

Russia-gate Is No Watergate or Iran-Contra

Special Report: Many comparisons have been made between Russia-gate and the earlier scandals of Watergate and Iran-Contra, but the similarities are at best superficial, explains Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Russia-gate, the sprawling investigation into whether Russia meddled in last year's U.S. election, is often compared to the two big political scandals of the latter half of the Twentieth Century, Watergate and Iran-Contra. Sometimes you even hear that Russia-gate is "bigger than Watergate."

Yet what is perhaps most remarkable about those two Twentieth Century scandals is how little Official Washington really understands them – and how these earlier scandals significantly contrast, rather than compare, with what is unfolding now.

Although the historical record is still incomplete on Watergate and Iran-Contra, the available evidence indicates that both scandals originated in schemes by Republicans to draw foreign leaders into plots to undermine sitting Democratic presidents and thus pave the way for the elections of Richard Nixon in 1968 and Ronald Reagan in 1980.

As for Russia-gate, even if you accept that the Russian government hacked into Democratic emails and publicized them via WikiLeaks, there is still no evidence that Donald Trump or his campaign colluded with the Kremlin to do so. By contrast, in the origins of Watergate and Iran-Contra, it appears the Nixon and Reagan campaigns, respectively, were the instigators of schemes to enlist foreign governments in blocking a Vietnam peace deal in 1968 and negotiations to free 52 American hostages in Iran in 1980.

Though Watergate is associated directly with the 1972 campaign – when Nixon's team of burglars was caught inside the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate building – Nixon's formation of that team, known as the Plumbers, was driven by his fear that he could be exposed for sabotaging President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace talks in 1968 in order to secure the White House that year.

After Nixon's narrow victory over Vice President Hubert Humphrey in the 1968 election, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover informed Nixon that Johnson had a secret file, complete with wiretapped phone calls, detailing the Nixon campaign's

backchannel messages to South Vietnamese officials convincing them to boycott Johnson's Paris peace talks. Later, Nixon learned that this incriminating file had disappeared from the White House.

So, in 1971, after the leaking of the Pentagon Papers, which recounted the lies that had been used to justify the Vietnam War through 1967, Nixon fretted that the missing file about his peace-talk gambit in 1968 might surface, too, and would destroy him politically. Thus, he organized the Plumbers to find the file, even contemplating fire-bombing the Brookings Institution to enable a search of its safe where some aides thought the missing file might be found.

In other words, Watergate wasn't simply a break-in at the Democratic National Committee on June 17, 1972, in pursuit of useful political intelligence and Nixon's ensuing cover-up; the scandal had its origins in a far worse scandal, the derailing of peace talks that could have ended the Vietnam War years earlier and saved the lives of tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers and possibly more than 1 million Vietnamese.

Iran-Contra Parallels

Similarly, the Iran-Contra scandal exploded in 1986 with revelations that President Reagan had authorized secret arms sales to Iran with some of the profits going to fund the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, but the evidence now indicates that the connections between Reagan's team and Iran's revolutionary regime traced back to 1980 when emissaries from Reagan's campaign worked to stymie President Jimmy Carter's negotiations to free 52 American hostages then held in Iran.

According to multiple witnesses, including former Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs Nicholas Veliotis, the pre-election contacts led to the opening of a weapons pipeline to Iran (via Israel), after Reagan was sworn in on Jan. 20, 1981, which was the precise moment when Iran finally released the American hostages after 444 days.

Some key players in the 1980 Reagan-Iran contacts reappeared four years later at the start of direct (again secret) U.S. arms shipments to Iran in 1985, which also involved Israeli middlemen. These key players included Iranian CIA operative Cyrus Hashemi, former CIA clandestine services chief Theodore Shackley, Reagan's campaign chief and then-CIA Director William Casey, and former CIA Director and then-Vice President George H.W. Bush.

In other words, the Iran-Contra weapons shipments of 1985-86 appear to have been an outgrowth of the earlier shipments dating back to 1980 and continuing under Israeli auspices until the supply line was taken over more directly by the

Reagan administration in 1985-86.

Thus, both the Watergate scandal in 1972 and the Iran-Contra Affair in 1986 could be viewed as “sequels” to the earlier machinations driven by Republican hunger to seize the enormous powers of the U.S. presidency. However, for decades, Official Washington has been hostile to these underlying explanations of how Watergate and Iran-Contra began.

For instance, The New York Times, the so-called “newspaper of record,” treated the accumulation of evidence regarding Nixon’s 1968 peace-talk gambit as nothing more than a “rumor” until earlier this year when a scholar, John A. Farrell, uncovered cryptic notes taken by Nixon’s aide H.R. Haldeman, which added another piece to the mosaic and left the Times little choice but to pronounce the historical reality finally real.

Grasping the Watergate Narrative

Still, the Times and other major news outlets have failed to factor this belated admission into the larger Watergate narrative. If you understand that Nixon did sabotage President Johnson’s Vietnam War peace talks and that Nixon was aware that Johnson’s file on what LBJ called Nixon’s “treason” had disappeared from the White House, the early “Watergate tapes” from 1971 suddenly make sense.

Nixon ordered White House chief of staff H.R. “Bob” Haldeman and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger to locate the missing file but their search came up empty. Yet, some Nixon aides thought the file might be hidden at the Brookings Institution, a liberal think tank in Washington. So, in his desperate pursuit of the file, Nixon called for a break-in at Brookings, possibly even fire-bombing the building as a cover for his team of burglars to slip in amid the confusion and rifle the safe.

The old explanation that Nixon simply wanted to find some file related to Johnson’s 1968 pre-election Vietnam bombing halt never made sense given the extreme steps that Nixon was prepared to take.

The relevant portions of Nixon’s White House tapes include an entry on June 17, 1971, coincidentally one year to the day before the Watergate burglars were caught. Nixon summoned Haldeman and Kissinger to the Oval Office and pleaded with them again to locate the file.

“Do we have it?” Nixon asked Haldeman. “I’ve asked for it. You said you didn’t have it.”

Haldeman: “We can’t find it.”

Kissinger: "We have nothing here, Mr. President."

Nixon: "Well, damn-it, I asked for that because I need it."

Kissinger: "But Bob and I have been trying to put the damn thing together."

Haldeman: "We have a basic history in constructing our own, but there is a file on it."

Nixon: "Where?"

Haldeman: "[Presidential aide Tom Charles] Huston swears to God that there's a file on it and it's at Brookings."

Nixon: "Bob? Bob? Now do you remember Huston's plan [for White House-sponsored break-ins as part of domestic counter-intelligence operations]? Implement it."

Kissinger: "Now Brookings has no right to have classified documents."

Nixon: "I want it implemented. Goddamn-it, get in and get those files. Blow the safe and get it."

Haldeman: "They may very well have cleaned them by now, but this thing, you need to "

Kissinger: "I wouldn't be surprised if Brookings had the files."

Haldeman: "My point is Johnson knows that those files are around. He doesn't know for sure that we don't have them around."

But Johnson did know that the file was no longer at the White House because he had ordered his national security adviser, Walt Rostow, to remove it in the final days of Johnson's presidency.

Forming the Burglars

On June 30, 1971, Nixon again berated Haldeman about the need to break into Brookings and "take it [the file] out." Nixon suggested using former CIA officer E. Howard Hunt to conduct the Brookings break-in.

"You talk to Hunt," Nixon told Haldeman. "I want the break-in. Hell, they do that. You're to break into the place, rifle the files, and bring them in. Just go in and take it. Go in around 8:00 or 9:00 o'clock."

Haldeman: "Make an inspection of the safe."

Nixon: "That's right. You go in to inspect the safe. I mean, *clean it up.*"

For reasons that remain unclear, it appears that the Brookings break-in never took place (nor did the fire-bombing), but Nixon's desperation to locate Johnson's peace-talk file was an important link in the chain of events that led to the creation of Nixon's burglary unit under Hunt's supervision. Hunt later oversaw the two Watergate break-ins in May and June of 1972.

While it's possible that Nixon was still searching for the file about his Vietnam-peace sabotage when the ill-fated Watergate break-ins occurred a year later, it's generally believed that the burglary was more broadly focused, seeking any information that might have an impact on Nixon's re-election, either defensively or offensively.

However, if you think back on 1971 when the Vietnam War was tearing the country apart and massive antiwar demonstrations were descending on Washington, Nixon's desperation to locate the missing file suddenly doesn't seem quite so crazy. There would have been hell to pay if the public learned that Nixon had kept the war going to gain a political advantage in 1968.

Through 1972 – and the early days of the Watergate scandal – former President Johnson had stayed silent about Nixon's sabotage of the Paris peace talks. But the ex-President became livid when – after Nixon's reelection in 1972 – Nixon's men sought to pressure Johnson into helping them shut down the Watergate investigation, in part, by noting that Johnson, too, had deployed wiretaps against Nixon's 1968 campaign to obtain evidence about the peace-talk sabotage.

While it's not clear whether Johnson would have finally spoken out, that threat to Nixon ended two days after Nixon's second inaugural when on Jan. 22, 1973, Johnson died of a heart attack. However, unbeknownst to Nixon, Johnson had left the missing file, called "The X-Envelope," in the care of Rostow, who – after Johnson's death – gave the file to the LBJ presidential library in Austin, Texas, with instructions that it be kept under wraps for at least 50 years. (Rostow's instructions were overturned in the 1990s, and I found the now largely declassified file at the library in 2012.)

So, with the "The X-Envelope" squirreled away for more than two decades at the LBJ library and with the big newspapers treating the early sketchy reports of Nixon's peace-talk sabotage as only "rumors," Watergate remained a scandal limited to the 1972 campaign.

Still, Nixon's cover-up of his campaign's role in the Watergate break-in produced enough clear-cut evidence of obstruction of justice and other offenses that Nixon was forced to resign on Aug. 9, 1974.

A Failed Investigation

The 1979-81 hostage confrontation with Iran was not nearly as devastating a crisis as the Vietnam War but America's humiliation during the 444-day-long ordeal became a focus of the 1980 election, too, with the first anniversary of Iran's seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran coincidentally falling on Election Day 1980.

President Carter's failure to gain freedom for the 52 embassy personnel turned what had been a close race into a landslide for Ronald Reagan, with Republicans also gaining control of the U.S. Senate and ousting some of the most influential Democratic senators.

In 1984, Reagan won reelection in another landslide, but two years later ran afoul of the Iran-Contra scandal. Reagan's secret arms sales to Iran and diversion of profits to the Contras "broke" in November 1986 but focused only on Reagan's 1985-1986 arms sales and the diversion. Still, the scandal's crimes included violations of the Arms Export Control Act and the so-called Boland Act's prohibitions on arming the Contras as well as perjury and obstruction of justice. So there was the prospect of Reagan's impeachment.

But – from the start of Iran-Contra – there was a strong pushback from Republicans who didn't want to see another GOP president driven from office. There was also resistance to the scandal from many mainstream media executives who personally liked Reagan and feared a public backlash if the press played an aggressive role similar to Watergate.

And, moderate Democrats, such as Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana who co-chaired the congressional investigation, sought to tamp down the Iran-Contra fires and set up firebreaks to prevent the investigation from spreading to related crimes such as the Reagan administration's protection of Contra cocaine traffickers.

"Ask about the cocaine," pleaded one protester who was dragged from the Iran-Contra hearing room, as the congressional investigators averted their eyes from such unseemly matters, focusing instead on stilted lectures about the Congress's constitutional prerogatives.

It was not until 1990-91 that it became clear that secret U.S.-approved arms shipments to Iran did not start in 1985 as the Iran-Contra narrative claimed but traced back to 1981 with Reagan's approval of arms sales to Iran through Israel.

Reagan's politically risky move of secretly arming Iran immediately after his inauguration and the hostage release was nearly exposed when one of the Israeli flights strayed into Soviet airspace on July 18, 1981, and crashed or was shot down.

In a PBS interview nearly a decade later, Nicholas Veliotis, Reagan's assistant

secretary of state for the Middle East, said he looked into the incident by talking to top administration officials.

“It was clear to me after my conversations with people on high that indeed we had agreed that the Israelis could transship to Iran some American-origin military equipment,” Veliotos said.

In checking out the Israeli flight, Veliotos came to believe that the Reagan camp’s dealings with Iran dated back to before the 1980 election. “It seems to have started in earnest in the period probably prior to the election of 1980, as the Israelis had identified who would become the new players in the national security area in the Reagan administration,” Veliotos said. “And I understand some contacts were made at that time.”

However, in 1981, Veliotos said, the State Department issued misleading press guidance to cover the administration’s tracks and the Washington media failed to follow up. Thus, the U.S.-Israeli arms pipeline to Iran stayed secret from the American people until November 1986 when – despite Reagan’s long-running insistence that he would never trade arms with a terrorist state like Iran – the operation was exposed.

When I re-interviewed Veliotos in 2012, he said he couldn’t recall who the “people on high” were who had described the informal clearance of the Israeli shipments of U.S.-manufactured weapons, but he indicated that “the new players” were the young neoconservatives who were working on the Reagan campaign, many of whom later joined the administration as senior political appointees.

Documents that I discovered at the Reagan presidential library revealed that Reagan’s neocons at the State Department, particularly Robert McFarlane and Paul Wolfowitz, initiated a policy review in 1981 to allow Israel to undertake secret military shipments to Iran.

McFarlane and Wolfowitz also maneuvered to put McFarlane in charge of U.S. relations toward Iran and to establish a clandestine U.S. back-channel to the Israeli government outside the knowledge of even senior U.S. government officials.

Another Failed Investigation

In 1991, faced with the accumulating evidence of a prequel to the Iran-Contra scandal, Congress grudgingly agreed to take a look at these so-called “October Surprise” allegations. But Republicans, then led by President George H.W. Bush and his White House team, mounted an aggressive cover-up to “spike” the story.

And, with the congressional inquiry largely in the hands again of Rep. Hamilton,

the Democrats timidly folded their tent despite a growing body of evidence that the Reagan team was indeed guilty.

Much of that evidence flowed into the House Task Force in December 1992 when President George H.W. Bush had already been defeated for reelection and the Democrats were looking forward to their renewed control of Washington. So, instead of giving a careful review to the new evidence, the House Task Force ignored, disparaged or buried it.

The late-arriving material included sworn testimony on Dec. 18, 1992, from David Andelman, the biographer of French intelligence chief Alexandre deMarenches, describing how deMarenches had confided that he had helped arrange the Republican-Iranian contacts. Andelman, an ex-New York Times and CBS News correspondent, said that while he was working on deMarenches's autobiography, the arch-conservative spymaster admitted arranging meetings between Republicans and Iranians about the hostage issue in the summer and fall of 1980, with one meeting held in Paris in October.

Andelman said deMarenches ordered that the secret meetings be kept out of his memoirs because the story could otherwise damage the reputations of his friends, William Casey and George H.W. Bush. Andelman's testimony corroborated longstanding claims from a variety of international intelligence operatives about a Paris meeting involving Casey and Bush. But the Task Force report brushed this testimony aside, paradoxically terming it "credible" but then claiming it was "insufficiently probative."

The Task Force's report argued that Andelman could not "rule out the possibility that deMarenches had told him he was aware of and involved in the Casey meetings because he, deMarenches, could not risk telling his biographer he had no knowledge of these allegations."

