

The Shame of the Jesuits

Exclusive: A spotlight has fallen on a shameful chapter in the history of Georgetown University's Jesuits, the 1838 sale of 272 African-Americans into Deep South slavery, but moral lapses didn't end there, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Anti-war prophet Rev. Daniel Berrigan, S.J., was onto something with his "hunch" – in his 1987 autobiography, *To Dwell in Peace* – that "the fall of a great enterprise," the Jesuit university, would end up "among those structures whose moral decline and political servitude signalize a larger falling away of the culture itself."

Berrigan, a Jesuit himself, lamented "highly placed" churchmen and their approval of war, "uttered ... with sublime confidence, from on high, from highly placed friendships, and White House connections. Thus compromised, the Christian tradition of nonviolence, as well as the secular boast of disinterested pursuit of truth – these are reduced to bombast, hauled out for formal occasions, believed by no one, practiced by no one."

But that "moral decline" among Jesuit institutions of higher learning may have had deeper roots than even Berrigan understood. One of those deep roots is drawing national attention, an 1838 decision by the Jesuit leaders of the Jesuits' Maryland Province and Georgetown College to improve the school's financial health by selling 272 African-American men, women and children as slaves into the Deep South.

As New York Times writer Rachel L. Swarns described the scene in Sunday's editions, "The human cargo was loaded on ships at a bustling wharf in the nation's capital, destined for the plantations of the Deep South. Some slaves pleaded for rosaries as they were rounded up, praying for deliverance. But on this day, in the fall of 1838, no one was spared: not the 2-month-old baby and her mother, not the field hands, not the shoemaker and not Cornelius Hawkins, who was about 13 years old when he was forced onboard."

Rev. Thomas Mulledy, S.J., the Provincial (head) of the Maryland Jesuits, sold the 272 enslaved African-Americans to Henry Johnson, the former governor of Louisiana, and Louisiana landowner Jesse Batey for \$115,000, the equivalent of \$3.3 million in today's dollars, according to the Times account.

Documents show that \$90,000 went to support the "formation" of Jesuits (the preparation of candidates spiritually, academically and practically for the

ministries that they will be called on to offer the Church and the world); \$17,000 to Georgetown College; and \$8,000 to a pension fund for the archbishop of Baltimore.

There is now a campaign among Georgetown professors, students, alumni and genealogists to discover what happened to those 272 human beings and whether Georgetown can do anything to compensate their descendants.

An Earlier Alert

But there is also a sad back story to this telling slice of Jesuit history, in which I became personally involved after I first learned of this scandal two decades ago from Edward F. Beckett, a young Jesuit who had the courage to speak out and summon his superiors to conscience. Beckett published his research in "Listening to Our History: Inculturation and Jesuit Slaveholding" in the journal *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* (28/5, November 1996).

Beckett and I became friends while working at the Fr. Horace McKenna Center where I volunteered at the overnight shelter for homeless men in the basement of St. Aloysius Church in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol. The Jesuits were quick to exult Rev. Horace McKenna, S.J., as "Apostle of the Poor" after he died, but – while alive – not so much. Fr. McKenna was known for being something of a pain; he once even wrote a letter to the Vatican complaining – using a sports analogy – that his superiors were "not throwing enough forward passes to the poor."

During the Great Depression, Fr. McKenna set up a food distribution system and other assistance to struggling farmers, and advocated vigorously for racial integration in churches and schools. He expressed "passionate impatience" toward go-slow approaches which were favored by some of his fellow Jesuits and priests.

After I got to know Beckett as we worked nights with the men in the St. Aloysius Church shelter, he gave me a copy of his booklet relating the history of how – in the 1800s – the Maryland Jesuits rebuffed ethical calls from other religious leaders who were pushing for the abolition of slavery. Instead, the Jesuits were more interested in how much money they could get for selling slaves.

It was, you see, an economic issue since the Jesuits no longer needed the proceeds from slave labor on their plantations in southern Maryland because they had received permission from Rome to reverse their longstanding tradition of free education and start charging tuition to the wealthy sons of plantation owners to attend Georgetown.

So, no longer needing the slaves to work the fields, the Jesuits decided to sell them into the Deep South to turn a tidy profit and invest the money in the "moral education" of young Jesuits while also providing a pension to the

Baltimore archbishop.

A Chance to Repent

After learning of this history two decades ago, I joined with a small group of activists to ask Maryland Provincial Rev. James R. Stormes, S.J., in effect, to seize a unique opportunity to confess and repent.

We thought our initiative was particularly well timed since President Bill Clinton had announced the appointment of a seven-member advisory board for his initiative on race to promote "a national dialogue on controversial issues surrounding race; to increase our understanding of the history of race relations and the common future people of all races share; to recruit leadership at all levels to help bridge racial divides, and to propose actions to address critical areas such as education, economic opportunity, housing, health care, crime and the administration of justice."

John Hope Franklin, an eminent historian and educator, whose writings included the 1946 landmark study *From Slavery to Freedom*, was appointed chair, and Judith A. Winston was named Executive Director of this "One America Initiative," with a senior staff of national civil rights leaders as senior staff.

As the initiative was getting off the ground, our small, diverse group met with Ms. Winston, herself a graduate of Georgetown University Law School, who was clearly delighted with what we proposed. We told her that we were not about blaming, but rather about acknowledging, apologizing, and reconciling, and said we were approaching then-Georgetown President Rev. Leo O'Donovan, S.J. and Maryland Provincial Stormes as follows:

"We have a vision of Georgetown's most prominent alumnus standing up before the cameras at Georgetown University this spring (1998) and being able to say, in all sincerity, that he has never been prouder of his alma mater and the Jesuits who run it. He might tell a bit of the story of Georgetown's origins and then, jointly with Fr. Stormes and Fr. O'Donovan, announce the establishment of a foundation to promote the education of the descendants of the Jesuits' slaves. President Clinton could then cite this as precisely the kind of action he had hoped would spring forth from his Initiative on Race, and could call upon others to follow the courageous example of the Maryland Jesuits. We think this could be a welcome boost for the President's Initiative."

But our optimism was misplaced. Even though many of us had learned at Jesuit hands about acting in a just way and doing recompense for injustice, we were told that we had no "standing," as what the Jesuits call "externs" or outsiders who have no right to hold them accountable. We still cannot figure out exactly

why the Jesuit leaders were so offended by our initiative and they wouldn't tell us. We were denied an audience with Stormes – and without Stormes's *nihil obstat*, there was no hope for support from O'Donovan.

The final nail in the coffin for our own initiative (as well as Bill Clinton's) came in early 1998 as his trysts with Monica Lewinsky and his lies about them deprived him of any pretense to moral leadership. The whole Initiative died an inconsequential death.

By chance I found myself sitting next to Judith Winston on a plane a few years ago. She saw my name, recognized me, and recalled our ill-fated common effort. Neither of us could do much more than simply shake our heads.

Jesuit Universities

Perhaps even more sadly, the behavior of those Jesuit leaders in 1838 was not entirely an aberration. As Fr. Berrigan noted in this autobiography, Jesuit institutions have often traded ethics for clout, preferring to hobnob with the great and powerful rather than act as moral critics of social wrongs, such as slavery, war and – in recent times – even assassinations and torture.

Among its graduates, Georgetown University churned out CIA Director George Tenet, who offered “slam dunk” deceptions to justify the invasion of Iraq, and Vice President Dick Cheney's torture-excusing lawyer David Addington, who graduated *summa cum laude*.

Nor is Georgetown alone as a Jesuit institution in this dubious position of training people to engage in jesuitical arguments to justify the unjustifiable. My *alma mater*, Fordham, which has forever been trying to be “just like Georgetown,” produced CIA Director John Brennan, an ardent, public supporter of the kidnapping/“rendering” of suspected terrorists to “friendly” Arab intelligence services for interrogation.

Brennan also defended the use of U.S. secret prisons abroad, as well as “enhanced interrogation techniques” (also known as torture).

But Brennan was a big shot in the White House and Fordham's Trustees were susceptible to the “celebrity virus.” So, Fordham President, Rev. Joseph M. McShane, S.J., invited Brennan to give the university commencement address on May 19, 2012, and to be awarded – of all things – a Doctorate of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*.

Several graduating seniors, who were aware of and cared about what Brennan represents, did their best, in vain, to get him dis-invited. They saw scandal in the reality that the violent policies Brennan advocated remain in stark contrast

to the principles that Fordham University was supposed to stand for as a Catholic Jesuit University.

