

US Journalism's New 'Golden Age'?

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

By Robert Parry

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

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

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

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

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

Journalism or Hatchet Job?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An Embarrassing Product

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

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

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

Further, the report repeatedly used the word "assesses" – rather than "proves" or "establishes" – and the terminology is important because, in intelligence-world-speak, "assesses" often means "guesses." The report admits as much, saying, "Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents."

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

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

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

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

A True 'Golden Age'?

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

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

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

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

Contempt for Trump

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not Remembering the USS Liberty

Desperately seeking some praise, President Trump surely won't remind Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu about the USS Liberty, which Israel nearly sank a half century ago killing 34 sailors, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern recalls.

By Ray McGovern

It is safe to assume that when President Donald Trump lands in Israel Monday, he will not have been briefed on the irrefutable evidence that, nearly 50 years ago – on June 8, 1967 – Israel deliberately attacked the USS Liberty in international waters, killing 34 U.S. sailors and wounding more than 170 other crew. All of Trump's predecessors – Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama – have refused to address the ugly reality and/or covered up the attack on the Liberty.

It is not too late for someone to fill Trump in on this shameful episode, on the chance he may wish to show more courage than former presidents and warn the Israelis that this kind of thing will not be tolerated while he is president.

A new book by Philip Nelson titled: *Remember the Liberty: Almost Sunk by Treason on the High Seas*, is a must-read for anyone wishing to understand what actually happened to the Liberty and to contemplate the implications.

As I wrote in the book's Foreword: Even today, scandalously few Americans have heard of the deliberate Israeli attack on the USS Liberty, because the cowardly U.S. political, military, and media establishments have managed to hide what happened. No one "important" wanted to challenge Israel's lame "oops-mistake" excuse. Intercepted Israeli communications show beyond doubt it was no "mistake."

Chief Petty Officer J.Q. "Tony" Hart, who monitored conversations between then-Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Sixth Fleet Carrier Division Commander Rear Admiral Lawrence Geis, reported McNamara's instructive reply to Geis, who had protested the order to recall the U.S. warplanes on their way to engage those attacking the Liberty. McNamara: "President Johnson is not going to go to war or embarrass an American ally (sic) over a few sailors."

The late Adm. Thomas Moorer after interviewing the commanders of the U.S. aircraft carriers America and Saratoga confirmed that McNamara ordered the aircraft back to their carriers. Moorer called it "the most disgraceful act I witnessed in my entire military career."

Thanks to this book, those who care about such things can learn what actually happened 50 years ago:

(1) On June 8, 1967, Israel attempted to sink the US Navy intelligence collection ship USS Liberty and leave no survivors. The attack came by aircraft and torpedo boat, in full daylight in international waters during the Six-Day Israeli-Arab War;

(2) The U.S. cover-up taught the Israelis that they could *literally* get away with murder; they killed 34 U.S. sailors (and wounded more than 170 others); and

(3) As part of an unconscionable government cover-up, the Navy threatened to court martial and imprison any survivor who so much as told his wife what had actually happened. (This, incidentally, put steroids to the PTSD suffered by many of the survivors.)

One Stab at Truth

The only investigation worth the name was led by Adm. Moorer, who had been Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He led a blue-ribbon, independent commission to examine what happened to the Liberty. Among the findings announced by the commission on October 2003:

“...Unmarked Israeli aircraft dropped napalm canisters on the USS Liberty bridge, and fired 30mm cannon and rockets into the ship; survivors estimate 30 or more sorties were flown over the ship by a minimum of 12 attacking Israeli planes. ...

“...The torpedo boat attack involved not only the firing of torpedoes, but machine-gunning of Liberty’s firefighters and stretcher-bearers. ... The Israeli torpedo boats later returned to machine-gun at close range three of the Liberty’s life rafts that had been lowered into the water by survivors to rescue the most seriously wounded.”

Shortly before he died in February 2004, Adm. Moorer strongly appealed for the truth to be brought out and pointed directly at what he saw as the main obstacle: “I’ve never seen a President ... stand up to Israel. ... If the American people understood what a grip these people have on our government, they would rise up in arms.” [As quoted by Richard Curtiss in *A Changing Image: American Perception of the Arab-Israeli Dispute.*]

Echoing Moorer, former U.S. Ambassador Edward Peck, who served many years in the Middle East, condemned Washington’s attitude toward Israel as “obsequious, unctuous subservience ... at the cost of the lives and morale of our own service members and their families.”

And the Six-Day War? Most Americans believe the Israelis were forced to defend against a military threat from Egypt. Not so, admitted former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin 35 years ago: “In June 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [Egyptian President] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.” [The New York Times quoting an August 1982 Begin speech.]

Adm. Moorer kept asking why our government continues to subordinate American interests to those of Israel. It is THE question.

The War in Syria

Fast forward to the catastrophe that is now Syria. U.S. policy support for illusory “moderate rebels” there – including false-flag chemical attacks blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad – can only be fully understood against the mirror of U.S. acquiescence to Israeli objectives.

New York Times Jerusalem Bureau Chief in 2013, Jodi Rudoren, received an unusually candid response when she asked senior Israeli officials about Israel’s preferred outcome in Syria. In a New York Times article on September 6, 2013, titled “Israel Backs Limited Strike Against Syria,” Rudoren reported the Israeli view that the best outcome for Syria’s civil war was no outcome:

“For Jerusalem, the status quo, horrific as it may be from a humanitarian perspective, seems preferable to either a victory by Mr. Assad’s government and his Iranian backers or a strengthening of rebel groups, increasingly dominated by Sunni jihadis.

“‘This is a playoff situation in which you need both teams to lose, but at least you don’t want one to win – we’ll settle for a tie,’ said Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul general in New York. ‘Let them both bleed, hemorrhage to death: that’s the strategic thinking here. As long as this lingers, there’s no real threat from Syria.’”

Obama may have read or been briefed on Rudoren’s article. In any event, last year he told journalist Jeffrey Goldberg how proud he is at having resisted strong pressure from virtually all his advisors to fire cruise missiles on Syria in September 2013. Instead, Obama chose to take advantage of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s offer to get the Syrians to surrender their chemical weapons for destruction, verified by the U.N., aboard a U.S. ship configured for such destruction. President Trump, in contrast, chose to go with his “mad-dog” advisors. It is not yet clear whether he was successfully mousetrapped, or whether he saw the April 4 chemical incident in Syria as an opportunity to “retaliate,” and get a bump in popularity.

There are wider ramifications of rank dishonesty and cover-up, at which Establishment Washington excels. Have we not seen this movie before? Think Iraq. Once again, the “intelligence” is being “fixed.”

Back to the Liberty, Adm. Moorer is right in saying that, if Americans were told the truth about what happened on June 8, 1967, they might be more discriminating in seeing through Israel’s rhetoric and objectives. Moorer insisted that we owe

no less to brave men of the USS Liberty, but also to every man and woman who is asked to wear the uniform of the United States. And he is right about that too.

This book makes a huge contribution toward those worthy ends.

[For more on this topic, see [“Navy Vet Honored, Foiled Israeli Attack”](#); [“Still Waiting for USS Liberty’s Truth”](#); [“A USS Liberty’s Hero’s Passing”](#)]

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How China Lobby Shaped America

Exclusive: A prototype of the modern foreign lobby in Washington was the China Lobby, bribing and bending U.S. politicians to serve the will of the Nationalists who fled to Taiwan and helped fuel McCarthyism, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the second in a series on foreign lobbies.)

One of the first big foreign lobbies to blossom after passage of the 1938 Foreign Agents Registration Act was the infamous China Lobby, defined by William Safire in his political dictionary as an “attack phrase used against those urging support of Chiang Kai-shek against Mao Zedong, and later pressing for aid to Chiang on Taiwan.”

Testifying to the China Lobby’s seminal importance – actually what would more accurately be called the Taiwan Lobby – Safire credited it with inspiring the term “Israel lobby” to describe the equally formidable support network for another equally tiny country.

The China Lobby demanded – and won – billions of dollars in military and economic aid for Chiang’s dictatorship, first on mainland China and then on Taiwan. Exploiting the wave of anti-Communism during the McCarthy era, it also ruthlessly suppressed any criticism of Nationalist China’s shortcomings or any moves toward diplomatic recognition of the People’s Republic of China.

Some of its American operatives were opportunistic lawyer-lobbyists like Thomas Corcoran, a former New Dealer who turned his talents to money-making intrigues. Some were anti-communist militants like Gen. Claire Chennault of Flying Tigers fame, who founded a CIA-controlled airline (Civil Air Transport) with Corcoran’s

help to support Chiang's armies and run covert operations in the Far East.

