

The 'Guccifer 2.0' Gaps in Mueller's Full Report

Like Team Mueller's indictment last July of Russian agents, the full report reveals questions about *Wikileaks'* role that much of the media has been ignoring, writes Daniel Lazare.

By **Daniel Lazare**

Special to Consortium News



As official Washington pores over the Gospel According to Saint Robert, an all-important fact about the Mueller report has gotten lost in the shuffle. Just as the Christian gospels were filled with holes, the latest version is too – particularly with regard to *WikiLeaks* and Julian Assange.

The five pages that the special prosecutor's report devotes to *WikiLeaks* are essentially lifted from Mueller's indictment last July of 12 members of the Russian military intelligence agency known as the GRU. It charges that after hacking the Democratic National Committee, the GRU used a specially-created online persona known as Guccifer 2.0 to transfer a gigabyte's worth of stolen emails to *WikiLeaks* just as the 2016 Democratic National Convention was approaching. Four days after opening the encrypted file, the indictment says, "Organization 1 [i.e. *WikiLeaks*] released over 20,000 emails and other documents stolen from the DNC network by the Conspirators [i.e. the GRU]."

Mueller's report says the same thing, but with the added twist that Assange then tried to cover up the GRU's role by suggesting that murdered Democratic National Committee

staffer Seth Rich may have been the source and by telling a congressman that the DNC email heist was an “inside job” and that he had “physical proof” that the material was not from Russian.

All of which is manna from heaven for corporate news outlets eager to pile on Assange, now behind bars in London. An April 11, 2019, *New York Times* [news analysis](#), for instance, declared that “[c]ourt documents have revealed that it was Russian intelligence – using the Guccifer persona – that provided Mr. Assange thousands of emails hacked from the Democratic National Committee,” while another *Times* [article](#) published shortly after his arrest accuses the *WikiLeaks* founder of “promoting a false cover story about the source of the leaks.”

But there’s a problem: it ain’t necessarily so. The official story that the GRU is the source doesn’t hold water, as a timeline from mid-2016 shows. Here are the key events based on the GRU indictment and the Mueller report:

- June 12: Assange [tells](#) Britain’s ITV that another round of Democratic Party disclosures is on the way: “We have upcoming leaks in relation to Hillary Clinton, which is great. *WikiLeaks* is having a very big year.”
- June 14: The Democratic National Committee [accuses](#) Russia of hacking its computers.
- June 15: Guccifer 2.0 claims credit for the hack. “The main part of the papers, thousands of files and mails, I gave to *WikiLeaks* ,” he [brags](#). “They will publish them soon.”
- June 22: *WikiLeaks* tells Guccifer via email: “Send any new material here for us to review and it will have a

much higher impact than what you are doing.”

- July 6: *WikiLeaks* sends Guccifer another email: “if you have anything hillary related we want it in the next twee [sic] days prefable [sic] because the DNC [Democratic National Convention] is approaching and she will solidify bernie supporters behind her after.” Replies Guccifer: “ok . . . i ”
- July 14: Guccifer sends *WikiLeaks* an encrypted file titled “wk dnc link1.txt.gpg.”
- July 18: *WikiLeaks* confirms it has opened “the 1Gb or so archive” and will release documents “this week.”
- July 22: *WikiLeaks* releases more than 20,000 DNC emails and 8,000 other attachments.

According to Mueller and obsequious news outlets like the *Times*, the sequence is clear: Guccifer sends archive, *WikiLeaks* receives archive, *WikiLeaks* accesses archive, *WikiLeaks* publishes archive. Donald Trump may not have colluded with Russia, but Julian Assange plainly did. [Attorney General Will Barr, significantly calling *WikiLeaks* a publisher, said at his Thursday press conference: “Under applicable law, publication of these types of materials would not be criminal unless the publisher also participated in the underlying hacking conspiracy.”]

Avoiding Questions

The narrative raises questions that the press studiously avoids. Why, for instance, would Assange announce on June 12 that a big disclosure is on the way before hearing from the supposed source? Was there a prior communication that Mueller has not disclosed? What about the reference to “new

material” on June 22 – does that mean Assange already had other material in hand? After opening the Guccifer file on July 18, why would he publish it just four days later? Would that give WikiLeaks enough time to review some 28,000 documents to insure they’re genuine?

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“If a single one of those emails had been shown to be maliciously altered,” blogger Mark F. McCarty observes, “Wikileaks’ reputation would have been in tatters.” There’s also the question that an investigator known as Adam Carter poses in *Disobedient Media*: why would Guccifer brag about giving *WikiLeaks* “thousands of files” that he wouldn’t send for another month?

The narrative doesn’t make sense – a fact that is crucially important now that Assange is fighting for his freedom in the U.K. *New Yorker* staff writer Raffi Khatchadourian sounded a rare note of caution last summer when he warned that little about Guccifer 2.0 adds up. While claiming to be the source for some of *WikiLeaks*’ most explosive emails, the material he released on his own had proved mostly worthless – 20 documents that he “said were from the DNC but which were almost surely not,” as Khatchadourian puts it, a purported Hillary Clinton dossier that “was nothing of the sort,” screenshots of emails so blurry as to be “unreadable,” and so forth.

While insisting that “our source is not the Russian government and it is not a state party, Assange told Khatchadourian that the source was not Guccifer either. “We

received quite a lot of submissions of material that was already published in the rest of the press, and people seemingly submitted the Guccifer archives,” he said somewhat cryptically. “We didn’t publish them. They were already published.” When Khatchadourian asked why he didn’t put the material out regardless, he replied that “the material from Guccifer 2.0 – or on WordPress – we didn’t have the resources to independently verify.”

No Time for Vetting

So four days was indeed too short a time to subject the Guccifer file to proper vetting. Of course, Mueller no doubt regards this as more “dissembling,” as his report describes it. Yet WikiLeaks has never been caught in a lie for the simple reason that honesty and credibility are all-important for a group that promises to protect anonymous leakers who supply it with official secrets. (See “Inside WikiLeaks: Working with the Publisher that Changed the World,” [Consortium News](#), July 19, 2018.) Mueller, by contrast, has a rich history of mendacity going back to his days as FBI director when he sought to cover up [the Saudi role in 9/11](#) and [assured](#) Congress on the eve of the 2003 invasion that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction pose “a clear threat to our national security.”

So if the Mueller narrative doesn’t hold up, the charge of dissembling doesn’t either. Indeed, as ex-federal prosecutor Andrew C. McCarthy [observes](#) in *The National Review*, the fact that the feds have charged Assange with unauthorized access to a government computer rather than conspiring with the Kremlin could be a sign that Team Mueller is less than confident it can prove collusion beyond a reasonable

doubt. As he puts it, the GRU indictment “was more like a press release than a charging instrument” because the special prosecutor knew that the chances were zero that Russian intelligence agents would surrender to a U.S. court.

Indeed, when Mueller charged 13 employees and three companies owned by Russian businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin with interfering in the 2016 election, he clearly didn’t expect them to surrender either. Thus, his team seemed taken aback when one of the alleged “troll farms” showed up in Washington asking to be heard. The prosecution’s initial response, as McCarthy put it, was to seek a delay “on the astonishing ground that the defendant has not been properly served – notwithstanding that the defendant has shown up in court and asked to be arraigned.” When that didn’t work, prosecutors tried to limit Concord’s access to some 3.2 million pieces of evidence on the grounds that the documents are too “sensitive” for Russian eyes to see. If they are again unsuccessful, they may have no choice but to drop the charges entirely, resulting in yet another “public relations disaster” for the Russia-gate investigation.

None of which bodes well for Mueller or the news organizations that worship at his shrine. After blowing the Russia-gate story all these years, why does the *Times* continue to slander the one news organization that tells the truth?

Daniel Lazare is the author of “The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy” (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique* and blogs about the Constitution and related

matters at Daniellazare.com.

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VIPS Fault Mueller Probe, Criticize Refusal to Interview Assange

The bug in Mueller's report released on Thursday is that he accepts that the Russian government interfered in the election. Trump should challenge that, says VIPS.



MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: The Fly in the Mueller Ointment

April 16, 2019

Mr. President:

The song has ended but the melody lingers on. The release Thursday of the redacted text of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's "Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election" nudged the American people a tad closer to the truth on so-called "Russiagate."

But the Mueller report left unscathed the central-but-unproven allegation that the Russian government hacked into the DNC and Podesta emails, gave them to *WikiLeaks* to publish, and helped you win the election. The thrust will be the same; namely, even if there is a lack of evidence that you colluded with Russian President Vladimir Putin, you have him to thank for becoming president. And that melody will linger on for the rest of your presidency, unless you seize the moment.

Mueller has accepted that central-but-unproven allegation as gospel truth, apparently in the lack of any disinterested, independent forensic work. Following the odd example of his erstwhile colleague, former FBI Director James Comey, Mueller apparently has relied for forensics on a discredited, DNC-hired firm named CrowdStrike, whose credibility is on a par with "pee-tape dossier" compiler Christopher Steele. Like Steele, CrowdStrike was hired and paid by the DNC (through a cutout).

We brought the lack of independent forensics to the attention of Attorney General William Barr on March 13 in a [Memorandum](#) entitled "Mueller's Forensic-Free Findings", but received no reply or acknowledgement. In that Memorandum we

described the results of our own independent, agenda-free forensic investigation led by two former Technical Directors of the NSA, who avoid squishy “assessments,” preferring to base their findings on fundamental principles of science and the scientific method. Our findings remain unchallenged; they reveal gaping holes in CrowdStrike’s conclusions.

We do not know if Barr shared our March 13 Memorandum with you. As for taking a public position on the forensics issue, we suspect he is being circumspect in choosing his battles carefully, perhaps deferring until later a rigorous examination of the dubious technical work upon which Mueller seems to have relied.

Barr’s Notification to Congress

As you know, the big attention-getter came on March 24 when Attorney General William Barr included in his four-page summary a quote from Mueller’s report: “The investigation did not establish that members of the Trump campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities.” Understandably, that grabbed headlines – the more so, since most Americans had been convinced earlier by the media that the opposite was true.

There remains, however, a huge fly in the ointment. The Mueller report makes it clear that Mueller accepts as a given – an evidence-impoverished given – that the Russian government interfered in the election on two tracks:

Track 1 involves what Barr, echoing Mueller, claims “a Russian organization, the Internet Research Agency (IRA)” did in using social media “to sow social discord, eventually

with the aim of interfering with the election.” A careful look at this allegation shows it to be without merit, despite Herculean efforts by *The New York Times*, for example, to put lipstick on this particular pig. After some rudimentary research, award winning investigative reporter Gareth Porter promptly put that pig out of its misery and brought home the bacon. We do not believe “Track 1” merits further commentary.

