

The Murky Future for US Health Care

Republicans vow to repeal Obamacare, but President-elect Trump has injected confusion by claiming that the replacement will provide health insurance for all. But many health experts fear what comes next, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

All eyes are on the Republicans and Obamacare, as the dominant GOP now proceeds toward dismantling President Barack Obama's signature healthcare policy plan, formally known as the Affordable Care Act. What they plan to replace it with is still anybody's guess.

I spoke recently to public health care expert and single-payer advocate Dr. Don McCain about the debate, the negatives and positives of Obamacare, and what kind of health care system we need in the U.S. to really attend to the medical needs of all people.

McCain, a senior health policy fellow with the group Physicians for a National Health Program, said recently about the current debate, "President Obama meeting with the Congressional Democrats, and Vice President-elect Pence meeting with the Republicans are being touted as a strategy efforts on the two opposite sides of the health care reform debate. But are they really opposites?"

Dennis Bernstein: What do you mean by that? Aren't they opposites? It does seem like the Democrats are on one side, and the Republicans are on the other.

Dr. Don McCain: That's certainly the way they framed it. Of course, they passed Obamacare. The Democrats passed that even though it was a Republican plan. And now the Republicans claim it's a Democrat plan that has to be repealed. Yet, what are they talking about, as far as reform is concerned? They are talking about tweaking our current system. Well, that's all that Obamacare did.

We have a highly dysfunctional system, fragmented, with extreme administrative excesses. And a system that doesn't function very well because it leaves people with insurance in debt. It leaves too many people uninsured and takes away choices for our health care providers, through these narrow networks that are increasing in prevalence.

The Democrats did improve that, but the improvements were very small compared to what needs to be done. The Republicans would turn around, and maybe repeal some of those things, and then introduce their own tweaks. But these are all only tweaks to our current, highly dysfunctional, wasteful, fragmented system.

So the opposite would be an integrated, universal system that provides healthcare to everyone, and eliminates this profound administrative waste. And gives people their choice again. Of course, that's a single payer, national health program commonly known as an improved Medicare For All—fixing Medicare, and providing it to everyone.

DB: Well... the Republicans would say that's a budget buster, that's a big government program, that's socialism, and ultimately it will be a disaster.

DM: Of course, it is paid through taxes but we already... two-thirds of our health care is already paid for through the tax system. In fact, we pay more in taxes for health care in the United States than other nations pay for their entire health care system.

So tax isn't the problem. Getting the tax right is the problem, and we've got to make it much more equitable through progressive taxes where everyone can afford to pay the taxes that we would need to run the system. But it doesn't bust budgets.

In fact, the efficiencies of a single payer system actually slow down the increases in health care costs. So we would not be having these high increases every year. Yeah, there's been slowing for a couple of years, but they haven't really fixed the fundamental defects, whereas through a Medicare-like system, they do control healthcare costs, much more effectively. So we would all be ahead and we would all have health care.

DB: ... Let's do a compare and contrast: Under Obamacare, how does the U.S. system compare to, say, Europe?

DM: It is much less efficient [with] extreme administrative waste. We pay about a trillion dollars a year in just administration of our system. It's because it's this fragmented system of multiple programs, and other reasons, for the excesses. We could recover about one-half of that trillion dollars, and redirect it into health care. They don't have that in the European systems. They have much more efficient financing systems. None of them pay near what we do, in administration.

DB: And, in terms of actual health care?

DM: The health care systems... the health care delivery systems are pretty comparable. There is a difference and that is that many people in the United States, either because they are uninsured or underinsured, they have excess deductibles that they cannot afford, are unable to access our system. Whereas in the European nations [and] Canada there's no problem with access.

Yes, there may be some delays in some countries, but that's mainly for elective care. Any urgent care is taken care of right away and so, overall, the performance of their systems is superior. Commonwealth has done a study a few times of eleven nations and we always fall in last place, the eleventh, as far as the functioning of our healthcare system.

DB: And, what is your concern if the Republicans simply dismantle Obamacare? Will it matter... [if they don't] have any program to put in its place? What do you think is going to happen here?

