

Trump Should Withdraw Haspel Nomination, Intel Vets Say

More than two dozen former U.S. intelligence officers urge President Trump to rescind Gina Haspel's nomination to lead the CIA, citing torture that she oversaw while supervising a black site prison, as well as her role in destroying evidence.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Request to Withdraw Nomination of Gina Haspel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With respect, we veteran intelligence officers from CIA and other agencies urge you to withdraw the nomination of Gina Haspel for CIA director. From what is already known of her leading role in CIA torture 16 years ago, she has disqualified herself.

In 2002 Haspel supervised the first CIA "black site" for interrogation, where cruel and bizarre forms of torture were applied to suspected terrorists. And when the existence of 92 videotapes of those torture sessions was revealed, Haspel signed a cable ordering their destruction, against the advice of legal counsel at CIA and the White House.

Does Torture 'Work?'

We are confident that if you set aside some time to read the unredacted portions of the Senate Intelligence Committee report of 2014 on the torture ordered and supervised by Haspel and other CIA managers, you will change your mind about her nomination. The five-year Senate investigation was based primarily on original CIA cables and other sensitive documents.

In addition to revealing clear violations of the UN Convention Against Torture, the Senate investigation shows that claims by senior CIA officials that torture is effective are far from true. The US Army – in which many of us have served – has been aware of the ineffectiveness of torture for decades.

General John Kimmons, head of Army Intelligence, drove home that point on September 6, 2006 – approximately an hour before President George W. Bush publicly extolled the virtues of torture methods that became known as "enhanced interrogation techniques." Gen. Kimmons stated: "No good intelligence is going

to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years – hard years – tell us that.”

We believe that Defense Secretary James Mattis’ lack of enthusiasm for torture reflects lessons drawn from the historical experience of the Marine Corps, as well. Not to mention the twin reality that torture brutalizes the brutalizer, and that US use of torture puts our own troops in serious jeopardy when captured. Moreover, there is no more effective recruitment tool than torture to attract more terrorists.

International and Domestic Law

Please also be aware that many signatories to the UN Convention Against Torture take seriously their obligations under the principle of “universal jurisdiction,” which applies when those who authorize or practice torture are not brought to justice by authorities in their home countries.

George W. Bush experienced a precarious brush with this reality in 2011, when he had to abruptly cancel a visit to Geneva, Switzerland, after discovering that plans were in place to arrest him as soon as he stepped onto Swiss soil. [See [“America’s Stay-at-Home Ex-President”](#)] The widely respected European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights already has made no secret of its intention to proceed quickly against Haspel, should she set foot in Europe.

We believe that CIA’s activities and general focus have become severely unbalanced, with the lion’s share of funding and energy going to the paramilitary-prone operational side – where the potential for human rights abuses is not given sufficient consideration.

That trend has gone on steroids in more recent decades, and it is a safe bet that Gina Haspel would accelerate it. We would also observe that if most of the talent and funding goes to CIA paramilitary operations, then the by-products will necessarily include a tendency to engage in politically motivated – and therefore shabby – analysis. That means that senior policymakers like you will be poorly informed, particularly with respect to complex world issues – including biased perspectives on Russia and its newly re-elected president, Vladimir Putin.

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We Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) are extremely concerned at the possibility that Gina Haspel might become the next Director of the CIA. Haspel actually supervised a CIA “black site” codenamed “Cat’s Eye” in Thailand where a number of suspected terrorists were tortured. She subsequently collaborated in destroying all 92 videotapes of the torture sessions,

effectively covering up what were likely serious war crimes.

There should be no question about the illegality of torture. It has been universally condemned and banned by both the Geneva Conventions and United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 and ratified by the Senate in 1994.

The UN Convention defines torture “as any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession...” and makes clear that “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.”

The Convention’s Article 2 requires signatories to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction. The complete prohibition of torture is absolute. Under international law, officials cannot receive immunity in cases involving torture and governments that have signed the Convention are obligated to bring torturers to justice. US domestic law was brought in line with the Convention once the US became a signatory and ratified it.

In the wake of the Abu Ghraib revelations, torture, to include its variations that have been euphemistically described as “enhanced interrogation techniques” (EIT), is now explicitly banned by the US military in its training manuals. A number of soldiers were tried and imprisoned in the wake of Abu Ghraib, although the “upper ranks” – in civilian as well as military spheres – who approved torture managed to escape serious consequences.

Some in the Pentagon clearly took seriously allegations of torture and were willing to file criminal charges against those involved, though Department of Defense leadership never saw fit to assume responsibility for having set up a policy environment that quite clearly condoned EIT.

There is also another significant historical and legal precedent that demonstrates that the United States government has by its own actions agreed that what is today being called “enhanced interrogation” is a war crime. In 1946-1948, Japanese officers who tortured Allied soldiers – including what is now referred to as waterboarding – were tried at the Tokyo post-war tribunals for that crime, found guilty, and executed.

Heinous

More recently, the meticulously documented unclassified 528 page Executive

Summary of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) report on the CIA's secret Rendition, Detention and Interrogation (RDI) program is remarkable for its candor. That five-year investigation was based on original CIA cables and other documents.

In blunt language, the Senate report describes the horrors of the black site secret prisons and the efforts that were made to get terrorist suspects to talk. It demonstrates that the interrogations were brutal – worse than anyone had been led to believe – and also that they did not produce any information that might not have been developed otherwise or, in many cases, any actionable intelligence whatsoever. The full classified text of the report – which names names of the actual torture perpetrators redacted in the summary – runs to almost 7,000 pages.

Moreover, coercive interrogation frequently produced misleading or fabricated intelligence that wasted resources by having to be meticulously checked before being used. This conclusion was also arrived at by former FBI interrogator Ali Soufan – who deplored CIA methods – as well as by a review conducted by CIA's then-Inspector General (IG), John Helgerson, in 2004. The “Helgerson Report” condemned both CIA leadership and Langley's on-the-ground management of questionable programs driven by “analytical assessments that were unsupported by credible intelligence” – programs which quickly became abusive.

It is our collective judgment that the loathsome physical abuses that included beatings, repeated waterboardings and anal violations referred to as “rectal feeding” – as well as physical threats to family members – cannot be whitewashed with the convenient euphemism of “enhanced interrogation.” All of those are acts of torture – plain and simple.

And while there are undoubtedly many good moral arguments against torture, there are practical considerations as well. Despite what the media would have Americans believe, torture does not work.

We recall the unambiguous remarks of then-commander of Army intelligence, Gen. John Kimmons, who held a Pentagon press conference on Sept. 6, 2006 – the same day President George W. Bush announced what he called “an alternative set of procedures” for interrogation (which later morphed into the term “enhanced interrogation techniques”). Anticipating that Bush would claim the EITS to be necessary and effective, Gen. Kimmons told the media: “No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years – hard years –tells us that.”

Colin Powell Mousetrapped by ‘Intelligence’ From Torture

Worse still, intelligence officials have used information, which they knew was gained from torture, to mislead the most senior US officials on issues of war and peace. One of the signatories below was eyewitness to how CIA Director George Tenet persuaded Secretary of State Colin Powell to tell the UN of a “sinister nexus” between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda.

Tenet did not tell Powell that this “intelligence” came from a source, Abu Yahya al-Libi, who had been “rendered” to, and waterboarded by, Egyptian intelligence. The Defense Intelligence Agency had deemed this intelligence unreliable, but Tenet chose to ignore DIA and never informed Powell. Al-Libi recanted less than a year later, admitting that he fabricated the story about Saddam and al-Qaeda in order to stop his torture.

Moreover, when you wink at torture, you motivate enemies of the United States to do the same to captured US soldiers, diplomats and travelers while also providing a propaganda bonanza for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Indeed, the only reason why CIA torturers have not been tried and sentenced to prison for the damage they have done to the nation is that an intimidated President Barack Obama – who once proclaimed that “nobody is above the law” – balked at allowing the judicial process to run its course, thereby whitewashing the Bush Administration’s many crimes related to the so-called “global war on terror.” Obama attempted to justify his inaction as looking forward rather than backward, but it is more likely that he feared opening up a Pandora’s Box of shameful government secrets that no doubt would have emerged.

Promoting Haspel in spite of her tainted record would send a message to both intelligence and military personnel that embracing practices like torture – indisputably a war crime – can be a path to promotion.

Haspel’s involvement with torture began when she accepted the assignment to go to Thailand – which she could have turned down – to run the “black site” where the interrogations were being conducted. She was, at the time, the deputy in CIA’s Counter Terrorism Center (CTC), working for Jose Rodriguez.

She was in charge of the secret Thailand base in late 2002 while Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri and possibly more suspects were being tortured in a process that included slamming victims’ heads against walls, subjecting them to painful stress positions, regularly depriving them of sleep, confining them to small, coffin-like boxes, and waterboarding.

The “confinement boxes” were of two types; one was coffin-sized, and the other was smaller and less than waist-high. Both had strong claustrophobic effects. A prisoner would be forced into the smaller box as an extreme form of stress

positioning, creating excruciating pain. To maximize psychological distress and exploit phobias, insects were sometimes placed in the pitch-black “coffin” alongside the victim.

Destroying the Evidence

In 2005, after returning to CIA headquarters at Langley, she acted on instructions from Rodriguez and drafted the order to destroy the 92 videotapes that had been made of the interrogations. It has been reported that she was a “strong advocate” for the destruction. This was contrary to instructions provided by CIA Counsel John Rizzo and the White House. Thus, her act may have constituted destruction of evidence – a felony.

Jose Rodriguez was investigated for destruction of evidence by a Special Prosecutor who eventually ruled against charging him. An aide to CIA Executive Director Kyle “Dusty” Foggo later revealed Rodriguez’s rationale for shredding the tapes, writing in an email that “the heat from destroying [them] is nothing compared with what it would be if the tapes ever got into public domain – he [Rodriguez] said that they would make us look terrible; it would be devastating to us.” Gina Haspel ensured that these tapes – important, damning evidence of US government torture – would never see the light of day.

Haspel’s defenders claim that she was not the creator of the torture program and only served as a willing executor of a government initiative that she believed to be legal. That may be true as no one has access to the CTC documents that might prove otherwise. Nevertheless, it does not provide her a free pass under international law, where it is generally referred to as the “Nuremberg Defense” – a thoroughly discredited “defense” that harkens back to the era of Nazi atrocities and those who attempted to justify them by claiming perpetrators were “just following orders.”

‘Nuremberg Defense’ Didn’t Work at Nuremberg

Several former CIA leaders have supported her, saying that she was “implementing the legal orders of the president,” but many of them may be concerned about their own reputations or questionable decisions they may have made in the name of the “war on terror.” And the UN’s International Law Commission says something quite different in its codification of the legal options surrounding torture, writing that “the fact that a person acted pursuant to an order of his government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him.”

It is also claimed that Gina Haspel was working for the CIA Chief of Station (COS) in Bangkok and acting under the COS’s orders, but those of us who have

worked in and led CIA bases would dispute that that type of tight control was common, particularly since in this case, she was reporting directly to the Counterterrorism Center at Langley. Haspel would have been the boss and would have had independence in the field in executing directives from CIA Headquarters and the Counterterrorism Center – some of which she herself had a hand in drafting.

If Haspel is confirmed and wishes to travel abroad, she may have to restrict herself to countries not party to the UN Convention Against Torture because of her widely known involvement in the “black site” in Thailand. The 42 countries that have signed and ratified the Convention include the US and most of its allies. All take on a legal obligation to enforce the prohibition against torture, based on the principle of “universal jurisdiction,” when necessary. In other words, they are empowered to act when the accused’s home country refuses to do so.

