

# Spoiling for a Wider War in Syria

**Exclusive:** America's neocons are back pounding the war drums, urging President Trump to escalate U.S. military attacks inside Syria even if that means hitting Russian targets and risking a new world war, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. mainstream media's near universal demonization of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin – along with similar hatred directed toward Iran and Hezbollah – has put the world on a path toward World War III.

Ironically, the best hope for averting a dangerous escalation into a global conflict is to rely on Assad, Putin, Iran and Hezbollah to show restraint in the face of illegal military attacks by the United States and its Mideast allies inside Syria.

In other words, after the U.S. military has bombed Syrian government forces on their own territory and shot down a Syrian warplane on Sunday – and after Israel has launched its own strikes inside Syria and after Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies have financed and armed jihadists to overthrow Assad – it is now up to the Syrian government and its allies to turn the other cheek.

Of course, there is also a danger that comes from such self-control, in that it may encourage the aggressors to test the limits even further, seeing restraint as an acceptance of their impunity and a reason to ignore whatever warnings are issued and red lines drawn.

Indeed, if you follow The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and other big U.S. news outlets, perhaps the most striking groupthink that they all share is that the U.S. government and its allies have the right to intervene militarily anywhere in the world. Their slogan could be summed up as: "International law – that's for the other guy!"

In this upside-down world of American hegemony, Assad becomes the "aggressor" when he seeks to regain control of Syrian territory against armed insurgents, dominated by Al Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS), or when he protests the invasion of Syrian territory by foreign forces.

When Assad legally seeks help from Russia and Iran to defeat these foreign-armed and foreign-backed jihadists, the U.S. mainstream media and politicians treat his alliances as improper and troublemaking. Yet, the uninvited interventions into Syria by the United States and its various allies, including Turkey and

Israel, are treated as normal and expected.

### **Demanding Escalation**

The preponderance of U.S. media criticism about U.S. policy in Syria comes from neoconservatives and liberal interventionists who have favored a much more ambitious and vigorous “regime change” war, albeit cloaked in prettier phrases such as “safe zones” and “no-fly zones.”

So, you have Tuesday’s Wall Street Journal editorial, which praises Sunday’s U.S. shoot-down of a Syrian military plane because it allegedly was dropping bombs “near” one of the U.S.-backed rebel groups – though the Syrians say they were targeting an Islamic State position.

Although it was the U.S. that shot down the Syrian plane over Syria, the Journal’s editorial portrays the Russians and Syrians as the hotheads for denouncing the U.S. attack as a provocation and warning that similar air strikes will not be tolerated.

In response, the Journal’s neocon editors called for more U.S. military might hurled against Syria and Russia: “The risk of escalation is real, but this isn’t a skirmish the U.S. can easily avoid. Mr. Assad and his allies in Moscow and Tehran know that ISIS’s days are numbered. They want to assert control over as much territory as possible in the interim, and that means crushing the SDF [the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces].

“The Russian threat on Monday to target with anti-aircraft missiles any U.S. aircraft flying west of the Euphrates River in Syria is part of the same intimidation strategy. Russia also suspended a hotline between the two armed forces designed to reduce the risk of a military mistake. Iran, which arms and assists Mr. Assad on the ground, vowed further Syrian regime attacks against SDF, all but daring U.S. planes to respond amid the Russian threat.

“The White House and Pentagon reacted with restraint on Monday, calling for a de-escalation and open lines of communication. But if Syria and its allies are determined to escalate, the U.S. will either have to back down or prepare a more concerted effort to protect its allies and now U.S. aircraft.

“This is a predicament President Obama put the U.S. in when his Syrian abdication created an opening for Vladimir Putin to intervene. Had the U.S. established a no-fly or other safe zone to protect refugees, the Kremlin might have been more cautious.”

As senior U.S. commanders have explained, however, the notion of a sweet-sounding “no-fly or other safe zone” would require a massive U.S. military

campaign inside Syria that would devastate government forces and result in thousands of civilian deaths because many air defenses are located in urban areas. It also could lead to a victory for Al Qaeda and/or its spinoff, Islamic State, a grisly fate for most Syrians.

### **Propaganda Value**

But the “safe zone” illusion has great propaganda value, essentially a new packaging for another “regime change” war, which the neocons lusted for in Syria as the follow-on to the Iraq invasion in 2003 but couldn’t achieve immediately because the Iraq War turned into a bloody disaster.

Instead, the neocons had to settle for a proxy war on Syria, funded and armed by the U.S. government and its regional allies, relying on violent jihadists to carry out the brunt of the fighting and killing. When Assad’s government reacted clumsily to this challenge, the U.S. mainstream media depicted Assad as the villain and the “rebels” as the heroes.

In 2012, the Defense Intelligence Agency, then under the direction of Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, warned that the U.S. strategy would give rise to “a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria.”

Flynn went further in a 2015 interview when he said the intelligence was “very clear” that the Obama administration made a “willful decision” to back these jihadists in league with Middle East allies. (Flynn briefly served as President Trump’s national security adviser but was ousted amid the growing Russia-gate “scandal.”)

Only in 2014, when Islamic State militants began decapitating American hostages and capturing cities in Iraq, did the Obama administration reverse course and begin attacking ISIS while continuing to turn a blind-eye to the havoc caused by other rebel groups allied with Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front, including many outfits deemed “moderate” in the U.S. lexicon.

But the problem is that almost none of this history exists within the U.S. mainstream narrative, which – as the Journal’s neocon editors did on Tuesday – simply depicts Obama as weak and then baits President Trump to show more military muscle.

### **What U.S. National Interests?**

The Journal editorial criticized Trump for having no strategy beyond eradicating ISIS and adding: “Now is the time for thinking through such a strategy because Syria, Russia and Iran know what they want. Mr. Assad wants to reassert control over all of Syria, not a country divided into Alawite, Sunni and Kurdish parts.

Iran wants a Shiite arc of influence from Tehran to Beirut. Mr. Putin will settle for a Mediterranean port and a demonstration that Russia can be trusted to stand by its allies, while America is unreliable. None of this is in the U.S. national interests.”

But why isn't this in U.S. national interests? What's wrong with a unified secular Syria that can begin to rebuild its shattered infrastructure and repatriate refugees who have fled into Europe, destabilizing the Continent?

What's the big problem with “a Shiite arc of influence”? The Shiites aren't a threat to the United States or the West. The principal terror groups – Al Qaeda and ISIS – spring from the extremist Saudi version of Sunni Islam, known as Wahhabism. I realize that Israel and Saudi Arabia took aim at Syria in part to shatter “the Shiite arc,” but we have seen the horrific consequences of that strategy. How has the chaos that the Syrian war has unleashed benefited U.S. national interests?

And so what that Russia has a naval base on the Mediterranean Sea? That is no threat to the United States, either.

But what is the alternative prescription from the Journal's neocon editors? The editorial concludes: “The alternative would be to demonstrate that Mr. Assad, Iran and Russia will pay a higher price for their ambitions. This means refusing to back down from defending U.S. allies on the ground and responding if Russia aircraft or missiles attempt to take down U.S. planes. Our guess is that Russia doesn't want a military engagement with the U.S. any more than the U.S. wants one with Russia, but Russia will keep pressing for advantage unless President Trump shows more firmness than his predecessor.”

