

# Obama's Credibility Crisis

**Exclusive:** Inside Official Washington's bubble, the Important People believe their "group think" is the envy of the world, but the truth is that their credibility has collapsed to such a degree that their propaganda can't even match up with the head-chopping videos of the Islamic State crazies, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Like the old story of the little boy who cried wolf, the U.S. government is finding out that just when its credibility is most needed it doesn't have any. With all its "soft power" schemes of "perception management," funding "citizen bloggers" and sticking with "narratives" long after they've been discredited, the U.S. government is losing the propaganda battle against ISIS.

That was the conclusion of outside experts who examined the State Department's online campaigns to undercut ISIS, according to an article by The Washington Post's Greg Miller who wrote that the review "cast new doubt on the U.S. government's ability to serve as a credible voice against the terrorist group's propaganda."

In other words, even when the U.S. government competes with the creepy head-choppers of ISIS, the U.S. government comes in second. Of course, the State Department remains in denial about its collapse of credibility and typically won't release the details of the critical study.

Instead, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy Richard Stengel insisted that the State Department's messaging operation "is trending upward," although acknowledging that his team is facing a tough adversary in ISIS and must "be equally creative and innovative." [For more on Stengel's falsehoods, see Consortiumnews.com's "Who's the Propagandist: US or RT?"]

But the U.S. government's problem is much deeper than its inability to counter ISIS propaganda. Increasingly, almost no one outside Official Washington believes what senior U.S. officials say about nearly anything and that loss of trust is exacerbating a wide range of dangers, from demagoguery on the 2016 campaign trail to terrorism recruitment in the Middle East and in the West.

President Barack Obama seems to want so desperately to be one of the elite inhabitants of Official Washington's bubble that he keeps pushing narratives that he knows aren't true, all the better to demonstrate that he belongs in the in-crowd. It has reached the point that he speaks out so many sides of his mouth that no one can tell what his words actually mean.

Indeed, Obama arguably suffers from the worst “credibility gap” among the American people since Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon on the Vietnam War or at least since George W. Bush on the Iraq War. As eloquent as he can be, average folk in the U.S. and around the world tune him out.

## **White Rage**

So, on the domestic side, when the President tells Americans that another trade deal this one with Asia is going to be good for them, does anyone outside the opinion pages of the elite newspapers and the big-shot think tanks believe him?

America now has a swelling underclass of formerly middle-class whites who know that they’ve been sold out as they face declining living standards and an unprecedented surge in dying rates. Yet, because they don’t trust Obama, these whites are easily convinced by demagogues that their plight stems from government programs designed to help blacks and other minorities.

This white rage has fueled the race-baiting and anti-immigrant campaigns of billionaire Donald Trump and other political outsiders in the Republican Party. Trump has soared to the top of the GOP presidential field because he says a few things that are true that rich people have bought up the political process and that trade deals have screwed the middle class giving him an aura of “authenticity” that then extends to his uglier comments.

Americans are so starving for a taste of honesty which they’re not getting from Obama or other members of the elite that they will believe a megalomaniacal huckster like Trump. After all, they know that what they get from Obama and his clique is manipulative spin, treating them like dummies to be tricked, not citizens of a Republic to be respected.

The hard truth is that the Great American Middle Class indeed has been sold out, often by fast-talking neo-liberals like President Bill Clinton who with the help of many centrists and conservatives pushed through trade deals and banking “reforms” that gussied up Wall Street while boarding up Main Street. The neo-liberals, working with Republicans, also promoted trade deals with Mexico and other low-wage countries that sent millions of U.S. jobs overseas.

From this experience, many Americans see “guv-mint” to blame for their plight, enticing them down the right-wing path that seeks to negate government power. What these Americans don’t grasp is that this Tea Party ideology is further selling them out to the corporatists and the speculators who will be put in an ever stronger position to gouge what’s left of the Middle Class.

In other words, at a time when Americans need their government to collectively represent their interests to provide for “the general Welfare” as the U.S.

Constitution mandated they have no faith that the government is theirs or will protect their interests.

