

Man Bites Dog: NYT Does Journalism

Exclusive: When the Trump administration blamed Cuba for a “sonic attack” on U.S. diplomats, a New York Times reporter did something unusual for his newspaper: he tried objectively to assess the evidence, as Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

I often criticize The New York Times, Washington Post and other major mainstream media outlets for a very simple reason: they deserve it – especially for their propagandistic, unprofessional and reckless coverage of foreign crises.

But there are occasional moments when some reporter at an MSM outlet behaves responsibly and those instances should be noted at least under the classic definition of “news” – something that is unexpected – or as the old saying goes, “dog bites man is not news; man bites dog is news.”

One such moment occurred earlier this month when a Times science editor assigned science reporter Carl Zimmer to look into the mysterious illnesses affecting U.S. diplomats in the recently reopened U.S. embassy in Cuba.

About two dozen U.S. diplomats supposedly were suffering hearing loss and cognitive difficulties due to what has been labeled a “sonic attack.” The Trump administration blamed the Cuban government even though the Cubans claimed to be mystified and would seem to have little motive for disrupting a long-sought détente with Washington along with the expected boon to their tourist industry. President Trump “retaliated” by expelling 15 Cuban diplomats.

Zimmer recounted the background to his story in a reporter’s notebook piece on Oct. 6: “On Tuesday, Michael Mason, my editor on the science desk, shot me an email. Would I consider writing an article about ‘this sonic “attack” business’? I knew exactly what he was talking about. I had been vaguely puzzled about this business for months.”

Checking Out the Story

Zimmer then did what professional journalists are supposed to do: he started contacting impartial experts to get their assessments of what was possible, what

was likely, and what didn't make sense.



"I decided to try to find something out – not as a political reporter but as a science writer," Zimmer wrote in the sidebar that accompanied [his news article](#). "I usually base my ideas on scientific research that has matured far enough that it is beginning to get published in peer-reviewed journals. ... I knew that an article on sonic weapons would be very different from the ones I usually write. ..."

"I learned there was not even an official medical report. I decided to try to draw some boundary lines for all the speculation swirling around the story. Is the idea of a sonic attack plausible, based on what scientists know about sound and the human body? ..."

"So I hit the phone. I didn't want to talk with just anyone – I looked for people with lots of experience in research that had direct bearing on this question. I started with Timothy Leighton, whose job title at Southampton University is, literally, professor of ultrasonics and underwater acoustics. Better yet, Dr. Leighton has published the only thorough recent scientific review of the effects of environmental ultrasound that I'm aware of."

"When I interviewed Dr. Leighton and others, I made clear I didn't expect them to solve this mystery; I just wanted them to reconcile the question with what we know through science. ..."

"The consensus was that it was extremely unlikely the diplomats were the victims of a sonic weapon. It would be necessary to rule out less exotic possibilities before taking that one seriously."

Yet, despite this skeptical scientific consensus among experts, Zimmer noted, "The notion [of a sonic attack] has ricocheted like mad around the press, making it possible for readers to assume that [the sonic attack explanation] has been generally accepted by experts. But it most certainly has not. I'll be curious to see if articles like mine can put the brakes on the speculation."

Suspecting Putin

Well, Zimmer could have read the Times [editorial](#) in the same day's (Oct. 6) newspaper for a partial answer. While critical of the Trump administration for

rushing to judgment in blaming the Cuban government and expelling 15 diplomats, the editorial concluded: “The sonic attacks on Americans are too serious to be used for cynical political ends.”

So much for the editorial writers reading their own newspaper, but clearly they were driven by a higher agenda. A New York Times editorial about some unpleasant topic anywhere in the world these days wouldn't be complete without taking the opportunity to blame Russia or, in this case, at least suggest Russia as a possible villain in the mystery.

The Times wrote: “Other parties, most notably Russia, must also figure as suspects: President Vladimir Putin would probably welcome a setback to American-Cuban relations.”

Yes, every possible conspiracy theory must somehow circle back to Vladimir Putin, a real-life Dr. Evil. When he is not plotting how to flood Facebook with images of puppies or manipulate Americans in their pursuit of Pokemon Go characters, he is building secret sonic weapons to disorient U.S. diplomats in Havana and provoke President Trump to act rashly (when we all know how cool and collected Trump normally is).

But I thought the earlier conspiracy theory was that Putin had secret videos of Trump cavorting with prostitutes in a five-star Moscow hotel – knowing years ago that Trump would surely become the U.S. president – and thus all Putin would have needed to do was call Trump up and tell his Manchurian Candidate to ship home some Cuban diplomats.

Why would the evil Putin go to the trouble of inventing a sonic weapon when simply pulling Trump's puppet strings would have done the trick? Perhaps it's just that Putin is so evil that he delights in dastardly tricks for the sheer sadistic joy of hurting people. Yes, that must be the ticket!

Once again, the Times editors seem to be onto something – if only they could rein in their one journalist who still seems to think it's necessary to report a story by seeking out genuine experts who don't have some ax to grind or some lucrative government contract to audition for. It saves so much time and energy to just blame Putin.

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 Indonesia Massacre's Historic Message

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media's credulity toward today's Official Narratives is especially troubling given the false storylines from the past, such as the cover-up of Washington's hand in the Indonesia massacres, as Jonathan Marshall describes.

By Jonathan Marshall

Fifty-four years after the assassination of President Kennedy, historians are still waiting to see whether President Trump will approve the final release of secret records related to that crime by the Oct. 26 deadline set by a unanimous Congress in 1992 with the JFK Records Act.

Senior Republicans in both the House and Senate have called on the President to "reject any claims for the continued postponement" of declassification. "Transparency in government is critical not only to ensuring accountability; it's also essential to understanding our nation's history," said Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Just days before the scheduled release of JFK records, the National Archives – with much less fanfare – declassified nearly 30,000 pages of documents from the U.S. embassy in Jakarta from 1964 to 1968. That might seem in contrast like an obscure matter of interest only to a handful of specialists, but the period covers what the CIA once called "one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century": the massacre of half a million Indonesians, and the arrest of a million more, by the country's army and its supporters in the name of wiping out Communism.

Whether and how the U.S. government abetted that bloodbath is as "essential to understanding our nation's history" as learning what transpired two years earlier on the streets of Dallas. Indeed, the two events are related, as the murder of Kennedy prompted a hardline shift in U.S. policy to support a military coup in Indonesia. Yet despite the worthy new release of documents, Washington has been neither transparent nor accountable when it comes to the Indonesia massacre of 1965-66.

In particular, the U.S. government has yet to declassify any but a handful of operational files from the CIA or Defense Department. As a result, "we have only the barest outlines of what covert campaigns the CIA was undertaking and what assistance the United States was providing," historian Bradley Simpson, founder

and director of the Indonesia and East Timor Documentation Project, told me.

The Prelude to a Slaughter

The frightful massacres in Indonesia followed years of growing social, economic and political strife. Following a disastrously botched CIA coup attempt in 1958, Indonesia's leader and independence hero, Sukarno, treated Washington with deep suspicion. All through the early 1960s, Sukarno adopted an increasingly strident nationalist stance. He flirted with Soviet Russia and even with Communist China while he threatened military confrontations with the Dutch and British, legacy colonial powers. At home, he encouraged the rising influence of Indonesia's communist party, the PKI.

