

The Democrats' Joe McCarthy Moment

Exclusive: To shield Hillary Clinton from criticism of her Wall Street speeches, the Democrats are engaging in a new McCarthyism for the New Cold War, suggesting that Donald Trump is in league with the Russians, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

My first book, *Fooling America*, examined Washington's excited "conventional wisdom" around the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91 when nearly the entire political-punditry elite was thrilled about bombing the heck out of Iraq, inflicting heavy civilian casualties in Baghdad and slaughtering tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers as they fled from Kuwait.

Ironically, one of the few dissenters from this war lust was right-wing commentator Robert Novak, who actually did some quality reporting on how President George H.W. Bush rejected repeated peace overtures because he wanted a successful ground war as a way to instill a new joy of war among the American people.

Bush recognized that a brief, victorious ground war would – in his words – “kick the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all,” i.e. get Americans to forget their revulsion about foreign wars, a hangover from the bloody defeat in Vietnam.

So Novak, the anti-communist hardliner who often had baited other pundits for their “softness” toward “commies,” became on this occasion a naysayer who wanted to give peace a chance. But that meant Novak was baited on “The Capital Gang” chat show for his war doubts.

To my surprise, one of the most aggressive enforcers of the pro-war “group think” was Wall Street Journal Washington bureau chief Al Hunt, who had often been one of the more thoughtful, less warmongering voices on the program. Hunt dubbed Novak “Neville Novak,” suggesting that Novak's interest in avoiding war in the Middle East was on par with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Adolf Hitler before World War II.

Months later when I interviewed Hunt about his mocking of Novak's anti-war softness, Hunt justified his “Neville Novak” line as a fitting rejoinder for all the times Novak had baited opponents for their softness against communism. “After years of battling Novak from the left, to have gotten to his right, I enjoyed that,” Hunt said.

At the time, I found this tit-for-tat, hah-hah gotcha behavior among Washington's armchair warriors troubling because it ignored the terrible

suffering of people in various countries at the receiving end of American military might, such as the Iraqi civilians including women and children who were burned alive when a U.S. bomb penetrated a Baghdad bomb shelter, as well as the young Iraqi soldiers incinerated in their vehicles as they fled the battlefield.

In the 100-hour ground war, U.S. casualties were relatively light, 147 killed in combat and another 236 killed in accidents or from other causes. "Small losses as military statistics go," Gen. Colin Powell wrote later, "but a tragedy for each family." In Official Washington, however, the dead were a small price to pay for a "feel-good" war that let President Bush vanquish the psychological ghosts of the Vietnam War.

I also had the sickening sense that this "popular" war – celebrated with victory parades and lavish firework displays – was setting the stage for more horrors in the future. Already, neoconservative pundits, such as The Washington Post's Charles Krauthammer, were demanding that U.S. forces must go all the way to Baghdad and "finish the job" by getting rid of Saddam Hussein. A dangerous hubris was taking hold in Washington.

As we have seen in the decades since, the euphoria over the Persian Gulf victory did feed into the imperial arrogance that contributed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. At that moment, when the neocons in George W. Bush's administration were concocting excuses for finally marching to Baghdad, there were almost no voices among the big-shot commentators who dared repeat Robert Novak's "mistake" of 1991.

Playing Joe McCarthy

I mention all this now because we are seeing something similar with the Democrats as they lead the charge into a dangerous New Cold War with Russia. The Democrats, who bore the brunt of the Red-baiting during the earlier Cold War, are now playing the roles of Senators Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon in smearing anyone who won't join in the Russia-bashing as "stooges," "traitors" and "useful idiots."

When Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has one of his few lucid moments and suggests that the U.S. should cooperate with Russia rather than provoke more confrontations, he is denounced from many political quarters. But these attacks against Trump are most feverish from Democrats looking to give Hillary Clinton a boost politically and a diversionary excuse for her Wall Street speeches that she tried so hard to keep hidden until they were released by WikiLeaks from hacked emails of her longtime adviser John Podesta.

