

# In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in October dealt with the impact of climate change, the Saudi role in Mideast bloodshed, and the ongoing Russia-gate melodrama and what it means to journalism.

["Galveston's BioLab Amid Global Warming"](#) by Joe Lauria, Oct. 2, 2017

["America Not Immune from Chaos"](#) by Ann Wright, Oct. 3, 2017

["How 2nd Amendment Distortions Kill"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 3, 2017

["The Mystery of the Russia-gate Puppies"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 4, 2017

["Shielding Saudis on Yemen Atrocities"](#) by Shireen Al-Adeimi, Oct. 5, 2017

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["President Zigzag"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 6, 2017

["The Rise of Britain's 'New Politics'"](#) by John Pilger, Oct. 6, 2017

["Kurdish Referendum Roils the Mideast"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Oct. 7, 2017

["Agent Orange: Vietnam's Ongoing Calamity"](#) by Marjorie Cohn & Jonathan Moore, Oct. 9, 2017

["Anti-Nuke Activists Win Nobel Prize"](#) by Elizabeth Murray, Oct. 9, 2017

["Russia-gate Jumps the Shark"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 10, 2017

["The Osage Indian Murder Mystery"](#) by James DiEugenio, Oct. 11, 2017

["Catalonia and the 'Europe of Regions'"](#) by Andrew Spannaus, Oct. 11, 2017

["Why North Korea Wants Nuke Deterrence"](#) by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Oct. 12, 2017

["Trump's War for Coal Raises Risks"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Oct. 13, 2017

["The Legacy of Reagan's Civilian 'Psyops'"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 13, 2017

["Trump's North Korea Delusions"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Oct. 14, 2017

["Fueling More Bloodshed in Ukraine"](#) by James W. Carden, Oct. 14, 2017

["How Netanyahu Pulls Trump's Strings"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 15, 2017

**"Iraqi Forces Clash with Kurdish Militia"** by Joe Lauria, Oct. 16, 2017

**"Why the Vengeance Toward Sgt. Bergdahl"** by Matthew Hoh, Oct. 17, 2017

**"Blaming Russia for the Internet 'Sewer'"** by Robert Parry, Oct. 18, 2017

**"The Indonesia Massacre's Historic Message"** by Jonathan Marshall, Oct. 19, 2017

**"Man Bites Dog: NYT Does Journalism"** by Robert Parry, Oct. 19, 2017

**"Clinton, Assange and the War on Truth"** by John Pilger, Oct. 20, 2017

**"As Trump Preens, Puerto Rico Still Suffers"** by Dennis J. Bernstein, Oct. 23, 2017

**"Russia-China Tandem Changes the World"** by Gilbert Doctorow, Oct. 23, 2017

**"Trump's Praise for Philippines' Killer-President"** by Jonathan Marshall, Oct. 24, 2017

**"Getting the Left to Embrace US 'Exceptionalism'"** by James W. Carden, Oct. 24, 2017

**"California Wildfires Inflict More Devastation"** by Dennis J Bernstein and Miguel Gavilan Molina, Oct. 24, 2017

**"What Did Hillary Clinton Know?"** by Robert Parry, Oct. 25, 2017

**"Iraqi Kurds Suffer Major Setback"** by Joe Lauria, Oct. 25, 2017

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**"Russia-gate Breeds 'Establishment McCarthyism'"** by Robert Parry, Oct. 26, 2017

**"Guardians of the Magnitsky Myth"** by Robert Parry, Oct. 28, 2017

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**"How America Spreads Global Chaos"** by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Oct. 30, 2017

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## Getting the Left to Embrace US ‘Exceptionalism’

**Exclusive:** Neocons have deftly used the Left’s hatred of President Trump and the demonizing of Russia to lure liberals and progressives into an interventionist mindset to defend “American exceptionalism,” observes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

Last year, Donald J. Trump triumphed over 15 Republican primary opponents and a Democratic candidate with an impressive résumé largely on the strength of a simple four-word message: “Make America Great Again.”

Trump’s slogan worked even though President Obama offered the rejoinder, “America is already great,” and Hillary Clinton made the counterpoint that “America is great because America is good.”

Since Trump’s victory nearly a year ago, the major American media has often reprised the Obama-Clinton messaging that America is already great as though Trump, the most unabashedly jingoistic president since perhaps Ronald Reagan, needs reminding.

Yet in Trump’s Washington, where the bipartisan foreign policy consensus is wrongly perceived to be under attack, the Establishment has been circling the wagons in order to fend off what is viewed as Trump’s frontal assault on the core tenets of American exceptionalism.

Soon after the election, political and media elites, particularly those within Democratic Party circles, began to express their dismay at Trump’s seeming disregard for what, to their way of thinking, America represents to the rest of the world.

Two months into the Trump presidency, a former Obama State Department official whose specialty is described by the most amorphous and flexible of

constructions, “human rights,” took to the pages of The Atlantic magazine to inform readers that since the November election “the global club of autocrats has been crowing about Trump” because he, like they, takes a dim a view of “democracy, human rights, and transparency.”

Autocrats, declared Tom Malinkowski, now a Democratic candidate for Congress in New Jersey, were said to be delighted by Trump’s election because, “they’ve heard him echo their propaganda that America is too crooked and corrupt to preach moral standards to others.”

