

# Torture-Tainted Nominations Recall Failure to Prosecute Bush-Era Abuses

The declining human rights standards on display with the Haspel and Pompeo nominations are the latest in a long line of policy failures that include the Obama administration's lack of prosecutions of Bush-era torture, Nat Parry notes.

By Nat Parry

President Donald Trump's nominations of Gina Haspel to lead the CIA and Mike Pompeo to be America's top diplomat are the latest indications of steadily eroding human rights standards in the United States and the rollback of the rule of law that has characterized U.S. counterterrorism policies since Sept. 11, 2001.

Haspel, a CIA operative who oversaw the torture of terrorism suspects at a secret prison in Thailand and then helped destroy tapes of the interrogations, and Pompeo, who has made statements in support of torture and mass surveillance, are both expected to be confirmed by the Senate with little fanfare.

After all, when Pompeo was nominated for his current post of CIA Director his confirmation sailed through the Senate on a vote of 66-32. This, despite what Human Rights Watch's Maria McFarland Sanchez-Moreno called "dangerously ambiguous" responses to questions about torture and mass surveillance.

"Pompeo's failure to unequivocally disavow torture and mass surveillance, coupled with his record of advocacy for surveillance of Americans and past endorsement of the shuttered CIA torture program, make clear that he should not be running the CIA," Sanchez Moreno said in January 2017.

Shortly following Pompeo's confirmation, his deputy director at the CIA was named as Gina Haspel, who "played a direct role in the CIA's 'extraordinary rendition program,' under which captured militants were handed to foreign governments and held at secret facilities, where they were tortured by agency personnel," the New York Times reported last year.

She also ran the CIA's first black site prison and oversaw the brutal interrogations of two detainees, Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri. In addition, she played a vital role in the destruction of interrogation videotapes that showed the torture of detainees both at the black site she ran and other secret agency locations. The concealment of those interrogation tapes violated both multiple court orders as well the demands of the 9/11 Commission

and the advice of White House lawyers, as Glenn Greenwald has reported.

Despite these serious misgivings, Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said he is not currently urging Democrats to oppose Pompeo's nomination to be Secretary of State or Haspel's nomination to lead the CIA. So much for the #Resistance.

The Democratic acquiescence follows a long pattern of tolerating human rights abuses and normalizing torture. When President Barack Obama declared that he wanted to "look forward, not backward," and to close the chapter on the CIA's torture practices under the Bush administration without allowing any prosecutions for crimes that were committed, he ensured torture would remain a "policy option" for future presidents, in the words of Human Rights Watch.

### **Tortured Debate**

We began to see this play out during the Republican primary debates in 2016, when the GOP contenders were all jockeying for the pro-torture vote. At the time, Trump made clear his unambiguous support for the use of torture. When he was pressed on his statements about bringing back waterboarding and devising even more brutal torture methods, Trump decided to double down rather than backtrack.

On Feb. 7, 2016 candidate Trump appeared on "This Week" with George Stephanopoulos. "As president, you would authorize torture?" Stephanopoulos asked.

"I would absolutely authorize something beyond waterboarding," Trump said. "And believe me, it will be effective. If we need information, George, you have our enemy cutting heads off of Christians and plenty of others, by the hundreds, by the thousands."

When asked whether we "win by being more like them," i.e., to mimic the tactics of Islamic State terrorists, Trump stated flatly, "Yes."

"I'm sorry," he elaborated. "You have to do it that way. And I'm not sure everybody agrees with me. I guess a lot of people don't. We are living in a time that's as evil as any time that there has ever been. You know, when I was a young man, I studied Medieval times. That's what they did, they chopped off heads."

"So we're going to chop off heads?" Stephanopoulos asked.

"We're going to do things beyond waterboarding perhaps, if that happens to come," Trump replied.

Trump even insinuated that his competitor in the GOP race Ted Cruz was a “pussy” for hinting that he might show some degree of restraint in the use of torture. Alarmed, several human rights groups jumped in to remind the U.S. of its moral and legal obligations not to engage in sadistic and cruel practices such as waterboarding.

Amnesty International’s Naureen Shah issued a rebuttal to the debate over waterboarding, which she described as “slow-motion suffocation.” She pointed out the obvious that “the atrocities of the armed group calling itself Islamic State and other armed groups don’t make waterboarding okay.”

### **Policy Option**

What the “debate” over bringing back torture highlighted, and what the current nominations of torture advocates to lead the State Department and CIA drive home, is why prosecutions of the Bush-era CIA torture program were essential, and why it was so damaging that the Obama administration shirked its responsibilities in this regard for eight years.

As human rights advocates have long maintained, prosecuting Bush administration and CIA officials involved with the torture of terrorism suspects in the post-9/11 period was needed so that torture would not be repeated in the future by subsequent administrations who may consider themselves above the law.

Indeed, this is precisely why there is a requirement under international law for allegations of torture to be investigated and prosecuted – so that torture does not become a policy option to be utilized or shelved depending on the political whims of the day.

This is a point that UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism Ben Emmerson made following the release of the Senate’s torture report in late 2014. Senior officials from the Bush administration who sanctioned crimes, as well as the CIA and U.S. government officials who carried them out, must be investigated and prosecuted, Emmerson said.

“It is now time to take action,” Emmerson said on Dec. 9, 2014. “The individuals responsible for the criminal conspiracy revealed in today’s report must be brought to justice, and must face criminal penalties commensurate with the gravity of their crimes. The fact that the policies revealed in this report were authorized at a high level within the U.S. government provides no excuse whatsoever. Indeed, it reinforces the need for criminal accountability.”

International law prohibits the granting of immunity to public officials who have engaged in acts of torture, Emmerson pointed out. He further emphasized the United States’ international obligation to criminally prosecute the architects

and perpetrators of the torture methods described in the report:

“As a matter of international law, the U.S. is legally obliged to bring those responsible to justice. The UN Convention Against Torture and the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances require States to prosecute acts of torture and enforced disappearance where there is sufficient evidence to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction. States are not free to maintain or permit impunity for these grave crimes.”

Zeid Raad al-Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that it’s “crystal clear” that the United States has an obligation under the UN Convention against Torture to ensure accountability.

“In all countries, if someone commits murder, they are prosecuted and jailed. If they commit rape or armed robbery, they are prosecuted and jailed. If they order, enable or commit torture – recognized as a serious international crime – they cannot simply be granted impunity because of political expediency,” he said.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed hope that the release of the torture report was the “start of a process” toward prosecutions, because the “prohibition against torture is absolute,” Ban’s spokesman said.

Needless to say, these appeals largely fell on deaf ears, with no criminal investigations launched whatsoever. Instead, the U.S. Congress responded with a symbolic “reaffirmation” of the ban on the torture – a largely redundant and unnecessary piece of legislation since torture has long been unambiguously banned under international law, the United States Constitution and U.S. criminal statutes.

For his part, Obama used the publication of the Senate report as an opportunity to tout the virtues of the United States, and actually praised the CIA for its professionalism in carrying out its responsibilities.

### **American Exceptionalism**

Following the publication of the Senate report, in a statement obliquely trumpeting the notion of “American Exceptionalism,” Obama said: “Throughout our history, the United States of America has done more than any other nation to stand up for freedom, democracy, and the inherent dignity and human rights of people around the world.” He went on to offer a tacit defense of the torture techniques while touting his own virtue in bringing these policies to an end.

“In the years after 9/11, with legitimate fears of further attacks and with the responsibility to prevent more catastrophic loss of life, the previous

administration faced agonizing choices about how to pursue al Qaeda and prevent additional terrorist attacks against our country," he said. Although the U.S. did "many things right in those difficult years," he acknowledged that "some of the actions that were taken were contrary to our values."

"That is why I unequivocally banned torture when I took office," Obama said, "because one of our most effective tools in fighting terrorism and keeping Americans safe is staying true to our ideals at home and abroad."

He went on to claim that he would use his authority as President "to make sure we never resort to those methods again."

But clearly, by blocking criminal investigations into the policy's architects, Obama did very little in a practical sense to ensure that those methods are not used again. And now that we are faced with the prospect of torture-tainted heads of the CIA and State Department, we are reminded once again of the importance of upholding the laws of the land.

**Nat Parry is co-author of Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.**

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## Intel Committee Rejects Basic Underpinning of Russiagate

The assumption underpinning Russiagate – that Vladimir Putin preferred Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton – is not supported by the facts, according to "Initial Findings" of the House Intelligence Committee, as Ray McGovern reports.

By Ray McGovern

Let's try to make this simple: The basic rationale behind charges that Russian President Vladimir Putin interfered in the 2016 U.S. election to help candidate Donald Trump rests, of course, on the assumption that Moscow preferred Trump to Hillary Clinton. But that is wrong to assume, says the House Intelligence Committee, which has announced that it does not concur with "Putin's supposed preference for candidate Trump."

So, the House Intelligence Committee Republican majority, which has been pouring over the same evidence used by the "handpicked analysts" from just the CIA, FBI, and NSA to prepare the rump Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA) of Jan. 6, 2017, finds the major premise of the ICA unpersuasive. The committee's "Initial

Findings” released on Monday specifically reject the assumption that Putin favored Trump.

This puts the committee directly at odds with handpicked analysts from only the FBI, CIA, and NSA, who assessed that Putin favored Trump – using this as their major premise and then straining to prove it by cobbling together unconvincing facts and theories.

Those of us with experience in intelligence analysis strongly criticized the evidence-impoverished ICA as soon as it was released, but it went on to achieve Gospel-like respect, with penance assigned to anyone who might claim it was not divinely inspired.

Until now.

Rep. K. Michael Conway (R-Texas), who led the House Committee investigation, has told the media that the committee is preparing a separate, in-depth analysis of the ICA itself. Good.

The committee should also take names – not only of the handpicked analysts, but the hand-pickers. There is ample precedent for this. For example, those who shepherded the fraudulent National Intelligence Estimate on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq 15 years ago were named in the NIE. Without names, it is hard to know whom to hold accountable.

Here’s the key ICA judgment with which the House committee does not concur: “We assess Putin, his advisers, and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump over Secretary Clinton.” Not to be picky, but if House investigators have been unable to find enough persuasive evidence to convince them that “Putin’s supposed preference” was Trump, there is little reason to take seriously the ICA’s adolescent observations – like Putin held a “grudge” against Clinton because she called him nasty names – and other tortured reasoning in an Intelligence Community Assessment that, frankly, is an embarrassment to the profession of intelligence analysis.

I recall reading the ICA as soon as it was published. I concluded that no special expertise in intelligence analysis was needed to see how the assessment had been cobbled together around the “given” that Putin had a distinct preference for Trump. That was a premise with which I always had serious trouble, since it assumed that a Russian President would prefer to have an unpredictable, mercurial, lash-out-at-any-grievance-real-or-perceived President with his fingers on the nuclear codes. This – not name-calling – is precisely what Russian leaders fear the most.

