

Russia-gate Is No Watergate or Iran-Contra

Special Report: Many comparisons have been made between Russia-gate and the earlier scandals of Watergate and Iran-Contra, but the similarities are at best superficial, explains Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Russia-gate, the sprawling investigation into whether Russia meddled in last year's U.S. election, is often compared to the two big political scandals of the latter half of the Twentieth Century, Watergate and Iran-Contra. Sometimes you even hear that Russia-gate is "bigger than Watergate."

Yet what is perhaps most remarkable about those two Twentieth Century scandals is how little Official Washington really understands them – and how these earlier scandals significantly contrast, rather than compare, with what is unfolding now.

Although the historical record is still incomplete on Watergate and Iran-Contra, the available evidence indicates that both scandals originated in schemes by Republicans to draw foreign leaders into plots to undermine sitting Democratic presidents and thus pave the way for the elections of Richard Nixon in 1968 and Ronald Reagan in 1980.

As for Russia-gate, even if you accept that the Russian government hacked into Democratic emails and publicized them via WikiLeaks, there is still no evidence that Donald Trump or his campaign colluded with the Kremlin to do so. By contrast, in the origins of Watergate and Iran-Contra, it appears the Nixon and Reagan campaigns, respectively, were the instigators of schemes to enlist foreign governments in blocking a Vietnam peace deal in 1968 and negotiations to free 52 American hostages in Iran in 1980.

Though Watergate is associated directly with the 1972 campaign – when Nixon's team of burglars was caught inside the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate building – Nixon's formation of that team, known as the Plumbers, was driven by his fear that he could be exposed for sabotaging President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace talks in 1968 in order to secure the White House that year.

After Nixon's narrow victory over Vice President Hubert Humphrey in the 1968 election, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover informed Nixon that Johnson had a secret file, complete with wiretapped phone calls, detailing the Nixon campaign's

backchannel messages to South Vietnamese officials convincing them to boycott Johnson's Paris peace talks. Later, Nixon learned that this incriminating file had disappeared from the White House.

So, in 1971, after the leaking of the Pentagon Papers, which recounted the lies that had been used to justify the Vietnam War through 1967, Nixon fretted that the missing file about his peace-talk gambit in 1968 might surface, too, and would destroy him politically. Thus, he organized the Plumbers to find the file, even contemplating fire-bombing the Brookings Institution to enable a search of its safe where some aides thought the missing file might be found.

In other words, Watergate wasn't simply a break-in at the Democratic National Committee on June 17, 1972, in pursuit of useful political intelligence and Nixon's ensuing cover-up; the scandal had its origins in a far worse scandal, the derailing of peace talks that could have ended the Vietnam War years earlier and saved the lives of tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers and possibly more than 1 million Vietnamese.

Iran-Contra Parallels

Similarly, the Iran-Contra scandal exploded in 1986 with revelations that President Reagan had authorized secret arms sales to Iran with some of the profits going to fund the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, but the evidence now indicates that the connections between Reagan's team and Iran's revolutionary regime traced back to 1980 when emissaries from Reagan's campaign worked to stymie President Jimmy Carter's negotiations to free 52 American hostages then held in Iran.

According to multiple witnesses, including former Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs Nicholas Veliotis, the pre-election contacts led to the opening of a weapons pipeline to Iran (via Israel), after Reagan was sworn in on Jan. 20, 1981, which was the precise moment when Iran finally released the American hostages after 444 days.

Some key players in the 1980 Reagan-Iran contacts reappeared four years later at the start of direct (again secret) U.S. arms shipments to Iran in 1985, which also involved Israeli middlemen. These key players included Iranian CIA operative Cyrus Hashemi, former CIA clandestine services chief Theodore Shackley, Reagan's campaign chief and then-CIA Director William Casey, and former CIA Director and then-Vice President George H.W. Bush.

In other words, the Iran-Contra weapons shipments of 1985-86 appear to have been an outgrowth of the earlier shipments dating back to 1980 and continuing under Israeli auspices until the supply line was taken over more directly by the

Reagan administration in 1985-86.

Thus, both the Watergate scandal in 1972 and the Iran-Contra Affair in 1986 could be viewed as “sequels” to the earlier machinations driven by Republican hunger to seize the enormous powers of the U.S. presidency. However, for decades, Official Washington has been hostile to these underlying explanations of how Watergate and Iran-Contra began.

For instance, The New York Times, the so-called “newspaper of record,” treated the accumulation of evidence regarding Nixon’s 1968 peace-talk gambit as nothing more than a “rumor” until earlier this year when a scholar, John A. Farrell, uncovered cryptic notes taken by Nixon’s aide H.R. Haldeman, which added another piece to the mosaic and left the Times little choice but to pronounce the historical reality finally real.

Grasping the Watergate Narrative

Still, the Times and other major news outlets have failed to factor this belated admission into the larger Watergate narrative. If you understand that Nixon did sabotage President Johnson’s Vietnam War peace talks and that Nixon was aware that Johnson’s file on what LBJ called Nixon’s “treason” had disappeared from the White House, the early “Watergate tapes” from 1971 suddenly make sense.

Nixon ordered White House chief of staff H.R. “Bob” Haldeman and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger to locate the missing file but their search came up empty. Yet, some Nixon aides thought the file might be hidden at the Brookings Institution, a liberal think tank in Washington. So, in his desperate pursuit of the file, Nixon called for a break-in at Brookings, possibly even fire-bombing the building as a cover for his team of burglars to slip in amid the confusion and rifle the safe.

The old explanation that Nixon simply wanted to find some file related to Johnson’s 1968 pre-election Vietnam bombing halt never made sense given the extreme steps that Nixon was prepared to take.

The relevant portions of Nixon’s White House tapes include an entry on June 17, 1971, coincidentally one year to the day before the Watergate burglars were caught. Nixon summoned Haldeman and Kissinger to the Oval Office and pleaded with them again to locate the file.

“Do we have it?” Nixon asked Haldeman. “I’ve asked for it. You said you didn’t have it.”

Haldeman: “We can’t find it.”

Kissinger: "We have nothing here, Mr. President."

Nixon: "Well, damn-it, I asked for that because I need it."

Kissinger: "But Bob and I have been trying to put the damn thing together."

Haldeman: "We have a basic history in constructing our own, but there is a file on it."

Nixon: "Where?"

Haldeman: "[Presidential aide Tom Charles] Huston swears to God that there's a file on it and it's at Brookings."

Nixon: "Bob? Bob? Now do you remember Huston's plan [for White House-sponsored break-ins as part of domestic counter-intelligence operations]? Implement it."

Kissinger: "Now Brookings has no right to have classified documents."

Nixon: "I want it implemented. Goddamn-it, get in and get those files. Blow the safe and get it."

Haldeman: "They may very well have cleaned them by now, but this thing, you need to "

Kissinger: "I wouldn't be surprised if Brookings had the files."

Haldeman: "My point is Johnson knows that those files are around. He doesn't know for sure that we don't have them around."

But Johnson did know that the file was no longer at the White House because he had ordered his national security adviser, Walt Rostow, to remove it in the final days of Johnson's presidency.

Forming the Burglars

On June 30, 1971, Nixon again berated Haldeman about the need to break into Brookings and "take it [the file] out." Nixon suggested using former CIA officer E. Howard Hunt to conduct the Brookings break-in.

"You talk to Hunt," Nixon told Haldeman. "I want the break-in. Hell, they do that. You're to break into the place, rifle the files, and bring them in. Just go in and take it. Go in around 8:00 or 9:00 o'clock."

Haldeman: "Make an inspection of the safe."

Nixon: "That's right. You go in to inspect the safe. I mean, *clean it up.*"

For reasons that remain unclear, it appears that the Brookings break-in never took place (nor did the fire-bombing), but Nixon's desperation to locate Johnson's peace-talk file was an important link in the chain of events that led to the creation of Nixon's burglary unit under Hunt's supervision. Hunt later oversaw the two Watergate break-ins in May and June of 1972.

While it's possible that Nixon was still searching for the file about his Vietnam-peace sabotage when the ill-fated Watergate break-ins occurred a year later, it's generally believed that the burglary was more broadly focused, seeking any information that might have an impact on Nixon's re-election, either defensively or offensively.

However, if you think back on 1971 when the Vietnam War was tearing the country apart and massive antiwar demonstrations were descending on Washington, Nixon's desperation to locate the missing file suddenly doesn't seem quite so crazy. There would have been hell to pay if the public learned that Nixon had kept the war going to gain a political advantage in 1968.

Through 1972 – and the early days of the Watergate scandal – former President Johnson had stayed silent about Nixon's sabotage of the Paris peace talks. But the ex-President became livid when – after Nixon's reelection in 1972 – Nixon's men sought to pressure Johnson into helping them shut down the Watergate investigation, in part, by noting that Johnson, too, had deployed wiretaps against Nixon's 1968 campaign to obtain evidence about the peace-talk sabotage.

While it's not clear whether Johnson would have finally spoken out, that threat to Nixon ended two days after Nixon's second inaugural when on Jan. 22, 1973, Johnson died of a heart attack. However, unbeknownst to Nixon, Johnson had left the missing file, called "The X-Envelope," in the care of Rostow, who – after Johnson's death – gave the file to the LBJ presidential library in Austin, Texas, with instructions that it be kept under wraps for at least 50 years. (Rostow's instructions were overturned in the 1990s, and I found the now largely declassified file at the library in 2012.)

So, with the "The X-Envelope" squirreled away for more than two decades at the LBJ library and with the big newspapers treating the early sketchy reports of Nixon's peace-talk sabotage as only "rumors," Watergate remained a scandal limited to the 1972 campaign.

Still, Nixon's cover-up of his campaign's role in the Watergate break-in produced enough clear-cut evidence of obstruction of justice and other offenses that Nixon was forced to resign on Aug. 9, 1974.

A Failed Investigation

The 1979-81 hostage confrontation with Iran was not nearly as devastating a crisis as the Vietnam War but America's humiliation during the 444-day-long ordeal became a focus of the 1980 election, too, with the first anniversary of Iran's seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran coincidentally falling on Election Day 1980.

President Carter's failure to gain freedom for the 52 embassy personnel turned what had been a close race into a landslide for Ronald Reagan, with Republicans also gaining control of the U.S. Senate and ousting some of the most influential Democratic senators.

In 1984, Reagan won reelection in another landslide, but two years later ran afoul of the Iran-Contra scandal. Reagan's secret arms sales to Iran and diversion of profits to the Contras "broke" in November 1986 but focused only on Reagan's 1985-1986 arms sales and the diversion. Still, the scandal's crimes included violations of the Arms Export Control Act and the so-called Boland Act's prohibitions on arming the Contras as well as perjury and obstruction of justice. So there was the prospect of Reagan's impeachment.

But – from the start of Iran-Contra – there was a strong pushback from Republicans who didn't want to see another GOP president driven from office. There was also resistance to the scandal from many mainstream media executives who personally liked Reagan and feared a public backlash if the press played an aggressive role similar to Watergate.

And, moderate Democrats, such as Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana who co-chaired the congressional investigation, sought to tamp down the Iran-Contra fires and set up firebreaks to prevent the investigation from spreading to related crimes such as the Reagan administration's protection of Contra cocaine traffickers.

"Ask about the cocaine," pleaded one protester who was dragged from the Iran-Contra hearing room, as the congressional investigators averted their eyes from such unseemly matters, focusing instead on stilted lectures about the Congress's constitutional prerogatives.

It was not until 1990-91 that it became clear that secret U.S.-approved arms shipments to Iran did not start in 1985 as the Iran-Contra narrative claimed but traced back to 1981 with Reagan's approval of arms sales to Iran through Israel.

Reagan's politically risky move of secretly arming Iran immediately after his inauguration and the hostage release was nearly exposed when one of the Israeli flights strayed into Soviet airspace on July 18, 1981, and crashed or was shot down.

In a PBS interview nearly a decade later, Nicholas Veliotis, Reagan's assistant

secretary of state for the Middle East, said he looked into the incident by talking to top administration officials.

“It was clear to me after my conversations with people on high that indeed we had agreed that the Israelis could transship to Iran some American-origin military equipment,” Veliotos said.

In checking out the Israeli flight, Veliotos came to believe that the Reagan camp’s dealings with Iran dated back to before the 1980 election. “It seems to have started in earnest in the period probably prior to the election of 1980, as the Israelis had identified who would become the new players in the national security area in the Reagan administration,” Veliotos said. “And I understand some contacts were made at that time.”

However, in 1981, Veliotos said, the State Department issued misleading press guidance to cover the administration’s tracks and the Washington media failed to follow up. Thus, the U.S.-Israeli arms pipeline to Iran stayed secret from the American people until November 1986 when – despite Reagan’s long-running insistence that he would never trade arms with a terrorist state like Iran – the operation was exposed.

When I re-interviewed Veliotos in 2012, he said he couldn’t recall who the “people on high” were who had described the informal clearance of the Israeli shipments of U.S.-manufactured weapons, but he indicated that “the new players” were the young neoconservatives who were working on the Reagan campaign, many of whom later joined the administration as senior political appointees.

Documents that I discovered at the Reagan presidential library revealed that Reagan’s neocons at the State Department, particularly Robert McFarlane and Paul Wolfowitz, initiated a policy review in 1981 to allow Israel to undertake secret military shipments to Iran.

McFarlane and Wolfowitz also maneuvered to put McFarlane in charge of U.S. relations toward Iran and to establish a clandestine U.S. back-channel to the Israeli government outside the knowledge of even senior U.S. government officials.

Another Failed Investigation

In 1991, faced with the accumulating evidence of a prequel to the Iran-Contra scandal, Congress grudgingly agreed to take a look at these so-called “October Surprise” allegations. But Republicans, then led by President George H.W. Bush and his White House team, mounted an aggressive cover-up to “spike” the story.

And, with the congressional inquiry largely in the hands again of Rep. Hamilton,

the Democrats timidly folded their tent despite a growing body of evidence that the Reagan team was indeed guilty.

Much of that evidence flowed into the House Task Force in December 1992 when President George H.W. Bush had already been defeated for reelection and the Democrats were looking forward to their renewed control of Washington. So, instead of giving a careful review to the new evidence, the House Task Force ignored, disparaged or buried it.

The late-arriving material included sworn testimony on Dec. 18, 1992, from David Andelman, the biographer of French intelligence chief Alexandre deMarenches, describing how deMarenches had confided that he had helped arrange the Republican-Iranian contacts. Andelman, an ex-New York Times and CBS News correspondent, said that while he was working on deMarenches's autobiography, the arch-conservative spymaster admitted arranging meetings between Republicans and Iranians about the hostage issue in the summer and fall of 1980, with one meeting held in Paris in October.

Andelman said deMarenches ordered that the secret meetings be kept out of his memoirs because the story could otherwise damage the reputations of his friends, William Casey and George H.W. Bush. Andelman's testimony corroborated longstanding claims from a variety of international intelligence operatives about a Paris meeting involving Casey and Bush. But the Task Force report brushed this testimony aside, paradoxically terming it "credible" but then claiming it was "insufficiently probative."

The Task Force's report argued that Andelman could not "rule out the possibility that deMarenches had told him he was aware of and involved in the Casey meetings because he, deMarenches, could not risk telling his biographer he had no knowledge of these allegations."

In the last weeks of the investigation, the House investigators also received a letter from former Iranian President Bani-Sadr detailing his behind-the-scenes struggle with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his son Ahmad over their secret dealings with the Reagan campaign. But the House investigators dismissed Bani-Sadr's first-hand account as hearsay and thus also lacking "probative value."

I later unearthed some of the evidence in unpublished Task Force files. However, in the meantime, Official Washington had dismissed the "October Surprise" and other Iran-Contra-connected scandals, like Contra drug trafficking, as conspiracy theories.

The Russian Report

Ironically, another piece of late-arriving evidence was a January 1993 report

from a national security committee of the Russian parliament about the Kremlin's intelligence data confirming that key Republicans, including George H.W. Bush and William Casey, had met with Iranian officials in Europe regarding the hostages during the 1980 campaign.

Hamilton had requested the Russian assistance before the U.S. election in 1992, but the report was not sent until there were only two weeks left in George H.W. Bush's presidency.

