

# U.S. Media Whitewashes Gaza Massacre

As Israel killed more than 50 Palestinians in cold blood protesting the American embassy move on Monday, U.S. corporate media failed to accurately report what happened in Gaza, once again meekly protecting the government line, argues Joe Lauria.

By **Joe Lauria** *Special to Consortium News*



Typical of the mindset of corporate media reporting on what happened in Gaza on Monday as Israeli soldiers killed more than 50 protesting Palestinians, is this tweet from CNN. It says: “Death toll rises to at least 52 people during clashes along the border fence between Israel and Gaza, Palestinian officials say. More than 2,400 people have been injured.” CNN’s new slogan is “#FactsFirst.”

Adam Johnson, who writes for the media watchdog Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, responded to CNN with a tweet of his own:

“This one’s got it all:

- ‘death toll rises’ – no one was killed and no one specific party did the killing, the death toll just mysteriously ‘rises’
- ‘clashes’ – launders all power asymmetry
- ‘2,400 people have been injured’ – all 2,400 are Palestinian but lets go with ‘people’.”

Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, said on his [blog](#) that he did a Google News search for the word “massacre” and found not one reference to Gaza.

A *New York Times* headline on Monday said: “Dozens of Palestinians have died in protests as the U.S. prepares to open its Jerusalem Embassy.” Journalist Glenn Greenwald responded: “Most western media outlets have become quite skilled – through years of practice – at writing headlines and describing Israeli massacres using the passive tense so as to hide the culprit. But the all-time champion has long been, and remains, the New York Times. [#HaveDied](#).”

[Perhaps because of pressure from Greenwald and others, the *Times* on Monday night changed its headline to “Israel Kills Dozens at Gaza Border as U.S.

Embassy Opens in Jerusalem.”]

Yet another CNN headline simply read: “Dozens die in Gaza.” Journalist Max Blumenthal responded: “Maybe they were old. Perhaps they were very sick. They just up and died! Who will solve the mystery behind these deaths?”

Blumenthal later offered a possible solution to the mystery: “According to the White House, Khhamas launched 41 protesters into unsuspecting Israeli bullets.”

## **Projecting**

Deflecting blame from Israel is one thing. But projecting it onto the victim is quite another. Israel’s UN Ambassador Danny Danon on Monday called for the U.N. Security Council to, “Condemn Hamas for their war crimes,” because “every casualty on the border is a direct victim of Hamas.”

He said in a statement released by Israel’s U.N. mission:

“Condemn Hamas for the war crimes they commit. Not only does Hamas incite tens of thousands of Palestinians to breach the border and hurt Israeli civilians, but Hamas also deliberately endangers Palestinian civilians. The murder of Israeli civilians or deaths of the people of Gaza – each one of them is a desirable outcome for Hamas. Every casualty on the border is a victim of Hamas’ war crimes, every death is a result of Hamas’ terror activity, and these casualties are solely Hamas’ responsibility.”

That’s one way to wash the Israeli government’s (blood-soaked) hands of the matter. Especially if you fear Israel will be accused of war crimes itself for its actions on Monday. Danon mentioned “breaching the border.” But it is virtually impossible to get in or out of Gaza without Israeli permission. Burning kites lofted over the barrier that pens in nearly two million Gazans subject to an internationally unrecognized economic blockade, supposedly constitutes “breaching,” in Danon’s mind.

He would do well to consider the words of Moshe Dayan, one of the Israel’s

Founding Fathers, who said in 1956:



“What cause have we to complain about their fierce hatred to us? For eight years now, they sit in their refugee camps in Gaza, and before their eyes we turn into our homestead the land and villages in which they and their forefathers have lived.” He went on: “We are a generation of settlers, and without the steel helmet and gun barrel, we shall not be able to plant a tree or build a house. . . . Let us not be afraid to see the hatred that accompanies and consumes the lives of hundreds of thousands of Arabs who sit all around us and wait for the moment when their hands will be able to reach our blood.”

So on the day, 61 years later, when the United States declared Jerusalem/Al Quds as the capital of Israel by moving its embassy there, rather than leaving its status to negotiation, people still trapped in Gaza protested at the gate fencing them in while Israeli military snipers picked off more than 50 of them and wounded thousands more for protesting their entrapment.

**U.S. Parrots Israel, Media Parrots U.S.**

Danon's position was callously promoted by the White House on Monday. Deputy Press Secretary Raj Shah was asked several times to condemn Israel's military response. "We believe Hamas is responsible for these tragic deaths," he said. "Their rather cynical exploitation of the situation is what's leading to these deaths and we want it stopped." He later blamed Hamas for a "gruesome and unfortunate propaganda attempt."

Unsurprisingly, Congress also lined up behind the Jewish State, mostly ignoring what went on in Gaza.

At the ceremony opening the embassy, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, called Monday "a monumental day in United States-Israel relations." Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, who was among four senators and 10 members of the House of Representatives present, incredulously said moving the embassy "furthers the chances of peace in the Middle East by demonstrating that America's support for Israel is unconditional and will not be bullied by global media opinion."

Back in Washington, Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, proclaimed: "Every nation should have the right to choose its capital. I sponsored legislation to do this two decades ago, and I applaud President Trump for doing it."

Ajamu Baraka, the Green Party vice presidential candidate in 2016, tweeted: "Where are the democrats condemning the slaughter in Gaza? If this was Assad they would be joining the republicans calling for military action pretending like they cared for Arab life."

### **Handful of Democrats Speak Out**

Bernie Sanders of Vermont mildly criticized Israel's murderous response. "Hamas violence does not justify Israel firing on unarmed protesters," he said. "The United States must play an aggressive role in bringing Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and the international community together to address Gaza's humanitarian crisis and stop this escalating violence."

Senator Dianne Feinstein, a Democrat from California, was more critical: "It's just heartbreaking. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is desperate. Instead of cutting aid, the Trump administration must restore our leadership role and do what it can to alleviate the Palestinians' suffering. The location of the embassy is a final-status issue that should have been resolved as part of peace negotiations where both sides benefit, not just one side. Israel will only know true security when it is at peace with its neighbors."

Representative Betty McCollum, a Democrat from Minnesota, tweeted: "Today's @USEmbassyIsrael opening in Jerusalem & killing of dozens of Gaza protesters advances @netanyahu agenda of occupation & oppression of Palestinians."

@realDonaldTrump policies are fueling conflict, abandoning diplomatic efforts to achieve peace.”

Pressure to support Israel on The Hill is infamously intense. But what is the media’s excuse for being afraid to simply report facts, such as that Israeli soldiers “killed” Palestinians on Monday. They didn’t just simply die.

Just because U.S. government figures are apologists for Israel, does not mean the media must be too. But that would require the U.S. having an independent mainstream media.

When control of powerful mainstream communications breeds self-aggrandizement and adherence to a line pushed for so long because it got you where you are in the pecking order of media culture, it seems virtually impossible to shift gears and take another look at what you are reporting.

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## Playing Politics with Terrorism List

Congressional Republicans continue to push Islamo-phobic bills, now seeking to put the mostly political Muslim Brotherhood on the foreign terrorist list, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Legislation introduced by Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Florida, to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) is regrettable on multiple counts. It represents a perversion of the FTO list and reflects an attitude that is likely to increase rather than decrease Islamist terrorism.

There was no official U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations until 20 years ago, and no need for one despite international terrorism having been a major official concern well before then. Notwithstanding the common practice in public discourse and the press of referring to how this or that government brands or designates a particular group as “terrorist,” any listing or branding by itself accomplishes nothing in combating such groups or reducing terrorism.

