

# VIPS: Mueller's Forensics-Free Findings

The final Mueller report should be graded "incomplete," says VIPS, whose forensic work proves the speciousness of the story that DNC emails published by WikiLeaks came from Russian hacking.

March 13, 2019

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** The Attorney General

**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

**SUBJECT:** Mueller's Forensics-Free Findings

## **Executive Summary**

Media reports are predicting that Special Counsel Robert Mueller is about to give you the findings of his probe into any links and/or coordination between the Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump. If Mueller gives you his "completed" report anytime soon, it should be graded "incomplete." Major deficiencies include depending on a DNC-hired cybersecurity company for forensics and failure to consult with those who have done original forensic work, including us and the independent forensic investigators with whom we have examined the data. We stand ready to help.

We veteran intelligence professionals (VIPS) have done enough detailed forensic work to prove the speciousness of the prevailing story that the DNC emails published by WikiLeaks came from Russian hacking. Given the paucity of evidence to support that story, we believe Mueller may choose to finesse this key issue and leave everyone hanging.

That would help sustain the widespread belief that Trump owes his victory to President Vladimir Putin, and strengthen the hand of those who pay little heed to the unpredictable consequences of an increase in tensions with nuclear-armed Russia.

There is an overabundance of “assessments” but a lack of hard evidence to support that prevailing narrative. We believe that there are enough people of integrity in the Department of Justice to prevent the outright manufacture or distortion of “evidence,” particularly if they become aware that experienced scientists have completed independent forensic study that yield very different conclusions. We know only too well – and did our best to expose – how our former colleagues in the intelligence community manufactured fraudulent “evidence” of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

We have scrutinized publicly available physical data – the “trail” that every cyber operation leaves behind. And we have had support from highly experienced independent forensic investigators who, like us, have no axes to grind. We can prove that the conventional-wisdom story about Russian-hacking-DNC-emails-for-WikiLeaks is false. Drawing largely on the unique expertise of two VIPS scientists who worked for a combined total of 70 years at the National Security Agency and became Technical Directors there, we have regularly published our findings. But we have been deprived of a hearing in mainstream media – an experience painfully reminiscent of what we had to endure when we exposed the corruption of intelligence before the attack on Iraq 16 years ago.

This time, with the principles of physics and forensic science to rely on, we are able to adduce solid evidence exposing mistakes and distortions in the dominant story. We offer you below – as a kind of *aide-memoire*– a discussion of some of the key factors related to what has become known as “Russia-gate.” And we include our most recent findings drawn from forensic work on data associated with WikiLeaks’ publication of the DNC emails.

We do not claim our conclusions are “irrefutable and undeniable,” a la Colin Powell at the UN before the Iraq war. Our judgments, however, are based on the scientific method – not “assessments.” We decided to put this memorandum together in hopes of ensuring that you hear that directly from us.

If the Mueller team remains reluctant to review our work – or even to interview willing witnesses with direct knowledge, like WikiLeaks’ Julian Assange and former UK Ambassador Craig Murray, we fear that many of those yearning earnestly for the truth on Russia-gate will come to the corrosive conclusion that the Mueller investigation was a sham.

In sum, we are concerned that, at this point, an incomplete Mueller report will fall far short of the commitment made by then Acting Attorney General Rod Rosenstein “to ensure a full and thorough investigation,” when he appointed Mueller in May 2017. Again, we are at your disposal.

## **Discussion**

The centerpiece accusation of Kremlin “interference” in the 2016 presidential election was the charge that Russia hacked

Democratic National Committee emails and gave them to WikiLeaks to embarrass Secretary Hillary Clinton and help Mr. Trump win. The weeks following the election witnessed multiple leak-based media allegations to that effect. These culminated on January 6, 2017 in an evidence-light, rump report misleadingly labeled “Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA).” Prepared by “handpicked analysts” from only three of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies (CIA, FBI, and NSA), the assessment expressed “high confidence” in the Russia-hacking-to-WikiLeaks story, but lacked so much as a hint that the authors had sought access to independent forensics to support their “assessment.”

The media immediately awarded the ICA the status of Holy Writ, choosing to overlook an assortment of banal, full-disclosure-type caveats included in the assessment itself – such as:

“When Intelligence Community analysts use words such as ‘we assess’ or ‘we judge,’ they are conveying an analytic assessment or judgment. ...Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. ... Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary ... High confidence in a judgment does not imply that the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong.”

To their credit, however, the authors of the ICA did make a highly germane point in introductory remarks on “cyber incident attribution.” They noted: ***“The nature of cyberspace makes attribution of cyber operations difficult but not impossible. Every kind of cyber operation – malicious or not***

– *leaves a trail.*” [Emphasis added.]

## **Forensics**

The imperative is to get on that “trail” – and quickly, before red herrings can be swept across it. The best way to establish attribution is to apply the methodology and processes of forensic science. Intrusions into computers leave behind discernible physical data that can be examined scientifically by forensic experts. Risk to “sources and methods” is normally not a problem.

Direct access to the actual computers is the first requirement – the more so when an intrusion is termed “an act of war” and blamed on a nuclear-armed foreign government (the words used by the late Sen. John McCain and other senior officials). In testimony to the House Intelligence Committee in March 2017, former FBI Director James Comey admitted that he did not insist on physical access to the DNC computers even though, as he conceded, “best practices” dictate direct access.

In June 2017, Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Richard Burr asked Comey whether he ever had “access to the actual hardware that was hacked.” Comey answered, “In the case of the DNC ... we did not have access to the devices themselves. We got relevant forensic information from a private party, a high-class entity, that had done the work. ...” Sen. Burr followed up: “But no content? Isn’t content an important part of the forensics from a counterintelligence standpoint?” Comey: “It is, although what was briefed to me by my folks ... is that they had gotten the information from the private party that they needed to understand the

intrusion by the spring of 2016.”

The “private party/high-class entity” to which Comey refers is CrowdStrike, a cybersecurity firm of checkered reputation and multiple conflicts of interest, including very close ties to a number of key anti-Russian organizations. Comey indicated that the DNC hired CrowdStrike in the spring of 2016.

Given the stakes involved in the Russia-gate investigation – including a possible impeachment battle and greatly increased tension between Russia and the U.S. – it is difficult to understand why Comey did not move quickly to seize the computer hardware so the FBI could perform an independent examination of what quickly became the major predicate for investigating election interference by Russia. Fortunately, enough data remain on the forensic “trail” to arrive at evidence-anchored conclusions. The work we have done shows the prevailing narrative to be false. We have been suggesting this for over two years. Recent forensic work significantly strengthens that conclusion.

## **We Do Forensics**

Recent forensic examination of the Wikileaks DNC files shows they were created on 23, 25 and 26 May 2016. (On June 12, Julian Assange announced he had them; WikiLeaks published them on July 22.) We recently discovered that the files reveal a FAT (File Allocation Table) system property. ***This shows that the data had been transferred to an external storage device, such as a thumb drive, before WikiLeaks posted them.***

FAT is a simple file system named for its method of

organization, the File Allocation Table. It is used for storage only and is not related to internet transfers like hacking. Were WikiLeaks to have received the DNC files via a hack, the last modified times on the files would be a random mixture of odd-and even-ending numbers.

Why is that important? The evidence lies in the “last modified” time stamps on the Wikileaks files. When a file is stored under the FAT file system the software rounds the time to the nearest even-numbered second. Every single one of the time stamps in the DNC files on WikiLeaks’ site ends in an even number.

We have examined 500 DNC email files stored on the Wikileaks site. All 500 files end in an even number—2, 4, 6, 8 or 0. If those files had been hacked over the Internet, there would be an equal probability of the time stamp ending in an odd number. The random probability that FAT was not used is 1 chance in 2 to the 500th power. Thus, these data show that the DNC emails posted by WikiLeaks went through a storage device, like a thumb drive, and were physically moved before Wikileaks posted the emails on the World Wide Web.

This finding alone is enough to raise reasonable doubts, for example, about Mueller’s indictment of 12 Russian intelligence officers for hacking the DNC emails given to WikiLeaks. A defense attorney could easily use the forensics to argue that someone copied the DNC files to a storage device like a USB thumb drive and got them physically to WikiLeaks – not electronically via a hack.

## **Role of NSA**

For more than two years, we strongly suspected that the DNC

emails were copied/leaked in that way, not hacked. And we said so. We remain intrigued by the apparent failure of NSA's dragnet, collect-it-all approach – including “cast-iron” coverage of WikiLeaks – to provide forensic evidence (as opposed to “assessments”) as to how the DNC emails got to WikiLeaks and who sent them. Well before the telling evidence drawn from the use of FAT, other technical evidence led us to conclude that the DNC emails were not hacked over the network, but rather physically moved over, say, the Atlantic Ocean.

Is it possible that NSA has not yet been asked to produce the collected packets of DNC email data claimed to have been hacked by Russia? Surely, this should be done before Mueller competes his investigation. NSA has taps on all the transoceanic cables leaving the U.S. and would almost certainly have such packets if they exist. (The detailed slides released by Edward Snowden actually show the routes that trace the packets.)

The forensics we examined shed no direct light on who may have been behind the leak. The only thing we know for sure is that the person had to have direct access to the DNC computers or servers in order to copy the emails. The apparent lack of evidence from the most likely source, NSA, regarding a hack may help explain the FBI's curious preference for forensic data from CrowdStrike. No less puzzling is why Comey would choose to call CrowdStrike a “high-class entity.”

Comey was one of the intelligence chiefs briefing President Obama on January 5, 2017 on the “Intelligence Community Assessment,” which was then briefed to President-elect Trump

and published the following day. That Obama found a key part of the ICA narrative less than persuasive became clear at his last press conference (January 18), when he told the media, “The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive ... as to how ‘the DNC emails that were leaked’ got to WikiLeaks.

### **Is Guccifer 2.0 a Fraud?**

There is further compelling technical evidence that undermines the claim that the DNC emails were downloaded over the internet as a result of a spearphishing attack. William Binney, one of VIPS’ two former Technical Directors at NSA, along with other former intelligence community experts, examined files posted by Guccifer 2.0 and discovered that those files could not have been downloaded over the internet. It is a simple matter of mathematics and physics.