So, rather than allow the Syrian government to restore some form of order across Syria, the neocons want the Trump administration to continue violating international law, which forbids military invasions of sovereign countries, and keep the bloodshed flowing. Beyond that, the neocons want the U.S. military to play chicken with the other nuclear-armed superpower on the assumption that Russia will back down.

As usual, the neocon armchair warriors don't reflect much on what could happen if U.S. warplanes attacking inside Syria are shot down. One supposes that would require President Trump to authorize a powerful counterstrike against Russian targets with the possibility of these escalations spinning out of control. But such craziness is where a steady diet of neocon/liberal-hawk propaganda has taken America.

We are ready to risk nuclear war and end all life on the planet, so Israel and

Saudi Arabia can shatter a “Shiite arc of influence” and so American politicians don’t have to feel the rhetorical lash of the neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks.

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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## Why Hillary Clinton Really Lost

**Exclusive:** An insider book on Campaign 2016 reveals a paranoid Hillary Clinton who spied on staff emails after losing in 2008 and carried her political dysfunction into her loss to Donald Trump, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

An early insider account of Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign, entitled *Shattered*, reveals a paranoid presidential candidate who couldn’t articulate why she wanted to be President and who oversaw an overconfident and dysfunctional operation that failed to project a positive message or appeal to key voting groups.

Okay, I realize that people who have been [watching Rachel Maddow](#) and other MSNBC programs – as well as reading The New York Times and The Washington Post for the past four months – “know” that Clinton ran a brilliant campaign that was only derailed because of “Russian meddling.” But this insider account from reporters Jonathan Allen and Annie Parnes describes something else.

As The Wall Street Journal [review](#) notes, the book “narrates the petty bickering, foolish reasoning and sheer arrogance of a campaign that was never the sure thing that its leader and top staffers assumed. ... Mr. Allen and Ms. Parnes stress two essential failures of the campaign, the first structural, the second political. The campaign’s structure, the authors write, was an ‘unholy mess, fraught with tangled lines of authority, petty jealousies, and no sense of greater purpose.’”

The book portrays Hillary Clinton as distant from her campaign staff, accessible primarily through her close aide, Huma Abedin, and thus creating warring factions within her bloated operation.

According to the Journal's review by Barton Swaim, the book's authors suggest that this chaos resulted from "the fact that Mrs. Clinton didn't know why she wanted to be president. At one point no fewer than 10 senior aides were working on her campaign announcement speech, not one had a clear understanding of why Americans should cast their vote for Mrs. Clinton and not someone else. The speech, when she finally delivered it, was a flop – aimless, boring, devoid of much beyond bromides."

The book cites a second reason for Clinton's dismal performance – her team's reliance on analytics rather than on reaching out to real voters and their concerns.

There is also an interesting tidbit regarding Clinton's attitude toward the privacy of her staff's emails. "After losing to Mr. Obama in the protracted 2008 primary," the Journal's review says, Clinton "was convinced that she had lost because some staffers – she wasn't sure who – had been disloyal. So she 'instructed a trusted aide to access the campaign's server and download the [email] messages sent and received by top staffers.'"

### **Nixonian Paranoia**

In other words, Clinton – in some Nixonian fit of paranoia – violated the privacy of her senior advisers in her own mole hunt, a revelation that reflects on her own self-described "mistake" to funnel her emails as Secretary of State through a private server rather than a government one. As the Journal's review puts it: "she didn't want anyone reading her emails the way she was reading those of her 2008 staffers."

But there is even a greater irony in this revelation because of the current complaint from Clinton and her die-hard supporters that Russia sabotaged her campaign by releasing emails via WikiLeaks from the DNC, which described how party leaders had torpedoed the campaign of Clinton's rival for the nomination, Sen. Bernie Sanders, and other emails from her campaign chairman John Podesta, revealing the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street banks and some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

WikiLeaks has denied that it received the emails from Russia – and President Obama's outgoing intelligence chiefs presented no real evidence to support the allegations – but the conspiracy theory of the Trump campaign somehow colluding with the Russians to sink Clinton has become a groupthink among many Democrats as well as the mainstream U.S. media.

So, rather than conducting a serious autopsy on how Clinton and the national Democratic Party kicked away a winnable election against the buffoonish Donald

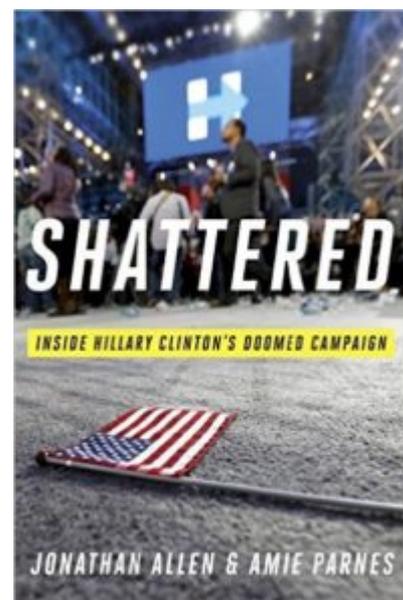
Trump, national Democrats have created a Zombie explanation for their failures, blaming their stunning defeat on the Russians.

This hysteria over Russia-gate has consumed the first several months of the Trump presidency – badgering the Trump administration into a more belligerent posture toward nuclear-armed Russia – but leaving little incentive for the Democrats to assess what they need to do to appeal to working-class voters who chose Trump’s empty-headed populism over Clinton’s cold-hearted calculations.

The current conventional wisdom among the mainstream media, many Democrats and even some progressives is that the only way to explain the victory by pussy-grabbing Trump is to complain about an intervention by the evil Russians. Maybe Maddow and the other Russia-did-it conspiracy theorists will now denounce *Shattered* as just one more example of “Russian disinformation.”

### **The Times’ View**

The New York Times’ [review](#) by Michiko Kakutani also notes how *Shattered* details Clinton’s dysfunction, but the newspaper inserted a phrase about “Russian meddling,” presumably to avoid a head-exploding cognitive dissonance among its readers who have been inundated over the past four months by the Times’ obsession on Russia! Russia! Russia!



However, the Times’ review still focuses on the book’s larger message: “In fact, the portrait of the Clinton campaign that emerges from these pages is that of a Titanic-like disaster: an epic fail made up of a series of perverse and often avoidable missteps by an out-of-touch candidate and her strife-ridden staff that turned ‘a winnable race’ into ‘another iceberg-seeking campaign ship.’”

“It’s the story of a wildly dysfunctional and ‘spirit-crushing’ campaign that embraced a flawed strategy (based on flawed data) and that failed, repeatedly,

to correct course. A passive-aggressive campaign that neglected to act on warning flares sent up by Democratic operatives on the ground in crucial swing states, and that ignored the advice of the candidate's husband, former President Bill Clinton, and other Democratic Party elders, who argued that the campaign needed to work harder to persuade undecided and ambivalent voters (like working-class whites and millennials), instead of focusing so insistently on turning out core supporters."

