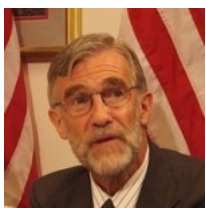


RAY McGOVERN: Unaccountable Media Faced with Dilemma in Next Phase of Deep State-gate

Now that the media has been exposed for wrongly siding with the intelligence agencies, how will it handle Devin Nunes's criminal referrals in Deep State-gate?, asks Ray McGovern.

By **Ray McGovern**

Special to Consortium News



Readers of *The Washington Post* on Monday were treated to more of the same from editorial page chief Fred Hiatt. Hiatt, who won his spurs by promoting misleading “intelligence” about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and suffered no consequences, is at it again.

This time he is trying to adjust to the fading prospect of a Deus ex Mueller to lessen Hiatt's disgrace for being among the most shameless in promoting the Trump-Russia collusion narrative.

He is not giving up. When you are confident you will not lose your job so long as you adhere to the agenda of the growing Military-Industrial-Congressional-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think-Tank complex (MICIMATT if you will), you need not worry about being a vanguard for the corporate media. It is almost as though Hiatt is a tenured professor in an endowed chair honoring Judith Miller, the *New York Times* reporter who perhaps did most to bring us Iraqi WMD.

In his Monday column Hiatt warned: “Trump was elected with the assistance of Russian spies and trolls, which he openly

sought and celebrated. But he did not (or so we are told) secretly conspire with them.” In effect, Hiatt is saying, *soto voce*: “Fie on former (now-de-canonized) Saint Robert of Mueller; we at the *Post* and our colleagues at *The New York Times*, CNN et al. know better, just because we’ve been saying so for more than two years.”

Times executive editor Dean Baquet said, about the backlash to the *Times*’ “collusion” coverage: “I have no regrets. It’s not our job to determine whether or not there was illegality.” CNN President Jeff Zucker said: “We are not investigators. We are journalists.” (One wonders what investigative journalist Bob Parry, who uncovered much of Iran-Contra and founded this site, would have thought of that last one.)

Going in Circles

Hiatt’s circular reasoning is all too familiar. It is the kind a former director of national intelligence excels at when he’s not lying, sometimes under oath. For instance, James Clapper was hawking his memoir at the Carnegie Endowment last year when he was confronted by unexpectedly direct questions from the audience.

Asked about the misleadingly labeled, rump “Intelligence Community Assessment” (ICA) of Jan. 6, 2017, which he orchestrated, and which blamed Russia for interfering in the 2016 election, Clapper gave an ipse dixit response: The ICA simply had to be correct because that’s what he had told President Barack Obama and President-elect Donald Trump.

In fact, that “Intelligence Community Assessment” stands out as the most irresponsible, evidence-free and at the same

time consequential crock of intelligence analysis since the National Intelligence Estimate of Oct. 2002 claimed there was WMD in Iraq. Recall that that one was shaped by out-and-out fraudulent intelligence to “justify” an attack on Iraq six months later.

Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), as chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, described the main thrust of the committee’s five-year bipartisan report, stating, “In making the case for war, the [Bush] Administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent.”

Hiatt was one of the media’s major offenders, feeding on what the Cheney/Bush folks told him. When no “weapons of mass destruction” were found in Iraq, Hiatt conceded during an interview with *The Columbia Journalism Review* that, “If you look at the editorials we write running up [to the war], we state as flat fact that he [Saddam Hussein] has weapons of mass destruction ... If that’s not true, it would have been better not to say it.” [CJR, March/April 2004] As Parry wryly observed at the time in a piece calling for Hiatt’s dismissal, “Yes, that is a common principle of journalism, that if something isn’t real, we’re not supposed to confidently declare that it is.”

The Morning After

The media set the prevailing tone the day after the ICA was published. The banner headline atop page one of the *Times* read: “Putin Led Scheme to Aid Trump, Report Says.” That put in motion more than two years of Dick Cheney-like chicanery in the media.

Buried inside the *Times* that same day was a cautionary paragraph written by staff reporter Scott Shane who noted, "What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the [three] agencies' claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. That is a significant omission." Indeed it was; and remains so.

(Sadly, Shane was then given his marching orders and fell in line with many other formerly reputable journalists in what has been the most miserable performance by the mainstream media since they helped pave the way for war on Iraq.)