Be that as it may, the ICA’s evidence adduced to demonstrate Russian

“interference” to help Trump win the election never passed the smell test. Worse still, it was not difficult to see powerful political agendas in play. While those agendas, together with the media which shared them, conferred on the ICA the status of Holy Writ, it had clearly been “writ” to promote those agendas and, as such, amounted to rank corruption of intelligence by those analysts “handpicked” by National Intelligence Director James Clapper to come up with the “right” answer.

Traces of the bizarre ideological – even racial – views of Intelligence Dean Clapper can also be discerned between the lines of the ICA. It is a safe bet that the handpicked authors of the ICA were well aware of – and perhaps even shared – the views Clapper later expressed to NBC’s Chuck Todd on May 28, 2017 about Russians: “[P]ut that in context with everything else we knew the Russians were doing to interfere with the election,” he said. “And just the historical practices of the Russians, who typically, are almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique. So, we were concerned.”

### **Always Read the Fine Print**

What readers of the intelligence assessment might have taken more seriously was the CYA in the ICA, so to speak, the truth-in-advertising cautions wedged into its final page. The transition from the lead paragraph to the final page – from “high confidence” to the actual definition of “high confidence” is remarkable. As a reminder, here’s how ICA starts:

“Putin Ordered Campaign To Influence US Election: We assess with high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election, the consistent goals of which were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. ...”

But wait, the fair warning on page 13 explains: “High confidence ... does not imply that the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong. ... Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that show something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

### **Questionable Logic**

The “logic” referred to rests primarily on assumptions related to Trump’s supposed friendliness with Putin, what Clinton Campaign Manager John Podesta called in 2015 a “bromance.” It assumes that Trump has been more than willing to

do the Kremlin's bidding from the White House, whether due to financial relationships Trump has with the Russians, or because he "owes them" for helping him get elected, or whether he is being blackmailed by "the pee tape" that Christopher Steele alluded to in his "dodgy dossier."

This is the crux of the whole "treason" aspect of the Russiagate conspiracy theory – the idea that Trump is a Manchurian (or as some clever wags among Russiagaters claim, a *Siberian*) candidate who is directly under the influence of the Kremlin.

Even as U.S.-Russian relations drop to historic lows – with tensions approaching Cuban Missile Crisis levels – amazingly, there are still those promoting this theory, including some in the supposedly "progressive" alternative media like The Young Turks (TYT). Following Putin's announcement on developments in Russia's nuclear program earlier this month, TYT's Cenk Uygur slammed Trump for not being more forceful in denouncing Putin, complaining that Trump "never criticizes Putin." Uygur even speculated: "I'm not sure that Trump represents our interests above Putin's."

This line of thinking ignores a preponderance of evidence that the U.S posture against Russian interests has only hardened over the past year-plus of the Trump administration – perhaps in part as a result of Trump's perceived need to demonstrate that he is not in "Putin's pocket."

The U.S. has intensified its engagement in Syria, for one thing, reportedly killing several Russians in recent airstrikes – a dangerous escalation that could lead to all-out military confrontation with Moscow and hardly the stuff of an alleged "bromance" between Trump and Putin. Then there was the Trump administration's recent decision to provide new lethal weapons to the Ukrainian military – a major reversal of the Obama administration's more cautious approach and an intensification of U.S. involvement in a proxy war on Russia's border. The Russian foreign ministry angrily denounced this decision, saying the U.S. had "crossed the line" in the Ukraine conflict and accused Washington of fomenting bloodshed.

On other major policy issues, the Trump administration has also been pushing a hard anti-Russian line, reiterating recently that it would never recognize Crimea as part of Russia, criticizing Russia for allegedly enabling chemical attacks in Syria, and identifying Moscow as one of the U.S.'s major adversaries in the global struggle for power and influence.

"China and Russia," the administration stated in its recent National Security Strategy, "challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity." In the recently issued Nuclear Posture



Review, the U.S. identifies Russia as a “contemporary threat,” and has a chapter outlining “A Tailored Strategy for Russia.” The document warns that Russia has “decided to return to Great Power competition.”

How does this in any way indicate that Trump is representing “Putin’s interests” above “ours,” as Uygur claims?

In short, there is no evidence to back up the theory that Putin helped Trump become president in order to do the Kremlin’s bidding, and no one pushing this idea should be taken seriously. In this respect, the Republicans’ “Initial Findings” – particularly the rejection of “Putin’s supposed preference for candidate Trump” have more credibility than most of the “analysis” put out so far, including the Jan. 6, 2017 ICA that has been held up as sacrosanct.

### **Democrats Angry**

The irrepressible Congressman Adam Schiff, Ranking Member of the House Intelligence Committee, and his fellow Democrats are in high dudgeon over the release of the Committee’s “Initial Findings” after “only” one year of investigation. So, of course, is NBC’s Rachel Maddow and other Russiagate aficionados. They may even feel a need to come up with real evidence – rather than Clapperisms like “But everyone knows about the Russians, and how, for example, they just really hated it when Mrs. Clinton called Putin Hitler.”

I had the opportunity to confront Schiff personally at a think tank in Washington, DC on January 25, 2017. President Obama, on his way out of office, had said something quite curious at his last press conference just one week earlier about inconclusive conclusions: “The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive” regarding WikiLeaks. In other words, the intelligence community had no idea how the DNC emails reached WikiLeaks.

Schiff had just claimed as flat fact that the Russians hacked the DNC and Podesta emails and gave them to WikiLeaks to publish. So I asked him if he knew more than President Obama about how Russian hacking had managed to get to WikiLeaks.

Schiff used the old, “I can’t share the evidence with you; it’s classified.” OK, I’m no longer cleared for classified information, but Schiff is; and so are all his colleagues on the House Intelligence Committee. The Republican majority has taken issue with the cornerstone assumption of those who explain Russian “hacking” and other “meddling” as springing from the “obvious fact” that Putin favored Trump. The ball is in Schiff’s court.

Last but not least, the committee’s Initial Finding that caught most of the

media attention was that there is “no evidence of collusion, coordination, or conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russians.” This, of course, poured cold water on what everyone listening to mainstream media “knows” about Russian “meddling” in the 2016 election. But, in the lack of persuasive evidence that President Putin preferred candidate Trump, why should we expect Russian “collusion, coordination, conspiracy” with the Trump campaign?

Ah, but the Russians want to “sow discord.” Sounds to me like a Clapperism.

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## The Strange Case of the Russian Spy Poisoning

Applying the principle of *cui bono* – who benefits? – to the case of Sergei Skripal might lead investigators away from the Kremlin as the prime suspect and towards Western intelligence agencies, argues James O’Neill.

By James O’Neill

The suspected nerve agent attack upon former Russian intelligence officer Sergei Skripal, which also affected his daughter in the English city of Salisbury last Sunday, has given rise to too much speculation, too much hysteria, and too little analysis or insight. It has provided ammunition for the Russophobic Western media to make accusations that it was another example of Russia in general and Vladimir Putin in particular disposing of a supposed enemy of the Kremlin.

As with the Mueller investigation into the alleged Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election there are accusations with varying degrees of wildness, but little or no actual evidence that would get past first base in any independent court of law.

First, what are the known facts, only some of which have been accurately reported in the western mainstream media? The victim (assuming it was a deliberate attack upon him and his daughter) was formerly a Colonel in the Russian military intelligence service (the GRU). This is the largest of the

Russian intelligence agencies and, as with its western equivalents, has a wide variety of functions, of which “spying” is only one.

In the early 1990s Skripal was recruited by an MI6 agent Pablo Miller, whom the British media declined to name. Miller was an MI6 agent in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Miller’s main task was recruiting Russians to provide information about their country to the British. An interesting fact, possibly coincidental, was that the MI6 officer under diplomatic cover in Moscow at this time was Christopher Steele. Steele was later to become better known as the principal author of the infamous Trump dossier.

When Steele returned to London, he ran MI6’s Russia desk between the 2006 and 2009. The information that Skripal disclosed would have been given to Steele, first in Moscow and later in London.

Skripal was arrested in 2004. In 2006 he was convicted of treason and sentenced to 18 years imprisonment. In 2010 he was released as part of a prisoner exchange deal with Russian spies in U.S. jails. He went to live in the United Kingdom where he has lived in supposed retirement ever since. Another interesting fact, although again possibly coincidental, is that Salisbury, where Skripal lived, is only about 12 kilometres from Porton Down, the U.K.’s principal research centre for nerve agents.

If the Russians had wanted to kill him, they had ample opportunity to do so during the years when he was imprisoned or the eight years he lived in retirement in Salisbury. If they did wish to kill him, it is not a very credible that they would do so very publicly and by a means that could not be bought off the shelf in the local pharmacy. The handling and the administering of these very dangerous substances require professional expertise. The obvious candidates for the attempted murder are therefore government agencies, but which government is the unanswered question.

This is where the facts become thinner, but the interesting connections of Skripal offer scope for some tentative hypotheses. While living in Salisbury, Skripal became friendly, according to [a report](#) in the UK newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, with none other than the aforementioned Pablo Miller – whom the Telegraph declined to name but has since been identified on the web.

Miller is now working with a British security consultancy named Orbis Business Intelligence. Again according to the Telegraph, Miller’s association with this company has now been removed from Miller’s LinkedIn profile.

The obvious question again is: why do so now?

Orbis is the same private intelligence agency as that of Christopher Steele. It

seems more than a mere coincidence that the same three men who had personal and professional links going back to the 1990s should have a continuing association at the same time as the Steele dossier was being compiled and later as the so-called Russiagate inquiry was imploding. Former FBI Director James Comey described the Steele dossier as “salacious and unverified” in a Senate hearing.

The former British ambassador Craig Murray has suggested on his blog that a motive for the attempted murder of Skripal and his daughter was to further promote the anti-Russian hysteria that inflicts the Western media and the body politic.

That is certainly plausible, and it has certainly been one of the consequences, as the abysmal coverage of the ABC among other outlets makes clear. But an alternative hypothesis presents itself in the light of the above facts, and this hypothesis has not even been mentioned, let alone discussed by our major media.

My admittedly speculative hypothesis (but I would argue, not an unreasonable one) is that Skripal was likely involved in the production of the Steele dossier. He was therefore in a position to offer potentially very damaging information into the circumstances of the Steele dossier. As noted above, that particular narrative has not only spectacularly collapsed, but the revelations reflect very badly on, among others, the U.S. intelligence community, the FBI, the Democratic National Committee, the Obama White House and the Clinton campaign.

In any major criminal enquiry one of the basic questions the investigation asks is: who had the means, the motive and the opportunity? Framed in that light, the Russians come a distant fourth behind the other prime suspects; the U.S. and U.K. intelligence agencies themselves, and those elements of the deep state that sought to prevent Trump winning, and subsequently to undermine his presidency. The primary motive being ascribed to the Russians is revenge for Skripal’s treachery more than a decade ago.

A second major question asked in any criminal investigation is cui bono – who benefits? It is difficult to perceive a credible argument that Russia is a beneficiary of Skripal’s poisoning.