Many were partisan Republicans who rejected criticism of Chiang's corrupt regime and attacked the Truman administration for not sending enough financial and military aid to prevent the "fall of China."

In 1949, two members of Congress called for an investigation of the lobby's "brazen power." Rep. Mike Mansfield, a Montana Democrat who would later become Senate majority leader, accused Nationalist Chinese officials – who had fled the mainland for Taiwan that year in the wake of the communist revolution – of diverting U.S. aid to fund political propaganda in the United States.

Ironically, a timely dispensation of \$800,000 from Nationalist Chinese officials in Taiwan to their New York office financed a successful campaign to squelch that proposed investigation.

A few intrepid reporters worked hard to fill the information gap. In April 1952, *Reporter* magazine ran two successive issues devoted to exposing the China Lobby.

"While what is left of Chiang's army is rusting in Formosa [another name for Taiwan], the Lobby's operators are employing all their mental and financial resources in the United States," observed editor Max Ascoli. "In the last couple of years, they have had remarkable success. Once more the big lie has proved to be unanswerable and undebatable."

Commenting on the China Lobby's ruthless methods, including McCarthyite demagoguery and the purge of liberal China experts from government, the magazine called it "the nearest thing to an effective Communist Party our country has ever had. There is no other outfit to which the China Lobby can be compared, with its hard core of fanatical, full-time operators, its underground, its legion of naïve, misled fellow travelers, its front organizations, and its foreign officials, in Washington with diplomatic immunity, who dutifully report to central headquarters."

CIA Support

The *Reporter* series likely had the support of officials in the Truman administration, and was substantially reported by a veteran U.S. intelligence officer who went to work for *Time* magazine after serving as the CIA's first station chief in Paris.

His co-author gave an advance briefing to the assistant to the director of the CIA in March 1952, offering up one explosive detail kept out of the published version: "the Nationalist government pumped more than \$2,000,000 into the Republican campaign in 1948."

The success of Republicans in the 1952 elections, however, forced the CIA more into line with the China Lobby. Pro-Taiwan organizations like the Committee to Defend America by Aiding Anti-Communist China and the Committee on National Affairs included among their officers or directors notable front-men for CIA propaganda operations, such as William Donovan, former head of the Office of Strategic Services, Jay Lovestone, a CIA-funded labor organizer, and Cord Meyer, who took charge of the Agency's International Organizations Division in 1954.

The CIA also covertly funded anti-communist organizations such as the Free Asia Committee and Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals (ARCI), which reinforced the China Lobby's messages.

The executive chairman of ARCI, Christopher Emmet, lauded its role in "making Americans more aware of the Chinese anti-Communist cause. . . . The reason is that the humanitarian appeal for relief incidentally permits giving all the political facts about persecution, etc. . . . It does not invite argument and attack as in the case of direct political propaganda."

The first academic study of this pressure campaign finally appeared – ever so briefly – in 1960. In the introduction to his *The China Lobby in American Politics*, political scientist Ross Koen made the blockbuster allegation that "There is . . . considerable evidence that a number of [Nationalist] Chinese officials engaged in the illegal smuggling of narcotics into the United States with the full knowledge and connivance of the Nationalist Chinese Government. The evidence indicates that several prominent Americans have participated in and profited from these transactions. It indicates further that the narcotics business has been an important factor in the activities and permutations of the China Lobby."

An energetic publicist for the China Lobby got hold of advance proofs of the book and shared them with allies in the Eisenhower administration. Together they brought heavy legal and political pressure to bear on the publisher, Macmillan, to withdraw the book. The book was not reissued until 1974, by Harper & Row.

Richard Nixon and the China Lobby

Through its hard-hitting propaganda campaigns, the China Lobby prevented U.S. diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China – the most populous country on Earth – for more than two decades. Its stranglehold on U.S. foreign policy was not broken until 1972, when President Nixon finally opened talks with Beijing to help end the Vietnam War.

Ironically, Nixon had long been one of the China Lobby's most ardent supporters. He won election to the Senate from California in 1950 in part by exploiting

popular dissatisfaction with the Truman administration's "loss" of China and the subsequent bloody war in Korea.

Washington columnist Drew Pearson later published the fact that Nixon took a large cash payoff from one of Chiang's nephews to help fund his successful 1950 campaign against the liberal Democratic incumbent, Helen Gahagan Douglas. Pearson also learned – but did not publish – the fact that a Nationalist Chinese agent supplied \$500,000 in cash to fund the campaign expenses of other Republican senators nationwide.

Years later, during the 1968 presidential election campaign, Nixon used the services of China Lobby notable Anna Chennault – widow of the late American general Claire Chennault and a prodigious Republican fundraiser in her own right – as his private emissary to the president of South Vietnam.

Through her, Nixon secretly blocked President Johnson's proposal for peace talks between North and South Vietnam, in order to slow momentum for Hubert Humphrey's campaign. Johnson, learning of the Nixon/Chennault intervention through top-secret intelligence sources, said nothing publicly but complained bitterly to Senate Republican Leader Everett Dirksen, "This is treason."

The China Lobby's Legacy

That same year, the China Lobby inspired a parallel lobby supporting the military dictatorship of South Korea, a close anti-communist ally of Taiwan. In 1968, Richard Hanna, a Taiwan supporter and Democratic congressman from Orange County – Nixon's home ground – "instructed" South Korea's prime minister "on how to lobby the U.S. Congress effectively by emulating the successful models set by Israel and Taiwan."

Following his advice, a South Korean businessman, working with the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, began recycling commissions from U.S. rice sales to Korea to pay for lavish entertainment and outright bribes to "congressmen, cabinet members, and other influential persons" in Washington, including Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, during the Nixon years.

In late 1970, a CIA "bug" in the office of South Korea's president implicated him in a scheme to spend upward of a million dollars a year to pay off dozens of U.S. officials, but the Nixon administration took no action.

In 1973, one member of Congress who later escaped prosecution for bribery because of the statute of limitations, wrote South Korea's president a letter of appreciation, commenting, "you have an extremely competent team working on your behalf and making things come out right for your country. Nothing, as you know, happens without a great deal of work and support."

The South Korean businessman who disbursed the bribes eventually testified before Congress in 1978, a decade after the “Koreagate” conspiracy began, under a grant of full immunity. Although he implicated some 30 members of Congress, only about 10 resigned or faced criminal charges.

Taiwan, meanwhile, continued to maintain a formidable lobby in Washington during the 1970s, despite President Nixon’s betrayal in recognizing mainland China. The lobby continued to win the hearts and minds of conservative Republicans, including Ronald Reagan. Among other vehicles, it used the services of the public relations firm Deaver and Hannaford, which also represented the military dictatorships of Argentina and Guatemala.

Partner Michael Deaver, a former aide to Governor Reagan, became President Reagan’s Deputy Chief of Staff in 1981. Much to Beijing’s displeasure, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan proceeded to soar, from \$312 million in 1981 to a high of \$709 million in 1985. An appreciative Taiwan, along with South Korea, provided covert support for the anti-Communist “Contras” fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua during these years.

In 1987, Deaver was convicted of perjuring himself before Congress and a federal grand jury regarding his use of the White House for lobbying activities.

The China Lobby lives on, with diminished clout, in today’s Republican Party. Its 2016 platform called for increased arms sales to Taiwan, reinstating it in international organizations, and a committing to its defense in case of a military showdown with China.

During the presidential campaign, candidate Donald Trump named several strong supporters of the island to his transition team. In December 2016, President-elect Trump held his notorious call with Taiwan’s leader to celebrate their respective elections and laud the “close economic, political, and security ties” between the United States and Taiwan.

Since then, of course, President Trump has reversed himself on this as on so many other policies, burning bridges with Taiwan to cultivate President Xi Jinping of China. But don’t count Taiwan out. If Xi fails to deliver on North Korea, or if U.S.-China military confrontations rise anew in the South China Sea, the small island that once commanded an army of U.S. supporters may roar yet again in Washington.

Next: The Israel Lobby

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The Long Ordeal of Julian Assange

For the past decade, WikiLeaks has published groundbreaking evidence of government and corporate abuse while getting targeted for abuse itself, including a seven-year vendetta against founder Julian Assange, says John Pilger.

By John Pilger

Julian Assange has been vindicated because the Swedish case against him was corrupt. The prosecutor, Marianne Ny, obstructed justice and should be prosecuted. Her obsession with Assange not only embarrassed her colleagues and the judiciary but exposed the Swedish state's collusion with the United States in its crimes of war and "rendition."

Had Assange not sought refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London, he would have been on his way to the kind of American torture pit Chelsea Manning had to endure.