Clapper and Hiatt are kindred souls when it comes to the "profound effect" of Russian election interference. In his column, Hiatt asserted as flat fact that: "Trump was elected with the assistance of Russian spies and trolls ..." At the Carnegie event in November, Clapper opined:

"As a private citizen, understanding the magnitude of what the Russians did and the number of citizens in our country they reached and the different mechanisms that, by which they reached them, to me it stretches credulity to think they didn't have a profound impact on election on the outcome of the election."

Hiatt: Captain of Cheerleaders

Hiatt emulated peppy, preppy cheerleader George W. Bush in leading Americans to believe that war on Iraq was necessary. Appointed *Washington Post* editorial page editor in 2000, he still runs the page – having not been held accountable for gross misfeasance, if not malfeasance, on Iraq. Shades of

Clapper, whom President Obama allowed to stay on as director of national intelligence for three and a half years after Clapper lied under oath to the Senate Intelligence Committee about NSA surveillance of U.S. persons.

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That Obama appointed Clapper to lead the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election speaks volumes. Clapper claims to have expertise on Russia and has made no effort to disguise his views on “the Russians.” Two years ago, he told Chuck Todd on *Meet the Press*:

“... in context with everything else we knew the Russians were doing to interfere with the election, and just the historical practices of the Russians, who are typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique ... we were concerned.”

It beggars belief that Obama could have been unaware of Clapper’s bizarre views on “the Russians.” Clearly, Obama was bowing yet again to pressure from powerful Deep State actors arguing that Clapper was the ideal man for the job.

And there is now documentary evidence that, from the Deep State point of view, indeed he was. In the text exchanges between discredited FBI sleuth Peter Strzok and his girlfriend, Lisa Page, a lawyer working for the FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, it seems clear that Obama wanted to be kept apprised of the FBI’s behind-the-scenes

machinations. In a Sept. 2, 2016 text to Strzok, Page writes that she was preparing talking points because the president “wants to know everything we’re doing.”

A Sweaty Pate?

Clapper is aware now that he is going to have to sweat it out. He may believe he can ignore White House press secretary Sarah Sanders, who has said that he and other former intelligence officials should be investigated after special counsel Mueller did not establish collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia.

But recent statements by members of the House and Senate intelligence committees cannot be dismissed so easily. In his media appearances, the supremely confident, hero-of-many-liberals Clapper has been replaced by a squirming (but-Obama-made-me-do-it) messenger of facts. He may find it harder this time to avoid being held accountable.

Devin Nunes (R-CA), the House Intelligence Committee ranking member, has gone on the offensive, writing Friday that committee Republicans “will soon be submitting criminal referrals on numerous individuals involved ... in the abuse of intelligence for political purposes. These people must be held to account to prevent similar abuses from occurring in the future.”

On Sunday, Nunes told Fox News he’s preparing to send eight criminal referrals to the Department of Justice this week concerning alleged misconduct during the Trump-Russia investigation. This will include leaks of “highly classified material” and conspiracies to lie to Congress and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court. It’s no-

holds-barred for Nunes, who has begun to talk publicly about prison for those whom DOJ might indict and bring to trial.

Nunes's full-speed-ahead offensive is being widely ignored in "mainstream" media (with the exception of Fox), giving the media the quality of "The Dog That Did Not Bark in the Night." The media has put its ducks in a row, such as they are, to try to rip Attorney General William Barr apart this coming week when he releases the redacted text of the Mueller report that so disappointed the Democratic Party/media coalition.

But how will they cover criminal referrals of the "heroes" who have leaked so much to them, providing grist for their Russia-gate mill? They will likely find a way, eventually, but the media silence about Nunes is depriving oxygen to the story.

On Sunday, Nunes said,

"They [the Democrats] have lied multiple times to the American people. All you have to do is look at their phony memos. They have had the full support of the media, 90 percent of the media in this country. They all have egg on their face. And so the fact of the matter remains, is there going to be – is justice going to be served or is justice going to be denied? And that's why we're sending over these criminal referrals."

Nunes is, of course, trying to project an image of confidence, but he knows he is fighting uphill. There is no more formidable foe than the MICIMATT, with the media playing *the* crucial role in these circumstances. How will

the American people be able to see egg on anyone's face if the "mainstream media" find ways to wipe it off and turn the tables on Nunes, as they have successfully done in the past?

Though the Democrats now control the House, they have lost some key inside-the-Deep-State allies.

