

The Crazy Imbalance of Russia-gate

Exclusive: If the U.S. government and mainstream media are really concerned about foreign influence in American politics, they might look at Israel and other nations with much more clout than Russia, notes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The core absurdity of the Russia-gate frenzy is its complete lack of proportionality. Indeed, the hysteria is reminiscent of Sen. Joe McCarthy warning that “one communist in the faculty of one university is one communist too many” or Donald Trump’s highlighting a few “bad hombres” raping white American women.

It’s not that there were no Americans who espoused communist views at universities and elsewhere or that there are no “bad hombre” rapists; it’s that these rare exceptions were used to generate a dangerous overreaction in service of a propagandistic agenda. Historically, we have seen this technique used often when demagogues seize on an isolated event and exploit it emotionally to mislead populations to war.

Today, we have The New York Times and The Washington Post repeatedly publishing front-page articles about allegations that some Russians with “links” to the Kremlin bought \$100,000 in Facebook ads to promote some issues deemed hurtful to Hillary Clinton’s campaign although some of the ads ran after the election.

Initially, Facebook could find no evidence of even that small effort but was pressured in May by Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia. The Washington Post reported that Warner, who is spearheading the Russia-gate investigation in the Senate Intelligence Committee, flew to Silicon Valley and urged Facebook executives to take another look at possible ad buys.

Facebook responded to this congressional pressure by scouring its billions of monthly users and announced that it had located 470 suspect accounts associated with ads totaling \$100,000 – out of Facebook’s \$27 billion in annual revenue.

Here is how the Times described those findings: “Facebook officials disclosed that they had shut down several hundred accounts that they believe were created by a Russian company linked to the Kremlin and used to buy \$100,000 in ads pushing divisive issues during and after the American election campaign.” (It sometimes appears that every Russian – all 144 million of them – is somehow “linked” to the Kremlin.)

Last week, congressional investigators urged Facebook to expand its review into

“troll farms” supposedly based in Belarus, Macedonia and Estonia – although Estonia is by no means a Russian ally; it joined NATO in 2004.

“Warner and his Democratic counterpart on the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Adam B. Schiff of California, have been increasingly vocal in recent days about their frustrations with Facebook,” the Post reported.

Facebook Complies

So, on Thursday, Facebook succumbed to demands that it turn over to Congress copies of the ads, a move that has only justified more alarmist front-page stories about Russia! Russia! Russia!

In response to this political pressure – at a time when Facebook is fending off possible anti-trust legislation – its chief executive Mark Zuckerberg added that he is expanding the investigation to include “additional Russian groups and other former Soviet states.”

So, it appears that not only are all Russians “linked” to the Kremlin, but all former Soviet states as well.

But why stop there? If the concern is that American political campaigns are being influenced by foreign governments whose interests may diverge from what’s best for America, why not look at countries that have caused the United States far more harm recently than Russia?

After all, Saudi Arabia and its Sunni Wahabbi leaders have been pulling the U.S. government into their sectarian wars with the Shiites, including conflicts in Yemen and Syria that have contributed to anti-Americanism in the region, to the growth of Al Qaeda, and to a disruptive flow of refugees into Europe.

And, let’s not forget the 8,000-pound gorilla in the room: Israel. Does anyone think that whatever Russia may or may not have done in trying to influence U.S. politics compares even in the slightest to what Israel does all the time?

Which government used its pressure and that of its American agents (i.e., the neocons) to push the United States into the disastrous war in Iraq? It wasn’t Russia, which was among the countries urging the U.S. not to invade; it was Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Indeed, the plans for “regime change” in Iraq and Syria can be traced back to the work of key American neoconservatives employed by Netanyahu’s political campaign in 1996. At that time, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and other leading neocons unveiled a seminal document entitled “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” which proposed casting aside negotiations with Arabs in

favor of simply replacing the region's anti-Israeli governments.

However, to make that happen required drawing in the powerful U.S. military, so after the 9/11 attacks, the neocons inside President George W. Bush's administration set in motion a deception campaign to justify invading Iraq, a war which was to be followed by more "regime changes" in Syria and Iran.

A Wrench in the Plans

Although the military disaster in Iraq threw a wrench into those plans, the Israeli/neocon agenda never changed. Along with Israel's new regional ally, Saudi Arabia, a proxy war was fashioned to remove Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

As Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren explained, the goal was to shatter the Shiite "strategic arc" running from Iran through Syria to Lebanon and Israel's Hezbollah enemies.

How smashing this Shiite "arc" was in the interests of the American people – or even within their consciousness – is never explained. But it was what Israel wanted and thus it was what the U.S. government enlisted to do, even to the point of letting sophisticated U.S. weaponry fall into the hands of Syria's Al Qaeda affiliate.

Israel's influence over U.S. politicians is so blatant that presidential contenders queue up every year to grovel before the Israel Lobby's conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. In 2016, Donald Trump showed up and announced that he was not there to "pander" and then pandered his pants off.

And, whenever Prime Minister Netanyahu wants to show off his power, he is invited to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress at which Republicans and Democrats compete to see how many times and how quickly they can leap to their feet in standing ovations. (Netanyahu holds the record for the number of times a foreign leader has addressed joint sessions with three such appearances, tied with Winston Churchill.)

Yet, Israeli influence is so engrained in the U.S. political process that even the mention of the existence of an "Israel Lobby" brings accusations of anti-Semitism. "Israel Lobby" is a forbidden phrase in Washington.

However, pretty much whenever Israel targets a U.S. politician for defeat, that politician goes down, a muscle that Israel flexed in the early 1980s in taking out Rep. Paul Findley and Sen. Charles Percy, two moderate Republicans whose crime was to suggest talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

So, if the concern is the purity of the American democratic process and the need to protect it from outside manipulation, let's have at it. Why not a full-scale review of who is doing what and how? Does anyone think that Israel's influence over U.S. politics is limited to a few hundred Facebook accounts and \$100,000 in ads?

A Historical Perspective

And, if you want a historical review, throw in the British and German propaganda around the two world wars; include how the South Vietnamese government collaborated with Richard Nixon in 1968 to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson's Paris peace talks; take a serious look at the collusion between Ronald Reagan's campaign and Iran thwarting President Jimmy Carter's efforts to free 52 American hostages in Tehran in 1980; open the books on Turkey's covert investments in U.S. politicians and policymakers; and examine how authoritarian regimes of all stripes have funded important Washington think tanks and law firms.

If such an effort were ever proposed, you would get a sense of how sensitive this topic is in Official Washington, where foreign money and its influence are rampant. There would be accusations of anti-Semitism in connection with Israel and charges of conspiracy theory even in well-documented cases of collaboration between U.S. politicians and foreign interests.

So, instead of a balanced and comprehensive assessment of this problem, the powers-that-be concentrate on the infinitesimal case of Russian "meddling" as the excuse for Hillary Clinton's shocking defeat. But the key reasons for Clinton's dismal campaign had virtually nothing to do with Russia, even if you believe all the evidence-lite accusations about Russian "meddling."

The Russians did not tell Clinton to vote for the disastrous Iraq War and play endless footsy with the neocons; the Russians didn't advise her to set up a private server to handle her State Department emails and potentially expose classified information; the Russians didn't lure Clinton and the U.S. into the Libyan fiasco nor suggest her ghastly joke in response to Muammar Gaddafi's lynching ("We came, we saw, he died"); the Russians had nothing to do with her greedy decision to accept millions of dollars in Wall Street speaking fees and then try to keep the speech contents secret from the voters; the Russians didn't encourage her husband to become a serial philanderer and make a mockery of their marriage; nor did the Russians suggest to Anthony Weiner, the husband of top Clinton aide Huma Abedin, that he send lewd photos to a teen-ager on a laptop also used by his wife, a development that led FBI Director James Comey to reopen the Clinton-email investigation just 11 days before the election; the Russians weren't responsible for Clinton's decision not to campaign in Wisconsin and Michigan; the Russians didn't stop her from offering a coherent message about

how she would help the struggling white working class; and on and on.

But the Russia-gate investigation is not about fairness and balance; it's a reckless scapegoating of a nuclear-armed country to explain away – and possibly do away with – Donald Trump's presidency. Rather than putting everything in context and applying a sense of proportion, Russia-gate is relying on wild exaggerations of factually dubious or relatively isolated incidents as an opportunistic means to a political end.

As reckless as President Trump has been, the supposedly wise men and wise women of Washington are at least his match.

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 Killing of History

PBS' "The Vietnam War" may show some of the conflict's horrors but still soft-pedals the horrific war crimes that America inflicted on Vietnam, fitting with a corporate-dependent documentary project, writes John Pilger.

By John Pilger

One of the most hyped "events" of American television, "The Vietnam War," has started on the PBS network. The directors are Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. Acclaimed for his documentaries on the Civil War, the Great Depression and the history of jazz, Burns says of his Vietnam films, "They will inspire our country to begin to talk and think about the Vietnam War in an entirely new way."

In a society often bereft of historical memory and in thrall to the propaganda of its "exceptionalism," Burns's "entirely new" Vietnam War is presented as an "epic, historic work." Its lavish advertising campaign promotes its biggest backer, Bank of America, which in 1971 was burned down by students in Santa Barbara, California, as a symbol of the hated war in Vietnam.

Burns says he is grateful to "the entire Bank of America family" which "has long supported our country's veterans." Bank of America was a corporate prop to an invasion that killed perhaps as many as four million Vietnamese and ravaged and poisoned a once bountiful land. More than 58,000 American soldiers were killed,

and around the same number are estimated to have taken their own lives.

I watched the first episode in New York. It leaves you in no doubt of its intentions right from the start. The narrator says the war "was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence and Cold War misunderstandings."

The dishonesty of this statement is not surprising. The cynical fabrication of "false flags" that led to the invasion of Vietnam is a matter of record – the Gulf of Tonkin "incident" in 1964, which Burns promotes as true, was just one. The lies litter a multitude of official documents, notably the *Pentagon Papers*, which the great whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg released in 1971.

There was no good faith. The faith was rotten and cancerous. For me – as it must be for many Americans – it is difficult to watch the film's jumble of "red peril" maps, unexplained interviewees, ineptly cut archive and maudlin American battlefield sequences. In the series' press release in Britain – the BBC will show it – there is no mention of Vietnamese dead, only Americans.

"We are all searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy," Novick is quoted as saying. How very post-modern.

All this will be familiar to those who have observed how the American media and popular culture behemoth has revised and served up the great crime of the second half of the Twentieth Century: from "The Green Berets" and "The Deer Hunter" to "Rambo" and, in so doing, has legitimized subsequent wars of aggression. The revisionism never stops and the blood never dries. The invader is pitied and purged of guilt, while "searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy." Cue Bob Dylan: *"Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?"*

What 'Decency' and 'Good Faith'?

I thought about the "decency" and "good faith" when recalling my own first experiences as a young reporter in Vietnam: watching hypnotically as the skin fell off napalmed peasant children like old parchment, and the ladders of bombs that left trees petrified and festooned with human flesh. General William Westmoreland, the American commander, referred to people as "termites."

In the early 1970s, I went to Quang Ngai province, where in the village of My Lai, between 347 and 500 men, women and infants were murdered by American troops (Burns prefers "killings"). At the time, this was presented as an aberration: an "American tragedy" (*Newsweek*). In this one province, it was estimated that 50,000 people had been slaughtered during the era of American "free fire zones." Mass homicide. This was not news.

To the north, in Quang Tri province, more bombs were dropped than in all of Germany during the Second World War. Since 1975, unexploded ordnance has caused more than 40,000 deaths in mostly "South Vietnam," the country America claimed to "save" and, with France, conceived as a singularly imperial ruse.

The "meaning" of the Vietnam War is no different from the meaning of the genocidal campaign against the Native Americans, the colonial massacres in the Philippines, the atomic bombings of Japan, the leveling of every city in North Korea. The aim was described by Colonel Edward Lansdale, the famous CIA man on whom Graham Greene based his central character in *The Quiet American*.

Quoting Robert Taber's *The War of the Flea*, Lansdale said, "There is only one means of defeating an insurgent people who will not surrender, and that is extermination. There is only one way to control a territory that harbours resistance, and that is to turn it into a desert."

Nothing has changed. When Donald Trump addressed the United Nations on Sept. 19 – a body established to spare humanity the "scourge of war" – he declared he was "ready, willing and able" to "totally destroy" North Korea and its 25 million people. His audience gasped, but Trump's language was not unusual. His rival for the presidency, Hillary Clinton, had boasted she was prepared to "totally obliterate" Iran, a nation of more than 80 million people. This is the American Way; only the euphemisms are missing now.

Returning to the U.S., I am struck by the silence and the absence of an opposition – on the streets, in journalism and the arts, as if dissent once tolerated in the "mainstream" has regressed to a dissidence: a metaphoric underground.

Missing What Trump Means

There is plenty of sound and fury at Trump the odious one, the "fascist," but almost none at Trump as the symptom and caricature of an enduring system of conquest and extremism. Where are the ghosts of the great anti-war demonstrations that took over Washington in the 1970s? Where is the equivalent of the Freeze Movement that filled the streets of Manhattan in the 1980s, demanding that President Reagan withdraw battlefield nuclear weapons from Europe?

