How Establishment Propaganda Gaslights Us Into Submission

“Gaslighting” can be an effective tactic to instill confusion and anxiety in people, causing them to doubt their own logical abilities, but it can be countered by remaining confident in our judgments, argues Caitlin Johnstone.

By Caitlin Johnstone

The dynamics of the establishment Syria narrative are hilarious if you take a step back and think about them. I mean, the Western empire is now openly admitting to having funded actual, literal terrorist groups in that country, and yet they’re still cranking out propaganda pieces about what is happening there and sincerely expecting us to believe them. It’s adorable, really; like a little kid covered in chocolate telling his mom he doesn’t know what happened to all the cake frosting.

Or at least it would be adorable if it weren’t directly facilitating the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people.

I recently had a pleasant and professional exchange with the Atlantic Council’s neoconservative propagandist Eliot Higgins, in which he referred to independent investigative journalist Vanessa Beeley as “bonkers” and myself as “crazy,” and I called him a despicable bloodsucking ghoul. I am not especially fond of Mr. Higgins.

You see this theme repeated again and again and again in Higgins’ work; the U.S.-centralized power establishment which facilitated terrorist factions in Syria is the infallible heroic Good Guy on the scene, and anyone who doesn’t agree is a mentally deranged lunatic.

This is also the model for the greater imperialist propaganda construct, not just with regard to Syria but with Russia, North Korea, Iran, and any other insolent government which refuses to bow to American supremacist agendas.

It works like this: first, the oligarch-owned establishment media, which itself is chock full of Council on Foreign Relations members, uses other warmongering think tanks and its own massive funding to force deep state psy-ops like Russiagate and Iraqi WMDs into becoming the mainstream narrative. Second, they use the mainstream, widely accepted status of this manufactured narrative to paint anyone who questions it as a mentally defective tinfoil hat-wearing conspiracy theorist.
It’s a perfect scheme. The mass media has given a few elites the ability to effectively turn a false story that they themselves invented into an established fact so broadly accepted that anyone who doubts it can be painted in the exact same light as someone who doubts the roundness of the Earth. The illusion of unanimous agreement is so complete that blatant establishment psy-ops are placed on the same level as settled scientific fact, even though it’s made of little else but highly paid pundits making authoritative assertions in confident tones of voice day after day.

Yes, it is a perfect scheme. But there also happens to be a name for it.

In a lucid essay titled “Gaslighting: State Mind Control and Abusive Narcissism,” Vanessa Beeley writes the following:

“The psychological term ‘Gaslighting’ comes from a 1944 Hollywood classic movie called ‘Gaslight.’ Gaslighting describes the abuse employed by a narcissist to instill in their victim’s mind, an extreme anxiety and confusion to the extent where they no longer have faith in their own powers of logic, reason and judgement. These gaslighting techniques were adopted by central intelligence agencies in the U.S. and Europe as part of their psychological warfare methods, used primarily during torture or interrogation.”

Anyone who has been in an abusive relationship is likely to be familiar with this textbook abuse tactic to some extent, because it is such a useful tool for crippling the better judgment and alarm bells we all have which are meant to help us avoid situations that are harmful to us.

If someone with confidence in their own clear judgment feels certain that their significant other is cheating, for example, there is likely to be a confrontation and some clothes out on the front lawn. If your significant other can convince you that you are paranoid or crazy, however, you will doubt what you are seeing and accept the stories you’re being told by someone who appears to be a lot more grounded in reality than you are.

Any degree of abuse can be justified in this way. The documentary “What Happened, Miss Simone?” tells an anecdote of jazz legend Nina Simone once having been tied up, raped, beaten and held at gunpoint by her husband, who left and then returned telling her she’d imagined the entire thing. And it worked.

We see the same thing today with the establishment Syria narrative and the Russiagate psy-op, which are both riddled with plot holes and depend on the irrational position that the same establishment which manufactured support for the Iraq invasion using lies is now beneficent and trustworthy. But if you point out the many reasons to be skeptical of these narratives, you belong in the
The good news is that there is an easy remedy for this tactic. We need only to be thoroughly confident in our own judgment.

History has testified unequivocally that extreme skepticism is the only rational response to have toward establishment narratives, especially when those narratives are beating the drums of war. The U.S. war machine has an extensive history of using lies, false flags and propaganda to manufacture support for its bloodthirsty agendas, and the adage that truth is the first casualty of war holds up flawlessly in cases of both hot war and cold war. It is simply self-evident that there is no good reason to take these people at their word, and every reason not to.

Your own educated best guess about what is going on in the world is infinitely superior to placing unquestioning faith in an establishment which has a vested interest in lying to you and a demonstrable history of doing so. Trust yourself and have full confidence that your conclusions, however imperfect, are always superior to those of known liars and manipulators.

Never, ever let anyone bully and cajole you for being skeptical of mainstream narratives instead of believing the say-so of malignant deceivers. Trust yourself. You are not being crazy, you are behaving logically. Don’t let them gaslight you.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at Medium. Follow her work on Facebook, Twitter, or her website. She has a podcast and a new book Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers. This article was re-published with permission.

U.S. Intelligence Crisis Poses a Threat to the World (Part 1)

Privatized and politicized intelligence is undermining the mission of providing unbiased information to both high-level decision makers and the American public, explains George Eliason in this first of a three-part series. (Part two of this series is available here. Part three is here.)

By George Eliason

Back in 1991, during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the general consensus
of the intelligence community was that America needed a strong Russia. Russians bore the weight of dismantling the Soviet Union and an internally strong and stable Russia was considered the biggest stable democratic government in the hemisphere.

A strong Russia provides stability throughout the region, it was understood. Without a strong and stable Russia, the massive Russian Federation would descend into small nationalist countries. Warring nations and instability would be the norm and not the exception.

For its part, Russia also needs an internally and externally strong America, as does the world. A weak America that is susceptible to overthrow would be the largest threat that nobody wants to talk about. Such a strong America requires professional and competent intelligence services.

On the other hand, if U.S. intelligence is questionable and untrustworthy, there is no single greater threat to the planet today. Members of an intelligence community who try to circumvent the democratic process should be prosecuted no matter who they are or who they are trying to undermine.

This three-part article series is a top-down look at the deep state. Its purpose isn’t to identify every company and every player. Instead, this lead-in is a primer showing the layout of the land at the highest levels and why things have gone so very wrong inside the intelligence community.

The second part will show how the top level relates to the next level down with contractors and companies that deal with public issues, public policy, and commit illegal actions. You’ll see what it looks like when people that have taken the mantle of national security use the tools for their own profit, politics, and prejudices.

Rather than an intellectual exercise, this will show concrete examples of people guiding and pushing fake agendas today. You’ll see clearly the damage they are doing to American citizens that have never been questioned or warned that these things could possibly happen to them in a democratic society.

The third part will explicitly show how this threat translates into the real world to unsuspecting people because they didn’t agree with someone they don’t even know exists. This is the reality when the destruction of your life, reputation, wealth, employment, and relationships become a payable item on someone else’s invoice. The sad fact is your innocence means as much to them as the pleas for mercy from the last “bad guy” they shot in a video game. For them, it’s only a game. You are a troll, not a human being.

The intelligence community lost the ability to police itself during the Iraq War
under George W. Bush’s tenure as president. While there remains a majority of intelligence professionals dedicated to public service, the nature of their work keeps them from even being able to talk about the corporate vultures that have taken over the industry and turned it into a for-profit venture that has little to do with national security.

The Spy Who Billed Me

In 2005, Dr. R.J. Hillhouse described this problem with the U.S. intelligence community as it was still developing. Her first Mother Jones article “The Spy Who Billed Me” began a short-lived, unfinished debate on the dangers of using contractors for intelligence work.

Because of how undeveloped the U.S. national security apparatus was going into the digital age, after 9/11 the U.S. government tried to shorten the learning curve by hiring contractors in droves to make up the gap in actionable intelligence. This meant, says John Pike of GlobalSecurity.org, that America’s spy network would soon resemble NASA’s mission control room in Houston.

