

# Election Results Could be Good for Pakistan, Bad for US

The election of Imran Khan as Pakistan's new president further underscores America's futile military strategy in the region, argues Graham Fuller.

By **Graham Fuller**



A bold new political face has come to power in the recent Pakistani elections, possibly offering the US a new opportunity in that country. Sadly the opportunity will likely be squandered—again. There's something about Pakistani and US interests that seem doomed to collision course—mainly because Pakistan's national interests are rarely what the US thinks they should be.

Pakistanis themselves can be pleased the country has just experienced for only the second time in its history a democratic electoral transition from one political party to another. Over long decades democratically-elected governments have been routinely dethroned by the all-powerful Pakistani military-dominated intelligence service ISI.

A key problem is that American interests in Pakistan have had little to do with Pakistan itself, but have been the function of other American interests—China, fighting the Soviet Union, al-Qaeda, and trying to win an ongoing—and losing—17-year US war in Afghanistan. Once about eliminating al-Qaeda, Washington today hopes the war in Afghanistan will eliminate the often violent fundamentalist Pashtun movement (Taliban) and enable the US to impose its strategic agenda upon Afghanistan. And over decades the US has alternately cajoled, but mostly threatened Pakistan to do US bidding in Afghanistan. (A former Deputy Secretary of the Pentagon, in the months after 9/11, threatened to “bomb Pakistan back to the Stone Age” if it didn't fully get on board and support the new US invasion of Afghanistan.)

In an earlier decade, after the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to prop up a failing Afghan communist regime, the US had recruited the Pakistani government to take the lead in organizing a new anti-Soviet “jihad” through supporting new mujahedin groups in Afghanistan. It was a fateful moment: this anti-Soviet jihad represented the first time that Islamist warriors, recruited from around the world in a joint US-Saudi-Pakistani strategy, became a powerful battle-hardened jihadi force that would later go on to fight new wars in the Middle East—and against US interests. As one of the mujahideen told me at the time, they had “defeated a superpower”—the USSR—and driven Soviet troops out of Afghanistan. What would be the implications for the future?

Then, after 9/11, the US invaded Afghanistan in order to overthrow the ruling Taliban—who had taken over the country and restored order after a devastating nine-year Afghan civil war following the Soviet withdrawal. The Taliban actually represent a home-grown movement—they had no interest in international terrorism. But they made one disastrous mistake: they allowed Osama Bin Laden to stay on in Afghanistan after he had played a small role in supporting the Taliban in achieving power in 1996. The US invasion ensued.

### **Pashtun Taliban**

The thing to be remembered is that the Taliban are primarily a Pashtun movement; Pashtuns constitute the single largest ethnic group in multi-ethnic Afghanistan and have traditionally dominated national Afghan politics over several hundred years. While unquestionably following a kind of Wahhabi-style Islamic rule, they also represent a powerful Pashtun ethnic impulse. Many Afghan Pashtuns dislike the Taliban but they generally also wish to see Pashtuns maintain power in Afghanistan. This same ethnic issue matters a lot when it comes to Pakistan.

The stated US agenda in Afghanistan now is to prevent the Taliban, who are conducting a fairly successful insurgency against the US-backed government in Kabul, from coming to power. Yet there is no way the Taliban can be decisively defeated, while the US may yet opt to move into its third decade of war there in trying to keep them out of power. While Taliban theology and policies are fairly Wahhabi in character, is it worth the longest war in American history to struggle on to keep them out? (There are a few encouraging signs that the US may be actually trying to reach some negotiated back-door deal with the Taliban for future power-sharing, but the Taliban may just decide to wait the US out.) What Washington doesn't talk about is its long, strategic ambition to maintain military bases in Afghanistan, right in the heart of Central Asia in close proximity to Russia and China—very much out of the US Cold War playbook. But is it worth this costly and losing game?

Here's where Pakistan comes in. In the Pak-Afghan border region there are twice as many Pashtuns living in Pakistan as there are in Afghanistan. They represent a powerful force in Pakistani politics—and that's where Imran Khan, Pakistan's new president from the heart of Pashtun territory, also comes in.

Bottom line: the US has consistently attempted to enlist Pakistan into rescuing America's losing war in Afghanistan; a key US demand has been for the Pakistanis to sever ties between Pakistani and Afghan Taliban movements and crush all radical Islamist groups in the border region. There is no doubt Pakistan has indeed helped the Afghan Taliban (Pashtuns) to fight on in Afghanistan. Pakistan has a deep interest, domestic and foreign, in keeping close ties with all Pashtuns, Taliban or not. (The Pakistani Taliban movement is more violent than

the Afghan one but cannot be easily crushed –perhaps only tamed—even by the Pakistani government.)

And the power base of Pakistan's new president lies precisely in this Pashtun region of the country. Khan will not likely agree to any policy pressures from the US to crush Taliban cross-border ties; he favors a strong Pashtun/Taliban presence in any Afghan government. Khan, a former cricket star, has also been outspokenly critical of the US role in Pakistan and he will guard Pakistani sovereignty more jealously than his predecessors.

### **And Then There's India**

And then there are geopolitics with India. Already hugely outweighed and outgunned by a huge and powerful Indian state on Pakistan's eastern border, Pakistan's geopolitics dictate that it can never allow its geographically narrow state to be simultaneously threatened by a pro-Indian government on Pakistan's western border in Afghanistan. Yet India has hugely invested—financially, politically and in an intelligence presence in Afghanistan with US blessing, which is perceived in Islamabad as a deadly geopolitical threat. Pakistan will do all it can to ensure that Afghanistan does not fall under Indian political domination. That also means deep involvement in Afghan Pashtun politics (that include the Taliban).

The US has consistently run roughshod over Pakistani sovereignty throughout its war in Afghanistan, thereby generating strong anti-US feelings in Pakistan. (My first novel: "Breaking Faith: An American's Crisis of Conscience in Pakistan," deals heavily with these issues, including the CIA and American military presence in Pakistan, as well as the complicated range of Pakistani Islamist movements at the human level of a Pakistani family.)

And finally there is the ever-growing China factor. Pakistan has long been China's closest ally and considers Beijing to be an "all-weather friend"—in pointed distinction to perceived US opportunism in Pakistan. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are now integral elements in China's sweeping new economic and infrastructural Eurasian development plan "One Bridge, One Road." (Iran too, incidentally, is linked into the same Chinese vision.) There is no way Pakistan will ever choose close ties with Washington over ties with China, for a dozen good reasons, including shared mutual distrust of India.

In short, Imran Khan may well bring some fresh air into Pakistani politics, including a declared willingness to clamp down on the country's rampant corruption. The powerful Pakistan military also supports him. It is hard to imagine how the US will not continue to lose ever more traction in the Pakistan-Afghan morass short of undertaking a major US shift away from its military-

driven foreign policy. That US policy and style seems to tally ever less with the interests of most states of the region.

*This article originally appeared on Graham Fuller's [blog](#).*

***Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is BEAR, a novel of the Great Bear Rainforest and Eco-Terrorism. (Amazon, Kindle) [grahamefuller.com](http://grahamefuller.com)***

---

## Intentions Matter More Than Weapons

Changing the intentions the U.S. and North Korea have towards each other in the long run is more important than possession of nuclear weapons themselves, argues Graham Fuller.

**By Graham E. Fuller**



The fascinating, elaborately choreographed diplomatic *pas de deux* in Singapore between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un mesmerized the world over two days. Most pundits look at the (perhaps more than) half empty glass of water on the table. Indeed, most Democrats and all Trump-haters refuse to grant the summit any worth lest it lend strength to Trump's political power. The high priests of denuclearization (an admittedly arcane discipline) are parsing the agreement; so far they have found very little of nuclear substance.

Yet instant gratification in the quest for immediate and complete denuclearization of North Korea is highly unrealistic given the dark layers of past conflict. Worse, evaluating the summit by the degree of denuclearization achieved is truly naive in geopolitical terms. This step taken at the summit, like it or not, is just that, a first but very significant step along a long and important road. This first step indeed may never be succeeded by a second—but the chances are good that it will. How it will all come out in the end is anybody's guess.

Yet the calming of the rabid language and ferocity of threats between the U.S. and North Korea over decades must be considered a major accomplishment in itself. It was not necessarily destined to happen at all. You don't reach settlements against a backdrop of escalating rage. The emergence of a new civility and the de-demonization of the other party is an vital prerequisite for any further progress. Without it you have nothing.

And there is a yet more important strategic point about nuclear weapons that many critics miss. In the end, it is the *nature and intentions* of those who possess nuclear weapons that matter, often much more than the mere possession of them. The British and the French could both blow the U.S. out of the water tomorrow with their nuclear arsenals. Yet we don't lose sleep over it. Why not? Because we have some reasonable confidence that the intentions of the British and the French governments are extremely unlikely to bring about a nuclear attack on the US.

China today can devastate the U.S. with its nuclear weapons. Indeed, there were real grounds for concern when founding leader of communist China Mao Zedong was at the helm because he was perceived as dangerously ideological and erratic in his political impulses, at home and abroad. So even though the Communist Party still runs China today, its newer generations of leadership and the nature of its functional ideology and its nuclear *intentions* today are perceived as much more rational. In addition, China was gradually admitted into the international community—which has a way of gradually dampening excessive radicalism. In this respect, the step towards greater international legitimization of North Korea, for all the country's ugly domestic facets, will likely serve to slowly impel it towards some greater acknowledgment of “international norms.”

