

Trump's Foreign Policy Incoherence

Exclusive: Powerful forces are arrayed against any significant changes that President Trump may try to make in foreign policy, a dilemma made worse by his own ineptness and staffing troubles, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

President Trump's emerging foreign policy is one of contradictions and chaos, caught up in a combination of old establishment orthodoxies and some fresh recognition of reality but without any strong strategic thinker capable of separating one from the other and leading the administration in a thoughtful direction.

The examples of new thinking include abandoning President Obama's fitful – and bloody – campaign to force “regime change” in Syria; accepting a more realistic solution to the political mess in Libya; and trying to cooperate with Russia on combating terrorism, such as the fight against Islamic State and Al Qaeda, and reducing international tensions, such as the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

But Team Trump also is hobbled by its inability to break free from many of the groupthinks that have dominated Official Washington for the past quarter century or so as the foreign policy establishment fell under the domination of the neoconservatives and their junior partners, the liberal interventionists, virtually banishing the formerly influential “realists” as well as the few peace advocates.

This enduring neocon/liberal-hawk strength – reflected in what all the “important people” know to be true – has left senior Trump officials still pandering to the Saudis and the Israelis; repeating the neocon mantra that “Iran is the principal source of terrorism” (though that is clearly not true given the support for Al Qaeda and other Sunni terror groups coming from U.S. “allies” such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar); and falling into line with NATO's hype of Russia as the new global villain.

Trapped in Old Thinking

What is increasingly clear is that Trump's inner circle lacks a comprehensive understanding about how these various foreign-policy forces fit together. Beyond Trump's transactional approach in demanding that “allies” – from Japan to Saudi Arabia to European nations in NATO – pay more for their costly U.S. security umbrella – Trump and his advisers lack a consistent foreign policy message.

Perhaps the most supple thinker is Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who started

out with a traditional fondness toward Israel and Saudi Arabia but now seems to be at the forefront of the administration's pragmatists, looking at novel ways of resolving the crises in Iraq, Syria and Libya, even if that means dealing with the Iranians and the Russians. Kushner, however, lacks knowledge and experience in foreign affairs and is hamstrung by a lack of support staff as his portfolio of responsibilities keeps expanding.

Other senior foreign policy officials – the likes of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defense Secretary James Mattis and United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley – fit more into the traditionalist mold, touting the unquestioned value of the alliances with Israel, Saudi Arabia, NATO and the European Union – although even these more conventional voices have acquiesced on the recognition of reality in Syria, that Bashar al-Assad's government isn't likely to be overthrown soon and that the fight against Islamic State takes precedence.

Yet, regarding a more thorough overhaul of U.S. foreign policy – getting tough with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States for their clandestine support for Sunni militants, demanding that Israel get serious in working out a peace agreement with the Palestinians, and forging a détente with Russia – the Tillerson-Mattis-Haley triangle appears resistant to going outside the foreign policy frame that the neocons have built.

Haley, with her own political ambitions, appears to relish her role as a favorite of Israel and the neocons, getting a particularly warm welcome when she addressed the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) last week and vowed to shield Israel from U.N. criticism.

The Neocon Rise

Over the past 35 years, the neocons have managed to amass extraordinary power in Washington because – unlike most of their adversaries – they possess a purposeful vision of what they want to accomplish, principally protecting Israel's interests in the Middle East and lavishing money on the Military Industrial Complex. They also push a Western neoliberal economic model on the world that breaks down traditional social values and enriches a global financial elite.

This combination of goals ensures a steady flow of many millions of dollars into the neocons' coffers via think tanks, non-governmental organizations, consultancies and business interests. But the neocons have proven their worth. Generally speaking, they are bright, articulate and politically savvy.

The neocons made their first big move into the centers of power during the Reagan administration, filling a void for skilled functionaries. After getting

credentialed in the 1980s, the neocons expanded their reach into the major media and big-time think tanks in the 1990s during the Clinton administration and fully claimed the levers of power in the 2000s under George W. Bush.

By the Obama administration, the neocons had so ensconced themselves in the centers of Washington power that they continued to exert great influence even though President Obama was never exactly one of them, coming more from the “realist” camp although he surrounded himself with liberal interventionists.

The world views of these liberal hawks matched closely with the neocons’, differing mostly in the rationalizations used for sponsoring “regime changes.” The neocons typically cited “terrorism” and “democracy-promotion” while the liberal interventionists would rally around “humanitarian concerns.” But they usually ended up in the same place, such as supporting the Iraq invasion in 2003 and the proxy war in Syria from 2011-2016.

Lacking Control

Throughout his presidency, Obama never took firm control of his foreign policy. At the start, he enlisted a “team of rivals” – seasoned players who ran circles around him bureaucratically, such as Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Gen. David Petraeus – and even in his second term, Obama let liberal hawks and neocons, such as Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, respectively, box him in.

Obama would often resist the most extreme schemes that these hawks would hatch, but he rarely challenged them directly, behaving more like a foot-dragger-in-chief than a forceful President.

Obama also let the neocons and the liberal interventionists control the narratives, turning adversaries into “demons” and allies into “innocents.” Whether it was the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin attack outside Damascus (blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad) or the July 17, 2014 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine (blamed on Russian President Vladimir Putin), Obama didn’t let the dubious evidentiary cases interfere with the desired propaganda value of the incidents.

So, when Obama finally left office, he left behind not only a nettlesome batch of international crises – Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Ukraine, South Sudan and a New Cold War with Russia – but also a series of exaggerated or false narratives that made resolving these trouble spots doubly difficult.

Trump’s Troubles

Under the best of circumstances, the Trump administration would have had a nearly impossible task unwinding the deceptive story lines and reaching out to foreign leaders who could actually help resolve these crises. But Donald Trump complicated the task with his own bizarre behavior, squandering his first days in office with silly complaints about whose Inauguration crowds were bigger and his absurd argument that he had really won the popular vote.

But the real challenge was how indoctrinated nearly all the “important people” in Washington had become after a quarter century or so of hearing almost exclusively the neocon point-of-view, which was built around the Israeli-Saudi viewpoint on the Middle East and on the need to demonize anyone who got in their way.

The cornerstone of Israel’s regional strategy derives from the fact that Lebanon’s Hezbollah militia bloodied the proud Israeli Defense Force when it was occupying southern Lebanon, forcing Israel to withdraw back to its borders and earning the Shiite militia the label of a “terrorist” organization. And, since Shiite-ruled Iran was helping Hezbollah, Iran soon became the chief sponsor of terrorism in Israeli eyes.

Because Israel insisted on that position, the U.S. government and the mainstream media fell in line. It didn’t matter that Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Sunni regimes were financing and arming Al Qaeda and other terror groups that were attacking the West. Between Israel’s political clout in the United States and the Saudi financial power, Official Washington parroted what it was told. Even as Al Qaeda and later the Islamic State became the major terror groups attacking the West, all the “important people” in media and government still recited the mantra: “Iran is the principal sponsor of terrorism.”

Israel/Saudi Alliance

Israel’s obsession with Hezbollah and Saudi Arabia’s sectarian hatred of the Shiites led to other strategic decisions in the region. Since Syria was allied with Iran and Hezbollah – and was considered the centerpiece of the so-called “Shiite crescent” stretching from Tehran through Damascus to Beirut – “regime change” in Syria would deal a powerful blow to the regional enemies of both Israel and Saudi Arabia.

So, “regime change” in Syria became an important priority shared by the American neocons and – because Bashar al-Assad could be painted as a ruthless dictator – by the liberal interventionists as well. Half-heartedly, Obama went along with the call that “Assad must go,” but Obama still resisted pressure from Secretary of State Clinton and Ambassador Power to commit the U.S. military too deeply to what was becoming a messy sectarian war.

Despite this hesitancy, Obama joined with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Israel and others in arming and/or supporting various rebel factions – some deemed “moderate” – that coalesced under Sunni extremists associated with Al Qaeda (Nusra Front), Nusra’s ally Ahrar al-Sham, and Al Qaeda’s spin-off (Islamic State).

Still, Assad and his government proved more resistant to “regime change” than had been expected. But the neocon/liberal-hawk hopes were raised in August 2013 when a mysterious sarin attack outside Damascus was blamed on Assad although the evidence seemed to point to a provocation by Al Qaeda-linked terrorists. Nevertheless, the mainstream U.S. media, key “human rights” groups, and much of the U.S. government pinned the blame on Assad amid expectations of a major U.S. bombing campaign to devastate his military.

But Western intelligence analysts shared with Obama their doubts about who was responsible and the President called off the bombing at the last minute to the fury of many in Official Washington who chastised Obama for not enforcing his “red line” against chemical weapons use.

The Putin Problem

Then, to make matters worse for the “regime change” advocates, Russian President Putin intervened with a face-saving plan in which Assad surrendered his chemical weapons while still denying responsibility for the attack. With that move, Putin – who was also assisting Obama on negotiations to constrain Iran’s nuclear program and thus heading off another neocon-desired “regime change” mission – jumped to the top of international targets.

The neocons recognized the need to punish Putin and drive a wedge between Putin and Obama before they might turn their joint attention to something as sensitive as an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. Ukraine became the convenient wedge.

By late September 2013, neocon Carl Gershman, president of the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy, had identified Ukraine as the “biggest prize” as well as an important step toward eventually removing Putin from power in Russia. Between Gershman’s NED lavishing money on activists and Assistant Secretary Nuland’s machinations supporting violent protests in Kiev, the stage was set for Ukraine’s “regime change,” ousting elected President Viktor Yanukovich and installing a fiercely anti-Russian regime.

After Yanukovich’s ouster – with neo-Nazi and ultranationalist street fighters leading the charge on Feb. 22, 2014 – Crimea, an ethnic Russian stronghold where Russia’s Black Sea naval fleet was based, reacted to the coup in Kiev by voting to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia. Putin committed some Russian troops

already stationed on the peninsula to protect Crimea's decision, a move that Western propaganda portrayed as a "Russian invasion."

Across Europe and the U.S., an anti-Russian hysteria took hold that entrenched the neocons/liberal hawks in even greater control of Western thinking. At this point, Obama essentially capitulated and joined in the Russia-bashing.

His expected successor, Hillary Clinton, was even more committed to the neocon/liberal-hawk narrative. But Clinton's inept campaign and the last-minute intervention by FBI Director James Comey (briefly reopening an investigation into her use of a private email server while Secretary of State) led to the surprise result of Donald Trump's victory.

Oddballs and Outsiders

Trump, however, was unprepared for victory. He had around him a motley crew of oddballs and outsiders. Many detested and distrusted the Washington foreign policy establishment, which was dominated by neocons and liberal hawks, but Team Trump had no sophisticated understanding of the complex global and political challenges that faced the new and inexperienced President.

Many of his advisers also had absorbed the dominant groupthinks, especially those pushed by Israel, such as the falsehood that Iran was the principal source of terrorism.

At first, Trump and son-in-law Jared Kushner seemed to think that they might be able to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace by getting Saudi Arabia to strong-arm the Palestinians into accepting Israeli dictates for a solution, called the "outside-in" plan. So, initially, there was the usual cozying up to the Israeli and Saudi "allies."

Meanwhile, Official Washington was busy trying to repel the Trump presidency much as a body deploys white cells to kill an infection. The chief method of attack was the charge of "Russian meddling" in the election and suspicions that it was coordinated with the Trump campaign. To achieve the goal of Trump's ouster, the mainstream media and the political elite adopted a revisionist history of the campaign, ignoring Clinton's numerous missteps and the key role played by Comey when he revived the FBI investigation into Clinton's email server just days before the Nov. 8 election.

Instead, the new groupthink was that some leaked emails earlier in the campaign revealing how the Democratic National Committee had tilted the playing field against Sen. Bernie Sanders and how Clinton's campaign had been hiding details of her speeches to Wall Street had somehow decided the election – and that Russia had hacked into those email accounts and passed the information onto

WikiLeaks.

WikiLeaks denied getting the emails from Russia but that claim was brushed aside, along with memories of the earlier analysis of what had caused Clinton's surprising defeat: her own incompetent campaign and Comey's intervention.

The poisonous climate created by Russia-gate further constrained Trump's possible outreach to Moscow for cooperation on resolving a number of global hotspots.

Although the Russia-gate accusers lacked evidence of collaboration between Team Trump and the Kremlin, the endless repetition of the charges had a powerful effect. In effect, the neocons and the liberal hawks exploited the "scandal" to protect their core interests. It now will be difficult for Trump to resolve Ukraine or cooperate with Russia on Syria and Libya or to team up with Russia to finally compel Israel to accept a reasonable agreement with the Palestinians.

Saudi Arabia also came up a winner with the Trump administration extending its support for the Saudi war on impoverished Yemen and the lifting of human rights constraints on arming Bahrain. In both cases, Sunni rulers are repressing Shiite-related populations and the violence is rationalized by the old mantra: "Iran is the principal source of terrorism."

There's also the hope among many in Official Washington and inside the mainstream media that Russia-gate can be transformed into an impeachment proceeding to remove Trump and put neocon-friendly Vice President Mike Pence in charge. He, in turn, would likely turn control of U.S. foreign policy over to the likes of neocon Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham. The status quo ante would be restored.

That is why wielding the anti-Russia stick has been so tempting, offering a way to both bludgeon Trump and beat to death any nascent détente with Russia, which would give new hope for more "regime change" wars. For the neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks, that would be a win-win-win.

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](#)).

Contrasting Tales of Two Besieged Cities

The U.S.-backed offensive to retake Iraq's Mosul from the Islamic State is inflicting hardships on civilians, but the Western media treats this humanitarian crisis differently than the recent one in Aleppo, Syria, notes Steven Chovanec.

By Steven Chovanec

During the Syrian army's offensive to retake the eastern part of Aleppo from the insurgent opposition, the Western media portrayed the assault as if Russia and Syria were carrying out a campaign primarily aimed at killing and harming civilians. The humanitarian crisis dominated headlines while key facts, such as Al Qaeda's domination of the opposition forces and the way in which the militants had brutally conquered the city's civilians, were marginalized or not reported at all.

A similar military offensive being carried out by the U.S. and its allies in the Iraqi city of Mosul reveals the hypocritical nature of Western news outlets, which portray their own countries' actions as targeting only Islamic State terrorists and scrupulously avoiding harm to civilians.

There is no doubt that the siege in eastern Aleppo resulted in a humanitarian crisis for the civilian population trapped within the warzone. As the Washington Institute's Fabrice Balanche described: "What the United Nations is describing [about] the humanitarian situation is correct: hospitals destroyed, people living in shelters, women and children trapped in the rubble, and so on."

Yet in reality the destruction waged upon Aleppo was hardly different from what is now being done in Mosul as the U.S.-led coalition carries out a similar campaign of counterinsurgency and siege warfare.

Currently the Iraqi army, backed by U.S. airstrikes, is conducting a violent and brutal assault on the western parts of Mosul city in order to drive out the Islamic State. A whole population of civilians is trapped within an ongoing warzone and cut off from food supplies and basic necessities as the military offensive hits heavily populated areas killing civilians while destroying important infrastructure in the process, including hospitals.

