

Mainstream Media's 'Victimhood'

Exclusive: Just weeks ago, mainstream U.S. media decried “fake news” and backed a blacklist of independent news sites over “Russian propaganda.” Now, under fire from President Trump, the MSM loves a free press, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It's heartwarming that The New York Times and The Washington Post are troubled that President Trump is loosely throwing around accusations of “fake news.” It's nice that they now realize that truth does not reliably come from the mouth of every senior government official or from every official report.

The Times is even taking out full-page ads in its own pages to offer truisms about truth: “The truth is hard. The truth is hidden. The truth must be pursued. The truth is hard to hear. The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn't so obvious. ...” On Sunday, those truth truisms ran opposite an alarmist column by Jim Rutenberg entitled, “Will the Real Democracy Lovers Please Stand Up?” Meanwhile, The Washington Post launched its own melodramatic slogan, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.”

Yet, it was only weeks ago when the Post and Times were eagerly promoting plans for silencing or blacklisting independent news sites that didn't toe the line on what the U.S. government and its allies were claiming was true.

On Nov. 20, the Times published a lead editorial calling on Facebook and other technology giants to devise algorithms that could eliminate stories that the Times deemed to be “fake.” The Times and other mainstream news outlets – along with a few favored Internet sites – joined a special Google-sponsored task force, called the First Draft Coalition, to decide what is true and what is not. If the Times' editorial recommendations were followed, the disfavored stories and the sites publishing them would no longer be accessible through popular search engines and platforms, essentially blocking the public's access to them. [See Consortiumnews.com's “What to Do About 'Fake News.'”]

On Thanksgiving Day, the Post ran a front-page story citing an anonymous group, called PropOrNot, blacklisting 200 Web sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other important sources of independent journalism, because we supposedly promoted “Russian propaganda.”

Although PropOrNot and the Post didn't bother to cite any actual examples or to ask the accused for comment, the point was clear: If you didn't march in lockstep behind the Official Narrative on, say, the Ukraine crisis or the war in Syria, you were to be isolated, demonized and effectively silenced. In the

article, the Post blurred the lines between “fake news” – stories that are simply made up – and what was deemed “propaganda,” in effect, information that didn’t jibe with what the U.S. State Department was saying.

Back then, in November, the big newspapers believed that the truth was easy, simple, obvious, requiring only access to some well-placed government official or a quick reading of the executive summary from some official report. Over the last quarter century or so, the Times, in particular, has made a fetish out of embracing pretty much whatever Officialdom declared to be true. After all, such well-

dressed folks with those important-sounding titles couldn’t possibly be lying.

That gullibility went from the serious, such as rejecting overwhelming evidence that Ronald Reagan’s Nicaraguan Contra rebels were deeply involved in drug trafficking, to the silly, trusting the NFL’s absurd Deflategate allegations against Tom Brady. In those “old” days, which apparently ended a few weeks ago, the Times could have run full-page ads, saying “Truth is whatever those in authority say it is.”

In 2002, when the George W. Bush administration was vouching for a motley crew of Iraqi “defectors” describing Saddam Hussein’s hidden WMDs, Iraq’s purchase of some “aluminum tubes” must have been for building nuclear bombs. In 2003, when Secretary of State Colin Powell showed some artist drawings of “mobile chemical weapons labs,” they must really exist – and anyone who doubted Powell’s “slam-dunk” testimony deserved only contempt and ridicule.

When the Obama administration issued a “government assessment” blaming the Syrian military for the sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, there was no need to scrutinize its dubious assertions or ask for actual proof. To do so made you an “Assad apologist.”

When a bunch of U.S. allies under the effective control of Ukraine’s unsavory SBU intelligence service presented some videos with computer-generated graphics showing Russians supplying the Buk missile that shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, there was no need to examine the holes in the evidence or note that the realistic-looking graphics were fictional and based on dubious assumptions. To do so made you a “Moscow stooge.”

In other words, when the U.S. government was gluing black hats on an “enemy” and white hats on a U.S. “ally,” the Times never seemed to object. Nor did pretty much anyone else in the mainstream media. No one seemed to note that both sides usually deserved gray hats. With very few exceptions – when the State Department or other U.S. agencies were making the charges – the Times and its cohorts

simply stopped applying responsible journalistic skepticism.

Of course, there is a problem with “fake news,” i.e., stories that are consciously made up for the purpose of making money from lots of clicks. There are also fact-free conspiracy theories that operate without evidence or in defiance of it. No one hates such bogus stories more than I do – and they have long been a bane of serious journalism, dating back centuries, not just to the last election.

But what the Times, the Post and the rest of the mainstream media have typically ignored is that there are many situations in which the facts are not clear or when there are alternative explanations that could reasonably explain a set of facts. There are even times when the evidence goes firmly against what the U.S. government is claiming. At those moments, skepticism and courage are necessary to challenge false or dubious Official Narratives. You might even say, “The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn’t so obvious...”

A Tough Transition

During the transition from the Obama administration to the Trump team, the Times, the Post and other mainstream media outlets got caught in their own transition from trusting whatever the outgoing officials said to distrusting whatever the incoming officials said. In those final days, big media accepted what President Obama’s intelligence agencies asserted about Russia supposedly interfering in the U.S. election despite the lack of publicly available evidence that could be scrutinized and tested.

Even something as squirrely as the attack on Trump’s National Security Adviser Michael Flynn – with Obama holdovers citing the never-prosecuted Logan Act from 1799 as the pretext for ginning up some kind of criminal-sounding case that scared Trump into firing Flynn – was treated as legitimate, without serious questions asked. Since Obama officials were doing the feeding, the no-skepticism rule applied to the eating. But whatever statements came from Trump, even his few lucid moments explaining why war with nuclear-armed Russia wasn’t such a great idea, were treated as dangerous nonsense.

When Trump scolded the mainstream press for engaging in “fake news” and then applied the phrase “enemy of the people,” the Times, the Post and the rest went into full victimization-mode. When a few news companies were excluded from a White House news briefing, they all rushed to the barricades to defend freedom of the press. Then, Trump went even further – he rejected his invitation to the White House Correspondents Dinner, the black-tie/evening-gown event where mainstream media stars compete to attract the hottest celebrity guests and hobnob with important government officials, a walking-talking conflict-of-

interest-filled evening, an orgy of self-importance.

So, the Times, the Post and their mainstream-media friends now feel under attack. Whereas just weeks ago they were demanding that Google, Facebook and other powerful information platforms throttle those of us who showed professional skepticism toward dubious claims from the U.S. government, now the Times, the Post and the others are insisting that we all rally around them, to defend their journalistic freedom. In another full-page ad on Sunday, the Times wrote: "Truth. It's more important now than ever."

I would argue that truth is always important, but especially so when government officials are leading countries toward war, when lives are at stake, whether in Iraq or Syria or Ukraine or the many other global hotspots. At those moments in the recent past, the Times did not treat truth – in all its subtlety and nuance – as important at all.

I would argue, too, that the stakes are raised even higher when propagandists and ideologues are risking the prospect of nuclear war that could kill billions and effectively end human civilization. However, in that case, the American people have seen little truly professional journalism nor a real commitment to the truth. Instead, it's been much more fun to demonize Russian President Vladimir Putin and paint black-and-white pictures of the evil Russians.

At such moments, those New York Times' truisms about truth are forgotten: "The truth is rarely simple. The truth isn't so obvious. ..."

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](#)).

NATO's Strange Addition of Montenegro

Exclusive: Official Washington's New Cold Warriors are painting NATO's admission of tiny Montenegro in the stark black-and-white colors of a heroic stand against "Russian aggression" but that misses the real reasons why it's a bad idea, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Any day now, Arizona Senator John McCain promises, the U.S. Senate will vote to approve the incorporation of Montenegro as the 29th member state in the NATO alliance. Though few Americans likely know where to find the tiny Balkan nation on a map, Montenegro has become another dubious focal point of the West's new confrontation with Russia.

At first glance, the case for extending NATO's umbrella over a country with fewer than 2,000 troops isn't obvious. Its seven helicopters are unlikely to make America safer. The Obama administration, which championed this latest in a long line of recent additions to the alliance, actually offered as a rationale the fact that Montenegro had donated some mortar rounds to the anti-ISIS coalition in Iraq and \$1.2 million to NATO's operations in Afghanistan over three years.

That sum is less than a third of what U.S. taxpayers spend in Afghanistan per hour. One critic quipped, "if the West's survival depends on Montenegro's inclusion in NATO, we should all be heading for the bunkers."

Maybe that's why hawks are citing the mere fact of Russia's predictable opposition as a prime reason to support Montenegro's accession. "Backing Montenegro's membership is not only the right thing for the Senate to do, it would send a clear signal that no third party has a veto over NATO enlargement decisions," argues the Heritage Foundation.

And two advocates at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, declared recently that Montenegro will be the key test of whether President Trump and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson "kowtow to their friend Russian President Vladimir Putin" and "acquiesce . . . in another Yalta" or stand up for "core U.S. goals."

Raising the specter of Putin and Yalta diverts attention from troubling questions about Montenegro's political suitability as a partner – and whether it has anything of military value to offer.

NATO ostensibly conditions its acceptance of new members on strict criteria, which include "demonstrating a commitment to the rule of law and human rights; establishing democratic control of armed forces; and promoting stability and well-being through economic liberty, social justice and environmental responsibility."

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Carpenter assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last September that Montenegro supported NATO's "values of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law." He must have missed the report from Freedom House, which gave the country a rating of only

“partly free” for both political rights and civil liberties.

The organization cited “restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly” and “years of harassment and discrimination against LGBT people.” It also noted “ongoing concerns . . . about the independence of the judiciary and the public broadcaster, as well as numerous failures to effectively prosecute past attacks against media workers.” The country suffers from “a lack of trust in the electoral process among voters,” it added.

Carpenter must also have missed the State Department’s human rights report, which accused Montenegro of numerous violations, including “impunity for war crimes, mistreatment by law enforcement officers of persons in their custody, overcrowded and dilapidated prisons and pretrial detention facilities, violations of the right to peaceful assembly,” and “selective prosecution of political and societal opponents.”

A Bastion of Corruption

As for the “rule of law,” consider that Montenegro’s ruler for nearly three decades, Milo Djukanović, was given the 2015 Organized Crime and Corruption “Person of the Year” Award by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), an organization of several hundred investigative journalists who report on corruption in Europe and Central Asia (and are partly financed by USAID).

Citing his success in “creating an oppressive political atmosphere and an economy choked by corruption and money laundering,” the OCCRP said Djukanović “has built one of the most dedicated kleptocracies and organized crime havens in the world.”

The organization pointed to his alleged role in cigarette smuggling with notorious Italian crime syndicates; his family’s takeover of a former state bank, which became a money laundry for organized crime; his controversial sale of major stretches of the country’s coastline to shady foreign oligarchs; and his offer of citizenship to a notorious regional drug kingpin.

Djukanović knows the money is greener to the west of Montenegro than to the east. That’s why he’s an ardent advocate of joining NATO. (Fewer than 40 percent of Montenegrins in a recent poll agreed – in part because alliance warplanes bombed the country during NATO’s campaign against Serbia in 1999.) President Obama congratulated Djukanović on his stand during an official reception in September.

Following national elections in October, Djukanović finally stepped down as prime minister, but he remains head of the ruling party. Taking his place as the

country's current prime minister was his hand-picked deputy, Dusko Markovic.