Even the collapse of the Soviet Union brought considerable change to the thinking of both Washington and Moscow. The intentions of communist Russia—its ideology, its closed world view—changed overnight as the bastions of the communist empire fell. A mood of far greater international relaxation emerged as a result.

Sadly, the US then decided to pursue a concerted effort to keep Russia weak and diminished. Remember Obama publicly describing Russia as nothing more than “a regional power?” This demeaning language accompanied U.S. moves to push NATO forces right up to Russia's very doorstep— in violation of George Bush senior's understanding with Gorbachev that the US would explicitly not seek to exploit Russia's new weakness.

### **The Importance of Civility**

In dealing with Pyongyang, the ability of North Korean nukes to reach the U.S. or its allies in East Asia is naturally a cause for concern and is closely monitored. When each side excoriates the other with extreme rhetoric, fears of inadvertent nuclear incidents or strategic miscalculations rise dramatically. When that rhetoric is calmed and exchanges become more civil, immediate fears recede a bit. The longer civility and dialog can prevail, the greater the relaxation of tensions. The nukes may not go away for quite a while. But the grounds for their use greatly recede.

All weapons are dangerous and nuclear weapons especially so. It would be eminently desirable to see a general global denuclearization, making war a little bit less devastating. Meanwhile there is a nuclear club whose members have fought their way into membership without invitation, and jealously guard the gates lest their own power be correspondingly diluted by still newer members seeking to join the club. One can argue that the more nukes there are, the greater the likelihood of their use. Yet that perspective has yet to be borne out by the facts of international life: so far the US is the only country in the world to have used nuclear weapons in conflict—against Japan at the end of World War II. Maybe nukes' devastating power brings greater sobriety to regional conflicts, as it so far seems to have done, say, between Pakistan and India, both nuclear powers.

So there is something to be celebrated in the Singapore summit between Trump and Kim. It has de-demonized both sides in the eyes of the other, and the exchanges have taken on greater mutual respect at the personal level. The strategic aspirations of both sides point to a diminution of confrontation rather than perpetuation of an unstable status quo. At least for now the apparent intentions of Pyongyang have receded to something already less threatening.

This event contains striking implications for Iran. The U.S. and Iran desperately need to engage in a wide exchange of views designed to de-escalate those intentions and lower the threat threshold. The first step is to sit down in civility with Tehran with a wide-open agenda. John Kerry brought those qualities—reciprocated by Iran— to the Iran nuclear agreement. The agenda, however, was very narrow. Regrettably neo-conservative, liberal interventionists and pro-Zionist forces in the US really don't want any agreement with Iran to take place short of total regime change in Tehran.

There is no question that Iran needs to de-escalate its rhetoric and move more guardedly in its regional actions—but so too must its neighbors who are hyping the "Shi'ite threat." Iran is massively outgunned and beggared by the US and all its regional allies. And the US is still driven by an anti-Iran obsession that is bolstered daily by Israel.

When the barrel of the pistol is removed from Tehran's head, it too may start finding a source of emulation in Kim Jong Un's new diplomatic gambit.

*This article originally appeared on Graham Fuller's blog.*

**Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his first novel is "Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American's crisis of conscience in Pakistan." His newest book is BEAR, a novel of the Great Bear Rainforest and Eco-Terrorism. (Amazon, Kindle)**

## What is the U.S. Fighting for in Syria?

The U.S. and Russia share strategic goals in Syria and the wider region, but Washington ideologues persist in unwelcome intervention that has led to disaster, argues Graham E. Fuller

**By Graham E. Fuller**



The Trump administration delivered several dozen military strikes against Syria purportedly aimed at chemical production and storage facilities. It was an act the international community feared might lead to overt war in Syria between the US, Iran and Russia, but it came off a bit better: the strike seems to have been carefully calibrated, involved care to avoid casualties and seemed largely symbolic in nature. The strikes did not meaningfully change facts on the ground.

What sense can we make out of all these strategic events in Syria? We encounter a baffling array of players: Syrian troops, Syrian insurgents, jihadis of varying ideologies, Iranians, Russians, Americans, Israelis, Turks, Saudis, Qataris, Emiratis, Shi'ite militias, Iraqis, Kurds, Hizballah—all locked in a deadly dance. But as complex as it may be, this seven-year bloody conflict still continues to pose the very same long-term fundamental questions to US policy in Syria and the region. These questions demand an answer.

### **Does the U.S. Want the War to End?**

In principle yes, but only under its own rigid terms which call for an end to President Bashar al-Assad's rule and the elimination of Russian and Iranian power in Syria. None of this is within the realm of reality.

The power struggle between the Assad regime and the array of diverse insurgents has oscillated over seven years. Initially, when the government faced the first outbreak of domestic insurgency in 2011, it appeared that he might not last long in the evolving Arab Spring. But he proved resilient.

He was willing to strike back ruthlessly at the early uprisings and nip them in the bud. He was aided by the fact that the Syrian population was itself highly

ambivalent about any collapse of his government. As regional regimes went it was unquestionably autocratic but not more brutal than usual in the region –at least not until early insurgent forces challenged the regime’s existence and Damascus began to show real teeth.

In fact many Syrians did not want civil war—understandably enough since the human and material costs would be devastating. Second, large numbers of Syrians who had no fondness for Assad had even greater reason to fear what might come after him: very likely some combination of radical jihadi forces. Indeed, victorious jihadis might likely then have gone on to wage an internecine power struggle among themselves, just like the civil war among the Afghan mujahideen after the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1988; it all but destroyed the country

Indeed from the comfort of our own American isolation such issues more closely resemble an electronic war game, or armchair strategizing. But for people who live in war zones, stakes are overwhelmingly real. At some point almost any peace is better than almost any war. Washington might be willing to fight to the last Syrian, but most Syrians are not willing to do so when most outcomes offer only death and destruction.

But the time for speculation about the regime’s fate is now past: Assad is close to restoring his control over the whole country. Ambivalence on the part of so many Syrians, the fecklessness and divisions of so many of the anti-Assad forces, and above all serious Russian and Iranian assistance to Damascus constituted the final tipping point.

But is Washington willing to accept, however reluctantly, Assad’s restoration of control over his own country? (It’s worth noting that whatever the issues at stake in Syria, Russia and Iran were legally invited by the Syrian government to provide military assistance. The US on the other hand was not invited to intervene in Syria, and on legal grounds is fighting in Syria “illegally.”)

Indeed, Washington’s goal all along has been to notch up one more “regime change by force” in the region that has included Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and perhaps Somalia, among other conflicts.

So is it justifiable, even ethical, to fight till the last Syrian? Or should the US reluctantly accept the desperately needed end to the war, and to allow restoration of public security, food, medicine, and a chance for the devastated country to rebuild itself? From a humanitarian perspective the choice would seem clear.

**So What is the U.S. Fighting For?**



Washington has sought to isolate or overthrow the Assads, father and son, for over forty years; it perceived them as representing staunch (secular) anti-colonial Arab nationalism, resistance to U.S. goals, and a refusal to bow to Israel's ever expanding borders and oppression of the Palestinians.

The world has learned that any state that does not accept the U.S.-designed order in the Middle East by definition becomes a "rogue regime"—hence losing any sovereign rights on the international scene. And Washington's policies have all along been heavily driven by Israel's own regional agenda. It's a bitter pill then: acceptance of Assad's remaining in power until the international order can eventually craft some new political process that offers more representative government there.

But U.S. policy, for all its talk of human rights and welfare, has no interest in an end to the war on anything except its own terms. It ceases to be about Syria at all any more. Syria is fated to remain the arena for grander U.S. strategic interests: the checking of Russian and Iranian influence in the Middle East. The Syrians themselves will pay the price—but they do not matter.

Yet the reality is that Washington can no longer single-handedly determine the strategic shape of the Middle East. All efforts to do so over the past fifteen years have ended in disaster for virtually everyone including the U.S.

Another reality is the presence of Russia as a diplomatic and strategic power in the Middle East. It has a history of several hundred years presence there, long before the U.S. or even Britain; even under the Russian Tsars Moscow was the official protector of Eastern Orthodox Christians in the Levant.

### **Russia and U.S. Share Mideast Goals**

After a hiatus of some two decades after the fall of the USSR and the collapse of the Russian economic order, Russia is now back again as a player. That fact will not change. Nor should a Russian presence in the Middle East represent an intolerable affront to U.S. interests. Indeed, Russia and the U.S. share many common goals, not least of which is a need for regional stability, the peaceful flow of energy, and suppression of violent jihadi movements such as ISIS or al-Qaeda.

But if neo-con and "liberal interventionist" ideologues in Washington have their way—and their power is growing—America's supreme interest in the Middle East centers on checking Russia—amounting to a self-fulfilling prophesy of confrontation. For these ideologues there can be no accommodation: it becomes a zero-sum game, not a win-win but a win-lose game.

This U.S. posture is also designed to perpetuate Washington's military presence

in Syria for a long time to come—with strikingly little to show for it. Russia will not be going anywhere. And Iran, now gradually normalizing its relations with most of the world, will also be resuming its place as a major Middle Eastern player. Yet Iran remains a point of obsession with Washington—equally seen as a “rogue” state— and here again reflecting Israel’s own determination to strategically dominate the Middle East itself.

