

Trump Falls in Line with Interventionism

Exclusive: President Trump's U.N. speech showed that despite his America First rhetoric, his policies are virtually the same as the neocon strategies of George W. Bush and liberal interventionism of Barack Obama, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In discussing President Trump, there is always the soft prejudice of low expectations – people praise him for reading from a Teleprompter even if his words make little sense – but there is no getting around the reality that his maiden address to the United Nations General Assembly must rank as one of the most embarrassing moments in America's relations with the global community.

Trump offered a crude patchwork of propaganda and bluster, partly delivered as a campaign speech praising his own leadership – boasting about the relatively strong U.S. economy that he mostly inherited from President Obama – and partly reflecting his continued subservience to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

However, perhaps most importantly, Trump's speech may have extinguished any flickering hope that his presidency might achieve some valuable course corrections in how the United States deals with the world, i.e., shifting away from the disastrous war/interventionist policies of his two predecessors.

Before the speech, there was at least some thinking that his visceral disdain for the neoconservatives, who mostly opposed his nomination and election, might lead him to a realization that their policies toward Iran, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere were at the core of America's repeated and costly failures in recent decades.

Instead, apparently after a bracing lecture from Netanyahu on Monday, Trump bared himself in a kind of neocon Full Monte:

–He repeated the Israeli/neocon tripe about Iran destabilizing the Middle East when Shiite-ruled Iran actually has helped stabilize Iraq and Syria against Sunni terrorist groups and other militants supported by Saudi Arabia and – to a degree – Israel;

–He again denounced the Iranian nuclear agreement whose main flaw in the eyes of the Israelis and the neocons is that it disrupted their plans to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran, and he called for “regime change” in Iran, a long beloved dream of the Israelis and the neocons;

–He repeated the Israeli/neocon propaganda about Hezbollah as a terrorist organization when Hezbollah’s real crime was driving the Israeli military out of southern Lebanon in 2000, ending an Israeli occupation that began with Israel’s 1982 invasion;

–He praised his rush-to-judgment decision to bomb Syria last April, in line with Israeli/neocon propaganda against President Bashar al-Assad and partly out of a desire to please the same Washington establishment that is still scheming how to impeach him;

–He spoke with the crass hypocrisy that the neocons and many Israeli leaders have perfected, particularly his demand that “all nations ... respect ... the rights of every other sovereign nation” – when he made clear that he, like his White House predecessors, is ready to violate the sovereignty of other nations that get in Official Washington’s way.

A Litany of Wars

Just this century, the United States has invaded multiple nations without U.N. authorization, based on various “coalitions of the willing” and other subterfuges for wars of aggression, which the Nuremberg Tribunals deemed the “supreme international crime” and which the U.N. was specifically created to prevent.

Not only did President George W. Bush invade both Afghanistan and Iraq – while also sponsoring “anti-terror” operations in many other countries – but President Barack Obama acknowledged ordering military attacks in seven countries, including against the will of sovereign states, such as Libya and Syria. Obama also supported a violent coup against the elected government of Ukraine.

For his part, Trump already has shown disdain for international law by authorizing military strikes inside Yemen and Syria. In other words, if not for the fear of provoking American anger, many of the world’s diplomats might have responded with a barrage of catcalls toward Trump for his blatant hypocrisy. Without doubt, the United States is the preeminent violator of sovereignty and international law in the world today, yet Trump wagged his finger at others, including Russia (over Ukraine) and China (over the South China Sea).

He declared: “We must reject threats to sovereignty, from the Ukraine to the South China Sea. We must uphold respect for law, respect for borders, and respect for culture, and the peaceful engagement these allow.”

Then, with a seeming blindness to how much of the world sees the United States as a law unto itself, Trump added: “The scourge of our planet today is a small group of rogue regimes that violate every principle on which the United Nations

is based.”

Of course, in the U.S. mainstream media’s commentary that followed, Trump’s hypocrisy went undetected. That’s because across the American political/media establishment, the U.S. right to act violently around the world is simply accepted as the way things are supposed to be. International law is for the other guy; not for the “indispensable nation,” not for the “sole remaining superpower.”

On Bibi’s Leash

Despite some of his “America First” rhetoric – tossed in as red meat to his “base” – Trump revealed a global outlook that differed from the Bush-Obama neoconservative/liberal-interventionist approach in words only. In substance, Trump appears to be just the latest American poodle on Bibi Netanyahu’s leash.

For instance, Trump bragged about attacking Syria over a dubious chemical-weapons claim while ignoring the role of the Saudi/Israeli tandem in assisting Al Qaeda and its Syrian affiliate; Trump threatened the international nuclear agreement with Iran while calling for regime change in Tehran, two of Netanyahu’s top priorities; and Trump warned that he would “totally destroy North Korea” over its nuclear and missile programs while making no mention of Israel’s rogue nuclear arsenal and sophisticated delivery capabilities.

Ignoring Saudi Arabia’s ties to terrorism, Trump touted his ludicrous summit in Riyadh in which he danced with swords and let King Salman and other corrupt Persian Gulf monarchs, who have long winked and nodded at ideological and logistical support going to Al Qaeda and other Islamic terror groups, pretend their governments were joining an anti-terror coalition.

Exploding the myth that he is at least a street-smart operator who can’t be easily conned, Trump added, “In Saudi Arabia early last year, I was greatly honored to address the leaders of more than 50 Arab and Muslim nations. We agreed that all responsible nations must work together to confront terrorists and the Islamist extremism that inspires them.”

No wonder Netanyahu seemed so pleased with Trump’s speech. The Israeli prime minister could have written it himself while allowing Trump to add a few crude flourishes, like calling North Korean leader Kim Jong Un “Rocket Man ... on a suicide mission”; referring to “the loser terrorists”; and declaring that many parts of the world are “going to hell.”

Trump also tossed in a plug for his “new strategy for victory” in Afghanistan and threw in some interventionist talk regarding the Western Hemisphere with more threats to Cuba and Venezuela about escalating sanctions and other

activities to achieve more “regime change” solutions.

So, what Trump made clear in his U.N. address is that his “America First” and “pro-sovereignty” rhetoric is simply cover for a set of policies that are indistinguishable from those pushed by the neocons of the Bush administration or the liberal interventionists of the Obama administration. The rationalizations may change but the endless wars and “regime change” machinations continue.

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](#)).

Harvard’s Cowardice on Chelsea Manning

Exclusive: In an abject display of intellectual cowardice, Harvard’s Kennedy School withdrew a fellowship from Chelsea Manning after hearing protests from accomplices in the war crimes she exposed, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government has shown that it is no profile in courage by withdrawing a visiting fellowship that had been awarded to Chelsea Manning, who served seven years in prison for revealing U.S. war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Kennedy School caved in to pressure from people who shared in responsibility for those and other crimes, including former CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell, who resigned his own fellowship in protest and denounced Manning as “a convicted felon and leaker of classified information.”

Of course, it is also true that Martin Luther King Jr. was jailed for criminal violations pertaining to his protests against “legal” injustices – as was South Africa’s Nelson Mandela. Manning represented perhaps America’s quintessential prisoner of conscience of this decade, someone who was severely punished for exposing wrongdoing.

After serving in Iraq as an Army intelligence analyst and witnessing the often-cavalier attitude toward killing Afghans and Iraqis, Manning decided to release thousands of classified documents, including what WikiLeaks labeled the “[Collateral Murder](#)” video of a U.S. helicopter gunship mowing down Iraqis and

two Reuters journalists on a Baghdad street. Manning's decision was an act of moral courage at a time when American Officialdom was violating a host of international laws with impunity.

Indeed, what was almost as troubling as the war crimes themselves was that virtually no one from the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama was punished for their criminal actions, especially for committing what the Nuremberg Tribunals deemed the "supreme international crime," the crime of "aggressive war."

Bush was allowed to retire to a quiet life as an artist; many of his senior national security officials have gone on to comfy jobs in the corporate and academic worlds; and Obama has already begun to hit the lucrative lecture circuit. But Manning served seven hard years in prison and has now been further humiliated by Harvard's cowardice.

In the explanation of the hasty late-night decision to withdraw Manning's fellowship, the school's dean Douglas Elmendorf wrote, "I see more clearly now that many people view a visiting fellow title as an honorific, so we should weigh that consideration when offering invitations."

Dubious Honorees

So, it's fine to honor the likes of Michael Morell (or for that matter other luminaries such as former Fox News host Bill O'Reilly, the current MSNBC duo of Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski, and President Trump's laughingstock express secretary Sean Spicer) but not a person who demonstrated true moral courage and suffered greatly to expose grave crimes of state.

By the way, Morell was regarded by many of his ex-CIA compatriots as a classic example of a bureaucratic climber with no moral balance.

Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote in 2011 that "Like many senior CIA officials in recent years, Morell's record is checkered, at best. He held key jobs in intelligence analysis over the past decade as the CIA often served as a handmaiden to the war propagandists.

"As for Michael Morell, as with many other successful CIA careerists, his strongest suit seemed to be pleasing his boss and not antagonizing the White House. ... Forgive me if my thinking about loyalty to the facts seems 'obsolete' or 'quaint' or if it seems unfair to expect CIA analysts to put their careers on the line when politicians and ideologues are misleading the nation to war but those were the principles that analysts of my generation tried to uphold."

And, last year after leaving government, Morell put on a display of tough-guy-

ism that presumably was meant to win him his coveted job of CIA director under the expected presidency of Hillary Clinton.

On the Charlie Rose show, Morell continued his disdain for international law by calling for the murder of Iranians and Russians inside Syria.

In an interview on Aug. 8, 2016, Morell said he wanted to “make the Iranians pay a price in Syria. ... make the Russians pay a price in Syria.”

Rose: “We make them pay the price by killing Russians?”

Morell: “Yeah.”

Rose: “And killing Iranians?”

Morell: “Yes ... You don’t tell the world about it. ... But you make sure they know it in Moscow and Tehran.”

Morell also advocated U.S. military bombing of Syrian government targets as part of achieving “regime change” in Syria.

The fact that everything that Morell was proposing violated international law didn’t seem to faze Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. The idea of killing Russians and Iranians inside Syria could be construed as terrorism but even that doesn’t raise eyebrows these days, although if some senior Russian or Iranian went on TV to propose killing Americans in, say, Iraq or Afghanistan, to send Washington a message, that would surely draw righteous condemnation.

The notion that the United States has the right to attack the sovereign nation of Syria with the goal of overthrowing its government has been at the heart of the kinds of war crimes that Chelsea Manning helped expose.

Morell, however, appears to have simply inculcated the lawless attitude that prevailed in both the Bush and Obama administrations, in which the U.S. government was a law unto itself, deciding when and where its forces would bomb and kill.