"Markovic, a former state security chief, is considered one of Djukanovi?'s closest confidantes," reported OCCRP. "He was publicly accused by a former head of the country's anti-organized crime police last year of involvement in cigarette smuggling, but was never charged." In 2014, Markovic was also charged by the head of a government investigative commission with obstructing a probe into the murder of a prominent newspaper editor and critic of Djukanovi?.

Western media have large ignored such troubling facts. Instead, what little coverage there is of Montenegro focuses on the government's sensational claim that Russians plotted to assassinate Djukanovi? at the time of the October election.

Markovic recently told Time magazine that his security services at the last minute uncovered a "criminal organization" formed by two Russian military intelligence agents, who planned on election day "to provoke incidents . . . and also possibly an armed conflict" as a pretext for taking power.

The prosecutor in charge of the case says "Russian state authorities" backed the plot to "prevent Montenegro from joining NATO." He vows to indict two alleged Russian plotters and 22 others, including a group of Serbian nationalists, by April 15. Russia's foreign minister called the allegations "baseless," but refuses to extradite any suspects. An independent expert, citing numerous anomalies in the official story, argues the plot was a "rogue operation" by Serbian and Russian nationalist freelancers.

Russia, which has long considered the Balkans to be in its sphere of influence, has a history of intruding in Montenegro's affairs. But absent persuasive supporting evidence for the government's case, outsiders should bear in mind the cautionary observation by Freedom House that "[Montenegro's] intelligence service has faced sustained criticism from international observers for a perceived lack of professionalism."

Still, it should come as no surprise that anti-Russia hawks haven't let ambiguous evidence deter them from demanding the expansion of NATO.

A *Wall Street Journal* editorial said the alleged coup plot "gives a good taste of Russia's ambitions – and methods – in Eastern and Central Europe" and concluded with a call for accepting Montenegro's bid to join NATO: "Western security is best served by supporting democratic governments of any size facing pressure from regional bullies. The alternative is to deliver another country into Moscow's grip, and whet its appetite to take another."

Time magazine commented even more breathlessly that "The aborted coup was a

reminder that a new battle for Europe has begun. From the Baltics to the Balkans and the Black Sea to Great Britain, Vladimir Putin is seeking to rebuild Russia's empire more than 25 years after the fall of the Soviet Union." Trump's past criticism of NATO, the magazine warned, has "raised flags that the U.S. might accept Russia's territorial grab."

Such inflammatory comments are stoking the political fires burning around Trump, including investigations of his campaign contacts with Russians, assertions of Moscow's interference with the election, and questions about business connections or personal indiscretions that make him vulnerable to Putin. Trump's stand on Montenegro – still to be determined – will signal whether he remains a critic of NATO or is caving to the New Cold Warriors.

Jonathan Marshall is author of many recent articles on arms issues, including ["Obama's Unkept Promise on Nuclear War,"](#) ["How World War III Could Start,"](#) ["NATO's Provocative Anti-Russian Moves,"](#) ["Escalations in a New Cold War,"](#) and ["Ticking Closer to Midnight."](#)

A Crackdown on the Poor and Hungry

Concerned about "quality of life" appearances, cities across America are cracking down on the homeless and the hungry, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Activist and author Keith McHenry, who co-founded Food Not Bombs in Boston in 1980, says cities across the U.S. have begun to take various steps to "criminalize" the homeless and those who try to help them.

I spoke to McHenry, author of *Hungry for Peace: How You Can Help End Poverty and War with Food Not Bombs*, in the seaside city of Santa Cruz, California, where he says there is an ongoing crackdown against Food Not Bombs workers as well as those who they are trying to feed.

"The most common government response to the suffering of those being forced into homelessness is for local authorities to make laws against being homeless," said McHenry. "Laws against sleeping, sitting, asking for money or what officials call 'Quality of Life Crimes,' living outside and lower[ing] the quality of life of those fortunate enough to not yet be forced out into the streets.

"Another [tactic] is to pass laws seeking to end the sharing of meals to the hungry in public ... hoping that by hiding the 'problem' of seeing so many of our neighbors living [on the streets], it will go away. Over 70 cities have passed

laws regulating or banning the sharing of free food with the homeless outside.”

According to a recent report from the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, 21.8 percent of the nation’s children and 15 percent of the population overall are poor and often hungry. Despite the growing needs of the homeless, the Federal government continues to cut vital services and assistance meant to help the most at-risk among us, said Jennifer Jones, Executive Director of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA), including “funding cuts for meals for homebound seniors, vocational training programs for those who’ve lost their jobs, food for low income families, and the list goes on. At a time when our nation needs to protect people from continued and increasing hardship, and support economic growth, the Federal government has imposed sequestration cuts and proposes further budget cuts that take us backwards.”

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, using the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education and the 2013 U.S. Census, at least “2.5 million children in America – one in every 30 children – go to sleep without a home of their own each year.”

I spoke to Keith McHenry in Santa Cruz on Feb. 23 about the continuing attacks on those who have devoted themselves to distributing free food to the poor, homeless and hungry.

Dennis Bernstein: Please talk a little bit in general about what you do in terms of trying to give out food. And a bit about how the need for food has increased in recent years.

Keith McHenry: Recently, I’ve been involved in this project called the Freedom Sleepers, with the right for people to sleep in Santa Cruz. And it’s illegal now to sleep here between the hours of 11 at night and 8:30 in the morning, outside, in a vehicle, or in the streets, or anywhere in the parks.

And the number of people that you see coming to our meals, it’s just always getting larger and larger. And downtown Santa Cruz, like many ... downtowns–L.A., I was just down there–it’s incredible the amount of people living on America’s street.

There’s a study that just was reported in the Washington Post... and several articles about homeless children. There’s estimated to be, using the federal government’s own statistics, 2.5 million homeless children in America.

DB: ...2.5 million homeless children.

KM: It’s just astounding. It’s heartbreaking. To me, it’s starting to have that sense of [Charles] Dickens, or the Great Depression, or something like that.

DB: ...sort of the look of the Third World, because you begin to see more and more whole families on the street.

KM: Absolutely. And you see entire little villages, and camps. And so, Food Not Bombs, and many other groups, are out on the streets serving free food. And what we do is we collect free food that can't be sold from grocery stores, and we make vegan meals that we share on the streets, under a banner that says Food Not Bombs, with a literature table with information.

And, of course, right now, information on immigrants' rights and information on how to resist all the crazy things that are going on, as a result of the election of Trump. But also, we were doing that under Obama with his wars, and so on.

So, it's just a ramped-up continuation of this resistance that we've been doing for 30... it'll be 37 years this May 24th. And the numbers for Food Not Bombs groups is just growing by leaps and bounds, all over the world. There's like three groups in Turkey, for instance, that are being arrested, for feeding people out on the streets, as part of the general clamp down after the coup attempt.

But Food Not Bombs in America has been having tons of trouble, as well. And, most recently, Tampa, Florida, arrested seven volunteers. But the outrage, world-wide, was just so huge that the district attorney dropped the charges.

And right now, as we're speaking, there's a meeting to try to figure out... with the city, to try to figure out what to do about Food Not Bombs. But, fortunately, those young people there, are just so impressive and so amazing, that they are not going to bend to the will of the authorities. Which is, basically, to try to get you to get a permit that then, in our experience, they withdraw as soon as they want to get rid of you. And then they use that as "Oh, well they had a permit, but they did something wrong, now they don't have it. Now it's our legitimate right to harass them."

The reality is, you don't need a permit to do this. We don't get paid. It's just a gift... an unregulated gift of love. And it would be like trying to issue permits for people doing anything to help their community, out of their own free will. Fortunately, we've been able to push back, attack after attack. Orlando, Ft. Lauderdale, Arcata, California, San Francisco, and now there's even efforts in Southern California and some of those small cities, like Corona, where they're trying to outlaw outdoor distribution of free food.

So, it's a growing municipal effort nation-wide to try to make this illegal and difficult, or impossible, for people to feed the hungry, with some kind of a

theory that if you stop feeding people, they will disappear.

DB: They will go get a job with their kids. Like they didn't just lose their job. Like there aren't so many people who have been permanently out of work. There are so many struggles. We see this all the time. Keith, about how many times have you been arrested for giving out free food?

KM: The San Francisco authorities said I have been arrested 94 times, there. And that the district attorney at the time, Carlos Smith, said I did 500 days in jail. And then I was arrested twice in Orlando, for feeding people, and did 18 days there, which was even more brutal than the 500 days that I did in San Francisco, because Florida jails are just unbelievably horrible. Horrible. In fact, somebody thought I should make a Lonely Planet guide to city jails in America, [which] I might do.

DB: Now, there is clearly... and I'd like you to talk a little bit about this Keith. There's clearly an attempt, they're continuing collaborations, cities, states... to criminalize both homelessness, and then the folks who become the supporters, like yourself, like people who provide food. This is sort of part of a trend, right?

KM: Right. It is. And there's this odd thing where there's... at least one consultant, and then possibly more, who are going around, helping cities, at a cost of \$5,300.00/month, solve their homeless problem by removing outdoor food service. And the most recent one was Phoenix, Arizona, where they actually... the Phoenix Human Resource Department, last September, did this thing called the Street Feeding Collaborative to educate faith and community based groups about why feeding can do more harm, than good.

And the kind of the leader of this, or the most prominent spokesperson for this theory, that feeding people outside will encourage them to stay homeless, and that somehow eating indoors will essentially get them access to addiction services. And his perspective—this man, Robert Marbut from San Antonio, Texas—is suggesting that basically people are on drugs or alcohol, and if they'd just get off of drugs and alcohol, by going to one of these multi-service centers, they'd get help, they'd get access to housing, they'd get drug treatment, and so on. But, if you feed people outdoors they won't get those services.

And he's really pushing this idea, but it's been sadly, for him, a failure. And that's where, and sadly for the homeless people that actually have tried to... that have been either denied food because people have been stopped from feeding people, or who also end up in these programs, and actually don't get the help that is so promised.

And most famously he has a program... he started a project that cost \$100,000,000 to start up, in San Antonio, Texas, called Haven for Hope. And, even in the last 12 months, there's been news reports ... that actually the homeless population is just huge in San Antonio, and way beyond the capacity of Haven for Hope. And Haven for Hope is in financial trouble, and it's just actually not a solution.

And I know, here in Santa Cruz, California, most of the people that eat with us actually do eat indoors at St. Francis, Monday through Friday, when they're open. And they're not getting drug rehab or any kind of housing. We have a Housing First program, which most of these do.

And very few people actually, ultimately do get housing. You hear huge stories all the time of like "Well, I went to this meeting, that meeting, and I had this voucher, and that voucher, blah, blah, blah. And after 3 years I never got any housing." And you hear this day in and day out from people on the streets.

So these programs really aren't working and, from Food Not Bombs's perspective, is that we should be out there building solidarity between the housed and the unhoused, so that we're humanizing the people, rather than dehumanizing people living on the streets. And that we make the point that we have to change all of society.

It's not a matter of tweaking this or getting a drug rehab program there. We saw, when we started 37 years ago, very few homeless Americans. And now, eight years of Reaganomics, and then all the other neo-liberal economic policies, have resulted in millions of people living on our streets. And with Trump, it's likely to be much, much worse. So, that's where the solution really is.

DB: I think, Keith McHenry, one of the most troubling things that I've seen, and I've seen it repeatedly in the context of the work that you all have done, witnessing it through film that oftentimes the authorities, the police, will come and literally take the food out of hungry people's' hands, they'll impound all the food, and then they'll just throw it in the garbage in front of hungry... this is sort of what they do. Why do they do that?