By all appearances, House Democrats still seem to be banking on help from the usual suspects still on duty in the FBI, CIA, and the Justice Department. Lacking that they seem ready to go down with the Schiff—Rep. Adam Schiff of California, perhaps the most virulent Russia-gater that there's been.

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Clapper is no long in position to help from the inside, and there's no knowing how his sleepy replacement, Dan Coates, will react, if and when he wakes up long enough to learn chapter and verse about the machinations and dramatic personae of 2016.

Of course, there is a new sheriff in town running the Department of Justice. Attorney General William Barr, for better or ill, is a far cry from Jeff Sessions, who let himself be diddled into recusing himself. He's not Rod Rosenstein either, whose involvement in this affair may have already earned him a prominent place on Nunes's list of referrals.

What Did Obama Know, and When Did He Know It?

BREAKING: A high-level source tells me it was Brennan who insisted that the unverified and fake Steele dossier be included in the Intelligence Report.. Brennan should be asked to testify under oath in Congress ASAP.

On top of this, Sen. Rand Paul (R, KY) has called for an investigation into the origins of Mueller’s probe, including on the dicey question of how witting President Obama was of the Deep State chicanery during the last months of his administration. Page did tell Strzok in that Sept. 2, 2016 text that the president “wants to know everything we’re doing.”

Sen. Paul has also tweeted information from “a high-level source” that it was former CIA Director John Brennan who “insisted that the unverified and fake Steele dossier be included in the Intelligence Report... Brennan should be asked to testify under oath in Congress ASAP.”

Vying for Media Attention

If, as expected, Nunes discloses the names of those being criminally referred to DOJ, and Barr releases a redacted text of the Mueller report, the “mainstream” media will have a fresh challenge on their hands. The odds would seem to favor the media covering the Democrats’ predictable criticism of Barr – and perhaps even of Mueller, now that he has been defrocked.

The *Post*’s Hiatt should be counted on, as always, to play a leading role.

At the same time, there are signs the America people are tired of this. It would be difficult though for the media to avoid reporting on criminal referrals of very senior law enforcement and intelligence officials. Given the media’s obvious preference for siding with the intelligence agencies

and reporting on Russia-gate rather than Deep-State-gate, it would be even harder for the media to explain why these officials would be in trouble.

Things appear to be unraveling but, as always, much will depend on whether the media opts to remain the “dog that didn’t bark,” and succeeds again in hoodwinking too many people.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years and prepared the President’s Daily Brief for Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. He is on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

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Consortium News’ Record on Russia-gate—How CN Covered the ‘Scandal’: No. 6—‘How the Department of Homeland Security Created a Deceptive Tale of Russia Hacking US Voter Sites’

The narrative about Russian cyberattacks on American election infrastructure is a self-interested abuse of power by DHS based on distortion of evidence, wrote Gareth Porter on Aug. 28, 2018.

By Gareth Porter

Special to Consortium News



The narrative of Russian intelligence attacking state and local election boards and threatening the integrity of U.S. elections has achieved near-universal acceptance by media and political elites. And now it has been accepted by the Trump administration's intelligence chief, Dan Coats, as well.

But the real story behind that narrative, recounted here for the first time, reveals that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created and nurtured an account that was grossly and deliberately deceptive.

DHS compiled an intelligence report suggesting hackers linked to the Russian government *could* have targeted voter-related websites in many states and then leaked a sensational story of Russian attacks on those sites without the qualifications that would have revealed a different story. When state election officials began asking questions, they discovered that the DHS claims were false and, in at least one case, laughable.

The National Security Agency and special counsel Robert Mueller's investigating team have also claimed evidence that Russian military intelligence was behind election infrastructure hacking, but on closer examination, those claims turn out to be speculative and misleading as well. Mueller's indictment of 12 GRU military intelligence officers does not cite any violations of U.S. election laws though it claims Russia interfered with the 2016 election.

A Sensational Story

On Sept. 29, 2016, a few weeks after the hacking of election-related websites in Illinois and Arizona, ABC News carried a sensational headline: “Russian Hackers Targeted Nearly Half of States’ Voter Registration Systems, Successfully Infiltrated 4.” The [story](#) itself reported that “more than 20 state election systems” had been hacked, and four states had been “breached” by hackers suspected of working for the Russian government. The story cited only sources “knowledgeable” about the matter, indicating that those who were pushing the story were eager to hide the institutional origins of the information.

