

# In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in November focused on the realities behind the Syrian crisis, Turkey's dangerous provocations toward Russia, the many failings of the mainstream U.S. media, and disclosures about Ukraine Finance Minister's self-enrichment at U.S. taxpayers' expense.

["Syria at a Crossroads"](#) by Nicolas J S Davies, Nov. 1, 2015

["Rubio Follows the Big Money"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 1, 2015

["Reviving the 'Liberal Media' Myth"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 2, 2015

["The Dark Truth in the Movie 'Truth'"](#) by James DiEugenio, Nov. 3, 2015

["America's Chalabi Legacy of Lies"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 4, 2015

["The Death of a Charming Charlatan"](#) by Karen Kwiatkowski, Nov. 4, 2015

["Why NYT Dissed the 'Drone Papers'"](#) by John Hanrahan, Nov. 4, 2015

["Obama's Risky 'Mission Creep' in Syria"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Nov. 6, 2015

["Bush-41 Finally Speaks on Iraq War"](#) by Ray McGovern, Nov. 8, 2015

["How Technology Kills Democracy"](#) by Norman Solomon, Nov. 9, 2015

["A New 'War on Christmas' Absurdity"](#) by Nat Parry, Nov. 9, 2015

["How Israel Out-Foxed US Presidents"](#) by Morgan Strong, Nov. 9, 2015

["How Ukraine's Finance Chief Got Rich"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 10, 2015

["Rubio's Big-time Military Build-up"](#) by Chuck Spinney, Nov. 11, 2015

["The Progressives' Green Party Dilemma"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Nov. 11, 2015

["Obama's Double-Standard on Leaks"](#) by John Hanrahan, Nov. 11, 2015

["Netanyahu Ups the US Ante"](#) by Ann Wright, Nov. 12, 2015

["Fresh Twists in the Lockerbie Case"](#) by John Ashton, Nov. 12, 2015

["Carpetbagging 'Crony Capitalism' in Ukraine"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 13, 2015

["How Saudi/Gulf Money Fuels Terror"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Nov. 14, 2015

["Can Obama Level with the People?"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 14, 2015

["Grasping the Motives for Terror"](#) by James Paul, Nov. 16, 2015

["Falling into the ISIS Trap"](#) by William R. Polk, Nov. 17, 2015

["CIA Whistleblower Kiriakou Honored"](#) by Ray McGovern, Nov. 18, 2015

["Neocons Make Rubio Their Favorite"](#) by JP Sottile, Nov. 18, 2015

["Reform Judaism's Israeli Critique"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Nov. 18, 2015

["Tangled Threads of US False Narrative"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 19, 2015

["How Russians See the West and Russia"](#) by Natylie Baldwin, Nov. 19, 2015

["The Saudi Connection to Terror"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Nov. 20, 2015

["The 'War on Terror' Has Been Lost"](#) by Nat Parry, Nov. 20, 2015

["Ducking the Issue of 'Perpetual War'"](#) by Sam Hussein, Nov. 22, 2015

["Hitting Saudi Arabia Where it Hurts"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 23, 2015

["A 'See-No-Evil' Drone War"](#) by John Hanrahan, Nov. 23, 2015

["Turkey Provokes Russia with Shoot-down"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 24, 2015

["Delinking Terrorism and Islam"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 24, 2015

["In the Dark on the 'Dark Side'"](#) by Nicolas J S Davies, Nov. 27, 2015

["The Collision Course in Syria"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Nov. 28, 2015

["Is Assad Part of a Solution?"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Nov. 29, 2015

["How Gaddafi's Ouster Unleashed Terror"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 30, 2015

["Ben Carson and the 'War on Christmas'"](#) by Nat Parry, Nov. 30, 2015

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# The Courage from Whistle-blowing

**Exclusive:** Courage, like cowardice, can grow when an action by one person influences decisions by others, either toward bravery or fear. Thus, the gutsy whistle-blowing by some NSA officials inspired Edward Snowden to expose mass data collection on all Americans, recalls ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

When Edward Snowden in early June 2013 began to reveal classified data showing criminal collect-it-all surveillance programs operated by the U.S. government's National Security Agency, former NSA professionals became freer to spell out the liberties taken with the Bill of Rights, as well as the feckless, counterproductive nature of bulk electronic data collection.

On Jan. 7, 2014, four senior retired specialists with a cumulative total of 144 years of work with NSA William Binney, Thomas Drake, Edward Loomis, and Kirk Wiebe prepared a Memorandum for the President providing a comprehensive account of the problems at NSA, together with suggestions as to how they might be best addressed.

The purpose was to inform President Obama as fully as possible, as he prepared to take action in light of Snowden's revelations.

On Jan. 23, 2015 in Berlin, Binney was honored with the annual Sam Adams Award for Integrity in Intelligence. Ed Snowden was live-streamed-in for the occasion, and said, "Without Bill Binney there would be no Ed Snowden." (Binney had been among the first to speak out publicly about NSA abuses; apparently that emboldened Snowden to do what he did.)

Snowden had already said when he fled to Hong Kong in June 2013 that he had learned an extremely important lesson from the four years of government persecution/prosecution of Tom Drake; namely, that he, Ed Snowden, had to leave the country in order to fulfill his mission and to have some reasonable chance to avoid spending the rest of his life behind bars. (Eventually, all the felony charges against Drake were dismissed.)

An important take-away lesson from Binney's and Drake's boldness and tenacity is that one never knows what impetus courageous truth-tellers can give to other, potential whistleblowers like Ed Snowden.

In 1998, Bill Binney, with some 35 years under his belt as a senior NSA mathematician and cryptologist took on a staggering problem for NSA: how to deal with the vast amount of data available on the world wide web without burying

intelligence analysts under a haystack of data.

From Binney's long experience, it seemed clear that selecting information by using metadata relationships was the smart way to go. As he puts it, "Smart selection is smart collection."

This approach was totally different from the word/phrase dictionary-select type approach in general use even today. Binney's technique was to use metadata and some additional rules to define relationships. This enabled discriminate selection of data from the tens of terabytes twisting in the ether. The approach focused the collected data around known targets, plus some potential developmental targets, and yielded much more manageable content for analysts to deal with.

### **Missing the Needles**

Experience had long since shown that collecting everything in bulk, and using word/phrase type queries, end up burying analysts in data and making them dysfunctional. In some of the internal NSA memos released by Snowden, NSA analysts complain of the kind of analysis paralysis that makes it extremely difficult for them to find and address the real threats.

As Snowden has quipped, "The problem with mass surveillance is when you collect everything, you understand nothing."

The net result is that people die first. Only then do detectives and law enforcement go wading into their vast data, focus on possible perpetrators of the crime and often find related information. This is, of course, exactly the reverse of how the security services should proceed assuming the main priority is to thwart terrorist or other attacks. And yet the U.S. government proceeds willy-nilly with its SOS (Stasi-On-Steroids) approach.

In sum, success can come only from a focused, disciplined selection of data off the fiber lines, yielding usable metadata, as Binney and his NSA colleagues demonstrated. Indeed, there was quite enough electronic intelligence collected by THINTHREAD, the collection system Binney and his team created, *before 9/11* to have thwarted the attacks, as NSA senior executive Thomas Drake learned, to his horror, *after* the fact.

"Smart selection" techniques can also protect individual privacy, as Binney and his colleagues likewise showed. More to the point, this approach can provide a rich but manageable data environment for analysts to use toward one of the most important intelligence objectives predicting intentions and capabilities.

This way, one is not reduced to watching attack after attack and then wiping up

the blood and searching data bases for clues to the perpetrators primarily the job of law enforcement.

### **Problems With Honesty**

Sadly, recent history has shown that the directors of U.S. intelligence services lie, and that directors of the NSA lie blatantly and suffer *zero* consequences. On March 12, 2013 (less than two months *before* the Snowden revelations), National Intelligence Director James Clapper lied under oath in denying that NSA was “wittingly” collecting “any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans.”

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, had put that question to Clapper that day at a formal, open Senate Intelligence Committee hearing.

Similarly, on June 27, 2013, three weeks *after* the first Snowden revelations started coming, then-NSA Director Keith Alexander lied in telling the same Senate committee that NSA’s bulk telephone surveillance program had thwarted 54 terrorist “plots or events.” On Oct. 2, 2013, Gen. Alexander admitted, in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, that the number of terrorist plots thwarted was not 54, but one. (And that particular one cannot bear close scrutiny.)

The failure to demand accountability for these deceptions proves as if further proof were needed that the Senate intelligence “oversight” committees has long since become the Senate intelligence “overlook” committee.

If democracy still means anything, we the people need to devise some kind of replacement for the sleepy “watchdogs” in Congress who have forfeited their responsibility to oversee and verify what the intelligence agencies are doing. Again, Bill Binney has what seem the most sensible and doable suggestions toward that end.

He has called for a properly cleared technical team, *responsible to the courts*, with clearly spelled-out authority to go into any intelligence agency and look directly into and inspect data bases and the tools in use. This would be a giant step toward ensuring that we the people through this intrusive inspection regime could monitor in some rudimentary way what our intelligence agencies are doing.

Binney suggests further that intelligence agencies be required to implement software to monitor their own networks to detect automatically and to report immediately violations of law and regulation.

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour inner-city Washington. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence**

Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), and is indebted to VIPS member Bill Binney for much of the substance of this article, which came from McGovern's prepared text for remarks at a conference on Thursday in Moscow, marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of RT's founding.

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## The US-Russia Proxy War in Syria

**Exclusive:** The risk of Syria becoming a proxy war between the U.S. and Russia became real last week when Turkey and Syrian jihadists used U.S.-supplied weaponry to shoot down a Russian warplane and rescue helicopter, killing two Russians, a danger that ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern explores.

By Ray McGovern

Belatedly, at a sidebar meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Paris climate summit on Monday, President Barack Obama reportedly expressed regret for last week's killing of a Russian pilot who was shot down by a Turkish air-to-air missile fired by a U.S.-supplied F-16 and the subsequent death of a Russian marine on a search-and-rescue mission, apparently killed by a U.S.-made TOW missile.