The Obama administration's intelligence community has claimed, without presenting evidence, that Russian intelligence was behind the Democratic Party hacks as a way to influence the U.S. election, a somewhat ironic charge given the long history of the U.S. government (and its intelligence community) engaging in much more aggressive actions to block the election of disfavored politicians abroad and even to overthrow democratically elected leaders who got in Washington's way.

Rather than seeking to explain Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street bigwigs and other special interests, Podesta and other Democrats have simply piled on the Russia-bashing with suggestions that Trump is consorting with America's enemies. In Wednesday night's debate, Clinton referred to Trump as Vladimir Putin's "puppet."

While the Democrats may consider this strategy very clever – a kind of karmic payback for the Republican red-baiting of Democrats during the Cold War – it carries even greater dangers than Al Hunt's putting down Robert Novak for trying to save lives in the Persian Gulf War.

By whipping up a new set of whipping boys – the "evil" Russians and their "ultra-evil" leader Vladimir Putin – the Democrats are setting in motion passions that could spin out of control and cause a President Hillary Clinton to push the two nuclear powers into a crisis that – with a simple misjudgment on the part of either nation – could end life on the planet.

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](#)).

Australia, Tagging Along into Other Nations' Wars

Since World War II, the U.S. has been the big boss leading a band of lackey nations, mostly in Europe but reaching distant Australia which tags along for the periodic pummeling of some hapless country, as James O'Neill explains.

By James O'Neill

For a country relatively remote from the world's trouble spots, Australia throughout its short history since European settlement in the late Eighteenth

Century has shown a remarkable capacity to involve itself in other people's wars. With the possible exception of Japan in World War II none of these wars have posed a threat to Australia's national security.

In the 1850s, Australia provided troops on behalf of the British in the Crimean War at a time when few Australians would have been able to locate Crimea on a map. Ironically, Tony Abbott as Prime Minister this decade was willing to commit troops to Ukraine, again over Crimea.



But Australian knowledge of historical and geopolitical realities in Crimea appeared no greater in 2014 than in the 1850s. The major difference was the infinitely greater threat to Australia's national security if such a foolhardy plan had occurred in 2014 and Australian troops had found themselves confronting Russian forces.

Australian troops were also committed to the Boer War in South Africa, World Wars I and II, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, to name just the major conflicts. All of these involvements had two major characteristics in common: at no point (with the possible exception of Japan 1942-45) were Australia's borders or national security threatened; and each involvement was at the behest of a foreign imperial power, often on entirely spurious grounds. The last four named conflicts above – Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria – had the added dimension of being contrary to international law.

A common justification advanced in support of these foreign adventures is that they constitute a form of insurance policy, with the deaths of tens of thousands of Australian servicemen and women being the premium that has to be paid. If we do not pay these premiums, the argument runs, the "policy" expires and our "great and powerful friends" – the United Kingdom and more recently the United States – will not come to our aid if and when we are, in turn, attacked.

It has never been clear just who these aggressors might be, despite endless manufactured potential foes, nor why Australia feels the need to base its foreign policy thus when scores of countries do not feel similarly threatened nor feel the need to pay such a price for their "security."

The capacity to have an intelligent debate about whether or not there are other, and better, options, is severely hampered by a number of factors. One of the major factors is the concentration of ownership of the mainstream print media. The Murdoch empire controls 70 percent of the nation's newspapers and is run by someone who is now an American citizen and no longer resides in Australia. The bulk of the balance is controlled by the Fairfax family who at least reside in Australia.

This concentration of ownership results in a degree of uniformity of opinion that Stalin would have recognized and appreciated. There is a greater diversity of media ownership and opinion in modern Russia than there is in Australia, yet the relentless message in the Australian media is that Russia is an authoritarian state where dissent from an all powerful Vladimir Putin is discouraged or worse. Such a view would be laughable if it were not so dangerous.

