

# Turkey's Nukes: A Sum of All Fears

**Exclusive:** The post-coup chaos in Turkey is a reminder about the risk of leaving nuclear weapons in unstable regions where they serve no clear strategic purpose but present a clear and present danger, explains Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

The national security priesthood in Washington has always used claims of superior wisdom and insider knowledge to silence dissent about nuclear policy. But not even they can explain any longer why U.S. nuclear bombs are being stored in politically unstable Turkey as it grows increasingly Islamist and anti-American.

The Incirlik air base in southeast Turkey – from which U.S. pilots launch bombing raids on ISIS forces in Syria – is home to about 50 B-61 hydrogen bombs. That makes it NATO's largest nuclear storage facility, with about a quarter of all theater nuclear weapons in the alliance's stockpiles.

Each bomb has a yield of up to 170 kilotons, nearly a dozen times more powerful than the weapon that leveled Hiroshima. The bombs are stored in underground vaults within aircraft shelters that in turn are protected by a base security perimeter.

But Eric Schlosser, author of a 2014 book on the perils of nuclear accidents, observed recently, "With a few hours and the right tools and training, you could open one of NATO's nuclear-weapons storage vaults, remove a weapon, and bypass the [protective switches] inside it. Within seconds, you could place an explosive device on top of a storage vault, destroy the weapon, and release a lethal radioactive cloud."

In addition, the security of the bombs is premised on them being defended by loyal NATO forces. In the case of Incirlik, that loyalty proved uncertain at best. Power to the base was cut after mutinous troops used a tanker plane from the base to refuel F-16s that menaced Ankara and Istanbul.

After the coup, the Turkish commander of Incirlik was arrested for complicity and marched off in handcuffs. One can easily imagine a clique of Islamist officers in a future coup seizing the nukes as a bargaining chip with Ankara and Washington – or, worse yet, to support radical insurgents in the region.

## Getting Attention

After years of inattention to NATO's nuclear deployment policy, the recent failed coup in Turkey is finally setting off alarm bells. Jeffrey Lewis, a

nuclear proliferation expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, asked rhetorically, “Does it seem like a good idea to station American nuclear weapons at an air base commanded by someone who may have just helped bomb his own country’s parliament?”

Hans Kristensen, a nuclear expert with the Federation of American Scientists, declared that “the security situation in Turkey and in the base area no longer meet the safety requirements that the United States should have for storage of nuclear weapons. You only get so many warnings before something goes terribly wrong. It’s time to withdraw the weapons.”

Most tellingly, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stavridis wrote – being careful not to publicly confirm any classified information – that if NATO really does house tactical nuclear weapons at Incirlik Air Base, “this poses a very dangerous problem, and Washington will need Ankara’s full cooperation to ensure that all U.S. military equipment and forces are fully protected.”

The questioning should go beyond the obvious security risks of loose nukes falling into unfriendly hands, however. No one has ever explained what enemy the hydrogen bombs stored in Turkey might be used against, a quarter century after the fall of the Soviet Union. No doubt there are plenty of neocons in Washington who would delight in dropping them on Iran, as advocated by Republican billionaire Sheldon Adelson, but one hopes that most Americans do not share his fondness for gambling outside of casinos.

Nor has anyone explained how the bombs might be used if an appropriate enemy were found, since NATO has no nuclear-certified aircraft stationed in Turkey. But in Washington and in Brussels, the inability to answer such basic questions is rarely cause to rethink old policies. After all, how many priests give up their incantations just because the chants don’t work?

Although Turkey offers an egregious case of nuclear risks, questions about nuclear weapons deployment should go well beyond that country. Security is also notoriously lax at NATO bases in Belgium and the Netherlands where nuclear weapons are stored.

As Schlosser recalls, “In 2010, peace activists climbed over a fence at the Kleine Brogel Airbase, in Belgium, cut through a second fence, entered a hardened shelter containing nuclear-weapon vaults, placed anti-nuclear stickers on the walls, wandered the base for an hour, and posted a video of the intrusion on YouTube. The video showed that the Belgian soldier who finally confronted them was carrying an unloaded rifle.”

## **Brandishing Nuclear Bombs**

As I have argued before, the threat of terrorism is only one of several reasons to rethink the presence of theater nuclear weapons on NATO soil. Those weapons actually *decrease* the security of Western Europe by raising the risks of catastrophic escalation in the case of an inadvertent conflict with Russia. The weapons are also utterly unnecessary for deterrence, given the nuclear arsenals available to the United States, Great Britain and France.

Despite these risks, influential voices in the alliance are calling for more brandishing of nuclear weapons, not less. A recent article in *NATO Review* declared, “The forces involved in the nuclear mission should be exercised openly and regularly, without undermining their specific nature. Such exercises should involve not only nuclear-weapon states, but other non-nuclear allies.”

Last December, Poland’s deputy defense minister proposed putting U.S. nuclear weapons on Polish soil. That proposal came a year after Polish F-16 jets took part in a NATO nuclear exercise.

And the Obama administration, for now at least, remains bent on upgrading its hydrogen bombs and building a new class of nuclear-tipped cruise missiles, both of which would be deployed in Europe.

Yet the observation of German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier remains as true today as when he said it in 2009: “From the military point of view, those (theater) weapons are absolutely senseless today.”

The question he asked then is the one that all thinking people should be asking in the wake of Turkey’s recent debacle: “Isn’t it time to include substrategic and tactical nuclear weapons in the nuclear disarmament process, in order to [eliminate] once and for all the leftovers of the Cold War on the territory of Russia and Europe?”

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## Israel’s Wolf-Crying about Iran’s Bomb

Despite Israeli and neocon-led doomsday talk, the year-old Iranian nuclear

agreement has achieved its principal goal of stopping Iran from getting the Bomb and has even quieted alarums from Israel, writes Trita Parsi.

By Trita Parsi

A year has passed since diplomats from Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; plus Germany) defied conventional wisdom and struck a deal aimed at both preventing Iran from getting the bomb and preventing it from getting bombed.

At the time, the deal's detractors were apoplectic; Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called it a "historic mistake" that would pave the way for Iran to obtain a bomb. But the world has not come to an end. Iran is not the hegemon of the Middle East, Israel can still be found on the map, and Washington and Tehran still define each other as enemies. These days, voices such as Jonathan Greenblatt of the Anti-Defamation League, criticize the deal for having changed too little.

But a closer examination shows that it has had a profound impact on the region's geopolitical dynamics. Only four years ago, the Iranian nuclear program was consistently referred to as the United States' number one national security threat. Senior U.S. officials put the risk of an Israeli attack on Iran at 50-50, a confrontation that the United States would quickly get dragged into. A war that was even more destabilizing than the Iraq invasion was not just a possibility; it seemed likely.

Today, however, the talk of war is gone. Even the hawkish government of Netanyahu has gone silent on the matter. Former Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon, a hawk in his own right, announced a few weeks ago that "at this point, and in the foreseeable future, there is no existential threat facing Israel. Thus it is fitting that the leadership of the country stop scaring the citizenry and stop giving them the feeling that we are standing before a second Holocaust."

Moreover, members of the U.S. Congress who have recently visited Israel have also noted that Israelis are no longer shifting every conversation to a discussion about the Iranian nuclear threat.

"I can't count how many times I, and many members of Congress, were urgently and passionately informed that negotiation with the Iranian menace was wishful thinking and the height of folly," Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minnesota, wrote after a recent visit to Israel. "And now? Nothing."

### **Silence, Not Admission**

The nuclear deal has thus halted the march toward war and Iran's progress toward

a bomb. And that certainly qualifies as significant change. To continue to argue that Israel and the region are not safer as a result of the deal would be to contend that Iran's nuclear program was never a threat to begin with. That is a not a position that the Likud government in Israel can argue with a straight face.

Other criticisms of the deal centered on predictions that Iran would not honor the agreement. Yet the International Atomic Energy Agency has reported that Iran is abiding by its obligations under the deal. Also not borne out have been prophecies that Iran's regional policies would radicalize, that the deal would, as The Heritage Foundation's James Phillips wrote, "project [American] weakness that could further encourage Iranian hardliners."

To be sure, Washington continues to view many of Iran's regional activities as unhelpful and destabilizing, but those activities have not increased as a result of the nuclear deal. Hezbollah and Tehran's posture toward Israel has, for instance, not become more aggressive than it already was.

Any changes that have occurred have been rooted in regional developments – the Syrian civil war or the Saudi assault on Yemen – rather than the nuclear deal. Important developments in Syria, such as Russia's broader entry into the war or Iran's maneuvers on the ground, are divorced from the nuclear deal and directly tied to developments on the ground in Syria.

If anything, as the European Union's foreign policy head, Federica Mogherini, told me last December, the deal paved the way for renewed dialogue on Syria, which offers a glimmer of hope to end the carnage there.

"What we have now in Syria – talks bringing together all the different actors (and we have it now and not last year) – is because we had the [nuclear] deal," she told me. And last month, U.S. Secretary Of State John Kerry stated that Iran has been "helpful" in Iraq, where both the United States and Iran are fighting the Islamic State (ISIS).

### **Shifting Relationship**

It is undisputable that outside of the nuclear deal, the relationship between the United States and Iran has shifted significantly since the breakthrough. That became abundantly clear in January, when ten American sailors drifted into Iranian waters and were apprehended by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – and were then promptly released.

