

# Russia-gate's Reach into Journalism

The investigation to somehow blame Russia for Donald Trump's election has now merged with another establishment goal of isolating and intimidating whistleblowers and other dissidents, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The Russia-gate investigation has reached into the ranks of journalism with the House Intelligence Committee's subpoena of Randy Credico, who produced a series about WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for Pacifica Radio and apparently is suspected of having passed on early word about leaked Democratic emails to Donald Trump's supporter Roger Stone.

The Credico subpoena, after he declined a request for a "voluntary" interview, underscores how the investigation is moving into areas of "guilt by association" and further isolating whistleblowers who defy the powers-that-be through unauthorized release of information to the public, a point made by National Security Agency whistleblower Thomas Drake in an interview.

Drake knows well what it means to blow the whistle on government misconduct and get prosecuted for it. A former senior NSA executive, Drake complained about a multi-billion-dollar fraud, waste, and widespread violation of the rights of civilians through secret mass surveillance programs. As a result, the Obama administration indicted Drake in 2010, "as the first whistleblower since Daniel Ellsberg charged with espionage," according to the Institute for Public Accuracy.

In 2011, the government's case against him, which carried a potential 35 years in prison, collapsed. Drake went free in a plea deal and was awarded the 2011 Ridenhour Truth Telling Prize.

I interviewed Drake about the significance of Credico's subpoena, which Credico believes resulted from his journalism about the persecution of Julian Assange for releasing information that powerful people would prefer kept hidden from the public. (I had a small role in Credico's 14-part radio series, *Julian Assange: Countdown to Freedom*. It was broadcast first as part of his Live on the Fly Series, over WBAI and later on KPFA and across the country on community radio.)

Credico got his start as a satirist and became a political candidate for mayor of New York City and later governor of New York, making mainstream politicians deal with issues they would rather not deal with.

I spoke to Thomas Drake by telephone on Nov. 30, 2017.

Dennis Bernstein: How do you look at Russiagate, based on what you know about what has already transpired in terms of the movement of information? How do you see Credico's role in this?

Thomas Drake: Information is the coin of the realm. It is the currency of power. Anyone who questions authority or is perceived as mocking authority—as hanging out with “State enemies”—had better be careful. But this latest development is quite troubling, I must say. This is the normalization of everything that has been going on since 9/11. Randy is a sort of 21st century Diogenes who is confronting authority and pointing out corruption. This subpoena sends a chilling message. It's a double whammy for Randy because, in the eyes of the US government, he is a media figure hanging out with the wrong media figure [Julian Assange].

Dennis Bernstein: Could you say a little bit about what your work was and what you tried to do with your expose?

Thomas Drake: My experience was quite telling, in terms of how far the government will go to try to destroy someone's life. The attempt by the government to silence me was extraordinary. They threw everything they had at me, all because I spoke the truth. I spoke up about abuse of power, I spoke up about the mass surveillance regime. My crime was that I made the choice to go to the media. And the government was not just coming after me, they were sending a really chilling message to the media: If you print this, you are also under the gun.

Dennis Bernstein: We have heard the charges again and again, that this was a Russian hack. What was the source? Let's trace it back as best we can.

Thomas Drake: In this hyper-inflated, politicized environment, it is extremely difficult to wade through the massive amount of disinformation on all sides. Hacking is something all modern nation-states engage in, including the United States, including Russia. The challenge here is trying to figure out who the players are, whose ox is being gored, and who is doing the goring.

From all accounts, Trump was duly elected. Now you have the Mueller investigation and the House investigation. Where is this all leading? The US intelligence agency hasn't done itself any favors. The ICA provides no proof either, in terms of allegations that the Russians “hacked” the election. We do have the evidence disclosed by Reality Winner that maybe there was some interference. But the hyper-politicization is making it extraordinarily difficult.

The advantage that intelligence has is that they can hide behind what they are

doing. They don't actually have to tell the truth, they can shade it, they can influence it and shape it. This is where information can be politicized and used as a weapon. Randy has found himself caught up in these investigations by virtue of being a media figure and hanging out with "the wrong people."

Dennis Bernstein: It looks like the Russiagateers in Congress are trying to corner Randy. All his life he has spoken truth to power. But what do you think the role of the press should be?

Thomas Drake: The press amplifies just about everything they focus on, especially with today's 24-hour, in-your-face social media. Even the mainstream media is publishing directly to their webpages. You have to get behind the cacophony of all that noise and ask, "Why?" What are the intentions here?

I believe there are still enough independent journalists who are looking further and deeper. But clearly there are those who are hell-bent on making life as difficult as possible for the current president and those who are going to defend him to the hilt. I was not surprised at all that Trump won. A significant percentage of the American electorate were looking for something different.

Dennis Bernstein: Well, if you consider the content of those emails....Certainly, the Clinton folks got rid of Bernie Sanders.

Thomas Drake: That would have been an interesting race, to have Bernie vs. Trump. Sanders was appealing, especially to young audiences. He was raising legitimate issues.

Dennis Bernstein: In Clinton, they had a known quantity who supported the national security state.

Thomas Drake: The national security establishment was far more comfortable having Clinton as president. Someone central to my own case, General Michael Hayden, just a couple days ago went apoplectic because of a tweet from Trump taking on the mainstream media. Hayden got over 100,000 likes on his response. Well, Hayden was central to what we did in deep secrecy at the highest levels of government after 9/11, engaging in widespread surveillance and then justifying it as "raw executive authority."

Now you have this interesting dynamic where the national security establishment is effectively undermining a duly elected president of the United States. I recognize that Trump is vulnerable, but these types of investigations often become highly politicized. I worry that what is really happening is being sacrificed on the altar of entertainment and the stage of political theater.

What is happening to Randy is symptomatic of a larger trend. If you dare speak truth to power, you are going to pay the price. Is Randy that much of a threat, just because he is questioning authority? Are we afraid of the press? Are we afraid of having the uncomfortable conversations, of dealing with the inconvenient truths about ourselves?

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## How Russia-gate Rationalizes Censorship

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

By Joe Lauria

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

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

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

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

enforced orthodoxy of Russia's alleged guilt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Support from Independent Media**

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

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

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

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

Yet, after the Jan. 6 report was published, leading Democrats asserted falsely that the "assessment" represented the consensus judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies – not just the views of "hand-picked" analysts from three – and much of the U.S. mainstream media began treating the allegations of Russian "hacking" as flat fact, not as an uncertain conclusion denied by both the Russian government and WikiLeaks, which insists that it did not get the two batches of Democratic emails from Russia.

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

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

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

Harbor.”

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

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

Journalist Max Blumenthal [tweeted](#) about it. British filmmaker and writer Tariq Ali [posted it](#) on his Facebook page. Ron Paul and Daniel McAdams [interviewed me](#) at length about the censorship on their TV program. *ZeroHedge* wrote a widely shared [piece](#) and someone actually took the time, 27 minutes and 13 seconds to be exact, to read the entire article on YouTube. I began a [petition](#) to *HuffPost*’s Polgreen to either explain the retraction or restore the article. It has gained more than 1,900 signatures so far. If a serious fact-check analysis was made of my article, it must exist and can and should be produced.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



possessing WMD made you a “Saddam apologist.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

recently.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In September 2015 at the U.N. General Assembly, Russian President Vladimir

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

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

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

### **Why Russia Is Targeted**

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

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

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

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

The viewpoints of Iranians, Palestinians, Russians, North Koreans and others are never fully reported in the Western media although the supposed mission of journalism is to help citizens understand a frighteningly complex world from

multiple points of view. It's impossible to do so without those voices included. Routinely or systematically shutting them out also dehumanizes people in those countries, making it easier to gain popular support to go to war against them.

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

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

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

The Jan. 6 intelligence assessment on alleged Russian election meddling is a good example of how this works. A third of its content is an attack on RT for "undermining American democracy" by reporting on Occupy Wall Street, the protest over the Dakota pipeline and, of all things, holding a "third party candidate debates."