There was a flurry of activity after Julian Assange announced on June 12, 2016: “We have emails relating to Hillary Clinton which are pending publication.” On June 14, DNC contractor CrowdStrike announced that malware was found on the DNC server and claimed there was evidence it was injected by Russians. On June 15, the Guccifer 2.0 persona emerged on the public stage, affirmed the DNC statement, claimed to be responsible for hacking the DNC, claimed to be a WikiLeaks source, ***and posted a document that forensics show was synthetically tainted with “Russian fingerprints.”***

Our suspicions about the Guccifer 2.0 persona grew when G-2 claimed responsibility for a “hack” of the DNC on July 5, 2016, which released DNC data that was rather bland compared

to what WikiLeaks published 17 days later (showing how the DNC had tipped the primary scales against Sen. Bernie Sanders). As VIPS reported in a wrap-up Memorandum for the President on July 24, 2017 (titled "Intel Vets Challenge 'Russia Hack' Evidence)," forensic examination of the July 5, 2016 cyber intrusion into the DNC showed it NOT to be a hack by the Russians or by anyone else, but rather a copy onto an external storage device. It seemed a good guess that the July 5 intrusion was a contrivance to preemptively taint anything WikiLeaks might later publish from the DNC, by "showing" it came from a "Russian hack." WikiLeaks published the DNC emails on July 22, three days before the Democratic convention.

As we prepared our July 24 memo for the President, we chose to begin by taking Guccifer 2.0 at face value; i. e., that the documents he posted on July 5, 2016 were obtained via a hack over the Internet. Binney conducted a forensic examination of the metadata contained in the posted documents and compared that metadata with the known capacity of Internet connection speeds at the time in the U.S. This analysis showed a transfer rate as high as 49.1 megabytes per second, which is much faster than was possible from a remote online Internet connection. The 49.1 megabytes speed coincided, though, with the rate that copying onto a thumb drive could accommodate.

Binney, assisted by colleagues with relevant technical expertise, then extended the examination and ran various forensic tests from the U.S. to the Netherlands, Albania, Belgrade and the UK. The fastest Internet rate obtained – from a data center in New Jersey to a data center in the UK

– was 12 megabytes per second, which is less than a fourth of the capacity typical of a copy onto a thumb drive.

The findings from the examination of the Guccifer 2.0 data and the WikiLeaks data does not indicate who copied the information to an external storage device (probably a thumb drive). But our examination does disprove that G.2 hacked into the DNC on July 5, 2016. Forensic evidence for the Guccifer 2.0 data adds to other evidence that the DNC emails were not taken by an internet spearphishing attack. The data breach was local. The emails were copied from the network.

### **Presidential Interest**

After VIPS' July 24, 2017 Memorandum for the President, Binney, one of its principal authors, was invited to share his insights with Mike Pompeo, CIA Director at the time. When Binney arrived in Pompeo's office at CIA Headquarters on October 24, 2017 for an hour-long discussion, the director made no secret of the reason for the invitation: "You are here because the President told me that if I really wanted to know about Russian hacking I needed to talk with you."

Binney warned Pompeo – to stares of incredulity – that his people should stop lying about the Russian hacking. Binney then started to explain the VIPS findings that had caught President Trump's attention. Pompeo asked Binney if he would talk to the FBI and NSA. Binney agreed, but has not been contacted by those agencies. With that, Pompeo had done what the President asked. There was no follow-up.

### **Confronting James Clapper on Forensics**

We, the *hoi polloi*, do not often get a chance to talk to people like Pompeo – and still less to the former intelligence chiefs who are the leading purveyors of the prevailing Russia-gate narrative. An exception came on November 13, when former National Intelligence Director James Clapper came to the Carnegie Endowment in Washington to hawk his memoir. Answering a question during the Q&A about Russian “hacking” and NSA, Clapper said:

“Well, I have talked with NSA a lot ... And in my mind, I spent a lot of time in the SIGINT business, ***the forensic evidence was overwhelming about what the Russians had done.*** There’s absolutely no doubt in my mind whatsoever.”  
[Emphasis added]

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

(A transcript of the interesting Q&A can be found [here](#) and a commentary on Clapper’s performance at Carnegie, as well as on his longstanding lack of credibility, is [here](#).)

Normally soft-spoken Ron Wyden, Democratic senator from Oregon, lost his patience with Clapper last week when he learned that Clapper is still denying that he lied to the Senate Intelligence Committee about the extent of NSA surveillance of U.S. citizens. In an unusual outburst, Wyden said: “James Clapper needs to stop making excuses for lying to the American people about mass surveillance. To be clear:

I sent him the question in advance. I asked him to correct the record afterward. He chose to let the lie stand.”

The materials brought out by Edward Snowden in June 2013 showed Clapper to have lied under oath to the committee on March 12, 2013; he was, nevertheless, allowed to stay on as Director of National Intelligence for three and half more years. Clapper fancies himself an expert on Russia, telling *Meet the Press* on May 28, 2017 that Russia’s history shows that Russians are “typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever.”

Clapper ought to be asked about the “forensics” he said were “overwhelming about what the Russians had done.” And that, too, before Mueller completes his investigation.

*For the steering group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity:*

**William Binney**, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA’s Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

**Richard H. Black**, Senator of Virginia, 13th District; Colonel US Army (ret.); Former Chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS)

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

**Philip Giraldi**, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

**Mike Gravel**, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the

Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

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

**Larry C. Johnson**, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

**John Kiriakou**, former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

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

**Edward Loomis**, Cryptologic Computer Scientist, former Technical Director at NSA (ret.)

**David MacMichael**, Ph.D., former senior estimates officer, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

**Ray McGovern**, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst; CIA Presidential briefer (ret.)

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

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

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

**Sarah G. Wilton**, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

**Kirk Wiebe**, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

**Ann Wright**, retired U.S. Army reserve colonel and former U.S. diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Iraq War

**Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)** is made up of former intelligence officers, diplomats, military officers and congressional staffers. The organization, founded in 2002, was among the first critics of Washington's justifications for launching a war against Iraq. VIPS advocates a US foreign and national security policy based on genuine national interests rather than contrived threats promoted for largely political reasons. An [archive](#) of VIPS memoranda is available at [Consortiumnews.com](http://Consortiumnews.com).

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## The Real Motive Behind the FBI Plan to Investigate Trump as a Russian Agent

Coverage of this episode by *The New York Times* and *CNN* further stigmatizes any dissent from new Cold War policy toward Russia, writes Gareth Porter.

By [Gareth Porter](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



*The New York Times* and *CNN* led media coverage last month of discussions among senior FBI officials in May 2017 of a possible national security investigation of President Donald Trump himself, on the premise that he may have acted as an agent of Russia.

The episode has potentially profound political fallout, because the *Times* and *CNN* stories suggested that Trump may indeed have acted like a Russian agent. [The New York Times story](#) on Jan. 11 was headlined, "F.B.I. Opened Inquiry into Whether Trump Was Secretly Working on Behalf of Russia." [CNN followed three days later](#) with: "Transcripts detail how FBI debated whether Trump was 'following directions' of Russia."

By reporting that Russia may have been able to suborn the president of the United States, these stories have added an even more extreme layer to the dominant national political narrative of a serious Russian threat to destroy U.S. democracy. An analysis of the FBI's idea of Trump as possible Russian agent reveals, moreover, that it is based on a devious concept of "unwitting" service to Russian interests that can be traced back to former CIA director John O. Brennan.

## **The Proposal That Fell Apart**

The FBI discussions that drove these stories could have led to the first known investigation of a U.S. president as a suspected national security risk. It ended only a few days after the deliberations among the senior FBI officials when on May 19, 2017, the Justice Department chose Robert Mueller, a former FBI director, to be special counsel. That put control over the Trump-Russia investigation into the hands of Mueller rather than the FBI.

Peter Strzok, who led the bureau's counter-espionage

section, was, along with former FBI General Counsel James A. Baker, one of those involved in the May 2017 discussions about investigating Trump. Strzok initially joined Mueller's team but was fired after a couple of months when text messages that he had written came to light exposing a deep animosity towards Trump that cast doubt over his impartiality.

The other FBI officials behind the proposed investigation of Trump have also since left the FBI; either fired or retired.

The entirety of what was said at the meetings of five or six senior FBI officials in the immediate aftermath of Trump's firing of James Comey as FBI director on May 9, 2017, remains a mystery.

### **Closed-door Testimony**

The CNN and *Times* stories were based on transcripts either obtained or, in the case of the *Times*, on portions read to it, of private testimony given to the House Judiciary and Government Oversight and Reform committees last October by Baker, one of the participants in the discussions of Trump as a possible Russian agent.

Excerpts of Baker's testimony published by CNN make it clear that the group spoke about Trump's policy toward Russia as a basis for a counter-intelligence investigation. Baker said they "discussed as [a] theoretical possibility" that Trump was "acting at the behest of [Russia] and somehow following directions, somehow executing their will."

Baker went on to explain that this theoretical possibility was only "one extreme" in a range of possibilities discussed

and that “the other extreme” was that “the President is completely innocent.”

He thus made it clear that there was no actual evidence for the idea that he was acting on behalf of Russia.

Baker also offered a simpler rationale for such an investigation of Trump: the president’s firing of FBI Director Comey. “Not only would [firing Comey] be an issue of obstructing an investigation,” he said, “but the obstruction itself would hurt our ability to figure what the Russians had done, and that is what would be the threat to national security.”

But the idea that Comey’s firing had triggered the FBI’s discussions had already been refuted by a text message that Strzok, who had been leading the FBI’s probe into the Trump campaign’s contacts with Russians, sent immediately after the firing to Lisa Page, then legal counsel to Andrew McCabe, formerly the bureau’s deputy director who was then acting director.

“We need to open *the case we’ve been waiting on* now while Andy is acting,” Strzok wrote, referring to McCabe.

As Page later confirmed to congressional investigators, [according to the CNN story](#), Strzok’s message referred to their desire to launch an investigation into possible collusion between Trump and the Russians. Strzok’s message also makes clear he, and others intent on the investigation, were anxious to get McCabe to approve the proposed probe before Trump named someone less sympathetic to the project as the new FBI director.

## Why the FBI Wanted to Investigate

*The New York Times* story argued that the senior FBI officials' interest in a counter-intelligence investigation of Trump and the Russians sprang from their knowledge of the sensational charges in the opposition research dossier assembled by British ex-spy Christopher Steele (paid for by the DNC and the Clinton campaign) that the Putin government had "tried to obtain influence over Mr. Trump by preparing to blackmail and bribe him."

