

Why Democrats Love Bush Now

The renewed popularity of George W. Bush among Democrats may reflect a growing tolerance of war among American voters, notes Caitlin Johnstone.

By Caitlin Johnstone

Will Ferrell returned to his familiar role last weekend as George W. Bush on Saturday Night Live, doing a bit on the recent news that the 43rd US president is now enjoying soaring popularity among Democrats.

It was a funny bit, I guess. Ferrell reminded the SNL audience how “historically not good” Dubya was, joked about thrown shoes and how Dick Cheney’s heart is made of Legos now, and of course snuck in the obligatory comment about Russia rigging America’s elections as though that’s a real thing.

The majority of the skit was built around a refrain you’re hearing more and more from Democratic pundits who haven’t quite lost their minds yet, reminding viewers that as bad as Trump is, he still hasn’t done anything remotely as bad as Bush’s full-scale ground invasions of nations where US troops are still involved.

Anyone with even a drop of self-awareness knows that the cuddly wuddly new image Dubya is enjoying in mainstream America is taking Trump hysteria a bridge too far. Even MSNBC stooge Chris Hayes said not long ago that “The Iraq War was worse than anything Donald Trump has done (so far).”

Yeah, they like to say that. What they never, ever like to do is acknowledge the far more uncomfortable fact that as bad as Trump is, he also still hasn’t done anything as bad as what the Obama administration did to Libya.

It’s true, though. For all the many, many, many evil things that this administration is guilty of, none of them come anywhere close to the destruction of an entire nation killing tens of thousands of people and creating a failed state where people are now sold as slaves. The destruction of Libya and attempted destruction of Syria that the Obama administration is guilty of have caused far more death and suffering than Trump has at this point in the game.

So I don’t think it’s accurate to suggest, as Ferrell’s Dubya character does, that Bush’s newfound popularity among Democrats is due solely to comparisons between the current Republican president and the last one. It’s impossible to hold Bush as the horribly evil butcher that he unquestionably was while cheering on his successor for eight years who only continued and expanded those same bloodthirsty agendas. In order to support Obama, you necessarily had to

compartmentalize away from the horrors of the Bush administration.

But I think there's an even more important factor at play here, and it's this: Democrats spent 2016 gaslighting themselves into believing that a warmongering neocon who supported the Iraq invasion would make a fantastic president.

Time and time again in the lead-up to the 2016 primary and general elections I debated Hillary Clinton supporters from the perspective that her support for the Iraq invasion utterly disqualified her for the role of Commander-in-Chief of the most powerful military force in the history of civilization. And they argued right back, often on the grounds that the Iraq invasion wasn't as bad as I was making it out to be.

Conversations and debates like this would have been happening all across the country that entire year, and Clinton supporters on that side of the debate would have to have found a way to contort their sense of reality into making Bush's barbarism seem understandable and acceptable. They had to psych themselves into supporting their candidate.

The more rank-and-file Democrats have been forced to find a way to get okay with the idea of warmongering neocon presidents, the more they're going to get okay with Bush.

And this is why members of the so-called "Resistance" would rather spend time drawing pictures of Robert Mueller riding on a shark than on trying to curb Trump's Orwellian surveillance powers and unconstitutional war powers: those are Bush's policies, and Democrats have been forced to gaslight themselves into falling in love with Bush.

Democrats are Bush now. Everything they once opposed they have now been manipulated into supporting, and the smiling, blood-soaked face of establishment politics is allowed to lull us all deeper and deeper into insanity.

Wake up. For God's sake, wake up.

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Former Ambassador Reflects on Current

Events

Former British Ambassador Craig Murray discussed the current situation with Julian Assange, the alleged Russian election hack, Trump's Israel embassy move and more in an interview with Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. Murray's books include *Zionism is Bullshit*—censored on Facebook—and *Murder in Samarkand*. He is a self-proclaimed defender and strong supporter of the work of Julian Assange as one of the most significant “Publishers” of our time.

Murray was interviewed by Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein on January 25.

Randy Credico: The last time we spoke, Craig, you were involved in a libel suit which I believe had a positive outcome for you. Even as we spoke, you were in route to London to defend yourself from the suit brought against by a gentleman you called a liar, after he publicly called you an anti-Semite because of your criticism of Israel and the ongoing ethnic cleansing there against the Palestinians. I understand that the suit was dropped just as the case was getting underway. But it cost you a pretty penny before it was over.

Craig Murray: Unfortunately, while I didn't lose the case, I still ended up having to pay my lawyers. Libel suits are incredibly expensive in the UK, which is why they are used by corporations and the wealthy to silence ordinary people. My legal bills came to well over \$100,000. Lucky for me, there were over 5,000 individuals who subscribed to our defense fund and that paid the bill for me. But it is frightening because ordinary people are terrified to write anything critical of the wealthy and powerful.

RC: I was there right after your suit ended. I was covering Stefania Maurizi's suit in the high court to get email transmissions from the Crown Prosecution Service to both Sweden and the US concerning Julian Assange. She made a great case but in the end they sided with the prosecution. Is the system totally rigged there, or is it libelous to say that?

CM: It is fair to say that the establishment stick together. In fact, I believe that the government and the judiciary are closer here than they are in the United States to some extent. There is quite a closed circle of the ruling class. They attend all the same schools and they are closely linked in various

ways. So once you take on the establishment, you are taking on the entire establishment.