President Kennedy tried to work with Sukarno. One of JFK's first acts as president was to invite the Indonesian leader to the White House. Kennedy's assassination, however, "unquestionably changed the direction of U.S. policy toward Indonesia," writes Simpson in his authoritative account of U.S.-Indonesia relations, *Economists With Guns*. Whereas Kennedy was willing to expend political capital to work with Sukarno, President Lyndon Johnson dismissed him as a "bully" who, if appeased one day, would "run you out of your bedroom the next night."

Administration leaders increasingly looked to Indonesia's U.S.-trained-and-supplied army as a political alternative to Sukarno.

In the fall of 1964, as relations with Jakarta soured, the CIA proposed a covert action program to "build up strength" among anti-communist groups and instigate "internal strife between communist and non-communist elements." The Agency raised the possibility of fomenting riots or other disorders that "might force the Army to assume broad powers in restoring order."

U.S. and other Western intelligence agencies began planting stories about PKI plots to assassinate army leaders and import weapons from Communist China, elements of a "strategy of tension" that the Agency would later use in Chile to provoke the 1973 military coup.

The Johnson administration curbed economic aid – intensifying the country's economic crisis – while continuing to train and assist the military. "When Sukarno leaves the scene, the military will probably take over," one senior State Department official told a congressional committee in executive session. "We want to keep the door open."

Bitter Fruit

In the fall of 1965, Washington's strategy bore fruit when several junior

Indonesian military officers, apparently with the support of certain PKI leaders, killed six Indonesian army generals in a bungled power play that remains poorly understood. The military struck back decisively. It rounded up the alleged plotters, accused them (falsely) of sexually mutilating the murdered generals, and then unleashed a nationwide campaign to murder PKI cadre and sympathizers.

The U.S. ambassador, Marshall Green, was thrilled by the opportunity to crush the communists. "It's now or never," he told Washington.

Green proposed fanning anti-communist violence by a covert propaganda campaign to "spread the story of PKI's guilt, treachery and brutality (this priority effort is perhaps most-needed immediate assistance we can give army if we can find way to do it without identifying it as solely or largely US effort)."

He instructed to U.S. Information Agency to use all its resources to "link this horror and tragedy with Peking and its brand of communism; associate diabolical murder and mutilation of the generals with similar methods used against village headmen in Vietnam."

As reports filtered in of the execution or arrest of thousands of PKI supporters by the army and allied Muslim death squads, Green said he had "increasing respect for [the army's] determination and organization in carrying out this crucial assignment."

The killings occurred on such a vast scale that "the disposal of the corpses has created a serious sanitation problem in East Java and Northern Sumatra where the humid air bears the reek of decaying flesh," reported *Time* magazine in December 1965, in one of the first U.S. stories on the massacre.

"Travelers from these areas tell of small rivers and streams that have been literally clogged with bodies. River transportation has at places been seriously impeded."

Previously classified documents from the U.S. embassy in Jakarta released this week add details to this story.

We learn, for example, from one cable that as prison overcrowding became a problem, "Many provinces appear to be successfully meeting this problem by executing their P.K.I. prisoners, or by killing them before they are captured, a task in which Moslem youth groups are providing assistance."

By December 1965, the embassy was reporting on the "striking Army success" in taking power, noting its killing of at least 100,000 people in just 10 weeks.

Yet we also learn that U.S. officials had reliable information that the PKI as an organization had no advance knowledge of or involvement in the murder of the six generals that triggered the nationwide bloodbath. A senior embassy officer also reported on the army's "widespread falsification of documents" to implicate the PKI in various crimes.

We owe these and other revelations to the persistent efforts of human rights activists, scholars, and politicians like Senators Tom Udall, D-New Mexico, and Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, to promote full disclosure of U.S. involvement in Indonesia's mass killings.

Following in their footsteps, Steve Aftergood, head of the Project on Government Secrecy at the Federation of American Scientists, contacted the National Declassification Center (established by President Obama), to urge the release of more Indonesia records. Historian Bradley Simpson and the non-profit National Security Archive then teamed with the U.S. National Archives to digitize 30,000 pages of decades-old embassy files to facilitate public access to the documents.

But without CIA and military operational files, the full, ugly story of Washington's complicity will remain obscured. Previous administrations have released deeply troubling CIA files on coups in Chile, Guatemala and Iran. Those files cast a terrible stain on our history but their release powerfully demonstrated the commitment of at least some American leaders to learn from the past. In that spirit, the time has come to open up our history with Indonesia as well.

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

Blaming Russia for the Internet 'Sewer'

Exclusive: As the Russia-gate hysteria spirals down from the implausible to the absurd, almost every bad thing is blamed on the Russians, even how they turned the previously pristine Internet into a "sewer," reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

With the U.S. government offering tens of millions of dollars to combat Russian "propaganda and disinformation," it's perhaps not surprising that we see "researchers" such as Jonathan Albright of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University making the absurd accusation that the Russians have

“basically turned [the Internet] into a sewer.”

I’ve been operating on the Internet since 1995 and I can assure you that the Internet has always been “a sewer” – in that it has been home to crazy conspiracy theories, ugly personal insults, click-bait tabloid “news,” and pretty much every vile prejudice you can think of. Whatever some Russians may or may not have done in buying \$100,000 in ads on Facebook (compared to its \$27 billion in annual revenue) or opening 201 Twitter accounts (out of Twitter’s 328 million monthly users), the Russians are not responsible for the sewage coursing through the Internet.

Americans, Europeans, Asians, Africans and pretty much every other segment of the world’s population didn’t need Russian help to turn the Internet into an informational “sewer.” But, of course, fairness and proportionality have no place in today’s Russia-gate frenzy.

After all, your “non-governmental organization” or your scholarly “think tank” is not likely to get a piece of the \$160 million that the U.S. government authorized last December to counter primarily Russian “propaganda and disinformation” if you explain that the Russians are at most responsible for a tiny trickle of “sewage” compared to the vast rivers of “sewage” coming from many other sources.

If you put the Russia-gate controversy in context, you also are not likely to have your “research” cited by The Washington Post as Albright did on Thursday because he supposedly found some links at the home-décor/fashion site Pinterest to a few articles that derived from a few of the 470 Facebook accounts and pages that Facebook suspects of having a link to Russia and shut them down. (To put that 470 number into perspective, Facebook has about two billion monthly users.)

Albright’s full quote about the Russians allegedly exploiting various social media platforms on the Internet was: “They’ve gone to every possible medium and basically turned it into a sewer.”

But let’s look at the facts. According to Facebook, the suspected “Russian-linked” accounts purchased \$100,000 in ads from 2015 to 2017 (compared to Facebook’s annual revenue of about \$27 billion), with only 44 percent of those ads appearing **before** the 2016 election and many having little or nothing to do with politics, which is curious if the Kremlin’s goal was to help elect Donald Trump and defeat Hillary Clinton.

Even former Clinton political strategist Mark Penn has acknowledged the absurdity of thinking that such piddling amounts could have any impact on a \$2.4 billion presidential campaign, plus all the billions of dollars worth of free-

media attention to the conventions, debates, etc. Based on what's known about the Facebook ads, Penn calculated that "the actual electioneering [in battleground states] amounts to about \$6,500."

In a Wall Street Journal op-ed on Monday, Penn added, "I have 40 years of experience in politics, and this Russian ad buy mostly after the election anyway, simply does not add up to a carefully targeted campaign to move voters. It takes tens of millions of dollars to deliver meaningful messages to the contested portion of the electorate."

