

Protecting the Shaky Russia-gate Narrative

Exclusive: The New York Times continues its sorry pattern of falsifying the record on Russia-gate, giving its readers information that the newspaper knows not to be true, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If Russia-gate is the massive scandal that we are told it is by so many Important People – across the U.S. mainstream media and the political world – why do its proponents have to resort to lies and exaggerations to maintain the pillars supporting the narrative?

A new example on Thursday was The New York Times' statement that a Russian agency “spent \$100,000 on [Facebook’s] platform to influence the United States presidential election last year” – when the Times knows that statement is not true.

According to Facebook, only 44 percent of that amount appeared *before* the U.S. presidential election in 2016 (i.e., \$44,000) and few of those ads addressed the actual election. And, we know that the Times is aware of the truth because it was acknowledged in a Times article in early October.

As part of that article, Times correspondents Mike Isaac and Scott Shane reported that the ads also covered a wide range of other topics: “There was even a Facebook group for animal lovers with memes of adorable puppies that spread across the site with the help of paid ads.”

As nefarious as the Times may think it is for Russians to promote a Facebook page about “adorable puppies,” the absurdity of that concern – and the dishonesty of the Times then “forgetting” what it itself reported just two months ago about the timing and contents of these “Russian-linked ads” – tells you a great deal about Russia-gate.

On Thursday, the Times chose to distort what it already knew to be true presumably because it didn’t want to make the \$100,000 ad buy (which is not a particularly large sum) look even smaller and less significant by acknowledging the pre-election total was less than half that modest amount – and even that total had little to do with the election.

Why would the Times lie? Because to tell the truth would undercut the narrative of evil Russians defeating Hillary Clinton and putting Donald Trump in the White

House – the core narrative of Russia-gate.

Another relevant fact is that Facebook failed to find any “Russian-linked” ads during its first two searches and only detected the \$100,000 after a personal visit from Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia, the vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a leading legislator on Internet regulation.

In other words, Facebook’s corporate executives dredged up something to appease Warner. That way, Warner and the Democrats could blame Russia for the Trump presidency, sparing further criticism of Clinton’s dreadful campaign (in which she labeled half of Trump’s voters “deplorables”) and her neo-liberal economic policies (and neo-conservative foreign policies) that have alienated much of America’s working class as well as many progressives.

Leaving Out Context

The Times also might have put the \$100,000 in “Russian-linked” ads over a two-year period in the context of Facebook’s \$27 billion in annual revenue, but the Times didn’t do that – apparently because it would make even the full \$100,000 look like a pittance.

Trimming the total down to \$44,000 and admitting that only a few of those ads actually dealt with Clinton and Trump would be even worse for the Russia-gate narrative.

Ironically, the Times’ latest false depiction of the \$100,000 in ads as designed “to influence” the 2016 election appeared in an article about Facebook determining that other Russian-linked ads, which supposedly had a powerful effect on Great Britain’s Brexit vote, totaled just three ads at the cost of 97 cents. (That is not a misprint.)

According to Facebook, the three ads, which focused on immigration, were viewed some 200 times by Britons over four days in May 2016. Of course, the response from British parliamentarians who wanted to blame the Brexit vote on Moscow was to assert that Facebook must have missed something. It couldn’t be that many Britons had lost faith in the promise of the European Union for their own reasons.

We have seen a similar pattern with allegations about Russian interference in German and French elections, with the initial accusations being widely touted but not so much the later conclusions by serious investigations knocking down the claims. [See, for instance, Consortiumnews.com’s “German Intel Clears Russia on Interference.”]

The only acceptable conclusion, it seems, is “Russia Guilty!”

These days in Official Washington, it has become almost forbidden to ask for actual evidence that would prove the original claim that Russia “hacked” Democratic emails, even though the accusation came from what President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper acknowledged were “hand-picked” analysts from the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

These “hand-picked” analysts produced the evidence-lite Jan. 6 “assessment” about Russia “hacking” the emails and slipping them to WikiLeaks – a scenario denied by both WikiLeaks and Russia.

When that “assessment” was released almost a year ago, even the Times’ Scott Shane noticed the lack of proof, writing: “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.’”

But the Times soon “forgot” what Shane had inconveniently noted and began reporting the Russian “hacking” as accepted wisdom.

The 17-Agencies Canard

Whenever scattered expressions of skepticism arose from a few analysts or non-mainstream media, the doubts were beaten back by the claim that “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” concurred in the conclusion that Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered the hacking to hurt Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump. And what kind of nut would doubt the collective judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies!

Though the 17-agency canard was never true, it served an important purpose in establishing the Russia-gate groupthink. Wielding the “all 17 intelligence agencies” club, the U.S. mainstream media pounded politicians and policymakers into line, making any remaining skeptics seem more out of step and crazy.

So, in May 2017, when Clapper (along with former CIA Director John Brennan) admitted in congressional testimony that it wasn’t true that all 17 agencies concurred in the Russian hacking conclusion, those statements received very little attention in the mainstream media.

The New York Times among other major news outlets just continued asserting the 17-agency falsehood until the Times was finally pressured to correct its lie in late June, but that only led to the Times shifting to slightly different but still misleading wording, citing a “consensus” among the intelligence agencies without mentioning a number or by simply stating the unproven hacking claim as flat fact.

Even efforts to test the Russian-hack claims through science were ignored or ridiculed. When former NSA technical director William Binney conducted experiments that showed that the known download speed of one batch of DNC emails could not have occurred over the Internet but matched what was possible for a USB-connected thumb drive – an indication that a Democratic insider likely downloaded the emails and thus that there was no “hack” – Binney was mocked as a “conspiracy theorist.”

Even with the new disclosures about deep-seated anti-Trump bias in text messages exchanged between two senior FBI officials who played important early roles in the Russia-gate investigation, there is no indication that Official Washington is willing to go back to the beginning and see how the Russia-gate story might have been deceptively spun.

In a recently released Aug. 15, 2016 text message from Peter Strzok, a senior FBI counterintelligence official, to his reputed lover, senior FBI lawyer Lisa Page, Strzok referenced an apparent plan to keep Trump from getting elected before suggesting the need for “an insurance policy” just in case he did. A serious investigation into Russia-gate might want to know what these senior FBI officials had in mind.

But the Times and other big promoters of Russia-gate continue to dismiss doubters as delusional or as covering up for Russia and/or Trump. By this point – more than a year into this investigation – too many Important People have bought into the Russia-gate narrative to consider the possibility that there may be little or nothing there, or even worse, that it is the “insurance policy” that Strzok envisioned.

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).

What’s at Stake in Honduran Election

Protests continue over the disputed Honduran presidential election after a solid lead by a progressive was wiped out amid gross irregularities and the right-wing incumbent was declared the winner, reports Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

For seven months in 1969, I hitch-hiked around the U.S., Mexico and Central America with my best friend from high school. Some class-mates from our school in Vancouver Canada saved their money then travelled to Europe or Australia but Ollie and I headed south. It was an eye-opening experience for two middle-class Canadians.

We had a lot of learning experiences in the U.S., but today I want to talk about Honduras because it is in crisis as I write this: the Honduran election took place on Nov. 26 yet the results are still in contention. Will the current right-wing government manage to retain power?

When we visited the capital Tegucigalpa in 1969 we went to the university campus to meet and hang out with young Hondurans. They told us about the recent visit of President Richard Nixon who had taken office a few months before and then travelled to Latin America. The Vietnam War was still raging in 1969 and people protested against the war and Nixon wherever he went.

The young Hondurans told us that when Nixon visited Tegucigalpa there had been a big protest. Several students who had been protesting from the top of a university building had been shot dead. It made an impression as did the warm and friendly people we met, some living in shacks along the banks of the Choluteca River running through the capital.

In Nicaragua, we heard more eye-opening stories from the youth there. They told us about the Somoza family dictatorship, how corrupt it was, and how they came to power through U.S. Marines. They also told us about the death of Cesar Sandino who fought for Nicaraguan independence but was killed by Somoza's National Guard in 1934. The Nicaraguan youth told us that when the U.S. asked for proof of Sandino's death, Somoza shipped Sandino's head in a box to Washington.

Those and many other experiences changed my life. Over the coming decades I kept an interest in Central America.

In 1979, when Nicaraguans overthrew the Somoza dictatorship, it seemed like a good thing. But President Ronald Reagan did not like an independent Nicaragua. Violating international law, the U.S. organized a mercenary army called the "Contras" to destabilize and upend the Sandinista government. The mercenaries were trained in Honduras with U.S. funding, supplies and weapons.

