

Making Russia 'The Enemy'

Exclusive: Despite conflicting accounts about who leaked the Democratic emails, the frenzy over an alleged Russian role is driving the U.S. deeper into a costly and dangerous New Cold War, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The rising hysteria about Russia is best understood as fulfilling two needs for Official Washington: the Military Industrial Complex's transitioning from the "war on terror" to a more lucrative "new cold war" – and blunting the threat that a President Trump poses to the neoconservative/liberal-interventionist foreign-policy establishment.

By hyping the Russian "threat," the neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks, who include much of the mainstream U.S. news media, can guarantee bigger military budgets from Congress. The hype also sets in motion a blocking maneuver to impinge on any significant change in direction for U.S. foreign policy under Trump.

Some Democrats even hope to stop Trump from ascending to the White House by having the Central Intelligence Agency, in effect, lobby the electors in the Electoral College with scary tales about Russia trying to fix the election for Trump.

The electors meet on Dec. 19 when they will formally cast their votes, supposedly reflecting the judgments of each state's voters, but conceivably individual electors could switch their ballots from Trump to Hillary Clinton or someone else.

On Thursday, liberal columnist E.J. Dionne Jr. joined the call for electors to flip, writing: "The question is whether Trump, Vladimir Putin and, perhaps, Clinton's popular-vote advantage give you sufficient reason to blow up the system."

That Democrats would want the CIA, which is forbidden to operate domestically in part because of its historic role in influencing elections in other countries, to play a similar role in the United States shows how desperate the Democratic Party has become.

And, even though The New York Times and other big news outlets are reporting as flat fact that Russia hacked the Democratic email accounts and gave the information to WikiLeaks, former British Ambassador Craig Murray, a close associate of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, told the London Daily Mail that

he personally received the email data from a “disgusted” Democrat.

Murray said he flew from London to Washington for a clandestine handoff from one of the email sources in September, receiving the package in a wooded area near American University.

“Neither of [the leaks, from the Democratic National Committee or Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta] came from the Russians,” Murray said, adding: “the source had legal access to the information. The documents came from inside leaks, not hacks.”

Murray said the insider felt “disgust at the corruption of the Clinton Foundation and the tilting of the primary election playing field against Bernie Sanders.” Murray added that his meeting was with an intermediary for the Democratic leaker, not the leaker directly.

[**Update:** Murray subsequently said his contact with the intermediary at American University was not for the purpose of obtaining a batch of the purloined emails, as the Daily Mail reported, since WikiLeaks already had them. He said the Mail simply added that detail to the story, but Murray declined to explain why he had the meeting at A.U. with the whistleblower or an associate.]

If Murray’s story is true, it raises several alternative scenarios: that the U.S. intelligence community’s claims about a Russian hack are false; that Russians hacked the Democrats’ emails for their own intelligence gathering without giving the material to WikiLeaks; or that Murray was deceived about the identity of the original leaker.

But the uncertainty creates the possibility that the Democrats are using a dubious CIA assessment to reverse the outcome of an American presidential election, in effect, making the CIA party to a preemptive domestic “regime change.”

Delayed Autopsy

All of this maneuvering also is delaying the Democratic Party’s self-examination into why it lost so many white working-class voters in normally Democratic strongholds, such as Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

Rather than national party leaders taking the blame for pre-selecting a very flawed candidate and ignoring all the warning signs about the public’s resistance to this establishment choice, Democrats have pointed fingers at almost everyone else – from FBI Director James Comey for briefly reviving Clinton’s email investigation, to third-party candidates who siphoned off votes, to the archaic Electoral College which negates the fact that Clinton did win the

national popular vote – and now to the Russians.

While there may be some validity to these various complaints, the excessive frenzy that has surrounded the still-unproven claims that the Russian government surreptitiously tilted the election in Trump's favor creates an especially dangerous dynamic.

On one level, it has led Democrats to support Orwellian/ McCarthyistic concepts, such as establishing "black lists" for Internet sites that question Official Washington's "conventional wisdom" and thus are deemed purveyors of "Russian propaganda" or "fake news."

On another level, it cements the Democratic Party as America's preeminent "war party," favoring an escalating New Cold War with Russia by ratcheting up economic sanctions against Moscow, and even seeking military challenges to Russia in conflict zones such as Syria and Ukraine.

One of the most dangerous aspects of a prospective Hillary Clinton presidency was that she would have appointed neocons, such as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and her husband, Project for the New American Century co-founder Robert Kagan, to high-level foreign policy positions.

Though that risk may have passed assuming Clinton's Electoral College defeat on Monday, Democrats now are excitedly joining the bash-Russia movement, making it harder to envision how the party can transition back into its more recent role as the "peace party" (at least relative to the extremely hawkish Republicans).

Trading Places

The potential trading places of the two parties in that regard – with Trump favoring geopolitical détente and the Democrats beating the drums for more military confrontations – augurs poorly for the Democrats regaining their political footing anytime soon.

If Democratic leaders press ahead, in alliance with neoconservative Republicans, on demands for escalating the New Cold War with Russia, they could precipitate a party split between Democratic hawks and doves, a schism that likely would have occurred if Clinton had been elected but now may happen anyway, albeit without the benefit of the party holding the White House.

The first test of this emerging Democratic-neocon alliance may come over Trump's choice for Secretary of State, Exxon-Mobil's chief executive Rex Tillerson, who doesn't exhibit the visceral hatred of Russian President Vladimir Putin that Democrats are encouraging.

As an international business executive, Tillerson appears to share Trump's real-politik take on the world, the idea that doing business with rivals makes more sense than conspiring to force "regime change" after "regime change."

Over the past several decades, the "regime change" approach has been embraced by both neocons and liberal interventionists and has been implemented by both Republican and Democratic administrations. Sometimes, it's done through war and other times through "color revolutions" – always under the idealistic guise of "democracy promotion" or "protecting human rights."

But the problem with this neo-imperialist strategy has been that it has failed miserably to improve the lives of the people living in the "regime-changed" countries. Instead, it has spread chaos across wide swaths of the globe and has now even destabilized Europe.

Yet, the solution, as envisioned by the neocons and their liberal-hawk understudies, is simply to force more "regime change" medicine down the throats of the world's population. The new "great" idea is to destabilize nuclear-armed Russia by making its economy scream and by funding as many anti-Putin elements as possible to create the nucleus for a "color revolution" in Moscow.

To justify that risky scheme, there has been a broad expansion of anti-Russian propaganda now being funded with tens of millions of dollars in taxpayer money as well as being pushed by government officials giving off-the-record briefings to mainstream media outlets.

However, as with earlier "regime change" plans, the neocons and liberal hawks never think through the scenario to the end. They always assume that everything is going to work out fine and some well-dressed "opposition leader" who has been to their think-tank conferences will simply ascend to the top job.

Remember, in Iraq, it was going to be Ahmed Chalabi who was beloved in Official Washington but broadly rejected by the Iraqi people. In Libya, there has been a parade of U.S.-approved "unity" leaders who have failed to pull that country together.

In Ukraine, Nuland's choice – Arseniy "Yats is the guy" Yatsenyuk – resigned amid broad public disapproval earlier this year after pushing through harsh cuts in social programs, even as the U.S.-backed regime officials in Kiev continued to plunder Ukraine's treasury and misappropriate Western economic aid.

Nuclear-Armed Destabilization

But the notion of destabilizing nuclear-armed Russia is even more hare-brained than those other fiascos. The neocon/liberal-hawk assumption is that Russians –

pushed to the brink of starvation by crippling Western sanctions – will overthrow Putin and install a new version of Boris Yeltsin who would then let U.S. financial advisers return with their neoliberal “shock therapy” of the 1990s and again exploit Russia’s vast resources.

Indeed, it was the Yeltsin era and its Western-beloved “shock therapy” that created the desperate conditions before the rise of Putin with his autocratic nationalism, which, for all its faults, has dramatically improved the lives of most Russians.

So, the more likely result from the neocon/liberal-hawk “regime change” plans for Moscow would be the emergence of someone even more nationalistic – and likely far less stable – than Putin, who is regarded even by his critics as cold and calculating.

The prospect of an extreme Russian nationalist getting his or her hands on the Kremlin’s nuclear codes should send chills up and down the spines of every American, indeed every human being on the planet. But it is the course that key national Democrats appear to be on with their increasingly hysterical comments about Russia.

The Democratic National Committee issued a statement on Wednesday accusing Trump of giving Russia “an early holiday gift that smells like a payoff. ... It’s rather easy to connect the dots. Russia meddled in the U.S. election in order to benefit Trump and now he’s repaying Vladimir Putin by nominating Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson as secretary of state.”

Besides delaying a desperately needed autopsy on why Democrats did so badly in an election against the also-widely-disliked Donald Trump, the new blame-Russia gambit threatens to hurt the Democrats and their preferred policies in another way.

If Democrats vote in bloc against Tillerson or other Trump foreign-policy nominees – demanding that he appoint people acceptable to the neocons and the liberal hawks – Trump might well be pushed deeper into the arms of right-wing Republicans, giving them more on domestic issues to solidify their support on his foreign-policy goals.

That could end up redounding against the Democrats as they watch important social programs gutted in exchange for their own dubious Democratic alliance with the neocons.

Since the presidency of Bill Clinton, the Democrats have courted factions of the neocons, apparently thinking they are influential because they dominate many mainstream op-ed pages and Washington think tanks. In 1993, as a thank-you gift

to the neocon editors of The New Republic for endorsing him, Clinton appointed neocon ideologue James Woolsey as head of the CIA, one of Clinton's more disastrous personnel decisions.

But the truth appears to be that the neocons have much less influence across the U.S. electoral map than the Clintons think. Arguably, their pandering to a clique of Washington insiders who are viewed as warmongers by many peace-oriented Democrats may even represent a net negative when it comes to winning votes.

I've communicated with a number of traditional Democrats who didn't vote for Hillary Clinton because they feared she would pursue a dangerous neocon foreign policy. Obviously, that's not a scientific survey, but the anecdotal evidence suggests that Clinton's neocon connections could have been another drag on her campaign.

Assessing Russia

I also undertook a limited personal test regarding whether Russia is the police state that U.S. propaganda depicts, a country yearning to break free from the harsh grip of Vladimir Putin (although he registers 80 or so percent approval in polls).

During my trip last week to Europe, which included stops in Brussels and Copenhagen, I decided to take a side trip to Moscow, which I had never visited before. What I encountered was an impressive, surprisingly (to me at least) Westernized city with plenty of American and European franchises, including the ubiquitous McDonald's and Starbucks. (Russians serve the Starbucks gingerbread latte with a small ginger cookie.)

Though senior Russian officials proved unwilling to meet with me, an American reporter, at this time of tensions, Russia had little appearance of a harshly repressive society. In my years covering U.S. policies in El Salvador in the 1980s and Haiti in the 1990s, I have experienced what police states look and feel like, where death squads dump bodies in the streets. That was not what I sensed in Moscow, just a modern city with people bustling about their business under early December snowfalls.

The police presence in Red Square near the Kremlin was not even as heavy-handed as it is near the government buildings of Washington. Instead, there was a pre-Christmas festive air to the brightly lit Red Square, featuring a large skating rink surrounded by small stands selling hot chocolate, toys, warm clothing and other goods.

Granted, my time and contact with Russians were limited – since I don't speak

Russian and most of them don't speak English – but I was struck by the contrast between the grim images created by Western media and the Russia that I saw.

It reminded me of how President Ronald Reagan depicted Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua as a “totalitarian dungeon” with a militarized state ready to march on Texas, but what I found when I traveled to Managua was a third-world country still recovering from an earthquake and with a weak security structure despite the Contra war that Reagan had unleashed against Nicaragua.

In other words, “perception management” remains the guiding principle of how the U.S. government deals with the American people, scaring us with exaggerated tales of foreign threats and then manipulating our fears and our misperceptions.

As dangerous as that can be when we're talking about Nicaragua or Iraq or Libya, the risks are exponentially higher regarding Russia. If the American people are stampeded into a New Cold War based more on myths than reality, the minimal cost could be the trillions of dollars diverted from domestic needs into the Military Industrial Complex. The far-greater cost could be some miscalculation by either side that could end life on the planet.

So, as the Democrats chart their future, they need to decide if they want to leapfrog the Republicans as America's “war party” or whether they want to pull back from the escalation of tensions with Russia and start addressing the pressing needs of the American people.

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](#)).

American Martyr to Right-Wing Repression

In 1981, Ronald Reagan signaled Guatemala's right-wing regime to escalate its death-squad operations, a decision that led to the murder of American priest Stanley Rother, now a candidate for sainthood, writes Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

While *Time* magazine has named Donald Trump its “person of the year” for 2016, the Roman Catholic Church has honored a very different American by [nominating Father Stanley Rother for sainthood](#).

Father Stanley was a parish priest in Santiago Atitlan in Guatemala, from 1968 until a U.S.-backed death squad assassinated him in 1981. The inspiring life and tragic death of Father Stanley offer a counterpoint to the soulless, materialistic life of Donald Trump, and a life-affirming example of how an American can meet our country's international brutality head-on in his own life and respond with grace, humanity and extraordinary courage.

Stanley is the first person born in the United States that the Catholic Church has recognized as a martyr. That he was killed by forces that his own government trained and supported, and that they killed him for the very qualities that make him a saint in the eyes of the Church, should spur Americans to reflect on the untenable moral position of our country in the world.

Father Stanley arrived in Guatemala 14 years after the CIA overthrew its democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. After the coup, U.S.-backed military governments reversed Arbenz's modest land reforms and reinforced an economic and political power structure in which the descendants of 10 colonial families still own nearly all the productive land in Guatemala and rule over millions of poor indigenous people who they provide with only the barest minimum of healthcare, education and other public services.

A failed uprising by left-wing junior military officers at Guatemala's national military academy in 1960 marked the beginning of 36 years of civil war, in which at least 200,000 people were killed. A U.N.-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission identified 93 percent of the dead and disappeared as victims of the U.S.-backed Guatemalan army, police and death squads, while only 3 percent were killed by guerrillas fighting the government and the killers of the other 4 percent were unknown.

Because the war devolved into a genocide against the Mayan indigenous population, who were sympathetic to the rebels, 83 percent of all the victims of the war were indigenous people. Since the peace agreement that ended the civil war in 1996, there have been modest improvements in public services in many indigenous communities: the meager fruits of decades of armed resistance that were only the latest chapter in a 500-year struggle for dignity and self-determination in the face of invasion, occupation, colonialism, slavery and brutality.

U.S. Role in Guatemala's Civil War

Guatemala's civil war was characterized by successive waves of brutal government repression and the emergence of new armed resistance groups in different parts of the country.

The survivors of the 1960 uprising worked with the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT) and student groups to launch armed resistance in three different regions, but they numbered no more than 500 men under arms. In the mid 1960s, they were largely suppressed in Zacapa and Izabal provinces by the small 5,000-strong Guatemalan Army, supported by 2,000 paramilitaries and 1,000 U.S. special forces.

