

# Obama Admits Gap in Russian 'Hack' Case

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

By Ray McGovern

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

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

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

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

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

Note the disconnect between the confidence about hacking and the stark declarative sentence about the information ending up at WikiLeaks. Obama does

not bridge the gap because to do so would represent a bald-faced lie, which some honest intelligence officer might call him on. So, he simply presents the two sides of the chasm – implies a connection – but leaves it to the listener to make the leap.

### **WikiLeaks Account**

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

Former U.K. Ambassador Craig Murray, a close associate of Assange, has made clear that the two separate batches of Democratic emails – one from the DNC and the other from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta – also were leaks from insiders, not hacks from outsiders.

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

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

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

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

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## How the NYT Plays with History

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

By Robert Parry

Whenever The New York Times or some other mainstream news outlet holds itself out as a paragon of professional journalism – by wagging a finger at some pro-Trump “fake news” or some Internet “conspiracy theory” – I cringe at the self-delusion and hypocrisy.

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

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

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

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

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

Then, if the evidence finally becomes so overwhelming that continued denials are

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

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

As the years went on and the case of Nixon's guilt grew stronger and stronger, the story still never managed to cross the threshold for the Big Media to take it seriously.

### **Definitive Evidence**

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

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

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

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

"President Lyndon Baines Johnson announced a halt to bombing of North Vietnam, based on his claim that peace talks had 'entered a new and a very much more hopeful phase,' and he invited the government of South Vietnam and the Viet Cong

to take part in negotiations. Raising hopes that the war might end soon, the announcement appeared to bolster the standing in the polls of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, the Democratic presidential nominee, but Humphrey still fell short in the election against former Vice President Richard M. Nixon, the Republican.”

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

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

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

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

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

### **Monkey Wrench It**

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

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

Though Farrell’s discovery is certainly newsworthy, its greatest significance

may be that it has served as a tipping point that finally has forced the Times and the mainstream media to move past their longstanding dismissals of this “conspiracy theory.”

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

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

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

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

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

## **A Reprise**

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

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

“conspiracy theory.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As these longstanding cover-ups slowly crack and begin to crumble, the serious

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

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

### **Contra-Cocaine Scandal**

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

### **Lies as Truth**

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

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

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

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

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

The end result, however, is to push more and more Americans into a state of confusion regarding what to believe. While some citizens may seek out honest

independent journalism to get what they're missing, others will surely fall prey to fake news and conspiracy theories.

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

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## It's Not About Trump, But Us

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

By John Pilger

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

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

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

"A writer," the journalist Martha Gellhorn told the second congress, "must be a man of action now . . . A man who has given a year of his life to steel strikes, or to the unemployed, or to the problems of racial prejudice, has not lost or wasted time. He is a man who has known where he belonged. If you should survive

such action, what you have to say about it afterwards is the truth, is necessary and real, and it will last.”

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

### **Clinton’s Contempt**

Today, false symbolism is all. “Identity” is all. In 2016, Hillary Clinton stigmatized millions of voters as “a basket of deplorables, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it.” Her abuse was handed out at an LGBT rally as part of her cynical campaign to win over minorities by abusing a white, mostly working-class, majority. Divide and rule, this is called; or identity politics in which race and gender conceal class, and allow the waging of class war. Trump understood this.

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

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

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

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

The sycophancy ran like a polluted babbling brook through page after page. “He was a vulnerable figure in many ways ... But the grace. The all-encompassing

grace: in manner and form, in argument and intellect, with humour and cool ...[He] is a blazing tribute to what has been, and what can be again ... He seems ready to keep fighting, and remains a formidable champion to have on our side ... The grace ... the almost surreal levels of grace ...”

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

### **Idolizing Obama**

None of them, however, could surpass the American writer, Ta-Nehisi Coates, the recipient of a “genius” grant worth \$625,000 from a liberal foundation. In an interminable essay for The Atlantic entitled, “My President Was Black,” Coates brought new meaning to prostration. The final “chapter,” entitled “When You Left, You Took All of Me With You,” a line from a Marvin Gaye song, describes seeing the Obamas “rising out of the limo, rising up from fear, smiling, waving, defying despair, defying history, defying gravity.” The Ascension, no less.

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

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

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

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

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

system ... it was the daily press and the radio that were the most important weapons.”

## **Destroying Libya**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cold War – having promised, in an emotional speech in Prague, to “help rid the world of nuclear weapons”.

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

### **A Smooth Operator**

Following the public relations disaster of George W. Bush, Obama, the smooth operator from Chicago via Harvard, was enlisted to restore what he calls “leadership” throughout the world. The Nobel Prize committee's decision was part of this: the kind of cloying reverse racism that beatified the man for no reason other than he was attractive to liberal sensibilities and, of course, American power, if not to the children he kills in impoverished, mostly Muslim countries.

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

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

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

Robinson points out that “whether in its 20th or its emerging 21st century variants, fascism is, above all, a response to deep structural crises of capitalism, such as that of the 1930s and the one that began with the financial meltdown in 2008 ... There is a near-straight line here from Obama to Trump ... The liberal elite's refusal to challenge the rapaciousness of transnational capital

and its brand of identity politics served to eclipse the language of the working and popular classes ... pushing white workers into an 'identity' of white nationalism and helping the neo-fascists to organise them"..

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

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

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

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

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

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## A Demand for Russian 'Hacking' Proof

More than 20 U.S. intelligence, military and diplomatic veterans are calling on President Obama to release the evidence backing up allegations that Russia aided the Trump campaign – or admit that the proof is lacking.

MEMORANDUM FOR: President Barack Obama

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: A Key Issue That Still Needs to be Resolved

As President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take the oath of office Friday, a pall hangs over his upcoming presidency amid an unprecedentedly concerted campaign to delegitimize it. Unconfirmed accusations continue to swirl alleging that Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized "Russian hacking" that helped put Mr. Trump in the White House.

As President for a few more days, you have the power to demand concrete evidence of a link between the Russians and WikiLeaks, which published the bulk of the information in question. Lacking that evidence, the American people should be told that there is no fire under the smoke and mirrors of recent weeks.

We urge you to authorize public release of any tangible evidence that takes us beyond the unsubstantiated, "we-assess" judgments by the intelligence agencies. Otherwise, we – as well as other skeptical Americans – will be left with the corrosive suspicion that the intense campaign of accusations is part of a wider attempt to discredit the Russians and those – like Mr. Trump – who wish to deal constructively with them.