The U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, John Negroponte, oversaw the mercenary army attacking Nicaragua and the emergence of death squads in El Salvador. Tens of thousands of peasants and opposition activists were killed with impunity. In Honduras itself, there was widespread repression and murder of those challenging

the status quo.

In 1998, Honduras was hit by Hurricane Mitch. The second worst Atlantic hurricane ever recorded caused huge destruction and death, especially in poor communities with weak infrastructure. The shacks and modest dwellings along the river bank in Tegucigalpa were all ripped and washed away. Over 7,000 Hondurans died, including people we had met three decades before.

Six years later, in 2004, I was again reminded of the U.S. role in Honduras when the same John Negroponte who had overseen the Contra operations went to Baghdad to take over management of the Iraq occupation. Newsweek magazine said he was coming with a new strategy, which they dubbed the "Salvador option."

Over the next year, sectarian death squads emerged to provoke sectarian bloodshed. Negroponte's right-hand man in Iraq, Robert S. Ford, was later appointed as U.S. Ambassador to Syria in 2010 where he helped fuel the uprisings in that country. Thus there is direct connection between U.S. interference and aggression in Central America and the Middle East.

Honduran Control

For decades Honduras was alternately ruled by two political parties representing different branches of the country's oligarchy. They traded power back and forth, effectively preventing alternative perspectives.

But things began to change in Honduras in 2006. President Manuel Zelaya came from the oligarchy but started to initiate changes benefiting the poor. He called for real land reform, raising the minimum wage and he questioned the need for US military bases. That was too much. In June 2009, President Zelaya was kidnapped in the middle of the night and flown from the capital to the U.S. military air base called Soto Cano, only 48 miles away. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had been in Honduras just weeks before. She disapproved of Zelaya and his policies. The coup went ahead.

After the 2009 coup, conditions in Honduras deteriorated rapidly. Tegucigalpa became the homicide capital of the world. Tens of thousands of youth have fled the country as it has been wracked by drug wars, corruption, and police or paramilitary repression. Alongside this, there has been widespread popular resistance.

In 2011, I returned to Honduras to see the conditions first hand. With a delegation organized by Alliance for Global Justice and Task Force on the Americas, I visited peasants in the fertile Aguan Valley, indigenous communities in the mountains and workers and church activists in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

We talked with a hard-working activist named Berta Caceres (who was assassinated five years later) and others in her indigenous organization COPINH. We learned that these communities were still actively resisting the coup and forming a new political party to challenge the right-wing coup government not with guns but with votes.

In 2013, I returned again to Honduras, this time as an election observer. In the contest, the new LIBRE party surpassed the traditional Liberal Party and made a strong challenge to the right-wing National Party. There were many examples of election malfeasance but Juan Orlando Hernandez of the right-wing National Party was anointed as the new President.

Since then social and economic conditions have not changed. The Hernandez regime governs to the benefit of rich Hondurans and international corporations. He has a strong military alliance with the U.S. military and is very friendly with President Trump's Chief of Staff, retired Marine Gen. John Kelly.

Wiping Out a Lead

That has set the stage for the most recent events. Days before the election. The Economist ran an article describing a National Party training session in cheating techniques. The election was held on Sunday, Nov. 26. On election night, with 57 percent of the votes counted, the opposition challenger was ahead by over 5 percentage points.

Then strange things began to happen. The election commission stopped updating the vote tally for 36 hours. The head of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal said on Monday they were still missing 6,000 tally sheets from different polling places. A few hours later, he said they were missing 7500 tally sheets. When the vote count resumed on Tuesday, the existing President Hernandez was gaining votes, cutting the opposition lead and then winning. It all looked very fishy, even to the OAS monitors.

The situation is rapidly coming to a head. Initially, the opposition demanded a full and complete review of all the 18,000 tally sheets. Now they are calling for the annulment of the election and a new election under international supervision.

The Honduran government is either stonewalling or is paralyzed. Hundreds of thousands of Hondurans have protested in the streets, with at least 12 protesters killed. However in a dramatic change, the elite paramilitary COBRA security forces have started to refuse orders, saying their job is not to repress their own communities.

The repercussions of what happens in Honduras could also reach across Latin

America. Just as the 2009 coup in Honduras was a setback for the entire region, the outcome of the current crisis will have wide-reaching consequences, too. As reported in Foreign Policy magazine, “The US has a lot riding on the Honduran election”; the U.S. foreign policy establishment wants the continuation of the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez.

Despite all the indications of electoral malfeasance and human rights abuses, the Trump Administration has praised the conservative government. Meanwhile, some North American reporters, analysts and activists are doing what they can to support Honduran popular forces and to stop the theft of the Honduran election.

The coming days may be momentous. I have explained why it personally matters to me. But this is more important than one person’s connection to a country. It should matter to anyone concerned with progress, justice, respect and international law. .

Rick Sterling is an investigative journalist and currently president of the board of Task Force on the Americas. He can be reached at rsterling1@gmail.com.

The Foundering Russia-gate ‘Scandal’

Exclusive: Taking on water from revealed FBI conflicts of interest, the foundering Russia-gate probe – and its mainstream media promoters – are resorting to insults against people who note the listing ship, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The disclosure of fiercely anti-Trump text messages between two romantically involved senior FBI officials who played key roles in the early Russia-gate inquiry has turned the supposed Russian-election-meddling “scandal” into its own scandal, by providing evidence that some government investigators saw it as their duty to block or destroy Donald Trump’s presidency.

As much as the U.S. mainstream media has mocked the idea that an American “deep state” exists and that it has maneuvered to remove Trump from office, the text messages between senior FBI counterintelligence official Peter Strzok and senior FBI lawyer Lisa Page reveal how two high-ranking members of the government’s intelligence/legal bureaucracy saw their role as protecting the United States from an election that might elevate to the presidency someone as unfit as Trump.

In one Aug. 6, 2016 text exchange, Page told Strzok: "Maybe you're meant to stay where you are because you're meant to protect the country from that menace." At the end of that text, she sent Strzok a link to a David Brooks column in The New York Times, which concludes with the clarion call: "There comes a time when neutrality and laying low become dishonorable. If you're not in revolt, you're in cahoots. When this period and your name are mentioned, decades hence, your grandkids will look away in shame."

Apparently after reading that stirring advice, Strzok replied, "And of course I'll try and approach it that way. I just know it will be tough at times. I can protect our country at many levels, not sure if that helps."

At a House Judiciary Committee hearing on Wednesday, Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, criticized Strzok's boast that "I can protect our country at many levels." Jordan said: "this guy thought he was super-agent James Bond at the FBI [deciding] there's no way we can let the American people make Donald Trump the next president."

In the text messages, Strzok also expressed visceral contempt for working-class Trump voters, for instance, writing on Aug. 26, 2016, "Just went to a southern Virginia Walmart. I could SMELL the Trump support. ... it's scary real down here."

Another text message suggested that other senior government officials – alarmed at the possibility of a Trump presidency – joined the discussion. In an apparent reference to an August 2016 meeting with FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, Strzok wrote to Page on Aug. 15, 2016, "I want to believe the path you threw out for consideration in Andy's office – that there's no way he gets elected – but I'm afraid we can't take that risk."

Strzok added, "It's like an insurance policy in the unlikely event that you die before you're 40."

It's unclear what strategy these FBI officials were contemplating to ensure Trump's defeat, but the comments mesh with what an intelligence source told me after the 2016 election, that there was a plan among senior Obama administration officials to use the allegations about Russian meddling to block Trump's momentum with the voters and – if elected – to persuade members of the Electoral College to deny Trump a majority of votes and thus throw the selection of a new president into the House of Representatives under the rules of the Twelfth Amendment.

The scheme involved having some Democratic electors vote for former Secretary of State Colin Powell (which did happen), making him the third-place vote-getter in the Electoral College and thus eligible for selection by the House. But the plan

fizzled when enough of Trump's electors stayed loyal to their candidate to officially make him President.

After that, Trump's opponents turned to the Russia-gate investigation as the vehicle to create the conditions for somehow nullifying the election, impeaching Trump, or at least weakening him sufficiently so he could not take steps to improve relations with Russia.

In one of her text messages to Strzok, Page made reference to a possible Watergate-style ouster of Trump, writing: "Bought all the president's men. Figure I needed to brush up on watergate."

As a key feature in this oust-Trump effort, Democrats have continued to lie by claiming that "all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred" in the assessment that Russia hacked the Democratic emails last year on orders from President Vladimir Putin and then slipped them to WikiLeaks to undermine Hillary Clinton's campaign.

