

Obama Bequeaths a More Dangerous World

Special Report: President Obama may have entered the White House with a desire to rein in America's global war-making but he succumbed to neocon pressure and left behind an even more dangerous world, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Any fair judgment about Barack Obama's presidency must start with the recognition that he inherited a dismal situation from George W. Bush: the U.S. economy was in free-fall and U.S. troops were bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan. Clearly, these intertwined economic and foreign policy crises colored how Obama viewed his options, realizing that one false step could tip the world into the abyss.

It's also true that his Republican rivals behaved as if they had no responsibility for the messes that Obama had to clean up. From the start, they set out to trip him up rather than lend a hand. Plus, the mainstream media blamed Obama for this failure of bipartisanship, rewarding the Republicans for their nihilistic obstructionism.

That said, however, it is also true that Obama – an inexperienced manager – made huge mistakes from the outset and failed to rectify them in a timely fashion. For instance, he bought into the romantic notion of a “Team of Rivals” with his White House trumpeting the comparisons to Abraham Lincoln (although some of Lincoln's inclusion of rivals actually resulted from deals made at the 1860 Republican convention in Chicago to gain Lincoln the nomination).

In the real world of modern Washington, Obama's choice of hawkish Sen. Hillary Clinton to be his Secretary of State and Republican apparatchik Robert Gates to remain as Secretary of Defense – along with keeping Bush's high command, including neocon favorite Gen. David Petraeus – guaranteed that he would achieve little real foreign policy change.

Indeed, in 2009, this triumvirate collaborated to lock Obama into a futile counterinsurgency escalation in Afghanistan that did little more than get another 1,000 or so U.S. soldiers killed along with many more Afghans. In his memoir *Duty*, Gates said he and Clinton could push their joint views – favoring more militaristic strategies – in the face of White House opposition because “we were both seen as ‘un-fireable.’”

Seasoned Operatives

So, Obama's rookie management mistake of surrounding himself with seasoned

Washington operatives with a hawkish agenda doomed his early presidency to maneuvering at the edges of change rather than engineering a major – and necessary – overhaul of how the United States deals with the world.

Obama may have thought he could persuade these experienced players with his intellect and charm but that is not how power works. At moments when Obama was inclined to move in a less warlike direction, Clinton, Gates and Petraeus could easily leak damaging comments about his “weakness” to friendly journalists at mainstream publications. Obama found himself consistently under pressure and he lacked the backbone to prove Gates wrong by firing Gates and Clinton.

Thus, Obama was frequently outmaneuvered. Besides the ill-fated counterinsurgency surge in Afghanistan, there was his attempt in 2009-10 to get Brazil and Turkey to broker a deal with Iran in which it would surrender much of its enriched uranium. But Israel and the neocons wanted a “regime change” bombing strategy against Iran, leading Secretary Clinton to personally torpedo the Brazil-Turkey initiative (with the strong support of The New York Times’ editorial page) as Obama silently acquiesced to her insubordination.

In 2011, Obama also gave in to pressure from Clinton and one of his key advisers, “humanitarian” warmonger Samantha Power, to support another “regime change” in Libya. That U.S.-facilitated air war devastated the Libyan military and ended with Islamic militants sodomizing Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi with a knife and then murdering him, a grisly outcome that Clinton celebrated with a chirpy rephrase of Julius Caesar’s famous boast about a conquest, as she said: “We came, we saw, he died.”

Clinton was less upbeat a year later when Islamic militants in Benghazi, Libya, killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. personnel, launching a scandal that led to the exposure of her private email server and reverberated through to the final days of her failed presidential campaign in 2016.

Second-Term Indecision

Even after Clinton, Gates and Petraeus were gone by the start of Obama’s second term, he continued to acquiesce to most of the demands of the neocons and liberal interventionists. Rather than act as a decisive U.S. president, Obama often behaved more like the sullen teen-ager complaining from the backseat about not wanting to go on a family trip. Obama grumbled about some of the neocon/liberal-hawk policies but he mostly went along, albeit half-heartedly at times.

For instance, although he recognized that the idea of “moderate” Syrian rebels

being successful in ousting President Bashar al-Assad was a “fantasy,” he nevertheless approved covert shipments of weapons, which often ended up in the hands of Al Qaeda-linked terrorists and their allies. But he balked at a full-scale U.S. military intervention.

Obama’s mixed-signal Syrian strategy not only violated international law – by committing aggression against a sovereign state – but also contributed to the horrific bloodshed that ripped apart Syria and created a massive flow of refugees into Turkey and Europe. By the end of his presidency, the United States found itself largely sidelined as Russia and regional powers, Turkey and Iran, took the lead in trying to resolve the conflict.

But one of the apparent reasons for Obama’s susceptibility to such fruitless undertakings was that he seemed terrified of Israel and its pugnacious Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who made clear his disdain for Obama by essentially endorsing Obama’s 2012 Republican challenger, Mitt Romney.

Although Obama may have bristled at Netanyahu’s arrogance – displayed even during meetings in the Oval Office – the President always sought to mollify the tempestuous Prime Minister. At the peak of Obama’s power – after he vanquished Romney despite Netanyahu’s electoral interference – Obama chose to grovel before Netanyahu with an obsequious three-day visit to Israel.

Despite that trip, Netanyahu treated Obama with disdain, setting a new standard for chutzpah by accepting a Republican invitation to appear before a joint session of Congress in 2015 and urge U.S. senators and representatives to side with Israel against their own president over Obama’s negotiated agreement to constrain Iran’s nuclear program. Netanyahu and the neocons wanted to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran.

However, the Iran nuclear deal, which Netanyahu failed to derail, may have been Obama’s most significant diplomatic achievement. (In his passive-aggressive way, Obama gave Netanyahu some measure of payback by abstaining on a December 2016 motion before the United Nations Security Council condemning Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands. Obama neither vetoed it nor voted for it, but let it pass.)

Obama also defied Washington’s hardliners when he moved to normalize relations with Cuba, although – by 2016 – the passionate feelings about the Caribbean island had faded as a geopolitical issue, making the Cuban sanctions more a relic of the old Cold War than a hot-button issue.

Obama’s Dubious Legacy

Yet, Obama’s fear of standing up consistently to Official Washington’s neocons

and cowering before the Israeli-Saudi tandem in the Middle East did much to define his foreign policy legacy. While Obama did drag his heels on some of their more extreme demands by resisting their calls to bomb the Syrian government in 2013 and by choosing diplomacy over war with Iran in 2014, Obama repeatedly circled back to ingratiating himself to the neocons and America's demanding Israeli-Saudi "allies."

Instead of getting tough with Israel over its continued abuse of the Palestinians, Obama gave Netanyahu's regime the most sophisticated weapons from the U.S. arsenal. Instead of calling out the Saudis as the principal state sponsor of terrorism – for their support for Al Qaeda and the Islamic State – Obama continued the fiction that Iran was the lead villain on terrorism and cooperated when the Saudis launched a brutal air war against their impoverished neighbors in Yemen.

Obama personally acknowledged authorizing military strikes in seven countries, mostly through his aggressive use of drones, an approach toward push-button warfare that has spread animosity against the United States to the seven corners of the earth.

However, perhaps Obama's most dangerous legacy is the New Cold War with Russia, which began in earnest when Washington's neocons struck back against Moscow for its cooperation with Obama in getting Syria to surrender its chemical weapons (which short-circuited neocon hopes to bomb the Syrian military) and in persuading Iran to accept tight limits on its nuclear program (another obstacle to a neocon bombing plan).

In both cases, the neocons were bent on "regime change," or at least a destructive bombing operation in line with Israeli and Saudi hostility toward Syria and Iran. But the biggest challenge to these schemes was the positive relationship that had developed between Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin. So, that relationship had to be shattered and the wedge that the neocons found handy was Ukraine.

By September 2013, Carl Gershman, the neocon president of the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy, had identified Ukraine as "the biggest prize" and a steppingstone toward the ultimate goal of ousting Putin. By late fall 2013 and winter 2014, neocons inside the U.S. government, including Sen. John McCain and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, were actively agitating for a "regime change" in Ukraine, a putsch against elected President Viktor Yanukovich that was carried out on Feb. 22, 2014.

This operation on Russia's border provoked an immediate reaction from the

Kremlin, which then supported ethnic-Russian Ukrainians who had voted heavily for Yanukovich and who objected to the coup regime in Kiev. The neocon-dominated U.S. mainstream media, of course, portrayed the Ukrainian conflict as a simple case of "Russian aggression," and Obama fell in line with this propaganda narrative.

After his relationship with Putin had deteriorated over the ensuing two-plus years, Obama chose to escalate the New Cold War in his final weeks in office by having U.S. intelligence agencies leak unsubstantiated claims that Putin interfered in the U.S. presidential election by hacking and publicizing Democratic emails that helped Trump and hurt Hillary Clinton.

Smearing Trump

The CIA also put in play salacious rumors about the Kremlin blackmailing Trump over a supposed video of him cavorting with prostitutes in a Moscow hotel. And, according to The Wall Street Journal, U.S. counterintelligence agents investigated communications between retired Gen. Michael Flynn, Trump's national security advisor, and Russian officials. In the New McCarthyism that now surrounds the New Cold War, any conversation with Russians apparently puts an American under suspicion for treason.

The anti-Russian frenzy also pulled in The New York Times, The Washington Post and virtually the entire mainstream media, which now treat any dissent from the official U.S. narratives condemning Moscow as prima facie evidence that you are part of a Russian propaganda apparatus. Even some "progressive" publications have joined this stampede because they so despise Trump that they will tout any accusation to damage his presidency.

Besides raising serious concerns about civil liberties and freedom of association, Obama's end-of-term anti-Russian hysteria may be leading the Democratic Party into supplanting the Republicans as America's leading pro-war party allied with neocons, liberal hawks, the CIA and the Military-Industrial Complex – in opposition to President Trump's less belligerent approach toward Russia.

