

Ukraine Factions Vie for Lobbying Edge

Exclusive: Though many Ukrainians live in poverty, government officials and oligarchs lavish millions on Washington insiders to buy influence, another example of how foreign lobbying can fuel a crisis, Jonathan Marshall reports.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the sixth and final installment of a series on foreign lobbying.)

Donald Trump doesn't just have a Russia problem, in the eyes of his critics. He also has a big – and related – Ukraine problem. His 2016 campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, was forced to resign last August amid a flurry of media exposés about Manafort's lobbying for former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Russia following violent protests against his government in February 2014.



“Any presidential candidate should properly vet the backgrounds of and moral decisions of the people he picks to advise him,” said Atlantic Council deputy director Alina Polyakova last year, declaring that Manafort's work in Ukraine “absolutely should cast a shadow on Trump's campaign.”

Either she or the reporter forgot to mention that two of her influential think tank's top 10 contributors are the U.S. State Department, which applauded the ouster of Yanukovich, and the Ukrainian World Congress, a diaspora organization that attacked him as well. The UWC now works to promote Ukraine's integration into the European Union, a key issue that helped cause Yanukovich's downfall and led to the ongoing crisis with Russia over Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

That small detail exemplifies the complexity of Ukrainian influence campaigns over the last few years. Although Trump's campaign manager attracted enormous public attention for his work in Ukraine, other prominent lobbyists in the Yanukovich camp were connected to high-level Obama administration officials. Still others took money from Yanukovich's political foes, or from independent

billionaire oligarchs with their own agendas.

The only common denominators are money, influence and lack of transparency.

Paul Manafort exemplifies those characteristics to the nth degree. A Republican adviser to the campaigns of Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bob Dole, he also represented a string of foreign dictators and warlords, including Philippines strongman Ferdinand Marcos, Zaire kleptocrat Mobutu Sese Seko, Angolan guerrilla leader Jonas Savimbi, Somali dictator Siad Barre, and Saudi Arabia.

A 1992 report by the Center for Public Integrity named his firm as one of the top five members of the “Torturer’s Lobby” in Washington. His former partner Roger Stone, the infamous political operative for Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, boasted that their firm “lined up most of the dictators of the world we could find.”

Manafort and Stone also represented the Trump Organization in the late 1980s. Trump reportedly met Manafort and Stone through Roy Cohn, the New York mafia lawyer and former hatchet man for Sen. Joseph McCarthy.

Another long-time Manafort client, the Kashmiri American Council, was exposed by U.S. prosecutors as a “scam” and a front group for Pakistani military intelligence, allegedly created to deflect public attention “away from the involvement of Pakistan in sponsoring terrorism in Kashmir and elsewhere.”

The Ukrainian Gold Mine

A *New York Times* exposé in July 2016 revealed that Trump’s campaign manager first got involved in Ukraine in the mid-2000s as an image consultant to billionaire oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, who was widely suspected of being an organized crime leader (a charge he has always denied).

Soon Manafort began advising Akhmetov’s favored presidential candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, and his Party of Regions. Manafort’s advice was credited by at least one Yanukovich ally with helping the candidate win Ukraine’s 2010 presidential election.

The original *Times* story also noted that “Mr. Manafort has not registered as a lobbyist representing Ukraine, which would require disclosing his earnings.” Two weeks later, the paper reported the existence of handwritten ledgers, produced by Ukraine’s National Anti-Corruption Bureau, showing that Manafort had received \$12.7 million in undisclosed cash payments from Yanukovich’s Party of Regions from 2007 to 2012. Manafort denied receiving the cash.

A follow-up story in the *Washington Post* reported that Manafort lobbied “State Department officials and other opinion leaders” on behalf of Yanukovich, failed to file official reports, and “did not officially close his business in Kiev until April 2016, the month after he joined the Trump campaign.” Manafort left the Trump campaign a day later.

Recent document disclosures confirm Manafort’s lobbying activities for the Party of Regions. They also confirm that he was aided by former Republican Congressman Vin Weber, whose lobbying firm Mercury Public Affairs earned more than \$1.2 million on the Ukraine account from 2012 to 2014.

“Our goal as Americans and Westerners was to bring Ukraine into the E.U.,” said Weber, who also represents Qatar and Turkey. “Our explicit work was anti-Russian.”

In the spirit of bipartisanship, Manafort also enlisted the services of Podesta Group Inc. – co-founded by John Podesta (President Clinton’s former chief of staff, President-elect Obama’s transition team chief, and Hillary Clinton’s campaign chairman) – to help influence Congress for a fee of about \$1 million.

Podesta Group last year also signed on as lobbyists to help lift sanctions against Russia’s largest financial institution, Sberbank, which the United States imposed after Russia intervened in Ukraine following the violent ouster of Yanukovich in 2014.

In the run-up to the overthrow of Yanukovich, anti-government Ukrainian protestors assembled on K Street – lobbyist row in Washington, D.C. – with signs saying, “Podesta Group Takes Blood Money.”

It wasn’t the first time critics had called attention to the firm’s choice of clients. For its services to such notorious human rights violators as Azerbaijan, Egypt, Thailand and Vietnam, Podesta Group was paid more than \$7 million from 2010 to 2015, according to the Center for Public Integrity.

Mercury and Podesta Group didn’t just lobby for Yanukovich; they also fought proposals in Washington to pressure his government to release his political rival, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, from prison on corruption charges.

She, in turn, was represented in Washington by several powerful lobbyists, including former Rep. Jim Slattery, D-Kansas. His law firm received \$920,000 over two years from Tymoshenko’s husband to pressure the Kiev government to free her. She was finally released in February 2014, after the successful *putsch* against Yanukovich.

"A lot of people are making a lot of money off Ukraine's political competition," observed Bruce Jackson, president of the Project on Transitional Democracies, in late 2013, noting that he and his group, which promoted democratic change in Eastern Europe, did not lobby.

That was rich coming from Jackson, a former vice president at Lockheed Martin, who had been a director of the infamous, neo-conservative Project for the New American Century, founder of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, and co-founder of the U.S. Committee to Expand NATO. It was NATO's 2008 commitment to expand into Ukraine that helped trigger the current crisis with Russia.

Biden and Kerry Connections

Another Democrat who cashed in on the Ukraine crisis was Vice President Joe Biden's son Hunter. In May 2014 he joined the board of Burisma Holdings, a private Ukrainian oil and gas company owned by a former government minister.

Also joining its board was Devon Archer, a Democratic fundraiser and former adviser to John Kerry, then Secretary of State. A week later, David Leiter, former Senate chief of staff to Kerry, came aboard as a lobbyist for the company, to promote "a stable and secure energy future for Ukraine," independent of Russia.

Time magazine commented at the time, "By taking a job with Burisma, the younger Biden has put himself in the middle of a struggle between the United States and Russia, which currently provides the bulk of the natural gas supplies to Ukraine. . . . Since Hunter Biden took the new job, his father, Vice President Joe Biden, has continued to serve as the Obama Administration's point person on Ukraine."

Although experts agreed that it appeared no one had broken any laws, a pundit at one Washington think tank observed, "It's unhelpful when we are trying to get across to the Ukrainians to clean up corruption and special deals for special folks. It maybe sends the wrong message that Westerners are just hypocritical."

Since Trump's election, money is pouring in to well-heeled Republican lobbyists. The Ukrainian government said in January that it had hired BGR Group as its Washington lobbyist to "help open lines of communication" with Congress, the administration, and other influential groups with the "goals of strengthening US-Ukrainian relations and increasing US business investment in Ukraine."

Translated, that means the lobbyists will urge members of Congress and the administration to tighten economic sanctions against Russia until it pulls out of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Ukraine also seeks more financial and military aid as it struggles to make ends meet. BGR Group is on a retainer worth \$50,000

a month. Its past foreign clients have included Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The “B” in BGR is former Republican Party leader and Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour. The “R” is Ed Rogers, a former White House official in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations and protégé of take-no-prisoners campaigner Lee Atwater. Rogers’s ongoing column in the *Washington Post* has come under fire for failing to disclose numerous conflicts of interest with his firm’s clients.

Also jumping on the Ukraine gravy train this year was Monica Crowley, a former Fox News commentator who had to pass up an appointment as director of strategic communications for Trump’s National Security Council after CNN revealed that she had plagiarized portions of her dissertation and a subsequent book.

Crowley now represents Ukrainian oligarch Victor Pinchuk in Washington policy circles on unspecified “issues of concern” to him. In a bipartisan spirit, Pinchuk also pays Democratic pollster Doug Shoen \$40,000 per month to facilitate conversations with U.S. policy makers “regarding Democratization in Ukraine and European integration.”

Pinchuk, a billionaire with interests in steel, pipelines, media and banking, ingratiated himself into the Clinton camp by contributing millions of dollars to the Clinton Foundation and hosting a visit to Ukraine by Chelsea Clinton and her husband. Two years ago, he paid the Trump Foundation \$150,000 in return for the Republican upstart appearing on video at an annual European strategy meeting held by Pinchuk.

Last but not least, Pinchuk’s foundation – along with the Ukrainian World Congress, as noted above – is a leading funder of the influential Atlantic Council, which promotes collaboration with other NATO powers to combat “Kremlin aggression in Ukraine.”

The Atlantic Council’s lavish funding of position papers, op-ed columns, conferences and other persuasive vehicles by agents of anti-Russian Ukrainians is not so very different – although somewhat less transparent – than pro-Russian propaganda disseminated by RT or Sputnik News. The Atlantic Council’s efforts show up as columns by think-tank experts in the *Washington Post* and other papers, while what appears on RT or Sputnik News is branded by Western officials as “information warfare.”

The American public, their elected officials, and Washington bureaucrats have a hard enough time sorting out the complex issues of foreign relations without the additional challenge of not knowing who is paying for their news and information. That’s why full disclosure is so vital. And that’s why the United

States badly needs not just an investigation into Russian political interference, but an in-depth probe into the activities of all foreign agents of influence in the United States.

[This is the sixth and last article in a series on foreign lobbying. The previous installments were "[The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying](#)"; "[How China Lobby Shaped America](#)"; "[Israel Pays the Political Piper](#)"; and "[Saudis Win Hearts by Lining Pockets](#)"; and "[Turkey's Varied Tactics of US Lobbying](#)."]]

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to ConsortiumNews.com.

New Cracks in Russia-gate 'Assessment'

Exclusive: President Obama's ex-intelligence chiefs admit they limited input into the Russia-gate "assessment," which was handled by "hand-picked" analysts, raising the specter of politicized intelligence, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

At the center of the Russia-gate scandal is a curious U.S. intelligence "assessment" that was pulled together in less than a month and excluded many of the agencies that would normally weigh in on such an important topic as whether Russia tried to influence the outcome of a U.S. presidential election.

The Jan. 6 [report](#) and its allegation that Russia "hacked" Democratic emails and publicized them through WikiLeaks have been treated as gospel by the mainstream U.S. media and many politicians of both parties, but two senior Obama administration intelligence officials have provided new information that raises fresh doubts about the findings.

On Tuesday, former CIA Director John Brennan told the House Intelligence Committee that only four of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies took part in the assessment, relying on analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the oversight of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Brennan said the report "followed the general model of how you want to do something like this with some notable exceptions. It only involved the FBI, NSA and CIA as well as the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. It wasn't a full inter-agency community assessment that was coordinated among the 17 agencies, and for good reason because of the nature and the sensitivity of

the information trying, once again, to keep that tightly compartmented.”