RC: So they are protecting the US government but they are protecting themselves as well. The UK was involved in a lot of the things that Assange exposed—the war logs and some of the cables. Is the motivation to keep him quiet so that the exposures don't continue?

CM: Yes, and the corporate press is part of the same nexus and control the public's access to judicial proceedings. Wikileaks very much threatens this control of government information. Wikileaks's motto is "we open governments" and that is very true.

Dennis Bernstein: I'd like to talk a little more about Julian Assange's situation. We know that the powers that be try to undermine the spirit as best they can. To date they have been unable to stop Julian from continuing this work for the people. We know he is facing health problems now. How do you assess his condition and what could happen at this point?

CM: I last met Julian in the embassy a little over two weeks ago. I am not a medical person but medical professionals now say he is in serious condition, both medical and psychological, from the effects of his confinement. He has a single room which is about twelve square feet and a smaller room where people from Wikileaks sometimes work with him. The entire Ecuadorian embassy in London is just an apartment.

Julian gets no daylight at all. He doesn't like to go near the windows because of the threats which have been made against him. He gets no outside exercise, which even the worse prison offenders are allowed for a short period every day to get some fresh air and stretch their legs. This kind of confining existence is a real health danger. In addition, there is the indeterminate nature of the whole thing, which is bound to have a severe psychological effect, not having any idea when he is going to be let out.

But having said all that, I have not seen any diminution in his intellectual abilities. In fact, he seems to be even more honed in on the issues of the day. He is extremely well informed on political and social developments and an extremely shrewd analyst. I don't want people to worry about him in that way. But he looks pale and he is obviously not in a healthy state. The dangers of decline are definitely there.

DB: The current Ecuadorian government, which would really like to earn some good favor in the United States, could become a very dangerous entity to Julian Assange.

CM: In general, Ecuador has been fantastic in what they have done for him.

Ecuador is a small country and like most countries in Latin America is vulnerable to pressure from the United States. The political situation there has changed and the left is not in the position it was five or six years ago.

There is a heavy CIA presence there, both overt and covert. So I don't criticize the Ecuadorian government, they're in a very difficult position.

DB: Facebook has not taken kindly to your recent critique of Zionism. What did they say?

CM: An editor has very kindly taken on the task of collecting earlier articles of mine into a book. They include a speech I gave after one of the big Israeli attacks in Gaza. I actually gave the speech in front of a crowd of 350,000 people in Hyde Park. That's when I first used the phrase "Zionism is bullshit," which became the title of the book.

Facebook took down ads for the book, claiming that they objected to the profanity, which is kind of funny because it is a word that appears quite often on Facebook. Later they claimed that the book was banned because the title denigrated a religion. Of course, Zionism is not a religion but a political movement. Many religious Jews do not support Zionism. If I don't agree with a political position I should be able to say so as plainly as I wish.

DB: The current US administration plans to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Would that be in keeping with Zionist policy?

CM: Look, my own ancestors were primarily Celtic and we know that 3,000 years ago the Celtic people resided in places like present-day Switzerland. Just because 3,000 years ago some people believed that God gave Jerusalem specifically to the Jewish people, that doesn't mean that you ignore the next 3,000 years and the place should become the capital of Israel based on biblical references. The idea that the rights of the Palestinian people can be ignored because of religious text written down thousands of years ago is absolutely ludicrous.

The Palestinians have had a dreadful time over the last ten years. Not only have they periodically suffered completely disproportionate military attacks but they continue to suffer the appropriation of their land and the destruction of their buildings and farms, with more and more Israeli settlements being built on Palestinian land, to the extent that a two-state solution is no longer viable because so much of what would be the Palestinian state is now Israeli settlements, containing hundreds of thousands of people.

To declare Jerusalem the capital of the Israeli state is going to be a major

handicap to any future peace settlement. It is something that the entire international community has resisted doing. It really does set back progress on the Israel/Palestine issue, doing nothing for the cause of peace or for Israeli security. This is being done to gain domestic political advantage in the United States with the Christian Evangelical lobby.

RC: Julian Assange has now been granted citizenship as well as diplomatic status by the Ecuadorian government. But the British government refuses to recognize this diplomatic status.

CM: Now it gets a little technical. Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, if you appoint an ambassador, that ambassador has to be approved in advance by the host country. If you appoint a diplomat to the embassy below the level of ambassador, you don't have to seek agreement in advance. All you have to do is notify. And Ecuador notified the British government of its decision to grant Assange diplomatic status.

Again, the Vienna Convention is absolutely clear that from the moment of notification that person enjoys diplomatic immunity. The host state doesn't have to accept the person, they can declare him or her persona non grata and the person then has to leave the country within a reasonable period of time. But they have diplomatic immunity from the moment of notification until they leave.

The whole point of diplomatic immunity is to prevent foreign states from effectively kidnapping your diplomats in order to extort from them your country's secrets. So the British government should have to allow Assange to leave the country and he should have immunity while he leaves, but they have stated that they would arrest him if he leaves the embassy.

The remedy would be for Ecuador to take the United Kingdom to the International Court of Justice to oblige the UK to follow international law in this regard.

Whether Ecuador is prepared to do that, I don't know. It would require significant legal resources and time and cost a certain amount of diplomatic capital.