DM: It will matter because many of the people who gained insurance under Obamacare will lose it. And they will do virtually nothing to control our increasing health care costs. So overall, it would be worse. ...

If they eliminate the subsidies and yet, as they said, they'll continue the right of anyone to buy insurance regardless of pre-existing conditions.... [Then] the insurance model breaks down, because sick people buy insurance. Healthy people don't until they get sick. Then insurance will be affordable for no one.

DB: So, what happens in terms of your own experiences as a medical doctor? What have been your struggles and how might they be mitigated so that you can spend your time doing health care, instead of being a businessman? Talk about that. What does that look like?

DM: It really happened with the managed care revolution in the '80s, where the insurance companies basically gained the right to contract with doctors, and, of course, they contract with patients by selling them insurance plans. But this physician contracting, they have used to try to slow the race that way, while they continue to ratchet down on the way physicians can provide care to their patients.

So the reimbursement rates do not keep up with inflation. The prior authorization requests that you have to go through make it more and more difficult to get care for your patients.

And now [with] these narrow networks, they've made it extremely difficult to get the specialists that your patient needs, because they are not in these networks. So we're losing choice in care.

And then the hassles, the computers. The computers are designed to assist the insurance company, and assist the government bureaucrats. But they are sure a headache, because they come between the physician and the patient.

Computerized records are a good thing, but the way the computers are being used, it's increased the hassle factor. And, in fact, physicians now, over 50% of

physicians are experiencing burn out, from a Mayo study.

DB: Wow. Now, before we let you go, I want to talk to you about something that's personal to me. I know you're a medical doctor, but dental care is very much a part of medical care. I don't know the exact figures for how many people don't have medical care now, but more people don't have adequate dental care. I mean, I have a health plan here at KPFA, Pacifica. But it's a joke. It's gone with the second cleaning.

DM: That's correct. In our proposals for health care reform, we include dental care. Because that's a very basic, essential health service. And we think it needs to be part of the national health care program.

DB: But, again, it is interesting that in this country ... I mean, I remember traveling as a student, and traveling in England, and having a massive toothache. I walked into an office and they took care of me. And I was done. I didn't get a bill.

DM: Right. That's the way it should be.

DB: And how would you explain it in this context—Health care is a human right?

DM: Yes. In fact, [on January 3rd] JAMA, The Journal of the American Medical Association, the editor-in-chief wrote an editorial and they're allowing access for free, that says "healthcare is a right, and as we reform health care, we have to accept that fact." And it's a very interesting editorial, and your listeners should look it up.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

It's Not About Trump, But Us

The looming inauguration of Donald Trump has led many on the "liberal/left" to vow eternal resistance but this fury has obscured the need for self-reflection on how "progressives" have lost their way, as John Pilger explains.

By John Pilger

On the day President Trump is inaugurated, thousands of writers in the United States will express their indignation. "In order for us to heal and move forward

...,” say Writers Resist, “we wish to bypass direct political discourse, in favour of an inspired focus on the future, and how we, as writers, can be a unifying force for the protection of democracy.”

And: “We urge local organizers and speakers to avoid using the names of politicians or adopting ‘anti’ language as the focus for their Writers Resist event. It’s important to ensure that nonprofit organizations, which are prohibited from political campaigning, will feel confident participating in and sponsoring these events.”

Thus, real protest is to be avoided, for it is not tax exempt. Compare such drivel with the declarations of the Congress of American Writers, held at Carnegie Hall, New York, in 1935, and again two years later. They were electric events, with writers discussing how they could confront ominous events in Abyssinia, China and Spain. Telegrams from Thomas Mann, C Day Lewis, Upton Sinclair and Albert Einstein were read out, reflecting the fear that great power was now rampant and that it had become impossible to discuss art and literature without politics or, indeed, direct political action.

“A writer,” the journalist Martha Gellhorn told the second congress, “must be a man of action now . . . A man who has given a year of his life to steel strikes, or to the unemployed, or to the problems of racial prejudice, has not lost or wasted time. He is a man who has known where he belonged. If you should survive such action, what you have to say about it afterwards is the truth, is necessary and real, and it will last.”