“Most people, when they see that room, think they’re looking at a bunch of NASA people,” Pike notes. “But it’s 90 percent contractors.”

Hillhouse argues that the contracting trend will leave intelligence unchecked and effective oversight less likely. By 2007, Hillhouse demonstrated that corporations, companies, and industry personalities were now starting to illegally oversee their own intelligence services and other companies instead of the agencies that are tasked with governing and controlling them.

For all practical purposes, effective control of the NSA is with private corporations, which run its support and management functions. As the Washington Post’s Walter Pincus reported last year, more than 70 percent of the staff of the Pentagon’s newest intelligence unit, Counterintelligence Field Activity, is made up of corporate contractors.

Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) lawyers revealed at a conference in May that contractors make up 51 percent of the staff in DIA offices. At the CIA, the situation is similar. Between 50 and 60 percent of the workforce of the CIA’s most important directorate, the National Clandestine Service (NCS), responsible for the gathering of human intelligence, is composed of employees of for-profit corporations.

While the numbers themselves are shocking, remember, these are 2007 numbers. At the same time, agencies according to the law are supposed to physically keep oversight over the companies and contractors. All intelligence was supposed to be filtered and a neutral report written by the agency before it was put into
the presidential daily briefing (PDB). This briefing is singly the most important document produced because of its potential impact on the world.

From the PDB, the president of the United States decides:

- Who is the enemy?
- Who is friendly (or are there really any friends out there)?
- Who is a danger and how?
- Why are they a danger?
- What is their motivation?
- What steps will the US need to take to stop them, turn them in a different direction, or make peace with them?

Privatized Intelligence

Hillhouse describes that being in the intelligence community during the Cold War was like being in an extended family. Everyone was doing the work because of a commitment to public service. People counted on each other and looked after each other.

By 2007 this was no longer the case. The critical departments of the agencies themselves were extra-legally almost fully privatized. It’s not a stretch to say that some of the most secret and sensitive work in intelligence was staffed by what amounts to day-hires.

She describes the change in the intelligence community as cataclysmic because it went from that strong tight-knit family setting to resembling groups of problem kids in foster homes because everybody was temporary and there was no commitment, job security, or real oversight.

In an earlier article detailing the rise and dangers of private contractors accessing Vault 7 tools, it becomes clear that to be a star in the new intelligence community, the only qualification is knowing how to network. And it helps if you hate the right people. One of the biggest stars of intelligence over the last decade is a former gift shop cashier that had no intelligence experience or training.

In that article, I asked Professor Michael Jasinsky Assistant Professor Department of Political Science University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh about this. Jasinski had oversight over researchers that were later hired by U.S. intelligence agencies and provided evaluations of them prior to their employment.

His comments show why a radical cleanup in both intelligence and counter-terrorism is necessary. Their patriotic feelings were real, he said, but they
had a distorted view of the intelligence community. Despite Hollywood
depictions, which are influenced by CIA “outreach,” the reality is little like
what you might see in Mission Impossible or the Bond films, Jasinsky explained.

“If you ever had personal contact with the ‘three-letter agencies’ for any
period of time, you’d think different,” he said. “My most recent experience with
the intelligence community was at MIIS, post-9/11 when the agencies were coming
there to hire, and they were hiring big. They hired many of my research
assistants … and in the process, they’d ask me, their immediate supervisor, for
my opinion. So I’d tell them point-blank: can’t read, can’t write, can’t
analyze. I don’t care what their CV says, the only language they can function in
at any level is English.”

Yet, they would get hired anyway, Jasinsky told me. “Scary political views they
wore on their sleeve? No matter, they’d get hired anyway. All of my good
assistants went to work for the UN, IAEA, major NGOs. The dregs went to
intelligence,” he said.

Jasinsky told me that when he sees the “Russian interference” stories and hears
about the intelligence community’s inability to safeguard, or use responsibly,
its own cyber-warfare arsenal, he isn’t surprised. “There are no shortcuts in
this kind of work,” he said. “If you rapidly expand at the cost of dramatically
lowering standards, you (and the country) are going to pay a price. We’re paying
it right now.”

Contract Renewals

Because their jobs depend on contracts being won or lost, there was no longer a
commitment to public service. People take real intelligence from one company to
another, to another, and so on. Hillhouse noted that out of work spies do what
spies do best: they spy and sell secrets.

“More than 70 percent of the Pentagon’s Counterintelligence Field Activity
(CIFA) unit is staffed by contractors, known as ‘green badgers,’ who also
represent the majority of personnel in the DIA, the CIA’s National Clandestine
Service, and the National Counterterrorism Center,” according to an article
by Simon Chesterman in *The European Journal of International Law*. At the CIA’s
station in Islamabad contractors reportedly outnumber government employees three
to one, Chesterman points out.

Private companies have been utilized to carry out torture and the misuse of
sensitive information collected by intelligence agencies, and yet almost every
intelligence and most field roles are being turned over to private companies
that get contracts because of “new” problems – crises, influence operations,
hacking, danger, threats, or dossiers their companies or related companies happen to find.

Confronted by arbitrary staffing ceilings and uncertain funding, components are left with no choice but to use contractors for work that may be borderline ‘inherently governmental’ – only to find that to do that work, those same contractors recruit our own employees, already cleared and trained at government expense, and then ‘lease’ them back at considerably greater expense.

Indeed, if you look at the LinkedIn profiles for either intelligence community corporation principals or any of the department heads and other leadership positions in government agencies, the revolving door pattern is there.

Chesterman’s paper identifies work given to corporations or individuals that should remain a strictly governmental function is now in the hands of companies that do it for hire. For-profit companies are behind most of what the intelligence the agency heads and the president see. For-profit, companies look after their own bottom line, often producing biased information in the hopes of getting repeat business.

Also, because they are committed to their companies and not public service, the lines have been blurred to the point that some of these contractors no longer distinguish between the work they do for U.S. intelligence and security and what they can do legally in the civilian world. There is no difference and they have no problem plying the same tools and techniques on an unsuspecting public.

Shadow Intelligence

In a 2007 Washington Post editorial titled “The Value of ‘Private Spies,” which was meant to answer Hillhouse’s accusations of corruption and mismanagement, the DNI tried to deflect it by giving a much lower percentage of contractors than it was using.

But the ODNI did concede that there is some danger of using private companies for intelligence and direct action work. “Our workforce has recovered to the point that we can begin to shed some contract personnel or shift them away from core mission areas, and the CIA is leading the way in this,” the ODNI stated.

So that was 11 years ago. Did the ODNI make good on taking control back from private companies that profit on national security problems? Nope. How are things shaping up in the intelligence community today?

In a 2015 article at The Nation titled “How Private Contractors Have Created a Shadow NSA,” Tim Shorrock describes what he calls “the cyberintelligence ruling class.”
“Over the last 15 years, thousands of former high-ranking intelligence officials and operatives have left their government posts and taken up senior positions at military contractors, consultancies, law firms, and private-equity firms. In their new jobs, they replicate what they did in government—often for the same agencies they left. But this time, their mission is strictly for-profit,” Shorrock wrote.

Many of the principal figures come from America’s wealthiest families. Although the wealthiest have always had a lead in filling policy and cabinet positions, this time the public service aspect is missing.

Shorrock goes on to detail how the same 1% Americans claim to be fighting is the cyberintelligence elite that controls the media. Mathew Olsen is an example as the former National Counterterrorism Center director and current IronNet Corp. president. He joined ABC as a commentator. He goes further and shows how this is the rule and not the exception.

This is going on all across media channels. Every network has their own cyberintelligence “expert” to explain complicated topics, but their conflicts of interest almost always remain hidden.

The other point Shorrock noted was that their storylines are almost always their companies’ position. They are why the networks don’t deviate often from the official version of things because they provide the official version to the U.S. government.