In the last weeks of the investigation, the House investigators also received a letter from former Iranian President Bani-Sadr detailing his behind-the-scenes struggle with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his son Ahmad over their secret dealings with the Reagan campaign. But the House investigators dismissed Bani-Sadr's first-hand account as hearsay and thus also lacking "probative value."

I later unearthed some of the evidence in unpublished Task Force files. However, in the meantime, Official Washington had dismissed the "October Surprise" and other Iran-Contra-connected scandals, like Contra drug trafficking, as conspiracy theories.

The Russian Report

Ironically, another piece of late-arriving evidence was a January 1993 report

from a national security committee of the Russian parliament about the Kremlin's intelligence data confirming that key Republicans, including George H.W. Bush and William Casey, had met with Iranian officials in Europe regarding the hostages during the 1980 campaign.

Hamilton had requested the Russian assistance before the U.S. election in 1992, but the report was not sent until there were only two weeks left in George H.W. Bush's presidency.

Lawrence Barcella, who served as the Task Force chief counsel, later told me that so much incriminating evidence arrived late that he asked Hamilton to extend the inquiry for three months but that Hamilton said no (although Hamilton told me that he had no recollection of denying Barcella's request).

The other fatal flaw of the House investigation was that it left much of the actual investigating up to President George H.W. Bush's White House counsel's office and the State Department, although Bush was one of the chief suspects and, in 1991-92, was running for re-election, a campaign that would have been derailed if the 1980 October Surprise allegations were confirmed.

The naivete of this decision was underscored years later when I located a memo at Bush's presidential library stating that the State Department had informed the White House counsel's office that Casey had traveled to Madrid in 1980, corroborating a key October Surprise allegation.

The confirmation of Casey's trip was passed along by State Department legal adviser Edwin D. Williamson to Associate White House Counsel Chester Paul Beach Jr. in early November 1991, just as the October Surprise inquiry was taking shape, according to Beach's "memorandum for record" dated Nov. 4, 1991.

Williamson said that among the State Department "material potentially relevant to the October Surprise allegations [was] a cable from the Madrid embassy indicating that Bill Casey was in town, for purposes unknown," Beach noted.

Two days later, on Nov. 6, 1991, Beach's boss, White House counsel C. Boyden Gray, arranged an inter-agency strategy session and explained the need to contain the congressional investigation into the October Surprise case. The explicit goal was to ensure the scandal would not hurt President Bush's reelection hopes in 1992.

In 2013, when I interviewed Hamilton about the Beach memo, he lamented that the Madrid information had not been shared with his investigation, saying "you have to rely on people" in authority to comply with information requests.

"We found no evidence to confirm Casey's trip to Madrid," Hamilton told me. "We

couldn't show that. The [George H.W. Bush] White House did not notify us that he did make the trip. Should they have passed that on to us? They should have because they knew we were interested in that."

Asked if knowledge that Casey had traveled to Madrid might have changed the Task Force's dismissive October Surprise conclusion, Hamilton said yes, because the question of the Madrid trip was key to the task force's investigation.

Not Moving the Needle

However, the Madrid trip revelation and other post-investigation disclosures failed to move the needle on Official Washington's disdain for the October Surprise story.

The later disclosures included a 1993 interview in Tel Aviv in which former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said he had read the 1991 book, *October Surprise*, by Carter's former National Security Council aide Gary Sick, which made the case for believing that the Republicans had intervened in the 1980 hostage negotiations to disrupt Carter's reelection.

With the topic raised, one interviewer asked, "What do you think? Was there an October Surprise?"

"Of course, it was," Shamir responded without hesitation. "It was."

And, there were other corroborating statements as well. In 1996, for instance, while former President Carter was meeting with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Arafat in Gaza City, Arafat tried to confess his role in the Republican maneuvering to block Carter's Iran-hostage negotiations.

"There is something I want to tell you," Arafat said, addressing Carter in the presence of historian Douglas Brinkley. "You should know that in 1980 the Republicans approached me with an arms deal [for the PLO] if I could arrange to keep the hostages in Iran until after the [U.S. presidential] election," Arafat said, according to Brinkley's article in the fall 1996 issue of *Diplomatic Quarterly*.

In 2013, after the movie "Argo" appeared regarding an early facet of the Iran-hostage crisis, former Iranian President Bani-Sadr elaborated on his account of Republican overtures to Iran in 1980 and how that secret initiative prevented release of the hostages.

In a *Christian Science Monitor* commentary, Bani-Sadr wrote, "Ayatollah Khomeini and Ronald Reagan had organized a clandestine negotiation which prevented the attempts by myself and then-U.S. President Jimmy Carter to free the hostages

before the 1980 U.S. presidential election took place. The fact that they were not released tipped the results of the election in favor of Reagan.”

Then, Bani-Sadr added a new detail, that “two of my advisors, Hussein Navab Safavi and Sadr-al-Hefazi, were executed by Khomeini’s regime because they had become aware of this secret relationship between Khomeini, his son Ahmad, ... and the Reagan administration.” [For more details on the October Surprise case, see Robert Parry’s *Trick or Treason and America’s Stolen Narrative.*]

Compare and Contrast

So how do Watergate and Iran-Contra compare and contrast with Russia-gate? One key difference is that in Watergate in 1972-73 and Iran-Contra in 1985-86, you had clear-cut crimes (even if you don’t want to believe the two “prequels” from 1968 and 1980, respectively).

In Watergate, five burglars were caught inside the DNC offices on June 17, 1972, as they sought to plant more bugs on Democratic phones. (An earlier break-in in May had installed two bugs, but one didn’t work.) Nixon then proceeded to mount a cover-up of his 1972 campaign’s role in funding the break-in and other abuses of power.

In Iran-Contra, Reagan secretly authorized weapons sales to Iran, which was then designated a terrorist state, without informing Congress, a violation of the Arms Export Control Act. He also kept Congress in the dark about his belated signing of a related intelligence “finding.” And the creation of slush funds to finance the Nicaraguan Contras represented an evasion of the U.S. Constitution.

There was also the attendant Iran-Contra cover-up mounted both by the Reagan White House and later the George H.W. Bush White House, which culminated in Bush’s Christmas Eve 1992 pardons of six Iran-Contra defendants as special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh was zeroing in on possible indictment of Bush for withholding evidence.

By contrast, Russia-gate has been a “scandal” in search of a specific crime. President Barack Obama’s intelligence chieftains have alleged – without presenting any clear evidence – that the Russian government hacked into the emails of the Democratic National Committee and of Hillary Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta and released those emails via WikiLeaks and other Internet sites. (The Russians and WikiLeaks have both denied the accusations.)

The DNC emails revealed that senior Democrats did not maintain their required independence regarding the primaries by seeking to hurt Sen. Bernie Sanders and help Clinton. The Podesta emails pulled back the curtain on Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street banks and on pay-to-play features of the Clinton

Foundation.

Hacking into personal computers is a crime, but the U.S. government has yet to bring any formal charges against specific individuals supposedly responsible for the hacking of the Democratic emails. There also has been no evidence that Donald Trump's campaign colluded with Russians in the hacking.

Lacking any precise evidence of this cyber-crime or of a conspiracy between Russia and the Trump campaign, Obama's Justice Department holdovers and now special prosecutor Robert Mueller have sought to build "process crimes," around false statements to investigators and possible obstruction of justice.

Railroading Flynn

In the case of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, Trump's first national security adviser, acting Attorney General Sally Yates used the archaic Logan Act of 1799 to create a predicate for the FBI to interrogate Flynn about a Dec. 29, 2016 conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, i.e., after Trump's election but before the Inauguration.

The Logan Act, which has never resulted in a prosecution in 218 years, was enacted during the period of the Alien and Sedition Acts to bar private citizens from negotiating on their own with foreign governments. It was never intended to apply to a national security adviser of an elected President, albeit before he was sworn in.

But it became the predicate for the FBI interrogation – and the FBI agents were armed with a transcript of the intercepted Kislyak-Flynn phone call so they could catch Flynn on any gaps in his recollection, which might have been made even hazier because he was on vacation in the Dominican Republic when Kislyak called.

Yates also concocted a bizarre argument that the discrepancies between Flynn's account of the call and the transcript left him open to Russian blackmail although how that would work – since the Russians surely assumed that Kislyak's calls would be monitored by U.S. intelligence and thus offered them no leverage with Flynn – was never explained.

Still, Flynn's failure to recount the phone call precisely and the controversy stirred up around it became the basis for an obstruction of justice investigation of Flynn and led to President Trump's firing Flynn on Feb. 13.

Trump may have thought that tossing Flynn overboard to the circling sharks would calm down the sharks but the blood in the water only excited them more. According to then-FBI Director James Comey, Trump talked to him one-on-one the

next day, Feb. 14, and said, “I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go. He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go.”

Trump’s “hope” and the fact that he later fired Comey have reportedly led special prosecutor Mueller to look at a possible obstruction of justice case against Trump. In other words, Trump could be accused of obstructing what appears to have been a trumped-up case against Flynn.

Of course, there remains the possibility that evidence might surface of Trump or his campaign colluding with the Russians, but such evidence has so far not been presented. Or Mueller’s investigation might turn over some rock and reveal some unrelated crime, possibly financial wrongdoing by Trump or an associate.

(Something similar happened in the Republican investigation of the Sept. 11, 2012 Benghazi attack, a largely fruitless inquiry except that it revealed that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sent and received official emails over a private server, which Comey decried during last year’s campaign as “extremely careless” but not criminal.)

Curb the Enthusiasm

Another contrast between the earlier scandals (Watergate and Iran-Contra) and Russia-gate is the degree of enthusiasm and excitement that the U.S. mainstream media and congressional Democrats have shown today as opposed to 1972 and 1986.

Though The Washington Post’s Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein aggressively pursued the Watergate scandal, there was much less interest elsewhere in major news outlets until Nixon’s criminality became obvious in 1973. Many national Democrats, including DNC Chairman Bob Strauss, were extremely hesitant to pursue the scandal if not outright against it.

Similarly, although Brian Barger and I at The Associated Press were pursuing aspects of Iran-Contra since early 1985, the big newspapers and networks consistently gave the Reagan administration the benefit of the doubt – at least before the scandal finally burst into view in fall 1986 (when a Contra-supply plane crashed inside Nicaragua and a Lebanese newspaper revealed U.S. arms shipments to Iran).

For several months, there was a flurry of attention to the complex Iran-Contra scandal, but the big media still ignored evidence of a White House cover-up and soon lost interest in the difficult work of unraveling the convoluted networks for arms smuggling, money laundering and cocaine trafficking.

Congressional Democrats also shied away from a constitutional confrontation with the popular Reagan and his well-connected Vice President George H.W. Bush.

After moving from AP to Newsweek in early 1987, I learned that the senior executives at Newsweek, then part of The Washington Post Company, didn't want "another Watergate"; they felt another such scandal was not "good for the country" and wanted Iran-Contra to go away as soon as possible. I was even told not to read the congressional Iran-Contra report when it was published in October 1987 (although I ignored that order and kept trying to keep my own investigation going in defiance of the wishes of the Newsweek brass until those repeated clashes led to my departure in June 1990).

So, perhaps the biggest similarity between Russia-gate and Watergate is that Richard Nixon and Donald Trump were both highly unpopular with the Washington establishment and thus had few influential defenders, while an important contrast with Iran-Contra was that Reagan and Bush were very well liked, especially among news executives such as Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham who, by all accounts, did not care for the uncouth Nixon. Today, the senior executives of The New York Times, The Washington Post and other major news outlets have made no secret of their disdain for the buffoonish Trump and their hostility toward Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In other words, what is driving Russia-gate – for both the mainstream news media and the Democrats – appears to be a political agenda, i.e., the desire to remove Trump from office while also ratcheting up a New Cold War with Russia, a priority for Washington's neoconservatives and their liberal-interventionist sidekicks.

If this political drama were playing out in some other country, we would be talking about a "soft coup" in which the "oligarchy" or some other "deep state" force was using semi-constitutional means to engineer a disfavored leader's removal.

Of course, since the ongoing campaign to remove Trump is happening in the United States, it must be presented as a principled pursuit of truth and a righteous application of the rule of law. But the comparisons to Watergate and Iran-Contra are a stretch.

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

Democrats Face Failing Russia-gate Scheme

National Democrats thought they could slough off their stunning election defeat last year by blaming Russia rather than looking in the mirror, but that strategy may be collapsing, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

The plan for Democrats to run against Russia may be falling apart.

After squandering much of the last six months on faulting Russians for the horrific presidency of Donald Trump... After blaming America's dire shortfalls of democracy on plutocrats in Russia more than on plutocrats in America... After largely marketing the brand of their own party as more anti-Russian than pro-working-people... After stampeding many Democratic Party-aligned organizations, pundits and activists into fixating more on Russia than on the thousand chronic cuts to democracy here at home... After soaking up countless hours of TV airtime and vast quantities of ink and zillions of pixels to denounce Russia in place of offering progressive remedies to the deep economic worries of American voters...

Now, Democrats in Congress and other party leaders are starting to face an emerging reality: The "winning issue" of Russia is a losing issue.

The results of a reliable new nationwide poll – and what members of Congress keep hearing when they actually listen to constituents back home – cry out for a drastic reorientation of Democratic Party passions. And a growing number of Democrats in Congress are getting the message.

"Frustrated Democrats hoping to elevate their election fortunes have a resounding message for party leaders: Stop talking so much about Russia," *The Hill* reported over the weekend. In sharp contrast to their party's top spokespeople, "rank-and-file Democrats say the Russia-Trump narrative is simply a non-issue with district voters, who are much more worried about bread-and-butter economic concerns like jobs, wages and the cost of education and healthcare."

The Hill coverage added: "In the wake of a string of special-election defeats, an increasing number of Democrats are calling for an adjustment in party messaging, one that swings the focus from Russia to the economy. The outcome of the 2018 elections, they say, hinges on how well the Democrats manage that shift.

A Big Disconnect

Such assessments aren't just impressionistic or anecdotal. A major poll has just reached conclusions that indicate party leaders have been operating under political illusions. Conducted last week, the Harvard-Harris national poll found a big disconnect between the Russia obsession of Democratic Party elites in Washington and voters around the country.

The poll "reveals the risks inherent for the Democrats, who are hoping to make big gains – or even win back the House – in 2018," *The Hill* reported. "The survey found that while 58 percent of voters said they're concerned that Trump may have business dealings with Moscow, 73 percent said they're worried that the ongoing investigations are preventing Congress from tackling issues more vital to them."

The co-director of the Harvard-Harris poll, Mark Penn, commented on the results: "While the voters have a keen interest in any Russian election interference, they are concerned that the investigations have become a distraction for the president and Congress that is hurting rather than helping the country."

Such incoming data are sparking more outspoken dissent from House Democrats who want to get re-elected as well as depose Republicans from majority power. In short, if you don't want a GOP speaker of the House, wise up to the politics at play across the country.

Vermont Congressman Peter Welch, a progressive Democrat, put it this way: "We should be focused relentlessly on economic improvement [and] we should stay away from just piling on the criticism of Trump, whether it's about Russia, whether it's about Comey. Because that has its own independent dynamic, it's going to happen on its own without us piling on."

Welch said, "We're much better off if we just do the hard work of coming up with an agenda. Talking about Trump and Russia doesn't create an agenda."