Does Iran constitute a “sectarian threat” as the Saudis have it? Iran reacts as a “Shi’ite force” to the degree that it is attacked as an “illegitimate,” that is, Shi’ite force by rival ultra-conservative Wahhabi Saudi forces. Iran views itself primarily not as a Shiite state but as a Muslim state—one intent on further blocking western interventionism in the Middle East. And it does not believe that monarchies represent the wave of the Middle Eastern future.

So the question remains: does Washington truly seek an end to the war—a war that it cannot win? Or will it fight on in a losing, devastating situation in a country to which it was not invited? Will it continue to seek “regime change” in yet another state with all the subsequent chaos, instability, and openings for the region’s most radical jihadi forces?

And are we ourselves to be manipulated as instruments for the achievement of local Israeli and Saudi strategic goals in the region?

*This piece originally appeared on <http://grahamefuller.com/blog/>*

**Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; including “Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American’s crisis of conscience in Pakistan,” and most recently “BEAR.” (Amazon, Kindle) [grahamefuller.com](http://grahamefuller.com)**

---

## Growing Risk of U.S.-Iran Hostilities Based on False Pretexts, Intel Vets Warn

As President Donald Trump prepares to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week, a group of U.S. intelligence veterans offers corrections to a number of false accusations that have been levelled against Iran.

February 26, 2018

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** The President

**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

**SUBJECT:** War With Iran

## **INTRODUCTION**

In our December 21st Memorandum to you, we cautioned that the claim that Iran is currently the world's top sponsor of terrorism is unsupported by hard evidence. Meanwhile, other false accusations against Iran have intensified. Thus, we feel obliged to alert you to the virtually inevitable consequences of war with Iran, just as we warned President George W. Bush six weeks before the U.S. attack on Iraq 15 years ago.

In our first Memorandum in this genre we told then-President Bush that we saw "no compelling reason" to attack Iraq, and warned "the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic." The consequences will be far worse, should the U.S. become drawn into war with Iran. We fear that you are not getting the straight story on this from your intelligence and national security officials.

After choosing "War With Iran" for the subject-line of this Memo, we were reminded that we had used it before, namely, for a Memorandum to President Obama on August 3, 2010 in similar circumstances. You may wish to ask your staff to give you that one to read and ponder. It included a startling quote from then-Chairman of President Bush Jr.'s Intelligence Advisory Board (and former national security adviser to Bush Sr.) Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who told the *Financial Times* on October 14, 2004 that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had George W. Bush "mesmerized;" that "Sharon just has him wrapped around his little finger." We wanted to remind you of that history, as you prepare to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week.

\* \* \*

## **Rhetoric vs. Reality**

We believe that the recent reporting regarding possible conflict with nuclear-armed North Korea has somewhat obscured consideration of the significantly higher probability that Israel or even Saudi Arabia will take steps that will lead to a war with Iran that will inevitably draw the United States in. Israel is particularly inclined to move aggressively, with potentially serious consequences for the U.S., in the wake of the recent incident involving an alleged Iranian drone and the shooting down of an Israeli aircraft.

There is also considerable anti-Iran rhetoric in U.S. media, which might well facilitate a transition from a cold war-type situation to a hot war involving U.S. forces. We have for some time been observing with some concern the growing

hostility towards Iran coming out of Washington and from the governments of Israel and Saudi Arabia. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster is warning that the “time to act is now” to thwart Iran’s aggressive regional ambitions while U.S. United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley sees a “wake-up” call in the recent shooting incident involving Syria and Israel. Particular concern has been expressed by the White House that Iran is exploiting Shi’a minorities in neighboring Sunni dominated states to create unrest and is also expanding its role in neighboring Iraq and Syria.

While we share concerns over the Iranian government’s intentions vis-à-vis its neighbors, we do not believe that the developments in the region, many of which came about through American missteps, have a major impact on vital U.S. national interests. Nor is Iran, which often sees itself as acting defensively against surrounding Sunni states, anything like an existential threat to the United States that would mandate the sustained military action that would inevitably result if Iran is attacked.

Iran’s alleged desire to stitch together a sphere of influence consisting of an arc of allied nations and proxy forces running from its western borders to the Mediterranean Sea has been frequently cited as justification for a more assertive policy against Tehran, but we believe this concern to be greatly exaggerated. Iran, with a population of more than 80 million, is, to be sure, a major regional power but militarily, economically and politically it is highly vulnerable.

### **Limited Military Capability**

Tehran’s Revolutionary Guard is well armed and trained, but much of its “boots on the ground” army consists of militiamen of variable quality. Its Air Force is a “shadow” of what existed under the Shah and is significantly outgunned by its rivals in the Persian Gulf, not to mention Israel. Its navy is only “green water” capable in that it consists largely of smaller vessels responsible for coastal defense supplemented by the swarming of Revolutionary Guard small speedboats.

When Napoleon had conquered much of continental Europe and was contemplating invading Britain it was widely believed that England was helpless before him. British Admiral Earl St Vincent was unperturbed: “I do not say the French can’t come, I only say they can’t come by sea.” We likewise believe that Iran’s apparent threat is in reality decisively limited by its inability to project power across the water or through the air against neighboring states that have marked superiority in both respects.

The concern over a possibly developing “Shi’ite land bridge,” also referred to

as an “arc” or “crescent,” is likewise overstated. It ignores the reality that Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon all have strong national identities and religiously mixed populations. They are influenced – some of them strongly – by Iran but they are not puppet states. And there is also an ethnic division that the neighboring states’ populations are very conscious of– they are Arabs and Iran is Persian, which is also true of the Shi’a populations in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

Majority Shi’a Iraq, for example, is now very friendly to Iran but it has to deal with considerable Kurdish and Sunni minorities in its governance and in the direction of its foreign policy. It will not do Iran’s bidding on a number of key issues, including Baghdad’s relationship with Washington, and would be unwilling to become a proxy in Tehran’s conflicts with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Iraqi Vice President Osama al-Nujaifi, the highest-ranking Sunni in the Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi government, has, for example, recently called for the demobilization of the Shi’ite Popular Mobilization Forces or militias that have been fighting ISIS because they “have their own political aspirations, their own [political] agendas. ... They are very dangerous to the future of Iraq.”

### **Nuclear Weapons Thwarted**

A major concern that has undergirded much of the perception of an Iranian threat is the possibility that Tehran will develop a nuclear weapon somewhere down the road. We believe that the current Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, even if imperfect, provides the best response to that Iranian proliferation problem. The U.N. inspections regime is strict and, if the agreement stands, there is every reason to believe that Iran will be unable to take the necessary precursor steps leading to a nuclear weapons program. Iran will be further limited in its options after the agreement expires in nine years. Experts believe that, at that point, Iran its not likely to choose to accumulate the necessary highly enriched uranium stocks to proceed.

The recent incident involving the shoot-down of a drone alleged to be Iranian, followed by the downing of an Israeli fighter by a Syrian air defense missile, resulted in a sharp response from Tel Aviv, though reportedly mitigated by a warning from Russian President Vladimir Putin that anything more provocative might inadvertently involve Russia in the conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is said to have moderated his response but his government is clearly contemplating a more robust intervention to counter what he describes as a developing Iranian presence in Syria.

In addition, Netanyahu may be indicted on corruption charges, and it is conceivable that he might welcome a “small war” to deflect attention from mounting political problems at home.

## Getting Snookered Into War

We believe that the mounting Iran hysteria evident in the U.S. media and reflected in Beltway groupthink has largely been generated by Saudi Arabia and Israel, who nurture their own aspirations for regional political and military supremacy. There are no actual American vital interests at stake and it is past time to pause and take a step backwards to consider what those interests actually are in a region that has seen nothing but disaster since 2003. Countering an assumed Iranian threat that is minimal and triggering a war would exacerbate instability, likely leading to a breakdown in the current political alignment of the entire Middle East. It would be costly for the United States.

Iran is not militarily formidable, but its ability to fight on the defensive against U.S. naval and air forces is considerable and can cause high casualties. There appears to be a perception in the Defense Department that Iran could be defeated in a matter of days, but we would warn that such predictions tend to be based on overly optimistic projections, witness the outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, Tehran would be able again to unleash terrorist resources throughout the region, endangering U.S. military and diplomats based there as well as American travelers and businesses. The terrorist threat might easily extend beyond the Middle East into Europe and also the United States, while the dollar costs of a major new conflict and its aftermath could break the bank, literally.

Another major consideration before ratcheting up hostilities should be that a war with Iran might not be containable. As the warning from President Vladimir Putin to Netanyahu made clear, other major powers have interests in what goes on in the Persian Gulf, and there is a real danger that a regional war could have global consequences.

In sum, we see a growing risk that the U.S. will become drawn into hostilities on pretexts fabricated by Israel and Saudi Arabia for their actual common objective ("regime change" in Iran). A confluence of factors and misconceptions about what is at stake and how such a conflict is likely to develop, coming from both inside and outside the Administration, has, unfortunately, made such an outcome increasingly likely.

We have seen this picture before, just 15 years ago in Iraq, which should serve as a warning. The prevailing perception of threat that the Mullahs of Iran allegedly pose directly against the security of the U.S. is largely contrived. Even if all the allegations were true, they would not justify an Iraq-style "preventive war" violating national as well as international law. An ill-considered U.S. intervention in Iran is surely not worth the horrific humanitarian, military, economic, and political cost to be paid if Washington

allows itself to become part of an armed attack.

