

# The Saudi-US Crisis Will Pass

U.S.-Saudi ties have withstood crises in the past and will withstand this one, says As'ad AbuKhalil.

## ***Washington and Riyadh Have Had Worse***

## ***Crises and Will Survive Khashoggi Murder***

By As'ad AbuKhalil

*Special to Consortium News*



Nobody in Washington, Republican or Democrat, welcomes the crisis in U.S.–Saudi relations prompted by the murder in Istanbul of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi defector, on October 2. Maintaining good relations with the Saudi royal family has been a high bipartisan priority since President Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud made their Faustian bargain in 1945: The U.S. would shield the Saudi kingdom's tyranny from criticism in exchange for a share of oil revenues and Riyadh's political loyalty (and American arms sales).

The relationship has continued this way in the decades since—and will still do so. The U.S. has covered up a long history of Saudi crimes and conspiracies; during the Cold War it used the Saudis to spread extremist jihadi ideologies to counter secular Arabs that tilted towards Moscow. More recently, the Saudi regime was not freelancing when it cultivated the likes of Osama bin Laden: He was part of a Saudi-U.S.-Pakistani effort to recruit, arm, and finance fanatical Muslims from around the world to undermine the progressive secular regime in Afghanistan.

If history is any guide, it is highly likely that Washington and Riyadh are collaborating behind the scenes to cover up the truth of the Khashoggi case and preserve the relationship as it has been for the past 85 years.

Beside the current crisis, there have been other dust-ups in the history of U.S.-Saudi relations. The 1973 oil crisis was the most serious, and it nearly undermined the alliance. Back then the Saudi regime couldn't ignore the rising tide of Arab sentiment against U.S. intervention on the side of Israel in the 1973 war.

King Faisal was adamant in discussions with Henry Kissinger, Nixon's secretary of state and national security adviser, that Israel should withdraw from occupied Arab territories in return for lifting the oil embargo. Contrary to his public statements, Faisal hadn't rejected Israel's occupation of Palestine since the 1948 war. Reflecting in part the king's deep anti-Semitism, Faisal only refused to recognize Jewish religious rights in Jerusalem.

When reminded of the significance of the Wailing Wall (*Buraq* Wall for Muslims), he recommended construction of a new wall where Jews "could weep." But Faisal's firm stance didn't last long: New U.S. arms sales were enough to make him abandon his insistence that Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories was a necessary condition for the restoration of oil sales to the West.

Another crisis arose with the broadcast of the movie "Death of a Princess" in 1980. The British-made film was based on a true story about the beheading of a Saudi princess who fell in love with a commoner. After the movie was shown in Britain, the Saudi government did not want U.S. television stations to broadcast it. The American oil lobby put enormous pressure on PBS stations around the country not to air it. Very few stations did, and the bilateral relationship was secured.

There were other crises in the relationship in the 1980s between the Saudi government and Congress: Under pressure from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Congress opposed arms sales to Saudi Arabia, even as administrations (Democratic and Republican) favored them.

AIPAC dropped its objections to weapons sales after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the establishment of secret contacts between Israel and Gulf countries.

This is the background from which to view the current, relatively minor crisis in comparison. The Khashshogi killing wouldn't have amounted to much if the U.S. mainstream media didn't make a strong case against the Saudi royal family (while suddenly discovering the Saudis' war on Yemen), and if the Turkish government hadn't leaked so many gruesome details about the murder in the Saudi's Istanbul consulate.

### **Trump's Waffles**

The Trump administration—in line with successive U.S. administrations—first tried to minimize the significance of the crime. President Donald Trump typically reminded Americans of the value of arms sales to the Saudi kingdom. But his subsequent statements were inconsistent: First he'd mention \$10 billion in arms sales and then he'd promise to sanction the regime. He even uncharacteristically, for a U.S. president, pledged to let Congress decide on sanctions once an investigation is completed. (Which of several investigations he didn't say.)

It's not a stretch to believe the Trump administration has been working covertly with the Saudis to come up with a coverup story. The Saudi's multiple explanations have been unconvincing from the start. The intent of CIA Director Gina Haspel's trip to Istanbul seemed to be to shield the Saudi regime from the murder and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's involvement. Haspel may have been behind Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's surprising reluctance to reveal "the naked truth," as he'd promised.

The U.S. almost certainly wanted the Turkish government's raw intelligence to better advise the Saudis on the coverup. After Haspel's meeting with Trump upon her return the Saudis admitted it was premeditated murder.

The U.S. likely mediated between Erdogan and MbS, given the animosity

between the Turks and Saudis. Outlines of a deal are emerging. The Saudis now refer to their former occupiers as “sisterly Turkey,” though bin Salmon previously included it in the region’s “axis of evil.” Official Saudi rhetoric has also changed towards Qatar, which the Saudis and their allies have blockaded since last year. MbS and Adel Jubeir, his foreign minister, have made conciliatory statements about Doha in the last few days, something unthinkable a month ago.

Western and Turkish media keeps the Khassoghi story alive. But AIPAC, UAE and Israeli pressure has been exerted on the U.S. not to abandon bin Salman. For Israel, he is the opportunity of a lifetime: a rising Saudi prince in line to be king who is unburdened by political or religious attachment to ditch the Palestinians and continue his hostility toward Iran.

It is to Washington’s advantage that MbS has been weakened. He might now abandon his proclivity for adventurism and become a more traditional Saudi despot deferring to DC on key decisions. But that should make him also be more cautious about confronting Iran and endorsing Trump’s “deal of the century” for the Palestinians. The U.S. is still capable, though, of maneuvering to replace him if he becomes no longer useful, despite Saudi threats to align itself with China and Russia, or quit its embrace of Israel.

The relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia has survived previous crises. It will survive this one.

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## Back in the (Great) Game: The Revenge of Eurasian Land Powers

What is left roaming our wilderness of mirrors depends on the mood swings of the Goddess of the Market. No wonder an effect of Eurasia integration will be a death blow to Bretton Woods and “democratic” neoliberalism, says Pepe Escobar.

**By Pepe Escobar**

*Special to Consortium News*



Get ready for a major geopolitical chessboard rumble: from now on, every butterfly fluttering its wings and setting off a tornado directly connects to the battle between Eurasia integration and Western sanctions as foreign policy.

It is the paradigm shift of China’s New Silk Roads versus America’s Our Way or the Highway. We used to be under the illusion that history had ended. How did it come to this?

Hop in for some essential time travel. For centuries the Ancient Silk Road, run by mobile nomads, established the competitiveness standard for land-based trade connectivity; a web of trade routes linking Eurasia to the – dominant – Chinese market.

In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, based on the tributary system, China had already established a Maritime Silk Road along the Indian Ocean all the way to the east coast of Africa, led by the legendary Admiral Zheng He. Yet it didn’t take much for imperial Beijing to conclude that China was self-sufficient enough – and that emphasis should be placed on land-based operations.

Deprived of a trade connection via a land corridor between Europe and China, Europeans went all-out for their own maritime silk roads. We are all familiar with the spectacular result: half a millennium of Western dominance.

Until quite recently the latest chapters of this Brave New World were conceptualized by the Mahan, Mackinder and Spykman trio.

## The Heartland of the World

Halford Mackinder's 1904 Heartland Theory – a product of the imperial Russia-Britain New Great Game – codified the supreme Anglo, and then Anglo-American, fear of a new emerging land power able to reconnect Eurasia to the detriment of maritime powers.

Nicholas Spykman's 1942 Rimland Theory advocated that mobile maritime powers, such as the UK and the U.S., should aim for strategic offshore balancing. The key was to control the maritime edges of Eurasia—that is, Western Europe, the Middle East and East Asia—against any possible Eurasia unifier. When you don't need to maintain a large Eurasia land-based army, you exercise control by dominating trade routes along the Eurasian periphery.

Even before Mackinder and Spykman, U.S. Navy Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan had come up in the 1890s with his *Influence of Sea Power Upon History* – whereby the “island” U.S. should establish itself as a seaworthy giant, modeled on the British empire, to maintain a balance of power in Europe and Asia.

It was all about containing the maritime edges of Eurasia.

In fact, we lived in a mix of Heartland and Rimland. In 1952, then Secretary of State John Foster Dulles adopted the concept of an “island chain” (then expanded to three chains) alongside Japan, Australia and the Philippines to encircle and contain both China and the USSR in the Pacific. (Note the Trump administration's attempt at revival via the Quad—U.S., Japan, Australia and India).

George Kennan, the architect of containing the USSR, was drunk on Spykman, while, in a parallel track, as late as 1988, President Ronald Reagan's speechwriters were still drunk on Mackinder. Referring to U.S. competitors as having a shot at dominating the Eurasian landmass, Reagan gave away the plot: “We fought two world wars to prevent this from occurring,” he said.

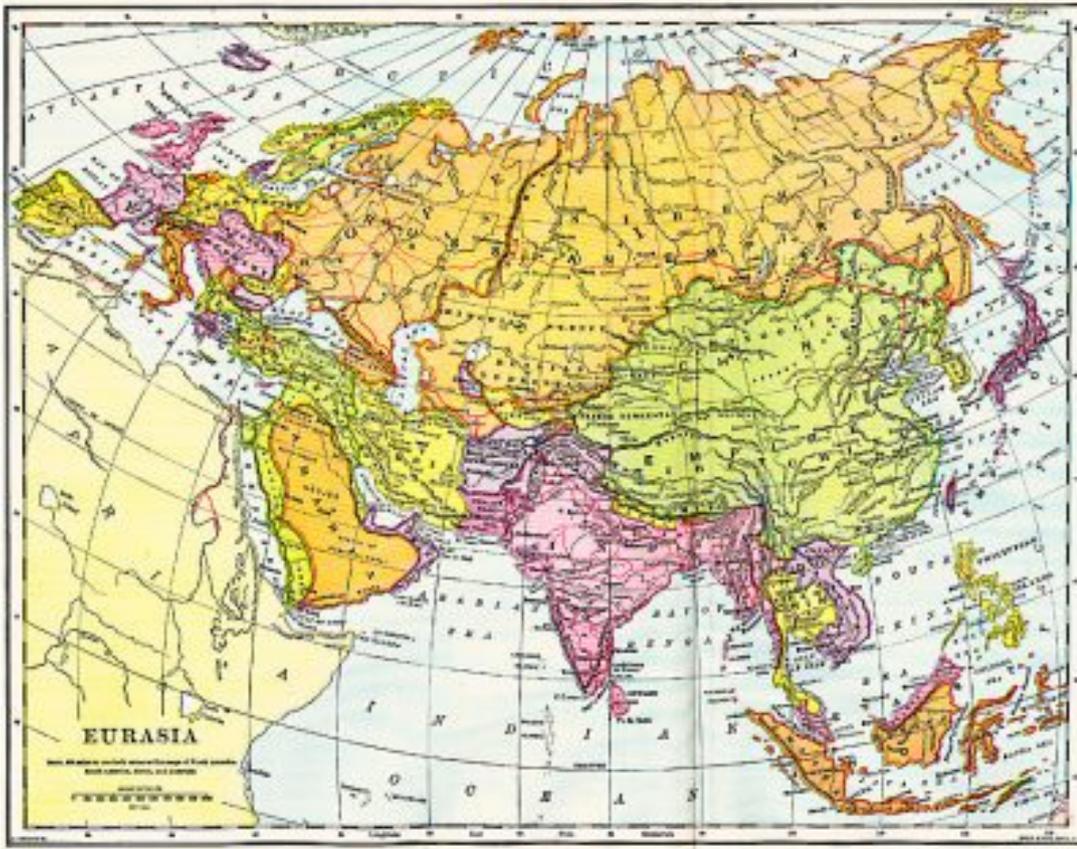
Eurasia integration and connectivity is taking on many forms. The China-driven New Silk Roads, also known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); the Russia-driven Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU); the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB); the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC), and myriad other mechanisms, are now leading us to a whole new game.

How delightful that the very concept of Eurasian “connectivity” actually comes from a 2007 World Bank report about competitiveness in global supply chains.

Also delightful is how the late Zbigniew “Grand Chessboard” Brzezinski was “inspired” by Mackinder after the fall of the USSR – advocating the partition of a then weak Russia into three separate regions; European, Siberian and Far

Eastern.

## All Nodes Covered



At the height of the unipolar moment, history did seem to have “ended.” Both the western and eastern peripheries of Eurasia were under tight Western control – in Germany and Japan, the two critical nodes in Europe and East Asia. There was also

that extra node in the southern periphery of Eurasia, namely the energy-wealthy Middle East.

Washington had encouraged the development of a multilateral European Union that might eventually rival the U.S. in some tech domains, but most of all would enable the U.S. to contain Russia by proxy.

China was only a delocalized, low-cost manufacture base for the expansion of Western capitalism. Japan was not only for all practical purposes still occupied, but also instrumentalized via the Asian Development Bank (ADB), whose message was: We fund your projects only if you are politically correct.

The primary aim, once again, was to prevent any possible convergence of European and East Asian powers as rivals to the US.

The confluence between communism and the Cold War had been essential to prevent Eurasia integration. Washington configured a sort of benign tributary system – borrowing from imperial China – designed to ensure perpetual unipolarity. It was duly maintained by a formidable military, diplomatic, economic, and covert apparatus, with a star role for the Chalmers Johnson-defined Empire of Bases

encircling, containing and dominating Eurasia.

Compare this recent idyllic past with Brzezinski's – and Henry Kissinger's – worst nightmare: what could be defined today as the “revenge of history”.