Another option would be, were he to be arrested, his lawyers could take his case to the courts in the UK. But we have spoken already of the close ties between the British courts and the government and whether he could succeed is an open question. The fear is that immediately an extradition request would come in from the United States.

DB: The fact is, Julian Assange is a political prisoner who has made an extraordinary practice of monitoring centers of power. They are going to do whatever they can to bring him down. The only real way to save Assange is for

the people to be made aware and for them to rise up and prevent the UK government from doing this because this person has performed a great public service on many fronts in many countries.

CM: You are absolutely right. He is being persecuted by governments because of the tremendous journalism he has published. It is ironic that at the moment Hollywood is bringing out a film called *The Post* about the Pentagon Papers and that is being celebrated at the same time that the entire establishment is out to get Julian Assange for publishing in exactly the way The Washington Post did.

Of course, The Washington Post has now given up on that and we no longer have a liberal media. The New York Times and The Washington Post are leading the calls for attacks on whistleblowers. Julian Assange exemplifies the only remaining form of free media outlet.

DB: You write in your recent piece "The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming", "The complete and unmitigated irrationality of the current epidemic of Russia-phobia does nothing to reduce its incredible virulence as it continues to infect the entire political and media class." That would include The Washington Post, wouldn't it?

CM: In fact, the articles that The Washington Post has been spewing out for a year now on Russiagate and the alleged collusion between WikiLeaks and Russia have been quite remarkable to behold. They appear to have given up any journalistic standards in terms of truthful reporting, in terms of allowing people a chance to reply to their allegations, and in terms of doing any real investigation of the facts. The New York Times is probably just as bad on this story. They have both been astonishing in their inaccuracy.

It is difficult to explain what is happening. The political and intelligence communities have seen WikiLeaks as an enemy ever since the Chelsea Manning revelations. And then the political establishment was very alarmed by the challenges to Hillary Clinton, the first of which was the challenge posed by Bernie Sanders. Then WikiLeaks got a hold of emails from the DNC and Podesta which indicated that the entire playing field was being quite deliberately tilted against Sanders to make sure that he didn't win. This, of course, added to Clinton's unpopularity. All through the campaign opinion polls showed that Clinton was the only person who could possibly lose to Donald Trump. But the establishment made sure that she got the nomination. Already during the campaign she and her people identified Russia as the scapegoat.

So we have had the coming together of these factors: the hatred of WikiLeaks by the intelligence community, the military's need for Russia as an enemy to justify the billions and billions in military spending, and the need of the so-

called liberal left for a scapegoat for Hillary's defeat. So you have this kind of perfect storm that has led people to concoct this imaginary scenario where Russia installed the president of the United States in collusion with Julian Assange.

DB: So again, was this a hack or a leak?

CM: It was definitely not a hack, not by Russia or anybody else. It was a leak of information legally downloaded from their servers. I know this because I am quite closely associated with WikiLeaks. But WikiLeaks never reveal their sources because they are totally focused on source protection.

RC: Is there an economic motivation here? Is there a Russiagate industry that has developed?

CM: We shouldn't underestimate the NSA and their fantastic capabilities. People from inside the agency, such as William Binney and Edward Snowden, all say that if it were a hack the NSA would have the technical ability to trace that data as it passed through the Internet. They would be able to tell you the exact second the hack occurred and where it went. There is no such data, because it wasn't a hack.

People tend to rationalize doing what makes their employers happy or what they consider to be to their advantage in terms of their career. That is a kind of economic motive, but I think it is largely subconscious. People do what they do to get ahead.

Of course, people at the top have a very definite economic motive. They are trying to maintain corporate control and the control of the political class through a process described by Noam Chomsky [and the late Edward Herman] as "manufacturing consent." But I believe the foot soldiers subconsciously fall in with what they are supposed to do in order to keep their jobs.

RC: You just wrote a piece on Margaret Thatcher and her support for Apartheid in South Africa.

CM: It is interesting how the media airbrush history. One of the things which has been airbrushed out of Margaret Thatcher's history is that she was a strong supporter of the Apartheid system. I have no doubt about this whatsoever because my first job as a foreign officer was at the South Africa desk as a political officer.

The entire two years I was there, we were trying to bring her to understand that Apartheid was evil and had to end. But this went against her strong personal instincts, which were to support Whites-only rule. She successfully opposed any

sanctions against Apartheid South Africa. She refused to allow any of her government officials to talk to the ANC or to anybody representing Black people in South Africa.

I have been explaining this to people for many years but people have tended to doubt me because I was going against the accepted narrative. I was very gratified last week that Sir Patrick Wright, the head of the foreign service at that time, published his diaries from that time, where he makes absolutely plain that Thatcher supported Apartheid and that he considered her a racist. I am happy indeed that the truth is starting to get out there.

But the other point is that there are many people in senior positions in the conservative party now—including our minister of defense who just resigned—who at the time were also strong supporters of Apartheid.

DB: Meanwhile, as we all know, Apartheid is alive and well in Israel/Palestine. Let us pray that the kind of forces that rose up to end Apartheid in South Africa will also bring pressure to end the situation in Palestine.

