

# WPost's New 'Fake News' on Russian 'Hack'

**Exclusive:** The Washington Post's latest folly – falsely reporting a Russian “hack” into Vermont's electric grid – reflects the paper's steep decline from the days of Watergate, reports ex-British intelligence officer Annie Machon.

By Annie Machon

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) has been hacked – cue a national American trauma, allegations of dirty tricks, fears that democracy has been subverted, all leading to what the next U.S. president would call “our long national nightmare.”

But, no, I am not talking about the current Russo-phobic hysteria currently engulfing the mainstream U.S. media, replete with claims about “fake news,” expelled Russian diplomats, and a lack of skepticism about the evidence-lite hacking allegations.

Instead, I am dipping back into history – the old Watergate scandal – when Richard Nixon's “plumbers” stole information the old-fashioned way; they broke into the DNC offices, rifled the files and planted listening devices. On June 17, 1972, when police captured five burglars inside the DNC offices at the Watergate building in Washington, the case slowly unfolded over the next two years until President Nixon resigned on Aug. 9, 1974, and was replaced by Vice President Gerald Ford who declared “our long national nightmare is over.”

During those two years, The Washington Post became internationally and justifiably famous for breaking the story about Nixon's role in the Watergate cover-up and – since then – generations of cub reporters have dreamed of being the next Woodward and Bernstein. Besides leading to the downfall of the mendacious and paranoid Nixon, the scandal contributed to the reining in of an out-of-control intelligence establishment culminating in the Church Committee hearings of 1975.

What followed was greater, if unfortunately temporary, control of the U.S. intelligence agencies and at least an apparent respect for the rights of American citizens under the terms of the U.S. Constitution. The work of The Washington Post then was indeed relevant and world-changing.

The movie depiction of the Post's investigation, “All the President's Men” celebrated this exposé and confirmed in Western minds that our wonderful free press spoke truth to power. And perhaps, in this case, the press did (although I

have to say that I preferred the meltdown scene in the prophetic movie, “The Network,” which envisioned the slide of the news media into ratings-driven madness).

## **Lost Credibility**

But – regarding The Washington Post – how the mighty have fallen. Over the past couple of months, the Post has blown what was left of its journalistic reputation out of the water.

First it unblushingly reported the PropOrNot “blacklist” of “fake news” Internet sites that were allegedly working at the Kremlin’s command to swing the U.S. election to Donald Trump, except that the list encompassed many of the most reputable independent (i.e., not U.S. corporate-owned) English-language international news sites (including Consortiumnews.com). Threatened with angry writs from some of the sites, the paper quickly printed a disclaimer distancing itself from the anonymous people behind PropOrNot, but still not apologizing for the McCarthyistic smear.

Then, last Friday, the newspaper was at it again – breathlessly reporting that the Vermont energy grid was apparently hacked by the scapegoat du jour, Russia. Although there should have been obvious questions asked: Why Vermont? What has that state ever done to Russia? Well, not much as it turns out; nor Russia to Vermont.

Yet again the Post has revised its reporting down to the fact that a laptop, completely unconnected to the grid, according to the energy provider’s statement, had been infected by malware. In other words, there was no Russian hacking into the Vermont power grid.

And yet, because it’s The Washington Post, this fake breaking “news” was taken seriously and metastasized through the body politic of America and beyond. This Russian hacking became a “post-truth” reality, no matter how fact-free the original story. (I hereby propose a #factfreediet for us all on Twitter for January, so we can highlight this phenomenon.)

## **Explaining Why**

But here are the obvious next questions: Why did this non-story appear in The Washington Post and why now? Has The Washington Post suddenly fallen prey to a revamped Operation Mockingbird, its editorial staff stuffed to the gills with CIA agents of influence?

As I have written before, the CIA and its associates within the Deep State appear to be hell bent on undermining the legitimacy of the Trump election

result and this hyping of Russian hacking is one of the key weapons in this struggle. So perhaps the Deep State players are (re)activating a few agents of influence in the mainstream American media?

But there may possibly be a more tangential explanation for The Washington Post's plunge into fiction: Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon.com and one of the wealthiest people in the world. Amazon is not only the favorite purveyor of all goods online, but also suspected (at least in the U.K.) of massive tax avoidance scams as well as abusive employment practices in the same country.

Bezos is also, since 2013, the proud owner of The Washington Post, a purchase that heralded his unexpected business swerve into the old mainstream media. The deal to buy the newspaper was reported in the business press to have cost him \$250 million.

Interestingly in the same year Amazon cut a deal to develop a cloud-based service for the CIA – a deal worth a reported \$600 million over ten years. It also appears that this service has expanded across all 17 of America's intelligence agencies, so who can tell what it might be worth to Amazon now and in the future?

It is no doubt just an interesting coincidence that the Bezos-owned Washington Post is the fount of the current stream of CIA assertions that the Russians are hacking key U.S. institutions, starting with the DNC – which then somehow became “hacking the election” – and now the utility grid. Bezos himself has asserted that he exerts no direct control over the editorial decisions of the newspaper, and he has left in place many of the neoconservative editors who preceded his stewardship, so there may not be any need for direct orders.

Of course, all state-level players, including the Russians and certainly the Americans, are going to be probing the basic systems underpinning all our countries for vulnerabilities. That is what intelligence agencies do, and it is also what mercenary spy companies do on behalf of their corporate clients, and what hackers (either of the criminal flavor or the socially-minded hacktivists) do too. The dodgy malware, the code, and the vulnerabilities are all out there, often for sale or squirreled away by the national spy agencies for potential future advantage.

Whatever the truth about the DNC hacking allegations, The Washington Post sadly seems uninterested in properly pursuing it – indeed it seems interested in little beyond pursuing the specific political agenda of fanning a dangerous distrust of Russia and undermining the legitimacy of President-elect Trump.

If such a compliant corporate culture had existed back in 1972 at the time of

the first DNC “hack,” the Watergate scandal would surely never have been exposed. And the old media still wonders why it is no longer trusted?

**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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## The War Against Alternative Information

The U.S. government is creating a new \$160 million bureaucracy to shut down information that doesn’t conform to U.S. propaganda narratives, building on the strategy that sold the bloody Syrian “regime change” war, writes Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

The U.S. establishment is not content simply to have domination over the media narratives on critical foreign policy issues, such as Syria, Ukraine and Russia. It wants total domination. Thus we now have the “Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act” that President Obama signed into law on Dec. 23 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for 2017, setting aside \$160 million to combat any “propaganda” that challenges Official Washington’s version of reality.

The new law mandates the U.S. Secretary of State to collaborate with the Secretary of Defense, Director of National Intelligence and other federal agencies to create a Global Engagement Center “to lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interests.” The law directs the Center to be formed in 180 days and to share expertise among agencies and to “coordinate with allied nations.”

The legislation was initiated in March 2016, as the demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia was already underway and was enacted amid the allegations of “Russian hacking” around the U.S. presidential election and the mainstream media’s furor over supposedly “fake news.” Defeated Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton voiced strong support for the bill: “It’s imperative that leaders in both the private sector and the public sector step up to protect our democracy, and innocent lives.”

The new law is remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least because it merges a new McCarthyism about purported dissemination of Russian “propaganda”

on the Internet with a new Orwellianism by creating a kind of Ministry of Truth – or Global Engagement Center – to protect the American people from “foreign propaganda and disinformation.”

As part of the effort to detect and defeat these unwanted narratives, the law authorizes the Center to: “Facilitate the use of a wide range of technologies and techniques by sharing expertise among Federal departments and agencies, seeking expertise from external sources, and implementing best practices.” (This section is an apparent reference to proposals that Google, Facebook and other technology companies find ways to block or brand certain Internet sites as purveyors of “Russian propaganda” or “fake news.”)

Justifying this new bureaucracy, the bill’s sponsors argued that the existing agencies for “strategic communications” and “public diplomacy” were not enough, that the information threat required “a whole-of-government approach leveraging all elements of national power.”

The law also is rife with irony since the U.S. government and related agencies are among the world’s biggest purveyors of propaganda and disinformation – or what you might call evidence-free claims, such as the recent accusations of Russia hacking into Democratic emails to “influence” the U.S. election.

Despite these accusations – leaked by the Obama administration and embraced as true by the mainstream U.S. news media – there is little or no public evidence to support the charges. There is also a contradictory analysis by veteran U.S. intelligence professionals as well as statements by Wikileaks founder Julian Assange and an associate, former British Ambassador Craig Murray, that the Russians were not the source of the leaks. Yet, the mainstream U.S. media has virtually ignored this counter-evidence, appearing eager to collaborate with the new “Global Engagement Center” even before it is officially formed.

Of course, there is a long history of U.S. disinformation and propaganda. Former CIA agents Philip Agee and John Stockwell documented how it was done decades ago, secretly planting “black propaganda” and covertly funding media outlets to influence events around the world, with much of the fake news blowing back into the American media.

In more recent decades, the U.S. government has adopted an Internet-era version of that formula with an emphasis on having the State Department or the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy supply, train and pay “activists” and “citizen journalists” to create and distribute propaganda and false stories via “social media” and via contacts with the mainstream media. The U.S. government’s strategy also seeks to undermine and discredit journalists who challenge this orthodoxy. The new legislation escalates this information war by tossing another

\$160 million into the pot.

## **Propaganda and Disinformation on Syria**

Syria is a good case study in the modern application of information warfare. In her memoir *Hard Choices*, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote that the U.S. provided “support for (Syrian) civilian opposition groups, including satellite-linked computers, telephones, cameras, and training for more than a thousand activists, students and independent journalists.”

Indeed, a huge amount of money has gone to “activists” and “civil society” groups in Syria and other countries that have been targeted for “regime change.” A lot of the money also goes to parent organizations that are based in the United States and Europe, so these efforts do not only support on-the-ground efforts to undermine the targeted countries, but perhaps even more importantly, the money influences and manipulates public opinion in the West.

In North America, representatives from the Syrian “Local Coordination Committees” (LCC) were frequent guests on popular media programs such as “DemocracyNow.” The message was clear: there is a “revolution” in Syria against a “brutal regime” personified in Bashar al-Assad. It was not mentioned that the “Local Coordination Committees” have been primarily funded by the West, specifically the Office for Syrian Opposition Support, which was founded by the U.S. State Department and the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

More recently, news and analysis about Syria has been conveyed through the filter of the White Helmets, also known as Syrian Civil Defense. In the Western news media, the White Helmets are described as neutral, non-partisan, civilian volunteers courageously carrying out rescue work in the war zone. In fact, the group is none of the above. It was initiated by the U.S. and U.K. using a British military contractor and Brooklyn-based marketing company.

