

# Steve Bannon's Apocalyptic 'Unravelling'

**From the Archive:** Ousted White House strategist Steve Bannon was a perplexing mix of populist, operative and opportunist, but his political theories crossed into the apocalyptic and bizarre, as Alastair Crooke described last March.

By Alastair Crooke (First published on March 9, 2017)

Steve Bannon is accustomed to start many of his talks to activists and Tea Party gatherings in the following way: "At 11 o'clock on 18 September 2008, Hank Paulson and Ben Bernanke told the U.S. President that they had already stove-piped \$500 billions of liquidity into the financial system during the previous 24 hours – but needed a further one Trillion dollars, *that same day*."

"The pair said that if they did not get it immediately, the U.S. financial system would implode within 72 hours; the world's financial system, within three weeks; and that social unrest and political chaos could ensue within the month." (In the end, Bannon notes, it was more like \$5 trillion that was required, though no one really knows how much, as there has been no accounting for all these trillions).

"We (the U.S.) have", he continues, "in the wake of the bailouts that ensued, liabilities of \$200 trillions, but net assets – including everything – of some \$50-60 trillion." (Recall that Bannon is himself a former Goldman Sachs banker).

"We are upside down; the industrial democracies today have a problem we have never had before; we are over-leveraged (we have to go through a massive de-leveraging); and we have built a welfare state which is completely and totally unsupportable.

"And why this is a crisis ... the problem ... is that the numbers have become so esoteric that even the guys on Wall Street, at Goldman Sachs, the guys I work with, and the Treasury guys ... It's so tough to get this together ... Trillion dollar deficits ... etcetera."

But, Bannon says – in spite of all these esoteric, unimaginable numbers wafting about – the Tea Party women (and it is mainly led by women, he points out) get it. They *know* a different reality: they know what groceries now cost, they know their kids have \$50,000 in college debt, are still living at home, and see no jobs in prospect: "The reason I called the film *Generation Zero* is because this generation, the guys in their 20s and 30s: We've wiped them out."

And it's not just Bannon. A decade earlier, in 2000, Donald Trump was writing in a very similar vein in a pamphlet that marked his first toying with the prospect

of becoming a Presidential candidate: “My third reason for wanting to speak out is that I see not only incredible prosperity ... but also the possibility of economic and social upheaval ... Look towards the future, and if you are like me, you will see storm clouds brewing. Big Trouble. I hope I am wrong, but I think we may be facing an economic crash like we’ve never seen before.”

And before the recent presidential election, Donald Trump kept to this same narrative: the stock market was dangerously inflated. In an interview on CNBC, he said, “I hope I’m wrong, but I think we’re in a big, fat, juicy bubble,” adding that conditions were so perilous that the country was headed for a “very massive recession” and that “if you raise interest rates even a little bit, (everything’s) going to come crashing down.”

### **The Paradox**

And here, precisely, is the paradox: Why – if Trump and Bannon view the economy as already over-leveraged, excess-bubbled, and far too fragile to accommodate even a small interest rate rise – has Trump (in Mike Whitney’s words) “promised ... more treats and less rules for Wall Street ... tax cuts, massive government spending, and fewer regulations ... \$1 trillion in fiscal stimulus to rev up consumer spending and beef up corporate profits ... to slash corporate tax rates and fatten the bottom line for America’s biggest businesses. And he’s going to gut Dodd-Frank, the ‘onerous’ regulations that were put in place following the 2008 financial implosion, to prevent another economy-decimating cataclysm.”

Does President Trump see the world differently, now that he is President? Or has he parted company with Bannon’s vision?

Though Bannon is often credited – though most often, by a hostile press, aiming to present Trump (falsely) as the “accidental President” who never really expected to win – as the intellectual force behind President Trump. In fact, Trump’s current main domestic and foreign policies were all presaged, and entirely present, in Trump’s 2000 pamphlet.

In 2000, Bannon was less political, screenwriter Julia Jones, a long-time Bannon collaborator, notes. “But the Sept. 11 attacks,” Ms. Jones says, “changed him” and their Hollywood collaboration did not survive his growing engagement with politics.

Bannon himself pins his political radicalization to his experience of the 2008 Great Financial Crisis. He detested how his Goldman colleagues mocked the Tea Party’s “forgotten” ones. As Ms. Jones sees it, a more reliable key to Bannon’s worldview lies in his military service.

“He has a respect for duty,” she said in early February. “The word he has used a

lot is 'dharma.'" Mr. Bannon found the concept of dharma in the Bhagavad Gita, she recalls. It can describe one's path in life or one's place in the universe.

There is no evidence, however, that President Trump either has changed his economic views or that he has diverged in his understanding of the nature of the crisis facing America (and Europe).

### Tests Ahead

Both men are very smart. Trump understands business, and Bannon finance. They surely know the headwinds they face: the looming prospect of a wrangle to increase the American \$20 trillion "debt ceiling" (which begins to bite on March 15), amid a factious Republican Party, the improbability of the President's tax or fiscal proposals being enacted quickly, and the likelihood that the Federal Reserve will hike interest rates, "until something breaks." If they are so smart, what then is going on?

What Bannon has brought to the partnership however, is a clear articulation of the nature of this "crisis" in his Generation Zero film, which explicitly is built around the framework of a book called *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, written in 1997 by Neil Howe and William Strauss.

In the words of one of the co-authors, the analysis "rejects the deep premise of modern Western historians that social time is either linear (continuous progress or decline) or chaotic (too complex to reveal any direction). Instead we adopt the insight of nearly all traditional societies: that social time is a recurring cycle in which events become meaningful only to the extent that they are what philosopher Mircea Eliade calls 'reenactments.' In cyclical space, once you strip away the extraneous accidents and technology, you are left with only a limited number of social moods, which tend to recur in a fixed order."

Howe and Strauss write: "The cycle begins with the First Turning, a 'High' which comes after a crisis era. In a High, institutions are strong and individualism is weak. Society is confident about where it wants to go collectively, even if many feel stifled by the prevailing conformity.

"The Second Turning is an 'Awakening,' when institutions are attacked in the name of higher principles and deeper values. Just when society is hitting its high tide of public progress, people suddenly tire of all the social discipline and want to recapture a sense of personal authenticity.

"The Third Turning is an 'Unravelling,' in many ways the opposite of the High. Institutions are weak and distrusted, while individualism is strong and flourishing.

“Finally, the Fourth Turning is a ‘Crisis’ period. This is when our institutional life is reconstructed from the ground up, always in response to a perceived threat to the nation’s very survival. *If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action.* Civic authority revives, and people and groups begin to pitch in as participants in a larger community. As these Promethean bursts of civic effort reach their resolution, Fourth Turnings refresh and redefine our national identity.” (Emphasis added).

### **Woodstock Generation**

Bannon’s film focuses principally on the causes of the 2008 financial crisis, and on the “ideas” that arose amongst the “Woodstock generation” (the Woodstock musical festival occurred in 1969), that permeated, in one way or another, throughout American and European society.

The narrator calls the Woodstock generation the “Children of Plenty.” It was a point of inflection: a second turning “Awakening”; a discontinuity in culture and values. The older generation (that is, anyone over 30) was viewed as having nothing to say, nor any experience to contribute. It was the elevation of the “pleasure principle” (as a “new” phenomenon, as “their” discovery), over the puritan ethic; It celebrated doing one’s own thing; it was about “Self” and narcissism.

The “Unravelling” followed in the form of government and institutional weakness: the “system” lacked the courage to take difficult decisions. The easy choices invariably were taken: the élites absorbed the self-centered, spoilt-child, ethos of the “me” generation. The 1980s and 1990s become the era of “casino capitalism” and the “Davos man.”

The lavish taxpayer bailouts of the U.S. banks after the Mexican, Russian, Asian and Argentinian defaults and crises washed away the bankers’ costly mistakes. The 2004 Bear Stearns exemption which allowed the big five banks to leverage their lending above 12:1 – and, which quickly extended to become 25:1, 30:1 and even 40:1 – permitted the irresponsible risk-taking and the billions in profit-making. The “Dot Com” bubble was accommodated by monetary policy – and then the massive 2008 bailouts accommodated the banks, yet again.

The “Unravelling” was essentially a cultural failure: a failure of responsibility, of courage to face hard choices – it was, in short, the film suggests, an era of spoilt institutions, compromised politicians and irresponsible Wall Streeters – the incumbent class – *indulging themselves, and “abdicating responsibility.”*

Now we have entered the “Fourth Turning”: “All the easy choices are back of us.” The “system” still lacks courage. Bannon says this period will be the “nastiest, ugliest in history.” It will be brutal, and “we” (by which he means the Trump Tea Party activists) will be “vilified.” This phase may last 15 – 20 years, he predicts.

### **Greek Tragedy**

The key to this Fourth Turning is “character.” It is about values. What Bannon means by “our crisis” is perhaps best expressed when the narrator says: “the essence of Greek tragedy is that it is not like a traffic accident, where somebody dies [i.e. the great financial crises didn’t just arise by mischance].

The Greek sense is that tragedy is where something happens because it has to happen, because of the nature of the participants. Because the people involved, make it happen. And they have no choice to make it happen, because that’s their nature.”

This is the deeper implication of what transpired from Woodstock: the nature of people changed. The “pleasure principle,” the narcissism, had displaced the “higher” values that had made America what it was. The generation that believed that there was “no risk, no mountain they could not climb” brought this crisis upon themselves. They wiped out 200 years of financial responsibility in about 20 years. This, it appears, captures the essence of Bannon’s thinking.

That is where we *are*, Bannon asserts: Stark winter inevitably follows, after a warm, lazy summer. It becomes a time of testing, of adversity. Each season in nature has its vital function. Fourth turnings are necessary: they a part of the cycle of renewal.

Bannon’s film concludes with author Howe declaring: “history is seasonal and winter is coming,”

And, what is the immediate political message? It is simple, the narrator of Bannon’s film says: “STOP”: stop doing what you were doing. Stop spending like before. Stop taking on spending commitments that cannot be afforded. Stop mortgaging your children’s future with debt. Stop trying to manipulate the banking system. It is a time for tough thinking, for saying “no” to bailouts, for changing the culture, and re-constructing institutional life.

### **Cultural Legacy**

And how do you re-construct civic life? You look to those who still possess a sense of duty and responsibility – who have retained a cultural legacy of values. It is noticeable that when Bannon addresses the activists, almost the

first thing he does is to salute the veterans and serving officers, and praise their qualities, their sense of duty.

It is no surprise then that President Trump wants to increase both the veterans' and the military's budget. It is not so much a portent of U.S. military belligerence, but more that he sees them as warriors for the coming "winter" of testing and adversity. Then, and only then does Bannon speak to the "thin blue line" of activists who still have strength of character, a sense of responsibility, of duty. He tells them that the future rests in their hands, alone.

Does this sound like men – Bannon and Trump – who want to ramp up a fresh financial bubble, to indulge the Wall Street casino (in their words)? No? So, what is going on?

