

US Journalism's New 'Golden Age'?

Exclusive: The Washington Post and other big media are hailing a new journalistic “golden age” as they punish President Trump for disparaging them, but is this media bias a sign of good journalism or itself a scandal, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The mainstream U.S. media is congratulating itself on its courageous defiance of President Trump and its hard-hitting condemnations of Russia, but the press seems to have forgotten that its proper role within the U.S. democratic structure is not to slant stories one way or another but to provide objective information for the American people.

By that standard – of respecting that the people are the nation’s true sovereigns – the mainstream media is failing again. Indeed, the chasm between what America’s elites are thinking these days and what many working-class Americans are feeling is underscored by the high-fiving that’s going on inside the elite mainstream news media, which is celebrating its Trump- and Russia-bashing as the “new golden age of American journalism.”

The New York Times and The Washington Post, in particular, view themselves as embattled victims of a tyrannical abuser. The Times presents itself as the brave guardian of “truth” and the Post added a new slogan: “Democracy dies in darkness.” In doing so, they have moved beyond the normal constraints of professional, objective journalism into political advocacy – and they are deeply proud of themselves.

In a Sunday column entitled “How Trump inspired a golden age,” Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank wrote that Trump “took on the institution of a free press – and it fought back. Trump came to office after intimidating publishers, barring journalists from covering him and threatening to rewrite press laws, and he has sought to discredit the ‘fake news’ media at every chance. Instead, he wound up inspiring a new golden age in American journalism.

“Trump provoked the extraordinary work of reporters on the intelligence, justice and national security beats, who blew wide open the Russia election scandal, the contacts between Russia and top Trump officials, and interference by Trump in the FBI investigation. Last week’s appointment of a special prosecutor – a crucial check on a president who lacks self-restraint – is a direct result of their work.”

Journalism or Hatchet Job?

But has this journalism been professional or has it been a hatchet job? Are we seeing a new “golden age” of journalism or a McCarthyistic lynch mob operating on behalf of elites who disdain the U.S. constitutional process for electing American presidents?

For one thing, you might have thought that professional journalists would have demanded proof about the predicate for this burgeoning “scandal” – whether the Russians really did “hack” into emails of the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta and then slip the information to WikiLeaks to influence the outcome of the 2016 election.

You have surely heard and read endlessly that this conclusion about Russia’s skulduggery was the “consensus view of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” and thus only some crazy conspiracy theorist would doubt its accuracy even if no specific evidence was evinced to support the accusation.

But that repeated assertion is not true. There was no National Intelligence Estimate (or NIE) that would compile the views of the 17 intelligence agencies. Instead, as President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on May 8, the Russia-hacking claim came from a “special intelligence community assessment” (or ICA) produced by selected analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation, or as Clapper put it, “a coordinated product from three agencies – CIA, NSA, and the FBI – not all 17 components of the intelligence community.”

Further, as Clapper explained, the “ICA” was something of a rush job beginning on President Obama’s instructions “in early December” and completed by Jan. 6, in other words, a month or less.

Clapper continued: “The two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.” However, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you “hand-pick” the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion.

You can say the analysts worked independently but their selection, as advocates for one position or another, could itself dictate the outcome. If the analysts were hardliners on Russia or hated Trump, they could be expected to deliver the conclusion that Obama and Clapper wanted, i.e., challenging the legitimacy of Trump’s election and blaming Russia.

The point of having a more substantive NIE is that it taps into a much broader network of U.S. intelligence analysts who have the right to insert dissents to

the dominant opinions. So, for instance, when President George W. Bush belatedly ordered an NIE regarding Iraq's WMD in 2002, some analysts – especially at the State Department – inserted dissents (although they were expunged from the declassified version given to the American people to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq).

An Embarrassing Product

Obama's "ICA," which was released on Jan. 6, was a piece of work that embarrassed many former U.S. intelligence analysts. It was a one-sided argument that lacked any specific evidence to support its findings. Its key point was that Russian President Vladimir Putin had a motive to authorize an information operation to help Hillary Clinton's rival, Donald Trump, because Putin disdained her work as Secretary of State.

But the Jan. 6 report failed to include the counter-argument to that *cui bono* assertion, that it would be an extraordinary risk for Putin to release information to hurt Clinton when she was the overwhelming favorite to win the presidency. Given the NSA's electronic-interception capabilities, Putin would have to assume that any such undertaking would be picked up by U.S. intelligence and that he would likely be facing a vengeful new U.S. president on Jan. 20.

While it's possible that Putin still took the risk – despite the daunting odds against a Trump victory – a balanced intelligence assessment would have included such contrary arguments. Instead, the report had the look of a prosecutor's brief albeit without actual evidence pointing to the guilt of the accused.

Further, the report repeatedly used the word "assesses" – rather than "proves" or "establishes" – and the terminology is important because, in intelligence-world-speak, "assesses" often means "guesses." The report admits as much, saying, "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."

In other words, the predicate for the entire Russia-gate scandal, which may now lead to the impeachment of a U.S. president and thus the negation of the Constitution's electoral process, is based partly on a lie – i.e., the claim that the assessment comes from all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies – and partly on evidence-free speculation by a group of "hand-picked" analysts, chosen by Obama's intelligence chiefs.

Yet, the mainstream U.S. news media has neither corrected the false assertion about the 17 intelligence agencies nor demanded that actual evidence be made

public to support the key allegation that Russia was the source of WikiLeaks' email dumps.

By the way, both Russia and WikiLeaks deny that Russia was the source, although it is certainly possible that the Russian government would lie and that WikiLeaks might not know where the two batches of Democratic emails originated.

A True 'Golden Age'?

Yet, one might think that the new "golden age of American journalism" would want to establish a firm foundation for its self-admiring reporting on Russia-gate. You might think, too, that these esteemed MSM reporters would show some professional skepticism toward dubious claims being fed to them by the Obama administration's intelligence appointees.

That is unless, of course, the major U.S. news organizations are not abiding by journalistic principles, but rather see themselves as combatants in the anti-Trump "resistance." In other words, if they are behaving less as a Fourth Estate and more as a well-dressed mob determined to drag the interloper, Trump, from the White House.

The mainstream U.S. media's bias against Putin and Russia also oozes from every pore of the Times' and Post's reporting from Moscow. For instance, the Times' [article](#) on Putin's comments about supposed secrets that Trump shared with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the White House had the headline in the print editions: "Putin Butts In to Claim There Were No Secrets..." The article by Andrew Higgins then describes Putin "asserting himself with his customary disruptive panache" and "seizing on foreign crises to make Russia's voice heard."

Clearly, we are all supposed to hate and ridicule Vladimir Putin. He is being demonized as the new "enemy" in much the way that George Orwell foresaw in his dystopian novel, *1984*. Yet, what is perhaps most troubling is that the major U.S. news outlets, which played instrumental roles in demonizing leaders of Iraq, Syria and Libya, believe they are engaged in some "golden age" journalism, rather than writing propaganda.

Contempt for Trump

Yes, I realize that many good people want to see Trump removed from office because of his destructive policies and his buffoonish behavior – and many are eager to use the new *bête noire*, Russia, as the excuse to do it. But that still does not make it right for the U.S. news media to abandon its professional responsibilities in favor of a political agenda.

On a political level, it may not even be a good idea for Democrats and progressives who seem to be following the failed strategy of Hillary Clinton's campaign in seeking to demonize Trump rather than figuring out how to speak to the white working-class people who voted for him, many out of fear over their economic vulnerability and others out of anger over how Clinton dismissed many of them as "deplorables."

And, by the way, if anyone thinks that whatever the Russians may have done damaged Clinton's chances more than her colorful phrase disdaining millions of working-class people who understandably feel left behind by neo-liberal economics, you may want to enroll in a Politics 101 course. The last thing a competent politician does is utter a memorable insult that will rally the opposition.

In conversations that I've had recently with Trump voters, they complain that Clinton and the Democrats weren't even bothering to listen to them or to talk to them. These voters were less enamored of Trump than they were conceded to Trump by the Clinton campaign. These voters also are not impressed by the endless Trump- and Russia-bashing from The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and MSNBC, which they see as instruments of the elites.

The political danger for national Democrats and many progressives is that mocking Trump and thus further insulting his supporters only extends the losing Clinton strategy and cements the image of Democrats as know-it-all elitists. Thus, the Democrats risk losing a key segment of the U.S. electorate for a generation.

Not only could that deny the Democrats a congressional majority for the foreseeable future, but it might even get Trump a second term.

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](#)).

Do High-Level Leaks Suggest a Conspiracy?

Widespread concern inside Official Washington about President Trump's unfitness for the job is fueling a campaign of high-level leaks that is taking on the look of a "soft coup," says ex-CIA officer Philip Giraldi.

By Philip Giraldi

Back in my time in the CIA, there were two places in the headquarters building one could go that were free speech zones – places where it was safe to vent about senior management without necessarily being admonished or even reported. They were the Historical Intelligence Collection room off the library, where no one ever went to look at the books, and the office supplies storage room in the basement.

The supplies room had a lot of dark corners and concealing shelves where it was possible to be anonymous and it was completely unsupervised in the belief that true-blue CIA officers would never stoop to taking even a single pencil more than was actually needed to get the job done.

I don't know if those rooms still exist, but I sometimes think of them when the subject of government conspiracies come up. I have this vision of two or three conspirators huddled in the corner behind the staplers back in 1975 discussing how one would go about eliminating the likes of Senator Frank Church, who at that time was heading a major congressional investigation into CIA improprieties.

If there had been such a gathering, I would imagine that the *Washington Post* would have found out about it on the next day as intelligence officers are gregarious and like to talk. This has been my principal problem with the debate in some quarters about the 9/11 Commission. Their report did indeed miss many important angles in order to protect certain governmental interests, but if there had been a genuine conspiracy involving what must have been hundreds of people to demolish the Twin Towers with explosives, it surely would have leaked long ago.

Two months ago, I would have dismissed as fantasy any thoughts of a conspiracy based in America's national security agencies to bring down Donald Trump. But now I am not so sure. Many of my friends who are former intelligence officers are increasingly asking questions. It is worth pointing out that none of us are fans of what the White House has been doing and saying – quite the contrary.

Defense of the Constitution

Still, alerting the country to concerns over what might be a developing soft coup orchestrated by the intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to nullify the results of a national election in no way equates to trying to protect Donald Trump and his uncouth and ill-informed behavior. It is rather a defense of the Constitution.

Donald Trump said on Wednesday that "This is the single greatest witch hunt of a

politician in American history!” He might be right. He was referring to Deputy Attorney General Rob Rosenstein’s appointment of the highly-respected Robert Mueller as independent counsel to investigate “any links and/or coordination between Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump, and any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation.”

Trump’s bombast puts everyone but his most tone-deaf supporters on edge, but there are two points that he has been making repeatedly that are essential to any understanding of what is going on.

First, the investigation into Russia and the Trumpsters has been a high priority at FBI and also in Congress for nearly a year. Yet so far no one has produced evidence that anyone broke any law or even that someone did something wrong.

Second, and more importantly, the vilification of Trump and Russia has been driven by a series of leaks that come from the very top of the national security apparatus, leaks that appear not to have been seriously investigated.

This involvement of FBI and CIA in the campaign, whether inadvertently or by design, was particularly evident in the various reports that surfaced and were leaked to the press during the campaign and right up to the inauguration. The leaks of that type of information, to include technical intelligence and Special Access Program “codeword” material, require top-level access as well as the ability to arrange clandestine contacts with major players in the media, something far beyond the reach of most employees at CIA or the FBI.

The Lavrov Leak

Similar leaks have been appearing since that time. I confess to finding Monday’s detailed account of what President Trump discussed with Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov, which included corroborating material that likely did more damage than the information that was actually shared, highly suggestive of the possibility that something like a conspiracy is, in fact, functioning.

Given the really tight-security control of that transcript after it was determined that it contained sensitive information, one might reasonably assume that the leaks to the media came directly out of Donald Trump’s own National Security Council or from the highest levels of the office of the DNI, CIA, or FBI.

