

Israel's Quiet Reaction to US Neo-Nazis

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to call the tune for U.S. policy in the Middle East, going so far as to avoid criticizing U.S. neo-Nazis to not offend President Trump, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar describes.

By Paul R. Pillar

Recently I wrote about the two-sided Saudi policy on Iran, in which Riyadh sees good reason to take quiet steps to reduce tension with its neighbor across the Persian Gulf while still making alarm about a supposed Iranian threat the basis for keeping the United States tied to its side.

But Saudi Arabia (along with its partners in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain) is not the only party in the region to exploit an anti-Iran theme as a basis for retaining U.S. support, and it certainly is not the most influential one in shaping U.S. policy. That would be the right-wing government of Israel, which has made relentless excoriation of Iran one of the dominant themes of its public diplomacy.

The Israeli push to keep Iran in the status of an isolated, despised demon with whom nobody should do any business has included opposition to the agreement that limits Iran's nuclear agreement – even though, as senior Israeli security officials have observed, by closing any route to an Iranian nuclear weapon this agreement is very much in Israel's security interests.

The Israeli government does not have the same sort of balancing act the Gulf Arabs have in manipulating the Iran issue. Israel does not live in, or export oil from, the Persian Gulf. It would not be paying the human and material costs of armed confrontation between Iran and Arabs or between Iran and the United States.

Indeed, warfare in the Persian Gulf would all the more serve the purposes that the promotion of unending hostility toward Iran already serve for the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu. A clash in the Gulf would foreclose any possibility (already almost nonexistent under Donald Trump) of any further U.S. rapprochement with Iran. It would thus play to the Israeli line of Israel being the only reliable partner for the United States in the Middle East. It would weaken a major competitor to Israel for influence in the Middle East. It would play to the Israeli line that Iran is the font of all trouble and instability in the region. And it would be a wonderful distraction of the world's attention from destabilizing matters involving Israel itself.

A background to all this – because this background has become the principal defining characteristic of the Israeli government’s policies and its relationship with the rest of the world – is the half-century-old Israeli occupation of conquered Palestinian territory and the continued denial of political and civil rights to the subject Palestinian population.

This is the topic that, more than any other, commands the attention of Netanyahu’s government in shaping the propaganda that Israelis call *hasbara*, in batting away complaints from foreign governments and international organizations, and in cultivating distractions to deflect attention from the subject. This is the topic that, more than any other, underlies the importance to Netanyahu’s government of continued unquestioning U.S. support that includes veto-invoking political cover at the United Nations Security Council and voluminous financial aid transfers free of any conditions or strings involving Israel’s continued colonization of the West Bank.

Silence about Neo-Nazis

During this past week we saw an indication of the overriding priority Netanyahu gives to not endangering this automatic U.S. backing, even if this means ignoring other values or concerns that we might otherwise expect to guide him.

The ugly events in Charlottesville elicited shock and outspoken dismay from much of the rest of the world and especially the West about this blatant display of neo-Nazism in America. A spokesman for German Chancellor Angela Merkel described the events as “sickening”.

But the Prime Minister of Israel was conspicuously silent. This is the same Prime Minister who has been quick to call out anti-Semitism, either real or imagined, in countless other circumstances, and who certainly has shown no hesitation about wading into the domestic politics of the United States. And yet he had nothing to say about an event featuring chants of “Jews will not replace us” and culminating in a neo-Nazi’s lethal terrorist attack with a vehicle.

The principal and obvious explanation for this non-response is that Netanyahu did not want to take the slightest risk of jeopardizing support from a U.S. president who, in addition to asserting moral equivalence between the racist torch-bearers in Charlottesville and those who demonstrated against them, is notoriously thin-skinned and lashes out at anyone voicing anything that sounds like criticism of him.

Goodness only knows what Netanyahu thinks is in Donald Trump’s heart and what prejudices may or may not lurk there. But Netanyahu perceives that his government has a good thing going politically with a president who, since midway

through the presidential campaign, has pretty much toed the right-wing Israeli line, including backing away from previous administrations' endorsement of a Palestinian state. And Netanyahu could not ask for anything more from Trump regarding vituperative, automatic, unending hostility toward Iran and unwillingness to do any business with it or even to talk to its government.

Israel's Lost Sensitivity

An additional possible explanation for Netanyahu's non-response flows from the nature of the background condition: an occupation based on ethnic and religious distinctions between a dominant population that is in control and a subjected population that is the one under occupation.

It would not be surprising for members of a political movement centered on such a system to lose sensitivity over time to the dangers of other forms of prejudice and discrimination based on ethnicity or religious identity, including ones with a violent element. In any case, this is not the first time Netanyahu has appeared to disregard legitimate fears, concerns, and interests of parts of world Jewry, on whose behalf he often claims to speak and act.

Any accounting of Netanyahu's current priorities must take note of the domestic political fix he is in with multiple charges of corruption against him and his family. There are reasons to believe he will not be leaving office any time soon. Whether he does or not, the patterns described above are unlikely to change. As long as he stays, Netanyahu is dependent on maintaining a coalition in which parts of it are even more extreme than he is on issues involving the occupation.

Meanwhile, Americans ought to be most concerned about compromises with American values, not just Israeli ones. There is much to be concerned about in how the effort to maintain lockstep U.S. support and cover for Israeli policies has involved that sort of compromise. This involves not just the Trump administration but the U.S. Congress.

A recent case in point is the reprehensible bill, introduced by Senator Ben Cardin and promoted by the lobby that works on the Israeli government's behalf, that would subject to criminal penalties any form of support for peaceful economic boycotts authorized by the United Nations or the European Union and aimed at the illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories.

In the wake of the Charlottesville episode, old debates have been rekindled about limits to free speech and how much freedom should be given to hate speech. There are reasonable and differing positions that can be, and have been, taken on this question in Western countries. But we ought to be able to agree

that it is unacceptable to outlaw speech that has nothing to do with hate speech but instead is only a form of criticism of policies that have themselves been determined by the international community, including the United States, to be illegal.

As we know from the history of the original Nazis whom the extremists at Charlottesville admire, loss of freedom of speech is a signpost on the road to power of movements that are truly hateful and extreme.

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Steve Bannon's Apocalyptic 'Unravelling'

From the Archive: Ousted White House strategist Steve Bannon was a perplexing mix of populist, operative and opportunist, but his political theories crossed into the apocalyptic and bizarre, as Alastair Crooke described last March.

By Alastair Crooke (First published on March 9, 2017)

Steve Bannon is accustomed to start many of his talks to activists and Tea Party gatherings in the following way: "At 11 o'clock on 18 September 2008, Hank Paulson and Ben Bernanke told the U.S. President that they had already stove-piped \$500 billions of liquidity into the financial system during the previous 24 hours – but needed a further one Trillion dollars, *that same day*."

"The pair said that if they did not get it immediately, the U.S. financial system would implode within 72 hours; the world's financial system, within three weeks; and that social unrest and political chaos could ensue within the month." (In the end, Bannon notes, it was more like \$5 trillion that was required, though no one really knows how much, as there has been no accounting for all these trillions).

"We (the U.S.) have", he continues, "in the wake of the bailouts that ensued, liabilities of \$200 trillions, but net assets – including everything – of some \$50-60 trillion." (Recall that Bannon is himself a former Goldman Sachs banker).