Not Too Late to Do the Right Thing

If you do not withdraw the nomination of Gina Haspel and she is confirmed, this will cast a moral stain on the vast numbers of patriotic and ethically upright Americans who serve their country in the field of national security. It will also be a continuation of the steady erosion of human rights standards and rule of law post-9/11.

Apparent widespread support for torture among the US public – enabled largely by the false message of Hollywood, the media and the Cheney family that it “works” – is deplorable. It might have been headed off by the prosecutions of Haspel, Rodriguez and others by former President Obama, together with graphic exposure of the evidence. You have an opportunity to reverse this wrong.

Withdrawing Haspel’s nomination now would be a step in the right direction. Confirming her as Director of CIA would signal that Washington embraces what then-Vice President Dick Cheney referred to as the “dark side.” Regrettably, torture was once part of US policy. Indeed, one of this Memorandum’s signatories spent nearly two years in federal prison because he revealed that. But torture cannot be relied upon to yield accurate intelligence. It remains an internationally condemned malignancy that must be excised, never to return.

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

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William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA's Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard H. Black, Senator of Virginia, 13th District; Colonel US Army (ret.); Former Chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS)

Marshall Carter-Tripp, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

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

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, National Intelligence Council & CIA political analyst (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Valerie Plame, former operations officer, CIA (associate VIPS)

Diane Roark, Republican Professional Staff, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, 1985-2002 (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Greg Thielmann, former Director, Office of Strategic, Political, and Military Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, State Department; Former staff member, Senate Intelligence Committee

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Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army (ret.); also Foreign Service Officer who resigned in opposition to the US war on Iraq

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ANNEX

MEMORANDA from VIPS to President Barack Obama Regarding Torture

1 –

US Media Ignores CIA Cover-up on Torture

September 16, 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR: Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Vice Chairman, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: U.S. Media Mum On How Your Committee Faced Down Both CIA and Obama

2 –

US Intel Vets Decry CIA's Use of Torture

September 19, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Intelligence Veterans Challenge CIA's "Rebuttal" on Torture

3 –

Udall Urged to Disclose Full Torture Report

December 29, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: Senator Mark Udall

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Time to Speak Out on Floor of Congress to Stop Torture

4 –

<https://consortiumnews.com/2009/092809a.html>

September 27, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: There Must be Accountability for Torture

5 –

<https://consortiumnews.com/2009/042909e.html>

April 29, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Torture: An Accumulated Evil (see Nuremberg): John Brennan Publicly Defended "Extraordinary Rendition" Knowing Its Purpose Was Torture

A National Defense Strategy of Sowing Global Chaos

In the new U.S. National Defense Strategy, military planners bemoan the erosion of the U.S.'s "competitive edge," but the reality is that they are strategizing to maintain the American Empire in a chaotic world, explains Nicolas J.S. Davies.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

Presenting the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States on Friday at the Johns Hopkins University, Secretary of Defense James Mattis painted a picture of a dangerous world in which U.S. power – and all of the supposed "good" that it does around the world – is on the decline.

"Our competitive edge has eroded in every domain of warfare – air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace," he said. "And it is continually eroding."

What he could have said instead is that the United States military is overextended in every domain, and that much of the chaos seen around the world is the direct result of past and current military adventurism. Further, he could have acknowledged, perhaps, that the erosion of U.S. influence has been the result of a series of self-inflicted blows to American credibility through foreign policy disasters such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

There were also two important words hidden between the lines, but never mentioned by name, in the new U.S. National Defense Strategy: "empire" and "imperialism."

It has long been taboo for U.S. officials and corporate media to speak of U.S. foreign policy as "imperialism," or of the U.S.'s global military occupations and network of hundreds of military bases as an "empire." These words are on a

long-standing blacklist of “banned topics” that U.S. official statements and mainstream U.S. media reports must never mention.

The streams of Orwellian euphemisms with which U.S. officials and media instead discuss U.S. foreign policy do more to obscure the reality of the U.S. role in the world than to describe or explain it, “hiding imperial interests behind ever more elaborate fig leaves,” as British historian A.J.P. Taylor described European imperialists doing the same a century ago.

As topics like empire, imperialism, and even war and peace, are censored and excised from political debate, U.S. officials, subservient media and the rest of the U.S. political class conjure up an illusion of peace for domestic consumption by simply not mentioning our country’s 291,000 occupation troops in 183 other countries or the 39,000 bombs and missiles dropped on our neighbors in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan since Trump took office.

The 100,000 bombs and missiles dropped on these and other countries by Obama and the 70,000 dropped on them by Bush II have likewise been swept down a kind of real time “memory hole,” leaving America’s collective conscience untroubled by what the public was never told in the first place.

But in reality, it’s been a long time since U.S. leaders of either party resisted the temptation to threaten anyone anywhere, or to follow through on their threats with “fire and fury” bombing campaigns, coups and invasions. This is how empires maintain a “credible threat” to undergird their power and discourage other countries from challenging them.

But far from establishing the “Pax Americana” promised by policymakers and military strategists in the 1990s, from Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney to Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton, the results have been consistently catastrophic, producing what the new National Defense Strategy calls, “increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing, rules-based international order.”

Of course the drafters of this U.S. strategy document dare not admit that U.S. policy is almost single-handedly responsible for this global chaos, after successive U.S. administrations have worked to marginalize the institutions and rules of international law and to establish illegal U.S. threats and uses of force that international law defines as crimes of aggression as the ultimate arbiter of international affairs.

Nor do they dare acknowledge that the CIA’s politicized intelligence and covert operations, which generate a steady stream of political pretexts for U.S. military intervention, are designed to create and exacerbate international

crises, not to solve them. For U.S. officials to admit such hard truths would shake the very foundations of U.S. imperialism.

Opposition to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran – the so-called nuclear deal – from Republicans and Democratic hawks alike seems to stem from the fear that it might validate the use of diplomacy over sanctions, coups and war, and set a dangerous precedent for resolving other crises – from Afghanistan and Korea to future crises in Africa and Latin America. Iran's success at bringing the U.S. to the negotiating table, instead of falling victim to the endless violence and chaos of U.S.-backed regime change, may already be encouraging North Korea and other targets of U.S. aggression to try to pull off the same trick.

But how will the U.S. justify its global military occupation, illegal threats and uses of force, and trillion-dollar war budget once serious diplomacy is seen to be more effective at resolving international crises than the endless violence and chaos of U.S. sanctions, coups, wars and occupations?

From Bhurtpoor to Baghdad

Major Danny Sjursen, who has fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and taught history at West Point, is a rare voice of sanity from within the U.S. military. In a poignant article in Truthdig, Major Sjursen eloquently described the horrors he has witnessed and the sadness he expects to live with for the rest of his life. "The truth is," he wrote, "I fought for next to nothing, for a country that, in recent conflicts, has made the world a deadlier, more chaotic place."

Danny Sjursen's life as a soldier of the U.S. Empire reminds me of another soldier of Empire, my great-great-great grandfather, Samuel Goddard. Samuel was born in Norfolk in England in 1793, and joined the 14th Regiment of Foot as a teenager. He was a Sergeant at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. During 14 years in India, his battalion led the assault on the fortress of Bhurtpoor in 1826, which ended the last resistance of the Maratha dynasty to British rule. He spent 3 years in the Caribbean, 6 years in Canada, and retired as Commandant of Dublin Castle in 1853 after a lifetime of service to Empire.

Danny's and Samuel's lives have much in common. They would probably have a lot to talk about if they could ever meet. But there are critical differences. At Bhurtpoor, the two British regiments who led the attack were followed through the breach in the walls by 15 regiments of Indian "Native Infantry." After Bhurtpoor, Britain ruled India (including Pakistan and Bangladesh) for 120 years, with only a thousand British officials in the Indian Civil Service and a few thousand British officers in command of up to 2.5 million Indian troops.

The British brutally put down the Indian Mutiny in 1857-8 with massacres in Delhi, Allahabad, Kanpur and Lucknow. Then, as up to 30 million Indians died in famines in 1876-9 and 1896-1902, the British government of India explicitly prohibited relief efforts or actions that might reduce exports from India to the U.K. or interfere with the operation of the "free market."

As Mike Davis wrote in his 2001 book, Late Victorian Holocausts, "What seemed from a metropolitan perspective the nineteenth century's final blaze of imperial glory was, from an Asian or African viewpoint, only the hideous light of a giant funeral pyre."

And yet Britain kept control of India by commanding such loyalty and subservience from millions of Indians that, in every crisis, Indian troops obeyed orders from British officers to massacre their own people.

Danny Sjursen and U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Iraq and other post-Cold War U.S. war zones are having a very different experience. In Afghanistan, as the Taliban and its allies have taken control of more of the country than at any time since the U.S. invasion, the U.S.-backed Afghan National Army has 25,000 fewer troops under its command than it did five years ago, while ten years of training by U.S. special operations forces has produced only 21,000 trained Afghan Commandos, the elite troops who do 70-80% of the killing and dying for the corrupt U.S.-backed Afghan government.

But the U.S. has not completely failed to win the loyalty of its imperial subjects. The first U.S. soldier killed in action in Afghanistan in 2018 was Sergeant 1st Class Mihail Golin, originally from Latvia. Mihail arrived in the U.S. in November 2004, enlisted in the U.S. Army three months later and has now given his life for the U.S. Empire and for whatever his service to it meant to him. At least 127 other Eastern Europeans have died in occupied Afghanistan, along with 455 British troops, 158 Canadians and 396 soldiers from 17 other countries. But 2,402 – or 68%, over two-thirds – of the occupation troops who have died in Afghanistan since 2001, were Americans.

In Iraq, an American war that always had even less international support or legitimacy, 93% of the occupation troops who have died were Americans, 4,530 out of a total of 4,852 "coalition" deaths.

When Ben Griffin, who later founded the U.K. branch of Veterans for Peace, told his superiors in the U.K.'s elite SAS (Special Air Service) that he could no longer take part in murderous house raids in Baghdad with U.S. special operations forces, he was surprised to find that his entire chain of command understood and accepted his decision. The only officer who tried to change his mind was the chaplain.

The Future of Empire

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff have explicitly told Congress that war with North Korea would require a ground invasion, and the same would likely be true of a U.S. war on Iran. South Korea wants to avoid war at all costs, but may be unavoidably drawn into a U.S.-led Second Korean War.

But besides South Korea, the level of support the U.S. could expect from its allies in a Second Korean War or other wars of aggression in the future would probably be more like Iraq than Afghanistan, with significant international opposition, even from traditional U.S. allies. U.S. troops would therefore make up nearly all of the invasion and occupation forces – and take nearly all of the casualties.

Compared to past empires, the cost in blood and treasure of policing the U.S. Empire and the blame for its catastrophic failures fall disproportionately – and rightly – on Americans. Even Donald Trump recognizes this problem, but his demands for allied countries to spend more on their militaries and buy more U.S. weapons will not change their people's unwillingness to die in America's wars.

This reality has created political pressure on U.S. leaders to wage war in ways that cost fewer American lives but inevitably kill many more people in countries being punished for resistance to U.S. imperialism, using air strikes and locally recruited death squads instead of U.S. "boots on the ground" wherever possible.

The U.S. conducts a sophisticated propaganda campaign to pretend that U.S. air-launched weapons are so accurate that they can be used safely without killing large numbers of civilians. Actual miss rates and blast radii are on the "banned topics" blacklist, along with realistic estimates of civilian deaths.