But Brennan’s excuse about “tightly compartmented” information was somewhat disingenuous because other intelligence agencies, such as the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), could have been consulted in a limited fashion, based on their areas of expertise. For instance, INR could have weighed in on whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would have taken the risk of trying to sabotage Hillary Clinton’s campaign, knowing that – if she won as expected and learned of the operation – she might have sought revenge against him and his country.

The Jan. 6 report argued one side of the case – that Putin had a motive for undermining Clinton because he objected to her work as Secretary of State when she encouraged anti-Putin protests inside Russia – but the report ignored the counter-argument that the usually cautious Putin might well have feared infuriating the incoming U.S. President if the anti-Clinton ploy failed to block her election.

A balanced intelligence assessment would have included not just arguments for believing that the Russians did supply the Democratic emails to WikiLeaks but the reasons to doubt that they did.

Pre-Cooked Intelligence

However, the restricted nature of the Jan. 6 report – limiting it to analysts from CIA, NSA and FBI – blocked the kind of expertise that the State Department, the Defense Department, the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies might have provided. In other words, the Jan. 6 report has the look of pre-cooked intelligence.

That impression was further strengthened by the admission of former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on May 8 that “the two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.”

Yet, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you “hand-pick” the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion. For instance, if the analysts were known to be hard-liners on Russia or supporters of Hillary Clinton, they could be expected to deliver the one-sided report that they did.

In the history of U.S. intelligence, we have seen how this approach has worked, such as the determination of the Reagan administration to pin the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II and other acts of terror on the Soviet Union.

CIA Director William Casey and Deputy Director Robert Gates shepherded the

desired findings through the process by putting the assessment under the control of pliable analysts and sidelining those who objected to this politicization of intelligence.

The point of enlisting the broader intelligence community – and incorporating dissents into a final report – is to guard against such “stove-piping” of intelligence that delivers the politically desired result but ultimately distorts reality.

Another painful example of politicized intelligence was President George W. Bush’s 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq’s WMD that removed INR’s and other dissents from the declassified version that was given to the public.

Lacking Evidence

The Jan. 6 report – technically called an Intelligence Community Assessment (or ICA) – avoided the need to remove any dissents by excluding the intelligence agencies that might have dissented and by hand-picking the analysts who compiled the report.

However, like the declassified version of the Iraq NIE, the Russia-gate ICA lacked any solid evidence to support the conclusions. The ICA basically demanded that the American public “trust us” and got away with that bluff because much of the mainstream U.S. news media wanted to believe anything negative about then-President-elect Trump.

Because of that, the American people were repeatedly – and falsely – informed that the findings about Russian “hacking” reflected the collective judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies, making anyone who dared question the conclusion seem like a crackpot or a “Russian apologist.”

Yet, based on the testimonies of Clapper and Brennan, we now know that the ICA represented only a hand-picked selection of the intelligence community – four, not 17, agencies.

There were other biases reflected in the ICA, such as a bizarre appendix that excoriated RT, the Russian television network, for supposedly undermining Americans’ confidence in their democratic process.

This seven-page appendix, dating from 2012, accused RT of portraying “the US electoral process as undemocratic” and offered such “proof” as RT’s staging of a debate among third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Republican-Democratic debates between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama.

“RT broadcast, hosted and advertised third-party candidate debates,” the report

said, as if allowing political figures in the United States who were not part of the two-party system to express their views, was somehow anti-democratic, when you might think that letting Americans hear alternatives was the essence of democracy.

“The RT hosts asserted that the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a ‘sham,’” the report continued. Yet, polls have shown that large numbers of Americans would prefer more choices than the usual two candidates and, indeed, most Western democracies have multiple parties, So, the implicit RT criticism of the U.S. political process is certainly not out of the ordinary.

The report also took RT to task for covering the Occupy Wall Street movement and for reporting on the environmental dangers from “fracking,” topics cited as further proof that the Russian government was using RT to weaken U.S. public support for Washington’s policies (although, again, these are topics of genuine public interest).

Assessing or Guessing

But at least the appendix offered up some “evidence” – as silly as those examples might have been. The main body of the report amounted to one “assessment” after another with no verifiable evidence included, at least in the unclassified version that the American people were allowed to see.

The report also contained a warning about how unreliable these “assessments” could be: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

In other words, “assessing” in intelligence terms often equates with “guessing” – and if the guessers are hand-picked by political appointees – it shouldn’t be surprising that they would come up with an “assessment” that would please their bosses, in this case, President Obama and his appointees at CIA, NSA, FBI and ODNI.

The timing and speed of the Jan. 6 report also drew some attention at Tuesday’s House Intelligence Committee hearing, where Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-New York, noted that President Obama requested the ICA on Dec. 9 and the last entry was dated Dec. 29.

“This report was produced in just 20 days in December,” Stefanik said, adding: “It’s of concern to me that there was a two-month lag” between when Obama’s intelligence agencies first alleged Russian “hacking” of Democratic emails and

when Obama ordered the ICA.

Of course, the ICA's flaws do not mean that Russia is innocent or that WikiLeaks is telling the truth when it asserts that the two batches of Democratic emails – one from the Democratic National Committee and the other from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta – did not come from the Russians.

But the Jan. 6 report has served as the foundation for a series of investigations that have hobbled the Trump administration and could lead to the negation of a U.S. presidential election via the impeachment or forced resignation of President Trump.

The seriousness of that possibility would seem to demand the most thorough examination and the fullest vetting of the evidence. Even just the appearance that the ICA might be one more case of politicized intelligence would do more to destroy Americans' faith in their democratic system than anything that Putin might dream up.

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](#)).

Turkey's Varied Tactics of US Lobbying

Exclusive: Turkey has built one of the premier foreign lobbies in Washington by paying powerful politicians, spreading around money to arms manufacturers, and teaming up with the Israel Lobby, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the fifth in a series on foreign lobbying.)

For all the furor over retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn's ties to Russia, which got him fired after just [24 days on the job](#) as President Trump's first national security adviser, his biggest legal risks may relate to his unregistered lobbying for agents of the Turkish government. A federal grand jury has [subpoenaed all records of that work](#) as part of a major ongoing investigation of Flynn's foreign ties.

Although details of Flynn's work on the account remain murky, and his own story has characteristically shifted over time, his job put him in crowded company.

The Turkish lobby has long been one of the most active and unrestrained in Washington. An article in *Politico* last fall called Turkey “the poster child when it comes to foreign lobbying opportunities for former members of both parties.”

In the past few years, the article noted, “the country’s increasingly autocratic government has employed an army of lobbyists, including [former Missouri Democrat and House Minority Leader Richard] Gephardt, [former Mississippi Republican and Senate Majority Leader Trent] Lott, [former Louisiana Democrat and Senator John] Breaux, former House Speaker-elect Bob Livingston (R-La.), the late Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), former House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), former CIA director and longtime House member Porter Goss (R-Fla.) and former Reps. Albert Wynn (D-Md.) and Jim McCrery (R-La.).”

Turkey has also multiplied its lobbying clout by allying with various “defense contractors, finance and energy corporations, trade groups . . . and a well-financed network of domestic advocacy nonprofits,” according to the Sunlight Foundation.

Cognizant of Turkey’s importance as a major NATO arms market, for example, the Aerospace Industries Association helped coordinate lobbying by major military contractors such as Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Textron on issues important to Turkey.

The American Turkish Council, which promotes “stronger U.S.-Turkey relations,” is chaired by retired Gen. James L. Jones, former U.S. national security adviser and commander of NATO. Its board members have included representatives of Lockheed Martin, PepsiCo., Pfizer, Boeing, General Electric, Raytheon, and Bechtel.

Another friend in Washington is the Atlantic Council, a widely quoted, pro-NATO think tank, whose vice chairman, Stephen Hadley, was national security adviser to President George W. Bush. The Atlantic Council’s top financial supporters include no fewer than five major Turkish government and business organizations, along with Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and other large military contractors.

The Atlantic Council’s annual Istanbul Summit drew fire this year for allegedly excluding critical journalists and opposition politicians, at the request of the Erdogan regime. The council’s CEO said that it supported Turkey in today’s turbulent times, adding, “the Atlantic Council is not a fair weather friend.”

Fighting the Armenian Genocide Resolution

One longstanding issue for Turkey has been fighting perennial efforts in Congress to adopt a resolution condemning as genocide the mass killing of 1.5

million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, starting in 1915. A study published in 2009 by ProPublica and the Sunlight Foundation reported that Turkey was the fifth biggest spender on foreign lobbying, at more than \$3.5 million. Turkey ranked number one in contacts with members of Congress, as a result of its ongoing fight to block the genocide resolution.

A big chunk of the \$1.7 million raked in by former Rep. Gephardt from the Turkish government in 2015 was dedicated to that end. Buying his services was a real coup for Ankara. During his long career in Congress, Gephardt had been a champion of the Armenian-American community's campaign to officially recognize the genocide of their ancestors.

Turkey found a powerful ally for its genocide denial campaign in the Israel Lobby, which backed Ankara out of gratitude for the Muslim state's recognition of Israel. In 2007, as they had for many years, the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, and Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs joined Turkey in opposing the congressional genocide resolution.

Abraham Foxman, longtime head of the Anti-Defamation League, told one reporter bluntly, "Our focus is Israel. If helping Turkey helps Israel, then that's what we're in the business of doing."

"Since the 1990s, Turkey has turned into a key strategic ally," explained *Jerusalem Post* writer Herb Keion. "What Israel gets from Turkey is clear: a friendly Muslim face in a sea of hostility; a geographical asset; a huge market for military wares and other products. . . . And what do the Turks get? Firstly, they benefit from our geography, just as we do from theirs. Both countries box in Syria for the other, and Syrian-Turkish relations, put mildly, have known their ups and downs. Secondly, they buy our arms. . . .

"And the final thing the Turks 'get' from Israel is access to the Jewish lobby in Washington. . . . Turkey looks to these organizations to put in a good word in Congress or with the administration when issues of importance to Ankara – such as issues regarding the Armenians or Cyprus – make their way to those bodies."

Years of genocide denial by major American Jewish organizations finally caused a furor in 2007, not only among Armenian-Americans but among many progressive Jews who decried the cynicism of their community leaders.

Rep. Adam Schiff, a Jewish Democrat from California and lead sponsor of the genocide resolution, condemned Israel's interference and said, "I cannot see how major Jewish American organizations can in good conscience and in any way

support efforts to deny the undeniable.” (Today Schiff is the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee’s investigation of possible Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.)

Leaders of conservative Jewish groups began changing their tune in 2010 – after Ankara condemned Israel for killing nine Turkish citizens aboard a flotilla bound for Gaza. In 2016, under more progressive new leadership, the Anti-Defamation League finally officially recognized the 1915 massacre of Armenians as “unequivocally genocide.”

The Sibel Edmonds Affair

The Turkish lobby hasn’t always played by the rules, according to former FBI-translator-turned-whistleblower Sibel Edmonds. She testified that over the years 1996 to 2002, she had access to FBI counterintelligence wiretaps that implicated former House Speaker Dennis Hastert in taking “large sums” of cash – roughly half a million dollars in bribes – “to do certain favors . . . (for the) Turkish government’s interest.”

It is a matter of record that after leaving Congress in 2007, Hastert went on the payroll of the Turkish government as a registered lobbyist, earning \$35,000 a month. In 2016, he was convicted of bank fraud relating to allegations that years earlier he sexually abused boys he coached in high school wrestling.