This prospect was obscured by the grim farce played out in Sweden. "It's a laughing stock," said James Catlin, one of Assange's Australian lawyers. "It is as if they make it up as they go along."

It may have seemed that way, but there was always serious purpose. In 2008, a secret Pentagon document prepared by the "Cyber Counterintelligence Assessments Branch" foretold a detailed plan to discredit WikiLeaks and smear Assange personally.

The "mission" was to destroy the "trust" that was WikiLeaks' "center of gravity." This would be achieved with threats of "exposure [and] criminal prosecution." Silencing and criminalizing such an unpredictable source of truth-telling was the aim.

Perhaps this was understandable. WikiLeaks has exposed the way America dominates much of human affairs, including its epic crimes, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq: the wholesale, often homicidal killing of civilians and the contempt for sovereignty and international law.

These disclosures are protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. As a presidential candidate in 2008, Barack Obama, a professor of constitutional law, lauded whistle blowers as "part of a healthy democracy [and they] must be protected from reprisal." In 2012, the Obama campaign boasted on its website that Obama had prosecuted more whistle blowers in his first term than all other

US presidents combined. Before Chelsea Manning had even received a trial, Obama had publicly pronounced her guilty.

Few serious observers doubt that should the U.S. get its hands on Assange, a similar fate awaits him. According to documents released by National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden, he is on a "Manhunt target list." Threats of his kidnapping and assassination became almost political and media currency in the U.S. following then Vice-President Joe Biden's preposterous slur that the WikiLeaks founder was a "cyber-terrorist."

Hillary Clinton, the destroyer of Libya and, as WikiLeaks revealed last year, the secret supporter and personal beneficiary of forces underwriting ISIS, proposed her own expedient solution: "Can't we just drone this guy," according to the conservative Web site True Pundit, which cited State Department sources for the quote. [Clinton said she didn't recall making the remark but adding: "It would have been a joke, if it had been said, but I don't recall that."]

According to Australian diplomatic cables, Washington's bid to get Assange is "unprecedented in scale and nature." In Alexandria, Virginia, a secret grand jury has sought for almost seven years to contrive a crime for which Assange can be prosecuted. This is not easy.

The First Amendment Obstacle

The First Amendment protects publishers, journalists and whistleblowers, whether it is the editor of the New York Times or the editor of WikiLeaks. The very notion of free speech is described as America's "founding virtue" or, as Thomas Jefferson called it, "our currency."

Faced with this hurdle, the U.S. Justice Department has contrived charges of "espionage," "conspiracy to commit espionage," "conversion" (theft of government property), "computer fraud and abuse" (computer hacking) and general "conspiracy." The favored Espionage Act, which was meant to deter pacifists and conscientious objectors during World War One, has provisions for life imprisonment and the death penalty.

Assange's ability to defend himself in such a Kafkaesque world has been severely limited by the U.S. declaring his case a state secret. In 2015, a federal court in Washington blocked the release of all information about the "national security" investigation against WikiLeaks, because it was "active and ongoing" and would harm the "pending prosecution" of Assange. The judge, Barbara J. Rothstein, said it was necessary to show "appropriate deference to the executive in matters of national security." This is a kangaroo court.

For Assange, his trial has been trial by media. On August 20, 2010, when the

Swedish police opened a “rape investigation,” they coordinated it, unlawfully, with the Stockholm tabloids. The front pages said Assange had been accused of the “rape of two women.” The word “rape” can have a very different legal meaning in Sweden than in Britain [or elsewhere]; a pernicious false reality became the news that went round the world.

Less than 24 hours later, the Stockholm Chief Prosecutor, Eva Finne, took over the investigation. She wasted no time in cancelling the arrest warrant, saying, “I don’t believe there is any reason to suspect that he has committed rape.” Four days later, she dismissed the rape investigation altogether, saying, “There is no suspicion of any crime whatsoever.”

Enter Claes Borgstrom, a highly contentious figure in the Social Democratic Party then standing as a candidate in Sweden’s imminent general election. Within days of the chief prosecutor’s dismissal of the case, Borgstrom, a lawyer, announced to the media that he was representing the two women and had sought a different prosecutor in Gothenberg. This was Marianne Ny, whom Borgstrom knew well, personally and politically.

On August 30, Assange attended a police station in Stockholm voluntarily and answered the questions put to him. He understood that was the end of the matter. Two days later, Ny announced she was re-opening the case.

At a press conference, Borgstrom was asked by a Swedish reporter why the case was proceeding when it had already been dismissed. The reporter cited one of the women as saying she had not been raped. He replied, “Ah, but she is not a lawyer.”

On the day that Marianne Ny reactivated the case, the head of Sweden’s military intelligence service – which has the acronym MUST – publicly denounced WikiLeaks in an article entitled “WikiLeaks [is] a threat to our soldiers [under US command in Afghanistan].”

Both the Swedish prime minister and foreign minister attacked Assange, who had been charged with no crime. Assange was warned that the Swedish intelligence service, SAPO, had been told by its U.S. counterparts that U.S.-Sweden intelligence-sharing arrangements would be “cut off” if Sweden sheltered him.

For five weeks, Assange waited in Sweden for the renewed “rape investigation” to take its course. The Guardian was then on the brink of publishing the Iraq “War Logs,” based on WikiLeaks’ disclosures, which Assange was to oversee in London.

Finally, he was allowed to leave. As soon as he had left, Marianne Ny issued a European Arrest Warrant and an Interpol “red alert” normally used for terrorists and dangerous criminals.

Stuck in London

Assange attended a police station in London, was duly arrested and spent ten days in Wandsworth Prison, in solitary confinement. Released on £340,000 bail, he was electronically tagged, required to report to police daily and placed under virtual house arrest while his case began its long journey to the U.K. Supreme Court.

He still had not been charged with any offense. His lawyers repeated his offer to be questioned in London, by video or personally, pointing out that Marianne Ny had given him permission to leave Sweden. They suggested a special facility at Scotland Yard commonly used by the Swedish and other European authorities for that purpose. She refused.

For almost seven years, while Sweden has questioned 44 people in the U.K. in connection with police investigations, Ny refused to question Assange and so advance her case.

Writing in the Swedish press, a former Swedish prosecutor, Rolf Hillegren, accused Ny of losing all impartiality. He described her personal investment in the case as “abnormal” and demanded she be replaced.

Assange asked the Swedish authorities for a guarantee that he would not be “rendered” to the U.S. if he was extradited to Sweden. This was refused. In December 2010, The Independent revealed that the two governments had discussed his onward extradition to the U.S.

Contrary to its reputation as a bastion of liberal enlightenment, Sweden has drawn so close to Washington that it has allowed secret CIA “renditions” – including the illegal deportation of refugees. The rendition and subsequent torture of two Egyptian political refugees in 2001 was condemned by the U.N. Committee against Torture, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch; the complicity and duplicity of the Swedish state are documented in successful civil litigation and in WikiLeaks cables.

“Documents released by WikiLeaks since Assange moved to England,” wrote Al Burke, editor of the online Nordic News Network, an authority on the multiple twists and dangers that faced Assange, “clearly indicate that Sweden has consistently submitted to pressure from the United States in matters relating to civil rights. There is every reason for concern that if Assange were to be taken into custody by Swedish authorities, he could be turned over to the United States without due consideration of his legal rights.”

A Faltering Case

The war on Assange now intensified. Marianne Ny refused to allow his Swedish lawyers, and the Swedish courts, access to hundreds of SMS messages that the police had extracted from the phone of one of the two women involved in the “rape” allegations.

Ny said she was not legally required to reveal this critical evidence until a formal charge was laid and she had questioned him. Then, why wouldn't she question him? Catch-22.

When she announced last week that she was dropping the Assange case, she made no mention of the evidence that would destroy it. One of the SMS messages makes clear that one of the women did not want any charges brought against Assange, “but the police were keen on getting a hold on him.” She was “shocked” when they arrested him because she only “wanted him to take [an HIV] test.” She “did not want to accuse JA of anything” and “it was the police who made up the charges.” In a witness statement, she is quoted as saying that she had been “railroaded by police and others around her.”

Neither woman claimed she had been raped. Indeed, both denied they were raped and one of them has since tweeted, “I have not been raped.” The women were manipulated by police – whatever their lawyers might say now. Certainly, they, too, are the victims of this sinister saga.

The Politics of ‘Rape’

Katrin Axelsson and Lisa Longstaff of Women Against Rape wrote: “The allegations against [Assange] are a smokescreen behind which a number of governments are trying to clamp down on WikiLeaks for having audaciously revealed to the public their secret planning of wars and occupations with their attendant rape, murder and destruction. ... The authorities care so little about violence against women that they manipulate rape allegations at will. [Assange] has made it clear he is available for questioning by the Swedish authorities, in Britain or via Skype. Why are they refusing this essential step in their investigation? What are they afraid of?”