### **Remember the Maine?**

Alleged Russian interference has been labeled "an act of war" and Mr. Trump a "traitor." But the "intelligence" served up to support those charges does not pass the smell test. Your press conference on Wednesday will give you a chance to respond more persuasively to NBC's Peter Alexander's challenge at the last one (on Dec. 16) "to show the proof [and], as they say, put your money where your mouth is and declassify some of the intelligence. ..."

You told Alexander you were reluctant to "compromise sources and methods." We can understand that concern better than most Americans. We would remind you, though, that at critical junctures in the past, your predecessors made judicious decisions to give higher priority to buttressing the credibility of U.S. intelligence-based policy than to protecting sources and methods. With the Kremlin widely accused by politicians and pundits of "an act of war," this is the kind of textbook case in which you might seriously consider taking special pains to substantiate serious allegations with hard intelligence – if there is any.

During the Cuban missile crisis, for instance, President Kennedy ordered us to show highly classified photos of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba and on ships en



route, even though this blew sensitive detail regarding the imagery intelligence capabilities of the cameras on our U-2 aircraft.

President Ronald Reagan's reaction to the Libyan terrorist bombing of La Belle Disco in Berlin on April 5, 1986, that killed two and injured 79 other U.S. servicemen is another case in point. We had intercepted a Libyan message that morning: "At 1:30 in the morning one of the acts was carried out with success, without leaving a trace behind." (We should add here that NSA's dragnet SIGINT capability 30 years later renders it virtually impossible to avoid "leaving a trace behind" once a message is put on the network.)

President Reagan ordered the U.S. Air Force to bomb Col. Muammar Qaddafi's palace compound to smithereens, killing several civilians. Amid widespread international consternation and demands for proof that Libya was responsible for the Berlin attack, President Reagan ordered us to make public the encrypted Libyan message, thereby sacrificing a collection/decryption capability unknown to the Libyans – until then.

As senior CIA veteran Milton Bearden has put it, there are occasions when more damage is done by "protecting" sources and methods than by revealing them.

### **Where's the Beef?**

We find the New York Times- and Washington Post-led media Blitz against Trump and Putin truly extraordinary, despite our long experience with intelligence/media related issues. On Jan. 6, the day after your top intelligence officials published what we found to be an embarrassingly shoddy report purporting to prove Russian hacking in support of Trump's candidacy, the Times banner headline across all six columns on page 1 read: **"PUTIN LED SCHEME TO AID TRUMP, REPORT SAYS."**

The lead article began: "President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia directed a vast cyberattack aimed at denying Hillary Clinton the presidency and installing Donald J. Trump in the Oval Office, the nation's top intelligence agencies said in an extraordinary report they delivered on Friday to Mr. Trump." Eschewing all subtlety, the Times added that the revelations in "this damning report ... undermined the legitimacy" of the President-elect, and "made the case that Mr. Trump was the favored candidate of Mr. Putin."

On page A10, however, Times investigative reporter Scott Shane pointed out: "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. That is a significant omission."

Shane continued, "Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to

'trust us.' There is no discussion of the forensics used to recognize the handiwork of known hacking groups, no mention of intercepted communications between the Kremlin and the hackers, no hint of spies reporting from inside Moscow's propaganda machinery."

Shane added that the intelligence report "offers an obvious reason for leaving out the details, declaring that including 'the precise bases for its assessments' would 'reveal sensitive sources and methods and imperil the ability to collect critical foreign intelligence in the future.'"

Shane added a quote from former National Security Agency lawyer Susan Hennessey: "The unclassified report is underwhelming at best. There is essentially no new information for those who have been paying attention." Ms. Hennessey served as an attorney in NSA's Office of General Counsel and is now a Brookings Fellow in National Security Law.

### **Everyone Hacks**

There is a lot of ambiguity – whether calculated or not – about "Russian hacking." "Everyone knows that everyone hacks," says everyone: Russia hacks; China hacks; every nation that can hacks. So do individuals of various nationalities. This is not the question.

You said at your press conference on Dec. 16 "the intelligence that I have seen gives me great confidence in their [U.S. intelligence agencies'] assessment that the Russians carried out this hack." "Which hack?" you were asked. "The hack of the DNC and the hack of John Podesta," you answered.

Earlier during the press conference you alluded to the fact that "the information was in the hands of WikiLeaks." The key question is how the material from "Russian hacking" got to WikiLeaks, because it was WikiLeaks that published the DNC and Podesta emails.

Our VIPS colleague William Binney, who was Technical Director of NSA and created many of the collection systems still in use, assures us that NSA's "cast-iron" coverage – particularly surrounding Julian Assange and other people associated with WikiLeaks – would almost certainly have yielded a record of any electronic transfer from Russia to WikiLeaks. Binney has used some of the highly classified slides released by Edward Snowden to demonstrate precisely how NSA accomplishes this using trace mechanisms embedded throughout the network. [See: "[U.S. Intel Vets Dispute Russia Hacking Claims](#)," Dec. 12, 2016.]

### **NSA Must Come Clean**

We strongly suggest that you ask NSA for any evidence it may have indicating

that the results of Russian hacking were given to WikiLeaks. If NSA can produce such evidence, you may wish to order whatever declassification may be needed and then release the evidence. This would go a long way toward allaying suspicions that no evidence exists. If NSA cannot give you that information – and quickly – this would probably mean it does not have any.

In all candor, the checkered record of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper for trustworthiness makes us much less confident that anyone should take it on faith that he is more “trustworthy than the Russians,” as you suggested on Dec. 16. You will probably recall that Clapper lied under oath to the Senate Intelligence Committee on March 12, 2013, about NSA dragnet activities; later apologizing for testimony he admitted had been “clearly erroneous.” In our Memorandum for you on Dec. 11, 2013, we cited chapter and verse as to why Clapper should have been fired for saying things he knew to be “clearly erroneous.”

In that Memorandum, we endorsed the demand by Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner that Clapper be removed. “Lying to Congress is a federal offense, and Clapper ought to be fired and prosecuted for it,” said Sensenbrenner in an interview with The Hill. “The only way laws are effective is if they’re enforced.”

Actually, we have had trouble understanding why, almost four years after he deliberately misled the Senate, Clapper remains Director of National Intelligence – overseeing the entire intelligence community.

### **Hacks or Leaks?**

Not mentioned until now is our conclusion that leaks are the source of the WikiLeaks disclosures in question – not hacking. Leaks normally leave no electronic trace. William Binney has been emphasizing this for several months and suggesting strongly that the disclosures were from a leaker with physical access to the information – not a hacker with only remote access.