Further support for the hypothesis that this was a false flag operation comes in this statement that British Prime Minister Theresa May made to the UK Parliament. The statement was frankly absurd and could only have been made when the intention was to further demonize and punish Russia, rather than any attempt to establish the truth and apply ordinary principles of evidence and factual analysis.

May's argument is thoroughly deconstructed on the Moon of Alabama website, which pointed out that Russia had destroyed all left over stocks from the Soviet Union's chemical weapon program and does not currently produce chemical weapons. Further, there are any number of governments capable of carrying out the Salisbury attack. "If someone is run-over by a BMW is it 'highly likely' that the German government is responsible for it?" the Moon of Alabama asks.

The obfuscations of the British reinforce in the view that Skripal was dangerous to the anti-Trump forces and the authorities therefore sought to have them removed. There is ample precedent for such actions and those familiar with the "suicide" of Dr. David Kelly will recognize the parallels.

The chances of the truth emerging have become vanishingly small at the same time as a serious conflict with Russia becomes correspondingly greater.

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## To Stop War, Do What Katharine Gun Did

Legendary whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg's advice to stop current and future wars is simple: do what Katharine Gun did, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

Daniel Ellsberg has a message that managers of the warfare state don't want people to hear.

"If you have information that bears on deception or illegality in pursuing wrongful policies or an aggressive war," he said in a statement released last week, "don't wait to put that out and think about it, consider acting in a timely way at whatever cost to yourself... Do what Katharine Gun did."

If you don't know what Katharine Gun did, chalk that up to the media power of the war system.

Ellsberg's video statement went public as this month began, just before the 15th anniversary of when a British newspaper, the Observer, revealed a secret NSA memo – thanks to Katharine Gun. At the UK's intelligence agency GCHQ, about 100 people received the same email memo from the National Security Agency on the last day of January 2003, seven weeks before the invasion of Iraq got underway. Only Katharine Gun, at great personal risk, decided to leak the document.

If more people had taken such risks in early 2003, the Iraq War might have been prevented. If more people were willing to take such risks in 2018, the current military slaughter in several nations, mainly funded by U.S. taxpayers, might be curtailed if not stopped. Blockage of information about past whistleblowing deprives the public of inspiring role models.

That's the kind of reality George Orwell was referring to when he wrote: "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."

Fifteen years ago, "I find myself reading on my computer from the Observer the most extraordinary leak, or unauthorized disclosure, of classified information that I'd ever seen," Ellsberg recalled, "and that definitely included and surpassed my own disclosure of top-secret information, a history of U.S. decision-making in Vietnam years earlier." The Pentagon Papers whistleblower instantly recognized that, in the Observer article, "I was looking at something that was clearly classified much higher than top secret.... It was an operational cable having to do with how to conduct communications intelligence."

What Ellsberg read in the newspaper story "was a cable from the NSA asking GCHQ to help in the intercepting of communications, and that implied both office and home communications, of every member of the Security Council of the UN. Now, why would NSA need GCHQ to do that? Because a condition of having the UN headquarters and the Security Council in the U.S. in New York was that the U.S. intelligence agencies promised or were required not to conduct intelligence on members of the UN. Well, of course they want that. So, they rely on their allies, the buddies, in the British to commit these criminal acts for them. And with this clearly I thought someone very high in access in Britain intelligence services must dissent from what was already clear the path to an illegal war."

But actually, the leak didn't come from "someone very high" in GCHQ. The whistleblower turned out to be a 28-year-old linguist and analyst at the agency, Katharine Gun, who had chosen to intervene against the march to war.

As Gun has recounted, she and other GCHQ employees "received an email from a senior official at the National Security Agency. It said the agency was 'mounting a surge particularly directed at the UN Security Council members,' and that it wanted 'the whole gamut of information that could give U.S. policymakers an edge in obtaining results favorable to U.S. goals or to head off surprises.'"

In other words, the U.S. and British governments wanted to eavesdrop on key UN delegations and then manipulate or even blackmail them into voting for war.

Katharine Gun took action: "I was furious when I read that email and leaked it.

Soon afterwards, when the Observer ran a front-page story – ‘U.S. dirty tricks to win vote on Iraq war’ – I confessed to the leak and was arrested on suspicion of the breach of section 1 of the Official Secrets Act.”

The whistleblowing occurred in real time. “This was not history,” as Ellsberg put it. “This was a current cable, I could see immediately from the date, and it was before the war had actually started against Iraq. And the clear purpose of it was to induce the support of the Security Council members to support a new UN resolution for the invasion of Iraq.”

The eavesdropping was aimed at gaining a second – and this time unequivocal – Security Council resolution in support of an invasion. “British involvement in this would be illegal without a second resolution,” Ellsberg said. “How are they going to get that? Obviously essentially by blackmail and intimidation, by knowing the private wants and embarrassments, possible embarrassments, of people on the Security Council, or their aides, and so forth. The idea was, in effect, to coerce their vote.”

Katharine Gun foiled that plan. While scarcely reported in the U.S. media (despite cutting-edge news releases produced by my colleagues at the Institute for Public Accuracy beginning in early March of 2003), the revelations published by the Observer caused huge media coverage across much of the globe – and sparked outrage in several countries with seats on the Security Council.

“In the rest of the world there was great interest in the fact that American intelligence agencies were interfering with their policies of their representatives in the Security Council,” Ellsberg noted. A result was that for some governments on the Security Council at the time, the leak “made it impossible for their representatives to support the U.S. wish to legitimize this clear case of aggression against Iraq. So, the U.S. had to give up its plan to get a supporting vote in the UN.”

The U.S. and British governments “went ahead anyway, but without the legitimating precedent of an aggressive war that would have had, I think, many consequences later.”

Ellsberg said: “What was most striking then and still to me about this disclosure was that the young woman who looked at this cable coming across her computer in GCHQ acted almost immediately on what she saw was the pursuit of an illegal war by illegal means.... I’ve often been asked, is there anything about the release of the Pentagon Papers on Vietnam that you regret. And my answer is yes, very much. I regret that I didn’t put out the top-secret documents available to me in the Pentagon in 1964, years before I actually gave them to the Senate and then to the newspapers. Years of war and years of bombing. It

wasn't that I was considering that all that time. I didn't have a precedent to instruct me on that at that point. But in any case, I could have been much more effective in averting that war if I'd acted much sooner."

Katharine Gun "was not dealing only with historical material," Ellsberg emphasizes. She "was acting in a timely fashion very quickly on her right judgment that what she was being asked to participate in was wrong. I salute her. She's my hero. I think she's a model for other whistleblowers. And for a long time I've said to people in her position or my old position in the government: Don't do what I did. Don't wait till the bombs are falling or thousands more have died."

By making her choice, Gun risked two years of imprisonment. In Ellsberg's words, she seemed to be facing "a sure conviction – except that the government was not willing to have the legality of that war discussed in a courtroom, and in the end dropped the charges."

As this month began, Katharine Gun spoke at a London news conference, co-sponsored by ExposeFacts and RootsAction.org (organizations I'm part of) and hosted by the National Union of Journalists. Speaking alongside her were three other whistleblowers – Thomas Drake, Matthew Hoh and Jesselyn Radack – who have emerged as eloquent American truth tellers from the NSA, State Department and Justice Department. The presentations by the four are stunning to watch.

Their initiatives, taken at great personal risk, underscore how we can seize the time to make use of opportunities for forthright actions of conscience. This truth is far from confined to what we call whistleblowing. It's about possibilities in a world where silence is so often consent to what's wrong, and disruption of injustice is imperative for creating a more humane future.

**Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.**

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## 'Progressive' Journalists Jump the Shark on Russiagate

A lack of skepticism has characterized much of the reporting on Russiagate, with undue credibility being given to questionable sources like the Steele dossier, and now progressives like Jane Mayer and Cenk Uygur are joining the bandwagon,



Ray McGovern observes.

By Ray McGovern

Jane Mayer of *The New Yorker* and Cenk Uygur of The Young Turks are the latest progressives to jump on the anti-Trump, pro-Russiagate bandwagon. They have made it crystal clear that, in Mayer's words, they are not going to let Republicans, or anyone else, "take down the whole intelligence community," by God.

Odd? Nothing is too odd when it comes to spinning and dyeing the yarn of Russiagate; especially now that some strands are unraveling from the thin material of the "Steele dossier."

Before the 2016 election, British ex-spy Christopher Steele was contracted (through a couple of cutouts) by the Clinton campaign and Democratic National Committee to dig up dirt on candidate Donald Trump. They paid him \$168,000. They should ask for their money back.

Mayer and Uygur have now joined with other Trump-despisers and new "progressive" fans of the FBI and CIA – among them Amy Goodman and her go-to, lost-in-the-trees journalist, Marcy Wheeler of Emptywheel.net. All of them (well, maybe not Cenk) are staying up nights with needle and thread trying to sew a silk purse out of the sow's-ear dossier of Steele allegations and then dye it red for danger.

Monday brought a new low, with a truly extraordinary one-two punch by Mayer and Uygur.

### **A Damning Picture?**

Mayer does her part in a *New Yorker* article, in which she – intentionally or not – cannot seem to see the forest for the trees.

In her article, Mayer explains up front that the Steele dossier "painted a damning picture of collusion between Trump and Russia," and then goes on to portray him as a paragon of virtue with praise that is fulsome, in the full meaning of that word. For example, a friend of Steele told Mayer that regarding Steele, "Fairness, integrity, and truth, for him, trump any ideology."

Now, if one refuses to accept this portrait on faith, then you are what Mayer describes as a "Trump defender." According to Mayer, Trump defenders argue that Steele is "a dishonest Clinton apparatchik who had collaborated with American intelligence and law enforcement officials to fabricate false charges against Trump and his associates, in a dastardly (sic) attempt to nullify the 2016 election. According to this story line, it was not the President who needed to

be investigated, but the investigators themselves.”

Can you imagine!

I could not help but think that Mayer wrote her piece some months ago and that she and her editors might have missed more recent documentary evidence that gives considerable support to that “dastardly” story line. But seriously, it should be possible to suspect Steele of misfeasance or malfeasance – or simply telling his contractors what he knows they want to hear – without being labeled a “Trump supporter.” I, for example, am no Trump supporter. I am, however, a former intelligence officer and I have long since concluded that what Steele served up is garbage.

### **Character References**

Mayer reports that Richard Dearlove, head of MI6 from 1999 to 2004, described Steele as “superb.” Personally, I would shun any “recommendation” from that charlatan. Are memories so short? Dearlove was the intelligence chief who briefed Prime Minister Tony Blair on July 23, 2002 after a quick trip to Washington. The official minutes of that meeting were leaked to the London Times and published on May 1, 2005.

Dearlove explained to Blair that President George W. Bush had decided to attack Iraq for regime change and that the war was to be “justified by the conjunction of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.” Dearlove added matter-of-factly, “The intelligence and facts are being fixed around the policy.”