The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 created the U.S. FTO list for a very specific practical reason. Other provisions in that law criminalized for the first time the provision of material support to foreign terrorist organizations. To make prosecution under this statute possible, there needed to be a precise way of defining what constitutes a foreign terrorist organization. Hence the creation of the list.

The 1996 legislation established a procedure in which the various departments and agencies involved participate in a lengthy review process to examine which groups should be listed as FTOs. The law spells out the criteria to govern the review, which basically are that the group must be an identifiable organization that is foreign and has engaged in terrorism that somehow affects U.S. interests. The review process has been thorough and laborious, including the preparation of detailed "administrative records" assembling the available information about each group under examination. The Secretary of State makes the final determinations regarding listing or delisting.

There has been some political manipulation of the list, though it has been to keep or move a group off the list rather than putting it on. The most salient case of this involved the Iranian cult and terrorist group known as the Mojahedin-e Khalq, which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delisted in 2012. The group, which has killed American citizens in terrorist attacks and clearly met the criteria for being on the FTO list, had not changed its stripes. Instead, the delisting was a response to the group's long-running and well-financed lobbying campaign to win favor in Washington and especially among members of Congress.

A Congressionally imposed listing of the Muslim Brotherhood would be the first time such politicization would involve putting an organization on the FTO list rather than taking it off. It also would be the first time a group was listed not because of terrorist activities but instead because of dislike for its ideology.

Such a Congressional imposition would be a political end-run around the well-established process for applying the best possible expertise and information to the question of whether a group meets the criteria under the law that governs the FTO list. Such a move would reduce further the credibility in foreign eyes of what the U.S. Government say about terrorism, and lend substance to charges that much of what the United States calls opposition to terrorism is really just opposition to politics and ideologies it does not favor.

### **Mostly Political, Not Violent**

The Muslim Brotherhood is a predominantly Egyptian organization with origins

that go back to the 1920s. Its establishment was partly a response to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and to the militant secularism of Ataturk and his abolition of the Istanbul-based caliphate. For most of its modern history in Egypt, the Brotherhood has been the principal peaceful manifestation of political Islam.

During the rule of Hosni Mubarak, the Brotherhood was officially proscribed but in practice tolerated, being allowed to run candidates for office as independents or under the label of some other party. The extent of the Brotherhood's popular support was demonstrated after Mubarak's fall, when in a free election a Brotherhood leader, Mohamed Morsi, was elected president. The Egyptian military coup of 2013 began a harsh crackdown that was aimed at political liberties in general but specifically at the Muslim Brotherhood.

The forms and practices of Brotherhood offshoots outside Egypt have depended on the extent of political liberty in each location. In Jordan, for example, the organization has had a status slightly freer than the Egyptian Brotherhood had under Mubarak. The group in Jordan runs candidates and wins parliamentary seats under the Brotherhood's own party label, the Islamic Action Front. Where political liberty is lacking, something different evolves. In the Palestinian territories, for example, that evolution involved the creation of Hamas (which has its own place on the U.S. FTO list).

The habit of seeing previous Muslim Brotherhood ties in the violent and extreme activities of other groups disregards how participation in these groups, and especially the use of terrorism, is a *rejection* of the Brotherhood's peaceful, gradualist path. Such groups are foes, not offshoots or extensions, of the Brotherhood. The groups that terrorized Egypt in the 1990s explicitly opposed the Brotherhood and thought that its peaceful ways were feckless. The leader of one of those groups, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is now the leader of Al Qaeda.

### **The Folly of Suppression**

The fundamental mistake in suppressing groups such as the Brotherhood, or in effect condoning such suppression with a step such as the Cruz-Diaz legislation, is that closing peaceful channels for the expression of political Islam moves more people into the violent channels. We have seen this process playing out in Egypt since the coup, with the harsh practices of military strongman Abdul Fatah al-Sisi being followed directly by an upsurge in terrorist violence in Egypt.

The unfortunate lesson being absorbed by many young men with Islamist inclinations is that all those years of forbearance by the Brotherhood were for naught. The lesson is that only a violent path has any chance of success.

The newly introduced legislation is bad not only as a politicization of counterterrorism but also as a counterproductive approach to Islamist terrorism in particular. Also unfortunate are indications of this approach becoming part of the new administration's direction. A disturbing part of the testimony this week by the nominee for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, was his seamless lumping of the Muslim Brotherhood with "other agents of radical Islam, like al-Qaeda."

Likely to be even more damaging is the entrenchment of indiscriminate Islamophobia at the center of national security decision-making in the White House.

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## Dangers from Hating Government

Since Ronald Reagan declared "government is the problem," the hostility to public solutions has snowballed, leading to the Republican Party's selection of Donald Trump, someone who's never served in public office, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The determination beyond reasonable doubt of the presidential nominees of each of the two major political parties has invited much analysis of what a Clinton-vs.-Trump contest means in terms of larger political fault lines. Robert Merry's view of the election in terms of globalism and nationalism is an example. But the contest also is part of a larger pattern not only in terms of issue preferences that these two candidates represent but also in terms of the qualities that these individuals would bring to the presidency.

Much of what any president does in office cannot be programmed in advance and cannot be derived from positions on issues enumerated in a campaign or party platform or expressed in a campaign speech. Much of the important things a president does derive instead from the experience, intellect, instincts, and values that he or she brings into the job and that in turn are based on that



individual's background.

In that respect one of the most glaring attributes of presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump is that, were he to become president, he would be the only president in the history of the United States to have entered that office with no prior public service. Every U.S. president to date, from Washington through Obama, has either held elective office at the level of at least the U.S. Congress or governor of a state, or been appointed to public office at the level of the federal cabinet, or been a senior military officer at the level of a general who has commanded major campaigns.

Many U.S. presidents have combined two or more of these qualifications. Not only has Trump been none of these things; he doesn't even have any junior-level experience, civilian or military, that has anything to do with public service.

Even within the private sector, Trump's background does not extend to the sorts of decision-making situations that would confront, say, the chief executive officer of a large, well-established corporation.

Instead, Trump's career, apart from his flings at presidential campaigning, has almost exclusively been about deal-making aimed at personal enrichment and enhancing recognition of the Trump brand name. Against the backdrop of U.S. history and past U.S. presidents, Trump's personal qualifications are breathtakingly narrow and shallow, and his endeavors inwardly oriented.

### **Differences in Jobs**

High public office entails demands that are different in several important respects from even the most difficult and remunerative endeavors in the private sector. One difference involves not being able to pick the business lines one will pursue or the problems one will solve. The problems tend to impose themselves, especially though not exclusively in foreign affairs.

When making deals about building resorts or naming golf courses, the deal-maker works with a particular situation because he thinks there is profit to be made there; if there isn't profit to be made, he just looks somewhere else to do business instead. The occupant of the Oval Office has nothing like that sort of freedom to choose what problems to handle.

Another major difference involves having to deal with multiple and conflicting constituencies and interests – which is intrinsic to the art and skill of politics. The CEO of a major corporation gets into this somewhat, in the sense of having to deal with labor and customers as well as shareholders, but even there a bottom line of shareholder value (or executive suite value) predominates.

Juggling commercial balls is not like juggling political balls, given the fundamentally different sorts of claims for consideration from would-be stakeholders. And for a wheeler-dealer financial engineer, multiple constituencies need not be involved at all.