"We are upside down; the industrial democracies today have a problem we have never had before; we are over-leveraged (we have to go through a massive de-

leveraging); and we have built a welfare state which is completely and totally unsupportable.

“And why this is a crisis ... the problem ... is that the numbers have become so esoteric that even the guys on Wall Street, at Goldman Sachs, the guys I work with, and the Treasury guys ... It’s so tough to get this together ... Trillion dollar deficits ... etcetera.”

But, Bannon says – in spite of all these esoteric, unimaginable numbers wafting about – the Tea Party women (and it is mainly led by women, he points out) get it. They *know* a different reality: they know what groceries now cost, they know their kids have \$50,000 in college debt, are still living at home, and see no jobs in prospect: “The reason I called the film *Generation Zero* is because this generation, the guys in their 20s and 30s: We’ve wiped them out.”

And it’s not just Bannon. A decade earlier, in 2000, Donald Trump was writing in a very similar vein in a pamphlet that marked his first toying with the prospect of becoming a Presidential candidate: “My third reason for wanting to speak out is that I see not only incredible prosperity ... but also the possibility of economic and social upheaval ... Look towards the future, and if you are like me, you will see storm clouds brewing. Big Trouble. I hope I am wrong, but I think we may be facing an economic crash like we’ve never seen before.”

And before the recent presidential election, Donald Trump kept to this same narrative: the stock market was dangerously inflated. In an interview on CNBC, he said, “I hope I’m wrong, but I think we’re in a big, fat, juicy bubble,” adding that conditions were so perilous that the country was headed for a “very massive recession” and that “if you raise interest rates even a little bit, (everything’s) going to come crashing down.”

The Paradox

And here, precisely, is the paradox: Why – if Trump and Bannon view the economy as already over-leveraged, excess-bubbled, and far too fragile to accommodate even a small interest rate rise – has Trump (in Mike Whitney’s words) “promised ... more treats and less rules for Wall Street ... tax cuts, massive government spending, and fewer regulations ... \$1 trillion in fiscal stimulus to rev up consumer spending and beef up corporate profits ... to slash corporate tax rates and fatten the bottom line for America’s biggest businesses. And he’s going to gut Dodd-Frank, the ‘onerous’ regulations that were put in place following the 2008 financial implosion, to prevent another economy-decimating cataclysm.”

Does President Trump see the world differently, now that he is President? Or has he parted company with Bannon’s vision?

Though Bannon is often credited – though most often, by a hostile press, aiming to present Trump (falsely) as the “accidental President” who never really expected to win – as the intellectual force behind President Trump. In fact, Trump’s current main domestic and foreign policies were all presaged, and entirely present, in Trump’s 2000 pamphlet.

In 2000, Bannon was less political, screenwriter Julia Jones, a long-time Bannon collaborator, notes. “But the Sept. 11 attacks,” Ms. Jones says, “changed him” and their Hollywood collaboration did not survive his growing engagement with politics.

Bannon himself pins his political radicalization to his experience of the 2008 Great Financial Crisis. He detested how his Goldman colleagues mocked the Tea Party’s “forgotten” ones. As Ms. Jones sees it, a more reliable key to Bannon’s worldview lies in his military service.

“He has a respect for duty,” she said in early February. “The word he has used a lot is ‘dharma.’” Mr. Bannon found the concept of dharma in the Bhagavad Gita, she recalls. It can describe one’s path in life or one’s place in the universe.

There is no evidence, however, that President Trump either has changed his economic views or that he has diverged in his understanding of the nature of the crisis facing America (and Europe).

Tests Ahead

Both men are very smart. Trump understands business, and Bannon finance. They surely know the headwinds they face: the looming prospect of a wrangle to increase the American \$20 trillion “debt ceiling” (which begins to bite on March 15), amid a factious Republican Party, the improbability of the President’s tax or fiscal proposals being enacted quickly, and the likelihood that the Federal Reserve will hike interest rates, “until something breaks.” If they are so smart, what then is going on?

What Bannon has brought to the partnership however, is a clear articulation of the nature of this “crisis” in his Generation Zero film, which explicitly is built around the framework of a book called *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, written in 1997 by Neil Howe and William Strauss.

In the words of one of the co-authors, the analysis “rejects the deep premise of modern Western historians that social time is either linear (continuous progress or decline) or chaotic (too complex to reveal any direction). Instead we adopt the insight of nearly all traditional societies: that social time is a recurring cycle in which events become meaningful only to the extent that they are what philosopher Mircea Eliade calls ‘reenactments.’ In cyclical space, once you

strip away the extraneous accidents and technology, you are left with only a limited number of social moods, which tend to recur in a fixed order.”

Howe and Strauss write: “The cycle begins with the First Turning, a ‘High’ which comes after a crisis era. In a High, institutions are strong and individualism is weak. Society is confident about where it wants to go collectively, even if many feel stifled by the prevailing conformity.

“The Second Turning is an ‘Awakening,’ when institutions are attacked in the name of higher principles and deeper values. Just when society is hitting its high tide of public progress, people suddenly tire of all the social discipline and want to recapture a sense of personal authenticity.

“The Third Turning is an ‘Unravelling,’ in many ways the opposite of the High. Institutions are weak and distrusted, while individualism is strong and flourishing.

“Finally, the Fourth Turning is a ‘Crisis’ period. This is when our institutional life is reconstructed from the ground up, always in response to a perceived threat to the nation’s very survival. If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action. Civic authority revives, and people and groups begin to pitch in as participants in a larger community. As these Promethean bursts of civic effort reach their resolution, Fourth Turnings refresh and redefine our national identity.” (Emphasis added).

Woodstock Generation

Bannon’s film focuses principally on the causes of the 2008 financial crisis, and on the “ideas” that arose amongst the “Woodstock generation” (the Woodstock musical festival occurred in 1969), that permeated, in one way or another, throughout American and European society.

The narrator calls the Woodstock generation the “Children of Plenty.” It was a point of inflection: a second turning “Awakening”; a discontinuity in culture and values. The older generation (that is, anyone over 30) was viewed as having nothing to say, nor any experience to contribute. It was the elevation of the “pleasure principle” (as a “new” phenomenon, as “their” discovery), over the puritan ethic; It celebrated doing one’s own thing; it was about “Self” and narcissism.

The “Unravelling” followed in the form of government and institutional weakness: the “system” lacked the courage to take difficult decisions. The easy choices invariably were taken: the élites absorbed the self-centered, spoilt-child, ethos of the “me” generation. The 1980s and 1990s become the era of “casino

capitalism” and the “Davos man.”

The lavish taxpayer bailouts of the U.S. banks after the Mexican, Russian, Asian and Argentinian defaults and crises washed away the bankers’ costly mistakes. The 2004 Bear Stearns exemption which allowed the big five banks to leverage their lending above 12:1 – and, which quickly extended to become 25:1, 30:1 and even 40:1 – permitted the irresponsible risk-taking and the billions in profit-making. The “Dot Com” bubble was accommodated by monetary policy – and then the massive 2008 bailouts accommodated the banks, yet again.