Creating a compelling agenda would mean rejecting what has become the rote reflex of Democratic Party leadership – keep hammering Trump as a Kremlin tool. In a typical recent comment, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi pounded away at a talking point already so worn out that it has the appearance of a bent nail: "What do the Russians have on Donald Trump?"

In contrast, another House Democrat, Matt Cartwright of Pennsylvania, said: "If you see me treating Russia and criticisms of the president and things like that as a secondary matter, it's because that's how my constituents feel about it."

Betting on a Lame Horse

But ever since the election last November, Democratic congressional leaders have

been placing the party's bets heavily on the Russia horse. And it's now pulling up lame.

Yes, a truly independent investigation is needed to probe charges that the Russian government interfered with the U.S. election. And investigators should also dig to find out if there's actual evidence that Trump or his campaign operatives engaged in nefarious activities before or after the election. At the same time, let's get a grip. The partisan grandstanding on Capitol Hill, by leading Republicans and Democrats, hardly qualifies as "independent."

In the top strata of the national Democratic Party, and especially for the Clinton wing of the party, blaming Russia has been of visceral importance. A recent book about Hillary Clinton's latest presidential campaign – *Shattered* by journalists Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes – includes a revealing passage. "Within 24 hours of her concession speech," the authors report, campaign manager Robby Mook and campaign chair John Podesta "assembled her communications team at the Brooklyn headquarters to engineer the case that the election wasn't entirely on the up-and-up."

At that meeting, "they went over the script they would pitch to the press and the public. Already, Russian hacking was the centerpiece of the argument."

In early spring, the former communications director of the 2016 Clinton presidential campaign, Jennifer Palmieri, summarized the post-election approach in a *Washington Post* opinion piece: "If we make plain that what Russia has done is nothing less than an attack on our republic, the public will be with us. And the more we talk about it, the more they'll be with us."

Polling data now indicate how wrong such claims are. Initially in lockstep this year, Democrats on Capitol Hill probably didn't give it a second thought if they read my article published by *The Hill* nearly six months ago under the headline "Democrats Are Playing With Fire on Russia." At the outset, I warned that "the most cohesive message from congressional Democrats is: blame Russia. The party leaders have doubled down on an approach that got nowhere during the presidential campaign – trying to tie the Kremlin around Donald Trump's neck."

And I added: "Still more interested in playing to the press gallery than speaking directly to the economic distress of voters in the Rust Belt and elsewhere who handed the presidency to Trump, top Democrats would much rather scapegoat Vladimir Putin than scrutinize how they've lost touch with working-class voters."

Nuclear War Risks

But my main emphasis in that Jan. 9 article was that "the emerging incendiary

rhetoric against Russia is extremely dangerous. It could lead to a military confrontation between two countries that each has thousands of nuclear weapons.”

I noted that “enthusiasm for banging the drum against Putin is fast becoming a big part of the Democratic Party’s public identity in 2017. And – insidiously – that’s apt to give the party a long-term political stake in further demonizing the Russian government.”

My article pointed out: “The reality is grim, and potentially catastrophic beyond comprehension. By pushing to further polarize with the Kremlin, congressional Democrats are increasing the chances of a military confrontation with Russia.”

Here’s a question worth pondering: How much time do members of Congress spend thinking about ways to reduce the risks of nuclear holocaust, compared to how much time they spend thinking about getting re-elected?

In political terms, *The Hill*’s June 24 news article headlined “Dems Push Leaders to Talk Less About Russia” should be a wakeup call. Held in the thrall of Russia-bashing incantations since early winter, some Democrats in Congress have started to realize that they must break the spell. But they will need help from constituents willing to bluntly tell them to snap out of it.

If there is to be a human future on this planet, it will require real diplomacy between the U.S. and Russia, the world’s two nuclear-weapons superpowers. Meanwhile – even if the nuclear threat from continuing to escalate hostility toward Russia doesn’t rank high on the list of Democrats’ concerns on Capitol Hill – maybe the prospects of failure in the elections next year will compel a major change. It’s time for the dangerous anti-Russia fever to break.

Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.

Policing ‘Truth’ to Restore ‘Trust’

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media insists it just wants “truth” algorithms to purge “fake news” from the Internet, but the real goal seems to be restoring public “trust” by limiting what the people get to see, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There's been a lot of self-righteous talk about "truth" recently, especially from the people at The New York Times, The Washington Post and the rest of the mainstream news media. They understandably criticize President Trump for his casual relationship with reality and happily dream about how nice it would be if they could develop algorithms to purge the Internet of what they call "fake news."

But these "truth-loving" pundits, the likes of star Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman, never seem to reflect on their own responsibility for disseminating devastating "fake news," such as the falsehoods about Iraq's WMD, lies that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and thousands of American soldiers and spread horrific chaos across the Mideast and into Europe.

Nor does that Iraq experience ever cause Friedman and his fellow pundits to question other Official Narratives, including those relating to the proxy war in Syria or the civil war in Ukraine or the New Cold War with Russia. Meanwhile those of us who ask for substantiating facts or observe that some official claims don't make sense are subjected to insults as fill-in-the-blank "apologists" or "stooges."

It seems that any deviation from Officialdom's pronouncements makes you an enemy of "truth" because "truth" is what the Establishment says is "truth." And, if you don't believe me, I refer you to Friedman's Wednesday's column.

Friedman leads off the article by quoting himself telling a questioner at a Montreal conference: "I fear we're seeing the end of 'truth'."

But Friedman doesn't take himself to task by noting how he helped disseminate the Iraq WMD lies and how he flacked for that illegal and disastrous war for years.

If he had 'fessed up, maybe Friedman could then have explained why he didn't resign in disgrace and engage in some lifelong penance, preferably including a vow of silence, rather than continuing to spout lots of other nonsense while also continuing to collect a handsome salary and to rack up lucrative speaking fees.

Instead, after wringing his hands over why Americans no longer trust their leaders, Friedman cites another voice of authority, a friend and mentor, Dov Seidman, who complains that "What we're experiencing is an assault on the very foundations of our society and democracy – the twin pillars of truth and trust.

...

“What makes us Americans is that we signed up to have a relationship with ideals that are greater than us and with truths that we agreed were so self-evident they would be the foundation of our shared journey toward a more perfect union – and of respectful disagreement along the way. We also agreed that the source of legitimate authority to govern would come from ‘We the people’.”

Friedman then goes on to share Seidman’s lament that when “we” no longer share basic truths “then there is no legitimate authority and no unifying basis for our continued association.”

The Villains

Friedman identifies the villains in this scenario as “social networks and cyberhacking,” which help “extremists to spread vitriol and fake news at a speed and breadth we have never seen before.” So, it seems those “truth” algorithms can’t arrive soon enough.

However, if you keep reading Friedman’s column, you learn that the real problem is not that “cyberhacking” is generating “fake news,” but rather that it has let Americans see too many ugly truths about their leadership, as happened when WikiLeaks published emails showing how the Democratic National Committee unethically tilted the playing field against Sen. Bernie Sanders; how Hillary Clinton pandered to Goldman Sachs in return for lucrative speaking fees; and how the Clinton Foundation engaged in pay-to-play with rich foreigners.

Friedman’s column acknowledges as much, again citing Seidman: “Social networks and hacking also ‘have enabled us to see, in full color, into the innermost workings of every institution and into the attitudes of those who run them,’ noted Seidman, ‘and that has eroded trust in virtually every institution, and the authority of many leaders, because people don’t like what they see’.”

In other words, the answer to restoring “trust” and to respecting “truth” is to hide ugly realities from the unwashed public. If the people are shielded from the facts, the Establishment will regain its control over “truth” and thus win back the people’s “trust.”

If all this seems upside-down to you – if you think that the real answer is for America’s leaders to behave more responsibly, to let the public in on the real “truth,” and thus to make the people’s “trust” mean something – you must be a “Kremlin stooge.” After all, the current groupthink is that the diabolical Russians slipped WikiLeaks those Democratic emails in a nefarious plot to undermine Americans’ faith in their democracy.

However, if you’re still having trouble with Friedman’s logic, you also must not understand how America’s new media paradigm works. The job of the media is not

to provide as much meaningful information as possible to the people so they can exercise their free judgment; it is to package certain information in a way to guide the people to a preferred conclusion.

Pleasant Myths

You see the last thing that Friedman really wants is for the American people to understand their own reality – the good, the bad and the ugly. Instead, we are to have our pretty little heads filled with pleasant myths that make us feel special as we are herded either to the shearing shed or to the slaughterhouse.

For instance, reflect on the history that we hear from Friedman's friend Seidman about how we "signed up" for those high-minded proclamations in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. The truth is that most of us didn't "sign up" for anything; we were just born here; and – by the way – the Founders were hypocrites who said and wrote things that they didn't believe at all.

When slaveholding Thomas Jefferson wrote "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," he didn't believe a word of it. He considered his black slaves inferior beings and thought they deserved none of those "unalienable rights." He devoted much of his adult life to defending and expanding the institution of slavery, which – by increasing demand for his human chattel – also increased his personal wealth.

When Gouverneur Morris penned the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, citing "We the People" as the nation's true sovereigns, he really meant white men of money and means, not poorer white men, nor women, and surely not slaves. His reference to "the People" was another propagandistic affectation.

There may be some irony in the fact that history imparts genuine value to the words of Jefferson and Morris even if they were simply empty propaganda when written. Jefferson's assertion that "all men are created equal" possessing "unalienable rights" has inspired people around the world – and a literal interpretation of Morris's florid rhetoric did, in a way, make "We the People" the technical sovereigns of America, as much as today's ruling elites don't really believe that either.

Much of what we see from the likes of Friedman is designed to reassert elite control by putting us back in an information-starved dependent state, reliant on the Establishment to parcel out a few morsels of information as it sees fit, the "truth" that the powers-that-be deign to give us. All the better for us to "trust" them.

But the messy behind-the-scenes reality that WikiLeaks and other publishers of “cyberhacked” and leaked material have made available to us – as well as the hypocritical and ambiguous history of the United States – is part of America’s “truth” and thus a reality that should belong to all the people.

Instead, Friedman and other Important People prefer a future in which unpleasant and unpopular truths can be marginalized or erased, all the better to guarantee our “trust” in our leaders.

The Times and the Post, in particular, have consistently conflated any deviation from their preferred groupthinks with “fake news” and “propaganda.” That is why it is particularly troubling when they and other self-proclaimed arbiters of truth, including the pro-NATO propaganda site Bellingcat, sit on Google’s First Draft Coalition and salivate over the prospects of unleashing high-tech algorithms to hunt down and eliminate information that runs counter to what they call the “truth.”

The real truth about truth is that it is almost always complex and often hidden by powerful interests. It requires skepticism, hard work and even courage to reveal it.

Sure, there are occasions when creeps and crazy people purposely make up stuff or ignore reality in pursuit of some nutty conspiracy theory – and that deserves hearty condemnation – but there are many other times when the conventional wisdom is wrong and the people demanding inconvenient facts and asking probing questions turn out to be right.

So, if Friedman and his friends really want to restore trust and truth, they might begin by acknowledging their own flaws and by admitting the times when their groupthinks turned out to be wrong. They also might start respecting the value that dissent has in the difficult pursuit of truth.

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

Behind the ‘Scapegoating’ of Russia

The media/political hysteria over Russia-gate is leading the world to possible nuclear annihilation with few serious questions asked. But a new book, *The Plot to Scapegoat Russia*, tries to supply some context, writes Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

Attorney Dan Kovalik has written an extremely important book that challenges the current media/political focus on "Russia-gate" and warns that dark forces of war are taking us in an ever more dangerous direction.

In the foreword to the book, *The Plot to Scapegoat Russia: How the CIA and Deep State Have Conspired to Vilify Russia*, author David Talbot writes: "The US war machine has revived the tried-and-true Red Scare... This massive anti-Russian propaganda campaign is one of the biggest fake news operations in U.S. history..."

"Unlike our war-obsessed media, human rights lawyer Dan Kovalik does understand that peace and diplomacy are in the best interests of the American and Russian peoples. His book is an urgently needed counterassault against the propaganda forces that are trying to push us over a precipice that it too terrifying to even contemplate. It's time for all of us to speak truth to power before it's too late."

Talbot's warning is not hyperbole. As I write this review, the U.S. military is pushing ever closer to direct military confrontation with Syria, Iran and Russia inside Syria.

But the book is also entertaining reading because Kovalik combines his personal evolution with facts and history. He grew up as a conservative Roman Catholic fearful and wary of communism and the Soviet Union. Kovalik describes his own youthful belief in "American Exceptionalism" whereby U.S. policies and actions are believed to be uniquely good and well meaning. For the author, that belief was confronted by a very different reality when he traveled to Central America in the 1980s. There he saw the reality of U.S.-funded "Contras" terrorizing Nicaraguan villagers. There he learned of the four Catholic nuns murdered by the Salvadoran military, which the U.S. government was supporting.

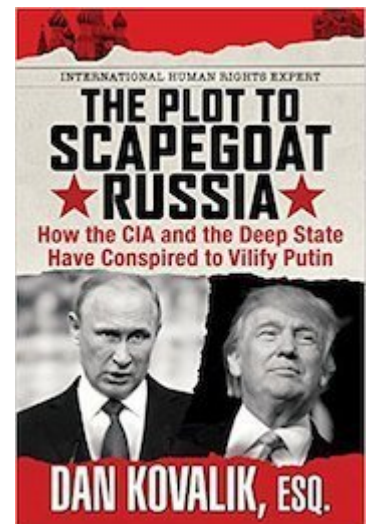
The first-hand experience led to more reading and research which resulted in the shocking realization that the U.S. government has been behind coups and military dictatorships from Indonesia to Iran, Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, Paraguay, Chile and more.

The author discusses U.S. foreign policy since World War Two, before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He puts the current "new" Cold War in historical context and reviews the facts behind the current media/political focus on "Russia-gate." He concludes that we are being blinded with baseless Russo-phobia while forces pushing for more American war and aggression are going unchallenged and recklessly threatening a war that could engulf us all.

Relevant but not widely known historical facts are reviewed:

- the role of American advisers in the collapse of the Russian economy during the 1990s.
- the broken promises to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev about restraining the growth of NATO.
- the expansion of NATO right up to the Russian border.
- the NATO wars on Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya.
- the increasing discrepancy between rich and poor both within the U.S. and internationally

The author presents the case that the real threat to democracy is not coming from Russia, it is coming from our own political system and the forces which benefit from and which promote war and aggression. Former President Jimmy Carter has said the U.S. is an "oligarchy with unlimited political bribery."



Kovalik also reviews the history of whistleblowers at the CIA and other intelligence agencies and concludes that "The CIA is not a reliable source and poses a much greater threat to US democracy than Russia ever could." He cites the long history of conflict between the CIA and presidents seeking to promote peace. President John Kennedy had such fierce conflict with the CIA that he said he wanted to "break it into a thousand pieces and scatter to the wind." Now, the CIA wants President Trump to stay on the path of confrontation with Russia, Kovalik explains.

Kovalik presents a persuasive case that the demonization of Russia and President Vladimir Putin is being used to justify war and, thus, an ever-increasing military budget. Instead of a "peace dividend," the post-Cold War period led to ever-greater U.S. intervention abroad. Now, the New Cold War is raising the risk of a direct confrontation and possible nuclear war even though most Americans do

not want another war.

So, why are we headed down that slippery slope? This book goes a long way to explaining why.

