

# Man Bites Dog: NYT Does Journalism

**Exclusive:** When the Trump administration blamed Cuba for a “sonic attack” on U.S. diplomats, a New York Times reporter did something unusual for his newspaper: he tried objectively to assess the evidence, as Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

I often criticize The New York Times, Washington Post and other major mainstream media outlets for a very simple reason: they deserve it – especially for their propagandistic, unprofessional and reckless coverage of foreign crises.

But there are occasional moments when some reporter at an MSM outlet behaves responsibly and those instances should be noted at least under the classic definition of “news” – something that is unexpected – or as the old saying goes, “dog bites man is not news; man bites dog is news.”

One such moment occurred earlier this month when a Times science editor assigned science reporter Carl Zimmer to look into the mysterious illnesses affecting U.S. diplomats in the recently reopened U.S. embassy in Cuba.

About two dozen U.S. diplomats supposedly were suffering hearing loss and cognitive difficulties due to what has been labeled a “sonic attack.” The Trump administration blamed the Cuban government even though the Cubans claimed to be mystified and would seem to have little motive for disrupting a long-sought détente with Washington along with the expected boon to their tourist industry. President Trump “retaliated” by expelling 15 Cuban diplomats.

Zimmer recounted the background to his story in a reporter’s notebook piece on Oct. 6: “On Tuesday, Michael Mason, my editor on the science desk, shot me an email. Would I consider writing an article about ‘this sonic “attack” business’? I knew exactly what he was talking about. I had been vaguely puzzled about this business for months.”

## Checking Out the Story

Zimmer then did what professional journalists are supposed to do: he started contacting impartial experts to get their assessments of what was possible, what

was likely, and what didn't make sense.



“I decided to try to find something out – not as a political reporter but as a science writer,” Zimmer wrote in the sidebar that accompanied [his news article](#). “I usually base my ideas on scientific research that has matured far enough that it is beginning to get published in peer-reviewed journals. ... I knew that an article on sonic weapons would be very different from the ones I usually write. ...

“I learned there was not even an official medical report. I decided to try to draw some boundary lines for all the speculation swirling around the story. Is the idea of a sonic attack plausible, based on what scientists know about sound and the human body? ...

“So I hit the phone. I didn't want to talk with just anyone – I looked for people with lots of experience in research that had direct bearing on this question. I started with Timothy Leighton, whose job title at Southampton University is, literally, professor of ultrasonics and underwater acoustics. Better yet, Dr. Leighton has published the only thorough recent scientific review of the effects of environmental ultrasound that I'm aware of.

“When I interviewed Dr. Leighton and others, I made clear I didn't expect them to solve this mystery; I just wanted them to reconcile the question with what we know through science. ...

“The consensus was that it was extremely unlikely the diplomats were the victims of a sonic weapon. It would be necessary to rule out less exotic possibilities before taking that one seriously.”

Yet, despite this skeptical scientific consensus among experts, Zimmer noted, “The notion [of a sonic attack] has ricocheted like mad around the press, making it possible for readers to assume that [the sonic attack explanation] has been generally accepted by experts. But it most certainly has not. I'll be curious to see if articles like mine can put the brakes on the speculation.”

### **Suspecting Putin**

Well, Zimmer could have read the Times [editorial](#) in the same day's (Oct. 6) newspaper for a partial answer. While critical of the Trump administration for

rushing to judgment in blaming the Cuban government and expelling 15 diplomats, the editorial concluded: “The sonic attacks on Americans are too serious to be used for cynical political ends.”

So much for the editorial writers reading their own newspaper, but clearly they were driven by a higher agenda. A New York Times editorial about some unpleasant topic anywhere in the world these days wouldn't be complete without taking the opportunity to blame Russia or, in this case, at least suggest Russia as a possible villain in the mystery.

The Times wrote: “Other parties, most notably Russia, must also figure as suspects: President Vladimir Putin would probably welcome a setback to American-Cuban relations.”

Yes, every possible conspiracy theory must somehow circle back to Vladimir Putin, a real-life Dr. Evil. When he is not plotting how to flood Facebook with images of puppies or manipulate Americans in their pursuit of Pokemon Go characters, he is building secret sonic weapons to disorient U.S. diplomats in Havana and provoke President Trump to act rashly (when we all know how cool and collected Trump normally is).

But I thought the earlier conspiracy theory was that Putin had secret videos of Trump cavorting with prostitutes in a five-star Moscow hotel – knowing years ago that Trump would surely become the U.S. president – and thus all Putin would have needed to do was call Trump up and tell his Manchurian Candidate to ship home some Cuban diplomats.

Why would the evil Putin go to the trouble of inventing a sonic weapon when simply pulling Trump's puppet strings would have done the trick? Perhaps it's just that Putin is so evil that he delights in dastardly tricks for the sheer sadistic joy of hurting people. Yes, that must be the ticket!

Once again, the Times editors seem to be onto something – if only they could rein in their one journalist who still seems to think it's necessary to report a story by seeking out genuine experts who don't have some ax to grind or some lucrative government contract to audition for. It saves so much time and energy to just blame Putin.

**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).**

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# The Indonesia Massacre's Historic Message

**Exclusive:** The U.S. mainstream media's credulity toward today's Official Narratives is especially troubling given the false storylines from the past, such as the cover-up of Washington's hand in the Indonesia massacres, as Jonathan Marshall describes.

By Jonathan Marshall

Fifty-four years after the assassination of President Kennedy, historians are still waiting to see whether President Trump will approve the final release of secret records related to that crime by the Oct. 26 deadline set by a unanimous Congress in 1992 with the JFK Records Act.

Senior Republicans in both the House and Senate have called on the President to "reject any claims for the continued postponement" of declassification. "Transparency in government is critical not only to ensuring accountability; it's also essential to understanding our nation's history," said Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Just days before the scheduled release of JFK records, the National Archives – with much less fanfare – declassified nearly 30,000 pages of documents from the U.S. embassy in Jakarta from 1964 to 1968. That might seem in contrast like an obscure matter of interest only to a handful of specialists, but the period covers what the CIA once called "one of the worst mass murders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century": the massacre of half a million Indonesians, and the arrest of a million more, by the country's army and its supporters in the name of wiping out Communism.

Whether and how the U.S. government abetted that bloodbath is as "essential to understanding our nation's history" as learning what transpired two years earlier on the streets of Dallas. Indeed, the two events are related, as the murder of Kennedy prompted a hardline shift in U.S. policy to support a military coup in Indonesia. Yet despite the worthy new release of documents, Washington has been neither transparent nor accountable when it comes to the Indonesia massacre of 1965-66.

In particular, the U.S. government has yet to declassify any but a handful of operational files from the CIA or Defense Department. As a result, "we have only the barest outlines of what covert campaigns the CIA was undertaking and what assistance the United States was providing," historian Bradley Simpson, founder

and director of the Indonesia and East Timor Documentation Project, told me.

### **The Prelude to a Slaughter**

The frightful massacres in Indonesia followed years of growing social, economic and political strife. Following a disastrously botched CIA coup attempt in 1958, Indonesia's leader and independence hero, Sukarno, treated Washington with deep suspicion. All through the early 1960s, Sukarno adopted an increasingly strident nationalist stance. He flirted with Soviet Russia and even with Communist China while he threatened military confrontations with the Dutch and British, legacy colonial powers. At home, he encouraged the rising influence of Indonesia's communist party, the PKI.

President Kennedy tried to work with Sukarno. One of JFK's first acts as president was to invite the Indonesian leader to the White House. Kennedy's assassination, however, "unquestionably changed the direction of U.S. policy toward Indonesia," writes Simpson in his authoritative account of U.S.-Indonesia relations, *Economists With Guns*. Whereas Kennedy was willing to expend political capital to work with Sukarno, President Lyndon Johnson dismissed him as a "bully" who, if appeased one day, would "run you out of your bedroom the next night."

Administration leaders increasingly looked to Indonesia's U.S.-trained-and-supplied army as a political alternative to Sukarno.

In the fall of 1964, as relations with Jakarta soured, the CIA proposed a covert action program to "build up strength" among anti-communist groups and instigate "internal strife between communist and non-communist elements." The Agency raised the possibility of fomenting riots or other disorders that "might force the Army to assume broad powers in restoring order."

U.S. and other Western intelligence agencies began planting stories about PKI plots to assassinate army leaders and import weapons from Communist China, elements of a "strategy of tension" that the Agency would later use in Chile to provoke the 1973 military coup.

The Johnson administration curbed economic aid – intensifying the country's economic crisis – while continuing to train and assist the military. "When Sukarno leaves the scene, the military will probably take over," one senior State Department official told a congressional committee in executive session. "We want to keep the door open."

### **Bitter Fruit**

In the fall of 1965, Washington's strategy bore fruit when several junior

Indonesian military officers, apparently with the support of certain PKI leaders, killed six Indonesian army generals in a bungled power play that remains poorly understood. The military struck back decisively. It rounded up the alleged plotters, accused them (falsely) of sexually mutilating the murdered generals, and then unleashed a nationwide campaign to murder PKI cadre and sympathizers.

The U.S. ambassador, Marshall Green, was thrilled by the opportunity to crush the communists. "It's now or never," he told Washington.

Green proposed fanning anti-communist violence by a covert propaganda campaign to "spread the story of PKI's guilt, treachery and brutality (this priority effort is perhaps most-needed immediate assistance we can give army if we can find way to do it without identifying it as solely or largely US effort)."

He instructed to U.S. Information Agency to use all its resources to "link this horror and tragedy with Peking and its brand of communism; associate diabolical murder and mutilation of the generals with similar methods used against village headmen in Vietnam."

As reports filtered in of the execution or arrest of thousands of PKI supporters by the army and allied Muslim death squads, Green said he had "increasing respect for [the army's] determination and organization in carrying out this crucial assignment."

The killings occurred on such a vast scale that "the disposal of the corpses has created a serious sanitation problem in East Java and Northern Sumatra where the humid air bears the reek of decaying flesh," reported *Time* magazine in December 1965, in one of the first U.S. stories on the massacre.

"Travelers from these areas tell of small rivers and streams that have been literally clogged with bodies. River transportation has at places been seriously impeded."

Previously classified documents from the U.S. embassy in Jakarta released this week add details to this story.

We learn, for example, from one cable that as prison overcrowding became a problem, "Many provinces appear to be successfully meeting this problem by executing their P.K.I. prisoners, or by killing them before they are captured, a task in which Moslem youth groups are providing assistance."