On Wednesday, the anonymous sources struck again, revealing that “Michael Flynn and other advisers to Donald Trump’s campaign were in contact with Russian officials and others with Kremlin ties in at least 18 calls and emails during the last seven months of the 2016 presidential race.” That sort of information

had to come from the top level of the FBI and would have been accessible to only a few, but even though the leaks of what constitutes highly-classified information have been recurring for many months, no one has been fired or arrested.

The emphasis on Russia derives from the government and media consensus that Moscow was behind the hacking of Democratic National Committee (DNC) computers that led to the exposure of what the DNC was doing to destroy the candidacy of Bernie Sanders. There is also a related consensus that the Russian hacking was intended to damage American democracy and also to help the Trump campaign, a narrative that the President has described as a “made-up thing,” a view that I share. All of these assertions are regarded as unquestionably true as measured by inside-the-beltway groupthink, with even the White House now conceding that there was Russian interference in the election.

Sometimes the hysteria over Russia produces over-the-top stories in the mainstream media, including last week’s completely speculative piece wondering whether the entourage of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had sought to sneak a recording device into the White House during his White House visit. It was the type of tale that might have been inspired by a leak from someone in the National Security Council who personally observed the context of the meeting and was able to provide corroborating details.

Where’s the Beef?

Nevertheless, in spite of the overwhelming groupthink, it has been repeated *ad nauseam* by people like myself that no actual evidence has been produced to support any of the claims being made about Russia and Trump. There is more evidence that the White House was penetrated by Ankara – through the good services of Michael Flynn – than by Moscow, but Congress has not called for an investigation into Turkey’s lobbying.

Ray McGovern, a former senior CIA analyst, is even speculating that the Agency might have been the actual hacker into the DNC, leaving a trail behind that would have suggested that it was done by the Russians. His concern arises from the recent WikiLeaks revelation that the CIA had developed cyber-warfare capabilities to do just that.

McGovern, like myself, is also asking why former CIA Director John Brennan has not been summoned by the Senate Committee looking into Russia-gate. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has testified twice, while former FBI Director James Comey, current NSA Director Mike Rogers, and former Justice Department senior official Sally Yates have all appeared once. Brennan’s absence is conspicuous as he was the senior national security official most

closely tied to the Obama Administration, may have had the tools at hand to fake the Russian connection, and has also been plausibly linked to “encouraging” British Intelligence to provide damaging information on Michael Flynn.

I now suspect that there is indeed a group at the top of the U.S. national security system that wants to remove Donald Trump and has wanted to do so for quite some time. If that is true, I believe that they have been operating with that goal in mind for at least the past year. It is not a traditional conspiracy or cabal in that it does not meet and conspire together, but I suspect the members know what they are doing in a general sense and are intervening whenever they can to keep Trump off balance.

Their program is simple: convince the nation that the President and his team colluded with the Russians to rig the 2016 election in his favor, which, if demonstrable even if not necessarily true, would provide grounds for impeachment. They are motivated by the belief that removing Trump must be done “for the good of the country” and they are willing to do what they consider correcting a mistake made by the American voters. They are assisted in their effort by the mainstream media, which agrees with both the methods employed and the overall objective and is completely on board with the process.

Saving the country from Trump is certainly an attractive notion. I suspect the Comeys, Clappers, and Brennans, together with a host of former senior officers who appear regularly on television, if they were involved, see themselves as great patriots. But they must understand that the blunt instrument they are using is far more dangerous than the current occupant of the White House.

A soft coup engineered by the national security and intelligence agencies would be far more threatening to our democracy than anything Donald Trump or even the Russians can do.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest. [This article is re-posted with the author’s permission. It first appeared at The American Conservative at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/do-high-level-leaks-suggest-a-conspiracy/>]

How NSA Can Secretly Aid Criminal Cases

From the Archive: Official Washington is thrilled by the choice of ex-FBI Director Mueller as Russia-gate special counsel, hailing him as a straight-

shooter, but he cut some legal corners in office, ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote in 2014.

By Ray McGovern (Originally published on June 12, 2014)

Rarely do you get a chance to ask a just-retired FBI director whether he had “any legal qualms” about what, in football, is called “illegal procedure,” but at the Justice Department is called “parallel construction.”

Government wordsmiths have given us this pleasant euphemism to describe the use of the National Security Agency’s illegal eavesdropping on Americans as an investigative tool to pass on tips to law enforcement agencies which then hide the source of the original suspicion and “construct” a case using “parallel” evidence to prosecute the likes of you and me.

For those interested in “quaint” things like the protections that used to be afforded us by the Fourth and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution, information about this “parallel construction” has been in the public domain, including the “mainstream media,” for at least a year or so.

So, I welcomed the chance to expose this artful practice to still more people with cameras rolling at a large conference on “Ethos & Profession of Intelligence” at Georgetown University on June 11, 2014, during the Q & A after former FBI Director Robert Mueller spoke.

Mueller ducked my question regarding whether he had any “legal qualms” about this “parallel construction” arrangement. He launched into a discursive reply in which he described the various “authorities” enjoyed by the FBI (and the CIA), which left the clear impression not only that he was without qualms but that he considered the practice of concealing the provenance of illegally acquired tip-off information somehow within those professed “authorities.”

Bottom line? Beware, those of you who think you have “nothing to hide” when the NSA scoops up your personal information. You may think that the targets of these searches are just potential “terrorists.” But the FBI, Internal Revenue Service, Drug Enforcement Administration and countless other law enforcement bodies are dipping their cursors into the huge pool of mass surveillance.

And, chances are that if some of your scooped-up data gets shared with law enforcement and the Feds conclude that you’ve violated some law, you’ll never become aware of how they got onto you in the first place. They’ll just find some “parallel” evidence to nail you.

After all, it’s altogether likely for a great majority of us that some dirt can

be retrieved with the NSA's voluminous files an inviting starting point. AT&T, for example, apparently has kept metadata about its customers, as well as all other traffic going through its switches, for the past 27 years.

For those who are Caesar's-wife pure and whose loved ones also approach perfection, "constructing" a prosecutable case may be more of a challenge. But relax not. If for some reason the government decides to get you if you've popped up as somehow an obstacle to "national security" it is not impossible. Even in recent decades, critics of government policies have ended up facing dredged-up, if not trumped-up, criminal charges over some past indiscretion or misdeed.

Learning Curve

It has been my good fortune to sponge up data and wisdom in equal measure from NSA alumni like Bill Binney, Kirk Wiebe, Tom Drake, and Ed Loomis, who in early January 2014 authored "[NSA Insiders Reveal What Went Wrong.](#)"

More recently (on May 31, 2014), Bill and I took part in a panel discussion in New York, so this freshly sponged-up learning still dwelled in my frontal lobe when I was [interviewed](#) by RT on June 5, 2014, the anniversary of the first-published disclosure from Edward Snowden.

When asked how "ordinary people" in the U.S. were being affected by the disclosures about bulk collection, I passed along what I had recently learned from Bill and other whistleblowers regarding how law enforcement is masking illegal surveillance to the severe detriment of defendants' constitutional rights.

Former FBI Division Counsel in Minneapolis Coleen Rowley who, with Jesselyn Radack, Tom Drake and me, visited Snowden in Russia in October 2013 told me of two legal doctrines established many decades ago: the "exclusionary rule" and the rule regarding the "fruit of the poisonous tree."

These were designed to force over-zealous law enforcement officers to adhere to the Constitution by having judges throw out cases derived from improperly obtained evidence. To evade this rule, law enforcement officials who have been on the receiving end of NSA's wiretap data must conceal what tipped off an investigation.

After the Tip-Off

Among the revelations over the past year was DEA's definition of "parallel construction" as "the use of normal [read legal] investigative techniques to re-create the information received by DEA's Special Ops Division" from NSA or other sources that can't be acknowledged. Some of these sources may be confidential

informants whose identities need protecting, but the NSA's massive database has become a very inviting place to trawl for valuable leads.

As Reuters reported in August 2013, "A secretive U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration unit is funneling information from intelligence intercepts, wiretaps, informants and a massive database of telephone records to authorities across the nation to help them launch criminal investigations of Americans.

"Although these cases rarely involve national security issues, documents reviewed by Reuters show that law enforcement agents have been directed to conceal how such investigations truly begin – not only from defense lawyers but also sometimes from prosecutors and judges.

"The undated documents show that federal agents are trained to 'recreate' the investigative trail to effectively cover up where the information originated, a practice that some experts say violates a defendant's Constitutional right to a fair trial. If defendants don't know how an investigation began, they cannot know to ask to review potential sources of exculpatory evidence – information that could reveal entrapment, mistakes or biased witnesses."

So, in this way, the NSA's warrantless surveillance can result in illegal law enforcement. And the FBI, the DEA and other organs of the deep state have become quite good at it, thank you very much.

Here's how it works: NSA's domestic surveillance though supposedly restricted to detecting terrorism gets wind of some potentially illegal activity unrelated to terrorism. So, NSA passes the information on to the relevant law enforcement agency. It could be a vehicle transporting illegal drugs or a transfer of suspicious funds or pretty much anything.

This evidence then sparks an investigation, but the original information can't be used legally because it was acquired illegally for "national security" purposes. After the tip, "parallel" law enforcement techniques are introduced to collect other evidence and arrest and charge the suspects/defendants.

The arrest is made to appear the splendid result of traditional detective techniques. However, if the court learns of the initial shenanigans, the defendant may be released because her/his constitutional rights were violated.

To avoid that possibility, the government simply perjures itself during the court discovery process by concealing the key role played by the NSA database, exculpatory evidence that could weaken or destroy the government's case.

Blackmail?

Last week a journalist asked me why I thought Congress' initial outrage seemingly genuine in some quarters over bulk collection of citizens' metadata had pretty much dissipated in just a few months. What started out as a strong bill upholding Fourth Amendment principles ended up much weakened with only a few significant restraints remaining against NSA's flaunting of the Constitution?

Let me be politically incorrect and mention the possibility of blackmail or at least the fear among some politicians that the NSA has collected information on their personal activities that could be transformed into a devastating scandal if leaked at the right moment.

Do not blanch before the likelihood that the NSA has the book on each and every member of Congress, including extramarital affairs and political deal-making. We know that NSA has collected such information on foreign diplomats, including at the United Nations in New York, to influence votes on the Iraq War and other issues important to U.S. "national security."

We also know how the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover used much more rudimentary technology a half century ago to develop dossiers on the personal indiscretions of political and ideological opponents. It makes sense that people with access to the NSA's modern surveillance tools would be sorely tempted to put these new toys to use in support of their own priorities.

I happened to be with a highly accomplished attorney one not involved in security law when we saw TV reporting that the Solicitor General of the United States had misled the U.S. Supreme Court. My lawyer friend kept shaking his head, with his mouth agape: "Now THAT is not supposed to happen" is all he could muster.

Other than the Supreme Court justices themselves, the Solicitor General is among the most influential members of the legal community. Indeed, the Solicitor General has been called the "tenth justice" as a result of the relationship of mutual trust that tends to develop between the justices and the Solicitor General.

Thus, while it is sad, it is hardly surprising that no one took President Obama's Solicitor General Donald Verrilli Jr. to the woodshed. There are seldom penalties in Washington for playing fast and loose with the truth.

Verrilli assured the Court in the "Clapper v. Amnesty International USA" case that defendants would be informed of evidence coming from NSA. The Department of Justice had reviewed his draft testimony and did not tell Verrilli that this was not the truth.

In the case, a majority of the Supreme Court justices decided to wait until a criminal defendant was actually convicted with the admitted use of NSA evidence before ruling on whether this violates the Fourth Amendment and the requirement of court warrants based on "probable cause" before police searches can be conducted.

The result of the Supreme Court's decision was that the challenge to the constitutionality of NSA's mass collection was abruptly stopped, and the mass surveillance continued. But Verrilli subsequently found out that his assurances had been false, and there ensued an argument with the Department of Justice, which opposed revealing use of NSA sources in any court.

Verrilli apparently prevailed partially, with the government subsequently notifying a few defendants in ongoing terrorism cases that NSA sources were used.

Separation of Powers?

