

Russia-gate Jumps the Shark

Exclusive: Russia-gate has jumped the shark with laughable new claims about a tiny number of “Russia-linked” social media ads, but the U.S. mainstream media is determined to keep a straight face, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A key distinction between propaganda and journalism is that manipulative propaganda relies on exaggeration and deceit while honest journalism provides context and perspective. But what happens when the major news outlets of the world’s superpower become simply conveyor belts for warmongering propaganda?

That is a question that the American people now face as The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and virtually the entire mainstream media hype ridiculously minor allegations about Russia’s “meddling” in American politics into front-page hysteria.

For instance, on Tuesday, the major news outlets were filled with the latest lurid chapter of Russia-gate, how Google, the Internet’s dominant search engine, had detected suspected “Russia-linked” accounts that bought several thousand dollars worth of ads.

The Washington Post ran this item as front-page news entitled “Google finds links to Russian disinformation in its services,” with the excited lede paragraph declaring: “Russian operatives bought ads across several of Google’s services without the company’s knowledge, the latest evidence that their campaign to influence U.S. voters was as sprawling as it was sophisticated in deploying the technology industry’s most powerful tools.”

Wow! That sounds serious. However, if you read deeply enough into the story, you discover that the facts are a wee bit less dramatic. The Post tells us:

“Google’s internal investigation found \$4,700 of search ads and display ads that the company believes are Russian-connected, and found \$53,000 of ads with political content that were purchased from Russian Internet providers, building addresses or with Russian currency, people familiar with the investigation said.

...

“One Russian-linked account spent \$7,000 on ads to promote a documentary called ‘You’ve Been Trumped,’ a film about Donald Trump’s efforts to build a golf course in Scotland along an environmentally sensitive coastline, these people said. Another spent \$30,000 on ads questioning whether President Obama needed to resign. Another bought ads to promote political merchandise for Obama.”

A journalist – rather than a propagandist – would immediately follow these figures with some context, i.e., that Google's net digital ad sales revenue is about \$70 billion annually. In other words, these tiny ad buys – with some alleged connection to Russia, a nation of 144 million people and not all Vladimir Putin's "operatives" – are infinitesimal when put into any rational perspective.

A Dangerous Hysteria

But rationality is not what the Post and other U.S. mainstream news outlets are engaged in here. They are acting as propagandists determined to whip up a dangerous hysteria about being at "war" with nuclear-armed Russia and to delegitimize Trump's election last year.

It doesn't seem to matter that the facts don't fit the desired narrative. First of all, none of this content, detected by Google, is "disinformation" as the Post claims, unless you consider a critical documentary about Trump's Scottish golf course to be "disinformation," or for that matter criticism and/or support for President Obama.

And, by the way, how does any of this material reveal a Russian plot to put Trump in the White House and to ensure Hillary Clinton's defeat, which was the original Russia-gate narrative? Now, we're being told that any Internet ads bought by Russians or maybe even by Americans living in Russia are part of some nefarious Kremlin plot even if the content is an anti-Trump documentary or some ads for or against President Obama, but nothing attacking Hillary Clinton.

This surely does not seem like evidence of a "sophisticated" campaign to influence U.S. politics, as the Post tells us; it is either an indication of a totally incoherent campaign or no campaign at all, just some random ads taken out by people in Russia possibly to increase clicks on a Web site or to sell some merchandise or to express their own opinions.

And, if you think that this latest Post story is an anomaly – that maybe some editor was having a bad day and just forgot to include the requisite perspective and balance – you'd be wrong.

The same journalistic failures have appeared in similar articles about Facebook and Twitter, which like Google didn't detect any Russian operation until put under intense pressure by influential members of Congress and then "found" a tiny number of "Russia-linked" accounts.

At Facebook, after two searches found nothing – and after a personal visit from Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a key legislator on the high-tech industry – the social media company turned

up \$100,000 in “Russia-linked” ads spread out over three years (compared to its annual revenue of \$27 billion). Facebook also reported that only 44 percent of the ads appeared *before* the 2016 election.

Facing similar pressures from key members of Congress, Twitter identified 201 “Russia-linked” accounts (out of Twitter’s 328 million monthly users).

Tiny Pebbles

However, rather than include the comparative numbers which would show how nutty Russia-gate has become, the U.S. mainstream media systematically avoids any reference to how tiny the “Russia-linked” pebbles are when compared to the size of the very large lake into which they were allegedly tossed.

