNN* has been at war since the moment he was elected. Trump’s Dec. 19 decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria thus presented the network with a double win because it allowed it to rail against the pullout as “bizarre” and a “win for Moscow” while complaining at the same time about administration policy in Yemen. Trump is at fault, it seems, when he pulls out *and* when he stays in.

In either instance, *CNN* gets to ride the high horse as it blasts away at the chief executive that corporate outlets most love to hate. Maybe Elbagir should have given her exposé a different title: “Why arming homicidal maniacs is bad news in one country but OK in another.”

Daniel Lazare is the author of “The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy” (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for

a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique* and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at Daniellazare.com.

Netanyahu's Brand of Tolerance for Anti-Semitism Goes Back 120 Years

The Israeli prime minister's ease with neo-Nazism and revisionist Holocaust history are not as surprising as they might seem, writes Daniel Lazare.

By [Daniel Lazare](#)

Special to Consortium News



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a soft spot for rightwing authoritarians. This is no surprise since Netanyahu is a rightwing authoritarian himself, one who sees Israel as an old-fashioned ethno-state in which Jewish national aspirations are the only ones that count – as his support for last year's "[Nation-State Law](#)" makes clear.

But what may come as a surprise is that he also has a soft spot for rightwing authoritarians with a pronounced anti-Semitic streak. Last July, he welcomed Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to Israel even though Orban has led a campaign to [rehabilitate](#) Miklos Horthy, the pro-Axis dictator who sent hundreds of thousands of Jews to death camps and bragged, "[I have been an anti-Semite throughout my life.](#)" Two months later, he welcomed Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who once compared himself to Hitler,

saying, “There are three million drug addicts [in the Philippines]. I’d be happy to slaughter them.”

He issued a joint statement with Polish Premier Mateusz Morawiecki lauding Poland’s wartime efforts to alert the world to the Nazi death camps, a statement that Israel’s own Yad Vashem Holocaust museum later repudiated on the grounds that it “contains highly problematic wording that contradicts existing and accepted historical knowledge in this field.” His government has also supplied weapons to the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion fighting pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Ukraine.

So what’s the explanation? If Netanyahu is a hawk’s hawk when it comes to enemies of the Jewish state, then doesn’t it follow that he should be no less militant when it comes to enemies of the Jews?

The answer is, no, it doesn’t, for the simple reason that Zionism’s attitude toward anti-Semitism is more ambiguous than people realize. Theodore Herzl, the Viennese journalist who founded modern Zionism, made this clear in the 1890s. Rather than combatting anti-Semitism, he argued that Jews should accept it as an ineradicable fact of life. Instead of opposing it, they should make use of it as a lever with which to pry their co-religionists loose from western society so that they would move to Palestine. As he put it in “The Jewish State,” the 1896 manifesto that put modern Zionism on the map:

“Great exertions will hardly be necessary to spur on the [emigration] movement. Anti-Semites provide the requisite impetus. They need only do what they did before, and then

they will create a desire to emigrate where it did not previously exist, and strengthen it where it existed before.”

Herzl's goal was twofold: to provide Jews with a homeland and to win over non-Jews by removing an irritant from their midst. Jews, he wrote, “continue to produce an abundance of mediocre intellects who find no outlet, and this endangers our social position as much as it does our increasing wealth. Educated Jews without means are now rapidly becoming Socialists.” The more radical they become, the more Christian society would close ranks against them. The solution was to provide them with a homeland of their own so they would cease subverting someone else's.

“They will pray for me in the synagogues, and in the churches as well,” Herzl confided to his diary. Not only would Jews liberate themselves, but they would be liberating Christians too, “liberating them from us.”

Zionism's DNA

Modern observers might dismiss such ideas as ancient history since they date to more than 120 years ago. But they have become part of Zionism's DNA. Instead of battling anti-Semites, the movement has repeatedly followed Herzl's advice by emulating them and adopting their techniques for their own purposes.

In the 1920s, Jews were thus shocked when Zionist settlers organized a movement to drive out Arab workers in Palestine. The reason is that it was all too similar to anti-Semitic nationalists in Poland who were seeking to

drive out Polish Jews. An immigrant socialist complained in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, according to the historian [Yaacov N. Goldstein](#), that the “conquest of labor” campaign “sends shudders through the Jewish workers in the Diaspora countries because the gentiles could try out this principle against the Jewish workers...” Said another: “How do we react when the reactionary chauvinists in Poland fight for their ‘conquest of labor,’ meaning prevention of Jews working in Polish industrial and commercial enterprises? How do we respond to the ‘conquest of labor’ of the Romanians?”

In the 1930s, a growing rightwing Zionist movement latched onto Benito Mussolini for much the same reason – because he wished to purify Italy just as they wished to purify Palestine. With Mussolini’s permission, a rightwing Zionist leader named Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky opened a training school in Civitavecchia, some 40 miles west of Rome. According to the Marxist historian [Lenni Brenner](#), this is how an Italian Zionist newspaper described the opening ceremonies:

“The order – ‘Attention!’ A triple chant ordered by the squad’s commanding officer – ‘Viva L’Italia! Viva Il Re! Viva Il Duce!’ resounded, followed by the benediction which rabbi Aldo Lattes invoked in Italian and Hebrew for God, the king, and Il Duce... ‘Giovinezza’ [the Fascist Party anthem] was sung with much enthusiasm...”

Mussolini [praised](#) Jabotinsky as a good fascist in 1935 while Abba Ahimeir, a leader of the Palestinian branch of Jabotinsky’s “Revisionist” movement, wrote a regular newspaper column entitled “Diary of a Fascist.” Ahimeir’s

editor was Benzion Netanyahu, father of the current prime minister, who would later become Jabotinsky's personal assistant. In Poland, the leader of the Revisionists was a young man named Mieczslaw Biegun, better known by the Hebrew name Menachem Begin, who would serve as Israeli prime minister from 1977 to 1983.

When Begin embarked on a U.S. speaking tour in 1948, Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Sidney Hook, and some two dozen other Jewish intellectuals sent a letter to the *The New York Times* denouncing his movement as "akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties," one that "preache[s] an admixture of ultra-nationalism, religious mysticism, and racial superiority."

Given this rich history of fascism, it's no surprise 70 years later that Netanyahu would enjoy hobnobbing with a new generation of rightwing strong men (including new Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro) or that he would look the other way when it comes to the anti-Semitism of the Polish government, which last year made it a crime to say that Poles were complicit in the Holocaust, or of Orban's campaign against international financier George Soros. Indeed, it's no surprise that Netanyahu's 26-year-old son Yair would join in the fun by posting an anti-Semitic cartoon on Facebook showing George Soros directing a conspiracy against his father.

"Is this what the kid hears at home?" wondered former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who was also targeted by the cartoon. But not everyone was displeased. "Welcome to the club, Yair – absolutely amazing, wow, just wow," tweeted Ku Klux Klan

leader David Duke.

Welcome to the club, Yair – absolutely amazing, wow, just wow.

pic.twitter.com/D3yMWhUIGa

– David Duke (@DrDavidDuke) [September 10, 2017](#)

Declared the neo-Nazi *Daily Stormer* website: “Yair Netanyahu is a total bro. Next he’s going to call for gassings.”

Role Model for Xenophobes

What’s a little anti-Semitism among friends? Netanyahu’s devotion to Jewish ethnic purity has meanwhile turned him into a role model for xenophobes the world over. So has his hostility to refugees. Last March, he declared that illegal African migrants are “much worse” than terrorists, adding: “How could we assure a Jewish and democratic state with 50,000 and then 100,000 and 150,000 migrants a year? After a million, 1.5 million, one could close up shop. But we have not closed down. We built a fence and at the same time, with concern for security needs, we are making a major investment in infrastructures.” This is the same fence that Donald Trump now points to as his model for his Mexican wall.

Thanks to such attitudes at the top, Israel has seen an upsurge of racial violence. In 2014, an Israeli **stabbed** a baby three times in the head, telling police: “They said that a black baby, blacks in general, are terrorists.” A few months later, a mob shot and beat to death an African refugee named **Halton Zarhum** in the southern city of Beer Sheva. A year after that, two Israeli teenagers beat to death an African refugee named **Babikir Ali Adham-Abdo** in a

suburb of Tel Aviv.

Netanyahu, of course, will reply that he was nowhere near the scene of the crime. But the more Zionism's true colors come out, the more such atrocities are likely to occur.

It must be stressed that the problem with Jewish nationalism lies not with the first half of the term but the second. Nationalism in general suffers from a similar combination of chauvinism and separatism. Examples are rife. Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan is a well-known anti-Semite who last summer inveighed against "Satanic Jews who have infected the whole world with poison and deceit." His ideological predecessor, [Marcus Garvey](#), whose back-to-Africa movement in the 1920s had curious parallels with Zionism, repeatedly provoked black leftists of the day by speaking out in favor of Jim Crow and meeting with a Ku Klux Klan leader named Edward Young Clarke in Atlanta.

"I regard the Klan, the Anglo-Saxon clubs and White American societies, as far as the Negro is concerned, as better friends of the race than all other groups of hypocritical whites put together," he wrote. "I like honesty and fair play. You may call me a Klansman if you will, but, potentially, every white man is a Klansman as far as the Negro in competition with whites socially, economically and politically is concerned, and there is no use lying."

Garvey's dark side was forgotten in the 1960s when he emerged as a hero of the Black Power movement. Zionism's dark side was similarly forgotten after the [Six Day War in 1967](#) when it emerged as a favorite ally of the United

States. Thereafter, anyone who tried to bring up the love affair with fascism was ostracized by neo-conservatives, many of them Jewish, who increasingly dominated intellectual discourse.