Her words echo across the unctious and violence of the Obama era and the silence of those who colluded with his deceptions. That the menace of rapacious power – rampant long before the rise of Trump – has been accepted by writers, many of them privileged and celebrated, and by those who guard the gates of literary criticism, and culture, including popular culture, is uncontroversial. Not for them the impossibility of writing and promoting literature bereft of politics. Not for them the responsibility to speak out, regardless of who occupies the White House.

Clinton’s Contempt

Today, false symbolism is all. “Identity” is all. In 2016, Hillary Clinton stigmatized millions of voters as “a basket of deplorables, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it.” Her abuse was handed out at an LGBT rally as part of her cynical campaign to win over minorities by abusing a white, mostly working-class, majority. Divide and rule, this is called; or identity politics in which race and gender conceal class, and allow the waging of class war. Trump understood this.

“When the truth is replaced by silence,” said the Soviet dissident poet Yevtushenko, “the silence is a lie.”

This is not an American phenomenon. A few years ago, Terry Eagleton, then professor of English literature at Manchester University, reckoned that “for the first time in two centuries, there is no eminent British poet, playwright or novelist prepared to question the foundations of the western way of life.”

No Shelley speaks for the poor, no Blake for utopian dreams, no Byron damns the corruption of the ruling class, no Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin reveal the moral disaster of capitalism. William Morris, Oscar Wilde, HG Wells, George Bernard Shaw have no equivalents today. Harold Pinter was the last to raise his voice. Among today’s insistent voices of consumer-feminism, none echoes Virginia Woolf, who described “the arts of dominating other people ... of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital.”

There is something both venal and profoundly stupid about famous writers as they venture outside their cosseted world and embrace an “issue.” Across the Review section of the Guardian on Dec. 10 was a dreamy picture of Barack Obama looking up to the heavens and the words, “Amazing Grace” and “Farewell the Chief.”

The sycophancy ran like a polluted babbling brook through page after page. “He was a vulnerable figure in many ways ... But the grace. The all-encompassing grace: in manner and form, in argument and intellect, with humour and cool ... [He] is a blazing tribute to what has been, and what can be again ... He seems ready to keep fighting, and remains a formidable champion to have on our side ... The grace ... the almost surreal levels of grace ...”

I have conflated these quotes. There are others even more hagiographic and bereft of mitigation. The Guardian’s chief apologist for Obama, Gary Younge, has always been careful to mitigate, to say that his hero “could have done more”: oh, but there were the “calm, measured and consensual solutions ...”

Idolizing Obama

None of them, however, could surpass the American writer, Ta-Nehisi Coates, the recipient of a “genius” grant worth \$625,000 from a liberal foundation. In an interminable essay for The Atlantic entitled, “My President Was Black,” Coates brought new meaning to prostration. The final “chapter,” entitled “When You Left, You Took All of Me With You,” a line from a Marvin Gaye song, describes seeing the Obamas “rising out of the limo, rising up from fear, smiling, waving, defying despair, defying history, defying gravity.” The Ascension, no less.

One of the persistent strands in American political life is a cultish extremism that approaches fascism. This was given expression and reinforced during the two

terms of Barack Obama. "I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being," said Obama, who expanded America's favorite military pastime, bombing, and death squads ("special operations") as no other president has done since the Cold War.

According to a Council on Foreign Relations survey, in 2016 alone Obama dropped 26,171 bombs. That is 72 bombs every day. He bombed the poorest people on earth, in Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan.

Every Tuesday – reported The New York Times – he personally selected those who would be murdered by mostly hellfire missiles fired from drones. Weddings, funerals, shepherds were attacked, along with those attempting to collect the body parts festooning the "terrorist target."

A leading Republican senator, Lindsey Graham, estimated, approvingly, that Obama's drones killed 4,700 people. "Sometimes you hit innocent people and I hate that," he said, "but we've taken out some very senior members of Al Qaeda."

Like the fascism of the 1930s, big lies are delivered with the precision of a metronome: thanks to an omnipresent media whose description now fits that of the Nuremberg prosecutor: "Before each major aggression, with some few exceptions based on expediency, they initiated a press campaign calculated to weaken their victims and to prepare the German people psychologically ... In the propaganda system ... it was the daily press and the radio that were the most important weapons."