The sheer energy and moral persistence of these great movements largely succeeded; by 1987 Reagan had negotiated with Mikhail Gorbachev an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) that effectively ended the Cold War.

Today, according to secret NATO documents obtained by the German newspaper, *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, this vital treaty is likely to be abandoned as "nuclear

targeting planning is increased.” The German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel has warned against “repeating the worst mistakes of the Cold War. ... All the good treaties on disarmament and arms control from Gorbachev and Reagan are in acute peril. Europe is threatened again with becoming a military training ground for nuclear weapons. We must raise our voice against this.”

But not in America. The thousands who turned out for Sen. Bernie Sanders’s “revolution” in last year’s presidential campaign are collectively mute on these dangers. That most of America’s violence across the world has been perpetrated not by Republicans, or mutants like Trump, but by liberal Democrats, remains a taboo.

Barack Obama provided the apotheosis, with seven simultaneous wars, a presidential record, including the destruction of Libya as a modern state. Obama’s overthrow of Ukraine’s elected government has had the desired effect: the massing of American-led NATO forces on Russia’s western borderland through which the Nazis invaded in 1941.

Obama’s “pivot to Asia” in 2011 signaled the transfer of the majority of America’s naval and air forces to Asia and the Pacific for no purpose other than to confront and provoke China. The Nobel Peace Laureate’s worldwide campaign of assassinations is arguably the most extensive campaign of terrorism since 9/11.

What is known in the U.S. as “the Left” has effectively allied with the darkest recesses of institutional power, notably the Pentagon and the CIA, to prevent a peace deal between Trump and Vladimir Putin and to reinstate Russia as an enemy, on the basis of no evidence of its alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election.

The true scandal is the insidious assumption of power by sinister war-making vested interests for which no American voted. The rapid ascendancy of the Pentagon and the surveillance agencies under Obama represented an historic shift of power in Washington. Daniel Ellsberg rightly called it a coup. The three generals running Trump are its witness.

All of this fails to penetrate those “liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics,” as Luciana Bohne noted memorably. Commodified and market-tested, “diversity” is the new liberal brand, not the class people serve regardless of their gender and skin color: not the responsibility of all to stop a barbaric war to end all wars.

“How did it fucking come to this?” says Michael Moore in his Broadway show, *Terms of My Surrender*, a vaudeville for the disaffected set against a backdrop of Trump as Big Brother.

I admired Moore's film, *Roger & Me*, about the economic and social devastation of his hometown of Flint, Michigan, and *Sicko*, his investigation into the corruption of healthcare in America.

The night I saw his show, his happy-clappy audience cheered his reassurance that "we are the majority!" and calls to "impeach Trump, a liar and a fascist!" His message seemed to be that had you held your nose and voted for Hillary Clinton, life would be predictable again.

He may be right. Instead of merely abusing the world, as Trump does, Clinton, the Great Obliterator, might have attacked Iran and lobbed missiles at Putin, whom she likened to Hitler: a particular profanity given the 27 million Russians who died in Hitler's invasion.

"Listen up," said Moore, "putting aside what our governments do, Americans are really loved by the world!"

There was a silence.

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More Holes in Russia-gate Narrative

Exclusive: New tests support the skepticism of U.S. intelligence veterans that Russia "hacked" the DNC's computers, pointing instead to a download of emails by an insider, write ex-NSA official William Binney and ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By William Binney and Ray McGovern

It is no secret that our July 24 VIPS Memorandum for the President, entitled "[Was the 'Russian Hack' an Inside Job?](#)," gave rise to some questioning and controversy – nor was it a surprise that it was met with almost total silence in the mainstream media.

The ongoing U.S. media campaign against Russia has been so effective that otherwise intelligent people have been unable even to entertain the notion that they may have been totally misled by the intelligence community. The last time this happened in 2003, after a year of such propaganda, the U.S. attacked Iraq on fraudulent – not "mistaken" – intelligence.

Anticipating resistance from those allergic to rethinking “what everybody knows” about Russian “meddling,” we based our VIPS analysis on forensic investigations that, oddly, the FBI had bent over backwards to avoid. In other words, we relied on the principles of physics and the known capability of the Internet in early July 2016.

We stand by our main conclusion that the data from the intrusion of July 5, 2016, into the Democratic National Committee’s computers, an intrusion blamed on “Russian hacking,” was not a hack but rather a download/copy onto an external storage device by someone with physical access to the DNC.

That principal finding relied heavily on the speed with which the copy took place – a speed much faster than a hack over the Internet could have achieved at the time – or, it seems clear, even now. Challenged on that conclusion – often by those conducting experiments within the confines of a laboratory – we have conducted and documented additional tests to determine the speeds that can be achieved now, more than a year later.

To remind: We noted in the VIPS memo that on July 5, 2016, a computer directly connected to the DNC server or DNC Local Area Network, copied 1,976 megabytes of data in 87 seconds onto an external storage device. That yields a transfer rate of **22.7 megabytes per second**.

Recent Tests

Over the last few weeks, we ran three tests to determine how quickly data could be exfiltrated from the U.S. across the Atlantic to Europe.



–First, we used a 100 megabits-per-second (mbps) line to pull data from a one-gigabyte file to Amsterdam. The peak transfer speed was **.8 MBps**.

–Second, we used a commercial DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) to send the same one-gigabyte file to a commercial DSL in Amsterdam. The peak transfer speed was **1.8 MBps**.

–Third, we pushed the same one-gigabyte file from a data center in New Jersey to a data center in the UK. The peak transfer speed was **12 MBps**.

None of these attempts achieve anything close to the average rate of **22.7 megabytes per second** evident in the July 5, 2016 download/copy associated with the DNC. In fact, this happens to be the speed typical of a transfer to a USB-2 external storage device. We do not think this pure coincidence; rather, it is additional evidence of a local download.

We are preparing further trans-Atlantic testing over the next few weeks.

Some researchers have noted that some partitioning of the data might have occurred in the U.S., allowing for a transfer to be made at the measured speed over the Internet, and that this could have made possible a hack from the other side of the Atlantic. One of our associate investigators has found a way to achieve this kind of data partitioning and later transfer.

In theory, this would be one possible way to achieve such a large-data transfer, but we have no evidence that anything like this actually occurred. More important, in such a scenario, the National Security Agency would have chapter and verse on it, because such a hack would have to include software to execute the partitioning and subsequent data transfer. NSA gives the highest priority to collection on “execution software.”

Must Americans, apparently including President Donald Trump, remain in a Russia-did-it-or-could-have-maybe-might-have-done-it subjunctive mood on this important issue – one that has been used to inject Cold War ice into relations with Russia? The answer is absolutely not. Rather, definitive answers are at hand.

How can we be so confident? Because NSA alumni now active in Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) are intimately familiar with NSA’s capabilities and practice with respect to bulk capture and storage of fiber-optic communications. Two of us actually devised the systems still in use, and Edward Snowden’s revelations filled in remaining gaps. Today’s NSA is in position to clear up any and all questions about intrusions into the DNC.

In sum, we are certain that the truth of what actually happened – or didn’t happen – can be found in the databases of NSA. We tried to explain this to President Barack Obama in a VIPS Memorandum of Jan. 17, just three days before he left office, noting that NSA’s known programs are fully capable of capturing – and together with liaison intelligence services do capture – all electronic transfers of data.

Our Jan. 17 Memorandum included this admonition: “We strongly suggest that you ask NSA for any evidence it may have indicating that the results of Russian

hacking were given to WikiLeaks.” ... “If NSA cannot give you that information – and quickly – this would probably mean it does not have any.”

We also appealed to Obama in his final days in office to order the chiefs of the NSA, FBI and CIA to the White House and have them lay all their cards on the table about “Russian hacking,” and show him what tangible evidence they might have – not simply their “assessments.” We added, “We assume you would not wish to hobble your successor with charges that cannot withstand close scrutiny.” Having said this, we already were reaching the assumption that there was no real evidence to back the “assessments” up.

FBI: Not Leaning Forward

The FBI could still redeem itself by doing what it should have done as soon as the DNC claimed to have been “hacked.” For reasons best known to former FBI Director James Comey, the Bureau failed to get whatever warrant was needed to confiscate the DNC servers and computers to properly examine them.

In testimony to the House Intelligence Committee six months ago, Comey conceded “best practice is always to get access to the machines themselves.” And yet he chose not to. And his decision came amid frenzied charges by senior U.S. officials that Russia had committed “an act of war.”

But is it not already too late for such an investigation? We hope that, at this point, it is crystal clear that the answer is: No, it is not too late. All the data the FBI needs to do a proper job is *in NSA databases* – including data going across the Internet to the DNC server and then included in their network logs.

If President Trump wants to know the truth, he can order the FBI to do its job and NSA to cooperate. Whether the two and the CIA would obey such orders is an open question, given how heavily invested all three agencies are in their evidence-impooverished narrative about “Russian hacking.”

Let us close with the obvious. All three agencies have been aware all along that NSA has the data. One wonders why it should require a Presidential order for them to delve into that data and come up with conclusions based on fact, as opposed to “assessing.”

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PBS' 'Vietnam War' Tells Some Truths

Exclusive: The PBS 10-part Vietnam War series offers valuable insights into the horrific conflict but still treads lightly on U.S. leaders' guilt as they lied and connived to start and extend the slaughter, as war correspondent Don North describes.

By Don North (Correction: An earlier version incorrectly stated that the PBS series did not address the issue of Nixon's sabotage of Johnson's 1968 peace talks. The topic is mentioned.)

Vietnamese-American author Viet Thanh Nguyen observed in his 2016 book, *Nothing Ever Dies*, that "All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory." That is surely true of the Vietnam War, which – although it ended four decades ago – continues as a battle of memory, history and truth.

And, the stakes are still high since honest narratives about important past events can shape the future, even national destinies, and – perhaps most importantly – whether there will be more wars or possibly peace.

When PBS announced that it was broadcasting a 10-part, 18-hour series, entitled "The Vietnam War," I wasn't sure what to expect. As a network news correspondent who covered the war for five years through many of its bloodiest chapters, I have had mixed feelings about some of the other attempts to recount and explain the war.

Many of the previous efforts were colored by the political pressures of the moment, especially from policymakers and journalists who had career stakes in how assessments of the failed war would make them look. So, with some trepidation, I watched the entire 10-part series and read the companion book by writer Geoffrey C. Ward over the past week. To my pleasant surprise, I found many reasons to applaud the effort and my criticisms were relatively minor.

In my view, the PBS series, directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, represents the most honest and thorough account available to the general public. Over those 18 hours, the series reveals so much duplicity and mendacity that this real history makes even the most cynical movies about the war, such as "Apocalypse Now," and "The Deer Hunter," look tame by comparison.

I think that all Americans and Vietnamese who experienced the years of that war will find watching the series at least an educational experience, at best an inspiring one, and for some of us – who witnessed, fought or protested the war –

a profoundly emotional experience as well. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has recognized the series may bring up such stressful memories for combat veterans that it has offered a crisis line for counseling at 1-800-273-8255.

A Clear Narrative

The cement that holds together the interviews of some 80 participants is a clear narration written by Ward and performed by Peter Coyote without the “voice of God” style used in so many documentaries. Ward’s prologue to the first program is a sort of mission statement for the series, which I would criticize mostly because it still contains a residue of the longstanding desire to put a well-meaning gloss on the war’s justifications even when the evidence points elsewhere:

“America’s involvement in Vietnam began in secrecy. It ended thirty years later in failure witnessed by the entire world. It was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence, and cold war miscalculation. And it was prolonged because it seemed easier to muddle through than to admit it had been caused by tragic decisions, made by five American presidents, belonging to both political parties ... For those Americans who fought in it, and for those who fought against it back home – as well as those who merely glimpsed it on the nightly news – the Vietnam War was a decade of agony, the most divisive period since the Civil War.”

Yet, when you hear some of the secret telephone recordings of White House conversations by President Lyndon Johnson, Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, you’re not left with the impression that there was so much “good faith” by “decent people.”

For instance, one phone conversation between Johnson and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy reflected how Johnson really felt about Vietnam, contrary to the optimistic assessments that he was selling to the public and belying his assurances that the blood and treasure were worth the cost.

Johnson: I don’t know what in hell ... it looks like we’re getting into another Korea. I don’t think it’s worth fighting for and I don’t think we can get out. And it’s just the biggest damn mess.

Bundy: It is an awful mess.

Johnson: What in hell is Vietnam worth to me? What is it worth to the country?

Past the Talking Points

The PBS series interviews some 80 people on camera, including about 20 Vietnamese from both North and South. Drawing heavily from writers and poets, the series presents intelligent thoughts from all sides of the conflict. Novick, who is reported to have conducted most of the interviews, succeeded in getting people to go beyond the usual talking points.

When I returned to Vietnam shortly after the war to interview Vietnamese participants, there was always a government “minder” present. The results were hours of hearing Communist party dogma of little news value. That control seems to have broken down.