Yet, while Western officials and media pundits vehemently condemned the Syrian assault on Aleppo, they are largely silent – or congratulatory and supportive – as the U.S. and its partners lay waste to the more heavily populated city of Mosul.

A senior Iraqi politician told veteran journalist Patrick Cockburn that “the Iraqi armed forces will eventually capture west Mosul ... but the city itself will be destroyed in the fighting,” pointing to the massive destruction already inflicted upon eastern Mosul which was recently captured by the U.S.-backed forces.

So, even though the current U.S.-led siege has resulted in a larger humanitarian crisis in purely quantitative terms, the outcry over it is largely nonexistent. The trauma is reported on, but selectively, while the full extent of the civilian catastrophe is hidden from view.

For instance, The New York Times dedicated only two major stories to the offensive this month, yet flooded its pages with heartrending stories during the siege of Aleppo. In addition, coalition actions in Mosul that result in civilian casualties, like the destruction of hospital complexes, are depicted as justified or unintentional, compared to the portrayal of Syrian and Russian strikes in east Aleppo as intentional war crimes when similar complexes were hit or civilians killed.

Similarly, justifications for civilian suffering – scoffed at and ridiculed when made by Russia and Syria – are used without irony or shame to defend U.S. actions. Whereas the West’s media treated civilians in Aleppo as the targeted victims of the Russian-Syrian attacks, civilians in Mosul are described as “human shield” victims of Islamic State terrorists who also hoard food supplies and prevent civilians from escaping.

This is not to say that these accusations against the Islamic State are false, but similar Russian-Syrian claims against the Al Qaeda-dominated rebels in east Aleppo were brushed aside as lies and propaganda.

A Dire Situation

Without doubt, the conditions on the ground in ISIS-held western Mosul are dire. Aid groups warn that the situation has been deteriorating rapidly following a U.S.-backed coalition airstrike that destroyed the last remaining bridge leading out of the city, trapping the population and preventing supplies from entering. The coalition justified the attack as necessary to cut off ISIS from supply lines, but that also had drastic humanitarian implications.

“Humanitarian conditions in the west of the city are deteriorating after supply routes were cut off in November when the east of the city was recaptured,” Oxfam reported. “An estimated 750,000 people are trapped in western Mosul without any safe means of escape from the latest military offensive.”

The result is that “up to 750,000 people in western Mosul city are estimated to

remain largely inaccessible to humanitarians," the U.N. warned, while "serious concerns remain for the protection of civilians in the west of the city, where food, water, medicine and fuel are running low."

Patrick Cockburn, one of the few honest Western journalists reporting on the region, noted that "already shelling and airstrikes are causing heavy casualties among families sheltering in cellars or beneath the stairs in their houses."

Writing for Middle East Eye, Nafeez Ahmed quoted Ross Caputi, a Marine veteran of the Iraq War, describing "horror stories about civilian casualties coming out of Mosul. An aid worker friend of mine was trying to recruit volunteer doctors to work in a surgical unit in Erbil, where many of the more serious cases were being redirected. She told me that the situation is worse than it's being portrayed in the media."

Even more startling is evidence that the first week of March was characterized by a severe rise in civilian deaths as a result of U.S.-coalition actions, at the same time when major news outlets had drastically reduced coverage on the topic.

"The US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State may have killed hundreds of civilians" in the first week of March alone, according to open source data compiled by Airwars, which estimates that "between 250 and 370 civilians have been killed" since March 1. Nafeez Ahmed explained this is "exponentially higher than the US count of just 21 civilian deaths from bombing since November 2016."

Yet, instead of highlighting the humanitarian crisis and placing blame on U.S. and Iraqi forces for the misery, the Western media has portrayed the operation as assiduously avoiding harm to civilians. For example, the coalition strike severing the bridge was described as a victory against ISIS, while the humanitarian implications were downplayed or ignored.

One report described the destruction of the bridge as "a historic setback for the Islamic State as the terror group loses its grip on its Iraqi hub of Mosul," with no mention of the harm to civilians. Another stated "American-led airstrikes damaged all five bridges last year in a bid to isolate the militants in Mosul."

At least one of the ruined bridges was captured recently by Iraqi government forces. But U.S. Air Force Col. (and spokesman for the coalition) John Dorrian made it clear that bridges would be fully repaired "only after defeating ISIS," choosing to intensify the humanitarian crisis by continuing a debilitating siege on the almost one million residents who are trapped.

Perhaps the destruction of bridges and siege warfare are warranted to isolate

and defeat the Islamic State, yet when main news outlets deliberately hide the humanitarian implications of such actions and portray them merely as military victories without connection to the human suffering, they are engaged in manipulation of public perceptions which mobilizes support for state actions rather than objectively informing public opinion of the reality of the situation.

Stephen Gowanz summed up the nature of this media bias: “the United States and its allies have been practicing siege warfare in the Levant and beyond for years, and continue to do so. It’s just that US-led siege warfare has been concealed behind anodyne, even heroic, labels, while the siege warfare of countries Washington is hostile to, is abominated by Western state officials crying crocodile tears.”

Manufactured Consent

The reason for this hypocrisy is that the primary function of mass media in “free societies” is to serve as a system of propaganda. Under this “propaganda model” view of the media, one would expect Western coverage of the Mosul crisis to take for granted that the U.S. is carrying out its efforts in the service of benevolent ideals, with the goal of defending civilians from aggression and terrorism while making painstaking efforts to limit casualties.

On the other hand, in the Aleppo case, one would expect Western media to act in the opposite fashion, taking for granted that civilian lives are treated with contempt and that motives are inherently suspicious or malevolent, while context and rational understanding of actions are marginalized or disregarded altogether.

When comparing coverage of these two stories, we see that this is exactly what you find, namely indignation directed at “enemy” military operations over civilian suffering and sympathy for U.S. and allied military assaults with the civilian casualties downplayed or rationalized.

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky explain in their extensive study on media propaganda, *Manufacturing Consent*, that “while this differential treatment occurs on a large scale, the media, intellectuals, and public are able to remain unconscious of the fact and maintain a high moral and self-righteous tone. This is evidence of an extremely effective propaganda system.”

The question is *how* does this occur when the news media is not openly controlled by a state bureaucracy as in a totalitarian system but nonetheless achieves similar outcomes. An institutional analysis reveals that there exist various factors inherent within the structure of the media which essentially serve as a

filter which sifts out inconvenient facts while propagating other information that is in accordance with the interests of the institution.

The basic structure of Western media is that the outlets themselves are powerful corporations with a profit-making goal. The product that they are selling are audiences, mostly wealthier and privileged people, as consumers of advertisements paid for by other major corporations. Given this reality, it's not surprising that the news product reflects a worldview that is in alignment with corporate interests and prejudices, such as the military defense contractors and the military itself whose ads line the pages of major Western journals and consume significant ad time on TV.

It is in the interests of these pro-military entities for audiences to get a positive image of the U.S. military while creating an adverse image for foreign villains who can be collectively despised. It's also understood that American audiences want to feel good about what the U.S. military is doing abroad, rather than being challenged with unpleasant truths.

Herman and Chomsky explain that this phenomenon of slanted reporting "is normally not accomplished by crude intervention, but by the selection of right-thinking personnel and by the editors' and working journalists' internalization of priorities and definitions of news-worthiness that conform to the institutions policy."

The result is an extremely skewed media picture, which is determined by which side of the geopolitical struggle certain actions occur. In the cases of Mosul and Aleppo, the similarities of the tragedies that have devastated the two cities serve to further highlight the very dissimilar way in which the two stories have been reported.

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The Kagans Are Back; Wars to Follow

Exclusive: The neocon royalty Kagans are counting on Democrats and liberals to be the foot soldiers in the new neocon campaign to push Republicans and President Trump into more "regime change" wars, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Kagan family, America's neoconservative aristocracy, has reemerged having recovered from the letdown over not gaining its expected influence from the election of Hillary Clinton and from its loss of official power at the start of the Trump presidency.

Back pontificating on prominent op-ed pages, the Family Kagan now is pushing for an expanded U.S. military invasion of Syria and baiting Republicans for not joining more enthusiastically in the anti-Russian witch hunt over Moscow's alleged help in electing Donald Trump.

In a Washington Post op-ed on March 7, Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century and a key architect of the Iraq War, jabbed at Republicans for serving as "Russia's accomplices after the fact" by not investigating more aggressively.

Then, Frederick Kagan, director of the Critical Threats Project at the neocon American Enterprise Institute, and his wife, Kimberly Kagan, president of her own think tank, Institute for the Study of War, touted the idea of a bigger U.S. invasion of Syria in a Wall Street Journal op-ed on March 15.

Yet, as much standing as the Kagans retain in Official Washington's world of think tanks and op-ed placements, they remain mostly outside the new Trump-era power centers looking in, although they seem to have detected a door being forced open.

Still, a year ago, their prospects looked much brighter. They could pick from a large field of neocon-oriented Republican presidential contenders or – like Robert Kagan – they could support the establishment Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, whose "liberal interventionism" matched closely with neoconservatism, differing only slightly in the rationalizations used for justifying wars and more wars.

There was also hope that a President Hillary Clinton would recognize how sympatico the liberal hawks and the neocons were by promoting Robert Kagan's neocon wife, Victoria Nuland, from Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs to Secretary of State.

Then, there would have been a powerful momentum for both increasing the U.S. military intervention in Syria and escalating the New Cold War with Russia, putting "regime change" back on the agenda for those two countries. So, early last year, the possibilities seemed endless for the Family Kagan to flex their muscles and make lots of money.

A Family Business

As I noted two years ago in an article entitled "A Family Business of Perpetual War": "Neoconservative pundit Robert Kagan and his wife, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, run a remarkable family business: she has sparked a hot war in Ukraine and helped launch Cold War II with Russia and he steps in to demand that Congress jack up military spending so America can meet these new security threats.

"This extraordinary husband-and-wife duo makes quite a one-two punch for the Military-Industrial Complex, an inside-outside team that creates the need for more military spending, applies political pressure to ensure higher appropriations, and watches as thankful weapons manufacturers lavish grants on like-minded hawkish Washington think tanks.

"Not only does the broader community of neoconservatives stand to benefit but so do other members of the Kagan clan, including Robert's brother Frederick at the American Enterprise Institute and his wife Kimberly, who runs her own shop called the Institute for the Study of War."

But things didn't quite turn out as the Kagans had drawn them up. The neocon Republicans stumbled through the GOP primaries losing out to Donald Trump and then – after Hillary Clinton muscled aside Sen. Bernie Sanders to claim the Democratic nomination – she fumbled away the general election to Trump.

After his surprising victory, Trump – for all his many shortcomings – recognized that the neocons were not his friends and mostly left them out in the cold. Nuland not only lost her politically appointed job as Assistant Secretary but resigned from the Foreign Service, too.

With Trump in the White House, Official Washington's neocon-dominated foreign policy establishment was down but far from out. The neocons were tossed a lifeline by Democrats and liberals who detested Trump so much that they were happy to pick up Nuland's fallen banner of the New Cold War with Russia. As part of a dubious scheme to drive Trump from office, Democrats and liberals hyped evidence-free allegations that Russia had colluded with Trump's team to rig the U.S. election.

New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman spoke for many of this group when he compared Russia's alleged "meddling" to Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor and Al Qaeda's 9/11 terror attacks.

On MSNBC's "Morning Joe" show, Friedman demanded that the Russia hacking allegations be treated as a casus belli: "That was a 9/11 scale event. They attacked the core of our democracy. That was a Pearl Harbor scale event." Both

Pearl Harbor and 9/11 led to wars.

So, with many liberals blinded by their hatred of Trump, the path was open for neocons to reassert themselves.

Baiting Republicans

Robert Kagan took to the high-profile op-ed page of The Washington Post to bait key Republicans, such as Rep. Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee who was pictured above the Post article and its headline, "Running interference for Russia."

Kagan wrote: "It would have been impossible to imagine a year ago that the Republican Party's leaders would be effectively serving as enablers of Russian interference in this country's political system. Yet, astonishingly, that is the role the Republican Party is playing."

Kagan then reprised Official Washington's groupthink that accepted without skepticism the claims from President Obama's outgoing intelligence chiefs that Russia had "hacked" Democratic emails and released them via WikiLeaks to embarrass the Clinton campaign.

Though Obama's intelligence officials offered no verifiable evidence to support the claims – and WikiLeaks denied getting the two batches of emails from the Russians – the allegations were widely accepted across Official Washington as grounds for discrediting Trump and possibly seeking his removal from office.

Ignoring the political conflict of interest for Obama's appointees, Kagan judged that "given the significance of this particular finding [about Russian meddling], the evidence must be compelling" and justified "a serious, wide-ranging and open investigation."

But Kagan also must have recognized the potential for the neocons to claw their way back to power behind the smokescreen of a New Cold War with Russia.

He declared: "The most important question concerns Russia's ability to manipulate U.S. elections. That is not a political issue. It is a national security issue. If the Russian government did interfere in the United States' electoral processes last year, then it has the capacity to do so in every election going forward. This is a powerful and dangerous weapon, more than warships or tanks or bombers.

"Neither Russia nor any potential adversary has the power to damage the U.S. political system with weapons of war. But by creating doubts about the validity, integrity and reliability of U.S. elections, it can shake that system to its

foundations.”

A Different Reality

As alarmist as Kagan’s op-ed was, the reality was far different. Even if the Russians did hack the Democratic emails and somehow slipped the information to WikiLeaks – an unsubstantiated and disputed contention – those two rounds of email disclosures were not that significant to the election’s outcome.

Hillary Clinton blamed her surprise defeat on FBI Director James Comey briefly reopening the investigation into her use of a private email server while serving as Secretary of State.

Further, by all accounts, the WikiLeaks-released emails were real and revealed wrongdoing by leading Democrats, such as the Democratic National Committee’s tilting of the primaries against Sen. Bernie Sanders and in favor of Clinton. The emails of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta disclosed the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from voters, as well as some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

In other words, the WikiLeaks’ releases helped inform American voters about abuses to the U.S. democratic process. The emails were not “disinformation” or “fake news.” They were real news.

A similar disclosure occurred both before the election and this week when someone leaked details about Trump’s tax returns, which are protected by law. However, except for the Trump camp, almost no one thought that this illegal act of releasing a citizen’s tax returns was somehow a threat to American democracy.

The general feeling was that Americans have a right to know such details about someone seeking the White House. I agree, but doesn’t it equally follow that we had a right to know about the DNC abusing its power to grease the skids for Clinton’s nomination, about the contents of Clinton’s speeches to Wall Street bankers, and about foreign governments seeking pay-to-play influence by contributing to the Clinton Foundation?

Yet, because Obama’s political appointees in the U.S. intelligence community “assess” that Russia was the source of the WikiLeaks emails, the assault on U.S. democracy is a reason for World War III.

More Loose Talk

But Kagan was not satisfied with unsubstantiated accusations regarding Russia undermining U.S. democracy. He asserted as “fact” – although again without presenting evidence – that Russia is “interfering in the coming elections in

France and Germany, and it has already interfered in Italy's recent referendum and in numerous other elections across Europe. Russia is deploying this weapon against as many democracies as it can to sap public confidence in democratic institutions."