By December 1965, the embassy was reporting on the "striking Army success" in taking power, noting its killing of at least 100,000 people in just 10 weeks.

Yet we also learn that U.S. officials had reliable information that the PKI as an organization had no advance knowledge of or involvement in the murder of the six generals that triggered the nationwide bloodbath. A senior embassy officer also reported on the army's "widespread falsification of documents" to implicate the PKI in various crimes.

We owe these and other revelations to the persistent efforts of human rights activists, scholars, and politicians like Senators Tom Udall, D-New Mexico, and Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, to promote full disclosure of U.S. involvement in Indonesia's mass killings.

Following in their footsteps, Steve Aftergood, head of the Project on Government Secrecy at the Federation of American Scientists, contacted the National Declassification Center (established by President Obama), to urge the release of more Indonesia records. Historian Bradley Simpson and the non-profit National Security Archive then teamed with the U.S. National Archives to digitize 30,000 pages of decades-old embassy files to facilitate public access to the documents.

But without CIA and military operational files, the full, ugly story of Washington's complicity will remain obscured. Previous administrations have released deeply troubling CIA files on coups in Chile, Guatemala and Iran. Those files cast a terrible stain on our history but their release powerfully demonstrated the commitment of at least some American leaders to learn from the past. In that spirit, the time has come to open up our history with Indonesia as well.

**Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international relations and history.**

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## Blaming Russia for the Internet 'Sewer'

**Exclusive:** As the Russia-gate hysteria spirals down from the implausible to the absurd, almost every bad thing is blamed on the Russians, even how they turned the previously pristine Internet into a "sewer," reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

With the U.S. government offering tens of millions of dollars to combat Russian "propaganda and disinformation," it's perhaps not surprising that we see "researchers" such as Jonathan Albright of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University making the absurd accusation that the Russians have

“basically turned [the Internet] into a sewer.”

I’ve been operating on the Internet since 1995 and I can assure you that the Internet has always been “a sewer” – in that it has been home to crazy conspiracy theories, ugly personal insults, click-bait tabloid “news,” and pretty much every vile prejudice you can think of. Whatever some Russians may or may not have done in buying \$100,000 in ads on Facebook (compared to its \$27 billion in annual revenue) or opening 201 Twitter accounts (out of Twitter’s 328 million monthly users), the Russians are not responsible for the sewage coursing through the Internet.

Americans, Europeans, Asians, Africans and pretty much every other segment of the world’s population didn’t need Russian help to turn the Internet into an informational “sewer.” But, of course, fairness and proportionality have no place in today’s Russia-gate frenzy.

After all, your “non-governmental organization” or your scholarly “think tank” is not likely to get a piece of the \$160 million that the U.S. government authorized last December to counter primarily Russian “propaganda and disinformation” if you explain that the Russians are at most responsible for a tiny trickle of “sewage” compared to the vast rivers of “sewage” coming from many other sources.

If you put the Russia-gate controversy in context, you also are not likely to have your “research” cited by The Washington Post as Albright did on Thursday because he supposedly found some links at the home-décor/fashion site Pinterest to a few articles that derived from a few of the 470 Facebook accounts and pages that Facebook suspects of having a link to Russia and shut them down. (To put that 470 number into perspective, Facebook has about two billion monthly users.)

Albright’s full quote about the Russians allegedly exploiting various social media platforms on the Internet was: “They’ve gone to every possible medium and basically turned it into a sewer.”

But let’s look at the facts. According to Facebook, the suspected “Russian-linked” accounts purchased \$100,000 in ads from 2015 to 2017 (compared to Facebook’s annual revenue of about \$27 billion), with only 44 percent of those ads appearing **before** the 2016 election and many having little or nothing to do with politics, which is curious if the Kremlin’s goal was to help elect Donald Trump and defeat Hillary Clinton.

Even former Clinton political strategist Mark Penn has acknowledged the absurdity of thinking that such piddling amounts could have any impact on a \$2.4 billion presidential campaign, plus all the billions of dollars worth of free-



media attention to the conventions, debates, etc. Based on what's known about the Facebook ads, Penn calculated that "the actual electioneering [in battleground states] amounts to about \$6,500."

In a Wall Street Journal op-ed on Monday, Penn added, "I have 40 years of experience in politics, and this Russian ad buy mostly after the election anyway, simply does not add up to a carefully targeted campaign to move voters. It takes tens of millions of dollars to deliver meaningful messages to the contested portion of the electorate."

### **Puppies and Pokemon**

And, then there is the curious content. According to The New York Times, one of these "Russian-linked" Facebook groups was dedicated to photos of "adorable puppies." Of course, the Times tried hard to detect some sinister motive behind the "puppies" page.

Similarly, CNN went wild over its own "discovery" that one of the "Russian-linked" pages offered Amazon gift cards to people who found "Pokémon Go" sites near scenes where police shot unarmed black men – if you would name the Pokémon after the victims.

"It's unclear what the people behind the contest hoped to accomplish, though it may have been to remind people living near places where these incidents had taken place of what had happened and to upset or anger them," CNN mused, adding:

"CNN has not found any evidence that any Pokémon Go users attempted to enter the contest, or whether any of the Amazon Gift Cards that were promised were ever awarded – or, indeed, whether the people who designed the contest ever had any intention of awarding the prizes."

So, these dastardly Russians are exploiting "adorable puppies" and want to "remind people" about unarmed victims of police violence, clearly a masterful strategy to undermine American democracy or – according to the original Russia-gate narrative – to elect Donald Trump.

A New York Times article on Wednesday acknowledged another inconvenient truth that unintentionally added more perspective to the Russia-gate hysteria.

It turns out that some of the mainstream media's favorite "fact-checking" organizations are home to Google ads that look like news items and lead readers to phony sites dressed up to resemble People, Vogue or other legitimate content providers.

"None of the stories were true," the Times reported. "Yet as recently as late

last week, they were being promoted with prominent ads served by Google on PolitiFact and Snopes, fact-checking sites created precisely to dispel such falsehoods.”

There is obvious irony in PolitiFact and Snopes profiting off “fake news” by taking money for these Google ads. But this reality also underscores the larger reality that fabricated news articles – whether peddling lies about Melania Trump or a hot new celebrity or outlandish Russian plots – are driven principally by the profit motive.

### **The Truth About Fake News**

Occasionally, the U.S. mainstream media even acknowledges that fact. For instance, last November, The New York Times, which was then flogging the Russia-linked “fake news” theme, ran a relatively responsible article about a leading “fake news” Web site that the Times tracked down. It turned out to be an entrepreneurial effort by an unemployed Georgian student using a Web site in Tbilisi to make some money by promoting pro-Trump stories, whether true or not.

The owner of the Web site, 22-year-old Beqa Latsabidse, said he had initially tried to push stories favorable to Hillary Clinton but that proved unprofitable so he switched to publishing anti-Clinton and pro-Trump articles, including made-up stories. In other words, the Times found no Russian connection.

The Times article on Wednesday revealed the additional problem of Google ads placed on mainstream Internet sites leading readers to bogus news sites to get clicks and thus advertising dollars. And, it turns out that PolitiFact and Snopes were at least unwittingly profiting off these entrepreneurial ventures by running their ads. Again, there was no claim here of Russian “links.” It was all about good ole American greed.

But the even larger Internet problem is that many “reputable” news sites, such as AOL, lure readers into clicking on some sensationalistic or misleading headline, which takes readers to a story that is often tabloid trash or an extreme exaggeration of what the headline promised.

This reality about the Internet should be the larger context in which the Russia-gate story plays out, the miniscule nature of this Russian “meddling” even if these “suspected ... links to Russia” – as the Times initially described the 470 Facebook pages – turn out to be true.

But there are no lucrative grants going to “researchers” who would put the trickle of alleged Russian “sewage” into the context of the vast flow of Internet “sewage” that is even flowing through the esteemed “fact-checking” sites of PolitiFact and Snopes.

There are also higher newspaper sales and better TV ratings if the mainstream media keeps turning up new angles on Russia-gate, even as some of the old ones fall away as inconsequential or meaningless (such as the Senate Intelligence Committee dismissing earlier controversies over Sen. Jeff Sessions's brief meeting with the Russian ambassador at the Mayflower Hotel and minor changes in the Republican platform).

### **Saying 'False' Is 'True'**

And, there is the issue of who decides what's true. PolitiFact continues to defend its false claim that Hillary Clinton was speaking the truth when – in referencing leaked Democratic emails last October – she claimed that the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies “have all concluded that these espionage attacks, these cyberattacks, come from the highest levels of the Kremlin, and they are designed to influence our election.”

That claim was always untrue because a reference to a consensus of the 17 intelligence agencies suggests a National Intelligence Estimate or similar product that seeks the judgments of the entire intelligence community. No NIE or community-wide study was ever done on this topic.

Only later – in January 2017 – did a small subset of the intelligence community, what Director of National Intelligence James Clapper described as “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies – the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation – issue an “assessment” blaming the Russians while acknowledging a lack of actual evidence.

In other words, the Jan. 6 “assessment” was comparable to the “stovepiped” intelligence that influenced many of the mistaken judgments of President George W. Bush's administration. In “stovepiped” intelligence, a selected group of analysts is closeted away and develops judgments without the benefit of other experts who might offer contradictory evidence or question the groupthink.

So, in many ways, Clinton's statement was the opposite of true both when she said it in 2016 and later in 2017 when she repeated it in direct reference to the Jan. 6 assessment. If PolitiFact really cared about facts, it would have corrected its earlier claim that Clinton was telling the truth, but the fact-checking organization wouldn't budge – even after The New York Times and The Associated Press ran corrections.

In this context, PolitiFact showed its contempt even for conclusive evidence – testimony from former DNI Clapper (corroborated by former CIA Director John Brennan) that the 17-agency claim was false. Instead, PolitiFact was determined to protect Clinton's false statement from being described for what it was:

false.

Of course, maybe PolitiFact is suffering from the arrogance of its elite status as an arbiter of truth with its position on Google's First Draft coalition, a collection of mainstream news outlets and fact-checkers which gets to decide what information is true and what is not true – for algorithms that then will exclude or downplay what's deemed "false."

So, if PolitiFact says something is true – even if it's false – it becomes "true." Thus, it's perhaps not entirely ironic that PolitiFact would collect money from Google ads placed on its site by advertisers of fake news.