Behind that sensational story was a federal agency seeking to establish its leadership within the national security state apparatus on cybersecurity, despite its limited resources for such responsibility. In late summer and fall 2016, the Department of Homeland Security was maneuvering politically to designate state and local voter registration databases and voting systems as “critical infrastructure.” Such a designation would make voter-related networks and websites under the protection a “priority sub-sector” in the DHS “National Infrastructure Protection Plan, which already included 16 such sub-sectors.

DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson and other senior DHS officials [consulted with many state election officials](#) in the hope of getting their approval for such a designation. Meanwhile, the DHS was finishing an intelligence report that would both highlight the Russian threat to U.S. election infrastructure and the role DHS could play in protecting it, thus creating political impetus to the designation. But several secretaries of state—the officials in charge of the election

infrastructure in their state—strongly opposed the designation that Johnson wanted.

On Jan. 6, 2017—the same day three intelligence agencies released a joint “assessment” on Russian interference in the election—Johnson announced the designation anyway.

Media stories continued to reflect the official assumption that cyber attacks on state election websites were Russian-sponsored. Stunningly, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in December 2016 that DHS was itself behind hacking attempts of Georgia’s election database.

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The facts surrounding the two actual breaches of state websites in Illinois and Arizona, as well as the broader context of cyberattacks on state websites, didn’t support that premise at all.

In July, Illinois discovered an intrusion into its voter registration website and the theft of personal information on as many as 200,000 registered voters. (The 2018 Mueller indictments of GRU officers would unaccountably put the figure at 500,000.) Significantly, however, the hackers only had copied the information and had left it unchanged in the database.

That was a crucial clue to the motive behind the hack. DHS Assistant Secretary for Cyber Security and Communications Andy Ozment told a Congressional committee in late September 2016 that the fact hackers hadn’t tampered with the voter data indicated that the aim of the theft was not to

influence the electoral process. Instead, it was “possibly for the purpose of selling personal information.” Ozment was contradicting the line that already was being taken on the Illinois and Arizona hacks by the National Protection and Programs Directorate and other senior DHS officials.

In an interview with me last year, Ken Menzel, the legal adviser to the Illinois secretary of state, confirmed what Ozment had testified. “Hackers have been trying constantly to get into it since 2006,” Menzel said, adding that they had been probing every other official Illinois database with such personal data for vulnerabilities as well. “Every governmental database—driver’s licenses, health care, you name it—has people trying to get into it,” said Menzel.

In the other successful cyberattack on an electoral website, hackers had acquired the username and password for the voter database Arizona used during the summer, as Arizona Secretary of State Michele Reagan learned from the FBI. But the reason that it had become known, according to Reagan in an [interview with Mother Jones](#), was that the login and password had shown up for sale on the dark web—the network of websites used by cyber criminals to sell stolen data and other illicit wares.

Furthermore, the FBI had told her that the effort to penetrate the database was the work of a “known hacker” whom the FBI had monitored “frequently” in the past. Thus, there were reasons to believe that both Illinois and Arizona hacking incidents were linked to criminal hackers seeking information they could sell for profit.

Meanwhile, the FBI was unable to come up with any theory

about what Russia might have intended to do with voter registration data such as what was taken in the Illinois hack. When FBI Counterintelligence official Bill Priestap was asked in a June 2017 hearing how Moscow might use such data, his answer revealed that he had no clue: “They took the data to understand what it consisted of,” said the struggling Priestap, “so they can affect better understanding and plan accordingly in regards to possibly impacting future elections by knowing what is there and studying it.”

The inability to think of any plausible way for the Russian government to use such data explains why DHS and the intelligence community adopted the argument, as senior DHS officials Samuel Liles and Jeanette Manfra put it, that the hacks “could be intended or used to undermine public confidence in electoral processes and potentially the outcome.” But such a strategy could not have had any effect without a decision by DHS and the U.S. intelligence community to assert publicly that the intrusions and other scanning and probing were Russian operations, despite the absence of hard evidence. So DHS and other agencies were consciously sowing public doubts about U.S. elections that they were attributing to Russia.

DHS Reveals Its Self-Serving Methodology

In June 2017, Liles and Manfra testified to the Senate Intelligence Committee that an October 2016 DHS intelligence report had listed election systems in 21 states that were “potentially targeted by Russian government cyber actors.”

