

The Foundering Russia-gate 'Scandal'

Exclusive: Taking on water from revealed FBI conflicts of interest, the foundering Russia-gate probe – and its mainstream media promoters – are resorting to insults against people who note the listing ship, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The disclosure of fiercely anti-Trump text messages between two romantically involved senior FBI officials who played key roles in the early Russia-gate inquiry has turned the supposed Russian-election-meddling “scandal” into its own scandal, by providing evidence that some government investigators saw it as their duty to block or destroy Donald Trump’s presidency.

As much as the U.S. mainstream media has mocked the idea that an American “deep state” exists and that it has maneuvered to remove Trump from office, the text messages between senior FBI counterintelligence official Peter Strzok and senior FBI lawyer Lisa Page reveal how two high-ranking members of the government’s intelligence/legal bureaucracy saw their role as protecting the United States from an election that might elevate to the presidency someone as unfit as Trump.

In one Aug. 6, 2016 text exchange, Page told Strzok: “Maybe you’re meant to stay where you are because you’re meant to protect the country from that menace.” At the end of that text, she sent Strzok a link to a David Brooks [column](#) in The New York Times, which concludes with the clarion call: “There comes a time when neutrality and laying low become dishonorable. If you’re not in revolt, you’re in cahoots. When this period and your name are mentioned, decades hence, your grandkids will look away in shame.”

Apparently after reading that stirring advice, Strzok replied, “And of course I’ll try and approach it that way. I just know it will be tough at times. I can protect our country at many levels, not sure if that helps.”

At a House Judiciary Committee hearing on Wednesday, Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, criticized Strzok’s boast that “I can protect our country at many levels.” Jordan said: “this guy thought he was super-agent James Bond at the FBI [deciding] there’s no way we can let the American people make Donald Trump the next president.”

In the text messages, Strzok also expressed visceral contempt for working-class Trump voters, for instance, writing on Aug. 26, 2016, “Just went to a southern Virginia Walmart. I could SMELL the Trump support. ... it’s scary real down here.”

Another text message suggested that other senior government officials – alarmed at the possibility of a Trump presidency – joined the discussion. In an apparent reference to an August 2016 meeting with FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, Strzok wrote to Page, “I want to believe the path you threw out for consideration in Andy’s office – that there’s no way he gets elected – but I’m afraid we can’t take that risk.”

It’s unclear what strategy these FBI officials were contemplating to ensure Trump’s defeat, but the comments mesh with what an intelligence source told me after the 2016 election, that there was a plan among senior Obama administration officials to use the allegations about Russian meddling to block Trump’s momentum with the voters and – if elected – to persuade members of the Electoral College to deny Trump a majority of votes and thus throw the selection of a new president into the House of Representatives under the rules of the Twelfth Amendment.

The scheme involved having some Democrats vote for former Secretary of State Colin Powell (which did happen), making him the third-place vote-getter in the Electoral College and thus eligible for selection by the House. But the plan fizzled when enough of Trump’s electors stayed loyal to their candidate to officially make him President.

After that, Trump’s opponents turned to the Russia-gate investigation as the vehicle to create the conditions for somehow nullifying the election, impeaching Trump, or at least weakening him sufficiently so he could not take steps to improve relations with Russia.

In one of her text messages to Strzok, Page made reference to a possible Watergate-style ouster of Trump, writing: “Bought all the president’s men. Figure I needed to brush up on watergate.”

As a key feature in this oust-Trump effort, Democrats have continued to lie by claiming that “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred” in the assessment that Russia hacked the Democratic emails last year on orders from President Vladimir Putin and then slipped them to WikiLeaks to undermine Hillary Clinton’s campaign.

That canard was used in the early months of the Russia-gate imbroglio to silence any skepticism about the “hacking” accusation, and the falsehood was repeated again by a Democratic congressman during Wednesday’s hearing of the House Judiciary Committee.

But the “consensus” claim was never true. In May 2017 testimony, President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper acknowledged that the

Jan. 6 “Intelligence Community Assessment” was put together by “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies: the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

Biased at the Creation

And, the new revelations of high-level FBI bias puts Clapper’s statement about “hand-picked” analysts in sharper perspective, since any intelligence veteran will tell you that if you hand-pick the analysts you are effectively hand-picking the analysis.

Although it has not yet been spelled out exactly what role Strzok and Page may have had in the Jan. 6 report, I was told by one source that Strzok had a direct hand in writing it. Whether that is indeed the case, Strzok, as a senior FBI counterintelligence official, would almost surely have had input into the selection of the FBI analysts and thus into the substance of the report itself. [For challenges from intelligence experts to the Jan. 6 report, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“More Holes in the Russia-gate Narrative.”](#)]

If the FBI contributors to the Jan. 6 report shared Strzok’s contempt for Trump, it could explain why claims from [an unverified dossier of Democratic-financed “dirt”](#) on Trump, including salacious charges that Russian intelligence operatives videotaped Trump being urinated on by prostitutes in a five-star Moscow hotel, was [added as a classified appendix](#) to the report and presented personally to President-elect Trump.

Though Democrats and the Clinton campaign long denied financing the dossier – prepared by ex-British spy Christopher Steele who claimed to rely on second- and third-hand information from anonymous Russian contacts – [it was revealed](#) in October 2017 that the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign shared in the costs, with the payments going to the “oppo” research firm, Fusion GPS, through the Democrats’ law firm, Perkins Coie.

That discovery helped ensnare another senior Justice Department official, Associate Attorney General Bruce Ohr, who [talked](#) with Steele during the campaign and had a post-election meeting with Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson. Recently, Simpson has [acknowledged](#) that Ohr’s wife, Nellie Ohr, was hired by Fusion GPS last year to investigate Trump.

Bruce Ohr has since been demoted and Strzok was quietly removed from the Russia-gate investigation last July although the reasons for these moves were not publicly explained at the time.

Still, the drive for “another Watergate” to oust an unpopular – and to many insiders, unfit – President remains at the center of the thinking among the top mainstream news organizations as they have scrambled for Russia-gate “scoops”

over the past year even at the cost of making serious reporting errors.

For instance, last Friday, CNN – and then CBS News and MSNBC – trumpeted an email supposedly sent from someone named Michael J. Erickson on Sept. 4, 2016, to Donald Trump Jr. that involved WikiLeaks offering the Trump campaign pre-publication access to purloined Democratic National Committee emails that WikiLeaks published on Sept. 13, nine days later.

Grasping for Confirmation

Since the Jan. 6 report alleged that WikiLeaks received the “hacked” emails from Russia – a claim that WikiLeaks and Russia deny – the story seemed to finally tie together the notion that the Trump campaign had at least indirectly colluded with Russia.

This new “evidence” spread like wildfire across social media. As The Intercept’s Glenn Greenwald wrote in an article critical of the media’s performance, some Russia-gate enthusiasts heralded the revelation with graphics of cannons booming and nukes exploding.

But the story soon collapsed when it turned out that the date on the email was actually Sept. 14, 2016, i.e., the day *after* WikiLeaks released the batch of DNC emails, not Sept. 4. It appeared that “Erickson” – whoever he was – had simply alerted the Trump campaign to the public existence of the WikiLeaks disclosure.

Greenwald noted, “So numerous are the false stories about Russia and Trump over the last year that I literally cannot list them all.”

Yet, despite the cascade of errors and grudging corrections, including some belated admissions that there was no “17-intelligence-agency consensus” on Russian “hacking” – The New York Times made a preemptive strike against the new documentary evidence that the Russia-gate investigation was riddled with conflicts of interest.

The Times’ lead editorial on Wednesday mocked reporters at Fox News for living in an “alternate universe” where the Russia-gate “investigation is ‘illegitimate and corrupt,’ or so says Gregg Jarrett, a legal analyst who appears regularly on [Sean] Hannity’s nightly exercise in presidential ego-stroking.”

Though briefly mentioning the situation with Strzok’s text messages, the Times offered no details or context for the concerns, instead just heaping ridicule on anyone who questions the Russia-gate narrative.

“To put it mildly, this is insane,” the Times declared. “The primary purpose of Mr. Mueller’s investigation is not to take down Mr. Trump. It’s to protect

America's national security and the integrity of its elections by determining whether a presidential campaign conspired with a foreign adversary to influence the 2016 election – a proposition that grows more plausible every day.”

The Times fumed that “roughly three-quarters of Republicans still refuse to accept that Russia interfered in the 2016 election – a fact that is glaringly obvious to everyone else, including the nation's intelligence community.” (There we go again with the false suggestion of a consensus within the intelligence community.)

The Times also took to task Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, for seeking “a Special Counsel to investigate ALL THINGS 2016 – not just Trump and Russia.” The Times insisted that “None of these attacks or insinuations are grounded in good faith.”

But what are the Times editors so afraid of? As much as they try to insult and intimidate anyone who demands serious evidence about the Russia-gate allegations, why shouldn't the American people be informed about how Washington insiders manipulate elite opinion in pursuit of reversing “mistaken” judgments by the unwashed masses?

Do the Times editors really believe in democracy – a process that historically has had its share of warts and mistakes – or are they just elitists who think they know best and turn away their noses from the smell of working-class people at Walmart?

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](#)).

Trump's Lethal Decision on Jerusalem

President Trump has won praise from Christian Zionists and many staunch supporters of Israel for declaring Jerusalem Israel's capital, but critics say it only makes peace a more distant goal, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Protests have broken out across the Middle East against President Trump's

recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital – and Western critics complain that the move adds one more brick in the wall against the prospects for peace.

Professor Francis Boyle, who teaches international law at the University of Illinois College of Law and served as a long-time legal adviser to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), calls Trump's announcement a "symbolic but still critical step in Israeli designs to control not just Jerusalem, but all of historic Palestine." I spoke with Boyle on Dec. 6.

Dennis Bernstein: What was your initial response to the announcement by President Trump that the United States will be moving its embassy to Jerusalem?

Francis Boyle: It is always a sad day when you know that people are going to die. It is a defeat for the human spirit. In the last intifada [September 2000-February 2005], about 3,000 Palestinians died and 1,000 Israelis. I don't know what will happen this time. The Palestinians have called for "three days of rage." Trump could very well set off a third intifada here.

Dennis Bernstein: Trump says this doesn't get in the way of the US being an honest broker, that the vision is for peace. From the legal perspective, how do you see this?

Francis Boyle: First of all, the United States has never been an honest broker here. I was legal advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace Negotiations from 1991, when they began, to the signing of Oslo. It was very clear that the United States was always serving as Israel's lawyer. You had Miller, Ross, and Kurtzer, all three American Jews, two of them orthodox.

The Palestinians had to go hat-in-hand to present their case to American Jews. Nothing has changed: We now have Kushner, Greenblatt and Friedman, all three of whom are orthodox Jews. The whole thing has been preposterous from the beginning. We have always been in favor of Israel, using lies, threats and intimidation to force the Palestinians to accept whatever the Israelis are giving them. That is international diplomacy for you, conducted by the United States, not only in the Middle East but all over the world.

Dennis Bernstein: Would you say that what is going on here is not just Israel trying to control Jerusalem but all of Palestine?

Francis Boyle: That has always been Israel's policy. I had a conversation with the chair of the Palestinian Delegation to the Middle East peace negotiations. He told me that the Zionists have not changed their position since the Basel Convention of 1897. They want all of Palestine. What is happening now in Jerusalem is a step in that direction.

If you look at the recently leaked so-called peace plan that was presented to [Palestinian President Mahmoud] Abbas in Saudi Arabia, he was basically given an ultimatum to either accept some tiny bantustan or forget it. It is very clear that they want all of Palestine, all of the West Bank, all of Jerusalem. They want the Golan Heights and maybe even some more of Syria.

Dennis Bernstein: We have revelations now that Jared Kushner, our chief peace negotiator in the Middle East, failed to disclose in ethics filings his role as director of a family foundation that funded Israeli settlements. Do you think that is a problem?

Francis Boyle: Of course, because basically he is aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity in Palestine.

Dennis Bernstein: Is the United States participating in illegal actions in Israel, or doesn't it matter anymore?

Francis Boyle: For most of the Arab and Muslim world, it matters. Here in the United States, apart from the BDS movement, we have basically thrown in our lot with the Israeli government. Congress has been bought and paid for by the Israel lobby. During his campaign, Trump made explicit promises in order to secure Jewish funding and votes.

We arm, equip, supply and train Israel. What is going on in Gaza right now is a form of genocide. They are being strangled to death. The 1948 Genocide Convention, to which both Israel and the United States are parties, says that "deliberately inflicting on a people conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction in whole or in part" is genocide. That is exactly what is going on in Gaza today.

Dennis Bernstein: How would you assess the situation now? Is a two-state solution at all viable?

Francis Boyle: That is for the Palestinians to decide. Their right of self determination is at stake here. As of today, their official position is two states with their capital in East Jerusalem. There have been hints that they might go back to the one-state solution, which was their position before the Palestinian Declaration of Independence of December 15, 1988, when they officially accepted a two-state solution. Since then they have gotten nothing. Every day Israel just steals more land and drives out more Palestinians.

Dennis Bernstein: Are there any options for the Palestinians in the international arena, for example, at the United Nations?

Francis Boyle: I have advised them to invoke the "Uniting for Peace" resolution

adopted by the general assembly in 1950, so that they can be admitted to the UN General Assembly as a full-fledged UN member state, recognizing their capital as East Jerusalem. And, as you know, after Palestine became a UN observer state, you and I discussed the concept of a “legal intifada” that the Palestinians could pursue.

My advice to the Palestinians is a full-court press in all specialized United Nations agencies and affiliated organizations, using all available legal mechanisms. This would include suing Israel at the International Court of Justice, which I have offered to do for them. And of course they have filed a complaint against Israel for war crimes and crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court. According to press reports, they are meeting right now to decide what to do and President Abbas will soon be addressing the Palestinian people.

Dennis Bernstein: I suppose it is important to emphasize the fact that this could turn very violent.

