

Hillary Clinton Promised Wars, Too

Exclusive: President Trump has shattered the hope of many peace-oriented Americans that he would pull back from U.S. foreign interventions, but Hillary Clinton might have pursued even more wars, notes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

The alliance between neoconservatives and the Democratic foreign policy establishment, which is largely made up of former Obama administration officials and former Clinton campaign surrogates, has been much noted of late, particularly since the formation of the German Marshall Fund's "Alliance for Democracy Project" which brings together high-profile members of both groups in an effort to fight what is loosely (and often inaccurately) defined as Russian "disinformation."

Those who applaud the new alignment are quick to point out that Donald J. Trump who, by virtue of his volatile temperament and his alarming ignorance and inexperience, is a menace to his country and the planet. And at this stage in Mr. Trump's presidency, that would seem unarguable.

And yet, Clinton partisans charge that those who withheld their support from Clinton not only bear responsibility for Trump, but also had no right to do so since it was, according to them, obvious that Clinton would have been, among other things, a more responsible steward of U.S. foreign policy than Trump.

And so, given the extreme bitterness that Hillary Clinton's loss has engendered among a number of prominent members of the liberal commentariat, it might be worth looking at what her campaign promised with regard to foreign policy to see if the above criticism holds water.

The argument here isn't that Trump isn't awful (which is something I've never argued); it's that he's proven to be every bit as bad as some of us reasonably expected Clinton would have been; and if one takes the time to consult the Clinton campaign's own briefing papers and fact sheets, one will find that on issue after issue, Clinton invariably took hawkish positions that reflected the fact that Clinton was (and remains) a saber-rattler *par excellence* – very much on par with the current occupant of the White House.

When North Korea conducted a nuclear test in September 2016, she released a statement, if not quite promising "fire and fury," that did declare: "North Korea's decision to conduct another nuclear test is outrageous and unacceptable. ... This constitutes a direct threat to the United States, and we cannot and will

never accept this.”

No Regrets on ‘Regime Change’

Beyond that, Clinton remained a firm believer in regime-change strategies. On Syria, the Clinton campaign “proposed instituting a coalition no-fly zone in the air coupled with safe zones on the ground to protect Syrian civilians and create leverage for a diplomatic resolution that includes Assad’s departure.” She supported the “deployment of special operating forces to Syria” and “strongly urged President Obama to arm moderate rebels in support of the eventual removal of the brutal Assad regime.”

Clinton also favored escalation in other hot spots. On Iran, the Clinton campaign outlined “a plan to counter Iran’s other malicious behavior” which included pledges to “deepen America’s unshakeable commitment to Israel’s security”; “expand our military presence in the region”; “increase security cooperation in areas like intelligence sharing, military backing and missile defense with our Gulf allies, to ensure they can defend themselves against Iranian aggression”; and “build a coalition to counter Iran’s proxies.”

When we also factor in Clinton’s support for the NATO’s illegal airstrikes on Kosovo (1999), her vote to authorize the second Iraq War (2003), her enthusiastic support for sending more troops to fight and die in Afghanistan (2009), and her disastrous embrace of regime change in Libya (2011) and Syria (2012), how can anyone be sure that her administration’s foreign policy would have been much of an improvement over what we now have?

Indeed, those who threw their support behind Clinton’s vision of American world leadership, like those associated with the “Alliance for Democracy,” really, with the notable exception of Trump’s abandonment of the Paris Climate Accord, have little to complain about.

Trump has done much as Clinton would have done by, among other things: slapping sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea; pledging unlimited support to Israel; reassuring “our allies” in the Persian Gulf and eastern Europe; condemning Russia’s actions in eastern Ukraine; expanding military operations in eastern Syria; and lobbing none-to-veiled threats at the left-wing government in Venezuela.

So while it’s easy and almost certainly emotionally satisfying to the legions of Clinton supporters to tell themselves (and their readers) that *of course* Hillary would have been a better steward of U.S. foreign policy than Trump, that assertion remains both unprovable and, given her record, highly questionable.

James W. Carden served as an adviser on Russia policy at the US State

Department. Currently a contributing writer at The Nation magazine, his work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Quartz, The American Conservative and The National Interest.

Trump's Soft-Shoe on Racist Violence

On Monday, President Trump did a second take on his remarks about the white-nationalist-sparked violence in Charlottesville, but his tepid first take offered a troubling look into his soul, says Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

Enough. We have a president who is emotionally challenged and empathy-free, who on Saturday read from a prepared statement of concern and condemnation, incapable of speaking genuinely from the heart, apparently because he knows that those who speak racist hate and commit acts of deadly violence are a portion of his "base."

Witness Ku Kluxer David Duke declaring in Charlottesville, Virginia, before Saturday's violence, "We are determined to take our country back. We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump. That's what we believed in, that's why we voted for Donald Trump. Because he said he's going to take our country back."

It's true that you can't always choose those who want to march in support of you, although Trump's refusal to condemn his backing from white supremacists is appalling. Nor can it be denied that on the extreme left there are a few, like so many on the extreme right, who see violence as a means to an end. But Trump not only has failed to speak out against white nationalists, he allows them to work in his White House and mutter seditious nonsense into his all-too-susceptible ears.

As he spoke on Saturday afternoon he was unable to out-and-out condemn the neo-Nazis in Charlottesville without diluting his censure, saying there was "hatred, bigotry and violence" but adding "on many sides, on many sides." And then he tweeted, "Condolences to the family of the young woman killed today, and best regards to all of those injured, in Charlottesville, Virginia. So sad!"

Best regards? So sad? So lame. A woman died, a paralegal named Heather Heyer, and others were wounded at the hand of what appears to be a racist murderer using a car as a deadly weapon. This is a national tragedy, Mr. President. It is domestic terrorism and your reaction must be one of outrage, not left-handed

sympathy.

On Saturday, Trump said, "It's been going on for a long time in our country. Not Donald Trump. Not Barack Obama. It's been going on for a long, long time." He's right about the long, long time part but as Richard Cohen, president of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) wrote on Saturday:

"[F]rom the day he came down the escalator in the tower that bears his name, Trump consciously poured fuel on the fire. He ran a racist, xenophobic campaign that energized the radical right... Trump calls for the country to unite. But he is still ducking responsibility for his role in dividing it."

Domestic Terrorism

Many Republican senators denounced Saturday's fascist extremists more strongly and explicitly than the President, including Colorado's Cory Gardner, who tweeted, "Mr. President – we must call evil by its name. These were white supremacists and this was domestic terrorism."

But in the not-so-distant past, out of fear of alienating some conservative voters, Republicans have condemned groups like the SPLC for calling out the growing threat of the extreme right and white supremacy, just as those Republicans so vehemently attacked a 2009 report from the Department of Homeland Security on rightwing domestic terrorism that it was withdrawn from circulation. That analysis found that every year, with the exception of 2001 and the 9/11 attacks, right-wing extremism was responsible for more violence in the United States than radical Islamic terrorism.

The report's findings were backed up by an FBI analysis last year that hate crimes were up and by a 2015 survey conducted with the Police Executive Research Forum. Two of those involved, Charles Kurzman of the University of North Carolina and David Schanzer of Duke University, wrote in *The New York Times*, "The main terrorist threat in the United States is not from violent Muslim extremists, but from right-wing extremists..."

"An officer from a large metropolitan area said that 'militias, neo-Nazis and sovereign citizens' are the biggest threat we face in regard to extremism," they wrote. "One officer explained that he ranked the right-wing threat higher because 'it is an emerging threat that we don't have as good of a grip on, even with our intelligence unit, as we do with the Al Shabab/Al Qaeda issue, which we have been dealing with for some time.'"

President Trump, you reap what you sow and boilerplate statements of sorrow ring hollow. Presidents are supposed to bring us together. Your predecessors, Republicans and Democrats, have done so with grace. But this President says he

loves all Americans while working to deprive them of their freedoms. And keeps within his circle of advisors those for whom hate is an asset and not a dagger to the heart of democracy.

Fire Sebastian Gorka, the bogus security advisor who earlier this week told *Breitbart News Daily* that white supremacists are not a problem. Fire Stephen Miller, who seems to think the Statue of Liberty is more a symbol of exclusion than welcome. And fire Steve Bannon and his off-the-wall, destructive theories of white nationalism.

Their dismissals would be a start. But on Saturday, we saw into your soul, Donald Trump. And there was nothing there.

Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of *Moyers & Company* and *BillMoyers.com*. Follow him on Twitter: [@MichaelWinship](https://twitter.com/MichaelWinship). [This story first appeared at <http://billmoyers.com/story/charlottesville-goddam/>]

How Obama, Trump Had Their Wings Clipped

Presidents Obama and Trump contrast sharply on foreign policy, but share a common denominator: they faced resistance to smoothing relations with a key power, Obama on Iran; Trump on Russia, Andrew Spannaus noted at Aspenia.

By Andrew Spannaus

President Donald Trump was backed into a corner in late July, forced to sign a bill imposing new sanctions on Russia, despite opposing it on substance and form. Trump issued a signing statement, claiming that the new law impinges on “the President’s constitutional authority to recognize foreign governments” (referring to the case of Crimea and Ukraine), limits the President’s actions on sanctions, and violates “the President’s exclusive constitutional authority to determine the time, scope, and objectives of international negotiations”, among other things.

The overwhelming vote on the sanctions bill in both the House and the Senate (419-3 and 98-2, respectively) was a clear indicator of how much of official Washington sees the White House’s attempts to improve relations with Russia: as a dangerous goal that needs to be stopped as soon as possible, lest the apparently bumbling, self-absorbed and ineffective President actually succeed in implementing a major change in U.S. foreign policy, one with repercussions on numerous areas of global geopolitics.

Influential Republicans in the Senate such as John McCain and Lindsey Graham have never hidden their disdain for Trump's anti-neocon positions, and now they find themselves with the almost unanimous support of their colleagues on the Democratic side of the aisle as well.

The constant churn of Russiagate scandals, although they have yet to turn up a smoking gun, has created an environment in which politicians and major press outlets have decided that Russia is Trump's weak point, on which a strong defeat can neuter his effectiveness and potentially even lead to his impeachment.

The White House's isolation on a point of foreign policy that would represent a major strategic shift recalls another situation not too many years ago, that of Iran, when then-President Barack Obama found himself in a difficult battle with the overwhelming majority of Congress apparently opposed to his plan to shift gears in the Middle East. Obama ultimately won that battle, succeeding in reaching a historic deal regarding Iran's nuclear program, after adopting a strategy of secret negotiations, clear goals, and an explicit definition of the choices to be made.