**FOR THE STEERING GROUP, VETERAN INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS FOR SANITY**

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

Richard Black, Virginia State Senator; former Marine officer in Vietnam, later Army Judge Advocate General officer, retiring as Colonel after 31 years

Kathleen Christison, CIA, Senior Analyst on Middle East (ret.)

Graham E. Fuller, Vice-Chair, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC Iraq; Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry C. Johnson, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF; ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC) (ret.)

John Brady Kiesling, Foreign Service Officer; resigned Feb. 27, 2003 as Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy, Athens, in protest against the U.S. attack on Iraq (ret.)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Edward Loomis, Jr., former NSA Technical Director for the Office of Signals Processing (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Estimates Officer (ret.)

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

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

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

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

Greg Thielmann, former Director of the Strategic, Proliferation, and Military Affairs Office, State Department Bureau of Intelligence & Research (INR), and former senior staffer on Senate Intelligence Committee (ret.)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.)

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), former Chief of Staff for Secretary of State; Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

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

---

## Who is Containing Whom?

“Containment” has long been a cornerstone of U.S. policy in dealing with countries that are seen as threats to U.S. interests, but today some countries are applying the same principle to the United States, observes Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

Over the years “containment” has been a key U.S. political instrument by which it has sought to isolate, starve out, or excommunicate from the “international community” regimes unwilling to accept the U.S.-dominated world order.

Yet the great irony today is that this very U.S. policy of containment seems now to characterize the way many major powers in the world have come to think about dealing with the United States. These countries don’t actually use the word “containment,” but the intent is still the same; they perceive the need to “contain” or constrain Washington, thereby limiting the damage that the U.S. can inflict upon their national interests without engaging in outright confrontation with the U.S.

Containment has been a reasonably sensible way of dealing with hostile states that cannot be readily defeated militarily except at potentially huge military cost to the U.S. itself—especially if it risks nuclear war. Both the Soviet Union and China for many decades were “contained” due to their perceived radical ideologies and hostility to the U.S.-dominated world order.



These two states also supported many radical leftist revolutionary movements around the world that ideologically opposed the U.S. (Often these movements had good reason to be hostile and revolutionary, frequently due to terrible domestic conditions in their own countries—and under regimes often supported by Washington. Cuba, Chile, and Nicaragua come to mind, although the U.S. eventually made efforts to overthrow them after their revolutions.)

In more recent decades the U.S. applied containment policies to Saddam's Iraq and to Iran. Containment of North Korea has been a long-standing policy, arguably wiser than most other options. Indeed, might not continued containment of Saddam in Iraq have been the wiser policy compared to the Pandora's Box unleashed by the U.S. invasion and occupation of that country and its still unfolding wide regional fallout?

But containment also raises some searching questions. One is that once on the U.S. "containment list" it is often hard for a state to ever get off it, short of being targeted by U.S.-sponsored "regime change." One becomes a "rogue regime." And the biggest problem with being "contained" is that in some ways it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy of enduring hostility.

Since the end of the Cold War the world has come to look rather different. Among states that have attained reasonably comfortable living standards there is less appetite for confrontation or war. As a result the self-assumed US "burden of global leadership" in war and peace on the international scene is seen as a less desirable commodity than before.

Hence fewer nations and peoples are willing to risk the potential war that US "leadership" might today bring about—in Korea, in Europe vis-a-vis NATO's confrontations along the Russian borders, in patrolling the straits of Taiwan, or war in Venezuela, or "maintaining the free flow of oil" in the Persian Gulf (when such free flow has almost never been challenged.)

Increasing numbers of international polls over the years suggest that the populations of many countries in the world have now come to view the U.S. itself as one of the biggest threats to global peace. The U.S.—almost continually at war somewhere since the fall of the USSR—increasingly gravitates towards military approaches to handling global crises. Even before Trump's presidency U.S. diplomacy has grown ever weaker in the face of rising U.S. regional military commands that dwarf the authority and skills of our ambassadors abroad. The commander of US AFRICOM, for example, presides over a massive military budget and effectively represents the dominant voice of U.S. policy in Africa. These institutionalized military resources dwarf the financial and political power of any single U.S. ambassador in any African country. No wonder such maldistribution of U.S. power abroad leads to an enhanced consideration of

military solutions over political or diplomatic ones.

In today's rapidly shifting world scene the US is arguably more upset than any other major country by the nature and speed of strategic global shifts in power. Blame games are rife in Washington. The U.S. had grown used to being in the driver's seat of the world order that it engineered since the end of World War II. It seems almost inconceivable to most Americans—and to some foreigners who grew up in that same environment—to imagine a world in which the U.S. is no longer the architect or the supreme arbiter of that global order.

This shift thus generates serious anxieties in Washington over its (relatively) declining power. These anxieties lead to a constant need to publicly reinforce at home and abroad the belief that U.S. power has indeed not slipped at all. The U.S. increasingly invokes the argument that military action is required somewhere, if for nothing else than “to maintain U.S. credibility.”

In short, if you don't act, however unwise such action might be, you might be broadcasting weakness and no longer representing a credible “commitment.” Hence we move into the seventeenth year of war in Afghanistan. This is all part of the great danger in the dangerous dance of rising and declining powers. The psychology intrinsic to both rising and declining power can be dangerous. As a result the U.S. is treated by outsiders with caution, even as perhaps a snake capable of striking out unexpectedly.

The upshot is widespread global nervousness about U.S. intentions and actions—even before Trump—and their risky or unwanted consequences. And that is why much of the world now thinks in terms of damage limitation when it anticipates more aggressive U.S. policies.

If we were then to settle on any one single description of the psychology that characterizes Chinese and Russian strategy these days it is indeed “containment” of the U.S. The EU too, for example, increasingly believes it needs to take its relations with Russia into its own hands, rather than potentially be led into a military confrontation with Russia via dubious NATO exercises on Moscow's borders.

Supporting U.S. “credibility” is not high on the European foreign policy wish list (except understandably for those few small neighbors sadly doomed to eternal life next to the Russian Bear.) South Korean leadership too finds playing the U.S. card sometimes diplomatically useful, but posing a huge danger if Washington is actually willing to unleash war—in which Seoul has everything to lose. Indeed, the one state in the world that tends to completely support US military action almost anywhere in the world these days is Israel.

Finally, the concept of “containment” raises a deeper point about the psychology of international relations. How wise is it to maintain lists of enemy states and leaders who require containment? Few other states do so, partially because declaring another state to be an enemy has obvious negative consequences that easily lead to self-fulfilling prophecy. This phenomenon is fundamental to the very psychology of human relationships. If we signal to someone that we consider them a threat or an enemy, the chances are very good that the other party will reciprocate and that mutual relations will predictably deteriorate. That is why shrewd “good neighbor policies” represent more than just naive feel-goodism. Yet the U.S. still spends a great deal of time drawing up and announcing lists of who is an enemy, or a rival, and who must be punished or contained.

For better or for worse, the international order of the late 20th century is gone. In a period of major strategic change the United States seems determined to cling to the status quo that so long favored it. Yet it might be wise for Washington to stop yearning for it—and for all the trouble that now offers. Perhaps rather than the endless search for enemies (“dragons to slay abroad”) that is the daily stuff of most Washington strategists and think tanks, a determination to adjust to and find common cause with new world powers would yield somewhat more desirable results all around.

**Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is “Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American’s crisis of conscience in Pakistan.” (Amazon, Kindle) This article originally appeared at his blog, [grahamefuller.com](http://grahamefuller.com). Reprinted with permission.**

---

## Trump Follows Well-Worn Mideast Trail

Despite the chaotic appearance of President Trump’s Mideast policies, they actually represent a troubling consistency in U.S. subservience to Israel and Saudi Arabia, as ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller explains.

By Graham E. Fuller

Washington media, think tanks, various commentators and now Sen. John McCain continue hammering on an old theme – that the U.S. has “no policy towards the Middle East.” This is fake analysis. In fact the U.S. very much does have a long-standing policy towards the Middle East. It’s just the wrong one.

What, then, is U.S. policy in the Middle East – under Trump, Obama, Bush and Clinton (and even earlier)? When all the rhetoric has been stripped away, we can

identity quite clear, precise, and fairly consistent major strategic policy positions.

–First, Washington accedes to almost anything that Israel wants. This is an untouchable posture, a third rail, beyond any debate or discussion lest we anger the powerful Zionist lobby of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and end up being labeled “anti-Semitic.”

The New York Times does not even allow us to know that In Israel itself these issues are indeed seriously debated – but never in the U.S. Small tactical issues aside, there is zero American discussion about whether the far-right government of Israel should be the lode-star of U.S. policy-making in the Middle East.

–Second, we oppose all Iranian actions and seek to weaken that state. Not surprisingly this reflects a key Israeli position on the Middle East as well. Admittedly the U.S. has its own grudges against Iran going back a long way, while the Iranians bear grudges against the U.S. going back well before that.

–Oppose almost anything that Russia does in the Middle East and routinely seek to weaken the Russian position in the region.

–Destroy armed radical jihadi groups anywhere – unilaterally or via proxy.