Controversy on campus grew, catalyzed by two protest petitions created by Fordham students and multiple articles in the school newspaper, *The Ram*. Eventually, Fordham senior and organizer, Scott McDonald, requested a meeting with university president McShane to discuss why Fordham's trustees could not be trusted to invite someone more representative of Fordham's core values.

McDonald met with McShane, Vice President Jeffrey Gray and university secretary Margaret Ball, but McShane dismissed Scott's qualms about torture: "We don't live in a black and white world; we live in a gray world."

Then McShane announced that what was said at the meeting was "off the record...not to leave this room." But McDonald had not agreed to that. He left the meeting wondering if the moral theologians at Fordham would agree that torture had now become a "gray area."

We who attended Jesuit institutions decades ago were taught that there was a moral category called "intrinsic evil" – actions that were always wrong, such as torture, rape and slavery. At Fordham, at least, torture seems to have slipped out of that category.

Now that the issue of the 272 slaves has again surfaced, Georgetown University needs to acknowledge its institutional guilt, apologize and find some way to make restitution to the descendants of those African-Americans.

Though clearly whatever is done will fall into the category of way-too-little and way-too-late, confession of this earlier sin might finally put the brakes on the steady moral decline of what once was an important social as well as religious institution – the Jesuit university.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He graduated from Fordham Prep (just 41 years after Horace McKenna did), earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from Fordham University, and finds it difficult to un-learn what he learned there.

Hillary Clinton's Gender Argument

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton calls on women to support her to be the first female President, but all Americans should look carefully at her record advocating bloody, neocon "regime change" wars, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Not race nor gender – nor any other innate characteristic – should be **the** touchstone in voting for President of the United States. Yet, as I have traveled the country these past several years, I have been amazed at how many Americans have no qualms in stating that their support for President Barack Obama is based solely – or mostly – on his being black. Equally amazing is the unabashedly indiscriminate support I hear voiced by highly educated women for Hillary Clinton – “because she is a woman and it’s our turn,” as they put it.

Five years ago in Atlanta, I sat down with Rev. Dr. Joseph E. Lowery, then 90 and a legendary leader of the African-American-church-led struggle for human rights in the South. We met in an historic building used 50 years before by the courageous young leaders of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

I had been a longtime admirer of Dr. Lowery, who acted very much in the tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when Lowery chose the occasion of Coretta Scott King’s funeral (Feb. 7, 2006) to admonish a captive audience that included Presidents Bush-41, Bush-43, Carter and Clinton.

“We know now there were no weapons of mass destruction over there [in Iraq]. But Coretta knew and we know that there are weapons of misdirection right down here,” Dr. Lowery said. “Poverty abounds. For war billions more but no more for the poor!”

So I was pleased to meet with Dr. Lowery in early May 2011 and felt comfortable enough to voice disappointment at how Barack Obama, despite his rhetoric, seemed to be pursuing the pro-war/pro-Wall-Street policies of his predecessor. But I was brought up short when Lowery reacted quite strongly.

“Obama is one of us,” he said. “We will support him no matter what!”

Sensitive Topic

I am aware of the delicacy involved in saying these things and the criticism one can expect. Granted, I carry the proverbial knapsack of white/male privilege. I do make a constant effort to reflect on the very real implications of that reality, rather than give it mere lip service. I have been working at a black-led nonprofit in inner-city Washington for the past 18 years; I worship at a predominantly African-American church, and just this week I was “Best Man” at the marriage of black friends.

If that sounds a little like “some of my best friends are black,” well, they are. I do try hard to divest myself of the knapsack of white/male privilege that is mine by accident of birth. Recognizing that unearned privilege will always

be part of my DNA, I feel all the more conscience bound to put those unmerited gifts to good use. Often this means risking opprobrium attached to telling it like it is – or, admittedly, like I think it is.

Twenty-five years ago I earned the epithet “radical feminist” (not a good thing in Catholic circles) to which I proudly plead guilty. Rather than take the chance that our three daughters end up with the idea that they were second-class citizens, and not having any better idea, I stood up in silence in the middle of my parish congregation for the entire Sunday Mass for almost five years. It was a witness to the reality that the Catholic liturgy itself is flawed with fundamental injustice when women are barred from presiding. From time to time other “radical feminists,” women and men parishioners, joined me.

But for many it was a most unwelcome reminder – a disruption. I was treated like a leper by some of my most “progressive” co-parishioners, until I left the parish after those five years (1991-96) of standing. (*Catholics in Crisis*, a book by Jim Naughton centers on the bitter controversy sparked by what came to be known as “The Standing.”)

Gender and Justice

In the midst of such witness, there seemed to be signs of some progress – at least in the secular world. In 1993, I rejoiced that our country was getting a “two-for” with Hillary Clinton as a new kind of First Lady, essentially a partner in governance with her husband. And just four years later, another breakthrough, Madeleine Albright became the first female Secretary of State and the highest-ranking woman in the history of the U.S. government.

But, alas: as U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Albright had justified the brutal effects of the sanctions imposed on Iraq (later branded “unconscionable” by the U.S. Catholic bishops). When asked in May 1996 about the U.N. finding that the sanctions had taken the lives of 500,000 Iraqi children, Albright told CBS’s Leslie Stahl, “We think the price is worth it.” Albright displayed not only callousness, but entitlement.

In February of this year, while on the campaign trail in New Hampshire for former Secretary of State Clinton, Albright condescendingly chided and challenged women, especially the young who were rallying to Sen. Bernie Sanders: “You have to help. Hillary Clinton will always be there for you. And just remember, there’s a special place in Hell for women who don’t help each other.”

Hillary Clinton is clearly expecting the votes of many women who believe she is entitled to become President because “it is time.” While I agree that it is well past time for a woman to be President, I disagree that it should be Hillary

Clinton. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded us that people should not be judged by external factors (whether the color of their skin or, in this case, their gender) “but by the content of their character.”

Hillary Clinton’s record as Secretary of State makes it unmistakably clear that – like her hawkish predecessor Albright – she lacks the level-headedness, vision, and, yes, compassion without which the country’s top diplomat or (even more importantly) the commander in chief can be outright dangerous.

If there is a Hell, I could visualize a special place for both men and women who operate with the cold-blooded, unfeeling cruelty toward victims of American power. What brought this to mind was the way Clinton exulted shortly after getting word that Muammar Gaddafi had been killed.

The Libyan leader had been flushed out of a culvert hiding place, tortured, sodomized with a bayonet and murdered. Then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton chose to rejoice with undisguised glee, using a riff on words attributed to Julius Caesar, “I came; I saw; I conquered.” Hillary said: “We came; we saw; he died!”

Chaos now reigns in Libya and, according to Colin Powell’s “Pottery Barn” rule, Clinton broke it, so she now owns it. And Obama has just conceded publicly that if he could get a do-over, it would be Libya. He recently expressed open regret over the aftermath of the U.S. military involvement championed by Secretary of State Clinton, calling it the “worst mistake” of his presidency.

In Lock-Step With Neocons

Frankly, it is hard to distinguish Clinton’s foreign policy from the neocons’ “regime change” obsession. Like the neocons, Clinton expresses full support for whatever Israel does and applies the same step-by-step approach toward dragging the United States into more “regime change” wars against governments and political movements that don’t toe Washington’s line.

Currently, she’s pushing for the U.S. military to impose a “safe zone” or “no-fly zone” in Syria, nice-sounding phrases that mean in reality a direct U.S. invasion of Syria, requiring the violent destruction of Syria’s air force and air defenses. It is the same ploy that Clinton used in beginning the disastrous “regime change” in Libya: start with sweet phrases like “responsibility to protect” and “no-fly zones” and then escalate to another “regime change.”

President George W. Bush and his neocon advisers pulled a similar stunt in drawing the United States into the Iraq War. Bush insisted that he simply needed the authority to use force to pressure Saddam Hussein to surrender his WMD; then U.S. troops were deployed to the region to show that the U.S. meant business;

then, U.S. “credibility” would be impaired if the troops simply had to wait around until the U.N. weapons inspectors searched for the WMD, so the invasion began.

Clinton has consistently been onboard such neocon bandwagons, famously voting for and supporting the Iraq War as a U.S. senator. She also has favored coups and wars to remove troublesome leaders whom she demonizes much as the neocons do, understanding the importance of propaganda and “perception management” to bring a sometimes reluctant U.S. population along for the blood-soaked ride.

