

Russia-gate's Litany of Corrections

Exclusive: As much as the U.S. mainstream media insists that the Russia-gate scandal is growing, what is undeniably growing is the list of major corrections that news outlets have been forced to issue, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. mainstream media's year-long hysteria over Russia's alleged role in the election of Donald Trump has obliterated normal reporting standards leading to a rash of journalistic embarrassments that have both disgraced the profession and energized Trump's backers over new grievances about the MSM's "fake news."



Misguided groupthink is always a danger when key elements of the Washington establishment and the major news media share the same belief – whether that is Iraq's supposed possession of WMD or the need to bring down some foreign or domestic leader unpopular with the elites.

Yet, we have rarely witnessed such a cascading collapse of journalistic principles as has occurred around the Russia-gate "scandal." It is hard to keep track of all the corrections or to take note of all the dead ends that the investigation keeps finding.

But anyone who dares note the errors, the inconsistencies or the illogical claims is either dismissed as a "Kremlin stooge" or a "Trump enabler." The national Democrats and the mainstream media seem determined to keep hurtling down the Russia-gate roadway assuming that the evidentiary barriers ahead will magically disappear at some point and the path to Trump's impeachment will be clear.

On Friday, the rush to finally prove the Russia-gate narrative led CNN – and then CBS News and MSNBC – to trumpet an email supposedly sent from someone named Michael J. Erickson on Sept. 4, 2016, to Donald Trump Jr. that involved WikiLeaks offering the Trump campaign pre-publication access to purloined Democratic National Committee emails that WikiLeaks published on Sept. 13, nine days later.

With CNN finally tying together the CIA's unproven claim that WikiLeaks

collaborates with Russia and the equally unproven claim that Russian intelligence “hacked” the Democratic emails, CNN drew the noose more tightly around the Trump campaign for “colluding” with Russia.

After having congressional reporter Manu Raju lay out the supposed facts of the scoop, CNN turned to a panel of legal experts to pontificate about the crimes that the Trump campaign may have committed now that the “evidence” proving Russia-gate was finally coming together.

Not surprisingly the arrival of this long-awaited “proof” of Russian “collusion” exploded across social media. As The Intercept’s Glenn Greenwald noted in an article critical of the media’s performance, some Russia-gate enthusiasts heralded the CNN revelation with graphics of cannons booming and nukes exploding.

The problem, however, was that CNN and other news outlets that jumped on the story misreported the date of the email; it was Sept. 14, 2016, i.e., the day *after* WikiLeaks released the batch of DNC emails, not Sept. 4. In other words, it appeared that “Erickson” – whoever he was – was simply alerting the Trump campaign to the WikiLeaks disclosure.

CNN later issued a quiet correction to its inflammatory report – and not surprisingly people close to Trump cited the false claim as yet another example of “fake news” being spread by the mainstream media, which has put itself at the forefront of the anti-Trump Resistance over the past year.

But this sloppy journalism – compounded by CNN’s rush to put the “Sept. 4 email” in some criminal context and with CBS and MSNBC panting close behind – was not a stand-alone screw-up. A week earlier, ABC News made a similar mistake in claiming that candidate Donald Trump instructed Michael Flynn to contact Russian officials during the campaign, when Trump actually made the request after the election when Flynn was national security adviser-designate, a thoroughly normal move for a President-elect to make. That botched story led ABC News to suspend veteran investigative reporter Brian Ross.

Another inaccurate report from Bloomberg News, The Wall Street Journal and other news outlets – that Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller had subpoenaed Deutsche Bank records of President Trump and his family – was denied by Trump’s lawyer and later led to more corrections. The error apparently was that the bank records were not those of Trump and his family but possibly other associates.

A Pattern of Bias

But it wasn’t just a bad week for American mainstream journalism. The string of errors followed a pattern of earlier false and misleading reporting and other

violations of journalistic standards, a sorry record that has been the hallmark of the Russia-gate “scandal.” Many stories have stirred national outrage toward nuclear-armed Russia before petering out as either false or wildly exaggerated. [See, for instance, Consortiumnews.com’s “[Russia-gate Jumps the Shark.](#)”]

As Greenwald [noted](#), “So numerous are the false stories about Russia and Trump over the last year that I literally cannot list them all.”

The phenomenon began in the weeks after Trump’s shocking victory over Hillary Clinton as Democrats and the mainstream media looked for people to blame for the defeat of their much-preferred candidate.

So, on Thanksgiving Day, just weeks after the election, The Washington Post published a front-page story based on an anonymous group called Prop0rNot accusing 200 Web sites of [acting as propaganda agents](#) for Russia. The list included some of the Internet’s leading independent news sources, including Consortiumnews, but the Post did not bother to contact the slandered Web sites nor to dissect the dubious methodology of the unnamed accusers.

Apparently, the “crime” of the Web sites was to show skepticism toward the State Department’s claims about Syria and Ukraine. In conflating a few isolated cases of “fake news” in which people fabricated stories for political or profitable ends with serious dissent regarding the demonizing of Russia and its allies, the Post was laying down a marker that failure to get in line behind the U.S. government’s propaganda on these and other topics would get you labeled a “Kremlin tool.”

As the Russia-gate hysteria built in the run-up to Trump’s inauguration during the final weeks of the Obama administration, the Post also jumped on a claim from the Department of Homeland Security that Russian hackers had penetrated into the nation’s electrical grid through Vermont’s Burlington Electric.

As journalist Gareth Porter [noted](#), “The Post failed to follow the most basic rule of journalism, relying on its DHS source instead of checking with the Burlington Electric Department first. The result was the Post’s sensational Dec. 30 story under the headline ‘Russian hackers penetrated U.S. electricity grid through a utility in Vermont, U.S. officials say.’ ...

“The electric company quickly issued a firm denial that the computer in question was connected to the power grid. The Post was forced to retract, in effect, its claim that the electricity grid had been hacked by the Russians. But it stuck by its story that the utility had been the victim of a Russian hack for another three days before admitting that no such evidence of a hack existed.”

The Original Sin

In other cases, major news outlets, such as The New York Times, reported dubious Russia-gate claims from U.S. intelligence agencies as flat fact, rather than unproven allegations that remain in serious dispute. The Times and others reported Russian “hacking” of Democratic emails as true even though WikiLeaks denied getting the material from the Russians and the Russians denied providing it.

For months into 2017, in dismissing or ignoring those denials, the U.S. mainstream media reported routinely that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the conclusion that Russia was behind the disclosure of Democratic emails as part of a plot initiated by Russian President Vladimir Putin to help elect Trump. Anyone who dared question this supposed collective judgment of all the U.S. intelligence agencies risked being called a “conspiracy theorist” or worse.

But the “consensus” claim was never true. Such a consensus judgment would have called for a comprehensive National Intelligence Estimate, which was never commissioned on the Russian “hacking” issue. Instead there was something called an “Intelligence Community Assessment” on Jan. 6 that – according to testimony by President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in May 2017 – was put together by “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies: the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

Even after Clapper’s testimony, the “consensus” canard continued to circulate. For instance, in The New York Times’ White House Memo of June 25, correspondent Maggie Haberman mocked Trump for “still refus[ing] to acknowledge a basic fact agreed upon by 17 American intelligence agencies that he now oversees: Russia orchestrated the attacks, and did it to help get him elected.”

Finally, the Times ran a correction appended to that article. The Associated Press ran a similar “clarification” applied to some of its fallacious reporting which used the “17-intelligence-agencies” meme.

After the correction, however, the Times simply shifted to other deceptive wording to continue suggesting that U.S. intelligence agencies were in accord on Russian “hacking.” Other times, the Times just asserted the claim of Russian email hacking as flat fact. All of this was quite unprofessional, since the Jan. 6 “assessment” itself stated that it was not asserting Russian “hacking” as fact, explaining: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact.”

Even worse than the Times, the “fact-checking” site Politifact, which is part of Google’s First Draft Coalition for deciding what the search engine’s algorithms will promote as true and what information will be disappeared as false, simply

decided to tough it out and continued insisting that the false “consensus” claim was true.

When actual experts, such as former National Security Agency technical director William Binney, sought to apply scientific analysis to the core claim about Russian “hacking,” they reached the unpopular conclusion that the one known download speed of a supposed “hack” was not possible over the Internet but closely matched what would occur via a USB download, i.e., from someone with direct access to the Democratic National Committee’s computers using a thumb drive. In other words, the emails more likely came from a DNC insider, not an external “hack” from the Russians or anyone else.

You might have thought that the U.S. news media would have welcomed Binney’s discovery. However, instead he was either ignored or mocked as a “conspiracy theorist.” The near-religious belief in the certainty of the Russian “hack” was not to be mocked or doubted.

‘Hand-picked’ Trouble

In recent days, former DNI Clapper’s reference to “hand-picked” analysts for the Jan. 6 report has also taken on a more troubling odor, since questions have been raised about the objectivity of the Russia-gate investigators and – as any intelligence expert will tell you – if you “hand-pick” analysts known for their personal biases, you are hand-picking the conclusion, a process that became known during the Reagan administration as “politicizing intelligence.”

Though little is known about exactly who was “hand-picked” by President Obama’s intelligence chiefs to assess the Russian “hacking” suspicions, Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller has been forced to reassign Peter Strzok, one of the top FBI investigators who worked on both the Hillary Clinton email-server case and the Trump-Russia inquiry, after it was discovered that he exchanged anti-Trump and pro-Clinton textmessages with a lawyer who also works at the FBI.

Last week, Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee sought answers from new FBI Director Christopher Wren about Strzok’s role in clearing Hillary Clinton of criminal wrongdoing in her use of a private unsecured email server to handle official State Department communications while Secretary of State. They also wanted to know what role in the Russia-gate probe was played by a Democratic-funded “opposition research” report from ex-British intelligence officer Christopher Steele, which included unverified hearsay claims by unnamed Russians about Trump.

Wren avoided direct answers by citing an ongoing Inspector General’s review and

Mueller's criminal investigation, but Republicans expressed displeasure at this evasiveness.

The Republican questions prompted E.J. Dionne Jr., a liberal columnist at The Washington Post, to publish a spirited attack on the GOP committee members, accusing them of McCarthyistic tactics in questioning the FBI's integrity.

Dionne's straw man was to postulate that Republicans – because of this discovery of anti-Trump bias – would discount evidence that proves Trump's collusion with Russia: "if Strzok played some role in developing [the] material. ... Trump's allies want us to say: Too bad the president lied or broke the law or that Russia tried to tilt our election. This FBI guy sending anti-Trump texts is far more important, so let's just forget the whole thing. Really?"

But the point is that no such evidence of Russian collusion has been presented and to speculate how people might react if such evidence is discovered is itself McCarthyistic, suggesting guilt based on hypotheticals, not proof. Whatever one thinks of Trump, it is troubling for Dionne or anyone to imply treasonous activities based on speculation. That is the sort of journalistic malfeasance that has contributed to the string of professional abuses that pervades Russia-gate.

What we are witnessing is such an intense desire by mainstream journalists to get credit for helping oust Trump from office that they have forgotten that journalism's deal with the public should be to treat everyone fairly, even if you personally disdain the subject of your reporting.

Journalists are always going to get criticized when they dig up information that puts some politician or public figure in a negative light, but that's why it's especially important for journalists to strive for genuine fairness and not act as if journalism is just another cover for partisan hatchetmen.

The loss of faith among large swaths of Americans in the professionalism of journalists will ultimately do severe harm to the democratic process by transforming information into just one more ideological weapon. Some would say that the damage has already been done.

It was, if you recall, the U.S. mainstream media that started the controversy over "fake news," expanding the concept from the few low-lives who make up stories for fun and profit into a smear against anyone who expressed skepticism toward State Department narratives on foreign conflicts. That was the point of The Washington Post's PropOrNot story.

But now many of these same mainstream outlets are livid when Trump and his backers throw the same "fake news" epithet back at the major media. The sad

truth is that The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, MSNBC and other leading news organizations that have let their hatred of Trump blind them from their professional responsibilities have made Trump's job easy.

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](#)).

When Washington Cheered the Jihadists

Exclusive: Official Washington helped unleash hell on Syria and across the Mideast behind the naïve belief that jihadist proxies could be used to transform the region for the better, explains Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

When a Department of Defense intelligence [report](#) about the Syrian rebel movement became public in May 2015, lots of people didn't know what to make of it. After all, what the report said was unthinkable – not only that Al Qaeda had dominated the so-called democratic revolt against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for years, but that the West continued to support the jihadis regardless, even to the point of backing their goal of creating a Sunni Salafist principality in the eastern deserts.

The United States lining up behind Sunni terrorism – how could this be? How could a nice liberal like Barack Obama team up with the same people who had brought down the World Trade Center?

It was impossible, which perhaps explains why the report remained a non-story long after it was released courtesy of a Judicial Watch freedom-of-information [lawsuit](#). The New York Times didn't mention it until [six months later](#) while the Washington Post waited more than a year before [dismissing it](#) as “loopy” and “relatively unimportant.” With ISIS rampaging across much of Syria and Iraq, no one wanted to admit that U.S. attitudes were ever anything other than hostile.

But three years earlier, when the Defense Intelligence Agency was compiling the report, attitudes were different. Jihadis were heroes rather than terrorists, and all the experts agreed that they were a low-risk, high-yield way of removing Assad from office.

After spending five days with a Syrian rebel unit, for instance, New York Times reporter C.J. Chivers wrote that the group “mixes paramilitary discipline, civilian policing, Islamic law, and the harsh demands of necessity with battlefield coldness and outright cunning.”

Paul Salem, director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, assured the Washington Post that “al Qaeda is a fringe element” among the rebels, while, not to be outdone, the gossip site Buzzfeed published a pin-up of a “ridiculously photogenic” jihadi toting an RPG.

“Hey girl,” said the subhead. “Nothing sexier than fighting the oppression of tyranny.”

And then there was Foreign Policy, the magazine founded by neocon guru Samuel P. Huntington, which was most enthusiastic of all. Gary Gambill’s “Two Cheers for Syrian Islamists,” which ran on the FP web site just a couple of weeks after the DIA report was completed, didn’t distort the facts or make stuff up in any obvious way. Nonetheless, it is a classic of U.S. propaganda. Its subhead glibly observed: “So the rebels aren’t secular Jeffersonians. As far as America is concerned, it doesn’t much matter.”

Assessing the Damage

Five years later, it’s worth a second look to see how Washington uses self-serving logic to reduce an entire nation to rubble.

First a bit of background. After displacing France and Britain as the region’s prime imperial overlord during the 1956 Suez Crisis and then breaking with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser a few years later, the United States committed itself to the goal of defeating Arab nationalism and Soviet Communism, two sides of the same coin as far as Washington was concerned. Over the next half-century, this would mean steering Egypt to the right with assistance from the Saudis, isolating Libyan strong man Muammar Gaddafi, and doing what it could to undermine the Syrian Baathist regime as well.

William Roebuck, the American embassy’s chargé d’affaires in Damascus, thus urged Washington in 2006 to coordinate with Egypt and Saudi Arabia to encourage Sunni Syrian fears of Shi’ite Iranian proselytizing even though such concerns are “often exaggerated.” It was akin to playing up fears of Jewish dominance in the 1930s in coordination with Nazi Germany.

