

Russians Spooked by Nukes-Against-Cyber-Attack Policy

New U.S. policy on nuclear retaliatory strikes for cyber-attacks is raising concerns, with Russia claiming that it's already been blamed for a false-flag cyber-attack – namely the election hacking allegations of 2016, explain Ray McGovern and William Binney.

By Ray McGovern and William Binney

Moscow is showing understandable concern over the lowering of the threshold for employing nuclear weapons to include retaliation for cyber-attacks, a change announced on Feb. 2 in the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).

Explaining the shift in U.S. doctrine on first-use, the NPR cites the efforts of potential adversaries “to design and use cyber weapons” and explains the change as a “hedge” against non-nuclear threats. In response, Russia described the move as an “attempt to shift onto others one’s own responsibility” for the deteriorating security situation.

Moscow’s concern goes beyond rhetoric. Cyber-attacks are notoriously difficult to trace to the actual perpetrator and can be pinned easily on others in what we call “false-flag” operations. These can be highly destabilizing – not only in the strategic context, but in the political arena as well.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has good reason to believe he has been the target of a false-flag attack of the political genre. We judged this to be the case a year and a half ago, and said so. Our judgment was fortified last summer – thanks to forensic evidence challenging accusations that the Russians hacked into the Democratic National Committee and provided emails to WikiLeaks. (Curiously, the FBI declined to do forensics, even though the “Russian hack” was being described as an “act of war.”)

Our conclusions were based on work conducted over several months by highly experienced technical specialists, including another former NSA technical director (besides co-author Binney) and experts from outside the circle of intelligence analysts.

On August 9, 2017, investigative reporter Patrick Lawrence summed up our findings in The Nation. “They have all argued that the hack theory is wrong and that a locally executed leak is the far more likely explanation,” he explained.

As we wrote in an open letter to Barack Obama dated January 17, three days

before he left office, the NSA's programs are fully capable of capturing all electronic transfers of data. "We strongly suggest that you ask NSA for any evidence it may have indicating that the results of Russian hacking were given to WikiLeaks," our letter said. "If NSA cannot produce such evidence – and quickly – this would probably mean it does not have any."

A 'Dot' Pointing to a False Flag?

In his article, Lawrence included mention of one key, previously unknown "dot" revealed by WikiLeaks on March 31, 2017. When connected with other dots, it puts a huge dent in the dominant narrative about Russian hacking. Small wonder that the mainstream media immediately applied white-out to the offending dot.

Lawrence, however, let the dot out of the bag, so to speak: "The list of the CIA's cyber-tools WikiLeaks began to release in March and labeled Vault 7 includes one called Marble Framework that is capable of obfuscating the origin of documents in false-flag operations and leaving markings that point to whatever the CIA wants to point to."

If congressional oversight committees summon the courage to look into "Obfus-Gate" and Marble, they are likely to find this line of inquiry as lucrative as the Steele "dossier." In fact, they are likely to find the same dramatis personae playing leading roles in both productions.

Two Surprising Visits

Last October CIA Director Mike Pompeo invited one of us (Binney) into his office to discuss Russian hacking. Binney told Pompeo his analysts had lied and that he could prove it.

In retrospect, the Pompeo-Binney meeting appears to have been a shot across the bow of those cyber warriors in the CIA, FBI, and NSA with the means and incentive to adduce "just discovered" evidence of Russian hacking. That Pompeo could promptly invite Binney back to evaluate any such "evidence" would be seen as a strong deterrent to that kind of operation.

Pompeo's closeness to President Donald Trump is probably why the heads of Russia's three top intelligence agencies paid Pompeo an unprecedented visit in late January. We think it likely that the proximate cause was the strategic danger Moscow sees in the nuclear-hedge-against-cyber-attack provision of the Nuclear Posture Statement (a draft of which had been leaked a few weeks before).

If so, the discussion presumably focused on enhancing hot-line and other fail-safe arrangements to reduce the possibility of false-flag attacks in the strategic arena – by anyone – given the extremely high stakes.

Putin may have told his intelligence chiefs to pick up on President Donald Trump's suggestion, after the two met last July, to establish a U.S.-Russian cyber security unit. That proposal was widely ridiculed at the time. It may make good sense now.

