

# The Rise of the New McCarthyism

**From the Archive:** On March 9, 1954, Senate Republicans criticized Joe McCarthy's overreaches and took action to limit his power, marking the end of McCarthyism. On the anniversary of that event, we republish an article on the New McCarthyism by Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry (first published Sept. 26 2017)

Make no mistake about it: the United States has entered an era of a New McCarthyism that blames nearly every political problem on Russia and has begun targeting American citizens who don't go along with this New Cold War propaganda.

A difference, however, from the McCarthyism of the 1950s is that this New McCarthyism has enlisted Democrats, liberals and even progressives in the cause because of their disgust with President Trump; the 1950s version was driven by Republicans and the Right with much of the Left on the receiving end, maligned by the likes of Sen. Joe McCarthy as "un-American" and as Communism's "fellow travelers."

The real winners in this New McCarthyism appear to be the neoconservatives who have leveraged the Democratic/liberal hatred of Trump to draw much of the Left into the political hysteria that sees the controversy over alleged Russian political "meddling" as an opportunity to "get Trump."

Already, the neocons and their allies have exploited the anti-Russian frenzy to extract tens of millions of dollars more from the taxpayers for programs to "combat Russian propaganda," i.e., funding of non-governmental organizations and "scholars" who target dissident Americans for challenging the justifications for this New Cold War.

The Washington Post, which for years has served as the flagship for neocon propaganda, is again charting the new course for America, much as it did in rallying U.S. public backing for the 2003 invasion of Iraq and in building sympathy for abortive "regime change" projects aimed at Syria and Iran. The Post has begun blaming almost every unpleasant development in the world on Russia! Russia! Russia!

For instance, a Post editorial on Tuesday shifted the blame for the anemic victory of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the surprising strength of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) from Merkel's austerity policies, which have caused hardship for much of the working class, or from her open door for Mideast refugees, which has destabilized some working-class neighborhoods, to –

you guessed it – Russia!

The evidence, as usual, is vague and self-interested, but sure to be swallowed by many Democrats and liberals, who hate Russia because they blame it for Trump, and by lots of Republicans and conservatives, who have a residual hatred for Russia left over from the Old Cold War.

The Post cited the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, which has been pushing much of the hysteria about alleged Russian activities on the Internet. The Atlantic Council essentially is NATO's think tank and is financed with money from the U.S. government, Gulf oil states, military contractors, global financial institutions and many other sources which stand to gain directly or indirectly from the expanding U.S. military budget and NATO interventions.

### **Blaming Russia**

In this New Cold War, the Russians get blamed for not only disrupting some neocon "regime change" projects, such as the proxy war in Syria, but also political developments in the West, such as Donald Trump's election and AfD's rise in Germany.

The Atlantic Council's digital lab claimed, according to the Post editorial, that "In the final hours of the [German] campaign, online supporters of the AfD began warning their base of possible election fraud, and the online alarms were 'driven by anonymous troll accounts and boosted by a Russian-language bot-net.'"

Of course, the Post evinces no evidence tying any of this to the Russian government or to President Vladimir Putin. It is the nature of McCarthyism that actual evidence is not required, just heavy breathing and dark suspicions. For those of us who operate Web sites, "trolls" – some volunteers and some professionals – have become a common annoyance and they represent many political outlooks, not just Russian.

Plus, it is standard procedure these days for campaigns to issue last-minute alarms to their supporters about possible election fraud to raise doubts about the results should the outcome be disappointing.

The U.S. government has engaged in precisely this strategy around the world, having pro-U.S. parties not only complain about election fraud but to take to the streets in violent protests to impugn the legitimacy of election outcomes. That U.S. strategy has been applied to places such as Ukraine (the Orange Revolution in 2004); Iran (the Green Revolution in 2009); Russia (the Snow Revolution in 2011); and many other locations.

Pre-election alerts also have become a feature in U.S. elections, even in 2016 when both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton raised questions about the legitimacy of the balloting, albeit for different reasons.

Yet, instead of seeing the AfD maneuver as a typical ploy by a relatively minor party – and the German election outcome as an understandable reflection of voter discontent and weariness over Merkel's three terms as Chancellor – the Atlantic Council and the Post see Russians under every bed and particularly Putin.

### **Loving to Hate Putin**

In the world of neocon propaganda, Putin has become the great *bête noire*, since he has frustrated a variety of neocon schemes. He helped head off a major U.S. military strike against Syria in 2013; he aided President Obama in achieving the Iran nuclear agreement in 2014-15; Putin opposed and – to a degree – frustrated the neocon-supported coup in Ukraine in 2014; and he ultimately supplied the air power that defeated neocon-backed “rebel” forces in Syria in 2015-17.

So, the Post and the neocons want Putin gone – and they have used gauzy allegations about “Russian meddling” in the U.S. and other elections as the new propaganda theme to justify destabilizing Russia with economic sanctions and, if possible, engineering another “regime change” project in Moscow.

None of this is even secret. Carl Gershman, the neocon president of the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy, publicly proclaimed the goal of ousting Putin in an op-ed in The Washington Post, writing: “The United States has the power to contain and defeat this danger. The issue is whether we can summon the will to do so.”