They revealed that the sensational story leaked to the press in late September 2016 had been based on a draft of

the DHS report. And more importantly, their use of the phrase “potentially targeted” showed that they were arguing only that the cyber incidents it listed were *possible* indications of a Russian attack on election infrastructure.

Furthermore, Liles and Manfra said the DHS report had “catalogued suspicious activity we observed on state government networks across the country,” which had been “largely based on suspected malicious tactics and infrastructure.” They were referring to a list of eight IP addresses an August 2016 FBI “flash alert” had obtained from the Illinois and Arizona intrusions, which DHS and FBI had not been able to attribute to the Russian government.

The DHS officials recalled that the DHS began to “receive reports of cyber-enabled scanning and probing of election-related infrastructure in some states, some of which appeared to originate from servers operated by a Russian company.” Six of the eight IP addresses in the FBI alert were indeed traced to King Servers, owned by a young Russian living in Siberia. But as DHS cyber specialists knew well, the country of ownership of the server doesn’t prove anything about who was responsible for hacking: As cybersecurity expert Jeffrey Carr pointed out, the Russian hackers who coordinated the Russian attack on Georgian government websites in 2008 used a Texas-based company as the hosting provider.

The cybersecurity firm ThreatConnect noted in 2016 that one of the other two IP addresses had hosted a Russian criminal market for five months in 2015. But that was not a serious indicator, either. Private IP addresses are reassigned

frequently by server companies, so there is not a necessary connection between users of the same IP address at different times.

The DHS methodology of selecting reports of cyber incidents involving election-related websites as “potentially targeted” by Russian government-sponsored hackers was based on no objective evidence whatever. The resulting list appears to have included any one of the eight addresses as well as any attack or “scan” on a public website that could be linked in any way to elections.

This methodology conveniently ignored the fact that criminal hackers were constantly trying to get access to every database in those same state, country and municipal systems. Not only for Illinois and Arizona officials, but state electoral officials.

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In fact, 14 of the 21 states on the list experienced nothing more than the routine scanning that occurs every day, according to the Senate Intelligence Committee. Only six involved what was referred to as a “malicious access attempt,” meaning an effort to penetrate the site. One of them was in Ohio, where the attempt to find a weakness lasted less than a second and was considered by DHS’s internet security contractor a “non-event” at the time.

State Officials Force DHS to Tell the Truth

For a year, DHS did not inform the 21 states on its list that their election boards or other election-related sites

had been attacked in a presumed Russian-sponsored operation. The excuse DHS officials cited was that it could not reveal such sensitive intelligence to state officials without security clearances. But the reluctance to reveal the details about each case was certainly related to the reasonable expectation that states would publicly challenge their claims, creating a potential serious embarrassment.

On Sept. 22, 2017, DHS notified 21 states about the cyber incidents that had been included in the October 2016 report. The public announcement of the notifications said DHS had notified each chief election officer of “any potential targeting we were aware of in their state leading up to the 2016 election.” The phrase “potential targeting” again telegraphed the broad and vague criterion DHS had adopted, but it was ignored in media stories.

But the notifications, which took the form of phone calls lasting only a few minutes, provided a minimum of information and failed to convey the significant qualification that DHS was only suggesting targeting as a possibility. “It was a couple of guys from DHS reading from a script,” recalled one state election official who asked not to be identified. “They said [our state] was targeted by Russian government cyber actors.”

A number of state election officials recognized that this information conflicted with what they knew. And if they complained, they got a more accurate picture from DHS. After Wisconsin Secretary of State Michael Haas demanded further clarification, he got an email [response from a DHS official](#) with a different account. “[B]ased on our external analysis,” the official wrote, “the WI [Wisconsin] IP

address affected belongs to the WI Department of Workforce Development, not the Elections Commission.”

California Secretary of State Alex Padilla said DHS initially had notified his office “that Russian cyber actors ‘scanned’ California’s Internet-facing systems in 2016, including Secretary of State websites.” But under further questioning, DHS admitted to Padilla that what the hackers had targeted was the California Department of Technology’s network.

Texas Secretary of State Rolando Pablos and Oklahoma Election Board spokesman Byron Dean also denied that any state website with voter- or election-related information had been targeted, and Pablos demanded that DHS “correct its erroneous notification.”

Despite these embarrassing admissions, a statement issued by DHS spokesman Scott McConnell on Sept. 28, 2017 said the DHS “stood by” its assessment that 21 states “were the target of Russian government cyber actors seeking vulnerabilities and access to U.S. election infrastructure.” The statement retreated from the previous admission that the notifications involved “potential targeting,” but it also revealed for the first time that DHS had defined “targeting” very broadly indeed.