By “honoring” the likes of Morell and “dishonoring” the likes of Manning, Harvard’s Kennedy School has sent a clear message regarding how it sees the role of the U.S. government in the world. The school is signaling that it embraces the moral hypocrisy at the core of this attitude and is demonstrating that it can be trusted to train future U.S. government leaders in how to operate outside the norms of civilized behavior.

[For more on Manning’s contributions to civilization, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?”](#)]

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The NYT's Yellow Journalism on Russia

Exclusive: The New York Times' descent into yellow journalism over Russia recalls the sensationalism of Hearst and Pulitzer leading to the Spanish-American War, but the risks to humanity are much greater now, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Reading The New York Times these days is like getting a daily dose of the "Two Minutes Hate" as envisioned in George Orwell's *1984*, except applied to America's new/old enemy Russia. Even routine international behavior, such as Russia using fictitious names for potential adversaries during a military drill, is transformed into something weird and evil.

In the snide and alarmist style that the Times now always applies to Russia, reporter Andrew Higgins [wrote](#) – referring to a fictitious war-game "enemy" – "The country does not exist, so it has neither an army nor any real citizens, though it has acquired a feisty following of would-be patriots online. Starting on Thursday, however, the fictional state, Veishnoriya, a distillation of the Kremlin's darkest fears about the West, becomes the target of the combined military might of Russia and its ally Belarus."

This snarky front-page story in Thursday's print editions also played into the Times' larger narrative about Russia as a disseminator of "fake news." You see the Russkies are even inventing "fictional" enemies to bully. Hah-hah-hah! The article was entitled, "Russia's War Games With Fake Enemies Cause Real Alarm."

Of course, the U.S. and its allies also conduct war games against fictitious enemies, but you wouldn't know that from reading the Times. For instance, [U.S. war games](#) in 2015 substituted five made-up states – Ariana, Atropia, Donovia, Gorgas and Limaria – for nations near the Caucasus mountains along the borders of Russia and Iran.

In earlier war games, the U.S. used both fictitious names and colors in place of actual countries. For instance, in 1981, the Reagan administration conducted

“Ocean Venture” with that war-game scenario focused on a group of islands called “Amber and the Amberdines,” obvious stand-ins for Grenada and the Grenadines, with “Orange” used to represent Cuba.

In those cases, the maneuvers by the powerful U.S. military were clearly intended to intimidate far weaker countries. Yet, the U.S. mainstream media did not treat those war rehearsals for what they were, implicit aggression, but rather mocked protests from the obvious targets as paranoia since we all know the U.S. would never violate international law and invade some weak country! (As it turned out, Ocean Venture '81 was a dress rehearsal for the actual U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983.)

Yet, as far as the Times and its many imitators in the major media are concerned, there's one standard for “us” and another for Russia and other countries that “we” don't like.

Yellow Journalism

But the Times' behavior over the past several years suggests something even more sinister than biased reporting. The “newspaper of record” has slid into yellow journalism, the practice of two earlier New York newspapers – William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World – that in the 1890s manipulated facts about the crisis in Cuba to push the United States into war with Spain, a conflict that many historians say marked the beginning of America's global empire.

Except in today's instance, The New York Times is prepping the American people for what could become World War III. The daily message is that you must learn to hate Russia and its President Vladimir Putin so much that, first, you should support vast new spending on America's Military-Industrial Complex and, second, you'll be ginned up for nuclear war if it comes to that.

At this stage, the Times doesn't even try for a cosmetic appearance of objective journalism. Look at how the Times has twisted the history of the Ukraine crisis, treating it simply as a case of “Russian aggression” or a “Russian invasion.” The Times routinely ignores what actually happened in Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014 when the U.S. government aided and abetted a violent coup that overthrew Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich after he had been demonized in the Western media.

Even as neo-Nazi and ultranationalist protesters hurled Molotov cocktails at police, Yanukovich signaled a willingness to compromise and ordered his police to avoid worsening violence. But compromise wasn't good enough for U.S. neocons – such as Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland; Sen. John McCain; and

National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman. They had invested too much in moving Ukraine away from Russia.

Nuland put the U.S. spending at \$5 billion and was caught discussing with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt who should be in the new government and how to “glue” or “midwife this thing”; McCain appeared on stage urging on far-right militants; and Gershman was overseeing scores of NED projects inside Ukraine, which he had deemed the “biggest prize” and an important step in achieving an even bigger regime change in Russia, or as he put it: “Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents. ... Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

The Putsch

So, on Feb. 20, 2014, instead of seeking peace, a sniper firing from a building controlled by anti-Yanukovych forces killed both police and protesters, touching off a day of carnage. Immediately, the Western media blamed Yanukovych.

Shaken by the violence, Yanukovych again tried to pacify matters by reaching a compromise – guaranteed by France, Germany and Poland – to relinquish some of his powers and move up an election so he could be voted out of office peacefully. He also pulled back the police.

At that juncture, the neo-Nazis and ultra-nationalists spearheaded a violent putsch on Feb. 22, 2014, forcing Yanukovych and other officials to flee for their lives. Ignoring the agreement guaranteed by the three European nations, Nuland and the U.S. State Department quickly deemed the coup regime “legitimate.”

However, ethnic Russians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, which represented Yanukovych’s electoral base, resisted the coup and turned to Russia for protection. Contrary to the Times’ narrative, there was no “Russian invasion” of Crimea because Russian troops were already there as part of an agreement for its Sevastopol naval base. That’s why you’ve never seen photos of Russian troops crashing across Ukraine’s borders in tanks or splashing ashore in Crimea with an amphibious landing or descending by parachute. They were already inside Crimea.

The Crimean autonomous government also voted to undertake a referendum on whether to leave the failed Ukrainian state and to rejoin Russia, which had governed Crimea since the Eighteenth Century. In that referendum, Crimean citizens voted by some 96 percent to exit Ukraine and seek reunion with Russia, a democratic and voluntary process that the Times always calls “annexation.”

The Times and much of the U.S. mainstream media refuses even to acknowledge that

there is another side to the Ukraine story. Anyone who mentions this reality is deemed a “Kremlin stooge” in much the same way that people who questioned the mainstream certainty about Iraq’s WMD in 2002-03 were called “Saddam apologists.”

But what is particularly remarkable about the endless Russia-bashing is that – because it started under President Obama – it sucked in many American liberals and even some progressives. That process grew even worse when the contempt for Russia merged with the Left’s revulsion over Donald Trump’s election.

Many liberals came to view the dubious claims of Russian “meddling” in the 2016 election as the golden ticket to remove Trump from the White House. So, amid that frenzy, all standards of proof were jettisoned to make Russia-gate the new Watergate.

The Times, The Washington Post and pretty much the entire U.S. news media joined the “resistance” to Trump’s presidency and embraced the neocon “regime change” goal for Putin’s Russia. Very few people care about the enormous risks that this “strategy” entails.

For one, even if the U.S. government were to succeed in destabilizing nuclear-armed Russia sufficiently to force out President Putin, the neocon dream of another malleable Boris Yeltsin in the Kremlin is far less likely than the emergence of an extreme Russian nationalist who might be ready to push the nuclear button rather than accept further humiliation of Mother Russia.

The truth is that the world has much less to fear from the calculating Vladimir Putin than from the guy who might follow a deposed Vladimir Putin amid economic desperation and political chaos in Russia. But the possibility of nuclear Armageddon doesn’t seem to bother the neocon/liberal-interventionist New York Times. Nor apparently does the principle of fair and honest journalism.

The Times and rest of the mainstream media are just having too much fun hating Russia and Putin to worry about the possible extermination of life on planet Earth.

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Reagan Documents Shed Light on U.S. 'Meddling'

Special Report: "Secret" documents from the Reagan administration show how the U.S. embedded "political action," i.e., the manipulation of foreign governments, in ostensibly well-meaning organizations, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

"Secret" documents, recently declassified by the Reagan presidential library, reveal senior White House officials reengaging a former CIA "proprietary," The Asia Foundation, in "political action," an intelligence term of art for influencing the actions of foreign governments.

The documents from 1982 came at a turning-point moment when the Reagan administration was revamping how the U.S. government endeavored to manipulate the internal affairs of governments around the world in the wake of scandals in the 1960s and 1970s involving the Central Intelligence Agency's global covert operations.

Instead of continuing to rely heavily on the CIA, President Reagan and his national security team began offloading many of those "political action" responsibilities to "non-governmental organizations" (NGOs) that operated in a more overt fashion and received funding from other U.S. government agencies.

But secrecy was still required for the involvement of these NGOs in the U.S. government's strategies to bend the political will of targeted countries. If the "political action" of these NGOs were known, many countries would object to their presence; thus, the "secret" classification of the 1982 White House memos that I recently obtained via a "mandatory declassification review" from the archivists at the Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, California.

In intelligence circles, "political action" refers to a wide range of activities to influence the policies and behaviors of foreign nations, from slanting their media coverage, to organizing and training opposition activists, even to setting the stage for "regime change."

The newly declassified memos from the latter half of 1982 marked an ad hoc period of transition between the CIA scandals, which peaked in the 1970s, and the creation of more permanent institutions to carry out these semi-secretive functions, particularly the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which was created in 1983.

Much of this effort was overseen by a senior CIA official, Walter Raymond Jr., who was moved to Reagan's National Security Council's staff where he managed a number of interagency task forces focused on "public diplomacy," "psychological operations," and "political action."

Raymond, who had held top jobs in the CIA's covert operations shop specializing in propaganda and disinformation, worked from the shadows inside Reagan's White House, too. Raymond was rarely photographed although his portfolio of responsibilities was expansive. He brought into his orbit emerging "stars," including Lt. Col. Oliver North (a central figure in the Iran-Contra scandal), State Department propagandist (and now a leading neocon) Robert Kagan, and NED President Carl Gershman (who still heads NED with its \$100 million budget).

Despite his camera avoidance, Raymond appears to have grasped his true importance. In his NSC files, I found a doodle of an organizational chart that had Raymond at the top holding what looks like the crossed handles used by puppeteers to control the puppets below them. The drawing fit the reality of Raymond as the behind-the-curtains operative who controlled various high-powered inter-agency task forces.

Earlier declassified documents revealed that Raymond also was the conduit between CIA Director William J. Casey and these so-called "pro-democracy" programs that used sophisticated propaganda strategies to influence not only the thinking of foreign populations but the American people, too.

This history is relevant again now amid the hysteria over alleged Russian "meddling" in last year's U.S. presidential elections. If those allegations are true – and the U.S. government has still not presented any real proof – the Russian motive would have been, in part, payback for Washington's long history of playing games with the internal politics of Russia and other countries all across the planet.

A Fight for Money

The newly released memos describe bureaucratic discussions about funding levels for The Asia Foundation (TAF), with the only sensitive topic, to justify the "secret" stamp, being the reference to the U.S. government's intent to exploit TAF's programs for "political action" operations inside Asian countries.

Indeed, the opportunity for "political action" under TAF's cover appeared to be the reason why Reagan's budget cutters relented and agreed to restore funding to the foundation.