While they may have performed some genuine rescue operations, the White Helmets are primarily a media organization with a political goal: to promote NATO intervention in Syria. (The manipulation of public opinion using the White Helmets and promoted by the New York Times and Avaaz petition for a “No Fly Zone” in Syria is documented here.)

The White Helmets hoax continues to be widely believed and receives uncritical promotion though it has increasingly been exposed at alternative media outlets as the creation of a “shady PR firm.” During critical times in the conflict in Aleppo, White Helmet individuals have been used as the source for important news stories despite a track record of deception.

## **Recent Propaganda: Blatant Lies?**

As the armed groups in east Aleppo recently lost ground and then collapsed, Western governments and allied media went into a frenzy of accusations against Syria and Russia based on reports from sources connected with the armed opposition. CNN host Wolf Blitzer described Aleppo as “falling” in a “slaughter of these women and children” while CNN host Jake Tapper referred to “genocide by another name.”

The Daily Beast published the claims of the Aleppo Siege Media Center under the title “Doomsday is held in Aleppo” and amid accusations that the Syrian army was executing civilians, burning them alive and “20 women committed suicide in order not to be raped.” These sensational claims were widely broadcast without verification. However, this “news” on CNN and throughout Western media came from highly biased sources and many of the claims – lacking anything approaching independent corroboration – could be accurately described as propaganda and disinformation.

Ironically, some of the supposedly “Russian propaganda” sites, such as RT, have provided first-hand on-the-ground reporting from the war zones with verifiable information that contradicts the Western narrative and thus has received almost no attention in the U.S. news media. For instance, some of these non-Western outlets have shown videos of popular celebrations over the “liberation of Aleppo.”

There has been further corroboration of these realities from peace activists, such as Jan Oberg of Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research who published a photo essay of his eyewitness observations in Aleppo including the happiness of civilians from east Aleppo reaching the government-controlled areas of west Aleppo, finally freed from areas that had been controlled by Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate and its jihadist allies in Ahrar al-Sham.

Dr. Nabil Antaki, a medical doctor from Aleppo, described the liberation of Aleppo in an interview titled “Aleppo is Celebrating, Free from Terrorists, the Western Media Misinformed.” The first Christmas celebrations in Aleppo in four years are shown here, replete with marching band members in Santa Claus outfits. Journalist Vanessa Beeley has published testimonies of civilians from east Aleppo. The happiness of civilians at their liberation is clear.

Whether or not you wish to accept these depictions of the reality in Aleppo, at a minimum, they reflect another side of the story that you have been denied while being persistently force-fed the version favored by the U.S. State Department. The goal of the new Global Engagement Center to counter “foreign propaganda” is to ensure that you never get to hear this alternative narrative to the Western propaganda line.

Even much earlier, contrary to the Western mythology of rebel “liberated zones,” there was strong evidence that the armed groups were never popular in Aleppo. American journalist James Foley described the situation in 2012 like this:

“Aleppo, a city of about 3 million people, was once the financial heart of Syria. As it continues to deteriorate, many civilians here are losing patience with the increasingly violent and unrecognizable opposition – one that is hampered by infighting and a lack of structure, and deeply infiltrated by both foreign fighters and terrorist groups. The rebels in Aleppo are predominantly from the countryside, further alienating them from the urban crowd that once lived here peacefully, in relative economic comfort and with little interference from the authoritarian government of President Bashar al-Assad.”

On Nov. 22, 2012, Foley was kidnapped in northwestern Syria and held by Islamic State terrorists before his beheading in August 2014.

### **The Overall Narrative on Syria**

Analysis of the Syrian conflict boils down to two competing narratives. One narrative is that the conflict is a fight for freedom and democracy against a brutal regime, a storyline promoted in the West and the Gulf states, which have been fueling the conflict from the start. This narrative is also favored by some self-styled “anti-imperialists” who want a “Syrian revolution.”

The other narrative is that the conflict is essentially a war of aggression against a sovereign state, with the aggressors including NATO countries, Gulf monarchies, Israel and Jordan. Domination of the Western media by these powerful interests is so thorough that one almost never gets access to this second narrative, which is essentially banned from not only the mainstream but also much of the liberal and progressive media.

For example, listeners and viewers of the generally progressive TV and radio program “DemocracyNow” have rarely if ever heard the second narrative described in any detail. Instead, the program frequently broadcasts the statements of Hillary Clinton, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power and others associated with the U.S. position. Rarely do you hear the viewpoint of the Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations, the Syrian Foreign Minister or analysts inside Syria and around the world who have written about and follow events there closely.

“DemocracyNow” also has done repeated interviews with proponents of the “Syrian revolution” while ignoring analysts who call the conflict a war of aggression sponsored by the West and the Gulf monarchies. This blackout of the second narrative continues despite the fact that many prominent international figures



see it as such. For example, the former Foreign Minister of Nicaragua and former President of the UN General Assembly, Father Miguel D'Escoto, has said, "What the U.S. government is doing in Syria is tantamount to a war of aggression, which, according to the Nuremberg Tribunal, is the worst possible crime a State can commit against another State."

In many areas of politics, "DemocracyNow" is excellent and challenges mainstream media. However in this area, coverage of the Syrian conflict, the broadcast is biased, one-sided and echoes the news and analysis of mainstream Western corporate media, showing the extent of control over foreign policy news that already exists in the United States and Europe.

### **Suppressing and Censoring Challenges**

Despite the widespread censorship of alternative analyses on Syria and other foreign hotspots that already exists in the West, the U.S. government's new "Global Engagement Center" will seek to ensure that the censorship is even more complete with its goal to "counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation." We can expect even more aggressive and better-financed assaults on the few voices daring to challenge the West's "group thinks" – smear campaigns that are already quite extensive.

In an article titled "Controlling the Narrative on Syria", Louis Allday describes the criticisms and attacks on journalists Rania Khalek and Max Blumenthal for straying from the "approved" Western narrative on Syria. Some of the bullying and abuse has come from precisely those people, such as Robin Yassin-Kassab, who have been frequent guests in liberal Western media.

Reporters who have returned from Syria with accounts that challenge the propaganda themes that have permeated the Western media also have come under attack. For instance, Canadian journalist Eva Bartlett recently returned to North America after being in Syria and Aleppo, conveying a very different image and critical of the West's biased media coverage. Bartlett appeared at a United Nations press conference and then did numerous interviews across the country during a speaking tour. During the course of her talks and presentation, Bartlett criticized the White Helmets and questioned whether it was true that Al Quds Hospital in opposition-held East Aleppo was attacked and destroyed as claimed.

Bartlett's recounting of this information made her a target of Snopes, which has been a mostly useful website exposing urban legends and false rumors but has come under criticism itself for some internal challenges and has been inconsistent in its investigations. In one report entitled "White Helmet Hearsay," Snopes' writer Bethania Palmer says claims the White Helmets are

“linked to terrorists” is “unproven,” but she overlooks numerous videos, photos, and other reports showing White Helmet members celebrating a Nusra/Al Qaeda battle victory, picking up the bodies of civilians executed by a Nusra executioner, and having a member who alternatively appears as a rebel/terrorist fighter with a weapon and later wearing a White Helmet uniform. The “fact check” barely scrapes the surface of public evidence.

The same writer did another shallow “investigation” titled “victim blaming” regarding Bartlett’s critique of White Helmet videos and what happened at the Al Quds Hospital in Aleppo. Bartlett suggests that some White Helmet videos may be fabricated and may feature the same child at different times, i.e., photographs that appear to show the same girl being rescued by White Helmet workers at different places and times. While it is uncertain whether this is the same girl, the similarity is clear.

The Snopes writer goes on to criticize Bartlett for her comments about the reported bombing of Al Quds Hospital in east Aleppo in April 2016. A statement at the website of Doctors Without Borders says the building was “destroyed and reduced to rubble,” but this was clearly false since photos show the building with unclear damage. Five months later, the September 2016 report by Doctors Without Borders says the top two floors of the building were destroyed and the ground floor Emergency Room damaged yet they re-opened in two weeks.

The many inconsistencies and contradictions in the statements of Doctors Without Borders resulted in an open letter to them. In their last report, Doctors Without Borders (known by its French initials, MSF) acknowledges that “MSF staff did not directly witness the attack and has not visited Al Quds Hospital since 2014.”

Bartlett referenced satellite images taken before and after the reported attack on the hospital. The images do not show severe damage and it is unclear whether or not there is any damage to the roof, the basis for Bartlett’s statement. In the past week, independent journalists have visited the scene of Al Quds Hospital and report that that the top floors of the building are still there and damage is unclear.

The Snopes’ investigation criticizing Bartlett was superficial and ignored the broader issues of accuracy and integrity in the Western media’s depiction of the Syrian conflict. Instead the article appeared to be an effort to discredit the eyewitness observations and analysis of a journalist who dared challenge the mainstream narrative.

U.S. propaganda and disinformation on Syria has been extremely effective in misleading much of the American population. Thus, most Americans are unaware how

many billions of taxpayer dollars have been spent on yet another “regime change” project. The propaganda campaign – having learned from the successful demonizations of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi and other targeted leaders – has been so masterful regarding Syria that many liberal and progressive news outlets were pulled in. It has been left to RT and some Internet outlets to challenge the U.S. government and the mainstream media.

But the U.S. government’s near total control of the message doesn’t appear to be enough. Apparently even a few voices of dissent are a few voices too many.

The enactment of HR5181, “Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation,” suggests that the ruling powers seek to escalate suppression of news and analyses that run counter to the official narrative. Backed by a new infusion of \$160 million, the plan is to further squelch skeptical voices with operation for “countering” and “refuting” what the U.S. government deems to be propaganda and disinformation.

As part of the \$160 million package, funds can be used to hire or reward “civil society groups, media content providers, nongovernmental organizations, federally funded research and development centers, private companies, or academic institutions.”

Among the tasks that these private entities can be hired to perform is to identify and investigate both print and online sources of news that are deemed to be distributing “disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda directed at the United States and its allies and partners.”

