

A Call to Bring Julian Assange Home

The Australian government has an obligation to free Julian Assange, John Pilger told a rally in Sydney on June 16, marking Assange's six years' confinement in the Ecuadorean embassy in London.

By **John Pilger**



The persecution of Julian Assange must end. Or it will end in tragedy.

The Australian government and prime minister Malcolm Turnbull have an historic opportunity to decide which it will be.

They can remain silent, for which history will be unforgiving. Or they can act in the interests of justice and humanity and bring this remarkable Australian citizen home.

Assange does not ask for special treatment. The government has clear diplomatic and moral obligations to protect Australian citizens abroad from gross injustice: in Julian's case, from a gross miscarriage of justice and the extreme danger that await him should he walk out of the Ecuadorean embassy in London unprotected.

We know from the Chelsea Manning case what he can expect if a U.S. extradition warrant is successful – a United Nations Special Rapporteur called it torture.

I know Julian Assange well; I regard him as a close friend, a person of extraordinary resilience and courage. I have watched a tsunami of lies and smear engulf him, endlessly, vindictively, perfidiously; and I know why they smear him.

In 2008, a plan to destroy both WikiLeaks and Assange was

laid out in a top secret document dated 8 March, 2008. The authors were the Cyber Counter-intelligence Assessments Branch of the U.S. Defence Department. They described in detail how important it was to destroy the "feeling of trust" that is WikiLeaks' "centre of gravity".

This would be achieved, they wrote, with threats of "exposure [and] criminal prosecution" and a unrelenting assault on reputation. The aim was to silence and criminalise WikiLeaks and its editor and publisher. It was as if they planned a

war on a single human being and on the very principle of freedom of speech.

Vichy Media

Their main weapon would be personal smear. Their shock troops would be enlisted in the media – those who are meant to keep the record straight and tell us the truth.

The irony is that no one told these journalists what to do. I call them Vichy journalists – after the Vichy government that served and enabled the German occupation of wartime France.

Last October, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation journalist Sarah Ferguson interviewed Hillary Clinton, over whom she fawned as “the icon for your generation”.

This was the same Clinton who threatened to “obliterate totally” Iran and, who, as U.S. secretary of State in 2011, was one of the instigators of the invasion and destruction of Libya as a modern state, with the loss of 40,000 lives. Like the invasion of Iraq, it was based on lies.

When the Libyan President was murdered publicly and gruesomely with a knife, Clinton was filmed whooping and cheering. Thanks largely to her, Libya became a breeding ground for ISIS and other jihadists. Thanks largely to her, tens of thousands of refugees fled in peril across the Mediterranean, and many drowned.

WikiLeaks Exposed Clinton

Leaked emails published by WikiLeaks revealed that Hillary Clinton’s foundation – which she shares with her husband – received millions of dollars from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the main backers of ISIS and terrorism across the Middle East.

As Secretary of State, Clinton approved the biggest arms sale ever – worth \$80 billion – to Saudi Arabia, one of her foundation’s principal benefactors. Today, Saudi Arabia is using these weapons to crush starving and stricken people in a genocidal assault on Yemen.

Sarah Ferguson, a highly paid reporter, raised not a word of this with Hillary Clinton sitting in front of her.

Instead, she invited Clinton to describe the “damage” Julian Assange did “personally to you”. In response, Clinton defamed Assange, an Australian citizen, as “very clearly a tool of Russian intelligence” and “a nihilistic opportunist who does the bidding of a dictator”.

She offered no evidence – nor was asked for any – to back her grave allegations.

At no time was Assange offered the right of reply to this shocking interview, which Australia's publicly-funded state broadcaster had a duty to give him.

As if that wasn't enough, Ferguson's executive producer, Sally Neighbour, followed the interview with a vicious re-tweet: "Assange is Putin's bitch. We all know it!"

There are many other examples of Vichy journalism. The *Guardian*, reputedly once a great liberal newspaper, conducted a vendetta against Julian Assange. Like a spurned lover, the *Guardian* aimed its personal, petty, inhuman and craven attacks at a man whose work it once published and profited from.

The former editor of the *Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger, called the WikiLeaks disclosures, which his newspaper published in 2010, "one of the greatest journalistic scoops of the last 30 years". Awards were lavished and celebrated as if Julian Assange did not exist.

Maligning and Profiting off Assange

WikiLeaks' revelations became part of the *Guardian's* marketing plan to raise the paper's cover price. They made money, often big money, while WikiLeaks and Assange struggled to survive. With not a penny going to WikiLeaks, a hyped *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie deal. The book's authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, gratuitously abused Assange as a "damaged personality" and "callous".

They also revealed the secret password Julian had given the *Guardian* in confidence and which was designed to protect a digital file containing the U.S. embassy cables.

With Assange now trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy, Harding, who had enriched himself on the backs of both Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, stood among the police outside the embassy and gloated on his blog that "Scotland Yard may get the last laugh".

The question is *why*.

Julian Assange has committed no crime. He has never been charged with a crime. The Swedish episode was bogus and farcical and he has been vindicated.

Katrin Axelsson and Lisa Longstaff of Women Against Rape summed it up when they wrote, "The allegations against [Assange] are a smokescreen behind which a number of governments are trying to clamp down on WikiLeaks for having audaciously revealed to the public their secret planning of wars and occupations with their attendant rape, murder and destruction... The authorities care so

little about violence against women that they manipulate rape allegations at will.”

This truth was lost or buried in a media witch-hunt that disgracefully associated Assange with rape and misogyny. The witch-hunt included voices who described themselves as on the left and as feminist. They willfully ignored the evidence of extreme danger should Assange be extradited to the United States.

According to a document released by Edward Snowden, Assange is on a “Manhunt target list”. One leaked official memo says: “Assange is going to make a nice bride in prison. Screw the terrorist. He’ll be eating cat food forever.”

In Alexandria, Virginia – the suburban home of America’s war-making elite – a secret grand jury, a throwback to the middle ages – has spent seven years trying to concoct a crime for which Assange can be prosecuted.

This is not easy; the U.S. Constitution protects publishers, journalists and whistleblowers. Assange’s crime is to have broken a silence.

They Never Happened

No investigative journalism in my lifetime can equal the importance of what WikiLeaks has done in calling rapacious power to account. It is as if a one-way moral screen has been pushed back to expose the imperialism of liberal democracies: the commitment to endless warfare and the division and degradation of “unworthy” lives: from Grenfell Tower to Gaza.

When Harold Pinter accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005, he referred to “a vast tapestry of lies up on which we feed”. He asked why “the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought” of the Soviet Union were well known in the West while America’s imperial crimes “never happened ... even while [they] were happening, they never happened.”

In its revelations of fraudulent wars (Afghanistan, Iraq) and the bald-faced lies of governments (the Chagos Islands), WikiLeaks has allowed us to glimpse how the imperial game is played in the 21st century. *That* is why Assange is in mortal danger.

Seven years ago, in Sydney, I arranged to meet a prominent Liberal Member of the Federal Parliament, Malcolm Turnbull.

I wanted to ask him to deliver a letter from Gareth Peirce, Assange’s lawyer, to the government. We talked about his famous victory – in the 1980s when, as a young barrister, he had fought the British Government’s attempts to suppress

free speech and prevent the publication of the book *Spycatcher* – in its way, a WikiLeaks of the time, for it revealed the crimes of state power.

The prime minister of Australia was then Julia Gillard, a Labor Party politician who had

declared WikiLeaks “illegal” and wanted to cancel Assange’s passport – until she was told she could not do this: that Assange had committed no crime: that WikiLeaks was a publisher, whose work was protected under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Australia was one of the original signatories.

In abandoning Assange, an Australian citizen, and colluding in his persecution, Prime Minister Gillard’s outrageous behaviour forced the issue of his recognition, under international law, as a political refugee whose life was at risk. Ecuador invoked the 1951 Convention and granted Assange refuge in its embassy in London.

Gillard has recently been appearing in a gig with Hillary Clinton; they are billed as pioneering feminists.

If there is anything to remember Gillard by, it a warmongering, sycophantic, embarrassing speech she made to the US Congress soon after she demanded the illegal cancellation of Julian’s passport.

Malcolm Turnbull is now the Prime Minister of Australia. Julian Assange’s father has written to Turnbull. It is a moving letter, in which he has appealed to the prime minister to bring his son home. He refers to the real possibility of a tragedy.

I have watched Assange’s health deteriorate in his years of confinement without sunlight. He has had a relentless cough, but is not even allowed safe passage to and from a hospital for an X-ray.

Malcolm Turnbull can remain silent. Or he can seize this opportunity and use his government’s diplomatic influence to defend the life of an Australian citizen, whose courageous public service is recognised by countless people across the world. He can bring Julian Assange home.

John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist based in London. Pilger’s Web site is: www.johnpilger.com. His new film, “The Coming War on China,” is available in the U.S. from www.bullfrogfilms.com

Britain's Brave New World Just Got Braver

Britain's new counter-terrorism initiative builds on Stasi-like methods to create a potentially Orwellian present for British citizens, as former MI-5 officer Annie Machon explains.

By Annie Machon *Special to Consortium News*
in Brussels



British Home Secretary Sajid Javid unveiled a new counter-terrorism initiative last week that he says targets an ever-metastasizing threat, yet it raises a raft of new questions about people's rights.

The government is acting on the imperative that *something* needs to be done. But MI5 – officially known as Britain's domestic Security Service and the lead organization combating terrorism within the UK – has already, since the start of the “war on terror,” doubled in size and has been promised yet more staff over the next two years.

Yet despite these boosted resources for MI5, as well as increased funding and surveillance powers for the entire UK intelligence community, virtually every terror attack carried out in the UK over the last few years has been committed by someone already known to the authorities. Indeed, the Manchester bomber, Salman Abedi, had been aggressively investigated but MI5 ignored vital intelligence and closed down the active investigation shortly before he carried out the attack.

This failure to target known threats is not just a UK problem. Attacks across Europe over the last few years have repeatedly been carried out by people already on the local security radar.

New approaches are needed. But this latest offering appears to be a medley of already failed initiatives and more worryingly, a potentially dangerous blueprint for a techno-Stasi state.

The main points of the new Home Office plan include: making MI5 share intelligence on 20,000 “subjects of concern” with a wide range of organizations, including local councils, corporations, local police, social workers, and teachers; calling on internet companies to detect and eradicate extremist or suspicious content; making online marketplaces such as Amazon and eBay report

suspicious purchases; increasing surveillance of infrastructure and big events; and passing even tougher anti-terrorism laws.

It sounds reasonable until you realize how similar initiatives have failed and how the new plan can make wholesale abuse of surveillance powers more likely.

Intelligence is Not Evidence

The most chilling part of the MI5 plan is sharing intelligence on 20,000 "subjects of concern." First of all, this is *intelligence*— by nature gathered from a range of *secret* sources that MI5 would normally wish to protect. When communicating with counter-terrorism police, intelligence agencies will normally hide the source, but that requires an immense amount of work for 20,000 cases before the information can be shared. Secondly, intelligence is *not* evidence. Effectively MI5 will be very widely circulating partially assessed suspicions, perhaps even rumors, about individuals who cannot be charged with a crime just based on the intelligence, but who will nonetheless fall under a deep shadow of suspicion within their communities.

Also if this intelligence is spread as widely as is currently being suggested, it will land in the laps of thousands of public bodies – for instance, schools, councils, social care organizations and local police. Multiple problems could arise from this. There will no doubt be leaks and gossip within communities that so-and-so is being watched by MI5 and so on.