An incident that in the pre-deal era likely would have taken months, if not years, to resolve was now settled in 16 hours. Direct diplomacy between Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif combined with a mutual desire to

resolve the matter quickly made all the difference. The two countries had embarked on a path that could transform their relationship, and both were too committed to that path to allow the incident to fester.

“I was afraid that this [the sailors’ arrest] would jeopardize everything, not just the implementation [of the JCPOA],” Zarif admitted to me.

But for relations to improve beyond the nuclear deal, moderate elements on both sides need to be strengthened by the deal. That is one area where the skepticism of the critics may have been justified. Rather than seeing the government of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani gain momentum after the deal, the pushback from Iranian hardliners has been fierce.

Those officials couldn’t prevent Iran from signing the agreement, but they could create enough problems to halt any effort to translate the nuclear deal into a broader opening to the United States. A swift crackdown against individuals and entities seeking to build bridges between Iran and the West had its intended effect: Confidence that the nuclear deal would usher in a new era for U.S.-Iranian relations quickly plummeted.

Moreover, challenges to sanctions relief has given hardline opponents of the deal in Iran a boost. Their critique of the agreement – that the United States is not trustworthy – seems to ring true since no major banks have been willing to enter the Iranian market. The banks’ hesitation, in turn, is mainly rooted in the fear that after the U.S. presidential elections, Washington’s political commitment to the deal will wane.

Neither Republican candidate Donald Trump nor Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton have signaled any desire to continue down the Obama administration’s path with Iran in general. Clinton has vowed to uphold the deal, but neither she nor Trump have made it crystal clear that they will protect the agreement from new congressional sanctions or other measures that would cause the deal’s collapse.

Clinton’s team has signaled that its priority will be to rebuild relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia and restore those allies’ confidence that the United States will counter Iran in the region. Meanwhile, the uncertainty around a Trump presidency needs no explaining. As a result, many banks deem the risk of entering the Iranian market too high due to the political challenges on the U.S. side. That has left Iranians without much in the way of sanctions relief, which is in turn costing Rouhani politically.

In other words, although the deal has been remarkably successful in achieving its explicit goals – halting, and even reversing, Iran’s nuclear advances while

avoiding a costly and risky war with Tehran – its true value in rebalancing U.S. relationships in the Persian Gulf and creating a broader opening with Iran may be squandered once Obama leaves office. If Obama's successor returns to the United States' old ways in the Middle East while hardliners in Tehran stymie outreach to the West, these unique and historic opportunities will be wasted.

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## Still Sabotaging the Iran-Nuke Agreement

Iran has lived up to the terms of the nuclear agreement, now one year old, but that has not stopped its neocon opponents from conjuring up new reasons to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The one-year anniversary of the Iran nuclear agreement, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is naturally an occasion for stock-taking, as such anniversaries commonly are. Much spinning is mixed in with the stock-taking, and it is worthwhile to take stock of the spinning as well as of the reality that is relevant to the agreement.

The most obvious and noteworthy part of the reality is that Iran has fully observed the extensive, very limiting and intrusive, provisions of the agreement regarding its nuclear program. The Iranian record of compliance actually extends back significantly longer than a year.

Before the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action there was a preliminary agreement, the Joint Plan of Action, which came into effect in January 2014 and included most of the limitations on Iran that also would enter into the later agreement. Iran now has been in compliance for two and a half years with stringent restrictions on its nuclear program agreed to in multilateral negotiations.

Despite this record of compliance, efforts to destroy the agreement continue.

Those efforts demonstrate that most opposition to the agreement has not been motivated by the ostensible reasons, and most of the actual reasons are not ones that would be satisfied or negated no matter how well and how long Iran conforms with its obligations.

It always was obvious that the agreement would be superior to the alternative of no agreement in assuring that the Iranian nuclear program stays peaceful. The main motivations for opposition to the agreement have had nothing to do with nuclear nonproliferation and instead have to do with not wanting to have any agreement of any sort with Iran.

That opposition has centered in two overlapping places. One is Republican determination not to let Barack Obama have a major foreign policy success. The other is the objective of the right-wing Israeli government – with everything such an objective customarily implies regarding domestic U.S. politics – to keep Iran permanently ostracized and not to have anyone (especially the United States) do any business with it, and thereby to keep Iran forever as a *bête noire* that is portrayed as the “real” source of trouble in the Middle East, to continue to use it as a distraction from any other troubles the Israeli government prefers not to talk about, to make sure there will be no competition to Israel as supposedly the only reliable U.S. partner in the Middle East, and to keep a major regional competitor to Israel weak and isolated.

The talking points of opponents of the agreement have shifted as their earlier arguments have become less tenable. We used to hear a lot more about a danger of Iranian cheating. That line of argument has become less credible as the highly intrusive international inspection procedures that the agreement itself put into place have been working as they were supposed to work and have confirmed Iranian compliance. So we don't hear so much about cheating anymore.

### **Weak Excuses**

Arguments that we do still hear under that heading tend to be patently weak. For example, in [one of a series of anniversary pieces](#) by the anti-agreement Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Simon Henderson suggests we should worry because “some analysts fear” that Iran may have technical cooperation with North Korea and Pakistan, whose uranium enrichment centrifuges are similar to the ones Iran uses.

So what? Iran already has the technology, and no matter where the technology may have originated, this doesn't affect the inability of Iran to exceed any agreed limitations on uranium enrichment when its facilities are crawling with international inspectors.



The entire nuclear side of the issue – even though the specter of an Iranian nuclear weapon was the big supposed threat that those wanting to keep Iran isolated had been exclaiming about, more than any other issue, for years – has come to play a much reduced role in the talking points of opponents of the agreement, as it became obvious how the agreement was superior to the alternative regarding nuclear nonproliferation.

We should remember – and note how far things have come in the interim – Benjamin Netanyahu's display of a cartoon bomb before the United Nations General Assembly. Even the preliminary agreement drained Netanyahu's bomb, and the JCPOA has cemented the limitations and inspection procedures that will keep it drained. That reality underlies the support for the agreement among Israeli security officials.

Even before the JCPOA was adopted and implemented, opponents of the agreement had shifted much of their rhetorical energy to the notion that the agreement would somehow encourage more “nefarious,” destabilizing Iranian activity in the Middle East. This whole line of argument never was grounded in the reality of exactly what Iran has been doing in the Middle East, how that activity resembles or differs from what other powers have been doing, and how what it has been doing relates to U.S. interests.

A further part of the opposition argument was that relief from economic sanctions would provide a “windfall” to Iran to finance more of the nefarious activity. That part of the argument also was erroneous, not only in involving faulty assertions about the amounts of frozen assets not already spoken for but also in relying on the invalid idea that Iran determines its regional policies according to how much money it has in its bank account.

Faulty or not, the argument about a financial windfall has run into the fact that so far Iran has gotten much less financial and economic benefit than it hoped and anticipated it would – a fact that hardliners in Iran who oppose the agreement are emphasizing.

This development about the meager financial benefits has led American opponents of the agreement to shift their tactics again. They see this as an opening for killing the agreement; if the Iranians get fed up enough with not getting any significant benefit in return for all the restrictions placed on their nuclear program, they might just renounce the whole bargain – which for American opponents would have the extra advantage of being able to blame a breakdown of the agreement on the Iranians.

## **Punishing Iran**

The American opponents are thus concentrating on opposing any action that would encourage the kind of economic and financial activity involving Iran that was envisioned under the JCPOA. Opponents are playing up the idea that the sources of Iran's economic problems are to be found in domestic deficiencies in the Iranian economy and playing down what is in fact a big reason for the meager nature of economic benefit to Iran so far: that international banks are frightened of inadvertently stepping across a line in the complicated U.S. sanctions system or of being whipsawed by any U.S. reneging on the nuclear agreement by a new administration or by Congress, and therefore are not engaging in commercial activity with Iran that they are permitted to conduct under the sanctions relief provided for in the JCPOA.

Opponents of the agreement say: no, no, what Iran is getting right now is all that it is entitled to get, and any effort to grease the international banking wheels would go beyond what is required by the agreement. Note the contradiction with earlier opposition arguments: earlier the contention was that the JCPOA would provide a financial windfall to Iran; now the argument is that under the terms of the agreement Iran is not entitled to any such windfall, or even to benefits much less than what could be considered a windfall.

There still are plenty of opposition references to "nefarious" region-wide Iranian activity, but such rhetoric is not tied to the earlier idea of a financial windfall. Instead the rhetoric replies on a now-habitual recitation of the mantra of Iran doing all sorts of bad things in the region, along with a general distaste for doing any business with any regime that does bad things.

An example is a recent piece by the Washington Institute's Mathew Levitt. Levitt's item is titled, "Under cover of nuclear deal, Iran foments regional instability". But look at the text and you will see that there is no connection whatever, either logical or empirical, drawn between the nuclear agreement and any Iranian actions in the region.

Look at the text more closely and see that the part of the title that singles out Iran for fomenting regional instability isn't supported either. A reference to Bahrain, for example, takes at face value an assertion by the Bahraini information minister (hardly an unbiased source) that because explosives used in an attack on regime forces were "very similar" to ones that earlier and allegedly had "come from Iran," then Iran must be responsible for all such troubles.

A reference to Iranian aid to the Houthis in Yemen makes no mention of the fact that the Saudi intervention on the other side of that civil war is far more destructive and more responsible for escalating that conflict and for intensifying the sectarian animosities involved than anything Iran has done.