But with ethno-chauvinism now staging a powerful comeback, Zionism's far-right past has returned to haunt it – and the rest of the world as well.

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The Memo That Helped Kill a Half Million People in Syria

The memo shows the advice Hillary Clinton was getting to plunge the U.S. deeper into the Syrian war. As Trump seeks to extricate the U.S. the memo has again become relevant, writes Daniel Lazare.

By [Daniel Lazare](http://Daniellazare.com)

Special to Consortium News



A memo sent to Hillary Clinton that WikiLeaks made public in 2016 has not gotten the attention it deserves. Now is the time. After President Donald Trump tweeted that he was pulling American troops out of Syria, Clinton joined his vociferous critics who want more war in Syria.

“Actions have consequences, and whether we’re in Syria or not, the

people who want to harm us are there & at war,” Clinton tweeted in response to Trump. “Isolationism is weakness. Empowering ISIS is dangerous. Playing into Russia & Iran’s hands is foolish. This President is putting our national security at grave risk.”

Actions indeed have consequences.

The memo shows the kind of advice Clinton was getting as secretary of state to plunge the U.S. deeper into the Syrian war. It takes us back to 2012 and the early phase of the conflict.

At that point, it was largely an internal affair, although Saudi arms shipments were playing a greater and greater role in bolstering rebel forces. But once the President Barack Obama eventually decided in favor of intervention, under pressure from Clinton, the conflict was quickly internationalized as thousands of holy warriors flooded in from as far away as western China.

The 1,200-word memo written by James P. Rubin, a senior diplomat in Bill Clinton’s State Department, to then-Secretary of State Clinton, which Clinton twice requested be printed out, begins with the subject of Iran, an important patron of Syria.

The memo dismisses any notion that nuclear talks will stop Iran “from improving the crucial part of any nuclear weapons program—the capability to enrich uranium.” If it does get the bomb, it goes on, Israel will suffer a strategic setback since it will no longer be able to “respond to provocations with conventional military strikes on Syria and Lebanon, as it can today.” Denied the ability to bomb at will, Israel might leave off secondary targets and strike at the main enemy instead.

Consequently, the memo argues that the U.S. should topple the Assad regime so as to weaken Iran and allay the fears of Israel, which has long regarded the Islamic republic as its primary enemy. As the memo puts it:



“Bringing down Assad would not only be a massive boon to Israel’s security, it would also ease Israel’s understandable fear of losing its nuclear monopoly. Then, Israel and the United States might be able to develop a common view of when the Iranian program is so dangerous that military action could be warranted.”

This [document](#), making the case to arm Syrian rebels, may have been largely overlooked because of confusion about its dates, which appear to be inaccurate.

The time stamp on the email is “2001-01-01 03:00” even though Clinton was still a New York senator-elect at that point. That date is also out of synch [with the timeline](#) of nuclear diplomacy with Iran.

But the body of the email gives a State Department case and document number with the date of 11/30/2015. But that’s incorrect as well because Clinton resigned as secretary of state on Feb. 1, 2013.

Central to the Great Debate

Consequently, anyone stumbling across the memo in the Wikileaks archives might be confused about how it figures in the great debate about whether to use force to bring down Syrian President Bashir al-Assad. But textual clues provide an answer. The second paragraph refers to nuclear talks with Iran “that began in Istanbul this April and will continue in Baghdad in May,” [events](#) that took place in 2012. The sixth invokes an interview with CNN’s Christiane Amanpour, Rubin’s wife, conducted with then-Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak “last week.” Since the [interview](#) took place on April 19, 2012, the memo can therefore be dated to the fourth week in April. (After it was sent as a memo to Clinton, Rubin published a [version](#) of it in *Foreign Policy* on June 4, 2012.)

The memo syncs with Clinton’s thinking on Syria, such as calling for Assad’s overthrow and continuing to push for a no-fly zone in

her last debate with Donald Trump even after Gen. Joseph Dunford had testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that it could mean war with Russia.

The memo was sent to her shortly before Clinton joined forces with then-CIA Director David Petraeus to push for an aggressive program of rebel military aid.

Needless to say, the memo's skepticism about negotiating with Iran proved to be unwarranted since Iran eventually agreed to shut down its nuclear program. The memo, which Clinton twice asked to be printed out for her, underscores the conviction that Israeli security trumps all other considerations even if it means setting fire to a region that's been burned over more than once.

But the memo illustrates much else besides: a recklessness, lack of realism and an almost mystical belief that everything will fall neatly into place once the United States flexes its muscle. Overthrowing Assad would be nothing less than "transformative," the memo says.

"...Iran would be strategically isolated, unable to exert its influence in the Middle East. The resulting regime in Syria will see the United States as a friend, not an enemy. Washington would gain substantial recognition as fighting for the people in the Arab world, not the corrupt regimes. For Israel, the rationale for a bolt from the blue attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would be eased. And a new Syrian regime might well be open to early action on the frozen peace talks with Israel. Hezbollah in Lebanon would be cut off from its Iranian sponsor since Syria would no longer be a transit point for Iranian training, assistance and missiles."

It was "a low-cost high-payoff approach," the memo says, that would eliminate one enemy, weaken two more, and generate such joy among ordinary Syrians that peace talks between Damascus and Tel Aviv

will spring back to life. The risks appeared to be nil. Since “the Libyan operation had no long-lasting consequences for the region,” the memo supposes, referring to the overthrow of strongman Muammer Gaddafi six months earlier, the Syrian operation wouldn’t either. In a passage that may have influenced Clinton’s policy of a no-fly zone, despite Dunford’s warning, the memo says:

“Some argue that U.S. involvement risks a wider war with Russia. But the Kosovo example [in which NATO bombed Russian-ally Serbia] shows otherwise. In that case, Russia had genuine ethnic and political ties to the Serbs, which don’t exist between Russia and Syria, and even then Russia did little more than complain. Russian officials have already acknowledged they won’t stand in the way if intervention comes.”

So, there was nothing to worry about. Sixty-five years of Arab-Israeli conflict would fall by the wayside while Russia remains safely marginalized.

How it Turned Out

Needless to say, that’s not how things turned out. At that moment, Libya seemed under control. But three or four months later, it would explode as Western-backed Islamist militias blasted away at one another, imposing strict Sharia law, re-instituting slavery and rolling back decades of social progress. Once President Barack Obama approved a modified version of the Clinton-Petraeus plan, Syria would plunge into the same abyss as jihadis funded by Saudi Arabia and the other oil monarchies, many of whom came from Libya, spread sectarian violence and fear.

The memo’s assumption that the U.S. could neatly and cleanly decapitate the Syrian government without having to worry about broader consequences was little short of deluded.

The notion that ordinary Syrians would fall to their knees in gratitude was ludicrous while Clinton’s disregard for the intricacies of Syrian politics was astonishing.

There is also the memo's blithe suggestion that Washington "work with regional allies like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to organize, train, and arm Syrian rebel forces."

In late 2009, Secretary of State Clinton sent another diplomatic memo made public by Wikileaks saying that "donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide." So what made her think two years later that the kingdom would not fund Syrian jihadis of precisely the same ilk?

The 2009 memo slammed Qatar for allowing Al Qaeda, the Taliban and other terrorist groups to use the sheikdom "as a fundraising locale." She was well aware then that a pro-Al Qaeda autocracy would now help Syrians "fight for their freedom," as the memo she sent puts it.

There is a remarkable continuity between the Syria policy that Clinton backed and earlier policies in Afghanistan and Libya. In the first, U.S. military aid wound up flowing to the notorious warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a religious sectarian and raging anti-western xenophobe who nonetheless was "the most efficient at killing Soviets," as Steve Coll put it in "Ghost Wars," his bestselling 2004 account of the CIA's love affair with jihad.

Hekmatyar's cutthroats wound up with the lion's share of American arms. More or less the same thing happened in Libya once Clinton persuaded Qatar to join the anti-Gaddafi coalition. The sheikdom seized the opportunity to distribute some \$400 million to various rebel militias, many of them extreme Islamist. The Obama administration said nothing in response.

Once again, U.S. arms and materiel flowed to the most reactionary elements. The same would happen in Syria where U.S. and Saudi arms went to the local Al Qaeda affiliate, known as Jabhat al-Nusra, and even to ISIS, as a meticulous report by Conflict Armament Research, a Swiss and EU-funded study group in London, has shown. (See "Did

[Obama Arm Islamic State Killers?](#) Consortium News, Dec. 21, 2017.)

Insurgency Mix

By August 2012, a secret Defense Intelligence Agency [report](#) found that Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Al Qaeda were already “the major forces driving of the insurgency” and that the U.S. and Gulf states backed them regardless. The report warned that the U.S. and some of its allies were supporting the establishment of a “Salafist principality” in eastern Syria to pressure Assad that could turn into an “Islamic State”—two years before the Islamic State was declared in 2014. Clinton was among senior Obama administration officials who had to have seen the report as it was sent to the State Department among several other agencies.

In 2016, then Secretary of State John Kerry confirmed this policy in a leaked [audio conversation](#), saying that the U.S., rather than seriously fighting the Islamic State in Syria, was ready to use the growing strength of the jihadists to pressure Assad to resign, just as outlined in the DIA document.

“We know that this was growing, we were watching, we saw that Daesh [an Arabic name for Islamic State] was growing in strength, and we thought Assad was threatened,” Kerry said. “We thought however we could probably manage that Assad might then negotiate, but instead of negotiating he got Putin to support him.”