Puppies and Pokemon

And, then there is the curious content. According to The New York Times, one of these "Russian-linked" Facebook groups was dedicated to photos of "adorable puppies." Of course, the Times tried hard to detect some sinister motive behind the "puppies" page.

Similarly, CNN went wild over its own "discovery" that one of the "Russian-linked" pages offered Amazon gift cards to people who found "Pokémon Go" sites near scenes where police shot unarmed black men – if you would name the Pokémon after the victims.

"It's unclear what the people behind the contest hoped to accomplish, though it may have been to remind people living near places where these incidents had taken place of what had happened and to upset or anger them," CNN mused, adding:

"CNN has not found any evidence that any Pokémon Go users attempted to enter the contest, or whether any of the Amazon Gift Cards that were promised were ever awarded – or, indeed, whether the people who designed the contest ever had any intention of awarding the prizes."

So, these dastardly Russians are exploiting "adorable puppies" and want to "remind people" about unarmed victims of police violence, clearly a masterful strategy to undermine American democracy or – according to the original Russia-gate narrative – to elect Donald Trump.

A New York Times article on Wednesday acknowledged another inconvenient truth that unintentionally added more perspective to the Russia-gate hysteria.

It turns out that some of the mainstream media's favorite "fact-checking" organizations are home to Google ads that look like news items and lead readers to phony sites dressed up to resemble People, Vogue or other legitimate content providers.

"None of the stories were true," the Times reported. "Yet as recently as late

last week, they were being promoted with prominent ads served by Google on PolitiFact and Snopes, fact-checking sites created precisely to dispel such falsehoods.”

There is obvious irony in PolitiFact and Snopes profiting off “fake news” by taking money for these Google ads. But this reality also underscores the larger reality that fabricated news articles – whether peddling lies about Melania Trump or a hot new celebrity or outlandish Russian plots – are driven principally by the profit motive.

The Truth About Fake News

Occasionally, the U.S. mainstream media even acknowledges that fact. For instance, last November, The New York Times, which was then flogging the Russia-linked “fake news” theme, ran a relatively responsible article about a leading “fake news” Web site that the Times tracked down. It turned out to be an entrepreneurial effort by an unemployed Georgian student using a Web site in Tbilisi to make some money by promoting pro-Trump stories, whether true or not.

The owner of the Web site, 22-year-old Beqa Latsabidse, said he had initially tried to push stories favorable to Hillary Clinton but that proved unprofitable so he switched to publishing anti-Clinton and pro-Trump articles, including made-up stories. In other words, the Times found no Russian connection.

The Times article on Wednesday revealed the additional problem of Google ads placed on mainstream Internet sites leading readers to bogus news sites to get clicks and thus advertising dollars. And, it turns out that PolitiFact and Snopes were at least unwittingly profiting off these entrepreneurial ventures by running their ads. Again, there was no claim here of Russian “links.” It was all about good ole American greed.

But the even larger Internet problem is that many “reputable” news sites, such as AOL, lure readers into clicking on some sensationalistic or misleading headline, which takes readers to a story that is often tabloid trash or an extreme exaggeration of what the headline promised.

This reality about the Internet should be the larger context in which the Russia-gate story plays out, the miniscule nature of this Russian “meddling” even if these “suspected ... links to Russia” – as the Times initially described the 470 Facebook pages – turn out to be true.

But there are no lucrative grants going to “researchers” who would put the trickle of alleged Russian “sewage” into the context of the vast flow of Internet “sewage” that is even flowing through the esteemed “fact-checking” sites of PolitiFact and Snopes.

There are also higher newspaper sales and better TV ratings if the mainstream media keeps turning up new angles on Russia-gate, even as some of the old ones fall away as inconsequential or meaningless (such as the Senate Intelligence Committee dismissing earlier controversies over Sen. Jeff Sessions's brief meeting with the Russian ambassador at the Mayflower Hotel and minor changes in the Republican platform).

Saying 'False' Is 'True'

And, there is the issue of who decides what's true. PolitiFact continues to defend its false claim that Hillary Clinton was speaking the truth when – in referencing leaked Democratic emails last October – she claimed that the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies “have all concluded that these espionage attacks, these cyberattacks, come from the highest levels of the Kremlin, and they are designed to influence our election.”

That claim was always untrue because a reference to a consensus of the 17 intelligence agencies suggests a National Intelligence Estimate or similar product that seeks the judgments of the entire intelligence community. No NIE or community-wide study was ever done on this topic.

Only later – in January 2017 – did a small subset of the intelligence community, what Director of National Intelligence James Clapper described as “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies – the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation – issue an “assessment” blaming the Russians while acknowledging a lack of actual evidence.

In other words, the Jan. 6 “assessment” was comparable to the “stovepiped” intelligence that influenced many of the mistaken judgments of President George W. Bush's administration. In “stovepiped” intelligence, a selected group of analysts is closeted away and develops judgments without the benefit of other experts who might offer contradictory evidence or question the groupthink.

So, in many ways, Clinton's statement was the opposite of true both when she said it in 2016 and later in 2017 when she repeated it in direct reference to the Jan. 6 assessment. If PolitiFact really cared about facts, it would have corrected its earlier claim that Clinton was telling the truth, but the fact-checking organization wouldn't budge – even after The New York Times and The Associated Press ran corrections.

In this context, PolitiFact showed its contempt even for conclusive evidence – testimony from former DNI Clapper (corroborated by former CIA Director John Brennan) that the 17-agency claim was false. Instead, PolitiFact was determined to protect Clinton's false statement from being described for what it was:

false.

Of course, maybe PolitiFact is suffering from the arrogance of its elite status as an arbiter of truth with its position on Google's First Draft coalition, a collection of mainstream news outlets and fact-checkers which gets to decide what information is true and what is not true – for algorithms that then will exclude or downplay what's deemed "false."

So, if PolitiFact says something is true – even if it's false – it becomes "true." Thus, it's perhaps not entirely ironic that PolitiFact would collect money from Google ads placed on its site by advertisers of fake news.

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

Trump Escalates Anti-Leak Campaign

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

By Jesselyn Radack and Kathleen McClellan

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

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

As recently as last month, the Department of Defense has developed training courses, toolkits, templates, posters, and videos, all aimed toward silencing and deterring anyone who would disclose to the press or the public information that the government wants kept secret for no legitimate reason and that the

public has an interest in knowing. It is not only federal employees who receive these trainings, but tens of thousands of government contractors as well. Companies with any classified access are required to implement an “Insider Threat Program,” an insidious presumption that employees cannot be trusted.

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

Anti-Leak Posters

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

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

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

Another informational video includes a fictionalized news story about Americans dying in a terrorist attack because of a release of classified information. Such a story has never appeared in the actual news media because it has never happened. In Chelsea Manning’s criminal case – worth mentioning since her leaks are consistently singled out in the videos – the government was unable to

provide a finalized damage assessment, even though the leaks occurred years prior. (Curiously, Edward Snowden's even more-well known leaks are not mentioned by name in the videos.)

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

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

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

Jesselyn Radack was a whistleblower at the Department of Justice under the Bush administration and now heads the Whistleblower and Source Protection Program (WHISPeR) at ExposeFacts, where she has provided legal representation for clients including Edward Snowden, Thomas Drake, and William Binney. Kathleen McClellan is the Deputy Director at WHISPeR. [This article originally ran at ExposeFacts at

<https://exposefacts.org/insider-threat-program-training-and-trumps-war-on-leaks-a-chilling-combination-for-whistleblowers/>]

Why the Vengeance Toward Sgt. Bergdahl

The angry politics around Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl's "desertion" in Afghanistan revolve around right-wing hatred for President Obama who engineered Bergdahl's freedom from the Taliban, as Matthew Hoh describes.