That canard was used in the early months of the Russia-gate imbroglio to silence any skepticism about the "hacking" accusation, and the falsehood was repeated again by a Democratic congressman during Wednesday's hearing of the House Judiciary Committee.

But the "consensus" claim was never true. In May 2017 testimony, President Obama's Director of National Intelligence James Clapper acknowledged that the Jan. 6 "Intelligence Community Assessment" was put together by "hand-picked" analysts from only three agencies: the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

Biased at the Creation

And, the new revelations of high-level FBI bias puts Clapper's statement about "hand-picked" analysts in sharper perspective, since any intelligence veteran will tell you that if you hand-pick the analysts you are effectively hand-picking the analysis.

Although it has not yet been spelled out exactly what role Strzok and Page may have had in the Jan. 6 report, I was told by one source that Strzok had a direct hand in writing it. Whether that is indeed the case, Strzok, as a senior FBI counterintelligence official, would almost surely have had input into the selection of the FBI analysts and thus into the substance of the report itself. [For challenges from intelligence experts to the Jan. 6 report, see Consortiumnews.com's "More Holes in the Russia-gate Narrative."]

If the FBI contributors to the Jan. 6 report shared Strzok's contempt for Trump, it could explain why claims from an unverified dossier of Democratic-financed

“dirt” on Trump, including salacious charges that Russian intelligence operatives videotaped Trump being urinated on by prostitutes in a five-star Moscow hotel, was added as a classified appendix to the report and presented personally to President-elect Trump.

Though Democrats and the Clinton campaign long denied financing the dossier – prepared by ex-British spy Christopher Steele who claimed to rely on second- and third-hand information from anonymous Russian contacts – it was revealed in October 2017 that the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign shared in the costs, with the payments going to the “oppo” research firm, Fusion GPS, through the Democrats’ law firm, Perkins Coie.

That discovery helped ensnare another senior Justice Department official, Associate Attorney General Bruce Ohr, who talked with Steele during the campaign and had a post-election meeting with Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson. Recently, Simpson has acknowledged that Ohr’s wife, Nellie Ohr, was hired by Fusion GPS last year to investigate Trump.

Bruce Ohr has since been demoted and Strzok was quietly removed from the Russia-gate investigation last July although the reasons for these moves were not publicly explained at the time.

Still, the drive for “another Watergate” to oust an unpopular – and to many insiders, unfit – President remains at the center of the thinking among the top mainstream news organizations as they have scrambled for Russia-gate “scoops” over the past year even at the cost of making serious reporting errors.

For instance, last Friday, CNN – and then CBS News and MSNBC – trumpeted an email supposedly sent from someone named Michael J. Erickson on Sept. 4, 2016, to Donald Trump Jr. that involved WikiLeaks offering the Trump campaign pre-publication access to purloined Democratic National Committee emails that WikiLeaks published on Sept. 13, nine days later.

Grasping for Confirmation

Since the Jan. 6 report alleged that WikiLeaks received the “hacked” emails from Russia – a claim that WikiLeaks and Russia deny – the story seemed to finally tie together the notion that the Trump campaign had at least indirectly colluded with Russia.

This new “evidence” spread like wildfire across social media. As The Intercept’s Glenn Greenwald wrote in an article critical of the media’s performance, some Russia-gate enthusiasts heralded the revelation with graphics of cannons booming and nukes exploding.

But the story soon collapsed when it turned out that the date on the email was actually Sept. 14, 2016, i.e., the day *after* WikiLeaks released the batch of DNC emails, not Sept. 4. It appeared that “Erickson” – whoever he was – had simply alerted the Trump campaign to the public existence of the WikiLeaks disclosure.

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

Yet, despite the cascade of errors and grudging corrections, including some belated admissions that there was no “17-intelligence-agency consensus” on Russian “hacking” – The New York Times made a preemptive strike against the new documentary evidence that the Russia-gate investigation was riddled with conflicts of interest.

The Times’ lead editorial on Wednesday mocked reporters at Fox News for living in an “alternate universe” where the Russia-gate “investigation is ‘illegitimate and corrupt,’ or so says Gregg Jarrett, a legal analyst who appears regularly on [Sean] Hannity’s nightly exercise in presidential ego-stroking.”

Though briefly mentioning the situation with Strzok’s text messages, the Times offered no details or context for the concerns, instead just heaping ridicule on anyone who questions the Russia-gate narrative.

“To put it mildly, this is insane,” the Times declared. “The primary purpose of Mr. Mueller’s investigation is not to take down Mr. Trump. It’s to protect America’s national security and the integrity of its elections by determining whether a presidential campaign conspired with a foreign adversary to influence the 2016 election – a proposition that grows more plausible every day.”

The Times fumed that “roughly three-quarters of Republicans still refuse to accept that Russia interfered in the 2016 election – a fact that is glaringly obvious to everyone else, including the nation’s intelligence community.” (There we go again with the false suggestion of a consensus within the intelligence community.)

The Times also took to task Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, for seeking “a Special Counsel to investigate ALL THINGS 2016 – not just Trump and Russia.” The Times insisted that “None of these attacks or insinuations are grounded in good faith.”

But what are the Times editors so afraid of? As much as they try to insult and intimidate anyone who demands serious evidence about the Russia-gate allegations, why shouldn’t the American people be informed about how Washington insiders manipulate elite opinion in pursuit of reversing “mistaken” judgments by the unwashed masses?

Do the Times editors really believe in democracy – a process that historically has had its share of warts and mistakes – or are they just elitists who think they know best and turn away their noses from the smell of working-class people at Walmart?

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](#)).

Silencing of Courageous Documentaries

Historically, documentaries have told important truth in powerful ways and often challenging powerful groupthinks, but such brave films are becoming an endangered species, explains John Pilger.

By John Pilger

I first understood the power of the documentary during the editing of my first film, *The Quiet Mutiny*. In the commentary, I make reference to a chicken, which my crew and I encountered while on patrol with American soldiers in Vietnam.

“It must be a Vietcong chicken – a communist chicken,” said the sergeant. He wrote in his report: “enemy sighted.” The chicken moment seemed to underline the farce of the war – so I included it in the film. That may have been unwise.

The regulator of commercial television in Britain – then the Independent Television Authority or ITA – had demanded to see my script. What was my source for the political affiliation of the chicken? I was asked. Was it really a communist chicken, or could it have been a pro-American chicken?

Of course, this nonsense had a serious purpose; when *The Quiet Mutiny* was broadcast by ITV in 1970, the U.S. ambassador to Britain, Walter Annenberg, a personal friend of President Richard Nixon, complained to the ITA. He complained not about the chicken but about the whole film. “I intend to inform the White House,” the ambassador wrote. Gosh.

The Quiet Mutiny had revealed that the U.S. Army in Vietnam was tearing itself apart. There was open rebellion: drafted men were refusing orders and shooting their officers in the back or “fragging” them with grenades as they slept. None of this had been news. What it meant was that the war was lost; and the

messenger was not appreciated.

The Director-General of the ITA was Sir Robert Fraser. He summoned Denis Foreman, then Director of Programmes at Granada TV, and went into a state of apoplexy. Spraying expletives, Sir Robert described me as a “dangerous subversive.”

What concerned the regulator and the ambassador was the *power* of a single documentary film: the power of its facts and witnesses: especially young soldiers speaking the truth and treated sympathetically by the film-maker.

I was a newspaper journalist. I had never made a film before and I was indebted to Charles Denton, a renegade producer from the BBC, who taught me that facts and evidence told straight to the camera and to the audience could indeed be subversive.

This subversion of official lies *is* the power of documentary. I have now made 60 films and I believe there is nothing like this power in any other medium.

Nuclear Warning

In the 1960s, a brilliant young film-maker, Peter Watkins, made *The War Game* for the BBC. Watkins reconstructed the aftermath of a nuclear attack on London. *The War Game* was banned.



“The effect of this film,” said the BBC, “has been judged to be too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting.”

The then chairman of the BBC’s Board of Governors was Lord Normanbrook, who had been Secretary to the Cabinet. He wrote to his successor in the Cabinet, Sir Burke Trend: “*The War Game* is not designed as propaganda: it is intended as a purely factual statement and is based on careful research into official material ... but the subject is alarming, and the showing of the film on television might have a significant effect on public attitudes towards the policy of the nuclear deterrent.”

In other words, the power of this documentary was such that it might alert people to the true horrors of nuclear war and cause them to question the very existence of nuclear weapons. The Cabinet papers show that the BBC secretly colluded with the government to ban Watkins's film. The cover story was that the BBC had a responsibility to protect "the elderly living alone and people of limited mental intelligence."