They know "the crisis" is coming. Let us recall what Neil Howe wrote in the *Washington Post* concerning the "Fourth Turning":

"This is when our institutional life is reconstructed from the ground up, always in response to a perceived threat to the nation's very survival. If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action. Civic authority revives, and people and groups begin to pitch in as participants in a larger community. As these Promethean bursts of civic effort reach their resolution, Fourth Turnings refresh and redefine our national identity."

Trump has no need to "fabricate" a financial crisis. It will happen "because it has to happen, because of the nature of the participants (in the current 'system'). Because the people involved, make it happen. And they have no choice to make it happen, because that's their nature."

It is not even President Obama's or Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson's *fault*, per se. They are just who they are.

Trump and Bannon therefore are *not* likely trying to ignite the "animal spirits" of the players in the financial "casino" (as many in the financial sphere seem to assume). If Bannon's film and Trump's articulation of crisis mean anything, it is that their aim is to ignite the "animal spirits" of "the working-class casualties and those forgotten Americans" of the Midwest, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

At that point, they hope that the "thin blue line" of activists will "pitch in" with a Promethean burst of civic effort which will reconstruct America's institutional and economic life.

If this is so, the Trump/Bannon vision both is audacious – and quite an extraordinary gamble ...

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## Russia-gate's Evidentiary Void

**Exclusive:** A cyber-warfare expert sees no technical evidence linking Russia to the Democratic email releases, but The New York Times presses ahead with a new hope that Ukraine can fill the void, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times' unrelenting anti-Russia bias would be almost comical if the possible outcome were not a nuclear conflagration and maybe the end of life on planet Earth.

A classic example of the Times' one-sided coverage was a front-page [article](#) on Thursday expressing the wistful hope that a Ukrainian hacker whose malware was linked to the release of Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails in 2016 could somehow "blow the whistle on Russian hacking."

Though full of airy suspicions and often reading like a conspiracy theory, the article by Andrew E. Kramer and Andrew Higgins contained one important admission (buried deep inside the "jump" on page A8 in my print edition), a startling revelation especially for those Americans who have accepted the Russia-did-it groupthink as an established fact.

The article quoted Jeffrey Carr, the author of a book on cyber-warfare, referring to a different reality: that the Russia-gate "certainties" blaming the DNC "hack" on Russia's GRU military intelligence service or Russia's FSB security agency lack a solid evidentiary foundation.

"There is not now and never has been a single piece of technical evidence produced that connects the malware used in the DNC attack to the GRU, FSB or any agency of the Russian government," Carr said.

Yet, before that remarkable admission had a chance to sink into the brains of Times' readers whose thinking has been fattened up on a steady diet of treating the "Russian hack" as flat fact, Times' editors quickly added that "United

States intelligence agencies, however, have been unequivocal in pointing a finger at Russia.”

The Times’ rebuke toward any doubts about Russia-gate was inserted after Carr’s remark although the Times had already declared several times on page 1 that there was really no doubt about Russia’s guilt.

“American intelligence agencies have determined Russian hackers were behind the electronic break-in of the Democratic national Committee,” the Times reported, followed by the assertion that the hacker’s “malware apparently did” get used by Moscow and then another reminder that “Washington is convinced [that the hacking operation] was orchestrated by Moscow.”

By repeating the same point on the inside page, the Times editors seemed to be saying that any deviant views on this subject must be slapped down promptly and decisively.

### **A Flimsy Assessment**

But that gets us back to the problem with the Jan. 6 “Intelligence Community Assessment,” which – contrary to repeated Times’ claims – was not the “consensus” view of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies, but rather the work of a small group of “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies: the Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation and National Security Agency. And, they operated under the watchful eye of President Obama’s political appointees, CIA Director John Brennan and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, who was the one who called them “hand-picked.”

Those analysts presented no real evidence to support their assessment, which they acknowledged was not a determination of fact, but rather what amounted to their best guess based on what they perceived to be Russian motives and capabilities.

The Jan. 6 assessment admitted as much, saying its “judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Much of the unclassified version of the report lambasted Russia’s international TV network RT for such offenses as hosting a 2012 presidential debate for third-party candidates excluded from the Republican-Democratic debate, covering the Occupy Wall Street protests, and reporting on dangers from “fracking.” The assessment described those editorial decisions as assaults on American democracy.



But rather than acknowledge the thinness of the Jan. 6 report, the Times – like other mainstream news outlets – treated it as gospel and pretended that it represented a “consensus” of all 17 intelligence agencies even though it clearly never did. (Belatedly, the Times slipped in a correction to that falsehood in one article although continuing to use similar language in subsequent stories so an unsuspecting Times reader would not be aware of how shaky the Russia-gate foundation is.)

Russian President Vladimir Putin and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange have denied repeatedly that the Russian government was the source of the two batches of Democratic emails released via WikiLeaks in 2016, a point that the Times also frequently fails to acknowledge. (This is not to say that Putin and Assange are telling the truth, but it is a journalistic principle to include relevant denials from parties facing accusations.)

### **Conspiracy Mongering**

The rest of Thursday’s Times article veered from the incomprehensible to the bizarre, as the Times reported that the hacker, known only as “Profexer,” is cooperating with F.B.I. agents inside Ukraine.

Yet, the reliance on Ukraine to provide evidence against Russia defies any objective investigative standards. The Ukrainian government is fiercely anti-Russian and views itself as engaged in an “information war” with Putin and his government.

Ukraine’s SBU security service also has been implicated in possible torture, according to United Nations investigators who were denied access to Ukrainian government detention facilities housing ethnic Russian Ukrainians who resisted the violent coup in February 2014, which was spearheaded by neo-Nazis and other extreme nationalists and overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich.

The SBU also has been the driving force behind the supposedly “Dutch-led” investigation into the July 17, 2014 shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17. That inquiry has ignored evidence that a rogue Ukrainian force may have been responsible – not even addressing a Dutch/NATO intelligence report stating that all anti-aircraft missile batteries in eastern Ukraine on that day were under the control of the Ukrainian military – and instead tried to pin the atrocity on Russia, albeit with no suspects yet charged.

In Thursday’s article, the Times unintentionally reveals how fuzzy the case against “Fancy Bear” and “Cozy Bear” – the two alleged Russian government hacking operations – is.

The Times reports: “Rather than training, arming and deploying hackers to carry

out a specific mission like just another military unit, Fancy Bear and its twin Cozy Bear have operated more as centers for organization and financing; much of the hard work like coding is outsourced to private and often crime-tainted vendors.”

Further, under the dramatic subhead – “A Bear’s Lair” – the Times reported that no such lair may exist: “Tracking the bear to its lair ... has so far proved impossible, not least because many experts believe that no such single place exists.”

### **Lacking Witnesses**

The Times’ article also noted the “absence of reliable witnesses” to resolve the mystery – so to the rescue came the “reliable” regime in Kiev, or as the Times wrote: “emerging from Ukraine is a sharper picture of what the United States believes is a Russian government hacking group.”

The Times then cited various cases of exposed Ukrainian government emails, again blaming the Russians albeit without any real evidence.

The Times suggested some connection between the alleged Russian hackers and a mistaken report on Russia’s Channel 1 about a Ukrainian election, which the Times claimed “inadvertently implicated the government authorities in Moscow.”

The Times’ “proof” in this case was that some hacker dummied a phony Internet page to look like an official Ukrainian election graphic showing a victory by ultra-right candidate, Dmytro Yarosh, when in fact Yarosh polled less than 1 percent. The hacker supposedly sent this “spoof” graphic to Channel 1, which used it.

But such an embarrassing error, which would have no effect on the actual election results, suggests an effort to discredit Channel 1 rather than evidence of a cooperative relationship between the mysterious hacker and the Russian station. The Times, however, made this example a cornerstone in its case against the Russians.

Meanwhile, the Times offered its readers almost no cautionary advice that – in the case of Russia-gate – Ukraine would have every motive to send U.S. investigators in directions harmful to Russia, much as happened with the MH-17 investigation.

So, we can expect that whatever “evidence” Ukraine “uncovers” will be accepted as gospel truth by the Times and much of the U.S. government – and anyone who dares ask inconvenient questions about its reliability will be deemed a “Kremlin stooge” spreading “Russian propaganda.”

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

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## The Goal of 'Not Losing' in Afghanistan

**Exclusive:** America's adventures in Afghanistan – dating back to the 1980s – have led to one disaster after another with President Trump and other politicians afraid to finally admit failure, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

“Let's get out of Afghanistan. Our troops are being killed by the Afghans we train and we waste billions there. Nonsense!” – [Donald Trump](#), January 11, 2013

Taking a break from his defense of the “[very fine people](#)” who marched with Nazis in Charlottesville, President Trump will reportedly meet with his national security team today (Friday, August 18) at Camp David to discuss a far deadlier but ironically less controversial issue: the war in Afghanistan.

That war, the longest in our history, has [cost the United States](#) more than 2,350 killed, 20,000 injured, and a trillion dollars. Yet unlike Charlottesville, it arouses little passion. It gained impeccably bipartisan credentials through successive Republican and Democratic administrations. Although [a huge majority](#) of Americans today oppose the war, they lack sufficient conviction to prevent Congress from continuing to appropriate tens of billions of dollars each year to fund it.

Trump is in a bind. As [Taliban forces continue to rack up military and political gains](#) across their country, no serious expert can possibly believe that continued U.S. intervention will deliver “victory.” Sixteen years of experience show that almost every U.S. tactic has not only failed, but backfired.

Far from winning hearts and minds, nighttime Special Forces raids and bombing runs have turned countless villagers against the Afghan government and its foreign backers. Far from bolstering Kabul's resources, tens of billions of dollars in U.S. aid created an epidemic of corruption that decimated the government's credibility and put money and [weapons in the hands of the Taliban](#).

Far from defeating Islamist tyranny, the United States has [empowered](#) viciously

cruel warlords. Far from promoting law and order, U.S. anti-drug campaigns turned poppy-growing peasants into allies and funders of the Taliban. And far from closing off Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan, Washington's surly relations with Islamabad have amplified dangerous anti-American sentiments in that nuclear-armed, Islamic state.

### **A Parallel Disaster**

"It is most disturbing to find that after [many] years [the country] appears less, not more, stable than it was at the outset," said one prominent U.S. senator. "It appears more removed from, rather than closer to, the achievement of popularly responsible and responsive government."

That was actually the observation of Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, D-Montana, reporting on a study mission to Vietnam in the fall of 1962. It applies just as well to Afghanistan today.

Yet as Trump's national security experts huddle with the President, most are almost certainly advocating an increased troop commitment to Afghanistan – not to bear the brunt of the fighting, but ostensibly to train government forces to stand on their own. That, of course, was the mission of U.S. military advisers sent to Vietnam in the early 1960s, before that war ballooned into a national disaster.