There will also be the inevitable mission-creep and abuse of power that we saw almost 20 years ago when a whole range of the same public bodies were allowed access to the then new eavesdropping and surveillance law, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (2000). Back then, local councils were abusing counter-terrorism legislation to catch people who might be trying to buy second homes in desirable school catchment areas (districts) to get their kids into better schools, or even, and I kid you not, might be cockle-rustling on their local beach. Of course, such intrusive electronic surveillance powers have been significantly increased since then, with the Investigatory Powers Act 2017, that allows bulk storage, bulk dataset hacking and hacking per se.

All this follows the notorious Home Office counter-terrorism PREVENT scheme – the failed parent of these new proposals.

A decade ago PREVENT was designed to build bridges with Muslim communities across Britain, encouraging them to report any suspicious behavior to the authorities to nip incipient radicalization in the bud. Unfortunately it did not quite work out that way. Young Muslims told stories of pressure from MI5 to spy on their communities. It destroyed community trust rather than built it.

The new Home Office scheme goes even further down that wrong path. It asks teachers, social workers, the local police and other authority figures to go beyond reporting suspicious behavior to actually be given a list of names to keep a watch on “subjects of interest.”

The last system of community informants in Europe was ended when the Berlin Wall opened in 1989 and East Germany’s Stasi system of a vast network of informers was shortly afterward revealed in all its horror. How ironic that the same system that was devised to protect East German youth from the “decadent influence” of the West is now being proposed in a “decadent” Western country to spy on its own youth for traces of radicalization.

Corporate Allies

Suffice to say that if the British government cannot even make internet titans such as Google and Facebook pay their fair share in taxes, nor call Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg to account in Parliament about the Cambridge Analytica scandal, then good luck forcing them make a meaningful effort to root out extremist material.

But even if they do agree, the idea is fraught with the troublesome question of who gets to decide whether something is extremist material or a dissenting opinion against the establishment? Facebook, Google and YouTube are already engaging in what can only be called censorship by de-ranking in search results material from legitimate dissident websites that they, with no history of exercising news judgement, deem “fake news.” Such established news sites such as Wikileaks, Consortium News and World Socialist Web Site, as well as many others listed on the notorious and unreliable PropOrNot list have taken a significant hit since these restrictions came into play on April 23, 2017.

Amazon, eBay and other retail companies are being asked to report suspicious sales of precursor materials for bombs and other potential weapons. Car hire companies will be asked to report suspicious individuals hiring cars and lorries. Algorithms to detect weapons purchases may be feasible, but denying rentals to merely “suspicious” individuals who’ve committed no crimes strays into Stasi territory.

Back in the era of fertilizer and nail bombs, laws were put in place across Europe to require fertilizer companies to report strange purchases – from people who were not registered agriculturalists, for example. Unfortunately, this law was easily subverted by Norwegian right-wing terrorist Anders Breivik, who simply worked to establish a farm and then legally purchased the ingredients for his Oslo car bomb in 2011.

You are Being Watched

The UK is known to have the most CCTV cameras per capita in the Western world. There have been various plans mooted (some leaked to Wikileaks) to hook these up to corporations such as Facebook for immediate face-tagging capabilities with algorithms that can identify suspicious behavior in real time, allowing the police to intercept the “suspect.”

Face recognition cameras are being tested by three police forces in the UK with software that can allegedly watch crowds at events and permit police to potentially identify known criminals and suspects. Police would then be alerted to swoop in.

Unfortunately, according to Big Brother Watch in the UK, these computer systems have up to a 98 percent failure rate. If the Home Secretary is really suggesting that such dodgy software is going to be used to police our public spaces I would suggest he asks his geeks to finish their homework.

Do we really want to live in a country where our every movement is watched by technology, with the police waiting to pounce; a country where if we are having a stressed work day and seem “strange” to a clerk at a car hire company we can be tracked as a potential terrorist; where children need to fear that if they ask awkward questions of their teachers or raise family concerns with social care, they might be put on a watch list?

In that direction lies totalitarianism. I have been tracking how a state can slide unthinkingly into such a situation for years, particularly looking at such warnings from 1930s Germany. Over the last decade I have seriously begun to fear for my country.

If these measures go through, Britons could be living under SS-GB— the name of a book by the excellent spy writer, Len Deighton, who envisioned what the UK would have been like if the Nazis had invaded and occupied Britain during World War Two. The acronym attributed to MI5 at international intelligence conferences way back in the 1990s used to be UK SS – UK Security Service. I hear it has changed now...

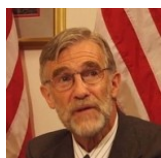
Annie Machon is a former intelligence officer in the UK’s domestic MI5 Security Service.

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Still Waiting for Evidence of a Russian Hack

More than two years after the allegation of Russian hacking of the 2016 U.S. presidential election was first made, conclusive proof is still lacking and may never be produced, says Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern *Special to Consortium News*



If you are wondering why so little is heard these days of accusations that Russia hacked into the U.S. election in 2016, it could be because those charges could not withstand close scrutiny. It could also be because special counsel Robert Mueller appears to have never bothered to investigate what was once the central alleged crime in Russia-gate as no one associated with WikiLeaks has ever been questioned by his team.

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity – including two “alumni” who were former National Security Agency technical directors – have long since concluded that Julian Assange did not acquire what he called the “emails related to Hillary Clinton” via a “hack” by the Russians or anyone else. They found, rather, that he got them from someone with physical access to Democratic National Committee computers who copied the material onto an external storage device – probably a thumb drive. In December 2016 VIPS explained this in some detail in an open Memorandum to President Barack Obama.

On January 18, 2017 President Obama admitted that the “conclusions” of U.S. intelligence regarding how the alleged Russian hacking got to WikiLeaks were “inconclusive.” Even the vapid FBI/CIA/NSA “Intelligence Community Assessment of Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections” of January 6, 2017, which tried to blame Russian President Vladimir Putin for election interference, contained no direct evidence of Russian involvement. That did not prevent the “handpicked” authors of that poor excuse for intelligence analysis from expressing “high confidence” that Russian intelligence “relayed material it acquired from the Democratic National Committee ... to WikiLeaks.” Handpicked analysts, of course, say what they are handpicked to say.

Never mind. The FBI/CIA/NSA “assessment” became bible truth for partisans like Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, who was among the first off the blocks to blame Russia for interfering to help Trump. It simply could not have been that Hillary Clinton was quite capable of snatching defeat out of victory all by herself. No, it had to have been the

Russians.

Five days into the Trump presidency, I had a chance to challenge Schiff personally on the gaping disconnect between the Russians and WikiLeaks. Schiff still “can’t share the evidence” with me ... or with anyone else, because it does not exist.

WikiLeaks

It was on June 12, 2016, just six weeks before the Democratic National Convention, that Assange announced the pending publication of “emails related to Hillary Clinton,” throwing the Clinton campaign into panic mode, since the emails would document strong bias in favor of Clinton and successful attempts to sabotage the campaign of Bernie Sanders. When the emails were published on July 22, just three days before the convention began, the campaign decided to create what I call a Magnificent Diversion, drawing attention away from the substance of the emails by blaming Russia for their release.

Clinton’s PR chief Jennifer Palmieri later admitted that she golf-carted around to various media outlets at the convention with instructions “to get the press to focus on something even we found difficult to process: the prospect that Russia had not only hacked and stolen emails from the DNC, but that it had done so to help Donald Trump and hurt Hillary Clinton.” The diversion worked like a charm. Mainstream media kept shouting “The Russians did it,” and gave little, if any, play to the DNC skullduggery revealed in the emails themselves. And like Brer’ Fox, Bernie didn’t say nothin’.

Meanwhile, highly sophisticated technical experts, were hard at work fabricating “forensic facts” to “prove” the Russians did it. Here’s how it played out:

June 12, 2016: Assange announces that WikiLeaks is about to publish “emails related to Hillary Clinton.”

June 14, 2016: DNC contractor CrowdStrike, (with a dubious professional record and multiple conflicts of interest) announces that malware has been found on the DNC server and claims there is evidence it was injected by Russians.

June 15, 2016: “Guccifer 2.0” affirms the DNC statement; claims responsibility for the “hack;” claims to be a WikiLeaks source; and posts a document that the forensics show was synthetically tainted with “Russian fingerprints.”

The June 12, 14, & 15 timing was hardly coincidence. Rather, it was the start of a pre-emptive move to associate Russia with anything WikiLeaks might have been about to publish and to “show” that it came from a Russian hack.

Enter Independent Investigators

A year ago independent cyber-investigators completed the kind of forensic work that, for reasons best known to then-FBI Director James Comey, neither he nor the “handpicked analysts” who wrote the Jan. 6, 2017 assessment bothered to do. The independent investigators found verifiable evidence from metadata found in the record of an alleged Russian hack of July 5, 2016 showing that the “hack” that day of the DNC by Guccifer 2.0 was not a hack, by Russia or anyone else.

Rather it originated with a copy (onto an external storage device – a thumb drive, for example) by an insider – the same *process* used by the DNC insider/leaker before June 12, 2016 for an altogether different purpose. (Once the metadata was found and the “fluid dynamics” principle of physics applied, this was not difficult to disprove the validity of the claim that Russia was responsible.)

One of these independent investigators publishing under the name of The Forensicator on May 31 published new evidence that the Guccifer 2.0 persona uploaded a document from the West Coast of the United States, and not from Russia.

In our July 24, 2017 Memorandum to President Donald Trump we stated, “We do not know who or what the murky Guccifer 2.0 is. You may wish to ask the FBI.”

Our July 24 Memorandum continued: “Mr. President, the disclosure described below may be related. Even if it is not, it is something we think you should be made aware of in this general connection. On March 7, 2017, WikiLeaks began to publish a trove of original CIA documents that WikiLeaks labeled ‘Vault 7.’ WikiLeaks said it got the trove from a current or former CIA contractor and described it as comparable in scale and significance to the information Edward Snowden gave to reporters in 2013.

“No one has challenged the authenticity of the original documents of Vault 7, which disclosed a vast array of cyber warfare tools developed, probably with help from NSA, by CIA’s Engineering Development Group. That Group was part of the sprawling CIA Directorate of Digital Innovation – a growth industry established by John Brennan in 2015. [(VIPS warned President Obama of some of the dangers of that basic CIA reorganization at the time.)

Marbled



“Scarcely imaginable digital tools – that can take control of

your car and make it race over 100 mph, for example, or can enable remote spying through a TV – were described and duly reported in the *New York Times* and other media throughout March. But the Vault 7, part 3 release on March 31 that exposed the “Marble Framework” program apparently was judged too delicate to qualify as ‘news fit to print’ and was kept out of the *Times* at the time, and has never been mentioned since.

“The *Washington Post*’s Ellen Nakashima, it seems, ‘did not get the memo’ in time. Her March 31 article bore the catching (and accurate) headline: ‘WikiLeaks’ latest release of CIA cyber-tools could blow the cover on agency hacking operations.’

“The WikiLeaks release indicated that Marble was designed for flexible and easy-to-use ‘obfuscation,’ and that Marble source code includes a “de-obfuscator” to reverse CIA text obfuscation.

“More important, the CIA reportedly used Marble during 2016. In her *Washington Post* report, Nakashima left that out, but did include another significant point made by WikiLeaks; namely, that the obfuscation tool could be used to conduct a ‘forensic attribution double game’ or false-flag operation because it included test samples in Chinese, Russian, Korean, Arabic and Farsi.”

A few weeks later William Binney, a former NSA technical director, and I commented on Vault 7 Marble, and were able to get a shortened op-ed version published in *The Baltimore Sun*.

The CIA’s reaction to the WikiLeaks disclosure of the Marble Framework tool was neuralgic. Then Director Mike Pompeo lashed out two weeks later, calling Assange

and his associates “demons,” and insisting; “It’s time to call out WikiLeaks for what it really is, a non-state hostile intelligence service, often abetted by state actors like Russia.”