As Secretary of State, Clinton supported the 2009 coup in Honduras that ousted a relatively progressive president who had offended powerful corporate and oligarchic interests. Also in 2009, she joined hawkish Republican holdovers inside the Obama administration to push for what turned out to be a pointless but bloody “counterinsurgency” escalation in Afghanistan.

In 2011, Clinton tipped the balance in convincing Obama to support the Western invasion of Libya. And in seeking another “regime change” in Syria, she advocated arming Syrian rebels, even though many fought side-by-side with Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front.

Clinton also has voiced excessive hostility toward Iran, heightening the confrontation during her years as Secretary of State and threatening to renew it if she becomes President. With Iranian hardliners already questioning the value of Iran’s accepting extraordinary constraints on its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief (when much of that relief has not materialized), it’s not hard to imagine how a President Clinton-45 might push Iran into renouncing the deal, thus reopening the “bomb-bomb-bomb-Iran” option favored by the neocons.

Only the blindest supporters of Secretary Clinton could fail to acknowledge that there is little or no daylight between her and the neocons.

Full Disclosure

I should note that five years ago as Secretary Clinton began a major speech at George Washington University on the imperative of respecting dissent (in Iran), she did not miss a syllable as “security” officers brutally assaulted me and hauled me away directly in front of her. My crime? Standing silently with my back to her.

Clinton’s confidant Sidney Blumenthal sent her a quick email, telling her that I was well known in the U.S. intelligence community, where I had long served as a CIA analyst, though since then I had “become a Christian antiwar leftist who goes around bearing witness.” He added, “Whatever his views, he’s harmless.”

Harmless or not, I ended up with cuts and bruises, far less than the slaughter and maiming of the millions of victims of Clinton's misbegotten policies. Her gender does not excuse her for that suffering nor does it mean that we should ignore her judgment when deciding whether she should be elevated to the most powerful office on earth.

Ray McGovern is a former Army officer and CIA analyst. He prepared the *President's Daily Brief* for Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, and conducted the morning briefings, one-on-one, of Reagan's most senior advisers. He is a member of the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

How an Iran War Was Averted

Exclusive: A decade ago, the Bush administration was eager to bomb Iran but U.S. intelligence analysts challenged the casus belli by finding that Iran was not building a nuclear bomb, recalls ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

On a recent TV appearance, I was asked about whistleblowing, but the experience brought back to mind a crystal-clear example of how, before the Iraq War, CIA careerists were assigned "two bosses" – CIA Director George Tenet and John Bolton, the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, the arch-neocon who had been thrust on an obedient Secretary of State Colin Powell.

CIA "analyst" Frederick Fleitz took the instructions quite literally, bragging about being allowed to serve, simultaneously, "two bosses" – and becoming Bolton's "enforcer." Fleitz famously chided a senior intelligence analyst at State for not understanding that it was the prerogative of policymakers like Bolton – not intelligence analysts – to "interpret" intelligence data.

In an email from Fleitz in early 2002, at the time when one of his bosses, the pliable George Tenet, was "fixing" the intelligence to "justify" war on Iraq, Fleitz outlined the remarkable new intelligence ethos imposed by President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and their subordinates who were reshaping the U.S. Intelligence Community.

Apparently, senior State Department intelligence analyst, Christian Westermann, "had not gotten the memo" on how things had changed. Rather, he was performing his duties like a professional analyst under the old rules. Westermann had the

temerity to block coordination on a speech in which Bolton wanted to make the spurious assertion that Cuba had a developing biological weapons program.

On Feb. 12, 2002, after a personal run-in with Westermann, Fleitz sent Bolton this email: "I explained to Christian [Westermann] that it was a political judgment as to how to interpret this data and the I.C. [Intelligence Community] should do as we asked." Fleitz informed Bolton that Westermann still "strongly disagrees with us."

At this point, Bolton became so dyspeptic that he summoned Westermann to his office for a tongue-lashing and then asked top officials of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) to fire him. Instead, they defended him, and this was not the only time intelligence managers at State – virtually alone in the Intelligence Community – gave the Bush-43 White House and political hacks like Bolton the clear message not to count on managers and analysts at INR to acquiesce in the politicization of intelligence.

Exaggerating Iran Threat

Later, Fleitz went on to bigger and better things. In 2006, he became "senior adviser" to House Intelligence Committee chair Pete Hoekstra, R-Michigan. Bowing to desires of the White House to portray Iran as a strategic threat, Hoekstra had Fleitz draft an almost comically alarmist paper titled "Recognizing Iran as Strategic Threat: An Intelligence Challenge for the United States." Fleitz was told not to coordinate his paper with the Intelligence Community.

The objective was to pre-empt a formal National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear weapons program – an NIE that the Senate had just commissioned. Fleitz and Hoekstra feared the NIE might come to unwelcome conclusions, contradicting the kinds of stark warnings about Iran's nuclear program that the White House wanted to use to stir up fear and justify action against Iran. Iraq *deja vu*.

The Fleitz-Hoekstra gambit failed. Their over-the-top paper made them the subject of ridicule in professional intelligence circles.

Meanwhile, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence Thomas Fingar was named to manage the formal NIE on Iran, and, *mirable dictu*, he was not only a seasoned professional but also a practitioner of the old-time ethos of objective, non-politicized intelligence.

Worse still for Bush, Cheney and their sycophants, the NIE of November 2007, endorsed by all 16 agencies of the Intelligence Community began: "We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program."

That Estimate holds the distinction of being the only NIE of which I am aware

that demonstrably played a key role in preventing an unnecessary war – the war on Iran that Cheney and Bush were planning for 2008. Bush pretty much admits this in his memoir *Decision Points*, which includes a highly instructive section that he must have written himself.

Indeed, nowhere in his memoir is Bush's bizarre relationship to truth so manifest as when he describes his dismay at learning that the Intelligence Community had redeemed itself for its lies about Iraq by preparing an honest NIE that stuck a rod in the wheels of the juggernaut rolling toward war with Iran.

Bush complains bitterly that the “eye-popping” NIE “tied my hands on the military side,” adding that the “NIE’s conclusion was so stunning that I felt it would immediately leak to the press.” He writes that he authorized declassification of the key findings “so that we could shape the news stories with the facts.” Facts?

A disappointed Bush writes, “The backlash was immediate. [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad hailed the NIE as a ‘great victory.’” Bush’s apparent “logic” here is to use the widespread disdain for Ahmadinejad to discredit the NIE through association, i.e. whatever Ahmadinejad praises must be false.

An Embarrassment

How embarrassing it must have been for Bush and Cheney! Here before the world were the key judgments of an NIE, the most authoritative genre of intelligence report, unanimously approved “with high confidence” by 16 U.S. intelligence agencies and signed by the Director of National Intelligence, saying, in effect, that Bush and Cheney were lying about the “Iranian nuclear threat.” Just a month before the Estimate was issued, Bush was claiming that the threat from Iran could lead to “World War III.”

In his memoir, Bush laments: “I don’t know why the NIE was written the way it was. ... Whatever the explanation, the NIE had a big impact – and not a good one.” Spelling out how the NIE had tied his hands “on the military side,” Bush included this kicker:

“But after the NIE, how could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?”

Yet, that didn’t stop neocon warmongers from trying. The NIE was subject to virulent criticism by those disappointed that it did not provide justification for a “preventive” attack on Iran.

Former CIA Director James Woolsey, who has proudly described himself as the

“anchor of the Presbyterian wing of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA),” called the Iran NIE “deceptive.” Hoekstra called it “a piece of trash.”

Greg Thielmann, a former State Department official who had managed strategic intelligence analysis but quit before the intelligence debacle on Iraq, could not resist commenting on this bizarre set of circumstances from his new position as a senior fellow at the Arms Control Association: “There is some considerable irony in hearing such criticism from those intimately familiar with the inner workings of the intelligence community, who seemed to have sleep-walked through the serious professional lapses of the 2002 NIE on Iraq WMD.”

But the neocons were deprived of the Iran war for which they had been lusting (just as, six years later, they were deprived of the war on Syria, into which they almost mouse-trapped President Barack Obama).

Still, you need not worry about any negative consequences for the compliant Bush-Cheney “analysts” who were willing to “fix” more intelligence around war policies. As usually happens in Official Washington, they landed on their feet. For instance, Fleitz is now Senior Vice President for Policy and Programs with the Center for Security Policy, a think tank founded by Frank Gaffney, Jr., an archdeacon of neocondom, who is still its president.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A former Army officer and CIA analyst, McGovern co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) in January 2003, in an attempt to expose the corruption of intelligence under the Cheney-Bush regime.