By Matthew Hoh

Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl's guilty plea begins the end of this phase of an embarrassing, sad and morally absurd saga of American history.

Sergeant Bergdahl was dismissed from the Coast Guard because of mental illness, was recruited into the Army in spite of such issues, and then was sent to the frontlines of Afghanistan where he walked away from his base and was captured, kept as a prisoner, and tortured by the Taliban for nearly five years. Yet, he has been offered almost no compassion, sympathy or forgiveness by large swaths of the American public, political classes, veterans and the media.

The shameful blood-crazed calls for vengeance against Sergeant Bergdahl, screamed across Fox News, talk radio and Twitter, by millions of right-wing Americans have begun again with Sergeant Bergdahl's guilty plea.

This hostility has resumed despite an Army investigation finding no Americans were killed by Sergeant Bergdahl's departure of his unit; despite the Pentagon admitting it was known that Sergeant Bergdahl was in Pakistan within a few days of his capture, thus negating the validity of the right-wing talking points of continuous search missions for Sergeant Bergdahl that jeopardized American lives; despite the general who led the investigation of Sergeant Bergdahl's disappearance stating Sergeant Bergdahl should not be punished and the colonel who led the Army's version of a grand jury trial recommending the same; despite the United States military's top prisoner of war expert testifying that Sergeant Bergdahl endured more torture at the hands of the Taliban than any American prisoner of war has endured since the Vietnam War, undoubtedly due to his multiple escape attempts and unwillingness to cooperate with his kidnappers; and despite repeated calls made by President Trump for Sergeant Bergdahl to be executed, as well as calls for retaliation against the military if Sergeant Bergdahl is not sent to jail by Senator John McCain, clear and blatant forms of wrongful and illegal command influence prohibited by military law against a defendant.

Despite all that, Sergeant Bergdahl finds himself having just entered a guilty plea and putting himself at the mercy of a U.S. Army judge.

In time, Sergeant Bergdahl may become just a footnote to America's wars in the Muslim world, wars that have killed well over a million people since 2001. But his individual story relays some fundamental truths of these American wars against Sunnis and Shias, and Arabs, Africans and Pashtuns, (it is a fact that nearly all the people we have killed, maimed and made homeless have been Muslim and dark skinned). One truth is that there is no logic to our violence, only the unending and insatiable requirement for more war and more destruction.

No Forgiveness

There is also no forgiveness in this loudly and righteously proclaimed Christian nation, only the scapegoating of a young man and his family for the failures of immoral and unwinnable wars on the murderous altar of the twin godheads of American Exceptionalism and White Supremacy.

Sergeant Berghdal's story does not just inform us of the madness of our wars overseas, but highlights our wars here at home; for our wars abroad come from the same root causes as our wars at home.

It was Sergeant Bergdahl's parents standing outside the White House with President Obama that began the rage against him and his family. This was the treason that so angered and upset the white conservative audiences of Megyn Kelly and Rush Limbaugh. Sergeant Bergdahl's white parents standing at the White House with *that black president* and thanking him for freeing their son began the scorn, the vitriol and the outrage against Sergeant Bergdahl, his mother and his father.

Jani and Bob Bergdahl, who were just released from the captivity of the unimaginable nightmare of the imprisonment and torture of their son for five years by the Taliban, had the audacity to stand with Barack *Hussein* Obama and to give him thanks. That was a betrayal to the usurped, rightful and white structures that underlie so many white Americans understanding of United States history and society.

Military Mythology

The grand mythology of American militarism, a key pillar of both American Exceptionalism and White Supremacy, does not allow for figures such as Sergeant Bergdahl. *The greatest military in the history of the world* is a required statement of faith for all American politicians and public persons, even though the American military has not achieved victory in war in over 70 years, so an explanation of collusion and cooperation with anti-American and anti-white forces is necessary to provide the causation of such an undermining.

Of course, once Bob and Jani Bergdahl stood with President Obama, the racially

fueled reactionary political anger appeared in Facebook posts and twitter rants and the lies needed to sustain that anger and turn it into a useful political tool arrived: Sergeant Bergdahl attempted to join the Taliban, Sergeant Bergdahl gave information to the enemy, Sergeant Bergdahl got Americans killed, Sergeant Bergdahl had anti-American beliefs, Sergeant Bergdahl's father is a Muslim...all claims that were untrue and disproved over time, but such a straightening of facts is almost always inconsequential to those whose identity is an abominable mix of race, right-wing politics and nationalism.

People of such a type as those who believe Jesus would be okay with them carrying handguns into church, demand that Santa Claus can only be white, and that the Confederate flag is a symbol of a proud heritage, have little time or consideration for the particulars of anything that triggers the base tribalism that dominates and informs their lives.

The fundamental aspects of Sergeant Bergdahl's disappearance were well known and documented years prior to that White House announcement of his release. Veterans' organizations called for his rescue and return at rallies and Republican senators enacted legislation to help release him "Bring Him Home" and "No Man Left Behind" were echoed repeatedly by Republican politicians and pundits, and even Ronald Reagan's most famed acolyte and Fox News hero, Oliver North, wore a Bowe Bergdahl POW bracelet.

However, to be white and to stand tearfully and gratefully alongside *that black president* is unconscionable and unforgivable to many "true Americans" and so the parents' sins became the son's and Sergeant Bergdahl's treason was a dog whistle to those who believe anti-whiteness and anti-Americanism are inseparable.

For the man who used race so overtly and effectively to become President of the United States, calling during his campaign for a traitor like Sergeant Bergdahl to face the firing squad, or be thrown out of a plane without a parachute, was a rudimentary requirement in order to Make America Great Again. Even General James Mattis, who hung outside his office a horseshoe that had belonged to Sergeant Bergdahl and had been given to the general by the sergeant's father, understands the political importance of Bergdahl's treason.

General Mattis who previously had supported the soldier and given great comfort to the family, now, as Secretary of Defense, is silent. I believe Secretary Mattis to have higher ambitions than simply running the Pentagon and keeping that white base of support in his favor is not anything such a savvy and cunning careerist, such as James Mattis, would imperil.

We will soon know what, if any punishment Sergeant Bergdahl is to receive. Hopefully, he and his family will be spared further pain and they can begin

rebuilding lives that were shattered by the unending war in Afghanistan and then shattered again by the race-fueled partisan politics of the unending war against people of color in the United States.

For Bowe Bergdahl, a young man who never should have been inducted into the Army to begin with, his suffering is testament to the viciousness, callousness and hate that dominates American actions both at home and abroad. We deserve no forgiveness for what has been done, and may still be done, to him and his family.

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The Thwarted Dreams of Kurdistan

Almost a century ago, European powers promised the Kurds a state but soon reneged on the deal, leaving Kurdish nationalists to fume for generations and leading to Iraq's recent military capture of Kirkuk, reports Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

It was in 1916, in the midst of World War I, that Britain and France (pitted against the Germans, Austrians and Ottoman Turks) made their infamous Sykes-Picot agreement. In grand imperial style, they used this agreement to divide up the Middle East between them.