But the *Times* writers must have known that Bruce Ohr, former associate deputy attorney general, had already given McCabe, Page and Strzok information about Steele and his dossier that raised fundamental questions about its reliability.

Ohr's first contacts at FBI headquarters regarding Steele and his dossier came Aug. 3, 2016, with Page and her boss McCabe. Ohr later met with Strzok.

Ohr said he told them that Steele's work on the dossier had been financed by the Clinton campaign through the Perkins-Cole law firm. He also told them that Steele, in a July 30, 2016 meeting, told him he was "desperate that Donald Trump not get elected and was passionate about him not being president," according to Ohr's contemporaneous notes of the meeting.

So, key figures in the discussion of Trump and Russia in May 2017 knew that Steele was acting out of both political and business motives to come up with sensational material.

Strzok and Page may have started out as true believers in the idea that the Russians were using Trump campaign

officials to manipulate Trump administration policy. However, by May 2017, Strzok had evidently concluded that there was no real evidence.

In a text message to Page on May 19, 2017, Strzok said he was reluctant to join the Mueller investigation, because of his “gut sense and concern” that “there’s no big there there.”

Why, then, were Strzok, Page, McCabe and others so determined to launch an investigation of Trump at about the same time in May 2017?

A *CNN* article about the immediate aftermath of the Comey firing reported that Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and senior FBI officials “viewed Trump as a leader who needed to be reined in, according to two sources describing the sentiment of the time.”

That description by anti-Trump law enforcement officials suggests that the proposed counter-intelligence investigation of Trump served as a means to maintain some leverage over his treatment of the FBI in regard to the Russia issue.

That motivation would be consistent with the decision by McCabe on May 15, 2017 – a few days after the discussions in question among the senior FBI officials – to resume the bureau’s relationship with Steele.

The FBI had hired Steele as a paid source when it had earlier launched its investigation of Trump campaign official’s contacts with Russians in July 2016. But it had suspended and then terminated the relationship over Steele’s

unauthorized disclosure of the investigation to David Corn of *Mother Jones* magazine in October 2016. So, the decision to resume the relationship with Steele suggests that the group behind the new investigation were thinking of seizing an opportunity to take off the gloves against Trump.

### **The 'Unwitting Collaboration' Ploy**

The discussion by senior FBI officials of a counter-intelligence investigation of Trump has become part of the political struggle over Trump mainly because of the stories in the *Times* and *CNN*.

The role of the authors of those stories illustrates how corporate journalists casually embraced the ultimate conspiracy theory – that the president of the United States was acting as a Russian stooge.

The reporters of the *CNN* story – Jeremy Herb, Pamela Brown and Laura Jarrett – wrote that the FBI officials were “trying to understand why [Trump] was acting in ways that seemed to benefit Russia.”

*The New York Times* story was more explicit. Co-authors Adam Goldman, Michael S. Schmidt and Nicholas Fandos wrote that the FBI officials “sought to determine whether Mr. Trump was knowingly working for Russia or had unwittingly fallen under Moscow’s influence.”

The same day the *Times* story was published, the lead author on the piece, Adam Goldman, was interviewed by *CNN*. Goldman referred to Trump’s interview with *NBC*’s Lester Holt in the days after the Comey firing as something that supposedly pushed the FBI officials over the edge. Goldman declared,

“The FBI is watching him say this, and they say he’s telling us why he did this. He did it on behalf of Russia.”

But Trump said nothing of kind. What he actually said – as the *Times* itself quoted Trump, from the *NBC* interview –was: “[W]hen I decided just to do it, I said to myself – I said, you know this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story.” The *Times* article continued: “Mr. Trump’s aides have said that a fuller examination of his comments demonstrates that he did not fire Mr. Comey to end the Russia inquiry. ‘I might even lengthen out the investigation, but I have to do the right thing for the American people,” Mr. Trump added. ‘He’s the wrong man for that position.’ ” Goldman was evidently trying to sell the idea of Trump as a suspected agent of Russia.

Goldman also gave an [interview to \*The New Yorker\*’s Isaac Chotiner](#), in which the interviewer pressed him on the weakest point of the Trump-as-Russian-agent theory. “What would that look like if the President was an unwitting agent of a foreign power?” asked Chotiner.

The *Times* correspondent, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the alleged Russian efforts to influence the 2016 election, responded: “It is hard to say what that would look like.” Goldman then reiterated the concept. “People were very careful to tell me that: ‘It is wittingly or unwittingly.’” And in answer to a follow-up question, Goldman referred to evidence he suggested might be held by the FBI that “perhaps suggests that the President himself may be acting as a foreign agent, either wittingly or unwittingly...”

The idea that American citizens were somehow at risk of being led by an agent of the Russian government “wittingly or unwittingly” did not appear spontaneously. It had been pushed aggressively by former CIA Director John O. Brennan both during and after his role in pressing for the original investigation.

When Brennan testified before the House Intelligence Committee in May 2017, he was asked whether he had intelligence indicating that anyone in the Trump campaign was “colluding with Moscow.” Instead of answering the question directly, Brennan said he knew from past experience that “the Russians try to suborn individuals, and they try get them to act on their behalf either wittingly or unwittingly.” And he recalled that he had left the government with “unresolved questions” about whether the Russians had been successful in doing so in regard to unidentified individuals in the case of the 2016 elections.

Brennan’s notion of “unwitting collaboration” with Russian subversion is illogical. Although a political actor might accidentally reveal information to a foreign government that is valuable, real “collaboration” must be mutually agreeable. A policy position or action that may benefit a foreign government, but is also in the interest of one’s own government, does not constitute “unwitting collaboration.”

The real purpose of that concept is to confer on national security officials and their media allies the power to cast suspicion on individuals on the basis of undesirable policy views of Russia rather than on any evidence of actual collaboration with the Russian government.

The “witting or unwitting” ploy has its origins in the unsavory history of extreme right-wing anti-communism during the Cold War. For example, when the [House Un-American Activities Committee](#) was at its height in 1956, Chairman Francis E. Walter [declared](#) that “people who are not actually Communist Party members are witting or unwitting servants of the Communist cause.”

The same logic – without explicit reference to the phrase – has been used to impugn the independence and loyalty of people who have contacts with Russia.

It has also been used to portray some independent media as part of a supposedly all-powerful Russian media system.

The revelation that it was turned against a sitting president, however briefly, is a warning signal that national security bureaucrats and their media allies are now moving more aggressively to delegitimize any opposition to the new Cold War.

**Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian writing on U.S. national security policy. His latest book, “Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare,” was published in 2014. Follow him on Twitter: [@GarethPorter](#).**

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## How Russia-gate Rationalized Censorship

**From the Archives:** Russia-gate mania spread beyond a strategy for neutralizing Donald Trump or removing him from office into an excuse for stifling U.S. dissent that challenges the New Cold War, reported Joe Lauria on Dec. 4, 2017.

By [Joe Lauria](#)

*Special to Consortium News*

At the end of October 2017, I wrote an [article](#) for **Consortium News** about the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton's campaign paying for unvetted opposition research that became the basis for much of the disputed story about Russia allegedly interfering in the 2016 presidential election on the orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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

And the second was CrowdStrike, an anti-Putin private company, examining the DNC's computer server to dubiously claim discovery of a Russian "hack." In a similar

examination using the same software of an alleged hack of a Ukrainian artillery app, CrowdStrike also blamed Russia but its software was exposed as faulty and it was later forced to rewrite it. CrowdStrike was hired after the DNC refused to allow the FBI to look at the server.

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

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

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

But Huffington stepped down as editor in August 2016 and has nothing to do with the site now. It is run by Lydia Polgreen, a former *New York Times* reporter and editor, who

evidently has very different ideas. In April, she completely redesigned the site and renamed it *HuffPost*.

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

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

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

### **Support from Independent Media**

Like the word "fascism," "censorship" is an over-used and mis-used accusation, and I usually avoid using it. But

without any explanation, I could only conclude that the decision to retract was political, not editorial.

I am non-partisan as I oppose both major parties for failing to represent millions of Americans' interests. I follow facts where they lead. In this case, the facts led to an understanding that the Jan. 6, 2017 FBI/NSA/CIA intelligence "assessment" on alleged Russian election interference, prepared by what then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called "hand-picked" analysts, was based substantially on unvetted opposition research and speculation, not serious intelligence work.

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

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

Yet, after the Jan. 6 report was published, leading Democrats asserted falsely that the "assessment" represented the consensus judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies

– not just the views of “hand-picked” analysts from three – and much of the U.S. mainstream media began treating the allegations of Russian “hacking” as flat fact, not as an uncertain conclusion denied by both the Russian government and WikiLeaks, which insists that it did not get the two batches of Democratic emails from Russia.

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

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

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

That the supposedly dissident *Intercept* would use this quote is instructive about how imbalanced the media’s reporting on Russia-gate has been. We have actual film of Japanese planes attacking Pearl Harbor and American ships burning – and we have the eyewitness accounts of thousands of U.S. soldiers

and sailors. Yet, on Russia-gate, we only have the opinions of some “hand-picked” intelligence officials who themselves say that they are not claiming that their opinions are fact. No serious editor would allow a self-interested and unnamed source to equate the two in print.

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

Journalist Max Blumenthal [tweeted](#) about it. British filmmaker and writer Tariq Ali [posted](#) it on his Facebook page. Ron Paul and Daniel McAdams [interviewed](#) me at length about the censorship on their TV program. *ZeroHedge* wrote a widely shared [piece](#) and someone actually took the time, 27 minutes and 13 seconds to be exact, to read the entire article on YouTube. I began a [petition](#) to *HuffPost*'s Polgreen to either explain the retraction or restore the article. It gained 3,517 signatures. If a serious fact-check analysis was made of my article, it must exist and can and should be produced.

### **Watchdogs & Media Defending Censorship**

Despite this support from independent media, a senior official at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, I learned,

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

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

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

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

the *HuffPost* and that was that. In this way, he acquiesced with the censorship.

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

That Russia-gate has reached this point, based on faith and not fact, was further illustrated by a Facebook exchange I had with Gary Sick, an academic who served on the Ford and Carter national security staffs. When I pressed Sick for evidence of Russian interference, he eventually replied: "If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck..." When I told him that was a very low-bar for such serious accusations, he angrily cut off debate.