Francis Boyle: I am afraid so. This could turn into the third intifada. The First Intifada, which took place in 1987, was spontaneous. The Second Intifada [September 2000-February 2005] was provoked when Ariel Sharon went to the Al-Aqsa mosque with a couple hundred soldiers. Eventually, about 3,000 Palestinians lost their lives as a result.

Now we have Trump provoking the situation. His people, including Bannon and Flynn, know exactly what they are doing. They believe in Sam Huntington’s concept of “the clash of civilizations.” They truly believe that they are leading a crusade against the Muslim world. This is being done very deliberately.

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Russia-gate’s Litany of Corrections

Exclusive: As much as the U.S. mainstream media insists that the Russia-gate scandal is growing, what is undeniably growing is the list of major corrections that news outlets have been forced to issue, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. mainstream media's year-long hysteria over Russia's alleged role in the election of Donald Trump has obliterated normal reporting standards leading to a rash of journalistic embarrassments that have both disgraced the profession and energized Trump's backers over new grievances about the MSM's "fake news."



Misguided groupthink is always a danger when key elements of the Washington establishment and the major news media share the same belief – whether that is Iraq's supposed possession of WMD or the need to bring down some foreign or domestic leader unpopular with the elites.

Yet, we have rarely witnessed such a cascading collapse of journalistic principles as has occurred around the Russia-gate "scandal." It is hard to keep track of all the corrections or to take note of all the dead ends that the investigation keeps finding.

But anyone who dares note the errors, the inconsistencies or the illogical claims is either dismissed as a "Kremlin stooge" or a "Trump enabler." The national Democrats and the mainstream media seem determined to keep hurtling down the Russia-gate roadway assuming that the evidentiary barriers ahead will magically disappear at some point and the path to Trump's impeachment will be clear.

On Friday, the rush to finally prove the Russia-gate narrative led CNN – and then CBS News and MSNBC – to trumpet an email supposedly sent from someone named Michael J. Erickson on Sept. 4, 2016, to Donald Trump Jr. that involved WikiLeaks offering the Trump campaign pre-publication access to purloined Democratic National Committee emails that WikiLeaks published on Sept. 13, nine days later.

With CNN finally tying together the CIA's unproven claim that WikiLeaks collaborates with Russia and the equally unproven claim that Russian intelligence "hacked" the Democratic emails, CNN drew the noose more tightly around the Trump campaign for "colluding" with Russia.

After having congressional reporter Manu Raju lay out the supposed facts of the scoop, CNN turned to a panel of legal experts to pontificate about the crimes that the Trump campaign may have committed now that the "evidence" proving Russia-gate was finally coming together.

Not surprisingly the arrival of this long-awaited “proof” of Russian “collusion” exploded across social media. As The Intercept’s Glenn Greenwald noted in an article critical of the media’s performance, some Russia-gate enthusiasts heralded the CNN revelation with graphics of cannons booming and nukes exploding.

The problem, however, was that CNN and other news outlets that jumped on the story misreported the date of the email; it was Sept. 14, 2016, i.e., the day *after* WikiLeaks released the batch of DNC emails, not Sept. 4. In other words, it appeared that “Erickson” – whoever he was – was simply alerting the Trump campaign to the WikiLeaks disclosure.

CNN later issued a quiet correction to its inflammatory report – and not surprisingly people close to Trump cited the false claim as yet another example of “fake news” being spread by the mainstream media, which has put itself at the forefront of the anti-Trump Resistance over the past year.

But this sloppy journalism – compounded by CNN’s rush to put the “Sept. 4 email” in some criminal context and with CBS and MSNBC panting close behind – was not a stand-alone screw-up. A week earlier, ABC News made a similar mistake in claiming that candidate Donald Trump instructed Michael Flynn to contact Russian officials during the campaign, when Trump actually made the request after the election when Flynn was national security adviser-designate, a thoroughly normal move for a President-elect to make. That botched story led ABC News to suspend veteran investigative reporter Brian Ross.

Another inaccurate report from Bloomberg News, The Wall Street Journal and other news outlets – that Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller had subpoenaed Deutsche Bank records of President Trump and his family – was denied by Trump’s lawyer and later led to more corrections. The error apparently was that the bank records were not those of Trump and his family but possibly other associates.

A Pattern of Bias

But it wasn’t just a bad week for American mainstream journalism. The string of errors followed a pattern of earlier false and misleading reporting and other violations of journalistic standards, a sorry record that has been the hallmark of the Russia-gate “scandal.” Many stories have stirred national outrage toward nuclear-armed Russia before petering out as either false or wildly exaggerated. [See, for instance, Consortiumnews.com’s “Russia-gate Jumps the Shark.”]

As Greenwald noted, “So numerous are the false stories about Russia and Trump over the last year that I literally cannot list them all.”

The phenomenon began in the weeks after Trump’s shocking victory over Hillary

Clinton as Democrats and the mainstream media looked for people to blame for the defeat of their much-preferred candidate.

So, on Thanksgiving Day, just weeks after the election, The Washington Post published a front-page story based on an anonymous group called PropOrNot accusing 200 Web sites of acting as propaganda agents for Russia. The list included some of the Internet's leading independent news sources, including Consortiumnews, but the Post did not bother to contact the slandered Web sites nor to dissect the dubious methodology of the unnamed accusers.

Apparently, the "crime" of the Web sites was to show skepticism toward the State Department's claims about Syria and Ukraine. In conflating a few isolated cases of "fake news" in which people fabricated stories for political or profitable ends with serious dissent regarding the demonizing of Russia and its allies, the Post was laying down a marker that failure to get in line behind the U.S. government's propaganda on these and other topics would get you labeled a "Kremlin tool."

As the Russia-gate hysteria built in the run-up to Trump's inauguration during the final weeks of the Obama administration, the Post also jumped on a claim from the Department of Homeland Security that Russian hackers had penetrated into the nation's electrical grid through Vermont's Burlington Electric.

As journalist Gareth Porter noted, "The Post failed to follow the most basic rule of journalism, relying on its DHS source instead of checking with the Burlington Electric Department first. The result was the Post's sensational Dec. 30 story under the headline 'Russian hackers penetrated U.S. electricity grid through a utility in Vermont, U.S. officials say.' ...

"The electric company quickly issued a firm denial that the computer in question was connected to the power grid. The Post was forced to retract, in effect, its claim that the electricity grid had been hacked by the Russians. But it stuck by its story that the utility had been the victim of a Russian hack for another three days before admitting that no such evidence of a hack existed."

The Original Sin

In other cases, major news outlets, such as The New York Times, reported dubious Russia-gate claims from U.S. intelligence agencies as flat fact, rather than unproven allegations that remain in serious dispute. The Times and others reported Russian "hacking" of Democratic emails as true even though WikiLeaks denied getting the material from the Russians and the Russians denied providing it.

For months into 2017, in dismissing or ignoring those denials, the U.S.

mainstream media reported routinely that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the conclusion that Russia was behind the disclosure of Democratic emails as part of a plot initiated by Russian President Vladimir Putin to help elect Trump. Anyone who dared question this supposed collective judgment of all the U.S. intelligence agencies risked being called a “conspiracy theorist” or worse.

But the “consensus” claim was never true. Such a consensus judgment would have called for a comprehensive National Intelligence Estimate, which was never commissioned on the Russian “hacking” issue. Instead there was something called an “Intelligence Community Assessment” on Jan. 6 that – according to testimony by President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in May 2017 – was put together by “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies: the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

Even after Clapper’s testimony, the “consensus” canard continued to circulate. For instance, in The New York Times’ White House Memo of June 25, correspondent Maggie Haberman mocked Trump for “still refus[ing] to acknowledge a basic fact agreed upon by 17 American intelligence agencies that he now oversees: Russia orchestrated the attacks, and did it to help get him elected.”

Finally, the Times ran a correction appended to that article. The Associated Press ran a similar “clarification” applied to some of its fallacious reporting which used the “17-intelligence-agencies” meme.

After the correction, however, the Times simply shifted to other deceptive wording to continue suggesting that U.S. intelligence agencies were in accord on Russian “hacking.” Other times, the Times just asserted the claim of Russian email hacking as flat fact. All of this was quite unprofessional, since the Jan. 6 “assessment” itself stated that it was not asserting Russian “hacking” as fact, explaining: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact.”

Even worse than the Times, the “fact-checking” site Politifact, which is part of Google’s First Draft Coalition for deciding what the search engine’s algorithms will promote as true and what information will be disappeared as false, simply decided to tough it out and continued insisting that the false “consensus” claim was true.

When actual experts, such as former National Security Agency technical director William Binney, sought to apply scientific analysis to the core claim about Russian “hacking,” they reached the unpopular conclusion that the one known download speed of a supposed “hack” was not possible over the Internet but closely matched what would occur via a USB download, i.e., from someone with

direct access to the Democratic National Committee's computers using a thumb drive. In other words, the emails more likely came from a DNC insider, not an external "hack" from the Russians or anyone else.

You might have thought that the U.S. news media would have welcomed Binney's discovery. However, instead he was either ignored or mocked as a "conspiracy theorist." The near-religious belief in the certainty of the Russian "hack" was not to be mocked or doubted.

'Hand-picked' Trouble

In recent days, former DNI Clapper's reference to "hand-picked" analysts for the Jan. 6 report has also taken on a more troubling odor, since questions have been raised about the objectivity of the Russia-gate investigators and – as any intelligence expert will tell you – if you "hand-pick" analysts known for their personal biases, you are hand-picking the conclusion, a process that became known during the Reagan administration as "politicizing intelligence."

Though little is known about exactly who was "hand-picked" by President Obama's intelligence chiefs to assess the Russian "hacking" suspicions, Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller has been forced to reassign Peter Strzok, one of the top FBI investigators who worked on both the Hillary Clinton email-server case and the Trump-Russia inquiry, after it was discovered that he exchanged anti-Trump and pro-Clinton text messages with a lawyer who also works at the FBI.

Last week, Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee sought answers from new FBI Director Christopher Wren about Strzok's role in clearing Hillary Clinton of criminal wrongdoing in her use of a private unsecured email server to handle official State Department communications while Secretary of State. They also wanted to know what role in the Russia-gate probe was played by a Democratic-funded "opposition research" report from ex-British intelligence officer Christopher Steele, which included unverified hearsay claims by unnamed Russians about Trump.

Wren avoided direct answers by citing an ongoing Inspector General's review and Mueller's criminal investigation, but Republicans expressed displeasure at this evasiveness.

The Republican questions prompted E.J. Dionne Jr., a liberal columnist at The Washington Post, to publish a spirited attack on the GOP committee members, accusing them of McCarthyistic tactics in questioning the FBI's integrity.

Dionne's straw man was to postulate that Republicans – because of this discovery of anti-Trump bias – would discount evidence that proves Trump's collusion with

Russia: “if Strzok played some role in developing [the] material. ... Trump’s allies want us to say: Too bad the president lied or broke the law or that Russia tried to tilt our election. This FBI guy sending anti-Trump texts is far more important, so let’s just forget the whole thing. Really?”

But the point is that no such evidence of Russian collusion has been presented and to speculate how people might react if such evidence is discovered is itself McCarthyistic, suggesting guilt based on hypotheticals, not proof. Whatever one thinks of Trump, it is troubling for Dionne or anyone to imply treasonous activities based on speculation. That is the sort of journalistic malfeasance that has contributed to the string of professional abuses that pervades Russia-gate.

What we are witnessing is such an intense desire by mainstream journalists to get credit for helping oust Trump from office that they have forgotten that journalism’s deal with the public should be to treat everyone fairly, even if you personally disdain the subject of your reporting.

Journalists are always going to get criticized when they dig up information that puts some politician or public figure in a negative light, but that’s why it’s especially important for journalists to strive for genuine fairness and not act as if journalism is just another cover for partisan hatchetmen.

The loss of faith among large swaths of Americans in the professionalism of journalists will ultimately do severe harm to the democratic process by transforming information into just one more ideological weapon. Some would say that the damage has already been done.

It was, if you recall, the U.S. mainstream media that started the controversy over “fake news,” expanding the concept from the few low-lives who make up stories for fun and profit into a smear against anyone who expressed skepticism toward State Department narratives on foreign conflicts. That was the point of The Washington Post’s PropOrNot story.

But now many of these same mainstream outlets are livid when Trump and his backers throw the same “fake news” epithet back at the major media. The sad truth is that The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, MSNBC and other leading news organizations that have let their hatred of Trump blind them from their professional responsibilities have made Trump’s job easy.

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](#)).

National Democrats Resist Reforms

Still refusing to face why Donald Trump and the Republicans won in 2016, the national Democratic Party rebuffs proposals from progressives to make the party more democratic and less corporate-dominated, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

With the Democratic Party's "Unity Reform Commission" now history, major political forces are entering a new stage of contention over the future of the party. Seven months after the commission's first meeting – and nine months after Hillary Clinton backer Tom Perez won a close election over Bernie Sanders supporter Keith Ellison to become chair of the Democratic National Committee – the battle lines are coming into focus for next year.

The commission's final meeting adjourned on Saturday after a few steps toward democratizing the party had won approval – due to the grassroots strength of progressives. But the recommendations from the commission will go to the Rules and Bylaws Committee, which was one of the DNC decision-making bodies that Perez subjected to a purge two months ago. Now, in the words of Jim Zogby (who was removed from the Executive Committee by Perez), "There are virtually no Bernie supporters on the Rules and Bylaws Committee."

When the latest Unity Reform Commission meeting got underway, Perez talked a lot about unity. But kicking Sanders supporters off of key DNC committees is the ugly underside of an ongoing dual discourse. (Are we supposed to believe Perez's soothing words or our own eyes?) And party unity behind a failed approach – internally undemocratic and politically hitched to corporate wagons – would hardly be auspicious.

"Emerging sectors of the electorate are compelling the Democratic Party to come to terms with adamant grassroots rejection of economic injustice, institutionalized racism, gender inequality, environmental destruction and corporate domination," says the recent report "[Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis](#)" (which I co-authored). The report adds: "Siding with the people who constitute the base isn't truly possible when party leaders seem to be afraid of them."