This, of course, makes it even harder to pin the blame on President Putin, or anyone else. And we suspect that this explains why NSA demurred when asked to join the CIA and FBI in expressing “high confidence” in this key judgment of the report put out under Clapper’s auspices on Jan. 6, yielding this curious formulation:

**“We also assess Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump’s election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him.** All three agencies agree with this judgment. CIA and FBI have high confidence in this judgment; NSA has moderate confidence.” (Emphasis, and lack of emphasis, in original)

In addition, former U.K. Ambassador Craig Murray has said publicly he has first-hand information on the provenance of the leaks, and has expressed surprise that no one from the New York Times or the Washington Post has tried to get in touch with him. We would be interested in knowing whether anyone from your administration, including the intelligence community, has made any effort to contact Ambassador Murray.

### **What to Do**

President-elect Trump said a few days ago that his team will have a “full report on hacking within 90 days.” Whatever the findings of the Trump team turn out to be, they will no doubt be greeted with due skepticism, since Mr. Trump is in no way a disinterested party.

You, on the other hand, enjoy far more credibility – AND power – for the next few days. And we assume you would not wish to hobble your successor with charges that cannot withstand close scrutiny. We suggest you order the chiefs of the NSA, FBI and CIA to the White House and ask them to lay all their cards on the table. They need to show you why you should continue to place credence in what, a month ago, you described as “uniform intelligence assessments” about Russian hacking.

At that point, if the intelligence heads have credible evidence, you have the option of ordering it released – even at the risk of damage to sources and methods. For what it may be worth, we will not be shocked if it turns out that they can do no better than the evidence-deprived assessments they have served up in recent weeks. In that case, we would urge you, in all fairness, to let the American people in on the dearth of convincing evidence before you leave office.

As you will have gathered by now, we strongly suspect that the evidence your intelligence chiefs have of a joint **Russian-hacking-WikiLeaks-publishing** operation is no better than the “intelligence” evidence in 2002-2003 – expressed then with comparable flat-fact “certitude” – of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

### **Obama’s Legacy**

Mr. President, there is much talk in your final days in office about your legacy. Will part of that legacy be that you stood by while flames of illegitimacy rose willy-nilly around your successor? Or will you use your power to reveal the information – or the fact that there are merely unsupported allegations – that would enable us to deal with them responsibly?

In the immediate wake of the holiday on which we mark the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it seems appropriate to make reference to his legacy, calling

to mind the graphic words in his "Letter From the Birmingham City Jail," with which he reminds us of our common duty to expose lies and injustice:

*"Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up, but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured."*

*For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)*

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Marshall Carter-Tripp, Foreign Service Officer (ret) and former Office Director in the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research

Thomas Drake, former Senior Executive, NSA

Bogdan Dzakovic, Former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security, (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Mike Gravel, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC, Iraq & Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry Johnson, former CIA Intelligence Officer & former State Department Counter-Terrorism Official, ret.

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF (Ret.); ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC)

Brady Kiesling, former U.S. Foreign Service Officer, ret. (Associate VIPS),

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former Senior Investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Karen Kwiatkowski, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

Linda Lewis, WMD preparedness policy analyst, USDA (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Middle East, CIA (ret.)

Scott Ritter, former MAJ., USMC, former UN Weapon Inspector, Iraq

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Peter Van Buren, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.)

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, U.S. Army Reserve Colonel (ret) and former U.S. Diplomat

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## Trump's Remaking of US Foreign Policy

President-elect Trump is outlining a foreign policy that rejects the interventionist tenets of Washington's neocon/liberal-hawk establishment and puts U.S.-Russia nuclear arms control at the top of his agenda, writes Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Over the weekend, President-elect Trump received two journalists from mainstream European print media – *The Times of London* and the German magazine *Bild* – for a joint interview in New York City's Trump Tower. The event was videotaped and we are seeing some remarkable sound bites, particularly those of interest to the British and German publics.

For the government of British Prime Minister Theresa May, nothing could have sounded sweeter than Donald Trump's statement that she would be invited for talks in the White House shortly after he is sworn in on Jan. 20 and that he seeks very quickly to reach agreement on a bilateral free trade pact. The effect of the pledge itself, even ahead of its successful implementation, assures the

British that the sting of severing ties with the European Union will be greatly offset by new commercial possibilities in the world's biggest economy; in this way, it strengthens May's hand enormously as she enters into talks with the E.U. leadership over the detailed terms of what will apparently be a "Hard Brexit."

Further adding to her leverage with the E.U. were Trump's remarks suggesting that the E.U. will face stern trade pressure, beginning with Germany and its automobile industry, to do more to manufacture in the U.S. That precisely raises the relative importance of the U.K. market, which the E.U. will otherwise lose if it imposes severe penalties on Britain in negotiations over Brexit.

For the general public's consumption, Donald Trump used the interview to explain his special affection for Britain, speaking about his Scottish mother's delight in the Queen and her watching every royal event on television for its unequaled pageantry. But we may expect that Prime Minister May will find there is a bill to pay for the "special relationship" with the U.S. under President Trump.

Rather than the British media's early speculation that Prime Minister May would be the one to set the misguided Trump straight about the nefarious Vladimir Putin, she may now have to become a leading European advocate for détente with Russia at Trump's behest. In this connection, British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson's advice to Congress during his visit to Washington last week that Official Washington "stop demonizing Putin" may well have been a straw in the wind.

For the Germans, Trump also offered a bit of flattery, saying how much he respected their Chancellor Angela Merkel. However, as he went on, he virtually flattened the Iron Lady's reputation by calling her open-door policy of admitting migrants into Germany and the E.U. a catastrophe. He noted that Merkel's controversial position had swayed the election results in Britain on Brexit and may lead to the departure of other countries from the E.U. Given his staff's consultation with Marine Le Pen, a visiting French candidate for the presidency from the right-wing Front National, Trump's list surely includes France.

Finally, among the sound bites that will be featured in media coverage of the interview, we hear Donald Trump describe NATO as an outdated organization that needs overhaul. However, apart from his reiterated insistence that Member States must pay their fair share, which he claims only Britain and four others from the 28 Member States are currently doing, the interview offers no specifics on what kind structural change, if any, he seeks for NATO. We only hear that NATO has not been prepared to deal with the threat of international terrorism.