When former Iraqi foreign minister Hoshyar Zebari told Patrick Cockburn of the U.K.'s Independent newspaper that he had seen Iraqi Kurdish intelligence reports which estimated that the U.S.- and Iraqi-led destruction of Mosul had killed 40,000 civilians, the only remotely realistic estimate so far from an official source, no other mainstream Western media followed up on the story.

But America's wars are killing millions of innocent people: people defending themselves, their families, their communities and countries against U.S. imperialism and aggression; and many more who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time under the onslaught of over 210,000 American bombs and missiles dropped on at least 7 countries since 2001.

According to a growing body of research (for example, see the UN Development Program study, Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping-Point for Recruitment), most people who join armed resistance or

“terrorist” groups do so mainly to protect themselves and their families from the dangers of wars that others have inflicted on them. The UNDP survey found that the final “tipping point” that pushes over 70% of them to take the fateful step of joining an armed group is the killing or detention of a close friend or family member by foreign or local security forces.

So the reliance on airstrikes and locally recruited death squads, the very strategies that make U.S. imperialism palatable to the American public, are in fact the main “drivers” spreading armed resistance and terrorism to country after country, placing the U.S. Empire on a collision course with itself.

The U.S. effort to delegate war in the Middle East to Saudi Arabia is turning it into a target of global condemnation as it tries to mimic the U.S. model of warfare by bombing and starving millions of innocent people in Yemen while blaming the victims for their plight. The slaughter by poorly trained and undisciplined Saudi and Emirati pilots is even more indiscriminate than U.S. bombing campaigns, and the Saudis lack the full protection of the Western propaganda system to minimize international outrage at tens of thousands of civilian casualties and an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis.

The need to win the loyalty of imperial subjects by some combination of fear and respect is a basic requirement of Empire. But it appears to be unattainable in the 21st century, certainly by the kind of murderous policies the U.S. has embraced since the end of the Cold War. As Richard Barnet already observed 45 years ago, at the end of the American War in Vietnam, “At the very moment the number one nation has perfected the science of killing, it has become an impractical instrument of political domination.”

Obama’s sugar-coated charm offensive won U.S. imperialism a reprieve from global public opinion and provided political cover for allied leaders to actively rejoin U.S.-led alliances. But it was dishonest. Under cover of Obama’s iconic image, the U.S. spread the violence and chaos of its wars and regime changes and the armed resistance and terrorism they provoke farther and wider, affecting tens of millions more people from Syria and Libya to Nigeria and Ukraine.

Now Trump has taken the mask off and the world is once again confronting the unvarnished, brutal reality of U.S. imperialism and aggression.

China’s approach to the world based on trade and infrastructure development has been more successful than U.S. imperialism. The U.S. share of the global economy has declined from 40% to 22% since the 1960s, while China is expected to overtake the U.S. as the world’s largest economy in the next decade or two – by some measures, it already has.

While China has become the manufacturing and trading hub of the global economy, the U.S. economy has been financialized and hollowed out, hardly a solid basis for future growth. The neoliberal model of politics and economics that the U.S. adopted a generation ago has created even greater wealth for people who already owned disproportionate shares of everything, but it has left working people in the U.S. and across the U.S. Empire worse off than before.

Like the “next to nothing” that Danny Sjursen came to realize he was fighting for in Iraq and Afghanistan, the prospects for the U.S. economy seem ephemeral and highly vulnerable to the changing tides of economic history.

The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers

In his 1987 book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, historian Paul Kennedy examined the relationship between economic and military power in the histories of the Western empires who colonized the world in the past 500 years. He described how rising powers enjoy significant competitive advantages over established ones, and how every once-dominant power sooner or later has to adjust to the tides of economic history and find a new place in a world it can no longer dominate.

Kennedy explained that military power is only a secondary form of power that wealthy nations develop to protect and support their expanding economic interests. An economically dominant power can quickly convert some of its resources into military power, as the U.S. did during the Second World War or as China is doing today. But once formerly dominant powers have lost ground to new, rising powers, using military power more aggressively has never been a successful way to restore their economic dominance. On the contrary, it has typically been a way to squander the critical years and scarce resources they could otherwise have used to manage a peaceful transition to a prosperous future.

As the U.K. found in the 1950s, using military force to try to hold on to its empire proved counter-productive, as Kennedy described, and peaceful transitions to independence proved to be a more profitable basis for future relations with its former colonies. The drawdown of its global military commitments was an essential part of its transition to a viable post-imperial future.

The transition from hegemony to coexistence has never been easy for any great power, and there is nothing exceptional about the temptation to use military force to try to preserve and prolong the old order. This has often led to catastrophic wars and it has always failed.

It is difficult for any political or military leader to preside over a

diminution of his or her country's power in the world. Military leaders are rewarded for military strategies that win wars and expand their country's power, not for dismantling it. Mid-level staff officers who tell their superiors that their weapons and armies cannot solve their country's problems do not win promotion to decision-making positions.

As Gabriel Kolko noted in *Century of War* in 1994, this marginalization of critical voices leads to an "inherent, even unavoidable institutional myopia," under which, "options and decisions that are intrinsically dangerous and irrational become not merely plausible but the only form of reasoning about war and diplomacy that is possible in official circles."

After two world wars and the independence of India, the Suez crisis of 1956 was the final nail in the coffin of the British Empire, and the Eisenhower administration burnished its own anti-colonial credentials by refusing to support the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden was forced to resign, and he was replaced by Harold Macmillan, who had been a close aide to Eisenhower during the Second World War.

Macmillan dismantled the remains of the British Empire behind the backs of his Conservative Party's supporters, winning reelection in 1959 on the slogan, "You've never had it so good," while the U.S. supported a relatively peaceful transition that preserved Western international business interests and military power.

As the U.S. faces a similar transition from empire to a post-imperial future, its leaders have been seduced by the chimera of the post-Cold War "power dividend" to try to use military force to preserve and expand the U.S. Empire, even as the relative economic position of the U.S. declines.

In 1987, Paul Kennedy ended *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* with a prescient analysis of the U.S. position in the world. He concluded,

"In all of the discussions about the erosion of American leadership, it needs to be repeated again and again that the decline referred to is relative not absolute, and is therefore perfectly natural; and that the only serious threat to the real interests of the United States can come from a failure to adjust sensibly to the newer world order."

But after Kennedy wrote that in 1987, instead of accepting the future of peace and disarmament that the whole world hoped for at the end of the Cold War, a generation of American leaders made a fateful bid for "superpower." Their delusions were exactly the kind of failure to adjust to a changing world that Kennedy warned against.

The results have been catastrophic for millions of victims of U.S. wars, but they have also been corrosive and debilitating for American society, as the perverted priorities of militarism and Empire squander our country's resources and leave working Americans poorer, sicker, less educated and more isolated from the rest of the world.

When I began writing *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq* in 2008, I hoped that the catastrophes in Afghanistan and Iraq might bring U.S. leaders to their senses, as the Suez crisis did to British leaders in 1956.

Instead, eight more years of carefully disguised savagery under Obama have squandered more precious time and good will and spread the violence and chaos of U.S. war-making even farther and wider. The new National Defense Strategy's implicit threats against Russia and China reveal that 20 years of disastrous imperial wars have done nothing to disabuse U.S. leaders of their delusions of "superpower status" or to restore any kind of sanity to U.S. foreign policy.

Trump is not even pretending to respect diplomacy or international law, as he escalates Bush's and Obama's wars and threatens new ones of his own. But maybe Trump's nakedly aggressive policies will force the world to finally confront the dangers of U.S. imperialism. A coming together of the international community to stop further U.S. aggression may be the only way to prevent an even greater catastrophe than the ones that have already befallen the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Honduras, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.

Or will it actually take a new and even more catastrophic war in Korea, Iran or somewhere else to finally force the United States to "adjust sensibly to the new world order," as Paul Kennedy put it in 1987? The world has already paid a terrible price for our leaders' failure to take his sound advice a generation ago. But what will be the final cost if they keep ignoring it even now?

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

Did Obama Arm Islamic State Killers?

Exclusive: A new study shows that U.S. government weapons ended up in the hands of Islamic State jihadists, but no one in Washington seems interested in how

they got there or what President Obama knew, writes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

Did Barack Obama arm ISIS? The question strikes many people as absurd, if not offensive. How can anyone suggest something so awful about a nice guy like the former president? But a stunning report by an investigative group known as Conflict Armament Research (CAR) leaves us little choice but to conclude that he did.

CAR, based in London and funded by Switzerland and the European Union, spent three years tracing the origin of some 40,000 pieces of captured ISIS arms and ammunition. Its findings, made public last week, are that much of it originated in former Warsaw Pact nations in Eastern Europe, where it was purchased by United States and Saudi Arabia and then diverted, in violation of various rules and treaties, to Islamist rebels seeking to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The rebels, in turn, somehow caused or allowed the equipment to be passed on to Islamic State, which is also known by the acronyms ISIS or ISIL, or just the abbreviation IS.

This is damning stuff since it makes it clear that rather than fighting ISIS, the U.S. government was feeding it.

But CAR turns vague when it comes to the all-important question of precisely how the second leg of the transfer worked. Did the rebels turn the weapons over voluntarily, involuntarily, or did they somehow drop them when ISIS was in close proximity and forget to pick them up? All CAR will say is that "background information ... indicates that IS [Islamic State] forces acquired the materiel through varied means, including battlefield capture and the amalgamation of disparate Syrian opposition groups." It adds that it "cannot rule out direct supply to IS forces from the territories of Jordan and Turkey, especially given the presence of various opposition groups, with shifting allegiances, in cross-border supply locations." But that's it.

If so, this suggests an astonishing level of incompetence on the part of Washington. The Syrian rebel forces are an amazingly fractious lot as they merge, split, attack one another and then team up all over again. So how could the White House have imagined that it could keep weapons tossed into this mix from falling into the wrong hands? Considering how each new gun adds to the chaos, how could it possibly keep track? The answer is that it couldn't, which is why ISIS wound up reaping the benefits.

But here's the rub. The report implies a level of incompetence that is not just staggering, but *too* staggering. How could such a massive transfer occur without

field operatives not having a clue as to what was going on? Was every last one of them deaf, dumb, and blind?

Not likely. What seems much more plausible is that once the CIA established “plausible deniability” for itself, all it cared about was that the arms made their way to the most effective fighting force, which in Syria happened to be Islamic State.

This is what had happened in Afghanistan three decades earlier when the lion’s share of anti-Soviet aid, some \$600 million in all, went to a brutal warlord named Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Hekmatyar was a raging bigot, a sectarian, and an anti-western xenophobe, qualities that presumably did not endear him to his CIA handlers. But as Steve Coll notes in *Ghost Wars*, his bestselling 2004 account of the CIA’s love affair with Islamic holy war, he “was the most efficient at killing Soviets” and that was the only thing that mattered. As one CIA officer put it, “analytically, the best fighters – the best-organized fighters – were the fundamentalists” that Hekmatyar led. Consequently, he ended up with the most money.

After all, if you’re funding a neo-medieval uprising, it makes sense to steer the money to the darkest reactionaries of them all. Something similar occurred in March 2015 when Syrian rebels launched an assault on government positions in the northern province of Idlib. The rebel coalition was under the control of Jabhat al-Nusra, as the local branch of Al Qaeda was known at the time, and what Al-Nusra needed most of all were high-tech TOW missiles with which to counter government tanks and trucks.