The “Unravelling” was essentially a cultural failure: a failure of responsibility, of courage to face hard choices – it was, in short, the film suggests, an era of spoilt institutions, compromised politicians and irresponsible Wall Streeters – the incumbent class – *indulging themselves, and “abdicating responsibility.”*

Now we have entered the “Fourth Turning”: “All the easy choices are back of us.” The “system” still lacks courage. Bannon says this period will be the “nastiest, ugliest in history.” It will be brutal, and “we” (by which he means the Trump Tea Party activists) will be “vilified.” This phase may last 15 – 20 years, he predicts.

Greek Tragedy

The key to this Fourth Turning is “character.” It is about values. What Bannon means by “our crisis” is perhaps best expressed when the narrator says: “the essence of Greek tragedy is that it is not like a traffic accident, where somebody dies [i.e. the great financial crises didn’t just arise by mischance].

The Greek sense is that tragedy is where something happens because it has to happen, because of the nature of the participants. Because the people involved, make it happen. And they have no choice to make it happen, because that’s their nature.”

This is the deeper implication of what transpired from Woodstock: the nature of people changed. The “pleasure principle,” the narcissism, had displaced the “higher” values that had made America what it was. The generation that believed that there was “no risk, no mountain they could not climb” brought this crisis upon themselves. They wiped out 200 years of financial responsibility in about 20 years. This, it appears, captures the essence of Bannon’s thinking.

That is where we *are*, Bannon asserts: Stark winter inevitably follows, after a warm, lazy summer. It becomes a time of testing, of adversity. Each season in nature has its vital function. Fourth turnings are necessary: they a part of the cycle of renewal.

Bannon's film concludes with author Howe declaring: "history is seasonal and winter is coming,"

And, what is the immediate political message? It is simple, the narrator of Bannon's film says: "STOP": stop doing what you were doing. Stop spending like before. Stop taking on spending commitments that cannot be afforded. Stop mortgaging your children's future with debt. Stop trying to manipulate the banking system. It is a time for tough thinking, for saying "no" to bailouts, for changing the culture, and re-constructing institutional life.

Cultural Legacy

And how do you re-construct civic life? You look to those who still possess a sense of duty and responsibility – who have retained a cultural legacy of values. It is noticeable that when Bannon addresses the activists, almost the first thing he does is to salute the veterans and serving officers, and praise their qualities, their sense of duty.

It is no surprise then that President Trump wants to increase both the veterans' and the military's budget. It is not so much a portent of U.S. military belligerence, but more that he sees them as warriors for the coming "winter" of testing and adversity. Then, and only then does Bannon speak to the "thin blue line" of activists who still have strength of character, a sense of responsibility, of duty. He tells them that the future rests in their hands, alone.

Does this sound like men – Bannon and Trump – who want to ramp up a fresh financial bubble, to indulge the Wall Street casino (in their words)? No? So, what is going on?

They know "the crisis" is coming. Let us recall what Neil Howe wrote in the *Washington Post* concerning the "Fourth Turning":

"This is when our institutional life is reconstructed from the ground up, always in response to a perceived threat to the nation's very survival. If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action. Civic authority revives, and people and groups begin to pitch in as participants in a larger community. As these Promethean bursts of civic effort reach their resolution, Fourth Turnings refresh and redefine our national identity."

Trump has no need to "fabricate" a financial crisis. It will happen "because it has to happen, because of the nature of the participants (in the current 'system'). Because the people involved, make it happen. And they have no choice to make it happen, because that's their nature."

It is not even President Obama's or Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson's *fault*, per se. They are just who they are.

Trump and Bannon therefore are *not* likely trying to ignite the "animal spirits" of the players in the financial "casino" (as many in the financial sphere seem to assume). If Bannon's film and Trump's articulation of crisis mean anything, it is that their aim is to ignite the "animal spirits" of "the working-class casualties and those forgotten Americans" of the Midwest, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

At that point, they hope that the "thin blue line" of activists will "pitch in" with a Promethean burst of civic effort which will reconstruct America's institutional and economic life.

If this is so, the Trump/Bannon vision both is audacious – and quite an extraordinary gamble ...

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Russia-gate's Evidentiary Void

Exclusive: A cyber-warfare expert sees no technical evidence linking Russia to the Democratic email releases, but The New York Times presses ahead with a new hope that Ukraine can fill the void, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times' unrelenting anti-Russia bias would be almost comical if the possible outcome were not a nuclear conflagration and maybe the end of life on planet Earth.

A classic example of the Times' one-sided coverage was a front-page [article](#) on Thursday expressing the wistful hope that a Ukrainian hacker whose malware was linked to the release of Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails in 2016 could somehow "blow the whistle on Russian hacking."

Though full of airy suspicions and often reading like a conspiracy theory, the article by Andrew E. Kramer and Andrew Higgins contained one important admission (buried deep inside the "jump" on page A8 in my print edition), a startling revelation especially for those Americans who have accepted the Russia-did-it

groupthink as an established fact.

The article quoted Jeffrey Carr, the author of a book on cyber-warfare, referring to a different reality: that the Russia-gate “certainties” blaming the DNC “hack” on Russia’s GRU military intelligence service or Russia’s FSB security agency lack a solid evidentiary foundation.

“There is not now and never has been a single piece of technical evidence produced that connects the malware used in the DNC attack to the GRU, FSB or any agency of the Russian government,” Carr said.

Yet, before that remarkable admission had a chance to sink into the brains of Times’ readers whose thinking has been fattened up on a steady diet of treating the “Russian hack” as flat fact, Times’ editors quickly added that “United States intelligence agencies, however, have been unequivocal in pointing a finger at Russia.”

The Times’ rebuke toward any doubts about Russia-gate was inserted after Carr’s remark although the Times had already declared several times on page 1 that there was really no doubt about Russia’s guilt.

“American intelligence agencies have determined Russian hackers were behind the electronic break-in of the Democratic national Committee,” the Times reported, followed by the assertion that the hacker’s “malware apparently did” get used by Moscow and then another reminder that “Washington is convinced [that the hacking operation] was orchestrated by Moscow.”

By repeating the same point on the inside page, the Times editors seemed to be saying that any deviant views on this subject must be slapped down promptly and decisively.

A Flimsy Assessment

But that gets us back to the problem with the Jan. 6 “Intelligence Community Assessment,” which – contrary to repeated Times’ claims – was not the “consensus” view of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies, but rather the work of a small group of “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies: the Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation and National Security Agency. And, they operated under the watchful eye of President Obama’s political appointees, CIA Director John Brennan and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, who was the one who called them “hand-picked.”

Those analysts presented no real evidence to support their assessment, which they acknowledged was not a determination of fact, but rather what amounted to their best guess based on what they perceived to be Russian motives and

capabilities.

The Jan. 6 assessment admitted as much, saying its “judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Much of the unclassified version of the report lambasted Russia’s international TV network RT for such offenses as hosting a 2012 presidential debate for third-party candidates excluded from the Republican-Democratic debate, covering the Occupy Wall Street protests, and reporting on dangers from “fracking.” The assessment described those editorial decisions as assaults on American democracy.