Another character reference Mayer gives for Steele is former CIA Deputy Director John McLaughlin (from 2000 to 2004) who, with his boss George Tenet, did the fixing of intelligence to “justify” the war on Iraq. State Department intelligence director at the time, Carl Ford, told the authors of “Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War” that both McLaughlin and Tenet “should have been shot” for what they did.

And then there is CIA veteran spy John Sipher who, Mayer says, “ran the Agency’s Russia program before retiring, in 2014.” Sipher tells her he thinks the Steele dossier is “generally credible” in “saying what Russia might be up to.” Sipher may be a good case officer but he has shown himself to be something of a cipher on substance.

Worse still, he displays a distinct inclination toward the remarkable view of former National Intelligence Director James Clapper, who has said that Russians are “typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever.” If Mayer wanted to find some ostensibly authoritative figure to endorse the kind of material in Steele’s dossier, she surely picked a good one

in Sipher.

Mayer notes, "It's too early to make a final judgment about how much of Steele's dossier will be proved wrong, but a number of Steele's major claims have been backed up by subsequent disclosures. She includes, as flat fact, his claim that the Kremlin and WikiLeaks were working together to release the DNC's emails, but provides no evidence.

### **Major Holes**

Mayer, however, should know better. There have been lots of holes in the accusation that the Russians hacked the DNC and gave the material to WikiLeaks to publish. Here's one major gap we reported on Jan. 20, 2017: President Barack Obama told his last press conference on Jan. 18, that the U.S. intelligence community had no idea how the Democratic emails reached WikiLeaks.

Using lawyerly language, Obama admitted that "the conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive as to whether WikiLeaks was witting or not in being the conduit through which we heard about the DNC e-mails that were leaked."

It is necessary to carefully parse Obama's words since he prides himself in his oratorical constructs. He offered a similarly designed comment at a Dec. 16, 2016 press conference when he said: "based on uniform intelligence assessments, the Russians were responsible for hacking the DNC. ... the information was in the hands of WikiLeaks."

Note the disconnect between the confidence about hacking and the stark declarative sentence about the information ending up at WikiLeaks. Obama does not bridge the gap because to do so would be a bald-faced lie, which some honest intelligence officer might call him on. So, he simply presented the two sides of the chasm – implies a connection – but leaves it to the listener to make the leap.

It was, of course, WikiLeaks that published the very damaging Democratic information, for example, on the DNC's dirty tricks that marginalized Sen. Bernie Sanders and ensured that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would win the Democratic nomination. What remained to be demonstrated was that it was "the Russians" who gave those emails to WikiLeaks. And that is what the U.S. intelligence community could not honestly say.

Saying it now, without evidence, does not make it true.

### **Cenk Also in Sync**

Cenk Uygur of The Young Turks at once picked up, big time, on the part of Mayer's article that homes in on an "astonishing" report from Steele in late November 2016 quoting one "senior Russian official." According to that official, "The Kremlin had intervened to block Trump's initial choice for secretary of state, Mitt Romney." Steele's late November memo alleged that the Kremlin had asked Trump to appoint someone who would be prepared to lift Ukraine-related sanctions and cooperate on security issues like Syria.

Mayer commented, "As fantastical as the memo sounds, subsequent events could be said to support it." Fantastical or not, Uygur decided to run with it. His amazing 12-minute video is titled: "New Steele Dossier: Putin PICKED Trump's Secretary of State." Uygur asks: "Who does Tillerson work for; and that also goes for the President."

### **Return to Sanity**

As an antidote to all the above, let me offer this cogent piece on the views of Joseph E. diGenova, who speaks out of his unique experience, including as Counsel to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (the Church Committee). The article is entitled: "The Politicization of the FBI."

"Over the past year," diGenova wrote, "facts have emerged that suggest there was a plot by high-ranking FBI and Department of Justice (DOJ) officials in the Obama administration, acting under color of law, to exonerate Hillary Clinton of federal crimes and then, if she lost the election, to frame Donald Trump and his campaign for colluding with Russia to steal the presidency."

He pointed out that nearly half of Americans, according to a CBS poll, believe that Mueller's Trump-Russia collusion probe is "politically motivated." And, he noted, 63 percent of polled voters in a Harvard CAPS-Harris Poll believe that the FBI withheld vital information from Congress about the Clinton and Russia collusion investigations.

This skepticism is entirely warranted, as diGenova explains, with the Russiagate probe being characterized by overreach from the beginning.

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served in Army and CIA intelligence analysis for 30 years and, after retiring, co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

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# Is MSNBC Now the Most Dangerous Warmonger Network?

A recent study revealed that MSNBC's coverage of 'Russiagate' vastly outweighs its coverage of other issues, such as the US-backed humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and the network's refusal to correct the disparity could lead to dangerous conclusions, notes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

The evidence is damning. And the silence underscores the arrogance.

More than seven weeks after a devastating report from the media watch group FAIR, top executives and prime-time anchors at MSNBC still refuse to discuss how the network's obsession with Russia has thrown minimal journalistic standards out the window.

FAIR's study, "MSNBC Ignores Catastrophic U.S.-Backed War in Yemen," documented a picture of extreme journalistic malfeasance at MSNBC:

– "An analysis by FAIR has found that the leading liberal cable network did not run a single segment devoted specifically to Yemen in the second half of 2017. And in these latter roughly six months of the year, MSNBC ran nearly 5,000 percent more segments that mentioned Russia than segments that mentioned Yemen."

– "Moreover, in all of 2017, MSNBC only aired one broadcast on the U.S.-backed Saudi airstrikes that have killed thousands of Yemeni civilians. And it never mentioned the impoverished nation's colossal cholera epidemic, which infected more than 1 million Yemenis in the largest outbreak in recorded history."

– "All of this is despite the fact that the U.S. government has played a leading role in the 33-month war that has devastated Yemen, selling many billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia, refueling Saudi warplanes as they relentlessly bomb civilian areas and providing intelligence and military assistance to the Saudi air force."

Meanwhile, MSNBC's incessant "Russiagate" coverage has put the network at the media forefront of overheated hyperbole about the Kremlin. And continually piling up the dry tinder of hostility toward Russia boosts the odds of a cataclysmic blowup between the world's two nuclear superpowers.

In effect, the programming on MSNBC follows a thin blue party line, breathlessly

conforming to Democratic leaders' refrains about Russia as a mortal threat to American democracy and freedom across the globe. But hey—MSNBC's ratings have climbed upward during its monochrome reporting, so why worry about whether coverage is neglecting dozens of other crucial stories? Or why worry if the anti-Russia drumbeat is worsening the risks of a global conflagration?

FAIR's report, written by journalist Ben Norton and published on Jan. 8, certainly merited a serious response from MSNBC and the anchors most identified by the study, Rachel Maddow and Chris Hayes. Yet no response has come from them or network executives. (Full disclosure: I'm a longtime associate of FAIR.)

In the aftermath of the FAIR study, a petition gathered 22,784 signers and 4,474 individual comments—asking MSNBC to remedy its extreme imbalance of news coverage. But the network and its prime-time luminaries Maddow and Hayes refused to respond despite repeated requests for a reply.

The petition was submitted in late January to Maddow and Hayes via their producers, as well as to MSNBC senior vice president Errol Cockfield and to the network's senior manager in charge of media relations for "The Rachel Maddow Show" and "All In with Chris Hayes."

Signers responded to outreach from three organizations—Just Foreign Policy, RootsAction.org (which I coordinate), and World Beyond War—calling for concerned individuals to "urge Rachel Maddow, Chris Hayes, and MSNBC to correct their failure to report on the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen and the direct U.S. military role in causing the catastrophe by signing our petition." (The [petition](#) is still gathering signers.)

As the cable news network most trusted by Democrats as a liberal beacon, MSNBC plays a special role in fueling rage among progressive-minded viewers toward Russia's "attack on our democracy" that is somehow deemed more sinister and newsworthy than corporate dominance of American politicians (including Democrats), racist voter suppression, gerrymandering and many other U.S. electoral defects all put together.

At the same time, the anti-Russia mania also services the engines of the current militaristic machinery.

It's what happens when nationalism and partisan zeal overcome something that could be called journalism.

"The U.S. media's approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propaganda," the independent journalist Robert Parry [wrote at the end of 2017](#), in the last article published before his death. "Does any sentient human being read the New York Times' or the Washington Post's coverage of Russia and think that he or she

is getting a neutral or unbiased treatment of the facts?"

Parry added that "to even suggest that there is another side to the story makes you a 'Putin apologist' or 'Kremlin stooge.' Western journalists now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonizing of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many 'liberals' who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the U.S. intelligence community feeds us, even if we're told to accept the assertions on faith."

Across a U.S. media landscape where depicting Russia as a fully villainous enemy is now routine, MSNBC is a standout. The most profound dangers from what Rachel Maddow and company are doing is what they least want to talk about—how the cumulative effects and momentum of their work are increasing the likelihood that tensions between Washington and Moscow will escalate into a horrendous military conflict.

Even at the height of the Cold War during the 1960s, when Soviet Communists ruled Russians with zero freedom of speech or press, most U.S. political and media elites recognized the vital need for détente. They applauded the "Spirit of Glassboro" when the top leadership of the United States and Russia met at length. Now, across most of the U.S. media spectrum, no such overtures to the Kremlin are to be tolerated.

The U.S. government's recently released "Nuclear Posture Review" underscores just how unhinged the situation has become.

Consider the assessment from the head of a first-rate research organization in the nuclear weapons field, the Los Alamos Study Group. Its executive director, Greg Mello, said: "What is most 'missing in action' in this document is civilian leadership. Trump is not supplying that. In part the fault for this comes from Democrats—who, allied with the intelligence community and other military-industrial interests, insist that the U.S. must have an adversarial relationship with Russia. There is no organized senior-level opposition to the new Cold War, which is intensifying week by week. This document reflects, and is just one of many policies embodying, the new and very dangerous Cold War."

But—with everyone's survival at stake—none of that seems to matter much to those who call the shots at MSNBC.

**Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." Solomon was a member of the independent task force**

that wrote the recent report “Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis.” [This article was originally published at Truthdig ([www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com)).]

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## How ‘Operation Merlin’ Poisoned U.S. Intelligence on Iran

Exclusive: The CIA’s “Operation Merlin,” which involved providing Iran with a flawed design for a nuclear weapon and resulted in an alleged whistleblower going to prison, was the perfect example of creating intelligence in order to justify operations, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

Jeffrey Sterling, the case officer for the CIA’s covert “Operation Merlin,” who was convicted in May 2015 for allegedly revealing details of that operation to James Risen of the *New York Times*, was released from prison in January after serving more than two years of a 42-month sentence. He had been tried and convicted on the premise that the revelation of the operation had harmed U.S. security.

The entire case against him assumed a solid intelligence case that Iran had indeed been working on a nuclear weapon that justified that covert operation.