Assange's choice was stark: extradition to a country that had refused to say whether or not it would send him on to the U.S., or to seek what seemed his last opportunity for refuge and safety.

Supported by most of Latin America, the government of tiny Ecuador granted him refugee status on the basis of documented evidence that he faced the prospect of cruel and unusual punishment in the U.S.; that this threat violated his basic human rights; and that his own government in Australia had abandoned him and colluded with Washington.

Australia's Labor government of then Prime Minister Julia Gillard had even threatened to take away his Australian passport – until it was pointed out to her that this would be unlawful.

The renowned human rights lawyer, Gareth Peirce, who represents Assange in London, wrote to then Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd: "Given the extent of the public discussion, frequently on the basis of entirely false assumptions... it is very hard to attempt to preserve for him any presumption of innocence. Mr. Assange has now hanging over him not one but two Damocles swords, of potential extradition to two different jurisdictions in turn for two different alleged crimes, neither of which are crimes in his own country, and that his personal safety has become at risk in circumstances that are highly politically charged."

It was not until she contacted the Australian High Commission in London that Peirce received a response, which answered none of the pressing points she raised. In a meeting I attended with her, Australian Consul-General Ken Pascoe made the astonishing claim that he knew "only what I read in the newspapers" about the details of the case.

In 2011, in Sydney, I spent several hours with a conservative Member of Australia's Federal Parliament, Malcolm Turnbull. We discussed the threats to Assange and their wider implications for freedom of speech and justice, and why Australia was obliged to stand by him. Turnbull then had a reputation as a free speech advocate. He is now the Prime Minister of Australia.

I gave him Gareth Peirce's letter about the threat to Assange's rights and life. He said the situation was clearly appalling and promised to take it up with the Gillard government. Only his silence followed.

A Vituperative Campaign

For almost seven years, this epic miscarriage of justice has been drowned in a vituperative campaign against the WikiLeaks founder. There are few precedents. Deeply personal, petty, vicious and inhuman attacks have been aimed at a man not charged with any crime yet subjected to treatment not even meted out to a defendant facing extradition on a charge of murdering his wife. That the U.S. threat to Assange was a threat to all journalists, and to the principle of free speech, was lost in the sordid and the ambitious. I would call it anti-journalism.

Books were published, movie deals struck and media careers launched or kick-started on the back of WikiLeaks and an assumption that attacking Assange was fair game and he was too poor to sue. People have made money, often big money, while WikiLeaks has struggled to survive.

The previous editor of the Guardian, Alan Rusbridger, called the WikiLeaks disclosures, which his newspaper published, “one of the greatest journalistic scoops of the last 30 years.” Yet no attempt was made to protect the Guardian’s provider and source. Instead, the “scoop” became part of a marketing plan to raise the newspaper’s cover price.

With not a penny going to Assange or to WikiLeaks, a hyped Guardian book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie. The book’s authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, gratuitously described Assange as a “damaged personality” and “callous.” They also revealed the secret password he had given the paper in confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing the U.S. embassy cables. With Assange now trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy, Harding, standing among the police outside, gloated on his blog that “Scotland Yard may get the last laugh.”

Journalism students might well study this period to understand the most ubiquitous source of “fake news” – as from within a media self-ordained with a false respectability and as an extension of the authority and power it courts and protects.

The presumption of innocence was not a consideration in Kirsty Wark’s memorable live-on-air interrogation in 2010. “Why don’t you just apologize to the women?” she demanded of Assange, followed by: “Do we have your word of honor that you won’t abscond?”

On the BBC’s Today program, John Humphrys bellowed: “Are you a sexual predator?” Assange replied that the suggestion was ridiculous, to which Humphrys demanded to know how many women he had slept with.

“Would even Fox News have descended to that level?” wondered the American historian William Blum. “I wish Assange had been raised in the streets of Brooklyn, as I was. He then would have known precisely how to reply to such a question: ‘You mean including your mother?’”

Last week, on BBC World News, on the day Sweden announced it was dropping the case, I was interviewed by Greta Guru-Murthy, who seemed to have little knowledge of the Assange case. She persisted in referring to the “charges” against him. She accused him of putting Trump in the White House; and she drew my attention to the “fact” that “leaders around the world” had condemned him. Among these “leaders” she included Trump’s CIA director. I asked her, “Are you a journalist?”

The injustice meted out to Assange is one of the reasons Parliament reformed the Extradition Act in 2014. “His case has been won lock, stock and barrel,” Gareth Peirce told me, “these changes in the law mean that the UK now recognizes as

correct everything that was argued in his case. Yet he does not benefit." In other words, he would have won his case in the British courts and would not have been forced to take refuge.

Ecuador's decision to protect Assange in 2012 was immensely brave. Even though the granting of asylum is a humanitarian act, and the power to do so is enjoyed by all states under international law, both Sweden and the United Kingdom refused to recognize the legitimacy of Ecuador's decision.

Police Siege

Ecuador's embassy in London was placed under police siege and its government abused. When William Hague's Foreign Office threatened to violate the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, warning that it would remove the diplomatic inviolability of the embassy and send the police in to get Assange, outrage across the world forced the government to back down.

During one night, police appeared at the windows of the embassy in an obvious attempt to intimidate Assange and his protectors.

Since then, Assange has been confined to a small room without sunlight. He has been ill from time to time and refused safe passage to the diagnostic facilities of hospital. Yet, his resilience and dark humor remain quite remarkable in the circumstances. When asked how he put up with the confinement, he replied, "Sure beats a supermax."

It is not over, but the campaign against him is unraveling. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention – the tribunal that adjudicates and decides whether governments comply with their human rights obligations – last year ruled that Assange had been detained unlawfully by Britain and Sweden. This is international law at its apex.

Both Britain and Sweden participated in the 16-month long U.N. investigation and submitted evidence and defended their position before the tribunal. In previous cases ruled upon by the Working Group – Aung Sang Suu Kyi in Burma, imprisoned opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia, detained Washington Post journalist Jason Rezaian in Iran – both Britain and Sweden gave full support to the tribunal. The difference now is that Assange's persecution endures in the heart of London.

The Metropolitan Police say they still intend to arrest Assange for bail infringement should he leave the embassy. What then? A few months in prison while the U.S. delivers its extradition request to the British courts?

If the British Government allows this to happen it will, in the eyes of the

world, be shamed comprehensively and historically as an accessory to the crime of a war waged by rampant power against justice and freedom, and all of us.

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The Gaping Holes of Russia-gate

Between Russia-gate and President Trump's potential impeachment, Washington is blending the thrill of McCarthyism and the excitement of Watergate, as ex-U.S. intelligence officials Ray McGovern and William Binney explain.

By Ray McGovern and William Binney

Official Washington got to relive the excitement of Watergate in a "gotcha" moment after President Trump fired FBI Director James Comey. There were fond recollections of how righteous the major newspapers felt when condemning President Nixon over his "Saturday Night Massacre" firing of special prosecutor Archibald Cox.

But the overriding question from "this Russia thing, with Trump and Russia" – as President Trump calls it – is whether there is any there there. The President labeled it a "made-up story" and, by all appearances from what is known at this time, he is mostly correct.

A few days before Comey's firing, the FBI Director reportedly had asked for still more resources to hunt the Russian bear for supposedly "interfering" with last year's election to hurt Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump. And so the firing allowed the Watergate-recalling news outlets to trot out the old trope that "the cover-up is worse than the crime."

But can that argument bear close scrutiny, or is it the "phony narrative" that Senate Republican Whip John Cornyn of Texas claims it to be? Cornyn quipped that, if impeding the investigation was Trump's aim, "This strikes me as a lousy way to do it. All it does is heighten the attention given to the issue."

Truth is, President Trump had ample reason to be fed up with Comey, in part for his lack of enthusiasm toward investigating actual, provable crimes related to "Russia-gate" – like the flood of sensitive national security leaks, such as the highly sensitive intercepted communications used to precipitate the demise of

Trump aide Michael Flynn.

The retired Army lieutenant general was “caught” talking with Russia’s ambassador last December, a normal undertaking for a person designated as the incoming National Security Adviser. But Obama administration holdovers twisted that into a supposed violation of the archaic 1799 Logan Act and then used a transcript of the phone call to trip up Flynn because he didn’t have perfect recollection of the conversation.