Trump differs considerably from Obama on Iran, instead following the traditional Israeli-Saudi line to date, but the clash with Congress and the power of neoconservative foreign policy is an area where the two Presidents definitely have something in common; in this case, Trump could draw on aspects of Obama's strategy, although the circumstances are undoubtedly different, and the stakes possibly even higher today.

Obama's Iran Initiative

President Obama's first attempt at reaching an agreement with Iran, in 2009, failed miserably due to a series of circumstances, some under the White House's responsibility, and others not. The events of the Green Revolution, the substantial opposition within his own Administration – Hillary Clinton spoke openly of negotiations merely as an excuse to then slap more sanctions on Iran – and a lack of a solid strategy all doomed the first round of negotiations, making some believe Obama never really intended to go all the way.

At the start of his second term though, Obama began to lay the groundwork for a major shift in foreign policy. One of the key aspects was the renewed push for an agreement with Iran. Secret negotiations began in Oman in the spring of 2013, leading to the initial Joint Plan of Action adopted in November of that year. Over the subsequent two years negotiations continued with the other members of the P5+1 (the permanent five members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany, as well as the European Union), until the accord was finalized in July 2015.

In order for the United States to fulfill its commitments, it was sufficient for the President to begin waiving sanctions, but the anti-Iran forces within the United States were determined to block the deal, and thus pushed for a Congressional vote to prevent the President from moving forward. The attempt failed, as the Senate voted 58-42 to close debate on the resolution, just shy of the 60-vote threshold needed for final passage.

Despite the widespread commentary about how the Democrats predictably handed their President a victory, success was far from assured in this case. As a matter of fact, by any historical standard, the failure of a vote against Iran, presented to members as a way to express support for Israel, was a startling achievement.

Just consider the vote totals for similar bills in years past, or even on the same issue. In May 2015, as negotiations were ongoing, the Senate voted on the "Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act", which required the President to submit the agreement to Congressional review, setting up the vote which Obama eventually won. That bill passed 98-1 in the Senate, and 400-25 in the House of Representatives.

These are common numbers for legislation that is considered pro-Israel and has the backing of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), whose widespread influence on U.S. politicians has been well chronicled in recent years. AIPAC did everything it could to win the vote against the Iran deal, but failed spectacularly, in a defeat that not only tarnished the group's invincible image, but also contributed to the rise of other pro-Israel groups on the U.S. political scene whose policies are not necessarily aligned with the right-wing governments led by Benjamin Netanyahu – who still happens to be in power.

Challenging the Establishment

In addition to working behind the scenes to assure Senators' votes, Obama also made his case for the Iran deal publicly. His most effective intervention came in August 2015 when speaking at American University in Washington, D.C. He put the choice in stark terms, rather than attempting to woo lawmakers with a soft approach: a vote against the Iran deal was a vote for war in the future. And he drew a clear parallel with the decision to invade Iraq in 2002, that in hindsight many Congressmen have been forced to admit was wrong, and avoidable.

Defining the Iran deal as a vote for or against conflict was obviously not what Obama's opponents expected. Consider the response from Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell at the time: "This goes way over the line of civil discourse... The President needs to retract his bizarre and preposterous comments."

Laying out the consequences so directly went against the normal rules of politics, but it was precisely what Obama needed to ensure that the stakes would be clear to everyone before the fact, not afterwards if the pro-war faction had won the day once again.

At the time the initial understanding was reached with Iran, in the fall of 2013, Obama was beginning his attempt at a wholesale change in U.S. foreign policy. Not only did he work with Russia and China on the nuclear deal, but he decided not to bomb the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, accepting Russian President Vladimir Putin's offer of a deal to remove chemical weapons from Syria.

Still today this decision is seen in the U.S. establishment as a disastrous capitulation after having drawn the infamous "red line" regarding chemical weapons attacks. Yet Obama, who pulled back after hearing doubts about the intelligence and recognizing that Congress was unlikely to support action, later defined that as one of the most important moments of his presidency, when he broke with the "Washington playbook" of automatic military response.

The attempt to move away from the policies of "regime change," drawing down support for extremist groups linked to Al Qaeda and ISIS while seeking different alliances, would ultimately be too little, and too late.

In 2014 cooperation with Russia was derailed due to the crisis in Ukraine – a situation where the Washington playbook remains intact – and by the time Obama and Putin were able to begin working together in Syria again, through the activism of John Kerry and Sergei Lavrov, time had essentially run out.

In 2016, the U.S. foreign policy establishment wasn't willing to follow Obama towards cooperation with Russia, as most anticipated the more hawkish Hillary Clinton would win in November.

Obama moved quickly to embrace the new Cold War posture permeating Washington in the final months of his presidency, but his original goal of rebalancing the U.S. presence in the Middle East and cooperating with Vladimir Putin's Russia in the fight against terrorism provides a direct link to the challenges facing the Trump Administration today.

The current President has openly declared his intentions with respect to Russia, which Obama rarely did. Despite numerous setbacks – some of his own making, of course – Trump has continued to seek better relations with Putin; yet the overwhelming pressure from both inside and outside of the Administration has heavily scaled back expectations of how far he can go, and thwarted cooperation on numerous fronts.

If Donald Trump wants to truly reach his goal of better relations with Russia, he could look to the successful aspects of Obama's victory on the Iran deal. Not only is it essential to work behind the scenes, through back channels that avoid sabotage from within his own Administration, but the President could potentially go back on the offensive if he were to define the issue publicly on his own terms.

It won't be easy to convince the American people, and a considerable part of the institutions, given the current environment; however, a clear and honest accounting of our relations with Russia, including the unthinkable dangers of conflict, could go a long way towards inaugurating a more rational discussion of Trump's desired foreign policy shift.

Andrew Spannaus is a freelance journalist and strategic analyst based in Milan, Italy. He is the founder of Transatlantico.info, that provides news, analysis and consulting to Italian institutions and businesses. He has published the books "Perché vince Trump" (Why Trump is Winning – June 2016) and "La rivolta degli elettori" (The Revolt of the Voters – July 2017). [This article first appeared at <http://www.aspeninstitute.it/aspenia-online/article/congress-vs-president-what-trump-can-learn-obama>]

Russia-gate's Fataally Flawed Logic

Exclusive: By pushing the Russia-gate "scandal" and neutering President Trump's ability to conduct diplomacy, Democrats and Congress have encouraged his war-making side on North Korea, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There was always a logical flaw in pushing Russia-gate as an excuse for Hillary Clinton's defeat – besides the fact that it was based on a dubious "assessment" by a small team of "hand-picked" U.S. intelligence analysts. The flaw was that it poked the thin-skinned Donald Trump over one of his few inclinations toward diplomacy.

We're now seeing the results play out in a very dangerous way in Trump's bluster about North Korea, which was included in an aggressive economic sanctions bill – along with Russia and Iran – that Congress passed nearly unanimously, without a single Democratic no vote.

Democrats and Official Washington's dominant neocons celebrated the bill as a vote of no-confidence in Trump's presidency but it only constrained him in possible peacemaking, not war-making.

The legislation, which Trump signed under protest, escalated tensions with those three countries while limiting Trump's power over lifting sanctions. After signing the bill into law, Trump denounced the bill as "seriously flawed – particularly because it encroaches on the executive branch's authority to negotiate."

As his "signing statements" made clear, Trump felt belittled by the congressional action. His response has been to ratchet up bellicose rhetoric about North Korea, bluster appearing to be his natural default position when under pressure.

Remember, in April, as the Russia-gate hysteria mounted, Trump changed the subject, briefly, by rushing to judgment on an alleged chemical-weapons incident in Khan Sheikhoun, Syria, and firing off 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian military base.

He immediately won acclaim from Official Washington, although Hillary Clinton and other hawks argued that he should have gone further with a much larger U.S. invasion of Syria, i.e., establishing a "no-fly zone" even if that risked nuclear war with Russia.

What Trump learned from that experience is that even when he is going off half-cocked, he is rewarded for taking the military option. (More careful analysis of the Khan Sheikhoun evidence later raised serious doubts that the Syrian military was responsible.)

Schoolyard Taunts

So, we now have President Trump in a bizarre exchange of schoolyard taunts with the leadership of North Korea, with Trump's "fire and fury like the world has never seen" rhetoric possibly plunging the United States into a confrontation that could have devastating consequences for the Korean peninsula, Japan and indeed the whole world.

Given the fact that the world has already seen the U.S. nuclear destruction of two Japanese cities at the end of World War II, Trump's loose phrasing seems to suggest that the United States is prepared to use nuclear weapons against North Korea (although he may be referring to "just" carpet-bombing with conventional ordnance).

If nuclear weapons are brought into play, it is hard to fathom what the long-

term consequences might be. It's unlikely that Trump – not known for his deep thinking – has even contemplated that future.

However, even a “limited” war with conventional weapons and confined to the Korean peninsula could kill hundreds of thousands of people and severely shake the world's economy. If North Korea manages to deliver retaliatory damage on Japan, a human catastrophe and a financial panic could follow.

Many thoughtful people are now expressing alarm at Trump's erratic behavior, but many of those same people cheered the promotion of Russia-gate as a way to corner Trump politically. They didn't seem to care that the “scandal” was built on a foundation of flimsy or phony evidence and that a key argument – that “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” concurred in the Russian-hacking conclusion – was false.

Once that fake “consensus” claim disappeared – after President Obama's intelligence chiefs acknowledged that the Jan. 6 “assessment” was the work of “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies – there should have been a stepping back from the Russia-gate groupthink. There should have been demands for a reassessment of the underlying assumptions.

However, by then, too many Important People, including editors and executives at major news organizations, had accepted Russia's guilt as flat fact, meaning that their reputations were at risk. To protect their estimable careers, all doubts about Russia's guilt had to be crushed and the conventional wisdom enforced.

That self-serving defensiveness became the backdrop to the Russia-Iran-North Korean sanctions bill. Not only could no rethinking be allowed on Russia-gate but Trump's resistance to the groupthink had to be broken by neutering him along with his presidential powers to conduct diplomacy.

Still eager to please the Democratic #Resistance which sees Russia-gate as the pathway to Trump's impeachment, Democrats – from neocons like Sen. Ben Cardin to anti-interventionists such as Rep. Tulsi Gabbard – joined in the stampede for the sanctions bill.

In their rush, the Democrats even endangered Obama's signature diplomatic accomplishment, the international agreement blocking an Iranian nuclear weapon. Obama had promised Iran sanctions relief, not more sanctions. Now, the prospects for the accord's collapse are increased and the neocon dream to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran revived.

And, by tossing North Korea into the mix, the Democrats left Trump few options other than to unleash his warmongering side and plunge the world toward a potential cataclysm.