A reference to Syria does not note that the Iranian activity that supposedly is “fomenting instability” consists of support for an incumbent regime that has been in power for decades. And a reference to Iraq fails to mention that in the biggest part of the conflict there – the fight against ISIS – Iran is on the same side as the United States.

## **Future Risks**

Hardliners in the United States and Israel are playing off hardliners in Iran in ways that imperil the future of the nuclear agreement, with the most likely scenario for the accord unraveling being that U.S. hostility and continued economic warfare against Iran would tip the balance of power in Tehran in favor of those who would declare that the accord is a bad bargain for Iran and should be scrapped.

The hardliners motivated by the objectives mentioned above are being abetted by those in the United States who may not share those objectives but, out of habit or perceived political self-interest, go along with the mantras about Iran always being an enemy and a trouble-maker and deserving of our hostility. This includes presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, notwithstanding her declared support for the nuclear agreement.

So the struggle to keep the nuclear agreement alive continues. Those wanting to kill it do not appear ready to quit. Fighting back against the would-be agreement-killers is worth the effort. What is at stake is not only one of the more important nuclear nonproliferation measures in recent years but also whether the shackles on U.S. diplomacy represented by refusal to do business with Iran will continue to come off or will be put back on, making it harder than ever to deal with problems in the Middle East.

As time continues to go by and the record of compliance with the accord gets longer, those defending the agreement do not need to talk just about hypotheticals and the fanciful scenarios that opponents have embedded in their rhetoric. The inconsistency between actual events and those scenarios will become increasingly glaring.

We should also call opponents to account for the increasingly obvious internal inconsistencies in their whole line of attack, which has shamelessly shifted from one assertion to another as each assertion has lost plausibility.

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# NATO Reaffirms Its Bogus Russia Narrative

**Exclusive:** President Obama and NATO leaders signed on to the false narrative of a minding-its-own-business West getting sucker-punched by a bunch of Russian meanies, a storyline that suggests insanity or lies, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It's unnerving to realize that the NATO alliance – bristling with an unprecedented array of weapons including a vast nuclear arsenal – has lost its collective mind. Perhaps it's more reassuring to think that NATO simply feels compelled to publicly embrace its deceptive "strategic communications" so gullible Western citizens will be kept believing its lies are truth.

But here were the leaders of major Western "democracies" lining up to endorse a Warsaw Summit Communiqué condemning "Russia's aggressive actions" while knowing that these claims were unsupported by their own intelligence agencies.

The leaders – at least the key ones – know that there is no credible intelligence that Russian President Vladimir Putin provoked the Ukraine crisis in 2014 or that he has any plans to invade the Baltic states, despite the fact that nearly every "important person" in Official Washington and other Western capitals declares the opposite of this to be reality.

But there have been a few moments when the truth has surfaced. For instance, in the days leading up to the just-completed NATO summit in Warsaw, General Petr Pavel, chairman of the NATO Military Committee, divulged that the deployment of NATO military battalions in the Baltic states was a political, rather than military, act.

"It is not the aim of NATO to create a military barrier against broad-scale Russian aggression, because such aggression is not on the agenda and no intelligence assessment suggests such a thing," Pavel told a news conference.

What Pavel blurted out was what I have been told by intelligence sources over the past two-plus years – that the endless drumbeat of Western media reports about "Russian aggression" results from a clever demonization campaign against Putin and a classic Washington "group think" rather than from a careful intelligence analysis.

Ironically, however, just days after the release of the British Chilcot report

documenting how a similar propaganda campaign led the world into the disastrous Iraq War – with its deadly consequences still reverberating through a destabilized Mideast and into an unnerved Europe – NATO reenacts the basic failure of that earlier catastrophe, except now upping the ante into a confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

The Warsaw communiqué – signed by leaders including President Barack Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and British Prime Minister David Cameron – ignores the reality of what happened in Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014 and thus generates an inside-out narrative.

Instead of reprising the West's vacuous propaganda themes, Obama and the other leaders could have done something novel and told the truth, but that apparently is outside their operating capabilities. So they all signed on to the dangerous lie.

### **What Really Happened**

The real narrative based on actual facts would have acknowledged that it was the West, not Russia, that instigated the Ukraine crisis by engineering the violent overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich and the imposition of a new Western-oriented regime hostile to Moscow and Ukraine's ethnic Russians.

In late 2013, it was the European Union that was pushing an economic association agreement with Ukraine, which included the International Monetary Fund's demands for imposing harsh austerity on Ukraine's already suffering population. Political and propaganda support for the E.U. plan was financed, in part, by the U.S. government through such agencies as the National Endowment for Democracy and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

When Yanukovich recoiled at the IMF's terms and opted for a more generous \$15 billion aid package from Putin, the U.S. government threw its public support behind mass demonstrations aimed at overthrowing Yanukovich and replacing him with a new regime that would sign the E.U. agreement and accept the IMF's demands.

As the crisis deepened in early 2014, Putin was focused on the Sochi Winter Olympics, particularly the threat of terrorist attacks on the games. No evidence has been presented that Putin was secretly trying to foment the Ukraine crisis. Indeed, all the evidence is that Putin was trying to protect the status quo, support the elected president and avert a worse crisis.

It would be insane to suggest that Putin somehow orchestrated the E.U.'s destabilizing attempt to pull Ukraine into the association agreement, that he then stage-managed the anti-Yanukovich violence of the Maidan protests, that he

collaborated with neo-Nazi and other ultra-nationalist militias to kill Ukrainian police and chase Yanukovich from Kiev, and that he then arranged for Yanukovich to be replaced by a wildly anti-Russian regime – all while pretending to do the opposite of all these things.

In the real world, the narrative was quite different: Moscow supported Yanukovich's efforts to reach a political compromise, including a European-brokered agreement for early elections and reduced presidential powers. Yet, despite those concessions, neo-Nazi militias surged to the front of the U.S.-backed protests on Feb. 22, 2014, forcing Yanukovich and many of his officials to run for their lives. The U.S. State Department quickly recognized the coup regime as "legitimate" as did other NATO allies.

On a personal note, I am sometimes criticized by conspiracy theorists for not accepting their fact-free claims about nefarious schemes supposedly dreamed up by U.S. officials, but frankly as baseless as some of those wacky stories can be, they sound sensible when compared with the West's loony conspiracy theory about Putin choreographing the Ukraine coup.

Yet, that baseless conspiracy theory roped in supposedly serious thinkers, such as New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, who conjured up the notion that Putin stirred up this trouble so he could pull off a land grab and/or distract Russians from their economic problems.

"Delusions of easy winnings still happen," Krugman wrote in a 2014 column. "It's only a guess, but it seems likely that Vladimir Putin thought that he could overthrow Ukraine's government, or at least seize a large chunk of its territory, on the cheap, a bit of deniable aid to the rebels, and it would fall into his lap. ...

"Recently Justin Fox of the Harvard Business Review suggested that the roots of the Ukraine crisis may lie in the faltering performance of the Russian economy. As he noted, Mr. Putin's hold on power partly reflects a long run of rapid economic growth. But Russian growth has been sputtering, and you could argue that the Putin regime needed a distraction."

### **Midwifing This Thing**

Or, rather than "a guess," Krugman could have looked at the actual facts, such as the work of neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland conspiring to organize a coup that would put her hand-picked Ukrainians in charge of Russia's neighbor. Several weeks before the putsch, Nuland was caught plotting the "regime change" in an intercepted phone call with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt.

Regarding who should replace Yanukovych, Nuland's choice was Arseniy "Yats is the guy" Yatsenyuk. The phone call went on to muse about how they could "glue this thing" and "midwife this thing." After the coup was glued or midwived on Feb. 22, 2014, Yatsenyuk emerged as the new prime minister and then shepherded through the IMF austerity plan.

Since the coup regime in Kiev also took provocative steps against the ethnic Russians, such as the parliament voting to ban Russian as an official language and allowing neo-Nazi extremists to slaughter anti-coup protesters, ethnic Russian resistance arose in the east and south. That shouldn't have been much of a surprise since eastern Ukraine had been Yanukovych's political base and stood to lose the most from Ukraine's economic orientation toward Europe and reduced economic ties to Russia.

Yet, instead of recognizing the understandable concerns of the eastern Ukrainians, the Western media portrayed the ethnic Russians as simply Putin's pawns with no minds of their own. The U.S.-backed regime in Kiev launched what was called an "Anti-Terrorist Operation" against them, spearheaded by the neo-Nazi militias.

In Crimea – another area heavily populated with ethnic Russians and with a long history of association with Russia – voters opted by 96 percent in a referendum to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a process supported by Russian troops stationed in Crimea under a prior agreement with Ukraine's government.

There was no Russian "invasion," as The New York Times and other mainstream U.S. news outlets claimed. The Russian troops were already in Crimea assigned to Russia's historic Black Sea naval base at Sevastopol. Putin agreed to Crimea's annexation partly out of fear that the naval base would otherwise fall into NATO's hands and pose a strategic threat to Russia.

But the key point regarding the crazy Western conspiracy theory about Putin provoking the crisis so he could seize territory or distract Russians from economic troubles is that Putin only annexed Crimea because of the ouster of Yanukovych and the installation of a Russia-hating regime in Kiev. If Yanukovych had not been overthrown, there is no reason to think that Putin would have done anything regarding Crimea or Ukraine.

Yet, once the false narrative got rolling, there was no stopping it. The New York Times, The Washington Post and other leading Western publications played the same role that they did during the run-up to the Iraq invasion, accepting the U.S. government's propaganda as fact and marginalizing the few independent journalists who dared go against the grain.