In Zacapa, the army's scorched earth policy killed an estimated 15,000 people, 50 times more than were active in the armed resistance. Meanwhile, U.S.-trained urban death squads headed by Colonel Rafael Arriaga abducted, tortured and killed PGT members in Guatemala City, notably 28 prominent labor leaders who were abducted and disappeared in March 1966.

After the first wave of armed resistance was already largely suppressed, the government set out to compile more extensive lists of "subversives." The model of "Committees Against Communism" set up by the CIA to kill thousands of Guatemalans after the 1954 coup was enhanced by a new telecommunications center and a new intelligence agency based in the presidential palace. The government compiled a database of people across the country, including leaders of farming co-ops and labor, student and indigenous activists, to provide ever-growing target lists for its death squads.

The CIA and the U.S. School of the Americas (SOA) have trained generations of U.S.-backed forces across Latin America and the world in this model of state terrorism, which is also still the model for U.S. special forces operations in Afghanistan and wherever U.S. occupation forces face resistance across the world.

Major Joseph Blair, the former director of instruction at the School of the Americas, described its training program to John Pilger in his film, The War You Don't See: "The doctrine that was taught was that, if you want information, you use physical abuse, false imprisonment, threats to family members, and killing. If you can't get the information you want, if you can't get the person to shut up or stop what they're doing, you assassinate them – and you assassinate them with one of your death squads."

The SOA moved from Panama to Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1984, and was rebranded as the "Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation" (WHINSEC) in 2001. U.S. officials have claimed that it no longer trains Latin American military officers in the use of torture and death squads, but Joe Blair has insisted that nothing really changed.

Testifying at a trial of SOA Watch protesters in 2002, Blair said, "There are no substantive changes besides the name. They teach the identical courses that I

taught, and changed the course names, and use the same manuals.”

Another element of public deception in such U.S. “counterinsurgency” programs is the notion that the targets are actual guerrillas. In reality, because guerrillas are elusive by definition, these programs really target civilian populations to make them “pay a price” for giving material and moral support to armed resistance groups.

As the U.S. was unleashing newly trained death squads to counter growing resistance in Iraq in January 2005 in what *Newsweek* called the “Salvador option,” – but might equally have called the “Guatemala option” – a U.S. officer was unusually candid about the real purpose of the campaign.

“The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving the terrorists,” he told *Newsweek*, “From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.” The unintended but unavoidable consequence of such a brutal strategy against civilian populations is to put them in a position where they have nothing left to lose by joining armed resistance groups, driving many to do so.

As Albert Camus wrote in *Combat*, the underground French Resistance newspaper that he edited in 1944 “you will be killed, deported, or tortured as a sympathizer just as easily as if you were a militant. Act: your risk will be no greater, and you will at least share in the peace at heart that the best of us take with them into the prisons.”

From Guatemala to Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. government has not yet found an effective response to Camus’s appeal. The only real solution would be to not put people in such an intolerable position in the first place, but that would conflict with the intractable “institutional myopia” that is endemic in U.S. official circles, under which, as historian Gabriel Kolko wrote in 1994, “options and decisions that are intrinsically dangerous and irrational become not merely plausible but the only form of reasoning about war and diplomacy that is possible in official circles.”

Father Stanley in Santiago Atitlan

Soon after Father Stanley arrived in Guatemala in 1968, Colonel Manuel Arana Ossorio was elected president in a far from democratic election in 1970. Arana declared a “state of siege” in the country. In one speech, he said he would “not hesitate to turn the country into a cemetery in order to pacify it.”

Arana’s four-year reign of terror killed another 20,000 people across the country and provoked the formation of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) among the Ixil people in the northern highlands, where the Army’s brutal counter-

insurgency strategy escalated to genocide in the 1980s.

In Santiago, Father Stanley drew on his own background in rural Oklahoma to establish a farmers' cooperative, a school, a hospital and a radio station, and he shared the hard life and conditions of his parishioners in the spirit of "liberation theology," like many other Catholic priests in Latin America at the time. He fell in love with the local Tz'utujil people and culture, and learned their language well enough to conduct church services in Tz'utujil and to translate the New Testament of the Bible into Tz'utujil.

In the mid-1970s, a new labor movement in Guatemala united indigenous farmers with other workers in new labor unions and rural farming co-ops like the one that Father Stanley helped to organize in Santiago. The new co-ops and labor organizing saved hundreds of thousands of indigenous people in the highlands from a way of life in which they had been forced to abandon their own land and crops to spend months of each year working in near-slavery conditions on coffee plantations along the Pacific coast.

In the late 1970s, Rodrigo Asturias, the eldest son of the Nobel-prize winning Guatemalan novelist Miguel Angel Asturias, returned from exile in Mexico and launched a new armed resistance group called the Revolutionary Organization of Armed People (ORPA). It was based in the Western highlands around Xela (Quetzaltenango), and also in the mountains and cloud forest above Father Stanley's parish in Santiago Atitlan.

The government saw the cooperatives and the Catholic Church as part of the civilian base of support for the EGP, ORPA and other armed groups, and so co-op leaders and Catholic activists became prime targets for the death squads. In Ixil, 163 village and co-op leaders and 143 Catholic activists were assassinated or disappeared between 1976 and 1978.

U.S. Support For Genocide in Ixil

The election of General Romeo Lucas Garcia as president in 1978 unleashed a new escalation of death squad violence in both Guatemala City and in the highlands. Once President Ronald Reagan restored U.S. support to the Guatemalan army in 1981, Lucas unleashed the genocide in Ixil for which senior Guatemalan officials are now being prosecuted.

Consortiumnews has reported extensively on declassified CIA documents that reveal how much the new Reagan administration knew of the atrocities being committed in Guatemala when it restored U.S. military aid and support, only months before Father Stanley was assassinated. The Carter administration had partially cut off military aid to Guatemala in response to the crimes of its

military rulers, so the CIA prepared extensive reviews of the situation in the country to justify the U.S. policy change that would unleash genocide in Ixil and tacitly approve death squad murders like Father Stanley's in Santiago.

In April 1981, Vernon Walters, the former Deputy Director of the CIA and Reagan's special envoy in the region, met with President Lucas in Guatemala. Walters's talking points for the meeting included the approval of \$3 million worth of military trucks and jeeps for the Guatemalan army. The U.S. also provided \$2 million in covert CIA funding for Guatemala that year and eventually delivered military transport planes and helicopters worth another \$45 million and 10 M41 tanks worth \$34 million.

As Walters told Lucas in April, "We wish to reestablish our traditional military supply and training relationship as soon as possible."

Walters' talking points to President Lucas continued, "If you could give me your assurance that you will take steps to halt official involvement in the killing of persons not involved with the guerrilla forces or their civilian support mechanism we would be in a much stronger position to defend successfully with the Congress a decision to begin to resume our military supply relationship with your government."

In this carefully worded statement, as *Consortiumnews* noted, the U.S. tacitly approved the killing, not just of people "involved with the guerrilla forces," but also of people involved with their "civilian support mechanism."

Other CIA documents detail the massacre and destruction of entire villages in Ixil, and acknowledge that the army treated the entire indigenous population as the "civilian support mechanism" of the guerrillas. One CIA report concluded, "The well documented belief by the army that the entire Ixil Indian population is pro-EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) has created a situation in which the army can be expected to give no quarter to combatants and non-combatants alike."

But the Reagan administration made a deliberate decision to increase U.S. military aid and moral and logistical support for these systematic war crimes, up to and including genocide.

Once the "traditional military supply and training relationship" was restored, Lieutenant Colonel George Maynes, the senior U.S. military adviser in Guatemala, sat down with General Benedicto Lucas, the president's brother, to plan "Operation Ash," in which 15,000 army troops swept through Ixil massacring indigenous people and burning hundreds of villages to ashes.

Death Squads In Santiago Atitlan

After the ORPA guerrillas began openly recruiting in Santiago Atitlan, the army set up a camp on the outskirts of the town in October 1980, from where it dispatched death squads to kill local leaders and activists. Ten people were killed or disappeared in the first two months.

At Christmas, Father Stanley wrote a public letter to fellow Catholics in Oklahoma: "The reality is that we are in danger. But we don't know when or what form the government will use to further repress the Church... Given the situation, I am not ready to leave here just yet... But if it is my destiny that I should give my life here, then so be it... I don't want to desert these people, and that is what will be said, even after all these years. There is still a lot of good that can be done under the circumstances. The shepherd cannot run at the first sign of danger."

On Jan. 7, 1981, Father Stanley wrote again, to a friend in Oklahoma City, and described how a parishioner was abducted by four armed men just 15 feet from the door of the church as he tried to reach sanctuary.

Father Stanley wrote: "by the time I ... got outside, they had taken him down the front steps of the church and were putting him in a waiting car. ... I just stood there wanting to jump down to help, but knowing that I would be killed or taken along also. The car sped off with him yelling for help, but no one was able to help him."

"Then I realized that I had just witnessed a kidnapping of someone that we had gotten to know and love and were unable to do anything about it. They had his mouth covered, but I can still hear his muffled screams for help. As I got back in the rectory I got a cramp in my back from the anger I felt that this friend was being taken off to be tortured for a day or two and then brutally murdered for wanting a better life and more justice for his pueblo. He had told me before, 'I have never stolen, have never hurt anyone, have never eaten someone else's food, why then do they want to hurt and kill me?' He was 30 years old, left a wife and two boys, ages 3 and 1."

Father Stanley added a postscript to the letter. In retaliation for a guerrilla ambush of an army convoy, the army had now abducted and killed another 17 people from Santiago. "[They] were not involved in anything," he wrote, "Their bodies were found in different parts of the country. They, these bodies, were badly tortured, e.g. skin peeled off their faces, etc." He added that two schoolteachers were also shot and killed the same day at an army roadblock.

A week or two later, Father Stanley was warned that his name was also on a death list, and he returned to Oklahoma for a few months. But he very bravely decided to go back to Santiago to celebrate Easter with his parishioners, and he was

still there when the death squad came for him on July 28, 1981. He resisted going with them to be disappeared, but he didn't call out for help for fear that anyone who came to help him would be killed too. His killers eventually shot him in his office.

Today in the church in Santiago, visitors can still see the office where Father Stanley was killed and a beautiful memorial to everyone killed or disappeared in Santiago, a sculpture of a white swan on an altar in a side-chapel. There are always local people of all ages praying at the memorial, from elderly widows of men long dead or disappeared to grandchildren who never met their grandfathers.

The last time I was there, there was also a group of children with guitars rehearsing Bob Dylan's "Blowing In the Wind" in Spanish. If Father Stanley had lived a bit longer, he might well have translated that into Tz'utujil too.

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The Rise of White Racial Nationalism

While there were many reasons for Donald Trump's surprise victory, a particularly ugly one was his success in touching the raw nerve of white racial animosities, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is little doubt that white racism played a role in the U.S. presidential election of 2016. As Zach Beauchamp demonstrates in a Nov. 10 article at Vox.com, enthusiastic support for Donald Trump – 10 on a scale of 10 – among white voters in mostly white geographic areas was about 25 percent. However, in areas of growing ethnic and racial diversity, the percentage of all-in Trump support goes way up.

Beauchamp quotes the research of the University of London scholar Eric Kaufmann, who surveyed Trump's white supporters. Kaufmann's original findings are reported in the policy blog of the London School of Economics. One result was that in areas that had experienced a 30 percent rise in Latino population, the number of whites who enthusiastically supported Trump rose to 70 percent.

Trump's own racism had been on public display during his entire campaign and often (although erroneously) merged the phenomena of immigration and violence. Here he found a ready and responsive audience. Beauchamp goes on to demonstrate that white supporters of Donald Trump saw immigration and terrorism as the country's major problems.

Moreover, they connected these two issues to their fear of the country's growing diversity. Of course, economic woes were also a concern, but they too were exacerbated by fear of the fact that the country was under the leadership of a black man, Barack Obama.

Then, to broaden their outlook of the xenophobic and sectarian impact on politics, both Beauchamp and Kaufmann point out that the racist underpinning of Trump's electoral success parallels the Brexit voting patterns in the United Kingdom in June 2016. There too, ethnocentric "anxiety over a changing society" appears to have spurred on the vote to leave the European Union.

Racism and Netanyahu's 2015 Victory

Brexit is not the only telling parallel to a Trump-style popular racist appeal. Indeed, if you are looking for someone whose bigoted outlook and unethical political practice comes close to Donald Trump's, you can go to Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu stood for reelection in March 2015. His main opponent was Labor Party leader Isaac Herzog. During the election campaign, one of Herzog's consultants was the American political adviser Paul Begala – a longtime political ally of the Clintons. Soon after Netanyahu's reelection Begala explained how Netanyahu had won: "He won because of race. ... In the U.S. you could never get away with those kind of racist appeals. But, man, did it work [in Israel]."

He went on, "I have never seen anything like Bibi's furious surge to the right in the last four days [of the campaign]. He had robo-calls calling the [U.S.] President 'Hussein Obama, the Muslim,' he had ads saying the Arabs will vote in droves. He accused Herzog of wanting to divide Jerusalem."

The fact that "man, did it [this racist approach] work" in Israel should have been no surprise. A year later, in March 2016, a Pew Research Center survey of Israeli society reported "that nearly half of Jews in the country [48 percent] say they support the ethnic cleansing of Arabs." The Israeli Prime Minister and fellow travelers certainly knew this ahead of the Pew report.

As it turned out, Netanyahu's appeal to fear of the Arabs was roughly equivalent to Trump's appeal to fear of immigrants in the United States. Begala readily recognized the importance of the racist factor in Netanyahu's success. Where he

was wrong was to think that “in the U.S. you could never get away with those kind of racist appeals.” It turned out that many white U.S. voters were as receptive to such a race-based fear campaign as were Israeli Jews. As with Netanyahu, racism helped Trump win.

A Broader Phenomenon

Taking a broader view, we can see that the racism manifesting itself in Israel and the United States is part of a general phenomenon of reactionary populism spreading throughout the West. This fact has been recognized by the venerable and progressive Israeli commentator Uri Avnery.

In a recent column entitled “The Call of the Nation,” Avnery observes, “a DARK wave is submerging democracies all over the Western world. ... fascism and populism are gaining ground all around” and doing so in the name of old-fashioned ethnocentric nationalism. After all, “for most people, the need to belong to a nation is a profound psychological need. People create a national culture, often speak a national language. People are ready to die for their nation.”

In the end, Avnery concludes that “What we are witnessing now is a rebellion of nationalism against the trend towards ... a globalist world.”

The globalist trend Avnery speaks of showed its disruptive potential soon after World War II. It was then that there began a large-scale movement of peoples from poorer countries and regions into richer ones. This was often supported by Western elites because of pressing, if temporary, post-war labor needs. This was later joined by the creation of larger trans-national economic units, which saw the movement of not people, but jobs, flowing from richer to poorer countries and regions. The motive here was a search for cheaper labor markets.