A year later, former NATO commander Wesley Clark learned of a classified Defense Department memo stating that U.S. policy was now to “attack and destroy the governments in seven countries in five years,” first Iraq, then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran. (Quote starts at 2:07.)

Since the United States didn't like what such governments were doing, the solution was to install more pliable ones in their place. Hence Washington's joy when the Arab Spring struck Syria in March 2011 and it appeared that protesters would soon topple the Baathists on their own.

Even when lofty democratic rhetoric gave way to ominous sectarian chants of "Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the coffin," U.S. enthusiasm remained strong. With Sunnis accounting for perhaps 60 percent of the population, strategists figured that there was no way Assad could hold out against religious outrage welling up from below.

Enter Gambill and the FP. The big news, his article began, is that secularists are no longer in command of the burgeoning Syrian rebel movement and that Sunni Islamists are taking the lead instead. As unfortunate as this might seem, he argued that such a development was both unavoidable and far from entirely negative.

"Islamist political ascendancy is inevitable in a majority Sunni Muslim country brutalized for more than four decades by a secular minoritarian dictatorship," he wrote in reference to the Baathists. "Moreover, enormous financial resources are pouring in from the Arab-Islamic world to promote explicitly Islamist resistance to Assad's Alawite-dominated, Iranian-backed regime."

So the answer was not to oppose the Islamists, but to use them. Even though "the Islamist surge will not be a picnic for the Syrian people," Gambill said, "it has two important silver linings for US interests." One is that the jihadis "are simply more effective fighters than their secular counterparts" thanks to their skill with "suicide bombings and roadside bombs."

The other is that a Sunni Islamist victory in Syria will result in "a full-blown strategic defeat" for Iran, thereby putting Washington at least part way toward fulfilling the seven-country demolition job discussed by Wesley Clark.

"So long as Syrian jihadis are committed to fighting Iran and its Arab proxies," the article concluded, "we should quietly root for them – while keeping our distance from a conflict that is going to get very ugly before the smoke clears. There will be plenty of time to tame the beast after Iran's regional hegemonic ambitions have gone down in flames."

Deals with the Devil

The U.S. would settle with the jihadis only after the jihadis had settled with Assad. The good would ultimately outweigh the bad. This kind of self-centered moral calculus would not have mattered had Gambill only spoken for himself. But he didn't. Rather, he was expressing the viewpoint of Official Washington in

general, which is why the ultra-respectable FP ran his piece in the first place.

The Islamists were something America could employ to their advantage and then throw away like a squeezed lemon. A few Syrians would suffer, but America would win, and that's all that counts.

The parallels with the DIA are striking. "The west, gulf countries, and Turkey support the opposition," the intelligence report declared, even though "the Salafist[s], the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI [i.e. Al Qaeda in Iraq] are the major forces driving the insurgency."

Where Gambill predicted that "Assad and his minions will likely retreat to northwestern Syria," the DIA speculated that the jihadis might establish "a declared or undeclared Salafist principality" at the other end of the country near cities like Hasaka and Der Zor (also known as Deir ez-Zor).

Where the FP said that the ultimate aim was to roll back Iranian influence and undermine Shi'ite rule, the DIA said that a Salafist principality "is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran)."

Bottle up the Shi'ites in northwestern Syria, in other words, while encouraging Sunni extremists to establish a base in the east so as to put pressure on Shi'ite-influenced Iraq and Shi'ite-ruled Iran.

As Gambill put it: "Whatever misfortunes Sunni Islamists may visit upon the Syrian people, *any* government they form will be strategically preferable to the Assad regime, for three reasons: A new government in Damascus will find continuing the alliance with Tehran unthinkable, it won't have to distract Syrians from its minority status with foreign policy adventurism like the *ancien régime*, and it will be flush with petrodollars from Arab Gulf states (relatively) friendly to Washington."

With the Saudis footing the bill, the U.S. would exercise untrammelled sway.

Disastrous Thinking

Has a forecast that ever gone more spectacularly wrong? Syria's Baathist government is hardly blameless in this affair. But thanks largely to the U.S.-backed sectarian offensive, 400,000 Syrians or more have died since Gambill's article appeared, with another 6.1 million displaced and an estimated 4.8 million fleeing abroad.

War-time destruction totals around \$250 billion, according to U.N. estimates, a

staggering sum for a country of 18.8 million people where per-capita income prior to the outbreak of violence was under \$3,000. From Syria, the specter of sectarian violence has spread across Asia and Africa and into Europe and North America as well. Political leaders throughout the advanced industrial world are still struggling to contain the populist fury that the Middle East refugee crisis, the result of U.S.-instituted regime change, helped set off.

So instead of advancing U.S. policy goals, Gambill helped do the opposite. The Middle East is more explosive than ever while U.S. influence has fallen to sub-basement levels. Iranian influence now extends from the Arabian Sea to the Mediterranean, while the country that now seems to be wobbling out of control is Saudi Arabia where Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman is lurching from one self-induced crisis to another. The country that Gambill counted on to shore up the status quo turns out to be undermining it.

It's not easy to screw things up so badly, but somehow Washington's bloated foreign-policy establishment has done it. Since helping to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, Gambill has moved on to a post at the rightwing Middle East Forum where Daniel Pipes, the group's founder and chief, now inveighs against the same Sunni ethnic cleansing that his employee defended or at least apologized for.

The forum is particularly well known for its Campus Watch program, which targets academic critics of Israel, Islamists, and – despite Gambill's kind words about “suicide bombings and roadside bombs” – anyone it considers the least bit apologetic about Islamic terrorism.

Double your standard, double the fun. Terrorism, it seems, is only terrorism when others do it to the U.S., not when the U.S. does it to others.

Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).

Russia-gate's Reach into Journalism

The investigation to somehow blame Russia for Donald Trump's election has now merged with another establishment goal of isolating and intimidating whistleblowers and other dissidents, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The Russia-gate investigation has reached into the ranks of journalism with the House Intelligence Committee's subpoena of Randy Credico, who produced a series about WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for Pacifica Radio and apparently is suspected of having passed on early word about leaked Democratic emails to Donald Trump's supporter Roger Stone.

The Credico subpoena, after he declined a request for a "voluntary" interview, underscores how the investigation is moving into areas of "guilt by association" and further isolating whistleblowers who defy the powers-that-be through unauthorized release of information to the public, a point made by National Security Agency whistleblower Thomas Drake in an interview.

Drake knows well what it means to blow the whistle on government misconduct and get prosecuted for it. A former senior NSA executive, Drake complained about a multi-billion-dollar fraud, waste, and widespread violation of the rights of civilians through secret mass surveillance programs. As a result, the Obama administration indicted Drake in 2010, "as the first whistleblower since Daniel Ellsberg charged with espionage," according to the Institute for Public Accuracy.

In 2011, the government's case against him, which carried a potential 35 years in prison, collapsed. Drake went free in a plea deal and was awarded the 2011 Ridenhour Truth Telling Prize.

I interviewed Drake about the significance of Credico's subpoena, which Credico believes resulted from his journalism about the persecution of Julian Assange for releasing information that powerful people would prefer kept hidden from the public. (I had a small role in Credico's 14-part radio series, *Julian Assange: Countdown to Freedom*. It was broadcast first as part of his Live on the Fly Series, over WBAI and later on KPFA and across the country on community radio.)

Credico got his start as a satirist and became a political candidate for mayor of New York City and later governor of New York, making mainstream politicians deal with issues they would rather not deal with.

I spoke to Thomas Drake by telephone on Nov. 30, 2017.

Dennis Bernstein: How do you look at Russiagate, based on what you know about what has already transpired in terms of the movement of information? How do you see Credico's role in this?

Thomas Drake: Information is the coin of the realm. It is the currency of power. Anyone who questions authority or is perceived as mocking authority—as hanging out with "State enemies"—had better be careful. But this latest development is quite troubling, I must say. This is the normalization of

everything that has been going on since 9/11. Randy is a sort of 21st century Diogenes who is confronting authority and pointing out corruption. This subpoena sends a chilling message. It's a double whammy for Randy because, in the eyes of the US government, he is a media figure hanging out with the wrong media figure [Julian Assange].

Dennis Bernstein: Could you say a little bit about what your work was and what you tried to do with your expose?

Thomas Drake: My experience was quite telling, in terms of how far the government will go to try to destroy someone's life. The attempt by the government to silence me was extraordinary. They threw everything they had at me, all because I spoke the truth. I spoke up about abuse of power, I spoke up about the mass surveillance regime. My crime was that I made the choice to go to the media. And the government was not just coming after me, they were sending a really chilling message to the media: If you print this, you are also under the gun.

Dennis Bernstein: We have heard the charges again and again, that this was a Russian hack. What was the source? Let's trace it back as best we can.

Thomas Drake: In this hyper-inflated, politicized environment, it is extremely difficult to wade through the massive amount of disinformation on all sides.

Hacking is something all modern nation-states engage in, including the United States, including Russia. The challenge here is trying to figure out who the players are, whose ox is being gored, and who is doing the goading.

From all accounts, Trump was duly elected. Now you have the Mueller investigation and the House investigation. Where is this all leading? The US intelligence agency hasn't done itself any favors. The ICA provides no proof either, in terms of allegations that the Russians "hacked" the election. We do have the evidence disclosed by Reality Winner that maybe there was some interference. But the hyper-politicization is making it extraordinarily difficult.

The advantage that intelligence has is that they can hide behind what they are doing. They don't actually have to tell the truth, they can shade it, they can influence it and shape it. This is where information can be politicized and used as a weapon. Randy has found himself caught up in these investigations by virtue of being a media figure and hanging out with "the wrong people."

Dennis Bernstein: It looks like the Russiagateers in Congress are trying to corner Randy. All his life he has spoken truth to power. But what do you think the role of the press should be?

Thomas Drake: The press amplifies just about everything they focus on, especially with today's 24-hour, in-your-face social media. Even the mainstream media is publishing directly to their webpages. You have to get behind the cacophony of all that noise and ask, "Why?" What are the intentions here?

I believe there are still enough independent journalists who are looking further and deeper. But clearly there are those who are hell-bent on making life as difficult as possible for the current president and those who are going to defend him to the hilt. I was not surprised at all that Trump won. A significant percentage of the American electorate were looking for something different.

Dennis Bernstein: Well, if you consider the content of those emails....Certainly, the Clinton folks got rid of Bernie Sanders.

Thomas Drake: That would have been an interesting race, to have Bernie vs. Trump. Sanders was appealing, especially to young audiences. He was raising legitimate issues.

Dennis Bernstein: In Clinton, they had a known quantity who supported the national security state.

Thomas Drake: The national security establishment was far more comfortable having Clinton as president. Someone central to my own case, General Michael Hayden, just a couple days ago went apoplectic because of a tweet from Trump taking on the mainstream media. Hayden got over 100,000 likes on his response. Well, Hayden was central to what we did in deep secrecy at the highest levels of government after 9/11, engaging in widespread surveillance and then justifying it as "raw executive authority."

Now you have this interesting dynamic where the national security establishment is effectively undermining a duly elected president of the United States. I recognize that Trump is vulnerable, but these types of investigations often become highly politicized. I worry that what is really happening is being sacrificed on the altar of entertainment and the stage of political theater.

What is happening to Randy is symptomatic of a larger trend. If you dare speak truth to power, you are going to pay the price. Is Randy that much of a threat, just because he is questioning authority? Are we afraid of the press? Are we afraid of having the uncomfortable conversations, of dealing with the inconvenient truths about ourselves?

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Sucking Liberals into a New Cold War

Out of fury against President Trump, many liberals have enlisted in the ranks of the New Cold War against Russia, seeming to have forgotten the costs to rationality and lives from the first Cold War, warns William Blum.

By William Blum

Cold War Number One: 70 years of daily national stupidity. Cold War Number Two: Still in its youth, but just as stupid.

“He said he absolutely did not meddle in our election. He did not do what they are saying he did.” – President Trump re Russian President Vladimir Putin after their meeting in Vietnam. [*Washington Post*, Nov. 12, 2017]

Putin later added that he knew “absolutely nothing” about Russian contacts with Trump campaign officials. “They can do what they want, looking for some sensation. But there are no sensations.”

Numerous U.S. intelligence agencies have said otherwise. Former Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, responded to Trump’s remarks by declaring: “The president was given clear and indisputable evidence that Russia interfered in the election.”

As we’ll see below, there isn’t too much of the “clear and indisputable” stuff. And this of course is the same James Clapper who made an admittedly false statement to Congress in March 2013, when he responded, “No, sir” and “not wittingly” to a question about whether the National Security Agency was collecting “any type of data at all” on millions of Americans. Lies don’t usually come in any size larger than that.

Virtually every member of Congress who has publicly stated a position on the issue has criticized Russia for interfering in the 2016 American presidential election. And it would be very difficult to find a member of the mainstream media who has questioned this thesis.

What is the poor consumer of news to make of these gross contradictions? Here are some things to keep in mind:

How do we know that the tweets and advertisements “sent by Russians” -- those presented as attempts to sway the vote -- were actually sent by Russians? The Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), composed of National

Security Agency and CIA veterans, recently declared that the CIA knows how to disguise the origin of emails and tweets. The *Washington Post* has as well reported that Twitter “makes it easy for users to hide their true identities.” [Washington Post, Oct. 10, 2017]

Russians! Russians! Russians!

Even if these communications were actually sent from Russia, how do we know that they came from the Russian government, and not from any of the other 144.3 million residents of Russia?

Even if they were sent by the Russian government, we have to ask: Why would they do that? Do the Russians think the United States is a Third World, under-developed, backward Banana Republic easily influenced and moved by a bunch of simple condemnations of the plight of blacks in America and the Clinton “dynasty”? Or clichéd statements about other controversial issues, such as gun rights and immigration? If so, many Democratic and Republican officials would love to know the secret of the Russians’ method. Consider also that Facebook has stated that 90 percent of the alleged-Russian-bought content that ran on its network did not even mention Trump or Clinton. [*Washington Post*, Nov. 15, 2017]

On top of all this is the complete absence of even the charge, much less with any supporting evidence, of Russian interference in the actual voting or counting of votes.

After his remark suggesting he believed Putin’s assertion that there had been no Russian meddling in the election, Trump – of course, as usual – attempted to backtrack and distance himself from his words after drawing criticism at home; while James Clapper declared: “The fact the president of the United States would take Putin at his word over that of the intelligence community is quite simply unconscionable.” [*Reuters*, Nov. 12, 2017]

Given Clapper’s large-size lie referred to above, can Trump be faulted for being skeptical of the intelligence community’s Holy Writ? Purposeful lies of the intelligence community during the first Cold War were legendary, many hailed as brilliant tactics when later revealed. The CIA, for example, had phony articles and editorials planted in foreign newspapers (real Fake News), made sex films of target subjects caught *in flagrante delicto* who had been lured to Agency safe houses by female agents, had Communist embassy personnel expelled because of phony CIA documents, and much more.

The *Post* recently published an article entitled “How did Russian trolls get into your Facebook feed? Silicon Valley made it easy.” In the midst of this “exposé,” The *Post* stated: “There’s no way to tell if you personally saw a Russian post or

tweet.” [Washington Post, Nov. 2, 2017]

A Case or Not?

So ... Do the Cold Warriors have a case to make or do they not? Or do they just want us to remember that the Russkis are bad? So it goes.