KM: Well, you know ... I think that that is done to try to make it so uncomfortable and embarrassing for people to live in the cities, that they somehow get a bus ticket and go to somebody else's city to be their problem. [The] city council, here in Santa Cruz, had an agenda item surrounding the issue of homelessness, and they had two things. One was this Housing First program which has been a horrible failure. And the other was funding bus tickets out of town.

[...]

It's just really troubling that people are living on the streets, and then the city government's policies are like, let's get rid of them, or let's hide them, or something like that. And in Santa Cruz there are two groups that are like citizen groups connected to the police. And one of them is the Legalize and the other is Take Back Santa Cruz. And Take Back Santa Cruz is actually really a neo-fascist organization. And homeless people report being beaten by them, and the other thing that's happening is related...

DB: ...what do you mean being beaten? They come right up on the street and beat them, or, throw them around?

KM: They beat them up. Yeah, they punch them and stuff. And we've been getting report after report ... these people after they push the people around, and everything, and hit them, say "if you're not out of here, we're coming back with a baseball bat to beat you up."

And the other thing, on Tuesday night [Feb. 21]—it freaked me out immensely—when feeding people outside of City Hall, people kept coming in their stocking feet, without shoes. And it turns out people are stealing the shoes of homeless people. Now, maybe its homeless people stealing other people's shoes because their shoes got stolen, but the rumor on the street says that some non-homeless people are just... [they] see you sleeping in a doorway...

DB: ...it's a way of torturing, and abusing and forcing the issue.

KM: Yeah, just like Frank Jordan, in San Francisco, in the '90s, when he was Mayor. He had a thing called Quality of Life Enforcement Matrix Program. And one of the aspects of that program was for the police to surround a group of homeless people, in a park usually, Golden Gate Park, Civic Center, something, and confiscate everybody's shoes. And here they're confiscating, officially the police are confiscating people's belongings. They're taking their bedrolls, their sleeping bags and everything. And they wake people up, like over and over again, every night.

And, again, on Tuesday and Wednesday morning [Feb. 21 and 22], it was shocking to see the park rangers, Santa Cruz City park rangers, going and harassing homeless people, waking them up. And we've even had reports of homeless people being woken up in the middle of the day when it's legal to sleep.

It reminds me of like what they do at Pelican Bay [State Prison], or in control units in the SHUs in prisons [Special/Security Housing Units, ie. solitary confinement], where they wake you up over and over again. And no wonder people go kind of bonkers...

DB: ...and isn't it in Santa Cruz, Keith, where they use these noise

making/buzzing machines that were meant to chase out insects? And they use them to drown out with noise, to intimidate, and run homeless people out, is that true?

KM: Yeah, they have. ... The city manager's office, which is really the people behind this cruelty to the homeless. And they're working with the downtown business association, the downtown alliance, and so on, and developers, and a bunch of the city councilors put \$10,000 or \$15,000 into buying what they call mosquito boxes. So at a certain time, at night, under the bridges and parks, this loud, deafening, nauseating sound goes off – you just can't possibly stay there. And they did that without public comment, or anything. It just became a downtown improvement budget item. And then the next thing you know they're holding a press conference saying how wonderful it is they got these mosquito boxes.

And so, this chasing Food Not Bombs away aspect of it, while the city council seems to be intimidated a bit because we are really, fortunately, very loved by the people here in Santa Cruz. These two right-wing groups are allies with the majority on the council.

And so, they are really pushing, and the thing that they ... so far in the last... since the first of the year, we were told by the police that there's all these complaints, and we had to meet with them. So, finally, we met with them and they showed us all these e-mails that they got, about, oh, that we left trash after a meal, and actually we clean up and the Post Office people claim the cleanest times are after a meal. And then same at City Hall. The people that clean up City Hall find that, after we serve food there, there's virtually nothing around after we clean up. So that's totally a phony complaint.

And, in fact, the bags of household garbage [that] have been laying around the Post Office when we arrive, and I've had to pick it up, and it's clearly white kitchen garbage bags full of Drano and things like that. Things that homeless people and Food Not Bombs would not be leaving on the street. And they take photos of them and email it to all the politicians.

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.

A Nazi Skeleton in the Family Closet

Exclusive: Canada's fiercely anti-Russian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland says her Ukrainian grandfather struggled "to return freedom and democracy to Ukraine," but she leaves out that he was a Nazi propagandist justifying the slaughter of Jews, writes Arina Tsukanova.

By Arina Tsukanova

On Jan. 10, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau replaced Foreign Minister Stephane Dion with Chrystia Freeland, a former journalist proud of her Ukrainian roots and well-known for her hostility toward Russia. At the time, a big question in Ottawa was why. Some analysts believed that Trudeau's decision may have started when it still seemed likely that Hillary Clinton would become the new U.S. president and a tough line against Moscow was expected in Washington.

However, by the time the switch was made, Donald Trump was on his way into the White House and Trudeau's choice meant that Canada was allying itself more with the mounting hostility toward Russia inside the European Union than with President Trump's hopes for a more cooperative relationship with the Kremlin. With Freeland running Canada's Foreign Ministry, the chance for a shared view between Ottawa and Washington suddenly seemed remote.

People who have followed Freeland's career were aware that her *idée fixe* for decades has been that Ukraine must be ripped out of the Russian sphere of influence. Her views fit with the intense Ukrainian nationalism of her maternal grandparents who immigrated to Canada after World War II and whom she has portrayed as victims of Josef Stalin and the Red Army.

So, Freeland celebrated the Soviet collapse in 1991, which enabled Ukraine to gain its independence. Freeland, then in her early 20s, was working in Kiev as a stringer for The Financial Times and The Washington Post, shining with delight over the emergence of a "New Ukraine."

By the next decade, working as the U.S. managing editor of The Financial Times, she proudly interviewed then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, who had won control as a result of the 2004 "Orange Revolution." In her approach to journalism, Freeland made clear her commitment to foment Ukrainian-Russian tensions in any possible way. Indeed, during her journalistic career, which ended in 2013 when she won a seat in Canada's parliament, Freeland remained fiercely anti-Russian.

In 2014, Yushchenko's rival Viktor Yanukovich was Ukraine's elected president while Canadian MP Freeland urged on the "Euro-Maidan" protests against

Yanukovych and his desire to maintain friendly relations with Moscow. On Jan. 27, 2014, as the protests grew more violent with ultra-nationalist street fighters moving to the forefront and firebombing police, Freeland visited Kiev and published an op-ed in The Globe and Mail blaming the violence on Yanukovych.

“Democratic values are rarely challenged as directly as they are being today in Ukraine,” Freeland wrote, arguing that the protesters, not the elected president, represented democracy and the rule of law. “Their victory will be a victory for us all; their defeat will weaken democracy far from the Euromaidan. We are all Ukrainians now. Let’s do what we can – which is a lot – to support them.”

Ukraine’s ‘Regime Change’

Freeland’s op-ed appeared at about the same time as her ideological ally, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, was caught on an insecure phone line discussing with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt who the new leaders of Ukraine should be. “Yats is the guy,” Nuland said about Arseniy Yatsenyuk while dismissing the E.U.’s less aggressive approach to the crisis with the pithy remark, “Fuck the E.U.” Nuland and Pyatt then pondered how to “glue this thing” and “midwife this thing.”

Several weeks later, on Feb. 20, a mysterious sniper shot both police and protesters, touching off a day of bloody mayhem. On Feb. 22, armed rioters seized government buildings and forced Yanukovych to flee for his life. He was then impeached without the constitutional rules being followed. Yatsenyuk became prime minister, and Western governments quickly pronounced the new regime “legitimate.”

The new xenophobic regime in Kiev – bristling with hostility toward ethnic Russian Ukrainians – did not embarrass Freeland. As Canada’s newly appointed minister of international trade, Freeland met frequently with Ukrainian officials, more so than with many of Canada’s leading trade partners.

But the more troubling question is whether Freeland’s devotion to Ukrainian nationalism is rooted not in her commitment to the “rule of law” or “democratic values” or even the well-being of the Ukrainian people whose living standards have declined sharply since the Feb. 22, 2014 putsch (amid continued government corruption), but in her devotion to her Ukrainian grandparents whom she still views as victims of Stalin and the Red Army.

Last Aug. 24, reflecting on so-called Black Ribbon Day, which lumps together the crimes of Josef Stalin and Adolf Hitler (with Stalin getting top billing), she wrote on Twitter, “Thinking of my grandparents Mykhailo & Aleksandra Chomiak on

Black Ribbon Day. They were forever grateful to Canada for giving them refuge and they worked hard to return freedom and democracy to Ukraine. I am proud to honour their memory today.”



In her autobiography, Freeland presents her grandparents in the following way: “My maternal grandparents fled western Ukraine after Hitler and Stalin signed their non-aggression pact in 1939. They never dared to go back, but they stayed in close touch with their brothers and sisters and their families, who remained behind.”



According to Freeland, her grandfather Mykhailo Chomiak was “a lawyer and journalist before the Second World War, but they [her grandparents] knew the Soviets would invade western Ukraine (and) fled.” After the war, her mother was born in a refugee camp in Germany before the family immigrated to western Canada, Freeland wrote.

Freeland’s grandfather was allegedly able to get a visa only thanks to his sister who had crossed the ocean before the war. The family story told by Freeland portrays her grandparents as World War II victims, but that is not the real or full story.

Chrystia Freeland’s dark family secret is that her grandfather, Mykhailo Chomiak, faithfully served Nazi Germany right up to its surrender, and Chomiak’s family only moved to Canada after the Third Reich was defeated by the Soviet Union’s Red Army and its allies – the U.S. and Great Britain.

Mykhailo Chomiak was not a victim of the war – he was on the side of the German aggressors who collaborated with Ukrainian nationalists in killing Russians, Jews, Poles and other minorities. Former journalist Freeland chose to whitewash

her family history to leave out her grandfather's service to Adolf Hitler. Of course, if she had told the truth, she might never have achieved a successful political career in Canada. Her fierce hostility toward Russia also might be viewed in a different light.

Freeland's Grandfather

According to Canadian sources, Chomiak graduated from Lviv University in western Ukraine with a Master's Degree in Law and Political Science. He began a career with the Galician newspaper *Dilo* (Action), published in Lviv. After the start of World War II, the Nazi administration appointed Chomiak to be editor of the newspaper *Krakivski Visti* (News of Krakow).

So the truth appears to be that Chomiak moved from Ukraine to Nazi-occupied Poland in order to work for the Third Reich under the command of Governor-General Hans Frank, the man who organized the Holocaust in Poland. Chomiak's work was directly supervised by Emil Gassner, the head of the press department in the Polish General Government.

Mikhailo Chomiak comfortably settled his family into a former Jewish (or Aryanized) apartment in Krakow. The editorial offices for *Krakivski Visti* also were taken from a Jewish owner, Krakow's Polish-language Jewish newspaper *Nowy Dziennik*. Its editor at the time was forced to flee Krakow for Lviv, where he was captured following the occupation of Galicia and sent to the Belzec extermination camp, where he was murdered along with 600,000 other Jews.

So, it appears Freeland's grandfather – rather than being a helpless victim – was given a prestigious job to spread Nazi propaganda, praising Hitler from a publishing house stolen from Jews and given to Ukrainians who shared the values of Nazism.

On April 24, 1940, *Krakivski Visti* published a full-page panegyric to Adolf Hitler dedicated to his 51st birthday (four days earlier). Chomiak also hailed Governor-General Hans Frank: "The Ukrainian population were overjoyed to see the establishment of fair German authority, the bearer of which is you, Sir Governor-General. The Ukrainian people expressed this joy not only through the flowers they threw to the German troops entering the region, but also through the sacrifices of blood required to fight Polish usurpers." (Because of Frank's role in the Holocaust, the Nuremberg Tribunal found him guilty of crimes against humanity and executed him.)