William Schneider Jr. of the Office of Management and Budget wrote in a Sept. 2, 1982 memo that the Budget Review Board (BRB) had axed TAF funding earlier in the

year.

“When the BRB last considered this issue on March 29, 1982, it decided not to include funding in the budget for a U.S. Government grant to TAF. The Board’s decision was based on the judgement that given the limited resources available for international affairs programs, funding for the Foundation could not be justified. During that March 29 meeting, the State Department was given the opportunity to fund TAF within its existing budget, but would not agree to do so.”

However, as Schneider noted in the memo to Deputy National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, “I now understand that a proposal to continue U.S. funding for the Asia Foundation is included in the ‘political action’ initiatives being developed by the State Department and several other agencies.

“We will, of course, work with you to reconsider the relative priority of support for the Foundation as part of these initiatives keeping in mind, however, the need for identifying budget offsets.”

A prime mover behind this change of heart appeared to be Walter Raymond, who surely knew TAF’s earlier status as a CIA “proprietary.” In 1966, Ramparts magazine exposed that relationship and led the Johnson administration to terminate the CIA’s money.

According to an April 12, 1967 memo from the State Department’s historical archives, CIA Director Richard Helms, responding to a White House recommendation, “ordered that covert funding of The Asia Foundation (TAF) shall be terminated at the earliest practicable opportunity.”

In coordination with the CIA’s “disassociation,” TAF’s board released what the memo described as “a carefully limited statement of admission of past CIA support. In so doing the Trustees sought to delimit the effects of an anticipated exposure of Agency support by the American press and, if their statement or some future expose does not seriously impair TAF’s acceptability in Asia, to continue operating in Asia with overt private and official support.”

The CIA memo envisioned future funding from “overt U.S. Government grants” and requested guidance from the White House’s covert action oversight panel, the 303 Committee, for designation of someone “to whom TAF management should look for future guidance and direction with respect to United States Government interests.”

In 1982, with TAF’s funding again in jeopardy, the CIA’s Walter Raymond rallied to its defense from his NSC post. In an undated memo to McFarlane, Raymond recalled that “the Department of State underscored that TAF had made significant

contributions to U.S. foreign policies through fostering democratic institutions and, as a private organization, had accomplished things which a government organization cannot do.” [Emphasis in original]

Raymond’s bureaucratic intervention worked. By late 1982, the Reagan administration had arranged for TAF’s fiscal 1984 funding to go through the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) budget, which was being used to finance a range of President Reagan’s “democracy initiatives.” Raymond spelled out the arrangements in a Dec. 15, 1982 memo to National Security Advisor William Clark.

“The issue has been somewhat beclouded in the working levels at State since we have opted to fund all FY 84 democracy initiatives via the USIA budgetary submission,” Raymond wrote. “At the same time, it is essential State maintain its operational and management role with TAF.”

Over the ensuing three and half decades, TAF has continued to be subsidized by U.S. and allied governments. According to its annual report for the year ending Sept. 30, 2016, TAF said it “is funded by an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress, competitively bid awards from governmental and multilateral development agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, United Kingdom’s Department for International Development and by private foundations and corporations,” a sum totaling \$94.5 million.

TAF, which operates in 18 Asian countries, describes its purpose as “improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia.” TAF’s press office had no immediate comment regarding the newly released Reagan-era documents.

Far From Alone

But TAF was far from alone as a private organization that functioned with U.S. government money and collaborated with U.S. officials in achieving Washington’s foreign policy goals.

For instance, other documents from the Reagan library revealed that Freedom House, a prominent human rights organization, sought advice and direction from Casey and Raymond while advertising the group’s need for financial help.

In an Aug. 9, 1982 letter to Raymond, Freedom House executive director Leonard R. Sussman wrote that “Leo Cherne [another senior Freedom House official] has asked me to send these copies of Freedom Appeals. He has probably told you we have had to cut back this project to meet financial realities. We would, of course, want to expand the project once again when, as and if the funds become available.”

According to the documents, Freedom House remained near the top of Casey's and Raymond's thinking when it came to the most effective ways to deliver the CIA's hardline foreign policy message to the American people and to the international community.

On Nov. 4, 1982, Raymond wrote to NSC Advisor Clark about the "Democracy Initiative and Information Programs," stating that "Bill Casey asked me to pass on the following thought concerning your meeting with [right-wing billionaire] Dick Scaife, Dave Abshire [then a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board], and Co.

"Casey had lunch with them today and discussed the need to get moving in the general area of supporting our friends around the world. By this definition he is including both 'building democracy' and helping invigorate international media programs. The DCI [Casey] is also concerned about strengthening public information organizations in the United States such as Freedom House.

"A critical piece of the puzzle is a serious effort to raise private funds to generate momentum. Casey's talk with Scaife and Co. suggests they would be very willing to cooperate. Suggest that you note White House interest in private support for the Democracy initiative."

In a Jan. 25, 1983 memo, Raymond wrote, "We will move out immediately in our parallel effort to generate private support" for "public diplomacy" operations. Then, on May 20, 1983, Raymond recounted in another memo that \$400,000 had been raised from private donors brought to the White House Situation Room by USIA Director Charles Wick. According to that memo, the money was divided among several organizations, including Freedom House and Accuracy in Media, a right-wing media attack group.

In an Aug. 9, 1983 memo, Raymond outlined plans to arrange private backing for that effort. He said USIA Director Wick "via [Australian publishing magnate Rupert] Murdoch [sic], may be able to draw down added funds" to support pro-Reagan initiatives. Raymond recommended "funding via Freedom House or some other structure that has credibility in the political center."

[For more on the Murdoch connection, see Consortiumnews.com's "Rupert Murdoch: Propaganda Recruit."]

Questions of Legality

Raymond remained a CIA officer until April 1983 when he resigned so in his words "there would be no question whatsoever of any contamination of this" propaganda operation to woo the American people into supporting Reagan's policies.

Raymond fretted, too, about the legality of Casey's role in the effort to influence U.S. public opinion because of the legal prohibition against the CIA influencing U.S. policies and politics. Raymond confided in one memo that it was important "to get [Casey] out of the loop," but Casey never backed off and Raymond continued to send progress reports to his old boss well into 1986.

It was "the kind of thing which [Casey] had a broad catholic interest in," Raymond said during his Iran-Contra deposition in 1987. He then offered the excuse that Casey undertook this apparently illegal interference in domestic affairs "not so much in his CIA hat, but in his adviser to the president hat."

In 1983, Casey and Raymond focused on creating a permanent funding mechanism to support private organizations that would engage in propaganda and political action that the CIA had historically organized and paid for covertly. The idea emerged for a congressionally funded entity that would be a conduit for this money.

But Casey recognized the need to hide the strings being pulled by the CIA. In one undated letter to then-White House counselor Edwin Meese III, Casey urged creation of a "National Endowment," but added: "Obviously we here [at CIA] should not get out front in the development of such an organization, nor should we appear to be a sponsor or advocate."

A document in Raymond's files offered examples of what would be funded, including "Grenada – 50 K – To the only organized opposition to the Marxist government of Maurice Bishop (The Seaman and Waterfront Workers Union). A supplemental 50 K to support free TV activity outside Grenada" and "Nicaragua – \$750 K to support an array of independent trade union activity, agricultural cooperatives."

The National Endowment for Democracy took shape in late 1983 as Congress decided to also set aside pots of money – within NED – for the Republican and Democratic parties and for organized labor, creating enough bipartisan largesse that passage was assured.

But some in Congress thought it was important to wall the NED off from any association with the CIA, so a provision was included to bar the participation of any current or former CIA official, according to one congressional aide who helped write the legislation.

This aide told me that one night late in the 1983 session, as the bill was about to go to the House floor, the CIA's congressional liaison came pounding at the door to the office of Rep. Dante Fascell, a senior Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and a chief sponsor of the bill.

The frantic CIA official conveyed a single message from CIA Director Casey: the language barring the participation of CIA personnel must be struck from the bill, the aide recalled, noting that Fascell consented to the demand, not fully recognizing its significance.

The aide said Fascell also consented to the Reagan administration's choice of Carl Gershman to head the National Endowment for Democracy, again not recognizing how this decision would affect the future of the new entity and American foreign policy.

Gershman, who had followed the classic neoconservative path from youthful socialism to fierce anticommunism, became NED's first (and, to this day, only) president. Though NED is technically independent of U.S. foreign policy, Gershman in the early years coordinated decisions on grants with Raymond at the NSC.

For instance, on Jan. 2, 1985, Raymond wrote to two NSC Asian experts that "Carl Gershman has called concerning a possible grant to the Chinese Alliance for Democracy (CAD). I am concerned about the political dimension to this request. We should not find ourselves in a position where we have to respond to pressure, but this request poses a real problem to Carl."

Besides clearing aside political obstacles for Gershman, Raymond also urged NED to give money to Freedom House in a June 21, 1985 letter obtained by Professor John Nichols of Pennsylvania State University.

What the documents at the Reagan library make clear is that Raymond and Casey stayed active shaping the decisions of the new funding mechanism throughout its early years. (Casey died in 1987; Raymond died in 2003.)

Lots of Money

Since its founding, NED has ladled out hundreds of millions of dollars to NGOs all over the world, focusing on training activists, building media outlets, and supporting civic organizations. In some geopolitical hotspots, NED may have scores of projects running at once, such as in Ukraine before the 2014 coup that overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich and touched off the New Cold War with Russia. Via such methods, NED helped achieve the "political action" envisioned by Casey and Raymond.

From the start, NED also became a major benefactor for Freedom House, beginning with a \$200,000 grant in 1984 to build "a network of democratic opinion-makers." In NED's first four years, from 1984 and 1988, it lavished \$2.6 million on Freedom House, accounting for more than one-third of its total income, according to a study by the liberal Council on Hemispheric Affairs, which was entitled

“Freedom House: Portrait of a Pass-Through.”

Over the ensuing decades, Freedom House has become almost an NED subsidiary, often joining NED in holding policy conferences and issuing position papers, both organizations pushing primarily a neoconservative agenda, challenging countries deemed insufficiently “free,” including Syria, Ukraine (before the 2014 coup) and Russia.

NED and Freedom House often work as a kind of tag-team with NED financing NGOs inside targeted countries and Freedom House berating those governments if they try to crack down on U.S.-funded NGOs.

For instance, on Nov. 16, 2012, NED and Freedom House joined together to denounce a law passed by the Russian parliament requiring Russian recipients of foreign political money to register with the government. Or, as NED and Freedom House framed the issue: the Russian Duma sought to “restrict human rights and the activities of civil society organizations and their ability to receive support from abroad. Changes to Russia’s NGO legislation will soon require civil society organizations receiving foreign funds to choose between registering as ‘foreign agents’ or facing significant financial penalties and potential criminal charges.”