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

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

There are also deeper reasons why Russia is being targeted. The Russia-gate story fits neatly into a geopolitical strategy that long predates the 2016 election. Since Wall Street and the U.S. government lost the dominant position

in Russia that existed under the pliable President Boris Yeltsin, the strategy has been to put pressure on getting rid of Putin to restore a U.S. friendly leader in Moscow. There is substance to Russia's concerns about American designs for "regime change" in the Kremlin.

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

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

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

In the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur said he didn't "desire to reestablish wartime censorship" and instead asked the press for self-censorship. He largely got it until the papers began reporting American battlefield losses. On July 25, 1950, "the army ordered that reporters were not allowed to publish 'unwarranted' criticism of command decisions, and that the army would be 'the sole judge and jury' on what 'unwarranted' criticism entailed," according to a Yale University study on military censorship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

While the government can't openly shut down a news site, the Federal Communications Commission's upcoming vote on whether to deregulate the Internet by ending net neutrality will free private Internet companies in the U.S. to

further marginalize Russian and dissident websites by slowing them down and thus discouraging readers from viewing them.

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

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

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

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

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

### **Growing McCarthyite Attacks**

Western rulers' wariness about popular unrest also can be seen in the extraordinary and scurrilous attack on the Canadian website globalresearch.ca. The attack started with a chilling study by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization into the relatively obscure website, followed by a vicious hit

piece on Nov. 18 by the *Globe and Mail*, Canada's largest newspaper. The headline was: "How a Canadian website is being used to amplify the Kremlin's view of the world."

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

### **Russia-gate’s Hurdles**

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

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

The Russia-gate faithful assured us to wait for the indictment of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, briefly Trump’s national security adviser. But again there was nothing about pre-election “collusion,” only charges that Flynn had lied to

the FBI or omitted details about two conversations with the Russian ambassador regarding policy matters during the presidential transition, i.e., *after* the election.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another vague Russia-gate suspicion stemming largely from Steele's opposition

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

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

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

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

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## Edward R. Murrow's Timeless Warnings

As the Russia-gate hysteria expands, it is coming to resemble the McCarthyism of the 1950s, except this time liberals and progressives are promoting the insidious "guilt by association," as Michael Milillo describes.

By Michael Milillo

Does the American government requiring "RT America" – a Russian news organization – to register as a foreign agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) constitute censorship by the government?

If registration in this context is NOT censorship as many latter-day "liberal" McCarthyites contend, then Americans should NOT be afraid to appear on "RT America" as commentators presenting their opinions which may be different from the current narratives that are being propagated by the mainstream media across the United States.

But Americans will be afraid to appear due to “Guilt by Association,” which in its current form is being used to suggest that any Russian who happens to be attending the same social event as President Trump is therefore proof that Trump is a Russian collaborator. Thus, by extrapolation, “Guilt by Association” will be used to denounce any American who appears on “RT America” and presents a narrative that conflicts with the narrative being broadcast by the mainstream media.

The mainstream media will immediately indict that American commentator as a “Russian agent” – or at least that will be the reasonable fear – and thus other Americans will be prevented from listening to and/or reading these alternative opinions – and that amounts to censorship.

Some mainstream media outlets have already censored stories when the analyses conflict with the current liberal narrative for what caused Hillary Clinton to lose to Donald Trump in the November 2016 elections. That narrative is that Hillary Clinton was defeated due to the Russian government hacking into the computer servers at the Democratic National Committee, i.e., “Russia-gate.”

Some liberal web sites now are censoring material that conflicts with this Russia-gate narrative. Case in point is an article written by HuffPost’s contributor Joe Lauria entitled “On The Origins of Russia-gate.”

One day after Lauria posted his article on the “HuffPost” web site, the “HuffPost” editorial staff deleted – censored – the article, citing supposed factual errors. However, the editors did not attempt to contact Lauria before the deletion or to discuss with Lauria what facts he used in his article that were deemed false or misleading. His real offense appears to have been that the story raised doubts about the current narrative accepting the certainty of Russian “meddling” in the 2016 election.

Although some have argued that “HuffPost” has the right to censor material published on its web site, the “HuffPost” readers should NOT be involved in that determination (without at least the author getting a chance to provide a defense). That is censorship by “Mob Rule.”

### **McCarthyite Blacklists**

To further explain what censorship looks like, watch the “70th Year Commemoration of the Hollywood Blacklist” on C-Span. The commemoration cites the statements or the testimonies of the “Blacklisted” entertainers who appeared before the “House Un-American Activities Committee” [HUAC] in 1947.

If today’s liberals are infuriated by the 1947 proceedings of HUAC and the McCarthyism that challenged the patriotism of Americans, then these liberals

should NOT be in favor of today's censorship either. What HUAC and McCarthyism did was to make Americans fearful of being called "Un-American" just because their opinions or politics were different from what either HUAC or Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy said they should be.

Beyond that, Americans came to shun neighbors, fellow workers, and acquaintances – in order to protect themselves from ending up on the "Blacklist" – because you didn't know who might be accused or might be pressured to make accusations, such as the case of director Elia Kazan.

As "RT America" has been accused by the American government to "speak in the U.S. on behalf of a foreign government" – Russia, therefore "RT America" must register under FARA. But the BBC "speaks in the U.S. on behalf of a foreign government" – the United Kingdom. Then why hasn't the American government requested that the BBC register as well under NARA as "RT America" was forced to do under protest?

Is it because the BBC has accepted without question the dominant narratives of the U.S. mainstream media in the BBC's reporting of the news? Unlike the BBC, "RT America" has allowed alternative opinions to be heard by its audience rather than stringently following the mainstream media's narratives.

There are some liberals who argue that "RT America" is a tool used by the Russian government to disseminate Russian propaganda. But Americans who have appeared on "RT America" present their own alternative opinions, NOT the opinions of the Russian government.

If you think the U.S. government requiring "RT America" to register as a foreign agent is NOT censorship, then you have NOT heard of "The Case of Milo Radulovich." When Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy was looking for communists employed by the U.S. government, he supposedly found one such person in Milo Radulovich, a Lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve.

In 1953, Air Force regulation 35-62 stated, "A man may be regarded as a security risk if he has close and continuing associations with communists or people believed to have communist sympathies."

When Lieutenant Radulovich refused to resign from the Air Force as he did nothing wrong, a special Board "recommended that Radulovich be severed from the Air Force" despite the fact that the board never questioned the loyalty of Lieutenant Radulovich.

Radulovich was an easy target because his father "subscribed to several Serbian newspapers, one of which was classified as Communist by the US government." And as his sister supported liberal causes, she was declared to be a communist

sympathizer.

With this “Guilt By Association” in mind, CBS correspondent Edward R. Murrow said, “We believe that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, even though that iniquity be proved, and in this case it was not.”

As an archive of Edward R. Murrow’s work noted, “Not only were the witch hunts affecting the military, Hollywood, government, and academia, this case proved that the average guy can be targeted.”

### **Murrow’s Lament**

During the broadcast of “See It Now” on March 9, 1954 by CBS TV, Edward R. Murrow said: “We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. We must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason, if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men – not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular.

“We can deny our heritage and our history, but we cannot escape responsibility for the result. There is no way for a citizen of a republic to abdicate his responsibilities. As a nation we have come into our full inheritance at a tender age. We proclaim ourselves, as indeed we are, the defenders of freedom, wherever it continues to exist in the world, but we cannot defend freedom abroad by deserting it at home.”

Putting what Murrow said into perspective as it relates to “RT America,” both the U.S. government and many liberals are now using the same tactic of “Guilt By Association” by insinuating that “RT America” is a Russian news organization and thus must be a puppet of the Russian government without providing any proof to support that accusation.

Murrow’s comment is just as relevant today as it was back in 1954. Perhaps even more so because liberals are supposed to be the good guys.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Russia-gate Breeds Establishment McCarthyism.”]