But the accumulated evidence shows that the intelligence not only did not support the need for Operation Merlin, but that the existence of the CIA’s planned covert operation itself had a profound distorting impact on intelligence assessment of the issue. The very first U.S. national intelligence estimate on the subject in 2001 that Iran had a nuclear weapons program was the result of a heavy-handed intervention by Deputy Director for Operations James L. Pavitt that was arguably more serious than the efforts by Vice-President Dick Cheney to influence the CIA’s 2002 estimate on WMD in Iraq.

The full story of the interaction between the CIA operation and intelligence



analysis, shows, moreover, that Pavitt had previously fabricated an alarmist intelligence analysis for the Clinton White House on Iran's nuclear program in late 1999 in order to get Clinton's approval for Operation Merlin.

### **Pavitt Plans Operation Merlin**

The story of Operation Merlin and the suppression of crucial intelligence on Iran's nuclear intentions cannot be understood apart from the close friendship between Pavitt and CIA Director George Tenet. Pavitt's rise in the Operations Directorate had been so closely linked to his friendship with Tenet that the day after Tenet announced his retirement from the CIA on June 3, 2004, Pavitt announced his own retirement.

Soon after he was assigned to the CIA's Non-Proliferation Center (NPC) in 1993, Pavitt got the idea of creating a new component within the Directorate of Operations to work solely on proliferation, as former CIA officials recounted for Valerie Plame Wilson's memoir, *Fair Game*. Pavitt proposed that the new proliferation division would have the authority not only to collect intelligence but also to carry out covert operations related to proliferation, using its own clandestine case officers working under non-official cover.

Immediately after Tenet was named Deputy Director of the CIA in 1995, Pavitt got the new organization within the operations directorate called the Counter-Proliferation Division, or CPD. Pavitt immediately began the planning for a major operation targeting Iran. According to a CIA cable declassified for the Sterling trial, as early as March 1996, CPD's "Office of Special Projects" had already devised a scheme to convey to the Iranians a copy of the Russian TBA-486 "fireset" – a system for multiple simultaneous high explosive detonations to set off a nuclear explosion. The trick was that it had built-in flaws that would make it unworkable.

A January 1997 declassified cable described a plan for using a Russian émigré, former Soviet nuclear weapons engineer recruited in 1996 to gain "operational access" to an Iranian "target." The cable suggested that it would be for the purpose of intelligence on the Iranian nuclear program, in light of the fact that the agency had not issued a finding that Iran was working on nuclear weapons.

But in mid-March 1997 the language used by CPD to describe its proposed covert operation suddenly changed. Another declassified CPD cable from May 1997 said the ultimate goal was "to plant this substantial piece of deception information on the Iranian nuclear weapons program." That shift in language apparently reflected Tenet's realization that the CIA would need to justify the proposed covert operation to the White House, as required by legislation.

With his ambitious plan for a covert operation against Iran in his pocket, Pavitt was promoted to Associate Deputy Director of Operations in July 1997. On February 2, 1998, CPD announced to other CIA offices, according to the declassified cable, that a technical team from one of the national laboratories had finished building the detonation device that would include "multiple nested flaws," including a "final fatal flaw" ensuring "that it will not detonate a nuclear weapon."

An official statement from the national lab certifying that fact was a legal requirement for the CIA to obtain the official Presidential "finding" for any covert operation required by legislation passed in the wake of the Iran-Contra affair.

Pavitt obtained the letter from the national laboratory in mid-1999, a few weeks after it was announced he would be named Deputy Director of the CIA for Operations.

But that left a final political obstacle to a presidential finding: the official position of the CIA's Intelligence Directorate remained that Iran did not have a nuclear weapons program. The language of the CIA's report to Congress for the first half of 1999, which was delivered to Congress in early 2000, contained formulations that showed signs of having been negotiated between those who believed Iran must have a nuclear weapons program and those who did not.

The report referred to nuclear-related projects that "will help Iran augment its nuclear technology infrastructure, which in turn would be useful in supporting nuclear weapons research and development." The shift from "will" to "would" clearly suggested that nuclear weapons work was not yet an established fact.

A second sentence said, "expertise and technology gained, along with the commercial channels and contacts established-even from cooperation that appears strictly civilian in nature-could be used to advance Iran's nuclear weapons research and developmental program." That seemed to hint that maybe Iran already had such a nuclear weapons program.

That was not sufficient for Tenet and Pavitt to justify a covert nuclear weapons program involving handing over a fake nuclear detonation device. So the dynamic duo came up with another way around that obstacle. A new intelligence assessment, reported in a front page article by James Risen and Judith Miller in the *New York Times* on January 17, 2000, said the CIA could no longer rule out the possibility that Iran now had the capability to build a bomb – or even that it may have actually succeeded in building one.

Risen and Miller reported that Tenet had begun briefings for Clinton

administration officials on the new CIA assessment in December 1999 shortly after the document was completed, citing "several U.S. officials" familiar with it. The Tenet briefings made no mention of any evidence of a bomb-making program, according to the sources cited by the Times. It was based instead on the alleged inability of U.S. intelligence to track adequately Iran's acquisition of nuclear technology and materials from the black market.

But the new assessment had evidently not come from the Intelligence Directorate. John McLaughlin, then Deputy Director for Intelligence, said in an e-mail response to a query that he did not recall the assessment. And when this writer asked him whether it was possible that he would not remember or would not have known about an intelligence assessment on such a high profile issue, McLaughlin did not respond. Pavitt and Tenet had obviously gone outside the normal procedure for an intelligence assessment in order to get around the problem of lack of support for their thesis from the analysts.

A declassified CIA cable dated November 18, 1999 instructed the Russian émigré to prepare for a possible trip to Vienna in early 2000, indicating that Tenet hoped to get the finding within a few weeks. Clinton apparently did give the necessary finding in early 2000; in the first days of March 2000 the Russian émigré dropped the falsified fireset plans into the mail chute of the Iranian mission to the United Nations in Vienna.

### **Pavitt Suppresses Unwelcome Iran Nuclear Intelligence**

Pavitt's CPD was also managing a group of covert operatives who recruited spies to provide information on weapons of mass destruction in Iran and Iraq. CPD not only controlled the targeting of the operatives working on those accounts but the distribution of their reports. CPD's dual role thus represented a serious conflict of interest, because the CPD had a vested interest in an intelligence estimate that showed Iran had an active nuclear weapons program, and it could prevent intelligence analysts from getting information that conflicted with that interest.

That is exactly what happened in 2001. One especially valuable CPD operative, who was fluent in both Farsi and Arabic, had begun recruiting agents to provide intelligence on both Iran and Iraq since 1995. His talents had been recognized by the CPD and by higher levels of the Operations Directorate: by 2001 he had been promised an intelligence medal and a promotion to GS-14 – the second highest pay grade level in the civil service.

But that same year the operative reported very important intelligence on the Iran nuclear issue that would have caused serious problems for Pavitt and CPD and led ultimately to his being taken out of the field and being fired.

In a November 2005 court filing in a lawsuit against Pavitt, the unnamed head of CPD and then CIA Director Porter Goss, the operative, identified only as "Doe" in court records, said that one of his most highly valued "human assets" – the CIA term for recruited spies – had given him very important intelligence in 2001. That information was the subject of three crucial lines of the key paragraph in the operative's complaint that were redacted at the demand of the CIA. For years "Doe" sought to declassify the language that had been redacted, but the CIA had fought it.

It was assumed in press accounts at the time that the redacted lines were related to Iraq. But the lawyer who handled the lawsuit for "Doe," Roy Krieger, revealed to this writer in interviews that the redacted lines revealed that the CIA "human asset" in question was an Iranian, and that he had told "Doe" that the Iranian government had no intention of "weaponizing" the uranium that it was planning to enrich.

It was the first intelligence from a "highly-valued" U.S. spy – one who was known to be in a position to know what he claimed to know – on Iran's intentions regarding nuclear weapons to become available to the U.S. intelligence community. "Doe" reported what the spy had said to his supervisor at CPD, according to the court filing, and the supervisor immediately met with Pavitt and the head of CPD. After that meeting the CPD supervisor ordered "Doe" not to prepare any written report on the matter and assured him that Pavitt and the head of the CPD would personally brief President Bush on the intelligence.

But "Doe" soon learned from his own contacts at CIA headquarters that no such briefing ever took place. And "Doe" was soon instructed to terminate his relationship with the asset. After another incident involving intelligence he had reported on WMD in Iraq that had also conflicted with the line desired by the Bush administration, CIA management took "Doe" out of the field, put him in a headquarters job and denied him the intelligence medal and promotion to GS-14 that he had been promised, according to his court filing. The CIA fired "Doe" without specifying a reason in 2005.

Pavitt did not respond to requests for an interview for this story both at the Scowcroft Group and, after he retired, at his home in McLean, Virginia.

The intervention by Pavitt to prevent the intelligence from Doe's Iranian asset from circulating within the U.S. government came as the intelligence community was working on the 2001 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on the Iranian nuclear program. That NIE concluded that Iran was working on a nuclear weapon, but the finding was far from being clear-cut. Paul Pillar, the CIA's National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East and North Africa, who was involved in the 2001 NIE, recalled that the intelligence community had no direct evidence of

an Iranian nuclear weapons program. "We're talking about things that are a matter of inference, not direct evidence," Pillar said in an interview with this writer.

Furthermore he recalls that there was a deep divide in the intelligence community between the technical analysts, who tended to believe that evidence of uranium enrichment was evidence of a weapons program, and the Iran specialists, including Pillar himself, who believed Iran had adopted a "hedging strategy" and had made no decision in favor of a nuclear weapon. The technical analysts at the CIA's Weapons Intelligence Non-Proliferation and Arms Control (WINPAC), were given the advantage of writing the first draft not only on Iranian technical capabilities but on Iranian intentions – a subject on which it had no real expertise – as well, according to Pillar.

The introduction of the intelligence from a highly credible Iranian intelligence asset indicating no intention to convert its enriched uranium into nuclear weapons would arguably have changed the dynamic of the estimate dramatically. It would have meant that one side could cite hard intelligence from a valued source in support of its position, while the other side could cite only their own predisposition.

Pillar confirmed that no such intelligence report was made available to the analysts for the 2001 NIE. He noted just how rarely the kind of intelligence that had been obtained by "Doe" was available for an intelligence estimate. "Analysts deal with a range of stuff," he said, "from a tidbit from technical intelligence to the goldmine well-placed source with an absolutely credible account," but the latter kind of intelligence "almost never comes up."

After reading this account of the intelligence obtained by the CPD operative, Pillar said he is not in a position to judge the value of the intelligence from the Iranian asset, but that the information from the CPD Iranian asset "should have been considered by the NIE team in conjunction with other sources of information."

That led to a series of estimates that assumed Iran had a nuclear weapons program.

In 2004, a large cache of purported Iranian documents showing alleged Iranian research related to nuclear weapons was turned over to German intelligence, which the Bush administration claimed came from the laptop of an Iranian scientist or engineer. But former senior German Foreign Official Karsten Voigt later revealed to this writer that the whole story was a fabrication, because the documents had been given by the Mujahedin-E Khalq, the Iranian opposition group that was known to have publicized anti-Iran information fed to it by

Israel's Mossad.