So, this is what the Russia-gate opportunism has wrought. The logical flaw in Russia-gate may turn out to be a fatal one.

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](#)).

Lawsuit Challenges DNC Anti-Sanders Bias

Blaming Russia has allowed the national Democratic Party to duck the real reasons why Hillary Clinton lost, the lack of a populist connection that a lawsuit is trying to expose, writes Norman Solomon at Truthdig.

By Norman Solomon

Nine months after losing the presidency, the Democratic Party is in dire need of a course correction. Grass-roots enthusiasm for the party is far from robust. Despite incessant funding appeals and widespread revulsion for the Trump administration, the Democratic National Committee's fundraising is [notably weak](#).

And the latest DNC chair, Tom Perez, sounds no more inspiring than his recent predecessors. When Perez speaks next to Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, it's a stark contrast between establishment clichés and progressive populism.

While a united front against the Trump regime would be ideal, mere unity behind timeworn Democratic leadership would hardly be auspicious. Breaking the Republican stranglehold at election time will require mobilizing the Democratic Party's base on behalf of authentic populism. But the power structure of the DNC has other priorities.

A comment from Sanders five months ago remains fully relevant: "Certainly, there are some people in the Democratic Party who want to maintain the status quo. They would rather go down with the Titanic so long as they have first-class seats."

Meanwhile, along with most Democrats in Congress, the DNC remains eager to heap blame on Russia for the defeat of Hillary Clinton. That's been a nifty way to [deflect attention](#) from what cried out for scrutiny after November's election – the reality that Clinton's close ties with Wall Street and big banks made it unconvincing to pitch her as an ally of working people.

All this is context for a lawsuit against the Democratic National Committee that has been slowly wending its way through a federal district court in Florida. The suit contends that the DNC engaged in fraud by renegeing on a key commitment in its charter.

The DNC charter is fairly explicit. Article V, Section 4 says: "In the conduct and management of the affairs and procedures of the Democratic National Committee, particularly as they apply to the preparation and conduct of the Presidential nomination process, the Chairperson shall exercise impartiality and evenhandedness as between the Presidential candidates and campaigns."

The charter goes on to state: "The Chairperson shall be responsible for ensuring that the national officers and staff of the Democratic National Committee maintain impartiality and evenhandedness during the Democratic Party Presidential nominating process."

DNC emails that reached the public a year ago show direct and purposeful violations of those DNC rules. As The New York Times reported with understatement days before the national convention, "The emails appear to bolster Mr. Sanders's claims that the committee, and in particular [DNC Chair Debbie] Wasserman Schultz, did not treat him fairly."

A Lawsuit Filed

A week after the release of those incriminating DNC emails in July 2016, a Miami-based law firm (Beck & Lee) filed a suit on behalf of plaintiffs who had donated to the DNC, alleging that the DNC committed "civil fraud."

The DNC emails show that top committee officials violated the DNC charter's "impartiality and evenhandedness" requirements. When compelled to respond at a hearing in U.S. District Court in southern Florida on April 25, the DNC's legal team came up with a revealing defense – claiming that the DNC has a right to be unfair during the presidential nominating process.

A lawyer for the DNC, Bruce Spiva, told the judge: "We could have voluntarily decided that, 'Look, we're gonna go into backrooms like they used to and smoke cigars and pick the candidate that way.' That's not the way it was done. But they could have. And that would have also been their right."

In other words, Spiva was saying that his clients atop the DNC didn't mug democracy in this case but could have if they'd wanted to – and they retain the right to do so in the future.

Later that day, Spiva tried to clean up a potential public relations snafu while reaffirming the DNC's legalistic stance: "In response to my hypothetical that

the party could choose its nominees in a smoke-filled room, I want to just reiterate that the party ran the process fair and impartially, and does not do that and doesn't plan to do that. But these, again, are political choices that either party is free to make and are not enforceable in a court of law."

Lawyers often make "even if" arguments in court that might not look good elsewhere. But this one is unusually telling – telling us that the most powerful people at the DNC reserve the right to put their thumbs on the scales when the Democratic Party chooses its presidential nominee.

If DNC leaders really want to help build the kind of relationships with the grass roots that are needed for defeating the Trump-Pence forces, the DNC should be trying to climb out of its estrangement hole, not digging itself in deeper.

Alienation from the Democratic Party hierarchy last fall—especially among young people who turned out for Sanders during the primaries but not for Clinton in November – was a major factor in Trump's victory. (Clinton's youthful support sank to such a low level in national polling that I [wrote for The Hill](#) just five weeks before the November election, "If this country had a maximum voting age of 35, Hillary Clinton would now be in danger of losing the election to Libertarian Party candidate Gary Johnson.") Like the Clinton campaign itself, the DNC was complacent about the distrust that the party's hierarchy had earned.

Eight months into 2017, the DNC seems to be on the same basic track as last year. It is symbolic and substantive that one of the national Democratic Party's most prominent online fundraising spokespeople still is Donna Brazile, who filled in as acting DNC chair after Wasserman Schultz suddenly resigned in disrepute last summer when her on-the-job bias was exposed.

Tipping the Scales

The release of Clinton campaign emails showed that Brazile had used her position as a CNN commentator to obtain and secretly [funnel debate questions](#) to Clinton – via campaign chairman John Podesta and communications director Jennifer Palmieri – during the primary battle between Clinton and Sanders.

In [a recent article](#), Salon columnist Sophia McClennen recalled: "In the months when she was interim DNC chair, Brazile went on totally lying about her transgressions until she finally admitted to doing it, but stated that she felt no remorse."

McClennen added: "The DNC is tone deaf to the fact that Brazile and Wasserman Schultz and the whole pack of insiders that didn't hold an ethical primary should be exiled from the party, they are tone deaf to the real reasons why Trump won, and they are tone deaf to the fact that Sanders is the most popular

politician and the most popular Senator in the nation. ... The Trump administration's cronyism, elitism and disregard for any semblance of democratic values has voters calling for impeachment, but the DNC has its own credibility problems – exemplified by the fact that Donna Brazile is still a party insider.”

The twin imperatives of taking government control away from Republicans and fighting for a genuinely progressive agenda will require an ongoing challenge to the entrenched national Democratic Party leadership. (Those who scoff at using the Democratic Party as an electoral tool to oust the Trump-Pence-Ryan-McConnell GOP have no other credible electoral tool to propose.) We can't afford to leave the Democratic Party to the corporatists and militarists who currently dominate it from the top.

Odds are that the fraud lawsuit against the Democratic National Committee won't get much further in legal proceedings. Yet the suit has already clarified and underscored a crucial reality. Progressive rhetoric notwithstanding, the DNC remains in sync with the same kind of anti-democratic arrogance that oversaw the party's disastrous 2016 election campaign. The progressive uprising for political revolution must continue.

Norman Solomon is coordinator of the online activist group [RootsAction.org](https://www.rootsaction.org). His books include [*War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*](#). He was a Bernie Sanders delegate and coordinator of the Bernie Delegates Network at the 2016 Democratic National Convention. [This article first appeared at Truthdig at <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/dnc-fraud-lawsuit-exposes-anti-democratic-views-democratic-party/>]

New Cracks in Russia-gate Foundation

The Russia-gate groupthink always rested on a fragile foundation of dubious analysis and biased guesswork, but now has been shaken by new forensic studies of the purported “hack,” as Patrick Lawrence reported at The Nation.

By Patrick Lawrence

It is now a year since the Democratic National Committee's mail system was compromised – a year since events in the spring and early summer of 2016 were identified as remote hacks and, in short order, attributed to Russians acting in behalf of Donald Trump.

A great edifice has been erected during this time. President Trump, members of his family, and numerous people around him stand accused of various corruptions and extensive collusion with Russians. Half a dozen simultaneous investigations proceed into these matters. Last week news broke that Special Counsel Robert Mueller had convened a grand jury, which issued its first subpoenas on August 3. Allegations of treason are common; prominent political figures and many media cultivate a case for impeachment.

The President's ability to conduct foreign policy, notably but not only with regard to Russia, is now crippled. Forced into a corner and having no choice, Trump just signed legislation imposing severe new sanctions on Russia and European companies working with it on pipeline projects vital to Russia's energy sector. Striking this close to the core of another nation's economy is customarily considered an act of war, we must not forget.

In retaliation, Moscow has announced that the United States must cut its embassy staff by roughly two-thirds. All sides agree that relations between the United States and Russia are now as fragile as they were during some of the Cold War's worst moments. To suggest that military conflict between two nuclear powers inches ever closer can no longer be dismissed as hyperbole.

All this was set in motion when the DNC's mail server was first violated in the spring of 2016 and by subsequent assertions that Russians were behind that "hack" and another such operation, also described as a Russian hack, on July 5. These are the foundation stones of the edifice just outlined.

The evolution of public discourse in the year since is worthy of scholarly study: Possibilities became allegations, and these became probabilities. Then the probabilities turned into certainties, and these evolved into what are now taken to be established truths. By my reckoning, it required a few days to a few weeks to advance from each of these stages to the next. This was accomplished via the indefensibly corrupt manipulations of language repeated incessantly in our leading media.

Lost in a year that often appeared to veer into our peculiarly American kind of hysteria is the absence of any credible evidence of what happened last year and who was responsible for it. It is tiresome to note, but none has been made available. Instead, we are urged to accept the word of institutions and senior officials with long records of deception. These officials profess "high confidence" in their "assessment" as to what happened in the spring and summer of last year – this standing as their authoritative judgment.

Few have noticed since these evasive terms first appeared that an assessment is an opinion, nothing more, and to express high confidence is an upside-down way

of admitting the absence of certain knowledge. This is how officials avoid putting their names on the assertions we are so strongly urged to accept – as the record shows many of them have done.

We come now to a moment of great gravity.

There has been a long effort to counter the official narrative we now call “Russiagate.” This effort has so far focused on the key events noted above, leaving numerous others still to be addressed. Until recently, researchers undertaking this work faced critical shortcomings, and these are to be explained. But they have achieved significant new momentum in the past several weeks, and what they have done now yields very consequential fruit.

Forensic investigators, intelligence analysts, system designers, program architects, and computer scientists of long experience and strongly credentialed are now producing evidence disproving the official version of key events last year. Their work is intricate and continues at a kinetic pace as we speak. But its certain results so far are two, simply stated, and freighted with implications:

- There was no hack of the Democratic National Committee’s system on July 5 last year – not by the Russians, not by anyone else. Hard science now demonstrates it was a leak – a download executed locally with a memory key or a similarly portable data-storage device. In short, it was an inside job by someone with access to the DNC’s system. This casts serious doubt on the initial “hack,” as alleged, that led to the very consequential publication of a large store of documents on WikiLeaks last summer.
- Forensic investigations of documents made public two weeks prior to the July 5 leak by the person or entity known as Guccifer 2.0 show that they were fraudulent: Before Guccifer posted them they were adulterated by cutting and pasting them into a blank template that had Russian as its default language. Guccifer took responsibility on June 15 for an intrusion the DNC reported on June 14 and professed to be a WikiLeaks source – claims essential to the official narrative implicating Russia in what was soon cast as an extensive hacking operation. To put the point simply, forensic science now devastates this narrative.