**Michael Milillo, who lives in Pennsylvania, is a retiree with a background in accounting and finance.**

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# Russia-gate Inquisitors Subpoena Journalist

The Russia-gate frenzy is reaching into the ranks of non-mainstream journalists with the House Intelligence Committee's subpoena of Pacifica's Randy Credico, who compares this witch-hunt to the McCarthy era, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The House Intelligence Committee, as part of its Russia-gate investigation, has issued a subpoena demanding the testimony of journalist-activist-and-satirist Randy Credico presumably because he produced a series on WikiLeaks founder and editor Julian Assange, who oversaw the publication of leaked Democratic Party emails in 2016.

"Joe McCarthy is back," said Credico, who traced the committee's actions "to my 14- part series on Assange, 'Julian Assange: Countdown to Freedom,' which includes Wikileaks founder, Julian Assange, his mom, and some of the most significant U.S. government intelligence agency whistle blowers in modern history. They [the Russia-gate investigators] also abhor my recent visits with Assange [at the Ecuadorian embassy in London], where he is still in exile after five and a half years."

Credico, a journalistic contributor to the Flashpoints program on Pacifica Radio, was served the subpoena through his lawyer Martin Stolar in New York City. The subpoena was dated Nov. 27 and followed a request for Credico's "voluntary" testimony that he rebuffed. The subpoena demands Credico's appearance on Capitol Hill on Dec. 15.

A letter dated Nov. 9 from Rep. Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, in effect, demanded Credico's "voluntary" cooperation with the panel's "bipartisan investigation into Russian active measures directed at the 2016 US election."

Schiff also requested "the preservation and production of all documents, records, electronically-stored information, recordings, data and tangible things, including but not limited to graphs, charts, photographs, images and other documents, regardless of form other than those widely available (e.g. newspaper articles) related to the committee's investigation, your interview and any ancillary matters."

Credico told the Flashpoints show that he would not give testimony voluntarily

and, if subpoenaed, he would not cooperate with the House Intelligence Committee's Russia-gate investigation. His lawyer informed the committee of Credico's position and was told that Credico would receive a subpoena to compel his testimony.

I spoke with Credico in New York City on the morning of Nov. 27 before the subpoena arrived.

Dennis Bernstein: I am looking at a letter dated Nov. 9, 2017. It says, "Dear Mr. Credico, as part of its bipartisan investigation into Russian active measures directed at the 2016 US election, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence requires that you participate in a voluntary, transcribed interview at the committee offices." What is this letter about and what is your response?

Randy Credico: I have no idea what they want from me specifically. I did a 14-part series on Julian Assange.

Dennis Bernstein: I want to read a little more from this letter. It says, "We respectfully ask that you produce to the committee by no later than November 24 your availability for the interview during the time identified above." You're not going, are you?

Randy Credico: I have declined to voluntarily testify. The counsel for the committee told my lawyer that I would be subpoenaed.

Dennis Bernstein: Will you respond to a subpoena?

Randy Credico: I am very reluctant to give credence to a broad-based witch hunt such as this.

Dennis Bernstein: Let me read on: "This letter also requests preservation and production of all documents, records, electronically-stored information, recordings, data and tangible things, including but not limited to graphs, charts, photographs, images and other documents, regardless of form other than those widely available (e.g. newspaper articles) related to the committee's investigation, your interview and any ancillary matters."

Randy Credico: It certainly sounds like a form letter. Look, I don't like Trump anymore than anyone else. There are ways that they can get him legally, but to use this Russia-gate thing is a false premise. They are throwing the net too wide and they are spending a lot of money on this. Meanwhile, people are being deported to Haiti, to El Salvador, we're not taking care of business in Puerto Rico. We have this new tax bill which is about to destroy the middle class and the poor. We have two and a half million people in prison. These are the issues



they should be talking about in Congress, but they are not.

Look, they have yet to request an interview with Julian Assange. They know they are not going to get anything that is satisfactory to them and that this would force their hand.

Dennis Bernstein: We depended on you, Randy, to report on the New York Police Department during very violent times. You made the current mayor of New York swear that he would put an end to stop-and-frisk.

Randy Credico: I hope I got the word out not only about stop-and-frisk but about the horrible criminal justice system in New York City. This is the Deep South. We always focus on Alabama and Mississippi but the same thing goes on here. The judges are 95% white and the prosecutors are 95% white and mostly male. When I ran for governor I focused on Attica and Sing-Sing and all these other dungeons that should be closed. I learned a lot from Bill Kunstler about focusing on where you can be impactful.

Dennis Bernstein: Why have you devoted so much time to Julian Assange's story?

Randy Credico: It would be the same thing if they were trying to snuff your voice out. This man is an important journalist. A lot of journalists in the corporate media have abandoned him. He has suffered so much, his family has suffered, he hasn't been able to see his kids for five years. And yet he continues to publish, even in his present circumstances.

Dennis Bernstein: Finally, what is the significance of this kind of congressional witch hunt?

Randy Credico: This is a replay of the 1950s, of the Palmer Raids earlier. This is a very significant moment. A person can still be blacklisted. And it is being done by Democrats! What bothers me most is the fact that you have people from the intelligence community who get to testify publicly and without challenge. People like me have to do it privately.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net).**

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# The Struggles of 'A Good American'

**Exclusive:** A new documentary tells the story of ex-NSA official William Binney and his fight to get the federal bureaucracy to accept an inexpensive system for detecting terrorists while respecting the U.S. Constitution, writes James DiEugenio.

By James DiEugenio

In my view, one could not find a better title for Friedrich Moser's film about former National Security Agency technical expert William Binney than the one decided upon, *A Good American*. His life illustrates the cost some people pay when a person's morality and professional ethics clash with a governmental bureaucracy that values neither. Friedrich Moser's film captures the man and his dilemma on a personal level, in historical terms, and in a memorable aesthetic form.



William Binney was born in Pennsylvania in September 1943. He attended Penn State University and graduated with a degree in mathematics. During the Vietnam War, Binney joined the Army so he could have some control over where he was stationed abroad. As the film shows, during his testing and his service, it was demonstrated he had a high aptitude in mathematical analysis and code breaking. So, he was stationed in Turkey for communications interception. From that nearby location, he was tasked with spying on the Soviet Union.

To say that Binney was good at what he did does not do his performance justice. In December 1967, given signals intercepted in Vietnam by an officer friend of his, Binney predicted the Tet offensive. Because of that forewarning, Binney's friend was able to hold his position with almost no casualties. In 1968, based on intelligence gathering, he predicted two days in advance that the Soviets

would invade Czechoslovakia.

What Binney was so good at was, in those days, called traffic analysis. That is, from the data he was given – no matter how skimpy, no matter how foreign – once it was translated, he was able to break down signal codes, and he then would use that information to map out a whole chain of command and control.

As his friend and eventual National Security Agency colleague Ed Loomis states, Binney was so good at this that he could eventually map out who was talking to whom and which way the communication was going. That is either up the hierarchy or down the hierarchy. All this from the raw data of intercepts. Off this performance, the Army decided to transfer Binney to the National Security Agency.

### **Skilled at Puzzles**

While there, Binney continued his uncanny and unique work in deciphering war preparation through signals intelligence. He predicted the Yom Kippur War in 1973. As he states on camera, he accomplished this through bypassing the very long list of warning signals the NSA gave him. He made a much shorter list of only five indicators that he used at his own desk.

And it was this list that Binney used again six years later to predict the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He predicted both the time and the day. As he notes on camera, he was off by one hour. Binney was so gifted in the creation and perfection of mathematical algorithms that when he got a 64K ram desktop computer in 1983, he was soon outperforming the gigantic mainframes, which took up the entire floor of an office building.

During this introductory segment of the film, Binney says something that is crucial to understanding him, this film, and the moral quandary that constitutes the misuse of intelligence for political ends. Binney states that he got into signals intelligence because he did not think that America should go to war due to bad information.

Therefore, he saw his function as informing leadership properly so they did not make mistakes. When one thinks of some of the wars that the U.S. entered under false intelligence – from the Spanish-American War through the Vietnam War and most recently the war with Iraq – one has to appreciate how important Binney's approach to his job was and how the contrary approach of politicized intelligence – i.e., analysis designed to please political interests – has led to disastrous results.