We cannot escape some pretty dismal conclusions here. Not only have the Executive and Legislative branches been corrupted by establishing, funding, hiding and promoting unconstitutional surveillance programs during the "war on terror," but the Judicial branch has been corrupted, too.

The discovery process in criminal cases is now stacked in favor of the government through its devious means for hiding unconstitutional surveillance and using it in ways beyond the narrow declared purpose of thwarting terrorism.

Moreover, federal courts at the district, appeals and Supreme Court levels have allowed the government to evade legal accountability by insisting that plaintiffs must be able to prove what often is not provable, that they were surveilled through highly secretive NSA means. And, if the plaintiffs make too much progress, the government can always get a lawsuit thrown out by invoking "state secrets."

The Separation of Powers designed by the Constitution's Framers to prevent excessive accumulation of power by one of the branches has stopped functioning amid the modern concept of "permanent war" and the unwillingness of all but a few hearty souls to challenge the invocation of "national security." Plus, the corporate-owned U.S. media, with very few exceptions, is fully complicit.

Thus, a massive, intrusive power now looms over every one of us and especially those few brave individuals with inside knowledge who might be inclined to inform the rest of us about the threat. Whistleblowers, like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, have faced decades in prison for divulging important secrets to the American people. And so the legal rot continues.

The concept of a “United Stasi of America,” coined by Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, has been given real meaning by the unconstitutional behavior and dereliction of duty on the part of both the George W. Bush and Obama administrations.

Just days after the first published disclosure from Snowden, Ellsberg underscored that the NSA, FBI and CIA now have surveillance capabilities that East Germany’s Stasi secret police could scarcely have imagined.

What, We Worry?

In June 2013, Mathew Schofield of McClatchy conducted an interesting interview of Wolfgang Schmidt, a former lieutenant colonel in the Stasi, in Berlin. With the Snowden revelations beginning to tumble out into the media, Schofield described Schmidt as he pondered the sheer magnitude of domestic spying in the United States.

Schmidt: “You know, for us, this would have been a dream come true.”

Schofield continues: “In those days, his department was limited to tapping 40 phones at a time, he recalled. Decide to spy on a new victim and an old one had to be dropped, because of a lack of equipment. He finds breathtaking the idea that the U.S. government receives daily reports on the cellphone usage of millions of Americans and can monitor the Internet traffic of millions more.”

“So much information, on so many people,” says Schmidt who, at that point, volunteers a stern warning for Schofield and the rest of us:

“It is the height of naivete to think that, once collected, this information won’t be used. This is the nature of secret government organizations. The only way to protect the people’s privacy is not to allow the government to collect their information in the first place.” [emphasis added]

(For those who missed it, “The Lives of Others,” a 2006 film, offers a chilling depiction of the Stasi, a far more capable incarnation of which may soon be coming to your home or neighborhood with assistance of “parallel construction.”)

Take note, those of you who may still feel fearless, those of you with “nothing to hide.”

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army officer and CIA analyst for a total of 30 years and is now on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

The Push for Trump's Impeachment

Exclusive: Establishment voices are escalating their calls for President Trump's impeachment, even without any public evidence that his campaign colluded with Russia, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Russia-gate affair has taken a strange turn as advocates for President Trump's removal say his ouster should take precedence over completing the investigation and actually seeing how much there is there – whereas at least one target of the inquiry wants the U.S. government to put its cards on the table.

Carter Page, a former foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign who is reportedly under an FBI counterintelligence investigation for his contacts with Russians, has called on Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who is overseeing the investigation, to immediately release “any documents related to [the Obama administration's] alleged wiretapping of me.”

In Page's view, it was the Obama administration's spreading of allegations about the Trump campaign's connections to Russia that represented “government meddling in the 2016 election,” rather than Russia's alleged hacking Democratic emails and publicizing them via WikiLeaks, a claim made by President Obama's intelligence chiefs but denied by WikiLeaks and Russia.

Yet, what has been perhaps most remarkable about the entire Russia-gate affair is that it has been conducted with almost no evidence being shared with the American people. Thus, we have the prospect of a duly elected President of the United States being targeted for removal by the political and media Establishment without the citizens being let in on exactly what evidence exists and how significant it is.

The impeachment spotlight has already shifted from the underlying issue of whether the Trump campaign colluded with Russians to President Trump's inept firing of FBI Director James Comey, who played a key role in sinking Hillary Clinton's campaign by reopening an investigation into possible security breaches in her use of a private email server while Secretary of State – before Comey took another star turn in pursuing the Trump campaign's possible ties to Russia.

Trump, whose fitness for the presidency was always a profound concern to many American voters, again displayed his incompetence in firing Comey. You might have thought that Trump – as a former reality-TV star whose trademark line was “you're fired!” – would have had the process down, but apparently not.

Trump didn't even fire Comey face to face, but rather clumsily at long distance. Then, Trump had his subordinates justify Comey's abrupt removal as a response to the FBI director's violation of Justice Department protocols in announcing the politically sensitive investigation of Clinton in a way that appeared to influence a national election. But Trump undercut that rationale by blurting out comments that seemed to tie Comey's removal to his lack of loyalty and to the Russian inquiry.

This latest botched move again showed that Trump can't follow one of the most elementary rules of politics: stick to your own talking points. When one considers what Republicans did with the Obama administration's initial confusion about the causes for the 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, you might think that Trump would have learned the lesson about getting a story straight before telling it, but apparently not.

Whatever the justification for Comey's firing, what Trump did was shift the Russia-gate "scandal" from the actual facts of the case to the process of the investigation. One of Official Washington's favorite slogans is "the cover-up is worse than the crime" – although that's usually a cop-out for journalists and members of Congress who don't have the skills to investigate the underlying crime or determine if one even exists.

A 'Soft Coup'

While the Establishment's outrage over Comey's firing has been widespread, one might have thought there would be a countervailing concern about the FBI and other U.S. intelligence agencies intervening to affect electoral outcomes, whether that was torpedoing Clinton or now sinking Trump.

The curious role of the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the FBI in spearheading the Russia-gate investigation – including having handpicked "senior analysts" from the three agencies produce a clearly biased and nearly evidence-free report on Jan. 6 – has raised concerns of a "soft coup" or "deep-state coup" to negate the 2016 election.

Considering the seriousness of such a move in a constitutional republic that prides itself as the gold standard of democracy, it might have been expected that the law-enforcement and intelligence agencies would go the extra mile in sharing their evidence with the American people whose electoral judgment would, in effect, be made meaningless: both by Comey's late intervention against Clinton and now the pressure to impeach Trump.

Yet, instead of a commitment to openness, the intelligence community is telling the citizens that we must accept the fact of Russian "meddling" as "a given,"

sans evidence. In addition, influential voices are emerging to declare that Trump's impeachment should proceed even without the results of the Russia-gate investigation of possible Trump-Russia collusion being known to the public.

On Sunday, The Washington Post published an opinion article by Harvard University law professor Laurence H. Tribe declaring: "The time has come for Congress to launch an impeachment investigation of President Trump for obstruction of justice. ... Now the country is faced with a president whose conduct strongly suggests that he poses a danger to our system of government."

Tribe continued: "Ample reasons existed to worry about this president, and to ponder the extraordinary remedy of impeachment, even before he fired FBI Director James B. Comey and shockingly admitted on national television that the action was provoked by the FBI's intensifying investigation into his campaign's ties with Russia."

Grave Threat

According to Tribe, Trump's threat to the system is so grave that his removal should precede any conclusions from the Russia-gate investigation. Tribe wrote that immediate impeachment could have been fashioned around other issues, "even without getting to the bottom of what Trump dismissed as 'this Russia thing'," though Tribe acknowledged that such an extreme step might have seemed premature at the time.

"No longer," Tribe continued. "To wait for the results of the multiple investigations underway is to risk tying our nation's fate to the whims of an authoritarian leader. Comey's summary firing will not stop the inquiry, yet it represented an obvious effort to interfere with a probe involving national security matters vastly more serious than the 'third-rate burglary' that Nixon tried to cover up in Watergate.

"The question of Russian interference in the presidential election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign go to the heart of our system and ability to conduct free and fair elections."

Like many mainstream "experts," Tribe doesn't seem to understand what Watergate was really about; recent historical discoveries show it to be an outgrowth of Nixon's cover-up of his 1968 sabotage of President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace talks, a maneuver that secured Nixon the presidency but extended the war for four more years. Nixon's fear that his dirty trick might get leaked led to formation of the Watergate "plumbers."

Tribe also ignores the fact that the "Russian interference" still remains a "question," not a proven fact, and no investigator has cited any evidence of the

Trump campaign's collusion. To skirt that problem, Tribe focuses on the firing of Comey as the grounds for impeachment:

"To say that this does not in itself rise to the level of 'obstruction of justice' is to empty that concept of all meaning. Obstruction of justice was the first count in the articles of impeachment against Nixon and, years later, a count against Bill Clinton. In Clinton's case, the ostensible obstruction consisted solely in lying under oath about a sordid sexual affair that may have sullied the Oval Office but involved no abuse of presidential power as such.

"But in Nixon's case, the list of actions that together were deemed to constitute impeachable obstruction reads like a forecast of what Trump would do decades later – making misleading statements to, or withholding material evidence from, federal investigators or other federal employees; trying to interfere with FBI or congressional investigations; trying to break through the FBI's shield surrounding ongoing criminal investigations; dangling carrots in front of people who might otherwise pose trouble for one's hold on power.

"It will require serious commitment to constitutional principle, and courageous willingness to put devotion to the national interest above self-interest and party loyalty, for a Congress of the president's own party to initiate an impeachment inquiry. It would be a terrible shame if only the mounting prospect of being voted out of office in November 2018 would sufficiently concentrate the minds of representatives and senators today.

"But whether it is devotion to principle or hunger for political survival that puts the prospect of impeachment and removal on the table, the crucial thing is that the prospect now be taken seriously, that the machinery of removal be reactivated, and that the need to use it become the focus of political discourse going into 2018."

Lay Out the Evidence

There is, of course, another alternative: the FBI and other intelligence agencies could expedite whatever investigations they're doing and let the American people in on the evidence.

The key question, as Russia-gate was first being formulated as a political scandal, was whether some member of the Trump campaign colluded with Russian intelligence operatives to deliver, by memory stick or other means, hacked Democratic emails to WikiLeaks.

Yet, beyond the fact that the Jan. 6 report offered no government evidence that the Russians even hacked the Democratic emails, there also seems to be no rush to question the "usual suspects" from the Trump campaign – Roger Stone, Paul

Manafort, Michael Flynn and Page – about what they might know regarding the possible delivery of the emails to WikiLeaks.

Nor has there been any public testimony regarding another source of the Russia-gate allegations, ex-British spy Christopher Steele who prepared a series of opposition research reports on Trump and Russia apparently funded by Clinton supporters. It's still not even known who paid for the Steele dossier.

Typically, the FBI and Justice Department refuse to discuss investigations until they've reached a conclusion, but that rule has already been broken by Comey, who justified announcing both the Clinton and Trump investigations because of their political significance.

In the Clinton case, Comey was urged to expedite his work so Clinton could be cleared before the election and he appeared to do so, terminating the reopened investigation of her email server two days before the Nov. 8 election. Today, the public interest in wrapping up the Russian inquiry is arguably even stronger.

In congressional testimony, Comey announced that the FBI began the Russia investigation last July, so it's not as if the investigators haven't had time to assess the evidence and decide what to do.

An Open Process

Carter Page's suggestion – in effect waiving his privacy rights to get out in the open whatever evidence was used by the Obama administration to justify a reported Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant against him – could be a start.

Congressional committees also could call as many willing Trump campaign people as possible to testify about their knowledge of any collusion with Russia. So far, the only witnesses have been law enforcement and intelligence officials appointed by President Obama, who have presented various allegations while refusing to offer back-up on the grounds that the evidence is "classified."

While Professor Tribe and other advocates for impeaching Donald Trump may not care whether the Russia-gate evidence is ever released, they should recognize that – for better or worse – nearly 63 million Americans voted for Trump and – under the U.S. political process – he won the election (although Clinton got about 3 million more votes nationwide).