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Deep History of America's Deep State

Exclusive: The idea of an elitist Deep State – erasing a “mistake” by the people – pervades current efforts to remove buffoonish President Trump, but the concept has deep historical roots dating from the Founding, writes Jada Thacker.

By Jada Thacker

Everybody seems to be talking about the Deep State these days. Although the term appears to have entered the lexicon in the late 1990s, for years it referred only to shady foreign governments, certainly not to our own “indispensable nation.”

Does the sudden presence of an American Deep State – loosely defined as an unelected elite that manipulates the elected government to serve its own interests – pose a novel, even existential, threat to democracy?

Not exactly. The threat seems real enough, but it's nothing new. Consider these facts: 230 years ago, an unelected group of elite Americans held a secretive meeting with an undisclosed agenda. Their purpose was not merely to manipulate lawful government in their own interests, but to abolish it altogether. In its place, they would install a radically undemocratic government – a “more perfect” government, they said – better suited to their investment portfolios.

History does not identify these conspirators as the Deep State. It calls them the Founders. The Founders did not consider themselves conspirators, but “republicans” – not in reference to any political party, but rather to their economic station in society. But their devotion to “republicanism” was transparently self-serving. A current college text, *The American Journey: A History of the United States*, explains though does not explicate “republican ideology”:

“Their main bulwark against tyranny was civil liberty, or maintaining the right of the people to participate in government. The people who did so, however, had

to demonstrate virtue. To eighteenth century republicans, virtuous citizens were those who were focused not on their private interests but rather on what was good for the public as a whole.

"They were necessarily property holders, since only those individuals could exercise an independence of judgment impossible for those dependent upon employers, landlords, masters, or (in the case of women and children) husbands and fathers." [Emphasis supplied]

Republicanism was a handy idea if you happened to be a master or a landlord, who were the only persons this ideology considered "virtuous" enough to vote or hold political office. Thus, "republicanism" – virtually indistinguishable from today's "neoliberalism" – created the original Deep State in the image of the economic system it was designed to perpetuate.

How this was accomplished is not a comforting tale. But it cannot be related nor understood without an appreciation of the historical context in which it occurred.

Masters and Servants

Post-colonial America was predominantly agrarian, and about 90 percent of the population was farmers. (The largest city in 1790 was New York, with a whopping population of 33,000 residents.) There was a small middle class of artisans, shopkeepers, and even a handful of industrial workers, but the politically and economically powerful people were the relatively few big-time merchants and landowners – who also fulfilled the function of bankers.

America was not quite a feudal society, but it resembled one. Commoners did not call at the front doors of the rich, but were received around back. Most states had official religions, some with compulsory church attendance backed by fines. Commodity-barter was the currency of the day for the vast majority. Debtors were imprisoned. Parents sold their children into bondage. It wasn't what most people think of when they hear "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

All states restricted voting only to men who owned a requisite amount of property, while the majority: un-widowed women, servants, and tenants owned no property. Moreover, most states had property requirements for eligibility to elective office, some with the higher offices reserved for those with the most property. Such restrictions had discriminated against the urban underclass and farmers since the beginning of American colonization.

Nobody at the time characterized this land of masters and servants as a "democracy." Indeed, the master class considered "democracy" synonymous with "mob rule." But not everybody was happy with "republican virtue" in post-war

America, least of all the slaves of the “virtuous.”

The Revolutionary War had stirred passions among the servant class for social and economic liberty, but when the war ended nothing much had changed. In fact, the war proved not to have been a revolution at all, but represented only a change from British overlords to American overlords. Edmund Morgan, considered the dean of American history in the colonial era, characterized the “non-Revolutionary War” this way:

“The fact the lower ranks were involved in the contest should not obscure the fact that the contest itself was generally a struggle for office and power between members of an upper class: the new against the established.”

About 1 percent of the American population had died in a war fought, they had been told, for “liberty.” (Compare: if the U.S. lost the same proportion of its population in a war today, the result would be over *three million* dead Americans.) Yet after the war, economic liberty was nowhere in sight.

Moreover, the very concept of “liberty” meant one thing to a farmer and quite another to his rich landlord or merchant. Liberty for a common farmer – who was generally a subsistence farmer who did not farm to make money, but rather only to provide the necessities of life for his family – meant staying out of debt. Liberty for merchants and property owners – whose business it was to make monetary profits – meant retaining the ability to lend or rent to others and access to the power of government to enforce monetary repayment from debtors and tenants.

Much like the American Indians who had first communally owned the property now occupied by American subsistence farmers, agrarian debtors faced the unthinkable prospect of losing their ability to provide for their families (and their vote) if their land were confiscated for overdue taxes or debt. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“How Debt Conquered America.”](#)]

Loss of their land would doom a freeholder to a life of tenancy. And the servitude of tenants and slaves differed mainly as a function of iron and paper: slaves were shackled by iron, tenants were shackled by debt contracts. But iron and paper were both backed by law.

By the end of the Revolutionary War, as few as a third of American farmers owned their own land. When the urban elites began to foreclose on the debts and raise the taxes of subsistence farmers – many of whom had fought a long and excruciating war to secure their “liberty” – it amounted to a direct assault on the last bastion of Americans’ economic independence.

The Original Great Recession

After the war, British merchants and banks no longer extended credit to Americans. Moreover, Britain refused to allow Americans to trade with its West Indies possessions. And, to make matters worse, the British Navy no longer protected American ships from North African pirates, effectively closing off Mediterranean commerce. Meanwhile, the American navy could not protect American shipping, in the Mediterranean or elsewhere, because America did not happen to possess a navy.

In the past, American merchants had obtained trade goods from British suppliers by “putting it on a tab” and paying for the goods later, after they had been sold. Too many Americans had reneged on those tabs after the Revolution, and the British now demanded “cash on the barrelhead” in the form of gold and silver coin before they would ship their goods to America.

As always, Americans had limited coin with which to make purchases. As the credit crunch cascaded downwards, wholesalers demanded cash payment from retailers, retailers demanded cash from customers. Merchants “called in” loans they had made to farmers, payable in coin. Farmers without coin were forced to sell off their hard-earned possessions, livestock, or land to raise the money, or risk court-enforced debt collection, which included not only the seizure and sale of their property but also imprisonment for debt.

The most prominent result of Americans’ war for “liberty” turned out to be a full-blown economic recession that lasted a decade. Even so, the recession would not have posed a life-threatening problem for land-owning subsistence farmers, who lived in materially self-sufficient, rural, communal societies. But when state governments began to raise taxes on farmers, payable only in unavailable gold and silver coin, even “self-sufficient” farmers found themselves at risk of losing their ability to feed their families.

Debt, Speculation, and the Deep State

The Continental Congress had attempted to pay for its war with Britain by printing paper money. The British undermined these so-called “Continental” dollars, not only by enticing American merchants with gold and silver, but by counterfeiting untold millions of Continental dollars and spending them into circulation. The aggregate result was the catastrophic devaluation of the Continental dollar, which by war’s end was worthless.

In the meantime, both Congress and state governments had borrowed to pay for “liberty.” By war’s end, war debt stood at \$73 million, \$60 million of which was owed to domestic creditors. It was a staggering sum of money. In his now studiously ignored masterpiece, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, historian Charles A. Beard showed that domestically-held

war debt was equivalent to 10 percent of the value of all the surveyed land holdings (including houses) in the entire United States at the time.

The war debt carried interest, of course – which is a problem with debt if you owe it, but is a feature of debt if it is owed to you. Not only was “freedom not free” – it came with dividends attached for Deep State investors. This should sound at least vaguely familiar today.

As Continental paper money lost its value, Congress and state governments continued to pay for “liberty” with coin borrowed at interest. When that ran short, government paid only with *promises to pay* at a later date – merely pieces of paper that promised to pay coin (or land) at some indeterminate time after the war was won.

This was how the government supplied the troops (whenever it managed to do so) and also how it paid its troops. In actual practice, however, Congress often did not pay the troops anything, not even with paper promises, offering only verbal promises to pay them at the end of the war.

But war is never a money-making enterprise for government, and when it ended, the government was as broke as ever. So, it wrote its verbal promises on pieces of paper, and handed them to its discharged troops with a hearty *Good Luck with That!* Even so, Congress paid the soldiers in bonds worth only a fraction of the amount of time most had served, promising (again!) to pay the balance later – which it never did.

Thousands of steadfast, longsuffering troops were abandoned this way. Most had not been paid any money in years (if ever), and many were hundreds of miles from their homes – ill, injured, and starving – as they had been for months and years. Others literally were dressed only in rags or pieces of rags. Some carried paper promises of money; some carried paper promises of geographically distant land – none of which would be available until years in the future, if at all.

Seven-year Revolutionary War veteran Philip Mead described his plight in a bitter memoir entitled *A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*: “We were absolutely, literally starved. I do solemnly declare that I did not put a single morsel of victuals in my mouth for four days and as many nights, except a little black birch bark which I gnawed off a stick of wood, if that can be called victuals. I saw several of the men roast their old shoes and eat them...”

“When the country had drained the last drop of service it could screw out of the poor soldiers, they were turned adrift like old worn-out horses, and nothing

said about land to pasture them on.”

Was this *liberty*? To impoverished veterans, “liberty” looked bleak, indeed. To speculators in government bonds, liberty looked like a golden opportunity, quite literally so.

Vultures possessed of coin swooped in and bought a dollar’s worth of government promises for a dime, and sometimes for just a nickel. Speculators wheedled promises not only from desperate veterans (many of whom sold their promises merely to obtain food and clothes on their long trudge home), but from a host of people whose goods or services had been paid with IOUs.

Optimistic speculators cadged bonds from pessimistic speculators. The more desperate people became during the recession, the more cheaply they sold their promises to those who were not.

Speculators expected their investments, even those made with now-worthless paper money, to be paid in gold or silver coin. What’s more, “insiders” expected all those various government promises would eventually be converted – quietly, if possible – into interest-bearing bonds backed by a single, powerful taxing authority. All the Deep State needed now was a national government to secure the investment scheme. A man named Daniel Shays unwittingly helped to fulfil that need.

Rebellion and Backlash

Thomas Jefferson penned the famous sentence: “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” He was not referring to heroic American Patriots charging up Bunker Hill against British bayonets. He was referring instead to American farmers – many of whom had been the starving soldiers in a war for forsaken liberty – taking their lives into their hands to oppose the tax policies of the government of Massachusetts in 1787. The principal leader of this revolt was a farmer and war veteran Daniel Shays.

In a sense, the most interesting thing about Shays’s Rebellion is that it was not a unique event.

The first notable example of agrarian revolt had been Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 Virginia, when frontier farmers marched on the rich plantation owners of Jamestown, burned it to the ground, published their democratic “Declaration of the People,” and threatened to hang every elite “tyrant” on their list – which included some of the forefathers of America’s patriot Founders.

Historian Gary Nash reminds us Bacon’s Rebellion had echoes across early

American history: "Outbreaks of disorder punctuated the last quarter of the 17th century, toppling established governments in Massachusetts, New York, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina." Jimmy Carter, in *The Hornet's Nest*, the only novel ever published by an American president, tells a similar story of the agony of dispossessed farmers in Georgia a century later.

Other farmers had rebelled in New Jersey in the 1740s; in the New York Hudson Valley rent wars in the 1750s and 1760s and concurrently in Vermont by Ethan Allen's Green Mountain Boys; for a decade in North Carolina in the 1760s, where vigilantes called Regulators battled the government of the urban elite; and in Virginia in the 1770s. Likewise, American cities had been scenes of labor unrest, riots, and strikes for a century. American class rebellion, apparently unbeknownst to most history teachers in America, was closer to the rule than the exception.

Victory in the war against England only intensified the conflict between those who considered "liberty" as a necessary condition to live without debt, against those who considered "liberty" to be their class privilege to grow rich from the debts others owed them. Howard Zinn, in his *A People's History of the United States* describes the economic realities of Eighteenth Century America:

"The colonies, it seems, were societies of contending classes – a fact obscured by the emphasis, in traditional histories, on the external struggle against England, the unity of colonists in the Revolution. The country therefore was not 'born free' but born slave and free, servant and master, tenant and landlord, poor and rich."

Although Shays's Rebellion was not unique, it was a huge event, coming at a time when the rich were owed a great deal of money by impoverished governments. Pressured by rich bondholders and speculators, the government of Massachusetts duly raised taxes on farmers. To make matters far worse, the taxes were to be paid only in gold or silver – which was completely out of the question for most western farmers, who had no way to obtain coined money.

When the farmers complained, their complaints were ignored. When farmers petitioned the government to issue paper money and accept it as payment of debts and taxes, the government refused their petitions. When the farmers pleaded for the passage of "legal tender laws" that would allow them to settle their debts or taxes with their labor, they were rebuffed.

But when farmers could not pay what they did not have, the Massachusetts's courts ordered their land seized and auctioned. At last, the farmers understood the practical effect, if not the specific intent, of the tax: confiscation of their property and its transfer to the rich, to whom the government owed its

interest-bearing debt. Government had become an armed collection agency.

To the utter dismay of the erstwhile proudly tax-rebellious Patriots, the farmers too rebelled. Shaysites forcibly shut down the tax courts that were condemning them to servitude. The rich responded by loaning the destitute government more money (at interest!) to pay a militia force to oppose Shays's rebels.

At this point, tax rebels abandoned reform for radical revolution and – in a resounding echo of Nathaniel Bacon's century-old Declaration of the People – pledged to march on Boston and burn it to the ground. This was no Tea Party vandalism, stage-managed by well-to-do Bostonians like Samuel Adams. It was a full-blown, grassroots agrarian revolution a century in the making.

The urban bond-holding merchant-class in Boston and elsewhere panicked. And none panicked more than bond speculators, who intimately understood the rebels threatened their "virtuous" republican "liberty" to extract profit from others. Historian Woody Holton exposes the astonishing callousness of one of America's major bond speculators in his nationally acclaimed *Unruly Americans and the Origin of the Constitution*:

"As a bondholder, Abigail Adams would benefit immensely if her fellow Massachusetts citizens [paid the tax] levied by the legislature in March 1786, but she also saw compliance as a sacred duty. If Massachusetts taxpayers were 'harder-pressed by public burdens than formerly,' she wrote, 'they should consider it as the price of their freedom'."

Future First Lady Abigail Adams was not alone in thinking freedom came with dividends payable to her account. Historian David Szatmary reminds us in his *Shays Rebellion; The Makings of an Agrarian Insurrection* that the former Patriot leadership, especially those in the merchant class, were among the first to advocate violence against democratic rebellion.

Said a published opinion piece at the time: "When we had other *rulers*, committees and conventions of the people were lawful – they were then necessary; but since I *myself* became a ruler, they cease to be lawful – the people have no right to examine my conduct."

Showboat Patriot and bond speculator Samuel Adams –former mastermind of the Boston Tea Party and erstwhile propagandist against unfair British taxes (as well as cousin to Abigail's husband John Adams) – sponsored a Massachusetts law that allowed sheriffs to kill tax protesters outright.

Another rich bondholder and speculator, ex-Revolutionary War General Henry Knox (the fitting namesake of Fort Knox, the famous repository of gold bullion) wrote

an alarming letter to his former commander George Washington, accusing the Shays's rebels of being "levelers" (which was the closest term to "communists" then in existence). He informed Washington that the country needed a much stronger government (and military) to prevent any riffraff challenge to the elite. His message was not wasted on General Washington, America's richest slave owner.