Trump's generals – McMaster, Mattis and Kelly – know this history as well as anyone. (H. R. McMaster's book, *Dereliction of Duty*, is considered a classic history of failed military leadership in the Vietnam War.) So does John McCain, the Senate's most famous Vietnam veteran, who nonetheless insists on doing whatever it takes to "turn the tide" in Afghanistan. So why do they – like Obama's team before them – keep calling for throwing away more lives and money on a lost cause?

The answer to that also lies in Vietnam. As former Defense Department official and Pentagon Papers leaker Daniel Ellsberg argued in a seminal 1971 essay, "The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine," U.S. leaders knew full well, every step of the way, that their successive escalations of that war would not bring victory. Instead, their goal was to prevent defeat – and with it, a repetition of the political traumas that followed the "loss of China" and the rise of McCarthyism in the early 1950s.

"If I tried to pull out completely now, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands," President John F. Kennedy told Sen. Mansfield in 1963. The assassination of Kennedy that November precluded any possibility that he would pull out after his reelection. Two days later, President Lyndon Johnson told a

White House meeting, “I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not going to be the president who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.”

### **The Cost of ‘Not Losing’**

Forty-six years later, a *Washington Post* story on America’s longest war reports, “talk of ‘winning’ is scarce. The goal now seems more akin to ‘not losing.’” Pundits like former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta now talk of staying in Afghanistan for decades. It’s a replay of the Vietnam stalemate – but with more manageable costs, little TV coverage, and no mass anti-war demonstrations.

Most Washington leaders hardly know or care whether any U.S. “national interests” are actually at stake in Afghanistan. But they view the political risks of pulling out as worse than the risks of keeping the stalemate going. They don’t dare face charges that they allowed Afghanistan to become once again a haven for terrorists. No matter that Islamist jihadists operate just fine today without bases in Afghanistan – in our post-reality world, what counts are not the facts, but what fire-breathing analysts on Fox News will say about any apparent retreat.

No one knows what would happen if the United States were to pull out of Afghanistan. But if the Vietnam analogy holds, the consequences, though not pretty, would surely be less disastrous than many pundits predict. It’s hard to dispute the (admittedly self-serving) words of one Taliban spokesman, who said a U.S. withdrawal “will prevent further loss of its manpower and economy . . . This will be a means of salvage for us Afghans, too. . . Therefore, if America’s occupation comes to an end, it means that the problem between the two nations will end, too.”

Donald Trump, who had no trouble advising President Obama to quit the war, has reportedly ruled out a withdrawal from Afghanistan and complained to his military advisers that they aren’t giving him a strategy to win. If those reports are correct, he will forfeit his last opportunity to blame the war on his predecessor and cut his losses.

Senator McCain had it partly right when he said in July, “Eight [try 16] years of a ‘don’t lose’ strategy have cost us lives and treasure in Afghanistan. Our troops deserve better.”

So do American taxpayers – and Afghan civilians. Unfortunately, McCain, like most members of the Washington foreign policy “blob,” can only envision further military escalation to maintain the stalemate. What the United States desperately needs now is a mass movement to resist not only racism and plutocracy at home, but endless militarism abroad.

## Refusing to Learn Lessons from Libya

**Exclusive:** Official Washington never likes to admit a mistake no matter how grave or obvious. Too many Important People would look bad. So, the rationalizations never stop as with the Libyan fiasco, observes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

In recent weeks, the *Washington Post's* Cairo bureau chief Sudarsan Raghavan has published a series of remarkable dispatches from war-torn Libya, which is still reeling from the aftermath of NATO's March 2011 intervention and the subsequent overthrow and murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

On July 2, Raghavan reported on what amounts to Libya's modern-day slave trade. According to his report, Libya is "now home to a thriving trade in humans. Unable to pay exorbitant smuggling fees or swindled by traffickers, some of the world's most desperate people are being held as slaves, tortured or forced into prostitution."

The numbers help tell the tale. "The number of migrants departing from Libya is surging," writes Raghavan, "with more than 70,000 arriving in Italy so far this year, a 28 percent increase over the same period last year."

On August 1, Raghavan returned to the pages of the *Post* with a disturbing portrait of life in Tripoli, reporting that: "Six years after the revolution that toppled dictator Moammar Gaddafi, the mood in this volatile capital is a meld of hopelessness and gloom. Diplomatic and military efforts by the United States and its allies have failed to stabilize the nation; the denouement of the crisis remains far from clear. Most Libyans sense that the worst is yet to come."

Raghavan notes that "Under Gaddafi, the oil-producing country was once one of the world's wealthiest nations." Under his rule, "Libyans enjoyed free health care, education and other benefits under the eccentric strongman's brand of socialism." It would be difficult not to see, Raghavan writes, "the insecurity that followed Gaddafi's death has ripped apart the North African country."

Taken together, Raghavan's reports should come as a rude shock to stalwart supporters of NATO's intervention in Libya. Yet the embarrassing fervor with

which many embraced the intervention remains largely undiminished – with, as we will see, one notable exception.

### **An Upside-Down Meritocracy**

Anne Marie Slaughter, who served as policy planning chief at the State Department under Hillary Clinton, emailed her former boss after the start of the NATO operation, to say: “I cannot imagine how exhausted you must be after this week, but I have never been prouder of having worked for you.”

Five months after the start of NATO operation against Gaddafi, Slaughter went public with her approval in an op-ed for the *Financial Times* titled “Why Libya Skeptics Were Proved Badly Wrong.” Proving, if nothing else, that the foreign policy establishment is a reverse meritocracy, Slaughter holds an endowed chair at Princeton and is also the well-compensated president of the influential Washington think tank New America.

President Obama’s decision to intervene received wide bipartisan support in the Congress and from media figures across the political spectrum, including Bill O’Reilly and Cenk Uyghur.

Yet the *casus belli* used to justify the intervention, as a U.K. parliamentary report made clear last September, was based on a lie: that the people of the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi were in imminent danger of being slaughtered by Gaddafi’s forces.

The report, issued by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, states that “Despite his rhetoric, the proposition that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered the massacre of civilians in Benghazi was not supported by the available evidence.”

The report also noted that while “Many Western policymakers genuinely believed that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered his troops to massacre civilians in Benghazi ... this did not necessarily translate into a threat to everyone in Benghazi. In short, the scale of the threat to civilians was presented with unjustified certainty. US intelligence officials reportedly described the intervention as ‘an intelligence-light decision.’”

Even as it became clear that the revolution had proved to be a disaster for the country, the arbiters of acceptable opinion in Washington continued to insist that NATO’s intervention was not only a success, but the right thing to do. It is a myth that has gained wide purchase among D.C.’s foreign policy cognoscenti, despite the judgment of former President Barack Obama, who famously described the intervention as “a shit show.”

## Still Spinning

A full year after the commencement of NATO's campaign against Gaddafi, former NATO Ambassador Ivo Daalder and NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stravidis took to the pages of that reliable bellwether of establishment opinion, *Foreign Affairs*, to declare that "NATO's operation in Libya has rightly been hailed as a model intervention."

According to Daalder and Stravidis, "the alliance responded rapidly to a deteriorating situation that threatened hundreds of thousands of civilians rebelling against an oppressive regime."

In 2016, a Clinton campaign press release justifying the ill-starred intervention, claimed "Qadhafi and his regime made perfectly clear what their plans were for dealing with those who stood up against his reign, using disgusting language in urging his backers to cleanse the country of these rebels. This was a humanitarian crisis."

Astonishingly, the campaign "Factsheet" goes on to assert that, "there was no doubt that further atrocities were on the way, as Qadhafi's forces storming towards the county's second biggest city." Yet there is, as both the U.K. parliamentary report and a Harvard study by Alan J. Kuperman found, no evidence for this whatsoever.

"Qaddafi did not perpetrate a 'bloodbath' in any of the cities that his forces recaptured from rebels prior to NATO intervention – including Ajdabiya, Bani Walid, Brega, Ras Lanuf, Zawiya, and much of Misurata – so there was," writes Kuperman, "virtually no risk of such an outcome if he had been permitted to recapture the last rebel stronghold of Benghazi."

Nevertheless, the myth persists. Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Shadi Hamid, the author of *Islamic Exceptionalism*, continues to insist, against all evidence, that the intervention was a success.

"The Libya intervention was successful," says Hamid, "The country is better off today than it would have been had the international community allowed dictator Muammar Qaddafi to continue his rampage across the country."

In this, Hamid is hardly alone. Left-activists in thrall to a Trotskyite vision of permanent revolution also continue to make the case that NATO's intervention was a net positive for the country.

In a recent interview with *In These Times*, Leila Al-Shami claimed that "If Gaddafi had not fallen, Libya now would look very much like Syria. In reality, the situation in Libya is a million times better. Syrian refugees are fleeing to



Libya. Far fewer people have been killed in Libya since Gaddafi's falling than in Syria. Gaddafi being ousted was a success for the Libyan people."

That danger in all this is that by refusing to learn the lessons of Libya (and Kosovo and Iraq and Syria) the U.S. foreign policy establishment will likely continue to find itself backing forces that seek to turn the greater Middle East into a fundamentalist Sunnistan, ruled by Sharia law, utterly hostile to religious pluralism, the rights of women, minorities and, naturally, U.S. national security interests in the region.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Hillary Clinton's Failed Libya 'Doctrine.'](#)"]

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## The Agony of 'Regime Change' Refugees

**Exclusive:** There are positive signs of [Syrians returning to Aleppo](#) after the ouster of Al Qaeda's militants. But the legacy of Western "regime change" wars continues to plague Europe and inflict human suffering, writes Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

European nations have been thrown into a political crisis by the hundreds of thousands of migrants coming north from the Middle East and Africa. The number has grown in recent years, due to a mix of wars and poverty, resulting in a visible increase of the influx of foreigners across Europe, and a popular backlash that has political institutions scrambling to find a way to stem the flow and lessen the sense of emergency.

The problem is that the causes of the mass migration have deep roots that cannot be solved in the short-term; and even a medium- to long-term solution will require serious changes in foreign and economic policy for the entire Western world.

In September 2015, as the number of refugees from Syria increased due to the ongoing military conflict there, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a surprising announcement. Going against the grain of public opinion, in which

anti-immigrant sentiment seemed to be rising rapidly, Merkel announced that her country would open its doors and accept hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers. Germany already has a large number of recent immigrants among its population, and the view was that a wealthy country with a population of over 80 million could certainly do its part to deal with the humanitarian crisis enveloping the Middle East.

The open attitude didn't last long. In March 2016, Germany played a key role in reaching a deal with President Erdogan of Turkey, who in exchange for billions of euros, essentially closed the land route towards Europe through the Balkans. As a result, only the sea routes remained, with departures principally from Turkey, Egypt and Libya, making Greece and Italy the primary entry points to Europe. The routes have been further reduced over the past year, with the vast majority of departures currently originating in Libya.