### **The War on Terror**

From this point, the film introduces the Age of Terror, which *A Good American* starts with the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Ramzi Yousef, one of the perpetrators, had spent time in an Al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan. And the plot was advanced via telephone and through wire transfers from Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, who was suspected later of playing a large part in the 9/11 attacks. The idea was to use a 1330-pound truck bomb to blast the basement supports of the North Tower and crash it into the South Tower. The plan did not come off as intended. But still, six people were killed and about a thousand were injured.

Some in the intelligence community thought the 1993 bombing was an isolated incident. But others, including Binney's colleague at NSA, Tom Drake, thought it was really the start of a dangerous worldwide movement. But that warning went pretty much unheeded.

But Binney took it seriously; especially the phone calls and wire transfers involved. And that caused him to begin to think of constructing a worldwide surveillance program that would root out a terrorist threat before it could strike.

Binney boldly stated that they had to build something like a giant electronic grid, one that would somehow be able to capture, decipher and segregate the routing messages of 2.5 billion phones throughout the world.

When someone objected to the idea as being beyond the reach of any kind of cyber capability, Binney replied that if modern physics could map out a sub-atomic world that no one had seen or imagined, then the NSA could do the same in the atmosphere above us. That decision gave birth to first SARC, or Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center, and then to Thin Thread.

SARC was a group of very select technicians and analysts within the NSA. In 1997, Binney chose them from the thousands of people he supervised. He picked them based on their creative aptitudes and their ability to think outside the box and not be limited or intimidated by the bureaucracy. Two of Binney's cohorts in SARC are featured in the film: computer scientist Ed Loomis and senior analyst Kirk Wiebe.

In many ways, Thin Thread was Binney's magnum opus, the crowning capstone to a brilliant career. It was an all-encompassing surveillance program that worked from what has come to be known as metadata. That term usually refers to what we would call the header, or the routing information on a message. That is, the program was guided by the earmarks of the sender, the receiver(s), the time stamp, and the geographic points of origin and destination.

Thin Thread would then correlate the information from financial transactions, travel records, web searches, and email messages in order to chart relationships among people in real time, as events were happening. As Binney says, it was all about finding patterns among people and charting out relationships.

### **Constitutional Safeguards**

Binney had designed the program with internal safeguards in order to avoid legal and constitutional violations. The main objectives in this regard were to avoid stealing the actual contents of a message, and to also avoid as much as possible the danger of spying on Americans.

The latter was accomplished by only being able to focus the program on persons who were already targeted as domestic suspects. From there, if probable cause was established, the program was designed to take the case to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to obtain a FISA warrant.

Fellow employees in the NSA who saw the prototype said the precision of the final correlations of information resembled a fingerprint a lawyer could take to a FISA Court.

From everyone in SARC, the Thin Thread program received fulsome praise as a problem solver for the NSA. Yet there were some in the NSA who wanted to work with more information, not less.

To Binney, this desire was problematic on three levels. First, it created storage problems for the immense amount of data collection. Second, there was the problem of time consumption: the more data collected (or "data mining"), the longer it took to analyze the information. Third, there was the constitutional problem from the invasion of privacy of American citizens.

Binney felt that this more invasive approach would lead to a breakdown in the legal system that would resemble the intrusions of a fascist state. The indiscriminate vacuuming up of data would fulfill the Orwellian idea of National Security Advisor John Poindexter's Total Information Awareness (TIA).

As the film depicts, Thin Thread fell victim to the ambitions of NSA Director Michael Hayden, who had been an Air Force General prior to heading the NSA. Thus, he understood how hierarchies work, and how power operates in a bureaucracy as large as the Pentagon, i.e., the value of expensive programs over cheaper ones.

When Thin Thread was ready to activate, Binney talked to a project acquisitions officer about purchasing the system for the NSA to use. According to Binney, the problem was that the price tag was too low. After the initial briefing, the

officer came back and said words to the effect: Could you expand it to a budget of \$300 million?

In short order Binney discovered the problem was that Hayden wanted a colossal program that he could tag with a correspondingly colossal price. This would expand the size and scope of the NSA to make it rival the CIA, which had always been the biggest kid on the block as far as the intelligence community went.

### **The Victory of Money**

Therefore, over time, Thin Thread lost out to a much more expensive, but much less efficient and workable program called Trail Blazer, which was budgeted at over \$1 billion and which eventually cost well over that sum.

As the film shows, the congressional liaison for the NSA, Diane Roark, told the agency that the project was both overdesigned and overly complicated. To her, it looked like a boondoggle in the making.

After Roark voiced her reservations, and interviewed some NSA employees from SARC, Hayden circulated a memo in which he voiced his disagreement with those who were countering his decision. He said these actions were hurting the NSA and he would not tolerate the dissent, a thinly veiled hint at retaliation.

Hayden decided to outsource Trail Blazer, rather than develop the program in-house. Hayden used a private company called Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), which employs many former NSA managers. Hayden also brought back to the NSA an SAIC executive named Bill Black who was appointed Deputy Director to develop Trail Blazer.

Hayden then dispatched his third-in-command, Maureen Baginski, to deliver the news that Thin Thread was being abandoned. As Binney recalls, her memorable words were: If we abandon Trail Blazer, I make 500 people unhappy; if we abandon Thin Thread, I make 6 people unhappy. But happiness management was not Binney's idea of what the NSA was about.

The clincher to that meeting was that the 9/11 attacks occurred three weeks later.

Evidently fearful of further attacks, Hayden closed down the NSA offices on 9/11 and the day after. To get inside, Binney disguised himself as a custodian and was astonished by the attitudes of people like Baginski who looked at the 9/11 attacks as something like a gift because now the NSA budget and its powers would be expanded beyond their wildest dreams. About two months later, both Binney and Wiebe decided to resign from the NSA.

It turned out that Roark and SARC were correct. Trail Blazer ended up being a costly failure. It was finally abandoned in 2006. But in 2002, members of SARC filed a complaint with the Department of Defense about the waste and abuse involved in the decision to start Trail Blazer when Thin Thread was already operating in prototype. That complaint was accepted and the inquiry by the Inspector General went on for years. When the report was finally issued in mid-2005, the large majority of the text was redacted. The film shows us these blank pages as Binney leafs through the report.

Tom Drake stayed on at NSA. He knew about Thin Thread and realized the prototype was still there. He decided to run the program through the data that had been collected prior to 9/11. Drake discovered that Binney's program worked as he said it would. It picked up all the important movements and dispersal patterns. It even showed that the plot was more expansive than revealed: part of it had failed since some other planes had not been hijacked. Drake concluded that the information was there for the NSA to interpret but without Thin Thread they could not do so.

### **Hayden's Intervention**

When Wiebe and Binney left the NSA they created their own private company called Entity Mapping LLC, which began selling Thin Thread to other intelligence agencies like the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), and Customs and Border Patrol. The NSA stepped in and negated these deals.

The film implies that Hayden did not want the NSA to be further embarrassed by a program he had rejected for all the wrong reasons. It was at this point that SARC decided to file the complaint with the Department of Defense. Drake said he would support the action from the inside since he was still at NSA. Although the Inspector General report was largely redacted, enough of it was readable so it was clear that Trail Blazer was the most expensive failure in the history of the NSA.

One might think that this story could not get any worse. But it does. After the *New York Times* and *Baltimore Sun* exposed the fact that, as Binney predicted, the NSA would eventually be involved with warrantless eavesdropping and invasions of privacy, the FBI made a series of criminal raids.

In July 2007, the FBI raided the homes of Loomis, Wiebe, Roark and Binney, along with a Justice Department lawyer named Thomas Tamm. The Bush administration was upset that the media was exposing their violations of the original FISA law that was enacted after the Church Committee's exposure of U.S. intelligence abuses.

The FBI agents entered Binney's home with guns drawn while he was in the shower.

According to Roark, much of her NSA data on Thin Thread was confiscated by the FBI during the raid.