Foremost among the Vietnamese interviewed in the PBS series is Bao Ninh, a former North Vietnamese soldier and author of *The Sorrow of War*, a brutal and emotional novel about the war in the jungle and his bitter re-entry into society.

Bao remembers, “At the recruiting station they had singers and poets, working up the spirit of those signing up. There were two types of people – those full of anti-American spirit. And those like me. We were told to go and went.” Of 500 recruits in his brigade sent to fight in the South in 1969, he is one of ten who survived.

Duong Van Mai, now Duong Van Mai Elliot, was the daughter of a high official in the French colonial administration in Hanoi before fleeing south with her family after North and South were split. Mai later studied at Georgetown University and became an American. She is author of *Sacred Willows: Four Generations of a Vietnamese Family*.

One of the most articulate and compelling American witnesses is former U.S. Marine John Musgrave, so badly wounded in Vietnam that doctors rated him as expected to die. We follow Musgrave from his early training through battle, dropping out, alcoholism and war protesting, a veteran who still struggles with effects of his wounds.

Another Marine, Roger Harris, who pops up in almost every program, served in the deadly Con Thien base adjacent to the Demilitarized Zone. Harris recalls: “You go over there with one mind-set and then you adapt. You adapt to the atrocities of war. You adapt to the killing and dying, whatever. ... When I first arrived I questioned some of the Marines. I was made to realize this is war – and this is what we do.”

Karl Marlantis, a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, dropped out of school to join the U.S. Marines and led a platoon near the DMZ. Marlantis wrote *Matterhorn*, a Vietnam War classic. His frequent interview segments are articulate and

thoughtful as when he discusses his anger: "I can understand policy errors that kill a lot of people by mistake, but my bitterness is with the lying. Robert McNamara knew by 1965 the war was unwinnable and covering up killing people for your own ego and that's what makes me mad."

Secretary of Defense McNamara is often portrayed as a villain, but a very poignant interview is included with McNamara's son Craig who recalls his appeal to his father to provide him with information for a college debate supporting the war. He never receives it and concludes his father didn't believe in it himself.

Lack of Accountability

Tim O'Brian, another writer and author of *The Things They Carried*, served in the U.S Army's Americal Division and was familiar with the village the troops called "Pinkville," which became the scene of a massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai. O'Brian is critical that no soldiers involved in the massacre were ever sent to prison.

Lt. Commander Everett Alvarez, flying from the carrier USS Constellation, was the first American pilot to be shot down over North Vietnam and the first POW.

"When we approached the target coming down from altitude," recalled Alvarez, "it was obvious they could pick us up on their radar. I was a bit scared. But once we went in and they started firing at us, the fear went away. My plane, an A-4 Skyhawk, was like a ballet in the sky, and I was just performing. And then I got hit."

Alvarez spent eight years as a POW in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." In 1990 on a visit to Hanoi, I found that ironically a new Hilton Hotel had been built over what remained of the prison. Walking into the hotel bar, I was hailed by a middle-age man sitting on a barstool.

"Hey, you're an American aren't you?" he said. "Let me buy you a drink. I'm sitting over what used to be my prison cell for eight years."

The anti-war movement merits substantial time throughout the series and features many articulate protesters. Bill Zimmerman carries the protesters narrative from 1963 when he was a senior at the University of Chicago and member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) working for civil rights in Mississippi.

"We had watched the civil rights movement in the South to stand up against injustice, allow yourself to be beaten up or hit by a policeman," he recalled. "Then one day we saw on TV a picture of a burning monk in Saigon. I asked myself

what were we doing in Vietnam. Ending the war in Vietnam became my constant pre-occupation.”

The anti-war movement is not always portrayed in a favorable light, particularly in later years when bombings occurred and violent demonstrations became frequent. The hostility of many Americans toward the protesters is also captured in an interview with Jan Howard of Tennessee who describes her reaction to a student demonstrator asking her if she would join an anti-war march:

“I said ... my son is dead. One of the reasons he died was so you’d have the right to do this, so go ahead and demonstrate. Have at it. No, I won’t be joining you. But I tell you what, if you ever ring my doorbell again I’ll blow your damned head off with a .357 Magnum.”

Upsetting Hanoi

The series succeeds in cutting through the fog of the often secretive North Vietnamese leadership. Although the series includes interesting footage and photos of Ho Chi Minh, considered the father of modern Vietnam, and General Vo Nguyen Giap, the hero of Dien Bien Phu, the battle which effectively ended French colonial rule, the real power later shifted to Le Duan, a hard-line Communist of the Politburo and mastermind of the Tet offensive.

Newsweek reports that powerful figures in the Hanoi government are not happy with the series to such an extent that they ousted foreign ministry press officers who helped Burns and Novick set up interviews. The leaders’ primary complaint is reported to be that the series exposed the dissension and rivalries throughout the war at the top levels of the Hanoi regime.

They are also annoyed that several Vietnamese who were interviewed spoke frankly about the massacre of civilians in Hue during the Tet offensive. In the past, the North Vietnamese blamed the deaths on American bombs and artillery. (Although PBS devoted considerable time and expense to create a Vietnamese-language version of the series, no one expects the government to allow it to be shown in Vietnam.)

Despite how ambitious the 18-hour series is, there were a few subjects and individuals conspicuous by their absence. For instance, you see Colonel Edward Lansdale meeting with South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon but no mention of Lansdale’s years running a psy-war program against the North Vietnamese.

Also, missing is a thorough examination of Nixon’s decision to have 30,000 American soldiers and 50,000 South Vietnamese troops storm across the Cambodian border in April 1970, an invasion that contributed to the Khmer Rouge’s

overthrow of the Cambodian government and the unleashing of one more Vietnam War-related tragedy, the deaths of as many as two million Cambodians from 1975 to 1979. Nixon's decision to expand the war merited only 2 minutes and 50 seconds in episode six.

But even in an 18-hour series, editorial judgments must be made about what works toward telling the necessary narrative and what doesn't make the cut (though I would disagree with some of those choices). I also found it confusing when Burns succumbed to some film school techniques, such as "foreshadowing" in episode one entitled "Déjà Vu" that juxtaposed black-and-white archival footage of the failed French colonial occupation of Vietnam with later color film of American troops on patrol.

But a powerful element of the series is the impact of photographs and film from both sides of the conflict. Most film in Vietnam was shot silent, so the sound of bombs and gunshots was mixed in along with popular music. Vietnam, after all, was the first war fought to a rock 'n roll beat. [Full disclosure: I provided some photographs for the series.]

There is no identification of the photographers who at great risk took many of the photos. Apparently, the producers thought jamming the screen with constant credits for photos and film would be distracting. But the classic photos, many of which have become icons of the war, are readily recognized as the work of Horst Faas, Larry Burrows, Eddie Adams, Tim Page, Don McCullin, Henri Huet and Nick Ut, among many others.

The war claimed the lives of 135 photojournalists. A special tribute to Vietnam photojournalists is included in the closing credits.

Publicity Campaign

For the past month, directors Burns and Novick have spearheaded a massive publicity campaign to promote the series. Last week, the Kennedy Center Opera House was filled for an advance screening of program highlights followed by a panel discussion. Before the screening, Burns asked anyone who served in the military during the war to stand and be recognized with applause. He then asked anyone who protested Vietnam to stand. At that point, two of the war's most famous veterans, Sen. John McCain and former Secretary of State John Kerry, joined in applauding the anti-war demonstrators, too.

It was a moment that set the tone of reconciliation and harmony the series producers said they had hoped for in documenting one of the most divisive chapters in American history. In the ensuing panel discussion, the 81-year-old McCain, who was a bomber pilot shot down over Hanoi and held as a POW for more

than five years, said, "Maybe we can look back on Vietnam and make sure we don't make the same mistakes again. We can learn lessons today because the world is in such turmoil: Tell the American people the truth!"

Winston Churchill once said, "The longer you look back, the farther you can look forward." That would surely be true for any careful study of the Vietnam War, an unwinnable war fought against a country that Americans knew virtually nothing about and in which the U.S. had no vital interests. It was a lesson in how arrogance, ignorance, ideology and political cowardice can be a deadly mix.

The war took the lives of more than 58,000 American soldiers. Although Vietnamese casualty estimates vary widely, the Vietnamese government tallied more than 1 million soldiers dead along with 2 million civilians.

In 2001, I interviewed historian Arthur Schlesinger at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba and asked him if we were learning from our history. "History is an argument without end," Schlesinger told me. "No historian would use the word definitive because new times bring new preoccupations and we historians realize we are prisoners of our own experience. As Oscar Wilde used to say 'One duty we owe to history is to re-write it.'"

As upsetting as the Vietnam War series may be, it holds out hope that we might still learn from history.

Don North is a veteran war correspondent who covered the Vietnam War and many other conflicts around the world. He is the author of *Inappropriate Conduct*, the story of a World War II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he uncovered.

How the UN Covers for US Aggression

For decades the American Right has decried the U.N. for encroaching on American sovereignty, but the truth is that the U.N. is a chief U.S. accomplice in violating the sovereignty of other nations, notes J.P. Sottile.

By J.P. Sottile

President Trump opened his big United Nations week ... and his famous mouth ... with a predictable plug for one of his properties and some playful glad-handing with French President Emmanuel Macron. Trump also scolded the U.N.'s unwieldy scrum for "not living up to its potential." He made a passing reference to the U.N.'s

wasteful use of American money. And he called for “reform” of the much-maligned international forum.

It was a stolid prelude to what will no doubt be “must-see” TV when he speaks to the UN General Assembly on Tuesday about North Korea and Iran. And it was a far cry from the way America’s leading “America Firster” spent the campaign lamenting how unfair the U.N. is to the poor schlemiel we call Uncle Sam.

He is likely to use his speech to throw a little bit of that same red meat to his base, but his call for reform falls well short of what his supporters want ... which is an abrupt end of U.S. involvement in the international body. They are motivated by a grab-bag of reasons that point to the U.N. being a threat to their guns, their bank accounts and their God-given freedom.

Oddly enough, these conspiratorial narratives have been around for decades and they mostly center on a grand plan by U.N. elites to abscond American sovereignty and dissolve the U.S. into a U.N.-led world government. And the evidence of this is the way the U.N. harasses and restricts Uncle Sam while siphoning-off America’s wealth. At least, that’s what some think.

Most ominously, many object to the way U.N. funds are being used to quietly deploy gun-grabbing U.N. soldiers in advance of the big takeover. But like so much of Trump’s intoxicating irredentism ... this is a grievance more likely rooted in a three-day meth bender in a Tallahassee trailer park than it is from shocking evidence gathered from well-traveled observation. It’s paranoia. But really, it’s worse than that.

Why? Because the U.N. has basically been the complete opposite of what its angriest critics claim. It is not out to get the U.S. Rather, it has largely been America’s tool since its inception and, in particular, it has repeatedly covered Uncle Sam’s overly-exposed butt as he (a.k.a. “the royal we”) has gone around the world on a three decade-long military bender since the end of the Cold War.

Yes, the Gulf War was U.N. approved and the whole world got behind it because (April Glaspie’s backstory notwithstanding) the *prima facie* case was strong and it was a fairly clear-cut example of unwarranted aggression. That was an easy call.

Global Violence

But since then, the calls have been nothing short of murky as the U.S. has bombed and droned and deployed and invaded and covertly-acted and regime-changed all around the globe. And the unspoken truth is that the United Nations has been America’s all-too silent partner as Uncle Sam traipsed around the planet with a

loaded gun, remote control assassination machines and paper-thin rationales for intervention.

Although the U.N. occasionally puts a bug up Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu's ass on the issue of the slow-motion ethnic cleansing in the West Bank ... what other issue is there where the U.N. has taken a real stand against the U.S. or U.S. policy objectives?

Where is the U.N.'s punishment for being lied to by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell? And where is the punishment for destroying a bystander nation under false pretenses? Where is the punishment for Abu Ghraib or Gitmo?

Where is the punishment for America's summary execution of "suspected militants" around the Muslim world simply because they are of "military age" and in the wrong place at the right time ... and for the CIA, it is always the right time to kill a suspect no matter how wrong the place may be. And where is the condemnation of America's destabilizing role as the world's leading supermarket of military hardware?

How about mounting civilian casualties from an ever-widening bombing campaign? The U.N. can say the killings are "unacceptable," but does it really matter if there is no sanction? There haven't been any sanctions after children were killed in a "U.S.-backed raid" in Somalia. Go figure, right?

Or what about America's complicity in the catastrophe of Yemen? Where are those sanctions? And what exactly has the U.N. done to punish any number of extra-legal maneuver by a succession of American presidents over the course of the "Global War on Terror"? The simple answer is nothing.

Instead, the Secretary General is largely beholden to the disproportionate influence of the United States. The Security Council's agenda is basically set by the United States ... and that's particularly true since the Soviet Union collapsed. At the same time, the U.N.'s occasionally contentious debates do little more than offer the imprimatur of international approbation or well-noted disdain despite the functionally inconsequential nature of those debates.