Beyond extolling Hitler and his henchmen, Chomiak rejoiced over Nazi military victories, including the terror bombings of Great Britain. While praising the Third Reich, *Krakivski Visti* was also under orders by the German authorities to

stir up hatred against the Jewish population. Editorial selections from Chomiak's newspaper can be found in Holocaust museums around the world, such as the one in Los Angeles, California.

The Nov. 6, 1941 issue of *Krakivski Visti* ecstatically describes how much better Kiev is without Jews. "There is not a single one left in Kiev today, while there were 350,000 under the Bolsheviks," the newspaper wrote, gloating that the Jews "got their comeuppance."

That "comeuppance" refers to the mass shooting of Kiev's Jewish population at Babi Yar. In just two days, Sept. 29-30, 1941, a total of 33,771 people were murdered, a figure that does not include children younger than three years old. There were more shootings in October, and by early November, *Krakivski Visti* was enthusing over a city where the Jewish population had "disappeared" making Kiev "beautiful, glorious." Chomiak's editorials also described a Poland "iiinfected by Jews."

According to John-Paul Himka, a Canadian historian of Ukrainian origin, *Krakivski Visti* stirred up emotions against Jews, creating an atmosphere conducive to mass murder. In 2008, the Institute of Historical Research at Lviv National University published a paper co-authored by Himka entitled "What Was the Attitude of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists toward the Jews?" The paper states that, by order of the German authorities, *Krakivski Visti* published a series of articles between June and September 1943 under the title "*Yids in Ukraine*" that were written in an extremely anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi vein. The Canadian historian writes that Jews were portrayed as criminals, while Ukrainians were portrayed as victims.

Refuge in Canada

As the war turned against the Nazis and the Red Army advanced across Ukraine and Poland, Nazi propagandist Emil Gassner took Mykhailo Chomiak in 1944 to Vienna where *Krakivski Visti* continued to publish. As the Third Reich crumbled, Chomiak left with the retreating German Army and surrendered to the Americans in Bavaria, where he was placed with his family in a special U.S. military intelligence facility in Bad Wörishofen, a cluster of hotels situated 78 kilometers from Munich in the foothills of the Alps.

The Chomiak family was given accommodations, living expenses and health care. In her biography, Freeland refers to it only as "a refugee camp." In September 1946, Mikhailo Chomiak's daughter Halyna was born in that spa town. In May 1948, the facility was closed and Chomiak, the former Nazi editor, departed for Canada.

While it is true that the sins of a grandfather should not be visited on his descendants, Freeland should not have misled the public on history of such importance, especially when her deceptions also concealed how she partly developed her world view. The family's deep hostility toward Russia appears to have been passed down from Mikhailo Chomiak's generation to his granddaughter Chrystia Freeland.

Like many of today's Ukrainian nationalists, including pockets of post-World War II immigrants in Canada and the United States, Freeland glosses over the violent abuses of the current regime in Kiev toward ethnic Russians, including the fatal firebombing of the Trade Union Building in Odessa and enlistment of neo-Nazi militias to prosecute the so-called "Anti-Terror Operation" against ethnic Russian rebels in the Donbass region. Overall, the conflict has killed some 10,000 people, including many ethnic Russian civilians.

But Freeland only sees "Russian aggression" and vows to maintain an unrelentingly hard line to punish Moscow. So, the pressing question about Freeland is whether her family history makes her incapable of an objective assessment of this dangerous New Cold War crisis. Is a person who describes her Nazi-collaborating grandfather as someone who "worked hard to return freedom and democracy to Ukraine" fit to represent Canada to the world?

Arina Tsukanova is a Russian Ukrainian journalist from Kiev currently living in Crimea. Before the Euromaidan she used to work for several Ukrainian newspapers, now closed.

The Risk of Baiting Trump on Russia

In the drive to damage President Trump, American liberals have seized on his desire for more cooperation with Russia, baiting him as "a Putin puppet," a dangerous strategy, says Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

Four weeks into Donald Trump's presidency, *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman wrote that "nothing he has done since the inauguration allays fears that he is in effect a Putin puppet." The liberal pundit concluded with a matter-of-fact reference to "the Trump-Putin axis."

Such lines of attack have become routine, citing and stoking fears that the president of the United States is a Kremlin stooge. The meme is on the march –

and where it will end, nobody knows. Actually, it could end with a global nuclear holocaust.

The incessant goading and denunciations of Trump as a Kremlin flunky are escalating massive pressure on him to prove otherwise. Exculpatory behavior would involve setting aside possibilities for detente and, instead, confronting Russia – rhetorically and militarily.

Hostile behavior toward Russia is what much of the U.S. media and political establishment have been fervently seeking. It's also the kind of behavior that could drag us all over the brink into thermonuclear destruction. But c'mon, why worry about that?

For countless media commentators and partisan Democrats including many avowed progressives – as well as for some Republican hawks aligned with the likes of Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham – the benefits of tarring Trump as a Russian tool are just too alluring to resist.

To be clear: For a vast number of reasons, the Trump administration is repugnant. And the new president's flagrant violations of the U.S. Constitution's foreign and domestic emoluments clauses are solid grounds for impeaching him. I'm glad to be involved with a nationwide petition campaign – which already has 890,000 signers – urging Congress to begin impeachment proceedings. We should go after Trump for well-grounded reasons based on solid facts.

At the same time, we should refuse to be stampeded by the nonstop drumbeats from partisan talking points and mainline media outlets – as well as “the intelligence community.”

It wasn't mere happenstance when the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, openly lied at a Senate committee hearing in early 2013, replying “No sir” to a pivotal question from Sen. Ron Wyden: “Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?” The lie was exposed three months later when Edward Snowden made possible the release of key NSA documents.

Yet now we're supposed to assume straight-arrow authoritative honesty can be found in a flimsy 25-page report “assessing Russian activities and intentions,” issued in early January under the logo of Clapper's Office of the Director of National Intelligence. That report has been critiqued and demolished by one astute analyst after another.

As investigative journalist Gareth Porter noted, “In fact, the intelligence community had not even obtained evidence that Russia was behind the publication

by WikiLeaks of the e-mails [of the] Democratic National Committee, much less that it had done so with the intention of electing Trump. Clapper had testified before Congress in mid-November and again in December that the intelligence community did not know who had provided the e-mails to WikiLeaks and when they were provided.”

More broadly and profoundly, many cogent analyses have emerged to assess the proliferating anti-Russia meme and its poisonous effects. For instance: “Why We Must Oppose the Kremlin-Baiting Against Trump” by Stephen F. Cohen at *The Nation*; “The Increasingly Unhinged Russia Rhetoric Comes From a Long-Standing U.S. Playbook” by Glenn Greenwald at *The Intercept*; and “The Did-You-Talk-to-Russians Witch Hunt” by Robert Parry at *ConsortiumNews*.

The frenzy to vilify Russia and put the kibosh on the potential for detente is now undermining open democratic discourse about U.S. foreign policy – while defaming advocates of better U.S.-Russia relations in ways that would have made Joe McCarthy proud. So, President Trump’s expressions of interest in improving relations with Russia – among his few lucid and constructive statements about anything – are routinely spun and smeared as corroborations of the meme that he’s in cahoots with the Russian government.

Many organizations that call themselves progressive are culpable. One of the largest, MoveOn, blasted out an email alert on February 10 with a one-sentence petition calling for a congressional investigation of Trump – flatly declaring that he has “ties to the Russian government.”

Trump’s Views on Russia

Consider these words from President Trump at his February 16 news conference:

– “Look, it would be much easier for me to be tough on Russia, but then we’re not going to make a deal. Now, I don’t know that we’re going to make a deal. I don’t know. We might. We might not. But it would be much easier for me to be so tough – the tougher I am on Russia, the better. But you know what? I want to do the right thing for the American people. And to be honest, secondarily, I want to do the right thing for the world.”

– “They’re a very powerful nuclear country and so are we. If we have a good relationship with Russia, believe me, that’s a good thing, not a bad thing.”

– “By the way, it would be great if we could get along with Russia, just so you understand that. Now tomorrow, you’ll say ‘Donald Trump wants to get along with Russia, this is terrible.’ It’s not terrible. It’s good.”

Rather than being applauded and supported, such talk from Trump is routinely

depicted as further indication that – in Krugman’s words – Trump “is in effect a Putin puppet.”

And how could President Trump effectively allay fears and accusations that he’s a Kremlin flunky? How could he win cheers from mainstream newsrooms and big-megaphone pundits and CIA headquarters? He could get in a groove of decisively denouncing Russian President Vladimir Putin. He could move U.S. military forces into more confrontational stances and menacing maneuvers toward Russia.

Such brinkmanship would occur while each country has upward of 4,000 nuclear warheads deployed or stockpiled for potential use. Some are attached to missiles on “hair-trigger alert” – which, the Union of Concerned Scientists [explains](#), “is a U.S. military policy that enables the rapid launch of nuclear weapons. Missiles on hair-trigger alert are maintained in a ready-for-launch status, staffed by around-the-clock launch crews, and can be airborne in as few as 10 minutes.”

Those who keep goading and baiting President Trump as a puppet of Russia’s government are making nuclear war more likely. If tensions with the Kremlin keep escalating, what is the foreseeable endgame? Do we really want to push the U.S. government into potentially catastrophic brinkmanship with the world’s other nuclear superpower?

Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group [RootsAction.org](#) and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our notable stories in January, focusing on the U.S. presidential transfer of power, the issue of alleged Russian interference in the election and the furor over “fake news.”

[“The War Against Alternative Information”](#) by Rick Sterling, Jan. 1, 2017

[“Crosses Marking Chicago Death Toll”](#) by Kathy Kelly, Jan. 2, 2017

[“Israel’s Above-the-Law Behavior”](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Jan. 2, 2017

[“WPost’s New ‘Fake News’ on Russian ‘Hack’”](#) by Annie Machon, Jan. 2 2017

"Requiem for a UN 'Yes Man'" by Joe Lauria, Jan. 3, 2017

"Obama's Deadly Afghan Acquiescence" by Ray McGovern, Jan. 3, 2017

"Anti-Trump Coalition Shows Cracks" by Nat Parry, Jan. 4, 2017

"Donald Trump's Debt to Willie Horton" by JP Sottile, Jan. 5, 2017

"The Dubious Case on Russian 'Hacking'" by William Binney & Ray McGovern, Jan. 6 2017

"US Report Still Lacks Proof on Russia 'Hack'" by Robert Parry, Jan. 7, 2017

"Europe's Mixed Feelings About Trump" by Andrew Spannaus, Jan. 9, 2017

"The 'Post-Truth' Mainstream Media" by Nicolas JS Davies, Jan. 9, 2017

"The Democrats' Russia-Did-It Dodge" by Norman Solomon, Jan. 10, 2017

"Wall Street's Win-Win with Trump" by Mike Lofgren, Jan. 10, 2017

"Obama Belatedly Says No to Israel" by Marjorie Cohn, Jan. 10, 2017

"What DeVos Might Do to Public Schools" by Dennis J Bernstein, Jan. 11, 2017

"Obama's Unkept Promise on Nuclear War" by Jonathan Marshall, Jan. 11, 2017

"How Obama Spread the Mideast Fires" by Daniel Lazare, Jan. 11, 2017

"Did Trump Kill 'Liberal Democracy'?" by Mike Lofgren, Jan. 12, 2017

"Pulling a J. Edgar Hoover on Trump" by Robert Parry, Jan. 12, 2017

"Who's the Real Manipulator of Elections?" by Jonathan Marshall, Jan. 13, 2017

"Mainstream Media's Russian Bogeymen" by Gareth Porter, Jan. 13, 2017

"The Scheme to Take Down Trump" by Daniel Lazare, Jan. 14, 2017

"America's Self-Destructive Obsessions" by Michael Brenner, Jan. 15, 2017

"Democrats Lost in a Corporate Wilderness" by Lawrence Davidson, Jan. 16, 2017

"Donald Trump v. the Spooks" by Annie Machon, Jan. 16, 2017

"A Demand for Russian 'Hacking' Proof" by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Jan. 17, 2017