Of course, the United States has a nearly identical Foreign Agent Registration Act that likewise requires entities that receive foreign funding and seek to influence U.S. government policy to register with the Justice Department or face possible fines or imprisonment.

But the Russian law would impede NED’s efforts to destabilize the Russian government through funding of political activists, journalists and civic organizations, so it was denounced as an infringement of human rights and helped justify Freedom House’s rating of Russia as “not free.”

The Russian government’s concerns were not entirely paranoid. On Sept. 26, 2013, Gershman, in effect, charted the course for the crisis in Ukraine and the greater neocon goal of regime change in Russia. In a Washington Post op-ed, Gershman called Ukraine “the biggest prize” and explained how pulling it into the Western camp could contribute to the ultimate defeat of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents,” Gershman wrote. “Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

The long history of the U.S. government interfering covertly or semi-covertly in

the politics of countries all over the world is the ironic backdrop to the current frenzy over Russia-gate and Russia's alleged dissemination of emails that undermined Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton's campaign.

The allegations are denied by both Putin and WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange who published the Democratic emails – and the U.S. government has presented no solid evidence to support the accusations of “Russian meddling” – but if the charges are true, they could be seen as a case of turnabout as fair play.

Except in this case, U.S. officials, who have meddled ceaselessly with their “political action” operations in countries all over the world, don't like even the chance that they could get a taste of their own medicine.

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](#)).

Has the NYT Gone Collectively Mad?

Special Report: Crossing a line from recklessness into madness, The New York Times published a front-page opus suggesting that Russia was behind social media criticism of Hillary Clinton, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

For those of us who have taught journalism or worked as editors, a sign that an article is the product of sloppy or dishonest journalism is that a key point will be declared as flat fact when it is unproven or a point in serious dispute – and it then becomes the foundation for other claims, building a story like a high-rise constructed on sand.

This use of speculation as fact is something to guard against particularly in the work of inexperienced or opinionated reporters. But what happens when this sort of unprofessional work tops page one of The New York Times one day as a major “investigative” article and reemerges the next day in even more strident form as a major Times editorial? Are we dealing then with an inept journalist who got carried away with his thesis or are we facing institutional corruption or even a collective madness driven by ideological fervor?

What is stunning about the [lede story](#) in last Friday's print edition of The New

York Times is that it offers no real evidence to support its provocative claim that – as the headline states – “To Sway Vote, Russia Used Army of Fake Americans” or its subhead: “Flooding Twitter and Facebook, Impostors Helped Fuel Anger in Polarized U.S.”

In the old days, this wildly speculative article, which spills over three pages, would have earned an F in a J-school class or gotten a rookie reporter a stern rebuke from a senior editor. But now such unprofessionalism is highlighted by The New York Times, which boasts that it is the standard-setter of American journalism, the nation’s “newspaper of record.”

In this case, it allows reporter Scott Shane to introduce his thesis by citing some Internet accounts that apparently used fake identities, but he ties none of them to the Russian government. Acting like he has minimal familiarity with the Internet – yes, a lot of people do use fake identities – Shane builds his case on the assumption that accounts that cited references to purloined Democratic emails must be somehow from an agent or a bot connected to the Kremlin.

For instance, Shane cites the fake identity of “Melvin Redick,” who suggested on June 8, 2016, that people visit DCLeaks which, a few days earlier, had posted some emails from prominent Americans, which Shane states as fact – not allegation – were “stolen ... by Russian hackers.”

Shane then adds, also as flat fact, that “The site’s phony promoters were in the vanguard of a cyberarmy of counterfeit Facebook and Twitter accounts, a legion of Russian-controlled impostors whose operations are still being unraveled.”

The Times’ Version

In other words, Shane tells us, “The Russian information attack on the election did not stop with the hacking and leaking of Democratic emails or the fire hose of stories, true, false and in between, that battered Mrs. Clinton on Russian outlets like RT and Sputnik. Far less splashy, and far more difficult to trace, was Russia’s experimentation on Facebook and Twitter, the American companies that essentially invented the tools of social media and, in this case, did not stop them from being turned into engines of deception and propaganda.”

Besides the obvious point that very few Americans watch RT and/or Sputnik and that Shane offers no details about the alleged falsity of those “fire hose of stories,” let’s examine how his accusations are backed up:

“An investigation by The New York Times, and new research from the cybersecurity firm FireEye, reveals some of the mechanisms by which suspected Russian operators used Twitter and Facebook to spread anti-Clinton messages and promote the hacked material they had leaked. On Wednesday, Facebook officials disclosed

that they had shut down several hundred accounts that they believe were created by a Russian company linked to the Kremlin and used to buy \$100,000 in ads pushing divisive issues during and after the American election campaign. On Twitter, as on Facebook, Russian fingerprints are on hundreds or thousands of fake accounts that regularly posted anti-Clinton messages.”

Note the weasel words: “suspected”; “believe”; “linked”; “fingerprints.” When you see such equivocation, it means that these folks – both the Times and FireEye – don’t have hard evidence; they are speculating.

And it’s worth noting that the supposed “army of fake Americans” may amount to hundreds out of Facebook’s two billion or so monthly users and the \$100,000 in ads compare to the company’s annual ad revenue of around \$27 billion. (I’d do the math but my calculator doesn’t compute such tiny percentages.)

So, this “army” is really not an “army” and we don’t even know that it is “Russian.” But some readers might say that surely we know that the Kremlin did mastermind the hacking of Democratic emails!

That claim is supported by the Jan. 6 “intelligence community assessment” that was the work of what President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies – the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation. But, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you hand-pick the analysts, you are hand-picking the conclusions.

Agreeing with Putin

But some still might protest that the Jan. 6 report surely presented convincing evidence of this serious charge about Russian President Vladimir Putin personally intervening in the U.S. election to help put Donald Trump in the White House. Well, as it turns out, not so much, and if you don’t believe me, we can call to the witness stand none other than New York Times reporter Scott Shane.

Shane wrote at the time: “What is missing from the [the Jan. 6] public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

So, even Scott Shane, the author of last Friday’s opus, recognized the lack of “hard evidence” to prove that the Russian government was behind the release of the Democratic emails, a claim that both Putin and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who published a trove of the emails, have denied. While it is surely possible that Putin and Assange are lying or don’t know the facts, you might

think that their denials would be relevant to this lengthy investigative article, which also could have benefited from some mention of Shane's own skepticism of last January, but, hey, you don't want inconvenient details to mess up a cool narrative.

Yet, if you struggle all the way to the end of last Friday's article, you do find out how flimsy the Times' case actually is. How, for instance, do we know that "Melvin Redick" is a Russian impostor posing as an American? The proof, according to Shane, is that "His posts were never personal, just news articles reflecting a pro-Russian worldview."

As it turns out, the Times now operates with what must be called a neo-McCarthyistic approach for identifying people as Kremlin stooges, i.e., anyone who doubts the truthfulness of the State Department's narratives on Syria, Ukraine and other international topics.

Unreliable Source

In the article's last section, Shane acknowledges as much in citing one of his experts, "Andrew Weisburd, an Illinois online researcher who has written frequently about Russian influence on social media." Shane quotes Weisburd as admitting how hard it is to differentiate Americans who just might oppose Hillary Clinton because they didn't think she'd make a good president from supposed Russian operatives: "Trying to disaggregate the two was difficult, to put it mildly."

According to Shane, "Mr. Weisburd said he had labeled some Twitter accounts 'Kremlin trolls' based simply on their pro-Russia tweets and with no proof of Russian government ties. The Times contacted several such users, who insisted that they had come by their anti-American, pro-Russian views honestly, without payment or instructions from Moscow."

One of Weisburd's "Kremlin trolls" turned out to be 66-year-old Marilyn Justice who lives in Nova Scotia and who somehow reached the conclusion that "Hillary's a warmonger." During the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, she reached another conclusion: that U.S. commentators were exhibiting a snide anti-Russia bias perhaps because they indeed were exhibiting a snide anti-Russia bias.

Shane tracked down another "Kremlin troll," 48-year-old Marcel Sardo, a web producer in Zurich, Switzerland, who dares to dispute the West's groupthink that Russia was responsible for shooting down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine on July 17, 2014, and the State Department's claims that the Syrian government used sarin gas in a Damascus suburb on Aug. 21, 2013.

Presumably, if you don't toe the line on those dubious U.S. government

narratives, you are part of the Kremlin's propaganda machine. (In both cases, there actually are serious reasons to doubt the Western groupthinks which again lack real evidence.)

But Shane accuses Sardo and his fellow-travelers of spreading "what American officials consider to be Russian disinformation on election hacking, Syria, Ukraine and more." In other words, if you examine the evidence on MH-17 or the Syrian sarin case and conclude that the U.S. government's claims are dubious if not downright false, you are somehow disloyal and making Russian officials "gleeful at their success," as Shane puts it.

But what kind of a traitor are you if you quote Shane's initial judgment after reading the Jan. 6 report on alleged Russian election meddling? What are you if you agree with his factual observation that the report lacked anything approaching "hard evidence"? That's a point that also dovetails with what Vladimir Putin has been saying – that "IP addresses can be simply made up. ... This is no proof"?

So is Scott Shane a "Kremlin troll," too? Should the Times immediately fire him as a disloyal foreign agent? What if Putin says that 2 plus 2 equals 4 and your child is taught the same thing in elementary school, what does that say about public school teachers?

Out of such gibberish come the evils of McCarthyism and the death of the Enlightenment. Instead of encouraging a questioning citizenry, the new American paradigm is to silence debate and ridicule anyone who steps out of line.

You might have thought people would have learned something from the disastrous groupthink about Iraqi WMD, a canard that the Times and most of the U.S. mainstream media eagerly promoted.

But if you're feeling generous and thinking that the Times' editors must have been chastened by their Iraq-WMD fiasco but perhaps had a bad day last week and somehow allowed an egregious piece of journalism to lead their front page, your kind-heartedness would be shattered on Saturday when the Times' editorial board penned a laudatory reprise of Scott Shane's big scoop.

Stripping away even the few caveats that the article had included, the Times' editors informed us that "a startling investigation by Scott Shane of The New York Times, and new research by the cybersecurity firm FireEye, now reveal, the Kremlin's stealth intrusion into the election was far broader and more complex, involving a cyberarmy of bloggers posing as Americans and spreading propaganda and disinformation to an American electorate on Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. ...

“Now that the scheming is clear, Facebook and Twitter say they are reviewing the 2016 race and studying how to defend against such meddling in the future. ... Facing the Russian challenge will involve complicated issues dealing with secret foreign efforts to undermine American free speech.”

But what is the real threat to “American free speech”? Is it the possibility that Russia – in a very mild imitation of what the U.S. government does all over the world – used some Web sites clandestinely to get out its side of various stories, an accusation against Russia that still lacks any real evidence?