This "trading places" moment over which party is the bigger warmonger could be another profound part of Obama's legacy, presenting a crisis for pro-peace Democrats as the Trump presidency unfolds.

The Real Obama

Yet, one of the mysteries of Obama is whether he was always a closet hawk who just let his true colors show over the course of his eight years in office or whether he was a weak executive who desperately wanted to belong to the

Washington establishment and underwent a gradual submission to achieve that acceptance.

I know some Obama watchers favor the first answer, that he simply bamboozled people into thinking that he was an agent for foreign policy change when he was always a stealth warmonger. But I tend to take the second position. To me, Obama was a person who – despite his intelligence, eloquence and accomplishments – was never accepted by America's predominantly white establishment.

Because he was a black male raised in a white family and in a white-dominated society, Obama understood that he never really belonged. But Obama desperately wanted to be part of that power structure of well-dressed, well-schooled and well-connected elites who moved with such confidence within the economic-political system.

An instructive moment came in 2014 when Obama was under sustained criticism for his refusal to bomb the Syrian military after a sarin gas attack outside Damascus that was initially blamed on the government though later evidence suggested that it was a provocation committed by Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate.

Despite the uncertainty about who was responsible, the neocons and liberal hawks deemed Obama "weak" for not ordering the bombing strike to enforce his "red line" against chemical weapons use.

In a 2016 article in The Atlantic, Obama cited his sarin decision as a moment when he resisted the Washington "playbook" that usually favors a military response. The article also reported that Obama had been informed by Director of National Intelligence James Clapper that there was no "slam dunk" evidence pinning the attack on the Syrian military. Yet, still Obama came under intense pressure to strike.

A leader of this pressure campaign was neocon ideologue Robert Kagan, an architect of the Iraq War and the husband of Assistant Secretary of State Nuland. Kagan penned a long essay in The New Republic entitled "Superpowers Don't Get to Retire." A subsequent New York Times article observed that Kagan "depicted President Obama as presiding over an inward turn by the United States that threatened the global order and broke with more than 70 years of American presidents and precedence."

Kagan "called for Mr. Obama to resist a popular pull toward making the United States a nation without larger responsibilities, and to reassume the more muscular approach to the world out of vogue in Washington since the war in Iraq drained the country of its appetite for intervention," the Times article read.

Obama was so sensitive to this criticism that he modified his speech to the West

Point graduation and “even invited Mr. Kagan to lunch to compare world views,” the Times reported. A source familiar with that conversation described it to me as a “meeting of equals.”

So, Obama’s subservience to the neocons and liberal hawks may have begun as a case of an inexperienced president getting outmaneuvered by rivals whom he had foolishly empowered. But Obama’s descent into a full-scale New Cold Warrior by the end of his second term suggests that he was no longer an overpowered naïf but someone who had become a committed convert.

How Obama reached that point may be less significant than the fact that he did. Thus, the world that President Obama bequeaths to President Trump may not have all the same dangers that Bush left to Obama but the post-Obama world has hazards that Obama did more to create than to resolve – and some of the new risks may be even scarier.

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).

Need to Reorganize US Spy Agencies

On President Trump’s first full day in office, he went to the CIA and promised to back the nation’s spy agencies, but his time would be better spent downsizing the sprawling intelligence community, says Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

Originating from the dispute over whether the Russians hacked the U.S. election and tried to influence it, rumblings came from the Trump transition team about reorganizing the intelligence community or parts thereof. That’s not a bad idea at all.

Prior to 9/11, the U.S. intelligence community had grown to 16 sprawling, secretive agencies, which stayed in their stovepipes, thus cooperating insufficiently. For example, the CIA and FBI had coordination problems that really impaired the government’s warning of the 9/11 attacks.

Logically, coordination problems tend to multiply the more intelligence agencies the government has and the bigger they get. Yet after 9/11, the George W. Bush

administration and Congress instead used political logic. They wanted to be perceived as “doing something,” often anything, about the problem – no matter whether it would be effective in dealing with it, a mere placebo with no effect but looked good, or an action that was actually counterproductive.

“Reform” of the intelligence community after 9/11 fell into the last category. After a crisis, politicians often add government bureaucracy to show the public they are not letting a problem slide. In this case, they added yet a 17th intelligence agency – the Office of the Director of National Intelligence – to “coordinate” the CIA, FBI, NSA and other mostly gargantuan organizations of the 16-agency community.

Of course, one person couldn't herd all these big cats, so the DNI had to have a new bureaucracy to allegedly tame them. Yet the DNI's bureaucracy did not win control over the budgets of the other 16 agencies. In fact, most of the intelligence community's budget is controlled by the massive Department of Defense – in which many of the intelligence agencies reside.

Complicated enough? In the government, like everywhere else, controlling money directs effort. Thus, the DNI has been ineffectual in coordinating the U.S. intelligence community.

Instead of adding yet another bureaucracy to coordinate the existing ones (after 9/11, the president and Congress did the same thing in the homeland security sphere by creating the new Department of Homeland Security to incorporate and coordinate all the government entities dealing with that function), the politicians should have done the opposite.

The new enemy, which is not so new anymore, was small, agile cells of terrorists, not the traditional slothful nation states of the Cold War, such as the Soviet Union. In bureaucratic parlance, the terrorist chain of command is simple and responsive. To counter this threat, the intelligence community must also be nimbler, not less agile.

Dysfunction and Inefficiency

This means that after 9/11, intelligence agencies and excess personnel should have been pruned, not added. Dysfunction and inefficiency would have also been reduced when dealing with threats from other nation-states.

A specific plan for streamlining the intelligence community to make it more agile and effective for a new global security environment might begin by eliminating the ineffectual Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI). Then the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) should be merged with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), which like the ODNI, sits on top of other

intelligence agencies – the service intelligence agencies of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard, which provide tactical battlefield intelligence.

The Marine and Coast Guard intelligence agencies could be folded under the umbrella of the Office of Naval Intelligence. The technical collection functions of the National Security Agency, The National Reconnaissance Office, and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency should be merged into an Office of Technical Intelligence Collection.

The small Office of Intelligence and Research in the State Department, the only intelligence agency that was skeptical that Saddam Hussein's Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, should be left alone as a counter to the frequently alarmist threat inflation of the CIA/DIA.

The FBI should be returned to being a law enforcement agency, with its intelligence functions being transferred to the Office of Intelligence and Analysis in the Homeland Security Department. The intelligence branches of the Energy and Treasury Departments, as well as that of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in the Justice Department, should be abolished (in fact, because the federal drug war has been such a costly and abysmal failure, the entire DEA should be dismantled).

Streamlining and Consolidation

Such streamlining of and consolidation in the intelligence community would enable many redundancies to be reduced or eliminated, thus eliminating much duplication and bureaucratic overhead.

In addition, during the Cold War the U.S. intelligence community concentrated on having the best technical means of gathering information in the world – satellites, spy aircraft, drones, and other technological marvels of modern intelligence gathering. However, such gadgets have their limitations when trying to penetrate a small, secretive terrorist cell; human agents are still needed. Yet a decade-and-a-half after 9/11, the intelligence community still needs to improve its human intelligence (humint) capability. One major reason humint has lagged is that it doesn't generate big money contracts in states and congressional districts, as does the building of satellites, spy aircraft, drones, and other electronic collection gizmos.

Thus, some intelligence agencies need to be eliminated or combined with sister agencies and the excess personnel eliminated. On the other hand, money should be taken away from technical collection and used to recruit more human agents.

In sum, almost any Trump administration shake-up of the ossified intelligence

community would be welcome.

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Selectivity in Trashing Trump

Exclusive: Around the United States, massive demonstrations have protested the inauguration of Donald Trump, but there is a danger that the anti-Trump forces could block the positive elements of his message, writes Robert Parry

By Robert Parry

To say that Donald Trump is an imperfect messenger for some reasonable messages doesn't do justice to the word "imperfect." But he is right to note that Official Washington has gone far off-track in recent decades and that the Establishment needs shaking up.

For instance, in his Inaugural Address, President Trump made clear that he would break with the orthodoxy of neoconservatism and liberal interventionism that has led to endless wars in the Middle East and a dangerous New Cold War with Russia.

Trump declared: "We will seek friendship and goodwill with the nations of the world, but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first. We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example. We will shine for everyone to follow."

That sentiment reflects a traditional U.S. approach to the world, followed by America's first presidents who warned against "entangling alliances" and articulated best by President John Quincy Adams who said in 1821 that while America will speak on behalf of liberty, "she has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings, as to the last vital drop that visits the heart.

"Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be

unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.”

Over the past several decades – even after the end of the Cold War –American presidents have violated this founding precept as they repeatedly went abroad “in search of monsters to destroy.”

These missions – designed and advocated by Washington’s dominant neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks – have not only wasted trillions of dollars and cost the lives of thousands of U.S. soldiers but the projects have failed to improve national security, have led to massive bloodshed in the targeted countries and have undermined global stability.

No Accountability

Yet, it has been a sign of Official Washington’s disconnect from reality that the architects of these failed endeavors have escaped accountability and indeed have solidified their control over the foreign policy establishment and the mainstream news media.

Despite the bloody fiascos in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and other unfortunate countries where the neocons and liberal hawks have prescribed “regime change,” these esteemed know-it-alls have systematically pushed aside all rivals, including old-school “realists” and peace proponents.

The confirmation gauntlets that have confronted Trump’s nominees for State, Defense and other national security posts have revealed a near-unanimous bipartisanship in favor of a continuation of neocon/liberal-hawk orthodoxy, demanding pugnacious approaches toward Iran, Russia, Syria and China.

So, while there is a great deal to worry about from President Trump and his administration – particularly an apparent hostility toward climate-change science, disdain for minority rights and the embrace of right-wing law-and-order nostrums – there could be a new opening for conflict resolution and a return to traditional diplomacy. Already, there has been a housecleaning at the State Department, where the biographies of some of the most prominent neocons, such as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, have disappeared.