In the end, the Congress, under the Articles of Confederation, could raise no money from the states to provide an army, but the privately-financed, for-profit Massachusetts militia successfully defeated Shays's rebels. Still, the nearly hysterical fear of democratic economic revolution had been planted in the minds of the masters. Shays's Rebellion proved to be the last straw for bond speculators whose profits were jeopardized by democracy.

Worse even, the governments of many other states were beginning to cave under intense democratic pressure from rebellious debtors. Some states were entertaining laws that prevented the seizure of property for debt; others were creating paper money in order to break the gold and silver monopoly. Rhode Island not only voted in a paper money system, but threatened to socialize all commercial business enterprises in the state.

In response to the threat of populism, the "virtuous" elite reacted decisively – not to remedy the plight of debtors, of course – but to secure their own profits from them. Accordingly, in 1786, five states sent delegates to meet at Annapolis, Maryland, just as Shays's Rebellion veered into revolution. This unelected minority called for Congress to authorize a convention to be held in Philadelphia the next year "for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation." The Articles were never to be "revised." They were to be scrapped altogether by the Deep State.

The Deep State Conspires

Thanks to Charles A. Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, we know quite a lot about the status of the 55 men who conspired to draft the Constitution. But the very first thing we need to know is that they were not authorized by "We the People" simply because nobody had voted for them; all were political appointees.

Nor were they even a representative *sample* of the people. Not a single person in the Convention hall "worked for a living," nor was female, nor was a person of color. Only one claimed to be a "farmer," the current occupation of about 90 percent of the population. Most were lawyers. Go figure.

If the delegates represented anybody at all, it was the economic elite: 80

percent were bondholders; 44 percent were money-lenders; 27 percent were slave owners; and 25 percent were real estate speculators. Demographically, the 39 who finally signed the final draft of the Constitution constituted .001 percent of the American population reported in the 1790 census. George Washington, who presided, was arguably the wealthiest man in the country. Deep State gamblers all.

And the stakes were high. Recall that the face value of outstanding domestic government bonds in 1787 was \$60 million, equivalent to 10 percent of the total improved land value of the country. But these bonds, for the most part, had been obtained by speculators at a fraction of face value. Beard very conservatively estimated the profit of speculators – if the bond were redeemed at face value – would have been some \$40 million. Expressed as the same proportion of total improved land value at the time of the Founding, the expected profit from government bonds held then would equal at least \$3 trillion today. Tax free.

We still do not know everything that transpired at the convention. No one was assigned to keep a record of what was discussed. Reportedly, even the windows to the meeting hall were nailed shut to prevent eavesdropping – though there would be “leaks.” Because of its secrecy and its unauthorized nature, some historians have called the convention “the second American Revolution.” But revolutions are public, hugely participatory events. This was a *coup d'état* behind locked doors.

Most delegates presumably understood their undisclosed purpose was to dump the whole system of confederated government (which had cost 25,000 American lives to secure) into a dustbin. They evidently did not intend to obey their instructions “solely to revise” the Articles because a number of them showed up at the convention with drafts for a new constitution in hand.

The conspirators’ ultimate goal was to replace the Confederation with what they later euphemized as “a more perfect Union” – designed from the outset to protect their class interests and to ensure the new government possessed all the power necessary to perpetuate the existing oligarchy.

At the Convention, Alexander Hamilton captured the prevailing sentiment: “All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well-born; the other the mass of the people ... turbulent and changing, they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the Government. ... Nothing but a permanent body can check the imprudence of democracy.”

Hamilton further proposed that both the President and the Senate be appointed (not elected) *for life*. His vision was but half a step removed from monarchy. Though not a Convention delegate, John Jay, Hamilton’s political ally,

slaveowner, and the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, stated the purpose of “republicanism” with brutal brevity: “The people who own the country ought to govern it.”

The Founders never once envisioned any such a thing as “limited government” – unless perhaps in the sense that the power of government was to be *limited to* their own economic class. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Right’s Made-up Constitution.”](#)]

In *Towards an American Revolution: Exposing the Constitution & Other Illusions*, historian Jerry Fresia sums the Founders’ views succinctly: “The vision of the Framers, even for Franklin and Jefferson who were less fearful of the politics of the common people than most, was that of a strong centralized state, a nation whose commerce and trade stretched around the world. In a word, the vision was one of empire *where property owners would govern themselves.*” [Emphasis supplied]

Self-government *by the people* was to remain permanently out of the question. The Deep State was to govern itself. “We the People,” a phrase hypocritically coined by the ultra-aristocrat Gouverneur Morris, would stand forever after as an Orwellian hoax.

The tricky task of the hand-picked delegates was to hammer out a radical new system of government that would superficially resemble a democratic republic, but function as an oligarchy.

William Hogeland’s excellent *Founding Finance*, recounts the anti-democratic vehemence expressed at the Convention: “On the first day of the meeting that would become known as the United States Constitutional Convention, Edmund Randolph of Virginia kicked off the proceedings [...] ‘Our chief danger,’ Randolph announced, ‘arises from the democratic parts of our constitutions. ... None of the constitutions’ – he meant those of the states’ governments – ‘have provided sufficient checks against the democracy.’”

No wonder they nailed the windows shut. It should be no surprise that the word “democracy” does not appear once in the entire U.S. Constitution, or any of its Amendments, including the Bill of Rights. Accordingly, the Constitution does not once refer to the popular vote, and it did not guarantee a single person or group suffrage until the adoption of the 15th Amendment in 1870, over 80 years after ratification. The Preamble aside, the Founders used the phrase “the People” only a single time (Art. I, Sec. 2).

It has been suggested the word “democracy” had a different meaning then than it has now. It did not. “Democracy” to the Convention delegates meant the same

thing as it does today: “rule by the people.” That’s why they detested it. The delegates considered themselves the patriarchs of “republicanism,” the ideology that rejected participation in government by people like their wives, servants, tenants, slaves, and other non-propertied inferiors. No doubt, the delegates passionately disagreed on many things, but the “fear and loathing” of democracy was not one of them. Then or now.

The Deep State’s Specific Goals

Embedded within the Founders’ broadly anti-democratic agenda were four specific goals. These were not a list of items jotted down in advance, but were derived by group consensus as the minimum requirements necessary to achieve the Deep State’s ultimate agenda.

To camouflage the stark oligarchic nationalism the measures intended, the Founders disingenuously styled themselves “Federalists.” But nothing about these measures concerned a “federation” of sovereign states; taken together, they were intended to demolish the existing “perpetual” confederation, not to re-create it more effectively.

National government with limited citizen participation. Of all the measures required to achieve a national oligarchy, this was the most daunting. It was achieved by a wide array of provisions.

The Electoral College. The President and Vice President are not elected by popular vote, but by electors – then and now. For example, when George Washington was first elected President, the American population was 3.9 million. How many of those folks voted for George? Exactly 69 persons – which was the total number of electors voting at the time. (Art. I, Sec. 3)

Bi-Cameral Congress. Congress is bi-cameral, composed of two “houses” – the House of Representatives and the Senate. Under the original Constitution, the House members represented the people who vote for them, while the Senate represented states, not persons, and was therefore not a democratic body, at all. It was generally expected that the Senate would “check” the democratic House. Indeed, this was the entire purpose of bi-cameralism wherever it has existed. (Art. I, Secs. 1 and 2)

State Appointment of Senators. Senators were originally appointed by state legislatures (until the 17th Amendment in 1913). It was expected that the Senate would function in Congress as the House of Lords functioned in Parliament: the voice of the aristocracy. Even though Senators are now popularly elected, it is far more difficult to challenge an incumbent because of the prohibitive expense of running a state-wide campaign. (Art. I, Sec. 3)

Appointment of the Judiciary. All federal judges are appointed for life terms by the President and confirmed by the (originally undemocratic) Senate. (Art. III, Sec. 1)

Paucity of Representation. Most undemocratic of all was the extreme paucity of the total number of House members. The House originally was composed of only 65 members, or one member per 60,000 persons. Today, there are 435 members, each representing about 700,000 persons. Thus, current House representation of the public is 12 times less democratic than when the Constitution was written – and it was poor (at best) then.

Compare: The day before the Constitution was ratified, the people of the 13 United States were represented by about 2,000 democratically elected representatives in their various state legislatures (1:1950 ratio); the day after ratification, the same number of people were to be represented by only 65 representatives in the national government (1:60000). In quantitative terms, this represents more than a 3,000 percent *reduction* of democratic representation for the American people. (Art. I, Sec. 2)

Absence of Congressional Districts. Although House members now run for election in equal-populated districts, the districts were created by Congress, not the Constitution. Until the 1960s, some House members were elected at-large (like Senators). This disadvantaged all but the richest and best-known candidates from winning. (Not referenced in Constitution)

Absence of Recall, Initiative and Referendum. The Constitution does not allow the people to vote to recall (un-elect) a Congress member, demand a Congressional vote on any issue (propose an initiative) or vote directly in a referendum on any issue (direct democracy). (Not referenced in Constitution)

Absence of Independent Amendment Process. One of the reasons Americans now have professional politicians is that the Constitution does not provide a way for “the people” to amend it without the required cooperation of a sitting Congress. At the Constitutional convention, Edmund Randolph of Virginia (surprisingly) proposed that the people be afforded a way to amend the Constitution without the participation of Congress. This excellent idea, however, was not adopted. (Art. V)

National authority to tax citizens directly. (Art. I, Sec. 8; 16th Amendment)

National monopolization of military power. (Art. I, Sec.8, clauses 12, 13, 14, 15, 16)

Denial of states’ power to issue paper money or provide debtor relief. (Art. I, Sec.10; Art. I Sec.8, clause 4)

All of these provisions were completely new in the American experience. For 150 years or more, citizen participation in government, independent militias, and the issuance of paper money had been the prerogative of the several, independent colonies/states – while direct external taxation had been universally and strenuously resisted. When the British Crown had threatened to curtail colonial prerogatives, the very men who now conspired for national power had risen in armed rebellion. The hypocrisy was stunning. And people took note of the fact.

Consent of the Minority

One of the note-takers was Robert Yates, a New York delegate to the Convention, who had walked out in protest. Not long afterwards, Yates (who owned no government bonds) stated his objection to the new Constitution: “This government is to possess absolute and uncontrollable power, legislative, executive and judicial, with respect to every object to which it extends. ...

“The government then, so far as it extends, is a complete one. ... It has the authority to make laws which will affect the lives, the liberty, and the property of every man in the United States; nor can the constitution or the laws of any state, in any way prevent or impede the full and complete execution of every power given.”

At least half of the American population (collectively called “Anti-federalists”) thought the Constitution was a terrible idea. To be sure, well-to-do Anti-federalists like Yates were not overtaxed farmers, and their objections were often based upon the defense of states’ rights, not peoples’ economic rights. Most Anti-federalists, however, seemed alarmed that the Constitution contained no guarantee of the basic political rights they had enjoyed under the British Empire, such as freedom of speech or trial by jury.

The debate between supporters and critics of the Constitution raged for a year, while partisan newspapers published articles both pro and con. A collection of 85 “pro” articles is known now as *The Federalist Papers*, which were written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay. Although these articles have been studied almost as religious relicts by historians, they do not tell us “what the Constitution really means.”

The Constitution means what it says. *The Federalist Papers* are sales brochures, written by lawyers trying to get others to “buy” the Constitution. The same can be said about a similar collection of “Anti-federalist Papers,” from which Yates’s quote above was taken. In any event, it is up to the courts to interpret the Constitution, not lawyers with vested interests.

In due course, the Anti-federalists put their collective foot down. There would

be no hope of ratification without amendments guaranteeing fundamental political – *but not economic* – rights. Although Hamilton argued a guarantee of rights would be “dangerous,” James Madison convinced the Federalists that agreeing to guarantee a *future* Bill of Rights would be much safer than meddling with the text of the current document, which might entail unraveling its core nationalist, anti-democratic agenda. And so, a deal was struck.

Even so, the battle over the ratification of the Constitution was not ultimately decided by the people of the nation. Although the people of the several states had not voted to authorize the Convention, or the document it had produced, the Founders had been incredibly arrogant, not to mention sly. Not only had they presented the unauthorized document to the states as a take-it-or-leave-it proposition (no changes allowed), but the document itself demanded that only special state “conventions” could ratify it – not the majority popular vote of the people.

Specifying ratification by conventions meant the people would be voting for convention delegates, who would in turn vote for ratification. This was tantamount to turning ratification into a popularity contest between convention delegates, rather than a democratically direct vote on the document, itself. Moreover, ratification by convention would present the possibility that a minority of the people in a state (those in favor of the Constitution) might “pack” a convention with delegates, who would then approve of a document establishing a government for all.

Electoral shenanigans were not just hypothetical possibilities. In Philadelphia, for example, a mob kidnapped elected legislators who were boycotting a convention vote, physically dragged them into the state house, and tied them to their chairs in order to force a convention vote. Other, more subtle methods of manipulation occurred elsewhere, notably the disenfranchisement of voters through property qualifications.

Over a hundred years ago, Charles A. Beard completed his exhaustive study of the Constitution and confirmed that it most likely was ratified by a majority – *of a minority of the people*.

Among Beard’s final conclusions were these: “The Constitution was ratified by a vote of probably not more than one-sixth of the adult males....The leaders who supported the Constitution in the ratifying conventions represented the same economic groups as the members of the Philadelphia Convention....The Constitution was not created by ‘the whole people’ as the jurists [judges] have said; neither was it created by ‘the states’ as Southern nullifiers long contended; but it was the work of a consolidated group whose interests knew no state boundaries and were truly national in their scope.”

The Deep State, in other words. It was darkly appropriate that a document whose primary purpose was to defeat democratic rule was, itself, brought into force without a majoritarian vote.

In 1788, nine of the 13 states' conventions ratified the Constitution (as specified in the Constitution's own Article VII) and the document became the supreme law of the land for those nine states. By 1789, even the democratic holdout Rhode Island had followed suit. And America's schoolchildren have been led to believe ever since that the Constitution is a sacred document, inspired and ordained by the public-spirited benevolence of Founding Fathers.



But this had been predicted. It had seemed painfully obvious to Eighteenth Century Genevan political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau that constitutional government was the invention of the Deep State, its designated beneficiary.

Dripping with sarcasm, his virtuoso *Discourse on Inequality* explained the process: "[T]he rich man ... at last conceived the deepest project that ever entered the human mind: this was to employ in his favour the very forces that attacked him, to make allies of his enemies...

"In a word, instead of turning our forces against ourselves, let us collect them into a sovereign power, which may govern us by wise laws, may protect and defend all the members of the association, repel common enemies, and maintain a perpetual concord and harmony among us."

Rousseau penned these words in 1754, 33 years before Gouverneur Morris oversaw the drafting of the identical sales pitch that constitutes the Preamble to the United States Constitution: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the

Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

Rousseau concludes: “All offered their necks to the yoke in hopes of securing their liberty; for though they had sense enough to perceive the advantages of a political constitution, they had not experience enough to see beforehand the dangers of it; *those among them, who were best qualified to foresee abuses, were precisely those who expected to benefit by them....*” [Emphasis added]

Does the Deep State pose an existential threat to American democracy today? Move along, folks – nothing new to see here.