**Same Narrative**

If it looks like U.S. intelligence and the media networks are all working from the exact same narrative, it’s because they are. By using narrative builders the intelligence elite avoids information fratricide. This happens when there are opposing views to a given situation which neutralize the point you want to push.

Information fratricide is defined as actions, perceptions, and information from friendly forces that create improper impressions can adversely affect intelligence operations. This means everyone in media has to follow the same narrative. Stopping information fratricide was why the PropOrNot blacklist was rolled out, and is why certain sectors are very aggressive in shutting down or discrediting independent media outlets.

In fact, this is a well-worn process, going back decades. As the late Robert Parry has explained, the media agenda is enforced through a tactic called “controversializing,” which is a process of being marginalized, attacked and “subjected to systematic smears and professional deconstruction.”
As a result, they have undermined a free and unrestricted press and essentially destroyed the Fourth Estate.

When people can’t get the facts to judge governmental actions, the government can do no wrong because there are no freedoms, rights, or protections left for the people. People engaged in real criminal activity can do no wrong and there is no accountability possible.

When I started researching this three years ago, I was focused on the bottom of this intelligence-media pyramid. In the two follow-up articles, the way the very top of the pyramid interacts with the boots on the ground practitioners in the new American reality will be examined.

George Eliason is an American journalist who lives and works in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

Part two of this series is available here. Part three is here.

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**Donald Trump v. the Spooks**

*From the Archive:* Just before Trump took office last year, ex-British intelligence officer Annie Machon wrote about the battle he was facing with U.S. intelligence agencies. As Russia-gate morphs into Intel-gate, we re-publish her prescient article today.

By Annie Machon (first published Jan. 16, 2017)

The clash between plutocratic President-elect Trump and the CIA is shaping up to be the heavyweight prize fight of the century, and Trump at least is approaching it with all the entertaining bombast of Mohammed Ali at the top of his game. Rather than following the tradition of doing dirty political deals in dark corners, more commonly known as fixing the match, Trump has come out swinging in the full glare of the media.

In that corner, we have a deal-making, billionaire “man of the people” who, to European sensibilities at least, reputedly espouses some of the madder domestic obsessions and yet has seemed to offer hope to many aggrieved Americans. But it is his professed position on building a rapprochement with Russia and cooperating with Moscow to sort out the Syrian mess that caught my attention and that of many other independent commentators internationally.

In the opposite corner, Trump’s opponents have pushed the CIA into the ring to
deliver the knock-out blow, but this has yet to land. Despite jab after jab, Trump keeps evading the blows and comes rattling back against all odds. One has to admire the guy’s footwork.

So who are the opponents ranged behind the CIA, yelling encouragement through the ropes? The obvious culprits include the U.S. military-industrial complex, whose corporate bottom line relies on an era of unending war. As justification for extracting billions – even trillions – of dollars from American taxpayers, there was a need for frightening villains, such as Al Qaeda and even more so, the head choppers of ISIS. However, since the Russian intervention in Syria in 2015, those villains no longer packed as scary a punch, so a more enduring villain, like Emmanuel Goldstein, the principal enemy of the state in George Orwell’s 1984, was required. Russia was the obvious new choice, the old favorite from the Cold War playbook.

The Western intelligence agencies have a vested interest in eternal enemies to ensure both eternal funding and eternal power, hence the CIA’s entry into the fight. As former British MP and long-time peace activist George Galloway so eloquently said in a recent interview, an unholy alliance is now being formed between the “war party” in the U.S., the military-industrial-intelligence complex and those who would have previously publicly spurned such accomplices: American progressives and their traditional host, the Democratic Party.

Yet, if the Democratic National Committee had not done its best to rig the primaries in favor of Hillary Clinton, then perhaps we would not be in this position. Bernie Sanders would be the President-elect.

Two-Party Sham

These establishment forces have also revealed to the wider world a fact long known but largely dismissed as conspiracy theory by the corporate mainstream media, that the two-party system in both the U.S. and the U.K. is a sham. In fact, we are governed by a globalized elite, working in its own interest while ignoring ours. The Democrats, openly disgruntled by Hillary Clinton’s election loss and being seen to jump into bed so quickly with the spooks and the warmongers, have laid this reality bare.

In fact, respected U.S. investigative journalist Robert Parry recently wrote that an intelligence contact told him before the election that the intelligence agencies did not like either of the presidential candidates. This may go some way to explaining the FBI’s intervention in the run-up to the election against Hillary Clinton, as well as the CIA’s attempts to de-legitimize Trump’s victory afterwards.
Whether that was indeed the case, the CIA has certainly held back no punches since Trump’s election. First the evidence-lite assertion that it was the Russians who hacked the DNC emails and leaked them to WikiLeaks: then the fake news about Russia hacking the voting computers; that then morphed into the Russians “hacked the election” itself; then they “hacked” into the U.S. electric grid via a Vermont utility. All this without a shred of fact-based evidence provided, but Obama’s expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats last month solidified this dubious reality in Americans’ minds.

All this culminated in the “dirty dossier” allegations last week about Trump, which he has rightly knocked down – it was desperately poor stuff.

This last item, from a British perspective, is particularly concerning. It appears that a Washington dirt-digging company was hired by a Republican rival to Trump to unearth any potential Russian scandals during the primaries; once Trump had won the nomination this dirt-digging operation was taken over by a Democrat supporter of Hillary Clinton. The anti-Trump investigation was then sub-contracted to an alleged ex-British spy, an ex-MI6 man named Christopher Steele.

**The Role of MI6**

Much has already been written about Steele and the company, much of it contradictory as no doubt befits the life of a former spy. But it is a standard career trajectory for insiders to move on to corporate, mercenary spy companies, and this is what Steele appears to have done successfully in 2009. Of course, much is predicated on maintaining good working relations with your former employers.

That is the aspect that interests me most – how close a linkage did he indeed retain with his former employers after he left MI6 in 2009 to set up his own private spy company? The answer is important because companies such has his can also be used as cut-outs for “plausible deniability” by official state spies.

I’m not suggesting that happened in this case, but Steele reportedly remained on good terms with MI6 and was well thought of. For a man who had not been stationed in Russia for over 20 years, it would perhaps have been natural for him to turn to old chums for useful connections.

But this question is of extreme importance at a critical juncture for the U.K.; if indeed MI6 was complicit or even aware of this dirt digging, as it seems to have been, then that is a huge diplomatic problem for the government’s attempts to develop a strong working relationship with the US, post-Brexit. If MI6’s sticky fingers were on this case, then the organization has done the precise
opposite of its official task—“to protect national security and the economic well-being of the UK.”

MI6 and its U.S. intelligence chums need to remember their designated and legislated roles within a democracy—to serve the government and protect national security by gathering intelligence, assessing it impartially and making recommendations on which the government of the day will choose to act or not as the case may be.

The spies are not there to fake intelligence to suit the agenda of a particular regime, as happened in the run-up to the illegal Iraq War, nor are they there to endemically spy on their own populations (and the rest of the world, as we know post-Snowden) in a pointless hunt for subversive activity, which often translates into legitimate political activism and acts of individual expression).

And most especially the intelligence agencies should not be trying to subvert democratically elected governments. And yet this is what the CIA and a former senior MI6 officer, along with their powerful political allies, appear to be now attempting against Trump.

**Chances for Peace**

If I were an American, I would be wary of many of Trump’s domestic policies. As a European concerned with greater peace rather than increasing war, I can only applaud his constructive approach towards Russia and his offer to cooperate with Moscow to stanch the bloodshed in the Middle East.

That, of course, may be the nub of his fight with the CIA and other vested interests who want Russia as the new bogeyman. But I would bet that Trump takes the CIA’s slurs personally. After all, given the ugliness of the accusations and the lack of proof, who would not?

So, this is a world championship heavy-weight fight over who gets to hold office and wield power, an area where the U.S. and U.K. intelligence agencies have considerable experience in rigging matches and knockout opponents. Think, for instance, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953; Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973; Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in 2003; and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is wobbly but still standing, thanks to some good corner support from Russia.