But rather than acknowledge the thinness of the Jan. 6 report, the Times – like other mainstream news outlets – treated it as gospel and pretended that it represented a “consensus” of all 17 intelligence agencies even though it clearly never did. (Belatedly, the Times slipped in a correction to that falsehood in one article although continuing to use similar language in subsequent stories so an unsuspecting Times reader would not be aware of how shaky the Russia-gate foundation is.)

Russian President Vladimir Putin and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange have denied repeatedly that the Russian government was the source of the two batches of Democratic emails released via WikiLeaks in 2016, a point that the Times also frequently fails to acknowledge. (This is not to say that Putin and Assange are telling the truth, but it is a journalistic principle to include relevant denials from parties facing accusations.)

Conspiracy Mongering

The rest of Thursday’s Times article veered from the incomprehensible to the bizarre, as the Times reported that the hacker, known only as “Profexer,” is cooperating with F.B.I. agents inside Ukraine.

Yet, the reliance on Ukraine to provide evidence against Russia defies any objective investigative standards. The Ukrainian government is fiercely anti-Russian and views itself as engaged in an “information war” with Putin and his government.

Ukraine’s SBU security service also has been implicated in possible torture, according to United Nations investigators who were denied access to Ukrainian government detention facilities housing ethnic Russian Ukrainians who resisted the violent coup in February 2014, which was spearheaded by neo-Nazis and other extreme nationalists and overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich.

The SBU also has been the driving force behind the supposedly “Dutch-led” investigation into the July 17, 2014 shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17. That inquiry has ignored evidence that a rogue Ukrainian force may have been responsible – not even addressing a Dutch/NATO intelligence report stating that all anti-aircraft missile batteries in eastern Ukraine on that day were under the control of the Ukrainian military – and instead tried to pin the atrocity on Russia, albeit with no suspects yet charged.

In Thursday’s article, the Times unintentionally reveals how fuzzy the case against “Fancy Bear” and “Cozy Bear” – the two alleged Russian government hacking operations – is.

The Times reports: “Rather than training, arming and deploying hackers to carry out a specific mission like just another military unit, Fancy Bear and its twin Cozy Bear have operated more as centers for organization and financing; much of the hard work like coding is outsourced to private and often crime-tainted vendors.”

Further, under the dramatic subhead – “A Bear’s Lair” – the Times reported that no such lair may exist: “Tracking the bear to its lair ... has so far proved impossible, not least because many experts believe that no such single place exists.”

Lacking Witnesses

The Times’ article also noted the “absence of reliable witnesses” to resolve the mystery – so to the rescue came the “reliable” regime in Kiev, or as the Times wrote: “emerging from Ukraine is a sharper picture of what the United States believes is a Russian government hacking group.”

The Times then cited various cases of exposed Ukrainian government emails, again blaming the Russians albeit without any real evidence.

The Times suggested some connection between the alleged Russian hackers and a mistaken report on Russia’s Channel 1 about a Ukrainian election, which the Times claimed “inadvertently implicated the government authorities in Moscow.”

The Times’ “proof” in this case was that some hacker dummied a phony Internet page to look like an official Ukrainian election graphic showing a victory by ultra-right candidate, Dmytro Yarosh, when in fact Yarosh polled less than 1 percent. The hacker supposedly sent this “spoof” graphic to Channel 1, which used it.

But such an embarrassing error, which would have no effect on the actual election results, suggests an effort to discredit Channel 1 rather than evidence

of a cooperative relationship between the mysterious hacker and the Russian station. The Times, however, made this example a cornerstone in its case against the Russians.

Meanwhile, the Times offered its readers almost no cautionary advice that – in the case of Russia-gate – Ukraine would have every motive to send U.S. investigators in directions harmful to Russia, much as happened with the MH-17 investigation.

So, we can expect that whatever “evidence” Ukraine “uncovers” will be accepted as gospel truth by the Times and much of the U.S. government – and anyone who dares ask inconvenient questions about its reliability will be deemed a “Kremlin stooge” spreading “Russian propaganda.”

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

The Goal of ‘Not Losing’ in Afghanistan

Exclusive: America’s adventures in Afghanistan – dating back to the 1980s – have led to one disaster after another with President Trump and other politicians afraid to finally admit failure, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

“Let’s get out of Afghanistan. Our troops are being killed by the Afghans we train and we waste billions there. Nonsense!” – [Donald Trump](#), January 11, 2013

Taking a break from his defense of the “[very fine people](#)” who marched with Nazis in Charlottesville, President Trump will reportedly meet with his national security team today (Friday, August 18) at Camp David to discuss a far deadlier but ironically less controversial issue: the war in Afghanistan.

That war, the longest in our history, has [cost the United States](#) more than 2,350 killed, 20,000 injured, and a trillion dollars. Yet unlike Charlottesville, it arouses little passion. It gained impeccably bipartisan credentials through successive Republican and Democratic administrations. Although [a huge majority](#) of Americans today oppose the war, they lack sufficient conviction to prevent Congress from continuing to appropriate tens of billions of dollars each year to

fund it.

Trump is in a bind. As Taliban forces continue to rack up military and political gains across their country, no serious expert can possibly believe that continued U.S. intervention will deliver “victory.” Sixteen years of experience show that almost every U.S. tactic has not only failed, but backfired.

Far from winning hearts and minds, nighttime Special Forces raids and bombing runs have turned countless villagers against the Afghan government and its foreign backers. Far from bolstering Kabul’s resources, tens of billions of dollars in U.S. aid created an epidemic of corruption that decimated the government’s credibility and put money and weapons in the hands of the Taliban.

Far from defeating Islamist tyranny, the United States has empowered viciously cruel warlords. Far from promoting law and order, U.S. anti-drug campaigns turned poppy-growing peasants into allies and funders of the Taliban. And far from closing off Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan, Washington’s surly relations with Islamabad have amplified dangerous anti-American sentiments in that nuclear-armed, Islamic state.

A Parallel Disaster

“It is most disturbing to find that after [many] years [the country] appears less, not more, stable than it was at the outset,” said one prominent U.S. senator. “It appears more removed from, rather than closer to, the achievement of popularly responsible and responsive government.”

That was actually the observation of Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, D-Montana, reporting on a study mission to Vietnam in the fall of 1962. It applies just as well to Afghanistan today.

Yet as Trump’s national security experts huddle with the President, most are almost certainly advocating an increased troop commitment to Afghanistan – not to bear the brunt of the fighting, but ostensibly to train government forces to stand on their own. That, of course, was the mission of U.S. military advisers sent to Vietnam in the early 1960s, before that war ballooned into a national disaster.

Trump’s generals – McMaster, Mattis and Kelly – know this history as well as anyone. (H. R. McMaster’s book, *Dereliction of Duty*, is considered a classic history of failed military leadership in the Vietnam War.) So does John McCain, the Senate’s most famous Vietnam veteran, who nonetheless insists on doing whatever it takes to “turn the tide” in Afghanistan. So why do they – like Obama’s team before them – keep calling for throwing away more lives and money on a lost cause?

The answer to that also lies in Vietnam. As former Defense Department official and Pentagon Papers leaker Daniel Ellsberg argued in a seminal 1971 essay, “The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine,” U.S. leaders knew full well, every step of the way, that their successive escalations of that war would not bring victory. Instead, their goal was to prevent defeat – and with it, a repetition of the political traumas that followed the “loss of China” and the rise of McCarthyism in the early 1950s.