So, perhaps this new book about how Hillary Clinton really lost Campaign 2016 will enable national Democrats to finally start charting a course correction before the party slams another Titanic-style campaign into another iceberg.

**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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## Rigging the Coverage of Syria

The major U.S. news media has consistently slanted its coverage of the Syrian conflict to back neocon desires for more U.S. military intervention in support of "regime change," Gareth Porter wrote for FAIR.

By Gareth Porter

Coverage of the breakdown of the partial ceasefire in Syria illustrated the main way corporate news media distort public understanding of a major foreign policy story. The problem is not that the key events in the story are entirely unreported, but that they were downplayed and quickly forgotten in the media's embrace of themes with which they were more comfortable.

In this case, the one key event was the major offensive launched in early April by Al Nusra Front – the Al Qaeda franchise in Syria – alongside U.S.-backed armed opposition groups. This offensive was mentioned in at least two "quality" U.S. newspapers. Their readers, however, would not have read that it was that offensive that broke the back of the partial ceasefire.

On the contrary, they would have gotten the clear impression from following the major newspapers' coverage that systematic violations by the Assad government doomed the ceasefire from the beginning.

Corporate media heralded the ceasefire agreement when it was negotiated by the

United States and Russia in February, with the Los Angeles Times (2/3/16) calling it “the most determined diplomatic push to date aimed at ending the nation’s almost five-year conflict.” The “partial cessation of hostilities” was to apply between the Syrian regime and the non-jihadist forces, but not to the regime’s war with Nusra and with ISIS.

The clear implication was that the U.S.-supported non-jihadist opposition forces would have to separate themselves from Nusra, or else they would be legitimate targets for airstrikes.

But the relationship between the CIA-backed armed opposition to Assad and the jihadist Nusra Front was an issue that major U.S. newspapers had already found very difficult to cover (FAIR.org, 3/21/16).

U.S. Syria policy has been dependent on the military potential of the Nusra Front (and its close ally, Ahrar al Sham) for leverage on the Syrian regime, since the “moderate” opposition was unable to operate in northwest Syria without jihadist support. This central element in U.S. Syria policy, which both the government and the media were unwilling to acknowledge, was a central obstacle to accurate coverage of what happened to the Syrian ceasefire.

### **Shaping the Story**

This problem began shaping the story as soon as the ceasefire agreement was announced. On Feb. 23, New York Times correspondent Neil MacFarquhar wrote a news analysis on the wider tensions between the Obama administration and Russia that pointed to “a gaping loophole” in the Syria ceasefire agreement: the fact that “it permits attacks against the Islamic State and the Nusra Front, an Al Qaeda affiliate, to continue.”

MacFarquhar asserted that exempting Nusra from the ceasefire “could work in Moscow’s favor, since many of the anti-Assad groups aligned with the United States fight alongside the Nusra Front.” That meant that Russia could “continue to strike United States-backed rebel groups without fear ... of Washington’s doing anything to stop them,” he wrote.

On the same day, Adam Entous of the Wall Street Journal reported that Obama’s “top military and intelligence advisers don’t believe Russia will abide by a just-announced ceasefire in Syria and want to ready plans to increase pressure on Moscow by expanding covert support to rebels fighting the Russia-backed Assad regime.”

For two of the country’s most prominent newspapers, it was thus clear that the primary context of the Syria ceasefire was not its impact on Syria’s population, but how it affected the rivalry between powerful national security officials and

Russia.

Contrary to those dark suspicions of Russian intentions to take advantage of the agreement to hit U.S.-supported Syrian opposition groups, however, as soon as the partial ceasefire agreement took effect on Feb. 27, Russia released a map that designated “green zones” where its air forces would not strike.

The green zones, according to the Russian Ministry of Defense, corresponded with Syrian opposition groups that had signed on to the ceasefire. Furthermore, Russia stopped bombing the Nusra-controlled areas of northwest Syria, instead focusing on ISIS targets, as Pentagon spokesperson Jeff Davis confirmed on March 14.

### **Breaking the Ceasefire**

But instead of separating themselves from Nusra Front, the U.S.-supported armed opposition joined with Nusra and its jihadist allies in a major offensive aimed at destroying the ceasefire.

Charles Lister, a leading British specialist on the jihadists in Syria, has recounted being told by the commander of a U.S.-backed armed group that around March 20, Nusra officials began a round of meetings with non-jihadist opposition groups from Hama, Latakia and southern Aleppo – including those supported by the United States – to persuade them to participate in a major offensive against the Assad regime, rather than in a ceasefire and political negotiations.

News media did not ignore the offensive launched on April 3 by Nusra Front and its “moderate” allies. The Los Angeles Times (4/4/16) described a “punishing attack” by Nusra and several “so-called moderate rebel factions” on the town of Al Eis, southwest of Aleppo, “overlooking the M5 highway, a vital artery connecting the Syrian capital, Damascus, in the southwest of the country, with the government-held city of Homs, in west-central Syria, and Aleppo in the north.”

Associated Press (4/3/16) reported that Nusra Front’s closest ally, Ahrar al Sham, together with U.S.-supported factions had simultaneously “seized government positions in heavy fighting in northwestern Latakia province.” The story quoted Zakariya Qaytaz of the U.S.-supported Division 13 brigade as telling the agency through Twitter: “The truce is considered over. This battle is a notice to the regime.”

The Nusra-led offensive was a decisive violation of the ceasefire, which effectively frustrated the intention of isolating the jihadists. It led to continued high levels of fighting in the three areas where it had taken place, and Russian planes returned to Nusra Front-controlled territory for the first

time in nearly six weeks. Yet after the first reports on the offensive, its very existence vanished from media coverage of Syria.

### **Disappearing Key Facts**

No U.S. newspaper followed up over the next two weeks to analyze its significance in terms of U.S. policy, especially in light of the role of “legitimate” armed opposition groups in trashing the ceasefire.

Wall Street Journal correspondent Sam Dagher (4/4/16) suggested in his initial report on the offensive that it was a response to a Syrian air force airstrike in an opposition-controlled suburb of Damascus two days earlier, which activists said killed 30 civilians. But the offensive was so complex and well-organized that it had obviously been prepared well in advance of that strike.

None of the other papers sought to portray the offensive as the result of a pattern of increasing military pressure on the Nusra Front or its allies. In fact, after the initial reports, all four major newspapers – the New York Times, LA Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post – simply ignored the fact that the offensive had been carried out.

On April 19, three separate articles presented three variants of what became the broad media approach to explaining the fate of the ceasefire agreement. The Journal’s Nour Malas and Sam Dagher wrote: “A limited truce in Syria, brokered by the US and Russia in late February, has unraveled in recent weeks, with government forces escalating attacks on several fronts and rebels relaunching operations around the northern city of Aleppo.”

That formulation clearly suggested that either the regime had moved first, or that government and rebels had somehow both taken the offensive at the same moment; the former interpretation was encouraged by the headline, “Syrian Government Steps Up Airstrikes.”