### **Italy at Forefront**

This has meant that in 2017 over 85 percent of total migrants headed towards Europe have arrived in Italy, a country that has led efforts to rescue people risking death in the Mediterranean in recent years. There have been ongoing negotiations with other European nations to relocate the migrants that are taken to Italian ports and lessen the burden on the country of entry, but the number of migrants relocated has been only a small portion of those that arrive.

As a result Italy, which is not particularly efficient in managing the new arrivals despite making significant strides in recent years, feels left alone to deal with a crisis that is straining its resources. One of the side effects is a palpable shift in public attitudes in this Catholic country, from openness to help those in need, to a feeling that the situation is out of control and that the identity of Europe is under threat from the constant influx of migrants from different cultures.

The Italian government is attempting to find a technical solution to reduce the flow across the sea, which includes negotiations with the various factions in Libya, a new code of conduct for NGOs working in the area, and tightening the rules for bringing migrants to Italian ports.

All of these measures address only the last link in the chain of migration from the Middle East and Africa though, and even if they were to succeed, would only block the flow from Libya – where migrants suffer horrendous conditions, including torture – while human traffickers would seek new routes to get around the obstacles put up by European governments.

### **The Larger Issue**

The deeper problem to address is the causes of the migrant crisis. This requires taking a step backwards, to understand how the current situation was created. The first issue is that of Libya itself, a country without any effective centralized control, ruled over by rival factions that are unable or unwilling to stop the numerous human trafficking networks from taking money from desperate migrants and putting them on rafts pointed towards Italy, where they will either be rescued by naval forces or NGOs, or die along the way.

The prime responsibility for the Libyan chaos lies in Paris, London and Washington. The goal of overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi had been present for decades in Western capitals, but it was not until 2011 – under the cover of the “Arab Spring” – that the French government in particular began to organize the effort to overthrow him, and gain economic and strategic advantages for itself in Northern Africa as a result.

The French had already prepared the attack as they encouraged U.S. President Barack Obama to join the “humanitarian” war that was intended to save the opposition from being massacred by Gaddafi. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton headed up the pro-intervention faction in the Obama Administration to the point that the Libyan campaign became known to many as “Hillary’s War.”

Upon learning of Gaddafi’s brutal murder, Clinton paraphrased Julius Caesar declaring: “We came, we saw, he died.” The result though, rather than being a triumph of democracy, has been a descent into chaos, that among other things has allowed the country to become a key gathering point for terrorist groups such as ISIS.

### **‘Regime Change’ Chaos**

The Libyan chaos, the most immediate hindrance to stopping the flow of migrants to Europe at this moment, leads to the larger issue of Western policy regarding terrorism and the Middle East in general. The series of “regime change” wars in recent years have reflected the goal of using terrorist networks for the West’s strategic advantage, while ignoring the long-term effects of this tactic. The support for the Mujahidin in Afghanistan in the 1980s, in an attempt to weaken the Soviet Union, led directly to the rise of Osama bin-Laden and Al Qaeda in the 1990s.

The financial backing given to Sunni extremism, provided in particular by allies such as Saudi Arabia, spawned the terrorist groups that today target the West. From the war in Iraq to support for the most extreme anti-Assad groups in Syria, the United States and other Western powers have had a major hand in creating the very problem they are scrambling to deal with today.

The Obama Administration began a timid shift away from “regime change,” with the decision not to bomb Syria in 2013, and rather to seek cooperation with Russia. The attempt to rebalance U.S. interests in the Middle East was also reflected in the nuclear deal reached with Iran. The effort ultimately proved to be too little, too late though, as large sections of the institutions resisted the shift and Obama himself essentially ran out of time; by the end of his term he had succumbed to the pressure to maintain a hostile position towards Russia, and failed to define a new strategic orientation towards the Middle East.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly criticized the policies of regime change and is moving forward on cooperation with Russia in Syria, despite the bombing of a Syrian air base in April in response to dubious claims of a chemical weapons attack by the Syrian government. Yet he has also toed the traditional pro-Saudi, anti-Iran line in the Middle East in general, making it seem doubtful that he is willing, or even able, to actually change U.S. policy in the region. As of now, the conflicts are far from being over, and from this perspective, it becomes clear that no short-term solutions are on the horizon.

An even broader issue is that of development, as economic conditions are once again overtaking political unrest as the main driver of migration. There has been talk recently of a European Plan for Africa, to spur economic development and remove the root causes that drive people to leave their homes and families despite the potential dangers. The reality though, is that the discussion still revolves around the type of limited initiatives that are all too similar to the programs of the International Monetary Fund, focused on improving the climate for private investment and other “structural reforms.”

Some of the goals may be laudable, but the approach is a far cry from that of the Marshall Plan for Europe after World War II – which is often thrown around as a precedent when new plans are announced – that involved large amounts of public investment in rebuilding industrial capacity.

On this front as well, Western nations seem unable to recognize their own mistakes and contribution to the poverty in Africa that is driving a decades-long humanitarian crisis, that has now become an urgent political crisis for much of Europe as well.

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# Taking Nuclear War Seriously

With remarkably little public debate, the U.S. government has raised the risk of a nuclear conflagration with face-offs against Russia and now North Korea, an existential issue that Dennis J Bernstein discusses with journalist John Pilger.

Dennis J Bernstein

Emmy-Award winning filmmaker John Pilger's latest film, *The Coming War on China*, deals directly with the new projection of U.S. power into Asia, as well as the toll U.S. aggression has already taken on the people of the region.

Pilger started his career as a war correspondent in Vietnam and has been a strong critic of U.S. aggression in Asia ever since as he twice won Britain's Journalist of the Year Award. I spoke to Pilger on August 8 about the dangers from the current face-off between the U.S. and North Korea.

Dennis Bernstein: John Pilger, your new piece is called "On the Beach 2017: The Beckoning of Nuclear War." Could you give a little context to that title?

John Pilger: I read Nevil Shute's novel *On the Beach* for the first time recently. It came out in 1959 and is about the aftermath of nuclear war. Actually, it isn't about war as such. It is about a great silence. At the front of the book, Shute quotes T.S. Eliot, who wrote "When it happens it will be not with a bang but with a whimper." The novel is about the last US warship to survive, a submarine. The rest have all gone. The northern hemisphere is completely radioactive. The submarine heads south to Australia but is being followed by this closing blind of radioactivity. It is about a community in Australia that attempts to come to grips with the fact that the radioactivity is coming and will be there by September and that will be the end.

It is an astonishingly moving book, and I happened to read it just as the US Congress nearly unanimously voted in favor of sanctions against Russia—in effect, for an economic war with Russia. These sanctions are so provocative, so unjustified, so wrongheaded. There is a cynical side to them because they are really directed against Europe, against Germany, which is dependent upon Russian natural gas.

But these sanctions really are a declaration of war on the second biggest nuclear power in the world. In Shute's novel, the characters are unsure of how the war started, they think it was a mistake or accident and that the US, Russia and China were involved. Everyone is very unclear about what ended life on the planet.

The prospect of nuclear war is still a great abstraction. It is beyond most people's imagination. But our imagination had better catch up pretty soon, when we see outrageous provocation such as this from the US Congress. These sanctions include the end of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Weapons Treaty signed by Reagan and Gorbachev, which marked the end of the Cold War. Bush II knocked out most of the treaties with Russia. This was a very important one and there you find it, buried in the sanctions. It is gone.

DB: Trump was clearly not in favor of these sanctions. While many want to believe that the reason he wouldn't support these sanctions is because of his business ties with Russia, these business connections seem like our last hope for detente.

JP: This requires some thinking on the part of people. I am sorry if this sounds patronizing but people have just got to give up some of their beloved assumptions. The obsession with Trump is understandable.

Trump is an odious human being, we know that. But there is only one thing he has really been consistent about and that is not wanting a war with Russia. He almost parallels Ronald Reagan in that. In the end, Reagan didn't want to have war with Russia. This legislation absolutely ends the prospects for peace.

DB: We now have Washington pundits telling us that we have to think about a first strike against North Korea before they strike us.

JP: Once you have a first strike, that's it. This THAAD system in South Korea is so dangerous because it invites the Chinese to strike it so that it doesn't happen to them when they try to respond. There is a kind of sleepwalking element to all of this. I am not an alarmist person but I am very alert to something like this.

In my film *The Coming War on China*, we have the testimony of a member of a US Air Force missile crew based on Okinawa during the time of the Cuban missile crisis. He and his crew were given orders to fire their nuclear-tipped missiles. Fortunately, a very acute junior officer refused to follow the order, but that is how close it got in 1962. There have been other incidents since. Now we are pretty well back to something like that. Perhaps not on a day-to-day basis but on a more insidious basis.

DB: You write in your latest piece ("On the Beach 2017: The Beckoning of Nuclear War"): "They have encircled Russia and China with missiles and a nuclear arsenal. They have used neo-Nazis to install an unstable, aggressive regime on Russia's borderland [Ukraine], through which Hitler invaded Russia and caused the death of some 27 million people. Their goal is to dismember the modern

Russian Federation.” How do you see this moving forward?

JP: This was illustrated quite clearly during the immediate post-Soviet years, when we were subverting and seeking to control Russia. The effect on Russia was dramatic. The fabric of the old Soviet Union was torn up, in a way similar to how the Chicago Boys went into Chile. It makes the whole question of the Russians interfering in the US election so absurd. It was quite clear during that period that the aim was to divide and control Russia. That is always the aim of imperial states.

Vladimir Putin has incurred the wrath of our “betters” in the West basically because he made Russia independent again. That has been his great crime, actually. That is the test for countries that become enemies. The reason we are getting so much media coverage of Venezuela is that they are independent. I make this general point to explain why I think that the goal here is to divide. But we are talking about Russia here, not Venezuela. We are talking about the second most lethal nuclear power on earth. China was cut up into many pieces during what they still refer to as “the century of humiliation.” The Chinese have no intention of allowing this to be repeated.

DB: One of the most chilling parts of your piece is when you quote the admiral commanding the US Pacific fleet who said that, if required, he would nuke China.

JP: Two-thirds of US naval forces are now in the Pacific as part of the so-called Asian Pivot that President Obama initiated. He was speaking in Australia, where US forces had just completed a huge military exercise. One of the features of this exercise was to rehearse blocking the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea, through which most of China’s trade passes. The fact that this senior admiral would say such a thing publically at this very tense moment in time is pretty breathtaking.

The lie that Hiroshima was nuked in order to end the war was demonstrated by the dropping of the second bomb on Nagasaki. The bombings were both experimental and they were a very clear warning to the Soviet Union not to enter Japan at the end of the war. They were the first terrible shots of the Cold War.

DB: They were obviously testing these new weapons. One was plutonium and the other uranium. There is still a battle over the incredible amount of footage that was taken by the US to document the effects of these two bombs. These were clearly testing grounds.

JP: Interestingly, most of the actual footage taken by the US itself was not released until 1968. But a great deal of the archive footage of Hiroshima and especially Nagasaki has never been released.