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Russia-gate Flops as Democrats’ Golden Ticket

Exclusive: The national Democrats saw Russia-gate and the drive to impeach President Trump as their golden ticket back to power, but so far the ticket seems to be made of fool’s gold, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The national Democratic Party and many liberals have bet heavily on the Russia-gate investigation as a way to oust President Trump from office and to catapult Democrats to victories this year and in 2018, but the gamble appears not to be paying off.

The Democrats’ disappointing loss in a special election to fill a congressional seat in an affluent Atlanta suburb is just the latest indication that the strategy of demonizing Trump and blaming Russia for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 defeat may not be the golden ticket that some Democrats had hoped.

Though it’s still early to draw conclusive lessons from Karen Handel’s victory over Jon Ossoff – despite his raising \$25 million – one lesson may be that a Middle America backlash is forming against the over-the-top quality of the Trump-accusations and the Russia-bashing, with Republicans rallying against the image of Official Washington’s “deep state” collaborating with Democrats and the mainstream news media to reverse a presidential election.

Indeed, the Democrats may be digging a deeper hole for themselves in terms of reaching out to white working-class voters who abandoned the party in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin to put Trump over the top in the Electoral College even though Clinton's landslide win in California gave her almost three million more votes nationwide.

Clinton's popular-vote plurality and the #Resistance, which manifested itself in massive protests against Trump's presidency, gave hope to the Democrats that they didn't need to undertake a serious self-examination into why the party is in decline across the nation's heartland. Instead, they decided to stoke the hysteria over alleged Russian "meddling" in the election as the short-cut to bring down Trump and his populist movement.

A Party of Snobs?

From conversations that I've had with some Trump voters in recent weeks, I was struck by how they viewed the Democratic Party as snobbish, elitist and looking down its nose at "average Americans." And in conversations with some Clinton voters, I found confirmation for that view in the open disdain that the Clinton backers expressed toward the stupidity of anyone who voted for Trump. In other words, the Trump voters were not wrong to feel "dissed."

It seems the Republicans – and Trump in particular – have done a better job in presenting themselves to these Middle Americans as respecting their opinions and representing their fears, even though the policies being pushed by Trump and the GOP still favor the rich and will do little good – and significant harm – to the middle and working classes.

By contrast, many of Hillary Clinton's domestic proposals might well have benefited average Americans but she alienated many of them by telling a group of her supporters that half of Trump's backers belonged in a "basket of deplorables." Although she later reduced the percentage, she had committed a cardinal political sin: she had put the liberal disdain for millions of Americans into words – and easily remembered words at that.

By insisting that Hillary Clinton be the Democratic nominee – after leftist populist Bernie Sanders was pushed aside – the party also ignored the fact that many Americans, including many Democrats, viewed Clinton as the perfectly imperfect candidate for an anti-Establishment year with many Americans still fuming over the Wall Street bailouts and amid the growing sense that the system was rigged for the well-connected and against the average guy or gal.

In the face of those sentiments, the Democrats nominated a candidate who personified how a relatively small number of lucky Americans can play the system

and make tons of money while the masses have seen their dreams crushed and their bank accounts drained. And Clinton apparently still hasn't learned that lesson.

Citing Women's Rights

Last month, when asked why she accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars for speaking to Goldman Sachs, Clinton rationalized her greed as a women's rights issue, saying: "you know, men got paid for the speeches they made. I got paid for the speeches I made."

Her excuse captured much of what has gone wrong with the Democratic Party as it moved from its working-class roots and New Deal traditions to becoming a party that places "identity politics" ahead of a duty to fight for the common men and women of America.

Demonstrating her political cluelessness, Clinton used the serious issue of women not getting fair treatment in the workplace to justify taking her turn at the Wall Street money trough, gobbling up in one half-hour speech what it would take many American families a decade to earn.

While it's a bit unfair to personalize the Democratic Party's problems, Hillary and Bill Clinton have come to represent how the party is viewed by many Americans. Instead of the FDR Democrats, we have the Davos Democrats, the Wall Street Democrats, the Hollywood Democrats, the Silicon Valley Democrats, and now increasingly the Military-Industrial Complex Democrats.

To many Americans struggling to make ends meet, the national Democrats seem committed to the interests of the worldwide elites: global trade, financialization of the economy, robotization of the workplace, and endless war against endless enemies.

Now, the national Democrats are clambering onto the bandwagon for a costly and dangerous New Cold War with nuclear-armed Russia. Indeed, it is hard to distinguish their foreign policy from that of neoconservatives, although these Democrats view themselves as liberal interventionists citing humanitarian impulses to justify the endless slaughter.

Earlier this year, a Washington Post/ABC News poll found only 28 percent of Americans saying that the Democrats were "in touch with the concerns of most people" – an astounding result given the Democrats' long tradition as the party of the American working class and the party's post-Vietnam War reputation as favoring butter over guns.

Yet rather than rethink the recent policies, the Democrats prefer to fantasize about impeaching President Trump and continuing a blame-game about who – other

than Hillary Clinton, her campaign and the Democratic National Committee – is responsible for Trump’s election. Of course, it’s the Russians, Russians, Russians!

A Problem’s Deep Roots

Without doubt, some of the party’s problems have deep roots that correspond to the shrinking of the labor movement since the 1970s and the growing reliance on big-money donors to finance expensive television-ad-driven campaigns. Over the years, the Democrats also got pounded for being “weak” on national security.

Further, faced with Republican “weaponization” of attack ads in the 1980s, many old-time Democrats lost out to the Reagan Revolution, clearing the way for a new breed of Democrats who realized that they could compete for a slice of the big money by cultivating the emerging coastal elites: Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Hollywood and even elements of the National Security State.

By the 1990s, President Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council defined this New Democrat, politicians who reflected the interests of well-heeled coastal elites, especially on free trade; streamlined financial regulations; commitment to technology; and an activist foreign policy built around spreading “liberal values” across the globe.

Mixed in was a commitment to the rights of various identity groups, a worthy goal although this tolerance paradoxically contributed to a new form of prejudice among some liberals who came to view many white working-class people as fat, stupid and bigoted, society’s “losers.”

So, while President Clinton hobnobbed with the modern economy’s “winners” – with sleepovers in the Lincoln bedroom and parties in the Hamptons – much of Middle America felt neglected if not disdained. The “losers” were left to rot in “flyover America” with towns and cities that had lost their manufacturing base and, with it, their vitality and even their purpose for existing.

Republican Fraud

It wasn’t as if the Republicans were offering anything better. True, they were more comfortable talking to these “forgotten Americans” – advocating “gun rights” and “traditional values” and playing on white resentments over racial integration and civil rights – but, in office, the Republicans aggressively favored the interests of the rich, cutting their taxes and slashing regulations even more than the Democrats.

The Republicans paid lip service to the struggling blue-collar workers but control of GOP policies was left in the hands of corporations and their

lobbyists.

Though the election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president, raised hopes that the nation might finally bind its deep racial wounds, it turned out to have a nearly opposite effect. Tea Party Republicans rallied many white working-class Americans to resist Obama and the hip urban future that he represented. They found an unlikely champion in real-estate mogul and reality TV star Donald Trump, who sensed how to tap into their fears and anger with his demagogic appeals and false populism.

Meanwhile, the national Democrats were falling in love with data predicting that demographics would magically turn Republican red states blue. So the party blithely ignored the warning signs of a cataclysmic break with the Democrats' old-time base.

Despite all the data on opioid addiction and declining life expectancy among the white working class, Hillary Clinton was politically tone-deaf to the rumbles of discontent echoing across the Rust Belt. She assumed the traditionally Democratic white working-class precincts would stick with her and she tried to appeal to the "security moms" in typically Republican suburbs by touting her neoconservative foreign policy thinking. And she ran a relentlessly negative campaign against Trump while offering voters few positive reasons to vote for her.

Ignoring Reality

When her stunning loss became clear on Election Night – as the crude and unqualified Trump pocketed the electoral votes of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin – the Democrats refused to recognize what the elections results were telling them, that they had lost touch with a still important voting bloc, working-class whites.

Rather than face these facts, the national Democrats – led by President Obama and his intelligence chiefs – decided on a different approach, to seek to reverse the election by blaming the result on the Russians. Obama, his intelligence chiefs and a collaborative mainstream media insisted without presenting any real evidence that the Russians had hacked into Democratic emails and released them to the devastating advantage of Trump, as if the minor controversies from leaked emails of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta explained Trump's surprising victory.

As part of this strategy, any Trump link to Russia – no matter how inconsequential, whether from his businesses or through his advisers – became the focus of Woodward-and-Bernstein/Watergate-style investigations. The obvious

goal was to impeach Trump and ride the wave of Trump-hating enthusiasm to a Democratic political revival.

In other words, there was no reason to look in the mirror and rethink how the Democratic Party might begin rebuilding its relationships with the white working-class, just hold hearings featuring Obama's intelligence chieftains and leak damaging Russia-gate stuff to the media.

But the result of this strategy has been to deepen the Democratic Party's reliance on the elites, particularly the self-reverential mavens of the mainstream media and the denizens of the so-called "deep state." From my conversations with Trump voters, they "get" what's going on, how the powers-that-be are trying to negate the 63 million Americans who voted for Trump by reversing a presidential election carried out under the U.S. constitutional process.

A Letter from 'Deplorable' Land

Some Trump supporters are even making this point publicly. Earlier this month, a "proud deplorable" named Kenton Woodhead from Brunswick, Ohio, wrote to The New York Times informing the "newspaper of record" that he and other "deplorables" were onto the scheme.

"I wanted to provide you with an unsophisticated synopsis of The New York Times and the media's quest for the implosion of Donald Trump's presidency from out here in the real world, in 'deplorable' country. ... Every time you and your brethren at other news organizations dream up a new scheme to get Mr. Trump, we out here in deplorable land increase our support for him. ...

"Regardless of what you dream up every day, we refuse to be sucked into your narrative. And even more humorously, there isn't anything you can do about it! And I love it that you are having the exact opposite effect on those of us you are trying to persuade to think otherwise.

"I mean it is seriously an enjoyable part of my day knowing you are failing. And badly! I haven't had this much fun watching the media stumble, bumble and fumble in years. I wonder what will happen on the day you wake up and realize how disconnected you've become."

So, despite Trump's narcissism and incompetence – and despite how his policies will surely hurt many of his working-class supporters – the national Democrats are further driving a wedge between themselves and this crucial voting bloc. By whipping up a New Cold War with Russia and hurling McCarthistic slurs at people who won't join in the Russia-bashing, the Democratic Party's tactics also are alienating many peace voters who view both the Republicans and Democrats as

warmongers of almost equal measures of guilt.

While it's certainly not my job to give advice to the Democrats – or any other political group – I can't help but thinking that this Russia-gate “scandal” is not only lacking in logic and evidence, but it doesn't even make any long-term political sense.

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

At FBI, Mueller Oversaw Post-9/11 Abuses

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media gushes over Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller as an upright man of the Establishment, ignoring how he oversaw abuses of innocent Arabs after 9/11, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Robert Mueller III, the former FBI director who now heads the wide-ranging investigation into alleged misdeeds by President Trump and his associates, just dodged a major legal bullet himself. On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court gave him and other former senior Bush administration officials legal immunity for the vicious abuses committed against more than 700 foreigners who were rounded up with little or no cause after the 9/11 attacks.

The court ruled 4-2, nearly 16 years after the fact, that “national security” trumps civil liberties and that however unfounded the arrests, or intolerable their treatment, the detainees had no right to sue senior federal officials for damages.

Punting to Congress, a branch of government rarely known for its defense of individual rights, the court declared, “The proper balance in situations like this, between deterring constitutional violations and freeing high officials to make the lawful decisions necessary to protect the Nation in times of great peril, is one for the Congress to undertake, not the Judiciary.”

Although the climate of fear that followed 9/11 has eased a bit, the decision is highly relevant in the Trump era because the abused victims were all immigrants who had overstayed their visas. If the FBI had any question about the arrestees,

it designated them “of interest” and ordered them held until cleared – in other words, guilty until proven innocent.

Dozens of the hapless victims were held at the Administrative Maximum Special Housing Unit in Brooklyn’s Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC), which was the subject of two scathing reports by the Bush Justice Department’s own Inspector General in 2003. Besides documenting a wide range of abuses, the reports concluded that staff members brazenly lied about the rough treatment they meted out.

Appalling Abuses

News accounts of the Supreme Court decision made only brief reference to that treatment. Yet the appalling story can be glimpsed from this summary of facts provided in 2013 by U.S. District Judge John Gleeson:

“The harsh confinement policy was expressly directed at Arab and Muslim noncitizens who had violated immigration laws . . . In other words, it was discriminatory on its face. . .

“They were confined in tiny cells for over 23 hours a day, provided with meager and barely edible food, and prohibited from moving around the unit . . . (or) keeping any property, including personal hygiene items like toilet paper and soap, in their cells. Whenever they left their cells, they were handcuffed and shackled. . . (D)etainees . . . were often physically abused along the way, and were sometimes left for hours in the cold recreation cell, over their protests, as a form of punishment. . . .

“Detainees also were denied sleep. Bright lights were kept on . . . for 24 hours a day . . . and staff at the MDC made a practice of banging on the MDC Detainees’ cell doors and engaging in other conduct designed to keep them from sleeping. They also conducted inmate ‘counts’ at midnight, 3:00 a.m., and 5:00 a.m. . . . One of the officers walked by about every 15 minutes throughout the night, kicked the doors to wake up the detainees, and yelled things such as, ‘Motherfuckers,’ ‘Assholes,’ and ‘Welcome to America.’

“The MDC Detainees also were subjected to frequent physical and verbal abuse . . . The physical abuse included slamming the MDC Detainees into walls; bending or twisting their arms, hands, wrists, and fingers; lifting them off the ground by their arms; pulling on their arms and handcuffs; stepping on their leg restraints; restraining them with handcuffs and/or shackles even while in their cells; and handling them in other rough and inappropriate ways. The use of such force was unnecessary because the MDC Detainees were always fully compliant with orders . . . The verbal abuse included referring to the MDC Detainees as

'terrorists' and other offensive names, threatening them with violence, cursing at them, (and) insulting their religion . . .

“(Detainees) . . . were subjected to unreasonable and punitive strip-searches. . . Female officers were often present during the strip-searches; the strip-searches were regularly videotaped in their entirety . . . and MDC officers routinely laughed and made inappropriate sexual comments during the strip-searches.

“Officers at the MDC . . . also interfered with the Detainees’ ability to practice and observe their Muslim faith. . . In addition, most of the MDC Detainees were held incommunicado during the first weeks of their detention. MDC staff repeatedly turned away everyone, including lawyers and relatives, who came to the MDC looking for the MDC Detainees, and thus the MDC Detainees had neither legal nor social visits during this period.”

An Abu Ghraib in Brooklyn

Though not at the level of brutality of water boarding and some of the beatings associated with secret CIA detention centers, these MDC abuses had some similarities to the humiliation and mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq – and the abuses were taking place right in the heart of New York City. Plus, unlike some of the CIA’s torture victims, these detainees had nothing to do with terrorist plots; some were never even questioned by the FBI after their arrest.