**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](#)).**

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## Trump Escalates Anti-Leak Campaign

President Trump has made clear his anger about "leaks," but he is far from alone among recent U.S. presidents waging war against whistleblowing, write Jesselyn Radack and Kathleen McClellan for ExposeFacts.

By Jesselyn Radack and Kathleen McClellan

The Trump administration has declared a war on media leaks and called for the U.S. federal workforce and contractors to receive "anti-leak" training. The centerpiece of Trump's anti-leak campaign, aside from early morning tweet-storms railing against leakers and media, is the [National Insider Threat Taskforce](#).

The Insider Threat Program is not a Trump-era creation. In then-secret [testimony to Congress in 2012](#), Directorate of National Intelligence official Robert Litt touted the original Insider Threat Program as a highlight in administrative efforts to "sanction and deter" leaks. In the past, Insider Threat Program training has [improperly included](#) "WANTED"-style images of whistleblowers pictured alongside actual spies and mass murderers.

As recently as last month, the Department of Defense has developed training courses, toolkits, templates, posters, and videos, all aimed toward silencing and deterring anyone who would disclose to the press or the public information that the government wants kept secret for no legitimate reason and that the

public has an interest in knowing. It is not only federal employees who receive these trainings, but tens of thousands of government contractors as well. Companies with any classified access are required to implement an “Insider Threat Program,” an insidious presumption that employees cannot be trusted.

Part of the “Unauthorized Disclosure” training includes watching a Fox News clip on the crackdown on leaks and Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s statement announcing an increase in criminal leak investigations. A student guide from the Insider Threat Awareness training includes the McCarthyesque request that employees report on each other for “general suspicious behaviors,” including “Questionable national loyalty” such as “Displaying questionable loyalty to U.S. government or company” or “Making anti-U.S. comments.” Never mind that the only oath government employees take is to the U.S. Constitution, not to any government official or the U.S. government itself and certainly not to a private company.

### **Anti-Leak Posters**

The many secrecy trainings come with promotional posters with unsophisticated rhyming slogans cringe-worthy to First Amendment advocates and marketing professionals alike, such as “There no delete when you tweet” or “Tweets sink fleets.” The poster with the slogan “Every Leak makes us weak” is accompanied by a melting American flag info-graphic. Then there’s the most anti-press poster, a mock newspaper website with the slogan “Think before you click,” complete with a red, Trumpian-style, all caps “IT’S A CRIME” at the bottom. The messaging is so heavy-handed it would be funny if the consequences weren’t the freedoms of speech and the press.

Finally, there’s the laughably inaccurate and awkward slogan “Free speech doesn’t mean careless talk.” Actually, it does. Free speech does not mean screaming “FIRE” in a crowded theater, but there is no Supreme Court ruling holding that “careless speech” is somehow exempt from First Amendment protections, lest our President’s Twitter feed be censorable.

There is an “unauthorized disclosures” video training from September 2017 billed as “compliant with White House and Secretary of Defense Memoranda” that condemns leaks, points out punishment for leakers, and warns apocalyptically that when there are unauthorized leaks, “we all risk losing our way of life.”

Another informational video includes a fictionalized news story about Americans dying in a terrorist attack because of a release of classified information. Such a story has never appeared in the actual news media because it has never happened. In Chelsea Manning’s criminal case – worth mentioning since her leaks are consistently singled out in the videos – the government was unable to

provide a finalized damage assessment, even though the leaks occurred years prior. (Curiously, Edward Snowden's even more-well known leaks are not mentioned by name in the videos.)

The trainings include little or no mention of whistleblowing, except to say that leaking to the media is not whistleblowing, and the First Amendment offers no protection to whistleblowers. This is chilling, but not accurate. The Supreme Court has recognized that the media is a legitimate outlet for whistleblowers. And, information that has been classified to cover up government wrongdoing or prevent embarrassment is not properly classified. In fact, whistleblowers leaking to the media is a time-honored tradition dating back, at least, to Daniel Ellsberg's leaking of the Pentagon Papers.

The Insider Threat Program trainings do not send a simple message against leaking properly classified information, such as nuclear launch codes or covert identities. Rather, the trainings send much more destructive messages against all leaks and speech the government does not like: do not criticize the government or you will be reported as an insider threat and keep *all* government secrets, even when the government breaks the law. These are messages contrary to a free and open democratic society, especially one where the First Amendment protects freedoms of speech, association, and the press.

The training videos go beyond simply urging employees to keep quiet. Employees are instructed not to access or share information *already in the public sphere*. Considering that every major newspaper includes almost daily leaks of classified information, such an instruction is impossible to comply with, and will almost certainly be used, as it has in the past, to retaliate against whistleblowers. After all, the biggest leaker of classified information is the U.S. government itself.

Jesselyn Radack was a whistleblower at the Department of Justice under the Bush administration and now heads the Whistleblower and Source Protection Program (WHISPeR) at ExposeFacts, where she has provided legal representation for clients including Edward Snowden, Thomas Drake, and William Binney. Kathleen McClellan is the Deputy Director at WHISPeR. [This article originally ran at ExposeFacts at

<https://exposefacts.org/insider-threat-program-training-and-trumps-war-on-leaks-a-chilling-combination-for-whistleblowers/> ]

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# Understanding the 'Fake News' Hysteria

The mainstream media's hysteria over "fake news" is aimed less at the few instances of intentionally fabricated stories than at well-reported articles that challenge the U.S. government's dubious official narratives, says David P. Hamilton.

By David P. Hamilton

For the most part, "fake news" is a fake concept designed by the corporate news media to discredit those who challenge the official U.S. hegemonic narrative. The typical MSM fake news accusation starts with some egregious fictionalization and then morphs over to the real targets: the subversives, those who would dispute foundational elements of the official history or its recent approved updates.

These subversive elements are likely to question important myths, such as the necessity of the nuclear incineration of Hiroshima or – before the Iraq War – Saddam Hussein possessing WMD, and hence must be silenced.

There are people in this world who write what they know to be fiction and try to pass it off as fact. Many of them work for the CIA and related institutions. Then, there are satirists like The Onion who write fictionalized truth. These professional prevaricators are not what draws the ire of the corporate "news."

The approved rendition of U.S. history is a composite of lies, euphemisms and dubious rationales taught in schools, public and private, since the nation's founding. It is continuously updated by the corporate news media. There is an army of PR types and psy-op warriors working constantly on this project; some private sector, some public, who often switch roles and sectors, but work hand-in-glove regardless.

The real fake news is the fake narrative that flows perpetually forth from these functionaries of the MSM to dominate the discourse which the billionaire owners allow voiced via their facilities. In this manner, we are all being played, all the time, and have been since birth.

For the record, the official narrative follows certain principles. Among them are:

1. The U.S. is never wrong in any conflict with other nations.
2. If the U.S. ever happens to be wrong, it was a reasonable mistake.
3. U.S. intentions are always benign and honorable.

4. U.S. judgment is always objective and fair.
5. The U.S. is a democracy and always supports democracy.
6. Americans are a peaceful people.
7. Americans are a superior people, so American lives matter more.
8. Americans are always on the high moral ground because God is on our side.
9. The word of our leaders is sufficient proof of any assertion.
10. The U.S. is the greatest nation in history.
11. Private is always better than public.
12. Individualism is always better than collectivism.

### **One-Sided 'News'**

In application of these principles, NPR's "All Things Considered" never considers the Maduro government's position in Venezuela, nor is Noam Chomsky, often voted the world's foremost public intellectual, to be heard on this "public" radio. Nor will North Korea's negotiating position relative to their nuclear weapons program be explained. It requires the U.S. military to refrain from conducting war games on North Korea's border in exchange for freezing their weapons program; unmentionable because the U.S. militaristic leadership is unwilling to consider the proposal and because it sounds too rational.

You will hear from the world's greatest exporter of terrorism that Iran, which hasn't invaded a neighbor since Darius I in 500 BCE, is the world's greatest exporter of terrorism. And that apartheid Israel is a democracy. And that the Saudis are jolly guys in silk robes you want to hold hands and dance with.

Are the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, et al, lying knowingly? Not exactly. The news media doesn't have to invent the lies, only repeat them. They are mainly the stenographers of governmental agencies that provide the raw material to be quoted, invariably substantiating the validity of the official position. The owners of those news outlets likely believe that narrative, but mainly they want you to believe it.

The pundits and talking heads of those news media, the on-camera personalities, must think within the parameters the official narrative or they wouldn't have been hired to the position of highly paid spokesperson for it. Wolf Blitzer is a Zionist true believer who used to do P.R. for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Anderson Cooper is a Vanderbilt heir worth \$100 million.

How objective can you be about issues of income inequality when you've been the top .0001% for six or seven generations? And if one dare to go off the reservation, the next thing you know you'll be working for RT for a lot less money like Ed Schultz.



This process of narrative creation is principally a matter of focus, parameters and interpretation. On major U.S. cable news channels, the great bulk of coverage involves domestic politics, mass murders and “natural” disasters. In Europe, the focus is far more on international relationships.

The spectrum of opinion allowed in the U.S. is limited to the point that Hillary Clinton is considered “the left” and the anti-capitalist left might as well not exist. The range of permissible opinion typically stretches from pro-capitalist social liberals to pro-capitalist social conservatives. This is hardly surprising if one considers that billionaire investors own the controlling interest in all major U.S. news media. One outcome is that the U.S. is the only major industrial nation without a significant socialist political party.

The private interests that own the news media don’t have to get together and compare notes because they all have a high level of ruling-class consciousness that includes shared economic fundamentals, e.g., socialize debts and privatize profits. Their message control is described far more clearly by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman in *Manufacturing Consent*, chapter 1 on “the propaganda model”.

### **Dubious Conformity**

It is generally accurate to assume that there is an entirely reasonable interpretation of news events that contradicts what you are being told to believe by the corporate news media. Cases of official duplicity are notorious and legion: the Gulf of Tonkin, WMD in Iraq, the black kid killed by the police had a gun, etc.

Central among the American myths is that the myth surrounding the origins of the Cold War. This myth would have you believe that the Soviet Union in 1945, despite having lost over 30 million of its citizens during two German invasions in less than 30 years and with a devastated infrastructure, would suddenly decide to invade Western Europe, into the teeth of the world’s sole nuclear armed military power, the USA, and its various formidable allies.

Furthermore, that the Soviets would do this despite having achieved their major war aims, a divided and demilitarized Germany and a “sphere of influence” between themselves and Germany, an arrangement agreed upon by Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt at Yalta. This Cold War creation myth of Soviet aggressive intent is essentially a U.S. cover story to mask U.S. aggression disguised as defensive.