–Support Saudi Arabia on nearly all issues. Never mind that the Saudi state is responsible for the export of the most radical, dangerous and ugly interpretations of Islam anywhere and is the prime promoter of extremist Islamist ideas across the Muslim world.

–Maintain a U.S. military presence (and as many U.S. military bases as possible) across the Middle East and Eurasia.

–Maximize U.S. arms sales across the region for profit and influence. (There is of course a lot of competition here from the U.K., Russia, France, China, and Israel.)

–Support any regime in the Middle East – regardless of how authoritarian or reactionary it may be – as long as it supports these U.S. goals and policies in the region.

–“Protect the free flow of oil.” Yet that free flow of Middle East oil has almost never been threatened and its chief consumers – China, Japan, Korea – should bear whatever burden that might be. But the U.S. wants to bear that “burden” to justify permanent U.S. military forces in the Gulf.

But what about “American values” that are often invoked as goals – such as

support for democracy and human rights? Yes, these values are worthy, but they receive support in practice only as long as they do not conflict with the paramount hierarchy of the main goals stated above. And they usually do conflict with those goals.

Far from a “lack of Middle East policy,” all this sounds to me like a very clear set of U.S. policy positions. Washington has consistently followed them for long decades. They largely represent a solid “Washington consensus” that varies only slightly as the think-tankers of one party or the other rotate in and out of government.

### **Trump in Line**

Donald Trump has typically upset the apple cart somewhat on all of this – mostly in matters of style in his spontaneous policy lurchings of the moment. But Official Washington is pretty good in keeping the range of foreign policy choices fairly narrowly focused within these parameters. Indeed, some might say that this policy mix is just about right. Yet these U.S. aspirations have fairly consistently failed.

The most prominent U.S. policy failures are familiar and proceed from the goals.

–If unquestioning support to Israel is the top priority, Washington has not failed here. But Israel remains about as truculent as ever in maintaining its own priority of extending territorial control and creeping takeover of all Palestinian lands and people. Washington has not been able to protect Israel from itself; Israel has never been more of an international pariah than now in the eyes of most of the world, including large numbers of Jews.

Actually it would serve American interests to officially abandon the absurd theater of the “peace process” which has always served as Israeli cover for ever greater annexation of Palestinian land. Instead the U.S. should let the international community assume the major voice, yes, including the United Nations, in holding Israel to international norms.

By now the “two-state solution” is unreachable; the issue is how to manage the very difficult and painful transition to an inevitable “one-state solution” for Palestinians and Israelis – in a democratic and binational secular state.

–Russia is today stronger and more important in the Middle East than since Soviet days. Moscow has been outplaying the U.S. in nearly every respect of the policy game since 9/11. U.S. influence meanwhile has declined in both relative and absolute terms. Yet Washington’s determination to maintain its own absolute primacy across the world firmly excludes any significant Russian role in global issues.

However, if Washington can bring itself to abandon the zero-sum game mindset and work towards a win-win approach with Moscow, it will find much to cooperate with Russia about. As it stands, persistent confrontational policies guarantee unending rivalry, a never-ending self-fulfilling prophesy.

—Contrary to stated U.S. policy goals, Iran has emerged the massive winner from nearly all U.S. policies in the region over two decades. Yet Turkey and Iran represent the only two serious, developed, advanced, stable states in the region, with broadly developed economies, serious “soft power,” and a flexible policies that have gained the respect of most Middle Eastern peoples, even if not of their governments.

Yes, Erdogan’s Turkey is at the moment a loose cannon; but Turkish political institutions will certainly survive him even as the clock is ticking on his power grip. Iran’s elections are more real than virtually any other Muslim state in the area. It may be convenient for some to lay virtually all U.S. troubles in the region at Iran’s door, but such analysis upon serious examination is quite deliberately skewed.

—U.S. policies and actions against radical and violent Islamist movements in the Muslim world represent a serious task. Sadly, it is the ongoing U.S. military actions themselves that help explain much of the continued existence and growth of radical movements, starting with major U.S. military support to Islamist mujahedeen in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Later the U.S. destruction of state and societal structures in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, to some extent even in Syria and Yemen, have further stirred up anger and radical jihadism.

### **Another Way?**

What can be done? Withdrawal of U.S. boots on the ground and the chain of military bases across the region and into Asia would represent a start, but only a start, in allowing the region to calm down. The region must work out its own problems and not be the object of incessant self-serving U.S. helicopter interventions.

Yes, ISIS is a target deserving of destruction, and U.S. policies have been a bit wiser in at least allowing many international forces to play a role in that campaign. But radicalism invariably emerges from radical conditions. There are few military solutions to radical social, political, economic and identity problems. And autocratic rulers will always greet a U.S. presence that helps maintain them in power.

Saudi policies that view Iran as the source of all Middle Eastern problems are

erroneous and self-serving, and ignore the real roots of the region's problems: unceasing war (primarily launched by the U.S.), vast human and economic dislocations, self-serving monarchs and presidents for life, and the absence of any voice by the people over the way they are ruled.

The militarization of U.S. foreign policy everywhere is ill-designed to solve regional problems that call for diplomacy and close cooperation with *all* regional powers – not their exclusion. Yet these U.S. policies increasingly resemble the late days of the Roman Empire as it found itself up to its neck in barbarians.

Most of the world would welcome shifts in U.S. policies away from the heavy focus on the military option. One reason the U.S. has been losing respect, clout and influence in the region is due to this failing military focus.

The rest of the world is now simply trying to work around U.S. fixations. Donald Trump is exacerbating the problem but he is in many ways the logical culmination of decades of failed American policies. Even a kinder gentler Trump cannot solve systemic U.S. foreign policy failures that are now deeply institutionalized.

So repeating the mantra that the U.S. lacks a Middle East policy serves only to conceal the problem. The U.S. very much does have a clear policy. It's just been dead wrong.

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

[This article originally appeared at <http://grahamefuller.com/washington-does-have-a-clear-me-policy-its-just-the-wrong-one/> ]

---

## America's 'Global Policeman' Role

America's influential neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks want U.S. interventions pretty much everywhere, but other powers are chafing against this U.S. "global policeman," as ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller explains.

By Graham E. Fuller

Global disorder is on the rise. What can the U.S. do about it? There are two fundamentally different approaches one can take – it all depends on your

philosophy of how the world works.

The first school thinks primarily in terms of law, order and authority: it accepts the need for a global policeman. The second school is more willing to let regional nations take the initiative to eventually work things out among themselves. Both schools possess advantages and disadvantages. Something called Balance of Power politics lies halfway between the two.

Global policemen nominate themselves from among the ranks of the most powerful – and ambitious – states of the world. Over the last half century the U.S. has assumed this role – but a significant shift is already under way. In Washington this school argues that growing American disinclination to assert order is a key reason for a more chaotic world. From the end of World War II to the fall of the USSR in 1991 Washington had shared, reluctantly, that role with the Soviet Union – rivals but both unwilling to let the world spin out of control into chaos and nuclear war. Then, after the fall of the USSR, the U.S. triumphantly assumed the role of “the world’s sole superpower.” In an earlier century the British Empire played the same role, although contested by Germany, France and others.

In Washington right now, neoconservatives and liberal interventionists (export democracy, by gunpoint if necessary) lead the charge against what they see as U.S. abandonment of its moral duty, leaving the world in the lurch. Their list of American failed duties is long: if only we had moved earlier to remove the Kim dynasty in North Korea, or Assad in Syria, or blocked the referendum that reincorporated Crimea into Russia, or brought about regime change in Iran, or backed Saudi Arabia against Qatar to keep the Gulf from splitting, or employed sufficient force to put an end to civil conflict in Afghanistan, or backed Ukraine to the hilt against Russia, pressed more vigorously in Venezuela, established firmer lines in the China Sea, warned Philippine leader Duterte off from his murderous anti-drug policies, and intervened to prevent looming Ethiopian-Somali-Eritrean war in the strategic Horn of Africa, etc. The list of U.S. duties, neglected in the eyes of this school of “benign” intervention, is endless.

### **Troubling Questions**

Yet this perspective raises troubling questions:

–Is the U.S. willing to perpetually expend its blood and treasure around the world in military and covert interventions to remove undemocratic leaders – or simply leaders we don’t like? Simply to maintain U.S. pre-eminence? What is the overall gain in a cost-benefit analysis?

–How acceptable are the opportunity costs of such interventions – as opposed to



better use of U.S. taxpayer money domestically?

–How much can the U.S. really prevent the rise of other powers with their increasing sense of their own interests and entitlements? Small powers are willing to sacrifice quite a lot when it involves interests on their doorstep – compared to limited American enthusiasm for intervention across an ocean for dubious gain.

–How do we respond to rising weapons technology abroad which increasingly circumscribes U.S. freedom of action? Nuclear weapons employ technology from the mid-Twentieth Century. And by now many powers are developing a meaningful cyber capability against rivals and opponents. To a cyber-warrior the world is a candy store of targets. Ditto for drones – simple technology spreading fast, capable of inflicting potentially great damage.

The counter-perspective to the global policeman accepts the reality of new powers arising all around us. There is little we can do to prevent them. We increasingly face major alternative power centers out there. China, a non-player for the last hundred years or more (unlike in much earlier centuries), is formidably back on the scene and asserting political, economic and cultural power. China even assumes a new degree of global leadership functions, some of which contain positive features.