Trump’s Secretary of State-designate Rex Tillerson is regarded as a pragmatic businessman who has little patience for the destructive “regime change” strategies of the neocons and liberal hawks. However, because of that and Tillerson’s desire for better relations with Russia, many Democrats and some Republicans appear eager to block his confirmation and force Trump to pick someone more acceptable to the neocon/liberal-hawk foreign policy establishment.

Reasons to Resist

Progressives and Democrats have every right and reason to express revulsion at Trump's crude remarks about women, Mexicans and others – and to resist Trump if he pursues the failed environmental, economic and domestic policies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. But there seems to be an attitude of rejecting everything associated with Trump.

On Friday when I was moving among protesters on the outskirts of Trump's inauguration, I noticed a large number of signs denouncing Trump's interest in détente with Russia. There were repeated references to Russian President Vladimir Putin and to the CIA's unproven claims that Putin approved the release of Democratic emails showing the party hierarchy's hostility to Sen. Bernie Sanders and revealing the contents of Hillary Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street and some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

This CIA-initiated narrative that Putin somehow rigged the election for Trump has become an accepted wisdom not only in Official Washington but among much of the Democratic Party and within the progressive movement. Little interest is shown toward the lack of evidence provided by the U.S. intelligence community and the dubious reasoning involved, since it would have been a huge gamble for Putin to have interfered in the U.S. election and then faced the likely outcome of an angry President Hillary Clinton seeking revenge once she took office.

There's also a logical inconsistency in portraying Trump as a Manchurian candidate, since the idea of putting such a secret agent in the White House would involve the person talking tough *against* Russia during the campaign – to garner political support – rather than declaring publicly a desire for better relations with Russia, a position that was widely viewed as harmful to Trump's chances.

Trump never hid his interest in avoiding a costly New Cold War with Russia and took a rhetorical beating for it, both during the Republican primaries and during the general election. That would not have been the approach of a true Manchurian candidate.

A Current Danger

But the current danger for Democrats and progressives is that – by bashing everything that Trump says and does – they will further alienate the white working-class voters who became his base and will push away anti-war activists.

There is a risk that the Left will trade places with the Right on the question of war and peace, with Democrats and progressives associating themselves with Hillary Clinton's support for "endless war" in the Middle East, the political

machinations of the CIA, and a New Cold War with Russia, essentially moving into an alliance with the Military (and Intelligence) Industrial Complex.

Many populists already view the national Democrats as elitists disdainful of the working class, promoters of harmful “free trade” deals, and internationalists represented by the billionaires at the glitzy annual confab in Davos, Switzerland.

If – in a rush to demonize and impeach President Trump – Democrats and progressives solidify support for wars of choice in the Middle East, a New Cold War with Russia and a Davos-style elitism, they could further alienate many people who might otherwise be their allies.

In other words, selectivity in opposing and criticizing Trump – where he rightly deserves it – rather than opportunism in rejecting everything that Trump says might make more sense. A movement built entirely on destroying Trump could drop Democrats and progressives into some politically destructive traps.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Neocons: the Anti-Realists”](#) and [“Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon.”](#)]

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Obama Admits Gap in Russian ‘Hack’ Case

The hole in the U.S. intelligence community’s “high confidence” about Russia “hacking” Democratic emails has always been who gave the material to WikiLeaks, as President Obama admitted, notes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Oops. Did President Barack Obama acknowledge that the extraordinary propaganda campaign to blame Russia for helping Donald Trump become president has a very big hole in it, i.e., that the U.S. intelligence community has no idea how the Democratic emails reached WikiLeaks? For weeks, eloquent obfuscation – expressed with “high confidence” – has been the name of the game, but inadvertent admissions now are dispelling some of the clouds.

Does the Russian government hack, as many other governments do? Of course. Did

it hack the emails of the Democratic National Committee? Almost certainly, though it was likely not alone in doing so. In the Internet age, hacking is the bread and butter of intelligence agencies. If Russian intelligence did not do so, this would constitute gross misfeasance, especially since the DNC was such easy pickings and the possibility of gaining important insights into the U.S. government was so high. But that is not the question.

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

At President Obama's Jan. 18 press conference, he admitted as much: ***"the conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive as to whether WikiLeaks was witting or not in being the conduit through which we heard about the DNC e-mails that were leaked."*** [Emphasis added]

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

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

WikiLeaks Account

As I suggested to RT viewers right after the last press conference, the reason WikiLeaks might have been "not witting" could be that it was quite sure it was not a "conduit" for "hacking" by the Russians or anyone else. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has stated that the Russian government was not the source and it's significant that President Obama stopped short of contradicting him. It is also clear that WikiLeaks, in the past, has obtained LEAKED information from U.S. whistleblowers, such as Chelsea Manning.

Former U.K. Ambassador Craig Murray, a close associate of Assange, has made clear that the two separate batches of Democratic emails – one from the DNC and

the other from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta – also were leaks from insiders, not hacks from outsiders.

After the Jan. 18 press conference – what Murray called the “Stunning Admission from Obama on Wikileaks” – Murray wrote:

“In his final press conference, beginning around 8 minutes 30 seconds in, Obama admits that they have no evidence of how WikiLeaks got the DNC material. This undermines the stream of completely evidence-free nonsense that has been emerging from the US intelligence services this last two months, in which a series of suppositions have been strung together to make unfounded assertions that have been repeated again and again in the mainstream media.

“Most crucially of all Obama refers to ‘The DNC emails that were leaked.’ Note ‘leaked’ and not ‘hacked.’ I have been repeating that this was a leak, not a hack, until I am blue in the face. William Binney, former Technical Director of the NSA, has asserted that were it a hack the NSA would be able to give the precise details down to the second it occurred, and it is plain from the reports released they have no such information. Yet the media has persisted with this nonsense ‘Russian hacking’ story.”

So I suppose we should thank Barack Obama for dispelling at least some of the obfuscation at which he is so rhetorically eloquent, while our lame “mainstream” media take steno and regurgitate *ad nauseam*.

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Where Donald Trump Makes Sense

Many progressives so despise Donald Trump that they decry all his positions even those that make some sense, such as questioning NATO and the dangerous New Cold War with Russia, as ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller explains.

By Graham E. Fuller

With the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States, it’s hard to know where first to focus attention. Rage and righteous indignation on all sides are mounting. There is more than enough blame to go

around for how the U.S. got itself into this situation. Where it will all go from here is beyond the imagination of the most lurid screenwriters of White House dramas.

Whatever the outrage *du jour* may be, we must not forget that history didn't begin with the 2015-2016 presidential campaign/circus. To believe that is analytically lazy, an easy cop-out, even self-serving. Major elements of these deep domestic pathologies trace back at a minimum to America's fateful actions from the very beginning of this disastrous American Twenty-first Century.

It was in 2000 that the Supreme Court, in an act of sheer partisanship, threw the contested Florida election to George W. Bush. This "decision" did two things: it demonstrated that the politicization of the Supreme Court had now touched the very pinnacle of the U.S. political order. The Court's reputation would never recover from the event.

Second, it enraged many Democrats who felt that the election had been stolen from Al Gore, thereby tainting the presidency of George W. Bush from the outset. Bush's incompetence, ignorance, and domination by dark neocon forces led us into a series of desperate wars in the Middle East that shaped the region down to this day – the Global War on Terror, the collapse of Iraq, Libya, Yemen, an Afghanistan on the ropes, the creation of ISIS on the smoking ruins of Iraq's civil struggle and to the beginning of the Syrian agony whose impact has massively shaken even Europe, and pushed the nature of U.S.-Russian relations towards resuscitation of the Cold War.

Unlike other nations that have undergone terrorist cataclysms but succeeded in rising above it, the United States never survived the psychological shock of 9/11. It is still living with it. U.S. obsession with domestic security – in one of the world's safer environments – even invented a new, Teutonic-sounding word "Homeland" to celebrate the birth of the security state; it also raised the corrosive specter of the "Muslim Other" in our midst.

It was this event that spurred Washington to massively expand the size and number of existing security and intelligence organizations, and create vast multiple layers of new ones. We see how they now compete and stumble around against each other; their very unmanageable size has arguably contributed to an overall deterioration in the quality of U.S. intelligence. A sober grip on the trajectories of world forces seems quite beyond Washington's ken.

Whatever Donald Trump may think about the CIA – and how legitimate any of his perceptions may or may not be – his dissatisfaction is not entirely out of place; it would be prudent for him to undertake a close, zero-based review of the entire massive and redundant national security structure. More is not

better; bigger is not better. The national security structure would be leaner, meaner, and more efficient were it immediately slashed by 50 percent at the outset.

All organizations work hard to preserve their individual corporate fiefdoms; when does a bureaucracy voluntarily ever downsize? Better intelligence is no longer even the real dynamic at work; institutional self-preservation is.

Militarized Foreign Policy

The militarization of American foreign policy grew special wings under the Global War on Terror. It is little wonder that so many of the key senior positions in the Trump cabinet and the White House are now being filled by military men: National Security Advisor, CIA chief, Director of National Intelligence, the NSA, the Secretary of Defense, etc. We narrowly missed a military Secretary of State.

This is not to say that the military cannot produce significant competence at the top, but again the problem with the military – and a military budget that surpasses most of the rest of the world combined – has led to securitization and militarization of foreign policy. Defense trumps State every time. Global threats expand to meet and justify the military budget; military solutions become default approaches to world issues. Where would we be without our threats?

The new national security state has promoted the most dangerous security idea of all – the idea that international security is a zero-sum game; that among great powers everything takes on the character of a win-lose confrontation. Our think tanks earnestly scour the globe for “coming threats.” (I know, I’ve written many of them in my day.)

We cannot contemplate such a thing as a win-win relationship among great powers. Of course the massive resources consumed by the U.S. military (think of the staggering lost opportunity costs) are powerfully backed by the military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower presciently warned us about half a century ago.