Speechwriter Ben Rhodes summed up the problem of “moderate” rebels who were indistinguishable from Al Qaeda, in his White House memoir, [“The World As It Is.”](#) He writes:

“Al Nusra was probably the strongest fighting force within the opposition, and while there were extremist elements in the group, it was also clear that the more moderate opposition was fighting

side by side with al Nusra. I argued that labeling al Nusra as terrorists would alienate the same people we want to help, while giving al Nusra less incentive to avoid extremist affiliations.”

The problem was how to separate the “good” Al Qaeda fighters from the “bad.” Rhodes later complained when Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he and his fellow Obama officials were “trying to climb a spruce tree naked without scratching our ass.” This was “smug,” Rhodes writes. But Putin was merely using a colorful expression to say that the policy made no sense; which it didn’t.

The cost of the Clinton-backed policy in Syria has been staggering. As many as 560,000 people have died, and half the population has been displaced, while the World Bank has estimated total war damage at \$226 billion, roughly six years’ income for every Syrian man, woman, and child.

A cockeyed memo thus helped unleash a real-life catastrophe that refuses to go away. It’s a nightmare from which Trump is struggling to escape by trying to withdraw U.S. troops in his confused and deluded way. And it’s a nightmare that warmongers from arch-neocon John Bolton, Trump’s national security adviser, to “liberal” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to Hillary Clinton are determined to keep going.

Daniel Lazare is the author of “*The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy*”(Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *LeMonde Diplomatique* and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at Daniellazare.com.

CORRECTION: The first memo discussed in this article was written by U.S. diplomat James Rubin to Hillary Clinton and not by her, as an earlier version of this article said. It has also been revised with additional information.

The Great Saudi Muddle

Two U.S. Senate resolutions last week have resulted in a ball of confusion, one that tries to distance the U.S. from a murderous Saudi prince while at the same time demanding closer relations with the government he heads.

By Daniel Lazare

Special to Consortium News



Does the Senate want Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman to own up to the murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi? Is it really seeking an end to Saudi Arabia's war of aggression against Yemen? The answer to both questions is: kind of, sort of, not really.

That's the takeaway from a couple of resolutions the chamber approved amid great fanfare last week. The first, sponsored by Senator Bernie Sanders, calls on Trump "to remove United States Armed Forces from hostilities in or affecting the Republic of Yemen" by, among other things, putting an end to in-flight refueling of Saudi and the United Arab Emirate war planes. The resolution, which passed 56 to 41, was a small step toward ending a war of aggression that has claimed as many as 80,000 lives – although it would have been stronger and less self-serving if it had also called for cutting off arms sales that have allowed US weapons manufacturers to reap vast profits off human misery.

But the second resolution, which passed on a unanimous voice vote, was a muddle that shows just how self-defeating US policy has become. Sponsored by Republican Senator Bob Corker, it began by holding the crown prince responsible for Khashoggi's murder in an Istanbul consulate on Oct. 2, an act, it said, that has "undermined trust and confidence in the longstanding friendship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

This generated excited headlines to the effect that the U.S. might

at last be breaking with MbS, as Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman is universally known. But news outlets failed to mention what the resolution said next. It declared, for instance, that the U.S.-Saudi relationship is “an essential element of regional security.” While saying nothing about arms shipments to Saudi allies, it condemned Iran for supplying rebel forces with “advanced lethal weapons.” It blamed the Houthis “for egregious human rights abuses, including torture, use of human shields, and interference with, and diversion of, humanitarian aid shipments” – this while remaining silent about Saudi-UAE atrocities, which reportedly include a string of torture chambers in which political opponents are roasted over open fires, among other horrors.

Most bizarrely of all, the resolution warned the Saudis that “increasing purchases of military equipment from, and cooperation with, the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China challenges the strength and integrity of the long-standing military-to-military relationship” between Washington and Riyadh. The Senate is thus angry with MBS not only because he sent a seventeen-member hit squad to knock off a US resident in the middle of a European capital, but because he’s consorting with America’s business rivals. The resolution further warns that such purchases “may introduce significant national security and economic risks to both parties,” language that is every bit as threatening as it sounds.

The result is a ball of confusion, one that tries to distance the US from a murderous Saudi prince while at the same time demanding closer relations with the government he heads. It calls on the Saudis to behave more nicely to their neighbors, wind down the war in Yemen, and cease murdering people in broad daylight so that the clock can be turned back a few years and the process starts all over again. To quote Giuseppe de Lampedusa’s famous line in his novel, *The Leopard*, it wants everything to change so that everything can remain the same.

Incoherence

This is as incoherent as anything Trump has come up with, including his notorious Nov. 20 [statement](#) with regard to MbS's guilt or innocence that "maybe he did and maybe he didn't." Trump can't let go of his Saudi ties. But, then, the Senate can't let go and *not* let go at the same time.

No one knows what to do, which is why the resolution tried to play both sides of the net. In [describing](#) MbS as "a wrecking ball," one whom it is "very difficult to be able to do business" with, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham was essentially calling on the crown prince to step down.

He could be replaced, under U.S. pressure, perhaps with the former crown prince he replaced, Muhammad bin Nayef, said to be favored by the CIA, which publicly blamed MbS for Khashoggi's murder.

But it could also mean a destabilizing factional feud within the ruling clan leading to a messy regime change, which, as Washington foreign-policy experts have learned all too painfully since the Arab Spring, could well lead to chaos.

To be sure, there is always the hope that a senior member of the Al-Saud will step in once MbS is removed and re-establish order. Indeed, Saudi experts already have a candidate for the job in mind: King Salman's younger brother Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, who, while living in self-imposed exile in London, startled Saudi watchers by [telling](#) a small group of hecklers not to blame the Al-Saud for the Yemen war, only the king and crown prince. "They are responsible for crimes in Yemen," he said. "Tell Mohammed bin Salman to stop the war."

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Since public criticism of this sort is unprecedented, it was assumed that when Prince Ahmed flew back to Riyadh a few weeks

after the Khashoggi murder under [a US-UK promise of protection](#), it was with the goal of putting the Al-Saud on a new footing.

But no one knows what might bubble up if he were to try. Things might return to normal after a royal shake-up – assuming one is in the works – or they may not. After all, it was assumed that Libya would return to normal once a former prime minister named [Ali Zeidan](#) took over from deposed strongman Muammar Gaddafi. When that didn't work out, it was hoped that an ex-academic named [Omar al-Hassi](#) would have better luck. But when he fell too, it was clear that only anarchy would reign.

Hence the fear in Saudi Arabia is that something similar might occur post-MbS – that, as a source [told](#) *The New Yorker's* Robin Wright, “[s]omeone from outside the system could make it collapse,” whereupon the kingdom would succumb to “instability like elsewhere in the region.”

Homemade in Washington

If so, it's a problem entirely of Washington's own making. Democratic and Republican administrations alike have continued to build up Saudi Arabia despite repeated warnings that it was creating a monster.

In 1945, FDR granted Saudi King Ibn Saud a blanket security guarantee in return for unrestricted oil access. A few years later, Truman used the newly-established Marshall Fund to finance [massive Saudi oil shipments](#) to war-torn western Europe, thereby establishing the kingdom as the world's leading exporter. Following the epic price increases and [Oil Embargo](#) of the 1973, Washington hit upon yet another deal, this time to recycle excess petrodollars by exchanging Saudi oil profits for U.S. weaponry. A regional military colossus was thus born, one that felt free to attack whomever it pleased thanks to colossal oil wealth, vast quantities of high-tech arms, and an unlimited U.S. security guarantee and political cover.

Aggression and repression were the inevitable result. Unwilling to upset a vital strategic partner, the Obama administration said nothing when Riyadh sent troops into neighboring Bahrain to bloodily suppress democratic protests; when it flooded Syria with bloodthirsty Sunni jihadis, and when, in March 2015, it declared war on Yemen, its neighbor to the south. Indeed, the administration felt it had no choice but to help out.

Thus, a top general signaled his assent even while admitting that he had only been given a few hours' notice while a State Department spokesman added forlornly: "We don't want this to be an open-ended military campaign." Nearly four years later, with as many as 13 million people teetering on the brink of starvation, that's exactly what it's turned out to be.

Joined at the hip with the Saudis, the U.S. appears to have no idea how to go about severing an increasingly toxic relationship, as last week's incoherent Senate resolutions make clear.

The U.S. was happy to build Saudi Arabia up, but it's clueless now that Saudi Arabia is dragging it down.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from The Nation to Le Monde Diplomatique and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at Daniellazare.com.

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The Khashoggi Affair and the Future of Saudi Arabia

If the Saudi power structure were to crumble in the wake of the Khashoggi scandal there would be chaos at home and a shift in power around the Gulf, says Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

Special to Consortium News



If Donald Trump seems at a loss about how to respond to the Jamal Khashoggi murder, it may not be because he's worried about his Saudi business investments or any of the other things that Democrats like to bring up to avoid talking about more serious topics. Rather, it's likely because Trump may be facing one of the biggest U.S. foreign-policy crises since the overthrow of the shah in 1979.

At that time the U.S. counted on support from Arab Gulf states no less frightened by the Iranian revolution. That included Saddam Hussein's Iraq, oil emirates Kuwait and Qatar, plus the Saudis themselves.

But if the Saudi power structure were ever to crumble in the wake of the Khashoggi scandal, there would likely be chaos because there is no alternative to replace it. The impact on the region would be significant. With its 55-percent Shi'ite majority, Iraq is already in the Iranian orbit after the U.S. overthrow of Saddam; Qatar and Oman are on businesslike terms with Tehran, while Kuwait and the UAE could possibly reach an accommodation with Teheran as well. The upshot would be an immense power shift in which the Persian Gulf could revert to being an Iranian lake. That's probably why the United States and Israel will do everything in its power to prevent the House of Saud from falling.