Our July 24 Memorandum continued: “Mr. President, we do not know if CIA’s Marble Framework, or tools like it, played some kind of role in the campaign to blame Russia for hacking the DNC. Nor do we know how candid the denizens of CIA’s Digital Innovation Directorate have been with you and with Director Pompeo. These are areas that might profit from early White House review. [President Trump then directed Pompeo to invite Binney, one of the authors of the July 24, 2017 VIPS Memorandum to the President, to discuss all this. Binney and Pompeo spent an hour together at CIA Headquarters on October 24, 2017, during which Binney briefed Pompeo with his customary straightforwardness.]

“We also do not know if you have discussed cyber issues in any detail with President Putin. In his interview with NBC’s Megyn Kelly he seemed quite willing – perhaps even eager – to address issues related to the kind of cyber tools revealed in the Vault 7 disclosures, if only to indicate he has been briefed on them. Putin pointed out that today’s technology enables hacking to be ‘masked and camouflaged to an extent that no one can understand the origin’ [of the hack] ... And, vice versa, it is possible to set up any entity or any individual that everyone will think that they are the exact source of that attack.

“‘Hackers may be anywhere,’ he said. ‘There may be hackers, by the way, in the United States who very craftily and professionally passed the buck to Russia. Can’t you imagine such a scenario? ... I can.’

New attention has been drawn to these issues after I discussed them in a widely published 16-minute interview last Friday.

In view of the highly politicized environment surrounding these issues, I believe I must append here the same notice that VIPS felt compelled to add to our key Memorandum of July 24, 2017:

“Full Disclosure: Over recent decades the ethos of our intelligence profession has eroded in the public mind to the point that agenda-free analysis is deemed well nigh impossible. Thus, we add this disclaimer, which applies to everything we in VIPS say and do: We have no political agenda; our sole purpose is to spread truth around and, when necessary, hold to account our former intelligence colleagues.

“We speak and write without fear or favor. Consequently, any resemblance between what we say and what presidents, politicians and pundits say is purely coincidental.” The fact we find it is necessary to include that reminder speaks

volumes about these highly politicized times.

Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer before serving as a CIA analyst for 27 years. His duties included preparing, and briefing one-on-one, the President's Daily Brief.

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Distorting the Life of Bobby Kennedy

As the 50th anniversary of his assassination is being remembered on Tuesday, it is vital to have a complete and accurate picture of the complex figure of Robert F. Kennedy, explains James DiEugenio.

By James DiEugenio *Special to Consortium News*



TV commentator Chris Matthews' book, *Bobby Kennedy: A Raging Spirit*, has been a best seller since it was released last October, but there's a lot of important material that Matthews left out about Kennedy, whose assassination on June 5, 1968 is being remembered on Tuesday.

In recapping his early life, Matthews tells the story of Kennedy graduating from Harvard and going on to pursue a law degree at the University of Virginia, where he was chair of the Student Legal Forum. In that role, he invited some high profile guests to speak in Charlottesville.

One guest, Nobel Prize winner Ralph Bunche, would augur Kennedy's later support for civil rights. Bunche, both a diplomat and professor at Howard University, was African-American, and the invitation was to a state where most of everyday life was still segregated. When Bunche told Kennedy he would not speak before a segregated audience, RFK appealed the issue through four levels of the college administration—saying he would not back down for moral reasons—and won. Bunche ultimately addressed an overflowing, integrated audience

that was about one-third African-American. As Matthews correctly notes, Bunche stayed at Bobby's house that night, which was pelted with stones.

A Transformative Trip Abroad

In 1951, after he graduated, Bobby traveled with his brother, then Congressman Jack Kennedy, to the Middle and Far East to learn about U.S. foreign policy and raise his credentials in that area. Matthews mentions the trip, but omits the name of Edmund Gullion, a respected State Department diplomat whom the brothers contacted in Saigon to assess whether France could win its war to re-colonize Indochina.

Matthews' excision of Gullion is inexplicable, given his importance: he told the Kennedy brothers that France could not win, since Ho Chi Minh had inspired the Viet Minh to fight until death, rather than return under colonialism's yoke. Gullion also said France could not win a war of attrition, because the home front would not support it.

Bobby later said Gullion deeply affected JFK's foreign policy views. Thus, soon after, JFK attacked both parties' positions on thwarting Communism in the Third World. That lonely campaign continued for six years, climaxing in the senator's speech protesting Eisenhower's second attempt to support France's desperate effort to maintain an imperial empire, this time in Algeria.

During the next year (1958), JFK bought 100 copies of the best-selling book, *The Ugly American*, one for each senator, a story Matthews fails to tell. The thinly disguised novel was an unsubtle critique of America's growing involvement in Indochina and the State Department's incompetence in dealing with the Vietnamese.

As JFK aide Arthur Schlesinger noted, when Senator John Kennedy opposed the Eisenhower/Nixon proposed intervention at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, RFK agreed, believing one could not consider anti-Communism in the Third World without considering colonialism's impacts. Bobby noted this in a 1956 article for *The New York Times Magazine*:

“ . . .because we think that the uppermost thought in all people's

minds is communism...We are still too often doing too little too late to recognize and assist the irresistible movements for independence that are sweeping one dependent territory after another.”

At a talk at Fordham University, Bobby told the audience that the fatal flaw of American foreign policy was the commitment to European colonialism, noting “We supported France in Indochina far too long.” Although this is a stunning critique, Matthews does not include it in his book.

RFK and Joseph McCarthy

By leaving out such stories, it seems Matthews is trying to position Bobby Kennedy closer to Senator Joe McCarthy than he really was to paint RFK as an ardent Cold Warrior. After Bobby successfully managed his brother’s Senate campaign in 1952, his father suggested he work for McCarthy, who was Joe Kennedy’s friend. Matthews devotes seven pages to this part of the history, though he omits some key points.

For example, Bobby resigned in protest from McCarthy’s committee after only six months. During this time, he worked on what many think was the Committee’s most valuable report, about how some American allies’ trade practices benefited China and North Korea during the Korean conflict. Unlike Roy Cohn, McCarthy’s choice for chief counsel, RFK’s report did not accuse individuals of being traitors.

Further, RFK did not participate in Cohn’s pursuit of alleged Russian spies in the State Department. In fact, in private, he clearly admitted his dispute with Cohn, whom he found reckless and pugnacious, attracting the wrong kind of publicity to the Committee. Once he resigned, he kept a low profile for a short while and then the Democratic minority appointed him their chief counsel.

As RFK predicted, McCarthy and Cohn imploded on national television during the Army-McCarthy hearings. After this, Bobby took over the committee and retired two of its most controversial, even absurd, cases, against a Queens, NY dentist, Irving Peress and a Pentagon pastry chef, Annie Lee Moss. Also, the RFK-run committee never filed charges with respect to McCarthy’s accusation about the infiltration

of defense plants.

When the proceedings ended, Bobby wrote the minority report, which was so critical of McCarthy and Cohn that some Democrats would not sign it. It recommended the Senate take action for their abuses. The report provoked hearings on the subject of censure; which was the end result. However, Matthews spends significantly more time on RFK's earlier Committee work than on his later role, which was longer and more important.

Matthews skims over the next part of RFK's life, as Chief Counsel for the McClellan Committee. Here, the 31-year-old lawyer rose to national prominence as the foe of Teamsters' President Jimmy Hoffa and organized crime. Mathews captures little of the political complexity of this four-year drama. For example, the Committee Republicans, led by Sen. Barry Goldwater, were pleased when RFK began pursuing Hoffa since they thought it would weaken unions, in general. But they were unhappy when RFK expanded the focus to the Teamsters' relationship with the Mafia, since the Committee now sought to clean up corrupt unions.

It got even worse for Goldwater when, while Bobby was investigating a long strike against the Kohler Company in Wisconsin, he became close to Walter Reuther, the United Automobile Workers' president, who was running the strike. As chief counsel, RFK made him a featured witness before the Committee. This resulted in the largest fine ever levied against a corporation in a strike until that time. Again, Matthews omits this important biographical material.

JFK's Presidential Bid

In 1960, Bobby managed his brother's presidential campaign against Vice-President Richard Nixon. Matthews does note Bobby's 1959 visit to Johnson's ranch, where LBJ lied to him about his intention not to enter the 1960 race. Thus, when Johnson did enter, late in the campaign, RFK had to run a two-stage strategy: The first beating Senator Hubert Humphrey in the primaries; the second was to beat Johnson in the local and state delegations in states without primaries. Despite the extra load, Bobby held off Johnson and JFK won

on the first ballot at the convention.

At this point, a group of advisors convinced JFK to abandon his original choice for vice-president, Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri, and instead pick Johnson, so he could win in the south.

Matthews' version of what followed differs from the dominant meme in the literature. Authors like Jeff Shesol and Robert Caro concluded that, after Johnson accepted JFK's offer, Bobby tried to get Johnson to leave the ticket. Matthews' interpretation is that JFK knew what Bobby was doing and supported it, since he had not thought Johnson would accept the offer. Whichever version is correct, it made the LBJ/RFK relationship even rockier, and the two were antagonists for the next eight years—which ultimately fractured the 1968 Democratic convention.

The Kennedys and the CIA

Matthews correctly views the Bay of Pigs operation as one that was designed to fail. In his previous books, he didn't admit this, which is odd, since CIA Director Allen Dulles left a handwritten confession to that effect in his Princeton archives. Peter Grose, Dulles' biographer, discussed this in his 1994 book, *Gentleman Spy*. Thus, Matthews took two decades to present what Dulles admitted over 50 years earlier. So, finally, Matthews says the goal behind the deception was to have JFK send the Navy and Marines into Cuba to save the day. However, JFK refused, although Nixon—whom Kennedy defeated in 1960 for the White House—advised the President to declare a beachhead and invade. This discredits what Matthews observed in his previous book *Kennedy and Nixon*, where he implies there was an equivalency between the two presidents.

Matthews virtually eliminates the crucial role Bobby had soon after. The President appointed him as a member of a White House committee that was mandated to investigate the operation. During the inquiry, Bobby granted Dulles no quarter, since he already suspected what Dulles later admitted: that the CIA director had deceived JFK about the operation's chance of success, hoping he would approve an American armada to save himself from a humiliating defeat.

Thus, the President had authorized the Bay of Pigs given false information; and when RFK understood Dulles' deceptions, he conferred with his father, who arranged for his son to meet former Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett, who admitted he and David Bruce (at State) had tried to get Dulles fired in the 1950s. But Dulles was protected by his brother, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

Lovett advised JFK that he now had the perfect opportunity to do what he, himself, could not. Thus, on Bobby's and Lovett's advice, the President fired not just Allen Dulles, but Deputy Director Charles Cabell and Director of Plans, Dick Bissell. Feeling duped by the CIA and the Pentagon—which had also approved the disastrous project—Bobby now became JFK's trusted advisor on foreign affairs.

Operation Mongoose

Matthews omits these episodes and then writes that 1962's Operation Mongoose was Bobby's idea. Mongoose was the secret campaign of sabotage and covert actions against Cuba that, after seven months of memo shuffling, was authorized in November 1961 and launched in February 1962.

The definitive record of the memoranda—*Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume X*—shows that it was hardly Bobby's idea. In fact, it was Walt Rostow, Assistant to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, who began the discussion by focusing on the "Cuba problem" and suggesting a blockade or an invasion. Others, like Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and CIA officer Tracy Barnes, joined in later; and it was Barnes' option to infiltrate and sabotage shipping that was ultimately supported.

President Kennedy appointed Bobby to be a kind of ombudsman over the project, since he did not trust the CIA. As David Corn revealed in *Blond Ghost*, a biography of Ted Shackley, Mongoose's day-to-day supervisor, Bobby insisted on seeing every plan for every foray into Cuba. He also demanded that every plan include a detailed, written description. To put it mildly, after the freewheeling days of Allen Dulles, the Agency chafed at this studious procedure for Mongoose. This is another point Matthews' ignores.