That features the Russia-China strategic partnership, from energy to trade: interpolating Russia-China geo-economics; the concerted drive to bypass the U.S. dollar; the AIIB and the BRICS's New Development Bank involved in infrastructure financing; the tech upgrade inbuilt in Made in China 2025; the push towards an alternative banking clearance mechanism (a new SWIFT); massive stockpiling of gold reserves; and the expanded politico-economic role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

As Glenn Diesen formulates in his brilliant book, Russia's Geo-economic Strategy for a Greater Eurasia, “the foundations of an Eurasian core can create a gravitational pull to draw the rimland towards the centre.”

If the complex, long-term, multi-vector process of Eurasia integration could be resumed by just one formula, it would be something like this: the heartland progressively integrating; the rimlands mired in myriad battlefields and the power of the hegemon irretrievably dissolving. Mahan, Mackinder and Spykman to the rescue? It's not enough.

### **Divide and Rule, Revisited**

The same applies for the preeminent post-mod Delphic Oracle, also known as Henry Kissinger, simultaneously adorned by hagiography gold and despised as a war criminal.

Before the Trump inauguration, there was much debate in Washington about how Kissinger might engineer – for Trump – a “pivot to Russia” that he had envisioned 45 years ago. This is how I framed the shadow play at the time.

In the end, it's always about variations of Divide and Rule – as in splitting Russia from China and vice-versa. In theory, Kissinger advised Trump to “rebalance” towards Russia to oppose the irresistible Chinese ascension. It won't happen, not only because of the strength of the Russia-China strategic partnership, but because across the Beltway, neocons and humanitarian imperialists ganged up to veto it.

Brzezinski's perpetual Cold War mindset still lords over a fuzzy mix of the Wolfowitz Doctrine and the Clash of Civilizations. The Russophobic Wolfowitz Doctrine – still fully classified – is code for Russia as the perennial top existential threat to the U.S. The Clash, for its part, codifies another variant of Cold War 2.0: East (as in China) vs. West.

Kissinger is trying some rebalancing/hedging himself, noting that the mistake the West (and NATO) is making “is to think that there is a sort of historic evolution that will march across Eurasia – and not to understand that somewhere on that march it will encounter something very different to a Westphalian entity.”

Both Eurasianist Russia and civilization-state China are already on post-Westphalian mode. The redesign goes deep. It includes a key treaty signed in 2001, only a few weeks before 9/11, stressing that both nations renounce any territorial designs on one another’s territory. This happens to concern, crucially, the Primorsky Territory in the Russian Far East along the Amur River, which was ruled by the Ming and Qing empires.

Moreover, Russia and China commit never to do deals with any third party, or allow a third country to use its territory to harm the other’s sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.

So much for turning Russia against China. Instead, what will develop 24/7 are variations of U.S. military and economic containment against Russia, China and Iran – the key nodes of Eurasia integration – in a geo-strategic spectrum. It will include intersections of heartland and rimland across Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan and the South China Sea. That will proceed in parallel to the Fed weaponizing the U.S. dollar at will.

### **Heraclitus Defies Voltaire**

Alastair Crooke took a great shot at deconstructing why Western global elites are terrified of the Russian conceptualization of Eurasia. It’s because “they ‘scent’...a stealth reversion to the old, pre-Socratic values: for the Ancients ... the very notion of ‘man’, in that way, did not exist. There were only men: Greeks, Romans, barbarians, Syrians, and so on. This stands in obvious opposition to universal, cosmopolitan ‘man’.”

So it’s Heraclitus versus Voltaire – even as “humanism” as we inherited it from the Enlightenment, is de facto over. Whatever is left roaming our wilderness of mirrors depends on the irascible mood swings of the Goddess of the Market. No wonder one of the side effects of progressive Eurasia integration will be not only a death blow to Bretton Woods but also to “democratic” neoliberalism.

What we have now is also a remastered version of sea power versus land powers. Relentless Russophobia is paired with supreme fear of a Russia-Germany rapprochement – as Bismarck wanted, and as Putin and Merkel recently hinted at. The supreme nightmare for the U.S. is in fact a truly Eurasian Beijing-Berlin-Moscow partnership.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has not even begun; according to the official Beijing timetable, we're still in the planning phase. Implementation starts next year. The horizon is 2039.

This is China playing a long-distance game of *go* on steroids, incrementally making the best strategic decisions (allowing for margins of error, of course) to render the opponent powerless as he does not even realize he is under attack.

The New Silk Roads were launched by Xi Jinping five years ago, in Astana (the Silk Road Economic Belt) and Jakarta (the Maritime Silk Road). It took Washington almost half a decade to come up with a response. And that amounts to an avalanche of sanctions and tariffs. Not good enough.

Russia for its part was forced to publicly announce a show of mesmerizing weaponry to dissuade the proverbial War Party adventurers probably for good – while heralding Moscow's role as co-driver of a brand new game.

On sprawling, superimposed levels, the Russia-China partnership is on a roll; recent examples include summits in Singapore, Astana and St. Petersburg; the SCO summit in Qingdao; and the BRICS Plus summit.

Were the European peninsula of Asia to fully integrate before mid-century – via high-speed rail, fiber optics, pipelines – into the heart of massive, sprawling Eurasia, it's game over. No wonder Exceptionalist elites are starting to get the feeling of a silk rope drawn ever so softly, squeezing their gentle throats.

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## The U.S. is Meddling in Venezuelan Election

As Venezuelans go to the polls Sunday, the U.S. is working to disrupt the re-election of Nicolas Maduro and rollback leftwing governments in the region, reports Roger D. Harris.

**By Roger D. Harris** *Special to Consortium News*



Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is the frontrunner in the presidential elections that will take place on Sunday. If past pronouncements and practice by the United States are any indication, every effort will be made to oust an avowed socialist from the the

U.S. "backyard."

This week, the leftist president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, tweeted: "Before the elections they (U.S. and allies) will carry out violent actions supported by the media and after the elections they will try a military invasion with Armed Forces from neighboring countries."

U.S. antipathy towards the Venezuelan government started with the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998, followed by a brief and unsuccessful U.S.-backed coup in 2002. Chávez made the magnanimous, but politically imprudent, gesture of pardoning the *golpistas*, who are still trying to achieve by extra-parliamentary means what they have been unable to realize democratically. After Chávez died in 2013, the Venezuelans elected Maduro to carry on what has become known as the Bolivarian Revolution.

### **The Phantom Menace**

In 2015 then U.S. President Barack Obama declared "a national emergency" because of a supposed Venezuelan threat to the U.S. The U.S. has military bases to the west of Venezuela in Colombia and to the east in the Dutch colonial islands. The Fourth Fleet patrols Venezuela's Caribbean coast. Yet somehow in the twisted logic of imperialism, the phantom of Venezuela posed a menacing, "extraordinary threat" to the U.S.

Each year Obama renewed and deepened sanctions against Venezuela under the National Emergencies Act. Taking no chances that his successor might not be sufficiently hostile to Venezuela, Obama prematurely renewed the sanctions his last year in office even though the sanctions would not have expired until two months into Trump's tenure.

The fear was that presumptive U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson might try to normalize U.S. -Venezuelan relations to negotiate an oil deal between Venezuela and his former employer Exxon. As it turns out, the Democrats need not have feared Trump going soft on regime change.

Last August, Donald Trump publicly raised the "military option" to overthrow Venezuela's democratically-elected government. Then David Smilde of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) counseled for regime change, not by military means, but by "deepening the current sanctions" to "save Venezuela." The somewhat liberal, inside-the-beltway NGO argued against a direct military invasion because the Venezuelan military would resist, not because such an act is the gravest violation of international law.

Meanwhile the sanctions have taken a punishing toll on the Venezuelan people, even causing death. Sanctions are designed, in Richard Nixon's blood-curdling

words, to “make the economy scream” so that the people will abandon their democratically elected government for one vetted by the U.S.

In January, Trump’s first State of the Union address called for regime change of leftist governments in Latin America, boasting, “My government has imposed harsh sanctions on the communist and socialist dictatorships of Cuba and Venezuela.” Hearing these stirring words, both Democrats and Republicans burst out in thunderous applause.

“Dictatorships,” as the term is wielded by the U.S. government and mainstream media, should be understood as countries that try to govern in the interests of their own peoples rather than privileging the dictates of the U.S. State Department and the prerogatives of international capital.

### **Attack of the Clones**

In addition to summoning Venezuela’s sycophantic domestic opposition, who support sanctions against their own people, the U.S. has gone on the offensive using the regional Lima Group to destabilize Venezuela. The group was established last August in Lima, the capital of Peru, as a block to oppose Venezuela.

The eighth Summit of the Americas was held in Lima in April under the lofty slogan of “democratic governance against corruption.” Unfortunately for the imperialists, the president of the host country was unable to greet the other U.S. clones. A few days earlier he had been forced to resign because of corruption. Venezuelan President Maduro was barred from attending.

Along with Peru and the U.S. ’ ever faithful junior partner Canada, other members of the Lima Group are:

- Mexico, a prime participant of the U.S. -sponsored War on Drugs, is plagued with drug cartel violence. The frontrunner for the July presidential election is left-of-center Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who is widely believed to have won the last two elections only to have them stolen from him.
- Panama’s government is a direct descendent of the one installed on a U.S. warship when the U.S. invaded Panama in 1989. Recall the triggering incident that unleashed U.S. bombs and 26,000 troops into Panama against a defense force of 3,000: a GI in civilian clothes was fatally shot running a military checkpoint and another GI and his wife were assaulted. What similarly grave affront to the global hegemon might precipitate a comparable military response for Venezuela? Panama imposed sanctions

against Venezuela in a spat in April, accusing Venezuela of money laundering. Panama is a regional money laundering center for the illicit drug trade (some alleged through a Trump-owned hotel).

- Argentina elected Mauricio Macri president in 2015. He immediately sold the country out to the vulture funds and the IMF while imposing severe austerity measures on working people. The economy has tanked, reversing the gains of the previous left-leaning presidencies of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández. Military and diplomatic deference to the U.S. has become the order of the day. Macri has negotiated installation of two U.S. military bases in Argentina, first with Obama and now with Trump.
- Brazil deposed its left-leaning, democratically elected President Dilma Rousseff in a 2016 parliamentary coup. Her successor, the unelected Michel Temer, has imposed austerity measures and cooperated with the U.S. in joint military exercises along the Brazilian border with Venezuela. Temer suffers from single digit popularity ratings and is barred from running for public office due to a corruption conviction. Former left-leaning president “Lula” da Silva is the frontrunner in October’s presidential election but was imprisoned in April by Temer’s government.
- Chile was the victim of the U.S. -backed coup, which overthrew the elected left-leaning government of Salvador Allende in 1973. A reign of terror followed with the extreme rightwing government of Gen. Augusto Pinochet killing thousands. An economic and diplomatic destabilization campaign coordinated by Washington set the stage for the coup. The Chilean regime-change scenario could be the model for Venezuela. The rightwing opposition in Venezuela torched a maternity hospital with mothers and babies inside and even poured gasoline on suspected Chávez supporters, burning them alive.
- Colombia is the U.S. ’ closest ally in the region, the recipient of the most U.S. military aid, and the source of the greatest amount of illicit drugs afflicting the U.S. . The Colombian government has flaunted its recent peace accords with the FARC and continues to be a world leader with 7 million internally displaced persons and political assassinations of trade union leaders, human rights workers, and journalists. In cooperation with the U.S. , Colombia has been provocatively massing troops along its border with Venezuela.

- Costa Rica is a neoliberal state that has been a staunch silent partner of U.S. imperialism ever since it served as a base for the Contra war against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.
- Guatemala is a major source of undocumented immigrants fleeing violence into the relative safety of the U.S. . Femicide is rampant as is criminal impunity, all legacies of the U.S. -backed dirty war of genocide from the 1960s through the '80s, which claimed some 200,000 Mayan lives.
- Honduras' left-leaning President Zelaya was deposed in a U.S. -backed coup in 2009. In the aftermath of rightwing repression and domestic violence, Honduras earned the title of murder capital of the world. The current rightwing president was reelected last November in an election so blatantly fraudulent that even the Organization of American States (OAS) failed to endorse the results.
- Paraguay is the site of the first of the rightwing parliamentary coups in the region when left-leaning President Fernando Lugo was deposed in 2012.

Such is the nature of the rightwing states allied against Venezuela in contemporary Latin America. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of this right tide is the willingness of Brazil and Argentina to allow U.S. military installations in their border areas as well as conducting joint U.S. -led military exercises with contingents from Panama, Colombia and other countries.

Cuba, Bolivia, and Nicaragua are Venezuela's few remaining regional allies, all of which have been subject to U.S. -backed regime-change schemes. Most recently, the Nicaraguan government undertook modest measures to increase workers' and employers' contributions but lower benefits. It led to violent demonstrations. Some sources hostile to the Ortega government labelled the protests as "made in the U.S. A." In the face of such protests, the government rescinded the changes on April 23.

### **The Empire Strikes Back**

In early April, the U.S. Southern Command conducted a series of military exercises, dubbed "Fused Response," just 10 miles off the Venezuelan coast, simulating an invasion.

Later that month, Juan Cruz, Special Assistant to President Trump and Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, was asked whether the U.S. government supports a military coup in Venezuela. Speaking for the White House and dripping with imperial arrogance, he responded affirmatively:

“If you look at the history of Venezuela, there’s never been a seminal movement in Venezuela’s history, politics, that did not involve the military. And so it would be naïve for us to think that a solution in Venezuela wouldn’t in some fashion include a very strong nod – at a minimum – strong nod from the military, a whisper in the ear, a coaxing or a nudging, or something a lot stronger than that.”