Though Obama, Merkel and other key leaders know how deceptive the Western propaganda has been, they have become captives to their governments' own lies. For them to deviate substantially from the Official Story would open them to harsh criticism from the powerful neoconservatives and their allied media outlets.

Even a slight contradiction to NATO's "strategic communications" brought down harsh criticism on German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier after he said: "What we shouldn't do now is inflame the situation further through saber-rattling and warmongering. ... Whoever believes that a symbolic tank parade on the alliance's eastern border will bring security is mistaken."

### **Excoriating Russia**

So, at the Warsaw conference, the false NATO narrative had to be reaffirmed – and it was. The communiqué declared, "Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force, are a source of regional instability, fundamentally challenge the Alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. ...

"Russia's destabilising actions and policies include: the ongoing illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, which we do not and will not recognise and which we call on Russia to reverse; the violation of sovereign borders by force; the deliberate destabilisation of eastern Ukraine; large-scale snap exercises contrary to the spirit of the Vienna Document, and provocative military activities near NATO borders, including in the Baltic and Black Sea regions and the Eastern Mediterranean; its irresponsible and aggressive nuclear rhetoric, military concept and underlying posture; and its repeated violations of NATO Allied airspace.

"In addition, Russia's military intervention, significant military presence and support for the regime in Syria, and its use of its military presence in the Black Sea to project power into the Eastern Mediterranean have posed further risks and challenges for the security of Allies and others."

In the up-is-down world that NATO and other Western agencies now inhabit, Russia's military maneuvers within its own borders in reaction to NATO maneuvers along Russia's borders are "provocative." So, too, is Russia's support for the internationally recognized government of Syria, which is under attack from Islamic terrorists and other armed rebels supported by the West's Mideast allies, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and NATO member Turkey.



In other words, it is entirely all right for NATO and its members to invade countries at will, including Iraq, Libya and Syria, and subvert others as happened in Ukraine and is still happening in Syria. But it is impermissible for any government outside of NATO to respond or even defend itself. To do so amounts to a provocation against NATO – and such hypocrisy is accepted by the West’s mainstream news media as the way that the world was meant to be.

And those of us who dare point out the lies and double standards must be “Moscow stooges,” just as those of us who dared question the Iraq WMD tales were dismissed as “Saddam apologists” in 2003.

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

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## Challenging the New Cold War

As NATO plans for a new Cold War, some Western dissidents are questioning the scare-mongering about Russia and the rationale for this expensive and dangerous revival, write Medea Benjamin and Alice Slater.

By Medea Benjamin and Alice Slater

Donald Trump angered the D.C. establishment when he said that NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance, may be obsolete and the U.S. should reassess its spending on the alliance. Hillary Clinton has used Trump’s comments as another example that he is a dangerous, loose cannon. But Trump has brought up an issue worth exploring and this month, amid NATO’s Annual Summit in Warsaw, Poland, is an excellent opportunity to do so.

Formed in the early years of the Cold War, 1949, with the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, U.K., Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France, by 1952 this post-WWII alliance included Greece and Turkey, and had rejected the Soviet Union’s request to join.

In 1956, when West Germany was admitted to NATO membership, the USSR formed the Warsaw Pact in response and the Cold War was then on, full-blown. Missiles and nuclear weapons from each side pointed menacingly at each other, with the United States parking nuclear weapons in five NATO countries (Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Turkey), where they remain to this day. NATO doctrine provides that nuclear weapons will be used if necessary, at will, on behalf of

all its members.

After the Berlin wall fell in 1989 and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev miraculously let go of all the Soviet-occupied Eastern European countries, dissolving the Warsaw Pact without a shot, the U.S. promised Gorbachev that if he didn't object to East Germany's inclusion in NATO, we would never expand NATO further eastward. Russia had lost 27 million people to the Nazi onslaught during World War II and had good cause to fear a military alliance on its borders.

Despite U.S. assurances to Gorbachev, today NATO has expanded to include 12 new countries in eastern and central Europe, including Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Croatia. NATO now extends right up to Russia's border, and has even been discussing membership with Georgia and the Ukraine.

One can only imagine what the response would be in the United States if Russia were to invite Canada and Mexico into its military alliance. Let us not forget how close we came to war when the Soviet Union put missiles in Cuba. And part of the deal President Kennedy made with President Khrushchev for their removal was to take U.S. missiles out of Turkey.

Although NATO took no military action during the Cold War, during the first Gulf War it deployed forces for the first time, and then acted unlawfully when it bombed Yugoslavia without UN authorization. The UN Charter, devoted to preventing "the scourge of war," allows nations to use force only in self-defense when under threat of imminent attack, or when authorized by the Security Council, neither of which had occurred when NATO bombed Yugoslavia in the 1999 Kosovo war. Since then NATO has taken part in many military actions, including in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. But this year it has been particularly aggressive and provocative, conducting massive military maneuvers on Russia's borders.

It is totally unacceptable to be taking these provocative measures when the U.S. and Russia have nearly 2,000 nuclear warheads on hair trigger alert, loaded on missiles, submarines and airplanes, poised and ready to fire in minutes. Next year, the Pentagon plans to quadruple military spending in Europe to \$3.4 billion and begin rotating an armored brigade through Eastern Europe – in addition to extra NATO forces to be deployed to Poland and the Baltics. The U.S., the main force behind NATO, is already in a deadly proxy war in eastern Ukraine.

In June, NATO launched the largest war games since the Cold War, involving hundreds of tanks and jets, as well as 31,000 troops from 24 countries. The war games in Poland included air-ground assaults and electronic warfare scenarios.

Airborne units, infantrymen, medics, military police and aviation units have operated jointly throughout the exercise, which culminated in a massive live-fire event led by the U.S. military. A naval exercise involving NATO forces has just begun in Finland. Meanwhile, there is an ongoing “Saber Strike” operation in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

One can only wonder how, 25 years after the end of the Cold War, we find ourselves rattling our sabers, nuclear and conventional, in this untenable dilemma. Surely President Eisenhower’s prescient warning way back in 1961 that “we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex” is a potent warning for today, more than half a century later.

The time has come to spread the word about the dangerous mischief NATO is causing on Russia’s border. With the recent breakup of the old paradigm after the U.K. just voted to leave the European Union, there may be a new opening for change. It has been reported that Germany and France have been talking about ending the sanctions on Russia imposed after the Ukraine events and are now recommending a less aggressive posture for NATO.

America too, could do its share to make good on the U.N. promise to “end the scourge of war” by ratcheting down the hostilities towards Russia and working for the abolition of NATO. You don’t have to be a Donald Trump supporter to recognize that it is time to rethink NATO

**Medea Benjamin is the cofounder of the peace group CODEPINK. Alice Slater is the New York Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. [This article previously appeared in The Hill newspaper.**

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/286917-time-to-rethink-nato>

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## Misunderstanding Russia and Russians

Western media has demonized Russia and President Putin with unrelenting propaganda that has dazed and confused many Russians, a condition that retired U.S. Col. Ann Wright encountered on a recent visit.

By Ann Wright

I’ve just ended two weeks visiting cities in four regions of Russia. The questions that were asked over and over were: “Why does America hate us? Why do

you demonize us?" Most would add a caveat – "I like American people and I think YOU like us individually but why does the American government hate our government?"

This article is a composite of the comments made and questions asked to our 20-person delegation and to me as an individual. I do not attempt to defend the views but offer them as an insight into the thinking of many of the persons with whom we came into contact in meetings and on the streets.

None of the questions, comments or views tell the full story, but I hope they give a feel for the desire of the ordinary Russian that his or her country and its citizens are respected as a sovereign nation with a long history and that it is not demonized as an outlaw state or an "evil" nation. Russia has its flaws and room for improvement in many areas, just as every nation does, including for sure, the United States.

### **New Russia Looks Like You**

The United States worked hard to make the Soviet Union collapse, and it did. You wanted to remake Russia like the United States – a democratic, capitalist country in which your companies could make money – and you have done that.

After 25 years, we are a new nation much different from the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation has created laws that have allowed a large private business class to emerge. Our cities now look like your cities. We have Burger King, McDonalds, Subway, Starbucks and malls filled with a huge number of totally Russian business ventures for the middle class.

We have chain stores with merchandise and food, similar to Wal-Mart and Target. We have exclusive stores with top-of-the-line clothing and cosmetics for the richer. We drive new (and older) cars now just like you do. We have massive rush hour traffic jams in our cities, just like you do. We have extensive, safe, inexpensive metros in all of our major cities, just like you have. When you fly across our country, it looks just like yours, with forests, farm fields, rivers and lakes – only bigger, many time zones bigger.

Most people on buses and in the metro are looking at our mobile phones with internet, just like you do. We have a smart youth population that is computer literate and most of whom speak several languages.

You sent your experts on privatization, international banking, stock exchanges. You urged us to sell off our huge state industries to the private sector at ridiculously low prices, creating the multi-billionaire oligarchs that in many ways mirror the oligarchs of the United States. And you made money in Russia from this privatization. Some of the oligarchs are in prison for violating our

laws.

You sent us experts on elections. For over 25 years we have held elections. And we have elected some politicians you don't like and some that we as individuals may not like. We have political dynasties, just like you do. We don't have a perfect government, nor perfect government officials – which is also what we observe in the U.S. government and its officials. We have graft and corruption in and outside of government, just as you do. Some of our politicians are in jail for violating our laws, just like some of your politicians are in jail for violating your laws.