Lawrence Barcella, who served as the Task Force chief counsel, later told me that so much incriminating evidence arrived late that he asked Hamilton to extend the inquiry for three months but that Hamilton said no (although Hamilton told me that he had no recollection of denying Barcella's request).

The other fatal flaw of the House investigation was that it left much of the actual investigating up to President George H.W. Bush's White House counsel's office and the State Department, although Bush was one of the chief suspects and, in 1991-92, was running for re-election, a campaign that would have been derailed if the 1980 October Surprise allegations were confirmed.

The naivete of this decision was underscored years later when I located a memo at Bush's presidential library stating that the State Department had informed the White House counsel's office that Casey had traveled to Madrid in 1980, corroborating a key October Surprise allegation.

The confirmation of Casey's trip was passed along by State Department legal adviser Edwin D. Williamson to Associate White House Counsel Chester Paul Beach Jr. in early November 1991, just as the October Surprise inquiry was taking shape, according to Beach's "memorandum for record" dated Nov. 4, 1991.

Williamson said that among the State Department "material potentially relevant to the October Surprise allegations [was] a cable from the Madrid embassy indicating that Bill Casey was in town, for purposes unknown," Beach noted.

Two days later, on Nov. 6, 1991, Beach's boss, White House counsel C. Boyden Gray, arranged an inter-agency strategy session and explained the need to contain the congressional investigation into the October Surprise case. The explicit goal was to ensure the scandal would not hurt President Bush's reelection hopes in 1992.

In 2013, when I interviewed Hamilton about the Beach memo, he lamented that the Madrid information had not been shared with his investigation, saying "you have to rely on people" in authority to comply with information requests.

"We found no evidence to confirm Casey's trip to Madrid," Hamilton told me. "We

couldn't show that. The [George H.W. Bush] White House did not notify us that he did make the trip. Should they have passed that on to us? They should have because they knew we were interested in that."

Asked if knowledge that Casey had traveled to Madrid might have changed the Task Force's dismissive October Surprise conclusion, Hamilton said yes, because the question of the Madrid trip was key to the task force's investigation.

Not Moving the Needle

However, the Madrid trip revelation and other post-investigation disclosures failed to move the needle on Official Washington's disdain for the October Surprise story.

The later disclosures included a 1993 interview in Tel Aviv in which former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said he had read the 1991 book, *October Surprise*, by Carter's former National Security Council aide Gary Sick, which made the case for believing that the Republicans had intervened in the 1980 hostage negotiations to disrupt Carter's reelection.

With the topic raised, one interviewer asked, "What do you think? Was there an October Surprise?"

"Of course, it was," Shamir responded without hesitation. "It was."

And, there were other corroborating statements as well. In 1996, for instance, while former President Carter was meeting with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Arafat in Gaza City, Arafat tried to confess his role in the Republican maneuvering to block Carter's Iran-hostage negotiations.

"There is something I want to tell you," Arafat said, addressing Carter in the presence of historian Douglas Brinkley. "You should know that in 1980 the Republicans approached me with an arms deal [for the PLO] if I could arrange to keep the hostages in Iran until after the [U.S. presidential] election," Arafat said, according to Brinkley's article in the fall 1996 issue of *Diplomatic Quarterly*.

In 2013, after the movie "Argo" appeared regarding an early facet of the Iran-hostage crisis, former Iranian President Bani-Sadr elaborated on his account of Republican overtures to Iran in 1980 and how that secret initiative prevented release of the hostages.

In a *Christian Science Monitor* commentary, Bani-Sadr wrote, "Ayatollah Khomeini and Ronald Reagan had organized a clandestine negotiation which prevented the attempts by myself and then-U.S. President Jimmy Carter to free the hostages

before the 1980 U.S. presidential election took place. The fact that they were not released tipped the results of the election in favor of Reagan.”

Then, Bani-Sadr added a new detail, that “two of my advisors, Hussein Navab Safavi and Sadr-al-Hefazi, were executed by Khomeini’s regime because they had become aware of this secret relationship between Khomeini, his son Ahmad, ... and the Reagan administration.” [For more details on the October Surprise case, see Robert Parry’s *Trick or Treason and America’s Stolen Narrative.*]

Compare and Contrast

So how do Watergate and Iran-Contra compare and contrast with Russia-gate? One key difference is that in Watergate in 1972-73 and Iran-Contra in 1985-86, you had clear-cut crimes (even if you don’t want to believe the two “prequels” from 1968 and 1980, respectively).

In Watergate, five burglars were caught inside the DNC offices on June 17, 1972, as they sought to plant more bugs on Democratic phones. (An earlier break-in in May had installed two bugs, but one didn’t work.) Nixon then proceeded to mount a cover-up of his 1972 campaign’s role in funding the break-in and other abuses of power.

In Iran-Contra, Reagan secretly authorized weapons sales to Iran, which was then designated a terrorist state, without informing Congress, a violation of the Arms Export Control Act. He also kept Congress in the dark about his belated signing of a related intelligence “finding.” And the creation of slush funds to finance the Nicaraguan Contras represented an evasion of the U.S. Constitution.

There was also the attendant Iran-Contra cover-up mounted both by the Reagan White House and later the George H.W. Bush White House, which culminated in Bush’s Christmas Eve 1992 pardons of six Iran-Contra defendants as special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh was zeroing in on possible indictment of Bush for withholding evidence.

By contrast, Russia-gate has been a “scandal” in search of a specific crime. President Barack Obama’s intelligence chieftains have alleged – without presenting any clear evidence – that the Russian government hacked into the emails of the Democratic National Committee and of Hillary Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta and released those emails via WikiLeaks and other Internet sites. (The Russians and WikiLeaks have both denied the accusations.)

The DNC emails revealed that senior Democrats did not maintain their required independence regarding the primaries by seeking to hurt Sen. Bernie Sanders and help Clinton. The Podesta emails pulled back the curtain on Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street banks and on pay-to-play features of the Clinton

Foundation.

Hacking into personal computers is a crime, but the U.S. government has yet to bring any formal charges against specific individuals supposedly responsible for the hacking of the Democratic emails. There also has been no evidence that Donald Trump's campaign colluded with Russians in the hacking.

Lacking any precise evidence of this cyber-crime or of a conspiracy between Russia and the Trump campaign, Obama's Justice Department holdovers and now special prosecutor Robert Mueller have sought to build "process crimes," around false statements to investigators and possible obstruction of justice.

Railroading Flynn

In the case of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, Trump's first national security adviser, acting Attorney General Sally Yates used the archaic Logan Act of 1799 to create a predicate for the FBI to interrogate Flynn about a Dec. 29, 2016 conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, i.e., after Trump's election but before the Inauguration.

The Logan Act, which has never resulted in a prosecution in 218 years, was enacted during the period of the Alien and Sedition Acts to bar private citizens from negotiating on their own with foreign governments. It was never intended to apply to a national security adviser of an elected President, albeit before he was sworn in.

But it became the predicate for the FBI interrogation – and the FBI agents were armed with a transcript of the intercepted Kislyak-Flynn phone call so they could catch Flynn on any gaps in his recollection, which might have been made even hazier because he was on vacation in the Dominican Republic when Kislyak called.

Yates also concocted a bizarre argument that the discrepancies between Flynn's account of the call and the transcript left him open to Russian blackmail although how that would work – since the Russians surely assumed that Kislyak's calls would be monitored by U.S. intelligence and thus offered them no leverage with Flynn – was never explained.

Still, Flynn's failure to recount the phone call precisely and the controversy stirred up around it became the basis for an obstruction of justice investigation of Flynn and led to President Trump's firing Flynn on Feb. 13.

Trump may have thought that tossing Flynn overboard to the circling sharks would calm down the sharks but the blood in the water only excited them more. According to then-FBI Director James Comey, Trump talked to him one-on-one the

next day, Feb. 14, and said, “I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go. He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go.”

Trump’s “hope” and the fact that he later fired Comey have reportedly led special prosecutor Mueller to look at a possible obstruction of justice case against Trump. In other words, Trump could be accused of obstructing what appears to have been a trumped-up case against Flynn.

Of course, there remains the possibility that evidence might surface of Trump or his campaign colluding with the Russians, but such evidence has so far not been presented. Or Mueller’s investigation might turn over some rock and reveal some unrelated crime, possibly financial wrongdoing by Trump or an associate.

(Something similar happened in the Republican investigation of the Sept. 11, 2012 Benghazi attack, a largely fruitless inquiry except that it revealed that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sent and received official emails over a private server, which Comey decried during last year’s campaign as “extremely careless” but not criminal.)

Curb the Enthusiasm

Another contrast between the earlier scandals (Watergate and Iran-Contra) and Russia-gate is the degree of enthusiasm and excitement that the U.S. mainstream media and congressional Democrats have shown today as opposed to 1972 and 1986.

Though The Washington Post’s Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein aggressively pursued the Watergate scandal, there was much less interest elsewhere in major news outlets until Nixon’s criminality became obvious in 1973. Many national Democrats, including DNC Chairman Bob Strauss, were extremely hesitant to pursue the scandal if not outright against it.

Similarly, although Brian Barger and I at The Associated Press were pursuing aspects of Iran-Contra since early 1985, the big newspapers and networks consistently gave the Reagan administration the benefit of the doubt – at least before the scandal finally burst into view in fall 1986 (when a Contra-supply plane crashed inside Nicaragua and a Lebanese newspaper revealed U.S. arms shipments to Iran).

For several months, there was a flurry of attention to the complex Iran-Contra scandal, but the big media still ignored evidence of a White House cover-up and soon lost interest in the difficult work of unraveling the convoluted networks for arms smuggling, money laundering and cocaine trafficking.

Congressional Democrats also shied away from a constitutional confrontation with the popular Reagan and his well-connected Vice President George H.W. Bush.

After moving from AP to Newsweek in early 1987, I learned that the senior executives at Newsweek, then part of The Washington Post Company, didn't want "another Watergate"; they felt another such scandal was not "good for the country" and wanted Iran-Contra to go away as soon as possible. I was even told not to read the congressional Iran-Contra report when it was published in October 1987 (although I ignored that order and kept trying to keep my own investigation going in defiance of the wishes of the Newsweek brass until those repeated clashes led to my departure in June 1990).

So, perhaps the biggest similarity between Russia-gate and Watergate is that Richard Nixon and Donald Trump were both highly unpopular with the Washington establishment and thus had few influential defenders, while an important contrast with Iran-Contra was that Reagan and Bush were very well liked, especially among news executives such as Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham who, by all accounts, did not care for the uncouth Nixon. Today, the senior executives of The New York Times, The Washington Post and other major news outlets have made no secret of their disdain for the buffoonish Trump and their hostility toward Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In other words, what is driving Russia-gate – for both the mainstream news media and the Democrats – appears to be a political agenda, i.e., the desire to remove Trump from office while also ratcheting up a New Cold War with Russia, a priority for Washington's neoconservatives and their liberal-interventionist sidekicks.

If this political drama were playing out in some other country, we would be talking about a "soft coup" in which the "oligarchy" or some other "deep state" force was using semi-constitutional means to engineer a disfavored leader's removal.

Of course, since the ongoing campaign to remove Trump is happening in the United States, it must be presented as a principled pursuit of truth and a righteous application of the rule of law. But the comparisons to Watergate and Iran-Contra are a stretch.

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](#)).

Afghanistan's Lessons for Syria

The bloody history of Afghanistan's civil war in the 1980s – how the U.S. “victory” over the Soviets morphed into decades of chaos – is a cautionary tale for today's Syria, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The battle for Raqqa is now being waged, and the diverse forces that have been helping to extinguish the self-proclaimed caliphate of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) soon must face squarely what becomes of the portion of Syria that ISIS had controlled.

It may be useful to recall an earlier and somewhat similar situation in which the defeat of a common enemy led not to peace and stability but instead to fighting among the victors. This occurred some two decades ago in another land in which, like Syria, the United States struggles to formulate a strategy: Afghanistan.

After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime hung on for another three years before succumbing to the militias, known collectively as mujahedin, that with foreign backing (including from the United States) had fought the Soviets throughout the 1980s. This mujahedin victory was followed by an accord providing for a power-sharing arrangement, but the agreement never fully took hold.

The warlords who had been allies in fighting against the Soviets and Najibullah fell out among themselves. A new phase of the Afghan civil war ensued, which for the next few years saw fighting, especially in the cities, that was at least as intense as the decade-long combat against the Soviets.

This phase of the war concluded as a new movement of religious radicals, known as the Taliban and supported by Pakistan, swept aside the brawling militias in most of the country and imposed their own version of order in south and central Afghanistan. The Taliban are, of course, today widely considered to be a principal adversary in Afghanistan of the United States and its allies.

Lessons for Syria

There are obvious differences between this piece of Afghan history and the current situation in eastern Syria, but there nonetheless are several observations about the former that apply as well to the latter.

There was too little advance planning or effort at accommodation that looked

beyond whatever was the immediate military objective. This deficiency was at least as true of the United States as of any of the other external or internal participants in either war.

There was no military solution to the differences and disagreements that ensued after the earlier enemy was defeated. No single Afghan militia was strong enough to overpower the rest. Even the Taliban never gained control of all of Afghanistan; a coalition in the northern portion of the country continued to resist.

In Syria, the Assad regime, especially with its Russian and Iranian backing, is not going away. But neither does it have the strength (and its foreign backers do not have the will) to gain control over all Syrian territory and to wipe out the sources of resistance to the regime.

The new phase of civil war (in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal) reflected bloated ambitions and mission creep stimulated by earlier victories, not well-considered objectives that would justify a prolongation of the war. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was the most destructive of the power-hungry chieftains in Afghanistan, but hardly the only one.

In the Syrian war, echoes of Afghanistan are heard in talk, including in debates on U.S. policy, about moving against the interests of Russia, Iran or the Assad regime as part of a military expedition that was supposed to have been all about defeating ISIS.

The problems, threats and adversaries that emerge from prolongation of the civil war into a new phase may take new forms that are difficult to foresee. In Afghanistan in 1992, as Najibullah's regime fell and the militia leaders were just beginning their new round of conflict among themselves, it would have been hard to anticipate the Taliban emerging and sweeping to power as it soon would. In Syria, violent extremism bred by chaos and conflict after the fall of Raqqa may take non-ISIS forms for which we do not yet have a label.

Prolonged War

Most important, later problems and security threats have resulted from prolongation of the armed conflict itself, not from specific participants in that conflict winning or losing, or seeing their influence expand or contract. In Afghanistan in the early 1990s, it was not the fortunes of any one warlord or militia that defined the country's political and security future. It was the violent quarrel among them that gave the Taliban their opening.

The Taliban would not have had their opportunity if power-sharing had been fully and faithfully implemented. In Syria, we already have seen a similar dynamic, in

which it was the civil war itself, not the existence of a specific regime or its longstanding foreign alliances, that gave ISIS the opening to score its dramatic gains. The same can be expected with any post-ISIS radical movements.

Despite the differences between the two cases, a major conclusion applying to both is that minimizing future security problems requires de-escalation and accommodation, not prolongation of warfare and mission creep. This specifically means not using the occasion of victory over one enemy to get in some whacks against someone else one considers an adversary.

From the mid-1990s, the subsequent few years of Afghan history saw Al Qaeda's alliance with the Taliban, 9/11, and a direct U.S. military intervention beginning in late 2001 and continuing, seemingly without end, today. One endless war, with a changing cast of adversaries, is too much; the United States does not need another one in Syria.

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

Intel Behind Trump's Syria Attack Questioned

Exclusive: The mainstream media is so hostile to challenges to its groupthink that famed journalist Seymour Hersh had to take his take-down of President Trump's April 6 attack on Syria to Germany, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Legendary investigative reporter Seymour Hersh is challenging the Trump administration's version of events surrounding the April 4 "chemical weapons attack" on the northern Syrian town of Khan Sheikhoun – though Hersh had to find a publisher in Germany to get his information out.

In the Sunday edition of Die Welt, Hersh reports that his national security sources offered a distinctly different account, revealing President Trump rashly deciding to launch 59 Tomahawk missiles against a Syrian airbase on April 6 despite the absence of intelligence supporting his conclusion that the Syrian military was guilty.