Across the Atlantic on May 3, the European Parliament demanded Venezuela suspend presidential elections. Four days later, U.S. Vice President Pence called on the OAS to expel Venezuela. Adding injury to insult, the U.S. announced yet another round of sanctions. Then the next day, U.S. ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley joined the chorus calling on President Maduro to cancel the presidential election and resign.

Far more blatant and frightening is the *Plan to Overthrow the Venezuelan Dictatorship – Masterstroke*, dated February 23, 2018. *Masterstroke* was leaked on the website [Voltaire.net.org](http://Voltaire.net.org) and picked up by Stella Calloni in the reliable and respected [Resumen Latinoamericano](http://Resumen Latinoamericano). Although *Masterstroke* is unverified, the contents as reported by Calloni are entirely consistent with U.S. policy and pronouncements:

“The document signed by the head of the U.S. Southern Command demands making the Maduro government unsustainable by forcing him to give up, negotiate or escape. This Plan to end in very short terms the so-called ‘dictatorship’ of Venezuela calls for, ‘Increase internal instability to critical levels, intensifying the decapitalization of the country, the escape of foreign capital and the deterioration of the national currency, through the application of new inflationary measures that increase this deterioration.’”

That is, blame the Venezuelan government for the conditions imposed upon it by its enemies.

*Masterstroke* calls for, “Continuing to harden the condition within the (Venezuelan) Armed Forces to carry out a coup d’état, before the end of 2018, if this crisis does not cause the dictatorship to collapse or if the dictator (Maduro) does not decide to step aside.”

Failing an internal coup, *Masterstroke* plans an international military invasion: “Uniting Brazil, Argentina, Colombia and Panama to contribute a good number of troops, make use of their geographic proximity...”

## **A New Hope**

With the urging of the Pope and under the auspices of the government of the Dominican Republic, the Maduro government and elements of the opposition agreed

to sit down to negotiate last January in the hopes of ending the cycle of violence and the deterioration of living conditions in Venezuela.

By early February they had come to a tentative agreement to hold elections. The Maduro government initially opposed a UN election observation team as a violation of national sovereignty, but then accepted it as a concession to the opposition. The opposition in turn would work to end the unilateral sanctions by the U.S. , Canada, and the EU, which are so severely crippling the daily life of ordinary Venezuelans. Two years of adroit diplomacy by the Maduro government with the less extreme elements of the opposition were bearing fruit.

The agreement had been crafted and a meeting was called for the government and the opposition to sign on. The government came to the final meeting, but not the opposition. The opposition as good clones of Washington had gotten a call from their handlers to bail.

In a damned-if-you-do/damned-if-you-don't scenario, the U.S. first accused Venezuela of not scheduling presidential elections. Then elections were scheduled, but too early for the U.S. . Then the date of the elections was moved to April and then extended to May. No matter what, the U.S. would not abide by any elections in Venezuela. *Ipsa factoelections* are considered fraudulent by U.S. if the people might vote for the wrong candidate.

*Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* (MUD), the coalition of Venezuelan opposition groups allied with and partially funded by the U.S., are accordingly boycotting Sunday's election and are putting pressure on Henri Falcón to withdraw his candidacy. Falcón is Maduro's main competition in the election. MUD has already concluded that the election is fraudulent and are doing all they can to discourage voting.

CNBC, reflecting the Washington consensus, expects the U.S. to directly target the Venezuelan oil industry immediately after the election in what they describe as "a huge sucker punch to Maduro's socialist administration, which is depending almost entirely on crude sales to try and decelerate a deepening economic crisis."

Ever hopeful and always militant, Maduro launched the new Petro cryptocurrency and revalued the country's traditional currency, the Bolivar, in March. The Petro is collateralized on Venezuela's vast mineral resources: the largest petroleum reserves in the world and large reserves of gold and other precious metals. The U.S. immediately accused Venezuela of sinisterly trying to circumvent the sanctions...which is precisely the intent of the Petro and other economic reforms, some of which are promised for after the presidential election.

## **The Force Awakens**

Latin America has been considered the U.S. empire's proprietary backyard since the proclamation of the Monroe Document in 1823, reaffirmed by John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in 1961, and asserted by today's open military posturing by President Trump.

The so-called Pink Tide of left-leaning governments spearheaded by Venezuela in the early part of this century served as a counter-hegemonic force. By any objective estimation that force has been ebbing but can awaken.

Before Chávez, all of Latin America suffered under neoliberal regimes except Cuba. If Maduro is overthrown, a major obstacle to re-establishing this hemispheric wide neoliberalism would be gone.

The future of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution is pivotal to the future of the counter-hegemonic project, which is why it is the empire's prime target in the Western Hemisphere. If the Venezuelan government falls, all Latin American progressive movements could suffer immensely: AMLO's campaign in Mexico, the resistance in Honduras and Argentina, maybe the complete end of the peace accords in Colombia, a left alternative to Lenin Moreno in Ecuador, the Sandinista social programs in Nicaragua, the struggle for Lula's presidency in Brazil, and even Morales and the indigenous movements in Bolivia.

As U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger said in 1970: "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its people. The issues are much too important for the Chilean voters to be left to decide for themselves."

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## **The World Will Not Mourn the Decline of U.S. Hegemony**

Commentators on both right and left bemoan the decline of American global power under Donald Trump, but is that such a bad thing? asks Paul Street in this commentary.

**By Paul Street**



There are good reasons to bemoan the presence of the childish, racist, sexist and ecocidal, right-wing plutocrat Donald Trump in the White House. One complaint about Trump that should be held at arm's-length by anyone on the left, however, is the charge that Trump is contributing to the decline of U.S. global power—to the erosion of the United States' superpower status and the emergence of a more multipolar world.

This criticism of Trump comes from different elite corners. Last October, the leading neoconservative foreign policy intellectual and former George W. Bush administration adviser Eliot Cohen wrote an Atlantic magazine essay titled “How Trump Is Ending the American Era.” Cohen recounted numerous ways in which Trump had reduced “America’s standing and ability to influence global affairs.” He worried that Trump’s presidency would leave “America’s position in the world stunted” and an “America lacking confidence” on the global stage.

But it isn’t just the right wing that writes and speaks in such terms about how Trump is contributing to the decline of U.S. hegemony. A recent Time magazine reflection by the liberal commentator Karl Vick (who wrote in strongly supportive terms about the giant January 2017 Women’s March against Trump) frets that that Trump’s “America First” and authoritarian views have the world “looking for leadership elsewhere.”

“Could this be it?” Vick asks. “Might the American Century actually clock out at just 72 years, from 1945 to 2017? No longer than Louis XIV ruled France? Only 36 months more than the Soviet Union lasted, after all that bother?”

I recently reviewed a manuscript on the rise of Trump written by a left-liberal American sociologist. Near the end of this forthcoming and mostly excellent and instructive volume, the author finds it “worrisome” that other nations see the U.S. “abdicating its role as the world’s leading policeman” under Trump—and that, “given what we have seen so far from the [Trump] administration, U.S. hegemony appears to be on shakier ground than it has been in a long time.”

I’ll leave aside the matter of whether Trump is, in fact, speeding the decline of U.S. global power (he undoubtedly is) and how he’s doing that, to focus instead on a very different question: What would be so awful about the end of “the American Era”—the seven-plus decades of U.S. global economic and related military supremacy between 1945 and the present? Why should the world mourn the “premature” end of the “American Century”?

### **What Would the Rest of the World Say?**

It would be interesting to see a reliable opinion poll on how the politically

cognizant portion of the 94 percent of humanity that lives outside the U.S. would feel about the end of U.S. global dominance. My guess is that Uncle Sam's weakening would be just fine with most Earth residents who pay attention to world events.

According to a global survey of 66,000 people conducted across 68 countries by the Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WINMR) and Gallup International at the end of 2013, Earth's people see the United States as the leading threat to peace on the planet. The U.S. was voted top threat by a wide margin.

There is nothing surprising about that vote for anyone who honestly examines the history of "U.S. foreign affairs," to use a common elite euphemism for American imperialism. Still, by far and away world history's most extensive empire, the U.S. has at least 800 military bases spread across more than 80 foreign countries and "troops or other military personnel in about 160 foreign countries and territories." The U.S. accounts for more than 40 percent of the planet's military spending and has more than 5,500 strategic nuclear weapons, enough to blow the world up 5 to 50 times over. Last year it increased its "defense" (military empire) spending, which was already three times higher than China's, and nine times higher than Russia's.



Think it's all in place to ensure peace and democracy the world over, in accord with the standard boilerplate rhetoric of U.S. presidents, diplomats and senators?

Do you know any other good jokes?

A Pentagon study released last summer laments the emergence of a planet on which the U.S. no longer controls events. Titled "At Our Own Peril: DoD Risk Assessment in a Post-Primary World," the study warns that competing powers "seek a new distribution of power and authority commensurate with their emergence as legitimate rivals to U.S. dominance" in an increasingly multipolar world. China, Russia and smaller players like Iran and North Korea have dared to "engage," the Pentagon study reports, "in a deliberate program to demonstrate the limits of U.S. authority, reach influence and impact." What chutzpah! This is a problem, the report argues, because the endangered U.S.-managed world order was "favorable" to the interests of U.S. and allied U.S. states and U.S.-based transnational corporations.

Any serious efforts to redesign the international status quo so that it favors any other states or people is portrayed in the report as a threat to U.S. interests. To prevent any terrible drifts of the world system away from U.S. control, the report argues, the U.S. and its imperial partners (chiefly its European NATO partners) must maintain and expand “unimpeded access to the air, sea, space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum in order to underwrite their security and prosperity.” The report recommends a significant expansion of U.S. military power. The U.S. must maintain “military advantage” over all other states and actors to “preserve maximum freedom of action” and thereby “allow U.S. decision-makers the opportunity to dictate or hold significant sway over outcomes in international disputes,” with the “implied promise of unacceptable consequences” for those who defy U.S. wishes.

“America First” is an understatement here. The underlying premise is that Uncle Sam owns the world and reserves the right to bomb the hell out of anyone who doesn’t agree with that (to quote President George H.W. Bush after the first Gulf War in 1991: “What we say goes.”

### **Investment Not Democracy**

It’s nothing new. From the start, the “American Century” had nothing to do with advancing democracy. As numerous key U.S. planning documents reveal over and over, the goal of that policy was to maintain and, if necessary, install governments that “favor[ed] private investment of domestic and foreign capital, production for export, and the right to bring profits out of the country,” according to Noam Chomsky. Given the United States’ remarkable possession of half the world’s capital after World War II, Washington elites had no doubt that U.S. investors and corporations would profit the most. Internally, the basic selfish national and imperial objectives were openly and candidly discussed. As the “liberal” and “dovish” imperialist, top State Department planner, and key Cold War architect George F. Kennan explained in “Policy Planning Study 23,” a critical 1948 document:

We have about 50% of the world’s wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. ... In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. ... To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. ... We should cease to talk about vague and ... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.

The harsh necessity of abandoning “human rights” and other “sentimental” and “unreal objectives” was especially pressing in the global South, what used to be known as the Third World. Washington assigned the vast “undeveloped” periphery of the world capitalist system—Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and the energy-rich and thus strategically hyper-significant Middle East—a less than flattering role. It was to “fulfill its major function as a source of raw materials and a market” (actual State Department language) for the great industrial (capitalist) nations (excluding socialist Russia and its satellites, and notwithstanding the recent epic racist-fascist rampages of industrial Germany and Japan). It was to be exploited both for the benefit of U.S. corporations/investors and for the reconstruction of Europe and Japan as prosperous U.S. trading and investment partners organized on capitalist principles and hostile to the Soviet bloc.

“Democracy” was fine as a slogan and benevolent, idealistic-sounding mission statement when it came to marketing this imperialist U.S. policy at home and abroad. Since most people in the “third” or “developing” world had no interest in neocolonial subordination to the rich nations and subscribed to what U.S. intelligence officials considered the heretical “idea that government has direct responsibility for the welfare of its people” (what U.S. planners called “communism”), Washington’s real-life commitment to popular governance abroad was strictly qualified, to say the least.

“Democracy” was suitable to the U.S. as long as its outcomes comported with the interests of U.S. investors/corporations and related U.S. geopolitical objectives. Democracy had to be abandoned, undermined and/or crushed when it threatened those investors/corporations and the broader imperatives of business rule to any significant degree. As President Richard Nixon’s coldblooded national security adviser Henry Kissinger explained in June 1970, three years before the U.S. sponsored a bloody fascist coup that overthrew Chile’s democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende: “I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people.”

The U.S.-sponsored coup government that murdered Allende would kill tens of thousands of real and alleged leftists with Washington’s approval. The Yankee superpower sent some of its leading neoliberal economists and policy advisers to help the blood-soaked Pinochet regime turn Chile into a “free market” model and to help Chile write capitalist oligarchy into its national constitution.

“Since 1945, by deed and by example,” the great Australian author, commentator and filmmaker John Pilger wrote nearly nine years ago, “the U.S. has overthrown 50 governments, including democracies, crushed some 30 liberation movements and

supported tyrannies from Egypt to Guatemala (see William Blum's histories). Bombing is apple pie." Along the way, Washington has crassly interfered in elections in dozens of "sovereign" nations, something curious to note in light of current liberal U.S. outrage over real or alleged Russian interference in "our" supposedly democratic electoral process in 2016. Uncle Sam also has bombed civilians in 30 countries, attempted to assassinate foreign leaders and deployed chemical and biological weapons.