Like Germans in 1939 believing the Polish horse cavalry was about to attack their tanks, Americans bought this spurious interpretation. These steady U.S. “defensive” efforts have now brought NATO, essentially an agency of U.S. foreign

policy, to Russia's very doorstep in the Baltic states, with Ukraine up next for NATO membership. Who is the aggressor?

Every other late Twentieth Century storyline of official U.S. history had to conform to the basic foundational concept of the U.S. defending freedom against an expansionist Soviet Union/Russia bent on destroying us. And so, today, we have thousands of NATO troops, innumerable missile batteries and nuclear-armed aircraft carrier-led naval battle groups patrolling Russia's borders and shorelines, including the Black Sea, because "THEY are the aggressor."

Try to imagine the U.S. reaction to a Russian fleet cruising the Gulf of Mexico, although that might be difficult given that 11 of the world's 17 aircraft carriers, a uniquely aggressive weapon, belong to the U.S., all with unlimited range, and Russia's only puny little single carrier rarely leaves Russian territorial waters and doesn't have enough range to get to the U.S. and back.

The U.S. has an estimated 800 foreign military bases in well over 100 countries while Russia has three in two countries. U.S. military budget is at least ten times that of Russia's and was just increased by 10 percent while the Russians just reduced theirs by 7 percent. Who is the aggressor?

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## How Netanyahu Pulls Trump's Strings

**Special Report:** It turns out that Hillary Clinton was partly correct: President Trump is a "puppet," but his puppet master isn't Russian President Putin but Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In the final presidential debate of 2016, Hillary Clinton famously called Donald Trump the "puppet" of Russian President Vladimir Putin. But what's increasingly clear is that Trump has a more typical puppet master for a U.S. politician – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Since Sept. 18, when the two men met in New York around the United Nations General Assembly, Netanyahu has been pulling Trump's strings on almost every foreign policy issue. Arguably, the puppet/puppeteer relationship began much

earlier, but I've been told that Trump bridled early on at Netanyahu's control and even showed a few signs of rebellion.

For instance, Trump initially resisted Netanyahu's demand for a deeper U.S. commitment in Syria by ordering the shutdown of the CIA operation supporting anti-government rebels, along with the Trump administration's statement that U.S. policy no longer sought "regime change" in Damascus.

Immediately after that announcement, Netanyahu had some success in getting Trump to reverse direction and fire 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian air base on April 6. The attack followed what one intelligence source told me was a staged chemical weapons incident by Al Qaeda operatives in the rebel-controlled town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province, possibly using sarin delivered via drone from a Saudi/Israeli special operations base in Jordan. Yet, although apparently duped by the subterfuge into the missile strike, Trump still balked at a complete reversal of his Syrian policy.

Then, in May, Trump picked Saudi Arabia and Israel as his first overseas trip as president – essentially following the advice of his son-in-law Jared Kushner – but I'm told he came away feeling somewhat humiliated by the over-the-top treatment that involved him getting pulled into a ceremonial sword dance in Saudi Arabia and facing condescension from Netanyahu.

So, over the summer, Trump listened to advice about a possible major overhaul of U.S. foreign policy that would have checked Israeli/Saudi regional ambitions, opened diplomatic doors to Iran, and addressed the Korean crisis by brokering negotiations between the North and the South over some form of loose confederation.

There was even the possibility of a Nixon-goes-to-China moment with tough-guy Trump meeting with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and the two countries restoring diplomatic ties, a process that could have given U.S. companies a better chance to compete in the Iranian market.

Those proposed moves had the advantage of reducing international tensions, saving the U.S. government money on future military adventures, and freeing U.S. corporations from the tangle of economic sanctions – exactly the "America First" strategy that Trump had promised his working-class base.

However, instead Netanyahu succeeded in pulling Trump's strings during their conversations on Sept. 18 in New York, although exactly how is still a mystery to some people close to these developments. One source said the Kushner family real-estate company has exposure to substantial Israeli financing that could be yanked, although Jared Kushner's financial disclosure form only lists a \$5

million unsecured line of credit, held jointly with his father, from the Israel Discount Bank.

Trump also has major pro-Netanyahu donors to his political war chest and his legal defense fund who are strong advocates for war with Iran, including casino tycoon Sheldon Adelson, who has plowed \$35 million into the pro-Trump Super PAC Future 45 and has publicly called for dropping a nuclear bomb on Iran as a negotiating tactic. So, Netanyahu had a number of potential strings to pull.

### **Going on Rants**

Whatever the precise reasons, on Sept. 19, Trump turned his maiden speech to the U.N. General Assembly into a war-like rant, personally insulting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as “Rocket Man,” threatening to “totally destroy” his nation of 25 million people, and parroting Netanyahu’s calls for another regime change project aimed at Iran.

Most diplomats in the audience sat in stunned silence as Trump threatened aggressive war from the podium of an organization created to prevent the scourge of war. The one notable exception was Netanyahu who enthusiastically applauded his success in jerking Trump into the neocon camp.

So, rather than shift U.S. policy away from confrontation, Trump jettisoned the diplomatic strategy although it already had dispatched intermediaries to make contacts with the Iranians and North Koreans. Instead, Trump opted for the classic neocon approach favored by Netanyahu, albeit with Trump dressing up his neocon surrender in some “America First” rhetoric.

The U.N. speech left some of the U.S. intermediaries scrambling to explain to their contacts in Iran and North Korea why Trump had repudiated the messages that they had been carrying. Privately, Trump explained to one that he just liked to “zigzag” and that the intended end point hadn’t change.

Some of these tensions surfaced in late September when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took the extraordinary step of announcing the behind-the-scenes contacts with North Korea during a state visit to China.

“We are probing, so stay tuned,” Tillerson said. “We ask, ‘Would you like to talk?’ We have lines of communications to Pyongyang – we’re not in a dark situation, a blackout.” Tillerson added, “We have a couple, three channels open to Pyongyang ... We do talk to them. , , , Directly. We have our own channels.”

In reaction to Tillerson’s efforts to salvage the backchannel initiatives, Trump showed that his obeisance to Netanyahu and the neocons outweighed loyalty to either his Secretary of State or the intermediaries who had ventured into dicey

situations on Trump's behalf.

In Twitter messages, Trump belittled the idea of a dialogue with North Korea, tweeting: "I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man."

"Save your energy Rex," Trump added, before slipping in another thinly veiled threat of a military strike: "we'll do what has to be done!"

While on the surface, Trump's repudiation of Tillerson might have been viewed as another "zigzag," it is now clear that Trump's "zigzag" explanation was just another lie. Rather than zigzagging, he is instead following a straight line marked out by Netanyahu.

Meanwhile, in Syria, Netanyahu seems to have won more concessions from Trump. The U.S. military appears to be helping the remnants of Islamist forces still fighting the government, according to Russian officials. Their accusation is that the U.S. is secretly aiding the Islamist terror groups with weapons, tactical advice and aerial reconnaissance.

In other words, Trump appears to be continuing U.S. military intervention in Syria – just as Netanyahu desires.

### **Falling in Line**

Trump further showed that he is following Netanyahu's marching orders with the extremist speech about Iran on Friday, essentially repeating all the Israeli propaganda lines against Iran and burning whatever bridges remained toward a meaningful diplomatic approach.

Trump's Iran speech was so ludicrous it almost defies serious analysis. It ranks with the reckless rhetoric of President George W. Bush when he pronounced an "axis of evil," with the incongruous linking of Iraq and Iran (two bitter enemies) and North Korea accompanied by Bush's bogus claims about Iraq's WMD and Iraq's alleged collaboration with Al Qaeda.

In Friday's speech, which looked like the handiwork of John Bolton, one of Bush's neocon advisers who was seen entering the White House last week, Trump repeated all the nonsense tying Iran to Al Qaeda, presumably thinking that the American people still don't understand that Al Qaeda is a fanatical Sunni terror group that targets both the West and Shiites, the dominant Muslim faith in Iran, as heretics deserving death.

The inconvenient truth is that Al Qaeda has long been connected to Saudi Arabia, which has supported these fanatics since the 1980s when Saudi citizen Osama bin

Laden was supported in his jihad against Soviet troops in Afghanistan, who were there trying to protect a secular regime.

Though officially the Saudi monarchy insists that it is opposed to Al Qaeda, Saudi intelligence has used Al Qaeda as essentially an unconventional fighting force deployed to destabilize and terrorize adversaries in the region and around the world. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[The Need to Hold Saudi Arabia Accountable.](#)"]

As the Israelis have developed a de facto alliance with Saudi Arabia in recent years, they also have expressed [a preference for an Al Qaeda victory in Syria](#) if necessary to destroy what Michael Oren, former Ambassador to the U.S. and now a deputy minister under Netanyahu, has described as the Shiite "strategic arc" running from Tehran through Damascus to Beirut.

One of the frequent Israeli complaints about Iran is that it has assisted the sovereign government of Syria in defeating Al Qaeda and its militant allies (as well as Al Qaeda's spinoff Islamic State), which should tell you a lot about where Netanyahu's loyalties lie.

### **A Compromised Media**

Yet, as dishonest as Trump's Iran speech was, the U.S. mainstream media won't criticize it as harshly as it deserves because virtually all the important journalists and talking heads have swallowed Israel's anti-Iran propaganda whole. They have frequently repeated the canard about Iran as "the world's chief sponsor of terrorism" when that title clearly should go to the Saudis and the Qataris if not others.

The West's major news outlets also have ingested all the sophisticated propaganda against the Assad government in Syria, particularly the claims about chemical weapons attacks while ignoring evidence that Al Qaeda's operatives and their "civil defense" collaborators have staged attacks with the goal of provoking a direct U.S. military intervention. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[A New Hole in Syria-Sarin Certainty.](#)"]

In his Friday speech, Trump also touted one of the [earliest canards about Iranian "terrorism,"](#) the attack by Lebanese Shiite militants on the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 killing 241 Americans.

When that attack happened, I was working at The Associated Press as an investigative reporter specializing in national security issues. While the precise Iranian role was not clear, what should have been obvious was that the attack was not "terrorism," which is classically defined as violence toward civilians to achieve a political goal.

Not only were the Marines not civilians but the Reagan administration had made them belligerents in the Lebanese war by the decision to order the USS New Jersey to shell Muslim villages. Reagan's National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, who often represented Israel's interests inside the administration, was the spark plug for this mission creep, which killed Lebanese civilians and convinced Shiite militants that the United States had joined the war against them.