"Obama's Bombing Legacy" by Nicolas JS Davies, Jan. 18, 2017

["The Ugly Specter of Torture and Lies"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jan. 18, 2017

["How the NYT Plays with History"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 19, 2017

["Selectivity in Trashing Trump"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 21, 2017

["America's Putin Derangement Syndrome"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Jan. 23, 2017

["The Zionist Record on Refugees"](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Jan. 23, 2017

["Russia's Leery Reaction to President Trump"](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Jan. 24, 2017

["Obama Bequeaths a More Dangerous World"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 24, 2017

["Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 25, 2017

["The Injustices of Manning's Ordeal"](#) by Marjorie Cohn, Jan. 25, 2017

["Getting Better Results Than Law-and-Order"](#) by Don Ediger, Jan. 25, 2017

["Death of the Syrian 'Moderate' Fantasy"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Jan. 26, 2017

["Donald Trump and His 'Magic Mirror'"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 27, 2017

["Deep State vs. Donald Trump"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Jan. 28, 2017

["Calling a Lie a Lie in the Age of Trump"](#) by Daniel C Maguire, Jan. 29, 2016

["Trump Lets Saudis Off His 'Muslim Ban'"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 29, 2017

["Rachel Maddow Plays Glenn Beck"](#) by Norman Solomon, Jan. 30, 2017

["Rising Resistance to Trump on Immigration"](#) by Dennis J Bernstein, Jan. 31, 2017

To produce and publish these stories – and many more – costs money. And except for some book sales, we depend on the generous support of our readers.

So, please consider a tax-deductible donation either by [credit card online](#) or by [mailing a check](#). (For readers wanting to use PayPal, you can address contributions to our PayPal Giving Fund account, which is named "The Consortium for Independent Journalism").

Assessing Diversity on Russian TV

The U.S. view of Russian media is that it is all propaganda all the time to keep the Russian people in line, but it actually encourages diverse and even hostile

opinions, says Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Anyone looking into Russian television programming on both state-owned and privately owned federal channels cannot ignore the heavy presence of political talk shows. They enjoy time on air comparable with formal news broadcasting. Indeed some are wrapped around news bulletins, and all make use of audio-visuals taken from the newsroom to drive the panelists' debates.

The genre of political talk shows is as much a fixture of Russian television around the clock as the daily serials dealing with romance, detective stories and adventure. They tell you that the Russian public, young and old, female and male, is very politicized and keen to hear political views that are divergent from what state news program hosts are reading off their teleprompters. If I had to find a comparable interest in politics in Western Europe, I would name France. I suspect that the U.S. public trails far behind.

But does Russian television present the views of the political opposition to viewers? Does the Kremlin tightly control Russian television for political content? Is Russian mass media monolithic or pluralistic? Are the talk shows journalism or state propaganda?

This review is based on my own participation in nearly all the political talk shows on the Russian national channels from May 2016 through this month. I stress the importance of personal participation because of what I learned about the culture of these shows, about the presenters and producers from chats in the holding pens before and in the refreshments rooms after the shows, as well as from talking to other panelists during the breaks. This is something you cannot get from watching the shows either in live broadcasts or on the Internet postings afterwards (nearly all shows appear on the channels' websites or on youtube.com). Moreover, only by being present on set can you appreciate how the debates are cut in the editing room before they are broadcast in the case of those shows not going out "live" or before posting on the Internet.

The political talk shows in which I participated are as follows and – except as noted – all have their broadcast headquarters in Moscow:

Rossiya-1 (state-owned): 60 Minutes; Sunday Evening with Vladimir Soloviev

Pervy Kanal (state-owned): Time Will Tell

NTV (privately owned): Meeting Place

Zvezda (federal channel of the Russian Armed Forces): Special Article

Pyaty Kanal (state-owned, St Petersburg based channel 5): Open Studio

Pecking Order

In terms of intellectual level of discourse, the Vladimir Soloviev programs are Russia's finest. They operate in several formats besides the one mentioned above. One of the most interesting is what is called "Duels" between exponents of two adversarial positions with breaks for coaching by their respective teams and call-in voting to tabulate who has been more persuasive.

While numbers of viewers or ratings are not available and may in fact not be greater than for other programs on the same channel or than talk shows on Pervy Kanal, the numbers of viewers tracked by Youtube.com for the *Sunday Evening with Vladimir Soloviev* shows often come to 250,000 within 12 hours of posting. Given the demands of such shows on audience knowledge and interest, that is a very impressive showing.

It bears mention that the quality of Soloviev's program is directly related to the level of the guests he attracts. They are chairpersons of the Duma or Federation Council committees, presidents of the Duma parties, and the very best academic minds. The quality also may be attributed to the freedom the moderator enjoys both for his professional standing and as a Kremlin loyalist. He appears to be very much his own man and interacts freely with his panelists. All of this raises the entertainment value as well as the journalistic content.

I would set this in direct contrast to another leading daily talk show program on the same Rossiya-1, *60 Minutes*, where the presenters Yevgeny Popov and his wife Olga Skabeyeva appear to be working strictly from the texts on their teleprompters and instructions given by their managers-producers coming through their ear plugs. The result is loss of spontaneity and authenticity.

In terms of national attention, I would place the *Time Will Tell* show of Pervy Kanal on a level at or above *60 Minutes*. Being an afternoon program with audience of pensioners, it does not draw in first-quality analysts or politicians, although rank-and-file Duma members are frequent visitors. Its outstanding feature is the relative freedom of action of the moderators. Its drawback is the excessively tight control of panelists' access to microphones, which leads to a great deal of clamor and noise. But the control may be justified by its being the first program to broadcast live to the Moscow time zone, which carries greater political risk than Rossiya-1 shows that broadcast live to the Russian Far East and then are progressively rebroadcast by time zone East to West from recordings to reach Moscow eight hours later.

The commercial station NTV opted for a political talk show modeled on Pervy

Kanal's *Time Will Tell*, taking over some staff, virtually duplicating the studio and also occupying live broadcast time in mid-afternoon. Its ratings are said to trail substantially the competition, although the lead presenter came to the job with a lot of relevant experience.

The federal channel Five talk show *Open Studio* operates a split panel sitting in two cities, two in Moscow and four in St. Petersburg, but its home audience is surely in the northern capital. The moderator conducts what might be called sequential interviews with each of the participants, and there is very little cross-talk. One peculiarity of this show is audience call-in of questions.

The Ministry of Defense channel Zvezda has the only talk show that is not broadcast live. From my experience, there was as much shouting on stage as in the noisiest major channel shows, but it was nearly all deleted in the cutting room to yield a smooth flow of debate to the audience. Panelists are taken from a different pool than the major stations, which may be characterized as an advantage, as I will discuss below.

A Constantly Evolving Genre

Russian television programming follows the ratings, because all channels rely on paid commercials, which may take up 12 minutes or more of an hour on air. The hottest competition is between the leading state channels Pervy Kanal and Rossiya-1. They fought tooth and nail to attract audiences to their New Year's 2017 programming. They fight daily in the talk program genre and ratings swing back and forth depending on the hour of day, topicality of the day's subject, prestige or charisma of the invited panelists.

When I appeared on Pervy Kanal's show *Time Will Tell* dedicated to the U.S. presidential election of Nov. 8, the hosts proudly told me their ratings that day spiked to 20 percent, well above their norm of 15 percent. This means that at the given hours of broadcast in the middle of the afternoon Moscow time 20 percent of all Russian television sets were tuned to the show. By contrast, the leading competitors had ratings of 10 percent or less at that given time.

Because of the fight for ratings and fierce competition, the genre of political talk shows is constantly evolving. The technical sophistication of the studios, the decision to broadcast live (and to which time zones) or to distribute pre-recorded and edited videos, hosting by one, usually male, presenter versus male-female pairs, the level of control of the proceedings before cameras from unseen producers upstairs, the use of evening prime time versus afternoon hours when pensioners and housewives predominate: all of these variables are constantly in play as given shows are enhanced or replaced with each season.

Shouting Matches

It has to be said that Russian political talk shows are meant to be entertaining as well as informative. They are more of a free-for-all than debate governed by Oxford Union type decorum. This reflects the streak in Russian culture that goes in for mixed discipline martial arts contests or single combat “without rules.” It is also calibrated to the time of day and target audience of the given show, as Artyom Sheinin, the moderator of *Time Will Tell* explained to me when I first appeared there: the show’s afternoon time slot attracts a disproportionately high number of retirees who want an “adrenaline shot” at mid-day. The evening programs on the same Pervy Kanal are less excited, so as not to disturb the digestion of those who just returned home from work and are seated in their armchairs in a reflective mood.

Still, even in the evening slots, most talk shows on both state and private channels put a lot of Russian intellectuals off by their noise. The noise predominates at the middle quality range of the genre. At the ends of the middle spectrum in terms of specifics of the audience (Zvezda with its military families or the more staid and traditional St. Petersburg channel 5, where all panelists have a cultivated demeanor and dress in suits and ties), either the clatter is cut in the editing room, as in the former case, or it does not happen at all because of the prevailing culture, the latter case.

Then there is another and very important exception to the practice of shouting matches, namely the top quality shows, in particular those moderated by Vladimir Soloviev. The very important politicians and political commentators whom he attracts expect and receive their due courtesy and are almost never interrupted.

Subject Matter

The talk shows or show segments in which I and other foreigners participate as panelists debate exclusively issues of international relations, as is entirely logical. If we have any value for the Russian viewers, it is as experts bringing in fresh perspectives and challenging what they otherwise hear from the Russian establishment. On domestic issues, our remarks would not be informed, nor would they be welcomed.

The subject matter on the talk shows closely tracks the topics on Russian news. Over the period of my experience from May 2016 to present, the news has been heavily skewed to Russian relations with Ukraine, military conflict in the Donbas, implementation of the Minsk accords, NATO military exercises near the Russian borders, the NATO battalions arriving in the Baltic States, the Syrian civil war and in particular the liberation of Palmyra and Aleppo, the U.S. presidential campaign, the election results of Nov. 8 and what the new

administration of Donald Trump might bring.

On the premier programs of Vladimir Soloviev, international affairs constitute close to 100 percent of the subject matter. However, on other political talk shows, domestic topics in the news may make up between 30 and 50 percent of the programming. Subjects have included the draft law on violence in households, the "Yarovaya" law on electronic surveillance and record keeping, rising monthly fees of apartment owners for building services and repairs, how to deal with the many fatalities caused by joyriding of Russia's golden youth.

Abstract debates on economic issues or social issues are not in the nature of the talk shows, which are so news-driven that the panelists may be interchanged, even the studio hours may be moved back in order to give the production team time to prepare visuals for a show devoted to some "breaking news."

Panelist Diversity

The outstanding fact, which is surely the greatest weakness of the genre, is that the pool of panelists from which the major channels draw overlaps excessively. On any given day, you can tune in to several of these talk shows on different channels and find the very same panelists holding forth.