DNC Chairman Perez and allied power brokers keep showing that they're afraid of the party's progressive base. No amount of appealing rhetoric changes that reality.

“We pride ourselves on being inclusive and welcoming to all,” the Democratic National Committee proclaimed anew at the start of this month, touting the commission meeting as “open to the public.” Yet the DNC delayed and obscured information about the meeting, never replying to those who filled out an online RSVP form – thus leaving them in the dark about the times of the meeting. In short, the DNC went out of its way to suppress public turnout rather than facilitate it.

Rebuking the DNC

One member of the task force that wrote the Autopsy, Karen Bernal, is the chair of the Progressive Caucus of the California Democratic Party. After traveling across the country and sitting in the sparse audience during the first day of the Unity Reform Commission meeting, she took the liberty of speaking up as the second day got underway. Bernal provided a firm rebuke of the DNC’s efforts to suppress public attendance.

“For all of the talk about wanting to improve and reform and make this party more transparent, the exact opposite has happened,” Bernal told the commission. (Her intervention, which lasted a little more than two minutes, aired in full on C-SPAN.)

On Sunday, a mass email from Zogby via Our Revolution summed up: “We are fighting for racial, social, economic, and environmental justice. The Democratic Party needs everyone, regardless of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, country of origin, language, or socioeconomic status, to be deeply involved in order to change the course of this country.”

For those reasons, he added, “we are calling for an end to superdelegates, [for] open primaries and caucuses, [for] same-day registration, and [for] more transparent, fair, and accountable leadership at the helm of the DNC.”

Overall, the commission approved some recommendations that were partial victories for progressives. Among the most notable: It called for reducing the number of notoriously undemocratic superdelegates to the national convention from 712 to about 300, while the only democratic number would be zero.

[Superdelegates are party insiders who are not chosen through a primary or caucus but nevertheless get to vote for the party’s nominees. In 2016, they broke overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton.]

The commission somewhat improved transparency for often-dubious DNC contracts with high-paid consultants and vendors, while defeating sensible amendments by commission member Nomiki Konst – who spoke with notable clarity about the need to clamp down on financial conflicts of interest among DNC decision-makers.

The eight Sanders appointees – Konst, Zogby, Larry Cohen, Lucy Flores, Jane Kleeb, Gus Newport, Nina Turner and Jeff Weaver – put up a good fight as members of the Unity Reform Commission. They were outnumbered, and on key issues were often outvoted, by the 13 who'd been selected by Clinton or Perez. Next year, the odds to overcome will be much worse.

With the purged Rules and Bylaws Committee now overwhelmingly stacked against progressives, only massive pressure from the grassroots will be able to sustain momentum toward a democratic Democratic Party. Meanwhile, corporate forces will do all they can to prevent the Democratic Party from living up to its first name.

Norman Solomon, the national coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org, is a member of the task force that wrote "Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis." His books include *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.

Missing the Significance of Israel-gate

Amid the U.S. mainstream media's hyping of Russia-gate, there has been much less attention given to what some call "Israel-gate," evidence that Israel was wielding much more behind-the-scenes influence, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

President Trump's decision to begin moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to the disputed city of Jerusalem – and disclosure that first-son-in-law Jared Kushner failed to disclose his role in a foundation funding Israeli settlements and lobbied against a United Nations' resolution critical of those settlements during the transition – are reminders that the foreign government with truly broad influence over U.S. politics is Israel.

Trump's Jerusalem announcement also threatened to touch off more disorder in the Middle East, which Ali Abunimah, co-founder of the Electronic Intifada, says reflected the Trump administration's determination to demand a full capitulation by the Palestinians. I spoke with Abunimah on Dec. 5.

Dennis Bernstein: We turn our attention back to occupied Palestine. We have now seen the kind of policy we are going to get from the Trump administration.

Jared Kushner has described bringing peace to the region as his dream. We are going to talk about that in the context of his investment in settlements there.

I suppose the central issue in Palestine this week is whether the embassy is going to be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and what will the timing be, as in, will it happen some time soon?

Ali Abunimah: Actually, it will not be moved any time soon. Trump will announce tomorrow [Dec. 6] that the US is recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital but he will also sign a waiver delaying the move for another six months and the whole process will likely take years.

Dennis Bernstein: How bad is the situation now? We know that settlements are being built apace, that the repression continues in the Gaza Strip, where life is barely livable.

Ali Abunimah: It is interesting that no one is actually talking about what is happening on the ground in Jerusalem, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians there are facing systematic ethnic cleansing by Israel. This includes home demolitions, revocation of residency rights, land confiscations.

In the words of B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, since the occupation of East Jerusalem began in 1967, Israel has treated Palestinians in the city as "unwanted immigrants" and worked systematically to drive them out of the area.

Whatever Trump announces tomorrow will not change the situation. The so-called international community is doing nothing about it and is letting Israel get away with it.

Dennis Bernstein: Jared Kushner is a broker for illegal settlements.

Ali Abunimah: He is a donor to illegal settlements, a philanthropist for illegal settlements. How many headlines have been devoted to Kushner failing to disclose important information in his government ethics filings? The latest is that he failed to disclose the fact that he was a director of his family's foundation, which has donated to building settlements in the occupied West Bank, particularly the settlement of Beit El, the same settlement that receives philanthropic donations from David Friedman, Trump's ambassador in Tel Aviv.

Kushner, who is supposedly charged with coming up with a peace plan, is actually busy funding settlements. Kushner's family are close friends of Benjamin Netanyahu. It is just farcical to pretend that anyone like Jared Kushner could ever be an honest broker.

Dennis Bernstein: Is all of this legal?

Ali Abunimah: That's questionable. Actually, in the past year there were lawsuits filed challenging this massive multi-billion dollar flow of tax-deductible, so-called charitable funds for illegal purposes, including the

construction of settlements and massive donations to groups like Friends of the IDF.

Another issue is this whole business of what Jared Kushner was doing during the transition, when he was trying to undermine the policy of the sitting Obama administration and stop the UN Security Council resolution passed last December condemning Israeli settlements. This all came out in the context of the Mueller investigation and Michael Flynn's guilty plea, which revealed not so much a collusion with Russia as a very close collusion between the Trump transition and Israel.

Dennis Bernstein: You would think then that MSNBC, which makes a living on pumping up Russiagate, would want to jump into this case of collusion.

Ali Abunimah: The Michael Flynn revelation did not show collusion with Russia and certainly did not show any interference in the US election. What Flynn pled guilty to was lying about two meetings. Flynn is a serial liar, he lied about his work for the Turkish government.

The facts that were filed in the documents with his plea show that a "very senior member" of the Trump transition team, who has since been identified as Jared Kushner, had ordered Flynn to contact every member of the UN Security Council to try to defeat this resolution criticizing Israel. It was also reported in The New York Times that Kushner had acted at the urging of Netanyahu.

None of this has anything to do with Russian interference in the elections.

What it does show is clear collusion at the highest level with a foreign government [Israel] to undermine and sabotage the policy of the sitting administration.

Dennis Bernstein: It doesn't appear that Arab outrage is going to have much influence over what happens with this plan to move the capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Ali Abunimah: On the contrary, I think that it has actually been facilitated by the fact that Saudi Arabia, which markets itself as the guardian of Islam, has been engaging in this major rapprochement with Israel, pressuring the Palestinians to accept what amounts to surrender, in order to get them out of the way so that Saudi Arabia and Israel can embrace each other and go to war together against Iran.

The New York Times reported details of the so-called Trump peace plan that Jared Kushner has been putting together, which basically creates a Palestinian state in name only. The Palestinians would have very limited autonomy in very small

non-contiguous areas of the West Bank. They would have no control, no sovereignty, no capital in East Jerusalem, no right of return for refugees, and so on. But they would be free to call this a Palestinian state if they want to.

All of this sounds familiar to people who have followed this issue because this is a rehashing of the kind of schemes that have been put forward since the 1990's. What is different this time is that Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority leader, was called to Riyadh last month and told by Mohammad bin Salman that he was going to accept this or else. The thinking behind it is that the Palestinian issue is a thorn in the side of the Saudi/Israeli alliance that wants to escalate the catastrophic confrontation with Iran.

Dennis Bernstein: How does the crisis with the prime minister in Lebanon play into all of this?

Ali Abunimah: The Saudis have been behind so many of the regional disasters, including escalating the situation in Syria by funding a proxy war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people. For two years they have been bombing the poorest Arab country, Yemen, with millions suffering famine and tens of thousands killed and injured. Saudi Arabia has been unable to defeat the people resisting them in Yemen. They were trying to destabilize Lebanon and that failed because [Prime Minister] Hariri went home and rescinded his forced resignation under pressure from the Saudis.

Dennis Bernstein: I guess maybe the one silver lining in all of this is the boycott/divestment movement. There is not much else going on in terms of global resistance to the brutality in occupied Palestine.

Ali Abunimah: I suppose it is possible to look at all of this and just feel immobilized and hopeless. But I think it is important to feel hope as well. Even in Jerusalem, Palestinians have been standing up to Israel and winning victories, as they did this summer when they forced Israel to back down from its efforts to impose stricter control on entrance to the al-Aqsa mosque compound. That was a real victory for people power in Jerusalem against one of the strongest armies in the world.

Despite a twenty-fold increase in lobbying, Israel has not been able to stop the "impressive growth" of the Palestine solidarity movement, particularly the boycott/divestment/sanctions movement. So it's not time to be hopeless, it's time to get on with the work, because there is lots to do and people power is still winning victories.

Dennis Bernstein: I guess you could say that proof of those victories is the amount of repression and clamp-down of Palestinian students and their supporters

all over the country.

Ali Abunimah: And it is across the board now, including the effort of the big Silicon Valley companies who are helping the establishment to censor and limit the reach of independent media like us. They know that people are listening and we are powerful, even though we may sometimes feel small in the face of the forces that are trying to reshape the world.

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

Sucking Liberals into a New Cold War

Out of fury against President Trump, many liberals have enlisted in the ranks of the New Cold War against Russia, seeming to have forgotten the costs to rationality and lives from the first Cold War, warns William Blum.

By William Blum

Cold War Number One: 70 years of daily national stupidity. Cold War Number Two: Still in its youth, but just as stupid.

“He said he absolutely did not meddle in our election. He did not do what they are saying he did.” – President Trump re Russian President Vladimir Putin after their meeting in Vietnam. [*Washington Post*, Nov. 12, 2017]

Putin later added that he knew “absolutely nothing” about Russian contacts with Trump campaign officials. “They can do what they want, looking for some sensation. But there are no sensations.”

Numerous U.S. intelligence agencies have said otherwise. Former Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, responded to Trump’s remarks by declaring: “The president was given clear and indisputable evidence that Russia interfered in the election.”

As we’ll see below, there isn’t too much of the “clear and indisputable” stuff. And this of course is the same James Clapper who made an admittedly false statement to Congress in March 2013, when he responded, “No, sir” and “not wittingly” to a question about whether the National Security Agency was collecting “any type of data at all” on millions of Americans. Lies don’t usually come in any size larger than that.

Virtually every member of Congress who has publicly stated a position on the issue has criticized Russia for interfering in the 2016 American presidential election. And it would be very difficult to find a member of the mainstream media who has questioned this thesis.

What is the poor consumer of news to make of these gross contradictions? Here are some things to keep in mind:

How do we know that the tweets and advertisements “sent by Russians” -- those presented as attempts to sway the vote -- were actually sent by Russians? The Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs), composed of National Security Agency and CIA veterans, recently declared that the CIA knows how to disguise the origin of emails and tweets. The *Washington Post* has as well reported that Twitter “makes it easy for users to hide their true identities.” [Washington Post, Oct. 10, 2017]

Russians! Russians! Russians!

Even if these communications were actually sent from Russia, how do we know that they came from the Russian government, and not from any of the other 144.3 million residents of Russia?

Even if they were sent by the Russian government, we have to ask: Why would they do that? Do the Russians think the United States is a Third World, under-developed, backward Banana Republic easily influenced and moved by a bunch of simple condemnations of the plight of blacks in America and the Clinton “dynasty”? Or clichéd statements about other controversial issues, such as gun rights and immigration? If so, many Democratic and Republican officials would love to know the secret of the Russians’ method. Consider also that Facebook has stated that 90 percent of the alleged-Russian-bought content that ran on its network did not even mention Trump or Clinton. [Washington Post, Nov. 15, 2017]

On top of all this is the complete absence of even the charge, much less with any supporting evidence, of Russian interference in the actual voting or counting of votes.

After his remark suggesting he believed Putin’s assertion that there had been no Russian meddling in the election, Trump – of course, as usual – attempted to backtrack and distance himself from his words after drawing criticism at home; while James Clapper declared: “The fact the president of the United States would take Putin at his word over that of the intelligence community is quite simply unconscionable.” [Reuters, Nov. 12, 2017]

Given Clapper’s large-size lie referred to above, can Trump be faulted for being skeptical of the intelligence community’s Holy Writ? Purposeful lies of the

intelligence community during the first Cold War were legendary, many hailed as brilliant tactics when later revealed. The CIA, for example, had phony articles and editorials planted in foreign newspapers (real Fake News), made sex films of target subjects caught *in flagrante delicto* who had been lured to Agency safe houses by female agents, had Communist embassy personnel expelled because of phony CIA documents, and much more.

The *Post* recently published an article entitled “How did Russian trolls get into your Facebook feed? Silicon Valley made it easy.” In the midst of this “exposé,” The *Post* stated: “There’s no way to tell if you personally saw a Russian post or tweet.” [*Washington Post*, Nov. 2, 2017]

A Case or Not?

So ... Do the Cold Warriors have a case to make or do they not? Or do they just want us to remember that the Russkis are bad? So it goes.

An organization in Czechoslovakia with the self-appointed name of European Values has produced a lengthy report entitled “The Kremlin’s Platform for ‘Useful Idiots’ in the West: An Overview of RT’s Editorial Strategy and Evidence of Impact.” It includes a long list of people who have appeared on the Russian-owned TV station RT (formerly *Russia Today*), which can be seen in the U.S., the U.K. and other countries. Those who’ve been guests on RT are the “idiots” useful to Moscow. (The list is not complete. I’ve been on RT about five times, but I’m not listed. Where is my Idiot Badge?)