The consequences in terms of U.S. imperial interests would be nearly incalculable. For decades, America has used the Gulf to shape and direct its interests in the larger Eurasian economy. Thanks to trillions of dollars in military investment, the Saudis control the spigot through which roughly 24 percent of the world's daily oil supply flows, much of it bound for such economic powerhouses as India, China, South Korea, and Japan. Should control pass to someone else, America would find its monopoly severely impaired. The effects would also be felt in Syria, where Israel is incensed by the Iranian presence. It would be even more so should the Saudi counterweight be removed.

Expert consensus is that the regime is conservative, consensus-oriented, and

stable, and that all the king might have to do ensure the regime's survival is to remove his son, Muhammad bin Salman (MbS), as crown prince.

However, the kingdom may be less stable than it appears. It was already in trouble when MbS began his rise in early 2015. The second generation of Al-Saud rulers appeared played out along with their economic model.

Adjusted for inflation, oil prices had fallen two-thirds since the 2008 financial crisis while the kingdom was as dependent on oil as ever despite forty years of lip service to the virtues of diversification. Corruption was out of control while unemployment continued to climb because young Saudis prefer to wait years for a no-show government sinecure instead of taking a private-sector job in which they might actually have to work. (Studies show that Saudi government employees put in only an hour's worth of real labor per day.)

Internationally, the country found itself facing growing headwinds as Barack Obama firmed up his historic nuclear accord with Iran. Obama's statement in April 2016 that Saudis needed to "share" the Middle East with its arch-rival to the north would come as a blow to a family that thought it could always count on unqualified U.S. support.

MbS' Trail of Disaster

Oil was supposed to keep Saudi Arabia rich and powerful, but instead total reliance on it was threatening to eventually weaken it. Something had to be done, and King Salman, although only intermittently lucid, figured his 29-year-old son was the man. Shoving rivals aside – most notably cousin Muhammad bin Nayef, the prince in charge of combatting Al Qaeda – Muhammad bin Salman began grabbing the reins and issuing orders.

The results have been disastrous. Within weeks of being named minister of defense – his appointment as crown prince would take a few months longer – MbS launched an air war on Yemen that would soon turn into a classic quagmire, one that would cause as many as fifty thousand combat deaths, propel much of the country to the brink of starvation, and generate annual costs back home of \$50 billion or more that the kingdom could no longer afford.

In June 2017, bin Salman imposed a quarantine of Qatar on the grounds of excessive cordiality with Iran and too close relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, but he was taken aback when the emirate showed that it could carry on despite the blockade. A few months later, MbS' henchmen kidnapped Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri and forced him to read a resignation speech on Saudi TV. But Hariri repudiated the speech as soon as he was back in Lebanon.

Every attempt to assert Saudi strength only underscored its growing weakness.

Bin Salman rounded up two hundred of the kingdom's richest princes and businessmen last November, herded them into the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton, and then, following beatings and torture, forced them to hand over \$100 billion or more.

Capital flight accelerated as a consequence while foreign direct investment is now off eighty percent from 2016 levels. The crown prince unveiled a series of grandiose vanity projects – an entertainment park twice the size of Disneyworld, a \$500-billion robot city known as Neom, and a tourist park the size of Belgium – but then had to put them on hold when his father blocked plans to privatize five percent of Saudi Aramco, which he had been counting on as a revenue source. He hiked gas prices by eighty percent and slapped on a five-percent sales tax, but then went on a Marie Antoinette-style spending spree, shelling out \$550 million for a yacht, \$450 million for a painting, and \$300 million for a French chateau. Whatever the benefits of austerity, they were promptly undercut.

Now the torture, murder, and dismemberment of a dissident journalist in Istanbul has made matters many times worse. With MbS *persona non grata* across the globe, the kingdom's political and economic isolation is as great as it has probably ever been. According to a report in the Paris daily *Le Figaro*, moves have begun to replace MbS as crown prince, second in line to the throne.

An abundance of princely candidates compounds the confusion caused by an unclear line of succession. Since Saudi kings have generally claimed a right to choose their successors, it would be up to Salman to appoint a replacement. So far, the rest of the family has been too terrified to say otherwise. But if MbS departs the scene, factions that suffered under his reign might grow bold enough to demand a say. Since it is unclear what that would mean in an absolute monarchy, a royal donnybrook could conceivably ensue.

Other forces might also weigh in. One is the military, which can't be too happy now that Maj. Gen. Ahmed al-Assiri, a top intelligence officer, is being set up as the fall guy in the Khashoggi affair. Another is the *Wahhabiyya*, the ultra-conservative mullahs who have allied themselves with the Al-Saud since the eighteenth-century, only to see themselves shunted aside by a headstrong crown prince. MbS seemed to go out of his way in recent months to stick it to the mullahs. "No one can define Wahhabism," he said in an interview last spring. "There is no Wahhabism. We don't believe we have Wahhabism." Those are words that mullahs are not likely to forget, which is why they will probably speak out if the question of a new crown prince is raised.

The Extremist Threat

Then there is the threat of ISIS and Al Qaeda. After accusing Saudi Arabia of

“trying to secularize its inhabitants and ultimately destroy Islam,” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Islamic State’s self-proclaimed caliph, launched an attack inside the kingdom in July that killed two people. Al Qaeda, which also portrays itself as defender of the true Wahhabist faith, has launched a similar campaign. Hamza bin Laden, Osama’s son, has released six videos denouncing the royal family as “agents of the Americans,” and called on “honest, glorious scholars ... [to] participate in promoting change with their tongues, their pens, their media, and their tweets,” and urging “youth and those capable of fighting” to join the “mujahideen in Yemen.”

Jihad abroad is a habit the Al-Saud can’t kick. Since MbS launched his ill-fated war on Yemen, Al-Qaeda’s forces in that country have mushroomed from near zero to an estimated four thousand fighters. While its strength inside Saudi Arabia is unknown, there is no question that the group continues to enjoy significant support. According to a 2015 poll of Saudis between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four, 28 percent say that groups like ISIS or Al Qaeda “are mostly wrong, but sometimes raise issues I agree with,” five percent say “they are mostly right, but I disagree with some of their words and actions,” while ten percent say that “they are not a perversion at all.” Sympathy for such forces will likely grow as disorder mounts.

Disaffected royals thus demand political change along with angry mullahs, obsessed jihadis, and millions of jobless young people. By flooding Saudi Arabia with oil revenue and high-tech armaments and allowing it to attack whomever it pleases, the U.S. has contributed to an increasingly dangerous build-up of highly combustible forces. Liberals may hope that a constitutional monarchy emerges out of the current mess, but it’s unlikely in the extreme. The Saudi crisis is likely instead to intensify.

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New Writers Welcomed to Consortium News

In the past few weeks **Consortium News** has added a group of accomplished writers as regular contributors, ensuring that **Consortium** remains a unique source of news, analysis and commentary that you will not find in mainstream media.

Pepe Escobar, the globe-trotting veteran Brazilian journalist, who can turn a phrase with the best of them while delivering incisive analysis of social movements and West vs. East geopolitics, recently joined **Consortium's** roster and has already delivered.

His piece on the Brazilian presidential election is a must read.

Joining Pepe as a new **Consortium** writer is Max Blumenthal, one of the top journalists in alternative media. Max penned a brilliant obituary of Senator John McCain that gave you everything that was missing from *The New York Times*.

Patrick Lawrence, a long-time contributor to *The Nation*, *Salon* and other important alternative media, with a background in the mainstream as Asia Editor of *The International Herald Tribune*, has begun contributing his insightful analysis to **Consortium News**.

As'ad AbuKhalil, a.k.a "The Angry Arab," began contributing a few months ago with a special perspective on the Middle East as a Lebanese scholar of the region that overrides the usual Orientalist Western view.

Alexander Mercouris, a sharp observer of British politics has begun filing a regular Letter from Britain, in the vein of the legendary BBC U.S. correspondent Alistair Cooke's Letter from America.

John Kiriakou, a former CIA agent who blew the whistle on torture, has also begun contributing a regular column to **Consortium News**.

These important writers join our stable of regulars that include Ray Mc Govern, Gareth Porter, Daniel Lazare, Jonathan Marshall, Marjorie Cohn, Diana Johnstone and Annie Machon.

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Is Saudi Arabia the Middle East's Next Failed State?

Ibn Khaldun—the famous Tunisian historian, geographer and social theorist—believed that decadence leads to collapse for Muslim dynasties. Such a scenario may be playing out with the Saudis, reports Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

Special to Consortium News



Reports are growing that Muhammad bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's hyperactive crown prince, is losing his grip. His economic reform program has stalled since his father, King Salman, nixed plans to privatize 5 percent of Saudi Aramco. The Saudi war in Yemen, which the prince launched in March 2015, is more of a quagmire than ever while the kingdom's sword rattling with Iran is making the region increasingly jumpy.

Heavy gunfire in Riyadh last April sparked rumors that MBS, as he's known, had been killed in a palace coup. In May, an exiled Saudi prince urged top members of the royal family to oust him and put an end to his "irrational, erratic, and stupid" rule. Recently, Bruce Riedel, an ex-CIA analyst who heads up the Brookings Institution's Intelligence Project, reported that the prince is so afraid for his life that he's taken to spending nights on his yacht in the Red Sea port of Jeddah.

Channeling Ibn Khaldun

What does it all mean? The person to ask is Ibn Khaldun, the famous Tunisian historian, geographer, and social theorist. You might have trouble getting him on the phone, though, since he died in 1406. But he's still the single best guide to the deepening Saudi crisis.

