

America's Election Meddling Would Indeed Justify Other Countries Retaliating In Kind

Highlighting the U.S.'s long history in meddling in other countries' elections is not "whataboutism," but rather a highly germane point to understanding the context for the allegations of Russian meddling in Election 2016, Caitlin Johnstone observes.

By Caitlin Johnstone

There is still no clear proof that the Russian government interfered with the 2016 U.S. election in any meaningful way. Which is weird, because Russia and every other country on earth would be perfectly justified in doing so.

Like every single hotly publicized Russiagate "bombshell" that has broken since this nonsense began, Mueller's indictment of 13 Russian social media trolls was paraded around as proof of something hugely significant (an "act of war" in this case), but on closer examination turns out to be empty.

The always excellent Moon of Alabama recently made a solid argument that has also been advanced by Russiagate skeptics like TYT's Michael Tracey and Max Blumenthal of The Real News, pointing out that there is in fact no evidence that the troll farming operation was an attempt to manipulate the U.S. election, nor indeed that it had any ties to the Russian government at all, nor indeed that it was anything other than a crafty Russian civilian's money making scheme.

The notion that a few Russian trolls committed a "conspiracy to defraud the United States" by "sowing discord" with a bunch of wildly contradictory posts endorsing all sorts of different ideologies sounds completely ridiculous in a country whose mainstream media spends all its time actively creating political division anyway, but when you look at it as a civilian operation to attract social media followers to sock puppet accounts with the goal of selling promoted posts for profit, it makes perfect sense.

James Corbett of The Corbett Report has a great video about how absolutely bizarre it is that public dialogue is ignoring the fact that these trolls overwhelmingly used mainstream media like the *Washington Post* in their shares instead of outlets like RT and Infowars. As a scheme to acquire followers, it makes perfect sense. As a scheme to subvert America, it's nonsensical.

There is currently no evidence that the Russian government interfered in the U.S. election. But it is worth pointing out that if they did they had every

right to.

What About Whataboutism

“Whataboutism” is the word of the day. At some point it was decreed by the internet forum gods that adding “-ism” to a description of something that someone is doing makes for a devastating argument in and of itself, and people have hastened to use this tactic as a bludgeon to silence anyone who points out the extremely obvious and significant fact that America interferes in elections more than any other government on earth.

“Okay, so America isn’t perfect and we’ve meddled a few times,” the argument goes. “So what? You’re saying just because we’ve done it that makes it okay for Russia to do it?”

Actually, yes. Of course it does. Clearly. That isn’t a “whataboutism,” it’s an observation that is completely devastating to the mainstream Russia narrative. If it’s okay for the CIA to continuously interfere in the elections of other countries up to and including modern times, it is okay for other countries to interfere in theirs. Only in the most warped American supremacist reality tunnel is that not abundantly obvious.

Every country on earth is absolutely entitled to interfere in America’s elections. America is responsible for the overwhelming majority of election interferences around the world in modern times, including an interference in Russia’s elections in the nineties that was so brazen they made a Hollywood movie about it, so clearly an environment has been created wherein the United States has declared that this acceptable.

It amazes me that more people aren’t willing to call this like it is. No, it would not be wrong for Russia to interfere in America’s elections. Yes, what America did to Russia absolutely would make a proportionate retaliation okay. Of course it would.

Ridiculous Double Standards

Imagine this:



A guy in a cowboy hat runs into a bar and starts punching people. Most of them just rub their sore jaws and hunch over their drinks hoping to avoid any trouble, but one guy in a fur cap sets down his vodka and shoves the man in the cowboy hat.



The man in the cowboy hat begins shrieking like a little girl. All his friends rush to his side to comfort him and begin angrily shaking their fists at the man in the fur cap.

“Hey, he punched me!” says the man in the fur cap.

“That’s a whataboutism!” sobs the man in the cowboy hat.

Can you imagine anything more ridiculous?

Seriously, how do people think this is a thing? How does anyone think it’s legitimate to respond to my article about a former CIA Director openly admitting that the U.S. still to this day interferes with elections around the world babbling about “whataboutisms”? What a doofy, indefensible monkey wrench to throw into the gears of political discourse.

Yes, obviously by asserting that it is acceptable for the CIA to meddle in other countries’ elections, the US has created an environment where that sort of thing is acceptable. If Americans just want to embrace their American supremacist bigotry and say “Yeah we can do that to you but you can’t do it to us cuz we have big guns and we said so,” that’s at least a logically consistent position. Crying like little bitches and behaving as though they’ve been victimized by some egregious immorality is not.

Channel 4 News reported on the research of the Institute for Politics and Strategy at Carnegie Mellon University's Don Levin back in November, writing the following:



“Dov Levin, an academic from the Institute for Politics and Strategy at Carnegie Mellon University, has calculated the vast scale of election interventions by both the US and Russia.

“According to his research, there were 117 “partisan electoral interventions” between 1946 and 2000. That’s around one of every nine competitive elections held since Second World War.

The majority of these – almost 70 percent – were cases of U.S. interference.

“And these are not all from the Cold War era; 21 such interventions took place between 1990 and 2000, of which 18 were by the US.”

If Americans don’t like election meddling, they need to demand that their government stops doing it. As long as it remains the very worst offender in that department, the U.S. is entitled to nothing other than the entire world meddling in its elections.

I shouldn’t even have to say this. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Don’t dish it out if you can’t take it.