It said the category included “some cases” involving “direct scanning of targeted systems” but also cases in which “malicious actors scanned for vulnerabilities in networks that may be connected to those systems or have similar characteristics in order to gain information about how to later penetrate their target.”

It is true that hackers may scan one website in the hope of learning something that could be useful for penetrating another website, as cybersecurity expert Prof. Herbert S. Lin of Stanford University explained to me in an interview. But including any incident in which that motive was theoretical meant that any state website could be included on the DHS list, without any evidence it was related to a political motive.

Arizona's further exchanges with DHS revealed just how far DHS had gone in exploiting that escape clause in order to add more states to its "targeted" list. Arizona Secretary of State Michele Reagan tweeted that DHS had informed her that "the Russian government targeted our voter registration systems in 2016." After meeting with DHS officials in early October 2017, however, Reagan [wrote in a blog post](#) that DHS "could not confirm that any attempted Russian government hack occurred whatsoever to any election-related system in Arizona, much less the statewide voter registration database."

What the DHS said in that meeting, as Reagan's spokesman Matt Roberts recounted to me, is even more shocking. "When we pressed DHS on what exactly was actually targeted, they said it was the Phoenix public library's computers system," Roberts recalled.

In April 2018, a CBS News "60 Minutes" segment reported that the October 2016 DHS intelligence report had included the Russian government hacking of a "county database in Arizona." Responding to that CBS report, an unidentified "senior Trump administration official" who was well-briefed on the DHS report [told Reuters](#) that "media reports" on the

issue had sometimes “conflated criminal hacking with Russian government activity,” and that the cyberattack on the target in Arizona “was not perpetrated by the Russian government.”

NSA Finds a GRU Election Plot

NSA intelligence analysts claimed in a May 2017 analysis to have documented an effort by Russian military intelligence (GRU) to hack into U.S. electoral institutions. In an intelligence analysis obtained by *The Intercept* and reported in June 2017, NSA analysts wrote that the GRU had sent a spear-phishing email—one with an attachment designed to look exactly like one from a trusted institution but that contains malware design to get control of the computer—to a vendor of voting machine technology in Florida. The hackers then designed a fake web page that looked like that of the vendor. They sent it to a list of 122 email addresses NSA believed to be local government organizations that probably were “involved in the management of voter registration systems.” The objective of the new spear-phishing campaign, the NSA suggested, was to get control of their computers through malware to carry out the exfiltration of voter-related data.

But the authors of *The Intercept* story failed to notice crucial details in the NSA report that should have tipped them off that the attribution of the spear-phishing campaign to the GRU was based merely on the analysts’ own judgment—and that their judgment was faulty.

The Intercept article included a color-coded chart from the original NSA report that provides crucial information

missing from the text of the NSA analysis itself as well as *The Intercept's* account. The chart clearly distinguishes between the elements of the NSA's account of the alleged Russian scheme that were based on "Confirmed Information" (shown in green) and those that were based on "Analyst Judgment" (shown in yellow). The connection between the "operator" of the spear-phishing campaign the report describes and an unidentified entity confirmed to be under the authority of the GRU is shown as a yellow line, meaning that it is based on "Analyst Judgment" and labeled "probably."

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A major criterion for any attribution of a hacking incident is whether there are strong similarities to previous hacks identified with a specific actor. But the chart concedes that "several characteristics" of the campaign depicted in the report distinguish it from "another major GRU spear-phishing program," the identity of which has been redacted from the report.

The NSA chart refers to evidence that the same operator also had launched spear-phishing campaigns on other web-based mail applications, including the Russian company "Mail.ru." Those targets suggest that the actors were more likely Russian criminal hackers rather than Russian military intelligence.

Even more damaging to its case, the NSA reports that the same operator who had sent the spear-phishing emails also had sent a test email to the "American Samoa Election Office." Criminal hackers could have been interested in

personal information from the database associated with that office. But the idea that Russian military intelligence was planning to hack the voter rolls in American Samoa, an unincorporated U.S. territory with 56,000 inhabitants who can't even vote in U.S. presidential elections, is plainly risible.

The Mueller Indictment's Sleight of Hand

The Mueller indictment of GRU officers released on July 13 appeared at first reading to offer new evidence of Russian government responsibility for the hacking of Illinois and other state voter-related websites. A close analysis of the relevant paragraphs, however, confirms the lack of any real intelligence supporting that claim.