“If I tried to pull out completely now, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands,” President John F. Kennedy told Sen. Mansfield in 1963. The assassination of Kennedy that November precluded any possibility that he would pull out after his reelection. Two days later, President Lyndon Johnson told a White House meeting, “I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not going to be the president who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.”

The Cost of ‘Not Losing’

Forty-six years later, a *Washington Post* story on America’s longest war reports, “talk of ‘winning’ is scarce. The goal now seems more akin to ‘not losing.’” Pundits like former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta now talk of staying in Afghanistan for decades. It’s a replay of the Vietnam stalemate – but with more manageable costs, little TV coverage, and no mass anti-war demonstrations.

Most Washington leaders hardly know or care whether any U.S. “national interests” are actually at stake in Afghanistan. But they view the political risks of pulling out as worse than the risks of keeping the stalemate going. They don’t dare face charges that they allowed Afghanistan to become once again a haven for terrorists. No matter that Islamist jihadists operate just fine today without bases in Afghanistan – in our post-reality world, what counts are not the facts, but what fire-breathing analysts on Fox News will say about any apparent retreat.

No one knows what would happen if the United States were to pull out of Afghanistan. But if the Vietnam analogy holds, the consequences, though not pretty, would surely be less disastrous than many pundits predict. It’s hard to dispute the (admittedly self-serving) words of one Taliban spokesman, who said a U.S. withdrawal “will prevent further loss of its manpower and economy . . . This will be a means of salvage for us Afghans, too. . . Therefore, if America’s occupation comes to an end, it means that the problem between the two nations will end, too.”

Donald Trump, who had no trouble advising President Obama to quit the war, has reportedly ruled out a withdrawal from Afghanistan and complained to his military advisers that they aren’t giving him a strategy to win. If those

reports are correct, he will forfeit his last opportunity to blame the war on his predecessor and cut his losses.

Senator McCain had it partly right when he said in July, “Eight [try 16] years of a ‘don’t lose’ strategy have cost us lives and treasure in Afghanistan. Our troops deserve better.”

So do American taxpayers – and Afghan civilians. Unfortunately, McCain, like most members of the Washington foreign policy “blob,” can only envision further military escalation to maintain the stalemate. What the United States desperately needs now is a mass movement to resist not only racism and plutocracy at home, but endless militarism abroad.

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.

President Trump’s ‘White Blindness’

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

By Robert Parry

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

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

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

And, if that recollection of my grade-school experience sounds hard to believe, just watch the 1939 movie classic “Gone with the Wind,” which presents Tara’s

plantation slaves as mostly content with their enslavement and loyal to their masters. That was pretty much what Americans were taught for generations and explains why the 1977 TV miniseries "Roots" was such a shocking event, because it showed the systematic cruelty of slavery from the perspective of the slaves.

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

Reagan's Dog Whistle

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

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

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

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

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

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

who's next, Washington, Jefferson? So foolish!"

Neo-Confederate Thinking

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

Most of these monuments were erected in the Twentieth Century, often as symbolic rebukes to progress being made by the descendants of African-American slaves. These were monuments to white supremacy – and for Trump and other white Americans to pretend otherwise is anti-historical nonsense.

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

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

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

Democratic Cowardice

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

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

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

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

Honoring Treason

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

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

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

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

United States sought to find its footing in its early years.

Jefferson's Hypocrisy

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

Recent historical revelations also reveal Jefferson to have been a much more ruthless slave master than his admirers have wanted to believe. He countenanced the whipping of boys, calculated the financial value of child-bearing females, and apparently helped the "breeding" along by imposing himself sexually on one and likely more of his slave girls.

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

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

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

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

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

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for

The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Trump's Outdated Hatred for Iran

The Saudi-Israeli tandem has often driven U.S. policies in the Middle East. But the Trump administration keeps following the old Saudi line on Iran even as Riyadh shifts toward diplomacy, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Regimes that crave U.S. support in their regional rivalries are apt to strike two different postures that may seem contradictory but really aren't. They publicly play up the supposed threatening nature and incorrigibility of the rival, to keep Americans thinking that the United States should take sides against the rival. But they also realize that unending hostility and tension are not in their own best interests.

They realize that there are two sides to every dispute, that compromise and conciliation are necessary to keep conflict from escalating, and that peace in their neighborhood is better than war.

This combination of postures characterizes the Persian Gulf Arabs and especially Saudi Arabia. Ties to the United States have been, ever since Ibn Saud's meeting with Franklin Roosevelt during World War II, important to the Al Saud despite the absence of a mutual security treaty. The fragility of their anachronistic family rule has made an implied U.S. security guarantee especially useful to them.

Since the end of the Cold War, the USSR can no longer function as chief bogeyman (although the Saudis are happy to sound Cold War echoes regarding Russian involvement in Syria). The Sunni extremism that since the Cold War has become a major American preoccupation hits too close to Saudi Arabia being part of the problem rather than part of the solution for it to be the centerpiece of a Saudi strategy for drawing in the Americans. That centerpiece has instead been the purported threat from Saudi Arabia's cross-Gulf rival Iran.

With the Trump administration, this part of the Saudi strategy has been conspicuously successful, as illustrated by Donald Trump's sword-dancing visit to Riyadh earlier this year. The Saudis could not hope for a more unquestioning

U.S. taking of their side in the cross-Gulf rivalry.

Rethinking a Rivalry

But a lessening of tension in that rivalry is in Saudi Arabia's interests, as well as being in the interests of Iran. Both countries rely on the oil trade continuing without interruption from armed conflict or the fear of such conflict. Both have potentially restive domestic minorities that could find sympathy and support on the other side of the Gulf.

For the Saudis this mainly means Shia in the Eastern Province. In Iran this means not only Arabs but other ethnic minorities among whom ISIS is trying to stir up trouble in revenge for Iran's strong opposition to the group elsewhere in the Middle East.

The young and powerful Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MbS), has hitched his rise to a more aggressive Saudi foreign policy that seeks regional hegemony at the expense of, among others, Iran. The setbacks associated with that policy, however, have MbS thinking about course corrections. In particular, he appears to be seeking a way out of the highly costly and unsuccessful military intervention in Yemen.

Thus it is no surprise to see multiple reports that MbS is actively seeking improved relations with Iran. He is looking to Iraq to play a helpful mediating role in this endeavor, and Saudi Arabia already has taken several steps to improve its relations with Iraq itself.

This diplomacy is proceeding quietly, thus not diminishing for American audiences the established line about Iran being a threat. But the direction of Riyadh's diplomacy is clear, and it is just as much in Saudi Arabia's interests as were previous rapprochements between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

An Outdated Hostility

All this makes Trump's vehement and unbending hostility toward Iran all the more likely to further isolate the United States. It is a hostility that has fallen behind the curve of Persian Gulf diplomacy. Trump may have been dancing to the Saudis' tune insofar as that tune was written to ensure that the United States took Saudi Arabia's side, but the resulting policy of the Trump administration is not in the interests of Saudi Arabia itself, nor of the other Arab members of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Most important for Americans, it is not in the interests of the United States – which, along with the Gulf Arabs and Iran, shares an interest in a Persian Gulf

characterized by peaceful commerce and competition for influence, rather than by confrontation and conflagration.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, otherwise known as the Iran nuclear agreement, figures into this equation because of Trump's declared intention to destroy the accord despite Iran's compliance with it. Negotiation of the agreement had made the Saudis nervous about a possible major realignment in which the United States would start taking Iran's side more than Saudi Arabia's.