On the same day, New York Times Beirut correspondent Anne Barnard wrote a piece focused mainly on regime airstrikes in two Idlib towns, Maarat al Numan and Kafr Nable, that had killed many as 40 civilians.

Barnard’s piece was headlined, “Ceasefire Crumbles as Bombings Kill Dozens” – suggesting that the airstrikes had somehow led to the “crumbling.” Barnard did refer to an otherwise unidentified “insurgent offensive” that preceded the strikes, but did not draw any causal relationship between it and the bombing.

The article cited the opposition claim that the government had repeatedly violated the partial ceasefire, but didn’t cite a single concrete instance of such a violation. And it appears to contradict that argument by observing that

the Idlib airstrikes had ended “the relative respite from airstrikes that had lasted nearly two months” – i.e., from the time the ceasefire had gone into effect.

Yet a third article to appear that day, published by Reuters, explicitly asserted that the regime airstrike on a crowded market by Syrian planes to which Barnard referred was the cause of the failure of the partial ceasefire.

“Syrian peace talks appeared all but doomed on Tuesday,” it said, “after airstrikes killed about 40 people in a crowded vegetable market in rebel territory, with the opposition saying a truce was finished and it would keep out of negotiations indefinitely.”

### **Wrapping Up the Distortions**

Finally, on April 27, Karen DeYoung, associate editor of the Washington Post, wrote a news analysis piece looking back on what happened to the ceasefire. The piece never mentioned the major Nusra Front offensive in which U.S.-supported armed groups had played a key role, passing on instead the distorted explanation of the fate of the ceasefire offered by national security bureaucrats.

“Some Defense Department and intelligence officials,” she wrote, “think Russia and its Syrian government client are clearly violating the ceasefire and provoking the opposition into doing the same.”

Like the three April 19 articles, DeYoung focused entirely on military moves taken by the regime more than two weeks after the joint Nusra/opposition April offensive. She cited the Syrian government bombing of Kafr Nabl and Maarat al Numan the previous week, asserting that the towns were “heavily bombed by Assad after rebel forces threw out Nusra occupiers and civilians took to the streets in anti-Assad demonstrations.”

But that characterization of the situation in the two towns, clearly aimed to support the notion that they were free of Nusra control, was false. In fact, Kafr Nabl had formerly been the home of the U.S.-backed Division 13, but far from having been thrown out, Nusra Front had reasserted its direct control over the towns in mid-March, kicking Division 13 out of its base and seizing its U.S.-supplied weapons after a fight over the larger town Maarat al Numan.

DeYoung went so far as to embrace the CIA/Pentagon bureaucrats’ argument that the United States should not have agreed to allow any attacks on Nusra Front in the ceasefire agreement.

“The Nusra ceasefire exception had already left a hole big enough for the Syrian

government and Russia to barrel through,” she wrote, “and they have not hesitated to do so in pursuit of regaining the initiative on the ground for Assad.”

The implication of the argument is that the United States should do nothing to interfere with Nusra’s capacity to strike at the Assad regime. Thus DeYoung quoted an analyst for the Institute for the Study of War, which favors a more belligerent U.S. policy in Syria, dismissing the military collaboration by U.S.-supported groups with Nusra Front as not really significant, because it is only “tactical,” and that Nusra merely offers to help those allies “retaliate” against regime attacks, rather than seeking a military solution to the conflict.

Such arguments are merely shallow rationalizations, however, for the preference of hardliners in Washington for pitting Al Qaeda’s military power against Russia and its Syrian client, enhancing the power position of the U.S. national security state in Syria.

### **A Simplistic Summary**

As more time passes, the media version of why the partial ceasefire failed has become even more simplistic and distorted. On July 12, DeYoung revisited the issue in the context of the Obama administration’s negotiations with Russia on military cooperation against Nusra Front. This time she portrayed the ceasefire quite starkly as the victim of Syrian and Russian bombing:

“Despite a ceasefire ostensibly in effect since February, Syrian planes have kept up a steady bombardment of both civilian and opposition sites – where they have argued that Al Nusra forces, exempt from the truce, are mixed with rebel groups covered by the accord. After observing the early weeks of the ceasefire, Russian planes joined the Syrian forces, including in an offensive last weekend that took over the only remaining supply route for both rebels and civilians hunkered down in the northern city of Aleppo.”

Playing the role of ultimate media arbiter of how the attentive public is to understand the pivotal issue of why the ceasefire failed, DeYoung has deleted from memory the essential facts. In her narrative, there was no Nusra Front plan to destroy the ceasefire, and no April Nusra offensive to seize strategic territory south of Aleppo with the full participation of U.S.-supported opposition groups.

The lesson of the Syrian ceasefire episode is clear: The most influential news media have virtually complete freedom to shape the narrative surrounding a given issue simply by erasing inconvenient facts from the storyline. They can do that even when the events or facts have been reported by one or more of those very

news media.

In the world of personal access and power inhabited by those who determine what will be published and what won't, even the most obviously central facts are disposable in the service of a narrative that maintains necessary relationships.

**Gareth Porter, an independent investigative journalist and historian on US national security policy, is the winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for Journalism. His latest book is *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, published in 2014. [This article was originally published by FAIR at <http://fair.org/home/how-media-distorted-syrian-ceasefires-breakdown/>]**

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## How Neocons Banished Realism

The grip that neocons and liberal interventionists have on Official Washington's opinion circles is now so strong that "realists" who once provided an important counterbalance have been almost banished from foreign policy debates, a dangerous dilemma that James W Carden explores.

By James W Carden

In a widely remarked upon article for the online version of *Foreign Policy* last week, Harvard's Stephen Walt asked a very good question. Why, Walt asked, are elite outlets like the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* "allergic to realist views, given that realists have been (mostly) right about some very important issues, and the columnists they publish have often been wrong?"

Walt then went on to do something pundits are generally loath to do: he admitted that he'd didn't really know the answer. This is not to say that I do, but I think Walt's question is worth exploring.

Why indeed? My own hunch is that we realists are a source of discomfit for the Beltway armchair warrior class not so much because we have been right about every major U.S. foreign policy question since the invasion of Iraq, but because we dare to question the premise which undergirds the twin orthodoxies of neoconservatism and liberal interventionism.

The premise, shared by heroes of the Left and Right, is this: America, a "shining city on a hill" (John Winthrop, later vulgarized by Ronald Reagan) "remains the one indispensable nation" (Barack Obama) and deprived of America's "benevolent global hegemony" (Robert Kagan) the world will surely collapse into

anarchy.

This strain of messianic thinking has deep roots in the psyche of the American establishment and so, in a sense, neoconservatism, which is really little more than a latter-day Trotskyist sect, is as American as apple pie.

Common though it is to trace, or conflate, the rise of American messianism to 1898 when the country first emerged as a global power, the cult of "American exceptionalism" has its roots in Puritan theology.

In his indispensable work, *The Irony of American History*, the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr cites a tract from 1650 in which the colonial leader Edward Johnson wrote that New England was "where the Lord would create a new heaven and a new earth, new churches and a new commonwealth together." Niebuhr wrote that the Puritans had a "sense of being a 'separated' nation which God was using to make a new beginning for mankind."