Edmonds also claimed that former Rep. Stephen Solarz, who also became a registered lobbyist for Turkey, “acted as conduit to deliver or launder contributions and other bribe(s) to certain members of Congress.” She accused Rep. Tom Lantos, a California Democrat, of “bribe(ry)” and “disclosing [the] highest level protected U.S. intelligence and weapons technology information both to Israel and to Turkey [and] other very serious criminal conduct.” And she alleged that Turkish agents filmed a member of the House Intelligence Committee who was lured into a sexual affair.

Most explosively, Edmonds told a reporter that former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Deputy Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman sold nuclear technology to Turkish agents acting for Pakistani military intelligence, and that he revealed to Turkish diplomats the identify of a CIA front company engaged in gathering intelligence on nuclear proliferation.

Grossman strongly denied her claims, but the London *Sunday Times* found them credible enough to run a major story in 2008 (without identifying Grossman by name). Former FBI counterintelligence and counterespionage manager John Cole later went on the record, saying, “I am fully aware of the FBI’s decade-long investigation of . . . Marc Grossman, which ultimately was buried and covered

up. It is long past time to investigate this case and bring about accountability.”

Evidently other officials in Washington did not find her allegations credible, however. In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appointed Grossman to replace Richard Holbrooke as special U.S. envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It should also be noted that Edmonds’s initial allegations, given some credence by the Department of Justice’s inspector general and “60 Minutes,” concerned mainly potential espionage by a co-worker and general incompetence in the FBI’s translation department, not the much more explosive charges against major politicians. Nor is it clear how she would have had access to so many highly sensitive investigative files involving members of Congress.

The Michael Flynn Affair

President Trump’s former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, is reportedly under investigation by at least two congressional committees, the Pentagon’s inspector general, and a federal grand jury not only for his relations with Russia, but also about his payments from a Turkish organization while he was a top foreign policy adviser to Trump’s campaign.

Investigators say they have found no evidence that Flynn sought permission from the Departments of Defense or State for his foreign payments. Flynn’s consulting firm, Flynn Intel Group, did not register as a foreign lobbyist until last September, a month past the start of its work for Turkish interests.

The subject of Flynn’s work was well disguised. His client was an obscure Dutch firm. An enterprising reporter who checked Dutch records discovered that its founder was military contractor and real estate magnate Ekim Alptekin, “an ally of Erdogan’s who is director of the Turkey-U.S. Business Council, a non-profit arm of Turkey’s Foreign Economic Relations Board. . . . In the role, Alptekin helped coordinate [President] Erdogan’s visit to the U.S. [in 2016].”

Three months after signing with Alptekin’s firm – on Election Day 2016, no less – Flynn published an opinion column in *The Hill* lauding Turkey as “vital to U.S. interests” and “our strongest ally” against ISIS. He denounced the coup attempt that summer, which he had once praised, and supported Turkey’s controversial request for the extradition of exiled Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara accuses of inspiring the coup.

In March 2017, a month after Flynn resigned as national security adviser for lying about his contacts with Russian officials, the White House finally admitted, in the words of CNN, that “President Donald Trump’s transition team was aware that retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn engaged in work that would likely

require him to register his consulting firm as a foreign agent before Flynn was tapped to serve as national security adviser.”

A few days later, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that back in September, Flynn had met with senior Turkish government officials to discuss “the political climate in Turkey.” One attendee, former CIA Director James Woolsey, claimed that when he walked into the meeting, they were reviewing options for kidnapping Gulen to avoid the extradition process. Woolsey said he “found the topic startling and the actions being discussed possibly illegal.”

Flynn denied Woolsey’s account. But he did belatedly file foreign agent registration papers with the Justice Department this March, acknowledging that the \$530,000 his firm received from August to mid-November “could be construed to have principally benefitted the Republic of Turkey.”

Members of the House Oversight Committee from both parties have since said that Flynn’s failure to get permission for those payments from Turkey could subject him to criminal prosecution for violating a constitutional ban on retired military officers taking payments from foreign governments.

Trump and Turkey

Something of Flynn’s support for Turkey seems to have rubbed off on Donald Trump. The U.S. President called Turkey’s President Recep Erdogan to congratulate him after the success of April’s controversial national referendum, which greatly expanded the powers of the Turkish presidency. Trump was apparently oblivious to allegations of electoral fraud, warnings about the death of Turkish democracy, and the fate of more than 113,000 people detained since last year’s coup attempt.

Critics of Trump’s embrace of Erdogan recalled what Trump had to say on Steve Bannon’s radio show, *Breitbart News Daily*, on Dec. 1, 2015: “I have a little conflict of interest ‘cause I have a major, major building in Istanbul. It’s a tremendously successful job. It’s called Trump Towers – two towers, instead of one, not the usual one, it’s two.” Trump was no doubt grateful to Erdogan for presiding over the opening of Trump Towers in 2012.

In mid-May, President Trump also honored Erdogan as one of the first foreign leaders received this year at the White House. But while Trump lauded Turkey’s “legendary” courage in wartime, and Erdogan hailed Trump’s “legendary triumph” in the 2016 election, no one was fooled. The two countries have grave differences over how to handle the military campaign against ISIS in Syria and Turkey’s request to extradite Gulen.

In short, Turkey’s millions of dollars have bought it a few seats at the table,

not a guarantee of winning its case in either Congress or the White House. But every seat counts in politics, and as the international stakes keep rising, so will Turkey's investment in shaping policies in Washington.

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Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to ConsortiumNews.com.

US Journalism's New 'Golden Age'?

Exclusive: The Washington Post and other big media are hailing a new journalistic "golden age" as they punish President Trump for disparaging them, but is this media bias a sign of good journalism or itself a scandal, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The mainstream U.S. media is congratulating itself on its courageous defiance of President Trump and its hard-hitting condemnations of Russia, but the press seems to have forgotten that its proper role within the U.S. democratic structure is not to slant stories one way or another but to provide objective information for the American people.

By that standard – of respecting that the people are the nation's true sovereigns – the mainstream media is failing again. Indeed, the chasm between what America's elites are thinking these days and what many working-class Americans are feeling is underscored by the high-fiving that's going on inside the elite mainstream news media, which is celebrating its Trump- and Russia-bashing as the "new golden age of American journalism."

The New York Times and The Washington Post, in particular, view themselves as embattled victims of a tyrannical abuser. The Times presents itself as the brave guardian of "truth" and the Post added a new slogan: "Democracy dies in darkness." In doing so, they have moved beyond the normal constraints of professional, objective journalism into political advocacy – and they are deeply proud of themselves.

In a Sunday [column](#) entitled "How Trump inspired a golden age," Washington Post

columnist Dana Milbank wrote that Trump “took on the institution of a free press – and it fought back. Trump came to office after intimidating publishers, barring journalists from covering him and threatening to rewrite press laws, and he has sought to discredit the ‘fake news’ media at every chance. Instead, he wound up inspiring a new golden age in American journalism.

“Trump provoked the extraordinary work of reporters on the intelligence, justice and national security beats, who blew wide open the Russia election scandal, the contacts between Russia and top Trump officials, and interference by Trump in the FBI investigation. Last week’s appointment of a special prosecutor – a crucial check on a president who lacks self-restraint – is a direct result of their work.”

Journalism or Hatchet Job?

But has this journalism been professional or has it been a hatchet job? Are we seeing a new “golden age” of journalism or a McCarthyistic lynch mob operating on behalf of elites who disdain the U.S. constitutional process for electing American presidents?

For one thing, you might have thought that professional journalists would have demanded proof about the predicate for this burgeoning “scandal” – whether the Russians really did “hack” into emails of the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta and then slip the information to WikiLeaks to influence the outcome of the 2016 election.

You have surely heard and read endlessly that this conclusion about Russia’s skulduggery was the “consensus view of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” and thus only some crazy conspiracy theorist would doubt its accuracy even if no specific evidence was evinced to support the accusation.

But that repeated assertion is not true. There was no National Intelligence Estimate (or NIE) that would compile the views of the 17 intelligence agencies. Instead, as President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on May 8, the Russia-hacking claim came from a “special intelligence community assessment” (or ICA) produced by selected analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation, or as Clapper put it, “a coordinated product from three agencies – CIA, NSA, and the FBI – not all 17 components of the intelligence community.”

Further, as Clapper explained, the “ICA” was something of a rush job beginning on President Obama’s instructions “in early December” and completed by Jan. 6, in other words, a month or less.

Clapper continued: “The two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.” However, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you “hand-pick” the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion.

You can say the analysts worked independently but their selection, as advocates for one position or another, could itself dictate the outcome. If the analysts were hardliners on Russia or hated Trump, they could be expected to deliver the conclusion that Obama and Clapper wanted, i.e., challenging the legitimacy of Trump’s election and blaming Russia.

The point of having a more substantive NIE is that it taps into a much broader network of U.S. intelligence analysts who have the right to insert dissents to the dominant opinions. So, for instance, when President George W. Bush belatedly ordered an NIE regarding Iraq’s WMD in 2002, some analysts – especially at the State Department – inserted dissents (although they were expunged from the declassified version given to the American people to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq).

An Embarrassing Product

Obama’s “ICA,” which was released on Jan. 6, was a piece of work that embarrassed many former U.S. intelligence analysts. It was a one-sided argument that lacked any specific evidence to support its findings. Its key point was that Russian President Vladimir Putin had a motive to authorize an information operation to help Hillary Clinton’s rival, Donald Trump, because Putin disdained her work as Secretary of State.

But the Jan. 6 report failed to include the counter-argument to that *cui bono* assertion, that it would be an extraordinary risk for Putin to release information to hurt Clinton when she was the overwhelming favorite to win the presidency. Given the NSA’s electronic-interception capabilities, Putin would have to assume that any such undertaking would be picked up by U.S. intelligence and that he would likely be facing a vengeful new U.S. president on Jan. 20.

While it’s possible that Putin still took the risk – despite the daunting odds against a Trump victory – a balanced intelligence assessment would have included such contrary arguments. Instead, the report had the look of a prosecutor’s brief albeit without actual evidence pointing to the guilt of the accused.

Further, the report repeatedly used the word “assesses” – rather than “proves” or “establishes” – and the terminology is important because, in intelligence-world-speak, “assesses” often means “guesses.” The report admits as much, saying, “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows

something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

In other words, the predicate for the entire Russia-gate scandal, which may now lead to the impeachment of a U.S. president and thus the negation of the Constitution’s electoral process, is based partly on a lie – i.e., the claim that the assessment comes from all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies – and partly on evidence-free speculation by a group of “hand-picked” analysts, chosen by Obama’s intelligence chiefs.

Yet, the mainstream U.S. news media has neither corrected the false assertion about the 17 intelligence agencies nor demanded that actual evidence be made public to support the key allegation that Russia was the source of WikiLeaks’ email dumps.

By the way, both Russia and WikiLeaks deny that Russia was the source, although it is certainly possible that the Russian government would lie and that WikiLeaks might not know where the two batches of Democratic emails originated.

A True ‘Golden Age’?

Yet, one might think that the new “golden age of American journalism” would want to establish a firm foundation for its self-admiring reporting on Russia-gate. You might think, too, that these esteemed MSM reporters would show some professional skepticism toward dubious claims being fed to them by the Obama administration’s intelligence appointees.

That is unless, of course, the major U.S. news organizations are not abiding by journalistic principles, but rather see themselves as combatants in the anti-Trump “resistance.” In other words, if they are behaving less as a Fourth Estate and more as a well-dressed mob determined to drag the interloper, Trump, from the White House.