Track 2 does need informed commentary, since it is more technical and – to most Americans – arcane. In Barr’s words: “The Special Counsel found that Russian government actors successfully hacked into computers and obtained emails from persons affiliated with the Clinton campaign and Democratic Party organizations, and publicly disseminated those materials through various intermediaries, including *WikiLeaks*. Based on these activities, the Special Counsel brought criminal charges against a number of Russian military officers for conspiring to hack into computers in the United States for purposes of influencing the election.”

We are eager to see if Mueller’s report contains more persuasive forensic evidence than that which VIPS has already debunked. In Barr’s summary, the only mention of forensics refers to “forensic accountants” – a far cry from the kind of forensic investigators needed to provide convincing proof of “hacking” by the Russian government.

But They Were Indicted!

Circular reasoning is not likely to work for very long, even with a U.S. populace used to being brainwashed by the media. Many Americans had mistakenly assumed that Mueller’s

indictment of Russians – whether they be posting on FaceBook or acting like intelligence officers – was proof of guilt. But, as lawyers regularly point out, “one can easily indict a ham sandwich” – easier still these days, if it comes with Russian dressing.

Chances have now increased that the gullible folks who had been assured that Mueller would find collusion between you and Putin may now be a bit more circumspect – skeptical even – regarding the rest of the story-line of the “Russian hack,” and that will be even more likely among those with some technical background. Such specialists will have a field day, IF – and it is a capital “IF” – by some miracle, word of VIPS’ forensic findings gets into the media this time around.

The evidence-impooverished, misleadingly labeled “Intelligence Community Assessment” of January 6, 2017 had one saving grace. The authors noted: “The nature of cyberspace makes attribution of cyber operations difficult but not impossible. Every kind of cyber operation – malicious or not – leaves a trail.” Forensic investigators can follow a trail of metadata and other technical properties. VIPS has done that.

A “High-Class Entity?”

If, as we strongly suspect, Mueller is relying for forensics solely on CrowdStrike, the discredited firm hired by the DNC in the spring of 2016, he is acting more in the mold of Inspector Clouseau than the crackerjack investigator he is reputed to be. It simply does not suffice for Mueller’s former colleague James Comey to tell Congress that

CrowdStrike is a “high-class entity.” It is nothing of the sort and, in addition to its documented incompetence, it is riddled with conflicts of interest. Comey needs to explain why he kept the FBI away from the DNC computers after they were said to have been “hacked.”

And former National Intelligence Director James Clapper needs to explain his claim last November that “the forensic evidence was overwhelming about what the Russians had done.” What forensic evidence? From CrowdStrike? We at VIPS, in contrast, are finding more and more forensic evidence that the DNC emails were leaked, not hacked by the Russians or anyone else – and that “Guccifer 2.0” is an out-and-out fraud. Yes, we can prove that from forensics too.

But the Talking Heads Say ...

Again, if Mueller’s incomplete investigation is allowed to assume the status of Holy Writ, most Americans will continue to believe that – whether you colluded the Russians or not – Putin came through for you big time. In short, absent President Putin’s help, you would not be president.

Far too many Americans will still believe this because of the mainstream-media fodder – half-cooked by intelligence leaks – that they have been fed for two and a half years. The media have been playing *the* central role in the effort of the MICIMATT (the Military-Industrial-Congressional-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think-Tank) complex to stymie any improvement in relations with Russia. We in VIPS have repeatedly demonstrated that the core charges of Russian interference in the 2016 election are built on a house of cards. But, despite our record of accuracy on this issue –

not to mention our pre-Iraq-war warnings about the fraudulent intelligence served up by our former colleagues – we have gotten no play in mainstream media.

Most of us have chalked up decades in the intelligence business and many have extensive academic and government experience focusing on Russia. We consider the issue of “Russian interference” of overriding significance not only because the allegation is mischievously bogus and easily disproven. More important, it has brought tension with nuclear-armed Russia to the kind of dangerous fever pitch not seen since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, when the Russian provocation was real – authentic, not synthetic.

Sober minds resolved that crisis more than a half-century ago, and we all got to live another day. These days sober minds seem few and far between and a great deal is at stake. On the intelligence/forensics side, we have proved that the evidence adduced to “prove” that the Russians hacked into the DNC and Podesta emails and gave them to *WikiLeaks* is spurious. For example, we have examined metadata from one key document attributed to Russian hacking and shown that it was synthetically tainted with “Russian fingerprints.”

Who Left the Bread Crumbs?

So, if it wasn't the Russians, who left the “Russian” breadcrumb “fingerprints?” We do not know for sure; on this question we cannot draw a conclusion based on the principles of science – at least not yet. We suspect, however, that cyber warriors closer to home were responsible for inserting the “tell-tale signs” necessary to attribute “hacks” to Russia. We tacked on our more speculative views regarding

this intriguing issue onto the end of our July 24, 2017 [Memorandum](#) to you entitled “Intelligence Veterans Challenge Russia Hack Evidence.”

We recall that you were apprised of that Memorandum’s key findings because you ordered then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo to talk to William Binney, one of our two former NSA Technical Directors and one of the principal authors of that Memorandum. On October 24, 2017, Pompeo began an hour-long meeting with Binney by explaining the genesis of the odd invitation to CIA Headquarters: “You are here because the president told me that if I really wanted to know about Russian hacking I needed to talk to you.”

On the chance Pompeo has given you no report on his meeting with Binney, we can tell you that Binney, a plain-spoken, widely respected scientist, began by telling Pompeo that his (CIA) people were lying to him about Russian hacking and that he (Binney) could prove it. Pompeo reacted with disbelief, but then talked of following up with the FBI and NSA. We have no sign, though, that he followed through. And there is good reason to believe that Pompeo himself may have been reluctant to follow up with his subordinates in the Directorate of Digital Innovation created by CIA Director John Brennan in 2015. CIA malware and hacking tools are built by the Engineering Development Group, part of that relatively new Directorate.

‘Obfuscation’

A leak from within the CIA, published on March 31, 2017 by *WikiLeaks* as part of the so-called “Vault 7” disclosures, exposed a cyber tool called “Marble,” which was used during

2016 for “obfuscation” (CIA’s word). This tool can be used to conduct a forensic attribution double game (aka a false-flag operation); it included test samples in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, and Russian. *Washington Post* reporter Ellen Nakashima, to her credit, immediately penned an informative article on the Marble cyber-tool, under the catching (and accurate) headline “WikiLeaks’ latest release of CIA cyber-tools could blow the cover on agency hacking operations.” That was apparently before Nakashima “got the memo.” Mainstream media have otherwise avoided like the plague any mention of Marble.

Mr. President, we do not know if CIA’s Marble, or tools like it, played some kind of role in the campaign to blame Russia for hacking the DNC. Nor do we know how candid the denizens of CIA’s Directorate of Digital Innovation have been with the White House – or with former Director Pompeo – on this touchy issue. Since it is still quite relevant, we will repeat below a paragraph included in our July 2017 Memorandum to you under the sub-heading “Putin and the Technology:”

“We also do not know if you have discussed cyber issues in any detail with President Putin. In his interview with NBC’s Megyn Kelly, he seemed quite willing – perhaps even eager – to address issues related to the kind of cyber tools revealed in the Vault 7 disclosures, if only to indicate he has been briefed on them. Putin pointed out that today’s technology enables hacking to be “masked and camouflaged to an extent that no one can understand the origin” [of the hack] ... And, vice versa, it is possible to set up any entity or any individual that

everyone will think that they are the exact source of that attack. Hackers may be anywhere,” he said. “There may be hackers, by the way, in the United States who very craftily and professionally passed the buck to Russia. Can’t you imagine such a scenario? ... I can.”

As we told Attorney General Barr five weeks ago, we consider Mueller’s findings fundamentally flawed on the forensics side and *ipso facto* incomplete. We also criticized Mueller for failing to interview willing witnesses with direct knowledge, like *WikiLeaks*’ Julian Assange.

Political Enemies & Mainstream Media (Forgive the Redundancy)

You may be unaware that in March 2017 lawyers for Assange and the Justice Department (acting on behalf of the CIA) reportedly were very close to an agreement under which Assange would agree to discuss “technical evidence ruling out certain parties” in the leak of the DNC emails and agree to redact some classified CIA information, in exchange for limited immunity. According to the investigative reporter John Solomon of *The Hill*, Sen. Mark Warner, (D-VA) vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, learned of the incipient deal and told then-FBI Director Comey, who ordered an abrupt “stand down” and an end to the discussions with Assange.

Why did Comey and Warner put the kibosh on receiving “technical evidence ruling out certain parties” [read Russia]? We won’t insult you with the obvious answer. Assange is now in prison, to the delight of so many – including Mrs. Clinton who has said Assange must now “answer

for what he has done.”

But is it too late to follow up somehow on Assange’s offer? Might he or his associates be still willing to provide “technical evidence” showing, at least, who was *not* the culprit?

You, Mr. President, could cause that to happen. You would have to buck strong resistance at every turn, and there all manner of ways that those with vested interests and a lot of practice in sabotage can try to thwart you – with the full cooperation of most media pundits. By now, you know all too well how that works.

But you are the president. And there may be no better time than now to face them down, show the spurious nature of the concocted “evidence” attempting to put you in “Putin’s pocket,” and – not least – lift the cloud that has prevented you from pursuing a more decent relationship with Russia.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Bogdan Dzakovic, former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Mike Gravel, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

James George Jatras, former U.S. diplomat and former foreign policy adviser to Senate leadership (Associate VIPS)

Larry Johnson, former CIA Intelligence Officer & former State Department Counter-Terrorism Official, (ret.)

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF (ret.); ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC)

John Kiriakou, former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former Senior Investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Karen Kwiatkowski, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

Clement J. Laniewski, LTC, U.S. Army (ret.)

Linda Lewis, WMD preparedness policy analyst, USDA (ret.)

Edward Loomis, NSA Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

David MacMichael, former Senior Estimates Officer, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA presidential briefer (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East & CIA political analyst (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Peter Van Buren, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Robert Wing, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (former) (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, U.S. Army Reserve Colonel (ret) and former U.S. Diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Iraq War

Assange's Lynch Mob Commenters in the NYT

The Gray Lady now seems to be against press freedom, writes James Howard Kunstler.

By **James Howard Kunstler**

Clusterfuck Nation



And so now Julian Assange of *Wikileaks* has been dragged out of his “sanctuary” in the London embassy of Ecuador for failing to clean his cat’s litter box. Have you ever cleaned a litter box?

The way we always did it was to spread some newspaper – say, *The New York Times* – on the floor, transfer the used cat litter onto it, wrap it into a compact package, and put it in the trash.