We also should consider the basic dimension of the public interest versus self-interest, and where the values of an individual really lie as indicated by past life choices. Of course, public office as well as private sector pursuits can be used as a vehicle for pursuing blind personal ambition – for a good portrait of a current example, see [Frank Bruni's take on Ted Cruz](#). But complete absence of any public service is itself a strong statement about this dimension.

As with other aspects of the Trump phenomenon – such as the xenophobia, the misogyny, and the wall-building nationalism – Trump's success in this election campaign reflects larger attitudes, be they those of angry white men or something else. As many commentators have observed, some of the most prominent themes that Trump has ridden to the nomination had already been nurtured and ridden, sometimes in slightly different and less crude form, by others – especially within the Republican Party, and in that sense the party deserves to get Trump as its nominee.

The same is true of the rejection, also represented by Trump, of public service and of selfless dedication to a greater public good. Government service and government programs are not the only way to serve the public good in general, but for many specific public needs they are the only way to serve them.

We hear the rejection incessantly in the form of the “government bad, private sector good” mantra that takes innumerable forms every day on Capitol Hill, from bureaucrat-bashing to ignoring crying needs that can only be answered by a larger government program – such as repairing debilitated transportation infrastructure, of which anyone who rides Washington's maintenance-deferred, and frequently breaking down, Metro system to work is acutely aware.

### **Disdain for Government**

We have seen other manifestations of the same set of attitudes from other candidates in this year's Republican race. There is Cruz, who even before his inane call to abolish the IRS (so then who collects taxes?) had devoted his tenure in the Senate to trying to shut down government rather than trying to make it work better. There is Marco Rubio, who even before his presidential campaign got rolling, had lost interest in doing his senatorial job and in working at it full time for six full years on behalf of the constituents who had elected him to do so.

And speaking of senators doing or not doing their jobs, there is of course the willful crippling of the Supreme Court for at least a year by the majority party in the Senate refusing to consider President Barack Obama's nomination to fill a vacancy.

Aspects of these attitudes, voiced as they are so incessantly from one side of the political spectrum, have cultivated corresponding attitudes in the larger American population. Heroes to the American public do not tend to be, as they once were, those who made exceptional sacrifices or performed exceptional deeds on behalf of the public good. Today they are at least as likely to be successful entrepreneurs – someone such as, say, Steve Jobs – who are admired for some combination of their financial success and the way they have satisfied us not as citizens but as consumers.

We have seen a slight foreshadowing of the Trump phenomenon in the presidential nominations in the most recent years. Consider the two Republican opponents who ran against Barack Obama. In 2008 it was John McCain, a senior senator and a war hero. In 2012 it was Mitt Romney, who – although his single term as governor of Massachusetts would have kept alive the unbroken string of public service experience among U.S. presidents – has devoted the rest of his career to being a private equity artist. i.e., a financial engineer, making deals to turn profits without a public interest being served, very much in the manner of Trump's dealings. Trump brought this mini-trend full circle last year with his disgraceful comments in which he said McCain was not a war hero but a loser.

The rejection of a sense of public spirit, and with that rejection the associated attitude that government is always a problem and never part of the solution, inflicts immense damage on the public good, even though much of that damage is less apparent than the condition of Washington's Metro.

Or sometimes it only becomes apparent when the damage becomes great enough to cause a crisis, as it has recently with the contamination of the public water supply in Flint, Michigan. Efforts of Republicans in Congress to deflect blame away from the Republican governor whose administration had taken control of the city and aim it instead at part of the despised federal bureaucracy, the Environmental Protection Agency, ignored how Congress had intentionally legislated away the power of EPA to do much in such situations.

President Obama, who visited Flint this week, spoke accurately about the "corrosive attitude" that opposes government investments in public infrastructure. "It's a mind-set that says that environmental rules designed to keep your water clean or your air clean are optional or not that important," Mr. Obama said. "That attitude is as corrosive to our democracy as the stuff that results in lead in your water."

People focused on making fortunes in the private sector should reflect on the lesson provided by Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson in the most recent *Foreign Affairs*, in which they explain, “It was the emergence in the first half of the twentieth century of a robust U.S. government willing and able to act boldly on behalf of the country as a whole that led to spectacular advances in national well-being over many decades.”

Steve Jobs was a terrific innovator, but look inside that iPhone that helped make him a hero, note Hacker and Pierson, and “you’ll find that most of its major components (GPS, lithium-ion batteries, cellular technology, touch-screen and LCD displays, Internet connectivity) rest on research that was publicly funded or even directly carried out by government agencies.”

The authors sadly note that “it has been the withering of government capabilities, ambitions, and independence in the last generation or two that has been a major cause of the drying up of the good times” that had prevailed in particular during the first three decades after World War II.

The dominant public philosophy in the United States about individual citizens’ relationship with their nation and their government has experienced a big turn for the worse in the half century since John Kennedy was urging citizens to ask what they can do for their country rather than what their country can do for them. The nomination by a major party of someone who has done nothing for his country and instead boasts of an ability to make money-making deals is a culmination of this terrible trend.

Donald Trump has exploited that trend, but there are many others who share responsibility for the trend and continue to exert their malign influence on American attitudes today.

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## Democrats March Toward Cliff

**Exclusive:** Barack Obama once called Hillary Clinton “likable enough,” but a new poll raises doubts about that, as the Democratic frontrunner’s net-negative has nearly doubled to 24 points, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As Democratic-insider “super-delegates” give Hillary Clinton a seemingly insurmountable lead for the presidential nomination, the former Secretary of State’s negative ratings continue to soar to stunning levels, hitting a net 24-point unfavorable in the new NBC-Wall Street Journal poll.

It is hard to imagine someone who is viewed unfavorably by a clear majority of voters (56 percent) and with a net-negative of 24 points winning the White House, except that most voters also don’t like the top Republican choices either. Donald Trump sports a 41-point net-negative and Sen. Ted Cruz is at minus-23 points. (By contrast, of the two trailing candidates, Sen. Bernie Sanders gets a net-positive 9 points and Gov. John Kasich a net-positive 12 points.)

But a major difference between Trump and Clinton in the latest poll is that Trump’s numbers haven’t moved much while Clinton’s net-negative has almost doubled in the last month. In other words, the more Americans get to see of Clinton the more they don’t want her.

While Clinton’s dismal approval ratings haven’t seemed to have shaken the Democratic establishment, which continues to line up behind her long-anticipated coronation, some outside analysts see the party leaders blindly marching toward a cliff.

Despite Sanders’s string of victories, Clinton still leads him in elected delegates, but her daunting lead comes from her dominance of “super-delegates,” party insiders who are not chosen by primaries or caucuses but still get to vote at the convention. According to The Associated Press tally, Clinton has 1,289 elected delegates to Sanders’s 1,045, but she has the backing of 469 “super-delegates” to Sanders’s 31. To win requires 2,383 delegates.

So, if Clinton’s eventual nomination is inevitable, the Democrats will be putting up a candidate who is broadly disliked by the American people. That means a Clinton candidacy will require massive spending on negative ads to make the Republican candidate so frightening in the eyes of most Americans that they will vote for Clinton out of fear, not hope.

There’s also the irony that although most attention has focused on the Republican need for a brokered convention – to block a Trump nomination – an argument could be made that the Democrats would benefit from a brokered convention themselves.