“This,” wrote Malinkowski, “makes me sad.”

Likewise, Obama’s National Security Adviser Susan Rice also has expressed alarm that the administration has been busy “jettisoning American values and abdicating United States leadership of the world.”

Rice believes that “The network of alliances that distinguishes America from other powers and has kept our nation safe and strong for decades is now in jeopardy. We will see the cost when next we need the world to rally to our side.”

### **Fears for American Hegemony**

A number of liberal journalists have been quick to join the fretting. At The Intercept, a foreign affairs analyst worried that Trump is letting American global hegemony slip away.

“Through a network of nearly 800 military bases located in 70 countries around the globe, in addition to an array of trade deals and alliances,” wrote Murtaza Hussain, “the U.S. has cemented its influence for decades across both Europe and Asia. American leaders helped impose a set of rules and norms that promoted free trade, democratic governance – in theory, if not always in practice – and a prohibition on changing borders militarily, using a mixture of force and suasion to sustain the systems that keep its hegemony intact.”

Over at Slate, Yascha Mounk, opined that, with regard to Russia, “Trump likes Putin because he admires his strong (read: autocratic) leadership. And he sees him as an ally because he shares Putin’s disdain for the liberal order, preferring a world in which strong powers do what they like in their spheres of influence without having to worry about obeying – much less enforcing – international norms or human rights.”

Similarly, when The New Republic’s Jeet Heer recently delved into the realm of U.S.-Russia relations, he warned readers that “The problem is not just the nature of Putin’s autocratic government, which uses social conservatism and

nationalism to hold together a nation frayed by massive economic inequality. ... The problem is that Russia's foreign policy threatens to export many of the Putin regime's worst features, particularly xenophobia and homophobia."

For Her the proper response to Putin's foreign policy is obvious: "Fighting Trumpism in America is not enough. Leftists have to be ready to battle it in all its forms, at home and abroad."

In other words, it's time now to undertake yet another global crusade against Russia.

By this point it should be clear that what these worthies are doing is conflating a vision of a liberal, tolerant America with American hegemony; their concerns always come back to their quite unfounded worry that Trump is in the process of repudiating the unipolar fantasy that they themselves buy into and seek to perpetuate.

### **Innocents Abroad?**

Among many other problems, the hubristic nature of American Exceptionalist ideology feeds delusions of innocence, which serve to prevent a critical rethinking of America's recent, mainly catastrophic adventures abroad. We can see how this tendency manifests itself in the mainstream media.

In July, The New York Times published a piece that whitewashed the motives behind the decision by George W. Bush's White House to invade Iraq. "When the United States invaded Iraq 14 years ago to topple Saddam Hussein," wrote reporter Tim Arango, "it saw Iraq as a potential cornerstone of a democratic and Western-facing Middle East."

This is now par for the course. The media critic Adam Johnson has rightly pointed out that "nominally down-the-middle reporters are allowed to mind-read U.S. policy makers' motives so long as they conclude that those motives were noble and in good faith. Never are reporters allowed to ascribe sinister motives to U.S. officials—this is only permissible when covering America's enemies."

Similarly, the illegal American intervention in the Syrian war was portrayed as "self-defense" when U.S. forces shot down a Syrian fighter jet over Raqqa in June. "The Syrian regime and others in the regime need to understand," said White House spokesman Sean Spicer (who has now since mercifully resigned), "that we will retain the right of self-defense, of coalition forces aligned against ISIS."

Time was, during the early years of the First Cold War, that public intellectuals often looked askance at America's belief in its innate virtue.

Within a decade of the allied victory in the Second World War, during which time American power and prestige was at its zenith, prominent Anglo-American thinkers, including Graham Greene, George Kennan and Reinhold Niebuhr were already casting a gimlet eye on the pretenses of the “American Century.”

Where are the contrarian voices such as these calling for restraint and reflection now that we are in the throes of a Second Cold War? They are almost utterly absent from mainstream American political discourse.

### **A Bipartisan Pretense**

Part of the reason Trump won, of course, is that he plays and feeds into the very same pretenses that the both the Establishment and the public does – though in cruder form. There is only a difference in degree, not in kind, between “Make America Great Again” and “America Is Already Great” since both are premised on the same line of reasoning: America, due to its providential founding, cannot be and is not a normal country: it is exceptional, a “shining city on a hill.”

The idea that Trump himself hasn’t embraced and internalized the core tenets of American exceptionalism is laughable – and even some neoconservatives, like Bloomberg’s Eli Lake, have begun to notice. Lake, observing Trump’s September speech to the United Nations General Assembly, cracked, “For a moment, I closed my eyes and thought I was listening to a Weekly Standard editorial meeting.”

Yet there’s an insoluble problem that remains for the adherents of the myth of American exceptionalism: the presumption that the rest of the world buys into the myth which largely rests upon a willful misunderstanding of the past, and blinds us to available alternatives, such as realism.

Some on the Left see little cause for concern. America, by their lights, *should* intervene all over the world on a values crusade. Leftist journals like Dissent and Jacobin have endeavored to excuse the Trotskyite impulse to political violence. In this way neoconservatism, the American variant of Trotskyism, is not dead yet, it remains a zombie ideology that haunts the country.