The mainstream U.S. media’s bias against Putin and Russia also oozes from every pore of the Times’ and Post’s reporting from Moscow. For instance, the Times’ [article](#) on Putin’s comments about supposed secrets that Trump shared with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the White House had the headline in the print editions: “Putin Butts In to Claim There Were No Secrets...” The article by Andrew Higgins then describes Putin “asserting himself with his customary disruptive panache” and “seizing on foreign crises to make Russia’s voice heard.”

Clearly, we are all supposed to hate and ridicule Vladimir Putin. He is being demonized as the new “enemy” in much the way that George Orwell foresaw in his

dystopian novel, 1984. Yet, what is perhaps most troubling is that the major U.S. news outlets, which played instrumental roles in demonizing leaders of Iraq, Syria and Libya, believe they are engaged in some “golden age” journalism, rather than writing propaganda.

Contempt for Trump

Yes, I realize that many good people want to see Trump removed from office because of his destructive policies and his buffoonish behavior – and many are eager to use the new *bête noire*, Russia, as the excuse to do it. But that still does not make it right for the U.S. news media to abandon its professional responsibilities in favor of a political agenda.

On a political level, it may not even be a good idea for Democrats and progressives who seem to be following the failed strategy of Hillary Clinton’s campaign in seeking to demonize Trump rather than figuring out how to speak to the white working-class people who voted for him, many out of fear over their economic vulnerability and others out of anger over how Clinton dismissed many of them as “deplorables.”

And, by the way, if anyone thinks that whatever the Russians may have done damaged Clinton’s chances more than her colorful phrase disdaining millions of working-class people who understandably feel left behind by neo-liberal economics, you may want to enroll in a Politics 101 course. The last thing a competent politician does is utter a memorable insult that will rally the opposition.

In conversations that I’ve had recently with Trump voters, they complain that Clinton and the Democrats weren’t even bothering to listen to them or to talk to them. These voters were less enamored of Trump than they were conceded to Trump by the Clinton campaign. These voters also are not impressed by the endless Trump- and Russia-bashing from The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and MSNBC, which they see as instruments of the elites.

The political danger for national Democrats and many progressives is that mocking Trump and thus further insulting his supporters only extends the losing Clinton strategy and cements the image of Democrats as know-it-all elitists. Thus, the Democrats risk losing a key segment of the U.S. electorate for a generation.

Not only could that deny the Democrats a congressional majority for the foreseeable future, but it might even get Trump a second term.

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](#)).

Israel Lobby Pays the Political Piper

Exclusive: The Israel Lobby is so powerful that for years it insisted it didn't exist – and Official Washington went along with the lie. Today, President Trump scrambles to secure the lobby's blessings, Jonathan Marshall observes.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the third part of a series on foreign lobbying.)

In this age of rancorous hyper-partisanship, getting members of Congress to agree on anything beyond the naming of a post office is a challenge. Yet in late April, all 100 members of the U.S. Senate signed a [tough letter](#) to the U.N. Secretary General, demanding that the organization end its “unwarranted attacks” on Israel's human rights record.

Three months earlier, members of the House [voted overwhelmingly](#) to condemn a U.N. Security Council resolution critical of Israel's relentless expansion of settlements on occupied lands. Like dozens of other Democrats, House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer of Maryland blasted President Obama for abstaining from the U.N. vote, saying it “sent the wrong signal to our ally Israel.” In the Senate, leading progressives like Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders [offered no support](#) for President Obama, either.

Their votes and rhetoric did not simply reflect public opinion. Although Americans sympathize with Israel far more than the Palestinians, [two-thirds of adults surveyed](#) in in 2015 said the United States should not take sides in the Middle East conflict. Fewer than half say they consider Israel an ally.

Those congressional actions instead illustrated the power of the pro-Israel Lobby, a highly organized and well-funded coalition that works to give Israeli leaders freedom to operate with unquestioned U.S. diplomatic, economic and military support. Its influence helps account for the [quarter trillion dollars in aid](#) (adjusted for inflation) that the United States has given Israel since 1948.

When it comes to influencing American politics, [Russia runs far behind](#) highly motivated supporters of Israel. President Obama experienced that first hand when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, representing a state of just 8.6 million people, received rousing, bipartisan acclaim in no fewer than three addresses

before Congress and nearly blocked approval of the Iran nuclear deal, perhaps the signature foreign policy initiative of Obama's administration.

The pro-Israel Lobby has been the subject of much informal comment and a critical academic study by two of America's most distinguished political scientists, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, an ardent disparager of their work, recently offered a backhanded acknowledgement of its thesis during a talk to an Orthodox synagogue in affluent Scarsdale, New York:

"People write a book called the Israel lobby and complain that AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] is one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington. My response to that is, that's not good enough. We should be the most powerful lobby in Washington. . . . We are entitled to use our power. We have contributed disproportionately to the success of this country. . . . We are a very influential community. We deserve our influence."

Contrary to the implication of his remarks, however, AIPAC and similar organizations do not comprise an ethnic Jewish lobby, though major Jewish organizations are primary constituents. Many U.S. Jews either question Israeli government policies or have little interest in promoting them.

A 2013 Pew survey found that only 30 percent of American Jews were "very attached" emotionally to Israel, and a substantial plurality believed that continued building of Jewish settlements hurts Israel's security. A large majority of Jews voted for President Obama, despite his strained relations with the Israeli government. Most American Jews also supported his nuclear deal with Iran, in defiance of most pro-Israel organizations.

Further reflecting the pro-Israel lobby's political rather than ethnic focus, it derives much support from Christian Zionists, some of them outright anti-Semites, who believe that the return of Jews to Israel foreshadows the Second Coming of Christ.

The pro-Israel camp today features even the likes of White House counterterrorism adviser Sebastian Gorka, "despite his controversial ties to allies of the Nazis," and Austria's Freedom Party, "a movement of anti-immigrant, right-wing nationalists founded in part by former Nazis."

Follow the Money

Unlike most other foreign lobbies, the pro-Israel lobby draws much of its strength from grass-roots support. With little organized opposition, it can influence Congress more readily than better-funded business lobbies that face stiff competition. However, the single biggest source of its power is not voters

– only a tiny percentage make Israel their top political priority – but campaign funds.

In a revealing comment, Stephanie Schriock of Emily's List confessed last year, "the money ... is a big piece of this story and cannot be overlooked at all."

"I have written more Israel papers that you can imagine," she explained. "I'm from Montana. I barely knew where Israel was until I looked at a map, and the poor campaign manager would come in, or the policy director, and I'd be like, 'Here is your paper on Israel. This is our policy.' We've sent it all over the country because this is how we raise money. ... This means that these candidates who were farmers, school teachers, or businesswomen, ended up having an Israel position without having any significant conversations with anybody."

Hillary Clinton's pandering to the pro-Israel lobby during the 2016 election – promising AIPAC that she would take relations with Israel "to the next level" and that she would meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during her first month in office – reflected her financial dependence on pro-Israel funders. Chief among them was billionaire donor Haim Saban, a hawkish Israeli-American who famously said, "I'm a one-issue guy, and my issue is Israel."

New Yorker correspondent Connie Bruck reported that Saban, speaking at a 2009 conference in Israel, described the "three ways to be influential in American politics" as donating to political parties, creating think tanks, and buying up influential media.

"In 2002," she observed, "he contributed seven million dollars toward the cost of a new building for the Democratic National Committee – one of the largest known donations ever made to an American political party. That year, he also founded the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, in Washington, D.C. He . . . tried to buy *Time* and *Newsweek*, . . . acquired Univision in 2007, and he has made repeated bids for the Los Angeles *Times*."

Mother Jones reported that "After the launch of the Saban Center, the billionaire began pouring more and more of his fortune into Israeli causes. He donated \$10 million to support the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces. . . . He also made seven-figure gifts to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the hawkish Israeli lobbying group."

Saban, who was invited to stay overnight in the Lincoln bedroom at the White House during Bill Clinton's presidency, takes credit for helping launch Hillary Clinton's run for that office as early as 2004. Over the years he hosted several lavish fundraisers for her, including a dinner in 2016. With an entry price of \$100,000 per couple, it raised more than \$5 million for Clinton's campaign.

Saban and his wife gave more than \$10 million to a super-PAC that supported her as well.

And those donations don't include the \$7 million paid by the Saban Family Foundation to the Clinton Foundation during Hillary's four-year stint in the Obama administration, the \$30 million more that it pledged, the \$5 million donation to the Clinton Library, or the \$250,000 fee paid to Bill Clinton for a 15-minute promotional event in 2015.

The Republican Purse

As Israel pursues ever more extreme policies grounded in ethnic and religious nationalism, the pro-Israel lobby has become increasingly aligned with the Republican Party.

A recent national poll showed sympathy for Israel falling 10 points among Democrats to 33 percent from April 2016 to January 2017. In contrast, a near-record 74 percent of Republican now support Israel. Similarly, a Brookings poll last fall found that just over half of Democrats think that "the Israeli government has too much influence" in the United States, compared to just over a quarter of Republicans.

Republicans, who traditionally looked mainly to big oil, finance, real estate and other business sectors for campaign cash, increasingly rely on billionaires with a passion for Israel, such as Wall Street hedge fund owner Paul Singer, Florida auto dealer Norman Braman, casino mogul Sheldon Adelson, and Hobby Lobby founder David Green (a Christian Zionist).

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, mulling over a potential presidential run in 2015, crassly told a reporter, "If I put together a finance team that will make me financially competitive enough to stay in this thing . . . I may have the first all-Jewish cabinet in America because of the pro-Israel funding. [Chuckles.] Bottom line is, I've got a lot of support from the pro-Israel funding."

Graham earned that support the usual way – by promising to put Israel first. During an obligatory visit to Jerusalem the previous December, Graham, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Appropriations Subcommittee, promised Netanyahu that "Congress will follow your lead" on imposing economic sanctions against Iran.

The most notable among the pro-Israel GOP mega-donors is Sheldon Adelson. Blurring the lines between American supporters and Israeli leaders, Adelson also spent millions to buy an election for the American-educated Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the right-wing Likud party.

Adelson, an ideological ally of Netanyahu, reportedly called the Palestinians “an invented people” whose “purpose ... is to destroy Israel,” and advocated vaporizing Tehran if necessary to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. Adelson captured the Republican Party’s attention in 2012 by contributing an astonishing \$150 million to conservative candidates in that election, including Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney.

Romney, who promised to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem “if Israel’s leaders thought that a move of that nature would be helpful to their efforts,” also won the favor of Netanyahu’s closest political adviser, the American-born Ron Dermer.

Dermer also liked Gingrich. As a young man, before taking Israeli citizenship, Dermer helped the House Speaker promote his 1994 “Contract With America.”

Dermer became Israel’s ambassador to Washington in 2013. The following year, in a blatant violation of diplomatic protocol, he attended a series of GOP candidate screening sessions held by Adelson in Las Vegas, which became known as the “Adelson primary.”

The same year, Ambassador Dermer publicly endorsed Netanyahu’s reelection as prime minister, for which he was reprimanded by Israel’s Civil Service Commission. He then went on in 2015 to arrange the infamous invitation from Republican leaders to Netanyahu to address Congress on the perils of dealing with Iran, a speech that was arranged without consulting the White House.

Onward with Donald Trump

Through Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, a major contributor to AIPAC, Dermer influenced the Republican candidate’s tough speech to that organization during the 2016 campaign. AIPAC attendees cheered when Trump applauded the end of President Obama’s administration and called him “maybe the worst thing to ever happen to Israel.”

Adelson soon endorsed Trump in an email to dozens of Republican Jewish donors, saying “he will be a tremendous president when it comes to the safety and security of Israel.” Playing the odds shrewdly, Adelson donated \$35 million or more to the Trump campaign.