## **Views on Russia**

But it was in another area, Trump's remarks on Russia and the terms he named for possibly lifting sanctions, that we find convincing proof that the President-elect's approach to foreign affairs is not just the sum of isolated tactical considerations but a complete reinvention of the guiding principles of U.S. foreign policy. What we are witnessing is a shift to a new strategic, geopolitical paradigm.

In the past couple of decades, going back to the second term of President Bill Clinton, the ideology of neoconservatism with its stress on "democracy promotion" as being the whole of national interest, dictated policy decisions that amounted to the tail wagging the dog. The Baltic States were admitted into NATO in its 2004 enlargement *because they wanted it*. The decision to station U.S., German and other NATO brigades in Poland and other states along the Russian border taken last July in Warsaw and implemented, in the case of Poland, by U.S. forces in the past several days, was justified by *the anxiety of these countries* over the possibility of Russian aggression, even though NATO's action has been highly provocative vis-à-vis Russia and brought the major nuclear powers ever closer to direct confrontation.

In the interview, Trump changed entirely the metrics by which sanctions on Russia would be lifted. Instead of fulfillment of the Minsk Accords over Ukraine's ethnic Russian Donbas region – which nationalist hardliners in Kiev had the power to block – Trump conditioned the relaxation of sanctions on progress in curbing the nuclear arms race and moving toward significant nuclear disarmament, issues that are fully within the power of the Kremlin to implement.

To be sure, these issues today are more complex than they were in the heyday of disarmament talks. The recent obstacles include the U.S. anti-ballistic missile installations in Poland and Romania, the forward stationing of NATO human and materiel resources in the former Warsaw Pact countries, and the standing invitations to Ukraine and Georgia to enter NATO. So any negotiations between Washington and Moscow will be very complex.

But Trump's statement shows that he is focused on the big picture, on the triangular relationship between Washington, Moscow and Beijing that he believes to be of vital importance in keeping the peace globally, rather than on some amorphous reliance on expanding democracy globally on the unproven assumption that democracies among themselves are peace-loving.

These elements in Donald Trump's thinking, quite unexpected in a businessman, bring him very close to the Realism of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, while his setting nuclear disarmament as a key goal, aligns him with Ronald Reagan and – strange to say – with Barack Obama at the very start of his presidency.



If Donald Trump can stave off the jackals from the Western mainstream media and the U.S. foreign policy establishment – a combination that has formed a snarling circle around him even before he takes office – he may have a chance to make historic changes in international relations toward a more peaceful world.

**Gilbert Doctorow is the European Coordinator of The American Committee for East West Accord Ltd. His latest book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015.**

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## Donald Trump v. the Spooks

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

By Annie Machon

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

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

In the opposite corner, Trump’s opponents have pushed the CIA into the ring to deliver the knock-out blow, but this has yet to land. Despite jab after jab, Trump keeps evading the blows and comes rattling back against all odds. One has to admire the guy’s footwork.

So who are the opponents ranged behind the CIA, yelling encouragement through the ropes? The obvious culprits include the U.S. military-industrial complex, whose corporate bottom line relies on an era of unending war. As justification for extracting billions – even trillions – of dollars from American taxpayers, there was a need for frightening villains, such as Al Qaeda and even more so,

the head choppers of ISIS. However, since the Russian intervention in Syria in 2015, those villains no longer packed as scary a punch, so a more enduring villain, like Emmanuel Goldstein, the principal enemy of the state in George Orwell's *1984*, was required. Russia was the obvious new choice, the old favorite from the Cold War playbook.

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

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

### **Two-Party Sham**

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

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

Whether that was indeed the case, the CIA has certainly held back no punches since Trump's election. First the evidence-lite assertion that it was the Russians who hacked the DNC emails and leaked them to WikiLeaks: then the fake news about Russia hacking the voting computers; that then morphed into the Russians "hacked the election" itself; then they "hacked" into the U.S. electric grid via a Vermont utility. All this without a shred of fact-based evidence provided, but Obama's expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats last month solidified this dubious reality in Americans' minds.

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

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

### **The Role of MI6**

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

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

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

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

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

The spies are not there to fake intelligence to suit the agenda of a particular

regime, as happened in the run-up to the illegal Iraq War, nor are they there to endemically spy on their own populations (and the rest of the world, as we know post-Snowden) in a pointless hunt for subversive activity, which often translates into legitimate political activism and acts of individual expression).

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

### **Chances for Peace**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# America's Self-Destructive Obsessions

The U.S. population is led from one hysteria to the next, now transitioning from the Global War on Terror to the New Cold War with Russia, a fearful madness that is infecting the collective psyche, says Michael Brenner.

By Michael Brenner

Captain Ahab's obsessive hunt for Moby Dick was driven by the thirst for revenge. The great white whale had maimed Ahab – in soul as well as body. Ahab was consumed by the passion to restore his sense of self, and make himself whole again, by killing his nemesis – a compulsion that his wooden leg never lets weaken.

America's "war-on-terror" has become our national mission for restoration. The psychic wound of 9/11 is what grieves us; it inflames our collective passion for vengeance. The physical wound is already healed. By now, it must be memorialized in order for the scar to be seen. It never did impair our functioning. In that sense, little more than a broken toe.

In the aftermath of 9/11, there was genuine fear of a repeat attack – something that we now know never was in the cards. Our enemy has been emasculated; the great Satan was shot dead in Abbottabad. Only pinpricks at long intervals from within our midst draw blood.

Catharsis has eluded us, though. We still seethe with emotions. We suffer from the embedded anxiety that is dread, from uneasy feelings of vulnerability, from a seeming lost prowess and control. A society that talks casually about "closure" on almost all occasions cannot find closure on 9/11. Instead, the society has a powerful need to ritualize the fear, to pursue the implacable quest for ultimate security, to perform violent acts of vengeance that neither cure nor satiate.

So, we search the seven seas hunting for monsters to slay; not Moby Dick himself, but his accessories, accomplices, enablers, facilitators, emulators, sympathizers. Whales of every species, great and small, fall to our harpoons. The dead and innocent dolphins far outnumber even the smallest of whales. Fortunes of war.

Since there is no actual Moby Dick out there to pursue, we have fashioned a virtual game of acting out the hunt, the encounter, the retribution. We thereby have embraced the post-9/11 trauma rather than exorcised it. That is the "war-on-terror." That war is about *us* – it no longer is about *them*.