For the average Western citizen it was all very confusing and frightening. Almost simultaneously they saw what appeared to be alien groups invading their local environments while, a bit later, their traditional job base was swept away to some foreign land. It was inevitable that all of this would, sooner or later, cause a backlash. In the West, this backlash would merge racism with economics – suggesting to many that economic rivalry was another form of racial competition.

The backlash has also, as Avnery suggests, released a wave of nationalist populism, with its strong ethnocentric undertones. While this movement will create a context for racist and tribalistic venting, it will not be able to do more than momentarily slow economic globalization. That will continue as long as capitalism rules our commercial, fiscal and industrial lives. So, economically, it is one world in the long run.

Seeing these two – racist nationalism and economic globalism – in juxtaposition is important. Racist nationalism as it now expresses itself in the U.S., Israel, the United Kingdom and the European continent has the ability to make a profound mess of local politics. It can, and no doubt will, undermine democratic virtues such as civil and human rights. It will probably undermine the rule of law itself.

Yet, the very thing it fears the most, the one-world economic process, will certainly go on apace. And, because of the weakening of political and legal rights at the hands of racist and authoritarian governments, in the long run we will all end up more exposed to economic exploitation than we ought to be.

That will prove to be a very high price for whatever emotional satisfaction your stalwart white nationalist may now feel.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.

How America Disgraces Itself

The ugly spectacle of the U.S. election is spilling over into the transition with new conspiracy theories about Russia and Donald Trump, as the world looks on in shock and dismay, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

It had been an exhausting, interminable 18-20 months of presidential campaigning during which much of the business of thoughtful American governance had to yield space to the riveting follies of politics. Yet most other countries in the world, not locked into dictators or kings for life, conduct their elections far more briskly and get on with business.

Canada with its parliamentary system extended its last federal election campaign to 11 weeks; many were angered that the campaign had been extended even that far beyond the more traditional seven or eight weeks it takes to hold a federal election.

One might have hoped too, that whatever the electoral cost and fatigue had been

in the U.S., the process would at least eventually distill it all down to the finest of candidates, tempered and honed in the exhausting demands of the campaign, to now represent America's best. Instead we got what was demonstrably far from America's finest – two candidates competing for the honor of who was hated the least. Election night left almost no one truly inspired, enriched or empowered by the outcome.

One might also have expected that by now, hallelujah, it would at least be all over, leaving nothing but a few sober post-mortem analyses of events. But even here the agony is exquisitely drawn out in a two-month interregnum, closer to purgatory, between the election and the inauguration.

The campaign indeed now seems far from over as we enter a new, extended, and possibly uglier period of speculation and spectacle in the parade of contestants now modeling for high office. Here again this interregnum seems unduly prolonged and messy compared to a parliamentary system where a back-bench opposition steps in ready to take over within days after election results are in.

Indeed, the circus now shifts to the very nature of the Electoral College system itself, exciting partisan passions further as to who the "legitimate" victor is. The challenging of the very legitimacy of winners seems now to have become part of the system – most vividly begun with George W. Bush's appointment as president by the Supreme Court in 2000, followed eight years later with significant parts of the nation questioning Barack Obama's legitimacy – even his very citizenship.

Eyes on Russia

Conspiracy theories (and yes, in theory conspiracies can exist) continue to flow about what might have been, including whether the FBI had intervened improperly and deliberately to swing the election to Trump. And now it is all eyes on Russia.

The handwriting is on the wall. The specter of Russia has likely now become a permanent beast lurking behind the scenes in the Trump era.

The Russians may well have had a hand in helping hack the Republican and Democratic National Committees. But these WikiLeaks also revealed how a corrupted Democratic National Committee contributed heavily to skewing the Democratic Party nomination process against Bernie Sanders. If the Russians were involved – and we have not yet had an official pronouncement on that, only leaks – such interference is unacceptable and must be fully and publicly investigated. But such investigation should neither distract from nor delegitimize the content of the specific WikiLeaks information on the DNC, which should also be the

object of outrage.

And now, in perhaps the most volatile delegitimization gambit ever, Trump is now whispered to be “Putin’s candidate,” a Russian pawn who has infiltrated the White House itself. The witch hunt on Russia conveniently displaces the entire substance of critically needed electoral and policy reform.

This is all very ugly stuff. Worse, it looks like questioning the electoral process and the legitimacy of the election itself may become a permanent feature of our domestic politics, inciting further divisiveness and bitterness on both sides of the political divide, rendering the country (even more) ungovernable. The bread and circuses of the interminable campaign extravaganza now seamlessly transition into the background noise of the entire Trump presidency itself.

Apart from the damage to the moral fiber of the nation and its divisive recriminations, the business of governance continues to be indefinitely sidetracked by such circuses. It blocks sober debate about the sad plight of so many aspects of the nation – erratic foreign policy, runaway military spending, non-stop wars, the failing education system, the degradation of the national infrastructure, the decline of health care and rise of mortality rates, the ignoring of the environment, the need to treat broad ethnic injustices, myths about immigration, the movement of American jobs overseas (as the very essence of how capitalism is *supposed* to work) – these hard questions all lie unaddressed. And they are much less fun or telegenic than hurling charges about foreign conspiracies and presidential legitimacy.

Who Trump really is remains a major question. While his earlier utterances have been all over the map, his appointments provide more concrete indicators. And so far it doesn’t look pretty. We seem poised to enter a period of extreme retrogression and reaction across the board, a massive setback on nearly all fronts – unless some welcome surprises are in store from the very people who we wouldn’t expect them from. That cannot be utterly ruled out.

The American Outlier

But it is no wonder that the U.S. for all its massive military power and huge economy, is increasingly becoming an outlier on the international scene. Foreign statesmen both good and bad simply shake their heads in incredulous dismay at the decline of U.S. rationality, prestige and steadiness. But who can avert one’s eyes from a train wreck?

Yet this isn’t new. It’s not as if the U.S. has suddenly turned a corner with this election. U.S. foreign policy has grown ever more isolated from the world and from reality since at least 9/11. Life in this world of denial may even date

from the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. That was when the U.S. received what must now be seen as palpably a curse – the transient domination of the entire global scene, when we trumpeted ourselves as the “sole global superpower.” We assumed that such was the new permanent order of the world. We’ve never gotten over it. We’re still trying to maintain that fiction and it’s not working. Trump will find that out painfully soon.

Our domestic political antics exclude us ever further from the ranks of more responsible, sober and clear-sighted states. The rest of the world is simply going to have to go on working around us in damage limitation mode as it has been doing since 9/11. Are we capable of limiting the long-standing damage to ourselves at home? The necessary very heavy lifting seems now almost a bridge too far.

Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is *Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American’s crisis of conscience in Pakistan*. (Amazon, Kindle) grahamefuller.com

The Never-ending ‘War on Terror’

The Constitution granted war-making powers to Congress, but President Obama, like his post-World War II predecessors, has trampled on that provision with open-ended executive wars, writes Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

The Obama administration has decided to stretch the 15-year-old congressional authorization for war against the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, or those harboring them, to include an illegal war against a group in Somalia – al-Shabab – that wasn’t even in existence at the time of the attacks in 2001.

In fact, as with many of its Islamist terrorist opponents worldwide – including the original Al Qaeda, the perpetrator of 9/11 that arose from U.S. arming of mujahedeen guerrillas against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Al Qaeda in Iraq, which arose to combat the U.S. invasion there and morphed into ISIS – the United States inadvertently helped create al-Shabab in the first place. Al-Shabab did not arise until after 2007, long after 9/11, when the U.S. sponsored an Ethiopian invasion of Somalia to wrest control of the country from a milder Islamist council. The more virulent al-Shabab rose to attempt to repel this foreign invasion.

More generally, after 9/11, rather than following the congressional authorization and focusing like a laser beam on countering the original Al Qaeda group and their patrons, the Afghan Taliban, the George W. Bush administration launched a general “war on terror,” which covered all terrorist groups of international scope, regardless of whether or not they focused on attacking U.S. targets.

In the end, this massive Bush administration violation of the narrow 2001 authorization led to illegal U.S. drone wars and airstrikes in countries all over the Middle East and Southwest Asia – Somalia (against al-Shabab), Yemen (against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), Pakistan (against the Pakistani Taliban), and Iraq, Syria, and Libya (against ISIS). The Obama administration then accelerated all these unconstitutional wars.

Now Obama is trying shore up the already thin legal fig leaf, so that it can pass such travesties – which actually make Islamist groups more rabid each time the U.S. intervenes – onto the incoming Trump administration. When Obama took office, he complained that he inherited from the Bush administration an economic meltdown and a military quagmire in Iraq, but he in turn is bequeathing a legal quagmire to his successor.

No Ambiguity

Ambiguities in the U.S. Constitution do exist, but which branch of government was given the war power is not one of them. In Eighteenth Century Britain, the prerogative of deciding to go to war was the king’s. Having been a victim of this prerogative, debates at the American Constitutional Convention of 1787, the Constitution that resulted, and actual practice in the republic for almost two centuries until the Korean War in 1950 demonstrate conclusively that Congress – the people’s branch – gets to initiate war, not the executive.

The Constitution specifically gives Congress the power to commence war; the debates at the Constitutional Convention indicate that the only exception is for urgent self-defense – that is, when U.S. territory is under sustained attack, thus preventing the Congress from convening. Even then, the Congress should meet at the earliest possible time to ratify any moves in self-defense made by the president, as commander in chief. Very early in American history, even in the informal and sporadic war at sea with France (the Quasi-War) in the last few years of the Eighteenth Century, the Congress was in the driver’s seat in conducting the war and President John Adams complied with its desires.

And in contrast to presidential claims of an expansive commander-in-chief role since the Korean War, the Constitution’s framers intended, and normal practice until 1950 confirmed, that the president’s role in that capacity was taken

narrowly to mean only commanding troops on the battlefield after war had already been initiated by Congress – not commanding the entire nation, in times of crises or otherwise.

Yet since 1950, presidents have claimed powers to start wars even without any authorization from Congress – either getting none (for example, Bill Clinton in his war to separate Kosovo from Serbia in 1999 or Barack Obama in overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011) or claiming that they needed to do so only as a courtesy, which was primarily a gambit to win increased political support for their military escapades (for example, both Bushes in each of their misadventures in Iraq).

The Drone War Deception

Another trick is what Bush and Obama have done with the aforementioned drone wars – trying to blatantly fold wars against other only tangentially-related “Islamist” groups in countries far from Afghanistan into the congressional authorization for war against the perpetrators of 9/11 – the original Al Qaeda group and their hosts, the Afghan Taliban. Such legal gymnastics must stop.

During the Trump administration, the many drone wars either must be made legally legitimate, with specific approval for each of them from the people’s houses of Congress, or they must be stopped. The latter solution would be preferred – because those counterproductive foibles are making the threat from Islamist terrorism more virulent with each U.S. military intervention – but even the former option would at least put the wars on a much sounder constitutional footing.

Ivan Eland is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center on Peace & Liberty at the Independent Institute. Dr. Eland is a graduate of Iowa State University and received an M.B.A. in applied economics and Ph.D. in national security policy from George Washington University. He spent 15 years working for Congress on national security issues, including stints as an investigator for the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Principal Defense Analyst at the Congressional Budget Office. [This article first appeared as a blog post at Huffington Post.]

Hypocrisy Behind the Russian-Election Frenzy

Exclusive: The madness sweeping Official Washington and the mainstream media about alleged Russian interference in the U.S. election is pervaded by

breathhtaking hypocrisy, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As Democrats, the Obama administration and some neocon Republicans slide deeper into conspiracy theories about how Russia somehow handed the presidency to Donald Trump, they are behaving as they accused Trump of planning to behave if he had lost, questioning the legitimacy of the electoral process and sowing doubts about American democracy.

The thinking then was that if Trump had lost, he would have cited suspicions of voter fraud – possibly claiming that illegal Mexican immigrants had snuck into the polls to tip the election to Hillary Clinton – and Trump was widely condemned for even discussing the possibility of challenging the election's outcome.

His refusal to commit to accepting the results was front-page news for days with leading editorialists declaring that his failure to announce that he would abide by the outcome disqualified him from the presidency.

But now the defeated Democrats and some anti-Trump neoconservatives in the Republican Party are jumping up and down about how Russia supposedly tainted the election by revealing information about the Democrats and the Clinton campaign.

Though there appears to be no hard evidence that the Russians did any such thing, the Obama administration's CIA has thrown its weight behind the suspicions, basing its conclusions on "circumstantial evidence," according to a [report](#) in The New York Times.

The Times reported: "The C.I.A.'s conclusion does not appear to be the product of specific new intelligence obtained since the election, several American officials, including some who had read the agency's briefing, said on Sunday. Rather, it was an analysis of what many believe is overwhelming circumstantial evidence – evidence that others feel does not support firm judgments – that the Russians put a thumb on the scale for Mr. Trump, and got their desired outcome."

In other words, the CIA apparently lacks direct reporting from a source inside the Kremlin or an electronic intercept in which Russian President Vladimir Putin or another senior official orders Russian operatives to tilt the U.S. election in favor of Trump.

More 'Group Thinking'?

The absence of such hard evidence opens the door to what is called "confirmation bias" or analytical "group think" in which the CIA's institutional animosity

toward Russia and Trump could influence how analysts read otherwise innocent developments.

For instance, Russian news agencies RT or Sputnik reported critically at times about Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, a complaint that has been raised repeatedly in U.S. press accounts arguing that Russia interfered in the U.S. election. But that charge assumes two things: that Clinton did not deserve critical coverage and that Americans – in any significant numbers – watch Russian networks.

Similarly, the yet-unproven charge that Russia organized the hacking of Democratic National Committee emails and the private email account of Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta assumes that the Russian government was responsible and that it then selectively leaked the material to WikiLeaks while withholding damaging information from hacked Republican accounts.

Here the suspicions also seem to extend far beyond what the CIA actually knows. First, the Republican National Committee denies that its email accounts were hacked, and even if they were hacked, there's no evidence that they contained any information that was particularly newsworthy. Nor is there any evidence that – if the GOP accounts were hacked – they were hacked by the same group that hacked the Democratic Party emails, i.e., that the two hacks were part of the same operation.

That suspicion assumes a tightly controlled operation at the highest levels of the Russian government, but the CIA – with its intensive electronic surveillance of the Russian government and human sources inside the Kremlin – appears to lack any evidence of such a top-down operation.

Second, WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange directly denies that he received the Democratic leaked emails from the Russian government and one of his associates, former British Ambassador Craig Murray, told the U.K. Guardian that he knows who "leaked" the Democratic emails and that there never was a "hack," i.e. an outside electronic penetration of an email account.

Murray said, "I've met the person who leaked them, and they are certainly not Russian and it's an insider. It's a leak, not a hack; the two are different things."