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

Nunes: FBI and DOJ Perps Could Be Put on Trial

House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes has stated that “DOJ and FBI are

not above the law," and could face legal consequences for alleged abuses of the FISA court, reports Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Throwing down the gauntlet on alleged abuse of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) by the Department of Justice and the FBI, House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) stated that there could be legal consequences for officials who may have misled the FISA court. "If they need to be put on trial, we will put them on trial," he said. "The reason Congress exists is to oversee these agencies that we created."

Nunes took this highly unusual, no-holds-barred stance during an interview with Emmy-award winning investigative journalist Sharyl Attkisson, which aired on Sunday.

Attkisson said she had invited both Nunes and House Intelligence Committee Ranking Member Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) but that only Nunes agreed. She asked him about Schiff's charge that Nunes' goal was "to put the FBI and DOJ on trial." What followed was very atypical bluntness – candor normally considered quite unacceptable in polite circles of the Washington Establishment.

Rather than play the diplomat and disavow what Schiff contended was Nunes' goal, Nunes said, in effect, let the chips fall where they may. He unapologetically averred that, yes, a criminal trial might well be the outcome. "DOJ and FBI are not above the law," he stated emphatically. "If they are committing abuse before a secret court getting warrants on American citizens, you're darn right that we're going to put them on trial."

Die Is Cast

The stakes are very high. Current and former senior officials – and not only from DOJ and FBI, but from other agencies like the CIA and NSA, whom documents and testimony show were involved in providing faulty information to justify a FISA warrant to monitor former Trump campaign official Carter Page – may suddenly find themselves in considerable legal jeopardy. Like, felony territory.

This was not supposed to happen. Mrs. Clinton was a shoo-in, remember? Back when the FISA surveillance warrant of Page was obtained, just weeks before the November 2016 election, there seemed to be no need to hide tracks, because, even if these extracurricular activities were discovered, the perps would have looked forward to award certificates rather than legal problems under a Trump presidency.

Thus, the knives will be coming out. Mostly because the mainstream media will make a major effort – together with Schiff-mates in the Democratic Party – to marginalize Nunes, those who find themselves in jeopardy can be expected to push back strongly.

If past is precedent, they will be confident that, with their powerful allies within the FBI/DOJ/CIA “Deep State” they will be able to counter Nunes and show him and the other congressional investigation committee chairs, where the power lies. The conventional wisdom is that Nunes and the others have bit off far more than they can chew. And the odds do not favor folks, including oversight committee chairs, who buck the system.

Staying Power

On the other hand, the presumptive perps have not run into a chairman like Nunes in four decades, since Congressmen Lucien Nedzi (D-Mich.), Otis Pike (D-NY), and Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) ran tough, explosive hearings on the abuses of a previous generation deep state, including massive domestic spying revealed by quintessential investigative reporter Seymour Hersh in December 1974. (Actually, this is largely why the congressional intelligence oversight committees were later established, and why the FISA law was passed in 1978.)

At this point, one is tempted to say *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* – or the more things change, the more they stay the same – but that would be only half correct in this context. Yes, scoundrels will always take liberties with the law to spy on others. But the huge difference today is that mainstream media have no room for those who uncover government crimes and abuse. And this will be a major impediment to efforts by Nunes and other committee chairs to inform the public.

One glaring sign of the media’s unwillingness to displease corporate masters and Official Washington is the harsh reality that Hersh’s most recent explosive investigations, using his large array of government sources to explore front-burner issues, have not been able to find a home in any English-speaking newspaper or journal. In a sense, this provides what might be called a “confidence-building” factor, giving some assurance to deep-state perps that they will be able to ride this out, and that congressional committee chairs will once again learn to know their (subservient) place.

Much will depend on whether top DOJ and FBI officials can bring themselves to reverse course and give priority to the oath they took to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic. This should not be too much to hope for, but it will require uncommon courage in facing up honestly to the major misdeeds appear to have occurred – and letting

the chips fall where they may. Besides, it would be the right thing to do.

Nunes is projecting calm confidence that once he and Trey Gowdey (R-Tenn.), chair of the House Oversight Committee, release documentary evidence showing what their investigations have turned up, it will be hard for DOJ and FBI officials to dissimulate.

In Other News ...

In the interview with Attkisson, Nunes covered a number of other significant issues:

- The committee is closing down its investigation into possible collusion between Moscow and the Trump campaign; no evidence of collusion was found.
- The apparently widespread practice of “unmasking” the identities of Americans under surveillance. On this point, Nunes said, “In the last administration they were unmasking hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of Americans’ names. They were unmasking for what I would say, for lack of a better definition, were for political purposes.”
- Asked about Schiff’s criticism that Nunes behaved improperly on what he called the “midnight run to the White House,” Nunes responded that the stories were untrue. “Well, most of the time I ignore political nonsense in this town,” he said. “What I will say is that all of those stories were totally fake from the beginning.”

Not since Watergate has there been so high a degree of political tension here in Washington but the stakes for our Republic are even higher this time. Assuming abuse of FISA court procedures is documented and those responsible for playing fast and loose with the required justification for legal warrants are not held to account, the division of powers enshrined in the Constitution will be in peril.

A denouement of some kind can be expected in the coming months. Stay tuned.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years and is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Anti-Trumpists Use Mueller Indictments to Escalate Tensions With Nuclear-Armed

Russia

Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller's indictment of 13 alleged members of a Russian troll farm is leading to calls for escalation with Russia, exacerbating tensions that are already at historic – and dangerous – lows, observes Caitlin Johnstone.