RT’s YouTube channel has more than two million followers and claims to be the “most-watched news network” on the video site. Its Facebook page has more than 4 million likes and followers. Can this explain why the powers-that-be forget about a thing called freedom-of-speech and treat the station like an enemy? The U.S. government recently forced *RT America* to register as a foreign agent and has cut off the station’s Congressional press credentials.

The Cold War strategist, George Kennan, wrote prophetically: “Were the Soviet Union to sink tomorrow under the waters of the ocean, the American military-industrial establishment would have to go on, substantially unchanged, until some other adversary could be invented. Anything else would be an unacceptable shock to the American economy.”

Writer John Wight has described the new Cold War as being “in response to Russia’s recovery from the demise of the Soviet Union and the failed attempt to turn the country into a wholly owned subsidiary of Washington via the imposition of free market economic shock treatment thereafter.”

So let’s see what other brilliance the New Cold War brings us. ... Ah yes, another

headline in the *Post* (Nov. 18, 2017): “British alarm rising over possible Russian meddling in Brexit.” Of course, why else would the British people have voted to leave the European Union? But wait a moment, again, one of the British researchers behind the report “said that the accounts they analyzed – which claimed Russian as their language when they were set up but tweeted in English – posted a mixture of pro-‘leave’ and pro-‘remain’ messages regarding Brexit. Commentators have said that the goal may simply have been to sow discord and division in society.”

Was there ever a time when the *Post* would have been embarrassed to be so openly, amateurishly biased about Russia? Perhaps during the few years between the two Cold Wars.

In case you don't remember how stupid Cold War Number One was ...

- 1948: The *Pittsburgh Press* published the names, addresses, and places of employment of about 1,000 citizens who had signed presidential-nominating petitions for former Vice President Henry Wallace, running under the Progressive Party. This, and a number of other lists of “communists,” published in the mainstream media, resulted in people losing their jobs, being expelled from unions, having their children abused, being denied state welfare benefits, and suffering various other punishments.
- Around 1950: The House Committee on Un-American Activities published a pamphlet, “100 Things You Should Know About Communism in the U.S.A.” This included information about what a communist takeover of the United States would mean: ?Q: What would happen to my insurance?? A: It would go to the Communists.? Q: Would communism give me something better than I have now?? A: Not unless you are in a penitentiary serving a life sentence at hard labor.
- 1950s: Mrs. Ada White, member of the Indiana State Textbook Commission, believed that Robin Hood was a Communist and urged that books that told the Robin Hood story be banned from Indiana schools.
- As evidence that anti-communist mania was not limited to the lunatic fringe or conservative newspaper publishers, here is Clark Kerr, president of the University of California at Berkeley in a 1959 speech: “Perhaps 2 or even 20 million people have been killed in China by the new [communist] regime.” One person wrote to Kerr: “I am wondering how you would judge a person who estimates the age of a passerby on the street as being ‘perhaps 2 or even 20 years old.’ Or what would you think of a physician who tells you to take ‘perhaps 2 or even twenty teaspoonsful of a remedy’?”
- Throughout the cold war, traffic in phony Lenin quotes was brisk, each one passed around from one publication or speaker to another for years. Here's *S. News and World Report* in 1958 demonstrating communist duplicity by

quoting Lenin: "Promises are like pie crusts, made to be broken." Secretary of State John Foster Dulles used it in a speech shortly afterward, one of many to do so during the cold war. Lenin actually did use a very similar line, but he explicitly stated that he was quoting an English proverb (it comes from Jonathan Swift) and his purpose was to show the unreliability of the bourgeoisie, not of communists. "First we will take Eastern Europe, then the masses of Asia, then we will encircle the United States, which will be the last bastion of capitalism. We will not have to attack. It will fall like an overripe fruit into our hands." This Lenin "quotation" had the usual wide circulation, even winding up in the *Congressional Record* in 1962. This was not simply a careless attribution; this was an out-and-out fabrication; an extensive search, including by the Library of Congress and the United States Information Agency failed to find its origin.

- A favorite theme of the anti-communists was that a principal force behind drug trafficking was a communist plot to demoralize the United States. Here's a small sample: Don Keller, District Attorney for San Diego County, California in 1953: "We know that more heroin is being produced south of the border than ever before and we are beginning to hear stories of financial backing by big shot Communists operating out of Mexico City." Henry Giordano, Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, 1964, interviewed in the *American Legion Magazine*: Interviewer: "I've been told that the communists are trying to flood our country with narcotics to weaken our moral and physical stamina. Is that true?" Giordano: "As far as the drugs are concerned, it's true. There's a terrific flow of drugs coming out of Yunnan Province of China. ... There's no question that in that particular area this is the aim of the Red Chinese. It should be apparent that if you could addict a population you would degrade a nation's moral fiber." Fulton Lewis, Jr., prominent conservative radio broadcaster and newspaper columnist, 1965: "Narcotics of Cuban origin – marijuana, cocaine, opium, and heroin – are now peddled in big cities and tiny hamlets throughout this country. Several Cubans arrested by the Los Angeles police have boasted they are communists." We were also told that along with drugs another tool of the commies to undermine America's spirit was fluoridation of the water.
- Mickey Spillane was one of the most successful writers of the 1950s, selling millions of his anti-communist thriller mysteries. Here is his hero, Mike Hammer, in "One Lonely Night," boasting of his delight in the grisly murders he commits, all in the name of destroying a communist plot to steal atomic secrets. After a night of carnage, the triumphant Hammer gloats, "I shot them in cold blood and enjoyed every minute of it. I pumped slugs into the nastiest bunch of bastards you ever saw. ... They were Commies. ... Pretty soon what's left of Russia and the slime that breeds

there won't be worth mentioning and I'm glad because I had a part in the killing. God, but it was fun!"

- 1952: A campaign against the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) because it was tainted with "atheism and communism," and was "subversive" because it preached internationalism. Any attempt to introduce an international point of view in the schools was seen as undermining patriotism and loyalty to the United States. A bill in the U.S. Senate, clearly aimed at UNESCO, called for a ban on the funding of "any international agency that directly or indirectly promoted one-world government or world citizenship." There was also opposition to UNESCO's association with the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights on the grounds that it was trying to replace the American Bill of Rights with a less liberty-giving covenant of human rights.
- 1955: A U.S. Army 6-page pamphlet, "How to Spot a Communist," informed us that a communist could be spotted by his predisposition to discuss civil rights, racial and religious discrimination, the immigration laws, anti-subversive legislation, curbs on unions, and peace. Good Americans were advised to keep their ears stretched for such give-away terms as "chauvinism," "book-burning," "colonialism," "demagogy," "witch hunt," "reactionary," "progressive," and "exploitation." Another "distinguishing mark" of "Communist language" was a "preference for long sentences." After some ridicule, the Army rescinded the pamphlet.
- 1958: The noted sportscaster Bill Stern (one of the heroes of my innocent youth) observed on the radio that the lack of interest in "big time" football at New York University, City College of New York, Chicago, and Harvard "is due to the widespread acceptance of Communism at the universities."
- 1960: U.S. General Thomas Power speaking about nuclear war or a first strike by the U.S.: "The whole idea is to *kill* the bastards! At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win!" The response from one of those present was: "Well, you'd better make sure that they're a man and a woman."
- 1966: The Boys Club of America is of course wholesome and patriotic. Imagine their horror when they were confused with the Dubois Clubs. (W.E.B. Du Bois had been a very prominent civil rights activist.) When the Justice Department required the DuBois Clubs to register as a Communist front group, good loyal Americans knew what to do. They called up the Boys Club to announce that they would no longer contribute any money, or to threaten violence against them; and sure enough an explosion damaged the national headquarters of the youth group in San Francisco. Then former Vice President Richard Nixon, who was national board chairman of the Boys Club, declared: "This is an almost classic example of Communist deception and

duplicity. The 'DuBois Clubs' are not unaware of the confusion they are causing among our supporters and among many other good citizens."

- 1966: "Rhythm, Riots and Revolution: An Analysis of the Communist Use of Music, The Communist Master Music Plan," by David A. Noebel, published by Christian Crusade Publications, (expanded version of 1965 pamphlet: "Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles"). Some chapters: Communist Use of Mind Warfare ... Nature of Red Record Companies ... Destructive Nature of Beatle Music ... Communist Subversion of Folk Music ... Folk Music and the Negro Revolution ... Folk Music and the College Revolution
- 1968: William Calley, U.S. Army Lieutenant, charged with overseeing the massacre of more than 100 Vietnamese civilians in My Lai in 1968, said some years later: "In all my years in the Army I was never taught that communists were human beings. We were there to kill ideology carried by – I don't know – pawns, blobs, pieces of flesh. I was there to destroy communism. We never conceived of old people, men, women, children, babies."
- 1977: Scientists theorized that the earth's protective ozone layer was being damaged by synthetic chemicals called chlorofluorocarbons. The manufacturers and users of CFCs were not happy. They made life difficult for the lead scientist. The president of one aerosol manufacturing firm suggested that criticism of CFCs was "orchestrated by the Ministry of Disinformation of the KGB."
- 1978: Life inside a California youth camp of the ultra anti-communist John Birch Society: Five hours each day of lectures on communism, Americanism and "The Conspiracy"; campers learned that the Soviet government had created a famine and spread a virus to kill a large number of citizens and make the rest of them more manageable; the famine led starving adults to eat their children; communist guerrillas in Southeast Asia jammed chopsticks into children's ears, piercing their eardrums; American movies are all under the control of the Communists; the theme is always that capitalism is no better than communism; you can't find a dictionary now that isn't under communist influence; the communists are also taking over the Bibles.
- The Reagan administration declared that the Russians were spraying toxic chemicals over Laos, Cambodia and Afghanistan – the so-called "yellow rain" – and had caused more than ten thousand deaths by 1982 alone, (including, in Afghanistan, 3,042 deaths attributed to 47 separate incidents between the summer of 1979 and the summer of 1981, so precise was the information). Secretary of State Alexander Haig was a prime dispenser of such stories, and President Reagan himself denounced the Soviet Union thusly more than 15 times in documents and speeches. The "yellow rain," it turned out, was pollen-laden feces dropped by huge swarms of honeybees flying far overhead.
- 1982: In commenting about sexual harassment in the Army, General John

- Crosby stated that the Army doesn't care about soldiers' social lives – "The basic purpose of the United States Army is to kill Russians," he said.
- 1983: The U.S. invasion of Grenada, the home of the Cuban ambassador is damaged and looted by American soldiers; on one wall is written "AA," symbol of the 82nd Airborne Division; beside it the message: "Eat shit, commie faggot." ... "I want to fuck communism out of this little island," says a marine, "and fuck it right back to Moscow."
 - 1984: During a sound check just before his weekly broadcast, President Reagan spoke these words into the microphone: "My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you I have signed legislation to outlaw Russia, forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." His words were picked up by at least two radio networks.
 - 1985: October 29 BBC interview with Ronald Reagan: asked about the differences he saw between the U.S. and Russia, the President replied: "I'm no linguist, but I've been told that in the Russian language there isn't even a word for freedom." (The word is "svoboda.")
 - 1986: Soviet artists and cultural officials criticized Rambo-like American films as an expression of "anti-Russian phobia even more pathological than in the days of McCarthyism." Russian filmmaker Stanislav Rostofsky claimed that on one visit to an American school "a young girl trembled with fury when she heard I was from the Soviet Union, and said she hated Russians."
 - 1986: Roy Cohn, who achieved considerable fame and notoriety in the 1950s as an assistant to the communist-witch-hunting Sen. Joseph McCarthy, died, reportedly of AIDS. Cohn, though homosexual, had denied that he was and had denounced such rumors as communist smears.
 - 1986: After American journalist Nicholas Daniloff was arrested in Moscow for "spying" and held in custody for two weeks, New York Mayor Edward Koch sent a group of 10 visiting Soviet students storming out of City Hall in fury. "The Soviet government is the pits," said Koch, visibly shocking the students, ranging in age from 10 to 18 years. One 14-year-old student was so outraged he declared: "I don't want to stay in this house. I want to go to the bus and go far away from this place. The mayor is very rude. We never had a worse welcome anywhere." As matters turned out, it appeared that Daniloff had not been completely pure when it came to his newsgathering.
 - 1989: After the infamous Chinese crackdown on dissenters in Tiananmen Square in June, the U.S. news media was replete with reports that the governments of Nicaragua, Vietnam and Cuba had expressed their support of the Chinese leadership. Said the *Wall Street Journal*: "Nicaragua, with Cuba and Vietnam, constituted the only countries in the world to approve the Chinese Communists' slaughter of the students in Tiananmen Square." But it was all someone's fabrication; no such support had been expressed by any of

the three governments. At that time, as now, there were few, if any, organizations other than the CIA which could manipulate major Western media in such a manner. [Sources for almost all of this section can be found in William Blum, *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire* (2005), chapter 12; or the author can be queried at bblum6@aol.com]

NOTE: It should be remembered that the worst consequences of anti-communism were not those discussed above. The worst consequences, the ultra-criminal consequences, were the abominable death, destruction, and violation of human rights that we know under various names: Vietnam, Chile, Korea, Guatemala, Cambodia, Indonesia, Brazil, Greece, Afghanistan, El Salvador, and many others.

William Blum is an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <https://williamblum.org/> .]

The Tangled Threads of Russia-gate

Exclusive: Once a Washington groupthink takes hold, as it has in the fervent belief about Russia-gate, respect for facts and logic fly out the window since all these important people can't be wrong, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A curious feature about the Russia-gate "scandal" is that its proponents ignore the growing number of moments when their evidence undercuts their narrative. Instead, they press ahead toward a predetermined destination in much the way that true-believing conspiracy theorists are known to do.

For instance, The New York Times ran [a story](#) on Monday, entitled "Operative Offered Trump Campaign Access to Putin," detailing how a conservative operative "told a Trump adviser that he could arrange a back-channel meeting between Donald J. Trump and Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian president, according to an email sent to the Trump campaign" – and apparently described to the Times by a helpful source on Capitol Hill.