Hersh draws on the kind of inside sources from whom he has earned longstanding trust to dispute that there ever was a “chemical weapons attack” and to assert that Trump was told that no evidence existed against the Syrian government but ordered “his generals” to “retaliate” anyway.

Marine General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and former Marine General, now Defense Secretary James “Mad-Dog” Mattis ordered the attacks apparently knowing that the reason given was what one of Hersh’s sources called a “fairy tale.”

They then left it to Trump’s national security adviser Army General H. R. McMaster to further the deceit with the help of a compliant mainstream media, which broke from its current tradition of distrusting whatever Trump says in favor of its older tradition of favoring “regime change” in Syria and trusting pretty much whatever the “rebels” claim.

According to Hersh’s sources, the normal “deconfliction” process was followed before the April 4 strike. In such procedures, U.S. and Russian officers supply one another with advance details of airstrikes, such as target coordinates, to avoid accidental confrontations among the warplanes crisscrossing Syria.

Russia and Syrian Air Force officers gave details of the flight path to and from Khan Sheikhoun in English, Hersh reported. The target was a two-story cinderblock building in which senior leaders – “high-value targets” – of the two jihadist groups controlling the town were about to hold a meeting. Because of the perceived importance of the mission, the Russians took the unusual step of giving the Syrian air force a GPS-guided bomb to do the job, but the explosives were conventional, not chemical, Hersh reported.

The meeting place was on the floor above the basement of the building, where a source whom Hersh described as “a senior adviser to the U.S. intelligence community,” told Hersh: “The basement was used as storage for rockets, weapons, and ammunition ... and also chlorine-based decontaminates for cleansing the bodies of the dead before burial.”

A Bomb Damage Assessment

Hersh describes what happened when the building was struck on the morning of April 4: “A Bomb Damage Assessment by the U.S. military later determined that the heat and force of the 500-pound Syrian bomb triggered a series of secondary explosions that could have generated a huge toxic cloud that began to spread over the town, formed by the release of fertilizers, disinfectants, and other goods stored in the basement, its effect magnified by the dense morning air, which trapped the fumes close to the ground.

“According to intelligence estimates, the strike itself killed up to four jihadist leaders and an unknown number of drivers and security aides. There is no confirmed count of the number of civilians killed by the poisonous gases that were released by the secondary explosions, although opposition activists reported that there were more than 80 dead, and outlets such as CNN have put the figure as high as 92.”

Due to the fog of war, which is made denser by the fact that jihadists associated with Al Qaeda control the area, many of the details of the incident were unclear on that day and remain so still. No independent on-the-ground investigation has taken place.

But there were other reasons to doubt Syrian guilt, including the implausibility of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad choosing that time – while his forces were making dramatic strides in finally defeating the jihadists and immediately after the Trump administration had indicated it had reversed President Obama’s “regime change” policy in Syria – to launch a sarin attack, which was sure to outrage the world and likely draw U.S. retaliation.

However, logic was brushed aside after local “activists,” including some closely tied to the jihadists, quickly uploaded all manner of images onto social media, showing dead and dying children and other victims said to be suffering from sarin nerve gas. Inconsistencies were brushed aside – such as the “eyewitness” who insisted, “We could smell it from 500 meters away” when sarin is odorless.

Potent Images

Still, whether credible or not, these social-media images had a potent propaganda effect. Hersh writes that within hours of watching the gruesome photos on TV – and before he had received any U.S. intelligence corroboration – Trump told his national security aides to plan retaliation against Syria. According to Hersh, it was an evidence-free decision, except for what Trump had seen on the TV shows.

Hersh quotes one U.S. officer who, upon learning of the White House decision to “retaliate” against Syria, remarked: “We KNOW that there was no chemical attack ... the Russians are furious – claiming we have the real intel and know the truth...”

A similar event had occurred on Aug. 21, 2013, outside Damascus – and although the available evidence now points to a “false-flag” provocation pulled off by the jihadists to trick the West into mounting a full-fledged assault on Assad’s military, Western media still blames that incident on Assad, too.

In the Aug. 21, 2013 case, social media also proved crucial in creating and

pushing the Assad-did-it narrative. On Aug. 30, 2013, then-Secretary of State John Kerry pinned the responsibility on Assad no fewer than 35 times, even though earlier that week National Intelligence Director James Clapper had warned President Obama privately that Assad's culpability was "not a slam dunk."

Kerry was fond of describing social media as an "extraordinarily useful tool," and it sure did come in handy in supporting Kerry's repeated but unproven charges against Assad, especially since the U.S. government had invested heavily in training and equipping Syrian "activists" to dramatize their cause. (The mainstream media also has ignored evidence that the jihadists staged at least one chlorine gas attack. And, as you may recall, President George W. Bush also spoke glowingly about the value of "catapulting the propaganda.")

Implications for U.S.-Russia

To the extent Hersh's account finds its way into Western corporate media, most likely it will be dismissed out of hand simply because it dovetails with Moscow's version of what happened and thus is, ipso facto, "wrong."

But the Russians (and the Syrians) know what did happen – and if there really was no sarin bombing – they recognize Trump's reckless resort to Tomahawks and the subsequent attempts to cover up for the President. All this will have repercussions.

This is as tense a time in U.S-Russian relations as I can remember from my five decades of experience watching Russian defense and foreign policy. It is left to the Russians to figure out which is worse: a President controlled by "his generals" or one who is so out of control that "his generals" are the ones who must restrain him.

With Russia reiterating its threat to target any unannounced aircraft flying in Syrian airspace west of the Euphrates, Russian President Putin could authorize his own generals to shoot first and ask questions later. Then, hold onto your hat.

As of this writing, there is no sign in "mainstream media" of any reporting on Hersh's groundbreaking piece. It is a commentary on the conformist nature of today's Western media that an alternative analysis challenging the conventional wisdom – even when produced by a prominent journalist like Sy Hersh – faces such trouble finding a place to publish.

The mainstream hatred of Assad and Putin has reached such extraordinary levels that pretty much anything can be said or written about them with few if any politicians or journalists daring to express doubts regardless of how shaky the evidence is.

Even the *London Review of Books*, which published Hersh's earlier debunking of the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin-gas incident, wouldn't go off onto the limb this time despite having paid for his investigation.

According to Hersh, the *LRB* did not want to be "vulnerable to criticism for seeming to take the view of the Syrian and Russia governments when it came to the April 4 bombing in Khan Sheikhoun." So much for diversity of thought in today's West.

Yet, what was interesting about the Khan Sheikhoun case is that was a test of whom the mainstream media detested more. The MSM has taken the position that pretty much whatever Trump says is untrue or at least deserving of intense fact-checking. But the MSM also believes whatever attacks on Assad that the Syrian "activists" post on social media are true and disbelieves whatever Putin says. So, this was a tug-of-war on which prejudices were stronger – and it turned out that the antipathy toward Syria and Russia is more powerful than the distrust of Trump.

Ignoring Critics

The MSM bought into Trump's narrative to such a degree that any criticism, no matter how credentialed the critic, gets either ignored or ridiculed.

For instance, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity produced [a memo](#) on April 11 questioning Trump's rush to judgment. Former MIT professor Ted Postol, a specialist in applying science to national security incidents, also [poked major holes](#) in the narrative of a government sarin attack. But the MSM silence was deafening.

In remarks to *Die Welt*, Seymour Hersh, who first became famous for exposing the My Lai massacre story during the Vietnam War and disclosed the Abu Ghraib abuse story during the Iraq War, explained that he still gets upset at government lying and at the reluctance of the media to hold governments accountable:

"We have a President in America today who lies repeatedly ... but he must learn that he cannot lie about intelligence relied upon before authorizing an act of war. There are those in the Trump administration who understand this, which is why I learned the information I did. If this story creates even a few moments of regret in the White House, it will have served a very high purpose."

But it may be that the Germans reading *Welt am Sonntag* may be among the few who will get the benefit of Hersh's contrarian view of the April 4 incident in Khan Sheikhoun. Perhaps they will begin to wonder why Chancellor Angela Merkel continues with her "me-too" approach to whatever Washington wants to do regarding tensions with Russia and warfare in Syria.

Will Merkel admit that she was likely deceived in parroting Washington's line making the Syrian government responsible for a "massacre with chemical weapons" on April 4? Mercifully, most Americans will be spared having to choose between believing President Trump and Seymour Hersh.

Ray McGovern works with the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27 years as a CIA analyst, he was Chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch; he also prepared the *President's Daily Brief*, and conducted the early morning briefings of President Reagan's top national security advisers.

A Baseless Justification for War in Syria

For almost 16 years, the U.S. government has stretched the military force authorization against Al Qaeda to justify a wide-ranging "war on terror" but now has gone further, attacking the Syrian military inside Syria, notes Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

U.S. government officials, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., claim the current U.S. authority to mount military operations in Iraq and Syria is legally based on the Authorization for the Use of Military Force [AUMF] declaration to go after Al Qaeda and related terror groups after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. But how does that cover the recent U.S. attacks on Syrian government forces that have been battling both Al Qaeda and its spinoff, Islamic State?

Francis Boyle, professor of international law at the University of Illinois College of Law, asserts that the recent U.S. shoot-down of a Syrian government jet inside Syria on June 18 was not only illegal under international law but amounts to an impeachable act by President Trump.

In an interview with Flashpoints' Dennis J. Bernstein, Professor Boyle said, "What the U.S. government is getting away with here is incredible." Boyle also talked to Bernstein about the questionable Russia-gate investigation and the darker history behind Special Prosecutor Robert Swan Mueller III, the former Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Dennis Bernstein: Will Syria's hot war and the recent U.S. bombings there lead

us into a hot war with Russia? Well, the generals are saying this shoot-down in Syria is legal. You want to jump into this?

Francis Boyle: You know Dunford doesn't have a law degree that I'm aware of. But, of course, still the Pentagon is going to try to justify whatever war crimes it can. They always do.

Clearly the U.S. invasion, which we have done, and now repeated military attacks against Syria constitutes a Nuremberg crime against peace, and in violation of the Nuremberg charter, judgment and principles, and, of course, a violation of the United Nations' charter. [It is] an act of aggression as defined by, oh even the new element of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court that is not yet in force. But it has a definition based upon the 1974 definition of aggression which the World Court found to be customary international law in the very famous Nicaraguan case when it applied it against Nicaragua.

Indeed, it's very interesting, you know, if you go back and read the Nicaragua case, and change Syria for Nicaragua, pretty much the law, the illegalities remain the same. Likewise, the United States Congress has never authorized any act of war against Syria.

So, this violates the War Powers clause of the United States Constitution, the War Powers Resolution of 1973, and is clearly an impeachable act against President Trump. This is a slam dunk. We don't have time to go through all the other arguments being made on impeachment here, but for the most part, all those are being made by these totally hypocritical Democratic lawyers who never applied the same impeachable arguments against President Obama. So, I'm not going to waste time with them.

And, finally, this is existentially dangerous, what is going on right now in Syria. But Russia is there with the consent of the legitimate government of Syria. They're not violating international law. The United States is in clear cut violation, as I have explained. And, now, Russia ... has said that they are going to begin to target U.S. planes and drones. And, the problem is, of course, when you target planes, that triggers their radar and they fire back. So, we're pretty much on a hair trigger right now in Syria for war between the United States and Russia.

And given the massive war mongering campaign we're seeing being waged against Russia by almost all the mainstream news media, the Democrats, the whole Democratic Party, the Hillary Clinton people, etc. and sort of neo-McCarthyism against Russia, Putin and everyone else, I shudder to think what would happen if Russia were to shoot down an American pilot under these circumstances. In my lifetime, Dennis, my political lifetime, I don't think we've been in such a

dangerous situation since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

I mean, anything could go wrong here, soon. And, even if it's not deliberate, as President Kennedy said when the Soviet Union shot down a U-2 spy plane at the heart of the Cuban Missile Crisis that could have resulted in World War III, he said something like, "Well, there's always some son-of-a-bitch down the line who doesn't get the message." So, anything could go wrong here. And we could end up being at war with Russia momentarily.

DB: You want to talk a little bit about the so-called deconfliction zones, that are really conflict zones and a potential for war?

FB: Yeah, it's clear, Dennis, and indeed [the] Financial Times now has an article on this, but I've said this for a while, these deconfliction zones are really de-facto partition zones for Russia and the United States. And what we're seeing here is effectively all these surrounding states are going into Syria and grabbing a chunk of their territory.

It's like jackals descending on a wounded animal. Iran is in there, Hezbollah is in there, Turkey is in there, the Kurds are in there, the U.S. is in there. We have our proxy terrorist groups in there. The best analogy would be a pack of jackals descending upon and eating away at a wounded animal. And the so-called deconfliction zones are just part of the de-facto carve up of Syria, in violation of Syria's territorial integrity and political independence guaranteed by the United Nations' charter.

DB: Well, as you say, these are incredibly dangerous times, and very, very difficult policies. Who loses, who gains on this kind of response to Syria, and bombing of Syria?

FB: Well, the United States government believes it gains because they are out – and have always been out – to overthrow the Assad government, and put a puppet in power. And, you know, continue to achieve their objectives there in the Middle East, going back for quite some time, preparing the way for future action against Iran and Russia, for sure.

So, they believe that this is to their advantage: the Pentagon, the CIA, the White House, the so-called Power Ministries, the Deep State. Call them whatever you want. They could be tragically short-sighted. I mean, this is the way the First World War and the Second World War began. What can I say, Dennis? It's a tinder box, already.

DB: And how would you characterize Israel's interest and their role in this policy? Do you think they're a driving force in it?

FB: Of course. That's got reported [...] in the Wall Street Journal. I guess I should say Israel wants its chunk of Syria, too. They've already stolen the Golan Heights, in 1967. And they've been arming, equipping and supplying these terrorist organizations since the outset of the uprising in Syria. And, indeed, they've now carved out a further buffer zone in Syria.

So, they're in to get their share of Syria, as well, along with everyone else. I'm not saying they're any better or any worse than anyone else. But they're doing exactly the same thing everyone else is doing. As I said, it's this pack of hyenas going in there to gnaw away, and eat the flesh of Syria. And Israel is getting its pound of flesh, as it sees it.

DB: And this, you think, could easily unravel. These are perhaps, would you say, the most dangerous times of our life time, or close to it?

FB: Well, when you have Russia saying it is going to target so-called paint U.S. jet fighters, and jet fighters bombers, and their standard operating procedure when they get painted is to destroy the source that is targeting them. Yes. As I said, we could have war, at least in Syria, between the United States and Russia.

And given the anti-Russian warmongering and hysteria, and neo-McCarthyism in this country that has been deliberately orchestrated by the Clinton campaign and the Democrats and their fellow travelers in the mainstream news media since the Democratic Convention last summer, if a U.S. pilot gets killed, we could see Congress going into session, and declaring war against Russia. Sure. It's a catastrophe, Dennis. I mean, anything could happen here. I shudder to think of the consequences.

DB: Amazing. But I do want to, just before we let you go, I want to ask you to weigh in. Because we've seen this amazing, as you call it, McCarthyite attack. People don't like Trump, they find him very difficult. And it's not hard to find him difficult. How would you describe what is happening against him in terms of ... people refer to it as the Deep State, or an intelligence coup? How would you unpack that?

FB: Right, well, first of all, let me say I did not vote for either Clinton or Trump. As I saw it, it was a choice between the cholera and the plague. And I decided not to have anything to do with either of them. But I think if Clinton had been elected we'd probably be at war with Russia, right now. I think what we're seeing is the elements in the Obama administration that was being run by [Zbigniew] Brzezinski, this ex-patriot Pole who hated the Russians with a passion, and the CIA, the FBI, the Pentagon, all moving further in the direction of a direct conflict with Russia, and especially over Ukraine.

As we know, it was the Obama administration, Assistant Secretary of State [Victoria] Nuland, a neo-con holdover from the Bush administration, who admitted, we had put \$5 billion in there to overthrow the democratically elected government of Ukraine. Which we did. It was a standard textbook CIA coup d'etat, that followed the manual going back to the original CIA overthrow of the Mossadegh government in Iran.

Trump seemed to indicate that he was going to take a different approach, and not continue with this agenda. And so, now what we're seeing is all the forces that had been lined up to steal Ukraine, to confront Russia, are furiously fighting back.