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How Trump and the GOP Exploit Israel

Exclusive: Donald Trump’s Israel policies may have more to do with outmaneuvering Democrats than they do with any concern for Middle East peace, argues Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Vice President Mike Pence’s trip to Israel last week revived warnings by foreign policy experts over the Trump administration’s controversial announcement that it will break with past policy and relocate the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

“It’s still mysterious just how Mr. Trump believes he has advanced the cause of peace, or fortified America’s standing in the world, with that decision,” the *New York Times* editorialized. “Its costs in terms of American isolation, on the other hand, were evident throughout [Pence’s] trip.”

Henry Siegman, former executive director of the American Jewish Congress, earlier derided the “stunning level of ignorance” displayed by Trump’s decision.

The *Washington Post* called it a “big risk,” predicting rightly that it would inflame opposition in the Arab world and give new ammunition to extremists in the region. Senator Bernie Sanders tweeted that the president’s move would “undermine the prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and severely, perhaps irreparably, damage our ability to broker it.”

All these and myriad similar comments were valid, but they missed the point. Trump doesn’t care a whit about peace in the Middle East, or who he alienates abroad: He cares about winning votes at home. Equally important, he cares about splitting the Democratic Party off from its funding base. To that end, Trump and his crew have a pretty good idea what they’re doing.

Defunding the Democrats

For years now, GOP has executed a successful plan to undermine major financial and organizational pillars of the Democratic Party by demonizing once popular groups like plaintiff lawyers (“tort reform”), unions (“right to work”), public employees (“privatization”), and especially public school teachers (“school choice”).

Exploiting the issue of Israel in much the same way, Republican strategists have aimed at neutralizing the Democratic Party’s largest individual donors, who are overwhelmingly Jewish.

Many of those donors also have a long history of financial support for Israel, and of discouraging public debates in the United States over its policies. Raising doubts about the Democratic Party’s commitment to Israel thus became a GOP ploy to dry up portions of that traditional funding base.

In 2003, just before the start of the Iraq war, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Tex., had exactly that strategy in mind when he denounced the Democratic Party to a group of 150 Orthodox Jewish leaders.

“DeLay has been the driving force in the Republican effort to capitalize on President Bush’s strong support of Israel and his leadership in the war on terrorism to weaken Democratic support and financial backing from Jews,” wrote political analysts Thomas Edsall and Alan Cooperman.

A GOP strategist told them, “There are only a few key pillars left holding up the Democratic coalition, especially financial pillars, and if we can fracture one of them, they [Democrats] are going to go into 2004 in big trouble.”

Edsall and Cooperman added, “In presidential elections, Democratic candidates depend on Jewish supporters to supply as much as 60 percent of the money raised from private sources. Any significant reduction in the financial support will

weaken Democratic candidates and the Democratic Party organizations.”

A Partisan Issue

As part of that strategy to defund the Democratic Party, Republicans have sought to turn Israel from a bipartisan issue—a bedrock principle of the traditional Israel Lobby, led by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)—into a partisan one their party could exploit.

That became easier as Israel itself turned hard right politically under the leadership of the Likud Party, headed now by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. His unyielding crackdown on the Palestinians, vigorous campaign against President Obama’s nuclear deal with Iran, and tacit support for Mitt Romney in 2012 thrilled conservatives, alienated liberal Democrats, and left strong supporters of Israel within the Democratic Party divided.

Further driving a wedge between Democrats and Republicans, Israel today resembles a Trumpian state more than a liberal democracy, as tribalism, authoritarianism, and religious zealotry increasingly define its politics. “Israeli’s secular democrats are growing increasingly worried that Israel’s future may resemble Saudi Arabia and Iran more than Europe,” writes journalist Israel Rafalovich.

None of that bothers Christian conservatives in the United States, many of whom believe the gathering of Jews in Israel heralds the Second Coming of Christ. Borrowing from Trump’s bag of divisive culture-war issues, Netanyahu told a large Christian Zionist audience last summer that “Israel has no better friend in America than you,” calling them allies in a “struggle of free societies against the forces of militant Islam.”

Netanyahu was right: 78% of white evangelicals support Israel, more than almost any other group. Given that they are also among Trump’s strongest allies, it’s no wonder Republicans today are far more likely (52%) to have a favorable opinion of Netanyahu than Democrats (18%).

As a result, the GOP’s dream of capturing Israel as a partisan issue is coming true.

“The partisan divide in Middle East sympathies, for Israel or the Palestinians, is now wider than at any point since 1978,” the Pew Research Center reported this week. “Currently, 79% of Republicans say they sympathize more with Israel than the Palestinians, compared with just 27% of Democrats.”

The Republican Jewish Coalition, citing the survey, crowed, “Republican Support for Israel Soars as Democrat Support Wanes.”

The Embassy as a Political Wedge

Trump's decision to relocate the U.S. embassy drove this wedge even deeper. A strong majority of Christian evangelicals backed the move. Alluding to the Book of Revelations, televangelist Pat Robertson said "it's absolutely crucial in terms of biblical prophecy that [Israel] maintain control over [Jerusalem] ... It's going to be a major battle, it will be over Jerusalem."

The fact that the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to condemn the administration's decision was a feature, not a bug. It gave UN Ambassador Nikki Haley raw meat to throw at Trump's base of aggrieved America Firsters, as she spoke hotly of "exercising our right as a sovereign nation" and threatened to cut funding to the world body.

Outbreaks of violence by Palestinians in reaction to the announcement were also selling points for Trump and Netanyahu, furthering their narrative that the United States and Israel are lonely defenders of order and Judeo-Christian civilization.