Mueller accused two GRU officers of working with unidentified "co-conspirators" on those hacks. But the only alleged evidence linking the GRU to the operators in the hacking incidents is the claim that a GRU official named Anatoly Kovalev and "co-conspirators" deleted search history related to the preparation for the hack after the FBI issued its alert on the hacking identifying the IP address associated with it in August 2016.

A careful reading of the relevant paragraphs shows that the claim is spurious. The first sentence in Paragraph 71 says that both Kovalev and his "co-conspirators" researched domains used by U.S. state boards of elections and other entities "for website vulnerabilities." The second says Kovalev and "co-conspirators" had searched for "state political party email addresses, including filtered queries for email addresses listed on state Republican Party

websites.”

Searching for website vulnerabilities would be evidence of intent to hack them, of course, but searching Republican Party websites for email addresses is hardly evidence of any hacking plan. And Paragraph 74 states that Kovalev “deleted his search history”—not the search histories of any “co-conspirator”—thus revealing that there were no joint searches and suggesting that the subject Kovalev had searched was Republican Party emails. So any deletion by Kovalev of his search history after the FBI alert would not be evidence of his involvement in the hacking of the Illinois election board website.

With this rhetorical misdirection unraveled, it becomes clear that the repetition in every paragraph of the section of the phrase “Kovalev and his co-conspirators” was aimed at giving the reader the impression the accusation is based on hard intelligence about possible collusion that doesn’t exist.

The Need for Critical Scrutiny of DHS Cyberattack Claims

The DHS campaign to establish its role as the protector of U.S. electoral institutions is not the only case in which that agency has used a devious means to sow fear of Russian cyberattacks. In December 2016, DHS and the FBI published a long list of IP addresses as indicators of possible Russian cyberattacks. But most of the addresses on the list had no connection with Russian intelligence, as former U.S. government cyber-warfare officer Rob Lee [found on close examination.](#)

When someone at the Burlington, Vt., Electric Company

spotted one of those IP addresses on one of its computers, the company reported it to DHS. But instead of quietly investigating the address to verify that it was indeed an indicator of Russian intrusion, DHS immediately informed *The Washington Post*. The result was a sensational story that Russian hackers had penetrated the U.S. power grid. In fact, the IP address in question was merely Yahoo's email server, as Rob Lee told me, and the computer had not even been connected to the power grid. The threat to the power grid was a tall tale created by a DHS official, which the Post had to embarrassingly retract.

Since May 2017, DHS, in partnership with the FBI, has begun an even more ambitious campaign to focus public attention on what it says are Russian "targeting" and "intrusions" into "major, high value assets that operate components of our Nation's critical infrastructure", including energy, nuclear, water, aviation and critical manufacturing sectors.

Any evidence of such an intrusion must be taken seriously by the U.S. government and reported by news media. But in light of the DHS record on alleged threats to election infrastructure and the Burlington power grid, and its well-known ambition to assume leadership over cyber protection, the public interest demands that the news media examine DHS claims about Russian cyber threats far more critically than they have up to now.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. His latest book is *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*.

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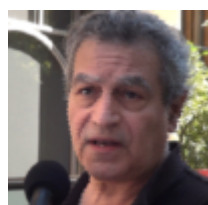
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Gravel Declares Presidential Bid to Highlight Anti-Interventionism and Direct Democracy

The former U.S. senator, 89, who read the Pentagon Papers into the Congressional record, and ran for president in 2008, says he's not entering to win but to inject crucial issues into Democratic primary debates.

By **Joe Lauria**

Special to Consortium News



Former U.S. Senator Mike Gravel formally declared his bid on Monday for the Democratic Party's 2020 nomination for president in an effort to introduce into the primary debates critical discussion of U.S. interventionism abroad and a system for direct democracy at home.

Gravel, who is 89 years old, says he's not in it to win but to spur debate on what he sees as the two most vital issues facing the United States: ending militarism and expanding democracy beyond representative government.

Serving as a U.S. senator from Alaska between 1969 and 1981, Gravel became best known for having read the highly-classified Pentagon Papers into the Congressional Record at a Senate subcommittee meeting that he chaired on June 29,

1971. Several other senators had turned down copies of it from whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg.

Gravel had immunity to reveal classified information in the midst of a legislative act as laid out in [Article 1, Section 6](#) of the U.S. Constitution, the so-called speech or debate clause. It is rarely invoked by members of Congress to make public secret evidence of governmental criminality or abuse.