This strain of American solipsism was also noted with distaste by that most perceptive chronicler of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville who, in 1840, wrote that it was "impossible to conceive of a more troublesome and garrulous patriotism."

The historian John Lamberton Harper has observed that the strain of messianic thinking was evident throughout the Nineteenth Century, reminding us that Indiana Sen. Albert Beveridge once claimed that the good Lord had "marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world."

And so on and so on.

Throughout the Twentieth Century, the messianic way of thinking became ever more firmly entrenched – particular among the governing class – as America continued what many felt was its inexorable rise to global supremacy. At the turn of the century prominent men of politics and letters such as Brooks Adams, Theodore Roosevelt and the geopolitical theorist Alfred MacKinder enthusiastically subscribed to the notion that "all signs point to the approaching supremacy of the United States." Indeed, that this was so was an "inexorable decree of destiny."

America's entry into the First World War only deepened that sense of singularity. Here's Walter Lippmann, who later in life became something like the dean of American realists, writing about President Woodrow Wilson in the *New Republic* in 1917: "other men have led nations to war to increase their glory, their wealth, their prestige no other statesman has ever so clearly identified the glory of his country with the peace and liberty of the world."

Decades later, during the Cold War, Lippmann regained his sanity, while *TNR* all but lost its. And indeed, it was during that 40-year-long “twilight struggle” between the U.S. and the USSR that the messianic consensus grabbed hold of the American mind and, to this day, has not let go. But the roots of that way of thinking, as we have seen, are deep and long predate the Cold War.

And so I would submit that the reason the three major American newspapers are “allergic to realism” is because they are part and parcel of an establishment that has, for well over a century now, been in thrall to a messianic vision of global supremacy.

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## Making Excuses for Saudi Misbehavior

**Exclusive:** Saudi-Israeli apologists are doing back flips to justify why the U.S. interest in having peaceful relations with Iran should take a back seat to sectarian and regional desires of Riyadh and Tel Aviv, including that peace with Iran will cause the Saudis to misbehave even more, notes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

As the former publisher of the *The Wall Street Journal*, Karen Elliott House is as close to journalist royalty as they come. But that doesn’t make her all bad. Her 2012 book, *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines and Future*, is actually well worth reading. The product of years of behind-the-scenes reporting, it provided readers with a fascinating tour of a kingdom drowning in sleaze, decadence and hypocrisy.

“Islam as preached is not practiced,” House wrote. “Jobs are promised but not delivered. Corruption is rampant, entrapping almost every Saudi in a web of favors and bribes large and small, leaving even the recipients feeling soiled and resentful. Powerful and powerless alike are seeking to grab whatever they can get, turning a society governed by supposedly strict Sharia law into an increasingly lawless one, where law is whatever the king or one of his judges says it is or people feel they can get away with.”

The result is a grotesque combination of oppression, regimentation, and street-level anarchy. In other countries, for instance, young people are free to drink

beer, see movies, go to all-night raves, or do any of the other dumb stuff that young people the world over like to do. But in Saudi Arabia, where all such activities are forbidden, young men have one option only: steal cars.

As House puts it: "Nearly 80 percent of all cars are stolen by Saudis between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. Most use the cars for *tafheet*, or spinning, a favorite after-midnight pastime of thrill-seeking young Saudi men. Groups of young men gather on isolated roads and accelerate their cars, spin them sideways, sometimes overturn them, or more often smash them into the parked vehicles of the scores of other young men who gather to watch. Not surprisingly, those who engage in *tafheet* prefer to spare their own vehicles by using stolen cars. Some 90 percent of stolen cars are found abandoned by thieves after joyriding or spinning."

YouTube is thus filled with amazing videos showing young Saudis drifting, crashing or changing tires while speeding along on two wheels rather than four.

Corruption also leads to massive economic dysfunctionality. As House writes, the kingdom's "many webs of patronage and multiple layers of bureaucracy evolved over the years to accomplish some purpose or another, but rather than enable, they increasingly disable Saudi citizens in their daily lives."

Paradoxically, it also leads to bigotry and fanaticism. Although one might think that nothing could be more enjoyable than burning through millions of dollars in unearned oil revenue, in fact it leaves growing numbers of petro-sheikhs feeling guilty and confused, particularly in a kingdom that pays endless tribute to Islam's martial virtues.

Thus, King Fahd, who ruled from 1982 to 2005, took time off from his splendiferous lifestyle, according to *On Saudi Arabia*, to build 200 Islamic colleges, 210 Islamic centers, 1,500 mosques, and 2,000 madrassas around the globe at a total cost of \$75 billion all for the purpose of spreading the kingdom's ultra-intolerant form of Islam to as many countries as possible.

Decadence and unearned oil wealth thus leads to a hankering for the austerities of jihad. In a follow-up visit last November, House told of a Saudi imam who informed her "that his son is begging to go to Syria to join ISIS. While the imam says he is discouraging the teenager, he acknowledged that he finds the ISIS call for a caliphate 'exciting.' Like all too many Saudis, he sees the Al Saud as too worldly."

### **Bowing to Saudi Desires**

*On Saudi Arabia* is thus a powerful indictment of a rentier state whose sole non-energy export at this point is jihad. Now that the same state is upset because

the U.S. has reached a nuclear accord with Iran, one would think that House's answer, given the scathing portrait she has drawn, would be roughly the same as Rhett Butler's in "Gone With the Wind": "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

But, no, House is beside herself with indignation that Barack Obama would do such a terrible thing to an old friend. Obama says he is bringing peace, she writes in the Wall Street Journal, but "the near-term consequence will be more and even bloodier sectarian violence in the Middle East."

"Under the deal announced Tuesday," she adds, "Iran stands to have \$100 billion of assets unfrozen by late this year. That, coupled with the bizarre U.S. decision to unfreeze the ban on selling Iran conventional weapons and ballistic missiles down the road, means that Tehran can use those billions of freshly available assets not to enhance its economy, as the Iranians promised negotiators, but rather to buy deadly new arms for its nefarious partners across the region. These include Shiite militias in Iraq, Syria's Bashar Assad, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen."

The result is a "nightmare" that "puts Saudi Arabia in the cross hairs of Iran, but also of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). As Iranian-backed Shiites across the region increase efforts to exploit turmoil in failing Mideast states for Tehran's benefit, so too will their Sunni opponents in ISIS, who are no friends of the Saudis."

The accord, she adds, will also destabilize Saudi Arabia from within by fostering jihad: "Some 60% of the Saudi population is under 30 years old, and unemployment among those young Saudis is about 30%. Saudi Arabia has made it a crime for its citizens to join ISIS, but the Saudi Interior Ministry has acknowledged that in recent years some 2,200 young Saudis have gone to Syria to fight. As Saudi Sunnis watch their Sunni coreligionists being killed by Iranian-backed Shiites across the region with little opposition from any force other than ISIS, that terror organization's appeal grows, especially among deeply religious young Saudis."