"Religious conflicts, like racial and ethnic ones, are critical to Trump's appeal," observed journalist and political scientist Peter Beinart. "He needs Mexican-Americans to rape and murder white girls. He needs African-American athletes to 'disrespect the flag.' And he needs Muslims to explode bombs and burn American flags. . . . If Trump has to invent these dangers, he will. In the case of Jerusalem, however, he can go further: He can help create them."

Above all, however, the decision furthered the GOP's long-range strategy of driving a wedge between the Democratic Party and its biggest traditional funders.

Even as most American Jews oppose an immediate move of the embassy, mainstream Jewish organizations like AIPAC, which disproportionately represent Jewish donors, generally greeted the decision (no doubt with some private reservations).

Hard-line pro-Israel political funders lauded the administration's break with past U.S. policy. President Trump reportedly acted at the urging of his biggest backer, the hawkish casino billionaire, Sheldon Adelson. According to reporter Eli Clifton, Adelson and his wife donated \$35 million to help elect Trump in 2016, in part because Trump promised to move the embassy. Adelson also forked over another \$5 million for Trump's inauguration.

As grassroots Democrats grow more skeptical of Israel's right-wing government, the question is whether major Democratic donors will tolerate a diversity of opinion toward Israel within the party, in keeping with progressive values.

For example, Hillary Clinton's single biggest financial backer was Adelson's friend Haim Saban, a strongly pro-Israel billionaire. To keep him and other large donors on board, Clinton strongly attacked the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and promised to meet with Netanyahu her first month in office. If the Democrats next time put up a candidate like Bernie Sanders, who is more critical of Israel's leadership, there's strong reason to believe fundlers like Saban would hold onto their wallets.

The specter of losing critical financial support will undoubtedly motivate more clashes between party insiders and progressive insurgents who decline to give unconditional support to Israel. The Democratic Party may try to sidestep such conflicts by focusing on economic, environmental, and other winning causes. But Trump and the GOP will surely keep stoking the Middle East as a hot domestic wedge issue as long as they can.

Jonathan Marshall is the author or co-author of five books on international affairs and national security, including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War, and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

A Call to Action against Citizen Apathy

In this call to action, Dan Maguire argues that non-voters and "vote-and-run" citizens are enabling vicious agendas to be carried out.

By Dan Maguire

In Donald Trump's so-called Electoral College triumph – which, a year into his presidency, he still cannot resist bragging about – he received votes from fewer than 25 percent of eligible voters.

That indicting statistic points to two kinds of citizen depravity: (1) citizens who do not vote, who cravenly surrender their power to those who do vote. Voting is an act of social justice, a citizen's minimal duty to the common good. Those who don't vote are therefore unjust, immoral, and only half alive. (2) Vote-and-run citizens. These citizens make the little effort to vote, and then drop dead politically. No follow up. No participation. Pop the bubbly when Obama wins,



and then hang him out to dry.

Voting without follow-up participation in politics is a symbolic, feel-good activity. The predatory one percent have nothing to fear from vote-and-run citizens.

The old Roman Juvenal said that all that is needed to sucker the people into passivity is "bread and circus." Pizza, beer, and football for some: latte, escargot and golf for others. All good things in their place as long as you are staying morally alive, i.e. a citizen in motion.

"OK, so what am I to do!!" A fair question.

If you are not morally defunct, some issues engage you. Decide on three, or four, or five issues and there are a plethora of fully and delightfully alive citizen groups who will tell you basic good things you can do. Groups such as MoveOn, Code Pink, Ultraviolet, Jewish Voice for Peace, Greenpeace, League of Women's Voters, National Coalition on Health Care, Black Lives Matter, Black Student Movement, Sierra Club, and many more. They are as close as your smart phone or your dumb phone.

Contact them and feel the elixir that comes when hope and action kiss.

Put some alternate press into your reading diet to prevent intellectual anemia. The "mainstream press" get locked into occlusive, self-interested, semi-blind orthodoxies.

Non-voters and vote-and-run voters have no complaining rights. The current form of the Republican Party is totally and sordidly corrupt, unlike earlier Republicans who fought slavery, created national parks, supported women's reproductive rights, and supported union rights in places like Wisconsin.

Inactive citizens underwrite the Republicans' vicious agenda as these mean-spirited folks take food stamps and health care from poor kids and their parents, give tax breaks to fat cats, stupidly prefer kill-power to diplomacy, and ignore climate disasters even as these disasters are right now crashing around us and around the world. Don't complain, non-voters and vote-and-run voters. You're complicit with the "Republican base."

There is something despicable about non-voting and vote-and-run citizens. The Book of Revelations trashes their ilk in language our bravest pundits would timidly eschew:

"I know all your ways; you are neither hot nor cold! How I wish you were either hot or cold! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will vomit

you out of my mouth... In fact, though you do not know it, you are the most pitiful wretches, poor, blind, and naked." (3:15-17)

Overblown rhetoric? Histrionic overkill? Not when guilty inertia underwrites well advanced ecological suicide and the trashing of the poor by the rich in gorge mode.

Do you want to hear some really strong language? Here it is: we get the government we deserve. Now that is really strong language.

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Mass Surveillance and the Memory Hole

The NSA's recent destruction of evidence in contravention of a court order follows a long-established pattern of intelligence abuses, as Ted Snider explains.