Arming Al Qaeda

So the Obama administration arranged for Nusra to get them. To be sure, it didn’t provide them directly. To ensure deniability, rather, it allowed Raytheon to sell some 15,000 TOWs to Saudi Arabia in late 2013 and then looked the other way when the Saudis transferred large numbers of them to pro-Nusra forces in Idlib. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Climbing into bed with Al-Qaeda.”](#)] Al-Nusra had the toughest fighters in the area, and the offensive was sure to send the Assad regime reeling. So even though its people were compatriots with those who destroyed the World Trade Center, Obama’s White House couldn’t say no.

“Nusra have always demonstrated superior planning and battle management,” Yezid Sayigh, a senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, said a few weeks later. If the rebel coalition was successful as a whole, it “was entirely due to their willingness to work with Nusra, who have been the backbone in all of this.”

Scruples, assuming they existed in the first place, fell by the wayside. A senior White House official told The Washington Post that the Obama administration was “not blind to the fact that it is to some extent inevitable” that U.S. weapons would wind up in terrorist hands, but what could you do? It was all part of the game of *realpolitik*. A senior Washington official crowed that “the trend lines for Assad are bad and getting worse” while The New York Times happily noted that “[t]he Syrian Army has suffered a string of defeats from re-energized insurgents.” So, for the master planners in Washington, it was worth it.

Then there is ISIS, which is even more beyond the pale as most Americans are concerned thanks to its extravagant displays of barbarism and cruelty – its killing of Yazidis and enslavement of Yazidi women and girls, its mass beheadings, its fiery execution of Jordanian fighter pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh, and so on.

Yet U.S. government attitudes were more ambivalent than most Americans realized. Indeed, the U.S. government was strictly neutral as long as ISIS confined itself to attacking Assad. As a senior defense official told the Wall Street Journal in early 2015: “Certainly, ISIS has been able to expand in Syria, but that’s not our main objective. I wouldn’t call Syria a safe haven for ISIL, but it is a place where it’s easier for them to organize, plan, and seek shelter than it is in Iraq.”

In other words, Syria *was* a safe haven because, the Journal explained, the U.S. was reluctant to interfere in any way that might “tip the balance of power toward Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who is fighting Islamic State and other rebels.” So the idea was to allow ISIS to have its fun as long as it didn’t bother anyone else. For the same reason, the U.S. refrained from bombing the group when, shortly after the Idlib offensive, its fighters closed in on the central Syrian city of Palmyra, 80 miles or so to the east. This was despite the fact that the fighters would have made perfect targets while “traversing miles of open desert roads.”

As The New York Times explained: “Any airstrikes against Islamic State militants in and around Palmyra would probably benefit the force of President Bashar al-Assad. So far, United States-led airstrikes in Syria have largely focussed on areas far outside government control, to avoid the perception of aiding a leader whose ouster President Obama has called for.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s “How US-Backed War on Syria Helped ISIS.”]

Looting Palmyra

The United States thus allowed ISIS to capture one of the most archeologically

important cities in the world, killing dozens of government soldiers and decapitating 83-year-old Khalid al-Asaad, the city's retired chief of antiquities. (After looting and destroying many of the ancient treasures, ISIS militants were later driven from Palmyra by a Russian-backed offensive by troops loyal to President Assad.)

Obama's bottom line was: ISIS is very, very bad when it attacks the U.S.-backed regime in Iraq, but less so when it wreaks havoc just over the border in Syria. In September 2016, John Kerry clarified what the administration was up to in a tape-recorded conversation at the U.N. that was later made public. Referring to Russia's decision to intervene in Syria against ISIS, also known by the Arabic acronym Daesh, the then-Secretary of State told a small knot of pro-rebel sympathizers:

"The reason Russia came in is because ISIL was getting stronger. Daesh was threatening the possibility of going to Damascus and so forth, and that's why Russia came in, because they didn't want a Daesh government and they supported Assad. And we know this was growing. We were watching. We saw that Daesh was growing in strength, and we thought Assad was threatened. We thought, however, we could probably manage, that Assad might then negotiate. Instead of negotiating, he got ... Putin in to support him. So it's truly complicated."
(Quote starts at 26:10.)

"We were watching." Kerry said. So, by giving ISIS free rein, the administration hoped to use it as a lever with which to dislodge Assad. As in Afghanistan, the United States thought it could use jihad to advance its own imperial interests. Yet the little people – Syrian soldiers, three thousand office workers in lower Manhattan, Yazidis, the Islamic State's beheading of Western hostages, etc. – made things "truly complicated."

Putting this all together, a few things seem clear. One is that the Obama administration was happy to see its Saudi allies use U.S.-made weapons to arm Al Qaeda. Another is that it was not displeased to see ISIS battle Assad's government as well. If so, how unhappy could it have been if its allies then passed along weapons to the Islamic State so it could battle Assad all the more? The administration was desperate to knock out Assad, and it needed someone to do the job before Vladimir Putin stepped in and bombed ISIS instead.

It was a modern version of Henry II's lament, "Who will rid me of this meddlesome priest?" The imperative was to get rid of Assad; Obama and his team had no interest in the messy details.

None of which proves that Obama armed ISIS. But unless one believes that the CIA is so monumentally inept that it could screw up a two-car funeral, it's the only explanation that makes sense. Obama is still a congenial fellow. But he's a classic liberal who had no desire to interfere with the imperatives of empire and whose idea of realism was therefore to leave foreign policy in the hands of neocons or liberal interventionists like Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry.

If America were any kind of healthy democracy, Congress would not rest until it got to the bottom of what should be the scandal of the decade: Did the U.S. government wittingly or unwittingly arm the brutal killers of ISIS and Al Qaeda? However, since that storyline doesn't fit with the prevailing mainstream narrative of Washington standing up for international human rights and opposing global terrorism, the troublesome question will likely neither be asked nor answered.

Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).

Trump Lets Saudis Off His 'Muslim Ban'

Exclusive: By leaving Saudi Arabia and other key terrorism sponsors off his "Muslim ban," President Trump shows the same cowardice and dishonesty that infected the Bush and Obama administrations, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

President Trump's ban against letting people from seven mostly Muslim countries enter the United States looks to many like a thinly concealed bias against a religion, but it also is a troubling sign that Trump doesn't have the nerve to challenge the false terrorism narrative demanded by Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The Israeli-Saudi narrative, which is repeated endlessly inside Official Washington, is that Iran is the principal sponsor of terrorism when that dubious

honor clearly falls to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Sunni-led Muslim states, including Pakistan, nations that did not make Trump's list.

The evidence of who is funding and supporting most of the world's terrorism is overwhelming. All major terrorist groups that have bedeviled the United States and the West over the past couple of decades – from Al Qaeda to the Taliban to Islamic State – can trace their roots back to Sunni-led countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Qatar.

Privately, this reality has been recognized by senior U.S. officials, including former Vice President Joe Biden, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Trump's National Security Advisor Michael Flynn. But that knowledge has failed to change U.S. policy, which caters to the oil-rich Saudis and the politically powerful Israelis.

For instance, in August 2012, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency – then headed by General Flynn – warned that Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Al Qaeda were “the major forces driving the insurgency” against the largely secular government in Syria.

Flynn's DIA advised President Obama that rebels were trying to establish a “Salafist principality in eastern Syria,” and that “western countries, the gulf states, and Turkey are supporting these efforts” to counter the supposed Shiite threat to the region.

Hillary Clinton also was aware of this reality, as the threat from the head-chopping Islamic State – also known as ISIL or ISIS – grew worse in summer 2014. In September 2014, the former Secretary of State wrote in an email that Saudi Arabia and Qatar were “providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups.”

Later in 2014, Vice President Joe Biden made the same point in a talk at Harvard's Kennedy School: “Our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria ... the Saudis, the emirates, 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.]

Known But Unknown

So the truth was known at senior levels of the Obama administration – and now via National Security Advisor Flynn at the top of the Trump administration – but

the Israelis and the Saudis don't want that reality to shape U.S. foreign policy. In other words, this truth about the real source of terrorism was known but unknown.

Instead, Israel demands that Washington share its hatred of the Lebanese militant group, Hezbollah, a Shiite force that organized in the 1980s to drive the invading Israeli army out of southern Lebanon. Because Hezbollah dealt a rare defeat to the Israeli Defense Force, Israel puts it at the top of "terrorist" organizations. And, Hezbollah is supported by Iran.

Saudi Arabia, too, hates Iran because the Sunni-fundamentalist Saudi monarchy considers Shia Islam heretical, a sectarian conflict that dates back to the Seventh Century. So, the Saudi government has viewed Sunni jihadists as the tip of the spear against these Shiite rivals.

Israeli and Saudi officials have even made clear that they would prefer Al Qaeda or Islamic State to prevail in the Syrian war rather than have the largely secular government of President Bashar al-Assad survive because they see his regime as part of a "Shiite crescent" reaching from Tehran through Damascus to the Hezbollah neighborhoods of Beirut.

In September 2013, Israel's Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren, a close adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told the Jerusalem Post that Israel favored the Sunni extremists over Assad.

"The greatest danger to Israel is by the strategic arc that extends from Tehran, to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc," Oren said in [the interview](#). "We always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran." He said this was the case even if the "bad guys" were affiliated with Al Qaeda.

And, in June 2014, speaking as a former ambassador at an Aspen Institute conference, Oren expanded on his position, [saying](#) Israel would even prefer a victory by the brutal Islamic State over continuation of the Iranian-backed Assad in Syria. "From Israel's perspective, if there's got to be an evil that's got to prevail, let the Sunni evil prevail," Oren said.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's ["Israel, Saudi Arabia and Terrorism."](#)]

The West's Worries

However, when Americans and Europeans worry about terrorism, they are talking about Al Qaeda and Islamic State, terror groups led by Sunni extremists. Those

are the groups that have been responsible for bloody attacks on the United States and Western Europe.

The absurdity of Trump's immigration ban is underscored by the fact that it would not have kept out the 15 Saudi hijackers dispatched by Al Qaeda to carry out the 9/11 attacks. They came from the home country of Al Qaeda's Saudi founder Osama bin Laden.

Neither would Trump's ban have stopped Muhamed Atta, one of the 9/11 ringleaders who was from Egypt, another country ignored by Trump, which also happens to be the original home of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's current leader.

So, what Trump's initial foray into the complex issue of terrorism has revealed is that he is unwilling to take on the real nexus of terrorism, just as Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama shied away from a clash with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf sheikdoms.

In the first week of Donald Trump's presidency, the regional interests of Israel and Saudi Arabia have continued to dictate how Official Washington addresses terrorism.

Trump's seven-nation list includes Iran, Syria and Sudan as state sponsors of terrorism and Iraq, Yemen, Somalia and Libya as countries where there has been terrorist activity. But the governments of Iran and Syria arguably have become two of the leading fighters against the terrorist groups of most concern to the U.S. and European populations.

Iran is aiding both Syria and Iraq in their conflicts with Al Qaeda and Islamic State. Inside Syria, the Syrian army has borne the brunt of that fighting against terror groups funded and armed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and – yes – at least indirectly, the United States. Yet while none of the Al Qaeda/Islamic State benefactors made Trump's list, Iran and Syria did.

In other words, not only is Trump's ban a blunderbuss blast at thousands of innocent Muslims who have no intention of hurting the United States but it doesn't even take aim at the most dangerous targets which represent a genuine terrorist threat.

Trump's ban is really a twisted case of "political correctness" purporting to reject "political correctness." While Trump claims to recognize that it is dangerously naïve to let in Muslims when Islamic terrorism has remained a threat to Americans, Trump has left off his list the most likely sources of terrorists because – to do otherwise – would have negative political consequences in Official Washington.

By going after Iran and Syria, in particular, Trump appears to be currying favor with neoconservatives and liberal hawks in Congress and across Official Washington. Perhaps, he is simply hesitating while the Senate considers confirmation of his choice for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson. The Senate also could reject other of his foreign policy nominees.