Europe, after over a century of murderous and suicidal wars, is finally back on its feet representing perhaps the most progressive political grouping in the world. With a lot of soft and hard power Europe feels increasingly independent.

Russia has a global vision stemming from centuries of exercising power widely across Eurasia, and in the Cold War, as a “global super-power.” Its diplomatic and military power far overshadows its poor economy, but it is willing to pay the cost to be part of the global game. As with China, Russia is not entirely a negative factor on the world scene either, except to those U.S. hawks reluctant to compromise with any alternative power.

Additionally the world is witnessing more and more medium powers asserting their interests in their own regions than the U.S. or the Soviet Union would ever have “permitted” during the Cold War. Today that list includes states like India, Brazil, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Iran, Canada, and South Korea with strong perceptions of their own interests.

### **Many Flashpoints**

Any world policeman today faces a growing number of flashpoints beyond its capabilities. Many are ugly and may cost lives of millions of people. Humanitarian crises will continue to abound (like Palestine, Yemen, South Sudan,

the Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Myanmar, Afghanistan, global refugees.)

Global warming and environmental degradation create powerful refugee mills that produce millions of hungry and angry have-nots. U.S. intervention is not designed to cope with these issues.

And then routine intervention by a world policeman also creates another major negative: the continued political infantilization of so many countries in the world. Routine U.S. intervention invariably leads to warring parties who prefer in the end to deal with Washington rather than with their own rivals for power. We see this repeatedly, most recently in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere where factions prefer to manipulate Washington to get what they want rather than face local realities. The Gulf States today are similarly playing Washington against Iran rather than communicating.

So a difficult and deeper issue arises: should most countries and peoples be “allowed” to stew in their own juices? To settle their own issues? Should they not take local responsibility? Doesn’t political maturity arise from being compelled to deal with rivals within a country, or a region? Remember, everybody in the world is eager to enlist the U.S. to fight on its side. Didn’t it take two hideous World Wars (preceded by many uglier centuries before then) before war-like Europeans finally figured out that enough was enough, and created alternative mechanisms for dealing with each other? Yet now it is an article of faith in European politics that war in Europe must be *unthinkable*.

Do problems have to “ripen” (to use that ugly political science term) before warring factions decide it is simply too damaging, dangerous, costly – even immoral – to press the conflict forward?

In a thoughtful and skillfully-argued recent essay, long-time journalist and conservative geopolitical observer and thinker Robert Kaplan shows himself to be in the first camp: the indispensable need for imposed law and order.

He argues that only continuing American commitment to its deepest international ideals is what makes the U.S. what it is; that if we fail to uphold our ideals we are left with no organizing national principle – and thus no national purpose. (Never mind that these “ideals” are upheld on a highly selective, transient, cherry-picked basis.)

### **Dubious Neocon Logic?**

But do we really believe that the U.S. will atrophy as a society in the absence of “maintaining global values?” It would be sad to think that U.S. greatness depends on constant intervention and war in the name of the global order.

How long can the U.S. go on “generously,” supplying international order? Perhaps we are indeed doomed to watch an increasingly Darwinian world out there, operating without Big Brother. But the handwriting is on the wall: few in the world still support American policing of the world – or perhaps policing by any single state.

If policing is required (and there may be an occasional role for it), it will ever more likely involve a consortium of major international players – at a bare minimum the European Union, China, and Russia. The United Nations Security Council, when it can agree, also plays an important role. Indeed, these three powers are determined to deny the U.S. any further monopoly of international power. And that was true before Trump.

In the end, how do we think about history? A process of gradual advancement? Or anarchy kept at bay only by great powers? Does history have any “meaning,” any trajectory? Or, as an earlier British statesman debunked the whole notion: “history is just one damn thing after another.”

If we believe that permanent conflict is simply a fundamental element of the human condition, then the argument for a policeman gains weight. But from now on international policing is going to be shared – like it or not. And however “inefficient” it may be.

After all, there aren’t many “benign” hegemonies around any more to do the job – if they ever existed.

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

---

## Trump and the American Decline

The fury over President Trump’s behavior and the hysteria over Russia are concealing the more significant long-term erosion of U.S. global influence from endless wars in the Mideast, observes ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

President Trump’s ignorant, oafish and crude foreign policy style rivets our attention, arouses our indignation. But the drama of the diplomatic mayhem he wreaks while traveling abroad also distracts from recognizing more serious

underlying problems of U.S. policy – deep negative trends that predate Trump.

Focusing on Trump's latest crude pronouncements encourages the soothing belief that these current dilemmas are all his doing. In other words, if we didn't have Trump, the U.S. would be back in the comfortable saddle as world's acknowledged, respected, indispensable leader.

The sad fact is, we can vent our anger as we like, but the old days just aren't coming back. It would indeed be a huge relief to be able to attribute our current foreign policy mess to the incompetence of one individual.

President Obama posed the reverse problem: his intelligent, gracious, sophisticated and knowledgeable style lulled us into believing that all should be well on the foreign policy front with the right guy in charge. But in reality the gratifying nature of Obama's style too, concealed on numerous fronts the critical issues he failed to address or incorrectly addressed.

Trump's outrages are too numerous to deal with in one piece; here I'd like to focus specifically on the recent brouhaha over NATO and questions about Trump's alleged destruction of America's "reliability" as a partner in Europe. Let me suggest a few key, perhaps contrarian, propositions of my own, drawn from my perspective as a former "sovietologist," and student of Russian culture and affairs.

I write this too, with overwhelming concern for the unprecedented binge of American hysteria – there is no other word for it – over Putin and Russia's place in the world.

The words of Soviet expert on American foreign policy, Georgi Arbatov, to an American diplomat upon the collapse of the USSR, come back to haunt: "We are going to do a terrible thing to you, we are going to deprive you of your enemy." Indeed the U.S. has been thrashing around ever since.

So, Trump has bluntly called upon the E.U. to shoulder a greater share of the burden in NATO's upkeep. He is not wrong. Indeed, the E.U. very much should take far more responsibility on issues of global security – but not so much financially, but by determining, on its own for a change, what it perceives to be its own security problems and how to manage them.

### **Europe's View**

In today's post-Soviet world the reality is that most of European political culture no longer instinctively shares the American perspective on global affairs. The U.S. is increasingly driven by a security- and military-dominated approach to handling international crises. This trend towards the militarization

of American foreign policy has been growing by leaps and bounds, particularly since 9/11. America excels at “threat perception,” it’s what keeps U.S. think tanks and arms industries in business.

Let’s take the proposition one step farther. Despite the many shrill voices in Washington, Russia simply cannot be taken as “the greatest threat to American security and welfare.” Non-stop American wars and their consequences are the greatest threat.

Washington’s choice of primarily military means to handle contemporary radical trends in Muslim societies has not only failed to solve them, but has demonstrably exacerbated them. We are fighting on more fronts against radicalized Muslims than ever before.

Yet these multiple simultaneous American wars bleed the budget, usurp funding for social infrastructure, maintain a culture of fear, and stimulate the growth of the security state. And yes, it’s gotten worse under Trump.

Just look at the costs. The U.S. suffers from the most massive gap between rich and poor of any country in the developed world. This gap not only produces economic hardship, but corrodes social unity, stimulates anger, bitterness, divisiveness and feeds the paranoid attitudes that are directly responsible for electing Trump in the first place.

There is no sign that the insatiable American embrace of non-stop war is slackening – on the contrary. New crises emerge everywhere; there is virtually no area of the world left that does not at some point require “urgent American leadership” to preserve American “vital interests.”

But this perspective of what constitutes the “vital interests” of the West is no longer widely shared in Europe. And it is simply extraordinary that there is *zero* discussion anywhere in U.S. election campaigns or in the MSM to challenge the military budget.

Nor for most of Europe is Russia anywhere remotely the greatest challenge to their security and welfare. Massive refugee flows, immigration and their resulting domestic tensions, costs of refugee absorption, and even Muslim extremism are the true challenges.

Can we really believe that American military intervention in the Muslim world over the past few decades – resulting in the killing of at least *two million* Muslims – has not created profound ground for the ongoing backlash?

## **E.U. Priorities**

Beyond security issues, the E.U. also urgently faces the need to reform its economic bureaucracy to more fairly and equitably address the economic and social problems of Europe. Here the E.U. places the highest priority on preserving domestic tranquility, even while the U.S. does not.

Starving Europe's social and economic budgets to support greater military expenditures is not productive. Europe knows that. Global security is better served by preserving Europe's own economic and social order than by spending money on arming itself up at U.S. behest for some putative Russian military threat.

Let's consider the Russian military threat. The U.S. military budget alone is greater than the combined budgets of the next eight military budgets combined (including Russia and China.) Russia is a poor country with a modest military budget. Numbers aren't everything of course, and U.S. think tanks work overtime forging creative scenarios about how Russia can still actually defeat the U.S. in a European conflict – justifying ever greater U.S. military budgets.

But what do we think Russia is actually going to do? Invade Europe? In reality Russia does not threaten the E.U. in any serious respect, as most balanced European observers will admit. It's interesting here to look at how many times Russia has actually invaded the West. Looks like twice in two centuries – and both times in direct response to *European invasions* of the Russian heartland.

The first occurred under the Napoleonic Wars in the early 1800s. Napoleon, as part of his campaigns to conquer most of Europe, foolishly invaded Russia in 1812. As the French were unable to get the strategically retreating Russian army to seriously engage militarily, even at the gates of Moscow, the Russians, aided by "General Winter" as Tolstoy puts it, chased Napoleon all the way back into Central Europe.