Israel and its U.S. supporters have since discovered, like everyone else, that Trump is mercurial and not easily managed. After swearing fealty to the Jewish state during the campaign, he has put the brakes on his promise to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, called for restraint on further building of settlements, and met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

On the other hand, he appointed the most right-wing, pro-settlements ambassador in history, and will make Israel the second foreign visit of his presidency, just after Saudi Arabia.

Far more important to the Netanyahu government, and to its neoconservative supporters in the United States, is the fact that Trump has surrounded himself with anti-Iran hardliners. He himself has falsely called into question Iran's compliance with the nuclear agreement, contrary to the State Department's own certification.

As Brookings analyst Suzanne Maloney commented recently, "Donald Trump has the Islamic Republic of Iran in his sights . . . neither restraint nor continuity on Iran is really in the offing. . . . Trump has elevated a national security team that shares an Iran-centric interpretation of the problems that plague the Middle East and threaten vital American interests there. . . . The Trump administration has begun to replace accommodation with confrontation as the guiding principle of U.S. policy toward Tehran, seeking to counter Iran through a multi-front campaign of diplomatic, economic, and military pressure."

No one, presumably including Trump himself, can predict where this hostility will lead. But the hard-liners in Israel and the United States who lost out to President Obama on Iran – their first significant defeat in many years – are back in the saddle. Never count the pro-Israel lobby out.

[This is the third in a series on foreign lobbying. The previous installments were "The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying" and "How China Lobby Shaped America." Next: The Saudi Lobby.]

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to ConsortiumNews.com.

The Long Ordeal of Julian Assange

For the past decade, WikiLeaks has published groundbreaking evidence of government and corporate abuse while getting targeted for abuse itself, including a seven-year vendetta against founder Julian Assange, says John Pilger.

By John Pilger

Julian Assange has been vindicated because the Swedish case against him was corrupt. The prosecutor, Marianne Ny, obstructed justice and should be

prosecuted. Her obsession with Assange not only embarrassed her colleagues and the judiciary but exposed the Swedish state's collusion with the United States in its crimes of war and "rendition."

Had Assange not sought refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London, he would have been on his way to the kind of American torture pit Chelsea Manning had to endure.

This prospect was obscured by the grim farce played out in Sweden. "It's a laughing stock," said James Catlin, one of Assange's Australian lawyers. "It is as if they make it up as they go along."

It may have seemed that way, but there was always serious purpose. In 2008, a secret Pentagon document prepared by the "Cyber Counterintelligence Assessments Branch" foretold a detailed plan to discredit WikiLeaks and smear Assange personally.

The "mission" was to destroy the "trust" that was WikiLeaks' "center of gravity." This would be achieved with threats of "exposure [and] criminal prosecution." Silencing and criminalizing such an unpredictable source of truth-telling was the aim.

Perhaps this was understandable. WikiLeaks has exposed the way America dominates much of human affairs, including its epic crimes, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq: the wholesale, often homicidal killing of civilians and the contempt for sovereignty and international law.

These disclosures are protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. As a presidential candidate in 2008, Barack Obama, a professor of constitutional law, lauded whistle blowers as "part of a healthy democracy [and they] must be protected from reprisal." In 2012, the Obama campaign boasted on its website that Obama had prosecuted more whistle blowers in his first term than all other US presidents combined. Before Chelsea Manning had even received a trial, Obama had publicly pronounced her guilty.

Few serious observers doubt that should the U.S. get its hands on Assange, a similar fate awaits him. According to documents released by National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden, he is on a "Manhunt target list." Threats of his kidnapping and assassination became almost political and media currency in the U.S. following then Vice-President Joe Biden's preposterous slur that the WikiLeaks founder was a "cyber-terrorist."

Hillary Clinton, the destroyer of Libya and, as WikiLeaks revealed last year, the secret supporter and personal beneficiary of forces underwriting ISIS, proposed her own expedient solution: "Can't we just drone this guy," according

to the conservative Web site True Pundit, which cited State Department sources for the quote. [Clinton said she didn't recall making the remark but adding: "It would have been a joke, if it had been said, but I don't recall that."]

According to Australian diplomatic cables, Washington's bid to get Assange is "unprecedented in scale and nature." In Alexandria, Virginia, a secret grand jury has sought for almost seven years to contrive a crime for which Assange can be prosecuted. This is not easy.

The First Amendment Obstacle

The First Amendment protects publishers, journalists and whistleblowers, whether it is the editor of the New York Times or the editor of WikiLeaks. The very notion of free speech is described as America's "founding virtue" or, as Thomas Jefferson called it, "our currency."

Faced with this hurdle, the U.S. Justice Department has contrived charges of "espionage," "conspiracy to commit espionage," "conversion" (theft of government property), "computer fraud and abuse" (computer hacking) and general "conspiracy." The favored Espionage Act, which was meant to deter pacifists and conscientious objectors during World War One, has provisions for life imprisonment and the death penalty.

Assange's ability to defend himself in such a Kafkaesque world has been severely limited by the U.S. declaring his case a state secret. In 2015, a federal court in Washington blocked the release of all information about the "national security" investigation against WikiLeaks, because it was "active and ongoing" and would harm the "pending prosecution" of Assange. The judge, Barbara J. Rothstein, said it was necessary to show "appropriate deference to the executive in matters of national security." This is a kangaroo court.

For Assange, his trial has been trial by media. On August 20, 2010, when the Swedish police opened a "rape investigation," they coordinated it, unlawfully, with the Stockholm tabloids. The front pages said Assange had been accused of the "rape of two women." The word "rape" can have a very different legal meaning in Sweden than in Britain [or elsewhere]; a pernicious false reality became the news that went round the world.

Less than 24 hours later, the Stockholm Chief Prosecutor, Eva Finne, took over the investigation. She wasted no time in cancelling the arrest warrant, saying, "I don't believe there is any reason to suspect that he has committed rape." Four days later, she dismissed the rape investigation altogether, saying, "There is no suspicion of any crime whatsoever."

Enter Claes Borgstrom, a highly contentious figure in the Social Democratic

Party then standing as a candidate in Sweden's imminent general election. Within days of the chief prosecutor's dismissal of the case, Borgstrom, a lawyer, announced to the media that he was representing the two women and had sought a different prosecutor in Gothenberg. This was Marianne Ny, whom Borgstrom knew well, personally and politically.

On August 30, Assange attended a police station in Stockholm voluntarily and answered the questions put to him. He understood that was the end of the matter. Two days later, Ny announced she was re-opening the case.

At a press conference, Borgstrom was asked by a Swedish reporter why the case was proceeding when it had already been dismissed. The reporter cited one of the women as saying she had not been raped. He replied, "Ah, but she is not a lawyer."

On the day that Marianne Ny reactivated the case, the head of Sweden's military intelligence service – which has the acronym MUST – publicly denounced WikiLeaks in an article entitled "WikiLeaks [is] a threat to our soldiers [under US command in Afghanistan]."

Both the Swedish prime minister and foreign minister attacked Assange, who had been charged with no crime. Assange was warned that the Swedish intelligence service, SAPO, had been told by its U.S. counterparts that U.S.-Sweden intelligence-sharing arrangements would be "cut off" if Sweden sheltered him.

For five weeks, Assange waited in Sweden for the renewed "rape investigation" to take its course. The Guardian was then on the brink of publishing the Iraq "War Logs," based on WikiLeaks' disclosures, which Assange was to oversee in London.

Finally, he was allowed to leave. As soon as he had left, Marianne Ny issued a European Arrest Warrant and an Interpol "red alert" normally used for terrorists and dangerous criminals.

Stuck in London

Assange attended a police station in London, was duly arrested and spent ten days in Wandsworth Prison, in solitary confinement. Released on £340,000 bail, he was electronically tagged, required to report to police daily and placed under virtual house arrest while his case began its long journey to the U.K. Supreme Court.

He still had not been charged with any offense. His lawyers repeated his offer to be questioned in London, by video or personally, pointing out that Marianne Ny had given him permission to leave Sweden. They suggested a special facility at Scotland Yard commonly used by the Swedish and other European authorities for

that purpose. She refused.

For almost seven years, while Sweden has questioned 44 people in the U.K. in connection with police investigations, Ny refused to question Assange and so advance her case.

Writing in the Swedish press, a former Swedish prosecutor, Rolf Hillegren, accused Ny of losing all impartiality. He described her personal investment in the case as “abnormal” and demanded she be replaced.

Assange asked the Swedish authorities for a guarantee that he would not be “rendered” to the U.S. if he was extradited to Sweden. This was refused. In December 2010, The Independent revealed that the two governments had discussed his onward extradition to the U.S.

Contrary to its reputation as a bastion of liberal enlightenment, Sweden has drawn so close to Washington that it has allowed secret CIA “renditions” – including the illegal deportation of refugees. The rendition and subsequent torture of two Egyptian political refugees in 2001 was condemned by the U.N. Committee against Torture, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch; the complicity and duplicity of the Swedish state are documented in successful civil litigation and in WikiLeaks cables.

“Documents released by WikiLeaks since Assange moved to England,” wrote Al Burke, editor of the online Nordic News Network, an authority on the multiple twists and dangers that faced Assange, “clearly indicate that Sweden has consistently submitted to pressure from the United States in matters relating to civil rights. There is every reason for concern that if Assange were to be taken into custody by Swedish authorities, he could be turned over to the United States without due consideration of his legal rights.”

A Faltering Case

The war on Assange now intensified. Marianne Ny refused to allow his Swedish lawyers, and the Swedish courts, access to hundreds of SMS messages that the police had extracted from the phone of one of the two women involved in the “rape” allegations.

Ny said she was not legally required to reveal this critical evidence until a formal charge was laid and she had questioned him. Then, why wouldn't she question him? Catch-22.

When she announced last week that she was dropping the Assange case, she made no mention of the evidence that would destroy it. One of the SMS messages makes clear that one of the women did not want any charges brought against Assange,

“but the police were keen on getting a hold on him.” She was “shocked” when they arrested him because she only “wanted him to take [an HIV] test.” She “did not want to accuse JA of anything” and “it was the police who made up the charges.” In a witness statement, she is quoted as saying that she had been “railroaded by police and others around her.”

Neither woman claimed she had been raped. Indeed, both denied they were raped and one of them has since tweeted, “I have not been raped.” The women were manipulated by police – whatever their lawyers might say now. Certainly, they, too, are the victims of this sinister saga.

The Politics of ‘Rape’

Katrin Axelsson and Lisa Longstaff of Women Against Rape wrote: “The allegations against [Assange] are a smokescreen behind which a number of governments are trying to clamp down on WikiLeaks for having audaciously revealed to the public their secret planning of wars and occupations with their attendant rape, murder and destruction. ... The authorities care so little about violence against women that they manipulate rape allegations at will. [Assange] has made it clear he is available for questioning by the Swedish authorities, in Britain or via Skype. Why are they refusing this essential step in their investigation? What are they afraid of?”

Assange’s choice was stark: extradition to a country that had refused to say whether or not it would send him on to the U.S., or to seek what seemed his last opportunity for refuge and safety.

Supported by most of Latin America, the government of tiny Ecuador granted him refugee status on the basis of documented evidence that he faced the prospect of cruel and unusual punishment in the U.S.; that this threat violated his basic human rights; and that his own government in Australia had abandoned him and colluded with Washington.

Australia’s Labor government of then Prime Minister Julia Gillard had even threatened to take away his Australian passport – until it was pointed out to her that this would be unlawful.