It turned out that it was Tamm who had been talking to the *New York Times*. Since he was a lawyer in the Justice Department working the FISA cases, he understood that the Bush administration was violating the law as to how NSA was attaining information and how the surveillance agency had targeted domestic citizens who were not contacted by foreign entities. The administration had set up a special branch of the FISA court to deal with those special cases.

The FBI cases against Binney, Roark, Loomis, Tamm and Wiebe were eventually dropped for lack of evidence. Drake's home was raided a few months later because he had talked to the *Sun*. The prosecuting attorneys tried to get Drake to testify against the others, but he refused to do so.

The prosecutors tried to get Roark to turn against Drake, but that did not work either. After Drake appeared on *Sixty Minutes*, the government dropped all charges except a misdemeanor for misusing an NSA computer system. Drake ended up losing his \$155,000-a-year job at NSA, and his pension. He also was fired from his university teaching position.

As NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden has stated, the major reason he decided not to go through internal channels when he discovered other abuses within the NSA programs, was because of the prior examples of what had happened to men like Binney and Drake.

Thus, in 2013, Snowden fled the country, contacted people in the media and revealed to them the privacy problems with NSA programs like Stellar Wind, and PRISM and Tempora. Binney had worked on Stellar Wind, but the NSA had altered it to spy on Americans after he left.

In other words, if Hayden had listened to Binney and SARC, there would have been no Edward Snowden and 9/11 might not have occurred. But as the film painfully points out, while Binney, Roark and Drake were being prosecuted, Hayden went on to get two major promotions. The first was Deputy Director of National Intelligence and later Director of the CIA. (Hayden remains a respected go-to intelligence expert sought out by the mainstream U.S. media.)

### **An Artistic Documentary**

Friedrich Moser's film about Binney is well made in what might be called the post- Errol Morris documentary mode. There is the well-chosen use of dramatic music and the liberal use of reenactments to demonstrate certain stages of Binney's career. In an age of fine photography, the cinematography in this film is exceptional, even when watching without high definition. In fact, this



documentary is more imaginatively directed than many feature films I have seen of late.

I would be remiss if I did not note that Moser is from Austria and his film was sponsored by the Austrian Film Institute. I doubt that such a film could be made in the United States today. Recently, the mainstream U.S. media has labeled him a “conspiracy theorist” because he has disputed the conventional wisdom that Russia “hacked” Democratic emails to help elect President Trump; Binney’s experiments revealed that the download speed of one of the key hacks was impossible via an Internet hack and instead matched what was possible from a direct download onto a thumb drive, i.e., a leak from an insider.

But that is the fate of people who sacrifice their careers for just causes. They eventually lose their reputations.

Moser is to be congratulated for making his aptly titled film, which would be enormously informative to about 99 percent of the public. I would recommend it to anyone. You can see it on Amazon for \$4, the story of a good American.

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is Reclaiming Parkland.**

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## Russia-gate Breeds ‘Establishment McCarthyism’

**Exclusive:** As Russia-gate gives cover for an Establishment attack on Internet freedom and independent news, traditional defenders of a free press and civil liberties are joining the assault or staying on the sidelines, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In the past, America has witnessed “McCarthyism” from the Right and even complaints from the Right about “McCarthyism of the Left.” But what we are witnessing now amid the Russia-gate frenzy is what might be called “Establishment McCarthyism,” traditional media/political powers demonizing and silencing dissent that questions mainstream narratives.

This extraordinary assault on civil liberties is cloaked in fright-filled stories about “Russian propaganda” and wildly exaggerated tales of the Kremlin’s

“hordes of Twitter bots,” but its underlying goal is to enforce Washington’s “groupthinks” by creating a permanent system that shuts down or marginalizes dissident opinions and labels contrary information – no matter how reasonable and well-researched – as “disputed” or “rated false” by mainstream “fact-checking” organizations like PolitiFact.

It doesn’t seem to matter that the paragons of this new structure – such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and, indeed, PolitiFact – have a checkered record of getting facts straight.

For instance, PolitiFact still rates as “true” Hillary Clinton’s false claim that “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” agreed that Russia was behind the release of Democratic emails last year. Even the Times and The Associated Press belatedly ran corrections after President Obama’s intelligence chiefs admitted that the assessment came from what Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies: CIA, FBI and NSA.

And, the larger truth was that these “hand-picked” analysts were sequestered away from other analysts even from their own agencies and produced “stove-piped intelligence,” i.e., analysis that escapes the back-and-forth that should occur inside the intelligence community.

Even then, what these analysts published last Jan. 6 was an “assessment,” which they specifically warned was “not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact.” In other words, they didn’t have any conclusive proof of Russian “hacking.”

Yet, the Times and other leading newspaper routinely treat these findings as flat fact or the unassailable “consensus” of the “intelligence community.” Contrary information, including WikiLeaks’ denials of a Russian role in supplying the emails, and contrary judgments from former senior U.S. intelligence officials are ignored.

The Jan. 6 report also tacked on a seven-page addendum smearing the Russian television network, RT, for such offenses as sponsoring a 2012 debate among U.S. third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Republican-Democratic debates. RT also was slammed for reporting on the Occupy Wall Street protests and the environmental dangers from “fracking.”

How the idea of giving Americans access to divergent political opinions and information about valid issues such as income inequality and environmental dangers constitutes threats to American “democracy” is hard to comprehend.

However, rather than address the Jan. 6 report’s admitted uncertainties about

Russian “hacking” and the troubling implications of its attacks on RT, the Times and other U.S. mainstream publications treat the report as some kind of holy scripture that can’t be questioned or challenged.

## **Silencing RT**

For instance, on Tuesday, the Times published a front-page story entitled “YouTube Gave Russians Outlet Portal Into U.S.” that essentially cried out for the purging of RT from YouTube. The article began by holding YouTube’s vice president Robert Kyncki up to ridicule and opprobrium for his praising “RT for bonding with viewers by providing ‘authentic’ content instead of ‘agendas or propaganda.’”

The article by Daisuke Wakabayashi and Nicholas Confessore swallowed whole the Jan. 6 report’s conclusion that RT is “the Kremlin’s ‘principal international propaganda outlet’ and a key player in Russia’s information warfare operations around the world.” In other words, the Times portrayed Kyncki as essentially a “useful idiot.”

Yet, the article doesn’t actually dissect any RT article that could be labeled false or propagandistic. It simply alludes generally to news items that contained information critical of Hillary Clinton as if any negative reporting on the Democratic presidential contender – no matter how accurate or how similar to stories appearing in the U.S. press – was somehow proof of “information warfare.”

As Daniel Lazare wrote at Consortiumnews.com on Wednesday, “The web version [of the Times article] links to an RT interview with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange that ran shortly before the 2016 election. The topic is a September 2014 email obtained by Wikileaks in which Clinton acknowledges that ‘the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia ... are providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups in the region.’”

In other words, the Times cited a documented and newsworthy RT story as its evidence that RT was a propaganda shop threatening American democracy and deserving ostracism if not removal from YouTube.

## **A Dangerous Pattern**

Not to say that I share every news judgment of RT – or for that matter The New York Times – but there is a grave issue of press freedom when the Times essentially calls for the shutting down of access to a news organization that may highlight or report on stories that the Times and other mainstream outlets downplay or ignore.

And this was not a stand-alone story. Previously, the Times has run favorable articles about plans to deploy aggressive algorithms to hunt down and then remove or marginalize information that the Times and other mainstream outlets deem false.

Nor is it just the Times. Last Thanksgiving, The Washington Post ran a fawning front-page article about an anonymous group PropOrNot that had created a blacklist of 200 Internet sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other independent news sources, that were deemed guilty of dispensing “Russian propaganda,” which basically amounted to our showing any skepticism toward the State Department’s narratives on the crises in Syria or Ukraine.

So, if any media outlet dares to question the U.S. government’s version of events – once that storyline has been embraced by the big media – the dissidents risk being awarded the media equivalent of a yellow star and having their readership dramatically reduced by getting downgraded on search engines and punished on social media.