But Obama administration officials continued to take the side of Turkey, a NATO "ally" which claims implausibly that it was simply defending its air space and that the Russian pilot of the SU-24 warplane had ignored repeated warnings. According to accounts based on Turkish data, the SU-24 may have strayed over a slice of Turkish territory for 17 seconds. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Facts Back Russia on Turkish Attack](#)."] ]

Immediately after the incident on Nov. 24, Obama offered [a knee-jerk justification of Turkey's provocative action](#) which appears to have been a deliberate attack on a Russian warplane to deter continued bombing of Syrian jihadists, including the Islamic State and Al Qaeda's Nusra Front. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, an Islamist, has supported various jihadists as his tip of the spear in his goal to overthrow the secular regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

In his first public comments about the Turkish attack, Obama gracelessly asserted Turkey's right to defend its territory and air space although there was never any indication that the SU-24 even if it had strayed momentarily into Turkish air space had any hostile intentions against Turkey. Indeed, Turkey and the United States were well aware that the Russian planes were targeting the

Islamic State, Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and other jihadist rebels.

Putin even complained, "We told our U.S. partners in advance where, when at what altitudes our pilots were going to operate. The U.S.-led coalition, which includes Turkey, was aware of the time and place where our planes would operate. And this is exactly where and when we were attacked. Why did we share this information with the Americans? Either they don't control their allies, or they just pass this information left and right without realizing what the consequences of such actions might be. We will have to have a serious talk with our U.S. partners."

Putin also suggested that the Turkish attack was in retaliation for Russia's bombing of a truck convoy carrying Islamic State oil to Turkey. On Monday, on the sidelines of the Paris summit, Putin said Russia has "received additional information confirming that that oil from the deposits controlled by Islamic State militants enters Turkish territory on industrial scale."

Turkey's Erdogan – also in Paris – denied buying oil from terrorists and vowed to resign "if it is proven that we have, in fact, done so."

### **Was Obama Angry?**

In private, Obama may have been outraged by Erdogan's reckless actions as some reports suggest but, if so, Obama seems publicly more afraid of offending the neocons who dominate Official Washington's opinion circles and who hold key positions in his own administration, than of provoking a possible nuclear confrontation with Russia.

On Nov. 24, even as Russian emotions were running high reacting to the killing of one Russian pilot and the death of a second Russian marine killed after his helicopter was shot down apparently by a U.S.-supplied TOW missile fired by Syrian jihadists Obama chose to act "tough" against Putin, both during a White House press conference with French President Francois Holland and later with pro-Turkish remarks from U.S. officials.

During the press conference after the Turkish shoot-down and the deliberate fire from Turkish-backed Syrian jihadists aiming at two Russian airmen as they parachuted to the ground, Obama chose to make disparaging remarks about the Russian president.

Obama boasted about the 65 nations in the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State compared to Putin's small coalition of Russia and Iran (although Putin's tiny coalition appears to be much more serious and effective than Obama's bloated one, which includes countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar that have been implicated in supporting jihadist elements, including Al Qaeda

and the Islamic State).

By delivering these anti-Russian insults at such a delicate time, Obama apparently was trusting that Putin would keep his cool and tamp down public emotions at home, even as Obama lacked the integrity and courage to stand up to neocon criticism from The Washington Post's editorial page or from some of his hawkish subordinates.

The administration's neocons who keep demanding an escalation of tensions with Russia include Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland. Then, there are the officials most identified with arms procurement, sales and use, such as Defense Secretary Ashton Carter.

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford recently volunteered to Congress that U.S. forces "can impose a no-fly zone" for Syria (a dangerous play advocated by presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and Sen. John McCain). Dunford is the same hawk who identified Russia as the "existential threat" to the U.S. and said it would be "reasonable" to send heavy weapons to Ukraine on Russia's border.

Meanwhile, NATO commander Gen. Philip Breedlove keeps up his fly-by-the-pants information warfare campaign citing Russian "aggression," "invasions" and plans to do still more evil things. One is tempted to dismiss him as a buffoon; but he is the NATO commander.

### **Lack of Control**

It does not appear as though Obama has the same degree of control over foreign and defense policy that Putin enjoys in Moscow or at least one hopes Putin can retain such control since some hard-line Russian nationalists are fuming that Putin has been too accommodating of his Western "partners."

Perhaps the greatest danger from Obama's acquiescence to the neocons' new Cold War with Russia is that the neocon hopes for "regime change in Moscow" will be realized except that Putin will be replaced by some ultra-nationalist who would rather risk nuclear war than accept further humiliation of Mother Russia.

Meanwhile, back in Washington, the U.S. establishment is such that the generals, the arms manufacturers and weapons merchants, the Defense Department, and most of Congress have a very strong say in U.S. foreign policy and Obama seems powerless to change it.

The model of governing in Washington is a far cry from Russia's guiding principle of *edinonachaliye* by which one supreme authority is in clear control of decision-making on defense and foreign policy.



Even when Obama promises, he often fails to deliver. Think back to what Obama told then-President Dmitry Medvedev when they met in Seoul in March 2012, about addressing Russian concerns over European missile defense. In remarks picked up by camera crews, Obama asked for some “space” until after the U.S. election. Obama can be heard saying, “This is my last election. After my election, I have more flexibility.”

Yet, even after winning reelection, Obama has remained cowed by the influential neocons even as he has bucked some of their more aggressive demands, such as a massive U.S. bombing campaign against Assad’s military in summer 2013 and bomb-bomb-bombing Iran; instead, in 2014-15, Obama pushed for a negotiated agreement to constrain Iran’s nuclear program.

Ideally, Obama should be able to show some flexibility on Syria during his last year in office, but no one should hold their breath. Obama appears to have deep fears about crossing the neocons or Israel regarding what they want for the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Besides the neocons’ close ties to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the neocons are intimately connected to the interests of the Military-Industrial Complex, which provides substantial funding for the major think tanks where many neocons hang their hats and churn out new arguments for more world conflict and thus more military spending.

Unlike Obama, Pope Francis addressed this fact-of-life head-on in his Sept. 24 address to members of the U.S. Congress many if not most of whom also are lavished with proceeds from the arms trade and then appropriate still more funding for arms production and sales.

“Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering,” Francis asked them face-to-face. “Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for money: money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood.”

### **An Old Epithet**

From my days as a CIA analyst covering the Soviet Union, I’m reminded of the epithet favored by the Soviet party daily *Pravda* a few decades ago “*vallstreetskiye krovopitsiy*” or Wall St. bloodsuckers. Propaganda-ish as that term seemed, it turns out that Soviet media were not far off on that subject.

Indeed, the banks and corporations involved in arms manufacture and sales enjoy immense power arguably, more than a president; unarguably more than Obama. The moneyed interests including Congress are calling the shots.

The old adage “money makes the world go round” is also apparent in Washington’s

velvet-gloves treatment of the Saudis and is nowhere better illustrated than in the continued suppression of 28 pages of the 2002 Joint Congressional Inquiry on 9/11. Those pages deal with the Saudi role in financing and supporting some of the 9/11 hijackers, but both the Bush and Obama administrations have kept those pages hidden for 13 years.

One reason is that the Saudis are the primary recipients of the U.S. trade in weapons, for which they pay cash. American manufacturers are selling the Saudis arms worth \$100 billion under the current five-year agreement. Oddly, acts of terrorism sweeten the pot. Three days after the attacks in Paris, Washington and Riyadh announced a deal for \$1.3 billion more.

And yet, neither Obama, nor any of the candidates trying to replace him, nor Congress is willing to jeopardize the arms trade by insisting that Riyadh call an abrupt halt to its support for the jihadists fighting in Syria for fear this might incur the wrath of the deep-pocket Saudis.

Not even Germany already inundated, so far this year, by a flood of 950,000 refugees, mostly from Syria is willing to risk Saudi displeasure. Berlin prefers to pay off the Turks with billions of euros to stanch the flow of those seeking refuge in Europe.

And so, an unholy alliance of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states continues to fuel the war in Syria while Obama pretends that his giant coalition is really doing the job of taking on many of those same jihadists. But Obama's coalition has been woefully incompetent and indeed compromised, bumbling along and letting the Islamic State seize more territory along with Al Qaeda and its affiliates and allies.

Russia's entry into the war in September changed the equation because unlike Obama's grand coalition Putin's puny coalition with Iran actually was serious about beating back the jihadists and stabilizing Assad's regime. Turkey's shoot-down of the Russian warplane on Nov. 24 was a crude message from Erdogan that success in defeating the jihadists would not be tolerated.

As for the United States and Europe, myopia prevails. None seems concerned that the terrorists whom they support today will come back to bite them tomorrow. American officials, despite their rhetoric and despite 9/11, seem to consider the terrorist threat remote from U.S. shores and, in any case, dwarfed in importance by the lucrative arm sales.

As for the Vienna talks on Syria, the speed with which they were arranged (with Iran taking part) raised expectations now dampened. Last week, for example, Secretary of State John Kerry bragged about how a meeting of "moderate" rebels

is to convene “in the next few weeks” to come up with principles for negotiating with Syrian President Assad’s government. The convener? Saudi Arabia!

Obama knows what has to happen for this terrorist threat to be truly addressed. The Saudis and Turks have to be told, in no uncertain terms, to stop supporting the jihadists. But that would require extraordinary courage and huge political perhaps even physical risk. There is no sign that President Obama dares bite that bullet.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years, from the administration of John F. Kennedy to that of George H. W. Bush. From 1981 to 1985, he prepared the *President’s Daily Brief*, which he briefed one-on-one to President Ronald Reagan’s five most senior national security advisers.

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## In Case You Missed...

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## CIA Whistleblower Kiriakou Honored

CIA officer John Kiriakou, the first U.S. official to confirm that waterboarding was used to torture "war on terror" detainees, then faced a retaliatory prosecution and 30 months in prison. Recognizing his sacrifice, the

literary group PEN gave Kiriakou its First Amendment Award, observed ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

**Editor's Note:** On Nov. 16, PEN Center USA, the West Coast branch of PEN International, gave former CIA officer John Kiriakou its First Amendment Award for his role in exposing waterboarding as torture used during President George W. Bush's "war on terror." Kiriakou then faced retaliation which led to a 30-month prison term for revealing classified information.

PEN International, a human rights and literary arts organization that promotes the written word and freedom of expression, asked former CIA analyst Ray McGovern to write an essay describing Kiriakou's contribution and sacrifice. McGovern wrote:

John Kiriakou was just a name in the news until early 2012 when I got a call from Jesselyn Radack, mutual friend, whistleblower and intrepid attorney, who suggested I have lunch with him. John had been arrested in January and charged with unauthorized disclosure of classified information. Over lunch I learned how John had transitioned from highly decorated CIA officer to target of a government vendetta.

John, you see, had refused to be trained in how to torture. Even worse, he had the temerity to confirm publicly that our government was implementing a White House-approved program of torture techniques that turned out to be virtually identical to those listed in the Gestapo *Handbuch*.