If we "consider only Latin America since the 1950s," writes the sociologist Howard Waitzkin:

[T]he United States has used direct military invasion or has supported military coups to overthrow elected governments in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Haiti, Grenada, and Panama. In addition, the United States has intervened with military action to suppress revolutionary movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia. More recently ... the United States has spent tax dollars to finance and help organize opposition groups and media in Honduras, Paraguay, and Brazil, leading to congressional impeachments of democratically elected presidents. Hillary Clinton presided over these efforts as Secretary of State in the Obama administration, which pursued the same pattern of destabilization in Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia.

### **Death Count: In the Millions**

The death count resulting from "American Era" U.S. foreign policy runs well into the many millions, including possibly as many as 5 million Indochinese killed by Uncle Sam and his agents and allies between 1962 and 1975. The flat-out barbarism of the American war on Vietnam is widely documented on record. The infamous My Lai massacre of March 16, 1968, when U.S. Army soldiers slaughtered more than 350 unarmed civilians—including terrified women holding babies in their arms—in South Vietnam was no isolated incident in the U.S. "crucifixion of Southeast Asia" (Noam Chomsky's phrase at the time). U.S. Army Col. Oran Henderson, who was charged with covering up the massacre, candidly told reporters that "every unit of brigade size has its My Lai hidden somewhere."

It is difficult, sometimes, to wrap one's mind around the extent of the savagery the U.S. has unleashed on the world to advance and maintain its global supremacy. In the early 1950s, the Harry Truman administration responded to an early challenge to U.S. power in Northern Korea with a practically genocidal three-year bombing campaign that was described in soul-numbing terms by the

Washington Post years ago:

The bombing was long, leisurely and merciless, even by the assessment of America's own leaders. 'Over a period of three years or so, we killed off—what—20 percent of the population,' Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay, head of the Strategic Air Command during the Korean War, told the Office of Air Force History in 1984. Dean Rusk, a supporter of the war and later Secretary of State, said the United States bombed 'everything that moved in North Korea, every brick standing on top of another.' After running low on urban targets, U.S. bombers destroyed hydroelectric and irrigation dams in the later stages of the war, flooding farmland and destroying crops ... [T]he U.S. dropped 635,000 tons of explosives on North Korea, including 32,557 tons of napalm, an incendiary liquid that can clear forested areas and cause devastating burns to human skin.

Gee, why does North Korea fear and hate us?

This ferocious bombardment, which killed 2 million or more civilians, began five years after Truman arch-criminally and unnecessarily ordered the atom bombing of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to warn the Soviet Union to stay out of Japan and Western Europe.

Some benevolent "world policeman."

The ferocity of U.S. foreign policy in the "America Era" did not always require direct U.S. military intervention. Take Indonesia and Chile, for two examples from the "Golden Age" height of the "American Century." In Indonesia, the U.S.-backed dictator Suharto killed millions of his subjects, targeting communist sympathizers, ethnic Chinese and alleged leftists. A senior CIA operations officer in the 1960s later described Suharto's 1965-66 U.S.-assisted coup as a "the model operation" for the U.S.-backed coup that eliminated the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, seven years later. "The CIA forged a document purporting to reveal a leftist plot to murder Chilean military leaders," the officer wrote, "[just like] what happened in Indonesia in 1965."

As Pilger noted 10 years ago, "the U.S. embassy in Jakarta supplied Suharto with a 'zap list' of Indonesian Communist party members and crossed off the names when they were killed or captured. ... The deal was that Indonesia under Suharto would offer up what Richard Nixon had called 'the richest hoard of natural resources, the greatest prize in south-east Asia.' "

"No single American action in the period after 1945," wrote the historian

Gabriel Kolko, "was as bloodthirsty as its role in Indonesia, for it tried to initiate [Suharto's] massacre."

Two years and three months after the Chilean coup, Suharto received a green light from Kissinger and the Gerald Ford White House to invade the small island nation of East Timor. With Washington's approval and backing, Indonesia carried out genocidal massacres and mass rapes and killed at least 100,000 of the island's residents.

### **Mideast Savagery**

Among the countless episodes of mass-murderous U.S. savagery in the oil-rich Middle East over the last generation, few can match for the barbarous ferocity of the "Highway of Death," where the "global policeman's" forces massacred tens of thousands of surrendered Iraqi troops retreating from Kuwait on Feb. 26 and 27, 1991. Journalist Joyce Chediac testified that:

U.S. planes trapped the long convoys by disabling vehicles in the front, and at the rear, and then pounded the resulting traffic jams for hours. 'It was like shooting fish in a barrel,' said one U.S. pilot. On the sixty miles of coastal highway, Iraqi military units sit in gruesome repose, scorched skeletons of vehicles and men alike, black and awful under the sun ... for 60 miles every vehicle was strafed or bombed, every windshield is shattered, every tank is burned, every truck is riddled with shell fragments. No survivors are known or likely. ... 'Even in Vietnam I didn't see anything like this. It's pathetic,' said Major Bob Nugent, an Army intelligence officer. ... U.S. pilots took whatever bombs happened to be close to the flight deck, from cluster bombs to 500-pound bombs. ... U.S. forces continued to drop bombs on the convoys until all humans were killed. So many jets swarmed over the inland road that it created an aerial traffic jam, and combat air controllers feared midair collisions. ... The victims were not offering resistance. ... [I]t was simply a one-sided massacre of tens of thousands of people who had no ability to fight back or defend.

The victims' crime was having been conscripted into an army controlled by a dictator perceived as a threat to U.S. control of Middle Eastern oil. President George H.W. Bush welcomed the so-called Persian Gulf War as an opportunity to demonstrate America's unrivaled power and new freedom of action in the post-Cold War world, where the Soviet Union could no longer deter Washington. Bush also heralded the "war" (really a one-sided imperial assault) as marking the end of the "Vietnam Syndrome," the reigning political culture's curious term for U.S. citizens' reluctance to commit U.S. troops to murderous imperial mayhem.

As Chomsky observed in 1992, reflecting on U.S. efforts to maximize suffering in Vietnam by blocking economic and humanitarian assistance to the nation it had devastated: “No degree of cruelty is too great for Washington sadists.”

But Uncle Sam was only getting warmed up building his Iraqi body count in early 1991. Five years later, Bill Clinton’s U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright told CBS News’ Leslie Stahl that the death of 500,000 Iraqi children due to U.S.-led economic sanctions imposed after the first “Persian Gulf War” (a curious term for a one-sided U.S. assault) was a “price ... worth paying” for the advancement of inherently noble U.S. goals.

“The United States,” Secretary Albright explained three years later, “is good. We try to do our best everywhere.”

In the years following the collapse of the counter-hegemonic Soviet empire, however, American neoliberal intellectuals like Thomas Friedman—an advocate of the criminal U.S. bombing of Serbia—felt free to openly state that the real purpose of U.S. foreign policy was to underwrite the profits of U.S.-centered global capitalism. “The hidden hand of the market,” Friedman famously wrote in The New York Times Magazine in March 1999, as U.S. bombs and missiles exploded in Serbia, “will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.”

In a foreign policy speech Sen. Barack Obama gave to the Chicago Council of Global Affairs on the eve of announcing his candidacy for the U.S. presidency in the fall of 2006, Obama had the audacity to say the following in support of his claim that U.S. citizens supported “victory” in Iraq: “The American people have been extraordinarily resolved. They have seen their sons and daughters killed or wounded in the streets of Fallujah.”

It was a spine-chilling selection of locales. In 2004, the ill-fated city was the site of colossal U.S. war atrocities, crimes including the indiscriminate murder of thousands of civilians, the targeting even of ambulances and hospitals, and the practical leveling of an entire city by the U.S. military in April and November. By one account, “Incoherent Empire,” Michael Mann wrote:

The U.S. launched two bursts of ferocious assault on the city, in April and November of 2004 ... [using] devastating firepower from a distance which minimizes U.S. casualties. In April ... military commanders claimed to have precisely targeted ... insurgent forces, yet the local hospitals reported that many or most of the casualties were civilians, often women, children, and the

elderly... [reflecting an] intention to kill civilians generally. ... In November ... [U.S.] aerial assault destroyed the only hospital in insurgent territory to ensure that this time no one would be able to document civilian casualties. U.S. forces then went through the city, virtually destroying it. Afterwards, Fallujah looked like the city of Grozny in Chechnya after Putin's Russian troops had razed it to the ground.

The "global policeman's" deployment of radioactive ordnance (depleted uranium) in Fallujah created an epidemic of infant mortality, birth defects, leukemia and cancer there.

### 'Bug-Splat'

Fallujah was just one especially graphic episode in a broader arch-criminal invasion that led to the premature deaths of at least 1 million Iraqi civilians and left Iraq as what Tom Engelhardt called "a disaster zone on a catastrophic scale hard to match in recent memory." It reflected the same callous mindset behind the Pentagon's early computer program name for ordinary Iraqis certain to be killed in the 2003 invasion: "bug-splat." America's petro-imperial occupation led to the death of as many as one million Iraqi "bugs" (human beings). According to the respected journalist Nir Rosen in December 2007, "Iraq has been killed. ... [T]he American occupation has been more disastrous than that of the Mongols who sacked Baghdad in the thirteenth century."

As the Senate is poised to confirm an alleged torturer as CIA director it is important to remember that along with death in Iraq came ruthless and racist torture. In an essay titled "I Helped Create ISIS," Vincent Emanuele, a former U.S. Marine, recalled his enlistment in an operation that gave him nightmares more than a decade later:

I think about the hundreds of prisoners we took captive and tortured in makeshift detention facilities. ... I vividly remember the marines telling me about punching, slapping, kicking, elbowing, kneeling and head-butting Iraqis. I remember the tales of sexual torture: forcing Iraqi men to perform sexual acts on each other while marines held knives against their testicles, sometimes sodomizing them with batons. ... [T]hose of us in infantry units ... round[ed] up Iraqis during night raids, zip-tying their hands, black-bagging their heads and throwing them in the back of HUMVEEs and trucks while their wives and kids collapsed to their knees and wailed. ... Some of them would hold hands while marines would butt-stroke the prisoners in the face. ... [W]hen they were released, we would drive them from the FOB (Forward Operating Base) to the middle of the desert and release them several miles from their homes. ...

After we cut their zip-ties and took the black bags off their heads, several of our more deranged marines would fire rounds from their AR-15s into their air or ground, scaring the recently released captives. Always for laughs. Most Iraqis would run, still crying from their long ordeal.

The award-winning journalist Seymour Hersh told the ACLU about the existence of classified Pentagon evidence files containing films of U.S.-“global policeman” soldiers sodomizing Iraqi boys in front of their mothers behind the walls of the notorious Abu Ghraib prison. “You haven’t begun to see [all the] ... evil, horrible things done [by U.S. soldiers] to children of women prisoners, as the cameras run,” Hersh told an audience in Chicago in the summer of 2014.

It isn’t just Iraq where Washington has wreaked sheer mass murderous havoc in the Middle East, always a region of prime strategic significance to the U.S. thanks to its massive petroleum resources. In a recent Truthdig reflection on Syria, historian Dan Lazare reminds us that:

[Syrian President Assad’s] Baathist crimes pale in comparison to those of the U.S., which since the 1970s has invested trillions in militarizing the Persian Gulf and arming the ultra-reactionary petro-monarchies that are now tearing the region apart. The U.S. has provided Saudi Arabia with crucial assistance in its war on Yemen, it has cheered on the Saudi blockade of Qatar, and it has stood by while the Saudis and United Arab Emirates send in troops to crush democratic protests in neighboring Bahrain. In Syria, Washington has worked hand in glove with Riyadh to organize and finance a Wahhabist holy war that has reduced a once thriving country to ruin.

Chomsky has called Barack Obama’s targeted drone assassination program “the most extensive global terrorism campaign the world has yet seen.” The program “officially is aimed at killing people who the administration believes might someday intend to harm the U.S. and killing anyone else who happens to be nearby.” As Chomsky adds, “It is also a terrorism generating campaign—that is well understood by people in high places. When you murder somebody in a Yemen village, and maybe a couple of other people who are standing there, the chances are pretty high that others will want to take revenge.”

### **The Last, Best Hope**

“We lead the world,” presidential candidate Obama explained, “in battling immediate evils and promoting the ultimate good. ... America is the last, best hope of earth.”

Obama elaborated in his first inaugural address. "Our security," the president said, "emanates from the justness of our cause; the force of our example; the tempering qualities of humility and restraint"—a fascinating commentary on Fallujah, Hiroshima, the U.S. crucifixion of Southeast Asia, the "Highway of Death" and more.

Within less than half a year of his inauguration and his lauded Cairo speech, Obama's rapidly accumulating record of atrocities in the Muslim world would include the bombing of the Afghan village of Bola Boluk. Ninety-three of the dead villagers torn apart by U.S. explosives in Bola Boluk were children. "In a phone call played on a loudspeaker on Wednesday to outraged members of the Afghan Parliament," *The New York Times* reported, "the governor of Farah Province ... said that as many as 130 civilians had been killed." According to one Afghan legislator and eyewitness, "the villagers bought two tractor trailers full of pieces of human bodies to his office to prove the casualties that had occurred. Everyone at the governor's cried, watching that shocking scene." The administration refused to issue an apology or to acknowledge the "global policeman's" responsibility.