Now, coming to today’s real third-rail topic: Russia. The obsessive – virtually hysterical – narrative of Russia in U.S. domestic politics today is not really about a true threat to the national security. Russia hasn’t done anything that we don’t routinely do to ourselves (and others). Hacking abounds, it is the new growth industry.

“Blame Russia” instead is a convenient joint project for several unexpected bed-fellows: Clinton Democrats, embittered by Hillary’s defeat, seeking a scapegoat;

Democrats who may detest Trump for quite understandable reasons, and seek to fully delegitimize his presidency at any cost and to refuse any constructive cooperation. What better device than to label him a Russian agent. End of discussion.

In addition, we have the military-industrial-security complex viscerally opposed to any kind of rapprochement with Moscow or talks with Putin; it's simply bad for business. By all means investigate the Russians. But that is not basically why our nation is in a fix.

We are talking of sacred cows here. NATO is perceived as a God-given good in itself. Yet there are plenty of good, rational reasons for rethinking the place of NATO in the world. Try [the views](#) of the seasoned, beady-eyed conservative geopolitician George Friedman who does exactly that. Or my more [critical blog](#) of last July.

It constitutes neither treason nor ignorance to reconsider these foundations of our future place in a world that no longer resembles that of NATO's founding. And of course by now NATO has its own priority of deeply-rooted institutional self-preservation at any cost, through promotion of ranges of new missions designed expressly to preserve its role. Serious debate with Europe about what NATO should and should not be is urgently due, but any such rational debate is not to be found in Washington, on this or so many other global strategy issues.

And finally, however emotionally satisfying, where does de-legitimization of the president take us? Rejection of the (highly flawed) electoral system entirely? Good luck at changing it. And who has the right to determine "legitimacy"? Our partisan Supreme Court? Determined citizens? This all represents exceptionally dangerous ground indeed. We've been down this de-legitimization route now against George W. Bush and Barack Obama (for differing reasons), and now Trump. It gets uglier with each iteration, but also exceedingly more dangerous to the nation as more and more people join the ranks of "he's not my president."

Draining the Swamp?

Trump's promise to "drain the swamp" in Washington had some allure during the primaries. The swamp goes back decades. Yet very little draining has yet taken place; instead we have a celebration of plutocracy in power as never before.

Money in politics has simply moved yet one further step up the rung, now foreshadowing a permanent future American corporatist governing structure. This deep, corrosive, bald presence of money in politics has grown by leaps and bounds in this century; no need to go to election 2016 to start bemoaning it.

It is self-deception if we let the coarseness of the Trump image lead us away

from the thought that it has ever been much different. And the 90 percent left behind this time will be the chief victims of oppression, poor health, prejudice, discrimination.

The U.S. does not even seem capable of governing itself at this point, and the fault lines are sharpening. The specter of domestic political violence can hardly be excluded in this swirl of personalized politics of black hats and white hats. There is no debate, only vituperation, slander, vilification and demonization.

Drastic failures in U.S. foreign policies going back at least to 2000 have raised ongoing serious doubts in the eyes of the world about U.S. "leadership." More and more countries, friends and rivals, are moving into damage limitation mode in dealing with us; their main task is to prevent the U.S. from dragging the rest of the world into dangerous confrontation.

Like so many others, I too am deeply disturbed at Trump's style, manner, impulses, psychology, and policy preferences. Worse perhaps are their translation into dismaying top personnel choices. Trump himself may not be an ideologue but his appointments mostly are.

But don't let the grossness of the immediate Trump symbol lead us to overlook the degree to which most of this goes back many, many years, and we all had a hand in it in one way or another.

Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is "Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American's crisis of conscience in Pakistan." (Amazon, Kindle)
grahamefuller.com

How the NYT Plays with History

Special Report: By failing to tell the hard truth about Establishment wrongdoing, The New York Times – along with other mainstream U.S. media outlets – has destabilized American democracy, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Whenever The New York Times or some other mainstream news outlet holds itself out as a paragon of professional journalism –by wagging a finger at some pro-

Trump “fake news” or some Internet “conspiracy theory” – I cringe at the self-delusion and hypocrisy.

No one hates fake news and fact-free conspiracy theories more than I do, but the sad truth is that the mainstream press has opened the door to such fantasies by losing the confidence of the American people and becoming little more than the mouthpiece for the Establishment, which spins its own self-serving narratives and tells its own lies.

Rather than acting as a watchdog against these deceptions, the Times and its mainstream fellow-travelers have transformed themselves into little more than the Establishment’s apologists and propagandists.

If Iraq is the “enemy,” we are told wild tales about how Iraq’s non-existent WMD is a danger to us all. If Syria is in Washington’s crosshairs, we are given a one-sided account of what’s happening there, black hats for the “regime” and white hats for the “rebels”?

If the State Department is backing a coup in Ukraine to oust an elected leader, we are regaled with tales of his corruption and how overthrowing a democratically chosen leader is somehow “democracy promotion.” Currently, we are getting uncritical stenography on every conceivable charge that the U.S. government lodges against Russia.

Yet, while this crisis in American journalism has grown more severe in recent years, the pattern is not entirely new. It is reflected in how the mainstream media has missed many of the most significant news stories of modern history and has, more often than not, been an obstacle to getting at the truth.

Then, if the evidence finally becomes so overwhelming that continued denials are no longer tenable, the mainstream media tries to reclaim its tattered credibility by seizing on some new tidbit of evidence and declaring that all that went before were just rumors but now we can take the long whispered story seriously – because the Times says so.

For instance, we have the case of Richard Nixon’s sabotage of President Lyndon Johnson’s Vietnam War peace talks in 1968 to give himself a crucial boost in a tight presidential race against Vice President Hubert Humphrey. In “real time” – both as Nixon was executing his maneuver and in the years immediately afterwards – there was reporting by second-tier newspapers and independent journalists into what Johnson privately called Nixon’s “treason,” but the Times and other “newspapers of record” treated the story as little more than a conspiracy theory.

As the years went on and the case of Nixon’s guilt grew stronger and stronger,

the story still never managed to cross the threshold for the Big Media to take it seriously.

Definitive Evidence

Several years ago, I compiled a detailed narrative of the 1968 events from material declassified by Johnson's presidential library and I published the material at Consortiumnews.com. Not only did I draw from newly available recordings of Johnson's phone calls but from a file of top secret wiretaps – labeled "The 'X' envelope" – which Johnson had ordered his national security adviser, Walt Rostow, to remove from the White House before Nixon's inauguration.

I also traced how Nixon's paranoia about the missing White House file and who might possess it led him to assemble a team of burglars, known as the Plumbers, whose activities later surfaced in the Watergate scandal.

In other words, by unraveling the mystery of Nixon's 1968 "treason," you change the narratives of the Vietnam War and Watergate, two of the pivotal issues of modern American history. But the mainstream U.S. media studiously ignored these new disclosures.

Just last November, in [a review](#) of past "October Surprise" cases – in the context of FBI Director James Comey telling Congress that the FBI had reopened its investigation of Hillary Clinton's emails – the Times offered this summary of the 1968 affair:

"President Lyndon Baines Johnson announced a halt to bombing of North Vietnam, based on his claim that peace talks had 'entered a new and a very much more hopeful phase,' and he invited the government of South Vietnam and the Viet Cong to take part in negotiations. Raising hopes that the war might end soon, the announcement appeared to bolster the standing in the polls of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, the Democratic presidential nominee, but Humphrey still fell short in the election against former Vice President Richard M. Nixon, the Republican."

In other words, the Times treated Johnson's bombing halt and claim of peace-talk progress as the "October Surprise" to try to influence the election in favor of Humphrey. But the evidence now is clear that a peace agreement was within reach and that the "October Surprise" was Nixon's sabotage of the negotiations by persuading South Vietnamese President Nguyen van Thieu to boycott the Paris talks.

The Times got the story upside-down by failing to reexamine the case in light of convincing new evidence that had been available for years, albeit circulating

outside the mainstream.

However, finally, that disdain for the story may be dissipating. Earlier this month, the Times highlighted in an op-ed and a follow-up news article cryptic notes from Nixon's 1968 campaign revealing Nixon's instructions to top aide H.R. Haldeman.

Haldeman's notes – discovered at the Nixon presidential library by historian John A. Farrell – reveal Nixon telling Haldeman “Keep Anna Chennault working on SVN,” meaning South Viet Nam and referring to the campaign's chief emissary to the South Vietnamese government, right-wing Chinese émigré Anna Chennault.

Nixon's gambit was to have Chennault pass on word to South Vietnamese President Thieu that if he boycotted Johnson's Paris peace talks – thus derailing the negotiations – Nixon would assure Thieu continued U.S. military support for the war.

Monkey Wrench It

Another Haldeman note revealed Nixon's intent to get Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen, R-Illinois, to berate Johnson about a planned bombing halt while Nixon looked for “Any other way to monkey wrench it? Anything RN [Richard Nixon] can do.”

Though Haldeman's scribbling is sometimes hard to decipher, the next entry makes reference to “SVN” and adds: “tell him hold firm” – the same message that Anna Chennault later passed on to senior South Vietnamese officials in the last days of the 1968 campaign.

Though Farrell's discovery is certainly newsworthy, its greatest significance may be that it has served as a tipping point that finally has forced the Times and the mainstream media to move past their longstanding dismissals of this “conspiracy theory.”

The Times gave Farrell space on its op-ed page of Jan. 1 to explain his discovery and the Times followed up with an inside-the-paper story about the Haldeman notes. That story included some favorable comments from mainstream writers, such as former Newsweek bureau chief Evan Thomas saying Farrell “nailed down what has been talked about for a long time.”

Of course, the story of Nixon's Vietnam peace-talk sabotage has been more than “talked about for a long time.” A series of journalists have pieced together the evidence, including some as the scheme was unfolding and others from digging through yellowed government files as they became available over the past couple of decades.