The mainstream Russia-gate narrative also keeps running up against other inconveniently contrary facts that then have to be explained away by the “responsible media.” For instance, The New York Times discovered that one of the “Russia-linked” Facebook groups was devoted to photos of “adorable puppies.” That left the “newspaper of record” musing about how nefarious the Russians must be to cloak their sinister operations behind puppies. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “The Mystery of the Russia-gate Puppies.”]

The alternative explanation, of course, is unthinkable at least within the confines of “acceptable thought”; the alternative being that there might be no sinister Kremlin campaign to poison American politics or to install Trump in the White House, that what we are witnessing is a mainstream stampede similar to what preceded the Iraq War in 2003.

In the run-up to that disastrous invasion, every tidbit of suspicion about Saddam Hussein hiding WMD was trumpeted loudly across the front pages of The New York Times, The Washington Post and other major U.S. news outlets. The handful of dissenters who questioned the groupthink were ignored or dismissed as “Saddam apologists”; most were essentially banned from the public square.

Another similarity is that in both cases the U.S. government was injecting large sums of money that helped finance the pro-war propaganda. In the Iraq case, Congress funded the Iraqi National Congress, which helped generate false WMD claims that were then accepted credulously by the U.S. mainstream media.

In the Russia-gate case, Congress has authorized tens of millions of dollars to combat alleged Russian “propaganda and disinformation,” a sum that is creating a feeding frenzy among “scholars” and other “experts” to produce reports that support the anti-Russia narrative. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “The Slimy Business of Russia-gate.”]

Of course, the big difference between Iraq in 2003 and Russia in 2017 is that as catastrophic as the Iraq invasion was, it pales against the potential for thermo-nuclear war that could lie at the end of this latest hysteria.

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](#)).

Citadels of Paranoia: An Occupation by Phantoms

The frantic fear-mongering of American culture – Russians, North Koreans, Iranians, the Others are out to get us – has generated an alienation that fuels violence, globally and in random acts of murder, writes poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

The bad news is we have been deluged with bad, even mortifying, news, and for such an extended period of time, the mind reels in bafflement as the spirit sinks. Despair seems an apt response to events one cannot reconcile, of circumstances of which one cannot gain perspective nor control.

“The only sadnesses that are dangerous and unhealthy are the ones that we carry around in public in order to drown them out with the noise; like diseases that are treated superficially and foolishly, they just withdraw and after a short interval break out again all the more terribly; and gather inside us and are life, are life that is un-lived, rejected, lost, life that we can die of.” ?
Rainer Maria Rilke, excerpt from Letters to a Young Poet

Depression can be a compensatory response to the inherently manic nature of capitalist dominance of every aspect of life in late modernity. The affliction knocks you on your ass and keeps you there until the psyche can find a better means of using the agency of libido, which, under the extant corporate/consumer/surveillance state panopticon has been usurped.

Under the system's economic despotism and attendant anomie and alienation, one's longings, more often than not, do not lead to the connecting eros of a life-enhancing vocation or deepening interpersonal encounters but only as a vehicle that hijacks one's life into the service of a soul-crushing system, wholly designed to exploit every moment of this fleeting life for the benefit of an

overclass of parasites, a klavern of vampires and ghouls.

Depression is the soul's way of saying, to paraphrase the Vietnam-era antiwar chant, "Hell no, I won't go."

Alienation is an apt response to negotiating a soulless landscape. Where is the eros in Big Box/strip-mall encounters? The ad hoc architecture of the consumer culture, which manages to be both utilitarian and garish, renders the heart dry as dust and grinds the mind to spittle. The psyche is in constant communion with its outer surroundings.

Thus, what comes to pass if what is extant is a nadascape of vapid commercialization, designed to deliver the shallow sensations concomitant to consumerism but lacking a connecting eros to both numinous inner realities and binding human encounters? A mortification occurs. Some individuals are driven to lash out in anger, even in acts of mass murder. The rage remains inchoate thus is displayed in acts of road rage... in nebulous hatred of outsiders and minorities and the foreign other.

Creating Enemies

The propagandists of empire are privy to the fact. Hence, so many are convinced, so easily, that North Korea and Iran are threat to the homeland; that Russiagate is a thing; that the U.S. military and the nation's so-called intelligence agencies are a force for good and act as agents of protection against a hostile world.

But with some, their soul isn't buying it. Depression pulls one deep into oneself; therefore, manic compensation and displacement is not possible. They have opted out of the collective madness. Depression's descent into the self becomes the option to surface level tropes of distraction. Compulsions fall away like autumn leaves, the sap of life is seemingly frozen, the winds of the world howl through barren branches of one's inner wilderness – to wit, an accurate apprehension of the sound of propaganda and its affront to mind and soul.