By Ted Snider

Though it received disturbingly little attention – perhaps a symptom of desensitization to news that we are constantly being surveilled – it was recently revealed that the National Security Agency (NSA) destroyed data about some of its surveillance activity that it was under court order to preserve. The NSA was ordered to save the data in 2007 because of pending lawsuits over the questionable legality of Bush ordered warrantless wiretaps of American digital and telecommunications. The data was evidence, and the NSA destroyed evidence.

It seems that the NSA not only destroyed evidence but serially misled the courts by claiming that it was complying with court orders while it simultaneously was not in compliance: the NSA was not preserving internet communications that were intercepted for several years between 2001 and 2007. Though as late as 2014, the NSA was assuring the court that it was “preserving magnetic/digital tapes of the Internet content intercepted under the [Presidential Surveillance Program] since the inception of the program,” the NSA has now confessed that assurance “may have been only partially accurate.”

The NSA claims that the destruction of data happened unintentionally during a general cleaning undertaken to “free-up space.” It is remarkable that the NSA has managed to save virtually every communication that every one has made in

case it could be used against him but was not competent enough to avoid accidentally deleting data that could be used against them.

The NSA is not the only American intelligence agency to have spied on Americans and lied about it. That began at least 65 years ago. At that time, the CIA's Soviet Russia Division began recording the names and addresses on letters being mailed by Americans to the Soviet Union. The purpose was to identify possible Soviet spies in America, but the letters were never opened.

That all changed, though, in December of 1955, when CIA Counterintelligence chief Jim Angleton requested and received authorization to open and copy the content of the letters. The surveillance operation was codenamed HT/LINGUAL, and, by 1958, when the FBI joined in the illegal fun, it was opening over 8,000 letters a year. The FBI name for the joint program was Project HUNTER. By 1967, the number of letters read by LINGUAL/HUNTER reached 23,617.

Whereas the modern-day NSA had to destroy evidence of surveillance the president had authorized, the CIA had no such need to destroy evidence to protect the president because the president never knew. According to CIA historian John Prados, no American president ever knew about Project LINGUAL. It had been kept secret, not just from Americans, but from their presidents: all of them.

Later, though, like the NSA, the CIA would need to employ the Orwellian memory hole to keep their secrets. In 2016, the CIA "mistakenly" destroyed its copy of the Senate report on detention and torture, and then, in an "inadvertent" error, deleted the hard disk backup. The report is full of files on the CIA's use of torture techniques, including waterboarding. Like the NSA, the CIA was simultaneously assuring the court that it was compliantly preserving the document, and, like the NSA, the CIA claimed the deletion was "inadvertent."

But that was not the first time that the CIA deliberately destroyed evidence of torture. In May of 2002, CIA director George Tenet promoted Jose A. Rodriguez to head of the CIA's Counter-Terrorist Center. At the time, there were ninety-two videotapes that documented harsh interrogation: a euphemism for torture.

In a meeting held on January 10, 2003, CIA director Tenet made the decision to have those videotapes destroyed. The next month, in a meeting with congressional leaders, Rodriguez and others told Congress for the first time that "enhanced interrogation" – that is, torture – had been approved by lawyers and that there were videotapes. At that time, the CIA's general consul, Scott Muller, informed the congressmen at the meeting that it was the intention of the CIA to destroy those videotapes. However, in the face of some opposition, the destruction plan was put on hold.

The CIA pretended at times that it wanted to destroy the tapes for reasons of national security and to protect the officers depicted in the tapes. But the real reason was the fear caused by the realization that the videotapes documented war crimes. The problem was that on May 11, 2004, White House lawyers Alberto Gonzales and David Addington explicitly ordered the CIA not to destroy the tapes. By November 2005, the CIA had been clearly instructed to confer with the White House before doing anything with the tapes.

But as the existence of black prison torture cites became known in 2005, Rodriguez explicitly set out to ensure the destruction of the taped evidence even though, by now—as in the NSA case today—that action would constitute destruction of evidence, since they had been subpoenaed as evidence by courts and commissions looking into torture following 9/11.

In November of 2005, Rodriguez personally ordered the destruction of the torture videotapes even though, by now, no less than seven court orders existed ordering their preservation. According to *Washington Post* reporter Dana Priest, he sent this order despite having just received a cable from CIA headquarters saying not to destroy them yet, but to hold on to them a little longer.

On March 2, 2009, the *New York Times* reported that federal prosecutors disclosed for the first time that the CIA had “destroyed 92 videotapes documenting the harsh interrogations of two Qaeda suspects in CIA detention.” The order to destroy the tapes, the *Times* says, was given by Jose A. Rodriguez Jr., who at the time was the head of the spy agency’s clandestine service.”

Although an accountability board found that Rodriguez had acted in violation of his knowledge that the CIA and the White House had ordered the tapes preserved, Rodriguez received only a letter of reprimand. He never went to prison for his crime. Neither did Jim Angleton. Neither, so far, has anyone from the NSA: evidence that, perhaps not only the public has become desensitized to mass surveillance and torture, but that Washington has too.

Evidence of illegal mass surveillance and of torture seem to go down the Washington memory hole like planes over the Bermuda Triangle.

Ted Snider writes on analyzing patterns in U.S. foreign policy and history.

Treasury’s ‘Kremlin Report’ Seen as Targeting Russian Economy

The Treasury Dept. has issued a list of some 200 Russians for sanctions, which could impact the whole Russian economy and further exacerbate U.S.-Russian tensions, Gilbert Doctorow explains.