There's been a lot of handwringing in Official Washington and across the Mainstream Media about the "post-truth" era, but these supposed avatars for truth are as guilty as anyone, acting as if constantly repeating a fact-free claim is the same as proving it.

But it's clear what Kagan and other neocons have in mind, an escalation of hostilities with Russia and a substantial increase in spending on U.S. military hardware and on Western propaganda to "counter" what is deemed "Russian propaganda."

Kagan recognizes that he already has many key Democrats and liberals on his side. So he is taking aim at Republicans to force them to join in the full-throated Russia-bashing, writing:

"But it is the Republicans who are covering up. The party's current leader, the president, questions the intelligence community's findings, motives and integrity. Republican leaders in Congress have opposed the creation of any special investigating committee, either inside or outside Congress. They have insisted that inquiries be conducted by the two intelligence committees.

"Yet the Republican chairman of the committee in the House has indicated that he sees no great urgency to the investigation and has even questioned the seriousness and validity of the accusations. The Republican chairman of the committee in the Senate has approached the task grudgingly.

"The result is that the investigations seem destined to move slowly, produce little information and provide even less to the public. It is hard not to conclude that this is precisely the intent of the Republican Party's leadership, both in the White House and Congress. ...

"When Republicans stand in the way of thorough, open and immediate investigations, they become Russia's accomplices after the fact."

Lying with the Neocons

Many Democrats and liberals may find it encouraging that a leading neocon who helped pave the road to war in Iraq is now by their side in running down Republicans for not enthusiastically joining the latest Russian witch hunt. But they also might pause to ask themselves how they let their hatred of Trump get them into an alliance with the neocons.

On Wednesday in The Wall Street Journal, Robert Kagan's brother Frederick and his wife Kimberly dropped the other shoe, laying out the neocons' long-held dream of a full-scale U.S. invasion of Syria, a project that was put on hold in 2004 because of U.S. military reversals in Iraq.

But the neocons have long lusted for "regime change" in Syria and were not satisfied with Obama's arming of anti-government rebels and the limited infiltration of U.S. Special Forces into northern Syria to assist in the retaking of the Islamic State's "capital" of Raqqa.

In the Journal op-ed, Frederick and Kimberly Kagan call for opening a new military front in southeastern Syria:

"American military forces will be necessary. But the U.S. can recruit new Sunni Arab partners by fighting alongside them in their land. The goal in the beginning must be against ISIS because it controls the last areas in Syria where the U.S. can reasonably hope to find Sunni allies not yet under the influence of al Qaeda. But the aim after evicting ISIS must be to raise a Sunni Arab army that can ultimately defeat al Qaeda and help negotiate a settlement of the war.

"The U.S. will have to pressure the Assad regime, Iran and Russia to end the conflict on terms that the Sunni Arabs will accept. That will be easier to do with the independence and leverage of a secure base inside Syria. ... President Trump should break through the flawed logic and poor planning that he inherited from his predecessor. He can transform this struggle, but only by transforming America's approach to it."

A New Scheme on Syria

In other words, the neocons are back to their clever word games and their strategic maneuverings to entice the U.S. military into a "regime change" project in Syria.

The neocons thought they had almost pulled off that goal by pinning a mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, on the Syrian government and mousetrapping Obama into launching a major U.S. air assault on the Syrian military.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin stepped in to arrange for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to surrender all his chemical weapons even as Assad continued to deny any role in the sarin attack.

Putin's interference in thwarting the neocons' dream of a Syrian "regime change" war moved Putin to the top of their enemies' list. Soon key neocons, such as National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman, were taking aim at

Ukraine, which Gershman deemed “the biggest prize” and a steppingstone toward eventually ousting Putin in Moscow.

It fell to Assistant Secretary Victoria “Toria” Nuland to oversee the “regime change” in Ukraine. She was caught on an unsecured phone line in late January or early February 2014 discussing with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt how “to glue” or “to midwife” a change in Ukraine’s elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

Several weeks later, neo-Nazi and ultranationalist street fighters spearheaded a violent assault on government buildings forcing Yanukovich and other officials to flee for their lives, with the U.S. government quickly hailing the coup regime as “legitimate.”

But the Ukraine putsch led to the secession of Crimea and a bloody civil war in eastern Ukraine with ethnic Russians, events that the State Department and the mainstream Western media deemed “Russian aggression” or a “Russian invasion.”

So, by the last years of the Obama administration, the stage was set for the neocons and the Family Kagan to lead the next stage of the strategy of cornering Russia and instituting a “regime change” in Syria.

All that was needed was for Hillary Clinton to be elected president. But these best-laid plans surprisingly went astray. Despite his overall unfitness for the presidency, Trump defeated Clinton, a bitter disappointment for the neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks.

Yet, the so-called “#Resistance” to Trump’s presidency and President Obama’s unprecedented use of his intelligence agencies to paint Trump as a Russian “Manchurian candidate” gave new hope to the neocons and their agenda.

It has taken them a few months to reorganize and regroup but they now see hope in pressuring Trump so hard regarding Russia that he will have little choice but to buy into their belligerent schemes.

As often is the case, the Family Kagan has charted the course of action – batter Republicans into joining the all-out Russia-bashing and then persuade a softened Trump to launch a full-scale invasion of Syria. In this endeavor, the Kagans have Democrats and liberals as the foot soldiers.

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 Flawed UN Investigation on Syria

Exclusive: U.N. investigators increasingly make their conclusions fall in line with Western propaganda, especially on the war in Syria, as occurred in a distorted report about last year's attack on an aid convoy, explains Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

The March 1 report by the United Nations' "Independent International Commission of Inquiry" asserted that the bloody attack on a humanitarian aid convoy west of Aleppo City on Sept. 19, 2016, was an airstrike by Syrian government planes. But an analysis of the U.N. panel's report shows that it was based on an account of the attack from the pro-rebel Syrian "White Helmets" civil defense organization that was full of internal contradictions.

The U.N. account also was not supported by either the photographic evidence that the White Helmets provided or by satellite imagery that was available to the commission, according to independent experts. Further undermining the U.N. report's credibility, the White Helmets now acknowledge that rockets they photographed were not fired from Russian or Syrian planes but from the ground.

Like last December's summary of the U.N.'s Headquarters Board of Inquiry report on the same incident, the Commission's report described the attack as having begun with "barrel bombs" dropped by Syrian helicopters, followed by further bombing by fixed-wing planes and, finally, strafing by machine guns from the air.

The March 1 report did not identify any specific source for its narrative, citing only "[c]ommunications from governments and non-government organizations." But in fact the U.N. investigators accepted the version of events provided by the White Helmets chief in Aleppo province as well as specific evidence that the White Helmets had made public.

The White Helmets, which are heavily funded by Western governments and operate only in rebel-controlled areas, are famous for using social media to upload videos purporting to show injured children and other civilian victims of the war.

Last year, a well-organized campaign pushed the group's nomination for a Nobel Peace Prize and a Netflix film about the group won an Oscar last month. The United Nations and the mainstream Western news media have frequently relied on White Helmets accounts from war zones that are not accessible to outsiders. But

the White Helmets' officials have pursued an obvious political agenda in support of opposition forces in Al Qaeda-dominated zones in Aleppo and Idlib where they have operated.

On Sept. 19, immediately after the attack on the aid convoy, the chief of the White Helmets organization in the Aleppo governorate, Ammar al-Selmo, presented a dramatic narrative of a Russian-Syrian air attack, but it was marked by obvious internal contradictions.

At first, Selmo claimed in an interview that he had been more than a kilometer away from the warehouses where the attack occurred and had seen Syrian helicopters dropping "barrel bombs" on the site. But his eyewitness account would have been impossible because it was already dark by the time he said the attack began at about 7:15 p.m. He changed his story in a later interview, claiming that he had been right across the street at the moment of the attack and had heard the "barrel bombs" being dropped rather than seeing them.

Selmo insisted in a video filmed that night that the attack began with Syrian helicopters dropping eight "barrel bombs," which are described as large, crudely constructed bombs weighing from 250 kg to 500 kg or even more. Citing a box-shaped indentation in the rubble, Selmo said the video is showing "the box of the barrel bomb," but the indentation is far too small to be a crater from such a bomb.

Selmo continued the account, "Then the regime also target this place with cluster bombs two times, and also the aircraft of the Russians target this place with C-5 and with bullets," apparently referring to Soviet-era S-5 rockets. The White Helmets photographed two such rockets and sent it to media outlets, including the Washington Post, which published the picture in the Post story with credit to the White Helmets.

Story Contradictions

But Hussein Badawi, apparently the White Helmet official in charge of the Urum al Kubrah area, contradicted Selmo's story. In a separate interview, Badawi said the attack had begun not with "barrel bombs" but with "four consecutive rockets" that he said had been launched by government forces from their defense plant in Aleppo province – meaning that it was a ground-launched attack rather than an air attack.

In an email response to a query from me, Selmo retracted his own original claim about the S-5 rockets. "[B]efore aircraft's attack on the area," he wrote, "many land to land missiles attacked the place coming from the defense factories which [are] located in eastern Aleppo [east of] the city, regime controlled area.

[T]hen aircraft came and attacked the place.”

But such a rocket attack from that “regime controlled area” would not have been technically possible. The Syrian government defense plant is located in Safira, 25 kilometers southeast of Aleppo City and even farther from Urum al-Kubrah, whereas the S-5 rockets that the White Helmets photographed have a range of only three or four kilometers.

Moreover, the Russians and Syrian government forces were not the only warring parties to have S-5s in their arsenal. According to a study of the S-5 rocket by Armament Research Services consultancy, Syrian armed opposition forces had been using S-5 rockets as well. They had gotten them from the CIA’s covert program of moving weapons from Libyan government stockpiles to be distributed to Syrian rebels beginning in late 2011 or early 2012. Syrian rebels had used improvised launch systems to fire them, as the ARS study documented with a picture.

Significantly, too, the explicit claim by Selmo that Russian planes were involved in the attack, which was immediately echoed by the Pentagon, was summarily dismissed by the U.N. panel report, which stated flatly, without further explanation, that “no Russian strike aircraft were nearby during the attack.”

Misplaced Evidence

Yet, despite the multiple discrepancies in the White Helmets’ story, the U.N. investigators said they corroborated the account of the air attack “by a site assessment, including analysis of remnants of aerial bombs and rockets documented at the site, as well as satellite imagery showing impact consistent with the use of air-delivered munitions.”

The U.N. Commission’s report cited a photograph of the crumpled tailfin of a Russian OFAB-250 bomb found under some boxes in a warehouse as evidence that it had been used in the attack. The White Helmets took the photograph and circulated it to the news media, including to the Washington Post and to the Bellingcat website, which specializes in countering Russia’s claims about its operations in Syria.

But that bomb could not have exploded in that spot because it would have made a crater many times larger than the small indentation in the floor in the White Helmet photo – as shown in this video of a man standing in the crater of a similar bomb in Palmyra.

Something other than an OFAB-250 bomb – such as an S-5 rocket – had caused the fine shrapnel tears in the boxes shown in the photo, as a detail from the larger scene reveals. So the OFAB bomb tailfin must have been placed at the scene after

the attack.

Both U.N. imagery analysts and independent experts who examined the satellite images found that the impact craters could not have come from the “aerial bombs” cited by the Commission.

The analysis of the satellite images by United Nations specialists at UNITAR-UNOSAT made public by the U.N. Office of Humanitarian Coordination on March 1 further contradicts the White Helmet account, reflecting the absence of any evidence of either “barrel bombs” or OFAB-250 bombs dropped on the site.

The U.N. analysts identified four spots in the images on pages five and six of their report as “possible impact craters.” But a U.N. source familiar with their analysis of the images told me that it had ruled out the possibility that those impact points could have been caused by either “barrel bombs” or Russian OFAB-250 bombs.

The reason, the U.N. source said, was that such bombs would have left much larger craters than those found in the images. Those possible impact points could have been either from much smaller air-launched munitions or from ground-based artillery or mortar fire, but not from either of those weapons, according to the U.N. source.

Expert Challenges

A former U.S. intelligence official with long experience in analysis of aerial photos and Pierre Sprey, a former Pentagon analyst, both of whom reviewed the satellite images, agreed that the spots identified by UNOSAT could not have been from either “barrel bombs” or OFAB-250 bombs.

The former intelligence official, who demanded anonymity because he still deals with government officials, said the small impact points identified by the U.N. team reminded him of impacts from “a multiple rocket launcher or possibly a mortar.”

Sprey agreed that all of those impact points could have been from artillery or mortar fire but also noted that photographs of the trucks and other damaged vehicles show no evidence that they were hit by an airstrike. The photos show only extensive fire damage and, in the case of one car, holes of irregular size and shape, he said, suggesting flying debris rather than bomb shrapnel.

Sprey further pointed to photographic evidence indicating that an explosion that the U.N. Commission blamed on a Syrian airstrike came from within the building itself, not from an external blast. The building across the street from some of the trucks destroyed by an explosion (in Figure 9 of a series of photos on the

[Bellingcat website](#)) clearly shows that the front wall of the building was blown outward toward the road, whereas the rear wall and the roof were still intact.

The photograph (in Figure 10) taken from inside the remains of that same building shows the debris from the blast was blown all the way across the street to the damaged truck. Sprey said those pictures strongly suggest that an IED (improvised explosive device) had been set in the house to explode toward the trucks.

In embracing the Syrian-air-strike narrative – although it falls apart on closer examination – the U.N. “Commission of Inquiry” thus fell into line with the dominant Western political bias in favor of the armed opposition to the Syrian government, a prejudice that has been applied to the Syrian conflict by U.N. organs since the beginning of the war in 2011.

But never has the evidence so clearly contradicted that line as it has in this case – even though you will not learn that by reading or watching the West’s commercial news media.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*.

An Oscar for a Propaganda Flick

Hollywood activists prefer their human rights causes blessed by the U.S. government, which contributed to the dubious Oscar for “The White Helmets” propaganda flick, writes Patrick Hennigsen at 21st Century Wire.

By Patrick Hennigsen

In your average lifetime, everyone will get to see his or her share of war propaganda films. In America, it’s a kind of sacred tradition, where Hollywood does the job of revisionism, paving over an otherwise uncomfortable history with a new coat of stain. It’s necessary – not just to make us feel better about ourselves, but also to cover-up any inconvenient truths and high crimes of the

state.



To be honest, when I first heard about “The White Helmets” film being promoted by Netflix, I wasn’t surprised at all because ever since the Syria conflict began in 2011, the establishment media has gone out of its way to falsely promote it as a “civil war” and have used the NGO known as the White Helmets, which calls itself the “Syria Civil Defense,” as its primary media protagonist in furthering that narrative.

The fact that a documentary about *The White Helmets* received an Oscar simply confirms what a glorious bubble the entertainment industry resides in, and how easy it is these days for a documentary film to be used for the purposes of propaganda and made to reinforce a mainly U.S.-U.K. foreign policy project.

To Hollywood, it’s a feel-good documentary, designed to make us feel good about a dirty war in Syria. But this is a level of distortion that would make even Joseph Goebbels’s head spin.