Forget anti-imperialism, some Leftists say, it’s Trumpian nationalism that is the real problem. And there are indeed elements of Trumpian nationalism that are troubling. But is the answer a crusade to impose, in the felicitous phrasing of neocon propagandist Max Boot, “the rule of law, property rights and other guarantees, at gunpoint if need be?”

In the end, the ideology of American Exceptionalism feeds delusions of American Innocence and prepares the ground for military intervention the world over. Is that really the right way to oppose Donald Trump?

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

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## Fueling More Bloodshed in Ukraine

**Exclusive:** In the U.S., Russia-hating liberals are joining the neocons in seeking more war in Ukraine, as the prospects for a rational and peaceful resolution to the crisis continue to fade, explains James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

Last January, Sen. John McCain led a delegation along with his longtime sidekick, Sen. Lindsey Graham, to a contingent of Ukrainian troops not far from the front line in eastern Ukraine. In the presence of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Graham told the soldiers: “Your fight is our fight ... 2017 will be the year of offense. All of us will go back to Washington and we will push the case against Russia.”

McCain promised the assembled troops, “we will do everything we can to provide you with what you need to win.”

When contemplating the long careers of the two Republican senators, it is hard to escape the conclusion that McGeorge Bundy’s quip about the famed Cold War columnist Joe Alsop – that he had “never known him to go to any area where blood could be spilled that he didn’t come back and say more blood” – applies equally to McCain and Graham.

Indeed, last month’s National Defense Authorization Act shows that – if nothing else – McCain and Graham are as good as their word: the recently passed defense appropriations bill provides for \$500 million, including “defensive lethal assistance” to Kiev, as part of a \$640 billion overall spending package.

The aid comes at a good time for the embattled Ukrainian President Poroshenko, whose approval rating hovers around 16 percent. In a bid to stave off the possibility of a far-right *coup d’etat*, Poroshenko is back to banging the war drums, promising, well, more blood.

In a little covered speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on Sept. 19, Poroshenko promised that “American weapons will help us liberate the Donbas

and return Ukrainian territories.” He also noted that Ukraine spends roughly 6 percent of its GDP on defense, “a figure,” he observed, “much bigger than the obligation for the NATO members.”

Clearly Washington’s condemnation of governments that wage war “against their own people” remains selective, contingent upon who is doing the killing and who is doing the dying. In this case, it would seem that Russian-speaking Ukrainians simply don’t rate.

In addition to promising a wider war in the Donbas, Poroshenko has repeatedly promised that he will seek NATO membership. In August, during a visit by U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis, Poroshenko declared: “Our Ukrainian caravan is on a roll and we have one road to travel upon – a wide Euro-Atlantic highway, leading to membership in the European Union and NATO.”

### **Ukraine’s Human Rights Abuses**

There are a number of objections to yet another round of NATO expansion. As I reported in February 2015: “The current [Ukrainian] government has, according to organizations that could hardly be described as Kremlin friendly (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), committed war crimes in its attempt to defeat the Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas. ... NATO’s principal consideration should not be whether NATO will make Ukraine more secure, but whether Ukraine will make NATO more secure. The answer is self-evident.”

It is true that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, as recently as this month, insisted to Russian state media that NATO is not contemplating Ukrainian membership, telling Sputnik that “There is no MAP [membership action plan] on the agenda.” Yet Stoltenberg has also said, as he did in a speech to the Ukrainian parliament in July, that he believes Ukraine “has the right to choose its own security arrangements” further noting that “last month, NATO welcomed Montenegro as the 29th member of our Alliance. This shows that NATO’s door remains open.”

So the issue doesn’t seem to be going away.

Poroshenko’s push to join NATO, which is being made against the backdrop of ever-worsening relations between the U.S. and Russia, ignores, perhaps purposefully, one of the principal causes of the morass in which Kiev and Moscow find themselves. It was Moscow’s not unfounded fear that Ukraine might join NATO that helped spark the Ukrainian crisis in early 2014.

In the weeks prior to Russia’s annexation of Crimea (and just over a month before the outbreak of full hostilities in the Donbas), three former presidents



of Ukraine (Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yushchenko) called on the post-Maidan regime to renounce the 2010 Kharkiv agreement which allowed for Russia to base its Black Sea naval fleet in Crimea (in return for discounted prices on Russian natural gas).

It is perhaps not unreasonable that this last move, in addition to the foreign policy and security protocols embedded within the European Union Association agreement (which Poroshenko signed in June 2014), would cause the Russian government to at the very least suspect that NATO was setting the stage for Ukraine's eventual absorption into the alliance.

Indeed, Kiev's launch of its violent and indiscriminate "Anti-Terrorist Operation" against the Donbas – with the effect of intimidating and alienating otherwise loyal Russian-speaking citizens in the eastern part of the country – surely played a role in the Kremlin's decision to come to the aid of the rebels later in the summer of 2014 and again at Debaltseve early the following year.

### **Less Dangerous Options**

One reasonable alternative to NATO membership would be a treaty along the lines of the 1955 Austrian State Treaty, which was an agreement reached between the four post-World War II occupying powers (U.S., USSR, Great Britain and France) that granted Austria its independence "with the understanding," according to the U.S. State Department, "that the newly independent state of Austria would declare its neutrality, creating a buffer zone between the East and the West," meaning it would join neither NATO nor the Soviet-run Warsaw Pact.