US Intel Vets Warn Against Torture

Exclusive: Experienced intelligence professionals reaffirm that torture – while popular with “tough” politicians – doesn’t work in getting accurate and actionable information, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

To those living “outside the Beltway” it may seem counterintuitive that those of us whose analysis has been correct on key issues that the U.S. government got criminally wrong – like the invasion of Iraq in 2003 – would be blacklisted from “mainstream” media and ostracized by the Smart People of the Establishment. But, alas, that’s the way it is.

Forget the continuing carnage in which hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions made refugees. Within the mainstream U.S. media and around Washington's major policy circles, there is little serious dialogue, much less debate about what went so hideously wrong; and Americans still innocently wonder – regarding the people on the receiving end of the blunderbuss violence – “why they hate us.”

After more than 13 years of presenting thoughtful critiques to senior officials – and having little discernible impact – we Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity are strongly tempted to take some solace in having made a good-faith effort to spread some truth around – and, now, go play golf. But the stakes are too high. We can't in good conscience approach the first tee without having tried one more time.

Accordingly, we repeat the offer we extended on Feb. 26 – this time to the winnowed candidate roster of Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump – to make our deep experience and proven expertise available to those of you interested in the tell-it-like-it-is analysis that has been our niche for so many years.

Given our 13-year record for accuracy and insight, we had hoped that at least one or two of you would take us up on the offer, especially since a few of you have faced criticism for a paucity of foreign policy and national security experts.

Of more immediate importance to the nation and the world, statements by some of you in reaction to the Monday bombings in Brussels, seem to betray:

- A) Gross naiveté about how to counter terrorism;
- B) Demagogic disregard for the civil liberty protections embodied in the U.S. Constitution; or
- C) Both of the above.

We can help round out your understanding of terrorism, its causes and its possible cures – but with respect to “A” above, you may wish to begin by reading VIPS memorandum #15 (of June 18, 2007), *How **Not** to Counter Terrorism*, drafted by our VIPS colleague, former Special Agent Coleen Rowley, who was FBI Division Counsel, Minneapolis, during 9/11. (Rowley later blew the whistle about the ineptitude at FBI headquarters that thwarted the simple steps that would have prevented those terrorist attacks.)

On Torture, PoIs & Polls

Based on our lengthy experience in intelligence, we know that torture doesn't "work." So we confess to a certain disgust with the "new normal," fostered not only by some presidential candidates but also by the media, that torture techniques like waterboarding yield useful intelligence. **They don't.**

This issue has come to the fore again in the immediate aftermath of the Brussels bombings. We continue to be concerned that presidential candidates may be unaware, not only that harsh interrogation techniques don't "work," but also that they are a great fillip to the recruitment of more terrorists.

There are, of course, polls purporting to show that a majority of Americans still think that torturing "bad guys" can be justified. That simply means that many citizens have been seduced by artificially stoked fear into believing what **all** independent investigations – including the detailed Senate study relying on original CIA documents – have proven: that despite all the TV and Hollywood propaganda "showing" that torture "works," it doesn't.

The sole exception is if your purpose is to obtain unreliable or false "intelligence." For instance, if you wish to coerce an Al Qaeda operative into "confessing" that there were close ties between Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, well, then torture can work like a charm. A detainee will happily confirm a lie to stop the pain.

As for those responsible for implementing torture – like former CIA directors George Tenet, Porter Goss and Michael Hayden – is it not clear that they have strong incentive to "justify" their criminal behavior? Some other complicit CIA officials and operatives, eager to protect themselves from the opprobrium that comes from torturing, also continue to pretend that torture helps "keep us safe."

The opposite is the case, but these torture practitioners and their accomplices continue to promote the lie that useful intelligence can be gotten via abusive interrogation techniques (never mind that most such "enhanced" techniques are clearly illegal, not to mention immoral and ineffective).

VIPS has spoken out strongly – most recently in a Sept. 14, 2015 [memo](#) – against these crass attempts by former intelligence officials to exculpate themselves and other perpetrators.

What the commanding general of U.S. Army intelligence has said about torture bears repeating: On Sept. 6, 2006, the very day President George W. Bush announced and applauded the effectiveness of "enhanced interrogation techniques," Gen. John Kimmons told a Pentagon press conference: "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, tell us that.”

Wise Advisers Needed

Some of today’s presidential candidates are brimming with what we’re told are sage foreign policy advisers, even though many have been implicated in the disastrous policies of recent decades; other candidates have relatively few advisers – some of them unknown entities about whom little can be found even via Goggle. As a collective, VIPS stands ready to help any and all candidates who might be interested. It may now be time to insert some names into our offer.

The listing below contains only those members of VIPS who signed onto our Memorandum of Sept. 14, 2015, addressing our former bosses’ transparent attempts to cover up their role in torture:

VIPS Steering Group, Sept. 14, 2015

Fulton Armstrong, National Intelligence Officer for Latin America (ret.)

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Tony Camerino, former Air Force and Air Force Reserves, senior interrogator in Iraq and author of *How to Break a Terrorist* under pseudonym Matthew Alexander

Glenn L. Carle, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Transnational Threats, CIA (ret.)

Thomas Drake, former Senior Executive, NSA

Daniel Ellsberg, former State Department and Defense Department Official (VIPS Associate)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

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

Larry C Johnson, CIA & State Department (ret.)

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF Intelligence Agency (Retired), ex Master SERE Instructor

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer

Karen Kwiatkowski, Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.)

Edward Loomis, NSA, Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

James Marcinkowski, Attorney, former CIA Operations Officer

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

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

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

Scott Ritter, former Maj., USMC, former UN Weapon Inspector, Iraq

Diane Roark, former professional staff, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

Coleen Rowley, Division Counsel & Special Agent, FBI (ret.)

Ali Soufan, former FBI Special Agent

Robert David Steele, former CIA Operations Officer

Greg Thielmann, U.S. Foreign Service Officer (ret.) and former Senate Intelligence Committee

Peter Van Buren, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary

Valerie Plame Wilson, CIA Operations Officer (ret.)

Ann Wright, U.S. Army Reserve Colonel (ret) and former U.S. Diplomat

Ray McGovern served for 30 years as an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Behind the Crimea/Russia Reunion

Exclusive: Official Washington marches in propaganda lockstep about Crimea's decision to rejoin Russia two years ago, with references to a Russian "invasion"

and a “sham” referendum of Crimea’s voters, but the reality is different, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

With high symbolism Russian President Vladimir Putin is visiting Crimea “to check on the construction of the Kerch Strait Bridge, which will link the Crimean peninsula and continental Russia,” the Kremlin announced on Thursday.

As the Russians like to say, “It is no accident” that he chose today – marking the second anniversary of Russia’s annexation of Crimea three weeks after the U.S.-sponsored coup in Kiev on Feb. 22, 2014, and just days after a referendum in which Crimean voters approved leaving Ukraine and rejoining Russia by a 96 percent majority.

The 12-mile bridge is a concrete metaphor, so to speak, for the re-joining of Crimea and Russia. When completed (the target is December 2018), it will be the longest bridge in Russia.

Yet, the Obama administration continues to decry the political reunion between Crimea and Russia, a relationship that dates back to the Eighteenth Century. Instead, the West has accused Russia of violating its pledge in the 1994 Budapest agreement – signed by Ukraine, Russia, Great Britain and the U.S. – “to respect the independence and sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine,” in exchange for Ukraine surrendering its Soviet-era nuclear weapons.

Did Moscow violate the Budapest agreement when it annexed Crimea? A fair reading of the text yields a Yes to that question. Of course, there were extenuating circumstances, including alarm among Crimeans over what the unconstitutional ouster of Ukraine’s president might mean for them, as well as Moscow’s not unfounded nightmare of NATO taking over Russia’s major, and only warm-water, naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea.

But what is seldom pointed out is that the other parties, including the United States, seem to have been guilty, too, in promoting a coup d’etat removing the democratically elected president and essentially disenfranchising millions of ethnic Russian Ukrainians who had voted for President Viktor Yanukovich. In such a context, it takes a markedly one-dimensional view to place blame solely on Russia for violating the Budapest agreement.