The Pervasive 'Group Think'

Academia is little better. The universities and the so-called "think tanks" rely heavily on subsidies from their American equivalents, or from Australian government departments committed to the government's policies. There is an obvious reluctance to criticize, for example, American foreign policy when such criticism endangers funding sources, promotions, and comfortable sabbaticals in the U.S.

A recent example of the intellectual drivel that this can lead to was found in the recent publication of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute entitled "Why Russia is a Threat to the International Order," authored by Paul Dibb, a former spymaster. It was an ill-informed discussion all too typical of what passes for foreign policy analysis. Not only did it demonstrate a complete misunderstanding of Russian strategic policy, it wholly accepted an American-centered view of the world.

In Dibb's world, the Americans only act from the best of intentions and for the benefit of the people unfortunate enough to be the object of their attentions. Any analysis of the way U.S. foreign policy is actually practiced is air brushed from the reader's attention. The treatment of Ukraine is instructive in this regard.

Dibb completely ignores the February 2014 American-organized and financed coup that removed the legitimate Yanukovich government from power. Dibb ignores the military agreement that provided for the stationing of Russian troops in Crimea; that Crimea had for centuries been part of Russia until Khrushchev "gifted" Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 (without consulting the Crimeans); the overwhelming

support in two referenda to secede from Ukraine and apply to rejoin the Russian Federation; the discriminatory treatment of the largely Russian-speaking population of the Donbass region in Eastern Ukraine; and the Kiev regime's systematic violation of the Minsk Accords designed to find a peaceable solution to the Ukrainian conflict.

Instead, he writes that Russia's "invasion" and "annexation" of Crimea and its attempt through military means to detach the Donbass region in the eastern part of Ukraine have to be seen as a fundamental challenge to the post-war sanctity of Europe's borders. Such historical revisionism and detachment from reality is unfortunately not confined to Dobb. It is all too common in the Australian media in all its forms.

A selective view of the world, of which Dobb is but one example, extends to a sanitizing of the U.S.'s role in post-war history. The U.S. has bombed, invaded, undermined, overthrown the governments of, and destroyed more countries and killed more people in the process over the past 70 years than all other countries in the world combined. Its disregard for international law, all the while proclaiming the importance of a "rules based system," is well documented.

A particularly egregious but far from unique example is the war in Syria in which Australia is also involved, even to the comical extent of admitting culpability in the "mistaken" bombing of Syrian government troops at Douma.

That the bombing was not a mistake but rather, as several commentators have pointed out (although never in the Australian media), was much more likely to have been a deliberate sabotaging by Defense Secretary Ashton Carter's Pentagon element of the American war machine of the Kerry-Lavrov negotiated partial ceasefire.

Syrian intelligence has reported intercepts of communications between the U.S. military and the jihadist terrorists immediately before the bombing in which their respective actions were coordinated. The bombing was followed by immediate terrorist attacks on Syrian army positions in the area and is highly unlikely to have been a coincidence.

Cozy with Terrorists

This is, of course, consistent with American policy in Syria from the outset. The U.S. government has sought to maintain a ludicrous distinction between "moderate" terrorists and the rest.

Before the Russian intervention at the end of September 2015, the U.S. managed to avoid actually stopping the Islamic State advance through large swathes of

Syrian territory, and together with Washington's Saudi and Qatari allies have trained, financed and armed the terrorists from the outset. All of which is part of a pattern of U.S. support for terrorists, as long as they support U.S. strategic goals.

No such analysis appears in the Australian mainstream media which maintains an unswerving allegiance to only one form of analysis. This dangerous group think and intolerance of dissent is exemplified in a recent article by Peter Hartcher, the senior political correspondent of the Fairfax media.