Ahab destroyed himself, destroyed his crew, destroyed his ship. He sacrificed all in the quest – a quest for the unattainable. The United States is sacrificing its principles of liberty, its political integrity, the trust that is the bedrock of its democracy, its standing in the world as the “best hope of mankind,” and its capacity to feel for others – including its fellow citizens. America’s Moby Dick has migrated and transmuted itself. It now is lodged in our innermost being.

There, it spawns fictive offspring, such as Vladimir Putin. But the **phantasmagoric** Putin is but the projection of our own existential dread. The spectral persona who haunts our minds, “Putin” has no objective existence. “Putin” is the creation of our troubled national psyche. We have transposed onto him the whole maelstrom of turbid emotions we had imparted to Osama bin-Laden, and then the Islamic State.

To be rid of America’s transmuted Moby Dick we must kill part of our tainted being – a form of psycho-political chemotherapy. Otherwise, our national soul will wither away just as Ahab was sucked into the ocean depths entangled in the very ropes he had fashioned to ensnare Moby Dick.

**Michael Brenner is a professor of international affairs at the University of Pittsburgh. [mbren@pitt.edu](mailto:mbren@pitt.edu)**

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## The Scheme to Take Down Trump

**Exclusive:** The U.S. intelligence community’s unprecedented assault on an incoming U.S. president – now including spreading salacious rumors – raises questions about how long Donald Trump can hold the White House, says Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

Is a military coup in the works? Or are U.S. intelligence agencies laying the political groundwork for forcing Donald Trump from the presidency because they can’t abide his rejection of a new cold war with Russia? Not long ago, even asking such questions would have marked one as the sort of paranoid nut who believes that [lizard people run the government](#). But no longer.

Thanks to the now-notorious 35-page dossier concerning Donald Trump’s alleged sexual improprieties in a Moscow luxury hotel, it’s clear that strange maneuverings are underway in Washington and that no one is quite sure how they

will end.

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper added to the mystery Wednesday evening by releasing a 200-word statement to the effect that he was shocked, shocked, that the dossier had found its way into the press. Such leaks, the statement said, “are extremely corrosive and damaging to our national security.”

Clapper added: “that this document is not a US Intelligence Community product and that I do not believe the leaks came from within the IC. The IC has not made any judgment that the information in this document is reliable, and we did not rely upon it in any way for our conclusions. However, part of our obligation is to ensure that policymakers are provided with the fullest possible picture of any matters that might affect national security.”

Rather than vouching for the dossier’s contents, in other words, all Clapper says he did was inform Trump that it was making the rounds in Washington and that he should know what it said – and that he thus couldn’t have been more horrified than when *Buzzfeed* posted all 35 pages on its website.

But it doesn’t make sense. As *The New York Times* noted, “putting the summary in a report that went to multiple people in Congress and the executive branch made it *very likely that it would be leaked*” (emphasis in the original). So even if the “intelligence community” didn’t leak the dossier itself, it distributed it knowing that someone else would.

Then there is the *Guardian*, second to none in its loathing for Trump and Vladimir Putin and hence intent on giving the dossier the best possible spin. It printed a quasi-defense not of the memo itself but of the man who wrote it: Christopher Steele, an ex-MI6 officer who now heads his own private intelligence firm. “A sober, cautious and meticulous professional with a formidable record” is how the *Guardian* described him. Then it quoted an unnamed ex-Foreign Office official on the subject of Steele’s credibility:

“The idea his work is fake or a cowboy operation is false, completely untrue. Chris is an experienced and highly regarded professional. He’s not the sort of person who will simply pass on gossip. ... If he puts something in a report, he believes there’s sufficient credibility in it for it to be worth considering. Chris is a very straight guy. He could not have survived in the job he was in if he had been prone to flights of fancy or doing things in an ill-considered way.”

In other words, Steele is a straight-shooter, so it’s worth paying attention to what he has to say. Or so the *Guardian* assures us. “That is the way the CIA and the FBI, not to mention the British government, regarded him, too,” it adds, so presumably Clapper felt the same way.

## What is Afoot?

So what does it all mean? Simply that U.S. intelligence agencies believed that the dossier came from a reliable source and that, as a consequence, there was a significant possibility that Trump was a “Siberian candidate,” as *Times* columnist Paul Krugman once described him. They therefore sent out multiple copies of a two-page summary on the assumption that at least one would find its way to the press.

Even if Clapper & Co. took no position concerning the dossier’s contents, they knew that preparing and distributing such a summary amounted to a tacit endorsement. They also knew, presumably, that it would provide editors with an excuse to go public. If the CIA, FBI, and National Security Agency feel that Steele’s findings are worthy of attention, then why shouldn’t the average reader have an opportunity to examine them as well?

How did Clapper expect Trump to respond when presented with allegations that he was vulnerable to Russian blackmail and potentially under the Kremlin’s thumb? Did he expect him to hang his head in shame, break into great racking sobs, and admit that it was all true? If so, did Clapper \then plan to place a comforting hand on Trump’s shoulder and suggest, gently but firmly, that it was time to step aside and allow a trusted insider like Mike Pence to take the reins?

Based on the *sturm und drang* of the last few days, the answer is very possibly yes. If so, the gambit failed when Trump, in his usual high-voltage manner, denounced the dossier as “fake news” and sailed into the intelligence agencies for behaving like something out of “Nazi Germany.” The intelligence community’s hopes, if that’s what they were, were dashed.

All of which is thoroughly unprecedented by American political standards. After all, this is a country that takes endless pride in the peaceful transfer of power every four years or so. Yet here was the intelligence community attempting to short-circuit the process by engineering Trump’s removal before he even took office.

But the *Guardian* then upped the ante even more by suggesting that the CIA continue with the struggle. Plainly, the Republican congressional leadership has “no appetite” for an inquiry into Steele’s findings, the paper’s New York correspondent, Ed Pilkington, wrote, adding:

“That leaves the intelligence agencies. The danger for Trump here is that he has so alienated senior officials, not least by likening them to Nazis, that he has hardly earned their loyalty.”



What was the *Guardian* suggesting – that *disloyal* intelligence agents keep on searching regardless? And what if they come up with what they claim is a smoking gun?

Explained Pilkington: “To take a flight of fancy, what if it [i.e. Steele’s findings] were substantiated? That would again come down to a question of politics. No US president has ever been forced out of office by impeachment (Richard Nixon resigned before the vote; Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton were acquitted by the Senate). Any such procedure would have to be prepared and approved by a majority of the House of Representatives, and then passed to the Senate for a two-thirds majority vote. As the Republicans hold the reins in both chambers, it would take an almighty severing of ties between Trump and his own party to even get close to such a place.”