But that is exactly the kind of compromising that undermined any attempts by President Obama to engineer a real change from the “war of terror” strategy of George W. Bush. Obama was so afraid of going against the Israelis and the Saudis that he only altered U.S. policy on the margins and let himself get dragged into Israeli-Saudi-favored “regime change” adventures in Syria and Yemen.

Dashed or Delayed Hopes

When Trump initially rebuffed the neocons and liberal hawks who dominate Official Washington’s foreign establishment, there was hope that he might at least try to hold Saudi Arabia accountable as the chief sponsor of terrorism, rather than to continue the Israeli-Saudi-imposed narrative.

But to do so carried political risks beyond offending the politically potent Israelis who have forged a quiet alliance with the wealthy Saudis. Trump would also have to recognize the important role of Republican icon Ronald Reagan in creating the terrorist threat.

After all, the origins of the modern jihadist movement trace back to the \$1 billion-a-year collaboration between the Reagan administration and the Saudi monarchy to support the Afghan mujahedeen in their war against a secular government in Kabul backed by the Soviet Union.

The extravagant arming of these Afghan fundamentalists, who were bolstered by international jihadists led by Osama bin Laden, dealt a harsh blow to the Soviet forces and ultimately led to the collapse of the secular regime in Kabul, but the victory also paved the way for the rise of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, blowback that hit the United States on 9/11.

The U.S. reaction to that shock never directly addressed how the problem had originated and who the underlying culprits were. Though George W. Bush’s administration did begin by invading Afghanistan, the neoconservatives around him quickly turned the U.S. retaliation against longstanding Israeli targets, such as Iraq’s Saddam Hussein and Syria’s Assad dynasty though they had nothing to do with 9/11.

The fiction that these largely secular governments were responsible for Islamic terrorism – and the mislabeling of Shia-ruled Iran as the chief sponsor of such terrorism – have remained the myths confusing the American people and thus

justifying continued U.S. support for the Israeli-Saudi war against the “Shiite crescent.”

Trump, who is heavily criticized for his inability to distinguish fact from fantasy, could have displayed a brave commitment to truth-telling if he had fashioned his counter-terrorism policy to actually address the real sponsors of terrorism. Instead, he chose to continue the lies that the Israelis and Saudis insist that Official Washington tell.

In doing so, Trump is not only offending much of the world and alienating countries that are at the forefront of the fight against the worst terrorist threats, but he is continuing to shield the key regimes that have perpetuated the scourge of terrorism.

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](#)).

Playing Politics with Terrorism List

Congressional Republicans continue to push Islamo-phobic bills, now seeking to put the mostly political Muslim Brotherhood on the foreign terrorist list, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Legislation [introduced](#) by Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Florida, to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) is regrettable on multiple counts. It represents a perversion of the FTO list and reflects an attitude that is likely to increase rather than decrease Islamist terrorism.

There was no official U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations until 20 years ago, and no need for one despite international terrorism having been a major official concern well before then. Notwithstanding the common practice in public discourse and the press of referring to how this or that government brands or designates a particular group as “terrorist,” any listing or branding by itself accomplishes nothing in combating such groups or reducing terrorism.

The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 created the U.S. FTO

list for a very specific practical reason. Other provisions in that law criminalized for the first time the provision of material support to foreign terrorist organizations. To make prosecution under this statute possible, there needed to be a precise way of defining what constitutes a foreign terrorist organization. Hence the creation of the list.

The 1996 legislation established a procedure in which the various departments and agencies involved participate in a lengthy review process to examine which groups should be listed as FTOs. The law spells out the criteria to govern the review, which basically are that the group must be an identifiable organization that is foreign and has engaged in terrorism that somehow affects U.S. interests. The review process has been thorough and laborious, including the preparation of detailed "administrative records" assembling the available information about each group under examination. The Secretary of State makes the final determinations regarding listing or delisting.

There has been some political manipulation of the list, though it has been to keep or move a group off the list rather than putting it on. The most salient case of this involved the Iranian cult and terrorist group known as the Mojahedin-e Khalq, which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delisted in 2012. The group, which has killed American citizens in terrorist attacks and clearly met the criteria for being on the FTO list, had not changed its stripes. Instead, the delisting was a response to the group's long-running and well-financed lobbying campaign to win favor in Washington and especially among members of Congress.

A Congressionally imposed listing of the Muslim Brotherhood would be the first time such politicization would involve putting an organization on the FTO list rather than taking it off. It also would be the first time a group was listed not because of terrorist activities but instead because of dislike for its ideology.

Such a Congressional imposition would be a political end-run around the well-established process for applying the best possible expertise and information to the question of whether a group meets the criteria under the law that governs the FTO list. Such a move would reduce further the credibility in foreign eyes of what the U.S. Government say about terrorism, and lend substance to charges that much of what the United States calls opposition to terrorism is really just opposition to politics and ideologies it does not favor.

Mostly Political, Not Violent

The Muslim Brotherhood is a predominantly Egyptian organization with origins that go back to the 1920s. Its establishment was partly a response to the fall

of the Ottoman Empire and to the militant secularism of Ataturk and his abolition of the Istanbul-based caliphate. For most of its modern history in Egypt, the Brotherhood has been the principal peaceful manifestation of political Islam.

During the rule of Hosni Mubarak, the Brotherhood was officially proscribed but in practice tolerated, being allowed to run candidates for office as independents or under the label of some other party. The extent of the Brotherhood's popular support was demonstrated after Mubarak's fall, when in a free election a Brotherhood leader, Mohamed Morsi, was elected president. The Egyptian military coup of 2013 began a harsh crackdown that was aimed at political liberties in general but specifically at the Muslim Brotherhood.

The forms and practices of Brotherhood offshoots outside Egypt have depended on the extent of political liberty in each location. In Jordan, for example, the organization has had a status slightly freer than the Egyptian Brotherhood had under Mubarak. The group in Jordan runs candidates and wins parliamentary seats under the Brotherhood's own party label, the Islamic Action Front. Where political liberty is lacking, something different evolves. In the Palestinian territories, for example, that evolution involved the creation of Hamas (which has its own place on the U.S. FT0 list).

The habit of seeing previous Muslim Brotherhood ties in the violent and extreme activities of other groups disregards how participation in these groups, and especially the use of terrorism, is a *rejection* of the Brotherhood's peaceful, gradualist path. Such groups are foes, not offshoots or extensions, of the Brotherhood. The groups that terrorized Egypt in the 1990s explicitly opposed the Brotherhood and thought that its peaceful ways were feckless. The leader of one of those groups, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is now the leader of Al Qaeda.

The Folly of Suppression

The fundamental mistake in suppressing groups such as the Brotherhood, or in effect condoning such suppression with a step such as the Cruz-Diaz legislation, is that closing peaceful channels for the expression of political Islam moves more people into the violent channels. We have seen this process playing out in Egypt since the coup, with the harsh practices of military strongman Abdul Fatah al-Sisi being followed directly by an upsurge in terrorist violence in Egypt.

The unfortunate lesson being absorbed by many young men with Islamist inclinations is that all those years of forbearance by the Brotherhood were for naught. The lesson is that only a violent path has any chance of success.

The newly introduced legislation is bad not only as a politicization of

counterterrorism but also as a counterproductive approach to Islamist terrorism in particular. Also unfortunate are indications of this approach becoming part of the new administration's direction. A disturbing part of the testimony this week by the nominee for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, was his seamless lumping of the Muslim Brotherhood with "other agents of radical Islam, like al-Qaeda."

Likely to be even more damaging is the entrenchment of indiscriminate Islamophobia at the center of national security decision-making in the White House.

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.)

US Foreign Policy Elite vs. the Evil One

The crème de la U.S. foreign policy establishment gathered in Texas last week, reaffirming at a friendly conclave the need for their skillful stewardship of the national security state, as Michael Brenner witnessed.

By Michael Brenner

The combined security/intelligence communities held a high-powered public conference at the University of Texas in Austin last week, a now regular event blessed by Chancellor (Admiral) William McRaven who previously had led OPERATIONS COMMAND (SOCOM).

The line-up of heavy hitters was impressive: Clapper, McLaughlin, Hadley, Breedlove, Zelikow, Negroponte, Eliot Cohen, General Norton Schwartz (former Chief of staff, Air Force), Joshua Bolten (Bush Chief of Staff), John Helgerson (CIA Inspector General), Kurt Campbell. Its purpose, though, remains obscure.

Outreach to the American public is one standard explanation for this type of shindig. Communication in this instance, though, was one-way. The panels included only true believers in a hard-line, aggressive approach to a very long security agenda. The speakers' roster was similarly stacked. Token participants from outside the "community" who had figured in previous meetings were nowhere in sight. So what the public gets is instruction rather than exchange or

communication.

The choice of Texas is particularly odd since there are few locals who need conversion. At last year's event, CIA Director John Brennan's litany of grievances against all those who, like the Senate Intelligence Committee, were trying to rein in the CIA, NSA, et al elicited a standing ovation from the entire audience (minus one).

The level of enthusiasm was what one might expect had he announced the decimation of the last Comanche band or a State Supreme Court's decision to void all land grants to Mexicans from the King of Spain. In 2015, Russia, Iran, Syria, the Islamic State and – not least- domestic enemies provided the amphetamine-like rush. Same this year. So what we had was the College of Cardinals trekking 1,200 miles to preach to the choir of a provincial town.

This effusive welcome is not surprising. After all, Texas is where the Governor (Greg Abbott) called out the State Guard to defend the citizenry from the threat of abuse by U.S. Army units engaged in a training exercise in one county north of Austin. He voiced sympathy for their claimed fears about possible rapine, robbery, wreckage, and – above all – confiscation of their firearms. So did almost all other elected officials.

In other words, the event had elements of an Evangelical rally – the crowd leaned toward the elderly, albeit with a considerable sprinkling of the college-aged and Generation "Xs." Still, it was illuminating to hear the Word straight from the apostles. Understandably, in those congenial conditions restraint or ellipse are dispensed with in outbursts of self-satisfied candor.

Perhaps a better metaphor is a gathering of senior prelates at Rome's Society of Jesus sometime in the early Seventeenth Century. For America's foreign policy Establishment has a "near enemy" and a "far enemy." The former includes those forces who would curb the robust exertion of power at home and abroad – either through misguided legal constraints or a scaling back of its audacious goals.

The aroused opposition to draconian surveillance and associated illegalities had been a threat to the Establishment's authority and legitimacy. Now, that abortive Reformation has been quelled and the *status quo ante* restored with trivial concessions to the heretics. The outgoing Pope had seen the necessity and virtue of aligning with the Society and the Pope-designate is a proven sister-in-Christ.

Prioritizing Enemies

The "near enemy" is the priority, of course. For it poses a manifest or latent threat to the essence of the Establishment: its bureaucratic control, its lavish

financing, its political clout and – above all – its position as cynosure of the creed, defender of the Faith from heresy, and spiritual guide to the nation in pursuing its external relations.

The “far enemy” is the world “out there.” That space can be divided into four categories: those places where conversion is complete and governments can be expected to bow to American suzerainty: Western Europe, Japan, etc.; other places where active proselytization is well underway: Eastern Europe, South Asia; places occupied by hostile forces which threaten directly or otherwise endanger the Establishment’s supremacy or general well-being; and, finally, those ambiguous zones where threats potentially could spawn.

Category III is where the “Evil One” resides – in his many manifestations: e.g. Russia, Iran, North Korea, Islamic terrorists. The “Evil One” is omnipresent – even when not visible as was the case in Austin.