The nervousness was one of the factors, along with the rise of MbS, that made opposition to Iran a prominent theme in Saudi statements over the past year or two. The Saudi fear was always unwarranted; even just the restoration of normal diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran was not in the cards during the Obama administration. Obviously the relationship is going nowhere in a positive direction under Trump.

An accord that is working to keep closed all possible paths to an Iranian nuclear weapon is in Saudi Arabia's interests, and the Saudis are smart enough to realize that. The Saudis do not need a nuclear arms race in the Persian Gulf, and if one occurred, the Saudis probably would lose it. For Trump to carry through with his threat to trash the agreement would represent a piece of campaign baggage that is in nobody's interests.

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The Agony of 'Regime Change' Refugees

Exclusive: There are positive signs of Syrians returning to Aleppo after the ouster of Al Qaeda's militants. But the legacy of Western "regime change" wars continues to plague Europe and inflict human suffering, writes Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

European nations have been thrown into a political crisis by the hundreds of thousands of migrants coming north from the Middle East and Africa. The number has grown in recent years, due to a mix of wars and poverty, resulting in a visible increase of the influx of foreigners across Europe, and a popular backlash that has political institutions scrambling to find a way to stem the

flow and lessen the sense of emergency.

The problem is that the causes of the mass migration have deep roots that cannot be solved in the short-term; and even a medium- to long-term solution will require serious changes in foreign and economic policy for the entire Western world.

In September 2015, as the number of refugees from Syria increased due to the ongoing military conflict there, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a surprising announcement. Going against the grain of public opinion, in which anti-immigrant sentiment seemed to be rising rapidly, Merkel announced that her country would open its doors and accept hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers. Germany already has a large number of recent immigrants among its population, and the view was that a wealthy country with a population of over 80 million could certainly do its part to deal with the humanitarian crisis enveloping the Middle East.

The open attitude didn't last long. In March 2016, Germany played a key role in reaching a deal with President Erdogan of Turkey, who in exchange for billions of euros, essentially closed the land route towards Europe through the Balkans. As a result, only the sea routes remained, with departures principally from Turkey, Egypt and Libya, making Greece and Italy the primary entry points to Europe. The routes have been further reduced over the past year, with the vast majority of departures currently originating in Libya.

Italy at Forefront

This has meant that in 2017 over 85 percent of total migrants headed towards Europe have arrived in Italy, a country that has led efforts to rescue people risking death in the Mediterranean in recent years. There have been ongoing negotiations with other European nations to relocate the migrants that are taken to Italian ports and lessen the burden on the country of entry, but the number of migrants relocated has been only a small portion of those that arrive.

As a result Italy, which is not particularly efficient in managing the new arrivals despite making significant strides in recent years, feels left alone to deal with a crisis that is straining its resources. One of the side effects is a palpable shift in public attitudes in this Catholic country, from openness to help those in need, to a feeling that the situation is out of control and that the identity of Europe is under threat from the constant influx of migrants from different cultures.

The Italian government is attempting to find a technical solution to reduce the flow across the sea, which includes negotiations with the various factions in

Libya, a new code of conduct for NGOs working in the area, and tightening the rules for bringing migrants to Italian ports.

All of these measures address only the last link in the chain of migration from the Middle East and Africa though, and even if they were to succeed, would only block the flow from Libya – where migrants suffer horrendous conditions, including torture – while human traffickers would seek new routes to get around the obstacles put up by European governments.

The Larger Issue

The deeper problem to address is the causes of the migrant crisis. This requires taking a step backwards, to understand how the current situation was created. The first issue is that of Libya itself, a country without any effective centralized control, ruled over by rival factions that are unable or unwilling to stop the numerous human trafficking networks from taking money from desperate migrants and putting them on rafts pointed towards Italy, where they will either be rescued by naval forces or NGOs, or die along the way.

The prime responsibility for the Libyan chaos lies in Paris, London and Washington. The goal of overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi had been present for decades in Western capitals, but it was not until 2011 – under the cover of the “Arab Spring” – that the French government in particular began to organize the effort to overthrow him, and gain economic and strategic advantages for itself in Northern Africa as a result.

The French had already prepared the attack as they encouraged U.S. President Barack Obama to join the “humanitarian” war that was intended to save the opposition from being massacred by Gaddafi. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton headed up the pro-intervention faction in the Obama Administration to the point that the Libyan campaign became known to many as “Hillary’s War.”

Upon learning of Gaddafi’s brutal murder, Clinton paraphrased Julius Caesar declaring: “We came, we saw, he died.” The result though, rather than being a triumph of democracy, has been a decent into chaos, that among other things has allowed the country to become a key gathering point for terrorist groups such as ISIS.

‘Regime Change’ Chaos

The Libyan chaos, the most immediate hindrance to stopping the flow of migrants to Europe at this moment, leads to the larger issue of Western policy regarding terrorism and the Middle East in general. The series of “regime change” wars in recent years have reflected the goal of using terrorist networks for the West’s strategic advantage, while ignoring the long-term effects of this tactic. The

support for the Mujahidin in Afghanistan in the 1980s, in an attempt to weaken the Soviet Union, led directly to the rise of Osama bin-Laden and Al Qaeda in the 1990s.

The financial backing given to Sunni extremism, provided in particular by allies such as Saudi Arabia, spawned the terrorist groups that today target the West. From the war in Iraq to support for the most extreme anti-Assad groups in Syria, the United States and other Western powers have had a major hand in creating the very problem they are scrambling to deal with today.

The Obama Administration began a timid shift away from “regime change,” with the decision not to bomb Syria in 2013, and rather to seek cooperation with Russia. The attempt to rebalance U.S. interests in the Middle East was also reflected in the nuclear deal reached with Iran. The effort ultimately proved to be too little, too late though, as large sections of the institutions resisted the shift and Obama himself essentially ran out of time; by the end of his term he had succumbed to the pressure to maintain a hostile position towards Russia, and failed to define a new strategic orientation towards the Middle East.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly criticized the policies of regime change and is moving forward on cooperation with Russia in Syria, despite the bombing of a Syrian air base in April in response to dubious claims of a chemical weapons attack by the Syrian government. Yet he has also toed the traditional pro-Saudi, anti-Iran line in the Middle East in general, making it seem doubtful that he is willing, or even able, to actually change U.S. policy in the region. As of now, the conflicts are far from being over, and from this perspective, it becomes clear that no short-term solutions are on the horizon.

An even broader issue is that of development, as economic conditions are once again overtaking political unrest as the main driver of migration. There has been talk recently of a European Plan for Africa, to spur economic development and remove the root causes that drive people to leave their homes and families despite the potential dangers. The reality though, is that the discussion still revolves around the type of limited initiatives that are all too similar to the programs of the International Monetary Fund, focused on improving the climate for private investment and other “structural reforms.”