In his essay published at Global Research, Dr. T.P. Wilkinson explains the liberal obsession with cosmetic revisionism: “The ‘wrong war’ thesis is elemental to what Carroll Quigley called ‘liberal imperialism’ in his history of the Anglo-American establishment. Liberal imperialists, to which the *faux gauche* (the descendants of Fabianism) also belong, do not oppose empire. They simply want it to be more aesthetically appealing, and lost wars are most un-aesthetic. So what is the liberal imperialist’s answer to unappetizing military defeats? It is cosmetic surgery.”

Expensive war propaganda in Hollywood is nothing new. High-profile films like “Zero Dark Thirty,” “American Sniper” and “Argo” were all released to much fanfare. Each of them fulfilled a role in forming a more perfect American narrative, and in some cases completely rewrote history altogether. But these were meant to be theatrical releases so naturally there’s a generous dose of artistic license taken by the director. Nothing unusual there. It’s what Hollywood does. These films also had some distance between the present day and wars which had already lapsed.

A veneer of integrity is always important. Hollywood still purports to put a lot of currency in the truth. During this year's Oscars, *The New York Times* ran a TV ad for the first time since 2010 entitled, "*The truth is. . .*" This campaign is meant to decry *fake news* and its ugly cousin "alternative facts" to show what high standards the mainstream media has – which demonstrates the delusional world the in which the establishment exists.

Earlier this month, I wrote an exposé showing exactly how the *New York Times* has been America's perennial leader in running fake news for the purposes of advancing a war agenda. It's ironic that this Times advertisement would run on a night when an Oscar would be given to one of the most egregious propaganda films of all time.

Happy Hollywood

Last Sunday night, "The White Helmets," directed by Orlando von Einsiedel and Joanna Natasegara, took home an Academy Award for best documentary short. But this was not a conventional documentary film. The footage was provided by a terrorist-affiliated NGO based in Turkey, operating in Syria, and which is primarily funded by the U.S. State Department, the British Foreign Office, the Netherlands, and other NATO members and Gulf states to the tune of over \$150 million and whose chief remit is producing U.S.-led "coalition" propaganda images for mass media consumption. The film, funded and distributed by Netflix, seems to be an extension of that remit. [Watch the film's trailer [here](#).]

Normally we think of documentaries as films that are supposed to speak *truth to power*, but this film does the opposite. It reinforces an Anglo-American establishment power structure responsible for one of the most violent, dirty wars in modern history. It reinforces a collection of lies placed on heavy rotation by the political and media establishments since the conflict began.

In every way, Syria is the *wrong* war. However, for the U.S. and the U.K., there's much at stake – the legacies of two paradigmatic political figures, Barack Obama and David Cameron, along with the reputations of other architects of the West's dirty war on Syria, like former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and British Foreign Minister William Hague.

Back when the war was getting started, both Clinton and Hague were busy front-running their "Friends of Syria" whistle-stop tour around the Middle East and Europe, securing Gulf cash commitments while grooming their hand-picked "opposition" government-in-exile, holding court in various five-star hotels in Paris, London and Istanbul.

The U.S. had tried this only a year earlier with Libya, and at the time in

2011-2012, they had every reason to believe that the Libyan formula could be repeated in Syria. Those hopes were dashed by early 2013, when it became apparent that Libya was officially a failed state.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of extremist foreign fighters and jihadi soldiers of fortune began pouring into Syria. It was an invasion. This was the West's proxy army, ready to decapitate the government, dismember the state and destabilize the region – with the full blessing of Washington D.C. and its partners.

The Troika of Washington-London-Paris then doubled down by pouring billions of dollars in lethal weapons to various fighting groups laying in wait in Turkey and Jordan, as well as those already active in Syria. There were a number of well-documented arrangements, but one of the most successful working models was for the CIA and its European NATO partners illegally supplying the weapons funneled through Jordan and Turkey – and all paid for by Saudi, Qatari cash.

All the while, the public was told by the U.S.-led “Coalition” all of this was for the “moderate rebels” in Syria. These were meant to be the “freedom fighters” that Ronald Reagan referred to back in the 1980s. As it turned out, these “freedom fighters” in Syria were a chip off the old block from the violent, psychopathic U.S.-backed and CIA-trained paramilitary death squads, which would wreak havoc and terrorize El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras.

In Syria, they are much worse in fact, as they employed a potent brand of warped, radical Salafi and Wahabist religious fervor as the central axis of their self-styled, Medieval nihilistic raison d'être. Yes, these are the moderates, backed by the U.S., U.K., France, Turkey, Germany, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, every other NATO member state, and of course, Israel, which has skillfully stayed out of the media firing line. It's a collective project. The mission: “regime change” in Syria – to overthrow by force – the government in Damascus.

As dirty wars go, none is filthier than this one. As the U.S. and the U.K. ran point on public relations for this criminal enterprise, their big challenge was selling it to their electorates. In order to justify the dirty war, a narrative had to be constructed and maintained. This required a relentless negative public relations campaign demonizing the Syrian government and all of its agencies. The following original talking points were therefore reinforced:

–Syria's peaceful “Arab Spring” uprising happened in 2011, and was violently squashed by the government.

–Assad is a brutal dictator, and is illegitimate.

–The Syrian government and its armed forces are deliberately killing their own people.

–The U.S.-NATO and Gulf-backed armed “rebel” opposition is legitimate.

–Syrian and Russian Airforce are only killing civilians, and not militant and terrorists.

–Terrorists do not exist in Syria or are only a tiny element opposed by the “moderate rebels” and other Syrians “fighting for freedom.”

–Therefore, Assad must be removed from power and replaced with a U.S.-approved government.

Add to this, the entrance of Russia in the fall of 2015 at the lawful invitation of Damascus, and Russia was added to the demonization campaign.

These talking points were then repeated and recycled, over and over, and held up as justification for U.S.-led, crippling economic and diplomatic sanction against the Syrian state and the destructive policy of flooding the region with arms.

In the summer of 2014, an added bonus for the U.S. was inserted into the mix – the emergence of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Sham). The appearance of ISIS allowed the U.S. to fly air sorties over Syria, allegedly to fight ISIS, although after two years the U.S. had produced little if any verifiable progress in “defeating” ISIS. In truth, the U.S. had hoped that ISIS, along with the other Al Qaeda affiliates, would somehow do the job of destabilizing Syria and overthrowing the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus.

Meanwhile, on-script Western media operatives and politicians alike still referred to the jihadists as “rebels” and “armed opposition” – violent radical terrorist groups like Jabbat al Nusra (Nusra Front), Ahrar al Sham, Nour al-Din al-Zinki, Jaish al-Fatah (The Army of Conquest), along with some radical remnants of Sen. John McCain’s beloved “Free Syrian Army.” This was all part of the public relations con.

The ‘White Helmets’

But that wasn’t enough. Washington and London needed a face for the evening news. They needed to *personalize* the conflict in order to help maintain the illusion of a “civil war” in Syria. This is where the White Helmets come in. A merry band of men, comprised of “ordinary citizens, from bakers to teachers to painters,” all donning the White Helmets to save humanity in this moment of

turmoil.

Raed Saleh, the group's spokesman, says his organization is guided by a verse in the Qu'ran: "To save *one life* is to save all of humanity." No doubt a beautiful line, but like so many aspects of the White Helmets – it's been applied cosmetically.

Who would dare be so insensitive as to challenge such a perfect story? For war planners in Washington and London, the White Helmets provided the P.R. cushion they needed to help sell a filthy proxy war to Western audiences. By creating and managing their own "first responder" NGO, the U.S., U.K. and its other stakeholder partners have been able to leverage public sympathies – enough to keep the project going, until the war was either won or lost, or until someone caught on to the scam.

In 2014, a number of independent researchers in the West began to detect the White Helmets' unmistakable stench of dupery. Cory Morningstar's article, "SYRIA: AVAAZ, PURPOSE & THE ART OF SELLING HATE FOR EMPIRE" (April 2014). In an article in *Counterpunch* in April 2015, Rick Sterling summarized the White Helmet roll-out and basic agenda: "In reality the White Helmets is a project created by the UK and USA. Training of civilians in Turkey has been overseen by former British military officer and current contractor, James Le Mesurier. Promotion of the program is done by 'The Syria Campaign' supported by the foundation of billionaire Ayman Asfari. The White Helmets is clearly a public relations project which has received glowing publicity from HuffPo to Nicholas Kristof at the NYT. White Helmets have been heavily promoted by the U.S. Institute of Peace (U.S.I.P.) whose leader began the press conference by declaring 'U.S.I.P. has been working for the Syrian Revolution from the beginning.'"

There was also the work of researcher Petri Krohn's notable wiki site "A Closer Look at Syria," which cracked the facade. They were followed by extensive investigations by Vanessa Beeley who has since produced a formidable volume of research and analysis on the White Helmets and other similar NGO projects, all of which are readily available on *21st Century Wire*.

Any researcher working on a White Helmets documentary would have had access to all of this information, through a simple key word search.

Interestingly, mainstream media defenders of the White Helmets such as Michael Weiss, a senior fellow at NATO's own propaganda think tank the Atlantic Council, as well as editor at the dubious *Daily Beast*, claim that criticism of the White Helmets is a Russian plot organized by Putin himself. Weiss's conspiracy theory is expected considering his employer's affiliation, but such typical hyperbolic accusations belie the fact that the first individuals to expose this pseudo NGO

are not Russian, but rather independent writers and researchers from the U.S., Canada and Great Britain and why not – because it's *their* tax dollars that are funding the White Helmets.

It's also worth noting that in December 2016 when the Nusra terrorist hold over East Aleppo was collapsing, it was Michael Weiss who was responsible for circulating bogus reports, including that women in East Aleppo were committing "mass suicide" to avoid "mass rape" by Assad's soldiers.

"Seventy-nine of them were executed at the barricades. The rest – everyone under 40 – were taken to warehouses that look more like internment camps. They face an unknown fate," Weiss said. "This morning 20 women committed suicide in order not to be raped."

Weiss's source for these sensational reports: *terrorists* in East Aleppo. This was just one of many fake news stories disseminated in the mainstream media. Weiss then went on to repeat the fabricated story to a global mainstream audience on CNN's Don Lemon Show.

In reality, and according to countless first-hand on-the-ground eyewitness testimonies collected by 21WIRE and other media outlets, as the Syrian Army began liberating East Aleppo, the so-called "moderate rebels" promoted by Weiss and other Western media operatives were using residents as human shields, and in some cases shooting residents who attempted to flee terrorist enclaves prior to government forces liberating the eastern half of the city.

Dramatic Video

With direct funding to the White Helmets from U.S.-led Coalition countries already well in excess \$150 million – international stakeholders expect a return on their investment. That return comes in the form of dramatic "search and rescue" videos, some of which may have even been produced in Turkey and which were then sent in a highly coordinated fashion to the editorial desks of CNN, NBC, BBC, Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, New York Times, Washington Post, The Guardian and others. At no time have any of these Western or GCC-based "journalists" ever queried the authenticity of the staged video and photographic productions supplied by the White Helmets.

Mainly, their videos have been produced to promote a "No Fly Zone" or "Safe Zones" in Syria by creating the false impression that somehow Syrian and Russian air forces are targeting civilians in a *Blitzkrieg* fashion, using crude "barrel bombs." Outside of the White Helmets propaganda, there is scant evidence of these "barrel bombs" – supposedly homemade explosive devices – allegedly dropped by the "Assad Regime" every day, according to the White Helmets. (No mainstream

journalist ever seems to wonder why – with a source of modern munitions supplied by Russia – the Syrian military would have to resort to building homemade improvised bombs.)

In the run-up to the White Helmets' failed Nobel Peace Prize bid in October, CNN even went so far as to plant a fake story about a "barrel bomb" hitting a "White Helmets Center" in Damascus.

But the media hype has had a downside. Increasing attention has also meant that some people are beginning to question the group's incredible claim that it had somehow saved 60,000 lives since it started in late 2013. In one letter first published at Canadian Dimension, retired academic John Ryan, PhD, a retired professor of geography and senior scholar at the University of Winnipeg, challenged this narrative, saying:

"It is the White Helmets themselves who have claimed that they have rescued 60,000 civilians; this has not been verified by any other source. Despite such a classic conflict of interest, searching for independent evidence and disqualifying self-serving claims from belligerent parties in Syria has been ignored in much of the western media. As such, this claim by the White Helmets without any verification is next to meaningless."

Despite the questions, the group continued to raise this figure by about 10,000 every two months. They now claim to have "Saved over 82,000 lives" since they were formed in 2013. Where are the list of names, dates, times, locations and medical reports – so as to corroborate and cross-reference the casualties with the alleged Syrian and Russian airstrikes? What's the problem – can't \$150 million buy a little bit of administration for the White Helmets?

At no point have they ever been able to produce any data to back up their outlandish numbers claims – so we can only conclude that this claim, like so many other claims by the group, are fraudulent. But when has Hollywood ever let facts and data get in the way of a good war propaganda story?

In addition, the White Helmets claim that they have trained some 3,000 "volunteers" throughout Syria, and yet their training facility is actually located in neighboring NATO member state Turkey, on the outskirts of the city of Gaziantep. This is the same Gaziantep that's been described in reports as "the home to ISIS killers, sex traders..."

'Civil Defense' Fraud

Vanessa Beeley's investigation eventually took her to Syria, where she was able to track down the REAL Syria Civil Defense organization. The U.S. and U.K. creation of the "White Helmets" required that they steal the name "Syria

Civil Defense” from a real existing civil defense group based in Syria. Unlike the fraudulent Western construct, the real Syria Civil Defense was founded 63 years ago and is a registered member of the International Civil Defense Organization (ICDO) based in Geneva.

For the real Syria Civil Defense you dial “113” inside Syria. The White Helmets have no such number because they are not a real “search and rescue” organization. Their whole existence is a fraudulent construct.

Beeley spoke at length to the real Syria Civil Defense and what the crew told her was shocking. During the “rebel” (terrorist) invasion in 2012 of East Aleppo, future members of the White Helmets arrived accompanied by armed terrorists to attack the real Syria Civil Defense headquarters. They stole equipment, killed and kidnapped real civil defense volunteers as part of their operation to loot and destroy the existing institution.

Real civil defense workers also detailed how terrorist “Hell Cannon” attacks had besieged the Old City of Aleppo, which lies right on the border with the Al Nusra front lines and was a regular target for the rebels’ continuous indiscriminate attacks against residents. Resident testimonies have echoed the same story: while Hell Cannons terrorized the civilians of Aleppo, the White Helmets did nothing – probably because they were with the terrorists who were launching these attacks.

Terrorist Hell Cannons use an assortment of containers – gas canisters, water heater tanks packed full of explosives, glass, metal and any other limb-shredding materials – these were fired indiscriminately into civilian neighborhoods throughout Aleppo. These crude artillery guns also just happen to have the exact destructive footprint as the alleged “barrel bombs” which the White Helmets and Western media are repeatedly saying are being fired by the “The Regime” (Assad) against civilians.

If the White Helmets are to be believed, Assad’s “barrel bombs” have an impact the equivalent of 7.6 on the Richter scale. This outrageous claim was actually made by White Helmets founder James Le Mesurier on CNN. In fact, 7.6 on the Richter scale is the equivalent of a hydrogen bomb, we begin to get a picture of the scale of the lies which the Western narrative has been spinning to justify this dirty war.