And we have the poor just like you do. We have villages, towns and small cities that are struggling with migration to the big cities with people moving in hopes of finding jobs, just like you do.

Our middle class travels throughout the world, just like you do. In fact, as a Pacific nation just like the U.S., we bring so much tourism money with us on our trips that your Pacific island territories of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas have negotiated with the U.S. Federal government to allow Russian tourists to enter both of those U.S. territories for 45 days without the time-consuming and expensive U.S. visa.

We have a strong science and space program and are a key partner in the International Space Station. We sent the first satellite into space and the first humans into space. Our rockets still take astronauts to the space station while your NASA program has been curtailed.

### **Dangerous NATO Military Exercises**

You have your allies and we have our allies. You told us during the dissolution of the Soviet Union that you would not enlist countries from the Eastern block into NATO, yet you have done that. Now you are placing missile batteries along our border and you are conducting major military exercises with strange names such as Anaconda, the strangling snake, along our borders.

You say that Russia could possibly invade neighboring countries and you have big dangerous military exercises in countries on our borders with these countries. We did not build up our Russian military forces along those borders until you continued to have ever increasingly large military “exercises” there. You install missile “defenses” in countries on our borders, initially saying they are to protect against Iranian missiles and now you say Russia is the aggressor and your missiles are aimed at us.

For our own national security, we must respond, yet you vilify us for a response that you would have if Russia would have military maneuvers along the Alaskan

coast or the Hawaii islands or with Mexico on your southern border or with Canada on your northern border.

### **Syrian Conflict**

We have allies in the Middle East including Syria. For decades, we have had military ties to Syria and the only Soviet/Russian port in the Mediterranean is in Syria. Why is it unexpected that we help defend our ally, when the stated policy of your country is for “regime change” of our ally – and you have spent hundreds of millions of dollars for Syrian regime change?

With this said, we Russia saved the U.S. from an enormous political and military blunder in 2013 when the U.S. was determined to attack the Syrian government for “crossing the red line” when a horrific chemical attack that tragically killed hundreds was erroneously blamed on the Assad government. We provided you documentation that the chemical attack did not come from the Assad government and we brokered a deal with the Syrian government in which they turned over their chemical weapons arsenal to the international community for destruction.

Ultimately, Russia arranged for the chemicals to be destroyed and you provided an especially designed U.S. ship that carried out the destruction. Without Russian intervention, a direct U.S. attack on the Syrian government for the mistaken allegation of use of chemical weapons would have resulted in even greater chaos, destruction and destabilization in Syria.

Russia has offered to host talks with the Assad government about power sharing with opposition elements. We, like you, do not want to see the takeover of Syria by a radical group such as ISIS that will use the land of Syria to continue its mission to destabilize the region. Your policies and financing of regime change in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya and Syria have created instability and chaos that is reaching all over the world.

### **Coup in Ukraine**

You say that Crimea was annexed by Russia and we say Crimea “reunited” with Russia. We believe that the U.S. sponsored a coup of the elected Ukrainian government that had chosen to accept a loan from Russia rather than from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

We believe that coup and the resulting government was illegally brought to power through your multi-million dollar “regime change” program. We know that your Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland described in a phone call, which our intelligence services recorded, that “Yats is the guy,” referring to Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who became prime minister after the pro-West/NATO coup.

In response to that U.S.-sponsored violent government take-over of the elected government of the Ukraine – rather than allow a new presidential election within a year – ethnic Russians in the Ukraine, particularly those in the eastern provinces and in Crimea were very afraid of the anti-Russian violence that had been unleashed by neo-fascist forces that were in the militia arm of the takeover.

With the takeover of the Ukrainian government, the people of Crimea – many of them ethnic Russians – voted by 96 percent with more than 80 percent of voters casting ballots to unite with the Russian Federation instead of staying with Ukraine. Of course, some citizens of Crimea disagreed and left to live in Ukraine.

We wonder whether citizens of the United States realize that the Southern Fleet of the Russian military was located in the Black Sea ports in the Crimea and in light of the violent take over of Ukraine that our government felt it was vital to ensure access to those ports.

On the basis of Russian national security, the Russian Duma (Parliament) voted to accept the results of the referendum and annexed Crimea as a republic of the Russian Federation and gave federal city status to the important seaport of Sevastopol.

### **Sanctions and Double Standards**

While the U.S. and European governments accepted and cheered for the violent overthrow of the elected government of the Ukraine, both the U.S. and European nations were very vengeful against the non-violent referendum of people of Crimea and have slammed Crimea with all sorts of sanctions that have reduced international tourism, the main industry of the Crimea, to almost nothing.

In the past in Crimea, we received over 260 cruise ships filled with international passengers from Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, Spain and other parts of Europe. Now, because of the sanctions we have virtually no European tourists. You are the first group of Americans we have seen in over a year. Now, our business is with other citizens from Russia.

The U.S. and the European Union have put sanctions on Russia again. The Russian ruble has been devalued almost 50 percent, some from the downturn of worldwide price of oil, but some from the sanctions the international community has placed on Russia from the Crimea “reunification.”

We believe you want the sanctions to hurt us so we will overthrow our elected government, just like you put sanctions on Iraq for the Iraqis to overthrow Saddam Hussein or on North Korea or on Iran for the people of those countries to

overthrow their governments.

Sanctions have the opposite effect than what you want. While we know sanctions do hurt the ordinary person and if left on a population for a long time can kill through malnutrition and lack of medicines, sanctions have made us stronger.

Now, we may not get your cheeses and wines, but we are developing or redeveloping our own industries and have become more self-reliant. We now see how the globalization trade mantra of the United States can and will be used against countries that decide not to go along with the U.S. on its worldwide political and military agenda. If a country decides not to go along with the United States, its people will be cut off from the global markets that the trade agreements have made you dependent upon.

We wonder why the double standard? Why haven't the member states of the United Nations put sanctions on the U.S. since you have invaded and occupied countries and killed hundreds of thousands in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Syria.

Why is the U.S. not held accountable for kidnapping, extraordinary rendition, torture and imprisonment of almost 800 persons that have been held in the gulag called Guantanamo?

### **Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

We want the elimination of nuclear weapons. Unlike you, we have never used a nuclear weapon on people. Even though we consider nuclear weapons as a defensive weapon, they should be eliminated because one political or military mistake will have devastating consequences for the entire planet.

We know the terrible costs of war. Our great-grandparents remind us of the 27 million Soviet citizens killed during World War II, our grandparents tell us of the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the difficulties arising from the Cold War.

We don't understand why the West continues to vilify and demonize us when we are so much like you. We too are concerned about threats to our national security and our government responds in many ways like yours. We do not want another Cold War, a war in which everyone gets frost bitten, or worse, a war that will kill hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people.

We want a peaceful future. We Russians are proud of our lengthy history and heritage. We want a bright future for ourselves and our families... and for yours. We want to live in a peaceful world. We want to live in peace.

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Colonel. She also served 16 years as a US diplomat in US Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to President Bush's war on Iraq. She is the co-author of *Dissent: Voices of Conscience*.

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## Trading Places: Neocons and Cockroaches

**Exclusive:** Neocons want a new Cold War – all the better to pick the U.S. taxpayers' pockets – but this reckless talk and war profiteering could spark a nuclear war and leave the world to the cockroaches, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If the human species extinguishes itself in a flash of thermonuclear craziness and the surviving cockroaches later develop the intellect to assess why humans committed this mass suicide, the cockroach historians may conclude that it was our failure to hold the neoconservatives accountable in the first two decades of the Twenty-first Century that led to our demise.

After the disastrous U.S.-led invasion of Iraq – an aggressive war justified under false premises – there rightly should have been a mass purging of the people responsible for the death, destruction and lies. Instead the culprits were largely left in place, indeed they were allowed to consolidate their control of the major Western news media and the foreign-policy establishments of the United States and its key allies.

Despite the Iraq catastrophe which destabilized the Middle East and eventually Europe, the neocons and their liberal interventionist chums still filled the opinion columns of The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and virtually every other mainstream outlet. Across the American and European political systems and “think tanks,” the neocons and the liberal hawks stayed dominant, too, continuing to spin their war plans while facing no significant peace movement.

The cockroach historians might be amazed that at such a critical moment of existential danger, the human species – at least in the most advanced nations of the West – offered no significant critique of the forces leading mankind to its doom. It was as if the human species was unable to learn even the most obvious

lessons needed for its own survival.

Despite the falsehoods of the Iraq War, the U.S. government was still widely believed whenever it came out with a new propaganda theme. Whether it was the sarin gas attack in Syria in 2013 or the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down over eastern Ukraine in 2014, U.S. government assertions blaming the Syrian government and the Russian government, respectively, were widely accepted without meaningful skepticism or simple demands for basic evidence.

### **Swallowing Propaganda**

Just as with the Iraqi WMD case, the major Western media made no demands for proof. They just fell in line and marched closer to the edge of global war. Indeed, the learned cockroaches might observe that the supposed watchdogs in the American press had willingly leashed themselves to the U.S. government as the two institutions moved in unison toward catastrophe.

The few humans in the media who did express skepticism – largely found on something called the Internet – were dismissed as fill-in-the-blank “apologists,” much as occurred with the doubters against the Iraqi WMD case in 2002-2003. The people demanding real evidence were marginalized and those who accepted whatever the powerful said were elevated to positions of ever-greater influence.