I do not have a firm explanation for this phenomenon. A casual observer might guess that some of the panelists are making their livelihood by multiple appearances, but there is no way of knowing who is being paid to appear. From my chats at the sidelines, I understand that most panelists are being paid nothing other than their taxi fares if they are locals as most are, or flights and hotel if they are out-of-towners. Foreigners are a special case: it is widely assumed that "enemies" are paid for their trouble, meaning in particular panelists coming from Poland and Ukraine.

Factors that I identify to explain the different channels' drawing on the same pool are availability, known success with the competition and skill of repartee. Appearing on one show draws the attention of the young "producers," meaning administrators, working at other channels. The job prospects of these handlers rise when they bring in and coach fresh talent. In the case of foreigners, it is fluency in Russian, which must be of rather high standard given the pressures of fast and interrupted debate.

As I have indicated in passing above, some of the best local panelists are Russian legislators from the lower or upper houses of the Federal Assembly. Others are journalists, think tank political scientists, area specialists, military experts. Most have well-established professional careers. A very few are young docents seeking public exposure to gain promotions.

By nationality, the foreigners on talk shows panels come from countries which are in the news and which have tense relations with Russia: Ukrainians, Poles, Baltic States, the U.K. and the U.S. Most, but not all deliver, as expected, harsh critiques of Russian foreign policy. In this respect, Russian television for the domestic audience has a totally different set of requirements and objectives than the channel dedicated to foreign audiences, *Russia Today*, where foreign guests are often “friends of Russia.”

Among the most experienced foreigners with near native fluency regularly appearing on the Pervy Kanal and Rossiya-1 is the British journalist and lecturer, Owen Matthews, from *Newsweek*. I joined him at a session of *60 Minutes*. Another journalist of major standing with whom I appeared on *Time Will Tell* is David Filipov, Moscow bureau chief of *The Washington Post*. It bears mention that, to my knowledge, neither they nor the other Western critics of President Putin who are invited onto Russian talk shows have written anything about their experiences while their readerships are led to believe by the publications they work for that Russian media are just monolithic propaganda outlets for the Kremlin.

Other U.S.-based guests from the think tank world who appear regularly on the premier talk shows of Rossiya-1 are Ariel Cohen from the Atlantic Council and Dimitri Simes, President of the Center for the National Interest. Both are given 5 or 10 minutes to themselves by satellite link from Washington, D.C. Their statements, usually about political developments in the U.S. from the perspective of “inside-the-Beltway,” then are commented upon by the talk show’s in-studio panelists. Cohen is also occasionally in the Moscow studio as a panelist. Both speak native Russian.

Finally, there is the unique phenomenon of all Russian talk shows during the time period under review: the journalist Michael Bohm, who spent a decade as editor of the op-ed page of *The Moscow Times* and now provides spice to Russian television by energetically defending the views of the neocons and liberal interventionists in their anti-Russian policies. He is the American whom many Russians love to hate. Nonetheless, his mastery of Russian folk sayings has endeared him even to his harshest detractors.

By party affiliation, the Russian politicians appearing on the political talk shows belong predominantly, but not exclusively to the parties in the Duma. Among the most frequent guests on the Soloviev shows are leading members of the ruling United Russia party Vyacheslav Nikonov, chairman of the Duma Committee on Education; Aleksey Pushkov, former chair of the Duma Committee on International Affairs; and his predecessor in this post, Konstantin Kosachev, now chair of the same committee on the Federation Council.

Though less often, the other Duma parties are definitely visible on these shows. Vladimir Soloviev gives frequent invitations to the president of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia Vladimir Zhirinovskiy whose nationalist views he obviously shares. LDPR's Duma Deputy Leonid Slutsky, the new chair of the Committee on International Relations, was on the talk shows soon after his appointment. Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, is invited far less often to the major talk shows and the invitation is usually in connection with commemoration of some event or personality from the Soviet era.

The political talk shows also regularly invite as panelists members of certain parties that were unable to reach the 5 percent voter threshold to win seats in the State Duma. By rule of thumb at *Time Will Tell*, for example, they constitute 10 percent of the panelists. The parties most commonly invited are Yabloko and Party of Growth.

How Diverse?

So, does Russian television present the views of the Opposition? It all comes down to definitions. What do we mean by the "Opposition"?

For many American experts on Russia, the definition of "opposition" pre-determines the answer to the questions of pluralism, genuine journalism and the like on Russian television. This is because the notion of Russian opposition that has taken hold in the United States is attached to "regime change," not to normal electoral politics. Only those committed to bringing down the "Putin regime" are deemed worthy of the designation "opposition."

In this view, all Duma parties other than the ruling United Russia party – namely the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Just Russia, and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia – do not count as opposition.

To be sure, nearly all Duma parties rally behind the foreign policy of Vladimir Putin, though several are still more strident nationalists than the ruling United Russia party. However, in matters of domestic policy, the Duma parties have their own policies and strongly criticize the ruling party seeking to modify its legislative initiatives and to introduce bills of their own. To deny them the status of Opposition is like considering the Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. an undifferentiated mass because they largely share a bipartisan foreign policy (at least until the advent of Donald Trump). This point is all the more relevant when we consider that a variable but always substantial portion of most talk show programming is devoted to domestic as opposed to foreign policy issues.

Until his death in 2015, Boris Nemtsov and his Parnas movement were THE OPPOSITION in the eyes of American experts. Nemtsov, Milov and Kasyanov were striking out against the corruption with which the Putin regime was said to rely to stay in power, against its authoritarian if not dictatorial ways, and stood in favor of accommodation with the West, which they claimed was obtainable if only Russia cast aside the aggressive, assertive habits of the Putin regime.

Since Nemtsov's death, the new White Knight in Russian politics for American observers has been the blogger Alexei Navalny, who showed his political muscle in the last mayoral elections in Moscow. Never mind that Navalny has little electoral support outside the capital or that his political views are ultra-nationalist. He is determined to bring down the regime and that is enough.

From my observations of the period under review, neither representatives of Parnas nor Navalny and similarly minded, self-styled "non-systemic opposition" were ever admitted to any of the television talk shows whatever the channel precisely because of their seditious intent.

But before our American experts exclaim "gotcha" I would ask them whether they can cite an appearance of leaders from Occupy Wall Street on *Meet the Press*, say in 2009, or at any time since? The American equivalent of "non-systemic opposition" is precisely that kind of folks. No government, including no democratic government, will give such opponents the microphone to foment insurrection on national television, least of all during prime time.

For these reasons, I insist that the question of pluralism and the journalistic mission of informing the audience and bringing to them alternative points of view have to be posed more broadly without reference to specific individuals or parties/movements being given the microphone on air.

Besides the well-known positions of the Yabloko Party leaders who appear in the talk shows among the 10 percent reserved for defenders of the Yeltsin-era accommodation with the West, mention has to be made of Sergei Stankevich, who since 2016 represents the Party of Growth, another non-Duma party. An early ally of Yeltsin who later fell out of favor, spent several years as a political exile in Poland and was later pardoned, Stankevich regularly questions on air the whole logic of Russia's actions in Crimea and in Ukraine's Donbas region.

And, if we take a broad view and look to the airing of ideas challenging the official party line of the Kremlin on international affairs, the foreign guests who are always invited onto the panels are a proxy for the views of the anti-Kremlin domestic opposition, including the non-systemic opposition.

At a minimum, the talk shows in which I have participated were staged to present

a discussion of topical issues of international relations by skilled and well-informed experts representing diverse points of view. In that sense, they demonstrate pluralism as opposed to Kremlin propaganda. They are guided by a journalistic interest to address current events and to expose the public to various interpretations.

Gilbert Doctorow is a Brussels-based political analyst. His latest book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015. © Gilbert Doctorow, 2017

Risks in Rush to Crush ISIS

President Trump's vow to crush the Islamic State quickly may lead to hasty actions that could compound the problem rather than solve it, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A couple of tendencies that are all too common in policymaking and policy debate tend to make for unwise foreign commitments or overextended foreign expeditions. One is to treat a goal that is at most an intermediate objective as if it were an end in itself. Doing so obfuscates clear analysis of means and ends, overlooks other ways to achieve the same ends, and distorts perception of the costs and benefits associated with achieving the immediate objective.

The other tendency is to give insufficient attention to what comes after achieving the immediate objective. One only has to recall the example of insufficient attention given to what would come after the objective of overthrowing Saddam Hussein to appreciate the problems involved.

One could add a third phenomenon, which is less common but sometimes arises, which is to try to fulfill a campaign promise for the sake of fulfilling a campaign promise.

All three factors appear to be present now with the issue of next steps for the U.S. military in Syria in going after ISIS. The head of U.S. Central Command is saying, "It could be that we take on a larger burden ourselves." His comment comes amid the Department of Defense coming up with a plan requested by President Trump, who promised during the campaign to hasten the defeat of ISIS.

Of course ISIS is a horrible group, and everyone not in it agrees that the world

will be better off without it. But before U.S. forces take up any larger share of the burden of fighting it, three realities ought to be carefully considered.

One is that the ISIS mini-state in Syria and Iraq already is well on the way to being extinguished, at the hands of the forces already engaging it. This should not be surprising, given the group's lack of external support and the way its brutal methods lose it any support among the populations with which it has come into contact. The issue involved in considering any escalation with U.S. forces is not whether the mini-state will be killed off, but only how quickly it will be.

Second, if our main concern is with how ISIS could endanger American lives through acts of terrorism, we should realize that the connection between that danger and the fate of the mini-state in Syria and Iraq has always been tenuous at best, and less than is commonly supposed. There has been more of a tension than a direct connection between ISIS fomenting terrorism in the West on one hand, and on the other hand the group using its available resources to defend and shore up the mini-state. To the extent the overseas terrorist threat has materialized, it has been far more a matter of inspiration and ideology than of organizational dependence on a piece of real estate in the Middle East.

Third, the ISIS problem will not go away when the mini-state is extinguished. The problem will continue in the form of the ideology and the inspiration, and probably also in the form of insurgency in the lands in which the mini-state has existed.

This last point leads to the further observation that as far as not only anti-Western terrorism but also instability in the Middle East are concerned, what matters most is not how hastily the ISIS mini-state is crushed but rather what arrangements are left on the ground after the crushing.

Fertile Climate

The more that chaos, disputes, and uncertainty prevail there, the more that ground will remain fertile for violent extremism, whether under the ISIS label or some other brand. The rest of the political, diplomatic, and military story of conflict in Syria still has a good way to go before providing a more promising and stable alternative for what comes after ISIS. It would not be advantageous for the anti-ISIS military campaign to get ahead of that story. Speed in this case is not necessarily good.

All of this is in addition to one of the biggest downsides of U.S. forces assuming more of a military role: playing into the ideology and propaganda of ISIS and similar extremists, who appeal for support with a message about how the

United States uses its armed might to intervene in Muslim lands and to kill Muslims.

This set of issues will be an early test for new national security adviser H. R. McMaster. He is a highly regarded military officer whose professional focus, from study of war in Vietnam to the practice of war in Iraq, has been on what use of force and how much force are needed to achieve an objective of military victory. His natural inclination, as much as of others, may be to take the swift extinguishing of the ISIS mini-state as such an objective and to treat it more as an end than a means. A more thorough and careful performance as national security adviser would instead broaden the policy question and take into account the considerations mentioned above.

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.)