Preserving this and other key pieces of fiction is central to the U.S., U.K. and George Soros-funded public relations management of the White Helmets – and essential to their entire Syria narrative which has been described by American writer Rick Sterling as something akin to a “Feel Good Hoax.”

Forget about actual “search and rescue.” That’s not the primary function of this “NGO.” If you need to know one priority for the White Helmets, it’s this: marketing. A central part of the marketing campaign is images of men with beards looking up at the sky – presumably waiting for the next “barrel bomb,” or the media’s favorite term, the “double tap” (apparently, this is when a sinister Assad or Putin pilot returns immediately after an airstrike just to have another crack at the White Helmets).

In most of their videos, you will also see a large number of bearded men in jeans and T-shirts just standing around on the sidelines, always watching the camera, or looking busy – as if they are cognizant that filming is taking place. When we showed some of these videos to *real* first responders we were normally met with shoulder shrugs and cynical laughs.

People who actually work in this trade will tell you that filming on a first responder call is a luxury no worker really has – aside from maybe a GoPro helmet cam. It’s just not something anyone in their right mind would think about very much if there were really people in need of assistance – and yet, this is all the White Helmets seem to do, all day, every day. They film and produce well-edited emotive videos.

Another aspect real first responders will point out to us is that most of the time, the White Helmets often look like they don’t know what they are doing – indicating either a lack of training or experience – which seems to at least contradict their lofty claims of rescuing 82,000 people in 3½ years – certainly that would provide more experience for 2,900 “volunteers” than any other search and rescue worker on the planet.

The White Helmets claim they were only operational in early 2014, so that’s an average of 75 persons per day, everyday. Considering the amount of people they claim to have trained, spread out over Syria, and where actual air sorties have been flown – it seems like a near mathematical impossibility.

As the White Helmets provide no incident data for the alleged 82,000 persons saved, there is no way to validate their sensational narrative. In other words, the White Helmets mythology and pantomime is not very credible to any serious observer. But it seems to be good enough for a Netflix audience, and sadly, good enough for the Academy, too.

The other mandatory feature in the White Helmets marketing imagery where men with beards are running to or from a scene, they’re always carrying children over their shoulder. Again, when we showed many of these images to actual rescue workers, we were met with puzzled looks.

Firstly, why does 99 percent of the White Helmets marketing imagery only feature small children? Are there not any adults out of the “82,000 saved” to be rescued from the rubble?

Also, you will rarely, if ever see the \$150 million British-trained rescue crew ever use a spinal injury backboard – opting instead to just yank the children by the arm and throw them over the shoulder. When we showed these images to real first-responder workers, they were deemed not credible.

So it's safe to conclude that the White Helmets only care about one thing: *pictures and videos* – wired via satellite to CNN, the New York Times, or the BBC's news desk.

'Smart Power' and the NGO Complex

Still, despite the group's obvious links to the U.S. and U.K. governments, and to known extremists and terrorists – the Western media continues to accept this NGO as if it were a legitimate 'Civil Defense' organization. The pseudo NGO strategy is part of an over-arching Western strategy which is related to the term **“Smart Power”** (following on from *Soft Power*) where Western governments create shadow state organizations designed to co-opt and ultimately usurp actual state agencies – in effect weakening the real civil body by replacing it with a fake version of the original.

In the calculus of war planners in the U.S., U.K. and France, even if they were unsuccessful in toppling the Assad government in Damascus, these fake NGOs would still be operational in “rebel” areas in the hopes that they might be viewed as legitimate civil organizations and would then replace the real ones.

After five years, the U.S. or European authorities could then cite these organizations as legitimate deliverers of public service, thus giving Western governments a much-needed foothold in governance inside the target nation, in this case, Syria.

Similar projects have been undertaken to replace municipal police forces with the **“Free Syrian Police,”** as well as Western and GCC-sponsored projects in terrorist-held Idlib to create uniformed civil cleaning staff, and so on. Why doesn't Netflix make a documentary exposing that? If they did, that would be real filmmaking; instead what we get is more public relations promotion for a failed Western foreign policy.

By now, it should be obvious how this propaganda cycle has been functioning, although apparently, not obvious enough for Netflix's award-winning filmmakers Joanna Natasegara and Orlando Von Einsiedel. The fact that their beloved White Helmets stole their “Syria Civil Defense” name from an

existing, legitimate and internationally recognized first-responder agency should be cause for alarm.

For any journalist researching the White Helmets, you would think the first port of call would be to speak to the official certified civil defense body. This is what 21WIRE and Beeley did. Why didn't Natasegara and Von Einsiedel bother to check this obvious line of inquiry? The fact they didn't might be proof that the intention on their film was not to make a legitimate documentary, but rather to glorify to U.S.-led narrative of the "moderate opposition."

By definition, Natasegara and Von Einsiedel's work cannot rightly be called journalistic but *propagandistic*. By promoting a pseudo "NGO" funded by Western governments and by giving succor to extremists, their film is directed *against* the Syrian people – which exactly characterizes the U.S. and U.K. foreign policy in Syria since 2011.

If Natasegara and Von Einsiedel deserve any reward today it should really be the *Leni Riefenstahl Award* for Best Propaganda Film.

But even Nazi war propaganda filmmaker Riefenstahl could hardly imagine propaganda on this scale – a third-sector NGO and integrated media arm attached to dozens of governments, paramilitary military units, intelligence agencies, hundreds of corporate media outlets, and with a multi-million dollar crowd-funding facility.

If nothing else, the White Helmets operation is impressive in its scope. It's the West's template for building a Shadow State in target nations. If it's successful in Syria, this formula will be recreated in other marginal hot zones around the globe. That's why the White Helmets are being guarded so closely by the Western establishment.

Doubts over Authenticity

Boston Globe columnist Stephen Kizner was one of a number of serious journalists who expressed disappointment over the Academy's selection, writing on Twitter: "Congratulations to al-Qaeda and Syrian jihadists for the #Oscar given to a film about their PR outfit, the White Helmets.

There is also the problem of the obvious staging in many of the White Helmets' supposed video rescues accompanied by highly misleading editing. In the so-called "Rag Doll" clip, we first see two separate views of the three men working on the rescue site – and then the edit suddenly cuts to the miraculous rescue of charming little 4-year-old girl – supposedly emerging from under tons of concrete and rubble from a collapsed building. Miraculously, she is not crying and looks immaculate, while holding an equally clean rag doll.

Then the edit cut jumps, and a little 3-year-old boy suddenly appears from the exact same spot. Both children appear to have sustained no injuries, nor any visible cuts or bruises, and no *dust*. Not bad for being buried under tons of concrete, gravel and dust. Incredible, but par for the course in the completely improbable “first-responder” reality show that is the White Helmets.

After reviewing this video, it’s difficult to deny that it has all the hallmarks of a staged production piece, designed to tug at the hearts of a Western public – conditioned to accept this “first responder” narrative as *sacrosanct*, for fear of appearing callous in the face of this media-driven, multi-million dollar **“No Fly Zone”** public relations campaign. This is not the only fraudulent video released by the White Helmets, but even the existence of one fraudulent rescue video should be grounds to question all the group’s material.

Again, the whole purpose of these video and photos is to influence public opinion against the Syrian and Russian governments. Therefore, the core mission of the White Helmets media campaign is influence Western and Gulf audiences.

Syrian Curveballs

Back in 2003, one man became emblematic of the campaign of WMD lies that helped fabricate the U.S. and U.K. case for invading Iraq. He became known as “Curveball.”

In Syria, the West has been developing a new generation of “curveballs” – on call and ready to deliver whatever the U.S. State Department or the British Foreign Office need in order to grandstand in front of the U.N. Security Council or on the floor of Parliament.

The New York Times reported that during March and April of 2015, the White Helmets claimed that at least 20 “barrel bombs” containing chlorine were dropped in six towns in northwestern Syria. It almost sounded as if the U.S. and U.K. were so desperate to establish Assad as crossing the “red line” against chemical weapons use that they would go so far as to fabricate a case that chlorine bombs were used by “the regime.”

As the Times reported: “Frustrated with the Security Council’s impasse over the issue, rescue workers and doctors are now working to bring evidence of chlorine gas attacks directly to the French, British and American governments for testing. The aim is to give states a solid basis for action against the attacks, in the Security Council or through quieter diplomatic pressure, said James Le Mesurier, the British director of a nonprofit group, Mayday Rescue, that trains and equips the White Helmets, Syrian volunteers supported by the British, Danish

and Dutch governments.”

At the time, White Helmet founder Le Mesurier was heavily involved in trying to fashion together a chemical weapons case against the Syrian government.

In 2015, the Times wrote: “Going directly to governments that have pushed for Mr. Assad’s ouster creates its own challenges. His allies may dismiss their evidence as politically tainted and can point to recent chlorine attacks in Iraq for which the government there blamed insurgents, not to mention the discredited American claims of an Iraqi chemical weapons program that were used to justify invading Iraq. To deter allegations of tampering or falsification, Mr. Le Mesurier and three Syrian doctors involved said they systematically documented the chain of custody from collection to handover. They have plenty of cases to work with. Since March 16, in Idlib alone, the White Helmets have documented 14 attacks with 26 suspected chlorine barrels that sickened scores of people.”

(Although U.N. investigators spoke to several eyewitnesses who denounced one of the “chlorine attack” stories as “staged,” the White Helmets’ campaign of overwhelming U.N. investigators with “evidence” that was hard to verify – and with Western powers pushing for U.N. confirmation – succeeded in getting the U.N. to blame the Syrian government for at least a couple of these cases, which enabled the Western mainstream media to resume its “war crimes” drumbeat against the Assad government.)

Similarly, in September 2016, the White Helmets were instrumental in trying to assign blame for an incident where a U.N. aid convoy was attacked outside of the town of Urm al-Kubra, west of Aleppo. As if by magic, the White Helmets were the first on the scene recording among the flames. 21WIRE later reported that the White Helmets had helped to stage the said ‘Russian bombing’ scene.

The Western mainstream media, Secretary of State John Kerry, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power and others cited the case as “proof” of Russian and Syrian guilt. (The U.N. also accepted the video “evidence” presented by the White Helmets in blaming the Syrian government for the attack.)

Hollywood ‘Change Agents’

One of the White Helmets documentary’s biggest advocates was Hollywood actor George Clooney. In the run-up to the Oscars, Clooney, along with his wife – celebrity human rights lawyer, Amal Clooney – personally campaigns on behalf of the film. Clooney’s interest was more than just that of a liberal activist. AP reported that Clooney is in the process of producing a feature-film version of the “White Helmets.”

He said: “The White Helmets are the heroes. So if I can help them out at all,

and people can know about it, in any way possible, that's a good use of celebrity, I think."

As a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Clooney seems to relish his role of celebrity humanitarian. Unfortunately, fellow members of the Council include an impressive line-up of war criminals and other dignitaries, like former Vice President Dick Cheney and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, as well as a chief architect of the collapse of Libya and the dirty war in Syria, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

However, judging by Clooney's devotion to the White Helmets, it's pretty clear that he is either ignorant of what he is supporting or worse – he is using his public profile to push a Deep State agenda.

In September 2016, Clooney managed to get an audience with John Kerry and the U.S. State Department to promote his new "anti-corruption" NGO called, The Sentry. Not surprisingly, the establishment's globalist information outlet the *Daily Beast* was on hand (along with a prime segment which aired on CNN) to get the word out.

Daily Beast editor John Avlon wrote: "Getting Americans to care about human-rights atrocities half-a-world away is hard. Getting them fired up about confronting the corruption that fuels those slaughters is an order of magnitude harder. But that's what actor George Clooney and human-rights activist John Prendergast are aiming to do with their new project, The Sentry."

The Sentry, is supposed to help the poor people of South Sudan by "taking aim at government corruption." Clooney goes on to demonize the South Sudanese government as utterly corrupt and deserving of prosecution before the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

What Clooney will not tell his fawning public is the CIA's role in fomenting unrest in Sudan prior to its rather convenient partition in 2010. We say *convenient* because splitting the country effectively cut-off port access and therefore oil pipeline access for South Sudan of which China has been a major partner on the exploration of energy. This was followed by a dirty war in South Sudan with much of the evidence pointing to the CIA.

TeleSur English reports: "The CIA is using a mercenary warlord named Riek Machar, who has a long history of ethnic massacres and mass murder to his credit, to try and overthrow the internationally recognized government of President Salva Kiir for the crime of doing business with rivals of Pax Americana, the Chinese."

Again, we hear the familiar tropes about “child soldiers” and “mass rape,” and how, “we must act now” – all part and parcel of the neocolonial “helpless Africa” narrative.

Clooney’s partner John Prendergast delivers the emotive plea: “The war erupted, it was a fire that just raged across the land...They’ll use attack helicopters. They’ll use rape as a tool of war. They’ll recruit child soldiers and go in and send them as cannon fodder into villages to kill people. The worst human-rights abuses being committed in the world. And this is what South Sudan has dealt with because of this fallout between these thieves over the last 2½ years.”

(Clooney also played a key role in splitting Sudan into two parts through his earlier demonization of Sudan’s government over the conflict in Darfur. Well-organized Western protests against alleged “genocide” in Darfur set the stage for the U.S.-led effort to carve oil-rich South Sudan away from Sudan although by doing so the U.S. made it impossible for South Sudan to get its oil to market, thus creating the hardship that then contributed to the new conflict in South Sudan, a good example of how human-rights “do-gooders” can cause more harm than good.)

Interestingly, Clooney’s Sentry Project is nested under the globalist think tank, the Center for Advanced Defense Studies and bankrolled by John Podesta’s Center for American Progress, a Washington D.C.-based think tank with ties to the military-industrial complex. (The Podesta Group lobbying firm was famous for its pay-to-play tactics, getting governments to pony up millions of dollars in exchange for access to the Clintons, an example of the kind of corruption common in Washington.)

Peace activist and author David Swanson outlined Sentry’s precarious connections to America’s defense industry here. We also can point out that the policy of “evicting Chinese influence” from Africa was included in the military directives outlined in US AFRICOM immediately after its official launch in 2007-2008. Similarly, billions of dollars in direct Chinese investment in Libya was thwarted by NATO’s illegal abuse of U.N. Resolution 1973 which led to the complete collapse of the Libyan state.

We can see that Clooney’s celebrated “crusade against corruption” is very likely part of a public relations smokescreen to conceal U.S. clandestine efforts to isolate Chinese interests in the now divided territory of Sudan, while nudging forward U.S. and transnational corporate policy in South Sudan, with the ultimate goal of “regime change” in that country, too.

You can’t help but be reminded here of another similar Deep State public relations ploy centered around the exact same location back in 2012. There’s

no better example of how Hollywood's do-gooder wars are waged than "Kony 2012," described in *Atlantic Magazine* as a viral video campaign, which "reinforces a dangerous, centuries-old idea that Africans are helpless and that idealistic Westerners must save them."

Like with Clooney's Sentry Project, "Kony 2012" leveraged the power of media and celebrity to manufacture public consent through an emotive public appeal and collected millions in public donations in the process. In this case, the antagonist was the illusive warlord Joseph Kony, leader of the Lords Resistance Army. The only problem was, at the time in 2012, no one had actually seen Kony in six years.