The Times quoted the email from National Rifle Association member Paul Erickson to Trump campaign adviser Rick Dearborn as saying, "Putin is deadly serious about building a good relationship with Mr. Trump. ... [Putin] wants to extend an

invitation to Mr. Trump to visit him in the Kremlin before the election.”

An NRA conference in Louisville, Kentucky, was supposed to be the location for the “first contact” between the Russians and the Trump campaign, according to the email.

The Times treated its new information as further confirmation of nefarious connections between the Trump campaign and the Russian government. Immediately after introducing this May 2016 email, which had the subject line, “Kremlin Connection,” the Times reprised the background of former FBI Director Robert Mueller conducting a special-prosecutor investigation into “Russian interference in the election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign.”

Note how the Times’ reference to “Russian interference” was treated as flat fact although the Times still hedges on “possible collusion” between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign. Like much of the U.S. mainstream media, the Times no longer bothers to use “alleged” in front of “Russian interference” even though no solid evidence of a coordinated Kremlin effort has been presented.

But there is a bigger problem with this “scoop”: If the Russia-gate narrative were correct – that the Kremlin had identified Trump years earlier as a likely U.S. president and undertook a multi-year campaign to bribe and blackmail him to be Moscow’s Manchurian candidate or Putin’s “puppet” as Hillary Clinton charged – the Russians wouldn’t need some little-known “conservative operative” to serve as an intermediary in May 2016 to set up a back-channel meeting.

The Contradiction

In other words, assuming that the Times’ story is correct, the email suggests the opposite of the impression that the Times wants its readers to get. The email is either meaningless in that it led to no actual meeting or it contradicts the storyline about a longstanding Russian operation to plant a patsy in the White House.

Times reporter Nicholas Fandos noted that it was unclear what Dearborn did in response to this overture, although the Times reported that Dearborn had forwarded a similar proposal by Christian conservative activist Rick Clay to Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, who rebuffed the offer.

On Monday, I read the rest of the Times email story looking for some acknowledgement of the problems with its implied scenario, but found none. Fandos made references to other low-level efforts by Russians to make contact with Trump’s advisers (without noticeable success, I might add), but again these examples actually run counter to the image of Trump as the Kremlin’s prized chump.

If Putin had several years ago foreseen what no one else did – that Trump would become the U.S. president – then these ad hoc contacts with members of Trump’s entourage in 2016 would not have been needed.

The Times’ scoop parallels the story of the plea deal that Russia-gate prosecutors struck with low-level Trump foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos who admitted lying about his contacts with an obscure academic in Stirling, Scotland, who supposedly offered to be another intermediary between Trump’s team and the Kremlin.

According to court documents, Papadopoulos, a 30-year-old campaign aide, got to know a professor of international relations who claimed to have “substantial connections with Russian government officials,” with the professor identified in press reports as Joseph Mifsud, who is associated with the University of Stirling.

The first contact between Mifsud and Papadopoulos supposedly occurred in mid-March 2016 in Italy, with a second meeting in London on March 24 when the professor purportedly introduced Papadopoulos to a Russian woman whom the young campaign aide believed to be Putin’s niece, an assertion that Mueller’s investigators determined wasn’t true.

Trump, who then was under pressure for not having a foreign policy team, included Papadopoulos as part of a list drawn up to fill that gap, and Papadopoulos participated in a campaign meeting on March 31 in Washington at which he suggested a meeting between Trump and Putin, a prospect that other senior aides reportedly slapped down.

In other words, at least based on the reporting about the Dearborn email and the Papadopoulos overture, there is no reason to believe that Trump was colluding with Moscow or had any significant relationship at all.

If these developments point to anything, it is to the opposite; that Russia was fishing for some contacts with what – however implausibly – was starting to look like a possible future U.S. president, but with whom they were not well-connected.

Gotcha Moments

There have been similar problems with other Russia-gate “gotcha” moments, such as disclosures of a possible Trump hotel deal in Moscow with Mikhail Fridman of Russia’s Alfa Bank. Though Trump’s presumed financial tie-ins to Russian oligarchs close to Putin were supposed to be fundamental to the Russia-gate narrative, the outcome of the hotel deal turned out to be a big nothing.

One source knowledgeable about the proposed deal told me it fell apart because Trump was willing to put little on the table beyond the branding value of the Trump name. However, if Putin were actually trying to buy Trump's loyalty, money presumably would have been no obstacle. Indeed, you would think that the more money used to line Trump's pockets the better. But the hotel deal collapsed; there is no Trump hotel in Moscow.

Other Russia-gate cases are equally disconnected from what had been the original narrative about senior Russians spending years cultivating Trump as their Manchurian candidate.

The accusations against Trump's onetime campaign chief Paul Manafort focus on his alleged failure to report income from – and pay taxes on – work that he did for the elected government of Ukraine before any involvement in the Trump campaign.

Last week's guilty plea from former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn related to purportedly false statements and omissions that he made when questioned by FBI agents about calls to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the transition, i.e., after Trump had been elected.

Despite the breathless coverage on MSNBC and the Times' excited headlines about how the "inquiry grows," there remain other core problems for the narrative. No matter how often the U.S. mainstream media asserts the suspicion of Russian "hacking" of Democratic emails as flat fact, no solid proof has yet been presented – and the claim has been denied by both the Russian government and WikiLeaks, which published the key emails.

Sleight of Hand

The Times and other mainstream media outlets play their sleight of hand on this key point by asserting that "U.S. intelligence agencies" have "concluded" that Russian intelligence services "hacked" the emails from the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chief John Podesta, but that summary ignores the specifics.

First of all, by using this summary of the facts, the Times and other outlets continue to give the false impression that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the conclusion, a false claim that Hillary Clinton and the mainstream press have asserted over and over, although it is now clear that no such consensus ever existed.

Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified that the Jan. 6 report on alleged Russian interference was produced by "hand-picked" analysts from only three organizations: the FBI, CIA and National Security Agency.

And, even those “hand-picked” analysts stipulated that they were not asserting Russian guilt as fact but only as their best guess. They included the disclaimer: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Even New York Times reporter Scott Shane initially noted the absence of evidence, writing: “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

Former senior U.S. intelligence officials, including the NSA’s ex-technical director William Binney, have raised further doubts about whether a “hack” occurred. Binney conducted tests on download speeds and determined that the extraction of one known batch of Democratic emails was not possible over the Internet, but did match the speed of a USB download onto a thumb drive, suggesting a leak from a Democratic insider.

So, rather than the many disparate strings of Russia-gate coming neatly together more than a year after last year’s election, the various threads either are becoming hopelessly tangled or flying off in different directions.

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).

How Russia-gate Rationalizes Censorship

Special Report: The Russia-gate hysteria has spread beyond simply a strategy for neutralizing Donald Trump or even removing him from office into an excuse for stifling U.S. dissent that challenges the New Cold War, reports Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

At the end of October, I wrote an article for *Consortiumnews* about the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton’s campaign paying for unvetted opposition research that became the basis for much of the disputed story about Russia allegedly interfering in the 2016 presidential election on

the orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The piece showed that the Democrats' two paid-for sources that have engendered belief in Russia-gate are at best shaky. First was former British spy Christopher Steele's largely unverified dossier of second- and third-hand opposition research portraying Donald Trump as something of a Russian Manchurian candidate.

And the second was CrowdStrike, an anti-Putin private company, examining the DNC's computer server to dubiously claim discovery of a Russian "hack." In a similar examination of an alleged hack of a Ukrainian artillery app, CrowdStrike also blamed Russia but used faulty data for its report that it was later forced to rewrite. CrowdStrike was hired after the DNC refused to allow the FBI to look at the server.

My piece also described the dangerous consequences of partisan Democratic faith in Russia-gate: a sharp increase in geopolitical tensions between nuclear-armed Russia and the U.S., and a New McCarthyism that is spreading fear – especially in academia, journalism and civil rights organizations – about questioning the enforced orthodoxy of Russia's alleged guilt.

After the article appeared at *Consortiumnews*, I tried to penetrate the mainstream by then publishing a version of the article on the *HuffPost*, which was rebranded from the *Huffington Post* in April this year by new management. As a contributor to the site since February 2006, I am trusted by *HuffPost* editors to post my stories directly online. However, within 24 hours of publication on Nov. 4, *HuffPost* editors retracted the article without any explanation.

This behavior breaks with the earlier principles of journalism that the Web site claimed to uphold. For instance, in 2008, Arianna Huffington told radio host Don Debar that, "We welcome all opinions, except conspiracy theories." She said: "Facts are sacred. That's part of our philosophy of journalism."

But Huffington stepped down as editor in August 2016 and has nothing to do with the site now. It is run by Lydia Polgreen, a former *New York Times* reporter and editor, who evidently has very different ideas. In April, she completely redesigned the site and renamed it *HuffPost*.

Before the management change, I had published several articles on the *Huffington Post* about Russia without controversy. For instance, *The Huffington Post* published my piece on Nov. 5, 2016, that predicted three days *before* the election that if Clinton lost she'd blame Russia. My point was reaffirmed by the campaign-insider book *Shattered*, which revealed that immediately after Clinton's loss, senior campaign advisers decided to blame Russia for her defeat.

On Dec. 12, 2016, I published another piece, which the *Huffington Post* editors promoted, called, “Blaming Russia To Overturn The Election Goes Into Overdrive.” I argued that “Russia has been blamed in the U.S. for many things and though proof never seems to be supplied, it is widely believed anyway.”

After I posted an updated version of the *Consortiumnews* piece – renamed “On the Origins of Russia-gate” – I was informed 23 hours later by a Facebook friend that the piece had been retracted by *HuffPost* editors. As a reporter for mainstream media for more than a quarter century, I know that a newsroom rule is that before the serious decision is made to retract an article the writer is contacted to be allowed to defend the piece. This never happened. There was no due process. A *HuffPost* editor ignored my email asking why it was taken down.

Support from Independent Media

Like the word “fascism,” “censorship” is an over-used and mis-used accusation, and I usually avoid using it. But without any explanation, I could only conclude that the decision to retract was political, not editorial.

I am non-partisan as I oppose both major parties for failing to represent millions of Americans’ interests. I follow facts where they lead. In this case, the facts led to an understanding that the Jan. 6 FBI/NSA/CIA intelligence “assessment” on alleged Russian election interference, prepared by what then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called “hand-picked” analysts, was based substantially on unvetted opposition research and speculation, not serious intelligence work.

The assessment even made the point that the analysts were not asserting that the alleged Russian interference was a fact. The report contained the disclaimer: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Under deadline pressure on Jan. 6, Scott Shane of *The New York Times* instinctively wrote what many readers of the report must have been thinking: “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

Yet, after the Jan. 6 report was published, leading Democrats asserted falsely that the “assessment” represented the consensus judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies – not just the views of “hand-picked” analysts from three – and much of the U.S. mainstream media began treating the allegations of

Russian “hacking” as flat fact, not as an uncertain conclusion denied by both the Russian government and WikiLeaks, which insists that it did not get the two batches of Democratic emails from Russia.

(There is also dissent inside the broader U.S. intelligence community about whether an alleged “hack” over the Internet was even possible based on the download speeds of one known data extraction, which matched what was possible from direct USB access to a computer, i.e., a download onto a thumb drive presumably by a Democratic insider,)

However, because of the oft-repeated “17 intelligence agencies” canard and the mainstream media’s careless reporting, the public impression has built up that the accusations against Russia are indisputable. If you ask a Russia-gate believer today what their faith is based on, they will invariably point to the Jan. 6 assessment and mock anyone who still expresses any doubt.

For instance, an unnamed former CIA officer told *The Intercept* last month, “You’ve got all these intelligence agencies saying the Russians did the hack. To deny that is like coming out with the theory that the Japanese didn’t bomb Pearl Harbor.”

That the supposedly dissident *Intercept* would use this quote is instructive about how imbalanced the media’s reporting on Russia-gate has been. We have actual film of Japanese planes attacking Pearl Harbor and American ships burning – and we have the eyewitness accounts of thousands of U.S. soldiers and sailors. Yet, on Russia-gate, we only have the opinions of some “hand-picked” intelligence officials who themselves say that they are not claiming that their opinions are fact. No serious editor would allow a self-interested and unnamed source to equate the two in print.

In this groupthink atmosphere, it was probably easy for *HuffPost* editors to hear some complaints from a few readers and blithely decide to ban my story. However, before it was pulled, 125 people had shared it. Ray McGovern, a former CIA analyst and frequent contributor to *Consortiumnews*, then took up my cause, being the first to write about the *HuffPost* censorship on his blog. McGovern included a link to a .pdf file that I captured of the censored HuffPost story. It has since been republished on numerous other websites.

Journalist Max Blumenthal tweeted about it. British filmmaker and writer Tariq Ali posted it on his Facebook page. Ron Paul and Daniel McAdams interviewed me at length about the censorship on their TV program. *ZeroHedge* wrote a widely shared piece and someone actually took the time, 27 minutes and 13 seconds to be exact, to read the entire article on YouTube. I began a petition to *HuffPost*’s Polgreen to either explain the retraction or restore the article. It has gained

more than 1,900 signatures so far. If a serious fact-check analysis was made of my article, it must exist and can and should be produced.

Watchdogs & Media Defending Censorship

Despite this support from independent media, a senior official at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, I learned, declined to take up my cause because he believes in the Russia-gate story. I also learned that a senior officer at the American Civil Liberties Union rejected my case because he too believes in Russia-gate. Both of these serious organizations were set up precisely to defend individuals in such situations on principle, not preference.

In terms of their responsibilities for defending journalism and protecting civil liberties, their personal opinions about whether Russia-gate is real or not should be irrelevant. The point is whether journalists should be permitted to show skepticism toward this latest dubiously based groupthink. I fear that – amid the frenzy about Russia and the animosity toward Trump – concerns about careers and funding are driving these decisions, with principles brushed aside.