### **The Propaganda Imperative**

A similar realization holds true with foreign policy. The U.S. government has so thoroughly bought into the concept of "perception management" and "strategic communications" blending psy-ops, propaganda and P.R. that the government has decoupled from facts. Information is just there to be exploited for geopolitical gain, usually to pin some offense on the latest "designated villain."

We saw this in 2003 with the disinformation campaign about Iraq's WMD, but it didn't stop there. The U.S. government has used its control of important media levers to demonize a variety of world leaders who have gotten in the way of Official Washington's desires. Meanwhile, equal or worse abuses by "our guys" are downplayed or ignored.

For instance, Libya's secular dictator Muammar Gaddafi was mocked when he warned of Islamist terrorists rampaging in eastern Libya. Indeed, Gaddafi's vow to fight them became the pretext used for a "regime change" operation under the "human rights" banner, "responsibility to protect."

That operation promoted by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who gloated over Gaddafi's murder ("We came, we saw, he died") has transformed Libya into a land of anarchy with the Islamic State and other terror groups seizing ground and chopping off heads. But Clinton, like other architects of this disaster, won't admit to a mistake.

Similarly, the Obama administration and the compliant mainstream U.S. media pushed a propaganda campaign against Syria's secular leader Bashar al-Assad, blaming him for virtually all the violence that engulfed Syria despite the awareness of senior U.S. officials, including Vice President Joe Biden, about the key role played by Sunni jihadists and terror groups with the backing of Sunni-ruled Gulf states and Turkey.

So, when a lethal sarin gas attack struck a suburb of Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, the Obama administration and key "human rights" groups blamed Assad's forces although some U.S. intelligence analysts and independent observers quickly smelled a rat, the likelihood of a provocation sponsored by Al Qaeda operatives possibly aided by Turkish intelligence trying to induce the U.S. military to destroy Assad's army and clear the way for a terrorist victory.

Though that "false flag" scenario became increasingly likely as the case against Assad's forces essentially collapsed Obama and his administration have never corrected the record. They just left what now appears to be a false narrative on

the record, so it can still be cited by neocon opinion leaders or “human rights” advocates and thus be used to mislead the American public.

Some people defend Obama for not admitting a mistake because to do so would undermine U.S. credibility, but I think the opposite holds true, that a frank admission that there was a misguided rush to judgment would be refreshing for Americans who are sick and tired of spin.

Similarly, there’s the case of the July 17, 2014 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine, which the Obama administration pinned on ethnic Russian rebels and indirectly on Russian President Vladimir Putin. The case whipped up a frenzy of Russia-bashing across the West and thus became a valuable propaganda club.

But again, as U.S. intelligence analysts sifted through the evidence, some moved off in a different direction, blaming a rogue element of the Ukrainian government, according to a source briefed on these findings.

Yet, instead of either correcting the record or presenting evidence to buttress the initial judgment, the Obama administration has gone silent, refusing to make public any evidence that it possesses about the killing of 298 people. That has allowed the West’s mainstream media and some supposedly “independent” bloggers to continue to push the Russia-did-it line.

### **Shifting Blame**

More recently, the Obama administration has reacted to overwhelming evidence that some of its Mideast “allies” have been aiding and abetting the Islamic State, Al Qaeda and other violent jihadists by trying to shift the blame to the Syrian government and Russia.

In other words, we’re told not to blame the Saudis and the Qataris for funding and arming these jihadists (despite admissions from Vice President Biden, former Secretary of State Clinton and the Defense Intelligence Agency). Nor should we notice that the Islamic State has been shipping its illicit oil into Turkey in large truck convoys through Turkish border crossings which also allow jihadist fighters to go back and forth.

The evidentiary record of Turkey’s covert support for these radical jihadists is a long one, including many admissions from Turkish officials and reports from major Turkish media outlets. But we’re told to ignore all that evidence and trust that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is doing all he can to seal off his border and stop the terrorists.

Instead, though the Syrian and Russian governments have been delivering heavy

blows to the jihadists, including Russia shaming the Obama administration into belatedly joining in the bombing of those ISIS oil convoys, we're supposed to believe that Damascus and Moscow are actually in cahoots with ISIS. This storyline amounts to the U.S. government's own crazy conspiracy theory.