Category IV embraces two concerns: a) nests where minor vipers may lurk – Latin American “reformers,” African gangster cabals, Mexican drug cartels – but not Afghan ones; and b) China. This last bulks large and ominously in the anxious imagination of the Establishment. It is the equivalent of nascent Islam to Christian Europe of the Dark Ages or – perhaps more closely – the Ottomans to Renaissance Europe.

What to do – confront, co-opt, co-exist, engage tactically? The Establishment’s movers-and-shakers instinctively lean toward confrontation. Their practical sense leans them toward vigilant accommodation. They fret but they don’t think creatively.

The blunt truth is that China scares the American foreign policy elite. It is too big, too successful, too self-confident, too ready to make claims of exceptionalism that supposedly are an American exclusive. That is why these Establishment apostles compulsively deploy the classic avoidance devices of disparaging it, of magnifying its problems, of persuading themselves that the United States’ position as king of the hill is impregnable. In other words, adolescent wishful thinking.

The “near enemy” front and the “far enemy” front intersect. They are mutually dependent. High-threat assessments on the latter are assets in campaigning for maximum support on the former. Expanded assets, material and political, in turn permit for more extensive engagement abroad. A veritable perpetual motion machine.

There does indeed exist a terrorism industry whose behavior largely conforms to that of other industries. It admittedly has a number of distinctive features. It

is a public/private partnership; therefore it deals in two currencies – political rewards and money. Its activities have deep and pervasive support among the populace at large and elites. It is impervious to criticism since its functions are deemed critical to the nation's basic security. Critics are either shrugged off or accused of not taking seriously grave threats.

The terrorism industry's value to the country is impossible to measure since its success is defined in terms of negatives (things that haven't happened) rather than positives (things that did happen). While tangible benefits are immeasurable, there are millions of people whose livelihood, status, self-esteem and political future depend on perpetuation of the terrorism industry as it currently is structured and operates.

In addition, the terrorism industry is both seller and buyer of its products – all of which are in the form of services. Its for-profit and non-profit components both depend on a high level of demand. Fear of terrorism generates the demand. Stoking fear generates higher returns for all those who work in the industry.

The same people in the non-profit sector who benefit also make the judgments, launch the policies and control the discourse as to how great the need is. A critique of assertions about the magnitude, nature and change in the level of threat we face must be understood against this backdrop. So, too, must any assessment of how well present policies and practices are working.

Remarkable Conclave

The Austin conclave was remarkable in two respects: its calm self-confidence; and its unquestioning belief that the American Establishment has a Providential mission to oversee the affairs of the globe. Truth is immanent (or inherent) in U.S. foreign policy. America's motives pure. Its means measured.

The paramount responsibility of those who lead is to scour the world to find and identify threats – and then to devise strategies for eliminating them. Periodically, they must also ensure that the American people fully understand why and what is being done on their behalf.

When it comes to policy advocacy, the two recurrent words are “should” and “must” – as in *New York Times* editorials. “We should strengthen our military presence in Syria to counter Russian influence.” “Putin must stop his aggression in the Baltics and Balkans” – Stephen Hadley, national security adviser to President George W. Bush. (Geography evidently is not this crowd's strong suit).

Embedded in this rhetoric is a pair of core propositions. Like pillars of the Faith, they do not require explicit restatement. The overriding purpose of

American foreign policy is to achieve absolute security for the United States. In the long run, that means Americanizing the world. In the shorter term, that means strenuous, unrelenting efforts to smite our enemies and to preempt potential threats.

There are four guiding principles:

- It is legitimate, even imperative, for the threatened democratic world, led by Washington, to use its power to forestall assaults on them.
- Traditional concepts of state sovereignty do not constitute an acceptable legal or political barrier to efforts at imposing that solution.
- The United States, therefore, is not a "global Leviathan" that advances its selfish interests at the expense of others. It is, rather, the benign producer of public goods.
- The privilege of partial exception from the international norms, including the right to act unilaterally, is earned by an historical record of selfless performance.

Don't Look Back

The worthies on the Austin panel spent no time on a retrospective critique of the policies and action that have flowed from this world-view. The objective record may show that the country has invested enormously in serial failure relieved only by the modest success of dispersing Classic Al Qaeda and dislodging the Taliban – temporarily.

The global struggle goes on against enemies real and imagined without any appreciable change in strategic thinking. Its sole convincing victory has been mastery of the American public mind. Yet, there is no reappraisal of core premises. The tragic Iraq fiasco got one mention: "we need to better identify what factors in the equation we have inadequate Intelligence about, like WMDs"
-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper.

The resilience of Faith in strategic doctrine as some sort of Holy Writ is evident in the Establishment's approach to Syria. Speakers evinced an undifferentiated and unqualified consensus on America purposes there. American priorities emerged clearly. In this mess, we still can discern what they are – and that there exists a consensus on their importance and ordering. As noted in an earlier post:

1. The paramount objective is to thwart Russia's efforts to exercise influence and to establish its position in Syria.

2. Get rid of Assad. We have committed ourselves to the Israelis, the Turks, and the Saudis on this. Their wish is our command.
3. Marginalize and weaken Iran by breaking the Shi'ite Crescent
4. Wear down and slowly fragment ISIS. Success on this score can cover failure on all others in domestic opinion.
5. Ensure a permanent American physical presence in Iraq, i.e. achieve what we failed to achieve in 2008.
6. Facilitate a de facto partition of Iraq with bits of Syria attached to the Iraqi bits. Hold this out as the lure for the Kurds to act as our infantry.
7. Facilitate some kind of Sunni entity in Anbar and eastern Syria. How can we prevent it being destabilized by attacks from ISIS remnants? How can we prevent it falling under the sway of Al Qaeda? Good subjects for the Obama Foundation's first major study project.
8. Al-Nusra in Syria proper? Hope that the Turks can "domestic" al-Nusra. Incentive? Obscure. No one made mention of Washington's tacit alliance with Al Qaeda in Syria. No one made mention of pressuring Turkey and the KSA to cease and desist supporting jihadi elements, no mention was made of Israel, no mention was made of post-Assad Syria.

The words "should" or "must" in regard to other parties were absent from all discussion of Syria. Indeed, Hadley and others urged that we redouble efforts to repair credibility in the eyes of Riyadh and Ankara. These Establishment figures have spent so much time in blind alleys that they seem unable to tell night from day.

Every Soul is captive

Of its own Deeds – Qur'an 74:38

The U.S. foreign policy Establishment is not big on introspection or self-reflection – it sparks fear of an acute agoraphobia attack.

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Study Says Drones Generate More Terrorism

Using lethal drones to kill "bad guys" on the other side of the planet is offensive to many people on moral grounds, but a new study finds it is also ineffective in reducing terrorism, observes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A recent study by Emily Manna about drone strikes and terrorism in Pakistan warrants attention as a useful contribution to discussion of the effectiveness of such strikes as a counterterrorism tool.

The issue of just how useful the firings of missiles from unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly called drones, are in killing suspected terrorists on the ground, has multiple dimensions. Larger legal and moral questions arise with this form of remote-control violence being inflicted in disparate places ranging across many international boundaries – especially in the absence of any well-defined and up-to-date congressional authorization for the overseas use of force.

A narrower question of effectiveness concerns how much the killing of individual members, including even leading members, leads to the weakening or demise of any existing terrorist group. The tactic is only one of several approaches toward trying to eliminate a terrorist group, and not necessarily one of the more effective ones.

Groups with a well-developed internal structure, which also tend to be the more formidable and sophisticated groups, are adept at filling vacancies. Sometimes the replacement turns out to be more able than the leader who was bumped off. This was true when Israel's killing of Hezbollah secretary general Abbas Musawi led to the succession of the more capable Hassan Nasrallah. It also was true when the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, cleared the way for the more adept Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to take over and to expand the group into what we now know as ISIS.

Another set of issues that are just important concerns hostile reactions to this use of force by the United States, leading to anger and resentment that pushes some people across the line into extremist violence and thus breeding more terrorists than there were before.

There is some reason to believe that most such counterproductive effects occur at some remove from the location of drone strikes; word of the destructive application of U.S. power can spread quickly and widely, but any favorable effects of removing a bad guy from the neighborhood would tend to be more local. If net positive effects are to be observed, they would more likely be relatively close to the scene of a drone strike.

Manna's research suggests that, at least in Pakistan, the effects are negative even in the neighborhood of a drone strike. Her methodology involved looking at individual provinces and correlating terrorist activity in the same month as,

and the month following, drone strikes. The principal finding was a statistically significant rise in terrorist attacks in a province after it became the target of U.S. drone strikes.

The U.S. program of drone strikes never was the result of a calculated process of analyzing the effects of different counterterrorist tools and choosing this tool as more effective than some others. Rather, the tool was seized on because it was the only way to reach some suspected terrorists in remote areas, at least short of staging a major military ground expedition into those areas.

But if the result of a tactic – in counterterrorism or any other endeavor – is a net minus rather than a net plus, then it ought not to be used even if it is the only tactic available. As more analyzable data from the drone program become available, they ought to be used to take fresh looks at the rationale for the entire program. And political leaders need to resist the temptation to seize upon certain tactics as a way of responding to popular demand to “do something” about terrorism.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies and 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.)

Obama Taunts Putin over Syria

President Obama mocked Russian President Putin for not fixing Syria during the past month and chided him about Moscow’s Afghan quagmire in the 1980s, proving that Obama has either no self-awareness or no sense of irony given the U.S. misadventures in both countries, as Sam Hussein describes.

By Sam Hussein

President Barack Obama’s remarks about Russian President Vladimir Putin’s intervention in the Syria conflict were remarkably ironic: “The Russians now have been there for several weeks, over a month, and I think fair-minded reporters who have looked at the situation would say that the situation hasn’t changed significantly.

“In the interim, Russia has lost a commercial passenger jet. You’ve seen another jet shot down. There have been losses in terms of Russian personnel. And I think Mr. Putin understands that with Afghanistan fresh in the memory, for him to

simply get bogged down in an inconclusive and paralyzing civil conflict is not the outcome that he's looking for."

In those remarks on Tuesday in Paris, Obama scrutinized the hard effects of Russian foreign policy, but not his own. "With Afghanistan fresh in the memory," said the U.S. President, presumably referring to the Russian intervention there that ended in 1989 – and not the 14-year U.S. intervention in the same country which is ongoing.

Obama can see the speck in Putin's eye, but not the log in his own. To say nothing of the fact that the U.S. started the modern movement of Islamic jihadists in the 1980s by organizing, funding and arming the Afghan mujahedeen to make the Russians bleed.

Gore Vidal called the USA the "United States of Amnesia" – but it's more like the USSA: The United States of Selective Amnesia.

The U.S. has been bombing the Mideast for decades now – not a month – and has yet to make a serious accounting of all the people killed, cities destroyed and hatred engendered. Would some "fair-minded" reporter look at the U.S. experience from Afghanistan since the 1980s to Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s to Libya and Syria this decade and judge that Washington has solved the problems or made them markedly worse?

A few hours after Obama made his remarks, Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced the U.S. was again expanding its military actions in Iraq.

Why Terrorism?

While it rarely occurs to anyone to question that the stated goals of the U.S. government might not be the actual goals, it's rarely thought to examine the stated goals of the 9/11 or Paris attackers. Many have rightly noted that the "terrorism" label is applied selectively, most recently regarding the shooting at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado, but beyond the use of the word "terrorism," the notion of explicitly articulating an attacker's motive is selective.