Or is the bigger threat that the nearly year-long Russia-gate hysteria will be used to clamp down on Americans who dare question fact-lite or fact-free Official Narratives handed down by the State Department and The New York Times?

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Thank you for your support.

Robert Parry

Echoes of Iraq-WMD Fraud in Syria

Special Report: Just as the West ignored signs in 2002-03 that anti-government Iraqis were fabricating WMD claims, evidence is being brushed aside that Syrian jihadists have ginned up chemical attacks, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times and other Western media have learned few lessons from the Iraq War, including how the combination of a demonized foreign leader and well-funded “activists” committed to flooding the process with fake data can lead to dangerously false conclusions that perpetuate war.

What we have seen in Syria over the past six years parallels what occurred in Iraq in the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion in 2002-03. In both cases, there was evidence that the “system” was being gamed – by the Iraqi National Congress (INC) in pushing for the Iraq War and by pro-rebel “activists” promoting “regime change” in Syria – but those warnings were ignored. Instead, the flood of propagandistic claims overwhelmed what little skepticism there was in the West.

Regarding Iraq, the INC generated a surge of “defectors” who claimed to know where Saddam Hussein was concealing his WMD stockpiles and where his nuclear program was hidden. In Syria, we have seen something similar with dubious claims about chemical weapons attacks.

The Iraqi “defectors,” of course, were lying, and a little-noticed congressional study revealed that the CIA had correctly debunked some of the fakers but – because of the pro-invasion political pressure from George W. Bush’s White House and the U.S. mainstream media’s contempt for Saddam Hussein – other bogus claims were accepted as true. The result was catastrophic.

But the telltale signs of an INC disinformation campaign were there before the war. For instance, by early February 2003, as the final invasion plans were underway, the parade of Iraqi “walk-ins” was continuing. U.S. intelligence agencies had progressed up to “Source Eighteen,” one fellow who came to epitomize what some CIA analysts suspected was systematic INC coaching of sources.

As the CIA planned a debriefing of Source Eighteen, another Iraqi exile passed on word to the agency that an INC representative had told Source Eighteen to “deliver the act of a lifetime.” CIA analysts weren’t sure what to make of that piece of news since Iraqi exiles frequently badmouthed each other but the value of the warning soon became clear.

U.S. intelligence officers debriefed Source Eighteen the next day and discovered that "Source Eighteen was supposed to have a nuclear engineering background, but was unable to discuss advanced mathematics or physics and described types of 'nuclear' reactors that do not exist," according to a Senate Intelligence Committee report on the Iraq War's intelligence failures.

"Source Eighteen used the bathroom frequently, particularly when he appeared to be flustered by a line of questioning, suddenly remembering a new piece of information upon his return. During one such incident, Source Eighteen appeared to be reviewing notes," the report said.

Not surprisingly, U.S. intelligence officers concluded that Source Eighteen was a fabricator. But the sludge of INC-connected disinformation kept oozing through the U.S. intelligence community, fouling the American intelligence product in part because there was little pressure from above demanding strict quality controls. Indeed, the opposite was true.

A more famous fake Iraqi defector earned the code name "Curve Ball" and provided German intelligence agencies details about Iraq's alleged mobile facilities for producing agents for biological warfare.

Tyler Drumheller, then chief of the CIA's European Division, said his office had issued repeated warnings about Curve Ball's accounts. "Everyone in the chain of command knew exactly what was happening," Drumheller said. [Los Angeles Times, April 2, 2005]

Despite those objections and the lack of direct U.S. contact with Curve Ball, he earned a rating as "credible" or "very credible," and his information became a core element of the Bush administration's case for invading Iraq. Drawings of Curve Ball's imaginary bio-weapons labs were a central feature of Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation to the U.N. on Feb. 5, 2003.

The Syrian Parallel

Regarding Syria, a similar mix of factors exists. The Obama administration's advocacy for Syrian "regime change" and the hostility from many Western interest groups toward President Bashar al-Assad lowered the bar of skepticism enabling propaganda arms of Al Qaeda and its jihadist allies to have enormous success in selling dubious accusations about chemical attacks and other atrocities.

As with the CIA analysts who tripped up a few of the Iraqi liars, some United Nations investigators have seen evidence of the trickery. For instance, they learned from townspeople of Al-Tamanah about how the rebels and allied "activists" staged a chlorine gas attack on the night of April 29-30, 2014, and then sold the false story to a credulous Western media and, initially, to the

U.N. investigative team.

“Seven witnesses stated that frequent alerts [about an imminent chlorine weapons attack by the government] had been issued, but in fact no incidents with chemicals took place,” the U.N. report stated. “While people sought safety after the warnings, their homes were looted and rumours spread that the events were being staged. ... [T]hey [these witnesses] had come forward to contest the wide-spread false media reports.”

Accounts from other people, who did allege that there had been a government chemical attack on Al-Tamanah, provided suspect evidence, including data from questionable sources, according to the U.N. report.

The report said, “Three witnesses, who did not give any description of the incident on 29-30 April 2014, provided material of unknown source. One witness had second-hand knowledge of two of the five incidents in Al-Tamanah, but did not remember the exact dates. Later that witness provided a USB-stick with information of unknown origin, which was saved in separate folders according to the dates of all the five incidents mentioned by the FFM (the U.N.’s Fact-Finding Mission).

“Another witness provided the dates of all five incidents reading it from a piece of paper, but did not provide any testimony on the incident on 29-30 April 2014. The latter also provided a video titled ‘site where second barrel containing toxic chlorine gas was dropped tamanaa 30 April 14’”

Some other witnesses alleging a Syrian government attack offered curious claims about detecting the chlorine-infused “barrel bombs” based on how the device sounded in its descent.

The U.N. report said, “The eyewitness, who stated to have been on the roof, said to have heard a helicopter and the ‘very loud’ sound of a falling barrel. Some interviewees had referred to a distinct whistling sound of barrels that contain chlorine as they fall. The witness statement could not be corroborated with any further information.”

However, the claim itself is absurd since it is inconceivable that anyone could detect a chlorine canister inside a “barrel bomb” by “a distinct whistling sound.”

The larger point, however, is that the jihadist rebels in Al-Tamanah and their propaganda teams, including relief workers and activists, appear to have organized a coordinated effort at deception complete with a fake video supplied to U.N. investigators and Western media outlets.

For instance, the Telegraph in London reported that “Videos allegedly taken in Al-Tamanah ... purport to show the impact sites of two chemical bombs. Activists said that one person had been killed and another 70 injured.”

The Telegraph also quoted supposed weapons expert Eliot Higgins, the founder of Bellingcat, as endorsing the report. “Witnesses have consistently reported the use of helicopters to drop the chemical barrel bombs used,” said Higgins. “As it stands, around a dozen chemical barrel bomb attacks have been alleged in that region in the last three weeks.”

To finish up pointing the finger of guilt at the government, the Telegraph added that “The regime is the only party in the civil war that possesses helicopters” – a claim that also has been in dispute since the rebels had captured government air assets and had received substantial military assistance from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United States, Israel, Jordan and other countries.

The Al-Tamanah debunking received no mainstream media attention when the U.N. findings were issued in September 2016 because the U.N. report relied on rebel information to blame two other alleged chlorine attacks on the government and that got all the coverage. But the case should have raised red flags given the extent of the apparent deception.

If the seven townspeople were telling the truth, that would mean that the rebels and their allies issued fake attack warnings, produced propaganda videos to fool the West, and prepped “witnesses” with “evidence” to deceive investigators. Yet, no alarms went off about other rebel claims.

The Ghouta Incident

A more famous attack – with sarin gas on the Damascus suburb of Ghouta on Aug. 21, 2013, killing hundreds – was also eagerly blamed on the Assad regime, as The New York Times, Human Rights Watch, Higgins’s Bellingcat and many other Western outlets jumped to that conclusion despite the unlikely circumstances. Assad had just welcomed U.N. investigators to Damascus to examine chemical attacks that he was blaming on the rebels.

Assad also was facing a “red line” threat from President Obama warning him of possible U.S. military intervention if the Syrian government deployed chemical weapons. Why Assad and his military would choose such a moment to launch a deadly sarin attack, killing mostly civilians, made little sense.

But this became another rush to judgment in the West that brought the Obama administration to the verge of launching a devastating air attack on the Syrian military that might have helped Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate and/or the Islamic State win the war.

Eventually, however, the case blaming Assad for the 2013 sarin attack collapsed. An analysis by genuine weapons experts – Theodore A. Postol, a professor of science, technology and national security policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Richard M. Lloyd, an analyst at the military contractor Tesla Laboratories – found that the missile that delivered the sarin had a very short range placing its likely firing position in rebel territory.

Later, reporting by journalist Seymour Hersh implicated Turkish intelligence working with jihadist rebels as the likely source of the sarin.

We also learned in 2016 that a message from the U.S. intelligence community had warned Obama how weak the evidence against Assad was. There was no “slam-dunk” proof, said Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. And Obama cited his rejection of the Washington militaristic “playbook” to bomb Syria as one of his proudest moments as President.

With this background, there should have been extreme skepticism when jihadists and their allies made new claims about the Syrian government engaging in chemical weapons attacks, just like the CIA should have recognized that the Iraqi National Congress’s production of some obviously phony “walk-ins” justified doubts about all of them.

After the invasion of Iraq and the U.S. failure to find the promised WMD caches, INC leader Ahmed Chalabi congratulated his organization as “heroes in error” for its success in using falsehoods to help get the United States to invade.

But the West appears to have learned next to nothing from the Iraq deceptions – or arguably the lessons are being ignored out of a desire to continue the neoconservative “regime change” project for the Middle East.

Pressure to Confirm

U.N. investigators, who have been under intense pressure to confirm accusations against the Syrian government, continue to brush aside contrary evidence, such as testimony regarding the April 4 “sarin incident” at Khan Sheikhoun, that suggested a replay of the Al-Tamanah operation.

In a new U.N. report, testimony from two people, who were apparently considered reliable by investigators from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, asserted that anti-government aircraft spotters issued no early-morning warning of a flight leaving the Syrian military airbase of Shayrat, contradicting claims from Al Qaeda’s allies inside Khan Sheikhoun who insisted that there had been such a warning.

If no warplanes left Shayrat airbase around dawn on April 4, then President

Trump's case for retaliating with 59 Tomahawk missiles launched against the base two days later would collapse. The U.S. strike reportedly killed several soldiers at the base and nine civilians, including four children, in nearby neighborhoods. It also risked inflicting death on Russians stationed at the base.

But the U.N. report accepts the version from the activists and rebels inside the Al Qaeda-controlled town and then goes on to endorse other rebel claims regarding alleged Syrian military chemical attacks on at least 20 other occasions.