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

might somehow be negated.

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

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

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

### **Why Critical News is Suppressed**

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

A lesson of the 2016 campaign was that growing numbers of

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

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

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

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

Careerist journalists readily acquiesce in this suppression of news to maintain their jobs, their status and their lifestyles. Meanwhile, a growing body of poorly paid

freelancers compete for the few remaining decent-paying gigs for which they must report from the viewpoint of the mainstream news organizations and their wealthy owners.

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

Examples abound: [America's role in the Ukraine](#) coup was denied or downplayed; a British parliamentary report exposing American lies that led to the destruction of Libya was [suppressed](#); and most infamously, the media promoted the WMD hoax and the fable of "bringing democracy" to Iraq, leading to the illegal invasion and devastation of that country. A November 2017 *60 Minutes* [report](#) on the Saudi destruction of Yemen, conspicuously failed to mention America's crucial role in the carnage.

I've pitched numerous news stories critical of U.S. foreign policy to a major American newspaper that were rejected or changed in the editorial process. One example is the declassified Defense Intelligence Agency [document](#) of August 2012 that accurately predicted the rise of the Islamic State two years later.

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

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

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

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

It was much easier to promote the "imperial" narrative and to ignore Putin's clear [explanation](#) to French TV channel TF1, which was not picked up by American media.

"Remember what Libya or Iraq looked like before these countries and their organizations were destroyed as states by our Western partners' forces?" Putin said. "These states

showed no signs of terrorism. They were not a threat for Paris, for the Cote d'Azur, for Belgium, for Russia, or for the United States. Now, they are the source of terrorist threats. Our goal is to prevent the same from happening in Syria."

### **Why Russia Is Targeted**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Jan. 6 intelligence assessment on alleged Russian

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

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

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

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

Moscow sees an aggressive America expanding NATO and putting

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

### **Accelerated Censorship in the Private Sector**

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



In the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur said he didn't "desire to reestablish wartime censorship" and instead asked the press for self-censorship. He largely got it until the papers began reporting American battlefield losses. On July

25, 1950, “the army ordered that reporters were not allowed to publish ‘unwarranted’ criticism of command decisions, and that the army would be ‘the sole judge and jury’ on what ‘unwarranted’ criticism entailed,” according to a Yale University [study](#) on military censorship.

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

It is important to realize that the [First Amendment](#) applies only to Congress and not to private companies, including the media. It is not illegal for them to practice censorship. I never made a First Amendment argument against the *HuffPost*, for instance. However, under pressure from Washington, even in peacetime, media companies can be pressured to do the government’s dirty work to censor or limit free speech for the government.

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

Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Alphabet, Google’s parent company, [said](#) on Nov. 18, 2017 that Google would “derank” articles from RT and Sputnik in the Google

searches, making the stories harder for readers to find. The billionaire Schmidt claimed Russian information can be “repetitive, exploitative, false, [or] likely to have been weaponized,” he said. That is how factual news critical of U.S. corporate and political leadership is seen, as a weapon.

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

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

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

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

Responding to a deadline from Congress to act, Facebook on Nov. 22, 2017 announced that it would inform users if they have been “targeted” by Russian “propaganda.” Facebook’s help center will tell users if they liked or shared ads allegedly from the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency, which supposedly bought \$100,000 in ads over a two-

year period, with more than half these ads coming after the 2016 U.S. election and many not related to politics.

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

Facebook described the move as "part of our ongoing effort to protect our platforms and the people who use them from bad actors who try to undermine our democracy." Congress wants more from Facebook, so it will not be surprising if users will eventually be told when they've liked or shared an RT report in the future. [The suppression of dissident news and manipulation of information has since grown worse with the advent of [NewsGuard](#) and the discovery of the [Integrity Initiative](#).]

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

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

After the Department of Justice forced, under threat of arrest, RT to register its employees as foreign agents under the *Foreign Agents Registration Act*, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nuaert said last Tuesday that "FARA does

not police the content of information disseminated, does not limit the publication of information or advocacy materials, and does not restrict an organization's ability to operate." She'd earlier said that registering would not "impact or affect the ability of them to report news and information. We just have them register. It's as simple as that."

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

Even so, Russia-gate faithful ignore these aggressive moves and issue calls for even harsher action. After forcing RT to register, Keir Giles, a Chatham House senior consulting fellow, acted as though it never happened. He said in a Council on Foreign Relations Cyber Brief on Nov. 27, 2017: "Although the Trump administration seems unlikely to pursue action against Russian information operations, there are steps the U.S. Congress and other governments should consider."

I commented on this development on RT America. It would also have been good to have the State Department's Nuaert answer for this discrepancy about the claim that forced FARA registrations would not affect news gathering when it already has. My criticism of RT is that they should be interviewing U.S. decision-makers to hold them accountable,

rather than mostly guests outside the power structure. The decision-makers could be called out on air if they refuse to appear, as many may well do.

### **Growing McCarthyite Attacks**

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

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

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

undermine the Free World.

Drawing from the NATO report, *The Globe and Mail's* denunciation of this website continued: "It uses that reach to push not only its own opinion pieces, but 'news' reports from little-known websites that regularly carry dubious or false information. At times, the site's regular variety of international-affairs stories is replaced with a flurry of items that bolster dubious reportage with a series of opinion pieces, promoted on social media and retweeted and shared by active bots."

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

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

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

"Alex Ovechkin is one of Putin's biggest fans. The question

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

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

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

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

### **Russia-gate's Hurdles**

Much of this spreading global hysteria and intensifying censorship traces back to Russia-gate. Yet, it remains remarkable that the corporate media has failed so far to

prove any significant Russian interference in the U.S. election at all. Nor have the intelligence agencies, Congressional investigations and special prosecutor Robert Mueller. His criminal charges so far have been for financial crimes and lying to federal authorities on topics unrelated to any "collusion" between the Trump campaign and Russians to "hack" Democratic emails.

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

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

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

As journalist Yasha Levine tweeted: "So the country that influenced US policy through Michael Flynn is Israel, not

Russia. But Flynn did try to influence Russia, not the other way around. Ha-ha. This is the smoking gun? What a farce.”

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

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

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

As for the vaguer concerns about some Russian group “probably” buying \$100,000 in ads, mostly after Americans had voted, as a factor in swaying a \$6 billion election, is too silly to contemplate. That *RT* and *Sputnik* ran pieces

critical of Hillary Clinton was their right, and they were hardly alone. *RT* and *Sputnik's* reach in the U.S. is minuscule compared to *Fox News*, which slammed Clinton throughout the campaign, or for that matter, MSNBC, CNN and other mainstream news outlets, which often expressed open disdain for Republican Donald Trump but also gave extensive coverage to issues such as the security concerns about Clinton's private email server.

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

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

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

**Joe Lauria is the editor-in-chief of Consortium News. He has**

been a correspondent 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@consortiumnews.com](mailto:joelauria@consortiumnews.com) and followed on Twitter at [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe).

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## Ray McGovern: Russia-gate Evidence, Please

Was former FBI Director James Comey pulling a Hoover on Trump to keep him in line? asks Ray McGovern.

**By Ray McGovern**

*Special to Consortium News*



For those interested in evidence – or the lack of it– regarding collusion between Russia and the presidential campaign of Donald Trump, we can thank the usual Russia-gate [promoters](#) at *The New York Times* and [CNN](#) for inadvertently filling in some gaps in recent days.

Stooping to a new low, Friday's *Times* headline screamed: "F.B.I. Opened Inquiry Into Whether Trump Was Secretly Working on Behalf of Russia." The second paragraph noted that FBI agents "sought to determine whether Mr. Trump was knowingly working for Russia or had unwittingly fallen under Moscow's influence."

Trump had been calling for better relations with Russia during his presidential campaign. As journalist Michael

Tracy tweeted on Sunday, the *Times* report made it “not a stretch to say: the FBI criminally investigating Trump on the basis of the ‘national security threat’ he allegedly poses, with the ‘threat’ being his perceived policy preferences re: Russia, could constitute literal criminalization of deviation from foreign policy consensus.”

On Monday night CNN talking heads, like former House Intelligence Committee chair Mike Rogers, were expressing wistful hope that the FBI had more tangible evidence than Trump’s public statements to justify such an investigation. Meanwhile, they would withhold judgment regarding the Bureau’s highly unusual step.

### **Evidence?**

NYT readers had to get down to paragraph 9 to read: “No evidence has emerged publicly that Mr. Trump was secretly in contact with or took direction from Russian government officials.” Four paragraphs later, the *Times*’ writers noted that, “A vigorous debate has taken shape among former law enforcement officials ... over whether FBI investigators overreacted.”

That was what Republican Rep. Trey Gowdy was wondering when he grilled former CIA director John Brennan on May 23, 2017 on what evidence he had provided to the FBI to catalyze its investigation of Trump-Russia collusion.

Brennan replied: “I don’t do evidence.”

The best Brennan could do was repeat the substance of a clearly well-rehearsed statement: “I encountered and am aware of information and intelligence that revealed contacts

and interactions between Russian officials and U.S. persons involved in the Trump campaign ... that required further investigation by the Bureau to determine whether or not U.S. persons were actively conspiring, colluding with Russian officials.”

That was it.

CNN joined the piling on Monday, quoting former FBI General Counsel James Baker in closed-door Congressional testimony to the effect that FBI officials were weighing “whether Trump was acting at the behest of [the Russians] and somehow following directions, somehow executing their will.” The problem is CNN also noted that Lisa Page, counsel to then FBI Acting Director Andrew McCabe, testified that there had been “indecision in the Bureau as to whether there was sufficient predication to open [the investigation].” “Predication” is another word for evidence.

Within hours of Comey’s firing on May 9, 2017, Page’s boyfriend and a top FBI counterintelligence official, Peter Strzok texted her: “We need to open the case we’ve been waiting on now while Andy [McCabe] is acting [director].” After all, if Trump were bold enough, he could have appointed a new FBI director and who knew what might happen then. When Page appeared before Congress, she was reportedly asked what McCabe meant. She confirmed that his text was related to the Russia investigation into potential collusion.