'Real News'

But even if Assange did get the data from the Russians, it's important to remember that nothing in the material has been identified as false. It all appears to be truthful and none of it represented an egregious violation of privacy with some salacious or sensational angle.

The only reason the emails were newsworthy at all was that the documents revealed information that the DNC and the Clinton campaign were trying to keep secret from the American voters.

For instance, some emails confirmed Sen. Bernie Sanders's suspicions that the DNC was improperly tilting the nomination race in favor of Clinton. The DNC was lying when it denied having an institutional thumb on the scales for Clinton. Thus, even if the Russians did uncover this evidence and did leak it to WikiLeaks, they would only have been informing the American people about the DNC's abuse of the democratic process, something Democratic voters in particular had a right to know.

And, regarding Podesta's emails, their most important revelation related to the partial transcripts of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street banks, the contents of which Clinton had chosen to hide from the American people. So, again, if the Russians were involved in the leak, they would only have been giving to the voters information that Clinton should have released on her own. In other words, these disclosures are clearly not "fake news" – the other hysteria now sweeping Official Washington.

In the mainstream news media, there has been a clumsy effort to conflate these parallel frenzies, the leak of "real news" and the invention of "fake news." But investigations of so-called "fake news" have revealed that these operations were run mostly by young entrepreneurs in places like Macedonia or Georgia who realized they could make advertising dollars by creating outlandish "click bait" stories that Trump partisans were particularly eager to read.

According to [a New York Times investigation](#) into one of the "fake news" sites, a college student in Tbilisi, Georgia, first tried to create a pro-Clinton "click bait" Web site but found that a pro-Trump operation was vastly more lucrative. This and other investigations did not trace the "fake news" sites back to Russia or any other government.

So, what's perhaps most telling about the information that the CIA has accused Russia of sharing with the American people is that it was all "real news" about newsworthy topics.

What Threat to Democracy?

So, how does giving the American people truthful and relevant information undermine American democracy, which is the claim that is reverberating throughout the mainstream media and across Official Washington?

Presumably, the thinking is that it would have been better for the American people to have been kept in the dark about these secret maneuverings by the DNC

and the Clinton campaign and, by keeping the public ignorant, that would have ensured Clinton's election, the preferred outcome of the major U.S. news media.

There's another double standard here. For instance, when a hack of – or a leak from – a Panamanian law firm exposed the personal finances of thousands of clients, including political figures in Iceland, Ukraine, Russia and other nations, there was widespread applause across the Western media for this example of journalism at its best.

The applause was deafening despite the fact that at least one of the principal "news agencies" involved was partly funded by the U.S. government. The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), a USAID-backed non-governmental organization, also was earlier involved in efforts to destabilize and delegitimize the elected Ukrainian government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

"Corruption" allegations against Yanukovich – pushed by OCCRP – were integral to the U.S.-supported effort to organize a violent putsch that drove Yanukovich from office on Feb. 22, 2014, touching off the Ukrainian civil war and – on a global scale – the New Cold War with Russia.

Yet, in the case of the "Panama Papers" or other leaks about "corruption" in governments targeted by U.S. officials for "regime change," there are no frenzied investigations into where the information originated. Regarding the "Panama Papers," there was simply back-slapping for the organizations that invested time and money in analyzing the volumes of material. And there were cheers when implicated officials were punished or forced to step down.

So, why are some leaks "good" and others "bad"? Why do we hail the "Panama Papers" or OCCRP's "corruption evidence" that damaged Yanukovich – and ask no questions about where the material came from and how it was selectively used – yet we condemn the Democratic email leaks and undertake investigations into the source of the information?

In both the "Panama Papers" case and the "Democratic Party leaks," the material appeared to be real. There was no evidence of disinformation or "black propaganda." But, apparently, it's okay to disrupt the politics of Iceland, Ukraine, Russia and other countries, but it is called a potential "act of war" – by neocon Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona – to reveal evidence of wrongdoing or excessive secrecy on the part of the Democratic Party in the United States.

Shoe on the Other Foot

Russian President Putin, while denying any Russian government attempt to tilt the election to Trump, recently commented on the American hypocrisy about interfering in other nations' elections while complaining about alleged

interference in its own or those of its allies. He described a conversation with an unnamed Western “colleague.”

Putin said, “I recently had a conversation with one of my colleagues. We touched upon our [Russian] alleged influence on some political processes abroad. I told him: ‘And what are you doing? You have been constantly interfering in our political life.’ And he replied: ‘It’s not us, it’s the NGOs’. I said: ‘Oh? But you pay them and write instructions for them.’ He said: ‘What kind of instructions?’ I said: ‘I have been reading them.’”

Whatever one thinks of Putin, he is not wrong in describing how various U.S.-funded NGOs, in the name of “democracy promotion,” seek to undermine governments that have ended up on Official Washington’s target list.

And another aspect of the hypocrisy permeating Official Washington’s belligerent rhetoric directed toward Russia: Aren’t the Democrats doing exactly what they accused Trump of planning to do if he had lost the Nov. 8 election, i.e., question the legitimacy of the results and thus undermine the faith of the American people in their democratic system?

For days, Trump’s unwillingness to accept, presumptively, the results of the election earned him front-page denunciations from many of the same mainstream newspapers and TV networks that are now trumpeting the unproven claims by the CIA that the Russians somehow influenced the election’s outcome by presenting some Democratic hidden facts to the American people.

Yet, this anti-Russian accusation not only undermines the American people’s faith in the election’s outcome but also represents a reckless last-ditch gamble to block Trump’s inauguration – or at least discredit him before he takes office – while using belligerent rhetoric that could push Russia and the United States closer to nuclear war.

Wouldn’t it be a good idea for the CIA to at least have hard evidence before the spy agency precipitated such a crisis?

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).

US Intel Vets Dispute Russia Hacking Claims

As the hysteria about Russia's alleged interference in the U.S. election grows, a key mystery is why U.S. intelligence would rely on "circumstantial evidence" when it has the capability for hard evidence, say U.S. intelligence veterans.

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

MEMORANDUM

Allegations of Hacking Election Are Baseless

A *New York Times* report on Monday alluding to "overwhelming circumstantial evidence" leading the CIA to believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin "deployed computer hackers with the goal of tipping the election to Donald J. Trump" is, sadly, evidence-free. This is no surprise, because harder evidence of a technical nature points to an inside leak, not hacking – by Russians or anyone else.

Monday's *Washington Post* reports that Sen. James Lankford, R-Oklahoma, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has joined other senators in calling for a bipartisan investigation of suspected cyber-intrusion by Russia. Reading our short memo could save the Senate from endemic partisanship, expense and unnecessary delay.

In what follows, we draw on decades of senior-level experience – with emphasis on cyber-intelligence and security – to cut through uninformed, largely partisan fog. Far from hiding behind anonymity, we are proud to speak out with the hope of gaining an audience appropriate to what we merit – given our long labors in government and other areas of technology. And corny though it may sound these days, our ethos as intelligence professionals remains, simply, to tell it like it is – without fear or favor.

We have gone through the various claims about hacking. For us, it is child's play to dismiss them. The email disclosures in question are the result of a leak, not a hack. Here's the difference between leaking and hacking:

Leak: When someone physically takes data out of an organization and gives it to some other person or organization, as Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning did.

Hack: When someone in a remote location electronically penetrates operating systems, firewalls or any other cyber-protection system and then extracts data.

All signs point to leaking, not hacking. If hacking were involved, the National Security Agency would know it – and know both sender and recipient.

In short, since leaking requires physically removing data – on a thumb drive, for example – the only way such data can be copied and removed, with no electronic trace of what has left the server, is via a physical storage device.

Awesome Technical Capabilities

Again, NSA is able to identify both the sender and recipient when hacking is involved. Thanks largely to the material released by Edward Snowden, we can provide a full picture of NSA's extensive domestic data-collection network including Upstream programs like Fairview, Stormbrew and Blarney. These include at least 30 companies in the U.S. operating the fiber networks that carry the Public Switched Telephone Network as well as the World Wide Web. This gives NSA unparalleled access to data flowing within the U.S. and data going out to the rest of the world, as well as data transiting the U.S.

In other words, any data that is passed from the servers of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) or of Hillary Rodham Clinton (HRC) – or any other server in the U.S. – is collected by the NSA. These data transfers carry destination addresses in what are called packets, which enable the transfer to be traced and followed through the network.

Packets: Emails being passed across the World Wide Web are broken down into smaller segments called packets. These packets are passed into the network to be delivered to a recipient. This means the packets need to be reassembled at the receiving end.

To accomplish this, all the packets that form a message are assigned an identifying number that enables the receiving end to collect them for reassembly. Moreover, each packet carries the originator and ultimate receiver Internet protocol number (either IPV4 or IPV6) that enables the network to route data.

When email packets leave the U.S., the other "Five Eyes" countries (the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and the seven or eight additional countries participating with the U.S. in bulk-collection of everything on the planet would also have a record of where those email packets went after leaving the U.S.

These collection resources are extensive [see attached NSA slides 1, 2, 3, 4, 5]; they include hundreds of trace route programs that trace the path of packets going across the network and tens of thousands of hardware and software implants in switches and servers that manage the network. Any emails being extracted from one server going to another would be, at least in part, recognizable and

traceable by all these resources.

The bottom line is that the NSA would know where and how any “hacked” emails from the DNC, HRC or any other servers were routed through the network. This process can sometimes require a closer look into the routing to sort out intermediate clients, but in the end sender and recipient can be traced across the network.

The various ways in which usually anonymous spokespeople for U.S. intelligence agencies are equivocating – saying things like “our best guess” or “our opinion” or “our estimate” etc. – shows that the emails alleged to have been “hacked” cannot be traced across the network. Given NSA’s extensive trace capability, we conclude that DNC and HRC servers alleged to have been hacked were, in fact, not hacked.

The evidence that should be there is absent; otherwise, it would surely be brought forward, since this could be done without any danger to sources and methods. Thus, we conclude that the emails were *leaked by an insider* – as was the case with Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning. Such an insider could be anyone in a government department or agency with access to NSA databases, or perhaps someone within the DNC.

As for the comments to the media as to what the CIA believes, the reality is that CIA is almost totally dependent on NSA for ground truth in the communications arena. Thus, it remains something of a mystery why the media is being fed strange stories about hacking that have no basis in fact. In sum, given what we know of NSA’s existing capabilities, it beggars belief that NSA would be unable to identify anyone – Russian or not – attempting to interfere in a U.S. election by hacking.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Mike Gravel, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

Larry Johnson, former CIA Intelligence Officer & former State Department Counter-Terrorism Official

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

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Middle East, CIA

(ret.)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.)

The Syrian-Sarin ‘False Flag’ Lesson

Exclusive: Amid Official Washington’s desire to censor non-official news on the Internet, it’s worth remembering how the lack of mainstream skepticism almost led the U.S. into a war on Syria, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

A review of events leading to the very edge of full-blown U.S. shock-and-awe on Syria three years ago provides a case study with important lessons for new policymakers as they begin to arrive in Washington.

It is high time to expose the whys and wherefores of the almost-successful attempt to mousetrap President Barack Obama into an open attack on Syria three years ago. Little-known and still less appreciated is the last-minute intervention of Russian President Vladimir Putin as *deus ex machina* rescuing Obama from the corner into which he had let himself be painted.

Accumulating evidence offers persuasive proof that Syrian rebels supported by Turkish intelligence – not Syrian Army troops – bear responsibility for the infamous sarin nerve-gas attack killing hundreds of people on Aug. 21, 2013 in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus. The incident bears all the earmarks of a false-flag attack.

But U.S. and other “rebel-friendly” media outlets wasted no time in offering “compelling” evidence from “social media” – which Secretary of State John Kerry described as an “extraordinary tool” – to place the onus on the Syrian government.

However, as the war juggernaut started rolling toward war, enter Putin from stage right with an offer difficult for Obama to refuse – guaranteed destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons on a U.S. ship outfitted for such purpose. This cheated Washington’s neocon mousetrap-setters out of their war on Syria. They would get back at Putin six months later by orchestrating an anti-Russian coup in Kiev.

But the play-by-play in U.S.-Russian relations in summer 2013 arguably surpasses in importance even the avoidance of an overt U.S. assault on Syria. Thus, it is

important to appreciate the lessons drawn by Russian leaders from the entire experience.

Putting Cheese in the Mousetrap

So, let us recall that on Dec. 10, 2015, just over one year ago, Turkish Member of Parliament Eren Erdem testified about how Turkey's intelligence service helped deliver sarin precursors to rebels in Syria.

The Official Story blaming Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was already collapsing – largely discredited by reports in independent media and by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh – though it remained widely accepted in the U.S. mainstream media which repeatedly cited the case as the moment when Assad crossed Obama's "red line" against using chemical weapons and Obama had failed to back up his threat.

But Erdem took the debunking of the "official" tale to a public and official level. Based on government documents from a Turkish court, which he waved before his MP colleagues, Erdem poured ice water on the West's long-running excited belief that Assad had "gassed his own people."

But, alas, if you do not understand Turkish, or if you missed this story in the *Belfast Telegraph* of Dec. 14 or if you don't read some independent Web sites or if you believe that RT publishes only Russian "propaganda," this development may still come as a huge surprise, for Erdem's revelations appeared in no other English-language newspaper.

So, those malnourished by "mainstream media" may be clueless about the scary reality that Obama came within inches of letting himself be mousetrapped into ordering U.S. armed forces to mount a shock-and-awe-type attack on Syria in late summer 2013.

Turkish MP Testimony

Addressing fellow members of the Turkish Parliament, Turkish MP Erdem from the opposition Republican People's Party directly confronted his government on this key issue. Waving a copy of "Criminal Case Number 2013/120," Erdem described official Turkish reports and electronic evidence documenting a smuggling operation with Turkish government complicity.

In an interview with RT four days later, Erdem said Turkish authorities had evidence of sarin gas-related shipments to anti-government rebels in Syria, and did nothing to stop them.

The General Prosecutor in the Turkish city of Adana opened a criminal case and

an indictment stated “chemical weapons components” from Europe “were to be seamlessly shipped via a designated route through Turkey to militant labs in Syria.”

Erdem cited evidence implicating the Turkish Minister of Justice and the Turkish Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation in the smuggling of sarin. Small wonder that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan immediately accused Erdem of “treason.”

Erdem testified that the 13 suspects, who had been arrested in police raids on the plotters, were released just a week after they were indicted. The case was shut down abruptly by higher authority.

Erdem told RT that the sarin attack at Ghouta took place shortly after the criminal case was closed and that the attack probably was carried out by jihadists with sarin gas smuggled through Turkey.

Erdem’s disclosures were not entirely new. More than two years before Erdem’s brave actions, in a Memorandum for the President by the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity of Sept. 6, 2013, we had reported that coordination meetings had taken place just weeks before the sarin attack at a Turkish military garrison in Antakya, some 15 miles from the border with Syria.