Ray McGovern, a CIA analyst for 27 years, was chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch and briefed the President's Daily Brief one-on-one from 1981-1985. William Binney worked for NSA for 36 years, retiring in 2001 as the technical director of world military and geopolitical analysis and reporting; he created many of the collection systems still used by NSA.

NYT's 'Really Weird' Russiagate Story

Exclusive: The Russiagate narrative has taken a turn toward the surreal with a report in the *New York Times* alleging that U.S. spies paid a "shadowy Russian" \$100,000 for dirt on the president, explains Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

A Russian national with ties to cybercrime and Russian intelligence snookered U.S. spooks out of \$100,000 by promising them fresh dirt on Donald Trump.

That's the takeaway from a strange front-page article that ran in last weekend's *New York Times*, "[U.S. Spies, Seeking to Retrieve Cyberweapons, Paid Russian Peddling Trump Secrets.](#)" That's not all the article said, but the rest was so convoluted and implausible that it can be safely discounted.



Even Matthew Rosenberg, the *Times* reporter who wrote the story, described it as "a really weird one" in an [interview](#) with Slate. More than merely weird, however, the piece offers valuable insight into the parallel universe that is Russiagate, one in which logic is absent, neo-McCarthyism is rampant, and evidence means whatever the corporate press wants it to mean.

The article says that the U.S. spies were seeking cyberweapons stolen from the National Security Agency by a group calling itself the Shadow Brokers in 2016, but that a "shadowy Russian" kept pushing instead evidence buttressing the "golden showers" episode in the Christopher Steele dossier. The spooks were not

interested because they didn't want to soil their hands with "the stuff of tabloid gossip pages" and because they feared that the Russian was trying to drive a wedge between the intelligence agencies and the White House. As the article puts it:

"The United States intelligence officials ... were wary of being entangled in a Russian operation to create discord inside the American government. They were also fearful of political fallout in Washington if they were seen to be buying scurrilous information on the president."

But Rosenberg's account raises a number of questions. One is why the spooks were "desperately" trying to retrieve stolen NSA hacking tools in the first place when, as cyber-security experts have warned, stolen malware is essentially irretrievable for the simple reason that it can be copied endlessly in an instant. Once a secret is out, the damage is done – there's no getting it back.

Another concerns why U.S. agents would continue taking "multiple deliveries" of anti-Trump data beginning last October that "they made clear that they did not want." Was the Russian unusually insistent? Or were the Americans less adamant than Rosenberg would have us believe?

Indeed, the article says that "at least four Russians with espionage and underworld connections have appeared in Central and Eastern Europe, offering to sell *kompromat* [i.e. compromising material] to American political operatives, private investigators and spies that would corroborate the [Steele] dossier."

So it seems that demand for kompromat is as strong as it was in October 2016 when former FBI Director James Comey used the same unsubstantiated gossip to obtain a secret warrant to eavesdrop on an ex-Trump campaign aide named Carter Page.

Since the story about buying back malware doesn't make sense, could it be that kompromat is what the Americans were seeking all along? This is not the sort of thing that Trump would like to hear. The article says that Russia is out to spread material that will "cast doubt on the federal and congressional investigations into the Russian meddling" even though kompromat buttressing the Steele dossier would do the opposite. It says that the negotiations "ended this year with American spies chasing the Russian out of Western Europe, warning him not to return if he valued his freedom," and that the anti-Trump material remains in the hands of an American go-between "who has secured it in Europe."

Which raises more questions still. Can U.S. spies really lock up anyone they wish? And where, precisely, did the American stash the *kompromat* – and to what end? Rosenberg indicates that he also interviewed the purported Russian agent. But nowhere do we get his side of the story concerning what the Americans

were really after.

The results are incoherent even by *Times* standards. One reason may be that Rosenberg dashed the story off at breakneck speed after long-time intelligence writer and former *Times*-man James Risen published a similar piece a few hours earlier in *The Intercept*. But another is that the Russiagate narrative that the *Times* is pushing is itself incoherent and that Rosenberg is guilty of nothing more than toeing the company line.

He let the cat out of the bag in the Slate interview, which ran shortly after the story appeared on the *Times* website:

“Spy games happen all the time, but you need a confluence of circumstances [for this]: You need an election with Russian interference. You then need a president to win and deny interference ever happened and say there is no collusion. You need the Russians to say, ‘Oh, wow, let’s take advantage of this. This really worked out. Let’s make it worse and start selling this stuff off.’”