Battle for Civil Rights

Matthews begins the Kennedys' battle for civil rights with Bobby's role as Attorney General and his intervention in the Freedom Riders' attempt to integrate inter-state busing in the south. However, this is not the whole story. During JFK's campaign in June 1960, he said he was prepared to win the Democratic nomination without a single vote from the south at the convention. As author Harry Golden noted, after he was nominated, he told his civil rights advisors that he would break the walls of segregation through legal actions based on three statutes that his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, did not use to any significant degree: the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board* decision of 1954, and the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Acts.

And this is what Attorney General Bobby Kennedy did, filing more civil rights cases in his first year than Eisenhower filed during his two full terms in office. By the end of 1961, he opened 61 new investigations and by 1963, five times as many lawyers were working on civil rights cases than under Eisenhower.

This approach had been planned by the Kennedy campaign's civil rights advisor, Harris Wofford. Before Bobby became attorney general, Wofford had written a long memorandum on the issue, saying it was not possible to pass an omnibus civil rights bill through Congress in 1961, and probably not in 1962—since the Senate would filibuster it. Thus, the Attorney General and White House would be wise to use executive orders and legal actions to build momentum.

This happened, and faster than Wofford anticipated, because some of the things JFK had done before he was president encouraged the civil rights movement in a way that Eisenhower had not. For example, in 1957, he spoke in Jackson, Mississippi, stating that all Americans must accept the *Brown vs. Board* decision as the law of the land. Further, during the 1960 campaign, JFK called Coretta Scott King to comfort her about her husband's arrest, while Bobby worked behind the scenes to get King out of prison. In May 1961, as the new attorney general, Bobby declared at the University of Georgia Law School that he would enforce the *Brown v. Board* decision.

Matthews ignores almost all of this. But without this information, the story of the meteoric success of the civil rights movement from 1961-1963 is incomplete. Vivian Malone, one of the first black students to enroll at the segregated University of Alabama, did so although Governor George Wallace stated he would stand in the schoolhouse door to prevent it. When Vivian's sister was asked why Vivian did such a dangerous thing, she said her sister trusted that Bobby Kennedy would protect her. And he did, sending over 3,000 troops under General Creighton Abrams to the campus. Matthews simply does not explain this crucial link between the civil rights movement and the Kennedys' actions.

Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam

Nor does he shed light on the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam in 1963. As to the former, Matthews notes that Bobby proposed an air strike to destroy the missiles on the island, tracing this to the first meeting of President Kennedy's advisors. However, I could not find this quote in the meeting's transcript. In fact, RFK cautioned his brother against both an invasion and bombing campaign at the first meeting. Although he mentioned more aggressive actions at the second meeting, he qualified them with words like 'if' and 'whether.' Thus, these were contingencies, not commitments.

Matthews then says the brothers acknowledged former Secretary of State Dean Acheson's view, which is completely inaccurate. In one of the most famous incidents during that two-week crisis, Acheson wanted no negotiations, and rather pushed for a sneak attack on the missile sites to eliminate them. Bobby, then attorney general, recoiled, saying it would be the equivalent of what the Japanese did to America at Pearl Harbor.

The transcripts show that JFK asked about each option—an invasion, bombing campaign, and surgical air strikes. For each, he considered the number of casualties. The President even questioned Chief of Staff Maxwell Taylor about the number of fatalities with a "surgical strike." And when the President visited the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he was appalled by their opposition to his choice of a blockade. What

really startled the brothers was when the congressional leaders they called to the White House said they also thought a blockade was too meek—including liberal Senator William Fulbright, who favored an invasion.

Feeling isolated, JFK had Bobby work as his back channel to the Soviets; thus, Bobby communicated with Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and worked out a deal: the Russians would remove the atomic weapons from Cuba in return for the U.S. not invading the island and making a silent promise that JFK would later remove American missiles from Turkey.

If we understand Bobby's role here, we understand what JFK was doing in Vietnam in 1963, and also RFK's position on the war from 1964-1968. Nevertheless, Matthews seems unable to deal with the ramifications of NSAM 263, President Kennedy's October 1963 order to begin withdrawing American advisors from Vietnam; and, Bobby's prime role in designing it.

The President had sent Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and General Taylor to Saigon that fall to report on the conditions that would support NSAM 263. But since he didn't trust the two to write what he needed to justify his withdrawal plan, he summoned General Victor Krulak and Colonel Fletcher Prouty to the White House. As historian John Newman notes, JFK asked Bobby to supervise their report, which was sent by jet to Hawaii where it was given to McNamara and Taylor to read on their flight to Washington. But you will not read one sentence about this in Matthews' book.

LBJ and RFK's Decision to Run for President

This omission points to a larger vacuum. One reason Bobby decided to run for president in 1968 was because he felt that though Johnson had said he wanted to continue JFK's policies, he obviously had little intention to. As John Bohrer notes in *The Revolution of Robert Kennedy*, even in early 1964, the Attorney General was advising Johnson not to militarize Vietnam. His advice, of course, was ignored.

Bobby also figured that Dean Rusk, the hawkish secretary of state,

would now urge Johnson to escalate the war to heights he and his brother had never contemplated. But it was Johnson's signing ceremony for the civil rights bill in 1964 that was a turning point: LBJ asked RFK to pass around pens, after LBJ had already given one to racist FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Bobby had had enough. He left the Administration and successfully ran for senator from New York. After this, he headed the "Kennedy wing of the Democratic party."

In 1965, Bobby asked Johnson to fire Rusk and tell South Vietnam the U.S. would no longer fight its war. He also railed against the NRA's influence, insisted on warning labels for cigarettes, and even asked that "right to work" laws—which weakened unions—be repealed. You can read about these courageous stands in John Bohrer's book, but not in Matthews'.

One thing LBJ did to reverse JFK's foreign policy was to appoint Thomas Mann to key positions on Latin America. Bobby suspected that Johnson did this to deliberately undo one of JFK's key diplomatic creations—the Alliance for Progress. Thus, Bobby, as senator, traveled to Latin America to find out what was going on. Matthews gives one page to this central event. Yet some of the things RFK said and did before, during and after this trip are crucial to understanding who he was at the time.

After the State Department briefed him about whom he should meet and what to say, Bobby told a colleague, "It sounds like we're working for United Fruit again." He told a crowd in Lima, Peru they should imitate great Latin American revolutionaries like San Martin and O'Higgins. At almost every other stop he ended his speeches by saying, "The responsibility of our times is nothing less than revolution." He made it a point to visit the ancient capital of the Inca empire in Cuzco and, on his way back, children were cheering "Viva Kennedy."

In Brazil, when sugar cane workers told him they were paid only for three days while working six, the senator walked to the landlord's house and yelled that he was swindling his workers. After this, he visited Brazil's president, who had been installed by a CIA-sponsored coup after JFK was killed. While driving back to his hotel room he saw

soldiers striking some of the crowd and trying to keep them away from his car. As Bohrer writes, he jumped out and shouted, "Down with the government! On to the palace!" I have to share these key incidents with the reader because they are not in Matthews' book.

That journey south is a fitting prelude to Bobby's last campaign. Matthews does include a couple of important incidents in the prelude to RFK's decision to run against President Johnson. First, he describes a meeting between Bobby and Walter Cronkite, where the CBS broadcaster told he him must run in order to end the Vietnam War. Second, he quotes Bobby saying in November 1967 that his brother would have never committed half a million men to Vietnam and, in fact, was determined not to send combat troops at all. But Matthews doesn't write how Bobby came to that conclusion.

An Incandescent Crusade

Matthews' description of Bobby's remarkable 85-day campaign is fairly prosaic and doesn't come close to capturing what was perhaps the most bold and brilliant presidential campaign in the last 60 years. Here was the last crusade of the 1960s—the last hope of a generation that had already witnessed to this point the murders of JFK in 1963 and Malcolm X in 1965. Martin Luther King was relying on Bobby to enter the race, and when he did, was overjoyed, saying he would make an outstanding president. RFK had King, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta on his side.



At his first formal campaign appearance at Kansas State University, before Johnson exited the race, RFK called the president's Vietnam policy "bankrupt" and "deeply wrong." He then quoted the officer who said that after the Battle of Ben Tre, "We had to wipe out the village in order to save it." Bobby then asked, "Where does such logic end?" Later he said, "We cannot send American troops to assume the burden of fighting for corrupt

and repressive governments all the way round the globe. . . .” Then, in Indiana, he echoed King when he said black Americans were dying in the war in disproportionate numbers than whites.

King was gunned down in Memphis on April 4, 1968 during the Indiana primary campaign. Kennedy had a rally scheduled in a predominantly African-American area of Indianapolis that night, which the police told him to cancel, since they couldn't assure his safety. Nevertheless, he went and made one of his two greatest speeches. The other had been his “Ripple of Hope” address in Cape Town, South Africa on June 6, 1966, exactly two years before his death. Bobby pleaded with the crowd in Indianapolis not to give in to racial polarization, to hatred and bitterness. As many have noted, almost every major city in America went up in smoke that night, but Indianapolis did not.

Kennedy won Indiana and Nebraska, two primarily agricultural states outside the northeast. He also won every primary he entered except for Oregon. And he climaxed his triumphant crusade with his greatest victory in the California primary. As journalist Jack Newfield and others have pointed out, something exceptional happened in California. Chavez and Huerta got the word out about RFK all the way down to Los Angeles; and King's followers did not forget RFK's speeches in Cape Town and Indianapolis.

When the polls opened that morning, Kennedy's workers drove around East LA to check the turnout and were shocked to see Hispanics and African Americans lined up before the doors opened. For the first time in the city's history, the turnout on the poor east side surpassed the wealthy west side. Bobby had given the poor a reason to vote, which is why he beat Eugene McCarthy. A few moments after declaring his victory and saying, “On to Chicago, and let's win there,” he was killed—the last of four major 1960s' assassinations. Matthews doesn't mention how they brought the end to a remarkable decade. Nor does he mention how his death caused the violent Chicago convention and how its influence led, among other reasons, to the victory of Richard Nixon, the anti-RFK candidate.

Why does Matthews continually ignore these points? If one thinks, as

his employers at MSNBC do, that Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are the liberal ideal, then what Bobby Kennedy represented in 1968 was radical: Can you imagine either of these politicians telling Brazilian citizens to storm the palace? Not even on *Saturday Night Live*.

James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is *The JFK Assassination : The Evidence Today*.

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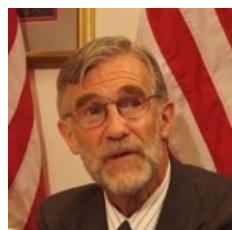
Bolton Flunky Fleitz Raises Stakes for Iran

From the Archive: Islamophobe & Bolton pal Fred Fleitz has been named chief of staff for the National Security Council. Fleitz was a danger a decade ago in the Bush administration and is even more so now, recalls Ray McGovern.

Ray McGovern reports that with Bolton's old "enforcer" Fred Fleitz as NSC Chief of Staff the odds increase of war with Iran. Bolton and Fleitz can now elbow out any honest intelligence on Iran and goad the President into a world-class catastrophe. This time the result would be much worse – geometrically worse says McGovern than during the Bush administration.

By Ray McGovern *Special to Consortium News*

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On a recent TV appearance, I was asked about whistleblowing, but the experience brought back to mind a crystal-clear example of how, before the Iraq War, CIA careerists were assigned “two bosses” – CIA Director George Tenet and John Bolton, the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, the arch-neocon who had been thrust on an obedient Secretary of State Colin Powell.