But the major newspapers mostly brushed aside this accumulation of evidence apparently because it challenged their “authoritative” narrative of that era. As strange and vicious as some of Nixon’s paranoid behavior may have been, it seems to have been a bridge too far to suggest that he put his political ambitions ahead of the safety of a half million U.S. soldiers in the Vietnam war zone in 1968.

For the American people to have been told that troubling truth might have profoundly shaken their trust in the Establishment, given the deaths of 58,000 U.S. soldiers in the Vietnam War, plus the killing of several million Vietnamese. (Nearly half of the dead were killed after Johnson’s peace talks failed and as Nixon lived up to his commitment to Thieu by extending the direct U.S. combat role for four more years.)

[For more details, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“LBJ’s ‘X-File’ on Nixon’s ‘Treason’”](#) and [“The Heinous Crime Behind Watergate.”](#)]

A Reprise

But the mainstream media’s concealment of Nixon’s “treason” was not a stand-alone problem in terms of distorting recent U.S. history. If the American people had realized how far some top U.S. officials would go to achieve their political ambitions, they might have been more willing to believe other serious allegations of government wrongdoing.

For instance, the evidence is now almost as overwhelming that Ronald Reagan’s campaign reprised Nixon’s 1968 gambit in 1980 by undermining President Jimmy Carter’s negotiations to free 52 American hostages then held in Iran, another well-documented “October Surprise” case that the mainstream media still labels a “conspiracy theory.”

With more than two dozen witnesses – including U.S., Iranian, Israeli and other officials – describing aspects of that Republican behind-the-scenes deal, the reality of this “prequel” to Reagan’s later Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal should be widely accepted as a real piece of modern American history.

But a half-hearted congressional investigation in 1991-93 naively gave then-President George H.W. Bush the crucial job of assembling internal U.S. government records to confirm the allegations – despite the fact that Bush was a principal suspect in the 1980 operation.

Several years ago, I uncovered documents from the Bush presidential library in College Station, Texas, showing how Bush’s White House staff organized a cover-up to conceal key evidence and hide a key witness from the investigation.

One memo by one of Bush's lawyers disclosed that the White House had received confirmation of a key October Surprise allegation – a secret trip by campaign chairman (and later CIA Director) William Casey to Madrid – but then withheld that information from congressional investigators. Documents also showed the White House frustrating attempts to interview former CIA officer Donald Gregg, a key witness.

Another document bluntly set out the White House's goal: "kill/spike this story" to protect Bush's reelection chances in 1992.

After I discovered the Madrid confirmation several years ago – and sent the document to former Rep. Lee Hamilton, who had headed the congressional inquiry which had concluded that there was no credible evidence supporting the allegations – he was stunned by the apparent betrayal of his trust.

"The [Bush-41] White House did not notify us that he [Casey] did make the trip" to Madrid, Hamilton told me in an interview. Asked if knowledge that Casey had traveled to Madrid might have changed the investigation's dismissive October Surprise conclusion, Hamilton said yes, because the question of the Madrid trip was central to the inquiry.

Yet, to this day, both right-wing and mainstream media outlets cite the investigation's inconclusive results as their central argument for defending Reagan and his legacy. However, if Nixon's 1968 gambit – jeopardizing the lives of a half million U.S. soldiers – had been accepted as genuine history earlier, the evidence that Reagan endangered 52 U.S. embassy personnel might have seemed a lot easier to believe.

As these longstanding cover-ups slowly crack and begin to crumble, the serious history behind them has started to show through in the mainstream media. For instance, on Jan. 3, during a CNN panel discussion about interference in U.S. presidential elections, popular historian Doug Brinkley added, "One point: 1980, Ronald Reagan was taking on Jimmy Carter, and there was the October Surprise meeting keeping the hostages in Iran. William Casey, people in the Reagan administration were interfering with foreign policy then saying, 'Keep the hostages in until after the election.' So it has happened before. It's not just Nixon here or Donald Trump."

[For more details on the 1980 case, see Robert Parry's [*America's Stolen Narrative*](#) or [*Trick or Treason: The 1980 October Surprise Mystery*](#) or Consortiumnews.com's [*"Second Thoughts on October Surprise."*](#)]

Contra-Cocaine Scandal

But the denial of serious Establishment wrongdoing dies hard. For instance, The

New York Times, The Washington Post and other major news outlets have long refused to accept the overwhelming evidence that Reagan's beloved Nicaraguan Contra rebels engaged in cocaine trafficking under the benevolent gaze of the White House and the CIA.

My Associated Press colleague Brian Barger and I assembled a lot of that evidence in 1985 for the first story about this scandal, which undermined Reagan's claims that he was fighting a relentless war on drugs. Back then, the Times also went to bat for the Establishment. Based on self-serving information from Reagan's Justice Department, the Times knocked down our AP reporting. And, once the Times got taken in by its official sources, it and other mainstream publications carried on vendettas against anyone who dared contradict the accepted wisdom.

So, when San Jose Mercury News reporter Gary Webb revived the Contra-cocaine story in 1996 – with evidence that some of that cocaine had fed into the “crack epidemic” – the Times and other big newspapers savaged Webb's articles and destroyed his career. Not even an institutional confession by the CIA in 1998 that it had been aware of widespread Contra drug smuggling and looked the other way was enough to shake the mainstream media's false conventional wisdom about the Contras' and the CIA's innocence.

After the CIA inspector general reached his damning conclusions admitting knowledge of the drug-running, the Times did run a story acknowledging that there may have been more to the allegations than the newspaper had previously believed, but the same article kept up the bashing of Webb, who was drummed out of journalism and, nearly penniless, committed suicide in 2004.

Despite the CIA admissions, The Washington Post also continued to deny the Contra-cocaine reality. When a movie about Webb's ordeal, “Kill the Messenger,” was released in 2014, the Post's investigative editor Jeff Leen kept up the paper's long-running denial of the reality with a nasty new attack on Webb.

Leen's story was endorsed by the Post's former executive editor Leonard Downie Jr., who circulated Leen's take-down of Webb with the added comment: “I was at The Washington Post at the time that it investigated Gary Webb's stories, and Jeff Leen is exactly right. However, he is too kind to a movie that presents a lie as fact.”

[For more on Leen's hit piece, see Consortiumnews.com's “WPost's Slimy Assault on Gary Webb.” For more on the Contra-cocaine story, see “The Sordid Contra-Cocaine Saga.”]

Lies as Truth

The fact that mainstream media “stars” lie in calling facts a lie – or they can’t distinguish between facts and lies – has contributed to a dangerous breakdown in the public’s ability to sort out what is and what is not real.

Essentially, the problem is that the mainstream media has sought to protect the integrity of the Establishment by dismissing real cases of institutional criminality and abuse of power. However, by shoring up these defenses – rather than challenging systemic wrongdoing – the mainstream media has watched its own credibility erode.

One might hope that someone in a position of power within the major news organizations would recognize this danger and initiate a sweeping reform, which might start by acknowledging some of the long-buried historical realities even if it puts Establishment icons, such as Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, in a negative light.

But that is clearly not the direction that the mainstream U.S. news media is heading. Instead, the Times, the Post and other mainstream outlets continue to take whatever Establishment sources hand out – now including dubious and bizarre U.S. intelligence allegations about Russia and President-elect Donald Trump.

Rather than join in demanding real evidence to support these claims, the mainstream media seems intent on simply channeling the Establishment’s contempt for both Russia and Trump. So, whatever is said – no matter how unlikely – merits front-page headlines.

The end result, however, is to push more and more Americans into a state of confusion regarding what to believe. While some citizens may seek out honest independent journalism to get what they’re missing, others will surely fall prey to fake news and conspiracy theories.

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).

The Ugly Specter of Torture and Lies

Exclusive: President Obama refused to hold “war on terror” torturers to account but punished truth-tellers severely, a bleak legacy not erased by Chelsea Manning’s belated commutation, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

January 17 was an unusually good day for truth and human rights on both sides of the Atlantic. Even before President Obama commuted whistleblower Chelsea Manning's long prison sentence, the British Supreme Court ruled unanimously that government ministers cannot claim "state immunity" or other specious grounds to avoid legal accountability in cases of abduction (rendition) and torture. The decision was heralded by Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, and other human rights groups.

The lawsuit against Britain's former foreign secretary, Jack Straw, and a former senior intelligence officer was brought by Libyan dissident Abdel Hakim Belhaj, a militant opponent of Muammar Gaddafi. He was kidnapped with his pregnant wife from Bangkok in March 2004 based on a tip from MI6, the British intelligence service.

Taken to a secret CIA prison in Thailand, they were blindfolded, hooded, hung from hooks on the cell wall, beaten, and blasted with loud music. A few days later the CIA flew them to Tripoli, where Belhaj was jailed and tortured by the Libyan regime for six years. He says he was also interrogated by British intelligence officers.

Owing to an edict by President Obama, Bush administration officials have never been tried for their complicity in more than 60 renditions of CIA prisoners, but Britain's senior officials may face justice thanks to their Supreme Court ruling, which cited legal authorities ranging from the Magna Carta of 1215 to the United Nations Convention Against Torture.

Evidence of official British complicity in the kidnapping of Belhaj was discovered by Human Rights Watch in Gaddafi's intelligence files after the Libyan dictator was overthrown in 2011. A 2004 fax by the chief of counterterrorism at MI6 to his Libyan counterpart said of Belhaj's capture, "This was the least we could do for you and for Libya to demonstrate the remarkable relationship we have built in recent years."

Seeking Favors from Gaddafi

At the time, Prime Minister Tony Blair's government was cozying up to Gaddafi, not only to fight Islamist extremists but to exploit lucrative business opportunities in the sectors of oil and finance. (Blair continued to visit Gaddafi even after Blair left office to pursue banking deals for JP Morgan, according to a senior executive with the \$70 billion Libyan Investment Authority.)