In other words, we are about to see an escalation of the information war.

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## Hypocrisy Over Alleged Russian ‘Hacking’

As Official Washington rages over alleged Russian hacking of Democratic emails, a forgotten back story is how the U.S. government pioneered the tactics of cyber-war and attacked unsuspecting countries, recalls Michael Brenner.

By Michael Brenner

The psychodrama over the alleged but unsubstantiated Russian hacking of Democratic emails to influence the U.S. presidential election has yet to reach

its climax. Already, though, it has earned nomination as the most surreal and passionate work of fiction of the Twenty-first Century.

In all the excitement, it is easy to lose perspective. Perhaps the biggest piece of the untold story is the United States government's pioneering role in electronic surveillance and hacking. We seem to have forgotten that the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency eavesdropped on heads of state in Germany, Brazil, Argentina, Iraq, Venezuela – and, at last count, several score other capitals. Also, the United Nations Secretary General, the President of the European Union Commission, the European Central Bank and God knows whom else.

This was not coincidental. It was part of a calculated strategy approved by two successive Presidents to monitor all electronic communications around the globe. Author James Bamford and other knowledgeable experts have provided us with a detailed history of the program.

Yet, the U.S. – as presented to us by the mainstream media and most commentators reflecting Official Washington – is portrayed as the innocent among the main protagonists. The plot line represents America as the victim of unprovoked cyber aggression by the Russians and, in other circumstances, the Chinese – these attacks coming out of the blue, an aggressive blow in an assumed contest for global dominance between the powers.

Is any of this true? Frankly, we haven't even seen the proof. But let's assume that there is an element of truth to it (leaving apart the nonsense about a Kremlin plot to manipulate and then destroy American democracy).

### **On the Offensive**

Let us recall that it was the United States that launched the first cyber attacks – some years ago by the NSA. This history is detailed in the Snowden documents whose authenticity never has been questioned. We succeeded in trespassing on the computer networks of several Chinese government agencies and individuals. We boasted about our success in intra-governmental communications. Those occurred at a time when related documents now in the public realm revealed the NSA's ambition to tap into every electronic communications network in the world and laid out a program for achieving that goal.

Simultaneously, the United States was launching **offensive assaults** on Iran. The targets there included not just their nuclear research facilities but also critical centers for the oil and gas industry. These are acts of war. Yet there was never a mandate from any international body for doing so, nor a *casus belli*. We did it in collaboration with the Israelis because we made the unilateral

judgment that aggression was in our national interest. Now we are outraged that others are doing what we have done. This is rank hypocrisy. It also is not very bright. For the initial actions made the casual assumptions that the U.S. would always have an advantage; therefore, the setting of norms and rules was unnecessary and undesirable. The same logic operated in regard to drones and targeted assassinations.

Conditions now have changed and the now U.S. is vulnerable to attack. The option of negotiating international rules of the road and perhaps formal regulations is slipping away. We will have to live with the chaotic mess that we have created.

Whatever thinking the NSA did on the subject (and perhaps other agencies) bears an uncanny resemblance to Air Force General Curtis LeMay's attitude toward nuclear strategy: An emphasis on offense because it played to our advantage; defense only in the form of "massive retaliation" which – for Lemay – was the strategic cover for massive first strike; and a conviction that this was an unavoidable zero-sum game played for the highest stakes. In other words, cowboy strategy. And it is cowboy strategic thinking that has ruled in the NSA.

### **Cyber Army**

The most revealing article on this appeared in *WIRED* in July 2014 by James Bamford. Army General Keith Alexander, who was NSA director from 2005 to 2014, revealed the full scope of his ambition. Here are some of the article's more noteworthy quotes: "For years, U.S. General Keith Alexander has been amassing a secret cyber army. Now it's ready to attack. ... Alexander's forces are formidable – thousands of NSA spies, plus 14,000 cyber troops. ... Endgame hunts for hidden security weaknesses that are ripe for exploitation."

Plans included a "launch on warning" doctrine calling for a massive cyber-retaliation against anyone who launched a strategic attack on sensitive U.S. computers. Its code name was "MonsterMind." But preparations for the Great Cyber War evidently left no time to keep track of smaller attacks (such as the alleged hacking of Democratic emails) or else its radar was badly defective.

[Also see *THE INTERCEPT* of Oct. 10, 2014, "[Core Secrets: NSA Saboteurs in China and Germany](#)" by Peter Maass and Laura Poitras.]

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# Details Still Lacking on Russian 'Hack'

**Exclusive:** The mainstream U.S. media is all atwitter about Russia having to pay a price for hacking into Democratic emails and supposedly tilting the U.S. election to Donald Trump, but the evidence still is lacking, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Amid more promises of real evidence to come, the Obama administration released a report that again failed to demonstrate that there is any proof behind U.S. allegations that Russia both hacked into Democratic emails and distributed them via WikiLeaks to the American people.

The New York Times, which has been busy flogging the latest reasons to hate Russia and its President Vladimir Putin, asserted, "The F.B.I. and Department of Homeland Security released a report on Thursday detailing the ways that Russia acted to influence the American election through cyberespionage."

But the actual report fell far short of "detailing" much at all about how the disclosures of the Democratic National Committee's manipulation of the primaries to hobble Sen. Bernie Sanders and the contents of Hillary Clinton's Wall Street speeches ended up at WikiLeaks and ultimately became available to American voters.

Most of the 13-page FBI/DHS report was devoted to suggestions on how Internet users can protect their emails from malware, but there was little new that proved that the Russians were the source of the Democratic emails given to WikiLeaks.

The tip-off to how little proof was being offered came in the report's statement that "The U.S. government assesses that information was leaked to the press and publicly disclosed." When you read a phrase like "the U.S. government assesses," it really means the U.S. government is guessing – and the report notably uses a passive tense that doesn't even assert that the Russians did the leaking.

A well-placed intelligence source told me that there's little doubt that elements of Russian intelligence penetrated the emails of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta, but the Russians were far from alone. Indeed, placing various forms of malware on computers is a common practice, as average folks who periodically take their laptops to an I.T. professional can attest. There's always some kind of "spyware" or other malicious code to be discovered.

The source said the more debatable issue is whether Russian intelligence then turned over the emails to WikiLeaks, especially given that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and an associate, former British Ambassador Craig Murray, have stated that the material did not come from the Russian government. Murray has suggested that there were two separate sources, the DNC material coming from a disgruntled Democrat and the Podesta emails coming from possibly a U.S. intelligence source, since the Podesta Group represents Saudi Arabia and other foreign governments.

### **Future 'Details'**

So, The New York Times misled its readers by claiming that the FBI/DHS report released Thursday was "detailing" how the Russians carried out the operation, and a separate Times article essentially acknowledged that the details were still to come.

"A more detailed report on the intelligence, ordered by President Obama, will be published in the next three weeks, though much of the detail – especially evidence collected from 'implants' in Russian computer systems, tapped conversations and spies – is expected to remain classified."

In other words, the FBI/DHS report really didn't have much in the way of details and the "more detailed report" – due out before President Obama leaves office on Jan. 20 – will still be hiding "much of the detail" to justify Obama's retaliation against Russia including new sanctions and expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats or intelligence officers from the United States.

But the Times article does inadvertently make the interesting admission that the U.S. government has penetrated Russian computers, much as the U.S. government accuses Russia of doing to U.S. computers.

But the data purloined by these U.S. "implants" and other clandestinely obtained evidence – assuming there really is any – won't be something that the American people will get to see.

The shell game will continue up to the start of the Trump administration with the apparent goal to hem in President Trump from trying to reach out to Russia to avert a costly and dangerous New Cold War.

But the evidence so far released by the Obama administration still amounts to "trust us."

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "Escalating the Risky Fight with Russia" and "Summing Up Russia's Real Nuclear Fears."]

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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## Summing Up Russia's Real Nuclear Fears

**Exclusive:** The mainstream U.S. media's relentless Russia-bashing has obscured Moscow's legitimate fears about Washington's provocative nuclear-missile strategies, which could lead to Armageddon, explains Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

The conflicts between Washington and Moscow keep on growing: Ukraine and Syria, rival war games, "hybrid" wars and "cyber-wars." Talk of a new Cold War doesn't do justice to the stakes.

"My bottom line is that the likelihood of a nuclear catastrophe today is greater than it was during the Cold War," [declares](#) former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry.

If a new Trump administration wants to peacefully reset relations with Russia, there's no better way to start than by canceling the deployment of costly new ballistic missile defense systems in Eastern Europe. [One such system went live in Romania this May](#); another is slated to go live in Poland in 2018. Few U.S. actions have riled President Putin as much as this threat to erode Russia's nuclear deterrent.

Only last month, at a meeting in Sochi with Russian military leaders to discuss advanced new weapons technology, [Putin vowed](#), "We will continue to do all we need to ensure the strategic balance of forces. We view any attempts to change or dismantle it, as extremely dangerous. Our task is to effectively neutralize any military threats to Russia's security, including those posed by the newly-deployed strategic missile defense systems."

Putin [accused](#) unnamed countries – obviously led by the United States – of "nullifying" international agreements on missile defense "in an effort to gain unilateral advantages."

Moscow has reacted to this perceived threat with more than mere words. It is developing new and deadlier nuclear missiles, [including the SS-30](#), to counter



U.S. defenses. It has rebuffed new arms control negotiations. And it has provocatively stationed nuclear-capable Iskander missiles in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad to “target . . . the facilities that . . . start posing a threat to us,” as Putin put it last month.

If a new arms race is underway, it's not for lack of warning. The Russians have voiced their concerns about missile defenses for years and years, without any serious acknowledgment from Washington. From their vantage point, the apparent bad faith of successive U.S. administrations, Democratic as well as Republican, is a flashing red light to which they had to respond.

### **Russia's Nightmare**

From the earliest days of President Reagan's Strategic Defense (“Star Wars”) Initiative to make ballistic missiles “impotent and obsolete,” an alarmed Moscow has viewed U.S. efforts to build a missile shield as a long-term threat to their nuclear deterrent.