A Fig Leaf for Empire

Either way it is a win for Uncle Sam because the presence of a neutered United Nations provides the United States with a fig leaf just big enough to cover the dangly parts of America's otherwise naked empire.

The money that does go from the U.S. Treasury into the minutia around the margins ... like UNESCO programs and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and all the other little crumbs that get

thrown around the world ... these are payoffs. This is what the world gets for mostly keeping its mouth shut in the face of America's globe-spanning empire. The tiny amount of aid that trickles down past the bureaucracy ... much like the bureaucracy itself ... is not an example of America "getting played" by wasteful foreigners with hidden agendas. This is America paying to play the world like organ grinder with a hurdy-gurdy monkey.

Frankly, the "28.5% of the overall peacekeeping bill" that Trump calls "unfair" (about \$2.2 billion of the \$3.3 billion the U.S. gives to the UN annually) is a pittance ... particularly if you want the unchecked right to tell Persians what they can and cannot do in the Persian Gulf, to tell the Chinese what they can and cannot build in the South China Sea, and to tell every other power on the face of the earth why they cannot have the same nuclear capability America not only has ... but is currently "upgrading" to the tune of \$1.5 trillion.

Even more amazingly, the U.S. wants to deny these nations the only real insurance policy against U.S.-led regime change. And why is that? Because there ain't a Curveball's chance in Hell that the U.N. will ever be able to stop Uncle Sam from marching where he wants, when he wants and for whatever reason he wants to cook-up. That's a historically provable fact.

The only real check on U.S. power is the ability of an asymmetrical power to go nuclear. And let's admit it, they are ALL asymmetrical powers when compared to America's gargantuan, trillion-dollar national security beast. And this is why the U.N.'s "partnership" with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is the only U.N.-associated agency that really matters. They can't do much, but they can throw a wrench into another WMD snipe hunt ... like they are doing now with the Iran Nuclear Deal.

But like it was tested by Team Bush, the IAEA is going to be tested again as Trump and Netanyahu make their bogus case ... without a hint of irony ... that Iran is the world's greatest threat. But that's really just par for a course that's riddled with falsified flags haphazardly stuck into the shallow holes of a back nine that's actually been built by and for a club-wielding Uncle Sam.

A Cult of Grievance

And therein lies the truly pernicious part of the Trumped-up case against the U.N. ... because, like so much of America's growing cult of grievance, it reflects an ever-widening gap between America's stated ideals and its self-serving behavior around the world.

As we are learning almost daily, Americans tried to square that circle by electing a profligate liar who fully embodies America's insatiable desire to

take credit, particularly where none is due ... and to outsource the blame to scapegoats like the U.N., particularly when the only alternative is a long look into the mirror.

And in the case of the U.N., that projected guilt is in spite of the fact that it is often tasked with quietly cleaning up some of the collateral damage wrought by their main accuser. They just have to do so without any real power or the funds to do the job. That's the simple truth you won't hear in Trump's speech ... or any speech, for that matter.

It's the fact that the U.N.'s meager amount of "wasteful spending" doesn't even begin to cover the cost of doing business when your business depends of paying the world to look the other way while you get away with murder.

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The Right's Made-up Constitution

From the Archive: On the U.S. Constitution's 230th birthday, many Americans don't realize that the document actually gives the federal government broad powers to provide for the nation's welfare, as Jada Thacker noted in 2013.

By Jada Thacker (Originally published on July 6, 2013)

The Cato Institute's *Handbook for Policy Makers* says, "The American system was established to provide limited government." The American Enterprise Institute states its purpose to "defend the principles" of "limited government." The Heritage Foundation claims its mission is to promote "principles of limited government." A multitude of Tea Party associations follow suit.

At first glance the concept of "limited government" seems like a no-brainer. Everybody believes the power of government should be limited somehow. All those who think totalitarianism is a good idea raise your hand. But there is one problem with the ultra-conservatives' "limited government" program: it is wrong. It is not just a little bit wrong, but demonstrably false.

The Constitution was never intended to "provide limited government," and furthermore it did not do so. The U.S. government possessed the same constitutional power at the moment of its inception as it did yesterday

afternoon. This is not a matter of opinion, but of literacy. If we want to discover the truth about the scope of power granted to federal government by the Constitution, all we have to do is read what it says.

The Constitution's grant of essentially unlimited power springs forth in its opening phrases: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

As might be expected in a preamble to a founding document, especially one written under supervision of arch-aristocrat Gouverneur Morris, the terms are sweeping and rather grandiose. But the point is crystal clear: "to form a more perfect Union." If the object of the Constitution were to establish "limited government," its own Preamble must be considered a misstatement.

Enumerated Powers

Article I establishes Congress, and Section 8 enumerates its powers. The first clause of Article I, Section 8 repeats the sweeping rhetoric of the Preamble verbatim. While it provides for a measure of uniformity, it does not so much as hint at a limit on the federal government's power to legislate as it sees fit:

"The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States; but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States"

No attempt is made here, or at any other place in the Constitution, to define "general Welfare." This oversight (if that is what it was) is crucial. The ambiguous nature of the phrase "provide for the general Welfare" leaves it open to widely divergent interpretations.

Making matters worse for federal government power-deniers is the wording of the last clause of Article I, the so-called "Elastic Clause": Congress shall have power "To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof."

Thus the type, breadth and scope of federal legislation became unchained. When viewed in light of the ambiguous authorization of the Article's first clause, the importance of the "necessary and proper" clause truly is astonishing. Taken together, these clauses restated in the vernacular flatly announce that

“Congress can make any law it feels is necessary to provide for whatever it considers the general welfare of the country.”

Lately there has been an embarrassingly naive call from the Tea Party to require Congress to specify in each of its bills the Constitutional authority upon which the bill is grounded. Nothing could be easier: the first and last clauses of Article I, Section 8 gives Congress black-and-white authority to make any law it so desires. Nor was this authority lost on the Founders.

“Limited government” advocates are fond of cherry-picking quotes from *The Federalist Papers* to lend their argument credibility, but an adverse collection of essays called the *Anti-federalist Papers* unsurprisingly never gets a glance. Here is a sample from New Yorker Robert Yates, a would-be founder who walked out of the Philadelphia convention in protest, written a month after the Constitution had been completed:

“This government is to possess absolute and uncontrollable power, legislative, executive and judicial, with respect to every object to which it extends. The government then, so far as it extends, is a complete one. It has the authority to make laws which will affect the lives, the liberty, and the property of every man in the United States; nor can the constitution or the laws of any state, in any way prevent or impede the full and complete execution of every power given.”

Yates, it must be emphasized, took pains to identify the “necessary and proper” clause as the root of the “absolute power” inherent in the Constitution well over a year before ratification.

The Tenth Amendment

A particular darling of secession-prone, far-Right Texas Gov. Rick Perry, the Tenth Amendment is often claimed as the silver-bullet antidote for the powers unleashed by the “general welfare” and “elastic clauses.” Here is the text of the Amendment in its entirety: “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

Superficially, the Tenth seems to mean “since certain powers are not delegated to the federal government, then those powers are reserved to the states or the people.” This would seem to be good news for champions of limited government. But this is not the case.

The Tenth does *not* say that important powers remain to be delegated to the United States. It merely says that powers “not [yet] delegated” are “reserved” to the states or the people. This sounds like a terrific idea until we realize, of course, that all the important powers had *already* been delegated in 1787,

four years before the Tenth Amendment was ratified.

As we have seen, the first and last clauses of Article I, Section 8 made the Tenth Amendment a lame-duck measure even as James Madison composed its words in 1791 and so it remains today. The sweeping powers “to make all laws necessary and proper” in order to “provide for the general welfare,” had already been bestowed upon Congress. The Johnny-come-lately Tenth Amendment closed the constitutional pasture gate after the horses had been let out.

This apparently has never occurred to the likes of Gov. Rick Perry and his far-Right cohorts who believe a state may reclaim power by withdrawing its consent, in effect repossessing their previously delegated power through state legislation. Superficially, the logic of this position seems sound: if the states had the legal authority to delegate power, then they may use the same authority to “un-delegate” it by law.

But a close re-reading of the Tenth’s wording nixes such reasoning. Oddly, the Tenth Amendment does not say the *states* delegated their powers to the federal government although it may be argued that it probably ought to have said so. It says “The powers not delegated to the United States *by the Constitution* are reserved to the States. ”

Thus, according to the Tenth Amendment, the Constitution *itself* delegated the power to the federal government. States, in other words, now have no standing to “reserve-back” what they had never “delegated-away” in the first place.

Had it been possible to “un-delegate” the powers of the United States by invoking the Tenth, the Old South would have simply done so and spared itself the bother of secession not to mention the bother of being annihilated by a series of subsequent Northern invasions. The fact that the South did not even attempt such a strategy attests to the toothlessness of the Tenth Amendment.

No other instance in law would be a better example that we should choose our votes carefully. For in ratifying the Bill of Rights, which included the Tenth Amendment, the American people endorsed the legal fiction that the Constitution not the original 13 states, or “We the People” authorized the power of the United States *because the Constitution itself said so*. If the Constitution has an Orwellian twist, this is it no matter which side of the aisle you’re on.

The states and the people may amend the Constitution. But they may not do so by nullification (according to the logic inherent in the wording of the Tenth Amendment), or by the judgment of state courts (according to the “supremacy clause” of Article VI), nor may any Amendment be made without the participation of the federal government, itself (according to Article V.) If the Founders had

meant to ensure “limited government,” there is no trace of such intent here.

Paucity of Rights

If the Constitution were intended to provide “limited government,” we might expect it to be chock full of guarantees of individual rights. This is what Tea Partiers may fantasize but this is not really true. In fact, the Constitution is amazingly stingy in reference to “rights.”



The word “right” is mentioned *only once* in the Constitution as ratified. (Art. I, Sec. 8 allows Congress to award copyrights/patents to ensure their holders “Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.”)

The word “right” somewhat counter-intuitively appears only six times in the ten Amendments called the “Bill of Rights.”

Almost a century later, the first of seven other rights were added under pressure from Progressive activists almost all of which were intended to create and extend democratic participation in self-government.

Amendment XIV (sanctions against states denying suffrage); XV (universal male suffrage); XIX (women’s suffrage); XXIV (denial of poll tax); and XXVI (18 year-old suffrage); and twice in Amendment XX, which gives Congress the “right of choice” in presidential succession.

In grand total, the word “right” appears only 14 times in the entire Constitution, as it exists today (including the two rights conferred to *government*).

Did we all notice that the “Constitution of the Founders” did not include the “right” for anybody at all to vote? Notable, too, is the absence of language implying that any “rights” are “unalienable” or “natural” or “endowed by their Creator.” All such phraseology belongs to the Declaration of Independence, which apparently unbeknownst to Tea Partiers everywhere bears no force of law.

The word “power,” by the way, occurs 43 times in the Constitution, each time referring exclusively to the prerogative of government, not right-wingers. Since “individual” rights are mentioned only 12 times, this yields a ratio of about 4:1 in favor of government power over individual rights. Without the efforts of those pesky, democracy-mongering Progressives, who fought for universal voting rights, the ratio would be more than 6:1 today or 50 percent higher.

This statistical factoid is not as trivial as it may appear. Expressed in practical terms, Michele Bachmann, Sarah Palin or Clarence Thomas would almost certainly never have achieved public office had they lived under the "limited government" designed by the Founders they so revere.

The Bill of Rights

So what exactly are our non-patent/copyright "rights," under so-called "limited government?"

Amendment I the right of people "peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for redress of grievances"

Amendment II the right "to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed"

Amendment IV the right "to be secure against unreasonable searches or seizures"

Amendment VI the right "to a speedy and public trial"

Amendment VII the right "of a trial by jury"

Amendment IX enumeration "of certain rights" shall not deny "others retained by the people"

That's it. What happened to the famous rights of free speech, religion or press? The way the First Amendment is worded does not enumerate these as positive rights that people possess, but rather as activities the government may not infringe upon. If Bill of Rights author James Madison had meant to stipulate them as positive "rights" all he had to do was write it that way, but he did not.

Bear in mind Madison (then a federalist) wrote the Bill of Rights under political duress. Since anti-federalists (recall the skepticism of Robert Yates) flatly refused to ratify the Constitution unless it guaranteed *something*, Madison had to write *something*. In effect, the amendments were the pig the anti-federalists had bought in the poke, three years after ratification had paid for it.

Madison, at the time of writing, had little incentive to take pains with what he wrote because federalists did not believe a Bill of Rights was necessary, or even good idea (with Alexander Hamilton arguing a Bill of Rights would be "dangerous.") This may account for the fact that some of what Madison wrote seems vague, or even ambiguous, as in the case of Amendment II.

Amendment IX, for example, actually makes little sense, which may account for the fact nobody ever seems to mention it: "The enumeration in the Constitution,

of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.”

This sounds “righteous” enough, until we recall the Constitution to which this Amendment pertains had “enumerated” only a single right in the first place! Even if Amendment IX applies to the Bill of Rights (to include itself), then all it says is “the people may have more rights than the half dozen mentioned so far, but we’re not going to tell you what they are.” (So if Amendment X is Orwellian, Amendment IX verges on Catch-22.)