By telling and sickening contrast, Obama had just offered a full apology and fired a White House official because that official had scared New Yorkers with an ill-advised Air Force One photo-shoot flyover of Manhattan that reminded people of 9/11. The disparity was extraordinary: Frightening New Yorkers led to a full presidential apology and the discharge of a White House staffer. Killing more than 100 Afghan civilians did not require any apology.

Reflecting on such atrocities the following December, an Afghan villager was moved to comment as follows: "Peace prize? He's a killer. ... Obama has only brought war to our country." The man spoke from the village of Armal, where a crowd of 100 gathered around the bodies of 12 people, one family from a single home. The 12 were killed, witnesses reported, by U.S. Special Forces during a late-night raid.

Obama was only warming up his "killer" powers. He would join with France and other NATO powers in the imperial decimation of Libya, which killed more than 25,000 civilians and unleashed mass carnage in North Africa. The U.S.-led assault on Libya was a disaster for black Africans and sparked the biggest refugee crisis since World War II.

Two years before the war on Libya, the Obama administration helped install a murderous right-wing coup regime in Honduras. Thousands of civilians and activists have been murdered by that regime.

The clumsy and stupid Trump has taken the imperial baton from the elegant and

silver-tongued "imperial grandmaster" Obama, keeping the superpower's vast global military machine set on kill. As Newsweek reported last fall, in a news item that went far below the national news radar screen in the age of the endless insane Trump clown show:

According to research from the nonprofit monitoring group Airwars ... through the first seven months of the Trump administration, coalition air strikes have killed between 2,800 and 4,500 civilians. ... Researchers also point to another stunning trend—the 'frequent killing of entire families in likely coalition airstrikes.' In May, for example, such actions led to the deaths of at least 57 women and 52 children in Iraq and Syria. ... In Afghanistan, the U.N. reports a 67 percent increase in civilian deaths from U.S. airstrikes in the first six months of 2017 compared to the first half of 2016.

That Trump murders with less sophistication, outward moral restraint and credible claim to embody enlightened Western values and multilateral commitment than Obama did is perhaps preferable to some degree. It is better for empire to be exposed in its full and ugly nakedness, to speed its overdue demise.

The U.S. is not just the top menace only to peace on Earth. It is also the leading threat to personal privacy (as was made clearer than ever by the Edward Snowden revelations), to democracy (the U.S. funds and equips repressive regimes around the world) and to a livable global natural environment (thanks in no small part to its role as headquarters of global greenhouse gassing and petro-capitalist climate denial).

The world can be forgiven, perhaps, if it does not join Eliot Cohen and Karl Vick in bemoaning the end of the "American Era," whatever Trump's contribution to that decline, which was well underway before he entered the Oval Office.

Ordinary Americans, too, can find reasons to welcome the decline of the American empire. As Chomsky noted in the late 1960s: "The costs of empire are in general distributed over the society as a whole, while its profits revert to a few within."

The Pentagon system functions as a great form of domestic corporate welfare for high-tech "defense" (empire) firms like Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Raytheon—this while it steals trillions of dollars that might otherwise meet social and environmental needs at home and abroad. It is a significant mode of upward wealth distribution within "the homeland."

The biggest costs have fallen on the many millions killed and maimed by the U.S. military and allied and proxy forces in the last seven decades and before. The

victims include the many U.S. military veterans who have killed themselves, many of them haunted by their own participation in sadistic attacks and torture on defenseless people at the distant command of sociopathic imperial masters determined to enforce U.S. hegemony by any and all means deemed necessary.

*This [article](#) originally appeared on TruthDig.*

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## Turning on Russia, Part Two

In the second part of this two-part series, Paul Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Gould explore how neo-conservatives, behind the scenes, took control of U.S. foreign policy. Part One can be found [here](#).

**By Paul Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Gould**



In the months and years following the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973, the issue of Israel and its security would become so enmeshed in American policy as to become one and the same. The lesson of October 1973 that détente had succeeded in securing American and Soviet interests, was anathema to the entire neoconservative agenda and revealed its true hand.

At the time a majority of American Jews were not necessarily against better U.S.-Soviet relations. But with the forceful hammering of influential right-wing neoconservative pundits like Ben Wattenberg and Irving Kristol and the explosive manifestation of the [Evangelical Christian Zionist movement](#), many of Israel's liberal American supporters were persuaded to turn against détente for the first time.

According to the distinguished State Department Soviet specialist [Raymond Garthoff's \*Détente and Confrontation\*](#); "Analytically and objectively the American-Soviet cooperation in defusing both the Israeli-Arab conflict, and their own involvement in a crisis confrontation, may be judged a successful application of crisis management under détente." But as Garthoff acknowledges, this success threatened "Israel's jealously guarded freedom of action to determine unilaterally its own security requirements," and set off alarm bells

in Tel Aviv and Washington.

With Richard Nixon on the ropes with Watergate and Vietnam dragging to a conclusion, American foreign policy was open to external pressure and within a year would fall permanently into the hands of a coalition of pro-Israel neoconservative and right-wing defense industry lobbying groups.

### **A Crusade to Control the Mideast**

These groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), the American Security Council and Committee on the Present Danger would set about to make American interests and their own personal crusade to control the greater Middle East, interchangeable.

The issue of U.S. support for Israel, its neoconservative backers and its dedicated anti-Russian bias has a long and complicated history dating back long before Theodor Herzl's 19<sup>th</sup> century Zionist Project. Zionism was not instilled in American thinking by Jews, but by 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century British Puritans whose sacred mission was to reestablish an ancient Kingdom of Israel and fulfill what they believed to be biblical prophecy based on the King James Version of the bible.

Britain's Anglo/Israel movement found common cause with the British Empire's 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century political goals of controlling the Middle East through Jewish resettlement of Palestine which culminated in the Balfour declaration of 1917. This long term plan of the British Empire continues today through American policy and what has been dubbed the Zionist Project or the Yinon plan.

Add the 700 million strong worldwide Evangelical movement and its 70 million Christian Zionists in the United States, and American foreign policy towards the Middle East becomes an apocalyptic confluence of covert agendas, ethnic grudges and religious feuds locked in permanent crisis.

It has been argued that the neoconservative's slavish adherence to Israel makes neoconservatism an exclusively Jewish creation. Numerous neoconservative writers like the New York Times' David Brooks tar critics of Israel as anti-Semites by accusing them of substituting the term "neoconservative" for "Jew." Others argue that "neoconservatism is indeed a Jewish intellectual and political movement" with "close ties to the most extreme nationalistic, aggressive, racist and religiously fanatic elements within Israel."

Although clearly acting as a political front for Israel's interests and an

engine for permanent war, neoconservatism would never have succeeded as a political movement without the support and cooperation of powerful non-Jewish elites.

New America Foundation co-founder Michael Lind writes in The Nation in 2004, "Along with other traditions that have emerged from the anti-Stalinist left, neoconservatism has appealed to many Jewish intellectuals and activists but it is not, for that reason, a Jewish movement. Like other schools on the left, neoconservatism recruited from diverse 'farm teams' including liberal Catholics... populists, socialists and New Deal liberals in the South and Southwest... With the exception of Middle East strategy... there is nothing particularly 'Jewish' about neoconservative views on foreign policy. While the example of Israel has inspired American neocons... the global strategy of today's neocons is shaped chiefly by the heritage of cold war anti-Communism."

Add to that the abiding influence of Britain's Imperial policy-makers following World War II – the British creation of Pakistan in 1947 and Israel in 1948 – and the hidden hand of a global imperial strategy is revealed. Pakistan exists to keep the Russians out of Central Asia and Israel exists to keep the Russians out of the Middle East.

Whether American democracy could have survived the stresses put upon it by the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War and the ongoing frauds posed by neoconservatism now poses an answerable question. It couldn't. Fletcher School international law professor Michael Glennon maintains that the creation of the national security state in 1947 as a second, double government effectively renders the question mute. He writes: "The public believes that the constitutionally-established institutions control national security policy, but that view is mistaken. Judicial review is negligible; congressional oversight is dysfunctional; and presidential control is nominal. Absent a more informed and engaged electorate, little possibility exists for restoring accountability in the formulation and execution of national security policy."

### **The Reach of Jackson-Vanik**

The motion to kill détente and hobble Henry Kissinger's balance of power or "realist" foreign policy quickly followed the 1973 war in the form of the anti-Soviet amendment to the Trade Act known as Jackson-Vanik. Sponsored by Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington State and Representative Charles A. Vanik of Ohio, but engineered by Albert Wohlstetter acolyte Richard Perle, trade concessions and virtually anything regarding Moscow would be forever linked to the Zionist Project through Jewish emigration to Israel from the Soviet Union.

Supported by organized labor, traditional conservatives, liberals and

neoconservatives, Jackson-Vanik hobbled efforts by the Nixon/Ford administration to slow the arms race and move towards a permanent easing of tensions with the Soviet Union. It removed control of American foreign policy from the President and Secretary of State, while delivering it permanently into the hands of the old anti-Stalinist/Trotskyist neoconservatives.

Jackson-Vanik overcame liberal support for détente because of an intellectual dishonesty within the non-communist left that had been roiling America's intelligentsia since the 1930s. That dishonesty had transformed left wing Trotskyists into the CIA's very own anti-Soviet cultural Cold Warriors and aligned them with the goals of the West's right-wing. By the 1950s their cause was not about left or right, or even liberal anti-Communism versus Stalinism. It was about exchanging a value system of laws and checks and balances for a system alien to America.

As Frances Stonor Saunders describes in her book *The Cultural Cold War*, it was simply about grabbing power and keeping it. "'It's so corrupt, it doesn't even know it,' said [legendary Random House editor] Jason Epstein, in an uncompromising mood. 'When these people talk about a 'counter-intelligentsia,' what they do is to set up a false and corrupt value system to support whatever ideology they're committed to at the time. The only thing they're really committed to is power, and the introduction of Tzarist-Stalinist strategies in American politics. They're so corrupt they probably don't even know it. They're little, lying apparatchiks. People who don't believe in anything, who are only against something, shouldn't go on crusades or start revolutions.'"

### **A New Nomenklatura**

But neoconservatives did go on crusades and start revolutions and continued to corrupt the American political process until it was unrecognizable. In 1973 neoconservatives did not want the United States having better relations with Moscow and created Jackson-Vanik to obstruct it. But their ultimate goal as explained by Janine Wedel in her 2009 study *the Shadow Elite*, was the complete transfer of power from an elected government representing the American people to what she referred to as a "new nomenklatura," or "guardians of the national interest," free from the restraints imposed by the laws of the nation.

Wedel writes, "Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the late senator from New York and onetime neoconservative, suggested that this kind of suspension of the rules and processes was what motivated him to part ways with the movement in the 1980s: 'They wished for a military posture approaching mobilization; they would create or invent whatever crises were required to bring this about.'"

The synthesis of James Burnham's Cold War ethos (established formally by Paul

Nitze in his 1950 NSC-68) together with Trotskyism (espoused by the core neoconservatives), combined with this aggressive new support for Israel, empowered America's neoconservatives with a cult-like political influence over American decision-making that would only grow stronger with time.

As envisaged by Burnham, the Cold War was a struggle for the world and would be fought with the kind of political subversion he'd learned to master as a leading member of Trotsky's Fourth International. But joined to Israel by Burnham's fellow Trotskyists and the underlying influence of British Israelism – it would enter an apocalyptic mythos and resist any and all efforts to bring it to an end.

John B. Judis, former editor of the *New Republic* relates in a 1995 *Foreign Affairs* book review of the *Rise of Neoconservatism* by John Ehrman: "In the framework of international communism, the Trotskyists were rabid internationalists rather than realists or nationalists... The neoconservatives who went through Trotskyist and socialist movements came to see foreign policy as a crusade, the goal of which was first global socialism, then social democracy, and finally democratic capitalism. They never saw foreign policy in terms of national interest or balance of power. Neoconservatism was a kind of inverted Trotskyism, which sought to 'export democracy' in [Joshua] Muravchik's words, in the same way that Trotsky originally envisaged exporting socialism."

Through the eyes of the State Department's Raymond Garthoff, the moves against détente in 1973 are viewed from the narrow perspective of a professional American diplomat. But according to Judis in his article titled "Trotskyism to Anachronism: The Neoconservative Revolution," the legacy of NSC-68 and Trotskyism contributed to a form of apocalyptic thinking that would slowly exclude the professional policy-making process from the realm of empirical observation and replace it with a politicized mechanism for creating endless conflict. "The constant reiteration and exaggeration of the Soviet threat was meant to dramatize and win converts, but it also reflected the doomsday revolutionary mentality that characterized the old left," Judis wrote.

In the end, he argues that the neoconservative success at using self-fulfilling prophecies to kill détente actually made the Cold War far more dangerous by encouraging the Soviet Union to undertake a military buildup and expand its influence, which the neoconservatives then used as proof that their theories were correct. In effect, "Neoconservatism was a self-fulfilling prophecy. It helped precipitate the crisis in U.S.-Soviet relations that it then claimed to uncover and respond to."

Writing in the summer of 1995 with the Cold War finally ended and the storm passed, Judis considered neoconservatism as the subject of ridicule, describing

key neoconservatives as merely political anachronisms and not the thriving political dynamo described by John Ehrman in his book. But in the end Ehrman turned out to be right, the neoconservative crusade had not come to a close with the end of the Cold War but had only entered a new and more dangerous phase.

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## Doomsday Machines

*The Doomsday Machine*, published in December by Bloomsbury, is Daniel Ellsberg's account of the 1960s U.S. nuclear weapons program told from his experience as a consultant to the Pentagon and the White House. Ellsberg drafted Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's nuclear war plans. He later became the most famous whistleblower in American history. Here is an excerpt from his new book, printed by permission of Bloomsbury, which appeared first in Harper's Magazine.