In 2002, President Bush one-upped Reagan and unilaterally canceled the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972. He did so after Russia's foreign minister, Igor Ivanov, publicly pleaded with Washington not to terminate this landmark arms control agreement.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Ivanov warned that such a move would set back recent progress in Russian-U.S. relations and destroy “30 years of efforts by the world community” to reduce the danger of nuclear war. Russia would be forced, against its desire for international cooperation, to build up its own forces in response. The arms race would be back in full force – leaving the United States less secure, not more.

But with Russia still reeling from the neoliberal “shock therapy” that it suffered through during the 1990s, the neoconservatives (then in charge of U.S. foreign policy) were confident of winning such an arms race. In 2002, President Bush adopted a National Security Strategy that explicitly called for U.S. military superiority over every other power. To that end, he called on the Pentagon to develop a ground-based missile defense system within two years.

Since then, that program has lined the pockets of major U.S. military contractors without achieving any notable successes. Critics – including the U.S. General Accountability Office, National Academy of Sciences and Union of Concerned Scientists – have blasted the program for failing more than half of its operational tests. Today, after the expenditure of more than \$40 billion, it enjoys bipartisan support mainly as a jobs program.

Russia fears, however, that it's only a matter of time before the U.S. perfects

its missile shield technology enough to erode the deterrent capabilities of Moscow's nuclear arsenal.

### **Promoting U.S. Nuclear Primacy**

That specter was highlighted in 2006 when two U.S. strategic arms experts declared in the pages of the establishment-oriented Foreign Affairs that the age of nuclear deterrence "is nearing an end. Today, for the first time in almost 50 years, the United States stands on the verge of attaining nuclear primacy. It will probably soon be possible for the United States to destroy the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a first strike. . . . Unless they reverse course rapidly, Russia's vulnerability will only increase over time."

The authors, Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, added, "Washington's pursuit of nuclear primacy helps explain its missile defense strategy." Missile defense, they pointed out, is not the same as population defense. No conceivable defense could truly protect American cities against an all-out attack by Russia, or even China. Rather, a leaky shield "would be valuable primarily in an offensive context, not a defensive one – as an adjunct to a U.S. first-strike capability, not as a standalone shield."

"If the United States launched a nuclear attack against Russia (or China)," they explained, "the targeted country would be left with a tiny surviving arsenal – if any at all. At that point, even a relatively modest or inefficient missile-defense system might well be enough to protect against any retaliatory strikes, because the devastated enemy would have so few warheads and decoys left."

As if to make that scenario a reality, the Bush administration soon announced plans to install an anti-missile base in Poland and a radar control center in the Czech Republic – ostensibly to counter a nuclear threat from Iran. No matter that Iran had neither nuclear weapons nor long-range ballistic missiles – or that Washington had rebuffed Russia's offer to cooperate on building missile defenses closer to Iran. No, Moscow was supposed to believe President Bush's assurance that "Russia is not the enemy."

Republican hawks in Congress didn't get the message. Said Rep. Trent Franks of Arizona, "This is not just about missile defense; this is about demonstrating to Russia that America is still a nation of resolve . . . and we're not going to let Russian expansionism intimidate everyone."

Yet when Russian officials reacted with alarm, and warned of the potential for a "new Cold War," American news accounts accused them of being "bellicose."

### **Obama Blows Up the Reset Button**

Taking office in 2009, President Obama promised a new era of nuclear sanity. Again, the Russians pleaded for an end to the missile defense program in Eastern Europe. Privately, they expressed a new and genuine concern – that a future U.S. administration could secretly fit interceptor rockets with nuclear warheads and use them to “decapitate” Russia’s top leadership with “virtually no warning time.” Russia’s response: retaliate at the first sign of an incoming strike, without hesitating to check if it’s a false alarm.

Obama and his team didn’t heed the warnings. Instead, they snubbed Putin – and the entire Russian leadership – by marching ahead with the missile shield deployment in Eastern Europe, still insulting Moscow’s intelligence with the pretense that it was a defense against Iran.

Obama’s “reset button” was the first casualty of his nuclear policy. In 2011, a despairing President Dmitry Medvedev warned that Russia would have no choice but to respond exactly as Putin has done, by upgrading the offensive capabilities of Russian nuclear missiles and deploying Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad. Still to come may be a Russian withdrawal from the New START treaty, which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton claimed as her greatest accomplishment in the field of arms control.

President Obama never intended to expand his limited missile defense program into an existential threat to Russia’s nuclear deterrent, but he opened that door. Exactly as Moscow has long feared, hawks in Congress now are chomping at the bit to spend what it takes to build an all-out missile defense system, which former Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned would be “enormously destabilizing not to mention unbelievably expensive.”

One 2003 study pegged the possible cost of a full defensive shield covering the United States at more than \$1 trillion. But that’s a small price compared to what could happen if a jittery Russian military command, armed to the teeth with nuclear missiles set on hair-trigger alert to counter a successful U.S. first strike, receives a false warning of just such an attack. Such a scenario has happened more than once.

One of these days such a mistake may prompt an all-out Russian nuclear launch – and then, not even a full missile defense will spare the United States, and much of the world, from devastation.

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

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# Escalating the Risky Fight with Russia

**Exclusive:** To box in President-elect Trump, the neocons and liberal hawks are pushing for “crippling sanctions” against Russia that they see as crucial to their dangerous “regime change” agenda in Moscow, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The neocons and their liberal-interventionist chums never seem to think through one of their “regime change” schemes. It’s enough that they wrote the plan down in some op-ed article or reached a consensus at a think-tank conference. After that, all there is to do is to generate the requisite propaganda, often accompanied by intelligence “leaks” and maybe some heartbreaking photos of children, to rile up the American people so they can be easily herded into the next slaughterhouse.

We’ve seen this pattern play out over and over again, from Iraq to Libya to Syria to Ukraine. You could even go back to the 1980s and the project for arming Afghanistan’s mujahedeen and a collection of international jihadists led by Osama bin Laden, a project enthusiastically supported by both Republicans and Democrats.

The one consistent in these bloody follies is that the neocon/liberal-hawk plans never work out as they were drawn up. Time and again, it turns out that the great idea – looking so good on the op-ed page or sounding so smart at the think-tank conference – wasn’t all that great or smart after all.

Remember how the Iraqis were going to welcome U.S. troops with flowers and how neocon favorite Ahmed Chalabi would be hailed as Iraq’s new leader; or how the murder of Muammar Gaddafi would be followed by the flowering of Libyan democracy; or how enforcing the “must go” edict on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would be accomplished pretty quickly; or how overthrowing democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich was sure to put a stop to Ukraine’s endemic corruption.

Instead, the people in those countries were left bloodied and battered while the areas around them became destabilized, too, now with those social and economic disruptions extending all the way to Europe, which not that long ago was one of the world’s bastions of stability. And, oh, yes, the Afghan operation from the 1980s gave us the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

**No Accountability**

The neocon/liberal-hawk elitists never seem to get anything right but they are so well-connected that they never are held accountable. They just keep coming up with new gambits, expressed with the same confidence and certainty – all beautifully explained in the next round of op-eds and at the think-tank conferences.

When the new scheme arrives, it's as if the earlier disasters hadn't happened. Across the ideological spectrum, the mainstream media's star reporters act as if the only proper reaction toward the latest brilliant idea is to show undying credulity. The only questions that get asked of politicians are why they aren't intervening faster and going bigger, whether the new plan is to blast the targeted country in a "shock and awe" display or ship weapons to some proxy force which may include jihadists and neo-Nazis or sabotage a country's economy so the people will support a coup out of hunger and desperation.

Time and again, the unhappy country at the receiving end of America's latest "regime change" project ends up wallowing in pools of blood as the international circle of chaos widens. But the U.S. public's attention quickly goes elsewhere, like a child bored with a broken Christmas toy. The targeted country is mostly forgotten, except for the occasional op-ed or think-tank complaint that if only the politicians had started the wars earlier or had dispatched a bigger military force or had kept U.S. soldiers there indefinitely or had done more to undermine some demonized leader, then the neocon/liberal-hawks scheme would have worked out just perfectly. Which sets us up for the next grand idea.

### **Dropping the Big One**

But the next grand idea arguably could be the last one. After several years of intensifying anti-Russian propaganda, the United States reportedly is ready to escalate the New Cold War with Russia by inflicting new punishments in retaliation for the still-unproven allegation that President Vladimir Putin authorized the hacking of Democratic emails and then released them to the American people via WikiLeaks.

Though the Obama administration has yet to provide any public evidence to support the charges, mainstream news outlets – particularly The Washington Post and The New York Times – have lapped up their own leaks from the Central Intelligence Agency, which appears to have been operating under instructions from President Obama to discredit President-elect Donald Trump's victory.

The hope seemed to be that the CIA's claims about Putin's interference in the election could anger enough electors to the Electoral College to prevent Trump from getting the 270 required votes on Dec. 19 and thus toss the selection of a new president into the House of Representatives, which under the Twelfth

Amendment would pick from the Electoral College's top three vote-getters (who turned out to be Trump, Hillary Clinton and former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who received four votes from Clinton's electors in Washington State).

Though this Electoral College coup failed – Trump got more than the 270 votes he needed – the CIA's claims about Russian hacking lived on with neocon and liberal-hawk members of Congress (not to mention pretty much every important op-ed writer and editorialist in America) demanding that Russia be made to pay a heavy price.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, spoke for many of his colleagues when he tweeted, "My goal is to put on President Trump's desk crippling sanctions against Russia."

In a new leak to The Washington Post on Wednesday, Obama administration officials vowed to do just that, readying "a series of measures to punish Russia for its interference in the 2016 presidential election, including economic sanctions and diplomatic censure [as well as] covert actions that will probably involve cyber-operations."

### **A New Escalation**

This latest U.S. escalation of tensions with nuclear-armed Russia actually culminates at least a half decade of probing by the United States for Moscow's vulnerabilities to "regime change," an operation that appears to have begun around Russia's 2011 elections and continued with protests against Putin's election in 2012, street demonstrations dubbed by the West's media as the "snow revolution," since all these strategies seem to require a "color" or a similar special identification marking.

Former Secretary of State (and defeated Democratic presidential nominee) Hillary Clinton has cited Putin's belief that she orchestrated this interference in Russian politics as his supposed motive for leaking emails that embarrassed her campaign. And, without doubt, the Russian election protests had the strong support of various U.S.-based "non-governmental organizations" that receive funding either from the U.S. government or from U.S. "pro-democracy" foundations.