So, a trumped-up federal case was used to help get Flynn fired, but an apparent criminal act – the Flynn leak among many other leaks – was apparently ignored. We suspect that one reason for Comey’s disinterest was that he already knows who was responsible.

In contrast to Comey’s see-no-evil reaction to criminal leaking, the FBI Director evinced strong determination to chase after ties between Russia and the Trump campaign until the cows came home. The investigation (already underway for 10 months) had the decided advantage of casting doubt on the legitimacy of Trump’s presidency and putting the kibosh on his plans to forge a more workable relationship with Russia, a win-win for the Establishment, the Military-Industrial Complex, and the FBI/CIA/NSA “Deep State”; a lose-lose for the President – and arguably the American people and the world, both of whom might benefit from fewer big-power tensions and lower spending on an arms race.

An Evidence Shortage

What has been particularly noteworthy about this “scandal” is how much spooky music we’ve heard and how many sinister suspicions have been raised versus actual “evidence” of the core allegations. So far, it has been smoke and mirrors with no chargeable offenses and not a scintilla of convincing proof of Russian “meddling” in the election.

The oft-cited, but evidence-free, CIA/FBI/NSA report of Jan. 6 – crafted by selected senior analysts, according to then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – is of a piece with the “high-confidence,” but fraudulent, National Intelligence Estimate 15 years ago about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

But what about the “Russian hacking,” the centerpiece of the accusations about Kremlin “interference” to help Trump? Surely, we know that happened. Or do we?

On March 31, 2017, WikiLeaks released original CIA documents – almost completely ignored by the mainstream media – showing that the agency had created a program allowing it to break into computers and servers and make it look like others did

it by leaving telltale signs (like Cyrillic markings, for example). The capabilities shown in what WikiLeaks calls the “Vault 7” trove of CIA documents required the creation of hundreds of millions of lines of source code. At \$25 per line of code, that amounts to about \$2.5 billion for each 100 million code lines. But the Deep State has that kind of money and would probably consider the expenditure a good return on investment for “proving” the Russians hacked into Democratic Party emails.

In other words, it is altogether possible that the hacking attributed to Russia was actually one of several “active measures” undertaken by a cabal consisting of the CIA, FBI, NSA and Clapper – the same agencies responsible for the lame, evidence-free report of Jan. 6.

Comey displayed considerable discomfort on March 20, explaining to the House Intelligence Committee why the FBI did not insist on getting physical access to the Democratic National Committee’s computers in order to do its own proper forensics, but chose to rely on the examination done by the DNC’s private contractor, CrowdStrike. The firm itself has conflicts of interests in its links to the pro-NATO and anti-Russia think tank, the Atlantic Council, through Dmitri Alperovitch, who is an Atlantic Council senior fellow and the co-founder of CrowdStrike.

Given the stakes involved in the Russia-gate investigation – now including a possible impeachment battle over removing the President of the United States – wouldn’t it seem logical for the FBI to insist on its own forensics for this fundamental predicate of the case? Or could Comey’s hesitancy to demand access to the DNC’s computers be explained by a fear that FBI technicians not fully briefed on CIA/NSA/FBI Deep State programs might uncover a lot more than he wanted?

President Trump has entered into a high-stakes gamble in confronting the Deep State and its media allies over the accusations of his colluding with Russia. Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat, publicly warned him of the risk earlier this year. “You take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you,” Schumer told MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow on Jan. 3.

If Mr. Trump continues to “take on” the Deep State, he will be fighting uphill, whether he’s in the right or not. It is far from certain he will prevail.

Ray McGovern (rrmcgovern@gmail.com) was a CIA analyst for 27 years; he briefed the president’s daily brief one-on-one to President Reagan’s most senior national security officials from 1981-85. William Binney (williambinney0802@comcast.net) worked for NSA for 36 years, retiring in 2001 as

the technical director of world military and geopolitical analysis and reporting; he created many of the collection systems still used by NSA.

Do High-Level Leaks Suggest a Conspiracy?

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

By Philip Giraldi

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

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

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

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

Two months ago, I would have dismissed as fantasy any thoughts of a conspiracy

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

Defense of the Constitution

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Lavrov Leak

Similar leaks have been appearing since that time. I confess to finding Monday's detailed account of what President Trump discussed with Russian Ambassador

Sergey Lavrov, which included corroborating material that likely did more damage than the information that was actually shared, highly suggestive of the possibility that something like a conspiracy is, in fact, functioning.

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

On Wednesday, the anonymous sources struck again, revealing that "Michael Flynn and other advisers to Donald Trump's campaign were in contact with Russian officials and others with Kremlin ties in at least 18 calls and emails during the last seven months of the 2016 presidential race." That sort of information had to come from the top level of the FBI and would have been accessible to only a few, but even though the leaks of what constitutes highly-classified information have been recurring for many months, no one has been fired or arrested.

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

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

Where's the Beef?

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

investigation into Turkey's lobbying.

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

McGovern, like myself, is also asking why former CIA Director John Brennan has not been summoned by the Senate Committee looking into Russia-gate. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has testified twice, while former FBI Director James Comey, current NSA Director Mike Rogers, and former Justice Department senior official Sally Yates have all appeared once. Brennan's absence is conspicuous as he was the senior national security official most closely tied to the Obama Administration, may have had the tools at hand to fake the Russian connection, and has also been plausibly linked to "encouraging" British Intelligence to provide damaging information on Michael Flynn.

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

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

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

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

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

When the Trump Coup-makers Cometh

Exclusive: As President Trump prepares for his first foreign trip, the turbulent political waters around him are rising and the tidal wave of a “soft coup” may be just over the horizon, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

So what did you think a U.S.-styled “soft coup” would look like? What we’re seeing regarding the intended removal of President Trump is not that much different from what has happened in dozens of other countries, whether Iran in 1953 or Ukraine in 2014 or Brazil in 2016. This one just has a few extra American touches.

Like other coups, there are often vague and unproven accusations leveled against the target and his or her entourage. Even though hard evidence is usually lacking, “process crimes,” such as making misstatements to prosecutors or obstructing justice, are developed as a substitute under the popular saying: “the cover-up is worse than the crime.” Whatever the case, a complicit media then trumpets alleged wrongdoing into grave and impeachable offenses.

And, if you had any doubts about what is looming, you should read Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne Jr.’s [op-ed](#), entitled in print editions “A quick end would be better,” which states:

“There is really only one issue in American politics at this moment: Will we accelerate our way to the end of the [Trump story](#), or will our government remain mired in scandal, misdirection and paralysis for many more months – or even years? ...

“Nothing could be worse than slow-walking the Trump inquiries. The evidence is already overwhelming that he is temperamentally and intellectually incapable of doing the job he holds. He is indifferent to acquiring the knowledge the presidency demands and apparently of the belief that he can improvise hour to hour. He will violate norms whenever it suits him and cross ethical lines

whenever he feels like it.”

The History of Coups

As this American coup against Trump progresses, one commonality of coups around the world – whether “hard coups” of military tanks or “soft coups” of “constitutional” removals – is that the coup’s target is not some perfect human being. He or she has likely made political mistakes or cut some corners or had associates who lined their pockets.

But the difference between those misdeeds being treated as politics as usual or becoming the stuff of “scandal” has more to do with the interests of powerful interests – a domestic “deep state” or an outside “superpower” – than any evenhanded pursuit of justice.

To say that Trump is an imperfect messenger for whatever populist message he thinks he’s carrying stretches beyond the breaking point any normal definition of the word “imperfect.” Indeed, Trump may be the perfectly imperfect messenger.

Yet, what’s really at stake in any coup is power and the direction that a country will take. In the case of Donald Trump, there appear to be several factors at play: he is regarded by many establishment figures as too incompetent and uncouth to serve as America’s President; he also defies the neoconservative orthodoxy over U.S. foreign policy; and perhaps most significantly, he doesn’t believe in the New Cold War, which will assure the Military-Industrial Complex years of expensive new weapons systems by making Russia the new/old “enemy.”

There is, of course, some truth to all these concerns. Trump is an egotistical buffoon who doesn’t seem to know what he doesn’t know. Often his brain doesn’t connect to his tongue – or his Twitter fingers. He is more a Kardashian “reality star,” saying stuff to get attention and to attract eyeballs, than a sober leader who holds his cards close and chooses his words carefully.

Though many Americans voted for him because they viewed him as a no-nonsense businessman, he was actually someone who ran what amounted to a family business without the kind of accountability that often comes with managing a large public corporation.

Puffing up his own importance, Trump even has bragged about his impunity. During the 2016 campaign, he was revealed as the kind of jerk who boasts about grabbing women by the “pussy” and getting away with it because of his star status and personal power.