Shiite militants struck back, sending a suicide truck bomber through U.S. security positions, demolishing the high-rise Marine barracks in Beirut. Reagan soon repositioned the surviving U.S. forces offshore. At the AP, I unsuccessfully argued against calling the Beirut attack "terrorism," a word that other news organizations also sloppily applied. But even senior Reagan officials recognized the truth.

"When the shells started falling on the Shiites, they assumed the American 'referee' had taken sides," Gen. Colin Powell wrote in his memoir, *My American Journey*. In other words, Powell, who was then military adviser to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, recognized that the actions of the U.S. military had altered the status of the Marines in the eyes of the Shiites.

(Although this "terrorism" is always blamed on Hezbollah, the group did not officially come into existence until 1985 as a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon which did not end until 2000.)

### **Opposed to Putin**

So, Trump is now on the path to wars with both North Korea and Iran, neither of which Russian President Putin favors. Putin, who played a key role in helping President Obama achieve the Iran-nuclear agreement, now sides with the Europeans in opposition to Trump's decertification.

Putin also favors a prompt end to the Syrian conflict with the defeat of Al Qaeda and its allies, and he wants peaceful negotiations with North Korea over its desire for security against threatened American aggression. Trump is on the opposite side of all these Putin priorities.

In other words, not only does the Russia-gate hysteria have core evidentiary problems – both on the issues of "hacking" Democratic emails and claims about suspected "Russia-linked" entities paying for an infinitesimal number of ads on social media (including some about puppies and another promoting a critical documentary about Donald Trump's golf course in Scotland) – but Trump is behaving in ways that are directly contrary to Putin's desires and interests.

If indeed Clinton were right that Trump was Putin's "puppet," then he would have

agreed to negotiations to address the North Korean crisis; would have accepted constructive diplomacy toward Iran; and would have ended all U.S. support for the Syrian militants and encouraged a quick end to the bloodletting.

Instead, Trump is moving in opposite directions, lining up with Netanyahu and the neocons, whom some European allies refer to as “America’s Israeli agents.” Although dressing up his capitulation to Netanyahu in tough-guy phrasing, Trump is doing what most U.S. politicians do – they grovel before Bibi Netanyahu.

And, if you have any doubts about that reality, you can watch how often both Republicans and Democrats jump to their feet when Netanyahu addresses a joint session of Congress, an honor that he has received three times, tying him with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Those moments of American humiliation – as almost all 535 members of Congress act like puppets on invisible strings – represent the actual subservience of the U.S. government to a foreign power. And that power is not Russia.

President Trump is just the latest American politician to have his strings yanked by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

**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).**

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## The Legacy of Reagan’s Civilian ‘Psyops’

**Special Report:** When the Reagan administration launched peacetime “psyops” in the mid-1980s, it pulled in civilian agencies to help spread these still-ongoing techniques of deception and manipulation, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Declassified records from the Reagan presidential library show how the U.S. government enlisted civilian agencies in psychological operations designed to exploit information as a way to manipulate the behavior of targeted foreign audiences and, at least indirectly, American citizens.

A just-declassified sign-in sheet for a meeting of an inter-agency “psyops” committee on Oct. 24, 1986, shows representatives from the Agency for International Development (USAID), the State Department, and the U.S.



Information Agency (USIA) joining officials from the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Department.

Some of the names of officials from the CIA and Pentagon remain classified more than three decades later. But the significance of the document is that it reveals how agencies that were traditionally assigned to global development (USAID) or international information (USIA) were incorporated into the U.S. government's strategies for peacetime psyops, a military technique for breaking the will of a wartime enemy by spreading lies, confusion and terror.

Essentially, psyops play on the cultural weaknesses of a target population so they could be more easily controlled or defeated, but the Reagan administration was taking the concept outside the traditional bounds of warfare and applying psyops to any time when the U.S. government could claim some threat to America.

This disclosure – bolstered by other documents released earlier this year by archivists at the Reagan library in Simi Valley, California – is relevant to today's frenzy over alleged "fake news" and accusations of "Russian disinformation" by reminding everyone that the U.S. government was active in those same areas.

The U.S. government's use of disinformation and propaganda is, of course, nothing new. For instance, during the 1950s and 1960s, the USIA regularly published articles in friendly newspapers and magazines that appeared under fake names such as Guy Sims Fitch.

However, in the 1970s, the bloody Vietnam War and the Pentagon Papers' revelations about U.S. government deceptions to justify that war created a crisis for American propagandists, their loss of credibility with the American people. Some of the traditional sources of U.S. disinformation, such as the CIA, also fell into profound disrepute.

This so-called "Vietnam Syndrome" – a skeptical citizenry dubious toward U.S. government claims about foreign conflicts – undermined President Reagan's efforts to sell his plans for intervention in the civil wars then underway in Central America, Africa and elsewhere.

Reagan depicted Central America as a "Soviet beachhead," but many Americans saw haughty Central American oligarchs and their brutal security forces slaughtering priests, nuns, labor activists, students, peasants and indigenous populations.

Reagan and his advisers realized that they had to turn those perceptions around if they hoped to get sustained funding for the militaries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras as well as for the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, the CIA-organized paramilitary force marauding around leftist-ruled Nicaragua.

## Perception Management

So, it became a high priority to reshape public perceptions inside those targeted countries but even more importantly among the American people. That challenge led the Reagan administration to revitalize and reorganize methods for distributing propaganda and funding friendly foreign operatives, such as creation of the National Endowment for Democracy under neoconservative president Ronald Reagan in 1983.

Another entity in this process was the Psychological Operations Committee formed in 1986 under Reagan's National Security Council. In the years since, the U.S. administrations, both Republican and Democratic, have applied many of these same psyops principles, cherry-picking or manufacturing evidence to undermine adversaries and to solidify U.S. public support for Washington's policies.

This reality – about the U.S. government creating its own faux reality to manipulate the American people and international audiences – should compel journalists in the West to treat all claims from Washington with a large grain of salt.

However, instead, we have seen a pattern of leading news outlets simply amplifying whatever U.S. agencies assert about foreign adversaries while denouncing skeptics as purveyors of “fake news” or enemy “propaganda.” In effect, the success of the U.S. psyops strategy can be measured by how Western mainstream media has stepped forward as the enforcement mechanism to ensure conformity to the U.S. government's various information themes and narratives.

For instance, any questioning of the U.S. government's narratives on, say, the current Syrian conflict, or the Ukraine coup of 2014, or Russian “hacking” of the 2016 U.S. election, or Iran's status as “the leading sponsor of terrorism” is treated by the major Western news outlets as evidence that you are a “useful fool” at best, if not a willful enemy “propagandist” with loyalty to a foreign power, i.e., a traitor.

Leading mainstream media outlets and establishment-approved Web sites are now teaming up with Google, Facebook and other technology companies to develop algorithms to bury or remove content from the Internet that doesn't march in lockstep with what is deemed to be true, which often simply follows what U.S. government agencies say is true.

Yet, the documentary evidence is now clear that the U.S. government undertook a well-defined strategy of waging psyops around the world with regular blowback of this propaganda and disinformation onto the American people via Western news agencies covering events in the affected countries.

During more recent administrations, euphemisms have been used to cloak the more pejorative phrase, “psychological operations” – such as “public diplomacy,” “strategic communications,” “perception management,” and “smart power.” But the serious push to expand this propaganda capability of the U.S. government can be traced back to the Reagan presidency.

### **The Puppet Master**

Over the years, I’ve obtained scores of documents related to the psyops and related programs via “mandatory declassification reviews” of files belonging to Walter Raymond Jr., a senior CIA covert operations specialist who was transferred to Reagan’s National Security Council staff in 1982 to rebuild capacities for psyops, propaganda and disinformation.

Raymond, who has been compared to a character from a John LeCarré novel slipping easily into the woodwork, spent his years inside Reagan’s White House as a shadowy puppet master who tried his best to avoid public attention or – it seems – even having his picture taken.

From the tens of thousands of photographs from meetings at Reagan’s White House, I found only a couple showing Raymond – and he is seated in groups, partially concealed by other officials.

But Raymond appears to have grasped his true importance. In his NSC files, I found a doodle of an organizational chart that had Raymond at the top holding what looks like the crossed handles used by puppeteers to control the puppets below them. The drawing fits the reality of Raymond as the behind-the-curtains operative who was controlling the various inter-agency task forces that were responsible for implementing psyops and other propaganda strategies.

In Raymond’s files, I found an influential November 1983 paper, written by Col. Alfred R. Paddock Jr. and entitled “Military Psychological Operations and US Strategy,” which stated: “the planned use of communications to influence attitudes or behavior should, if properly used, precede, accompany, and follow all applications of force. Put another way, psychological operations is the one weapons system which has an important role to play in peacetime, throughout the spectrum of conflict, and during the aftermath of conflict.”

Paddock continued, “Military psychological operations are an important part of the ‘PSYOP Totality,’ both in peace and war. ... We need a program of psychological operations as an integral part of our national security policies and programs. ... The continuity of a standing interagency board or committee to provide the necessary coordinating mechanism for development of a coherent, worldwide psychological operations strategy is badly needed.”

One declassified "top secret" document in Raymond's file – dated Feb. 4, 1985, from Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger – urged the fuller implementation of President Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 130, which was signed on March 6, 1984, and which authorized peacetime psyops by expanding psyops beyond its traditional boundaries of active military operations into peacetime situations in which the U.S. government could claim some threat to national interests.

"This approval can provide the impetus to the rebuilding of a necessary strategic capability, focus attention on psychological operations as a national – not solely military – instrument, and ensure that psychological operations are fully coordinated with public diplomacy and other international information activities," Weinberger's document said.

### **An Inter-Agency Committee**

This broader commitment to psyops led to the creation of a Psychological Operations Committee (POC) that was to be chaired by a representative of Reagan's National Security Council with a vice chairman from the Pentagon and with representatives from CIA, the State Department and USIA.

"This group will be responsible for planning, coordinating and implementing psychological operations activities in support of United States policies and interests relative to national security," according to a "secret" addendum to a memo, dated March 25, 1986, from Col. Paddock, the psyops advocate who had become the U.S. Army's Director for Psychological Operations.

"The committee will provide the focal point for interagency coordination of detailed contingency planning for the management of national information assets during war, and for the transition from peace to war," the addendum added. "The POC shall seek to ensure that in wartime or during crises (which may be defined as periods of acute tension involving a threat to the lives of American citizens or the imminence of war between the U.S. and other nations), U.S. international information elements are ready to initiate special procedures to ensure policy consistency, timely response and rapid feedback from the intended audience."