New Analyses

This article is based on an examination of the documents these forensic experts and intelligence analysts have produced, notably the key papers written over the past several weeks, as well as detailed interviews with many of those conducting investigations and now drawing conclusions from them. Before proceeding into this material, several points bear noting.

One, there are many other allegations implicating Russians in the 2016 political process. The work I will now report upon does not purport to prove or disprove any of them. Who delivered documents to WikiLeaks? Who was responsible for the “phishing” operation penetrating John Podesta’s e-mail in March 2016?

We do not know the answers to such questions. It is entirely possible, indeed, that the answers we deserve and must demand could turn out to be multiple: One thing happened in one case, another thing in another. The new work done on the mid-June and July 5 events bears upon all else in only one respect. We are now on notice: Given that we now stand face to face with very considerable cases of duplicity, it is imperative that all official accounts of these many events be subject to rigorously skeptical questioning. Do we even know that John Podesta’s e-mail was in fact “phished”? What evidence of this has been produced? Such rock-bottom questions as these must now be posed in all other cases.

Two, houses built on sand and made of cards are bound to collapse, and there can be no surprise that the one resting atop the “hack theory,” as we can call the prevailing wisdom on the DNC events, appears to be in the process of doing so.

Neither is there anything far-fetched in a reversal of the truth of this magnitude. American history is replete with similar cases. The Spanish sank the *Maine* in Havana harbor in February 1898. Iran’s Mossadegh was a Communist. Guatemala’s Árbenz represented a Communist threat to the United States. Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh was a Soviet puppet. The Sandinistas were Communists. The truth of the *Maine*, a war and a revolution in between, took a century to find the light of day, whereupon the official story disintegrated. We can do better now. It is an odd sensation to live through one of these episodes, especially one as big as Russiagate. But its place atop a long line of precedents can no longer be disputed.

Three, regardless of what one may think about the investigations and conclusions I will now outline – and, as noted, these investigations continue – there is a bottom line attaching to them. We can even call it a red line. Under no circumstance can it be acceptable that the relevant authorities – the National Security Agency, the Justice Department (via the Federal Bureau of Investigation), and the Central Intelligence Agency – leave these new findings without reply. Not credibly, in any case. Forensic investigators, prominent among them people with decades’ experience at high levels in these very institutions, have put a body of evidence on a table previously left empty. Silence now, should it ensue, cannot be written down as an admission of duplicity, but it will come very close to one.

It requires no elaboration to apply the above point to the corporate media, which have been flaccidly satisfied with official explanations of the DNC matter

from the start.

Qualified experts working independently of one another began to examine the DNC case immediately after the July 2016 events. Prominent among these is a group comprising former intelligence officers, almost all of whom previously occupied senior positions. Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), founded in 2003, now has 30 members, including a few associates with backgrounds in national-security fields other than intelligence. The chief researchers active on the DNC case are four: William Binney, formerly the NSA's technical director for world geopolitical and military analysis and designer of many agency programs now in use; Kirk Wiebe, formerly a senior analyst at the NSA's SIGINT Automation Research Center; Edward Loomis, formerly technical director in the NSA's Office of Signal Processing; and Ray McGovern, an intelligence analyst for nearly three decades and formerly chief of the CIA's Soviet Foreign Policy Branch. Most of these men have decades of experience in matters concerning Russian intelligence and the related technologies. This article reflects numerous interviews with all of them conducted in person, via Skype, or by telephone.

The customary VIPS format is an open letter, typically addressed to the President. The group has written three such letters on the DNC incident, all of which were first published by Robert Parry at www.consortiumnews.com. [Here](#) is the latest, dated July 24; it blueprints the forensic work this article explores in detail. They have all argued that the hack theory is wrong and that a locally executed leak is the far more likely explanation.

In a letter to Barack Obama dated January 17, three days before he left office, the group explained that the NSA's known programs are fully capable of capturing all electronic transfers of data. "We strongly suggest that you ask NSA for any evidence it may have indicating that the results of Russian hacking were given to WikiLeaks," the letter said. "If NSA cannot produce such evidence – and quickly – this would probably mean it does not have any."

The day after Parry published this letter, Obama gave his last press conference as President, at which he delivered one of the great gems among the official statements on the DNC e-mail question. "The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking," the legacy-minded Obama said, "were not conclusive." There is little to suggest the VIPS letter prompted this remark, but it is typical of the linguistic tap-dancing many officials connected to the case have indulged so as to avoid putting their names on the hack theory and all that derives from it.

Cyber-Evidence

Until recently there was a serious hindrance to the VIPS's work, and I have just suggested it. The group lacked access to positive data. It had no lump of cyber-material to place on its lab table and analyze, because no official agency had provided any.

Donald Rumsfeld famously argued with regard to the WMD question in Iraq, "The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." In essence, Binney and others at VIPS say this logic turns upside down in the DNC case: Based on the knowledge of former officials such as Binney, the group knew that (1) if there was a hack and (2) if Russia was responsible for it, the NSA would have to have evidence of both. Binney and others surmised that the agency and associated institutions were hiding the absence of evidence behind the claim that they had to maintain secrecy to protect NSA programs.

"Everything that they say must remain classified is already well-known," Binney said in an interview. "They're playing the Wizard of Oz game."

New findings indicate this is perfectly true, but until recently the VIPS experts could produce only "negative evidence," as they put it: The absence of evidence supporting the hack theory demonstrates that it cannot be so. That is all VIPS had. They could allege and assert, but they could not conclude: They were stuck demanding evidence they did not have – if only to prove there was none.

Research into the DNC case took a fateful turn in early July, when forensic investigators who had been working independently began to share findings and form loose collaborations wherein each could build on the work of others. In this a small, new website called www.disobedientmedia.com proved an important catalyst. Two independent researchers selected it, Snowden-like, as the medium through which to disclose their findings.

One of these is known as Forensicator and the other as Adam Carter. On July 9, Adam Carter sent Elizabeth Vos, a co-founder of Disobedient Media, a paper by the Forensicator that split the DNC case open like a coconut.

By this time Binney and the other technical-side people at VIPS had begun working with a man named Skip Folden. Folden was an IT executive at IBM for 33 years, serving 25 years as the IT program manager in the United States. He has also consulted for Pentagon officials, the FBI, and the Justice Department. Folden is effectively the VIPS group's liaison to Forensicator, Adam Carter, and other investigators, but neither Folden nor anyone else knows the identity of either Forensicator or Adam Carter. This bears brief explanation.

The Forensicator's July 9 document indicates he lives in the Pacific Time Zone,

which puts him on the West Coast. His notes describing his investigative procedures support this. But little else is known of him. Adam Carter, in turn, is located in England, but the name is a coy pseudonym: It derives from a character in a BBC espionage series called *Spooks*. It is protocol in this community, Elizabeth Vos told me in a telephone conversation this week, to respect this degree of anonymity.

Kirk Wiebe, the former SIGINT analyst at the NSA, thinks Forensicator could be “someone very good with the FBI,” but there is no certainty. Unanimously, however, all the analysts and forensics investigators interviewed for this column say Forensicator’s advanced expertise, evident in the work he has done, is unassailable. They hold a similarly high opinion of Adam Carter’s work.

Forensicator is working with the documents published by Guccifer 2.0, focusing for now on the July 5 intrusion into the DNC server. The contents of Guccifer’s files are known – they were published last September – and are not Forensicator’s concern. His work is with the metadata on those files. These data did not come to him via any clandestine means. Forensicator simply has access to them that others did not have. It is this access that prompts Kirk Wiebe and others to suggest that Forensicator may be someone with exceptional talent and training inside an agency such as the FBI.

“Forensicator unlocked and then analyzed what had been the locked files Guccifer supposedly took from the DNC server,” Skip Folden explained in an interview. “To do this he would have to have ‘access privilege,’ meaning a key.”

What has Forensicator proven since he turned his key? How? What has work done atop Forensicator’s findings proven? How?

The Transfer Rate

Forensicator’s first decisive findings, made public in the paper dated July 9, concerned the volume of the supposedly hacked material and what is called the transfer rate – the time a remote hack would require. The metadata established several facts in this regard with granular precision: On the evening of July 5, 2016, 1,976 megabytes of data were downloaded from the DNC’s server. The operation took 87 seconds. This yields a transfer rate of 22.7 megabytes per second.

These statistics are matters of record and essential to disproving the hack theory. No Internet service provider, such as a hacker would have had to use in mid-2016, was capable of downloading data at this speed. Compounding this contradiction, Guccifer claimed to have run his hack from Romania, which, for numerous reasons technically called delivery overheads, would slow down the

speed of a hack even further from maximum achievable speeds.

What is the maximum achievable speed? Forensicator recently ran a test download of a comparable data volume (and using a server speed not available in 2016) 40 miles from his computer via a server 20 miles away and came up with a speed of 11.8 megabytes per second – half what the DNC operation would need were it a hack. Other investigators have built on this finding. Folden and Edward Loomis say a survey published August 3, 2016, by www.speedtest.net/reports is highly reliable and use it as their thumbnail index. It indicated that the highest average ISP speeds of first-half 2016 were achieved by Xfinity and Cox Communications. These speeds averaged 15.6 megabytes per second and 14.7 megabytes per second, respectively. Peak speeds at higher rates were recorded intermittently but still did not reach the required 22.7 megabytes per second.

“A speed of 22.7 megabytes is simply unobtainable, especially if we are talking about a transoceanic data transfer,” Folden said. “Based on the data we now have, what we’ve been calling a hack is impossible.” Last week Forensicator reported on a speed test he conducted more recently. It tightens the case considerably. “Transfer rates of 23 MB/s (Mega Bytes per second) are not just highly unlikely, but effectively impossible to accomplish when communicating over the Internet at any significant distance,” he wrote. “Further, local copy speeds are measured, demonstrating that 23 MB/s is a typical transfer rate when using a USB-2 flash device (thumb drive).”

Time stamps in the metadata provide further evidence of what happened on July 5. The stamps recording the download indicate that it occurred in the Eastern Daylight Time Zone at approximately 6:45 pm. This confirms that the person entering the DNC system was working somewhere on the East Coast of the United States.

