

Trump Confronts New McCarthyism

President Trump has hit back forcefully against the New McCarthyism, including a stunning rebuke of Sen. John McCain for fanning a New Cold War with Russia and risking World War III, writes Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

The original McCarthyism of the early 1950s appeared with the consolidation of the Cold War. It was a witch hunt over supposed communist subversion of America's democratic institutions. It was all about the Red Menace and the Russians are coming. Today's New McCarthyism grew with the onset of a New Cold War and also has been about the Russians, especially the vilification of Vladimir Putin.

This anti-Russian hysteria reached a point of near absurdity in the last days of the Obama Administration with its trust-us allegations that the Russians defeated Hillary Clinton by releasing some emails showing how the Democratic National Committee sabotaged Bernie Sanders and other emails revealing what Clinton had told Wall Street banks but didn't want the voters to know. If you noted that Clinton had previously blamed her defeat on FBI Director James Comey for reopening and re-closing the investigation into her use of a private email server, you risked being labeled a "Putin apologist" or a "Kremlin stooge."

Of course, the anger toward anyone who resisted the "Russia-did-it" conformism did not come from nowhere. One can trace the current hostility to dissenters against U.S. foreign policy back to the presidency of George W. Bush when he gutted the Bill of Rights in promulgating the Patriot Act with almost no public challenge. In the post-9/11 climate – when any resistance to Bush's edicts was regarded as close to treason – many of us became uneasy while talking politics on the phone or looking up certain topics on the Internet or taking books out of the library.

This intimidating surveillance did not go away when the Democrats retook the White House and Congress in the 2008 elections, but we stopped thinking about it because supposedly the "right people" now held the levers of power and surely wouldn't repeat the abuses of Bush-43. However, not only did the surveillance state consolidate its powers under Barack Obama but the former constitutional lawyer sharply escalated the legal persecution of whistleblowers who dared give the American people a look behind the curtain.

Obama's unprecedented assault on government transparency was compounded by the liberal-chic contempt meted out to anyone who questioned the wisdom of imposing

“liberal values,” “human rights,” and “democracy promotion” on countries around the world. “Political correctness” dominated not only domestic U.S. debates but also the formulation of foreign policy.

Vladimir Putin was viewed as a retrograde force in the world, in part, because he aligned himself with Russia’s conservative social values and because he fell short of an ideal notion of what liberal democracy is supposed to be. The fact that the U.S. government also was falling far short of those standards – from ordering targeted assassinations with minimal due process to imprisoning patriotic whistleblowers – was largely ignored by an Obama Administration that saw itself as too wonderful to have flaws.

Blacklisting Dissent

So, when the U.S. confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, Crimea and the Donbas began in the summer of 2013, those of us who did not accept what was becoming the Washington Consensus, which held Putin to blame for everything, began to see ourselves as dissidents in the Soviet sense or at least in the manner of the old McCarthy era. In effect, we were blacklisted, largely excluded from publication in the professional journals, not to mention mainstream print and broadcast media. On campus, we mostly kept our mouths shut fearing for our jobs.

In the narrow, but politically important field of Russian studies, just how bleak the times had become was revealed in the December 2015 “Christmas issue” of *Johnson’s Russia List*, an important daily digest of expert and generalist writings about Russia which contained a 40-page propaganda barrage against Putin and his ill-begotten country. But the content of that daily issue merely reflected what was entering the editor-publisher’s in-basket each day. Still, the silence of dissenters should not be confused with agreement.

For all his blustery and egotistical faults, Donald Trump has punched huge holes in the dominant neocon ideology that underlay the Washington Consensus on foreign policy during the presidencies of both George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Trump’s tweets and campaign messages asked, aloud and repeatedly, what could be wrong with the United States getting along with Russia and cooperating on common interests, starting with a joint campaign against ISIS.

Yet, Trump’s rejection of Washington’s foreign-policy orthodoxy went beyond relations with Russia; Trump was questioning the consensus on how America has conducted its role as global leader and he was challenging the arrogance of intervening in other nations’ affairs, whether by finger-waving lectures or various regime-change schemes.

As noisy and messy as Trump’s political approach has been – with a number of

unnecessary diversions and self-inflicted wounds – there is a significant and “revolutionary” side of Trump’s approach. It represents a potential reordering of the two major political parties, a revamped struggle for power within the Right-Left dimension.

He restated this “revolutionary” aspect of his foreign policy in his Inaugural Address when he renounced the idea of endless interference in other countries’ politics and a return to the traditional role of America as an example, not an interventionist. This was an in-your-face condemnation of most of those sitting beside and behind him on the rostrum who favored a “values-based” foreign policy, globalization and American exceptionalism.

Taking on McCain

From the Oval Office, Trump has continued his frontal assault on this foreign-policy orthodoxy with his closely watched and disputed tweets. Much ridicule has been directed at Trump for ruling by tweets since they often reveal a lack of intellectual depth and his facile narcissism. But what they lack in refinement, Trump’s tweets make up for in feistiness and courage.

For instance, in a Jan. 30 tweet, Trump urged Republican neocon Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham to “focus their energies on ISIS, illegal immigration and border security *instead of always looking to start World War III*” [emphasis mine]. This was, in its own way, as significant as the pithy and devastating rebuke issued by attorney Joseph N. Welch to Sen. Joe McCarthy on June 9, 1954, after McCarthy attacked the patriotism of a young Army lawyer: “Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?” Welch asked.

In a way, Trump’s reference to the behavior of McCain and Graham, running around the world advocating for one war after another, including a military confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia, was as precise and cutting as Welch’s putdown of McCarthy. In doing so, Trump broke the decades-long taboo on criticizing McCain despite his behavior as a loose cannon on the deck of foreign affairs, especially during the Obama years.

Behaving as if he had won rather than lost the 2008 election, McCain has traveled to such hot spots as Syria, Georgia and Ukraine with the goal of making U.S. foreign policy in the field, urging militants onward into violent clashes with their own governments or pushing U.S.-client states into conflicts with their neighbors.

Trump began his challenge to McCain during the campaign when he publicly questioned the “war hero” status of the Arizona senator by rhetorically asking

in what way spending years in captivity as a Vietnam prisoner of war made McCain a war hero.

McCain took his revenge shortly before the inauguration when he informed the press that he had just handed over to the FBI for follow-up a dubious report generated by a former British intelligence agent accusing Trump of being vulnerable to Russian blackmail because of alleged cavorting with prostitutes during a visit to Moscow years ago.

To stymie any new détente with Russia, McCain also introduced a bill in the Senate calling for new and expanded sanctions against Russia. So, the White House tweet was a direct challenge to McCain for his actions that Trump warned were inviting World War III. In doing so, Trump is at least prying open space for a fuller debate about U.S. foreign policy and the wisdom of neocon interventionism.

So, notwithstanding all the self-righteous exclamations before media microphones by Establishment figures from both parties over the foibles of this populist president and notwithstanding the shouting in the streets by demonstrators, it appears that the President is advancing via his tactic of frontal attack.

A week ago, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Trump's bellwether choice to oversee a new foreign policy, was confirmed by the Senate to the surprise and pleasure of those of us who had kept our fingers crossed. It is too early to say how or why Trump won this test of strength. But initial fierce opposition from ranking Republicans John McCain, Lindsey Graham and Marco Rubio was beaten back.

Now, the question is whether Tillerson and Trump's other foreign policy appointees can achieve genuine change in the direction of U.S. foreign policy.

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Castigating Trump for Truth-Telling

Exclusive: President Trump says much that is untrue, but he draws some of Official Washington's greatest opprobrium when he speaks the truth, such as noting that senior U.S. officials have done a lot of killing, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Gaining acceptance in Official Washington is a lot like getting admittance into a secret society's inner sanctum by uttering some nonsensical password. In Washington to show you belong, you must express views that are patently untrue or blatantly hypocritical.

For instance, you might be called upon to say that "Iran is the principal source of terrorism" when that title clearly belongs to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf state allies that have funded Al Qaeda, the Taliban and the Islamic State. But truth has no particular value in Official Washington; adherence to "group think" is what's important.

Similarly, you might have to deny any "moral equivalence" between killings attributed to Russian President Vladimir Putin and killings authorized by U.S. presidents. In this context, the fact that the urbane Barack Obama scheduled time one day a week to check off people for targeted assassinations isn't relevant. Nor is the reality that Donald Trump has joined this elite club of official killers by approving a botched and bloody raid in Yemen that slaughtered a number of women and children (and left one U.S. soldier dead, too).

You have to understand that "our killings" are always good or at least justifiable (innocent mistakes do happen from time to time), but Russian killings are always bad. Indeed, Official Washington has so demonized Putin that any untoward death in Russia can be blamed on him whether there is any evidence or not. To suggest that evidence is needed shows that you must be a "Moscow stooge."

To violate these inviolable norms of Official Washington, in which participants must intuitively grasp the value of such "group think" and the truism of "American exceptionalism," marks you as a dangerous outsider who must be marginalized or broken.

Currently, President Trump is experiencing this official opprobrium as he is widely denounced by Republicans, Democrats and "news" people because he didn't react properly to a question from Fox News' Bill O'Reilly terming Putin "a killer."

"There are a lot of killers." Trump responded. "We've got a lot of killers. What do you think – our country's so innocent. You think our country's so innocent?"

Aghast at Trump's heresy, O'Reilly sputtered, "I don't know of any government leaders that are killers."

Trump: "Well – take a look at what we've done too. We made a lot of mistakes. I've been against the war in Iraq from the beginning."

O'Reilly: "But mistakes are different than –"

Trump: "A lot of mistakes, but a lot of people were killed. A lot of killers around, believe me."

'Moral Equivalence'

Though Trump is justly criticized for often making claims that aren't true, here he was saying something that clearly was true. But it has drawn fierce condemnation from across Official Washington, not only from Democrats but from Trump's fellow Republicans, too. Neoconservative Washington Post opinion writer Charles Krauthammer objected fiercely to Trump's "moral equivalence," and CNN's Anderson Cooper chimed in, lamenting Trump's deviation into "equivalence," i.e. holding the U.S. government to the same ethical standards as the Russian government.

This "moral equivalence" argument has been with us at least since the Reagan administration when human rights groups objected to President Reagan's support for right-wing governments in Central America that engaged in "death squad" tactics against political dissidents, including the murders of priests and nuns and genocide against disaffected Indian tribes. To suggest that Reagan and his friends should be subjected to the same standards that he applied to left-wing authoritarian governments earned you the accusation of "moral equivalence."

Declassified documents from Reagan's White House show that this P.R. strategy was refined at National Security Council meetings led by U.S. intelligence propaganda experts. Now the "moral equivalence" theme is being revived to discredit a new Republican president who dares challenge this particular Official Washington "group think."

Lots of Killing

The unpleasant truth is that all leaders of major countries and many leaders of smaller countries are "killers." President Obama admitted that he had ordered military strikes in seven different countries to kill people. His Secretary of State Hillary Clinton rejoiced over the grisly murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi with a clever twist on a famous Julius Caesar boast of conquest: "We came, we saw, he died," Clinton chirped.

