

Blaming Russia for Everything

Exclusive: The Senate Intelligence Committee launched its Russia-gate investigation by inviting some “experts” in to rant about how everything that goes wrong in the United States is the fault of the Russians, observes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It’s almost getting comical how everything that happens in the United States gets blamed on Russia! Russia! Russia! And, if any American points out the absurdity of this argument, he or she must be a “Moscow stooge” or a “Putin puppet.”

When Sen. Marco Rubio’s presidential campaign fails seemingly because he was a wet-behind-the-ears candidate who performed like a robot during debates repeating the same talking points over and over, you might have cited those shortcomings to explain why “Little Marco” flamed out. However, if you did, that would make you a Russian “useful idiot”! The “real” reason for his failure, as we learned from Thursday’s Senate Intelligence Committee hearing, was Russia!

When Americans turned against President Obama’s Pacific trade deals, you might have thought that it was because people across the country had grown sick and tired of these neoliberal agreements that have left large swaths of the country deindustrialized and former blue-collar workers turning to opioids and alcohol. But if you did think that, that would mean you are a dupe of the clever Russkies, as ex-British spy Christopher Steele made clear in one of his “oppo” research reports against Donald Trump. As Steele’s dossier explained, the rejection of Obama’s TPP and TTIP trade deals resulted from Russian propaganda!

When Hillary Clinton boots a presidential election that was literally hers to lose, you might have thought that she lost because she insisted on channeling her State Department emails through a private server that endangered national security; that she gave paid speeches to Wall Street and tried to hide the contents from the voters; that she called half of Donald Trump’s supporters “deplorables”; that she was a widely disliked establishment candidate in an anti-establishment year; that she was shoved down the throats of progressive Democrats by a Democratic Party hierarchy that made her nomination “inevitable” via the undemocratic use of unelected “super-delegates”; that some of her State Department emails were found on the laptop of suspected sex offender Anthony Weiner (the husband of Clinton’s close aide Huma Abedin); and that the laptop discovery caused FBI Director James Comey to briefly reopen the investigation of Clinton’s private email server in the last days of the campaign.

You might even recall that Clinton herself blamed her late collapse in the polls on Comey's announcement, as did other liberal luminaries such as New York Times columnist Paul Krugman. But if you thought those thoughts or remembered those memories, that is just more proof that you are a "Russian mole"!

As we all should know in our properly restructured memory banks and our rearranged sense of reality, it was all Russia's fault! Russia did it by undermining our democratic process through the clever means of releasing truthful information via WikiLeaks that provided evidence of how the Democratic National Committee rigged the nomination process against Sen. Bernie Sanders, revealed the contents of Clinton's hidden Wall Street speeches, and exposed pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation in its dealings with foreign entities.

You see the evil Russians undermined American democracy by arming the American people with truthful information! How dastardly is that! Could Boris and Natasha do any better or worse? And although the Soviet spies in FX's "The Americans" were in their prime in the 1980s and would be pretty old by now, do we know where they are in the present day? Though WikiLeaks denies getting the two batches of emails – the DNC's and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta's – from the Russians, have we ruled out that the emails might have been slipped to WikiLeaks by the FX characters Philip and Elizabeth Jennings, presumably in disguise?

Oddly, too, when similar factual revelations come from Western-favored leaks, such as the purloined financial records of a Panamanian law firm known as the "Panama Papers," we hail the disclosures regardless of the dubious methods that were used to steal them, especially if the contents can be spun to undermine disfavored governments like Russia (while also inconveniently embarrassing a few unimportant "allies").

But if you make that comparison or you note how the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. government-funded National Endowment for Democracy have supported various "independent" journalists and news outlets to advance U.S. propaganda, that makes you guilty of "moral equivalence," another serious offense.

Crazy Talk

So now that you know how the game is played, you had the Senate Intelligence Committee eliciting testimony from people like media watcher Clint Watts, who seems to believe that any criticism of a U.S. government official (at least anyone he likes) must be directed by Russia!

“This past week we observed social media accounts discrediting U.S. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan,” said Watts, who is billed in The Washington Post as “an expert in terrorism forecasting and Russian influence operations.”

Gee, I know you might say that you went on Facebook last week to criticize Ryan for bungling the “repeal and replace” of Obamacare by proposing a scheme that managed to alienate both right-wing and moderate Republicans as well as all Democrats. But that only proves you are indeed a Russian disinformation agent! (Watts also claimed that Sen. Rubio’s presidential bid “anecdotally suffered” from an online Russian campaign against him.)

As Watts describes these nefarious Russian schemes, they are so nefarious that they don’t have any discernible earmarks or detectable predictability. In his view, the Russians don’t want to help any particular person or group, just undermine America’s faith in its democracy.

As Watts puts it, Russians attack “people on both sides of the aisle ... solely based on what they [the Russians] want to achieve in their own landscape, whatever the Russian foreign policy objectives are. They win because they play both sides.” In other words, any political comment that an American might make might just prove that you’re a traitor.