In Antakya, senior Turkish, Qatari and U.S. intelligence officials were said to be coordinating plans with Western-sponsored rebels who were told to expect an imminent escalation in the fighting due to “a war-changing development.” This, in turn, would lead to a U.S.-led bombing of Syria, and rebel commanders were ordered to prepare their forces quickly to exploit the bombing, march into Damascus, and remove the Assad government.

A year earlier, The New York Times reported that the Antakya area had become a “magnet for foreign jihadis, who are flocking into Turkey to fight holy war in Syria.” The Times quoted a Syrian opposition member based in Antakya, saying the Turkish police were patrolling this border area “with their eyes closed.”

Kerry Dancing

It is a safe bet that Secretary of State John Kerry’s aides briefed him in timely fashion on Erdem’s revelations. This may account for why, on a visit to Moscow on Dec. 15, 2015 (four days after Erdem’s testimony), Kerry chose to repeat the meme that Assad “gassed his people; I mean, gas hasn’t been used in warfare formally for years and gas is outlawed, but Assad used it.”

Three days later, The Washington Post dutifully echoed Kerry, charging that Assad had killed “his own people with chemical weapons.” And this charge remains

a staple in U.S. corporate media, where Erdem's testimony is still nowhere to be found.

Kerry also didn't want to admit that he had grossly misled the American people on an issue of war and peace. Just days after the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin attack at Ghouta, Kerry and his neocon allies displayed their acumen in following George W. Bush's dictum: "You got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda."

On Aug. 30, Kerry solemnly claimed, no fewer than 35 times, "We know" the Assad government was responsible for the sarin deaths, finally giving Kerry and the neocons their *casus belli*.

But on Aug. 31, with U.S. intelligence analysts expressing their own doubts that Assad's forces were responsible, Obama put the brakes on the juggernaut toward war, saying he would first seek approval from Congress. Kerry, undaunted, wasted no time in lobbying Congress for war.

On Sept. 1, Kerry told ABC's George Stephanopoulos that briefings in Congress had already begun and that "we are not going to lose this vote." On Sept. 3, Kerry was back at it with a bravura performance before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, whose leaders showed in their own remarks the degree to which they were lusting for an attack on Syria.

The following offers a taste for Kerry's "protest-too-much" testimony: "the Assad regime, and only, undeniably, the Assad regime, unleashed an outrageous chemical attack against its own citizens. ... In their lust to hold on to power, [they] were willing to infect the air of Damascus with a poison that killed innocent mothers and fathers and hundreds of their children, their lives all snuffed out by gas in the early morning of August 21st.

"Now, some people here and there, amazingly, have questioned the evidence of this assault on conscience. I repeat here again today that only the most willful desire to avoid reality can assert that this did not occur as described or that the regime did not do it. It did happen, and the Assad regime did it.

"Within minutes of the attack, the social media exploded with horrific images of men and women, the elderly, and children sprawled on a hospital floor with no wounds, no blood, but all dead. Those scenes of human chaos and desperation were not contrived. They were real. No one could contrive such a scene. ...

"And as we debate, the world wonders, not whether Assad's regime executed the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21st century – that fact I think is now beyond question – the world wonders whether the United States of America will consent through silence to standing aside while this kind of brutality is

allowed to happen without consequence.”

Kerry’s added a credulity-stretching attempt to play down the role and effectiveness of Al Qaeda in Syria, and exaggerated the strength of the “moderate” rebels there. This drew unusually prompt and personal criticism from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Putin: “Kerry Lies”

Rarely does it happen that a president of a major country calls the head diplomat of a rival state a “liar,” but that is the label Russian President Putin chose for Kerry on the day after his congressional testimony. Referring to Kerry during a televised meeting of the Russian Presidential Human Rights Council on Sept. 4, Putin addressed the sarin issue in these words:

“It is simply absurd to imagine that Assad used chemical weapons, given that he is gaining ground. After all, this is a weapon of last resort.” Putin claimed, correctly, that Assad had “encircled his adversaries in some places and was finishing them off.”

Putin continued: “I watched the congressional debates. A congressman asked Mr. Kerry, ‘Is Al Qaeda present there? I’ve heard they have gained momentum.’ He replied, ‘No. I can tell you earnestly, they are not.’”

Putin continued, “The main combat unit, the so-called Al-Nusra, is an Al-Qaeda subdivision. They [the Americans] know about this. This was very unpleasant and surprising for me. After all ... we talk with them, and we assume they are decent people. But he is lying, and he knows he is lying. That is sad. ...

“We are currently focused on the fact that the U.S. Congress and Senate are discussing authorization for use of force. ... As you know, Syria is not attacking the U.S., so there is no question of self-defense; and anything else, lacking U.N. authorization, is an act of aggression. ... we are all glued to our televisions, waiting to see if they will get the approval of Congress.”

On the following day, Sept. 5, Obama arrived in St. Petersburg for a G-20 summit, with ample reason to suspect that Putin was right about Kerry lying about the sarin attack – the President having been warned the previous week by National Intelligence Director James Clapper that there was no “slam-dunk” evidence against the Assad regime. So, Obama agreed to Putin’s offer to get Syria to surrender its chemical weapons for destruction, and the war fever began to abate.

Curiously, Kerry himself was kept in the dark about the Putin-Obama agreement and was still making the case for war on Sept. 9. At the very end of a press

conference that day in London, Kerry was asked whether there was anything Assad could do to prevent a U.S. attack. Kerry answered that Assad could give up every one of his chemical weapons, but “he isn’t about to do that; it can’t be done.”

Still later on Sept. 9, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Syrian counterpart announced that Syria had agreed to allow all its chemical weapons to be removed and destroyed. As soon as Kerry arrived back in Washington, he was sent off to Geneva to sign the deal that Obama had cut directly with Putin. (All Syria’s chemical weapons have now been destroyed.)

Yet, two weeks later, Obama was still reading from the neocon teleprompter. In his formal address to the UN General Assembly on Sept. 24, 2013, he declared, “It’s an insult to human reason and to the legitimacy of this institution to suggest that anyone other than the [Syrian] regime carried out this [sarin] attack.”

More Candor With Goldberg

Earlier this year, though, Obama was bragging to his informal biographer, Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic*, about having thwarted planning for open war on Syria, even though that required disregarding the advice of virtually all his foreign-policy advisers.

One gem fished out by Goldberg was Obama’s admission that DNI Clapper had warned him in late August (a week before he went to St. Petersburg and a month before his U.N. speech) that the evidence pinning blame on Damascus for the sarin attack was hardly airtight.

Goldberg wrote that Clapper interrupted the President’s morning intelligence briefing “to make clear that the intelligence on Syria’s use of sarin gas, while robust, was not a ‘slam dunk.’” Clapper chose his words carefully, echoing the language that CIA Director George Tenet used to falsely assure President George W. Bush that the case could be made to convince the American people that Iraq was hiding WMDs.

Even though Obama continued to dissemble and the mainstream U.S. news media has continued to treat Syria’s “guilt” in the sarin attack as “flat fact,” the neocons did not get their war on Syria. I describe an unusually up-front-and-personal experience of their chagrin under the subtitle “Morose at CNN” in “How War on Syria Lost Its Way.”

Nor did neocon disappointment subside in subsequent years. Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tennessee, Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, has remained among the most outspoken critics of Obama’s decision to cancel the attack on Syria in 2013.

On Dec. 3, 2014, Corker complained that, while the U.S. military was poised to launch a “very targeted, very brief” operation against the Syrian government for using chemical weapons, Obama called off the attack at the last minute.

Corker’s criticism was scathing: “I think the worst moment in U.S. foreign policy since I’ve been here, as far as signaling to the world where we were as a nation, was August a year ago when we had a 10-hour operation that was getting ready to take place in Syria but it didn’t happen. ... In essence and – I’m sorry to be slightly rhetorical – we jumped in Putin’s lap.”

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. A CIA analyst for 27 years, he has experience recognizing false-flag attacks when he sees them. Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, which he co-founded, has published several memoranda on the sarin attack.

Big Media’s Contra-Cocaine Cover-up

Special Report: Twelve years ago, a campaign of character assassination by the major U.S. newspapers drove an honest journalist to suicide. Now those papers claim to be paragons of truth-telling, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Amid the mainstream U.S. media’s current self-righteous frenzy against “fake news,” it’s worth recalling how the big newspapers destroyed Gary Webb, an honest journalist who exposed some hard truths about the Reagan administration’s collaboration with Nicaraguan Contra cocaine traffickers.

Webb’s reward for reviving that important scandal in 1996 – and getting the CIA’s inspector general to issue what amounted to an institutional confession in 1998 – was to have The New York Times, The Washington Post and Los Angeles Times lobby for, essentially, his banishment from journalism.

The major media pile-on was so intense and so effective that Webb lost his job at the San Jose Mercury-News and could never find regular work in his profession again. Betrayed by his journalistic colleagues, his money gone, his family broken and his life seemingly hopeless, Webb committed suicide on Dec. 9, 2004.

Even then, the Los Angeles Times wrote up his obituary as if the paper were

telling the life story of an organized-crime boss, not a heroic journalist. The Times obit was then republished by The Washington Post.

In other words, on one of the most significant scandals of the Reagan era, major newspapers, which now want to serve as the arbiters of truth for the Internet, demonstrated how disdainful they actually are toward truth when it puts the U.S. government in a harsh light.

Indeed, if it had been up to the big newspapers, this important chapter of modern history would never have been known. A decade earlier, in 1985, Brian Barger and I first exposed the Contra-cocaine connection for The Associated Press – and we watched as the big papers turned their backs on the scandal then, too.

The main point that Webb added to the story was how some of the Contra cocaine fed into the production of crack-cocaine that had such a devastating effect on America's black communities in particular. Webb's disclosure of the crack connection infuriated many African-Americans and the big papers acted as if it was their civic duty to calm down those inner-city folks by assuring them that the U.S. government would never do such a thing.

So, instead of doing their jobs as journalists, the major newspapers acted as the last line of defense against the people learning the truth.

A Solid Record

Yet, what's remarkable now about the Contra-cocaine scandal is that – despite the cover-up efforts of the big papers – the truth is out there, available in official government documents, including the CIA's inspector general's report.

Collectively, the information also represents a damning indictment of The New York Times, The Washington Post and Los Angeles Times and demonstrates why they are unfit to lecture anyone about what's real and what's "fake."

For instance, in 2013, at the National Archives annex in College Park, Maryland, I discovered a declassified "secret" U.S. law enforcement report that detailed how top Contra leader Adolfo Calero was casually associating with Norwin Meneses, described in the records as "a well-reputed drug dealer." Meneses was near the center of Webb's 1996 articles for the San Jose Mercury-News.

The report was typical of the evidence that the Reagan administration – and the big newspapers – chose to ignore. It recounted information from Dennis Ainsworth, a blue-blood Republican from San Francisco who volunteered to help the Contra cause in 1984-85. That put him in position to witness the strange goings-on of Contra leaders hobnobbing with drug traffickers and negotiating

arms deals with White House emissaries.

Ainsworth also was a source of mine in fall 1985 when I was investigating the mysterious channels of funding for the Contras after Congress shut off CIA support in 1984 amid widespread reports of Contra atrocities inflicted on Nicaraguan civilians, including rapes, executions and torture.

Ainsworth's first-hand knowledge of the Contra dealings dovetailed with information that I already had, such as the central role of National Security Council aide Oliver North in aiding the Contras and his use of "courier" Rob Owen as an off-the-books White House intermediary to the Contras. I later developed confirmation of some other details that Ainsworth described, such as his overhearing Owen and Calero working together on an arms deal as Ainsworth drove them through the streets of San Francisco.

As for Ainsworth's knowledge about the Contra-cocaine connection, he said he sponsored a June 1984 cocktail party at which Calero spoke to about 60 people. Meneses, a notorious drug kingpin in the Nicaraguan community, showed up uninvited and clearly had a personal relationship with Calero, who was then the political leader of the Contra's chief fighting force, the CIA-backed Nicaraguan Democratic Force (or FDN).

"At the end of the cocktail party, Meneses and Calero went off together," Ainsworth told U.S. Attorney Joseph P. Russoniello, according to a "secret" Jan. 6, 1987 cable submitted by Russoniello to an FBI investigation code-named "Front Door," a probe into the Reagan administration's corruption.

After Calero's speech, Ainsworth said Meneses accompanied Calero and about 20 people to dinner and picked up the entire tab, according to a more detailed debriefing of Ainsworth by the FBI.

Concerned about this relationship, Ainsworth said he was told by Renato Pena, an FDN leader in the San Francisco area, that "the FDN is involved in drug smuggling with the aid of Norwin Meneses who also buys arms for Enrique Bermudez, a leader of the FDN." Bermudez was then the top Contra military commander.

Corroborating Account

Pena, who himself was convicted on federal drug charges in 1984, gave a similar account to the Drug Enforcement Administration. According to a 1998 report by the Justice Department's Inspector General Michael Bromwich, "When debriefed by the DEA in the early 1980s, Pena said that the CIA was allowing the Contras to fly drugs into the United States, sell them, and keep the proceeds.

"Pena stated that he was present on many occasions when Meneses telephoned Bermudez in Honduras. Meneses told Pena of Bermudez's requests for such things as gun silencers (which Pena said Meneses obtained in Los Angeles), cross bows, and other military equipment for the Contras. Pena believed that Meneses would sometimes transport certain of these items himself to Central America, and other times would have contacts in Los Angeles and Miami send cargo to Honduras, where the authorities were cooperating with the Contras. Pena believed Meneses had contact with Bermudez from about 1981 or 1982 through the mid-1980s."

Bromwich's report then added, "Pena said he was one of the couriers Meneses used to deliver drug money to a Colombian known as 'Carlos' in Los Angeles and return to San Francisco with cocaine. Pena made six to eight trips, with anywhere from \$600,000 to nearly \$1 million, and brought back six to eight kilos of cocaine each time. Pena said Meneses was moving hundreds of kilos a week. 'Carlos' once told Pena, 'We're helping your cause with this drug thing we are helping your organization a lot.'"

Ainsworth also said he tried to alert Oliver North in 1985 about the troubling connections between the Contra movement and cocaine traffickers but that North turned a deaf ear.

"In the spring some friends of mine and I went back to the White House staff but we were put off by Ollie North and others on the staff who really don't want to know all what's going on," Ainsworth told Russoniello.

When I first spoke with Ainsworth in September 1985 at a coffee shop in San Francisco, he asked for confidentiality, which I granted. However, since the documents released by the National Archives include him describing his conversations with me, that confidentiality no longer applies. Ainsworth also spoke with Webb for his 1996 San Jose Mercury-News series under the pseudonym "David Morrison."

Though I found Ainsworth to be generally reliable, some of his depictions of our conversations contained mild exaggerations or confusion over details, such as his claim that I called him from Costa Rica in January 1986 and told him that the Contra-cocaine story that I had been working on with my AP colleague Brian Barger "never hit the papers because it was suppressed by the Associated Press due to political pressure primarily from the CIA."