It’s a long shot, but the *Guardian*’s recommendation is that rogue agents keep on digging until they strike pay dirt, at which point they should go straight to Congress and persuade – if not pressure – the Republican leadership to initiate the process of throwing Trump out of office.

This is not the same as sending an armored column to attack Capitol Hill, but it’s close. Essentially, the *Guardian* was calling on the intelligence agencies to assume ultimate responsibility regarding who can sit in the Oval Office and who cannot.

### **A Desperate Establishment**

All of which demonstrates how desperate the military-intelligence complex has grown after Clapper’s report on alleged Russian hacking of Democratic emails met with such a derisory reception following its publication on Jan. 6. Even the *Times* admitted that it provided “no new evidence to support assertions that Moscow meddled covertly through hacking and other actions” while the *Daily Beast* said it was “unlikely to convince a single skeptic” due to a notable absence of anything by way of back-up data.

The Steele dossier was supposed to take up the slack. Yet it has fallen short as well. It asserts, for example, that Trump attorney Michael Cohen traveled to Prague to discuss hacking with a Russian official named Oleg Solodukhin, a claim that both men have since denied. It misspells the name of a major Russian bank and gets its Russian geography wrong too.

As Owen Matthews points out in a very smart article in *Newsweek*, it “seems to be under the impression that the suburb of Barvikha on the tony Rublevskoe highway is a closed government compound, instead of just an expensive vacation home area favored by the new rich.”

The dossier misspells the name of an Azeri real-estate mogul named Aras Agalarov and “reports his association with Trump as news in August 2016 – when Agalarov publicly organized Trump’s visit to the Miss Universe pageant in 2013 and arranged a meeting with top Russian businessmen for Trump afterward, both of which were widely reported at the time.”

Other aspects of the dossier don’t add up either. It reports that the Russian government “has been cultivating, supporting and assisting Trump for at least five years” in order to “encourage splits and divisions in the Western alliance.” But as Matthews points out, Trump wasn’t in politics five years ago and was considered a long shot for months after entering the presidential race in mid-2015. So how could the Kremlin be sure that their man would ultimately prevail?

The dossier says that Trump “accepted a regular flow of intelligence from the Kremlin, including on Democratic and other political rivals.” But Trump gave no hint of having inside information when he called for “Crooked Hillary” to be locked up for purging her email files; to the contrary, he did so on the basis of information available on every front page. The memo says that the Russians also had “compromising material” on Clinton. If so, then why wasn’t it used?

### **Hearsay Evidence**

The discrepancies go on. But this is what one would expect of a document based entirely of hearsay in which Source A claims to have gotten a juicy tidbit from Source B, who heard it from Source C deep inside the Kremlin.

Grasping at straws, the *Guardian*’s Ed Pilkington conceded that no news agency has been able to verify the dossier’s findings. But, he said, they are “unlikely to be discarded as quickly or as conclusively as Trump would like” for the simple reason that “the flip side of information that cannot be classed reliable is that neither can it be classed unreliable.”

But the same could be said for information that someone got from a friend whose brother-in-law heard from a park ranger that Barack and Michelle like to while away their evenings snorting cocaine. It can’t be classed as reliable because no one can verify that it’s true. But it can’t be classed as unreliable because no one can prove that it’s wrong. So maybe the best thing to do is to impeach Obama in the few days he has remaining just to be sure.

This not to say that the so-called President-elect’s legitimacy is not open to question. To the contrary, it is questionable in the extreme given that he lost the popular election by more than 2.86 million votes. In a democratic country, this should count for something. But the intelligence community is not attacking

him on democratic grounds, needless to say, but on imperial.

Trump is a rightwing blowhard whose absurd babblings about Saudi Arabia, Iran and Yemen reveal a man who is dangerously ignorant about how the world works. But he has managed to seize on one or two semi-good ideas over the years. One is that Obama administration's confrontational policies toward Russia are a recipe for disaster, while another is that toppling Syria's Bashar al-Assad with Al Qaeda and ISIS still up and about will only hasten their march on Damascus.

Both views are perfectly sensible. But because Washington's endlessly bellicose foreign-policy establishment is wedded to the opposite, it sees them as high treason.

This is very serious. U.S. foreign policy has been marked by a high degree of continuity since World War II as Republican and Democratic presidents alike pledged to uphold the imperial agenda. But Trump, as radical in his way as William Jennings Bryan was in 1896 or Henry A. Wallace in 1948, is bucking the consensus to an unprecedented degree.

Even though its policies have led to disaster after disaster, the foreign-policy establishment is aghast. Consequently, it is frantically searching for a way to prevent him from carrying his ideas out. The intelligence agencies appear to be running out of time with the inauguration only a few days away. But that doesn't mean they're giving up. All it means, rather, is that they'll go deeper underground. Trump may enter the White House on Jan. 20. But the big question is how long he'll remain.

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

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## Mainstream Media's Russian Bogeymen

**Exclusive:** The mainstream hysteria over Russia has led to dubious or downright false stories that have deepened the New Cold War, as Gareth Porter notes regarding last month's bogus tale of a hack into the U.S. electric grid.

By Gareth Porter

In the middle of a major domestic crisis over the U.S. charge that Russia had interfered with the U.S. election, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) triggered a brief national media hysteria by creating and spreading a bogus

story of Russian hacking into U.S. power infrastructure.

DHS had initiated the now-discredited tale of a hacked computer at the Burlington, Vermont Electricity Department by sending the utility's managers misleading and alarming information, then leaked a story they certainly knew to be false and continued to put out a misleading line to the media.

Even more shocking, however, DHS had previously circulated a similar bogus story of Russian hacking of a Springfield, Illinois water pump in November 2011.

The story of how DHS twice circulated false stories of Russian efforts to sabotage U.S. "critical infrastructure" is a cautionary tale of how senior leaders in a bureaucracy-on-the-make take advantage of every major political development to advance its own interests, with scant regard for the truth.

The DHS had carried out a major public campaign to focus on an alleged Russian threat to U.S. power infrastructure in early 2016. The campaign took advantage of a U.S. accusation of a Russian cyber-attack against the Ukrainian power infrastructure in December 2015 to promote one of the agency's major functions – guarding against cyber-attacks on America's infrastructure.