One online publication decidedly took the *HuffPost's* side. Steven Perlberg, a media reporter for *BuzzFeed*, asked the *HuffPost* why they retracted my article. While ignoring me, the editors issued a statement to *BuzzFeed* saying that “Mr. Lauria’s self-published” piece was “later flagged by readers, and after deciding that the post contained multiple factually inaccurate or misleading claims, our editors removed the post per our contributor terms of use.” Those terms include retraction for “any reason,” including, apparently, censorship.

Perlberg posted the *HuffPost* statement on Twitter. I asked him if he inquired of the editors what those “multiple” errors and “misleading claims” were. I asked him to contact me to get my side of the story. Perlberg totally ignored me. He wrote nothing about the matter. He apparently believed the *HuffPost* and that was that. In this way, he acquiesced with the censorship.

BuzzFeed, of course, is the sensationalist outlet that irresponsibly published the Steele dossier in full, even though the accusations – not just about Donald Trump but also many other individuals – weren’t verified. Then on Nov. 14, *BuzzFeed* reporter Jason Leopold wrote one of the most ludicrous of a long line of fantastic Russia-gate stories, reporting that the Russian foreign ministry had sent money to Russian consulates in the U.S. “to finance the election campaign of 2016.” The scoop generated some screaming headlines before it became clear that the money was to pay for Russian citizens in the U.S. to vote in the 2016 Duma election.

That Russia-gate has reached this point, based on faith and not fact, was

further illustrated by a Facebook exchange I had with Gary Sick, an academic who served on the Ford and Carter national security staffs. When I pressed Sick for evidence of Russian interference, he eventually replied: “If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck...” When I told him that was a very low-bar for such serious accusations, he angrily cut off debate.

Part of this Russia-gate groupthink stems from the outrage – and even shame – that many Americans feel about Trump’s election. They want to find an explanation that doesn’t lay the blame on the U.S. citizenry or America’s current dysfunctional political/media process. It’s much more reassuring, in a way, to blame some foreign adversary while also discrediting Trump’s legitimacy as the elected president. That leaves open some hope that his election might somehow be negated.

And, so many important people and organizations seem to be verifying the Russia-gate suspicions that the theory must be true. Which is an important point. When belief in a story becomes faith-based or is driven by an intense self-interest, honest skeptics are pushed aside and trampled. That is the way groupthink works, as we saw in the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq when any doubts about Iraq possessing WMD made you a “Saddam apologist.”

As the groupthink grows, the true-believers become disdainful of facts that force them to think about what they already believe. They won’t waste time making a painstaking examination of the facts or engage in a detailed debate even on something as important and dangerous as a new Cold War with Russia.

This is the most likely explanation for the *HuffPost*’s censorship: a visceral reaction to having their Russia-gate faith challenged.

Why Critical News is Suppressed

But the *HuffPost*’s action is hardly isolated. It is part of a rapidly growing landscape of censorship of news critical of American corporate and political leaders who are trying to defend themselves from an increasingly angry population. It’s a story as old as civilization: a wealthy and powerful elite fending off popular unrest by trying to contain knowledge of how the insiders gain at the others’ expense, at home and abroad.

A lesson of the 2016 campaign was that growing numbers of Americans are fed up with three decades of neoliberal policies that have fabulously enriched the top tier of Americans and debased a huge majority of the citizenry. The population has likewise grown tired of the elite’s senseless wars to expand their own interests, which these insiders try to conflate with the entire country’s

interests.

America's bipartisan rulers are threatened by popular discontent from both left and right. They were alarmed by the Bernie Sanders insurgency and by Donald Trump's victory, even if Trump is now betraying the discontented masses who voted for him by advancing tax and health insurance plans designed to further crush them and benefit the wealthy.

Trump's false campaign promises will only make the rulers' problem of a restless population worse. Americans are subjected to economic inequality greater than in the first Gilded Age. They are also subjected today to more war than in the first Gilded Age. American rulers today are engaged in multiple conflicts following decades of post-World War II invasions and coups to expand their global interests.

People with wealth and power always seem to be nervous about losing both. So plutocrats use the concentrated media they own to suppress news critical of their wars and domestic repression. For example, almost nothing was reported about militarized police forces until the story broke out into the open in the Ferguson protests and much of that discontent has been brushed aside more recently.

Careerist journalists readily acquiesce in this suppression of news to maintain their jobs, their status and their lifestyles. Meanwhile, a growing body of poorly paid freelancers compete for the few remaining decent-paying gigs for which they must report from the viewpoint of the mainstream news organizations and their wealthy owners.

To operate in this media structure, most journalists know to excise out the historical context of America's wars of domination. They know to uncritically accept American officials' bromides about spreading democracy, while hiding the real war aims.

Examples abound: America's role in the Ukraine coup was denied or downplayed; a British parliamentary report exposing American lies that led to the destruction of Libya was suppressed; and most infamously, the media promoted the WMD hoax and the fable of "bringing democracy" to Iraq, leading to the illegal invasion and devastation of that country. A recent example from November is a 60 Minutes report on the Saudi destruction of Yemen, conspicuously failing to mention America's crucial role in the carnage.

I've pitched numerous news stories critical of U.S. foreign policy to a major American newspaper that were rejected or changed in the editorial process. One example is the declassified Defense Intelligence Agency document of August 2012

that accurately predicted the rise of the Islamic State two years later.

The document, which I confirmed with a Pentagon spokesman, said the U.S. and its Turkish, European and Gulf Arab allies, were supporting the establishment of a Salafist principality in eastern Syria to put pressure on the Syrian government, but the document warned that this Salafist base could turn into an “Islamic State.”

But such a story would undermine the U.S. government’s “war on terrorism” narrative by revealing that the U.S.-backed strategy actually was risking the expansion of the jihadists’ foothold in Syria. The story was twice rejected by my editors and has received attention almost entirely – if not exclusively – on much-smaller independent news Web sites.

Another story I pitched in June 2012, just a year into the Syrian war, about Russia’s motives in Syria being guided by a desire to defeat the growing jihadist threat there, was also rejected. Corporate media wanted to keep the myth of Russia’s “imperial” aims in Syria alive. I had to publish the article outside the U.S., in a South African daily newspaper.

In September 2015 at the U.N. General Assembly, Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed my story about Russia’s motives in Syria to stop jihadists from taking over. Putin invited the U.S. to join this effort as Moscow was about to launch its military intervention at the invitation of the Syrian government. The Obama administration, still insisting on “regime change” in Syria, refused. And the U.S. corporate media continued promoting the myth that Russia intervened to recapture its “imperial glory.”

It was much easier to promote the “imperial” narrative and to ignore Putin’s clear explanation to French TV channel TF1, which was not picked up by American media.

“Remember what Libya or Iraq looked like before these countries and their organizations were destroyed as states by our Western partners’ forces?” Putin said. “These states showed no signs of terrorism. They were not a threat for Paris, for the Cote d’Azur, for Belgium, for Russia, or for the United States. Now, they are the source of terrorist threats. Our goal is to prevent the same from happening in Syria.”

Why Russia Is Targeted

So, where are independent-minded Western journalists to turn if their stories critical of the U.S. government and corporations are suppressed?

The imperative is to get these stories out – and Russian media has provided an

opening for some. This has presented a new problem for the plutocracy. The suppression of critical news in their corporate-owned media is no longer working if it's seeping out in Russian media (and through some dissident Western news sites on the Internet).

The solution has been to brand the content of the Russian television network, RT, as "propaganda" since it presents facts and viewpoints that most Americans have been kept from hearing. But just because these views – many coming from Americans and other Westerners – are not what you commonly hear on the U.S. mainstream media doesn't make them "propaganda" that must be stigmatized and silenced.

As a Russian-government-financed English-language news channel, RT also gives a Russian perspective on the news, the way CNN and *The New York Times* give an American perspective and the BBC a British one. American mainstream journalists, from my experience, arrogantly deny suppressing news and believe they present a universal perspective, rather than a narrow American view of the world.

The viewpoints of Iranians, Palestinians, Russians, North Koreans and others are never fully reported in the Western media although the supposed mission of journalism is to help citizens understand a frighteningly complex world from multiple points of view. It's impossible to do so without those voices included. Routinely or systematically shutting them out also dehumanizes people in those countries, making it easier to gain popular support to go to war against them.

Russia is scapegoated by charging that RT or *Sputnik* are sowing divisions in the U.S. by focusing on issues like homelessness, racism, or out-of-control militarized police forces, as if these divisive issues didn't already exist. The U.S. mainstream media also seems to forget that the U.S. government has engaged in at least 70 years of interference in other countries' elections, foreign invasions, coups, planting stories in foreign media and cyber-warfare.

Now, these American transgressions are projected onto Moscow. There's also a measure of self-reverence in this for "successful" people with a stake in an establishment that underpins the elite, demonstrating how wonderfully democratic they are compared to those ogres in Russia.

The overriding point about the "Russian propaganda" complaint is that when America's democratic institutions, including the press and the electoral process, are crumbling under the weight of corruption that the American elites have created or maintained, someone else needs to be blamed. Russia is both an old and a new scapegoat.

The Jan. 6 intelligence assessment on alleged Russian election meddling is a

good example of how this works. A third of its content is an attack on RT for “undermining American democracy” by reporting on Occupy Wall Street, the protest over the Dakota pipeline and, of all things, holding a “third party candidate debates.”

According to the Jan. 6 assessment, RT’s offenses include reporting that “the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a ‘sham.’” RT also “highlights criticism of alleged US shortcomings in democracy and civil liberties.” In other words, reporting on newsworthy events and allowing third-party candidates to express their opinions undermine democracy.

The report also says all this amounts to “a Kremlin-directed campaign to undermine faith in the US Government and fuel political protest,” but it should be noted those protests by dissatisfied Americans are against privileges of the wealthy and the well-connected, a status quo that the intelligence agencies routinely protect.

There are also deeper reasons why Russia is being targeted. The Russia-gate story fits neatly into a geopolitical strategy that long predates the 2016 election. Since Wall Street and the U.S. government lost the dominant position in Russia that existed under the pliable President Boris Yeltsin, the strategy has been to put pressure on getting rid of Putin to restore a U.S. friendly leader in Moscow. There is substance to Russia’s concerns about American designs for “regime change” in the Kremlin.

Moscow sees an aggressive America expanding NATO and putting 30,000 NATO troops on its borders; trying to overthrow a secular ally in Syria with terrorists who threaten Russia itself; backing a coup in Ukraine as a possible prelude to moves against Russia; and using American NGOs to foment unrest inside Russia before they were forced to register as foreign agents. Russia wants Americans to see this perspective.

Accelerated Censorship in the Private Sector

The Constitution prohibits government from prior-restraint, or censorship, though such tactics were imposed, largely unchallenged, during the two world wars. American newspapers voluntarily agreed to censor themselves in the Second World War before the government dictated it.

In the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur said he didn’t “desire to reestablish wartime censorship” and instead asked the press for self-censorship. He largely got it until the papers began reporting American battlefield losses. On July 25, 1950, “the army ordered that reporters were not allowed to publish

'unwarranted' criticism of command decisions, and that the army would be 'the sole judge and jury' on what 'unwarranted' criticism entailed," according to a Yale University study on military censorship.

After excellent on-the-ground reporting from Vietnam brought the war home to America, the military reacted by instituting, initially in the first Gulf War, serious control of the press by "embedding" reporters from private media companies which accepted the arrangement, much as World War II newspapers censored themselves.

It is important to realize that the First Amendment does not apply to private companies, including the media. It is not illegal for them to practice censorship. I never made a First Amendment argument against the *HuffPost*, for instance. However, under pressure from Washington, even in peacetime, media companies can do the government's dirty work to censor or limit free speech for the government.

In the past few weeks, we've seen an acceleration of attempts by corporations to inhibit Russian media in the U.S. Both Google and Facebook, which dominate the Web with more than 50 percent of ad revenue, were at first resistant to government pressure to censor "Russian propaganda." But they are coming around.

Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Alphabet, Google's parent company, said on Nov. 18 that Google would "derank" articles from RT and Sputnik in the Google searches, making the stories harder for readers to find. The billionaire Schmidt claimed Russian information can be "repetitive, exploitative, false, [or] likely to have been weaponized," he said. That is how factual news critical of U.S. corporate and political leadership is seen, as a weapon.

"My own view is that these patterns can be detected, and that they can be taken down or deprioritized," Schmidt said.

Though Google would effectively be hiding news produced by RT and *Sputnik*, Schmidt is sensitive to the charge of censorship, even though there's nothing legally to stop him.

"We don't want to ban the sites. That's not how we operate," Schmidt said cynically. "I am strongly not in favor of censorship. I am very strongly in favor of ranking. It's what we do."

But the "deranking" isn't only aimed at Russian sites; Google algorithms also are taking aim at independent news sites that don't follow the mainstream herd – and thus are accused of spreading Russian or other "propaganda" if they question the dominant Western narratives on, say, the Ukraine crisis or the war in Syria. A number of alternative websites have begun reporting a sharp fall-off of

traffic directed to their sites from Google's search engines.

Responding to a deadline from Congress to act, Facebook on Nov. 22 announced that it would inform users if they have been "targeted" by Russian "propaganda." Facebook's help center will tell users if they liked or shared ads allegedly from the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency, which supposedly bought \$100,000 in ads over a two-year period, with more than half these ads coming after the 2016 U.S. election and many not related to politics.

(The \$100,000 sum over two years compares to Facebook's \$27 billion in annual revenue. Plus, Facebook only says it "believes" or it's "likely" that the ads came from that firm, whose links to the Kremlin also have yet to be proved.)

Facebook described the move as "part of our ongoing effort to protect our platforms and the people who use them from bad actors who try to undermine our democracy." Congress wants more from Facebook, so it will not be surprising if users will eventually be told when they've liked or shared an RT report in the future.

While the government can't openly shut down a news site, the Federal Communications Commission's upcoming vote on whether to deregulate the Internet by ending net neutrality will free private Internet companies in the U.S. to further marginalize Russian and dissident websites by slowing them down and thus discouraging readers from viewing them.