Trump's Trouble with the Truth

Although occasionally blurting out inconvenient truths, President Trump has established an early record of remarkable falsehoods, raising doubts about his grasp of reality, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

During the presidential campaign, I often referred to Donald Trump as a congenital liar, but it is possible that in doing so I made a "category mistake." By definition liars, even chronic ones, belong to a category of people who know that there is truth from which their lies deviate. I am not sure that accurately describes President Trump's state of mind. Perhaps a more accurate way of describing Trump's outlook is that it presents as a "grandiose delusional disorder."

People with this sort of disorder seem not to be able to discern what is real from what they want to be real. Their beliefs do not have to be bizarre but can appear as persistent misrepresentations that are either false or gross exaggerations. One sort of delusional disorder is called "grandiose." Here the person has "an over-inflated sense of worth, power, knowledge, or identity." Trump seems to fit this description.

Here are a few of Trump's misrepresentations and exaggerations that appear to underpin his alternate reality.

– According to the President, the nation was in deep trouble when he took over. He insists that he inherited "a mess." No one challenged this description, although it is plainly an exaggeration. In truth the economy (including job production and employment rates) under his predecessor was doing well and no new foreign wars had been launched by Washington. Civil rights were being extended to more and more minority groups. Where there was dissension it was over such things as police violence (which Trump seems not to see as a problem).

To tackle this exaggerated "mess" Trump claims to have put together a "well-oiled machine." This is a misrepresentation. By all evidence his early administration is disorganized, amateurish and plagued by internal dissension. When the situation was reported in the press, Trump got very angry at this challenge to his preferred view of reality and declared that the media is the "enemy of the American people."

– President Trump claims that a key to the safety of the nation is the imposition of his immigration ban blocking immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim nations. But the statistical evidence showing a lack of violence on American soil by such immigrants makes Trump's claim insupportable. Just so his grossly exaggerated assertion that immigrants generally hurt the economy by taking jobs away from citizens.

– He (along with that other deluded leader Benjamin Netanyahu) describes Iran as the greatest terror state in the world, even though, in practice, Iran has been a discreet ally of the U.S. in the "war on terror."

– And, of course, Trump continues to insist on his overwhelming popularity, as exemplified by claims for his Electoral College numbers and an alleged record inauguration attendance, despite the fact that each claim can easily be shown to be a misrepresentation of reality. Trump's real approval rate now hovers around 40 percent, lower than every other post-World War II president at this point in their term.

To these instances of misrepresentation and exaggeration can be added other evidence, such as the fact that just about all contrary views appearing in the media are now described by Trump as "fake news." In his own opinion, nothing he says or does is ever wrong or mistaken. If something does go wrong it is because some other person or group has maliciously sabotaged his efforts, while twisting the truth he knows to exist into a maligning falsehood. This is why he can't work with anyone who has previously criticized him or who is likely to do so to his face.

Humbug or Worse

There is another way to understand what Trump is doing. This is explained in a 2005 book by Harry Frankfurt entitled *On Bullshit*. Actually, an older and less crude way of describing this is “humbug.” Whatever you call it, this way of relating to the world is, according to Frankfurt, worse than lying because it is “indifferent to the truth.”

Those who consistently engage in bullshit “quietly change the rules governing their end of the conversation so that claims about truth and falsity are irrelevant.” You do this enough and you lose your capacity to tell what is true and what isn’t. Frankfurt believes that Trump does often lie, but even more often he just bullshits, and he really cares little about what is actually true. Perhaps he has reached the stage where truth is just whatever comes out of his mouth.

How are we to understand the millions of Americans who respond to Donald Trump with uncritical enthusiasm – as if these large numbers are following a pied piper into a promised world. I think we have to see them as an archaic subset of any population. In the U.S. case, this is a largely white American subgroup that has been obsessively angry since the 1960s over both economic and cultural changes.

In other words, the progressive political and social reality that most Americans have created beginning with the Civil Rights movement is anathema to them. For these discontented people, the changes happening around them appeared unstoppable until now. However, Trump’s language, his attack on the political system per se, his choice of targets such as immigrants, have given voice and direction to the frustrations of this subgroup. Trump’s alternate reality is one that they are comfortable with. This situation is not unique to the U.S., nor is it unique to our historical period.

Even though there is no eliminating such a class of malcontents entirely, it is to be emphasized that, despite the publicity given emotional Trump rallies and the Tea Party movement, Trump devotees are a minority of the national population. If that is the case, how is it that Donald Trump occupies the White House? We can answer this question by accounting for the outlook of the rest of the adult U.S. population.

American Disaffection

First, it is important to understand that a large percentage of American adults (perhaps 40 percent) don’t vote. In my opinion, most of them are just not interested in politics. It is not an important part of their local reality.

Thus, they do not show an interest in, much less an understanding of, politically important issues beyond their own immediate locale. This accounts for the chronic low turnout for American elections both national and regional. The default position of this very large number of citizens is one of political passivity.

Second, during the past campaign season, a large number of traditionally Democratic Party voters became disaffected. The party was essentially split by the Bernie Sanders challenge. When that proved of no avail against an entrenched leadership mindset more beholden to special interests than to the needs of the ordinary citizen, the party lost millions of votes. Some of these defectors probably became closet Trump supporters. Others voted for third-party candidates or simply stayed home on Election Day.

You put all of this together with other voting variables such as gerrymandered voting districts, the usual barriers to minority group voting, and the distinct lack of enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton as a candidate, and the mystery of Trump's victory gets less mysterious.

Actually, Donald Trump's delusional worldview, and the reinforcing support given to it by his enthusiastic followers, does not prevent him from occasionally coming out with accurate observations. Unfortunately, these occur almost spontaneously, in what appears to spur-of-the-moment situations.

For instance, in an interview with Bill O'Reilly aired just before the Super Bowl, Trump responded to the assertion that Vladimir Putin was "a killer" by saying, "we've [the U.S.] got a lot of killers. What, do you think our country is so innocent?" This complemented his on-again – off-again desire to reach an accommodation with Moscow. Then, during Benjamin Netanyahu's recent visit to Washington, Trump questioned the continuing viability of the two-state solution (of course, without contextualizing the statement by pointing a finger at Israeli policies).

Yet these relatively rare public displays of reality-based insight are of little reassurance to the rest of us just because they are intermittent and apparently not characteristic of any disciplined analytical way of thinking. So, we are still left with guy who, for most of his waking hours, lives in his own world of "humbug."

So what can we expect from this delusional, morally suspect personality who now occupies the White House? My guess is that as things get more contentious, Trump will retreat from the policy business of governing. He will turn that over (if he hasn't already) to his accomplices: chief strategist Stephen Bannon, chief of staff Reince Priebus and Vice President Mike Pence. Having done so he will

devote more and more time to his so-called reelection campaign where he can vent his spleen amongst the adoring crowds of supporters who serve, collectively, as a stimulus for the man's immense ego.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.

How 'New Cold Warriors' Cornered Trump

Exclusive: The U.S. intelligence community's extraordinary campaign of leaks claiming improper ties between President Trump's team and Russia seeks to ensure a lucrative New Cold War by blocking detente, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

Opponents of the Trump administration have generally accepted as fact the common theme across mainstream media that aides to Donald Trump were involved in some kind of illicit communications with the Russian government that has compromised the independence of the administration from Russian influence.

But close analysis of the entire series of leaks reveals something else that is equally sinister in its implications: an unprecedented campaign by Obama administration intelligence officials, relying on innuendo rather than evidence, to exert pressure on Trump to abandon any idea of ending the New Cold War and to boost the campaign to impeach Trump.

A brazen and unprecedented intervention in domestic U.S. politics by the intelligence community established the basic premise of the cascade of leaks about alleged Trump aides' shady dealing with Russia. Led by CIA Director John Brennan, the CIA, FBI and NSA issued a [25-page assessment](#) on Jan. 6 asserting for the first time that Russia had sought to help Trump win the election.

Brennan had circulated a CIA memo concluding that Russia had favored Trump and had [told CIA staff](#) that he had met separately with Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and FBI Director James Comey and that they had agreed on the "scope, nature and intent of Russian interference in our presidential election."

In the end, however, Clapper refused to associate himself with the document and the NSA, which agreed to do so, was only willing to express “moderate confidence” in the judgment that the Kremlin had sought to help Trump in the election. In intelligence community parlance, that meant that the NSA considered the idea the Kremlin was working to elect Trump was merely plausible, not actually supported by reliable evidence.

In fact, the intelligence community had not even obtained evidence that Russia was behind the publication by Wikileaks of the e-mails Democratic National Committee, much less that it had done so with the intention of electing Trump. Clapper had testified before Congress in mid-November and again in December that the intelligence community did not know who had provided the e-mails to WikiLeaks and when they were provided.

The claim – by Brennan with the support of Comey – that Russia had “aspired” to help Trump’s election prospects was not a normal intelligence community assessment but an extraordinary exercise of power by Brennan, Comey and NSA Director Mike Rogers.

Brennan and his allies were not merely providing a professional assessment of the election, as was revealed by their embrace of the the dubious dossier compiled by a private intelligence firm hired by one of Trump’s Republican opponents and later by the Clinton campaign for the specific purpose of finding evidence of illicit links between Trump and the Putin regime.

Salacious Gossip

When the three intelligence agencies gave the classified version of their report to senior administration officials in January they appended a two-page summary of the juiciest bits from that dossier – including claims that Russian intelligence had compromising information about Trump’s personal behavior while visiting Russia. The dossier was sent, along with the assessment that Russia was seeking to help Trump get elected, to senior administration officials as well as selected Congressional leaders.

Among the claims in the private intelligence dossier that was summarized for policymakers was the allegation of a deal between the Trump campaign and the Putin government involving full Trump knowledge of the Russian election help and a Trump pledge – months before the election – to sideline the Ukraine issue once in office. The allegation – devoid of any verifiable information – came entirely from an unidentified “Russian emigre” claiming to be a Trump insider, without any evidence provided of the source’s actual relationship to the Trump camp or of his credibility as a source.

After the story of the two-page summary leaked to the press, Clapper publicly expressed “profound dismay” about the leak and said the intelligence community “has not made any judgment that the information in this document is reliable,” nor did it rely on it any way for our conclusions.”

One would expect that acknowledgment to be followed by an admission that he should not have circulated it outside the intelligence community at all. But instead Clapper then justified having passed on the summary as providing policymakers with “the fullest possible picture of any matters that might affect national security.”

By that time, U.S. intelligence agencies had been in possession of the material in the dossier for several months. It was their job to verify the information before bringing it to the attention of policymakers.

A former U.S. intelligence official with decades of experience dealing with the CIA as well other intelligence agencies, who insisted on anonymity because he still has dealings with U.S. government agencies, told this writer that he had never heard of the intelligence agencies making public unverified information on a U.S. citizen.

“The CIA has never played such a open political role,” he said.

The CIA has often tilted its intelligence assessment related to a potential adversary in the direction desired by the White House or the Pentagon and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but this is the first time that such a slanted report impinges not only on domestic politics but is directed at the President himself.

The egregious triple abuse of the power in publishing a highly partisan opinion on Russia and Trump’s election, appending raw and unverified private allegations impugning Trump’s loyalty and then leaking that fact to the media begs the question of motive. Brennan, who initiated the whole effort, was clearly determined to warn Trump not to reverse the policy toward Russia to which the CIA and other national security organizations were firmly committed.

A few days after the leak of the two-page summary, Brennan publicly warned Trump about his policy toward Russia. In an interview on Fox News, he said, “I think Mr. Trump has to understand that absolving Russia of various actions that it’s taken in the past number of years is a road that he, I think, needs to be very, very careful about moving down.”