Destroying Libya

Take the catastrophe in Libya. In 2011, Obama said Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was planning "genocide" against his own people. "We knew ... that if we waited one more day, Benghazi, a city the size of Charlotte, could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world."

This was the known lie of Islamist militias facing defeat by Libyan government forces. It became the media story; and NATO – led by Obama and Hillary Clinton – launched 9,700 "strike sorties" against Libya, of which more than a third were aimed at civilian targets. Uranium warheads were used; the cities of Misurata and Sirte were carpet-bombed. The Red Cross identified mass graves, and Unicef reported that "most [of the children killed] were under the age of ten."

Under Obama, the U.S. has extended secret "special forces" operations to 138 countries, or 70 per cent of the world's population. The first African-American president launched what amounted to a full-scale invasion of Africa. Reminiscent of the Scramble for Africa in the late Nineteenth Century, the U.S. African

Command (Africom) has built a network of supplicants among collaborative African regimes eager for American bribes and armaments. Africom's "soldier to soldier" doctrine embeds U.S. officers at every level of command from general to warrant officer. Only pith helmets are missing.

It is as if Africa's proud history of liberation, from Patrice Lumumba to Nelson Mandela, is consigned to oblivion by a new master's black colonial elite whose "historic mission," warned Frantz Fanon half a century ago, is the promotion of "a capitalism rampant though camouflaged."

It was Obama who, in 2011, announced what became known as the "pivot to Asia", in which almost two-thirds of U.S. naval forces would be transferred to the Asia-Pacific to "confront China," in the words of his Defense Secretary. There was no threat from China; the entire enterprise was unnecessary. It was an extreme provocation to keep the Pentagon and its demented brass happy.

In 2014, the Obama's administration oversaw and paid for a fascist-led coup in Ukraine against the democratically elected government, threatening Russia in the western borderland through which Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, with a loss of 27 million lives. It was Obama who placed missiles in Eastern Europe aimed at Russia, and it was the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize who increased spending on nuclear warheads to a level higher than that of any administration since the Cold War – having promised, in an emotional speech in Prague, to "help rid the world of nuclear weapons".

Obama, the constitutional lawyer, prosecuted more whistleblowers than any other president in history, even though the U.S. Constitution protects them. He declared Chelsea Manning guilty before the end of a trial that was a travesty. He has refused to pardon Manning who has suffered years of inhumane treatment, which the United Nations says amounts to torture. He has pursued an entirely bogus case against Julian Assange. He promised to close the Guantanamo concentration camp and didn't.

A Smooth Operator

Following the public relations disaster of George W. Bush, Obama, the smooth operator from Chicago via Harvard, was enlisted to restore what he calls "leadership" throughout the world. The Nobel Prize committee's decision was part of this: the kind of cloying reverse racism that beatified the man for no reason other than he was attractive to liberal sensibilities and, of course, American power, if not to the children he kills in impoverished, mostly Muslim countries.

This is the Call of Obama. It is not unlike a dog whistle: inaudible to most, irresistible to the besotted and boneheaded, especially "liberal brains pickled

in the formaldehyde of identity politics,” as Luciana Bohne put it. “When Obama walks into a room,” gushed George Clooney, “you want to follow him somewhere, anywhere.”

William I. Robinson, professor at the University of California, and one of an uncontaminated group of American strategic thinkers who have retained their independence during the years of intellectual dog-whistling since 9/11, wrote this last week:

“President Barack Obama ... may have done more than anyone to assure [Donald] Trump’s victory. While Trump’s election has triggered a rapid expansion of fascist currents in U.S. civil society, a fascist outcome for the political system is far from inevitable ... But that fight back requires clarity as to how we got to such a dangerous precipice. The seeds of 21st century fascism were planted, fertilized and watered by the Obama administration and the politically bankrupt liberal elite.”

Robinson points out that “whether in its 20th or its emerging 21st century variants, fascism is, above all, a response to deep structural crises of capitalism, such as that of the 1930s and the one that began with the financial meltdown in 2008 ... There is a near-straight line here from Obama to Trump ... The liberal elite’s refusal to challenge the rapaciousness of transnational capital and its brand of identity politics served to eclipse the language of the working and popular classes ... pushing white workers into an ‘identity’ of white nationalism and helping the neo-fascists to organise them”..