When talking about events like the Nov. 13 Paris attacks, "motive" doesn't enter into it; indeed, talk of "terrorism" or "war" is partly a substitute for thinking through a motive. In the case of the Planned Parenthood attack, it's seemingly taken for granted that someone can be opposed to abortion rights and be opposed to violent attacks on abortion clinics. But it's not a point taken to heart when examining U.S. – or French, or British – foreign policy.

One nation seems to have come to grips with this contradiction, at least to an

extent: On March 11, 2004, a series of nearly simultaneous bombs exploded on four commuter trains in Madrid. The blasts killed 191 people and wounded nearly 2,000.

That same day, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1530 that condemned in “the strongest terms the bomb attacks in Madrid, Spain, perpetrated by the terrorist group ETA.” Of course, it quickly became evident ETA – a Basque separatist group – had nothing to do with it.

This was a rare instance of officialdom not immediately trying to “blame the Muslims” after a bombing. And for good reason. The then right-wing ruling party in Spain, the inaptly named Peoples Party, had dragged the country into the Iraq War a year before and, with elections looming just three days later, there was fear that if the attack was shown to be Mideast-related, the public would be furious. In fact, the day of the election, Al Qaeda claimed responsibility.

Before the Madrid bombing, the Peoples Party led the polls by 5 percentage points, but the Socialist Party ended up winning by 5 percent. The victorious Socialist Party had called for the removal of Spanish troops from Iraq during the campaign.

Part of what was pivotal and crucial was that there were substantial protests in the immediate aftermath of the bombings. This included protests under the banner “No to Terrorism – No to War.” [See picture.]

The Socialist Party had promised to remove Spanish troops by June 30, 2004, and, after winning the election, the troops were withdrawn a month earlier than expected. I can’t find a record of any Mideast-related attacks in Spain since.

The story has been different with Great Britain and France, which took more prominent roles in interventions in their former colonies, Iraq and Syria, respectively. British Prime Minister Tony Blair was President George W. Bush’s principal sidekick during the invasion and occupation of Iraq, while French President Francois Hollande has joined Obama as leading voices in demanding “regime change” in Syria and in escalating war talk about the Islamic State.

There’s been much made in some circles about the French, who were derided in the U.S. for not supporting the 2003 Iraq invasion, now leading the fight in Syria and Hollande’s pro-war rhetoric. But Syria was a former French colony.

Yet, the fact that the interventionist dynamics line up with the imperial histories is damning to the Western powers by playing into the anti-Western narrative that today’s interventions are just modern versions of the Christian world’s war on and exploitation of the Muslim world dating back to the Crusades.

This Western imperial mindset toward the Mideast is evident, including the case of Israel's active settler colonial project against the Palestinians. It's also evident in the alliance between the U.S. establishment and the Western-installed monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other regimes.

And the mindset is even evident in the case of Iran, as former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated after the nuclear agreement with Iran earlier this year at the Brookings Institution: "I don't see Iran as the partner in this agreement, I see Iran as the subject of this agreement."

The imperial legacy is shown in restrictions to domestic freedoms as well. There's the rhetoric of "liberté" in France, but the state of emergency in France and prohibition of protests has its roots in laws enacted from France's colonial war with Algeria. (Many in France also seem to be letting "the terrorists win" by abrogating their own freedoms.)

A Pressing Need

The proclaimed motives of those claiming responsibility for attacks like 9/11 were never meaningfully discussed. They should be now, especially given the widespread sense that ISIS is now adopting Al Qaeda's tactic of striking at the West, rather than simply focusing on constructing its own Mideast caliphate.

Al Qaeda's leader Osama bin Laden addressed the U.S. public just before the 2004 election thus: "Contrary to Bush's claim that we hate freedom – if so, then let him explain to us why we don't strike for example – Sweden? ... But I am amazed at you. Even though we are in the fourth year after the events of September 11th, Bush is still engaged in distortion, deception and hiding from you the real causes. And thus, the reasons are still there for a repeat of what occurred."

Around the same time, said bin Laden: "When I saw those destroyed towers in Lebanon it sparked in my mind that the oppressors should be punished in the same way and that we should destroy towers in America so that they can taste what we tasted and so they will stop killing our women and children." (See my piece "U.S. Policy: 'Putting out the fire with gasoline?'" based on interviews with Lee Hamilton and Thomas Kean.)

This passage is almost never cited, and its context was outright falsified by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in his book, where he claims Bin Laden was "referring to the destruction of the Marine barracks and the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut." Robin Wright correctly notes in her book the context was that bin Laden was referring to "Israeli's 1982 invasion of Lebanon with American arms."

Paris and London should be looking toward Madrid's example in taking steps

toward shedding their imperial mindsets in stopping their war-obsessed elites. You can either be an emissary of empire or a decent democracy, but not both.

Hollande is clearly escalating the bombing that France has been conducting in Syria for over a year – now calling for “merciless” bombing. British Prime Minister David Cameron is pushing for Britain to join the bombing in Syria – in effect adopting a U.S. style of ecumenical imperialism – and not just in Britain’s traditional domains like Iraq.

It doesn’t have to be this way. History can change. And the fact is that there is a great legacy of anti-imperialism in the U.S. that’s continually overlooked. Mark Twain the pen name of author Samuel Clemens is revered now, but what’s typically ignored is Twain’s opposition to the U.S. becoming a global imperial power.

In 1898, he helped found the Anti-Imperialist League and wrote in 1900: “I have read carefully the Treaty of Paris [between the United States and Spain], and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem. ... And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.”

Of course, U.S. colonialism actually goes back to its own roots as a settler colonial state against the native peoples of North America.

Though Spain is still a NATO member and gave NATO support during the 2011 bombing of Libya (which has led to a massive disaster there), Madrid at least took a step away from the abyss with some positive results. This is in contrast to “leaders” in Paris, London, Washington and elsewhere who are plunging headlong into it.

In 2013, a British soldier was killed in the English town of Woolwich, a southeast part of London. Michael Adebolajo, one of the killers, explained his aim in vivid terms – literally with blood and knives in hand:

“Remove your governments, they don’t care about you. You think David Cameron is going to get caught in the street when we start busting our guns? You think politicians are going to die? No, it’s going to be the average guy, like you and your children. So get rid of them. Tell them to bring our troops back so can all live in peace. So leave our lands and we can all live in peace. That’s all I have to say.” [[transcript and video](#)]

People should listen closely for motive to better understand the choices before us.

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Delinking Terrorism and Islam

Exclusive: President Obama has faced sharp criticism from the Right for refusing to link Islam to acts of terrorism. He argues that to do so plays into the hands of violent criminals who wrap their brutality in the cloak of a great religion. But who has the better side of this argument, asks Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Sen. Ted Cruz, expressing the views of many conservatives, accuses President Obama of “bizarre, politically correct doublespeak” for referring to “*violent* extremists/jihadists/radicals” instead of “Islamic terrorists.” However, by avoiding the linkage between one of the world’s great religions and acts of mass murder, Obama says he seeks to isolate the terrorists from the 1.6 billion mostly peaceful Muslims who inhabit the world.

Is Obama wrong to downplay the factor of faith in the declared motives of terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State and Al Qaeda?

Early this year, *The Atlantic* magazine ran an influential article that condemned “a well-intentioned but dishonest campaign to deny the Islamic State’s medieval religious nature.” The author, Graeme Wood, declared, “The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very Islamic*. . . . The religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam.”

Unlike many conservative rants, Wood’s long piece was nuanced and acknowledged the obvious: most Muslims don’t subscribe to the political agenda of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh). But while insisting on the serious faith of its “most ardent followers,” Wood’s article failed to answer a key question: Does their support for terrorism flow logically from a long and deep immersion in Koranic studies, or is the Koran, with its fighting words and readily accessible jihadist doctrines, simply a convenient text to justify violent impulses that stem from other causes?

If the latter is true, Obama has a strong case for downplaying the religious context of terrorist movements that claim to honor the one true faith. Judging from some recent profiles of ISIS leaders and terrorists, Islam was less a motivating force than an ennobling cover for their basically criminal, anti-

social proclivities.

For example, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, described as the “godfather” of the organization, was “a onetime thief, . . . a tattooed Jordanian and a reformed drinker of extreme personal violence whose own mother had proclaimed him not very smart,” according to the *New York Times*. He spent his youth as a “petty criminal” before joining other jihadists in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Haji Bakr, the former Iraqi colonel and organizational genius behind the ISIS until he was killed in 2014, was described as “a nationalist, not an Islamist,” by Iraqi journalist Hisham al-Hashimi. A major study of Bakr’s career by *Der Spiegel* reporter Christoph Reuter, based on a trove of captured documents, notes pointedly that “there is no mention in Bakr’s writings of prophecies relating to the establishment of an Islamic State allegedly ordained by God.” Although Bakr was not particularly religious, “he did believe that the faith of others could be exploited.”

Reuter adds, ISIS “has little in common with predecessors like al-Qaida aside from its jihadist label. There is essentially nothing religious in its actions, its strategic planning, its unscrupulous changing of alliances and its precisely implemented propaganda narratives. Faith, even in its most extreme form, is just one of many means to an end. Islamic State’s only constant maxim is the expansion of power at any price.”

As *Atlantic* magazine’s Wood admits, ISIS propaganda “has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe.” Among them were the Paris terrorists. The suspected mastermind, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, was radicalized only last year when he traveled to Syria.

Growing up, he studied at a Catholic school before dropping out and “drifting into a life of thievery and drugs,” according to the *Independent*. He “showed much more interest in petty crime than Islam” and never prayed in a mosque, according to his sister.

The journalist and social historian Ian Buruma likened Abaaoud to the 1970s-era terrorist “Carlos the Jackal”: “the same self-satisfaction, the same pleasure in violence, the same delight in a deadly cause. . [Abaaoud’s] brand of political Islam is an extreme form of religious fanaticism, to be sure. But it cannot be properly understood by learning more about the Quran or the Hadith, any more than the bloodlust of [Carlos] can be reduced to readings of *Das Kapital*. Murderous revolutionaries, whether they act in the name of a religious or a secular cause, tend to be mesmerized by a cult of death. More conventional or traditional forms of Islam are far removed from a death cult.”

Salah Abdeslam, another ISIS operative who has been described as “the most wanted man in Europe” following the death of Abaaoud, was reportedly known most for “having a long line of girlfriends, including an English woman, and a party lifestyle.”

Hasna Ait Boulahcen, the woman killed during the police assault in Saint-Denis, “was a party animal with a string of boyfriends who had shown no interest in religion,” according to interviews by the London Daily Mail. She was “known for her love of alcohol and cigarettes rather than devotion to Islam,” the paper reported.

“Her brother . . . said that she had had no interest in religion, never read the Koran and had only started wearing a Muslim veil a month ago.” He added, “She had been the victim of violence since she was very young – mistreated and rejected – she never received the love she needed. From the age of five she was taken into care, so she grew up with a foster family.”

Princeton scholar Bernard Haykel, who was Graeme Wood’s main expert source, told another journalist that the vast majority of Muslim scholars reject ISIS’s ideology. Indeed, he explains the movement’s rise primarily in non-religious terms:

“The reason ISIS emerged clearly has to do with the chaos in Iraq, the disenfranchisement of the Sunnis of Iraq (which is the result of the American invasion-occupation), and the chaos in Syria (which is a regime that has also disenfranchised Sunni Muslims). We have two big Arab countries, side-by-side, both in chaos, both with large Sunni populations that are disenfranchised. With a lot of young men who have no prospects for employment and feel marginalized. And who then identify their sense of humiliation and marginalization with the larger Muslim world, which they claim is also being marginalized and being humiliated.”