Of course the idea was to calm suspicions that people would possess only the half-dozen rights enumerated in the Bill of Rights (plus patents!) and no others. Even so, Amendment IX did not guarantee any un-enumerated rights; it just did not peremptorily “deny or disparage” any.

And what sense should we make of the crucial Amendment V one of the four Bills of Rights not actually containing the word “right” at all?

“No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be **deprived of life, liberty, or property**, *without due process of law*; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.” [Emphasis supplied]

Thus, life, liberty and property are *not* expressly granted status as fundamental “rights,” but only as personal possessions that may be deprived or taken according to “due process.” The crucial implication is that Amendment V exists *in order to stipulate how the government may deny* an individual claim to life, liberty or property. *With* due process, you life, liberty and property may be toast. That is what it plainly says.

It is interesting, too, that the Bill of Rights does not speak to the origin of rights, but only to their existence. Moreover, the Constitution never speaks of granting rights, but only protecting them. There is a good reason for this: excepting the Progressive suffrage Amendments, none of the guaranteed rights were American inventions, but had for centuries been considered the rights of the English nobility.

For those who want to believe in “American Exceptionalism” as the basis of “limited government,” this is not encouraging news. Moreover, the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, hardly includes any “right” that had not already

been recognized at one time or another by medieval English monarchs or in ancient Rome and Greece.

Property Rights and 'Republic'

The strict libertarians among us claim the sole legitimate power of government is that which is necessary to protect private property rights. On this score, however, the "limited government" of the Founders is practically mute. Except for the aforementioned Article I, Section 8 provision for patents and copyrights, private "property" is only mentioned twice in the Constitution, both times in a single sentence of the "right"-less Amendment V quoted above:

"No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or **property** *without due process of law*; nor shall private **property** be taken for public use, *without just compensation.*" [Emphasis supplied]

Once again, Amendment V fails to guarantee personal immunity from the power of the state, but rather details the way state power may be used to dispossess individuals of their property. And we must bear in mind these words were not penned by Marxists, socialists, or Progressives.

Whether by design or happenstance, the original "Constitution of the Founders," or the Bill of Rights, or even the Constitution with all its Amendments does not grant any irrevocable "right of possession" to property. Even the Second Amendment's "right to keep" arms, is subject to the terms by which property may be taken under terms of Amendment V, and it always has been.

Tellingly, the word "democracy" does not appear in the Constitution. This intentional oversight is often smugly celebrated by anti-democrats among us, who insist that the United States of America was founded as a "republic." No doubt this is true, given that the Constitution was written by an exclusive, hand-picked cadre of oligarchs, whose number did not include a single woman, person of color, or wage-earner.

Unfortunately for the pro-republic "limited government" crowd, the Constitution does not contain the word "republic" either. The word does appear as an adjective, but only once, (Article IV, Section 4): "The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them from Invasion"

Typically for the Constitution, which defines few of its terms, the word "Republican" also remains unexplained. The ambiguity of the term turned out to be handy, however, as Radical Republicans continuously and egregiously violated Article IV, Sec. 4 from 1865-1877 as they enforced blatantly unconstitutional military occupation of former Confederate states during the gross misnomer of

“Reconstruction.”

It should be obvious that the “Constitution of our Founders,” including the Bill of Rights, may not protect as many rights as many wish to believe. Moreover, we have already noted the Constitution dropped all revolutionary talk of “unalienable” rights and “Creator endowed” liberty. This was not an oversight.

The revolutionary bit about “consent of the governed” posed an especially delicate problem for the Founders. Almost all owned slaves or were masters of property-less tenants or domestic servants, including their wives none of whom could offer their legal consent even if they wished to do so. Thus the Founders shrewdly considered it unnecessary to include any voting rights in the new republic they planned to rule, uncontested by the disenfranchised lower castes.

Did this result in the land of the free, with liberty and justice for all? Let’s see.

Under the U.S. Constitution, Americans were sentenced to death for protesting unfair taxes; journalists and citizens imprisoned for criticizing government officials; citizens’ property seized illegally; workers murdered by government agents; thousands jailed without the “privilege” of *habeas corpus*; entire states deprived of civilian courts; untold numbers of American Indians defrauded of liberty and property; debt-peonage and debtors’ prisons flourished, as did slavery and child labor; and the majority of the public was denied the vote.

All this was considered constitutional by the Founders. None of these outrages, please note, was the result of “progressivism,” which had yet to be articulated, and all were common prior to the New Deal and the advent of so-called Big Government. Was this the face of “limited government?”

No, it was not. The concept of a democratically “limited government” was not for a moment entertained by our Founders, nor is it by those who idolize them today. With few exceptions, the Founders were Eighteenth Century patricians who took a revolutionary gamble meant chiefly to perpetuate their privileges, free from English colonial overlordship. It should come as no surprise these elitists drafted a Constitution that posed no threat to aristocracy.

‘Limited Government’ as Act of Faith

The original Constitution of the United States of America was just so much ink on paper. The Constitution, as it stands today, is just a lot more ink on paper.

But the Constitution’s ink is important and deserves respect because it represents nothing less than the collective civic conscience of the American people. A great many Americans have dedicated their lives in trust to that

conscience on battlefields, in classrooms, in everyday civic life, and even a few in the halls of power.

It is evident that most of the Amendments to the original Constitution as well as the Supreme Court's decisions interpreting its scope and purpose were made because the document had over the course of time been found wanting by the American people, whose common interests it was not originally intended to serve. As the collective civic conscience of the people changed, so too did their interpretation of self-government.

But the entire concept of social evolution (much less biological evolution) is something the ultra-Conservative rank-and-file likely does not comprehend and it is not something their leaders encourage them to consider. The reason for this may have less to do with politics than with fundamentalist faith.

An anecdote in point: the editor-in-chief at Random House once asked the extremist libertarian Ayn Rand if she would consider revising a passage in one of her manuscripts. She reportedly replied, "Would you consider revising the Bible?"

Ergo, that which is sacrosanct neither requires nor will tolerate change to include the fantasized "limited government" of the immortalized "Founding Fathers." The fact that Rand was a noted atheist only underscores the point that fundamentalist faith is not restricted to any particular brand of fanaticism.

Yet the Constitution's conception was anything but immaculate. It was not carted down from the Mount in tablets of stone, nor is it the product of some mysterious Natural Law interpretable only by libertarian gurus. And whether its meaning is best exemplified by the Tea Party flag depicting a talking snake ("Don't Tread on Me"), perhaps only Eve could judge with authority.

The Constitution is not a holy book, and there is no good reason for anybody to treat it like one. The men who wrote it were not prophets, nor were they particularly virtuous, though some could turn a pretty phrase. In fact, the Constitution's most unholy-book characteristic is its most welcomed attribute: its readers are not required to believe in its infallibility in order for it to make sense to them.

But we are required to read the Constitution if we want to know what it says. The ultra-conservatives' obsession with a constitutionally "limited government," which has never actually existed, suggests they do not understand the Constitution as much as they merely idolize it.

These constitutional "fundamentalists" along with the American public in general would do better to pick the document up and read it sometime, not fall on bended

knee before it and expect the rest of us to follow their example.

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The NYT's Yellow Journalism on Russia

Exclusive: The New York Times' descent into yellow journalism over Russia recalls the sensationalism of Hearst and Pulitzer leading to the Spanish-American War, but the risks to humanity are much greater now, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Reading The New York Times these days is like getting a daily dose of the "Two Minutes Hate" as envisioned in George Orwell's *1984*, except applied to America's new/old enemy Russia. Even routine international behavior, such as Russia using fictitious names for potential adversaries during a military drill, is transformed into something weird and evil.

In the snide and alarmist style that the Times now always applies to Russia, reporter Andrew Higgins wrote – referring to a fictitious war-game "enemy" – "The country does not exist, so it has neither an army nor any real citizens, though it has acquired a feisty following of would-be patriots online. Starting on Thursday, however, the fictional state, Veishnoriya, a distillation of the Kremlin's darkest fears about the West, becomes the target of the combined military might of Russia and its ally Belarus."

This snarky front-page story in Thursday's print editions also played into the Times' larger narrative about Russia as a disseminator of "fake news." You see the Russkies are even inventing "fictional" enemies to bully. Hah-hah-hah! The article was entitled, "Russia's War Games With Fake Enemies Cause Real Alarm."

Of course, the U.S. and its allies also conduct war games against fictitious enemies, but you wouldn't know that from reading the Times. For instance, U.S. war games in 2015 substituted five made-up states – Ariana, Atropia, Donovia, Gorgas and Limaria – for nations near the Caucasus mountains along the borders of Russia and Iran.

In earlier war games, the U.S. used both fictitious names and colors in place of actual countries. For instance, in 1981, the Reagan administration conducted "Ocean Venture" with that war-game scenario focused on a group of islands called "Amber and the Amberdines," obvious stand-ins for Grenada and the Grenadines, with "Orange" used to represent Cuba.

In those cases, the maneuvers by the powerful U.S. military were clearly intended to intimidate far weaker countries. Yet, the U.S. mainstream media did not treat those war rehearsals for what they were, implicit aggression, but rather mocked protests from the obvious targets as paranoia since we all know the U.S. would never violate international law and invade some weak country! (As it turned out, Ocean Venture '81 was a dress rehearsal for the actual U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983.)

Yet, as far as the Times and its many imitators in the major media are concerned, there's one standard for "us" and another for Russia and other countries that "we" don't like.

Yellow Journalism

But the Times' behavior over the past several years suggests something even more sinister than biased reporting. The "newspaper of record" has slid into yellow journalism, the practice of two earlier New York newspapers – William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World – that in the 1890s manipulated facts about the crisis in Cuba to push the United States into war with Spain, a conflict that many historians say marked the beginning of America's global empire.

Except in today's instance, The New York Times is prepping the American people for what could become World War III. The daily message is that you must learn to hate Russia and its President Vladimir Putin so much that, first, you should support vast new spending on America's Military-Industrial Complex and, second, you'll be ginned up for nuclear war if it comes to that.

At this stage, the Times doesn't even try for a cosmetic appearance of objective journalism. Look at how the Times has twisted the history of the Ukraine crisis, treating it simply as a case of "Russian aggression" or a "Russian invasion." The Times routinely ignores what actually happened in Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014 when the U.S. government aided and abetted a violent coup that overthrew Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich after he had been demonized in the Western media.

Even as neo-Nazi and ultranationalist protesters hurled Molotov cocktails at police, Yanukovich signaled a willingness to compromise and ordered his police

to avoid worsening violence. But compromise wasn't good enough for U.S. neocons – such as Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland; Sen. John McCain; and National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman. They had invested too much in moving Ukraine away from Russia.

Nuland put the U.S. spending at \$5 billion and was caught discussing with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt who should be in the new government and how to “glue” or “midwife this thing”; McCain appeared on stage urging on far-right militants; and Gershman was overseeing scores of NED projects inside Ukraine, which he had deemed the “biggest prize” and an important step in achieving an even bigger regime change in Russia, or as he put it: “Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents. ... Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

The Putsch

So, on Feb. 20, 2014, instead of seeking peace, a sniper firing from a building controlled by anti-Yanukovich forces killed both police and protesters, touching off a day of carnage. Immediately, the Western media blamed Yanukovich.

Shaken by the violence, Yanukovich again tried to pacify matters by reaching a compromise – guaranteed by France, Germany and Poland – to relinquish some of his powers and move up an election so he could be voted out of office peacefully. He also pulled back the police.

At that juncture, the neo-Nazis and ultra-nationalists spearheaded a violent putsch on Feb. 22, 2014, forcing Yanukovich and other officials to flee for their lives. Ignoring the agreement guaranteed by the three European nations, Nuland and the U.S. State Department quickly deemed the coup regime “legitimate.”

However, ethnic Russians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, which represented Yanukovich’s electoral base, resisted the coup and turned to Russia for protection. Contrary to the Times’ narrative, there was no “Russian invasion” of Crimea because Russian troops were already there as part of an agreement for its Sevastopol naval base. That’s why you’ve never seen photos of Russian troops crashing across Ukraine’s borders in tanks or splashing ashore in Crimea with an amphibious landing or descending by parachute. They were already inside Crimea.

The Crimean autonomous government also voted to undertake a referendum on whether to leave the failed Ukrainian state and to rejoin Russia, which had governed Crimea since the Eighteenth Century. In that referendum, Crimean citizens voted by some 96 percent to exit Ukraine and seek reunion with Russia,

a democratic and voluntary process that the Times always calls “annexation.”

The Times and much of the U.S. mainstream media refuses even to acknowledge that there is another side to the Ukraine story. Anyone who mentions this reality is deemed a “Kremlin stooge” in much the same way that people who questioned the mainstream certainty about Iraq’s WMD in 2002-03 were called “Saddam apologists.”

But what is particularly remarkable about the endless Russia-bashing is that – because it started under President Obama – it sucked in many American liberals and even some progressives. That process grew even worse when the contempt for Russia merged with the Left’s revulsion over Donald Trump’s election.