Those documents led directly to another CIA estimate in 2005 asserting the existence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program, which in turn paved the way for all the subsequent estimates – all of which were adopted despite the absence of new evidence of such a program. The CIA swallowed the ruse repeatedly, because it had already been manipulated by Pavitt.

Operation Merlin is the perfect example of powerful bureaucratic interests running amok and creating the intelligence necessary to justify their operations. The net result is that Jeffrey Sterling was unjustly imprisoned and that the United States has gone down a path of Iran policy that poses serious – and unnecessary – threats to American security.

**Gareth Porter is an independent journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of numerous books, including *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare* (Just World Books, 2014).**

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## Katharine Gun's Risky Truth-telling

From the Archive: On March 2, 2003, British intelligence official Katharine Gun blew the whistle on a pre-Iraq War ploy. On today's 15-year anniversary of that event, we republish a 2014 article about Gun's truth-telling by Sam Hussein.

By Sam Hussein ([first published Nov. 19, 2014](#))

"I felt it was explosive, it really made me angry when I read it. ... I genuinely hoped that the information would strengthen the people's voice. ... It could derail the entire process for war." So said Katharine Gun recently when asked about information she leaked shortly before the invasion of Iraq.

It wasn't self-serving hyperbole. Daniel Ellsberg, who himself leaked the Pentagon Papers, has called Katharine Gun's leak "the most important and courageous leak I have ever seen. No one else – including myself – has ever done what Gun did: tell secret truths at personal risk, before an imminent war, in time, possibly, to avert it."

And indeed, Ellsberg had asked for such a leak during this period. He had been saying during the run-up to the Iraq invasion: "Don't wait until the bombs start falling. ... If you know the public is being lied to and you have documents to prove it, go to Congress and go to the press. ... Do what I wish I had done before

the bombs started falling [in Vietnam] ... I think there is some chance that the truth could avert war.”

Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers – internal documents which showed a pattern of U.S. government deception about the Vietnam War – in 1971, though he had the information earlier. And while the Pentagon Papers, the leaks by Chelsea Manning to WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden’s National Security Agency leaks were all quite massive, the Katharine Gun leak was just 300 words. Its power came from its timeliness.

In October of 2002, the U.S. Congress passed the so-called Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002. In November, the U.S. government had gotten the United Nations Security Council to pass a threatening resolution on Iraq, but in most people’s view, it stopped short of actually authorizing force.

The U.S. ambassador to the U.N. at the time, John Negroponte, said when resolution 1441 was adopted unanimously: “There’s no ‘automaticity’ and this is a two-stage process, and in that regard we have met the principal concerns that have been expressed for the resolution.” That is, the U.S. would intend to come back for a second resolution if Iraq didn’t abide by a “final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations.”

On Feb. 5, 2003, Colin Powell claimed in his infamous presentation at the UN that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. Feb. 15, 2003 saw the greatest global protests in history, with millions around the world rallying against the impending Iraq invasion, including over a million near the UN headquarters in New York City.

It was around this time that Katharine Gun, who worked as a language specialist at the Government Communications Headquarters, the British equivalent of the NSA, got a memo from the NSA and then decided to – through intermediaries – leak it to the media. The brief email read in part:

“As you’ve likely heard by now, the Agency is mounting a surge particularly directed at the UN Security Council (UNSC) members (minus US and GBR of course) for insights as to how membership is reacting to the on-going debate RE: Iraq, plans to vote on any related resolutions, what related policies/ negotiating positions they may be considering, alliances/ dependencies, etc – the whole gamut of information that could give US policymakers an edge in obtaining results favorable to US goals or to head off surprises. ... to revive/ create efforts against UNSC members Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Bulgaria and Guinea, as well as extra focus on Pakistan UN matters.”

The memo outlined that U.S. and British assets should focus on getting information to pressure member of the UN Security Council to go vote for a war resolution – material for blackmail to put it bluntly. This internal government document could show people – especially those who tend to put stock in government pronouncements – that what President George W. Bush was claiming at the time: “We are doing everything we can to avoid war in Iraq” – was exactly backwards. The U.S. government in fact was doing virtually everything it possibly could to ensure war.

When the British reporters writing the story called the author of the memo, Frank Koza, a top official at the NSA, they were put through to his office. When they shared the nature of their phone call, they were told by an assistant they had “the wrong number.” The reporters noted: “On protesting that the assistant had just said this was Koza’s extension, the assistant repeated that it was an erroneous extension, and hung up.”

The story was ignored by the U.S. media, though we at the Institute for Public Accuracy put out a string of news releases about it. Gun has commented that Martin Bright, one of the reporters who broke the story for the British *Observer*, had been booked on several U.S. TV networks just after the story was published but they had all quickly cancelled. [See video of an interview with Gun and Larry Wilkerson, former chief of staff for Colin Powell, on German TV from last year.]

However, the story did cause headlines around the world – especially in the countries on the Security Council that the memo listed as targets of the surveillance. Through whatever combination of authentic anger or embarrassment at their subservience to the U.S. government being exposed, most of these governments apparently peeled away from the U.S., and no second UN resolution was sought by the war planners.

Rather, George W. Bush started the Iraq war with unilateral demands that Saddam Hussein and his family leave Iraq (and then indicated that the invasion would commence in any case.)

In 2004, the *Observer* reported that “surveillance played a role in derailing a compromise UN resolution in the weeks before the Iraq war. Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, Mexico’s UN ambassador at the time, has charged that the U.S. spied on a private meeting of six swing countries on the Security Council aimed at a compromise. Zinser told the *Observer*: ‘The meeting was in the evening. They [U.S. diplomats] call us in the morning before the meeting of the Security Council and they say: “We appreciate you trying to find ideas, but this is not a good idea.”’”



Meanwhile, Katharine Gun had been found out as the leaker shortly after the memo was published – she has a talent for telling the truth, not so much for covering up apparently – and spent many months awaiting trial. England has no First Amendment that might have protected Gun. It does have a repressive Official Secrets Act, under which she was being prosecuted by the Blair government.

Marcia Mitchell, co-author of *The Spy Who Tried to Stop a War: Katharine Gun and the Secret Plot to Sanction the Iraq Invasion*, notes however that at the last minute, the Blair government, which was about to face elections “with her signed confession in hand, chose not to present evidence that the invasion of Iraq was, in fact, legal, a demand by the Defense.”

That is, the British government was afraid of what could come out about the legality of the Iraq war in a trial. And so Gun, who was newly married when she exposed the NSA/GCHQ’s activities, was able to avoid jail and continue as a language instructor. She has since been supportive of Edward Snowden and others who expose government wrongdoing.

### **At the UN**

The subject of spying at the UN was again highlighted in 2010 from cables leaked to WikiLeaks by Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning. Reuters reported at the time: “According to one cable, the State Department asked U.S. envoys at U.N. headquarters and elsewhere to procure credit card and frequent flyer numbers, mobile phone numbers, email addresses, passwords and other confidential data from top U.N. officials and foreign diplomats.”

Of course, spying on UN missions by the U.S. is illegal, Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations says: “The receiving State shall permit and protect free communication on the part of the mission for all official purposes.... The official correspondence of the mission shall be inviolable.”

Similarly, in 2013, the *Guardian* reported as G8 leaders meet in Northern Ireland: “Turkey, South Africa and Russia have reacted angrily to the British government demanding an explanation for the revelations that their politicians and senior officials were spied on and bugged during the 2009 G20 summit in London.” The governments were responding to the *Guardian* story: “GCHQ Intercepted Foreign Politicians’ Communications at G20 Summits,” based on Edward Snowden’s NSA leaks.

### **Lessons Learned**

The Katharine Gun case give us many lessons. First off, it’s a great example to rebut anyone parroting the establishment line that the NSA’s activities are based on stopping terrorism, or that they are merely overzealous efforts at

ensuring security, or perhaps typical diplomatic games. Here, the NSA and GCHQ were spying to try to facilitate an aggressive war – the highest war crime under the Nuremberg statutes.

Similarly, it highlights what great ideals some “whistleblowers” – the term doesn’t really do justice – are motivated by. And of course, such revealers are much more threatening to war-makers and others when they are acting in parallel with movements. Those movements may also help ward off the government attempting to imprison the whistleblower.

The “rebuttal” that everybody spies and therefore it’s no big deal when the U.S. or some other government is caught doing so similarly doesn’t hold up. Yes, virtually every government spies – but you’re not supposed to get caught. And if a government does get caught, it’s an indication that it’s own people – the very people who are paid to carry out the surveillance – don’t believe in it and are willing to put themselves at risk to expose the spying and the underlying wrongdoing.

Perhaps most importantly, the lesson is not that Katharine Gun’s leak was futile because the U.S. invaded Iraq – any more than the lesson is that the Feb. 15 global protests were in vain. Rather, more of both could have really changed things. If global protests had started in 2002, then the congressional authorization for war in late 2002 could have been prevented. If more people within the war-making governments had their consciences moved by such movements and had leaked more critical information, war could have been forestalled.

And, even if the Iraq invasion happened, if global protests had continued and global solidarity were better coordinated, when it became clear to all that the WMDs not in Iraq were a contrived pretext for aggression, a sustained revulsion against the invasion could have led to the war-makers being held accountable, preventing much suffering in Iraq and elsewhere – and laying the basis for a world free of war.

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## Missile-gate: U.S. Intel Misses Russia’s Big Advances in Nuclear Parity

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s announcement on Thursday of major technological advances in nuclear weapons delivery systems appears to have

caught the U.S. intelligence community unawares, reports Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

President Vladimir Putin's two-hour long address yesterday to the Federal Assembly, a joint session of both houses of Russia's bicameral legislature – plus large numbers of Russia's cultural, business and other elites – constituted his platform for the upcoming presidential election on March 18. This, in lieu of participation in the televised debates on all federal television channels in which other seven candidates are busy these days.

But as is the case with many of Vladimir Putin's major presentations, the speech yesterday was addressed to a far broader audience than the Russian electorate. Many of the estimated 700 journalists invited to attend were foreign correspondents. Indeed, one might reasonably argue that the speech was directed abroad, precisely to the United States.

The final third of the address, devoted to defense and presenting for the first time several major new and technically unparalleled offensive nuclear weapons systems, established Russia's claim to full nuclear parity with the United States, overturning the country's withdrawal from superpower status dating from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992. Some Russian commentators, in a burst of national pride, claimed that the power of the Soviet Union had now been restored and the wrongs of the 1990s were finally undone.

In its own way, this speech was as important, perhaps more important than Putin's talk to the Munich Security Conference in February 2007 at which he set out in length Russia's grievances with U.S. global hegemony installed in the 1990s and the utter disregard for or denial of Russia's national interests. That speech was a turning point in U.S.-Russian relations which headed us to the deep confrontation of today. Yesterday's speech suggested not the onset of a new arms race, but its conclusion, with outright Russian victory and U.S. defeat.