Did the Western-orchestrated coup in Kiev violate the undertaking “to respect the independence and sovereignty” of Ukraine? How about the pledge in the Budapest agreement “to refrain from economic coercion designed to subordinate to their own interest the exercise by the Ukraine of the rights inherent in its sovereignty.” Political and economic interference were rife in the months before

the February 2014 coup. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Who Violated Ukraine's Sovereignty?](#)"]

Did Ukrainian President Yanukovich expect to be overthrown if he opted for Moscow's economic offer, and not Europe's? Hard to tell. But if the putsch came as a total surprise, he sorely underestimated what \$5 billion in "democracy promotion" by Washington can buy.

After Yanukovich turned down the European Community's blandishments, seeing deep disadvantages for Ukraine, American neoconservatives like National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland pulled out all the stops to enable Ukraine to fulfill what Nuland called its "European aspirations."

"The revolution will not be televised," or so the saying goes. But the Feb. 22, 2014 putsch in Kiev was YouTube-ized two-and-a-half weeks in advance. Recall Nuland's amateurish, boorish – not to mention irresponsible – use of an open telephone line to plot regime change in Ukraine with fellow neocon, U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, during [an intercepted conversation](#) posted on YouTube on Feb. 4.

Nuland tells Pyatt, "Yats is the guy. He's got the economic experience, the governing experience. He's the guy you know. ... He has warned there is an urgent need for unpopular cutting of subsidies and social payments before Ukraine can improve."

Arseniy Yatsenyuk (aka "Yats") was quickly named prime minister of the coup regime, which was immediately given diplomatic recognition by Washington. Since then, he has made a royal mess of things. Ukraine is an economic basket case, and "Yats" barely survived a parliamentary vote of no confidence and is widely believed to be on his way out.

Did Moscow's strong reaction to the coup, to the danger of NATO setting up shop next door in Ukraine come as a surprise to Nuland and other advisers? If so, she ought to get new advisers, and quickly. That Russia would not let Crimea become a NATO base should have been a no-brainer.

Nuland may have seen the coup as creating a win-win situation. If Putin acted decisively, it would be all the easier to demonize him, denounce "Russian aggression," and put a halt to the kind of rapprochement between President Barack Obama and Putin that thwarted neocon plans for shock and awe against Syria in late summer 2013. However, if Putin acquiesced to the Ukrainian coup and accepted the dangers it posed to Russia, eventual membership for Ukraine in NATO might become more than a pipedream.

Plus, if Putin swallowed the humiliation, think of how politically weakened he would have become inside Russia. As NED's Gershman made clear, not only did American neocons see Ukraine as "the biggest prize" but as a steppingstone to ultimately achieve "regime change" in Moscow, or as Gershman wrote, "Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself."

Russian Equities

In a formal address in the Kremlin on March 18, 2014, the day Crimea was re-incorporated into Russia, Putin went from dead serious to somewhat jocular in discussing the general issue:

"We have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO's navy would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia. ...

"We are not opposed to cooperation with NATO ... [but] NATO remains a military alliance, and we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory. I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors. Of course, most of them are wonderful guys, but it would be better to have them come and visit us, be our guests, rather than the other way around."

A little-known remark by Putin a month later (on April 17, 2014) was unusually blunt in focusing on one of the main reasons behind Moscow's strong reaction – namely, Russia's felt need to thwart Washington's plan to incorporate Ukraine and Crimea into the U.S. anti-ballistic missile deployment encircling Russia. Putin was quite direct:

"This issue is no less, and probably even more important, than NATO's eastward expansion. Incidentally, our decision on Crimea was partially prompted by this."

This is a serious bone of contention, with far reaching implications. In short, if the Russian military becomes convinced that the Pentagon thinks it has the capability to carry out a strategic strike without fear of significant retaliation, the strategic tripwire for a nuclear exchange will regress more than four decades to the extremely dangerous procedure of "launch on warning," allowing mere minutes to "use 'em, or lose 'em."

Russia has been repeatedly rebuffed – or diddled – when it has suggested bilateral talks on this key issue. Four years ago, for example, at the March 2012 summit in Seoul, Russia's then-President Dmitry Medvedev asked Obama when

the U.S. would be prepared to address 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.” Putin claims to have seen no flexibility on this strategic question.

What Coup?

The Obama administration and its stenographers in the mainstream U.S. media would like the relevant Ukrainian history to start on Feb. 23, 2014 with “Yats” and his coup cronies deemed the “legitimate” authorities. To that end, there was a need to airbrush what George Friedman, president of the think-tank STRATFOR, publicly called “the most blatant coup in history” – the one plotted by Nuland and Pyatt in early February 2014 and carried out on Feb. 22.

As for Russia’s alleged designs on Crimea, one searches in vain for evidence that, before the coup, the Kremlin had given much thought to the vulnerability of the peninsula and a possible need to annex it. According to the public record, Putin first focused on Crimea at a strategy meeting on Feb. 23, the day after the coup.

Yet, given the U.S. mainstream media’s propagandistic reporting on the Ukraine crisis, it is small wonder that the American people forgot about (or never heard of) the putsch in Kiev. The word “coup” was essentially banished from the U.S. media’s lexicon regarding Ukraine.

The New York Times went so far as to publish what it deemed an investigative article in early 2015 announcing that there was no coup in Ukraine, just President Yanukovich mysteriously disappearing off to Russia. In reaching its no-coup conclusion, the Times ignored any evidence that there was a coup, including the Nuland-Pyatt phone call. In regards to Ukraine, “coup” became just another unutterable four-letter word.

Last year, when Sen. John McCain continued the “no coup” fiction, I placed the following letter in the *Washington Post* on July 1, 2015 (the censors apparently being away at the beach):

“In his June 28 Sunday Opinion essay, ‘The Ukraine cease-fire fiction,’ Sen. John McCain was wrong to write that Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed Crimea without provocation. What about the coup in Kiev on Feb. 22, 2014, that replaced President Viktor Yanukovich with pro-Western leaders favoring membership in NATO? Was that not provocation enough?

“This glaring omission is common in The Post. The March 10 World Digest item ‘Putin had early plan to annex Crimea’ described a ‘secret meeting’ Mr. Putin held on Feb. 23, 2014, during which ‘Russia decided it would take the Crimean Peninsula.’ **No mention was made of the coup the previous day. ...**” (emphasis added)

And so it goes. More recently, in Jeffrey Goldberg’s lengthy *magnum opus* in *The Atlantic* on Obama’s foreign policy, there were two mentions of how Russia “invaded” Crimea, two allusions to Russia’s “invasion” of Ukraine, but not a word about the coup in Kiev.

Invincible Ignorance

In Catholic theology, the theory that some people can be “invincibly ignorant” can lessen or even erase their guilt. Many Americans are so malnourished on accurate news – and so busy trying to make ends meet – that they would seem to qualify for this dispensation, with pardon for not knowing about things like the coup in Kiev and other key happenings abroad.

The following, unnerving example brings this to mind: A meeting of progressives that I attended last year was keynoted by a professor from a local Washington university. Discussing what she called the Russian “invasion” of Crimea, the professor bragged about her 9-year-old son for creating a large poster in Sunday School saying, “Mr. Putin, What about the commandment ‘Thou Shall Not Kill?’” The audience nodded approvingly.

This picnic, thought I, needed a skunk. So I asked the professor what her little boy was alluding to. My question was met by a condescending smirk of disbelief: “Crimea, of course.” I asked how many people had been killed in Crimea. “Oh, hundreds, probably thousands,” was her answer. I told her that there were, in fact, no reports of anyone having been killed.

I continued, explaining that, with respect to Russia’s “invasion,” what you don’t see in the “mainstream media” is that, a treaty between Ukraine and Russia from the late 1990s allowed Russia to station up to 25,000 Russian troops on the Crimean peninsula. There were 16,000 there, when a U.S.-led coup ousted the democratically elected government in Kiev on Feb. 22, 2014. (I had grabbed the attention of the audience; yet stares of incredulity persisted.)

In contrast to Crimea’s bloodless political secession from Ukraine, the Ukrainian government’s “anti-terror operation” against ethnic Russians in the east who resisted the coup authorities in Kiev has killed an estimated 10,000 people, many of them civilians. Yet, in the mainstream U.S. media, this carnage is typically blamed on Putin, not on the Ukrainian military which sent to the

front neo-Nazi and other right-wing militias (such as the Azov battalion) contemptuous of ethnic Russians. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Ukraine Merges Nazis and Islamists.](#)"]

A few weeks before the professor's remarks, after a speaking engagement in Moscow, I had a chance to do a little souvenir shopping on the Arbat. The behavior of the sales people brought me up short. It was decades since I had served as a CIA officer in the Soviet Union; the shopkeepers then were usually taciturn, allergic to discussing politics, and not at all given to bragging about their leaders.