Likewise, as the U.S. government doesn't want to be openly seen shutting down RT operations, it is working around the edges to accomplish that.

After the Department of Justice forced, under threat of arrest, RT to register its employees as foreign agents under the *Foreign Agents Registration Act*, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nuaert said last Tuesday that "FARA does not police the content of information disseminated, does not limit the publication of information or advocacy materials, and does not restrict an organization's ability to operate." She'd earlier said that registering would not "impact or affect the ability of them to report news and information. We just have them register. It's as simple as that."

Then on Wednesday the Congressional press office stripped RT correspondents of their Capitol Hill press passes, citing the FARA registration. "The rules of the Galleries state clearly that news credentials may not be issued to any applicant employed 'by any foreign government or representative thereof.' Upon its registration as a foreign agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), RT Network became ineligible to hold news credentials," read the letter to RT.

Even so, Russia-gate faithful ignore these aggressive moves and issue calls for even harsher action. After forcing RT to register, Keir Giles, a Chatham House senior consulting fellow, acted as though it never happened. He said in a Council on Foreign Relations Cyber Brief on Nov. 27: “Although the Trump administration seems unlikely to pursue action against Russian information operations, there are steps the U.S. Congress and other governments should consider.”

I commented on this development on RT America. It would also have been good to have the State Department’s Nuaert answer for this discrepancy about the claim that forced FARA registrations would not affect news gathering when it already has. My criticism of RT is that they should be interviewing U.S. decision-makers to hold them accountable, rather than mostly guests outside the power structure. Tse decision-makers could be called out on air if they refuse to appear.

Growing McCarthyite Attacks

Western rulers’ wariness about popular unrest also can be seen in the extraordinary and scurrilous attack on the Canadian website globalresearch.ca. The attack started with a chilling study by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization into the relatively obscure website, followed by a vicious hit piece on Nov. 18 by the *Globe and Mail*, Canada’s largest newspaper. The headline was: “How a Canadian website is being used to amplify the Kremlin’s view of the world.”

“What once appeared to be a relatively harmless online refuge for conspiracy theorists is now seen by NATO’s information warfare specialists as a link in a concerted effort to undermine the credibility of mainstream Western media – as well as the North American and European public’s trust in government and public institutions,” the *Globe and Mail* reported. “Global Research is viewed by NATO’s Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence – or StratCom – as playing a key accelerant role in helping popularize articles with little basis in fact that also happen to fit the narratives being pushed by the Kremlin, in particular, and the Assad regime.”

I’ve not agreed with everything I’ve read on the site. But it is a useful clearinghouse for alternative media. Numerous *Consortiumnews* articles are republished there, including a handful of mine. But the site’s typical sharing and reposting on the Internet is seen by NATO as a plot to undermine the Free World.

Drawing from the NATO report, *The Globe and Mail*’s denunciation of this website continued: “It uses that reach to push not only its own opinion pieces, but ‘news’ reports from little-known websites that regularly carry dubious or false

information. At times, the site's regular variety of international-affairs stories is replaced with a flurry of items that bolster dubious reportage with a series of opinion pieces, promoted on social media and retweeted and shared by active bots."

The newspaper continued, "'That way, they increase the Google ranking of the story and create the illusion of multi-source verification,' said Donara Barojan, who does digital forensic research for [StratCom]. But she said she did not yet have proof that Global Research is connected to any government."

This sort of smear is nothing more than a blatant attack on free speech by the most powerful military alliance in the world, based on the unfounded conviction that Russia is a fundamental force for evil and that anyone who has contacts with Russia or shares even a part of its multilateral world view is suspect.

High-profile individuals are now also in the crosshairs of the neo-McCarthyite witchhunt. On Nov. 25 *The Washington Post* ran a nasty hit piece on Washington Capitals' hockey player Alex Ovechkin, one of the most revered sports figures in the Washington area, simply because he, like 86 percent of other Russians, supports his president.

"Alex Ovechkin is one of Putin's biggest fans. The question is, why?" ran the headline. The story insidiously implied that Ovechkin was a dupe of his own president, being used to set up a media campaign to support Putin, who is under fierce and relentless attack in the United States where Ovechkin plays professional ice hockey.

"He has given an unwavering endorsement to a man who U.S. intelligence agencies say sanctioned Russian meddling in last year's presidential election," write the *Post* reporters, once again showing their gullibility to U.S. intelligence agencies that have provided no proof for their assertions (and even admit that they are not asserting their opinion as fact).

Less prominent figures are targeted too. John Kiriakou, a former CIA agent who blew the whistle on torture and was jailed for it, was kicked off a panel in Europe on Nov. 10 by a Bernie Sanders supporter who refused to appear with Kiriakou because he co-hosts a show on *Radio Sputnik*.

Then last week, Reporters Without Borders, an organization supposedly devoted to press freedom, tried to kick journalist Vanessa Beeley off a panel in Geneva to prevent her from presenting evidence that the White Helmets, a group that sells itself as a rescue organization inside rebel-controlled territory in Syria, has ties to Al Qaeda. The Swiss Press Club, which hosted the event, resisted the pressure and let Beeley speak.

Russia-gate's Hurdles

Much of this spreading global hysteria and intensifying censorship traces back to Russia-gate. Yet, it remains remarkable that the corporate media has failed so far to prove any significant Russian interference in the U.S. election at all. Nor have the intelligence agencies, Congressional investigations and special prosecutor Robert Mueller. His criminal charges so far have been for financial crimes and lying to federal authorities on topics unrelated to any "collusion" between the Trump campaign and Russians to "hack" Democratic emails.

There may well be more indictments from Mueller, even perhaps a complaint about Trump committing obstruction of justice because he said on TV that he fired Comey, in part, because of the "Russia thing." But Trump's clumsy reaction to the "scandal," which he calls "fake news" and a "witch hunt," still is not proof that Putin and the Russians interfered in the U.S. election to achieve the unlikely outcome of Trump's victory.

The Russia-gate faithful assured us to wait for the indictment of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, briefly Trump's national security adviser. But again there was nothing about pre-election "collusion," only charges that Flynn had lied to the FBI or omitted details about two conversations with the Russian ambassador regarding policy matters during the presidential transition, i.e., *after* the election.

And, one of those conversations related to trying unsuccessfully to comply with an Israeli request to get Russia to block a United Nations resolution censuring Israel's settlements on Palestinian land.

As journalist Yasha Levine tweeted: "So the country that influenced US policy through Michael Flynn is Israel, not Russia. But Flynn did try to influence Russia, not the other way around. Ha-ha. This is the smoking gun? What a farce."

There remain a number of key hurdles to prove the Russia-gate story. First, convincing evidence is needed that the Russian government indeed did "hack" the Democratic emails, both those of the DNC and Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta – and gave them to WikiLeaks. And, further that somehow the Trump campaign was involved in aiding and abetting this operation, i.e., collusion.

There's also the question of how significant the release of those emails was anyway. They did provide evidence that the DNC tilted the primary campaign in favor of Clinton over Sanders; they exposed the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from the voters; and they revealed some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation and its foreign donations.

But – even if the Russians were involved in providing that information to the American people – those issues were not considered decisive in the campaign. Clinton principally pinned her loss on FBI Director James Comey for closing and then reopening the investigation into her improper use of a private email server while Secretary of State. She also spread the blame to Russia (repeating the canard about “seventeen [U.S. intelligence] agencies, all in agreement”), Bernie Sanders, the inept DNC and other factors.

As for the vaguer concerns about some Russian group “probably” buying \$100,000 in ads, mostly after Americans had voted, as a factor in swaying a \$6 billion election, is too silly to contemplate. That *RT* and *Sputnik* ran pieces critical of Hillary Clinton was their right, and they were hardly alone. *RT* and *Sputnik*’s reach in the U.S. is minuscule compared to *Fox News*, which slammed Clinton throughout the campaign, or for that matter, MSNBC, CNN and other mainstream news outlets, which often expressed open disdain for Republican Donald Trump but also gave extensive coverage to issues such as the security concerns about Clinton’s private email server.

Another vague Russia-gate suspicion stemming largely from Steele’s opposition research is that somehow Russia is bribing or blackmailing Trump because Trump has done some past business with Russians. But there are evidentiary and logical problems with these theories, since some lucrative deals fell through (and presumably wouldn’t have if Trump was being paid off) – and no one, including the Russians, foresaw Trump’s highly improbable election as U.S. President years earlier.

Some have questioned how Trump could have supported detente with Russia without being beholden to Moscow in some way. But Jeffery Sommers, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin, wrote a convincing essay explaining adviser Steve Bannon’s influence on Trump’s thinking about Russia and the need for cooperation between the two powers to solve international problems.

Without convincing evidence, I remain a Russia-gate skeptic. I am not defending Russia. Russia can defend itself. However, amid the growing censorship and this dangerous new McCarthyism, I am trying to defend America – from itself.

Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist. He has written for the Boston Globe, the Sunday Times of London and the Wall Street Journal among other newspapers. He is the author of How I Lost By Hillary Clinton published by OR Books in June 2017. He can be reached at joelauria@gmail.com and followed on Twitter at @unjoe.

The Scalp-Taking of Gen. Flynn

Exclusive: The Russia-gate prosecutors have taken the scalp of ex- National Security Adviser (and retired Lt. Gen.) Flynn for lying to the FBI. But this case shows how dangerously far afield this “scandal” has gone, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Russia-gate enthusiasts are thrilled over the guilty plea of President Trump’s former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn for lying to the FBI about pre-inauguration conversations with the Russian ambassador, but the case should alarm true civil libertarians.

What is arguably most disturbing about this case is that then-National Security Adviser Flynn was pushed into a perjury trap by Obama administration holdovers at the Justice Department who concocted an unorthodox legal rationale for subjecting Flynn to an FBI interrogation four days after he took office, testing Flynn’s recollection of the conversations while the FBI agents had transcripts of the calls intercepted by the National Security Agency.

In other words, the Justice Department wasn’t seeking information about what Flynn said to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak – the intelligence agencies already had that information. Instead, Flynn was being quizzed on his precise recollection of the conversations and nailed for lying when his recollections deviated from the transcripts.

For Americans who worry about how the pervasive surveillance powers of the U.S. government could be put to use criminalizing otherwise constitutionally protected speech and political associations, Flynn’s prosecution represents a troubling precedent.

Though Flynn clearly can be faulted for his judgment, he was, in a sense, a marked man the moment he accepted the job of national security adviser. In summer 2016, Democrats seethed over Flynn’s participation in chants at the Republican National Convention to “lock her [Hillary Clinton] up!”

Then, just four days into the Trump presidency, an Obama holdover, then-acting Attorney General Sally Yates, primed the Flynn perjury trap by coming up with a novel legal theory that Flynn – although the national security adviser-designate at the time of his late December phone calls with Kislyak – was violating the 1799 Logan Act, which prohibits private citizens from interfering with U.S. foreign policy.

But that law – passed during President John Adams’s administration in the era of the Alien and Sedition Acts – was never intended to apply to incoming officials in the transition period between elected presidential administrations and – in the past 218 years – the law has resulted in no successful prosecution at all and thus its dubious constitutionality has never been adjudicated.

Stretching Logic

But Yates extrapolated from her unusual Logan Act theory to speculate that since Flynn’s publicly known explanation of the conversation with Kislyak deviated somewhat from the transcript of the intercepts, Flynn might be vulnerable to Russian blackmail.

Yet, that bizarre speculation would require that the Russians first would have detected the discrepancies; secondly, they would have naively assumed that the U.S. intelligence agencies had not intercepted the conversations, which would have negated any blackmail potential; and thirdly, the Russians would have to do something so ridiculously heavy-handed – trying to blackmail Flynn – that it would poison relations with the new Trump administration.

Yates’s legal theorizing was so elastic and speculative that it could be used to justify subjecting almost anyone to FBI interrogation with the knowledge that their imperfect memories would guarantee the grounds for prosecution based on NSA intercepts of their communications.

Basically, the Obama holdovers concocted a preposterous legal theory to do whatever they could to sabotage the Trump administration, which they held in fulsome disdain.

At the time of Flynn’s interrogation, the Justice Department was under the control of Yates and the FBI was still under President Obama’s FBI Director James Comey, another official hostile to the Trump administration who later was fired by Trump.

The Yates-FBI perjury trap also was sprung on Flynn in the first days of the Trump presidency amid reverberations of the massive anti-Trump protests that had arisen across the country in support of demands for a “#Resistance” to Trump’s rule.

Flynn also had infuriated Democrats when he joined in chants at the Republican National Convention of “lock her up” over Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton’s use of a private email server and other alleged offenses. So, in targeting Flynn, there was a mix of personal payback and sabotage against the Trump administration.

The Legal Construct

The two-page complaint against Flynn, made public on Friday, references false statements to the FBI regarding two conversations with Kislyak, one on Dec. 22, 2016, and the other on Dec. 29, 2016.

The first item in the complaint alleges that Flynn did not disclose that he had asked the Russian ambassador to help delay or defeat a United Nations Security Council vote censuring Israel for building settlements on Palestinian territory.

The New York Times reported on Friday that Russia-gate investigators “learned through witnesses and documents that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked the Trump transition team to lobby other countries to help Israel, according to two people briefed on the inquiry.

“Investigators have learned that Mr. Flynn and Mr. Trump’s son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, took the lead in those efforts. Mr. Mueller’s team has emails that show Mr. Flynn saying he would work to kill the vote, the people briefed on the matter said,” according to the Times.

Breaking with past U.S. precedents, President Obama had decided not to veto the resolution criticizing Israel, choosing instead to abstain. However, the censure resolution carried with Russian support, meaning that whatever lobbying Flynn and Kushner undertook was unsuccessful.