Now, I'm not saying Trump is a good guy here, but what I am saying, if you're watching the mainstream news media, none of the people involved here are good guys. No one wears a white hat. And it's an extremely dangerous situation.

[James] Comey, the FBI Director... well, first look at Wesley Swearingen, a decorated retired FBI agent, in his book *FBI Secrets*, has repeatedly called the FBI "the American Gestapo." And, of course, you and I and your listening audience certainly know that, Dennis. Certainly African-Americans know the FBI is the American Gestapo. Arabs know it. Muslims know it. Communists know it. I know it since they put me on all the government's terrorism watch lists here, because I refused to become an informant for them and the CIA on my Arab and Muslim clients.

So, Comey is no great hero here. And, indeed, when he worked for Bush Jr. he was Deputy Attorney General. He was up to his eye balls in every hideous atrocity Bush Jr. inflicted on everyone, both abroad and here at home, including the 1,100 Muslims that they summarily rounded up. Many of them were beaten up, and a few died.

As for Mueller, again, former Director of the FBI, the American Gestapo, Mueller, when he was Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division, Mueller was in charge of fixing the case against Libya and Gaddafi, for the Lockerbie bombing. When everyone knows Libya had absolutely nothing to do with the Lockerbie bombing.

Indeed, we had been told that the Lockerbie bombing effectively was revenge by Iran for the destruction of the Iran air jet by the USS Vincennes in the Persian Gulf, with the loss of all that innocent human life. And the Reagan administration refused to apologize, refused to accept responsibility, decorated the captain of the Vincennes that killed close to 270 completely innocent human beings.

But, in the run up to the Bush Sr.'s war against Iraq to steal Persian Gulf oil, he wanted and needed support of Iran, and also, Syria. There's evidence Lockerbie might have been staged out of Syria. I don't know if that's true or it isn't. So, we cut a deal that all of a sudden Iran, Syria, whatever the responsibility, they would be let off the hook, in return for Iran and Syria supporting the United States' war against Iraq. And, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, Libya gets blamed. Mueller was behind all of that. He fixed all that evidence that prevented us, the American people, from finding out who really was behind the Lockerbie bombing. I can't recall the number there was [270 total people killed], [187] American civilians were killed. Mueller is truly evil. [For more on the Lockerbie bombing, see Consortiumnews "[The Crumbling Lockerbie Case](#)"]

And then, in addition, Mueller was head of the FBI, and he was in charge of the cover up of the anthrax attacks of October 2001. At the time, I had given interviews right after these attacks pointing out that this was super weapons grade anthrax that could only be manufactured in a U.S. government lab, or one affiliated, working for the United States government. And, indeed, I informed the FBI of this, given my expertise on biological warfare. And the FBI, then under Mueller, sent a team out there to the Ames Repository for Anthrax, in Ames, Iowa – where we keep our weapons strains – and destroyed them all, attempting to cover up the U.S. government's origins of the anthrax attack.

That was all done while Mueller was head of the FBI, and under his direct supervision. So, this so-called special council that we see now is just a "fix-it man" for the CIA, the Pentagon, the military industrial complex, despite what you're reading in the newspaper about character and integrity. This man is a criminal, he should be prosecuted and put in jail, certainly for what he did on Lockerbie, and what he did on the anthrax attacks. And I won't go through the rest of his record here. So, this is a real scheme by, as I see it, the power ministries, what they used to call it in the Soviet Union, to continue our confrontation with Russia, and in Ukraine, in the Baltics, and also in Syria.

And in my read of the situation, that's what's going on. This is not to say Trump is a good guy, except to say, if Clinton had been elected I think we'd be at war with Russia. We dodged a bullet on November 8th. But I don't know how much longer we will be able to continue to dodge the bullet.

And, again, we have to remember, Dennis, that for eight years under the Obama administration... Obama's mentor was Zbigniew Brzezinski. Brzezinski and I went through the exact same PhD program at Harvard, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Department of Government, not the Kennedy School, which is basically a front organization for the CIA, and the Department of Defense. But the same

program that produces professors of political science, like Brzezinski, like [Henry] Kissinger, and like me, like [Samuel P.] Huntington. And Brzezinski is an ex-patriot Pole who hates the Soviet Union, and Russia, and the Russians with a passion.

Remember, it was Brzezinski who convinced President Carter to unleash Al-Qaeda [known at the time as the mujahideen] against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, in order to bring about, as he saw it, the Vietnam for the Soviet Union. And he was Obama's mentor, at Columbia. And when Obama decided to run for president, he brought in Brzezinski to be in charge of his entire foreign affairs and defense operation, during the campaign.

And then, once Obama became president, Brzezinski stacked the Obama administration with his proteges, all up and down the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the White House, and the CIA and everywhere else he could have. So, that is what we saw for eight years of Obama. And Clinton was just continuing along those lines.

DB: Wow. Well, we just have a couple of minutes left. Today happens to be the fifth year that, shall we say, Julian Assange is trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy [in London]. What do you think U.S. and British intelligence officials are so afraid of when it comes to WikiLeaks?

FB: The truth. That's what they're afraid of. Well, Dennis, WikiLeaks, as far as I can tell, so far, I haven't read all of these dispatches and everything, but I've read the accounts, is simply telling the truth. And we here live in a democracy. And, we, the American people are entitled to the truth.

You know, all this diddly squat about classifications and security is all baloney. We live in a democracy. We're entitled to everything so that we can make informed decisions. And the government refuses to do it. The NSA spies on all of us, every one of us.

When the CIA and the FBI came into my office to try to interrogate me for an hour, which they did, the first question they asked me is, well, why are you giving these interviews all over the world, if you can believe that. And then they tried to get me to become an informant, on my Arab and Muslim clients. So, it's the truth that the United States government cannot stand, and cannot withstand. And so far as I see it, Assange and WikiLeaks have tried to get the truth out.

And, remember, Mr. Justice [Louis] Brandeis of the United States Supreme Court said quite some time ago, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant." And WikiLeaks has been consistently providing sunlight to us Americans, to try and disinfect our

own government.

DB: Wow. Professor Boyle we appreciate always your stand, your information, and your willingness to be forthright in taking on the powers that be. We thank you so much, again, for joining us on Flashpoints.

FB: Well, thanks again, Dennis. And, remember, John Yoo to jail. [John Yoo is author of the "Torture Memos," which advised the CIA, Department of Defense, and president on the use of torture techniques after September 11.]

DB: John Yoo, he's still there teaching those kids. And he's been cleansed.

FB: The sick, demented Berkeley Law faculty gave him their most prestigious endowed chair. And that means that the Berkeley Law faculty have become accessories after the fact to the use of torture, war crimes and felonies. That's right. They knew exactly what they were doing.

And I wouldn't send my dog to the Berkeley Law School, these days. And I say that in sadness because the late, great dean there, Frank Newman, who taught international law and human rights, was a good friend of mine, and supported me at the beginning of my career. And then later he was on the California Supreme Court. And Yoo is now desecrating his slot there at Berkeley Law with the full cooperation of the sick and demented Berkeley Law faculties.

So I certainly would not go there for any reason. I had a son who could have gone to any top law school in the country and I said, "Don't go to Harvard Law School, they hired a war criminal. Don't go to Yale Law School, they have hired and still have war criminals. Don't go to Berkeley Law School, they have a war criminal. Don't go to the University of Chicago Law School, where I was an undergraduate, because they have a torture monger on there," and I went right down the list.

DB: So where does he go? There's nowhere to go.

FB: Well, he eventually went to work for the high tech business. What can I say? I lost my son... my dad was a lawyer, and I lost this boy to the law. But, regretfully, you just could see the total perversion of the American legal academy after 9/11, 2001. I regret to say that. So, what can I say?

DB: Well, we thank you for the frankness and for the information, Professor Francis Boyle, professor of international law at the University of Illinois, College of Law. Thanks again for joining us on Flashpoints.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the

Policing 'Truth' to Restore 'Trust'

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media insists it just wants "truth" algorithms to purge "fake news" from the Internet, but the real goal seems to be restoring public "trust" by limiting what the people get to see, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There's been a lot of self-righteous talk about "truth" recently, especially from the people at The New York Times, The Washington Post and the rest of the mainstream news media. They understandably criticize President Trump for his casual relationship with reality and happily dream about how nice it would be if they could develop algorithms to purge the Internet of what they call "fake news."

But these "truth-loving" pundits, the likes of star Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman, never seem to reflect on their own responsibility for disseminating devastating "fake news," such as the falsehoods about Iraq's WMD, lies that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and thousands of American soldiers and spread horrific chaos across the Mideast and into Europe.

Nor does that Iraq experience ever cause Friedman and his fellow pundits to question other Official Narratives, including those relating to the proxy war in Syria or the civil war in Ukraine or the New Cold War with Russia. Meanwhile those of us who ask for substantiating facts or observe that some official claims don't make sense are subjected to insults as fill-in-the-blank "apologists" or "stooges."

It seems that any deviation from Officialdom's pronouncements makes you an enemy of "truth" because "truth" is what the Establishment says is "truth." And, if you don't believe me, I refer you to Friedman's Wednesday's column.

Friedman leads off the article by quoting himself telling a questioner at a Montreal conference: "I fear we're seeing the end of 'truth'."

But Friedman doesn't take himself to task by noting how he helped disseminate the Iraq WMD lies and how he flacked for that illegal and disastrous war for years.

If he had 'fessed up, maybe Friedman could then have explained why he didn't

resign in disgrace and engage in some lifelong penance, preferably including a vow of silence, rather than continuing to spout lots of other nonsense while also continuing to collect a handsome salary and to rack up lucrative speaking fees.

Instead, after wringing his hands over why Americans no longer trust their leaders, Friedman cites another voice of authority, a friend and mentor, Dov Seidman, who complains that “What we’re experiencing is an assault on the very foundations of our society and democracy – the twin pillars of truth and trust.

...

“What makes us Americans is that we signed up to have a relationship with ideals that are greater than us and with truths that we agreed were so self-evident they would be the foundation of our shared journey toward a more perfect union – and of respectful disagreement along the way. We also agreed that the source of legitimate authority to govern would come from ‘We the people’.”

Friedman then goes on to share Seidman’s lament that when “we” no longer share basic truths “then there is no legitimate authority and no unifying basis for our continued association.”

The Villains

Friedman identifies the villains in this scenario as “social networks and cyberhacking,” which help “extremists to spread vitriol and fake news at a speed and breadth we have never seen before.” So, it seems those “truth” algorithms can’t arrive soon enough.

However, if you keep reading Friedman’s column, you learn that the real problem is not that “cyberhacking” is generating “fake news,” but rather that it has let Americans see too many ugly truths about their leadership, as happened when WikiLeaks published emails showing how the Democratic National Committee unethically tilted the playing field against Sen. Bernie Sanders; how Hillary Clinton pandered to Goldman Sachs in return for lucrative speaking fees; and how the Clinton Foundation engaged in pay-to-play with rich foreigners.

Friedman’s column acknowledges as much, again citing Seidman: “Social networks and hacking also ‘have enabled us to see, in full color, into the innermost workings of every institution and into the attitudes of those who run them,’ noted Seidman, ‘and that has eroded trust in virtually every institution, and the authority of many leaders, because people don’t like what they see’.”

In other words, the answer to restoring “trust” and to respecting “truth” is to hide ugly realities from the unwashed public. If the people are shielded from the facts, the Establishment will regain its control over “truth” and thus win

back the people's "trust."

If all this seems upside-down to you – if you think that the real answer is for America's leaders to behave more responsibly, to let the public in on the real "truth," and thus to make the people's "trust" mean something – you must be a "Kremlin stooge." After all, the current groupthink is that the diabolical Russians slipped WikiLeaks those Democratic emails in a nefarious plot to undermine Americans' faith in their democracy.

However, if you're still having trouble with Friedman's logic, you also must not understand how America's new media paradigm works. The job of the media is not to provide as much meaningful information as possible to the people so they can exercise their free judgment; it is to package certain information in a way to guide the people to a preferred conclusion.

Pleasant Myths

You see the last thing that Friedman really wants is for the American people to understand their own reality – the good, the bad and the ugly. Instead, we are to have our pretty little heads filled with pleasant myths that make us feel special as we are herded either to the shearing shed or to the slaughterhouse.

For instance, reflect on the history that we hear from Friedman's friend Seidman about how we "signed up" for those high-minded proclamations in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. The truth is that most of us didn't "sign up" for anything; we were just born here; and – by the way – the Founders were hypocrites who said and wrote things that they didn't believe at all.

When slaveholding Thomas Jefferson wrote "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," he didn't believe a word of it. He considered his black slaves inferior beings and thought they deserved none of those "unalienable rights." He devoted much of his adult life to defending and expanding the institution of slavery, which – by increasing demand for his human chattel – also increased his personal wealth.

When Gouverneur Morris penned the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, citing "We the People" as the nation's true sovereigns, he really meant white men of money and means, not poorer white men, nor women, and surely not slaves. His reference to "the People" was another propagandistic affectation.

There may be some irony in the fact that history imparts genuine value to the words of Jefferson and Morris even if they were simply empty propaganda when written. Jefferson's assertion that "all men are created equal" possessing

“unalienable rights” has inspired people around the world – and a literal interpretation of Morris’s florid rhetoric did, in a way, make “We the People” the technical sovereigns of America, as much as today’s ruling elites don’t really believe that either.

Much of what we see from the likes of Friedman is designed to reassert elite control by putting us back in an information-starved dependent state, reliant on the Establishment to parcel out a few morsels of information as it sees fit, the “truth” that the powers-that-be deign to give us. All the better for us to “trust” them.

But the messy behind-the-scenes reality that WikiLeaks and other publishers of “cyberhacked” and leaked material have made available to us – as well as the hypocritical and ambiguous history of the United States – is part of America’s “truth” and thus a reality that should belong to all the people.

Instead, Friedman and other Important People prefer a future in which unpleasant and unpopular truths can be marginalized or erased, all the better to guarantee our “trust” in our leaders.

The Times and the Post, in particular, have consistently conflated any deviation from their preferred groupthinks with “fake news” and “propaganda.” That is why it is particularly troubling when they and other self-proclaimed arbiters of truth, including the pro-NATO propaganda site Bellingcat, sit on Google’s First Draft Coalition and salivate over the prospects of unleashing high-tech algorithms to hunt down and eliminate information that runs counter to what they call the “truth.”

The real truth about truth is that it is almost always complex and often hidden by powerful interests. It requires skepticism, hard work and even courage to reveal it.

Sure, there are occasions when creeps and crazy people purposely make up stuff or ignore reality in pursuit of some nutty conspiracy theory – and that deserves hearty condemnation – but there are many other times when the conventional wisdom is wrong and the people demanding inconvenient facts and asking probing questions turn out to be right.

So, if Friedman and his friends really want to restore trust and truth, they might begin by acknowledging their own flaws and by admitting the times when their groupthinks turned out to be wrong. They also might start respecting the value that dissent has in the difficult pursuit of truth.

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](#)).

Behind the 'Scapegoating' of Russia

The media/political hysteria over Russia-gate is leading the world to possible nuclear annihilation with few serious questions asked. But a new book, *The Plot to Scapegoat Russia*, tries to supply some context, writes Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

Attorney Dan Kovalik has written an extremely important book that challenges the current media/political focus on "Russia-gate" and warns that dark forces of war are taking us in an ever more dangerous direction.

In the foreword to the book, *The Plot to Scapegoat Russia: How the CIA and Deep State Have Conspired to Vilify Russia*, author David Talbot writes: "The US war machine has revived the tried-and-true Red Scare... This massive anti-Russian propaganda campaign is one of the biggest fake news operations in U.S. history..."

"Unlike our war-obsessed media, human rights lawyer Dan Kovalik does understand that peace and diplomacy are in the best interests of the American and Russian peoples. His book is an urgently needed counterassault against the propaganda forces that are trying to push us over a precipice that it too terrifying to even contemplate. It's time for all of us to speak truth to power before it's too late."

Talbot's warning is not hyperbole. As I write this review, the U.S. military is [pushing ever closer](#) to direct military confrontation with Syria, Iran and Russia inside Syria.