For the past several days, I've been traveling through Trump country of West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio and have talked to several Trump voters along the way. Some indicated that they voted more against Clinton and the "elites"

than enthusiastically for Trump. And some criticized Trump for his egotistical excesses. But they wanted him to be given a fair chance to govern.

It's hard to know how angry these citizens would be if their judgment is overturned by the same "elites" whom they blamed for foisting on them the unpopular choice of Clinton versus Trump.

Reversing – or "correcting" – the result of the presidential election may seem like an obvious move for the editors of The New York Times and for Professor Tribe, but it is a deadly serious proposition that demands as full a release of evidence as possible, not long-running secret investigations or an impeachment based on an alleged "cover-up" of a crime that may or may not exist.

Negating the will of the voters as expressed through the constitutional process – as flawed as that process may be – requires its own process that is perceived as open and fair, not some star chamber or kangaroo court where the intelligence community gets to hide the evidence as "classified" and tells the citizenry to "trust us."

As unfit and inept as Donald Trump may be, he was elected – and no one should underestimate how dangerous it could be for Washington insiders and other Establishment figures to undo the electoral choice through a process cloaked in secrecy.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Watergate Redux or 'Deep State' Coup](#)" and "[The Soft Coup of Russia-gate.](#)"]

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](#)).

The 'Soft Coup' of Russia-gate

Special Report: The Russia-gate hysteria has grown stronger after President Trump's firing of FBI Director Comey, but the bigger question is whether an American "soft coup" is in the works, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Where is Stanley Kubrick when we need him? If he hadn't died in 1999, he would be the perfect director to transform today's hysteria over Russia into a

theater-of-the-absurd movie reprising his Cold War classic, "Dr. Strangelove," which savagely satirized the madness of nuclear brinksmanship and the crazed ideology behind it.

To prove my point, The Washington Post on Thursday published a lengthy story entitled in the print editions "Alarm at Russian in White House" about a Russian photographer who was allowed into the Oval Office to photograph President Trump's meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The Post cited complaints from former U.S. intelligence officials who criticized the presence of the Russian photographer as "a potential security breach" because of "the danger that a listening device or other surveillance equipment could have been brought into the Oval Office while hidden in cameras or other electronics."

To bolster this alarm, the Post cited a Twitter comment from President Obama's last deputy CIA director, David S. Cohen, stating "No, it was not" a sound decision to admit the Russian photographer who also works for the Russian news agency, Tass, which published the photo.

One could picture Boris and Natasha, the evil spies in the Bullwinkle cartoons, disguised as photographers slipping listening devices between the cushions of the sofas.

Or we could hear how Russians are again threatening to "impurify all of our precious bodily fluids," as "Dr. Strangelove" character, Gen. Jack D. Ripper, warned us in the 1964 movie.

Watching that brilliant dark comedy again might actually be a good idea to remind us how crazy Americans can get when they're pumped up with anti-Russian propaganda, as is happening again now.

Taking Down Trump

I realize that many Democrats, liberals and progressives hate Donald Trump so much that they believe that any pretext is justified in taking him down, even if that plays into the hands of the neoconservatives and other warmongers. Many people who detest Trump view Russia-gate as the most likely path to achieve Trump's impeachment, so this desirable end justifies whatever means.

Some people have told me that they even believe that it is the responsibility of the major news media, the law enforcement and intelligence communities, and members of Congress to engage in a "soft coup" against Trump – also known as a "constitutional coup" or "deep state coup" – for the "good of the country."

The argument is that it sometimes falls to these Establishment institutions to “correct” a mistake made by the American voters, in this case, the election of a largely unqualified individual as U.S. president. It is even viewed by some anti-Trump activists as a responsibility of “responsible” journalists, government officials and others to play this “guardian” role, to not simply “resist” Trump but to remove him.

There are obvious counter-arguments to this view, particularly that it makes something of a sham of American democracy. It also imposes on journalists a need to violate the ethical responsibility to provide objective reporting, not taking sides in political disputes.

But The New York Times and The Washington Post, in particular, have made it clear that they view Trump as a clear and present danger to the American system and thus have cast aside any pretense of neutrality.

The Times justifies its open hostility to the President as part of its duty to protect “the truth”; the Post has adopted a slogan aimed at Trump, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.” In other words, America’s two most influential political newspapers are effectively pushing for a “soft coup” under the guise of defending “democracy” and “truth.”

But the obvious problem with a “soft coup” is that America’s democratic process, as imperfect as it has been and still is, has held this diverse country together since 1788 with the notable exception of the Civil War.

If Americans believe that the Washington elites are removing an elected president – even one as buffoonish as Donald Trump – it could tear apart the fabric of national unity, which is already under extraordinary stress from intense partisanship.

That means that the “soft coup” would have to be carried out under the guise of a serious investigation into something grave enough to justify the President’s removal, a removal that could be accomplished by congressional impeachment, his forced resignation, or the application of Twenty-fifth Amendment, which allows the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet to judge a President incapable of continuing in office (although that could require two-thirds votes by both houses of Congress if the President fights the maneuver).

A Big Enough ‘Scandal’

That is where Russia-gate comes in. The gauzy allegation that Trump and/or his advisers somehow colluded with Russian intelligence officials to rig the 2016 election would probably clear the threshold for an extreme action like removing a President.

And, given the determination of many key figures in the Establishment to get rid of Trump, it should come as no surprise that no one seems to care that no actual government-verified evidence has been revealed publicly to support any of the Russia-gate allegations.

There's not even any public evidence from U.S. government agencies that Russia did "meddle" in the 2016 election or – even if Russia did slip Democratic emails to WikiLeaks (which WikiLeaks denies) – there has been zero evidence that the scheme resulted from collusion with Trump's campaign.

The FBI has been investigating these suspicions for at least nine months, even reportedly securing a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant against Carter Page, an American whom Trump briefly claimed as a foreign policy adviser when Trump was under fire for not having any foreign policy advisers.

One of Page's alleged offenses was that he gave a speech to an academic conference in Moscow in July 2016 that was mildly critical of how the U.S. treated countries from the former Soviet Union. He also once lived in Russia and met with a Russian diplomat who – apparently unbeknownst to Page – had been identified by the U.S. government as a Russian intelligence officer.

It appears that is enough, in these days of our New McCarthyism, to get an American put under a powerful counter-intelligence investigation.

The FBI and the Department of Justice also reportedly are including as part of the Russia-gate investigation Trump's stupid campaign joke calling on the Russians to help find the tens of thousands of emails that Hillary Clinton erased from the home server that she used while Secretary of State.

On July 27, 2016, Trump said, apparently in jest, "I will tell you this, Russia: if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing."

The comment fit with Trump's puckish, provocative and often tasteless sense of humor, but was seized on by Democrats as if it were a serious suggestion – as if anyone would use a press conference to seriously urge something like that. But it now appears that the FBI is grabbing at any straw that might support its investigation.

The (U.K.) Guardian reported this week that "Senior DoJ officials have declined to release the documents [about Trump's comment] on grounds that such disclosure could 'interfere with enforcement proceedings'. In a filing to a federal court in Washington DC, the DoJ states that 'because of the existence of an active, ongoing investigation, the FBI anticipates that it will ... withhold all records'.

“The statement suggests that Trump’s provocative comment last July is being seen by the FBI as relevant to its own ongoing investigation.”

The NYT’s Accusations

On Friday, in the wake of Trump’s firing of FBI Director James Comey and the President’s characterization of Russia-gate as “a total hoax,” The New York Times reprised what it called “The Trump-Russia Nexus” in a lead editorial trying to make the case of some fire behind the smoke.

Though the Times acknowledges that there are “many unknowns” in Russia-gate and the Times can’t seem to find any evidence of collusion, such as slipping a Russian data stick to WikiLeaks, the Times nevertheless treats a host of Trump advisers and family members as traitors because they’ve had some association with Russian officials, Russian businesses or Russian allies.

Regarding Carter Page, the Times wrote: “American officials believe that Mr. Page, a foreign policy adviser, had contacts with Russian intelligence officials during the campaign. He also gave a pro-Russia speech in Moscow in July 2016. Mr. Page was once employed by Merrill Lynch’s Moscow office, where he worked with Gazprom, a government-owned giant.”

You might want to let some of those words sink in, especially the part about Page giving “a pro-Russia speech in Moscow,” which has been cited as one of the principal reasons for Page and his communications being targeted under a FISA warrant.

I’ve actually read Page’s speech and to call it “pro-Russia” is a wild exaggeration. It was a largely academic treatise that faulted the West’s post-Cold War treatment of the nations formed from the old Soviet Union, saying the rush to a free-market system led to some negative consequences, such as the spread of corruption.

But even if the speech were “pro-Russia,” doesn’t The New York Times respect the quaint American notion of free speech? Apparently not. If your carefully crafted words can be twisted into something called “pro-Russia,” the Times seems to think it’s okay to have the National Security Agency bug your phones and read your emails.

The Ukraine Case

Another Times’ target was veteran political adviser Paul Manafort, who is accused of working as “a consultant for a pro-Russia political party in Ukraine and for Ukraine’s former president, Viktor Yanukovich, who was backed by the Kremlin.”

Left out of that Times formulation is the fact that the Ukrainian political party, which had strong backing from ethnic Russian Ukrainians – not just Russia– competed in a democratic process and that Yanukovich won an election that was recognized by international observers as free and fair.

Yanukovich was then ousted in February 2014 in a violent putsch that was backed by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt. The putsch, which was spearheaded by right-wing nationalists and even neo-Nazis, touched off Ukraine's civil war and the secession of Crimea, the key events in the escalation of today's New Cold War between NATO and Russia.

Though I'm no fan of U.S. political hired-guns selling their services in foreign elections, there was nothing illegal or even unusual about Manafort advising a Ukrainian political party. What arguably was much more offensive was the U.S. support for an unconstitutional coup that removed Yanukovich even after he agreed to a European plan for early elections so he could be voted out of office peacefully.

But the Times, the Post and virtually the entire Western mainstream media sided with the Ukrainian coup-makers and hailed Yanukovich's overthrow. That attitude has become such a groupthink that the Times has banished the thought that there was a coup.

Still, the larger political problem confronting the United States is that the neoconservatives and their junior partners, the liberal interventionists, now control nearly all the levers of U.S. foreign policy. That means they can essentially dictate how events around the world will be perceived by most Americans.

The neocons and the liberal hawks also want to continue their open-ended wars in the Middle East by arranging the commitment of additional U.S. military forces to Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria – and perhaps a new confrontation with Iran.

Early in Obama's second term, it became clear to the neocons that Russia was becoming the chief obstacles to their plans because President Barack Obama was working closely with President Vladimir Putin on a variety of projects that undermined neocon hopes for more war.

Particularly, Putin helped Obama secure an agreement from Syria to surrender its chemical weapons stockpiles in 2013 and to get Iran to accept tight constraints on its nuclear program in 2014. In both cases, the neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks were lusting for war.

Immediately after the Syria chemical-weapons deal in September 2013, key U.S.

neocons began focusing on Ukraine as what National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman called “the biggest prize” and a first step toward unseating Putin in Moscow.

Gershman’s grant-giving NED stepped up its operations inside Ukraine while Assistant Secretary Nuland, the wife of arch-neocon Robert Kagan, began pushing for regime change in Kiev (along with other neocons, including Sen. John McCain).

The Ukraine coup in 2014 drove a geopolitical wedge between Obama and Putin, since the Russian president couldn’t just stand by when a virulently anti-Russian regime took power violently in Ukraine, which was the well-worn route for invasions into Russia and housed Russia’s Black Sea fleet at Sevastopol in Crimea.

Rather than defend the valuable cooperation provided by Putin, Obama went with the political flow and joined in the Russia-bashing as key neocons raised their sights and put Putin in the crosshairs.

An Unexpected Obstacle

For the neocons in 2016, there also was the excited expectation of a Hillary Clinton presidency to give more momentum to the expensive New Cold War. But then Trump, who had argued for a new détente with Russia, managed to eke out an Electoral College win.