In other words, the U.S. government could engage in psyops virtually anytime because there are always "periods of acute tension involving a threat to the lives of American citizens."

The Psychological Operations Committee took formal shape with a "secret" memo from Reagan's National Security Advisor John Poindexter on July 31, 1986. Its first meeting was called on Sept. 2, 1986, with an agenda that focused on Central America and "How can other POC agencies support and complement DOD

programs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama.” The POC was also tasked with “Developing National PSYOPS Guidelines” for “formulating and implementing a national PSYOPS program.” (Underlining in original)

Raymond was named a co-chair of the POC along with CIA officer Vincent Cannistraro, who was then Deputy Director for Intelligence Programs on the NSC staff, according to a “secret” memo from Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Craig Alderman Jr.

The memo also noted that future POC meetings would be briefed on psyops projects for the Philippines and Nicaragua, with the latter project codenamed “Niagara Falls.” The memo also references a “Project Touchstone,” but it is unclear where that psyops program was targeted.

Another “secret” memo dated Oct. 1, 1986, co-authored by Raymond, reported on the POC’s first meeting on Sept. 10, 1986, and noted that “The POC will, at each meeting, focus on an area of operations (e.g., Central America, Afghanistan, Philippines).”

The POC’s second meeting on Oct. 24, 1986 – for which the sign-in sheet was just released – concentrated on the Philippines, according to a Nov. 4, 1986 memo also co-authored by Raymond.

But the Reagan administration’s primary attention continued to go back to Central America, including “Project Niagara Falls,” the psyops program aimed at Nicaragua. A “secret” Pentagon memo from Deputy Under Secretary Alderman on Nov. 20, 1986, outlined the work of the 4th Psychological Operations Group on this psyops plan “to help bring about democratization of Nicaragua,” by which the Reagan administration meant a “regime change.” The precise details of “Project Niagara Falls” were not disclosed in the declassified documents but the choice of codename suggested a cascade of psyops.

### **Key Operatives**

Other documents from Raymond’s NSC file shed light on who other key operatives in the psyops and propaganda programs were. For instance, in undated notes on efforts to influence the Socialist International, including securing support for U.S. foreign policies from Socialist and Social Democratic parties in Europe, Raymond cited the efforts of “Ledeem, Gershman,” a reference to neoconservative operative Michael Ledeen and Carl Gershman, another neocon who has served as president of the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED), from 1983 to the present. (Underlining in original.)

Although NED is technically independent of the U.S. government, it receives the bulk of its funding (now about \$100 million a year) from Congress. Documents

from the Reagan archives also make clear that NED was organized as a way to replace some of the CIA's political and propaganda covert operations, which had fallen into disrepute in the 1970s. Earlier released documents from Raymond's file show CIA Director William Casey pushing for NED's creation and Raymond, Casey's handpicked man on the NSC, giving frequent advice and direction to Gershman. [See Consortiumnews.com's "CIA's Hidden Hand in 'Democracy' Groups."]

While the initials USAID conjure up images of well-meaning Americans helping to drill wells, teach school and set up health clinics in impoverished nations, USAID also has kept its hand in financing friendly journalists around the globe.

In 2015, USAID issued a fact sheet summarizing its work financing "journalism education, media business development, capacity building for supportive institutions, and strengthening legal-regulatory environments for free media." USAID estimated its budget for "media strengthening programs in over 30 countries" at \$40 million annually, including aiding "independent media organizations and bloggers in over a dozen countries,"

In Ukraine before the 2014 coup, USAID offered training in "mobile phone and website security," which sounds a bit like an operation to thwart the local government's intelligence gathering, an ironic position for the U.S. with its surveillance obsession, including prosecuting whistleblowers based on evidence that they talked to journalists.

USAID, working with billionaire George Soros's Open Society, also funded the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), which engages in "investigative journalism" that usually goes after governments that have fallen into disfavor with the United States and then are singled out for accusations of corruption.

The USAID-funded OCCRP also collaborates with Bellingcat, an online investigative website founded by blogger Eliot Higgins, who is now a senior non-resident fellow of the Atlantic Council, a pro-NATO think tank that receives funding from the U.S. and allied governments.

Higgins has spread misinformation on the Internet, including discredited claims implicating the Syrian government in the sarin attack in 2013 and directing an Australian TV news crew to what looked to be the wrong location for a video of a BUK anti-aircraft battery as it supposedly made its getaway to Russia after the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July 2014.

Despite his dubious record of accuracy, Higgins has gained mainstream acclaim, in part, because his "findings" always match up with the propaganda theme that the U.S. government and its Western allies are peddling. Though most genuinely

independent bloggers are ignored by the mainstream media, Higgins has found his work touted by both The New York Times and The Washington Post, and Google has included Bellingcat on its First Draft coalition, which will determine which news will be deemed real and which fake.

In other words, the U.S. government has a robust strategy for deploying direct and indirect agents of influence who are now influencing how the titans of the Internet will structure their algorithms to play up favored information and disappear disfavored information.

## **A Heritage of Lies**

During the first Cold War, the CIA and the U.S. Information Agency refined the art of "information warfare," including pioneering some of its current features like having ostensibly "independent" entities and cut-outs present U.S. propaganda to a cynical public that would reject much of what it hears from government but may trust "citizen journalists" and "bloggers."

USIA, which was founded in 1953 and gained new life in the 1980s under its Reagan-appointed director Charles Wick, was abolished in 1999, but its propaganda functions were largely folded into the new office of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, which became a new fount of disinformation.

For instance, in 2014, President Obama's Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy Richard Stengel engaged in a series of falsehoods and misrepresentations regarding Russia's RT network. In one instance, he claimed that the RT had made the "ludicrous assertion" that the U.S. had invested \$5 billion in the regime change project in Ukraine. But that was an obvious reference to a public speech by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland on Dec. 13, 2013, in which she said "we have invested more than \$5 billion" to help Ukraine to achieve its "European aspirations."

Nuland also was a leading proponent of the Ukraine coup, personally cheering on the anti-government rioters. In an intercepted phone call with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, Nuland discussed how "to glue" or "midwife this thing" and who the new leaders would be. She picked Arseniy Yatsenyuk – "Yats is the guy" – who ended up as Prime Minister after elected President Viktor Yanukovich was overthrown.

Despite all the evidence of a U.S.-backed coup, The New York Times simply ignored the evidence, including the Nuland-Pyatt phone call, to announce that there never was a coup. The Times' obeisance to the State Department's false narrative is a good example of how the legacy of Walter Raymond, who died in

2003, extends to the present.

Over several decades, even as the White House changed hands from Republicans to Democrats, the momentum created by Raymond continued to push the peacetime psyops strategy forward.

In more recent years, the wording of the program may have changed to more pleasing euphemisms. But the idea is the same: how you can use psyops, propaganda and disinformation to sell U.S. government policies abroad and at home.

**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).**

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## Why North Korea Wants Nuke Deterrence

**Exclusive:** The revelation that North Korea hacked into South Korea's military secrets and found U.S. plans for a preemptive "decapitation" of Pyongyang's leadership explains its rush to build a nuclear deterrent, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

The Western media has been awash in speculation as to why, about a year ago, North Korea's "crazy" leadership suddenly launched a crash program to vastly improve its ballistic missile capabilities. That question has now been answered.

In September 2016, North Korean cyber-defense forces hacked into South Korean military computers and downloaded 235 gigabytes of documents. The BBC has revealed that the documents included detailed U.S. plans to assassinate North Korea's president, Kim Jong Un, and launch an all-out war on North Korea. The BBC's main source for this story is Rhee Cheol-Hee, a member of the Defense Committee of the South Korean National Assembly.

These plans for aggressive war have actually been long in the making. In 2003, the U.S. scrapped an agreement signed in 1994 under which North Korea suspended its nuclear program and the U.S. agreed to build two light water reactors in North Korea. The two countries also agreed to a step-by-step normalization of relations. Even after the U.S. scrapped the 1994 Agreed



Framework in 2003, North Korea did not restart work on the two reactors frozen under that agreement, which could by now be producing enough plutonium to make several nuclear weapons every year.

However, since 2002-03, when President George W. Bush included North Korea in his "axis of evil," withdrew from the Agreed Framework, and launched an invasion of Iraq over bogus WMD claims, North Korea once again began enriching uranium and making steady progress toward developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them.

By 2016, the North Koreans also were keenly aware of the horrific fate of Iraq and Libya and their leaders after the countries did surrender their unconventional weapons. Not only did the U.S. lead bloody "regime change" invasions but the nations' leaders were brutally murdered, Saddam Hussein by hanging and Muammar Gaddafi sodomized with a knife and then summarily shot in the head.

So, the discovery of the U.S. war plan in 2016 sounded alarm bells in Pyongyang and triggered an unprecedented crash program to quickly expand North Korea's ballistic missile program. Its nuclear weapons tests established that it can produce a small number of first-generation nuclear weapons, but it needed a viable delivery system before it could be sure that its nuclear deterrent would be credible enough to deter a U.S. attack.

In other words, North Korea's main goal has been to close the gap between its existing delivery systems and the missile technology it would need to actually launch a retaliatory nuclear strike against the United States. North Korea's leaders see this as their only chance to escape the same kind of mass destruction visited on North Korea in the first Korean War, when U.S.-led air forces destroyed every city, town and industrial area and General Curtis LeMay boasted that the attacks had killed 20 percent of the population.

Through 2015 and early 2016, North Korea only tested one new missile, the Pukkuksong-1 submarine-launched missile. The missile launched from a submerged submarine and flew 300 miles on its final, successful test, which coincided with the annual U.S.-South Korean military exercises in August 2016.

North Korea also launched its largest satellite to date in February 2016, but the launch vehicle seemed to be the same type as the Unha-3 used to launch a smaller satellite in 2012.

However, since the discovery of the U.S.-South Korean war plans a year ago, North Korea has vastly accelerated its missile development program, conducting at least 27 more tests of a wide range of new missiles and bringing it much

closer to a credible nuclear deterrent. Here is a timeline of the tests:

–Two failed tests of Hwasong-10 medium-range ballistic missiles in October 2016.

–Two successful tests of Pukguksong-2 medium-range ballistic missiles, in February and May 2017. The missiles followed identical trajectories, rising to a height of 340 miles and landing in the sea 300 miles away. South Korean analysts believe this missile's full range is at least 2,000 miles, and North Korea said the tests confirmed it is ready for mass production.