In reality, Barger and I returned from Costa Rica in fall 1985, wrote our story about the Contras' involvement in cocaine smuggling, and pushed it onto the AP wire in December though in a reduced form because of resistance from some senior AP news executives who were supportive of President Reagan's foreign policies. The CIA, the White House and other agencies of the Reagan administration did

seek to discredit our story, but they did not prevent its publication.

An Overriding Hostility

The Reagan administration's neglect of Ainsworth's insights reflected the overriding hostility toward any information even from a Republican activist like Ainsworth that put the Contras in a negative light. In early 1987, when Ainsworth spoke with U.S. Attorney Russoniello and the FBI, the Reagan administration was in full damage-control mode, trying to tamp down the Iran-Contra disclosures about Oliver North diverting profits from secret arms sales to Iran to the Contra war.

Fears that the Iran-Contra scandal could lead to Reagan's impeachment made it even less likely that the Justice Department would pursue an investigation into drug ties implicating the Contra leadership. Ainsworth's information was simply passed on to Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh whose inquiry was already overwhelmed by the task of sorting out the convoluted Iran transactions.

Publicly, the Reagan team continued dumping on the Contra-cocaine allegations and playing the find-any-possible-reason-to-reject-a-witness game. The major news media went along, leading to much mainstream ridicule of a 1989 investigative report by Sen. John Kerry, D-Massachusetts, who uncovered more drug connections implicating the Contras and the Reagan administration.

Only occasionally, such as when the George H.W. Bush administration needed witnesses to convict Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega did the Contra-cocaine evidence pop onto Official Washington's radar.

During Noriega's drug-trafficking trial in 1991, U.S. prosecutors called as a witness Colombian Medellin cartel kingpin Carlos Lehder, who, along with implicating Noriega, testified that the cartel had given \$10 million to the Contras, an allegation first unearthed by Sen. Kerry. "The Kerry hearings didn't get the attention they deserved at the time," a Washington Post editorial on Nov. 27, 1991, acknowledged. "The Noriega trial brings this sordid aspect of the Nicaraguan engagement to fresh public attention."

But the Post offered its readers no explanation for why Kerry's hearings had been largely ignored, with the Post itself a leading culprit in this journalistic misfeasance. Nor did the Post and the other leading newspapers use the opening created by the Noriega trial to do anything to rectify their past neglect.

Everything quickly returned to the status quo in which the desired perception of the noble Contras trumped the clear reality of their criminal activities. Instead of recognizing the skewed moral compass of the Reagan administration,

Congress was soon falling over itself to attach Reagan's name to as many public buildings and facilities as possible, including Washington's National Airport.

Meanwhile, those of us in journalism who had exposed the national security crimes of the 1980s saw our careers mostly sink or go sideways. We were regarded as "pariahs" in our profession.

As for me, shortly after the Iran-Contra scandal broke wide open in fall 1986, I accepted a job at Newsweek, one of the many mainstream news outlets that had long ignored Contra-connected scandals and briefly thought it needed to bolster its coverage. But I soon discovered that senior editors remained hostile toward the Iran-Contra story and related spinoff scandals, including the Contra-cocaine mess.

After losing battle after battle with my Newsweek editors, I departed the magazine in June 1990 to write a book (called *Fooling America*) about the decline of the Washington press corps and the parallel rise of a new generation of government propagandists.

I was also hired by PBS *Frontline* to investigate whether there had been a prequel to the Iran-Contra scandal, whether those arms-for-hostage deals in the mid-1980s had been preceded by contacts between Reagan's 1980 campaign staff and Iran, which was then holding 52 Americans hostage and essentially destroying Jimmy Carter's reelection hopes. [For more on that topic, see Robert Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege](#) and [America's Stolen Narrative](#).]

Finding New Ways

In 1995, frustrated by the growing triviality of American journalism, and acting on the advice of and with the assistance of my oldest son Sam, I turned to a new medium and launched the Internet's first investigative news magazine, known as Consortiumnews.com. The Web site became a way for me to put out well-reported stories that my former mainstream colleagues ignored or mocked.

So, when Gary Webb called me in 1996 to talk about his upcoming series reviving the Contra-cocaine story, I explained some of this tortured history and urged him to make sure that his editors were firmly behind him. He sounded perplexed at my advice and assured me that he had the solid support of his editors.

When Webb's "Dark Alliance" series finally appeared in late August 1996, it initially drew little attention. The major national news outlets applied their usual studied indifference to a topic that they had already judged unworthy of serious attention.

But Webb's story proved hard to ignore. First, unlike the work that Barger and I

did for AP in the mid-1980s, Webb's series wasn't just a story about drug traffickers in Central America and their protectors in Washington. It was about the on-the-ground consequences, inside the United States, of that drug trafficking, how the lives of Americans were blighted and destroyed as the collateral damage of a U.S. foreign policy initiative.

In other words, there were real-life American victims, and they were concentrated in African-American communities. That meant the ever-sensitive issue of race had been injected into the controversy. Anger from black communities spread quickly to the Congressional Black Caucus, which started demanding answers.

Secondly, the San Jose Mercury-News, which was the local newspaper for Silicon Valley, had posted documents and audio on its state-of-the-art Internet site. That way, readers could examine much of the documentary support for the series.

It also meant that the traditional "gatekeeper" role of the major newspapers, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times, was under assault. If a regional paper like the Mercury-News could finance a major journalistic investigation like this one, and circumvent the judgments of the editorial boards at the Big Three, then there might be a tectonic shift in the power relations of the U.S. news media. There could be a breakdown of the established order.

This combination of factors led to the next phase of the Contra-cocaine battle: the "get-Gary-Webb" counterattack. Soon, The Washington Post, The New York Times, and Los Angeles Times were lining up like some tag-team wrestlers taking turns pummeling Webb and his story.

On Oct. 4, 1996, The Washington Post published a front-page article knocking down Webb's series, although acknowledging that some Contra operatives did help the cocaine cartels. The Post's approach fit with the Big Media's cognitive dissonance on the topic: first, the Post called the Contra-cocaine allegations old news, "even CIA personnel testified to Congress they knew that those covert operations involved drug traffickers," the Post said, and second, the Post minimized the importance of the one Contra smuggling channel that Webb had highlighted in his series, saying it had not "played a major role in the emergence of crack."

To add to the smug hoo-hah treatment that was enveloping Webb and his story, the Post published a sidebar story dismissing African-Americans as prone to "conspiracy fears."

Next, The New York Times and Los Angeles Times weighed in with lengthy articles

castigating Webb and "Dark Alliance." The big newspapers made much of the CIA's internal reviews in 1987 and 1988, almost a decade earlier, that supposedly had cleared the spy agency of any role in Contra-cocaine smuggling.

But the first ominous sign for the CIA's cover-up emerged on Oct. 24, 1996, when CIA Inspector General Frederick Hitz conceded before the Senate Intelligence Committee that the first CIA probe had lasted only 12 days, and the second only three days. He promised a more thorough review.

Mocking Webb

But Webb had already crossed over from being treated as a serious journalist to becoming a target of ridicule. Influential Washington Post media critic Howard Kurtz mocked Webb for saying in a book proposal that he would explore the possibility that the Contra war was primarily a business to its participants. "Oliver Stone, check your voice mail," Kurtz smirked.

Yet, Webb's suspicion was no conspiracy theory. Indeed, Oliver North's chief Contra emissary, Rob Owen, had made the same point in a March 17, 1986 message about the Contra leadership. "Few of the so-called leaders of the movement . . . really care about the boys in the field," Owen wrote. "THIS WAR HAS BECOME A BUSINESS TO MANY OF THEM." [Emphasis in original.]

Ainsworth and other pro-Contra activists were reaching the same conclusion, that the Contra leadership was skimming money from the supply lines and padding their personal wealth with proceeds from the drug trade.

According to a Jan. 21, 1987 interview report by the FBI, Ainsworth said he had "made inquiries in the local San Francisco Nicaraguan community and wondered among his acquaintances what Adolfo Calero and the other people in the FDN movement were doing and the word that he received back is that they were probably engaged in cocaine smuggling."

In other words, Webb was right about the suspicion that the Contra movement had become less a cause than a business to many of its participants. Even Oliver North's emissary reported on that reality. But truthfulness had ceased to be relevant in the media's hazing of Gary Webb.

In another double standard, while Webb was held to the strictest standards of journalism, it was entirely all right for Kurtz, the supposed arbiter of journalistic integrity who was a longtime fixture on CNN's "Reliable Sources," to make judgments based on ignorance. Kurtz would face no repercussions for mocking a fellow journalist who was factually correct.

The Big Three's assault, combined with their disparaging tone, had a predictable

effect on the executives of the Mercury-News. As it turned out, Webb's confidence in his editors had been misplaced. By early 1997, executive editor Jerry Ceppos, who had his own corporate career to worry about, was in retreat.

On May 11, 1997, Ceppos published a front-page column saying the series "fell short of my standards." He criticized the stories because they "strongly implied CIA knowledge" of Contra connections to U.S. drug dealers who were manufacturing crack cocaine. "We did not have enough proof that top CIA officials knew of the relationship," Ceppos wrote.

Ceppos was wrong about the proof, of course. At AP, before we published our first Contra-cocaine article in 1985, Barger and I had known that the CIA and Reagan's White House were aware of the Contra-cocaine problem at senior levels. One of our sources was on Reagan's National Security Council staff.

However, Ceppos recognized that he and his newspaper were facing a credibility crisis brought on by the harsh consensus delivered by the Big Three, a judgment that had quickly solidified into conventional wisdom throughout the major news media and inside Knight-Ridder, Inc., which owned the Mercury-News. The only career-saving move – career-saving for Ceppos even if career-destroying for Webb – was to jettison Webb and the Contra-cocaine investigative project.

A 'Vindication'

The big newspapers and the Contras' defenders celebrated Ceppos's retreat as vindication of their own dismissal of the Contra-cocaine stories. In particular, Kurtz seemed proud that his demeaning of Webb now had the endorsement of Webb's editor.

Ceppos next pulled the plug on the Mercury-News' continuing Contra-cocaine investigation and reassigned Webb to a small office in Cupertino, California, far from his family. Webb resigned from the paper in disgrace. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Hung Out to Dry.](#)"]

For undercutting Webb and other Mercury-News reporters working on the Contra-cocaine project – some of whom were facing personal danger in Central America – Ceppos was lauded by the American Journalism Review and received the 1997 national Ethics in Journalism Award by the Society of Professional Journalists.

While Ceppos won raves, Webb watched his career collapse and his marriage break up. Still, Gary Webb had set in motion internal government investigations that would bring to the surface long-hidden facts about how the Reagan administration had conducted the Contra war.

The CIA published the first part of Inspector General Hitz's findings on Jan.

29, 1998. Though the CIA's press release for the report criticized Webb and defended the CIA, Hitz's *Volume One* admitted that not only were many of Webb's allegations true but that he actually understated the seriousness of the Contra-drug crimes and the CIA's knowledge of them.

Hitz conceded that cocaine smugglers played a significant early role in the Contra movement and that the CIA intervened to block an image-threatening 1984 federal investigation into a San Francisco-based drug ring with suspected ties to the Contras, the so-called "Frogman Case."

After *Volume One* was released, I called Webb (whom I had spent some time with since his series was published). I chided him for indeed getting the story "wrong." He had understated how serious the problem of Contra-cocaine trafficking had been, I said.

It was a form of gallows humor for the two of us, since nothing had changed in the way the major newspapers treated the Contra-cocaine issue. They focused only on the press release that continued to attack Webb, while ignoring the incriminating information that could be found in the full report. All I could do was highlight those admissions at Consortiumnews.com, which sadly had a much, much smaller readership than the Big Three.

The major U.S. news media also looked the other way on other startling disclosures.

On May 7, 1998, for instance, Rep. Maxine Waters, a California Democrat, introduced into the Congressional Record a Feb. 11, 1982 letter of understanding between the CIA and the Justice Department. The letter, which had been requested by CIA Director William Casey, freed the CIA from legal requirements that it must report drug smuggling by CIA assets, a provision that covered the Nicaraguan Contras and the Afghan mujahedeen.

In other words, early in those two covert wars, the CIA leadership wanted to make sure that its geopolitical objectives would not be complicated by a legal requirement to turn in its client forces for drug trafficking.

Justice Denied

The next break in the long-running Contra-cocaine cover-up was a report by the Justice Department's Inspector General Michael Bromwich. Given the hostile climate surrounding Webb's series, Bromwich's report also opened with criticism of Webb. But, like the CIA's *Volume One*, the contents revealed new details about serious government wrongdoing.

According to evidence cited by Bromwich, the Reagan administration knew almost

from the outset of the Contra war that cocaine traffickers permeated the paramilitary operation. The administration also did next to nothing to expose or stop the crimes.

Bromwich's report revealed example after example of leads not followed, corroborated witnesses disparaged, official law-enforcement investigations sabotaged, and even the CIA facilitating the work of drug traffickers.

The report showed that the Contras and their supporters ran several parallel drug-smuggling operations, not just the one at the center of Webb's series. The report also found that the CIA shared little of its information about Contra drugs with law-enforcement agencies and on three occasions disrupted cocaine-trafficking investigations that threatened the Contras.

As well as depicting a more widespread Contra-drug operation than Webb (or Barger and I) had understood, the Justice Department report provided some important corroboration about Nicaraguan drug smuggler Norwin Meneses, a key figure in Gary Webb's series and Adolfo Calero's friend as described by Dennis Ainsworth.

Bromwich cited U.S. government informants who supplied detailed information about Meneses's drug operation and his financial assistance to the Contras. For instance, Renato Pena, the money-and-drug courier for Meneses, said that in the early 1980s the CIA allowed the Contras to fly drugs into the United States, sell them, and keep the proceeds. Pena, the FDN's northern California representative, said the drug trafficking was forced on the Contras by the inadequate levels of U.S. government assistance.

The Justice Department report also disclosed repeated examples of the CIA and U.S. embassies in Central America discouraging DEA investigations, including one into Contra-cocaine shipments moving through the international airport in El Salvador. Bromwich said secrecy trumped all.

"We have no doubt that the CIA and the U.S. Embassy were not anxious for the DEA to pursue its investigation at the airport," he wrote.

Bromwich also described the curious case of how a DEA pilot helped a CIA asset escape from Costa Rican authorities in 1989 after the man, American farmer John Hull, had been charged in connection with Contra-cocaine trafficking. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[John Hull's Great Escape](#)."]]

Hull's ranch in northern Costa Rica had been the site of Contra camps for attacking Nicaragua from the south. For years, Contra-connected witnesses also said Hull's property was used for the transshipment of cocaine en route to the United States, but those accounts were brushed aside by the Reagan

administration and disparaged in major U.S. newspapers.

Yet, according to Bromwich's report, the DEA took the accounts seriously enough to prepare a research report on the evidence in November 1986. One informant described Colombian cocaine off-loaded at an airstrip on Hull's ranch.