A 2012 story in the *Guardian* on the Belhaj case reported:

“Two weeks after the couple were rendered to Libya, Tony Blair paid his first visit to the country, embracing Gaddafi and declaring that Libya had recognized ‘a common cause, with us, in the fight against al-Qaida extremism and terrorism.’ At the same time, in London, the Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell announced that it had signed a £110m deal for gas exploration rights off the Libyan coast.

“Three days after that, a second leading [anti-Gaddafi activist], Abu Munthir al-Saadi, was bundled aboard a plane in Hong Kong and taken to Tripoli in a joint British-Libyan rendition operation. Saadi’s wife and four children were also kidnapped and taken to Libya. The youngest was a girl aged six. The family was incarcerated . . . for more than two months before being released. Saadi and Belhaj were held for more than six years, however, and say they were subjected to torture throughout this time.”

In 2005, responding to revelations of such abuses in the U.S.-led “war on terror,” Foreign Secretary Straw insisted that the United Kingdom had not rendered suspects to other countries:

“Unless we all start to believe in conspiracy theories and that the officials are lying, that I am lying, that behind this there is some kind of secret state which is in league with some dark forces in the United States, . . . there simply is no truth in the claims that the United Kingdom has been involved in rendition full stop, because we have not been.” (The contrary evidence surfaced six years later, in 2011.)

In 2012, Saadi reached a £2.2 million settlement with the British government, which did not admit guilt. But Belhaj, who has asked for just £3 in damages, demands something money can’t buy: an official apology. Straw continues to deny responsibility for any unlawful renditions.

Andrew Tyrie, a Conservative MP and chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition, praised the latest ruling for bringing the public “a step closer to the truth about Britain’s role in extraordinary rendition – the program of kidnap and torture developed during the Bush administration, and facilitated by the UK government.”

He added, “The risk now is that the new laws on secret hearings – in the Justice and Security Act – could nonetheless thwart efforts to get to the truth, and undermine the ability of the courts to demonstrate that justice is being done. It would be bad for British justice if most of this case ends up buried in closed material proceedings.”

Obama’s Failure

The British government, which has spent more than £600,000 to fight the Belhaj case, claims that a full airing of the facts would seriously damage relations with the United States. President Obama could have knocked that assertion down at any time and welcomed the truth. Instead, he consistently refused throughout his two terms in office to convene a truth commission or hold anyone accountable for illegal rendition and torture (short of death). He even invoked the “state secrets” doctrine to block private lawsuits against government officials for torture.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, wrote in 2011, “Obama’s deliberate suppression of this shameful past is wrong. It reflects bad policy, a dereliction of presidential responsibilities and a continuing disregard for international law. It treats torture as a policy option – one that can be turned on or off at presidential will.”

With a noted supporter of torture now moving into the White House, the folly of Obama’s approach is clearer than ever. That’s why a spokesman for the human rights legal defense organization Reprieve declared, “this case isn’t just about history. . . In 72 hours, a would-be torturer will take the reins of Earth’s most powerful security state. We enter the Trump era with not a soul held to account for Britain’s past role in rendition. . . Our intelligence agencies may well be pressured to help America torture again.”

To discourage that from happening, he urged Prime Minister Theresa May to “apologize to this family, draw a line in the sand against torture, and restore British honor once and for all.”

Jonathan Marshall is author of many recent articles on arms issues, including “How World War III Could Start,” “NATO’s Provocative Anti-Russian Moves,” “Escalations in a New Cold War,” “Ticking Closer to Midnight,” and “Turkey’s Nukes: A Sum of All Fears.”

Obama’s Bombing Legacy

Exclusive: President Obama has joked he still doesn’t know why he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, but his record of waging war was no joke to thousands at the receiving end of U.S. bombs, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

As President Obama leaves office, much of his foreign policy record remains

shrouded in the symbolism that has been the hallmark of his presidency. The persistence of Obama's image as a reluctant war-maker and a Nobel Peace Prize winner has allowed Donald Trump and his cabinet nominees to claim that Obama has underfunded the military and been less than aggressive in his use of U.S. military power.

Nothing could be further from the truth, and their claims are clearly designed only to justify even more extravagant military spending and more aggressive threats and uses of force than those perpetrated under Mr. Obama's "disguised, quiet, media-free" war policy.

The reality is that Obama has increased U.S. military spending beyond the post-World War II record set by President George W. Bush. Now that Obama has signed the military budget for FY2017, the final record is that Obama has spent an average of \$653.6 billion per year, outstripping Bush by an average of \$18.7 billion per year (in 2016 dollars).

In historical terms, after adjusting for inflation, Obama's military spending has been 56 percent higher than Clinton's, 16 percent higher than Reagan's, and 42 percent more than the U.S. Cold War average, when it was justified by a military competition with a real peer competitor in the Soviet Union. By contrast, Russia now spends one-tenth of what we are pouring into military forces, weapon-building and war.

What all this money has paid for has been the polar opposite of what most of Obama's supporters thought they were voting for in 2008. Behind the iconic image of a hip, sophisticated celebrity-in-chief with strong roots in modern urban culture, lies a calculated contrast between image and reality that has stretched our country's neoliberal experiment in "managed democracy" farther than ever before and set us up for the previously unthinkable "post-truth" presidency of Donald Trump.

Obama's Model

Obama's doctrine of covert and proxy war was modeled on the Phoenix Program in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s and Ronald Reagan's proxy wars in Central America in the 1980s. It involved a massive expansion of U.S. special operations forces, now deployed to 138 different countries, compared with only 60 when Obama took office.

As senior military officers told the Washington Post in June 2010, the Obama administration allowed, "things that the previous administration did not," and, "They are talking publicly much less but they are acting more. They are willing to get aggressive much more quickly."

Wherever possible, U.S. forces have recruited and trained proxy forces to do the actual fighting and dying, from the Iraqi government's Shiite death squads to Al Qaeda splinter groups in Libya and Syria (supporting "regime change" projects in those countries) to mercenaries serving Arab monarchies and seemingly endless cannon fodder for the war in Afghanistan.

Obama's ten-fold expansion of drone strikes further reduced U.S. casualties relative to numbers of foreigners killed. This fostered an illusion of peace and normality for Americans in the homeland even as the death toll inflicted by America's post-9/11 wars almost certainly passed the two million mark.

The targets of these covert and proxy wars are not just guerrilla fighters or "terrorists" but also the "infrastructure" or "civilian support mechanism" that supports guerrillas with food and supplies, and the entire shadow government and civil society in areas that resist domination.

As a U.S. officer in Iraq explained to Newsweek in 2005, "The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving the terrorists. From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation."

In previous decades, the victims of similar operations in Central America included the grandfather of a young lady I met in Cotzal in Guatemala – he was beheaded by an Army death squad for giving food to the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. The Catholic Church has now named Father Stanley Rother from Oklahoma, who was killed by a Guatemalan Army death squad in Santiago Atitlan in 1981, as a martyr and candidate for sainthood.

Bloody Iraq

In Iraq, the targets of such operations have included hundreds of academics and other professionals and community leaders. Just last week, U.S. air strikes targeted and killed three senior professors and their families in their homes at Mosul University. The victims included Dr. Mohamad Tybee Al-Layla (Ph.D. Texas), the highly respected former Dean of the College of Engineering.

In 2004, after the assassination of Dr. Abdul-Latif Ali Al-Mayah in Baghdad, a senior police officer explained who killed him and why to British journalist Stephen Grey: "Dr. Abdul-Latif was becoming more and more popular because he spoke for people on the street here. ... You can look no further than the Governing Council. They are politicians that are backed by the Americans and who arrived to Iraq from exile with a list of their enemies. I've seen these lists. They are killing people one by one."

As Obama's murderous proxy wars in Iraq and Syria have spun further out of control, U.S. special operations forces and U.S.-trained death squads on the

ground have increasingly been backed up by U.S. and allied air forces. Four years ago, as Obama was inaugurated for a second term, I wrote that the U.S. and its allies dropped 20,000 bombs and missiles in his first term. In his second term, they have dropped four times that number, bringing the total for Obama's presidency to over 100,000 bombs and missiles striking seven countries, surpassing the 70,000 unleashed on five countries by George W. Bush.

Obama inherited a massive air campaign already under way in Afghanistan, where the U.S. and its allies dropped over 4,000 bombs and missiles every year for six years between 2007 and 2012. Altogether, U.S.-led air forces have dropped 26,000 bombs and missiles on Afghanistan under Obama, compared with 37,000 under Bush, for a total of 63,000 bomb and missile strikes in 15 years.

But the new U.S.-led bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria since 2014 has been much heavier, with 65,730 bomb and missile strikes in 2 1/2 years. Iraq has now been struck with 74,000 bombs and missiles, even more than Afghanistan: 29,200 in the "Shock & Awe" assault of 2003; 3,900 more before the invasion and during the U.S. occupation; and now another 41,000 in "Shock & Awe II" since 2014, including the current siege and bombardment of Mosul.

Obama's total of 100,000 air strikes are rounded out by 24,700 bombs and missiles dropped on Syria, 7,700 in NATO and its Arab monarchist allies' bombing of Libya in 2011, another 496 strikes in Libya in 2016, and at least 547 drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.

Failed Policy

Donald Trump and his choices for secretaries of State and Defense, Rex Tillerson and Jim Mattis, respectively, are right to say that Obama's war policy has failed. But they are wrong to insist that the answer is to spend even more on weapons and use them even more aggressively.

Obama's failure was the result of his deference to generals, admirals, the CIA and hawkish advisers like Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, and of his blind faith in U.S. military power. But war was never a legitimate or effective response to terrorism.

The misuse of military force has only spread violence and chaos across the Muslim world and spawned an explosive mix of political disintegration, rule by militias and warlords, a dizzying proliferation of armed groups with different interests and loyalties and, ultimately, more blowback for the West.

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Turkey, Israel, Qatar and other "allies" have been only too eager to exploit and redirect our aggression against their own enemies:

Iran; Syria; Libya; and different ethnic groups, minorities and political movements in what was, for centuries, a diverse, tolerant region of the world.