Those of you who have seen the documentary *Silenced* already know of the key role Jesselyn Radack has been playing in defending whistleblowers like John Kiriakou. What? This is the first you have heard of *Silenced*? Well, there's a subject for another discussion. Suffice it to note here that the powers-that-be in the distribution business simply chickened out, as they so often do.

*Silenced* chronicles behavior by faux lawyers at the Department of Justice that is anything but just or lawful. But, hey, who, in this day and age, wants to take on a notoriously vindictive DOJ? And so, with supreme irony, *Silenced* has been silenced.

The documentary shows in a poignant way how, after Jesselyn Radack's own ordeal at the hands of DOJ where she had been an adviser on legal ethics, she decided to devote the rest of her professional life to defending other whistle blowers. John Kiriakou and NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake are also featured all three playing their own roles.

The film presents an extraordinary example of how personal involvement with innocent suffering with injustice suffered first hand or by others can move the heart and the will so deeply that experience becomes catalyst for solidarity and action.

And healing. This came second nature to the community that immediately enfolded the Kiriakou family and helped John's wife Heather and their three young children 2, 7, and 9 at the time survive the ordeal of two years with dad stuck in prison. There were lots of us many no strangers to jail or prison for whistleblowing or nonviolent resistance and Code Pink, as usual, stepped up to share leadership.

### **Making an Example of John**

At CIA's urging, DOJ was coming after John Kiriakou big time. And Heather, herself a widely respected CIA analyst, was let go. In effect, government retaliation created a situation of "two-less" replacing the "twofer" that had been serving with such distinction and integrity at CIA.

When John went to prison, I could identify albeit in a very small way with what it means to be away from wife and children for what seems like forever. Decades ago I had spent three months alone in the Soviet Union, away from my wife and three small children. I ached; I missed the hugs so much that I dreamed of finding a way to send my arms home in the diplomatic pouch.

It's harder still, of course, for wives. It always is. It was challenging enough for my wife to cope with our three children all of them under ten for three months. The mind boggles at what it must have been like for Heather with three still younger children.

And in the midst of all this, with zero warning, Heather's mother had a fatal heart attack. She had been an anchor against the wind for Heather and also a large part of her grandchildren's lives. With our own three daughters, I have witnessed first-hand the sanctity of the unique bond between mother and daughter. Maybe only a woman can fully understand the depth of the challenge Heather faced with the sudden death of her treasured soul mate and with no husband nearby to lean on.

### **The "Dark Side"**

John Kiriakou had become CIA's Enemy No. 1 because he was the first insider to disclose that his former colleagues had been suborned into implementing a program of torture. Alarm bells had sounded at CIA: What if some of John's former colleagues retrieved their consciences and followed his example? This could not be allowed to happen. Swift retribution was indicated.

The broader question, of course, is why had it been so easy to get CIA operatives to walk on Dick Cheney's "Dark Side." The context, of course, is 9/11. We keep hearing: "AFTER 9/11 EVERYTHING CHANGED." Really? Everything? Did torture somehow slip out of the moral category it had long inhabited together with rape and slavery the category ethicists call "intrinsic evil?"

No way, said John Kiriakou. And thus began a cruel duel between two unequal adversaries: an exceedingly ruthless, vindictive government and a CIA professional determined not to violate his conscience.

What happened not only to many of John's colleagues but also to Americans at large parallels what happened to Germans after their "9/11," the burning of the Parliament building in Berlin on Feb. 27, 1933. Be afraid, they were told, be very afraid. It worked. With what a young German lawyer (later a writer with the pen-name Sebastian Haffner) living in Berlin at the time called "sheepish submissiveness," Germans acquiesced in the most draconian, one might say "Patriot Act"-type, violations of their own Constitution. Haffner wrote:

"The sequence of events ... is wholly within the normal range of psychology, and it helps to explain the inexplicable. The only thing that is missing is what in animals is called 'breeding.' This, a solid inner kernel that cannot be shaken by external pressures and forces, something noble and steely, a reserve of pride, principle, and dignity to be drawn on in the hour of trial."

Missing? Missing in many; anchored in Greek marble in John Kiriakou.

In exposing torture, John found himself in the company of other officials with integrity and guts like Gen. John Kimmons, head of U.S. Army Intelligence. On the very day (Sept. 6, 2006) that President George W. Bush publicly disclosed and bragged about the supposed effectiveness of what he called "an alternative set of procedures" for interrogation (then given the euphemism "enhanced interrogation techniques"), Kimmons arranged his own press conference at the Pentagon and said:

"I am absolutely convinced [that] no good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years, tells us that."

Actually, Kimmons could have gone back 70 years not just five. It turns out that "enhanced interrogation techniques" is a literal translation of the Gestapo *Handbuch's* "Verschaerfte Vernehmung." And most of those Nazi "techniques" are the same ones blessed by the Bush-Cheney administration (with just a few further enhancements).

The award from PEN seems all the more appropriate inasmuch as John is now a



writer and speaker of truth as well as a consultant on films and TV shows. And as many of us know only too well, he has his work cut out for him, whether writing about intelligence, torture, or how our prisons must be humanized.

## **The Challenge**

Polling shows that most Americans continue to support brutal methods of interrogation, even in the wake of the Senate Intelligence Committee report made public last December that, using CIA's own cables, disproved claims that torture "worked." Trouble is, Americans don't read Senate reports; they watch TV and movies. That's how they "know" torture works. Think Fox TV's series "24." Think Columbia Pictures' "Zero Dark Thirty."

"Jack Bauer, the hero of "24," breaks captives' fingers to elicit information that "keeps us safe." And Americans applaud. Worse still, interrogators are misled and corrupted. Lt. Col. Diane Beaver, a military lawyer at Guantanamo, told British author Philippe Sands that Bauer "gave people lots of ideas. We saw '24' on cable ... It was hugely popular."

Sands wrote, "She [Beaver] believed the series contributed to an environment in which those in Guantanamo were encouraged to see themselves as being on the frontline and to go further than they otherwise might." Sands added that "24" also made it more difficult for those who objected to the abuse to stop it.

In fact, "24" was making torture appear so effective and even glamorous that U.S. military officials appealed to the creators of the show to tone down the torture scenes and give less play to the fiction that torture is "effective."

Some psychological research has shown that fiction is as effective as non-fiction at deeply moving people even when they know that what they are being moved by is a fictional account. People tend to be "transported" by a good story providing "truths" that appear just as powerful (or even more so) as those we encounter in the real world.

## **'Zero Dark Thirty'**

Which brings us to "Zero Dark Thirty." And this, I believe, would be of particular interest to PEN. How in the world will John Kiriakou be able to open minds to the reality that the issue of morality aside torture does not "work," when so many have actually seen it "work" watching "Zero Dark Thirty," as well as "24?"

True, John Kiriakou has an abundance of experience and credibility. But what are these, stacked up against seeing torture work "with your own eyes?" John can cite the following facts until he is blue in the face, but the odds remain high

against him.

On Dec. 21, 2012, two days after “Zero Dark Thirty” premiered, CIA’s acting director took the unusual step of formally addressing agency employees with these words:

“[T]he film takes significant artistic license, while portraying itself as being historically accurate. ... [It] creates the strong impression that the enhanced interrogation techniques that were part of our former detention and interrogation program were the key to finding Bin Laden. That impression is false. ... I want you to remember that ‘Zero Dark Thirty’ is not a documentary.”

Sen. John McCain, who was tortured as a POW in North Vietnam, said the film left him sick “because it’s wrong.”

Historian Karen J. Greenberg, Director of Fordham University Law School’s Center for National Security, wrote this about the film’s director: “Bigelow has bought in, hook, line, and sinker, to the ethos of the Bush administration and its apologists.” Greenberg called the film “the perfect piece of propaganda, with all the appeal that naked brutality, fear, and revenge can bring.”

And Peter Maass of *The Atlantic* wrote that the film “represents a troubling new frontier of government-embedded filmmaking.” And Maass, too, is right.

### **Looking Forward**

I’m not sure John Kiriakou would qualify for PEN Center USA’s specific program for “Emerging Voices,” but I am sure that, just the same, this year’s First Amendment Awardee is a very important emerging voice both as writer and as a consultant on films and TV shows. Of this we can also be sure; nothing John gets involved in will glorify torture or otherwise bend to prevailing winds of dishonesty.

With the support of Heather and many others, he has already bucked a powerful system arrayed against him. John Kiriakou will give no quarter in his passion for spreading truth around, no matter how many additional systemic hurdles he may be required to surmount.

Besides, he has “backing.” If you don’t believe me, download *Silenced*.

**Ray McGovern was a CIA analyst for 27 years from the administration of John F. Kennedy to that of George H. W. Bush. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), which welcomed John Kiriakou into membership from federal prison.**

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# Bush-41 Finally Speaks on Iraq War

**Exclusive:** A dozen years too late, President George H.W. Bush has given voice to his doubts about the wisdom of rushing into the Iraq War, putting much of the blame on President George W. Bush's "iron-ass" advisers, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern explains.

By Ray McGovern

Media reports on Jon Meacham's biography of George H. W. Bush, the 41st President, have brought me a painful flashback to the deceptive, destructive yet at the same time highly instructive years 2002 and 2003, when his son George W. Bush, the 43rd President, attacked Iraq.

Reality should trump rhetoric regarding that godforsaken war in my view the most unprincipled and consequential foreign policy blunder in U.S. history. This may be reason enough to renew focus on those years because, for many Americans, those events remain cloaked in mystery and misunderstanding.

With his candor about his eldest son, the 91-year-old Bush patriarch also has sounded what may be the death knell for the moribund campaign of his younger son Jeb to be president #45. I do not suggest that #41 did that consciously. His unusually unguarded remarks, though, will lead voters to be chary of yet another Bush, if only on the "fool me once ... fool me twice" aphorism that Jeb's big brother had trouble remembering.

Meacham's *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush* will not be available to the *hoi polloi* until next week. Details already reported on the critical years of 2002 and 2003, however, permit I think, rather, dictate some preliminary analysis, before the Karl Roves of this world create still more "new history."

The clear and present danger of getting sucked into yet another quagmire or quicksand pool on false pretenses persists. Thus, it seems fitting and proper to review the lead-up to the unprovoked "shock and awe" on Iraq proudly launched in March 2003 by #43, egged on by Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and other white-collar thugs.