There is also no doubt that the West's neocons and liberal hawks want desperately to instigate a "regime change" in Moscow, in part, as punishment for Putin interfering in their "regime change" schemes for Syria and Iran.

In 2013, by getting Syria to surrender its chemical weapons, Putin helped thwart plans for a U.S. bombing campaign against the Syrian military in retaliation for a mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus that the Obama administration and

Western media immediately blamed on President Assad though later evidence suggested that it was a provocation carried out by Islamic extremists connected to Al Qaeda.

Putin also assisted Obama in securing concessions from Iran regarding the agreement to prevent it from developing a nuclear weapon, which disrupted Israeli and neocon hopes for a plan to “bomb-bomb-bomb” Iran, as Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, once described.

### **Putin's Payback**

The neocons and liberal hawks delivered Putin his first dose of payback when they helped orchestrate a putsch in neighboring Ukraine in 2014 that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich. Neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, a Hillary Clinton favorite, was caught on an unsecure phone line discussing with U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt how they would “glue” or “midwife” a change in government that would put Nuland's choice, Arseniy “Yats is the guy” Yatsenyuk in power. Meanwhile, the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) sponsored scores of projects inside Ukraine for training activists and funding journalists.

Another key project seeking to undermine Yanukovich's government was the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Open Society foundation of billionaire currency speculator George Soros.

Amid a massive propaganda barrage, street protests in Kiev and open encouragement from senior U.S. officials, a violent coup on Feb. 22, 2014 – spearheaded by neo-Nazi street fighters – forced Yanukovich to flee for his life and brought Yatsenyuk to power as Ukraine's prime minister.

When ethnic Russians from Crimea and eastern Ukraine rejected this unconstitutional transfer of power – and Crimeans voted overwhelmingly to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia – the State Department and the mainstream Western media reported this resistance as a “Russian invasion” or “Russian aggression” – prompting the first wave of U.S. economic sanctions to punish Russia.

The European Union was brought into the sanctions regime after Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, and the U.S. government immediately blamed Russia. The crash investigation – though technically “Dutch-led” – was effectively put under the control of Ukraine's unsavory intelligence agency, the SBU, which has among its mandates the protection of Ukrainian government secrets and has been implicated in torturing captured ethnic Russians.

Though I was told that at least some CIA analysts saw the hand of Ukrainian extremists behind the MH-17 shoot-down – and Dutch intelligence reported that the only powerful anti-aircraft missiles in the area that day were under the control of the Ukrainian military – Obama refused to release the details of the U.S. intelligence assessment, allowing the SBU-dominated investigation to pin the blame on Russia. [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

The U.S.-government-subsidized OCCRP also was involved in the analysis of the so-called “Panama Papers,” a law firm’s purloined financial records that led to front-page stories seeking to tie Putin to off-shored wealth even though Putin’s name was not found in the documents.

The West’s thorough demonization of Putin set the stage for Hillary Clinton’s attempts to delegitimize Donald Trump by portraying him as Putin’s “puppet” because the Republican nominee advocated seeking normalized relations with Russia and cooperating with Moscow on counter-terrorism operations against Islamic State.

The Clinton campaign theme, which I was personally briefed on, sought to convince journalists that Trump was a Russian agent completely under Putin’s control. That theme provided the backdrop for the CIA’s leaked allegations about Russian hacking of the emails of the Democratic National Committee, which revealed how the DNC improperly tilted the primary playing field in favor of Clinton over Sen. Bernie Sanders. A second batch of emails from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta disclosed the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street interests and pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton money machine.

### **Obama’s Hand**

Given Obama’s refusal to let CIA analysts brief reporters about internal CIA dissent questioning the mainstream consensus blaming the sarin attack on Syria and the MH-17 shoot-down on Russia – because those briefings might undercut the prevailing propaganda narratives – it’s a fair assumption that Obama authorized the CIA leaks to The Washington Post and other major media outlets about the alleged Russian hacks.

I’ve also been told that there is some internal CIA dissent against the publicly released claim of Russian responsibility for the Democratic leaks, an analytical dispute that appears to center less on whether Russian intelligence and other entities may have hacked the email accounts than whether Russia then released the material to WikiLeaks.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and former British Ambassador Craig Murray, an Assange associate who says he communicated with one of the sources (or a



representative) in a meeting in Washington in September, say the emails did not come from the Russian government. Murray also has indicated that the two batches of emails had two different sources, both American, one a disgruntled Democrat and the other possibly from the U.S. intelligence community.

Despite these doubts, the CIA's leaked claims about alleged Russian responsibility for the hacks have prompted congressional demands for a thorough investigation, possibly even a special committee like the ones that examined the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals.

### **Telling the Full Story**

If such an inquiry is undertaken – and assuming it's not a pre-packaged deal that starts with the conclusion of Russian guilt and assembles whatever is necessary to “prove” the case – the investigation should also obtain testimony regarding Putin's suspicion that Secretary of State Clinton, the National Endowment for Democracy and the Soros organization had a hand in the aborted “snow revolution” in Moscow from 2011 to 2013.

The investigation also should explore whether Obama assigned the CIA's leadership to leak information to the mainstream media in a failed attempt to reverse the outcome of the U.S. election by trying to stampede the Electoral College into denying Trump the presidency. Under the CIA's charter, it is forbidden to operate domestically or interfere in U.S. politics, a concern that worried President Harry Truman at the CIA's founding.

One of the most serious abuses of the Reagan administration was its systematic politicizing of the CIA's analytical division when it was under the control of CIA Director William Casey and his deputy, Robert Gates.

According to the CIA's then-chief Russia expert Melvin Goodman and other former CIA analysts, the Casey-Gates team broke down the agency's historic tradition of objective analysis and bullied CIA analysts into producing phony intelligence that served President Reagan's ideological agenda.

That corruption continued through both Republican and Democratic presidents, including George W. Bush's “slam-dunk” National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's non-existent WMD and now including Obama's selective release of data on Syria, Ukraine and Russia.

### **Going to Extremes**

As destructive as the past distortion of intelligence has been, the Obama CIA's apparent interference in an attempt to reverse the outcome of a U.S. presidential election arguably ranks with the worst intelligence scandals in

U.S. history.

And, compounding the CIA's political intervention is the fact that this controversy has taken on a life of its own as the Obama administration prepares to hit nuclear-armed Russia with a combination of new economic sanctions and covert cyber-attacks, apparently with the goal of heading off any rapprochement between Putin and Trump.

The neocons and their liberal-hawk allies clearly have in mind plans for making the Russian economy scream and somehow engineering a "regime change" in Moscow despite Putin's current 80 percent approval ratings. But this latest scheme – like the earlier ones – is almost surely not going to end as its architects have drawn it up.

While the neocons and liberal hawks may dream about some Western-beloved "liberal" being carried into the Kremlin while Putin is dragged away, the likelihood that the Russian people would put up with another round of American-prescribed "shock therapy" – in which Russia's resources were plundered, Russian life expectancy plunged, and various U.S. "advisers" and hedge funds made out like bandits – is remote.

The far more likely result of Sen. Graham's "crippling sanctions" would be that a hardline Russian nationalist would rise, lacking Putin's calculating temperament. Instead of Putin and his famous sang froid, the world would likely be facing some hot-blooded extremist determined to defend the honor of Mother Russia even to the point of pulling out the nuclear codes and pushing the button.

The neocons and liberal hawks may believe they've got this New Cold War all figured out, but if their record holds, they could easily be driving the world toward a hot war that would indeed be the war to end all wars – and to end humanity as well.

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

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## A Sour Holiday Season for Neocons

**Exclusive:** For the past couple of decades, the neocons have ruled the roost of American foreign policy, but they have now suffered some stunning reversals that

have left them fuming, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

America's extended Christmas holiday season, stretching through much of November and all of December, has not been a happy time for Official Washington's dominant neoconservatives and their liberal-interventionist sidekicks.

First, they had to lick their wounds over the defeat of their preferred U.S. presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton; then they had to watch as their "moderate" Syrian rebel proxies and their Al Qaeda allies were routed from east Aleppo; and finally they watched in disbelief as the Obama administration permitted passage of a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Israel's illegal settlements on Palestinian lands.

To say that the neocons and liberal hawks have not taken these reversals well would be an understatement. They have pretty much blamed Clinton's defeat on everyone but themselves and Clinton herself. They have been apoplectic over Aleppo and their lost dream of "regime change" in Syria. And they have sputtered in outrage over President Obama's failure to veto the Israeli anti-settlement resolution.

Regarding Clinton's defeat, her embrace of the neocon/liberal-hawk "regime change" obsessions siphoned off enthusiasm among the peace faction of the Democratic Party, a significant and activist part of the progressive movement.

Clinton's alignment with the neocon/liberal hawks may have helped her with the mainstream media, but the MSM has lost much of its credibility by making itself a handmaiden in leading the nation to wars and more wars.

Average Americans also could feel the contempt that these elites had for the rest of us. The neocons and liberal hawks had come to believe in the CIA's concept of "perception management," feeling that the American people were items to be controlled, not the nation's sovereigns to be informed and respected. Instead of "We the People," Official Washington's elites treated us like "Us the Sheep."

Though this "perception management" idea took hold during the Reagan administration – largely in reaction to the public's distrust of U.S. foreign policy following the Vietnam War – it became a bipartisan practice, extending through George W. Bush's WMD sham about Iraq and into the behavior of the Obama administration in manipulating public opinion about Syria, Libya, Ukraine and Russia, pretty much any country targeted for "regime change."

So, when this establishment tried to force Hillary Clinton's coronation down the nation's throat, enough Americans choked at the idea – even to the extent of voting for the eminently unqualified Donald Trump – to deny Clinton the White House. Indeed, many Americans who reluctantly did vote for Clinton did so only because they considered Trump even more unfit to lead the nation. The two candidates were in a fierce competition for who would arouse the most public revulsion.

### **No Self-Reflection**

But the neocons and liberal hawks are not ones for self-reflection and self-criticism. They move from one disaster to the next, finding others to blame and justifying their own failures by publishing self-apologias in the editorial pages of The New York Times, The Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal.

Thus, for the past several weeks, we have witnessed daily meltdowns across the mainstream media as neocons and liberal interventionists fume about all the forces that conspired to deny them their God-given right to select who runs America.