Some of the goals may be laudable, but the approach is a far cry from that of the Marshall Plan for Europe after World War II – which is often thrown around as a precedent when new plans are announced – that involved large amounts of public investment in rebuilding industrial capacity.

On this front as well, Western nations seem unable to recognize their own mistakes and contribution to the poverty in Africa that is driving a decades-

long humanitarian crisis, that has now become an urgent political crisis for much of Europe as well.

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Hillary Clinton Promised Wars, Too

Exclusive: President Trump has shattered the hope of many peace-oriented Americans that he would pull back from U.S. foreign interventions, but Hillary Clinton might have pursued even more wars, notes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

The alliance between neoconservatives and the Democratic foreign policy establishment, which is largely made up of former Obama administration officials and former Clinton campaign surrogates, has been much noted of late, particularly since the formation of the German Marshall Fund’s “Alliance for Democracy Project” which brings together high-profile members of both groups in an effort to fight what is loosely (and often inaccurately) defined as Russian “disinformation.”

Those who applaud the new alignment are quick to point out that Donald J. Trump who, by virtue of his volatile temperament and his alarming ignorance and inexperience, is a menace to his country and the planet. And at this stage in Mr. Trump’s presidency, that would seem unarguable.

And yet, Clinton partisans charge that those who withheld their support from Clinton not only bear responsibility for Trump, but also had no right to do so since it was, according to them, obvious that Clinton would have been, among other things, a more responsible steward of U.S. foreign policy than Trump.

And so, given the extreme bitterness that Hillary Clinton’s loss has engendered among a number of prominent members of the liberal commentariat, it might be worth looking at what her campaign promised with regard to foreign policy to see if the above criticism holds water.

The argument here isn’t that Trump isn’t awful (which is something I’ve never

argued); it's that he's proven to be every bit as bad as some of us reasonably expected Clinton would have been; and if one takes the time to consult the Clinton campaign's own briefing papers and fact sheets, one will find that on issue after issue, Clinton invariably took hawkish positions that reflected the fact that Clinton was (and remains) a saber-rattler *par excellence* – very much on par with the current occupant of the White House.

When North Korea conducted a nuclear test in September 2016, she released a statement, if not quite promising “fire and fury,” that did declare: “North Korea’s decision to conduct another nuclear test is outrageous and unacceptable. ... This constitutes a direct threat to the United States, and we cannot and will never accept this.”

No Regrets on ‘Regime Change’

Beyond that, Clinton remained a firm believer in regime-change strategies. On Syria, the Clinton campaign “proposed instituting a coalition no-fly zone in the air coupled with safe zones on the ground to protect Syrian civilians and create leverage for a diplomatic resolution that includes Assad’s departure.” She supported the “deployment of special operating forces to Syria” and “strongly urged President Obama to arm moderate rebels in support of the eventual removal of the brutal Assad regime.”

Clinton also favored escalation in other hot spots. On Iran, the Clinton campaign outlined “a plan to counter Iran’s other malicious behavior” which included pledges to “deepen America’s unshakeable commitment to Israel’s security”; “expand our military presence in the region”; “increase security cooperation in areas like intelligence sharing, military backing and missile defense with our Gulf allies, to ensure they can defend themselves against Iranian aggression”; and “build a coalition to counter Iran’s proxies.”

When we also factor in Clinton’s support for the NATO’s illegal airstrikes on Kosovo (1999), her vote to authorize the second Iraq War (2003), her enthusiastic support for sending more troops to fight and die in Afghanistan (2009), and her disastrous embrace of regime change in Libya (2011) and Syria (2012), how can anyone be sure that her administration’s foreign policy would have been much of an improvement over what we now have?

Indeed, those who threw their support behind Clinton’s vision of American world leadership, like those associated with the “Alliance for Democracy,” really, with the notable exception of Trump’s abandonment of the Paris Climate Accord, have little to complain about.

Trump has done much as Clinton would have done by, among other things: slapping

sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea; pledging unlimited support to Israel; reassuring “our allies” in the Persian Gulf and eastern Europe; condemning Russia’s actions in eastern Ukraine; expanding military operations in eastern Syria; and lobbing none-to-veiled threats at the left-wing government in Venezuela.

So while it’s easy and almost certainly emotionally satisfying to the legions of Clinton supporters to tell themselves (and their readers) that *of course* Hillary would have been a better of steward of U.S. foreign policy than Trump, that assertion remains both unprovable and, given her record, highly questionable.

James W. Carden served as an adviser on Russia policy at the US State Department. Currently a contributing writer at The Nation magazine, his work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Quartz, The American Conservative and The National Interest.

Trump’s Soft-Shoe on Racist Violence

On Monday, President Trump did a second take on his remarks about the white-nationalist-sparked violence in Charlottesville, but his tepid first take offered a troubling look into his soul, says Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

Enough. We have a president who is emotionally challenged and empathy-free, who on Saturday read from a prepared statement of concern and condemnation, incapable of speaking genuinely from the heart, apparently because he knows that those who speak racist hate and commit acts of deadly violence are a portion of his “base.”

Witness Ku Kluxer David Duke declaring in Charlottesville, Virginia, before Saturday’s violence, “We are determined to take our country back. We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump. That’s what we believed in, that’s why we voted for Donald Trump. Because he said he’s going to take our country back.”

It’s true that you can’t always choose those who want to march in support of you, although Trump’s refusal to condemn his backing from white supremacists is appalling. Nor can it be denied that on the extreme left there are a few, like so many on the extreme right, who see violence as a means to an end. But Trump not only has failed to speak out against white nationalists, he allows them to work in his White House and mutter seditious nonsense into his all-too-

susceptible ears.

As he spoke on Saturday afternoon he was unable to out-and-out condemn the neo-Nazis in Charlottesville without diluting his censure, saying there was “hatred, bigotry and violence” but adding “on many sides, on many sides.” And then he tweeted, “Condolences to the family of the young woman killed today, and best regards to all of those injured, in Charlottesville, Virginia. So sad!”

Best regards? So sad? So lame. A woman died, a paralegal named Heather Heyer, and others were wounded at the hand of what appears to be a racist murderer using a car as a deadly weapon. This is a national tragedy, Mr. President. It is domestic terrorism and your reaction must be one of outrage, not left-handed sympathy.

On Saturday, Trump said, “It’s been going on for a long time in our country. Not Donald Trump. Not Barack Obama. It’s been going on for a long, long time.” He’s right about the long, long time part but as Richard Cohen, president of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) wrote on Saturday:

“[F]rom the day he came down the escalator in the tower that bears his name, Trump consciously poured fuel on the fire. He ran a racist, xenophobic campaign that energized the radical right... Trump calls for the country to unite. But he is still ducking responsibility for his role in dividing it.”

Domestic Terrorism

Many Republican senators denounced Saturday’s fascist extremists more strongly and explicitly than the President, including Colorado’s Cory Gardner, who tweeted, “Mr. President – we must call evil by its name. These were white supremacists and this was domestic terrorism.”

But in the not-so-distant past, out of fear of alienating some conservative voters, Republicans have condemned groups like the SPLC for calling out the growing threat of the extreme right and white supremacy, just as those Republicans so vehemently attacked a 2009 report from the Department of Homeland Security on rightwing domestic terrorism that it was withdrawn from circulation. That analysis found that every year, with the exception of 2001 and the 9/11 attacks, right-wing extremism was responsible for more violence in the United States than radical Islamic terrorism.