If the cockroach historians could burrow deep enough into the radioactive ashes, they might discover that – on an individual level – people such as Washington Post editorial page editor Fred Hiatt wasn't fired after swallowing the WMD lies whole and regurgitating them on the Post's readership; that New York Times columnist Roger Cohen and dozens of similar opinion-leaders were not unceremoniously replaced; that Hillary Clinton, a neocon in the supposedly “liberal” Democratic Party, was rewarded with the party's presidential nomination in 2016; and that the likes of Iraq War architect Robert Kagan remained the toast of the American capital with his opinions sought after and valued.

The cockroaches might observe that humans showed little ability to adapt amid very dangerous conditions, i.e., the bristling nuclear arsenals of eight or so countries. Instead, the humans pressed toward their own doom, tagging along after guides who had proven incompetent over and over again but were still followed toward a civilization-ending precipice.

These guides casually urged the masses toward the edge with sweet-sounding phrases like “democracy promotion,” “responsibility to protect,” and “humanitarian wars.” The same guides, who had sounded so confident about the

wisdom of “shock and awe” in Iraq and then the “regime change” in Libya, pitched plans for a U.S. invasion of Syria, albeit presented as the establishment of “safe zones” and “no-fly zones.”

After orchestrating a coup in Russia’s neighbor Ukraine, overthrowing the elected president and then sponsoring an “anti-terrorism operation” to kill ethnic Russian Ukrainians who objected to the coup, Western politicians and policymakers saw only “Russian aggression” when Moscow gave these embattled people some assistance. When citizens in Crimea voted 96 percent to separate from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, the West denounced the referendum as a “sham” and called it a “Russian invasion.” It didn’t matter that opinion polls repeatedly found similar overwhelming support among the Crimean people for the change. The false narrative, insisting that Russia had instigated the Ukraine crisis, was accepted with near-universal gullibility across the West.

### **A Moscow ‘Regime Change’**

Behind this fog of propaganda, U.S. and other Western officials mounted a significant NATO military build-up on Russia’s border, complete with large-scale military exercises practicing the seizure of Russian territory.

Russian warnings against these operations were dismissed as hysterical and as further proof for the need to engineer another “regime change,” this time in Moscow. But first the Russian government had to be destabilized by making the economy scream. Then, the plan was for political disruptions and eventually a Ukraine-style coup to remove the thrice-elected President Vladimir Putin.

The wisdom of throwing a nuclear power into economic, political and social disorder – and risking that the nuclear codes might end up in truly dangerous hands – was barely discussed.

Even before the desired coup, the West’s neoconservatives advocated giving the Russians a bloody nose in Syria where Moscow’s forces had intervened at the Syrian government’s request to turn back Islamic jihadists who were fighting alongside Western-backed “moderate” rebels.

The neocon/liberal-hawk plans for “no-fly zones” and “safe zones” inside Syria required the U.S. military’s devastation of Syrian government forces and presumably the Russian air force personnel inside Syria with the Russians expected to simply take their beating and keep quiet.

The cockroach historians also might note that once the neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks decided on one of their strategic plans at some “think-tank” conference – or wrote it down in a report or an op-ed – they were single-minded in implementing it regardless of its impracticality or

recklessness.

These hawks were highly skilled at spinning new propaganda themes to justify what they had decided to do. Since they dominated the major media outlets, that was fairly easy without anyone of note taking note that the talking points were simply word games. But the neocons and liberal hawks were very good at word games. Plus, these widely admired interventionists were never troubled with self-doubt whatever mayhem and death followed in their wake.

So, when the decision was made to invade Iraq, Libya and Syria or to stage a coup in Ukraine or to destabilize nuclear-armed Russia, the neocons and their friends never countenanced the possibility that something could go wrong.

And when setbacks and even catastrophes resulted, the messes were excused away as the failure of some politician to implement the neocon/liberal-hawk scheme to the precise letter. If only more force had been used, if only people on the ground were more competent, if only the few critics were silenced and prevented from sowing doubts about the wisdom of the plan, then it would have succeeded. It was never their fault.

As the West's new foreign-policy establishment, the neocons and their liberal helpers validated their own thoughts as brilliant and infallible. And who was there to doubt them? Who had the necessary access to the West's mass media and who had the courage to counter their clever arguments and suffer the predictable ridicule, insults and slurs? After all, there were so many esteemed people and prestigious institutions that stamped the neocon/liberal-hawk plans with gilded seals of approval.

Still, the cockroach historians might yet be puzzled by how thoroughly the world's leadership failed the human species, particularly in the West, which prided itself in freedom of thought and diversity of opinion.

So, the pressures kept building, unchecked, until – perhaps accidentally amid excessive tensions or after some extreme nationalist had exploited Russia's "regime change" chaos to seize power – the final line was crossed.

### **'Extending American Power'**

Though much of human information would likely have been lost in the nuclear firestorms that were unleashed, the cockroach historians could learn much if they could get their antennae around a 2016 report by a group called the Center for a New American Security, consisting of prominent neocons and liberal interventionists, including some expected to play high-level roles in a Hillary Clinton administration.

These “experts” included foreign-policy stars such as Robert Kagan (formerly of the Reagan administration’s State Department, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century – an early advocate for the Iraq War – and later a scholar at the Brookings Institution and a Washington Post columnist), James P. Rubin (who served in Bill Clinton’s State Department and made a name for himself as a TV commentator), Michele Flournoy (the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy during Barack Obama’s first term and touted as Hillary Clinton’s favorite to be Secretary of Defense), Eric Edelman (who preceded Flournoy in her Obama job except he served under George W. Bush), Stephen J. Hadley (George W. Bush’s second-term national security advisor), and James Steinberg (a deputy national security advisor under Bill Clinton and Deputy Secretary of State under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton).

In other words, this group, which included many other big names as well, was a who’s who of who’s important in Washington’s foreign-policy establishment. Their report was brazenly entitled “Extending American Power” and painted an idyllic picture of the world population living happily under U.S. domination in the seven decades since World War II.

“The world order created in the aftermath of World War II has produced immense benefits for peoples across the planet,” the report asserted, ignoring periodic slaughters carried out across the Third World, from Vietnam to Latin America to Africa to the Middle East, often inflicted by the massive application of U.S. firepower and other times by tribal or religious hatreds and rivalries exacerbated by big-power interference.

Also downplayed was the environmental devastation that has come with the progress of hyper-capitalism, threatening the long-term survival of human civilization via “global warming” – assuming that “nuclear winter” doesn’t intervene first.

Even though many of these benighted “experts” were complicit in gross violations of international law – including aggressive war in Iraq, Libya and elsewhere; lethal drone strikes in multiple countries; torture of “war on terror” detainees; and subversion of internationally recognized governments – they deluded themselves into believing that they stood for some legalistic global structure, declaring:

“United States still has the military, economic, and political power to play the leading role in protecting a stable rules-based international order.” Exactly what stability and what rules were left fuzzy.

In line with their underlying delusions, these “experts” called for feeding more money into the maw of the Military-Industrial Complex and flexing American

military muscle: “An urgent first step is to significantly increase U.S. national security and defense spending and eliminate the budgetary strait-jacket of the Budget Control Act. A second and related step is to formulate policies that take advantage of the substantial military, economic, and diplomatic power Washington has available but has been reluctant to deploy in recent years.”

### **Battling Russia over Ukraine**

The bipartisan group – representing what might be called Official Washington’s consensus – also urged a tough stand against Russia regarding Ukraine, including military assistance to help the post-coup Ukrainian regime crush ethnic Russian resistance in the east.

“The United States must provide Ukrainian armed forces with the training and equipment necessary to resist Russian-backed forces and Russian forces operating on Ukrainian territory,” the report said, adding as a recommendation:

**“Underwrite credible security guarantees to NATO allies on the frontlines with Russia.** Given recent Russian behavior, it is no longer possible to ignore the possible challenge to NATO countries that border Russia. The Baltics in particular are vulnerable to both direct attack and the more complicated ‘hybrid’ warfare that Russia has displayed in Ukraine.

“To provide reassurance to U.S. allies and also to deter Russian efforts to destabilize these nations, it is necessary to build upon the European Reassurance Initiative and establish a more robust U.S. force presence in appropriate central and eastern Europe countries, which should include a mix of permanently stationed forces, rotationally deployed forces, prepositioned equipment, access arrangements and a more robust schedule of military training and exercises. ...

“The United States should also work with both NATO and the EU to counter Russian influence-peddling and subversion using corruption and illegal financial manipulation.”

Apparently that last point about “influence-peddling” was a reference to the need to silence dissident voices in the West that object to the new Cold War and dispute U.S. propaganda aimed at justifying the increased tensions with Russia. The report’s Washington insiders clearly understand that their future career prospects are advanced by taking a belligerent approach toward Russia.

Regarding Syria, the bipartisan group of neocons and liberal hawks urged a U.S. military invasion with the goal of establishing a “no-fly zone” while building up insurgent forces capable of compelling “regime change” in Damascus, a strategy similar to those followed in Iraq and Libya to disastrous results.

“In our view, there can be no political solution to the Syrian civil war so long as the military balance continues to convince [Syrian President Bashar al-] Assad he can remain in power. And as a result of Iran’s shock troops and military equipment deployed to Syria, and the modern aircraft and other conventional forces Russia has now deployed, the military balance tilts heavily in favor of the Assad regime,” the report said.