Yet: All too many cannot envisage the veritable dangers of our age: ecocide and their threatened extinction of the human species; blanched coral reefs, scoured of life; dying oceans, gagging in plastic particulates; the sky burning, the ashes of charred forests stippling the wind. Shooting sprees. As American as convenience store hotdogs, mass incarceration and drone murder.

Las Vegas, the crass and sterile U.S. landscape on stilts and steroids, retails in empty sensation. Dominion of night where coruscating lights have scoured away the stars. Perpetual, meretricious come-ons. City of towering, schlock temples wherein what the U.S. holds sacred is worshipped: legal larceny, the deification

of empty sensation, and the transubstantiation of everything it touches, flesh and material, into fodder for exploitation. Kitsch über Alles. A 24/7 neon Pentecost of Mammon.

A wilderness of the collective mind howling with hungry ghosts. Vengeful spirits ... inundate the air of the U.S. cult of death. The imprecatory prayers of millions of slaughtered Indians ride the western winds and are funneled into the void of vapidness that is Las Vegas.

A man, eaten hollow by alienation, his soul rancid with displaced rage, stands at a hotel window. The heft of his firearm is the only thing that feels tangible in his hollowness and amid the weightless sheen of the architecture of the city below.

The life of an Iraqi, Libyan, Yemeni, Syrian, Palestinian et. al. translates into nothing in the U.S. American system of value. "The only thing those people understand is brutality. When we rain down death ... that is the fate they demand."

The shooter's mind roils. He acts as he has been conditioned to act. Now, he has achieved the power and control he has been denied. He is a military empire of one. His birthright as a U.S. American has been fulfilled. God bless the USA.

Selling Death

After mass shootings in the U.S., the sale of firearms rises. The phenomenon is very much like the reaction of alcoholics whose solution to the stress-inducing trouble, pain and chaos that their addiction inflicts upon their lives is to attempt to remedy the situation by careening into another drinking binge. U.S. Americans are attracted to guns in the same manner drunks are in love with their chosen killer.

They are seeking sanctuary from fear. All too many view the world as a hostile place, and the remedy, U.S. culture has instructed them, is to dispatch the threat by means of violence. These tormented souls believe they will be provided safety on a weapons-bristling citadel built on a mountain of corpses.

(Floridians had to be advised that it would be a less than propitious act to fire weaponry into the fury of Hurricane Irma.)

Thus discussions of "gun control" will only exacerbate more fear, will cause gun sales to rise, and will increase the body count. The great unspoken is: U.S. Americans fear the wrong things. The culture roils in a miasma of confused apprehensions and displaced responses. The threat U.S. Americans are attempting to ward off is comprised by an occupation of ghosts, the ghost of history that stalks the precincts of their own minds.

If the habit of communal engagement is forsaken, the heart atrophies from a lack of practice. The presence of others, even the panoply of life itself, is misapprehended as menacing ... Others are perceived as malevolent, inhuman – as phantoms, devoid of face, heart and blood.

Empathy is cultivated through participation mystique. Denied of the experience, the heart is at risk of being rendered a cold citadel of angst and paranoia. Without empathy's agency, passion cannot be transmuted into compassion. Sans the sublimation of the heart's hearth, psychical fires threaten to become a raging wildfire of collective madness:

“Putin's neo-Cossack hacker squads have invaded my hard drive; Iran craves nukes; North Korea is a coiled, nuclear viper of seething crazy. Or the madness is made manifest as shooting sprees whereby the mass murderer attempts to cut down with barrages of semiautomatic weapon fire internal phantoms that torment him from within .” – Paranoid thoughts such as those can be read as, a confused soul's dark fantasies of release from ego-ossified bondage although by means of the agency of death.

Moreover, I have noticed that often the true state of mind crouched beneath paranoia is envy. Envy... unconsciously evinced as, others are taking up your space in the world and are plotting to maintain the arrangement by your undoing.

There is a solution: Go take a survey of the world beyond your self-circumscribed range and insist on your portion of life – your portion of fate. Yes, of course all too many situations in this life are rigged, e.g., the capitalist state. But life itself is too vast, too intricate to be fully controlled; the world is too big to rig.

First release yourself from the stultifying confinement attendant to self-inflicted bondage. Then proceed into the midst of life and show your face to the world.

Storms will pass, the landscape glistens with renewing rain...

Set barriers and barricades aflame ... their flames caress the future.

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