Even though Iran and ISIS are arch-enemies, peace with one will foster the spread of the other. Unemployment will rise, young Saudis will flock to the Islamic State in greater numbers, while bloodshed and terrorism will all increase, yet, according to House, it will be all the fault of Obama and Iran.

As hard as Riyadh tries to fight back, moreover, there is little it can do. It has been unable so far to drive Syria's Bashar al-Assad out of office, its air war in Yemen is turning into a quagmire, and while it has undoubtedly hurt Iran by allowing oil prices to slide, it is harming its own economic prospects as well.

“So,” House concludes, “while the nuclear agreement is being cheered in Tehran, while Obama aides are fist-pumping in the White House, while Europeans are salivating at the prospect of doing business in Iran, and while the Israelis are trying to lobby the U.S. Congress against the deal, the Saudis are left grinding their teeth in Riyadh, surveying a bleak future and no good options to change it.”

### **Enabling ‘Wolf of Wall Street’ Behavior**

This is all very strange, especially since House, in *On Saudi Arabia*, describes the kingdom as “fundamentally a family corporation” and not a very admirable one:

“Call it Islam Inc. The board of directors, some twenty senior religious scholars who theoretically set rules for corporate behavior, are handpicked by the Al Saud owners, can be fired at royal whim, and have nothing to say about who runs the company. Al Saud family members hold all the key jobs, not just at the top but right down through middle management, even to regional managers. (The governors of all thirteen Saudi provinces are princes.) At the bottom of the company, ordinary employees are poorly paid and even more poorly trained because management doesn’t want initiative that might threaten its control.”

If so, then one would think that the *Journal* would be cheering its demise. After all, any company that mistreats its employees while allowing executives to cheat, steal and throw wild parties in the boardroom — la “Wolf of Wall Street” deserves to go down the drain or so countless *Wall Street Journal* editorials have assured us.

But since Saudi Arabia is a U.S. “ally,” different rules pertain. It may be teetering on the edge, but Washington, House now writes, should do everything in its power to keep it from going over the precipice. It must tolerate its wars, its sectarianism, and its dysfunctional economic system because to do otherwise would be to violate a sacred trust although why that trust is so sacred is left unexplained.

House’s latest op-ed foray speaks volumes about how not only conservatives but nearly the entire foreign-policy establishment has painted itself into a corner over the need to cater to Saudi Arabia.

While decrying religious sectarianism, the U.S. has tied itself hand and foot to the two most sectarian regimes in the Middle East, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Washington claims to believe in democracy and regularly upbraids Syria, Iran and other countries for their human rights failings. Yet Israel is a

racial-supremacist state that grants superior status to the 48 percent of the population under its control that is Jewish, while Saudi Arabia is the single most illiberal society on earth, one that bans all religions other than Wahhabist Islam, mandates capital punishment for non-violent offenses (including sorcery), treats women like property, and subjects an estimated nine million foreign workers to “abuses and exploitation, sometimes amounting to conditions of forced labor.”

While the U.S. is supposedly the super-power in charge, it is so over-extended by this point and its commitment to such countries so open-ended that it is difficult to tell who's on top and who's not. Tel Aviv and Riyadh are obviously unhappy with the Iranian accord. Yet rather than showing irritation, the U.S. has responded with greater obsequiousness than ever.

When Obama called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on July 14 to inform him about the Iran deal, he offered what *The New York Times* called “a consolation prize: a fattening of the already generous military aid package the United States gives Israel.” In order not to ruffle the Israeli PM's feathers, the Times noted that the Obama administration “could be reluctant to put any additional pressure on Israel” to enter into peace talks with the Palestinians.

As for Saudi Arabia, the Times observed that “the United States, Britain and France are likely to want to soothe the kingdom's fears and in turn refrain from exerting a great deal of pressure on the Saudis' crippling airstrikes over Yemen.”

The U.S. thus tiptoes around its so-called clients more delicately than ever for fear of setting them off. Washington is less likely as a result to buck Saudi Arabia's air war against Yemen despite the increasingly horrendous consequences: twenty million people in need of humanitarian assistance, 15.2 million in need of basic health care, and more than one million internally displaced, not to mention a death toll that now tops 1,670.

It is also less likely to make a fuss over the fact that Yemeni militias backed by the Saudis and the other Arab gulf states are now fighting alongside Al Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula, the group that claimed credit for January's Charlie Hebdo massacre.

### **Dangerous Oil Dependency**

Of course, the real reason the U.S. keeps silent, the reason underlying all others, is the fact that the Saudi-dominated Gulf Cooperation Council sits on top of 40 percent or more of the world's proven oil reserves and 23 percent of its proven gas reserves.

Although the U.S. strategic policy in the Middle East is predicated above all else on safeguarding access to Persian Gulf energy supplies, in truth all that energy is less vital than the U.S. realizes since it is capable of weaning itself off fossil fuels through a combination of carbon taxes and strategic industrial investments. Yet global capitalism is too tenuous at this point to undertake anything so concerted even though it would conceivably be for its own good.

So the contradiction remains. Because the U.S. is unable to do the rational thing by weaning itself off oil, it finds itself doing the bidding of Saudi Arabia and other countries that are equally reactionary. It stands reality on its head by accusing Iran of destabilizing the Middle East when the guilty parties are obviously in its own camp. [See Consortiumnews.com's "US/Israeli/Saudi 'Behavior' Problems."]

Washington also accuses Iran of spreading the poison of religious sectarianism when, as *The New York Times* has admitted, it is the Saudis who are in fact obsessed with the putative Shi'ite threat. The U.S. decries war, yet joins with Riyadh in unprovoked assaults on countries like Syria and Yemen. By remaining dependent on energy from the Persian Gulf, the U.S. depletes its own energy political, moral, and intellectual.

Karen Elliott House has done some good reporting over the years. But the nightmare she describes from the Saudi reaction to the Iranian nuclear deal is not one that the U.S. is imposing on Saudi Arabia, but one that petro-capitalism is imposing on the world.

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## Anti-Government Economic Orthodoxy

Financial news network CNBC is dominated by correspondents and anchors who worship at the altar of the Market, preaching the right-wing theology of unrestrained capitalism and tightly constrained government. Amid that religious certainty, CNBC's Becky Quick breezily mocks economist Paul Krugman, Beverly Bandler notes.

By Beverly Bandler

Becky Quick, co-anchor of CNBC's "Squawk Box," thinks she knows more than Nobel

Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman, Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz, former Council of Economic Advisers chair Christina D. Romer and countless other eminent economists who have studied the New Deal and recession recovery data since the 1930s.

Quick, who joined CNBC in February 2001 after working for seven years for *The Wall Street Journal*, also believes she knows more than 320 economists who repudiated the right-wing budget-slashers in a statement from the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for America Progress in March 2011. Quick, who received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Rutgers (1993) and whose exposure to serious economics is unknown but appears limited, wrote in *Fortune*: “A call for frank talk about our debt from Bill Clinton (and me).”