The mainstream media ranted about a few incidents of “fake news” – concocted stories designed to get lots of clicks from Trump supporters – despite its own long history of publishing false and misleading stories. The MSM then tried to tar with that “fake news” broad brush serious independent Web sites that simply displayed professional skepticism toward propaganda emanating from the U.S. State Department.

The smear blurred the “fake news scandal” with what was deemed “Russian propaganda.” Anyone who wouldn't march in lockstep with the State Department's messaging must be a “Kremlin stooge.” Mainstream media outlets even began demanding that major technology companies, such as Facebook and Google, join in establishing a modern-age Ministry of Truth for the Internet that would punish independent Web sites that didn't toe the Official Line.

Then, there was the hysteria over the CIA's still-unproven claim that Russian President Vladimir Putin oversaw a scheme to hack into Democratic emails and expose embarrassing facts, such as the Democratic National Committee's tilting the primary playing field to favor Clinton over Sen. Bernie Sanders, the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to her Wall Street benefactors, and pay-to-play features of the Clinton money machine.

Though this information all appeared to be true – and revealed dubious or improper actions by Democratic officials and the Democratic presidential nominee – this truth-telling was also mixed in with the “fake news scandal” and other

excuse-making for why Clinton lost. Her defeat was Putin's fault. It was also FBI Director James Comey's fault for chastising Clinton for her "extremely careless" handling of U.S. government secrets because she insisted on using a private email server as Secretary of State. And, of course, there was the supposed over-reaction to Clinton calling many Trump supporters a "basket of deplorables."

In other words, the Clinton campaign appears to have been done in by various people telling the truth about a variety of unsavory aspects of Hillary Clinton's behavior and decision-making. If none of these facts had come out before the election, the thinking was that Clinton would have won and the neocons/liberal hawks could have continued and even expanded their dominion over U.S. foreign policy.

Yet, to me, the biggest head-scratcher about Clinton's disastrous campaign was why – after she left the State Department in 2013 – did she jump into the sleazy business of collecting hundreds of thousands of dollars for brief speeches to Wall Street and other special interests.

Her prospective presidency was crucial to the Clinton business model of soliciting huge donations and fees from corporations and foreign governments to the Clinton Foundation and to allied consulting firms, such as the Podesta Group. These corporate and foreign leaders were pre-paying for "access" to the future U.S. president. However, instead of shielding Clinton from the grubby business of collecting the money herself, she was dispatched to join in the money grabbing.

This greed or hubris left millions of Americans troubled by what a restoration of Clinton control of the Executive Branch might mean. Whether Trump was sincere or not, he hit a nerve when he talked about "draining the swamp."

### **'Regime Change' Reversals**

The neocons and liberal hawks also watched their "regime change" plans for Syria – something that has been on their agenda since the mid-1990s – collapse with this month's fall of east Aleppo to Syrian government troops, backed by Russia and Iran.

In the battle for Syria, the Obama administration, other Western governments and Persian Gulf states illegally armed a melange of rebels and terrorists. But the West and its allies also deployed state-of-the-art propaganda techniques in which government agencies and like-thinking private foundations invested tens of millions of dollars in training Syrian activists to use social media to rally international support.

This propaganda strategy reached its apex in Aleppo, which was portrayed in Western media as a case of the Syrian government and its allies willfully slaughtering helpless children. The fact that the “moderate” rebels were operating under the command structure of Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups, such as Ahrar al-Sham, was almost blacked out from the West’s mainstream media coverage.

The last piece of coal in the neocon/liberal-hawk stocking came last week with the U.N. Security Council’s repudiation of Israel’s illegal settlement building on Palestinian lands. Though the Obama administration only abstained from the vote, the lack of a U.S. veto enabled the resolution to pass unanimously, 14-0.

Again, the neocons erupted in fury. Rather than acknowledge that Israel had brought this condemnation on itself by its illegal actions, the neocons lashed out at Obama and the world for not taking Israel’s side. The neocon editors of The Washington Post decried Obama’s decision as “a dangerous parting shot at Israel.”

“It will encourage Palestinians to pursue more international sanctions against Israel rather than seriously consider the concessions necessary for statehood, and it will give a boost to the international boycott and divestment movement against the Jewish state, which has become a rallying cause for anti-Zionists,” the Post lamented.

“At the same time, it will almost certainly not stop Israeli construction in the West Bank, much less in East Jerusalem, where Jewish housing was also deemed by the resolution to be ‘a flagrant violation under international law.’”

Similarly, the neocon editors of the Wall Street Journal labeled Obama’s abstention his “Anti-Israeli Tantrum,” claiming that the non-vote was simply an extension of his “personal pique at adversaries,” in this case toward Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Like virtually all neocons, the Post’s and Journal’s editors insist that the U.S. government always stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel though that usually means that Netanyahu stands wherever he wants and U.S. officials sidle up to him.

Though neocons always blame the Palestinians for not making the concessions that Israel demands – and thus holding them at fault for the moribund peace process – the reality is that the Israeli leadership has no intention of reaching a reasonable two-state solution with the Palestinians and hasn’t for at least two decades.

**A Fig Leaf**

The mirage of a two-state solution has simply been a fig leaf for neocons and their liberal allies to cite as an excuse for allowing Israel's steady gobbling up of Palestinian land to continue apace.

The reality is that Israel is on a steady march to become a full-scale apartheid state in which Palestinians are kept as either stateless or second-class citizens indefinitely. When these facts on the ground can no longer be obfuscated or denied, then the world will have little choice but to engage in the sort of moral and economic pressure that confronted racist South Africa in the 1980s.

At that point, peaceful pressure, such as boycott and divestiture, will be the most reasonable steps to convince Israel that it has veered off onto a dangerously racist course that can't be justified simply by mystical allusions to ancient biblical text.

But the American neocons and their liberal-interventionist junior partners seem more committed to defending Israeli interests than American interests. So, they denounce any international criticism of Israel as "anti-Israel" or "anti-Semitic," a smear that has for years terrified politicians and journalists in Official Washington but may now be so overused and abused that it is no longer taken seriously.

The other grave danger from this neocon manipulation of America on behalf of Israeli interests is that this behavior will revive the historical evil of actual anti-Semitism, a threat that could be avoided now by convincing Israel to act like a responsible global partner, not a racist rogue state.

There is some hope among hardline pro-Israeli Americans that Donald Trump will support Israel as it encroaches more and more onto Palestinian lands. But the neocons and liberal hawks recognize that Trump's "America First" rhetoric is implicitly critical of undertaking more "regime change" projects against governments on Israel's enemies list.

By appointing a pro-settler American lawyer, David Friedman, as ambassador to Israel, Trump also may be, in effect, giving Netanyahu encouragement to cast aside the "two-state" fig leaf and reveal his territorial ambitions in all their nakedness.

The neocons, of course, would still find arguments to defend Israeli apartheid – we'd hear about what animals the Palestinians are, much as we heard about the savagery of South Africa's blacks from defenders of white supremacy – but that might finally be pushing beyond what the modern world could tolerate.

Thus, 2016 is ending on a decidedly sour note for the neocons and liberal

interventionists. They had high hopes that 2017 would mark the beginning of an escalated “regime change” adventure in Syria and the start of their “mother of all regime change” schemes for destabilizing nuclear-armed Russia and somehow staging a “color revolution” in Moscow, all while Hillary Clinton took the relationship with Israel “to the next level” as she promised in her speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Now, the neocons and liberal hawks find themselves on the outside looking in and one can expect their anger to be voiced at increasing decibels across the mainstream media. But whether anyone still takes them seriously is another question.

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

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## The Good That Trump Could Do

**Exclusive:** Despite fears about the many negatives from a Donald Trump presidency, one positive could be his shattering of the monopoly that neocons and liberal hawks now hold over U.S. foreign policy, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Americans and the world have valid reasons to worry about Donald Trump’s presidency, given his lack of experience and his refusal to recognize that his loss of the popular vote should moderate his emerging domestic policies. But Trump also could do some good things.

Particularly, Trump could break the death grip that neoconservatives and their “liberal interventionist” tag-team partners now have locked around the throat of U.S. foreign policy.

Trump owes little to these “regime change” advocates since nearly all of them supported either other Republicans or his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton. And the few who backed Trump, such as John Bolton and James Woolsey, have been largely passed over as Trump assembles his foreign policy and national security teams by relying mostly on a combination of outsiders and outcasts.

Obviously, there remains much uncertainty about what foreign policy direction a



President Trump will take and the neocons/liberal-hawks in Congress are sure to mount a fierce battle to defeat or intimidate some of his nominees, particularly Exxon-Mobil chief executive Rex Tillerson for Secretary of State because of his past working relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

However, assuming that the neocon/liberal-hawk establishment fails to stop Trump from escaping Official Washington's foreign policy "group thinks," the new president could radically reorder the way the U.S. government approaches the world.

### **Lost Opportunity**

Eight years ago, President Barack Obama had a similar opportunity but chose to accommodate the Establishment and empower the neocons and liberal hawks by appointing his infamous "team of rivals": Republican Robert Gates as Defense Secretary, liberal-hawk Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, and leaving in place President George W. Bush's military high command, including neocon-favorite Gen. David Petraeus.

For doing so, Obama won applause from the editorial and op-ed writers but he doomed his presidency to a foreign policy of continuity, rather than his promised change. Only on the edges did Obama resist the neocon/liberal-hawk pressures for war and more war, such as his decision not to bomb Syria in 2013 and his negotiations with Iran to prevent it from building a nuclear weapon in 2014.

But Obama bowed down more than he stood up. He let Secretary Clinton push a neoliberal economic agenda by supporting oligarchic interests in Latin America, such as the 2009 Honduran coup, and extend the neocon "regime change" strategy in the Middle East, with the brutal overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and covert support for rebels in Syria.

Even after the original "team of rivals" was gone at the start of his second term, Obama continued his pathetic efforts to appease the powerful, such as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by undertaking a submissive three-day tour of Israel in early 2013 and cozying up to the Saudi royals with trips to the kingdom despite intelligence that they and their Gulf state allies were financing Al Qaeda and Islamic State terrorists.