Rosenberg continued: “What the Russians were committed to – what we really know – is that they were committed to messing with American democracy. ... If their goal here is messing with American democracy, then getting some of this stuff out on Donald Trump, if it’s real, that’s worse, weakens him further, intensifies the political mess we are in. So there are reasons to do that. Plus, if you can get this into American consciousness through American spy agencies or law enforcement, you will have set off the White House versus its own spies in a way that if you are a Russian spy, that’s great. Disorder and dissension in the ranks of your enemies.”

This is a reporter’s mind on drugs, specifically the drug of boundless anti-Russian paranoia. But no matter how often the *Times* assures its readers that the Russians are out to get us, that they’re messing with our democracy, that they sow “disorder and dissension” wherever they can because that’s what Russians do – actual evidence, the stuff that sober minds require before making a judgment, remains remarkably thin.

Take Russian manipulation of social media, the subject of last November’s bizarre Moscow-style “show trial” in which attorneys for Facebook, Twitter, and Google were hauled before a congressional panel to confess their sins in allowing the Kremlin to use their platforms to subvert the state. But the subversive Facebook ads that the alleged Kremlin-linked St. Petersburg “troll factory” known as the Internet Research Agency purchased added up to just \$46,000 worth by Election Day, a drop in the bucket compared to the \$81 million spent by the Trump and Clinton campaigns.

Politically, moreover, the ads were all over the map, some leaning right, some leaning left, and in one case, a page featuring photos of cute puppies, leaning in no apparent direction at all. Last September, The Atlantic tried to figure out what the Internet Research Agency was up to. But after some 1,200 words of huffing and puffing, the best the magazine could come up with was that the ad campaign “was too small to seriously influence the election, but too big to be an afterthought.”

In other words, no one knows. In a rare moment of journalistic sanity, *Washington Post* reporter Philip Bump observed that the ad buys were “often modest, heavily dissociated from the campaign itself and minute in the context of election social media efforts.”

As for Twitter, Bump notes that the 2,700-plus accounts believed to be Russian-linked generated just 202,000 tweets between January 2011 and August 2017, a no-less-negligible sum next to the one billion election-related tweets sent out during the fourteen months prior to Election Day.

Even if all this shows the secret hand of the Kremlin at work, the effort pales in comparison to that of Israel (AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, is among the most powerful lobbies in Washington); the Arab gulf states (which finance virtually every major think tank in DC); Ukraine (which has proved surprisingly effective in swinging official opinion), and so forth.

It barely merits a four-graph story on page A16. Then there is the alleged Kremlin hack of the Democratic National Committee, the ur-crime that triggered the anti-Russian storm in the first place.

The January 2017 formal assessment by Director of National Intelligence James Clapper contained nothing by way of evidence that a break-in had occurred or that Russian intelligence was responsible. (WikiLeaks, the recipient of the purloined emails, continues to insist that it was an inside leak.) Even the *Times* conceded that the report was “unlikely to convince skeptics.”

Since the FBI never inspected the DNC’s computers first-hand, the only evidence comes from an Irvine, California, cyber-security firm known as CrowdStrike whose chief technical officer, Dmitri Alperovitch, a well-known Putin-phobe, is a fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank that is also vehemently anti-Russian as well as a close Hillary Clinton ally.

Thus, Putin-basher Clinton hired Putin-basher Alperovitch to investigate an alleged electronic heist, and to absolutely no one’s surprise, his company concluded that guilty party was ... Vladimir Putin. Amazing! Since then, a small army of internet critics has chipped away at CrowdStrike for praising the

hackers as among the best in the business yet declaring in the same breath that they gave themselves away by uploading a document in the name of “Felix Edmundovich,” i.e. Felix E. Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Soviet secret police.

As noted cyber-security expert Jeffrey Carr observed with regard to Russia’s two main intelligence agencies: “Raise your hand if you think that a GRU or FSB officer would add Iron Felix’s name to the metadata of a stolen document before he released it to the world while pretending to be a Romanian hacker. Someone clearly had a wicked sense of humor.”

None of this proves that Russian intelligence didn’t hack the DNC, merely that a lot more evidence is needed before accepting the word of professional CIA disinformation experts. But the *Times* lives in an evidence-free world in which Russians are guilty regardless of what they do. Whether they’re pro-Trump or anti, out to discredit the Mueller investigation or bolster it, the only thing that matters is that they’re intent on sowing discord – and that U.S. intelligence agencies are blameless upholders of the rule of law.