The U.S. has become a blind giant stumbling through a thick forest of shadows and unseen dangers, striking out with its devastating war machine at the instigation of self-serving allies and the same dark forces in its own “intelligence” bureaucracy who have stirred up trouble, staged coups and unleashed war in country after country for seventy years.

The only consistent beneficiary in all this death, destruction and chaos is the “military industrial complex” that President Eisenhower warned us against in his farewell address in 1961.

In 2012, I researched and wrote about how General Dynamics CEO Lester Crown and his Chicago family backed and bankrolled the political career of Barack Obama. As manufacturers of *Virginia* class submarines, *Arleigh Burke* and *Zumwalt* destroyers and littoral combat ships (all programs saved, revived or expanded by Obama) as well as other types of munitions, the Crown family’s patronage of Barack Obama has proven to be a profitable investment, from the violence and chaos in the Muslim world to the New Cold War with Russia to the “pivot” to the South China Sea.

Now Mr. Trump has nominated General Dynamics board member, General James “Mad Dog” Mattis as Secretary of Defense, despite his responsibility for illegal rules of engagement and systematic war crimes in Iraq, an obvious conflict of interest with the millions he has earned at General Dynamics and clear laws that require civilian control of the military.

When will we ever learn to tell the difference between corrupt warmongers like Obama and Mattis and progressive leaders who will let us live in peace with our neighbors around the world, even at the expense of General Dynamics’ profits?

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*.

It’s Not About Trump, But Us

The looming inauguration of Donald Trump has led many on the “liberal/left” to vow eternal resistance but this fury has obscured the need for self-reflection on how “progressives” have lost their way, as John Pilger explains.

By John Pilger

On the day President Trump is inaugurated, thousands of writers in the United States will express their indignation. "In order for us to heal and move forward ...," say Writers Resist, "we wish to bypass direct political discourse, in favour of an inspired focus on the future, and how we, as writers, can be a unifying force for the protection of democracy."

And: "We urge local organizers and speakers to avoid using the names of politicians or adopting 'anti' language as the focus for their Writers Resist event. It's important to ensure that nonprofit organizations, which are prohibited from political campaigning, will feel confident participating in and sponsoring these events."

Thus, real protest is to be avoided, for it is not tax exempt. Compare such drivel with the declarations of the Congress of American Writers, held at Carnegie Hall, New York, in 1935, and again two years later. They were electric events, with writers discussing how they could confront ominous events in Abyssinia, China and Spain. Telegrams from Thomas Mann, C Day Lewis, Upton Sinclair and Albert Einstein were read out, reflecting the fear that great power was now rampant and that it had become impossible to discuss art and literature without politics or, indeed, direct political action.

"A writer," the journalist Martha Gellhorn told the second congress, "must be a man of action now . . . A man who has given a year of his life to steel strikes, or to the unemployed, or to the problems of racial prejudice, has not lost or wasted time. He is a man who has known where he belonged. If you should survive such action, what you have to say about it afterwards is the truth, is necessary and real, and it will last."

Her words echo across the unctious and violence of the Obama era and the silence of those who colluded with his deceptions. That the menace of rapacious power – rampant long before the rise of Trump – has been accepted by writers, many of them privileged and celebrated, and by those who guard the gates of literary criticism, and culture, including popular culture, is uncontroversial. Not for them the impossibility of writing and promoting literature bereft of politics. Not for them the responsibility to speak out, regardless of who occupies the White House.

Clinton's Contempt

Today, false symbolism is all. "Identity" is all. In 2016, Hillary Clinton stigmatized millions of voters as "a basket of deplorables, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it." Her abuse was handed out at

an LGBT rally as part of her cynical campaign to win over minorities by abusing a white, mostly working-class, majority. Divide and rule, this is called; or identity politics in which race and gender conceal class, and allow the waging of class war. Trump understood this.

“When the truth is replaced by silence,” said the Soviet dissident poet Yevtushenko, “the silence is a lie.”

This is not an American phenomenon. A few years ago, Terry Eagleton, then professor of English literature at Manchester University, reckoned that “for the first time in two centuries, there is no eminent British poet, playwright or novelist prepared to question the foundations of the western way of life.”

No Shelley speaks for the poor, no Blake for utopian dreams, no Byron damns the corruption of the ruling class, no Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin reveal the moral disaster of capitalism. William Morris, Oscar Wilde, HG Wells, George Bernard Shaw have no equivalents today. Harold Pinter was the last to raise his voice. Among today’s insistent voices of consumer-feminism, none echoes Virginia Woolf, who described “the arts of dominating other people ... of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital.”

There is something both venal and profoundly stupid about famous writers as they venture outside their cosseted world and embrace an “issue.” Across the Review section of the Guardian on Dec. 10 was a dreamy picture of Barack Obama looking up to the heavens and the words, “Amazing Grace” and “Farewell the Chief.”

The sycophancy ran like a polluted babbling brook through page after page. “He was a vulnerable figure in many ways ... But the grace. The all-encompassing grace: in manner and form, in argument and intellect, with humour and cool ... [He] is a blazing tribute to what has been, and what can be again ... He seems ready to keep fighting, and remains a formidable champion to have on our side ... The grace ... the almost surreal levels of grace ...”

I have conflated these quotes. There are others even more hagiographic and bereft of mitigation. The Guardian’s chief apologist for Obama, Gary Younge, has always been careful to mitigate, to say that his hero “could have done more”: oh, but there were the “calm, measured and consensual solutions ...”

Idolizing Obama

None of them, however, could surpass the American writer, Ta-Nehisi Coates, the recipient of a “genius” grant worth \$625,000 from a liberal foundation. In an interminable essay for The Atlantic entitled, “My President Was Black,” Coates brought new meaning to prostration. The final “chapter,” entitled “When You Left, You Took All of Me With You,” a line from a Marvin Gaye song, describes

seeing the Obamas “rising out of the limo, rising up from fear, smiling, waving, defying despair, defying history, defying gravity.” The Ascension, no less.

One of the persistent strands in American political life is a cultish extremism that approaches fascism. This was given expression and reinforced during the two terms of Barack Obama. “I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being,” said Obama, who expanded America’s favorite military pastime, bombing, and death squads (“special operations”) as no other president has done since the Cold War.

According to a Council on Foreign Relations survey, in 2016 alone Obama dropped 26,171 bombs. That is 72 bombs every day. He bombed the poorest people on earth, in Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan.

Every Tuesday – reported The New York Times – he personally selected those who would be murdered by mostly hellfire missiles fired from drones. Weddings, funerals, shepherds were attacked, along with those attempting to collect the body parts festooning the “terrorist target.”

A leading Republican senator, Lindsey Graham, estimated, approvingly, that Obama’s drones killed 4,700 people. “Sometimes you hit innocent people and I hate that,” he said, “but we’ve taken out some very senior members of Al Qaeda.”

Like the fascism of the 1930s, big lies are delivered with the precision of a metronome: thanks to an omnipresent media whose description now fits that of the Nuremberg prosecutor: “Before each major aggression, with some few exceptions based on expediency, they initiated a press campaign calculated to weaken their victims and to prepare the German people psychologically ... In the propaganda system ... it was the daily press and the radio that were the most important weapons.”

Destroying Libya

Take the catastrophe in Libya. In 2011, Obama said Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was planning “genocide” against his own people. “We knew ... that if we waited one more day, Benghazi, a city the size of Charlotte, could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.”

This was the known lie of Islamist militias facing defeat by Libyan government forces. It became the media story; and NATO – led by Obama and Hillary Clinton – launched 9,700 “strike sorties” against Libya, of which more than a third were aimed at civilian targets. Uranium warheads were used; the cities of Misurata and Sirte were carpet-bombed. The Red Cross identified mass graves, and Unicef reported that “most [of the children killed] were under the age of ten.”

Under Obama, the U.S. has extended secret “special forces” operations to 138 countries, or 70 per cent of the world’s population. The first African-American president launched what amounted to a full-scale invasion of Africa. Reminiscent of the Scramble for Africa in the late Nineteenth Century, the U.S. African Command (Africom) has built a network of supplicants among collaborative African regimes eager for American bribes and armaments. Africom’s “soldier to soldier” doctrine embeds U.S. officers at every level of command from general to warrant officer. Only pith helmets are missing.

It is as if Africa’s proud history of liberation, from Patrice Lumumba to Nelson Mandela, is consigned to oblivion by a new master’s black colonial elite whose “historic mission,” warned Frantz Fanon half a century ago, is the promotion of “a capitalism rampant though camouflaged.”

It was Obama who, in 2011, announced what became known as the “pivot to Asia”, in which almost two-thirds of U.S. naval forces would be transferred to the Asia-Pacific to “confront China,” in the words of his Defense Secretary. There was no threat from China; the entire enterprise was unnecessary. It was an extreme provocation to keep the Pentagon and its demented brass happy.

In 2014, the Obama’s administration oversaw and paid for a fascist-led coup in Ukraine against the democratically elected government, threatening Russia in the western borderland through which Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, with a loss of 27 million lives. It was Obama who placed missiles in Eastern Europe aimed at Russia, and it was the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize who increased spending on nuclear warheads to a level higher than that of any administration since the Cold War – having promised, in an emotional speech in Prague, to “help rid the world of nuclear weapons”.

Obama, the constitutional lawyer, prosecuted more whistleblowers than any other president in history, even though the U.S. Constitution protects them. He declared Chelsea Manning guilty before the end of a trial that was a travesty. He has refused to pardon Manning who has suffered years of inhumane treatment, which the United Nations says amounts to torture. He has pursued an entirely bogus case against Julian Assange. He promised to close the Guantanamo concentration camp and didn’t.

A Smooth Operator

Following the public relations disaster of George W. Bush, Obama, the smooth operator from Chicago via Harvard, was enlisted to restore what he calls “leadership” throughout the world. The Nobel Prize committee’s decision was part of this: the kind of cloying reverse racism that beatified the man for no reason other than he was attractive to liberal sensibilities and, of course, American

power, if not to the children he kills in impoverished, mostly Muslim countries.