CIA “analyst” Frederick Fleitz took the instructions quite literally, bragging about being allowed to serve, simultaneously, “two bosses” – and becoming Bolton’s “enforcer.” Fleitz famously chided a senior intelligence analyst at State for not understanding that it was the prerogative of policymakers like Bolton – not intelligence analysts – to “interpret” intelligence data.

In an email from Fleitz in early 2002, at the time when one of his bosses, the pliable George Tenet, was “fixing” the intelligence to “justify” war on Iraq, Fleitz outlined the remarkable new intelligence ethos imposed by President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and their subordinates who were reshaping the U.S. Intelligence Community.

Apparently, senior State Department intelligence analyst, Christian Westermann, “had not gotten the memo” on how things had changed. Rather, he was performing his duties like a professional analyst under the old rules. Westermann had the temerity to block coordination on a speech in which Bolton wanted to make the spurious assertion that Cuba had a developing biological weapons program.

On Feb. 12, 2002, after a personal run-in with Westermann, Fleitz sent Bolton this email: “I explained to Christian [Westermann] that it was a political judgment as to how to interpret this data and the I.C. [Intelligence Community] should do as we asked.” Fleitz informed Bolton that Westermann still “strongly disagrees with us.”

At this point, Bolton became so dyspeptic that he summoned Westermann to his office for a tongue-lashing and then asked top officials of the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) to fire him. Instead, they defended him, and this was not the only time intelligence managers at State – virtually alone in the Intelligence Community – gave the Bush-43 White House and political hacks like Bolton the clear message not to count on managers and analysts at INR to acquiesce in the politicization of intelligence.

Exaggerating Iran Threat

Later, Fleitz went on to bigger and better things. In 2006, he became

“senior adviser” to House Intelligence Committee chair Pete Hoekstra, R-Michigan. Bowing to desires of the White House to portray Iran as a strategic threat, Hoekstra had Fleitz draft an almost comically alarmist paper titled “Recognizing Iran as Strategic Threat: An Intelligence Challenge for the United States.” Fleitz was told not to coordinate his paper with the Intelligence Community.

The objective was to pre-empt a formal National Intelligence Estimate on Iran’s nuclear weapons program – an NIE that the Senate had just commissioned. Fleitz and Hoekstra feared the NIE might come to unwelcome conclusions, contradicting the kinds of stark warnings about Iran’s nuclear program that the White House wanted to use to stir up fear and justify action against Iran. Iraq *deja vu*.

The Fleitz-Hoekstra gambit failed. Their over-the-top paper made them the subject of ridicule in professional intelligence circles.

Meanwhile, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence Thomas Fingar was named to manage the formal NIE on Iran, and, *mirable dictu*, he was not only a seasoned professional but also a practitioner of the old-time ethos of objective, non-politicized intelligence.

Worse still for Bush, Cheney and their sycophants, the NIE of November 2007, endorsed by all 16 agencies of the Intelligence Community began: “We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program.”

That Estimate holds the distinction of being the only NIE of which I am aware that demonstrably played a key role in preventing an unnecessary war – the war on Iran that Cheney and Bush were planning for 2008. Bush pretty much admits this in his memoir *Decision Points*, which includes a highly instructive section that he must have written himself.

Indeed, nowhere in his memoir is Bush’s bizarre relationship to truth so manifest as when he describes his dismay at learning that the Intelligence Community had redeemed itself for its lies about Iraq by preparing an honest NIE that stuck a rod in the wheels of the juggernaut rolling toward war with Iran.

Bush complains bitterly that the “eye-popping” NIE “tied my hands on the military side,” adding that the “NIE’s conclusion was so stunning that I felt it would immediately leak to the press.” He writes that he authorized declassification of the key findings “so that we could shape the news stories with the facts.” Facts?

A disappointed Bush writes, “The backlash was immediate. [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad hailed the NIE as a ‘great victory.’” Bush’s apparent “logic” here is to use the widespread disdain for Ahmadinejad to discredit the NIE through association, i.e. whatever Ahmadinejad praises must be false.

An Embarrassment

How embarrassing it must have been for Bush and Cheney! Here before the world were the key judgments of an NIE, the most authoritative genre of intelligence report, unanimously approved “with high confidence” by 16 U.S. intelligence agencies and signed by the Director of National Intelligence, saying, in effect, that Bush and Cheney were lying about the “Iranian nuclear threat.” Just a month before the Estimate was issued, Bush was claiming that the threat from Iran could lead to “World War III.”

In his memoir, Bush laments: “I don’t know why the NIE was written the way it was. ... Whatever the explanation, the NIE had a big impact – and not a good one.” Spelling out how the NIE had tied his hands “on the military side,” Bush included this kicker:

“But after the NIE, how could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?”

Yet, that didn’t stop neocon warmongers from trying. The NIE was subject to virulent criticism by those disappointed that it did not provide justification for a “preventive” attack on Iran.

Former CIA Director James Woolsey, who has proudly described himself as the “anchor of the Presbyterian wing of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA),” called the Iran NIE “deceptive.” Hoekstra called it “a piece of trash.”

Greg Thielmann, a former State Department official who had managed strategic intelligence analysis but quit before the intelligence debacle on Iraq, could not resist commenting on this bizarre set of circumstances from his new position as a senior fellow at the Arms Control Association: “There is some considerable irony in hearing such criticism from those intimately familiar with the inner workings of the intelligence community, who seemed to have sleep-walked through the serious professional lapses of the 2002 NIE on Iraq WMD.”

But the neocons were deprived of the Iran war for which they had been lusting (just as, six years later, they were deprived of the war on Syria, into which they almost mouse-trapped President Barack Obama).

Still, you need not worry about any negative consequences for the compliant Bush-Cheney “analysts” who were willing to “fix” more intelligence around war policies. As usually happens in Official Washington, they landed on their feet. For instance, Fleitz is now Senior Vice President for Policy and Programs with the Center for Security Policy, a think tank founded by Frank Gaffney, Jr., an archdeacon of neocondom, who is still its president.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A former Army officer and CIA analyst, McGovern co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) in January 2003, in an attempt to expose the corruption of intelligence under the Cheney-Bush regime.

Spooks Spooking Themselves

As the role of a well-connected group of British and U.S. intelligence agents begins to emerge, new suspicions are growing about what hand they may have had in weaving the Russia-gate story, as Daniel Lazare explains.

By Daniel Lazare *Special to Consortium News*



With the news that a Cambridge academic-cum-spy named Stefan Halper infiltrated the Trump campaign, the role of the intelligence agencies in shaping the great Russiagate saga is at last coming into focus.

It's looking more and more massive. The intelligence agencies initiated reports that Donald Trump was colluding with Russia, they nurtured them and helped them grow, and then they spread the word to the press and key government officials. Reportedly, they even tried to use these reports to force Trump to step down prior to his inauguration. Although the corporate press accuses Trump of conspiring with Russia to stop Hillary Clinton, the reverse now seems to be the case: the Obama administration intelligence agencies worked with Clinton to block "Siberian candidate" Trump.

The template was provided by ex-MI6 Director Richard Dearlove, Halper's friend and business partner. Sitting in winged chairs in London's venerable Garrick Club, according to *The Washington Post*, Dearlove told fellow MI6 veteran Christopher Steele, author of the famous "golden showers" opposition research dossier, that Trump "reminded him of a predicament he had faced years earlier, when he was chief of station for British intelligence in Washington and alerted US authorities to British information that a vice presidential hopeful had once been in communication with the Kremlin."

Apparently, one word from the Brits was enough to make the candidate in question step down. When that didn't work with Trump, Dearlove and his colleagues ratcheted up the pressure to make him see the light. A major scandal was thus born – or, rather, a very questionable scandal.

Besides Dearlove, Steele, and Halper, a bon-vivant known as "The Walrus" for his impressive girth, other participants include:

- Robert Hannigan, former director Government Communications Headquarters, GCHQ, UK equivalent of the NSA.
- Alexander Downer, top Australian diplomat.
- Andrew Wood, ex-British ambassador to Moscow.
- Joseph Mifsud, Maltese academic.
- James Clapper, ex-US Director of National Intelligence.
- John Brennan, former CIA Director (and now NBC News analyst).

In-Bred

A few things stand out about this august group. One is its in-bred quality. After helping to run an annual confab known as the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar, Dearlove and Halper are now partners in a private venture

calling itself “The Cambridge Security Initiative.” Both are connected to another London-based intelligence firm known as Hakluyt & Co. Halper is also connected via two books he wrote with Hakluyt representative Jonathan Clarke and Dearlove has a close personal friendship with Hakluyt founder Mike Reynolds, yet another MI6 vet. Alexander Downer served a half-dozen years on Hakluyt’s international advisory board, while Andrew Wood is linked to Steele via Orbis Business Intelligence, the private research firm that Steele helped found, and which produced the anti-Trump dossier, and where Wood now serves as an unpaid advisor.

Everyone, in short, seems to know everyone else. But another thing that stands out about this group is its incompetence. Dearlove and Halper appear to be old-school paranoids for whom every Russian is a Boris Badenov or a Natasha Fatale. In February 2014, Halper notified US intelligence that Mike Flynn, Trump’s future national security adviser, had grown overly chummy with an Anglo-Russian scholar named Svetlana Lokhova whom Halper suspected of being a spy – suspicions that Lokhova convincingly argues are absurd.

In December 2016, Halper and Dearlove both resigned from the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar because they suspected that a company footing some of the costs was tied up with Russian intelligence – suspicions that Christopher Andrew, former chairman of the Cambridge history department and the seminar’s founder, regards as “absurd” as well.

As head of Britain’s foreign Secret Intelligence Service, as MI6 is formally known, Dearlove played a major role in drumming up support for the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq even while confessing at a secret Downing Street meeting that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the [regime-change] policy.” When the search for weapons of mass destruction turned up dry, Clapper, as then head of the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, argued that the Iraqi military must have smuggled them into neighboring Syria, a charge with absolutely no basis in fact but which helped pave the way for US regime-change efforts in that country too.

Brennan was meanwhile a high-level CIA official when the agency was fabricating evidence against Saddam Hussein and covering up Saudi Arabia’s role in 9/11. Wood not only continues to defend the Iraqi invasion, but dismisses fears of a rising fascist tide in the Ukraine as nothing more than “a crude political insult” hurled by Vladimir Putin for his own political benefit. Such views now seem distressingly misguided in view of the alt-right torchlight parades and spiraling anti-Semitism that are now a regular feature of life in the Ukraine.

The result is a diplo-espionage gang that is very bad at the facts but very good

at public manipulation – and which therefore decided to use its skill set out to create a public furor over alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

It Started Late 2015

The effort began in late 2015 when GCHQ, along with intelligence agencies in Poland, Estonia, and Germany, began monitoring what they said were “suspicious ‘interactions’ between figures connected to Trump and known or suspected Russian agents.”

Since Trump was surging ahead in the polls and scaring the pants off the foreign-policy establishment by calling for a rapprochement with Moscow, the agencies figured that Russia was somehow behind it. The pace accelerated in March 2016 when a 30-year-old policy consultant named George Papadopoulos joined the Trump campaign as a foreign-policy adviser. Traveling in Italy a week later, he ran into Mifsud, the London-based Maltese academic, who reportedly set about cultivating him after learning of his position with Trump. Mifsud claimed to have “substantial connections with Russian government officials,” according to prosecutors. Over breakfast at a London hotel, he told Papadopoulos that he had just returned from Moscow where he had learned that the Russians had “dirt” on Hillary Clinton in the form of “thousands of emails.”

This was the remark that supposedly triggered an FBI investigation. *The New York Times* describes Mifsud as “an enthusiastic promoter of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia” and “a regular at meetings of the Valdai Discussion Club, an annual conference held in Sochi, Russia, that Mr. Putin attends,” which tried to suggest that he is a Kremlin agent of some sort. But WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange later tweeted photos of Mifsud with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and a high-ranking British intelligence official named Claire Smith at a training session for Italian security agents in Rome. Since it’s unlikely that British intelligence would rely on a Russian agent in such circumstances, Mifsud’s intelligence ties are more likely with the UK.