Despite the propaganda and more tangible signs of incipient war in Iraq, my former intelligence analyst colleagues and I with considerable professional experience watching other countries prepare for aggression against others were finding it difficult to believe that the United States of America would be doing precisely that.

Still harder was it to digest the notion that Washington would do so, absent credible evidence of any immediate threat and would “fix” intelligence to “justify” it. But that, sadly, is what happened. On March 19, 2003, U.S. “shock and awe” lit the sky over Baghdad.

### **A Dozen Years Later**

That was more than 12  $\frac{1}{2}$  years ago. That not one of the white-collar crooks responsible for the war and ensuing chaos has been held accountable is an indelible blot not only on our country, but also on international law and custom. After all, the U.S./U.K. attack on Iraq fits snugly the definition given to a “war of aggression” as defined by the post-World War II Nuremberg Tribunal. Nuremberg labeled such a war “the supreme international crime, differing from other war crimes only in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

And the evil continued to accumulate: torture, kidnapping, black prisons, extrajudicial killing, massive invasions of privacy, and even the annulment of such basic human rights as the great writ of *habeas corpus* that was wrested from England’s King John 800 years ago. And, in the wake of this criminality, bedlam now reigns across large swaths of the Middle East driving millions of refugees into neighboring countries and Europe.

That the U.S. and U.K. leaders who launched the Iraq war have so far escaped apprehension and prosecution might be seen as a sad example of “victor’s justice.” But there are no victors, only victims. The reality that President George W. Bush and his co-conspirators remain unpunished makes a mockery of the commitment to the transcendent importance of evenhanded justice as expressed on Aug. 12, 1945, by Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, the chief U.S. representative at Nuremberg:

“We must make clear to the Germans that the wrong for which their fallen leaders are on trial is not that they lost the war, but that they started it.”

Maybe it is partly because I know the elder Bush personally, but it does strike me that, since we are all human, some degree of empathy might be in order. I simply cannot imagine what it must be like to be a former President with a son, also a former President, undeniably responsible for such trespass on law for such widespread killing, injury and abject misery.

It is something of a stretch, but I have tried to put myself into the shoes of the elder Bush. In them I find myself insecure and struggling like Jacob before his dream about wrestling with God. The story in *Genesis* shows Jacob full of anxiety, despite God’s promise that God would bless his dynasty. He cannot

overcome his fear and is powerless to control his fate.

Jacob is aware that he is at a pivotal juncture but he is physically spent. Alone in the wilderness facing death, he collapses into a deep sleep, only to find himself wrestling all night with God. At daybreak he awakes with an injured hip; he is disabled but his life is spared. He had come to grips with God and, in the end, receives God's blessing of peace.

What author Meacham has written suggests to me the possibility that the sins of the son are being visited on the father, to reverse one familiar Biblical expression.

In these circumstances, the tendency to require that thugs like Cheney and Rumsfeld bear their share of the blame seems quite human. And, to his credit, Bush-41 concedes "the buck stops" at the President. But I sense him thinking correctly, in my view that without those two "iron-ass" advisers, things would have been quite different. The son might even have paid more heed to the experienced cautions of the father and his associates.

### **Sins of Omission**

As the senior Bush knows, sins of omission can be as consequential as those of commission. Judging from what he is quoted as saying in Meacham's book, it appears he decided to make a (sort-of) clean breast of things okay, call it a Watergate-style "modified, limited hangout," if you will. But, clearly, Bush has to be painfully aware that he was one of only a handful of people who might have been able to stop the chaos and carnage, had he spoken out publicly in real time.

He does hedge, saying for example that he still believes the attack on Iraq was the right thing to do. But this is a position he staked out years ago and, especially at 91, it may be too much to expect of him that he acknowledge the full implications of what he says elsewhere in the book about the misguided advice of "hardline" Cheney and "arrogant" Rumsfeld together with where, after all, the buck does stop.

My take is that Bush-41 has not completed his wrestle with the truth and with the guilt he may feel for failing to warn the rest of us what to expect from George, Cheney and Rumsfeld as he watched it happen. The elder Bush did use surrogates including two of his closest and most prominent friends, James Baker, his secretary of state, and Brent Scowcroft, his national security adviser, to speak out against the war.

But here the mainstream media was of no help. Instead of weighing the merits of the strong arguments of Baker, Scowcroft and other experienced foreign policy

professionals made against attacking Iraq, the media gave inordinate attention to incessant debates as to whether the seeming surrogates were actually speaking for the elder Bush.

In effect, the media was demanding what they knew Bush senior would almost certainly not do, "Speak for yourself, George H. W. Bush." He refused to do it; he would not even comment on the critical views expressed by Baker and Scowcroft on Bush-43's plan to attack Iraq.

Sure, it would have been hard, but at the time Bush senior was only in his late 70s, as he watched his son fall in with bad companions and join in the dishonesty and foolishness leading up to the attack on Iraq.

With his current modified, limited hangout especially (his richly deserved) criticism of Cheney and Rumsfeld Bush the elder may be able to live more comfortably with himself and to get past what I believe must be his regret now over having made no public effort to stop the madness back then.

The chronology below includes some of the more important events and may help inform those who have not had the time or inclination to follow the play-by-play as Cheney and Rumsfeld played on the younger Bush's unabashed preening as "the first war president of the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

### **Keeping a Watching Brief**

The elder Bush knew all too well what was happening. He also knew what his son George was capable of not to mention the inclinations of Cheney, Rumsfeld and other white-collar criminals. To be brutally candid, it is a little late for the family patriarch to be telling us all this while blaming the Iraq debacle mostly on Cheney and Rumsfeld, quintessentially blameworthy though they are.

Worst still, if Bush-43 is to be believed, Bush senior had guilty foreknowledge of the war-crime attack on Iraq. George W. Bush divulges this in his 2014 Virgil-style paean to his father, "41: A Portrait of My Father," in which he arrogates to himself Aeneas-like filial devotion. (Friends more cynical than me suggest that 43's panegyric should be construed as a benign pre-emptive move to prevent the father from blabbing to his biographer.)

In any event, Bush-43 includes the following sentences about informing his father about plans to attack Iraq: "We both knew that this was a decision that only the president can make. We did talk about the issue, however. Over Christmas 2002, at Camp David, I did give Dad an update on our strategy."

By that time, the die had been cast. Frankly, it is as painful as it is instructive to review the flow of key events in the summer and early fall of

2002. But I believe it may be necessary, not only to outline what Bush senior was watching, but also to pre-empt the creation of false history. Here are some selected benchmarks:

**July 23, 2002:** Tony Blair and his principal national security advisers are briefed at 10 Downing Street by MI-6 chief Richard Dearlove, CIA Director George Tenet's British counterpart, three days after Dearlove met with Tenet at CIA Headquarters. A participant in the July 23 briefing prepares minutes of the meeting that same day. They are eventually leaked and published in the *London Times* on May 1, 2005.

The minutes quote Dearlove, Foreign Minister Jack Straw, and Attorney-General Peter Goldsmith. First Dearlove: "Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD." [Translation: Saddam Hussein will be accused of having weapons of mass destruction that he could give to terrorists.]

"But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy. ... The Foreign Secretary said the case [for war] was thin. ... The Attorney-General said that the desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action."

**August 2002:** President George W. Bush spends from August 6 to 31 clearing brush at his ranch in Crawford, Texas. White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card sets up a White House Iraq Group (WHIG) to "educate the public" on the alleged threat from Iraq. The group includes heavy hitters like political adviser Karl Rove, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, Bush's communications director Karen Hughes, and two officials from Dick Cheney's entourage Irving Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and Mary Matalin. In his memoir, Cheney notes that both Matalin and Libby "wore two hats" serving as assistants to both Cheney and the President.

**August 2002:** With Bush in Crawford, there is trouble brewing for Cheney, Rumsfeld and others pushing for war on Iraq. Close associates of the elder Bush and other senior foreign policy mavens begin to speak out strongly against an attack on Iraq.

Brent Scowcroft leads off the campaign on Aug. 4 at CBS's *Face the Nation*. Next up is former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger with an Aug. 12 *Washington Post* op-ed titled "Unilateral Attack Will Set Dangerous Precedent." On Aug. 15, Scowcroft publishes an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* with the non-subtle title: "Don't Attack Saddam."

Also on Aug. 15, Lawrence Eagleburger, who served the elder Bush briefly as secretary of state, tells ABC News that unless Saddam Hussein "has his hand on a trigger that is for a weapon of mass destruction, and our intelligence is clear,

I don't know why we have to do it [attack Iraq] now."

Then on Aug. 25, in a *New York Times* op-ed, Bush-41's Secretary of State James Baker adduces, in a lawyerly but compelling way, virtually all the reasons that what Bush-43, Cheney, Rumsfeld et al. had already decided on regarding Iraq would bring disaster.

Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Nebraska, also says openly in August that Secretary of State Colin Powell and his deputy Richard Armitage had earlier advised President George W. Bush of their concerns about the risks and complexities of a military strike on Iraq.

More trouble for hawks like Cheney was brewing in the House. Republican Majority Leader Dick Armey publicly warned that an "unprovoked attack" on Iraq would be illegal, adding, "It would not be consistent with what we have been as a nation or what we should be as a nation."

(Armey later told Michael Isikoff, during an on-the-record interview for Isikoff's book *Hubris*, that he had warned President George W. Bush that war on Iraq might result in a "quagmire." He added that, while he found questionable the intelligence presented to him in support of such a war, he would give Bush the benefit of the doubt. According to Barton Gellman, author of *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency*, Cheney told Armey that Saddam Hussein's family had direct ties to Al Qaeda and that Saddam was developing miniature nuclear weapons. Armey then voted for the war, but bitterly complained later that he had been "bullshitted" by Cheney.)

### **Stopping the Peace Juggernaut**

With the President clearing brush and Andrew Card proceeding at what must have seemed to Cheney a dilatory pace, given the mounting opposition to war on Iraq, Cheney seized the bull by the horns, so to speak. Without a word to Secretary of State Powell or CIA Director Tenet, and not wanting to interrupt the President's vacation, Cheney set the parameters for using "fixed" intelligence to reverse the alarming efforts toward peace.

With the apparent endorsement of Bush junior, when the President got back in town on Sept. 1, the juggernaut was redirected toward war. (One stands in awe of the unchallenged power Cheney was able to exert even if it was, technically speaking, *ad referendum* the President.)

Cheney chose to include in an Aug. 26 speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Nashville extreme, unsubstantiated charges about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that set the terms of reference for virtually all that was to follow, including, I regret to say, the National Intelligence Estimate that my former



colleagues were suborned into "fixing" around the policy.