The drugs were then concealed in a shipment of frozen shrimp and transported to the United States. The alleged Costa Rican shipper was Frigorificos de Puntarenas, a firm controlled by Cuban-American Luis Rodriguez. Like Hull, however, Frigorificos had friends in high places. In 1985-86, the State Department had selected the shrimp company to handle \$261,937 in non-lethal assistance earmarked for the Contras.

Hull also remained a man with powerful protectors. Even after Costa Rican authorities brought drug charges against him, influential Americans, including Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Indiana, demanded that Hull be let out of jail pending trial. Then, in July 1989 with the help of a DEA pilot – and possibly a DEA agent as well – Hull managed to fly out of Costa Rica to Haiti and then to the United States.

Despite these startling new disclosures, the big newspapers still showed no inclination to read beyond the criticism of Webb in the press release.

Major Disclosures

By fall 1998, Washington was obsessed with President Bill Clinton's Monica Lewinsky sex scandal, which made it easier to ignore even more stunning Contra-cocaine disclosures in the CIA's *Volume Two*, published on Oct. 8, 1998.

In the report, CIA Inspector General Hitz identified more than 50 Contras and Contra-related entities implicated in the drug trade. He also detailed how the Reagan administration had protected these drug operations and frustrated federal investigations throughout the 1980s.

According to *Volume Two*, the CIA knew the criminal nature of its Contra clients from the start of the war against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. The earliest Contra force, called the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Democratic Alliance (ADREN) or the 15th of September Legion, had chosen "to stoop to criminal activities in order to feed and clothe their cadre," according to a June 1981 draft of a CIA field report.

According to a September 1981 cable to CIA headquarters, two ADREN members made the first delivery of drugs to Miami in July 1981. ADREN's leaders included Enrique Bermudez and other early Contras who would later direct the major Contra army, the CIA-organized FDN which was based in Honduras, along Nicaragua's

northern border.

Throughout the war, Bermudez remained the top Contra military commander. The CIA later corroborated the allegations about ADREN's cocaine trafficking, but insisted that Bermudez had opposed the drug shipments to the United States that went ahead nonetheless.

The truth about Bermudez's supposed objections to drug trafficking, however, was less clear. According to Hitz's *Volume One*, Bermudez enlisted Norwin Meneses the Nicaraguan cocaine smuggler, the friend of Adolfo Calero, and a key figure in Webb's series to raise money and buy supplies for the Contras.

Volume One had quoted another Nicaraguan trafficker, Danilo Blandon, a Meneses associate (and another lead character in Webb's series), as telling Hitz's investigators that he (Blandon) and Meneses flew to Honduras to meet with Bermudez in 1982. At the time, Meneses's criminal activities were well-known in the Nicaraguan exile community, but Bermudez told the cocaine smugglers that "the ends justify the means" in raising money for the Contras.

After the Bermudez meeting, Meneses and Blandon were briefly arrested by Honduran police who confiscated \$100,000 that the police suspected was to be a payment for a drug transaction. The Contras intervened, gained freedom for the two traffickers and got them their money back by saying the cash, which indeed was for a cocaine purchase in Bolivia, belonged to the Contras.

There were other indications of Bermudez's drug-smuggling complicity. In February 1988, another Nicaraguan exile linked to the drug trade accused Bermudez of participation in narcotics trafficking, according to Hitz's report. After the Contra war ended, Bermudez returned to Managua, Nicaragua, where he was shot to death on Feb. 16, 1991. The murder has never been solved.

The Southern Front

Along the Southern Front, the Contras' military operations in Costa Rica on Nicaragua's southern border, the CIA's drug evidence centered on the forces of Eden Pastora, another top Contra commander. But Hitz discovered that the U.S. government may have made the drug situation worse, not better.

Hitz revealed that the CIA put an admitted drug operative, known by his CIA pseudonym "Ivan Gomez," in a supervisory position over Pastora. Hitz reported that the CIA discovered Gomez's drug history in 1987 when Gomez failed a security review on drug-trafficking questions.

In internal CIA interviews, Gomez admitted that in March or April 1982, he helped family members who were engaged in drug trafficking and money laundering.

In one case, Gomez said he assisted his brother and brother-in-law transporting cash from New York City to Miami. He admitted he “knew this act was illegal.”

Later, Gomez expanded on his admission, describing how his family members had fallen \$2 million into debt and had gone to Miami to run a money-laundering center for drug traffickers.

Gomez said “his brother had many visitors whom [Gomez] assumed to be in the drug trafficking business.” Gomez’s brother was arrested on drug charges in June 1982. Three months later, in September 1982, Gomez started his CIA assignment in Costa Rica.

Years later, convicted drug trafficker Carlos Cabezas alleged that in the early 1980s, Ivan Gomez was the CIA agent in Costa Rica who was overseeing drug-money donations to the Contras. Gomez “was to make sure the money was given to the right people [the Contras] and nobody was taking . . . profit they weren’t supposed to,” Cabezas stated publicly.

But the CIA sought to discredit Cabezas at the time because he had trouble identifying Gomez’s picture and put Gomez at one meeting in early 1982 before Gomez started his CIA assignment. While the CIA was able to fend off Cabezas’s allegations by pointing to these minor discrepancies, Hitz’s report revealed that the CIA was nevertheless aware of Gomez’s direct role in drug-money laundering, a fact the agency hid from Sen. Kerry in his investigation during the late 1980s.

There was also more to know about Gomez. In November 1985, the FBI learned from an informant that Gomez’s two brothers had been large-scale cocaine importers, with one brother arranging shipments from Bolivia’s infamous drug kingpin Roberto Suarez.

Suarez already was known as a financier of right-wing causes. In 1980, with the support of Argentina’s hard-line anticommunist military regime, Suarez bankrolled a coup in Bolivia that ousted the elected left-of-center government. The violent putsch became known as the Cocaine Coup because it made Bolivia the region’s first narco-state.

By protecting cocaine shipments headed north, Bolivia’s government helped transform Colombia’s Medellin cartel from a struggling local operation into a giant corporate-style business for delivering vast quantities of cocaine to the U.S. market.

Flush with cash in the early 1980s, Suarez invested more than \$30 million in various right-wing paramilitary operations, including the Contra forces in Central America, according to U.S. Senate testimony by an Argentine intelligence

officer, Leonardo Sanchez-Reisse.

In 1987, Sanchez-Reisse said the Suarez drug money was laundered through front companies in Miami before going to Central America. There, other Argentine intelligence officers, veterans of the Bolivian coup, trained the Contras in the early 1980s, even before the CIA arrived to first assist with the training and later take over the Contra operation from the Argentines.

Inspector General Hitz added another piece to the mystery of the Bolivian-Contra connection. One Contra fund-raiser, Jose Orlando Bolanos, boasted that the Argentine government was supporting his Contra activities, according to a May 1982 cable to CIA headquarters. Bolanos made the statement during a meeting with undercover DEA agents in Florida. He even offered to introduce them to his Bolivian cocaine supplier.

Despite all this suspicious drug activity centered around Ivan Gomez and the Contras, the CIA insisted that it did not unmask Gomez until 1987, when he failed a security check and confessed his role in his family's drug business.

The CIA official who interviewed Gomez concluded that "Gomez directly participated in illegal drug transactions, concealed participation in illegal drug transactions, and concealed information about involvement in illegal drug activity," Hitz wrote.

But senior CIA officials still protected Gomez. They refused to refer the Gomez case to the Justice Department, citing the 1982 agreement that spared the CIA from a legal obligation to report narcotics crimes by people collaborating with the CIA who were not formal agency employees. Gomez was an independent contractor who worked for the CIA but was not officially on staff. The CIA eased Gomez out of the agency in February 1988, without alerting law enforcement or the congressional oversight committees.

When questioned about the case nearly a decade later, one senior CIA official who had supported the gentle treatment of Gomez had second thoughts. "It is a striking commentary on me and everyone that this guy's involvement in narcotics didn't weigh more heavily on me or the system," the official told Hitz's investigators.

Drug Path to the White House

A Medellin drug connection arose in another section of Hitz's report, when he revealed evidence suggesting that some Contra trafficking may have been sanctioned by Reagan's National Security Council. The protagonist for this part of the Contra-cocaine mystery was Moises Nunez, a Cuban-American who worked for Oliver North's NSC Contra-support operation and for two drug-connected seafood

importers, Ocean Hunter in Miami and Frigorificos De Puntarenas in Costa Rica.

Frigorificos De Puntarenas was created in the early 1980s as a cover for drug-money laundering, according to sworn testimony by two of the firm's principals, Carlos Soto and Medellin cartel accountant Ramon Milian Rodriguez. (It was also the company implicated by a DEA informant in moving cocaine from John Hull's ranch to the United States.)

Drug allegations were swirling around Moises Nunez by the mid-1980s. Indeed, his operation was one of the targets of my and Barger's AP investigation in 1985. Finally reacting to the suspicions, the CIA questioned Nunez about his alleged cocaine trafficking on March 25, 1987. He responded by pointing the finger at his NSC superiors.

"Nunez revealed that since 1985, he had engaged in a clandestine relationship with the National Security Council," Hitz reported, adding: "Nunez refused to elaborate on the nature of these actions, but indicated it was difficult to answer questions relating to his involvement in narcotics trafficking because of the specific tasks he had performed at the direction of the NSC. Nunez refused to identify the NSC officials with whom he had been involved."

After this first round of questioning, CIA headquarters authorized an additional session, but then senior CIA officials reversed the decision. There would be no further efforts at "debriefing Nunez."

Hitz noted that "the cable [from headquarters] offered no explanation for the decision" to stop the Nunez interrogation. But the CIA's Central American Task Force chief Alan Fiers Jr. said the Nunez-NSC drug lead was not pursued "because of the NSC connection and the possibility that this could be somehow connected to the Private Benefactor program [the Contra money handled by the NSC's Oliver North] a decision was made not to pursue this matter."

Joseph Fernandez, who had been the CIA's station chief in Costa Rica, confirmed to congressional Iran-Contra investigators that Nunez "was involved in a very sensitive operation" for North's "Enterprise." The exact nature of that NSC-authorized activity has never been divulged.

At the time of the Nunez-NSC drug admissions and his truncated interrogation, the CIA's acting director was Robert Gates, who nearly two decades later became President George W. Bush's second secretary of defense, a position he retained under President Barack Obama.

Drug Record

The CIA also worked directly with other drug-connected Cuban-Americans on the

Contra project, Hitz found. One of Nunez's Cuban-American associates, Felipe Vidal, had a criminal record as a narcotics trafficker in the 1970s. But the CIA still hired him to serve as a logistics coordinator for the Contras, Hitz reported.

The CIA also learned that Vidal's drug connections were not only in the past. A December 1984 cable to CIA headquarters revealed Vidal's ties to Rene Corvo, another Cuban-American suspected of drug trafficking. Corvo was working with Cuban anticommunist Frank Castro, who was viewed as a Medellin cartel representative within the Contra movement.

There were other narcotics links to Vidal. In January 1986, the DEA in Miami seized 414 pounds of cocaine concealed in a shipment of yucca that was going from a Contra operative in Costa Rica to Ocean Hunter, the company where Vidal (and Moises Nunez) worked. Despite the evidence, Vidal remained a CIA employee as he collaborated with Frank Castro's assistant, Rene Corvo, in raising money for the Contras, according to a CIA memo in June 1986.

By fall 1986, Sen. Kerry had heard enough rumors about Vidal to demand information about him as part of his congressional inquiry into Contra drugs. But the CIA withheld the derogatory information in its files. On Oct. 15, 1986, Kerry received a briefing from the CIA's Alan Fiers, who didn't mention Vidal's drug arrests and conviction in the 1970s.

But Vidal was not yet in the clear. In 1987, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Miami began investigating Vidal, Ocean Hunter, and other Contra-connected entities. This prosecutorial attention worried the CIA. The CIA's Latin American division felt it was time for a security review of Vidal. But on Aug. 5, 1987, the CIA's security office blocked the review for fear that the Vidal drug information "could be exposed during any future litigation."

As expected, the U.S. Attorney's Office did request documents about "Contra-related activities" by Vidal, Ocean Hunter, and 16 other entities. The CIA advised the prosecutor that "no information had been found regarding Ocean Hunter," a statement that was clearly false. The CIA continued Vidal's employment as an adviser to the Contra movement until 1990, virtually the end of the Contra war.

Hitz also revealed that drugs tainted the highest levels of the Honduran-based FDN, the largest Contra army. Hitz found that Juan Rivas, a Contra commander who rose to be chief of staff, admitted that he had been a cocaine trafficker in Colombia before the war.

The CIA asked Rivas, known as El Quiche, about his background after the DEA

began suspecting that Rivas might be an escaped convict from a Colombian prison. In interviews with CIA officers, Rivas acknowledged that he had been arrested and convicted of packaging and transporting cocaine for the drug trade in Barranquilla, Colombia. After several months in prison, Rivas said, he escaped and moved to Central America, where he joined the Contras.

Defending Rivas, CIA officials insisted that there was no evidence that Rivas engaged in trafficking while with the Contras. But one CIA cable noted that he lived an expensive lifestyle, even keeping a \$100,000 Thoroughbred horse at the Contra camp. Contra military commander Bermudez later attributed Rivas's wealth to his ex-girlfriend's rich family. But a CIA cable in March 1989 added that "some in the FDN may have suspected at the time that the father-in-law was engaged in drug trafficking."

Still, the CIA moved quickly to protect Rivas from exposure and possible extradition to Colombia. In February 1989, CIA headquarters asked that the DEA take no action "in view of the serious political damage to the U.S. Government that could occur should the information about Rivas become public."

Rivas was eased out of the Contra leadership with an explanation of poor health. With U.S. government help, he was allowed to resettle in Miami. Colombia was not informed about his fugitive status.

Another senior FDN official implicated in the drug trade was its chief spokesman in Honduras, Arnolando Jose "Frank" Arana. The drug allegations against Arana dated back to 1983 when a federal narcotics task force put him under criminal investigation because of plans "to smuggle 100 kilograms of cocaine into the United States from South America." On Jan. 23, 1986, the FBI reported that Arana and his brothers were involved in a drug-smuggling enterprise, although Arana was not charged.

Arana sought to clear up another set of drug suspicions in 1989 by visiting the DEA in Honduras with a business associate, Jose Perez. Arana's association with Perez, however, only raised new alarms. If "Arana is mixed up with the Perez brothers, he is probably dirty," the DEA said.

Drug Airlines

Through their ownership of an air services company called SETCO, the Perez brothers were associated with Juan Matta-Ballesteros, a major cocaine kingpin connected to the 1985 torture-murder of DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, according to reports by the DEA and U.S. Customs. Hitz reported that someone at the CIA scribbled a note on a DEA cable about Arana stating: "Arnold Arana . . . still active and working, we [CIA] may have a problem."