Meanwhile, Congress has authorized \$160 million to combat alleged Russian “propaganda and disinformation,” a gilded invitation for “scholars” and “experts” to gear up “studies” that will continue to prove what is supposed to be proved – “Russia bad” – with credulous mainstream reporters eagerly gobbling up the latest “evidence” of Russian perfidy.

There is also a more coercive element to what’s going on. RT is facing demands from the Justice Department that it register as a “foreign agent” or face prosecution. Clearly, the point is to chill the journalism done by RT’s American reporters, hosts and staff who now fear being stigmatized as something akin to traitors.

You might wonder: where are the defenders of press freedom and civil liberties? Doesn’t anyone in the mainstream media or national politics recognize the danger to a democracy coming from enforced groupthinks? Is American democracy so fragile that letting Americans hear “another side of the story” must be prevented?

### **A Dangerous ‘Cure’**

I agree that there is a limited problem with jerks who knowingly make up fake stories or who disseminate crazy conspiracy theories – and no one finds such behavior more offensive than I do. But does no one recall the lies about Iraq’s WMD and other U.S. government falsehoods and deceptions over the years?

Often, it is the few dissenters who alert the American people to the truth, even as the Times, Post, CNN and other big outlets are serving as the real propaganda

agents, accepting what the “important people” say and showing little or no professional skepticism.

And, given the risk of thermo-nuclear war with Russia, why aren’t liberals and progressives demanding at least a critical examination of what’s coming from the U.S. intelligence agencies and the mainstream press?

The answer seems to be that many liberals and progressives are so blinded by their fury over Donald Trump’s election that they don’t care what lines are crossed to destroy or neutralize him. Plus, for some liberal entities, there’s lots of money to be made.

For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union has made its “resistance” to the Trump administration an important part of its fundraising. So, the ACLU is doing nothing to defend the rights of news organizations and journalists under attack.

When I asked ACLU about the Justice Department’s move against RT and other encroachments on press freedom, I was told by ACLU spokesman Thomas Dresslar: “Thanks for reaching out to us. Unfortunately, I’ve been informed that we do not have anyone able to speak to you about this.”

Meanwhile, the Times and other traditional “defenders of a free press” are now part of the attack machine against a free press. While much of this attitude comes from the big media’s high-profile leadership of the anti-Trump Resistance and anger at any resisters to the Resistance, mainstream news outlets have chafed for years over the Internet undermining their privileged role as the gatekeepers of what Americans get to see and hear.

For a long time, the big media has wanted an excuse to rein in the Internet and break the small news outlets that have challenged the power – and the profitability – of the Times, Post, CNN, etc. Russia-gate and Trump have become the cover for that restoration of mainstream authority.

So, as we have moved into this dangerous New Cold War, we are living in what could be called “Establishment McCarthyism,” a hysterical but methodical strategy for silencing dissent and making sure that future mainstream groupthinks don’t get challenged.

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

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# Trump's Praise for Philippines' Killer-President

**Exclusive:** President Trump may see his tough-guy rhetoric as just part of the reality TV show that he's putting on, but violent talk often goes hand-in-hand with real-life violence as in the Philippines, notes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders recently confirmed that President Trump will soon meet his Philippines counterpart, President Rodrigo Duterte, during a tour of Asia to "underscore his commitment to long-standing United States alliances and partnerships."

The meeting will give Trump a chance to reaffirm his April 29 telephone call to "congratulate" Duterte on "what a great job" he has been doing to fight the scourge of drugs. "Keep up the good work, you are doing an amazing job," Trump gushed.

Human rights workers don't share Trump's enthusiasm. They accuse Duterte of presiding over the extrajudicial murder of more than 10,000 people – including dozens of children and several noted political opponents – by police death squads in a nationwide war against drug addicts and dealers. Although the bloodbath has been condemned by United Nations-sponsored investigators, not a single police officer has been convicted.

The country's Catholic Church has begun tolling church bells every day to acknowledge the victims. Manila's archbishop recently offered sanctuary and legal assistance to police officers and vigilantes who come forward to testify about their participation in the government's campaign of mass murder.

Yet Trump apparently finds all this easy to overlook. He and Duterte have become brothers in arms.

The two leaders have much in common, starting with a loathing of Barack Obama. The Philippines president must have warmed Trump's heart by calling President Obama a "son of a whore," an epithet he also used to describe another Trump enemy, Pope Francis.

Equally important, Duterte has been kind to Trump's commercial interests, which include a multi-million-dollar licensing deal that put Trump's name on a 57-floor apartment building in Manila. Last November, Duterte appointed as his new

trade envoy to Washington the chairman of the company building the Trump Tower. For months thereafter – until the Washington Post began asking questions – the project continued to feature promotional videos by President Trump and his daughter Ivanka, lauding the tower as a “milestone in Philippine real estate history.”

### **Violence and Vigilantism**

On a deeper emotional level, the two men share a fascination with violence and vigilantism.

Donald Trump boasted early in the 2016 presidential campaign that he could “stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody” without losing any of his supporters. The wildly popular Duterte did him one better, telling a group of businessmen last December that he personally *did* murder suspected criminals in the city where he was once mayor:

“In Davao I used to do it personally. Just to show to the guys [police] that if I can do it why can’t you. And I’d go around in Davao with a motorcycle, with a big bike, and I would just patrol the streets looking for trouble also. I was really looking for a confrontation so that I could kill.”

Although one senior Philippines official suggested that “Duterte Harry” was just exaggerating for effect, a former hit man for the Davao death squad testified before the country’s Senate that Duterte personally gunned down as many as eight victims between 1998 and 2000.

His explosive story was subsequently corroborated under oath by a retired police officer and death squad leader who recalled that Mayor Duterte told his unit to kill their victims and then “throw them in the ocean or in the quarry. Bury them. Make sure there are no traces of the bodies.”

This July, speaking before a group of law enforcement officials on Long Island, Trump sounded much like Duterte as he painted a frightening picture of communities across the country victimized by ruthless gang members who “butcher those little girls, they kidnap, they extort, they rape, they rob . . . they prey on children. . . they have transformed peaceful parks and beautiful, quiet neighborhoods into bloodstained killing fields.”

Trump then praised ICE Director Tom Homan for working to “rid out nation of cartels and criminals who are preying on our citizens.” Noting how much he liked Homan’s “very nasty” and “very mean” looks, the President recalled asking him how tough foreign gangs really are: “He said, they’re nothing compared to my guys. Nothing. And that’s what you need. Sometimes that’s what you need, right?”

## Unleashing Death Squads

Trump sounded like he might not mind unleashing death squads himself if he were not more restrained than Duterte. “The laws are stacked against us, but we’re ending that,” he promised.

As it was, Trump promised to “support our police like our police have never been supported before” so they could wipe out vicious immigrant gangs. “One by one, we’re liberating our American towns . . . like in the old Wild West. . . And when you see these towns and when you see these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon – you just see them thrown in, rough – I said, please don’t be too nice. (Laughter.) Like when you guys put somebody in the car and you’re protecting their head, you know, the way you put their hand over? Like, don’t hit their head and they’ve just killed somebody – don’t hit their head. I said, you can take the hand away, okay? (Laughter and applause.)”

A couple of weeks later, Duterte again showed Trump how it really works when there are no holds barred. Security forces in Manila and a neighboring province killed 60 people in a sweep aimed at rounding up drug users and dealers. Duterte said he would pardon and promote any police officers involved in extrajudicial murders, and ordered police to shoot any human rights observers on the scene.

“Let’s kill another 32 every day. Maybe we can reduce what ails this country,” he said.

Coincident with Duterte’s expressed blood lust, Trump again unveiled his dark id. He tweeted, in reaction to the Barcelona terror attack but with the Philippines in mind, “Study what General Pershing of the United States did to terrorists when caught. There was no more Radical Islamic Terror for 35 years!”