The New York Times was mightily impressed with the U.N. report's "unequivocal condemnation" of Assad's regime and cited it as justification for Israeli warplanes bombing a Syrian military facility on Thursday. Rather than criticize Israel for attacking a neighboring country, the Times framed the action in a positive light as having "brought renewed attention to Syria's chemical weapons."

But the journalistic (and intelligence) point should have been that the West was fooled in Iraq by self-interested "activists" flooding the Times, the CIA and the world with fake information – so many bogus walk-ins that they overwhelmed whatever half-hearted process there was to weed out lies from truth. The Syrian "opposition" appears to have adopted a similar strategy in Syria with similar success.

Given the history, skepticism should be the rule in Syria, not credulity. Or, as President George W. Bush once said in a different context, "fool me once, shame on – shame on you. Fool me – you can't get fooled again."

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).

U.N. Enablers of 'Aggressive War'

Special Report: U.N. investigative reports, like a new one condemning Syria for alleged sarin use, are received as impartial and credible, but are often just more war propaganda from compromised bureaucrats, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Many people still want to believe that the United Nations engages in impartial investigations and thus is more trustworthy than, say, self-interested governments, whether Russia or the United States. But trust in U.N. agencies is no longer well placed; whatever independence they may have once had has been broken, a reality relevant to recent “investigations” of Syrian chemical weapons use.



There is also the larger issue of the United Nations’ peculiar silence about one of its primary and original responsibilities, shouldered after the horrors of World War II – to stop wars of aggression, which today include “regime change” wars organized, funded and armed by the United States and other Western powers, such as the Iraq invasion in 2003, the overthrow of the Libyan government in 2011, and a series of proxy wars including the ongoing Syrian conflict.

After World War II, the Nuremberg Tribunals declared that a “war of aggression ... is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

That recognition became a guiding principle of the United Nations Charter, which specifically prohibits aggression or even threats of aggression against sovereign states.

The Charter declares in Article One that it is a chief U.N. purpose “to take effective collective measures ... for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace.” Article Two, which defines the appropriate behavior of U.N. members, adds that “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state...”

However, instead of enforcing this fundamental rule, the United Nations has, in

effect, caved in to the political and financial pressure brought to bear by the United States and its allies. A similar disregard for international law also pervades the U.S. mainstream media and much of the European and Israeli press as well.

There is an assumption that the United States and its allies have the right to intervene militarily anywhere in the world at anytime solely at their own discretion. Though U.S. diplomats and mainstream journalists still voice outrage when adversaries deviate from international law – such as denunciations of Russia over Ukraine’s civil war – there is silence or support when a U.S. president or, say, an Israeli prime minister orders military strikes inside another country. Then, we hear only justifications for these attacks.

Shielding Israel

For instance, on Friday, The New York Times published an article about Israel conducting a bombing raid inside Syria that reportedly killed two Syrians. The article is notable because it contains not a single reference to international law and Israel’s clear-cut violation of it. Instead, the article amounts to a lengthy rationalization for Israel’s aggression, framing the attacks as Israeli self-defense or, as the Times put it, “an escalation of Israel’s efforts to prevent its enemies from gaining access to sophisticated weapons.”

The article also contains no reference to the fact that Israel maintains a sophisticated nuclear arsenal and is known to possess chemical and biological weapons as well. Implicit in the Times article is that the U.S. and Israel live under one set of rules while countries on the U.S.-Israeli enemies list must abide by another. Not to state the obvious but this is a clear violation of the journalistic principle of objectivity.

But the Times is far from alone in applying endless double standards. Hypocrisy now permeates international agencies, including the United Nations, which instead of pressing for accountability in cases of U.S. or Israeli aggression has become an aider and abettor, issuing one-sided reports that justify further aggression while doing little or nothing to stop U.S.-backed acts of aggression.

For instance, there was no serious demand that U.S. and British leaders who organized the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, should face any accountability for committing the “supreme international crime” of an aggressive war. As far as the U.N. is concerned, war-crimes tribunals are for the little guys.

This breakdown in the integrity of the U.N. and related agencies has developed over the past few decades as one U.S. administration after another has exploited

U.S. clout as the world's "unipolar power" to ensure that international bureaucrats conform to U.S. interests. Any U.N. official who deviates from this unwritten rule can expect to have his or her reputation besmirched and career truncated.

So, while harshly critical of alleged abuses by the Syrian military, U.N. officials are notoriously silent when it comes to condemning the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Israel and other countries that have been "covertly" backing anti-government "rebels" who have engaged in grave crimes against humanity in Syria.

The U.S. and its allies have even mounted overt military operations inside Syrian territory, including airstrikes against the Syrian military and its allies, without permission of the internationally recognized government in Damascus. Yet, the U.N. does nothing to curtail or condemn these clear violations of its own Charter.

Breaking the Independence

The reason is that, for much of this century, the U.S. government has worked to bring key agencies, such as the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), under U.S. control and domination.

This drive to neutralize the U.N.'s independence gained powerful momentum after the 9/11 attacks and President George W. Bush's launching of his "global war on terror." But this effort continued under President Obama and now under President Trump.

In 2002, after opening the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and effectively waiving the Geneva Convention's protections for prisoners of war, Bush bristled at criticism from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary C. Robinson.

Soon, Robinson was targeted for removal. Her fierce independence, which also included criticism of Israel, was unacceptable. The Bush administration lobbied hard against her reappointment, leading to her retirement in 2002.

Also, in 2002, the Bush administration engineered the firing of OPCW's Director General Jose Mauricio Bustani who was viewed as an obstacle to the U.S. plans for invading Iraq.

Bustani, who had been reelected unanimously to the post less than a year earlier, described his removal in a 2013 interview with Marlise Simons of The New York Times, citing how Bush's emissary, Under-Secretary of State John

Bolton, marched into Bustani's office and announced that he (Bustani) would be fired.

"The story behind [Bustani's] ouster has been the subject of interpretation and speculation for years, and Mr. Bustani, a Brazilian diplomat, has kept a low profile since then," wrote Simons. "But with the agency [OPCW] thrust into the spotlight with news of the Nobel [Peace] Prize [in October 2013], Mr. Bustani agreed to discuss what he said was the real reason: the Bush administration's fear that chemical weapons inspections in Iraq would conflict with Washington's rationale for invading it. Several officials involved in the events, some speaking publicly about them for the first time, confirmed his account."

The official U.S. explanation for getting rid of Bustani was incompetence, but Bustani and the other diplomats close to the case reported that Bustani's real offense was drawing Iraq into acceptance of the OPCW's conventions for eliminating chemical weapons, just as the Bush administration was planning to pin its propaganda campaign for invading Iraq on the country's alleged secret stockpile of WMD.

Bustani's ouster gave President Bush a clearer path to the invasion by letting him frighten Americans with the prospect of Iraq sharing its chemical weapons and possibly a nuclear bomb with Al Qaeda terrorists.

Dismissing Iraq's insistence that it had destroyed its chemical weapons and didn't have a nuclear weapons project, Bush launched the invasion in March 2003, only for the world to discover later that the Iraqi government was telling the truth.

Compliant Replacements

In comparison to the independent-minded Bustani, the biography of the current OPCW director general, Ahmet Uzumcu, a career Turkish diplomat, suggests that the OPCW could be expected to slant its case against the Syrian government in the current Syrian conflict.

Not only has Turkey, a NATO ally of the United States, been a key player in supporting the proxy war to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, but Uzumcu also served as Turkey's ambassador to Israel, which has long sought regime change in Syria and has publicly come out in favor of the anti-government rebels.

Another one-time thorn in the side of the U.S. "unipolar power" was the IAEA when it was under the control of Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, an Egyptian. The IAEA challenged the Bush administration's claims about Iraq having a nuclear program, when one really didn't exist.

However, being right is no protection when U.S. officials want to bring an agency into line with U.S. policy and propaganda. So, early in the Obama administration – as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was pushing for a hardline on Iran over its nascent nuclear program – the U.S. government engineered the insertion of a pliable Japanese diplomat, Yukiya Amano, into the IAEA’s top job.

Before his appointment, Amano had portrayed himself as an independent-minded fellow who was resisting U.S.-Israeli propaganda about the Iranian nuclear program. Yet behind the scenes, he was meeting with U.S. and Israeli officials to coordinate on how to serve their interests (even though Israel is an actual rogue nuclear state, not a hypothetical or fictional one).

Amano’s professed doubts about an Iranian nuclear-bomb project, which even the U.S. intelligence community agreed no longer existed, was just a theatrical device to intensify the later impact if he were to declare that Iran indeed was building a secret nuke, thus justifying the desire of Israeli leaders and American neoconservatives to “bomb-bomb-bomb” Iran.

But this U.S. ploy was spoiled by Pvt. Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning’s leaking of hundreds of thousands of pages of U.S. diplomatic cables. Among them were reports on Amano’s hidden collaboration with U.S. and Israeli officials; his agreement with U.S. emissaries on who to fire and who to retain among IAEA officials; and even Amano’s request for additional U.S. financial contributions.

The U.S. embassy cables revealing the truth about Amano were published by the U.K. Guardian in 2011 (although ignored by The New York Times, The Washington Post and other mainstream U.S. news outlets). Despite the silence of the major U.S. news media, Internet outlets, such as Consortiumnews.com, highlighted the Amano cables, meaning that enough Americans knew the facts not to be fooled again. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Did Manning Help Avert War with Iran?”]

A Collective Collapse

So, over the years, there has been a collective collapse of the independence at U.N.-related agencies. An international bureaucrat who gets on the wrong side of the United States or Israel can expect to be fired and humiliated, while those who play ball can be assured of a comfortable life as a “respected” diplomat.

But this reality is little known to most Americans so they are still inclined to be influenced when a “U.N. investigation” reaches some conclusion condemning some country that already is on the receiving end of negative U.S. propaganda.

The New York Times, CNN and other major U.S. news outlets are sure to trumpet

these “findings” with great seriousness and respect and to treat any remaining doubters as outside the mainstream. Of course, there’s an entirely different response on the rare occasion when some brave or foolhardy human rights bureaucrat criticizes Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. Then, the U.N. finding is just a sign of anti-Israeli bias and should be discounted.

In the far more frequent cases when a U.N. report is in line with U.S. propaganda, American journalists almost never turn a critical eye toward the quality of the evidence or the leaps of logic. We saw that happen this week with a thinly sourced and highly dubious U.N. report blaming the Syrian government for an alleged sarin incident on April 4. A major contradiction in the evidence – testimony given to OPCW investigators undercutting the conclusion that a Syrian warplane could have dropped a sarin bomb – was brushed aside by the U.N. human rights investigators and was ignored by the Times and other major U.S. news outlets.

But what is perhaps most troubling is that these biased U.N. reports are now used to justify continued wars of aggression by stronger countries against weaker ones. So, instead of acting as a bulwark to protect the powerless from the powerful as the U.N. Charter intended, the U.N. bureaucracy has turned the original noble purpose of the institution on its head by becoming an enabler of the “supreme international crime,” wars of aggression.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “How US Pressure Bends UN Agencies.”]