It was interesting to scan the comments section of the *Times’s* stories about the Assange arrest: *Times readers* almost uniformly presented themselves as a lynch mob out for Assange’s blood. So much for the spirit of liberalism and the old “Gray Lady” who published *The Pentagon Papers* purloined by Daniel Ellsberg lo so many years ago. Reading between the lines in that once-venerable newspaper – by which I mean gleaning their

slant on the news – one surmises that the *Times* has actually come out *against* freedom of the press, a curious attitude, but consistent with the neo-Jacobin zeitgeist in “blue” America these days.

Anyway, how could anyone expect Assange to clean his cat’s litter box when he was unable to go outside his sanctuary to buy a fresh bag of litter, and was denied newspapers this past year, as well as any other contact with the outside world?

U.S. government prosecutors had better tread lightly in bringing Assange to the sort of justice demanded by readers of *The New York Times* – which is to say: lock him up in some SuperMax solitary hellhole and throw away the key. The show trial of Julian Assange on U.S. soil, when it comes to pass, may end up being the straw that stirs America’s Mickey Finn as a legitimate republic.

Symptom of Mass Confusion

The bloodthirsty hysteria among *New York Times* readers is a symptom of the mass confusion sown by agencies of the U.S. government itself when its own agents ventured to meddle in the national election of 2016 and then blame it on “the Russians.” As you will learn in the months ahead, it was the *Times* itself, and other corporate news organizations, who *colluded* with officers of the FBI, the Department of Justice, the CIA, and the Obama White House to concoct a phony narrative about Trump being in cahoots with Vladimir Putin, thus depriving Hillary Clinton of her “turn” in the White House; and then to join those agencies, and the grotesquely dishonest two-year investigation of Special

Counsel Robert Mueller, in a cover-your-ass operation to hide their nefarious and criminal acts.



The USA has a lot of sorting to do and, of course, the new Democratic-led Congress is already trying as hard as possible to prevent that from happening, the latest being their piling on Attorney General William Barr for testifying under oath that he believed the government ran a spying operation on candidate Donald Trump. The existence of FISA warrants establishes that as a fact, as does the million-dollar payment by the CIA and U.S. Defense Department to international man of mystery Stefan Halper, the secret agent (posing as an Oxford professor) commissioned to entrap Trump campaign associate Carter Page. The ugly cascade of truth about that ploy, and many other seditious subterfuges run by U.S. officials, will eventually bury the Jacobin "resistance" under more used cat litter than the Ecuadorian embassy staff could ever dream of.

The official charges so far against Julian Assange include skipping bail in the U.K. and supposedly attempting to assist the U.S. soldier then known as Bradley Manning to

find a password for entering certain U.S. government computer data bases. The U.K. bail matter revolved around Assange's extradition to Sweden on a bullshit rape charge that was subsequently dropped as having no merit by Swedish authorities.

The U.S. supposedly reserves the authority to lob additional charges at Assange, though they may face a lengthy extradition battle with his attorneys to lever him out of the U.K. and into U.S. custody. In the meantime, Assange may receive a Nobel Prize as a symbol of a lone conscience standing up against the despotic deceits of the world's Deep States. Wouldn't that gum up the works nicely? I'd like to see *The New York Times's* front page headline on that story: "Russian Colluder Wins Nobel Prize, Put on Trial in Federal Court." By then, the United States of America will be so completely gaslighted that it will pulsate in the darkness like a death star about to explode.

James Howard Kunstler is author of "The Geography of Nowhere," which he says he wrote "Because I believe a lot of people share my feelings about the tragic landscape of highway strips, parking lots, housing tracts, mega-malls, junked cities, and ravaged countryside that makes up the everyday environment where most Americans live and work." He has written several other works of nonfiction and fiction. Read more about him [here](#). This article first appeared on his blog, [ClusterfuckNation](#).

7 Years of Lies About Assange Won't Stop

Now

One of the few towering figures of our time was reduced to nothing more than a sex pest and scruffy bail-skipper, writes Jonathan Cook.

By **Jonathan Cook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



For seven years, from the moment Julian Assange sought refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London, they have been telling us we were wrong, that we were paranoid conspiracy theorists. We were told there was no real threat of Assange's extradition to the United States, that it was all in our fevered imaginations.

For seven years, we have had to listen to a chorus of journalists, politicians and "experts" telling us that Assange was nothing more than a fugitive from justice, and that the British and Swedish legal systems could be relied on to handle his case in full accordance with the law. Barely a "mainstream" voice was raised in his defense in all that time.

From the moment he sought asylum, Assange was cast as an outlaw. His work as the founder of *Wikileaks* – a digital platform that for the first time in history gave ordinary people a glimpse into the darkest recesses of the most secure vaults in the deepest of Deep States – was erased from the record.

Assange was reduced from one of the few towering figures of our time – a man who will have a central place in history

books, if we as a species live long enough to write those books – to nothing more than a sex pest, and a scruffy bail-skipper.

The political and media class crafted a narrative of half-truths about the sex charges Assange was under investigation for in Sweden. They overlooked the fact that Assange had been allowed to leave Sweden by the original investigator, who dropped the charges, only for them to be revived by another investigator with a well-documented political agenda.

They failed to mention that Assange was always willing to be questioned by Swedish prosecutors in London, as had occurred in dozens of other cases involving extradition proceedings to Sweden. It was almost as if Swedish officials did not want to test the evidence they claimed to have in their possession.

The media and political courtiers endlessly emphasized Assange's bail violation in the U.K., ignoring the fact that asylum seekers fleeing legal and political persecution don't usually honor bail conditions imposed by the very state authorities from which they are seeking asylum.

Ignoring Mounting Evidence

The political and media establishment ignored the mounting evidence of a secret grand jury in Virginia formulating charges against Assange, and ridiculed *Wikileaks'* concerns that the Swedish case might be cover for a more sinister attempt by the U.S. to extradite Assange and lock him away in a high-security prison, as had happened to whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

They belittled the 2016 verdict of a panel of United Nations legal scholars that the U.K. was “arbitrarily detaining” Assange. The media were more interested in the welfare of his cat.

They ignored the fact that after Ecuador changed presidents – with the new one keen to win favor with Washington – Assange was placed under more and more severe forms of solitary confinement. He was denied access to visitors and basic means of communications, violating both his asylum status and his human rights, and threatening his mental and physical wellbeing.

Equally, they ignored the fact that Assange had been given diplomatic status by Ecuador, as well as Ecuadorean citizenship. Britain was obligated to allow him to leave the embassy, using his diplomatic immunity, to travel unhindered to Ecuador. No “mainstream” journalist or politician thought this significant either.

They turned a blind eye to the news that, after refusing to question Assange in the U.K., Swedish prosecutors had decided to quietly drop the case against him in 2015. Sweden had kept the decision under wraps for more than two years.

It was a freedom of information request by an ally of Assange, not a media outlet, that unearthed documents showing that Swedish investigators had, in fact, wanted to drop the case against Assange back in 2013. The UK, however, insisted that they carry on with the charade so that Assange could remain locked up. A British official emailed the Swedes: “Don’t you dare get cold feet!!!”

Documents Destroyed

Most of the other documents relating to these conversations were unavailable. They had been destroyed by the U.K.'s Crown Prosecution Service in violation of protocol. But no one in the political and media establishment cared, of course.

Similarly, they ignored the fact that Assange was forced to hole up for years in the embassy, under the most intense form of house arrest, even though he no longer had a case to answer in Sweden. They told us – apparently in all seriousness – that he had to be arrested for his bail infraction, something that would normally be dealt with by a fine.

And possibly most egregiously of all, most of the media refused to acknowledge that Assange was a journalist and publisher, even though by failing to do so they exposed themselves to the future use of the same draconian sanctions should they or their publications ever need to be silenced. They signed off on the right of the U.S. authorities to seize any foreign journalist, anywhere in the world, and lock him or her out of sight. They opened the door to a new, special form of rendition for journalists.

This was never about Sweden or bail violations, or even about the discredited Russia-gate narrative, as anyone who was paying the vaguest attention should have been able to work out. It was about the U.S. Deep State doing everything in its power to crush WikiLeaks and make an example of its founder.

It was about making sure there would never again be a leak like that of “Collateral Murder,” the military video

released by *Wikileaks* in 2007 that showed U.S. soldiers celebrating as they murdered Iraqi civilians. It was about making sure there would never again be a dump of U.S. diplomatic cables, like those released in 2010 that revealed the secret machinations of the U.S. empire to dominate the planet whatever the cost in human rights violations.

Now the pretense is over. The British police invaded the diplomatic territory of Ecuador – invited in by Ecuador after it tore up Assange's asylum status – to smuggle him off to jail. Two vassal states cooperating to do the bidding of the U.S. empire. The arrest was not to help two women in Sweden or to enforce a minor bail infraction.

No, the British authorities were acting on an extradition warrant from the U.S. And the charges the U.S. authorities have concocted relate to Wikileaks' earliest work exposing the U.S. military's war crimes in Iraq – the stuff that we all once agreed was in the public interest, that British and U.S. media clamored to publish themselves.

Still the media and political class is turning a blind eye. Where is the outrage at the lies we have been served up for these past seven years? Where is the contrition at having been gulled for so long? Where is the fury at the most basic press freedom – the right to publish – being trashed to silence Assange? Where is the willingness finally to speak up in Assange's defense?

It's not there. There will be no indignation at the *BBC*, or the *Guardian*, or *CNN*. Just curious, impassive – even gently mocking – reporting of Assange's fate.

And that is because these journalists, politicians and

experts never really believed anything they said. They knew all along that the U.S. wanted to silence Assange and to crush *Wikileaks*. They knew that all along and they didn't care. In fact, they happily conspired in paving the way for today's kidnapping of Assange.

They did so because they are not there to represent the truth, or to stand up for ordinary people, or to protect a free press, or even to enforce the rule of law. They don't care about any of that. They are there to protect their careers, and the system that rewards them with money and influence. They don't want an upstart like Assange kicking over their applecart.

Now they will spin us a whole new set of deceptions and distractions about Assange to keep us anaesthetized, to keep us from being incensed as our rights are whittled away, and to prevent us from realizing that Assange's rights and our own are indivisible. We stand or fall together.

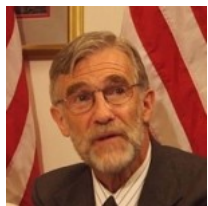
Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>.