Perhaps Trump could have diffused some of the hostility toward him but his narcissistic personality stopped him from extending an olive branch to the tens of millions of Americans who opposed him. He further demonstrated his political incompetence by wasting his first days in office making ridiculous claims about the size of his inaugural crowds and disputing the fact that he had lost the popular vote.

Widespread public disgust over his behavior contributed to the determination of many Americans to “resist” his presidency at all junctures and at all costs.

Russia-gate, the hazy suggestion that Putin put Trump in the White House and that Trump is a Putin “puppet” (as Clinton claimed), became the principal weapon to use in destroying Trump’s presidency.

However, besides the risks to U.S. stability that would come from an Establishment-driven “soft coup,” there is the additional danger of ratcheting up tensions so high with nuclear-armed Russia that this extreme Russia-bashing takes on a life – or arguably many, many deaths – of its own.

Which is why America now might need a piercing satire of today's Russia-phobia or at least a revival of the Cold War classic, "Dr. Strangelove," subtitled "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb."

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Watergate Redux or 'Deep State' Coup.](#)"]

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](#)).

Respecting a Courageous American

In a dreary era when politicians play predictable roles and avoid courageous stands, it is worth remembering former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, now 89, who dared challenge U.S. foreign policies, says Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

A new documentary about former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark explores his lifetime commitment to human rights and his deep and abiding belief in democratic principles.

As President Lyndon Johnson's chief law enforcement official, Clark was in charge of enforcing the court order that protected the historic Poor People's March, led by Martin Luther King Jr., from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. Clark also oversaw the drafting and passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and Civil Rights Act of 1968.

After his stint as Attorney General, Clark provided legal support for the late antiwar activist, Father Philip Berrigan, and Native American political prisoner, Leonard Peltier. An unrelenting and outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy, Clark, now 89, has called for an end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as a ban on depleted uranium weapons. Clark also risked his life to travel to Iraq and defend Saddam Hussein after his capture.

On May 2, I spoke with Joseph Stillman, the writer and director of *Citizen Clark: A Life of Principle*.

DB: How did this all begin? Where did this start?

JS: Well, I did a film about a returning Iraq veteran some 12 years ago, and

Ramsey was in the film. And an organization asked me to show that film and they wanted to honor Ramsey, because he was in it. And they asked me to bring him with me to that screening and I did. And afterwards someone in the audience asked Ramsey what he thought [that] the possibility of a nuclear war in this country might be. And he thought about it for a second, and gave this very elaborate and incredible sort of description of how such a horrific event, like that, would play out.

And then afterwards that same person that asked the question in the Q & A at the end of the screening said, "It sounds to me like you're not too optimistic about the future of the United States." To which Ramsey replied, "Quite the contrary, I'm an optimist. Because without optimism there is no hope. But I'm not just talking about the ramifications for the United States. I'm talking about the survival of mankind, on the face of this planet, as we know it."

And that night as we drove back to New York City from the Catskills we had a long discussion about that. And I thought, "What an incredible man with such an important perspective of not only the past and the present, but the future. What a great film it might make if somebody told his story." And so I asked him, had anybody ever done a film on his life. And he said "No, why would anyone want to?" Typical Ramsey response.

And then, eventually, I asked him if I could do it and he sort of hemmed and hawed and then he said "Yes." I think he said yes because his late wife is from my home town in Corpus Christi, Texas. He lived a couple of houses down from my grandparents. So, I think that's the reason he said yes.

But Ramsey's story is a really remarkable tale of a man that grew up in privilege, that could have written his own ticket, and instead chose to fight for the oppressed, and, really, a lot of groups, organizations and individuals who are unrepresented, and who needed a voice and he shed light on their plight.

DB: Well, he took the constitution seriously, and the right for everybody to have a vigorous defense in this world. Talk a little bit about ... I mean this is the son of a supreme court justice [Tom C. Clark], the former highest law enforcement official in the United States, the attorney general, who all of a sudden does, it seems, it's like a 180 [degree flip]. You want to talk about his early career and how that evolved?

JS: Sure. Well, when you're the highest law enforcement officer of the land, you traditionally, or in the past anyway, you take a position with a prestigious law firm, you write expensive coffee table books, you get tens of thousands of dollars for speeches. Well, Ramsey, when he got out of public service, the first thing he did was go to North Vietnam, at the height of the war, which was very

controversial at the time. He wrote a book called *Crime in America*, about the connection between poverty and crime, and solutions for that.

And then he chose instead [...] to go into various interventions throughout the world, to see what was actually going on, to report back about the real things that were happening in these various wars that our country got involved with.

[...] Martin Sheen, I think, said it best, in Los Angeles last year at another screening of this film, when he said that Ramsey Clark was the conscience of our country when we needed one: an individual who said the things that everyone knew was true but nobody wanted to be on record as saying. And that was Ramsey, a fearless advocate of the truth, and what was happening within our democratic process.

DB: [...] Talk about some of the major cases, controversial cases, he's taken on, set that up for us.

JS: Well, there's quite a few. I think he was involved in about 32 U.S. interventions across the world. And he offered ... just as an example, he offered to take the place of the Iran hostages [in 1980], very interesting story there. President Carter calls him up and says "Can you go and talk to the Ayatollah?" who Ramsey had a relationship with for twenty-something years. He said "Sure." He flies to Barcelona, then to Moscow. He's getting ready to go to Tehran the next day, and that night there was a failed attempt to rescue the hostages, by two helicopters, I think, that get caught in a sand storm and Ramsey's trip gets canceled, as a result of that.

But, you know, Ramsey was always in the midst of numerous interventions, because he knew a lot of the people. He had a relationship with Saddam. He represented Saddam Hussein. He was one of three international lawyers on his team. Six Iraqi lawyers were killed in the course of that trial. Ramsey was getting threatened every day. It was a very tense and difficult situation. And what's in it for someone like Ramsey, other than if you're going to talk about a country being a democracy, then you have to represent everybody, not just the people that can afford to be represented, or that you want to. So Ramsey was an individual of principle.

DB: And just to say a little bit more about the courage there, because he's...I'm sure he didn't have a lot of friends in the U.S. Marines or the U.S. government when he's there getting death threat[s], and putting his life on the line. So, he's not counting on the kind of protection, let's say, U.S. journalists get when they look like soldiers. He has always been out there in his suit and tie.

JS: Yep, absolutely. I think that a really good example is the first night of

the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965, Ramsey was assigned to protect the marchers by LBJ [President Lyndon Baines Johnson]. And the very first night, it was getting late, eleven o'clock or so, everybody was getting ready to go to bed, Ramsey had known Martin Luther King for a while. Martin Luther King turns to Ramsey and says, "You know Ramsey, never be afraid because fear will corrupt your soul. And you can never do what's right."

And I think that has been one of the themes of this film. There are many, but Ramsey was a fearless individual, just like the Kennedys, and Martin Luther King, and others who [knew] you cannot seek justice or truth if you are not fearless. And I think, actually, the message of this film, in many ways, is to empower all of us as citizens of, not only our communities and our country and the world, but we have to, all of us have to be fearless, if we expect to protect the rights of others and really to do the right thing for all of humanity. I think that's what Ramsey has done all his life. And I'm so honored to be able to tell, in a small way, his incredible story.

DB: What were a couple of the most surprising things that perhaps you weren't suspecting?

JS: About Ramsey?

DB: Yeah.

JS: Well, you know [...] when I first asked Ramsey if I could do this film, he reluctantly agreed to let me do it. And then he added one other caveat. He said, "You know, my life has been complicated." Well, if there was ever an understatement in the world, that was it. But I found so many instances where the situations that he found himself in were amazing.

Saddam Hussein, as an example, one day – [Hussein] was very curious about LBJ because of the Great Society programs, and the things that LBJ did for his country. And he said "Tell me about LBJ."

LBJ was the type of person that would walk into your office and start telling you a story about Mexican-American kids coming to school, when he was a school teacher, having no shoes, having bloody feet. And LBJ would begin to cry. This is a story that Ramsey told me about his experience with LBJ.

So when Saddam wanted to know about LBJ, Ramsey related this story about poor kids without shoes, and LBJ crying and Saddam thinks about it for a second and he says, "You know, that doesn't seem quite right, because how can he be concerned about kids with bloody shoes on their feet, when he's dropping bombs that are killing 2 million people in Vietnam?"

And so there were instances, many, many instances of that little story between Ramsey and Saddam that tell you a lot about the individuals that Ramsey came in contact with, or Ramsey knew. And I think that they all respected Ramsey because he was a person that always told the truth. You weren't going to get some kind of political smart kind of response to something. You were going to get an honest reflection of what Ramsey thought. And that was one of the reasons why I think LBJ trusted Ramsey because he always knew that he could get an answer that was forthright and not looking at it from a political standpoint of any sort, because Ramsey was apolitical.

DB: Apolitical. Like...but he's been called a communist, a traitor. People suggested that he be hung from the rafters.

JS: Sure.

DB: So, explain that. One would think that he's an extreme leftist.

JS: Yeah. I think that...I would get, in the course of the five years of this film [...] I would be talking to people and they would say "How can you...how could Ramsey justify representing someone like Saddam?" as an example. And Ramsey never said that Saddam was a good guy or a bad guy, or anything. He just said "You know, if you're a leader with three warring factions that are trying to destroy each other, you have to do whatever you have to do in order to keep your country together. And that doesn't mean that it's a good thing. It just means that that's what this individual had to do."

And Ramsey was always looking at the sort of geo-political kind of ramifications of various world leaders and events, because he was very much a student of history. [...] He said, "You have to go back, this started 900 years ago." So he was a person that had a very deep and committed insight into the various histories of those countries and what brought them to a certain point. And I think ultimately the one thing that Ramsey has been consistent with all his life is the fact of the influence of wealth, special interests, big money on government.

And I think that that's a universal theme with everything that Ramsey has done. He's always looked at policies that have happened in this country and said "Well, who is it that benefits from this intervention into this country or that? Is it representing the people that compose our democracy or is it representing some corporation that we had decided to go into this part of the world?" So Ramsey has always looked at whatever we have done as a country from the standpoint of, "Does this fit into our constitution? Is it legal? Does it fall into the rule of law?" And he's always analyzed these various things through that perspective.

DB: Indeed, he's somebody who has loved the law, and really respected the first amendment, and made it real by standing up for people who were always under attack by taking controversial stands. Ramsey Clark is certainly an extraordinary human being. It is a great service that you made this film about, as you say, somebody who comes out of the high places of power, the son of a supreme court justice, former attorney general, fighting in some of the most controversial legal battles, trying to hold the United States government accountable under international law. I think that's a pretty interesting part of Ramsey Clark's history, his love for the law, and his dedication to holding U.S. officials accountable for the things that they were accusing folks around the world of doing.

JS: Absolutely. It's amazing. When he was in the Justice Department as Attorney General, he was fighting Hoover, because Ramsey had made wiretapping illegal. And Hoover was, behind his back, still wiretapping members of the Civil Rights Movement. And it was just one of many, many things.

Ramsey put a stay on executions, and that held until 1994, [from] 1968 until 1994, when Timothy McVeigh was executed for the Oklahoma City Bombings. But he did numerous things like that. He helped to draft the Civil Rights Acts of '64 and '68 and the Voting Rights Act of '65, among other things. So, you could say that this is a man who really fought to make humanity and the lives of everyday people a more fair and just kind of a world. And I hope people get a chance to see this.

DB: Let me interrupt you here now, and let people know that they will have an opportunity to be part of an East Bay media presentation of *Citizen Clark: A Life of Principle*. That's going to be happening here for folks in the [San Francisco] Bay Area. It's going to be happening Wednesday, May 10th, 7 p.m., and it's going to be happening at the East Bay Media Center, 1939 Addison Street, if you're in the Bay Area. It's in Berkeley. It's a work in progress. You can be a part of this visionary film. You can learn more about Ramsey Clark. You can meet the film maker, and have an experience.

If you don't know who Ramsey Clark is, or if you're a young person whose tuned in in recent years to Pacifica radio and KPFA, and you don't know this extraordinary human being, if you're a member of Black Lives Matter, or the various brown revolutionary groups, and the immigrants' rights groups, you should know, you should meet Ramsey Clark as an example of a way to live, an example of the way to, if you will, enforce the law, in an equal way. [...]