After Papadopoulos caused a minor political ruckus by telling a reporter that Prime Minister David Cameron should apologize for criticizing Trump’s anti-Muslim pronouncements, a friend in the Israeli embassy put him in touch with a friend in the Australian embassy, who introduced him to Downer, her boss. Over drinks, Downer advised him to be more diplomatic. After Papadopoulos then passed along Mifsud’s tip about Clinton’s emails, Downer informed his government, which, in late July, informed the FBI.

Was Papadopoulos Set Up?

Suspicions are unavoidable but evidence is lacking. Other pieces were meanwhile clicking into place. In late May or early June 2016, Fusion GPS, a private Washington intelligence firm employed by the Democratic National Committee, hired Steele to look into the Russian angle.

On June 20, he turned in the first of eighteen memos that would eventually comprise the Steele dossier, in this instance a three-page document asserting that Putin “has been cultivating, supporting and assisting TRUMP for at least 5 years” and that Russian intelligence possessed “kompromat” in the form of a video of prostitutes performing a “golden showers” show for his benefit at the Moscow Ritz-Carlton. A week or two later, Steele briefed the FBI on his findings. Around the same time, Robert Hannigan flew to Washington to brief CIA Director John Brennan about additional material that had come GCHQ’s way, material so sensitive that it could only be handled at “director level.”

One player was filling Papadopoulos’s head with tales of Russian dirty tricks, another was telling the FBI, while a third was collecting more information and passing it on to the bureau as well.

On July 7, 2016 Carter Page delivered a lecture on U.S.-Russian relations in Moscow in which he complained that “Washington and other western capitals have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption, and regime change.” Washington hawks expressed “unease” that someone representing the presumptive Republican nominee would take Russia’s side in a growing neo-Cold War.

Stefan Halper then infiltrated the Trump campaign on behalf of the FBI as an informant in early July, weeks before the FBI launched its investigation. Halper had 36 years earlier infiltrated the Carter re-election campaign in 1980 using CIA agents to turn information over to the Reagan campaign. Now Halper began to court both Page and Papadopoulos, independently of each other.

On July 11, Page showed up at a Cambridge symposium at which Halper and Dearlove both spoke. In early September, Halper sent Papadopoulos an email offering \$3,000 and a paid trip to London to write a research paper on a disputed gas field in the eastern Mediterranean, his specialty. “George, you know about hacking the emails from Russia, right?” Halper asked when he got there, but Papadopoulos said he knew nothing. Halper also sought out Sam Clovis, Trump’s national campaign co-chairman, with whom he chatted about China for an hour or so over coffee in Washington.

The rightwing Federalist website speculates that Halper was working with Steele to flesh out a Sept. 14 memo claiming that “Russians do have further ‘kompromat’ on CLINTON (e-mails) and [are] considering disseminating

it.” Clovis believes that Halper was trying “to create an audit trail back to those [Clinton] emails from someone in the campaign ... so they could develop a stronger case for probable cause to continue to issue warrants and to further an investigation.” Reports that Halper apparently sought a permanent post in the new administration suggest that the effort was meant to continue after inauguration.

Notwithstanding Clovis’s nutty rightwing politics, his description of what Halper may have been up to makes sense as does his observation that Halper was trying “to build something that did not exist.” Despite countless hyper-ventilating headlines about mysterious Trump Tower meetings and the like, the sad truth is that Russiagate after all these months is shaping up as even more of a “nothing-burger” than Obama administration veteran Van Jones said it was back in mid-2017. Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller has indicted Papadopoulos and others on procedural grounds, he has indicted former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort for corruption, and he has charged a St. Petersburg company known as the Internet Research Agency with violating US election laws.

But the corruption charges have nothing to do with Russian collusion and nothing in the indictment against IRA indicates that either the Kremlin or the Trump campaign were involved. Indeed, the activities that got IRA in trouble in the first place are so unimpressive – just \$46,000 worth of Facebook ads that it purchased prior to election day, some pro-Trump, some anti, and some with no particular slant at all – that Mueller probably wouldn’t even have bothered if he hadn’t been under intense pressure to come up with anything at all.

The same goes for the army of bots that Russia supposedly deployed on Twitter. As *The Washington Post* noted in an oddly, cool-headed Dec. 2 article, 2,700 suspected Russian-linked accounts generated just 202,000 tweets in a six-year period ending in August 2017, a drop in a bucket compared to the one billion election-related tweets sent out during the fourteen months leading up to Election Day.

The Steele dossier is also underwhelming. It declares on one page that the Kremlin sought to cultivate Trump by throwing “various lucrative real estate development business deals” his way but says on another that Trump’s efforts to drum up business were unavailing and that he thus “had to settle for the use of extensive sexual services there from local prostitutes rather than business success.”

Why would Trump turn down business offers when he couldn’t generate any on his own? The idea that Putin would spot a U.S. reality-TV star somewhere around 2011 and conclude that he was destined for the Oval Office five years later is ludicrous. The fact that the Democratic National Committee funded the dossier

via its law firm Perkins Coie renders it less credible still, as does the fact that the world has heard nothing more about the alleged video despite the ongoing deterioration in US-Russian relations. What's the point of making a blackmail tape if you don't use it?

Even Steele is backing off. In a legal paper filed in response to a libel suit last May, he said the document "did not represent (and did not purport to represent) verified facts, but were raw intelligence which had identified a range of allegations that warranted investigation given their potential national security implications." The fact is that the "dossier" was opposition research, not an intelligence report. It was neither vetted by Steele nor anyone in an intelligence agency. Opposition research is intended to mix truths and fiction, to dig up plausible dirt to throw at your opponent, not to produce an intelligence assessment at taxpayer's expense to "protect" the country. And Steele was paid for it by the Democrats, not his government.

Using it Anyway

Nonetheless, the spooks have made the most of such pseudo-evidence. Dearlove and Wood both advised Steele to take his "findings" to the FBI, while, after the election, Wood pulled Sen. John McCain aside at a security conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to let him know that the Russians might be blackmailing the president-elect. McCain dispatched long-time aide David J. Kramer to the UK to discuss the dossier with Steele directly.

Although Kramer denies it, *The New Yorker* found a former national-security official who says he spoke with him at the time and that Kramer's goal was to have McCain confront Trump with the dossier in the hope that he would resign on the spot. When that didn't happen, Clapper and Brennan arranged for FBI Director James Comey to confront Trump instead. Comey later testified that he didn't want Trump to think he was creating "a J. Edgar Hoover-type situation – I didn't want him thinking I was briefing him on this to sort of hang it over him in some way."

But how could Trump think otherwise? As Consortium News founding editor Robert Parry observed a few days later, the maneuver "resembles a tactic out of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's playbook on government-style blackmail: I have some very derogatory information about you that I'd sure hate to see end up in the press."

Since then, the Democrats have touted the dossier at every opportunity, *The New Yorker* continues to defend it, while *Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg cites it as well, saying it's a "rather obvious possibility that Trump is being blackmailed." CNN, for its part, suggested not long ago that the dossier may

actually be Russian disinformation designed to throw everyone off base, Republicans and Democrats alike.

It sounds more like CIA paranoia raised to the *nth* degree. But that's what the intelligence agencies are for, i.e. to spread fear and propaganda in order to stampede the public into supporting their imperial agenda. In this case, their efforts are so effective that they've gotten lost in a fog of their own making. If the corporate press fails to point this out, it's because reporters are too befogged themselves to notice.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as *Jacobin* and *The American Conservative*.

Making Excuses for Russiagate

As months turn into nearly two years and no solid evidence emerges to nail Russia for nabbing Election 2016, some big Russia-gate cheerleaders are starting to cover their tracks, as Daniel Lazare explains.

By **Daniel Lazare** *Special to Consortium News*



The best evidence that Russia-gate is sinking beneath the waves is the way those pushing the pseudo-scandal are now busily covering their tracks. *The Guardian* complains that “as the inquiry has expanded and dominated the news agenda over the last year, the real issues of people’s lives are in danger of being drowned out by obsessive cable television coverage of the Russia investigation” – as if *The Guardian’s* own coverage hasn’t been every bit as obsessive as anything CNN has come up with.

The Washington Post, second to none when it comes to painting Putin as a real-life Lord Voldemort, now says that Special counsel Robert Mueller “faces a particular challenge maintaining the confidence of the citizenry” as his investigation enters its second year – although it’s sticking to its guns that the problem is not the inquiry itself, but “the regular attacks he faces from

President Trump, who has decried the probe as a 'witch hunt.'"

And then there's *The New York Times*, which this week devoted a 3,600-word front-page article to explain why the FBI had no choice but to launch an investigation into Trump's alleged Russian links and how, if anything, the inquiry wasn't aggressive enough. As the article puts it, "Interviews with a dozen current and former government officials and a review of documents show that the FBI was even more circumspect in that case than has been previously known."

It's Nobody's Fault

The result is a late-breaking media chorus to the effect that it's not the fault of the FBI that the investigation has dragged on with so little to show for it; it's not the fault of Mueller either, and, most of all, it's not the fault of the corporate press, even though it's done little over the last two years than scream about Russia. It's not anyone's fault, evidently, but simply how the system works.

This is nonsense, and the gaping holes in the *Times* article show why.

The piece, written by Matt Apuzzo, Adam Goldman, and Nicholas Fandos and entitled "Code Name Crossfire Hurricane: The Secret Origins of the Trump Investigation," is pretty much like everything else the *Times* has written on the subject, i.e. biased, misleading, and incomplete. Its main argument is that the FBI had no option but to step in because four Trump campaign aides had "obvious or suspected Russian ties."

'At Putin's Arm'

One was Michael Flynn, who would briefly serve as Donald Trump's national security adviser and who, according to the *Times*, "was paid \$45,000 by the Russian government's media arm for a 2015 speech and dined at the arm of the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin." Another was Paul Manafort, who briefly served as Trump's campaign chairman and was a source of concern because he had "lobbied for pro-Russia interests in Ukraine and worked with an associate who has been identified as having connections to Russian intelligence." A third was Carter Page, a Trump foreign-policy adviser who "was well known to the FBI" because "[h]e had previously been recruited by Russian spies and was suspected of meeting one in Moscow during the campaign."

The fourth was George Papadopoulos, a "young and inexperienced campaign aide whose wine-fueled conversation with the Australian ambassador set off the investigation. Before hacked Democratic emails appeared online, he had seemed to know that Russia had political dirt on Mrs. Clinton."

Seems incriminating, eh? But in each case the connection was more tenuous than the *Times* lets on. Flynn, for example, didn't dine "at the arm of the Russian president" at a now-famous December 2015 Moscow banquet honoring the Russian media outlet RT. He was merely at a table at which Putin happened to sit down for "maybe five minutes, maybe twenty, tops," according to Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein who was just a few chairs away. No words were exchanged, Stein says, and "[n]obody introduced anybody to anybody. There was no translator. The Russians spoke Russian. The four people who spoke English spoke English."

The Manafort associate with the supposed Russian intelligence links turns out to be a Russian-Ukrainian translator named Konstantin Kilimnik who studied English at a Soviet military school and who vehemently denies any such connection. It seems that the Ukrainian authorities did investigate the allegations at one point but declined to press charges. So the connection is unproven.

Page Was No Spy

The same goes for Carter Page, who was not "recruited" by Russian intelligence, but, rather, approached by what he thought were Russian trade representatives at a January 2013 energy symposium in New York. When the FBI informed him five or six months later that it believed the men were intelligence agents, Page appears to have cooperated fully based on a federal indictment filed with the Southern District of New York. Thus, Page was not a spy *pace* the *Times*, but a government informant as ex-federal prosecutor Andrew C. McCarthy has pointed out – in other words, a good guy, as the *Times* would undoubtedly see it, helping the catch a couple of baddies.