An organization in Czechoslovakia with the self-appointed name of European Values has produced a lengthy report entitled “The Kremlin’s Platform for ‘Useful Idiots’ in the West: An Overview of RT’s Editorial Strategy and Evidence of Impact.” It includes a long list of people who have appeared on the Russian-owned TV station RT (formerly *Russia Today*), which can be seen in the U.S., the U.K. and other countries. Those who’ve been guests on RT are the “idiots” useful to Moscow. (The list is not complete. I’ve been on RT about five times, but I’m not listed. Where is my Idiot Badge?)

RT’s YouTube channel has more than two million followers and claims to be the “most-watched news network” on the video site. Its Facebook page has more than 4 million likes and followers. Can this explain why the powers-that-be forget about a thing called freedom-of-speech and treat the station like an enemy? The U.S. government recently forced *RT America* to register as a foreign agent and has cut off the station’s Congressional press credentials.

The Cold War strategist, George Kennan, wrote prophetically: “Were the Soviet Union to sink tomorrow under the waters of the ocean, the American military-industrial establishment would have to go on, substantially unchanged, until some other adversary could be invented. Anything else would be an unacceptable shock to the American economy.”

Writer John Wight has described the new Cold War as being “in response to Russia’s recovery from the demise of the Soviet Union and the failed attempt to turn the country into a wholly owned subsidiary of Washington via the imposition of free market economic shock treatment thereafter.”

So let’s see what other brilliance the New Cold War brings us. ... Ah yes, another headline in the *Post* (Nov. 18, 2017): “British alarm rising over possible Russian meddling in Brexit.” Of course, why else would the British people have voted to leave the European Union? But wait a moment, again, one of the British researchers behind the report “said that the accounts they analyzed – which claimed Russian as their language when they were set up but tweeted in English – posted a mixture of pro-‘leave’ and pro-‘remain’ messages regarding Brexit. Commentators have said that the goal may simply have been to sow discord and division in society.”

Was there ever a time when the *Post* would have been embarrassed to be so openly,

amateurishly biased about Russia? Perhaps during the few years between the two Cold Wars.

In case you don't remember how stupid Cold War Number One was ...

- 1948: The *Pittsburgh Press* published the names, addresses, and places of employment of about 1,000 citizens who had signed presidential-nominating petitions for former Vice President Henry Wallace, running under the Progressive Party. This, and a number of other lists of "communists," published in the mainstream media, resulted in people losing their jobs, being expelled from unions, having their children abused, being denied state welfare benefits, and suffering various other punishments.
- Around 1950: The House Committee on Un-American Activities published a pamphlet, "100 Things You Should Know About Communism in the U.S.A." This included information about what a communist takeover of the United States would mean: ?Q: What would happen to my insurance?? A: It would go to the Communists.? Q: Would communism give me something better than I have now?? A: Not unless you are in a penitentiary serving a life sentence at hard labor.
- 1950s: Mrs. Ada White, member of the Indiana State Textbook Commission, believed that Robin Hood was a Communist and urged that books that told the Robin Hood story be banned from Indiana schools.
- As evidence that anti-communist mania was not limited to the lunatic fringe or conservative newspaper publishers, here is Clark Kerr, president of the University of California at Berkeley in a 1959 speech: "Perhaps 2 or even 20 million people have been killed in China by the new [communist] regime." One person wrote to Kerr: "I am wondering how you would judge a person who estimates the age of a passerby on the street as being 'perhaps 2 or even 20 years old.' Or what would you think of a physician who tells you to take 'perhaps 2 or even twenty teaspoonsful of a remedy'?"
- Throughout the cold war, traffic in phony Lenin quotes was brisk, each one passed around from one publication or speaker to another for years. Here's *S. News and World Report* in 1958 demonstrating communist duplicity by quoting Lenin: "Promises are like pie crusts, made to be broken." Secretary of State John Foster Dulles used it in a speech shortly afterward, one of many to do so during the cold war. Lenin actually did use a very similar line, but he explicitly stated that he was quoting an English proverb (it comes from Jonathan Swift) and his purpose was to show the unreliability of the bourgeoisie, not of communists. ?"First we will take Eastern Europe, then the masses of Asia, then we will encircle the United States, which will be the last bastion of capitalism. We will not have to attack. It will fall like an overripe fruit into our hands." This Lenin "quotation" had the usual wide circulation, even winding up in the *Congressional Record* in

1962. This was not simply a careless attribution; this was an out-and-out fabrication; an extensive search, including by the Library of Congress and the United States Information Agency failed to find its origin.

- A favorite theme of the anti-communists was that a principal force behind drug trafficking was a communist plot to demoralize the United States. Here's a small sample: Don Keller, District Attorney for San Diego County, California in 1953: "We know that more heroin is being produced south of the border than ever before and we are beginning to hear stories of financial backing by big shot Communists operating out of Mexico City." Henry Giordano, Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, 1964, interviewed in the *American Legion Magazine*: Interviewer: "I've been told that the communists are trying to flood our country with narcotics to weaken our moral and physical stamina. Is that true?" Giordano: "As far as the drugs are concerned, it's true. There's a terrific flow of drugs coming out of Yunnan Province of China. ... There's no question that in that particular area this is the aim of the Red Chinese. It should be apparent that if you could addict a population you would degrade a nation's moral fiber." Fulton Lewis, Jr., prominent conservative radio broadcaster and newspaper columnist, 1965: "Narcotics of Cuban origin – marijuana, cocaine, opium, and heroin – are now peddled in big cities and tiny hamlets throughout this country. Several Cubans arrested by the Los Angeles police have boasted they are communists." We were also told that along with drugs another tool of the commies to undermine America's spirit was fluoridation of the water.
- Mickey Spillane was one of the most successful writers of the 1950s, selling millions of his anti-communist thriller mysteries. Here is his hero, Mike Hammer, in "One Lonely Night," boasting of his delight in the grisly murders he commits, all in the name of destroying a communist plot to steal atomic secrets. After a night of carnage, the triumphant Hammer gloats, "I shot them in cold blood and enjoyed every minute of it. I pumped slugs into the nastiest bunch of bastards you ever saw. ... They were Commies. ... Pretty soon what's left of Russia and the slime that breeds there won't be worth mentioning and I'm glad because I had a part in the killing. God, but it was fun!"
- 1952: A campaign against the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) because it was tainted with "atheism and communism," and was "subversive" because it preached internationalism. Any attempt to introduce an international point of view in the schools was seen as undermining patriotism and loyalty to the United States. A bill in the U.S. Senate, clearly aimed at UNESCO, called for a ban on the funding of "any international agency that directly or indirectly promoted one-world government or world citizenship." There was also opposition to UNESCO's

association with the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights on the grounds that it was trying to replace the American Bill of Rights with a less liberty-giving covenant of human rights.

- 1955: A U.S. Army 6-page pamphlet, "How to Spot a Communist," informed us that a communist could be spotted by his predisposition to discuss civil rights, racial and religious discrimination, the immigration laws, anti-subversive legislation, curbs on unions, and peace. Good Americans were advised to keep their ears stretched for such give-away terms as "chauvinism," "book-burning," "colonialism," "demagogy," "witch hunt," "reactionary," "progressive," and "exploitation." Another "distinguishing mark" of "Communist language" was a "preference for long sentences." After some ridicule, the Army rescinded the pamphlet.
- 1958: The noted sportscaster Bill Stern (one of the heroes of my innocent youth) observed on the radio that the lack of interest in "big time" football at New York University, City College of New York, Chicago, and Harvard "is due to the widespread acceptance of Communism at the universities."
- 1960: U.S. General Thomas Power speaking about nuclear war or a first strike by the U.S.: "The whole idea is to *kill* the bastards! At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win!" The response from one of those present was: "Well, you'd better make sure that they're a man and a woman."
- 1966: The Boys Club of America is of course wholesome and patriotic. Imagine their horror when they were confused with the DuBois Clubs. (W.E.B. Du Bois had been a very prominent civil rights activist.) When the Justice Department required the DuBois Clubs to register as a Communist front group, good loyal Americans knew what to do. They called up the Boys Club to announce that they would no longer contribute any money, or to threaten violence against them; and sure enough an explosion damaged the national headquarters of the youth group in San Francisco. Then former Vice President Richard Nixon, who was national board chairman of the Boys Club, declared: "This is an almost classic example of Communist deception and duplicity. The 'DuBois Clubs' are not unaware of the confusion they are causing among our supporters and among many other good citizens."
- 1966: "Rhythm, Riots and Revolution: An Analysis of the Communist Use of Music, The Communist Master Music Plan," by David A. Noebel, published by Christian Crusade Publications, (expanded version of 1965 pamphlet: "Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles"). Some chapters: Communist Use of Mind Warfare ... Nature of Red Record Companies ... Destructive Nature of Beatle Music ... Communist Subversion of Folk Music ... Folk Music and the Negro Revolution ... Folk Music and the College Revolution
- 1968: William Calley, U.S. Army Lieutenant, charged with overseeing the

massacre of more than 100 Vietnamese civilians in My Lai in 1968, said some years later: "In all my years in the Army I was never taught that communists were human beings. We were there to kill ideology carried by – I don't know – pawns, blobs, pieces of flesh. I was there to destroy communism. We never conceived of old people, men, women, children, babies."

- 1977: Scientists theorized that the earth's protective ozone layer was being damaged by synthetic chemicals called chlorofluorocarbons. The manufacturers and users of CFCs were not happy. They made life difficult for the lead scientist. The president of one aerosol manufacturing firm suggested that criticism of CFCs was "orchestrated by the Ministry of Disinformation of the KGB."
- 1978: Life inside a California youth camp of the ultra anti-communist John Birch Society: Five hours each day of lectures on communism, Americanism and "The Conspiracy"; campers learned that the Soviet government had created a famine and spread a virus to kill a large number of citizens and make the rest of them more manageable; the famine led starving adults to eat their children; communist guerrillas in Southeast Asia jammed chopsticks into children's ears, piercing their eardrums; American movies are all under the control of the Communists; the theme is always that capitalism is no better than communism; you can't find a dictionary now that isn't under communist influence; the communists are also taking over the Bibles.
- The Reagan administration declared that the Russians were spraying toxic chemicals over Laos, Cambodia and Afghanistan – the so-called "yellow rain" – and had caused more than ten thousand deaths by 1982 alone, (including, in Afghanistan, 3,042 deaths attributed to 47 separate incidents between the summer of 1979 and the summer of 1981, so precise was the information). Secretary of State Alexander Haig was a prime dispenser of such stories, and President Reagan himself denounced the Soviet Union thusly more than 15 times in documents and speeches. The "yellow rain," it turned out, was pollen-laden feces dropped by huge swarms of honeybees flying far overhead.
- 1982: In commenting about sexual harassment in the Army, General John Crosby stated that the Army doesn't care about soldiers' social lives – "The basic purpose of the United States Army is to kill Russians," he said.
- 1983: The U.S. invasion of Grenada, the home of the Cuban ambassador is damaged and looted by American soldiers; on one wall is written "AA," symbol of the 82nd Airborne Division; beside it the message: "Eat shit, commie faggot." ... "I want to fuck communism out of this little island," says a marine, "and fuck it right back to Moscow."
- 1984: During a sound check just before his weekly broadcast, President Reagan spoke these words into the microphone: "My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you I have signed legislation to outlaw Russia, forever. We

begin bombing in five minutes." His words were picked up by at least two radio networks.

- 1985: October 29 BBC interview with Ronald Reagan: asked about the differences he saw between the U.S. and Russia, the President replied: "I'm no linguist, but I've been told that in the Russian language there isn't even a word for freedom." (The word is "svoboda.")
- 1986: Soviet artists and cultural officials criticized Rambo-like American films as an expression of "anti-Russian phobia even more pathological than in the days of McCarthyism." Russian filmmaker Stanislav Rostofsky claimed that on one visit to an American school "a young girl trembled with fury when she heard I was from the Soviet Union, and said she hated Russians."
- 1986: Roy Cohn, who achieved considerable fame and notoriety in the 1950s as an assistant to the communist-witch-hunting Sen. Joseph McCarthy, died, reportedly of AIDS. Cohn, though homosexual, had denied that he was and had denounced such rumors as communist smears.
- 1986: After American journalist Nicholas Daniloff was arrested in Moscow for "spying" and held in custody for two weeks, New York Mayor Edward Koch sent a group of 10 visiting Soviet students storming out of City Hall in fury. "The Soviet government is the pits," said Koch, visibly shocking the students, ranging in age from 10 to 18 years. One 14-year-old student was so outraged he declared: "I don't want to stay in this house. I want to go to the bus and go far away from this place. The mayor is very rude. We never had a worse welcome anywhere." As matters turned out, it appeared that Daniloff had not been completely pure when it came to his newsgathering.
- 1989: After the infamous Chinese crackdown on dissenters in Tiananmen Square in June, the U.S. news media was replete with reports that the governments of Nicaragua, Vietnam and Cuba had expressed their support of the Chinese leadership. Said the *Wall Street Journal*: "Nicaragua, with Cuba and Vietnam, constituted the only countries in the world to approve the Chinese Communists' slaughter of the students in Tiananmen Square." But it was all someone's fabrication; no such support had been expressed by any of the three governments. At that time, as now, there were few, if any, organizations other than the CIA which could manipulate major Western media in such a manner. [Sources for almost all of this section can be found in William Blum, *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire* (2005), chapter 12; or the author can be queried at bblum6@aol.com]

NOTE: It should be remembered that the worst consequences of anti-communism were not those discussed above. The worst consequences, the ultra-criminal consequences, were the abominable death, destruction, and violation of human rights that we know under various names: Vietnam, Chile, Korea, Guatemala,

Cambodia, Indonesia, Brazil, Greece, Afghanistan, El Salvador, and many others.

William Blum is an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <https://williamblum.org/> .]

The Tangled Threads of Russia-gate

Exclusive: Once a Washington groupthink takes hold, as it has in the fervent belief about Russia-gate, respect for facts and logic fly out the window since all these important people can't be wrong, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A curious feature about the Russia-gate “scandal” is that its proponents ignore the growing number of moments when their evidence undercuts their narrative. Instead, they press ahead toward a predetermined destination in much the way that true-believing conspiracy theorists are known to do.

For instance, The New York Times ran a story on Monday, entitled “Operative Offered Trump Campaign Access to Putin,” detailing how a conservative operative “told a Trump adviser that he could arrange a back-channel meeting between Donald J. Trump and Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian president, according to an email sent to the Trump campaign” – and apparently described to the Times by a helpful source on Capitol Hill.

The Times quoted the email from National Rifle Association member Paul Erickson to Trump campaign adviser Rick Dearborn as saying, “Putin is deadly serious about building a good relationship with Mr. Trump. ... [Putin] wants to extend an invitation to Mr. Trump to visit him in the Kremlin before the election.”

An NRA conference in Louisville, Kentucky, was supposed to be the location for the “first contact” between the Russians and the Trump campaign, according to the email.

The Times treated its new information as further confirmation of nefarious connections between the Trump campaign and the Russian government. Immediately after introducing this May 2016 email, which had the subject line, “Kremlin Connection,” the Times reprised the background of former FBI Director Robert

Mueller conducting a special-prosecutor investigation into “Russian interference in the election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign.”