People in power seem to have a kind of weird fascination with nuclear weapons, partly because of their apocalyptic nature. Sometimes when you hear a higher-up in the military open his mouth the way the admiral did the other day, you realize that these people do exist.

DB: What makes me really nervous is that Obama oversaw the largest weapons build-up ever and they are always looking for a war to test these weapons out.

JP: Yes, and Obama was awarded the Nobel Prize in part because he said that he was committed to getting rid of nuclear weapons. In fact, the Obama administration has committed the United States to spending about a trillion dollars over the next ten years developing nuclear weapons.

DB: Any final comments, John?

JP: To progressives, I would just say, politics isn't a game. It isn't just about oneself, it is about all of us. Whatever issues you think are important, to yourself or your group in isolation, in the end we have to think beyond that. We have to think in a communal way. These sanctions that Congress has pushed through without any opposition in the streets! All those people were out protesting Trump's inauguration. Where were they when Congress was pushing through this lethal legislation?

**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.**

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## A Ukraine Link to North Korea's Missiles?

**Exclusive:** By orchestrating the 2014 "regime change" in Ukraine, U.S. neocons may have indirectly contributed to a desperate Ukrainian factory selling advanced rocket engines to North Korea and endangering America, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

U.S. intelligence analysts reportedly have traced North Korea's leap forward in creating an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of striking U.S. territory to a decaying Ukrainian rocket-engine factory whose alleged role could lift the cover off other suppressed mysteries related to the U.S.-backed coup in



Kiev.

Because the 2014 coup – overthrowing elected President Viktor Yanukovich – was partly orchestrated by the U.S. government's influential neoconservatives and warmly embraced by the West's mainstream media, many of the ugly features of the Kiev regime have been downplayed or ignored, including the fact that corrupt oligarch Igor Kolomoisky was put in charge of the area where the implicated factory was located.

As the region's governor, the thuggish Kolomoisky founded armed militias of Ukrainian extremists, including neo-Nazis, who spearheaded the violence against ethnic Russians in eastern provinces, which had voted heavily for Yanukovich and tried to resist his violent overthrow.

Kolomoisky, who has triple citizenship from Ukraine, Cyprus and Israel, was eventually ousted as governor of Dnipropetrovsk (now called Dnipro) on March 25, 2015, after a showdown with Ukraine's current President Petro Poroshenko over control of the state-owned energy company, but by then Kolomoisky's team had put its corrupt mark on the region.

At the time of the Kolomoisky-Poroshenko showdown, Valentyn Nalyvaychenko, chief of the State Security Service, accused Dnipropetrovsk officials of financing armed gangs and threatening investigators, Bloomberg News reported, while noting that Ukraine had sunk to 142nd place out of 175 countries in Transparency International's Corruptions Perception Index, the worst in Europe.

Even earlier in Kolomoisky's brutal reign, Dnipropetrovsk had become the center for the violent intrigue that has plagued Ukraine for the past several years, including the dispatch of neo-Nazi militias to kill ethnic Russians who then turned to Russia for support.

### **Tolerating Nazis**

Yet, protected by the waves of anti-Russian propaganda sweeping across the West, Kolomoisky's crowd saw few reasons for restraint. So, among the Kolomoisky-backed militias was the Azov battalion whose members marched with Swastikas and other Nazi insignias.

Ironically, the same Western media which heartily has condemned neo-Nazi and white-nationalist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, adopted a much more tolerant attitude toward Ukraine's neo-Nazism even as those militants murdered scores of ethnic Russians in Odessa in May 2014 and attacked ethnic Russian communities in the east where thousands more died.

When it came to Ukraine, The New York Times and other mainstream outlets were so

dedicated to their anti-Russian propaganda that they veered between minimizing the significance of the neo-Nazi militias and treating them as bulwarks of Western civilization.

For instance, on Feb. 11, 2015, the Times published a long article by Rick Lyman that presented the situation in the port city of Mariupol as if the advance by ethnic Russian rebels amounted to the arrival of barbarians at the gate while the inhabitants were being bravely defended by the forces of civilization. But then the article cited the key role in that defense played by the Azov battalion.

Though the article provided much color and detail and quoted an Azov leader prominently, it left out the fact that the Azov battalion was composed of neo-Nazis.

This inconvenient truth that neo-Nazis were central to Ukraine's "self-defense forces" would have disrupted the desired propaganda message about "Russian aggression." After all, wouldn't many Americans and Europeans understand why Russia, which suffered some 27 million dead in World War II, might be sensitive to neo-Nazis killing ethnic Russians on Russia's border?

So, in Lyman's article, the Times ignored Azov's well-known neo-Nazism and referred to it simply as a "volunteer unit."

In other cases, the Times casually brushed past the key role of fascist militants. In July 2015, the Times published a curiously upbeat story about the good news that Islamic militants had joined with far-right and neo-Nazi battalions to kill ethnic Russian rebels.

The article by Andrew E. Kramer reported that there were three Islamic battalions "deployed to the hottest zones," such as around Mariupol. One of the battalions was headed by a former Chechen warlord who went by the name "Muslim," Kramer wrote, adding:

"The Chechen commands the Sheikh Mansur group, named for an 18th-century Chechen resistance figure. It is subordinate to the nationalist Right Sector, a Ukrainian militia. Right Sector formed during last year's street protests in Kiev from a half-dozen fringe Ukrainian nationalist groups like White Hammer and the Trident of Stepan Bandera.

"Another, the Azov group, is openly neo-Nazi, using the 'Wolf's Hook' symbol associated with the [Nazi] SS. Without addressing the issue of the Nazi symbol, the Chechen said he got along well with the nationalists because, like him, they loved their homeland and hated the Russians."

## Rockets for North Korea

The Times encountered another discomfiting reality on Monday when correspondents William J. Broad and David E. Sanger described U.S. intelligence assessments pointing to North Korea's likely source of its new and more powerful rocket engines as a Ukrainian factory in Dnipro.

Of course, the Times bent over backward to suggest that the blame might still fall on Russia even though Dnipro is a stronghold of some of Ukraine's most militantly anti-Russian politicians and although U.S. intelligence analysts have centered their suspicions on a Ukrainian-government-owned factory there, known as Yuzhmash.

So, it would seem clear that corrupt Ukrainian officials, possibly in cahoots with financially pressed executives or employees of Yuzhmash, are the likeliest suspects in the smuggling of these rocket engines to North Korea.

Even the Times couldn't dodge that reality, saying: "Government investigators and experts have focused their inquiries on a missile factory in Dnipro, Ukraine." But the Times added that Dnipro is "on the edge of the territory where Russia is fighting a low-level war to break off part of Ukraine" – to suggest that the Russians somehow might have snuck into the factory, stolen the engines and smuggled them to North Korea.

But the Times also cited the view of missile expert Michael Elleman, who addressed North Korea's sudden access to more powerful engines in a study issued this week by the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"It's likely that these engines came from Ukraine – probably illicitly," Elleman said in an interview with the Times. "The big question is how many they have and whether the Ukrainians are helping them now. I'm very worried."

Yet, always looking for a chance to shift the blame to Russia, the Times quickly inserted that "Mr. Elleman was unable to rule out the possibility that a large Russian missile enterprise, Energomash, which has strong ties to the Ukrainian complex, had a role in the transfer of the RD-250 engine technology to North Korea."

Of course by that standard – "unable to rule out the possibility" – almost anyone could be put under suspicion. One source familiar with the U.S. intelligence assessments said there is even suspicion that some operatives in Israel played a role in transferring the rocket engines to North Korea. The source cited Israel's historic arms-trade with North Korea dating back to Israel's covert arms pipeline to Iran during the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s.

Israel, a rogue nuclear-weapons state itself, also has a history of collaborating with other “pariah” states on nuclear proliferation, including apartheid South Africa which joined Israel in nuclear tests before the democratic election of Nelson Mandela.

Kolomoisky cultivated close ties between Israel and Dnipro by helping to construct one of the largest Jewish centers in the world in the Ukrainian city, which has fallen on hard times since the 2014 coup shattered economic ties with Russia and left the Yuzhmash factory with little work.

Yet, while the Ukraine crisis may have reduced living standards for average Ukrainians, it was an important catalyst in the creation of the New Cold War between Washington and Moscow, which offers lucrative opportunities for U.S. military contractors and their many think-tank apologists despite increasing the risk of nuclear war for the rest of us.

In particular, U.S. neoconservatives have viewed heightened tensions between the West and Russia as valuable both in driving up military spending and laying the groundwork for a possible “regime change” in Moscow. The neocons have wanted to retaliate against Russian President Vladimir Putin’s role in frustrating neocon (and Israeli-Saudi) desires to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and to bomb Iran, which Israel and Saudi Arabia now view as their principal regional adversary.

The neocon/Israeli-Saudi interests have produced many strange bedfellows with weapons flowing to Al Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria, and – because of Putin’s assistance to Syria and Iran – the tolerance of neo-Nazis and Islamic militants in Ukraine.

### **The MH-17 Case**

Kolomoisky’s operation in Dnipro also has come under suspicion for a possible role in the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 on July 17, 2014. According to a source briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts, Dnipro was the center of a plot to use a powerful anti-aircraft missile to shoot down Putin’s official plane on a return flight from South America, but instead – after Putin’s plane took a more northerly route – the missile brought down MH-17, killing all 298 people aboard.

For reasons that have still not been explained, the Obama administration suppressed U.S. intelligence reports on the MH-17 tragedy and instead joined in pinning the shoot-down on ethnic Russian rebels and, by implication, Putin and his government.

In the West, the MH-17 shoot-down became a cause celebre, generating a powerful

propaganda campaign to demonize Putin and Russia – and push Europe into joining sanctions against Moscow. Few people dared question Russia alleged guilt even though the Russia-did-it arguments were full of holes. [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

Now this North Korean case forces the issue of Ukraine’s reckless behavior to the fore again: Did an inept or corrupt Ukrainian bureaucracy participate in or tolerate a scheme to sell powerful rocket engines to North Korea and enable a nuclear threat to U.S. territory?

In response to the reports of possible Ukrainian collusion in North Korea’s missile program, Oleksandr Turchynov, secretary of the Ukrainian national security and defense council, issued [a bizarre denial](#) suggesting that The New York Times and U.S. intelligence agencies were pawns of Russia.

“This information [about North Korea possibly obtaining rocket engines from Ukraine] is not based on any grounds, provocative by its content, and most likely provoked by Russian secret services to cover their own crimes,” Turchynov said.

Press reports about Turchynov’s statement left out two salient facts: that as the interim President following the February 2014 coup, Turchynov ordered Right Sektor militants to begin the bloody siege of rebel-held Sloviansk, a key escalation in the conflict, and that Turchynov was the one who appointed Kolomoisky to be the ruler of Dnipropetrovsk.

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

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## How Obama, Trump Had Their Wings Clipped

Presidents Obama and Trump contrast sharply on foreign policy, but share a common denominator: they faced resistance to smoothing relations with a key power, Obama on Iran; Trump on Russia, Andrew Spannaus noted at Aspenia.