By Gilbert Doctorow

January 29 had been seen as a kind of “D-Day” in Russia, with anticipation and apprehension building for weeks over what many Russians believed could mark a critical change for the worse in relations with the United States. Russian media pitched their coverage to the country’s elites, who were under the Sword of Damocles of new U.S. sanctions that might be directed against them, but also to the general Russian public, who have watched with uneasiness, concerned over the effects of sanctions on the economy, on their livelihoods and living standards.



The document to be released on Jan. 29 was the Treasury Department’s so-called “Kremlin Report,” which identified 210 Russian officials and billionaires considered to be part of President Vladimir Putin’s ruling elite. The report, which the Trump administration was required to file with Congress no later than the 29th under the terms of the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, could open up these “oligarchs” to sanctions.

CAATSA was passed overwhelmingly by Congress and signed into law by President Trump on August 2, 2017, notwithstanding the Act directly contradicting his stated desire to normalize relations with Russia. His signature was effectively forced, in the recognition that his possible veto would be instantly overridden and further embitter his relations with Congress at a time when his administration had still no legislative achievements to its record.

With the anticipation of a breaking-news story of great importance to the nation, Russian media spared no expense to ensure their coverage of the Kremlin Report on the ground in the U.S. at the time of the release of reports relating to sanctions would be appropriate to the suspense at home. The top-rated Russian state news channel, Rossiya-1 sent its principal talk show presenter Yevgeni Popov to Washington to head up a panel of local experts that would get extensive broadcast time back home.

Among the American panelists chosen to speak about the Kremlin Report were the

credible and well known commentators Paul Sanders of *The National Interest* and David Filipov, until recently the Moscow bureau chief of *The Washington Post*. Their live coverage began at mid-day Moscow time which turned out to be almost 20 hours before the Report about which they were expected to comment was actually released. No matter, talk shows often dwell on speculation and so the medium did not disappoint.

By contrast, American and European media generally reacted more slowly and with less interest to the release of the Kremlin Report, with most coverage appearing only after the fact. While part of the lag might be explained by the timing of the report's release just before midnight on the 29th – and the six-hour time difference between the U.S. and Europe – the differences in coverage may also be explained by the level of prioritization the various players in the media give to Russian affairs.

In any case, be it known that notwithstanding the midnight hour of release, the European newspapers *The Financial Times (UK)* and *Le Monde* were right there in their morning online editions with excellent news coverage of the reports that remained factual and did little or no editorializing. This set them apart from other mainstream print media on the Continent who had zero coverage even in the middle of the business day on the 30th. I think in particular of *The Guardian (UK)*, *Le Figaro (France)*, *Die Zeit* or *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany)*.

Tuesday morning in the United States found no coverage of the Kremlin Report in mainstream print media including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, despite the report's potential for aggravating U.S. tensions.

Typically on major developments relating to Russia that somehow take an unexpected turn, as was surely the case with the Kremlin Report, the editorial boards take their time, sniff the air to see which way the wind is blowing, and only then commit themselves to an editorial position that directs their journalistic reporting.

And so it was not before mid-afternoon that the online edition of *The New York Times* took a stand on the report. And it was an equivocal and arm's length stand, telling us that the Trump administration had issued a report that managed to offend both sides to the issue: the Russians and the American Congressmen, both sides objecting to the lists and how they were compiled.

U.S. electronic media were faster off the mark and gave much more extensive coverage to the issue. None entered the fray with greater zest for the scent of blood than CNN, the longstanding *bête noire* of the Trump administration. CNN reporter and guest experts rounded on the President for defying the will of Congress and not immediately ratcheting up the sanctions on Russia to punish

them for their meddling in the 2016 presidential elections and to prevent continued meddling in the 2018 midterm elections as CIA director Pompeo had warned might happen just the day before.

Meanwhile, Bloomberg's online article on the sanctions was factual if brief, while their opinion writer specializing in Russian affairs, Leonid Bershidsky, smelled a rat in the way the lists of officials and in particular "oligarchs" had been compiled. As one-time chief editor of the Russian edition of *Forbes*, the rather embittered anti-Putin émigré Bershidsky used his space less for objective analysis and more for editorializing on how the lists really should have been drawn up and on how sanctions should have been imposed now.

Russian concerns over what exactly the Trump administration would issue had been fed by statements to the media from several advisers to the sanctions list project, all of whom have well established reputations as Russia-bashers. I make reference to the authors of an article entitled "How to Identify the Kremlin Ruling Elite and its Agents. Criteria for the US Administration's Kremlin Report" published by the Atlantic Council on November 13, 2017.

These authors are Anders Aslund, Daniel Fried, Andrei Illarianov and Andrei Piontkovsky. The idea they wished to see realized was an exposé of Putin and his "cronies," tracing their alleged illicit gains through corruption and abuse of power. Their view follows directly on the principles that guided the first American sanctions on Russia, the Magnitsky Act of 2012. In the days just before the 29th, Russian television carried a short video of several of the authors. One, Aslund, boasted that the coming sanctions would be "smart," as in targeted against the malefactors running things in Russia while doing no harm to the general population.