President George W. Bush launched an illegal war against Iraq based on false pretenses, causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, many of them children and other civilians.

President Bill Clinton ordered a vicious bombing campaign against the Serbian capital of Belgrade, which included intentionally targeting the Serb TV building and killing 16 civilian employees because Clinton considered the station's news reports to be "propaganda," i.e., not in line with U.S. propaganda.

President George H.W. Bush slaughtered scores of Panamanians who happened to live near the headquarters of the Panamanian Defense Forces and he killed tens of thousands of Iraqis, including incinerating a civilian bomb shelter in Baghdad, after he brushed aside proposals for resolving Iraq's invasion of Kuwait peacefully. (Bush wanted a successful war as a way to rally the American people behind future foreign military operations, so, in his words, the country could kick "the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all.")

Other U.S. presidents have had more or less blood on their hands than these recent chief executives, but it is hard to identify any modern U.S. president who has not been a "killer" in some form, inflicting death upon innocents whether as part of some "justifiable" mission or not.

But the mainstream U.S. press corps routinely adopts double standards when assessing acts by a U.S. president and those of an "enemy." When the U.S. kills people, the mainstream media bends over backwards to rationalize the violence, but does the opposite if the killing is authorized by some demonized foreign leader.

That is now the case with Putin. Any accusation against Putin – no matter how lacking in evidence – is treated as credible and any evidence of Putin's innocence is ridiculed or suppressed.

That was the case with a documentary that debunked claims that hedge fund accountant Sergei Magnitsky was murdered in a Russian prison because he was a whistleblower when the documentary showed that he was a suspect in a massive money-laundering scheme and died of natural causes. Although produced by a documentarian who started out planning to do a sympathetic portrayal of Magnitsky, the facts led in a different direction that caused the documentary to be shunned by the European Union and given minimal distribution in the United States.

By contrast, the ease with which Putin is called a murderer – based on "mysterious deaths" inside Russia – is reminiscent of how American right-wing groups suggested that Bill and Hillary Clinton were murderers by distributing a long list of "mysterious deaths" somehow related to the Clinton "scandals" from their Arkansas days. While there was no specific evidence connecting the Clintons to any of these deaths, the sheer number created suspicions that were hard to knock down without making you a "Clinton apologist." Similarly, a demand

for actual evidence proving Putin's guilt in a specific case makes you a "Putin apologist."

However, as a leader of a powerful nation facing threats from terrorism and other national security dangers, Putin is surely a "killer," much as U.S. presidents are killers. That appears to have been President Trump's point, that the United States doesn't have clean hands when it comes to shedding innocent blood.

But telling such an unpleasant albeit obvious truth is not the way to gain entrance into the inner sanctum of Official Washington's Deep State. The passwords for admission require you to say a lot of things that are patently false. Any inconvenient truth-telling earns you the bum's rush out into the alley, even if you're President of the United States.

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](#)).

How US Believes Impossible Things

Over many decades, the U.S. establishment has become practiced at putting out claims that are completely false or that leave out key details to mislead the public, but now come complaints about "fake news," observes William Blum.

By William Blum

As the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland* explained, "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Or as new Secretary of Defense James Mattis has said, "Since Yalta, we have a long list of times we've tried to engage positively with Russia. We have a relatively short list of successes in that regard."

If anyone knows where to find this long list, please send me a copy.

This delusion is repeated periodically by American military officials. A year ago, following the release of Russia's new national security document, naming as threats both the United States and the expansion of the NATO alliance, a Pentagon spokesman declared: "They have no reason to consider us a threat. We are not looking for conflict with Russia."

Meanwhile, in early January, the United States embarked upon its biggest military buildup in Europe since the end of the Cold War – 3,500 American soldiers landed, unloading three shiploads, with 2,500 tanks, trucks and other combat vehicles. The troops were to be deployed in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary and across the Baltics. Lt. Gen. Frederick Hodges, commander of U.S. forces in Europe, said, “Three years after the last American tanks left the continent, we need to get them back.”

The measures, General Hodges declared, were a “response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea. This does not mean that there necessarily has to be a war, none of this is inevitable, but Moscow is preparing for the possibility.” (See previous paragraph.)

This January 2017 buildup, we are told, is in response to a Russian action in Crimea of March 2014. The alert reader will have noticed that critics of Russia in recent years, virtually without exception, condemn Moscow’s Crimean action and typically nothing else. Could that be because they have nothing else to condemn about Russia’s foreign policy?

At the same time they invariably fail to point out what preceded the Russian action – the overthrow, with Washington’s indispensable help, of the democratically-elected, Moscow-friendly Ukrainian government, replacing it with an anti-Russian, neo-fascist (literally) regime, complete with Nazi salutes and swastika-like symbols.

Ukraine and Georgia, both of which border Russia, are all that’s left to complete the U.S./NATO encirclement. And when the U.S. overthrew the government of Ukraine, why shouldn’t Russia have been alarmed as the circle was about to close yet tighter? Even so, the Russian military appeared in Ukraine only in Crimea, where the Russians already had a military base with the approval of the Ukrainian government. No one could have blocked Moscow from taking over all of Ukraine if they wanted to.

Yet, the United States is right. Russia is a threat. A threat to American world dominance. And Americans can’t shake their upbringing. Here’s veteran National Public Radio newscaster Cokie Roberts bemoaning Trump’s stated desire to develop friendly relations with Russia: “This country has had a consistent policy for 70 years towards the Soviet Union and Russia, and Trump is trying to undo that.” Heavens! Nuclear war would be better than that!

Fake News, Fake Issue

The entire emphasis has been on whether a particular news item is factually correct or incorrect. However, that is not the main problem with mainstream

media. A news item can be factually correct and still be very biased and misleading because of what's been left out, such as the relevant information about the Russian "invasion" of Crimea mentioned above.

But when it comes to *real fake news* it's difficult to top the CIA's record in Latin America as revealed by Philip Agee, the leading whistleblower of all time. Agee spent 12 years (1957-69) as a CIA case officer, most of it in Latin America.

His first book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, published in 1974 revealed how it was a common Agency tactic to write editorials and phony news stories to be knowingly published by Latin American media with no indication of the CIA authorship or CIA payment to the particular media.

The propaganda value of such a "news" item might be multiplied by being picked up by other CIA stations in Latin America who would disseminate it through a CIA-owned news agency or a CIA-owned radio station. Some of these stories made their way back to the United States to be read or heard by unknowing North Americans.

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

A Reprise of the Iraq-WMD Fiasco?

Exclusive: Official Washington's new "group think" – accepting evidence-free charges that Russia "hacked the U.S. election" – has troubling parallels to the Iraq-WMD certainty, often from the same people, writes James W Carden.

By James W Carden

The controversy over Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election shows no sign of letting up. A bipartisan group of U.S. senators recently introduced legislation that would impose sanctions on Russia in retaliation for its acts of "cyber intrusions."

At a press event in Washington on Tuesday, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Illinois, called Election Day 2016 "a day that will live in cyber infamy." Previously, Sen. John

McCain, R-Arizona, called the Russian hacks of the Democratic National Committee “an act of war,” while Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, has claimed that there is near unanimity among senators regarding Russia’s culpability.

Despite all this, the question of who exactly is responsible for the providing WikiLeaks with the emails of high Democratic Party officials does not lend itself to easy answers. And yet, for months, despite the lack of publicly disclosed evidence, the media, like these senators, have been as one: Vladimir Putin’s Russia is responsible.

Interestingly, the same neoconservative/center-left alliance which endorsed George W. Bush’s case for war with Iraq is pretty much the same neoconservative/center-left alliance that is now, all these years later, braying for confrontation with Russia. It’s largely the same cast of characters reading from the Iraq-war era playbook.

It’s worth recalling Tony Judt’s observation in September 2006 that “those centrist voices that bayed most insistently for blood in the prelude to the Iraq war ... are today the most confident when asserting their monopoly of insight into world affairs.”

While that was true then, it is perhaps even more so the case today.

The prevailing sentiment of the media establishment during the months prior to the disastrous March 2003 invasion of Iraq was that of certainty: George Tenet’s now infamous assurance to President Bush, that the case against Iraq was a “slam drunk,” was essentially what major newspapers and television news outlets were telling the American people at the time. Iraq posed a threat to “the homeland,” therefore Saddam “must go.”

The Bush administration, in a move equal parts cynical and clever, engaged in what we would today call a “disinformation” campaign against its own citizens by planting false stories abroad, safe in the knowledge that these stories would “bleed over” and be picked up by the American press.

WMD ‘Fake News’

The administration was able to launder what were essentially “fake news” stories, such as the aluminum tubes fabrication, by leaking to Michael R. Gordon and Judith Miller of The New York Times. In September 2002, without an ounce of skepticism, Gordon and Miller regurgitated the claims of unnamed U.S. intelligence officials that Iraq “has sought to buy thousands of specially designed aluminum tubes ... intended as components of centrifuges to enrich uranium.” Gordon and Miller faithfully relayed “the intelligence agencies’ unanimous view that the type of tubes that Iraq has been seeking are used to

make centrifuges.”

By 2002, no one had any right to be surprised by what Bush and Cheney were up to; since at least 1898 (when the U.S. declared war on Spain under the pretense of the fabricated Hearst battle cry “Remember the Maine!”) American governments have repeatedly lied in order to promote their agenda abroad. And in 2002-3, the media walked in lock step with yet another administration in pushing for an unnecessary and costly war.

Like The New York Times, The Washington Post also relentlessly pushed the administration’s case for war with Iraq. According to the journalist Greg Mitchell, “By the *Post*’s own admission, in the months before the war, it ran more than 140 stories on its front page promoting the war.” All this, while its editorial page assured readers that the evidence Colin Powell presented to the United Nations on Iraq’s WMD program was “irrefutable.” According to the *Post*, it would be “hard to imagine” how anyone could doubt the administration’s case.

But the *Post* was hardly alone in its enthusiasm for Bush’s war. Among the most prominent proponents of the Iraq war was The New Yorker’s Jeffrey Goldberg, who, a full year prior to the invasion, set out to link Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. Writing for The New Yorker in March 2002, Goldberg retailed former CIA Director James Woolsey’s opinion that “It would be a real shame if the C.I.A.’s substantial institutional hostility to Iraqi democratic resistance groups was keeping it from learning about Saddam’s ties to Al Qaeda in northern Iraq.”

Indeed, according to Goldberg, “The possibility that Saddam could supply weapons of mass destruction to anti-American terror groups is a powerful argument among advocates of regime change,” while Saddam’s “record of support for terrorist organizations, and the cruelty of his regime make him a threat that reaches far beyond the citizens of Iraq.”

Writing in *Slate* in October 2002, Goldberg was of the opinion that “In five years . . . I believe that the coming invasion of Iraq will be remembered as an act of profound morality.”

Likewise, The New Republic’s Andrew Sullivan was certain that “we would find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. I have no doubt about that.” *Slate*’s Jacob Weisberg supported the invasion because he thought Saddam Hussein had WMD and he “thought there was a strong chance he’d use them against the United States.”