By Caitlin Johnstone

U.S. empire loyalists are so close to telling the truth when they babble about “Russian propaganda.” They are openly admitting that it is wrong to use media to manipulate the ways that Americans think and vote. Now all we need is for them to admit that they themselves do this constantly, and we'll be on the right track.

The word “Russians” is America's top trend on Twitter at the time of this writing because of a Mueller indictment of 13 alleged members of a Russian troll farm, those nefarious supervillains who posted pictures of puppies and promoted Bernie Sanders to “sow discord in the U.S. political system, including the 2016 U.S. election.”

Predictably, no evidence is added to cohesively tie the establishment Russia narrative together with allegations of Russia hacking the Democratic Party and giving their emails to WikiLeaks, meeting with Donald Trump, Jr. at Trump Tower, any shenanigans with well-hydrated Russian prostitutes, or indeed anything tying the troll farm to Trump or the Russian government at all.

The focus instead is on people disguising their identities to troll Americans on social media, which we have now learned constitutes a “conspiracy to defraud the United States.” As Disobedient Media's Elizabeth Lea Vos rightly points out, it is also behavior that the Hillary Clinton campaign is known to have funded and engaged in extensively.

In response to this underwhelming revelation, Democrats and Never-Trumpers are howling for new Cold War escalations with Russia. This despite the fact that this administration has already killed Russians in Syria, greatly escalated nuclear tensions with Russia, allowed the sale of arms to Ukraine (a move Obama refused for fear of angering Moscow), established a permanent military presence in Syria with the goal of effecting regime change, forced RT and Sputnik to register as foreign agents, expanded NATO with the addition of Montenegro, assigned Russia hawk Kurt Volker as special representative to Ukraine, shut down a Russian consulate in San Francisco and expelled Russian diplomats as part of continued back-and-forth hostile diplomatic exchanges.

We are already at an extremely dangerous point in the ongoing trend of continuous escalations with a country that is armed with thousands of nuclear warheads. And these deranged lunatics want more.

“Special Counsel Mueller’s indictments are further proof that Vladimir Putin directed a campaign to interfere with our elections, with the goal of tipping the outcome,” tweeted Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. “Given these indictments, @realDonaldTrump should implement the sanctions that Congress passed immediately.”

Steven Schmidt, MSNBC analyst and former strategist for George W. Bush and John McCain, said that the word “meddling” is not a sufficiently inflammatory word, because “What Russia did is ATTACK the United States. Trump and the Corrupted GOP majority refuse to defend the sovereignty of the country from this outside THREAT from a hostile state actor.”

Congressmen Ted Lieu and Adam Schiff, Senator Bernie Sanders, popular commentators Preet Bharara and Joe Walsh have all joined in the pile-on, along with many, many others, all demanding that the president do more to escalate tensions with Russia even further than he already has.

This is exactly what renowned U.S.-Russian relations expert Stephen Cohen has been warning of: an extremely dangerous mixture of continually escalating Cold War tensions coexisting with hot proxy wars between two nuclear superpowers, with a president facing immense political pressures to keep advancing and never, ever back down. A narcissist in the White House being baited by his political enemies into a game of nuclear “chicken,” without the ability to swerve when necessary.

Meanwhile what are Republicans talking about? Why, they’re all crowing about the fact that these Russia revelations began on Obama’s watch and don’t show collusion, of course.

Do you see what is happening here? There is never, ever going to be any proof of Trump-Russia collusion, because that has never been what this is about.

We’ve talked about this before: America’s unelected power establishment doesn’t care about impeaching Trump, it cares about hobbling Russia in order to prevent the rise of a potential rival superpower in its ally China. All this lunacy makes perfect sense when you realize this. The U.S. deep state is using the hysterical cult of anti-Trumpism to manufacture support for increasing escalations with Russia, and the anti-Trumpists are playing right along under the delusion that pushing for moves against Russia will hurt Trump.

Well they will not hurt Trump, because there has never been any Trump-Russia

collusion. If there had been it would have been picked up by America's sprawling surveillance networks and leaked to the Washington Post before the end of 2016, and if Trump were a Putin puppet he wouldn't be continually escalating toward direct conflict with Russia in ways his predecessor Obama never would have dreamed of doing. They aren't hurting Trump with these loud cries for increased sanctions and hawkishness, they're imperiling us all.

Democrats, it is time to stop letting them bait you into calling for even more escalations with a nuclear superpower and start calling for detente instead. Republicans, it is time for you to stop putting partisan politics ahead of the survival of our species and start pushing against these dangerous escalations that your president has been playing right along with. These escalations are extremely dangerous and getting ever more so, and in the name of all that is holy I implore you to stop before the unthinkable happens.

On my knees I beg you all to stop this madness, for the sake of my children and yours. You lunatics on both sides of the political divide are going to get us all killed. In God's name, stop. Please.

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

Russians Spooked by Nukes-Against-Cyber-Attack Policy

New U.S. policy on nuclear retaliatory strikes for cyber-attacks is raising concerns, with Russia claiming that it's already been blamed for a false-flag cyber-attack – namely the election hacking allegations of 2016, explain Ray McGovern and William Binney.

By Ray McGovern and William Binney

Moscow is showing understandable concern over the lowering of the threshold for employing nuclear weapons to include retaliation for cyber-attacks, a change announced on Feb. 2 in the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).

Explaining the shift in U.S. doctrine on first-use, the NPR cites the efforts of potential adversaries "to design and use cyber weapons" and explains the change as a "hedge" against non-nuclear threats. In response, Russia described the move

as an “attempt to shift onto others one’s own responsibility” for the deteriorating security situation.