So, yes, Trump is both incompetent and uncouth. But he is hardly the first president to bring unseemly personal baggage or an inadequate skill set into the

Oval Office. Bill Clinton was known as an insatiable hound dog preying on vulnerable women, and George W. Bush was shockingly unqualified for the demands of the presidency.

While Barack Obama had the intellectual skills and behaved commendably in his personal conduct, he had little experience in managing a complex organization – and it showed in some of his disastrous personnel decisions, such as appointing the hawkish Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State and keeping Bush loyalist Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense.

In other words, Trump's skill limitations were not by themselves disqualifying. With the proper advice and a modicum of self-control, Trump could have performed acceptably as Chief Executive. But he failed to recruit wise advisers and couldn't discipline either his tongue or his Twitter fingers.

Even staunch Trump supporters whom I've spoken with wish he could have parked his large but fragile ego at the White House gate rather than bringing it into the Oval Office.

Foreign Policy Dissent

Still, Trump's larger vulnerability was his failure to accept the foreign policy parameters prescribed by the neocon-dominated Establishment. He started out insulting powerful neocons by challenging their self-exculpatory narrative of the Iraq War – that it was a great idea sabotaged by poor execution but then salvaged by the “surge” before being betrayed by Obama.

Trump also belittled some of the neocon champions, such as old-lion Sen. John “No Hero” McCain and rising star Sen. Marco “Little Marco” Rubio. It would have been a neocon dream to have the 2016 campaign a match-up between Marco Rubio and Hillary Clinton, but the former fell to Trump in the primaries and the latter lost to Trump in the general election.

But Trump's greatest sin was his refusal to buy into Official Washington's big-ticket Russia-bashing, the goal of making Moscow an implacable enemy that then required massive new spending on both propaganda (supposedly to combat Russian “propaganda”) and military projects (including NATO expansion up to Russia's borders and new weapons systems to deter Russian “aggression”).

Despite his simple-mindedness (or perhaps because of it), Trump couldn't understand why the United States had to demonize Russia when he saw many areas of possible cooperation (such as the fight against terrorism).

Trump and a few of his advisers were so out-of-step on the “Russia thing” that Official Washington developed a new groupthink that the only possible

explanation was that Trump and his team must be somehow on the Kremlin's payroll. Any alleged "connection" to Russia – no matter how tenuous or seemingly innocuous – became front-page news.

For instance, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn's speakers bureau negotiated a relatively modest speaking fee of \$45,386 for him to address the tenth anniversary of RT, the Russian network, in December 2015, with RT even whittling down his fee – and that speech became a major cause celebre.

On Dec. 29, 2016, after the election and as the national security adviser-designate, Flynn took a phone call from Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak while Flynn was on vacation in the Dominican Republic, and Flynn later offered an incomplete account of the conversation, which the National Security Agency knew because it had intercepted the phone call.

Instead of people shrugging their shoulders and giving Flynn the benefit of the doubt, Obama's holdovers in the Justice Department literally made a federal case out of it, invoking the archaic and virtually-never-used 1799 Logan Act (which bars private citizens from negotiating with foreigners) and then advancing the absurd argument that somehow the discrepancies in Flynn's recollection made him vulnerable to Russian blackmail to get Trump to fire Flynn.

Then, Trump's alleged suggestion to then-FBI Director James Comey that Flynn was a good guy who had served his country and had suffered enough – and that it might be best to "let it go" – has now become the latest argument for impeaching Trump.

In Deep Water

Whether he knows it or not, Trump is now in very deep water and has no idea how to dog-paddle back to the shore. His aides seem to think that a nine-day foreign trip will do him good, but it is more likely to make him grovel before Saudi King Salman and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, knowing that any offense that those leaders might take would simply expedite Trump's political doom.

Trump is surely in no position to tell the Saudis to cut out their covert funding for Al Qaeda and other Sunni terrorist groups – or to insist that they stop bombing Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East. Nor could Trump dare challenge Netanyahu on the Israeli abuse of the Palestinians, the Prime Minister's obstruction of the peace process, and his blatant efforts to manipulate U.S. politics in favor of bloody neocon interventions across the region. Trump will be the desperate supplicant hoping for a reassuring pat on the head.

There is one – and perhaps only one – winning move that Trump has left. He could authorize CIA Director Mike Pompeo to prepare for release U.S. intelligence information regarding turning-point moments in recent years, such as the truth about the 2013 sarin incident in Syria and the 2014 Malaysia Airlines shoot-down in eastern Ukraine. [See here and here.]

If – as I’m told – the Obama administration systematically misrepresented the intelligence on those catastrophes to register propaganda gains (against the Syrian government in 2013 and Russia in 2014), the U.S. government’s internal information could shift those key narratives in more peaceful directions.

But whatever the truth is, Trump could shift his own image from a compulsive liar who disdains facts into a champion for transparency and honesty in government. He could turn the tables on The New York Times (which has set itself up as the great hero for Truth) and The Washington Post (which has fashioned a new melodramatic slogan, “Democracy Dies in Darkness”). He could point out their hypocritical lack of aggressiveness in challenging the Obama administration’s excessive secrecy.

Trump would also give his dispirited supporters something to rally around. Many blue-collar voters backed Trump because they thought he was at least addressing their economic fears of lost work and lost status, while Hillary Clinton – in their view – treated them with disregard and disdain, even calling many of them “deplorables.”

But Trump’s promises of recovered jobs were largely hollow. Whatever improvement Americans might be feeling in their pocketbooks, it is more the result of Obama’s careful economic management and the normal recovery from Bush’s Wall Street crash and the Great Recession than anything Trump can or will do.

So, revealing hidden truths – where the American people may have been misled – would not only be the right thing to do for democracy, it also could be the smart thing to do. When the Establishment coup-makers come for Trump – as they now almost certainly will – he can at least say that he tried to do something to return the U.S. government to the American people.

That might not save his presidency but it would at least elevate his purpose and possibly create some positive legacy to attach to the Trump name. As the situation stands now, Trump appears headed for a humiliating exit that won’t just strip him of the presidency but would strip away any luster for the Trump brand.

In other words, his impulsive foray into politics might not just make him one of the most reviled U.S. presidents in history but take down the Trump businesses,

too.

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

How NSA Can Secretly Aid Criminal Cases

From the Archive: Official Washington is thrilled by the choice of ex-FBI Director Mueller as Russia-gate special counsel, hailing him as a straight-shooter, but he cut some legal corners in office, ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote in 2014.

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

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

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

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

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

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

off information somehow within those professed “authorities.”

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

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

After all, it’s altogether likely for a great majority of us that some dirt can be retrieved with the NSA’s voluminous files an inviting starting point. AT&T, for example, apparently has kept metadata about its customers, as well as all other traffic going through its switches, for the past 27 years.

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

Learning Curve

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

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

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

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

the rule regarding the “fruit of the poisonous tree.”

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

After the Tip-Off

Among the revelations over the past year was DEA’s definition of “parallel construction” as “the use of normal [read legal] investigative techniques to re-create the information received by DEA’s Special Ops Division” from NSA or other sources that can’t be acknowledged. Some of these sources may be confidential informants whose identities need protecting, but the NSA’s massive database has become a very inviting place to trawl for valuable leads.

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

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

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

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

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

This evidence then sparks an investigation, but the original information can’t

be used legally because it was acquired illegally for “national security” purposes. After the tip, “parallel” law enforcement techniques are introduced to collect other evidence and arrest and charge the suspects/defendants.

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

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

Blackmail?

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

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

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

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

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

Other than the Supreme Court justices themselves, the Solicitor General is among

the most influential members of the legal community. Indeed, the Solicitor General has been called the “tenth justice” as a result of the relationship of mutual trust that tends to develop between the justices and the Solicitor General.

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

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

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

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

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

Separation of Powers?

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

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

Moreover, federal courts at the district, appeals and Supreme Court levels have allowed the government to evade legal accountability by insisting that plaintiffs must be able to prove what often is not provable, that they were surveilled through highly secretive NSA means. And, if the plaintiffs make too

much progress, the government can always get a lawsuit thrown out by invoking “state secrets.”

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

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

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

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

What, We Worry?

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

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

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

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

“It is the height of naivete to think that, once collected, this information won’t be used. This is the nature of secret government organizations. The only

way to protect the people's privacy is not to allow the government to collect their information in the first place." [emphasis added]

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

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

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

Seth Rich Murder Case Stirs Russia Doubts

Exclusive: New claims have revived old suspicions that slain Democratic Party staffer Seth Rich, not Russia, was the source of Democratic emails that were slipped to WikiLeaks last year, reports Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria (Updated with new details on May 20, 2017)

A private investigator looking into last year's murder of Seth Rich, an employee of the Democratic National Committee, has said that the victim's computer shows he was in contact with WikiLeaks and may have leaked Democratic Party emails being blamed instead on Russia.