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

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

By [**Ray McGovern**](#)

Special to Consortium News



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

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

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

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

Times executive editor Dean Baquet said, about the backlash to the *Times*’ “collusion” coverage: “I have no regrets. It’s

not our job to determine whether or not there was illegality.” CNN President Jeff Zucker said: “We are not investigators. We are journalists.” (One wonders what investigative journalist Bob Parry, who uncovered much of Iran-Contra and founded this site, would have thought of that last one.)

Going in Circles

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

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

In fact, that “Intelligence Community Assessment” stands out as the most irresponsible, evidence-free and at the same time consequential crock of intelligence analysis since the National Intelligence Estimate of Oct. 2002 claimed there was WMD in Iraq. Recall that that one was shaped by out-and-out fraudulent intelligence to “justify” an attack on Iraq six months later.

Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), as chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, described the main thrust of the committee’s five-year bipartisan report, stating, “In making

the case for war, the [Bush] Administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent.”

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

The Morning After

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

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

(Sadly, Shane was then given his marching orders and fell in

line with many other formerly reputable journalists in what has been the most miserable performance by the mainstream media since they helped pave the way for war on Iraq.)

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

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

Hiatt: Captain of Cheerleaders

Hiatt emulated peppy, preppy cheerleader George W. Bush in leading Americans to believe that war on Iraq was necessary. Appointed *Washington Post* editorial page editor in 2000, he still runs the page – having not been held accountable for gross misfeasance, if not malfeasance, on Iraq. Shades of Clapper, whom President Obama allowed to stay on as director of national intelligence for three and a half years after Clapper lied under oath to the Senate Intelligence Committee about NSA surveillance of U.S. persons.

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That Obama appointed Clapper to lead the investigation into

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

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

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

And there is now documentary evidence that, from the Deep State point of view, indeed he was. In the text exchanges between discredited FBI sleuth Peter Strzok and his girlfriend, Lisa Page, a lawyer working for the FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, it seems clear that Obama wanted to be kept apprised of the FBI’s behind-the-scenes machinations. In a Sept. 2, 2016 text to Strzok, Page writes that she was preparing talking points because the president “wants to know everything we’re doing.”

A Sweaty Pate?

Clapper is aware now that he is going to have to sweat it out. He may believe he can ignore White House press secretary Sarah Sanders, who has said that he and other former intelligence officials should be investigated

after special counsel Mueller did not establish collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia.

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

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

On Sunday, Nunes told Fox News he’s preparing to send eight criminal referrals to the Department of Justice this week concerning alleged misconduct during the Trump-Russia investigation. This will include leaks of “highly classified material” and conspiracies to lie to Congress and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court. It’s no-holds-barred for Nunes, who has begun to talk publicly about prison for those whom DOJ might indict and bring to trial.

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

Mueller report that so disappointed the Democratic Party/media coalition.

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

On Sunday, Nunes said,

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

Nunes is, of course, trying to project an image of confidence, but he knows he is fighting uphill. There is no more formidable foe than the MICIMATT, with the media playing *the* crucial role in these circumstances. How will the American people be able to see egg on anyone’s face if the “mainstream media” find ways to wipe it off and turn the tables on Nunes, as they have successfully done in the past?

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

By all appearances, House Democrats still seem to be banking on help from the usual suspects still on duty in the FBI,

CIA, and the Justice Department. Lacking that they seem ready to go down with the Schiff–Rep. Adam Schiff of California, perhaps the most virulent Russia-gater that there's been.

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

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

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

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

– Senator Rand Paul (@RandPaul) March 27, 2019

On top of this, Sen. Rand Paul (R, KY) has called for an investigation into the origins of Mueller's probe, including on the dicey question of how witting President Obama was of the Deep State chicanery during the last months of his administration. Page did tell Strzok in that Sept. 2, 2016

text that the president “wants to know everything we’re doing.”

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

Vying for Media Attention

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

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

At the same time, there are signs the America people are tired of this. It would be difficult though for the media to avoid reporting on criminal referrals of very senior law enforcement and intelligence officials. Given the media’s obvious preference for siding with the intelligence agencies and reporting on Russia-gate rather than Deep-State-gate, it would be even harder for the media to explain why these officials would be in trouble.

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

people.

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

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

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

By Gareth Porter

Special to Consortium News



The narrative of Russian intelligence attacking state and local election boards and threatening the integrity of U.S. elections has achieved near-universal acceptance by media and political elites. And now it has been accepted by the Trump

administration's intelligence chief, Dan Coats, as well.

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

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

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

A Sensational Story

On Sept. 29, 2016, a few weeks after the hacking of election-related websites in Illinois and Arizona, ABC News carried a sensational headline: "Russian Hackers Targeted Nearly Half of States' Voter Registration Systems, Successfully Infiltrated 4." The story itself reported that "more than 20 state election systems" had been hacked, and four states had been "breached" by hackers suspected of

working for the Russian government. The story cited only sources “knowledgeable” about the matter, indicating that those who were pushing the story were eager to hide the institutional origins of the information.

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

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

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

Media stories continued to reflect the official assumption

that cyber attacks on state election websites were Russian-sponsored. Stunningly, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in December 2016 that DHS was itself behind hacking attempts of Georgia's election database.

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

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

That was a crucial clue to the motive behind the hack. DHS Assistant Secretary for Cyber Security and Communications Andy Ozment told a Congressional committee in late September 2016 that the fact hackers hadn't tampered with the voter data indicated that the aim of the theft was not to influence the electoral process. Instead, it was "possibly for the purpose of selling personal information." Ozment was contradicting the line that already was being taken on the Illinois and Arizona hacks by the National Protection and Programs Directorate and other senior DHS officials.

In an interview with me last year, Ken Menzel, the legal

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

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

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

Meanwhile, the FBI was unable to come up with any theory about what Russia might have intended to do with voter registration data such as what was taken in the Illinois hack. When FBI Counterintelligence official Bill Priestap was [asked in a June 2017 hearing](#) how Moscow might use such data, his answer revealed that he had no clue: “They took the data to understand what it consisted of,” said the struggling Priestap, “so they can affect better

understanding and plan accordingly in regards to possibly impacting future elections by knowing what is there and studying it.”

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

DHS Reveals Its Self-Serving Methodology

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

They revealed that the sensational story leaked to the press in late September 2016 had been based on a draft of the DHS report. And more importantly, their use of the phrase “potentially targeted” showed that they were arguing only that the cyber incidents it listed were *possible* indications of a Russian attack on election infrastructure.

Furthermore, Liles and Manfra said the DHS report had

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

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

The cybersecurity firm ThreatConnect noted in 2016 that one of the other two IP addresses had hosted a Russian criminal market for five months in 2015. But that was not a serious indicator, either. Private IP addresses are reassigned frequently by server companies, so there is not a necessary connection between users of the same IP address at different times.

The DHS methodology of selecting reports of cyber incidents involving election-related websites as “potentially targeted” by Russian government-sponsored hackers was based

on no objective evidence whatever. The resulting list appears to have included any one of the eight addresses as well as any attack or “scan” on a public website that could be linked in any way to elections.

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

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

State Officials Force DHS to Tell the Truth

For a year, DHS did not inform the 21 states on its list that their election boards or other election-related sites had been attacked in a presumed Russian-sponsored operation. The excuse DHS officials cited was that it could not reveal such sensitive intelligence to state officials without security clearances. But the reluctance to reveal the details about each case was certainly related to the reasonable expectation that states would publicly challenge

their claims, creating a potential serious embarrassment.

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

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

A number of state election officials recognized that this information conflicted with what they knew. And if they complained, they got a more accurate picture from DHS. After Wisconsin Secretary of State Michael Haas demanded further clarification, he got an email response from a DHS official with a different account. “[B]ased on our external analysis,” the official wrote, “the WI [Wisconsin] IP address affected belongs to the WI Department of Workforce Development, not the Elections Commission.”

California Secretary of State Alex Padilla said DHS initially had notified his office “that Russian cyber actors ‘scanned’ California’s Internet-facing systems in 2016,

including Secretary of State websites.” But under further questioning, DHS admitted to Padilla that what the hackers had targeted was the California Department of Technology’s network.

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

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

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

It is true that hackers may scan one website in the hope of learning something that could be useful for penetrating another website, as cybersecurity expert Prof. Herbert S. Lin of Stanford University explained to me in an interview. But including any incident in which that motive was

theoretical meant that any state website could be included on the DHS list, without any evidence it was related to a political motive.

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

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

In April 2018, a CBS News "60 Minutes" segment reported that the October 2016 DHS intelligence report had included the Russian government hacking of a "county database in Arizona." Responding to that CBS report, an unidentified "senior Trump administration official" who was well-briefed on the DHS report [told Reuters](#) that "media reports" on the issue had sometimes "conflated criminal hacking with Russian government activity," and that the cyberattack on the target in Arizona "was not perpetrated by the Russian government."

NSA Finds a GRU Election Plot

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

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

The Intercept article included a color-coded chart from the original NSA report that provides crucial information missing from the text of the NSA analysis itself as well as *The Intercept*’s account. The chart clearly distinguishes between the elements of the NSA’s account of the alleged Russian scheme that were based on “Confirmed Information” (shown in green) and those that were based on “Analyst

Judgment” (shown in yellow). The connection between the “operator” of the spear-phishing campaign the report describes and an unidentified entity confirmed to be under the authority of the GRU is shown as a yellow line, meaning that it is based on “Analyst Judgment” and labeled “probably.”

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

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

Even more damaging to its case, the NSA reports that the same operator who had sent the spear-phishing emails also had sent a test email to the “American Samoa Election Office.” Criminal hackers could have been interested in personal information from the database associated with that office. But the idea that Russian military intelligence was planning to hack the voter rolls in American Samoa, an unincorporated U.S. territory with 56,000 inhabitants who can’t even vote in U.S. presidential elections, is plainly

risible.

The Mueller Indictment's Sleight of Hand

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

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

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

Searching for website vulnerabilities would be evidence of intent to hack them, of course, but searching Republican Party websites for email addresses is hardly evidence of any hacking plan. And Paragraph 74 states that Kovalev "deleted

his search history”—not the search histories of any “co-conspirator”—thus revealing that there were no joint searches and suggesting that the subject Kovalev had searched was Republican Party emails. So any deletion by Kovalev of his search history after the FBI alert would not be evidence of his involvement in the hacking of the Illinois election board website.

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

The Need for Critical Scrutiny of DHS Cyberattack Claims

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

When someone at the Burlington, Vt., Electric Company spotted one of those IP addresses on one of its computers, the company reported it to DHS. But instead of quietly investigating the address to verify that it was indeed an indicator of Russian intrusion, DHS immediately informed *The Washington Post*. The result was a sensational story that

Russian hackers had penetrated the U.S. power grid. In fact, the IP address in question was merely Yahoo's email server, as Rob Lee told me, and the computer had not even been connected to the power grid. The threat to the power grid was a tall tale created by a DHS official, which the Post had to embarrassingly [retract](#).