But Watts singled out President Trump for special criticism because he supposedly has tweeted about Russian-planted conspiracy theories. “Part of the reason active measures have worked in this U.S. election is because the commander-in-chief has used Russian active measure at times against his opponent,” Watts said, citing Trump’s bogus claims about 2016 voter fraud and his earlier silliness about President Obama’s Kenyan birthplace. Yes, as we all know, every goofy idea is manufactured in Russia. Americans are incapable of developing their own nonsense.

Watts then suggested that some kind of Ministry of Truth is needed to stamp out unapproved information. “Until we get a firm basis on fact and fiction in our own country, ... we’re going to have a big problem,” Watts said. He warned of a dangerous future from Russian information: “Somewhere in their cache right now there’s tremendous amounts of information laying around they can weaponize against other Americans.”

Perhaps what is even more frightening than the Russians letting Americans in on how Washington’s political process really works – by somehow slipping WikiLeaks some evidence of Democratic Party bigwigs tilting the Democratic primaries to ensure Clinton’s nomination and revealing what Clinton told those Wall Street bankers – is the idea that the U.S. government should be enlisted to enforce what Americans get to see and hear.

The PropOrNot Smear

Watts and his alarums showed up in another context in the weeks after the 2016 election when The Washington Post ran a front-page story highlighting the claims by an anonymous group, PropOrNot, which was pushing a blacklist of 200 Internet news sites, including such independent sources of information as Counterpunch, Truthdig, Naked Capitalism, Zero Hedge, Truth-out and Consortiumnews.

Though the Post granted PropOrNot anonymity so it could safely slander independent-minded journalists, the Post turned to Watts to bolster PropOrNot's case. "They [the Russians] want to essentially erode faith in the U.S. government or U.S. government interests," Watts said. "This was their standard mode during the Cold War. The problem is that this was hard to do before social media."

The Post then linked to an article that Watts had co-authored entitled, "Trolling for Trump: How Russia Is Trying to Destroy Our Democracy." which, in turn, cited as proof RT articles that mentioned Hillary Clinton's health problem last September (which was later acknowledged to be a bout with pneumonia) and that discussed the vulnerabilities of the Federal Reserve (in an age of escalating public and private debt). Both might seem to you like reasonable topics for journalists, but you must understand that RT – because it is Russian-sponsored – has become the favorite whipping boy of anyone trying to make the case that America is besieged by Russian propaganda. And don't you dare mention that almost no one in America actually watches RT or you might end up on PropOrNot's list, too.

Watts and his cohorts continue: "**Social issues** currently provide a useful window for Russian messaging. Police brutality, racial tensions, protests, anti-government standoffs, online privacy concerns, and alleged government misconduct are all emphasized to magnify their scale and leveraged to undermine the fabric of society."

And, we know for sure that you're a Russian agent if you express any concern that the heightened tensions between the U.S. and Russia might lead to nuclear war. As Watts and friends write, "More recently, Moscow turned to stoking fears of nuclear war between the United States and Russia" – and their "proof" was a link not to RT but to the financial Web site, Zero Hedge, which already had made it onto PropOrNot's black list.

So, let's see if we got this right: We are not to worry our pretty little heads about nuclear war or a future financial meltdown or police brutality toward racial minorities or race relations in general or armed right-wing clashes with authorities or spying on our Internet use or any government wrongdoing at all or

even citizen protests against that wrongdoing. Because if we debate such issues – if we even read about such issues – we are playing into Vladimir Putin’s evil plans.

What Democracy?

Which makes me wonder what kind of “democracy” these brave “defenders of democracy” have in mind. The New York Times, The Washington Post and some establishment-approved Internet sites already have begun work on establishing standards for what information the American people will be allowed to see and hear – with disapproved sources of news marginalized by Internet search engines or prevented from earning any money by exclusion from Google and other ad programs.

Presumably, the 200 or so Web sites on PropOrNot’s black list would be the first cut for the new Ministry of Truth since many of them have published articles that raised questions about the accuracy of claims made by the U.S. State Department or they have expressed the belief that there may be two sides to complex issues – when Americans are supposed to hear only the side that Official Washington wants them to hear.

Some of these “Russian propaganda” Web sites – prior to the Iraq War – even raised doubts about the U.S. government’s certainty that Saddam Hussein had stockpiles of WMDs. Thank goodness the Internet wasn’t as widely used back then or perhaps many Americans would have doubted the truth-telling by The New York Times and The Washington Post, which dutifully passed on the U.S. government’s pronouncements about Hussein’s secret WMDs.

Surely, in 2002-03, the Russians must have been behind the resistance by those few Web sites to the WMD group think that all the respectable people just knew to be true. How else can you explain the skepticism? And maybe Russia was responsible for the U.S. government’s failure to find any of those WMD stockpiles. Curse you, Russia!

With the Senate Intelligence Committee’s hearing on Thursday, this determination to squelch any dissenting American views as “Russian disinformation” moved up a notch, beyond some think-tank chatter, some newspaper articles or some initial planning for private-sector censorship.

The craziness has now become the focus of an official Senate investigation into Russian “meddling” in American political life. We have taken another step down the path of a New Cold War that blends a New McCarthyism with a New Orwellianism.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Orwellian War on](#)

Skepticism” and “How US Flooded the World with Psyops.”]

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).