By Andrew Spannaus

President Donald Trump was backed into a corner in late July, forced to sign a bill imposing new sanctions on Russia, despite opposing it on substance and form. Trump issued a signing statement, claiming that the new law impinges on

“the President’s constitutional authority to recognize foreign governments” (referring to the case of Crimea and Ukraine), limits the President’s actions on sanctions, and violates “the President’s exclusive constitutional authority to determine the time, scope, and objectives of international negotiations”, among other things.

The overwhelming vote on the sanctions bill in both the House and the Senate (419-3 and 98-2, respectively) was a clear indicator of how much of official Washington sees the White House’s attempts to improve relations with Russia: as a dangerous goal that needs to be stopped as soon as possible, lest the apparently bumbling, self-absorbed and ineffective President actually succeed in implementing a major change in U.S. foreign policy, one with repercussions on numerous areas of global geopolitics.

Influential Republicans in the Senate such as John McCain and Lindsey Graham have never hidden their disdain for Trump’s anti-neocon positions, and now they find themselves with the almost unanimous support of their colleagues on the Democratic side of the aisle as well.

The constant churn of Russiagate scandals, although they have yet to turn up a smoking gun, has created an environment in which politicians and major press outlets have decided that Russia is Trump’s weak point, on which a strong defeat can neuter his effectiveness and potentially even lead to his impeachment.

The White House’s isolation on a point of foreign policy that would represent a major strategic shift recalls another situation not too many years ago, that of Iran, when then-President Barack Obama found himself in a difficult battle with the overwhelming majority of Congress apparently opposed to his plan to shift gears in the Middle East. Obama ultimately won that battle, succeeding in reaching a historic deal regarding Iran’s nuclear program, after adopting a strategy of secret negotiations, clear goals, and an explicit definition of the choices to be made.

Trump differs considerably from Obama on Iran, instead following the traditional Israeli-Saudi line to date, but the clash with Congress and the power of neoconservative foreign policy is an area where the two Presidents definitely have something in common; in this case, Trump could draw on aspects of Obama’s strategy, although the circumstances are undoubtedly different, and the stakes possibly even higher today.

### **Obama’s Iran Initiative**

President Obama’s first attempt at reaching an agreement with Iran, in 2009, failed miserably due to a series of circumstances, some under the White House’s

responsibility, and others not. The events of the Green Revolution, the substantial opposition within his own Administration – Hillary Clinton spoke openly of negotiations merely as an excuse to then slap more sanctions on Iran – and a lack of a solid strategy all doomed the first round of negotiations, making some believe Obama never really intended to go all the way.

At the start of his second term though, Obama began to lay the groundwork for a major shift in foreign policy. One of the key aspects was the renewed push for an agreement with Iran. Secret negotiations began in Oman in the spring of 2013, leading to the initial Joint Plan of Action adopted in November of that year. Over the subsequent two years negotiations continued with the other members of the P5+1 (the permanent five members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany, as well as the European Union), until the accord was finalized in July 2015.

In order for the United States to fulfill its commitments, it was sufficient for the President to begin waiving sanctions, but the anti-Iran forces within the United States were determined to block the deal, and thus pushed for a Congressional vote to prevent the President from moving forward. The attempt failed, as the Senate voted 58-42 to close debate on the resolution, just shy of the 60-vote threshold needed for final passage.

Despite the widespread commentary about how the Democrats predictably handed their President a victory, success was far from assured in this case. As a matter of fact, by any historical standard, the failure of a vote against Iran, presented to members as a way to express support for Israel, was a startling achievement.

Just consider the vote totals for similar bills in years past, or even on the same issue. In May 2015, as negotiations were ongoing, the Senate voted on the “Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act”, which required the President to submit the agreement to Congressional review, setting up the vote which Obama eventually won. That bill passed 98-1 in the Senate, and 400-25 in the House of Representatives.

These are common numbers for legislation that is considered pro-Israel and has the backing of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), whose widespread influence on U.S. politicians has been well chronicled in recent years. AIPAC did everything it could to win the vote against the Iran deal, but failed spectacularly, in a defeat that not only tarnished the group’s invincible image, but also contributed to the rise of other pro-Israel groups on the U.S. political scene whose policies are not necessarily aligned with the right-wing governments led by Benjamin Netanyahu – who still happens to be in power.

## **Challenging the Establishment**

In addition to working behind the scenes to assure Senators' votes, Obama also made his case for the Iran deal publicly. His most effective intervention came in August 2015 when speaking at American University in Washington, D.C. He put the choice in stark terms, rather than attempting to woo lawmakers with a soft approach: a vote against the Iran deal was a vote for war in the future. And he drew a clear parallel with the decision to invade Iraq in 2002, that in hindsight many Congressmen have been forced to admit was wrong, and avoidable.

Defining the Iran deal as a vote for or against conflict was obviously not what Obama's opponents expected. Consider the response from Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell at the time: "This goes way over the line of civil discourse... The President needs to retract his bizarre and preposterous comments."

Laying out the consequences so directly went against the normal rules of politics, but it was precisely what Obama needed to ensure that the stakes would be clear to everyone before the fact, not afterwards if the pro-war faction had won the day once again.

At the time the initial understanding was reached with Iran, in the fall of 2013, Obama was beginning his attempt at a wholesale change in U.S. foreign policy. Not only did he work with Russia and China on the nuclear deal, but he decided not to bomb the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, accepting Russian President Vladimir Putin's offer of a deal to remove chemical weapons from Syria.

Still today this decision is seen in the U.S. establishment as a disastrous capitulation after having drawn the infamous "red line" regarding chemical weapons attacks. Yet Obama, who pulled back after hearing doubts about the intelligence and recognizing that Congress was unlikely to support action, later defined that as one of the most important moments of his presidency, when he broke with the "Washington playbook" of automatic military response.

The attempt to move away from the policies of "regime change," drawing down support for extremist groups linked to Al Qaeda and ISIS while seeking different alliances, would ultimately be too little, and too late.

In 2014 cooperation with Russia was derailed due to the crisis in Ukraine – a situation where the Washington playbook remains intact – and by the time Obama and Putin were able to begin working together in Syria again, through the activism of John Kerry and Sergei Lavrov, time had essentially run out.

In 2016, the U.S. foreign policy establishment wasn't willing to follow Obama towards cooperation with Russia, as most anticipated the more hawkish Hillary Clinton would win in November.



Obama moved quickly to embrace the new Cold War posture permeating Washington in the final months of his presidency, but his original goal of rebalancing the U.S. presence in the Middle East and cooperating with Vladimir Putin's Russia in the fight against terrorism provides a direct link to the challenges facing the Trump Administration today.

The current President has openly declared his intentions with respect to Russia, which Obama rarely did. Despite numerous setbacks – some of his own making, of course – Trump has continued to seek better relations with Putin; yet the overwhelming pressure from both inside and outside of the Administration has heavily scaled back expectations of how far he can go, and thwarted cooperation on numerous fronts.

If Donald Trump wants to truly reach his goal of better relations with Russia, he could look to the successful aspects of Obama's victory on the Iran deal. Not only is it essential to work behind the scenes, through back channels that avoid sabotage from within his own Administration, but the President could potentially go back on the offensive if he were to define the issue publicly on his own terms.

It won't be easy to convince the American people, and a considerable part of the institutions, given the current environment; however, a clear and honest accounting of our relations with Russia, including the unthinkable dangers of conflict, could go a long way towards inaugurating a more rational discussion of Trump's desired foreign policy shift.

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## Russia-gate's Fataally Flawed Logic

**Exclusive:** By pushing the Russia-gate "scandal" and neutering President Trump's ability to conduct diplomacy, Democrats and Congress have encouraged his war-making side on North Korea, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There was always a logical flaw in pushing Russia-gate as an excuse for Hillary Clinton's defeat – besides the fact that it was based on a dubious “assessment” by a small team of “hand-picked” U.S. intelligence analysts. The flaw was that it poked the thin-skinned Donald Trump over one of his few inclinations toward diplomacy.

We're now seeing the results play out in a very dangerous way in Trump's bluster about North Korea, which was included in an aggressive economic sanctions bill – along with Russia and Iran – that Congress passed nearly unanimously, without a single Democratic no vote.

Democrats and Official Washington's dominant neocons celebrated the bill as a vote of no-confidence in Trump's presidency but it only constrained him in possible peacemaking, not war-making.

The legislation, which Trump signed under protest, escalated tensions with those three countries while limiting Trump's power over lifting sanctions. After signing the bill into law, Trump denounced the bill as “seriously flawed – particularly because it encroaches on the executive branch's authority to negotiate.”

As his “signing statements” made clear, Trump felt belittled by the congressional action. His response has been to ratchet up bellicose rhetoric about North Korea, bluster appearing to be his natural default position when under pressure.

Remember, in April, as the Russia-gate hysteria mounted, Trump changed the subject, briefly, by rushing to judgment on an alleged chemical-weapons incident in Khan Sheikhoun, Syria, and firing off 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian military base.

He immediately won acclaim from Official Washington, although Hillary Clinton and other hawks argued that he should have gone further with a much larger U.S. invasion of Syria, i.e., establishing a “no-fly zone” even if that risked nuclear war with Russia.

What Trump learned from that experience is that even when he is going off half-cocked, he is rewarded for taking the military option. (More careful analysis of the Khan Sheikhoun evidence later raised serious doubts that the Syrian military was responsible.)

**Schoolyard Taunts**

So, we now have President Trump in a bizarre exchange of schoolyard taunts with the leadership of North Korea, with Trump's "fire and fury like the world has never seen" rhetoric possibly plunging the United States into a confrontation that could have devastating consequences for the Korean peninsula, Japan and indeed the whole world.

Given the fact that the world has already seen the U.S. nuclear destruction of two Japanese cities at the end of World War II, Trump's loose phrasing seems to suggest that the United States is prepared to use nuclear weapons against North Korea (although he may be referring to "just" carpet-bombing with conventional ordnance).

If nuclear weapons are brought into play, it is hard to fathom what the long-term consequences might be. It's unlikely that Trump – not known for his deep thinking – has even contemplated that future.

However, even a "limited" war with conventional weapons and confined to the Korean peninsula could kill hundreds of thousands of people and severely shake the world's economy. If North Korea manages to deliver retaliatory damage on Japan, a human catastrophe and a financial panic could follow.

Many thoughtful people are now expressing alarm at Trump's erratic behavior, but many of those same people cheered the promotion of Russia-gate as a way to corner Trump politically. They didn't seem to care that the "scandal" was built on a foundation of flimsy or phony evidence and that a key argument – that "all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies" concurred in the Russian-hacking conclusion – was false.

Once that fake "consensus" claim disappeared – after President Obama's intelligence chiefs acknowledged that the Jan. 6 "assessment" was the work of "hand-picked" analysts from only three agencies – there should have been a stepping back from the Russia-gate groupthink. There should have been demands for a reassessment of the underlying assumptions.