In theory the operation could have been conducted from Bangor or Miami or anywhere in between – but not Russia, Romania, or anywhere else outside the EDT zone. Combined with Forensicator’s findings on the transfer rate, the time stamps constitute more evidence that the download was conducted locally, since delivery overheads – conversion of data into packets, addressing, sequencing times, error checks, and the like – degrade all data transfers conducted via the Internet, more or less according to the distance involved.

Russian ‘Fingerprints’

In addition, there is the adulteration of the documents Guccifer 2.0 posted on June 15, when he made his first appearance. This came to light when researchers penetrated what Folden calls Guccifer’s top layer of metadata and analyzed what was in the layers beneath. They found that the first five files Guccifer made

public had each been run, via ordinary cut-and-paste, through a single template that effectively immersed them in what could plausibly be cast as Russian fingerprints. They were not: The Russian markings were artificially inserted prior to posting. "It's clear," another forensics investigator self-identified as HET, wrote in a report on this question, "that metadata was deliberately altered and documents were deliberately pasted into a Russianified [W]ord document with Russian language settings and style headings."

To be noted in this connection: The list of the CIA's cyber-tools WikiLeaks began to release in March and labeled Vault 7 includes one called Marble that is capable of obfuscating the origin of documents in false-flag operations and leaving markings that point to whatever the CIA wants to point to. (The tool can also "de-obfuscate" what it has obfuscated.) It is not known whether this tool was deployed in the Guccifer case, but it is there for such a use.

It is not yet clear whether documents now shown to have been leaked locally on July 5 were tainted to suggest Russian hacking in the same way the June 15 Guccifer release was. This is among several outstanding questions awaiting answers, and the forensic scientists active on the DNC case are now investigating it.

In a note Adam Carter sent to Folden and McGovern last week and copied to me, he reconfirmed the corruption of the June 15 documents, while indicating that his initial work on the July 5 documents – of which much more is to be done – had not yet turned up evidence of doctoring.

In the meantime, VIPS has assembled a chronology that imposes a persuasive logic on the complex succession of events just reviewed. It is this:

- On June 12 last year, Julian Assange announced that WikiLeaks had and would publish documents pertinent to Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.
- On June 14, CrowdStrike, a cyber-security firm hired by the DNC, announced, without providing evidence, that it had found malware on DNC servers and had evidence that Russians were responsible for planting it.
- On June 15, Guccifer 2.0 first appeared, took responsibility for the "hack" reported on June 14 and claimed to be a WikiLeaks source. It then posted the adulterated documents just described.
- On July 5, Guccifer again claimed he had remotely hacked DNC servers, and the operation was instantly described as another intrusion attributable to Russia. Virtually no media questioned this account.

It does not require too much thought to read into this sequence. With his June 12 announcement, Assange effectively put the DNC on notice that it had a little time, probably not much, to act preemptively against the imminent publication of

damaging documents. Did the DNC quickly conjure Guccifer from thin air to create a cyber-saboteur whose fingers point to Russia? There is no evidence of this one way or the other, but emphatically it is legitimate to pose the question in the context of the VIPS chronology. WikiLeaks began publishing on July 22. By that time, the case alleging Russian interference in the 2016 elections process was taking firm root. In short order Assange would be written down as a “Russian agent.”

By any balanced reckoning, the official case purporting to assign a systematic hacking effort to Russia, the events of mid-June and July 5 last year being the foundation of this case, is shabby to the point taxpayers should ask for their money back. The Intelligence Community Assessment, the supposedly definitive report featuring the “high confidence” dodge, was greeted as farcically flimsy when issued January 6.

Ray McGovern calls it a disgrace to the intelligence profession. It is spotlessly free of evidence, front to back, pertaining to any events in which Russia is implicated.

‘Hand-Picked’ Analysts

James Clapper, the former director of national intelligence, admitted in May that “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies (not the 17 previously reported) drafted the ICA.

There is a way to understand “hand-picked” that is less obvious than meets the eye: The report was sequestered from rigorous agency-wide reviews. This is the way these people have spoken to us for the past year.

Behind the ICA lie other indefensible realities. The FBI has never examined the DNC’s computer servers – an omission that is beyond preposterous. It has instead relied on the reports produced by CrowdStrike, a firm that drips with conflicting interests well beyond the fact that it is in the DNC’s employ. Dmitri Alperovitch, its co-founder and chief technology officer, is on the record as vigorously anti-Russian. He is a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, which suffers the same prejudice. Problems such as this are many.

“We continue to stand by our report,” CrowdStrike said, upon seeing the VIPS blueprint of the investigation. CrowdStrike argues that by July 5 all malware had been removed from the DNC’s computers. But the presence or absence of malware by that time is entirely immaterial, because the event of July 5 is proven to have been a leak and not a hack. Given that malware has nothing to do with leaks, CrowdStrike’s logic appears to be circular.

In effect, the new forensic evidence considered here lands in a vacuum. We now

enter a period when an official reply should be forthcoming. What the forensic people are now producing constitutes evidence, however one may view it, and it is the first scientifically derived evidence we have into any of the events in which Russia has been implicated. The investigators deserve a response, the betrayed professionals who formed VIPS as the WMD scandal unfolded in 2003 deserve it, and so do the rest of us. The cost of duplicity has rarely been so high.

I concluded each of the interviews conducted for this column by asking for a degree of confidence in the new findings. These are careful, exacting people as a matter of professional training and standards, and I got careful, exacting replies.

All those interviewed came in between 90 percent and 100 percent certain that the forensics prove out. I have already quoted Skip Folden's answer: impossible based on the data.

"The laws of physics don't lie," Ray McGovern volunteered at one point.

"It's QED, theorem demonstrated," William Binney said in response to my question. "There's no evidence out there to get me to change my mind." When I asked Edward Loomis, a 90 percent man, about the 10 percent he held out, he replied, "I've looked at the work and it shows there was no Russian hack. But I didn't do the work. That's the 10 percent. I'm a scientist."

Editor's note: In its chronology, VIPS mistakenly gave the wrong date for CrowdStrike's announcement of its claim to have found malware on DNC servers. It said June 15, when it should have said June 14. VIPS has acknowledged the error, and we have made the correction.

Patrick Lawrence is a longtime columnist, essayist, critic, and lecturer, whose most recent books are *Somebody Else's Century: East and West in a Post-Western World* and *Time No Longer: America After the American Century*. His website is patricklawrence.us. [This article was originally published at The Nation at <https://www.thenation.com/article/a-new-report-raises-big-questions-about-last-years-dnc-hack/>]

The Source of Trump's Real Clout

The image of Donald Trump's "deplorables" – as Hillary Clinton dubbed them – is a bunch of bigoted blue-collar whites waving Confederate flags, but the secret of Trump's real power lies elsewhere, says historian Keri Leigh Merritt.

By Keri Leigh Merritt

Since before the election, poor white voters largely have been blamed for the rise of Donald Trump. Although their complicity in his election is clear and well established, they're continually targeted as if their actions are the primary reason Trump won. But in fact, higher-earning, college-educated whites supported him at even greater rates.

It's quite easy to brand the working class as the most rabidly xenophobic and racist group of whites. Whether they're brandishing Confederate flags or vociferously vowing to "Make America Great Again," their beliefs about white supremacy are completely exposed for the world to witness. It's much harder to see how those atop the economic pyramid not only greatly benefit from white supremacy but actually use racism to their advantage – generally from behind the scenes.

In short, when we hold the working class responsible for white supremacy, other whites are absolved of racial wrongdoing. By allowing the spread of civic ignorance, by propagating historical lies and political untruths, and by engendering an insidious form of racism, upper-class whites are undoubtedly just as culpable – if not more so – than working-class whites in the quest to maintain white supremacy.

Certainly, there is no apology for the racism of working-class whites, nor any excuse; but we should seek to understand the ways in which white supremacy and power are completely intertwined. Throughout American history, the economic elite have used vile forms of racism to perpetuate the current hierarchy – politically, socially and economically. White supremacy is most commonly conceptualized as a way for lower-class whites to feel socially superior to people from other ethnic backgrounds. More important, though, white supremacy is a tried-and-tested means for upper-class whites to grow their wealth and power.

Whether pitting laborers of different races against each other, stoking racial fears through a sensationalistic and profit-driven media or politically scapegoating entire nationalities, America's white elite have successfully modernized age-old strategies of using racism to prevent the formation of a broad coalition of people along class lines.

The Goal of Manipulation

To be sure, the concept of white privilege must seem far-fetched to working-class whites who come from generations of cyclical poverty. They constantly are told that African-Americans are the primary recipients of welfare and social benefits, and that policies like affirmative action are greatly detrimental to

all whites. By controlling key aspects of the economy, especially education, politics and the media, the white elite often very easily manipulate less affluent whites.

First, by governing and managing the education system in this country, the upper classes remain in control of the equality of *opportunity*. While much of America is plagued by an underfunded, failing public school system that gets exponentially worse the deeper the area's poverty, the affluent live in areas with higher property taxes, and thus, better local school systems. Despite this disparity, the rich also are always able to send their children to private (and increasingly, "charter") schools, escaping the bleak educational realities that most Americans are left to suffer.

As the abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher wrote about the lack of public education in the slave South, "[I]gnorance is an institution. They legislate for ignorance the same way we legislate for schoolhouses." Today, as Republicans continue slashing education funding at the federal, state and local levels, they legislate for ignorance. They fear statistics and facts, realizing what may follow the political enlightenment of the lower classes. "Knowledge is not only power," Beecher aptly concluded, "but powder, also, liable to blow false institutions to atoms." ["Anti-Slavery Lectures," *The New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1855, 5.]

Second, elite authority over the educational system also means regulation over the teaching of subjects like history, government and civics. An overwhelming majority of Americans have shockingly little understanding of our own past and our own government, often leading to lower-class political apathy.

Third, a small number of extremely wealthy white men control and operate much of the American media. With just a handful of corporations owning the majority of our country's media, it is worth remembering that news today is essentially a product to be sold, a commodity. Trump himself has created a political firestorm by branding certain news outlets as "fake news," but the media monopoly obviously presents valid concerns about fair and balanced reporting. Each of the few very powerful, rich men have their own reasons for deciding what qualifies as "news."

Divide and Conquer

Finally, business owners and corporate leaders have historically sought to keep workers segregated, either physically or by job. Since antebellum times, masters attempted to engender racism between poor white laborers and enslaved blacks, trying to keep each side distrustful of the other.

By perpetuating and encouraging a vile form of racism, they attempted to establish psychological segregation, ultimately thwarting the prospect of an interracial coalition. Today, elites use white supremacy as a powerful tool in preventing unionism – as just witnessed with the failure of the United Auto Workers election at a Mississippi Nissan factory.