As for Papadopoulos, who the *Times* suggests somehow got advance word that WikiLeaks was about to dump a treasure trove of Hillary Clinton emails, the article fails to mention that at the time the conversation with the Australian ambassador took place, the Clinton communications in the news were the 30,000 State Department emails that she had improperly stored on her private computer. These were the emails that "the American people are sick and tired of hearing about," as Bernie Sanders put it. Instead of spilling the beans about a data breach yet to come, it's more likely that Papadopoulos was referring to emails that were already in the news – a possibility the *Times* fails to discuss.

FBI 'Perplexed'

One could go on. But not only does the *Times* article get the details wrong, it paints the big picture in misleading tones as well. It says that the FBI was "perplexed" by such Trump antics as calling on Russia to release still more Clinton emails after WikiLeaks went public with its disclosure. The word

suggests a disinterested observer who can't figure out what's going on. But it ignores how poisonous the atmosphere had become by that point and how everyone's mind was seemingly made up.

By July 2016, Clinton was striking out at Trump at every opportunity about his Russian ties – not because they were true, but because a candidate who had struggled to come up with a winning slogan had at last come across an issue that seemed to resonate with her fan base. Consequently, an intelligence report that Russia was responsible for hacking the Democratic National Committee “was a godsend,” wrote Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes in Shattered, their best-selling account of the Clinton campaign, because it was “hard evidence upon which Hillary could start to really build the case that Trump was actually in league with Moscow.”

Not only did Clinton believe this, but her followers did as well, as did the corporate media and, evidently, the FBI. This is the takeaway from text messages that FBI counterintelligence chief Peter Strzok exchanged with FBI staff attorney Lisa Page.

Andrew McCarthy, who has done a masterful job of reconstructing the sequence, notes that in late July 2016, Page mentioned an article she had come across on a liberal web site discussing Trump's alleged Russia ties. Strzok texted back that he's “partial to any women sending articles about nasty the Russians are.” Page replied that the Russians “are probably the worst. Very little I finding redeeming about this. Even in history. Couple of good writers and artists I guess.” Strzok heartily agreed: “f***ing conniving cheating savages. At statecraft, athletics, you name it. I'm glad I'm on Team USA.”

The F'ing Russian 'Savages'

This is the institutional bias that the *Times* doesn't dare mention. An agency whose top officials believe that “f***ing conniving cheating savages” are breaking down the door is one that is fairly guaranteed to construe evidence in the most negative, anti-Russian way possible while ignoring anything to the contrary. So what if Carter Page had cooperated with the FBI? What's important is that he had had contact with Russian intelligence at all, which was enough to render him suspicious in the bureau's eyes. Ditto Konstantin Kilimnik. So what if the Ukrainian authorities had declined to press charges? The fact that they had even looked was damning enough.

The FBI thus made the classic methodological error of allowing its investigation to be contaminated by its preconceived beliefs. Objectivity fell by the wayside. The *Times* says that Christopher Steele, the ex-MI6 agent whose infamous, DNC and Clinton camp paid-for opposition research dossier turned

“golden showers” into a household term, struck the FBI as “highly credible” because he had “helped agents unravel complicated cases” in the past. Perhaps. But the real reason is that he told agents what they wanted to hear, which is that the “Russian regime has been cultivating, supporting and assisting TRUMP for at least 5 years” with the “[a]im, endorsed by PUTIN, ... [of] encourage[ing] splits and divisions in [the] western alliance” (which can be construed as a shrewd defensive move against a Western alliance massing troops on Russian borders.)

What else would one expect of people as “nasty” as these? In fact, the Steele dossier should have caused alarm bells to go off. How could Putin have possibly known five years before that Trump would be a viable presidential candidate? Why would high-level Kremlin officials share inside information with an ex-intelligence official thousands of miles away? Why would the dossier declare on one page that the Kremlin has offered Trump “various lucrative real estate development business deals” but then say on another that Trump’s efforts to drum up business had gone nowhere and that he therefore “had had to settle for the use of extensive sexual services there from local prostitutes rather than business success”? Given that the dossier was little more than “oppo research” commissioned and funded by the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign, why was it worthy of consideration at all?

The Rush to Believe

But all such questions disappeared amid the general rush to believe. The *Times* is right that the FBI slow-walked the investigation until Election Day. This is because agents assumed that Trump would lose and that therefore there was no need to rush. But when he didn’t, the mood turned to one of panic and fury.

Without offering a shred of evidence, the FBI, CIA, NSA, and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper issued a formal assessment on Jan. 6, 2017, that “Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election ... [in order] to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency.” The “assessment” contains this disclaimer: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

The New Yorker reports that an ex-aide to John McCain hoped to persuade

the senator to use the Steele dossier to force Trump to resign even before taking office. (The ex-aide denies that this was the case.)

When FBI Director James Comey personally confronted Trump with news of the dossier two weeks prior to inauguration, the *Times* says he “feared making this conversation a ‘J. Edgar Hoover-type situation,’ with the FBI presenting embarrassing information “to lord over a president-elect.”

But that is precisely what happened. When someone – most likely CIA Director John Brennan, now a commentator with NBC News – leaked word of the meeting and *Buzzfeed* published the dossier four days later, the corporate media went wild. Trump was gravely wounded, while Adam Schiff, Democratic point man on the House Intelligence Committee, would subsequently trumpet the Steele dossier as the unvarnished truth. According to the *Times* account, Trump was unpersuaded by Comey’s assurances that he was there to help. “Hours earlier,” the paper says, “...he debuted what would quickly become a favorite phrase: ‘This is a political witch hunt.’”

The *Times* clearly regards the idea as preposterous on its face. But while Trump is wrong about many things, on this one subject he happens to be right. The press, the intelligence community, and the Democrats have all gone off the deep end in search of a Russia connection that doesn’t exist. They misled their readers, they made fools of themselves, and they committed a crime against journalism. And now they’re trying to dodge the blame.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as *Jacobin* and *The American Conservative*.

Haspel Could Be Subject to Arrest Abroad Under Universal Jurisdiction

Gina Haspel is the new CIA Director after the Senate voted on Thursday 54-44 to confirm her, with six Democrats agreeing. In this interview, Francis Boyle explains why Haspel could be at risk of arrest on trips abroad.

By Dennis J Bernstein



Francis Boyle is professor of international law at the University of Illinois College of Law. He is the author of many books on International Law and an outspoken critic of US policy in the Middle East. Boyle's books include *Foundations of World Order* and the sequel, *Destroying World Order*. In the following interview with Pacifica Radio host Dennis J Bernstein, Boyle warns that, among other things, given her background as key implementer of the US torture program, Gina Haspel is vulnerable to be arrested for war crimes and crimes against humanity if she travels abroad.

Dennis Bernstein spoke with Francis Boyle on May 10th, 2018. [The transcript has been updated to reflect Haspel's confirmation.]

DB: [We now have a new] a new CIA director who likes to get her hands dirty and participate directly in torture. She has also been actively involved in making sure nobody finds out that torture takes place.

FB: "Bloody" Gina Haspel is her nickname at the CIA. She was directly involved in the extraordinary rendition program, which is a euphemism for the enforced disappearance of human beings and their consequent torture. This was in the complaint I filed against Bush and company in 2010 with the International Criminal Court for this crime against humanity.

Last fall the ICC prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, said she is going to open up an investigation into the entire CIA extraordinary rendition program for violating the Rome Statute. Although the United States is not a party to the Rome Statute, these actions took place on the territorial sovereignty of Rome Statute states, and therefore the ICC does have jurisdiction. In my opinion, Gina Haspel is a presumptive war criminal and torturer. [We now] have a torturer and war criminal as head of the CIA.

As I have argued in anti-CIA cases here in the United States, the CIA is an organized criminal conspiracy like the SS and the Gestapo. We argued that successfully back in 1987 at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I was involved in large numbers of CIA protest cases back in the 1980's because of what was going on in Central America, with 35,000 dead in Nicaragua, 75,000 dead in El Salvador, and perhaps a quarter of a million in Guatemala. Most of those killed were Mayan Indians, which meant outright genocide.

DB: Will it be difficult for our director of the CIA to travel abroad? Maybe she has to be covert forever.

FB: That is correct. Under international law today—following a terrible decision by the International Court of Justice—heads of state and foreign ministers have

diplomatic immunity while there are in office. But that is not going to apply to the head of the CIA.

I have a whole dossier here against Bush, Jr. and the rest of them for the extraordinary rendition program. We scared him out of Switzerland over that. A Swiss prosecutor demanded that Bush be prosecuted if he showed up in Switzerland. I know that Amnesty International and the Center for Constitutional Rights also have extensive dossiers against high-level US officials involved in these torture programs, including Haspel. She would be a sitting duck for international human rights lawyers. The evidence is there.

We have a 600-page executive summary of the Senate Foreign Intelligence Committee's report on the extent of torture and extraordinary disappearances by the CIA. This is an official US government document. She was not personally named in there, but she was a high-level official who was personally involved. She certainly supervised the operation in Thailand. Under international law, there is a command responsibility. She is denying that she herself physically tortured anyone, but she supervised others doing the torturing. Under international criminal law, she is accountable for the criminal behavior she oversaw.

DB: She admitted at the hearing that she had the tapes of these torture sessions but she considered it prudent to destroy them.

FB: The Senate Committee had just announced their investigation so her boss, Jose Rodriguez, ordered her to destroy the tapes. Arguably, this would be obstruction of justice. [We now have] a notorious international criminal heading up the CIA. In my opinion, any senator who vote[d] to confirm her [became] an accessory after the fact to her crimes: torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and violations of the Geneva Conventions and the Convention against Torture.

DB: This is a very difficult time. We are all worried about our friend Ray McGovern, a former CIA analyst who was brutalized while protesting the Haspel nomination. Obviously, they are very serious about shutting up anyone protesting torture.

FB: Ray arguably has the defense of prevention of crimes under international law. I am not saying it would be a winner, because it is always tough going into a federal court and defending anyone protesting and resisting criminal behavior by the United States government.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of [Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom](#). You can access the

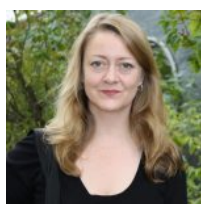
audio archives at www.flashpoints.net. You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

A Tale of Two Tortures

How the Americans and the British “tortured some folks” and got away with it, as Annie Machon explains.

By **Annie Machon** *Special to Consortium News*

in Brussels



It was with some disbelief that I read of two torture-related stories emerging around the same time last week. The first was about the legal victory of Abdul Hakim Belhaj, Libyan dissident, kidnap victim of MI6 and the CIA, and torture victim of Colonel Gaddafi. UK governmental apologies were finally made and reparation paid. For once justice was seen to be done and the use of torture condemned.

Meanwhile, across the pond last week the reverse side of the same coin was on full disgusting display. Our American chums are in the process of attempting to appoint an alleged notorious torturer as the head of the CIA.

While nominee [Gina Haspel](#) had soft-ball questions lobbed at her by a tame pack of senators at her confirmation hearing, retired CIA senior analyst, former presidential briefer, and now justice activist, Ray McGovern, stood up and said what the Senators knew, but would not say: namely that she supervised – directly, on site – the waterboarding of Al Nashiri, who had been kidnapped and brought to the first secret CIA prison abroad (in Thailand) for “interrogation.” McGovern was dragged out by four burly police, thrown to the ground, and injured when additional police piled on. Here is [a link to the video](#) of this assault.