–Four medium-range ballistic missiles that flew an average of 620 miles from the Tongchang-ri space center in March 2017.

–Two apparently failed missile tests from Sinpo submarine base in April 2017.

–Six tests of Hwasong-12 medium-range ballistic missiles (range: 2,300 to 3,700 miles) since April 2017.

–A failed test of a missile believed to be a "KN-17" from Pukchang airbase in April 2017.

–Test of a Scud-type anti-ship missile that flew 300 miles and landed in the Sea of Japan, and two other tests in May 2017.

–Several cruise missiles fired from the East coast in June 2017.

–A test of a powerful new rocket engine, maybe for an ICBM, in June 2017.

–North Korea tested two Hwasong-14 "near-ICBMs" in July 2017. Based on these tests, the Hwasong-14 may be capable of hitting city-sized targets in Alaska or Hawaii with a single nuclear warhead, but cannot yet reach the U.S. West Coast.

–Four more missiles tested in August 2017, including a Hwasong-12 that flew over Japan and travelled 1,700 miles before breaking up, maybe as a result of a failure in a "Post Boost Vehicle" added to improve range and accuracy.

–Another ballistic missile flew 2,300 miles over the Pacific on September 15, 2017.

An analysis of the two tests of the Hwasong-14 in July by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS) concluded that these missiles are not yet capable of carrying a 500 kg payload as far as Seattle or other U.S. West Coast cities. BAS notes that a first generation nuclear weapon based on the Pakistani model that North Korea is believed to be following could not weigh less than 500 kg, once the weight of the warhead casing and a heat shield to survive reentry into the Earth's atmosphere are taken into account.

## Global Reaction

Awareness of the role of the U.S. war plan in spurring the dramatic escalation of North Korea's missile program should be a game changer in the world's response to the crisis over Korea, since it demonstrates that the current acceleration of the North Korean missile program is a defensive response to a serious and potentially existential threat from the United States.

If the United Nations Security Council was not diplomatically and militarily intimidated by the United States, this knowledge should trigger urgent action in the Security Council to require all sides to make a firm commitment to peaceful and binding diplomacy to formally end the Korean War and remove the threat of war from all the people of Korea. And the whole world would unite politically and diplomatically to prevent the U.S. from using its veto to avoid accountability for its leading role in this crisis. Only a unified global response to potential U.S. aggression could possibly convince North Korea that it would have some protection if it eventually halted its nuclear weapons program.

But such unity in the face of a threat of U.S. aggression would be unprecedented. Most U.N. delegates quietly sat and listened on Sept. 19 when President Donald Trump delivered explicit threats of war and aggression against North Korea, Iran and Venezuela, while boasting about his missile strike against Syria on April 6 over dubious and disputed claims about a chemical weapons incident.

For the past 20 years or more, the United States has swaggered about as the "last remaining superpower" and the "indispensable nation," a global law unto itself, using the dangers of terrorism and weapons proliferation and highly selective outrage over "dictators" as propaganda narratives to justify illegal wars, CIA-backed terrorism, its own weapons proliferation, and support for its favored dictators like the brutal rulers of Saudi Arabia and other Arab monarchies.

For even longer, the United States has been two-faced about international law, citing it when some adversary can be accused of a violation but ignoring it when the U.S. or its allies are trampling on the rights of some disfavored country. When the International Court of Justice convicted the United States of aggression (including acts of terrorism) against Nicaragua in 1986, the U.S. withdrew from the ICJ's binding jurisdiction.

Since then, the U.S. has thumbed its nose at the entire structure of international law, confident in the political power of its propaganda or "information warfare" to cast itself as the guardian of law and order in the

world, even as it systematically violates the most basic rules spelled out in the U.N. Charter and the Geneva Conventions.

U.S. propaganda treats the U.N. Charter and the Geneva Conventions, the world's "Never again" to war, torture and the killing of millions of civilians in the Second World War, as relics of another time that it would be naive to take seriously.

But the results of the U.S. alternative – its lawless "might makes right" war policy – are now plain for all to see. In the past 16 years, America's post-9/11 wars have already killed at least two million people, maybe many more, with no end in sight to the slaughter as the U.S.'s policy of illegal war keeps plunging country after country into intractable violence and chaos.

### **An Ally's Fears**

Just as North Korea's missile programs are a rational defense strategy in the face of the threat Pyongyang faces from the U.S., the exposure of the U.S.'s war plan by American allies in South Korea is also a rational act of self-preservation, since they too are threatened by the possibility of war on the Korean peninsula.

Now maybe other U.S. allies, the wealthy countries that have provided political and diplomatic cover for the U.S.'s 20-year campaign of illegal war, will finally reassert their humanity, their sovereignty and their own obligations under international law, and start to rethink their roles as junior partners in U.S. aggression.

Countries like the U.K., France and Australia will sooner or later have to choose between forward-looking roles in a sustainable, peaceful multi-polar world and a slavish loyalty to the ever-more desperate death throes of U.S. hegemony. Now might be a good moment to make that choice, before they are dragged into new U.S. wars in Korea, Iran or Venezuela.

Even Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tennessee, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is afraid that Donald Trump will lead humanity into World War III. But it might come as a surprise to people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya and parts of a dozen other countries already engulfed by U.S.-driven wars to learn that they are not already in the midst of World War III.

Perhaps what really worries the Senator is that he and his colleagues may no longer be able to sweep these endless atrocities under the plush carpets of the halls of Congress without a genteel Barack Obama in the White House to sweet-talk U.S. allies around the world and keep the millions being killed in U.S. wars off U.S. TVs and computer screens, out of sight and out of mind.

If politicians in the U.S. and around the world need the ugliness of Donald Trump as a mirror for their own greed, ignorance and temerity, to shame them into changing their ways, so be it – whatever it takes. But it should not escape anyone anywhere that the signature on this diabolical war plan that now threatens to kill millions of Koreans was not Donald Trump's but Barack Obama's.

George Orwell might well have been describing the partisan blindness of the West's self-satisfied, so easily deluded, neoliberal society when he wrote this in 1945,

“Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them, and there is almost no kind of outrage – torture, the use of hostages, forced labor, mass deportations, imprisonment without trial, forgery, assassination, the bombing of civilians – which does not change its color when it is committed by our side... The Nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them.”

Here's the bottom line: The United States has been planning to assassinate Kim Jong Un and to launch an all-out war on North Korea. There. You've heard it. Now, can you still be manipulated into believing that Kim Jong Un is simply “crazy” and North Korea is the gravest threat to world peace?

Or do you now understand that the United States is the real threat to peace in Korea, just as it was in Iraq, Libya and many other countries where the leaders were deemed “crazy” and U.S. officials (and the Western mainstream media) promoted war as the only “rational” alternative?

**Nicolas J S Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapters on “Obama at War” in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama's First Term as a Progressive Leader*.**

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## Russia-gate Jumps the Shark

**Exclusive:** Russia-gate has jumped the shark with laughable new claims about a tiny number of “Russia-linked” social media ads, but the U.S. mainstream media is determined to keep a straight face, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A key distinction between propaganda and journalism is that manipulative propaganda relies on exaggeration and deceit while honest journalism provides context and perspective. But what happens when the major news outlets of the world's superpower become simply conveyor belts for warmongering propaganda?

That is a question that the American people now face as The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and virtually the entire mainstream media hype ridiculously minor allegations about Russia's "meddling" in American politics into front-page hysteria.

For instance, on Tuesday, the major news outlets were filled with the latest lurid chapter of Russia-gate, how Google, the Internet's dominant search engine, had detected suspected "Russia-linked" accounts that bought several thousand dollars worth of ads.

The Washington Post ran this item as front-page news entitled "Google finds links to Russian disinformation in its services," with the excited lede paragraph declaring: "Russian operatives bought ads across several of Google's services without the company's knowledge, the latest evidence that their campaign to influence U.S. voters was as sprawling as it was sophisticated in deploying the technology industry's most powerful tools."

Wow! That sounds serious. However, if you read deeply enough into the story, you discover that the facts are a wee bit less dramatic. The Post tells us:

"Google's internal investigation found \$4,700 of search ads and display ads that the company believes are Russian-connected, and found \$53,000 of ads with political content that were purchased from Russian Internet providers, building addresses or with Russian currency, people familiar with the investigation said.

...

"One Russian-linked account spent \$7,000 on ads to promote a documentary called 'You've Been Trumped,' a film about Donald Trump's efforts to build a golf course in Scotland along an environmentally sensitive coastline, these people said. Another spent \$30,000 on ads questioning whether President Obama needed to resign. Another bought ads to promote political merchandise for Obama."

A journalist – rather than a propagandist – would immediately follow these figures with some context, i.e., that Google's net digital ad sales revenue is about \$70 billion annually. In other words, these tiny ad buys – with some alleged connection to Russia, a nation of 144 million people and not all Vladimir Putin's "operatives" – are infinitesimal when put into any rational perspective.

## **A Dangerous Hysteria**

But rationality is not what the Post and other U.S. mainstream news outlets are engaged in here. They are acting as propagandists determined to whip up a dangerous hysteria about being at “war” with nuclear-armed Russia and to delegitimize Trump’s election last year.

It doesn’t seem to matter that the facts don’t fit the desired narrative. First of all, none of this content, detected by Google, is “disinformation” as the Post claims, unless you consider a critical documentary about Trump’s Scottish golf course to be “disinformation,” or for that matter criticism and/or support for President Obama.

And, by the way, how does any of this material reveal a Russian plot to put Trump in the White House and to ensure Hillary Clinton’s defeat, which was the original Russia-gate narrative? Now, we’re being told that any Internet ads bought by Russians or maybe even by Americans living in Russia are part of some nefarious Kremlin plot even if the content is an anti-Trump documentary or some ads for or against President Obama, but nothing attacking Hillary Clinton.

This surely does not seem like evidence of a “sophisticated” campaign to influence U.S. politics, as the Post tells us; it is either an indication of a totally incoherent campaign or no campaign at all, just some random ads taken out by people in Russia possibly to increase clicks on a Web site or to sell some merchandise or to express their own opinions.

And, if you think that this latest Post story is an anomaly – that maybe some editor was having a bad day and just forgot to include the requisite perspective and balance – you’d be wrong.

The same journalistic failures have appeared in similar articles about Facebook and Twitter, which like Google didn’t detect any Russian operation until put under intense pressure by influential members of Congress and then “found” a tiny number of “Russia-linked” accounts.