Even after it was becoming clear that the war was a debacle, the neoconservative pundit Charles Krauthammer declared that the inability to find WMDs was “troubling” but “only because it means that the weapons remain unaccounted for and might be in the wrong hands. The idea that our inability to thus far find

the weapons proves that the threat was phony and hyped is simply false.”

Smearing Skeptics

Opponents of the war were regularly accused of unpatriotic disloyalty. Writing in *National Review*, the neoconservative writer David Frum accused anti-intervention conservatives of going “far, far beyond the advocacy of alternative strategies.” According to Frum, “They deny and excuse terror. They espouse a potentially self-fulfilling defeatism. They publicize wild conspiracy theories. And some of them explicitly yearn for the victory of their nation’s enemies.”

Similarly, *The New Republic*’s Jonathan Chait castigated anti-war liberals for turning against Bush. “Have Bush haters lost their minds?” asked Chait. “Certainly some have. Antipathy to Bush has, for example, led many liberals not only to believe the costs of the Iraq war outweigh the benefits but to refuse to acknowledge any benefits at all.”

Yet of course we now know, thanks, in part, to a new book by former CIA analyst John Nixon, that everything the U.S. government thought it knew about Saddam Hussein was indeed wrong. Nixon, the CIA analyst who interrogated Hussein after his capture in December 2003, asks “Was Saddam worth removing from power?” “The answer,” says Nixon, “must be no. Saddam was busy writing novels in 2003. He was no longer running the government.”

It turns out that the skeptics were correct after all. And so the principal lesson the promoters of Bush and Cheney’s war of choice should have learned is that blind certainty is the enemy of fair inquiry and nuance. The hubris that many in the mainstream media displayed in marginalizing liberal and conservative anti-war voices was to come back to haunt them. But not, alas, for too long.

A Dangerous Replay?

Today something eerily similar to the pre-war debate over Iraq is taking place regarding the allegations of Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election. Assurances from the intelligence community and from anonymous Obama administration “senior officials” about the *existence* of evidence is being treated as, well, *actual* evidence.

State Department spokesman John Kirby told CNN that he is “100% certain” of the role that Russia played in U.S. election. The administration’s expressions of certainty are then uncritically echoed by the mainstream media. Skeptics are likewise written off, slandered as “Kremlin cheerleaders” or worse.

Unsurprisingly, *The Washington Post* is reviving its Bush-era role as principal publicist for the government’s case. Yet in its haste to do the government’s

bidding, the Post has published two widely debunked stories relating to Russia (one on the scourge of Russian inspired “fake news”, the other on a non-existent Russian hack of a Vermont electric utility) onto which the paper has had to append “editor’s notes” to correct the original stories.

Yet, those misguided stories have not deterred the Post’s opinion page from being equally aggressive in its depiction of Russian malfeasance. In late December, the Post published an op-ed by Rep. Adam Schiff and former Rep. Jane Harmon claiming “Russia’s theft and strategic leaking of emails and documents from the Democratic Party and other officials present a challenge to the U.S. political system unlike anything we’ve experienced.”

On Dec. 30, the Post editorial board chastised President-elect Trump for seeming to dismiss “a brazen and unprecedented attempt by a hostile power to covertly sway the outcome of a U.S. presidential election.” The Post described Russia’s actions as a “cyber-Pearl Harbor.”

On Jan. 1, the neoconservative columnist Josh Rogin told readers that the recent announcement of sanctions against Russia “brought home a shocking realization that Russia is using hybrid warfare in an aggressive attempt to disrupt and undermine our democracy.”

Meanwhile, many of the same voices who were among the loudest cheerleaders for the war in Iraq have also been reprising their Bush-era roles in vouching for the solidity of the government’s case.

Jonathan Chait, now a columnist for New York magazine, is clearly convinced by what the government has thus far provided. “That Russia wanted Trump to win has been obvious for months,” writes Chait.

“Of course it all came from the Russians, I’m sure it’s all there in the intel,” Charles Krauthammer told Fox News on Jan. 2. Krauthammer is certain.

And Andrew Sullivan is certain as to the motive. “Trump and Putin’s bromance,” Sullivan told MSNBC’s Chris Matthews on Jan. 2, “has one goal this year: to destroy the European Union and to undermine democracy in Western Europe.”

David Frum, writing in The Atlantic, believes Trump “owes his office in considerable part to illegal clandestine activities in his favor conducted by a hostile, foreign spy service.”

Jacob Weisberg agrees, tweeting: “Russian covert action threw the election to Donald Trump. It’s that simple.” Back in 2008, Weisberg wrote that “the first thing I hope I’ve learned from this experience of being wrong about Iraq is to be less trusting of expert opinion and received wisdom.” So much for that.

Foreign Special Interests

Another, equally remarkable similarity to the period of 2002-3 is the role foreign lobbyists have played in helping to whip up a war fever. As readers will no doubt recall, Ahmed Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National Congress, which served, in effect as an Iraqi government-in-exile, worked hand in hand with the Washington lobbying firm Black, Kelly, Scruggs & Healey (BKSH) to sell Bush's war on television and on the op-ed pages of major American newspapers.

Chalabi was also a trusted source of Judy Miller of the Times, which, in an apology to its readers on May 26, 2004, wrote: "The most prominent of the anti-Saddam campaigners, Ahmad Chalabi, has been named as an occasional source in Times articles since at least 1991, and has introduced reporters to other exiles. He became a favorite of hard-liners within the Bush administration and a paid broker of information from Iraqi exiles." The pro-war lobbying of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee has also been exhaustively documented.

Though we do not know how widespread the practice has been as of yet, something similar is taking place today. Articles calling for confrontation with Russia over its alleged "hybrid war" with the West are appearing with increasing regularity. Perhaps the most egregious example of this newly popular genre appeared on Jan. 1 in Politico magazine. That essay, which claims, among many other things, that "we're in a war" with Russia comes courtesy of one Molly McKew.

McKew is seemingly qualified to make such a pronouncement because she, according to her bio on the Politico website, served as an "adviser to Georgian President Saakashvili's government from 2009-2013, and to former Moldovan Prime Minister Filat in 2014-2015." Seems reasonable enough. That is until one discovers that McKew is actually registered with the Department of Justice as a lobbyist for two anti-Russian political parties, Georgia's UMN and Moldova's PLDM.

Records show her work for the consulting firm Fianna Strategies frequently takes her to Capitol Hill to lobby U.S. Senate and Congressional staffers, as well as prominent U.S. journalists at The Washington Post and The New York Times, on behalf of her Georgian and Moldovan clients.

"The truth," writes McKew, "is that fighting a new Cold War would be in America's interest. Russia teaches us a very important lesson: losing an ideological war without a fight will ruin you as a nation. The fight is the American way." Or, put another way: the truth is that fighting a new Cold War would be in McKew's interest – but perhaps not America's.

While you wouldn't know it from the media coverage (or from reading deeply

disingenuous pieces like McKew's) as things now stand, the case against Russia is far from certain. New developments are emerging almost daily. One of the latest is a report from the cyber-engineering company Wordfence, which concluded that "The IP addresses that DHS [Department of Homeland Security] provided may have been used for an attack by a state actor like Russia. But they don't appear to provide any association with Russia."

Indeed, according to Wordfence, "The malware sample is old, widely used and appears to be Ukrainian. It has no apparent relationship with Russian intelligence and it would be an indicator of compromise for any website."

On Jan. 4, BuzzFeed reported that, according to the DNC, the FBI never carried out a forensic examination on the email servers that were allegedly hacked by the Russian government. "The FBI," said DNC spokesman Eric Walker, "never requested access to the DNC's computer servers."

What the agency did do was rely on the findings of a private-sector, third-party vendor that was brought in by the DNC after the initial hack was discovered. In May, the company, CrowdStrike, determined that the hack was the work of the Russians. As one unnamed intelligence official told BuzzFeed, "CrowdStrike is pretty good. There's no reason to believe that anything that they have concluded is not accurate."

Perhaps not. Yet CrowdStrike is hardly a disinterested party when it comes to Russia. CrowdStrike's founder and chief technology officer, Dmitri Alperovitch, is also a senior fellow at the Washington think tank, The Atlantic Council, which has been at the forefront of escalating tensions with Russia.

As I reported in The Nation in early January, the connection between Alperovitch and the Atlantic Council is highly relevant given that the Atlantic Council is funded in part by the State Department, NATO, the governments of Latvia and Lithuania, the Ukrainian World Congress, and the Ukrainian oligarch Victor Pinchuk. In recent years, it has emerged as a leading voice calling for a new Cold War with Russia.

Time to Rethink the 'Group Think'

And given the rather thin nature of the declassified evidence provided by the Obama administration, might it be time to consider an alternative theory of the case? William Binney, a 36-year veteran of the National Security Agency and the man responsible for creating many of its collection systems, thinks so. Binney believes that the DNC emails were leaked, not hacked, writing that "it is puzzling why NSA cannot produce hard evidence implicating the Russian government and WikiLeaks. Unless we are dealing with a leak from an insider, not a hack."

None of this is to say, of course, that Russia did not and could not have attempted to influence the U.S. presidential election. The intelligence community *may* have intercepted damning evidence of the Russian government's culpability. The government's hesitation to provide the public with more convincing evidence *may* stem from an understandable and wholly appropriate desire to protect the intelligence community's sources and methods. But as it now stands the publicly available evidence is open to question.

But meanwhile the steady drumbeat of "blame Russia" is having an effect. According to a recent [you.gov/Economist](https://www.you.gov/Economist) poll, 58 percent of Americans view Russia as "unfriendly/enemy" while also finding that 52 percent of Democrats believed Russia "tampered with vote tallies."

With Congress back in session, Armed Services Committee chairman John McCain is set to hold a series of hearings focusing on Russian malfeasance, and the steady drip-drip-drip of allegations regarding Trump and Putin is only serving to box in the new President when it comes to pursuing a much-needed detente with Russia.

It also does not appear that a congressional inquiry will start from scratch and critically examine the evidence. On Friday, two senators – Republican Lindsey Graham and Democrat Sheldon Whitehouse – announced a Senate Judiciary subcommittee investigation into Russian interference in elections in the U.S. and elsewhere. But they already seemed to have made up their minds about the conclusion: "Our goal is simple," the senators said in a joint statement "To the fullest extent possible we want to shine a light on Russian activities to undermine democracy."

So, before the next round of Cold War posturing commences, now might be the time to stop, take a deep breath and ask: Could the rush into a new Cold War with Russia be as disastrous and consequential – if not more so – as was the rush to war with Iraq nearly 15 years ago? We may, unfortunately, find out.

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'Deflategate' Cloud over the Super Bowl

Exclusive: There's a larger point to the NFL's bizarre Deflategate story – how

checks and balances have broken down in America letting powerful institutions do almost whatever they want to anyone even Tom Brady, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Yes, I know that many people hate Tom Brady and the New England Patriots. And many others couldn't care less that the National Football League deemed Brady a cheater, a liar and a perjurer over the silly Deflategate scandal. But that is why it makes an excellent case study of how a powerful institution and its clever lawyers can make almost nothing into almost anything and get many people to go along.