By Daniel Ellsberg



At the conclusion of his 1964 film, *Dr. Strangelove*, Stanley Kubrick introduced the concept of a “Doomsday Machine”—designed by the Soviet Union to deter nuclear attack against the country by automating the destruction of all human life as a response to such an attack. The movie's Russian leader had installed the system before revealing it to the world, however, and it was now being triggered by a single nuclear explosion from an American B-52 sent off by a rogue commander without presidential authorization.

Kubrick had borrowed the name and the concept of the Doomsday machine from my former colleague Herman Kahn, a Rand physicist with whom he had discussed it. In his 1960 book *On Thermonuclear War*, Kahn wrote that he would be able to design such a device. It could be produced within ten years and would be relatively cheap—since it could be placed in one's own country or in the ocean. It would not depend on sending warheads halfway around the world.

But, he said, the machine was obviously undesirable. It would be too difficult to control—too inflexible and automatic—and its failure “kills too many people”—everyone, in fact, an outcome that the philosopher John Somerville later termed “omnicide.” Kahn was sure in 1961 that no such system had been built, nor would it be, by either the United States or the Soviet Union.

The physicist Edward Teller, known as the “father of the H-bomb,” likewise denied that omnicide—a concept he derided—was remotely feasible. In answer to a question I posed to him in 1982,

he said emphatically that it was impossible that the thermonuclear weapons that he had co-invented would kill “more than a quarter of the earth’s population.”

At the time, I thought of this assurance, ironically, as a version of the glass being three quarters full. (Teller was, along with Kahn, Henry Kissinger, and the former Nazi missile designer Wernher von Braun, one of Kubrick’s inspirations for the character of Dr. Strangelove.) And Teller’s estimate was closely in line with what the Joints Chief of Staff, or JCS, actually planned to do in 1961, though a better estimate would have been closer to one-third to one-half of the world population.

### **Nuclear Winter**

But the JCS were mistaken in 1961, and so was Herman Kahn in 1960, and so was Teller in 1982. Just one year after Teller had underestimated the destructive powers of nuclear weapons, the first papers to describe the phenomenon of nuclear winter were published. Nuclear winter referred to the effects of smoke injected into the stratosphere by firestorms generated by H-bombs. Although the Doomsday machine wasn’t likely to kill every last human, its fallout, once triggered, would come close to deserve its name.

Like covert operations and assassination plots, nuclear war plans and threats are not publicly discussed by the small minority of officials and consultants who know anything about them. These officials keep silent to maintain high clearances, access, and the possibility of being consultants after they’ve left service. This discretion, coupled with systematic secrecy, lying, and obfuscation has created extremely deficient scholarly and journalistic understanding and almost total public and congressional ignorance.

As a result, most aspects of the US nuclear planning system that I knew half a century ago still exist today, as prone to catastrophe as ever but on a scale that vastly exceeds what was understood then. The present risks of the current nuclear era go far beyond the dangers of proliferation and non-state terrorism that have been the almost exclusive focus of public concern for the past

generation and the past decade in particular. The arsenals and plans of Russia and the US are not only an insuperable obstacle to an effective global anti-proliferation campaign; they are themselves an existential danger to the human species.

### **Unimaginable Calamity**

The hidden reality I aim to expose is that for more than fifty years, all-out thermonuclear war—an irreversible, unprecedented, and almost unimaginable calamity for civilization and most life on earth—has been, like the disasters of Chernobyl, Katrina, the Gulf oil spill, and Fukushima Daiichi, and a catastrophe waiting to happen, on a scale infinitely greater than any of these. And that is still true today.

Here is what we now know: the United States and Russia each have an actual Doomsday Machine. It is not the same system that Herman Kahn envisioned (or Stanley Kubrick portrayed), with warheads buried deep and programmed to explode in their own territories, producing deadly global fallout. But a counterpart nevertheless exists for both countries: a system of men, machines, electronics, communications, institutions, plans, training, discipline, practices, and doctrine—which, under conditions of electronic warning, external conflict, or expectations of attack, would with unknowable but possibly high probability bring about the global destruction of civilization. These two systems still risk doomsday: both are on hair-trigger alert that makes their joint existence unstable. This is true even though the Cold War that rationalized their existence ended thirty years ago.

Here's the scenario: the fallout would remain mostly limited to the northern hemisphere but the smoke and soot generated by fierce firestorms in hundreds of burning cities would be lofted into the stratosphere, where it would not rain out and would remain for a decade or more, enveloping the globe in smoke and blocking out sunlight, lowering temperatures to the level of the last Ice Age, and killing all harvests worldwide, causing near-universal starvation within a year or two.

U.S. plans for thermonuclear war in the early sixties, if carried out in the Berlin or Cuban missile crises, would have killed many times more than the six hundred million people predicted by the JCS. They would have starved to death nearly everyone then living: at that time three billion people. The numbers of warheads in the possession of the U.S. and Russia have since declined. Yet according to the most recent scientific calculations, even a fraction of the existing arsenals would be enough to cause nuclear winter today.

### **Do We Still Need Them? Did We Ever?**

Does the United States still need a Doomsday Machine? Does Russia? Did they ever? Does its existence serve any national or international interest to a degree that would justify the danger to human life?

I do not ask the questions rhetorically. They deserve sober, reflective consideration. The answers seem obvious, but as far as I know they have never been addressed. There follows another question: Does any nation on earth have a right to possess such a power? A right to threaten—by its simple possession of that power— the continued existence of all other nations and their people, their cities, and civilization as a whole? Why is anything other than zero risk remotely acceptable?

We did not set out intentionally to acquire a doomsday capability. The existence of one such machine does not create a tangible incentive for an enemy to have one. In fact, having two on alert against one another is far more dangerous than if only one existed. If the two existing machines were stripped of their doomsday potential, there would be no strategic rationale to reconstruct it, any more than there was a conscious intention in the first place.

The good news is that dismantling the Doomsday Machine in one country or both would be relatively simple in concept and in physical operation (though politically and bureaucratically incredibly difficult). It could be accomplished within a year. But it would mean—and here's where institutional resistance would be strong—giving up certain illusions about our nuclear forces. It would mean scrapping our strategic nuclear war plans and discarding most of the forces deployed to carry them out.

However low the probability might currently be of the United States or Russia carrying out its strategic contingency plans against the other and causing nuclear winter, it never will be zero, so long as Doomsday Machines of the present type exist. Just how high does the risk have to be to make it intolerable? What risk of nuclear winter is "acceptable" as the price of maintaining our current strategic forces?

Since the end of the Cold War, the greatest likelihood is that a preemptive attack will be triggered by an electronic false alarm (which has repeatedly occurred) or an accidental detonation (which was a real risk in a number of previous accidents).

The danger that either a false alarm or a terrorist attack on Washington or Moscow would lead to a preemptive attack derives almost entirely from the existence in both countries of land-based missile forces, each vulnerable to attack by the other and therefore kept on a high state of alert, ready to launch within minutes of warning.

The easiest and fastest way to reduce that risk—and indeed, the overall danger of nuclear war—is to dismantle entirely (not merely

“dealert”) the Minuteman III missile force, the U.S. land-based leg of the nuclear “triad.” This shift would not totally eliminate the dangers of nuclear war, but it would abolish the threat of nuclear winter.

### **Dismantling Them**

This dismantlement of the Doomsday Machines is not intended as an adequate longterm substitute for more ambitious, necessary goals, including total universal abolition of nuclear weapons. We cannot accept the conclusion that abolition must be ruled out “for the foreseeable future” or put off for generations. There will not be a human future without it.

The nuclear weapon states must acknowledge the reality that they have been denying and that non-nuclear weapon states have been proclaiming for almost fifty years: effective nonproliferation is unavoidably linked to nuclear disarmament. Either all nations forgo the right to possess nuclear weapons indefinitely and to threaten others with them under any circumstances, or every nation will claim that right, and actual possession and use will become widespread.

What is often missing in the typical discussion of nuclear policies is the recognition that what is being discussed is dizzyingly insane. It is insane in its almost-incalculable destructiveness and deliberate murderousness, its disproportionality of risked and planned destructiveness for its secretly pursued aims (damage limitation to the United States and allies, “victory” in two-sided nuclear war), its criminality (to a degree that explodes visions of law, justice, crime), its lack of wisdom or compassion, its sinfulness and evil.

And yet part of what must be grasped—what makes it both understandable, once grasped, and at the same time mysterious and resistant to our ordinary understanding—is that the creation, maintenance, and political use of these monstrous machines has been directed and accomplished by ordinary people, neither better nor worse than the rest of us.

Is it really possible that normal, ordinary politicians, analysts, and military strategists have created and accepted dangers of the sort I am describing? Every impulse is to say “No! It can’t be that bad! And if it ever was, it can’t be true now, in our own country.”

That impulse is mistaken. After all, we Americans have seen human-caused catastrophes in recent years reflecting governmental or corporate recklessness that is far more conscious and deliberate. Above all, the invasion of Iraq and

the occupation of Afghanistan, but also the failure to prepare for or respond to Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf oil spill, and the 2008 financial crisis: the savings-and-loan scandal, Internet and housing bubbles, criminal fraud, and the meltdown of the banking and investment system.

Perhaps reflection on these political, social, and moral failures—and the disastrous decision-making of Donald Trump—will lend credibility to my basic theme, otherwise hard to absorb: that these same heedless, shortsighted, reckless, and dishonest decisions have characterized our government’s nuclear policies, risking a catastrophe incomparably greater than all others.

Our mortal predicament did not begin with the election of Donald J. Trump, and it will not end with his departure. The obstacles to achieving these necessary changes are posed not so much by the American public—though in recent years it has shown dismaying manipulability— but by officials and elites in both parties and by major institutions that consciously support militarism, American hegemony, and arms production and sales.

No policies in human history have more deserved to be recognized as immoral. The story of how this calamitous predicament came about and how and why it has persisted for over half a century is a chronicle of human madness. Whether Americans, Russians, and the rest of the world can rise to the challenge of reversing these policies and eliminating the danger of near-term extinction caused by their own inventions and proclivities remains to be seen. I choose to act as if that is still possible.

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## The Other Side of the Post’s Katharine Graham

Hollywood loves to make heroes of The Washington Post for the rare moments when it has stood up for journalism – while forgetting the blood-soaked cases of the Post spreading lies to justify wars, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

Movie critics are already hailing “The Post,” directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Meryl Streep as *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham. Millions of people will see the film in early winter. But the real-life political story of Graham and her newspaper is not a narrative that’s headed to the multiplexes.

“The Post” comes 20 years after Graham’s autobiography *Personal History* appeared

and won enormous praise. Read as a memoir, the book is a poignant account of Graham's long quest to overcome sexism, learn the newspaper business and gain self-esteem. Read as media history, however, it is deceptive.

"I don't believe that whom I was or wasn't friends with interfered with our reporting at any of our publications," Graham wrote. However, Robert Parry – who was a Washington correspondent for *Newsweek* during the last three years of the 1980s – has shed some light on the shadows of Graham's reassuring prose. Contrary to the claims in her book, Parry said he witnessed "self-censorship because of the coziness between Post-Newsweek executives and senior national security figures."

Among Parry's examples: "On one occasion in 1987, I was told that my story about the CIA funneling anti-Sandinista money through Nicaragua's Catholic Church had been watered down because the story needed to be run past Mrs. Graham, and Henry Kissinger was her house guest that weekend. Apparently, there was fear among the top editors that the story as written might cause some consternation." (The 1996 memoir of former CIA Director Robert Gates confirmed that Parry had the story right all along.)

Graham's book exudes affection for Kissinger as well as Robert McNamara and other luminaries of various administrations who remained her close friends until she died in 2001. To Graham, men like McNamara and Kissinger – the main war architects for Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon – were wonderful human beings.

In sharp contrast, Graham devoted dozens of righteous pages to vilifying *Post* press operators who went on strike in 1975. She stressed the damage done to printing equipment as the walkout began and "the unforgivable acts of violence throughout the strike." It is a profound commentary on her outlook that thuggish deeds by a few of the strikers were "unforgivable" – but men like McNamara and Kissinger were lovable after they oversaw horrendous slaughter in Southeast Asia.

Graham's autobiography portrays union stalwarts as mostly ruffians or dupes. "Only a handful of [Newspaper Guild] members had gone out for reasons I respected," she told readers. "One was John Hanrahan, a good reporter and a nice man who came from a longtime labor family and simply couldn't cross a picket line. He never did come back. Living your beliefs is a rare virtue and greatly to be admired."

But for Hanrahan (whose Republican parents actually never belonged to a union) the admiration was far from mutual. As he put it, "The *Washington Post* under Katharine Graham pioneered the union-busting 'replacement worker' strategy that

Ronald Reagan subsequently used against the air-traffic controllers and that corporate America – in the Caterpillar, Bridgestone/Firestone and other strikes – used to throw thousands of workers out of their jobs in the 1980s and the '90s.”

The *Washington Post* deserves credit for publishing sections of the Pentagon Papers immediately after a federal court injunction in mid-June 1971 stopped the *New York Times* from continuing to print excerpts from the secret document. That’s the high point of the *Washington Post*’s record in relation to the Vietnam War. The newspaper strongly supported the war for many years.