If neither Clinton nor Sanders could clinch the nomination on the first ballot, that could open the process to allow the party to select an alternative who has not been in the race, someone such as Sen. Elizabeth Warren, an economic

populist who is beloved by Sanders's backers and a woman who might be acceptable to Clinton supporters wanting the first female President.

Still, such a possibility does not appear to be in the cards. The odds remain heavily weighted in favor of Clinton securing the nomination and the Democrats then trying to make the best of her soaring unfavorable numbers.

In a 2008 debate, addressing a question about Clinton's high negatives, then-Sen. Barack Obama condescendingly opined that "you're likable enough, Hillary." But it turns out Obama may have been overstating the case. With her current unfavorable level at 56 percent – and only 32 percent holding a favorable view – many voters seem to be saying, she's not likable enough.

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

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## Groveling Before AIPAC

The recent AIPAC meeting brought four of the five remaining presidential candidates – all except Bernie Sanders – to Washington to grovel at the feet of the Israel lobby, a depressing scene, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A depressing sameness characterized the speeches of presidential candidates to the recently concluded exercise in fervid conformity that is called the AIPAC annual meeting. Although the event and the organization ostensibly are dedicated to support for, and friendship with, the state of Israel, in practice the dedication was instead to the policies of the right-wing government that currently holds power in Israel, which is something different.

There was nothing approaching a free and open discussion of what policies would be in the interest of the peace and security of Israel and that a true friend of Israel would support. There was [no mention](#) of the occupation that, in the course of nearly half a century, has become Israel's defining characteristic and the single biggest barrier to Israel being able to enjoy a future as a democratic and Jewish state.

The Republican candidates all found somewhat different ways to say they would destroy the agreement that limits Iran's nuclear program. Such destruction

would, of course, serve the purpose of the Netanyahu government in helping it to fulminate endlessly about Iran as the “real problem” in the Middle East, taking attention away from every other problem; maybe we would even see a return of cartoon bombs to the rostrum of the United Nations.

But the candidates did not explain how destroying the agreement, which would mean the Iranians could spin as many centrifuges as they want, enrich as much uranium as they want to whatever level they want, and kick out all of the extra international inspectors provided for in the agreement, would somehow be in the interest of Israeli security. As leading Israelis who have dedicated careers to their nation’s security recognize, it would not be.

Perhaps one question of interest regarding the candidates’ otherwise drearily similar speeches to the AIPAC meeting was who, in this contest in pandering, could out-pander the rest. Donald Trump made a go of it, evidently erasing some of the suspicions he had aroused among this constituency with earlier sinful suggestions such as that a posture of neutrality would be needed for the United States to do something about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

No such lines were crossed in Trump’s speech at AIPAC, and he got a positive reception that would remind some observers of how earlier notorious demagogues could whip up frenzy in a crowd.

But the prize for out-pandering the others should go to Ted Cruz’s speech, as measured by sheer shamelessness in using extreme and outright deceitful rhetoric. Speaking after Trump, Cruz made sure that no one would ever suspect him of falling into that disgraceful state known as neutrality or to do anything that might lead to creation of a Palestinian state.

To make doubly sure no one missed the point, in the second sentence of his speech, right after saying “God bless AIPAC” and stating how thrilled he was to be there, Cruz declared that “Palestine has not existed since 1948.” And if any resolution on Palestinian statehood were to come to a vote at the United Nations, said Cruz, “I will fly to New York to personally veto it myself.”

The thesaurus of extreme terminology at Cruz headquarters must be terribly dog-eared after preparing this speech, including, among much else, the portions about the Iran nuclear agreement. According to Cruz, the agreement “is Munich in 1938” and risks “catastrophic consequences” by “allowing a homicidal maniac to acquire the tools to murder millions” – never mind that the agreement is all about taking tools away from the Iranians.

Among the cascade of deceitful references throughout the speech is a bizarre comparison in which Cruz says that the nuclear agreement “gives over \$100

billion to the Ayatollah Khomeini, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism," and that this "dwarfs the \$3 billion we give each year to the nation of Israel," a difference that is "unconscionable" and "fundamentally immoral."

No attention is paid to the fact that U.S. aid to Israel comes straight out of the pockets of American taxpayers whereas frozen assets that have been unfrozen under the nuclear agreement already belonged to the Iranians and the United States is not "giving" Iran any of this, that the amount of unfrozen assets not already spoken for to settle existing accounts is far less than \$100 billion, and that Ayatollah Khomeini has been dead for 26 years.

The one remaining presidential candidate who did not speak to the AIPAC meeting was Bernie Sanders. Sanders, campaigning elsewhere, instead submitted a written statement that addresses important issues involving Israel. Sanders, who happens to be the only Jew in the presidential race, notes at the outset of his statement that he is the only candidate with personal ties to Israel, having spent time there on a kibbutz as a young man.

The leading issue that Sanders addresses in the statement is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What he says about it is vastly different from what the other candidates, and especially the Republicans, said about it in their speeches. What he says also should be seen as eminently reasonable by those who genuinely want peace to replace that conflict and by those who are true friends of Israel.

It is a well-balanced statement that recognizes that peace "will require compromises on both sides" and will mean "security for every Israeli from violence and terrorism" as well as "security for every Palestinian." Sanders does not shy away from using the word "occupation," and he notes that "it is important to understand that today there is a whole lot of suffering among Palestinians and that cannot be ignored. You can't have good policy that results in peace if you ignore one side."

The depressing sameness of speeches at the AIPAC meeting suggests that with the election of anyone other than Sanders, there will be a depressing sameness in U.S. policy toward Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict beginning next January. That will mean Israel continuing down the path of apartheid and isolation, with more endless conflict and more shedding of blood of Israelis as well as Palestinians, and Israel moving farther away from ever being a peaceful, democratic, Jewish state.

Barack Obama still has almost ten months to shift that momentum at least somewhat. He already has shown a willingness and ability to defy the rightist Israeli government and the lobby that works on its behalf when he waged the



political battle needed to bring the Iran nuclear agreement into existence.

He has given ample indication that he fully understands the underlying issues. He has given other indications of being able and willing to set some new directions notwithstanding the longevity of old, stale, and destructive directions – notably with his changing of U.S. policy toward Cuba. And he never needs to run in any election again, not even for dog-catcher.

Mr. Obama should, sometime before the end of summer, give a major speech that lays out the main terms of what knowledgeable observers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have long understood to be necessary parts of any final settlement of that conflict. This would not preclude necessary negotiation of details between the parties, but would lay out the framework for a two-state solution that has been clear for some time.

You might call this an updated version of the Clinton parameters. Then in the autumn the United States should not just not veto, and not just accept, but should sponsor and promote a resolution of the United Nations Security Council that incorporates this framework.

Mr. Obama would be able to do this secure in the knowledge that he can make a case that is strong and truthful on multiple grounds. This step certainly would be very much in U.S. interests, given the damage to those interests of being associated with the continued occupation. It would be in the interests of justice and self-determination for the Palestinian people. And it would be in the interests of Israel, by helping to pull Israel off its current self-destructive path.

The rightist government in Israel would scream, as would the U.S. lobby that works on its behalf. Until and unless there is significant political change in Israel, the combination of religious rationalization, economic greed, and government-stoked fear that has powered the tenacious clinging to conquered territory will still be a major barrier to a peaceful path.