Very similar techniques are used in more serious circumstances, such as the U.S. government and mainstream media demonizing some foreign leader in marching the American people in lockstep into another war.

So, the moral behind the story of Brady and the NFL is that the public should be alert whenever some powerful institution lodges an accusation against some figure who is widely disliked. The troubling truth is that often a mob-like excitement overwhelms any skepticism, leaving the few doubters of the establishment's claims labeled "apologists" and most everyone else going along.

That was what happened in January 2015 when the Deflategate case began to unfold under the intense media spotlight of a Super Bowl. Brady and the Patriots headed into that game, Super Bowl 49, surrounded by amateur sleuthing into why the Patriots' footballs in the AFC Championship game had tested at halftime below the league standard of 12.5 pounds per square inch or PSI.

In retrospect, we can put together what actually happened: how NFL officials didn't know the physics of the Ideal Gas Law, how the media stampede gathered speed despite a dearth of evidence, and how rival NFL owners then seized on the "scandal" to hobble the Patriots and disgrace Brady. But many Americans, who rely on The New York Times or ESPN, may still believe the charges are credible.

An Inauspicious Beginning

The story began on Jan. 18, 2015, on a cold and rainy night in Foxborough, Massachusetts, where the Patriots were hosting the Indianapolis Colts in the AFC Championship game.

Before the game, NFL officials had set the Patriots footballs for use on their offensive plays at 12.5 PSI – Brady's preferred number at the low end of the permissible level compared to the high end of 13.5 PSI. The Patriots' AFC opponent, the Indianapolis Colts set their footballs at 13 PSI.

However, because the game was played in the cold and rain, the PSI naturally declined below the 12.5 PSI for the footballs of both teams. But when the Colts intercepted one of Brady's passes in the first half and tested it, they noticed that it was below the legal limit and complained to the officials.

It turned out that no one involved in this initial phase understood the eighth-grade physics of the Ideal Gas Law, which was first promulgated in 1834 and measures how the PSI of an enclosed gas rises or falls depending on the outside temperature.

So, the NFL officials confiscated the Patriots' other 11 footballs at halftime and brought them indoors for a hastily organized effort to test the PSI with two different gauges – one of which was fairly accurate while the other wasn't – and found the footballs below the 12.5 PSI standard. The officials then added air to the Patriots' footballs.

Sometime toward the end of the testing, the officials also checked the Colts' footballs, botching one test and running out of time for eight of them but finding the other three were below the 12.5 PSI limit on the gauge that turned out to be accurate but above 12.5 PSI on the inaccurate gauge. No air was added to the Colts' footballs.

The measurements were further compromised by the fact that the longer the footballs remained indoors in warmer temperatures the more they naturally re-inflated. The NFL officials later claimed not to remember the precise chronology or timing of the process, including whether they re-inflated the Patriots' footballs before checking four of the Colts' footballs.

After the game, which the Patriots won 45-7, the balls were checked again with the re-inflated Patriots' footballs above the 12.5 PSI legal standard but the Colts' footballs below 12.5 PSI. In other words, the Colts had played both halves of the game with under-inflated footballs, yet it was the Patriots who came under attack.

A Media Frenzy

After the game, some NFL personnel leaked the fact that the Patriots' footballs had tested below the 12.5 PSI level. The leak also exaggerated how low the measurements were and falsely claimed that the Colts' footballs had not fallen

below 12.5 PSI.



That last inaccuracy proved crucial as the “scandal” exploded across the news media in the following days. Many well-meaning sports fans argued that Brady must be guilty of having organized a plot to illegally deflate the footballs because otherwise the Colts’ footballs would have shown a similar drop in PSI.

The reality is that the Colts’ footballs did experience a PSI drop although the extent was somewhat lessened by the timing of the halftime tests in which the Colts’ footballs were checked after having been in a warmer environment for nearly the entire halftime.

Over the following two weeks amid the Super Bowl media frenzy, there was a rush to judgment in both the sports press and in the mainstream media. Because of the widespread hatred of Brady and the Patriots – especially among fans of teams that had lost painful games to Brady’s team – there was a strong “confirmation bias,” that is, many people wanted to believe that Brady was guilty and thus any innocent action that could be spun in the direction of his guilt was seized upon.

But it was not just most NFL fans and the media that wanted the Deflategate story to be true. More significantly, so too did the owners of the other 31 NFL teams. They saw a chance to hobble the Patriots, who had become the dominant NFL team of the century winning four Super Bowls and appearing in six (now seven).

Yet, as much as fans may want to give their favorite team a boost, that is nothing compared to the intensity that exists in an owner’s box where not only pride but profits are at stake for owners if their teams can win lots of games and possibly a Super Bowl.

In view of that conflict of interest, you might have thought that NFL

Commissioner Roger Goodell would have shielded the investigative process from the prejudice of the 31 other owners but he didn't. He allowed the NFL Management Council, consisting of powerful rival owners, to weigh in, even letting them recommend how he should evaluate evidence. Goodell's salary of around \$35 million is controlled by the Management Council.

Making a Case

As the Deflategate hysteria gained momentum before and after Super Bowl 49, which the Patriots won with Brady declared the MVP, the NFL brought in a lawyer it had used before, Ted Wells, and hired a scientific firm, Exponent, to review the science.

Exponent was known as a hired-gun operation previously employed by the cigarette industry and other corporate clients to provide data that would help in legal cases.

In Deflategate, the firm at least knew the physics of the Ideal Gas Law but treated the sloppy halftime measurements as reliable – with the NFL offering a questionable chronology of how quickly and in what order the footballs were tested, to the Patriots' disadvantage.

Ultimately, Exponent determined that all or virtually all of the PSI decline could be attributable to the cold and damp weather, but then imposed a secondary test of probability and concluded that it was unlikely that the weather was the only factor.

The point seemed argumentative, given the other variables surrounding the haphazard tests and the absence of real-life field measurements on football PSI, but it gave the NFL the opening it needed to build a case for Brady's guilt.

In the meantime, Brady and two Patriot equipment employees who were responsible for the footballs testified that they had done nothing to the footballs after they left the control of the NFL officials. But attorney Wells seized on text messages that the two equipment employees had sent regarding Brady's complaints about the *over-inflation* of footballs in an earlier game against the New York Jets.

Although the text messages would seem to have exonerated the pair – at least regarding any previous scheme to deflate footballs since neither referred to why the balls had been over-inflated if Brady had wanted them under-inflated – the comments were treated as a "smoking gun" supposedly proving the case.

Wells also noted that Jim McNally, the equipment employee who carried the footballs to the field, had stopped briefly in a bathroom. Wells speculated that

McNally used the time not to urinate as McNally claimed but to hastily remove tiny amounts of air from the 12 footballs. (Wells also made the gotcha observation that McNally mentioned using a urinal when there was only a toilet in the room as if guys are precise about such matters.)

Relying on Wells's report, the NFL imposed a four-game suspension on Brady, stripped the Patriots of two high draft choices and demanded the firing of the two equipment employees. The New York Times, ESPN and pretty much the entire U.S. news media treated the findings as gospel.

Despite all the hours of commentary and pages of ink devoted to Deflategate, there was almost no serious skepticism applied to Wells's findings. To this day, the Times and ESPN have not subjected the report's dubious science and prosecutorial conclusions to critical analysis.

Enter the Rival Owners

When Brady appealed his suspension, Goodell allowed the Management Council to weigh in, urging Goodell to treat the absence of the two equipment employees at the appeal hearing as evidence of Brady's guilt (although the pair had testified repeatedly in other settings that there was no Deflategate conspiracy). Though Goodell said he rebuffed that recommendation, he clearly knew the verdict that the rival owners wanted – and he gave it to them.

In his report denying Brady's appeal, Goodell also recognized that the only time when the deflation scheme could have worked was the AFC Championship game because it was the only time when McNally had taken the footballs to the field unattended.

But what Goodell ignored was the reason why that happened on that one occasion. It was because the earlier NFC championship game had gone into overtime, forcing a delay in the start of the AFC game. When the NFC game ended in sudden-death overtime, there was confusion among the officials for the AFC game and McNally said he took it upon himself to get the footballs down to the field, stopping briefly to relieve himself in the bathroom.

If the NFL was operating without a confirmation bias, this unlikely set of circumstances would have brought a finding of innocence for Brady and the Patriots.

After all, as unlikely as the whole story was – since a tiny reduction in PSI would have almost no benefit for Brady, indeed it would make the footballs slightly slower and thus easier to intercept – the fact that Goodell concluded that the only time the scheme could have been implemented was on the one Sunday when the NFC and AFC championship games are played back-to-back and that it

would require the NFC game going into overtime and the sudden-death finish causing unexpected confusion among the officials makes the NFL's conspiracy findings ludicrous.

Yet, the NFL cited the commissioner's broad authority to discipline players and teams as the legal basis for suspending Brady and stripping the Patriots of valuable draft picks. The NFL also managed to get the case before a corporate-friendly federal court district in New York, which ultimately sided with the NFL without any serious testing of the quality of the evidence.

An Indelible Stain

Thus, Brady, whose storied career coming from the 199th pick in the draft to becoming arguably the greatest quarterback in NFL history, was left bearing the indelible black mark as a cheater, a liar and – because his last testimony was under oath – a perjurer.

To this day, The New York Times treats the Deflategate conspiracy theory as if it's flat fact and ESPN, which has a lucrative relationship with the NFL, has never assigned any of its investigative units to dissect the actual evidence.

With only a few exceptions, such as Washington Post columnist Sally Jenkins, there has been no effort by the mainstream news media to act as a check on the NFL's abuse of power. ESPN's investigative show E-60 offered its only skepticism about the scientific evidence last year by running a cute feature about a seventh-grader conducting his own PSI experiment on footballs and finding Brady innocent.

So, the stain on Brady's reputation remains with many rival fans who hate Brady finding his humiliation amusing. But Brady's father has spoken up on his son's behalf, voicing the lingering anger of those close to the 39-year-old quarterback.

"When it happens to your son, it's a whole different context – or your daughter or any one of your kids," Tom Brady Sr. told KRON-TV in San Francisco. "I think any parent kind of understands that. They'd rather take slings and arrows in the heart than have their kids take it.

"For what the league did to him and what Roger Goodell constantly lied about is beyond reprehensible as far as I'm concerned."

With the Patriots back in the Super Bowl this year, Goodell was asked about the awkward scene that might occur if the Patriots were to win and he had to hand the Lombardi Trophy to Brady. Goodell brushed off the question by saying it would be an honor because of Brady's illustrious career.

Tom Brady Sr. responded by saying, “It should be an honor, because somebody that has Roger Goodell’s ethics doesn’t belong on any stage that Tom Brady is on. ... He went on a witch hunt and went in way over his head and had to lie his way out in numerous ways ...

“And the reality is that Tommy never got suspended for deflating footballs. He got suspended because the court said that ... Roger Goodell could do anything he wanted to do to any player for any reason whatsoever. That’s what happened. The NFL admitted they had no evidence on him.”