Most of the press swallowed this. The ban on *The War Game* ended the career of Peter Watkins in British television at the age of 30. This remarkable film-maker left the BBC and Britain, and angrily launched a worldwide campaign against censorship. Telling the truth, and dissenting from the *official* truth, can be hazardous for a documentary film-maker.

In 1988, Thames Television broadcast *Death on the Rock*, a documentary about the war in Northern Ireland. It was a risky and courageous venture. Censorship of the reporting of the so-called Irish Troubles was rife, and many of us in documentaries were actively discouraged from making films north of the border. If we tried, we were drawn into a quagmire of compliance.

The journalist Liz Curtis calculated that the BBC had banned, doctored or delayed some 50 major TV programs on Ireland. There were, of course, honorable exceptions, such as John Ware

Roger Bolton, the producer of *Death on the Rock*, was another. *Death on the Rock* revealed that the British Government deployed SAS death squads overseas against the IRA, murdering four unarmed people in Gibraltar. A vicious smear campaign was mounted against the film, led by the government of Margaret Thatcher and the Murdoch press, notably the *Sunday Times*, edited by Andrew Neil.

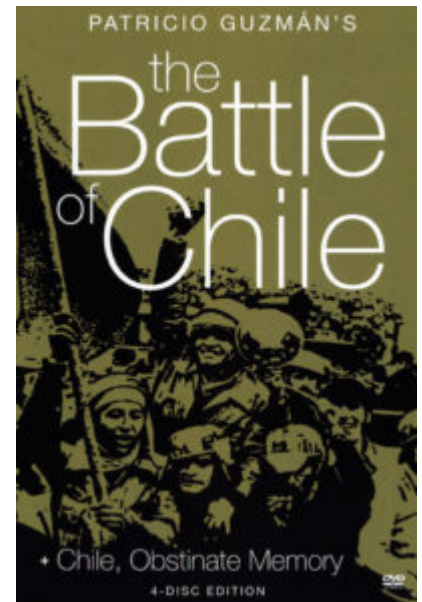
It was the only documentary ever subjected to an official inquiry – and its facts were vindicated. Murdoch had to pay up for the defamation of one of the film's principal witnesses. But that wasn't the end of it. Thames Television, one of the most innovative broadcasters in the world, was eventually stripped of its franchise in the United Kingdom.

Did Prime Minister Thatcher exact her revenge on ITV and the film-makers, as she had done to the miners? We don't know. What we do know is that the power of this one documentary stood by the truth and, like *The War Game*, marked a high point in filmed journalism.

Artistic Heresy

I believe great documentaries exude an artistic heresy. They are difficult to categorize. They are not like great fiction. They are not like great feature

movies. Yet, they can combine the sheer power of both.



The Battle of Chile: the fight of an unarmed people, is an epic documentary by Patricio Guzman. It is an extraordinary film: actually a trilogy of films. When it was released in the 1970s, the *New Yorker* asked: “How could a team of five people, some with no previous film experience, working with one Éclair camera, one Nagra sound-recorder, and a package of black and white film, produce a work of this magnitude?”

Guzman’s documentary is about the overthrow of democracy in Chile in 1973 by fascists led by General Augusto Pinochet and directed by the CIA. Almost everything is filmed hand-held, on the shoulder. And remember this is a *film* camera, not video. You have to change the magazine every ten minutes, or the camera stops; and the slightest movement and change of light affects the image.

In the *Battle of Chile*, there is a scene at the funeral of a naval officer, loyal to President Salvador Allende, who was murdered by those plotting to destroy Allende’s reformist government. The camera moves among the military faces: human totems with their medals and ribbons, their coiffed hair and opaque eyes. The sheer menace of the faces says you are watching the funeral of a whole society: of democracy itself.

There is a price to pay for filming so bravely. The cameraman, Jorge Muller, was arrested and taken to a torture camp, where he “disappeared” until his grave was found many years later. He was 27. I salute his memory.

In Britain, the pioneering work of John Grierson, Denis Mitchell, Norman Swallow, Richard Cawston and other film-makers in the early Twentieth Century crossed the great divide of class and presented another country. They dared put cameras and microphones in front of ordinary Britons and allowed them to talk in their own language.

John Grierson is said by some to have coined the term “documentary.” “The drama is on your doorstep,” he said in the 1920s, “wherever the slums are, wherever there is malnutrition, wherever there is exploitation and cruelty.”

Speaking from Below

These early British film-makers believed that the documentary should speak from below, not from above: it should be the medium of people, not authority. In other words, it was the blood, sweat and tears of ordinary people that gave us the documentary.



Denis Mitchell was famous for his portraits of a working-class street. “Throughout my career,” he said, “I have been absolutely astonished at the quality of people’s strength and dignity.”

When I read those words, I think of the survivors of Grenfell Tower, most of them still waiting to be re-housed, all of them still waiting for justice, as the cameras move on to the repetitive circus of a royal wedding.

The late David Munro and I made *Year Zero: the Silent Death of Cambodia* in 1979. This film broke a silence about a country subjected to more than a decade of bombing and genocide, and its power involved millions of ordinary men, women and children in the rescue of a society on the other side of the world.

Even now, *Year Zero* puts the lie to the myth that the public doesn’t care, or that those who do care eventually fall victim to something called “compassion fatigue.” *Year Zero* was watched by an audience greater than the audience of the current, immensely popular British “reality” program *Bake Off*. It was shown on mainstream TV in more than 30 countries, but not in the United States, where PBS rejected it outright, fearful, according to an executive, of the reaction of the new Reagan administration.

In Britain and Australia, it was broadcast without advertising – the only time, to my knowledge, this has happened on commercial television. Following the British broadcast, more than 40 sacks of post arrived at ATV’s offices in Birmingham, 26,000 first-class letters in the first post alone. Remember this was a time before email and Facebook.

In the letters was £1 million – most of it in small amounts from those who could least afford to give.

“This is for Cambodia,” wrote a bus driver, enclosing his week’s wages. Pensioners sent their pension. A single mother sent her savings of £50. People came to my home with toys and cash, and petitions for Thatcher and poems of indignation for Pol Pot and for his collaborator, President Richard Nixon, whose bombs had accelerated the fanatic’s rise.

For the first time, the BBC supported an ITV film. The *Blue Peter* program asked children to “bring and buy” toys at Oxfam shops throughout the country. By Christmas, the children had raised the astonishing amount of £3,500,000.

Across the world, *Year Zero* raised more than \$55 million, mostly unsolicited, and which brought help directly to Cambodia: medicines, vaccines and the installation of an entire clothing factory that allowed people to throw away the black uniforms they had been forced to wear by Pol Pot. It was as if the audience had ceased to be onlookers and had become participants.

Murrow’s Message

Something similar happened in the United States when CBS Television broadcast Edward R. Murrow’s film, *Harvest of Shame*, in 1960. This was the first time that many middle-class Americans glimpsed the scale of poverty in their midst.

Harvest of Shame is the story of migrant agricultural workers who were treated little better than slaves. Today, their struggle has such resonance as migrants and refugees fight for work and safety in foreign places. What seems extraordinary is that the children and grandchildren of some of the people in this film will be bearing the brunt of the abuse and strictures of President Trump.

In the United States today, there is no equivalent of Edward R. Murrow. His eloquent, unflinching kind of American journalism has been abolished in the so-called mainstream and has taken refuge in the Internet.

Britain remains one of the few countries where documentaries are still shown on mainstream television in the hours when most people are still awake. But documentaries that go against the received wisdom are becoming an endangered species, at the very time we need them perhaps more than ever.

In survey after survey, when people are asked what they would like more of on television, they say documentaries. I don’t believe they mean a type of current affairs program that is a platform for politicians and “experts” who affect a specious balance between great power and its victims. Observational

documentaries are popular; but films about airports and motorway police do not make sense of the world. They entertain.

David Attenborough's brilliant programs on the natural world are making sense of climate change – belatedly. The BBC's Panorama is making sense of Britain's secret support of jihadism in Syria – belatedly. But why is Trump setting fire to the Middle East? Why is the West edging closer to war with Russia and China?

Mark the words of the narrator in Peter Watkins's *The War Game*: "On almost the entire subject of nuclear weapons, there is now practically total silence in the press, and on TV. There is hope in any unresolved or unpredictable situation. But is there real hope to be found in this silence?"

In 2017, that silence has returned. It is not news that the safeguards on nuclear weapons have been quietly removed and that the United States is now spending \$46 million per hour on nuclear weapons: that's \$46 million every hour, 24 hours a day, every day. Who knows that?