The renowned human rights lawyer, Gareth Peirce, who represents Assange in London, wrote to then Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd: “Given the extent of the public discussion, frequently on the basis of entirely false assumptions... it is very hard to attempt to preserve for him any presumption of innocence. Mr. Assange has now hanging over him not one but two Damocles swords, of potential extradition to two different jurisdictions in turn for two different alleged crimes, neither of which are crimes in his own country, and that his personal

safety has become at risk in circumstances that are highly politically charged.”

It was not until she contacted the Australian High Commission in London that Peirce received a response, which answered none of the pressing points she raised. In a meeting I attended with her, Australian Consul-General Ken Pascoe made the astonishing claim that he knew “only what I read in the newspapers” about the details of the case.

In 2011, in Sydney, I spent several hours with a conservative Member of Australia’s Federal Parliament, Malcolm Turnbull. We discussed the threats to Assange and their wider implications for freedom of speech and justice, and why Australia was obliged to stand by him. Turnbull then had a reputation as a free speech advocate. He is now the Prime Minister of Australia.

I gave him Gareth Peirce’s letter about the threat to Assange’s rights and life. He said the situation was clearly appalling and promised to take it up with the Gillard government. Only his silence followed.

A Vituperative Campaign

For almost seven years, this epic miscarriage of justice has been drowned in a vituperative campaign against the WikiLeaks founder. There are few precedents. Deeply personal, petty, vicious and inhuman attacks have been aimed at a man not charged with any crime yet subjected to treatment not even meted out to a defendant facing extradition on a charge of murdering his wife. That the U.S. threat to Assange was a threat to all journalists, and to the principle of free speech, was lost in the sordid and the ambitious. I would call it anti-journalism.

Books were published, movie deals struck and media careers launched or kick-started on the back of WikiLeaks and an assumption that attacking Assange was fair game and he was too poor to sue. People have made money, often big money, while WikiLeaks has struggled to survive.

The previous editor of the Guardian, Alan Rusbridger, called the WikiLeaks disclosures, which his newspaper published, “one of the greatest journalistic scoops of the last 30 years.” Yet no attempt was made to protect the Guardian’s provider and source. Instead, the “scoop” became part of a marketing plan to raise the newspaper’s cover price.

With not a penny going to Assange or to WikiLeaks, a hyped Guardian book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie. The book’s authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, gratuitously described Assange as a “damaged personality” and “callous.” They also revealed the secret password he had given the paper in confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing the U.S. embassy cables. With

Assange now trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy, Harding, standing among the police outside, gloated on his blog that “Scotland Yard may get the last laugh.”

Journalism students might well study this period to understand the most ubiquitous source of “fake news” – as from within a media self-ordained with a false respectability and as an extension of the authority and power it courts and protects.

The presumption of innocence was not a consideration in Kirsty Wark’s memorable live-on-air interrogation in 2010. “Why don’t you just apologize to the women?” she demanded of Assange, followed by: “Do we have your word of honor that you won’t abscond?”

On the BBC’s Today program, John Humphrys bellowed: “Are you a sexual predator?” Assange replied that the suggestion was ridiculous, to which Humphrys demanded to know how many women he had slept with.

“Would even Fox News have descended to that level?” wondered the American historian William Blum. “I wish Assange had been raised in the streets of Brooklyn, as I was. He then would have known precisely how to reply to such a question: ‘You mean including your mother?’”

Last week, on BBC World News, on the day Sweden announced it was dropping the case, I was interviewed by Greta Guru-Murthy, who seemed to have little knowledge of the Assange case. She persisted in referring to the “charges” against him. She accused him of putting Trump in the White House; and she drew my attention to the “fact” that “leaders around the world” had condemned him. Among these “leaders” she included Trump’s CIA director. I asked her, “Are you a journalist?”

The injustice meted out to Assange is one of the reasons Parliament reformed the Extradition Act in 2014. “His case has been won lock, stock and barrel,” Gareth Peirce told me, “these changes in the law mean that the UK now recognizes as correct everything that was argued in his case. Yet he does not benefit.” In other words, he would have won his case in the British courts and would not have been forced to take refuge.

Ecuador’s decision to protect Assange in 2012 was immensely brave. Even though the granting of asylum is a humanitarian act, and the power to do so is enjoyed by all states under international law, both Sweden and the United Kingdom refused to recognize the legitimacy of Ecuador’s decision.

Police Siege

Ecuador’s embassy in London was placed under police siege and its government

abused. When William Hague's Foreign Office threatened to violate the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, warning that it would remove the diplomatic inviolability of the embassy and send the police in to get Assange, outrage across the world forced the government to back down.

During one night, police appeared at the windows of the embassy in an obvious attempt to intimidate Assange and his protectors.

Since then, Assange has been confined to a small room without sunlight. He has been ill from time to time and refused safe passage to the diagnostic facilities of hospital. Yet, his resilience and dark humor remain quite remarkable in the circumstances. When asked how he put up with the confinement, he replied, "Sure beats a supermax."

It is not over, but the campaign against him is unraveling. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention – the tribunal that adjudicates and decides whether governments comply with their human rights obligations – last year ruled that Assange had been detained unlawfully by Britain and Sweden. This is international law at its apex.

Both Britain and Sweden participated in the 16-month long U.N. investigation and submitted evidence and defended their position before the tribunal. In previous cases ruled upon by the Working Group – Aung Sang Suu Kyi in Burma, imprisoned opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia, detained Washington Post journalist Jason Rezaian in Iran – both Britain and Sweden gave full support to the tribunal. The difference now is that Assange's persecution endures in the heart of London.

The Metropolitan Police say they still intend to arrest Assange for bail infringement should he leave the embassy. What then? A few months in prison while the U.S. delivers its extradition request to the British courts?

If the British Government allows this to happen it will, in the eyes of the world, be shamed comprehensively and historically as an accessory to the crime of a war waged by rampant power against justice and freedom, and all of us.

John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist based in London. Pilger's Web site is: www.johnpilger.com. His new film, "The Coming War on China," is available in the U.S. from www.bullfrogfilms.com

The Gaping Holes of Russia-gate

Between Russia-gate and President Trump's potential impeachment, Washington is blending the thrill of McCarthyism and the excitement of Watergate, as ex-U.S. intelligence officials Ray McGovern and William Binney explain.

By Ray McGovern and William Binney

Official Washington got to relive the excitement of Watergate in a "gotcha" moment after President Trump fired FBI Director James Comey. There were fond recollections of how righteous the major newspapers felt when condemning President Nixon over his "Saturday Night Massacre" firing of special prosecutor Archibald Cox.

But the overriding question from "this Russia thing, with Trump and Russia" – as President Trump calls it – is whether there is any there there. The President labeled it a "made-up story" and, by all appearances from what is known at this time, he is mostly correct.

A few days before Comey's firing, the FBI Director reportedly had asked for still more resources to hunt the Russian bear for supposedly "interfering" with last year's election to hurt Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump. And so the firing allowed the Watergate-recalling news outlets to trot out the old trope that "the cover-up is worse than the crime."

But can that argument bear close scrutiny, or is it the "phony narrative" that Senate Republican Whip John Cornyn of Texas claims it to be? Cornyn quipped that, if impeding the investigation was Trump's aim, "This strikes me as a lousy way to do it. All it does is heighten the attention given to the issue."

Truth is, President Trump had ample reason to be fed up with Comey, in part for his lack of enthusiasm toward investigating actual, provable crimes related to "Russia-gate" – like the flood of sensitive national security leaks, such as the highly sensitive intercepted communications used to precipitate the demise of Trump aide Michael Flynn.

The retired Army lieutenant general was "caught" talking with Russia's ambassador last December, a normal undertaking for a person designated as the incoming National Security Adviser. But Obama administration holdovers twisted that into a supposed violation of the archaic 1799 Logan Act and then used a transcript of the phone call to trip up Flynn because he didn't have perfect recollection of the conversation.

So, a trumped-up federal case was used to help get Flynn fired, but an apparent

criminal act – the Flynn leak among many other leaks – was apparently ignored. We suspect that one reason for Comey’s disinterest was that he already knows who was responsible.

In contrast to Comey’s see-no-evil reaction to criminal leaking, the FBI Director evinced strong determination to chase after ties between Russia and the Trump campaign until the cows came home. The investigation (already underway for 10 months) had the decided advantage of casting doubt on the legitimacy of Trump’s presidency and putting the kibosh on his plans to forge a more workable relationship with Russia, a win-win for the Establishment, the Military-Industrial Complex, and the FBI/CIA/NSA “Deep State”; a lose-lose for the President – and arguably the American people and the world, both of whom might benefit from fewer big-power tensions and lower spending on an arms race.

An Evidence Shortage

What has been particularly noteworthy about this “scandal” is how much spooky music we’ve heard and how many sinister suspicions have been raised versus actual “evidence” of the core allegations. So far, it has been smoke and mirrors with no chargeable offenses and not a scintilla of convincing proof of Russian “meddling” in the election.

The oft-cited, but evidence-free, CIA/FBI/NSA report of Jan. 6 – crafted by selected senior analysts, according to then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – is of a piece with the “high-confidence,” but fraudulent, National Intelligence Estimate 15 years ago about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

But what about the “Russian hacking,” the centerpiece of the accusations about Kremlin “interference” to help Trump? Surely, we know that happened. Or do we?

On March 31, 2017, WikiLeaks released original CIA documents – almost completely ignored by the mainstream media – showing that the agency had created a program allowing it to break into computers and servers and make it look like others did it by leaving telltale signs (like Cyrillic markings, for example). The capabilities shown in what WikiLeaks calls the “Vault 7” trove of CIA documents required the creation of hundreds of millions of lines of source code. At \$25 per line of code, that amounts to about \$2.5 billion for each 100 million code lines. But the Deep State has that kind of money and would probably consider the expenditure a good return on investment for “proving” the Russians hacked into Democratic Party emails.

In other words, it is altogether possible that the hacking attributed to Russia

was actually one of several “active measures” undertaken by a cabal consisting of the CIA, FBI, NSA and Clapper – the same agencies responsible for the lame, evidence-free report of Jan. 6.

Comey displayed considerable discomfort on March 20, explaining to the House Intelligence Committee why the FBI did not insist on getting physical access to the Democratic National Committee’s computers in order to do its own proper forensics, but chose to rely on the examination done by the DNC’s private contractor, CrowdStrike. The firm itself has conflicts of interests in its links to the pro-NATO and anti-Russia think tank, the Atlantic Council, through Dmitri Alperovitch, who is an Atlantic Council senior fellow and the co-founder of CrowdStrike.

Given the stakes involved in the Russia-gate investigation – now including a possible impeachment battle over removing the President of the United States – wouldn’t it seem logical for the FBI to insist on its own forensics for this fundamental predicate of the case? Or could Comey’s hesitancy to demand access to the DNC’s computers be explained by a fear that FBI technicians not fully briefed on CIA/NSA/FBI Deep State programs might uncover a lot more than he wanted?

President Trump has entered into a high-stakes gamble in confronting the Deep State and its media allies over the accusations of his colluding with Russia. Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat, publicly warned him of the risk earlier this year. “You take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you,” Schumer told MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow on Jan. 3.

If Mr. Trump continues to “take on” the Deep State, he will be fighting uphill, whether he’s in the right or not. It is far from certain he will prevail.