But the book is also entertaining reading because Kovalik combines his personal evolution with facts and history. He grew up as a conservative Roman Catholic fearful and wary of communism and the Soviet Union. Kovalik describes his own youthful belief in "American Exceptionalism" whereby U.S. policies and actions are believed to be uniquely good and well meaning. For the author, that belief was confronted by a very different reality when he traveled to Central America in the 1980s. There he saw the reality of U.S.-funded "Contras" terrorizing Nicaraguan villagers. There he learned of the four Catholic nuns murdered by the Salvadoran military, which the U.S. government was supporting.

The first-hand experience led to more reading and research which resulted in the shocking realization that the U.S. government has been behind coups and military dictatorships from Indonesia to Iran, Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, Paraguay, Chile and more.

The author discusses U.S. foreign policy since World War Two, before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He puts the current “new” Cold War in historical context and reviews the facts behind the current media/political focus on “Russia-gate.” He concludes that we are being blinded with baseless Russo-phobia while forces pushing for more American war and aggression are going unchallenged and recklessly threatening a war that could engulf us all.

Relevant but not widely known historical facts are reviewed:

–the role of American advisers in the collapse of the Russian economy during the 1990s.

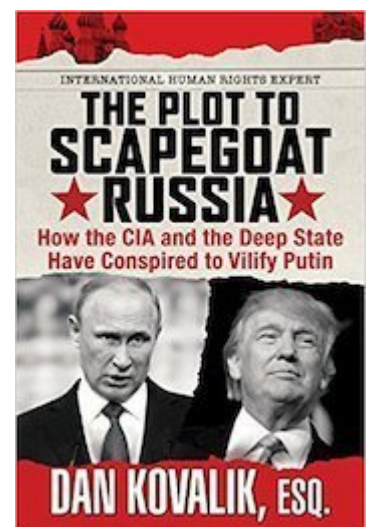
–the broken promises to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev about restraining the growth of NATO.

–the expansion of NATO right up to the Russian border.

–the NATO wars on Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya.

–the increasing discrepancy between rich and poor both within the U.S. and internationally

The author presents the case that the real threat to democracy is not coming from Russia, it is coming from our own political system and the forces which benefit from and which promote war and aggression. Former President Jimmy Carter has said the U.S. is an “oligarchy with unlimited political bribery.”



Kovalik also reviews the history of whistleblowers at the CIA and other

intelligence agencies and concludes that “The CIA is not a reliable source and poses a much greater threat to US democracy than Russia ever could.” He cites the long history of conflict between the CIA and presidents seeking to promote peace. President John Kennedy had such fierce conflict with the CIA that he said he wanted to “break it into a thousand pieces and scatter to the wind.” Now, the CIA wants President Trump to stay on the path of confrontation with Russia, Kovalik explains.

Kovalik presents a persuasive case that the demonization of Russia and President Vladimir Putin is being used to justify war and, thus, an ever-increasing military budget. Instead of a “peace dividend,” the post-Cold War period led to ever-greater U.S. intervention abroad. Now, the New Cold War is raising the risk of a direct confrontation and possible nuclear war even though most Americans do not want another war.

So, why are we headed down that slippery slope? This book goes a long way to explaining why.

Rick Sterling is an investigative journalist. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and can be reached at rsterling1@gmail.com

How America Armed Terrorists in Syria

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard’s “Stop Arming Terrorists Act” to curb weapons going to Al Qaeda-linked jihadists in Syria, has attracted only 14 co-sponsors pointing to hypocrisy in the “war on terror,” as Gareth Porter explained at The American Conservative.

By Gareth Porter

Three-term Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, a member of both the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs committees, has proposed legislation that would prohibit any U.S. assistance to terrorist organizations in Syria as well as to any organization working directly with them. Equally important, it would prohibit U.S. military sales and other forms of military cooperation with other countries that provide arms or financing to those terrorists and their collaborators.

Gabbard’s “Stop Arming Terrorists Act” challenges for the first time in Congress a U.S. policy toward the conflict in the Syrian civil war that should have set off alarm bells long ago: in 2012-13 the Obama administration helped its Sunni

allies Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar provide arms to Syrian and non-Syrian armed groups to force President Bashar al-Assad out of power. And in 2013 the administration began to provide arms to what the CIA judged to be “relatively moderate” anti-Assad groups – meaning they incorporated various degrees of Islamic extremism.

That policy, ostensibly aimed at helping replace the Assad regime with a more democratic alternative, has actually helped build up al Qaeda’s Syrian franchise al Nusra Front into the dominant threat to Assad.

The supporters of this arms-supply policy believe it is necessary as pushback against Iranian influence in Syria. But that argument skirts the real issue raised by the policy’s history. The Obama administration’s Syria policy effectively sold out the U.S. interest that was supposed to be the touchstone of the “Global War on Terrorism” – the eradication of al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates. The United States has instead subordinated that U.S. interest in counter-terrorism to the interests of its Sunni allies. In doing so it has helped create a new terrorist threat in the heart of the Middle East.

The policy of arming military groups committed to overthrowing the government of President Bashar al-Assad began in September 2011, when President Barack Obama was pressed by his Sunni allies – Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar – to supply heavy weapons to a military opposition to Assad they were determined to establish. Turkey and the Gulf regimes wanted the United States to provide anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to the rebels, according to a former Obama administration official involved in Middle East issues.

Obama refused to provide arms to the opposition, but he agreed to provide covert U.S. logistical help in carrying out a campaign of military assistance to arm opposition groups. CIA involvement in the arming of anti-Assad forces began with arranging for the shipment of weapons from the stocks of the Gaddafi regime that had been stored in Benghazi.

Shipments from Benghazi

CIA-controlled firms shipped the weapons from the military port of Benghazi to two small ports in Syria using former U.S. military personnel to manage the logistics, as investigative reporter Sy Hersh detailed in 2014. The funding for the program came mainly from the Saudis.

A declassified October 2012 Defense Intelligence Agency report revealed that the shipment in late August 2012 had included 500 sniper rifles, 100 RPG (rocket propelled grenade launchers) along with 300 RPG rounds and 400 howitzers. Each arms shipment encompassed as many as ten shipping containers, it reported, each

of which held about 48,000 pounds of cargo.

That suggests a total payload of up to 250 tons of weapons per shipment. Even if the CIA had organized only one shipment per month, the arms shipments would have totaled 2,750 tons of arms bound ultimately for Syria from October 2011 through August 2012. More likely it was a multiple of that figure.

The CIA's covert arms shipments from Libya came to an abrupt halt in September 2012 when Libyan militants attacked and burned the embassy annex in Benghazi that had been used to support the operation. By then, however, a much larger channel for arming anti-government forces was opening up.

The CIA put the Saudis in touch with a senior Croatian official who had offered to sell large quantities of arms left over from the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. And the CIA helped them shop for weapons from arms dealers and governments in several other former Soviet bloc countries.

Flush with weapons acquired from both the CIA's Libya program and from the Croatians, the Saudis and Qataris dramatically increased the number of flights by military cargo planes to Turkey in December 2012 and continued that intensive pace for the next two and a half months.

The *New York Times* reported a total 160 such flights through mid-March 2013. The most common cargo plane in use in the Gulf, the Ilyushin IL-76, can carry roughly 50 tons of cargo on a flight, which would indicate that as much as 8,000 tons of weapons poured across the Turkish border into Syria just in late 2012 and in 2013.

One U.S. official called the new level of arms deliveries to Syrian rebels a "cataract of weaponry." And a year-long investigation by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project revealed that the Saudis were intent on building up a powerful conventional army in Syria.

A Flood of Weapons

The "end-use certificate" for weapons purchased from an arms company in Belgrade, Serbia, in May 2013 includes 500 Soviet-designed PG-7VR rocket launchers that can penetrate even heavily-armored tanks, along with two million rounds; 50 Konkurs anti-tank missile launchers and 500 missiles, 50 anti-aircraft guns mounted on armored vehicles, 10,000 fragmentation rounds for OG-7 rocket launchers capable of piercing heavy body armor; four truck-mounted BM-21 GRAD multiple rocket launchers, each of which fires 40 rockets at a time with a range of 12 to 19 miles, along with 20,000 GRAD rockets.

The end-user document for another Saudi order from the same Serbian company listed 300 tanks, 2,000 RPG launchers, and 16,500 other rocket launchers, one million rounds for ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft guns, and 315 million cartridges for various other guns.

Those two purchases were only a fraction of the totality of the arms obtained by the Saudis over the next few years from eight Balkan nations. Investigators found that the Saudis made their biggest arms deals with former Soviet bloc states in 2015, and that the weapons included many that had just come off factory production lines.

Nearly 40 percent of the arms the Saudis purchased from those countries, moreover, still had not been delivered by early 2017. So the Saudis had already contracted for enough weaponry to keep a large-scale conventional war in Syria going for several more years.

By far the most consequential single Saudi arms purchase was not from the Balkans, however, but from the United States. It was the December 2013 U.S. sale of 15,000 TOW anti-tank missiles to the Saudis at a cost of about \$1 billion – the result of Obama’s decision earlier that year to reverse his ban on lethal assistance to anti-Assad armed groups.

The Saudis had agreed, moreover, that those anti-tank missiles would be doled out to Syrian groups only at U.S. discretion. The TOW missiles began to arrive in Syria in 2014 and soon had a major impact on the military balance.

This flood of weapons into Syria, along with the entry of 20,000 foreign fighters into the country – primarily through Turkey – largely defined the nature of the conflict. These armaments helped make al Qaeda’s Syrian franchise, al Nusra Front (now renamed Tahrir al-Sham or Levant Liberation Organization) and its close allies by far the most powerful anti-Assad forces in Syria – and gave rise to the Islamic State.

Al Qaeda’s Benefit

By late 2012, it became clear to U.S. officials that the largest share of the arms that began flowing into Syria early in the year were going to the rapidly growing al Qaeda presence in the country. In October 2012, U.S. officials acknowledged off the record for the first time to the *New York Times* that “most” of the arms that had been shipped to armed opposition groups in Syria with U.S. logistical assistance during the previous year had gone to “hardline Islamic jihadists” – obviously meaning al Qaeda’s Syrian franchise, al Nusra.

Al Nusra Front and its allies became the main recipients of the weapons because the Saudis, Turks, and Qataris wanted the arms to go to the military units that

were most successful in attacking government targets. And by the summer of 2012, al Nusra Front, buttressed by the thousands of foreign jihadists pouring into the country across the Turkish border, was already taking the lead in attacks on the Syrian government in coordination with "Free Syrian Army" brigades.

In November and December 2012, al Nusra Front began establishing formal "joint operations rooms" with those calling themselves "Free Syrian Army" on several battlefronts, as Charles Lister chronicles in his book *The Syrian Jihad*. One such commander favored by Washington was Col. Abdul Jabbar al-Oqaidi, a former Syrian army officer who headed something called the Aleppo Revolutionary Military Council. Ambassador Robert Ford, who continued to hold that position even after he had been withdrawn from Syria, publicly visited Oqaidi in May 2013 to express U.S. support for him and the FSA.

But Oqaidi and his troops were junior partners in a coalition in Aleppo in which al Nusra was by far the strongest element. That reality is clearly reflected in a video in which Oqaidi describes his good relations with officials of the "Islamic State" and is shown joining the main jihadist commander in the Aleppo region celebrating the capture of the Syrian government's Menagh Air Base in September 2013.

By early 2013, in fact, the "Free Syrian Army," which had never actually been a military organization with any troops, had ceased to have any real significance in the Syria conflict. New anti-Assad armed groups had stopped using the name even as a "brand" to identify themselves, as a leading specialist on the conflict observed.

The 'Moderate' Fiction

So, when weapons from Turkey arrived at the various battlefronts, it was understood by all the non-jihadist groups that they would be shared with al Nusra Front and its close allies. A report by McClatchy in early 2013, on a town in north central Syria, showed how the military arrangements between al Nusra and those brigades calling themselves "Free Syrian Army" governed the distribution of weapons.

One of those units, the Victory Brigade, had participated in a "joint operations room" with al Qaeda's most important military ally, Ahrar al Sham, in a successful attack on a strategic town a few weeks earlier. A visiting reporter watched that brigade and Ahrar al Sham show off new sophisticated weapons that included Russian-made RPG27 shoulder-fired rocket-propelled anti-tank grenades and RG6 grenade launchers.

When asked if the Victory Brigade had shared its new weapons with Ahrar al Sham,

the latter's spokesman responded, "Of course they share their weapons with us. We fight together."

Turkey and Qatar consciously chose al Qaeda and its closest ally, Ahrar al Sham, as the recipients of weapons systems. In late 2013 and early 2014, several truckloads of arms bound for the province of Hatay, just south of the Turkish border, were intercepted by Turkish police. They had Turkish intelligence personnel on board, according to later Turkish police court testimony.

The province was controlled by Ahrar al Sham. In fact Turkey soon began to treat Ahrar al Sham as its primary client in Syria, according to Faysal Itani, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East.

A Qatari intelligence operative who had been involved in shipping arms to extremist groups in Libya was a key figure in directing the flow of arms from Turkey into Syria. An Arab intelligence source familiar with the discussions among the external suppliers near the Syrian border in Turkey during those years told the *Washington Post's* David Ignatius that when one of the participants warned that the outside powers were building up the jihadists while the non-Islamist groups were withering away, the Qatari operative responded, "I will send weapons to al Qaeda if it will help."

The Qataris did funnel arms to both al Nusra Front and Ahrar al Sham, according to a Middle Eastern diplomatic source. The Obama administration's National Security Council staff proposed in 2013 that the United States signal U.S. displeasure with Qatar over its arming of extremists in both Syria and Libya by withdrawing a squadron of fighter planes from the U.S. airbase at al-Udeid, Qatar. The Pentagon vetoed that mild form of pressure, however, to protect its access to its bases in Qatar.

Turkey's Game

President Obama himself confronted Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan over his government's support for the jihadists at a private White House dinner in May 2013, as recounted by Hersh. "We know what you're doing with the radicals in Syria," he quotes Obama as saying to Erdogan.

The administration addressed Turkey's cooperation with the al Nusra publicly, however, only fleetingly in late 2014. Shortly after leaving Ankara, Francis Ricciardone, the U.S. ambassador to Turkey from 2011 through mid-2014, told *The Daily Telegraph* of London that Turkey had "worked with groups, frankly, for a period, including al Nusra."

The closest Washington came to a public reprimand of its allies over the arming of terrorists in Syria was when Vice President Joe Biden criticized their role

in October 2014. In impromptu remarks at Harvard University's Kennedy School, Biden complained that "our biggest problem is our allies." The forces they had supplied with arms, he said, were "al Nusra and al Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world."

Biden quickly apologized for the remarks, explaining that he didn't mean that U.S. allies had deliberately helped the jihadists. But Ambassador Ford confirmed his complaint, telling BBC, "What Biden said about the allies aggravating the problem of extremism is true."

In June 2013, Obama approved the first direct U.S. lethal military aid to rebel brigades that had been vetted by the CIA. By spring 2014, the U.S.-made BGM-71E anti-tank missiles from the 15,000 transferred to the Saudis began to appear in the hands of selected anti-Assad groups. But the CIA imposed the condition that the group receiving them would not cooperate with the al Nusra Front or its allies.

That condition implied that Washington was supplying military groups that were strong enough to maintain their independence from al Nusra Front. But the groups on the CIA's list of vetted "relatively moderate" armed groups were all highly vulnerable to takeover by the al Qaeda affiliate.

In November 2014, al Nusra Front troops struck the two strongest CIA-supported armed groups, Harakat Hazm and the Syrian Revolutionary Front on successive days and seized their heavy weapons, including both TOW anti-tank missiles and GRAD rockets.

In early March 2015, the Harakat Hazm Aleppo branch dissolved itself, and al Nusra Front promptly showed off photos of the TOW missiles and other equipment they had captured from it. And in March 2016, al Nusra Front troops attacked the headquarters of the 13th Division in northwestern Idlib province and seized all of its TOW missiles. Later that month, al Nusra Front released a video of its troops using the TOW missiles it had captured.