### **Comey v. Trump Goes Back to Jan. 6, 2017**

The *Times* and CNN, however unintentionally, have shed light on what ensued after Trump finally fired Comey. Apparently,

it finally dawned on Trump that, on Jan. 6, 2017, Comey had treated him to the time-honored initiation-rite-for-presidents-elect – with rubrics designed by former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

It seems then-FBI Director James Comey rendered a good impersonation of Hoover that day when he briefed President-elect Trump on the scurrilous “Steele dossier” that the FBI had assembled on Trump. Excerpts from an interview Trump gave to the *Times* (below) after the firing throw light on what Trump says was at least part of his motivation to dump Comey.

To dramatize the sensitivity of the dossier, Comey asked then-National Intelligence Director James Clapper and the heads of the CIA and NSA to depart the room at the Trump Tower, leaving Comey alone with the President-elect. The Gang of Four had already briefed Trump on the evidence-impooverished “Intelligence Community Assessment.” That “assessment” alleged that Putin himself ordered his minions to help Trump win. The dossier had been leaked to the media, which withheld it but *Buzzfeed* [published it](#) on Jan. 10.?

### **‘This Russia Thing’**

Evidently, it took Trump four months to fully realize he was being played, and that he couldn’t expect the “loyalty” he is said to have asked of Comey. So Trump fired Comey on May 9. Two days later he [told](#) NBC’s Lester Holt:

“When I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said, ‘You know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story, it’s an excuse by the Democrats for having lost an election that they should’ve won.’”

The mainstream media and other Russia-gater aficionados immediately seized on “this Russian thing” as proof that Trump was trying to obstruct the investigation of alleged Russian collusion with the Trump campaign. However, in the Holt interview Trump appeared to be reflecting on Comey’s J. Edgar Hoover-style, one-on-one gambit alone in the room with Trump.

Would Comey really do a thing like that? Was the former FBI director protesting too much in his June 2017 testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee when he insisted he’d tried to make it clear to Trump that briefing him on the unverified but scurrilous information in the dossier wasn’t intended to be threatening. It took a few months but it seems Trump figured out what he thought Comey was up to.

### **Trump to NYT: ‘Leverage’ (aka Blackmail)**

In a long Oval Office [interview](#) with the *Times* on July 19, 2017, Trump said he thought Comey was trying to hold the dossier over his head.

“...Look what they did to me with Russia, and it was totally phony stuff. ... the dossier ... Now, that was totally made-up stuff,” Trump said. “I went there [to Moscow] for one day for the Miss Universe contest, I turned around, I went back. It was so disgraceful. It was so disgraceful.

“When he [James B. Comey] brought it [the dossier] to me, I said this is really made-up junk. I didn’t think about anything. I just thought about, man, this is such a phony deal. ... I said, this is – honestly, it was so wrong, and they didn’t know I was just there for a very short period of time. It was so wrong, and I was with groups of people. It

was so wrong that I really didn't, I didn't think about motive. I didn't know what to think other than, this is really phony stuff."

The dossier, paid for by the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign and compiled by former British spy Christopher Steele, relates a tale of Trump allegedly cavorting with prostitutes, who supposedly urinated on each other before the same bed the Obamas had slept in at the Moscow Ritz-Carlton hotel. [On February 6, 2018, *The Washington Post* [reported](#) that that part of the dossier was written Cody Shearer, a long-time Clinton operative and passed it along to Steele. Shearer ignored a request for comment from **Consortium News**. [Shearer had been a Consortium advisory board member who was asked to resign and left the board.]

Trump told the *Times*: "I think [Comey] shared it so that I would – because the other three people [Clapper, Brennan, and Rogers] left, and he showed it to me. ... So anyway, in my opinion, he shared it so that I would think he had it out there. ... As leverage.

"Yeah, I think so. In retrospect. In retrospect. You know, when he wrote me the letter, he said, 'You have every right to fire me,' blah blah blah. Right? He said, 'You have every right to fire me.' I said, that's a very strange – you know, over the years, I've hired a lot of people, I've fired a lot of people. Nobody has ever written me a letter back that you have every right to fire me."

*McGovern lays out more details during a 12-minute [interview](#) on Jan. 10 with Tyrel Ventura of "Watching the*

*Hawks.”*

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A CIA analyst for 27 years and Washington area resident for 56 years, he has been attuned to these machinations. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

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## Alger Hiss and Russia-gate

Jeremy Kuzmarov argues the Cold War case has enduring relevance to American political culture and provides clues to the motives and machinations underlying the new Russophobia.

By Jeremy Kuzmarov



**I**n January 1950, Alger Hiss, a former State Department employee and director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was convicted of perjury and sentenced to five years in a federal penitentiary. The sentence, of which Hiss served 44 months, culminated a frenzied political trial that catapulted Richard Nixon to fame, undergirded the advent of McCarthyism and heated up the Cold War.

Today, it is worth looking back at the Hiss case because it offers important clues to the motives and machinations underlying the similarly politicized Russia-gate investigations. In both cases, powerful political players appear to have attempted to deflect acts of malfeasance by

falsely accusing political adversaries of treasonous behavior while igniting anti-Russia hysteria and paranoid fears of subversion that threatened war between the major nuclear powers.

Hiss was the embodiment of the liberal, New Deal establishment, which had promoted a major expansion of domestic social welfare programs. Educated at Harvard Law School, Hiss clerked for Supreme Court Justices Felix Frankfurter and Oliver Wendell Holmes, and worked for the State Department before moving on to head the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Supportive of President Franklin Roosevelt's policy of accommodation towards the Soviets, Hiss had been present at the 1945 Yalta conference, which resulted in a spheres of influence agreement.

Hiss had also worked as a legal assistant for the Nye Committee in the 1930s, a congressional investigation into war profiteering led by Gerald Nye, a Republican senator from North Dakota. The investigation exposed high-level corruption and connections between American companies and the growth of the Nazi war machine.

For instance, it revealed how United Aircraft sold commercial airplane engines to Germany for use in Luftwaffe fighter planes. It showed how Nazi troops were armed with American guns, and how Union Banking Corporation had engaged in a cartel agreement with the German chemical conglomerate, I.G. Farben, soon to be gas maker for Holocaust gas chambers.

Because of his work on the committee, Hiss made many powerful enemies. The Republican Party at the time was

looking to revive its fortunes through red-baiting tactics that would deflect attention from their anti-labor program. The Justice Department also had begun to investigate alleged treasonous activities by GOP power brokers.

Among them was Thomas McKittrick, a former agent of the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor of the CIA) who was the wartime president of the Bank for International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland. He was also an executive with Chase Manhattan Bank and a Marshall Plan administrator who allegedly conspired with his friend, the future CIA Director Allen Dulles, to move looted Nazi gold to Argentina.

Another official under DOJ investigation was Sen. Prescott Bush, a managing director of the Union Banking Corporation, which helped provide financing to Nazi industrialists in violation of the Trading with the Enemy Act during World War II. Bush was the father of President George H.W. Bush and grandfather of President George W. Bush.

### **The Dulles' Diversion'**

The origins of McCarthyism predate McCarthy. In order to bury the war profiteering investigation and undermine a wartime plan adopted by FDR's Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau to deindustrialize Germany and break the power of its banking cartel, Dulles and his associates began accusing New Deal Democrats of being spies.

The first was Harry Dexter White, liberal postwar director of the International Monetary Fund, who had pushed the

German deindustrialization plan, and then came Hiss.

The GOP's accusations of treason were part of a political counter-offensive designed to protect the real traitors while bolstering the party's political fortune. Hiss' alleged treason provided the "proof" that the Roosevelt and Truman administrations were "dyed pink in Moscow." Hiss' trial was in turn politicized as much as the Soviet show trials.

John Foster Dulles, President Dwight Eisenhower's secretary of state, and his brother Allen had worked as attorneys for Sullivan & Cromwell, which according to journalist Stephen Kinzer, "thrived on its cartels and ties to the Nazi regime," and kept its business with its clients all the way through the war.

After supporting Nixon's campaign in California's 12th Congressional district against Democrat Jerry Voorhis in 1946, the Dulles brothers began to accuse their enemies of communist subversion in order to bury investigation into their nefarious war-time activities and to undermine Morgenthau's plan to deindustrialize Germany and break the power of its banking cartel.

The first target of their accusations was Harry Dexter White, liberal postwar executive director of the IMF and an assistant to Morgenthau who championed the German deindustrialization plan. President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill adopted the plan at the second Quebec Conference in September 1944. Truman replaced it in 1947 with the Marshall Plan, a robust program of economic aid that benefited U.S. business.

Hiss was the second major target to fall victim to Dulles' plot. Like Russia-gate, which has deflected attention from the Democratic Party failings, Hiss' case became a media sensation that derailed critical scrutiny into treasonous wartime activity by plutocratic interests and provided "proof" for GOP voters that the Roosevelt and Truman administrations were "dyed pink in Moscow"—much as Donald Trump is portrayed as a Moscow puppet.

Like the allegations against Trump, Hiss' actual connection to Soviet espionage remains unproven. He never left any traces of even being a socialist. The documents Hiss is alleged to have smuggled were mundane and would have done nothing to harm national security. They included blank and illegible microfilms along with synopses about economic conditions in Manchuria, German trade policy in Braziland, unclassified manuals for operating naval rafts, parachutes and fire extinguishers; information that could have been found in the New York public library.

The Hiss case was marred by prosecutorial misconduct and illegalities. Hiss was entrapped by prosecutors who benefited from FBI surveillance of his witnesses and the sharing of that information with the prosecution's leading witness, Whittaker Chambers, a *Time* magazine editor who said he had known Hiss in the mid-1930s. Allegations of biased FBI misconduct against Trump are similarly rife.

Like proponents of Russia-gate, Chambers had questionable credibility. His credibility was undermined by contradictory statements, dubious claims about the spy-craft trade and false testimony. William A. Reuben, who spent four decades

researching the Hiss case, found that “the first thing to note about Whittaker Chambers’ confessions of communist underground work is that it has never been corroborated, either by documentary evidence or by the word of any other human being.”

### **KGB: Hiss Never an Asset**

Years after the case, Oleg Kalugin, a former KGB general and longtime chief of Russia’s foreign intelligence operations, stated that “Russian intelligence service has no documents proving that Alger Hiss cooperated with our service somewhere or anywhere,” while retired KGB Maj. Gen. Julius Kobyakov said Hiss “never had any relationship with Soviet intelligence.”

Hede Massing, an Austrian actress and confessed former Soviet spy inside the U.S., was another key witness for the prosecution who was threatened with deportation if she did not testify against Hiss. The government claimed that Hiss was part of an underground spy cell called the “Ware Group.”