However, it would appear that Trump is a stranger to the spies’ self-defined Queensbury Rules in which targets are deemed paranoid if they try to alert the public to the planned “regime change” or they become easy targets by staying silent. By contrast, Trump appears shameless and pugnacious. Street-smart and
self-promoting, he seems comfortable with bare-knuckle fighting.

This match has already gone into the middle rounds with Trump still bouncing around on his toes and still relishing the fight. It would be ironic if out of this nasty prize fight came greater world peace and safely for us all.

Annie Machon is a former intelligence officer in the UK’s MI5 Security Service (the U.S. counterpart is the FBI).

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**A Note to Our Readers**

As Consortiumnews.com forges ahead with publishing incisive articles offering fresh takes on current events, we also continue to develop a long-term strategy to ensure that Robert Parry’s vision for independent journalism lives on.

By Nat Parry

For the past few weeks, since Robert Parry’s health issues led to his hospitalization and to his untimely passing, his assistant editor, Chelsea Gilmour, and I have been handling the daily editing and upkeep of this website. We greatly appreciate the committed group of writers my dad has worked with over the years, who have continued to contribute quality content and offer unique perspectives on the most pressing issues of the day.

With Robert’s passing, Consortiumnews lost not only its editor but also its most prolific writer. Therefore we have tried to not only uphold his high editorial standards, but also to fill the gap in content by reaching out to new contributors, who have for the most part been warmly received by this website’s dedicated readership. Naturally, with any changes also come criticism, and we have experienced our share — including from a small but vocal clique of trolls on Twitter.

I suppose this comes with the territory when publishing a website that covers controversial topics, and particularly in the overheated political environment in the United States these days, it should be expected that any contrarian views will be met with hostility from various sectors.

Even with that in mind, it has been surprising to see some of the vitriol, which I can’t help but chalk up to the general state of hysteria that is gripping the United States these days. This is the result, it seems, of both the Russiagate controversy and the general trauma of the Donald Trump presidency. I have lived
in Denmark the past ten years and don’t get back to the U.S. as much as I used to. The last time I was there, before heading back in mid-January to be with my dad as he dealt with his health issues, was during the election in November 2016. The atmosphere at that time was of course pretty heated with Americans coping with a highly divisive election campaign and coming to terms with the reality of a Trump presidency.

Following the news closely since the election, even from abroad, it was obvious that the Russiagate story was taking on a hysterical tone reminiscent of the Joe McCarthy era of the 1950s. We were seeing independent political movements like Black Lives Matter, the Standing Rock water protectors, and the Green Party being dragged through the mud and tarred with the “Russian agent” epithet. It was also clear that Russiagate was claiming a disproportionate amount of attention in the U.S., even as major issues like climate change and questions of war and peace were downplayed or ignored.

It wasn’t until I visited in January, however, that I realized how all-encompassing the Trump/Russia story is within the context of U.S. politics. Dividing my time between hospital visits to see my dad and working on the upkeep of Consortiumnews.com, I didn’t have a lot of free time for TV watching, but every time that I did turn the TV on and flipped to a cable “news” channel, it was nothing but nonstop Russiagate coverage.

No matter how long I watched – whether 15 minutes, an hour, or two hours – the subject matter was always the same: all Russia, all the time. And of course, the coverage was highly slanted – always taking at face value the underlying allegations made by the intelligence community, despite their well-known track record for deceit. It’s not clear to me whether Americans realize how abnormal this environment is.

Robert Parry did realize it though, and it was in this environment that he tried to build a home for independent journalism that took a fresh look at the big issues. His approach was always in the spirit of trying to present at least two sides to the story – and sometimes more than two sides. As he recalled in Consortiumnews.com’s mission statement, as a young reporter, he was “expected to seek out those alternative views, not dismiss them or pretend they didn’t exist.”

“But the major Western news outlets began to see journalism differently,” he wrote. “It became their strange duty to shut down questioning of the Official Story, even when the Official Story had major holes and made little sense, even when the evidence went in a different direction and serious analysts were disputing the groupthink.”
In this spirit, Consortiumnews has attracted a talented and knowledgeable team of writers who contribute from a variety of perspectives – as journalists, activists, academics, whistleblowers, and former intelligence officials who have grown weary of the politicization of their profession. This site has always been about the right of people to know what’s real and what’s not, what’s proven and what’s unproven. We hope that even in Robert’s absence, this independent approach can carry on.

Although Chelsea and I are now handling the editing and day-to-day operations of the website, the Board of the Consortium for Independent Journalism – which publishes Consortiumnews.com – is currently conducting a search for a full-time editor-in-chief who would take over the responsibilities on a more long-term basis.

During this transition period, we appreciate the continued support of readers who engage in lively debates on these pages and the writers who provide such interesting content on a daily basis. We will try to keep readers in the loop regarding next steps.

Thanks for your support.

U.S. Misses Opportunity for Korean Peace at Olympics

Despite President Moon’s efforts to encourage diplomacy, the childish anti-diplomatic behavior of Vice President Pence undermined an opportunity for peace diplomacy at the opening of the Olympic Games, writes Kevin Zeese.

By Kevin Zeese

President Moon Jae-in said at a carefully planned dinner to honor Kim Yong Nam, the North Korean president’s sister, and Vice President Mike Pence that he hoped the Winter Olympics would be remembered as the “day peace began.” But Vice President Pence did his best to make sure that did not happen, missing the opportunity to further peace on the peninsula created by Moon. Dismissing the historic opening created by North and South Korea, Pence handled the situation instead like a childish teenager.

At a dinner reception where President Moon sought an opportunity for dialogue between U.S. officials and North Koreans, Pence went through great – and somewhat awkward – lengths to avoid talking to them. According to Reuters, when Pence
arrived late to the reception he told Moon he planned to leave directly after a photo session but Moon asked him to “come and say hello to friends.” Moon was trying to create a dialogue to advance peace but Pence went around the table and shook hands with everyone except Kim Yong Nam of North Korea.

“There are some who would not want to be in the same room together if it wasn’t for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics,” Moon said. “But what is more important than anything is that we are together.” Politico described it as a close call for Pence: “Vice President Mike Pence’s Olympic visit to Pyeongchang, South Korea, began Friday with a close call with the North Korean officials, whom the vice president appeared to avoid at a diplomatic reception before the opening ceremonies.”

Since Pence arrived at the dinner late the seating plan was shuffled, Pence again missing an opportunity created by Moon. Originally, the seating plan showed Pence, with his wife to the left and Moon to his right, seated across the round table from Kim, who was nestled between UN Secretary General António Guterres and International Olympics Committee President Thomas Bach’s wife.

Kim’s visit is significant as she is the first member of North Korea’s ruling family to enter South Korea since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Who knows what kind of conversation could have occurred that might have furthered the prospects for peace, but Pence avoided the opportunity.

Pence left the event after five minutes. Reuters reports that he skipped the symbolic desert called “A Plate of Hope,” a “dark chocolate tempered in the shape of barbed wire lay over a map of the Korean peninsula rendered in thin blue chocolate, a representation of the heavily militarized border that separates Games host South Korea and its old enemy in the North.”

The Moon administration’s diplomatic response to Pence’s behavior was muted. “A source in the Moon administration said Pence’s absence at the reception was a ‘mere bump’ in an otherwise successful diplomatic event,” Reuters reported.

At the stadium Pence sat one row in front of the North Koreans, but even with Kim Jong Yo just behind him, he never even turned around to exchange pleasantries – Pence had “no interaction” with her, according to press reports. New York Magazine described it as Pence “avoiding eye contact” with the Korean leader. Another missed opportunity for dialogue.

At the same moment, South Korean President Moon Jae-in shook hands with Kim Yo Jong, creating a historic moment and a photograph that gave hopes to many for peace between North and South Korea and movement toward unification and an end of hostilities.
Another show of unity was when two members of the Unified Korean Hockey Team, one from the north and one from the south, carried the Olympic torch up the final flight of stairs in the opening ceremonies. They handed the torch over to figure skater Yuna Kim, a South Korean who won the gold medal in 2010 and the silver medal in 2014 who lit the Olympic cauldron.