The seedbed is Obama’s Weimar Republic, a landscape of endemic poverty, militarized police and barbaric prisons: the consequence of a “market” extremism which, under his presidency, prompted the transfer of \$14 trillion in public money to criminal enterprises in Wall Street.

Perhaps his greatest “legacy” is the co-option and disorientation of any real opposition. Bernie Sanders’ specious “revolution” does not apply. Propaganda is his triumph.

The lies about Russia – in whose elections the U.S. has openly intervened – have made the world’s most self-important journalists laughingstocks. In the country with constitutionally the freest press in the world, free journalism now exists only in its honorable exceptions.

The obsession with Trump is a cover for many of those calling themselves “left/liberal”, as if to claim political decency. They are not “left,” neither are they especially “liberal.” Much of America’s aggression towards the rest of humanity has come from so-called liberal Democratic administrations – such as

Obama's. America's political spectrum extends from the mythical center to the lunar right. The "left" are homeless renegades Martha Gellhorn described as "a rare and wholly admirable fraternity." She excluded those who confuse politics with a fixation on their navels.

While they "heal" and "move forward", will the Writers Resist campaigners and other anti-Trumpists reflect upon this? More to the point: when will a genuine movement of opposition arise? Angry, eloquent, all-for-one-and-one-for all. Until real politics return to people's lives, the enemy is not Trump, it is ourselves.

John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist based in London. Pilger's Web site is: www.johnpilger.com.

A Demand for Russian 'Hacking' Proof

More than 20 U.S. intelligence, military and diplomatic veterans are calling on President Obama to release the evidence backing up allegations that Russia aided the Trump campaign – or admit that the proof is lacking.

MEMORANDUM FOR: President Barack Obama

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: A Key Issue That Still Needs to be Resolved

As President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take the oath of office Friday, a pall hangs over his upcoming presidency amid an unprecedentedly concerted campaign to delegitimize it. Unconfirmed accusations continue to swirl alleging that Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized "Russian hacking" that helped put Mr. Trump in the White House.

As President for a few more days, you have the power to demand concrete evidence of a link between the Russians and WikiLeaks, which published the bulk of the information in question. Lacking that evidence, the American people should be told that there is no fire under the smoke and mirrors of recent weeks.

We urge you to authorize public release of any tangible evidence that takes us beyond the unsubstantiated, "we-assess" judgments by the intelligence agencies. Otherwise, we – as well as other skeptical Americans – will be left with the corrosive suspicion that the intense campaign of accusations is part of a wider attempt to discredit the Russians and those – like Mr. Trump – who wish

to deal constructively with them.

Remember the Maine?

Alleged Russian interference has been labeled “an act of war” and Mr. Trump a “traitor.” But the “intelligence” served up to support those charges does not pass the smell test. Your press conference on Wednesday will give you a chance to respond more persuasively to NBC’s Peter Alexander’s challenge at the last one (on Dec. 16) “to show the proof [and], as they say, put your money where your mouth is and declassify some of the intelligence. ...”

You told Alexander you were reluctant to “compromise sources and methods.” We can understand that concern better than most Americans. We would remind you, though, that at critical junctures in the past, your predecessors made judicious decisions to give higher priority to buttressing the credibility of U.S. intelligence-based policy than to protecting sources and methods. With the Kremlin widely accused by politicians and pundits of “an act of war,” this is the kind of textbook case in which you might seriously consider taking special pains to substantiate serious allegations with hard intelligence – if there is any.

During the Cuban missile crisis, for instance, President Kennedy ordered us to show highly classified photos of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba and on ships en route, even though this blew sensitive detail regarding the imagery intelligence capabilities of the cameras on our U-2 aircraft.