Many liberals came to view the dubious claims of Russian “meddling” in the 2016 election as the golden ticket to remove Trump from the White House. So, amid that frenzy, all standards of proof were jettisoned to make Russia-gate the new Watergate.

The Times, The Washington Post and pretty much the entire U.S. news media joined the “resistance” to Trump’s presidency and embraced the neocon “regime change” goal for Putin’s Russia. Very few people care about the enormous risks that this “strategy” entails.

For one, even if the U.S. government were to succeed in destabilizing nuclear-armed Russia sufficiently to force out President Putin, the neocon dream of another malleable Boris Yeltsin in the Kremlin is far less likely than the emergence of an extreme Russian nationalist who might be ready to push the nuclear button rather than accept further humiliation of Mother Russia.

The truth is that the world has much less to fear from the calculating Vladimir Putin than from the guy who might follow a deposed Vladimir Putin amid economic desperation and political chaos in Russia. But the possibility of nuclear Armageddon doesn’t seem to bother the neocon/liberal-interventionist New York Times. Nor apparently does the principle of fair and honest journalism.

The Times and rest of the mainstream media are just having too much fun hating Russia and Putin to worry about the possible extermination of life on planet Earth.

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](#)).

Reagan Documents Shed Light on U.S. 'Meddling'

Special Report: "Secret" documents from the Reagan administration show how the U.S. embedded "political action," i.e., the manipulation of foreign governments, in ostensibly well-meaning organizations, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

"Secret" documents, recently declassified by the Reagan presidential library, reveal senior White House officials reengaging a former CIA "proprietary," The Asia Foundation, in "political action," an intelligence term of art for influencing the actions of foreign governments.

The documents from 1982 came at a turning-point moment when the Reagan administration was revamping how the U.S. government endeavored to manipulate the internal affairs of governments around the world in the wake of scandals in the 1960s and 1970s involving the Central Intelligence Agency's global covert operations.

Instead of continuing to rely heavily on the CIA, President Reagan and his national security team began offloading many of those "political action" responsibilities to "non-governmental organizations" (NGOs) that operated in a more overt fashion and received funding from other U.S. government agencies.

But secrecy was still required for the involvement of these NGOs in the U.S. government's strategies to bend the political will of targeted countries. If the "political action" of these NGOs were known, many countries would object to their presence; thus, the "secret" classification of the 1982 White House memos that I recently obtained via a "mandatory declassification review" from the archivists at the Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, California.

In intelligence circles, "political action" refers to a wide range of activities to influence the policies and behaviors of foreign nations, from slanting their media coverage, to organizing and training opposition activists, even to setting the stage for "regime change."

The newly declassified memos from the latter half of 1982 marked an ad hoc period of transition between the CIA scandals, which peaked in the 1970s, and the creation of more permanent institutions to carry out these semi-secretive functions, particularly the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which was created in 1983.

Much of this effort was overseen by a senior CIA official, Walter Raymond Jr., who was moved to Reagan's National Security Council's staff where he managed a number of interagency task forces focused on "public diplomacy," "psychological operations," and "political action."

Raymond, who had held top jobs in the CIA's covert operations shop specializing in propaganda and disinformation, worked from the shadows inside Reagan's White House, too. Raymond was rarely photographed although his portfolio of responsibilities was expansive. He brought into his orbit emerging "stars," including Lt. Col. Oliver North (a central figure in the Iran-Contra scandal), State Department propagandist (and now a leading neocon) Robert Kagan, and NED President Carl Gershman (who still heads NED with its \$100 million budget).

Despite his camera avoidance, Raymond appears to have grasped his true importance. In his NSC files, I found a doodle of an organizational chart that had Raymond at the top holding what looks like the crossed handles used by puppeteers to control the puppets below them. The drawing fit the reality of Raymond as the behind-the-curtains operative who controlled various high-powered inter-agency task forces.

Earlier declassified documents revealed that Raymond also was the conduit between CIA Director William J. Casey and these so-called "pro-democracy" programs that used sophisticated propaganda strategies to influence not only the thinking of foreign populations but the American people, too.

This history is relevant again now amid the hysteria over alleged Russian "meddling" in last year's U.S. presidential elections. If those allegations are true – and the U.S. government has still not presented any real proof – the Russian motive would have been, in part, payback for Washington's long history of playing games with the internal politics of Russia and other countries all across the planet.

A Fight for Money

The newly released memos describe bureaucratic discussions about funding levels for The Asia Foundation (TAF), with the only sensitive topic, to justify the "secret" stamp, being the reference to the U.S. government's intent to exploit TAF's programs for "political action" operations inside Asian countries.

Indeed, the opportunity for "political action" under TAF's cover appeared to be the reason why Reagan's budget cutters relented and agreed to restore funding to the foundation.

William Schneider Jr. of the Office of Management and Budget wrote in a Sept. 2, 1982 memo that the Budget Review Board (BRB) had axed TAF funding earlier in the

year.

“When the BRB last considered this issue on March 29, 1982, it decided not to include funding in the budget for a U.S. Government grant to TAF. The Board’s decision was based on the judgement that given the limited resources available for international affairs programs, funding for the Foundation could not be justified. During that March 29 meeting, the State Department was given the opportunity to fund TAF within its existing budget, but would not agree to do so.”

However, as Schneider noted in the memo to Deputy National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, “I now understand that a proposal to continue U.S. funding for the Asia Foundation is included in the ‘political action’ initiatives being developed by the State Department and several other agencies.

“We will, of course, work with you to reconsider the relative priority of support for the Foundation as part of these initiatives keeping in mind, however, the need for identifying budget offsets.”

A prime mover behind this change of heart appeared to be Walter Raymond, who surely knew TAF’s earlier status as a CIA “proprietary.” In 1966, Ramparts magazine exposed that relationship and led the Johnson administration to terminate the CIA’s money.

According to an April 12, 1967 memo from the State Department’s historical archives, CIA Director Richard Helms, responding to a White House recommendation, “ordered that covert funding of The Asia Foundation (TAF) shall be terminated at the earliest practicable opportunity.”

In coordination with the CIA’s “disassociation,” TAF’s board released what the memo described as “a carefully limited statement of admission of past CIA support. In so doing the Trustees sought to delimit the effects of an anticipated exposure of Agency support by the American press and, if their statement or some future expose does not seriously impair TAF’s acceptability in Asia, to continue operating in Asia with overt private and official support.”

The CIA memo envisioned future funding from “overt U.S. Government grants” and requested guidance from the White House’s covert action oversight panel, the 303 Committee, for designation of someone “to whom TAF management should look for future guidance and direction with respect to United States Government interests.”

In 1982, with TAF’s funding again in jeopardy, the CIA’s Walter Raymond rallied to its defense from his NSC post. In an undated memo to McFarlane, Raymond recalled that “the Department of State underscored that TAF had made significant

contributions to U.S. foreign policies through fostering democratic institutions and, as a private organization, had accomplished things which a government organization cannot do." [Emphasis in original]

Raymond's bureaucratic intervention worked. By late 1982, the Reagan administration had arranged for TAF's fiscal 1984 funding to go through the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) budget, which was being used to finance a range of President Reagan's "democracy initiatives." Raymond spelled out the arrangements in a Dec. 15, 1982 memo to National Security Advisor William Clark.

"The issue has been somewhat beclouded in the working levels at State since we have opted to fund all FY 84 democracy initiatives via the USIA budgetary submission," Raymond wrote. "At the same time, it is essential State maintain its operational and management role with TAF."

Over the ensuing three and half decades, TAF has continued to be subsidized by U.S. and allied governments. According to its annual report for the year ending Sept. 30, 2016, TAF said it "is funded by an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress, competitively bid awards from governmental and multilateral development agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, United Kingdom's Department for International Development and by private foundations and corporations," a sum totaling \$94.5 million.

TAF, which operates in 18 Asian countries, describes its purpose as "improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia." TAF's press office had no immediate comment regarding the newly released Reagan-era documents.

Far From Alone

But TAF was far from alone as a private organization that functioned with U.S. government money and collaborated with U.S. officials in achieving Washington's foreign policy goals.

For instance, other documents from the Reagan library revealed that Freedom House, a prominent human rights organization, sought advice and direction from Casey and Raymond while advertising the group's need for financial help.

In an Aug. 9, 1982 letter to Raymond, Freedom House executive director Leonard R. Sussman wrote that "Leo Cherne [another senior Freedom House official] has asked me to send these copies of Freedom Appeals. He has probably told you we have had to cut back this project to meet financial realities. We would, of course, want to expand the project once again when, as and if the funds become available."

According to the documents, Freedom House remained near the top of Casey's and Raymond's thinking when it came to the most effective ways to deliver the CIA's hardline foreign policy message to the American people and to the international community.

On Nov. 4, 1982, Raymond wrote to NSC Advisor Clark about the "Democracy Initiative and Information Programs," stating that "Bill Casey asked me to pass on the following thought concerning your meeting with [right-wing billionaire] Dick Scaife, Dave Abshire [then a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board], and Co.

"Casey had lunch with them today and discussed the need to get moving in the general area of supporting our friends around the world. By this definition he is including both 'building democracy' and helping invigorate international media programs. The DCI [Casey] is also concerned about strengthening public information organizations in the United States such as Freedom House.

"A critical piece of the puzzle is a serious effort to raise private funds to generate momentum. Casey's talk with Scaife and Co. suggests they would be very willing to cooperate. Suggest that you note White House interest in private support for the Democracy initiative."

In a Jan. 25, 1983 memo, Raymond wrote, "We will move out immediately in our parallel effort to generate private support" for "public diplomacy" operations. Then, on May 20, 1983, Raymond recounted in another memo that \$400,000 had been raised from private donors brought to the White House Situation Room by USIA Director Charles Wick. According to that memo, the money was divided among several organizations, including Freedom House and Accuracy in Media, a right-wing media attack group.

In an Aug. 9, 1983 memo, Raymond outlined plans to arrange private backing for that effort. He said USIA Director Wick "via [Australian publishing magnate Rupert] Murdock [sic], may be able to draw down added funds" to support pro-Reagan initiatives. Raymond recommended "funding via Freedom House or some other structure that has credibility in the political center."

[For more on the Murdoch connection, see Consortiumnews.com's "Rupert Murdoch: Propaganda Recruit."]

Questions of Legality

Raymond remained a CIA officer until April 1983 when he resigned so in his words "there would be no question whatsoever of any contamination of this" propaganda operation to woo the American people into supporting Reagan's policies.

Raymond fretted, too, about the legality of Casey's role in the effort to influence U.S. public opinion because of the legal prohibition against the CIA influencing U.S. policies and politics. Raymond confided in one memo that it was important "to get [Casey] out of the loop," but Casey never backed off and Raymond continued to send progress reports to his old boss well into 1986.

It was "the kind of thing which [Casey] had a broad catholic interest in," Raymond said during his Iran-Contra deposition in 1987. He then offered the excuse that Casey undertook this apparently illegal interference in domestic affairs "not so much in his CIA hat, but in his adviser to the president hat."

In 1983, Casey and Raymond focused on creating a permanent funding mechanism to support private organizations that would engage in propaganda and political action that the CIA had historically organized and paid for covertly. The idea emerged for a congressionally funded entity that would be a conduit for this money.

But Casey recognized the need to hide the strings being pulled by the CIA. In one undated letter to then-White House counselor Edwin Meese III, Casey urged creation of a "National Endowment," but added: "Obviously we here [at CIA] should not get out front in the development of such an organization, nor should we appear to be a sponsor or advocate."

A document in Raymond's files offered examples of what would be funded, including "Grenada – 50 K – To the only organized opposition to the Marxist government of Maurice Bishop (The Seaman and Waterfront Workers Union). A supplemental 50 K to support free TV activity outside Grenada" and "Nicaragua – \$750 K to support an array of independent trade union activity, agricultural cooperatives."

The National Endowment for Democracy took shape in late 1983 as Congress decided to also set aside pots of money – within NED – for the Republican and Democratic parties and for organized labor, creating enough bipartisan largesse that passage was assured.

But some in Congress thought it was important to wall the NED off from any association with the CIA, so a provision was included to bar the participation of any current or former CIA official, according to one congressional aide who helped write the legislation.

This aide told me that one night late in the 1983 session, as the bill was about to go to the House floor, the CIA's congressional liaison came pounding at the door to the office of Rep. Dante Fascell, a senior Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and a chief sponsor of the bill.

The frantic CIA official conveyed a single message from CIA Director Casey: the language barring the participation of CIA personnel must be struck from the bill, the aide recalled, noting that Fascell consented to the demand, not fully recognizing its significance.

The aide said Fascell also consented to the Reagan administration's choice of Carl Gershman to head the National Endowment for Democracy, again not recognizing how this decision would affect the future of the new entity and American foreign policy.

Gershman, who had followed the classic neoconservative path from youthful socialism to fierce anticommunism, became NED's first (and, to this day, only) president. Though NED is technically independent of U.S. foreign policy, Gershman in the early years coordinated decisions on grants with Raymond at the NSC.

