

# Broken Arrow

by G. Murphy Donovan (April 2015)



Policy is a worldview, a kind of wishful thinking. Intelligence is the real world, a wilderness of untidy facts that may or may not influence policy. The policymaker thinks he knows the answer. The intelligence officer and national security analyst have the much tougher tasks of confirming or changing minds.

When Intelligence fails to provide a true and defensible estimate, a clear picture of threat, policy becomes a rat's nest of personal and political agendas where asserted conclusions and political correctness become the loudest voices in the room. American national security analysis has been poisoned by such toxins. An Intelligence report these days might be any estimate that supports the politics of the [moment](#). Truth today is an afterthought at best and an orphan at worst.

Alas, corrupt Intelligence is the midwife of strategic fiasco. Four contemporary failures provide illustrations: revolutionary theocracy, the Islam bomb, imperial Islamism, and the new Cold War.

## Back to Theocracy

The Persian revolution of 1979 was arguably the most significant strategic [surprise](#) of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Yes, more significant than the fall of Soviet Communism. The precipitous fall of the Soviet Bloc, however, was another bell weather event [unanticipated](#) by Intelligence analysis. The successful religious coup in Iran, heretofore an American client regime, now provides a model for all Muslim states where the default setting among tribal autocracies is now theocracy not democracy. In the wake of the Communist collapse, Fukuyama [argued](#) that the democratic ideal was triumphant, an end of history as we knew it, the evolutionary consequence of progressive dialects. Fukuyama was wrong, tragically wrong. History is a two-way street that runs forward as well as backwards.

The fall of the Soviet monolith was not the end of anything. It was followed by profound regression, an era of religious irredentism. Worrisome as the Cold War was, the relationship with Moscow was fairly well managed. Who can argue today that East Europe or the Muslim world is more stable or peaceful than it was three decades ago?

The Persian revolution of 1979, not only reversed the vector of Muslim politics, but the triumph of Shia imperialism blew new life into the Shia/Sunni sectarian fire, a conflict that had been smoldering for a thousand years or more. The theocratic victory in Tehran also raised the ante for Israel too, now confronted by state sponsored Shia and Sunni antagonists, *Hezb'allah*, *Fatah*, and *Hamas*.

Shia *Hezb'allah* calls itself the party of God! Those in the Intelligence Community who continue to insist that religion is not part of the mix, have yet to explain why God is only part of the [conversation](#) on the Islamic side of the equation.

Global Islamic terror is now metastasizing at an alarming rate. More ominous is the assent of the Shia clergy, apocalyptic ayatollahs, a lowering of the nuclear threshold in the Middle East. Sunni ISIS by comparison is just another tactical terror symptom on the Sunni side – and yet another strategic warning [failure](#) too.

Tehran is in the cat bird's seat, on the cusp of becoming a nuclear superpower. Nuclear Iran changes every strategic dynamic: with Israel, with Arabia, and also with NATO. A Shia bomb is the shortcut to checkmate the more numerous, albeit more primitive, Sunni. Iran will not be “talked out” of the most potent tool in imperial Shia kit – and the related quest for parity with Arabian apostates.

## **The Islam Bomb**

The Islam bomb has been with us for years, in Sunni Pakistan, although you might never know that if you followed the small wars follies in South Asia. The enemy, as represented by American analysis is atomized, a cast of bit players on the subcontinent. First, America was fighting a proxy war with the Soviets. When the Russians departed, the enemy became the murderous *Taliban* followed by *al Qaeda*. Both now make common cause with almost every stripe of mujahedeen today. In the 25 years since the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan has been reduced to a rubble of narco-terror and tribalism. If we can believe bulletins from the Pentagon or the Oval Office, America is headed for the Afghan exit in the next two years – maybe. Throughout, the real threat in South Asia remains unheralded – and unmolested.

Nuclear [Pakistan](#) is one car bomb, or one AK-47 clip, away from another Taliban theocracy. This is not the kind of alarm that has been raised by the Intelligence Community. Hindu India probably understands the threat, Shia Persia surely understands the Sunni threat, and just as surely, Israel understands that a Sunni bomb is the [raison d'être](#) for a more proximate Shia bomb. Who would argue that the Sunni Saudis need nuclear “power”? Nonetheless, Riyadh is now [in the game](#) too. The most unstable corner of the globe is now host to a nuclear power pull.

The American national security establishment seems to be clueless on all of this. Indeed, when a unique democracy like Israel tries to illuminate a portion of the nuclear threat before the American Congress, the Israeli prime minister is stiff-armed by the Oval Office. If Washington failed with Pakistan and North Korea, why would anyone, let alone the Israelis, believe that Wendy [Sherman](#) is a match for the nuclear pipedreams of apocalyptic Shia priests.

Alas, the motive force behind a Shia bomb is not Israeli capabilities or intentions. Israel is a stable democracy where any territorial ambitions are limited to the traditional Jewish homeland. Israel is no threat to Persia or Arabia. Pakistan, in contrast, is like much of the Sunni world today, another internecine tribal or sectarian wildfire waiting for a match.