Charles Bohlen, the legendary American diplomat who served as ambassador to Moscow from 1953-57, recalled in his memoir *Witness To History* that, with regard to the Austrian State Treaty, he believed "that the Kremlin leaders, and probably the Soviet military chiefs, decided that a genuinely neutral Austria was of more value to Soviet Russia than the maintenance of a divided country where the Red Army would occupy only the poorer half."

The situation in postwar Austria – occupied by East and West – is not perfectly analogous to the situation that obtains in Ukraine today, but there seem to be lessons from what Bohlen intuited were the Kremlin's motives that might be drawn upon to inform Western diplomacy.

But instead of trying to implement the Minsk peace agreement (which calls for the Donbas to remain as part of Ukraine but with more autonomy from Kiev) or search for a reasonable alternative to what are indeed perplexing and pressing matters of national security, Poroshenko has continued to ring the alarm over the another, this time illusory, Russian invasion.

In a recent speech before the Ukrainian parliament, Poroshenko claimed “there is more and more evidence for [Russia’s] preparations for an offensive war of continental proportions.”

Yet perhaps the danger isn’t as clear and present as Poroshenko portrayed it. As Mary Dejevesky of the U.K.’s Independent has observed: “Nato itself had held exercises in the Black Sea and before that in and around the western borderlands of Ukraine. Who, it has to be asked here, is threatening whom?”

Indeed, if Russia was on the precipice of launching a land war in Eastern Europe, would it have cut its defense budget by 25 percent to \$48 billion a year, as was recently announced by the Kremlin?

As difficult as it might be for our hearty band on new cold warriors to believe (some of whom have scant knowledge about the topic of U.S.-Russia relations on which they so frequently choose to declaim), the push for a peaceable settlement in Ukraine is coming not from Washington, but from Moscow and Berlin.

Nevertheless, the stalemate continues: a resolution to the Ukrainian conflict – through the implementation of the Minsk agreements, as well as a settlement of the outstanding security concerns of *all* parties to the conflict – seems to remain tragically out of reach.

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

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in August focused on Official Washington’s growing hostility toward dissent, the Trump administration’s drift toward more endless warfare, and the worsening crises in Korea and Mideast.

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**“A Blacklisted Film and the New Cold War”** by Robert Parry, Aug. 2, 2017

**“How the World May End”** by John Pilger, Aug. 4, 2017

**“Neocons Leverage Trump-Hate for More Wars”** by Robert Parry, Aug. 5, 2017

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## Refusing to Learn Lessons from Libya

**Exclusive:** Official Washington never likes to admit a mistake no matter how grave or obvious. Too many Important People would look bad. So, the rationalizations never stop as with the Libyan fiasco, observes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

In recent weeks, the *Washington Post's* Cairo bureau chief Sudarsan Raghavan has published a series of remarkable dispatches from war-torn Libya, which is still reeling from the aftermath of NATO's March 2011 intervention and the subsequent overthrow and murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

On July 2, Raghavan [reported on](#) what amounts to Libya's modern-day slave trade. According to his report, Libya is "now home to a thriving trade in humans. Unable to pay exorbitant smuggling fees or swindled by traffickers, some of the world's most desperate people are being held as slaves, tortured or forced into prostitution."

The numbers help tell the tale. "The number of migrants departing from Libya is surging," writes Raghavan, "with more than 70,000 arriving in Italy so far this year, a 28 percent increase over the same period last year."

On August 1, Raghavan returned to the pages of the *Post* with a disturbing portrait of life in Tripoli, reporting that: “Six years after the revolution that toppled dictator Moammar Gaddafi, the mood in this volatile capital is a meld of hopelessness and gloom. Diplomatic and military efforts by the United States and its allies have failed to stabilize the nation; the denouement of the crisis remains far from clear. Most Libyans sense that the worst is yet to come.”

Raghavan notes that “Under Gaddafi, the oil-producing country was once one of the world’s wealthiest nations.” Under his rule, “Libyans enjoyed free health care, education and other benefits under the eccentric strongman’s brand of socialism.” It would be difficult not to see, Raghavan writes, “the insecurity that followed Gaddafi’s death has ripped apart the North African country.”

Taken together, Raghavan’s reports should come as a rude shock to stalwart supporters of NATO’s intervention in Libya. Yet the embarrassing fervor with which many embraced the intervention remains largely undiminished – with, as we will see, one notable exception.

### **An Upside-Down Meritocracy**

Anne Marie Slaughter, who served as policy planning chief at the State Department under Hillary Clinton, emailed her former boss after the start of the NATO operation, to say: “I cannot imagine how exhausted you must be after this week, but I have never been prouder of having worked for you.”

Five months after the start of NATO operation against Gaddafi, Slaughter went public with her approval in an op-ed for the *Financial Times* titled “Why Libya Skeptics Were Proved Badly Wrong.” Proving, if nothing else, that the foreign policy establishment is a reverse meritocracy, Slaughter holds an endowed chair at Princeton and is also the well-compensated president of the influential Washington think tank New America.

President Obama’s decision to intervene received wide bipartisan support in the Congress and from media figures across the political spectrum, including Bill O’Reilly and Cenk Uyghur.

Yet the *casus belli* used to justify the intervention, as a U.K. parliamentary report made clear last September, was based on a lie: that the people of the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi were in imminent danger of being slaughtered by Gaddafi’s forces.