Still, the campaign lobbied President Obama to deploy U.S. forces to Uganda to "find Kony" under the justification of "saving the children." Despite the collapse of the project following a very public meltdown by the charity's founder, Jason Russell, the U.S. still went and deployed U.S. military assets to Uganda under an expansion of US AFRICOM operations in Africa. Mission accomplished.

The genius of this was that it concealed the genocide and crimes against humanity carried out by President Obama's good friend and Uganda's "President for Life" Yoweri Museveni, whose crimes have since been well-documented in powerful independent non-CIA film production called a "Brilliant Genocide." It turns out that Museveni is guilty of all the things and more – which the West had laid on the ghost of Kony.

Of course, the irony of this is mostly lost on Hollywood's humanitarian jet-set, all of whom thought "Kony 2012" was such a great idea when it was first launched. What "Kony 2012" achieved on an "activist" and public relations level is exactly what "The White Helmets" documentary is doing now – an expensive smokescreen to hide the real horrors of a conflict, namely, the destructive policies of Western governments and their local "partners" fomenting trouble and strife.

In the case of Syria, it's the U.S., U.K., Turkey, France and GCC support of violent, armed extremists – who the White Helmets are exclusively embedded with.

The cynical use of the classic American gospel hymn, "When the Saints Go Marching In" as the documentary's theme song by filmmakers Natasegara and Von Einsiedel speaks to level of manipulation of the narrative.

Regarding the White Helmets project, Clooney revealed something else in his rhetoric when he remarked that as a celebrity, "I can't change policy ... but I can make things louder." This is an example of the *power-*

activist political set in Hollywood.

We find similar language in an interview with White Helmets director Joanna Natasegara in 2016, at the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) in Malaysia while promoting her Oscar nominated film "Virunga" and its new foundation. Natasegara refers to herself as an "Impact Producer" (aka "Change Agent") using documentaries to make a big impact by reinforcing or pushing a narrative.

In many ways, this is antithetical to the whole process of filmmaking, especially in the research and discovery stages, and in the investigative aspects of historical documentary filmmaking – which is about documenting events but also about looking below popular political narratives to gain deeper insights, and not pushing political or policy outcomes.

Power-activism is personified by numerous online marketing campaigns calling for a No Fly Zone in Syria. At the Oscar ceremony, both Natasegara and Von Einsiedel called for "an end to the war in Syria" – a sentiment that everyone can agree on – but it rings hollow given their P.R. support for a direct Western military intervention under the guise of a "No Fly Zone."

Compare that to the words of U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, and Tima Kurdi, the aunt of three-year-old Alan Kurdi who washed-up on a beach to become the face of the tragic face of the migrant crisis. Both Gabbard and Kurdi appeared on global media calling for the U.S. and its Coalition allies to STOP sending arms, cash and support to extremists and terrorist "rebels" in Syria. Only this can bring an end to the war and allow refugees to return to Syria, said both Gabbard and Kurdi.

This plea is *real* and reflects the facts on the ground, as opposed to the fake narrative constructed by Natasegara and Von Einsiedel, which carefully whitewashes all clandestine involvement by U.S., U.K. and its partners which have aided in the systematic destruction of Syria over the last six years, not to mention the needless deaths of hundreds of thousands.

It is no coincidence that many members of the White Helmets have extremist ties and that this fact is being covered-up by Natasegara and Von Einsiedel who are literally portraying the group as "saints" – revealing the level of deception involved in this story.

More Propaganda

We can see Natasegara's modus operandi with making the White Helmets film; it's not so much about documenting history in the conventional sense, so much as it is about "making an impact" politically – on behalf of the governments who

created the White Helmets, which veers into the area of propaganda again.

On the surface, Natasegara appears to be waging the classic international liberal crusade by fighting against mining, oil and poaching in the poor, permanently “developing” countries like the Congo. No one will argue that the level of corruption in African countries can be extreme in some cases, but what are the real causes of institutional corruption in those lands?

Little attention is paid to stopping corrupt officials at the corporate level in London, Belgium, New York or Washington. In fact, many of the biggest corporate donors to these “good causes” projects are connected to the very same corporate behemoth that activists purport to be fighting against.

This cycle of power-activism feeds into the cycle of neocolonialism – in what researcher Cory Morningstar so rightly refers to as “the wrong kind of green.”

As it turns out, the International Anti-Corruption Conference is funded by Transparency International (T.I.), one of the main players in the globalist “anti-corruption” syndicate, which is very much linked to the work of Hollywood activists like Clooney. In the past, T.I. has been accused of cooking its own books in its anti-corruption investigations, including an incident in 2008 where the organization used falsified data to try and frame the Chavez government in Venezuela during one of T.I.’s anti-corruption investigations. This is a good example of NGO *smart power* being used to undermine a target nation. Clooney and Natasegara are just two of the many public faces who represent this network.

Back in 2016, when the “Panama Papers” story broke, based on purloined documents from a law firm, the mainstream media utterly failed in analyzing what they were really looking at. Yes, there’s plenty of corruption and shady shell companies in Panama (but no word of the giant offshore corporate maze located in Delaware), but was the endgame of that supposedly independent “investigation”?

Amid all the mainstream media hype and “anti-corruption” grandstanding, researcher James Corbett was one of the few people who asked the right question: “So why does this new mega-leak seemingly only expose those in the State Department crosshairs or expendable others and not a single prominent American politician or businessman?” (LISTEN to my full interview last year with James Corbett here)

‘Citizen Journalists’

Natasegara also goes on about using “activists” and “citizen journalists” to achieve the desired “impact.” Here she is alluding to the scores of Syrian “activists” and the White Helmets who have supplied Western media outlets with the images our governments want in order to reinforce the official narrative.

Natasegara is promoting the exact tool she utilized in the deceptive Netflix project in which all of the alleged stock “rescue” footage was supplied by the White Helmets themselves.

Natasegara claims to have trained 21-year-old White Helmet “activist” Khaled Khatib in Turkey before sending him into Syria to shoot much of the footage. NPR claims that he “risked his life” to shoot the film for Netflix. Khatib was later blocked from entering the U.S. to attend the Oscar ceremony in Los Angeles. So the Netflix producers had no way of independently verifying what they’ve been given – effectively relying on Al Qaeda-affiliated individuals to supply them with made-to-order “rescue” footage. How can they call this a documentary?

In this case, it didn’t seem to matter to Joanna Natasegara and her co-producer Orlando Von Einsiedel whether it’s real or staged, so long as the White Helmets narrative was achieved.

Despite the claims by Netflix producers, Natasegara and Von Einsiedel, the purpose was to reinforce the U.S.-led Coalition’s fake Syrian narrative, which has never resembled the facts on the ground. The U.S.-U.K. establishment could not have hand-picked better tools for this job than Natasegara and Von Einsiedel.

If they were real filmmakers interested in the truth, they would have paused to question why this group was founded by a senior British Military intelligence officer, James Le Mesurier; why it is based in Turkey and not Syria; and why the group only operated exclusively in Al Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria), Ahrar al Sham (another Al Qaeda affiliate) and ISIS-held areas in Syria; why are White Helmets members routinely pictured with weapons and with terrorists. The answer is simple to anyone with half a brain and who is being honest: the White Helmets are composed mainly of partisan extremists.

Still, all of this is noticeably missing from Natasegara and Von Einsiedel’s storybook version of the White Helmets, which is inexcusable considering how there’s no shortage of readily available evidence pointing directly to White Helmets’ ties to terrorists.

One has to assume that the filmmakers knew about the extremist links and the U.S.-NATO funding of the group but chose to ignore this in favor of producing their expensive piece of propaganda. And as we saw this week, both were all too happy to lap up their Academy Award – even though the fiction they created has aided further *legitimizing* U.S.-led Coalition-backed terrorism in Syria.

One of the saddest parts of this whole story is that the power of marketing and propaganda means that tens of thousands of unwitting members of the public have

been duped into donating their hard-earned money for this dubious NGO. If the wider public knew what Aleppo residents already know – that the White Helmets function as a support group alongside known terrorists groups like Al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, Nour al-Din al-Zinki, ISIS and others (all known extremist groups operating inside of Syria), the White Helmets would not be celebrated as humanitarian but rather condemned as a multimillion-dollar fraud, customized by the West to give cover to the illicit practice of arming and supporting “rebel” terrorists by the US, UK, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and others.

By all accounts, White Helmets video-and-photo propaganda has been instrumental in aiding in the recruitment of new terrorists – new fighters from the West, Middle East and Asia – who see the contrived news reports and believe the false narrative being portrayed by mainstream media news agencies.

In this way, you could say that because the mainstream Western media is not vetting any of this material and has defaulted into a Western foreign policy bias, these major media outlets are complicit in helping recruit more terrorists internationally. In other words, they are providing material support and comfort to known violent, religious extremists terrorists.

Lastly, to see the White Helmets’ fundamental terrorist connection, one need look no further than to its ‘President’ Raed Saleh. Last month, 21WIRE investigative journalist Vanessa Beeley reported on White Helmet leader Raed Saleh’s close partner, Mustafa al-Haj Yusef, leader of the White Helmets center in the Al Nusra-occupied city of Khan Shaykhun, Idlib. The photographic evidence clearly demonstrates the close relationship that Saleh shares with his friend and colleague Yusef, and apparently with the armed militant seen standing behind the two White Helmet leaders.

On June 1, 2014, White Helmet deputy Yusef called for the shelling of civilians during elections in Damascus. He declares that this murderous act would be the “greatest declaration of revolution.” Are these the words of a “neutral, impartial, humanitarian”? Here we can see the White Helmets calling for direct violence against civilians who are doing nothing more than exercising their right to vote – in their own country. [See the full story here.]

So to even suggest that the White Helmets are “*unarmed and neutral civilian volunteers*” is tantamount to fraud. The fact that filmmakers Natasegara, Von Einsiedel and Netflix are using this false statement in their film and public relations material demonstrates outright deception on their part.

If Netflix were to take this issue seriously, after reviewing readily available evidence they would remove this film from their distribution chain,

and Natasegara and Von Einsiedel should return their award to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[For more on this topic and photos showing White Helmet connections to terror groups, go to <http://21stcenturywire.com/2017/03/02/forget-oscar-give-the-white-helmets-the-leni-riefenstahl-award-for-best-war-propaganda-film/>]

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Mainstream Media's 'Victimhood'

Exclusive: Just weeks ago, mainstream U.S. media decried “fake news” and backed a blacklist of independent news sites over “Russian propaganda.” Now, under fire from President Trump, the MSM loves a free press, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It's heartwarming that The New York Times and The Washington Post are troubled that President Trump is loosely throwing around accusations of “fake news.” It's nice that they now realize that truth does not reliably come from the mouth of every senior government official or from every official report.

The Times is even taking out full-page ads in its own pages to offer truisms about truth: “The truth is hard. The truth is hidden. The truth must be pursued. The truth is hard to hear. The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn't so obvious. ...” On Sunday, those truth truisms ran opposite an alarmist column by Jim Rutenberg entitled, “[Will the Real Democracy Lovers Please Stand Up?](#)” Meanwhile, The Washington Post launched its own melodramatic slogan, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.”

Yet, it was only weeks ago when the Post and Times were eagerly promoting plans for silencing or blacklisting independent news sites that didn't toe the line on what the U.S. government and its allies were claiming was true.

On Nov. 20, the Times published a [lead editorial](#) calling on Facebook and other technology giants to devise algorithms that could eliminate stories that the Times deemed to be “fake.” The Times and other mainstream news outlets – along

with a few favored Internet sites – joined a special Google-sponsored task force, called the First Draft Coalition, to decide what is true and what is not. If the Times' editorial recommendations were followed, the disfavored stories and the sites publishing them would no longer be accessible through popular search engines and platforms, essentially blocking the public's access to them. [See Consortiumnews.com's "What to Do About 'Fake News.'"]

On Thanksgiving Day, the Post ran a front-page story citing an anonymous group, called PropOrNot, blacklisting 200 Web sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other important sources of independent journalism, because we supposedly promoted "Russian propaganda."

Although PropOrNot and the Post didn't bother to cite any actual examples or to ask the accused for comment, the point was clear: If you didn't march in lockstep behind the Official Narrative on, say, the Ukraine crisis or the war in Syria, you were to be isolated, demonized and effectively silenced. In the article, the Post blurred the lines between "fake news" – stories that are simply made up – and what was deemed "propaganda," in effect, information that didn't jibe with what the U.S. State Department was saying.

Back then, in November, the big newspapers believed that the truth was easy, simple, obvious, requiring only access to some well-placed government official or a quick reading of the executive summary from some official report. Over the last quarter century or so, the Times, in particular, has made a fetish out of embracing pretty much whatever Officialdom declared to be true. After all, such well-

dressed folks with those important-sounding titles couldn't possibly be lying.

That gullibility went from the serious, such as rejecting overwhelming evidence that Ronald Reagan's Nicaraguan Contra rebels were deeply involved in drug trafficking, to the silly, trusting the NFL's absurd Deflategate allegations against Tom Brady. In those "old" days, which apparently ended a few weeks ago, the Times could have run full-page ads, saying "Truth is whatever those in authority say it is."

In 2002, when the George W. Bush administration was vouching for a motley crew of Iraqi "defectors" describing Saddam Hussein's hidden WMDs, Iraq's purchase of some "aluminum tubes" must have been for building nuclear bombs. In 2003, when Secretary of State Colin Powell showed some artist drawings of "mobile chemical weapons labs," they must really exist – and anyone who doubted Powell's "slam-dunk" testimony deserved only contempt and ridicule.

When the Obama administration issued a "government assessment" blaming the

Syrian military for the sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, there was no need to scrutinize its dubious assertions or ask for actual proof. To do so made you an “Assad apologist.”

When a bunch of U.S. allies under the effective control of Ukraine’s unsavory SBU intelligence service presented some videos with computer-generated graphics showing Russians supplying the Buk missile that shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, there was no need to examine the holes in the evidence or note that the realistic-looking graphics were fictional and based on dubious assumptions. To do so made you a “Moscow stooge.”

In other words, when the U.S. government was gluing black hats on an “enemy” and white hats on a U.S. “ally,” the Times never seemed to object. Nor did pretty much anyone else in the mainstream media. No one seemed to note that both sides usually deserved gray hats. With very few exceptions – when the State Department or other U.S. agencies were making the charges – the Times and its cohorts simply stopped applying responsible journalistic skepticism.

Of course, there is a problem with “fake news,” i.e., stories that are consciously made up for the purpose of making money from lots of clicks. There are also fact-free conspiracy theories that operate without evidence or in defiance of it. No one hates such bogus stories more than I do – and they have long been a bane of serious journalism, dating back centuries, not just to the last election.

But what the Times, the Post and the rest of the mainstream media have typically ignored is that there are many situations in which the facts are not clear or when there are alternative explanations that could reasonably explain a set of facts. There are even times when the evidence goes firmly against what the U.S. government is claiming. At those moments, skepticism and courage are necessary to challenge false or dubious Official Narratives. You might even say, “The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn’t so obvious...”