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

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

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

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Russia-gate's Successor Gambit

Now the propaganda crusade has been initiated to defame the AG, writes James Howard Kunstler.

By **James Howard Kunstler**

Clusterfuck Nation



Having disgraced themselves with full immersion in the barren Russia-gate “narrative,” the Resistance is now tripling down on Russia-gate’s successor gambit: obstruction of justice where there was no crime in the first place. What exactly was that bit of mischief Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller inserted in his final report, saying that “...while this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him?”

It’s this simple: prosecutors are charged with finding crimes. If there is insufficient evidence to bring a case, then that is the end of the matter. Prosecutors, special or otherwise, are not authorized to offer hypothetical accounts where they can’t bring a criminal case. But Mueller produced a brief of arguments pro-and-con about obstruction for others to decide upon. In doing that, he was out of order, and maliciously so.

Of course, Attorney General William Barr took up the offer and declared the case closed, as he properly should where the prosecutor could *not conclude that a crime was committed*. One hopes that the AG also instructed Mueller and his staff to shut the f... up vis-à-vis further ex post facto “anonymous source” speculation in the news media. But, of

course, the Mueller staff – which inexplicably included lawyers who worked for the Clinton Foundation and the Democratic National Committee – at once started insinuating to [New York Times](#) reporters that the full report would contain an arsenal of bombshells reigniting enough suspicion to fuel several congressional committee investigations.

The objective apparently is to keep President Donald Trump burdened, hobbled, and disabled for the remainder of his term, and especially in preparation for the 2020 election against whomever emerges from the crowd of lightweights and geriatric cases now roistering through the primary states. It also leaves the door open for the Resistance to prosecute an impeachment case, since that is a political matter, not a law enforcement action.

Setting up the AG

This blog is not associated with any court other than public opinion, and I am free to hypothesize on the meaning of Mueller's curious gambit, so here goes: Barr, long before being considered for his current job, published his opinion that there was no case for obstruction of justice in the Russia-gate affair. By punting the decision to Barr, Mueller sets up the AG for being accused of prejudice in the matter – and, more to the point, has managed to generate a new brushfire in the press.

Barr could see this coming from a thousand miles away. I suspect he's pissed off about being set up like this. I suspect further that he knows this brushfire is intended to produce a smokescreen to obscure the rash of grand jury referrals coming down in the weeks and months ahead against

the many government employees who concocted the Russia-gate scandal. Personally, I think Mueller himself deserves to be in that roundup for destroying evidence (the Strzok / Page cell phones) and for malicious prosecution against General Michael Flynn, among other things.

The reason Mueller did not bring an obstruction-of-justice charge against Trump is that the evidence didn't support it. He didn't have a case. In a trial – say, after Trump was impeached or left office – the discovery process could bring to light evidence that might embarrass and even incriminate Mueller and his staff, and cast further opprobrium on the federal justice agencies. For instance: why did Mueller drag out his inquiry for two years when he must have known by at least the summer of 2017 that the Steele dossier was a fraud perpetrated by the Clinton campaign?

Now the propaganda crusade has been initiated to defame Barr. The idiots running the budding new congressional inquiries are going to pile on him, with the help of the news media. Though he is said to be an “old friend” of Robert Mueller's, I believe they have become adversaries, perhaps even enemies. Mueller is not in a position of strength in this battle. He has now officially exited the stage as his mandate expires, so he has no standing to oppose further consequences in the aftermath of Russia-gate. What remains is a dastardly and seditious hoax as yet unadjudicated and an evidence trail a mile wide, and no amount of jumping up and down crying “woo woo woo” by Democratic lawmakers Jerrold Nadler, Maxine Waters, and Adam Schiff is going to derail that choo-choo train a'chuggin' down the tracks.

James Howard Kunstler is author of “The Geography of Nowhere,” which he says he wrote “Because I believe a lot of people share my feelings about the tragic landscape of highway strips, parking lots, housing tracts, mega-malls, junked cities, and ravaged countryside that makes up the everyday environment where most Americans live and work.” He has written several other works of nonfiction and fiction. Read more about him [here](#). This article first appeared on his blog, [ClusterfuckNation](#).

Consortium News’ Record on Russia-gate—How CN Covered the ‘Scandal’: No. 5—‘Spooks Spooking Themselves’

On Thursday Daniel Lazare wrote a [review](#) of a book about how intelligence agents set up aspects of the “collusion” story. But in May 2018 Lazare had already begun figuring out the story for himself.

By Daniel Lazare

Special to Consortium News



With the news that a Cambridge academic-cum-spy named Stefan Halper infiltrated the Trump campaign, the role of the intelligence agencies in shaping the great Russiagate saga is at last coming into focus.

It’s looking more and more massive. The intelligence agencies initiated reports that Donald Trump was colluding

with Russia, they nurtured them and helped them grow, and then they spread the word to the press and key government officials. Reportedly, they even tried to use these reports to force Trump to step down prior to his inauguration. Although the corporate press accuses Trump of conspiring with Russia to stop Hillary Clinton, the reverse now seems to be the case: the Obama administration intelligence agencies worked with Clinton to block "Siberian candidate" Trump.

The template was provided by ex-MI6 Director Richard Dearlove, Halper's friend and business partner. Sitting in winged chairs in London's venerable Garrick Club, according to *The Washington Post*, Dearlove told fellow MI6 veteran Christopher Steele, author of the famous "golden showers" opposition research dossier, that Trump "reminded him of a predicament he had faced years earlier, when he was chief of station for British intelligence in Washington and alerted US authorities to British information that a vice presidential hopeful had once been in communication with the Kremlin."

Apparently, one word from the Brits was enough to make the candidate in question step down. When that didn't work with Trump, Dearlove and his colleagues ratcheted up the pressure to make him see the light. A major scandal was thus born – or, rather, a very questionable scandal.

Besides Dearlove, Steele, and Halper, a bon-vivant known as "The Walrus" for his impressive girth, other participants include:

- Robert Hannigan, former director Government

Communications Headquarters, GCHQ, UK equivalent of the NSA.

- Alexander Downer, top Australian diplomat.
- Andrew Wood, ex-British ambassador to Moscow.
- Joseph Mifsud, Maltese academic.
- James Clapper, ex-US Director of National Intelligence.
- John Brennan, former CIA Director (and now NBC News analyst).

In-Bred

A few things stand out about this august group. One is its in-bred quality. After helping to run an annual confab known as the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar, Dearlove and Halper are now partners in a private venture calling itself “The Cambridge Security Initiative.” Both are connected to another London-based intelligence firm known as Hakluyt & Co. Halper is also connected via two books he wrote with Hakluyt representative [Jonathan Clarke](#) and Dearlove has a close personal friendship with Hakluyt founder Mike Reynolds, yet another MI6 vet. Alexander Downer [served](#) a half-dozen years on Hakluyt’s international advisory board, while Andrew Wood is linked to Steele via Orbis Business Intelligence, the private research firm that Steele helped found, and which produced the anti-Trump dossier, and where Wood now serves as an [unpaid advisor](#).

Everyone, in short, seems to know everyone else. But another thing that stands out about this group is its incompetence. Dearlove and Halper appear to be old-school paranoids for whom every Russian is [a Boris Badenov or a Natasha Fatale](#). In February 2014, Halper notified US intelligence that Mike Flynn, Trump’s future national

security adviser, had grown overly chummy with an Anglo-Russian scholar named Svetlana Lokhova whom Halper suspected of being a spy – suspicions that Lokhova convincingly argues are absurd.

In December 2016, Halper and Dearlove both resigned from the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar because they suspected that a company footing some of the costs was tied up with Russian intelligence – suspicions that Christopher Andrew, former chairman of the Cambridge history department and the seminar's founder, regards as “absurd” as well.

As head of Britain's foreign Secret Intelligence Service, as MI6 is formally known, Dearlove played a major role in drumming up support for the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq even while confessing at a secret Downing Street meeting that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the [regime-change] policy.” When the search for weapons of mass destruction turned up dry, Clapper, as then head of the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, argued that the Iraqi military must have smuggled them into neighboring Syria, a charge with absolutely no basis in fact but which helped pave the way for US regime-change efforts in that country too.

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Brennan was meanwhile a high-level CIA official when the agency was fabricating evidence against Saddam Hussein and covering up Saudi Arabia's role in 9/11. Wood not only continues to defend the Iraqi invasion, but dismisses fears of a rising fascist tide in the Ukraine

as nothing more than “a crude political insult” hurled by Vladimir Putin for his own political benefit. Such views now seem distressingly misguided in view of the alt-right torchlight parades and spiraling anti-Semitism that are now a regular feature of life in the Ukraine.

The result is a diplo-espionage gang that is very bad at the facts but very good at public manipulation – and which therefore decided to use its skill set out to create a public furor over alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

It Started Late 2015

The effort began in late 2015 when GCHQ, along with intelligence agencies in Poland, Estonia, and Germany, began monitoring what they said were “suspicious ‘interactions’ between figures connected to Trump and known or suspected Russian agents.”

Since Trump was surging ahead in the polls and scaring the pants off the foreign-policy establishment by calling for a rapprochement with Moscow, the agencies figured that Russia was somehow behind it. The pace accelerated in March 2016 when a 30-year-old policy consultant named George Papadopoulos joined the Trump campaign as a foreign-policy adviser. Traveling in Italy a week later, he ran into Mifsud, the London-based Maltese academic, who reportedly set about cultivating him after learning of his position with Trump. Mifsud claimed to have “substantial connections with Russian government officials,” according to prosecutors. Over breakfast at a London hotel, he told Papadopoulos that he had just returned from Moscow where he

had learned that the Russians had “dirt” on Hillary Clinton in the form of “thousands of emails.”

This was the remark that supposedly triggered an FBI investigation. *The New York Times* describes Mifsud as “an enthusiastic promoter of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia” and “a regular at meetings of the Valdai Discussion Club, an annual conference held in Sochi, Russia, that Mr. Putin attends,” which tried to suggest that he is a Kremlin agent of some sort. But WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange later tweeted photos of Mifsud with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and a high-ranking British intelligence official named Claire Smith at a training session for Italian security agents in Rome. Since it’s unlikely that British intelligence would rely on a Russian agent in such circumstances, Mifsud’s intelligence ties are more likely with the UK.

After Papadopoulos caused a minor political ruckus by telling a reporter that Prime Minister David Cameron should apologize for criticizing Trump’s anti-Muslim pronouncements, a friend in the Israeli embassy put him in touch with a friend in the Australian embassy, who introduced him to Downer, her boss. Over drinks, Downer advised him to be more diplomatic. After Papadopoulos then passed along Mifsud’s tip about Clinton’s emails, Downer informed his government, which, in late July, informed the FBI.