Graham Fuller, who was a CIA operations officer for 20 years and was also National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East for four years in the Reagan administration, observed in an e-mail, that Brennan, Clapper and Comey “might legitimately fear Trump as a loose cannon on the national scene,” but they are

also “dismayed at any prospect that the official narrative against Russia could start falling apart under Trump, and want to maintain the image of constant and dangerous Russian intervention into affairs of state.”

Flynn in the Bull’s Eye

As Trump’s National Security Adviser, Michael Flynn presented an easy target for a campaign to portray the Trump team as being in Putin’s pocket. He had already drawn heavy criticism not only by attending a Moscow event celebrating the Russian television RT in 2016 but sitting next to Putin and accepting a fee for speaking at the event. More importantly, however, Flynn had argued that the United States and Russia could and should cooperate in their common interest of defeating Islamic State militants.

That idea was anathema to the Pentagon and the CIA. Obama’s Defense Secretary Ashton Carter had attacked Secretary of State John Kerry’s negotiating a Syrian ceasefire that included a provision for coordination of efforts against Islamic State. The official investigation of the U.S. attack on Syrian forces on Sept. 17 turned up evidence that CENTCOM had deliberately targeted the Syrian military sites with the intention of sabotaging the ceasefire agreement.

The campaign to bring down Flynn began with a leak from a “senior U.S. government official” to Washington Post columnist David Ignatius about the now-famous phone conversation between Flynn and Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak on Dec. 29. In his column on the leak, Ignatius avoided making any explicit claim about the conversation. Instead, he asked “What did Flynn say, and did it undercut the U.S. sanctions?”

And referring to the Logan Act, the 1799 law forbidding a private citizen from communicating with a foreign government to influence a “dispute” with the United States, Ignatius asked, “Was its spirit violated?”

The implications of the coy revelation of the Flynn conversation with Kislyak were far-reaching. Any interception of a communication by the NSA or the FBI has always been considered one of the most highly classified secrets in the U.S. intelligence universe of secrets. And officers have long been under orders to protect the name of any American involved in any such intercepted communication at all costs.

But the senior official who leaked the story of Flynn-Kislyak conversation to Ignatius – obviously for a domestic political purpose – did not feel bound by any such rule. That leak was the first move in a concerted campaign of using such leaks to suggest that Flynn had discussed the Obama administration’s sanctions with Kislyak in an effort to undermine Obama administration policy.

The revelation brought a series of articles about denials by the Trump transition team, including Vice President-elect Mike Pence, that Flynn had, in fact, discussed sanctions with Kislyak and continued suspicions that Trump's aides were covering up the truth. But the day after Trump was inaugurated, the Post itself reported that the FBI had begun in late December go back over all communications between Flynn and Russian officials and "had not found evidence of wrongdoing or illicit ties to the Russian government..."

Two weeks later, however, the Post reversed its coverage of the issue, publishing a story citing "nine current and former officials, who were in senior positions at multiple agencies at the time of the calls," as saying that Flynn had "discussed sanctions" with Kislyak.

The story said Flynn's conversation with Kislyak was "interpreted by some senior U.S. officials as an inappropriate and potentially illegal signal to the Kremlin that it could expect a reprieve from sanctions that were being imposed by the Obama administration in late December to punish Russia for its alleged interference in the 2016 election."

The Post did not refer to its own previous reporting of the FBI's unambiguous view contradicting that claim, which suggested strongly that the FBI was trying to head off a plan by Brennan and Clapper to target Flynn. But it did include a crucial caveat on the phrase "discussed sanctions" that few readers would have noticed. It revealed that the phrase was actually an "interpretation" of the language that Flynn had used. In other words, what Flynn actually said was not necessarily a literal reference to sanctions at all.

Only a few days later, the Post reported a new development: Flynn had been interviewed by the FBI on Jan. 24 – four days after Trump's inauguration – and had denied that he discussed sanctions in the conversation. But prosecutors were not planning to charge Flynn with lying, according to several officials, in part because they believed he would be able to "parse the definition of the word 'sanctions'." That implied that the exchange was actually focused not on sanctions per se but on the expulsion of the Russian diplomats.

Just hours before his resignation on Feb. 13, Flynn claimed in an interview with the Daily Caller that he had indeed referred only to the expulsion of the Russian diplomats.

"It wasn't about sanctions. It was about the 35 guys who were thrown out," Flynn said. "It was basically, 'Look, I know this happened. We'll review everything.' I never said anything such as, 'We're going to review sanctions,' or anything like that."

The Russian Blackmail Ploy

Even as the story of the Flynn's alleged transgression in the conversation with the Russian Ambassador was becoming a political crisis for Donald Trump, yet another leaked story surfaced that appeared to reveal a shocking new level of the Trump administration's weakness toward Russia.

The Post reported on Feb. 13 that Acting Attorney General Sally Yates, an Obama holdover, had decided in late January – after discussions with Brennan, Clapper and FBI Director James Comey in the last days of the Obama administration – to inform the White House Counsel Donald McGahn in late January that Flynn had lied to other Trump administration officials – including Vice President Mike Pence – in denying that he discussed sanctions with Kislyak. The Post cited “current and former officials” as the sources.

That story, repeated and amplified by many other news media, led to Flynn's downfall later that same day. But like all of the other related leaks, the story revealed more about the aims of the leakers than about links between Trump's team and Russia.

The centerpiece of the new leak was that the former Obama administration officials named in the story had feared that “Flynn put himself in a compromising position” in regard to his account of the conversation with Kislyak to Trump members of the Trump transition.

Yates had told the White House that Flynn might be vulnerable to Russian blackmail because of the discrepancies between his conversation with the Ambassador and his story to Pence, according to the Post story.

But once again the impression created by the leak was very different from the reality behind it. The idea that Flynn had exposed himself to a potential Russian blackmail threat by failing to tell Pence exactly what had transpired in the conversation was fanciful in the extreme.

Even assuming that Flynn had flatly lied to Pence about what he had said in the meeting – which was evidently not the case – it would not have given the Russians something to hold over Flynn, first because it was already revealed publicly and second, because the Russian interest was to cooperate with the new administration.

The ex-Obama administration leakers were obviously citing that clumsy (and preposterous) argument as an excuse to intervene in the internal affairs of the new administration. The Post's sources also claimed that “Pence had a right to know that he had been misled...” True or not, it was, of course, none of their business.

Pity for Pence

The professed concern of the Intelligence Community and Justice Department officials that Pence deserved the full story from Flynn was obviously based on political considerations, not some legal principle. Pence was a known supporter of the New Cold War with Russia, so the tender concern for Pence not being treated nicely coincided with a strategy of dividing the new administration along the lines of policy toward Russia.

All indications are that Trump and other insiders knew from the beginning exactly what Flynn had actually said in the conversation, but that Flynn had given Pence a flat denial about discussing sanctions without further details.

On Feb. 13, when Trump was still trying to save Flynn, the National Security Adviser apologized to Pence for “inadvertently” having failed to give him a complete account, including his reference to the expulsion of the Russian diplomats. But that was not enough to save Flynn’s job.

The divide-and-conquer strategy, which led to Flynn’s ouster, was made effective because the leakers had already created a political atmosphere of great suspicion about Flynn and the Trump White House as having had illicit dealings with the Russians. The normally pugnacious Trump chose not to respond to the campaign of leaks with a detailed, concerted defense. Instead, he sacrificed Flynn before the end of the very day the Flynn “blackmail” story was published.

But Trump’s appears to have underestimated the ambitions of the leakers. The campaign against Flynn had been calculated in part to weaken the Trump administration and ensure that the new administration would not dare to reverse the hardline policy of constant pressure on Putin’s Russia.

Many in Washington’s political elite celebrated the fall of Flynn as a turning point in the struggle to maintain the existing policy orientation toward Russia. The day after Flynn was fired the Post’s national political correspondent, James Hohmann, wrote that the Flynn “imbroglio” would now make it “politically untenable for Trump to scale back sanctions to Moscow” because the “political blowback from hawkish Republicans in Congress would be too intense...”

But the ultimate target of the campaign was Trump himself. As neoconservative journalist Eli Lake put it, “Flynn is only the appetizer. Trump is the entree.”

Susan Hennessey, a well-connected former lawyer in the National Security Agency’s Office of General Counsel who writes the “Lawfare” blog at the Brookings Institution, agreed. “Trump may think Flynn is the sacrificial lamb,” she told The Guardian, “but the reality is that he is the first domino. To the extent the administration believes Flynn’s resignation will make the Russia

story go away, they are mistaken.”

The Phony “Constant Contacts” Story

No sooner had Flynn’s firing been announced than the next phase of the campaign of leaks over Trump and Russia began. On Feb. 14, CNN and the New York Times published slight variants of the same apparently scandalous story of numerous contacts between multiple members of the Trump camp with the Russian at the very time the Russians were allegedly acting to influence the election.

There was little subtlety in how mainstream media outlets made their point. CNN’s headline was, “Trump aides were in constant touch with senior Russian officials during campaign.” The Times headline was even more sensational: “Trump Campaign Aides Had Repeated Contacts with Russian Intelligence.”

But the attentive reader would soon discover that the stories did not reflect those headlines. In the very first paragraph of the CNN story, those “senior Russian officials” became “Russians known to U.S. intelligence,” meaning that it included a wide range of Russians who are not officials at all but known or suspected intelligence operatives in business and other sectors of society monitored by U.S. intelligence. A Trump associate dealing with such individuals would have no idea, of course, that they are working for Russian intelligence.

The Times story, on the other hand, referred to the Russians with whom Trump aides were said to be in contact last year as “senior Russian intelligence officials,” apparently glossing over a crucial distinction that sources had made to CNN between intelligence officials and Russians being monitored by U.S. intelligence.

But the Times story acknowledged that the Russian contacts also included government officials who were not intelligence officials and that the contacts had been made not only by Trump campaign officials but also associates of Trump who had done business in Russia. It further acknowledged it was “not unusual” for American business to come in contact with foreign intelligence officials, sometimes unwittingly in Russia and Ukraine, where “spy services are deeply embedded in society.”

Even more important, however, the Times story made it clear that the intelligence community was seeking evidence that Trump’s aides or associates were colluding with the Russians on the alleged Russian effort to influence the election, but that it had found no evidence of any such collusion. CNN failed to report that crucial element of the story.

The headlines and lead paragraphs of both stories, therefore, should have conveyed the real story: that the intelligence community had sought evidence of

collusion by Trump aides with Russia but had not found it several months after reviewing the intercepted conversations and other intelligence.

Unwitting Allies of the War Complex?

Former CIA Director Brennan and other former Obama administration intelligence officials have used their power to lead a large part of the public to believe that Trump had conducted suspicious contacts with Russian officials without having the slightest evidence to support the contention that such contacts represent a serious threat to the integrity of the U.S. political process.

Many people who oppose Trump for other valid reasons have seized on the shaky Russian accusations because they represent the best possibility for ousting Trump from power. But ignoring the motives and the dishonesty behind the campaign of leaks has far-reaching political implications. Not only does it help to establish a precedent for U.S. intelligence agencies to intervene in domestic politics, as happens in authoritarian regimes all over the world, it also strengthens the hand of the military and intelligence bureaucracies who are determined to maintain the New Cold War with Russia.

Those war bureaucracies view the conflict with Russia as key to the continuation of higher levels of military spending and the more aggressive NATO policy in Europe that has already generated a gusher of arms sales that benefits the Pentagon and its self-dealing officials.

Progressives in the anti-Trump movement are in danger of becoming an unwitting ally of those military and intelligence bureaucracies despite the fundamental conflict between their economic and political interests and the desires of people who care about peace, social justice and the environment.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*.