If you do somehow channel him, the message might be grim. In a nutshell, it's that if MBS goes, he'll likely take the Al-Saud with him, and that the people waiting in the wings will not be the "moderates" beloved of Washington, but ISIS and al-Qaida. A modern state bristling with shopping malls, superhighways, and high-tech weaponry thus will succumb to a ragtag militia riding Toyota pickups and waving AK-47s.

Ibn Khaldun, a member of an upper-class Spanish-Muslim family that fled to North Africa after the fall of Seville in 1248, was one of the most remarkable personalities of the late Middle Ages on either side of the Christian-Muslim

divide. He wrote *The Muqaddimah*, a book-length prologue to his six-volume world history, which British historian Arnold Toynbee praised “as undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place.” The anthropologist Ernest Gellner described Khaldun as a forerunner of modern sociology. The *Muqaddimah*, a strange blend of faith, fatalism, and science, is best known for its musings on the subject of the urban-nomadic conflict and the process by which dynasties rise and decay.

As Ibn Khaldun put it:

[T]he life of a dynasty does not as a rule extend beyond three generations. The first generation retains the desert qualities, desert toughness, and desert strategy. ... They are sharp and greatly feared. People submit to them. ... [T]he second generation changes from the desert attitude to sedentary culture, from privation to luxury and plenty, from a state in which everybody shared in the glory to one in which one man claims all the glory for himself while the others are too lazy to strive for glory. ... The third generation ... has completely forgotten the period of desert life and toughness, as if it never existed... Luxury reaches its peak among them, because they are so much given to a life of prosperity and ease.

Decadence leads to collapse as fierce nomadic fundamentalists gather in the desert and prepare to mete out punishment to the city dwellers for their religious laxity. “[A] new purge of the faith is required,” summed up Friedrich Engels, who evidently read Ibn Khaldun, “a new Mahdi [i.e., redeemer] arises, and the game starts again from the beginning.”

It’s a recurrent cycle that has held true for a remarkable number of Muslim dynasties from the seventh century on.

Evidence of Instability

The big question now is whether the pattern will hold true for the Saudis.

The answer so far is that it will. Events are proceeding on course. Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern Saudi state, by allying himself with Wahhabism, the local version of Islamic ultra-fundamentalism, embodied Ibn Khaldun’s concept of a ruthless desert warrior who uses religion to mobilize his fellow tribesman and battle his way to the throne in 1932. Once Saud took power, he proved to be a tough and cagey politician who put down rebellion and expertly played Britain and America off against one another to solidify his throne.

But the half-dozen sons who followed were different. The first, Saud, was a

heavy spender who brought the kingdom to the brink of bankruptcy. The second, Faisal was an autocrat who was so out of his depth that he believed Zionism somehow begat communism. Khalid, who took power in 1975, was an absentee monarch who was gripped by paralysis when hundreds of rebels took over Mecca's Grand Mosque in November 1979 and had to be rescued by French commandos flown in specially for the occasion. Fahd, who succeeded to the throne in 1982, was obese, diabetic, and a heavy smoker who ultimately fell victim to a massive stroke. Abdullah, his successor, also was sickly and obese, while Salman, who assumed the throne in 2015 at age 79, has suffered at least one stroke and is said to exhibit "mild dementia." A video of the king landing in Moscow in 2017 shows a doddering old man who can barely descend a staircase.

The upshot is a group study in decrepitude. MBS, who all but took over the throne in 2015, meanwhile personifies all the foolishness and decadence that Ibn Khaldun attributed to the third generation. He's more energetic than his father. But as one would expect of someone who has spent his entire life cosseted amid fantastic wealth, he's headstrong, impractical, and immature. Appointed minister of defense by his father at the ripe old age of 29, he declared war on Yemen, Saudi Arabia's neighbor to the south, two months later and then disappeared on a luxury vacation in the Maldives where a frantic Ashton Carter, Barack Obama's secretary of defense, was unable to reach him for days.

A year later, MBS unveiled Vision 2030 a grandiose development plan aimed at bringing Saudi Arabia into the 21st century by diversifying the economy, loosening the grip of the ultra-intolerant Wahhabiyya, and putting an end to the country's dual addiction to oil revenue and cheap foreign labor. In a country in which young men routinely wait years for a comfortable government sinecure to open up, the goal was to rejigger the incentives to encourage them to take private-sector jobs instead.

It hasn't worked. In a rare moment of candor, a pro-government newspaper recently reported that thousands of employers are evading government hiring quotas by paying Saudi workers not to show up. "Employers say young Saudi men and women are lazy and are not interested in working," it said, "and accuse Saudi youth of preferring to stay at home rather than to take a low-paying job that does not befit the social status of a Saudi job seeker."

Some 800,000 foreign workers have left the country while capital is fleeing in the wake of last November's mass roundup in which hundreds of princes and businessmen were herded into the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton and forced to turn over billions in assets. Foreign direct investment has plummeted from \$7.5 billion to \$1.4 billion since 2016 while a series of super-splashy development projects are in jeopardy now that Saudi Aramco privatization, which MBS was counting on as a

revenue source, is on hold.

While granting women permission to drive, MBS has imprisoned women's rights advocates, threatened a dissident cleric and five Shiite activists with the death penalty, and cracked down on satirical postings on social media. He preaches austerity and hard work, yet plunked down \$500 million for his yacht, \$450 million for a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, and \$300 million for a French chateau. The hypocrisy is so thick that it's almost as if he *wants* to be overthrown.

Fundamental Enemies

As for the lean and hungry fundamentalists whom Ibn Khaldun said would administer the final blow, there's no doubt who fits that bill: ISIS and al-Qaida. Both are fierce, warlike, and pious, both inveigh against a Saudi regime drowning in corruption, and both would like nothing more than to parade about with the crown prince's head on a pike.

In May, al-Qaida denounced Saudi religious reforms as "heretical" and urged clerics to rise up against a "moderate, open Islam, which all onlookers know is American Islam."

In July, Islamic State took credit for an attack on a Saudi security checkpoint that claimed the life of a security officer and a foreign resident.

In August, ISIS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi accused Saudi Arabia of "trying to secularize its inhabitants and ultimately destroy Islam."

These are fighting words. Both groups meanwhile enjoy extensive support inside the kingdom. Prior to the attack on the World Trade Center, wealthy Saudis, including members of the royal family, helped fund al-Qaida to the tune of \$30 million a year, according to Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan's 2011 best seller, *The Eleventh Day: The Full Story of 9/11 and Osama bin Laden*.

In 2009, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton confided in a diplomatic memo that "donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide." More than three thousand Saudis have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join up with al-Qaida, ISIS and other Islamist forces. Once they return home, such jihadis might constitute a fifth column threatening the royal family as well. A crumbling royal family could fall like a ripe date into their outstretched palm.

Could Saudi Arabia become the Middle East's next failed state?

Washington is filled with so-called Middle East experts contributing to one

disaster after another. Could it be that the best Mideast hand worth listening to is a North African scholar who died more than six centuries ago?

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique* and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at Daniellazare.com.

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Corbyn Might Long Regret Capitulation on Anti-Semitism

The British Labour Party's decision to adopt the IHRA's contested anti-Semitism definition is a victory for the Israel lobby and for forces on both sides of the Atlantic seeking to stifle criticism of Mideast policy, argues Daniel Lazare.

Daniel Lazare

Special to Consortium News



After months of pummeling, Jeremy Corbyn, the besieged leader of Britain's Labor Party, [gave in](#) to the Zionist lobby and adopted a fiercely contested [definition of anti-Jewish hatred](#) that Arab activists [say](#) essentially brands the Palestinian cause as anti-Semitic.

Opinion varies as to what the capitulation will mean.

Alexander Mercouris, editor of the pro-Russian website *The Duran*, [wrote on Consortium News](#) that the impact will be limited. It "will not end criticism of Israel within the Labour Party or in British society," he said. "Corbyn himself will not change his views, nor will other supporters of the Palestinian struggle"

But the redoubtable freelance journalist Jonathan Cook, based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, was more convincing two or three weeks earlier when he [argued](#) in a piece [republished](#) on Consortium News that adopting the new definition "will be a major victory both for Israel and its apologists in Britain, who have been seeking to silence all meaningful criticism of Israel,

and for the British corporate media, which would dearly love to see the back of an old-school socialist Labour leader whose program threatens to loosen the 40-year stranglehold of neoliberalism on British society.”

A Victory for Israel

Cook understates the case. The decision by the party’s National Executive Committee is a victory for the Israel lobby and for forces on both sides of the Atlantic seeking to stifle criticism of Mideast policy. The reason is simple. Anglo-American policy rests on unqualified support for two regional powers—Israel and Saudi Arabia—that have been granted *carte blanche* to wage war on their neighbors at any time they like. All other issues—refugees, minority rights, secularism—take a second seat next to this United States-conferred license to kill.

At a time when Western powers are cutting a swath of destruction from Libya to Yemen, there is little hope of opposing Israeli-Saudi aggression without tackling Jewish chauvinism and Wahhabist sectarianism. This requires strict neutrality with regard to ethno-religious conflicts while promoting democracy, secularism, national independence and equality.

This is elementary for “an old-school socialist” like Corbyn. But the definition that Labour has adopted tips the scales in favor of the chauvinists. Instead of charting an independent course, it subordinates the party to an endlessly bellicose foreign-policy establishment at a time when America and its allies are once again threatening war over Syria’s bid to expel U.S.-backed pro-al-Qaida forces from the northeastern province of Idlib.

The spillover will be immense in the United Kingdom and United States. In a letter to the right-wing Zionist Organization of America, Kenneth L. Marcus, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos’ chief of civil rights, announced in August that the Trump administration will use the new definition in reopening an investigation into charges that a pro-Palestinian meeting at Rutgers University in 2011 violated Jewish student rights. Unless challenged in the courts, the decision will force universities throughout the country to shut down pro-Palestinian forces of just about any stripe on the grounds that their activities are discriminatory.