But a change in U.S. direction – if speeches and resolutions are backed up with corresponding use of material U.S. leverage – might at least lead Israeli voters and true friends of Israel elsewhere to see that the days of U.S. abetting of the self-destructive behavior are over, and to acknowledge that the conflict with the Palestinians over land and sovereignty cannot indefinitely be wished or bludgeoned away. And that would mean the new U.S. president, whoever he or she is, would be facing a new situation and new possibilities, different from the one that persists today.

To return in the end to the United States' own interests – as we always should –

the slogan that the Trump campaign uses, about making America great again, has some relevance. A really great nation does not display the obsequiousness toward another government that was on display in the arena where AIPAC met, and people who want to lead a great nation should not display it either.

We should ask, as President Bill Clinton did after his first meeting with a bullying Benjamin Netanyahu, “Who’s the [expletive deleted] superpower here?”

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post](#) at The National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)**

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## US Intel Vets Warn Against Torture

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

By Ray McGovern

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

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

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

Accordingly, we repeat [the offer](#) we extended on Feb. 26 – this time to the

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

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

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

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

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

### **On Torture, Pols & Polls**

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

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

There are, of course, polls purporting to show that a majority of Americans still think that torturing “bad guys” can be justified. That simply means that many citizens have been seduced by artificially stoked fear into believing what **all** independent investigations – including the detailed Senate study relying on original CIA documents – have proven: that despite all the TV and Hollywood

propaganda “showing” that torture “works,” it doesn’t.

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

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

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

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

What the commanding general of U.S. Army intelligence has said about torture bears repeating: On Sept. 6, 2006, the very day President George W. Bush announced and applauded the effectiveness of “enhanced interrogation techniques,” Gen. John Kimmons told a Pentagon press conference: “I am absolutely convinced [that] no good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years, tell us that.”

### **Wise Advisers Needed**

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

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

VIPS Steering Group, Sept. 14, 2015

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

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

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

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

Thomas Drake, former Senior Executive, NSA

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

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

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

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

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

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer

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

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

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

James Marcinkowski, Attorney, former CIA Operations Officer

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ali Soufan, former FBI Special Agent

Robert David Steele, former CIA Operations Officer

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

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

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

Valerie Plame Wilson, CIA Operations Officer (ret.)

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

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

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## Two Corrupt Establishments

**Exclusive:** The insurgent campaigns of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders have staggered Official Washington's twin corrupt establishments on the Republican and Democratic sides, but what happens next, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The United States is led by two corrupt establishments, one Democratic and one Republican, both deeply dependent on special-interest money, both sharing a similar perspective on world affairs, and both disdainful toward the American people who are treated as objects to be manipulated, not citizens to be respected.

There are, of course, differences. The Democrats are more liberal on social policy and favor a somewhat larger role of government in addressing the nation's domestic problems. The Republicans embrace Ronald Reagan's motto, "government is the problem," except when they want the government to intervene on "moral" issues such as gay marriage and abortion.

But these two corrupt establishments are intertwined when it comes to important

issues of trade, economics and foreign policy. Both are true believers in neo-liberal “free trade”; both coddle Wall Street (albeit seeking slightly different levels of regulation); and both favor interventionist foreign policies (only varying modestly in how the wars are sold to the public).

Because the two establishments have a chokehold on the mainstream media, they escape any meaningful accountability when they are wrong. Thus, their corruption is not just defined by the billions of special-interest dollars that they take in but in their deviations from the real world. The two establishments have created a fantasyland that all the Important People treat as real.

Which is why it has been somewhat amusing to watch establishment pundits pontificate about what must be done in their make-believe world – stopping “Russian aggression,” establishing “safe zones” in Syria, and fawning over noble “allies” like Saudi Arabia and Turkey – while growing legions of Americans have begun to see through these transparent fictions.

Though the candidacies of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders have many flaws, there is still something encouraging about Americans listening to some of straight talk from both Trump and Sanders – and to watch the flailing reactions of their establishment rivals.

While it’s true Trump has made comments that are offensive and stupid, he also has dished out some truths that the GOP establishment simply won’t abide, such as noting President George W. Bush’s failure to protect the country from the 9/11 attacks and Bush’s deceptive case for invading Iraq. Trump’s rivals were flummoxed by his audacity, sputtering about his apostasy, but rank-and-file Republicans were up to handling the truth.

Trump violated another Republican taboo when he advocated that the U.S. government take an evenhanded position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and even told pro-Israeli donors that they could not buy his support with donations. By contrast, other Republicans, such as Sen. Marco Rubio, were groveling for the handouts and advocating a U.S. foreign policy that could have been written by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Trump’s Israel heresy brought the Republican foreign-policy elite, the likes of William Kristol and other neoconservatives, to full battle stations. Kristol’s fellow co-founder of the neocon Project for the New American Century, Robert Kagan, was so apoplectic over Trump’s progress toward the GOP nomination that he announced that he would vote for Democrat Hillary Clinton.

### **Clinton’s Struggles**

Clinton, however, has had her own struggles toward the nomination. Though her

imposing war chest and machine-driven sense of inevitability scared off several potential big-name rivals, she has had her hands full with Sen. Bernie Sanders, a 74-year-old “democratic socialist” from Vermont. Sanders pulled off a stunning upset on Tuesday by narrowly winning Michigan.

While Sanders has largely finessed foreign policy issues – beyond noting that he opposed the Iraq War and Clinton voted for it – Sanders apparently found a winning issue in Michigan when he emphasized his rejection of trade deals while Clinton has mostly supported them. The same issue has worked well for Trump as he lambastes U.S. establishment leaders for negotiating bad deals.

What is notable about the “free trade” issue is that it has long been a consensus position of both the Republican and Democratic establishments. For years, anyone who questioned these deals was mocked as a know-nothing or a protectionist. All the smart money was on “free trade,” a signature issue of both the Bushes and the Clintons, praised by editorialists from The Wall Street Journal through The New York Times.

The fact that “free trade” – over the past two decades – has become a major factor in hollowing out of the middle class, especially across the industrial heartland of Middle America, was of little concern to the financial and other elites concentrated on the coasts. At election time, those “loser” Americans could be kept in line with appeals to social issues and patriotism, even as many faced borderline poverty, growing heroin addiction rates and shorter life spans.

Despite that suffering, the twin Republican/Democratic establishments romped merrily along. The GOP elite called for evermore tax cuts to benefit the rich; demanded “reform” of Social Security and Medicare, meaning reductions in benefits; and proposed more military spending on more interventions overseas. The Democrats were only slightly less unrealistic, negotiating a new trade deal with Asia and seeking a new Cold War with Russia.

Early in Campaign 2016, the expectations were that Republican voters would again get behind an establishment candidate like former Florida Jeb Bush or Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, while the Democrats would get in line behind Hillary Clinton’s coronation march.

TV pundits declared that there was no way that Donald Trump could win the GOP race, that his high early poll numbers would fade like a summer romance. Bernie Sanders was laughed at as a fringe “issue” candidate. But then something unexpected happened.

On the Republican side, blue-collar whites finally recognized how the GOP establishment had played them for suckers; they weren’t going to take it



anymore. On the Democratic side, young voters, in particular, recognized how they had been dealt an extremely bad hand, stuck with massive student debt and unappealing job prospects.

So, on the GOP side, disaffected blue-collar whites rallied to Trump's self-financed campaign and to his promises to renegotiate the trade deals and shut down illegal immigration; on the Democratic side, young voters joined Sanders's call for a "political revolution."

The two corrupt establishments were staggered. Yet, whether the populist anti-establishment insurrections can continue moving forward remains in doubt.