But the larger point may be that if a powerful American institution can do something like this to Tom Brady and encounter virtually no check or balance from the U.S. mainstream news media or the court system which one of us can expect better.

And if accountability has been lost in America – replaced by the raw power of those in authority to create their own reality – what can we expect when the next rush to judgment occurs on something even more important than a person’s reputation?

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](#)).

Trump’s Troubling First Days

Donald Trump’s presidency is off to a chaotic and troubling start with provocateur Steve Bannon pushing controversial policies and Trump closing ranks with the Right, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

The smell of a coup hung over the White House this past weekend, like the odor of gunpowder after fireworks on the Fourth of July.

In these first few days of the Trump administration we have witnessed a series of executive orders and other pronouncements that fly in the face of the Republic’s most fundamental values. But Friday’s misbegotten announcement of a ban on refugees from Syria and a [120-day ban on refugees](#) from seven Muslim nations defies reason, pandering to a segment of the population festering with

paranoia and rage.

Let's just look at some of the misrepresentations that litter Trump's declaration like garbage strewn across a sidewalk. Despite claims that the order is not about religion (!), it gives Christian refugees priority because, Trump wrongly said, "If you were a Muslim you could come in, but if you were a Christian it was almost impossible." The New York Times reports that, "In fact, the United States accepts tens of thousands of Christian refugees. According to the Pew Research Center, almost as many Christian refugees (37,521) were admitted as Muslim refugees (38,901) in the 2016 fiscal year."

Trump went on to say that in Mideast war zones, "Everybody was persecuted, in all fairness – but they were chopping off the heads of everybody, but more so the Christians." Again the facts: The Washington Post notes that "Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war and the rise of the Islamic State, many more Muslims than Christians have been killed or displaced because of the violence."

What's more, The New York Times editorial board observed, "The order lacks any logic. It invokes the attacks of Sept. 11 as a rationale, while exempting the countries of origin of all the hijackers who carried out that plot and also, perhaps not coincidentally, several countries where the Trump family does business."

Add to all this the haste and hurry, the sloppiness of preparation and apparent lack of prior review by qualified attorneys and affected government agencies, the chaos and pain created by its sudden, thoughtless implementation and the fuel this will doubtless add to the propaganda of the very same radical Islamic terrorists the executive order is supposed to keep out of the country. What Trump did makes little or no sense, and the way he did it was an insult to due process.

Immigration Decree

The President's decree on immigration is the act of a self-assumed Caesar – a Peronista strongman, wielding power like a blunt instrument with no regard for the short- or long-term consequences on fellow human beings or other nations. The courts have countered him for the moment on some provisions, but the stay is temporary. And Trump will soon be replacing more than 100 federal judges, all in his image, no doubt, like mannequins in a store window.

Oddly enough, while it seems clearer than ever that Donald Trump has never really read the U.S. Constitution, he may have inadvertently picked up a wrong idea or two from the Declaration of Independence. Among the Founders' grievances against King George III was that the monarch was "obstructing the Laws for

Naturalization of Foreigners” and “refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither.”

Does it come as any surprise that with his refugee ban Trump favors a ban that sounds more like it came from tyrannical old King George than leaders of the American Revolution? No wonder he leaped at the invitation extended by the U.K.’s Prime Minister Theresa May last week to dine with Queen Elizabeth. Next thing you know the gilded letters T-R-U-M-P will grace Downton Abbey. You can imagine dreams of reviving old royal traditions like primogeniture jitterbugging in his head – otherwise, what’s the use of having three sons if not so at least one of them can inherit the gilded throne? (Sorry, Ivanka and Tiffany.)

But we digress. Let’s also not forget Trump’s ludicrous feud with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, Trump’s childish obsessions with voter fraud and crowd size at his inauguration, his failure to mention 6 million Jews when saluting International Holocaust Remembrance Day and still, the never-ending tweets.

Washington Post columnist Ruth Marcus got it right: “You don’t have to disagree with Trump’s policies to be rattled to the core by his unhinged behavior. Many congressional Republicans privately express concerns that range from apprehension to outright dread.” Which raises another question: Why do GOP lawmakers remain so publicly cowed? Is it because they cherish their party’s power more than they do America’s principles?

The Rise of Bannon

Now the new president has placed his spooky senior counselor Steve Bannon on the National Security Council. This is a man so far to the right he called William Buckley’s *National Review* and William Kristol’s *The Weekly Standard* “both left-wing magazines.” During his reign as chief of *Breitbart News*, he tolerated racist and sexist attitudes, and announced to a real journalist, “I am a Leninist.” He went on to explain: “Lenin wanted to destroy the state, and that’s my goal, too. I want to bring everything crashing down, and destroy all of today’s establishment.”

At least until the President gets fed up with the attention Bannon’s receiving and fires him, the gruesome twosome appear to have settled on their mode of governance: Trump does the theatrics, Bannon does the policy. Bannon writes the executive orders, Trump signs them.

With all this instability, it’s not surprising that not only progressives but also thoughtful conservatives already have had it with the President. Here’s neo-con Eliot Cohen in *The Atlantic*: “Trump, in one spectacular week, has

already shown himself one of the worst of our presidents, who has no regard for the truth (indeed a contempt for it), whose patriotism is a belligerent nationalism, whose prior public service lay in avoiding both the draft and taxes, who does not know the Constitution, does not read and therefore does not understand our history, and who, at his moment of greatest success, obsesses about approval ratings, how many people listened to him on the Mall and enemies. He will do much more damage before he departs the scene, to become a subject of horrified wonder in our grandchildren's history books."

At Washington Monthly, Martin Longman agreed. "Cohen and I couldn't be more different in our personal politics or our foreign policy priorities," he wrote, "and yet we're singing from the exact same hymnal on Trump. ... I honestly do not think this country can endure a four-year term of Trump as our president, and the prospects for worldwide calamity are so great that I can't avoid saying very radical sounding things about where we stand and what must be done."

Those "things" could be impeachment or implementing Section 4 of the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, the one that says that if it's determined that the President "is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President."

Ladies and gentlemen, we are already in the midst of a national emergency. The radical right – both religious and political – have been crusading for 40 years to take over the government and in Trump they have found their rabble-rouser and enabler. They intend to hallow the free market as infallible, outlaw abortion, Christianize public institutions by further leveling the "wall" between church and state, channel public funds to religious schools, build walls to keep out brown people and put "America first" on the road to what Trump's nominee to be Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has called "God's Kingdom."

You can see in the chaos a pattern: the political, religious and financial right collaborating to move America further from the norms of democracy with the triumph of one-party, one-man rule. There's never been anything like it in our history. But many in the media are catching on, which explains the strategy Trump and his pack have adopted to discredit journalists, as Bannon tried last week when he proclaimed that the media "should keep its mouth shut."

That's not going to happen. Nor does it look as if the hundreds of thousands of protesters who marched the day after the inauguration and this past weekend at the nation's airports to protest the refugee ban are about to stop either. A sturdy line of resistance is forming as the press, the people and patriotic lawyers join in fighting for our rights in the nation's courts of justice and in the court of public opinion. Perhaps some brave Republican legislators,

uncharacteristically demonstrating a profile in courage, will take a stand, too, against the despotic urges now roiling the Republic.

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<http://billmoyers.com/story/donald-trumps-mission-creep-just-took-giant-leap-forward/>

Trump Quiets Some Russian Doubts

President Trump's weekend phone call to President Putin seems to have quieted some of Russia's concerns about the unpredictability of the real-estate-mogul-turned-politician, reports Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Donald Trump's desire to establish constructive working relations with Russia got off to a rocky start, although for reasons that he might not have understood. In an interview with The Times of London just days before the Inauguration, Trump proposed changing the metrics used for possible lifting of sanctions on Russia from full implementation of the Minsk Accords, regarding the Ukraine conflict, to progress on curbing the nuclear arms race and disarmament.

While the shift was seen by many Western observers as a concession to Moscow – because it separated the sanctions from the nettlesome Ukrainian crisis – Trump's proposal failed to take into account the Kremlin's aversion to any reductions in its nuclear arsenal as long as there is no new security architecture in Europe that would reduce NATO's advantage in conventional weapons. So, the response from Moscow was a firm “nyet.”

This false start was compounded by remarks from Trump's White House spokesman suggesting that America still favored creation of safe havens or a no-flight zone in Syria. This American initiative had already been dismissed when advanced by President Obama as just another ruse to protect anti-Assad terrorists and armed rebels who are supported by Washington and its Gulf State allies.

But those early reversals were more than repaired by the 45-minute telephone call between President Vladimir Putin and Trump on Saturday. Trump appears to have kindled a very respectful and enthusiastic response from Official Russia, i.e., the Kremlin elites in parliament, in the universities and think tanks, and

in the media upon whom Putin depends for nationwide support of his policies. Their collective views may be a better indication of where Russia is headed than remarks of Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesperson.

There is no need for a bug under Putin's pillow or that of his Kremlin entourage to figure this out. The reality is clear from open sources, such as the premier television news and political talk shows that run every Sunday night.

The first half-hour or so of Vesti Nedeli (News of the Week) on Sunday might have been mistaken for a U.S.-origin program dubbed into Russian because it was almost entirely devoted to the phone call and to the demonstrations against Trump's various executive orders. The presenter, Dmitri Kiselyov, is also the head of all news reporting on Russian state radio and television, so his giving his seal of approval to the talks between the two presidents carried a lot of weight.

Another Thumbs Up

But the more telling "thumbs up" evaluation came on the next featured program of the Rossiya-1/Vesti-24 channel, "Sunday Evening with Vladimir Soloviev," which has a deserved reputation as the most serious political talk show in the country. It was [posted on Youtube.com](#) immediately after airing on nationwide television and within 12 hours had received more than 280,000 views, which is a fair indication of its popularity with Russia's chattering classes.

The Vladimir Soloviev show is important precisely because of the array of panelists having their own power bases and contributing what was complementary but clearly defined and individualistic appreciations of why the conversation between the presidents was so promising.

Among the panelists and the first to speak was Vyacheslav Nikonov, who as the grandson of Molotov may be called hereditary Soviet aristocracy; he is also chairman of the Duma's Committee on Education; member of the top governing body of United Russia, chairman of the Board of Russky Mir, the NGO supporting Russian culture and the Russian diaspora abroad.

Second in the pecking order was Aleksei Pushkov, chairman of the Commission on Information Policy in the Federation Council and from 2011 to 2016 chairman of the Duma Committee on Foreign Affairs. Other notables included Oleg Morozov, member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Federation Council; Andrei Sidorov, head of the World Politics Department, Moscow State University; and Sergei Stankevich, head of the International Contacts section in the center-right Party of Growth (Boris Titov).

Another noteworthy aspect of the program and of the positive view presented on

prospects for collaboration with Donald Trump's America is that it unfolded under the direction of the great Trump-skeptic, Vladimir Soloviev himself.

As I know from talking to Soloviev on the sidelines of one of his broadcasts last September, Soloviev was no fan of Trump before the U.S. elections and preferred to see Hillary Clinton win on the logic that it's better to deal with the devil you know. In Trump, he saw only unpredictability and volatility. He assured me that Trump's pro-Russian statements were purely pre-election rhetoric which Trump would betray the day after taking office.