The Coming War on China, which I completed last year, has been broadcast in the United Kingdom but not in the United States – where 90 per cent of the population cannot name or locate the capital of North Korea or explain why Trump wants to destroy it. China is next door to North Korea.

According to one "progressive" film distributor in the U.S., the American people are interested only in what she calls "character-driven" documentaries. This is code for a "look at me" consumerist cult that now consumes and intimidates and exploits so much of our popular culture, while turning away film-makers from a subject as urgent as any in modern times.

"When the truth is replaced by silence," wrote the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, "the silence is a lie."

Whenever young documentary film-makers ask me how they can "make a difference," I reply that it is really quite simple. They need to break the silence.

This is an edited version of an address John Pilger gave at the British Library on Dec. 9 as part of a retrospective festival, "The Power of the Documentary," held to mark the Library's acquisition of Pilger's written archive. www.johnpilger.com

North Korea's Understandable Fears

By escalating threatening rhetoric – and staging provocative military maneuvers – President Trump may believe he can intimidate North Korea into capitulation but history would tell you something else, writes David William Pear.

By David William Pear

Like Pavlov's dog, the mainstream media slobbers predicable reactions every time North Korea launches another test missile. Listening to the blather one would think that once Kim Jong Un has a missile capable of reaching the U.S., he is going to use it in an unprovoked nuclear attack on the U.S. mainland killing millions of Americans.

However, for Kim to attack the U.S., he would have to be insane, paranoid, and suicidal. Top officials in the U.S. intelligence agencies say he is not. Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats has said publicly that Kim is acting very rationally; Secretary of State Rex Tillerson says that Kim is "not insane"; the CIA deputy director of the Korea Mission Center, Yong Suk Lee, says that Kim is not suicidal, either.

So we can rest fairly assured that Kim Jong Un is highly unlikely to wake up one morning and nuke America because he can. According to Yong, Kim "wants to rule for a long time and die peacefully in his own bed."[CNN, October 6, 2017]. Everyone in the mainstream media knows this or should.

And, North Korea has long had more reasons to fear the U.S. than vice versa. North Korea is not an existential threat to the U.S. national security; but the opposite is not the case – and the U.S. government is not shy about reminding North Korea of that fact. The U.S. regularly practices nuclear attacks on North Korea by air, land and sea, which draw the predictable response from Kim.

Yet, North Korea has offered to stop testing nuclear bombs, if the U.S. would stop playing nuclear war games on its border [The Guardian]. The reality is that the U.S. has been threatening North Korea for over 70 years.

While the U.S. mainstream media excites the U.S. public with warnings about "crazy" Kim Jong Un, what should frighten the American people is the long history of U.S. crazies who seriously contemplated and/or implicitly threatened to start a nuclear war with a variety of countries. President Trump is not the first president who cannot be trusted with the nuclear button. It is only by sheer luck that the world has escaped a nuclear war or a cataclysmic nuclear accident. There have been many close calls, and one day there may be one too

many.

The U.S. keeps gambling with nuclear roulette, threatening North Korea, Iran, Russia, and the enemy *du jour*. One of the favorite U.S. verbal threats is to say that “all options are on the table,” which adversaries understand to include the nuclear option. The U.S. has even used nuclear bombs twice against civilian populations in 1945, and according to many historians unnecessarily, because Japan had already offered to surrender. Hundreds of thousands of Japanese died mostly so that President Harry Truman could impress Soviet leader Josef Stalin with a terrifying show of U.S. military might.

During the Korean War (1950 to 1953). President Truman publicly threatened to use the atomic bomb, and the military planned, practiced and shipped nuclear bombs to Asia to be dropped on North Korea. General Douglas MacArthur wanted to use 26 nuclear bombs and start a war with China, too [[History News Network](#)].

Truman gave General Matthew Ridgeway pre-authorization to use nuclear bombs, even after MacArthur was relieved of his command. Instead, the [U.S. chose to destroy North Korea](#) with conventional bombs and napalm, killing an estimated 20 percent to 30 percent of the population.

The Korean War is called the “Forgotten War” for a number of reasons, including that the U.S. military suffered what amounted to a humiliating defeat with some 37,000 American soldiers killed while they were being used essentially as negotiating chips. They “died for a tie,” where to draw the Military Demarcation Line between the North and South; and South Korea, too, was largely “destroyed to save it” from communism.

The South Koreans deserve a lot of credit for rebuilding a modern highly advanced society in all categories such as education, healthcare, technology, and their standard of living. But contrary to propaganda mythology, they did not develop under capitalist free-trade and democracy. The South Korean “miracle on the Han River” was achieved under a U.S.-backed military dictatorship, a highly planned economy, and billions of dollars from U.S. aid, loans and direct investment. [[“Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism”](#), by Ha-Joon Chang].

Very Good Reasons

So, Kim Jong Un has very good reasons to fear U.S. threats. He knows that the U.S. is ruthless enough to kill millions of his people and destroy his country (along with gruesomely dispatching its leaders), much like the U.S. did in Iraq and Libya.

Sen. John McCain’s daughter Meghan McCain said on Fox News that the U.S. should

assassinate the "Crazy Fat Kid". Words like that along with Trump's insults ("Little Rocket Man"), threats and nuclear war games are sure to draw bombastic verbal reactions by Kim Jong Un and cause him to redouble his nuclear and missile programs. [The Nation].

While the U.S. constantly talks about a denuclearized Korean peninsula, it is the U.S. that first nuclearized it, starting with President Harry Truman's threats in 1951. Then in July 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower unilaterally withdrew from section 13(d) of the 1953 Armistice Agreement, which made the introduction of any new weapon systems in the Korean peninsula forbidden to both sides. The U.S. broke the promise so that it could "equip U.S. forces in Korea with modern weapons;" dual capability (nuclear-conventional) weapons, such as the Honest John and the 280 mm. cannon, i.e. tactical nuclear weapons [National Security Council Report].

All during the rest of the Cold War the U.S. stationed at least 950 nuclear weapons in South Korea. The U.S. may have withdrawn its nuclear weapons from South Korea in 1991 as it says, but it still has plenty in Guam and elsewhere that it uses to constantly threaten North Korea with a nuclear attack.

While the U.S. mainstream media ponders how to get North Korea to sit down at the negotiating table, it is the U.S. that refuses to talk. North Korea has often offered to sign a permanent peace treaty and non-aggression agreement, but the U.S. has consistently rebuffed the offers. The State Department has repeatedly said in news conferences that it will not negotiate with North Korea unless North Korean officials meet unspecified preconditions first [U.S. Department of State]. What is puzzling is what the preconditions are, and how to get the U.S. to sit down at the table. Yet, the U.S. and its media constantly say it is North Korea that refuses to talk.

Understandable Paranoia

Unless there is a diplomatic solution, Kim Jong Un is rationally following in his father's footsteps by developing a credible nuclear deterrent against threatened U.S. aggression.

In 2000, George W. Bush scoffed at President Clinton's nuclear agreement with North Korea, and then, as President in 2002, Bush intensified threats with his "Axis of Evil" speech, which put North Korea on an enemies list with Iraq and Iran. Bush followed that speech by invading Iraq in 2003 with "Shock and Awe," leaving the cradle of human civilization in ruins and later hanging Saddam Hussein.

Bush did not plan to stop with Iraq. Retired Gen. Wesley Clark says he was told

at the Pentagon that Bush planned to invade seven countries in five years: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran [YouTube].

It is the U.S. that has been paranoid, unpredictable and insane during the Twenty-first Century. And the problem did not start with Trump. After the initial U.S. invasion of Iraq, a smug-looking Bush got out of the passenger seat of a fighter jet that the pilot had landed on the USS Abraham Lincoln. He strutted over to the microphone in his flight suit and gave a premature "Mission Accomplished" speech.

Lisa Schiffren gushed in the Wall Street Journal that Bush's performance made him look hot and sexy in his flight suit, adding with admiration that Bush is "credible as a Commander in Chief." The mainstream media has been the cheerleader for all of the Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Obama, Clinton and Kerry wars. The media is now inciting the U.S. public with propaganda for war with North Korea, Iran and Russia.

What can be said of Trump is that he seems to take pride in acting even crazier than his predecessors. So, Kim Jong Un is not paranoid to be fearful of what the U.S. might do and he has been acting predictably. The U.S. has left him little choice other than to defend his country with the deterrent of nuclear weapons.

As part of the "Axis of Evil" strategy, President George W. Bush sabotaged the negotiated nuclear agreement that the U.S. and North Korea had made under President Bill Clinton in the 1990s. That is what precipitated North Korea withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and resuming its nuclear program.