On the Democratic side, Clinton's candidacy appears to have been saved because African-American voters know her better than Sanders and associate her with President Barack Obama. They've given her key support, especially in Southern states, but the Michigan result suggests that Clinton may have to delay her long-expected "pivot to the center" a bit longer.

On the Republican side, Trump's brash style has driven many establishment favorites out of the race and has put Rubio on the ropes. If Rubio is knocked out – and if Ohio Gov. John Kasich remains an also-ran – then the establishment's only alternative would be Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, a thoroughly disliked figure in the U.S. Senate. It's become increasingly plausible that Trump could win the Republican nomination.

What a Trump victory would mean for the Republican Party is hard to assess. Is it even possible for the GOP establishment with its laissez-faire orthodoxy of tax cuts for the rich and trickle-down economics for everyone else to reconcile with Trump's populist agenda of protecting Social Security and demanding revamped trade deals to restore American manufacturing?

Further, what would the neocons do? They now control the Republican Party's foreign policy apparatus, which is tied to unconditional support for Israel and interventionism against Israel's perceived enemies, from Syria's Bashar al-Assad, to Iran, to Vladimir Putin's Russia. Would they join Kagan in backing Hillary Clinton and trusting that she would be a reliable vessel for neocon desires?

And, if Clinton prevails against Sanders and does become the neocon "vessel," where might the growing ranks of Democratic and Independent non-interventionists go? Will some side with Trump despite his ugly remarks about Mexicans and Muslims? Or will they reject both major parties, either voting for a third party or staying home?

Whatever happens, Official Washington's twin corrupt establishments have been

dealt an unexpected and potentially lasting punch.

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

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## Trump's Fear of a 'Brokered' Convention

**Exclusive:** The Republican establishment's last-ditch battle to stop Donald Trump may come down to whether convention rules can be rewritten, as ex-CIA analyst Peter W. Dickson explains.

By Peter W. Dickson

The spectacle of a deadlocked Republican convention and perhaps a nomination "bought" or brokered in Cleveland in July is a prospect that pundits have begun to take seriously as the primary and caucus contests have unfolded over the past month.

It is a scenario that particularly threatens front-runner Donald Trump, who has acknowledged that if he doesn't wrap up a majority of the delegates before the convention, he will be at "a disadvantage." And there is little doubt that the GOP power-brokers who see him as not electable (as well as a threat to the party establishment) are exploring ways to stop him at the convention and, if necessary, to "steal" the nomination from him.

Since the 11 state contests on Super Tuesday (March 1) were not winner-take-all contests, Trump was unable to drive his chief competitors, Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, out of the race. With pluralities in seven states, Trump won 240 delegates, far short of the 300 delegates that pundits had predicted before the fury over Trump's evasive remarks about an endorsement from white nationalist David Duke and the Ku Klux Klan.

Trump's main rivals were able to meet minimum thresholds to collect delegates in many of the Super Tuesday contests. But Trump regained his momentum in the March 8 contests, winning three – Michigan, Mississippi and Hawaii – while Cruz prevailed in Idaho.

Yet there is a key Republican [convention rule](#), known as Rule 40, which could hand Trump the nomination on a silver platter because it limits the number of nominees while prohibiting certain attempts to steal the nomination away from a

front runner.

The purpose of this rule was to help ensure the coronation of a clear front runner and to give a presumptive nominee a celebratory sendoff into the general election. Prior to the 2012 convention, this rule required a candidate to have won a **plurality** of delegates in at least five states to have his or her name put into nomination at the convention.

However, once Mitt Romney secured enough delegates to win the 2012 nomination, his supporters (especially key adviser-operative Ben Ginsburg) got this rule revised to block any person from being nominated at the convention unless he or she had won a **majority** of delegates in at least eight states. (Part of Romney's reasoning was to freeze out a major floor demonstration of support for libertarian Rep. Ron Paul of Texas and thus to present to the nation watching on TV a united party rallying behind the former Massachusetts governor.)

In addition to prohibiting the recording of any delegates won by candidates who failed to meet the eight-state threshold, Rule 40 barred delegates from promoting a groundswell on the convention floor for any person who did not participate in the state contests. Thus, the rule prevents a modern-day replay of the "We Want Willkie" selection of Wendell Willkie at the 1940 Republican convention. (Ironically, that would now rule out a stealth establishment strategy to mount a "Romney, Romney" uprising at the convention in Cleveland.)

It remains to be seen if and when Trump and his rivals can secure majorities of the delegates in eight states. Trump has met that threshold in seven of the 15 states in which he has won the most votes, meaning he is just one state short of the threshold.

Cruz has won the most votes in seven states and secured a majority of delegates in four states: Idaho, Kansas, Maine and Texas. In other words, the Texas senator is halfway there. But Rubio and Kasich have made little or no progress thus far, with the former only getting a majority of delegates for Puerto Rico.

The opportunity to secure a majority of a state's delegates becomes easier after March 15 when states can conduct "winner-take-all" primaries. That means the candidates will only need **pluralities** to win the 20 winner-take-all contests (all outside the South except Florida) to be held on or after March 15. (Another five states will give the top vote-getter a majority of their delegates.)

The number of delegates to be awarded under those rules total 960 which are almost 40 percent of all the delegates at the convention. The current situation would seem to favor Trump and Cruz as the ones most likely to exceed the eight-state threshold.

Even if Rubio and Kasich win their winner-take-all home states of Florida and Ohio, respectively, on March 15, it will be a formidable challenge in a four-man race for them to win a majority of delegates in eight states without a strong swing of support in their favor. So, it is not entirely out of the question that Trump alone or perhaps Trump and Cruz could end up being the only nominees at the convention, with all the Rubio and Kasich delegates effectively set to the side uncounted.

This outcome would mean that the magic figure – a simple majority – to win the nomination would drop below the stated requirement of 1,237 delegates. The practical effect of Rule 40, in wiping out the delegates won by candidates who cannot meet the threshold, makes a first-ballot victory a virtual certainty if there are only one or two candidates who are able to get their names placed in nomination.

Of course, there is the possibility that Republican Party leaders, who are mounting a frantic stop-Trump movement, might move to modify Rule 40 before the convention. North Dakota National Committeeman Curly Haugland, a member of the RNC Rules Committee, told The Daily Caller on Tuesday that there will be an attempt to change Rule 40 to open the convention to any candidate who has won any delegates.

Such a rule change, however, would have to be placed before the convention, meaning that it would need a majority of the delegates to pass, a difficult hurdle if Trump controls most of the votes. But if he doesn't, the maneuver could open a path for denying him the nomination on the first ballot and then steering the prize to another candidate on subsequent ballots, i.e., a "brokered" convention.

If a last-minute rule change is engineered to block Trump – or even just proposed for a vote on the convention floor – Trump and his supporters might throw the proceedings into chaos reminiscent of the Democratic convention in Chicago in 1968. Or Trump could decide to run as an independent as he has suggested he would do if he is "not treated fairly."

### **Historical Precedents**

Though there are few recent historical examples of a brokered GOP convention – the last seriously contested Republican convention was in 1976 when California Gov. Ronald Reagan challenged but lost to sitting President Gerald Ford – floor fights were far more common in earlier eras when the party bosses held sway.

In that context, it's well worth revisiting a pivotal, even iconic moment in the Republican Party's long history when the young party held its second national

convention in 1860, at “the Wigwam” in Chicago. Arguably, it was the most consequential presidential convention of all time, resulting in the dramatic nomination of a “dark horse” candidate named Abraham Lincoln whose nomination was undeniably “bought” via a pivotal bargain reached in a smoke-filled hotel room well past midnight, only hours before the balloting began.