Of course, it is easy to overestimate the importance of these images of North and South Koreans shaking hands and being friendly toward each other, as well as of South and North Korean athletes walking into the Olympic stadium together. The displays of unity are largely symbolic and on political level may not ultimately lead to a diplomatic breakthrough or ensure peace on the Korean peninsula. It is a long hard road to peace and much needs to be negotiated.

But considering the high level of tensions on the peninsula, the trading of insults that has taken place between President Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, and the impasse over North Korea’s nuclear program, these gestures should be celebrated as glimmers of hope that could help us avoid the real possibility of all-out war.

Instead, the gestures were rejected by highest levels of the U.S. government. Dialogue was rejected and peace became a more distant prospect. This prospect is made even more difficult with the U.S. threatening to give North Korea a “bloody nose,” bully talk for a military first strike, against North Korea.

At the end of the day, Pence had exemplified the worst of arrogant U.S. foreign policy with his childish behavior.

Kevin Zeese co-directs Popular Resistance. [This article originally appeared at https://popularresistance.org and is republished with author’s permission.]

‘This is Nuts’: Liberals Launch ‘Largest Mobilization in History’ in Defense of Russiagate Probe

Exclusive: Hundreds of thousands have pledged to take to the streets if Special Counsel Robert Mueller is removed, reflecting misplaced priorities and some fundamental misunderstandings, report Coleen Rowley and Nat Parry.

By Coleen Rowley and Nat Parry

With Democrats and self-styled #Resistance activists placing their hopes for
taking down Donald Trump’s presidency in the investigation being led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, online groups such as MoveOn and Avaaz are launching campaigns to come to the Special Counsel’s defense in the event of him being removed by the president.

In an action alert to supporters on Wednesday, Avaaz announced plans to hold some 600 events around the country to defend Mueller in case Trump tries to fire him. “This is nuts,” Avaaz writes. “Trump is clearly gearing up to fire the independent official investigating Russia’s influence over the election – if he does, he’ll have delivered a death blow to one of the fundamental pillars of our democracy.”

Avaaz claims that hundreds of thousands of supporters have signed up for actions protesting Mueller’s possible removal, and that more than 25 national organizations support the protests. The group calls it potentially “the largest national mobilization in history.”

Considering all of the threats to democracy posed by unconstitutional overreach, unfair elections, corruption, and voter suppression – not to mention environmental challenges, economic inequality, an out-of-control U.S. foreign policy, numerous foreign conflicts that the U.S. is engaged in, and the ever-present threat of nuclear war – it is telling that the liberal establishment is mobilizing on this particular issue.

Social psychologists have long talked about how emotional manipulation can work effectively to snooker a large percentage of the population, to get them, at least temporarily, to believe the exact opposite of the facts. These techniques are known in the intelligence community as “perception management,” and have been refined since the 1980s “to keep the American people compliant and confused,” as the late Robert Parry has reported. We saw this in action last decade, when after months of disinformation, about 70% of Americans came to falsely believe that Saddam Hussein was behind 9/11 when the truth was the opposite – Saddam was actually an enemy of the Al Qaeda perpetrators.

Such emotional manipulation is the likely explanation for the fact that so many people are now gearing up to defend someone like Mueller, while largely ignoring other important topics of far greater consequence. With no demonstrations being organized to stop a possible war with North Korea – or an escalation in Syria – hundreds of thousands of Americans are apparently all too eager to go to the mat in defense of an investigation into the president’s possible “collusion” with Russia in its alleged meddling in election 2016.

Setting aside for the moment the merits of the Russiagate narrative, who really is this Robert Mueller that amnesiac liberals clamor to hold up as the champion
of the people and defender of democracy? Co-author Coleen Rowley, who as an FBI
whistleblower exposed numerous internal problems at the FBI in the early 2000s,
didn’t have to be privy to his inner circle to recall just a few of his actions
after 9/11 that so shocked the public conscience as to repeatedly generate moral
disapproval even on the part of mainstream media. Rowley was only able to
scratch the surface in listing some of the more widely reported wrongdoing that
should still shock liberal consciences.

Although Mueller and his “joined at the hip” cohort James Comey are now hailed
for their impeccable character by much of Washington, the truth is, as top law
enforcement officials of the George W. Bush administration (Mueller as FBI
Director and Comey as Deputy Attorney General), both presided over post-9/11
cover-ups and secret abuses of the Constitution, enabled Bush-Cheney
fabrications used to launch wrongful wars, and exhibited stunning levels of
incompetence.

Ironically, recent declassifications of House Intelligence Committee’s and
Senate Judiciary Committee Leaders letters (here and here) reveal strong
parallels between the way the public so quickly forgot Mueller’s spotty track
record with the way the FBI and (the Obama administration’s) Department of
Justice rushed, during the summer of 2016, to put a former fellow spy,
Christopher Steele up on a pedestal. Steele was declared to be a “reliable
source” without apparently vetting or corroborating any of the “opposition
research” allegations that he had been hired (and paid $160,000) to quickly
produce for the DNC and Hillary Clinton’s campaign.

There are typically at least two major prongs of establishing the “reliability”
of any given source in an affidavit, the first – and the one mostly pointed
to – being the source’s track record for having furnished accurate and reliable
information in the past. Even if it is conceded that Steele would have initially
satisfied this part of the test for determining probable cause, based on his
having reportedly furnished some important information to FBI agents
investigating the FIFA soccer fraud years before, his track record for
truthfulness would go right up in smoke only a month or so later, when it was
discovered that he had lied to the FBI about his having previously leaked the
investigation to the media. (Moreover, this lie had led the FBI to mislead the
FISA court in its first application to surveil Carter Page.)

The second main factor in establishing the reliability of any source’s
information would be even more key in this case. It’s the basis of the
particular informant’s knowledge, i.e. was the informant an eye witness or
merely reporting double-triple hearsay or just regurgitating the “word on the
street?”
If the actual basis of the information is uncertain, the next step for law enforcement would normally be to seek facts that either corroborate or refute the source’s information. It’s been reported that FBI agents did inquire into the basis for Steele’s allegations, but it is not known what Steele told the FBI — other than indications that his info came from secondary sources making it, at best, second- or third-hand. What if anything did the FBI do to establish the reliability of the indirect sources that Steele claimed to be getting his info from? Before vouching for his credibility, did the FBI even consider polygraphing Steele after he (falsely) denied having leaked his info since the FBI was aware of significant similarities of a news article to the info he had supplied them?

Obviously, more questions than answers exist at the present time. But even if the FBI was duped by Steele — whether as the result of their naivete in trusting a fellow former spy, their own sloppiness or recklessness, or political bias — it should be hoped by everyone that the Department of Justice Inspector General can get to the bottom of how the FISA court was ultimately misled.

As they prepare for the “largest mobilization in history” in defense of Mueller and his probe into Russiagate, liberals have tried to sweep all this under the rug as a “nothing burger.” Yet, how can liberals, who in the past have pointed to so many abusive past practices by the FBI, ignore the reality that these sorts of abuses of the FISA process more than likely take place on a daily basis — with the FISA court earning a well-deserved reputation as little more than a rubberstamp?

Other, more run-of-the-mill FISA applications — if they were to be scrutinized as thoroughly as the Carter Page one — would reveal similar sloppiness and lack of factual verification of source information used to secure surveillance orders, especially after FISA surveillances skyrocketed after 9/11 in the “war on terror.” Rather than dismissing the Nunes Memo as a nothing burger, liberals might be better served by taking a closer look at this FISA process which could easily be turned against them instead of Trump.

It must be recognized that FBI agents who go before the secret FISA court and who are virtually assured that whatever they present will be kept secret in perpetuity, have very little reason to be careful in verifying what they present as factual. FISA court judges are responsible for knowing the law but have no way of ascertaining the “facts” presented to them.