Yet Graham’s book avoids any semblance of introspection about the Vietnam War and the human costs of the *Post*’s support for it. Her book recounts that she huddled with a writer in line to take charge of the editorial page in August 1966: “We agreed that the *Post* ought to work its way out of the very supportive editorial position it had taken, but we couldn’t be precipitous; we had to move away gradually from where we had been.” Vast carnage resulted from such unwillingness to be “precipitous.”

Although widely touted as a feminist parable, Graham’s Pulitzer Prize-winning autobiography is notably bereft of solidarity for women without affluence or white skin. They barely seemed to exist in her range of vision; painful realities of class and racial biases were dim, faraway specks. Overall the 625-page book gives short shrift to the unrich and unfamous, whose lives are peripheral to the drama played out by the wealthy publisher’s dazzling peers. The name of Martin Luther King Jr. does not appear in her star-studded, history-drenched book.

Katharine Graham’s decision to publish the Pentagon Papers was indeed laudable, helping to expose lies that had greased the wheels of the war machinery with such horrific consequences in Vietnam. But the *Washington Post* was instrumental in avidly promoting the lies that made the Vietnam War possible in the first place. No amount of rave reviews or Oscar nominations for “The Post” will change that awful truth.

**Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group [RootsAction.org](http://RootsAction.org) and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.”**

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# Russia-China Tandem Changes the World

The West's persistent demonization of Russia over the past decade has pushed Moscow into a de facto alliance with China, changing the geopolitical landscape in ways that U.S. pundits still won't admit, writes Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Much of what Western "experts" assert about Russia – especially its supposed economic and political fragility and its allegedly unsustainable partnership with China – is wrong, resulting not only from the limited knowledge of the real situation on the ground but from a prejudicial mindset that does not want to get at the facts, i.e. from wishful thinking.

Russia may not be experiencing dynamic growth, but over the past two years it has survived a crisis of circumstance in depressed oil prices and economic warfare against it by the West that would have felled less competently managed governments enjoying less robust popularity than is the case in Vladimir Putin's Russia. Moreover, as stagnant of Russia's GNP has been, the numbers have been on a par with Western Europe's very slow growth.

Meanwhile, Russian agriculture is booming, with the 2017 grain harvest the best in 100 years despite very adverse climatic conditions from early spring. In parallel, domestically produced farm machinery has been going from strength to strength. Other major Industrial sectors like civil aircraft production have revived with the launch of new and credible models for both domestic and export markets.

Major infrastructure projects representing phenomenal engineering feats like the bridge across the Kerch straits to Crimea are proceeding on schedule to successful termination in the full glare of regular television broadcasts. So where is this decrepit Russia that our Western commentators describe daily?

The chief reason for the many wrongheaded observations is not so hard to discover. The ongoing rampant conformism in American and Western thinking about Russia has taken control not only of our journalists and commentators but also of our academic specialists who serve up to their students and to the general public what is expected and demanded: proof of the viciousness of the "Putin regime" and celebration of the brave souls in Russia who go up against this regime, such as the blogger-turned-politician Alexander Navalny or Russia's own Paris Hilton, the socialite-turned-political-activist Ksenia Sochak.

Although vast amounts of information are available about Russia in open sources,

meaning the Russian press and commercial as well as state television, these are largely ignored. The sour grapes Russian opposition personalities who have settled in the United States are instead given the microphone to sound off about their former homeland. Meanwhile, anyone taking care to read, hear and analyze the words of Vladimir Putin becomes in these circles a "stooge." All of this limits greatly the accuracy and usefulness of what passes for expertise about Russia.

In short, the field of Russia studies suffers, as it also did during the heyday of the Cold War, from a narrow ideological perspective and from the failure to put information about Russia in some factually anchored framework of how Russia fits in a comparative international setting.

Just what this means was brought into perspective last week by a rare moment of erudition regarding Russia when professor emeritus of the London School of Economics Dominic Lieven delivered a lecture in Sochi at the latest Valdai Club annual meeting summarizing his take on the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Lieven, arguably the greatest living historian of imperial Russia, is one of the very rare birds who brought to his Russian studies a profound knowledge of the rest of the world and in particular of the other imperial powers of the Nineteenth Century with which Russia was competing. This knowledge takes in both hard and soft power, meaning on the one hand, military and diplomatic prowess and, on the other, the intellectual processes which are used to justify imperial domination and constitute a world view if not a full-fledged ideology.

### **Self-blinded 'Experts'**

By contrast, today's international relations "experts" lack the in-depth knowledge of Russia to say something serious and valuable for policy formulation. The whole field of area studies has atrophied in the United States over the past 20 years, with actual knowledge of history, languages, cultures being largely scuttled in favor of numerical skills that will provide sure employment in banks and NGOs upon graduation. The diplomas have been systematically depreciated.

The result of the foregoing is that there are very few academics who can put the emerging Russian-Chinese alliance into a comparative context. And those who do exist are systematically excluded from establishment publications and roundtable public discussions in the United States for not being sufficiently hostile to Russia.

If that were not the case, one could look at the Russian-Chinese partnership as it compares firstly with the American-Chinese partnership created by Richard

Nixon and Henry Kissinger, which is now being replaced by the emerging Russian-Chinese relationship. Kissinger was fully capable of doing this when he wrote his book *On China* in 2011, but Kissinger chose to ignore the Russian-Chinese partnership though its existence was perfectly clear when he was writing his text. Perhaps he did not want to face the reality of how his legacy from the 1970s had been squandered.

What we find in Kissinger's description of his accomplishments in the 1970s is that the American-Chinese partnership was all done at arm's length. There was no alliance properly speaking, no treaty, in keeping with China's firm commitment not to accept entanglement in mutual obligations with other powers. The relationship was two sovereign states conferring regularly on international developments of mutual interest and pursuing policies that in practice proceeded in parallel to influence global affairs in a coherent manner.

This bare minimum of a relationship was overtaken and surpassed by Russia and China some time ago. The relationship has moved on to ever larger joint investments in major infrastructure projects having great importance to both parties, none more so than the gas pipelines that will bring very large volumes of Siberian gas to Chinese markets in a deal valued at \$400 billion.

Meanwhile, in parallel, Russia has displaced Saudi Arabia as China's biggest supplier of crude oil, and trading is now being done in yuan rather than petrodollars. There is also a good deal of joint investment in high technology civilian and military projects. And there are joint military exercises in areas ever farther from the home bases of both countries.

I think it is helpful to look at this partnership as resembling the French-German partnership that steered the creation and development of what is now the European Union. From the very beginning, Germany was the stronger partner economically with France's economy experiencing relative stagnation. Indeed, one might well have wondered why the two countries remained in this partnership as nominal equals.

The answer was never hard to find: with its historical burden from the Nazi epoch, Germany was, and to this day remains, incapable of taking responsibility in its own name for the European Union. The French served as the smokescreen for German power. Since the 1990s, that role has largely been transferred to the E.U. central bodies in Brussels, where key decision-making positions are in fact appointed by Berlin. Yet, France remains an important junior partner in the German-driven process.

## **The Russian-Chinese Tandem**

One may say much the same about the Russian-Chinese tandem. Russia is essential to China because of Moscow's long experience managing global relations going back to the period of the Cold War and because of its willingness and ability today to stand up directly to the American hegemon, whereas China, with its heavy dependence on its vast exports to the U.S., cannot do so without endangering vital interests. Moreover, since the Western establishment sees China as the long-term challenge to its supremacy, it is best for Beijing to exercise its influence through another power, which today is Russia.

Of course, in light of the E.U.'s Brexit troubles and Trump's abandonment of world leadership, it is undeniably possible that China will step out of the shadows and seek to assume direction of global governance. But that would be problematic. China faces major domestic challenges including the transition of its economy from being led by exports to relying more on domestic consumption. That will absorb the attention of its political leadership for some time.

Kissinger, who has been an adviser to Trump, whispers in Trump's ear about the importance of separating Russia from China, but Kissinger's limited and outdated knowledge of Russia has caused him to underestimate the powerful motives behind the Russian-Chinese relationship. America's less gifted and informed pundits are even more clueless.

For one thing, given the sustained hostility directed at Russia from the West in general and from Washington in particular, it is inconceivable that Putin would be wooed away from Beijing by some flirtatious "come hither" gestures from the Trump administration even if that were politically possible for Trump to do. One of Putin's outstanding features is his loyalty to his friends and his principles as well as to his nation's interests.

As Putin revealed during his address and Q&A at the Valdai Club gathering this past week, he now bears a deep distrust of the West in light of its having taken crude advantage of Russia's weakness in the 1990s and by its expansion of NATO to Russian borders and other threatening actions. Whatever hopes Putin once may have held for warmer relations with the West, those hopes have been dashed over the past several years.

Putting personalities aside, Russian foreign policy has a commonality that is rare to see on the world stage: actions first, diplomatic charters later. Russia's political relations with China come on top of massive mutual investments that have taken many years to agree on and execute.

In the same way, Russia is proceeding with Japan to work towards a formal peace treaty by first putting in place massive trade and investment projects. It is entirely foreseeable that the first step to the treaty will be the start of

construction in 2018 of a railway bridge in the Far East linking the Russian island of Sakhalin with the mainland. The general contractor and engineering team is also in place: Arkady Rotenberg and his SGM Group. That bridge is the prerequisite for Japan and Russia signing a \$50 billion deal to build a railway bridge linking Sakhalin and Hokkaido. This bridge will draw the attention of the whole region to Russian-Japanese cooperation. It could be the foundation for a durable and not merely paper peace treaty resolving the territorial dispute over the Kurile Islands.

### **Lost Opportunities**

In light of these realities, it is puerile to speak of detaching Russia from China with the promise of normalized relations with the West. The opportunity to do that existed in the 1990s, when President Boris Yeltsin and his "Mr. Yes" Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev did everything possible to win U.S. agreement to Russian accession to NATO immediately following accession by Poland. To no avail.

Then again early in Putin's presidency, the Russians made a determined effort to win admission to the Western alliance. Again to no avail. Russia was excluded, and measures were taken to contain it, to place it in a small box as just another European regional power.

Finally, following the confrontation with the United States and Europe over their backing of the 2014 coup in Ukraine, followed by the Russian annexation/merger with Crimea, and Russian support for the insurgency in Ukraine's Donbas region, Russia openly was cast as the enemy. It was compelled to mobilize all of its friendships internationally to stay afloat. No state was more helpful in this regard than China. Such moments are not forgotten or betrayed.

The Kremlin understands full well that the West has nothing substantial to offer Russia as long as the U.S. elites insist on maintaining global hegemony at all costs. The only thing that could get the Kremlin's attention would be consultations to revise the security architecture of Europe with a view to bringing Russia in from the cold. This was the proposal of then President Dmitry Medvedev in 2010, but his initiative was met by stony silence from the West. Bringing in Russia would mean according it influence proportionate to its military weight, and that is something NATO has opposed tooth and nail to this day.

It is for this reason, the failure to seek solutions to the big issue of Russia's place in overall security, that the re-set initiative under Barack Obama failed. It is for this reason that Henry Kissinger's advice to Donald

Trump at the start of his presidency to offer relief from sanctions in return for progress on disarmament rather than implementation of the Minsk accords regarding the Ukraine crisis also failed, with Vladimir Putin giving a firm “nyet.”

Implicit in the few American “carrots” being extended to Russia these days is its acceptance of the anti-Russian regime in Ukraine and its authority over the heavily ethnic Russian areas of the Donbas and Crimea, concessions that would be politically devastating to Putin inside Russia. Yet, that “normalization” would still leave the much milder but still nasty “human rights” sanctions that the U.S. imposed in 2012 through the Magnitsky Act, driven by what the Kremlin regards as false propaganda surrounding the criminal case and death of accountant Sergei Magnitsky.

The sting of the Magnitsky Act was to discredit Russia and prepare the way for it being designated a pariah state. It came amidst an already longstanding campaign of demonization of the Russian president in the U.S. media. In fact, to begin to find a halfway normal period of bilateral relations, you would have to go back to before George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq, which Russia denounced along with Germany and France. The latter two powers got a tap on the wrist from Washington. For Russia, it was the start of a period of reckoning for its uncooperativeness with American global domination.

### **Demonizing Russia**

As for Europe and Russia, the question is very similar. To find mention of a strategic relationship, firstly from the German Foreign Ministry, you have to go back to before 2012. And what constituted normality then? At the time, renewal of the E.U.-Russia cooperation agreement was already being held up for years, nominally over a difference of views on the provisions of E.U. law governing gas deliveries through Russian-owned pipelines. Behind this difference was the total opposition of the Baltic States and Poland to anything resembling normal relations with Russia, for which they received full encouragement from the U.S.

The rallying cry was to put a stop to Russia’s status as “monopoly supplier” to Europe as regards gas, but also oil. Of course, no monopoly ever existed, nor does it exist today, but determined geopolitical actors never let such details stand in the way of policy formulation.

This hostility also played out in the contest of wills between the E.U. and Russia over introduction of a visa-free regime for travel by their respective citizens. Here the opposition of Germany’s Angela Merkel, justified by her vicious characterization of Russia as a mafia state, doomed the visa-free regime and by the same token doomed normal relations.

All of this unfinished business has to be addressed and put right for there to be any possibility of the U.S. and the E.U. ending their hostility toward Russia and for the Kremlin to regain any trust toward the West. Even then, however, Russia would not surrender its valued relationship with China.

In my view, the de facto Russian-Chinese alliance matches the de jure US-West European alliance. The net result of both is the partition of the world into two camps. We now have, in effect, a bipolar world that broadly resembles that of the Cold War, though still in a formative stage since many countries have not signed on definitively to one side or another.