The report, issued by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, states that “Despite his rhetoric, the proposition that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered the massacre of civilians in Benghazi was not supported by the available

evidence.”

The report also noted that while “Many Western policymakers genuinely believed that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered his troops to massacre civilians in Benghazi ... this did not necessarily translate into a threat to everyone in Benghazi. In short, the scale of the threat to civilians was presented with unjustified certainty. US intelligence officials reportedly described the intervention as ‘an intelligence-light decision.’”

Even as it became clear that the revolution had proved to be a disaster for the country, the arbiters of acceptable opinion in Washington continued to insist that NATO’s intervention was not only a success, but the right thing to do. It is a myth that has gained wide purchase among D.C.’s foreign policy cognoscenti, despite the judgment of former President Barack Obama, who famously described the intervention as “a shit show.”

### **Still Spinning**

A full year after the commencement of NATO’s campaign against Gaddafi, former NATO Ambassador Ivo Daalder and NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stravidis took to the pages of that reliable bellwether of establishment opinion, *Foreign Affairs*, to declare that “NATO’s operation in Libya has rightly been hailed as a model intervention.”

According to Daalder and Stravidis, “the alliance responded rapidly to a deteriorating situation that threatened hundreds of thousands of civilians rebelling against an oppressive regime.”

In 2016, a Clinton campaign press release justifying the ill-starred intervention, claimed “Qadhafi and his regime made perfectly clear what their plans were for dealing with those who stood up against his reign, using disgusting language in urging his backers to cleanse the country of these rebels. This was a humanitarian crisis.”

Astonishingly, the campaign “Factsheet” goes on to assert that, “there was no doubt that further atrocities were on the way, as Qadhafi’s forces storming towards the county’s second biggest city.” Yet there is, as both the U.K. parliamentary report and a Harvard study by Alan J. Kuperman found, no evidence for this whatsoever.

“Qaddafi did not perpetrate a ‘bloodbath’ in any of the cities that his forces recaptured from rebels prior to NATO intervention – including Ajdabiya, Bani Walid, Brega, Ras Lanuf, Zawiya, and much of Misurata – so there was,” writes Kuperman, “virtually no risk of such an outcome if he had been permitted to recapture the last rebel stronghold of Benghazi.”

Nevertheless, the myth persists. Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Shadi Hamid, the author of *Islamic Exceptionalism*, continues to insist, against all evidence, that the intervention was a success.

“The Libya intervention was successful,” says Hamid, “The country is better off today than it would have been had the international community allowed dictator Muammar Qaddafi to continue his rampage across the country.”

In this, Hamid is hardly alone. Left-activists in thrall to a Trotskyite vision of permanent revolution also continue to make the case that NATO’s intervention was a net positive for the country.

In a recent interview with *In These Times*, Leila Al-Shami claimed that “If Gaddafi had not fallen, Libya now would look very much like Syria. In reality, the situation in Libya is a million times better. Syrian refugees are fleeing to Libya. Far fewer people have been killed in Libya since Gaddafi’s falling than in Syria. Gaddafi being ousted was a success for the Libyan people.”

That danger in all this is that by refusing to learn the lessons of Libya (and Kosovo and Iraq and Syria) the U.S. foreign policy establishment will likely continue to find itself backing forces that seek to turn the greater Middle East into a fundamentalist Sunnistan, ruled by Sharia law, utterly hostile to religious pluralism, the rights of women, minorities and, naturally, U.S. national security interests in the region.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Hillary Clinton’s Failed Libya ‘Doctrine.’”]

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

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## Hillary Clinton Promised Wars, Too

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

By James W. Carden

The alliance between neoconservatives and the Democratic foreign policy

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

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

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

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

The argument here isn't that Trump isn't awful (which is something I've never argued); it's that he's proven to be every bit as bad as some of us reasonably expected Clinton would have been; and if one takes the time to consult the Clinton campaign's own briefing papers and fact sheets, one will find that on issue after issue, Clinton invariably took hawkish positions that reflected the fact that Clinton was (and remains) a saber-rattler *par excellence* – very much on par with the current occupant of the White House.

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

### **No Regrets on 'Regime Change'**

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



of the brutal Assad regime.”

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

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

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

Trump has done much as Clinton would have done by, among other things: slapping sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea; pledging unlimited support to Israel; reassuring “our allies” in the Persian Gulf and eastern Europe; condemning Russia’s actions in eastern Ukraine; expanding military operations in eastern Syria; and lobbing none-to-veiled threats at the left-wing government in Venezuela.

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

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

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in July focused on the first meeting between

Presidents Trump and Putin, the growing chaos surrounding the Trump administration, and the ongoing violence in the Middle East.