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).

A New Hole in Syria-Sarin Certainty

Special Report: A new contradiction has emerged in the West’s groupthink blaming Syria for an April 4 chemical attack, with one group of U.N. investigators raising doubt about the flight of a Syrian warplane, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. mainstream media is treating a new United Nations report on the April 4 chemical weapons incident in Khan Sheikhoun as more proof of Syrian government

guilt, but that ignores a major contradiction between two groups of U.N. investigators that blows a big hole in the groupthink.

Though both U.N. groups seem determined to blame the Syrian government, the frontline investigators from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) reported that spotters of departing Syrian military aircraft from Shayrat airbase did not send out a warning of any flights until late that morning – while the alleged dropping of a sarin bomb occurred at around dawn.

The report by the U.N.'s Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic noted that “two individuals interviewed by the OPCW claimed that on the morning of 4 April the early warning system did not issue warnings until 11 to 11:30 a.m., and that no aircraft were observed until that time.”

If the OPCW's information is correct – that no warplanes took off from the government's Shayrat airbase until late in the morning – then the Trump administration's rationale for launching a retaliatory strike of 59 Tomahawk missiles at that airfield on April 6 is destroyed.

But the U.N. commission's report – released on Wednesday – simply brushes aside the OPCW's discovery that no warplanes took off at dawn. The report instead relies on witnesses inside jihadist-controlled Khan Sheikhoun who claim to have heard a warning about 20 minutes before a plane arrived at around 6:45 a.m.

Indeed, the report's account of the alleged attack relies almost exclusively on “eyewitnesses” in the town, which was under the control of Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and allied jihadist groups.

The report also gives no attention to the possibility that the alleged sarin incident, which reportedly killed scores of people including women and children, was a staged event by Al Qaeda to reverse the Trump administration's announcement just days earlier that it was no longer U.S. policy to seek “regime change” in Syria.

The Khan Sheikhoun incident prompted President Trump to launch the missile strike that, according to Syrian media reports, killed several soldiers at the base and nine civilians, including four children, in nearby neighborhoods. It also risked inflicting death on Russians stationed at the base.

Lost History

In the U.N. commission's report, the possibility of a staged event is not considered even though the OPCW had previously uncovered evidence that a chlorine-gas attack in the rebel-controlled town of Al-Tamanah, which also was blamed on the Syrian government, was staged by Al Qaeda operatives and their

civilian “relief workers.”

OPCW investigators, who like most U.N. bureaucrats have seemed eager to endorse allegations of chlorine-gas attacks by the Syrian government, ran into this obstacle when townspeople from Al-Tamanah came forward to testify that a supposed attack on the night of April 29-30, 2014, was a fabrication.

“Seven witnesses stated that frequent alerts [about an imminent chlorine weapons attack by the government] had been issued, but in fact no incidents with chemicals took place,” the OPCW report stated. “[T]hey [these witnesses] had come forward to contest the wide-spread false media reports.”

In addition, accounts from people who did allege that there had been a government chemical attack on Al-Tamanah provided suspect evidence, including data from questionable sources, according to the OPCW report, which added:

“Three witnesses, who did not give any description of the incident on 29-30 April 2014, provided material of unknown source. One witness had second-hand knowledge of two of the five incidents in Al-Tamanah, but did not remember the exact dates. Later that witness provided a USB-stick with information of unknown origin, which was saved in separate folders according to the dates of all the five incidents mentioned by the FFM [the U.N.’s Fact-Finding Mission].

“Another witness provided the dates of all five incidents reading it from a piece of paper, but did not provide any testimony on the incident on 29-30 April 2014. The latter also provided a video titled ‘site where second barrel containing toxic chlorine gas was dropped tamanaa 30 April 14’”

Some other “witnesses” who alleged a Syrian government attack offered ridiculous claims about detecting the chlorine-infused “barrel bomb” based on how the device sounded in its descent.

The report said, “The eyewitness, who stated to have been on the roof, said to have heard a helicopter and the ‘very loud’ sound of a falling barrel. Some interviewees had referred to a distinct whistling sound of barrels that contain chlorine as they fall. The witness statement could not be corroborated with any further information.”

Although the report didn’t say so, there was no plausible explanation for someone detecting a chlorine canister in a “barrel bomb” based on its “distinct whistling sound.” The only logical conclusion is that the chlorine attack had been staged by the jihadists and that their supporters then lied to the OPCW investigators to enrage the world against the Assad regime.

The coordination of the propaganda campaign, with “witnesses” armed with data to

make their stories more convincing, further suggests a premeditated and organized conspiracy to “sell” the story, not just some random act by a few individuals.

The Ghouta Attack

There was a similar collapse of the more notorious sarin incident outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, which killed hundreds and was also blamed on the Assad government but now appears to have been carried out as a trick by Al Qaeda operatives to get President Obama to order the U.S. military to devastate the Syrian military and thus help Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front to win the war.

You might have thought that these experiences with staged chemical attacks would have given U.N. investigators more pause when another unlikely incident occurred last April 4 in the town of Khan Sheikhoun, which was under Al Qaeda’s control.

The Trump administration had just announced a U.S. policy reversal, saying that the U.S. goal was no longer “regime change” in Syria but rather to defeat terrorist groups. At the time, Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front, the Islamic State and other jihadist forces were in retreat across much of Syria.

In other words, the Syrian government had little or no reason to provoke U.S. and international outrage by launching a sarin gas attack on a remote town with only marginal strategic significance.

Chemical attacks, especially the alleged use of chlorine but sarin gas as well, also offer minimal military effectiveness if dropped on a town. Chlorine gas in this form rarely kills anyone, and the international outrage over sarin far exceeds any military value.

But the jihadists did have a powerful motive to continue staging chemical attacks as their best argument for derailing international efforts to bring the war to an end, which would have meant defeat for the jihadists and their international allies.

And, we know from the Al-Tamanah case that the jihadists are not above feeding fabricated evidence to U.N. investigators who themselves have strong career motives to point the finger at the Assad regime and thus please the Western powers.

In the Khan Sheikhoun case, a well-placed source told me shortly after the incident that at least some U.S. intelligence analysts concluded that it was a hastily staged event in reaction to the Trump administration’s renunciation of Syrian “regime change.”

The source said some evidence indicated that a drone from a Saudi-Israeli special-operations base inside Jordan delivered the sarin and that the staging of the attack was completed on the ground by jihadist forces. Initial reports of the attack appeared on social media shortly after dawn on April 4.

The Time Element

Syrian and Russian officials seemed to have been caught off-guard by the events, offering up a possible explanation that the Syrian government's airstrike aimed at a senior jihadist meeting in Khan Sheikhoun at around noon might have accidentally touched off a chemical chain reaction producing sarin-like gas.

But U.S. mainstream media accounts and the new U.N. report cited the time discrepancy – between the dawn attack and the noontime raid – as proof of Russian and Syrian deception. Yet, it made no sense for the Russians and Syrians to lie about the time element since they were admitting to an airstrike and, indeed, matching up the timing would have added to the credibility of their hypothesis.

In other words, if the airstrike had occurred at dawn, there was no motive for the Russians and Syrians not to say so. Instead, the Russian and Syrian response seems to suggest genuine confusion, not a cover-up.

For the U.N. commission to join in this attack line on the timeline further suggests a lack of objectivity, an impression that is bolstered by the rejection of OPCW's finding that no take-off alert was issued early on the morning of April 4.

Instead, the U.N. commission relied heavily on "eyewitnesses" from the Al Qaeda-controlled town with unnamed individuals even providing the supposed identity of the aircraft, a Syrian government Su-22, and describing the dropping of three conventional bombs and the chemical-weapons device on Khan Sheikhoun around 6:45 a.m.

But there were other holes in the narrative. For instance, in a little-noticed [May 29, 2017 report](#), Theodore Postol, professor of science, technology and national security policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, challenged the Syria-government-did-it conclusions of The New York Times, Human Rights Watch and the Establishment's favorite Internet site, Bellingcat. .

Postol's analysis focused on a New York Times [video report](#), entitled "How Syria And Russia Spun A Chemical Strike," which followed Bellingcat research that was derived from social media. Postol concluded that "**NONE** of the forensic evidence in the *New York Times* video and a follow-on *Times* news article supports the conclusions reported by the *New York Times*." [Emphasis in original.]

The basic weakness of the NYT/Bellingcat analysis was a reliance on social media from the Al Qaeda-controlled Khan Sheikhoun and thus a dependence on “evidence” from the jihadists and their “civil defense” collaborators, known as the White Helmets.

Sophisticated Propaganda

The jihadists and their media teams have become very sophisticated in the production of propaganda videos that are distributed through social media and credulously picked up by major Western news outlets. (A Netflix infomercial for the White Helmets even won an Academy Award earlier this year.)

Postol zeroed in on the Times report’s use of a video taken by anti-government photographer Mohamad Salom Alabd, purporting to show three conventional bombs striking Khan Sheikhoun early in the morning of April 4.

The Times report extrapolated from that video where the bombs would have struck and then accepted that a fourth bomb – not seen in the video – delivered a sarin canister that struck a road and released sarin gas that blew westward into a heavily populated area supposedly killing dozens.

But the Times video analysis – uploaded on April 26 – contained serious forensic problems, Postol said, including showing the wind carrying the smoke from the three bombs in an easterly direction whereas the weather reports from that day – and the presumed direction of the sarin gas – had the wind going to the west.

Indeed, if the wind were blowing toward the east – and if the alleged location of the sarin release was correct – the wind would have carried the sarin away from the nearby populated area and likely would have caused few if any casualties, Postol wrote.

Postol also pointed out that the Times’ location of the three bombing strikes didn’t match up with the supposed damage that the Times claimed to have detected from satellite photos of where the bombs purportedly struck. Rather than buildings being leveled by powerful bombs, the photos showed little or no apparent damage.

The Times also relied on before-and-after satellite photos that had a gap of 44 days, from Feb. 21, 2017, to April 6, 2017, so whatever damage might have occurred couldn’t be tied to whatever might have happened on April 4.

Nor could the hole in the road where the crushed “sarin” canister was found be attributed to an April 4 bombing raid. Al Qaeda jihadists could have excavated the hole the night before as part of a staged provocation. Other images of activists climbing into the supposedly sarin-saturated hole with minimal

protective gear should have raised other doubts, Postol noted in earlier reports.

Critics of the White Helmets have identified the photographer of the airstrike, Mohamad Salom Alabd, as a jihadist who appears to have claimed responsibility for killing a Syrian military officer. But the Times described him in a companion article to the video report only as “a journalist or activist who lived in the town.”