Note how the Times’ reference to “Russian interference” was treated as flat fact although the Times still hedges on “possible collusion” between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign. Like much of the U.S. mainstream media, the Times no longer bothers to use “alleged” in front of “Russian interference” even though no solid evidence of a coordinated Kremlin effort has been presented.

But there is a bigger problem with this “scoop”: If the Russia-gate narrative were correct – that the Kremlin had identified Trump years earlier as a likely U.S. president and undertook a multi-year campaign to bribe and blackmail him to be Moscow’s Manchurian candidate or Putin’s “puppet” as Hillary Clinton charged – the Russians wouldn’t need some little-known “conservative operative” to serve as an intermediary in May 2016 to set up a back-channel meeting.

The Contradiction

In other words, assuming that the Times’ story is correct, the email suggests the opposite of the impression that the Times wants its readers to get. The email is either meaningless in that it led to no actual meeting or it contradicts the storyline about a longstanding Russian operation to plant a patsy in the White House.

Times reporter Nicholas Fandos noted that it was unclear what Dearborn did in response to this overture, although the Times reported that Dearborn had forwarded a similar proposal by Christian conservative activist Rick Clay to Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, who rebuffed the offer.

On Monday, I read the rest of the Times email story looking for some acknowledgement of the problems with its implied scenario, but found none. Fandos made references to other low-level efforts by Russians to make contact with Trump’s advisers (without noticeable success, I might add), but again these examples actually run counter to the image of Trump as the Kremlin’s prized chump.

If Putin had several years ago foreseen what no one else did – that Trump would become the U.S. president – then these ad hoc contacts with members of Trump’s entourage in 2016 would not have been needed.

The Times’ scoop parallels the story of the plea deal that Russia-gate prosecutors struck with low-level Trump foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos who admitted lying about his contacts with an obscure academic in Stirling, Scotland, who supposedly offered to be another intermediary between Trump’s team and the Kremlin.

According to court documents, Papadopoulos, a 30-year-old campaign aide, got to know a professor of international relations who claimed to have “substantial connections with Russian government officials,” with the professor identified in press reports as Joseph Mifsud, who is associated with the University of Stirling.

The first contact between Mifsud and Papadopoulos supposedly occurred in mid-March 2016 in Italy, with a second meeting in London on March 24 when the professor purportedly introduced Papadopoulos to a Russian woman whom the young campaign aide believed to be Putin’s niece, an assertion that Mueller’s investigators determined wasn’t true.

Trump, who then was under pressure for not having a foreign policy team, included Papadopoulos as part of a list drawn up to fill that gap, and Papadopoulos participated in a campaign meeting on March 31 in Washington at which he suggested a meeting between Trump and Putin, a prospect that other senior aides reportedly slapped down.

In other words, at least based on the reporting about the Dearborn email and the Papadopoulos overture, there is no reason to believe that Trump was colluding with Moscow or had any significant relationship at all.

If these developments point to anything, it is to the opposite; that Russia was fishing for some contacts with what – however implausibly – was starting to look like a possible future U.S. president, but with whom they were not well-connected.

Gotcha Moments

There have been similar problems with other Russia-gate “gotcha” moments, such as disclosures of a possible Trump hotel deal in Moscow with Mikhail Fridman of Russia’s Alfa Bank. Though Trump’s presumed financial tie-ins to Russian oligarchs close to Putin were supposed to be fundamental to the Russia-gate narrative, the outcome of the hotel deal turned out to be a big nothing.

One source knowledgeable about the proposed deal told me it fell apart because Trump was willing to put little on the table beyond the branding value of the Trump name. However, if Putin were actually trying to buy Trump’s loyalty, money presumably would have been no obstacle. Indeed, you would think that the more money used to line Trump’s pockets the better. But the hotel deal collapsed; there is no Trump hotel in Moscow.

Other Russia-gate cases are equally disconnected from what had been the original narrative about senior Russians spending years cultivating Trump as their Manchurian candidate.

The accusations against Trump's onetime campaign chief Paul Manafort focus on his alleged failure to report income from – and pay taxes on – work that he did for the elected government of Ukraine before any involvement in the Trump campaign.

Last week's guilty plea from former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn related to purportedly false statements and omissions that he made when questioned by FBI agents about calls to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the transition, i.e., after Trump had been elected.

Despite the breathless coverage on MSNBC and the Times' excited headlines about how the "inquiry grows," there remain other core problems for the narrative. No matter how often the U.S. mainstream media asserts the suspicion of Russian "hacking" of Democratic emails as flat fact, no solid proof has yet been presented – and the claim has been denied by both the Russian government and WikiLeaks, which published the key emails.

Sleight of Hand

The Times and other mainstream media outlets play their sleight of hand on this key point by asserting that "U.S. intelligence agencies" have "concluded" that Russian intelligence services "hacked" the emails from the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chief John Podesta, but that summary ignores the specifics.

First of all, by using this summary of the facts, the Times and other outlets continue to give the false impression that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the conclusion, a false claim that Hillary Clinton and the mainstream press have asserted over and over, although it is now clear that no such consensus ever existed.

Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified that the Jan. 6 report on alleged Russian interference was produced by "hand-picked" analysts from only three organizations: the FBI, CIA and National Security Agency.

And, even those "hand-picked" analysts stipulated that they were not asserting Russian guilt as fact but only as their best guess. They included the disclaimer: "Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents."

Even New York Times reporter Scott Shane initially noted the absence of evidence, writing: "What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies'

claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to 'trust us.'"

Former senior U.S. intelligence officials, including the NSA's ex-technical director William Binney, have raised further doubts about whether a "hack" occurred. Binney conducted tests on download speeds and determined that the extraction of one known batch of Democratic emails was not possible over the Internet, but did match the speed of a USB download onto a thumb drive, suggesting a leak from a Democratic insider.

So, rather than the many disparate strings of Russia-gate coming neatly together more than a year after last year's election, the various threads either are becoming hopelessly tangled or flying off in different directions.

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 Russia-gate Rationalizes Censorship

Special Report: The Russia-gate hysteria has spread beyond simply a strategy for neutralizing Donald Trump or even removing him from office into an excuse for stifling U.S. dissent that challenges the New Cold War, reports Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

At the end of October, I wrote an article for *Consortiumnews* about the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton's campaign paying for unvetted opposition research that became the basis for much of the disputed story about Russia allegedly interfering in the 2016 presidential election on the orders of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The piece showed that the Democrats' two paid-for sources that have engendered belief in Russia-gate are at best shaky. First was former British spy Christopher Steele's largely unverified dossier of second- and third-hand opposition research portraying Donald Trump as something of a Russian Manchurian candidate.

And the second was CrowdStrike, an anti-Putin private company, examining the DNC's computer server to dubiously claim discovery of a Russian "hack." In a

similar examination of an alleged hack of a Ukrainian artillery app, CrowdStrike also blamed Russia but used faulty data for its report that it was later forced to rewrite. CrowdStrike was hired after the DNC refused to allow the FBI to look at the server.

My piece also described the dangerous consequences of partisan Democratic faith in Russia-gate: a sharp increase in geopolitical tensions between nuclear-armed Russia and the U.S., and a New McCarthyism that is spreading fear – especially in academia, journalism and civil rights organizations – about questioning the enforced orthodoxy of Russia’s alleged guilt.

After the article appeared at *Consortiumnews*, I tried to penetrate the mainstream by then publishing a version of the article on the *HuffPost*, which was rebranded from the *Huffington Post* in April this year by new management. As a contributor to the site since February 2006, I am trusted by *HuffPost* editors to post my stories directly online. However, within 24 hours of publication on Nov. 4, *HuffPost* editors retracted the article without any explanation.

This behavior breaks with the earlier principles of journalism that the Web site claimed to uphold. For instance, in 2008, Arianna Huffington told radio host Don Debar that, “We welcome all opinions, except conspiracy theories.” She said: “Facts are sacred. That’s part of our philosophy of journalism.”

But Huffington stepped down as editor in August 2016 and has nothing to do with the site now. It is run by Lydia Polgreen, a former *New York Times* reporter and editor, who evidently has very different ideas. In April, she completely redesigned the site and renamed it *HuffPost*.

Before the management change, I had published several articles on the *Huffington Post* about Russia without controversy. For instance, *The Huffington Post* published my piece on Nov. 5, 2016, that predicted three days *before* the election that if Clinton lost she’d blame Russia. My point was reaffirmed by the campaign-insider book *Shattered*, which revealed that immediately after Clinton’s loss, senior campaign advisers decided to blame Russia for her defeat.

On Dec. 12, 2016, I published another piece, which the *Huffington Post* editors promoted, called, “Blaming Russia To Overturn The Election Goes Into Overdrive.” I argued that “Russia has been blamed in the U.S. for many things and though proof never seems to be supplied, it is widely believed anyway.”

After I posted an updated version of the *Consortiumnews* piece – renamed “On the Origins of Russia-gate” – I was informed 23 hours later by a Facebook friend that the piece had been retracted by *HuffPost* editors. As a reporter for mainstream media for more than a quarter century, I know that a newsroom rule is

that before the serious decision is made to retract an article the writer is contacted to be allowed to defend the piece. This never happened. There was no due process. A *HuffPost* editor ignored my email asking why it was taken down.

Support from Independent Media

Like the word “fascism,” “censorship” is an over-used and mis-used accusation, and I usually avoid using it. But without any explanation, I could only conclude that the decision to retract was political, not editorial.

I am non-partisan as I oppose both major parties for failing to represent millions of Americans’ interests. I follow facts where they lead. In this case, the facts led to an understanding that the Jan. 6 FBI/NSA/CIA intelligence “assessment” on alleged Russian election interference, prepared by what then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called “hand-picked” analysts, was based substantially on unvetted opposition research and speculation, not serious intelligence work.

The assessment even made the point that the analysts were not asserting that the alleged Russian interference was a fact. The report contained the disclaimer: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Under deadline pressure on Jan. 6, Scott Shane of *The New York Times* instinctively wrote what many readers of the report must have been thinking: “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

Yet, after the Jan. 6 report was published, leading Democrats asserted falsely that the “assessment” represented the consensus judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies – not just the views of “hand-picked” analysts from three – and much of the U.S. mainstream media began treating the allegations of Russian “hacking” as flat fact, not as an uncertain conclusion denied by both the Russian government and WikiLeaks, which insists that it did not get the two batches of Democratic emails from Russia.

(There is also dissent inside the broader U.S. intelligence community about whether an alleged “hack” over the Internet was even possible based on the download speeds of one known data extraction, which matched what was possible from direct USB access to a computer, i.e., a download onto a thumb drive presumably by a Democratic insider,)

However, because of the oft-repeated “17 intelligence agencies” canard and the mainstream media’s careless reporting, the public impression has built up that the accusations against Russia are indisputable. If you ask a Russia-gate believer today what their faith is based on, they will invariably point to the Jan. 6 assessment and mock anyone who still expresses any doubt.

For instance, an unnamed former CIA officer told *The Intercept* last month, “You’ve got all these intelligence agencies saying the Russians did the hack. To deny that is like coming out with the theory that the Japanese didn’t bomb Pearl Harbor.”

That the supposedly dissident *Intercept* would use this quote is instructive about how imbalanced the media’s reporting on Russia-gate has been. We have actual film of Japanese planes attacking Pearl Harbor and American ships burning – and we have the eyewitness accounts of thousands of U.S. soldiers and sailors. Yet, on Russia-gate, we only have the opinions of some “hand-picked” intelligence officials who themselves say that they are not claiming that their opinions are fact. No serious editor would allow a self-interested and unnamed source to equate the two in print.

In this groupthink atmosphere, it was probably easy for *HuffPost* editors to hear some complaints from a few readers and blithely decide to ban my story. However, before it was pulled, 125 people had shared it. Ray McGovern, a former CIA analyst and frequent contributor to *Consortiumnews*, then took up my cause, being the first to write about the *HuffPost* censorship on his blog. McGovern included a link to a .pdf file that I captured of the censored HuffPost story. It has since been republished on numerous other websites.

Journalist Max Blumenthal tweeted about it. British filmmaker and writer Tariq Ali posted it on his Facebook page. Ron Paul and Daniel McAdams interviewed me at length about the censorship on their TV program. *ZeroHedge* wrote a widely shared piece and someone actually took the time, 27 minutes and 13 seconds to be exact, to read the entire article on YouTube. I began a petition to *HuffPost*’s Polgreen to either explain the retraction or restore the article. It has gained more than 1,900 signatures so far. If a serious fact-check analysis was made of my article, it must exist and can and should be produced.

Watchdogs & Media Defending Censorship

Despite this support from independent media, a senior official at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, I learned, declined to take up my cause because he believes in the Russia-gate story. I also learned that a senior officer at the American Civil Liberties Union rejected my case because he too believes in Russia-gate. Both of these serious organizations were set up precisely to defend

individuals in such situations on principle, not preference.

In terms of their responsibilities for defending journalism and protecting civil liberties, their personal opinions about whether Russia-gate is real or not should be irrelevant. The point is whether journalists should be permitted to show skepticism toward this latest dubiously based groupthink. I fear that – amid the frenzy about Russia and the animosity toward Trump – concerns about careers and funding are driving these decisions, with principles brushed aside.

One online publication decidedly took the *HuffPost's* side. Steven Perlberg, a media reporter for *BuzzFeed*, asked the *HuffPost* why they retracted my article. While ignoring me, the editors issued a statement to *BuzzFeed* saying that “Mr. Lauria’s self-published” piece was “later flagged by readers, and after deciding that the post contained multiple factually inaccurate or misleading claims, our editors removed the post per our contributor terms of use.” Those terms include retraction for “any reason,” including, apparently, censorship.

Perlberg posted the *HuffPost* statement on Twitter. I asked him if he inquired of the editors what those “multiple” errors and “misleading claims” were. I asked him to contact me to get my side of the story. Perlberg totally ignored me. He wrote nothing about the matter. He apparently believed the *HuffPost* and that was that. In this way, he acquiesced with the censorship.

BuzzFeed, of course, is the sensationalist outlet that irresponsibly published the Steele dossier in full, even though the accusations – not just about Donald Trump but also many other individuals – weren’t verified. Then on Nov. 14, *BuzzFeed* reporter Jason Leopold wrote one of the most ludicrous of a long line of fantastic Russia-gate stories, reporting that the Russian foreign ministry had sent money to Russian consulates in the U.S. “to finance the election campaign of 2016.” The scoop generated some screaming headlines before it became clear that the money was to pay for Russian citizens in the U.S. to vote in the 2016 Duma election.

That Russia-gate has reached this point, based on faith and not fact, was further illustrated by a Facebook exchange I had with Gary Sick, an academic who served on the Ford and Carter national security staffs. When I pressed Sick for evidence of Russian interference, he eventually replied: “If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck...” When I told him that was a very low-bar for such serious accusations, he angrily cut off debate.

Part of this Russia-gate groupthink stems from the outrage – and even shame – that many Americans feel about Trump’s election. They want to find an explanation that doesn’t lay the blame on the U.S. citizenry or America’s current dysfunctional political/media process. It’s much more reassuring, in a

way, to blame some foreign adversary while also discrediting Trump's legitimacy as the elected president. That leaves open some hope that his election might somehow be negated.