And an anonymous federal investigator has gone even further, reportedly telling Fox News that the slain employee sent WikiLeaks more than 40,000 emails and 17,000 attachments, which would suggest that Rich, not Russia, leaked the material to WikiLeaks.

Seth Rich was a 27-year old Voter Expansion Data Director for the Democratic Party when he was shot dead on a Washington street last July. Police said it was a robbery attempt, but Rich's father said his wallet, money and credit cards were not taken.

Shortly after Rich's murder, WikiLeaks posted a Tweet offering a \$20,000 reward for information leading to the solution of the mystery of who killed Seth Rich.

WikiLeaks' interest in the case suggested that Rich might have been involved in the DNC email leak although WikiLeaks never reveals the sources who give it confidential information about governments and companies that WikiLeaks then publishes online.

Julian Assange, WikiLeaks founder and publisher, brought up Rich's murder out of context in an interview with Dutch TV last August. "Whistle-blowers go to significant efforts to get us material and often very significant risks," Assange said. "As a 27-year-old, works for the DNC, was shot in the back, murdered just a few weeks ago for unknown reasons as he was walking down the street in Washington."

Pressed by the interviewer to say whether Rich was the source of the DNC emails, Assange said WikiLeaks never reveals its sources. Yet, it appeared to be an indirect way of naming Rich, while formally maintaining WikiLeaks' policy. An alternative view would be to believe that Assange is cynically using Rich's death to divert the trail from the real source.

Further suggesting that WikiLeaks has a strong interest in the Seth Rich case, Assange on Tuesday morning retweeted the Fox5 News report citing the new developments in the murder mystery.

There also has been pushback against the Fox reports. NBC News cited a current FBI official and a former one denying that "an FBI analysis of a computer belonging to Rich contained thousands of e-mails to and from WikiLeaks. Local police in Washington, D.C., never even gave the FBI Rich's laptop to analyze after his murder, according to the current FBI official. And a former law enforcement official with first-hand knowledge of Rich's laptop said the claim was incorrect."

Rich's parents also have blasted the reports of their son's possible involvement with WikiLeaks. "As we've seen through the past year of unsubstantiated claims, we see no facts, we have seen no evidence, we have been approached with no emails and only learned about this when contacted by the press," said Rich's family spokesman, Brad Bauman, who has worked as a Democratic Party public relations consultant.

However someone embarking on such a risky move as leaking thousands of emails purloined from his or her employer is unlikely to tell even family and friends. Edward Snowden, for instance, informed no one, including his longtime girlfriend, that he had leaked a trove of National Security Agency secrets to journalist Glenn Greenwald.

DNC Emails Revealed

Last July, the same month Rich died, WikiLeaks published thousands of Democratic Party emails which showed the Democratic National Committee violated its own charter that pledges neutrality by working for Hillary Clinton against her primary challenger, Sen. Bernie Sanders.

After the DNC emails were leaked, Clinton and other Democrats immediately blamed Russia for hacking their computers, but the DNC refused to allow the FBI to examine its computer servers to see who might have hacked in.

Instead the DNC turned to a private company, CrowdStrike, to investigate. The company – linked to the anti-Russian think tank, the Atlantic Council – concluded that Russia was behind the hack. The company said it was a sophisticated attack but also that the hackers sloppily left behind Cyrillic script and the name of the first Soviet chief of secret police – clues cited to pin the hack on Russia.

Russia and WikiLeaks have both denied that Russia was the source of the leaked emails.

William Binney, arguably one of the best mathematicians ever to work at the National Security Agency, and former CIA officer Ray McGovern, have argued that the emails must have come from a leak because a hack would be traceable by the NSA.

More speculation about the alleged election hack was raised after WikiLeaks' "Vault 7" release, which revealed that the CIA is not beyond covering up its own hacks by leaving clues implicating others.

After Trump's election victory, President Obama's intelligence agencies also pinned the blame for the DNC and other Democratic-connected leaks on Russia and depicted the leaks as part of a Russian government scheme to hurt the Clinton campaign and thus boost Donald Trump.

But the Jan. 6 report by selected analysts at the FBI, CIA and NSA – and released by Obama's Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – offered no hard evidence of Russian guilt, merely intelligence "assessments."

A New Turn

Now, the email mystery has taken a new turn. While the Seth Rich murder case remains unsolved, a private detective hired by an anonymous third party for Rich's family has spoken out, saying there is evidence on Seth Rich's computer indicating that he was in touch with WikiLeaks.

Rod Wheeler, a former D.C. homicide detective, also told the local Washington

Fox TV affiliate on Monday night that a police source told him the detectives were ordered to back off the murder investigation, a claim that D.C. police denied.

Wheeler also raised questions about the relationship between the DNC and Democratic D.C. Mayor Muriel Browser, who could have control over the D.C. police investigation. Browser told The Daily Caller: "I don't think I particularly talked to the DNC. They came in to talk to us. I was with [Rich's family] and their discussions with us." When she was asked about Wheeler's assertion that the DC police were told to shut down the case, Browser said: "Certainly not. That's preposterous."

The DNC did not respond to questions put to its press office by Consortium News regarding whether Rich would have had legal access to the DNC emails. Rich was not included as a participant in any of the more than 40,000 emails given to WikiLeaks.

The FBI told the Washington Post it is a matter for the D.C. police. But Wheeler believes Rich's computer may be in the custody of the FBI. It is not clear exactly what role, if any, the FBI has played in the Seth Rich murder case, an FBI that joined in the effort to blame Russia and was under the command of Director James Comey until he was fired by President Trump on May 9.

Through the Democratic Party-linked spokesman, Rich's family said Wheeler was not authorized to speak for them. "The services of the private investigator who spoke to press was offered to the Rich family and paid for by a third party, and contractually was barred from speaking to press or anyone outside of law enforcement or the family unless explicitly authorized by the family," Bauman said. The third party that Bauman says is paying Wheeler has not been positively identified.

Following Wheeler's assertions to the local Fox station, an unnamed federal investigator reportedly told Fox network news that the FBI inspected Rich's computer within 96 hours of his murder. The investigator told Fox he had read through the emails, which he claimed numbered 45,053 as well as 17,761 attachments. Such exact numbers appear to lend credibility to the claim, though it is not out of the question that they could have been fabricated to match the number of items believed given to WikiLeaks.

According to the Fox News report, the investigator also said the emails and attachments had been sent among DNC leaders between January 2015 and May 2016. He said Rich sent the emails and attachments to Gavin MacFadyen, an American journalist, filmmaker and director of WikiLeaks in London, where MacFadyen died of natural causes last year.

Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist. He has written for the Boston Globe, the Sunday Times of London and the Wall Street Journal among other newspapers. He is the author of "How I Lost By Hillary Clinton" published by OR Books in June 2017. He can be reached at joelauria@gmail.com and followed on Twitter at [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe).

The Existential Risk of Trusting 'Intel'

Official Washington has a near mystical faith in "intelligence," especially when it's warning of some foreign enemy, but ideological bias and groupthink often creep in as shown in an insightful Cold War memoir, reports John V. Walsh.

By John V. Walsh

In Tom Lehrer's ballad satirizing former Nazi rocket scientist Wernher von Braun's cavalier attitude toward the deadly consequences of his work, there's the line, "'Once the rockets are up, who cares where they come down? That's not my department,' says Wernher von Braun."

From MAD to Madness: Inside Pentagon Nuclear War Planning is the enlightening memoir by Paul Johnstone, a man who worked in the "department" that decided where "they" would come down. Johnstone labored there during WWII and then from 1949 to 1969, the initial period of the Cold War and the period covered by this book. On Aug. 29, 1949, the Soviet Union caught the world flat-footed when it set off its first nuclear bomb (just over four years after the United States dropped nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

Thus began the years when frightened children scrambled under their desks by day and were tormented with mushroom cloud nightmares by night. The U.S. and the USSR stood on The Brink over the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin Crisis when The Wall went up. Those years were the initial period of nuclear standoff called MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction).

What Johnstone saw as he went about his duties horrified him – and it should also horrify us. For it is the thesis of the Afterword, by the author's daughter, the prominent political commentator Diana Johnstone, that after the demise of the Soviet Union, the U.S. moved quickly from "MAD to Madness."

Madness refers to plans for a knockout nuclear first strike on Russia, aided and abetted by the latest missile defense boondoggle. That was a favorite fantasy of the generals in the post-WWII era. Whether we now live in another era of

Madness, when a disabling first strike again dances in the heads of the Elite, or once again in an era of MAD is an open question in my mind. But Paul Johnstone's memoir is a work of great importance in either case.