The advent of the Islam bomb in Asia was not just a strategic surprise, but the step-child of strategic [apathy](#). The folly of taking sides with the Sunni has now come home to roost. Iran is about to go for the atomic brass ring too, with the Saudis in trail, and there's not much that America can/will do except mutter about secret diplomacy and toothless sanctions. Of course, there's always the option of blaming Jews when appeasement fails.

### **Imperial Islam**

The *Ummah* problem, the Muslim world, has now replaced the Soviet empire, as Churchill would have put it, as the "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." There are four dimensions to the Islamic conundrum: the Shia/Sunni rift, intramural secular/religious conflicts, kinetic antipathy towards Israel and the West writ large, and the failure of analysis, especially strategic Intelligence, to unwrap the Muslim onion in any useful way. Imperial Islam, dare we say [Islamofascism](#), now threatens secular autocracy and democracy on all points of the compass.



### **Islam in London**

Islamic imperialism is a decentralized global movement. Nonetheless, the various theaters are united by tactics, strategy, ideology, and objectives. The tactics are *jihad*, small wars, and terror. The strategy is the imposition of [Shariah](#) Law. The ideology is the Koran and the Hadith. And the objective is a Shia or Sunni Islamic Caliphate – for infidels, a distinction without difference.

Muslim religious proselytizers and *jihad* generals in the field make no secret of any of this. The problem isn't that some Muslims dissent from this agenda, the problem is that the West, especially national security analysts, cannot/will not believe or accept what Islamic imperialists say [aloud](#), about themselves. The enemy is hiding in plain sight, yet the

Intelligence Community doesn't have the integrity or courage to make a clear call.

Noted British criminal psychiatrist Theodore Dahlrymple [captures](#) the bizarre logic of appeasement:

Racial, religious and cultural identity are morally important in politics, precisely what so many people would like to deny because it can so easily unleash the vilest political passions. Something that is true, say our people of goodwill to themselves, could have nasty consequences; therefore it is not true.

Propaganda provides many of the strategic "tells" in any conflict. The Nemstov murder in the shadow of the Kremlin provides an example. The knee-jerk reaction of politician and pundits in America was to implicate Russian culture, the Kremlin, or Vladimir [Putin](#).

Contrast the Nemstov blame game with any or every recent Islamist atrocity and the nuclear race in the *Ummah*. With these, the knee-jerk reaction is to [defend](#) Islam, more concern for Islamism and the religious equivalence shibboleth than the nuclear threat or Jewish, Christian, and apostate heads that are now literally rolling on a global scale. In a recent US State Department brief, we are told by State Department spokesman Marie Harf that Islamic terrorism might be [attributed](#) to "unemployment" (sic).

### **Cold War Redux**

The West can no longer take yes for an answer. The deliberate [resuscitation](#) of the Cold War midst a host of tactical defeats in the *Ummah* is probably one of the worst foreign policy choices on record.

The old Soviet Union: took down the Berlin Wall, relinquished former satellites, dismantled the Warsaw Pact military alliance, and purged East Europe of nuclear weapons. In response, America and the EU dismantled Yugoslavia, taking the Muslim side we might add, and aggressively expanded NATO up to the traditional Russian border. The "End of (totalitarian) [History](#)" as we knew it wasn't enough. Any vestigial associations with Moscow were relentlessly undermined. The American sponsored coup, orchestrated by Victoria Nuland at the US State Department, with likely help from the CIA, in Ukraine is the best and most recent example.

The "regime change" [strategy](#) in Europe has degenerated into some petulant version of nuclear chicken with the Russians. The American embassies in Moscow and Kiev regularly [host](#) anti-Putin dissidents in Ukraine and Russia.

Regime change folly has lowered the nuclear threshold in South Asia, the Mideast, and now

Eastern Europe. Sevastopol and Kiev are side shows. The real target for Brussels and Washington is Moscow – and the Putin [regime](#). The idea that the Kremlin or Russians can be undone or manipulated by: black operations, cyber war, sanctions, propaganda, or provocations is naïve and reckless. Putin is not a Pahlavi, Gadhafi, Assad, or Yanukovich.

Russians were very helpful in ridding Syria of chemical weapons and clearing the Ukraine of nuclear weapons. Moscow and Putin have the potential also to be very useful against terror, nuclear proliferation, and resolving the Levant lunacy too.

House of Representatives minority leader Pelosi recently lamented losing the “public relations” war with Russia. The American Secretary of State responded that Russian Television (RT) was [responsible](#) (sic). The more believable narrative spun by the Kremlin might be closer to the mark. Truth is a powerful ally, especially when it’s coupled with propaganda.