At that point the Russian army joined the grand European coalition against Napoleon in Europe. Indeed, Napoleon's disaster in Russia was a turning point for the European war against Napoleon. The Russian army soon thereafter went back home.

The second Russian invasion of the West was in the late days of World War II. Here, as we know, Hitler fatally decided to invade Russia, where he spread destruction, starvation and death. The Soviet Union, at the staggering costs of upwards of 25 million Russians dead in the long war, eventually drove Hitler back into Germany.

### **Defeating the Nazis**

Russia was more responsible than any other country for the devastation of

Hitler's Wehrmacht. And Western allies gave maximum support to the Red Army's offensive against Hitler. Trouble was, after driving the Germans back to Germany, Soviet forces didn't go back home. Stalin occupied all of Eastern Europe (and Karelia) subjecting it to harsh Russian communist control and ideology for over 40 years.

These events represent the two extraordinary circumstances of Russian invasion of the West. These conditions are not readily replicated.

For sure, Russia has played its part over the past two centuries in numerous small military engagements around its periphery as part of the endless European Great Power struggles for spheres of influence. But the same has been true of every single major Western power fighting battles in its periphery over the years, including the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Austria, Turkey and others. It is never comfortable for a small state to live next to a great power anywhere.

Europe, by dint of proximity and experience, knows and understands Russia well. Germany above all is the one major power that will always bear the primary responsibility for handling the Russian account in Europe; Russia and Germany after all are the two major powers of Central and Eastern Europe. Here Germany remains knowledgeable and sober-minded.

Since the fall of the ideological empire of the Soviet Union large segments of German public opinion are uncomfortable with American policies designed to push NATO up to the very gates of Russia. Such acts are viewed as highly provocative intrusion into an area of traditional Russian sphere of influence.

Indeed, Germany's last Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier recently spoke out against what he saw as "provocative" NATO exercises near the Russian border in the Baltics.

Yet Washington seems hard-wired to deprive Russia of its sphere of influence anywhere it can, all the while finding it unacceptable that any power should challenge, anywhere, the American sphere of interest. Indeed, the U.S. has been obsessed with Russia for over two centuries, especially on the religious, cultural and ideological level. (See the NYT book review of a deeply insightful book *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'* by David S. Foglesong.)

### **Holding Down Russia**

Thus Washington persists in its own strategic view in which there can be no win-win with Russia. (Trump actually spoke of trying to improve relations, only to unleash the full wrath of the U.S. security establishment upon his head. Trump's own unorthodox approach has not helped.)

Maintenance of overwhelming U.S. power and strategic global reach – “full-spectrum dominance” in Pentagonese – is the American strategic goal. But that is not the European goal or the European perception of a future world order.

Europe is far more readily willing to deal seriously, for example with Cuba, Iran, Palestine, China and Russia, among others. And Europe has been severely damaged by U.S.-sponsored regime change wars in the Middle East – witness Muslim terrorism and refugees.

Europe is also well aware of how the balance of world influence has gradually been shifting against the U.S. (although certainly not in military terms). Europeans do not applaud this change as such, but understand that the rise of other world powers represents future geopolitical reality.

Thus, Europe, from its own perspective, is ironically in a much healthier position if it now does assume primary responsibility for its own security in managing the European political, economic, and social relationship with Russia.

Once the Cold War was over NATO essentially had become Washington’s chief instrument for exerting dominant control over European security policy. That situation increasingly tallies less with European strategic perceptions.

Trump’s crudeness thus finally provided the tipping point for new and long overdue E.U. thinking about the European-Russian relationship under the new world realities. NATO officials of course will never see it that way. But this European reality will not likely be reversed by any U.S. president.

And Europe is acutely aware that Putin’s policies in Europe will directly reflect U.S. policy steps against him. Russia is Russia; neocon fantasies about “solving the problem” by getting rid of Putin is bereft of any geostrategic or historical understanding of reality. In a similar vein Europe does not wish to buy into a confrontational position with China in Asia.

This is not to say that there will not be occasions for some kind of joint Western military presence to possibly bolster unstable situations in different parts of the world down the road. But if Europe is to be enlisted into military operations elsewhere in the world, Europe will have to decide independently where and how its interests dictate.

America’s genius has always lain in its soft power, a commodity that sadly seems in increasingly short supply.

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



first appeared at [www.grahamefuller.com](http://www.grahamefuller.com) at

<http://grahamefuller.com/trump-blundering-into-european-truths/>. ]

---

## Restoring a Responsible ‘Conservatism’

As much as “liberal” has become a dirty word in U.S. politics, the word “conservative” has been ripped from all its honorable traditions and redefined as a dangerous form of radicalism, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

What is it about the U.S. that makes it virtually the only country in the world where a political Left scarcely exists? We have a center Right – the Democratic Party. And we have a far Right – the Republican Party. In fact, just invoking the L-word “Liberal” can inflict quick political death. Yes, we’re safe from the Left here in America.

Having such a stunted political spectrum is bad enough in itself. Still worse is the utter corruption of the word *conservative*. U.S. society has allowed the Republican Party to hijack the word, distort it and redefine it to its own ends, against its real meaning.

Isn’t it time for progressives to stop bashing their heads against the “liberalism” wall? Even the Democratic Party machine itself has barred the gates against progressive Democratic candidates. At this point, we need a rethink.

Wouldn’t it make more sense simply to yield up the term *Liberal* to all its many enemies? Put it in the cold freeze? In a doggedly right-of-center country, it might instead be smarter to seize back the term *conservatism* out of Republican hands, re-own it, and restore it to its true meaning.

Conservatism has a venerable history. The very word says a lot. It seeks to *preserve and conserve* fundamental human institutions, values, and lives in a precarious world.

Such as, for example, conserving the planet we live on, its forests, its water, its creatures, its bounty. It’s our only home. In fact, preserving and conserving the earth really is the ultimate conservative agenda. We have been given a stewardship over this unique and precious blue orb in the cosmos upon which all life depends.

Indeed, it’s the Republicans who are False Conservatives. They place the

interests of the corporate world, profit and the welfare of a minority above all else. Their agenda is clear: generating ever more corporate business, clearing more land for “development,” installing more robots to make production more efficient – this is a conservative agenda?

Actually it sounds like a very aggressive revolutionary approach to reshaping our entire earthly domicile in economic terms. It risks all in the name of production and profit. What true conservative could buy into that?

What of the preservation of life? Wouldn't prioritizing the preservation of human life over death represent a true conservative agenda as well? How much good does war do for people actually living it on the ground? Nobody is saying that one should never fight in true self-defense, but in the end, it's hard to make the case that war has done a lot of good for most human beings involved.

### **Can Peace Be ‘Conservative’?**

Might one even say that almost *any* peace that spares human lives is better than almost *any* war? Might not that be a conservative value? In the U.S. we're used to thinking about fighting wars *over there*. We are spared the need to conceive of war at home. So who among us actually ends up better off as a result of war? Our families? Our streets, our infrastructure, our loyalties, our institutions, our civilities, in the violence and anarchy of war? Yet our nation has been at almost non-stop war since the collapse of the USSR – following “conservative” values.

Republicans tend to believe that war is heroic, glorious, “our finest fighting men,” pride of the nation, anything to keep our nation safe, huge budget expenditures at the cost of almost everything else. Here's what founding father James Madison had to say about it:

“Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes ... known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few.... No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.”

So is it a “conservative value” to arm the nation to the teeth and lead the world in arms sales to others? “Conservatives” want to “protect freedom” by advocating the greatest and most intrusive national security surveillance state in history?

When it comes to “national security,” how much do our own communities genuinely benefit from U.S. military encirclement of China and Russia – an incredibly costly, provocative, never-ending undertaking that gins up increased

international tensions? For that matter, would the U.S. ever tolerate for one second efforts by Russia or China to “encircle the U.S.” militarily? Is it “conservative” to “go abroad to seek monsters to slay,” as John Quincy Adams warned?

And what of the civilian sciences and exploration of space? NASA and non-military scientific research have grown impoverished. Education, surely a prime conservative value, languishes underfunded.

And then there’s the economy. Republicans generally believe that the number one policy goal of the nation is *first and foremost* the health of the economy – read the health of our corporations.

President Calvin Coolidge before the Great Depression famously said, “The chief business of the American people is business.” Republicans have even since managed to persuade faux Democrats to adopt this position. (Remember Bill Clinton – it’s the economy stupid!) But prioritizing the health of the economy gets the priorities wrong: for a genuine conservative the first priority is the health and welfare of our communities and our people.

Now, there is undeniably a relationship between the health of the economy and the general welfare, but they are not one and the same thing at all. Human welfare must be the end goal; a healthy economy, however interpreted, represents the *means* and says nothing of equitable distribution.) This is another issue that should be denied to the False Conservatism of the Republicans.

### **Making Progress Work**

Preserving our communities should be among the highest conservative priorities. But it’s going to be increasingly hard to preserve jobs at home. Robotics above all is seeing to that. And it is more efficient to ship most jobs off to China, Vietnam or Bangladesh.