Was Papadopoulos Set Up?

Suspicious are unavoidable but evidence is lacking. Other pieces were meanwhile clicking into place. In late May or

early June 2016, Fusion GPS, a private Washington intelligence firm employed by the Democratic National Committee, hired Steele to look into the Russian angle.

On June 20, he turned in the first of eighteen memos that would eventually comprise the Steele dossier, in this instance a three-page document asserting that Putin “has been cultivating, supporting and assisting TRUMP for at least 5 years” and that Russian intelligence possessed “kompromat” in the form of a video of prostitutes performing a “golden showers” show for his benefit at the Moscow Ritz-Carlton. A week or two later, Steele briefed the FBI on his findings. Around the same time, Robert Hannigan flew to Washington to brief CIA Director John Brennan about additional material that had come GCHQ’s way, material so sensitive that it could only be handled at “director level.”

One player was filling Papadopoulos’s head with tales of Russian dirty tricks, another was telling the FBI, while a third was collecting more information and passing it on to the bureau as well.

On July 7, 2016 Carter Page delivered a lecture on U.S.-Russian relations in Moscow in which he complained that “Washington and other western capitals have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption, and regime change.” Washington hawks expressed “unease” that someone representing the presumptive Republican nominee would take Russia’s side in a growing neo-Cold War.

Stefan Halper then infiltrated the Trump campaign on behalf

of the FBI as an informant in early July, weeks before the FBI launched its investigation. Halper had 36 years earlier infiltrated the Carter re-election campaign in 1980 using CIA agents to turn information over to the Reagan campaign. Now Halper began to court both Page and Papadopoulos, independently of each other.

On July 11, Page showed up at a Cambridge symposium at which Halper and Dearlove both spoke. In early September, Halper sent Papadopoulos an email offering \$3,000 and a paid trip to London to write a research paper on a disputed gas field in the eastern Mediterranean, his specialty. "George, you know about hacking the emails from Russia, right?" Halper asked when he got there, but Papadopoulos said he knew nothing. Halper also sought out Sam Clovis, Trump's national campaign co-chairman, with whom he chatted about China for an hour or so over coffee in Washington.

The rightwing Federalist website [speculates](#) that Halper was working with Steele to flesh out a Sept. 14 memo claiming that "Russians do have further 'kompromat' on CLINTON (e-mails) and [are] considering disseminating it." Clovis [believes](#) that Halper was trying "to create an audit trail back to those [Clinton] emails from someone in the campaign ... so they could develop a stronger case for probable cause to continue to issue warrants and to further an investigation." Reports that Halper apparently sought [a permanent post](#) in the new administration suggest that the effort was meant to continue after inauguration.

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Notwithstanding Clovis's nutty rightwing politics, his description of what Halper may have been up to makes sense as does his observation that Halper was trying "to build something that did not exist." Despite countless hyper-ventilating headlines about mysterious Trump Tower meetings and the like, the sad truth is that Russiagate after all these months is shaping up as even more of a "nothing-burger" than Obama administration veteran Van Jones said it was back in mid-2017. Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller has indicted Papadopoulos and others on procedural grounds, he has indicted former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort for corruption, and he has charged a St. Petersburg company known as the Internet Research Agency with violating US election laws.

But the corruption charges have nothing to do with Russian collusion and nothing in the indictment against IRA indicates that either the Kremlin or the Trump campaign were involved. Indeed, the activities that got IRA in trouble in the first place are so unimpressive – just \$46,000 worth of Facebook ads that it purchased prior to election day, some pro-Trump, some anti, and some with no particular slant at all – that Mueller probably wouldn't even have bothered if he hadn't been under intense pressure to come up with anything at all.

The same goes for the army of bots that Russia supposedly deployed on Twitter. As *The Washington Post* noted in an oddly, cool-headed Dec. 2 article, 2,700 suspected Russian-linked accounts generated just 202,000 tweets in a six-year period ending in August 2017, a drop in a bucket compared to the one billion election-related tweets sent out during the

fourteen months leading up to Election Day.

The Steele dossier is also underwhelming. It declares on one page that the Kremlin sought to cultivate Trump by throwing "various lucrative real estate development business deals" his way but says on another that Trump's efforts to drum up business were unavailing and that he thus "had to settle for the use of extensive sexual services there from local prostitutes rather than business success."

Why would Trump turn down business offers when he couldn't generate any on his own? The idea that Putin would spot a U.S. reality-TV star somewhere around 2011 and conclude that he was destined for the Oval Office five years later is ludicrous. The fact that the Democratic National Committee funded the dossier via its law firm Perkins Coie renders it less credible still, as does the fact that the world has heard nothing more about the alleged video despite the ongoing deterioration in US-Russian relations. What's the point of making a blackmail tape if you don't use it?

Even Steele is backing off. In a legal paper filed in response to a libel suit last May, he said the document "did not represent (and did not purport to represent) verified facts, but were raw intelligence which had identified a range of allegations that warranted investigation given their potential national security implications." The fact is that the "dossier" was opposition research, not an intelligence report. It was neither vetted by Steele nor anyone in an intelligence agency. Opposition research is intended to mix truths and fiction, to dig up plausible dirt to throw at your opponent, not to produce an intelligence assessment at taxpayer's expense to "protect" the country.

And Steele was paid for it by the Democrats, not his government.

Using it Anyway

Nonetheless, the spooks have made the most of such pseudo-evidence. Dearlove and Wood both advised Steele to take his “findings” to the FBI, while, after the election, Wood pulled Sen. John McCain aside at a security conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to let him know that the Russians might be blackmailing the president-elect. McCain dispatched long-time aide David J. Kramer to the UK to discuss the dossier with Steele directly.

Although Kramer denies it, *The New Yorker* found a former national-security official who says he spoke with him at the time and that Kramer’s goal was to have McCain confront Trump with the dossier in the hope that he would resign on the spot. When that didn’t happen, Clapper and Brennan arranged for FBI Director James Comey to confront Trump instead. Comey later testified that he didn’t want Trump to think he was creating “a J. Edgar Hoover-type situation – I didn’t want him thinking I was briefing him on this to sort of hang it over him in some way.”

But how could Trump think otherwise? As *Consortium News* founding editor Robert Parry observed a few days later, the maneuver “resembles a tactic out of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover’s playbook on government-style blackmail: I have some very derogatory information about you that I’d sure hate to see end up in the press.”

Since then, the Democrats have touted the dossier at every opportunity, *The New Yorker* continues to defend it, while

Times columnist Michelle Goldberg cites it as well, saying it's a "rather obvious possibility that Trump is being blackmailed." CNN, for its part, suggested not long ago that the dossier may actually be Russian disinformation designed to throw everyone off base, Republicans and Democrats alike.

It sounds more like CIA paranoia raised to the *nth* degree. But that's what the intelligence agencies are for, i.e. to spread fear and propaganda in order to stampede the public into supporting their imperial agenda. In this case, their efforts are so effective that they've gotten lost in a fog of their own making. If the corporate press fails to point this out, it's because reporters are too befogged themselves to notice.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as *Jacobin* and *The American Conservative*.

We got Russia-gate right. Help us to keep on going.

The Tale of a 'Deep State Target'

Daniel Lazare reviews George Papadopoulos's book about his misadventures with a nest of intelligence agents.

By **Daniel Lazare**

Special to Consortium News

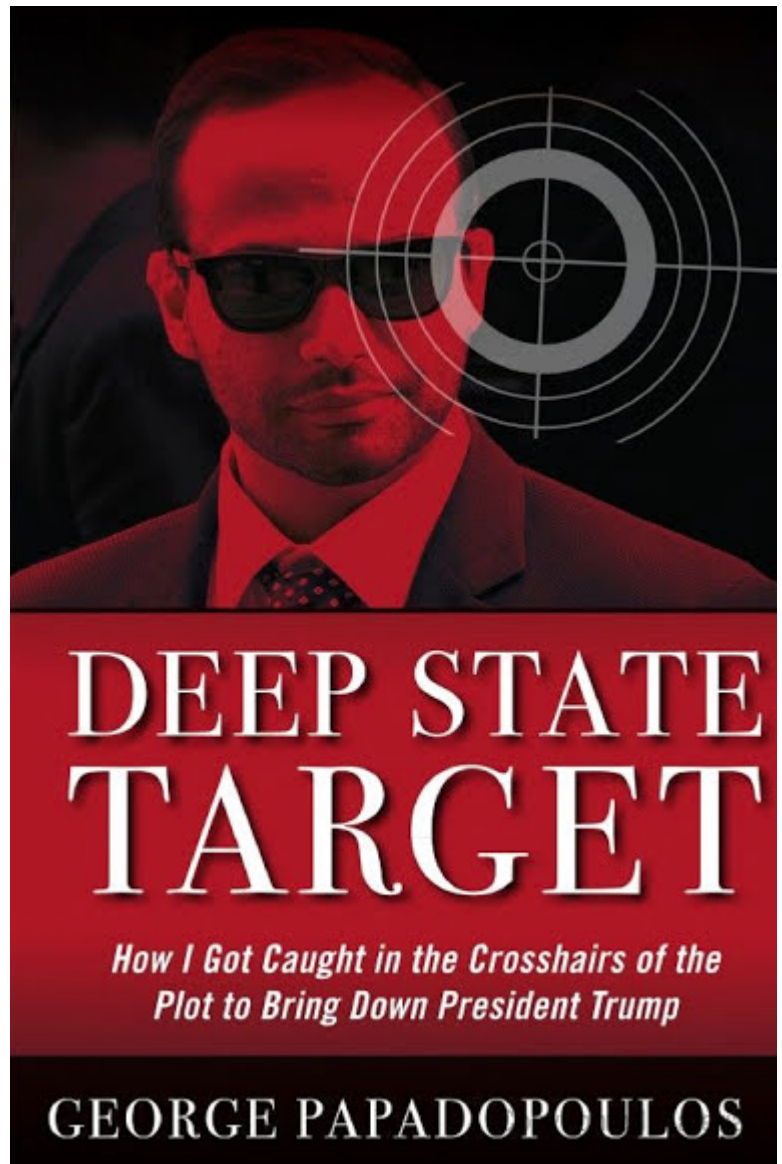


Now that Russian collusion is dead and buried thanks to Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller, the big question is how and why such charges arose.

George Papadopoulos's "Deep State Target: How I Got Caught in the Crosshairs of the Plot to Bring Down President Trump" doesn't tell the whole story. But this account by one of the crusade's first victims pulls the covers off a few important aspects.