By the way, have you heard his response to Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III being appointed to Attorney General? Has he mentioned...?

JS: You know, I haven't.

DB: What a contrast!

JS: I did ask him what he thought about Donald Trump, though. Well, he said "Donald Trump wants to take Lady Liberty and tear her up in pieces, and toss her into the Hudson."

DB: I'm surprised he hasn't made that into a Trump Tower. It's coming.

JS: [Ramsey] did, after all, lead the movement to impeach George Bush, that got 1.5 million signatures for that.

[...]

But, when I did first ask him about what he thought about Donald Trump, he said "Not much." So, those were his two comments. It's interesting that Ramsey is not typically a person that will say a lot of bad things about individuals. It's mostly about the deeds that they do, or the policies that they try to enact. So, he never tries to take it to a personal level.

DB: Right, he focuses on the wars, and the breaking of international law that lead to massive destruction and illegal operations.

JS: Well, especially the loss of life. The sanctions in Iraq killed 1/2 million women and children, more so than any of the casualties from combatants. It's always about the women and children who are the real casualties of any war, that Ramsey tries to address.

DB: Yes, it is. [...]

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The Silent Slaughter of the US Air War

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media voiced moral outrage when Russian warplanes killed civilians in Aleppo but has gone silent as U.S. warplanes slaughter innocents in Mosul and Raqqa, notes Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

April 2017 was another month of mass slaughter and unimaginable terror for the

people of Mosul in Iraq and the areas around Raqqa and Tabqa in Syria, as the heaviest, most sustained U.S.-led bombing campaign since the American War in Vietnam entered its 33rd month.

The Airwars monitoring group has compiled reports of 1,280 to 1,744 civilians killed by at least 2,237 bombs and missiles that rained down from U.S. and allied warplanes in April (1,609 on Iraq and 628 on Syria). The heaviest casualties were in and around Old Mosul and West Mosul, where 784 to 1,074 civilians were reported killed, but the area around Tabqa in Syria also suffered heavy civilian casualties.

In other war zones, as I have explained in previous articles ([here](#) and [here](#)), the kind of “passive” reports of civilian deaths compiled by Airwars have only ever captured between 5 percent and 20 percent of the actual civilian war deaths revealed by comprehensive mortality studies. Iraqbodycount, which used a similar methodology to Airwars, had only counted 8 percent of the deaths discovered by a mortality study in occupied Iraq in 2006.

Airwars appears to be collecting reports of civilian deaths more thoroughly than Iraqbodycount 11 years ago, but it classifies large numbers of them as “contested” or “weakly reported,” and is deliberately conservative in its counting. For instance, in some cases, it has counted local media reports of “many deaths” as a minimum of one death, with no maximum figure. This is not to fault Airwars’ methods, but to recognize its limitations in contributing to an actual estimate of civilian deaths.

Allowing for various interpretations of Airwars’ data, and assuming that, like such efforts in the past, it is capturing between 5 percent and 20 percent of actual deaths, a serious estimate of the number of civilians killed by the U.S.-led bombing campaign since 2014 would by now have to be somewhere between 25,000 and 190,000.

The Pentagon recently revised its own facetious estimate of the number of civilians it has killed in Iraq and Syria since 2014 to 352. That is less than a quarter of the 1,446 victims whom Airwars has positively identified by name.

Airwars has also collected reports of civilians killed by Russian bombing in Syria, which outnumbered its reports of civilians killed by U.S.-led bombing for most of 2016. However, since the U.S.-led bombing escalated to over 10,918 bombs and missiles dropped in the first three months of 2017, the heaviest bombardment since the campaign began in 2014, Airwars’ reports of civilians killed by U.S.-led bombing have surpassed reports of deaths from Russian bombing.

Because of the fragmentary nature of all Airwars’ reports, this pattern may or

may not accurately reflect whether the U.S. or Russia has really killed more civilians in each of these periods. There are many factors that could affect that.

For example, Western governments and NGOs have funded and supported the White Helmets and other groups who report civilian casualties caused by Russian bombing, but there is no equivalent Western support for the reporting of civilian casualties from the Islamic State-held areas that the U.S. and its allies are bombing. If Airwars' reporting is capturing a greater proportion of actual deaths in one area than another due to factors like this, it could lead to differences in the numbers of reported deaths that do not reflect differences in actual deaths.

Shock, Awe ... and Silence

To put the 79,000 bombs and missiles with which the U.S. and its allies have bombarded Iraq and Syria since 2014 in perspective, it is worth reflecting back to the "more innocent" days of "Shock and Awe" in March 2003. As NPR reporter Sandy Tolan reported in 2003, one of the architects of that campaign predicted that dropping 29,200 bombs and missiles on Iraq would have, "the non-nuclear equivalent of the impact that the atomic weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on Japan."

When "Shock and Awe" was unleashed on Iraq in 2003, it dominated the news all over the world. But after eight years of "disguised, quiet, media-free" war under President Obama, the U.S. mass media don't even treat the daily slaughter from this heavier, more sustained bombardment of Iraq and Syria as news. They cover single mass casualty events for a few days, but quickly resume normal "Trump Show" programming.

As in George Orwell's *1984*, the public knows that our military forces are at war with somebody somewhere, but the details are sketchy. "Is that still a thing?" "Isn't North Korea the big issue now?"

There is almost no political debate in the U.S. over the rights and wrongs of the U.S. bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria. Never mind that bombing Syria without authorization from its internationally recognized government is a crime of aggression and a violation of the U.N. Charter. The freedom of the United States to violate the U.N. Charter at will has already been politically (not legally!) normalized by 17 years of serial aggression, from the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, to drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen.

So who will enforce the Charter now to protect civilians in Syria, who already

face violence and death from all sides in a bloody civil and proxy war, in which the U.S. was already deeply complicit well before it began bombing Syria in 2014?

In terms of U.S. law, three successive U.S. regimes have claimed that their unconstrained violence is legally justified by the Authorization for the Use of Military Force passed by the U.S. Congress in 2001. But sweeping as it was, that bill said only,

“That the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11th, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.”

How many of the thousands of civilians the U.S. has killed in Mosul in the past few months played any such role in the September 11th terrorist attacks? Every person reading this knows the answer to that question: probably not one of them. If one of them was involved, it would be by sheer coincidence.

Any impartial judge would reject a claim that this legislation authorized 16 years of war in at least eight countries, the overthrow of governments that had nothing to do with 9/11, the killing of about 2 million people and the destabilization of country after country – just as surely as the judges at Nuremberg rejected the German defendants’ claims that they invaded Poland, Norway and the U.S.S.R. to prevent or “preempt” imminent attacks on Germany.

U.S. officials may claim that the 2002 Iraq AUMF legitimizes the bombardment of Mosul. That law at least refers to the same country. But while it is also still on the books, the whole world knew within months of its passage that it used false premises and outright lies to justify overthrowing a government that the U.S. has since destroyed.

The U.S. war in Iraq officially ended with the withdrawal of the last U.S. occupation forces in 2011. The AUMF did not and could not possibly have approved allying with a new regime in Iraq 14 years later to attack one of its cities and kill thousands of its people.

Caught in a Web of War Propaganda

Do we really not know what war is? Has it been too long since Americans experienced war on our own soil? Perhaps. But as thankfully distant as war may be from most of our daily lives, we cannot pretend that we do not know what it is or what horrors it brings.

This month, two friends and I visited our Congresswoman's office representing our local Peace Action affiliate, Peace Justice Sustainability Florida, to ask her to cosponsor legislation to prohibit a U.S. nuclear first strike; to repeal the 2001 AUMF; to vote against the military budget; to cut off funding for the deployment of U.S. ground troops to Syria; and to support diplomacy, not war, with North Korea.

When one of my friends explained that he'd fought in Vietnam and started to talk about what he'd witnessed there, he had to stop to keep from crying. But the staffer didn't need him to go on. She knew what he was talking about. We all do.

But if we all have to see dead and wounded children in the flesh before we can grasp the horror of war and take serious action to stop it and prevent it, then we face a bleak and bloody future. As my friend and too many like him have learned at incalculable cost, the best time to stop a war is before it starts, and the main lesson to learn from every war is: "Never again!"

Both Barack Obama and Donald Trump won the presidency partly by presenting themselves as "peace" candidates. This was a carefully calculated and calibrated element in both their campaigns, given the pro-war records of their main opponents, John McCain and Hillary Clinton. The American public's aversion to war is a factor that every U.S. president and politician has to deal with, and promising peace before spinning us into war is an American political tradition that dates back to Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt.

As Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering admitted to American military psychologist Gustave Gilbert in his cell at Nuremberg, "Naturally, the common people don't want war; neither in Russia nor in England nor in America, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy or a fascist dictatorship or a Parliament or a Communist dictatorship."

"There is one difference," Gilbert insisted, "In a democracy, the people have some say in the matter through their elected representatives, and in the United States only Congress can declare wars."

Goering was unimpressed by Madison's and Hamilton's cherished constitutional safeguards. "Oh, that is all well and good," he replied, "but, voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them that they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country."

Our commitment to peace and our abhorrence of war are too easily undermined by the simple but timeless techniques Goering described. In the U.S. today, they are enhanced by several other factors, most of which also had parallels in World War Two Germany:

–Mass media that suppress public awareness of the human costs of war, especially when U.S. policy or U.S. forces are responsible.

–A media blackout on voices of reason who advocate alternative policies based on peace, diplomacy or the rule of international law.

–In the ensuing silence regarding rational alternatives, politicians and media present “doing something,” meaning war, as the only alternative to the perennial straw man of “doing nothing.”

–The normalization of war by stealth and deception, especially by public figures otherwise seen as trustworthy, like President Obama.

–The dependence of progressive politicians and organizations on funding from labor unions that have become junior partners in the military industrial complex.

–The political framing of U.S. disputes with other countries as entirely the result of actions by the other side, and the demonization of foreign leaders to dramatize and popularize these false narratives.

–The pretense that the U.S. role in overseas wars and global military occupation stems from a well-meaning desire to help people, not from U.S. strategic ambitions and business interests.

Taken altogether, this amounts to a system of war propaganda, in which the heads of TV networks bear a share of responsibility for the resulting atrocities along with political and military leaders. Trotting out retired generals to bombard the home front with euphemistic jargon, without disclosing the hefty directors’ and consultants’ fees they collect from weapons manufacturers, is only one side of this coin.

The equally important flip-side is the media’s failure to even cover wars or the U.S. role in them, and their systematic marginalization of anyone who suggests there is anything morally or legally wrong with America’s wars.

The Pope and Gorbachev

Pope Francis recently suggested that a third party could act as a mediator to help resolve our country’s nearly 70-year-old conflict with North Korea. The Pope suggested Norway. Even more importantly, the Pope framed the problem as a

dispute between the United States and North Korea, not, as U.S. officials do, as North Korea posing a problem or a threat to the rest of the world.

This is how diplomacy works best, by correctly and honestly identifying the roles that different parties are playing in a dispute or a conflict, and then working to resolve their disagreements and conflicting interests in a way that both sides can live with or even benefit from. The JCPOA that resolved the U.S. dispute with Iran over its civilian nuclear program is a good example of how this can work.

This kind of real diplomacy is a far cry from the brinkmanship, threats and aggressive alliances that have masqueraded as diplomacy under a succession of U.S. presidents and secretaries of state since Truman and Acheson, with few exceptions. The persistent desire of much of the U.S. political class to undermine the JCPOA with Iran is a measure of how U.S. officials cling to the use of threats and brinkmanship and are offended that the “exceptional” United States should have to come down from its high horse and negotiate in good faith with other countries.

At the root of these dangerous policies, as historian William Appleman Williams wrote in The Tragedy of American Diplomacy in 1959, lies the mirage of supreme military power that seduced U.S. leaders after the allied victory in the Second World War and the invention of nuclear weapons. After running headlong into the reality of an unconquerable post-colonial world in Vietnam, this American Dream of ultimate power faded briefly, only to be reborn with a vengeance after the end of the Cold War.