The reduction ad absurdum occurred a few days later when CIA Director Mike Pompeo, FBI Director Christopher Wray, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, and other heavyweights testified before Congress that Russian interference in the 2018 midterm elections is already underway.

“Throughout the entire [intelligence] community,” declared Coats, “we have not seen any evidence of any significant change from last year” – which, loosely translated, means that evidence that Russia is on the warpath is as sparse today as it was previously. Since “President Trump continues to refuse to even acknowledge the malevolent Russian role,” a *Times* editorial concluded, the possibility that “he is giving Russia a green light to tamper with the 2018 elections ... can no longer be dismissed out of hand.”

All that was needed was for Editorial Page Editor James Bennet to hold up a list of 205 known Communists toiling away in the State Department. Trump is a reactionary, a con man, a bully, and much else besides. But with remarkable accuracy, liberals are obsessively zeroing in on the one thing he’s not: a Russian agent.

Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).

The Right's Second Amendment Lies

From the Archive: In the wake of the latest gun massacre in the United States, we republish an article by Robert Parry debunking some of the right-wing myths about the Second Amendment that have prevented common sense gun laws.

By Robert Parry ([first published December 21, 2012](#))

Right-wing resistance to meaningful gun control is driven, in part, by a false notion that America's Founders adopted the Second Amendment because they wanted an armed population that could battle the U.S. government. The opposite is the truth, but many Americans seem to have embraced this absurd, anti-historical narrative.

The reality was that the Framers wrote the Constitution and added the Second Amendment with the goal of creating a strong central government with a citizens-based military force capable of putting down insurrections, not to enable or encourage uprisings. The key Framers, after all, were mostly men of means with a huge stake in an orderly society, the likes of George Washington and James Madison.

The men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 weren't precursors to France's Robespierre or Russia's Leon Trotsky, believers in perpetual revolutions. In fact, their work on the Constitution was influenced by the experience of Shays' Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786, a populist uprising that the weak federal government, under the Articles of Confederation, lacked an army to defeat.

Daniel Shays, the leader of the revolt, was a former Continental Army captain who joined with other veterans and farmers to take up arms against the government for failing to address their economic grievances.

The rebellion alarmed retired Gen. George Washington who received reports on the developments from old Revolutionary War associates in Massachusetts, such as Gen. Henry Knox and Gen. Benjamin Lincoln. Washington was particularly concerned that the disorder might serve the interests of the British, who had only recently accepted the existence of the United States.

On Oct. 22, 1786, in a letter seeking more information from a friend in Connecticut, Washington wrote: "I am mortified beyond expression that in the moment of our acknowledged independence we should by our conduct verify the predictions of our transatlantic foe, and render ourselves ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of all Europe."

In another letter on Nov. 7, 1786, Washington questioned Gen. Lincoln about the spreading unrest. "What is the cause of all these commotions? When and how will they end?" Lincoln responded: "Many of them appear to be absolutely so [mad] if an attempt to annihilate our present constitution and dissolve the present government can be considered as evidence of insanity."

However, the U.S. government lacked the means to restore order, so wealthy Bostonians financed their own force under Gen. Lincoln to crush the uprising in February 1787. Afterwards, Washington expressed satisfaction at the outcome but remained concerned the rebellion might be a sign that European predictions about American chaos were coming true.

"If three years ago [at the end of the American Revolution] any person had told me that at this day, I should see such a formidable rebellion against the laws & constitutions of our own making as now appears I should have thought him a bedlamite – a fit subject for a mad house," Washington wrote to Knox on Feb. 3, 1787, adding that if the government "shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws anarchy & confusion must prevail."

Washington's alarm about Shays' Rebellion was a key factor in his decision to take part in and preside over the Constitutional Convention, which was supposed to offer revisions to the Articles of Confederation but instead threw out the old structure entirely and replaced it with the U.S. Constitution, which shifted national sovereignty from the 13 states to "We the People" and dramatically enhanced the power of the central government.