Unlike a criminal surveillance authorized by a federal district court, no FBI affidavit justifying the surveillance will ever end up under the microscope of defense attorneys and defendants to be pored over to ensure every asserted detail was correct and if not, to challenge any incorrect factual assertions in
pre-trial motions to suppress evidence.

It is therefore shocking to watch how this political manipulation seems to make people who claim to care about the rule of law now want to bury this case of surveillance targeting Carter Page based on the ostensibly specious Steele dossier. This is the one case unique in coming to light among tens of thousands of FISA surveillances cloaked forever in secrecy, given that the FISA system lacks the checks on abusive authority that inherently exist in the criminal justice process, and so the Page case is instructive to learn how the sausage really gets made.

Neither the liberal adulation of Mueller nor the unquestioned credibility accorded Steele by the FBI seem warranted by the facts. It is fair for Americans to ask whether Mueller’s investigation would have ever happened if not for his FBI successor James Comey having signed off on the investigation triggered by the Steele dossier, which was paid for by the Clinton campaign to dig up dirt on her opponent.

In any event, please spare us the solicitations of these political NGOs’ “national mobilization” to protect Mueller. There are at least a million attorneys in this country who do not suffer from the significant conflicts of interest that Robert Mueller has with key witnesses like his close, long-term colleague James Comey and other public officials involved in the investigation.

And, at the end of the day, there are far more important issues to be concerned about than the “integrity” of the Mueller investigation – one being the need to fix FISA court abuses and restoring constitutional rights.

Coleen Rowley, a retired FBI special agent and division legal counsel whose May 2002 memo to then-FBI Director Robert Mueller exposed some of the FBI’s pre-9/11 failures, was named one of TIME magazine’s “Persons of the Year” in 2002.


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Russiagate Narrative Undercut by Nunes Memo

The key allegations of election meddling at the heart of Russiagate continue to lack supporting evidence, while on the other hand, evidence of overreach by investigators undermines the narrative of Trump-Russia collusion, reports Philip
By Philip Giraldi

The so-called Nunes Memo prepared for the Republican majority on the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee – even if possibly overblown – provides strong reason to believe that there was unwarranted and quite possibly illegal FBI surveillance of a former Trump staffer over completely legal Russian business dealings. Meanwhile, regarding the key allegations of election meddling at the heart of Russiagate, the nine month-long investigation of Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Moscow’s possible interference has so far only shown that it was Israel rather than Russia that meddled with the campaign by meeting with Trump associates and seeking favors.

Notably missing is any evidence that the Russian government did anything beyond the usual probing that intelligence agencies worldwide do when confronted by important developments in another country that is either a competitor or adversary.

An aspect of the Republican memo that has been scarcely commented upon in the avalanche of news reporting centered on the story is how the mainstream media is continuing to exercise a dangerous obsession with Russia and is insisting that the Russiagate inquiry should continue even more aggressively in spite of the concerns that the entire process has been politicized. There is nothing in the memo itself that indicates that Moscow actually tried to recruit any Trump associate as an agent or interfere in the U.S. election. The raison d’etre for both the Congressional and Special Counsel Robert Mueller investigations therefore appears to be lacking. It might eventually emerge that Russia did little or even nothing beyond the usual probing and nosing around that intelligence agencies routinely do.

President Donald Trump, who had campaigned on a sensible pledge to seek better relations with Moscow, has provided only feeble resistance to the onslaught of the media and political class. He has recently allowed the Justice Department and Treasury to punish Russia’s two major news outlets operating in the United States, RT America and Sputnik. They both have been forced to register as foreign agents, even though no other non-American news service operating in the United States has been compelled to do the same, while new allegations about perfidious Moscow surface weekly.

Two recent news reports illustrate perfectly just how out-of-control the Russia inquiry has become. At the end of January, the U.S. Treasury Department released the names of 210 alleged Kremlin insiders, including government ministers, who
were being included on a list for possible sanctions, though it was also announced that no sanctions would be put in place pending further ongoing review of the behavior of those individuals under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

The so-called “Kremlin List” was clearly designed to put pressure on the inner circle of the Russian government as many of those named have major business ties with the United States and Western Europe that could be severely damaged through sanctions. The intention may have been to encourage those individuals to lessen their support for President Vladimir Putin in the upcoming Russian national elections on March 18.

The Kremlin List has significantly impacted internal Russian politics ahead of a major election and therefore could be seen as the U.S.’s own attempt at election-meddling. It comes on top of a British government claim that Moscow intends to rip British “infrastructure apart, actually cause thousands and thousands and thousands of deaths,” and create “total chaos within the country,” as well as a U.S. Senate report that alleges a two decade-long assault by Putin “on democratic institutions, universal values, and the rule of law across Europe and in his own country.”

The second story, which is more bizarre than the first, describes how Congressman Adam Schiff told a University of Pennsylvania audience that Russian-promoted ads during the 2016 election encouraged people to exercise their Second Amendment rights to own guns. Per Schiff, “the Russians would be thrilled if we were doing nothing but killing each other very day, and sadly we are.” So now the Russians, apparently, are responsible not only for Donald Trump getting elected, but also for the U.S. epidemic of gun violence.

Neither Congressman Schiff’s meanderings nor the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act serve any conceivable United States national interest – and the Nunes Memo demonstrates, if anything, that the evidence for Russian interference in the U.S. election is elusive at best.

If the alleged Russiagate conspiracy is never actually demonstrated, which looks increasingly likely, it would certainly disappoint the many American talking heads and media “experts” who have been building careers off of bashing Moscow 24/7, but it might also provide a window for the White House to fulfill its electoral promise to fix the Russia relationship.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest. [This article originally appeared at Strategic Culture. Reprinted with permission.]
Syria’s White Helmets Go Global

Syria’s White Helmets have been boosted by the West as a trusted humanitarian organization, but their origins and motives remain murky. Now, the White Helmets effort appears to be spreading to other countries, Caitlin Johnstone notes.

By Caitlin Johnstone

I sat down with my coffee this beautiful Australian morning to watch two of my favorite independent media figures jam together in a Corbett Report interview of renowned independent investigative journalist Vanessa Beeley. About two-thirds of the way through, I nearly fell out of my chair.

At 24:30 of the clip, the following bone-chilling conversation takes place about the nature of the establishment media’s aggressive protection of the highly publicized “Syrian Civil Defense,” also known as the White Helmets.

Beeley: But I think what is interesting, why is this organization being protected to such an extent? I think it’s because the imperialist apparatus is defending the concept. We’ve already seen [White Helmets founder] James Le Mesurier recruiting in Brazil. We know that the White Helmets have appeared in Malaysia and in Venezuela, and in the Philippines. So you know, because this went through my head so many times, these are only 3,000 criminals and thugs that have emerged from the terrorist ranks or the “Free Syrian Army” [air quotes] moderate extremist ranks to become the White Helmets in order to continue to get paid doing the same job but under a different auspice.

Why are they being so heavily protected? But I think it’s more to do with the concept. It’s more to do with the importance of this concept going forward. As James Le Mesurier said very recently, who would you trust more than the fire brigade or a first response NGO? There you have it. That’s the key to why this group is so important.

James Corbett: It is the perfect cover. And it certainly is a template that I’m sure will be used over and over in these types of situations if they can get away with it. So, extremely important.

Extremely important indeed. The White Helmets are a war propaganda firm with extensive ties to both lucrative western financial backing and known terrorist factions, and the notion of this organization branching out into other potential targets of the U.S.-centralized war machine is absolutely horrifying.
We already see the White Helmets cited constantly by Western mass media in every allegation against the government of Bashar al-Assad, as in this article courtesy of Associated Press and the Washington Post using the “Syrian Civil Defense” as their source for a report on an alleged chemical weapons attack in the Idlib province, referring to them in the header as “Syrian activists.”