In his Aug. 26, 2002 speech, Cheney broadly warned that Saddam Hussein intends to "subject the United States to nuclear blackmail." He continued:

"Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction [and] is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us. What he wants is ... more time to husband his resources to invest in his ongoing chemical and biological weapons program, and to gain possession of nuclear weapons.

"Deliverable weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terror network, or a murderous dictator, or the two working together constitutes as grave a threat as can be imagined. The risks of inaction are far greater than the risk of action. The Iraqi regime has in fact been very busy enhancing its capabilities in the field of chemical and biological agents, and they continue to pursue the nuclear program they began so many years ago.

"Against that background, a person would be right to question any suggestion that we should just get inspectors back into Iraq, and then our worries will be over. Saddam has perfected the game of shoot and retreat, and is very skilled in the art of denial and deception. A return of inspectors would provide no assurance whatsoever of his compliance with UN resolutions."

Colin Powell, George Tenet and others had five days, before Bush got back in town, to regain their composure after being blindsided by Cheney time enough, apparently, to remind themselves about who it was that really had the President's ear. There is no sign that either Powell or Tenet chose to make a federal case out of it, so to speak. Also choosing to remain silent was former the CENTCOM commander, Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni, who was right there at the VFW convention.

### **Hear No Evil, Speak No Truth**

Zinni later said he was shocked to hear Cheney's depiction of intelligence (Iraq has WMD and is amassing them to use against us) that did not square with what he knew. Although Zinni had retired two years before, his role as consultant had enabled him to stay up to date on key intelligence findings.

"There was no solid proof that Saddam had WMD. I heard a case being made to go to war," Zinni told "Meet the Press" 3 ½ years later.

The question lingers: why did Zinni not go public when he first heard Cheney lie? After all, he was one of the very few credible senior officials who might have prevented a war he knew was unnecessary. A tough, widely respected Marine

intimidated by a Vice President with five draft deferments? It happens. It happened.

Secretary of State Powell was also blindsided, but there is no sign he summoned the courage to voice any objections directly to the President about Cheney's version of the threat from Iraq and what had to be done about it.

CIA Director Tenet has written that he, too, was taken completely by surprise by what Cheney said. In his memoir, Tenet added, "I had the impression that the president wasn't any more aware than we were of what his number-two was going to say to the VFW until he said it." But Tenet, as noted above, knew only too well that the intelligence was being "fixed," because he was in charge of fixing it.

So for Tenet the surprise was simply one of timing that Cheney would go out on so long a limb before Bush got back from vacation.

From Cheney's perspective the timing was perfect. With Bush out of town, it was even easier to avoid messy fights with what Cheney considered a troublesome, unnecessary bureaucracy (he had built up his own). And with UK Prime Minister Blair coming to Camp David six days after Bush got back, it would be cumbersome enough to fine-tune and coordinate the appropriate talking points for Bush to use with Blair on Sept. 7.

And so, with the month of August seeing a phalanx of senior Bush foreign policy advisers and other experts, as well as key Congressional leaders, speaking out in a troubling way against the war, an ever decisive Cheney decided he could not abide by the proverbial maxim that Andrew Card actually let drop publicly in early September: "From a marketing point of view, you don't introduce new products in August." Just to be clear, the White House chief of staff was talking about marketing war.

By the time George W. Bush got back to the Oval Office, the White House Iraq Group (WHIG) had gotten its instructions from Cheney on the strategy with which to approach Tony Blair to keep him harnessed onto the commander's Jeep for war with particular attention to the joint U.S.-U.K. "marketing" campaign to be launched, big time, the day after the Bush and Blair met at Camp David.

The media did a little warm-up, with the BBC reporting that President Bush had shared with Prime Minister Blair satellite photographs released by a UN agency that allegedly showed clear evidence that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction. "I don't know what more evidence we need," said Mr. Bush. (There were no such photos.)

On Sunday, Sept. 8, came the opening salvo of the marketing campaign a major propaganda blitz with all hands on deck. The WHIG had been doing its homework

and was working with very accommodating media. Cheney, Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Richard Meyers fanned out to the talk shows right after Bush gave Blair the word at Camp David.

The hot topic was new information, apparently made available by the administration to the *New York Times* a day or two before, concerning “aluminum tubes,” sought by Iraq, supposedly for use in refining uranium for a nuclear weapon.

Rice claimed that the tubes were “really are only suited to – high-quality aluminum tools that are only really suited for nuclear weapons programs, centrifuge programs.” Rice acknowledged that “there will always be some uncertainty” in determining how close Iraq may be to obtaining a nuclear weapon but warned, “We don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.” (It turned out the tubes were actually for artillery known to be in Iraq’s inventory.)

Upon her return to the White House from CNN, she must have been awarded WHIG’s first Oscar. Cheney should have been runner-up for his *Meet the Press* performance accusing Saddam Hussein of moving aggressively to develop nuclear weapons to add to his stockpile of chemical and biological arms. The Vice President actually let slip the White House strategy, expressing hope that Congress would vote for war before it recessed in October (mid-term elections coming the following month).

With members fearing accusations of “softness” if they resisted President Bush’s authorization to use force, Congress voted for war. The war was on.

Also, on Sunday, Sept. 8, 2002, Rumsfeld on *Face the Nation* warned that inspections in Iraq would have to be intrusive enough to ensure that Saddam Hussein is disarmed. Powell told Fox News that the Bush administration believes that the best way to disarm Iraq “is with a regime change.” And Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Myers on ABC’s *This Week* added, “We have the forces, we have the readiness. U.S. armed forces will prevail, if called upon to strike Iraq.”

### **Six Months Later**

A half-year later on Feb. 15, 2003, as the elder Bush watched 30 million demonstrators in 800 cities around the world marching against the war for which Bush-43 was so keen, I suspect there may have been a tinge of regret at having pulled strings to ensure young George would not have to experience war by serving in Vietnam.

Unlike his father, George W. had not the foggiest notion of what war is like, and Bush-41 can be thought to have been painfully aware of that. It may have occurred to him to belatedly apply some tough-love to 43 or to even go public in

a last-ditch effort to prevent the coming catastrophe. He probably knew that it was unrealistic to expect that the likes of Scowcroft and Baker could influence 43 to change course.

But George H. W. Bush continued to say and do nothing, waiting until now more than a dozen years after the catastrophic Iraq War was launched to voice his objections. An unhappy ending for the patriarch of a would-be dynasty.

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He worked for George H. W. Bush when he was director of the CIA and again during the first Reagan administration when he briefed him mornings, one-on-one, with the *President's Daily Brief*.**

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## Seeing Syrian Crisis Through Russian Eyes

**Exclusive:** While there is a ray of hope that international negotiations may finally find a way to resolve the Syrian war, there is also growing pressure on President Obama to escalate U.S. military involvement even if that risks a wider war with Russia, a danger that ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern assesses.

By Ray McGovern

“To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war,” as Sir Winston Churchill put it at a White House luncheon on June 1954. The aphorism applies in spades today as the U.S., Russia and other key countries involved in troubles in Syria decide whether to jaw or to war.

Russia’s recent military intervention in Syria could open up new possibilities for those working for a negotiated solution or not. There does seem to be considerable overlap in U.S. and Russian interests and objectives.

For instance, both sides say they want to suppress terrorism, including the Islamic State (also known as ISIL, ISIS or Daesh) and Al Qaeda’s affiliate, the Nusra Front, and both the U.S. and Russia talk about the need for political reconciliation among Syria’s disparate religious and ethnic groups. The chief disagreement is over the future of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whether he “must go,” as U.S. officials insist, or whether that issue should be left to the ballots of the Syrian people, the view favored by Russia.

Yet, what happens in the next week or so whether it turns out to be a belated “jaw-jaw” or an escalated “war-war” will have a significant effect on bilateral U.S.-Russian relations, as well as developments in Syria, Iraq and the whole neighborhood, which now includes Europe because of the destabilizing flow of refugees.

So, I think it makes sense for me to undertake what we did at some of the best moments inside the CIA’s analytical branch: view a crisis from where the other side stood and thus project how an adversary (or a friend) might react to a U.S. initiative. A common trap in intelligence analysis is mirror-imaging assuming that others, whether adversaries or friends, look at facts and intentions the same way we do.

It can be helpful to step into the other side’s shoes and consider how its leaders are likely to see us. I make a stab at that below.

In what follows, I imagine myself working within Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (the SVR, Russia’s CIA equivalent) in the analysis office responsible for preparing *The President’s Daily Brief* for President Vladimir Putin. I further imagine that his daily brief resembles what the U.S. Intelligence Community prepares for the U.S. President. So, I pattern the item below after the (now declassified) *PDB* for President George W. Bush that on Aug. 6, 2001 famously warned him, “Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S.” (In my paper, intelligence assessments are presented in italics.)

*The President’s Daily Brief*

Oct. 28, 2015

### **Re Syria: Obama Trying to Fend Off US Hawks**

*President Obama is under severe pressure from senior military and intelligence officials and Congress to raise the ante in Syria.*

Yesterday’s *Washington Post* lead story, sourced to unnamed U.S. officials, reported that Obama is considering Pentagon proposals to “put U.S. troops closer to front lines” in Iraq and Syria.

Diplomats at our embassy in Washington note that this kind of story often reflects decisions already made and about to be formally announced. In this particular case, however, the embassy thinks it at least equally likely that the *Post* is being used by officials who favor more aggressive military action, in order to put pressure on the President. During Obama’s first year in office, senior military leaders used the media to make it extremely difficult for Obama to turn down leaked Pentagon proposals to “surge” troops into Afghanistan.

Yesterday, Sen. John McCain, the Republican chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, used a Senate hearing to ridicule administration policy on Syria and grill Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford on the policy's embarrassing failings. Carter said attacks against ISIL in Syria and Iraq would increase, including "direct action on the ground." But Dunford admitted, "The balance of forces now are in Assad's advantage."

*Facing heavy criticism for indecisiveness, Obama still seems reluctant to put many more U.S. Army or "moderate rebel" boots into the "quagmire" that he warned us against when we began our airstrikes. He would also wish to avoid the kind of destructive attacks that would pour still more Syrian refugees into Europe.*

*We do not think occasional "direct action on the ground" will change much. Indeed, a White House spokesman reiterated yesterday that the administration has "no intention of long-term ground combat."*

As for the "no-fly zone" advocated by McCain and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, Secretary Carter said, "We have not made that recommendation to the President," adding the obligatory caveat, "He hasn't taken it off the table." Dunford added, "From a military perspective, we can impose a no-fly zone."