Thus, even though working-class whites certainly support Trump and his policies, it is important to remember why. Indeed, poorer whites may be the ones branded as hardened white supremacists, but let's not forget who benefits the most from racism: the white economic elite.

“You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings,” the famous populist leader Tom Watson once told a gathering of white and black laborers. “You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both.” With a few short breaths, Watson had laid bare the most important reason why white supremacy has always thrived in this country, especially during times of severe economic inequality.

Many vestiges of the past – including a long history of upper-class whites using racism to their advantage – have re-emerged in Trump's America. As our nation impetuously tumbles toward a very uncertain future, we must take heed that the racist rhetoric and divisive political issues have only just begun. The millionaires and billionaires of this country literally have a fortune to protect, and white supremacy has always helped assure their place at the apex of society.

As Watson rightfully crowed to his interracial crowd, “You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.” [Thomas E. Watson, “The Negro Question in the South,” *The Arena* (Boston), VI, Oct. 1892, 540-550.]

Keri Leigh Merritt is an independent historian in Atlanta, Georgia. She is the author of *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*. Follow her on Twitter: [@KeriLeighMerritt](https://twitter.com/KeriLeighMerritt). [This article originally appeared at <http://billmoyers.com/story/white-supremacy-age-trump/>]

A New Twist in Seth Rich Murder Case

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media dismisses any link between the murder of DNC official Seth Rich and leaked DNC emails as a “conspiracy theory” – while

blaming Russia instead – but a new possibility has arisen, writes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

With U.S.-Russia tensions as dangerously high as they've been since the worst days of the Cold War, there is potential new evidence that Russia was not behind a hack of the Democratic National Committee, although Congress and the U.S. mainstream media accept the unproven allegation of Russia's guilt as indisputable fact.

The possible new evidence comes in the form of a leaked audiotape of veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh in which Hersh is heard to say that not Russia, but a DNC insider, was the source of the Democratic emails published by WikiLeaks just before the start of the Democratic National Convention in late July 2016.

Hersh said on the tape that the source of the leak was former DNC employee Seth Rich, who was murdered on a darkened street in a rough neighborhood of Northwest Washington D.C. two weeks before the Convention, on July 10, 2016. But Hersh threw cold water on a theory that the murder was an assassination in retaliation for the leak. Instead, Hersh concurs with the D.C. police who say the murder was a botched robbery.

Mainstream news outlets have mocked any linkage between Rich's murder and the disclosure of the DNC emails as a "conspiracy theory," but Hersh's comments suggest another possibility – that the murder and the leak were unrelated while Rich may still have been the leaker.

In dismissing the possibility that Rich was the leaker, mainstream media outlets often ignore one of the key reasons why some people believe that he was: Shortly after his murder, WikiLeaks, which has denied receiving the emails from the Russian government, posted a Tweet offering a \$20,000 reward for information leading to the solution of the mystery of who killed Rich.

Julian Assange, WikiLeaks founder and publisher, brought up Rich's murder out of context in an [interview](#) with Dutch TV last August. "Whistle-blowers go to significant efforts to get us material and often very significant risks," Assange said. "As a 27-year-old, works for the DNC, was shot in the back, murdered just a few weeks ago for unknown reasons as he was walking down the street in Washington."

Pressed by the interviewer to say whether Rich was the source of the DNC emails, Assange said WikiLeaks never reveals its sources. Yet, it appeared to be an indirect way of naming Rich, while formally maintaining WikiLeaks's

policy. An alternative view would be to believe that Assange is cynically using Rich's death to divert the trail from the real source.

But Assange is likely one of the few people who actually knows who the source is, so his professed interest in Rich's murder presents a clue regarding the source of the leak that any responsible news organization would at least acknowledge although that has not been the case in many recent mainstream articles about the supposed Seth Rich "conspiracy theory."

Hersh's Unwitting Tapes

Hersh's taped comments add another element to the mystery, given his long record of shedding light into the dark corners of the U.S. government's crimes, lies and cover-ups. He exposed the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War; revealed illegal CIA spying in the 1970s spurring wide-ranging Congressional investigations and reform; and uncovered U.S. torture in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

In the audiotape – which Hersh told me was made without his permission – he quoted an unnamed government source who told him that Rich offered the DNC emails to WikiLeaks in exchange for money.

"What I know comes off an FBI report. Don't ask me how. You can figure it out, I've been around a long time," Hersh says on the tape. "I have somebody on the inside who will go and read a file for me. This person is unbelievably accurate and careful, he's a very high-level guy and he'll do a favor. You're just going to have to trust me."

The FBI cyber unit got involved after the D.C. police were unable to access protected files on Rich's computer, Hersh said. So the FBI "found what he'd done. He had submitted a series of documents, of emails. Some juicy emails from the DNC," to Wikileaks, Hersh said.

"He offered a sample, an extensive sample, you know I'm sure dozens of emails and said 'I want money.' Then later Wikileaks did get the password, he had a Dropbox, a protected Dropbox," Hersh said.

"Wikileaks got access, and before he was killed ... he also, and this is also in the FBI report, he also let people know, with whom he was dealing. ... I don't know how he dealt with the Wikileaks and the mechanism but ... the word was passed according to the NSA report, 'I've also shared this box with a couple of friends so if anything happens to me it's not going to solve your problem.'" Hersh said he didn't know what this "problem" was.

Either Hersh misspoke when he mentioned an "NSA report," instead meaning the FBI

report, or the National Security Agency may have provided a record of Rich's communication to the FBI. Both the FBI and the D.C. police have denied that the FBI got involved in the case.

The Tape Is Leaked

The Hersh audiotape was posted on a website called Big League Politics, which displays links to Project Veritas, a right-wing group run by James O'Keefe, though there is no evidence that Veritas was involved in the Hersh tape. Veritas does undercover audio and video recordings of unsuspecting subjects and has been accused of doctoring its video and audiotapes. But a recent O'Keefe undercover video of a CNN medical producer saying the network's coverage of the Russia-gate story was "bullshit" was confirmed by CNN, which took no action against the producer.

People who believe that Hersh's apparent revelation could reduce Russia-U.S. tensions are clamoring for him to confirm what he said. Popular blogger Caitlin Johnstone wrote: "If Hersh has any information at all indicating that the WikiLeaks releases last year came not from Russian hackers but from a leaker on the inside, he is morally obligated to volunteer all the information that he has. Even the slightest possibility that his information could help halt America's collision course with Russia by killing public support for new cold war escalations makes his remaining silent absolutely inexcusable."

Only Hersh's voice is heard on the taped interview, which was conducted by Ed Butowsky, a wealthy Republican donor and Trump supporter. Until now, Hersh's only public comment about the tape was to National Public Radio. "I hear gossip," Hersh said. "[Butowsky] took two and two and made 45 out of it."

I contacted Hersh on Friday via email. He confirmed to me that it was his voice on the tape by angrily condemning those who he said secretly recorded him, without identifying them. He did not respond when I asked him whether he thought the tape may have been altered. Hersh refused to comment further.

On June 2, in an exchange of emails between Hersh and Butowsky, Hersh denied any knowledge of the FBI report. That was two months before Hersh discovered that he had been secretly recorded when the tape was made public on Aug. 1 by Big League Politics. A screenshot of the Hersh-Butowsky email exchange was published by Big League Politics last week.

"I am curious why you haven't approached the house committee telling them what you were read by your FBI friend related to Seth Rich that you in turn read to me," Butowsky wrote.

Hersh replied: "ed -you have a lousy memory...i was not read anything by my fbi

friend..i have no firsthand information and i really wish you would stop telling others information that you think i have...please stop relaying information that you do not have right...and that i have no reason to believe is accurate..."

Without informing him that he had been recorded, Butowsky replies: "I know it isn't first hand knowledge but you clearly said, my memory is perfect, that you had a friend at the FBI who read / told you what was in the file on Seth Rich and I wonder why you aren't helping your country and sharing that information on who it was?"

Further suggesting that Rich may have been the source of the DNC emails, WikiLeaks [posted](#) a link to the audiotape on Twitter.

Hersh has given no indication he's planning to write a piece based on his source who he said has seen the FBI report. Hersh has found it difficult to be published in recent years in the United States. He has been writing for the *London Review of Books* until that publication earlier this year rejected a piece challenging the purported U.S. evidence blaming a chemical weapons attack in Syria, which led to Trump's bombing of a Syrian air field. Hersh's story was published instead in a major German weekly, *Die Welt*.

MSM Contempt

Corporate media's uniform reaction has been to treat the idea of Seth Rich being WikiLeaks's source as a "conspiracy theory" – while mostly ignoring Assange's hints and now the Hersh tape. Major U.S. media outlets cover Russia-gate as if Russian interference in last November's U.S. election is proven, rather than based on a shaky "assessment" by "hand-picked" analysts from three – not all 17 – U.S. intelligence agencies.

If Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller is serious about getting to the bottom of who WikiLeaks's source is there are several avenues he could pursue. He could check Rich's bank accounts to see if there was a transfer of money from a representative of WikiLeaks. He could try to find Rich's friends who may have been given his Dropbox password. He could seek to interview Hersh.

"Someone ought to ask Mueller, if he had an ounce of integrity (which [he doesn't](#)), why he's not showing these FBI and/or NSA reports to his Grand Jury which could blow the lid off of 'Russiagate' that Mueller was appointed to investigate," former FBI official and whistleblower Coleen Rowley told me in an email. "It's sad the FBI could be keeping this secret. But I think the [Rich] family could sue to get the FBI Report that Hersh mentioned or now that FOX is sued, its attorneys could try to subpoena the FBI documents in discovery." She added that the FBI would likely fight such a subpoena, however.

The lawsuit that Rowley mentioned was filed by Rod Wheeler, a D.C. private detective, against Butowsky and Fox News. Wheeler was hired by Butowsky on behalf of the Rich family to find the killer. In a Fox News item on May 16, Wheeler was quoted referring to a Fox source in the federal government who said that Rich was WikiLeaks's source.

Fox News retracted the story a week later citing unspecified breaches of its editorial policies. At the time Fox had suffered ad boycotts when its chairman, Roger Ailes, and then its top presenter, Bill O'Reilly, faced sexual harassment allegations. Both later resigned. Sean Hannity, another top presenter, continued to pursue the Rich story until he was threatened with an ad boycott, at which point Fox retracted the story.

Wheeler's suit now alleges that he was misquoted and that the purpose of the Fox story was to distract attention from Russia's connection with the DNC emails. Big League Politics has posted audio of Wheeler saying that Aaron Rich, the victim's brother, blocked him from pursuing leads on Seth Rich's computer.

