

An Apology and Explanation

From Editor Robert Parry: For readers who have come to see Consortiumnews as a daily news source, I would like to extend my personal apology for our spotty production in recent days. On Christmas Eve, I suffered a stroke that has affected my eyesight (especially my reading and thus my writing) although apparently not much else. The doctors have also been working to figure out exactly what happened since I have never had high blood pressure, I never smoked, and my recent physical found nothing out of the ordinary. Perhaps my personal slogan that “every day’s a work day” had something to do with this.

Perhaps, too, the unrelenting ugliness that has become Official Washington and national journalism was a factor. It seems that since I arrived in Washington in 1977 as a correspondent for The Associated Press, the nastiness of American democracy and journalism has gone from bad to worse. In some ways, the Republicans escalated the vicious propaganda warfare following Watergate, refusing to accept that Richard Nixon was guilty of some extraordinary malfeasance (including the 1968 sabotage of President Johnson’s Vietnam peace talks to gain an edge in the election and then the later political dirty tricks and cover-ups that came to include Watergate). Rather than accept the reality of Nixon’s guilt, many Republicans simply built up their capability to wage information warfare, including the creation of ideological news organizations to protect the party and its leaders from “another Watergate.”

So, when Democrat Bill Clinton defeated President George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election, the Republicans used their news media and their control of the special prosecutor apparatus (through Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Appeals Court Judge David Sentelle) to unleash a wave of investigations to challenge Clinton’s legitimacy, eventually uncovering his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The idea had developed that the way to defeat your political opponent was not just to make a better argument or rouse popular support but to dredge up some “crime” that could be pinned on him or her. The GOP success in damaging Bill Clinton made possible George W. Bush’s disputed “victory” in 2000 in which Bush took the presidency despite losing the popular vote and almost certainly losing the key state of Florida if all ballots legal under state law were counted. Increasingly, America – even at the apex of its uni-power status – was taking on the look of a banana republic except with much higher stakes for the world.

Though I don’t like the word “weaponized,” it began to apply to how

“information” was used in America. The point of Consortiumnews, which I founded in 1995, was to use the new medium of the modern Internet to allow the old principles of journalism to have a new home, i.e., a place to pursue important facts and giving everyone a fair shake. But we were just a tiny pebble in the ocean. The trend of using journalism as just another front in no-holds-barred political warfare continued – with Democrats and liberals adapting to the successful techniques pioneered mostly by Republicans and by well-heeled conservatives.

Barack Obama’s election in 2008 was another turning point as Republicans again challenged his legitimacy with bogus claims about his “Kenyan birth,” a racist slur popularized by “reality” TV star Donald Trump. Facts and logic no longer mattered. It was a case of using whatever you had to diminish and destroy your opponent.

We saw similar patterns with the U.S. government’s propaganda agencies developing themes to demonize foreign adversaries and then to smear Americans who questioned the facts or challenged the exaggerations as “apologists.” This approach was embraced not only by Republicans (think of President George W. Bush distorting the reality in Iraq in 2003 to justify the invasion of that country under false pretenses) but also by Democrats who pushed dubious or downright false depictions of the conflict in Syria (including blaming the Syrian government for chemical weapons attacks despite strong evidence that the events were staged by Al Qaeda and other militants who had become the tip of the spear in the neocon/liberal interventionist goal of removing the Assad dynasty and installing a new regime more acceptable to the West and to Israel).

More and more I would encounter policymakers, activists and, yes, journalists who cared less about a careful evaluation of the facts and logic and more about achieving a pre-ordained geopolitical result – and this loss of objective standards reached deeply into the most prestigious halls of American media. This perversion of principles – twisting information to fit a desired conclusion – became the *modus vivendi* of American politics and journalism. And those of us who insisted on defending the journalistic principles of skepticism and evenhandedness were increasingly shunned by our colleagues, a hostility that first emerged on the Right and among neoconservatives but eventually sucked in the progressive world as well. Everything became “information warfare.”

The New Outcasts

That is why many of us who exposed major government wrongdoing in the past have ended up late in our careers as outcasts and pariahs. Legendary investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, who helped expose major crimes of state from the My Lai massacre to the CIA’s abuses against American citizens, including illegal spying

and LSD testing on unsuspecting subjects, has literally had to take his investigative journalism abroad because he uncovered inconvenient evidence that implicated Western-backed jihadists in staging chemical weapons attacks in Syria so the atrocities would be blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The anti-Assad group think is so intense in the West that even strong evidence of staged events, such as the first patients arriving at hospitals before government planes could have delivered the sarin, was brushed aside or ignored. The Western media and the bulk of international agencies and NGOs were committed to gin up another case for “regime change” and any skeptics were decried as “Assad apologists” or “conspiracy theorists,” the actual facts be damned.