Though Obama would eventually boast about the rare moments when he defied what he called the Washington "playbook" of relying on military options rather than diplomatic ones, it was a case of the exception proving the rule. The rule was that Obama so wanted to be accepted by Washington's well-dressed and well-heeled establishment that he never ventured too far from what the editorialists at The

Washington Post and The New York Times deemed permissible.

Still, the neocon/liberal-hawk establishment continued to scold America's first African-American president for not doing everything that the "smart people" demanded, such as escalating the U.S. role in the "regime change" war in Syria or fully arming Ukraine's military so it could more efficiently slaughter ethnic Russian rebels on Russia's border.

### **Power Consolidated**

In the end, however, Obama did nothing to alter Official Washington's balance of power on foreign policy. Indeed, over his eight years, the neocons and liberal hawks consolidated their power, essentially banishing the once-relevant "realists" from establishment circles and smearing the few anti-war and independent voices as fill-in-the-blank "apologists," maybe even "traitors" deserving FBI investigation.

It now is clear that if Hillary Clinton had won, the drive to silence any dissent against the neocon/liberal-hawk orthodoxy would have escalated. The recently revealed strategies for isolating and punishing dissident Web sites took shape before the Nov. 8 election, not afterwards.

The U.S. government also continues programs to throw tens of millions of dollars to contractors whose job it is "to counter Russian propaganda," code words for going after and harassing Web sites and other news outlets that question U.S. State Department propaganda.

For historians, there may be a reasonable debate about whether Obama was an enthusiastic supporter of these anti-democratic policies or was simply too eager to please the Establishment to resist them.

Nevertheless, despite his early promises of transparency and openness, he oversaw an administration that ruthlessly suppressed government whistleblowers and bought into the neocon/liberal-hawk manipulation of the American people via "perception management" or what NATO likes to call "strategic communications."

Obama then sat back passively as his Democratic Party sought to replace him with Hillary Clinton who had done as much as anyone to turn his beloved motto of "change" into the sad reality of "more of the same."

I'm told that Obama privately had grave doubts about Clinton but he did nothing to encourage alternative Democratic candidates, like Senators Elizabeth Warren or Sherrod Brown, to take on the money-churning Clinton machine.

Because of Obama's miscalculations and timidity, he now will have to take part

in the painful and humiliating process of handing over the keys to the White House to a man who launched his national political career by pushing the racist canard that Obama was born in Kenya.

### **Trump's Challenge**

But the question after Jan. 20 will be whether Trump has the guts and tenacity to enact some of the "change" that Obama promised. Particularly, will Trump stay the course in challenging the neocon/liberal-hawk establishment that rules the roost of Washington's foreign policy?

Can Trump withstand the barrage of slings and arrows that will zero in on him if he rejects the neocons' "regime change" ambitions and if he presses for a détente with Russia to resolve the Ukraine crisis and to present a united front against Islamic terrorism?

If Trump moves in those directions – pulling back on the New Cold War with Russia and ending the coddling of Saudi Arabia over its covert backing of jihadists across the region – he could finally put the U.S. government on a more rational track for achieving its national interests.

One of Official Washington's favorite "group thinks" has been that Iran is the "chief sponsor of terrorism," a formulation favored by Israel and Saudi Arabia – as part of their anti-Shiite alliance – but it is clearly a lie. Yet, to take on the Saudis over their real leading role as state sponsors of terrorism, Trump would have to take on the Israelis, a daunting prospect.

In that regard, Trump's choice of lawyer David Friedman, a staunch supporter of right-wing Israeli settlers, to be U.S. ambassador to Israel has been viewed as a major concession to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, but it could be a decidedly mixed blessing.

If Israel gets its way and further expands Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory, it will be jettisoning the longstanding false hope for a "two-state solution." That means Israel will have to either become a blatantly "apartheid state," holding Palestinians as stateless or second-class citizens, or accept a "one-state solution," granting both Jews and Arabs equal rights, arguably the most logical and humane answer to the Israeli-Palestinian dilemma.

In other words, if Trump takes on Saudi Arabia – finally recognizing its role as the principal state sponsor of terrorism – and sweeps away the "two-state solution" which has been a liberal excuse for doing nothing to resolve the Israel-Palestine mess for years, he could be clearing a path to a saner U.S. policy toward the region, not one dictated by the likes of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Saudi King Salman.

Obviously, the powerful neocons and their “liberal interventionist” sidekicks would not sit idly by and accept such a radical challenge to their preferred options in the region, i.e. more “regime changes” for countries that get onto the Israeli-Saudi “enemies list.”

And, it is certainly possible that President Trump would retreat when he confronts the Establishment’s fury that would surely come. However, if he follows through on this course of action, he might finally shatter the neocon/liberal-hawk monopoly over Official Washington’s bloody foreign policy. And the world and the American people might find that a very positive thing indeed.

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## German Resistance to Russia Detente

The German political hierarchy and major media remain hostile to any détente with Russia, but the ground may be shifting under the feet of Chancellor Merkel and her allies, reports Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

As German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government is staggered by [security lapses](#) that may have permitted a fatal terrorist attack on a Christmas market in Berlin, the question many inside and outside Germany are asking is how this may affect the chances of her CDU party and its junior affiliate in Bavaria (CSU) to dominate the 2017 parliamentary elections and form the next government.

Her personal standing has weathered a number of crises in the past year, and polls before the terror attack gave her about a 50 percent approval rating. Moreover, within the CDU itself, she received more than 89 percent backing at the party convention in Essen a couple of weeks ago to remain at the helm and fight for another term as Chancellor next October.

That being said, the party has not done as well as Merkel. It lost several regional elections this past fall and the leader of her Bavarian affiliate, Herr

Seehofer, was nipping at her heels over her continued hardline economic sanctions against Russia relating to the Ukraine crisis and more particularly over her lenient admission of around one million Mideast immigrants.

One of the widely noted features of Angela Merkel's ten-years-plus in office is that she has sidelined all possible competitors, not only within her party but even in the leading opposition party, the Socialists (SPD) with whom she has shared a coalition government.

Just what this means in practice I saw firsthand last Friday when I was in Berlin for an event organized and attended by SPD party officials and supporters. The event was a press briefing at the Bundestag announcing the European launch of *Détente Now!* (or "*Neue Entspannungspolitik Jetzt!*" in German) after its U.S. debut with an op-ed in *The Nation*. The launch on two continents was meant to draw attention to the overarching objective of establishing a new peaceful Atlanticism to replace the neocon-dominated Atlantic Alliance that has developed over the past two decades in a malignant way, bringing us into a New Cold War and, in the estimation of some of us, to the brink of a hot war.

Judged as a "press briefing," the meeting was a failure. Out of the 20 or so participants, there were just three journalists. One came from *Deutsche Welle* – not to prepare a report or do interviews but to ask insulting questions, such as why Russian President Vladimir Putin's signature was not on the appeal to reinstate the policy of *rapprochement* with Moscow that German Chancellor Willy Brandt had championed nearly a half century ago.

### **Explaining the History of *Détente***

The significance of the event lay elsewhere as several organizers of *Détente Now!* met with representatives of German church groups, pacifist movements, one former Greens politician, and American friends of the initiative (myself and one other). But the single most important politician in the room was SPD Bundestag member Ute Finckh-Kraemer, a longtime supporter of peaceful coexistence who keeps the memory of *détente's* great thinker Egon Bahr shining bright.

Ute Finckh-Krämer is on the Bundestag's Foreign Affairs Committee and is Deputy Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Arms Control and Disarmament. In that context, it was illuminating to hear her response to a somewhat hostile question: namely how can you consider implementing *détente* with Russia when Putin is doing so many nasty things like flying military aircraft around the Baltic Sea with their transponders turned off?

Finckh-Kraemer reminded the questioner of just how *Entspannungspolitik* originally came about, not at a time of easy relations with Moscow but amid

dangerous tensions. Détente toward Moscow was first implemented by Willie Brandt in 1969 in response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia the preceding August to oust a reformist regime. Instead of imposing sanctions on the Soviet Union, Brandt sent his assistant, Egon Bahr, to Moscow for extensive talks with the Kremlin with plans to draw closer to them and seek to influence their behavior from within.

Finckh-Kraemer argued that what is urgently needed today is precisely what Brandt undertook in 1969, a policy of de-escalating tensions without preconditions. With her comments, Finckh-Kraemer demonstrated that within the SPD there are very able defenders of détente who understand with great clarity why it's needed.

The problem is that the party as a whole is enthralled to discipline of the coalition government with the CDU and to its own internal hierarchy, where the most senior voices of the party, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Sigmar Gabriel, lack charisma and seem to lack as well the courage to openly challenge the "group think" coming from Washington and passing down through Merkel to the whole German government.

The apologists for Steinmeier explained that he, like Merkel, helped frame the still-uncompleted Minsk-2 accords regarding the Ukraine crisis in 2015 out of fear that the then-imminent defeat of Ukrainian forces in the Debaltsevo Cauldron might cause the United States to step up its military support for Kiev, risking an all-out proxy war with Russia that could spread the conflagration into Central Europe.

Since then, it would appear that Steinmeier and Merkel have remained fearful of breaking with Washington over the anti-Russian sanctions or over Syria lest the Obama administration do something reckless in its final weeks in office.

That is a different approach from what is happening in France where Republican candidate Francois Fillon – emboldened by Donald Trump's U.S. victory – made improved relations with Russia a key element in his successful primary campaign in November.

### **Can Germany Shift?**

In Germany, the question is: will the timorous SPD and the pigheaded CDU continue to hold to these New Cold War policies during the fall 2017 federal elections? The answer seems to be yes, unless the issue is seriously addressed now and a constituency arises favoring a more constructive approach toward Russia.

Within the SPD, the two main contenders for party leadership as candidates for

Chancellor are Sigmar Gabriel, who is presently serving as Deputy Chancellor for Economics, and Martin Schulz, the outgoing President of the European Parliament. Of the two, Schulz is arguably the more “charismatic” if that is taken to mean outwardly self-confident, even strident. But Schulz brings with him the baggage of his association with the increasingly unpopular European Union bureaucracy.

During his years in the European Union’s institutions, Schulz was a defender of what is called “democracy promotion,” the West’s funding and training of activists who then challenge – through media propaganda and street protests – governments that are regarded as insufficiently liberal. In that context, Schulz has been arrogant and censorious towards Russia, very much in line with the policy that developed in Berlin over the same period.

Gabriel is less involved in foreign policy and lacks his own message regarding future relations with Russia.