In her *Fortune* piece, Quick is quick to dismiss Krugman’s concern about “deficit hysteria,” “fiscal scare tactics,” and the dangers of the “austerity budget.” In February 2010, for instance, Krugman presciently wrote:

“Thanks to deficit hysteria, Washington now has its priorities all wrong: all the talk is about how to shave a few billion dollars off government spending, while there’s hardly any willingness to tackle mass unemployment. Policy is headed in the wrong direction, and millions of Americans will pay the price.”

Yet, according to Quick, Krugman is wrong about the deficit. She asserts that the U.S. must reduce the national debt now. “Krugman’s claim that there is no fiscal crisis isn’t just laughable, it’s downright dangerous,” Quick said. “It is hard to find anyone who actually agrees with him.” She apparently is oblivious to a wide range of economic studies and the 320 economists mentioned above.

“It’s bad enough,” Quick stated, “that we can’t have a serious conversation about any of our nation’s problems during the election season. Now *folks* like Paul Krugman are trying to ensure that we can’t have one after the election either.” [Emphasis added]

Yet, as reporter Bonnie Kavoussi has pointed out: “Many economists agree that slashing government spending too quickly hurts economic growth. State and local austerity has deprived the economy of 2.3 million jobs over the past three years, according to a recent analysis by the Economic Policy Institute.

“Some financial bloggers,” Kavoussi notes, “think that Krugman is spot on.” Felix Salmon, finance blogger at Reuters, wrote, that CEOs’ latest call for deficit reduction is “gross self-interest masquerading as public statesmanship,” and that the economy needs “higher deficits, not lower ones” to combat high unemployment. Joe Weisenthal, deputy editor at *Business Insider*, also wrote in

October that “Obama’s deficits have done a lot of good” by helping dig the economy out of the recession.”

Economists agree that: “Both the private sector and the government have critical roles to play in growing our economy: Business investment drives the economy [and the middle class drives that], but public investments provide the foundations on which business investment depends. This winning combination paves the way for America’s economic success. Cutting necessary investments from the federal budget will only undermine the long-term competitiveness and productivity of the American economy.”

Despite such serious commentary, Quick claims not only to be oblivious to these judgments but she also appears to think that she know more than former President Bill Clinton by overlooking some important words in the statement that Clinton’s office provided her: “*it’s important not to impose austerity now before a growth trend is clearly established*, because as the austerity policies in the eurozone and the U.S. show, that will slow the economy, cut jobs, and increase deficits; and any credible deficit-reduction plan requires three things – spending reductions, *revenue increases*, and economic growth.” [Emphasis added]

So, what explains Quick’s positions and those of so many corporations? It seems that most Americans are slow to comprehend that there has been a hostile takeover of the nation and its government by corporations that can be traced back to the 1970s. For instance, on Aug. 23, 1971, soon-to-be Supreme Court Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr., then a Richmond, Virginia, attorney, drafted a confidential memorandum for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that describes a strategy for the corporate takeover of the dominant public institutions of American society.

But, is there anyone left in the English-speaking world who isn’t aware of corporations’ and Wall Street’s culpability in the current fiscal crisis?

The financial crisis, which began in August 2007, has been described as “the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.” Yet it did not come out of nowhere like some act of God. The crisis was just the latest phase of the evolution of financial markets under the radical deregulation process that began in the late 1970s.

The lax regulation permitted risky financial innovations, which then expanded rapidly amid an asset price bubble in the housing market. With huge profits to be taken, Wall Street and other financial institutions ignored their own risk management procedures and found little resistance from government (or skepticism from the media) where many allegedly smart people were worshipping at the altar of the “market.”

Quick, who appears to be one of those market true-believers, does not provide empirical (nor any other) support for her characterization of Krugman's views as "just laughable" and "downright dangerous." The "support" on which Quick apparently depends is the position of 44 CEOs from Fortune 500 companies who slavishly embrace Hooverville mentality and are now advocating the Simpson-Bowles plan.

Quick does not mention that the many *Fortune 500* companies have been contributing significantly to the deficit by not paying adequate taxes, in fact, some companies have been paying "zero" taxes. If corporations and the rich paid taxes at the same level as in the 1960s, the debt would disappear in a decade," according to a study by the Institute for Policy Studies.

Quick makes no mention of this rather provocative study nor has it been reported that corporations (reportedly awash with cash) have been enthusiastic about solving the national debt by paying their appropriate share of taxes along with the Super Rich. Quick also appears to have overlooked these related facts:

–In the 1940s, corporations paid 43 percent of all the federal income taxes collected in the U.S. In 2010, that percentage was only 8.9 percent.

–The U.S. raises less corporate tax revenue than most developed countries.

–The top statutory tax rate is 35 percent, but companies pay an average effective tax rate of about 25 percent. Some large companies paid "0" in taxes in 2010.

–Twelve major corporations made \$171 billion in profits from 2008 to 2010, yet had a negative income tax rate of 1.5 percent.

–In 2010, the tax bill of General Electric, with reported worldwide profits of \$14.2 billion (and \$5.1 billion from its operations in the United States), was: zero.

Economics is admittedly complex – it is a social science not for the faint of heart and no small challenge for non-economists. And serious economists can disagree. So, not having the education, the frame of reference, and intellect adequate to comprehend the empirical arguments of economists like Krugman and others is understandable.

But being arrogant and presumptuous to dismiss a serious thinker like Paul Krugman and several hundred other respected economists along with empirical studies over a period of several decades to serve the purposes of Wall Street and Big Business propaganda is another.

As the saying goes, “everyone has a right to one’s own opinion, but not one’s own facts.” In Quick’s case, and that of the government-budget-slashing corporations, neither facts nor empirical evidence have been presented to transform their opinions into supported, credible *arguments*.

Indeed, Quick and her corporate colleagues are long on opinions, myth and beliefs and short on arguments, facts and empirical evidence, a state of affairs mourned by eminent economists. They seem to consistently indulge in what the *New York Times* economics reporter Catherine Rampell calls “fake-onomics.”

During this pre-election period, many corporations seem to be too busy brazenly intimidating their employees and telling them how to vote as opposed to reading credible economic analysts.

Serious people can have serious disagreements, but Betsy Quick should not be considered “serious.” She is yet another example of questionable reporting and “opining” related to *The Wall Street Journal* (Amity Shlaes was also long a *WJS* Krugman critic. Shlaes, a onetime *WSJ* editorial board member “specializing in economics,” consistently criticized Krugman on the basis of a B.A. in English).

What the *WSJ* apparently considers quality reporting on economics is debatable. One can easily conclude that a job requirement at the *WSJ* is that of Krugman-hater (along with being anti-liberal, of course).

I personally believe that the *WSJ* is the most over-rated, most “downright dangerous” newspaper in the United States. The only time it is worth reading is when knowledgeable individuals like Bruce Bartlett, among others, write the *WSJ* in an attempt to straighten the editors out.

In my view, it takes advantage of its readers’ gullibility and confusing the love of money with economics. The *WSJ* is a prime example of “standing where it sits.” The name of the newspaper explains its focus, its loyalty, where its bread is buttered, *Wall Street*, not the nation’s economics, finance or fiscal health. *The Wall Street Journal* works for Wall Street and Big Business, period.