Despite its drug ties to Matta-Ballesteros, SETCO emerged as the principal company for ferrying supplies to the Contras in Honduras. During congressional Iran-Contra hearings, FDN political leader Adolfo Calero testified that SETCO was paid from bank accounts controlled by Oliver North. SETCO also received \$185,924 from the State Department for delivering supplies to the Contras in 1986. Furthermore, Hitz found that other air transport companies used by the Contras were implicated in the cocaine trade as well.

Even FDN leaders suspected that they were shipping supplies to Central America aboard planes that might be returning with drugs. Mario Calero, Adolfo Calero's brother and the chief of Contra logistics, grew so uneasy about one air freight company that he notified U.S. law enforcement that the FDN only chartered the planes for the flights south, not the return flights north.

Hitz found that some drug pilots simply rotated from one sector of the Contra operation to another. Donald Frixone, who had a drug record in the Dominican Republic, was hired by the CIA to fly Contra missions from 1983 to 1985. In September 1986, however, Frixone was implicated in smuggling 19,000 pounds of marijuana into the United States. In late 1986 or early 1987, he went to work for Vortex, another U.S.-paid Contra supply company linked to the drug trade.

By the time that Hitz's *Volume Two* was published in fall 1998, the CIA's defense against Webb's series had shrunk to a fig leaf: that the CIA did not *conspire* with the Contras to raise money through cocaine trafficking. But Hitz made clear that the Contra war took precedence over law enforcement and that the CIA withheld evidence of Contra crimes from the Justice Department, Congress, and even the CIA's own analytical division.

Besides tracing the evidence of Contra-drug trafficking through the decade-long Contra war, the inspector general interviewed senior CIA officers who acknowledged that they were aware of the Contra-drug problem but didn't want its exposure to undermine the struggle to overthrow Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

According to Hitz, the CIA had "one overriding priority: to oust the Sandinista government. . . . [CIA officers] were determined that the various difficulties they encountered not be allowed to prevent effective implementation of the Contra program." One CIA field officer explained, "The focus was to get the job done, get the support and win the war."

Hitz also recounted complaints from CIA analysts that CIA operations officers handling the Contras hid evidence of Contra-drug trafficking even from the CIA's analysts.

Because of the withheld evidence, the CIA analysts incorrectly concluded in the mid-1980s that “only a handful of Contras might have been involved in drug trafficking.” That false assessment was passed on to Congress and to major news organizations, serving as an important basis for denouncing Gary Webb and his “Dark Alliance” series in 1996.

CIA Admission

Although Hitz’s report was an extraordinary admission of institutional guilt by the CIA, it went almost unnoticed by the big American newspapers.

On Oct. 10, 1998, two days after Hitz’s *Volume Two* was posted on the CIA’s Web site, the New York Times published a brief article that continued to deride Webb but acknowledged the Contra-drug problem may have been worse than earlier understood. Several weeks later, the Washington Post weighed in with a story that simply missed the point of the CIA’s confession. Though having assigned 17 journalists to tear down Webb’s reporting, the Los Angeles Times chose not to publish a story on the release of Hitz’s *Volume Two*.

In 2000, the House Intelligence Committee grudgingly acknowledged that the stories about Reagan’s CIA protecting Contra drug traffickers were true. The committee released a report citing classified testimony from CIA Inspector General Britt Snider (Hitz’s successor) admitting that the spy agency had turned a blind eye to evidence of Contra-drug smuggling and generally treated drug smuggling through Central America as a low priority.

“In the end the objective of unseating the Sandinistas appears to have taken precedence over dealing properly with potentially serious allegations against those with whom the agency was working,” Snider said, adding that the CIA did not treat the drug allegations in “a consistent, reasoned or justifiable manner.”

The House committee, then controlled by Republicans, still downplayed the significance of the Contra-cocaine scandal, but the panel acknowledged, deep inside its report, that in some cases, “CIA employees did nothing to verify or disprove drug trafficking information, even when they had the opportunity to do so. In some of these, receipt of a drug allegation appeared to provoke no specific response, and business went on as usual.”

Like the release of Hitz’s report in 1998, the admissions by Snider and the House committee drew virtually no media attention in 2000, except for a few articles on the Internet, including one at Consortiumnews.com.

Because of this journalistic misconduct by the Big Three newspapers, choosing to conceal their own neglect of the Contra-cocaine scandal and to protect the

Reagan administration's image, Webb's reputation was never rehabilitated.

After his original "Dark Alliance" series was published in 1996, I joined Webb in a few speaking appearances on the West Coast, including one packed book talk at the Midnight Special bookstore in Santa Monica, California. For a time, Webb was treated as a celebrity on the American Left, but that gradually faded.

In our interactions during these joint appearances, I found Webb to be a regular guy who seemed to be holding up fairly well under the terrible pressure. He had landed an investigative job with a California state legislative committee. He also felt some measure of vindication when CIA Inspector General Hitz's reports came out.

But Webb never could overcome the pain caused by his betrayal at the hands of his journalistic colleagues, his peers. In the years that followed, Webb was unable to find decent-paying work in his profession, the conventional wisdom remained that he had somehow been exposed as a journalistic fraud. His state job ended; his marriage fell apart; he struggled to pay bills; and he was faced with a forced move out of a house near Sacramento, California, and in with his mother.

On Dec. 9, 2004, the 49-year-old Webb typed out suicide notes to his ex-wife and his three children; laid out a certificate for his cremation; and taped a note on the door telling movers, who were coming the next morning, to instead call 911. Webb then took out his father's pistol and shot himself in the head. The first shot was not lethal, so he fired once more.

Even with Webb's death, the big newspapers that had played key roles in his destruction couldn't bring themselves to show Webb any mercy. After Webb's body was found, I received a call from a reporter for the Los Angeles Times who knew that I was one of Webb's few journalistic colleagues who had defended him and his work.

I told the reporter that American history owed a great debt to Gary Webb because he had forced out important facts about Reagan-era crimes. But I added that the Los Angeles Times would be hard-pressed to write an honest obituary because the newspaper had ignored Hitz's final report, which had largely vindicated Webb.

To my disappointment but not my surprise, I was correct. The Los Angeles Times ran a mean-spirited obituary that made no mention of either my defense of Webb, nor the CIA's admissions in 1998. The obituary was republished in other newspapers, including the Washington Post.

In effect, Webb's suicide enabled senior editors at the Big Three newspapers to breathe a little easier, one of the few people who understood the ugly story of

the Reagan administration's cover-up of the Contra-cocaine scandal and the U.S. media's complicity was now silenced.

To this day, none of the journalists or media critics who participated in the destruction of Gary Webb has paid a price. None has faced the sort of humiliation that Webb had to endure. None had to experience that special pain of standing up for what is best in the profession of journalism, taking on a difficult story that seeks to hold powerful people accountable for serious crimes, and then being vilified by your own colleagues, the people that you expected to understand and appreciate what you had done.

On the contrary, many were rewarded with professional advancement and lucrative careers. For instance, for years, Howard Kurtz got to host the CNN program, "Reliable Sources," which lectured journalists on professional standards. He was described in the program's bio as "the nation's premier media critic." (His show later moved to Fox News, renamed "MediaBuzz.")

But the Webb tragedy and the Contra-cocaine case remain relevant today because they underscore how the mainstream press cannot be trusted with decisions about what news is true and what is false. If such a Ministry of Truth had existed in the late 1990s, the dark chapter of the Reagan administration's dealings with Nicaraguan drug traffickers would still be just a vague and easily dismissed rumor.

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](#)).

A New Cold War or a New Detente

The U.S. government's rush into the New Cold War with Russia has stumbled because of Donald Trump's victory and growing resistance in Europe, giving rise to a possible New Détente, says Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

The U.S. presidential election presented the American voting public with a clear choice on the issue of the New Cold War with Russia, between worsening tensions and a chance for détente.

Hillary Clinton offered a continuation and intensification of the policies of isolation, denigration and confrontation with Russia that President Obama has pursued over the past three years, bringing us closer to nuclear war. Donald Trump favored a policy of outreach to Russia, initially focused on a common struggle against Islamic State and Al Qaeda terrorism, but having the potential to mature into a broad constructive relationship.

But the reality is that the foreign policy dimension of the votes cast on Nov. 8 was always going to be relatively minor, given Americans' natural focus on domestic issues. And this year the whole electoral race was muddied by the vicious character assassinations practiced by both Republican and Democratic candidates.

In the op-ed article published below, which first appeared in *The Nation*, my fellow co-authors bring to the attention of a target audience of Americans interested in world affairs an opportunity to take a stand and "cast a vote" for peace that can materially affect the changing political landscape of Europe in 2017, where there will be nationwide elections in the locomotive nations of the European Union: France and Germany.

To be sure, as a result of the primary elections two weeks ago within the Center-Right party that bears the Gaullist traditions, the Republicans, and has the greatest likelihood of winning the Presidency in April-May 2017, the French appear to be choosing the more peaceful course on their own. They are rejecting Cold War rhetoric in favor of re-building ties to Russia.

However, in Germany, the candidate favored to win a fourth term in office in the autumn national elections, Chancellor Angela Merkel, considers herself the heir to Barack Obama's "legacy" of belligerence towards Russia. At the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party convention in Essen on Dec. 6, she was re-elected as standard-bearer of her party with some 98 percent of the votes.

In this context, it is important that within Germany's Socialist Party (SPD), which presently is Merkel's coalition partner but will be competing against her in the federal elections next autumn and which keeps alive the memory of Germany's own détente policy towards Russia, has now stepped out into the political arena and is gathering support from politicians both inside the SPD and in other parties to seek a change of direction with respect to Russia.

Where do Americans potentially fit into this equation? It would be no exaggeration to say that the Obama administration had a decisive role in scripting Angela Merkel's shift from a policy of strategic partnership with Russia in 2008 to Cold War venom in 2016. Vice President Joe Biden boasted openly of the pressure the U.S. applied to achieve and maintain the sanctions

against Russia in the European Union for which Germany was instrumental.

For these reasons, American citizens and organizations representing civil society should have no complexes about “influencing” the forthcoming German elections by demonstrating to their fellow-thinkers in the SPD and across the German political spectrum that the U.S. government did not speak for the American people when it imposed Cold War rules on the German chancellor and her backers in the ruling elites.

On the contrary, showing to German society that a peaceful Atlanticism is also possible and desirable, Americans could right the wrongs of the recent past. For those who wish to support this position, you can support the German pro-détente movement by signing the appeal:

<http://neue-entspannungspolitik.berlin/en/appeal/>

The following is a position paper, “Détente Now: A New Call for Peace, Security, and Cooperation,” by Gilbert Doctorow, Ute Finckh-Krämer, Ludger Volmer, Rolf Ekéus and Noam Chomsky

A transatlantic appeal for a new policy of détente with Russia has been launched. The declaration’s authors invite the general public to join leading political figures and social activists who have publicly rallied to support the call.

The initiative was born in Berlin several months ago in the days of deepest gloom engendered by confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, the Baltic countries, and Syria, with major war exercises held around Russia’s borders and bellicose language from both sides that suggested imminent hot war. As German Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank Walter Steinmeier (SPD) said in an interview with Bild newspaper on October 8, present times are more dangerous even than during the Cold War that ended in 1990: “Previously, the world was divided, but Moscow and Washington knew each other’s red lines and respected them. In a world with many regional conflicts and dwindling influence of the great powers, the world becomes more unpredictable.”

The roll-out of the initiative called Détente Now aims at bringing civil society on two continents into play both to enforce and to support approaches to pursue dialogue and compromise with Russian counterparts, e.g., on confidence- and security-building measures between Russia and its neighbors. Détente Now will be a powerful voice for change of direction in foreign policy within Europe, and within Germany in particular, as it and several other key EU countries have their national elections in the course of 2017.

In the United States, the word “détente” brings to mind the efforts of former

presidents and secretaries of state to control and reduce strategic weapons and to find ways of cooperation instead of confrontation. In Germany, the equivalent policy, *Entspannungspolitik*, was crafted in the 1970s by Chancellor Willy Brandt and his close adviser Egon Bahr. Their “Eastern Policy” promoted rapprochement as a means of gradually changing the behavior and views of the opposing side. It is widely believed to have facilitated the eventual fall of the Berlin Wall and end of the original Cold War.

The *Détente Now* declaration specifically seeks implementation of the twin objectives of a “Europe whole and free” and a common space of peace and security extending from Lisbon to Vladivostok. That vision of all-European security set out in the Charter of Paris signed in 1990 by all European states and the institutionalization of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Budapest in 1994, was predicated upon respect for human rights and liberties, and upon equal security provisions for all. Regrettably, in the 1990s this grand vision was replaced by political and security schemes that left Russia out in the cold: the greater European Union and an expanded NATO. The result has been nearly calamitous, the authors of *Détente Now* believe.

The declaration was initiated by a few concerned citizens of civil society, churches, and science, including Wolfgang Biermann (former adviser to Egon Bahr), Peter Brandt (historian), Konrad Raiser (former secretary general of the World Council of Churches), Reiner Hoffmann (chairman of the German Trade Unions Federation), and Horst Teltschik, (former head of Chancellor Kohl’s office and 1999–2008 director of the Munich Security Conference), as well as, from the United States, Daniel Ellsberg (longtime advocate for an informed citizenry).

Many people from the United States, Germany, and other countries support the declaration in the wake of the American presidential election as a transatlantic appeal for a new policy of *détente*. Among the key first signatories in Germany are well-known Bundestag members from the SPD party, recently joined by a growing number of Green deputies, as well as city mayors, scientists, artists, and journalists. In the United States, the declaration has won the support of several board members of the American Committee for East West Accord, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, the Association of International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, Veteran Intelligence Officials for Sanity, and of celebrities from the film and music industries, among them Roger Waters (founding member of Pink Floyd) or David Kasper (an Academy Award–winning filmmaker).

Starting this month, the declaration will be published on various homepages, and public collection of more signatures of support will start. A German version can be found [here](#), with an English version [here](#).

The Initiative “neue Entspannungspolitik jetzt!” / “DetenteNOW!” will open a German- and English-language portal to make available literature relevant to the cause. Supporters of the declaration also propose to organize round-table discussions both in Europe and in the United States, and to set up direct US-German-Russian and other exchanges of civil society activists who support the initiative.

Gilbert Doctorow is a professional Russia watcher going back to 1965. He is a board member and European Coordinator of the American Committee for East-West Accord.

Ute Finckh-Krämer , Member of the German Bundestag, SPD, is a Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Deputy Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Arms Control and Disarmament in the German Bundestag.

Ludger Volmer was a member of the German Bundestag from 1985 to 1990 and 1994 to 2002. He was undersecretary of state from 1998 to 2002.

Rolf Ekéus of Sweden was executive chairman of the UN Special Commission on Disarming Iraq from 1991 to 1997. He chaired the drafting of the principles of the Charter of Paris in 1990, a founding document of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor emeritus at MIT, has written many books and articles on international affairs, in particular on Israel and Palestine. His latest book is *Who Rules the World?*