["Trump Takes Aim at Energy R&D Funds"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jul. 1, 2017

["What Trump Can Expect from Putin"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jul. 1, 2017

["Foisting Blame for Cyber-hacking on Russia"](#) by Gareth Porter, Jul. 2, 2017

["The Democratic Party's Deadly Dead-End"](#) by Nicolas J S Davies, Jul. 3, 2017

["Russia-China Tandem Shifts Global Power"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jul. 3, 2017

["Grim Lessons from a Faraway War"](#) by Don North, Jul. 4, 2017

["The Price of America's Endless Wars"](#) by Kathy Kelly, Jul. 4, 2017

["The Fight over Mexican-American Books"](#) by Dennis J Bernstein, Jul. 6, 2017

["MSM, Still Living in Propaganda-ville"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 6, 2017

["Macron Cracks Down on French Liberty"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jul. 7, 2017

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["The Syrian Test of Trump-Putin Accord"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jul. 8, 2017

["Ten Problems with Anti-Russian Obsession"](#) by Rick Sterling, Jul. 9, 2017

["Trump and the New Mideast Paradox"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Jul. 10, 2017

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["Intel Vets Challenge 'Russia Hack' Evidence"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Jul. 24, 2017

["Pitching the 'Forever War' in Afghanistan"](#) by James W Carden, Jul. 25, 2017

["House GOP Seeks to Curb Yemen War"](#) by Dennis J Bernstein, Jul. 26, 2017

["PBS' Anti-Russia Propaganda Series"](#) by Rick Sterling, Jul. 27, 2017

["The World's Shift to Electric Cars"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jul. 28, 2017

["The Dawn of an Orwellian Future"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 28, 2017

["An Interview with WikiLeaks' Assange"](#) by Randy Credico & Dennis J Bernstein, Jul. 29, 2017

["Jerry Meldon's Passion for History"](#), Jul. 29, 2017

["Can Trump Find the 'Great' Path?"](#) by Robert Parry, Jul. 30, 2017

["Shielding Israel from Popular Outrage"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Jul. 31, 2017

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# Pitching the 'Forever War' in Afghanistan

**Exclusive:** Rather than rethink U.S. policy in the Mideast, particularly the entangling alliances with Israel and Saudi Arabia, Official Washington pushes schemes to perpetuate the “forever war” in Afghanistan, writes James W Carden.

By James W Carden

In May, the founder of the mercenary-for-hire group Blackwater (now since remained Academi), Erik Prince took to the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* to propose that the Pentagon employ “private military units” and appoint a “viceroy” to oversee the war in Afghanistan.

According to Prince, who has been actively lobbying for what he calls an “East India Company approach” as the solution to America’s longest war (16 years, \$117 billion and counting), “In Afghanistan, the viceroy approach would reduce rampant fraud by focusing spending on initiatives that further the central strategy, rather than handing cash to every outstretched hand from a U.S. system bereft of institutional memory.” (Prince naturally failed to say if his were among those “outstretched hands”)

On July 10, *The New York Times* reported that Prince and the owner of the military contractor Dyn Corporation, Stephen Feinberg, have, at the request of Stephen K. Bannon and Jared Kushner, been pushing a plan to, in effect, privatize the war effort in Afghanistan. (In recent weeks both The Nation and The American Conservative have published deep-dive investigative pieces into the behind the scenes machinations of would-be Viceroys Prince and Feinberg).

According to the *Times* report “The strategy has been called ‘the Laos option,’ after America’s shadowy involvement in Laos during the war in neighboring Vietnam.”

If so, then “the Laos option” is an unfortunate moniker for their strategy given the fact that the during America’s war over Laos (1964-73) the U.S. dropped 2.5 million tons of munitions on that country as part of the failed effort in Vietnam, which finally ended when the U.S. embassy in Saigon was evacuated in 1975.

It is worth mentioning, since we so often overlook the “collateral damage” caused by our overseas adventures, that in the 40-plus years since the cessation of operations in Laos that 20,000 Laotians have been killed by unexploded

ordinance dropped that had been dropped during that illegal nine-year campaign.

And while Prince and Feinberg have (so far anyway) gotten the cold shoulder from National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Pentagon Chief James Mattis, momentum is picking up for once again ramping up American involvement in Afghanistan among some of the (allegedly) more sophisticated members of the foreign policy establishment.

### **More Armchair Warmongering**

On July 11, former Deputy Defense Secretary Michele Flournoy and think tank functionary Richard Fontaine published a piece for the purportedly realist *National Interest* magazine that attempted to assure readers that “The Afghan War Is Not Lost.” Why not? Because even though there are roughly 8,400 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, “*More troops* can help achieve American objectives in Afghanistan, but only if they are part of a larger and more effective strategy.” [Emphasis mine].

The stress on more troops (if not to say, thousands upon thousands of unaccountable mercenaries in the pay of Feinberg and Prince) is deeply concerning because if anyone can be said to be a reliable barometer of prevailing opinion inside the Beltway it is Flournoy.

Readers may recall that Flournoy co-chaired the Obama administration’s Afghanistan policy review, which led to the President’s ill-fated December 2009 decision to send 33,000 American troops (plus a contingent of 7,000 from NATO) to prop up the Karzai regime in Afghanistan. The following year, 2010, would end up as the bloodiest one yet for coalition forces in Afghanistan. Indeed, nearly three-fourth of all American casualties in that war took place in the years following Obama’s decision to “surge” in Afghanistan.

But give Flournoy (who was at the top of Hillary Clinton’s short list to be Defense Secretary) credit: she persists. Today Flournoy and her frequent co-author Fontaine (both are executives of the hawkish think tank Center for a New American Security) say that American should commit to Afghanistan “indefinitely”:

“The centerpiece of the administration’s Afghanistan strategy must therefore be a clear and sustained American commitment to Afghanistan. By forswearing deadlines and making clear that the United States will support the Afghan government and security forces indefinitely and until they are able to hold their own, Washington can telegraph to the Taliban that it will not succeed in retaking the country.”