It was a daring move, considering that the war was at a stalemate and the two allies did not know if they were going to win the struggle. Nonetheless, they went ahead with the agreement and in doing so made a number of decisions that continue to shape the region to this day.

Besides bringing traditional European imperialism forward into the Twentieth Century, what made Sykes-Picot infamous was the fact that it broke a significant previous promise made to the Arabs. By 1916 the Arabs had taken to the battlefield against the Turks. For their doing so, the British had promised to support the creation of a large Arab state.

But this promise had always clashed with the imperial ambitions of Britain and France, and so, in the end, they secretly conspired to betray their non-Western ally. Among the eventual consequences of this betrayal, the “Arab state” was confined to what is, today, Saudi Arabia; Palestine (which originally was to be part of the Arab state) would become a “national home for the Jews”; Syria went to the French, and much of the rest of the region was given over to the British.

The Sykes-Picot agreement allowed for one further change. It made possible a state for the Kurds – a people who constituted the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East. This state, known as Kurdistan, was to be carved out of territory within the eventually defeated Ottoman Empire. This intent was publicly confirmed in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920.

The Kurdish leaders, who by this time must have been aware of the Western powers’ betrayal of the Arabs, therefore should not have been surprised when, despite the treaty, the British and French betrayed them as well. The 1923 Treaty of Lucerne amended the Treaty of Sevres, and sure enough, the state of Kurdistan was omitted. The lands that would have made up the Kurdish nation instead become parts of Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Thus, the Kurds remained stateless. However, they never gave up statehood as a goal.

Now we can fast-forward to March 19, 2003, the date that President George W. Bush took the fateful step of invading Iraq. Bush had an array of flimsy excuses for doing this: Saddam Hussein’s non-existent nuclear weapons and other WMD, Saddam’s alleged plot to assassinate Bush’s father, the dream (really the nightmare) of forceable “regime change” as a way of making the Middle East safe for the U.S. and Israel, or perhaps just the cutting loose of neoconservative bellicosity. Whatever the President’s depth of ignorance led him to anticipate, the invasion set loose forces that Bush and his White House successors have been unable to control. Among these are the consequences that followed the falling apart of Iraq.

Kurdish Issue Resurfaces

Like the destruction of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the destruction of Iraq that resulted from the 2003 U.S. invasion opened up a Pandora’s Box of potential territorial changes. Not the least of these was the possible creation of the state of Kurdistan.

Like the Arabs in World War I, the Kurds became a fighting ally of the West in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent Syrian civil war. The region’s chaos allowed for the emergence of the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (aka ISIS, ISIL, and Daesh). ISIS turned out to be a grim and brutal manifestation of religious fanaticism run amok. Its growth threatened just about

every state in the region, as well as the citizens of the European Union and the U.S.

If stability was to eventually prevail, ISIS had to be defeated, and the Kurds played (and continue to play) a notable role in this fight. There is little doubt that one of their goals in doing so is to create favorable conditions for a Kurdish state.

For all those regional powers (Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq) seeking to reestablish the status quo ante, the prospect of an independent Kurdish state is anathema. Each state has Kurdish minorities and is afraid that an independent Kurdistan, even one carved out of another state's territory, would lead to or exacerbate Kurdish insurgencies in their own countries. The possibility that such a state might instead cause a *lessening* of minority Kurdish restiveness through voluntary immigration seems not to have occurred to the leaders of Iran, Turkey and Syria.

As Jonathan Cook has recently made clear, the question of Kurdish independence has been complicated by Israeli influence in this matter. The Israelis have long been keen on an independent Kurdistan not because, as some of their politicians disingenuously claim, the Kurds have a "moral right" to a state (so do the Palestinians). Rather, the Israelis have an undeclared but official policy aimed at "Balkanizing" the Arab states. They have been encouraging "sectarian and ethnic discord" in order to destabilize their neighbors. In other words, Israeli support of the Kurds is an effort to weaken primarily Iraq, and secondarily, Syria and Iran (Turkey is just "collateral damage" in this process).

The Best Option

One can hardly blame the Kurds for taking help where they can get it – in this case from Israel – in a fight for independence that has been going on for centuries. Nonetheless, one can also understand that Israeli meddling seriously frightens the other states affected.

Leaving aside the Israeli issue for a moment, the question that should guide policy here is: can Iraq be reestablished as a viable state? Putting the question more informally, in 2003 a rather stupid American president – working under the influence of Zionists, witless neoconservatives, and Iraqi nationalists bearing false witness – knocked the Iraqi Humpty Dumpty off its precarious wall. Can it be put back together again? The answer is, well, maybe – but there seems to be only two ways to do this. One is a near-genocidal war waged by regional powers against the Kurds. Alternatively, Iraq might be resurrected if the Kurds are willing to settle for half a loaf in the form of being an autonomous part of a confederated state.

Right now the future is uncertain. One has the impression that the Turks and Iraqis (whose forces assaulted the Kurdish claimed city of Kirkuk on Oct. 16) are quite willing to try to solve the matter by prolonged war. This would be a big mistake. It would lead to an Iraq that may be technically united but in truth would be even weaker than it is now, and not really independent at all.

Its northern region would probably be under the de facto control of Turkey and Iran, and the rest of the country would continue to be in a decentralized mess experiencing an ongoing sectarian civil war. On the other hand, a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue could lead to the stabilization of the rest of Iraq as a confederated state. Also, as part of a confederated Iraq, Kurdistan's autonomy can preclude an independent foreign policy, thus minimizing Israeli influence.

Despite the recent Kurdish vote for independence, their leaders must know this can only be made real if they can win a prolonged war against Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Israel is not in a geographical position to effectively help them do this. And so, the Kurds probably cannot endure such a struggle. That leaves them with only one rational choice.

The Kurds are now closer to independent status than at any time since the near-miss days of World War I. Their best strategy is to make the best (if not the most) of that status within a confederated Iraq and end their interaction with Israel. This has to be better than a near-genocidal war in which they would be the victims. However – and this is the usual question in such situations – will the emotions roiling on all sides allow sanity to prevail?

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Busting Upward the Military Budget

The Trump administration and Congress are in accord on one thing: the budget constraints on military spending must be busted to sustain overseas bases and to fund local pork projects, writes Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

Although the Senate and House of Representatives have both passed the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2018 at the gargantuan sum of \$700 billion, most of the largesse has little to do with defending the United States and much to do with policing the informal American overseas empire. Thus, at least some trimming to the huge amount is possible.

Of the \$700 billion, about \$640 billion is the Pentagon's base budget and another \$60 billion dollars is allocated to fight simultaneous wars in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. This whopping amount exceeds last year's \$619 billion, thus flouting the "sequestration" spending caps in the 2011 Budget Control Act. Trump and the Republicans want to use budget savings from domestic spending to finance the defense spending increases. However, they will need Democratic votes to break the sequestration caps; the Democrats' price for doing so is a logrolling that would also require increases in domestic spending.

Yet the Budget Control Act has helped control federal spending, budget deficits, and debt accumulation and should be retained. Apparently, when conservatives tout slimming down government, they don't seem to think the Defense Department is part of the federal bureaucracy.

The idea is preposterous that a country which alone accounts for about half the world's defense budget needs more money to keep the readiness of its forces high and to rebuild a military that has been depleted by long, senseless wars in the Middle East and South Asia. The Defense Department is already slathered with over \$600 billion a year and just needs to reallocate some of its funds to improve readiness and conduct rebuilding.