And, so many important people and organizations seem to be verifying the Russia-gate suspicions that the theory must be true. Which is an important point. When belief in a story becomes faith-based or is driven by an intense self-interest, honest skeptics are pushed aside and trampled. That is the way groupthink works, as we saw in the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq when any doubts about Iraq possessing WMD made you a "Saddam apologist."

As the groupthink grows, the true-believers become disdainful of facts that force them to think about what they already believe. They won't waste time making a painstaking examination of the facts or engage in a detailed debate even on something as important and dangerous as a new Cold War with Russia.

This is the most likely explanation for the *HuffPost*'s censorship: a visceral reaction to having their Russia-gate faith challenged.

Why Critical News is Suppressed

But the *HuffPost*'s action is hardly isolated. It is part of a rapidly growing landscape of censorship of news critical of American corporate and political leaders who are trying to defend themselves from an increasingly angry population. It's a story as old as civilization: a wealthy and powerful elite fending off popular unrest by trying to contain knowledge of how the insiders gain at the others' expense, at home and abroad.

A lesson of the 2016 campaign was that growing numbers of Americans are fed up with three decades of neoliberal policies that have fabulously enriched the top tier of Americans and debased a huge majority of the citizenry. The population has likewise grown tired of the elite's senseless wars to expand their own interests, which these insiders try to conflate with the entire country's interests.

America's bipartisan rulers are threatened by popular discontent from both left and right. They were alarmed by the Bernie Sanders insurgency and by Donald Trump's victory, even if Trump is now betraying the discontented masses who voted for him by advancing tax and health insurance plans designed to further crush them and benefit the wealthy.

Trump's false campaign promises will only make the rulers' problem of a restless population worse. Americans are subjected to economic inequality greater than in the first Gilded Age. They are also subjected today to more war than in the

first Gilded Age. American rulers today are engaged in multiple conflicts following decades of post-World War II invasions and coups to expand their global interests.

People with wealth and power always seem to be nervous about losing both. So plutocrats use the concentrated media they own to suppress news critical of their wars and domestic repression. For example, almost nothing was reported about militarized police forces until the story broke out into the open in the Ferguson protests and much of that discontent has been brushed aside more recently.

Careerist journalists readily acquiesce in this suppression of news to maintain their jobs, their status and their lifestyles. Meanwhile, a growing body of poorly paid freelancers compete for the few remaining decent-paying gigs for which they must report from the viewpoint of the mainstream news organizations and their wealthy owners.

To operate in this media structure, most journalists know to excise out the historical context of America's wars of domination. They know to uncritically accept American officials' bromides about spreading democracy, while hiding the real war aims.

Examples abound: America's role in the Ukraine coup was denied or downplayed; a British parliamentary report exposing American lies that led to the destruction of Libya was suppressed; and most infamously, the media promoted the WMD hoax and the fable of "bringing democracy" to Iraq, leading to the illegal invasion and devastation of that country. A recent example from November is a *60 Minutes* report on the Saudi destruction of Yemen, conspicuously failing to mention America's crucial role in the carnage.

I've pitched numerous news stories critical of U.S. foreign policy to a major American newspaper that were rejected or changed in the editorial process. One example is the declassified Defense Intelligence Agency document of August 2012 that accurately predicted the rise of the Islamic State two years later.

The document, which I confirmed with a Pentagon spokesman, said the U.S. and its Turkish, European and Gulf Arab allies, were supporting the establishment of a Salafist principality in eastern Syria to put pressure on the Syrian government, but the document warned that this Salafist base could turn into an "Islamic State."

But such a story would undermine the U.S. government's "war on terrorism" narrative by revealing that the U.S.-backed strategy actually was risking the expansion of the jihadists' foothold in Syria. The story was twice rejected by

my editors and has received attention almost entirely – if not exclusively – on much-smaller independent news Web sites.

Another story I pitched in June 2012, just a year into the Syrian war, about Russia's motives in Syria being guided by a desire to defeat the growing jihadist threat there, was also rejected. Corporate media wanted to keep the myth of Russia's "imperial" aims in Syria alive. I had to publish the article outside the U.S., in a South African daily newspaper.

In September 2015 at the U.N. General Assembly, Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed my story about Russia's motives in Syria to stop jihadists from taking over. Putin invited the U.S. to join this effort as Moscow was about to launch its military intervention at the invitation of the Syrian government. The Obama administration, still insisting on "regime change" in Syria, refused. And the U.S. corporate media continued promoting the myth that Russia intervened to recapture its "imperial glory."

It was much easier to promote the "imperial" narrative and to ignore Putin's clear explanation to French TV channel TF1, which was not picked up by American media.

"Remember what Libya or Iraq looked like before these countries and their organizations were destroyed as states by our Western partners' forces?" Putin said. "These states showed no signs of terrorism. They were not a threat for Paris, for the Cote d'Azur, for Belgium, for Russia, or for the United States. Now, they are the source of terrorist threats. Our goal is to prevent the same from happening in Syria."

Why Russia Is Targeted

So, where are independent-minded Western journalists to turn if their stories critical of the U.S. government and corporations are suppressed?

The imperative is to get these stories out – and Russian media has provided an opening for some. This has presented a new problem for the plutocracy. The suppression of critical news in their corporate-owned media is no longer working if it's seeping out in Russian media (and through some dissident Western news sites on the Internet).

The solution has been to brand the content of the Russian television network, RT, as "propaganda" since it presents facts and viewpoints that most Americans have been kept from hearing. But just because these views – many coming from Americans and other Westerners – are not what you commonly hear on the U.S. mainstream media doesn't make them "propaganda" that must be stigmatized and silenced.

As a Russian-government-financed English-language news channel, RT also gives a Russian perspective on the news, the way CNN and *The New York Times* give an American perspective and the BBC a British one. American mainstream journalists, from my experience, arrogantly deny suppressing news and believe they present a universal perspective, rather than a narrow American view of the world.

The viewpoints of Iranians, Palestinians, Russians, North Koreans and others are never fully reported in the Western media although the supposed mission of journalism is to help citizens understand a frighteningly complex world from multiple points of view. It's impossible to do so without those voices included. Routinely or systematically shutting them out also dehumanizes people in those countries, making it easier to gain popular support to go to war against them.

Russia is scapegoated by charging that RT or *Sputnik* are sowing divisions in the U.S. by focusing on issues like homelessness, racism, or out-of-control militarized police forces, as if these divisive issues didn't already exist. The U.S. mainstream media also seems to forget that the U.S. government has engaged in at least 70 years of interference in other countries' elections, foreign invasions, coups, planting stories in foreign media and cyber-warfare.

Now, these American transgressions are projected onto Moscow. There's also a measure of self-reverence in this for "successful" people with a stake in an establishment that underpins the elite, demonstrating how wonderfully democratic they are compared to those ogres in Russia.

The overriding point about the "Russian propaganda" complaint is that when America's democratic institutions, including the press and the electoral process, are crumbling under the weight of corruption that the American elites have created or maintained, someone else needs to be blamed. Russia is both an old and a new scapegoat.

The Jan. 6 intelligence assessment on alleged Russian election meddling is a good example of how this works. A third of its content is an attack on RT for "undermining American democracy" by reporting on Occupy Wall Street, the protest over the Dakota pipeline and, of all things, holding a "third party candidate debates."

According to the Jan. 6 assessment, RT's offenses include reporting that "the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a 'sham.'" RT also "highlights criticism of alleged US shortcomings in democracy and civil liberties." In other words, reporting on newsworthy events and allowing third-party candidates to express their opinions undermine democracy.

The report also says all this amounts to “a Kremlin-directed campaign to undermine faith in the US Government and fuel political protest,” but it should be noted those protests by dissatisfied Americans are against privileges of the wealthy and the well-connected, a status quo that the intelligence agencies routinely protect.

There are also deeper reasons why Russia is being targeted. The Russia-gate story fits neatly into a geopolitical strategy that long predates the 2016 election. Since Wall Street and the U.S. government lost the dominant position in Russia that existed under the pliable President Boris Yeltsin, the strategy has been to put pressure on getting rid of Putin to restore a U.S. friendly leader in Moscow. There is substance to Russia’s concerns about American designs for “regime change” in the Kremlin.

Moscow sees an aggressive America expanding NATO and putting 30,000 NATO troops on its borders; trying to overthrow a secular ally in Syria with terrorists who threaten Russia itself; backing a coup in Ukraine as a possible prelude to moves against Russia; and using American NGOs to foment unrest inside Russia before they were forced to register as foreign agents. Russia wants Americans to see this perspective.

Accelerated Censorship in the Private Sector

The Constitution prohibits government from prior-restraint, or censorship, though such tactics were imposed, largely unchallenged, during the two world wars. American newspapers voluntarily agreed to censor themselves in the Second World War before the government dictated it.

In the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur said he didn’t “desire to reestablish wartime censorship” and instead asked the press for self-censorship. He largely got it until the papers began reporting American battlefield losses. On July 25, 1950, “the army ordered that reporters were not allowed to publish ‘unwarranted’ criticism of command decisions, and that the army would be ‘the sole judge and jury’ on what ‘unwarranted’ criticism entailed,” according to a Yale University study on military censorship.

After excellent on-the-ground reporting from Vietnam brought the war home to America, the military reacted by instituting, initially in the first Gulf War, serious control of the press by “embedding” reporters from private media companies which accepted the arrangement, much as World War II newspapers censored themselves.

It is important to realize that the First Amendment does not apply to private companies, including the media. It is not illegal for them to practice

censorship. I never made a First Amendment argument against the *HuffPost*, for instance. However, under pressure from Washington, even in peacetime, media companies can do the government's dirty work to censor or limit free speech for the government.

In the past few weeks, we've seen an acceleration of attempts by corporations to inhibit Russian media in the U.S. Both Google and Facebook, which dominate the Web with more than 50 percent of ad revenue, were at first resistant to government pressure to censor "Russian propaganda." But they are coming around.

Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Alphabet, Google's parent company, said on Nov. 18 that Google would "derank" articles from RT and Sputnik in the Google searches, making the stories harder for readers to find. The billionaire Schmidt claimed Russian information can be "repetitive, exploitative, false, [or] likely to have been weaponized," he said. That is how factual news critical of U.S. corporate and political leadership is seen, as a weapon.

"My own view is that these patterns can be detected, and that they can be taken down or deprioritized," Schmidt said.

Though Google would effectively be hiding news produced by RT and *Sputnik*, Schmidt is sensitive to the charge of censorship, even though there's nothing legally to stop him.

"We don't want to ban the sites. That's not how we operate," Schmidt said cynically. "I am strongly not in favor of censorship. I am very strongly in favor of ranking. It's what we do."

But the "deranking" isn't only aimed at Russian sites; Google algorithms also are taking aim at independent news sites that don't follow the mainstream herd – and thus are accused of spreading Russian or other "propaganda" if they question the dominant Western narratives on, say, the Ukraine crisis or the war in Syria. A number of alternative websites have begun reporting a sharp fall-off of traffic directed to their sites from Google's search engines.

Responding to a deadline from Congress to act, Facebook on Nov. 22 announced that it would inform users if they have been "targeted" by Russian "propaganda." Facebook's help center will tell users if they liked or shared ads allegedly from the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency, which supposedly bought \$100,000 in ads over a two-year period, with more than half these ads coming after the 2016 U.S. election and many not related to politics.

(The \$100,000 sum over two years compares to Facebook's \$27 billion in annual revenue. Plus, Facebook only says it "believes" or it's "likely" that the ads came from that firm, whose links to the Kremlin also have yet to be proved.)

Facebook described the move as “part of our ongoing effort to protect our platforms and the people who use them from bad actors who try to undermine our democracy.” Congress wants more from Facebook, so it will not be surprising if users will eventually be told when they’ve liked or shared an RT report in the future.

While the government can’t openly shut down a news site, the Federal Communications Commission’s upcoming vote on whether to deregulate the Internet by ending net neutrality will free private Internet companies in the U.S. to further marginalize Russian and dissident websites by slowing them down and thus discouraging readers from viewing them.

Likewise, as the U.S. government doesn’t want to be openly seen shutting down RT operations, it is working around the edges to accomplish that.

After the Department of Justice forced, under threat of arrest, RT to register its employees as foreign agents under the *Foreign Agents Registration Act*, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nuaert said last Tuesday that “FARA does not police the content of information disseminated, does not limit the publication of information or advocacy materials, and does not restrict an organization’s ability to operate.” She’d earlier said that registering would not “impact or affect the ability of them to report news and information. We just have them register. It’s as simple as that.”

Then on Wednesday the Congressional press office stripped RT correspondents of their Capitol Hill press passes, citing the FARA registration. “The rules of the Galleries state clearly that news credentials may not be issued to any applicant employed ‘by any foreign government or representative thereof.’ Upon its registration as a foreign agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), RT Network became ineligible to hold news credentials,” read the letter to RT.

Even so, Russia-gate faithful ignore these aggressive moves and issue calls for even harsher action. After forcing RT to register, Keir Giles, a Chatham House senior consulting fellow, acted as though it never happened. He said in a Council on Foreign Relations Cyber Brief on Nov. 27: “Although the Trump administration seems unlikely to pursue action against Russian information operations, there are steps the U.S. Congress and other governments should consider.”

I commented on this development on RT America. It would also have been good to have the State Department’s Nuaert answer for this discrepancy about the claim that forced FARA registrations would not affect news gathering when it already has. My criticism of RT is that they should be interviewing U.S. decision-makers

to hold them accountable, rather than mostly guests outside the power structure. The decision-makers could be called out on air if they refuse to appear.

Growing McCarthyite Attacks

Western rulers' wariness about popular unrest also can be seen in the extraordinary and scurrilous attack on the Canadian website globalresearch.ca. The attack started with a chilling study by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization into the relatively obscure website, followed by a vicious hit piece on Nov. 18 by the *Globe and Mail*, Canada's largest newspaper. The headline was: "How a Canadian website is being used to amplify the Kremlin's view of the world."

"What once appeared to be a relatively harmless online refuge for conspiracy theorists is now seen by NATO's information warfare specialists as a link in a concerted effort to undermine the credibility of mainstream Western media – as well as the North American and European public's trust in government and public institutions," the *Globe and Mail* reported. "Global Research is viewed by NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence – or StratCom – as playing a key accelerant role in helping popularize articles with little basis in fact that also happen to fit the narratives being pushed by the Kremlin, in particular, and the Assad regime."

I've not agreed with everything I've read on the site. But it is a useful clearinghouse for alternative media. Numerous *Consortiumnews* articles are republished there, including a handful of mine. But the site's typical sharing and reposting on the Internet is seen by NATO as a plot to undermine the Free World.

Drawing from the NATO report, *The Globe and Mail's* denunciation of this website continued: "It uses that reach to push not only its own opinion pieces, but 'news' reports from little-known websites that regularly carry dubious or false information. At times, the site's regular variety of international-affairs stories is replaced with a flurry of items that bolster dubious reportage with a series of opinion pieces, promoted on social media and retweeted and shared by active bots."

The newspaper continued, "'That way, they increase the Google ranking of the story and create the illusion of multi-source verification,' said Donara Barojan, who does digital forensic research for [StratCom]. But she said she did not yet have proof that Global Research is connected to any government."