CIA's Largesse

But that wasn't the only way for al Nusra Front to benefit from the CIA's largesse. Along with its close ally Ahrar al Sham, the terrorist organization began planning for a campaign to take complete control of Idlib province in the winter of 2014-15.

Abandoning any pretense of distance from al Qaeda, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar worked with al Nusra on the creation of a new military formation for Idlib called the "Army of Conquest," consisting of the al Qaeda affiliate and its closest allies. Saudi Arabia and Qatar provided more weapons for the campaign,

while Turkey facilitated their passage. On March 28, just four days after launching the campaign, the Army of Conquest successfully gained control of Idlib City.

The non-jihadist armed groups getting advanced weapons from the CIA assistance were not part of the initial assault on Idlib City. After the capture of Idlib the U.S.-led operations room for Syria in southern Turkey signaled to the CIA-supported groups in Idlib that they could now participate in the campaign to consolidate control over the rest of the province.

According to Lister, the British researcher on jihadists in Syria who maintains contacts with both jihadist and other armed groups, recipients of CIA weapons, such as the Fursan al haq brigade and Division 13, did join the Idlib campaign alongside al Nusra Front without any move by the CIA to cut them off.

As the Idlib offensive began, the CIA-supported groups were getting TOW missiles in larger numbers, and they now used them with great effectiveness against the Syrian army tanks. That was the beginning of a new phase of the war, in which U.S. policy was to support an alliance between “relatively moderate” groups and the al Nusra Front.

The new alliance was carried over to Aleppo, where jihadist groups close to Nusra Front formed a new command called Fateh Halab (“Aleppo Conquest”) with nine armed groups in Aleppo province, which were getting CIA assistance. The CIA-supported groups could claim that they weren’t cooperating with al Nusra Front because the al Qaeda franchise was not officially on the list of participants in the command. But as the report on the new command clearly implied, this was merely a way of allowing the CIA to continue providing weapons to its clients, despite their de facto alliance with al Qaeda.

The significance of all this is clear: by helping its Sunni allies provide weapons to al Nusra Front and its allies and by funneling into the war zone sophisticated weapons that were bound to fall into al Nusra hands or strengthen their overall military position, U.S. policy has been largely responsible for having extended al Qaeda’s power across a significant part of Syrian territory.

The CIA and the Pentagon appear to be ready to tolerate such a betrayal of America’s stated counter-terrorism mission. Unless either Congress or the White House confronts that betrayal explicitly, as Tulsi Gabbard’s legislation would force them to do, U.S. policy will continue to be complicit in the consolidation of power by al Qaeda in Syria, even if the Islamic State is defeated there.

Gareth Porter is an independent journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of numerous books, including *Manufactured*

Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare (Just World Books, 2014).

[This article originally appeared at The American Conservative,

<http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/how-america-armed-terrorists-in-syria/>]

The Criminal ‘Laws’ of Counterinsurgency

A new book traces how the CIA and U.S. counterinsurgency warfare operatives adopted lessons from the Nazis’ fight against the partisans and evolved into a dangerous law unto themselves, writes retired JAG Major Todd E. Pierce.

By Todd E. Pierce

Douglas Valentine has once again added to the store of knowledge necessary for American citizens to understand how the U.S. government actually works today, in his most recent book entitled *The CIA As Organized Crime*. (Valentine previously wrote *The Phoenix Program*, which should be read with the current book.)

The U.S. “deep state” – of which the CIA is an integral part – is an open secret now and the Phoenix Program (assassinations, death squads, torture, mass detentions, exploitation of information) has been its means of controlling populations. Consequently, knowing the deep state’s methods is the only hope of building a democratic opposition to the deep state and to restore as much as possible the Constitutional system we had in previous centuries, as imperfect as it was.

Princeton University political theorist Sheldon Wolin described the U.S. political system in place by 2003 as “inverted totalitarianism.” He reaffirmed that in 2009 after seeing a year of the Obama administration. Correctly identifying the threat against constitutional governance is the first step to restore it, and as Wolin understood, substantive constitutional government ended long before Donald Trump campaigned. He’s just taking unconstitutional governance to the next level in following the same path as his recent predecessors. However, even as some elements of the “deep state” seek to remove Trump, the President now has many “deep state” instruments in his own hands to be used at his unreviewable discretion.

Many “never-Trumpers” of both parties see the deep state’s national security bureaucracy as their best hope to destroy Trump and thus defend constitutional government, but those hopes are misguided. After all, the deep state’s bureaucratic leadership has worked arduously for decades to

subvert constitutional order.

As Michael Glennon, author of *National Security and Double Government*, pointed out in a June 2017 Harper's essay, if "the president maintains his attack, splintered and demoralized factions within the bureaucracy could actually support – not oppose – many potential Trump initiatives, such as stepped-up drone strikes, cyberattacks, covert action, immigration bans, and mass surveillance."

Glennon noted that the propensity of "security managers" to back policies which ratchet up levels of security "will play into Trump's hands, so that if and when he finally does declare victory, a revamped security directorate could emerge more menacing than ever, with him its devoted new ally." Before that happens, it is incumbent for Americans to understand what Valentine explains in his book of CIA methods of "population control" as first fully developed in the Vietnam War's Phoenix Program.

Hating the U.S.

There also must be the realization that our "national security" apparatchiks – principally but not solely the CIA – have served to exponentially increase the numbers of those people who hate the U.S. Some of these people turn to terrorism as an expression of that hostility. Anyone who is at all familiar with the CIA and Al Qaeda knows that the CIA has been Al Qaeda's most important "combat multiplier" since 9/11, and the CIA can be said to have birthed ISIS as well with the mistreatment of incarcerated Iraqi men in U.S. prisons in Iraq.

Indeed, by following the model of the Phoenix Program, the CIA must be seen in the Twenty-first Century as a combination of the ultimate "Murder, Inc.," when judged by the CIA's methods such as drone warfare and its victims; and the Keystone Kops, when the multiple failures of CIA policies are considered. This is not to make light of what the CIA does, but the CIA's misguided policies and practices have served to generate wrath, hatred and violence against Americans, which we see manifested in cities such as San Bernardino, Orlando, New York and Boston.

Pointing out the harm to Americans is not to dismiss the havoc that Americans under the influence of the CIA have perpetrated on foreign populations. But "morality" seems a lost virtue today in the U.S., which is under the influence of so much militaristic war propaganda that morality no longer enters into the equation in determining foreign policy.

In addition to the harm the CIA has caused to people around the world, the CIA works tirelessly at subverting its own government at home, as was most visible

in the spying on and subversion of the torture investigation by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. The subversion of democracy also includes the role the CIA plays in developing and disseminating war propaganda as “information warfare,” upon the American people. This is what the Rand Corporation under the editorship of Zalmay Khalilzad has described as “conditioning the battlefield,” which begins with the minds of the American population.

Douglas Valentine discusses and documents the role of the CIA in disseminating pro-war propaganda and disinformation as complementary to the violent tactics of the Phoenix Program in Vietnam. Valentine explains that “before Phoenix was adopted as the model for policing the American empire, many US military commanders in Vietnam resisted the Phoenix strategy of targeting civilians with Einsatzgruppen-style ‘special forces’ and Gestapo-style secret police.”

Military Commanders considered that type of program a flagrant violation of the Law of War. “Their main job is to zap the in-betweeners – you know, the people who aren’t all the way with the government and aren’t all the way with the Viet Cong either. They figure if you zap enough in-betweeners, people will begin to get the idea,” according to one quote from *The Phoenix Program* referring to the unit tasked with much of the Phoenix operations.

Nazi Influences

Comparing the Phoenix Program and its operatives to “Einsatzgruppen-style ‘special forces’ and Gestapo-style secret police” is not a distortion of the strategic understanding of each. Both programs were extreme forms of repression operating under martial law principles where the slightest form of dissent was deemed to represent the work of the “enemy.” Hitler’s *Bandit Hunters: The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe* by Philip W. Blood describes German “Security Warfare” as practiced in World War II, which can be seen as identical in form to the Phoenix Program as to how the enemy is defined as anyone who is “potentially” a threat, deemed either “partizans” or terrorists.

That the Germans included entire racial categories in that does not change the underlying logic, which was, anyone deemed an internal enemy in a territory in which their military operated had to be “neutralized” by any means necessary. The U.S. military and the South Vietnamese military governments operated under the same principles but not based on race, rather the perception that certain areas and villages were loyal to the Viet Cong.

This repressive doctrine was also not unique to the Nazis in Europe and the U.S. military in Vietnam. Similar though less sophisticated strategies were used against the American Indians and by the imperial powers of the late Nineteenth

and early Twentieth centuries, including by the U.S. in its newly acquired territories of the Philippines and in the Caribbean. This “imperial policing,” i.e., counter-insurgency, simply moved to more manipulative and, in ways, more violent levels.

That the U.S. drew upon German counter-insurgency doctrine, as brutal as it was, is well documented. This is shown explicitly in a 2011 article published in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* entitled *German Counterinsurgency Revisited* by Charles D. Melson. He wrote that in 1942, Nazi commander Heinrich Himmler named a deputy for “anti-bandit warfare,” (Bevollmächtigter für die Bandenkämpfung im Osten), SS-General von dem Bach, whose responsibilities expanded in 1943 to head all SS and police anti-bandit units and operations. He was one of the architects of the *Einsatzgruppen* “concept of anti-partisan warfare,” a German predecessor to the “Phoenix Program.”

‘Anti-Partisan’ Lessons

It wasn’t a coincidence that this “anti-partisan” warfare concept should be adopted by U.S. forces in Vietnam and retained to the present day. Melson pointed out that a “post-war German special forces officer described hunter or ranger units as ‘men who knew every possible ruse and tactic of guerrilla warfare. They had gone through the hell of combat against the crafty partisans in the endless swamps and forests of Russia.’”

Consequently, “The German special forces and reconnaissance school was a sought after posting for North Atlantic Treaty Organization special operations personnel,” who presumably included members of the newly created U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers, which was in part headquartered at Bad Tolz in Germany, as well as CIA paramilitary officers.

Just as with the later Phoenix Program to the present-day U.S. global counterinsurgency, Melson wrote that the “attitude of the [local] population and the amount of assistance it was willing to give guerilla units was of great concern to the Germans. Different treatment was supposed to be accorded to affected populations, bandit supporters, and bandits, while so-called population and resource control measures for each were noted (but were in practice, treated apparently one and the same). ‘Action against enemy agitation’ was the psychological or information operations of the *Nazi* period. The *Nazis* believed that, ‘Because of the close relationship of guerilla warfare and politics, actions against enemy agitation are a task that is just as important as interdiction and combat actions. All means must be used to ward off enemy influence and waken and maintain a clear political will.’”

This is typical of any totalitarian system – a movement or a government –

whether the process is characterized as counterinsurgency or internal security. The idea of any civilian collaboration with the “enemy” is the basis for what the U.S. government charges as “conspiracy” in the Guantanamo Military Commissions.

Valentine explains the Phoenix program as having been developed by the CIA in 1967 to combine “existing counterinsurgency programs in a concerted effort to ‘neutralize’ the Vietcong infrastructure (VCI).” He explained further that “neutralize” meant “to kill, capture, or make to defect.” “Infrastructure” meant civilians suspected of supporting North Vietnamese and Vietcong soldiers. Central to the Phoenix program was that its targets were civilians, making the operation a violation of the Geneva Conventions which guaranteed protection to civilians in time of war.

“The Vietnam’s War’s Silver Lining: A Bureaucratic Model for Population Control Emerges” is the title of Chapter 3. Valentine writes that the “CIA’s Phoenix program changed how America fights its wars and how the public views this new type of political and psychological warfare, in which civilian casualties are an explicit objective.” The intent of the Phoenix program evolved from “neutralizing” enemy leaders into “a program of systematic repression for the political control of the South Vietnamese people. It sought to accomplish this through a highly bureaucratized system of disposing of people who could not be ideologically assimilated.” The CIA claimed a legal basis for the program in “emergency decrees” and orders for “administrative detention.”

Lauding Petraeus

Valentine refers to a paper by David Kilcullen entitled Countering Global Insurgency. Kilcullen is one of the so-called “counter-insurgency experts” whom General David Petraeus gathered together in a cell to promote and refine “counter-insurgency,” or COIN, for the modern era. Fred Kaplan, who is considered a “liberal author and journalist” at Slate, wrote a panegyric to these cultists entitled, The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War. The purpose of this cell was to change the practices of the U.S. military into that of “imperial policing,” or COIN, as they preferred to call it.

But Kilcullen argued in his paper that “The ‘War on Terrorism’ is actually a campaign to counter a global insurgency. Therefore, Kilcullen argued, “we need a new paradigm, capable of addressing globalised insurgency.” His “disaggregation strategy” called for “actions to target the insurgent infrastructure that would resemble the unfairly maligned (but highly effective) Vietnam-era Phoenix program.”

He went on, "Contrary to popular mythology, this was largely a civilian aid and development program, supported by targeted military pacification operations and intelligence activity to disrupt the Viet Cong Infrastructure. A global Phoenix program (including the other key elements that formed part of the successful Vietnam CORDS system) would provide a useful start point to consider how Disaggregation would develop in practice."

It is readily apparent that, in fact, a Phoenix-type program is now U.S. global policy and – just like in Vietnam – it is applying "death squad" strategies that eliminate not only active combatants but also civilians who simply find themselves in the same vicinity, thus creating antagonisms that expand the number of fighters.

Corroborative evidence of Valentine's thesis is, perhaps surprisingly, provided by the CIA's own website where a number of redacted historical documents have been published. Presumably, they are documents first revealed under the Freedom of Information Act. A few however are copies of news articles once available to the public but now archived by the CIA which has blacked-out portions of the articles.

The Bloody Reality

One "sanitized" article – approved for release in 2011 – is a partially redacted New Times article of Aug. 22, 1975, by Michael Drosnin. The article recounts a story of a U.S. Army counter-intelligence officer "who directed a small part of a secret war aimed not at the enemy's soldiers but at its civilian leaders." He describes how a CIA-directed Phoenix operative dumped a bag of "eleven bloody ears" as proof of six people killed.

The officer, who recalled this incident in 1971, said, "It made me sick. ... I couldn't go on with what I was doing in Vietnam. . . . It was an assassination campaign . . . my job was to identify and eliminate VCI, the Viet Cong 'infrastructure' – the communist's shadow government. I worked directly with two Vietnamese units, very tough guys who didn't wear uniforms . . . In the beginning they brought back about 10 percent alive. By the end they had stopped taking prisoners. ...

"How many VC they got I don't know. I saw a hell of a lot of dead bodies. We'd put a tag on saying VCI, but no one really knew – it was just some native in black pajamas with 16 bullet holes."

This led to an investigation by New Times in a day when there were still "investigative reporters," and not the government sycophants of today. Based on first-hand accounts, their investigation concluded that Operation Phoenix was

the “only systematized kidnapping, torture and assassination program ever sponsored by the United States government. . . . Its victims were noncombatants.” At least 40,000 were murdered, with “only” about 8,000 supposed Viet Cong political cadres targeted for execution, with the rest civilians (including women and children) killed and “later conveniently labeled VCI. Hundreds of thousands were jailed without trial, often after sadistic abuse.” The article notes that Phoenix was conceived, financed, and directed by the Central Intelligence Agency, as Mr. Valentine writes.

A second article archived by the CIA was by the Christian Science Monitor, dated Jan. 5, 1971, describing how the Saigon government was “taking steps ... that could help eliminate one of the most glaring abuses of its controversial Phoenix program, which is aimed against the Viet Cong political and administrative apparatus.” Note how the Monitor shifted blame away from the CIA and onto the South Vietnamese government.

But the article noted that one of the most persistent criticisms of Phoenix was that it resulted “in the arrest and imprisonment of many innocent civilians.” These were called “Class C Communist offenders,” some of whom may actually have been forced to commit such “belligerent acts” as digging trenches or carrying rice. It was those alleged as the “hard core, full-time cadre” who were deemed to make up the “shadow government” designated as Class A and B Viet Cong.

Yet “security committees” throughout South Vietnam, under the direction of the CIA, sentenced at least 10,000 “Class C civilians” to prison each year, far more than Class A and B combined. The article stated, “Thousands of these prisoners are never brought to court trial, and thousands of other have never been sentenced.” The latter statement would mean they were just held in “indefinite detention,” like the prisoners held at Guantanamo and other U.S. detention centers with high levels of CIA involvement.