Beginning in late March 2016, DHS and FBI conducted a series of 12 unclassified briefings for electric power infrastructure companies in eight cities titled, "Ukraine Cyber Attack: implications for U.S. stakeholders." The DHS declared publicly, "These events represent one of the first known physical impacts to critical infrastructure which resulted from cyber-attack."

That statement conveniently avoided mentioning that the first cases of such destruction of national infrastructure from cyber-attacks were not against the United States, but were inflicted on Iran by the Obama administration and Israel in 2009 and 2012.

Beginning in October 2016, the DHS emerged as one of the two most important players – along with the CIA—in the political drama over the alleged Russian effort to tilt the 2016 election toward Donald Trump. Then on Dec. 29, DHS and FBI distributed a "Joint Analysis Report" to U.S. power utilities across the country with what it claimed were "indicators" of a Russian intelligence effort to penetrate and compromise U.S. computer networks, including networks related to the presidential election, that it called "GRIZZLY STEPPE."

The report clearly conveyed to the utilities that the "tools and infrastructure" it said had been used by Russian intelligence agencies to affect the election were a direct threat to them as well. However, according to Robert M. Lee, the founder and CEO of the cyber-security company Dragos, who had developed one of the earliest U.S. government programs for defense against cyber-attacks on U.S.

infrastructure systems, the report was certain to mislead the recipients.

“Anyone who uses it would think they were being impacted by Russian operations,” said Lee. “We ran through the indicators in the report and found that a high percentage were false positives.”

Lee and his staff found only two of a long list of malware files that could be linked to Russian hackers without more specific data about timing. Similarly a large proportion of IP addresses listed could be linked to “GRIZZLY STEPPE” only for certain specific dates, which were not provided.

The Intercept discovered, in fact, that 42 percent of the 876 IP addresses listed in the report as having been used by Russian hackers were exit nodes for the Tor Project, a system that allows bloggers, journalists and others – including some military entities – to keep their Internet communications private.

Lee said the DHS staff that worked on the technical information in the report is highly competent, but the document was rendered useless when officials classified and deleted some key parts of the report and added other material that shouldn’t have been in it. He believes the DHS issued the report “for a political purpose,” which was to “show that the DHS is protecting you.”

### **Planting the Story, Keeping it Alive**

Upon receiving the DHS-FBI report the Burlington Electric Company network security team immediately ran searches of its computer logs using the lists of IP addresses it had been provided. When one of IP addresses cited in the report as an indicator of Russian hacking was found on the logs, the utility immediately called DHS to inform it as it had been instructed to do by DHS.

In fact, the IP address on the Burlington Electric Company’s computer was simply the Yahoo e-mail server, according to Lee, so it could not have been a legitimate indicator of an attempted cyber-intrusion. That should have been the end of the story. But the utility did not track down the IP address before reporting it to DHS. It did, however, expect DHS to treat the matter confidentially until it had thoroughly investigated and resolved the issue.

“DHS wasn’t supposed to release the details,” said Lee. “Everybody was supposed to keep their mouth shut.”

Instead, a DHS official called The Washington Post and passed on word that one of the indicators of Russian hacking of the DNC had been found on the Burlington utility’s computer network. The Post failed to follow the most basic rule of journalism, relying on its DHS source instead of checking with the Burlington

Electric Department first. The result was the Post's sensational Dec. 30 story under the headline "Russian hackers penetrated U.S. electricity grid through a utility in Vermont, U.S. officials say."

DHS official evidently had allowed the Post to infer that the Russians hack had penetrated the grid without actually saying so. The Post story said the Russians "had not actively used the code to disrupt operations of the utility, according to officials who spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss a security matter," but then added, and that "the penetration of the nation's electrical grid is significant because it represents a potentially serious vulnerability."

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

The day after the story was published, the DHS leadership continued to imply, without saying so explicitly, that the Burlington utility had been hacked by Russians. Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs J. Todd Breasseale gave CNN a statement that the "indicators" from the malicious software found on the computer at Burlington Electric were a "match" for those on the DNC computers.

As soon as DHS checked the IP address, however, it knew that it was a Yahoo cloud server and therefore not an indicator that the same team that allegedly hacked the DNC had gotten into the Burlington utility's laptop. DHS also learned from the utility that the laptop in question had been infected by malware called "neutrino," which had never been used in "GRIZZLY STEPPE."

Only days later did the DHS reveal those crucial facts to the Post. And the DHS was still defending its joint report to the Post, according to Lee, who got part of the story from Post sources. The DHS official was arguing that it had "led to a discovery," he said. "The second is, 'See, this is encouraging people to run indicators.'"

### **Original DHS False Hacking Story**

The false Burlington Electric hack scare is reminiscent of an earlier story of Russian hacking of a utility for which the DHS was responsible as well. In November 2011, it reported an "intrusion" into a Springfield, Illinois water district computer that similarly turned out to be a fabrication.

Like the Burlington fiasco, the false report was preceded by a DHS claim that U.S. infrastructure systems were already under attack. In October 2011, acting DHS deputy undersecretary Greg Schaffer was quoted by The Washington Post as

warning that “our adversaries” are “knocking on the doors of these systems.” And Schaffer added, “In some cases, there have been intrusions.” He did not specify when, where or by whom, and no such prior intrusions have ever been documented.

On Nov. 8, 2011, a water pump belonging to the Curran-Gardner township water district near Springfield, Illinois, burned out after sputtering several times in previous months. The repair team brought in to fix it found a Russian IP address on its log from five months earlier. That IP address was actually from a cell phone call from the contractor who had set up the control system for the pump and who was vacationing in Russia with his family, so his name was in the log by the address.

Without investigating the IP address itself, the utility reported the IP address and the breakdown of the water pump to the Environmental Protection Agency, which in turn passed it on to the Illinois Statewide Terrorism and Intelligence Center, also called a fusion center composed of Illinois State Police and representatives from the FBI, DHS and other government agencies.

On Nov. 10 – just two days after the initial report to EPA – the fusion center produced a report titled “Public Water District Cyber Intrusion” suggesting a Russian hacker had stolen the identity of someone authorized to use the computer and had hacked into the control system causing the water pump to fail.

The contractor whose name was on the log next to the IP address later told Wired magazine that one phone call to him would have laid the matter to rest. But the DHS, which was the lead in putting the report out, had not bothered to make even that one obvious phone call before opining that it must have been a Russian hack.

The fusion center “intelligence report,” circulated by DHS Office of Intelligence and Research, was picked up by a cyber-security blogger, who called The Washington Post and read the item to a reporter. Thus the Post published the first sensational story of a Russian hack into a U.S. infrastructure on Nov. 18, 2011.