So Hersh and weapons experts such as MIT’s Theodore Postol were shoved into the gutter in favor of hip new NATO-friendly groups like Bellingcat, whose conclusions always fit neatly with the propaganda needs of the Western powers.

The demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia is just the most dangerous feature of this propaganda process – and this is where the neocons and the liberal interventionists most significantly come together. The U.S. media’s approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propaganda. Does any sentient human being read the New York Times’ or the Washington Post’s coverage of Russia and think that he or she is getting a neutral or unbiased treatment of the facts? For instance, the full story of the infamous Magnitsky case cannot be told in the West, nor can the objective reality of the Ukraine coup in 2014. The American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the “other side of the story.” Indeed to even suggest that there is another side to the story makes you a “Putin apologist” or “Kremlin stooge.”

Western journalists now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonizing of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many “liberals” who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the U.S. intelligence community feeds us, even if we’re told to accept the assertions on faith.

The Trump Crisis

Which brings us to the crisis that is Donald Trump. Trump’s victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton has solidified the new paradigm of “liberals” embracing every negative claim about Russia just because elements of the CIA, FBI and the National Security Agency produced a report last Jan 6 that blamed Russia for “hacking” Democratic emails and releasing them via WikiLeaks. It didn’t seem to matter that these “hand-picked” analysts (as Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called them) evinced no evidence and even admitted that they weren’t asserting any of this as fact.

The hatred of Trump and Putin was so intense that old-fashioned rules of journalism and fairness were brushed aside. On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump “Resistance.” The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster. Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.

Other people, including senior editors across the mainstream media, began to treat the unproven Russia-gate allegations as flat fact. No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government’s institutions. Anti-Trump “progressives” were posturing as the true patriots because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Hatred of Trump had become like some invasion of the body snatchers – or perhaps many of my journalistic colleagues had never believed in the principles of journalism that I had embraced throughout my adult life. To me, journalism wasn’t just a cover for political activism; it was a commitment to the American people and the world to tell important news stories as fully and fairly as I could; not to slant the “facts” to “get” some “bad” political leader or “guide” the public in some desired direction.

I actually believed that the point of journalism in a democracy was to give the voters unbiased information and the necessary context so the voters could make up their own minds and use their ballot – as imperfect as that is – to direct the politicians to take actions on behalf of the nation. The unpleasant reality that the past year has brought home to me is that a shockingly small number of people in Official Washington and the mainstream news media actually believe in real democracy or the goal of an informed electorate.

Whether they would admit it or not, they believe in a “guided democracy” in which “approved” opinions are elevated – regardless of their absence of factual basis – and “unapproved” evidence is brushed aside or disparaged regardless of its quality. Everything becomes “information warfare” – whether on Fox News, the Wall Street Journal editorial page, MSNBC, the New York Times or the Washington Post. Instead of information provided evenhandedly to the public, it is rationed out in morsels designed to elicit the desired emotional reactions and achieve a political outcome.

As I said earlier, much of this approach was pioneered by Republicans in their misguided desire to protect Richard Nixon, but it has now become all pervasive

and has deeply corrupted Democrats, progressives and mainstream journalism. Ironically, the ugly personal characteristics of Donald Trump – his own contempt for facts and his crass personal behavior – have stripped the mask off the broader face of Official America.

What is perhaps most alarming about the past year of Donald Trump is that the mask is now gone and, in many ways, all sides of Official Washington are revealed collectively as reflections of Donald Trump, disinterested in reality, exploiting “information” for tactical purposes, eager to manipulate or con the public. While I’m sure many anti-Trumpers will be deeply offended by my comparison of esteemed Establishment figures with the grotesque Trump, there is a deeply troubling commonality between Trump’s convenient use of “facts” and what has pervaded the Russia-gate investigation.

My Christmas Eve stroke now makes it a struggle for me to read and to write. Everything takes much longer than it once did – and I don’t think that I can continue with the hectic pace that I have pursued for many years. But – as the New Year dawns – if I could change one thing about America and Western journalism, it would be that we all repudiate “information warfare” in favor of an old-fashioned respect for facts and fairness – and do whatever we can to achieve a truly informed electorate.

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](#)).