Yet members of Congress always propose amendments adding extra weapons systems, such as ships and aircraft, to the budget that the Defense Department doesn't request. Not coincidentally, all this wasteful and unneeded pork spending just happens to be in these members' home states. Such pork is a regular occurrence in defense budgeting and explains why the Defense budget is so massive, yet force readiness and equipment depletion remain problems.

Other wasteful spending perennially occurs on stateside military bases that even DoD would like to close, but members of Congress like to keep open because it subsidizes local economies they represent. The Pentagon offered a useful proposal that would have opened another round of base closures to save money. These savings could have been put toward readiness and rebuilding. Both the House and Senate rejected it for the aforementioned parochial reason.

Overseas Bases

To save even more money, the United States should close some overseas bases and

decommission military units at those bases. Essentially, the military is like a fleet of expensive sports cars that is short on money for gas, repair, and maintenance. The overseas bases and forces need to be pruned so that the remaining forces at home have enough money for operations and support. With a \$20 trillion debt, the United States is overextended in the world; the U.S. half of global defense spending is paid for out less than a quarter of the world's GDP. Pruning the U.S. overseas footprint will help reduce the overextension.

Another way to save money would be to end unneeded and counterproductive wars in the Middle East and South Asia, which lead to increased blowback anti-U.S. terrorism. Sen. Rand Paul, R- Kentucky, laudably proposed repealing outdated congressional authorizations for the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, passed in 2001 and 2002. Congress was so scared of the proposal that it didn't even get a vote.

These two authorizations for the use of force should have been terminated. Going even further, one could question counterproductive (for the same reason as the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars), congressionally unapproved, and therefore unconstitutional air and drone wars in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, and Libya. Lives and even more money could be saved if they were also ended.

Therefore, eliminating pork spending, unneeded and counterproductive wars overseas, and excessive bases and forces at home and around the world could free up more money for military readiness and any post-war rebuilding necessary without ending the sequestration limits on defense spending needed to control budget deficits and debt accumulation, which are dragging the U.S. economy and preventing higher economic growth rates.

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Human Anxiety in Late-Stage Capitalism

Superficial explanations for today's social anxiety and political discontent miss the underlying reality: the crisis of late-stage capitalism in its frantic death throes, explains poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

A number of recent press articles, including an over 8,000-word feature piece in The New York Times have asked, to quote the Times' headline, "Why Are More

American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?"

Although the question was proffered, the reporters and editors responsible for the articles remain resolutely obtuse to the obvious: The bughouse crazy environment of late-stage capitalist culture evokes classic fight-or-flight responses attendant to episodes of severe anxiety and panic attacks.

The word panic has its derivation in reference to Pan, the Greek god of wilderness and wildness, of the animal body encoded within human beings and its attendant animalistic imperatives. To wit, deracinate an animal from its natural habitat and it will evince, on an instinctual basis, a fight-or-flight response.

If caged, the unfortunate creature will pace the confines of its imprisonment, chew and tear at its fur and flesh, become irritable, enervated, languish and even die from the deprivation of the environment it was born to inhabit. A caged animal, even if the unfortunate creature endures captivity, is not the entity nature conceived; the living being has been reduced to A Thing That Waits For Lunch.

Human beings, animals that we are, respond in a similar fashion. Experiencing anxiety is among the ways our innate animal spirits react to the capitalist cage. Inundate a teenager with the soul-defying criteria of the corporate/consumer state, with its overbearing, pre-careerist pressures, its paucity of communal eros, its demands, overt and implicit, to conform to a shallow, manic, nebulously defined yet oppressive societal order, and insist that those who cannot adapt, much less excel, are "losers" who are fated to become "basement dwellers" in their parents' homes or, for those who lack the privilege, be cast into homelessness, then the minds of the young or old alike are apt to be inundated with feelings of angst and dread.

Worse, if teenagers are culturally conditioned to believe said feelings and responses are exclusively experienced by weaklings, parasites, and losers then their suffering might fester to the point of emotional paralysis and suicidal inclinations.

No Real Remedies

What does the capitalist state offer as remedy? Obscenely profitable, corporately manufactured and widely prescribed psychoactive medications. Treatment, which, at best, merely masks symptoms and bestows the illusion of recovery.

As R. D. Laing observed: "What we call 'normal' is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being."

In short, it is insanity to be expected to adapt to socially acceptable insanity. Yet we are pressured to adapt to, thus internalize odious, groupthink concepts and tenets. To cite one such groupthink example: homelessness is natural to the human condition and is a communally acceptable situation.

Closer to fact: The problem of homelessness is the result of a societal-wide perception problem – the phenomenon is the very emblem of the scrambling, twisting, dissociating, and displacing of perception that capitalist propagandists specialize in. Homelessness would be considered a relic of a barbaric past if this very simple principle was applied: Having access to permanent shelter is a human right and not a privilege.

What kind of a vile, vicious people would deny that simple proposition? Those conditioned by a lingering Puritan/Calvinist mindset to believe: Punishment for resisting the usurpation of the fleeting hours of one's finite life must be severe. If the over-class can no longer get away with, as was once common practice in the Puritan/Calvinist tradition, public floggings to whip the labor force into line, then those who will not or cannot comply will be cast onto the cold, unforgiving concrete of a soulless cityscape.

It comes down to this, societies that are ridden with vast wealth inequity, due to the machinations of a rapacious over-class, create the obscenity known as homelessness. Moreover, the situation is only one of the numerous obscenities inherent to state capitalism. Obscenities that include, events that are dominating the present news cycle, e.g., the predations of a lecherous movie mogul, to the sub-cretinous doings and pronouncements of a Chief of State who is a bloated, bloviating, two-legged toxic waste dump.

Trump, No Aberration

How is it then, liberals fail to grasp the fact that the Trump presidency is not an aberration; rather, his ascension to power should be regarded as being among the high probability variables of late-stage capitalism and empire building? The psychopathic, tangerine-tinged clown Trump is the embodiment of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, a development that is concomitant to over-expanded empires. Thus he will continue to flounce deeper into the quagmire of crash-engendering, economic legerdemain and perpetual war.

Empires are death cults, and death cults, on a subliminal basis, long for their own demise. Paradoxically, the collective mindset of imperium, even as it thrusts across the expanse of the world, renders itself insular, cut off from culturally enhancing novelty, as all the while, the homeland descends into a psychical swamp of churning madness.

A draining of the swamp of the collective mind cannot come to pass, for the swamp and citizenry are one. Withal, the likes of leaders such as Trump rise from and are made manifest by the morass of the culture itself. In a swamp, the gospel of rebirth and redemption is heard in the song of humus. New life rises from its compost.

In the presence of Trump's debased mind and tombified carcass, one is privy to arias of rot. While Hillary Clinton's monotonous tempo was the dirge of a taxidermist – cold, desiccated of heart, and devoid of life's numinous spark – Trump's voice carries the depraved cacophony of a Célinean fool's parade ... its trajectory trudging towards the end of empire.

As liberals new BFFL (Best Friend for Life) George W. Bush might ask, "Is our liberals learning."

In a word, no. For example, the collective psyche of U.S. culture as been enflamed by the revelations that actresses were coerced into sexual encounters with a movie mogul whose power in the industry was only matched, even enhanced, by his sadistic nature. The staff of his company assisted, was complicit in, or remained silent about his lechery, as did the whole of the movie industry and the entertainment press. All as NFL athletes are being threatened with expulsion from the League if they kneel during the national anthem.