This time it was different. The sales people wanted to know what I thought of President Putin. They were eager to thrust two coffee cups into the shopping bag that I had filled with small gifts for our grandchildren. On one was emblazoned the Russian words for "polite people" under an image of two men with insignia-less green uniforms – depicting the troops that surrounded and eventually took over Ukrainian installations and government buildings in Crimea without a shot being fired. The other cup bore a photo of Putin over the Russian words for "the most polite of people."

The short conversation that ensued made it immediately clear that Russian salespeople in Moscow – unlike many "sophisticated" Americans – were well aware that the troubles in Ukraine and Crimea began in Kiev on Feb 22, 2014, with "the most blatant coup in history." And, not least, they were proud of the way Putin used the "polite green men" to ensure that Crimea was not lost to NATO.

Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27-year career as a CIA analyst he headed the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch. In retirement, he helped create Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Putin Shuns Syrian 'Quagmire'

Exclusive: Gambling that President Obama will cooperate in seeking peace for Syria, Russian President Putin called back much of Russia's military force dispatched to Syria last fall, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Russian President Vladimir Putin's abrupt announcement that Russia would begin

“the withdrawal of the main part” of its military “contingent” from Syria has been widely seen not only as a welcome surprise, but also as a hopeful fillip to serious negotiations to end the carnage in what is left of that beleaguered country.

As always, a modicum of skepticism is warranted the “morning after,” but the pledge to pull out the bulk of the Russian force seems genuine and, at this writing, the withdrawal is already under way. Putin’s announcement appears to mark the beginning of the end of Russia’s key but limited military intervention – the game-changer that started on Sept. 30, 2015, with Russian air strikes that enabled the Syrian army to regain lost ground, sever jihadist supply lines to Turkey, and drive rebels from hundreds of towns and cities.

Putin was clear in noting the Russian military presence that will remain in Syria, but was not so clear on its future use: “Our naval base in Tartus and airbase at Khmeimim will operate ‘as usual’. They are to be safely protected from land, sea, and air.”

This formulation presumably would allow for continued airstrikes on designated terrorist groups like the Islamic State and Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front, including during the current “cessation of hostilities” negotiated by the U.S. and Russia. (Putin’s phrasing may also be viewed as a warning against Turkey and/or Saudi Arabia not to act on recent threats to invade Syria.)

That said, many knowledgeable observers have expressed surprise that the partial cease-fire that went into effect on Feb. 27 has largely held. Plus, the rate of airstrikes reportedly has plunged since then.

A New Future

With all due respect to Yogi Berra’s dictum – “It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future” – Putin’s withdrawal order constitutes Part II of the game-changer put in play five and a half innings ago last September. Thus, it is now doubly the case that “The future ain’t what it used to be.” In essence, the ball is now bouncing around in President Barack Obama’s infield.

A great deal will depend on whether he will risk incurring the wrath of “allies”-cum-wealthy-arms-customers like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel, as well as unpredictable Turkey – an actual NATO ally (sans-quotation-marks), by applying unstinting pressure to get them to stop supporting terrorists in Syria.

On Monday, Putin said he considered the tasks given to the Russian defense ministry last September, “as a whole,” fulfilled. He had defined those tasks on Oct. 11, 2015, on Russian TV: “Our objective is to stabilize the legitimate authority [in Syria] and create conditions for a political compromise.”

Russia's armed intervention did strengthen the position of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, but – not surprisingly – political compromise toward peace remains elusive. Still, the altered circumstances have advanced the peace process, in part, because Moscow's intervention last fall was met with a clear-headed response from President Barack Obama, who chose to see a glass-half-full in Russia's intervention.

It was no secret that one key Russian aim was to rescue Assad from a possible defeat at the hands of the jihadist "Army of Conquest" freshly armed by Saudi Arabia and Turkey, including with U.S.-made TOW missiles. But even benighted White House advisers seemed able to discern that the devil-they-knew (Assad) might be preferable to the cutthroats of Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL) or Al Qaeda's affiliate, Nusra Front.

To his credit, Obama bet on the possibility that Russian airstrikes would also help thwart further ISIS gains and perhaps even help lead to serious negotiations. Thus, Obama instructed Secretary of State John Kerry to (1) forgo the poison-pill "Assad-must-go" precondition to talks on Syria's future; (2) set a place for Iran at the table; and (3) collaborate closely with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, to "deconflict" airstrikes over Syria and redouble efforts to get serious negotiations under way.

With uncommon speed, a meeting attended by representatives of 19 regional and global powers (including Iran) was held in Vienna on Oct. 30, 2015, one month after the Russian airstrikes began; on Dec. 18, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a road map and timeline for talks on Syria; and on Feb. 1, 2016, indirect talks between Syrian government and opposition leaders took place in Geneva, mediated by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura.

Those Geneva talks made zero progress; they were quickly suspended and resumption was put off for several weeks. They got under way again on Monday, which was not only the day Putin chose to announce the Russian withdrawal, but also the day that unarmed street protests broke out five years ago in Syria and were cruelly crushed by Assad's security apparatus.

Will Talks Make Progress?

Just as Moscow's military intervention put Assad back on his feet, the Russian pullout is likely now to make him wobblier, and Moscow may hope the withdrawal will put additional pressure on him to be more willing to compromise. One positive sign has come from those Syrian opposition leaders who have already voiced cautious praise for the Russian withdrawal.

The telephone conversation between President Obama and President Putin on Monday

evening suggests that they remain willing to build on the cessation of hostilities and lean on their respective clients to negotiate in good faith, even though the obstacles remain formidable.

For example, Foreign Minister Lavrov had this to say on Monday about the resumption of the talks in Geneva: "The work is not easy; it is yet to be understood how all these groups [taking part in the intra-Syrian talks] could gather at the same table together ... but the process has gotten under way, and it is in our common interests to make it sustainable and irreversible."

And according to the Russian news agency TASS, President Assad has told President Putin by telephone that he is ready to start a political process in Syria as soon as possible and that he hoped that eventual full-scale UN-mediated talks between Syrian government and opposition representatives in Geneva would produce concrete results.

A Calculated Decision

Putin is gambling that the interested parties – first and foremost, the U.S. – will put the heat on those over whom they have influence to make the cessation of hostilities stick and cooperate in thwarting the aims and actions of ISIS and Al Qaeda.

Russia's decision on a troop pullout having been unilateral, Putin retains the option to reinsert Russian forces should the gamble fail. It seems clear that he would prefer not to have to do that. And he is unlikely to do that, short of a rapidly growing threat from terrorists, trained and equipped for violence in Syria, returning to stir up trouble in Russia.

Putin is acutely aware of quagmires. The Soviet Union got bogged down in one in Afghanistan and, of course, he has watched what he calls "partners" get stuck there as well – not to mention Iraq, or Syria, or Libya – much less Vietnam. Last October, when President Obama and Secretary Kerry chose to warn Putin about quagmires, I can imagine the look on the Russian President's face.

The Russian withdrawal bespeaks an understanding that risky gambles are less to be feared than quagmires – the more so since Moscow lacks one of its "partner's" seemingly inexhaustible source of funding for its military escapades that result in quagmires. Indeed, Moscow has already announced a five percent cutback in military spending for this year.

Typically, when responding to provocations (like the February 2014 coup in Ukraine) from "partners," as well as to other dangers to Russia's security interests, Putin has displayed a notable penchant for heeding dicta more contemporary than those of Yogi Berra. One of them seems to be President Obama's

favorite motto: "Don't do stupid stuff."

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27-year career at CIA he was chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch and prepared the *President's Daily Brief* for Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in February focused on the early U.S. presidential race, the continuing U.S.-Russian tensions, and the bloodletting in Syria.