But the inclusion of this Israeli element shows how far afield the criminal Russia-gate investigation, headed by former FBI Director Robert Mueller, has gone. Though the original point of the inquiry was whether the Trump team colluded with Russians to use “hacked” emails to defeat Hillary Clinton’s campaign, the criminal charge against Flynn has nothing to do with election “collusion” but rather President-elect Trump’s aides weighing in on foreign policy controversies during the transition. And, the first initiative was undertaken at the request of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, not Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The second item, cited by Mueller’s prosecutors, referenced a Dec. 29 Flynn-Kislyak conversation, which received public attention at the time of Flynn’s Feb. 13 resignation after only 24 days on the job. That phone call touched on Russia’s response to President Obama’s decision to issue new sanctions against the Kremlin for the alleged election interference.

The complaint alleges that Flynn didn’t mention to the FBI that he had urged Kislyak “to refrain from escalating the situation” and that Kislyak had subsequently told him that “Russia had chosen to moderate its response to those sanctions as a result of his request.”

The Dec. 29 phone call occurred while Flynn was vacationing in the Dominican Republic and thus he would have been without the usual support staff for memorializing or transcribing official conversations. So, the FBI agents, with the NSA's transcripts, would have had a clearer account of what was said than Flynn likely had from memory. The content of Flynn's request to Kislyak also appears rather uncontroversial, asking the Russians not to overreact to a punitive policy from the outgoing Obama administration.

In other words, both of the Flynn-Kislyak conversations appear rather unsurprising, if not inconsequential. One was taken at the behest of Israel (which proved ineffective) and the other urged the Kremlin to show restraint in its response to a last-minute slap from President Obama (which simply delayed Russian retaliation by several months).

Double Standards

While Flynn's humiliation has brought some palpable joy to the anti-Trump "Resistance" – one more Trump aide being taken down amid renewed hope that this investigation will somehow lead to Trump's resignation or impeachment – many of the same people would be howling about trampled civil liberties if a Republican bureaucracy were playing this game on a Democratic president and his staff.

Indeed, in the turnabout-is-fair-play department, there is some equivalence in what is happening over Russia-gate to what the Republicans did in the 1990s exploiting their control of the special-prosecutor apparatus in the first years of Bill Clinton's presidency when interminable investigations into such side issues as his Whitewater real-estate deal and the firing of the White House travel office staff plagued the Clinton administration.

Similarly, Republicans seized on the deaths of four U.S. diplomatic personnel on Sept. 11, 2012, in Benghazi, Libya, to conduct a series of lengthy investigations to tarnish Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's tenure and raise questions about her judgment. Democrats understandably called these attacks partisan warfare in legal or investigative garb.

What I have heard from many Hillary Clinton supporters in recent months is that they don't care about the unfairness of the Russia-gate process or the dangerous precedents that such politicized prosecutions might set. They simply view Trump as such a danger that he must be destroyed at whatever the cost.

Yet, besides the collateral damage inflicted on mid-level government officials such as retired Lt. Gen. Flynn facing personal destruction at the hands of federal prosecutors with unlimited budgets, there is this deepening pattern of using criminal law to settle political differences, a process more common in

authoritarian states.

As much as the Russia-gate enthusiasts talk about how they are upholding “the rule of law,” there is the troubling appearance that the law is simply being used to collect the scalps of political enemies.

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](#)).

America’s Military-Industrial Addiction

Polls show that Americans are tired of endless wars in faraway lands, but many cheer President Trump’s showering money on the Pentagon and its contractors, a paradox that President Eisenhower foresaw, writes JP Sottile.

By JP Sottile

The Military-Industrial Complex has loomed over America ever since President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of its growing influence during his prescient [farewell address](#) on Jan. 17, 1961. The Vietnam War followed shortly thereafter, and its bloody consequences cemented the image of the Military-Industrial Complex (MIC) as a faceless cadre of profit-seeking warmongers who’ve wrested control of the foreign policy. That was certainly borne out by the war’s utter senselessness ... and by [tales of profiteering](#) by well-connected contractors like [Brown & Root](#).

Over five decades, four major wars and a dozen-odd interventions later, we often talk about the Military-Industrial Complex as if we’re referring to a nefarious, flag-draped Death Star floating just beyond the reach of helpless Americans who’d generally prefer that war was not, as the great [Gen. Smedley Darlington Butler](#) aptly put it, little more than a [money-making “racket.”](#)

The feeling of powerlessness that the MIC engenders in “average Americans” makes a lot of sense if you just follow the money coming out of Capitol Hill. The Project on Government Oversight (POGO) [tabulated](#) all “defense-related spending” for both 2017 and 2018, and it hit nearly \$1.1 trillion for each of the two years. The “defense-related” part is important because the annual [National Defense Authorization Act](#), a.k.a. the defense budget, doesn’t fully account for all the various forms of national security spending that gets peppered around a

half-dozen agencies.

It's a phenomenon that noted Pentagon watchdog William Hartung has tracked for years. He recently dissected it into "no less than 10 categories of national security spending." Amazingly only one of those is the actual Pentagon budget. The others include spending on wars, on homeland security, on military aid, on intelligence, on nukes, on recruitment, on veterans, on interest payments and on "other defense" – which includes "a number of flows of defense-related funding that go to agencies other than the Pentagon."

Perhaps most amazingly, Hartung noted in TomDisptach that the inflation-adjusted "base" defense budgets of the last couple years is "higher than at the height of President Ronald Reagan's massive buildup of the 1980s and is now nearing the post-World War II funding peak." And that's just the "base" budget, meaning the roughly \$600 billion "defense-only" portion of the overall package. Like POGO, Hartung puts an annual price tag of nearly \$1.1 trillion on the whole enchilada of military-related spending.

The MIC's 'Swamp Creatures'

To secure their share of this grandiloquent banquet, the defense industry's lobbyists stampede Capitol Hill like well-heeled wildebeest, each jockeying for a plum position at the trough. This year, a robust collection of 208 defense companies spent \$93,937,493 to deploy 728 "reported" lobbyists (apparently some go unreported) to feed this year's trumped-up, \$700 billion defense-only budget, according to OpenSecrets.org. Last year they spent \$128,845,198 to secure their profitable pieces of the government pie.

And this reliable yearly harvest, along with the revolving doors connecting defense contractors with Capitol Hill, K Street and the Pentagon, is why so many critics blame the masters of war behind the MIC for turning war into a cash machine.

But the cash machine is not confined to the Beltway. There are ATM branches around the country. Much in the way it lavishes Congress with lobbying largesse, the defense industry works hand-in-glove with the Pentagon to spread the appropriations around the nation. This "spread the wealth" strategy may be equally as important as the "inside the Beltway" lobbying that garners so much of our attention and disdain.

Just go to U.S. Department of Defense's contract announcement webpage on any weekday to get a good sense of the "contracts valued at \$7 million or more" that are "announced each business day at 5 p.m." A recent survey of these "awards" found the usual suspects like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics.

The MIC was well-represented. But many millions of dollars were also “won” by companies most Americans have never heard of ... like this sampling from one day at the end of October:

- Longbow LLC, Orlando Florida, got \$183,474,414 for radar electronic units with the stipulation that work will be performed in Orlando, Florida.
- Gradkell Systems Inc., Huntsville, Alabama, got \$75,000,000 for systems operations and maintenance at Fort Belvoir, Virginia
- Dawson Federal Inc., San Antonio, Texas; and A&H-Ambica JV LLC, Livonia, Michigan; and Frontier Services Inc., Kansas City, Missouri, will share a \$45,000,000 for repair and alternations for land ports of entry in North Dakota and Minnesota.
- TRAX International Corp., Las Vegas, Nevada, got a \$9,203,652 contract modification for non-personal test support services that will be performed in Yuma, Arizona, and Fort Greely, Alaska,
- Railroad Construction Co. Inc., Paterson, New Jersey, got a \$9,344,963 contract modification for base operations support services to be performed in Colts Neck, New Jersey.
- Belleville Shoe Co., Belleville, Illinois, got \$63,973,889 for hot-weather combat boots that will be made in Illinois.
- American Apparel Inc., Selma, Alabama, got \$48,411,186 for combat utility uniforms that will be made in Alabama.
- National Industries for the Blind, Alexandria, Virginia, got a \$12,884,595 contract modification to make and advanced combat helmet pad suspension system. The “locations of performance” are Virginia, Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

Sharing the Largesse

Clearly, the DoD is large enough, and smart enough, to award contracts to companies throughout the 50 states. Yes, it is a function of the sheer size or, more forebodingly, the utter “pervasiveness” of the military in American life. But it is also a strategy. And it’s a tactic readily apparent in a contract recently awarded to Raytheon.

On Oct. 31, 2017, they got a \$29,455,672 contract modification for missions systems equipment; computing environment hardware; and software research, test and development. The modification stipulates that the work will spread around the country to “Portsmouth, Rhode Island (46 percent); Tewksbury, Massachusetts (36 percent); Marlboro, Massachusetts (6 percent); Port Hueneme, California (5 percent); San Diego, California (4 percent); and Bath, Maine (3 percent).”

Frankly, it’s a brilliant move that began in the Cold War. The more Congressional districts that got defense dollars, the more votes the defense

budget was likely to receive on Capitol Hill. Over time, it evolved into its own underlying rationale for the budget.

As veteran journalist William Greider wrote in the Aug. 16, 1984 issue of Rolling Stone, “The entire political system, including liberals as well as conservatives, is held hostage by the politics of defense spending. Even the most well intentioned are captive to it. And this is a fundamental reason why the Pentagon budget is irrationally bloated and why America is mobilizing for war in a time of peace.”

The peace-time mobilization Greider referred to was the Reagan build-up that, as William Hartung noted, is currently being surpassed by America’s “War on Terror” binge. Then, as now ... the US was at peace at home, meddling around the world and running up a huge bill in the process. And then, as now ... the spending seems unstoppable.

And as an unnamed “arms-control lobbyist” told Greider, “It’s a fact of life. I don’t see how you can ask members of Congress to vote against their own districts. If I were a member of Congress, I might vote that way, too.”

Essentially, members of Congress act as secondary lobbyists for the defense industry by making sure their constituents have a vested interest in seeing the defense budget is both robust and untouchable. But they are not alone. Because the states also reap what the Pentagon sows ... and, in the wake of the massive post-9/11 splurge, they’ve begun quantifying the impact of defense spending on their economies. It helps them make their specific case for keeping the spigot open.

Enter the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), which notes, or touts, that the Department of Defense (DoD) “operates more than 420 military installations in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico.” Additionally, the NCSL is understandably impressed by a DoD analysis that found the department’s “\$408 billion on payroll and contracts in Fiscal Year 2015” translated into “approximately 2.3 percent of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP).”

And they’ve become a clearinghouse for state governments’ economic impact studies of defense spending. Here’s a sampling of recent data compiled on the NCSL website:

- In 2015, for example, military installations in North Carolina supported 578,000 jobs, \$34 billion in personal income and \$66 billion in gross state product. This amounts to roughly 10 percent of the state’s overall economy.
- In 2014, Colorado lawmakers appropriated \$300,000 in state funds to examine

the comprehensive value of military activities across the state's seven major installations. The state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs released its study in May 2015, reporting a total economic impact of \$27 billion.

- *Kentucky has also taken steps to measure military activity, releasing its fifth study in June 2016. The military spent approximately \$12 billion in Kentucky during 2014-15. With 38,700 active duty and civilian employees, military employment exceeds the next largest state employer by more than 21,000 jobs.*
- *In Michigan, for example, defense spending in Fiscal Year 2014 supported 105,000 jobs, added more than \$9 billion in gross state product and created nearly \$10 billion in personal income. A 2016 study sponsored by the Michigan Defense Center presents a statewide strategy to preserve Army and Air National Guard facilities following a future Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round as well as to attract new missions.*

Electoral Impact

But that's not all. According to the DoD study cited above, the biggest recipients of DoD dollars are (in order): Virginia, California, Texas, Maryland and Florida. And among the top 18 host states for military bases, electorally important states like California, Florida and Texas lead the nation.

And that's the real rub ... this has an electoral impact. Because the constituency for defense spending isn't just the 1 percent percent of Americans who actively serve in the military or 7 percent of Americans who've served sometime in their lives, but it is also the millions of Americans who directly or indirectly make a living off of the "defense-related" largesse that passes through the Pentagon like grass through a goose.

It's a dirty little secret that Donald Trump exploited throughout the 2016 presidential campaign. Somehow, he was able to criticize wasting money on foreign wars and the neoconservative interventionism of the Bushes, the neoliberal interventionism of Hillary Clinton, and, at the same time, moan endlessly about the "depleted" military despite "years of record-high spending." He went on to promise a massive increase in the defense budget, a massive increase in naval construction and a huge nuclear arsenal.

And, much to the approval of many Americans, he's delivered. A Morning Consult/Politico poll showed increased defense spending was the most popular among a variety of spending priorities presented to voters ... even as voters express trepidation about the coming of another war. A pair of NBC News/Survey Monkey polls found that 76 percent of Americans are "worried" the United States "will become engaged in a major war in the next four years" and only 25 percent

want America to become “more active” in world affairs.

More to the point, only 20 percent of Americans wanted to increase the troop level in Afghanistan after Trump’s stay-the-course speech in August, but Gallup’s three decade-long tracking poll found that the belief the U.S. spends “too little” on defense is at its highest point (37 percent) since it spiked after 9/11 (41 percent). The previous highpoint was 51 percent in 1981 when Ronald Reagan was elected in no small part on the promise of a major build-up.

So, if Americans generally don’t support wars or engagement in the world, why do they seem to reflexively support massive military budgets?

Frankly, look no further than Trump’s mantra of “jobs, jobs, jobs.” He says it when he lords over the sale of weapon systems to foreign powers or he visits a naval shipyard or goes to one of his post-election rallies to proclaim to “We’re building up our military like never before.” Frankly, he’s giving the people what they want. Although they may be war-weary, they’ve not tired of the dispersal system that Greider wrote about during Reagan’s big spree.

Ultimately, it means that the dreaded Military-Industrial Complex isn’t just a shadowy cabal manipulating policies against the will of the American people. Nor is the “racket” exclusive to an elite group of Deep State swamp things. Instead, the military and the vast economic network it feeds presents a far more “complex” issue that involves millions of self-interested Americans in much the way Eisenhower predicted, but few are willing to truly forsake.

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