Putin's address was a "shock and awe" event. I leave to others, more competent than I in military technology to comment on the specific capabilities of the various systems rolled out yesterday. Whether short range or unlimited range, whether ground launched or air launched, whether ballistic missiles or cruise missiles, whether flying through the atmosphere or navigating silently and at high speed the very depths of the oceans, these various systems are said to be invincible to any known or prospective air defense such as the United States has invested in heavily since it unilaterally left the ABM Treaty and set out on a course that would upend strategic parity.

Since 2002, U.S. policy has aimed at enabling a first strike knocking out

Russian ICBMs and then rendering useless Russia's residual nuclear forces which could be shot out of the air. Russia's new highly maneuverable and ultra-high speed (Mach 10 and Mach 20) missiles and underwater nuclear drone render illusory any scenario based on non-devastating response to the US homeland following a US strike on Russia. In passing, the new systems also render useless and turn into sitting duck targets the entire US navy, with its aircraft carrier formations.

U.S. and Western media response to Putin's address was varied. The *Financial Times* tried its best at neutral reporting, and midway through its feature article gave a paragraph each to two of Russia's most authoritative politicians with special expertise in relations with the West: Konstantin Kosachev and Alexei Pushkov, both former chairmen of the Duma's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

However, their reporters and editorial supervisors were out of their depth, unable to reach a consistent view on what the Kremlin is doing. On the one hand Putin's statements about Russia's "unstoppable" nuclear weapons are reduced to "claims," suggesting a certain skepticism; on the other hand, the consequence is to "fuel concern about a new arms race with the U.S." They cannot fathom that the race is over.

The *Washington Post* was fairly quick to post a lengthy article in its online edition yesterday. An unusually large part consisted of quotes from Putin's speech. The editorial line tells it all in the title assigned: "Putin claims Russia is developing nuclear arms capable of avoiding missile defenses." I would put the accent on "claims" and "is developing." The reporter and newspaper management seem not to have gotten the point: that one of these systems is already deployed in the Russia's Southern Military District and that others are going into serial production. These systems are not a wish list, they are hard facts.

The *New York Times* was characteristically slow in posting articles on a development which caught its staff and management totally unprepared. In the space of a couple of hours, it put up two articles in succession dealing with the defense section of Vladimir Putin's address. In both, but more particularly in the article co-authored by reporters Neil MacFarquhar and David E. Sanger, the stress is on "bluff."

It is blithely assumed that Putin was just delivering a campaign speech to rouse "the patriotic passions of Russians" and so consolidate his forthcoming electoral victory. The writers take solace in the notion that "deception lies at the heart of current Russian military doctrine," so that "questions arose about whether these weapons existed."

These speculations, especially in the *New York Times* tell us one thing: that our media willfully ignore the plain facts about Vladimir Putin. First, that he has always done what he has said. Second, that he is by nature very cautious and methodical. The word “carefully” (?????????) is a constant element in his speech vocabulary. In this context, the notion of “bluff” in a matter that would put Russian national security at risk and possibly cost tens of millions of Russian lives if the bluff were called – such a notion is utter nonsense.

I would like to believe that the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington will not be so giddy or superficial in judging what they heard yesterday from Mr. Putin. If that is so, they will be urgently recommending to their President to enter into very broad negotiations with the Russians over arms control. And they will be going back to their staffs to completely revise their recommendations with respect to the military hardware and installations which the United States is financing in 2019 and beyond. Our present budget, including the trillion or so being appropriated for upgrading nuclear warheads and producing more low-yield weapons is a waste of taxpayer money.

However, still more importantly, the implications of Vladimir Putin’s address yesterday are that U.S. intelligence has been asleep at the wheel for the past 14 years if not longer. It is a national scandal for the country to lose an arms race it was not even aware was occurring. Heads should roll, and the process should begin with proper hearings on Capitol Hill. For reasons that will be clear from what follows, among the first witnesses called upon to testify should be former Vice President Dick Cheney and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

In the past such a revelation of a vast security gap with the country’s main geopolitical and military competitor would lead to political recriminations and finger pointing. What came up yesterday is far bigger than the “missile gap” of the late 1950s that brought Jack Kennedy to the White House in a campaign to restore vigor to American political culture and wake it from the somnolent Eisenhower years with their complacency about security matters and much else.

Moreover, the roll-out yesterday of new Russian weaponry that changes the world power balance was just one in a chain of remarkable Russian achievements over the past four years that caught US leadership entirely by surprise. The explanation has till now been the alleged unpredictability of Vladimir Putin, even if absolutely nothing he did could not have been foreseen by someone paying close attention.

One prime example was the Russian capture of Crimea in February-March 2014 without a shot being fired or a single fatality in circumstances where the 20,000 Russian troops based in their leased Sevastopol enclave confronted 20,000

Ukrainian forces on the peninsula. Western media spoke of a Russian “invasion” which amounted to nothing more than the Russian troops leaving their barracks. The Russians had used nothing more exotic than psychological warfare, old-fashioned “psy-ops” as it is called in the States executed to perfection by pros, all dating from the time of Von Clausewitz.

Then the Pentagon was caught with its pants down in September 2015 when Putin at the United Nations General Assembly announced the dispatch of Russian warplanes to Syria for a campaign against ISIS and to support Assad that would begin the next day. Why did we suspect nothing? Was it because Russia was known to be too poor to execute such a challenging mission abroad to precise objectives and timelines?

In the same war theater, the Russians again “surprised” Americans by setting up a joint military intelligence center in Baghdad with Iraq and Iran. And it further “surprised” NATO by flying bombing missions to the Syrian theater over Iran and Iraqi airspace after being denied flight rights in the Balkans. With thousands of military and diplomatic staff based in Iraq, how is it that the United States knew nothing about the Russian agreements with Iraqi leadership in advance?

My point is that the confusion over how to interpret Putin’s announcement of Russia’s new defense capability is a systemic failure of U.S. intelligence. The next obvious question is why? Where is the CIA? Where are the intel bosses when they are not investigating Trump?

The answer is not to be found in just one or two elements, for sure. Nor is it a failure that developed recently. There is a good measure of blinding complacency about Russia as a “failed state” that has cut across the whole US political establishment since the 1990s when the Russia was flat on its back. One simply could not imagine the Kremlin rising to the challenge of its missions in Crimea, in Syria, in development of the world’s most sophisticated high-tech armaments.

And it is not only blindness to things Russian. It is a fundamental failure to grasp that state power anywhere is not dependent only on GDP and demographic trends but also on grit, patriotic determination and the intelligence of thousands of researchers, engineers and production personnel.

This conceptual poverty infects some our most brilliant Realpolitik political scientists in the academic community who in principle should be open to understanding the world as it is, not the world as we wish it to be. Somehow we seem to have forgotten the lesson of David and Goliath. Somehow we have forgotten the Israeli numbers of 4 or 5 million standing up militarily to 100 million Arabs. It was unimaginable to us that Russia would be the David to our

Goliath.

But there are more objective reasons for the utter failure of US intelligence to grasp the scale and seriousness of the Russian challenge to US global hegemony. Specifically, we must consider the gutting of our Russian intelligence capabilities in the days, months, years following 9/11.

There are those who will say, with reason, that the decline of US intelligence capabilities on Russia began already in the second administration of Ronald Reagan, when the Cold War came to an end and the expertise of Cold Warriors seemed no longer relevant. Surely numbers of Russia experts were allowed to decline by attrition.

And yet, when 9/11 struck, many of those in higher positions in the CIA had come to the Agency as Russia experts. It was the CIA's lack of skills in the languages and area knowledge of the Middle East that was glaring in the aftermath of the Al-Qaeda attack on the Twin Towers that guided the reshaping of priorities for intelligence. Clearly this deficiency and the necessary re-profiling of expertise could not augur well for the continued employment of holdovers from the Soviet desk.

But a still greater factor in the sharp decline in Russian expertise within US intelligence agencies was the shift from dependence on civil service employees to use of outside service providers, i.e., outsourcing of intelligence work. This was totally in line with the preferences of the U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, who introduced outsourcing in a generalized way to deal with the new challenges of the War On Terror.

The same phenomenon affected the U.S. military, especially beginning in 2003 following the invasion of Iraq. Operational security tasks of the U.S. military were outsourced to companies providing mercenaries like Blackwater. And normal procurement arrangements for materiel were short-circuited by the Vice President for the sake of quick satisfaction of urgent field requirements: hence the procurement of non-traditional but much needed fleets of armored troop transport and the like.

Several articles in Consortium News and elsewhere in recent months have called attention to the phenomenon of intel outsourcing. However, what was happening, why and to what effect was already clearly known a decade ago and promised nothing good.

In a sense, the commonality of all these changes in supply of intelligence, equipment and military force has been a quick-fix mentality and direct political intervention into processes that had been insulated in the civil service with

its bureaucratic procedures. Political intervention means ultimately *politicizing* methods and outcomes. Outsourced intelligence is more likely to meet the demands of the paymaster than to have some intellectual integrity and broad perspective of its own.

To better understand the phenomenon, I refer the reader to an outstanding and well documented article dating from March 2007 that was published by the European Strategic Intelligence Security Center (ESISC) entitled "Outsourcing Intelligence: The Example of the United States."

The author, ESISC Research Associate Raphael Ramos, tells us that at the time 70% of the budget of the American intelligence community was spent via contracts with private companies. At the time he wrote, outsourcing was said to be greatest among the agencies reporting to the Defense Department. The CIA was then said to have one-third of its staff coming from private companies.

Besides the changing priorities for foreign intelligence resulting from the end of the Cold War and the onset of the War on Terror, another factor in the changing structure of US intelligence was technologically driven. This relates to the modern communications technologies, with many start-ups appearing in the specialized fields of Signals Intelligence and Imagery Intelligence. The NSA availed itself of these new service providers to become a pioneer in outsourcing intelligence.

Other Pentagon agencies which followed the same course were the National Reconnaissance Office, responsible for space based systems of intelligence and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, charged with producing geographic intelligence from satellites. Add to that the changing intel practices coming from the development of the internet, which prioritized open source intelligence. OSINT could flourish in the private sector because it does not require special security clearances. This soon accounted for between 35% and 90% of intelligence procurement.

As noted above, outsourcing enabled the intelligence community to modernize, gain skills quickly and try to meet urgent new needs. However, judging by the results of intelligence with respect to Putin's Russia it seems that the outsourcing model has not delivered the goods. The country has been flying blind while taking outlandish and unsupportable positions to bully the world as if we enjoyed full spectrum dominance and Russia did not exist.