In later broadcasts, after Trump's election, Soloviev was one of those who remained guarded, arguing that this businessman would hardly succeed in implementing his promises over the opposition of America's Deep State. However, now it would appear that Soloviev is less leery of Trump and more hopeful.

With one phone call, it appears Donald Trump has set the stage for serious negotiations and, possibly, substantive "deals" with Putin at their eventual summit.

Below are translations of some select comments by the panelists:

Vyacheslav Nikonov

"All things considered this [Trump-Putin telephone chat] gave the maximum results one could hope for from the first conversation between Trump and Putin. To be sure, the American President is under very heavy pressure from opposition within his own party and the Senate of the USA, from the mass media with their anti-Russian tone. The fact that the conversation was constructive will, I think, disappoint many of the critics of Trump and Putin in America, though it did not really make the news there, being overtaken by the huge scandal over emigrants.... What were the main aspects? At the center of attention was Syria. This is precisely the aspect that was emphasized in the short press release from the White House. It means it is possible to create an anti-ISIS coalition with participation of both the USA and Russia. There are the first signs this is happening. The second important aspect I'd note is in the Russian press release, namely the agreement to establish partnership on an equal basis. The United States has not had partnership relations of equals not only with Russia but with no one else as well in the years following the end of the Cold War. They dealt with Russia as the side that had lost the Cold War and towards whom you can carry out any policy line without regard to our concerns. Then another very important word we noted was "restoration" – used to characterize our future trade and economic relations. Restoration of trade and economic relations is a rather transparent reference to the idea that one way or another the sanctions will be reexamined. This is so although the word "sanctions" itself was not

mentioned. I'd also note that they reviewed a wide range of issues. Syria, Ukraine, Iran, the Korean peninsula, and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This presupposes, at a minimum, that in this rather short conversation there were no serious disagreements or differences of opinion. They discussed what they wanted to discuss. The questions were prepared and the participants in the discussion afterwards were satisfied. Therefore, I consider this a very good, encouraging start in Russian-American relations. Let us not tempt fate and let us knock wood..Let us hope this continues in the same way in the future. We could not hope for better than this."

Vladimir Soloviev

"What bothers me is that I don't remember that it was ever otherwise the first time in conversation with an American president. The first contacts with an American president always were very good, in their first terms in office. Is there anything special this time? You know, this Trump is a strange fellow. So far he is not at all like a traditional American president. He is fulfilling his pre-election promises like a bulldozer."

Alexei Pushkov

"Trump is truly not like a traditional American president, because he does not come from the political milieu. He was never a Governor or a Senator or Congressman. He signifies a new style. Incidentally I think this is symbolic, because we are in new times. The times are changing. The world is changing. The US is changing. It think it makes sense that in new times Americans elected a new type of president. As for the suggestion that we always began this way with new American presidents, it's not quite right. With Obama, yes. But then relations were not on such a negative basis. It appears that Trump set as his goal to improve relations with Russia considering that they are deeply negative. We are not starting out at 0 but at minus 10. A very negative zone. He said he wanted to pull us out of this during the pre-election campaign and now has repeated it during the conversation. That is the first distinction. Next, consider how it was with Bush. He came to office on a very anti-Russian wave. He accused Clinton of having lost Russia, and he would apply a much tougher policy. Under Bush we established contact only 6 months after his [inauguration], that is in June 2001 when they met in Ljubljana and he said he looked into Putin's eyes and saw his soul. But that is not how it started. At the very beginning, he criticized Clinton for his close relations with Yeltsin. I won't go into the details but it was a different scenario. So what's important here? It's that Trump, unlike what his critics say, is very predictable. He said what he did in the campaign, and now he is taking steps in this direction. He said, by the way, 'I don't know if I will succeed with Putin, but I hope it will work out. That

is, he puts the question quite openly and honestly. He doesn't promise what he cannot be sure to achieve. 'I'll try...' He will try to find common language. And this explains the general shock of the whole American elite who got used to candidates lying during the electoral campaigns and then backing off from it all. ...Let's remember Obama. How much he promised. He tried to fulfill some of it, the medical insurance. "

Vladimir Soloviev

"So we should nominate Trump for the next Nobel Peace Prize?"

Alexei Pushkov

"I think the Nobel Prize Committee is also in shock over Trump. They are liberal and Obama was rather close to them. Trump is on another branch entirely. The second thing I'd note, and this is in the American release, that the conversation between Trump and Putin took place in a warm atmosphere. It was a 'warm conversation.' By contrast the conversation with Merkel was 'business-like' and rather dry. And the conversation with Hollande was tense. These are the terms they used. Hollande is the outgoing president; he has practically no importance and can say what he likes. Trump called him out of respect for France and the French people, not respect for Hollande who has ratings of 10% if not less. The value of the conversation between Trump and Hollande was, for us, that Hollande, unlike Merkel, who is trying to stay in power and is very cautious and careful in my view, Hollande presented Trump with the whole list of liberal claims against him. You can see in his list the pressure points liberal Europe will try to use against Trump: that you cannot remove the sanctions until the full implementation of Minsk Agreements, that half-dead formula; then on Syria...Hollande presented this fully aware of what he was doing. ... Trump has to find common language with Europe, with NATO allies. You have to remember that around Trump there are people who accept the concerns of Europe. So not everything is decided. "

Sergey Mikheyev – political scientist

"This is not Reagan and Gorbachev...Gorbachev was trying so hard to please the West he forgot about the Soviet Union and everything else. ..If only they would like him in the West, he could change the whole world. Putin cannot do the same because over these years we learned a lot. If Trump tries to behave with Putin the way Reagan did with Gorbachev then that is an absolute dead end and will lead to conflict. If we try to behave like Gorbachev and please the President, then that is also a dead end. The challenge before them and us is to find a wholly new formula. ...We need to find a qualitatively new form of dealing with one another. In my view that will not be very easy. "

Oleg Morozov

“You posed the question – what has changed with the coming of Trump. I understand perfectly that the times of Gorbachev are long gone and thank God they will not return. ...What did we have before? There was always an agenda from one side and an anti-agenda from the other side. Each side set out an agenda that was not necessarily at all topical or important for the other side. What did they set out 4 years ago: how to build democracy in Russia in dialogue with the USA, or human rights defenders, or whether it is good or bad that rockets appear right on the border with Russia because there is some sort of threat from Iran, so let’s put rockets in the Baltic States, in Romania, in Poland. What is now radically new is that the agenda proposed in this dialogue, which was clearly discussed in advance, this is an agenda that is absolutely interesting in equal measure to both sides. My second observation: all of the issues discussed are really of prime importance. They only had 45 minutes and Putin and Trump managed to cover it all. ...Thirdly, I want to continue the idea of Alexei Pushkov. Here in this studio, but more especially outside this studio, there was a very strange reading of Trump – that he is a populist, that he doesn’t understand what foreign policy is all about, he doesn’t understand where Russia is located and what to do about Russia, that he will look to his more experienced partners who understand the world much better than he and so what will happen is he will succumb. But look at what is happening: instead he is constantly seeking to strengthen his own positions. Intuitively he entirely correctly guides the policy line he set out in his electoral campaign. He does not weaken his position but instead strengthens it. So when Trump says ‘let’s try to find a dialogue with Russia,’ in my view this is not just tactics, it is really a long-term strategy of Trump today. And this gives us a good chance for this format...”

Vladimir Soloviev

“We have no illusions. We don’t expect anything good from Trump. Our task is to formulate our own agenda....Soviet and Russian diplomacy had a tendency to get disappointed. When they say we have to reexamine our commercial and economic relations, remember that they will never be what they were before. We don’t need it. We were used to setting the table for guests. The vodka and snacks were gone and we were left asking, where is their technology, where is...? That won’t happen again. We seek equal relations. “

Alexei Pushkov

“We have just heard the phrase that ‘Europe has been sleeping.’ The discussion today is between Trump and Putin. ...Merkel and Hollande are stuck in the old formulas....They have an old agenda. They don’t have anything in particular to

offer...Europe is off the highway and sidelined. This is another point that comes out of the [Trump-Putin] conversation.”

Yakov Kedmi [Israel, ex-Soviet, ex-Israeli intelligence]

“The conversation showed Trump’s rejection of bloc mentality. – EU and NATO are blocs. The USA prefers to deal with nations one to one. There is sense in this. When the US is so confident in its might, it is easier to deal with one than with many. They expect to achieve better results, and most likely it is correct...Two other observations. The conversation with President Putin was in a constructive tone, to agree and resolve conflicts. This is not due to Russia having changed its policy. Russia has not moved a millimeter from the position it held. The US administration was obliged to change its position. That is the US was obliged to change its positions and Russia stayed in the positions it held. The same happened with Turkey, which has radically changed its position.”

Sergey Stankevich

“It is good that the Presidents of the United States and Russia had a conversation. As a citizen of Russia, I don’t like to think half the world is holding its breath over how they prepare for this conversation and then hangs on every word, that we expect the course of the world to change or of Russia to change as a result of the two presidents conversing. I’d like a predictable international order. And I hope after this conversation it will begin. An order that is safe, comfortable and pleasant to live in. I’d like to see in this diplomacy the start of it which responsible statesmen...”

Vladimir Soloviev

“And I think of battalions marching when I hear the term ‘new world order.’ This is a dangerous combination of words.”

Sergey Stankevich

“We had a new world order at Yalta, Potsdam, then the creation of the UN, then in Helsinki where a new order was set down that included many elements including humanitarian issues and defense of human rights that were necessary for the world. I’d like to see this now, in the sense of building on predictability...”

Oleg Morozov

“Before this telephone conversation the world order existed in a state that did not suit anyone. Even the Americans were not satisfied with it. Not one of the tasks called out could be resolved. Dialogue between Russia and the USA is precisely the foundation on which you can build the new world order.”

Andrei Sidorov

“I’d like to start with agreeing terms. World order is precisely the agreements between victorious powers after a global war. That is what was done at Yalta, Teheran, Potsdam. Helsinki was not on that level. When the Yalta arrangements collapsed the West, and the USA in particular took this to mean its victory. And it was not accidental that we had all those discussions about the unipolar world. And it was the dissatisfaction of Russia and others with this unipolar world led to the fact that now Trump will set up a new world order by reaching agreement with those powers who did not accept globalization from the 1990s which was supposed to set up a new world order. ...Russia can now be a participant in the creation of the new world order. Putting aside the list of issues, the main item on the conversation was when do we meet and in what format....ISIS is the number one evil of our times. And if it is possible to joining forces to combat ISIS why not do so. That would be the implementation of precisely what Trump spoke about all during his electoral campaign.”

Yakov Kedmi

“What we are talking about is not a new world order but a new set of rules of conduct. It is not just a stop to military interventions but also to interference in other countries in general. That is what Trump was talking about.Order is too rigid... That is what Trump was saying, what Putin was saying. Let’s set up proper relations: everyone will live at home as he wishes. No one will give instructions to others. Not in the name of democracy, not in the name of God...All the wars and cruelty took place in the name of ideals. Therefore let’s not speak about a new world order but about a new, civilized way of communicating and dealing with one another.”