A central point of the Constitution was to create a peaceful means for the United States to implement policies favored by the people but within a structure of checks and balances to prevent radical changes deemed too disruptive to the established society. For instance, the two-year terms of the House of Representatives were meant to reflect the popular will but the six-year terms of the Senate were designed to temper the passions of the moment.

Within this framework of a democratic Republic, the Framers criminalized taking up arms against the government. Article IV, Section 4 committed the federal government to protect each state from not only invasion but "domestic Violence," and treason is one of the few crimes defined in the Constitution as "levying war against" the United States as well as giving "Aid and Comfort" to the enemy (Article III, Section 3).

But it was the Constitution's drastic expansion of federal power that prompted strong opposition from some Revolutionary War figures, such as Virginia's Patrick Henry who denounced the Constitution and rallied a movement known as the Anti-Federalists. Prospects for the Constitution's ratification were in such

doubt that its principal architect James Madison joined in a sales campaign known as the Federalist Papers in which he tried to play down how radical his changes actually were.

To win over other skeptics, Madison agreed to support a Bill of Rights, which would be proposed as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Madison's political maneuvering succeeded as the Constitution narrowly won approval in key states, such as Virginia, New York and Massachusetts. The First Congress then approved the Bill of Rights which were ratified in 1791. [For details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

Behind the Second Amendment

The Second Amendment dealt with concerns about "security" and the need for trained militias to ensure what the Constitution called "domestic Tranquility." There was also hesitancy among many Framers about the costs and risks from a large standing army, thus making militias composed of citizens an attractive alternative.

So, the Second Amendment read: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Contrary to some current right-wing fantasies about the Framers wanting to encourage popular uprisings over grievances, the language of the amendment is clearly aimed at maintaining order within the country.

That point was driven home by the actions of the Second Congress amid another uprising which erupted in 1791 in western Pennsylvania. This anti-tax revolt, known as the Whiskey Rebellion, prompted Congress in 1792 to expand on the idea of "a well-regulated militia" by passing the Militia Acts which required all military-age white males to obtain their own muskets and equipment for service in militias.

In 1794, President Washington, who was determined to demonstrate the young government's resolve, led a combined force of state militias against the Whiskey rebels. Their revolt soon collapsed and order was restored, demonstrating how the Second Amendment helped serve the government in maintaining "security," as the Amendment says.

Beyond this clear historical record that the Framers' intent was to create security for the new Republic, not promote armed rebellions there is also the simple logic that the Framers represented the young nation's aristocracy. Many, like Washington, owned vast tracts of land. They recognized that a strong central government and domestic tranquility were in their economic interests.

So, it would be counterintuitive as well as anti-historical to believe that

Madison and Washington wanted to arm the population so the discontented could resist the constitutionally elected government. In reality, the Framers wanted to arm the people at least the white males so uprisings, whether economic clashes like Shays' Rebellion, anti-tax protests like the Whiskey Rebellion, attacks by Native Americans or slave revolts, could be repulsed.

However, the Right has invested heavily during the last several decades in fabricating a different national narrative, one that ignores both logic and the historical record. In this right-wing fantasy, the Framers wanted everyone to have a gun so they could violently resist their own government. To that end, a few incendiary quotes are cherry-picked or taken out of context.

This "history" has then been amplified through the Right's powerful propaganda apparatus Fox News, talk radio, the Internet and ideological publications to persuade millions of Americans that their possession of semi-automatic assault rifles and other powerful firearms is what the Framers intended, that today's gun-owners are fulfilling some centuries-old American duty.

The mythology about the Framers and the Second Amendment is, of course, only part of the fake history that the Right has created to persuade ill-informed Tea Partiers that they should dress up in Revolutionary War costumes and channel the spirits of men like Washington and Madison.

But this gun fable is particularly insidious because it obstructs efforts by today's government to enact commonsense gun-control laws and thus the false narrative makes possible the kinds of slaughters that erupt periodically across the United States, most recently in Newtown, Connecticut, where 20 schoolchildren and six teachers were murdered in minutes by an unstable young man with a civilian version of the M-16 combat rifle.

While it's absurd to think that the Founders could have even contemplated such an act in their 18th Century world of single-fire muskets that required time-consuming reloading right-wing gun advocates have evaded that obvious reality by postulating that Washington, Madison and other Framers would have wanted a highly armed population to commit what the Constitution defined as treason against the United States.

Today's American Right is drunk on some very bad history, which is as dangerous as it is false.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