But the way neocon propaganda works is that the U.S. and its allies are always the victims of some nefarious enemy who must be thwarted to protect all that is good in the world. In other words, even as NED and other U.S.-funded operations take aim at Putin and Russia, Russia and Putin must be transformed into the aggressors.

“Mr. Putin would like nothing better than to generate doubts, fog, cracks and uncertainty around the German pillar of Europe,” the Post editorial said. “He relishes infiltrating chaos and mischief into open societies. In this case, supporting the far-right AfD is extraordinarily cynical, given how many millions of Russians died to defeat the fascists seven decades ago.”

Not to belabor the point but there is no credible evidence that Putin did any of this. There is a claim by the virulently anti-Russian Atlantic Council that some “anonymous troll accounts” promoted some AfD complaint about possible voter fraud and that it was picked up by “a Russian-language bot-net.” Even if that is

true – and the Atlantic Council is far from an objective source – where is the link to Putin?

Not everything that happens in Russia, a nation of 144 million people, is ordered by Putin. But the Post would have you believe that it is. It is the centerpiece of this neocon conspiracy theory.

### **Silencing Dissent**

Similarly, any American who questions this propaganda immediately is dismissed as a “Kremlin stooge” or a “Russian propagandist,” another ugly campaign spearheaded by the Post and the neocons. Again, no evidence is required, just some analysis that what you’re saying somehow parallels something Putin has said.

On Tuesday, in what amounted to a companion piece for the editorial, a Post article again pushed the unproven suspicions about “Russian operatives” buying \$100,000 in Facebook ads from 2015 into 2017 to supposedly influence U.S. politics. Once again, no evidence required.

In the article, the Post also reminds its readers that Moscow has a history of focusing on social inequities in the U.S., which gets us back to the comparisons between the Old McCarthyism and the new.

Yes, it’s true that the Soviet Union denounced America’s racial segregation and cited that ugly feature of U.S. society in expressing solidarity with the American civil rights movement and national liberation struggles in Africa. It’s also true that American Communists collaborated with the domestic civil rights movement to promote racial integration.

That was a key reason why J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI targeted Martin Luther King Jr. and other African-American leaders – because of their association with known or suspected Communists. (Similarly, the Reagan administration resisted support for Nelson Mandela because his African National Congress accepted Communist support in its battle against South Africa’s Apartheid white-supremacist regime.)

Interestingly, one of the arguments from liberal national Democrats in opposing segregation in the 1960s was that the repression of American blacks undercut U.S. diplomatic efforts to develop allies in Africa. In other words, Soviet and Communist criticism of America’s segregation actually helped bring about the demise of that offensive system.

Yet, King’s association with alleged Communists remained a talking point of die-hard segregationists even after his assassination when they opposed creating a national holiday in his honor in the 1980s.

These parallels between the Old McCarthyism and the New McCarthyism are implicitly acknowledged in the Post's news article on Tuesday, which cites Putin's criticism of police killings of unarmed American blacks as evidence that he is meddling in U.S. politics.

"Since taking office, Putin has on occasion sought to spotlight racial tensions in the United States as a means of shaping perceptions of American society," the article states. "Putin injected himself in 2014 into the race debate after protests broke out in Ferguson, Mo., over the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an African American, by a white police officer.

"'Do you believe that everything is perfect now from the point of view of democracy in the United States?' Putin told CBS's '60 Minutes' program. 'If everything was perfect, there wouldn't be the problem of Ferguson. There would be no abuse by the police. But our task is to see all these problems and respond properly.'"

The Post's speculative point seems to be that Putin's response included having "Russian operatives" buy some ads on Facebook to exploit these racial tensions, but there is no evidence to support that conspiracy theory.

However, as this anti-Russia hysteria spreads, we may soon see Americans who also protest the police killing of unarmed black men denounced as "Putin's fellow-travelers," much as King and other civil rights leaders were smeared as "Communist dupes."

### **Ignoring Reality**

So, instead of Democrats and Chancellor Merkel looking in the mirror and seeing the real reasons why many white working-class voters are turning toward "populist" and "extremist" alternatives, they can simply blame Putin and continue a crackdown on Internet-based dissent as the work of "Russian operatives."

Already, under the guise of combating "Russian propaganda" and "fake news," Google, Facebook and other tech giants have begun introducing algorithms to hunt down and marginalize news that challenges official U.S. government narratives on hot-button issues such as Ukraine and Syria. Again, no evidence is required, just the fact that Putin may have said something similar.

As Democrats, liberals and even some progressives join in this Russia-gate hysteria – driven by their hatred of Donald Trump and his supposedly "fascistic" tendencies – they might want to consider whom they've climbed into bed with and what these neocons have in mind for the future.

Arguably, if fascism or totalitarianism comes to the United States, it is more likely to arrive in the guise of “protecting democracy” from Russia or another foreign adversary than from a reality-TV clown like Donald Trump.

The New McCarthyism with its Orwellian-style algorithms might seem like a clever way to neutralize (or maybe even help oust) Trump, but – long after Trump is gone – a structure for letting the neocons and the mainstream media monopolize American political debate might be a far greater threat to both democracy and peace.

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

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