It describes a lengthy entrapment scheme that began when Papadopoulos told co-workers that presidential candidate Donald Trump was about to appoint him to his foreign-policy advisory team.

The time was March 2016, the place the London Centre of International Law Practice, where Papadopoulos was working as an energy consultant, a job that mainly involves meeting with diplomats and going out for a dinner and drinks. Regarding the LCILP, he recalls it as a “strange operation” where there’s “no actual law practice going on that I can see” and which he later suspects is an intelligent front.



The reaction to his announcement was not good. “You should not be working with Trump,” one of Papadopoulos’s bosses tells him. “He’s a threat to society. He’s a racist. He’s anti-Muslim.”

But the tone changes when another LCILP director insists that he join him for a three-day conference at Link Campus University, a privately-owned educational center in Rome. There he is introduced to a well-dressed Maltese academic in his mid-fifties named Joseph Mifsud.

“He asks about my background,” Papadopoulos writes. “He asks if I have Russian contacts. I shake my head. ‘I heard you

have connections,' I say. 'And that you might be able to help me with the campaign.'"

"Oh yes, absolutely," Mifsud replies. "Let's talk tonight. Let's go to dinner."

Into the Rabbit Hole

With that, the author enters into a rabbit hole filled with twists and turns in which he found himself in the middle of a deep-state intelligence war over Trump's alleged Kremlin ties and by the end of which he had served a 12-day sentence in a medium-security federal prison.

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In late April, Mifsud takes him to breakfast at a London hotel and informs him that he had just returned from Russia where officials say they have "dirt" on Hillary Clinton. "Emails of Clinton," Mifsud says. "They have thousands of emails." Papadopoulos writes it off as idle chitchat by a dubious diplomatic networker whom he has come to see as all talk and no action.

A friend from the Australian embassy introduces him to a top Aussie diplomat named Alexander Downer, who tells him over gin-and-tonics that his foreign-policy ideas are all wet.

A British foreign-ministry official takes him out for still

more drinks and grills him about Russia.

Stefan Halper, an old CIA hand turned Cambridge academic, contacts him out of the blue and pesters him about Russia as well.

A mysterious Belorussian-American name Sergei Millian offers him a secret \$30,000-a-month PR job but only if he continues working for Trump.

An Israeli-American businessman named Charles Tawil buys him lunch at a steakhouse in Skokie, Ill. Later, in Greece, they go clubbing together in Mykonos, and then Tawil flies Papadopoulos to Israel where he presents him with \$10,000 in cash – money that a wary Papadopoulos leaves with a lawyer in Thessaloniki.

While flying back to the U.S. in July 2017, Papadopoulos runs into a squad of FBI agents as he is changing planes. “And then, finally, it dawns on me as they are going through my bags,” he writes. “Charles Tawil and the money. They are looking for \$10,000 in undeclared cash! That fucking guy was setting me up.”

“I’ve barely slept in two days,” he goes on after appearing before a judge. “I’m wearing the same shirt that I left Athens in. I smell like garbage. I look like garbage. I’m disoriented – because while I’ve just finally heard the charges, I still don’t really understand any of it.” To his horror, he learns that he is facing 25 years in prison on charges of obstruction of justice and lying to the FBI.

What was going on? Although Papadopoulos doesn’t go into the pre-history, we know from other sources that, by late

2015, intelligence agencies were buzzing over reports that Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin were reaching out to one another behind the scenes.

Three Mood-Setting Events

Spooks are paranoid by profession, but three recent events had put them particularly on edge. One was the Euromaidan uprising in Kiev in early 2014, which, by driving out an allegedly pro-Russian president, sparked a parallel revolt among Russian speakers in the east. Another was in Syria where U.S. backing of Islamist rebels had prompted Russia to intervene in support of President Bashar al-Assad. The third was on the U.S. campaign trail where Trump was thoroughly shocking foreign-policy “experts” by sounding off against regime change and making friendly noises toward Putin.

“But I think that I would probably get along with him very well,” Trump said of the Russian president in October 2015. When *CNN* host John Dickerson asked about Russian air assaults, he replied: “And as far as him attacking ISIS, I’m all for it. If he wants to be bombing the hell out of ISIS, which he’s starting to do, if he wants to be bombing ISIS, let him bomb them, John. Let him bomb them. I think we [can] probably work together much more so than right now.”

Intelligence agencies might have conceded that the U.S. was wrong to encourage far-right elements in Kiev and that it was equally mistaken in giving backhanded support to Al Qaeda and ISIS in the Middle East. They might have granted that Trump, for all his reality-TV bluster, had a point. But western intelligence agencies don’t do self-criticism.

What they did was blame Putin for messing up their plans for a clean coup in Kiev and an equally neat ouster of Assad and then blamed Trump for arguing in his behalf. From there, it was a very short step to concluding that Trump was not only siding with Putin, but conspiring with him.

Individual intelligence assets went into action to prove this theory correct and, if need be, to invent a conspiracy where none existed. Joseph Mifsud was apparently among them. "Deep State Target" devotes a fair amount of space to his background. Although Mueller's indictment says Mifsud had "substantial connections to Russian government officials," a wealth of data indicates the opposite.

'Only One Master'

Stephan Roh, a Swiss-German lawyer who employed Mifsud as a consultant, writes in a self-published book that he has "only one master: the Western Political, Diplomatic, and Intelligence World, his only home, of which he is still deeply dependent." Mifsud has been photographed with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and veteran diplomat Claire Smith, a top British intelligence official. Indeed, Mifsud taught a course with Smith for Italian military and law-enforcement personnel at the same Link Campus where he'd met Papadopolous.

Mifsud's ties with western intelligence are thus multifarious and deep. The same goes for the other people with whom ran Papadopoulos had contact.

Alexander Downer, the Aussie diplomat with whom he had drinks, turns out to be a director of a London private intelligence firm known as Hakluyt & Co., which counts among

its close associates Halper, the Cambridge academic who was ex-CIA, and Sir Richard Dearlove, ex-director of MI6, the British equivalent of the CIA. These two – Dearlove and Halper – ran an intelligence seminar at Cambridge and are also partners in a private venture calling itself “The Cambridge Security Initiative.” (See “[Spooks Spooking Themselves](#),” *Consortium News*, May 31, 2018.)

Millian, the man who offered Papadopoulos \$30,000 a month, turns out to be a [source](#) for the notorious Steele Dossier, compiled by ex-MI6 agent Christopher Steele. Steele, in turn, [sought counsel](#) at one point from fellow Cambridge man Dearlove on how to spread his findings. According to one of Willian’s buddies, Millian works for the FBI as well.

All of which is enough to get anyone’s conspiratorial juices flowing.

As for Charles Tawil, he arouses Papadopoulos’s fears of an intelligence link once he arrives in Mykonos by boasting of his friendship with Uganda President Yoweri Museveni and then-South African President Jacob Zuma, and declaring of convicted Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard, “it wasn’t our fault he got caught.” In Israel, he brags about helping to wiretap Syrian strong man Hafez al-Assad, father of the current president. “We could have killed him at any time,” he says. Finally, Papadopoulos reveals a private diplomatic cable [citing](#) Tawil as a U.S. intelligence asset back in 2006.

Five intelligence assets were thus hounding Papadopoulos at every turn while a sixth was compiling the dossier that would send Russia-gate into overdrive. It added up to the

greatest propaganda campaign since the furor over Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and, like those nonexistent WMDs, turns out to have been manufactured out of thin air.

Full-Court Press

“Deep State Target” is vague about many details and Papadopoulos doesn’t have all the answers about Russia-gate.

No one at this point does. But his book leaves little doubt that he was the victim of a full-court press by intelligence assets in and around the FBI, CIA, and MI6.

Like everyone, Mifsud knew about Clinton’s emails – the ones she stored on her private server, not those that Wikileaks would later release – and fed Papadopoulos tidbits about a supposed Russia connection in the hope, no doubt, that he would pass them along to the Trump campaign. When he didn’t, Downer nonetheless reported back to Canberra that Papadopoulos had told him something along those lines. (Papadopoulos does not remember saying any such thing.) Once Canberra told Washington, the FBI investigation, dubbed Crossfire Hurricane, was on.

Halper tried to get him to admit to working with Russia: “It’s great that Russia is helping you and the campaign, right, George? George, you and your campaign are involved in hacking and working with Russia, right? It seems like you are a middleman for Trump and Russia, right? I know you know about the emails.”

Millian sends him an email shortly before the election telling him to “[p]lease be very cautious these last few days. Even to the point of not leaving your food and drinks out of eye sight.”

“Obviously a Greek Orthodox guy like you has close ties to Russia,” Charles Tawil, observes, leaving it to Papadopoulos to fill in the blanks.

Diehard Russia-truthers will point out that, even though the charge that Papadopoulos obstructed justice by misleading the FBI was dropped, Papadopoulos is still a convicted liar who pled guilty to misleading the FBI about the exact timing of his meetings with Mifsud. But he says that he was frightened and nervous and didn’t have his lawyer present and that he didn’t even remember what he had said until he read it in the indictment.

He also says he now regrets taking his then-lawyers’ advice to cop a plea: “There was never any pre-trial discovery. We never saw – or at least I hadn’t seen – the transcript of my interview, so all we had was the prosecutor’s word regarding what I had said. And we caved.” But he was an amateur running out of money while doing battle with a prosecutor with a [\\$25-million budget](#). He had little choice. Russia-gate was unstoppable – until the collusion theory finally collapsed.

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Consortium News' Record on Russia-gate—How CN Covered the 'Scandal': No. 4—'The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate'

As Russia-gate continues to buffet the Trump administration, we now know that the “scandal” started with Democrats funding the original dubious allegations of Russian interference, wrote Joe Lauria on Oct. 29, 2017.

The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate

By Joe Lauria

Special to Consortium News

The two sources that originated the allegations claiming that Russia meddled in the 2016 election – without providing convincing evidence – were both *paid for* by the Democratic National Committee, and in one instance also by the Clinton campaign: the Steele dossier and the CrowdStrike analysis of the DNC servers. Think about that for a minute.

We have long known that the DNC did not allow the FBI to examine its computer server for clues about who may have hacked it – or even if it was hacked – and instead turned to CrowdStrike, a private company co-founded by a virulently anti-Putin Russian. Within a day, CrowdStrike blamed Russia on dubious evidence.

And, it has now been disclosed that the Clinton campaign and the DNC [paid for](#) opposition research memos written by former

British MI6 intelligence agent Christopher Steele using hearsay accusations from anonymous Russian sources to claim that the Russian government was blackmailing and bribing Donald Trump in a scheme that presupposed that Russian President Vladimir Putin foresaw Trump's presidency years ago when no one else did.