Lincoln’s campaign manager David Davis “stole” the Republican nomination away from the icon of the Eastern Establishment, the famous New York Sen. William Seward. Defying the fastidious Lincoln’s repeated instructions from his home in Springfield, Illinois, not to cut any “bargains” or make “any contracts that will bind me,” Davis did just that and more, such as packing the arena with supporters given unauthorized tickets.

The turning point came when Davis made promises to the Pennsylvania delegation to get it to dump its favorite-son candidate (Simon Cameron) and flip to Lincoln on the second ballot. This stalled Seward’s powerful surge toward a majority of the delegates and brought an end to his anticipated coronation before the start of the fourth ballot.

The Seward supporters were livid. For Lincoln’s physical safety, Davis and his team fired off eight telegrams (preserved in the Lincoln papers at the Library of Congress) begging him to spurn numerous pleas that he come to Chicago to accept the nomination.

Despite his dismay over the wheeling and dealing, Lincoln suggested to Sen. Joshua Giddings any “conditions” (i.e. deals or promises) made at the convention were “honorable ones.” But Lincoln did make some appointments in line with Davis’s promises. For the sake of party unity, Lincoln appointed Cameron as Secretary of War, although he was sacked after nine months and replaced by Davis’s former Kenyon College classmate, Edwin Stanton.

Lincoln scholars, especially biographers, have long steered attention away from what happened at the Chicago convention. The revelation that Lincoln – a Christ-like figure after his assassination on Good Friday 1865 – needed a “kingmaker” like Davis takes away from the majestic trajectory of Lincoln’s life from humble origins to his martyrdom for a just cause: the salvation of the Union and the abolition of slavery.

Obviously, the nomination rules have changed dramatically from Lincoln’s days or even Willkie’s days – with party primaries and caucuses giving a much more prominent say to rank-and-file Republicans. This “democratizing” of the selection process has allowed a wealthy outsider like Trump to charge to the front of the race, running against the party insiders and spurning the financial backing of the powerful GOP “donor class.”

Now, the Republican establishment is hurling millions of dollars into anti-Trump campaign advertising to blunt Trump's popular appeal while counting on his three remaining challengers to block Trump's path to a clear majority of the delegates. That would make possible a convention scenario in which rules might be rewritten to open the floor to more choices.

Besides the delegates selected by voters, the GOP establishment will have 168 non-elected delegates, primarily members of the Republican National Committee (RNC) who can vote. But unlike the 712 "super-delegates" at the Democratic convention, they will not be free to vote as they wish to thwart a particular nominee and are supposed to support the candidate who won the most votes in their state.

Still, the key fight at the Republican convention beginning July 18 may be over the rules governing who is eligible to be nominated and what might happen if no one can win on the first ballot.

**Peter W. Dickson is a retired CIA political-military analyst and the author of *Old Kenyon and Lincoln's Kenyon Men*. Copyright © Peter W. Dickson, 2016**

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## VIPS Offers Advice to Candidates

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

By Ray McGovern

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

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

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

provide apolitical and unvarnished advice to anyone who seeks it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the first time).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our warnings to President Bush also came more than five years before the



completion of a five-year investigation by the Senate Intelligence Committee on pre-war intelligence, the results of which were approved by a bipartisan majority. On June 5, 2008, the date of its release, committee chair Jay Rockefeller commented on its findings:

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

### **Just So You Know**

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

The purpose of this open letter is merely to ensure that you know that you are welcome to dip into a different and unique “talent pool” Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). This pool is now several hundred years deep in collective experience and brimming with the kind of knowledge that flows from senior-level work in intelligence and related fields. Our record of memoranda, averaging three per year, speaks for itself.

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

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

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

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# New GOP Plans for Torture

President Obama's failure to prosecute Bush-era torturers created an impunity that has encouraged some Republican presidential candidates to tout new plans for more torture if they reach the White House, a grotesque example of "American exceptionalism," as Nat Parry explains.

By Nat Parry

Troubling comments within the Republican presidential field over whether to reinstate torture and implement other war crimes have been drawing criticism lately, with the 2008 Republican presidential nominee, Arizona Senator John McCain, even feeling compelled to weigh in last week by calling out the "loose talk" in the Republican primaries.

On Feb. 9, McCain took to the Senate floor to condemn remarks by his Republican colleagues regarding the use of torture, saying that "these statements must not go unanswered because they mislead the American people about the realities of interrogation, how to gather intelligence, what it takes to defend our security and at the most fundamental level, what we are fighting for as a nation and what kind of nation we are."

McCain's remarks were a welcome breath of sanity in a Republican presidential race that has recently been dominated by discourse that sounds much like a warped competition to see who would be the most brutal and lawless in the treatment of suspected terrorists. The televised debate on Feb. 6, for example, featured candidates Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz and Donald Trump vying for the "tough guy" vote, each expressing varied levels of support for waterboarding and other discredited "enhanced interrogation techniques."

While Cruz said he would support waterboarding in limited circumstances, Trump pledged to not only reintroduce the technique in a widespread way, but also introduce even more draconian torture practices if elected: "I would bring back waterboarding, and I would bring back a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding," he said.

Rubio also reiterated his support for waterboarding, saying that terrorism cases should not be held to the same humane legal standards of traditional law enforcement. "Well, when people talk about interrogating terrorists, they're acting like this is some sort of law enforcement function," he said. "Law enforcement is about gathering evidence to take someone to trial, and convict

them. Anti-terrorism is about finding out information to prevent a future attack so the same tactics do not apply.”

Taking this to its logical conclusion, what Rubio seems to be saying is that it is perfectly permissible to detain individuals suspected of ties to terrorism, without due process (or evidence), torture them into providing information, which may or may not be true including perhaps identifying other suspected terrorists in an endless process of extra-legal detention and torture that produces neither actionable intelligence nor evidence that can be used in a court of law.

It was precisely this sort of strategy that led to at least 26 of 119 detainees being wrongfully held and tortured in the CIA’s rendition program under George W. Bush, according to the Senate report on torture that was released in late 2014. (When asked about this later, former Vice President Dick Cheney coldly stated that he’s “more concerned with bad guys who got out and released than I am with a few that, in fact, were innocent.”)

This mentality of endless detention and interrogation is also largely responsible for the legal abomination of Guantanamo, and has complicated President Obama’s efforts in shuttering the prison. Because so much of the evidence against the detainees is tainted by torture, the evidence is inadmissible in court, making it impossible to bring them to trial in the United States.

But Rubio along with other Republican candidates has made it clear that it is a mistake to close the Guantanamo prison, which for 14 years has served as a legal black hole where detainees are denied the rights and protections they would be given by the Geneva Conventions or the Bill of Rights.

Rather than shuttering the prison, Rubio argued that it should be kept open indefinitely: “Here’s the bigger problem with all this,” he said. “We’re not interrogating anybody right now. Guantanamo’s being emptied by this president. We should be putting people into Guantanamo, not emptying it out, and we shouldn’t be releasing these killers who are rejoining the battlefield against the United States.”

In an earlier presidential debate, Rubio made clear that under his administration, indefinite detention and torture would be most welcome. “If we capture terrorists,” he said, “they’re going to Guantanamo, and we will find out everything they know.”