Moscow’s concern goes beyond rhetoric. Cyber-attacks are notoriously difficult to trace to the actual perpetrator and can be pinned easily on others in what we call “false-flag” operations. These can be highly destabilizing – not only in the strategic context, but in the political arena as well.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has good reason to believe he has been the target of a false-flag attack of the political genre. We judged this to be the case a year and a half ago, and said so. Our judgment was fortified last summer – thanks to forensic evidence challenging accusations that the Russians hacked into the Democratic National Committee and provided emails to WikiLeaks. (Curiously, the FBI declined to do forensics, even though the “Russian hack” was being described as an “act of war.”)

Our conclusions were based on work conducted over several months by highly experienced technical specialists, including another former NSA technical director (besides co-author Binney) and experts from outside the circle of intelligence analysts.

On August 9, 2017, investigative reporter Patrick Lawrence summed up our findings in The Nation. “They have all argued that the hack theory is wrong and that a locally executed leak is the far more likely explanation,” he explained.

As we wrote in an open letter to Barack Obama dated January 17, three days before he left office, the NSA’s programs are fully capable of capturing all electronic transfers of data. “We strongly suggest that you ask NSA for any evidence it may have indicating that the results of Russian hacking were given to WikiLeaks,” our letter said. “If NSA cannot produce such evidence – and quickly – this would probably mean it does not have any.”

A ‘Dot’ Pointing to a False Flag?

In his article, Lawrence included mention of one key, previously unknown “dot” revealed by WikiLeaks on March 31, 2017. When connected with other dots, it puts a huge dent in the dominant narrative about Russian hacking. Small wonder that the mainstream media immediately applied white-out to the offending dot.

Lawrence, however, let the dot out of the bag, so to speak: “The list of the CIA’s cyber-tools WikiLeaks began to release in March and labeled Vault 7 includes one called Marble Framework that is capable of obfuscating the origin of documents in false-flag operations and leaving markings that point to whatever the CIA wants to point to.”

If congressional oversight committees summon the courage to look into “Obfus-Gate” and Marble, they are likely to find this line of inquiry as lucrative as the Steele “dossier.” In fact, they are likely to find the same dramatis personae playing leading roles in both productions.

Two Surprising Visits

Last October CIA Director Mike Pompeo invited one of us (Binney) into his office to discuss Russian hacking. Binney told Pompeo his analysts had lied and that he could prove it.

In retrospect, the Pompeo-Binney meeting appears to have been a shot across the bow of those cyber warriors in the CIA, FBI, and NSA with the means and incentive to adduce “just discovered” evidence of Russian hacking. That Pompeo could promptly invite Binney back to evaluate any such “evidence” would be seen as a strong deterrent to that kind of operation.

Pompeo’s closeness to President Donald Trump is probably why the heads of Russia’s three top intelligence agencies paid Pompeo an unprecedented visit in late January. We think it likely that the proximate cause was the strategic danger Moscow sees in the nuclear-hedge-against-cyber-attack provision of the Nuclear Posture Statement (a draft of which had been leaked a few weeks before).

If so, the discussion presumably focused on enhancing hot-line and other fail-safe arrangements to reduce the possibility of false-flag attacks in the strategic arena – by anyone – given the extremely high stakes.

Putin may have told his intelligence chiefs to pick up on President Donald Trump’s suggestion, after the two met last July, to establish a U.S.-Russian cyber security unit. That proposal was widely ridiculed at the time. It may make good sense now.

Ray McGovern, a CIA analyst for 27 years, was chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch and briefed the President’s Daily Brief one-on-one from 1981-1985.

William Binney worked for NSA for 36 years, retiring in 2001 as the technical director of world military and geopolitical analysis and reporting; he created many of the collection systems still used by NSA.

Donald Trump v. the Spooks

From the Archive: Just before Trump took office last year, ex-British intelligence officer Annie Machon wrote about the battle he was facing with U.S.

intelligence agencies. As Russia-gate morphs into Intel-gate, we re-publish her prescient article today.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yet, if the Democratic National Committee had not done its best to rig the

primaries in favor of Hillary Clinton, then perhaps we would not be in this position. Bernie Sanders would be the President-elect.

Two-Party Sham

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

In fact, respected U.S. investigative journalist Robert Parry recently wrote that an intelligence contact told him before the election that the intelligence agencies did not like either of the presidential candidates. This may go some way to explaining the FBI's intervention in the run-up to the election against Hillary Clinton, as well as the CIA's attempts to de-legitimize Trump's victory afterwards.

Whether that was indeed the case, the CIA has certainly held back no punches since Trump's election. First the evidence-lite assertion that it was the Russians who hacked the DNC emails and leaked them to WikiLeaks: then the fake news about Russia hacking the voting computers; that then morphed into the Russians "hacked the election" itself; then they "hacked" into the U.S. electric grid via a Vermont utility. All this without a shred of fact-based evidence provided, but Obama's expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats last month solidified this dubious reality in Americans' minds.

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

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

The Role of MI6

Much has already been written about Steele and the company, much of it contradictory as no doubt befits the life of a former spy. But it is a standard career trajectory for insiders to move on to corporate, mercenary spy companies,

and this is what Steele appears to have done successfully in 2009. Of course, much is predicated on maintaining good working relations with your former employers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chances for Peace

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

Moscow to stanch the bloodshed in the Middle East.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Coleen Rowley and Nat Parry

With Democrats and self-styled #Resistance activists placing their hopes for taking down Donald Trump's presidency in the investigation being led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, online groups such as MoveOn and Avaaz are launching

campaigns to come to the Special Counsel's defense in the event of him being removed by the president.