Not for just the last decade or so, but well before, the American public has learned that Wall Street and Big Business are not the sources of the best economics nor the best ethics. And let us not forget their role in the Great Depression of the 1930s, a human catastrophe brought on by the greed and lack of government regulation in the Gilded Age and the Roaring Twenties.

The current fiscal crisis, as Betsy Quick should know, also belongs primarily on Wall Street’s doorstep. Only careful regulatory policies by the federal government combined with smart counter-recessionary government spending can get the U.S. economy back on its feet.

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## Murdoch's WSJ Misleads on Climate

**Exclusive:** Despite a broad consensus among scientists that global warming is real and dangerous, Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal and other right-wing media have made climate-denial a central tenet of U.S. conservatism, requiring endless distortions, as Sam Parry observes.

By Sam Parry

The recent op-ed in Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal signed by 16 scientists, "[No Need to Panic About Global Warming](#)," is less surprising in its denunciation of global warming science the Journal's editorial page [seems incapable of dealing in reality-based climate journalism](#) than it is in its bush-league analysis.

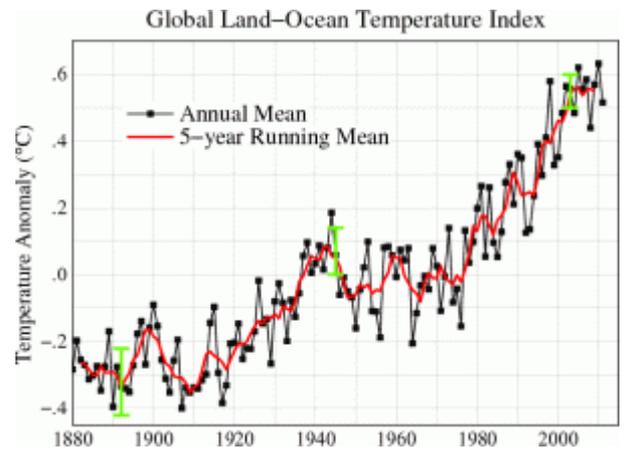
Memo to op-ed writers: When you resort to using Russian gulags to describe how modern scientific debate in the U.S. is conducted, you may want to adjust your hyperbole filters.

The only direct scientific claim made in the entire op-ed is the assertion that the planet hasn't warmed in the last ten years. How could climate change be happening if the planet isn't warming?

But anyone who has spent even a day researching climate change on the Internet will discover two points about this claim:

1) It isn't really true. 2) Even if someone really thinks it is true, it's irrelevant.

On the first point, just look at the average global temperatures since 1880 and you tell me if the planet is warming ([http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/graphs\\_v3/](http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/graphs_v3/)):



The claim that the planet hasn't warmed over the last 10 years bizarrely ignores the fact that the last ten years have all been well above normal. We've reached a new plateau in global temperatures that is significantly hotter than historical averages.

It also ignores the fact that global temperatures don't go straight up every single year. No one has ever claimed that to be the case. Indeed, climate scientists have bent over backwards to explain how we should focus on longer term trends and the big picture rather than looking at one specific year or a single weather event.

Global warming is like putting the climate on steroids. It doesn't by itself determine the weather in any given year. But the more we juice the atmosphere with heat-trapping gases, the longer warming term trends become painfully obvious.

Greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere are but one of many factors affecting the planet's climate. In any given year, events like the El Nino and La Nina Southern Oscillation cycle (ENSO) can have a much more immediate impact on average global temperatures.

We haven't had a strong El Nino which tends to cause warmer average global temperatures since late 1997 to early 1998. That El Nino event helped spike 1998's average global temperature, as you can see in the chart above. If you take the El Nino enhanced 1998 out of the chart, the average increase in global temperatures from the mid-1990s to today would be even more pronounced.

So this no-warming-in-the-last-decade claim is spurious. But, even if for the sake of argument you were to accept the point, it would still be completely irrelevant.

There is no denying that the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere has increased about 40 percent since the beginning of the Industrial

Revolution. We are now at 392 parts per million (ppm) CO<sub>2</sub> concentration compared with about 280 ppm pre-industrial levels.

This is a higher concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the Earth's atmosphere than anytime in at least hundreds of thousands perhaps millions of years. In fact, CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations have not exceeded 300 ppm at any time in at least the last 650,000 years. Considering that human civilization began roughly 15,000 years ago, we are already in uncharted territory.

But, this is just the prologue to what's in store. The current atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> are expected to explode in the coming decades. Even the most aggressive climate pollution reduction policies proposed and debated both in the U.S. and globally have been designed to limit CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations to 450 ppm.

Given the power of the denial-o-sphere in American media like the Wall Street Journal and the political gridlock in Washington, America is still probably years from taking the serious national steps to even hit the 450 ppm goal.

Globally, we continue to add CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere much faster than the planet can absorb. We are averaging 33.5 billion metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions every year. The planet can absorb some of these CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by processing carbon out of the atmosphere in natural carbon sinks, such as growing forests and phytoplankton floating near the surface of the ocean.

But these natural processes have limits. It's hard for the world's forests to act as carbon sinks, for instance, when humans are simultaneously deforesting the planet. While it's true that some of these forests are regenerating and growing forests absorb more carbon than mature forests, the current balance of deforestation rates make the world's forests a major source of carbon emissions, rather than a net sequestration resource.

Even the planet's vast oceans have their limits. Right now, oceans absorb up to a quarter of all anthropomorphic sources of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. But, recent research suggests that oceans are becoming less efficient at absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> as the concentrations of ocean CO<sub>2</sub> levels increase.

The results are all too obvious. The concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the Earth's atmosphere is growing at roughly 2-3 ppm per year and increasing. This rate of growth is overwhelming the planet's ability to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. And, according to some experts, we are currently on pace to hit an unheard-of 1000 ppm by the end of the century.

The last time the Earth saw CO<sub>2</sub> levels at 1000 ppm was 35 million years ago when the planet was about 30°C warmer than today, there was little or no ice on the

planet, and the seas were 250 feet higher than today.

This is roughly what the U.S. would look like with seas 250 feet higher:



Granted, this level of sea level rise is not going to happen in our lifetimes even under the direst climate models. Even if we hit 1000 ppm by the end of the century, it will take a long time to melt all the ice on the planet.

That said, scientists are very concerned that once we exceed 450 ppm, we could lose the ability to control future warming and that we will set the planet on a kind of runaway train course that will make this level of future warming inevitable.

The larger point is that we are not talking about trivial, manageable events. Global warming is a massive global experiment with obviously catastrophic implications beyond our ability to control.

Those who seek to deny the science and delay action really don't have a response to this bigger picture argument. What do they think the world looks like at 500 ppm? Or 1000 ppm?

Yes, they can play statistical games to claim that the Earth hasn't warmed in the last 10 years. But their protestations sound a lot more like children grabbing at excuses not to take a bath or brush their teeth. We certainly shouldn't make governing decisions based on this puerile nonsense.

For a more thorough take-down of the Wall Street Journal's silly 16 "scientists," please check out [Climate Progress](#).

**Sam Parry is co-author of [Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush](#).**

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