Critics will wind up even more marginalized than they already are, if such a thing can be believed. Farther afield, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will gain an even freer hand in Syria and the occupied territories while the Saudis will have nothing to fear from U.S. critics as they pursue their criminal war against Yemen. The fact that the definition now carries the Labour Party’s imprimatur makes it all the more difficult to resist.

The Origins of the Definition

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), the group behind the new definition, is a non-governmental organization founded by former Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson in 1998 to counter Holocaust denial. While its intentions may seem honorable, its political slant was apparent from the outset when it named the relentless self-promoter Elie Wiesel as its honorary chairman.

Wiesel, who died two years ago, was a world-class hypocrite who condemned Germans for not speaking out against Hitler while making it a point never to speak out against the Jewish state. When hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets in 1982 to protest the Israeli-backed slaughter of up to 3,500 Palestinians in Lebanon's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, he thus declared: "I support Israel—period. I identify with Israel—period. I never attack, never criticize Israel when I am not in Israel."

It did not augur well for the IHRA. After the alliance developed its working definition of anti-Semitism beginning in 2003, the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, an arm of the European Union, put it up on its website in early 2005, but "without formal review." The center's successor, the EU-sponsored Fundamental Rights Agency then took it down in 2013. After languishing for a while longer, the definition was then resurrected by the IHRA and adopted in 2016 under pressure from the conservative Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. Still, it won formal approval from only six of the alliance's 31 member nations.

The IHRA definition's opening statement—"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews"—is a grammatical mess, as Antony Lerman, a senior fellow at Vienna's Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue, observed on the British website openDemocracy. While five examples of anti-Semitism it offers are accurate, six others dealing with the Jewish state are nothing less than explosive. According to the IHRA, anti-Semitism includes:

- "Claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor."
- "Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation."
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

How is it anti-Semitic to describe Israel as a racist endeavor when leading Zionists explicitly endorsed ethnic cleansing in the years leading up to the establishment of a Jewish state? "We cannot start the Jewish state ... with half the population being Arab," Avraham Ussishkin, the Labor Zionist in charge of the Jewish National Fund, the agency charged with buying up land exclusively for Jewish use, declared in 1938, according to Benny Morris in *The Birth of the*

Palestinian Problem Revisited. "... Such a state cannot survive even half an hour."

A JNF official named Yosef Weitz added: "There is no way but to transfer the Arabs from here to the neighboring countries, to transfer all of them, save perhaps for Bethlehem, Nazareth, and old Jerusalem. Not one village must be left, not one tribe."

Is it Anti-Semitic if it's True?

Accusing critics of holding Israel to an unreasonably high standard is itself unreasonable. Considering the opprobrium heaped on the U.S. for its racial policies, on Britain for its colonial policies, on France for its collaborationist policies during World War II, and so forth, Israel has gotten off lightly even though its anti-Palestinian policies are no less atrocious.

Controversial comparison with the Nazis is rhetoric with a history in Israeli politics. In 1948, Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Sidney Hook, and other Jewish notables published an open letter accusing future Prime Minister Menachem Begin of heading up a political movement "closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy, and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties."

Does this make Einstein an anti-Semite?

Sixty-odd years later, hundreds of ultra-orthodox Jews paraded about in Jerusalem wearing concentration-camp uniforms with yellow Stars of David pinned to their chest. It was their way of showing that secular Israeli politicians are no better than Nazis. Are Hasidim anti-Semitic as well?

Yehuda Bauer, the Israeli historian who serves as the IHRA's formal academic adviser, in 2003 told a group of Danish visitors that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could conceivably end in a Mideast version of the Final Solution. "What we have here between the Israelis and the Palestinians is an armed conflict—if one side becomes stronger, there is a chance of genocide," he said. When a visitor asked, "Am I to understand that you think Israel could commit genocide on the Palestinian people?," Bauer replied: "Yes."

"Just two days ago," he went on, "extremist settlers passed out flyers to rid Arabs from this land. Ethnic cleansing results in mass killing."

By suggesting that Israel is in danger of succumbing to Nazi methods, has the alliance's own adviser run afoul of its own definition?

Logic like this has been brought into sharp relief in view of the Israeli government's attitude toward resurgent anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe and

elsewhere. In Lithuania, pro-Axis prosecutors have initiated legal proceedings against aged Jewish war veterans for alleged crimes committed while serving in anti-Nazi partisan units during World War II. In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government is rehabilitating interwar leader Miklos Horthy, who helped send half a million Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in 1944. In Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party has made it a crime to say that Poles were complicit in the Holocaust—which, in fact, thousands were—while Ukraine is now seeing "an unprecedented new surge of anti-Semitism" thanks to the U.S.-backed government's heavy reliance on ultra-right militias in its war against pro-Russian separatists.

How has Israel responded? With forthright denunciations? With ringing appeals to humanity? With denunciations of anti-semitism? Not quite. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu maintains close diplomatic relations with Lithuania and hails Orban as "a true friend of Israel" because he "understand[s] that the threat of radical Islam is a real one." He has whitewashed Poland's role in the Holocaust, earning a rebuke from Jerusalem's famous Yad Vashem Holocaust museum on the grounds that "existing documentation and decades of historical research yield a totally different picture."

The Israeli government's response to Ukraine has been to sell arms to the nation's ultra-right Azov Battalion, whose members sport Nazi regalia and whose founder, Andryi Biletsky, once proclaimed: "The historic mission of our nation in this critical moment is to lead the white races of the world in a final crusade for their survival. A crusade against the Semite-led *Untermenschen* [a term Nazis used to describe non-Aryan people]." As a result, Azov members carry Israeli-made Tavor rifles while former Israeli army officers provide training for Ukrainian military units.

Now the Labour Party officially says it's forbidden to suggest that Israel is in any way emulating Nazi methods. Apparently it's not anti-Semitic unless Netanyahu says it is, and considering how well he gets along with authoritarians like Orban, his judgement is questionable.

Corbyn is a mild-mannered man who has been under relentless attacks from the party's right-wing Blairite faction for months. Now, he's allowed a Pandora's box to be opened by giving in to the Zionist lobby, something he might long regret.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as Jacobin

and *The American Conservative*.

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Corporate Media's About-Face on Ukraine's Neo-Nazis

U.S. corporate media spent years dismissing the role of neo-Nazis in Ukraine's 2014 coup but it is suddenly going through a conversion, as Daniel Lazare reports.

By **Daniel Lazare**

Special to Consortium News



Last month a freelance journalist named Joshua Cohen published an [article](#) in *The Washington Post* about the Ukraine's growing neo-Nazi threat. Despite a gratuitous swipe at Russia for allegedly exaggerating the problem (which it hasn't), the piece was fairly accurate.

Entitled "Ukraine's ultra-right militias are challenging the government to a showdown," it said that fascists have gone on a rampage while the ruling clique in Kiev closes its eyes for the most part and prays that the problem somehow goes away on its own.

Thus, a group calling itself C14 (for the fourteen-word ultra-right motto, "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children") not only beat up a socialist politician and celebrated Hitler's birthday by stabbing an antiwar activist, but bragged about it on its website. Other ultra-nationalists, Cohen says, have stormed the Lvov and Kiev city councils and "assaulted or disrupted" art exhibits, anti-fascist demos, peace and gay-rights events, and a Victory Day parade commemorating the victory over Hitler in 1945.

Yet nothing has happened to stop this. President Petro Poroshenko could order a crackdown, but hasn't for reasons that should be obvious. The U.S.-backed "Euromaidan" uprising not only drove out former president Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014, who had won an OSCE-certified election, but tore the country in two, precisely because ultra-rightists like C14 were in the lead.

When resistance to the [U.S.-backed coup](#) broke out in Crimea and parts of the country's largely Russian-speaking east, the base of Yanukovich voters, civil

war ensued. But because the Ukrainian army had all but collapsed, the new, coup government had no one to rely on other than the neo-fascists who had helped propel it to power.

So an alliance was hatched between pro-western oligarchs at the top – Forbes puts Poroshenko's net worth at a cool \$1 billion – and neo-Nazi enforcers at the bottom. Fascists may not be popular. Indeed, Dmytro Yarosh, the fire-breathing leader of a white-power coalition known as Right Sector, received less than one percent of the vote when he ran for president in May 2014.

But the state is so weak and riddled with so many ultra-rightists in key positions – Andriy Parubiy, founder of the neo-Nazi Social-National Party of Ukraine, is speaker of the parliament, while ultra-rightist Arsen Avakov is minister of the interior – that the path before them is clear and unobstructed. As Cohen points out, the result is government passivity on one hand and a rising tide of ultra-right violence on the other. In the earlier stages of the civil war, for instance, the rightwing extremists burned more than 40 people alive in a labor union building in Odessa, a horrific incident downplayed by Western media.

Confusing its Readers

Cohen's article may have *Washington Post* readers scratching their heads for the simple reason that the paper has long said the opposite. Since Euromaidan, the *Post* has toed the official Washington line that Vladimir Putin has exaggerated the role of the radical right in order to discredit the anti-Yanukovych revolt and legitimize his own alleged interference.

Sure, anti-Yanukovych forces had festooned the Kiev town hall with a white supremacist banner, a Confederate flag, and a giant image of Stepan Bandera, a Nazi collaborator whose forces killed thousands of Jews during the German occupation and as many as 100,000 Poles. And yes, they staged a 15,000-strong torchlight parade in Bandera's honor and scrawled an SS symbol on a toppled statue of Lenin. They also destroyed a memorial to Ukrainians who had fought on what Bandera supporters regard as the wrong side of World War II, that is, with the Soviets and against the Axis.