The story behind that tweet is ugly. Trump was referring to an apocryphal story he told during the Republican presidential primary about General “Black Jack” Pershing who led counterinsurgency operations against Muslim rebels after U.S. troops invaded the Philippines in 1898 to replace Spain as colonial ruler.

“He caught 50 terrorists who did tremendous damage,” Trump claimed, “and . . . dipped 50 bullets in pig’s blood [which is considered haram]. . . And he has his men load up their rifles and he lined up the 50 people and they shot 49 of those people. And the 50th person, he said, you go back to your people and you tell them what happened. And for 25 years there wasn’t a problem.”

The moral of the story, Trump said, is “we’ve got to start getting tough and we’ve got to start being vigilant and we’ve got to start using our heads or



we're not gonna have a country, folks.”

In other words, Trump, like Duterte, glorifies state-sanctioned murder.

We have a long way to go before the United States resembles the Philippines – but not an inconceivably long way. Trump’s violent rhetoric, reflecting his obvious admiration for death squad tactics, is chipping steadily away at the legal norms that help keep our nation civilized. His planned visit to the killer of Manila next month should remind us all of the danger Trump represents to American democracy and human rights.

**Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international relations and history.**

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## Trump Escalates Anti-Leak Campaign

President Trump has made clear his anger about “leaks,” but he is far from alone among recent U.S. presidents waging war against whistleblowing, write Jesselyn Radack and Kathleen McClellan for ExposeFacts.

By Jesselyn Radack and Kathleen McClellan

The Trump administration has declared a war on media leaks and called for the U.S. federal workforce and contractors to receive “anti-leak” training. The centerpiece of Trump’s anti-leak campaign, aside from early morning tweet-storms railing against leakers and media, is the National Insider Threat Taskforce.

The Insider Threat Program is not a Trump-era creation. In then-secret testimony to Congress in 2012, Directorate of National Intelligence official Robert Litt touted the original Insider Threat Program as a highlight in administrative efforts to “sanction and deter” leaks. In the past, Insider Threat Program training has improperly included “WANTED”-style images of whistleblowers pictured alongside actual spies and mass murderers.

As recently as last month, the Department of Defense has developed training courses, toolkits, templates, posters, and videos, all aimed toward silencing and deterring anyone who would disclose to the press or the public information that the government wants kept secret for no legitimate reason and that the public has an interest in knowing. It is not only federal employees who receive these trainings, but tens of thousands of government contractors as well. Companies with any classified access are required to implement an “Insider

Threat Program,” an insidious presumption that employees cannot be trusted.

Part of the “Unauthorized Disclosure” training includes watching a Fox News clip on the crackdown on leaks and Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s statement announcing an increase in criminal leak investigations. A student guide from the Insider Threat Awareness training includes the McCarthyesque request that employees report on each other for “general suspicious behaviors,” including “Questionable national loyalty” such as “Displaying questionable loyalty to U.S. government or company” or “Making anti-U.S. comments.” Never mind that the only oath government employees take is to the U.S. Constitution, not to any government official or the U.S. government itself and certainly not to a private company.

### **Anti-Leak Posters**

The many secrecy trainings come with promotional posters with unsophisticated rhyming slogans cringe-worthy to First Amendment advocates and marketing professionals alike, such as “There no delete when you tweet” or “Tweets sink fleets.” The poster with the slogan “Every Leak makes us weak” is accompanied by a melting American flag info-graphic. Then there’s the most anti-press poster, a mock newspaper website with the slogan “Think before you click,” complete with a red, Trumpian-style, all caps “IT’S A CRIME” at the bottom. The messaging is so heavy-handed it would be funny if the consequences weren’t the freedoms of speech and the press.

Finally, there’s the laughably inaccurate and awkward slogan “Free speech doesn’t mean careless talk.” Actually, it does. Free speech does not mean screaming “FIRE” in a crowded theater, but there is no Supreme Court ruling holding that “careless speech” is somehow exempt from First Amendment protections, lest our President’s Twitter feed be censorable.

There is an “unauthorized disclosures” video training from September 2017 billed as “compliant with White House and Secretary of Defense Memoranda” that condemns leaks, points out punishment for leakers, and warns apocalyptically that when there are unauthorized leaks, “we all risk losing our way of life.”

Another informational video includes a fictionalized news story about Americans dying in a terrorist attack because of a release of classified information. Such a story has never appeared in the actual news media because it has never happened. In Chelsea Manning’s criminal case – worth mentioning since her leaks are consistently singled out in the videos – the government was unable to provide a finalized damage assessment, even though the leaks occurred years prior. (Curiously, Edward Snowden’s even more-well known leaks are not mentioned by name in the videos.)

The trainings include little or no mention of whistleblowing, except to say that leaking to the media is not whistleblowing, and the First Amendment offers no protection to whistleblowers. This is chilling, but not accurate. The Supreme Court has recognized that the media is a legitimate outlet for whistleblowers. And, information that has been classified to cover up government wrongdoing or prevent embarrassment is not properly classified. In fact, whistleblowers leaking to the media is a time-honored tradition dating back, at least, to Daniel Ellsberg's leaking of the Pentagon Papers.

The Insider Threat Program trainings do not send a simple message against leaking properly classified information, such as nuclear launch codes or covert identities. Rather, the trainings send much more destructive messages against all leaks and speech the government does not like: do not criticize the government or you will be reported as an insider threat and keep *all* government secrets, even when the government breaks the law. These are messages contrary to a free and open democratic society, especially one where the First Amendment protects freedoms of speech, association, and the press.

The training videos go beyond simply urging employees to keep quiet. Employees are instructed not to access or share information *already in the public sphere*. Considering that every major newspaper includes almost daily leaks of classified information, such an instruction is impossible to comply with, and will almost certainly be used, as it has in the past, to retaliate against whistleblowers. After all, the biggest leaker of classified information is the U.S. government itself.

Jesselyn Radack was a whistleblower at the Department of Justice under the Bush administration and now heads the Whistleblower and Source Protection Program (WHISPeR) at ExposeFacts, where she has provided legal representation for clients including Edward Snowden, Thomas Drake, and William Binney. Kathleen McClellan is the Deputy Director at WHISPeR. [This article originally ran at ExposeFacts at <https://exposefacts.org/insider-threat-program-training-and-trumps-war-on-leaks-a-chilling-combination-for-whistleblowers/> ]

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## Political Fig Leaf After Las Vegas Slaughter

The Las Vegas massacre, like all the other massacres, won't change the easy accessibility of guns in America, but politicians are scrambling to enact a fig-

leaf bill against a rapid-fire device used by this one shooter, JP Sottile explains.

By JP Sottile

Congress' forthcoming "bump stock" bill is the perfect political fig leaf. Cracking down on a simple device that turns deadly weapons even deadlier is an ideal political solve for lawmakers who desperately need to be seen taking some sort of action.

Republicans in particular can embrace this ultimately meaningless move under the guise of actually "doing something" about gun violence in America. And that's why they are embracing it ... it's gun control without controlling guns.

If passed, they can comfortably go into next year's elections inoculated against the charge that they are beholden to the National Rifle Association without actually transgressing the NRA or most gun-owners. In fact, the NRA just announced that *even they* are open to restrictions on bump stocks ... thus inoculating themselves from a potential backlash, too.

So it's a two-fer! But it is only a two-fer for the NRA and their "cash and carry" cadre in Congress. It is a big zero when it comes to the daily grind of American gun violence. It's pure political posturing that will not change anything.

That's because bump stocks have been flying off the shelves for three days ... often selling out in some locations. And bump stocks look like something that could be fashioned by a handy man in a well-stocked shop in a typical suburban garage. Even if someone doesn't have the skill to make one, they'll still be out there. Anyone who really wants one ... will get one ... particularly with millions of bump stocks already sold across America.

Given that stark reality, how will a new restriction functionally eliminate those privately owned bump stocks? And who will be tasked with stopping people from making one or buying one on the black market if they really want to get to the so-called "happy spot" where their already high-powered rifles spit out hundreds of rounds like an open garden hose? How will a new law put that genie back into the bottle?