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

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

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

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

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

Setting aside for the moment the merits of the Russiagate narrative, who really is this Robert Mueller that amnesiac liberals clamor to hold up as the champion of the people and defender of democracy? Co-author Coleen Rowley, who as an FBI whistleblower exposed numerous internal problems at the FBI in the early 2000s,

didn't have to be privy to his inner circle to recall just a few of his actions after 9/11 that so shocked the public conscience as to repeatedly generate moral disapproval even on the part of mainstream media. Rowley was only able to scratch the surface in listing some of the more widely reported wrongdoing that should still shock liberal consciences.

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

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

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

The second main factor in establishing the reliability of any source's information would be even more key in this case. It's the *basis* of the particular informant's knowledge, i.e. was the informant an eye witness or merely reporting double-triple hearsay or just regurgitating the "word on the street?"

If the actual basis of the information is uncertain, the next step for law enforcement would normally be to seek facts that either corroborate or refute

the source's information. It's been reported that FBI agents did inquire into the basis for Steele's allegations, but it is not known what Steele told the FBI – other than indications that his info came from secondary sources making it, at best, second- or third-hand. What if anything did the FBI do to establish the reliability of the indirect sources that Steele claimed to be getting his info from? Before vouching for his credibility, did the FBI even consider polygraphing Steele after he (falsely) denied having leaked his info since the FBI was aware of significant similarities of a news article to the info he had supplied them?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nat Parry is co-author of Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.

Russiagate Narrative Undercut by Nunes Memo

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

By Philip Giraldi

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

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

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

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

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

Through Sanctions Act.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Connecticut Court Decision Highlights U.S. Educational Failures

A recent court decision in Connecticut overturned a mandate that would have addressed inadequate education funding for poorer communities, a historic problem of the U.S. educational system, which relies on local resources instead of federal wealth, as Jonathan Kozol and Dennis J. Bernstein discussed.

By Dennis J Bernstein

In 1973, I was a struggling young teacher working in inner city Brooklyn when I discovered Jonathan Kozol's National Book Award-winning *Death at an Early Age*.

It became my young teacher's bible on understanding the nature of the school system and the pervasive racism at its core. Its subtitle, "The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools" is as relevant now as it was when it was published some 53 years ago.

Witness the recent decision by the Connecticut Supreme Court [Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding v. Rell], which rejected a claim by a coalition of municipalities, parents and students that the state's education funding formula is unconstitutional.

According to the AP, a divided court recently overturned a lower court ruling that had ordered state officials to develop plans for an overhaul of the state's education system, citing a huge gap in test scores between students in rich and poor towns. In response, Kozol remarked recently that this Court decision condones and sustains a system of virtual total segregation.

Kozol has worked with children in inner city schools for some fifty years.

Death at an Early Age was followed by a series of books, each one a powerful indictment of the public school system in the US, even as he celebrates the kids he meets and their teachers who continue to do their best, despite the abandonment of public schools and the racism that accompanies it.

His subsequent books include *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, and *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*.

I spoke with Kozol on January 31st in Boston.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you begin by describing what the decision was that the court overturned and explaining why it is significant.

Jonathan Kozol: A lower court had found that the inequalities within the state

between wealthy and poor school districts were unacceptable and unconstitutional. But the Connecticut Supreme Court in a divided decision unfortunately overturned the lower court judge. This has been a pattern all over the United States. By and large, we have seen this for decades.

In the 1990's we had the same situation in Ohio. They actually prevailed three times in showing that the system was blatantly unequal and won at the supreme court level. Even then, in contempt of court, the governor and legislature refused to obey the order. The governor finally packed the court with new appointees and the next time around they accepted the status quo.

This kind of thing has happened everywhere. Legislatures and governors have a thousand ways to drag their heels. In some cases they just say they don't have the money to do it.

There is a very poor town in Virginia named Petersburg. It is an important city in a way because it was a center of the slave trade and some important slave rebellions took place there. They have basically an all-Black school system.

They get about \$10,000 per child a year. Not so far away, in Arlington, Virginia, they're spending \$19,000 every year per child. That is almost twice as much, and of course the irony was that the kids in Petersburg were more in need!

They don't have parents who can take them to Paris before their French finals.

They don't get three years of preschool like wealthy kids do. There's just no level playing field in the United States.

I don't think this is ever going to be solved at the state level. The problem will only be solved when the education of every child in America is financed with the real wealth of the nation by the federal government. This is the way it is done in almost every other advanced society in the world.

We can't do that now because of a dreadful court decision [San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez] way back in 1972 in Texas. The poor districts prevailed at the local level and then the US Supreme Court overruled the district court. They ruled that education is not a protected right under the US Constitution.

DB: Your first book, *Death at an Early Age*, really broke the story of the unequal distribution of wealth among schools. As a substitute teacher in New York City, I remember that I would get called into a school on the east side of Manhattan and they had everything: a gymnasium, a library full of books, guidance counselors. You go up twenty or thirty blocks and the Dewey decimal system is still in place, athletics amounts to "here's a basketball, go out and play." It was always amazing for me to see the incredible difference in the same school system!

JK: I must say parenthetically that even in these very poorly funded schools, I keep running into terrific teachers. I've spent some time in Kern County, California, in schools that are just an hour and a half drive from L.A. These are badly funded schools but I would run into these great teachers and good principals, too.