["Feeding the Military-Industrial Complex"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 1, 2016

["Hillary Clinton's 'Progressive' Persona"](#) by Jeff Cohen, Feb. 4, 2016

["Giving Peace Very Little Chance"](#) by Robert Parry, Feb. 5, 2016

["Behind the North Korean Nuke Crisis"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 6, 2016

["Risking World War III in Syria"](#) by Joe Lauria, Feb. 6, 2016

["A Look at Ukraine's Dark Side"](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Feb. 7, 2016

["Hillary Clinton's Very Bad Night"](#) by Robert Parry, Feb. 10, 2016

["Saudis Goad Obama to Invade Syria"](#) by Joe Lauria, Feb. 10, 2016

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["How Crimeans See Ukraine Crisis"](#) by Natylie Baldwin, Feb. 11, 2016

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["Deconstructing America's 'Deep State'"](#) by Chuck Spinney, Feb. 12, 2016

["NATO's Provocative Anti-Russian Moves"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 13, 2016

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["Pro-War GOP Boos Donald Trump"](#) by Sam Hussein, Feb. 15, 2016

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["France Dumps Liberté for Security"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 16, 2016

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["Kosovo Chaos Undercuts Clinton 'Success'"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 21, 2016

["The GOP's 'Pitchfork' Rebellion"](#) by James W Carden, Feb. 22, 2016

["Dissing George Washington for Reagan"](#) by Robert Parry, Feb. 22, 2016

["Sanders the 'Realist'; Hillary the 'Neocon'"](#) by Robert Parry, Feb. 24, 2016

["A Plea for Reason on Israel"](#) by Alon Ben-Meir, Feb. 25, 2016

["How US Helps Al Qaeda in Yemen"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 25, 2016

["Neocon Kagan Endorses Hillary Clinton"](#) by Robert Parry, Feb. 25, 2016

["VIPS Offers Advice to Candidates"](#) by Ray McGovern, Feb. 26, 2016

["Testing Out Repression in Israel"](#) by Dennis Bernstein and Jeff Halper, Feb. 27, 2016

[“Meaning Behind the Republican Bile”](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Feb. 29, 2016

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Hillary’s Double-Standard on Protests

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton is lecturing Donald Trump on the need to respect protesters but – in 2011 – she did nothing to stop police from brutalizing a silent protester at one of her speeches, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Hillary Clinton has excoriated Donald Trump for failing to stop a supporter from roughing up a protester during a speech, saying “This kind of behavior is repugnant. We set the tone for our campaigns – we should encourage respect, not violence.” Yet, in 2011, she did nothing to stop security personnel from brutalizing a 71-year-old veteran who stood silently with his back to her during a speech.

The protester, Ray McGovern, a retired Army officer and CIA analyst, was wearing a black “Veterans for Peace” T-shirt, when he was set upon within sight of Secretary of State Clinton, who ironically was delivering a speech about the importance of foreign leaders respecting dissent. The assault on McGovern left him bruised and bloodied but it didn’t cause Clinton to pause as she coolly continued on, not missing a beat.

The Feb. 15, 2011 incident at George Washington University in Washington prompted an email from Clinton’s personal adviser Sidney Blumenthal who noted that “something bad happened” and suggested that Clinton have someone reach out and apologize to McGovern. Clinton, however, chose not to do so, although criminal charges against McGovern were dropped.

Subsequently, McGovern was placed on the State Department’s “Be On the Look-out” or BOLO alert list, instructing police to “USE CAUTION, stop” and question him and also contact the State Department’s Diplomatic Security Command Center.

After learning of the BOLO alert, the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund (PCJF), which is representing McGovern in connection with the 2011 incident, interceded to have the warning lifted. But McGovern wondered if the warning played a role in 2014 when he was aggressively arrested by New York City police at the entrance to the 92nd Street Y where he had hoped to pose a question to a speaker there, one of Clinton's friendly colleagues, former CIA Director and retired General David Petraeus.

After that arrest on Oct. 30, 2014, McGovern wrote, "God only knows (and then only if God has the proper clearances) what other organs of state security had entered the 'derogatory' information about the danger of my 'political activism' into their data bases. Had my 'derog' been shared, perhaps, with the ever-proliferating number of 'fusion centers' that were so effective in sharing information to track and thwart the activists of Occupy including subversives like Quakers and Catholic Workers?"

On Feb. 15, 2011, McGovern attended Clinton's GWU speech, deciding on the spur of the moment after feeling revulsion at the "enthusiastic applause" that welcomed the Secretary of State "to dissociate myself from the obsequious adulation of a person responsible for so much death, suffering and destruction.

"The fulsome praise for Clinton from GW's president and the loud, sustained applause also brought to mind a phrase that as a former Soviet analyst at CIA I often read in *Pravda*. When reprinting the text of speeches by high Soviet officials, the Communist Party newspaper would regularly insert, in italicized parentheses: '*Burniye applaudismenti; vce stoyat*' , *Stormy applause; all rise*.

"With the others at Clinton's talk, I stood. I even clapped politely. But as the applause dragged on, I began to feel like a real phony. So, when the others finally sat down, I remained standing silently, motionless, wearing my 'Veterans for Peace' T-shirt, with my eyes fixed narrowly on the rear of the auditorium and my back to the Secretary.

"I did not expect what followed: a violent assault in full view of Madam Secretary by what we Soviet analysts used to call the 'organs of state security.' The rest is history, as they say. A short account of the incident can be [found here](#).

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“The experience gave me personal confirmation of the impression that I reluctantly had drawn from watching her behavior and its consequences over the past decade. The incident was a kind of metaphor of the much worse violence that Secretary Clinton has coolly countenanced against others.

“Again and again, Hillary Clinton both as a U.S. senator and as Secretary of State has demonstrated a nonchalant readiness to unleash the vast destructiveness of American military power. The charitable explanation, I suppose, is that she knows nothing of war from direct personal experience.” [For more of McGovern’s account of his arrest, see Consortiumnews.com’s “[Standing Up to War and Hillary Clinton](#).”]

Proposed Apology

In the email exchange, Blumenthal suggested that Clinton “have someone apologize to Ray McGovern,” but referred to the incident and McGovern in condescending terms, noting that McGovern’s mistreatment has “become a minor cause célèbre on the Internet among lefties.” As for McGovern, Blumenthal said the former CIA analyst who was a presidential briefer to George H.W. Bush has “become a Christian antiwar leftist who goes around bearing witness. Whatever his views, he’s harmless.”

Clinton responded, “I appreciate your sending thgis [sic] to me. Neither State nor my staff had anything to do w this. The man stood up just as I was starting and GW – which claims their quick actions were part of their standard operating procedures to remove anyone who stands up and starts speaking while an invited guest is talking – moved to remove him. GW claims he was not in any way injured.”

However, McGovern was not speaking, simply standing quietly until he was attacked by the police. As for Clinton, no apology was forthcoming, nor any further explanation of why she failed to stop police from roughing up a peaceful protester in her presence. She now has chosen to lecture Donald Trump on the need to demonstrate respect toward protesters.

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

VIPS Offers Advice to Candidates

Former Secretary of State Clinton, whose campaign is brimming with establishment foreign policy advisers, has chided Democratic rival Sen. Sanders for lacking a roster of experts. But ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern says an untapped resource for any candidate is the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity.

By Ray McGovern

A Memo to: Dr. Ben Carson, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, Marco Rubio, Bernie Sanders, Dr. Jill Stein, and Donald Trump

The media brouhaha over naming your campaign advisers on foreign policy prompts this reminder of a unique resource available, gratis, to all of you. That resource is our nonpartisan group Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). If we were into self-promotion, we would add to our (virtual) letterhead: *"serving satisfied customers since 2003."*

We are about apolitical analysis; we are into spreading unvarnished truth around; we do not shape our analysis toward this or that debating point. Thus, we eschew the moniker "campaign adviser." But that doesn't mean we wouldn't provide apolitical and unvarnished advice to anyone who seeks it.

Unique? We are on the outer edge of atypical in the sense that we are a fiercely nonpartisan, tell-it-like-it-is group of professionals with long experience in intelligence and related fields and with no policy or personal axes to grind. We are Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Abundant proof that party preference plays no role in our analysis can be seen in our enviable record in the substantive work we have produced over the past 13 years both before and after the ill-advised attack on Iraq in March 2003.

Also distinguishing us from "campaign advisers," none of us in VIPS lust for a high position in a new administration; none are heavily invested in arms industries; none of us ask for a retainer. In other words, there are no strings attached to the substantive analysis we provide to *all* our readers and listeners. If objective, disinterested analysis is your cup of tea, we suggest that you check out VIPS's record, to include the multiple warnings we gave President George W. Bush in the months *before* the attack on Iraq.

In fact, VIPS was founded by a handful of former CIA analysts, including me, for the express purpose of warning President Bush that his small coterie of advisers, led by Vice President Dick Cheney, was adducing *fraudulent not mistaken* "intelligence" in promoting the war on Iraq.