This sort of smear is nothing more than a blatant attack on free speech by the most powerful military alliance in the world, based on the unfounded conviction

that Russia is a fundamental force for evil and that anyone who has contacts with Russia or shares even a part of its multilateral world view is suspect.

High-profile individuals are now also in the crosshairs of the neo-McCarthyite witchhunt. On Nov. 25 *The Washington Post* ran a nasty hit piece on Washington Capitals' hockey player Alex Ovechkin, one of the most revered sports figures in the Washington area, simply because he, like 86 percent of other Russians, supports his president.

"Alex Ovechkin is one of Putin's biggest fans. The question is, why?" ran the headline. The story insidiously implied that Ovechkin was a dupe of his own president, being used to set up a media campaign to support Putin, who is under fierce and relentless attack in the United States where Ovechkin plays professional ice hockey.

"He has given an unwavering endorsement to a man who U.S. intelligence agencies say sanctioned Russian meddling in last year's presidential election," write the Post reporters, once again showing their gullibility to U.S. intelligence agencies that have provided no proof for their assertions (and even admit that they are not asserting their opinion as fact).

Less prominent figures are targeted too. John Kiriakou, a former CIA agent who blew the whistle on torture and was jailed for it, was kicked off a panel in Europe on Nov. 10 by a Bernie Sanders supporter who refused to appear with Kiriakou because he co-hosts a show on *Radio Sputnik*.

Then last week, Reporters Without Borders, an organization supposedly devoted to press freedom, tried to kick journalist Vanessa Beeley off a panel in Geneva to prevent her from presenting evidence that the White Helmets, a group that sells itself as a rescue organization inside rebel-controlled territory in Syria, has ties to Al Qaeda. The Swiss Press Club, which hosted the event, resisted the pressure and let Beeley speak.

Russia-gate's Hurdles

Much of this spreading global hysteria and intensifying censorship traces back to Russia-gate. Yet, it remains remarkable that the corporate media has failed so far to prove any significant Russian interference in the U.S. election at all. Nor have the intelligence agencies, Congressional investigations and special prosecutor Robert Mueller. His criminal charges so far have been for financial crimes and lying to federal authorities on topics unrelated to any "collusion" between the Trump campaign and Russians to "hack" Democratic emails.

There may well be more indictments from Mueller, even perhaps a complaint about Trump committing obstruction of justice because he said on TV that he fired

Comey, in part, because of the “Russia thing.” But Trump’s clumsy reaction to the “scandal,” which he calls “fake news” and a “witch hunt,” still is not proof that Putin and the Russians interfered in the U.S. election to achieve the unlikely outcome of Trump’s victory.

The Russia-gate faithful assured us to wait for the indictment of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, briefly Trump’s national security adviser. But again there was nothing about pre-election “collusion,” only charges that Flynn had lied to the FBI or omitted details about two conversations with the Russian ambassador regarding policy matters during the presidential transition, i.e., *after* the election.

And, one of those conversations related to trying unsuccessfully to comply with an Israeli request to get Russia to block a United Nations resolution censuring Israel’s settlements on Palestinian land.

As journalist Yasha Levine tweeted: “So the country that influenced US policy through Michael Flynn is Israel, not Russia. But Flynn did try to influence Russia, not the other way around. Ha-ha. This is the smoking gun? What a farce.”

There remain a number of key hurdles to prove the Russia-gate story. First, convincing evidence is needed that the Russian government indeed did “hack” the Democratic emails, both those of the DNC and Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta – and gave them to WikiLeaks. And, further that somehow the Trump campaign was involved in aiding and abetting this operation, i.e., collusion.

There’s also the question of how significant the release of those emails was anyway. They did provide evidence that the DNC tilted the primary campaign in favor of Clinton over Sanders; they exposed the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from the voters; and they revealed some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation and its foreign donations.

But – even if the Russians were involved in providing that information to the American people – those issues were not considered decisive in the campaign. Clinton principally pinned her loss on FBI Director James Comey for closing and then reopening the investigation into her improper use of a private email server while Secretary of State. She also spread the blame to Russia (repeating the canard about “seventeen [U.S. intelligence] agencies, all in agreement”), Bernie Sanders, the inept DNC and other factors.

As for the vaguer concerns about some Russian group “probably” buying \$100,000 in ads, mostly after Americans had voted, as a factor in swaying a \$6 billion election, is too silly to contemplate. That *RT* and *Sputnik* ran pieces critical

of Hillary Clinton was their right, and they were hardly alone. *RT* and *Sputnik*'s reach in the U.S. is minuscule compared to *Fox News*, which slammed Clinton throughout the campaign, or for that matter, MSNBC, CNN and other mainstream news outlets, which often expressed open disdain for Republican Donald Trump but also gave extensive coverage to issues such as the security concerns about Clinton's private email server.

Another vague Russia-gate suspicion stemming largely from Steele's opposition research is that somehow Russia is bribing or blackmailing Trump because Trump has done some past business with Russians. But there are evidentiary and logical problems with these theories, since some lucrative deals fell through (and presumably wouldn't have if Trump was being paid off) – and no one, including the Russians, foresaw Trump's highly improbable election as U.S. President years earlier.

Some have questioned how Trump could have supported detente with Russia without being beholden to Moscow in some way. But Jeffery Sommers, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin, wrote a convincing essay explaining adviser Steve Bannon's influence on Trump's thinking about Russia and the need for cooperation between the two powers to solve international problems.

Without convincing evidence, I remain a Russia-gate skeptic. I am not defending Russia. Russia can defend itself. However, amid the growing censorship and this dangerous new McCarthyism, I am trying to defend America – from itself.

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Cherry-picking Toward War with Iran

In trying to rally American hostility toward Iran, CIA Director Pompeo and other U.S. officials are engaging in the same kind of distorted intelligence that led to the catastrophic Iraq invasion, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Although nobody knows exactly where Donald Trump intends to go with his campaign of seeking confrontation with Iran, his administration already has provided

disconcerting parallels with the techniques an earlier U.S. administration used in selling its launching of a war against Iraq. Among these techniques is the cherry-picking of intelligence not to inform policy-making or to enlighten the public but instead to inculcate false perceptions among the public and thereby to muster support for a policy already chosen.

The parallels have become remarkably close as the Trump administration has tried to get people to believe there is some sort of cooperation and common purpose between Iran and Al Qaeda. The President made this insinuation in his speech on Iran in October. Then his CIA director, Mike Pompeo, ordered a tendentious re-exploitation of already exploited documents captured in the raid at Abbottabad, Pakistan, that killed Osama bin Laden.

This time the purpose was to find any possible connection between bin Laden's group and Iran. Pompeo took the highly unusual step of giving an advance look at the selected documents to an advocacy organization: the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a leader of efforts to kill the agreement that limits Iran's nuclear program.

FDD duly did its part in the insinuation by highlighting a single document that it depicted as suggesting some sort of Iranian assistance to Al Qaeda. This was despite the fact that the thrust of the Abbottabad documents as far as Iran is concerned is that Tehran was in conflict, not cooperation, with Al Qaeda. This remains the judgment of experts who follow the terrorist group closely.

Even the very document FDD highlighted did not say what those highlighting it contended it said. It held no evidence of any Iranian assistance to Al Qaeda.

This entire effort to manipulate public perceptions has been remarkably similar to the efforts by promoters of the Iraq War to use whatever scraps they could find to suggest that there was, in George W. Bush's words, an "alliance" between the Iraqi regime and Al Qaeda that in fact never existed.

More Cherry-picking

Now Colum Lynch and Dan De Luce at *Foreign Policy* report that the White House, in the latest bit of cherry-picking, "is pressing to declassify intelligence allegedly linking Iran to short-range ballistic missile attacks by Yemeni insurgents against Saudi Arabia."

Our antennae ought to be raised very high regarding the motives and reality lying behind anything that comes out of this attempt to manipulate public perceptions.

Imagine that, in a parallel universe that Donald Trump did not inhabit, the

White House was sincerely trying to help the public understand whatever was the foreign policy problem at hand. The problem in this case is the Yemeni civil war, which originated with discontent among northern tribes about how their interests were treated by the central government. The education of the public would note that large-scale intervention led by Saudi Arabia – which has a long history of conflict with, and demographic and security concerns about, Yemen – turned the civil war into bigger carnage. An aerial assault by Saudi Arabia and its ally the United Arab Emirates, together with a Saudi-imposed blockade, has further turned Yemen into a humanitarian catastrophe.

Meanwhile, some Iranian assistance reportedly has gone from Iran to the principal northern tribe, known as the Houthis. By any reasonable account, the physical impact of any such aid is minor compared to the Saudi military offensive. The lesson to the public might note that the Houthis have been among the staunchest adversaries of Al Qaeda's branch in Yemen. It might also note that the Houthis have been allied for most of the war with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who during more than three decades in power became known as America's man in Yemen.

The Saudi air war has devastated Yemen. Is it any surprise that those now in power in the Yemeni capital of Sana (i.e., the Houthi-led coalition) would try to get off a few shots at Saudi Arabia in response? Should we even condemn this effort to strike back, any more than the much bigger strikes in the other direction?

The Trump administration's efforts to highlight this one facet of a much larger war serve two of its objectives. One is to continue its overall campaign to pin on Iran all blame for any mayhem in the Middle East. The other is to distract as much attention as possible from the indefensible U.S. support (which began during the previous administration) for the Saudi offensive against Yemen. Meanwhile, the cherry-picking conveys to the public a false impression of what the Yemeni war is all about and what has caused it to take the shape that it has.

Lynch and De Luce report that the effort by the Trump White House to make public cherry-picked intelligence about Houthi-fired missiles is intended to influence not just a domestic audience but also opinion at the United Nations. Here is yet another parallel with the selling of the Iraq War. Specifically, it evokes the presentation to the Security Council in February 2003 by Secretary of State Colin Powell, who – against Powell's own better judgment and contrary to the judgment of the U.S. intelligence community – laid out some scraps intended to persuade people that the non-existent alliance between Iraq and Al Qaeda really existed.

Such misuse of intelligence means foreign policy is being made on the basis of badly mistaken premises. The public sales job makes the misunderstanding all the worse, both because misperceptions are infused into a larger audience and because salesmen who are strongly committed to their cause – as was the case with the chief promoters of the Iraq War – come to believe their own propaganda.

The misuse also represents a subversion of the proper function of the intelligence agencies. Intelligence is supposed to inform policymakers to help them in making decisions they have not yet made. The agencies do not exist to be tools to sell publicly policy that already has been made.

The Trump administration is not the first to commit such misuse, but the misuse fits a pattern of how Trump has handled other government departments and agencies. That pattern, featuring many fox-running-the-henhouse senior appointments, has been one of subverting rather than executing the mission of agencies.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a [blog post](#) at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

The Scalp-Taking of Gen. Flynn

Exclusive: The Russia-gate prosecutors have taken the scalp of ex- National Security Adviser (and retired Lt. Gen.) Flynn for lying to the FBI. But this case shows how dangerously far afield this “scandal” has gone, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Russia-gate enthusiasts are thrilled over the guilty plea of President Trump's former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn for lying to the FBI about pre-inauguration conversations with the Russian ambassador, but the case should alarm true civil libertarians.

What is arguably most disturbing about this case is that then-National Security Adviser Flynn was pushed into a perjury trap by Obama administration holdovers at the Justice Department who concocted an unorthodox legal rationale for subjecting Flynn to an FBI interrogation four days after he took office, testing Flynn's recollection of the conversations while the FBI agents had transcripts

of the calls intercepted by the National Security Agency.

In other words, the Justice Department wasn't seeking information about what Flynn said to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak – the intelligence agencies already had that information. Instead, Flynn was being quizzed on his precise recollection of the conversations and nailed for lying when his recollections deviated from the transcripts.

For Americans who worry about how the pervasive surveillance powers of the U.S. government could be put to use criminalizing otherwise constitutionally protected speech and political associations, Flynn's prosecution represents a troubling precedent.

Though Flynn clearly can be faulted for his judgment, he was, in a sense, a marked man the moment he accepted the job of national security adviser. In summer 2016, Democrats seethed over Flynn's participation in chants at the Republican National Convention to "lock her [Hillary Clinton] up!"

Then, just four days into the Trump presidency, an Obama holdover, then-acting Attorney General Sally Yates, primed the Flynn perjury trap by coming up with a novel legal theory that Flynn – although the national security adviser-designate at the time of his late December phone calls with Kislyak – was violating the 1799 Logan Act, which prohibits private citizens from interfering with U.S. foreign policy.

But that law – passed during President John Adams's administration in the era of the Alien and Sedition Acts – was never intended to apply to incoming officials in the transition period between elected presidential administrations and – in the past 218 years – the law has resulted in no successful prosecution at all and thus its dubious constitutionality has never been adjudicated.

Stretching Logic

But Yates extrapolated from her unusual Logan Act theory to speculate that since Flynn's publicly known explanation of the conversation with Kislyak deviated somewhat from the transcript of the intercepts, Flynn might be vulnerable to Russian blackmail.

Yet, that bizarre speculation would require that the Russians first would have detected the discrepancies; secondly, they would have naively assumed that the U.S. intelligence agencies had not intercepted the conversations, which would have negated any blackmail potential; and thirdly, the Russians would have to do something so ridiculously heavy-handed – trying to blackmail Flynn – that it would poison relations with the new Trump administration.

Yates's legal theorizing was so elastic and speculative that it could be used to justify subjecting almost anyone to FBI interrogation with the knowledge that their imperfect memories would guarantee the grounds for prosecution based on NSA intercepts of their communications.

Basically, the Obama holdovers concocted a preposterous legal theory to do whatever they could to sabotage the Trump administration, which they held in fulsome disdain.

At the time of Flynn's interrogation, the Justice Department was under the control of Yates and the FBI was still under President Obama's FBI Director James Comey, another official hostile to the Trump administration who later was fired by Trump.

The Yates-FBI perjury trap also was sprung on Flynn in the first days of the Trump presidency amid reverberations of the massive anti-Trump protests that had arisen across the country in support of demands for a "#Resistance" to Trump's rule.

Flynn also had infuriated Democrats when he joined in chants at the Republican National Convention of "lock her up" over Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server and other alleged offenses. So, in targeting Flynn, there was a mix of personal payback and sabotage against the Trump administration.

The Legal Construct

The two-page complaint against Flynn, made public on Friday, references false statements to the FBI regarding two conversations with Kisylak, one on Dec. 22, 2016, and the other on Dec. 29, 2016.

The first item in the complaint alleges that Flynn did not disclose that he had asked the Russian ambassador to help delay or defeat a United Nations Security Council vote censuring Israel for building settlements on Palestinian territory.

The New York Times reported on Friday that Russia-gate investigators "learned through witnesses and documents that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked the Trump transition team to lobby other countries to help Israel, according to two people briefed on the inquiry.

"Investigators have learned that Mr. Flynn and Mr. Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, took the lead in those efforts. Mr. Mueller's team has emails that show Mr. Flynn saying he would work to kill the vote, the people briefed on the matter said," according to the Times.

Breaking with past U.S. precedents, President Obama had decided not to veto the resolution criticizing Israel, choosing instead to abstain. However, the censure resolution carried with Russian support, meaning that whatever lobbying Flynn and Kushner undertook was unsuccessful.