**Gilbert Doctorow, an independent political analyst based in Brussels, is serving as an international observer to the March 18 presidential election in Russia. His latest book, *Does the United States Have a Future?* was published in October 2017. Both paperback and e-book versions are available for purchase on**



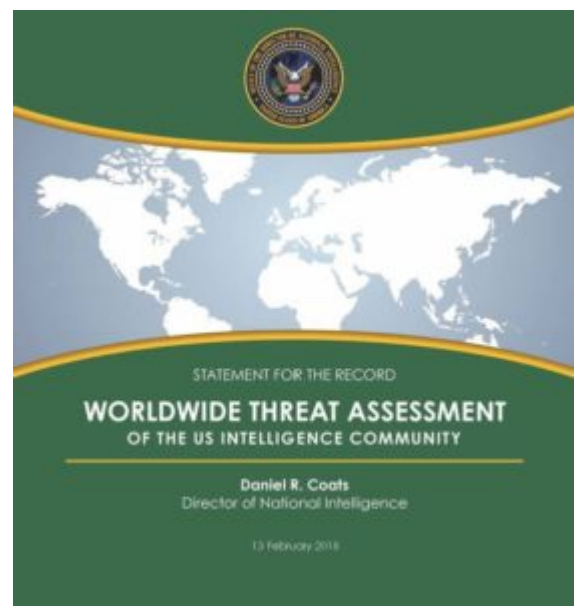
## North Korea, Iran and U.S. Intelligence that Neither Hears Nor Sees

A recent Worldwide Threat Assessment issued by the U.S. intelligence community exaggerates threats posed by North Korea and Iran, ignoring well-known realities and downplaying the U.S.'s own previous intelligence assessments, notes Ted Snider.

By Ted Snider

On February 13, the American intelligence community issued its Worldwide Threat Assessment for 2018. It is a frightening document to read, but perhaps not for the reasons you would expect. It is not frightening for the threat to America or the world that it reveals, but rather for its failure to hear or see what U.S. adversaries say or do.

On North Korea, for example, the agencies that hear everything cannot seem to hear anything North Korea has said; on Iran, the agencies that see everything cannot seem to see what they have long known.



The Worldwide Threat Assessment is a regular ritual of the intelligence community in which it shares a declassified summary of threats to U.S. national security with Congress. The current assessment is published under the name of Daniel R. Coats, Director of National Intelligence. In theory, the assessment is the result of input from all of America's sixteen intelligence agencies.

Worldwide Threat Assessments, according to Ray McGovern, are not as important as National Intelligence Estimates, but they are not unimportant. McGovern, a

former CIA analyst who prepared and briefed the President's Daily Brief for Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, explained to me that, though they are less important for shaping policy, they are no less important for shaping public perception.

When it comes to North Korea and Iran, Congress exaggerates the truth, and, according to McGovern, Worldwide Threat Assessments serves the interests of those who benefit from exaggerating the truth. When Congress misleads the public on North Korea and Iran, it can claim support from the intelligence community by referencing the Threat Assessment. Neocons and irresponsible journalists can all quote its exaggerated and unsupported claims.

### **North Korea**

North Korea receives a scant three paragraphs. North Korea is identified as "a complex and increasing threat to U.S. national security and interests." That threat cannot be removed by negotiations, it is always said, because North Korea is not willing to negotiate away their nuclear weapons program. That is the Trump administration's justification for bypassing diplomacy or even talking with North Korea. That premise is asserted when the Worldwide Threat Analysis insists that "repeatedly stating that nuclear weapons are the basis for its survival, suggests that the regime does not intend to negotiate them away."

But the intelligence community that can hear everything you say apparently cannot hear anything North Korea is saying. The North Koreans do say that their nuclear weapons program is the basis of its survival—a deterrent—but they have repeated many versions of the formulation that if the threat to its survival were removed, the deterrent to the threat would be removed.

North Korea's position is not a refusal, it's a conditional: North Korea is not saying it will not negotiate over its nuclear program; it is saying it will not negotiate away the deterrent until there are guarantees that they no longer need the deterrent. To change North Korea's undesirable behaviour, America has to change its undesirable behaviour.

It is well known – or would be well known if the essential role assigned to historians and journalists in a democratic society had not been appropriated by propagandists – that both times the United States seriously engaged in diplomatic discussions with North Korea – in 1994 and in 2005 – when the U.S. promised to stop threatening to attack North Korea, North Korea promised to stop its nuclear weapons program.

But, it is not necessary to appeal to distant history or to previous North Korean leaders. The same conditional formulation of abandoning the deterrent when the need for the deterrent is abandoned has been articulated repeatedly in

very recent history.

North Korea's Deputy Ambassador Kim In-ryong put it this way to UN Secretary-General António Guterres in August of 2017: "As long as the U.S. hostile policy and nuclear threat continue, the DPRK, no matter who may say what, will never place its self-defensive nuclear deterrence on the negotiating table." Ju Yong Chol, a North Korean diplomat, expressed the formulation exactly the same way.

The same conditional North Korean formulation was expressed by Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho in August of 2017. Ri said "We will, under no circumstances, put the nukes and ballistic rockets on the negotiating table. . . . unless the hostile policy and nuclear threat of the U.S. against the DPRK are fundamentally eliminated." The next month, RI Yong-ho explained to the U.N. that its nuclear program is "to all intents and purposes, a war deterrent for putting an end to nuclear threat of the U.S. and for preventing its military invasion, and our ultimate goal is to establish the balance of power with the U.S.."

Most importantly, Kim Jong Un, himself, has also expressed this conditional formulation. Kim has stated that "Our final goal is to establish the equilibrium of real force with the U.S. and make the U.S. rulers dare not talk about military options."

And despite the Worldwide Threat Assessment's assurance that "the regime does not intend to negotiate [its nuclear weapons] away," North Korea has not ceased to assure the world that it would. Investigative journalist Gareth Porter has recently reported on the possibility of an "intra-Korean" agreement between North and South Korea.

Porter says that in a South Korean proposal that has never been reported by the U.S. media, the U.S. and South Korea would "discuss reducing the South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises if North Korea suspends its nuclear weapons and missile activities." South Korean President Moon Jae-in has further suggested that the U.S. and South Korea could refrain from including aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines during their joint military exercises."

Kim Jong Un has responded in a way that suggests that this proposal satisfies the conditional formulation of North Korea's terms. He called for a détente with South Korea and requested that South Korea "discontinue all the nuclear drills they have staged with outside forces," meaning the U.S., and "refrain from bringing in nuclear armaments and aggressive forces of the United States." Separating nuclear cooperation with the U.S. during the drills from the mere existence of drills, suggests, as Porter points out, "that Kim was signaling [his] interest in negotiating an agreement along the lines that [South Korea] had raised."

The Worldwide Threat Assessment's position on North Korea is not based on real world intelligence. An intelligence community that can hear everything cannot seem to hear anything that North Korea is saying. Or it can but is using its Worldwide Threat Assessment to shape public perception in a way that serves the way the U.S. government wants the public to perceive North Korea.

## Iran

Iran receives a lot more space in the Worldwide Threat Assessment than North Korea. And, although there are a number of incredible claims made in the Iran section, the most incredible claims about Iran are made in the section on terrorism. In that section, two unsupportable claims are stated as accepted fact. The first reverberates out of the Washington echo chamber: "Iran remains the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism." The second is that "Lebanese Hizballah" – which is lumped together with Iran – "has demonstrated its intent to foment regional instability by deploying thousands of fighters to Syria"

The American intelligence agencies that can see everything apparently cannot see what they have long known. They know Iran is not "the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism" for two reasons: they know it's not Iran, and they know who it really is.

This is not only because all of the recent attempts to link Iran to terrorism have failed, but because their own reports on terrorism don't list Iran as the leading state sponsor of terrorism. The State Department's Patterns of Global Terrorisms rarely identifies terrorist incidents as carried out on behalf of Iran. And, the most recent Global Terrorism Index from the Department of Homeland Security clearly states that, not Iran, but "ISIL, Boko Haram, the Taliban and al-Qa'ida" are the biggest terrorist threats. None of these four groups is Shiite and none is aligned with Iran, but combined they are "responsible for 74 per cent of all deaths from terrorism." The Index also clearly identifies "ISIL," not Iran "as the deadliest terrorist group."

The intelligence community also knows that Iran is not the leading state sponsor of terrorism because it knows that Iran's enemy, Saudi Arabia, is. As early as December of 2009, the State Department already knew that "Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban . . . and other terrorist groups." A 2012 classified Defense Intelligence Agency Information Intelligence Report that made the rounds through the US intelligence community identified the "supporting powers" of ISIS to be "Western countries, the Gulf States and Turkey."

In 2014, Vice President Biden admitted that "[0]ur allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria. . . . They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and

tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad except that the people who were being supplied were Al Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis.”

Point 4 of a memo written by Hillary Clinton on September 17, of the same year confesses that based on “western intelligence, US intelligence and sources in the region,” the U.S. knew that “the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia . . . [were] providing clandestine financial and logistic support to Isis and other radical groups in the region.” And, in 2015, President “Obama and other US officials urged Gulf leaders who are funding the opposition to keep control of their clients, so that a post-Assad regime isn’t controlled by extremists from the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.”

In other words, the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the American intelligence community does not reflect what the American intelligence community has known for at least eight years: Iran is not the leading state sponsor of terrorism, Saudi Arabia is.

As the intelligence community cannot see what it has long been shown about terrorism, so it cannot see what it has long known about Iran’s role in the region. Iran and Hezbollah are not “foment[ing] regional instability by deploying thousands of fighters to Syria.” Iran is in Syria to fight the Islamic State and al-Qa’ida. According to the very same Worldwide Threat Assessment, “Sunni violent extremists – most notably ISIS and al-Qa’ida – pose continuing terrorist threats to US interests and partners worldwide.”

So, Iran is fomenting, not regional instability, but regional stability by playing a leading role in the fight against the most destabilizing terrorist organizations in the region. The Worldwide Threat Assessment identifies al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State as destabilizing forces in the region but simultaneously identifies Iran—whose role in the region is to combat those destabilizing forces—as destabilizing.

Ever since Iran tried and failed to mediate the dispute in Syria in an attempt to avoid the conflict, Iran and Hezbollah have backed Assad against the Islamic State, al-Qa’ida and the other rebel forces. Iran’s role against destabilizing forces in the region has not been a trivial one. Iran and Hezbollah have played a crucial role in defeating the rebels. For many people who are being threatened by al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State, Iran has surpassed the United States as their most important ally.

And it is not like the authors of the Worldwide Threat Assessment don’t know this. Ayatollah Khamenei has authorized his top commander to coordinate military operations with the U.S., and the Israeli media reported in 2014 that Iranian

F-4 Phantoms that have bombed Islamic State targets were “most likely” working in “[coordination with the U.S. military.](#)” Patrick Cockburn has suggested that advances by Iranian-controlled Shia militias against the Islamic State on the ground have been made possible by coordination with U.S. airstrikes on Islamic State positions.

On both Iran and North Korea, the Worldwide Threat Assessment is a terrifying document to read – terrifying for the incompetence it reveals. The best briefing that the U.S. intelligence community can offer Congress is an assessment based on incomplete information and logical inconsistency. The ears of America cannot hear what North Korea is saying; the eyes of America cannot see what Iran is doing.

**Ted Snider writes on analyzing patterns in U.S. foreign policy and history. This article originally appeared at [Antiwar.com](#). Reprinted with permission.**

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