Since then, the U.S. intelligence community has struggled to corroborate Steele's allegations, but those suspicions still colored the thinking of President Obama's intelligence chiefs who, according to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, "hand-picked" the analysts who produced the Jan. 6 "assessment" claiming that Russia interfered in the U.S. election.

In other words, possibly all of the Russia-gate allegations, which have been taken on faith by Democratic partisans and members of the anti-Trump Resistance, trace back to claims paid for or generated by Democrats.

If for a moment one could remove the sometimes justified hatred that many people feel toward Trump, it would be impossible to avoid the impression that the scandal may have been cooked up by the DNC and the Clinton camp in league with Obama's intelligence chiefs to serve political and geopolitical aims.

Absent new evidence based on forensic or documentary proof, we could be looking at a partisan concoction devised in the midst of a bitter general election campaign, a manufactured "scandal" that also has fueled a dangerous New Cold War against Russia; a case of a dirty political "opportunity" serving American ruling interests in reestablishing the dominance

over Russia that they enjoyed in the 1990s, as well as feeding the voracious budgetary appetite of the Military-Industrial Complex.

Though lacking independent evidence of the core Russia-gate allegations, the “scandal” continues to expand into wild exaggerations about the impact of a tiny number of social media pages suspected of having links to Russia but that apparently carried very few specific campaign messages. (Some pages reportedly were devoted to photos of puppies.)

‘Cash for Trash’

Based on what is now known, Wall Street buccaneer Paul Singer paid for GPS Fusion, a Washington-based research firm, to do opposition research on Trump during the Republican primaries, but dropped the effort in May 2016 when it became clear Trump would be the GOP nominee. GPS Fusion has strongly denied that it hired Steele for this work or that the research had anything to do with Russia.

Then, in April 2016 the DNC and the Clinton campaign paid its Washington lawyer Marc Elias to hire Fusion GPS to unearth dirt connecting Trump to Russia. This was three months before the DNC blamed Russia for hacking its computers and supposedly giving its stolen emails to WikiLeaks to help Trump win the election.

“The Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee retained Fusion GPS to research any possible connections between Mr. Trump, his businesses, his campaign team and Russia, court filings revealed this week,” *The New York Times* reported on Friday night.

So, linking Trump to Moscow as a way to bring Russia into the election story was the Democrats' aim from the start.

Fusion GPS then hired ex-MI6 intelligence agent Steele, it says for the first time, to dig up that dirt in Russia for the Democrats. Steele produced classic opposition research, not an intelligence assessment or conclusion, although it was written in a style and formatted to look like one.

It's important to realize that Steele was no longer working for an official intelligence agency, which would have imposed strict standards on his work and possibly disciplined him for injecting false information into the government's decision-making. Instead, he was working for a political party and a presidential candidate looking for dirt that would hurt their opponent, what the Clintons used to call "cash for trash" when they were the targets.

Had Steele been doing legitimate intelligence work for his government, he would have taken a far different approach. Intelligence professionals are not supposed to just give their bosses what their bosses want to hear. So, Steele would have verified his information. And it would have gone through a process of further verification by other intelligence analysts in his and perhaps other intelligence agencies. For instance, in the U.S., a National Intelligence Estimate requires vetting by all 17 intelligence agencies and incorporates dissenting opinions.

Instead Steele was producing a piece of purely political research and had different motivations. The first might well have been money, as he was being paid specifically for this project, not as part of his work on a government salary

presumably serving all of society. Secondly, to continue being paid for each subsequent memo that he produced he would have been incentivized to please his clients or at least give them enough so they would come back for more.

Dubious Stuff

Opposition research is about getting dirt to be used in a mud-slinging political campaign, in which wild charges against candidates are the norm. This “oppo” is full of unvetted rumor and innuendo with enough facts mixed in to make it seem credible. There was so much dubious stuff in Steele’s memos that the FBI was unable to confirm its most salacious allegations and apparently refuted several key points.

Perhaps more significantly, the corporate news media, which was largely partial to Clinton, did not report the fantastic allegations after people close to the Clinton campaign began circulating the lurid stories before the election with the hope that the material would pop up in the news. To their credit, established media outlets recognized this as ammunition against a political opponent, not a serious document.

Despite this circumspection, the Steele dossier was shared with the FBI at some point in the summer of 2016 and apparently became the basis for the FBI to seek Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants against members of Trump’s campaign. More alarmingly, it may have formed the basis for much of the Jan. 6 intelligence “assessment” by those “hand-picked” analysts from three U.S. intelligence agencies – the CIA, the FBI and the NSA – not all 17

agencies that Hillary Clinton continues to insist were involved. (Obama's intelligence chiefs, DNI Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan, publicly admitted that only three agencies took part and *The New York Times* printed a correction saying so.)

If in fact the Steele memos were a primary basis for the Russia collusion allegations against Trump, then there may be no credible evidence at all. It could be that because the three agencies knew the dossier was dodgy that there was no substantive proof in the Jan. 6 "assessment." Even so, a summary of the Steele allegations were included in a secret appendix that then-FBI Director James Comey described to then-President-elect Trump just two weeks before his inauguration.

Five days later, after the fact of Comey's briefing was leaked to the press, the Steele dossier was published in full by the sensationalist website BuzzFeed behind the excuse that the allegations' inclusion in the classified annex of a U.S. intelligence report justified the dossier's publication regardless of doubts about its accuracy.

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Russian Fingerprints

The other source of blame about Russian meddling came from

the private company CrowdStrike because the DNC blocked the FBI from examining its server after a suspected hack. Within a day, CrowdStrike claimed to find Russian “fingerprints” in the metadata of a DNC opposition research document, which had been revealed by an Internet site called DCLeaks, showing Cyrillic letters and the name of the first Soviet intelligence chief. That supposedly implicated Russia.

CrowdStrike also claimed that the alleged Russian intelligence operation was extremely sophisticated and skilled in concealing its external penetration of the server. But CrowdStrike’s conclusion about Russian “fingerprints” resulted from clues that would have been left behind by extremely sloppy hackers or inserted intentionally to implicate the Russians.

CrowdStrike’s credibility was further undermined when *Voice of America* [reported](#) on March 23, 2017, that the same software the company says it used to blame Russia for the hack wrongly concluded that Moscow also had hacked Ukrainian government howitzers on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine.

“An influential British think tank and Ukraine’s military are disputing a report that the U.S. cyber-security firm CrowdStrike has used to buttress its claims of Russian hacking in the presidential election,” *VOA* reported. Dimitri Alperovitch, a CrowdStrike co-founder, is also a senior fellow at the anti-Russian Atlantic Council think tank in Washington.

More speculation about the alleged election hack was raised with WikiLeaks’ Vault 7 release, which revealed that the CIA is not beyond covering up its own hacks by leaving clues

implicating others. Plus, there's the fact that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has declared again and again that WikiLeaks did not get the Democratic emails from the Russians. Buttressing Assange's denials of a Russian role, WikiLeaks associate Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, said he met a person connected to the leak during a trip to Washington last year.

And, William Binney, maybe the best mathematician to ever work at the National Security Agency, and former CIA analyst Ray McGovern have [published a technical analysis](#) of one set of Democratic email metadata showing that a transatlantic "hack" would have been impossible and that the evidence points to a likely leak by a disgruntled Democratic insider. Binney has further stated that if it were a "hack," the NSA would have been able to detect it and make the evidence known.

Fueling Neo-McCarthyism

Despite these doubts, which the U.S. mainstream media has largely ignored, Russia-gate has grown into something much more than an election story. It has unleashed a neo-McCarthyite attack on Americans who are accused of being dupes of Russia if they dare question the evidence of the Kremlin's guilt.

Just weeks after last November's election, *The Washington Post* [published a front-page story](#) touting a blacklist from an anonymous group, called Prop0rNot, that alleged that 200 news sites, including ***Consortiumnews.com*** and other leading independent news sources, were either willful Russian propagandists or "useful idiots."

Last week, a new list emerged with the names of over 2,000 people, mostly Westerners, who have appeared on RT, the Russian government-financed English-language news channel. The list was part of a report entitled, “The Kremlin’s Platform for ‘Useful Idiots’ in the West,” put out by an outfit called European Values, with a long list of European funders.

Included on the list of “useful idiots” absurdly are CIA-friendly Washington Post columnist David Ignatius; David Brock, Hillary Clinton’s opposition research chief; and U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

The report stated: “Many people in Europe and the US, including politicians and other persons of influence, continue to exhibit troubling naïveté about RT’s political agenda, buying into the network’s marketing ploy that it is simply an outlet for independent voices marginalised by the mainstream Western press. These ‘useful idiots’ remain oblivious to RT’s intentions and boost its legitimacy by granting interviews on its shows and newscasts.”

The intent of these lists is clear: to shut down dissenting voices who question Western foreign policy and who are usually excluded from Western corporate media. RT is often willing to provide a platform for a wider range of viewpoints, both from the left and right. American ruling interests fend off critical viewpoints by first suppressing them in corporate media and now condemning them as propaganda when they emerge on RT.

Geopolitical Risks

More ominously, the anti-Russia mania has increased chances of direct conflict between the two nuclear superpowers. The Russia-bashing rhetoric not only served the Clinton campaign, though ultimately to ill effect, but it has pushed a longstanding U.S.-led geopolitical agenda to regain control over Russia, an advantage that the U.S. enjoyed during the Yeltsin years in the 1990s.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Wall Street rushed in behind Boris Yeltsin and Russian oligarchs to asset strip virtually the entire country, impoverishing the population. Amid widespread accounts of this grotesque corruption, Washington intervened in Russian politics to help get Yeltsin re-elected in 1996. The political rise of Vladimir Putin after Yeltsin resigned on New Year's Eve 1999 reversed this course, restoring Russian sovereignty over its economy and politics.

That inflamed Hillary Clinton and other American hawks whose desire was to install another Yeltsin-like figure and resume U.S. exploitation of Russia's vast natural and financial resources. To advance that cause, U.S. presidents have supported the eastward expansion of NATO and have deployed 30,000 troops on Russia's border.

In 2014, the Obama administration helped orchestrate a coup that toppled the elected government of Ukraine and installed a fiercely anti-Russian regime. The U.S. also undertook the risky policy of aiding jihadists to overthrow a secular Russian ally in Syria. The consequences have brought the world closer to nuclear annihilation than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

In this context, the Democratic Party-led Russia-gate offensive was intended not only to explain away Clinton's defeat but to stop Trump – possibly via impeachment or by inflicting severe political damage – because he had talked, insincerely it is turning out, about detente with Russia. That did not fit in well with the plan at all.

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe) .