But the inclusion of this Israeli element shows how far afield the criminal Russia-gate investigation, headed by former FBI Director Robert Mueller, has gone. Though the original point of the inquiry was whether the Trump team colluded with Russians to use “hacked” emails to defeat Hillary Clinton’s campaign, the criminal charge against Flynn has nothing to do with election “collusion” but rather President-elect Trump’s aides weighing in on foreign policy controversies during the transition. And, the first initiative was undertaken at the request of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, not Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The second item, cited by Mueller’s prosecutors, referenced a Dec. 29 Flynn-Kislyak conversation, which received public attention at the time of Flynn’s Feb. 13 resignation after only 24 days on the job. That phone call touched on Russia’s response to President Obama’s decision to issue new sanctions against the Kremlin for the alleged election interference.

The complaint alleges that Flynn didn’t mention to the FBI that he had urged Kislyak “to refrain from escalating the situation” and that Kislyak had subsequently told him that “Russia had chosen to moderate its response to those sanctions as a result of his request.”

The Dec. 29 phone call occurred while Flynn was vacationing in the Dominican Republic and thus he would have been without the usual support staff for memorializing or transcribing official conversations. So, the FBI agents, with the NSA’s transcripts, would have had a clearer account of what was said than Flynn likely had from memory. The content of Flynn’s request to Kislyak also appears rather uncontroversial, asking the Russians not to overreact to a punitive policy from the outgoing Obama administration.

In other words, both of the Flynn-Kislyak conversations appear rather unsurprising, if not inconsequential. One was taken at the behest of Israel (which proved ineffective) and the other urged the Kremlin to show restraint in its response to a last-minute slap from President Obama (which simply delayed Russian retaliation by several months).

Double Standards

While Flynn’s humiliation has brought some palpable joy to the anti-Trump “Resistance” – one more Trump aide being taken down amid renewed hope that this

investigation will somehow lead to Trump's resignation or impeachment – many of the same people would be howling about trampled civil liberties if a Republican bureaucracy were playing this game on a Democratic president and his staff.

Indeed, in the turnabout-is-fair-play department, there is some equivalence in what is happening over Russia-gate to what the Republicans did in the 1990s exploiting their control of the special-prosecutor apparatus in the first years of Bill Clinton's presidency when interminable investigations into such side issues as his Whitewater real-estate deal and the firing of the White House travel office staff plagued the Clinton administration.

Similarly, Republicans seized on the deaths of four U.S. diplomatic personnel on Sept. 11, 2012, in Benghazi, Libya, to conduct a series of lengthy investigations to tarnish Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's tenure and raise questions about her judgment. Democrats understandably called these attacks partisan warfare in legal or investigative garb.

What I have heard from many Hillary Clinton supporters in recent months is that they don't care about the unfairness of the Russia-gate process or the dangerous precedents that such politicized prosecutions might set. They simply view Trump as such a danger that he must be destroyed at whatever the cost.

Yet, besides the collateral damage inflicted on mid-level government officials such as retired Lt. Gen. Flynn facing personal destruction at the hands of federal prosecutors with unlimited budgets, there is this deepening pattern of using criminal law to settle political differences, a process more common in authoritarian states.

As much as the Russia-gate enthusiasts talk about how they are upholding "the rule of law," there is the troubling appearance that the law is simply being used to collect the scalps of political enemies.

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

US Bows to Israeli/Saudi Alliance in Blaming Iran

Exclusive: Contrary to common belief, Israel supported Iran's Islamic Republic

for more than a decade in the 1980s before shifting its favors to Saudi Arabia in the 1990s and making sure the U.S. followed suit, recalls Ted Snider.

By Ted Snider

At first, American officials couldn't believe it. In 1993, the Israelis began pressuring the Clinton administration to view Iran as the greatest global threat. Only a short time earlier, in the 1980s, Israel had been cooperating with the Iranians militarily and selling them weapons to fight Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War.

Back then, the Israelis were Iran's best lobbyists in Washington, pushing the Reagan administration to talk to Iran, to sell arms to Iran, and even to ignore Iran's tough talk on Israel. In that process, Israel was aided by a group of staunchly pro-Israeli officials within the Reagan administration whom we now know as the neoconservatives.

In 1981, just months after Iran had held 52 American diplomatic personnel hostage for 444 days, senior State Department officials Robert McFarlane and Paul Wolfowitz were advocating on behalf of the Israeli desire to sell Iran weapons. That initiative, which was continued by McFarlane when he became President Reagan's National Security Advisor, ultimately led to the Iran-Contra scandal of 1986 when Reagan's secret approval of U.S. arms shipments to Iran became public.

Yet, even in the wake of that scandal and the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the neoconservatives who remained influential under Reagan's successor, President George H.W. Bush, pressed ahead with the goal of getting the U.S. to warm its relations with Iran. Iraq's defeat at the hands of the U.S. military and its allies in the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91 further reduced the Arab threat to Israel's security and encouraged more thinking about a possible U.S.-Iranian détente.

The Bush-I administration's 1991 "National Security Strategy of the United States" said the U.S. was open to "an improved relationship with Iran," a country that a 1991 National Intelligence Estimate said was "turning away from revolutionary excesses . . . toward more conventional behavior."

However, in 1993, with the Clinton administration in power, the Israelis changed their tune, urging the U.S. government to find Iran lurking behind every terrorist attack, every conflict and every threat.

There appear to have been several factors leading to this Israeli switch – from the fact that the Cold War was over and thus Arab states that had relied on

Soviet weaponry were weakened; that Iran-backed Hezbollah was challenging Israel's military occupation of southern Lebanon; and that Israel could no longer profit from Iran's desperate need for weapons (with the war with Iraq over and Iran's treasury depleted) while the Arab oil states offered a more lucrative opportunity for both geopolitical and financial gain.

Hooked on the Money

Israeli leadership had found the billions of dollars from arms sales to Iran useful in maintaining Israel's large military/intelligence infrastructure as well as Israel's development of Jewish settlements inside Palestinian territories on the West Bank. With that cash source gone, Israel began recalculating its longstanding Periphery Strategy, which had called for countering Arab pressure from close-in states by cultivating relations with non-Arab regional powers on the periphery, such as Iran and Turkey.

There were also two other seismic events that altered the geopolitical landscape. The Cold War was over and Saddam Hussein's Iraq had been humiliated in the Persian Gulf War. While the Israelis saw both events as positive, there were unintended consequences. The end of the Cold War meant the exit of the Soviet Union from the Middle East: that left Israel's traditional Arab enemies even more enfeebled and the U.S. government less worried about losing influence in the oil-rich region. Iran also emerged as relatively stronger than Iraq due to Iraq's failed invasion of Iran and its catastrophic defeat after its invasion of Kuwait.

Israel's 1992 elections also brought Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and the Labor Party to power, raising the possibility of finally reaching a peace accord with the Palestinians and thus the possibility of more normalized relations with the Arab world. In turn, that raised the potential for more lucrative arrangements with oil-rich sheikdoms by, in effect, renting out the Israel Lobby to the Sunni-ruled Gulf states so they could push their historic conflict with the Shiites whose power base was Iran.

"There was a feeling in Israel that because of the end of the Cold War, relations with the U.S. were cooling and we needed some new glue for the alliance," Efraim Inbar of the Begin-Sadat Center told Trita Parsi. "And the new glue was radical Islam."

But it was a very selective kind of radical Islam: not the kind Saudi Arabia was financing and exporting through Wahhabi fundamentalism and violent jihadists like those in Al Qaeda, but Iran's radical Shiite Islam. Selling Iran as the number one global terror threat gave birth to a new Middle East enemy that replaced the Soviet Union and reinflated Israel's value to the U.S. in the

region. "Iran," Inbar went on to explain, "was radical Islam."

A New Alliance

For the first time, an alliance between Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United States became possible with Iran as the designated enemy. The Israeli-Saudi relationship has evolved mostly in secret over the past couple of decades but has popped into view in recent years as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his inner circle have emphasized the common interests – especially animosity toward Iran – that they share with Saudi Arabia.

Netanyahu has recently referred to this Israeli-Saudi alliance when he said that Iran was driving Israel into cooperative arrangements with what he called "the modern Sunni states." He referred to "a new alliance between Israel and Islamic states. ... The good news is that the other guys are getting together with Israel as never before. It is something that I would have never expected in my lifetime."

Nine months ago, Netanyahu delivered the same message when he said "for the first time in my lifetime, and for the first time in the life of my country, Arab countries in the region do not see Israel as an enemy, but, increasingly, as an ally."

Though the Israeli-Saudi relationship is rarely spoken of out loud, Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz admitted recently that Israel "has ties that are . . . partly covert with many Muslim and Arab countries." Saudi Arabia was the only one he specifically named. According to Reuters, he said those ties are fueled by "common concerns over Iran."

But there are other foundations for this relationship. For years, Saudi Arabia sought to buy influence in Washington's policy circles regarding the Middle East but was largely unsuccessful because Israel had cornered that market and Israel's influential American supporters demonized lobbyists, academics and others who took Saudi money. Eventually, it became clear to Saudi Arabia that it made more sense to rent out Israel's sophisticated lobbying apparatus rather than to fight it.

Investigative journalist Robert Parry reported that Saudi money helped seal this Israel-Saudi alliance, with the Saudis giving Israel billions of dollars and Israel reciprocating by giving Saudi Arabia added influence in Washington.

But Official Washington was surprised in the 1990s when Israel's turnabout began – and Iran went from being a misunderstood nation tilting toward moderation to the world's leading sponsor of terrorism. Despite some bewilderment, U.S. policymakers soon readjusted their rhetoric as the legendary Israeli influence

operations carried the day. Shiite Iran became the new terror threat, even after the 9/11 attacks that were organized by Al Qaeda, a Sunni fundamentalist group associated with Saudi Arabia.

The Islamic State

The gap between the facts on the ground – the recognition that Al Qaeda and Islamic State remain the real chief terror threats from radical Islam – and the propaganda of principally blaming Iran for terrorism has led to a quandary for U.S./Israeli propagandists. They want to focus Americans' fury on Iran and its allies, Syria and Hezbollah, but it is Saudi-and-Gulf-connected terror groups, such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State, that were chopping off heads of innocents and sponsoring terrorist attacks in the U.S. and Europe.

That disconnected reality explains why America's response to the emergence of the Islamic State can best be characterized as confused and bizarre. Though the Obama administration claimed it was taken by surprise by the Islamic State's emergence in Iraq and Syria, it really wasn't. Rather, policymakers had sought to persuade the American public on the need for a "regime change" conflict in Syria, an Iranian ally. This strategy went back years.

A WikiLeaks-released cable dated Dec. 13, 2006, and written by the charge d'affaires of the U.S. embassy in Damascus to the Secretary of State recommended that the U.S. "coordinate more closely with" Egypt and Saudi Arabia in a policy to weaken President Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria and "to play on Sunni fears of Iranian influence." The cable also recognized that Islamist extremists were "certainly a long-term threat" to the Syrian government.

Over the years, there was little change in this inconvenient truth that jihadists were playing a crucial role in achieving these geopolitical goals.

For instance, in a December 2009 cable, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that "Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban . . . and other terrorist groups."

By Aug. 12, 2012, the U.S. government knew explicitly that Islamic extremists were the engine in the Syrian insurgency. A classified Defense Intelligence Agency Information Intelligence Report unambiguously declares that "The salafist [sic], the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI [al-Qaeda in Iraq, later ISIS and the Islamic State] are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria."

Section 8.C. of the report astonishingly predicts that "If the situation unravels there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared salafist principality in eastern Syria." Section 8.D.1. of the report goes on specifically to say that "ISI could also declare an Islamic State through its

union with other terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria.”

So, the U.S. government knew that the Islamic extremists drove the Syrian insurgency that Washington and its regional allies were supporting. U.S. intelligence analysts also had a surprisingly good idea what the possible outcome of that support was.

Yet, to advance the regional goals of the Israeli-Saudi tandem – i.e., the overthrow of the Syrian government because of its ties to Iran – the U.S. government was, in effect, supporting the very terrorists the war on terror was meant to eradicate.

Selling Al Qaeda

At times, senior Israeli officials made clear their preferences for Sunni extremists over more moderate Arabs associated with Shiite-ruled Iran. For instance, in September 2013, then-Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren told the Jerusalem Post that Israel favored the Sunni extremists over Syria’s largely secular President Bashar al-Assad.

“The greatest danger to Israel is by the strategic arc that extends from Tehran, to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc,” Oren said in [the interview](#). “We always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren’t backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran.” He said this was the case even if the “bad guys” were affiliated with Al Qaeda.

Oren reiterated this position in June 2014 at an Aspen Institute conference. Speaking as a former ambassador, Oren [said](#) Israel would even prefer a victory by the Islamic State, which was then massacring captured Iraqi soldiers and beheading Westerners, than the continuation of the Iranian-backed Assad in Syria.

“From Israel’s perspective, if there’s got to be an evil that’s got to prevail, let the Sunni evil prevail,” said Oren, who is now a member of the Knesset and part of Netanyahu’s government.

Other senior Israelis have expressed similar sentiments. Sima Shine, who is in charge of Iran for Israel’s Ministry of Strategic Affairs, urged Assad’s removal even if that might turn Syria over to extremists. “The ‘devil we know’ is worse than the devil we don’t,” she [said](#) in June 2013. “If Bashar remains in power, that would be a huge achievement for Iran.”

So, in 2014, when Islamic State jihadists advanced through Syria and Iraq and knocked on the door of Lebanon, their success should not have come as a surprise

to President Obama and other U.S. policymakers. Today's Iraq, Syria and Lebanon have in common that they are Iran's three principal allies in the region.

In other words, the Islamic State's interests largely corresponded to those of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the U.S.: isolating and weakening Iran. Only the Islamic State's shocking excesses of videotaped beheadings of Americans and other captives – as well as its military successes inside Iraq – forced President Obama's hand in committing U.S. forces to stop the Islamic State onslaught.

Obsessed with Assad

Still, America has long been bent on removing Assad from Syria. The coincidence of Islamic State and American interests in this regard is revealed in section 8.C of the DIA report: “there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared salafist principality in eastern Syria (Hasaka and Der Zor), and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran).”

So, the Islamic State's advance into this region was consistent with American (and more to the point, Israeli and Saudi) interests because these Sunni extremists would block the supply lines from Iran to Lebanon's Hezbollah. Thus, initially at least, the U.S. government acquiesced to the Islamic State and Al Qaeda's Nusra Front taking the lead in damaging or destroying Iran's allies in Syria.

And Iran suspected as much. According to Iran expert Trita Parsi, the Iranians believed that the initial relaxed approach by the U.S. government toward the Islamic State and Al Qaeda's Nusra Front was because those militants were the point of the spear against pro-Iranian Shiite influences in not only Syria but Iraq and Lebanon as well.

So, the Saudi government provided the “clandestine financial and logistic support to Isis and other radical groups in the region,” according to a leaked Hillary Clinton email on Sept. 17, 2014.

Less than a month later, on Oct. 2, 2014, Vice President Biden told a seminar at Harvard's Kennedy School that “the Saudis, the emirates ... poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of military weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad except that the people who were being supplied were Al Nusra and Al Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis.”