Yet senior FBI and Justice Department officials were complicit in the abuse. The 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals, in a 2015 ruling that the lawsuit could proceed, cited evidence that two of the defendants, Attorney General John Ashcroft and FBI Director Mueller, “met regularly with a small group of government officials in Washington, D.C., and mapped out ways to exert maximum pressure on the individuals arrested in connection with the terrorism investigation.”

They “discussed and decided upon a strategy to restrict the 9/11 detainees’ ability to contact the outside world and delay their immigration hearings. The group also decided to spread the word among law enforcement personnel that the 9/11 detainees were suspected terrorists[] . . . and that they needed to be encouraged in any way possible to cooperate.” And it was the FBI that recommended housing the detainees in the maximum security facility where their rights were sure to be abused.

Such official misconduct and brutality constitutes a stain on this nation’s honor. Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority, said “Nothing in this opinion should be read to condone the treatment to which the (plaintiffs)

contend they were subjected.”

A Terrible Precedent

But the court’s decision to protect high-level federal officials who made that treatment possible sets a terrible precedent. As the American Civil Liberties Union warned, it “would effectively immunize tens of thousands of federal officers . . . from damages, no matter how egregious the officers’ conduct. Indeed, [it] would effectively immunize federal officers from damages liability even for torture, so long as the torture arises in a context involving national security or noncitizens.”

Citing such egregious precedents as the Alien and Sedition Acts, the wholesale suppression of civil liberties during World War I, and the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II, a dissenting Justice Stephen Breyer insisted that the Court had an obligation to defend “fundamental constitutional rights.”

“History tells us of far too many instances where the Executive or Legislative Branch took actions during time of war that, on later examination, turned out unnecessarily and unreasonably to have deprived American citizens of basic constitutional rights,” he wrote. With the latest court ruling, that dark history is sure to be repeated.

[For more on the real Robert Mueller, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Russia-gate’s Mythical Heroes.”]

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.

More Corporate Control of the Internet

The flip side of the Trump administration’s war on government regulations is the expansion of corporate control, which is especially true for media and the Internet, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

In just a few short months, the Trump wrecking ball has pounded away at rules and regulations in virtually every government agency. The men and women the president has appointed to the Cabinet and to head those agencies are so far in sycophantic lockstep, engaged in dismantling years of protections in order to make real what White House strategist Steve Bannon infamously described as “the

deconstruction of the administrative state.”

The Federal Communications Commission is not immune. Its new chair, Republican Ajit Pai, embraces the Trump doctrine of regulatory devastation. “It’s basic economics,” he declared in an April 26 speech at Washington’s Newseum. “The more heavily you regulate something, the less of it you’re likely to get.”

His goal is to stem the tide of media reform that in recent years has made significant progress for American citizens. Even as we rely more than ever on digital media for information, education and entertainment, Pai and his GOP colleagues at the FCC seek to turn back the clock and increase even more the corporate control of cyberspace.

Net neutrality, the guarantee of an internet open to all, rich or poor, without preferential treatment, was codified by the FCC in 2015. Pai – a former lawyer for Verizon – wants net neutrality reversed and has taken the first steps toward its elimination. He has abandoned media ownership rules and attacked such FCC innovations as the Lifeline program that subsidizes broadband access for low income Americans. Among other rollbacks, he also has opposed rules capping the exorbitant cost of prison phone calls (that cap was overturned on June 13 by the US Court of Appeals).

A veteran of the FCC, Michael Copps vehemently opposes Pai’s master plan to strengthen the grip of big business on our media. Copps served two terms as a commissioner, including a brief period as interim chair. He also has taught history, worked as chief of staff to former South Carolina Sen. Fritz Hollings and was an assistant secretary of commerce.

Today, Copps is special adviser for the Media and Democracy Reform Initiative at the nonpartisan grassroots organization Common Cause. He “just may be,” Bill Moyers once said, “the most knowledgeable fellow in Washington on how communications policy affects you and me.”

Recently, I spoke with Copps to get his assessment of how the election of Donald Trump and Ajit Pai’s FCC chairmanship are affecting Americans and the media landscape. “I remain convinced that the last presidential election we had was of, by, and for, big media,” he said. “It made billions of dollars for these big media companies. We’re entering into a period where there likely will be more mergers than we’ve ever had before. The political and marketplace atmosphere that we have in this country right now favors them.”

The transcript that follows has been edited for length and clarity.

Michael Copps: [CBS CEO Les] Moonves said it best: “I don’t know if Donald Trump is good for the country. but he’s damn good for CBS.” The election was just a

glorified reality show and I do not think it was an aberration. Until we get that big picture straightened out and we get a civic dialogue that's worthy of the American people and that actually advances citizens' ability to practice the art of self-government – that informs citizens so they can cast intelligent votes and we stop making such damn-fool decisions – we're in serious trouble.

To me, that remains the problem of problems, it remains at the top of the list. Journalism continues to go south, thanks to big media and its strangulation of news, and there's not much left in the way of community or local media. Add to that an internet that has not even started thinking seriously about how it supports journalism. You have these big companies like Google and Facebook who run the news and sell all the ads next to it, but what do they put back into journalism? It isn't much.

I don't think right now that commercial media is going to fix itself or even that we can save it with any policy that's likely in the near-term, so we have to start looking at other alternatives. We have to talk about public media – public media probably has to get its act together somewhat, too. It's not everything that Lyndon Johnson had in mind back in 1967 [when the Public Broadcasting Act was signed], but it's still the jewel of our media ecosystem. So I'm more worried than ever about the state of our media – not just fake news but the lack of real news.

That's priority No. 1; I don't think you solve anything until you find some ways to repair our commercial media. That's not coming from inside the fabled Beltway anytime soon. It'll require major input from the grass roots. Big media won't cover its own shortcomings, so we have to have a national conversation and make some democracy-encouraging decisions. We just have to find a way.

Michael Winship: What about “fake news?”

MC: The fake news thing is a challenging phenomenon. No one has a viable solution yet that I know of. Again, don't look to Washington for much input under the present management. Maybe reinvigorating real news, the fact-based investigative journalism that big media has done so much to eliminate, would be the best solution. True journalism can do more than anything else to push aside fake news.

MW: So how do you characterize the Trump administration's attitude toward communications issues?

MC: This is not populism; this is a plutocracy. Trump has surrounded himself with millionaires and billionaires, plus some ideologues who believe in, basically, no government. And the Trump FCC already has been very successful in

dismantling lots of things – not just the net neutrality that they're after now, but privacy, and Lifeline, which is subsidized broadband for those who can't afford it. And just all sorts of things up and down the line. The whole panoply of regulation and public interest oversight – if they could get rid of it all, they would; if they can, they will.

I think the April 26 speech that Ajit Pai gave at the Newseum, which was partially funded, I think, by conservative activist causes, was probably the worst speech I've ever heard a commissioner or a chairman of the FCC give. It was replete with distorted history and a twisted interpretation of judicial decisions. And then, about two-thirds of the way through, it became intensely political and ideological, and he was spouting all this Ronald Reagan nonsense – if the government is big enough to do what you want, it's big enough to take away everything you have, and all that garbage. It was awful.

It's maybe the worst FCC I've ever seen or read about.

MW: How much of all this do you think is just simply the idea of destroying anything supported by the Obama White House? Is it that simple?

MC: Well, I think that some of it is the ego problem, but I think it goes beyond that. I think there is that right wing, pro-business, invisible hand ideology, and then there's just the unabashed and unprecedented and disgusting level of money in politics. I don't blame just the Republicans; the Democrats are just about as beholden to it, too.

MW: You mentioned Pai's speech at the Newseum; does he have any real philosophy?

MC: Yes, I think he believes this stuff, I think he's a true believer. He was in the Office of General Counsel when I was in there – very articulate, very bright, very pleasant. He is an attractive personality, but he has this *Weltanschauung* or whatever you want to call it that is so out of step with modern politics and where we should be in the history of this country that it's potentially extremely destructive. And Michael O'Rielly, the other Republican commissioner, is about the same. He's an ideologue, too.

It's all about the ideology, the world of big money, the access that the big guys have and continue to have. It's not that the FCC outright refuses to let public interest groups through the door or anything like that; it's just the lack of resources citizens and public interest groups have compared to what the big guys have. The public interest groups don't have much of a chance, but I think they've done a pretty good job given the lack of resources.

MW: Did you expect Pai to move so fast against net neutrality?

MC: It doesn't surprise me, but it's so dangerous. Net neutrality is the *sine qua non* of an open internet – “You can't have one without the other,” as the old song goes. We'll need to hope for a good court outcome if the FCC succeeds in eliminating the rules. But I really don't see how big telecom or the commission can make a credible case to overturn what the court approved just two years ago, and then go back to what the court overturned before that. It's downright surreal. But citizens should not limit their pro-net neutrality messages to just the FCC; Congress needs to understand how popular these rules are, so they keep their hands off it, which they may be more inclined to do as the 2018 elections come closer.

MW: There's so much of an X factor to everything.

MC: There really is. I just hope we can get the media covering it better. I think if we get a couple of really big mergers, and of course we have AT&T and Time Warner out there now, which Trump said he was going to oppose. I don't think he really will, but that itself should be an issue. And then, if we can join that to the net neutrality issue, then I think we can get some media attention. If we can do that with Time Warner and AT&T or whatever other mergers come along, certainly including Sinclair-Tribune, then we can actually make some progress. I sure hope so.

MW: There still seems to be a lot public support for net neutrality.

MC: No question about it, but there would be an avalanche if more people were informed about the issue by the media. Many Trump voters, I am convinced, are not consumers who support \$232 a year for a set-top box or who like constantly rising bills for cable and internet service, or who want a closed internet. That's not why they voted for him.

MW: Have the net neutrality rules passed in 2015 had a chance to work? Have they had a chance to be effective?

MC: Yes, I think so. Some say they are a solution in search of a problem, but that's not true. I think the companies have been on their good behavior over the last few years, by and large – but there have been numerous abuses, too. But once you throw out the rules we have now, it'll be “Katy bar the door,” and by the time we get another administration in, either the FCC or the Congress, it'll probably be too late to reverse the tide.

MW: What are the implications for free speech?

MC: They are huge. If you have an internet service provider [ISP] that's capable of slowing down other sites, or putting other sites out of business, or favoring their own friends and affiliates and customers who can pay for fast lanes,

that's a horrible infringement on free speech. It's censorship by media monopolies.

It's tragic: here we have a technology, the internet, that's capable really of being the town square of democracy, paved with broadband bricks, and we are letting it be taken over by a few gatekeepers. This is a first amendment issue; it's free speech versus corporate censorship.

MW: I want to talk to you about privacy, about protecting consumer information that's on the net.

MC: If the huge internet service providers are going to glean all manner of personal information about us and share it with others or sell it to others, we ought to have a right to say, "Yes, count me in, I don't mind that," or "No, I don't want any part of that." And I think the vast majority would say, "No, thank you, I don't want any part of that." So privacy is a huge issue. We've talked about it some in national security terms, but it's a much bigger issue in citizen terms and what it does to the average person.

MW: You mentioned Lifeline; I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that...

MC: Lifeline is directed toward those who cannot afford to be connected to broadband. How do they find a job when most corporations don't accept paper resumes or don't want to interview you in person? Nowadays you have to email something to potential employers. How do you and your kids educate yourselves? How do kids do their homework when they don't have broadband, and the kid in the next town or even in the next block has high-speed broadband? How do you care for your health – especially that now we're getting seriously into tele-health and tele-medicine?

You cannot be a fully functioning 21st-century citizen in this country unless you have access to high-speed broadband. It's as simple as that. We shouldn't settle for less. I don't know that the FCC can do this by itself, and we need a national mission to do this. And we need everybody pushing for it. I hope it's going to be included in Trump's infrastructure plan, but I'll be surprised if it's in such a meaningful way that it's going to get coverage for all the people in the inner cities and rural America.

And, you know, we're way, way down in the rankings in broadband penetration, adoption and affordability. And without competition, even when you have broadband, without competition people are paying through the ceiling for inferior service. They've got to feed families and find shelter, but broadband is also essential to them.

MW: I think another issue that a lot of people aren't aware of is the whole prison telephone problem.

MC: Commissioner Mignon Clyburn has done a fantastic job on that. We have such a high percentage of our population in the United States incarcerated and for their families to communicate with them or vice versa has become just very, very expensive. It's an industry that has made a lot of money off of other people's distress, and if you have a son in prison, and you can't afford to communicate with them, that doesn't help anybody, including the person who's in prison.

Commissioner Clyburn made some good progress on interstate calling in this regard, but then you've got to go state by state, and now the court has just thrown some obstacles in the way of the intrastate calls. So, there's work to be done, and we'll see how far it goes. But we were on the track of making good progress under the previous commission.

MW: Do you think there's any interest in consumer service remaining among the Republicans on the FCC or in Congress?

MC: It's mighty hard to find if you look at all the party-line votes and partisanship at work. I think there will be some cooperation for infrastructure if broadband is included. It depends on how much. Some Republicans will vote for that, but you can't find a Republican for net neutrality, and you can't find a Republican for doing anything to counteract the outrageous influence of money in the political bloodstreams.

MW: With so many of these American Enterprise Institute types and various other conservative groups and people wielding influence, would they lobby to eliminate the FCC completely?

MC: Oh, yes indeed. There were reports during the transition that some of those people were actually saying, "Do we even need an FCC? Why don't we just get rid of it?"

MW: So what can we all do at this point?

MC: Figure out how you really make this a grass-roots effort – and not just people writing, in but people doing more than that. In July, we will have a day devoted to internet action, so stay tuned on that. In addition, as Bill Moyers says, "If you can sing, sing. If you can write a poem, write a poem." Different initiatives attract different audiences, so whatever you can do, do. John Oliver made a huge difference in getting us to net neutrality and now he's helping again. If you went up to the Hill right after that first John Oliver show on net neutrality [in 2014], you saw immediately that it made a difference with the members and the staff.

There's no one silver bullet, no "do this" and it suddenly happens. You just have to do whatever you can do to get people excited and organized. It's as simple as that.

MW: So that's where the hope is?

MC: Well, that's where my hope is. I don't see anything else unless we get a change in power in Washington, and not just the name of the party in control but candidates who really are ready for a change and ready to do something to make it more reflective of what, I think, is the popular will.

MW: Which of the Democrats are good on these issues?

MC: There are a lot of them. I hesitate to get into names for fear of missing some. The problem is that Republicans inside the Beltway are joined in lockstep opposition on almost all these issues, and the level of partisanship, lobbying, big money, and ideology have thus far been insurmountable obstacles. But I believe if members of Congress spent more time at home, holding more town hall meetings, they would quickly learn that many, many of their constituents are on the pro-consumer, pro-citizen side of these issues.

It's just such a formative time, and in many respects the future is now. I don't know how long you can let this go on. How long can you open the bazaar to all this consolidation, how much can you encourage all this commercialization, how much can you ignore public media until you get to the point of no return where you can't really fix it anymore? And I also think that the national discourse on the future of the internet has really suffered while we play ping pong with net neutrality; one group comes in, does this, the other group, comes in and reverses it, boom, boom, boom. And net neutrality is not the salvation or the solution to all of the problems of the internet. As you know, it's kind of the opening thing you have to have, it lays a foundation where we can build a truly open internet.