Ray McGovern (rrmcgovern@gmail.com) was a CIA analyst for 27 years; he briefed the president’s daily brief one-on-one to President Reagan’s most senior national security officials from 1981-85. **William Binney (williambinney0802@comcast.net)** worked for NSA for 36 years, retiring in 2001 as the technical director of world military and geopolitical analysis and reporting; he created many of the collection systems still used by NSA.

The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying

Exclusive: Russia-gate has focused attention on requirements for U.S. citizens

acting as “foreign agents” to register with the Justice Department, but these rules have been sporadically or selectively enforced for decades, Jonathan Marshall writes in the first of a series.

By Jonathan Marshall

The alleged hacking of the Hillary Clinton campaign’s emails and the numerous contacts of Donald Trump’s circle with Russian officials, oligarchs and mobsters have triggered any number of investigations into Moscow’s alleged efforts to influence the 2016 election and the new administration. With U.S.-Russian relations at their lowest point since the Cold War, however, it would be tough to argue that Moscow has achieved any leverage in Washington.

In contrast, as journalist Robert Parry recently noted, American politicians and the media have been notably silent about other examples of foreign interference in U.S. national politics. In part that’s because supporters of more successful foreign pressure groups have enough clout to downplay or deny their very existence. In part it’s also because America’s political system is so riddled with big money that jaded insiders rarely question the status quo of influence peddling by other nations.

That wasn’t the case a century ago. In the run-up to U.S. entry into World War I, millions of Americans became wildly alarmed by the potential influence of pro-German fifth columnists. The success of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 shifted much of that paranoia toward the Soviet Union, prompting the infamous Red Scare.

Two decades later, Americans again became troubled by the growing influence of fascist and Communist propaganda in this country. In response, Congress in 1938 passed a law regulating “foreign agents” and requiring disclosure of their political and public relations activities and spending. Willful failure to register can be punished by up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Since the end of World War II, however, enforcement of the Foreign Agents Registration Act has been notably lax. Its effectiveness has been stymied by political resistance from lobby supporters as well as by the law’s many loopholes – including Justice Department’s admission that FARA “does not authorize the government to inspect records of those not registered under the Act.”

A 2016 audit by the inspector general of the Department of Justice determined that half of FARA registrations and 62 percent of initial registrations were filed late, and 15 percent of registrants simply stopped filing for periods of six months or more. It also determined that the Department of Justice brought

only seven criminal cases under FARA from 1966 to 2015, and filed no civil injunctions since 1991.

“FARA is violated more or less daily in Washington and largely ignored by authorities unless it involves someone without political connections,” commented Matt Taibbi of *Rolling Stone*. “An awful lot of important people in Washington who appear to be making fortunes lobbying for foreign countries are merely engaged in ‘litigation support,’ if you ask them.”

In addition, foreign governments find it easy to circumvent the act by tactics such as investing in influential foreign policy think tanks like the Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, and Center for Strategic and International Studies – buying credibility for their views without full disclosure.

In a rare exception to normal practice, the Atlantic Council’s foreign ties briefly came under close scrutiny in 2013, when its chairman, Chuck Hagel, was nominated to become President Obama’s Secretary of Defense. The Atlantic Council’s major funders include the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, several Turkish entities, the Ukrainian World Congress, Kazakhstan, and several of the biggest U.S. defense corporations. Yet good luck finding any such disclosures at the end of the many op-ed columns its staff publish in the *Washington Post* and other outlets on relevant issues of U.S. foreign policy.

The combination of lax enforcement and tremendously high stakes – including billions of dollars in foreign aid, arms sales, and economic sanctions – has led to intense foreign lobbying in the United States, some of it financed with recycled U.S. aid. But there’s nothing new about this trend.

Forty years ago, in their book *The Power Peddlers*, Russell Warren Howe and Sarah Hays Trott reported that “the foreign lobby network is a high growth industry, both in terms of numbers and cash; there are at least fifteen thousand persons already engaged in foreign lobby activity . . . in Washington – thirty for every Member of Congress.”

Despite the serious implications for U.S. foreign policy and American democracy, such investigations of foreign lobbying have been few and far between. Perhaps the most far-reaching official probe was launched by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright in 1963, led by special counsel Walter Pincus, who went on to a long career as an investigative reporter at the *Washington Post*. Among other things, the hearings exposed the lucrative, secretive work of lobbyists for various Caribbean nations to jack up U.S. purchases of their sugar exports at above-market prices. Their efforts put millions of dollars in the pockets of ruthless dictators like Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic.

After Trujillo's assassination in 1961, his former intelligence chief disclosed that Trujillo bought the votes of leading members of Congress for a bigger sugar quota with millions of dollars in bribes and the services of prostitutes. Those members of Congress went unprosecuted, but the Kennedy Justice Department nailed Hearst society columnist Igor Cassini – brother of the First Lady's favorite dress designer – for acting as an unregistered agent of the Trujillo regime. Three years earlier, the head of the Mutual Broadcasting System pleaded no contest to charges of accepting \$750,000 from Trujillo to act as another unregistered agent.

Unmasking the Pro-Israel Lobby

In 1962, the Justice Department also took rare aim at the pro-Israel lobby by forcing the American Zionist Council, formed in 1949 as a tax-exempt umbrella of American Jewish groups, to register as a foreign agent. Weeks later, supporters did an end run by folding AZC and incorporating the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to continue acting as a de facto lobby – but without Israeli money and without filing as a foreign agent.

The Fulbright committee did not drop the case, however. It subpoenaed records of the AZC and determined that it had been “ostensibly controlled by American citizens but had its budget approved in Jerusalem.” Over a period of eight years, the committee learned, AZC took more than \$5 million from the Jewish Agency, a semi-official arm of the Israeli government, to disseminate pro-Israeli propaganda in the United States.

Grant Smith, a pioneering researcher on the origins of the pro-Israel lobby, has asked “what might be different today if AIPAC in particular had been properly registered under the Act.”

“When AIPAC director Morris Amitay was caught red-handed mishandling classified missile secrets in 1975, he could have been prosecuted under FARA. When AIPAC and an Israeli diplomat purloined the entire 300-page book of classified trade secrets compiled from 70 U.S. industry groups opposed to unilateral trade concessions for Israel in 1984, they could have been prosecuted for failing to report their clandestine subversion of due process. When in 2005 [AIPAC officials] Steven J. Rosen and Keith Weissman met with Israeli diplomats during efforts to pass classified information to the press they thought could trigger a U.S. attack on Iran, FARA consequences would have awaited them all.

“However, because the U.S. Department of Justice has unilaterally abrogated its responsibility to enforce FARA, people, ideas, money and propaganda campaigns continue to secretly slosh freely between Tel Aviv and Israeli fronts in America with taxpayer funds thrown into the toxic brew.”

The issue of foreign agents and their role in U.S. politics resurfaced as a major issue in 2016, with speculation about Russian connections to the Trump campaign and reports of possible FARA violations by Trump's campaign manager and chief foreign policy adviser. The American people are long overdue for another Fulbright-style investigation into foreign lobbies and the adequacy of current enforcement measures. To highlight some of the critical issues at stake, Consortiumnews.com over the next few days will publish a series of articles on some of the workings of lobbyists, pressure groups and agents working on behalf of Taiwan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

Next: The China Lobby

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.

Donald Trump at a Lonely Crossroads

Battered for months by Russia-gate innuendo, Donald Trump finds his unlikely presidency at a dangerous crossroads with no clear-cut path ahead, writes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

It is time to pause, take a deep breath, and reflect. It is very clear that Trump's Presidency is at a crossroads. This is not because there is any evidence of any wrongdoing. To date, there is a torrent of innuendo, but zero "evidence." Rather, events have converged at a point of inflection, not because the President might be impeached – that is improbable because the bar in terms of evidence, and of Congressional votes required, is very high – but because recent days have unmasked the sheer breadth and visceral animosity of the forces determined to "take down" the President, by whatever means present themselves.

President Trump faces a mainstream media (MSM) that has become hysterical in perceiving collusion with Russia everywhere – even to the extent of querying how Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Ambassador, and a Russian photographer could have been allowed access to the Oval Office, thereby compromising American "security." Trump faces a coalition of Clintonites, "corporate" Republicans, neocons, and more significantly, a fifth column within the intelligence services which regards any attempt at détente with Russia to constitute *prima facie* treason.

In response to a question from Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, who asked

FBI Director James Comey in the Senate Judiciary Committee “what kind of threat” Russia presents “to the democratic process” (that is to say Graham’s question was not about Russia’s military capabilities, but on the threat to Western democracies), Comey answered: “Certainly, in my view, the greatest threat of any nation on Earth, given their [Russia’s] intention and their capability.”

One might reasonably conclude then, that Trump inevitably will be overwhelmed by this onslaught. Certainly the noise from the East Coast media bubble is overwhelming. And that, precisely, is the threat to the President: the drip, drip, of innuendo that Professor Stephen Cohen has dubbed “the accusation of treason.”

“And”, Cohen added, “we have a whole array of allegations that Putin helped him [Trump] get in the White House – to his [Trump’s] associates doing wrong things with Russians ... This, [the allegations lacking any solid evidence] is beyond belief now ... This has become a national security threat to us, in and of, itself.”

A Paralyzed Administration

And now a Special Prosecutor has been appointed. One commentator summed it up thus: “That’s how special prosecutors work ... they hobble the president, drain away his political credibility, separate him from his supporters, and paralyze his administration. No legislator is willing to lend his support for fear of what the prosecutor might find. Each one will run for cover rather than work with Trump to get something done. In appointing a prosecutor, [Deputy Attorney General Rod] Rosenstein has killed this Administration’s ability to function. No health care overhaul. No tax cuts. No government reform. All while we await the results of a nothing investigation into a nothing scandal.”

The noise is overwhelming, but it is nearly all emanating from the coastal élites who inevitably speak the loudest. Polls may say that Trump’s favorability rating is slipping. That is so; but the polls also speak to the growing polarity between the Republican base, and the coastal Establishment: 81 percent of Clinton voters support impeaching the President, but 83 percent of Trump voters adamantly oppose it. Equally 91 percent of Clinton supporters “disapprove” of Trump, whereas 86 percent of the Trump base “support” him. There is evidence that the “deplorables” have been deeply angered by the impeachment talk.

And here lies the “inflection point”: President Trump’s base is pretty clear in identifying the “game plan” (it is widely dissected on the New Right, and Alt Right sites): The onslaught is not about finding the “evidence” (which probably doesn’t exist): The “Russian interference” meme emerged primarily from the Democratic National Committee email leaks that were originally attributed to a

Russian “hack” (rather than a “leak” by Seth Rich, since murdered), via a private company, Crowd Strike, (evidence that experts now contest); from the discredited “dirty dossier” of ex-British spy Christopher Steele; and from unmasked intercepts of Trump aides (which have as yet shown no evidence of electoral collusion).

It is rather the drip, drip of innuendo which is intended – the Trump base avers – to collapse the President’s ratings (among his base) to the point at which even the Republican members of Congress will abandon the President, and join the “movement” to remove him, via one or other of the provisions of the U.S. Constitution.

Obstruction of Justice is unlikely to serve: As George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley has said, former FBI Director James Comey’s memo offers “no proof for impeachment” of Trump. Turley noted: “Indeed, it raises as many questions for Comey as it does Trump in terms of the alleged underlying conduct.

“A good place to start would be with the federal law, specifically 18 U.S.C. 1503. The criminal code demands more than what Comey reportedly describes in his memo. There are dozens of different variations of obstruction charges ranging from threatening witnesses to influencing jurors. None would fit this case. That leaves the omnibus provision on attempts to interfere with the ‘due administration of justice.’