Paul Johnstone started out in Henry Wallace's Department of Agriculture during the New Deal, but was moved to the Department of War after Pearl Harbor. His job was to pick targets for conventional bombs in Japan, although not the targets for the first atom bombs.

When the Cold War commenced, he studied how targets for nuclear weapons should be selected and how much damage The Bomb would do when dropped on various corners of the USSR. He also assessed the damage of Russian nukes landing in various corners of the U.S. He worked at the most august levels of U.S. intelligence: Air Force Intelligence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Office of Secretary of Defense.

Some of Johnstone's studies became part of the Pentagon Papers, leaked by former Pentagon official Daniel Ellsberg. Johnstone gave the manuscript for this memoir to his daughter, Diana Johnstone, when he was on his deathbed in 1981.

Faulty Intelligence

A central message of the book is the inevitable failure of intelligence. This aspect of the memoir is hard to apprehend in all its facets without actually reading it. Why can "intelligence" not be trusted?

First the intelligence agencies lie – and do so quite consciously when it suits those who command them or the desires of those who command their commanders. Anyone who does not recognize this by now has not been paying attention. Intel did this most notoriously in recent years in the case of the non-existent WMD that led the U.S. to a multitrillion dollar war on the innocent people of Iraq – which we fight to this day even though Barack Obama declared the war "officially" over.

But even when the Intel agencies are trying to make honest estimates, they face other obstacles. This is the major lesson that Paul Johnstone delivers. Let us take a few examples. On the topic of trying to assess the damage done by nuclear weapons either on the USSR or on the U.S., he writes:

–“They (the effects of nuking a target) would be researched, and in time – much time – a lot would be learned about them, although not enough ever to provide the basis for predictive measurements. So men do what men always do. They calculated what was calculable as best they could, and generally ignored, or dismissed with mere mention by name, the factors that, however relevant and crucial, were incalculable. Or they would just make a wild guess. One problem

was that whatever the uncertainties, those utilizing the information were rarely in a position to understand its degree of reliability.” (p. 39 of *From Mad to Madness*, hereafter FMTM)

So the “decision makers” for nuclear war could well be acting on intel that is “a wild guess,” and they would not know it! And here is Johnstone writing on the way that the “wild guesses” and other intelligence estimates come to be made, most notably about enemy capabilities – an essential if one plans to start a nuclear war:

–“I believe that, to anyone who has been deeply immersed in it and then has had the privilege of viewing it with some measure of detachment, military intelligence must seem a world of flickering light, dark shadows, mood music and whispered rumors, half heard against trumpeted accompaniment proclaiming dire threats that imperil us from outer darkness. Shapes are partly perceived at best, most commonly merely implied, often not seen at all, and often what you think you see is really not there at all. There are always some things you know you know, but you never know how many things there are that you have no evidence even to suspect. You do not know how much of what you see is deliberately staged to mislead you.

“What is seldom realized is that there is always a dominant mood that determines, more than the sharpest senses or the most acute reasoning, what you decide is out there and what is going on. Like all the world and all experience, it is kaleidoscopic; and the bits and pieces that flit before your eyes are what you thought you’d see before you looked.

“Always of course there are the true believers. The images immediately before their eyes are God’s own truth. It’s a matter of right or wrong, bright sunlight or utter darkness. Then there are those not fully convinced nor deeply caring, who find it least troublesome to see what others say they see. Like herded sheep they may once in a while say ‘baa,’ but though they may distrust the direction they are driven in, they feel reassured following the path forced on them by the pressure of the bodies next to them.” (FMTM, p. 63)

In other words, in the end, the data and analysis do little more than to confirm pre-existing sentiments and prejudices.

Agenda-Driven Intel

Then there were the “experts” who had their own agenda. A striking example is the “Special Studies Group” set up in the early 1950s in the Air Force Directorate of Intelligence.

Johnstone writes: “It was headed by Steve Possony, a Hungarian émigré who

professed to be an expert on Communism in general and the Soviet Union in particular. Steve was the first of several Central European émigrés I met in the next few years who passed as experts on Communist Europe. ... Others were Stausz-Hupé, Kissinger, Brzezinski and many lesser lights such as Leon Gouré and Helmut Sonnenfeldt. In every case I felt that they were thinking, consciously or otherwise, as representatives of a lost cause in their native land, and I always believed that they were used by the military because their 'obsessions' were so useful." (FTFM, p.80)

Of course it is not clear who was using whom here. But we can think of a latter day equivalent in Bush 2 time when neoconservatives like Paul Wolfowitz dominated the Pentagon. As they ginned up the War on Iraq, it was all too clear that their loyalty to Israel came into play. For while the wars in the Middle East and North Africa did little to advance the interests of the U.S., costing it blood, treasure and new enemies like ISIS, those wars left in ruins potential adversaries of Israel in its neighborhood. There can be little doubt that the interests of Israel were served by these American "strategic thinkers."

Johnstone goes on: "The one product of Possony's group that I most distinctly remember was an annual appraisal of the strategic situation. And the reason I remember it, perhaps, is that every year that appraisal forecast a massive Russian land attack on Western Europe the following year. Several of us began to laugh about it after a while, but the forecast was always intoned awesomely and with superficial plausibility. I do not know whether many people who heard the briefings really believed the forecasts. I suspect many doubted it would really be next year, and thought it more likely the year after or even later. But even doubters approved the forecast because, they reasoned, it was better to err in this direction than to minimize the danger. Above all, it was good to say things that emphasized the need for strong defenses." (FTFM, p. 80)

Alarmist warnings about impending Soviet invasions of Europe also were helpful in expanding U.S. military budgets.

The issues that Johnstone raises are relevant not only for scholars, but for each and every one of us since our very existence hangs by a thread increasingly frayed by the incessant anti-Russia drumbeat in our media. That drumbeat has reached a neo-McCarthyite crescendo in these days of Russia-gate where politicians crazed by hatred of Vladimir Putin like John McCain or hatred of Donald Trump like nearly every last Democrat hold sway.

A New Era of MAD

The relevance of the memoir is inescapable, and this is laid out with considerable insight in a preface and a postscript by Johnstone's daughter,

Diana, a journalist residing in Paris and a frequent commenter on French and U.S. politics. She is also the author of *The Politics of Euromissiles* (1984), *Greens in the European Parliament – A New Sense of Purpose for Europe* (1994), *Fool's Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions* (2003), and *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton* (2015).

She is careful of the conclusions she draws. In addition, Paul Craig Roberts's Foreword adds a further dimension to the book since he worked with some of Paul Johnstone's colleagues and also inside the Reagan cabinet when the first Cold War finally came to an end. (Regrettably here we are again – in Cold War 2.0.)

I remain unconvinced only by one conclusion of the book and that lies in Diana Johnstone's Afterword. One thesis of the Afterword is that we went from the era of MAD back to the era of Madness, that is an attempt at a nuclear first strike, after the demise of the USSR. That may well have been true in the first decade of the Century when Russia was still on its back and China was relatively weak. (Diana Johnstone cites literature from this period to make her case. See also "The End of Mad".)

George W. Bush was in power then, and the neocons were in the driver's seat. Bush withdrew from the ABM treaty in June 2002, which opened the door to developing the ever elusive anti-missile system that would make possible a first-strike on Russia and/or China. (At times first strike capability is called "nuclear primacy".) Those ABM plans persisted and have been implemented right up to the present with their deployment in Eastern Europe nominally against Iran and in South Korea nominally against the DPRK. They are in fact aimed at Russia and China, and no one is fooled by other claims, least of all Russia and China.

But we are now 15 years out from 2002 and Russia's economy and military are much stronger under Putin. Moreover, China's GDP was only about 18 percent of the U.S. GDP in Purchasing Power Parity terms in 2002; it is now in 2017 about 120 percent that of the U.S., and the gap grows daily. And of course military power grows out of economic power.

Things have changed. Certainly, the U.S. maintains a vast edge in its military capability, but is it enough for the neocons and neoliberalcons to realistically dream any longer of a nuclear first strike? I doubt it, but the grave danger is that they are living in the past and that their "intel" is telling them that nuclear primacy is still theirs. Why? Because the intel agencies might feel that is what their bosses want to hear.

After all, who wants to abandon past glory. Empires do not have a great track record when it comes to accepting decline. Living in the past is one of the things that might concern us after reading Paul Johnstone's work. So it is a

book of considerable importance for the moment. It warns us of the perilous age in which we live, and it tells us that the need to create a structure of peace in a multipolar world is urgent.

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