## **Diplomacy**

*We continue to believe that Obama prefers to regard this past month's events in Syria as an opportunity to bring the main players to the negotiating table rather than the battlefield.*

Defense Secretary Carter called attention to talks later this week in Vienna, in which Secretary of State John Kerry will be engaged, that are "precisely aimed at the contours of [a] political settlement." The big news here is that Kerry has dropped the U.S. objection to having Iran, a supporter of the Assad regime, participate.

*As for Kerry, unlike his behavior in late summer 2013 and in early 2014, he seems to be following the President's instructions to negotiate an end to the conflict and to the misery in Syria.*

Emerging on Friday from contentious talks with the Saudi and Turkish foreign ministers, as well as Foreign Minister Lavrov, Kerry sounded a hopeful note: "Diplomacy has a way of working through very difficult issues that seem to be absolutely contradictory ... but if we can get into a political process, then sometimes these things have a way of resolving themselves."

At the Senate hearing, Defense Secretary Carter called for an early political

transition in Syria, but was careful to add, "The structures of the Syrian state are going to be important to the future, and we don't want them to dissolve entirely. The U.S. approach to removing Assad has been mostly a political effort."

At which point, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, a close ally of Sen. McCain, complained bitterly, "Assad is as secure as the day is long," adding, "you have turned Syria over to Russia and Iran."

*The vitriol of McCain and Graham is no surprise. We want to make sure you know something about a relatively new player, JCS Chairman Joseph Dunford, who chose at his confirmation hearing on July 9, 2015, to let the world know that he is an unreconstructed Cold Warrior:*

"If you want to talk about a nation that could pose an existential threat to the United States, I'd have to point to Russia," Dunford said. "If you look at their behavior, it's nothing short of alarming." Dunford added that he thought it reasonable to send heavy weapons to Ukraine.

*Dunford took up his new duties at an inauspicious moment the day after we began launching air strikes against terrorist targets in Syria. Suffice it to say that, for the U.S. military and CIA, October has been one of the most humiliating months since the inglorious U.S. departure from Vietnam. It is important to bear that in mind.*

*We think this serves to double the pressure on President Obama to let loose the military on Syria and Iraq, as pushed by most of the corporate media that are attacking Obama for weakness and indecision. You will recall that he faced the same challenge in August 2013, when he came very close to letting himself be mouse-trapped into a major attack on Syria with U.S. forces.*

## **A Special Danger**

This time there is a new, quite delicate element of which you need to be aware the so-called "moderate" rebels whom the U.S. (primarily the CIA) trained, equipped, and inserted into Syria. This issue came up at the Senate Armed Services Committee meeting yesterday, when Chairman McCain expressed particular concern for pro-U.S. Syrian rebels he said are now being bombed by Russia and Syria.

Defense Secretary Carter replied that "no rebel group directly supported by the Defense Department under the law had been attacked." Casting a look of incredulity, McCain replied, "I promise you they have."

This is a particularly sore spot for McCain and his CIA friends. Ten days into

our air-strike campaign, another *Washington Post* lead story with the headline, "Early signs of Russian intent ... Strikes seemed to catch White House flat-footed," claimed that Russian aircraft "pounded" CIA-sponsored "moderate rebel groups ... who appeared to get no warning that they were in Russian jets' crosshairs."

"U.S. officials" told the *Post*, "CIA Director John Brennan has voiced frustration with U.S. inaction as fighters trained and armed by the agency at camps in Jordan over the past two years face a Russia assault."

*CIA officials do not like to be seen as leaving their own in the lurch whether in the mountains of Syria or on the beaches of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba. Many serious scholars who have investigated the assassination of President John F. Kennedy conclude that Allen Dulles, who was fired by Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, led a cabal that killed him and then sat on the Warren Commission to cover it all up.*

*We doubt that John Brennan is up to playing that kind of role, or that Dunford, for example, could be persuaded to do what a Marine predecessor, Gen. Smedley Butler, refused to do, join a coup against the sitting U.S. President (in Butler's case he rejected a right-wing scheme to remove President Franklin Roosevelt from office). But there is reason to think that Obama believes he has more to fear than the fate of his policies. One report alleges that he privately told friends of his fear of ending up like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*In sum, Obama has ample reason to be afraid that powerful people in Establishment Washington, convinced they know better than he how to protect the country, might succeed in pinning on his back a "too-soft-on-the-Russians" bulls-eye.*

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years, from the administration of John F. Kennedy to that of George H. W. Bush. From 1981 to 1985, McGovern prepared the *President's Daily Brief*, which he briefed one-on-one to President Ronald Reagan's five most senior national security advisers.

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in September focused on how the Syrian crisis careened out of control, how the Mideast troubles are now destabilizing Europe, how info-war manipulates public opinion, and how



hypocrisy played out at the UN General Assembly.

["Ukraine Rightists Kill Police; Putin Blamed"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 1, 2015

["US/NATO Embrace Psy-ops and Info-War"](#) by Don North, Sep. 2, 2015

["A Deflategate Slapdown of NFL and MSM"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 3, 2015

["Dangerous Redefinition of 'Terrorism'"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 3, 2015

["Muslim Memories of West's Imperialism"](#) by William R. Polk, Sep. 4, 2015

["Did Saudi King 'Snub' Obama on Iran?"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Sep. 6, 2015

["Israel's Bitter Anti-Iran Fight"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Sep. 6, 2015

["How Neocons Destabilized Europe"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 7, 2015

["More Incoherence in Syria Policy"](#) by Greg Maybury, Sep. 9, 2015

["Madness of Blockading Syria's Regime"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 10, 2015

["CIA and the Drug Business"](#) by Douglas Valentine, Sep. 10, 2015

["'Regime Change' Strategy Spreads Chaos"](#) by Nat Parry, Sep. 11, 2015

["On Syria, Incoherence Squared"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Sep. 11, 2015

["Neocons Blame Obama for Syria"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Sep. 11, 2015

["US War Theories Target Dissenters"](#) by Todd E. Pierce, Sep. 12, 2015

["Who's to Blame for Syria Mess? Putin!"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 13, 2015

["US Intel Vets Decry CIA's Use of Torture"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Sep. 14, 2015

["A Challenge to Neoliberal Orthodoxy"](#) by Nicolas J S Davies, Sep. 14, 2015

["Are Neocons an Existential Threat?"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 15, 2015

["US Confusion Over the Syrian War"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Sep. 15, 2015

["Neocons Babble Over Syria Crisis"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Sep. 16, 2015

["Was Turkey Behind Syria Sarin Attack?"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 16, 2015

\*["The Crisis of 'Regime Change Refugees'"](#) by James Paul, Sep. 16, 2015

["Solitary Confinement Under Attack"](#) by Marjorie Cohn, Sept. 16, 2015

["Lost Lessons from a Toddler's Death"](#) by Rick Sterling, Sep. 17, 2015

["Obama's Fateful Syrian Choice"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 18, 2015

["A Moral Challenge for Pope Francis"](#) by Ray McGovern, Sep. 21, 2015

["Will US Grasp Putin's Syria Lifeline?"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 22, 2015

["The Frantic Fear of Islam"](#) by Nat Parry, Sep. 22, 2015

["The Tempest Tost Syrian Refugees"](#) by Marjorie Cohn, Sept. 23, 2015

["Giving Up the Global-Cop Badge"](#) by Graham E. Fuller, Sep. 24, 2015

["Decline of Western Ethnic States"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Sep. 24, 2015

["Obama's Flak Demeans Putin's Posture"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 25, 2015

["Can Obama Lecture Xi on Human Rights?"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Sep. 25, 2015

["The Power of False Narrative"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 28, 2015

["Obama's True Foreign-Policy 'Weakness'"](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 28, 2015

["Value in Reading Others' Propaganda"](#) by Graham E. Fuller, Sep. 29, 2015

["Putin's Judo Move in Syria"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Sep. 29, 2015

["Obama's Self-Deceit"](#) by Joe Lauria, Sep. 29, 2015

["More Anti-Russian Bias at the NYT"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Sep. 30, 2015

[“Obama’s Ludicrous ‘Barrel Bomb’ Theme”](#) by Robert Parry, Sep. 30, 2015

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## How CNN Shapes Political Debate

**Exclusive:** CNN was happy to add a right-wing questioner for the Republican debate but won’t add a progressive for the Democratic debate, another sign of how the “mainstream media” shapes what’s acceptable in political discussion, a lesson that ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern has learned from personal experience.

By Ray McGovern

CNN, the sponsor of Tuesday’s debate among Democratic presidential candidates, has gone to extraordinary lengths to avoid being sullied with the stigma of “liberal bias.” The four CNN journalists handpicked to do the questioning have carefully protected themselves from such a charge.

As Jeff Cohen noted Friday in [“CNN’s Double Standards on Debates,”](#) CNN made a point of including a bona fide right-winger in the Republican debate but “is not planning to include a single progressive advocate among its panel of four questioners ... CNN presents as neutral: CNN’s [Dana] Bash and three CNN anchors (Anderson Cooper, Don Lemon, and Juan Carlos Lopez of CNN en Espanol.)”

The significance is that while a person from the Right or Left might break out of the usual frame of these debates, “mainstream” panelists can be counted on to ask predictable queries with maybe a “gotcha” question or two tossed in to show how “tough” the reporter can be. CNN’s line-up fits that description to a tee.

Dana Bash, who was also a panelist at last month’s debate among Republican

candidates, has been a godsend to me as I hunted for examples to illustrate what has become of the so-called “mainstream media.” Speaking to college and other audiences, I often show this short but revealing video clip of Bash plying her “neutral” trade.

Perhaps you will agree that, although less than a minute long, this clip is worth far more than a thousand words in making clear how CNN crackerjack reporters like Dana Bash and CNN senior statesman Wolf Blitzer apply their peculiar brand of “fair and balanced.”

What leaps out is how they, and their acutely attentive technical support, were prepared at a second’s notice to nip in the bud any favorable (or merely “neutral”) allusion to Iran, on the one hand, and any possibly negative reference to Israel, on the other.

In Iowa, reporting on the Republican caucus 3 1/2 years ago, Bash singled out Army Cpl. Jesse Thorsen for an interview. The young soldier sported on his neck a large tattoo of the Twin Towers with the words “9/11 Remember” making Thorsen seem an ideal candidate for the kind of “neutral” super-patriotic interview that Bash had in mind.