“At a minimum, the inadequate efforts hitherto to arm, train, and protect a substantial Syrian opposition force must be completely overhauled and made a much higher priority. In the meantime, and in light of this grim reality, the United States, together with France and other allies, must employ the necessary military power, including an appropriately designed no-fly zone, to create a safe space in which Syrians can relocate without fear of being killed by Assad’s forces and where moderate opposition militias can arm, train, and organize.”

How a U.S.-led invasion of a sovereign country and the arming of a military force to overthrow the government fit with the group’s enthusiasm for “a rule-based international order” is not explained. Clearly, the prescribed actions are in violation of the United Nations Charter and other international legal standards, but apparently the only real “rules” the group believes in are those that serve its purposes and change depending on the needs for “extending American power.”

Similar hypocrisy pervaded the group’s other recommendations, but the blind obedience to these double standards – indeed the inability to see or acknowledge the blatant contradictions – might be of interest to the cockroach historians because it could help them understand how the U.S. foreign policy establishment lost its mind and blundered into unnecessary conflicts that could easily escalate into strategic warfare, even thermonuclear conflagration.

### **A Steady Drumbeat**

But this collection of neocons and liberal hawks wasn’t just an odd group of careerist “thinkers” trying to impress Hillary Clinton. Their double-thinking “group think” extended throughout the American establishment in the second decade of the Twenty-first Century.

For instance, The New York Times and other major publications were dominated by both neocon and liberal-hawk commentators, writers like Roger Cohen, who was one of the many pundits who swallowed the Iraq War lies whole and – despite the disaster – avoided any negative career consequences. So, in 2016, that left Cohen and his fellow Iraq War cheerleaders still pressing political leaders to expand the war in Syria and ratchet up tensions with Russia at every opportunity.

In a column about the mass shooting at a gay night club in Orlando, Florida, on June 12 – in which the shooter was reported to have claimed allegiance to ISIS – Cohen tacked on a typically distorted account of President Obama’s approach to the Syrian conflict. Ignoring that Obama had the CIA and the Pentagon covertly train and arm rebel groups seeking to overthrow the Syrian government, Cohen wrote:

“Yes, to have actively done nothing in Syria over more than five years of war – so allowing part of the country to become an ISIS stronghold, contributing to a massive refugee crisis in Europe, acquiescing to slaughter and displacement on a devastating scale, undermining America’s word in the world, and granting open season for President Vladimir Putin to strut his stuff – amounts to the greatest foreign policy failure of the Obama administration. It has made the world far more dangerous.”

But Cohen did not acknowledge his own role as a brash supporter of the Iraq War in sparking the creation of Al Qaeda in Iraq, which later morphed into the Islamic State or ISIS. Nor did he address the fact that the United States and its allies, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have essentially kept the Syrian civil war going, a point even acknowledged by some supporters of Syrian “regime change.”

For instance, Thanassis Cambanis of the “progressive” Century Foundation produced a report entitled “The Case for a More Robust U.S. Intervention in Syria,” which acknowledged that “most of the armed opposition has survived only because of foreign intervention.” In other words, much of the death and destruction in Syria, which also has fueled political instability in Europe because of the massive refugee flow, resulted from intervention from the United States and its allies.

So, the cure to the mess created by these not-thought-through interventions, at least in the view of Cohen and other eager interventionists, is more intervention. It was just such obsessive and irrational thinking – embraced as Official Washington’s “conventional wisdom” – that pushed the world toward the eve of destruction in 2016.

Contemplating all this human foolishness, the cockroach historians might be left using one of their six legs to scratch their heads.

[For more on these topics, see Consortiumnews.com’s “A Family Business of Perpetual War”; “Neocons and Neolibs: How Dead Ideas Kill”; and “The State Department’s Collective Madness.”]

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



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

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## Who's the Bigger Danger – Clinton or Trump?

Donald Trump has offered some unnerving ideas about foreign policy, including a cavalier attitude toward nuclear proliferation, but Hillary Clinton's hawkishness may represent a bigger danger of nuclear war, as Ivan Eland explains.

By Ivan Eland

The senseless murder of 49 revelers at an Orlando, Florida, nightclub has amplified our need for a long overdue national conversation this election season about the overall direction of U.S. foreign policy and our proper role in the world. With the party nominating conventions just weeks away, now is a good time to start.

In what was billed as a major foreign-policy [address](#) several weeks ago, Hillary Clinton, who will carry the Democratic banner in this year's contest for the White House, got the ball rolling, characterizing presumptive GOP nominee Donald Trump's views as "dangerous."

Focusing on Trump's statement that Japan and South Korea should defend themselves, rather than rely on the United States – even if this includes the possible use of nuclear weapons – Clinton was anything but subtle: "This is not someone who should ever have the nuclear codes because it's not hard to imagine Donald Trump leading us into a war just because somebody got under his very thin skin."

By comparison, Lyndon Johnson's 1964 [television ad](#) smearing Barry Goldwater, which featured a nuclear mushroom cloud and a little girl with a flower, was the epitome of subtlety.

Clinton's biting attack on Trump got high marks from many in the media. Yet, ironically, Trump's foreign policy views, if you think about it, are less scary, even in their implications for possible nuclear war, than Clinton's belligerent interventionism – sold as "American world leadership."

Even if one fervently opposes nuclear proliferation, a strong case can be made

that the United States should spend more time worrying about the radical or unstable countries that either have nuclear weapons or are seeking them—such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and North Korea – than worrying about Japan and South Korea.

But that's not where Clinton chose to take us. Instead, Clinton and much of the U.S. foreign policy elite, Republican and Democrat alike, obsess about Trump saying what should be obvious. It would not be a catastrophe if Japan and South Korea – stable, democratic societies and good world citizens – were able to deter aggression, if need be, even with nuclear weapons.

In fact, for many years, the U.S. foreign-policy establishment has covered up the danger to the American public, an illusion created by America's extensive web of international security alliances and agreements. There is no plausible scenario in which any of our NATO allies, or any of the other nations that rely on the U.S. security umbrella – Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Israel, for example – is going to be called upon to defend the United States. As a practical matter it only works the other way: we guarantee their security.

Very few U.S. allies have nuclear weapons, and if they get into a scuffle with a nuclear power such as China or Russia, even over a minor issue, such as contested rocks in the South China Sea, the United States could ultimately be responsible by treaty to defend them. This ultimately could mean using nuclear weapons and inviting a retaliatory strike on American soil.

This essentially irrational policy was initiated during the Cold War to protect countries from attack by the powerful Soviet Union. However, as bad as a Soviet takeover of Western Europe or Japan would have been, it pales in comparison to American cities becoming nuclear wastelands.

The implicit U.S. pledge to use nuclear weapons to defend its allies was predicated on the risky notion that it would deter a Soviet attack. There was little or no conversation about the cataclysmic horror that could result if deterrence didn't work. If the policy was irrational during the Cold War, continuing it has been even more irrational since the Cold War ended.

Donald Trump is wise to question the United States' outdated, inflexible and costly commitment to protect large numbers of nations around the world. Such formal and informal alliances are the core of an overextended American foreign policy that requires having hundreds of U.S. military bases overseas and conducting countless – now seemingly perpetual – military campaigns, such as the wars Clinton supported in the Balkans, Iraq and Libya, to support this informal American Empire.

With a \$19 trillion national debt, the United States can no longer afford such a policy. Besides, it is unwise and puts the American public – and our military – unnecessarily at risk.

Ivan Eland is senior fellow and director of the Center on Peace & Liberty at the Independent Institute, Oakland, CA, and the author of *Recarving Rushmore: Ranking the Presidents on Peace, Prosperity, and Liberty*. [This article previously appeared at <http://nationalinterest.org/print/feature/hillarys-foreign-policy-scarier-trumps-16639>]

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## Pushing the Doomsday Clock to Midnight

As the U.S. and NATO mount provocative military maneuvers on Russia's border, the West is oblivious to how these threatening gestures ratchet up prospects of thermonuclear war that could extinguish civilization, says Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

In his eulogy to Mohammed Ali at the Louisville memorial service, Rabbi Michael Lerner reminded us all of the distinguishing feature of "The Greatest," that from the start of his career he spoke Truth to Power and paid the price when he was stripped of his heavyweight title for five years.

In that spirit, and in the presence of eminent national leaders, Rabbi Lerner listed major issues that concern Liberal Progressives, adding one issue that is often overlooked. He said that attempts to subjugate peoples and rule the world have been made over the last 10,000 years and they have never worked. In what follows, I will try to expand on that very important observation and how it bears on our own and broader humanity's prospects for survival now.

One of the very sad consequences of the monopoly control of mainstream print and electronic media, as well as of the two houses of Congress by the ideologists of Neoconservatism and Liberal Interventionism is that the broad American public, including instinctively skeptical Progressives, is clueless about the level of risk of all-out nuclear war that we are inviting by our current and projected policies of global domination. America's seemingly irresistible force is coming up against indomitable resistance from Russia and China and the result is an escalating confrontation that we have not seen since the days of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

I had a personal awakening to the reality of the false sense of security that

pervades American society some 18 months ago when I participated in a Peace Day event organized at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where the keynote speaker was Noam Chomsky and where a number of other leading personalities in the nationwide antiwar movement also held forth.