The mainstream media promotes everything this organization says as fact and does everything they can to protect and promote the White Helmets’ reputation, meaning that if they spread throughout the world, war propaganda can be manufactured from the inside against any government the empire wishes to target with its armies of extremist “freedom fighters.”

In response to this jarring new information I reached out to Vanessa Beeley to make sure I was understanding this properly, and she provided the following statement:

The White Helmets franchise is a terrifying extension of soft power infiltration deep inside target nations, exploiting trust, vulnerability and poverty with the “First Responder” construct that “everyone trusts” as James Le Mesurier so clearly stated in a recent interview in Brazil. This pseudo Humanitarian, NATO state-sanctioned fist will be used to crush many more nations in the future if it is not stopped in Syria. Just as Syria has contained the terrorist fire within its borders, so has it exposed the White Helmets as the terrorist alter ego, but for how long will both be contained? Terrorism is fanning out into Europe via the EU funded Turkish exit routes, the White Helmets are also establishing themselves further afield, in Venezuela, Malaysia, the Philippines to name a few. Terrorism and the White Helmets march in lock-step and can only be stopped by confronting the cancerous cultures in which they are cultivated—US Necolonialism, British Imperialism, EU Globalism, Gulf State Extremism & Israeli Parasitism.

Ouch. Okay. I was really hoping I’d misunderstood.

I cannot overemphasize how dangerous this is. The West is already saturated in deceitful war propaganda about Syria, as shown irrefutably in cases like the Bana Alabed CNN interview and the BBC’s Saving Syria’s Children footage, and this has largely been made possible by the mass media’s collaboration with the White Helmets.

Putting them in places like Venezuela, a regular target of imperialist manipulations with the largest oil reserves in the world, or the Philippines, a major longtime U.S. military asset where a Duterte pivot away from Washington
toward Beijing could get very ugly, would give the US war machine the ability to legitimize any allegation against those governments if it decides it’s time for aggressive regime change. The organization’s own website (archived here in case they change it) asserts that it is “currently assessing opportunities for implementation of Civil Defence-based stabilisation programmes in other countries in the Middle East, including Yemen and Iraq.”

Yesterday The Guardian, which has surely become the overall most aggressive promoter of Western war propaganda on the planet, ran an article titled (I swear I am not making this up) “‘Russia wants to hack the Oscars’: smear campaign targets Syrian nominee.” It was authored by Olivia Solon, the same Guardian writer who, without ever having been to Syria or having any Middle East reporting experience whatsoever, wrote an extremely deceptive smear piece on Beeley and other reporters who’ve been contradicting the establishment narrative about the White Helmets. The new article alleges that Russia is running a conspiratorial campaign to prevent yet another pro-White Helmets documentary from receiving yet another Academy Award.

Beeley picks apart this new film “The Last Men In Aleppo” and the ongoing trend of establishment media elevating such documentaries in this excellent article here, so there’s no need for me to get into why Olivia Solon’s latest war propaganda piece is just as ridiculous as her first, but it’s important to note how ferociously these establishment outlets are protecting the White Helmets. How weird is that? Where else do you see war zone search and rescue teams being made into glamorous media superstars with cute matching uniforms? Who are aggressively protected from counter-narratives by stalwart establishment outlets?

James Le Mesurier is a British private security specialist and a former British military intelligence officer. He knows how to construct a psy-op. He’s trying to franchise his war propaganda firm worldwide, where it will be used to manufacture pro-regime change narratives and will be aggressively defended and promoted by the establishment media, and its allegations against disobedient governments and factions will be reported as fact by western newscasters and pundits.

It’s a brilliant scheme, and it may become the future of war propaganda if we can’t shed enough light on it in time.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at Medium. Follow her work on Facebook, Twitter, or her website. She has a podcast and a new book Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers.
Who is Containing Whom?

“Containment” has long been a cornerstone of U.S. policy in dealing with countries that are seen as threats to U.S. interests, but today some countries are applying the same principle to the United States, observes Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

Over the years “containment” has been a key U.S. political instrument by which it has sought to isolate, starve out, or excommunicate from the “international community” regimes unwilling to accept the U.S.-dominated world order.

Yet the great irony today is that this very U.S. policy of containment seems now to characterize the way many major powers in the world have come to think about dealing with the United States. These countries don’t actually use the word “containment,” but the intent is still the same; they perceive the need to “contain” or constrain Washington, thereby limiting the damage that the U.S. can inflict upon their national interests without engaging in outright confrontation with the U.S.

Containment has been a reasonably sensible way of dealing with hostile states that cannot be readily defeated militarily except at potentially huge military cost to the U.S. itself—especially if it risks nuclear war. Both the Soviet Union and China for many decades were “contained” due to their perceived radical ideologies and hostility to the U.S.-dominated world order.

These two states also supported many radical leftist revolutionary movements around the world that ideologically opposed the U.S. (Often these movements had good reason to be hostile and revolutionary, frequently due to terrible domestic conditions in their own countries—and under regimes often supported by Washington. Cuba, Chile, and Nicaragua come to mind, although the U.S. eventually made efforts to overthrow them after their revolutions.)

In more recent decades the U.S. applied containment policies to Saddam’s Iraq and to Iran. Containment of North Korea has been a long-standing policy, arguably wiser than most other options. Indeed, might not continued containment of Saddam in Iraq have been the wiser policy compared to the Pandora’s Box unleashed by the U.S. invasion and occupation of that country and its still unfolding wide regional fallout?

But containment also raises some searching questions. One is that once on the U.S. “containment list” it is often hard for a state to ever get off it, short of being targeted by U.S.-sponsored “regime change.” One becomes a “rogue

...
regime.” And the biggest problem with being “contained” is that in some ways it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy of enduring hostility.

Since the end of the Cold War the world has come to look rather different. Among states that have attained reasonably comfortable living standards there is less appetite for confrontation or war. As a result the self-assumed US “burden of global leadership” in war and peace on the international scene is seen as a less desirable commodity than before.

Hence fewer nations and peoples are willing to risk the potential war that US “leadership” might today bring about—in Korea, in Europe vis-a-vis NATO’s confrontations along the Russian borders, in patrolling the straits of Taiwan, or war in Venezuela, or “maintaining the free flow of oil” in the Persian Gulf (when such free flow has almost never been challenged.)

Increasing numbers of international polls over the years suggest that the populations of many countries in the world have now come to view the U.S. itself as one of the biggest threats to global peace. The U.S.—almost continually at war somewhere since the fall of the USSR—increasingly gravitates towards military approaches to handling global crises. Even before Trump’s presidency U.S. diplomacy has grown ever weaker in the face of rising U.S. regional military commands that dwarf the authority and skills of our ambassadors abroad. The commander of US AFRICOM, for example, presides over a massive military budget and effectively represents the dominant voice of U.S. policy in Africa. These institutionalized military resources dwarf the financial and political power of any single U.S. ambassador in any African country. No wonder such maldistribution of U.S. power abroad leads to an enhanced consideration of military solutions over political or diplomatic ones.

In today’s rapidly shifting world scene the US is arguably more upset than any other major country by the nature and speed of strategic global shifts in power. Blame games are rife in Washington. The U.S. had grown used to being in the driver’s seat of the world order that it engineered since the end of World War II. It seems almost inconceivable to most Americans—and to some foreigners who grew up in that same environment—to imagine a world in which the U.S. is no longer the architect or the supreme arbiter of that global order.

This shift thus generates serious anxieties in Washington over its (relatively) declining power. These anxieties lead to a constant need to publicly reinforce at home and abroad the belief that U.S. power has indeed not slipped at all. The U.S. increasingly invokes the argument that military action is required somewhere, if for nothing else than “to maintain U.S. credibility.”

In short, if you don’t act, however unwise such action might be, you might be
broadcasting weakness and no longer representing a credible “commitment.” Hence we move into the seventeenth year of war in Afghanistan. This is all part of the great danger in the dangerous dance of rising and declining powers. The psychology intrinsic to both rising and declining power can be dangerous. As a result the U.S. is treated by outsiders with caution, even as perhaps a snake capable of striking out unexpectedly.