President Ronald Reagan’s reaction to the Libyan terrorist bombing of La Belle Disco in Berlin on April 5, 1986, that killed two and injured 79 other U.S. servicemen is another case in point. We had intercepted a Libyan message that morning: “At 1:30 in the morning one of the acts was carried out with success, without leaving a trace behind.” (We should add here that NSA’s dragnet SIGINT capability 30 years later renders it virtually impossible to avoid “leaving a trace behind” once a message is put on the network.)

President Reagan ordered the U.S. Air Force to bomb Col. Muammar Qaddafi’s palace compound to smithereens, killing several civilians. Amid widespread international consternation and demands for proof that Libya was responsible for the Berlin attack, President Reagan ordered us to make public the encrypted Libyan message, thereby sacrificing a collection/decryption capability unknown to the Libyans – until then.

As senior CIA veteran Milton Bearden has put it, there are occasions when more damage is done by “protecting” sources and methods than by revealing them.

Where’s the Beef?

We find the New York Times- and Washington Post-led media Blitz against Trump and Putin truly extraordinary, despite our long experience with intelligence/media related issues. On Jan. 6, the day after your top intelligence officials published what we found to be an embarrassingly shoddy report purporting to prove Russian hacking in support of Trump's candidacy, the Times banner headline across all six columns on page 1 read: **"PUTIN LED SCHEME TO AID TRUMP, REPORT SAYS."**

The lead article began: "President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia directed a vast cyberattack aimed at denying Hillary Clinton the presidency and installing Donald J. Trump in the Oval Office, the nation's top intelligence agencies said in an extraordinary report they delivered on Friday to Mr. Trump." Eschewing all subtlety, the Times added that the revelations in "this damning report ... undermined the legitimacy" of the President-elect, and "made the case that Mr. Trump was the favored candidate of Mr. Putin."

On page A10, however, Times investigative reporter Scott Shane pointed out: "What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies' claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. That is a significant omission."

Shane continued, "Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to 'trust us.' There is no discussion of the forensics used to recognize the handiwork of known hacking groups, no mention of intercepted communications between the Kremlin and the hackers, no hint of spies reporting from inside Moscow's propaganda machinery."

Shane added that the intelligence report "offers an obvious reason for leaving out the details, declaring that including 'the precise bases for its assessments' would 'reveal sensitive sources and methods and imperil the ability to collect critical foreign intelligence in the future.'"

Shane added a quote from former National Security Agency lawyer Susan Hennessey: "The unclassified report is underwhelming at best. There is essentially no new information for those who have been paying attention." Ms. Hennessey served as an attorney in NSA's Office of General Counsel and is now a Brookings Fellow in National Security Law.

Everyone Hacks

There is a lot of ambiguity – whether calculated or not – about "Russian hacking." "Everyone knows that everyone hacks," says everyone: Russia hacks; China hacks; every nation that can hacks. So do individuals of various nationalities. This is not the question.

You said at your press conference on Dec. 16 “the intelligence that I have seen gives me great confidence in their [U.S. intelligence agencies’] assessment that the Russians carried out this hack.” “Which hack?” you were asked. “The hack of the DNC and the hack of John Podesta,” you answered.

Earlier during the press conference you alluded to the fact that “the information was in the hands of WikiLeaks.” The key question is how the material from “Russian hacking” got to WikiLeaks, because it was WikiLeaks that published the DNC and Podesta emails.

Our VIPS colleague William Binney, who was Technical Director of NSA and created many of the collection systems still in use, assures us that NSA’s “cast-iron” coverage – particularly surrounding Julian Assange and other people associated with WikiLeaks – would almost certainly have yielded a record of any electronic transfer from Russia to WikiLeaks. Binney has used some of the highly classified slides released by Edward Snowden to demonstrate precisely how NSA accomplishes this using trace mechanisms embedded throughout the network. [See: [“U.S. Intel Vets Dispute Russia Hacking Claims,”](#) Dec. 12, 2016.]

NSA Must Come Clean

We strongly suggest that you ask NSA for any evidence it may have indicating that the results of Russian hacking were given to WikiLeaks. If NSA can produce such evidence, you may wish to order whatever declassification may be needed and then release the evidence. This would go a long way toward allaying suspicions that no evidence exists. If NSA cannot give you that information – and quickly – this would probably mean it does not have any.