Of course, more-or-less neutral states were also a feature of the Cold War, creating what was called the group of Nonaligned Nations, led back then by India and Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia no longer exists, but India has continued its tradition of let both poles court it, trying to eke out the greatest benefit to itself.

To be sure, a great many political scientists in the U.S., in Europe and in Russia as well, insist that we already have a multipolar world, saying that power is too diffuse in the world today, especially considering the rise of non-state actors after 1991. But the reality is that very few states or non-states can project power outside their own region. Only the two big blocs can do that.

The theoreticians defending multipolarity speak of a return to the balance of power of the Nineteenth Century, invoking the Congress of Vienna as a possible model for today's world governance. This is an approach that Henry Kissinger laid out in 1994 in his book *Diplomacy*.

Within Russia, this concept has found support in some influential think tanks and is most notably associated with Sergei Karaganov, head of the Council of Foreign and Defense Policy. Nonetheless, I maintain that everyday realities of power will decide this question. And is there anything inherently wrong with this de facto bipolar world, assuming the tensions can be managed and a major war averted?

In my view, two large blocs are more likely to keep global order because the scope of activities by proxies can be reined in – as often happened during the Cold War – by big powers not wanting their various clients to disrupt a functioning world order. The tails are less likely to wag the dog.

Moreover, as regards the Russia-China strategic partnership or alliance, Western observers should take comfort and not take alarm. The rise of China is a given whatever the constellation of great powers may wish. The close embrace of Russia and China also can serve as a moderating influence on China, given Russia's

greater experience in world leadership.

For all of the above positive and negative reasons, the Russia-China relationship should be viewed with equanimity in Western capitals

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## The Kissinger Backchannel to Moscow

**Exclusive:** Major U.S. media outlets insinuate that President Trump's advisers are traitors for secretly talking to Russians, but they ignore the history of Henry Kissinger doing the same thing for Richard Nixon, writes Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

Last week's [leak to the Washington Post](#) of an intelligence report about President Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner meeting with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak in early December to discuss a possible back channel to Moscow appears to represent the climax of the campaign of leaks against the Trump team regarding contacts between Trump associates and Russians.

The leak about Kushner came shortly after another sensational story [broadcast by CNN](#) on May 17 about U.S. intelligence picking up conversations among Russian officials during the presidential campaign in which they bragged about having cultivated a relationship with retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn and expressed the belief they could use him to influence Trump.

Those two leaks sandwiched extraordinary [testimony by former CIA Director John Brennan](#) before the House Intelligence Committee on May 23 in which he said he was concerned about "intelligence" regarding Russian efforts to "suborn" certain Americans – meaning to induce them to commit unlawful acts. That may have been a reference to the leaked interception of Russians bragging about their relationship with Flynn that had just been reported.

"It raised questions in my mind about whether the Russian's efforts were successful," Brennan said.

Then, Brennan offered an inflammatory comment reminiscent of McCarthyism. "Frequently people who go along a treasonous path do not know they are on a treasonous path until it is too late," Brennan said.

Unidentified former Obama national security officials immediately condemned the Kushner proposal to Kislyak for a backchannel – which occurred after Trump’s election but before his inauguration – as “not only highly improper but also possibly even illegal,” as Politico reported.

In an interview with the PBS NewsHour, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper followed that script, suggesting that the attempt to “mask this dialog” with Russia made the Kushner request inherently suspicious.

“Why all the cloak and dagger secrecy?” asked Clapper. “One wonders if there was something worse than that or more nefarious than that...”

Clapper also argued that the proposal for the channel was illegitimate because the meeting was held before Trump became president. “There is a distinction between reaching out, establishing lines of communication versus substantively interfering with the policy of the present administration,” he said.

### **The Kissinger Precedent**

But the Brennan-Clapper line insinuating that the Kushner request for contacts with the Russians was potentially treasonous collapses in light of the well-documented story of how President-elect Richard Nixon’s national security adviser-designate Henry Kissinger established his own personal backchannel to the Soviet leadership in 1968 using a known KGB operative with whom he had been meeting for years as his contact.

Historian Richard A. Moss of the Naval War College recently published an authoritative book-length study of the Kissinger backchannel showing that that Kissinger began setting up his backchannel to the Soviet government leadership through his Soviet contact in December 1968 soon after being named Nixon’s choice for national security adviser.

And it shows that Kissinger seized on the one Soviet government contact he already had to establish the backchannel. That was Boris Sedov, whom Kissinger knew to be a KGB operative. Kissinger had been acquainted with Sedov from the latter’s visits to Harvard. The two continued the contacts after Nixon’s election in 1968.

Moss’s book recounts how Kissinger used the Sedov channel to introduce the concept of “linkage” of different policy issues into negotiations with the Soviets. Sedov gave Kissinger a Soviet government paper on Middle East policy, according to Moss’s account. Only after Nixon’s inauguration did Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin agree that all further communication would be through Dobrynin.

Both the Kissinger-Sedov and Kissinger-Dobrynin channels were kept secret from the rest of the Nixon administration's national security apparatus, as recounted by Moss. Nixon agreed to set up a secure phone line in the White House linking him directly to Dobrynin. The U.S. intelligence agencies, the National Security Council staff and the Pentagon were kept in the dark about these conversations.

And to complete the parallels between the Kissinger backchannel episode and the Flynn and Kushner contacts with the Russians, Moss reveals that Sedov later bragged to a Lebanese-American about his contact with Kissinger -- a boast that was immediately picked up by FBI surveillance of Sedov.

Further, Oleg Kalugin, the head of the KGB's station in Washington, surely boasted to his Kremlin bosses about having "forged a close back channel tie with Henry Kissinger" – as Kalugin put it in his own memoirs – that would be useful in influencing Nixon's policy toward the Soviet Union.

Sedov later boasted to Kalugin that he had been so successful in cultivating Kissinger's assistant Richard Allen that he wanted to try to recruit Allen as an agent, according to Kalugin. But Kalugin rejected the proposal. (Allen went on to become President Ronald Reagan's first national security adviser.)

This history of Kissinger's Soviet backchannel in 1968 reveals Brennan's breathless alarm about Russian "suborning" Flynn or using the backchannel to manipulate Kushner as unworthy of a serious intelligence professional.

Nothing in the Kislyak report intercepted by U.S. intelligence suggests that Kushner's desire for the backchannel was for anything other than to discuss how to increase cooperation on issues of common interest. Two unidentified sources told ABC News that the Kushner-Kislyak meeting "was focused on the U.S. response to the crisis in Syria and other policy-related matters."

### **Need for Secrecy**

And the Trump transition team's reasons for wanting a private channel of communication with the Russians that would not be visible to the U.S. national security bureaucracy were precisely the same as those of Nixon and Kissinger.

Moss, the historian of the Kissinger backchannel, recalled in an opinion piece on the Kushner affair that Dobrynin's memoirs quote Kissinger as telling the Soviet Ambassador that the Nixon administration wanted to conduct a "most confidential exchange of views" with the Kremlin, because "The Soviet side . . . knows how to maintain confidentiality; but in our State Department, unfortunately, there are occasional leaks of information to the press."

The leak of the intelligence report of the Kushner-Kislyak meeting to The

Washington Post underscores the problem faced by the Trump team amid the flood of leaks about U.S.-Russian discussions that were conducted through official U.S. channels.

Demonstrating the intensity of the anti-Trump attitudes among many Obama officials – both those who have left the government and those who remain as holdovers – someone with access to the secret report was so determined to expose the Kushner backchannel as to reveal to the Russians what must be one of the most sensitive U.S. intelligence secrets of all – the U.S. capability to intercept Russia's diplomatic messages.

The idea of depending on a secure line of communication within the Russian Embassy for the backchannel was inherently unrealistic, but not because it would give the Russians some unfair advantage in negotiations. The real problem was that it would have been too awkward for a U.S. official to go to the Russian Embassy every time he wanted to use the channel. Indeed, it appears that the proposal was not pursued further because the Russians themselves were wary of it.

Moss, who says he is speaking for himself and not for the Naval War College, told this writer in an interview, "Better relations with the Russians would be a good thing." He noted several "areas of opportunity" including energy resources and cooperation on counter-terrorism in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. "If Kushner and Kislyak were discussing how to defeat ISIL that would be a perfectly legitimate thing," said Moss.

But Moss warns that the underlying political crisis in American society is a formidable obstacle to any shift by Trump in relations with Russia. Trump "feels he won the election fairly and that unelected bureaucrats are working against him," Moss observed, but "The people who suspect possible collusion between the Trump and Russian interference in the election may feel Trump is an illegitimate president."

Jared Kushner and Michael Flynn are obviously no Kissingers. But the insinuations from Brennan and others that Trump's advisers may have somehow crossed the line into treason is itself the crossing of a dangerous line into McCarthyism. And the mainstream U.S. news media is participating enthusiastically in the campaign to impugn the loyalty of Trump's advisers, even though there is still no public evidence to support such suspicions.

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# Trump's Chaotic Management Style

Donald Trump's White House – under the strong influence of tear-the-government-down agitator Steve Bannon – is doing exactly that with a chaotic policy style, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The fiasco of President Trump's executive order involving travel bans from selected Muslim-majority countries has consumed public attention for several days, although it was only one of several actions that have constituted the most disorganized and strife-laden opening ten days of any U.S. administration in memory.

This order deserves the vigorous criticism it has received on several grounds, but it is important to note how such a badly drafted document ever made it under the presidential pen in the first place. Reportedly it was the product of a small circle of political advisers surrounding Trump, with amazingly little input or review from any other parts of the government, including those parts responsible for implementing the order.

Not only were the responsible portions of the bureaucracy excluded; so were Trump's own cabinet appointees. Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, whose department is most directly involved in the implementation, was only halfway through receiving his first briefing on the new policy when the President signed the order.

Such an absence of an orderly policy-making process – an absence that has characterized not only the order about travel but several other of Trump's early actions – is markedly at odds with what has long been the usual procedure leading to presidential decisions involving major initiatives or redirections of U.S. foreign and security policy.

With only minor variations, most such major policy decisions in past administrations have been preceded by lengthy review and discussion, at multiple levels, among all the departments and agencies with responsibilities bearing on the subject at hand. Such review mostly takes place in interagency committees chaired by the National Security Council staff.

There are good and important reasons for such a process. Relevant realities that must be confronted, including political and diplomatic realities abroad, are best recognized and highlighted by those components of the government that have to deal with those realities every day or have a responsibility for monitoring

them. All relevant U.S. interests and objectives that could be affected by a policy change need to be considered.

### **Diverse Input**

Again, getting input from different departments and agencies that have specific responsibility for advancing different U.S. interests is the best way to ensure that all U.S. equities are taken into account. Then there are the potential unintended consequences and problems of interpretation and implementation that bedevil many major changes in policy. Having many different eyes, with different bureaucratic perspectives, being part of the review reduces the chance of overlooking such consequences and problems.

The order on travel and immigration was clearly and badly deficient on all of these grounds. Other early orders from the Trump White House may not have had as much immediately disruptive effect but, absent a decent policy process, also are deficient in the same way, with their overlooked problems likely to surface later.

Another of the early Trump directives, involving NSC machinery, reflects an inclination to keep operating in the same way that produced the travel ban. Trump's political adviser and chief ideologist Stephen Bannon, who reportedly played the biggest role in writing the travel order, has been given a permanent seat on the policymaking principals' committee, even as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of National Intelligence are denied such seats. Such an arrangement is certainly not aimed at accomplishing the legitimate and important purposes of policy review as mentioned above.

Bannon proudly told an interviewer a couple of years ago, "I'm a Leninist," explaining that "Lenin wanted to destroy the state, and that's my goal too."

One can already see Leninist tendencies in the Bannon-Trump White House, including with things like the handling of the anti-Muslim executive order. The Bolshevik leader installed what was called democratic centralism, with the "centralist" part being exceedingly tight control from the cabal at the top, and unquestioning obedience from everyone else. Other similarities between Petrograd 1917 and Washington 2017 can also be seen.

Probably we should focus most on Bannon's own words in conveying his sense of Leninism. No, he won't be able to destroy the state literally and send the United States into an anarchic state of nature. But he already has begun in effect to destroy it as far as policy formulation is concerned, with decisions coming out of the small band at the center.

As for the rest of the state, especially parts that include experienced and

well-informed officials with relevant responsibilities, the response will be, “Fall in line, or leave.”

### **A Risky Model**

The one instance in U.S. foreign policymaking since World War II that involved a major redirection that was run out of a White House vest pocket and excluded the normal policymaking machinery, and that in retrospect was successful, was Nixon and Kissinger’s opening to China in the early 1970s. One look at the personnel in corresponding positions in the current administration makes it immediately clear that this experience cannot be taken as a model.

Mr. Bannon, you’re no Henry Kissinger. Neither are you, Mr. Flynn. (And Mr. Trump, you’re no Nixon, at least as far as acumen about foreign affairs is concerned.) Even Kissinger himself later said that his method of running foreign policy and gaming the bureaucracy was so bizarre and so dependent on his own unusual skill set that no one else should ever try to run foreign policy the same way.

There was one other big decision in recent times for which there was no policy process and no opportunity for the relevant departments and bureaucracies to weigh in. There never were, in this case, any meetings in the Situation Room or any options papers that ever considered whether the decision to be taken was a good idea. This was the decision to launch the Iraq War of 2003.

The Deputy Secretary of State at the time, Richard Armitage, later commented, “There was never any policy process to break, by Condi [Rice] or anyone else. There never was one from the start. Bush didn’t want one, for whatever reason.”

And we all know how well that one worked out.

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

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