The DIA report also named the Gulf States as among the “supporting powers” of the Syrian opposition. And at a May 2015 meeting between President Obama and the

Princes of the Gulf Cooperation Council, according to David Ignatius of the *Washington Post*, “Obama and other US officials urged Gulf leaders who are funding the opposition to keep control of their clients, so that a post-Assad regime isn’t controlled by extremists from the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.”

However, with the Israel lobby redirecting Official Washington’s ire toward Iran, more political space was created for these Saudi-connected terror groups to carry out the regime change missions in Syria and elsewhere.

And Israel didn’t just prefer a victory in Syria by the extremists of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. United Nations observers in the Golan Heights reported witnessing cooperation between Israel and Syrian rebels, and Israel has frequently bombed Syrian targets (and here and here).

Netanyahu also reported that Israel has hit Hezbollah forces fighting against the Islamic State and Al Qaeda in Syria dozens of times. Recently, it has been revealed that Israel also provided funding, food and fuel to Syrian rebels fighting Assad.

Lebanon’s Crisis

But the Syrian “regime change” strategy didn’t work. With help from Iran and Hezbollah and Russia’s intervention in 2015, Assad and his army not only survived but routed the Islamic State, Al Qaeda’s Nusra and other jihadists from major urban strongholds. Instead of Iran losing an ally in the region, Iran emerged with a stronger alliance and greater influence.

This setback, however, has not changed the Israeli-Saudi priorities; it has only made them more intense. As the outcome in Syria became more apparent, the anti-Iran gun sight pivoted to Lebanon. The recent confusing events in Lebanon, like the earlier ones in Syria, are best made sense of by looking through the gun barrel that is targeted on Iran.

On Nov. 4, after being summoned to Saudi Arabia, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri unexpectedly and mysteriously resigned. Hariri’s resignation came just one day after a meeting in Beirut with Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior foreign policy advisor to Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, that was reportedly very positive. Velayati praised Hariri and reaffirmed Iran’s support for his coalition government.

Yet, a day later, speaking from Saudi Arabia, Hariri claimed his resignation was catalyzed by fear of an Iranian-Hezbollah assassination. But the Lebanese army said “it had not uncovered any plans for assassinations in Lebanon.” Neither had the army. So, why resign?

The clue may be provided by Saudi State Minister for Gulf Affairs, Thamer al-Sabhan, who expressed Saudi Arabia's desire for "toppling Hezbollah." He promised that "The coming developments will definitely be astonishing." He said the desire was not just his own, and that people "will see what will happen in the coming days."

The Saudis said Hariri resigned because Hezbollah had "hijacked" his coalition government. Al-Sabhan called Hezbollah "the Party of Satan."

Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, said that the resignation was "imposed on Prime Minister Hariri" by the Saudis. Nasrallah said Hezbollah did not want Hariri to resign, having been a part of Hariri's coalition government for almost a year. Lebanese President, Michel Aoun, seemed to share Nasrallah's suspicion, insisting that he would not accept Hariri's resignation until Hariri returned to Lebanon from Saudi Arabia because his "resignation must be voluntary."

In Lebanon, there was the suspicion that Hariri was held under house arrest. On Nov. 10, President Aoun told a meeting of foreign ambassadors that Hariri had been "kidnapped."

Now, having finally returned to Lebanon after a French intervention brought him to Paris, Hariri met with President Aoun who asked him "to temporarily suspend submitting [his resignation] and to put it on hold ahead of further consultations on the reasons for it." Hariri agreed.

Israel seems to have applauded Saudi Arabia's Lebanese action and reaffirmed the Iranian motivation behind it. Prime Minister Netanyahu said that "The resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri and his statements are a wake-up call for the international community to act against Iranian aggression."

Netanyahu also made a rare public acknowledgement of the Israeli-Saudi alliance when he said that Iran was driving Israel into cooperative arrangements with what he called "the modern Sunni states," referring to "a new alliance between Israel and Islamic states." According to reporting by Israel's Channel 10, a leaked classified cable from the Israeli foreign ministry to Israeli ambassadors reveals that Israel ordered them to support Saudi Arabia's efforts and to rally support for Hariri's resignation.

Iran has also suggested that President Trump and the United States approve of this Lebanese intervention. The resignation of the Lebanese Prime Minister came days after Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner visited Saudi Arabia on a trip that was not made known publicly.

Yemen's Tragedy

While this new alliance took aim at Iran by targeting Assad in Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon, it also has targeted a Shiite spin-off sect, the Houthis in Yemen. Since 2015, the Saudis have been bombing and blockading Yemen, the Middle East's poorest country. But on Nov. 5, Saudi Arabia expressed outrage after intercepting a ballistic missile fired by Houthi forces in Yemen toward Riyadh. The Saudis accused Iran of providing the missile and ordering the attack – and called this an “act of war” by Iran and Hezbollah.

General Mohammad Ali Jafari, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, called the charge against Iran “baseless,” as did Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, Gholamali Khoshroo. Even Saudi officials were calling the missile a Yemeni Burqan 2H missile when it was intercepted. The Houthis said they fired the missile in response to the long-running Saudi bombardment that included a recent attack that killed 26 people.

Despite these denials of Iranian responsibility and the context of Saudi Arabia's air war, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Nikki Haley called on the U.N. to hold Iran accountable for violating U.N. Security Council resolutions by supplying the missile. She called on the U.N. to take “necessary action” against Iran.

The U.S. government has consistently rationalized the Saudi bombardment of Yemen as necessary to thwart Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf. U.S. accusations about Iran allegedly supplying the Houthis with weapons hang precariously on an “assessment” that Iran has used fishing boats to smuggle weapons into Yemen.

However, according to investigative journalist Gareth Porter, the U.S. was never able to produce any evidence for the link between Iran and the Houthis because the boats were stateless, and their destination was Somalia, not Yemen. An earlier ship was, indeed, Iranian but was not really carrying any weapons.

The Houthis also are allied with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh who maintains control over the army, so the Houthis could get all the weapons they need from local arms supplies, including military bases stocked with American-made weapons.

And just as Iran does not substantially arm the Houthis, so it does not control them. In fact, they have proven to be beyond Tehran's efforts to influence them. In 2014, the Iranians specifically discouraged the Houthis from capturing the Yemeni capital, Sanaa. However, the Houthis captured the city anyway, demonstrating Iran's lack of control.

A U.S. intelligence official told *The Huffington Post* that “It is wrong to think of the Houthis as a proxy force for Iran.” Yemen specialist Gabriele vom Bruck

has called Iran's influence over the Houthis "trivial." She said the Houthis want to be independent, not controlled by Iran: "I don't think the Iranians have influence in their decision-making." To the extent that Iran is involved in Yemen at all, that involvement came as a result of the devastating Saudi air war.

Dating back to the Obama administration, the U.S. government has made the Saudi aerial bombardment of Yemen possible. The U.S. refuels the Saudi bombers in flight, supplies the bombs and provides targeting intelligence.

This U.S. complicity in what is widely regarded as a humanitarian catastrophe has continued into the Trump administration. A White House statement as recently as Nov. 24 reaffirmed U.S. support for Saudi Arabia, declaring: "We remain committed to supporting Saudi Arabia and all our Gulf partners against the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' aggression and blatant violations of international law. Backed by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Houthi rebels have used destabilizing missile systems to target Saudi Arabia."

The statement again reveals, not only the alliance with Saudi Arabia and the silence about its devastating bombing attacks, but the strategy of turning Yemen's human tragedy into another excuse to blame Iran. The Iranian foreign ministry said the White House statement "clearly and without question proves America's participation and responsibility in the atrocities committed by Saudi Arabia in Yemen".

Bahrain & Qatar

Washington's Saudi-Israeli-supplied blinders on the Middle East carry over to other regional conflicts, too. For instance, in 2011, protesters in Bahrain demanded a true constitutional monarchy, the resignation of the Prime Minister, greater civil liberties and a real elected parliament. Though Bahrain has a parliament, it is actually governed by the U.S.-backed dictator, King Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa, whose family has ruled Bahrain for over 200 years. The prime minister, the king's uncle, is the longest reigning prime minister in the world, in power now for nearly 40 years.

Bahrain's population is about 70 percent Shiite, though the ruling family, the government, the army and the police are all Sunni. The Shia have long been victims of discrimination. And the government maintains its control through repression, including the use of torture. Bahrain is located between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran and is seen by the U.S. as a strategically located check on Iranian influence and power.

Though the Obama administration touted itself as a big proponent of the "Arab

Spring” and its promised democratization, Washington sided with the Bahraini dictators against the majority of the Bahraini people.

Days after mass arrests and beatings of protesters, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, went through with his planned visit to Bahrain where he reaffirmed the U.S.’s strong commitment to its military relationship with Bahrain and called Bahrain’s response to the protests “very measured.” Mullen stressed the U.S.-Bahrain “partnership” and “friendship.”

On the same day, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates also gave full support to the Khalifa dictatorship. The U.S. continued to support the regime and to call for “stability” and “reform”: two words that are code for standing by dictatorships.

To help put down the protests in Bahrain, 1,000 Saudi troops invaded Bahrain across a causeway that connects the countries. The Obama administration remained silent.

Qatar also has suffered under the new Saudi-Israeli alliance because Qatar has pursued a more independent foreign policy than Saudi Arabia likes and now faces a Saudi-led siege as a consequence. Former British diplomat Alastair Crooke explained that Qatar’s principal sin is seeking peaceful coexistence with Iran.

When Washington asked Saudi Arabia to make reasonable proposals for the termination of the siege, Saudi Arabia included the demand that Qatar break all ties with Iran.

In other words, many of the most important events of the past several years are best explained as attempts to weaken Iran by weakening its proxies or allies or by setting up situations that appear to implicate Iran to justify hostility toward Iran.

A problem, however, has been that the major terrorist groups that have infuriated the American public are not Iranian-linked Shiites but rather Saudi-connected fundamentalist Sunnis. Still, the claim that “Iran is the chief sponsor of terrorism” has become a rote and routine refrain from both Republicans and Democrats – as well as the U.S. mainstream media.

Much as Russia now gets blamed for every negative turn in Western democracies, Iran is the all-purpose villain whenever anything goes wrong in the Middle East. Yet, to understand these conflicts and crises, it is best to view them through the perspective of the hostility that the Saudi-Israeli alliance directs toward Iran and the acquiescence of U.S. governments, regardless of which party is in power.

Ted Snider writes on analyzing patterns in US foreign policy and history.

Russia-gate Inquisitors Subpoena Journalist

The Russia-gate frenzy is reaching into the ranks of non-mainstream journalists with the House Intelligence Committee's subpoena of Pacifica's Randy Credico, who compares this witch-hunt to the McCarthy era, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The House Intelligence Committee, as part of its Russia-gate investigation, has issued a subpoena demanding the testimony of journalist-activist-and-satirist Randy Credico presumably because he produced a series on WikiLeaks founder and editor Julian Assange, who oversaw the publication of leaked Democratic Party emails in 2016.

"Joe McCarthy is back," said Credico, who traced the committee's actions "to my 14- part series on Assange, 'Julian Assange: Countdown to Freedom,' which includes Wikileaks founder, Julian Assange, his mom, and some of the most significant U.S. government intelligence agency whistle blowers in modern history. They [the Russia-gate investigators] also abhor my recent visits with Assange [at the Ecuadorian embassy in London], where he is still in exile after five and a half years."

Credico, a journalistic contributor to the Flashpoints program on Pacifica Radio, was served the subpoena through his lawyer Martin Stolar in New York City. The subpoena was dated Nov. 27 and followed a request for Credico's "voluntary" testimony that he rebuffed. The subpoena demands Credico's appearance on Capitol Hill on Dec. 15.

A letter dated Nov. 9 from Rep. Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, in effect, demanded Credico's "voluntary" cooperation with the panel's "bipartisan investigation into Russian active measures directed at the 2016 US election."

Schiff also requested "the preservation and production of all documents, records, electronically-stored information, recordings, data and tangible things, including but not limited to graphs, charts, photographs, images and other documents, regardless of form other than those widely available (e.g. newspaper articles) related to the committee's investigation, your interview and

any ancillary matters.”

Credico told the Flashpoints show that he would not give testimony voluntarily and, if subpoenaed, he would not cooperate with the House Intelligence Committee’s Russia-gate investigation. His lawyer informed the committee of Credico’s position and was told that Credico would receive a subpoena to compel his testimony.

I spoke with Credico in New York City on the morning of Nov. 27 before the subpoena arrived.

Dennis Bernstein: I am looking at a letter dated Nov. 9, 2017. It says, “Dear Mr. Credico, as part of its bipartisan investigation into Russian active measures directed at the 2016 US election, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence requires that you participate in a voluntary, transcribed interview at the committee offices.” What is this letter about and what is your response?

Randy Credico: I have no idea what they want from me specifically. I did a 14-part series on Julian Assange.

Dennis Bernstein: I want to read a little more from this letter. It says, “We respectfully ask that you produce to the committee by no later than November 24 your availability for the interview during the time identified above.” You’re not going, are you?

Randy Credico: I have declined to voluntarily testify. The counsel for the committee told my lawyer that I would be subpoenaed.

Dennis Bernstein: Will you respond to a subpoena?

Randy Credico: I am very reluctant to give credence to a broad-based witch hunt such as this.

Dennis Bernstein: Let me read on: “This letter also requests preservation and production of all documents, records, electronically-stored information, recordings, data and tangible things, including but not limited to graphs, charts, photographs, images and other documents, regardless of form other than those widely available (e.g. newspaper articles) related to the committee’s investigation, your interview and any ancillary matters.”

Randy Credico: It certainly sounds like a form letter. Look, I don’t like Trump anymore than anyone else. There are ways that they can get him legally, but to use this Russia-gate thing is a false premise. They are throwing the net too wide and they are spending a lot of money on this. Meanwhile, people are being

deported to Haiti, to El Salvador, we're not taking care of business in Puerto Rico. We have this new tax bill which is about to destroy the middle class and the poor. We have two and a half million people in prison. These are the issues they should be talking about in Congress, but they are not.

Look, they have yet to request an interview with Julian Assange. They know they are not going to get anything that is satisfactory to them and that this would force their hand.

Dennis Bernstein: We depended on you, Randy, to report on the New York Police Department during very violent times. You made the current mayor of New York swear that he would put an end to stop-and-frisk.

Randy Credico: I hope I got the word out not only about stop-and-frisk but about the horrible criminal justice system in New York City. This is the Deep South. We always focus on Alabama and Mississippi but the same thing goes on here. The judges are 95% white and the prosecutors are 95% white and mostly male. When I ran for governor I focused on Attica and Sing-Sing and all these other dungeons that should be closed. I learned a lot from Bill Kunstler about focusing on where you can be impactful.

Dennis Bernstein: Why have you devoted so much time to Julian Assange's story?

Randy Credico: It would be the same thing if they were trying to snuff your voice out. This man is an important journalist. A lot of journalists in the corporate media have abandoned him. He has suffered so much, his family has suffered, he hasn't been able to see his kids for five years. And yet he continues to publish, even in his present circumstances.

Dennis Bernstein: Finally, what is the significance of this kind of congressional witch hunt?

Randy Credico: This is a replay of the 1950s, of the Palmer Raids earlier. This is a very significant moment. A person can still be blacklisted. And it is being done by Democrats! What bothers me most is the fact that you have people from the intelligence community who get to testify publicly and without challenge. People like me have to do it privately.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