Lessons Learned

Other countries tried submissive tactics to mollify Washington. For instance, in 2003, Bush persuaded Libya's Muammar Gaddafi to abandon his nuclear program. At the time, Bush encouraged North Korea to follow suit, saying "we want to have lessons learned, because we want Libya to be a model for other countries" to unilaterally disarm.

So, North Korea was paying close attention in 2011 when President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton backed a military campaign that exploited Libya's defenselessness, destroyed the country, and led to Gaddafi's torture-murder. In a TV interview, Clinton gloated "we came, we saw, he died!, hahaha!"

The lesson of Libya, according to Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, is that "unfortunately, if you have nukes, never give them up – if you don't have them, get them."

Based on that history, the North Koreans are not going to trust a U.S. agreement again. They will trust in themselves, as they did when Kim's grandfather Kim Il-sung led the guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. Korea's historical philosophy is based on the principle of self-sufficiency and resistance against foreign domination, especially in the North.

The North Koreans now call their historical philosophy "Juche." North Korea is determined to follow the principle of Juche to the "realization of independence in politics, self-sufficiency in the economy and self-reliance in national defence." [[official DPRK Juche link](#)].

Now, President Trump has slammed the door shut on negotiations with Kim Jong Un by threatening to totally destroy North Korea with "fire and fury" and insulting him as the "Little Rocket Man."

Kim takes it seriously when the U.S. repeatedly threatens to destroy his country. Trump's insults also caused Kim to "lose face ([kibun](#))," a very serious affront in Korean culture. The natural reaction for a Korean who has been disrespected is to become infuriated. It is predictable, and the U.S. knows it.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley's latest outburst that "if war comes, the North Korean regime will be utterly destroyed" is a further provocation, which the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called "a really bloodthirsty tirade."

But Lavrov added that "Moscow has been closely working with the U.S. on the North Korean issue, with several meetings being held between the countries' diplomats in the Russian capital, and other venues."

Vast Bloodshed

In the late Twentieth and early Twentieth-first centuries, U.S. wars and embargoes have killed millions of people around the planet, according to some estimates. Besides deploying devastating high-tech military weapons, the U.S. has interdicted food and medical supplies as part of total-war concepts.

As President Bill Clinton's U.N. Ambassador (and later Secretary of State) [Madeleine Albright](#) once said, [500,000 dead children in Iraq – victims of U.S. sanctions – were "worth it"](#) to punish the Iraqi government's behavior. That is what the U.S. sanctions are now doing to North Korea. But as Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) said, "North Korea will 'eat grass' before giving up nukes."

The Koreans know the history of U.S. war-making well. The U.S. first contact with Korea in the Nineteenth Century involved [a U.S. military expedition](#) in support of a U.S. trade mission that challenged Korea's isolation, self-

sufficiency and refusal to trade. The appearance of U.S. warships sparked a conflict that led to the Americans killing some 243 Koreans at the cost of three American lives. When Japan colonized and annexed Korea in 1910, the Western colonial powers including the U.S. cheered approval.

All Korea has ever wanted was to be left alone. During its 4,000-year history, Korea has not been an aggressive expansionist country. To the contrary, Korea has been invaded by China, Mongolia, Japan, Russia and the U.S. Historically, Korea has resisted contact with foreigners because foreigners had always brought invasions.

Like his Korean ancestors, Kim Jong Un wants North Korea to be left alone for the Korean people to determine their own future.

David William Pear is a Senior Editor for OpEdNews.com and a Senior Contributing Editor for The Greenville Post. He is a Vietnam veteran having served as a member of the 5th Special Forces Group as a combat advisor to the Army of the Republic of (South) Viet Nam. [First Published at opednews.com]

When Washington Cheered the Jihadists

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

By Daniel Lazare

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

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

It was impossible, which perhaps explains why the report remained a non-story long after it was released courtesy of a Judicial Watch freedom-of-information

lawsuit. The New York Times didn't mention it until six months later while the Washington Post waited more than a year before dismissing it as "loopy" and "relatively unimportant." With ISIS rampaging across much of Syria and Iraq, no one wanted to admit that U.S. attitudes were ever anything other than hostile.

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

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

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

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

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

Assessing the Damage

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So long as Syrian jihadis are committed to fighting Iran and its Arab proxies,"

the article concluded, “we should quietly root for them – while keeping our distance from a conflict that is going to get very ugly before the smoke clears. There will be plenty of time to tame the beast after Iran’s regional hegemonic ambitions have gone down in flames.”

Deals with the Devil

The U.S. would settle with the jihadis only after the jihadis had settled with Assad. The good would ultimately outweigh the bad. This kind of self-centered moral calculus would not have mattered had Gambill only spoken for himself. But he didn’t. Rather, he was expressing the viewpoint of Official Washington in general, which is why the ultra-respectable FP ran his piece in the first place.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Disastrous Thinking

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

War-time destruction totals around \$250 billion, according to U.N. estimates, a staggering sum for a country of 18.8 million people where per-capita income prior to the outbreak of violence was under \$3,000. From Syria, the specter of sectarian violence has spread across Asia and Africa and into Europe and North America as well. Political leaders throughout the advanced industrial world are still struggling to contain the populist fury that the Middle East refugee crisis, the result of U.S.-instituted regime change, helped set off.

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

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

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

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

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

Sucking Liberals into a New Cold War

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

By William Blum

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Russians! Russians! Russians!

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

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

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

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

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

The *Post* recently published an article entitled “How did Russian trolls get into your Facebook feed? Silicon Valley made it easy.” In the midst of this “exposé,” The *Post* stated: “There’s no way to tell if you personally saw a Russian post or tweet.” [*Washington Post*, Nov. 2, 2017]

A Case or Not?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Was there ever a time when the *Post* would have been embarrassed to be so openly, amateurishly biased about Russia? Perhaps during the few years between the two

Cold Wars.

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

- 1948: The *Pittsburgh Press* published the names, addresses, and places of employment of about 1,000 citizens who had signed presidential-nominating petitions for former Vice President Henry Wallace, running under the Progressive Party. This, and a number of other lists of "communists," published in the mainstream media, resulted in people losing their jobs, being expelled from unions, having their children abused, being denied state welfare benefits, and suffering various other punishments.
- Around 1950: The House Committee on Un-American Activities published a pamphlet, "100 Things You Should Know About Communism in the U.S.A." This included information about what a communist takeover of the United States would mean: ?Q: What would happen to my insurance?? A: It would go to the Communists.? Q: Would communism give me something better than I have now?? A: Not unless you are in a penitentiary serving a life sentence at hard labor.
- 1950s: Mrs. Ada White, member of the Indiana State Textbook Commission, believed that Robin Hood was a Communist and urged that books that told the Robin Hood story be banned from Indiana schools.
- As evidence that anti-communist mania was not limited to the lunatic fringe or conservative newspaper publishers, here is Clark Kerr, president of the University of California at Berkeley in a 1959 speech: "Perhaps 2 or even 20 million people have been killed in China by the new [communist] regime." One person wrote to Kerr: "I am wondering how you would judge a person who estimates the age of a passerby on the street as being 'perhaps 2 or even 20 years old.' Or what would you think of a physician who tells you to take 'perhaps 2 or even twenty teaspoonsful of a remedy'?"
- Throughout the cold war, traffic in phony Lenin quotes was brisk, each one passed around from one publication or speaker to another for years. Here's *S. News and World Report* in 1958 demonstrating communist duplicity by quoting Lenin: "Promises are like pie crusts, made to be broken." Secretary of State John Foster Dulles used it in a speech shortly afterward, one of many to do so during the cold war. Lenin actually did use a very similar line, but he explicitly stated that he was quoting an English proverb (it comes from Jonathan Swift) and his purpose was to show the unreliability of the bourgeoisie, not of communists. ?"First we will take Eastern Europe, then the masses of Asia, then we will encircle the United States, which will be the last bastion of capitalism. We will not have to attack. It will fall like an overripe fruit into our hands." This Lenin "quotation" had the usual wide circulation, even winding up in the *Congressional Record* in 1962. This was not simply a careless attribution; this was an out-and-out

fabrication; an extensive search, including by the Library of Congress and the United States Information Agency failed to find its origin.

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

it was trying to replace the American Bill of Rights with a less liberty-giving covenant of human rights.