Not surprisingly to someone not affiliated with the CIA, the article found as well that “Individual case histories indicate that many who have gone to prison as active supporters of neither the government nor the Viet Cong come out as active backers of the Viet Cong and with an implacable hatred of the government.” In other words, the CIA and the COIN enthusiasts are achieving the same results today with the prisons they set up in Iraq and Afghanistan.

CIA Crimes

Valentine broadly covers the illegalities of the CIA over the years, including its well-documented role in facilitating the drug trade over the years. But, in this reviewer’s opinion, his most valuable contribution is his description of the CIA’s participation going back at least to the Vietnam War in the treatment

of what the U.S. government today calls “unlawful combatants.”

“Unlawful combatants” is a descriptive term made up by the Bush administration to remove people whom U.S. officials alleged were “terrorists” from the legal protections of the Geneva Conventions and Human Rights Law and thus to justify their capture or killing in the so-called “Global War on Terror.” Since the U.S. government deems them “unlawful” – because they do not belong to an organized military structure and do not wear insignia – they are denied the “privilege” of belligerency that applies to traditional soldiers. But – unless they take a “direct part in hostilities” – they would still maintain their civilian status under the law of war and thus not lose the legal protection due to civilians even if they exhibit sympathy or support to one side in a conflict.

Ironically, by the Bush administration’s broad definition of “unlawful combatants,” CIA officers and their support structure also would fit the category. But the American public is generally forgiving of its own war criminals though most self-righteous and hypocritical in judging foreign war criminals. But perhaps given sufficient evidence, the American public could begin to see both the immorality of this behavior and its counterproductive consequences.

This is not to condemn all CIA officers, some of whom acted in good faith that they were actually defending the United States by acquiring information on a professed enemy in the tradition of Nathan Hale. But it is to harshly condemn those CIA officials and officers who betrayed the United States by subverting its Constitution, including waging secret wars against foreign countries without a declaration of war by Congress. And it decidedly condemns the CIA war criminals who acted as a law unto themselves in the torture and murder of foreign nationals, as Valentine’s book describes.

Talleyrand is credited with saying, “They have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.” Reportedly, that was borrowed from a 1796 letter by a French naval officer, which stated, in the original language: *Personne n’est corrigé; personne n’a su ni rien oublier ni rien apprendre.* In English: “Nobody has been corrected; no one has known to forget, nor yet to learn anything.” That sums up the CIA leadership entirely.

Douglas Valentine’s book is a thorough documentation of that fact and it is essential reading for all Americans if we are to have any hope for salvaging a remnant of representative government.

Todd E. Pierce retired as a Major in the US Army Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps in November 2012. His most recent assignment was defense counsel in the Office of Chief Defense Counsel, Office of Military Commissions.

Russia-gate Flops as Democrats' Golden Ticket

Exclusive: The national Democrats saw Russia-gate and the drive to impeach President Trump as their golden ticket back to power, but so far the ticket seems to be made of fool's gold, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The national Democratic Party and many liberals have bet heavily on the Russia-gate investigation as a way to oust President Trump from office and to catapult Democrats to victories this year and in 2018, but the gamble appears not to be paying off.

The Democrats' disappointing loss in a special election to fill a congressional seat in an affluent Atlanta suburb is just the latest indication that the strategy of demonizing Trump and blaming Russia for Hillary Clinton's 2016 defeat may not be the golden ticket that some Democrats had hoped.

Though it's still early to draw conclusive lessons from Karen Handel's victory over Jon Ossoff – despite his raising \$25 million – one lesson may be that a Middle America backlash is forming against the over-the-top quality of the Trump-accusations and the Russia-bashing, with Republicans rallying against the image of Official Washington's “deep state” collaborating with Democrats and the mainstream news media to reverse a presidential election.

Indeed, the Democrats may be digging a deeper hole for themselves in terms of reaching out to white working-class voters who abandoned the party in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin to put Trump over the top in the Electoral College even though Clinton's landslide win in California gave her almost three million more votes nationwide.

Clinton's popular-vote plurality and the #Resistance, which manifested itself in massive protests against Trump's presidency, gave hope to the Democrats that they didn't need to undertake a serious self-examination into why the party is in decline across the nation's heartland. Instead, they decided to stoke the hysteria over alleged Russian “meddling” in the election as the short-cut to bring down Trump and his populist movement.

A Party of Snobs?

From conversations that I've had with some Trump voters in recent weeks, I was

struck by how they viewed the Democratic Party as snobbish, elitist and looking down its nose at “average Americans.” And in conversations with some Clinton voters, I found confirmation for that view in the open disdain that the Clinton backers expressed toward the stupidity of anyone who voted for Trump. In other words, the Trump voters were not wrong to feel “dissed.”

It seems the Republicans – and Trump in particular – have done a better job in presenting themselves to these Middle Americans as respecting their opinions and representing their fears, even though the policies being pushed by Trump and the GOP still favor the rich and will do little good – and significant harm – to the middle and working classes.

By contrast, many of Hillary Clinton’s domestic proposals might well have benefited average Americans but she alienated many of them by telling a group of her supporters that half of Trump’s backers belonged in a “basket of deplorables.” Although she later reduced the percentage, she had committed a cardinal political sin: she had put the liberal disdain for millions of Americans into words – and easily remembered words at that.

By insisting that Hillary Clinton be the Democratic nominee – after leftist populist Bernie Sanders was pushed aside – the party also ignored the fact that many Americans, including many Democrats, viewed Clinton as the perfectly imperfect candidate for an anti-Establishment year with many Americans still fuming over the Wall Street bailouts and amid the growing sense that the system was rigged for the well-connected and against the average guy or gal.

In the face of those sentiments, the Democrats nominated a candidate who personified how a relatively small number of lucky Americans can play the system and make tons of money while the masses have seen their dreams crushed and their bank accounts drained. And Clinton apparently still hasn’t learned that lesson.

Citing Women’s Rights

Last month, when asked why she accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars for speaking to Goldman Sachs, Clinton rationalized her greed as a women’s rights issue, saying: “you know, men got paid for the speeches they made. I got paid for the speeches I made.”

Her excuse captured much of what has gone wrong with the Democratic Party as it moved from its working-class roots and New Deal traditions to becoming a party that places “identity politics” ahead of a duty to fight for the common men and women of America.

Demonstrating her political cluelessness, Clinton used the serious issue of women not getting fair treatment in the workplace to justify taking her turn at

the Wall Street money trough, gobbling up in one half-hour speech what it would take many American families a decade to earn.

While it's a bit unfair to personalize the Democratic Party's problems, Hillary and Bill Clinton have come to represent how the party is viewed by many Americans. Instead of the FDR Democrats, we have the Davos Democrats, the Wall Street Democrats, the Hollywood Democrats, the Silicon Valley Democrats, and now increasingly the Military-Industrial Complex Democrats.

To many Americans struggling to make ends meet, the national Democrats seem committed to the interests of the worldwide elites: global trade, financialization of the economy, robotization of the workplace, and endless war against endless enemies.

Now, the national Democrats are clambering onto the bandwagon for a costly and dangerous New Cold War with nuclear-armed Russia. Indeed, it is hard to distinguish their foreign policy from that of neoconservatives, although these Democrats view themselves as liberal interventionists citing humanitarian impulses to justify the endless slaughter.

Earlier this year, a Washington Post/ABC News poll found only 28 percent of Americans saying that the Democrats were "in touch with the concerns of most people" – an astounding result given the Democrats' long tradition as the party of the American working class and the party's post-Vietnam War reputation as favoring butter over guns.

Yet rather than rethink the recent policies, the Democrats prefer to fantasize about impeaching President Trump and continuing a blame-game about who – other than Hillary Clinton, her campaign and the Democratic National Committee – is responsible for Trump's election. Of course, it's the Russians, Russians, Russians!

A Problem's Deep Roots

Without doubt, some of the party's problems have deep roots that correspond to the shrinking of the labor movement since the 1970s and the growing reliance on big-money donors to finance expensive television-ad-driven campaigns. Over the years, the Democrats also got pounded for being "weak" on national security.

Further, faced with Republican "weaponization" of attack ads in the 1980s, many old-time Democrats lost out to the Reagan Revolution, clearing the way for a new breed of Democrats who realized that they could compete for a slice of the big money by cultivating the emerging coastal elites: Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Hollywood and even elements of the National Security State.

By the 1990s, President Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council defined this New Democrat, politicians who reflected the interests of well-heeled coastal elites, especially on free trade; streamlined financial regulations; commitment to technology; and an activist foreign policy built around spreading “liberal values” across the globe.

Mixed in was a commitment to the rights of various identity groups, a worthy goal although this tolerance paradoxically contributed to a new form of prejudice among some liberals who came to view many white working-class people as fat, stupid and bigoted, society’s “losers.”

So, while President Clinton hobnobbed with the modern economy’s “winners” – with sleepovers in the Lincoln bedroom and parties in the Hamptons – much of Middle America felt neglected if not disdained. The “losers” were left to rot in “flyover America” with towns and cities that had lost their manufacturing base and, with it, their vitality and even their purpose for existing.

Republican Fraud

It wasn’t as if the Republicans were offering anything better. True, they were more comfortable talking to these “forgotten Americans” – advocating “gun rights” and “traditional values” and playing on white resentments over racial integration and civil rights – but, in office, the Republicans aggressively favored the interests of the rich, cutting their taxes and slashing regulations even more than the Democrats.

The Republicans paid lip service to the struggling blue-collar workers but control of GOP policies was left in the hands of corporations and their lobbyists.

Though the election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president, raised hopes that the nation might finally bind its deep racial wounds, it turned out to have a nearly opposite effect. Tea Party Republicans rallied many white working-class Americans to resist Obama and the hip urban future that he represented. They found an unlikely champion in real-estate mogul and reality TV star Donald Trump, who sensed how to tap into their fears and anger with his demagogic appeals and false populism.

Meanwhile, the national Democrats were falling in love with data predicting that demographics would magically turn Republican red states blue. So the party blithely ignored the warning signs of a cataclysmic break with the Democrats’ old-time base.

Despite all the data on opioid addiction and declining life expectancy among the white working class, Hillary Clinton was politically tone-deaf to the rumbles of

discontent echoing across the Rust Belt. She assumed the traditionally Democratic white working-class precincts would stick with her and she tried to appeal to the “security moms” in typically Republican suburbs by touting her neoconservative foreign policy thinking. And she ran a relentlessly negative campaign against Trump while offering voters few positive reasons to vote for her.

Ignoring Reality

When her stunning loss became clear on Election Night – as the crude and unqualified Trump pocketed the electoral votes of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin – the Democrats refused to recognize what the elections results were telling them, that they had lost touch with a still important voting bloc, working-class whites.

Rather than face these facts, the national Democrats – led by President Obama and his intelligence chiefs – decided on a different approach, to seek to reverse the election by blaming the result on the Russians. Obama, his intelligence chiefs and a collaborative mainstream media insisted without presenting any real evidence that the Russians had hacked into Democratic emails and released them to the devastating advantage of Trump, as if the minor controversies from leaked emails of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta explained Trump’s surprising victory.

As part of this strategy, any Trump link to Russia – no matter how inconsequential, whether from his businesses or through his advisers – became the focus of Woodward-and-Bernstein/Watergate-style investigations. The obvious goal was to impeach Trump and ride the wave of Trump-hating enthusiasm to a Democratic political revival.

In other words, there was no reason to look in the mirror and rethink how the Democratic Party might begin rebuilding its relationships with the white working-class, just hold hearings featuring Obama’s intelligence chieftains and leak damaging Russia-gate stuff to the media.

But the result of this strategy has been to deepen the Democratic Party’s reliance on the elites, particularly the self-reverential mavens of the mainstream media and the denizens of the so-called “deep state.” From my conversations with Trump voters, they “get” what’s going on, how the powers-that-be are trying to negate the 63 million Americans who voted for Trump by reversing a presidential election carried out under the U.S. constitutional process.

A Letter from ‘Deplorable’ Land

Some Trump supporters are even making this point publicly. Earlier this month, a “proud deplorable” named Kenton Woodhead from Brunswick, Ohio, wrote to The New York Times informing the “newspaper of record” that he and other “deplorables” were onto the scheme.

“I wanted to provide you with an unsophisticated synopsis of The New York Times and the media’s quest for the implosion of Donald Trump’s presidency from out here in the real world, in ‘deplorable’ country. ... Every time you and your brethren at other news organizations dream up a new scheme to get Mr. Trump, we out here in deplorable land increase our support for him. ...

“Regardless of what you dream up every day, we refuse to be sucked into your narrative. And even more humorously, there isn’t anything you can do about it! And I love it that you are having the exact opposite effect on those of us you are trying to persuade to think otherwise.

“I mean it is seriously an enjoyable part of my day knowing you are failing. And badly! I haven’t had this much fun watching the media stumble, bumble and fumble in years. I wonder what will happen on the day you wake up and realize how disconnected you’ve become.”

So, despite Trump’s narcissism and incompetence – and despite how his policies will surely hurt many of his working-class supporters – the national Democrats are further driving a wedge between themselves and this crucial voting bloc. By whipping up a New Cold War with Russia and hurling McCarthistic slurs at people who won’t join in the Russia-bashing, the Democratic Party’s tactics also are alienating many peace voters who view both the Republicans and Democrats as warmongers of almost equal measures of guilt.

While it’s certainly not my job to give advice to the Democrats – or any other political group – I can’t help but thinking that this Russia-gate “scandal” is not only lacking in logic and evidence, but it doesn’t even make any long-term political sense.

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

The Price that Julian Assange Pays

People who challenge power are often viewed by their supporters as more icons

than human beings thus missing the personal costs of their actions, a reality that Julian Assange's mother revealed to Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

June 19 marked the fifth full year that Wikileaks founder Julian Assange spent at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he was given asylum against the threat of arrest from a Swedish prosecutor pursuing a sex-abuse investigation (since dropped) and possible extradition to the United States for a potential espionage charge related to publication of U.S. secrets.

To gain insights into what this long ordeal has meant to Assange, an Australian native, Randy Credico of WBAI's "On the Fly" and Dennis Bernstein of "Flashpoints" on Pacifica Radio interviewed Assange's mother, Christine Assange. The interview also explored the deep history that led her son to found Wikileaks and to challenge the enormous powers of the U.S. and British governments by exposing the truth about their dangerous, deadly and often illegal policies.

Randy Credico: I guess I should begin by asking, how long has it been since you've seen your son Julian?

Christine Assange: A number of years, but we communicate.

RC: Yes, you communicate, but it's not the same, so far away. It must be difficult. I mean he's not in prison, but it may as well be prison. I know for a mother to be separated from her son like this, it must be grueling, and a difficult row to hoe on a daily basis.

CA: It is. It's very hard to put into words this experience that we're going through over the last seven years. There have been periods where I've coped and periods where I haven't. It tends to go up and down, as I guess Julian does as well. And it's very hard to communicate with your son when you know that every phone call that you're making, every text that you're sending, is being listened to. Or even a letter that you write. You end up feeling that it's almost useless trying to communicate anything real.

RC: That must really take its toll. So it will be five years [on June 19th]. Five years! Can you believe that he's been there for five years at this point in time?

CA: No, the idea is horrifying to me actually. I mean we know that he's been detained for seven years without charge, but five of those have been in the Ecuadorian Embassy [in London], and we thank the people of Ecuador for their protection.

But during those five years, Randy, the U.K. government and the Swedish government have refused all of Julian's requests for the normal one hour a day of life-giving fresh air, exercise and sunshine. It's a human right abuse of the grandest order.

Anyone who is involved with rights of refugees around the world should be highlighting his case. Here we are in the Western supposedly free world, interning someone without charge, and then denying them the rights that even people in Third World prisons get, including the right to have medical tests. He had a very bad shoulder with bad chronic pain for years, and they refused to allow him to have an MRI test.

Dennis Bernstein: Let me just ask you this question: do you remember the last time you were able to give your son a nice big hug?

CA: Yes, four years ago.

DB: Could you tell us what you remember about it?