The Great Unspoken

Yet the great unspoken remains: The enabling of and submission to the degradation, exploitation and tyranny, and the lack of resistance thereof share a common and singular factor: The careerism of all concerned. The cultural milieu concomitant to capitalism is at the rotten root and noxious blossoming of the situation.



Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 cinematic barnburner "Two or Three Things I Know About Her" should be required viewing for those unaware or in denial of the acuity of the film's theme i.e., becoming enmeshed within the psychical landscape of dominance, degradation, and submission inherent to and inseparable from capitalist/consumer culture will cause one to become party to societal sanctioned prostitution. When life is negotiated within a collective value system that devalues and deadens the individual's inner life thus warps every human transaction, anomie descends, the worst among a people ascend to positions of power.

"Panic is the sudden realization that everything around you is alive." – William S. Burroughs, from Ghost of Chance

When friends visited me in New York, where I lived for decades, I would take them on walking tours through the city. We would cross the Westside Highway and stroll the pedestrian walk along the Hudson River, or cross the East River by walking across the Brooklyn Bridge.

The effect of these excursions on people was often profound ... the combined elements of the elemental beauty of the rivers and vastness of the city's architecture and scope, clamor, and the dense interweaving of traditional ethnic customs and ad hoc social codes of New Yorkers often would heighten the visitors' senses and open them to larger, more intricate awareness of themselves and extant reality ... the freeways of the contemporary mind (conditioned to be constantly engaged in manic motion, with one's mind either frenzied by an obsession with performing (ultimately futile) maneuvers directed to saving time – or stalled at a frustration inducing standstill) were replaced by the exigencies of life at street level, i.e., novel situations that had to be apprehended and negotiated.

The possibilities of life seemed greater. The crimped eros of insular suburban thought became loosened before the city's intricacies and expansiveness. Although: Not all, or even a scant few, New Yorkers can maintain the state of being. Few of us can live by Rilke's resolve to "make every moment holy." Life, in the city, becomes grotesquely distorted ... High rents, inflicted by hyper-gentrification, in combination with the deification of success and its cult of careerism overwhelm one's psyche ... There is so far to fall.

Angst (the word originally can be traced to the ancient Greek deity Ananke, the immovable by prayer and offering bitch Goddess of Necessity and the root word of anxiety) clamps down one's sense of awareness. Ananke dominates the lives of the non-privileged citizenry while Narcissus, Trump's, the Clintons', et.al. and their financial and cultural elitists' patron God rules the day. The pantheon of possibility has been decimated, a cultural cleansing has been perpetrated, by

the egoist caprice of the beneficiaries of the late capitalist dictatorship of money.

Hence, we arrive at the primal wisdom tacitly conveyed by anxiety-borne states of fight or flight. Due to the reality that capitalism, on both an individual and collective basis, drives individuals into madness, all as the system destroys forest and field, ocean and sea and the soul-scape of all who live under its rapacious dominion, our plight comes down to this: We either struggle and strive, by and any and all means, to end the system – or it will end us.

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Understanding the ‘Fake News’ Hysteria

The mainstream media’s hysteria over “fake news” is aimed less at the few instances of intentionally fabricated stories than at well-reported articles that challenge the U.S. government’s dubious official narratives, says David P. Hamilton.

By David P. Hamilton

For the most part, “fake news” is a fake concept designed by the corporate news media to discredit those who challenge the official U.S. hegemonic narrative. The typical MSM fake news accusation starts with some egregious fictionalization and then morphs over to the real targets: the subversives, those who would dispute foundational elements of the official history or its recent approved updates.

These subversive elements are likely to question important myths, such as the necessity of the nuclear incineration of Hiroshima or – before the Iraq War – Saddam Hussein possessing WMD, and hence must be silenced.

There are people in this world who write what they know to be fiction and try to pass it off as fact. Many of them work for the CIA and related institutions. Then, there are satirists like The Onion who write fictionalized truth. These professional prevaricators are not what draws the ire of the corporate “news.”

The approved rendition of U.S. history is a composite of lies, euphemisms and

dubious rationales taught in schools, public and private, since the nation's founding. It is continuously updated by the corporate news media. There is an army of PR types and psy-op warriors working constantly on this project; some private sector, some public, who often switch roles and sectors, but work hand-in-glove regardless.

The real fake news is the fake narrative that flows perpetually forth from these functionaries of the MSM to dominate the discourse which the billionaire owners allow voiced via their facilities. In this manner, we are all being played, all the time, and have been since birth.

For the record, the official narrative follows certain principles. Among them are:

1. The U.S. is never wrong in any conflict with other nations.
2. If the U.S. ever happens to be wrong, it was a reasonable mistake.
3. U.S. intentions are always benign and honorable.
4. U.S. judgment is always objective and fair.
5. The U.S. is a democracy and always supports democracy.
6. Americans are a peaceful people.
7. Americans are a superior people, so American lives matter more.
8. Americans are always on the high moral ground because God is on our side.
9. The word of our leaders is sufficient proof of any assertion.
10. The U.S. is the greatest nation in history.
11. Private is always better than public.
12. Individualism is always better than collectivism.

One-Sided 'News'

In application of these principles, NPR's "All Things Considered" never considers the Maduro government's position in Venezuela, nor is Noam Chomsky, often voted the world's foremost public intellectual, to be heard on this "public" radio. Nor will North Korea's negotiating position relative to their nuclear weapons program be explained. It requires the U.S. military to refrain from conducting war games on North Korea's border in exchange for freezing their weapons program; unmentionable because the U.S. militaristic leadership is unwilling to consider the proposal and because it sounds too rational.

You will hear from the world's greatest exporter of terrorism that Iran, which hasn't invaded a neighbor since Darius I in 500 BCE, is the world's greatest exporter of terrorism. And that apartheid Israel is a democracy. And that the Saudis are jolly guys in silk robes you want to hold hands and dance with.

Are the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, et al, lying knowingly? Not

exactly. The news media doesn't have to invent the lies, only repeat them. They are mainly the stenographers of governmental agencies that provide the raw material to be quoted, invariably substantiating the validity of the official position. The owners of those news outlets likely believe that narrative, but mainly they want you to believe it.

The pundits and talking heads of those news media, the on-camera personalities, must think within the parameters the official narrative or they wouldn't have been hired to the position of highly paid spokesperson for it. Wolf Blitzer is a Zionist true believer who used to do P.R. for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Anderson Cooper is a Vanderbilt heir worth \$100 million.

How objective can you be about issues of income inequality when you've been the top .0001% for six or seven generations? And if one dare to go off the reservation, the next thing you know you'll be working for RT for a lot less money like Ed Schultz.

This process of narrative creation is principally a matter of focus, parameters and interpretation. On major U.S. cable news channels, the great bulk of coverage involves domestic politics, mass murders and "natural" disasters. In Europe, the focus is far more on international relationships.

The spectrum of opinion allowed in the U.S. is limited to the point that Hillary Clinton is considered "the left" and the anti-capitalist left might as well not exist. The range of permissible opinion typically stretches from pro-capitalist social liberals to pro-capitalist social conservatives. This is hardly surprising if one considers that billionaire investors own the controlling interest in all major U.S. news media. One outcome is that the U.S. is the only major industrial nation without a significant socialist political party.

The private interests that own the news media don't have to get together and compare notes because they all have a high level of ruling-class consciousness that includes shared economic fundamentals, e.g., socialize debts and privatize profits. Their message control is described far more clearly by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman in *Manufacturing Consent*, chapter 1 on "the propaganda model".