Worryingly, some members of Congress seem to be on board. In early July, a

bipartisan delegation including Senators John McCain, Lindsey Graham and Elizabeth Warren toured Pakistan and Afghanistan and called for greater military involvement in the region. Speaking on behalf of the delegation, McCain noted, “none of us would say that we’re on course to a success here in Afghanistan.”

### **The Forever War**

Driving the push to send more troops is the fact that, as Flournoy and Fontaine point out, the “Taliban today controls more territory than at any time since 9/11. Faced with corruption and exclusionary politics, popular opposition to the government in Kabul is rising, while the Taliban makes inroads in rural areas and, increasingly, near the cities.” This is no doubt the case.

And proponents of the forever war in Afghanistan are correct when they say, as they inevitably do, that the Taliban provided sanctuary to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda in the lead up to 9/11. But these same proponents usually neglect to note that bin Laden and Al Qaeda were motivated by the U.S.-Israeli special relationship and, according to the 9/11 Report, “grievances against the United States” that were “widely shared in the Muslim world.” Bin Laden “inveighed against the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia ... and against other U.S. policies in the Middle East.”

But, in the intervening years between 2001 and now, Al Qaeda’s leadership has been decimated, and according to a Brown University study, “the United States has spent or taken on obligations to spend more than \$3.6 trillion in current dollars on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria and on the Department of Homeland Security” in the years following 9/11.

Meanwhile other alternative strategies (such as the “offshore balancing strategy” advocated by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt) have never been tried. As I wrote at Consortiumnews in June, “there *are* alternatives (there always are). It’s just that these tend not to have the institutional backing of Washington’s policy/think tank community which, because it is deeply compromised by its defense industry funders, rarely given them voice or consideration.”

If the U.S. is to successfully combat terrorism emanating out of the Middle East a wholesale re-evaluation of U.S. policy is in order, particularly with regard to Israel and Saudi Arabia. To gloss over this is to miss the point.

And proponents of expanding and privatizing the war in Afghanistan miss it entirely.

**James W Carden is a contributing writer for The Nation and editor of The American Committee for East-West Accord’s eastwestaccord.com. He previously**

served as an advisor on Russia to the Special Representative for Global Inter-governmental Affairs at the US State Department.

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in June dealt with the seemingly endless Russia-gate frenzy, President Trump's stumbling debut on the global stage and Oliver Stone's insightful interviews with Vladimir Putin.

["Missing the Real Noriega Story"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jun. 1, 2017

["Hillary Clinton's Deceptive Blame-Shifting"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 1, 2017

["Hiding the Ugly Business of Torture"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jun. 2, 2017

["Trump Tumbles into Saudi-Israeli Trap"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Jun. 3, 2017

["The Kissinger Backchannel to Moscow"](#) by Gareth Porter, Jun. 3, 2017

["Will the Neocons' Long War Ever End?"](#) by Nicolas JS Davies, Jun. 5, 2017

["McMaster Urges Another Afghan 'Surge'"](#) by James W Carden, Jun. 5, 2017

["Russia-gate's Mythical Heroes"](#) by Coleen Rowley, Jun. 6, 2017

["NYT's New Syria-Sarin Report Challenged"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 7, 2017

["'Soft Coup' on Trump, Hiding in Plain Sight"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 8, 2017

["Trump's Blunders Fuel Mideast Conflicts"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Jun. 9, 2017

["The US Hand in the Libyan/Syrian Tragedies"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jun. 9, 2017

["U.K.'s Corbyn Told Truth about Terrorism"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Jun. 10, 2017

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["NBC's Kelly Hits Putin with a Beloved Canard"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jun. 12, 2017

["Oliver Stone Reveals a Vulnerable Putin"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 12, 2017

["How Vladimir Putin Sees the World"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 13, 2017

["Putin, Ukraine and What Americans Know"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 13, 2017

["Oliver Stone Receives Gary Webb Award"](#), Jun. 14, 2017

["Sorting Out Ukraine Conflict's History"](#) by James W Carden, Jun. 15, 2017

["Clapper's Unhinged Russia-Bashing"](#) by David Marks, Jun. 15, 2017

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["US Risks Wider War by Downing Syrian Plane"](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Jun. 19, 2017

["Spoiling for a Wider War in Syria"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 20, 2017

["At FBI, Mueller Oversaw Post-9/11 Abuses"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jun. 21, 2017

["Russia-gate Flops as Democrats' Golden Ticket"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 21, 2017

["Institutional Factors in US Violence"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Jun. 22, 2017

["The Criminal 'Laws' of Counterinsurgency"](#) by Todd E Pierce, Jun. 22, 2017

["Deep History of America's Deep State"](#) by Jada Thacker, Jun. 23, 2017

["Policing 'Truth' to Restore 'Trust'"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 24, 2017

["A Baseless Justification for War in Syria"](#) by Dennis J Bernstein, Jun. 25, 2017

["Intel Behind Trump's Syria Attack Questioned"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jun. 25, 2017

["How Trump Risks a Saudi-Qatar War"](#) by Joe Lauria, Jun. 26, 2017

["Russia-gate Is No Watergate or Iran-Contra"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 28, 2017

["Parry Awarded Gellhorn Journalism Prize"](#), Jun. 29, 2017

["NYT Finally Retracts Russia-gate Canard"](#) by Robert Parry, Jun. 29, 2017

["The Mad Chase for Russia-gate Prey"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Jun. 30, 2017

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## Neocons Enlist in Anti-Trump #Resistance

**Exclusive:** The neocons, who have influenced U.S. foreign policy since the 1980s, inflicting grave damage on U.S. interests and the world, are reinventing themselves as soldiers in the anti-Trump #Resistance, writes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

In these summer dog days of the Trump presidency, good news is hard to come by, but in late June it was reported that the successor institution to William Kristol’s Project for a New American Century, the Foreign Policy Initiative (FPI), was shutting its doors for good.