But so-called responsible, mainstream journalists are supposed to avert their eyes to avoid being tarred as a "useful idiot" whom Putin supposedly employs to advance his "anti-American agenda." Ten days after Yanukovych's departure, the *Post* dutifully assured its readers that Russian reports of "hooligans and fascists" had "no basis in reality."

A week or so later, it said "the new government, though peppered with right-wing

politicians, is led primarily by moderate, pro-European politicians.” A few weeks after that, it described Bandera as no more than “controversial” and quoted a Kiev businessman as saying: “The Russians want to call him a fascist, but I feel he was a hero for our country. Putin is using him to try to divide us.”

Thus, the *Post* and other corporate media continued to do its duty by attacking Putin for plainly saying “the forces backing Ukraine’s government in Kiev are fascists and neo-Nazis.” But who was wrong?

The New York Times was no better. It assailed Russia for hurling “harsh epithets” like “neo-Nazi,” and blamed the Russian leader for “scaremongering” by attributing Yanukovych’s ouster to “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes, and anti-Semites.” *The Guardian*’s Luke Harding – a leading Putin basher – said of the far-right Svoboda Party:

“Over the past decade the party appears to have mellowed, eschewing xenophobia, academic commentators suggest. On Monday, the U.S. ambassador in Kiev, Geoffrey Pyatt, said he had been ‘positively impressed’ by Svoboda’s evolution in opposition and by its behavior in the Rada, Ukraine’s parliament. ‘They have demonstrated their democratic bona fides,’ the ambassador asserted.”

This is the party whose founder, Oleh Tyahnybok, said in a 2004 speech that “a Moscow-Jewish mafia” was running the Ukraine and that Bandera’s followers “fought against the Muscovites, Germans, Jews and other enemies who wanted to take away our Ukrainian state.” Had the leopard really changed its spots, according to Pyatt? Or was it simply a matter of America not giving a damn as long as Svoboda joined the fight to encircle Russia and advance NATO’s drive to the east?

As someone named Marx once observed, “Who you gonna believe, me or your own two eyes?” As far as Ukraine was concerned, the answer for the corporate press came from the U.S. State Department. If Foggy Bottom said that Ukrainian neo-Nazism was a figment of Russia’s imagination, then that’s what it was, regardless of evidence to the contrary.

Someday, historians will look back on Euromaidan Ukraine as one of the looniest periods in western journalism – except, of course, for all the ones that have followed. But if one had to choose the looniest story of all, one that best reflects the abject toadyism of the reporting classes, it would have to be “Why Jews and Ukrainians Have Become Unlikely Allies,” a 1,400-word article that ran on the *Post*-owned *Foreign Policy* website in May 2014. Four years later, it

stands as a model of how not to write about an all-important political crisis.

Cohen's Conversion

The piece begins with the usual hand-wringing about Svoboda and Right Sector and expresses remorse that the latter still venerates the "controversial" Bandera, whose followers "fought on the side of the Nazis from 1944 until the end of World War II." (Actually, they welcomed the Germans from the start and, despite rocky relations with the Slav-hating Nazis, continued to work with them throughout the occupation.)

But then it gets down to business by asserting that as bad as Ukrainian nationalists may be, Russia is doubly worse. "Despite the substantial presence of right wing nationalists on the Maidan during the revolution," it says, "many in Ukraine's Jewish community resent being used by Putin in his propaganda war." The proof is an open letter signed by 21 Ukrainian Jewish leaders asserting that the real danger was Moscow.

"We know that the political opposition consists of various groups, including some that are nationalistic," the letter declared. "But even the most marginal of them do not demonstrate anti-Semitism or other forms of xenophobia. And we certainly know that our very few nationalists are well-controlled by civil society and the new Ukrainian government – which is more than can be said for the Russian neo-Nazis, who are encouraged by your security services."

This was music to Washington's ears. But if neo-Nazis are free of "anti-Semitism or other forms of xenophobia," how does one explain the white-power symbols in the Kiev town hall? If nationalists were "very few" in number, why did journalists need to explain them away? If Russian security forces really encouraged neo-Nazis, where were the torchlight parades and portraits of Bandera-like collaborators hanging from public buildings in Moscow?

The article might have noted that Josef Zissels, the Jewish community leader who organized the letter, is a provocative figure who has long maintained close relations with Ukraine's far right. A self-styled Zhydobanderivets – a word that roughly translates as "Kike follower of Bandera" – he has since infuriated other Jewish leaders by criticizing California Congressman Ro Khanna for sending a letter to the State Department asking that pressure be brought on the governments of Poland and Ukraine to combat Holocaust revisionism in their countries.

Forty-one Jewish leaders were so angry, in fact, that they sent out a letter of their own thanking Khanna for his efforts, expressing "deep concern at the rise of anti-Semitic incidents and expressions of xenophobia and intolerance,

including attacks on Roma communities,” and “strongly proclaim[ing] that Mr. Iosif Zissels and the organization VAAD do not represent the Jews of Ukraine.” A Jewish community leader in Russia was so outraged by the pro-Bandera apologetics of Zissels and a Ukrainian-Jewish oligarch named Igor Kolomoisky that he said he wanted to hang both men “in Dnepropetrovsk in front of the Golden Rose Synagogue until they stop breathing.”

So *Foreign Policy* used a highly dubious source to whitewash Ukraine’s growing neo-Nazi presence and absolve it of anti-Semitism. As crimes against the truth go, this is surely one of the worst. But now that the problem has gotten too big for even the corporate media to ignore, overnight muckrakers like Joshua Cohen are seeing to it that getting away with such offenses will no longer be so easy. Before his abrupt about-face, the author of that misleading *Foreign Policy* piece was Joshua Cohen.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as *Jacobin* and *The American Conservative*.

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Spooks Spooking Themselves

As the role of a well-connected group of British and U.S. intelligence agents begins to emerge, new suspicions are growing about what hand they may have had in weaving the Russia-gate story, as Daniel Lazare explains.

By Daniel Lazare *Special to Consortium News*



With the news that a Cambridge academic-cum-spy named Stefan Halper infiltrated the Trump campaign, the role of the intelligence agencies in shaping the great Russiagate saga is at last coming into focus.

It’s looking more and more massive. The intelligence agencies initiated reports that Donald Trump was colluding with Russia, they nurtured them and helped them grow, and then they spread the word to the press and key government

officials. Reportedly, they even tried to use these reports to force Trump to step down prior to his inauguration. Although the corporate press accuses Trump of conspiring with Russia to stop Hillary Clinton, the reverse now seems to be the case: the Obama administration intelligence agencies worked with Clinton to block "Siberian candidate" Trump.

The template was provided by ex-MI6 Director Richard Dearlove, Halper's friend and business partner. Sitting in winged chairs in London's venerable Garrick Club, according to *The Washington Post*, Dearlove told fellow MI6 veteran Christopher Steele, author of the famous "golden showers" opposition research dossier, that Trump "reminded him of a predicament he had faced years earlier, when he was chief of station for British intelligence in Washington and alerted US authorities to British information that a vice presidential hopeful had once been in communication with the Kremlin."

Apparently, one word from the Brits was enough to make the candidate in question step down. When that didn't work with Trump, Dearlove and his colleagues ratcheted up the pressure to make him see the light. A major scandal was thus born – or, rather, a very questionable scandal.

Besides Dearlove, Steele, and Halper, a bon-vivant known as "The Walrus" for his impressive girth, other participants include:

- Robert Hannigan, former director Government Communications Headquarters, GCHQ, UK equivalent of the NSA.
- Alexander Downer, top Australian diplomat.
- Andrew Wood, ex-British ambassador to Moscow.
- Joseph Mifsud, Maltese academic.
- James Clapper, ex-US Director of National Intelligence.
- John Brennan, former CIA Director (and now NBC News analyst).

In-Bred

A few things stand out about this august group. One is its in-bred quality. After helping to run an annual confab known as the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar, Dearlove and Halper are now partners in a private venture calling itself "The Cambridge Security Initiative." Both are connected to another London-based intelligence firm known as Hakluyt & Co. Halper is also connected via two books he wrote with Hakluyt representative Jonathan Clarke and Dearlove has a close personal friendship with Hakluyt founder Mike Reynolds, yet another MI6 vet. Alexander Downer served a half-dozen years on Hakluyt's international advisory board, while Andrew Wood is linked to Steele via Orbis Business Intelligence, the private research firm that Steele helped found, and which produced the anti-Trump dossier, and where Wood now serves as

an unpaid advisor.

Everyone, in short, seems to know everyone else. But another thing that stands out about this group is its incompetence. Dearlove and Halper appear to be old-school paranoids for whom every Russian is a Boris Badenov or a Natasha Fatale. In February 2014, Halper notified US intelligence that Mike Flynn, Trump's future national security adviser, had grown overly chummy with an Anglo-Russian scholar named Svetlana Lokhova whom Halper suspected of being a spy – suspicions that Lokhova convincingly argues are absurd.

In December 2016, Halper and Dearlove both resigned from the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar because they suspected that a company footing some of the costs was tied up with Russian intelligence – suspicions that Christopher Andrew, former chairman of the Cambridge history department and the seminar's founder, regards as "absurd" as well.

As head of Britain's foreign Secret Intelligence Service, as MI6 is formally known, Dearlove played a major role in drumming up support for the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq even while confessing at a secret Downing Street meeting that "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the [regime-change] policy." When the search for weapons of mass destruction turned up dry, Clapper, as then head of the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, argued that the Iraqi military must have smuggled them into neighboring Syria, a charge with absolutely no basis in fact but which helped pave the way for US regime-change efforts in that country too.