For instance, on Jan. 2, 1985, Raymond wrote to two NSC Asian experts that "Carl Gershman has called concerning a possible grant to the Chinese Alliance for Democracy (CAD). I am concerned about the political dimension to this request. We should not find ourselves in a position where we have to respond to pressure, but this request poses a real problem to Carl."

Besides clearing aside political obstacles for Gershman, Raymond also urged NED to give money to Freedom House in a June 21, 1985 letter obtained by Professor John Nichols of Pennsylvania State University.

What the documents at the Reagan library make clear is that Raymond and Casey stayed active shaping the decisions of the new funding mechanism throughout its early years. (Casey died in 1987; Raymond died in 2003.)

Lots of Money

Since its founding, NED has ladled out hundreds of millions of dollars to NGOs all over the world, focusing on training activists, building media outlets, and supporting civic organizations. In some geopolitical hotspots, NED may have scores of projects running at once, such as in Ukraine before the 2014 coup that overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich and touched off the New Cold War with Russia. Via such methods, NED helped achieve the "political action" envisioned by Casey and Raymond.

From the start, NED also became a major benefactor for Freedom House, beginning with a \$200,000 grant in 1984 to build "a network of democratic opinion-makers." In NED's first four years, from 1984 and 1988, it lavished \$2.6 million on Freedom House, accounting for more than one-third of its total income, according to a study by the liberal Council on Hemispheric Affairs, which was entitled

“Freedom House: Portrait of a Pass-Through.”

Over the ensuing decades, Freedom House has become almost an NED subsidiary, often joining NED in holding policy conferences and issuing position papers, both organizations pushing primarily a neoconservative agenda, challenging countries deemed insufficiently “free,” including Syria, Ukraine (before the 2014 coup) and Russia.

NED and Freedom House often work as a kind of tag-team with NED financing NGOs inside targeted countries and Freedom House berating those governments if they try to crack down on U.S.-funded NGOs.

For instance, on Nov. 16, 2012, NED and Freedom House joined together to denounce a law passed by the Russian parliament requiring Russian recipients of foreign political money to register with the government. Or, as NED and Freedom House framed the issue: the Russian Duma sought to “restrict human rights and the activities of civil society organizations and their ability to receive support from abroad. Changes to Russia’s NGO legislation will soon require civil society organizations receiving foreign funds to choose between registering as ‘foreign agents’ or facing significant financial penalties and potential criminal charges.”

Of course, the United States has a nearly identical Foreign Agent Registration Act that likewise requires entities that receive foreign funding and seek to influence U.S. government policy to register with the Justice Department or face possible fines or imprisonment.

But the Russian law would impede NED’s efforts to destabilize the Russian government through funding of political activists, journalists and civic organizations, so it was denounced as an infringement of human rights and helped justify Freedom House’s rating of Russia as “not free.”

The Russian government’s concerns were not entirely paranoid. On Sept. 26, 2013, Gershman, in effect, charted the course for the crisis in Ukraine and the greater neocon goal of regime change in Russia. In a Washington Post op-ed, Gershman called Ukraine “the biggest prize” and explained how pulling it into the Western camp could contribute to the ultimate defeat of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents,” Gershman wrote. “Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

The long history of the U.S. government interfering covertly or semi-covertly in

the politics of countries all over the world is the ironic backdrop to the current frenzy over Russia-gate and Russia's alleged dissemination of emails that undermined Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton's campaign.

The allegations are denied by both Putin and WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange who published the Democratic emails – and the U.S. government has presented no solid evidence to support the accusations of “Russian meddling” – but if the charges are true, they could be seen as a case of turnabout as fair play.

Except in this case, U.S. officials, who have meddled ceaselessly with their “political action” operations in countries all over the world, don't like even the chance that they could get a taste of their own medicine.

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 Neglected Legend of Dolores Huerta

Dolores Huerta, a largely unsung hero in the fight for farmworkers' rights, is the subject of the new movie, *Dolores*, that recounts her life as a feminist and union organizer, reports Dennis J Bernstein and Miguel Gavilan Molina.

By Dennis J Bernstein and Miguel Gavilan Molina

Peter Bratt's new film *Dolores*, about the life and times of United Farm Workers Co-Founder Dolores Huerta, shows the work of a woman who was way ahead of her time and whose work is right on time for the struggles that working people and all common folks are facing in the age of Donald Trump.

The filmmaker reminds us in a synopsis of the film, “Dolores Huerta is among the most important, yet least known, activists in American history. An equal partner in co-founding the first farm workers unions with Cesar Chavez. ...

“Dolores tirelessly led the fight for racial and labor justice alongside Chavez, becoming one of the most defiant feminists of the twentieth century – and she continues the fight to this day, at 87.”

I interviewed Dolores Huerta and filmmaker-director Peter Bratt on September 5. Joining me for the Flashpoints Radio interview was the show's Senior Producer, Miguel Gavilan Molina, an old friend of Huerta, who learned about the United

Farm Workers as a child farm worker in “the fields of toil.” The film is currently showing in selected theaters across the country.

Dennis Bernstein: Dolores Huerta, [...] I know you want to be out at that rally today [Sept. 5] protesting. We have just seen that President Trump has rescinded DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals], a terrible decision that hurts these kids and their families in so many different ways.

On the same day we hear that some Dreamers were actually killed trying to save people in Houston, a city with roughly 600,000 undocumented people who don't know whether to seek shelter or hide from the people who are supposed to provide that shelter.

DH: What they are saying is that they are going to shoot it over to Congress, in an interesting ploy. Jeff Sessions said that Obama had overextended his authority and had not gone to Congress to get the necessary authority. But actually, throughout history, presidents have made decisions about immigration without going to Congress.

In the next election, every single Congressperson in the House of Representatives has to run for office and because of actions like the recent pardoning of Arpaio, many Latinos are going to be organizing to take out Republicans. So maybe they are going to try to buy favors with the Dreamers.

DB: Sessions talks about the rule of law but here is a man who has literally made a career of trying to prevent people from voting.

DH: Well, if we all get involved we can take a lot of these Republicans out. We have to build our own wall, a wall of resistance. We have to get justice not only for the Dreamers but for the entire undocumented community.

DB: Amidst all of this, there was a victory in Arizona when a federal judge decided that the ethnic studies program there was a successful, important program that the kids in Tucson deserved to have. The racists there used you as an excuse for cancelling the program.

DH: I think we have to introduce ethnic studies programs into our kindergartens. People are not aware of the contributions to this country made by people of color. Unless we erase the ignorance and the bigotry and the misogyny and the homophobia, we are going to continue to be a country in distress. Children of color are made to feel like second-class citizens while white children feel this sense of entitlement because they have been taught that their ancestors did it all.

DB: They accuse you of hating white people.

DH: We don't hate anybody. We are a movement of love and justice and we are trying to reach those with hatred in their hearts so that they can join us in making a better world.

DB: Miguel, how did you first meet Dolores?

Miguel Gavilan Molina: Marching. When I was twelve years old, my *tio* and a couple of his *compadres* drove down in 1966 to Delano. I didn't know what was going on but I saw that red flag and I saw hundreds of brown Mexicans and no one was looking at the ground! Nobody was beat down from the weight of being poor, of being out there in the fields of misery.

I learned that, first of all, we were human beings, not just farm animals with no rights. I remember working in the fields and running, whenever airplanes flew over. But after that day, we didn't do that anymore. And then every time I heard that Dolores was going to be in the area, I brought our car club to the marches—to Sacramento, to San Francisco, to San Jose.

Dolores was the grandmother of the Chicano movement, she empowered all of us. She gave a voice to Chicanismo and also empowered *la mujer*. My mother was empowered by seeing, for the first time, a brown woman, a Mexicana, speaking for all of us.

DB: Did you think of yourself as a woman out there fighting? Was it daunting? Did people try to stop you?

DH: Fred Ross, Sr., who organized Cesar [Chavez] and myself, taught us that if you can talk to a few people at a time, you are reminding them that they have power to change things in their lives. When you bring them together at house meetings, they look at each other and say, "hey, we do have that power."

DB: In the movie, Cesar Chavez was asked why he chose you to work with him and his answer was "faith, drive, skills, knowledge and willingness to sacrifice." What was it that drove you?

DH: When people understand that this political world is their world also, they realize that they can participate in that world, can make changes that affect them and their family.

DB: How could you be a mother, an organizer, an activist, a writer of legislation, all at the same time?

DH: You find out what kind of help you need. Like Fred Ross would tell us all the time, you don't have to have all of the answers because along the journey the answers will come to you.

MGM: Going back to the battle for ethnic studies in Arizona, you made a statement that brought the situation to a national level. You said, "Our existence is our resistance."

DH: I was lucky to be born in the state of New Mexico. My grandfather would tell me the stories about how they took that land from Mexico and how they were treated because they were Hispanics. People want to build a wall? Let's use the 1848 map.

MGM: One of the things covered in the film, which really put the Chicano movement on a national scale, was the grape boycott. It brought awareness to Mexican-Americans as the cultivators and harvesters of the food that feeds the nation, but it also revealed corporate conspiracy with military forces to use violence against a peaceful, nonviolent movement.

We know that there were legendary arguments between you and Cesar Chavez, particularly when the union began complaining that they were breaking the strike by using workers brought directly from Mexico. On the one hand, Cesar didn't want Mexican workers...

DH: Actually, that is not true. From day one, the United Farm Workers has always been the largest organization of undocumented workers. In 1963, when the Bracero Program ended, they legalized tens of thousands of the Mexican braceros—without the help of Congress, by the way. Cesar and I set to work legalizing as many of these workers as we could, going with our typewriters out in the fields.

When we passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, we made sure that undocumented workers were covered by the law and all union benefits were made available to the undocumented. Then we passed the Amnesty Bill, which gave two million farm workers their residency.

MGM: Out in the fields you witnessed police violence. You yourself were the victim of police violence during an action in San Francisco in 1988. Would you say that today brown lives matter?

DH: Of course they do. In Bakersfield, California, where we are organizing at the moment, they have the highest rate of police killings in the country. We're fighting the school district in Kern County and the school-to-prison pipeline. We just reached a settlement with the Kern County school district which forces them to change their policies and procedures. The way we work is we organize the parents, we organize the people, so that they can do it for themselves.

DB: I think one of the untold stories of the United Farm Workers is that you were on the cutting edge of the environmental movement, highlighting how chemistry was hurting both the farm workers and the consumers of food. But that

battle continues. We are still doing stories about spraying [pesticides] near schools where the kids of farm workers are trying to learn.

Peter Bratt: And it is not just the farmworkers. There is Flint, Michigan, where a mostly African-American population was being poisoned by the water. There is Standing Rock, where oil is being piped through a poor and indigenous community.

DH: We have to put all the issues of environmental poisoning under the Department of Health and Human Services. Take it out of the EPA, take it out of Agriculture. In Bakersfield recently the farmers were being poisoned by a chemical that Trump just took off the restricted list.

DB: Peter Bratt, why did you decide to make this film? You have been working on it for five years.

PB: I wish I could take the credit for making this film, but it was really my brother Carlos Santana. He had the foresight and the wisdom to see the necessity of Dolores' story. There is an urgency today and a lot we can take from her work over the last seven decades.

As we were crisscrossing the country, digging through archives, the Black Lives Matter struggle had already started. I was looking at footage and thinking, my God, this was Black Lives Matter thirty years ago!

DB: What were some of the epiphanies you had making the film?

PB: Just the fact that Dolores lived at the intersection of racial justice, feminism, and environmental justice. Today we talk of intersectionality, of bringing movements together. But people like Cesar and Dolores, Angela Davis and Martin Luther King, they lived it, it grew out of necessity.

DB: Dolores, I want to talk to you about Robert Kennedy. He makes two significant appearances in the film. One was when he appeared at the hunger strike and the second when he was assassinated in Los Angeles. Can you talk about Kennedy's contribution to the work you were doing at that time?

DH: Over the years he was a great supporter. He helped us raise money for our clinics in Delano. We were working on his campaign and we had a lot of hope that we were going to have someone out there fighting for us. The last thing he said before he was killed was that we have a responsibility to our fellow citizens. June of next year will be fifty years since he was assassinated. We have no choice but to go forward. We don't have the luxury of cynicism or disengagement. There are too many people out there depending on us.

DB: You founded the Dolores Huerta Foundation in part to further the ability of

women to be a part of the struggle.

DH: Right now we are active in nine different communities, in seven different school districts, trying to make sure that state funds are spent the way they were supposed to be spent, for low-income people, for second-language people. Many of the people we have organized are now sitting on school boards, water boards, city councils.

MGM: Peter, the film that first brought you national acclaim was *Follow Me Home*, which was about the story of Native Americans. You followed this up with a movie that focused on Chicanismo, *La Mission*. And now you've made *Dolores*. I know, Peter, how difficult it is for a Latin American film director to get any kind of support from the industry. What was the biggest obstacle you came up against?