Dubious Conformity

It is generally accurate to assume that there is an entirely reasonable interpretation of news events that contradicts what you are being told to believe by the corporate news media. Cases of official duplicity are notorious and legion: the Gulf of Tonkin, WMD in Iraq, the black kid killed by the police had a gun, etc.

Central among the American myths is that the myth surrounding the origins of the

Cold War. This myth would have you believe that the Soviet Union in 1945, despite having lost over 30 million of its citizens during two German invasions in less than 30 years and with a devastated infrastructure, would suddenly decide to invade Western Europe, into the teeth of the world's sole nuclear armed military power, the USA, and its various formidable allies.

Furthermore, that the Soviets would do this despite having achieved their major war aims, a divided and demilitarized Germany and a "sphere of influence" between themselves and Germany, an arrangement agreed upon by Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt at Yalta. This Cold War creation myth of Soviet aggressive intent is essentially a U.S. cover story to mask U.S. aggression disguised as defensive.

Like Germans in 1939 believing the Polish horse cavalry was about to attack their tanks, Americans bought this spurious interpretation. These steady U.S. "defensive" efforts have now brought NATO, essentially an agency of U.S. foreign policy, to Russia's very doorstep in the Baltic states, with Ukraine up next for NATO membership. Who is the aggressor?

Every other late Twentieth Century storyline of official U.S. history had to conform to the basic foundational concept of the U.S. defending freedom against an expansionist Soviet Union/Russia bent on destroying us. And so, today, we have thousands of NATO troops, innumerable missile batteries and nuclear-armed aircraft carrier-led naval battle groups patrolling Russia's borders and shorelines, including the Black Sea, because "THEY are the aggressor."

Try to imagine the U.S. reaction to a Russian fleet cruising the Gulf of Mexico, although that might be difficult given that 11 of the world's 17 aircraft carriers, a uniquely aggressive weapon, belong to the U.S., all with unlimited range, and Russia's only puny little single carrier rarely leaves Russian territorial waters and doesn't have enough range to get to the U.S. and back.

The U.S. has an estimated 800 foreign military bases in well over 100 countries while Russia has three in two countries. U.S. military budget is at least ten times that of Russia's and was just increased by 10 percent while the Russians just reduced theirs by 7 percent. Who is the aggressor?

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Iraqi Forces Clash with Kurdish Militia

Iraqi military forces have seized strategic positions around the oil-rich city of Kirkuk as a showdown over Kurdish calls for independence enters a dangerous new phase, writes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

Overreaction in Baghdad, Ankara and Tehran to what in essence was a symbolic vote for independence by Iraqi Kurds last month has brought the Iraqi government to the brink of full-scale war with Kurdish authorities over the disputed, oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

According to the latest reports, the Iraqi army on Sunday night launched a military operation to take back the city and its environs. So far it has seized a military base occupied by Kurdish forces as well as Kirkuk airport.

The Iraqi army had built up its forces outside the oil-producing city over the past several days while the Kurdish peshmerga militia re-enforced the town with 6,000 fighters. According to peshmerga intelligence, the Iranian army, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and Shi'ite militias joined Iraq's military build-up.

Some peshmerga units fled from advancing Iraqi forces on Monday, while others have stood their ground and engaged in clashes. The long dispute between Baghdad and the Kurds over control of Kirkuk may well come to a head if the Iraqi army enters the city, where fighting could be intense.

All this came about because of a referendum for independence held on Sept. 25, in which 93 percent of Kurds voted to leave Iraq. However, Kurdish leaders repeatedly made clear they would not declare independence, despite their overwhelming mandate. Instead they want a one- to two-year negotiation with Baghdad to achieve sovereignty.

That has been flatly rejected by the central government, which asserted that there would be no negotiations for independence. Regionally, the Kurds also are isolated. Only one country openly supported the referendum and said it would recognize Kurdish independence – Israel.

Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed quasi-independence since the 2003 U.S. invasion. It has its own flag, army, and government ministries, and issues its own visas to foreign visitors. It has a robust oil industry, selling petroleum illegally through Turkey. Massive corruption and mismanagement however has not allowed the Kurds to build a modern state. It has no railroad, only one stretch of a highway

inside the Kurdish capital city Erbil; government workers go months without pay; and the regional government cannot provide electricity without frequent power cuts throughout the day.

A Risky Fantasy

Despite a legitimate argument to be a sovereign state, the idea of independence in the current political climate was a fantasy.

Except for the Kurds, it was a meaningless referendum. The vote was also a political move to build support for the ruling Kurdish Democratic Party in presidential and parliamentary elections in two weeks, on Nov. 1. Otherwise, this referendum was not unlike a 2005 independence vote, which also garnered more than 90 percent in favor, but which also went nowhere.

The Kurdish vote has made negotiations with Baghdad over oil, Kirkuk and other disputed territories virtually impossible, as the central government demanded Erbil first cancel the referendum's results. A planned 2007 referendum for the people of Kirkuk to decide whether they wanted to belong to Baghdad or Erbil was never held. Instead the fate of the city appears set to be decided by force of arms.

Given the tense, but stable situation, last month's referendum could have been simply ignored by its opponents. It would have died of its own accord. Instead the governments of Iraq, Turkey and Iran have severely overreacted, giving it more legitimacy than it had on its own.

Turkey and Iran feared the vote could stir up their own restive Kurdish populations who already have been agitating for years. Turkey has fought a 30-year insurgency against its Kurds, and Iran periodically puts down uprisings. Turkish and Iranian Kurds did not need an Iraqi Kurdish referendum to continue pursuing their separatist aims.

For Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, however, the overly strong reaction to the vote bolsters his domestic political support ahead of parliamentary elections next April. It is a reckless electioneering strategy risking bloodshed.

On Sept. 29, Baghdad imposed an international flight ban on the Kurdish region. On Sunday, Iran closed its three border crossings with the Kurdish region and has cut off all trade.

Border crossings from Turkey have been taken over inside Turkish territory by the central government. But so far Turkey has not cut off billions of dollars of exports to the landlocked Iraqi Kurds. Ankara is still importing the banned

Kurdish oil, which Baghdad has demanded be sold through the central government.

The Iraqi military has been conducting joint exercises with Turkish and Iranian troops just kilometers from the Kurdish borders with those countries. Baghdad gave Erbil a 2 a.m. Sunday deadline to cancel the referendum and pull the peshmerga out of Kirkuk.

According to a local media report, Baghdad's other demands were to turn over Kirkuk airport; return an Iraqi military base; give back all oil fields; hand over ISIS prisoners held by the peshmerga; permit the Iraqi army to return to positions it vacated when ISIS attacked the city in 2014, which allowed the peshmerga to take control of the city; and remove the Kurdish governor of Kirkuk governorate, who was fired by the Iraqi parliament but who has refused to step down. The Iraqi army now has enforced the first three demands.

Like the rest of the world, the U.S. opposed the referendum and urged negotiations. On Friday, Secretary of Defense James Mattis said: "We can't turn on each other right now. We don't want this to go to a shooting situation. These are issues that are longstanding in some cases ... We're going to have to recalibrate and move these back to a way (in which) we solve them politically and work them out with compromised solutions."

Yet Washington was unable to stop the Iraqi army's advance on Kirkuk and the possibility of a new conflict breaking out in the Middle East.

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