Much as its defeat in the First World War was not decisive enough to convince Germany that its military ambitions were doomed, a new generation of U.S. leaders saw the end of the Cold War as their chance to “kick the Vietnam syndrome” and revive America’s tragic bid for “full spectrum dominance.”

As Mikhail Gorbachev lamented in a speech in Berlin on the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 2014, “the West, and particularly the United States, declared victory in the Cold War. Euphoria and triumphalism went to the heads of Western leaders. Taking advantage of Russia’s weakening and the lack of a counterweight, they claimed monopoly leadership and domination of the world, refusing to heed words of caution from many of those present here.”

This post-Cold War triumphalism has predictably led us into an even more convoluted maze of delusions, disasters and dangers than the Cold War itself. The folly of our leaders’ insatiable ambitions and recurrent flirtations with mass extinction are best symbolized by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists’ Doomsday Clock, whose hands once again stand at two and a half

minutes to midnight.

The inability of the costliest war machine ever assembled to defeat lightly-armed resistance forces in country after country, or to restore stability to any of the countries it has destroyed, has barely dented the domestic power of the U.S. military-industrial complex over our political institutions and our national resources. Neither millions of deaths, trillions of dollars wasted, nor abject failure on its own terms has slowed the mindless spread and escalation of the “global war on terror.”

Futurists debate whether robotic technology and artificial intelligence will one day lead to a world in which autonomous robots could launch a war to enslave and destroy the human race, maybe even incorporating humans as components of the machines that will bring about our extinction. In the U.S. armed forces and military industrial complex, have we already created exactly such a semi-human, semi-technological organism that will not stop bombing, killing and destroying unless and until we stop it in its tracks and dismantle it?

Nicolas J S Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapters on “Obama at War” in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader*.

The McCarthyism of Russia-gate

Exclusive: Civil-liberties nightmares about the Surveillance State are coming true, but – since the victims are former Donald Trump advisers – many of the usual civil-liberties defenders are strikingly silent, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Congressional demands for personal and business information from several of Donald Trump’s campaign advisers demonstrate how the Russia-gate investigation continues to spill over into a new breed of McCarthyism infringing on civil liberties, including freedom of speech and freedom of association.

The original thinking had been that congressional and other investigations would concentrate on specific concerns from alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 election, such as whether a Trump intermediary somehow conveyed purloined Democratic emails to WikiLeaks for publication on the Internet.

WikiLeaks denies getting the leaked emails from Russians and the Trump campaign denies colluding with Russians, but President Obama's intelligence chiefs claimed that Russian agents hacked the emails and then used intermediaries to get the material to WikiLeaks – although no real evidence of that has been presented publicly.

However, instead of zeroing in on that central question, the Senate investigation appears engaged in a fishing expedition looking at virtually every contact between Trump advisers and Russians, who may or may not have ties to the government. The demands are so broad that they could entrap the targets for perceived obstruction of an official investigation if some name or contact is left off, intentionally or by accident.

For instance, the Senate Intelligence Committee has demanded from ex-Trump foreign policy adviser Carter Page, who has extensive business dealings and personal contacts in Russia, the names and details of pretty much anyone he contacted over an 18-month period who could be a Russian official or somehow connected to a Russian business.

In a letter dated April 28, the committee's top Republican, Richard Burr of North Carolina, and top Democrat, Mark Warner of Virginia, gave Page until May 9 to provide: "A list of all meetings between you and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests which took place between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017. For each meeting listed, please include the date, location, all individuals present, and complete copies of any notes taken by you or on your behalf."

Meetings with Campaign

Further, the committee set a deadline of May 19 for Page to also supply: "A list of all meetings of which you are aware between any individual with the Trump campaign and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests which took place between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017. For each meeting listed please include the date, location, and all individuals present."

By the same deadline, the committee demanded: "All communications records, including electronic communications records such as e-mail or text messages, written correspondence, and phone records of communications which took place between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017, to which you and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests was a party.

"All communications records, including electronic communications records such as e-mail or text message, written correspondence, and phone records, of communications related in any way to Russia, conducted between you and members

and advisors of the Trump campaign.

“All information regarding your financial and real estate holdings related to Russia between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017, including those financial securities or real estate holdings which you sold or from which you divested in that time period.”

Similar information requests reportedly have been sent to other Trump campaign advisers, including Roger Stone, Paul Manafort and Michael Flynn.

Given the extent of Page’s dealings in Russia, which included having lived there for several years, the broad information demand amounts to a perjury trap because even if Page tried his best to supply all the personal, phone and email contacts, he would be sure to miss something or someone, thus setting him up for prosecution for obstructing an investigation or lying to investigators.

A FISA Warrant

Also, since the Obama administration reportedly obtained a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant against Page last summer, the U.S. government may well have more complete records of Page’s contacts and communications than he would, thus putting him into even greater legal jeopardy for an omission.

The FISA warrant was allegedly obtained, in part, because of a speech that Page delivered in Russia on July 7, 2016, that was mildly critical of U.S. foreign policy toward the countries of the former Soviet Union. Beginning in late July, that FBI investigation then expanded into a much wider probe of people connected to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign with possible links to Russia.

In an article about the origins of the investigation of Page and other Trump advisers, The New York Times characterized Page’s July speech to the New Economic School in Moscow as critical of “American policy toward Russia in terms that echoed the position of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.”

The Times then quoted one line from the speech in which Page said, “Washington and other Western capitals have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption and regime change.”

The Times article by Scott Shane, Mark Mazzetti and Adam Goldman added: “His [Page’s] remarks accorded with Mr. Trump’s positive view of the Russian president, which had prompted speculation about what Mr. Trump saw in Mr. Putin – more commonly denounced in the United States as a ruthless, anti-Western autocrat.”

In reality, Page's speech was much more nuanced than the Times presented. His central point was that the hasty transformation of the former Soviet Union from state-controlled to free market economies led to unintended consequences, including increased corruption.

"As the state remained dominant and new markets were simultaneously established following the breakup of the Soviet Union, members of these societies devised other methods and means of survival through corruption," Page said, adding that the West was not entirely innocent of similar problems:

"These approaches mirror several corrupt tendencies at times found in Western societies. Some may be clear-cut such as the Bernard Madoff scandal in financial markets and Enron in the energy sector, while others are more subtle such as the perceived societal injustices highlighted by the Occupy Wall Street movement."

In other words, Page's comments fell well within a reasonable assessment of the troubles that have occurred within the countries of the former Soviet Union. Page also recognized that the West – despite its sometimes holier-than-thou attitude toward less-developed nations – has its own problems with both criminal corruption and the more subtle variety of Wall Street machinations. After all, the 2008 financial crisis stripped common citizens of both America and Europe of trillions of dollars in lost assets and costs from government bailouts.

Echoing Putin?

But note how The New York Times characterized Page's remarks as having "echoed the position of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia," suggesting that Page, a former U.S. Navy officer, was somehow demonstrating disloyalty.

The Times also suggested that Page's opinions as expressed in his speech contributed to the Obama administration's decision to seek and obtain a FISA warrant that allowed the U.S. government to monitor his communications as a suspected foreign agent.

Normally, such intrusive government action against a citizen for expressing his opinions – whether they "echoed" the views of President Putin or not – would alarm defenders of civil liberties. However, since Page briefly served as a foreign policy adviser to Trump – and much of the civil liberties community has enlisted in the #Resistance to Trump over his presumed threats to civil liberties – there has been extraordinary silence about the McCarthyistic treatment of Page and other Trump advisers.

Retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who served briefly as President Trump's national security adviser, has already had a taste of how the U.S. government's

surveillance powers can entrap a citizen in a “process” crime, such as lying to investigators or obstructing justice.

On Dec. 29, 2016, several weeks before Trump’s inauguration, Flynn – while vacationing in the Dominican Republic – took a phone call from Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak in which they apparently discussed mounting tensions between Washington and Moscow, as U.S. intelligence officials surreptitiously listened in.

Because Flynn was not officially part of the government at the time of the call, Obama administration appointees at the Justice Department created a pretext for a criminal investigation by citing the Logan Act, a law enacted in 1799 to prohibit private citizens from negotiating with foreign adversaries but never used to convict anyone, ever. The law also is of dubious constitutionality and was surely never intended to apply to a president-elect’s advisers.

However, based on that flimsy pretext, FBI agents – with a transcript of the electronic intercept of the Kislyak-Flynn phone call in hand – tested Flynn’s memory of the conversation and found his recollections incomplete. Flynn also has come under criticism for giving a paid speech in 2015 to a dinner in Moscow honoring the tenth anniversary of the Russian television station, RT. Under mounting media and political pressure, President Trump fired Flynn.

The New McCarthyism

So, while one can legitimately criticize Flynn’s judgment, the larger civil-liberties issue surrounding the Russia-gate investigation is the prospect of criminalizing otherwise innocuous contacts with Russia and punishing American citizens for resisting the New Cold War.

Many Democrats, liberals and even some progressives appear excited over the prospect of wielding this new McCarthyism against Trump’s advisers with the hope that Russia-gate can be built up into a case for Trump’s impeachment.

But the precedents that are being set could be very dangerous for the long term. If Americans can be put under invasive FISA warrants for going abroad and criticizing U.S. policies or if intercepted phone calls can be used to test the memories of citizens during FBI interviews, many of the warnings from civil libertarians about the dangers of “war on terror” surveillance powers being applied more broadly may be coming true.

After receiving the sweeping congressional demands for documents and other data, Carter Page, who is an oil industry consultant with numerous foreign contacts including in Russia, responded by taking note of the reported FISA surveillance of him, writing to Senators Burr and Warner:

"I remain committed to helping the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in any way that I can. But please note that any records I may have saved as a private citizen with limited technology capabilities will be miniscule in comparison to the full database of information which has already been collected under the direction of the Obama Administration during last year's completely unjustified FISA warrant that targeted me for exercising my First Amendment rights, both in 2016 as well as in years prior.

"As a starting point for this latest step in the witch hunt which you suggested per the cumbersome chores defined in your ... letter, I would request that you please begin by sharing [with me] the same information which you currently have ... Based on the database of my personal information already collected during the Obama Administration's domestic political intelligence operations which reportedly began at some point last year, it seems clear that many of the weighty task[s] you assigned will have already been largely completed.

"As a lone individual, I can assure you that my personal administrative capabilities pale in comparison to the clerical juggernaut represented by the numerous staff in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the U.S. Government which have heretofore been allegedly involved in this unscrupulous surveillance for many months on end."

Whether justified or not, the FISA surveillance of Page – and thus likely others whom he contacted – may create the basis for some kind of criminal charges against him. Other Trump advisers may be tripped up on various process crimes, such as failure to report properly under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, another law that gets enforced selectively mostly against people without political pull.

In an interview on Friday, Page told me that he was a small player who was innocent of violating any laws but who became an "obvious" target for the Obama administration's effort to undermine the Trump campaign.

"I don't have [political] protection and I have genuine, deep Russian connections," he said, adding that compliance with the Senate's demands would require him reviewing "thousands of emails and hundreds of phone calls. ... It defies all logic and common sense."

But the reality of Official Washington is that once momentum builds up around a "scandal," someone has to get convicted of something – or all the Important People who have weighed in on the "affair" will look stupid. In Russia-gate, however, important principles about the right to dissent, the right to privacy and the right to associate freely are getting trampled.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[The Did-You-Talk-to-Russians Witch-hunt.](#)"]

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](#)).

Finding New Homes for Lethal Drones

America's expanded use of drone warfare to kill targets half a world away is spreading from a base outside Las Vegas to other state-side locales, including Syracuse, New York, as Norman Solomon discovered.

By Norman Solomon

At dusk I stood on a residential street with trim lawns and watched planes approach a runaway along the other side of a chain-link fence. Just a few dozen yards away, a JetBlue airliner landed. Then a United plane followed. But the next aircraft looked different. It was a bit smaller and had no markings or taillights. A propeller whirled at the back. And instead of the high-pitched screech of a jet, the sound was more like ... a drone.