After the real story came out, DHS disclaimed responsibility for the report, saying that it was the fusion center’s responsibility. But a Senate subcommittee investigation revealed in a report a year later that even after the initial report had been discredited, DHS had not issued any retraction or correction to the report, nor had it notified the recipients about the truth.

DHS officials responsible for the false report told Senate investigators such reports weren’t intended to be “finished intelligence,” implying that the bar for accuracy of the information didn’t have to be very high. They even claimed

that report was a “success” because it had done what “what it’s supposed to do – generate interest.”

Both the Burlington and Curran-Gardner episodes underline a central reality of the political game of national security in the New Cold War era: major bureaucratic players like DHS have a huge political stake in public perceptions of a Russian threat, and whenever the opportunity arises to do so, they will exploit it.

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## Pulling a J. Edgar Hoover on Trump

**Exclusive:** President-elect Trump is fending off a U.S. intelligence leak of unproven allegations that he cavorted with Russian prostitutes, but the darker story might be the CIA’s intervention in U.S. politics, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The decision by the U.S. intelligence community to include in an official report some unverified and salacious accusations against President-elect Donald Trump resembles a tactic out of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover’s playbook on government-style blackmail: I have some very derogatory information about you that I’d sure hate to see end up in the press.

In this case, as leaders of the U.S. intelligence community were pressing Trump to accept their assessment that the Russian government had tried to bolster Trump’s campaign by stealing and leaking actual emails harmful to Hillary Clinton’s campaign, Trump was confronted with this classified “appendix” describing claims about him cavorting with prostitutes in a Moscow hotel room.

Supposedly, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan included the unproven allegations in the report under the rationale that the Russian government might have videotaped Trump’s misbehavior and thus could use it to blackmail him. But the U.S. intelligence community also had reasons to want to threaten Trump who has been critical of its performance and who has expressed doubts about its analysis of the Russian “hacking.”

After the briefing last Friday, Trump and his incoming administration did shift



their position, accepting the intelligence community's assessment that the Russian government hacked the emails of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chief John Podesta. But I'm told Trump saw no evidence that Russia then leaked the material to WikiLeaks and has avoided making that concession.

Still, Trump's change in tone was noted by the mainstream media and was treated as an admission that he was abandoning his earlier skepticism. In other words, he was finally getting onboard the intelligence community's Russia-did-it bandwagon. Now, however, we know that Trump simultaneously had been confronted with the possibility that the unproven stories about him engaging in unorthodox sex acts with prostitutes could be released, embarrassing him barely a week before his inauguration.

The classified report, with the explosive appendix, was also given to President Obama and the so-called "Gang of Eight," bipartisan senior members of Congress responsible for oversight of the intelligence community, which increased chances that the Trump accusations would be leaked to the press, which indeed did happen.

### **Circulating Rumors**

The stories about Russian intelligence supposedly filming Trump in a high-end Moscow hotel with prostitutes have been circulating around Washington for months. I was briefed about them by a Hillary Clinton associate who was clearly hopeful that the accusations would be released before the election and thus further damage Trump's chances. But the alleged video never seemed to surface and the claims had all the earmarks of a campaign dirty trick.

However, now the tales of illicit frolic have been elevated to another level. They have been inserted into an official U.S. intelligence report, the details of which were leaked first to CNN and then to other mainstream U.S. news media outlets.

Trump has denounced the story as "fake news" and it is certainly true that the juicy details – reportedly assembled by a former British MI-6 spy named Christopher Steele – have yet to check out. But the placement of the rumors in a U.S. government document gave the mainstream media an excuse to publicize the material.

It's also allowed the media to again trot out the Russian word "kompromat" as if the Russians invented the game of assembling derogatory information about someone and then using it to discredit or blackmail the person.

In American history, legendary FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was infamous for

using his agency to develop negative information on a political figure and then letting the person know that the FBI had the dirt and certainly would not want it to become public – if only the person would do what the FBI wanted, whether that was to reappoint Hoover to another term or to boost the FBI’s budget or – in the infamous case of civil rights leader Martin Luther King – perhaps to commit suicide.

However, in this case, it is not even known whether the Russians have any dirt on Trump. It could just be rumors concocted in the middle of a hard-fought campaign, first among Republicans battling Trump for the nomination (this opposition research was reportedly initiated by backers of Sen. Marco Rubio in the GOP race) before being picked up by Clinton supporters for use in the general election.

Still, perhaps the more troubling issue is whether the U.S. intelligence community has entered a new phase of politicization in which its leadership feels that it has the responsibility to weed out “unfit” contenders for the presidency. During the general election campaign, a well-placed intelligence source told me that the intelligence community disdained both Clinton and Trump and hoped to discredit both of them with the hope that a more “acceptable” person could move into the White House for the next four years.

### **Hurting Both Candidates**

Though I was skeptical of that information, it did turn out that FBI Director James Comey, one of the top officials in the intelligence community, badly damaged Clinton’s campaign by deeming her handling of her emails as Secretary of State “extremely careless” but deciding not to prosecute her – and then in the last week of the campaign briefly reopening and then re-closing the investigation.

Then, after the election, President Obama’s CIA began leaking allegations that Russian President Vladimir Putin had orchestrated the hacking of Democratic emails and provided them to WikiLeaks to reveal how the DNC undermined Sen. Bernie Sanders’s campaign and what Clinton had told Wall Street bigwigs in paid speeches that she had sought to keep secret from the American people.

The intelligence community’s assessment set the stage for what could have been a revolt by the Electoral College in which enough Trump delegates could have refused to vote for him to send the election into the House of Representatives, where the states would choose the President from one of the top three vote-getters in the Electoral College. The third-place finisher turned out to be former Secretary of State Colin Powell who got three votes from Clinton delegates in Washington State. But the Electoral College ploy failed when

Trump's delegates proved overwhelmingly faithful to the GOP candidate.

Now, we are seeing what looks like a new phase in this "stop (or damage) Trump" strategy, the inclusion of anti-Trump dirt in an official intelligence report that was then leaked to the major media.

Whether this move was meant to soften up Trump or whether the intelligence community genuinely thought that the accusations might be true and deserved inclusion in a report on alleged Russian interference in U.S. politics or whether it was some combination of the two, we are witnessing a historic moment when the U.S. intelligence community has deployed its extraordinary powers within the domain of U.S. politics. J. Edgar Hoover would be proud.

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

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