For more than a week in advance of what they called "Judgment Day," Russian media had featured warnings that the Kremlin Report could spell sharply stepped up sanctions. In Davos last week, Andrei Kostin, CEO of VTB Bank, one of the country's largest state-owned financial institutions decried the expected new sanctions as all-out economic warfare which would get a very harsh response from the Kremlin.

Against the background of threats by American Neocons and Russian fears and warnings in response, US Ambassador in Moscow Jon Huntsman had, in the meanwhile, been issuing statements to the press insisting that the sanctions would not be a serious impediment to relations,, that he sought dialogue with Russia just as his counterpart, the Russian Ambassador in Washington, was doing, and that there remain prospects for cooperation in areas of common interest notwithstanding the disagreements making the news.

So we must ask yet again, which voice on Russia policy coming from Washington is authoritative? Who has the upper hand: Congress or the White House? And within the administration, the President or his cabinet, and in particular his Secretary of State, who has in recent months become an intellectual hostage to the same neocons who ran the Obama foreign policy and before that the foreign policy of George W. Bush?

The Kremlin Report mandated by U.S. law was released to the public by the Treasury at the same time as a longer secret redaction was delivered to Congress. The time of delivery and more importantly the content of the report suggest that the Trump administration was responding to the letter of a law that the President had opposed but could not veto given its fulsome support in the legislature.

Yet, the administration dragged its feet and produced at the very last moment a report that could have been compiled in a couple of hours if it so desired. And the public version of the report itself is so patently absurd in content as to bring ridicule on the Congress that ordered it.

To wit, as the few Russians who were amused by this cynical anti-Russian exercise commented, the authors of the Kremlin Report lists of 200-plus Russians eligible for future sanctions just took the telephone directory of the Russian cabinet of ministers, presidential administration, and parastatal institutions and copied down the names of the top officers. The only high official omitted was Vladimir Putin himself.

As for the "oligarchs," they were arbitrarily defined as persons with net worth of more than \$1 billion, as shown in the Forbes ranking of the 100 richest persons in Russia.

If there was any exposé, any dirt on Russia's government and business elite in the secret version of the report, one can be sure that would have been leaked by now, given past behavior of the US authorities in anti-Russian operations. Nothing at all has surfaced so far.

This, of course, did not prevent the Russian authorities from hyperventilating over the sanctions report when asked to comment by local and international media today. For his part, while attending a campaign gathering, Vladimir Putin explained his views on the Kremlin Report in taking a question from the floor as to why he alone in the government was not on the sanctions list.

Putin said that the report named individuals who hold sway over whole sectors of the economy and strata of the population, which means, in a sense, that the sanctions lists embraced the entire Russian nation of 146 million people.

He noted that things could have been worse, and that he had been prepared, if necessary, *to cut all ties with the United States down to zero*. Nonetheless, he deemed the release of the Kremlin Report to be a hostile act that would contribute only to further deterioration of relations with the United States. For the moment, he said, there would be no Russian counter-measures, with his government adopting a wait-and-see posture.

Indeed, while the Kremlin Report did not introduce new personal sanctions and only identified those who would be the first to feel them if the situation justifying sanctions changed, that situation itself is very much under the control of American authorities and their proxies in Ukraine, in the Baltics, in Syria. The possibility is ever present that some miscalculation or some provocation would once again bring opprobrium upon the Russian Federation and prompt imposition of severe sanctions that were averted now.

Finally, let us consider the second report delivered by the Trump administration to Congress under the terms of the CAATSA: the report on advisability of further sectoral sanctions on Russian companies.

This was still briefer and will surely be questioned by the Russia-bashers in Congress. The administration reported that the existing sectoral sanctions on Russia's military industrial complex and on those who do business with it domestically in Russia and abroad were working effectively, so that no further sectoral actions were required. Specifically, it was claimed that thanks to the sanctions in place, Russia had been denied sales of arms worth several billion dollars.

That claim may be hard to verify, but January 29 was also the effective date for application of previously enacted sanctions on companies anywhere in the world doing business with prescribed Russian defense manufacturers and sales or import entities.

The ultimate objective of these sanctions is to attack Russia's arms sales abroad which amounted to more than \$14 billion in 2017, making it one of the largest suppliers worldwide. Major customers for Russian arms were India, China, Algeria, Vietnam, Iraq and Egypt as reported by the news agency RBC quoting *Jane's* for 2016.

Theoretically the U.S. can punish companies violating this ban on dealings with the Russian military industrial complex by applying any of five different sanctions including restricting their access to credits from American banks, a prohibition on carrying out transactions in dollars, or barring their officers from entering the United States.

However, in practice these sales can be shifted from private companies to Ministries of Defense, and then the feasibility of attaching sanctions becomes doubtful. The recent efforts of the U.S. to persuade the Turkish authorities to abandon their \$2.5 billion contract with Russia for procurement of its S-400 air defense system failed miserably. In these open trials of strength with the objective of punishing Russia, the United States exposes itself to failure and humiliation.

To summarize, should the United States resolve one day to impose sanctions on the whole Russian government listed in the Kremlin Report of 29 January, it will create a barrier that will quickly be broken by kinetic action, meaning a hot war with Russia.

If it implements the possibilities it theoretically enjoys against Russian industrial sectors, and in particular against the military industrial complex, then it is likely to suffer humiliation as other nations refuse to be bullied. For the United States in relation to Russia, the whole sanctions game amounts to a "heads you win, tails I lose" proposition.

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