Hartcher described what he called "rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows" by which he meant opponents in Australia of a war with China. The "rats" were politicians "compromised by China's embrace"; the "flies" are the "unwitting mouthpieces for the interests of the Chinese regime"; the mosquitoes were Australian business people "so captivated by their financial interests that they demand Australia assume a kowtow position"; the "sparrows" were Chinese students and Australia-Chinese associations that exist "specifically to spread China's influence."

In Hartcher's view all four groups were "pests" that needed to be eradicated. To call this reversion to the worst elements of 1950s McCarthyism is probably to do the late junior Senator from Wisconsin a disservice.

Were it simply a case of ignorance it might be simply consigned to the scrap heap where it richly belongs. But it is representative of the same mindset that has led Australia into so many disastrous foreign policy misadventures that it cannot be ignored. Another reason it cannot be ignored is that it represents and affects a widely held view among Australian politicians.

The demonization of Russia in general and Vladimir Putin in particular is clearly evident in the reporting of the situation in Ukraine and Syria. The ignoring of history and the inversion of reality is the default position. Everything that Russia does is a manifestation of its "aggression." Putin is commonly described as a "dictator" and the appalling Hillary Clinton even compared him with Hitler.

That there is not a shred of evidence to support the many wild allegations against President Putin does not prevent their regular repetition in the Western media.

Ignoring International Law

Similar blindness is evident with regard to the reporting on Syria. Australia is manifestly in breach of the United Nations Charter in its participation in the attacks upon the Syrian government and its forces. Foreign Minister Julie

Bishop's laughable defense of the presence of the Australian military in Syria, the central plank of which was specifically denied by the Iraqi government, was nonetheless accepted without question by the Australian mainstream media.

There is more preposterous posturing over the South China Sea. The much vaunted "freedom of navigation" demanded for shipping in the South China Sea (although no one can point to a single instance of civilian maritime traffic being hindered in any way) is a concept selectively applied. Just ask a Cuban, Palestinian or Yemeni if freedom of navigation is their recent or current experience of American policy.

Australia partakes annually in a U.S.-led naval exercise, Operation Talisman Sabre that rehearses the blockading of the Malacca Straits, a vital seaway for China that along with dozens of military bases (including in Australia), missile systems surrounding China, free trade agreements that pointedly exclude the world's largest trading nation, and many other aspects designed to "contain" China, are not the activities of a peacefully oriented nation.

Australia not only participates in clearly provocative actions, but the 2015 Defense White Paper is clearly predicated on planning a war with China. Public statements by senior defense personnel, both civilian and military, reflect a militaristic mindset vis-a-vis China that can only be described as magical thinking given the military capacity of the Peoples Republic of China to obliterate Australia within 30 minutes of hostilities actually breaking out is only part of the problem.

That such thinking takes place in a context where China, the perceived enemy, is also the country's largest trading partner by a significant margin and the source of much of Australia's prosperity over the past 40 years reveals a strategic conundrum that the politicians have singularly failed to come to grips with. Worse, it is not even considered a matter worthy of sustained serious discussion.

By its conduct both in Syria and the South China Sea, Australia runs the risk of becoming involved in a full-scale shooting war with both Russia and China. Viewed objectively, there is little doubt that in any such conflagration Russia and China enjoy significant military advantages. Even that superiority is not to be entertained. Instead, Australia pursues the purchase of hugely expensive submarines and F-35 fighter planes the strategic and military value of which is at best dubious and more probably, useless.

What then is the benefit to Australia of constantly putting itself in a position where the best it could hope for would be collateral damage? No rational human being would advance on a course of action where the detriments so significantly

outweigh the benefits, so why should a nation be any different?

With its crumbling infrastructure, endless wars that it regularly loses, a corrupt money-dominated political culture, technologically inferior weaponry and enormous burgeoning debt, the U.S. is hardly a model protector. To believe otherwise is simply delusional.