Vyacheslav Nikonov

“In fact that world order which is now being reconstructed, it was born not in Yalta or Potsdam but in the end of the Cold War. This was a unipolar world order in which strictly speaking the ‘world government’ was the United States itself , which was more powerful than the Roman Empire in its day, or the United States and its allies acting through the NATO bloc and the international financial institutions. This was the global, liberal world order in which Russia had its place as a conquered power on which others wiped their feet or in the best of circumstances was ignored. Precisely this world order is passing into history. Firstly because the United States was unable to maintain world domination nor did it have the desire to do so as we now see. As Trump said in his Inauguration speech, you have to allow that other states have their own interests. That had a revolutionary sound to it coming from an American President, since they never recognized national interests other than their own and their allies. Nobody now

wants to dissolve the NATO bloc, but I'd call attention to the following. During all the years of NATO's existence, the press of the member states has not been allowed to ask any serious questions about the American leadership, except for the period of the war in Iraq. Now 90% of what you read in the newspapers about the USA is so very negative like we never saw before. A real trans-Atlantic split that never existed before. So, what is coming? We see application of the term "new normalcy," which is very debatable. The "new normalcy" of a world with Trump, Putin, Brexit. What does that mean? There are various opinions, but it is clear it will be a multi-polar construction in which the poles are the great powers: ...China, India, Russia, United States. Maybe it will be 4-sided. Brzezinski recently spoke about the need for a triangular system: the USA, Russia and China. We also have a place in the Eurasian project, in the Chinese Silk Road, which might include the European Union. Ahead will be very serious re-formatting over the coming years, not months...But one thing is clear, in the new world order one of the decisive places will be held by our country."

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

Rachel Maddow Plays Glenn Beck

By pushing the new anti-Russian McCarthyism as an attack strategy against President Trump, Democrats – and progressives like Rachel Maddow – are encouraging a costly and dangerous New Cold War, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

When Rachel Maddow finished a 26-minute monologue that spanned two segments on her MSNBC program last Thursday night, her grave tones indicated that she thought she'd just delivered a whale of a story. But actually it was more like a minnow – and a specious one at that.

Convoluting and labored, Maddow's narrative tried to make major hay out of a report from Moscow that a high-ranking Russian intelligence official had been dragged out of a meeting, arrested and charged with treason. Weirdly, Maddow kept presenting that barebones story as verification that Russia's President Vladimir Putin had directly ordered the hacking and release of Democratic campaign emails in order to get Donald Trump elected president.

It was a free-associating performance worthy of Glenn Beck at a whiteboard. Maddow swirled together an array of facts, possible facts, dubious assertions and pure speculation to arrive at conclusions that were based on little more than her zeal to portray Trump as a tool of the Kremlin. Even when sober, Joe McCarthy never did it better.

We might dismiss her performance as just another bit of stagecraft on “MSDNC,” but Maddow was in sync with widespread fear-mongering by pundits and Democratic Party loyalists who think they’re picking some low-hanging fruit to throw at Trump. But what they’re doing is poisonous – and extremely dangerous.

The standard memes demanding hostility toward Putin virtually never address some crucial questions. Such as: What are the plausible results of escalating a new Cold War? Is it wise to push the U.S. government into evermore assertive brinkmanship with Russia? Wouldn’t the degree of success in that endeavor increase the degree of danger that the antagonisms will spiral into a military confrontation and, from there, into a nuclear holocaust?

Such questions don’t seem to bother the likes of Maddow, who has largely built her TV career on mocking, impugning and denouncing Republicans. Fair enough, except when it isn’t – and when it latches onto a Democratic party line of attack: no matter how bogus the reasoning or how dire the potential consequences for humans and all other life on this planet.

Sliding through a kind of time warp, Maddow’s performance on the night of January 26 was akin to what the most extreme Republicans have reveled in doing to incumbent Democrats in past decades – baiting them as accomplices of the Kremlin and warning against actual détente between the two countries.

To be clear: Donald Trump has already shown himself to be a horrendous president in countless ways that matter, from his Cabinet appointments to his numerous corrosive statements to his executive orders on subjects ranging from family planning for women overseas to immigration at home. Why spin into agenda-driven conjecture and illogic when there are so many empirical reasons to directly challenge Trump?

But for countless U.S. reporters and pundits as well as Democrats in Congress, the temptation to attack Trump as a servant of Putin is irresistible.

Norman Solomon is co-founder of the online activist group RootsAction.org. His books include *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. He is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.

Calling a Lie a Lie in the Age of Trump

The U.S. mainstream media bends over backward not to call the President a liar even when it's deserved, but Donald Trump's falsehoods are so glaring that the L word should apply, says ethicist Daniel C. Maguire.

By Daniel C. Maguire

The *L word* is suddenly center stage as Trump's presidency begins. No surprise there, given the river of falsehoods flowing from the administration and his devious cabinet misfits. Journalists scruple about the propriety of calling a lie a lie, especially when the liar is the President of the United States. The New York Times made news by calling one of Trump's manifest falsehoods a lie. National Public Radio, perhaps wary about federal funding, shies from the word.

Underlying all this is broad public confusion as to just what a lie is. The Oxford English Dictionary oversimplifies it by saying that a lie is "a false statement made with intent to deceive." Let ethics come to the rescue. Telling the Gestapo that the Frank family had left Amsterdam (even though you were actually bringing them food on a daily basis) would not earn you the moral stigma of "a liar."

And that is the point. "Lie" and "liar" are not neutral words. Sometimes you have a moral obligation to deceive as when someone intent on murder asks if you know the location of his intended victim. Truth-telling in that case would be lethal; intentional deception is mandatory.

*Lying is when you speak falsely intending to deceive someone **who has a right to the truth**.* The specific evil that makes an intentional deception evil is in the denial of the truth to someone who has a right to it. An engaged woman is secretly pregnant from another man. If she says no when her suspecting fiancé asks her directly, then she is in this instance, a liar. He has a right to know the truth.

So face it: "lie" and "liar" have a nasty denotation. It would not be a compliment if you said of someone that he was "very pleasant, quite talented, and an outstanding liar." Like the word "murder," "lie" and "liar" denote evil. They signify an unjustifiable deception.

It is not hard to understand the skittishness of the press regarding the *L word*. When you say the President lied, you are accusing him of immoral activity. You are saying that he is speaking falsely *in the face of abundant evidence to the contrary* and is trying to deceive the public on a matter where they have a right

to the truth.

But why should the President be spared the appropriate ethical term for his actions? The sacred calling of the press, well understood by the founders of this republic, is to speak the truth especially to those in power. Why would they betray that noble mission by shrinking from calling a powerful liar on his lies?

The lies of President Trump and those of his mendacity agents like Kellyanne Conway are more insulting than has been generally noted. They are despicably cynical because they insinuate that the American public and the press have no right to the truth. Fictional “alternative facts” are all they deserve.

Lying as the Tool of Despots

Truth is the natural enemy of despotism. Crushing the press and citizen protests is the instinctive reaction of despots. We are seeing this in full play today as the press is characterized as public enemy number one and as states form plans to suppress public protests and criminalize citizen protesters.

Truth is the life blood of a democracy. The Hebrew prophets saw how labile – or liable to change – it is and worried about its loss in a society. “Truth stumbles in the market-place and honesty is kept out of court, so truth is lost to sight.” (Isa. 59:14) The people are too susceptible to “smooth words and seductive visions.” (Isa. 30:10) The tragedy, complained Hosea, comes when eventually “There is no truth ... in the land.” (Hosea 4:1)

The antidote for despotic lies is not a polite silence or cowardly politeness and acquiescence. In the spirit of the prophets, it is thoroughly moral and right to call liars by their name. The prophets of Israel, who would make modern pundits seem timid and bland, would not shy from a word like “liar.”

The kings, said Jeremiah, are “stupid brutes.” (Jer 10;21). Isaiah went further saying Israel’s leaders were “blind ... dumb dogs who cannot bark ... lovers of sleep ... greedy dogs that can never have enough ... who understand nothing.” (Isa. 56:10-11)

And Jesus was no softer. He called the powerful religious and political leaders of his day “roaring lions ... wolves of the plain, hypocrites, blind guides, ... blind fools ... snakes, vipers ... who spill innocent blood.” (Matt. 23). He said they were best compared to painted sepulchers, beautified on the outside but inside filled with the stench of death.

That is precisely the blunt, blustery spirit needed today by citizen groups, the press, and the all too pusillanimous Democratic Party. Trump, ignoring the

structures of constitutional governance, is bending democracy toward autocracy and he uses lies to grease the skids of this subversion. The lies of this liar must be cited and he must be called by the name his deeds merit.

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Deep State vs. Donald Trump

President Trump has stepped onto a high-wire in defying America's Deep State, but can he withstand the powerful winds that will surely buffet him and what will President Putin do to help or hurt, asks ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said it often: the door to co-operation (with the U.S.) "lies ajar." He has said it repeatedly: that it was not Moscow in the first place that had withered – and then severed – the lines of communication with Washington. And Mr. Putin has been consistent in periodically easing the path to "Moscow" for President Trump.

(The Americans had hinted recently that they might appreciate "a gesture" from the Russians – and they got one: Russia invited the incoming U.S. administration to the Syria talks, at Astana. Moscow made this gesture – even at the cost of almost losing their Iranian ally's support at the talks.)

Perhaps it is this "door ajar" stance by Mr. Putin that has given rise to the idea, in much of the press, that détente between the two leaders is somehow a "slam dunk" bet – that Trump and Putin are cut from similar cloth, and will somehow end up bashing Islamic radicals together. If that is the consensus, then it is perhaps premature, and possibly wrong.

The door is indeed "open," and it is possible that the two leaders may indeed conjure up a détente. But it is no "slam dunk" (certainty). And Moscow certainly does not regard it to be "slam dunk" – at all. On the contrary, they are aware that whereas there are areas of common approach, there are also areas of obvious difference – and possible disagreement – between the new U.S. administration and

Moscow. The hope for détente ultimately may prove to lie just beyond reach. We shall have to see.

We do not know what President Trump's foreign policy – in practice – will be. It is not at all clear (intentionally so, in part. But, also because the details have not yet been thrashed out within the team, who are busy with managing a complex transition). Nonetheless we can tease out, perhaps, a few solid pointers in the wake of the new U.S. President's inaugural speech:

–Mr. Trump has witnessed America's political and economic decline over the years (he made plain previously his concerns about America's deteriorating situation in his 2000 campaign publication).

–He sincerely believes the U.S. to be in crisis – and that without radical, urgent and comprehensive reform, America (qua "America") will be in peril. He is, as it were, someone who has looked upon decay and corruption, and been transfigured by that which he saw: Yes, there was a Cromwellian "New Model Army" whiff to his inauguration speech. He said that he intends to purge – and then to remake – America, no less.