Although he supported libertarian Ron Paul, this young corporal on his way to his third deployment to Afghanistan looked like an easy mark for a fast-talking reporter whose “neutrality” was infused with Official Washington’s disdain for Paul’s anti-interventionist stance on foreign policy.

Pointing to the tattoo, Bash closed in for the kill, suggesting Ron Paul would endanger U.S. security if he pulled troops out of conflict areas like Afghanistan. Alas, Thorsen had not been briefed on the intended script, and the encounter did not work out the way Bash expected. The young soldier went off message into dangerous territory, mentioning or, rather, trying to mention Iran and Israel in ways that didn’t mesh with what all the Important People know to be true: Iran always bad, Israel always good.

Just in the nick of time, there was fortunate glitch cutting off the discordant message. Or as Blitzer explained, “we just lost our technical connection, unfortunately.”

### **Personal Experience**

For good or ill, I have had some rather instructive personal experience with two of the other three panelists on CNN’s all-star team for Tuesday evening Anderson Cooper and Don Lemon. Those experiences might help potential viewers know what to expect as the Democrats go under their magnifying glasses.

Minutes after the impromptu four-minute Q & A debate I had with then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld on May 4, 2006 in Atlanta in which I challenged Rumsfeld about his false pre-war claims about Iraqi links to Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's possession of WMD I got a call on my cell phone from CNN star Anderson Cooper. He noted that I had been causing "quite a stir here in Atlanta," adding that he wanted to interview me that evening.

"But first," he said in an awkwardly halting way, "I need to ask you a question. "Er ... weren't you afraid?"

Not really, I replied. The experience was, rather, a real high. I went on to suggest that Cooper could experience the same high, were he to do a little homework and ask folks like Rumsfeld pointed questions quoting them back to themselves, whenever possible.

The Rumsfeld speech and Q &A that followed took place in the early afternoon of May 4, 2006, and was broadcast live. So, in a sense, it fit with the perfect storm for that night's evening news. It was early enough to fit the evening TV "news" cycle; there was time to check facts; it was a live exchange of a citizen confronting a powerful official, something that is disturbingly rare in modern America; and it happened on a slow news day when there wasn't some other story that dominated public attention.

As it turned out, MSNBC's Keith Olbermann exhibited none of the self-censoring inhibitions that seemed to worry Anderson Cooper earlier that day. Olbermann decided to feature the story that evening, as he put it, "with fact-check." And for that and no doubt countless other violations of "mainstream media" etiquette Olbermann did not endear himself to his corporate TV brass. (Where is Olbermann now?)

The lesson here seems to be that, if you elect to give priority to having your comely face on the tube rather than speak truth to power, you forfeit the high that can come of being a serious journalist. You get to keep both your fame and your six- or seven-figure fortune for a Faustian bargain.

The issue at the Rumsfeld talk in Atlanta was no trifling matter. During the Q & A, it was easy to use his own past words together with his disingenuous responses to show that the Defense Secretary had lied through his teeth to help get the U.S. into what the post-WWII Nuremberg Tribunal called the "supreme international crime" a "war of aggression."

Worth emphasizing, though, is the unfortunate reality that – malnourished as most Americans have become on accurate information from the media only those TV viewers who were offered an Olbermann-type fact-check would have gotten anything

approaching the full story that evening. Otherwise, it would remain the proverbial whom-to-believe kind of puzzle: “Former CIA analyst said ‘Rumsfeld lied’ ... but Rumsfeld said, ‘I didn’t lie.’”

### **Last But Not Least**

Then, we have Don Lemon. After the publication by WikiLeaks of thousands of official cables many of them highly embarrassing to the U.S. which Bradley/Chelsea Manning gave to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, the Fawning Corporate Media eagerly joined an intense campaign by the Establishment to make Assange the *bête noire* of 2010, painting him the same deep black regularly used for the likes of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

“Expert” after “expert” on CNN tore into Assange. It was such a one-sided spectacle, that someone must have suggested that CNN invite some dope who might try to defend Assange (ha, ha; good luck) and deny that he was what Vice President Joe Biden called him “a high-tech terrorist.” I was to be the victim.

CNN introduced Lemon’s five-minute interview of me with a very violent clip from *Bonnie and Clyde* and additional footage showing other terrorist miscreants at work. (In retrospect, I was glad that CNN barred me from seeing that introduction before my interview; seeing it might have strained my Irish temper beyond the breaking point.)

Don Lemon was loaded for bear, since one of the jobs of mainstream journalists is to prove their “objectivity” by getting tough with anyone who deviates from the conventional wisdom. You have to see it to believe it: You Say Julian Assange Is a Journalist? Wattayou Crazy?

After Lemon’s lemon of an interview, I seem to have ended up on CNN’s “no-fly” list for me, a small price to pay. I would prefer to be in the company of the gutsy Olbermanns of this world rather than the timorous Coopers.

Let me add here that, in my view, Anderson Cooper is by no means the worst of the bought-and-sold pundits. He *is*, however, perhaps the wealthiest, as heir to the Vanderbilt fortune. So, with all due respect, he would not face the prospect of life on the streets with hat in hand, were he to decide to go for the high of committing real journalism rather than acquiesce in the customary low of showing deference when interviewing powerful war criminals like Rumsfeld.

So as not to raise unrealistic expectations about Tuesday’s debate, Cooper has said that there will be no “gotcha” questions. “As a moderator, it’s not my job in this kind of debate to try and force anything,” he said. “I don’t go into this with some strategy for getting people going in one way or another. Even if

I did have that strategy, or a strategy, I wouldn't necessarily telegraph that."

But one can expect a focus on many of the usual mainstream topics, framed in the typical mainstream way: What can be done to stop Putin? Why didn't President Obama do more to achieve "regime change" in Syria? If the ongoing catastrophe in Libya is mentioned, it is likely to be in the narrow context of the Benghazi investigation and Hillary Clinton's emails as Secretary of State.

It's not likely that Clinton will be pressed on her disastrous history as a liberal war hawk: supporting the Iraq War, pushing for a pointless "surge" in Afghanistan, orchestrating a "regime change" war in Libya that has left the country ungovernable and opened the door to inroads by Islamic State terrorists. She is not likely to be asked whether she thinks "American exceptionalism" exempts U.S. officials from the constraints of international law.

The reason why she won't be pressed on such questions is that CNN and the rest of the mainstream media accept the same premises that Clinton does. They frame the public debate with an implicit embrace of the U.S. right to invade countries and topple governments. The debate is only focused on whether the tactics worked, whether mistakes were made, not whether the decisions were wise or legal.

Other debate participants, such as Sen. Bernie Sanders, also will be expected to squeeze their comments into the acceptable mainstream frame. That is why it would have been a good idea – or at least a novel one – to invite at least one out-of-the-box progressive to join the panel and possibly shatter the frame.

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for more than 27 years after serving as an Army Infantry/Intelligence officer. He now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

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## The Hope Behind Putin's Syria Help

**Exclusive:** President Obama insists on looking the gift horse of Russian military help for Syria's embattled government in the mouth. Rather than welcome assistance in blocking a Sunni extremist victory, Obama bends to the neocons and liberal hawks, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern explains.

By Ray McGovern

Russia's airstrikes on rebel strongholds in Syria, now in their fifth day, are a

game-changer. To borrow an aphorism from philosopher Yogi Berra, "The future ain't what it used to be." Yogi also warned, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future."

What follows, then, will focus primarily on how and why the violence in Syria has reached this week's crescendo, the magnitude of the tipping point reached with direct Russian military intervention in support of Syria's government, and the self-inflicted dilemma confronting President Barack Obama and his hapless advisers who have been demanding "regime change" in Syria as the panacea to the bloody conflict.

Think of this piece as an attempted antidote to the adolescent analysis by Steven Lee Myers front-paged in Sunday's New York Times, and, for that matter, much else that's been written about Syria in the Times and other mainstream U.S. news outlets. Many articles, in accusing Russian President Vladimir Putin of bad faith, have willfully misrepresented his vow to strike at all "terrorist groups" as meaning only the Islamic State as if Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and other violent extremists don't qualify as "terrorists."

However, if Washington finally decides to face the real world not remain in the land of make-believe that stretches from the White House and State Department through the neocon-dominated think tanks to the editorial pages of the mainstream media it will confront a classic "devil-you-know" dilemma.

Does Washington really think that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, as demonized as he has been as a key player in a conflict blamed for killing more than 250,000, is worse than the beheaders of the Islamic State or the global-terrorism plotters of Al Qaeda? Does President Obama really think that some surgical "regime change" in Damascus can be executed without collapsing the Syrian government and clearing the way for an Islamic State/Al Qaeda victory? Is that a gamble worth taking?

President Obama needs to ask those questions to the State Department's neocons and liberal interventionists emplaced by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who like Israel's leaders positively lust for Assad's demise. "Regime change" in Syria has been on the Israeli/neocon to-do list since at least the mid-1990s and the neocon idea last decade was that Assad's overthrow would immediately follow the Iraq "regime change" in 2003, except the Iraq scheme didn't work out exactly as planned.

But there may be some reason to hope. After all, Obama showed courage in overcoming the strong resistance of the neocons to the recent nuclear deal with Iran. So, he may have the intelligence and stamina to face them down again, although you wouldn't know it from his recent rhetoric, which panders to the war



hawks' arguments even as he resists their most dangerous action plans.

At his news conference on Friday, Obama said, "in my discussions with President Putin, I was very clear that the only way to solve the problem in Syria is to have a political transition that is inclusive – that keeps the state intact, that keeps the military intact, that maintains cohesion, but that is inclusive – and the only way to accomplish that is for Mr. Assad to transition [out], because you cannot rehabilitate him in the eyes of Syrians. This is not a judgment I'm making; it is a judgment that the overwhelming majority of Syrians make."

But Obama did not explain how he knew what "the overwhelming majority of Syrians" want. Many Syrians especially the Christians, Alawites, Shiites and secular Sunnis appear to see Assad and his military as their protectors, the last bulwark against the horror of a victory by the Islamic State or Al Qaeda's Nusra Front, which is a major player in the so-called "Army of Conquest," as both groups make major gains across Syria.

Obama's cavalier notion, as expressed at the news conference, that "regime changes" are neat and tidy, easily performed without unintended consequences, suggests a sophomoric understanding of the world that is stunning for a U.S. president in office for more than 6 ½ years, especially since he adopted a similar approach toward Libya, which now has descended into violent anarchy.