The report’s findings were backed up by an FBI analysis last year that hate crimes were up and by a 2015 survey conducted with the Police Executive Research Forum. Two of those involved, Charles Kurzman of the University of North Carolina and David Schanzer of Duke University, wrote in *The New York Times*, “The main terrorist threat in the United States is not from violent Muslim

extremists, but from right-wing extremists...

“An officer from a large metropolitan area said that ‘militias, neo-Nazis and sovereign citizens’ are the biggest threat we face in regard to extremism,” they wrote. “One officer explained that he ranked the right-wing threat higher because ‘it is an emerging threat that we don’t have as good of a grip on, even with our intelligence unit, as we do with the Al Shabab/Al Qaeda issue, which we have been dealing with for some time.’”

President Trump, you reap what you sow and boilerplate statements of sorrow ring hollow. Presidents are supposed to bring us together. Your predecessors, Republicans and Democrats, have done so with grace. But this President says he loves all Americans while working to deprive them of their freedoms. And keeps within his circle of advisors those for whom hate is an asset and not a dagger to the heart of democracy.

Fire Sebastian Gorka, the bogus security advisor who earlier this week told *Breitbart News Daily* that white supremacists are not a problem. Fire Stephen Miller, who seems to think the Statue of Liberty is more a symbol of exclusion than welcome. And fire Steve Bannon and his off-the-wall, destructive theories of white nationalism.

Their dismissals would be a start. But on Saturday, we saw into your soul, Donald Trump. And there was nothing there.

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The Thankless Task of ‘Saving’ Trump

President Trump appears lost in the swamp of his own shallow mind, pulling down the “adults” around him more than they can lift him up, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

Optimism has repeatedly been expressed, especially after any qualified and respected person has been appointed to a senior position in the current administration, that the “adults in the room” will check the excesses and compensate for the deficiencies of a blatantly unqualified president.

Hope placed on the four-star shoulders of John Kelly as he assumed duties of White House chief of staff is a recent example. Such optimism has proven to be largely unfounded.

Repeatedly the excesses of Donald Trump have escaped any attempt to check them. Trump's fire-and-brimstone threats against North Korea, which surprised his foreign policy advisers, are the latest example. Trump's emulation of Kim Jong-un's scary rhetoric played into the hands of Kim's regime, whose propaganda emphasizes threats from the United States, and escalated tensions to the point of shaking global stock markets. The rhetoric was the sort of thing Trump turns to when he evidently does not have any better ideas for addressing a problem.

Even when the adults do seem to have had some restraining influence on their boss, the effect is likely to be limited and temporary. Last month Trump's advisers got him grudgingly to recognize reality and to certify that Iran is complying with the agreement that restricts its nuclear program. But since then, Trump has repeatedly asserted that Iran is not in compliance.

In other words, Trump is disseminating another of his lies. We know it is a lie because with the highly intrusive monitoring provisions of the agreement, international inspectors get to see first-hand whether Iran is complying.

Clean-up by his subordinates after Trump's rhetorical excesses has become a common pattern. This past week we had the remarkable case of the U.S. Secretary of State seeing it necessary to urge his fellow citizens to get a good night's sleep despite the inflammatory rhetoric of their own President about North Korea.

But clean-up duty can only accomplish so much. Where the damage extends beyond rhetoric to actions, such as withdrawal from the global climate change agreement, it cannot do much of anything.

The reasons the adults do not have any greater influence in preventing or limiting the damage Trump inflicts are centered primarily on the qualities of Donald Trump himself. An insecure narcissist who has used demagoguery to get where he is today is not a good subject for guidance and restraint by subordinates. Trump's lack of self-control, and resistance to anything that looks like control by others, manifests itself especially in how much his presidency is defined by after-hours tweets.

Never Wrong

The absolute refusal to admit in public that he is ever wrong is probably mirrored in how Trump interacts with advisers in private. His narrow and self-referential notion of loyalty, which is hard to distinguish from sycophancy,

implies an unwillingness to listen to contrary opinions from subordinates and an inclination to remove subordinates who persist in offering such opinions.

Some additional explanations for the adults' failure to rein in Trump pertain not just to characteristics of the President but to the thinking of the adults themselves. Awareness of how insecure is the job of any senior official in this administration who dares to differ with the President can lead to punches being pulled. This is not necessarily a selfish and cowardly clinging to a job. With such officials being aware of how much additional damage might be done by this President, it can be unselfish and patriotic to put up with the stresses and compromises necessary to work for him, in the interest of trying to inject prudence into this administration from the inside.

This may be the thinking of the national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, who has had a previously stellar reputation soiled by episodes of sycophancy. This process began soon after McMaster took the job, when he was trotted out to the White House driveway to try to justify to reporters Trump's disclosure of third-party classified information to the Russian ambassador and foreign minister.

Retired Army officer John Nagl, who knows McMaster well, sees what McMaster is doing in such terms. Nagl said, "The administration is clearly in free fall, and McMaster is exactly the man the nation needs to have ... to hold all the pieces together." Nagl added that "his friends and I believe" that it is worth McMaster giving up some of his "well-earned reputation for integrity."

Such reasoning is valid, and even high-level resignations are not apt to have as much impact on policy as is often alleged by observers criticizing such officials for not resigning. But in the meantime other damage is done. Tenuously situated subordinates have to pick their battles, and on the subjects on which they do not choose to fight, much bad policy and nonsense can ensue.

A Bad Mix

Maintaining standing and influence with the President can lead to subordinates publicly voicing notions that make adoption of bad policy all the more likely. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, although he reportedly was one of those who urged Trump in July to certify Iran's compliance with the nuclear agreement, has been saying publicly some of the very falsehoods that Trump would use in trashing the agreement.

Sometimes some of the adults, although useful restraints on the President on most matters, share his predilections and prejudices on others. This is true of Secretary of Defense James Mattis, particularly on anything having to do with Iran, against which he is waging almost a personal vendetta.

On some issues, adults may not see things the same way as Trump but there is a sort of malevolent convergence in which the President and his advisers go along with the same unproductive policy for different reasons.

This may be true of policy toward Afghanistan. Trump, who once averred that the United States “should have kept the oil” from Iraq, is now interested in getting U.S. hands on Afghanistan’s mineral resources. It is unlikely that most of the adults share that kind of crude mercantilist view, and they probably see the major downside of the United States presenting its overseas military operations as intended to grab other people’s mineral wealth. But the same adults, including Mattis and McMaster, favor continuation of the U.S. military expedition in Afghanistan to achieve something that can be called “victory” and to pursue the obsolete notion that Afghanistan is a unique key in determining terrorist threats in the West. Thus America’s longest war continues, with Trump craving minerals and his generals wanting to continue the effort for other reasons.

Trump, in imitating Kim Jong-un’s incendiary rhetoric, is still a long way from duplicating the ruthless North Korean dictatorship, in which even family members get executed when they fall out of favor. But there is some further resemblance in the difficulty in speaking truth to power, and in the likelihood that such speaking will make a difference. Even if surrounded by able hands, much policy will still reflect the whims and weaknesses of the man at the top.

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