But when these poorer kids do badly on these standardized tests, who does the media blame? They don't blame the state for cheating these kids from the hour of their birth, they blame the kids or else they blame their teachers. We have this whole regime now in the United States that holds the victims accountable.

In the poorer schools, we spend half the year drilling them for the tests, which has little to do with education but is training them to outsmart the test. We try to pump the scores a couple points and if that doesn't happen we blame the teachers.

The new solution is to set up charter schools in these cities, which become drill academies. Virtually all of them are apartheid schools because they specifically target minorities. And if they can raise the scores a few points, then the media says ah, that's the answer! Actually, they are just slightly higher-scoring separate and unequal schools.

If it were only inequality, then we could say it is a technical problem, we can solve it somehow. But there is a toxic synergy between financially unequal schools and virtually total abandonment of any integration efforts. In fact, when I talk about integration at school conferences, the corporate types that sponsor these events start to yawn.

What they do is sort of reinvent Dr. King's dream. They say, this is an all-Black school but we are living Dr. King's dream because we are training these Black and Latino kids to be more responsible for themselves and improving their character.

But Dr. King didn't say, "I have a dream that one day our victims will be more productive." It was about separate and unequal. We are back to that again. In my hometown of Boston, the system is more segregated than when I started teaching in 1964.

You mentioned New York and the Upper East Side. The Upper West Side is the classic example of what is happening now. There are a lot of affluent white professionals who are historically liberal in every way except this one. Just ten, twenty blocks to the north in Harlem you have virtually all-minority schools. And there are some schools that are kind of on the border between the two neighborhoods, but white people, for all their liberal beliefs, shun those

schools.

When enlightened civic leaders ask why these kids can't go to school together, the white parents aren't as obvious in their racism as people were in Alabama fifty years ago, but they will say, of course we believe in diversity, but if they go to those schools our kids won't do as well.

There is still this assumption of basic inferiority in the minority kids. They wouldn't say it is genetic inferiority but, for a combination of social reasons, these kids are going to ruin our kids' education. That is what it amounts to.

It is heartbreaking to me. I am 81 years old and I felt sure in 1968 that all this was going to change within ten years.

There are answers, of course. At least in small or middle-sized cities like Boston, we could very easily create a metropolitan school system. It wouldn't be a long ride for a kid to go in either direction. But that agenda is off the table, it's unfashionable now. This withdrawal from the mountaintop has been going on for a quarter century.

DB: One important point you make in *Savage Inequalities* is that we have to change the way public schools are funded. Schools are set up for failure from the get-go when so much depends on the local economic base. Is a lack of resources at the heart of the matter?

JK: These experts at the Hoover Institution and Heritage Foundation are always asking, "Is money really the answer?" Supposed liberals will look me in the face and say, "Jonathan, can you really solve the problems of those kinds by throwing money at them?" These are the same people who send their kids to prep schools that cost \$60,000 a year. My answer is always: "It seems to work for your kids, doesn't it?" It is sheer hypocrisy.

The basic funding for public schools comes from property taxes. States contribute what is known as "foundation money" so that no school goes without the bare minimum even if their local property taxes are insignificant.

The problem is that these foundation levels are always set so low. All the wealthy districts have to do is have a small bond levy and raise their property taxes half of one percent, and since they have lots of million dollar homes their funding shoots way up. Or they hold fundraising parties and in one night they will raise half a million dollars to build a new library or bring in art and music teachers. A poor district is lucky if they can raise \$800.

The only answer, I believe, is to do what all other developed nations do already and fund education out of the real wealth of the nation. It makes sense not only in practical terms, but in moral terms, in terms of citizenship. You don't

go to school to be a citizen of Nebraska or California. We go to school to be Americans. Kids pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States.

What we have today is an uneven social contract. If not for that decision in 1972, equal education would be a fundamental right under the US Constitution.

If Bernie Sanders had won, perhaps we would have ended up with a Supreme Court that would reexamine that decision.

DB: Finally, what do you think of the job our Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, is doing?

JK: She is a catastrophe. First of all, although she is not very smart, she is slick and gives a slick veneer to this old slogan “freedom of choice.”

This was the slogan of segregationists in the South after the Brown decision, when they started so-called “voucher schools.” She is not simply in favor of more and more of these segregated charter schools, which are even more segregated than public schools; she is also in favor of vouchers, the invidious idea that goes way back to Milton Friedman in the 1950’s and was tested out in Pinochet’s Chile.

Devos also wants to open this up to religious schools. She represents the spearhead of the privatization movement that would like to do away with public education altogether.

We are at the lowest point in the history of education in America that I can remember since the hopeful moment at the tail end of the 1960’s. Fortunately, there is a younger generation that is gathering momentum now. I am working with Black Lives Matter on a project. They are talking about these issues at last.

When I visit colleges, I’ll stay up half the night with these young minority kids, and sometimes some damn decent white kids who identify with the struggle. Maybe they are going to save us.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Biggest Nunes Memo Revelations Have Little To Do With Its Content

The most important revelations of the Nunes Memo relate not to its content, but the political establishment’s response to its release, argues Caitlin Johnstone.

By Caitlin Johnstone

It's fitting that the ever-tightening repetitive loops of America's increasingly schizophrenic partisan warfare finally hit peak shrillness and skyrocketed into a white noise singularity on Groundhog Day. Right now, we're right about at the part of the movie where Bill Murray is driving over a cliff in a pickup truck with a large rodent behind the wheel.