However, Lee Pressman, a labor attorney who was a law school classmate of Hiss and a member of the group, testified that this was a Marxist study group in the 1930s and that Hiss was not a member. Pressman was later accused of being a Russian spy.

It was claimed that Chambers and Hiss had been introduced by Josef Peters, alleged brain of the entire communist underground. But there is no record of this, and Peters was mysteriously deported to Hungary on the eve of the trial, so he could not testify and said he never met Chambers, except possibly once in the 1930s.

Hiss' wife, Priscilla, allegedly typed some of the smuggled State Department documents on a typewriter that was traced back to the Hiss family. However, later it was found that the FBI had suppressed a lab report showing **she could not have typed the documents**. The Woodcock typewriter, serving as key government evidence, was also possibly reproduced by the CIA or U.S. military intelligence, echoing the way the CIA has been alleged to be behind Guccifer 2 in the alleged Russian hack of the DNC computers.

Nixon alluded to this when he told aide Charles Colson, as recorded in White House tapes: "The typewriters are always key. We built one in the Hiss case."

Hiss' opponents believed they had their smoking gun years after the trial when **encrypted Soviet cables**, released following the opening of the Soviet archives in 1991 (known as the **Venona files**), exposed a State Department spy code-named Ales, whom they believed to mean Alger.

However, a **2007 American Scholar article** by Kai Bird and Svetlana Chervonnaya argued that a more likely candidate was Hiss' colleague, Wilder Foote, because a KGB operative placed Ales in Mexico City when Hiss was known to be in the U.S and the information came from someone inside the **Office of the Lend- Lease Administration**, where Hiss never worked.

The Soviets showed little interest in the political information Hiss could provide, since the **Cambridge Five** (famed British spies) **leaked the major secret documents** related to Yalta. Ales hence does not appear to have violated the Espionage Act, which requires specific injury to U.S. national interest.

## More Parallels With 2016

The Hiss case exemplifies the abuse of the judicial system and manipulation of public opinion by opportunists such as Richard Nixon and elements of the Deep State during the Cold War. One can see parallels with Russia-gate here too, with opportunists such as Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA) and his uncorroborated leaks coming from intelligence sources.

These resemblances to current events are unfortunately salient. The Deep State always has wanted Russia as an enemy so huge military-defense budgets can be maintained, and so Russia does not control **Central Asia's oil and gas wealth**. The main target of its political machinations today, farcically, is a Republican president who is an arch-imperialist and embodiment of the American dream in its valorization of wealth accumulation.

During the 2016 election, the party of Roosevelt ran a divisive candidate in Hillary Clinton who undermined the progressive insurgent, Bernie Sanders, through undemocratic methods. Instead of looking in the mirror, party power-brokers sought to blame Russia for its embarrassing defeat and divert the public's attention. They spread rumors of Russian electoral manipulation, which, as in the Hiss case, have never been corroborated and probably never could be.

The Russia-gate investigation so far has many of the footprints of a politicized disinformation campaign, an amateur one at that, given that the January 2017 "assessment" by only three intelligence agencies—released to try to prove the charge of election hacking—was bereft of any evidence and focused mainly on attacking English-

language Russian television as an alleged propaganda outlet.

Gross inconsistencies also have been apparent; in the refusal by Democratic National Committee to allow the FBI to examine its computer server where the alleged hack took place and in Special Counsel Robert Mueller's refusal to interview WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange or witnesses such as British diplomat Craig Murray who met with the alleged leaker. Mueller also refuses to engage with a study carried out by the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, or VIPS, that determined the DNC data was leaked, not hacked, and that the data copying was performed on the East Coast of the United States and exceeded internet capability for a remote hack.

### **Liberals as Rightists**

The timing of the indictment of 12 Russian spies by Mueller on the eve of a summit between Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump was also suspicious, along with the indictment being presented as proof when it is unlikely the case would ever be prosecuted.

Businessmen with ties to the Democratic Party, such as William F. Browder, meanwhile have replaced the old Wall Street Republicans in pushing the anti-Russia hysteria. They too aim to deflect attention from their commission of white-collar crime. In Browder's case it was tax evasion, for which Putin prosecuted him. The methods of the New Cold Warriors are generally reminiscent of the old GOP in the levying of baseless accusations and adoption of methods of clandestine surveillance and attempted entrapment to discredit or prosecute Americans suspected of collusion with

Russia, as had been the case with Hiss.

The [Democrats and liberal media pundits](#) on CNN and MSNBC and in journals like *The New Yorker* appear to be oddly in sync with the extremist John Birch society, which accused Eisenhower in the 1950s of leading a communist sleeper cell.

As Establishment Democrats and their fellow travelers drive much of the [Russophobic hysteria](#) in an effort to undermine Trump, it has been important for them to promote a useable past and distort the original history of the Cold War. As a case in point, [Seth Ackerman wrote a piece](#) in the supposedly left *Jacobin* magazine denouncing Roosevelt's vice president, Henry Wallace, who had advocated for détente with the Russians, as a communist dupe.

Ackerman then asserted in a [July essay](#), which was at least somewhat critical of the Democrats' current Russophobia, that "Hiss was a Soviet spy" who was "reportedly awarded secret Soviet decorations in honor of his service to Moscow." However, even serious scholarship of an anti-Hiss bent has acknowledged that Hiss' guilt remains speculative, and the opening of the Soviet archives has not revealed any smoking-gun evidence apart from the Venona files whose meaning is contested.

Joan Brady, in an [important recent study](#) of Hiss, "America's Dreyfuss," notes that the "red scare whipped up around the case became for America what antisemitism had been to Germany [in the 1930s], a force to unify the people and deflect attention from an economic re-arrangement that could not function freely without chipping away at their rights."

Decades after the case against Hiss, he remains a "bogeyman"

who continues to serve as the embodiment what happens when we let our guard down.

These words resonate in our political climate where the Russian threat is again being invoked as a force to unify the people against false enemies and to steer attention from pernicious economic arrangements and criminal malfeasance by political donors.

Spooked by insurgencies on both the right and the left in the 2016, the Establishment is worried about growing social unrest, both of which have been smeared as being influenced by Russia. New bogeymen are again being created to sustain a dangerous confrontationist policy toward Russia whose consequences may be even worse than the first Cold War.

**Jeremy Kuzmarov is an historian and author, with John Marciano, of "The Russians are Coming, Again: The First Cold War as Tragedy, the Second as Farce."**

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## Giuliani Says Assange Should Not Be Prosecuted

Donald Trump's lawyer said on Monday that WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange should not be prosecuted and he compared WikiLeaks publications to the Pentagon Papers.

**By Joe Lauria**

*Special to Consortium News*

Rudy Giuliani, a lawyer for President Donald Trump, said Monday that WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange had not done “anything wrong” and should not go to jail for disseminating stolen information just as major media does.

“Let’s take the Pentagon Papers,” Giuliani told Fox News. “The Pentagon Papers were stolen property, weren’t they? It was in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Nobody went to jail at *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.”

Giuliani said there were “revelations during the Bush administration” such as Abu Ghraib. “All of that is stolen property taken from the government, it’s against the law. But once it gets to a media publication, they can publish it,” Giuliani said, “for the purpose of informing people.”

“You can’t put Assange in a different position,” he said. “He was a guy who communicated.”

Giuliani said, “We may not like what [Assange] communicates, but he was a media facility. He was putting that information out,” he said. “Every newspaper and station grabbed it, and published it.”

The U.S. government has admitted that it has indicted Assange for publishing classified information, but it is battling in court to keep the details of the indictment secret. As a lawyer and close advisor to Trump, Giuliani could have influence on the president’s and the Justice Department’s thinking on Assange.

Giuliani also said there was no coordination between the

Trump campaign and WikiLeaks. "I was with Donald Trump day in and day out during the last four months of the campaign," he said. "He was as surprised as I was about the WikiLeaks disclosures. Sometimes surprised to the extent of 'Oh my god, did they really say that?' We were wondering if it was true. They [the Clinton campaign] never denied it."

Giuliani said: "The thing that really got Hillary is not so much that it was revealed, but they were true. They actually had people as bad as that and she really was cheating on the debates. She really was getting from Donna Brazile the questions before hand. She really did completely screw Bernie Sanders."

"Every bit of that was true," he went on. "Just like the Pentagon Papers put a different view on Vietnam, this put a different view on Hillary Clinton."

Giuliani said, "It was not right to hack. People who did it should go to jail, but no press person or person disseminating that for the purpose of informing did anything wrong."

Assange has been holed up as a refugee in the Ecuador embassy in London for the past six years fearing that if he were to leave British authorities would arrest him and extradite him to the U.S. for prosecution.

You can watch the entire Fox News interview with Giuliani here:

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## Diane Duston on Her Late Husband, Robert Parry

Bob Parry worked at his job nearly every waking hour. Diane Duston asked him why he kept it up. Her husband's answer was pretty simple. It's what journalists are supposed to do, he said.

### Dear Readers:

It has been almost a year since the death of my husband, **Consortium News** founder Robert Parry. The stroke he mentioned in the final piece he wrote for **Consortium News** was the first of three, caused by undiagnosed pancreatic cancer. It has been a challenging year for me and our family since he passed away on Jan. 27, but one of the things that has given us comfort is the continuation of his journalism through the website he founded.

The only way this can live on is through your donations. I urge you to contribute today so [Consortiumnews.com](https://consortiumnews.com) will thrive and grow.

A lot has happened in Washington since Bob wrote his last piece. But one thing that has not changed is the need for independent journalism. Bob was fond of saying, "I don't care WHAT the truth is. I just care what the truth IS."

I met Bob in the 1980s at the Associated Press where we both worked. As a member of the special assignments team, he was delving into inconsistencies about what the Reagan administration was saying and what it was doing. Eventually, his work led to revelations that became known as the Iran-Contra scandal. I never ceased in my admiration for Bob's dogged pursuit of the truth, no

matter what might happen politically. It took patience and long hours of documents research. It required source development and double-triple-quadruple fact-checking. It meant going to battle with editors who were worried about political fall-out. It wasn't easy. I was a journalist, too, but I didn't have the same kind of drive. Few do, really.

In 31 years of marriage, I remained in awe of his persistent quest for truth. He worked at it nearly every waking hour. I asked him why he kept it up. His answer was pretty simple. It's what journalists are supposed to do, he said.