By juxtaposing these two incidents I am not trying to make the point that the UK is morally better than the USA when it comes to torture over the last 17 years – manifestly it has not been – but certainly in the time I served in MI5 in the 1990s the use of torture was verboten. Partly for ethical reasons, but mainly because the British Deep State had learned to its cost how counter-productive the use of torture and illegal imprisonment could be during the early stages of the bitter civil war in Northern Ireland in the 1970s.

A Lesson Forgotten

Unfortunately those hard-won lessons were generational, and that peer group began to retire in the late 1990s. As a result, come the aftermath of 9/11, when the USA lurched down a path of harsh military retaliation, illegal war, kidnapping and torture, the compliant British intelligence agencies followed helter-skelter down the same path, all in the name of the special intelligence relationship.

So, back to the Belhaj case. To get to the root of this I shall need to transport you back to 1995. Although the US-funded Mujahideen in Afghanistan was by then morphing into al-Qaeda and had just about hit the radar of MI5 as an emergent, if regional threat, peace seemed to be breaking out all over the world: the Cold War was officially over, a peaceful resolution to the civil war in Northern Ireland was in the making, and there even seemed to be some progress with the running political sore that is Palestine and the Israeli occupation, with the Oslo Accords of 1993.

However, Libya – at that time a “rogue” nation – was still on the Western intelligence hit list. This was partly because it was suspected by the UK government to have been behind the Lockerbie bombing in 1988 and the search for the perpetrators was a top level priority for MI6 in which it had failed for years to make any progress, and partly because Gaddafi had largely closed the huge Libyan oil reserves to Western oil companies.

Worth a Ton to MI6

So when, in 1995, a Libyan military intelligence officer (subsequently codenamed TUNWORTH) walked into the British embassy in Tunis and asked to speak to the resident spook, MI6 leapt at the chance to get rid of Gaddafi, solve the Lockerbie case, and allow Britain and its allies to once again plunder the vast Libyan oil reserves.

TUNWORTH had a group of “rag-tag Islamist extremists” to carry out this coup attempt, and wanted support and money from MI6, which was quickly offered. The attack was illegal under UK law, which required a ministerial sign-off before such an operation, and then it went wrong, killing innocent people. How much heinous could it get? Here is the full account of this failed coup attempt.

So how does this fit in with Abdul Hakim Belhaj? Well, it turns out he was the co-founder of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), the very organisation that MI6 had funded for this attack. As a result, he was a wanted man in Libya. And after Gaddafi’s return to the international fold following his notorious deal in the desert with then-UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in 2004, Belhaj was the gift from MI6 that sealed the deal.

In 2004 he and his pregnant wife were tracked down and intercepted by MI6 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. They were flown to Bangkok in Thailand and held in a CIA black site, before onward transit to Libya. The flight took 18 hours, and both Belhaj and his pregnant wife were lashed to the floor of a US military transport plane for the duration.

Belhaj was subsequently held in the notorious Abu Selim prison for the next six years where he was repeatedly and hideously tortured. He was finally released under an amnesty brokered by Gaddafi's son and heir, Saif al-Islam, in 2010.

That could have been the end of it, except the West made a catastrophic decision to once again try to depose Colonel Gaddafi in 2011. This time the charge was led not by the USA but by France and its President at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy, but ably backed up by the ever-reliable UK and USA, in a "humanitarian intervention" to protect the citizens of Islamist Benghazi – which by the way was not under direct threat at the time. Another fabricated excuse for a Western war of aggression.

(As a side note, Sarkozy is currently under investigation for illegally accepting five million euros from Gaddafi to fund his bid for the French Presidency in the 2007 election, and in the same year Gaddafi was awarded a full state visit to France.)

The 'Deal in the Desert'

This time the West achieved openly and shamelessly, in the gaze of the world's media, what they had failed to do shamefully and in secret in 1996: it toppled Gaddafi, who was caught, brutalised and buggered with a bayonet, murdered, and his mutilated corpse left on display for days. His son, Saif al-Islam was captured, tortured and imprisoned. He is now free and re-entering the political fray in Libya.

In the chaos that followed the overthrow of Gaddafi, Human Rights Watch staff made it to Libya and found a cache of documents left in the office of notorious intelligence chief, Musa Kusa, who had fled the country initially to the UK and then fled on to Qatar.

Amongst these documents was a letter from the MI6 Head of Counter-Terrorism, Sir Mark Allen, dated from 2004. He had helped facilitate the "deal in the desert", and wrote a congratulatory letter to Musa Kusa about being able to help facilitate the capture of Belhaj, and effectively to see him as a "gift" to the Libyan regime in 2004, as a gesture of good will. Here is an excerpt from Allen's letter to Musa Kusa, submitted by Belhaj's lawyers:

"I congratulate you on the safe arrival of [Mr Belhaj]. This was the least we

could do for you and for Libya to demonstrate the remarkable relationship we have built over recent years....Amusingly, we got a request from the Americans to channel requests for information from [Mr Belhaj] through the Americans. I have no intention of doing any such thing. The intelligence about [Mr Belhaj] was British... I feel I have the right to deal with you direct on this”.

Because of that good will, the Gaddafi regime fatally trusted its new relationship with the West; and a man and his pregnant wife suffered, and the country as a whole continues to suffer immensely from the ensuing civil war that followed Gaddafi’s assassination..

The court case last week in the UK was a victory for them. Belhaj himself, despite successive UK governments offering one million pounds to drop the case, has always stated that he only required £1, plus an acknowledgement and apology from the UK government about what happened to him. This week he finally received it.

For her ordeal, his wife accepted half of the amount offered. The three UK key players – Blair, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, and MI6 Sir Mark Allen naturally have yet again not been called to account. Not a blemish to their reputations....

So are we likely to see the same admission of guilt from the instigators of the US torture programme?

Far from it. Even if Gina Haspel is not confirmed by the full Senate, the fact she was even considered for the post of heading the CIA is utterly shameless. As was the disgusting treatment of CIA pensioner and peace protester, Ray McGovern.

Annie Machon is a former intelligence officer in the UK’s MI5 Security Service (the U.S. counterpart is the FBI).

Haspel Says CIA Won’t Torture Again as Ray McGovern is Dragged Out of Hearing

2nd UPDATE: After refusing to directly answer questions about her history as an alleged torturer, Ray McGovern decided to ask Gina Haspel a question or two of his own and he wound up in jail for it, reports Joe Lauria.

Updated with news that McGovern returned home and details of him being charged with Unlawful Disruption of Congress and Resisting Arrest.

By Joe Lauria *Special to Consortium News*



Instead of facing a judge to defend herself against prosecution for violating U.S. law prohibiting torture, 33-year CIA veteran Gina Haspel on Wednesday faced the Senate Intelligence Committee in a hearing to confirm her as director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Haspel does not look like someone who would be associated with torture. Instead she would not be out of place as your next door neighbor or as a kindly grade-school teacher. "I think you will find me to be a typical middle-class American," she said in her opening statement.

Haspel is the face of America. She not only looks harmless, but looks like she wants to help: perhaps to recommend a good gardener to hire or to spread democracy around the globe while upholding human rights wherever they are violated.

But this perfectly typical middle class American personally supervised a black site in Thailand where terrorism suspects were waterboarded. It remains unclear whether she had a direct role in the torture. The CIA said she arrived at the black site after the waterboarding of senior al-Qaeda operative Abu Zubaydah had taken place. Some CIA officials disputed that to *The New York Times*. The newspaper also reported last year that Haspel ran the CIA Thai prison in 2002 when another suspect, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, was waterboarded.

Even if she did not have a direct hand in overseeing the torture, she certainly acquiesced to it. And if that were not bad enough, Haspel

urged the destruction of 92 videotaped CIA "enhanced interrogations," conducted at the prison in Thailand, eliminating evidence in a clear-cut obstruction of justice to cover-up her own possible crimes.

At her public hearing Haspel refused to say that the torture was immoral. Instead she tried to romanticize her nefarious past in adolescent language about the spy trade, about going to secret meetings on "dark, moonless nights," in the "dusty back alleys of Third World capitals."

Haspel claimed to have a "strong moral compass." We really can't know because we only found out about what she did in Thailand in 2002 because of press reports. Just about everything else she did during her three decades at the agency remains shrouded in secrecy because she refused to declassify almost all of her record for the committee.

"Bloody Gina," as some CIA colleagues called her, told the hearing she would not re-institute the "enhanced interrogation" program if she became director. One wonders if the US were attacked again like on 9/11 if she would keep her vow,

especially as she admitted nothing wrong with “enhanced interrogation” the first time.

Haspel testified that the U.S. has a new legal framework that governs detentions and interrogations forbidding what she refused to call torture. But the U.S. already had a law on the books against it when the Senate ratified the international Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on October 21, 1994. Every time the U.S. “tortured some folks” after that, as Barack Obama put it, it broke U.S. law.

In speaking about it in a folksy way, Obama was minimizing the enormity of the crime and justifying his decision to not prosecute any American who may have taken part in it. That includes Haspel. So instead of facing the law she’s facing a career promotion to one of the most powerful positions in the United States, if not the world.

McGovern Speaks Out

Haspel tried to wiggle out of relentless questioning about whether she thought torture was immoral, let alone illegal. Completely ignoring U.S. ratification of the Convention Against Torture, Haspel clung to the new Army Field Manual, which contains a loophole in an annex added after 9/11 that justifies cruel punishment, but not specifically torture.

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), who was tortured in Vietnam, had no doubts about Haspel. After the hearing he issued a statement saying, “Ms. Haspel’s role in overseeing the use of torture by Americans is disturbing. Her refusal to acknowledge torture’s immorality is disqualifying.”



Because she wasn't giving any straight answers, Ray McGovern, a CIA veteran of 27 years and frequent contributor to Consortium News, stood up in the hearing room and began asking his own questions.

Capitol police were immediately ordered by the chairman, Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), to physically remove McGovern from the room. As he continued turning towards the committee to shout his questions, four officers hauled him out. They ominously accused him of resisting arrest. Once they got him into the hallway, rather than letting him go his way, four policemen wrestled him to the ground, re-injuring his dislocated left shoulder, as they attempted to cuff him.

After spending the night in jail, McGovern, 78, was to be arraigned on Thursday. He has not responded to several voice messages left on his mobile phone. A police officer at Central Booking told Consortium News McGovern was no longer under their control and had been sent to court. According to DC Superior Court, he has been charged with Unlawful Disruption of Congress and Resisting Arrest. Ray returned home Thursday night.

McGovern was one of several people arrested before and during the hearing for speaking out. The spectacle of citizens of this country, and in Ray's case a veteran CIA officer, having to resort to disrupting a travesty of a hearing to put an alleged torturer in charge of the most powerful spy agency in the world is a disturbing indicator of how far we have come.

A Different Kind of Hearing

In 1975, Sen. Frank Church (D-ID) conducted hearings that revealed a raft of criminality committed by the CIA, the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation over a period of thirty years from the end of the Second World War. It has been more than 40 years since that Senate investigation. After

the release of the CIA Torture Report by the Senate in 2014 and the revelations about the NSA by Edward Snowden, a new Church Committee-style expansive probe into the intelligence agencies is long overdue.

A central question it should ask is whether the CIA really serves the interests of the American people or rather the interests of its rulers, which the agency has done from its founding by Wall Street elites, such as its first director, Allen Dulles.

While the Republican-controlled intelligence committee may have partisan motives to launch such a new Church-like commission to look into the agencies' shenanigans in the Russia-gate fiasco, the majority of Republicans are hawks on intelligence matters and many support torture and want Haspel to be the next CIA director. For instance, Burr told Haspel: "You are without a doubt the most qualified person the president could choose to lead the CIA and the most prepared nominee in the 70-year history of the agency. You have acted morally, ethically and legally over a distinguished 30-year career."

None of this bodes well for the nation.

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