If you only just started paying attention to U.S. politics in 2017 what I'm about to tell you will blow your mind, so you might want to sit down for this: believe it or not, there was once a time when both of America's mainstream political parties weren't screeching every single day that there was news about to break any minute now which would obliterate the other party forever. No Russiagate, no Nunes memo, no Rachel Maddow red yarn graphs, no Sean Hannity "tick tock," no nothing. People screaming that the end is nigh and it's all about to come crashing down were relegated to street corners and the occasional Infowars appearance, not practicing mainstream political punditry for multimillion dollar salaries on MSNBC and Fox News.

I'm not saying it's a bad thing that Americans are starting to look critically at the power dynamics in their country, but the partisan filters they've pulled over their eyes are causing mass confusion and delusion. Now everyone who questions the CIA is a Russian agent and the term "deep state" suddenly means "literally anyone who doesn't like Donald Trump." Your take on the contents of the Nunes memo will put you in one of two radically different political dimensions depending on which mainstream cult you've subscribed to, and it will cause you to completely miss the point of the entire ordeal.

The part of the memo that has everyone talking today reads as follows: "Furthermore, Deputy Director McCabe testified before the Committee in December 2017 that no surveillance warrant would have been sought from the FISC without the Steele dossier information."

This refers to a surveillance warrant requested by the FBI's then-Deputy Director Andrew McCabe from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court seeking permission to spy on the communications of Carter Page, a member of the 2016 Trump campaign. The controversy revolves around the claim that this surveillance warrant would never have even been requested if not for the clearly biased, Clinton-funded, and error-riddled Christopher Steele dossier which is acknowledged even by its former MI6 author to be 10 to 30 percent inaccurate.

Combine that with the fact that this has never been made clear to the public, and baby you've got yourself a scandal. The FBI knowingly using extremely tainted evidence from one presidential campaign to get permission to spy on

another would indeed be a very big deal.

There are some problems with the “BOOM! Bigger than Watergate!” exclamations that pro-Trump partisans have been parading around about this, however. The first is that the memo is only an internal communication between Republican congressmen; it’s not a sworn testimony or legal transcript or anything legally binding. It’s basically just some Republican ideas about what happened. The assertions made therein are reportedly being hotly contested by Democrats with knowledge of the situation, which is in turn being disputed by Republicans.

Another thing putting a damper on the GOP’s “KABOOM!” parade is the fact that the memo’s contents are not even entirely new; CNN reported way back in April of last year that sources had informed them that the Steele dossier had been used to get a FISA warrant on the Trump campaign. Additionally, even if every single allegation in the memo is true, the revelations are still arguably far less earth shattering than the Edward Snowden revelations of 2013 exposing the NSA’s sprawling domestic espionage network, so the expectation that these less significant new revelations would cause a radical transformation in U.S. politics when the Snowden revelations did not seems highly unrealistic.

Nonetheless, there have been some extremely important revelations as a result of this memo; they just haven’t come from the contents of the memo itself. In the same way that cybersecurity analysts observe the metadata underlying hacked files rather than the contents of the files themselves, political analysts have been pointing out that a lot can be learned about the political establishment by looking at its response to the possibility of the memo’s release.

“Memo is clearly not a blockbuster. We can tell so by reading it. Which makes Dems’ frantic efforts to prevent anyone from reading it seem even more bizarre,” observed TYT’s Michael Tracey. “Veracity of memo’s claims aside, we were told that its release would undermine the rule of law. So, just checking: is the rule of law still in tact?” he added later.

“Now it is clear to all,” WikiLeaks’ Julian Assange tweeted. “The claims about how the ‘Nunes’ memo would destroy ‘national security’ were lies. Classification stickers are used by bureaucrats trying to obtain ‘political security’ for their cronies.”

“One effect of the memo – it’s an example of how extensively we overclassify information,” wrote National Review’s David French. “I’m highly dubious that any information disclosed threatens national security in any way, shape, or form. I’d be willing to bet the Dem response is similarly harmless. Release it.”

Indeed, both the FBI and high-profile Democrats have been claiming that the

memo's unredacted release would pose a national security threat, with California Congressman (and virulent Russiagater) Eric Swalwell going so far to call it "brainwashing." A CNN panelist wandered completely off the paddock and suggested that yesterday may have been America's last day as a democracy. Why were they all flipping out so hysterically over a release of information that plainly poses no threat to the American people?

In addition to Assange's assertion that government secrecy has far less to do with national security than political security (a claim he has made before which seems to be proving correct time and time again), there's the jarring question posed by Republican Congressman Thomas Massie: "who made the decision to withhold evidence of FISA abuse until after Congress voted to renew FISA program?"

Whoa, Nelly. Hang on. What is he talking about?

It would be understandable if you were unaware of the debate over the reauthorization of FISA surveillance which resulted in unconditional bipartisan approval last month – the mainstream media barely touched it. In point of fact, though, the very surveillance practices alleged to have been abused in this hotly controversial memo are the same which was waved through by both the House and the Senate, and by the very same people promoting the memo in many cases.

The McCabe testimony was in December. FISA was renewed in January. Why is all this just coming out now? If the Republicans truly believed that McCabe said what the memo claims he said, why wasn't the public informed before their elected representatives renewed the intelligence community's dangerously intrusive surveillance approval? Was this information simply forgotten about until after those Orwellian powers had been secured?

Of course not. Don't be an idiot.