It hadn't brought him any particular financial rewards. His books never became best-sellers. He didn't seek praise from anyone, and he was irrationally modest about the awards he received. He eschewed self-promotion. He was too busy practicing journalism.

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*Please consider [making a donation](#) to Consortium News during our Winter Fund Drive.*

Here is the last piece that Bob Parry wrote:

## **An Apology and Explanation**

**From Editor Robert Parry:** For readers who have come to see **Consortium News** as a daily news source, I would like to extend my personal apology for our spotty production in recent days. On Christmas Eve, I suffered a stroke that has affected my eyesight (especially my reading and thus my writing) although apparently not much else. The doctors have also been working to figure out exactly what happened since I have never had high

blood pressure, I never smoked, and my recent physical found nothing out of the ordinary. Perhaps my personal slogan that “every day’s a work day” had something to do with this.

Perhaps, too, the unrelenting ugliness that has become Official Washington and national journalism was a factor. It seems that since I arrived in Washington in 1977 as a correspondent for The Associated Press, the nastiness of American democracy and journalism has gone from bad to worse. In some ways, the Republicans escalated the vicious propaganda warfare following Watergate, refusing to accept that Richard Nixon was guilty of some extraordinary malfeasance (including [the 1968 sabotage of President Johnson’s Vietnam peace talks](#) to gain an edge in the election and then the later political dirty tricks and cover-ups that came to include Watergate). Rather than accept the reality of Nixon’s guilt, many Republicans simply built up their capability to wage information warfare, including the creation of ideological news organizations to protect the party and its leaders from “another Watergate.”

So, when Democrat Bill Clinton defeated President George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election, the Republicans used their news media and their control of the special prosecutor apparatus (through Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Appeals Court Judge David Sentelle) to unleash a wave of investigations to challenge Clinton’s legitimacy, eventually uncovering his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The idea had developed that the way to defeat your political opponent was not just to make a better argument or rouse

popular support but to dredge up some “crime” that could be pinned on him or her. The GOP success in damaging Bill Clinton made possible George W. Bush’s disputed “victory” in 2000 in which Bush took the presidency despite losing the popular vote and almost certainly losing the key state of Florida if all ballots legal under state law were counted. Increasingly, America – even at the apex of its uni-power status – was taking on the look of a banana republic except with much higher stakes for the world.

Though I don’t like the word “weaponized,” it began to apply to how “information” was used in America. The point of **Consortium News**, which I founded in 1995, was to use the new medium of the modern Internet to allow the old principles of journalism to have a new home, i.e., a place to pursue important facts and giving everyone a fair shake. But we were just a tiny pebble in the ocean. The trend of using journalism as just another front in no-holds-barred political warfare continued – with Democrats and liberals adapting to the successful techniques pioneered mostly by Republicans and by well-heeled conservatives.

Barack Obama’s election in 2008 was another turning point as Republicans again challenged his legitimacy with bogus claims about his “Kenyan birth,” a racist slur popularized by “reality” TV star Donald Trump. Facts and logic no longer mattered. It was a case of using whatever you had to diminish and destroy your opponent.

We saw similar patterns with the U.S. government’s propaganda agencies developing themes to demonize foreign adversaries and then to smear Americans who questioned the facts or challenged the exaggerations as “apologists.” This

approach was embraced not only by Republicans (think of President George W. Bush distorting the reality in Iraq in 2003 to justify the invasion of that country under false pretenses) but also by Democrats who pushed dubious or downright false depictions of the conflict in Syria (including blaming the Syrian government for chemical weapons attacks despite strong evidence that the events were staged by Al Qaeda and other militants who had become the tip of the spear in the neocon/liberal interventionist goal of removing the Assad dynasty and installing a new regime more acceptable to the West and to Israel).

More and more I would encounter policymakers, activists and, yes, journalists who cared less about a careful evaluation of the facts and logic and more about achieving a pre-ordained geopolitical result – and this loss of objective standards reached deeply into the most prestigious halls of American media. This perversion of principles – twisting information to fit a desired conclusion – became the *modus vivendi* of American politics and journalism. And those of us who insisted on defending the journalistic principles of skepticism and evenhandedness were increasingly shunned by our colleagues, a hostility that first emerged on the Right and among neoconservatives but eventually sucked in the progressive world as well. Everything became “information warfare.”

### **The New Outcasts**

That is why many of us who exposed major government wrongdoing in the past have ended up late in our careers as outcasts and pariahs. Legendary investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, who helped expose major crimes of state from

the My Lai massacre to the CIA's abuses against American citizens, including illegal spying and LSD testing on unsuspecting subjects, has literally had to take his investigative journalism abroad because he uncovered inconvenient evidence that implicated Western-backed jihadists in staging chemical weapons attacks in Syria so the atrocities would be blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The anti-Assad group think is so intense in the West that even strong evidence of staged events, such as the first patients arriving at hospitals before government planes could have delivered the sarin, was brushed aside or ignored. The Western media and the bulk of international agencies and NGOs were committed to gin up another case for "regime change" and any skeptics were decried as "Assad apologists" or "conspiracy theorists," the actual facts be damned.

So Hersh and weapons experts such as MIT's Theodore Postol were shoved into the gutter in favor of hip new NATO-friendly groups like Bellingcat, whose conclusions always fit neatly with the propaganda needs of the Western powers.

The demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia is just the most dangerous feature of this propaganda process – and this is where the neocons and the liberal interventionists most significantly come together. The U.S. media's approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propaganda. Does any sentient human being read the New York Times' or the Washington Post's coverage of Russia and think that he or she is getting a neutral or unbiased treatment of the facts? For instance, the full story of the infamous Magnitsky case cannot be told in the West, nor can the

objective reality of the Ukraine coup in 2014. The American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the “other side of the story.” Indeed to even suggest that there is another side to the story makes you a “Putin apologist” or “Kremlin stooge.”

Western journalists now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonizing of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many “liberals” who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the U.S. intelligence community feeds us, even if we’re told to accept the assertions on faith.

### **The Trump Crisis**

Which brings us to the crisis that is Donald Trump. Trump’s victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton has solidified the new paradigm of “liberals” embracing every negative claim about Russia just because elements of the CIA, FBI and the National Security Agency produced a report last Jan 6 that blamed Russia for “hacking” Democratic emails and releasing them via WikiLeaks. It didn’t seem to matter that these “hand-picked” analysts (as Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called them) evinced no evidence and even admitted that they weren’t asserting any of this as fact.

The hatred of Trump and Putin was so intense that old-fashioned rules of journalism and fairness were brushed aside. On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump “Resistance.” The argument was that Trump was such a

unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster. Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.

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Other people, including senior editors across the mainstream media, began to treat the unproven Russia-gate allegations as flat fact. No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the [obvious bias among the never-Trumpers](#) inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government's institutions. Anti-Trump "progressives" were posturing as the true patriots because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Hatred of Trump had become like some invasion of the body snatchers – or perhaps many of my journalistic colleagues had never believed in the principles of journalism that I had embraced throughout my adult life. To me, journalism wasn't just a cover for political activism; it was a commitment to the American people and the world to tell important news stories as fully and fairly as I could; not to slant the "facts" to "get" some "bad" political leader or "guide" the public in some desired direction.

I actually believed that the point of journalism in a democracy was to give the voters unbiased information and the necessary context so the voters could make up their own minds and use their ballot – as imperfect as that is – to

direct the politicians to take actions on behalf of the nation. The unpleasant reality that the past year has brought home to me is that a shockingly small number of people in Official Washington and the mainstream news media actually believe in real democracy or the goal of an informed electorate.

Whether they would admit it or not, they believe in a “guided democracy” in which “approved” opinions are elevated – regardless of their absence of factual basis – and “unapproved” evidence is brushed aside or disparaged regardless of its quality. Everything becomes “information warfare” – whether on Fox News, the Wall Street Journal editorial page, MSNBC, the New York Times or the Washington Post. Instead of information provided evenhandedly to the public, it is rationed out in morsels designed to elicit the desired emotional reactions and achieve a political outcome.

As I said earlier, much of this approach was pioneered by Republicans in their misguided desire to protect Richard Nixon, but it has now become all pervasive and has deeply corrupted Democrats, progressives and mainstream journalism. Ironically, the ugly personal characteristics of Donald Trump – his own contempt for facts and his crass personal behavior – have stripped the mask off the broader face of Official America.

What is perhaps most alarming about the past year of Donald Trump is that the mask is now gone and, in many ways, all sides of Official Washington are revealed collectively as reflections of Donald Trump, disinterested in reality, exploiting “information” for tactical purposes, eager to manipulate or con the public. While I’m sure many anti-

Trumpers will be deeply offended by my comparison of esteemed Establishment figures with the grotesque Trump, there is a deeply troubling commonality between Trump's convenient use of "facts" and what has pervaded the Russia-gate investigation.

My Christmas Eve stroke now makes it a struggle for me to read and to write. Everything takes much longer than it once did – and I don't think that I can continue with the hectic pace that I have pursued for many years. But – as the New Year dawns – if I could change one thing about America and Western journalism, it would be that we all repudiate "information warfare" in favor of an old-fashioned respect for facts and fairness – and do whatever we can to achieve a truly informed electorate.

The late Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 as the Internet's first investigative magazine. He saw it as a way to combine modern technology and old-fashioned journalism to counter the increasing triviality of the mainstream U.S. news media.

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## The Fate of Julian Assange: Chris Hedges Interviews Consortium News Editor-in-Chief Joe Lauria

On his program "On Contact," journalist and author Chris Hedges interviews Joe Lauria, CN editor, on the moves to

prosecute Julian Assange using the Espionage Act; the media's cravenness and the latest on Assange's condition in London.

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## Newly Elected Progressives Face Palestine Taboo

After they won their primaries, some young progressives curbed their pro-Palestine rhetoric. Now they are in Washington getting oriented. Next up: early test votes in the new year sponsored by the pro-Israel lobby, writes As`ad AbuKhalil.

# Newly-Elected Progressives Confront AIPAC Test

By As`ad AbuKhalil

*Special to Consortium News*



People in the pro-Palestinian community worldwide will be watching to see if any of the new left-wing progressives elected in the midterms will dare speak out—and vote against—the wishes of the Israel lobby.