–He has arrayed against him the still intact power of the Deep State, yet he chooses mainly to taunt them. His inaugural speech told the Deep State flatly to prepare for its own disempowerment. He has thereby "burnt his bridges" in respect to any subsequent Faustian sale of his soul. He can only succeed, or dramatically fail.

–For all the pomp of an orderly transfer of power on Jan. 20th, the reality behind the trappings is one of a "state of war" between the U.S. President and the still-present Deep State elites (but not necessarily the Deep State's foot soldiers, many of whom, it appears, voted for Trump).

Political Tactics

Artemis Capital presciently describes Trump's likely political tactics: "Trump knows that if you can't win [as matters stand], then you change the rules of the game – this is what he has already done with American politics – and what he is about to do to the entire Post-Bretton Woods World Order. If you really want to know a person, watch what they do, and not what they say ... or what they tweet ... the rants and twitter storms are part of a strategy of media control and distraction.

"Trump's business career was largely comprised of three core strategies 1) Leverage 2) Restructure 3) Brand ... in that order. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s Trump rode a generational decline in interest rates and debt binge to purchase a range of high profile real estate projects including the Grand Hyatt

(1978), Trump Tower (1983), the Plaza Hotel (1988) and the Taj Mahal (1988). In the 1990s he went through a total of 6 bankruptcies due to over-leveraged hotel and casino businesses in Atlantic City and New York. In the 2000s he pivoted to move away from debt-driven property investments to building a global brand through the 'Apprentice' TV show.

"Trump will run the country as he ran his businesses ... He will lever, and lever, and lever, and lever ... and lever ... and then restructure his way to success, or whatever success is defined as, by the broadest measure of popularity at any given time. Trumponomics, if it delivers, will be a supply-side free for all: massive tax cuts, deficit spending to create jobs, financial and energy deregulation, business creation, and trade protectionism – all driving inflation. More importantly, Trump sees bankruptcy as a tool and not an obligation and will have no problem pushing the US to the limits of debt expansion. 'I do play with bankruptcy laws, they're very good to me!' he once said."

'The Destructor'

And this is what – in broad outline – we already see. Trump's tweets are "the destructor" element: Creating negotiating leverage through uncertainty. No one can be sure of Trump's final aims, or his "bottom line."

This is his strategy. The tweets are mini-grenades tossed into the mix, precisely to confuse, to distract, and to loosen up the existing "order" – and to make it more susceptible to negotiation – and to subsequent "re-structuring" – should initial negotiations hit a brick wall.

Similarly, with leverage. Trump has leverage: Most significantly, the U.S. is the globe's biggest buyer of consumer goods; it possesses the world's reserve currency, and controls all the Bretton Woods financial institutions, with all the privileges which that implies. It has the Federal Reserve and can manipulate other states' currencies; the U.S. "owns" NATO, and the defense protection it does (or does not) choose to confer on other states; it has the biggest military; and is more or less energy independent. Not bad cards.

Trump may be expected to lever, and lever again, all these assets. He will pull out all the stops in the interest of putting America First, and returning jobs and manufacturing to America's marginalized white middle- and blue-collar classes. He will lever this aim financially (i.e. debt, border taxes and tax incentives) too, as well as politically strong-arm America's trading rivals.

Brand "America" will be advanced by all the tradecraft that Trump acquired through his "reality" TV show: distractions, surprises, and publicity stunts to

create an aura of success – for he is determined to succeed. It is almost as if he feels he can lift the “animal spirits” of Americans, as it were, by willpower, and pithy, one-liner tweets. To an extent, he already has – to judge by polls on business confidence in the U.S.

A Method Behind Madness

The above account may imply that, with Trump, all policy will essentially be determined by the seat of his pants. But if that is what conveyed, it is only half the story. John Maudlin of Maudlin Economics provides this corrective:

“This is going to be a short letter summarizing my impressions from the last few days [in Washington talking with Trump’s transition team]. I think it might be easiest to present them in the form of a list.

“If you listen to the media you might have the impression that the Trump transition team is in complete disarray. Talking with leaders of the transition team certainly didn’t leave me with that impression. They have broken the transition process down into over 30 departments and have created a ‘landing document’ for each department. The analogy they are using is that this process is like planning an invasion, and they are going to hand the landing document off to the ‘beachhead teams’ who will then execute the plans.

“I was briefly allowed to look at (without actually being able to read) the plan for one cabinet-level department. It appeared to be about 100 pages plus of serious detail as to exactly what executive orders would need to be removed and added, what personnel would have to be replaced (both appointees and regular staff), what policies would need to be changed, and so forth.

“I was told that this level of planning was being done for every department. My impression is that there are a lot of people from various think tanks and others with experience in the presidential transition process who are involved in directing the plan for each department. That level of detailed planning doesn’t happen in less than two months. My guess is that some of that thinking has been going on for years, and now it can be implemented.

“That being said, we know that no battle plan survives contact with the enemy; and it was instructive to sit with Bill Bennett, who talked about his experience in trying to reform the Department of Education under Reagan. They were still dealing with personnel and policy issues a year later, and this was when the department was much smaller than it is today. And that is just one department.

“When I asked a key person how much of the overall plan would likely come to fruition, I got a rueful smile and a shrug. ‘If we even get half of this done in the first few years, that will be major reform’...

“Trump’s management style is going to drive the media (and admittedly, much of the country and the world) nuts. One person who has worked closely with Trump during the transition says it is a lot like the HBO show Entourage and not at all like the British sitcom Yes, Minister. Trump will have people in his entourage competing to give him the pieces of information he needs. In his business organization, he sets the vision and then hires people to execute that vision; and then he goes back to doing what we have seen him do so well, which is to create the brand and image.

“He is bringing in people to execute his vision, and he’s going to expect them to get it done. He will jump in when he thinks he’s needed or when he can add something to the process, but he will mostly be paying attention to his team’s performance.

“One assessment suggests that there is going to be more than the usual amount of personnel turnover in the first six months. The media will be writing about how Trump can’t keep people and about all the chaos in the White House and other parts of government. But from Trump’s perspective, and given his management style, that’s not necessarily bad in terms of his longer-term goal of changing things.

“We have not had a president with this type of management style in my lifetime. Since it’s not something that any of us are going to be familiar with, it is going to make some of us uncomfortable until we get used to it (and some people never will).”

Putin and Trump

Where does this put Russia? Is President Putin, then, cut from similar cloth, as many commentators suggest?

Superficially: Yes (but in other ways, no). President Putin too saw his nation in decline (the Yeltsin years). And yes, Putin also sincerely believed that Russia was in crisis when he assumed the Presidency.

President Putin did face Russian Deep State powers arrayed against him, but, unlike Trump, there was no public declaration of war against the Russian Deep State, but rather, the Russian President has made it his objective to try to “heal Russia,” and to keep the opposing Russian political poles from splintering away from the main trunk. In this respect, President Putin is no populist: there has been no metaphorical rallying of blue-collar “pitchforks and torches” against the Elites. Putin has preferred to out-manuever his enemies in more discreet, less public, ways.

So the “chemistry,” if it transpires in the flesh, derives from something else.

Steve Bannon, Trump's close confidant, in a 2014 interview, said simply enough: The "very, very, very intelligent" Putin just "gets it." He understands "us." He can see what our various Tea Party Movements are about (this interview was before Trump was a Candidate). Putin can tell that a "revolution" in America and Europe is brewing, Bannon implies, and notes that the Russian President has been quietly, (and "cleverly") positioning himself towards it, especially in Europe.

In other words, it is not so much the transactional possibilities that attracts Bannon to Putin, but a sense of dealing with someone who has an instinctive, almost telepathic, shared understanding of what Bannon and his Breitbart circle (now including Trump) are about, and how they view the world. This type of empathetic communication – if borne out by experience – does have a real potential to overcome otherwise difficult political differences.

Russia's Hot Buttons

And political differences, there are. Major potential hurdles: The "America First" policy, and that of aggressively re-building the home base, will not ruffle President Putin one jot. He feels the same about Russia. Ditto for the America First energy policy. Mr. Putin will have no problems with that (there can be fruitful exchanges with Secretary of State-designate Rex Tillerson, who is leaving his job as Exxon-Mobil's CEO, on this issue).

However, three issues could be very problematic: The first is Trump's emphasis that the U.S. "military dominance must be unquestioned" since this directly touches on Russia's own national security. Moscow does not seek an absolute "balance," but a balance of esteem, and "strategic stability" with the U.S. Two, Team Trump says the president will not "allow other nations to surpass our [U.S.] military capability"; and (in a White House policy outline), "We [the U.S.] will also develop a state-of-the-art missile defense system to protect against missile-based attacks from states like Iran and North Korea."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has already warned that nuclear weapons, strategic stability and nuclear and strategic parity, will be the key issue in Russian-U.S. relations. And the third "hot" issue will be whether Trump is intent on driving a wedge into the strategic security architecture linking China, Russia and Iran. Again, any attempt to split the coalition, or to collapse the keystone of the Eurasian economic "arch" (One Belt, One Road), could sour any entente between Trump and Putin.

There is however another major consideration for Russia: Can he do it? And, should he fail, what would be the implications for Russia? Might Trump's term in office be curtailed? Might the U.S. President be removed, and replaced by an administration that would pursue vindictive retribution against Russia, for

having allegedly “sided with” Trump?

Trump is determined to pull out all the stops: to succeed, but it will not be easy. The headwinds are strong. Growth is proving elusive – globally – for a range of complex factors. It is not Trump’s fault. It’s just how it is.

Economic Challenges

And a Damocles’ sword hangs over his economic program: Yes, he will try to lever, lever and lever again, as it he did in his business career (infrastructure projects, tax breaks and higher spending). For sure it is going to be inflationary – and interest rates already are rising. What happens when 10-year U.S. Treasuries hit 3 percent or more? Will it be war with a “tightening” Federal Reserve? Will debt markets generally, enter crisis?

But really, this program can, and almost certainly will, spice up life (and equity prices), for some U.S. corporations, but can it reach down, in the only sense that ultimately matters for Mr. Trump – to the level of bringing home the jobs to middle-class and blue-collar America? Who will work these newly returned plants? Robots? Americans on \$15 an hour, or Americans on \$45 an hour (a well-paid hourly job)?

And if the latter, who is going to purchase the expensive products which these well-paid workers will manufacture? Fellow Americans presumably, but it will take many millions of consumers, themselves on \$45 an hour, to afford these high price goods. But if it is Americans on \$15 per hour, from whence will come the revived consumer “animal spirits” and free spending? And if it is ‘bots...?

And is “tough on China” really viable? Modern industrial supply lines are long, transnational and complex. If America plays tough with end-product locus of manufacture, Asia can hit back in the supply lines. A whole supply line is much harder to pick up and put down elsewhere – than is one single plant.

More salient is the question: does China in fact have the economic “fat” to afford to part with some of it, to please America? Parts of America have been suffering from the effects of globalization, but now China has begun to be globalization’s latest victim, too. China may not have any “fat” to negotiate away. And China certainly does have “cards” of its own.

We have entered upon a bold experiment. Is it fully thought through, though? The Russians must be wondering, too.

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