In a recent speech on the “driving force behind jihadist terrorism,” the noted French scholar Olivier Roy confirmed that young men become jihadists because it offers them a chance to belong to a “small brotherhood of superheroes” in a celebrated global cause, not out of faith. “Almost none followed a real process of religious education,” he said. “Their religious knowledge is low (some brought with them ‘Islam for the Dummies’). When they said that they were going to learn Islam in Pakistan or Yemen, it is just to appease their parents: in fact they go for jihad.”

He added, “This explains why . . . ‘reforming Islam’ does not make sense: they just don’t care about ‘what Islam really means.’”

It is, of course, true that Islamic State, al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups operating mainly in the Middle East embrace Islam to justify their radical doctrines. But politicians and pundits who insist on branding them first and foremost as Islamic play into the hands of sociopaths by conflating them with peaceful followers of a religion who make up nearly a quarter of the world's population. Their focus demonizes Islam and casts the struggle waged by terrorists as a clash of civilizations, elevating the status of fringe extremists and attracting more thrill-seekers to their ranks.

So yes, words matter. In this sometimes shrill semantic debate, score one for President Obama, who wisely refuses to turn the world's battle against terrorists into a Twenty-first Century Crusade.

Jonathan Marshall is an independent researcher living in San Anselmo, California. Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "[Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions](#)"; "[Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran](#)"; "[Saudi Cash Wins France's Favor](#)"; "[The Saudis' Hurt Feelings](#)"; "[Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Bluster](#)"; "[The US Hand in the Syrian Mess](#)"; and "[Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War.](#)"]

Hitting Saudi Arabia Where It Hurts

Exclusive: Though faced with a global terrorism crisis, Official Washington can't get beyond its neocon-led "tough-guy-gal" rhetoric. But another option financial sanctions on Saudi Arabia might help finally shut down the covert supply of money and arms to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As the Islamic State and Al Qaeda enter a grim competition to see who can kill more civilians around the world, the fate of Western Civilization as we've known it arguably hangs in the balance. It will not take much more terror for the European Union to begin cracking up and for the United States to transform itself into a full-scale surveillance state.

Yet, in the face of this crisis, many of the same people who set us on this road to destruction continue to dominate and indeed frame the public debate. For instance, Official Washington's neocons still insist on their recipe for "regime change" in countries that [they targeted 20 years ago](#). They also [demand a new Cold War with Russia](#) in defense of [a corrupt right-wing regime in Ukraine](#), further destabilizing Europe and disrupting U.S.-Russian cooperation in Syria.

Given the stakes, you might think that someone in a position of power or one of the many candidates for U.S. president would offer some pragmatic and realistic ideas for addressing this extraordinary threat. But most Republicans from Marco Rubio to Carly Fiorina to Ted Cruz only offer more of “more of the same,” i.e. neocon belligerence on steroids. Arguably, Donald Trump and Rand Paul are exceptions to this particular hysteria, but neither has offered a coherent and comprehensive counter-analysis.

On the Democratic side, frontrunner Hillary Clinton wins praise from the neocon editors of The Washington Post for breaking with President Barack Obama’s hesitancy to fully invade Syria. Former Secretary of State Clinton wants an invasion to occupy parts of Syria as a “safe area” and to destroy Syrian (and presumably Russian) planes if they violate her “no-fly zone.”

Much like the disastrous U.S. invasions of Iraq and Libya, Clinton and her neocon allies are pitching the invasion of Syria as a humanitarian venture to remove a “brutal dictator” in this case, President Bashar al-Assad as well as to “destroy” the Islamic State, which Assad’s army and its Iranian-Russian allies have also been fighting. Assad’s military, Iranian troops and Russian planes have hit other jihadist groups, too, such as Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham, which receives U.S. weapons as it fights side-by-side with Nusra in the Army of Conquest.

Clinton’s strategy likely would protect jihadists except for the Islamic State – and thus keep hope alive for “regime change” – explaining why the Post’s neocon editors, who were enthusiastic boosters of the Iraq War in 2003, hailed her hawkish approach toward Syria as “laudable.”

To Clinton’s left, Sen. Bernie Sanders has punted on the issue of what to do in either Syria or the Middle East, failing to offer any thoughtful ideas about what can be done to stabilize the region. He opted instead for a clever but vacuous talking point, arguing that the Saudis and other rich oil sheiks of the Persian Gulf should use their wealth and militaries to bring order to the region, to “get their hands dirty.”

The problem is that the Saudis, the Qataris and the Kuwaitis along with the Turks are a big part of the problem. They have used their considerable wealth to finance and arm Al Qaeda and its various allies and spinoffs, including the Islamic State. Their hands are already very dirty.

Saudi ‘Hard Power’

What we have seen in the Middle East since the 1980s is Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states creating “hard power” for their regional ambitions by assembling

paramilitary forces that are willing and even eager to lash out at “enemies,” whether against Shiite rivals or Western powers.

While the wealthy Saudis, Qataris and other pampered princes don't want to become soldiers themselves, they're more than happy to exploit disaffected young Sunnis, turn them into jihadists and unleash them. Al Qaeda (dating back to the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s) and the Islamic State (emerging in resistance to the U.S.-installed Shiite regime in Iraq after 2003) are Saudi Arabia's foot soldiers.

This reality is similar to how the Reagan administration supported right-wing paramilitary forces in Central America during the 1980s, including “death squads” in El Salvador and Guatemala and the drug-tainted “Contras” in Nicaragua. These extremists were willing to do the “dirty work” that Reagan's CIA considered necessary to reverse the tide of leftist revolution in the region, but with “deniability” built in so Official Washington couldn't be directly blamed for the slaughters.

Also, in the 1980s, the Reagan administration's hardliners, including CIA Director William J. Casey, saw the value of using Islamic extremism to undermine the Soviet Union, with its official position of atheism. The CIA and the Saudis worked hand in hand in building the Afghan mujahedeen an Islamic fundamentalist movement to overthrow the Soviet-backed secular government in Kabul.

The “success” of that strategy included severe harm dealt to the struggling Soviet economy and the eventual ouster (and murder) of the Moscow-backed president, Najibullah. But the strategy also gave rise to the Taliban, which took power and installed a medieval regime, and Al Qaeda, which evolved from the Saudi and other foreign fighters (including Saudi Osama bin Laden) who had flocked to the Afghan jihad.

In effect, the Afghan experience created the modern jihadist movement and the Saudis, in particular, understood the value of this paramilitary force to punish governments and political groups that the Saudis and their oil-rich friends considered threats. Officially, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Sunni oil states could claim that they weren't behind the terrorists while letting money and arms slip through.

Though Al Qaeda and the other jihadists had their own agendas and could take independent action the Saudis and other sheiks could direct these paramilitary forces against the so-called “Shiite crescent,” from Iran through Syria to Lebanon (and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, against Iraq's Shiite government as well).

At times, the jihadists also proved useful for the United States and Israel, striking at Hezbollah in Lebanon, fighting for “regime change” in Syria, collaborating in the 2011 ouster (and murder) of Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi, even joining forces with the U.S.-backed Ukrainian government to kill ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine.

Israeli Role

Since these Sunni jihadists were most adept at killing Shiites, they endeared themselves not only to their Saudi, Qatari and Kuwaiti benefactors, but also to Israel, which has identified Shiite-ruled Iran as its greatest strategic threat. Thus, the American neocons, who collaborate closely with Israel’s right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, had mixed attitudes toward the Sunni jihadists, too.

Plus, high-profile terrorism, including the 9/11 attacks, enabled the tough-talking neocons to consolidate their control over U.S. foreign policy, diverting American fury over Al Qaeda’s killing nearly 3,000 people in New York and Washington to implement the neocons’ “regime change” agenda, first in Iraq though it had nothing to do with 9/11, with plans to move on to Syria and Iran.

As the Military-Industrial Complex made out like bandits with billions upon billions of dollars thrown at the “War on Terror,” grateful military contractors kicked back some profits to major think tanks where neocon thinkers were employed to develop more militaristic plans. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “A Family Business of Perpetual War.”]

But the downside of this coziness with the Sunni jihadists has been that Al Qaeda and its spinoff, the Islamic State, perceive the West as their ultimate enemy, drawing from both historic and current injustices inflicted on the Islamic world by Europe and the United States. The terrorist leaders cite this mistreatment to recruit young people from impoverished areas of the Middle East and the urban slums of Europe and get them to strap on suicide-belts.

Thus, Al Qaeda and now the Islamic State not only advance the neocon/Israeli/Saudi agenda by launching terror attacks in Syria against Assad’s government and in Lebanon against Hezbollah, but they strike out on their own against U.S. and European targets, even in Africa where Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for last week’s murderous assault on an upscale Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali.

It also appears that Al Qaeda and the Islamic State have entered into a competition over who can stage the bloodiest attacks against Westerners as a way to bolster recruitment. The Bamako attack was an attempt by Al Qaeda to regain

the spotlight from the Islamic State which boasted of a vicious string of attacks on Paris, Beirut and a Russian tourist flight in the Sinai.

The consequence of these murderous rampages has been to threaten the political and economic cohesion of Europe and to increase pressures for a strengthened surveillance state inside the United States. In other words, some of the most treasured features of Western civilization personal liberty and relative affluence are being endangered.

Yet, rather than explain the real reasons for this crisis and what the possible solutions might be no one in the U.S. mainstream political world or the major media seems able or willing to talk straight to the American people about how we got here.

Sanders's Lost Opportunity

While you might have expected as much from most Republicans (who have surrounded themselves with neocon advisers) and from Hillary Clinton (who has cultivated her own ties to the neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks), you might have hoped that Sanders would have adopted a thoughtful critique of Official Washington's neocon-dominated "group think."

But instead he offers a simplistic and nonsensical prescription of demanding the Saudis do more when that would only inflict more death and destruction on the region and beyond. Arguably, the opposite would make much more sense impose tough financial sanctions against Saudi Arabia as punishment for its continued support for Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Freezing or confiscating Saudi bank accounts around the world might finally impress on the spoiled princes of the Persian Gulf oil states that there is a real price to pay for dabbling in terrorism. Such an action against Saudi Arabia also would send a message to smaller Sunni sheikdoms that they could be next. Other pressures, including possible expulsion from NATO, could be brought to bear on Turkey.

If the West finally got serious about stopping this financial and military support for Al Qaeda, the Islamic State and their jihadist allies in Syria, the violence might finally abate. And, if the United States and Europe put pressure on the "moderate" Syrian opposition whatever there is of it to compromise, a political solution might be possible, too.

Right now, the biggest obstacle to a political agreement appears to be the U.S. insistence that President Assad be barred from elections once Syria achieves some stability. Yet, if President Obama is so certain that the Syrian people hate Assad, it seems crazy to let Assad's presumed defeat at the polls obstruct

such a crucial deal.

The only explanation for this U.S. stubbornness is that the neocons and the liberal hawks have made “regime change” in Syria such a key part of their agenda that they would lose face if Assad’s departure was not mandated. However, with the future of Western civilization in the balance, such obstinate behavior seems not only feckless but reckless.

From understanding how this mess was made, some U.S. politician could fashion an appeal that might have broad popular support across the political spectrum. If Sanders took up this torch for a rational plan for bringing relative peace to the Middle East, he also might shift the dynamics of the Democratic race.

Of course, to challenge Official Washington’s “group think” is always dangerous. If compromise and cooperation suddenly replaced “regime change” as the U.S. goal, the neocons and liberal hawks would flip out. But the stakes are extremely high for the planet’s future. Maybe saving Western civilization is worth the risk of facing down a neocon/liberal-hawk temper tantrum.

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](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