We're also supposed to believe that the Saudis, the Qataris and the Turks are seriously engaged in the grand U.S. "coalition" Obama has boasted of its 65 members to fight ISIS, Al Qaeda and other terrorists. But these "allies" are mostly just going through the motions.

The overall impact of the U.S. government's years and even decades of public manipulation has been to "trifurcate" the American people into three groups: those who still believe the official line, those who are open to real evidence that goes against the official line, and those who believe in fact-free conspiracy theories positing that nothing from any official source can be true.

To say that such a division is not healthy for a democratic Republic is to state the obvious. Indeed, a democratic Republic cannot long survive if government officials insist on managing the people's perceptions through propaganda and disinformation. Nor can it long survive if a significant part of the population believes the craziest of conspiracy theories.

Yet, it seems that President Obama and other senior officials simply can't resist taking the easy route of deception to reach a compliant consensus, rather than engaging in the hard work of presenting clear evidence and engaging the American people in serious debate.

Or, perhaps Obama and his advisers are too deep into the lies and thus fear the consequences of admitting that many of their claims were false or misleading. That would be like Toto pulling the curtain away from the Wizard of Oz and the wizard immediately confessing. The instinct is to tell the populace to ignore that man behind the curtain.

### **The Impossible Speech**

I have long advocated that Obama should go on television in the style of President Dwight Eisenhower's farewell address in 1961, sitting in the Oval Office, hands-folded, none of Obama's glitzy stage-craft, and simply level with the American people.

Before the speech, Obama could release the 28 pages from the congressional 9/11 report about Saudi support for the hijackers. He also could release other U.S. intelligence analyses on the role of the Saudis, Qataris and Turks in supporting Al Qaeda and ISIS. He could toss in what U.S. intelligence analysts have concluded about the 2013 sarin gas attack in Syria and about the 2014 shoot-down

of MH-17 in Ukraine.

To the degree that the U.S. government had misled the American people, the President could fess up. He could explain how he and other government officials were seduced by the siren song of the propagandists who promised to line up public opinion behind a policy with no muss or fuss. He could admit that such manipulation of U.S. citizens by the U.S. government is simply wrong.

Obama could explain that he now realizes that elitism in the pursuit of the people's subservience is incompatible with the principles of a Republic in which the citizens are the sovereigns of the nation. He could ask our forgiveness and recommit himself to the government transparency that he promised during the 2008 election. (While at it, he could pardon and apologize to the whistleblowers whom he has prosecuted and imprisoned.)

Having reestablished a foundation of trust and repudiating the past decades of deception he could explain what has to be done in Syria. Most significantly he could demand that Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and other countries helping ISIS and Al Qaeda shut down that assistance immediately or face severe financial and other consequences, "allies" or not.

Then, he could promise that after reasonable stability is restored to Syria the people of Syria would be allowed to decide who they want as their leaders. Right now, the key obstacle to a new power-sharing government in Syria is the West's insistence that Assad can't compete in future democratic elections. Yet, if President Obama is so sure that most Syrians hate Assad, nothing could demonstrate that better than Assad's resounding defeat at the polls. Why avoid that?

But it's become painfully obvious that Obama does not have it in him to give that speech or take such actions. It would require defying Official Washington's neocon-dominated insider community and "allies," such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel. To appease those forces, he will continue to play word games and to spin propaganda narratives. He is too much of an elitist to inform and empower the American people.

Thus, the Obama administration's credibility gap won't be closed. Indeed, it will widen into a chasm, with Official Washington sitting on one side and the vast majority of humanity on the other. The undeserving winners will include the terrorists of ISIS and Al Qaeda. There will be many losers who deserve better.

[Update: Obama's Oval Office speech on Sunday night attempted to calm the fears of the American public and to defend his anti-ISIS strategy, but the President offered no new information about how U.S. "allies" – such Saudi Arabia, Qatar

and Turkey – have been implicated in the rise of Al Qaeda and ISIS.]

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](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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