The upshot is widespread global nervousness about U.S. intentions and actions—even before Trump—and their risky or unwanted consequences. And that is why much of the world now thinks in terms of damage limitation when it anticipates more aggressive U.S. policies.

If we were then to settle on any one single description of the psychology that characterizes Chinese and Russian strategy these days it is indeed “containment” of the U.S. The EU too, for example, increasingly believes it needs to take its relations with Russia into its own hands, rather than potentially be led into a military confrontation with Russia via dubious NATO exercises on Moscow’s borders.

Supporting U.S. “credibility” is not high on the European foreign policy wish list (except understandably for those few small neighbors sadly doomed to eternal life next to the Russian Bear.) South Korean leadership too finds playing the U.S. card sometimes diplomatically useful, but posing a huge danger if Washington is actually willing to unleash war—in which Seoul has everything to lose. Indeed, the one state in the world that tends to completely support US military action almost anywhere in the world these days is Israel.

Finally, the concept of “containment” raises a deeper point about the psychology of international relations. How wise is it to maintain lists of enemy states and leaders who require containment? Few other states do so, partially because declaring another state to be an enemy has obvious negative consequences that easily lead to self-fulfilling prophecy. This phenomenon is fundamental to the very psychology of human relationships. If we signal to someone that we consider them a threat or an enemy, the chances are very good that the other party will reciprocate and that mutual relations will predictably deteriorate. That is why shrewd “good neighbor policies” represent more than just naive feel-goodism. Yet the U.S. still spends a great deal of time drawing up and announcing lists of who is an enemy, or a rival, and who must be punished or contained.

For better or for worse, the international order of the late 20th century is gone. In a period of major strategic change the United States seems determined to cling to the status quo that so long favored it. Yet it might be wise for Washington to stop yearning for it—and for all the trouble that now offers. Perhaps rather than the endless search for enemies (“dragons to slay abroad”)

that is the daily stuff of most Washington strategists and think tanks, a
determination to adjust to and find common cause with new world powers would
yield somewhat more desirable results all around.

Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on
the Muslim World; his latest book is “Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and
an American’s crisis of conscience in Pakistan.” (Amazon, Kindle) This article

A Treacherous Crossing

Paul Ryan’s recent trip to the Gulf reiterated the U.S. government’s support of
the Saudi-led assault on Yemen and a bellicose stance towards Iran, which has
created a watershed of human suffering, writes Kathy Kelly.

By Kathy Kelly

On January 23rd an overcrowded smuggling boat capsized off the coast of Aden in
Southern Yemen. Smugglers packed 152 passengers from Somalia and Ethiopia in the
boat and then, while at sea, reportedly pulled guns on the migrants to extort
additional money from them. The boat capsized, according to The Guardian, after
the shooting prompted panic. The death toll, currently 30, is expected to rise.
Dozens of children were on board.

The passengers had already risked the perilous journey from African shores to
Yemen, a dangerous crossing that leaves people vulnerable to false promises,
predatory captors, arbitrary detention and tortuous human rights violations.
Sheer desperation for basic needs has driven hundreds of thousands of African
migrants to Yemen. Many hope, upon arrival, they can eventually travel to
prosperous Gulf countries further north where they might find work and some measure of security. But the desperation and fighting in southern Yemen were horrible enough to convince most migrants that boarded the smuggling boat on January 23rd to try and return to Africa.

Referring to those who drowned when the boat capsized, Amnesty International’s Lynn Maalouf said: “This heart-breaking tragedy underscores, yet again, just how devastating Yemen’s conflict continues to be for civilians. Amid ongoing hostilities and crushing restrictions imposed by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, many people who came to Yemen to flee conflict and repression elsewhere are now being forced yet again to flee in search of safety. Some are dying in the process.”

In 2017, more than 55,000 African migrants arrived in Yemen, many of them teenagers from Somalia and Ethiopia where there are few jobs and severe drought is pushing people to the verge of famine. It’s difficult to arrange or afford transit beyond Yemen. Migrants become trapped in the poorest country in the Arab peninsula, which now, along with several drought-stricken North African countries, faces the worst humanitarian disaster since World War II.

In Yemen, eight million people are on the brink of starvation as conflict-driven near-famine conditions leave millions without food and safe drinking water. Over one million people have suffered from cholera over the past year and more recent reports add a diphtheria outbreak to the horror. Civil war has exacerbated and prolonged the misery while, since March of 2015, a Saudi-led coalition, joined and supported by the U.S., has regularly bombed civilians and infrastructure in Yemen while also maintaining a blockade that prevented transport of desperately needed food, fuel and medicines.

Maalouf called on the international community to “halt arms transfers that could be used in the conflict.” To heed Maalouf’s call, the international community must finally thwart the greed of transnational military contractors that profit from selling billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and other countries in the Saudi-led coalition. For instance, a November, 2017 Reuters report said that Saudi Arabia has agreed to buy about $7 billion worth of precision guided munitions from U.S. defense contractors. The UAE also has purchased billions in American armaments.

Raytheon and Boeing are the companies that will primarily benefit from a deal that was part of a $110 billion weapons agreement coinciding with President Donald Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia in May.

Paul Ryan’s Remarks
Another dangerous crossing happened in the region on January 24th. U.S. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) arrived in Saudi Arabia, along with a congressional delegation, to meet with the monarchy’s King Salman and subsequently with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has orchestrated the Saudi-led coalition’s war in Yemen. Following that visit, Ryan and the delegation met with royals from the UAE.

“So rest assured”, said Ryan, speaking to a gathering of young diplomats in the UAE, “we will not stop until ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates are defeated and no longer a threat to the United States and our allies.

“Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, we are focused on the Iranian threat to regional stability.”

Beyond the simple well-recorded fact of lavish Saudi financial support for Islamist terrorism, Ryan’s remarks overlook the Saudi-led coalition military assaults and “special operations” in Yemen, which the U.S. supports and joins. The war there is arguably undermining effort to combat jihadist groups, which have flourished in the chaos of the war, particularly in the south which is nominally under the control of the government allied to Saudi Arabia.

The Iranian government Ryan denounced does have allies in Yemen and may be smuggling weapons into Yemen, but no one has accused them of supplying the Houthi rebels with cluster bombs, laser-guided missiles and littoral (near-coastal) combat ships to blockade ports vital to famine relief. Iran does not provide in-air refueling for warplanes used in daily bombing runs over Yemen. The U.S. has sold all of these to countries in the Saudi-led coalition which have, in turn, used these weapons to destroy Yemen’s infrastructure as well as create chaos and exacerbate suffering among civilians in Yemen.

Ryan omitted any mention of the starvation, disease, and displacement afflicting people in Yemen. He neglected to mention documented human rights abuses in a network of clandestine prisons operated by the UAE in Yemen’s south. Ryan and the delegation essentially created a smokescreen of concern for human life that conceals the very real terror into which U.S. policies have thrust the people of Yemen and the surrounding region.

Potential starvation of their children terrifies people who can’t acquire food for their families. Those who can’t obtain safe drinking water face nightmarish prospects of dehydration or disease. Persons fleeing bombers, snipers, and armed militias who might arbitrarily detain them shudder in fear as they try to devise escape routes.

Paul Ryan, and the congressional delegation traveling with him, had an
extraordinary opportunity to support humanitarian appeals made by UN officials and human rights organizers.

Instead, Ryan implied the only security concerns worth mentioning are those that threaten people in the U.S. He pledged cooperation with brutally repressive dictators known for egregious human rights violations in their own countries, and in beleaguered Yemen. He blamed the government of Iran for meddling in the affairs of other countries and supplying militias with funds and weapons. U.S. foreign policy is foolishly reduced to “the good guys,” the U.S. and its allies, versus “the bad guy,” – Iran.

The “good guys” shaping and selling U.S. foreign policy and weapon sales exemplify the heartless indifference of the smugglers who gamble human life in exceedingly dangerous crossings.

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