Obama must realize that the alternative to Assad is both risky and grim and some of the suggestions coming from presidential candidate Clinton and other hawks for a U.S. imposition of a "no-fly zone" over parts of Syria would not only be a clear violation of international law but could create a direct military clash with nuclear-armed Russia. This time, the President may have to get down off his high horse and substitute a reality-based foreign policy for his rhetorical flourishes.

Yet, it is an open question whether Obama has become captive to his own propaganda, such as his obsession with Syria's use of "barrel bombs" in attacking rebel strongholds, as if this crude home-made weapon were some uniquely cruel device unlike the hundreds of thousands of tons of high explosives that the United States has dropped on Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and other countries in the last dozen years.

Does Obama really think that his "humanitarian" bombs and those given to U.S. "allies" such as Saudi Arabia and Israel don't kill innocents? In just the past week, a Saudi airstrike inside Yemen reportedly killed some 131 people at a wedding and an apparent U.S. attack in Kunduz, Afghanistan, blasted a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders, killing at least 22 people.

(By contrast, too, The New York Times treated the Kunduz atrocity gingerly, with the cautious headline, “US Is Blamed After Bombs Hit Afghan Hospital,” noting that Defense Secretary Ashton Carter extended his “thoughts and prayers to everyone afflicted” and added that a full investigation is under way in coordination with Afghanistan’s government to “determine exactly what happened.” Surely, we can expect the slaughter to be dismissed as some unavoidable “accident” or a justifiable case of “collateral damage.”)

With Obama, one cannot exclude the possibility that he has become so infatuated with his soaring words that he actually believes what he told the West Point graduating class on May 28, 2014; but if he does, someone needs to give him a quick reality check. He told the graduates:

“In fact, by most measures, America has rarely been stronger relative to the rest of the world. Those who argue otherwise ... are either misreading history or engaged in partisan politics. ... So the United States is and remains the one indispensable nation. That has been true for the century passed and it will be true for the century to come.”

### **How We Got Here**

The world could have taken a very different direction after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the evaporation of the Warsaw Pact in February 1991, and the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Those developments left the United States in a virtually unchallenged position of power – and wise leaders might have seized the opportunity to wind down the world’s excessive investment in military hardware and war-like solutions.

But the U.S. government chose a different course, one of “permanent” global hegemony with American troops as the world’s “armed-up” policemen. Gulf War I, led by the United States in January-February 1991 to punish Iraq for invading Kuwait the previous summer, injected steroids into leading arrogant neocons like Paul Wolfowitz already awash in hubris.

Shortly after that war, Gen. Wesley Clark recalled Wolfowitz (then Undersecretary of Defense for Policy) explaining the thinking: “We learned [from Gulf War I] that we can use our military in the region, in the Middle East, and the Soviets won’t stop us. And we’ve got about five or ten years to clean up those old Soviet client regimes Syria, Iran, Iraq before the next great superpower comes on to challenge us.”

Clark highlighted this comment in an Oct. 3, 2007 speech, apparently thinking this might somehow enhance his credentials as a contender for the Democratic presidential nomination (see this highly instructive [eight-minute excerpt](#)).

Clark added that neocons like Bill Kristol and Richard Perle “could hardly wait to finish Iraq so they could move into Syria. ... It was a policy coup. Wolfowitz, [Vice President Dick] Cheney, [Defense Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld, and you could name a half-dozen other collaborators from the Project for a New American Century. They wanted us to destabilize the Middle East, turn it upside down, make it under our control.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Neocon ‘Chaos Promotion’ in the Mideast.”]

The ideology of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) was summarized in a 90-page report published in 2000 and titled, *Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategies, Forces, and Resources For a New Century*, which advocated a Pax Americana enforced by the “preeminence of U.S. military forces.”

The report emphasized that the fall of the Soviet Union left the U.S. the world’s preeminent superpower, adding that the U.S. must work hard, not only to maintain that position, but to spread its military might into geographic areas that are ideologically opposed to its influence, subduing countries that may stand in the way of U.S. global preeminence.

PNAC’s dogma, in turn, had antecedents in “*A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm*,” a study written in 1996 for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he was running for the election of his first government. That study was chaired by arch-neocon Richard Perle, who later served as Chair of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld’s Defense Policy Board (2001-2003); the majority of the study contributors were also prominent American neocons.

Here’s what Perle and associates, many of whom later found influential posts in the Bush/Cheney administration, had to say on Syria: “Given the nature of the regime in Damascus, it is both natural and moral that Israel abandon the slogan ‘comprehensive peace’ and move to contain Syria, drawing attention to its weapons of mass destruction program [sic], and rejecting ‘land for peace’ deals on the Golan Heights. ...

“Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right as a means of foiling Syria’s regional ambitions.”

### **Why Won’t Assad Do What He’s Told?**

Given the hangover from the neocon binge during the Bush/Cheney years, one might say that President Obama was “under the influence” when he began calling for Assad to “step aside” in August 2011. Then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

chimed in, too, telling ABC, "Assad must go the sooner the better for everyone concerned."

The violence in 2011 was the catalyst for the civil war as Assad's forces cracked down on an "Arab Spring" uprising that while largely peaceful included extremist elements who killed police and ambushed troops. But the repeated unconditional-surrender demands from Secretary Clinton and other U.S. leaders that "Assad must go," plus "covert" U.S. support for rebels fighting against Syrian government forces, surely raised expectations that Assad would bow out, making the capture of Damascus a promising prize for a variety of Sunni militants.

Particularly pathetic has been Washington's benighted, keystone-cops support for so-called "moderate" rebels an embarrassing fiasco if there ever was one. For a while, the "mainstream media" actually was taking note of this disaster within a disaster, after the Pentagon recently acknowledged that its \$500 million project had produced only four or five fighters still in the field.

Even earlier, President Obama recognized the fallacy in this approach. In August 2014, he told New York Times' columnist Thomas Friedman that trust in rebel "moderates" was a "fantasy" that was "never in the cards" as a workable strategy. But Obama bent to political and media pressure to "do something."

As journalist Robert Parry pointed out, "Official Washington's most treasured 'fantasy' is the notion that a viable 'moderate opposition' exists in Syria or could somehow be created. That wish-upon-a-star belief was the centerpiece of congressional [approval in September 2014 of] a \$500 million plan by President Barack Obama to train and arm these 'moderate' rebels."

Even Pentagon-friend Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies recently conceded that "what is very clearly not happening is there has not been any meaningful military action or success on the part of any of the rebels that we have trained."

Cordesman described the state of play in Syria as "convoluted," noting that "In addition to Iran's involvement in the conflict, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have all sponsored armed groups in Syria, making it a surreal proxy playground, even by Middle East standards."

Yet, this past week, the "moderate" Syrian rebels sprang back to prominence, at least in the mainstream U.S. media, when Russian planes began bombing targets associated with the Army of Conquest, a coalition which is dominated by Al Qaeda's Nusra Front. This militant coalition suddenly was redefined as "moderate," as part of the argument that Russia should only be attacking Islamic

State targets.

The U.S. media also has downplayed where the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh) came from. It was an outgrowth of the Sunni resistance to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 when the group was known as "Al Qaeda in Iraq." It later splintered off from Al Qaeda over a tactical dispute, whether a fundamentalist Sunni caliphate should be started now (the ISIS view) or whether the focus should be on mounting terror attacks against the West (Al Qaeda's view.)

### **Putin Chides US Failures**

Putin reminded the world of this embarrassing history and other damaging consequences of U.S. interventionism during his Sept. 28 speech to the UN General Assembly when he noted: "The so-called Islamic State has tens of thousands of militants fighting for it, including former Iraqi soldiers who were left on the street after the 2003 invasion.

"Many recruits come from Libya whose statehood was destroyed as a result of a gross violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973. And now radical groups are joined by members of the so-called 'moderate' Syrian opposition backed by the West. They get weapons and training, and then they defect and join the so-called Islamic State. ...

"I'd like to tell those who engage in this: Gentlemen, the people you are dealing with are cruel but they are not dumb. They are as smart as you are. So, it's a big question: who's playing whom here? The recent incident where the most 'moderate' opposition group handed over their weapons to terrorists is a vivid example of that."

The UN speech was not the first time Putin complained about the way U.S. officials have presented the factual circumstances of the Syrian conflict. On Sept. 5, 2013, he publicly accused Secretary of State John Kerry of lying to Congress in exaggerating the strength of "moderate" rebels in Syria.

Alluding to Kerry's congressional testimony, Putin said: "This was very unpleasant and surprising for me. We talk to them [the Americans], and we assume they are decent people, but he is lying and he knows that he is lying. This is sad." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Rebuilding the Obama-Putin Trust.](#)"]

But the pretense continues. Obama knows only too well the sorry state of the handful of intrepid "moderates" that may still be operating within Syria. By the same token, he does not need Putin to tell him of the danger from ISIS or Al Qaeda if these Sunni extremists (either separately or together) march into Damascus.

So the question becomes: Will Obama bring himself to see Russian military intervention as a positive step toward stabilizing Syria and creating the chance for a political settlement or will he cling to the “Assad must go” precondition, rejecting Russia’s help and risking an ISIS/Al Qaeda victory?

### **This Time the Russians Can Stop Us**

There is another element here, creating an even graver risk. It is no longer 1991 when the triumphant neocons brushed aside hopes for global military de-escalation and instead pressed for worldwide U.S. military dominance. Under Putin, Russia has made clear that it will no longer sit back and let U.S. and NATO tighten a vise around Russia’s borders.

Regarding its “front yard” in Ukraine, Putin has sharply admonished those in the West who “want the Ukrainian government to destroy ... all political opponents and adversaries [in eastern Ukraine]. Is that what you want? That’s not what we want and we won’t allow that to happen.”

Putin’s deployment of aircraft and other arms to Assad reflects a similar attitude toward events in Syria, which Russia considers part of its backyard. The message is clear: “Overthrow Assad with the prospect of a terrorist victory? We won’t allow that to happen.”

The risk here, however, is that the American neocons and liberal interventionists remain drunk on their dreams of a permanent U.S. global hegemony that doesn’t broach any rivalry from Russia, China or any other potential challenger to America’s “full-spectrum dominance.” If these war hawks don’t sober up and if Obama remains their reluctant enabler the chances that the crises in Ukraine or Syria could escalate into a nuclear showdown cannot be ignored.

Thus, Russia’s move last week was truly a game-changer; and Putin is no longer playing games. One can only hope Obama can break free from the belligerent neocons and liberal war hawks. [For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Obama Tolerates the Warmongers.”]

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