It's really just an extension of the conundrum around the entire gun issue. It is estimated that Americans own 310 million guns. That's nearly a gun per person. America is locked and loaded. Simply put, this nation, which owns nearly half of the world's civilian-held guns, is a teeming mass of well-armed wannabe actions heroes who believe it is their birthright, and some even believe it's

their God-given right, to bear arms.

## No Gun Round-up

There is no chance they'll let go of that Hollywood-primed fantasy or that intoxicating feeling of individual power. And there is no way this country will engage in an Australia-style round-up of guns ... at least, not for another two generations. And we ain't gonna amend the Second Amendment ... at least, not for another two to four generations ... if ever. Let's be honest, it's gonna take a lot of effort and a long time to stop handing down America's uniquely potent gun-loving gene.

So, it seems like we are stuck. And that's because we are stuck. We have a culture that is suspicious of society and a society that is suspicious of each other. And we are a people who are suspicious of our government, which, it must be pointed out, is really just made up of people. Government is referred to like it is a being ... or a monster ... but it's really just made up of other Americans. Which brings us back around to a growing dysfunction that causes us to fear our neighbors and loathe our fellow Americans. Our distrust of government is intertwined with our distrust of each other. And that's the real reason we like our guns.

Frankly, this Hobbesian dystopia has been the rule in American history. The one blip was the period from the Great Depression through World War II and, with notable exceptions (Jim Crow plus McCarthyism), into the Eisenhower Years. That was a faint glimpse of America as a "whole" people who might be willing to entertain the idea of living in a society.

It was catalyzed by widespread economic hardship, total war and fear of Commies raining down nuclear holocaust on mom, apple pie and Chevrolet. They were tribal reactions to existential fears. But there was also a widely held belief that most Americans were in it together and that government and being a part of society were not inherently bad things. And other Americans were not merely your competition.

Since then, it is has been one long back-slide into the bloody, anti-social norm of American history. This has been the American Way since America's inception. It's been that way since the Whiskey Rebellion and runaway slave patrols and the bugle-tootin' cavalry galloping in to wipe out nettlesome American Indians who dared to get in the way of Manifest Destiny. It's been that way since the Black Wall Street Massacre of 1921. And it returned during the assassinations and chaos of 1968. The only real difference now is the turbo-charged nature of the weapons we wield thanks to the All-American ethos of bigger-faster-cheaper.

Of course we want more firepower with more bullets delivered in less time. That's not just an integral part of America's insatiable consumerism ... it's just common sense when everyone is armed and everyone is a potential enemy in a nation that looks and feels like one giant O.K. Corral. It's the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy and it ultimately ends up filling morgues with the collateral damage of our damaged culture.

And all the politically easy bump stock bans in the world will not fix that core issue. We are going to keep paying this price until there is a real and lasting change in the way we see each other. Until we are willing to be a part of society ... we will not be able to give up our gun-based culture.

**JP Sottile is a freelance journalist, radio co-host, documentary filmmaker and former broadcast news producer in Washington, D.C. He blogs at [Newsvandal.com](http://www.newsvandal.com) or you can follow him on Twitter, <http://twitter/newsvandal>.**

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## America's Hypocrisy on Democracy

U.S. politicians often lecture other nations about their flawed governance as if American democracy is the gold standard, but anti-democratic measures like gerrymandering belie that self-image, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

An old fear about Islamist political parties entering government is that once in power, even if they had gained their position through democratic means, they would subvert democracy for the sake of maintaining power.

The U.S. government explicitly mentioned the specter of "one man, one vote, one time" in condoning in 1992 the Algerian military's cancellation of the second round of a legislative election that the Islamic Salvation Front, which had won a plurality in the first round, was poised to win. The military's intervention touched off a vicious civil war in which hundreds of thousands of Algerians died.

History has indeed offered examples of rulers coming to power through democratic means and then clinging to power through undemocratic means. Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany only after his Nazi Party had won pluralities in two successive free elections in 1932. But there is no reason to associate such scenarios with Islamists more so than with parties of other ideological persuasions.

A relevant modern data point is Tunisia, the one Arab country in which democracy took hold as a result of the Arab Spring. The Islamist Ennahdha Party won a free election in 2011 and formed a government but willingly stepped down in 2014 after it lost much of its public support, very much in the mold of how governments in parliamentary democracies in the West vacate office after losing the public's confidence.

The more common recent pattern regarding Islamists in office has been for their opponents to cut their tenures short through undemocratic means. This has included, besides Algeria in 1992, the Turkish military's "coup by memorandum" to oust a mildly Islamist civilian government in 1997, and the Egyptian military's coup in 2013 that toppled President Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Democracy in Turkey today is being rapidly eroded, but this involves not the ideological coloration of the Justice and Development Party but instead the megalomania of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been using Turkish nationalist themes more than Islamist ones in cementing his hold on power.

### **Anti-Democratic Gerrymandering**

All this, important though it is, ought to be less important to Americans who are concerned about preserving democracy than what has been happening in their own country. The gerrymandering case that is before the Supreme Court this week is especially important in that respect, because it gets directly to the phenomenon of one person, one vote, one time.

That phenomenon is what has occurred in Wisconsin, where the case now before the court originated. Republican legislators, once in power, secretly and aggressively devised new legislative boundaries that have enabled them to retain their grip on power even after, in subsequent elections, losing majority support among the citizens of Wisconsin.

Given the power of those same legislators to draw Congressional districts as well as their own districts, the disconnect between the will of the people and the ideology of representatives extends to the federal as well as the state level.

The methods used may be different from those used by some of the foreign rulers who have transitioned from democratically elected leaders to autocrats using nondemocratic means. The prime method used in gerrymandering in the United States is not brown shirts in the streets but rather computing power used to crunch demographic data and to try out endless variations of how lines might be drawn to gain maximum partisan advantage. But the result is the same: rulers

stay in power even after most citizens no longer want them there.

Gerrymandering is not the only such undemocratic tool being used to the same effect. There also are the Republican-sponsored voter suppression laws designed to impede people's ability to exercise the right to vote, and to do so in ways that fall most heavily on those presumed to be more likely to support the opposition party. These methods are rationalized through unsupported assertions about widespread voter identification fraud. President Trump has even established a commission founded on such a lie, to provide momentum for still more voter suppression measures.

### **Excuses Not to Act**

When any case such as the Wisconsin case comes before the Supreme Court, there always are voices calling for the court to defer to elected branches of the government on what is a "political" question. But such a position is groundless when gerrymandering is involved. The problem at the very heart of the case concerns the composition of the political branch that has been drawing district lines. For the court to defer to that political branch would mean not that it is avoiding a decision but rather that it is deciding in favor of the pro-gerrymandering side.

Of course, the politicization of the U.S. Supreme Court is a long-established feature of American government and politics. The effects of gerrymandering and the voter suppression laws have been amplified by supposed "strict constructionists" construing the First Amendment guarantee of free speech so loosely as to strike down laws governing campaign financing. Moreover, the composition of the court that is now deliberating on the gerrymandering case is itself the product of an extra-constitutional exercise of power by a Senate majority that refused to perform its constitutional duty of considering a nomination by the then-incumbent president.

The health or sickness of democracy overseas has been a major focus of U.S. foreign policy debate and much policymaking. Some strains of policy thinking have even led to costly overseas military expeditions rationalized as efforts to install democracy in lands overseas. Any Americans thinking along such lines should stop and think first about how democracy in the United States appears to observers overseas. It is not an especially pretty sight.

The United States today is a less healthy democracy than what prevails in many other advanced industrial countries of the West. There is a foreign policy equity involved – in terms of the soft power that comes from being a conspicuously healthy democracy– but what is most important is what kind of political system Americans themselves can enjoy.



Of all the advantages of democracy that democratic theorists have posited, surely the most important is the ability of citizens to remove leaders whom they no longer support. There is no better guarantee that government will be run in the interests of the governed.

The case now before the Supreme Court will go a long way toward determining whether U.S. democracy will exhibit this principle or instead will be a case of one person, one vote, one time.

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