However, by then, too many Important People, including editors and executives at major news organizations, had accepted Russia's guilt as flat fact, meaning that their reputations were at risk. To protect their estimable careers, all doubts about Russia's guilt had to be crushed and the conventional wisdom enforced.

That self-serving defensiveness became the backdrop to the Russia-Iran-North Korean sanctions bill. Not only could no rethinking be allowed on Russia-gate but Trump's resistance to the groupthink had to be broken by neutering him along with his presidential powers to conduct diplomacy.

Still eager to please the Democratic #Resistance which sees Russia-gate as the

pathway to Trump's impeachment, Democrats – from neocons like Sen. Ben Cardin to anti-interventionists such as Rep. Tulsi Gabbard – joined in the stampede for the sanctions bill.

In their rush, the Democrats even endangered Obama's signature diplomatic accomplishment, the international agreement blocking an Iranian nuclear weapon. Obama had promised Iran sanctions relief, not more sanctions. Now, the prospects for the accord's collapse are increased and the neocon dream to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran revived.

And, by tossing North Korea into the mix, the Democrats left Trump few options other than to unleash his warmongering side and plunge the world toward a potential cataclysm.

So, this is what the Russia-gate opportunism has wrought. The logical flaw in Russia-gate may turn out to be a fatal one.

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

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## New Cracks in Russia-gate Foundation

The Russia-gate groupthink always rested on a fragile foundation of dubious analysis and biased guesswork, but now has been shaken by new forensic studies of the purported "hack," as Patrick Lawrence reported at The Nation.

By Patrick Lawrence

It is now a year since the Democratic National Committee's mail system was compromised – a year since events in the spring and early summer of 2016 were identified as remote hacks and, in short order, attributed to Russians acting in behalf of Donald Trump.

A great edifice has been erected during this time. President Trump, members of his family, and numerous people around him stand accused of various corruptions and extensive collusion with Russians. Half a dozen simultaneous investigations proceed into these matters. Last week news broke that Special Counsel Robert Mueller had convened a grand jury, which issued its first subpoenas on August 3. Allegations of treason are common; prominent political figures and many media

cultivate a case for impeachment.

The President's ability to conduct foreign policy, notably but not only with regard to Russia, is now crippled. Forced into a corner and having no choice, Trump just signed legislation imposing severe new sanctions on Russia and European companies working with it on pipeline projects vital to Russia's energy sector. Striking this close to the core of another nation's economy is customarily considered an act of war, we must not forget.

In retaliation, Moscow has announced that the United States must cut its embassy staff by roughly two-thirds. All sides agree that relations between the United States and Russia are now as fragile as they were during some of the Cold War's worst moments. To suggest that military conflict between two nuclear powers inches ever closer can no longer be dismissed as hyperbole.

All this was set in motion when the DNC's mail server was first violated in the spring of 2016 and by subsequent assertions that Russians were behind that "hack" and another such operation, also described as a Russian hack, on July 5. These are the foundation stones of the edifice just outlined.

The evolution of public discourse in the year since is worthy of scholarly study: Possibilities became allegations, and these became probabilities. Then the probabilities turned into certainties, and these evolved into what are now taken to be established truths. By my reckoning, it required a few days to a few weeks to advance from each of these stages to the next. This was accomplished via the indefensibly corrupt manipulations of language repeated incessantly in our leading media.

Lost in a year that often appeared to veer into our peculiarly American kind of hysteria is the absence of any credible evidence of what happened last year and who was responsible for it. It is tiresome to note, but none has been made available. Instead, we are urged to accept the word of institutions and senior officials with long records of deception. These officials profess "high confidence" in their "assessment" as to what happened in the spring and summer of last year – this standing as their authoritative judgment.

Few have noticed since these evasive terms first appeared that an assessment is an opinion, nothing more, and to express high confidence is an upside-down way of admitting the absence of certain knowledge. This is how officials avoid putting their names on the assertions we are so strongly urged to accept – as the record shows many of them have done.

We come now to a moment of great gravity.

There has been a long effort to counter the official narrative we now call

“Russiagate.” This effort has so far focused on the key events noted above, leaving numerous others still to be addressed. Until recently, researchers undertaking this work faced critical shortcomings, and these are to be explained. But they have achieved significant new momentum in the past several weeks, and what they have done now yields very consequential fruit.

Forensic investigators, intelligence analysts, system designers, program architects, and computer scientists of long experience and strongly credentialed are now producing evidence disproving the official version of key events last year. Their work is intricate and continues at a kinetic pace as we speak. But its certain results so far are two, simply stated, and freighted with implications:

- There was no hack of the Democratic National Committee’s system on July 5 last year – not by the Russians, not by anyone else. Hard science now demonstrates it was a leak – a download executed locally with a memory key or a similarly portable data-storage device. In short, it was an inside job by someone with access to the DNC’s system. This casts serious doubt on the initial “hack,” as alleged, that led to the very consequential publication of a large store of documents on WikiLeaks last summer.
- Forensic investigations of documents made public two weeks prior to the July 5 leak by the person or entity known as Guccifer 2.0 show that they were fraudulent: Before Guccifer posted them they were adulterated by cutting and pasting them into a blank template that had Russian as its default language. Guccifer took responsibility on June 15 for an intrusion the DNC reported on June 14 and professed to be a WikiLeaks source – claims essential to the official narrative implicating Russia in what was soon cast as an extensive hacking operation. To put the point simply, forensic science now devastates this narrative.

## **New Analyses**

This article is based on an examination of the documents these forensic experts and intelligence analysts have produced, notably the key papers written over the past several weeks, as well as detailed interviews with many of those conducting investigations and now drawing conclusions from them. Before proceeding into this material, several points bear noting.

One, there are many other allegations implicating Russians in the 2016 political process. The work I will now report upon does not purport to prove or disprove any of them. Who delivered documents to WikiLeaks? Who was responsible for the “phishing” operation penetrating John Podesta’s e-mail in March 2016?

We do not know the answers to such questions. It is entirely possible, indeed,

that the answers we deserve and must demand could turn out to be multiple: One thing happened in one case, another thing in another. The new work done on the mid-June and July 5 events bears upon all else in only one respect. We are now on notice: Given that we now stand face to face with very considerable cases of duplicity, it is imperative that all official accounts of these many events be subject to rigorously skeptical questioning. Do we even know that John Podesta's e-mail was in fact "phished"? What evidence of this has been produced? Such rock-bottom questions as these must now be posed in all other cases.

Two, houses built on sand and made of cards are bound to collapse, and there can be no surprise that the one resting atop the "hack theory," as we can call the prevailing wisdom on the DNC events, appears to be in the process of doing so.

Neither is there anything far-fetched in a reversal of the truth of this magnitude. American history is replete with similar cases. The Spanish sank the *Maine* in Havana harbor in February 1898. Iran's Mossadegh was a Communist. Guatemala's Árbenz represented a Communist threat to the United States. Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh was a Soviet puppet. The Sandinistas were Communists. The truth of the *Maine*, a war and a revolution in between, took a century to find the light of day, whereupon the official story disintegrated. We can do better now. It is an odd sensation to live through one of these episodes, especially one as big as Russiagate. But its place atop a long line of precedents can no longer be disputed.

Three, regardless of what one may think about the investigations and conclusions I will now outline – and, as noted, these investigations continue – there is a bottom line attaching to them. We can even call it a red line. Under no circumstance can it be acceptable that the relevant authorities – the National Security Agency, the Justice Department (via the Federal Bureau of Investigation), and the Central Intelligence Agency – leave these new findings without reply. Not credibly, in any case. Forensic investigators, prominent among them people with decades' experience at high levels in these very institutions, have put a body of evidence on a table previously left empty. Silence now, should it ensue, cannot be written down as an admission of duplicity, but it will come very close to one.

It requires no elaboration to apply the above point to the corporate media, which have been flaccidly satisfied with official explanations of the DNC matter from the start.

Qualified experts working independently of one another began to examine the DNC case immediately after the July 2016 events. Prominent among these is a group comprising former intelligence officers, almost all of whom previously occupied senior positions. Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs), founded

in 2003, now has 30 members, including a few associates with backgrounds in national-security fields other than intelligence. The chief researchers active on the DNC case are four: William Binney, formerly the NSA's technical director for world geopolitical and military analysis and designer of many agency programs now in use; Kirk Wiebe, formerly a senior analyst at the NSA's SIGINT Automation Research Center; Edward Loomis, formerly technical director in the NSA's Office of Signal Processing; and Ray McGovern, an intelligence analyst for nearly three decades and formerly chief of the CIA's Soviet Foreign Policy Branch. Most of these men have decades of experience in matters concerning Russian intelligence and the related technologies. This article reflects numerous interviews with all of them conducted in person, via Skype, or by telephone.

The customary VIPS format is an open letter, typically addressed to the President. The group has written three such letters on the DNC incident, all of which were first published by Robert Parry at [www.consortiumnews.com](http://www.consortiumnews.com). [Here is](#) the latest, dated July 24; it blueprints the forensic work this article explores in detail. They have all argued that the hack theory is wrong and that a locally executed leak is the far more likely explanation.

In a letter to Barack Obama dated January 17, three days before he left office, the group explained that the NSA's known programs are fully capable of capturing all electronic transfers of data. "We strongly suggest that you ask NSA for any evidence it may have indicating that the results of Russian hacking were given to WikiLeaks," the letter said. "If NSA cannot produce such evidence – and quickly – this would probably mean it does not have any."

The day after Parry published this letter, Obama gave his last press conference as President, at which he delivered one of the great gems among the official statements on the DNC e-mail question. "The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking," the legacy-minded Obama said, "were not conclusive." There is little to suggest the VIPS letter prompted this remark, but it is typical of the linguistic tap-dancing many officials connected to the case have indulged so as to avoid putting their names on the hack theory and all that derives from it.

### **Cyber-Evidence**

Until recently there was a serious hindrance to the VIPS's work, and I have just suggested it. The group lacked access to positive data. It had no lump of cyber-material to place on its lab table and analyze, because no official agency had provided any.

Donald Rumsfeld famously argued with regard to the WMD question in Iraq, "The



absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” In essence, Binney and others at VIPS say this logic turns upside down in the DNC case: Based on the knowledge of former officials such as Binney, the group knew that (1) if there was a hack and (2) if Russia was responsible for it, the NSA would have to have evidence of both. Binney and others surmised that the agency and associated institutions were hiding the absence of evidence behind the claim that they had to maintain secrecy to protect NSA programs.

“Everything that they say must remain classified is already well-known,” Binney said in an interview. “They’re playing the Wizard of Oz game.”

New findings indicate this is perfectly true, but until recently the VIPS experts could produce only “negative evidence,” as they put it: The absence of evidence supporting the hack theory demonstrates that it cannot be so. That is all VIPS had. They could allege and assert, but they could not conclude: They were stuck demanding evidence they did not have – if only to prove there was none.