The origin of the new Cold War may have domestic origins. Neither major American political party has a clue as what to do with the [metastasizing](#) Muslim problem. Indeed, both sides gag on words like Islam, Muslim, or Mohammed. As 2016 approaches, both parties desperately need to change the subject and find a foreign policy to run on. Regime change in Russia seems to be the consensus choice for American demagogues, Right and Left.

The idea that domestic “politics stops at the border” was always honored more in the breach than anywhere else. The politics of personal destruction is a time honored tradition in America, especially on the Left. That standard has now been folded into the foreign relations bag of tricks. Henry Kissinger [claims](#) that “demonization” is not policy. That may be true in any real politic sense, but the Putin bogymen is an ideal straw man for the next American presidential election. Proxy war abroad seems to be the safe sex of domestic politics.

### **What Now?**

The American Intelligence Community is now the largest (17 agencies and uncountable contractors) and most expensive data collection and processing [complex](#) in history. Unfortunately, this gold-plated leviathan is undone by inferior analysis; indeed, estimates and reports that are more political than prudent. Withal, existential functions like strategic [warning](#) may be in freefall.

The obvious solution would be to take the strategic warning and national estimative functions out from under the IC, and the Executive Branch, and give those tasks to some apolitical body, assuming of course that an impartial forum might be sustained beyond the control of any branch of government. Realistically, it’s hard to believe that any American political party would

sponsor an independent and uncontrollable voice of candor or objectivity.

Nonetheless, there are small things that might be done to make a huge difference. During the Cold War, USAF Intelligence ran a service of common concern for the IC called "Soviet Awareness." The purpose of that program at Bolling AFB was to educate novice intelligence officers and FBI agents about the Soviet threat. The program included Russian history, the rise and spread of Communism, Marxist ideology, and Soviet military capabilities.

Ironically, the inter-agency program that answered the question "why we fight" was discontinued by James Clapper when he became the USAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence. Clapper is now the Director of National Intelligence. The Soviet Awareness resources were reallocated to the information processing function. Today there is no awareness program of common concern on Russian, Islamist, or any other threats.

Clapper threw the threat baby out with the Soviet bathwater. Indeed, in most service schools, discussing Islamic ideology or religion is [off limits](#). If any soldier or Intelligence officer were to ask: "Why do we fight?" the answer today would have to be, "trust me."

The real tragedy of Intelligence failure today is the [burden](#) born by American veterans, servicemen and women: the dead, crippled, and maimed. "Why we fight?" is a leadership deficit, the forgotten [readiness](#) issue. Troops don't have a clear picture of the enemy or the ideology in play in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Arabia, the Philippines, and Africa. They will know even less about the rationale for serving in Eastern Europe should another conflict be engineered with Russia.

Indeed, the Pentagon and the Oval Office throw lives at small wars that generals and politicians have no intention of declaring, justifying, or winning – by their own admission. The Commander-in-Chief says the he [seeks](#) outcomes where there are no victors or vanquished. Indeed!

Traditionally, we like to think of collection and associated clandestine operations as the sharp end of the Intelligence spear. In fact, analysis is the cutting edge. Unfortunately, that edge is gone today. You could do worse than think of Intelligence analysis as the Broken Arrow in the national security quiver.

We may not know why we fight today, but there is little mystery anymore about why we fail.

## Epilogue



The importance of information is seldom self-evident. Even if significance were obvious, information is still not knowledge. And clearly knowledge is not wisdom. Just as surely, only conscience allows an analyst to know the difference. All key judgments must be accompanied by courage and conviction too; courage to communicate to policy mandarins, or voters, with enough force to prompt action. Repetition is often the midwife of acceptance.

Good data and good analysis might be necessary, but never sufficient. Bridging the gap between analysis and acceptance is often a bridge too far for the timid. The national security continuum is a perilous enterprise. The messenger is always in danger of being shot. Alas, truth is an equal opportunity offender. It doesn't care who gets hurt.

Nonetheless, changing minds is the object of any good Intelligence. Policy and action is only stimulated by an altered consciousness about the subject at hand. Prudent policy is a function of correct data, honest analysis, moral certainty, and rhetorical skill – written or spoken.

Alas, none of these self-evident, common sense [observations](#), with the possible exception of abundant evidence, play much of a role in American threat analysis these days. A very expensive and growing intelligence Community (IC) is now the weak link in the national security chain. Any speculations about the catastrophic failures of American foreign policy in the past fifty years should begin with the “wilderness of mirrors,” James [Angleton's](#) metaphor for Intelligence praxis.

---

**G. Murphy Donovan** was the last Director of Research and Russian (nee Soviet) Studies at USAF Intelligence, the directorate that staffed the associated Soviet Awareness Program. He served under General James Clapper.

To comment on this article, please click [here](#).

To help New English Review continue to publish interesting and thought provoking articles such as this one, please click [here](#).

If you enjoyed this article by G. Murphy Donovan and want to read more of his work, please click [here](#).

G. Murphy Donovan is a regular contributor to our community blog, The Iconoclast. To see all of his entries, please click [here](#).