It is not clear if Hersh's source is the same as Fox's (or if Fox was using Hersh in a second-hand way). Butowsky has a connection with Fox as an on-air commentator. The date of the Hersh audio recording has not been made known although it presumably predated his email exchange with Butowsky on June 2.

If an FBI report exists indicating that Rich was the source of the DNC emails and the report is made public, it could reduce tensions with Russia that Congress ratcheted up further last week by escalating sanctions – a form of economic warfare – against Russia as punishment for its alleged role in exposing the DNC emails and others belonging to Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta.

The DNC emails revealed DNC officials improperly interfering in the Democratic primaries to undercut Clinton's chief rival, Sen. Bernie Sanders. The Podesta emails included the contents of Clinton's speeches to Wall Street and other special interests as well as pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

On Jan. 6 – before leaving office – President Obama's intelligence chiefs oversaw "hand-picked" analysts from the CIA, FBI and NSA creating an "assessment" blaming Russia for the hacked emails albeit without presenting any hard evidence. Russian officials have denied supplying the emails to WikiLeaks and WikiLeaks has denied receiving them from Russia.

Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan and an associate of

Assange, has said categorically that the WikiLeaks source was a leak from an insider, not a hack. In an email message last week to former CIA analyst Ray McGovern, which McGovern shared with me, Murray wrote: “To my certain knowledge neither the DNC nor Podesta leaks to Wikileaks involved Russia. I met with someone while in Washington who, to the best of my knowledge, was an actual leaker.”

Nevertheless, the unproven allegations of Russian interference in the election have raised tensions between the two nuclear powers to levels not seen since the darkest days of the Cold War and possibly worse. Stephen Cohen, a leading U.S. expert on Russia, said the current showdown may be even more hazardous than the Cuban missile crisis.

“I think this is the most dangerous moment in American-Russian relations, at least since the Cuban missile crisis. And arguably, it’s more dangerous, because it’s more complex,” he told Democracy Now! in April. “Therefore, we ... have in Washington these – and, in my judgment, fact-less – accusations that Trump has somehow been compromised by the Kremlin.”

In the missile crisis “there was no doubt what the Soviets had done, putting missile silos in Cuba,” Cohen said. “No evidence has been presented today of anything. Imagine if Kennedy had been accused of being a secret Soviet Kremlin agent. He would have been crippled. And the only way he could have proved he wasn’t was to have launched a war against the Soviet Union. And at that time, the option was nuclear war.”

As it still is today.

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.

Neocons Leverage Trump-Hate for More Wars

Exclusive: The enactment of new sanctions against Russia and Iran – with the support of nearly all Democrats and Republicans in Congress – shows how the warmongering neocons again have come out on top, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A savvy Washington observer once told me that the political reality about the neoconservatives is that they alone couldn't win you a single precinct in the United States. But both Republicans and Democrats still line up to gain neocon support or at least neocon acceptance.

Part of the reason for this paradox is the degree of dominance that the neoconservatives have established in the national news media – as op-ed writers and TV commentators – and the neocon ties to the Israel Lobby that is famous for showering contributions on favored politicians and on the opponents of those not favored.

Since the neocons' emergence as big-time foreign policy players in the Reagan administration, they also have demonstrated extraordinary resilience, receiving a steady flow of money often through U.S. government-funded grants from organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy and through donations from military contractors to hawkish neocon think tanks.

But neocons' most astonishing success over the past year may have been how they have pulled liberals and even some progressives into the neocon strategies for war and more war, largely by exploiting the Left's disgust with President Trump.

People who would normally favor international cooperation toward peaceful resolution of conflicts have joined the neocons in ratcheting up global tensions and making progress toward peace far more difficult.

The provocative "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act," which imposes sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea while tying President Trump's hands in removing those penalties, passed the Congress without a single Democrat voting no.

The only dissenting votes came from three Republican House members – Justin Amash of Michigan, Jimmy Duncan of Tennessee, and Thomas Massie of Kentucky – and from Republican Rand Paul of Kentucky and Independent Bernie Sanders of Vermont in the Senate.

In other words, every Democrat present for the vote adopted the neocon position of escalating tensions with Russia and Iran. The new sanctions appear to close off hopes for a détente with Russia and may torpedo the nuclear agreement with Iran, which would put the bomb-bomb-bomb option back on the table just where the neocons want it.

The Putin Obstacle

As for Russia, the neocons have viewed President Vladimir Putin as a major obstacle to their plans at least since 2013 when he helped President Obama come up with a compromise with Syria that averted a U.S. military strike over dubious claims that the Syrian military was responsible for a sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

Subsequent evidence indicated that the sarin attack most likely was a provocation by Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate to trick the U.S. military into entering the war on Al Qaeda's side.

While you might wonder why the U.S. government would even think about taking actions that would benefit Al Qaeda, which lured the U.S. into this Mideast quagmire in the first place by attacking on 9/11, the answer is that Israel and the neocons – along with Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-governed states – favored an Al Qaeda victory if that was what was needed to shatter the so-called "Shiite crescent," anchored in Iran and reaching through Syria to Lebanon.

Many neocons are, in effect, America's Israeli agents and – since Israel is now allied with Saudi Arabia and the Sunni Gulf states versus Iran – the neocons exercise their media/political influence to rationalize U.S. military strikes against Iran's regional allies, i.e., Syria's secular government of Bashar al-Assad.

For his part, Putin compounded his offense to the neocons by facilitating Obama's negotiations with Iran that imposed strict constraints on Iran's actions toward development of a nuclear bomb and took U.S. war against Iran off the table. The neocons, Israel and Saudi Arabia wanted the U.S. military to lead a bombing campaign against Iran with the hope of crippling their regional adversary and possibly even achieving "regime change" in Tehran.

Punishing Russia

It was in that time frame that NED's neocon President Carl Gershman identified Ukraine as the "biggest prize" and an important step toward the even bigger prize of removing Putin in Russia.

Other U.S. government neocons, including Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and Sen. John McCain, delivered the Ukraine "prize" by supporting the Feb. 22, 2014 coup that overthrew the elected government of Ukraine and unleashed anti-Russian nationalists (including neo-Nazis) who began killing ethnic Russians in the south and east near Russia's border.

When Putin responded by allowing Crimeans to vote on secession from Ukraine and reunification with Russia, the West – and especially the neocon-dominated

mainstream media – denounced the move as a “Russian invasion.” Covertly, the Russians also helped ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine who defied the coup regime in Kiev and faced annihilation from Ukrainian military forces, including the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, which literally displayed Swastikas and SS symbols. Putin’s assistance to these embattled ethnic Russian Ukrainians became “Russian aggression.”

Many U.S. pundits and journalists – in the conservative, centrist and liberal media – were swept up by the various hysterias over Syria, Iran and Russia – much as they had been a decade earlier around the Iraq-WMD frenzy and the “responsibility to protect” (or R2P) argument for the violent “regime change” in Libya in 2011. In all these cases, the public debate was saturated with U.S. government and neocon propaganda, much of it false.

But it worked. For instance, the neocons and their liberal-interventionist sidekicks achieved extraordinary success in seducing many American “peace activists” to support the “regime change” war in Syria by sending sympathetic victims of the Syrian government on speaking tours.

Meanwhile, the major U.S. media essentially flacked for “moderate” Syrian rebels who just happened to be fighting alongside Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate and sharing their powerful U.S.-supplied weapons with the jihadists, all the better to kill Syrian soldiers trying to protect the secular government in Damascus.

Successful Propaganda

As part of this propaganda process, the jihadists’ P.R. adjunct, known as the White Helmets, phoned in anti-government atrocity stories to eager and credulous Western journalists who didn’t dare visit the Al Qaeda-controlled zones for fear of being beheaded.

Still, whenever the White Helmets or other “activists” accused the Syrian government of some unlikely chemical attack, the information was treated as gospel. When United Nations investigators, who were under enormous pressure to confirm the propaganda tales beloved in the West, uncovered evidence that one of the alleged chlorine attacks was staged by the jihadists, the mainstream U.S. media politely looked the other way and continued to treat the chemical-weapons stories as credible.

Historian and journalist Stephen Kinzer has said, “Coverage of the Syrian war will be remembered as one of the most shameful episodes in the history of the American press.”

But all these successes in the neocons’ “perception management” operations pale when compared to what the neocons have accomplished since Donald Trump defeated

Hillary Clinton last November.

Fueled by the shock and disgust over the egotistical self-proclaimed pussy-grabber ascending to the highest office in the land, many Americans looked for both an excuse for explaining the outcome and a strategy for removing Trump as quickly as possible. The answer to both concerns became: blame Russia.

The evidence that Russia had “hacked our democracy” was very thin – some private outfit called CrowdStrike found Cyrillic lettering and a reference to the founder of the Soviet KGB in some of the metadata – but that “incriminating evidence” contradicted CrowdStrike’s own notion of a crack Russian hacking operation that was almost impossible to trace.

So, even though the FBI failed to secure the Democratic National Committee’s computers so the government could do its own forensic analysis, President Obama assigned his intelligence chiefs, CIA Director John Brennan and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, to come up with an assessment that could be used to blame Trump’s victory on “Russian meddling.” Obama, of course, shared the revulsion over Trump’s victory, since the real-estate mogul/reality-TV star had famously launched his own political career by spreading the lie that Obama was born in Kenya.

‘Hand-Picked’ Analysts

According to Clapper’s later congressional testimony, the analysts for this job were “hand-picked” from the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency and assigned to produce an “assessment” before Obama left office. Their Jan. 6 report was remarkable in its lack of evidence and the analysts themselves admitted that it fell far short of establishing anything as fact. It amounted to a continuation of the “trust us” approach that had dominated the anti-Russia themes for years.

Much of the thin report focused on complaints about Russia’s RT network for covering the Occupy Wall Street protests and sponsoring a 2012 debate for third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Democratic-Republican debates between President Obama and former Gov. Mitt Romney.

The absurdity of citing such examples in which RT contributed to the public debate in America as proof of Russia attacking American democracy should have been apparent to everyone, but the Russia-gate stampede had begun and so instead of ridiculing the Jan. 6 report as an insult to reason, its shaky Russia-did-it conclusions were embraced as unassailable Truth, buttressed by the false claim that the assessment represented the consensus view of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies.

So, for instance, we get the internal contradictions of a Friday column by

Washington Post columnist David Ignatius who starts off by making a legitimate point about Washington groupthink.

“When all right-thinking people in the nation’s capital seem to agree on something – as has been the case recently with legislation imposing new sanctions on Russia – that may be a warning that the debate has veered into an unthinking herd mentality,” Ignatius wrote as he questioned the wisdom of overusing sanctions and tying the President’s hands on when to remove sanctions.