A Tough Transition

During the transition from the Obama administration to the Trump team, the Times, the Post and other mainstream media outlets got caught in their own transition from trusting whatever the outgoing officials said to distrusting whatever the incoming officials said. In those final days, big media accepted what President Obama’s intelligence agencies asserted about Russia supposedly interfering in the U.S. election despite the lack of publicly available evidence that could be scrutinized and tested.

Even something as squirrely as the attack on Trump’s National Security Adviser

Michael Flynn – with Obama holdovers citing the never-prosecuted Logan Act from 1799 as the pretext for ginning up some kind of criminal-sounding case that scared Trump into firing Flynn – was treated as legitimate, without serious questions asked. Since Obama officials were doing the feeding, the no-skepticism rule applied to the eating. But whatever statements came from Trump, even his few lucid moments explaining why war with nuclear-armed Russia wasn't such a great idea, were treated as dangerous nonsense.

When Trump scolded the mainstream press for engaging in “fake news” and then applied the phrase “enemy of the people,” the Times, the Post and the rest went into full victimization-mode. When a few news companies were excluded from a White House news briefing, they all rushed to the barricades to defend freedom of the press. Then, Trump went even further – he rejected his invitation to the White House Correspondents Dinner, the black-tie/evening-gown event where mainstream media stars compete to attract the hottest celebrity guests and hobnob with important government officials, a walking-talking conflict-of-interest-filled evening, an orgy of self-importance.

So, the Times, the Post and their mainstream-media friends now feel under attack. Whereas just weeks ago they were demanding that Google, Facebook and other powerful information platforms throttle those of us who showed professional skepticism toward dubious claims from the U.S. government, now the Times, the Post and the others are insisting that we all rally around them, to defend their journalistic freedom. In another full-page ad on Sunday, the Times wrote: “Truth. It's more important now than ever.”

I would argue that truth is always important, but especially so when government officials are leading countries toward war, when lives are at stake, whether in Iraq or Syria or Ukraine or the many other global hotspots. At those moments in the recent past, the Times did not treat truth – in all its subtlety and nuance – as important at all.

I would argue, too, that the stakes are raised even higher when propagandists and ideologues are risking the prospect of nuclear war that could kill billions and effectively end human civilization. However, in that case, the American people have seen little truly professional journalism nor a real commitment to the truth. Instead, it's been much more fun to demonize Russian President Vladimir Putin and paint black-and-white pictures of the evil Russians.

At such moments, those New York Times' truisms about truth are forgotten: “The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn't so obvious. ...”

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](#)).

Risks in Rush to Crush ISIS

President Trump's vow to crush the Islamic State quickly may lead to hasty actions that could compound the problem rather than solve it, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A couple of tendencies that are all too common in policymaking and policy debate tend to make for unwise foreign commitments or overextended foreign expeditions. One is to treat a goal that is at most an intermediate objective as if it were an end in itself. Doing so obfuscates clear analysis of means and ends, overlooks other ways to achieve the same ends, and distorts perception of the costs and benefits associated with achieving the immediate objective.

The other tendency is to give insufficient attention to what comes after achieving the immediate objective. One only has to recall the example of insufficient attention given to what would come after the objective of overthrowing Saddam Hussein to appreciate the problems involved.

One could add a third phenomenon, which is less common but sometimes arises, which is to try to fulfill a campaign promise for the sake of fulfilling a campaign promise.

All three factors appear to be present now with the issue of [next steps for the U.S. military in Syria](#) in going after ISIS. The head of U.S. Central Command is saying, "It could be that we take on a larger burden ourselves." His comment comes amid the Department of Defense coming up with a plan requested by President Trump, who promised during the campaign to hasten the defeat of ISIS.

Of course ISIS is a horrible group, and everyone not in it agrees that the world will be better off without it. But before U.S. forces take up any larger share of the burden of fighting it, three realities ought to be carefully considered.

One is that the ISIS mini-state in Syria and Iraq already is well on the way to being extinguished, at the hands of the forces already engaging it. This should not be surprising, given the group's lack of external support and the way its

brutal methods lose it any support among the populations with which it has come into contact. The issue involved in considering any escalation with U.S. forces is not whether the mini-state will be killed off, but only how quickly it will be.

Second, if our main concern is with how ISIS could endanger American lives through acts of terrorism, we should realize that the connection between that danger and the fate of the mini-state in Syria and Iraq has always been tenuous at best, and less than is commonly supposed. There has been more of a tension than a direct connection between ISIS fomenting terrorism in the West on one hand, and on the other hand the group using its available resources to defend and shore up the mini-state. To the extent the overseas terrorist threat has materialized, it has been far more a matter of inspiration and ideology than of organizational dependence on a piece of real estate in the Middle East.

Third, the ISIS problem will not go away when the mini-state is extinguished. The problem will continue in the form of the ideology and the inspiration, and probably also in the form of insurgency in the lands in which the mini-state has existed.

This last point leads to the further observation that as far as not only anti-Western terrorism but also instability in the Middle East are concerned, what matters most is not how hastily the ISIS mini-state is crushed but rather what arrangements are left on the ground after the crushing.

Fertile Climate

The more that chaos, disputes, and uncertainty prevail there, the more that ground will remain fertile for violent extremism, whether under the ISIS label or some other brand. The rest of the political, diplomatic, and military story of conflict in Syria still has a good way to go before providing a more promising and stable alternative for what comes after ISIS. It would not be advantageous for the anti-ISIS military campaign to get ahead of that story. Speed in this case is not necessarily good.

All of this is in addition to one of the biggest downsides of U.S. forces assuming more of a military role: playing into the ideology and propaganda of ISIS and similar extremists, who appeal for support with a message about how the United States uses its armed might to intervene in Muslim lands and to kill Muslims.

This set of issues will be an early test for new national security adviser H. R. McMaster. He is a highly regarded military officer whose professional focus, from study of war in Vietnam to the practice of war in Iraq, has been on what

use of force and how much force are needed to achieve an objective of military victory. His natural inclination, as much as of others, may be to take the swift extinguishing of the ISIS mini-state as such an objective and to treat it more as an end than a means. A more thorough and careful performance as national security adviser would instead broaden the policy question and take into account the considerations mentioned above.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Trump's Embattled 'Revolution'

President Trump's domestic "revolution" on behalf of "forgotten" Americans requires a complementary foreign policy of reduced warfare and a weaker dollar, explains ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

Pat Buchanan – perhaps the U.S. politician with the greatest feel (as a thrice-times U.S. presidential candidate himself) for what President Trump is trying to achieve – tells us compellingly, just why Trump is now the US President:

[Simply,] ...“He [Trump], read the nation and the world, better than his rivals. He saw the surging power of American nationalism at home, and of ethno-nationalism in Europe. And he embraced Brexit. While our bipartisan establishment worships diversity, Trump saw Middle America recoiling from the demographic change brought about by Third World invasions. And he promised to curb them.

“While our corporatists burn incense at the shrine of the global economy, Trump went to visit the working-class casualties. And those forgotten Americans in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin, responded. And while Bush II and President Obama plunged us into Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Trump saw that his countrymen wanted to be rid of the endless wars, and start putting America first. [And] He offered a new foreign policy ... Putin's Russia is not 'our number one geopolitical foe.'”

That's it. That's Trump's domestic, and his foreign policy, in one.

What we all presently are obsessed with, is the bellicosity and hysteria to which Trump and his agenda has given rise: Is détente with Russia now effectively dead, as a consequence of the new Russo-phobic McCathyism? Or, is that which we are witnessing nothing more than “a mere tantrum by a clutch of ‘spooks’ whose jobs are under threat ... along with the liberal press having a ‘parallel tantrum’: [not believing] that they lost the election to Donald Trump” – as one American commentator told MK Bhadrakumar? Or, are we seeing a brittle American Establishment splitting apart, in a more profound way?

We do not know the answer. The notion of removing Trump from office seems somewhat far-fetched (see here). Certainly, America is deeply divided: Trump plainly evokes strong, emotional reactions. Three-fourths of Americans react to him strongly – either positively or negatively.

The *Pew Research Center*’s latest survey shows that only eight percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents approve Trump’s job performance, which is the lowest rating for any new president from the opposing party in more than three decades. But interestingly, Pew also finds that *84 percent* of Republicans and Republican-leaners, regard Trump’s initial job performance as president “favorably.”

A Divided Administration

But then, Gilbert Doctorow relates, as the new Administration got underway, “came a stunning about-face in the early roll-out of Donald Trump’s new foreign policy, which looked a lot like Barack Obama’s old foreign policy. We heard presidential press secretary Sean Spicer say Trump ‘expected the Russian government to ... return Crimea’ to Ukraine.

“Then we heard Defense Secretary James Mattis in Brussels (NATO headquarters), Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in Bonn (G20 Foreign Ministers meeting) and Vice President Pence in Munich (Security Conference) collectively pledge unswerving loyalty to the NATO alliance, insist that any new talks with Russia must be conducted from ‘a position of strength,’ and vow to hold Russia accountable for the full implementation of the Minsk Accords, meaning all sanctions stay in place pending that achievement which the Ukrainian government has consistently blocked, while blaming Moscow.

“Amid these signals of surrender from the Trump Administration – suggesting continuation of the disastrous foreign policy of the last 25 years – the newly revived enemies of détente on Capitol Hill added more anti-Russian sanctions and threats. In response to alleged violations by the Kremlin of the Treaty on Intermediate and Short-range Missiles (INF) dating back to 1987, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Arkansas, introduced a bill enabling the re-installation of American

nuclear-tipped cruise missiles in Europe. If enacted, this would undo the main achievements of disarmament from the Reagan years, and bring us back to a full-blown Cold War.”

This has unnerved Trump supporters; apparently disappointed some in Moscow; and also failed to reassure anxious Europeans at the Munich Security Conference. They are puzzling over which Administration faction to believe more correctly reflects future U.S. policy: the Pence/Mattis/Haley ‘wing’, that Europeans would like to hope is dominant; or, the Trump/Bannon/Miller triumvirate, which Steve Bannon hints views the European Union as a flawed construct, and who foresees conducting future relations with Europe, on a bilateral basis.

Which of these two, reflects America’s likely path, more accurately? Has the Establishment now succeeded in walking-back Trump’s agenda? Who now speaks for the President?

The answer is not hard to fathom: return to Pat Buchanan’s clear explanation of how Trump became President: “He saw the surging power of American nationalism at home, and of ethno-nationalism in Europe. And he embraced Brexit. While our bipartisan establishment worships diversity, Trump saw Middle America recoiling from the demographic change, brought about by Third World invasions. And he promised to curb them.”

Obviously, it is the Trump-Bannon wing. Were Trump to abandon his reading of the nation and of the Europeans that brought him to the Presidency, he might as well throw in the towel now. He will not be re-elected.

Weakening the Dollar

And Mr. Trump is showing no signs of reversing (for all the mixed messaging that has emanated from his diverse team). So, back to basics. What then is his foreign policy? Simply this: If President Trump wishes to keep his 84 percent (Republican) approval rating – and stay elected – there is only one way that he can do that: he must continue to carry “the working-class casualties and those forgotten Americans” (as Buchanan called them) of the Midwest, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

And the only way to do that is to bring back manufacturing jobs to this (white), Middle America, (hurting) constituency. And the only way you can bring those jobs back, is with a weak dollar. A strong dollar would be deadly to Trump’s project.

Today, the dollar is too strong to allow any real return of manufacturing to the U.S. Trump needs to staunch any propensity for the dollar to rise. And, in his very first interview upon taking office (with the Wall Street Journal), Trump’s

main point, was that he wanted the U.S. dollar “down.”

Here it is, then: Trump’s main foreign policy objective is the return of jobs to Middle America – and that means, in practical terms, avoiding a strong dollar. Secondly, the ultimate point of *détente* with Russia – apart from Trump’s reading that Middle America is experiencing war fatigue – is that *détente* can release a “peace dividend” which would be vital for the task of rebuilding America’s frayed infrastructure. (His tax proposals ultimately will have to be revenue neutral if Trump is to avoid an ugly row with his Tea Party supporters, who are aggressively fiscal conservative.)

Again, *détente* with Russia *is a domestic need*, required to attend to the rebuilding of the frayed structures of the communities who voted him into office. It is not anchored in any particular foreign policy ideology, but merely in a sense of peoples’ fatigue.

Of course, wanting a weaker dollar *and* wanting *détente* with Russia, does not mean that Trump will get either; he will continue to face stiff internal resistance and filibustering. But these two aims, as it were, may be seen to constitute the overriding prism by which Trump views his foreign policy aims, in the longer term.

In the shorter term – perhaps – what we are seeing now, is a tactical pause, dictated by the malicious leaks from within the system, and by the unrelenting “war” being waged by the mainstream media – a pause to allow Trump to get on with sorting out his Administration – purging the leaks, putting in place his people, and contending with certain of the mainstream media.

It seems the purge is slowly happening (it must be a huge process, and be imposing a heavy demand on time). It is however, simply not very realistic for Trump to pursue an accord with either Russia or China while he is under siege, and when his very survival is being widely questioned. And, as is now widely known, Trump believes in negotiating from a position of strength, and not weakness. Pence and Mattis may well have been dispatched to Europe to apply some anaesthetizing balm, while the difficulties of the first month are being resolved.

So, how might this “foreign policy” be conducted in practice? Well, if Trump were to impose protectionist measures on other states (China, say), this would likely result in their currencies depreciating, as a consequence. A 30 percent tax might result in a 30 percent currency devaluation. We have seen something of the sort happening with the peso, in the case of Mexico. And, *ipso facto*, if the Mexican or Chinese currency weakens, the dollar appreciates (thus weakening U.S. capacity to compete).

There are two possible routes ahead: one is for Trump to negotiate bilaterally with (say) Germany, Japan, China and others, to warn them that either they revalue their currencies (or, at minimum, hold their foreign exchange value stable), or else to suffer the consequences of a U.S.-imposed protectionism, which would badly damage the health of their economies.

Or, Trump can revert to the Reagan tactic of the mid-1980s, when the then the U.S. President pulled together all the main global central banks and finance ministers in Paris, to instruct that the dollar was not to be allowed to rise in value any further (after its rapid appreciation in the early 1980s). This was known as the "Plaza Accord."

Going with 'Bilateralism'

It seems that Trump will pursue the first course (bilateralism), as he has already made it clear that he wants to negotiate on a fuller field than just the stability of foreign exchange values. Specific trade deals, and inward investment into the U.S., will be on the agenda – as well as his declared aim of leveraging U.S. defense provision as a bilaterally negotiated *quid pro quo*, in return further economic benefit to the U.S. – rather than having the U.S. defense umbrella being provided as a highly subsidized "good."

The implications of this bilateral approach are significant. It does not imply, *per se*, that Trump should want to split Russia from China. Trump, by his own logic, would not want, ultimately, to resort to protectionism against China (other than as a negotiating ploy). Imposing punitive tariffs on China would likely lead to a strengthening of the dollar, and risk a devaluation of the yuan – even possibly a maxi-devaluation of the yuan. Rather, he wants *a deal*. One that would bring additional jobs and Chinese infrastructure investment to America.

The notion that America needs to divide Russia from China (or Iran) for strategic reasons (though one probably embraced by some of his team) is essentially "old think." It belongs to the neoconservative era, which held that America must remain as a global defense and financial hegemon. And therefore must contain and weaken any contending rising power.