The answer will likely come early next year, in test votes sponsored by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, after the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress convenes. If the past is

any guide, Democratic leaders will insist on strict subservience from newcomers to the party's foreign policy priorities, which include U.S. sponsorship and defense of the Israeli occupation and war crimes.

Some members-elect voiced remarkable criticism of Israel in the primaries. Rashida Tlaib, from Michigan, may have gone the furthest, by calling for one state in Palestine. Ilhan Omar, from Minnesota, referred to Israel's "evil doings" and condemned apartheid in Israel. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, from New York, spoke against the occupation of Palestine.

After the primaries, however, Tlaib, Omar and Ocasio-Cortez softened their rhetoric. In a post-victory interview, Tlaib said that both sides (occupiers and occupied?) have "so much more in common." Ocasio-Cortez was quoted as favoring a two-state solution and believing "absolutely in Israel's right to exist" (as an apartheid occupation state?). She has expressed faith in U.S. legitimacy as "a force of good" in the world and shrugged off any serious understanding of the Middle East.

Antonio Delgado, who upset a GOP incumbent in upstate New York, caught heat during the general campaign for his positions on Israel. When he rejected the "democratic" label for Israel, his comment was widely described by news media as a regrettable gaffe.

The one Palestinian-American male candidate, Ammar Campa-Najjar, a Democrat who campaigned in San Diego, was the least critical of Israel and the only one who lost. He went to lengths to ingratiate himself with the Israel lobby, having changed his religion and name in the past. He even

condemned his grandfather, Abu Yusuf An-Najjar, a PLO diplomat killed by Israeli terrorists in Beirut in 1973, as a “murderer.”

The nature of U.S. public attitude towards Israel is changing. A few decades ago, isolationist conservative Republicans were the most likely to be detractors. That role has shifted to liberals in big cities. These days, southern Baptists and conservative Republicans in rural America are providing Israel some of the staunchest support.

### **Automatic Support for Israel**

But this change doesn't mean much in Congress. On Middle East issues, Democrats and Republicans remain ardent and automatic supporters of Israel.

Despite the War Powers Act of 1973, designed to check the president's power to commit the country to an armed conflict, the president retains quasi-imperial powers of foreign policy making. Given voters' worship of the military, representatives are often afraid to reject wars and interventions that presidents seek. To be accused of “failing to support the troops” is fatal to candidates from both parties. California Rep. Barbara Lee famously cast the lone vote against the authorization of military force following Sept. 11, 2001.

The two ruling parties, meanwhile, muzzle democratic discussion of their foreign policy agenda. Through the nominating process, the big wigs of the Democratic Party are able to sideline dissent. The Republican primaries, meanwhile, can seem like contests for the greatest show of fanaticism in supporting Israel. Even in local elections—for

mayors and city council—defiance of AIPAC can kill off contenders' chances. Some members of the Congressional Black Caucus, dominated by Democrats, break with AIPAC influence on votes, but the caucus leadership is closely aligned with the pro-Israel lobby.

The internal Democratic split (between its leadership and the liberal base) on Israel is comparable with that of liberal European political parties. The Socialist Party of France, for instance, pursues a traditional pro-Israeli agenda despite pro-Palestine sympathy within its ranks. The same had been true of the Labour Party in the U.K., until the rise of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. The United States has come to insist on a pro-Israeli plank from its European allies. In the 1970s, European nations often held positions on the PLO and on Palestinian self-determination that broke with U.S. doctrine. Since then, however, European disagreement with the U.S. on the Arab-Israeli question has diminished.

AIPAC, and its unofficial research arm, the [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#), have managed to establish themselves as the moral and authoritative sources of legislation and information on all matters related to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East. The lobby has succeeded through intimidation, as detailed in "They Dare to Speak Out," a book by former Illinois Rep. Paul Findley, a Republican. One successful method has been conflating any criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. This tactic has been most effective in discouraging U.S. politicians from opposing Israel.

**Not a 'Jewish Lobby'**

It must be stressed that AIPAC is not a “Jewish lobby,” but a pro-Israel lobby. Its champions are not exclusively Jewish. Anti-Semites wish to portray the lobby in classically bigoted terms, as a Jewish conspiracy. But some of its most ardent adherents have been non-Jewish U.S. presidents, members of Congress and administration officials.

On Palestine, Congress has changed substantially over the years. In the early 1980s, a few lawmakers, from both parties, still dared to challenge AIPAC, which was founded in 1963. In his 1985 [book](#), former Congressman Paul Findley, now 97, describes some of them. Back then, a wing of the Republican Party even stood for “even-handedness” in the Middle East.

By the end of the 1980s, few of these moderating voices on Israel were left. They’d either retired or lost their seats.

Since the 1990s, dissent on Israel is virtually absent in the upper house of Congress. The late Robert Byrd, from West Virginia, who died in 2010, was the last senator who dared to vote against legislation favored by AIPAC.

Sens. Patrick Leahy of Vermont and Diane Feinstein of California, both in their 80s, are mildly critical of Israel, but still vote with AIPAC most of the time. (Feinstein only recently started criticizing Israel perhaps because support in her state is secure). “Social Democrat” Sen. Bernie Sanders [gets heralded for challenging Israel](#). But that only shows the depth of the general silence. In fact, Sanders usually criticizes Israel in the most

restricted terms: (“I am not a fan of Netanyahu.”)

In the House, in recent years the number of members who—on rare occasions—vote to defy the Israeli agenda, has risen. But unlike in previous years, little is ever said about the rights of Palestinians or directly against AIPAC.

Dennis Kucinich, former member of Congress from Cleveland, and a former presidential candidate, may have been the last member to publicly champion the Palestinians. (He once told me that he made it a point to speak about Palestine weekly.) He lost his seat after redistricting in 2012.

The question now is whether some of those new faces in Congress, who carried the progressive torch in the campaigns, have the courage of a Kucinich on Israeli matters. Will any of them break the taboo against speaking for Palestine or against AIPAC? Their silence regarding the on-going Israeli assault on Gaza so far is deafening.

**As’ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the Historical Dictionary of Lebanon (1998), Bin Laden, Islam and America’s New “War on Terrorism” (2002), and The Battle for Saudi Arabia (2004). He also runs the popular blog The Angry Arab News Service.**

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## 33 Trillion More Reasons Why The New York Times Gets it Wrong on Russia-gate

Further research shows *The New York Times* was even further off the mark in blaming Russian social media for Trump's win, as Gareth Porter reports.

# Facebook Said 80,000 Russian Posts Were

# Buried in 33 Trillion Facebook Offerings Over

# Two-Year Period Further Undermining NYT's Case

By Gareth Porter

*Special to Consortium News*



Even more damning evidence has come to light undermining *The New York Times'* assertion in September that Russia used social media to steal the 2016 election for Donald Trump.

*The Times'* [claim last month](#) that Russian Facebook posts reached nearly as many Americans as actually voted in the 2016 election exaggerated the significance of those numbers by a factor of hundreds of millions,

as revealed by further evidence from Facebook's own Congressional testimony.

Th further research into an earlier **Consortium News** [article](#) shows that a relatively paltry 80,000 posts from the private Russian company Internet Research Agency (IRA) were engulfed in literally *trillions* of posts on Facebook over a *two-year* period before and *after* the 2016 vote.

That was supposed to have thrown the election, according to the paper of record. In its 10,000-word [article](#) on Sept. 20, the *Times* reported that 126 million out of 137 million American voters were exposed to social media posts on Facebook from IRA that somehow had a hand in delivering Trump the presidency.

The newspaper said: "Even by the vertiginous standards of social media, the reach of their effort was impressive: 2,700 fake Facebook accounts, 80,000 posts, many of them elaborate images with catchy slogans, and an eventual audience of 126 million Americans on Facebook alone." The paper argued that 126 million was "not far short of the [137 million people](#) who would vote in the 2016 presidential election."

But **Consortium News**, on Oct. 10, [debunked](#) that story, pointing out that reporters Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti failed to report several significant caveats and disclaimers from Facebook officers themselves, whose statements make the *Times'* claim that Russian election propaganda "reached" 126 million Americans an exercise in misinformation.

The newspaper failed to tell their readers that Facebook account holders in the United States had been "served" 33 trillion Facebook posts during that same period – 413 million times more than the 80,000 posts from the Russian company.

What Facebook general counsel Colin Stretch testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on October 31, 2017 is a far cry from what the *Times* claims. "Our best estimate is that approximately 126 million people *may have been* served one of these [IRA-generated] stories at

some time during the two year period,” Stretch said.

Stretch was expressing a theoretical possibility rather than an established fact. He said an estimated 126 million Facebook members *might* have gotten at least *one* story from the IRA -- not over the ten week election period, but over 194 weeks during the two years 2015 through 2017—including a full year *after* the election.

That means only an estimated 29 million FB users *may* have gotten at least one story in their feed in two years. The 126 million figure is based only on an assumption that they shared it with others, according to Stretch.

Facebook didn’t even claim most of those 80,000 IRA posts were election-related. It offered no data on what proportion of the feeds to those 29 million people were.

In addition, Facebook’s Vice President for News Feed, Adam Moseri, acknowledged in 2016 that FB subscribers actually read only about 10 percent of the stories Facebook puts in their News Feed every day. The means that very few of the IRA stories that actually make it into a subscriber’s news feed on any given day are actually read.

And now, according to the further research, the odds that Americans saw any of these IRA ads—let alone were influenced by them—are even more astronomical. In his Oct. 2017 testimony, Stretch said that from 2015 to 2017, “Americans using Facebook were exposed to, or ‘served,’ a total of over 33 trillion stories in their News Feeds.”

To put the 33 trillion figure over two years in perspective, the 80,000 Russian-origin Facebook posts represented just .0000000024 of total Facebook content in that time.

Shane and Mazzetti did not report the 33 trillion number even though *The New York Times’* own coverage of that 2017 Stretch testimony explicitly stated, “Facebook cautioned that the Russia-linked posts represented a minuscule amount of content compared with the billions of posts that flow through users’ News Feeds everyday.”

*The Times’* touting of the bogus 126 million out 137 million voters,

while not reporting the 33 trillion figure, should vie in the annals of journalism as one of the most spectacularly misleading uses of statistics of all time.

**Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian writing on US national security policy. His latest book, *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, was published in February of 2014. Follow him on Twitter: [@GarethPorter](#).**

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