CA: It's hard keeping up with all the fighting, Dennis. It's very hard to explain. But I got a big hug when I left. I was only there for a few weeks. I've actually got a few things here that I've got to look after. But probably the best time I remember him is the one with the picture you've got on your show, of me and him with his arm around me. That was when he'd just gotten out of prison, and I'd gone over there to campaign for him.

And we were out in the snow, at about 3 o'clock on the morning, outside of the place that he was staying. And that was with an Australian television crew and we were all Aussies together in that moment. And I was giving him a big hug, and they were cheering, and it was a really good moment. It all feels so far away, and so foreign for us all to be there together. And for me to hold Julian, with his countrymen around giving support, was a really good moment.

DB: And now that we've got Julian's mom on the phone, could you talk a little bit about ... the first clue that he was going to be perhaps an interesting person, a troublemaker, or somebody who was really interested in public affairs? How do you remember that beginning?

CA: Well I don't think there was any one point at which it happened. Julian had always been an incredibly curious child, and always wanted to know why – wanted to know how things worked. And I actually encouraged that in him as a child. He would ask how something would work, and rather than say, this is how it works, I would ask him, how do you think it works?

And then we would explore theories at his age level about how something would

work, and he was very turned on by all that. I also read him a lot of books. From the time he was a baby, he was read books every day, from fairy tales, to Greek legends, to the adventure heroic classics – Tarzan, for example, where good was trouncing evil, and there were heroic adventures.

The justice part of it was not to any form of ideology, it was just about showing empathy and fairness in everyday life. So I think all those things together – and he came from a creative background – all that enabled him to sort of explore justice, and the power to change.

Then he wanted to know how the world worked. He wanted to be a physicist because he wanted to get to the bottom of it. And he went to university for physics and was disappointed that most of the job opportunities involved working for the US government, developing weapons, etc., and so he wasn't very happy with that.

And then the next thing I remember, we were having a discussion about the ills of the world and what could make a change in the world and I asked him, what do you think would lead to a change? And he said he thought there are two possibilities: one was a cataclysmic event that knocked some sense into people because they'd have to really look at their environment.

The other one was technology. And I think Wikileaks was the result of the technology that he saw would change the world.

DB: You said something very interesting: that it wasn't about grand things, but about fairness in everyday life. Can you think of one of those everyday examples that sort of blossomed into the Julian Assange that we know in terms of his vision now for information?

CA: Well not anything specific in terms of day-to-day life, but just in general with people we were dealing with in the family or with neighbors: we wouldn't walk past somebody who was lying in the street, for example. If there was someone lying in the street, whether they were drunk or if it was a drug overdose, or if they were sick – we would stop and ask them if they were alright. And Julian would continue that. We were in a situation where we were helping some people involved in a justice situation that had to do with the court system, and Julian was boots and all defending people.

But also when he was a young teenager, he was very into computers. So I bought him a computer, and he went exploring on it, and later on he joined up with some other young people. And there was not a lot available in terms of being challenging and adventuring in the suburbs, but these bright young friends of his were challenging themselves on computers, and one of the ways they were doing it was to what they called "look-see" hacking, which was where they'd

break in and they'd look at things, they wouldn't damage anything, but let people know their system was insecure.

Now, in the process of doing that, I remember during the Gulf War that he got in and had a look, and he told me, "There's stuff going on here that's not right, there are people doing things that are not right here, and we're not being told about it – it's not coming out in the media."

And I think that also galvanized him into his concept of Wikileaks, which was basically a concept around really good media. And that is that the media hold the governments and the corporations through, basically the truth, responsible to the people.

RC: He has done an incredible job. We are much better off – we are more knowledgeable about our government's evil actions around the world, and obviously he's being penalized for that. First of all, he's been vilified by these phony allegations. How did you react when these allegations came out of the Swedish government prosecutor's office?

CA: Well I remember the time exactly. It was about 11 o'clock at night when I got a phone call, and the person didn't even introduce themselves, they just said, "Mrs. Assange, how does it feel to have your son accused of a double rape?"

And straight from my solar plexus I just said, "He didn't do it." Because I know my son, and I know that Julian wouldn't do it. But then I had to go through the whole process of investigating the case because, to defend him, I had to know exactly what was going on.

And so, like those who defended him with knowledge, we had to troll through all the documents, to find out the basis of the allegations, and then what we found was a complete and utter set up. And that was a horrifying feeling to find out that your son would actually be set up on something as serious as a rape allegation, purely because he published the truth about corrupt power.

DB: Where exactly are you right now?

CA: I'm in Australia.

DB: Oh, you're in Australia! You're very far away, but you're very close to us here, and we're really appreciating the kind of material that you're sharing about Julian Assange on this, his fifth year of his being held captive, really you have to say by threats of the United States government, who has a special penchant for hurting whistleblowers.

I'm thinking of this carpenter – this illiterate carpenter – who actually fled from fascist Italy and ended up in fascist Argentina. And he used to spout these phrases, and one of the things he used to say is, "Truth has few friends, and those few are suicides" [Antonio Porchia]. Now that's a very dark comment, but it does seem, if you think about Julian Assange or other great truth tellers, what was waiting for them was a jail cell, or a bullet. Your thoughts on that – that courage that it takes to go forward?

CA: Well the original truth teller was Jesus Christ, wasn't he? He was throwing the money changers out of the temple. And now 2,000 years later we've got defense contractors, the oil industry and Wall Street. And he said, "And you shall know the truth and it shall set you free."

And nothing has really changed since then. We still have corrupt power consolidating itself, and really destroying the world, and not working on the behalf of people. And it sort of brings me back to what we should be doing, as people. What should we do? Our leaders let us down again and again. They say they're going to do something and when they get in power they're either bad leaders who were leading us on, or they're good leaders who are under pressure themselves. And they're fighting each other and name-calling, but it's still not working, is it?

So I see Wikileaks as a uniting point for everybody – from the Left and the Right and everything in between – uniting around the First Amendment, which is what you call it in America, or the free press around the world, to hold our leaders in the business world and in the government accountable through transparency and truth.

And good leaders are actually supported by Wikileaks because if they are indeed under pressure from the Deep State – for example, supposing we assume that Donald Trump is a good guy, and does want to, as he says, "drain the swamp", which is the Deep State, then he's going to need Wikileaks – not just during the campaign, when Wikileaks was wonderful and he loved Wikileaks, but even more so now, when the Deep State is going to try to prevent his campaign.

Now if he's not in fact a good guy, but a bad guy all along, then of course he's going to want to suppress Wikileaks. And our assessment of Donald Trump very much hinges on whether he is going to protect Wikileaks and Julian.

DB: We were just speaking with one of the attorneys, Jesselyn Radack, who has worked with Julian Assange, and we were talking about the message that might be being sent now by the very strong crackdown and arrest of the most recent whistleblower coming out of the National Security Agency [Reality Winner]. Does that give you pause or concern that Julian might have a tough row ahead?

CA: Oh, I've always known he's going to have a tough row ahead, you only have to look at the way they've treated their own whistleblowers, as you said, in their own CIA and NSA. The Obama administration arrested and prosecuted more whistleblowers than all other presidents combined, so things were certainly not looking good, even before this change of administration.

I'm not talking about Reality Winner. I'm not sure where she's coming from but, even so, wherever she's coming from, the protocol should still be the same. And I don't know if that's the case. If you are a whistleblower there should be protections for you and then it should be investigated and authenticated. And there should be a transparent legal process, and your rights should be protected during that time period. The reason I say I don't know where she's coming from, is because they've been talking about so-called leaks about Russians, and all the rest of it, and we know that they've been set up, that the Russians didn't hack the DNC.

They're going to say that there were leaks and they're not leaks, but because we don't know who, that's the reason why we need to protect all whistleblowers, including her, and why it should go through due process, the same as for any other citizen.

DB: We know that Julian was pretty troubled by the way in which *The Intercept* blew their source in this context. He seems to have been a lot more careful in his work in terms of protecting sources. I'm wondering if you noted that.

CA: Oh, absolutely. I remember when Wikileaks was being set up, that Julian was saying to me, "We're going to spend two years with the best minds in the world, to create an anonymous drop box, so that nobody can crack it, because we want to protect our sources. And we want people to feel so comfortable in leaking to us and not to feel frightened that they're going to be revealed". So he's kept to that, even to the risk to his own life and liberty.

Wikileaks has never revealed a source – no source has been exposed by Wikileaks. Chelsea Manning exposed herself on the Internet. And very few other media have been willing to rise to that challenge. So it's best to leak to Wikileaks if you're going to leak. It's a pity that she [Reality Winner] didn't leak to Wikileaks.

RC: Yes. I must say, he really is a remarkable individual. I am not a techie, but he really knows all of this stuff really well, he's brilliant, but he comes off so genuine. It's really amazing to see him on all of these talk shows, on radio – how well he comes off. And he's got a great sense of humor, he's got an incredible education, he's so well-spoken, so dignified when he's on. Does that amaze you?

CA: Yes... well yes and no... because he's grown up with me, and I've seen him, and he's always been a refined person. He's never been a crude person. He's been an honest person and an empathetic person, and he's always been very bright, so that he got to where he is on the world stage doesn't surprise me.

Though of course in another way it does, and I'm in awe of him as well – not in any kind of demigod way, but just as a human being with such resilience and courage, and so strong in the truth. And taking the most incredible amount of attacks, not just from governments and corporations, and what they're getting up to behind the scenes, but trolls.

I mean the thing that probably hurt me the most when watching him stand up for his work, was seeing other journalists, particularly UK journalists, trolling him on Wikileaks with the most vile, immature, picky, vicious comments. I couldn't believe that this was coming out of the mouths of so-called journalists! And he's resilient, and the ability to rise above it is quite awe-inspiring, isn't it?

DB: And he continues on despite it all. He certainly has a resolve and a focus that borders on super-human. He has not been distracted from the work, in fact he has managed to expand it. It's sort of a bit of a miracle.

CA: Well, Julian is very grounded. His convictions come out of critical analysis, they don't come out of an easy path of jumping on some ideological bandwagon, so that when the going gets tough, he's grounded in where he's coming from. Because he drove himself, he's not easily shaken by attacks, by ideological attacks, for example, or personal attacks. I think they've called him every "ist" there is –narcissist, racist, marxist, capitalist – and on and on it goes. But he knows that the reason he's doing this is about media truth and justice, and government transparency, and he's grounded in that reality, and that's why he's not so easily shaken.

RC: He is the most fearless individual. I mean he's got the entire Intelligence Community, the Military Community [against him] – not just here in the U.S. but in Britain – even your own government.

What is your own government doing to protect one of their citizens? Under Prime Minister Turnbull?

CA: They've never done anything under any of them! The Labor government under Julia Gillard called what he did illegal and wanted to take his passport away, and she actually said she was quite happy to hand him over to the U.S. and change our extradition laws specifically to make it easier for him to be handed over.

Basically we don't have a real government, we've got a puppet government – it's just a U.S. puppet, and they're constantly auditioning through the US Embassy for a place in the spotlight. Prime Minister Turnbull was an ex-Director of Goldman Sachs Australia. Not sure if you're familiar with the term "government sets"? That's where big US banks put their people in governments around the world.

So basically it would appear that in the Australian political landscape, if you want a promotion, you will swear on your credentials that you're willing to tow the line on Assange.

DB: And finally, we've got Julian's mom here, and I have to end this way – forgive me, Mom, but what are you most proud of in terms of your son? What part of his actions, his work, makes you the most proud as his mom?

CA: That he's standing ethically in truth for justice, with courage. That he's willing to risk his life and his liberty for his fellow man, basically. And that's what he's doing – he's risking his health, his liberty and even his life, because we've heard all the horrible stuff coming out of various commentators: things like "We're gonna shoot the son of a bitch" coming from Bob Beckel, a Democratic strategist.

And all the horrible things that Mike Pompeo said about him being a demon and "an unsafe intelligence actor." And nonsense stuff about him being involved in child pornography from both sides, trying to set him up. I mean most people would have fallen over by now. But I think that because Julian is standing for something that's good and right and correct, I think that's where he derives his strength.

RC: He does have a lot of support, and I've been getting a lot of support from his supporters for this show, on Twitter and social media.

[...] What can people do? What do you recommend people do to help out Julian?

CA: [...] Some of the American supporters have been very busy lately. They've organized the Boycott UK and it's under the hashtag #BoycottUK and also the hashtag #FreeAssangeNOW .

This is a very good idea because we all know that money makes the world go round and in fact some are saying that a lot of the opposition to Julian is from greedy corporations because he exposes things like some of the reasons for war, and some of them profit from defense contracts. They also know that by reducing profits for major corporations, they will lean on government to change their policy. So boycotting big UK businesses until they free Julian – all big businesses that are operating in the UK.

Another California supporter ... has put up a campaign called "5 dollars for 5 years" and that is about how Julian spent five years in the Ecuadorian Embassy giving the truth, fighting for us, for our right to know. How about if we donate five dollars – a dollar for each year that he spent there? And that will go to top up the Julian Assange Defense fund which is at justice4assange.com. And you can donate your five dollars there.

Also on that site there's a lot of information – it's the best site in the world for finding out the facts about what's been happening to Julian Assange for the last seven years. And let me tell you, it reads like The Bourne Conspiracy – what the government's been up to to try to shut my son up is criminal and unbelievable.

So, just in America, just these last few weeks, American citizens have been standing up to fight.

But what you're doing is also incredibly important, Randy. We find that when people are apprised of the facts about Wikileaks, and the facts about Julian, that most come onboard to support him, and some even come onboard as very active supporters. So it's about getting out the facts, because there's an awful lot of propaganda and lies. But once people know the facts they are supportive, so that's also very important that people talk to each other about the facts, find out the facts. And there's a very good FAQ at justice4assange.com.

So getting out the facts is really important, boycotting is very important, and funding Julian and funding Wikileaks is also important. We often feel very alone and powerless in the world at the moment, but we do have two things that we can still do.

One thing is where we spend our consumer dollar. It might only be five dollars, but if a million people donate five dollars, that's really putting Julian and Wikileaks in a strong position to fight.

The other thing is the vote: keep your politician on speed dial and yank his or her chain every so often to remind them that we actually pay their wages, and we expect them to stand up for truth and government accountability, we expect them to not get in bed with corruption, and we are not impressed with them persecuting truth-telling media.

So there are just three things you can do straightaway. And of course you can always form your own Free Assange group – it can be a group of one or two or more. And this is what some ladies have done in America and around the world – nice people who have formed Free Assange groups. They are just ordinary people – they're not actually highly political people, they're often mothers who want to

see the world protected for their children, and they often have no political experience, but a lot of heart and drive and creativity. And they often make the best advocates.

RC: Well, Ms. Christine Assange, I really appreciate you being part of this show. You are welcome back anytime. You are really doing an incredible job on behalf of your son, who is a hero. And I would like to give you the last word. If there's something you want to convey to Julian and his supporters there in London, I'm going to give you the last word.

CA: Well, firstly, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all the supporters around the world who have stood up and fought to protect and defend Wikileaks and Julian. Sometimes you've only done one action, sometimes you've done more – it doesn't matter, you did something.

The people in London at the Ecuadorian Embassy have just been troopers. Both Ecuador and its embassy staff and the people of Ecuador and the people from the Julian Assange Defense Fund and Wise Up Action – those guys who stood outside that embassy, day-in, day-out – in the rain, hail, snow and sun – to support my son and protect him. And at one stage, when they tried to raid the embassy illegally and grab Julian, these people were his protectors. And I would encourage anybody who is visiting London anytime to drop into the embassy and stand outside the embassy and join these historic groups.

Show Julian that you care. Show the powers that be that the people care and they're not going away. Wikileaks, after all, is supplied by the people, with information for the people, for their protection. It's 100% funded by the people, and it's defended and protected by the people, including our lawyers. This is a people's publisher, and it just goes to show you what the people can achieve when they get together. Wikileaks is rocking the halls of power, and they're terrified. And they have come back as bad as IS [Islamic State] terrorists against the truth, but the people are standing firm.

And to my son, I love you, I'm still here, I'm still fighting, I'm incredibly proud of your work. You're a terrific human being, and we're all standing here and we will keep fighting until we get you out of there.

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