At Facebook, after two searches found nothing – and after a personal visit from Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a key legislator on the high-tech industry – the social media company turned up \$100,000 in “Russia-linked” ads spread out over three years (compared to its annual revenue of \$27 billion). Facebook also reported that only 44 percent of the ads appeared *before* the 2016 election.

Facing similar pressures from key members of Congress, Twitter identified 201 “Russia-linked” accounts (out of Twitter’s 328 million monthly users).

### **Tiny Pebbles**

However, rather than include the comparative numbers which would show how nutty Russia-gate has become, the U.S. mainstream media systematically avoids any reference to how tiny the “Russia-linked” pebbles are when compared to the size of the very large lake into which they were allegedly tossed.

The mainstream Russia-gate narrative also keeps running up against other inconveniently contrary facts that then have to be explained away by the “responsible media.” For instance, The New York Times discovered that one of the “Russia-linked” Facebook groups was devoted to photos of “adorable puppies.” That left the “newspaper of record” musing about how nefarious the Russians must be to cloak their sinister operations behind puppies. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “The Mystery of the Russia-gate Puppies.”]

The alternative explanation, of course, is unthinkable at least within the confines of “acceptable thought”; the alternative being that there might be no sinister Kremlin campaign to poison American politics or to install Trump in the White House, that what we are witnessing is a mainstream stampede similar to what preceded the Iraq War in 2003.

In the run-up to that disastrous invasion, every tidbit of suspicion about Saddam Hussein hiding WMD was trumpeted loudly across the front pages of The New York Times, The Washington Post and other major U.S. news outlets. The handful of dissenters who questioned the groupthink were ignored or dismissed as “Saddam apologists”; most were essentially banned from the public square.

Another similarity is that in both cases the U.S. government was injecting large sums of money that helped finance the pro-war propaganda. In the Iraq case, Congress funded the Iraqi National Congress, which helped generate false WMD claims that were then accepted credulously by the U.S. mainstream media.

In the Russia-gate case, Congress has authorized tens of millions of dollars to combat alleged Russian “propaganda and disinformation,” a sum that is creating a feeding frenzy among “scholars” and other “experts” to produce reports that support the anti-Russia narrative. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “The Slimy Business of Russia-gate.”]

Of course, the big difference between Iraq in 2003 and Russia in 2017 is that as catastrophic as the Iraq invasion was, it pales against the potential for thermo-nuclear war that could lie at the end of this latest hysteria.

**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).**



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# A Deaf Ear to Dire Russian Warnings

Official Washington is so obsessed with the hyped Russia-gate allegations that it isn't picking up on dire warnings from Russia that continued U.S. military interference in Syria won't be tolerated, as Gilbert Doctorow notes.

By Gilbert Doctorow

From time to time, the Kremlin uses the Sunday evening weekly news wrap-up program of Dmitry Kiselyov on state television, channel Rossiya-1, to send blunt and public warnings to Washington without diplomatic niceties. Last night was one such case and we must hope that the intended audience within the Beltway can put aside all its distractions about Russia-gate long enough to read a real message from Moscow.

The last such message came in the week following President Trump's April 6 decision to launch 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian air base to punish the Syrian government for an alleged but disputed chemical attack on a village in Idlib province. TV host Kiselyov used his airtime to spell out Russia's disdainful response, which he characterized as unprecedented in scope and seriousness.

It was essential to put all the elements of the warning together in one place, as he did, because the Pentagon sought to downplay the elements in isolation, such as Russia's installation of the Iskander nuclear potential missiles in Kaliningrad, a Russian city on the Baltic Sea surrounded by Poland and Lithuania; or the abrogation of the deconfliction agreement relating to air space over Syria; or the dispatch of still more Russian vessels to the Eastern Mediterranean equipped to sink U.S. Navy ships.

While U.S. generals were saying that the Russians didn't really mean it, Kiselyov put the whole picture on the screen: an ultimatum to Washington to back off or be prepared for war.

A still earlier message of this kind to Washington aired on the Kiselyov news show in the week following the supposedly accidental Sept. 17, 2016 bombing by U.S. and allied warplanes against Syrian army positions inside the encircled eastern town of Deir Ezzor, which killed more than 80 Syrian soldiers and prepared the way for a renewed offensive by the Islamic State. That bombing scuttled the agreement on a Syrian cease-fire concluded with the approval of President Obama less than a week earlier by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei

Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry after a 14-hour negotiating session.

Lavrov was shown on the Kiselyov program openly accusing U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter of directing "friendly fire" against Kerry and of dangerous insubordination to his boss, the U.S. President, which put in question any possibility of reaching agreements with the Americans on anything.

### **Who's in Charge Here?**

That last question about who's in charge in Washington has now re-emerged in the program that Kiselyov presented on Sunday evening. The Americans were identified as the "main obstacle" to the mopping up operation in Syria, at a time when Kiselyov indicated that people could finally see "the light at the end of the tunnel" for the horrific six-year conflict with more than 90 percent Syrian territory now back under government control.

The core of the accusation is that the United States is secretly aiding the Islamist terror groups at the center of the remaining resistance to President Bashar al-Assad's regime: supplying the terror groups with weapons, helping them to move around, removing them from hostile fire, and giving them the findings of aerial reconnaissance, maps of where Syrian government forces are operating and even the locations of Russian military detachments.

Things have gotten to the point where the Russians feel that it is not the military capability of the Islamic State that stands in the way of routing the remaining terrorists from Syrian territory but this American assistance to the terrorists. This analysis, said Kiselyov, is not his own idea: it is the official position of the Russian Ministry of Defense as issued through its spokesman this week, Igor Konashenkov.

Kiselyov added: "The Americans deny everything. But the RF Ministry of Defense does not believe their words, relying instead on facts. We recall in the past week how part of the main road connecting Palmyra and Deir Ezzor was taken over by the fanatics. This is the main artery supplying the Syrian forces leading the offensive from Deir Ezzor against the remaining forces of the terrorists in Syria. De facto this was an attack in the rear. This was planned and facilitated by the Americans. In parallel, on 28 September a large group of terrorists numbering about 300 men left the area of the American base in al-Tanf at the Jordanian border. In this area there is a refugee camp numbering tens of thousands."

According to Kiselyov, the Americans have cut off the refugee camp, not allowing in United Nations or other humanitarian relief convoys, so as to use the camp as

cover, a human shield, for the Islamic State fighters whom the U.S. military is supporting.

### **Striking at 'Random Events'**

According to the warning from Russian defense spokesman Konashenkov, if the U.S. forces see these attacks by mobile units of terrorists whom the Americans are assisting as "unforeseen random events," then Russian armed forces in Syria are prepared to totally destroy all such "random events" directed against the zone under their control.

Kiselyov asked why is this American behavior happening and whether President Trump made this decision. But the question is rhetorical. Though it may seem "amazing," Kiselyov suggested that it appears Trump was not a party to this behavior, that it more likely resulted from what the TV host called sloppy management when the military gets out from under political control.

On the territory of Syria, Kiselyov said, "they start wandering around quite on their own" and "flirting" with the terrorist groups.

Throughout the six-year war, the United States and its allies – including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Jordan and Israel – have provided support for Islamist militants and other rebels who have fought in close coordination with and often shared sophisticated U.S. weapons with Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Nusra Front, and at times Al Qaeda's spinoff, the Islamic State.

However, whatever the U.S. intentions may be, said Kiselyov, the result is extremely unpleasant both for Russia and for the American leadership as its generals are being pushed toward adventurism.

Konashenkov characterized the area in Syria under American control near the Jordanian border as a "black hole" that is 100 kilometers long. From this "black hole," the terrorists come out to stage their attacks on Syrian troops and against the peaceful civilian population.

The Sunday program's feature segment then shifted to a calmer note with the insistence that Russian President Vladimir Putin remains confident in the victory over the terrorists regardless of who is aiding them. To demonstrate this confidence, the show presented footage of Putin's response to questions put to him at the Energy Forum in Moscow at mid-week. Putin said, "in the end, we all [presumably including the Americans] have common interests in securing Syria and the region against terrorists and that will bring us together for cooperative action."

In the meantime, however, videos showed the results of Russian air activity in

Syria this past week, including more than 400 sorties of Russian planes based in Syria, plus SU-134 and SU-135 bombers arriving from Russian territory that killed a dozen or more terrorist leaders together with 50 security personnel and seriously injured a top official who lost an arm and sank into a coma.

Russian air attacks destroyed the terrorists' main underground weapons caches amounting to 1,000 tons, according to the report, and an attack by Kalibr cruise missiles launched from submarines in the Mediterranean destroyed Islamic State command installations and vehicles as well as weapons supplies. This attack cleared the way for Syrian troops to begin the liberation of the town of Meyadin.

The program left the dots unconnected, but the Russian threat is clear: Moscow will use its air power to eliminate all forces standing in the way of complete victory including U.S. forces on the ground near the Jordanian border.

### **The Saudi Visit**

The same news round-up had another segment that relates in less direct fashion to the Russian success in Syria: a state visit to Russia by the king of Saudi Arabia, the first in the two countries' 90-plus years of diplomatic relations. And it was not a simple affair.

Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud brought with him a contingent of 1,000 people, including business leaders, ministry officials and senior military officers. They came with a reported 100 tons of baggage, including favorite carpets and other accouterments of the royal lifestyle.

All aspects of this visit were impressive, including the signing of contracts and letters of intent for multi-billion-dollar joint investments in industrial projects in both countries, possible Saudi purchases of Russian Liquefied Natural Gas from yet another mega-project seeking financing and multi-billion dollar military procurement, said to include the latest S-400 air defense system that Russia agreed to supply to Turkey a few weeks ago in exchange for a \$2.5 billion down-payment and which Turkey accepted gratefully over NATO objections.

Putin quipped to the moderator of the Moscow Energy Forum, also held during the past week, that nothing is forever, not even the U.S. hold on the Saudis.

Kiselyov placed the visit in the context of Russian foreign policy in the region generally. Putin, he said, is pursuing a policy of seeking peaceful harmony in the Near East that takes into account the balance of interests of all countries in the region, a policy which is paying off: Russia is now the only country in the world to have good relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, Turkey, Iraq and, of course, Syria.

From both segments it would appear that U.S. longstanding domination of the region is unraveling.

**Gilbert Doctorow is an independent political analyst based in Brussels. His next book, Does the United States have a Future? will be published during October 2017.**

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