The Pentagon Papers, a secret Defense Department study of the Vietnam War, made clear that U.S. administrations had kept the war going while lying to the American people about the chances of victory in Southeast Asia.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled the next day, on June 30, 1971, that the Nixon Justice Department had violated the First Amendment of the Constitution by exercising “prior restraint,” that is, ordering a news organization in advance not to publish. The court’s decision was a victory for *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and for press freedom. But while the court said the government could not tell a newspaper not to publish classified information, the majority also ruled that *after* publication the state could prosecute a media outlet for having done so.

Gravel begins reading the Papers at the 7 minute mark:

While Gravel only faced possible censure or expulsion from the Senate (neither happened), he became liable for prosecution when he later had the Papers published in four volumes by Beacon Press in Boston. The FBI investigated the publisher.

While Nixon chose not to go after Gravel, a grand jury was

empaneled in Boston to indict two *New York Times* reporters who had worked on the Papers' story. The case collapsed before reaching an indictment when Ellsberg's trial for stealing the documents ended in a mistrial in part because of warrantless wiretapping against him. The *Times* reporters asked the prosecutors whether they had also been spied on and received no reply, Ellsberg said in a recent interview.

The attempt by Nixon to prosecute two journalists for possessing and disseminating classified information has gained new relevance with the case of Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder and publisher.

Assange is facing prosecution in the U.S. on what is believed to be similar charges of possession and dissemination under the Espionage Act. He is also being spied on in Ecuador's London embassy, where he has had asylum since 2102.

2008 Comeback

Gravel reemerged from a long absence in politics to challenge for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination.

He entered several debates and shared the stage with Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Joe Biden among other candidates and mixed it up with them:

It is in the debates that Gravel hopes again to shine a light on what he believes are the most important issues of the day.

But the Democratic Party has this year changed the rules for gaining entry to the 12 scheduled debates, the first of which will be on June 26 in Miami. Candidates must garner

donations from at least 65,000 individuals. And there must be contributions from a minimum of 200 different donors in at least 20 states.

Gravel has a steep obstacle to overcome in less than three months. He is not alone. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii has not yet reached the 65,000 donor threshold.

Gravel said that despite his run he's supporting Gabbard. "She's the only one prepared to take on the military industrial complex," Gravel said in a telephone interview. "She wants to close bases around the world and that's music to my ears."

Begun By Students

The idea for a Gravel run in 2020 was hatched by two first-year university students, David Oks and Henry Williams. Gravel gave them control of his Twitter feed after he saw how well they understood his thinking. "That's what really sold me [on running]," Gravel said.

Gravel's website lays out his platform with this introduction:

"Sen. Gravel is committed to ending America's imperial policies (especially in Venezuela and Iran), rescheduling cannabis, fundamentally reforming our politics through direct democracy, abolishing mass surveillance on American citizens, prioritizing climate change, dismantling America's carceral state, and building a foreign policy free of undue influence by Israel and Saudi Arabia."

He also called for Assange to be given amnesty, the National

Security Agency to be abolished, the U.S. to withdraw from the “Five Eyes” intelligence network, police to be held account for brutalizing citizens, a formal investigation into U.S. government involvement in human rights abuses around the world, and an end to foreign wars.

“There are two things that are destroying us,” Gravel said. “One, on the long arc of history, will be climate change—will this planet survive—and two, is the nuclear threat, which is stronger than ever and could eclipse us overnight.”

Gravel’s core issue, which he’s been working on for 25 years, is to establish the procedures to create a Legislature of the People in which citizens can use the initiative system, now present in 26 U.S. states, to make federal laws. Power resides with the people who give it away in elections to representatives who then use it for their own interests, Gravel said.

“The people will become the senior partners and representative government will shape up,” said Gravel.

He announced with this video on Monday:

"I'm Mike Gravel, and I'm running for President."

Together, we are the #Gravelanche. Get Mike to the debates and get this trending!<https://t.co/fSwN4nJW8j>

– Mike Gravel (@MikeGravel) April 8, 2019

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers.

He is the co-author with Mike Gravel of “A Political Odyssey,” published by Seven Stories Press. Joe can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe) .

Mike Gravel is a member of Consortium News' advisory board.

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