- 1955: A U.S. Army 6-page pamphlet, "How to Spot a Communist," informed us that a communist could be spotted by his predisposition to discuss civil rights, racial and religious discrimination, the immigration laws, anti-subversive legislation, curbs on unions, and peace. Good Americans were advised to keep their ears stretched for such give-away terms as "chauvinism," "book-burning," "colonialism," "demagogy," "witch hunt," "reactionary," "progressive," and "exploitation." Another "distinguishing mark" of "Communist language" was a "preference for long sentences." After some ridicule, the Army rescinded the pamphlet.
- 1958: The noted sportscaster Bill Stern (one of the heroes of my innocent youth) observed on the radio that the lack of interest in "big time" football at New York University, City College of New York, Chicago, and Harvard "is due to the widespread acceptance of Communism at the universities."
- 1960: U.S. General Thomas Power speaking about nuclear war or a first strike by the U.S.: "The whole idea is to *kill* the bastards! At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win!" The response from one of those present was: "Well, you'd better make sure that they're a man and a woman."
- 1966: The Boys Club of America is of course wholesome and patriotic. Imagine their horror when they were confused with the DuBois Clubs. (W.E.B. Du Bois had been a very prominent civil rights activist.) When the Justice Department required the DuBois Clubs to register as a Communist front group, good loyal Americans knew what to do. They called up the Boys Club to announce that they would no longer contribute any money, or to threaten violence against them; and sure enough an explosion damaged the national headquarters of the youth group in San Francisco. Then former Vice President Richard Nixon, who was national board chairman of the Boys Club, declared: "This is an almost classic example of Communist deception and duplicity. The 'DuBois Clubs' are not unaware of the confusion they are causing among our supporters and among many other good citizens."
- 1966: "Rhythm, Riots and Revolution: An Analysis of the Communist Use of Music, The Communist Master Music Plan," by David A. Noebel, published by Christian Crusade Publications, (expanded version of 1965 pamphlet: "Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles"). Some chapters: Communist Use of Mind Warfare ... Nature of Red Record Companies ... Destructive Nature of Beatle Music ... Communist Subversion of Folk Music ... Folk Music and the Negro Revolution ... Folk Music and the College Revolution
- 1968: William Calley, U.S. Army Lieutenant, charged with overseeing the massacre of more than 100 Vietnamese civilians in My Lai in 1968, said some

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

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

radio networks.

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

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

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

How Russia-gate Rationalizes Censorship

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

By Joe Lauria

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

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

And the second was CrowdStrike, an anti-Putin private company, examining the DNC's computer server to dubiously claim discovery of a Russian "hack." In a similar examination of an alleged hack of a Ukrainian artillery app, CrowdStrike also blamed Russia but used faulty data for its report that it was later forced to rewrite. CrowdStrike was hired after the DNC refused to allow the FBI to look at the server.

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

After the article appeared at *Consortiumnews*, I tried to penetrate the mainstream by then publishing a version of the article on the *HuffPost*, which

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

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

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

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

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

After I posted an updated version of the *Consortiumnews* piece – renamed "On the Origins of Russia-gate" – I was informed 23 hours later by a Facebook friend that the piece had been retracted by *HuffPost* editors. As a reporter for mainstream media for more than a quarter century, I know that a newsroom rule is that before the serious decision is made to retract an article the writer is contacted to be allowed to defend the piece. This never happened. There was no due process. A *HuffPost* editor ignored my email asking why it was taken down.

Support from Independent Media

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

I am non-partisan as I oppose both major parties for failing to represent millions of Americans' interests. I follow facts where they lead. In this case, the facts led to an understanding that the Jan. 6 FBI/NSA/CIA intelligence "assessment" on alleged Russian election interference, prepared by

what then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called “hand-picked” analysts, was based substantially on unvetted opposition research and speculation, not serious intelligence work.

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

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

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

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

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

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

That the supposedly dissident *Intercept* would use this quote is instructive about how imbalanced the media’s reporting on Russia-gate has been. We have

actual film of Japanese planes attacking Pearl Harbor and American ships burning – and we have the eyewitness accounts of thousands of U.S. soldiers and sailors. Yet, on Russia-gate, we only have the opinions of some “hand-picked” intelligence officials who themselves say that they are not claiming that their opinions are fact. No serious editor would allow a self-interested and unnamed source to equate the two in print.

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

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

Watchdogs & Media Defending Censorship

Despite this support from independent media, a senior official at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, I learned, declined to take up my cause because he believes in the Russia-gate story. I also learned that a senior officer at the American Civil Liberties Union rejected my case because he too believes in Russia-gate. Both of these serious organizations were set up precisely to defend individuals in such situations on principle, not preference.

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

One online publication decidedly took the *HuffPost*'s side. Steven Perlberg, a media reporter for *BuzzFeed*, asked the *HuffPost* why they retracted my article. While ignoring me, the editors issued a statement to *BuzzFeed* saying that “Mr. Lauria’s self-published” piece was “later flagged by readers, and after deciding

that the post contained multiple factually inaccurate or misleading claims, our editors removed the post per our contributor terms of use.” Those terms include retraction for “any reason,” including, apparently, censorship.

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

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

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

Part of this Russia-gate groupthink stems from the outrage – and even shame – that many Americans feel about Trump’s election. They want to find an explanation that doesn’t lay the blame on the U.S. citizenry or America’s current dysfunctional political/media process. It’s much more reassuring, in a way, to blame some foreign adversary while also discrediting Trump’s legitimacy as the elected president. That leaves open some hope that his election might somehow be negated.

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

As the groupthink grows, the true-believers become disdainful of facts that force them to think about what they already believe. They won’t waste time

making a painstaking examination of the facts or engage in a detailed debate even on something as important and dangerous as a new Cold War with Russia.

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

Why Critical News is Suppressed

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

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

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

Trump's false campaign promises will only make the rulers' problem of a restless population worse. Americans are subjected to economic inequality greater than in the first Gilded Age. They are also subjected today to more war than in the first Gilded Age. American rulers today are engaged in multiple conflicts following decades of post-World War II invasions and coups to expand their global interests.

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

Careerist journalists readily acquiesce in this suppression of news to maintain their jobs, their status and their lifestyles. Meanwhile, a growing body of

poorly paid freelancers compete for the few remaining decent-paying gigs for which they must report from the viewpoint of the mainstream news organizations and their wealthy owners.

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

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

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

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

But such a story would undermine the U.S. government's "war on terrorism" narrative by revealing that the U.S.-backed strategy actually was risking the expansion of the jihadists' foothold in Syria. The story was twice rejected by my editors and has received attention almost entirely – if not exclusively – on much-smaller independent news Web sites.

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

In September 2015 at the U.N. General Assembly, Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed my story about Russia's motives in Syria to stop jihadists from taking over. Putin invited the U.S. to join this effort as Moscow was about to launch its military intervention at the invitation of the Syrian government. The

Obama administration, still insisting on “regime change” in Syria, refused. And the U.S. corporate media continued promoting the myth that Russia intervened to recapture its “imperial glory.”

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

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

Why Russia Is Targeted

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Accelerated Censorship in the Private Sector

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

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

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

It is important to realize that the First Amendment does not apply to private companies, including the media. It is not illegal for them to practice censorship. I never made a First Amendment argument against the *HuffPost*, for instance. However, under pressure from Washington, even in peacetime, media companies can do the government's dirty work to censor or limit free speech for the government.

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

Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Alphabet, Google's parent company, said on Nov. 18 that Google would "derank" articles from RT and Sputnik in the Google searches, making the stories harder for readers to find. The billionaire Schmidt claimed Russian information can be "repetitive, exploitative, false, [or] likely

to have been weaponized," he said. That is how factual news critical of U.S. corporate and political leadership is seen, as a weapon.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Likewise, as the U.S. government doesn't want to be openly seen shutting down RT

operations, it is working around the edges to accomplish that.

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

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

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

I commented on this development on RT America. It would also have been good to have the State Department’s Nuaert answer for this discrepancy about the claim that forced FARA registrations would not affect news gathering when it already has. My criticism of RT is that they should be interviewing U.S. decision-makers to hold them accountable, rather than mostly guests outside the power structure. Tse decision-makers could be called out on air if they refuse to appear.

Growing McCarthyite Attacks

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

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

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

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

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

This sort of smear is nothing more than a blatant attack on free speech by the most powerful military alliance in the world, based on the unfounded conviction that Russia is a fundamental force for evil and that anyone who has contacts with Russia or shares even a part of its multilateral world view is suspect.

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

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

professional ice hockey.

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

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

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

Russia-gate’s Hurdles

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

There may well be more indictments from Mueller, even perhaps a complaint about Trump committing obstruction of justice because he said on TV that he fired Comey, in part, because of the “Russia thing.” But Trump’s clumsy reaction to the “scandal,” which he calls “fake news” and a “witch hunt,” still is not proof that Putin and the Russians interfered in the U.S. election to achieve the unlikely outcome of Trump’s victory.