During the next half-hour I saw three touch-and-go swoops by drones, their wheels scarcely reaching the runaway before climbing back above Syracuse's commercial airport. Nearby, pilots were at the controls in front of Air Force computers, learning how to operate the MQ-9 Reaper drone that is now a key weapon of U.S. warfare from Afghanistan to the Middle East to Africa.

Since last summer the Defense Department has been using the runway and airspace at the Syracuse Hancock International Airport to train drone operators, who work at the adjoining Air National Guard base. Officials say it's the first time that the federal government has allowed military drones to utilize a commercial airport. It won't be the last time.

No longer will the pilots who steer drones and fire missiles while staring at computer screens be confined to remote areas like the Nevada desert. With scant public information or debate, sizable American communities are becoming enmeshed in drone warfare on other continents. Along the way, how deeply will we understand – in human terms – what the drone war is doing to people far away? And to us?

Seen But Not Seen

The takeoffs and landings of military drones at the Syracuse airport get little attention in New York's fifth-largest city. Already routine, the maneuvers are hardly noticed. In an elevator at a hotel near the airport, I mentioned the Reaper drone exercises to an American Airlines flight attendant who had just landed on the same runway as the drones. "I had no idea," she said.

The Reaper drones using the Syracuse runway are unarmed, the Air Force says. But when trainees go operational, their computer work includes aiming and launching Hellfire missiles at targets many thousands of miles away.

Despite the official claims that drone strikes rarely hit civilians, some evidence says otherwise. For example, leaked classified documents (obtained by *The Intercept*) shed light on a series of U.S. airstrikes codenamed Operation Haymaker. From January 2012 to February 2013, those drone attacks in northeast Afghanistan killed more than 200 people, but only about one-sixth of them were the intended targets.

Even without a missile strike, there are traumatic effects of drones hovering overhead. The former *New York Times* reporter David Rohde has described what he experienced during captivity by the Taliban in tribal areas of Pakistan: "The drones were terrifying. From the ground, it is impossible to determine who or what they are tracking as they circle overhead. The buzz of a distant propeller is a constant reminder of imminent death."

As civic leaders in Syracuse and elsewhere embrace the expanding domestic involvement in day-to-day drone warfare, clear mention of the human toll far away is almost taboo. Elected officials join with business groups and public-relations officers from the military in extolling the benefits and virtues. Rarely does anyone acknowledge that civilians are maimed and killed as a result of the extolled activities, or that – in the name of a "war on terror" – people in foreign lands are subjected to the airborne presence of drones that is (to use Rohde's word) "terrifying."

Such matters are a far cry from Syracuse, where the local airport's role in drone warfare is visible yet virtually unseen. My random conversations with dozens of Syracuse residents in many walks of life turned up scant knowledge or concern about the nearby drone operations. What's front and center is the metropolitan area's economic distress.

Unlike the well-financed Air National Guard base, the city's crumbling infrastructure and budgets for relieving urban blight are on short rations. When I talked with people in low-income neighborhoods of Syracuse – one of the

poorest cities in the United States – despair was often unmistakable. A major study by the Century Foundation identified Syracuse as the city with the highest concentrations of poverty among African-Americans and Hispanics in the United States. Locally, the latest influx of federal largesse is for the drone war, not for them.

Opposing the Drones

A group called Upstate Drone Action has been protesting at the Air National Guard base on the outskirts of Syracuse with frequent vigils and persistent civil disobedience. A recent demonstration, on Good Friday, included nine arrests.

The participants said in a joint statement: “What if our country were constantly being spied upon by drones, with some of us killed by drones? What if many bystanders, including children, were killed in the process? If that were happening, we would hope that some people in that attacking country would speak up and try to stop the killing. We’re speaking up to try and stop the illegal and immoral drone attacks on countries against which Congress has not declared war.”

The last couple of months have not gone well for authorities trying to discourage civil disobedience – what organizers call “civil resistance” – at the base. In early March, a jury in the Dewitt Town Court took just half an hour to acquit four defendants on all charges from an action two years ago that could have resulted in a year behind bars for disorderly conduct, trespassing and obstruction of government administration.

Later in March, citing a lack of jurisdiction, a local judge dismissed charges against four people who set up a “nativity tableau” in front of the main gate at the Hancock Air Force Base two days before Christmas last year. In a press release, Upstate Drone Action said that the activists had been “protesting the hunter/killer MQ-9 Reaper drones piloted over Afghanistan by the 174th Attack Wing of the New York National Guard” at the base.

Expanding War

The U.S. drone war is escalating in numerous countries. A year ago the head of the Air Combat Command, Gen. Herbert Carlisle, told a Senate subcommittee that “an insatiable demand” was causing U.S. drone operations to grow at a “furious pace.” That pace has become even more furious since President Trump took office. In early April a researcher at the Council on Foreign Relations, Micah Zenko, calculated that President Trump had approved an average of one drone attack per day – a fivefold increase from the rate under the Obama

administration.

Upstate New York is leading the way for the Pentagon's plan to expand its drone program from isolated areas into populous communities, which offer ready access to workers. One hundred and sixty miles to the west of Syracuse, just outside the city of Niagara Falls, an Air National Guard base – the largest employer in the county – is in the final stages of building a cutting-edge digital tech center with huge bandwidth. There, pilots and sensor operators will do shifts at computer consoles, guiding MQ-9 drones and firing missiles on kill missions. The center is on track to become fully operational in a matter of months.

At the main gate of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, a sergeant from the public-affairs office was upbeat about the base "operating the MQ-9 remotely piloted aircraft." At city hall the mayor of Niagara Falls, a liberal Democrat, sounded no less pleased, while carefully sidestepping my questions about whether he could see any downsides to the upcoming drone role. A local businessman who chairs the Niagara Military Affairs Council – a private organization that has long spearheaded efforts to prevent closure of the base – told me that getting the drone mission was crucial for keeping the base open.

In such ways, functioning locally while enabling globally, the political economy and mass psychology of militarism do the work of the warfare state.

Norman Solomon is the author of *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. He is a co-founder of RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. This article was first published by ExposeFacts, a program of IPA.

Trump's Fragile Grasp of History

President Trump may have been a reality-TV star but his grasp of reality has always been tenuous, underscored by his weak understanding of U.S. and world history, as Michael Winship explains.

By Michael Winship

Gene Tunney, the champion prizefighter of the 1920s, wanted to promote an image of himself as a great intellectual. Trying to prove it, he always carried in his pocket a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets. Many members of the press weren't buying it. When Tunney published a volume titled *A Man Must Fight*, one sportswriter began his story about it with this immortal line: "Gene Tunney, who has written

one book and read several others..."

It's a line that would work for Donald Trump, too, but only if flipped: "Donald Trump, who has *written* several books and *read* one other..."

Of course, his various books have been written with the considerable help of long suffering ghosts. And yes, I know that on several occasions Trump has bragged to reporters about the many books he claims to have read. In 2011, for example, he told the official Chinese news agency Xinhua, "I've read hundreds of books about China over the decades." If you believe that, I've got a Great Wall to sell you. A real one. In China, not Mexico.

As I wrote a couple of weeks ago, one of Trump's least appealing of many unappealing traits is his incuriosity, his total lack of interest in history or pretty much anything that somehow doesn't pump up his ego or profits. It's deeply dangerous for all of us.

On Monday, here he was again, the man who just claimed an unprecedented first 100 days (must have been a helluva shock to FDR), who may have thought Frederick Douglass was still alive ("somebody who's done an amazing job") and who seemed eager to spread the news that Abraham Lincoln was a Republican ("Does anyone know? A lot of people don't know that!").

Now he was sharing his thoughts on the Civil War: "People don't realize, you know, the Civil War – if you think about it, why? People don't ask that question, but why was there the Civil War? Why could that one not have been worked out?"

When my eyes uncross and my head stops coming to a point, I'd like to read aloud to him from the Emancipation Proclamation. Trump's remarks came as he discussed in a radio interview his oft-stated admiration for Andrew Jackson. But as Aaron Blake at *The Washington Post* notes, Trump pulled yet another groaner when, "Just last week, in an interview with Reuters, Trump suggested there was really no reason for the Israelis and the Palestinians to have been fighting for all these decades.

"'I want to see peace with Israel and the Palestinians,' Trump said. 'There is no reason there's not peace between Israel and the Palestinians – none whatsoever. So we're looking at that, and we're also looking at the potential of going to Saudi Arabia.'"

"No reason whatsoever! You know, besides the whole claim-to-the-very-same-holy-land thing. Minor details."

Don't Know Much...

It boggles the mind. My former colleague, historian David McCullough, is no stranger to American presidents, having written Pulitzer Prize-winning biographies of Harry Truman and John Adams. He has been making the rounds promoting his new book, a collection of his speeches called *The American Spirit: Who We Are and What We Stand For.*

When he appeared on Leonard Lopate's talk show on New York public radio a couple of weeks ago, McCullough noted that in Donald Trump we had "put someone in the pilot seat who has never ever flown a plane before; who doesn't understand how our government works, who has no interest in the history of the country and has said so on more than one occasion, who has never read a book about the presidency or a biography of a president and claims... that he doesn't need to read books because he knows so much intuitively."

And yet when Trump declares that health care reform or pretty much anything else – in fact the entire job of being president – is much more complicated than he imagined it would be, it's precisely because he has no knowledge of history, the kind of knowledge that might at least from time to time buffer for him the shock of reality by offering the golden gift of precedence.

History, McCullough writes, is "an aid to navigation in such troubled uncertain times. ... All problems have histories and the wisest route to a successful solution to nearly any problem begins with understanding its history. Indeed, almost any attempt to solve a problem without an understanding of its history is to court failure – an example our tragic plunge into Vietnam with hardly a notion of its past."

Or our plunge into Iraq. Or Afghanistan. Or Iran. Or North Korea – especially when the sum total of Trump's knowledge of that country's fraught history seems to have been a 10-minute tutorial from the president of China.

History is that proverbial butterfly flapping its wings in Mexico and causing a tsunami in Malaysia. Which makes it all the more perilous when you have a president who uses "America First" as a campaign slogan, revealing little knowledge of the isolationist movement before World War II; whose press secretary makes ill-considered statements comparing Nazi Germany, Syria and the use of poison gas to massacre civilians; and who calls Sen. Elizabeth Warren "Pocahontas," demonstrating a willful, repugnant ignorance of Native American history that goes all the way back to a time some 24 years ago when he claimed owners of tribal casinos "are not Indians" because they didn't conform to his stereotype of what Native Americans should look like.

'A Bad Thing'

But even worse than any of these is a lack of knowledge of history and government that puts our very existence as a free and democratic government in peril. Embracing other countries' dictators is one slippery slope. And then on Sunday there was Trump's chief of staff Reince Priebus suggesting to Jonathan Karl of ABC News that his boss is contemplating amending or even eliminating the First Amendment to curb negative coverage of the president. And finally, there was Trump himself, complaining to Fox News about the difficulty of getting his program through Congress: "It's a very rough system. It's an archaic system... It's really a bad thing for the country."

In other words, history, the system of checks and balances and the Constitution itself are just getting in Trump's way, despite his prior claims to regard as inviolate the original language of the founders.

David McCullough has said that our past is an invaluable asset, but "if you've inherited some great work of art that is worth a fortune and you don't know that it's worth a fortune, you don't even know that it's a great work of art and you're not interested in it – you're going to lose it."

Trump and his minions seem determined to send the admittedly flawed masterwork that is our legacy to the trash. One of David's favorite quotes comes from Thomas Jefferson: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

Sadly, those words are probably unfamiliar to Trump precisely because of what Jefferson suggested. Past presidents have embraced our past as prologue, read books, invited eminent historians to the White House for advice and consultation. But Trump takes his history, as little as it is, from the dark spoutings of pseudointellectuals like Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka, or in tweets and soundbites from *Fox & Friends*. When he tries to parrot the words back as public statements, they come out even more mangled and malevolent.

While he is so ignorant we cannot be free.

Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of *Moyers & Company* and *BillMoyers.com*. Follow him on Twitter at @MichaelWinship.

[<http://billmoyers.com/story/dont-know-much-about-history/>]