That’s why many creative Western thinkers are now seriously examining the concept of a guaranteed national income for all. Once a wildly radical idea maybe, but it’s time is coming. Because capitalism *by definition* sends jobs to where they can be most cheaply performed – and it’s not in the USA. Sending jobs abroad is not “conservatism.”

Keeping people alive, healthy, and engaged – not alienated or resentful – is the most important social task we face.

Remember, that while capitalism is a powerful productive engine it has no *direct* interest in community welfare. It’s not that capitalism is immoral; morality is just outside capitalism’s functional purview. Capitalism by definition is about

maximizing profit; that's what capitalism does. Yet today most Republicans enshrine free-market capitalism as the Holy Grail over the welfare of the community. They don't worry about poverty and domestic despair. Or even the need to spread profits if society is to function.

Nor is *efficiency* a prime conservative value. Human welfare is. If we pay a dollar more for a loaf of bread that is largely locally produced, don't we all gain in the community?

France, for example, has always sought to keep some elements of small-scale domestic agriculture alive rather than yielding it all to agro-business. They perceive some absolute social good in preserving this way of life, even if it raises costs. Japan does the same thing on growing (expensive) domestic rice that most Japanese support on social grounds. It's kind of a tax for local benefit and welfare, to conserve the community.

Yes, the benefits of globalization can be real, but they need to be viewed in terms of the welfare of all, and not as an absolute ideological good. What good is a cheaper I-Phone when the rest of our standards of human welfare are dropping?

But where do our budget priorities now lie with most members of both parties in the U.S.? Cutting taxes. Yet what of the huge tax levied upon our families by a U.S. defense budget that is greater than the next *seven* most powerful nations put together? And going up. Have we become safer in a more stable world as a result?

Healthy communities also reflect a pride and exercise of artistic accomplishment. Is it *conservative* to dismiss cultural resources such as the Public Broadcasting System or the National Endowment for the Arts as economically without value? Or local arts?

Do you think the French or the Russians or Canadians don't place high community and national value on preservation of their national arts – which is unprofitable from a business perspective but central to national pride and cohesiveness?

And what of privatization of public lands? How do Republicans get away with calling that "conservative?" Doesn't "public" mean for the *community*? Is there no longer such a thing as the "public good?"

So let's maybe give up the "L-word" as a hopeless cause and instead work to restore the real meaning of what conservatism should be. This has been the colossal hoax the Republican Party (and some faux Democrats) have perpetrated upon this nation – utterly twisting and redefining conservatism to their own

ends. We must take the word back.

It is unconscionable – and incomprehensible – that conservatism today has come to stand for profit, the welfare of the military-security-industrial complex, and the massive corruption of our political order through their “political contributions.” Or that Republicanism should celebrate conservatism by throwing away social safety nets and sowing religious and ethnic fears.

And in the end there just might be some gain for the embattled progressive community in reclaiming the word: it could do better at the polls.

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

---

## Trump's One-State Openness on Israel

The ugly reality in Israel/Palestine is that the Zionist leaders are engaging in a slow-walk ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, a crime that can only be averted now by a secular singular state, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

Just because Donald Trump said it doesn't mean it has to be wrong. During the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington, President Trump publicly stated he is not necessarily wedded to a “two-state solution” in Palestine.

He is the first U.S. president to commit the heresy of questioning that sacred article of faith in U.S.-Middle East policy. Indeed, a serious rethink is long overdue in recognizing the bankruptcy – indeed the cruel cynicism – of the defunct two-state scheme.

Many honorable people have dedicated the bulk of their professional lives to the tedious minutiae and sad diplomatic history of the Palestinian-Israeli morass. Sadly, none of those efforts have brought any resolution whatsoever to a gangrenous issue – in many respects the granddaddy of so many of the Middle East's contemporary ills.

Trouble is, apart from a few dedicated diplomats and scholars who had hopes of one day truly accomplishing something, the two-state solution in practice is by now revealed as essentially a fraud. Yes, a few wiser Israeli leaders in the

past just possibly might have believed in that ideal, but for decades now the “two-state scheme” has simply been cynically exploited by newer Israeli leaders, especially by Bibi Netanyahu – the long-serving and most right-wing Prime Minister in Israel’s history.

Netanyahu has been backed by a formidable and wealthy pro-Zionist cheering section in the U.S. The goal is to conceal their true agenda – the ultimate Israeli annexation of all of Palestine. They themselves have been subtly but systematically torpedoing the “two-state solution” behind the scenes to that end.

None of my observations here on the hoax of the two-state solution are new or original. Many liberal Israeli observers have been stating the self-evident for years now. But those voices never get heard in the U.S. where it constitutes an unmentionable. But there should be no doubt: the concept of a “two-state solution” – a Palestinian and an Israeli state sharing historical Palestine and living side by side in sovereignty and dignity – is dead. It is almost inconceivable that it can now ever be resuscitated: nearly all the operative forces within Israel are systematically working to prevent it from ever coming about.

### **Facts on the Ground**

The harsh reality is that Israel, through a relentless process of “creating facts on the ground,” is now decades deep into the process of taking over illegally, step-by-step, the totality of Palestine. Israel has scant regard for any international law in this respect, and never has had.

Washington, apart from a few periodic pathetic bleats, has ended up functionally supporting this cynical scheme all the way, perhaps unwilling to confront the painful reality of what is really taking place, along with its dangerous political repercussions at home.

Israel is extending day-by-day its control – indeed ownership – of Palestinian lands through expansion of illegal Jewish settlements and the dispossession of the rightful owners of these Palestinian lands. Put simply, there is little left of Palestinian land out of which ever to fashion a “two-state solution.” That leaves us with only one alternative: the “one-state solution.” Indeed, Israel’s actions have already created the preconditions that make the “one-state solution” an unacknowledged but virtual fait accompli.

Honest observers know full well that the mantra of preserving “the peace process” for the two-state solution is now little more than a cover for full Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands. The sooner we all acknowledge this ugly

reality, the better. That will then require Israel, the Palestinians, and the world to get on with dealing with the complex challenge of crafting the bi-national state – the one-state solution.

The calculations of the hard-line Zionists – who are now largely in control of Israeli state mechanisms – are unyielding.

1) Israel should functionally take over all of Palestinian territory and permit full Jewish settlement therein. 2) Israel should still play the “two-state solution” game with visiting foreign diplomats to reduce pressure on Israel, to play for time while it quietly establishes the irreversible facts on the ground that shut out any possible viable Palestinian state.

3) Make life harsh enough for Palestinians that, bit by bit, they will grow bitter and weary, give up and go elsewhere, leaving all the land for Zionist settlers. 4) If Palestinians “stubbornly” resist, predictable periodic military and security crises in Palestine over the longer run will enable Israel to rid Palestine of all Palestinians – a gradual process of ethnic cleansing that returns all the land promised by God to the Jews.

### **A Secular State?**

Some liberal Israelis actually do accept the idea of a “one-state solution” in their own liberal vision of a future Israel – one in which Israelis and Palestinians live as equal citizens in a secular, democratic, binational, multi-cultural state enjoying equal rights, rather than the increasingly religiously dominated state that it is. And the liberal ideal makes sense: the country is already well on the way to becoming bi-lingual – and Hebrew and Arabic are closely-related languages. Both are Semitic peoples with ancient ties to the same land.

The problem is, ardent Zionists don’t want a binational Palestinian-Jewish state. They want a “Jewish state” and demand that the world accept that term. Yet, in today’s world isn’t the term “Jewish state” strikingly discordant? Who speaks of an “English” or “French” state? The world would freak out if tomorrow Berlin started calling itself “the German State.” Or Spain a “Christian state.”

So what do we make of a state that is dedicated solely to Jews and Judaism? Such concepts are remnants of Nineteenth Century movements that promoted the creation of ethnically and/or religiously pure states. Indeed it was precisely that kind of ugly religious and ethnic nationalism that caused Jews to flee from Eastern Europe in the first place to find their own homeland.

The true historical task of Israel, with the support of the world, is now to begin the challenging work of introducing the range of major reforms that will

transform Israel into just such a multi-ethnic and bi-lingual state of equal citizens enjoying equal rights under secular law. It is not a question of “allowing Palestinians” into Israel, they are already there and have been for millennia, in far greater numbers than Jews. Palestinians now seek full legal equality of treatment under secular law in Israel.

So let’s acknowledge the useful truth that Trump has blundered onto. Let’s abandon the naive and cynical rhetoric about the “two-state solution” that will never come about – in any just and acceptable form. Half of Israel never believed in it in the first place. It has served only as a cover for building an apartheid Jewish state – a term used frequently by liberal Israeli commentators.

Netanyahu and the right-wing Zionists clearly want all of Palestine. But they’re not ready yet to admit it. They want all the land, but without any of its people. But despite Zionist hopes, the Palestinians aren’t going to abandon their lands. And so the logical outcome of Israel’s take-over all of Palestine leads by definition to an ultimate single binational state.

The challenge to Israelis and Palestinians is huge. It entails a deep Palestinian rethink of their options and their future destiny in a new order, and the need to fight for those democratic rights in a binational state. It involves Israeli evolution away from “God-given rights” in a state solely for Jews and Judaism that can only be forever oppressive and undemocratic as it now stands. The process will be a slow and difficult one. But it also represents an evolution consonant with emerging contemporary global values.

We expect a democratic multi-cultural state from Germany and France, or from Britain, Canada and the United States – why not from Israel?

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

---