This makes the kicking, screaming, wailing and gnashing of teeth by the political establishment make a lot more sense, doesn't it? Now suddenly we're looking at a he-said, she-said partisan battle over an issue which can only be resolved with greater and greater transparency of more and more government documents, and we can all see where that's headed. In their rush to win a partisan battle and shield their president from the ongoing Russiagate conspiracy theory, the Republicans may have exposed too much of the establishment foundation upon which both parties are built.

The term "deep state" does not mean "Democrats and Never-Trumpers" as Republican pundits would have you believe, nor does the term refer to any kind of weird, unverifiable conspiracy theory. The deep state is in fact not a conspiracy

theory at all, but simply a concept used in political analysis for discussing the undeniable fact that unelected power structures exist in America, and that they tend to form alliances and work together in some sense.

There is no denying the fact that plutocrats, intelligence agencies, defense agencies and the mass media are both powerful and unelected, and there is no denying the fact that there are many convoluted and often conflicting alliances between them. All that can be debated is the manner and extent to which this is happening.

The deep state is America's permanent government, the U.S. power structures that Americans don't elect. These power structures plainly have a vested interest in keeping America's Orwellian surveillance structures in place, as evidenced by the intelligence community's menacingly urgent demand for FISA renewal back in December. If there's any thread to be pulled that really could make waves in the way Official Washington (hat tip to the late Robert Parry) operates, it is in the plot holes between the bipartisan scramble toward unconditional surveillance renewal and the highly partisan battle over exposing the abuse of those very powers.

If we're going to see a gap in the bars of our cages, that's a great place to keep our eyes trained, so keep watching. Watch what happens in a partisan war where both parties have a simultaneous interest in revealing as little of the game as possible and exposing the other party. Things could get very interesting.

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

Nunes Memo Reports Crimes at Top of FBI and DOJ

Exclusive: The newly released "Nunes Memo" reveals felony wrongdoing by top members of the FBI and DOJ for misrepresenting evidence to obtain a FISA warrant and may implicate other intelligence officials, writes Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

The long-awaited House Intelligence Committee report made public today identifies current and former top officials of the FBI and the Department of

Justice as guilty of the felony of misrepresenting evidence required to obtain a court warrant before surveilling American citizens. The target was candidate Donald Trump's adviser Carter Page.

The main points of what is widely known as the "Nunes Memo," after the House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), have been nicely summarized by blogger Publius Tacitus, who noted that the following very senior officials are now liable for contempt-of-court charges; namely, the current and former members of the FBI and the Department of Justice who signed off on fraudulent applications to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court: James Comey, Andy McCabe, Sally Yates, Dana Boente and Rob Rosenstein. The following is Publius Tacitus's summary of the main points:

- The dubious but celebrated Steele Dossier played a critical role in obtaining approval from the FISA court to carry out surveillance of Carter Page according to former FBI Deputy Director Andy McCabe.
- Christopher Steele was getting paid by the DNC and the FBI for the same information.
- No one at the FBI or the DOJ disclosed to the court that the Steele dossier was paid for by an opposition political campaign.
- The first FISA warrant was obtained on October 21, 2016 based on a story written by Michael Isikoff for Yahoo News based on information he received directly from Christopher Steele – the FBI did not disclose in the FISA application that Steele was the original source of the information.
- Christopher Steele was a long-standing FBI "source" but was terminated as a source after telling Mother Jones reporter David Corn that he had a relationship with the FBI.
- The FBI signers of the FISA applications/renewals were James Comey (three times) and Andrew McCabe.
- The DOJ signers of the FISA applications/renewals were Sally Yates, Dana Boente and Rod Rosenstein.
- Even after Steele was terminated by the FBI, he remained in contact with Deputy Attorney General Bruce Our, whose wife worked for FUSION GPS, a contractor that was deeply involved with the Steele dossier.

From what Michael Isikoff reported in September 2016 it appears that the CIA and the Director of National Intelligence (as well as the FBI) are implicated in spreading the disinformation about Trump and Russia. Isikoff wrote:

"U.S. intelligence officials are seeking to determine whether an American businessman identified by Donald Trump as one of his foreign policy advisers has opened up private communications with senior Russian officials – including talks about the possible lifting of economic sanctions if the Republican nominee

becomes president, according to multiple sources who have been briefed on the issue. [...]

“But U.S. officials have since received intelligence reports that during that same three-day trip, Page met with Igor Sechin, a longtime Putin associate and former Russian deputy prime minister who is now the executive chairman of Rosneft, Russian’s leading oil company, a well-placed Western intelligence source tells Yahoo News.”

Who were the “intelligence officials” briefing the select members of the House and Senate? That will be one of the next shoes to drop. We are likely to learn in the coming days that John Brennan and Jim Clapper were also trying to help the FBI build a fallacious case against Trump, adds Tacitus.

Indeed, Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR), Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has already indicated that his disclosures in the Nunes Memo represent just “one piece of a probably much larger mosaic of what went on.”

The Media Will Determine What Comes Next

As for Congressman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, it is now abundantly clear why he went to ridiculous lengths, as did the entire Democratic congressional leadership, to block or impugn the House Intelligence Committee report.

Until the mid-December revelations of the text messages between FBI lovers Peter Strzok and Lisa Page turned Russia-gate into FBI/DOJ-gate, Schiff had been riding high, often hiding behind what he said “he could not tell” the rest of us.

With the media, including what used to be the progressive media, fully supporting the likes of Adam Schiff, and the FBI/CIA/NSA deep state likely to pull out all the stops, the die is now cast. We are in for a highly interesting time over the next months.

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