Research into the DNC case took a fateful turn in early July, when forensic investigators who had been working independently began to share findings and form loose collaborations wherein each could build on the work of others. In this a small, new website called [www.disobedientmedia.com](http://www.disobedientmedia.com) proved an important catalyst. Two independent researchers selected it, Snowden-like, as the medium through which to disclose their findings.

One of these is known as Forensicator and the other as Adam Carter. On July 9, Adam Carter sent Elizabeth Vos, a co-founder of Disobedient Media, a paper by the Forensicator that split the DNC case open like a coconut.

By this time Binney and the other technical-side people at VIPS had begun working with a man named Skip Folden. Folden was an IT executive at IBM for 33 years, serving 25 years as the IT program manager in the United States. He has also consulted for Pentagon officials, the FBI, and the Justice Department. Folden is effectively the VIPS group’s liaison to Forensicator, Adam Carter, and other investigators, but neither Folden nor anyone else knows the identity of either Forensicator or Adam Carter. This bears brief explanation.

The Forensicator’s July 9 document indicates he lives in the Pacific Time Zone, which puts him on the West Coast. His notes describing his investigative procedures support this. But little else is known of him. Adam Carter, in turn, is located in England, but the name is a coy pseudonym: It derives from a character in a BBC espionage series called *Spooks*. It is protocol in this community, Elizabeth Vos told me in a telephone conversation this week, to respect this degree of anonymity.

Kirk Wiebe, the former SIGINT analyst at the NSA, thinks Forensicator could be “someone very good with the FBI,” but there is no certainty. Unanimously, however, all the analysts and forensics investigators interviewed for this column say Forensicator’s advanced expertise, evident in the work he has done, is unassailable. They hold a similarly high opinion of Adam Carter’s work.

Forensicator is working with the documents published by Guccifer 2.0, focusing for now on the July 5 intrusion into the DNC server. The contents of Guccifer’s files are known – they were published last September – and are not Forensicator’s concern. His work is with the metadata on those files. These data did not come to him via any clandestine means. Forensicator simply has access to them that others did not have. It is this access that prompts Kirk Wiebe and others to suggest that Forensicator may be someone with exceptional talent and training inside an agency such as the FBI.

“Forensicator unlocked and then analyzed what had been the locked files Guccifer supposedly took from the DNC server,” Skip Folden explained in an interview. “To do this he would have to have ‘access privilege,’ meaning a key.”

What has Forensicator proven since he turned his key? How? What has work done atop Forensicator’s findings proven? How?

### **The Transfer Rate**

Forensicator’s first decisive findings, made public in the paper dated July 9, concerned the volume of the supposedly hacked material and what is called the transfer rate – the time a remote hack would require. The metadata established several facts in this regard with granular precision: On the evening of July 5, 2016, 1,976 megabytes of data were downloaded from the DNC’s server. The operation took 87 seconds. This yields a transfer rate of 22.7 megabytes per second.

These statistics are matters of record and essential to disproving the hack theory. No Internet service provider, such as a hacker would have had to use in mid-2016, was capable of downloading data at this speed. Compounding this contradiction, Guccifer claimed to have run his hack from Romania, which, for numerous reasons technically called delivery overheads, would slow down the speed of a hack even further from maximum achievable speeds.

What is the maximum achievable speed? Forensicator recently ran a test download of a comparable data volume (and using a server speed not available in 2016) 40 miles from his computer via a server 20 miles away and came up with a speed of 11.8 megabytes per second – half what the DNC operation would need were it a hack. Other investigators have built on this finding. Folden and Edward Loomis

say a survey published August 3, 2016, by [www.speedtest.net/reports](http://www.speedtest.net/reports) is highly reliable and use it as their thumbnail index. It indicated that the highest average ISP speeds of first-half 2016 were achieved by Xfinity and Cox Communications. These speeds averaged 15.6 megabytes per second and 14.7 megabytes per second, respectively. Peak speeds at higher rates were recorded intermittently but still did not reach the required 22.7 megabytes per second.

“A speed of 22.7 megabytes is simply unobtainable, especially if we are talking about a transoceanic data transfer,” Folden said. “Based on the data we now have, what we’ve been calling a hack is impossible.” Last week Forensicator reported on a speed test he conducted more recently. It tightens the case considerably. “Transfer rates of 23 MB/s (Mega Bytes per second) are not just highly unlikely, but effectively impossible to accomplish when communicating over the Internet at any significant distance,” he wrote. “Further, local copy speeds are measured, demonstrating that 23 MB/s is a typical transfer rate when using a USB-2 flash device (thumb drive).”

Time stamps in the metadata provide further evidence of what happened on July 5. The stamps recording the download indicate that it occurred in the Eastern Daylight Time Zone at approximately 6:45 pm. This confirms that the person entering the DNC system was working somewhere on the East Coast of the United States.

In theory the operation could have been conducted from Bangor or Miami or anywhere in between – but not Russia, Romania, or anywhere else outside the EDT zone. Combined with Forensicator’s findings on the transfer rate, the time stamps constitute more evidence that the download was conducted locally, since delivery overheads – conversion of data into packets, addressing, sequencing times, error checks, and the like – degrade all data transfers conducted via the Internet, more or less according to the distance involved.

### **Russian ‘Fingerprints’**

In addition, there is the adulteration of the documents Guccifer 2.0 posted on June 15, when he made his first appearance. This came to light when researchers penetrated what Folden calls Guccifer’s top layer of metadata and analyzed what was in the layers beneath. They found that the first five files Guccifer made public had each been run, via ordinary cut-and-paste, through a single template that effectively immersed them in what could plausibly be cast as Russian fingerprints. They were not: The Russian markings were artificially inserted prior to posting. “It’s clear,” another forensics investigator self-identified as HET, wrote in a report on this question, “that metadata was deliberately altered and documents were deliberately pasted into a Russianified [W]ord document with Russian language settings and style headings.”

To be noted in this connection: The list of the CIA's cyber-tools WikiLeaks began to release in March and labeled Vault 7 includes one called Marble that is capable of obfuscating the origin of documents in false-flag operations and leaving markings that point to whatever the CIA wants to point to. (The tool can also "de-obfuscate" what it has obfuscated.) It is not known whether this tool was deployed in the Guccifer case, but it is there for such a use.

It is not yet clear whether documents now shown to have been leaked locally on July 5 were tainted to suggest Russian hacking in the same way the June 15 Guccifer release was. This is among several outstanding questions awaiting answers, and the forensic scientists active on the DNC case are now investigating it.

In a note Adam Carter sent to Folden and McGovern last week and copied to me, he reconfirmed the corruption of the June 15 documents, while indicating that his initial work on the July 5 documents – of which much more is to be done – had not yet turned up evidence of doctoring.

In the meantime, VIPS has assembled a chronology that imposes a persuasive logic on the complex succession of events just reviewed. It is this:

- On June 12 last year, Julian Assange announced that WikiLeaks had and would publish documents pertinent to Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.
- On June 14, CrowdStrike, a cyber-security firm hired by the DNC, announced, without providing evidence, that it had found malware on DNC servers and had evidence that Russians were responsible for planting it.
- On June 15, Guccifer 2.0 first appeared, took responsibility for the "hack" reported on June 14 and claimed to be a WikiLeaks source. It then posted the adulterated documents just described.
- On July 5, Guccifer again claimed he had remotely hacked DNC servers, and the operation was instantly described as another intrusion attributable to Russia. Virtually no media questioned this account.

It does not require too much thought to read into this sequence. With his June 12 announcement, Assange effectively put the DNC on notice that it had a little time, probably not much, to act preemptively against the imminent publication of damaging documents. Did the DNC quickly conjure Guccifer from thin air to create a cyber-saboteur whose fingers point to Russia? There is no evidence of this one way or the other, but emphatically it is legitimate to pose the question in the context of the VIPS chronology. WikiLeaks began publishing on July 22. By that time, the case alleging Russian interference in the 2016 elections process was taking firm root. In short order Assange would be written down as a "Russian agent."

By any balanced reckoning, the official case purporting to assign a systematic hacking effort to Russia, the events of mid-June and July 5 last year being the foundation of this case, is shabby to the point taxpayers should ask for their money back. The Intelligence Community Assessment, the supposedly definitive report featuring the “high confidence” dodge, was greeted as farcically flimsy when issued January 6.

Ray McGovern calls it a disgrace to the intelligence profession. It is spotlessly free of evidence, front to back, pertaining to any events in which Russia is implicated.

### **‘Hand-Picked’ Analysts**

James Clapper, the former director of national intelligence, admitted in May that “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies (not the 17 previously reported) drafted the ICA.

There is a way to understand “hand-picked” that is less obvious than meets the eye: The report was sequestered from rigorous agency-wide reviews. This is the way these people have spoken to us for the past year.

Behind the ICA lie other indefensible realities. The FBI has never examined the DNC’s computer servers – an omission that is beyond preposterous. It has instead relied on the reports produced by CrowdStrike, a firm that drips with conflicting interests well beyond the fact that it is in the DNC’s employ. Dmitri Alperovitch, its co-founder and chief technology officer, is on the record as vigorously anti-Russian. He is a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, which suffers the same prejudice. Problems such as this are many.

“We continue to stand by our report,” CrowdStrike said, upon seeing the VIPS blueprint of the investigation. CrowdStrike argues that by July 5 all malware had been removed from the DNC’s computers. But the presence or absence of malware by that time is entirely immaterial, because the event of July 5 is proven to have been a leak and not a hack. Given that malware has nothing to do with leaks, CrowdStrike’s logic appears to be circular.

In effect, the new forensic evidence considered here lands in a vacuum. We now enter a period when an official reply should be forthcoming. What the forensic people are now producing constitutes evidence, however one may view it, and it is the first scientifically derived evidence we have into any of the events in which Russia has been implicated. The investigators deserve a response, the betrayed professionals who formed VIPS as the WMD scandal unfolded in 2003 deserve it, and so do the rest of us. The cost of duplicity has rarely been so high.

I concluded each of the interviews conducted for this column by asking for a degree of confidence in the new findings. These are careful, exacting people as a matter of professional training and standards, and I got careful, exacting replies.

All those interviewed came in between 90 percent and 100 percent certain that the forensics prove out. I have already quoted Skip Folden's answer: impossible based on the data.

"The laws of physics don't lie," Ray McGovern volunteered at one point.

"It's QED, theorem demonstrated," William Binney said in response to my question. "There's no evidence out there to get me to change my mind." When I asked Edward Loomis, a 90 percent man, about the 10 percent he held out, he replied, "I've looked at the work and it shows there was no Russian hack. But I didn't do the work. That's the 10 percent. I'm a scientist."

Editor's note: In its chronology, VIPS mistakenly gave the wrong date for CrowdStrike's announcement of its claim to have found malware on DNC servers. It said June 15, when it should have said June 14. VIPS has acknowledged the error, and we have made the correction.

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