“However, that still leaves the need to show that the effort was to influence ‘corruptly’ when Trump could say that he did little but express concern for a longtime associate. The term ‘corruptly’ is actually defined differently under the various obstruction provisions, but it often involves a showing that someone acted ‘with the intent to secure an unlawful benefit for oneself or another.’ Encouraging leniency or advocating for an associate is improper but not necessarily seeking an unlawful benefit for him.”

What the point of inflection calls for (Trump’s supporters’ say), is to insist that the FBI investigation be concluded expeditiously, and that a counter-attack on the leaders of those forces (whomsoever they are), and on their “moles” – “embedded insurgents committed to forcing Trump from office” – who are leaking innuendo to the MSM, be prosecuted.

It is a crossroads. Trump has to halt the drumbeat, or see his Presidency crumble into dust. And the blade of “defamation politics” can be two-edged: Hillary Clinton was no paragon of virtue.

An Elusive Achievement

In this context, Trump now needs a policy achievement more than ever. A legislative success in the domestic arena is – evidently – not in prospect, but rather the political convulsions in D.C. may finally spook a somnolent and supine Wall Street to think about risk again (VIX, a litmus of market volatility, has been at historic lows) – especially as market insiders are warning their clients “not to expect to [be] bailed out by the Fed this time.” Indeed the entire Trump reflation program looks as if will be a long time coming (if it comes at all, this year).

At such times, foreign policy may come to the fore. We have already noted that the Astana Process has witnessed a White House, more ready than Obama’s, to work with Russia, Turkey and Iran, to reach some sort of settlement in Syria. The triumph of the “defeat” of ISIS in Raqqa’a and Mosul might constitute just such an achievement to rally Trump’s base.

Trump was politically courageous in inviting Lavrov into the Oval Office (at a time when “the drumbeat” of Russia collusion was reaching a crescendo). It seems that Russia and its allies are ready to concede to Trump the taking of Raqqa’a, (the Syrian Foreign Minister has effectively acknowledged this); and in return, Russia and Iran have been put on test by the White House.

The hostile rhetoric from Washington on Iran, has been notably absent since Astana, and the secondary sanctions waiver in connection with the JCPOA (the nuclear agreement) has been renewed. It seems Trump has realized that Generals James Mattis (Defense Secretary) and H.R. McMaster (National Security Adviser) were intent on leading the President back into a series of (unwinnable) wars – at least that seems to be the message of Astana which has put two negotiators, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson firmly in the driver’s seat.

But here too, the onslaught on the President, and on the Astana political process is likely to continue. Recall that President Obama, who was ever more hesitant than Trump – (never fully endorsing) Secretary of State John Kerry’s and FM Lavrov’s negotiating marathons – witnessed those political efforts sabotaged by his own Pentagon (the “accident” at Dier Azor, killing 68 Syrian Army soldiers defending their besieged base against ISIS militants), and Defense Secretary Ashton Carter’s public equivocation about sharing intelligence on ISIS and al-Qae’da with the Russians).

Already the signs of similar sabotage are present: i.e. the Acting Assistant Secretary of State Stuart Jones’s dubious announcement – on the eve of a Geneva round of Syria talks – that the U.S. had found evidence of a crematorium at a Syrian prison, in which the remains of mass executions of prisoners were burned. Two days later Jones resigned from the State Department, with a colleague noting

that while Jones was retiring early for personal reasons, his departure was a case of “another senior government official with real competence leaving.” (Or, in other words another anti-Trump dissident leaving the ship.)

Even Anne Barnard of the *New York Times* noted that the timing of the crematorium allegations seemed “political.” Yes, indeed political, but directed at the Russians or at Trump? There are also reports that a contingent of U.S. and British Special Forces are operating in southern Syria to stymie any Syrian army or Hezbollah advance in order to regain control of the Syrian-Iraqi border. On Thursday, a U.S.-led airstrike hit Syrian military forces that were deemed too close to the U.S.-British base.

So President Trump should beware. Peace settlements require huge efforts to assemble, but can be undone in a moment. And Saudi Defense Minister Prince Mohammad bin Salman should note: Trump just might be more interested in defeating ISIS at this moment, than suffering a further Saudi lecture on the misdeeds of Iran. Though President Trump will be happy to receive whatever boodle with which the Saudis may care to shower him. Rumors say up to \$300 billion – \$400 billion in arms deals! “Quite nice,” as the Donald might say.

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.

Do High-Level Leaks Suggest a Conspiracy?

Widespread concern inside Official Washington about President Trump’s unfitness for the job is fueling a campaign of high-level leaks that is taking on the look of a “soft coup,” says ex-CIA officer Philip Giraldi.

By Philip Giraldi

Back in my time in the CIA, there were two places in the headquarters building one could go that were free speech zones – places where it was safe to vent about senior management without necessarily being admonished or even reported. They were the Historical Intelligence Collection room off the library, where no one ever went to look at the books, and the office supplies storage room in the basement.

The supplies room had a lot of dark corners and concealing shelves where it was

possible to be anonymous and it was completely unsupervised in the belief that true-blue CIA officers would never stoop to taking even a single pencil more than was actually needed to get the job done.

I don't know if those rooms still exist, but I sometimes think of them when the subject of government conspiracies come up. I have this vision of two or three conspirators huddled in the corner behind the staplers back in 1975 discussing how one would go about eliminating the likes of Senator Frank Church, who at that time was heading a major congressional investigation into CIA improprieties.

If there had been such a gathering, I would imagine that the *Washington Post* would have found out about it on the next day as intelligence officers are gregarious and like to talk. This has been my principal problem with the debate in some quarters about the 9/11 Commission. Their report did indeed miss many important angles in order to protect certain governmental interests, but if there had been a genuine conspiracy involving what must have been hundreds of people to demolish the Twin Towers with explosives, it surely would have leaked long ago.

Two months ago, I would have dismissed as fantasy any thoughts of a conspiracy based in America's national security agencies to bring down Donald Trump. But now I am not so sure. Many of my friends who are former intelligence officers are increasingly asking questions. It is worth pointing out that none of us are fans of what the White House has been doing and saying – quite the contrary.

Defense of the Constitution

Still, alerting the country to concerns over what might be a developing soft coup orchestrated by the intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to nullify the results of a national election in no way equates to trying to protect Donald Trump and his uncouth and ill-informed behavior. It is rather a defense of the Constitution.

Donald Trump said on Wednesday that “This is the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history!” He might be right. He was referring to Deputy Attorney General Rob Rosenstein's appointment of the highly-respected Robert Mueller as independent counsel to investigate “any links and/or coordination between Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump, and any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation.”

Trump's bombast puts everyone but his most tone-deaf supporters on edge, but there are two points that he has been making repeatedly that are essential to

any understanding of what is going on.

First, the investigation into Russia and the Trumpsters has been a high priority at FBI and also in Congress for nearly a year. Yet so far no one has produced evidence that anyone broke any law or even that someone did something wrong.

Second, and more importantly, the vilification of Trump and Russia has been driven by a series of leaks that come from the very top of the national security apparatus, leaks that appear not to have been seriously investigated.

This involvement of FBI and CIA in the campaign, whether inadvertently or by design, was particularly evident in the various reports that surfaced and were leaked to the press during the campaign and right up to the inauguration. The leaks of that type of information, to include technical intelligence and Special Access Program "codeword" material, require top-level access as well as the ability to arrange clandestine contacts with major players in the media, something far beyond the reach of most employees at CIA or the FBI.

The Lavrov Leak

Similar leaks have been appearing since that time. I confess to finding Monday's detailed account of what President Trump discussed with Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov, which included corroborating material that likely did more damage than the information that was actually shared, highly suggestive of the possibility that something like a conspiracy is, in fact, functioning.

Given the really tight-security control of that transcript after it was determined that it contained sensitive information, one might reasonably assume that the leaks to the media came directly out of Donald Trump's own National Security Council or from the highest levels of the office of the DNI, CIA, or FBI.

On Wednesday, the anonymous sources struck again, revealing that "Michael Flynn and other advisers to Donald Trump's campaign were in contact with Russian officials and others with Kremlin ties in at least 18 calls and emails during the last seven months of the 2016 presidential race." That sort of information had to come from the top level of the FBI and would have been accessible to only a few, but even though the leaks of what constitutes highly-classified information have been recurring for many months, no one has been fired or arrested.

The emphasis on Russia derives from the government and media consensus that Moscow was behind the hacking of Democratic National Committee (DNC) computers that led to the exposure of what the DNC was doing to destroy the candidacy of Bernie Sanders. There is also a related consensus that the Russian hacking was

intended to damage American democracy and also to help the Trump campaign, a narrative that the President has described as a “made-up thing,” a view that I share. All of these assertions are regarded as unquestionably true as measured by inside-the-beltway groupthink, with even the White House now conceding that there was Russian interference in the election.

Sometimes the hysteria over Russia produces over-the-top stories in the mainstream media, including last week’s completely speculative piece wondering whether the entourage of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had sought to sneak a recording device into the White House during his White House visit. It was the type of tale that might have been inspired by a leak from someone in the National Security Council who personally observed the context of the meeting and was able to provide corroborating details.

Where’s the Beef?

Nevertheless, in spite of the overwhelming groupthink, it has been repeated *ad nauseam* by people like myself that no actual evidence has been produced to support any of the claims being made about Russia and Trump. There is more evidence that the White House was penetrated by Ankara – through the good services of Michael Flynn – than by Moscow, but Congress has not called for an investigation into Turkey’s lobbying.

Ray McGovern, a former senior CIA analyst, is even speculating that the Agency might have been the actual hacker into the DNC, leaving a trail behind that would have suggested that it was done by the Russians. His concern arises from the recent WikiLeaks revelation that the CIA had developed cyber-warfare capabilities to do just that.

McGovern, like myself, is also asking why former CIA Director John Brennan has not been summoned by the Senate Committee looking into Russia-gate. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has testified twice, while former FBI Director James Comey, current NSA Director Mike Rogers, and former Justice Department senior official Sally Yates have all appeared once. Brennan’s absence is conspicuous as he was the senior national security official most closely tied to the Obama Administration, may have had the tools at hand to fake the Russian connection, and has also been plausibly linked to “encouraging” British Intelligence to provide damaging information on Michael Flynn.

I now suspect that there is indeed a group at the top of the U.S. national security system that wants to remove Donald Trump and has wanted to do so for quite some time. If that is true, I believe that they have been operating with that goal in mind for at least the past year. It is not a traditional conspiracy or cabal in that it does not meet and conspire together, but I suspect the

members know what they are doing in a general sense and are intervening whenever they can to keep Trump off balance.

Their program is simple: convince the nation that the President and his team colluded with the Russians to rig the 2016 election in his favor, which, if demonstrable even if not necessarily true, would provide grounds for impeachment. They are motivated by the belief that removing Trump must be done “for the good of the country” and they are willing to do what they consider correcting a mistake made by the American voters. They are assisted in their effort by the mainstream media, which agrees with both the methods employed and the overall objective and is completely on board with the process.

Saving the country from Trump is certainly an attractive notion. I suspect the Comeys, Clappers, and Brennans, together with a host of former senior officers who appear regularly on television, if they were involved, see themselves as great patriots. But they must understand that the blunt instrument they are using is far more dangerous than the current occupant of the White House.

A soft coup engineered by the national security and intelligence agencies would be far more threatening to our democracy than anything Donald Trump or even the Russians can do.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest. [This article is re-posted with the author’s permission. It first appeared at The American Conservative at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/do-high-level-leaks-suggest-a-conspiracy/>]