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

And, one of those conversations related to trying unsuccessfully to comply with

an Israeli request to get Russia to block a United Nations resolution censuring Israel's settlements on Palestinian land.

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

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

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

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

As for the vaguer concerns about some Russian group "probably" buying \$100,000 in ads, mostly after Americans had voted, as a factor in swaying a \$6 billion election, is too silly to contemplate. That *RT* and *Sputnik* ran pieces critical of Hillary Clinton was their right, and they were hardly alone. *RT* and *Sputnik*'s reach in the U.S. is minuscule compared to *Fox News*, which slammed Clinton throughout the campaign, or for that matter, *MSNBC*, *CNN* and other mainstream news outlets, which often expressed open disdain for Republican Donald Trump but also gave extensive coverage to issues such as the security concerns about Clinton's private email server.

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

earlier.

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

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

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

Cherry-picking Toward War with Iran

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

By Paul R. Pillar

Although nobody knows exactly where Donald Trump intends to go with his campaign of seeking confrontation with Iran, his administration already has provided disconcerting parallels with the techniques an earlier U.S. administration used in selling its launching of a war against Iraq. Among these techniques is the cherry-picking of intelligence not to inform policy-making or to enlighten the public but instead to inculcate false perceptions among the public and thereby to muster support for a policy already chosen.

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

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

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

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

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

More Cherry-picking

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

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

Imagine that, in a parallel universe that Donald Trump did not inhabit, the White House was sincerely trying to help the public understand whatever was the foreign policy problem at hand. The problem in this case is the Yemeni civil war, which originated with discontent among northern tribes about how their interests were treated by the central government. The education of the public would note that large-scale intervention led by Saudi Arabia – which has a long history of conflict with, and demographic and security concerns about, Yemen – turned the civil war into bigger carnage. An aerial assault by Saudi Arabia and its ally the United Arab Emirates, together with a Saudi-imposed blockade, has further turned Yemen into a humanitarian catastrophe.

Meanwhile, some Iranian assistance reportedly has gone from Iran to the principal northern tribe, known as the Houthis. By any reasonable account, the physical impact of any such aid is minor compared to the Saudi military

offensive. The lesson to the public might note that the Houthis have been among the staunchest adversaries of Al Qaeda's branch in Yemen. It might also note that the Houthis have been allied for most of the war with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who during more than three decades in power became known as America's man in Yemen.

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

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

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

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

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

The Trump administration is not the first to commit such misuse, but the misuse fits a pattern of how Trump has handled other government departments and

agencies. That pattern, featuring many fox-running-the-henhouse senior appointments, has been one of subverting rather than executing the mission of agencies.

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

Edward R. Murrow's Timeless Warnings

As the Russia-gate hysteria expands, it is coming to resemble the McCarthyism of the 1950s, except this time liberals and progressives are promoting the insidious "guilt by association," as Michael Milillo describes.

By Michael Milillo

Does the American government requiring "RT America" – a Russian news organization – to register as a foreign agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) constitute censorship by the government?

If registration in this context is NOT censorship as many latter-day "liberal" McCarthyites contend, then Americans should NOT be afraid to appear on "RT America" as commentators presenting their opinions which may be different from the current narratives that are being propagated by the mainstream media across the United States.

But Americans will be afraid to appear due to "Guilt by Association," which in its current form is being used to suggest that any Russian who happens to be attending the same social event as President Trump is therefore proof that Trump is a Russian collaborator. Thus, by extrapolation, "Guilt by Association" will be used to denounce any American who appears on "RT America" and presents a narrative that conflicts with the narrative being broadcast by the mainstream media.

The mainstream media will immediately indict that American commentator as a "Russian agent" – or at least that will be the reasonable fear – and thus other Americans will be prevented from listening to and/or reading these alternative opinions – and that amounts to censorship.

Some mainstream media outlets have already censored stories when the analyses

conflict with the current liberal narrative for what caused Hillary Clinton to lose to Donald Trump in the November 2016 elections. That narrative is that Hillary Clinton was defeated due to the Russian government hacking into the computer servers at the Democratic National Committee, i.e., “Russia-gate.”

Some liberal web sites now are censoring material that conflicts with this Russia-gate narrative. Case in point is an article written by HuffPost’s contributor Joe Lauria entitled [“On The Origins of Russia-gate.”](#)

One day after Lauria posted his article on the “HuffPost” web site, the “HuffPost” editorial staff deleted – censored – the article, citing supposed factual errors. However, the editors did not attempt to contact Lauria before the deletion or to discuss with Lauria what facts he used in his article that were deemed false or misleading. His real offense appears to have been that the story raised doubts about the current narrative accepting the certainty of Russian “meddling” in the 2016 election.

Although some have argued that “HuffPost” has the right to censor material published on its web site, the “HuffPost” readers should NOT be involved in that determination (without at least the author getting a chance to provide a defense). That is censorship by “Mob Rule.”

McCarthyite Blacklists

To further explain what censorship looks like, watch the [“70th Year Commemoration of the Hollywood Blacklist”](#) on C-Span. The commemoration cites the statements or the testimonies of the “Blacklisted” entertainers who appeared before the “House Un-American Activities Committee” [HUAC] in 1947.

If today’s liberals are infuriated by the 1947 proceedings of HUAC and the McCarthyism that challenged the patriotism of Americans, then these liberals should NOT be in favor of today’s censorship either. What HUAC and McCarthyism did was to make Americans fearful of being called “Un-American” just because their opinions or politics were different from what either HUAC or Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy said they should be.

Beyond that, Americans came to shun neighbors, fellow workers, and acquaintances – in order to protect themselves from ending up on the “Blacklist” – because you didn’t know who might be accused or might be pressured to make accusations, such as the case of director [Elia Kazan](#).

As “RT America” has been accused by the American government to “speak in the U.S. on behalf of a foreign government” – Russia, therefore “RT America” must register under FARA. But the BBC “speaks in the U.S. on behalf of a foreign government” – the United Kingdom. Then why hasn’t the American government

requested that the BBC register as well under NARA as "RT America" was forced to do under protest?

Is it because the BBC has accepted without question the dominant narratives of the U.S. mainstream media in the BBC's reporting of the news? Unlike the BBC, "RT America" has allowed alternative opinions to be heard by its audience rather than stringently following the mainstream media's narratives.

There are some liberals who argue that "RT America" is a tool used by the Russian government to disseminate Russian propaganda. But Americans who have appeared on "RT America" present their own alternative opinions, NOT the opinions of the Russian government.

If you think the U.S. government requiring "RT America" to register as a foreign agent is NOT censorship, then you have NOT heard of "The Case of Milo Radulovich." When Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy was looking for communists employed by the U.S. government, he supposedly found one such person in Milo Radulovich, a Lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve.

In 1953, Air Force regulation 35-62 stated, "A man may be regarded as a security risk if he has close and continuing associations with communists or people believed to have communist sympathies."

When Lieutenant Radulovich refused to resign from the Air Force as he did nothing wrong, a special Board "recommended that Radulovich be severed from the Air Force" despite the fact that the board never questioned the loyalty of Lieutenant Radulovich.

Radulovich was an easy target because his father "subscribed to several Serbian newspapers, one of which was classified as Communist by the US government." And as his sister supported liberal causes, she was declared to be a communist sympathizer.

With this "Guilt By Association" in mind, CBS correspondent Edward R. Murrow said, "We believe that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, even though that iniquity be proved, and in this case it was not."

As an archive of Edward R. Murrow's work noted, "Not only were the witch hunts affecting the military, Hollywood, government, and academia, this case proved that the average guy can be targeted."

Murrow's Lament

During the broadcast of "See It Now" on March 9, 1954 by CBS TV, Edward R. Murrow said: "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. We must remember

always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason, if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men – not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular.

“We can deny our heritage and our history, but we cannot escape responsibility for the result. There is no way for a citizen of a republic to abdicate his responsibilities. As a nation we have come into our full inheritance at a tender age. We proclaim ourselves, as indeed we are, the defenders of freedom, wherever it continues to exist in the world, but we cannot defend freedom abroad by deserting it at home.”

Putting what Murrow said into perspective as it relates to “RT America,” both the U.S. government and many liberals are now using the same tactic of “Guilt By Association” by insinuating that “RT America” is a Russian news organization and thus must be a puppet of the Russian government without providing any proof to support that accusation.

Murrow’s comment is just as relevant today as it was back in 1954. Perhaps even more so because liberals are supposed to be the good guys.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Russia-gate Breeds Establishment McCarthyism.”](#)]

Michael Milillo, who lives in Pennsylvania, is a retiree with a background in accounting and finance.