FPI was founded in 2009 to give the displaced neocons who had worked for President George W. Bush a platform from which to endlessly criticize the new Democratic administration and push for a continuation of Bush’s disastrous neocon foreign policy. (Some other neocons sheltered in place mostly inside the State Department and the Pentagon.)

During the Obama years, FPI gave a platform to Kristol and likeminded neocons such as Dan Senor, James Kirchick and Jamie Fly, who went on to serve as a foreign policy adviser to neocon favorite Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida.

FPI was generously subsidized by hedge fund manager Paul Singer. *The Washington Post* recently reported that “Those close to the organization said that in the new policy and political environment marked by the ascendancy of Donald Trump, many donors, including Singer, are reassessing where to put their funds.”

But does the demise of FPI mean the neoconservatives would be, at long last, going away for a while – perhaps to take stock in the immense damage they have caused the country and the world? The answer would seem to be: not on your life. And why would they? In Donald Trump’s Washington, the neocons are in high demand even though a number of high-profile neocons (such as Elliott Abrams and John Bolton) were rebuffed for senior positions inside the new administration. But neocons are finding plenty of high-profile jobs elsewhere.

In April, the *New York Times* announced that longtime climate change denier Bret Stephens was joining the paper as an op-ed columnist. Stephens, who came to the *Times* from the *Wall Street Journal*, has been aptly described by *The Nation’s*

Eric Alterman as a “deliberate purveyor of propaganda and misinformation.” Stephens’s past columns include such classics as “I Am Not Sorry the CIA Waterboarded.”

For its part, the centrist Brookings Institution announced last month that it was hiring neocon smear artist James Kirchick. Kirchick, who will serve as a Brookings Visiting Fellow, has used his platform at the Internet tabloid Daily Beast to smear proponents of detente as “Putin apologists” and “anti-semites.” Kirchick, an outspoken NeverTrumper, also penned a hysterical (and discredited) screed accusing prominent liberals, without evidence, of supporting Donald Trump.

### **Joining the #Resistance**

Neocons are also in demand at what had long been one of the more responsible foreign policy think tanks in Washington. The German Marshall Fund just announced the launch of the Alliance for Securing Democracy, which, according to its mission statement, “will develop comprehensive strategies to defend against, deter, and raise the costs on Russian and other state actors’ efforts to undermine democracy and democratic institutions.”

“The Alliance,” read the statement, “will work to publicly document and expose Vladimir Putin’s ongoing efforts to subvert democracy in the United States and Europe.”

The Alliance will be run by none other than former FPI executive director Jamie Fly and a former foreign policy adviser to the Clinton campaign, Laura Rosenberger. The Alliance’s board of advisers is a veritable who’s who of neocon royalty including the ubiquitous Bill Kristol, along with David Kramer, Michael Morell and Kori Schake.

This is not to imply that the neocons find themselves confined to the think tank world and lack representation inside the Trump administration. Far from it. Trump has appointed several neocons to key jobs, such as United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, and the new Ukraine Envoy Kurt Volker. It is also rumored that Trump will appoint hardliner, A. Mitchell Weiss, as assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia, the post from which Victoria Nuland, a neocon holdover from the Bush years to the Obama administration, managed to do such lasting damage to U.S.-Russia relations.

The neocon revival has been facilitated by #Resistance-friendly media like MSNBC, which frequently features David Frum and Willian Kristol, two early and outspoken members of the NeverTrump movement. But perhaps what the #Resisters at

MSNBC are forgetting is that the neocon-dominated NeverTrump movement was driven by the fact that, for them, Trump was *not militaristic enough*, which is why they threw their support behind the likes of Marco Rubio and Lindsey Graham in the Republican primaries and, in the cases of Robert Kagan and Max Boot, behind Hillary Clinton in the general election.

The willingness of the pro-Hillary #Resistance to make common cause with the neocon NeverTrumpers is troubling and may explain why there has been so precious little “resistance” on their part to Trump’s plans to expand the wars in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen. (Indeed, Trump’s April 6 missile strike on Syria won praise from Hillary Clinton, who only lamented that Trump had not done more militarily in Syria.)

But perhaps all this isn’t so surprising, after all, the legions of embittered Clinton supporters never really objected all that strenuously (if at all) to their candidate’s record of support for endless war.

In the end, perhaps the neocons and the pro-Hillary #Resistance are not such strange bedfellows after all. Indeed, the #Resistance’s newfound enthusiasm for many prominent NeverTrumpers like Kristol and Frum helps explain the neocon revival now underway.

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

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