Brennan was meanwhile a high-level CIA official when the agency was fabricating evidence against Saddam Hussein and covering up Saudi Arabia's role in 9/11. Wood not only continues to defend the Iraqi invasion, but dismisses fears of a rising fascist tide in the Ukraine as nothing more than "a crude political insult" hurled by Vladimir Putin for his own political benefit. Such views now seem distressingly misguided in view of the alt-right torchlight parades and spiraling anti-Semitism that are now a regular feature of life in the Ukraine.

The result is a diplo-espionage gang that is very bad at the facts but very good at public manipulation – and which therefore decided to use its skill set out to create a public furor over alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

It Started Late 2015

The effort began in late 2015 when GCHQ, along with intelligence agencies in Poland, Estonia, and Germany, began monitoring what they said were "suspicious

'interactions' between figures connected to Trump and known or suspected Russian agents."

Since Trump was surging ahead in the polls and scaring the pants off the foreign-policy establishment by calling for a rapprochement with Moscow, the agencies figured that Russia was somehow behind it. The pace accelerated in March 2016 when a 30-year-old policy consultant named George Papadopoulos joined the Trump campaign as a foreign-policy adviser. Traveling in Italy a week later, he ran into Mifsud, the London-based Maltese academic, who reportedly set about cultivating him after learning of his position with Trump. Mifsud claimed to have "substantial connections with Russian government officials," according to prosecutors. Over breakfast at a London hotel, he told Papadopoulos that he had just returned from Moscow where he had learned that the Russians had "dirt" on Hillary Clinton in the form of "thousands of emails."

This was the remark that supposedly triggered an FBI investigation. *The New York Times* describes Mifsud as "an enthusiastic promoter of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia" and "a regular at meetings of the Valdai Discussion Club, an annual conference held in Sochi, Russia, that Mr. Putin attends," which tried to suggest that he is a Kremlin agent of some sort. But WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange later tweeted photos of Mifsud with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and a high-ranking British intelligence official named Claire Smith at a training session for Italian security agents in Rome. Since it's unlikely that British intelligence would rely on a Russian agent in such circumstances, Mifsud's intelligence ties are more likely with the UK.

After Papadopoulos caused a minor political ruckus by telling a reporter that Prime Minister David Cameron should apologize for criticizing Trump's anti-Muslim pronouncements, a friend in the Israeli embassy put him in touch with a friend in the Australian embassy, who introduced him to Downer, her boss. Over drinks, Downer advised him to be more diplomatic. After Papadopoulos then passed along Mifsud's tip about Clinton's emails, Downer informed his government, which, in late July, informed the FBI.

Was Papadopoulos Set Up?

Suspicious are unavoidable but evidence is lacking. Other pieces were meanwhile clicking into place. In late May or early June 2016, Fusion GPS, a private Washington intelligence firm employed by the Democratic National Committee, hired Steele to look into the Russian angle.

On June 20, he turned in the first of eighteen memos that would eventually comprise the Steele dossier, in this instance a three-page document asserting that Putin "has been cultivating, supporting and assisting TRUMP for at least 5

years" and that Russian intelligence possessed "kompromat" in the form of a video of prostitutes performing a "golden showers" show for his benefit at the Moscow Ritz-Carlton. A week or two later, Steele briefed the FBI on his findings. Around the same time, Robert Hannigan flew to Washington to brief CIA Director John Brennan about additional material that had come GCHQ's way, material so sensitive that it could only be handled at "director level."

One player was filling Papadopoulos's head with tales of Russian dirty tricks, another was telling the FBI, while a third was collecting more information and passing it on to the bureau as well.

On July 7, 2016 Carter Page delivered a lecture on U.S.-Russian relations in Moscow in which he complained that "Washington and other western capitals have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption, and regime change." Washington hawks expressed "unease" that someone representing the presumptive Republican nominee would take Russia's side in a growing neo-Cold War.

Stefan Halper then infiltrated the Trump campaign on behalf of the FBI as an informant in early July, weeks before the FBI launched its investigation. Halper had 36 years earlier infiltrated the Carter re-election campaign in 1980 using CIA agents to turn information over to the Reagan campaign. Now Halper began to court both Page and Papadopoulos, independently of each other.

On July 11, Page showed up at a Cambridge symposium at which Halper and Dearlove both spoke. In early September, Halper sent Papadopoulos an email offering \$3,000 and a paid trip to London to write a research paper on a disputed gas field in the eastern Mediterranean, his specialty. "George, you know about hacking the emails from Russia, right?" Halper asked when he got there, but Papadopoulos said he knew nothing. Halper also sought out Sam Clovis, Trump's national campaign co-chairman, with whom he chatted about China for an hour or so over coffee in Washington.

The rightwing Federalist website speculates that Halper was working with Steele to flesh out a Sept. 14 memo claiming that "Russians do have further 'kompromat' on CLINTON (e-mails) and [are] considering disseminating it." Clovis believes that Halper was trying "to create an audit trail back to those [Clinton] emails from someone in the campaign ... so they could develop a stronger case for probable cause to continue to issue warrants and to further an investigation." Reports that Halper apparently sought a permanent post in the new administration suggest that the effort was meant to continue after inauguration.

Notwithstanding Clovis's nutty rightwing politics, his description of what

Halper may have been up to makes sense as does his observation that Halper was trying “to build something that did not exist.” Despite countless hyper-ventilating headlines about mysterious Trump Tower meetings and the like, the sad truth is that Russiagate after all these months is shaping up as even more of a “nothing-burger” than Obama administration veteran Van Jones said it was back in mid-2017. Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller has indicted Papadopoulos and others on procedural grounds, he has indicted former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort for corruption, and he has charged a St. Petersburg company known as the Internet Research Agency with violating US election laws.

But the corruption charges have nothing to do with Russian collusion and nothing in the indictment against IRA indicates that either the Kremlin or the Trump campaign were involved. Indeed, the activities that got IRA in trouble in the first place are so unimpressive – just \$46,000 worth of Facebook ads that it purchased prior to election day, some pro-Trump, some anti, and some with no particular slant at all – that Mueller probably wouldn’t even have bothered if he hadn’t been under intense pressure to come up with anything at all.

The same goes for the army of bots that Russia supposedly deployed on Twitter. As *The Washington Post* noted in an oddly, cool-headed Dec. 2 article, 2,700 suspected Russian-linked accounts generated just 202,000 tweets in a six-year period ending in August 2017, a drop in a bucket compared to the one billion election-related tweets sent out during the fourteen months leading up to Election Day.

The Steele dossier is also underwhelming. It declares on one page that the Kremlin sought to cultivate Trump by throwing “various lucrative real estate development business deals” his way but says on another that Trump’s efforts to drum up business were unavailing and that he thus “had to settle for the use of extensive sexual services there from local prostitutes rather than business success.”

Why would Trump turn down business offers when he couldn’t generate any on his own? The idea that Putin would spot a U.S. reality-TV star somewhere around 2011 and conclude that he was destined for the Oval Office five years later is ludicrous. The fact that the Democratic National Committee funded the dossier via its law firm Perkins Coie renders it less credible still, as does the fact that the world has heard nothing more about the alleged video despite the ongoing deterioration in US-Russian relations. What’s the point of making a blackmail tape if you don’t use it?

Even Steele is backing off. In a legal paper filed in response to a libel suit last May, he said the document “did not represent (and did not purport to represent) verified facts, but were raw intelligence which had identified a

range of allegations that warranted investigation given their potential national security implications.” The fact is that the “dossier” was opposition research, not an intelligence report. It was neither vetted by Steele nor anyone in an intelligence agency. Opposition research is intended to mix truths and fiction, to dig up plausible dirt to throw at your opponent, not to produce an intelligence assessment at taxpayer’s expense to “protect” the country. And Steele was paid for it by the Democrats, not his government.

Using it Anyway

Nonetheless, the spooks have made the most of such pseudo-evidence. Dearlove and Wood both advised Steele to take his “findings” to the FBI, while, after the election, Wood pulled Sen. John McCain aside at a security conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to let him know that the Russians might be blackmailing the president-elect. McCain dispatched long-time aide David J. Kramer to the UK to discuss the dossier with Steele directly.

Although Kramer denies it, *The New Yorker* found a former national-security official who says he spoke with him at the time and that Kramer’s goal was to have McCain confront Trump with the dossier in the hope that he would resign on the spot. When that didn’t happen, Clapper and Brennan arranged for FBI Director James Comey to confront Trump instead. Comey later testified that he didn’t want Trump to think he was creating “a J. Edgar Hoover-type situation – I didn’t want him thinking I was briefing him on this to sort of hang it over him in some way.”

But how could Trump think otherwise? As Consortium News founding editor Robert Parry observed a few days later, the maneuver “resembles a tactic out of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover’s playbook on government-style blackmail: I have some very derogatory information about you that I’d sure hate to see end up in the press.”

Since then, the Democrats have touted the dossier at every opportunity, *The New Yorker* continues to defend it, while *Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg cites it as well, saying it’s a “rather obvious possibility that Trump is being blackmailed.” CNN, for its part, suggested not long ago that the dossier may actually be Russian disinformation designed to throw everyone off base, Republicans and Democrats alike.

It sounds more like CIA paranoia raised to the *nth* degree. But that’s what the intelligence agencies are for, i.e. to spread fear and propaganda in order to stampede the public into supporting their imperial agenda. In this case, their efforts are so effective that they’ve gotten lost in a fog of their own making. If the corporate press fails to point this out, it’s because reporters

are too befogged themselves to notice.

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