Another Debunking

In 2013, the work of Postol and his late partner, Richard M. Lloyd, an analyst at the military contractor Tesla Laboratories, debunked claims from the same trio – Bellingcat, the Times and Human Rights Watch – blaming the Syrian government for the sarin-gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

Postol and Lloyd showed that the rocket carrying the sarin had only a fraction of the range that the trio had assumed in tracing its path back to a government base.

Since the much shorter range placed the likely launch point inside rebel-controlled territory, the incident appeared to have been another false-flag provocation, one that almost led President Obama to launch a major retaliatory strike against the Syrian military.

Although the Times grudgingly acknowledged the scientific problems with its analysis, it continued to blame the 2013 incident on the Syrian government. Similarly, Official Washington’s “groupthink” still holds that the Syrian government launched that sarin attack and that Obama chickened out on enforcing his “red line” against chemical weapons use.

Obama’s announcement of that “red line,” in effect, created a powerful incentive for Al Qaeda and other jihadists to stage chemical attacks assuming that the atrocities would be blamed on the government and thus draw in the U.S. military on the jihadist side.

Yet, the 2013 “groupthink” of Syrian government guilt survives. After the April 4, 2017 incident, President Trump took some pleasure in mocking Obama’s weakness in contrast to his supposed toughness in quickly launching a “retaliatory” strike on April 6 (Washington time, although April 7 in Syria).

A Dubious Report

Trump’s attack came even before the White House released a supportive – though unconvincing – intelligence report on April 11. Regarding that report, Postol

wrote, "The White House produced a false intelligence report on April 11, 2017 in order to justify an attack on the Syrian airbase at Sheyrat, Syria on April 7, 2017. That attack risked an unintended collision with Russia and a possible breakdown in cooperation between Russia and United States in the war to defeat the Islamic State. The collision also had some potential to escalate into a military conflict with Russia of greater extent and consequence.

"The *New York Times* and other mainstream media immediately and without proper review of the evidence adopted the false narrative produced by the White House even though that narrative was totally unjustified based on the forensic evidence. The *New York Times* used an organization, *Bellingcat*, for its source of analysis even though *Bellingcat* has a long history of making false claims based on distorted assertions about forensic evidence that either does not exist, or is absolutely without any evidence of valid sources."

Postol continued, "This history of *New York Times* publishing of inaccurate information and then sticking by it when solid science-based forensic evidence disproves the original narrative cannot be explained in terms of simple error. The facts overwhelmingly point to a *New York Times* management that is unconcerned about the accuracy of its reporting.

"The problems exposed in this particular review of a *New York Times* analysis of critically important events related to the US national security is not unique to this particular story. This author could easily point to other serious errors in *New York Times* reporting on important technical issues associated with our national security.

"In these cases, like in this case, the *New York Times* management has not only allowed the reporting of false information without reviewing the facts for accuracy, but it has repeatedly continued to report the same wrong information in follow-on articles. It may be inappropriate to call this 'fake news,' but this loaded term comes perilously close to actually describing what is happening."

Referring to some of the photographed scenes in Khan Sheikhoun, including a dead goat that appeared to have been dragged into location near the "sarin crater," Postol called the operation "a rather amateurish attempt to create a false narrative."

Now, another U.N. agency has joined that narrative, despite a key contradiction from fellow U.N. investigators.

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](#)).

How 'Regime Change' Wars Led to Korea Crisis

Exclusive: The U.S.-led aggressions against Iraq and Libya are two war crimes that keep on costing, with their grim examples of what happens to leaders who get rid of WMDs driving the scary showdown with North Korea, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It is a popular meme in the U.S. media to say that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is "crazy" as he undertakes to develop a nuclear bomb and a missile capacity to deliver it, but he is actually working from a cold logic dictated by the U.S. government's aggressive wars and lack of integrity.

Indeed, the current North Korea crisis, which could end up killing millions of people, can be viewed as a follow-on disaster to President George W. Bush's Iraq War and President Barack Obama's Libyan intervention. Those wars came after the leaders of Iraq and Libya had dismantled their dangerous weapons programs, leaving their countries virtually powerless when the U.S. government chose to invade.

In both cases, the U.S. government also exploited its power over global information to spread lies about the targeted regimes as justification for the invasions – and the world community failed to do anything to block the U.S. aggressions.

And, on a grim personal note, the two leaders, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, were then brutally murdered, Hussein by hanging and Gaddafi by a mob that first sodomized him with a knife.

So, the neoconservatives who promoted the Iraq invasion supposedly to protect the world from Iraq's alleged WMDs – and the liberal interventionists who pushed the Libya invasion based on false humanitarian claims – may now share in the horrific possibility that millions of people in North Korea, South Korea, Japan and maybe elsewhere could die from real WMDs launched by North Korea and/or by

the United States.

Washington foreign policy “experts” who fault President Trump’s erratic and bellicose approach toward this crisis may want to look in the mirror and consider how they contributed to the mess by ignoring the predictable consequences from the Iraq and Libya invasions.

Yes, I know, at the time it was so exciting to celebrate the Bush Doctrine of preemptive wars even over a “one percent” suspicion that a “rogue state” like Iraq might share WMDs with terrorists – or the Clinton Doctrine hailed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s acolytes enamored by her application of “smart power” to achieve “regime change” in Libya.

However, as we now know, both wars were built upon lies. Iraq did not possess WMD stockpiles as the Bush administration claimed, and Libya was not engaged in mass murder of civilians in rebellious areas in the eastern part of the country as the Obama administration claimed.

Post-invasion investigations knocked down Bush’s WMD myth in Iraq, and a British parliamentary inquiry concluded that Western governments misrepresented the situation in eastern Libya where Gaddafi forces were targeting armed rebels but not indiscriminately killing civilians.

But those belated fact-finding missions were no comfort to either Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi, nor to their countries, which have seen mass slaughters resulting from the U.S.-sponsored invasions and today amount to failed states.

There also has been virtually no accountability for the war crimes committed by the Bush and Obama administrations. Bush and Obama both ended up serving two terms as President. None of Bush’s senior advisers were punished – and Hillary Clinton received the 2016 Democratic Party’s nomination for President.

As for the U.S. mainstream media, which behaved as boosters for both invasions, pretty much all of the journalistic war advocates have continued on with their glorious careers. To excuse their unprofessional behavior, some even have pushed revisionist lies, such as the popular but false claim that Saddam Hussein was to blame because he pretended that he did have WMDs – when the truth is that his government submitted a detailed 12,000-page report to the United Nations in December 2002 describing how the WMDs had been destroyed (though that accurate account was widely mocked and ultimately ignored).

Pervasive Dishonesty

The dishonesty that now pervades the U.S. government and the U.S. mainstream media represents another contributing factor to the North Korean crisis. What

sensible person anywhere on the planet would trust U.S. assurances? Who would believe what the U.S. government says, except, of course, the U.S. mainstream media?

Remember also that North Korea's nuclear program had largely been mothballed before George W. Bush delivered his "axis of evil" speech in January 2002, which linked Iran and Iraq – then bitter enemies – with North Korea. After that, North Korea withdrew from earlier agreements on limiting its nuclear development and began serious work on a bomb.

Yet, while North Korea moved toward a form of mutual assured destruction, Iraq and Libya chose a different path.

In Iraq, to head off a threatened U.S.-led invasion, Hussein's government sought to convince the international community that it had lived up to its commitments regarding the destruction of its WMD arsenal and programs. Besides the detailed declaration, Iraq gave U.N. weapons inspectors wide latitude to search on the ground.

But Bush cut short the inspection efforts in March 2003 and launched his "shock and awe" invasion, which led to the collapse of Hussein's regime and the dictator's eventual capture and hanging.

Gaddafi's Gestures

In Libya, Gaddafi also sought to cooperate with international demands regarding WMDs. In late 2003, he announced that his country would eliminate its unconventional weapons programs, including a nascent nuclear project.

Gaddafi also sought to get Libya out from under economic sanctions by taking responsibility for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103 over Scotland, although he and his government continued to deny carrying out the terror attack that killed 270 people.

But these efforts to normalize Libya's relations with the West failed to protect him or his country. In 2011 when Islamic militants staged an uprising around Benghazi, Gaddafi moved to crush it, and Secretary of State Clinton eagerly joined with some European countries in seeking military intervention to destroy Gaddafi's regime.

The United Nations Security Council approved a plan for the humanitarian protection of civilians in and around Benghazi, but the Obama administration and its European allies exploited that opening to mount a full-scale "regime change" war.

Prominent news personalities, such as MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell, cheered on the war with the claim that Gaddafi had American "blood on his hands" over the Pan Am 103 case because he had accepted responsibility. The fact that his government continued to deny actual guilt – and the international conviction of Libyan Abdelbaset al-Megrahi was a judicial travesty – was ignored. Almost no one in the West dared question the longtime groupthink of Libyan guilt.

By October 2011, Gaddafi had fled Tripoli and was captured by rebels in Sirte. He was tortured, sodomized with a knife and then executed. Clinton, whose aides felt she should claim credit for Gaddafi's overthrow as part of a Clinton Doctrine, celebrated his murder with a laugh and a quip, "We came; we saw; he died."

But Gaddafi's warnings about Islamist terrorists in Benghazi came back to haunt Clinton when on Sept. 11, 2012, militants attacked the U.S. consulate and CIA station there, killing Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

The obsessive Republican investigation into the Benghazi attack failed to demonstrate many of the lurid claims about Clinton's negligence, but it did surface the fact that she had used a private server for her official State Department emails, which, in turn, led to an FBI investigation which severely damaged her 2016 presidential run.

Lessons Learned

Meanwhile, back in North Korea, the young dictator Kim Jong Un was taking all this history in. According to numerous sources, he concluded that his and North Korea's only safeguard would be a viable nuclear deterrent to stave off another U.S.-sponsored "regime change" war – with him meeting a similar fate as was dealt to Hussein and Gaddafi.

Since then, Kim and his advisers have made clear that the surrender of North Korea's small nuclear arsenal is off the table. They make the understandable point that the United States has shown bad faith in other cases in which leaders have given up their WMDs in compliance with international demands and then saw their countries invaded and faced grisly executions themselves.

Now, the world faces a predicament in which an inexperienced and intemperate President Trump confronts a crisis that his two predecessors helped to create and make worse. Trump has threatened "fire and fury" like the world has never seen, suggesting a nuclear strike on North Korea, which, in turn, has vowed to retaliate.

Millions of people on the Korean peninsula and Japan – and possibly elsewhere – could die in such a conflagration. The world's economy could be severely shaken,

given Japan's and South Korea's industrial might and the size of their consumer markets.

If such a horror does come to pass, the U.S. government and the U.S. mainstream media will surely revert to their standard explanation that Kim was simply "crazy" and brought this destruction on himself. Trump's liberal critics also might attack Trump for bungling the diplomacy.

But the truth is that many of Washington's elite policymakers – both on the Republican and Democratic sides – will share in the blame. And so too should the U.S. mainstream media.

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](#)).