The auditorium, which accommodated the opening, plenary session, was filled by perhaps 350 activists, many of them gray-headed veterans from the 1960s Vietnam War resistance, but also a representative sampling of students from the Greater Boston area. When we broke up for workshops, perhaps 250 chose the then very fashionable issue of the Islamic State, whose exploits had filled our newspapers with beheadings and bloody terror taking place in distant lands. My own workshop was on the red-hot civil war then raging in Donbass, in southeastern Ukraine, which was becoming a proxy war between Russia and the U.S. It drew a total of five auditors.

And the workshop on nuclear dangers, which I looked in on when my session closed, had perhaps 10 auditors. The organizers were busy presenting slides showing what could happen in a European city like Rotterdam if “bad guys” managed to detonate a dirty radioactive bomb in the city center. A better scenario for substituting phony threats for real ones could not have been written by Pentagon strategists.

The thought that we might find ourselves in a nuclear exchange with Russia did not cross the minds of organizers or auditors alike. And yet to my understanding, the level of risk of war coming out of the Great Power stand-off in Ukraine, and of it – accidentally or otherwise – spinning out of control and going nuclear was vastly greater than anything that could ever befall us from the advance of radical Islamists in the Middle East.

My point is not to ridicule the very earnest and well-intentioned anti-war campaigners whose ranks I joined that day. It is to demonstrate how and why the highly tendentious reporting of what the U.S. is doing in the world and what others are doing to us, combined with selective news blackouts by major media, has left even activists unaware of real threats to the peace and to our very survival that American foreign policy has created over the past 20 years. And those threats are likely to grow in the future if the public does not awaken from its slumber and demand to be informed by experts with countervailing views.

### **Ignoring War and Peace**

We are living through a situation unparalleled in our history as a nation where the issues of war and peace are not being debated in public, at least not in any serious way.

Moreover, the risk of accidental war has moved quickly beyond where it was just 18 months ago. Now we are entering upon implementation of very provocative U.S.-directed military expansion of NATO activities at the borders of Russia. The ongoing war games – code-named Anaconda-16 in Poland numbering 31,000 troops, 17,000 of them Americans – are rehearsing a NATO seizure and occupation of Russia's Kaliningrad enclave, just a few miles away.

President Vladimir Putin's remark at the start of the exercises was that any move into Russian territory would elicit a nuclear response that would not be limited to the European theater but would be directed at the mainland United States. These were clear words, but I greatly doubt that many Americans heard them (or if they did, it was in the mainstream media's context of the demonized Putin's "reckless" rhetoric).

The NATO Summit planned for July 6-8 in Warsaw will confirm plans to greatly expand the presence of NATO troops and heavy equipment in bases being built in Poland as well as in the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In response to this unanticipated threat to its national security, Russia is now moving a large part of its armed forces from the center of the country to the Leningrad Oblast, bordering on Estonia. The distances separating Russian and NATO forces will be miniscule.

In this sense, we are now two minutes to midnight on the nuclear catastrophe clock. But the American people seem unaware of this potential threat to the survival of human civilization. The only political commentary is more belligerent talk directed at Putin and vows to confront "Russian aggression."

What can we do about this dire situation? First, we can write to the editors of our major national daily newspapers and complain about the wholly one-sided view of international affairs that they are feeding us day by day. We should politely demand that they open their op-ed pages to responsible experts and non-experts who challenge our present foreign and defense policies as being aggressive and provocative.

The same letters should be sent to the producers of news programming and panel discussions at CNN, MSNBC, Fox News and other leading electronic media who have systematically black-balled all those who do not agree with the Washington Narrative ever since the start of the Information Wars with Russia in 2007.

Secondly, we should write to our Congressmen and women demanding that Congressional hearings on foreign relations and relations with Russia and China in particular must cease to be phony exercises at which only those who support the U.S. government's present policies or call for still more drastic poking the Russians in the eye get invited to testify.

Hearings which bring in as well those who believe as I do that we are presently on course for Armageddon should get C-SPAN coverage and give the American public a chance to judge for itself from authoritative and credible sources and not only from “alternative media” that can easily be dismissed by the establishment.

These recommended actions will not by themselves turn back the minute hand on the Clock, but they may stop its progression and give us a very much needed time out to fix policies that are wrongheaded and extremely dangerous.

**Gilbert Doctorow is the European Coordinator and Board Member of The American Committee for East West Accord Ltd. His most recent book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015.**

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## The Bigger Nuclear Risk: Trump or Clinton?

**Exclusive:** If the U.S. election comes down to Hillary Clinton v. Donald Trump, the American people will have to decide between two candidates who could risk the future of the planet, albeit for very different reasons, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Hillary Clinton made a strong case for why handing the nuclear codes over to a President Donald Trump would be a scary idea, but there may be equal or even greater reason to fear turning them over to her. In perhaps the most likely area where nuclear war could break out – along Russia’s borders – Clinton comes across as the more belligerent of the two.

In Clinton’s world view, President Vladimir Putin, who has been elected multiple times and has approval ratings around 80 percent, is nothing more than a “dictator” who is engaged in “aggression” that threatens NATO following the U.S.-backed “regime change” in Ukraine.

“Moscow has taken aggressive military action in Ukraine, right on NATO’s doorstep,” she declared. But stop for a second and think about what Clinton said: she sees Russia responding to an unconstitutional coup in Ukraine – which installed a virulently anti-Russian regime on Russia’s border – as Moscow acting aggressively “on NATO’s doorstep.”

That’s the same NATO, whose job it was to protect Western Europe from the Soviet Union, that – following the Soviet Union’s collapse – added country after

country right up to Russia's border. In other words, NATO muscled its way into Russia's face and has announced plans to incorporate Ukraine as well, but when Russia reacts, it's the one doing the provoking.

Clinton's neoconservative interpretation of what's happening in Eastern Europe is so upside-down and inside-out that it could ultimately become the flashpoint for a nuclear war between Russia and the West.

While she sees Russia as the "aggressor" against NATO, the Russians see NATO moving troops up to its borders and watch the deployment of anti-ballistic-missile systems in Romania and Poland, thus making a first-strike nuclear attack against Russia more feasible. Russia has made clear that it views these military deployments, just kilometers from major Russian cities, as an existential threat.

In response, Russia is raising its alert levels and upgrading its strategic forces. Yet, Hillary Clinton believes the Russians have no reason to fear NATO's military encirclement and no right to resist U.S.-supported coups in countries on Russia's periphery. It is just such a contradiction of viewpoints that can turn a spark into an uncontrollable inferno.

What might happen, for instance, if Ukraine's nationalist – and even neo-Nazi – militias, which wield increasing power over the corrupt and indecisive regime in Kiev, received modern weaponry from a tough-talking Clinton-45 administration and launched an offensive to exterminate ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine and to reclaim Crimea, where 96 percent of the voters opted to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia?

A President Hillary Clinton would have talked herself into a position of supporting this "liberation" of "Russian-occupied territory" and her clever propagandists would surely present this "heroic struggle" as a war of good against evil, much as they justified bloody U.S. invasions of Iraq and Libya which Clinton supported as U.S. senator and Secretary of State, respectively.

What if the Ukrainian forces then fired missiles striking Russia's naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea, killing some of the 20,000 Russian troops stationed there and inflicting damage on Russia's Black Sea fleet? What if Kremlin hardliners finally got their way and unleashed the Russian army to launch a real invasion of Ukraine, crushing its military, rumbling through to Kiev and accomplishing their own "regime change"?

How would President Hillary Clinton respond? Would she put herself in the shoes of Russia's leaders and search for some way to de-escalate or would she get high-and-mighty and escalate the crisis by activating NATO military forces to

counter this “Russian aggression”?

Given what we know about Clinton’s tough-talking persona, the odds are good that she would opt for an escalation – and that could set the stage for nuclear war, possibly starting because the Russians would fear the imminence of a NATO first strike, made more possible by those ABM bases in Romania and Poland.

### **Clinton’s Non-Nuclear Wars**

There are other areas in the world where a President Hillary Clinton would likely go to war albeit at a sub-nuclear level. During the campaign, she has made clear that she intends to invade Syria once she takes office, although she frames her invasions as humanitarian gestures, such as creating “safe zones” and “no-fly zones.”

In other words, although she condemns Russian “aggression,” she advocates aggressive war herself, seemingly incapable of recognizing her hypocrisies and only grudgingly acknowledging her “mistakes,” such as her support for the invasion of Iraq.

So, on Thursday, even as she made strong points about Trump’s mismatched temperament for becoming Commander-in-Chief, she flashed a harsh temperament of her own that also was unsettling, although in a different way.

Trump shoots from the lip and has a thin skin, while Clinton is tightly wound and also has a thin skin. Trump lets his emotions run wild while Clinton is excessively controlled. Trump engages in raucous give-and-take with his critics; Clinton tries to hide her decision-making (and emails) from her critics.

It’s hard to say which set of behaviors is more dangerous. One can imagine Trump having free-form or chaotic diplomatic encounters with allies and adversaries alike, while Clinton would plot and scheme, insisting on cooperation from allies and demanding capitulation from adversaries.

Clinton sprinkled her speech denouncing Trump with gratuitous insults aimed at Putin and undiplomatic slaps at Russia, such as, “If Donald gets his way, they’ll be celebrating in the Kremlin. We cannot let that happen.”

In short, there is reason to fear the election of either of these candidates, one because of his unpredictability and the other because of her rigidity. How, one might wonder, did the two major political parties reach this juncture, putting two arguably unfit personalities within reach of the nuclear codes?

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a](#)



Neocon” and “Would a Clinton Win Mean More Wars?”]

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

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