Indeed, in recent years VIPS has been accused of naiveté in failing to understand that Bush, to whom we addressed most of our pre-war memos, was fully aware of how Cheney and his cunning co-conspirators and comen were fabricating the false pretenses for war. We plead guilty to believing that U.S. presidents deserve unspun analysis and to trusting that honest assessments will help presidents act responsibly on behalf of the nation.

Call us old-fashioned, but we just found it hard to believe that any U.S. president would justify war on “evidence” made out of whole cloth. Equally difficult to believe was that our former colleagues would acquiesce in the deception.

So, despite the doubts that Bush really wanted the real story, we rose to the occasion, nonetheless, and issued three corporate VIPS memoranda before the attack on Iraq: (1) “Today’s Speech By Secretary Powell At the UN,” February 5, 2003; (2) “Cooking Intelligence for War in Iraq,” March 12, 2003; and (3) “Forgery, Hyperbole, Half-Truth: A Problem,” March 18, 2003.

Our commentary on Secretary of State Colin Powell’s UN speech went out on the AFP wire and was widely read abroad. Foreign media followed up with us; U.S. media not so much. (This is the primary reason you may be learning all this for the first time).

During that critical pre-war period we took pains to use whatever entrée we had to influential people. For example, I personally sought to reach then-Sen. Hillary Clinton via a key person on her staff, who assured me that the senator was being given our op-eds and our analyses to read.

In our memorandum of Feb. 5, 2003, we told President Bush we could give Powell “only a C-minus in providing context and perspective.” As for input from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s Pentagon, we told the President: “Your Pentagon advisers draw a connection between war and terrorism, but for the wrong reasons. The connection takes on much more reality in a **post-U.S. invasion scenario**. [Emphasis in the original]

“Indeed, it is our view that an invasion of Iraq would ensure overflowing recruitment centers for terrorists into the indefinite future. Far from eliminating the threat it would enhance it exponentially.”

Though it went unheeded 13 years ago, the final paragraph of VIPS’s first Memorandum for the President seems quite relevant to the current discussion regarding “campaign advisers” on foreign policy. In our same-day memo to the President on Powell’s UN speech we noted that he had described what he said as “irrefutable and undeniable.” Our final paragraph started with an allusion to

those words:

“No one has a corner on the truth; nor do we harbor illusions that our analysis is irrefutable or undeniable. But after watching Secretary Powell today, we are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion beyond ... those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic.”

Our VIPS memorandum of Feb. 5, 2003, was sent to the President more than two years before the *London Times* published the minutes of a July 23, 2002 briefing at 10 Downing Street, during which Richard Dearlove, the head of British intelligence, reported to British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Dearlove's talks three days earlier with his U.S. counterpart, CIA Director George Tenet, at CIA headquarters. According to those undisputed minutes, Dearlove said the following:

“Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. **But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.**” [Emphasis added]

Our warnings to President Bush also came more than five years before the completion of a five-year investigation by the Senate Intelligence Committee on pre-war intelligence, the results of which were approved by a bipartisan majority. On June 5, 2008, the date of its release, committee chair Jay Rockefeller commented on its findings:

“In making the case for war, the administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent. As a result, the American people were led to believe that the threat from Iraq was much greater than actually existed.”

Just So You Know

One presidential candidate is said to have “an army of several hundred, perhaps even more than a thousand, foreign policy advisers;” another has been criticized for having no “talent pool” of “trusted experts.” Little is known about those advising other candidates or, for example, in which campaign headquarters erstwhile advisers to dropout candidates like Jeb Bush are now hanging their hats.

The purpose of this open letter is merely to ensure that you know that you are welcome to dip into a different and unique “talent pool” Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). This pool is now several hundred years deep in collective experience and brimming with the kind of knowledge that flows from

senior-level work in intelligence and related fields. Our record of memoranda, averaging three per year, speaks for itself.

If nonpartisan, fact-based analysis is your cup of tea, have a look at those memoranda, which we believe are second to none in terms of candor and tell-it-like-it-is analysis. Our work reflects the ethos that earlier guided the work of intelligence community analysts at CIA and elsewhere, a commitment to both objectivity and scholarship.

That was before Director Tenet decided to welcome frequent visits by Vice President Dick Cheney to make sure CIA analysts were finding or fabricating enough “intelligence” to “justify” the launch of an unnecessary war. We take no pleasure in having been correct at the outset, in predicting “the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic.”

Ray McGovern served for 30 years as a U.S. Army Infantry/Intelligence officer and then an analyst for CIA, where he prepared and conducted the early morning briefings of the President’s Daily Brief and also chaired National Intelligence Estimates. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Hillary Clinton’s Hypocrisy on Dissent

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton says she’s a great defender of American veterans, but when Army vet (and ex-CIA analyst) Ray McGovern was assaulted for silently protesting one of her speeches, she did nothing and newly released emails show she rebuffed an adviser’s proposal to apologize, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Five years ago, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s personal adviser Sidney Blumenthal urged her to apologize to former Army officer (and ex-CIA analyst) Ray McGovern after he was roughly arrested when he stood silently with his back turned in protest against a Clinton speech, ironically condemning foreign leaders who show intolerance of dissent.

According to an internal email recently released from former Secretary Clinton’s private email server, Blumenthal cited “an unfortunate incident” that occurred at her speech at George Washington University in Washington on Feb. 15, 2011. Blumenthal wrote that “something bad happened” and urged Clinton to have someone

reach out and apologize to McGovern.

Instead, Clinton, who has declared that “supporting veterans is a sacred responsibility,” denied any responsibility for McGovern’s brutal arrest, which left the 71-year-old who was wearing a “Veterans for Peace” T-shirt, bloodied and bruised. She also offered no explanation for why she failed to stop the police when the arrest was occurring right in front of her; instead she just continued on with her speech about the need for leaders to respect the rights of dissidents.

In the email, Clinton did tell Blumenthal, “I’ll see what else can be done,” but it’s not clear what that may have been. Afterwards, McGovern became a government target because of what the State Department called his “political activism, primarily anti-war.”

Though the criminal charges against McGovern were dropped, he was placed on the State Department’s “Be On the Look-out” or BOLO alert list, instructing police to “USE CAUTION, stop” and question him and also contact the State Department’s Diplomatic Security Command Center.

After learning of the BOLO alert, the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund (PCJF), which is representing McGovern in connection with the 2011 incident, interceded to have the warning lifted. But McGovern wondered if the warning played a role in 2014 when he was aggressively arrested by New York City police at the entrance to the 92nd Street Y where he had hoped to pose a question to a speaker there, one of Clinton’s friendly colleagues, former CIA Director and retired General David Petraeus.

After that arrest on Oct. 30, 2014, McGovern wrote, “God only knows (and then only if God has the proper clearances) what other organs of state security had entered the ‘derogatory’ information about the danger of my ‘political activism’ into their data bases. Had my ‘derog’ been shared, perhaps, with the ever-proliferating number of ‘fusion centers’ that were so effective in sharing information to track and thwart the activists of Occupy including subversives like Quakers and Catholic Workers?”

Clinton’s Speech

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In a civil court filing, the PCJF lawyers described the scene: "As Secretary Clinton was reading from her prepared remarks regarding Egypt's dictatorship [and] saying, 'Then the government pulled the plug,' the then-71-year-old McGovern was forcibly and falsely arrested by GWU police officers, grabbed by the head, assaulted, and as Secretary Clinton continued undisturbed stating, 'the government ... did not want the world to watch,' Mr. McGovern was removed from public view with excessive and brutal force, taken to jail, and left bleeding with bruises and contusions."

In a press release about Clinton's emails on Thursday, McGovern's attorneys said they had sought State Department emails related to McGovern's arrest but had not

received Clinton's email exchange with Blumenthal. Those emails surfaced in connection with congressional inquiries about Clinton conducting State Department business using a private server outside U.S. government control.

Based on the new disclosures, it was clear Clinton knew a great deal about the incident from Blumenthal, including receiving photos of McGovern's injuries.

Blumenthal suggested that Clinton "have someone apologize to Ray McGovern," but referred to the incident and McGovern in condescending terms, noting that McGovern's mistreatment has "become a minor cause cÅ©lÃ"bre on the Internet among lefties." As for McGovern, Blumenthal said the former CIA analyst who was a presidential briefer to George H.W. Bush has "become a Christian antiwar leftist who goes around bearing witness. Whatever his views, he's harmless."

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