PB: Films like this are not financed in Hollywood. With *La Mission*, it took us four years just to raise the money. With *Follow Me Home*, we actually had to do self-distribution, we hand-carried that film across the country. It is tough as an independent filmmaker but if you also choose as your subject matter Latinos or Chicanos, it is even tougher. You have to love your subject, it has to have deep meaning for you, because it consumes your life and the lives of those around you.

MGM: I'd like to ask you, Dolores, how has the border affected you and your personal life?

DH: We know that hundreds of people have died because of the wall. After all, crossing a border is not a crime. You are not hurting anybody when you cross a border without documents. They have turned it into a crime by deporting people. It is just part of the whole incarceration movement.

These people contribute so much to our society, why do we make them into criminals? It is political. Tom DeLay once said that the reason they don't want to legalize these people is because they vote for the Democrats.

DB: Today [Sept. 5] it was announced that the DACA program has been rescinded. We are already seeing protests across the country.

MGM: As Carlos Santana said a few years ago, concerning this issue of immigration, we are all Mexicans. Here in California, everybody is coming together, they are saying, "We are all DACA students." It is making clear that this movement is not just a Mexican thing, it is a human rights issue. It is a question of racial justice.

DH: We have to remind people about SB-54 [the California Values Act], to send an email to the governor's office asking him to sign this into law. Sheriffs are

putting a lot of pressure on Governor [Jerry] Brown to water down the bill.

MGM: Well, there is a problem with that, Dolores, and that is that one of the strongest unions here in California, the Correctional Officers and Police Union, has been putting a lot of pressure on Brown. I am not very comfortable with Jerry. It took a lot of pressure last year to get him to sign some of those bills.

DB: Let's talk about the Foundation and your mission to inspire young women to get engaged. Talk about some of the women you have already worked with and how you plan to make sure that the work continues.

DH: Basically, we create leadership in the communities and the majority of them turn out to be women who are actually doing the work out there. It is a no-fail way to create leadership that Fred Ross, Sr. taught us.

The only problem is that people don't quite understand that this takes time. It takes time for the leaders to emerge. We go into communities and give them the tools to form organizations.

One woman with very limited English, together with her husband, got a bond issue passed to build a new gymnasium at their middle school. Then she got elected to the school board and got the principal fired for wanting to end the breakfast program. Later she found out that the person they had hired to manage the water district was guilty of embezzlement so she got rid of him. These people are hotel workers, construction workers, farm workers, but they get elected to these boards and start doing the work of governing for the people.

In addition, we support voting efforts and civic engagement. We have an LGBT project because we know that there is a lot of discrimination, especially against transgender youth and adults. We also have a health program, to get people to exercise and eat more nutritious foods. The reason we can take on so many projects is that we build a base of a hundred or so people and then they all form different committees and take on the issues.

DB: It is incredibly frustrating if you are a woman and you have worked so hard on a project and just when it is about to see the light of day some man walks in and takes the credit.

DH: As Coretta Scott King said, we will never have peace in the world until women take power. If you see a board and there are no women on that board, they are going to make poor decisions. We saw that with these senators who were trying to repeal the healthcare bill. There were two Republican women who said there was no way they could vote for that. And who did the media give credit to? John McCain.

DB: It takes courage to get up and speak in front of people.

DH: One of the things we tell all our people is that they are going to have to speak in front of school boards, city councils. We have them practice and write down notes about what they are going to say, and that is how they eventually overcome their fears.

DB: A poetry teacher of mine once wrote, “What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.” Indeed, that is the case with our guest today, Dolores Huerta.

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

Has the NYT Gone Collectively Mad?

Special Report: Crossing a line from recklessness into madness, The New York Times published a front-page opus suggesting that Russia was behind social media criticism of Hillary Clinton, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

For those of us who have taught journalism or worked as editors, a sign that an article is the product of sloppy or dishonest journalism is that a key point will be declared as flat fact when it is unproven or a point in serious dispute – and it then becomes the foundation for other claims, building a story like a high-rise constructed on sand.

This use of speculation as fact is something to guard against particularly in the work of inexperienced or opinionated reporters. But what happens when this sort of unprofessional work tops page one of The New York Times one day as a major “investigative” article and reemerges the next day in even more strident form as a major Times editorial? Are we dealing then with an inept journalist who got carried away with his thesis or are we facing institutional corruption or even a collective madness driven by ideological fervor?

What is stunning about the lede story in last Friday’s print edition of The New York Times is that it offers no real evidence to support its provocative claim that – as the headline states – “To Sway Vote, Russia Used Army of Fake Americans” or its subhead: “Flooding Twitter and Facebook, Impostors Helped Fuel

Anger in Polarized U.S.”

In the old days, this wildly speculative article, which spills over three pages, would have earned an F in a J-school class or gotten a rookie reporter a stern rebuke from a senior editor. But now such unprofessionalism is highlighted by The New York Times, which boasts that it is the standard-setter of American journalism, the nation’s “newspaper of record.”

In this case, it allows reporter Scott Shane to introduce his thesis by citing some Internet accounts that apparently used fake identities, but he ties none of them to the Russian government. Acting like he has minimal familiarity with the Internet – yes, a lot of people do use fake identities – Shane builds his case on the assumption that accounts that cited references to purloined Democratic emails must be somehow from an agent or a bot connected to the Kremlin.

For instance, Shane cites the fake identity of “Melvin Redick,” who suggested on June 8, 2016, that people visit DCLeaks which, a few days earlier, had posted some emails from prominent Americans, which Shane states as fact – not allegation – were “stolen ... by Russian hackers.”

Shane then adds, also as flat fact, that “The site’s phony promoters were in the vanguard of a cyberarmy of counterfeit Facebook and Twitter accounts, a legion of Russian-controlled impostors whose operations are still being unraveled.”

The Times’ Version

In other words, Shane tells us, “The Russian information attack on the election did not stop with the hacking and leaking of Democratic emails or the fire hose of stories, true, false and in between, that battered Mrs. Clinton on Russian outlets like RT and Sputnik. Far less splashy, and far more difficult to trace, was Russia’s experimentation on Facebook and Twitter, the American companies that essentially invented the tools of social media and, in this case, did not stop them from being turned into engines of deception and propaganda.”

Besides the obvious point that very few Americans watch RT and/or Sputnik and that Shane offers no details about the alleged falsity of those “fire hose of stories,” let’s examine how his accusations are backed up:

“An investigation by The New York Times, and new research from the cybersecurity firm FireEye, reveals some of the mechanisms by which suspected Russian operators used Twitter and Facebook to spread anti-Clinton messages and promote the hacked material they had leaked. On Wednesday, Facebook officials disclosed that they had shut down several hundred accounts that they believe were created by a Russian company linked to the Kremlin and used to buy \$100,000 in ads pushing divisive issues during and after the American election campaign. On

Twitter, as on Facebook, Russian fingerprints are on hundreds or thousands of fake accounts that regularly posted anti-Clinton messages.”

Note the weasel words: “suspected”; “believe”; “linked”; “fingerprints.” When you see such equivocation, it means that these folks – both the Times and FireEye – don’t have hard evidence; they are speculating.

And it’s worth noting that the supposed “army of fake Americans” may amount to hundreds out of Facebook’s two billion or so monthly users and the \$100,000 in ads compare to the company’s annual ad revenue of around \$27 billion. (I’d do the math but my calculator doesn’t compute such tiny percentages.)

So, this “army” is really not an “army” and we don’t even know that it is “Russian.” But some readers might say that surely we know that the Kremlin did mastermind the hacking of Democratic emails!

That claim is supported by the Jan. 6 “intelligence community assessment” that was the work of what President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies – the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation. But, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you hand-pick the analysts, you are hand-picking the conclusions.

Agreeing with Putin

But some still might protest that the Jan. 6 report surely presented convincing evidence of this serious charge about Russian President Vladimir Putin personally intervening in the U.S. election to help put Donald Trump in the White House. Well, as it turns out, not so much, and if you don’t believe me, we can call to the witness stand none other than New York Times reporter Scott Shane.

Shane wrote at the time: “What is missing from the [the Jan. 6] public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

So, even Scott Shane, the author of last Friday’s opus, recognized the lack of “hard evidence” to prove that the Russian government was behind the release of the Democratic emails, a claim that both Putin and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who published a trove of the emails, have denied. While it is surely possible that Putin and Assange are lying or don’t know the facts, you might think that their denials would be relevant to this lengthy investigative article, which also could have benefited from some mention of Shane’s own skepticism of last January, but, hey, you don’t want inconvenient details to

mess up a cool narrative.

Yet, if you struggle all the way to the end of last Friday's article, you do find out how flimsy the Times' case actually is. How, for instance, do we know that "Melvin Redick" is a Russian impostor posing as an American? The proof, according to Shane, is that "His posts were never personal, just news articles reflecting a pro-Russian worldview."

As it turns out, the Times now operates with what must be called a neo-McCarthyistic approach for identifying people as Kremlin stooges, i.e., anyone who doubts the truthfulness of the State Department's narratives on Syria, Ukraine and other international topics.

Unreliable Source

In the article's last section, Shane acknowledges as much in citing one of his experts, "Andrew Weisburd, an Illinois online researcher who has written frequently about Russian influence on social media." Shane quotes Weisburd as admitting how hard it is to differentiate Americans who just might oppose Hillary Clinton because they didn't think she'd make a good president from supposed Russian operatives: "Trying to disaggregate the two was difficult, to put it mildly."

According to Shane, "Mr. Weisburd said he had labeled some Twitter accounts 'Kremlin trolls' based simply on their pro-Russia tweets and with no proof of Russian government ties. The Times contacted several such users, who insisted that they had come by their anti-American, pro-Russian views honestly, without payment or instructions from Moscow."

One of Weisburd's "Kremlin trolls" turned out to be 66-year-old Marilyn Justice who lives in Nova Scotia and who somehow reached the conclusion that "Hillary's a warmonger." During the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, she reached another conclusion: that U.S. commentators were exhibiting a snide anti-Russia bias perhaps because they indeed were exhibiting a snide anti-Russia bias.

Shane tracked down another "Kremlin troll," 48-year-old Marcel Sardo, a web producer in Zurich, Switzerland, who dares to dispute the West's groupthink that Russia was responsible for shooting down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine on July 17, 2014, and the State Department's claims that the Syrian government used sarin gas in a Damascus suburb on Aug. 21, 2013.

Presumably, if you don't toe the line on those dubious U.S. government narratives, you are part of the Kremlin's propaganda machine. (In both cases, there actually are serious reasons to doubt the Western groupthinks which again lack real evidence.)

But Shane accuses Sardo and his fellow-travelers of spreading “what American officials consider to be Russian disinformation on election hacking, Syria, Ukraine and more.” In other words, if you examine the evidence on MH-17 or the Syrian sarin case and conclude that the U.S. government’s claims are dubious if not downright false, you are somehow disloyal and making Russian officials “gleeful at their success,” as Shane puts it.

But what kind of a traitor are you if you quote Shane’s initial judgment after reading the Jan. 6 report on alleged Russian election meddling? What are you if you agree with his factual observation that the report lacked anything approaching “hard evidence”? That’s a point that also dovetails with what Vladimir Putin has been saying – that “IP addresses can be simply made up. ... This is no proof”?

So is Scott Shane a “Kremlin troll,” too? Should the Times immediately fire him as a disloyal foreign agent? What if Putin says that 2 plus 2 equals 4 and your child is taught the same thing in elementary school, what does that say about public school teachers?

Out of such gibberish come the evils of McCarthyism and the death of the Enlightenment. Instead of encouraging a questioning citizenry, the new American paradigm is to silence debate and ridicule anyone who steps out of line.

You might have thought people would have learned something from the disastrous groupthink about Iraqi WMD, a canard that the Times and most of the U.S. mainstream media eagerly promoted.

But if you’re feeling generous and thinking that the Times’ editors must have been chastened by their Iraq-WMD fiasco but perhaps had a bad day last week and somehow allowed an egregious piece of journalism to lead their front page, your kind-heartedness would be shattered on Saturday when the Times’ editorial board penned a laudatory reprise of Scott Shane’s big scoop.

Stripping away even the few caveats that the article had included, the Times’ editors informed us that “a startling investigation by Scott Shane of The New York Times, and new research by the cybersecurity firm FireEye, now reveal, the Kremlin’s stealth intrusion into the election was far broader and more complex, involving a cyberarmy of bloggers posing as Americans and spreading propaganda and disinformation to an American electorate on Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. ...

“Now that the scheming is clear, Facebook and Twitter say they are reviewing the 2016 race and studying how to defend against such meddling in the future. ... Facing the Russian challenge will involve complicated issues dealing with secret

foreign efforts to undermine American free speech.”

But what is the real threat to “American free speech”? Is it the possibility that Russia – in a very mild imitation of what the U.S. government does all over the world – used some Web sites clandestinely to get out its side of various stories, an accusation against Russia that still lacks any real evidence?

Or is the bigger threat that the nearly year-long Russia-gate hysteria will be used to clamp down on Americans who dare question fact-lite or fact-free Official Narratives handed down by the State Department and The New York Times?

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](#)).