Meanwhile, from my correspondence with leading experts on Russia within the SPD’s main think tank, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, I must conclude that people with a distinctly neocon or “liberal interventionist” viewpoint continue to rule the roost there. One does not get very far in the think tank by calling for a change of direction on Russia without being labeled “Putin Versteher,” a pejorative that roughly translates to “Putin sympathizer” and is fatal to any political career.

The same holds true for the Foundation’s foreign relations magazine, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* (IPG). Reading through the issues since the U.S. presidential election, you could easily assume that the journal is edited by frustrated members of Hillary Clinton’s campaign. Its featured articles and authors are all anti-Trump and anti-détente. With this think tank and magazine, it’s hard to see how the SPD can develop a new foreign policy that deviates from Merkel’s anti-Russian orthodoxy.

Of course, there is more to German politics than the CDU and SPD, which together in the last elections gathered less than 60 percent of the votes. But the other parties also do not give much reason for hope that Germany can change direction.

Die Linke (the Left) has some very courageous thinkers and politicians on the issue of foreign policy, none more so than Bundestag Member Sahra Wagenknecht. But Die Linke is split internally and engaged in petty wrangling, so that its electoral performance remains well below its potential.

Meanwhile, the German Greens have been – from their very beginning, going back to the days of Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Joscha Fischer – a virulently anti-Russian force. There are signs that the party has some dissenting voices today on the

Russia issue, but not enough to shift the course of German foreign policy.

That leaves the far-right Alternativ fuer Deutschland, which, like the Front National in France, is unequivocally in favor of normalizing relations with Russia. But the anti-immigration and other social issues espoused by the nationalist and xenophobic AfD puts them out of play for any coalition formations.

For all of the above reasons, it will take a small miracle for the Entspannungspolitik initiative to move forward and capture the imagination of the SPD and win at the polls in the autumn of 2017. That miracle could come either from France, where a veto on current E.U. foreign policy is virtually certain following the April elections and will position France as a direct competitor to Germany for leadership in the E.U. Or it may come from the U.S., depending on how the Trump administration handles relations with Germany and the E.U.

**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 20, 2015. © Gilbert Doctorow, 2016**

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## Trump's Need to Trust Americans

**Exclusive:** President Obama promised transparency but delivered a deceptive administration hostile to truth-tellers. President-elect Trump's narrow path to greatness would require the opposite choice, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Barack Obama's chance for a transformative presidency ended when he bowed to Official Washington's foreign-policy establishment of neocons and liberal interventionists and bought into the elitist notion that the American people should be guided by propaganda, not informed by facts.

Although he began his presidency by promising transparency, Obama instead undertook an unprecedented crackdown on national security whistleblowers, prosecuting more than all other presidents combined. Meanwhile, he authorized partial and misleading releases of information about key events. Instead of an informed public, his administration sought maximum propaganda advantage, such as with the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin gas attack outside Damascus, Syria, and with the July 17, 2014 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine.



But Obama's anti-democratic approach to information, i.e., treating Americans like mushrooms in a darkened cellar, creates an opportunity for President-elect Donald Trump to do the opposite, reinvigorate U.S. democracy by arming citizens with facts. By doing so, he also can counter his reputation as someone hostile to reality.

Once in office, Trump could use his power over pardons and commutations to reverse Obama's punishment of truth-tellers – the likes of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden – and Trump can authorize as full a release of evidence about turning-point events as possible. There's no justifiable reason for the U.S. intelligence community to continue to withhold its assessments on the Syria-sarin case, which killed hundreds of civilians, or on the shoot-down of MH-17, which killed 298 people.

I've been told by intelligence sources that there is a great deal more evidence regarding each incident than the Obama administration has shared even with official inquiries, although holding back this information has allowed guilty parties to escape while sending investigators off in wrong directions. [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

Instead of pursuing justice, the Obama administration exploited the atrocities to demonize geopolitical "enemies." The sarin case was pinned on the Syrian government and the MH-17 shoot-down was blamed on Russian President Vladimir Putin – all the better to gin up the New Cold War and justify massive new armaments spending.

Official Washington's foreign-policy establishment, aided and abetted by the mainstream U.S. media, also concealed or played down other relevant facts about Syria and Ukraine. Regarding Syria, the Obama administration hid the [degree of collaboration](#) between U.S.-backed "moderate" Syrian rebels and radical jihadists, including Al Qaeda's affiliate, Nusra Front. On Ukraine, Obama concealed American [complicity in the violent putsch](#) that overthrew Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich and threw Ukraine into a nasty civil war with the pro-U.S. side [relying on neo-Nazi storm troopers](#) to kill ethnic Russian Ukrainians. Those realities had to be whitewashed because they didn't reinforce the desired narrative.

### **Opening the Records**

On his first day in office, President Trump could order his CIA Director Mike Pompeo to review these cases and release all information that does not compromise sensitive sources and methods. The order could extend to other intelligence-related mysteries, including some that may reflect poorly on Republicans such as [the October Surprise mystery of 1980](#), whether Ronald

Reagan's campaign went behind President Jimmy Carter's back to undermine his hostage negotiations with Iran and thus ensure Reagan's election.

By demonstrating a readiness to tell it like it is – regardless of where the partisan chips fall – Trump could reassure nervous Democrats and progressives who view him as a demagogue who disdains facts and exploits emotions for political gain. He could reverse that negative image by doing what Obama promised – but failed to deliver on – a transparent government that trusts the people.

Trump also could put mainstream U.S. media outlets in a bind since they would have to admit that much of what they have reported about Syria and Ukraine amounted to either propaganda or disinformation. As much as the big newspapers have decried Trump as a purveyor of “fake news,” they would have a hard time arguing against the release of information that gives Americans a fuller understanding of the world around them.

After opening up these intelligence files, Trump could explain why he believes neocon/liberal-hawk “regime change” strategies are unwise and how relations with Moscow could be improved based on a clear knowledge of what the Kremlin has and has not done, rather than a slanted and selective presentation of propaganda designed to manage the perceptions of the American people.

### **Advice to Obama**

In early 2014, as the New Cold War was starting to heat up, I advocated for President Obama to find within himself the courage that Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy displayed when they explained real dangers that Americans faced from, respectively, the Military Industrial Complex and the demonizing of Moscow's leaders in the pursuit of the original Cold War.

In a farewell address on Jan. 17, 1961, Eisenhower ominously warned that “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.”

On June 10, 1963, at American University in Washington, D.C., Kennedy outlined the need to collaborate with Soviet leaders to avert dangerous confrontations, like the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962:

“What kind of peace do I mean and what kind of a peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, and the kind that enables men

and nations to grow, and to hope, and build a better life for their children, not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women, not merely peace in our time but peace in all time.”

And then, in arguably the most important words that he ever spoke, Kennedy said, “For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s futures. And we are all mortal.”

But U.S. presidents since then have opted for an expanded Military Industrial Complex, the demonization of “enemies” – and what the Reagan administration liked to call “perception management” of the American public. Rather than trusting the people as the true sovereigns of the nation, these U.S. presidents saw the people as simpleminded beasts to be guided and controlled.

### **Obama’s Choice**

Obama faced that test, too. Would he go over the heads of Washington’s elites and trust the people or would he keep the people in the dark and ally himself with the elites? Obama reached that crossroads in late 2013 and early 2014.

On March 14, 2014, I wrote: “With the neocons again ascendant and with the U.S. news media again failing to describe a foreign crisis honestly, Barack Obama faces perhaps the greatest challenge of his presidency, a moment when he needs to find the courage to correct a false narrative that his own administration has spun regarding Ukraine and to explain why it’s crucial to cooperate with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the cause of world peace.”

But Obama couldn’t find the courage to rise to the occasion. Instead he relied on the strident language of aides such as his “humanitarian” warmongering Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, and he stuck with the confrontational policies of neocon holdovers such as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, an architect of the Ukraine coup.

Obama’s failure to stand up to this neocon/liberal-hawk foreign-policy elite over Syria and Ukraine may well define his historical legacy. He allowed the Syrian conflict to escalate with shipments of U.S. weapons to rebels both directly and indirectly adding to the country’s carnage. Obama also acquiesced to the provocative overthrow of Ukraine’s elected president on Russia’s border and allowed the crisis to escalate into a risky stand-off with nuclear-armed Russia.

Rather than do what was best for the American people and the world, Obama sought to appease what’s often called Washington’s “war party,” apparently thinking that the neocons and liberal hawks would think better of him if he joined them

in beating the war drums.

Now, ironically, it may fall to a man with only a fraction of Obama's oratorical skills to pick up the torch for peace that Eisenhower and Kennedy raised in their two most important speeches.

However, even more important than giving a speech, Trump can give the American people the facts from which can be built a solid foundation for rational relationships with adversaries as well as allies.

### **Out of the Weeds**

If the weeds of propaganda and "perception management" are cleared away, a Trump administration could move forward with plans to tackle the international problems that most tripped up Obama: Ukraine and the Middle East.

With Ukraine, President Trump could make clear he will not tolerate the Kiev regime continuing to drag its feet on the Minsk II peace accord that calls for granting ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine some form of autonomy. The Crimea issue also could be resolved by arranging an internationally supervised referendum on whether the people want to be with Russia or Ukraine.

Regarding the Middle East, Trump could finally speak the truth – that Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-ruled Gulf states are the true prime sponsors of terrorism, not Iran. The Iran lie is a beloved Washington "group think" – favored by the powerful Israel Lobby – but the accusation is clearly not true.

Al Qaeda, Islamic State and other terror groups that have obsessed and bedeviled the West in recent decades are all Sunni and are backed by rich Sunni kingdoms and emirates, led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

If President Trump chooses to really level with the American people and truly wants to get to the root causes of terrorism, he will identify Saudi Arabia and its friends as state sponsors of terrorism and take appropriate actions to stop them.

Of course, if Trump does challenge Official Washington's vested interests in protecting the wealthy Saudis who have built an influential anti-Shiite alliance with Israel, he will find few friends in the U.S. capital. Which is why he must enlist the support of the American people by first empowering them with the truth and then rallying them to a policy that could make a difference.

Whether Trump has the courage and wisdom to pull off such a sharp break with the way Washington does business may determine whether he achieves his ambition to be a great president or simply presides over another failed presidency.

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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