But net neutrality alone doesn't solve consolidation, it doesn't solve commercialization, it doesn't solve, really, the big questions of the future of the internet. Add to the list issues of artificial intelligence and is AI going to put us out of work? These aren't strictly communication issues, but they are internet issues. What does AI mean for the future of work in our society? Are we even going to be working? Or, can we say the internet is throwing people out of work without sounding Luddite, because that's been said throughout history and it's been proven wrong, but I think now it looks like a lot of people already have been thrown out of work by it.

If Hillary Clinton had been elected, I would have gone down and talked with her

and suggested a White House conference on the future of the internet. You can't answer all these questions that I just posed but you can ask the questions and you can get the best minds in the country talking about them. Give the conference a mandate and get them to come back with a report and some recommendations and at least put people on it with enough visibility that the media has to cover it.

If we could win net neutrality, which is a stretch, there will be a lot of people who say, "Well, that takes care of the internet, everything's fine and dandy right now." But that's not true at all. It's just not true.

Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of *Moyers & Company* and *BillMoyers.com*. Follow him on Twitter: [@MichaelWinship](https://twitter.com/MichaelWinship). [This article originally appeared at <http://billmoyers.com/story/michael-copps-fcc-ajit-pai-worst-ever/>]

Trump Complies with War-Hawk Wishes

President Trump is plunging ahead with expanded Mideast wars, with emerging escalations in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere, building on the bloody policies of his predecessors, as retired Col. Ann Wright explains.

By Ann Wright

The militarization of U.S. foreign policy certainly didn't start with President Donald J. Trump; in fact, it goes back several decades. However, if Trump's first 100 days in office are any indication, he has no intention of slowing down the trend.

During a single week in April, the Trump administration fired 59 Tomahawk missiles into a Syrian airfield, and dropped the largest bomb in the U.S. arsenal on suspected ISIS tunnels in Afghanistan. This 21,600-pound incendiary percussion device that had never been used in combat – the Massive Ordnance Air Blast or MOAB, colloquially known as the "Mother of All Bombs"—was used in the Achin district of Afghanistan, where Special Forces Staff Sergeant Mark De Alencar had been killed a week earlier. (The bomb was tested only twice, at Elgin Air Base, Florida, in 2003.)

To underscore the new administration's preference for force over diplomacy, the decision to experiment with the explosive power of the mega-bomb was taken unilaterally by General John Nicholson, the commanding general of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. In praising that decision, President Trump declared that he had

given “total authorization” to the U.S. military to conduct whatever missions they wanted, anywhere in the world – which presumably means without consulting the interagency national security committee.

It is also telling that President Trump chose generals for two key national security positions traditionally filled by civilians: the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Advisor. Yet three months into his administration, he has left unfilled hundreds of senior civilian governmental positions at State, Defense and elsewhere.

While President Trump has not yet enunciated a policy on the subject of political assassinations, there has so far been no indication that he plans to change the practice of relying on drone killings established by his recent predecessors.

Back in 1976, however, President Gerald Ford set a very different example when he issued his Executive Order 11095. This proclaimed that “No employee of the United States government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, political assassination.”

President Ford instituted this prohibition after investigations by the Church Committee (the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, chaired by Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho) and the Pike Committee (its House counterpart, chaired by Rep. Otis G. Pike, D-New York) had revealed the extent of the Central Intelligence Agency’s assassination operations against foreign leaders in the 1960s and 1970s.

Permitting Assassinations

With a few exceptions, the next several presidents upheld the ban. But in 1986, President Ronald Reagan ordered an attack on Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi’s home in Tripoli, in retaliation for the bombing of a nightclub in Berlin that killed a U.S. serviceman and two German citizens and injured 229. In just 12 minutes, American planes dropped 60 tons of U.S. bombs on the house, though they failed to kill Gaddafi.

Twelve years later, in 1998, President Bill Clinton ordered the firing of 80 cruise missiles on al-Qaida facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan, in retaliation for the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The Clinton administration justified the action by asserting that the proscription against assassination did not cover individuals whom the U.S. government had determined were connected to terrorism.

Days after al-Qaida carried out its Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush signed an intelligence “finding” allowing the

Central Intelligence Agency to engage in “lethal covert operations” to kill Osama bin Laden and destroy his terrorist network. White House and CIA lawyers argued that this order was constitutional on two grounds. First, they embraced the Clinton administration’s position that E.O. 11905 did not preclude the United States’ taking action against terrorists. More sweepingly, they declared that the ban on political assassination did not apply during wartime.

The Bush administration’s wholesale rejection of the ban on targeted killing or political assassinations reversed a quarter-century of bipartisan U.S. foreign policy. It also opened the door to the use of unmanned aerial vehicles to conduct targeted killings (a euphemism for assassinations).

The U.S. Air Force had been flying unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), since the 1960s, but only as unmanned surveillance platforms. Following 9/11, however, the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency weaponized “drones” (as they were quickly dubbed) to kill both leaders and foot soldiers of al-Qaida and the Taliban.

The United States set up bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan for that purpose, but after a series of drone attacks that killed civilians, including a large group gathered for a wedding, the Pakistani government ordered in 2011 that the U.S. drones and U.S. military personnel be removed from its Shamsi Air Base. However, targeted assassinations continued to be conducted in Pakistan by drones based outside the country.

The Obama Approach

In 2009, President Barack Obama picked up where his predecessor had left off. As public and congressional concern increased about the use of aircraft controlled by CIA and military operators located 10,000 miles away from the people they were ordered to kill, the White House was forced to officially acknowledge the targeted killing program and to describe how persons became targets of the program.

Instead of scaling the program back, however, the Obama administration doubled down. It essentially designated all military-age males in a foreign strike zone as combatants, and therefore potential targets of what it termed “signature strikes.” Even more disturbing, it declared that strikes aimed at specific, high-value terrorists, known as “personality strikes,” could include American citizens.

That theoretical possibility soon became a grim reality. In April 2010, President Obama authorized the CIA to “target” Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen and a former imam at a Virginia mosque, for assassination. Less than a

decade before, the Office of the Secretary of the Army had invited the imam to participate in an interfaith service following 9/11. But al-Awlaki later became an outspoken critic of the “war on terror,” moved to his father’s homeland of Yemen, and helped al-Qaida recruit members.

On Sept. 30, 2011, a drone strike killed al-Awlaki and another American, Samir Khan – who was traveling with him in Yemen. U.S. drones killed al-Awlaki’s 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, an American citizen, 10 days later in an attack on a group of young men around a campfire. The Obama administration never made clear whether the 16-year-old son was targeted individually because he was al-Awlaki’s son or if he was the victim of a “signature” strike, fitting the description of a young military-age male. However, during a White House press conference, a reporter asked Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs how he could defend the killings, and especially the death of a U.S.-citizen minor who was “targeted without due process, without trial.”

Gibbs’s response did nothing to help the U.S. image in the Muslim world: “I would suggest that you should have had a far more responsible father if they are truly concerned about the well-being of their children. I don’t think becoming an al-Qaida jihadist terrorist is the best way to go about doing your business.”

On Jan. 29, 2017, al-Awlaki’s 8-year-old daughter, Nawar al-Awlaki, was killed in a U.S. commando attack in Yemen ordered by Obama’s successor, Donald Trump.

Weddings and Funerals

Meanwhile, the media continued to report incidents of civilians being killed in drone strikes across the region, which frequently target wedding parties and funerals. Many inhabitants of the region along the Afghan-Pakistan border could hear the buzz of drones circling their area around the clock, causing psychological trauma for all those who live in the area, especially children.

The Obama administration was strongly criticized for the tactic of “double-tap” – hitting a target home or vehicle with a Hellfire missile, and then firing a second missile into the group that came to the aid of those who had been wounded in the first attack. Many times, those who ran to help rescue persons trapped inside collapsed buildings or flaming cars were local citizens, not militants.

The rationale traditionally offered for using drones is that they eliminate the need for “boots on the ground” – whether members of the armed forces or CIA paramilitary personnel – in dangerous environments, thereby preventing loss of U.S. lives. U.S. officials also claim that the intelligence UAVs gather through lengthy surveillance makes their strikes more precise, reducing the number of civilian casualties. (Left unsaid, but almost certainly another powerful

motivator, is the fact that the use of drones means that no suspected militants would be taken alive, thus avoiding the political and other complications of detention.)

Even if these claims are true, however, they do not address the impact of the tactic on U.S. foreign policy. Of broadest concern is the fact that drones allow presidents to punt on questions of war and peace by choosing an option that appears to offer a middle course, but actually has a variety of long-term consequences for U.S. policy, as well as for the communities on the receiving end.

By taking the risk of loss of U.S. personnel out of the picture, Washington policymakers may be tempted to use force to resolve a security dilemma rather than negotiating with the parties involved. Moreover, by their very nature, UAVs may be more likely to provoke retaliation against America than conventional weapons systems. To many in the Middle East and South Asia, drones represent a weakness of the U.S. government and its military, not a strength. Shouldn't brave warriors fight on the ground, they ask, instead of hiding behind a faceless drone in the sky, operated by a young person in a chair many thousands of miles away?

Insider Attacks

Since 2007, at least 150 NATO personnel have been the victims of "insider attacks" by members of the Afghan military and national police forces being trained by the coalition. Many of the Afghans who commit such "green on blue" killings of American personnel, both uniformed and civilian, are from the tribal regions on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan where U.S. drone strikes have focused. They take revenge for the deaths of their families and friends by killing their U.S. military trainers.

Anger against drones has surfaced in the United States as well. On May 1, 2010, Pakistani-American Faisal Shahzad attempted to set off a car bomb in Times Square. In his guilty plea, Shahzad justified targeting civilians by telling the judge, "When the drone hits in Afghanistan and Iraq, they don't see children, they don't see anybody. They kill women, children; they kill everybody. They're killing all Muslims."

As of 2012 the U.S. Air Force was recruiting more drone pilots than pilots for traditional aircraft – between 2012 and 2014, they planned to add 2,500 pilots and support people to the drone program. That is nearly twice the number of diplomats the State Department hires in a two-year period.

Congressional and media concern over the program led to the Obama

administration's acknowledgment of the regular Tuesday meetings led by the President to identify targets for the assassination list. In the international media, "Terror Tuesdays" became an expression of U.S. foreign policy.

To many around the world, U.S. foreign policy has been dominated for the past 16 years by military actions in the Middle East and South Asia, and large land and sea military exercises in Northeast Asia. On the world stage, American efforts in the areas of economics, trade, cultural issues and human rights appear to have taken a back seat to the waging of continuous wars.

Continuing the use of drone warfare to carry out assassinations will only exacerbate foreign distrust of American intentions and trustworthiness. It thereby plays into the hands of the very opponents we are trying to defeat.

During his campaign, Donald Trump pledged he would always put "America First," and said he wanted to get out of the business of regime change. It is not too late for him to keep that promise by learning from his predecessors' mistakes and reversing the continued militarization of U.S. foreign policy.

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<http://www.afsa.org/killer-drones-and-militarization-us-foreign-policy>]

Blaming Bernie Sanders for a Shooting

The mainstream media usually won't blame non-violent political speech for a crazed gunman's shooting spree, but made an exception linking Bernie Sanders to the GOP-baseball-practice shooting, notes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

It's routine for right-wing outlets like Fox to smear progressive activists under the guise of "news" coverage. But why the New York Times? And why the special venom for Bernie Sanders?

After the horrific June 14 shooting of Congressman Steve Scalise and three other participants in a Republican baseball practice, the media floodgates opened for slimy innuendos. Before the day was done, a major supplier of the political sewage was the New York Times, which prominently published a left-blaming [article](#) that masqueraded as news reporting.

The media watch group FAIR [pointed out](#) that the Times piece "started with a false premise and patched together a dodgy piece of innuendo and guilt-by-association in order to place the blame for a shooting in Virginia on 'the most ardent supporters of Sen. Bernie Sanders.'" "

It would be a mistake to think that the Times story was only the result of bias inflamed by the grisly shooting spree. A few days earlier, the newspaper had front-paged another "news" [story](#) hostile to grassroots political forces aligned with Sanders – a de facto editorial masquerading as news coverage, headlined: "Democrats in Split-Screen: The Base Wants It All. The Party Wants to Win."

In a bizarre disconnect from electoral reality, the article portrayed a party establishment that had lost election after election, including a cataclysmic loss to Trump, as being about winning. And the article portrayed the party's activist base as interfering with the establishment's

winning ways.

Such Times stories are now operating under a heightened sense of journalistic impunity since the newspaper [abolished](#) its 14-year-old ombudsperson position of “public editor” more than two weeks ago – further insulating its reporters and editors from accountability. More than ever, calling the shots at the Times – the most influential news outlet in the United States – means never having to say you’re sorry, or even justify what you’ve done.

Media Hostility

Corporate-owned media hostility toward Sanders and the progressive base has been conspicuous and well-documented. That hostility [started early](#) in his [campaign](#) and never let up, sometimes manifested as giving him [scant coverage](#). When the momentum of the Bernie campaign gained powerful traction as a threat to the corporate order, big media efforts to trash him went over the top.

At a key political moment last year, as FAIR analyst Adam Johnson [wrote](#), “the Washington Post ran 16 negative stories on Bernie Sanders in 16 hours, between roughly 10:20 PM EST Sunday, March 6, to 3:54 PM EST Monday, March 7 – a window that includes the crucial Democratic debate in Flint, Michigan, and the next morning’s spin.” The day after this onslaught, Sanders stunned the elite pundit class by winning the Michigan primary.

Now, in mid-2017, with no presidential election in sight, why is the corporate media hostility toward Sanders so prone to surface?

Consider, as an example, this structural reality: Jeff Bezos, the owner of the Washington Post, has just unveiled plans for his company Amazon to buy Whole Foods. And Bernie Sanders, the [most popular](#) politician in the United States according to polls, is strongly opposed to allowing such huge consolidations of corporate power.

For good reasons, media powerhouses like the New York Times and Washington Post are averse to Donald Trump. At the same time, they remain quite cozy with Hillary Clinton's political orientation and especially with the sectors of the corporate-military establishment that she represents. Like so much of the mass media, those outlets see Sanders as dangerously anti-corporate and way too willing to challenge Wall Street, big insurance companies, the fossil fuel industry and the like.

On a political level, the Clinton wing of the party has been running on the equivalent of dumpster-fire fumes since the disastrous loss in November. The party's establishment, entwined with Wall Street and an agenda of continuous military intervention overseas, was just barely able to shoehorn its handpicked choice, Tom Perez, into becoming the new chair of the Democratic National Committee.

In a classic [joint interview](#) with MSNBC two months ago, Perez and Sanders showcased just how different their politics are. Perez mumbled platitudes, Sanders was forthright. Perez spoke about victims of an unfair economy, but he refused to denounce or even name their corporate victimizers – while Sanders was glad to do so.

The U.S. media establishment often conflates “populism” of

the right and the left, as though Trump and Sanders are somehow symmetrical as anti-establishment figures. And, as in the case of the New York Times article that appeared hours after the GOP baseball tragedy, the Times has sometimes jumped at the chance to draw far-fetched parallels between Trump's violence-tinged, pseudo-populist messaging from the right and Sanders's humane, inclusive messaging from the left.

Like it or not, the battle over the future of the Democratic Party – including what kind of presidential nominee the party should have in 2020 – is already underway. Overall, the top echelons of corporate media are oriented toward promoting the Clinton wing while denigrating the Bernie wing. The forces that brought us the disastrous 2016 Clinton campaign are not about to give up.

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