This is the Call of Obama. It is not unlike a dog whistle: inaudible to most, irresistible to the besotted and boneheaded, especially “liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics,” as Luciana Bohne put it. “When Obama walks into a room,” gushed George Clooney, “you want to follow him somewhere, anywhere.”

William I. Robinson, professor at the University of California, and one of an uncontaminated group of American strategic thinkers who have retained their independence during the years of intellectual dog-whistling since 9/11, wrote this last week:

“President Barack Obama ... may have done more than anyone to assure [Donald] Trump’s victory. While Trump’s election has triggered a rapid expansion of fascist currents in U.S. civil society, a fascist outcome for the political system is far from inevitable ... But that fight back requires clarity as to how we got to such a dangerous precipice. The seeds of 21st century fascism were planted, fertilized and watered by the Obama administration and the politically bankrupt liberal elite.”

Robinson points out that “whether in its 20th or its emerging 21st century variants, fascism is, above all, a response to deep structural crises of capitalism, such as that of the 1930s and the one that began with the financial meltdown in 2008 ... There is a near-straight line here from Obama to Trump ... The liberal elite’s refusal to challenge the rapaciousness of transnational capital and its brand of identity politics served to eclipse the language of the working and popular classes ... pushing white workers into an ‘identity’ of white nationalism and helping the neo-fascists to organise them”..

The seedbed is Obama’s Weimar Republic, a landscape of endemic poverty, militarized police and barbaric prisons: the consequence of a “market” extremism which, under his presidency, prompted the transfer of \$14 trillion in public money to criminal enterprises in Wall Street.

Perhaps his greatest “legacy” is the co-option and disorientation of any real opposition. Bernie Sanders’ specious “revolution” does not apply. Propaganda is his triumph.

The lies about Russia – in whose elections the U.S. has openly intervened – have made the world’s most self-important journalists laughingstocks. In the country with constitutionally the freest press in the world, free journalism now exists only in its honorable exceptions.

The obsession with Trump is a cover for many of those calling themselves

“left/liberal”, as if to claim political decency. They are not “left,” neither are they especially “liberal.” Much of America’s aggression towards the rest of humanity has come from so-called liberal Democratic administrations – such as Obama’s. America’s political spectrum extends from the mythical center to the lunar right. The “left” are homeless renegades Martha Gellhorn described as “a rare and wholly admirable fraternity.” She excluded those who confuse politics with a fixation on their navels.

While they “heal” and “move forward”, will the Writers Resist campaigners and other anti-Trumpists reflect upon this? More to the point: when will a genuine movement of opposition arise? Angry, eloquent, all-for-one-and-one-for all. Until real politics return to people’s lives, the enemy is not Trump, it is ourselves.

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Donald Trump v. the Spooks

Exclusive: President-elect Trump is in a nasty slugfest with U.S. intelligence agencies as they portray him as a Russian tool and he blasts their attempt to delegitimize his election, says ex-British intelligence officer Annie Machon.

By Annie Machon

The clash between plutocratic President-elect Trump and the CIA is shaping up to be the heavyweight prize fight of the century, and Trump at least is approaching it with all the entertaining bombast of Mohammed Ali at the top of his game. Rather than following the tradition of doing dirty political deals in dark corners, more commonly known as fixing the match, Trump has come out swinging in the full glare of the media.

In that corner, we have a deal-making, billionaire “man of the people” who, to European sensibilities at least, reputedly espouses some of the madder domestic obsessions and yet has seemed to offer hope to many aggrieved Americans. But it is his professed position on building a rapprochement with Russia and cooperating with Moscow to sort out the Syrian mess that caught my attention and that of many other independent commentators internationally.

In the opposite corner, Trump’s opponents have pushed the CIA into the ring to deliver the knock-out blow, but this has yet to land. Despite jab after jab,

Trump keeps evading the blows and comes rattling back against all odds. One has to admire the guy's footwork.

So who are the opponents ranged behind the CIA, yelling encouragement through the ropes? The obvious culprits include the U.S. military-industrial complex, whose corporate bottom line relies on an era of unending war. As justification for extracting billions – even trillions – of dollars from American taxpayers, there was a need for frightening villains, such as Al Qaeda and even more so, the head choppers of ISIS. However, since the Russian intervention in Syria in 2015, those villains no longer packed as scary a punch, so a more enduring villain, like Emmanuel Goldstein, the principal enemy of the state in George Orwell's *1984*, was required. Russia was the obvious new choice, the old favorite from the Cold War playbook.

The Western intelligence agencies have a vested interest in eternal enemies to ensure both eternal funding and eternal power, hence the CIA's entry into the fight. As former British MP and long-time peace activist George Galloway so eloquently said in a recent interview, an unholy alliance is now being formed between the "war party" in the U.S., the military-industrial-intelligence complex and those who would have previously publicly spurned such accomplices: American progressives and their traditional host, the Democratic Party.

Yet, if the Democratic National Committee had not done its best to rig the primaries in favor of Hillary Clinton, then perhaps we would not be in this position. Bernie Sanders would be the President-elect.

Two-Party Sham

These establishment forces have also revealed to the wider world a fact long known but largely dismissed as conspiracy theory by the corporate mainstream media, that the two-party system in both the U.S. and the U.K. is a sham. In fact, we are governed by a globalized elite, working in its own interest while ignoring ours. The Democrats, openly disgruntled by Hillary Clinton's election loss and being seen to jump into bed so quickly with the spooks and the warmongers, have laid this reality bare.

In fact, respected U.S. investigative journalist Robert Parry recently wrote that an intelligence contact told him before the election that the intelligence agencies did not like either of the presidential candidates. This may go some way to explaining the FBI's intervention in the run-up to the election against Hillary Clinton, as well as the CIA's attempts to de-legitimize Trump's victory afterwards.

Whether that was indeed the case, the CIA has certainly held back no punches

since Trump's election. First the evidence-lite assertion that it was the Russians who hacked the DNC emails and leaked them to WikiLeaks: then the fake news about Russia hacking the voting computers; that then morphed into the Russians "hacked the election" itself; then they "hacked" into the U.S. electric grid via a Vermont utility. All this without a shred of fact-based evidence provided, but Obama's expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats last month solidified this dubious reality in Americans' minds.

All this culminated in the "dirty dossier" allegations last week about Trump, which he has rightly knocked down – it was desperately poor stuff.

This last item, from a British perspective, is particularly concerning. It appears that a Washington dirt-digging company was hired by a Republican rival to Trump to unearth any potential Russian scandals during the primaries; once Trump had won the nomination this dirt-digging operation was taken over by a Democrat supporter of Hillary Clinton. The anti-Trump investigation was then sub-contracted to an alleged ex-British spy, an ex-MI6 man named Christopher Steele.

The Role of MI6

Much has already been written about Steele and the company, much of it contradictory as no doubt befits the life of a former spy. But it is a standard career trajectory for insiders to move on to corporate, mercenary spy companies, and this is what Steele appears to have done successfully in 2009. Of course, much is predicated on maintaining good working relations with your former employers.

That is the aspect that interests me most – how close a linkage did he indeed retain with his former employers after he left MI6 in 2009 to set up his own private spy company? The answer is important because companies such as his can also be used as cut-outs for "plausible deniability" by official state spies.

I'm not suggesting that happened in this case, but Steele reportedly remained on good terms with MI6 and was well thought of. For a man who had not been stationed in Russia for over 20 years, it would perhaps have been natural for him to turn to old chums for useful connections.

But this question is of extreme importance at a critical juncture for the U.K.; if indeed MI6 was complicit or even aware of this dirt digging, as it seems to have been, then that is a huge diplomatic problem for the government's attempts to develop a strong working relationship with the US, post-Brexit. If MI6's sticky fingers were on this case, then the organization has done the precise opposite of its official task – "to protect national security and the economic

well-being of the UK.”

MI6 and its U.S. intelligence chums need to remember their designated and legislated roles within a democracy – to serve the government and protect national security by gathering intelligence, assessing it impartially and making recommendations on which the government of the day will choose to act or not as the case may be.

The spies are not there to fake intelligence to suit the agenda of a particular regime, as happened in the run-up to the illegal Iraq War, nor are they there to endemically spy on their own populations (and the rest of the world, as we know post-Snowden) in a pointless hunt for subversive activity, which often translates into legitimate political activism and acts of individual expression).

And most especially the intelligence agencies should not be trying to subvert democratically elected governments. And yet this is what the CIA and a former senior MI6 officer, along with their powerful political allies, appear to be now attempting against Trump.

Chances for Peace

If I were an American, I would be wary of many of Trump’s domestic policies. As a European concerned with greater peace rather than increasing war, I can only applaud his constructive approach towards Russia and his offer to cooperate with Moscow to stanch the bloodshed in the Middle East.

That, of course, may be the nub of his fight with the CIA and other vested interests who want Russia as the new bogeyman. But I would bet that Trump takes the CIA’s slurs personally. After all, given the ugliness of the accusations and the lack of proof, who would not?

So, this is a world championship heavy-weight fight over who gets to hold office and wield power, an area where the U.S. and U.K. intelligence agencies have considerable experience in rigging matches and knocking out opponents. Think, for instance, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953; Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973; Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in 2003; and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is wobbly but still standing, thanks to some good corner support from Russia.

However, it would appear that Trump is a stranger to the spies’ self-defined Queensbury Rules in which targets are deemed paranoid if they try to alert the public to the planned “regime change” or they become easy targets by staying silent. By contrast, Trump appears shameless and pugnacious. Street-smart and self-promoting, he seems comfortable with bare-knuckle fighting.

This match has already gone into the middle rounds with Trump still bouncing around on his toes and still relishing the fight. It would be ironic if out of this nasty prize fight came greater world peace and safety for us all.

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