As for Trump, when he was pressed on his statements about bringing back waterboarding and devising even more brutal torture methods, he decided to

double down rather than backtrack.

On Feb. 7, the real-estate-mogul-turned-reality-TV-star-turned-presidential-contender appeared on "This Week" with George Stephanopoulos. "As president, you would authorize torture?" Stephanopoulos asked Trump.

"I would absolutely authorize something beyond waterboarding," Trump said. "And believe me, it will be effective. If we need information, George, you have our enemy cutting heads off of Christians and plenty of others, by the hundreds, by the thousands."

When asked whether we "win by being more like them," i.e., to mimic the tactics of Islamic State terrorists, Trump stated flatly, "Yes."

"I'm sorry," he elaborated. "You have to do it that way. And I'm not sure everybody agrees with me. I guess a lot of people don't. We are living in a time that's as evil as any time that there has ever been. You know, when I was a young man, I studied Medieval times. That's what they did, they chopped off heads."

"So we're going to chop off heads?" Stephanopoulos asked.

"We're going to do things beyond waterboarding perhaps, if that happens to come," Trump replied.

Trump has even insinuated that Cruz is a "pussy" for hinting that he might show some degree of restraint in the use of torture. With this kind of talk, it's clear that on the Republican side, the discussion has gone off the rails, leading several human rights groups to remind the U.S. of its moral and legal obligations not to engage in sadistic and cruel practices such as waterboarding.

"Waterboarding meets the legal definition of torture, and is therefore illegal," recalled Human Rights First's Raha Walla on Feb. 11. "Torture under U.S. and international law means acts that cause severe mental or physical pain or suffering. There's no question that waterboarding meets that definition."

Amnesty International's Naureen Shah also issued a rebuttal to the debate over waterboarding, which she described as "slow-motion suffocation." She pointed out the obvious that "the atrocities of the armed group calling itself Islamic State and other armed groups don't make waterboarding okay."

What the current "debate" over bringing back torture highlights, however, besides how perverse the Republican dialogue has become, is why prosecutions of the Bush-era CIA torture program are essential, and why it is so damaging that the Obama administration has shirked its responsibilities in this regard for

more than seven years.

As human rights advocates have long maintained, prosecuting Bush administration and CIA officials involved with the torture of terrorism suspects in the post-9/11 period is needed so that torture is not repeated in the future by subsequent administrations who because of previous decisions not to prosecute may consider themselves above the law.

Indeed, this is precisely why there is a requirement under international law for allegations of torture to be investigated and prosecuted so that torture does not become a “policy option” to be utilized or shelved depending on the political whims of the day.

This is a point that Amnesty International, for one, drove home following the release of the Senate’s CIA torture report in December 2014. In a statement entitled “Senate summary report on CIA detention programme must not be end of story,” Amnesty lamented that limited Justice Department investigations into CIA interrogations were ended in 2012 with no charges.

Human Rights Watch concurred, noting that unless the release of the Senate report leads to prosecutions, torture will remain a “policy option” for future presidents.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism Ben Emmerson stated unequivocally that senior officials from the Bush administration who sanctioned crimes, as well as the CIA and U.S. government officials who carried them out, must be investigated and prosecuted.

“It is now time to take action,” Emmerson said on Dec. 9, 2014. “The individuals responsible for the criminal conspiracy revealed in today’s report must be brought to justice, and must face criminal penalties commensurate with the gravity of their crimes. The fact that the policies revealed in this report were authorized at a high level within the U.S. government provides no excuse whatsoever. Indeed, it reinforces the need for criminal accountability.”

International law prohibits the granting of immunity to public officials who have engaged in acts of torture, Emmerson pointed out. He further emphasized the United States’ international obligation to criminally prosecute the architects and perpetrators of the torture methods described in the report:

“As a matter of international law, the U.S. is legally obliged to bring those responsible to justice. The UN Convention Against Torture and the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances require States to prosecute acts of torture and enforced disappearance where there is sufficient evidence to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction. States are not free to maintain or permit

impunity for these grave crimes.”

Zeid Raad al-Husseini, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that it’s “crystal clear” that the United States has an obligation under the UN Convention against Torture to ensure accountability.

“In all countries, if someone commits murder, they are prosecuted and jailed. If they commit rape or armed robbery, they are prosecuted and jailed. If they order, enable or commit torture, recognized as a serious international crime, they cannot simply be granted impunity because of political expediency,” he said.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed hope that the release of the torture report was the “start of a process” toward prosecutions, because the “prohibition against torture is absolute,” Ban’s spokesman said.

Needless to say, these appeals largely fell on deaf ears, with no criminal investigations launched whatsoever. Instead, the U.S. Congress responded with a symbolic “reaffirmation” of the ban on the torture a largely redundant and unnecessary piece of legislation since torture has long been unambiguously banned under international law, the United States Constitution and U.S. criminal statutes.

For his part, Obama used the publication of the Senate report as an opportunity to tout the virtues of the United States, and actually praised the CIA for its professionalism in carrying out its responsibilities.

Following the publication of the Senate report, in a statement obliquely trumpeting the notion of “American Exceptionalism,” Obama said: “Throughout our history, the United States of America has done more than any other nation to stand up for freedom, democracy, and the inherent dignity and human rights of people around the world.” He went on to offer a tacit defense of the torture techniques while touting his own virtue in bringing these policies to an end.

“In the years after 9/11, with legitimate fears of further attacks and with the responsibility to prevent more catastrophic loss of life, the previous administration faced agonizing choices about how to pursue al Qaeda and prevent additional terrorist attacks against our country,” he said. Although the U.S. did “many things right in those difficult years,” he acknowledged that “some of the actions that were taken were contrary to our values.”

“That is why I unequivocally banned torture when I took office,” Obama said, “because one of our most effective tools in fighting terrorism and keeping Americans safe is staying true to our ideals at home and abroad.” He went on to claim that he would use his authority as President “to make sure we never

resort to those methods again.”

But clearly, by blocking criminal investigations into the policy’s architects, Obama has done very little in a practical sense to ensure that those methods are not used again.

In an op-ed published by Reuters following the release of the Senate report, Human Rights Watch director Kenneth Roth called out the President for “steadfastly refus[ing] to permit a broad investigation of the use of torture after 9/11, allowing only a narrow investigation into unauthorized interrogation techniques that resulted in no prosecutions.”

Unless the Senate report’s revelations lead to prosecution of officials, torture will remain a “policy option” for future presidents, noted HRW. This is exactly what we are seeing play out today with the “loose talk,” as McCain calls it, regarding bringing back torture as official U.S. policy.

Following the one-year anniversary of the Senate torture report being released, Human Rights Watch reiterated its calls for prosecutions in a 153-page report, “No More Excuses: A Roadmap to Justice for CIA Torture.” The HRW report, released Dec. 1, 2015, challenges claims that prosecutions are not legally possible and outlines U.S. legal obligations to provide redress to victims of torture. It also details actions that other countries should take to pursue criminal investigations into CIA torture.

Of course, this report, like virtually all other calls for justice on the torture question over the past seven years, has been studiously ignored by Official Washington. And with the Republicans now falling over each other to pledge their support for illegal policies of torture and brutality, we are seeing the fruits of Obama’s refusal to uphold the laws of the land.

**Nat Parry is the co-author of *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.* [This story originally appeared at Essential Opinion, <https://essentialopinion.wordpress.com/2016/02/14/gop-torture-debate-and-obamas-failure-to-prosecute/>]**

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