In all candor, the checkered record of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper for trustworthiness makes us much less confident that anyone should take it on faith that he is more “trustworthy than the Russians,” as you suggested on Dec. 16. You will probably recall that Clapper lied under oath to the Senate Intelligence Committee on March 12, 2013, about NSA dragnet activities; later apologizing for testimony he admitted had been “clearly erroneous.” In [our Memorandum](#) for you on Dec. 11, 2013, we cited chapter and verse as to why Clapper should have been fired for saying things he knew to be “clearly erroneous.”

In that Memorandum, we endorsed the demand by Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner that Clapper be removed. “Lying to Congress is a federal offense, and Clapper ought to be fired and prosecuted for it,” said Sensenbrenner in an interview with The Hill. “The only way laws are effective is if they’re enforced.”

Actually, we have had trouble understanding why, almost four years after he

deliberately misled the Senate, Clapper remains Director of National Intelligence – overseeing the entire intelligence community.

Hacks or Leaks?

Not mentioned until now is our conclusion that leaks are the source of the WikiLeaks disclosures in question – not hacking. Leaks normally leave no electronic trace. William Binney has been emphasizing this for several months and suggesting strongly that the disclosures were from a leaker with physical access to the information – not a hacker with only remote access.

This, of course, makes it even harder to pin the blame on President Putin, or anyone else. And we suspect that this explains why NSA demurred when asked to join the CIA and FBI in expressing “high confidence” in this key judgment of the report put out under Clapper’s auspices on Jan. 6, yielding this curious formulation:

“We also assess Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump’s election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him. All three agencies agree with this judgment. CIA and FBI have high confidence in this judgment; NSA has moderate confidence.” (Emphasis, and lack of emphasis, in original)

In addition, former U.K. Ambassador Craig Murray has said publicly he has first-hand information on the provenance of the leaks, and has expressed surprise that no one from the New York Times or the Washington Post has tried to get in touch with him. We would be interested in knowing whether anyone from your administration, including the intelligence community, has made any effort to contact Ambassador Murray.

What to Do

President-elect Trump said a few days ago that his team will have a “full report on hacking within 90 days.” Whatever the findings of the Trump team turn out to be, they will no doubt be greeted with due skepticism, since Mr. Trump is in no way a disinterested party.

You, on the other hand, enjoy far more credibility – AND power – for the next few days. And we assume you would not wish to hobble your successor with charges that cannot withstand close scrutiny. We suggest you order the chiefs of the NSA, FBI and CIA to the White House and ask them to lay all their cards on the table. They need to show you why you should continue to place credence in what, a month ago, you described as “uniform intelligence assessments” about Russian hacking.

At that point, if the intelligence heads have credible evidence, you have the option of ordering it released – even at the risk of damage to sources and methods. For what it may be worth, we will not be shocked if it turns out that they can do no better than the evidence-deprived assessments they have served up in recent weeks. In that case, we would urge you, in all fairness, to let the American people in on the dearth of convincing evidence before you leave office.

As you will have gathered by now, we strongly suspect that the evidence your intelligence chiefs have of a joint **Russian-hacking-WikiLeaks-publishing** operation is no better than the “intelligence” evidence in 2002-2003 – expressed then with comparable flat-fact “certitude” – of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Obama’s Legacy

Mr. President, there is much talk in your final days in office about your legacy. Will part of that legacy be that you stood by while flames of illegitimacy rose willy-nilly around your successor? Or will you use your power to reveal the information – or the fact that there are merely unsupported allegations – that would enable us to deal with them responsibly?

In the immediate wake of the holiday on which we mark the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it seems appropriate to make reference to his legacy, calling to mind the graphic words in his “Letter From the Birmingham City Jail,” with which he reminds us of our common duty to expose lies and injustice:

“Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up, but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.”

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

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

Marshall Carter-Tripp, Foreign Service Officer (ret) and former Office Director in the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research

Thomas Drake, former Senior Executive, NSA

Bogdan Dzakovic, Former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security, (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Mike Gravel, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

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Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF (Ret.); ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC)

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Karen Kwiatkowski, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

Linda Lewis, WMD preparedness policy analyst, USDA (ret.)

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