As the U.S.-based Russian blogger Dmitry Orlov has recently pointed out, Russia's international conduct is governed by three basic principles: using military force as a reactive security measure; scrupulous adherence to international law; and seeing military action as being in the service of diplomacy. That clearly does not accord with the relentless misinformation Australians are constantly fed but to confuse propaganda with reality is a dangerous basis upon which to formulate foreign policy.

China is also choosing a radically different path in its international relations. The One Belt, One Road, or New Silk Road initiatives, associated as they are with a range of other developments, the significance of which most Australians barely grasp, has the capacity to transform the world's financial, economic and geopolitical structures in a remarkably short time.

The choice for Australia is stark. Does it persist in aligning itself with what the late Malcolm Fraser accurately called a "dangerous ally"? Or does it recognize that the world upon which its comfortable and dangerous illusions are based is rapidly changing and adjust its alliances accordingly.

At the moment Australia has the luxury of choice, but it is an opportunity that will vanish very quickly. Unfortunately, the lesson of history is that Australia will again make the wrong choice.

James O'Neill is a former academic and has practiced as a barrister since 1984. He writes on geopolitical issues, with a special emphasis on international law and human rights. He may be contacted at joneill@qldbar.asn.au.

How to Win Friends in Latin America

The U.S. government has won more friends in Latin America by opening diplomatic ties to Cuba than by demonstrating endless belligerence, a lesson little understood in Washington, observes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Much gets said and written, mostly as rhetoric intended to criticize the Obama administration, about the standing of the United States in the world supposedly having declined. To the extent such rhetoric gets linked to specific policy prescription, it most often amounts to an assertion that respect for the United States derives from throwing its weight around and particularly doing so with military power. But one doesn't have to look hard for reminders that this is not really the way the world works.

A word is in order about some of the sentiments involved and how they relate to each other. Respect is not identical with liking, but even in everyday life positive sentiments toward someone else tend to go together, and so do negative ones. It is hard to have respect for an authority figure such as a teacher or parent if one dislikes the person.

Dale Carnegie wrote a bestseller called *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and gave courses that encompassed both. The clustering of sentiment is at least as true in international relations, where the goal is to influence the behavior of both people and governments.

Riding roughshod over the sensitivities and concerns of other peoples may engender fear, but does not yield either liking or respect. Moreover, the opportunities for opposing the interests of even a superpower [are sufficiently numerous](#) that the weight-throwing approach is not a good strategy for winning influence.

Positive approaches that exhibit respect for the concerns of even those with whom one has significant disagreements are more likely to buy the sort of influence one wants. Respect engenders respect.

A reminder of such reality comes from *The Economist's* [Latin America columnist](#) Bello, who observes a trend in attitudes in the region toward the United States during the years of the Obama administration. Far from relying on the sort of force-reliant bullying that characterized much U.S. policy toward the region over the past two centuries, Mr. Obama's policies have involved trying to work through partners in the area.

By far the most conspicuous and significant of the administration's policy moves in the region has been the opening to Cuba, which as the columnist notes "was applauded by both left and right across Latin America." The impact on regional attitudes toward the colossus to the north also has been significant. In region-wide polling by Latinobarometro, the number of respondents saying they have a positive view of the United States has risen from 58 percent in 2008, the year Mr. Obama was elected, to 74 percent this year.

Bello notes that there has been a corresponding trend in governments' attitudes and behavior. Brazil's new government, for example, "does not place the hopes that its predecessor did in 'south-south' ties. Through the region, "many governments are now seeking to draw closer to the United States."

The knock-on effects go well beyond the diplomatic orientation of incumbent governments. Bello comments that if the opening to Cuba were to be reversed – as Donald Trump has threatened to do – this "could remove any hope that the transition to a post-Castro leadership, which is due to start in 2018, will involve a loosening of political control."

That's the way respect and influence work in Latin America, although one would never guess that by listening to those who want to sustain the failed half-century attempt to isolate Cuba. It's also the way they work elsewhere in the world, although one would never guess that from listening to much other foreign policy debate in the United States.

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