Lost Logic

But Ignatius failed to follow his own logic when it came to the core groupthink about Russia “meddling” in the U.S. election. Despite the thinness of the evidence, the certainty about Russia’s guilt is now shared by “all right-thinking people” in Washington, who agree that this point is beyond dispute despite the denials from both WikiLeaks, which published the purloined Democratic emails, and the Russian government.

Ignatius seemed nervous that his mild deviation from the conventional wisdom about the sanctions bill might risk his standing with the Establishment, so he added:

“Don’t misunderstand me. In questioning congressional review of sanctions, I’m not excusing Trump’s behavior. His non-response to Russia’s well-documented meddling in the 2016 presidential election has been outrageous.”

However, as usual for the U.S. mainstream media, Ignatius doesn’t cite any of those documents. Presumably, he’s referring to the Jan. 6 assessment, which itself contained no real evidence to support its opinion that Russia hacked into Democratic emails and gave them to WikiLeaks for distribution.

Just because a lot of Important People keep repeating the same allegation doesn’t make the allegation true or “well-documented.” And skepticism should be raised even higher when there is a clear political motive for pushing a falsehood as truth, as we should have learned from President George W. Bush’s Iraq-WMD fallacies and from President Barack Obama’s wild exaggerations about the need to intervene in Libya to prevent a massacre of civilians.

But Washington neocons always start with a leg up because of their easy access to the editorial pages of The New York Times and Washington Post as well as their speed-dial relationships with producers at CNN and other cable outlets.

Yet, the neocons have achieved perhaps their greatest success by merging Cold War Russo-phobia with the Trump Derangement Syndrome to enlist liberals and even progressives into the neocon drive for more “regime change” wars.

There can be no doubt that the escalation of sanctions against Russia and Iran will have the effect of escalating geopolitical tensions with those two important countries and making war, even nuclear war, more likely.

In Iran, hardliners are already telling President Hassan Rouhani, “We told you so” that the U.S. government can’t be trusted in its promise to remove – not increase – sanctions in compliance with the nuclear agreement.

And, Putin, who is actually one of the more pro-Western leaders in Russia, faces attacks from his own hardliners who view him as naïve in thinking that Russia would ever be accepted by the West.

Even relative Kremlin moderates such as Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, are citing Trump’s tail-between-his-legs signing of the sanctions bill as proof that the U.S. establishment has blocked any hope for a détente between Washington and Moscow.

In other words, the prospects for advancing the neocon agenda of more “regime change” wars and coups have grown – and the neocons can claim as their allies virtually the entire Democratic Party hierarchy which is so eager to appease its angry #Resistance base that even the heightened risk of nuclear war is being ignored.

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 the World May End

Republicans and Democrats – along with a complicit mainstream media – are plunging ahead toward war with Russia, a mad groupthink that could end life on the planet, observes John Pilger.

By John Pilger

The U.S. submarine captain says, “We’ve all got to die one day, some sooner and some later. The trouble always has been that you’re never ready, because you don’t know when it’s coming. Well, now we do know and there’s nothing to be done about it.”

He says he will be dead by September. It will take about a week to die, though

no one can be sure. Animals live the longest.

The war was over in a month. The United States, Russia and China were the protagonists. It is not clear if it was started by accident or mistake. There was no victor. The Northern Hemisphere is contaminated and lifeless now.

A curtain of radioactivity is moving south towards Australia and New Zealand, southern Africa and South America. By September, the last cities, towns and villages will succumb. As in the north, most buildings will remain untouched, some illuminated by the last flickers of electric light.

This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper

These lines from T.S. Eliot's poem *The Hollow Men* appear at the beginning of Nevil Shute's novel *On the Beach*, which left me close to tears. The endorsements on the cover said the same.

Published in 1957 at the height of the Cold War when too many writers were silent or cowed, it is a masterpiece. At first the language suggests a genteel relic; yet nothing I have read on nuclear war is as unyielding in its warning. No book is more urgent.

Some readers will remember the black and white Hollywood film starring Gregory Peck as the U.S. Navy commander who takes his submarine to Australia to await the silent, formless specter descending on the last of the living world.

I read *On the Beach* for the first time the other day, finishing it as the U.S. Congress passed a law to wage economic war on Russia, the world's second most lethal nuclear power. There was no justification for this insane vote, except the promise of plunder.

Aiming Toward a Hot War

The "sanctions" are aimed at Europe, too, mainly Germany, which depends on Russian natural gas and on European companies that do legitimate business with Russia. In what passed for debate on Capitol Hill, the more garrulous senators left no doubt that the embargo was designed to force Europe to import expensive American gas.

Their main aim seems to be war – real war. No provocation as extreme can suggest anything else. They seem to crave it, even though Americans have little idea what war is. The Civil War of 1861-65 was the last on their mainland. War is what the United States does to others.

The only nation to have used nuclear weapons against human beings, they have since destroyed scores of governments, many of them democracies, and laid to waste whole societies – the million deaths in Iraq were a fraction of the carnage in Indochina, which President Reagan called “a noble cause” and President Obama revised as the tragedy of an “exceptional people.” He was not referring to the Vietnamese.

Filming last year at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, I overheard a National Parks Service guide lecturing a school party of young teenagers. “Listen up,” he said. “We lost 58,000 young soldiers in Vietnam, and they died defending *your freedom.*”

At a stroke, the truth was inverted. No freedom was defended. Freedom was destroyed. A peasant country was invaded and millions of its people were killed, maimed, dispossessed, poisoned; 60,000 of the invaders took their own lives. Listen up, indeed.

A lobotomy is performed on each generation. Facts are removed. History is excised and replaced by what *Time* magazine calls “an eternal present.” Harold Pinter described this as “manipulation of power worldwide, while masquerading as a force for universal good, a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis [which meant] that it never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn’t happening. It didn’t matter. It was of no interest.”

Those who call themselves liberals or tendentiously “the left” are eager participants in this manipulation, and its brainwashing, which today revert to one name: Trump.

Trump is mad, a fascist, a dupe of Russia. He is also a gift for “liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics,” wrote Luciana Bohne memorably. The obsession with Trump the man – not Trump as a symptom and caricature of an enduring system – beckons great danger for all of us.

A Narcissistic Media

While they pursue their fossilized anti-Russia agendas, narcissistic media such as the *Washington Post*, the BBC and the *Guardian* suppress the essence of the most important political story of our time as they warmonger on a scale I cannot remember in my lifetime.

On 3 Aug., in contrast to the acreage the *Guardian* has given to drivel that the Russians conspired with Trump (reminiscent of the far-right smearing of John Kennedy as a “Soviet agent”), the paper buried, on page 16, news that the President of the United States was forced to sign a Congressional bill declaring economic war on Russia.

Unlike every other Trump signing, this was conducted in virtual secrecy and attached with a caveat from Trump himself that it was “clearly unconstitutional.”

A coup against the man in the White House is under way. This is not because he is an odious human being, but because he has consistently made clear he does not want war with Russia.

This glimpse of sanity, or simple pragmatism, is anathema to the “national security” managers who guard a system based on war, surveillance, armaments, threats and extreme capitalism. Martin Luther King called them “the greatest purveyors of violence in the world today.”

They have encircled Russia and China with missiles and a nuclear arsenal. They have used neo-Nazis to install an unstable, aggressive regime on Russia’s “borderland” – the way through which Hitler invaded, causing the deaths of 27 million people. Their goal is to dismember the modern Russian Federation.

In response, “partnership” is a word used incessantly by Vladimir Putin – anything, it seems, that might halt an evangelical drive to war in the United States. Incredulity in Russia may have now turned to fear and perhaps a certain resolution. The Russians almost certainly have war-gamed nuclear counter strikes. Air-raid drills are not uncommon. Their history tells them to get ready.

The threat is simultaneous. Russia is first, China is next. The U.S. has just completed a huge military exercise with Australia known as Talisman Sabre. They rehearsed a blockade of the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea, through which pass China’s economic lifelines.

The admiral commanding the U.S. Pacific fleet said that, “if required,” he would nuke China. That he would say such a thing publicly in the current perfidious atmosphere begins to make fact of Nevil Shute’s fiction.

Silencing Dissenting Journalists

None of this is considered news. No connection is made as the bloodfest of Passchendaele a century ago is remembered. Honest reporting is no longer welcome in much of the media. Windbags, known as pundits, dominate: editors are infotainment or party-line managers. Where there was once sub-editing, there is the liberation of axe-grinding clichés. Those journalists who do not comply are defenestrated.

The urgency has plenty of precedents. In my film, *The Coming War on China*, John Bordne, a member of a U.S. Air Force missile combat crew based in Okinawa,

Japan, describes how in 1962 – during the Cuban missile crisis – he and his colleagues were “told to launch all the missiles” from their silos.

Nuclear armed, the missiles were aimed at both China and Russia. A junior officer questioned this, and the order was eventually rescinded – but only after they were issued with service revolvers and ordered to shoot at others in a missile crew if they did not “stand down.”

At the height of the Cold War, the anti-communist hysteria in the United States was such that U.S. officials who were on official business in China were accused of treason and sacked. In 1957 – the year Shute wrote *On the Beach* – no official in the State Department could speak the language of the world’s most populous nation. Mandarin speakers were purged under strictures now echoed in the Congressional bill that has just passed, aimed at Russia.

The bill was bipartisan. There is no fundamental difference between Democrats and Republicans. The terms “left” and “right” are meaningless. Most of America’s modern wars were started not by conservatives, but by liberal Democrats.

When Obama left office, he presided over a record seven wars, including America’s longest war and an unprecedented campaign of extrajudicial killings – murder – by drones.

In his last year, according to a Council on Foreign Relations study, Obama, the “reluctant liberal warrior,” dropped 26,171 bombs – three bombs every hour, 24 hours a day. Having pledged to help “rid the world” of nuclear weapons, the Nobel Peace Laureate built more nuclear warheads than any president since the Cold War.

Trump is a wimp by comparison. It was Obama – with his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at his side – who destroyed Libya as a modern state and launched the human stampede to Europe. At home, immigration groups knew him as the “deporter-in-chief.”

One of Obama’s last acts as president was to sign a bill that handed a record \$618 billion to the Pentagon, reflecting the soaring ascendancy of fascist militarism in the governance of the United States. Trump has endorsed this.

Buried in the detail was the establishment of a “Center for Information Analysis and Response.” This is a ministry of truth. It is tasked with providing an “official narrative of facts” that will prepare us for the real possibility of nuclear war – if we allow it.

John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist based in London. Pilger’s Web

site is: www.johnpilger.com. His new film, "The Coming War on China," is available in the U.S. from www.bullfrogfilms.com