Russia will not, in any case, break with China. But in the Trumpian logic, why should that matter, so long as Trump has achieved satisfactory commercial deals with each? (Kissinger though, may try to persuade Trump otherwise.)

Again, pursuing the war on radical Islam (for which Trump has called for proposals from the Pentagon) would not necessarily call for decisive military U.S. interventions in the Middle East, on this logic. A change in policy, *and in*

ethos, by a reformed CIA – away from using radical Islam as “a tool” by which to pursue its “interests” (as it has from Afghanistan in the 1980s to Syria in recent years), would *in and of itself*, bring about a profound change. It would quickly percolate through to European intelligence services – and more slowly – marinate Gulf thinking.

Changing the ‘Group Think’

Pat Lang, a former senior U.S. Defense Intelligence officer, notes how a small shift in bureaucratic “group think” from one paradigm to another can bring crucial change, simply by virtue of approaching a problem from a different direction:

“1. General Dunford, USMC, the uniformed head of the US armed forces, is meeting the week at Baku in Azarbaijan with General Gerasimov, the head of the Russian General Staff.

“2. My sources tell me that US and Russian air forces are increasingly coordinating and de-conflicting their air actions in Syria and Iraq. This can clearly be seen in USAF and US Navy air attacks on ‘moderate’ (in fact jihadi forces) in Idlib Province. These obviously have been coordinated with Russian air defenses.

“3. *The CIA has stopped providing assistance to aforesaid ‘moderate’ jihadi and FSA forces in Syria. They would not have done that without instructions from outside and above CIA.*

All of that tells me that sanity reigns in the Trump Administration no matter what lunatics like Schumer, Waters and McCain may do, think or say.” (*emphasis added*).

What then are the major risks to the Trump “paradigm”? They are not negligible. Any increase in international tension usually will lead to a flight to the “safety” of the U.S. dollar – thus to a “strengthening” of the dollar. (One good reason why Trump may stick with *rhetoric* against Iran, rather than *action*).

Secondly, although Trump has been trying to “talk down” the value of the U.S. dollar, most of his policies (de-offshoring of corporate cash, de-regulation and tax cuts) are seen as inflationary – and therefore are pushing the dollar upwards. So, too, are pronouncements by the Federal Reserve about the prospects for an interest rate hike next month. It is not clear that Trump will be able to keep the dollar weak, against a general sense that interest rates are heading upwards. David Stockman’s inflation index for the U.S., which uses more realistic values for energy, food, shelter and medical insurance than the official CPI index, is now rising at better than a 4 percent annual rate.

And thirdly, China may yet undo Trump's plans. As one well-versed economic commentator notes:

"I strongly contend that a more than one-half Trillion (\$) one-month Chinese Credit expansion in early 2017 will exert divergent inflationary impacts to those from early 2016...

"Inflationary biases evolve significantly over time...Liquidity will tend to further inflate the already inflating asset class(s); 'hot money' will chase the hottest speculative Bubble. Inflationary surges in Credit growth can, as well, have profoundly different impacts depending on inflationary expectations, economic structure and the nature of financial flows.

"I would argue that Chinese officials today face a more daunting task of containing mounting financial leverage and imbalances than just a few months ago. *The clock continues to tick, with rising odds that Beijing will be forced to take the types of forceful measures that risk an accident.*"

These inflationary risks threaten Trump, more than the unlikely prospect of impeachment. He has been consistent in warning that whomsoever won this Presidential election, would, sooner or later, face a financial crisis – and then possibly a concomitant social crisis. Like most revolutions, Trump's revolution cannot afford to stand still: if it cannot, or does not, go forward, it will go backwards. We will return to the past. Trump, no doubt, grasps this.

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.

Syrian War Propaganda at the Oscars

The Western-backed war in Syria, like the invasion of Iraq, was so smothered by propaganda that truth was not only the first casualty but has been steadily suffocated for five years, now reaching the Oscars, says Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

The Netflix movie "The White Helmets" may win an Oscar in the "short documentary" category at the Academy Awards on Sunday. It would not be a surprise despite the fact that the group is a fraud and the movie is a contrived infomercial.

Awarding “The White Helmets” an Oscar would fit with the desire of Hollywood to appear supportive of “human rights,” even if that means supporting a propaganda operation to justify another bloody “regime change” war in the Middle East.

Much of what people think they know about the White Helmets is untrue. The group is not primarily Syrian; it was initiated by British military contractor James LeMesurier and has been heavily funded (about \$100 million) by the U.S., U.K. and other governments. The White Helmets are not volunteers; they are paid, which is confirmed in a [Al Jazeera video](#) that shows some White Helmet “volunteers” talking about going on strike if they don’t get paid soon.

Still, most of the group’s heavy funding goes to marketing, which is run by “The Syria Campaign” based in New York. The manager is an Irish-American, Anna Nolan, who has never been to Syria. As an example of its deception, “The Syria Campaign” [website](#) features video showing children dancing and playing soccer implying they are part of the opposition demand for a “free and peaceful” Syria. But the video images are taken from a [2010 BBC documentary](#) about education in Syria under the Baath government.

There is also something almost dated about the Academy selecting this infomercial as an Oscar finalist, let alone the possibility of giving it the award. It’s as if the Syrian propaganda narrative of “good” rebels vs. “bad” government was still viable. In the case of the White Helmets, they were literally made into “white hats” bravely resisting the government’s “black hats.”

Yet, we now know that the propaganda around the “noble” rebels holding out in east Aleppo – with the help of the White Helmets – was largely a lie. The rebels mostly fought under the command structure of Al Qaeda’s Nusra affiliate and its fellow jihadists in Ahrar al-Sham. A [video](#) shows White Helmet workers picking up the corpse of a civilian after execution by Nusra/Al Qaeda and celebrating the extremists’ battle wins.

Western “human rights” groups touted not only the White Helmets but the “moderate rebels” who we now know were largely a P.R. cover for the terrorists and jihadists, as well as an excuse for the U.S. and its allies to funnel in weapons that were then turned over to the extremists.

When eastern Aleppo was finally freed from the armed militants, it was discovered that the White Helmets headquarters were alongside the headquarters of Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate. [Civilians](#) from east Aleppo reported that the White Helmets primarily rallied their “humanitarian” operations when the militants were attacked.

Soon after departing Aleppo in government-supplied buses, the White Helmets showed up in the mountains above Damascus where they allied with terrorist groups responsible for poisoning and then shutting off the water source for five million people in Damascus.

Neither Neutral Nor Independent

The White Helmets's claim to be neutral and independent is another lie. They only work in areas controlled by the rebel groups, primarily Al Qaeda's Nusra, and their leaders seek to bring in direct U.S. and NATO military intervention to assure a "regime change" in Syria although it likely would create a vacuum that the extremists would exploit to the further suffering of the Syrian people.

The film is as fraudulent as the group it tries to turn into heroes. The filmmakers never set foot in Syria. Their video footage takes place in southern Turkey where they show White Helmet trainees in a hotel and talking on cell phones. The footage from inside Syria is not from independent journalists but from the White Helmets themselves – and much of it looks contrived.

Khaled Khatib, the White Helmets's photographer who says he filmed the footage inside Syria, reportedly received a U.S. visa and will attend the Oscars. Khatib tweeted the first video he took showing the White Helmets, with a girl who was totally buried being removed without injuries or wounds or even much dirt.

The original video has the logo of Aleppo Media Center (AMC), which was created by the Syrian Expatriates Organization. Their address on K Street in Washington DC suggests this is yet another Western-funded operation similar to the Iraqi National Congress that lobbied and lied on behalf of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In the past few days, with perfect timing for the upcoming Oscars, there was yet another "miracle" rescue, another girl buried but then removed and whisked away in record-breaking time – perfect for social media.

The momentum in support of the White Helmets infomercial raises a question about how this Oscar is awarded. Is it for journalistic authenticity or is it to conform with the political passions of the moment, which themselves are partly contrived by a well-funded propaganda campaign mounted by Western/Israeli/Gulf governments.

Investigative Reports

The true source and real purpose of the White Helmets were exposed almost two years ago by investigative journalists. Max Blumenthal has written a two-part detailed examination of the "shadowy PR firm" behind the White Helmets. And Jan Oberg has written an overview survey of the "pro" and "con" examinations in his

work ["Just How Gray are the White Helmets"](#).

More recently, Vanessa Beeley has documented the fact that the White Helmets pretends to be the Syrian Civil Defense when there is a [real Syrian Civil Defense](#), which was begun in the 1950s and is a member of the International Civil Defense Organizations. The White Helmets group was launched as "Syria Civil Defense" in Turkey in 2013 before being re-branded as the "White Helmets" in 2014.

According to on-the-ground interviews in Aleppo, militants began supplying this operation by killing real Syrian rescue workers and stealing their equipment. Since then the White Helmets have been supplied by the West through Turkey with brand new ambulances and related rescue equipment.

Despite exposés about the group, the West's mainstream media and some "alternative" outlets continue to uncritically promote the White Helmets myth and rely on the group as a source of news about Syria. In 2014-2015, the White Helmets became a rallying point for columnist [Nicholas Krisof](#), the activist group [Avaaz](#) and others to campaign for all-out Western assault on the Syrian government and its military.

Perhaps ironically – given the Israeli government's desire for a "regime change" in Syria – the Israeli mainstream TV program I24 presented both sides of the issue and titled the segment "White Helmets: Heroes or Hoax?" By contrast, the progressive program "DemocracyNow" in the United States has only broadcast a [puff piece](#) promoting the "White Helmet" disinformation.

Whether or not the White Helmets snag the Academy Award, they surely deserve recognition for their skillful marketing and advertising. In 2016, the group received the [Rights Livelihood Award](#) and was seriously considered for a Nobel Peace Prize. The Oscar nomination for "The White Helmets" movie is just the latest success in the ongoing campaign of distortion and deception around Syria.

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How Trump Could Be a Truth-teller

Exclusive: Viewed as uncaring about facts, President Trump could change his image by releasing important information about recent turning-point moments that President Obama chose to hide from the people, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

One positive thing about a change in party control of the White House is that the new occupants sometimes release information that the old residents kept hidden because the facts were politically embarrassing or did not support some favored policy.

We saw this in the first days of the Obama administration when President Barack Obama declassified some documents relating to President George W. Bush's internal policy debates about torture and other abuses from the "war on terror."

However, as yet, we have seen nothing similar from the Trump administration even though some truth-telling might work very well for President Donald Trump, especially given his reputation for getting facts wrong. A commitment to transparency – giving some truth to the American people on important topics – could change Trump's image for the better.

Plus, by releasing information that was unjustifiably kept hidden during Obama's second term, Trump could underscore how Obama grew increasingly obsessive about secrecy the longer he remained in the White House, treating the American people as objects to be manipulated rather than citizens to be informed.

For instance, Obama kept the clamps on CIA analyses relating to the Ukrainian crisis, even regarding the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, killing 298 people and leading to a dangerous escalation in the New Cold War with Russia.

After the crash, the Obama administration quickly steered the Western media toward blaming President Vladimir Putin and got the European Union to join in economic sanctions against Russia.

However, after exploiting the rush to judgment against Putin, the Obama administration went silent, withholding U.S. intelligence evidence even from the official crash investigators. The more the administration learned about the tragic event and who was responsible the less it wanted to say.

At the time, I was told that the reason was that some senior CIA analysts were uncovering evidence that went in an inconvenient direction, suggesting a rogue Ukrainian operation connected to a hardline oligarch with the intent of shooting down a Russian jetliner, possibly even the one carrying Putin back from a state visit in South America, but instead brought down MH-17, which had similar markings.

To spread confusion and create some deniability for the attack, the scheme supposedly called for launching the missile from as deep inside "rebel-

controlled” territory as possible.

A Closed File

The source described getting this briefing from U.S. intelligence analysts, but I was unable to get the CIA or the Office of Director of National Intelligence to provide any guidance. Instead, they clammed up, claiming that they didn’t want to “prejudice” the official Dutch-led investigation (although I pointed out that the hasty U.S. finger-pointing at Russia had already done that).

The refusal of the Obama administration to open its MH-17 files allowed the “Dutch-led” Joint Investigation Team (JIT) to be effectively taken over by Ukraine’s unsavory SBU intelligence agency, which oversaw the care and feeding of Dutch and Australian investigators who decamped for long periods in Kiev.

The SBU’s “evidence” became central to the JIT’s investigation although the SBU was deeply involved in the war against the ethnic-Russian Ukrainian rebels and was even denounced by United Nations investigators for blocking access to alleged SBU torture centers. Beyond that, part of the SBU’s mandate was to protect Ukrainian government secrets, so the SBU had obvious conflicts of interest.

Nevertheless, the JIT relied on SBU-provided telephone “intercepts” of cryptic Russian-language conversations to base its conclusion that Russia provided the rebels a Buk missile system on the night of July 16, 2014, which was then taken on a strangely circuitous route far to the west before circling back to the east to a location far from the battlefield where it shot down MH-17 on July 17 and then was driven back to Russia that evening, again taking an unnecessarily long way home.

Though there were numerous holes in the SBU’s evidence and serious questions about why the Buk would have taken its bizarrely long ride – when a much more direct and discreet route was available – the Western media again showed no skepticism, simply accepting Russian guilt as established fact and dismissing any alternative explanation as “fanciful.”

The Value of Truth

However, whatever the truth is – whether the Russians and their rebel allies were responsible for the tragedy or whether a rogue Ukrainian operation brought down MH-17 – there is no reason why President Trump shouldn’t instruct CIA Director Mike Pompeo to release as much of the U.S. intelligence analysis as possible.

First, the families of the dead deserve all the help that the U.S. government

can provide to identify the killers and bring them to justice. Second, by releasing the MH-17 file, President Trump can demonstrate that he does care about truth in contrast to President Obama who mysteriously withheld this information for 2½ years and thus gave the culprits, whoever they are, time to escape and cover their tracks.

Further, if the file blames the Russians, releasing it would show that Trump is not in Putin's pocket, as many people in Official Washington claim. And, if the file implicates an element of the Ukrainian government – even a rogue faction – that might relieve geopolitical tensions with Russia and open possible paths for resolving the Ukrainian crisis.

The Trump administration also could consider other topics for declassification, such as the circumstances surrounding the U.S.-backed coup that ousted elected Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich on Feb. 22, 2014. U.S. intelligence surely was following those events closely and could clarify the roles of Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt and Sen. John McCain, who all cheered on and encouraged violent protests that preceded the coup.

Obama also hid the intelligence regarding the mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus, Syria, on Aug. 21, 2013, which Secretary of State John Kerry and others blamed on the Syrian government although later evidence seemed to implicate jihadist rebels who wanted to trick the U.S. military into intervening directly in the war on their side.

Given the importance of those turning-point moments – and the Obama administration's attempts to exploit them for geopolitical ends – the American people deserve to know what the U.S. intelligence analysts ultimately concluded and whether President Obama's team was telling the truth or had gotten lost in the Orwellian idea of "perception management."

President Trump might find that he can begin to turn around his reputation as a person who doesn't care about the truth by becoming a truth-teller.

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).
