

Robert Parry's Legacy and the Future of Consortiumnews

Robert Parry, editor and publisher of Consortiumnews.com, died peacefully Saturday evening. In this tribute, his son Nat Parry describes Robert's unwavering commitment to independent journalism.

By Nat Parry

It is with a heavy heart that we inform Consortiumnews readers that Editor Robert Parry has passed away. As regular readers know, Robert (or Bob, as he was known to friends and family) suffered a stroke in December, which – despite his own speculation that it may have been brought on by the stress of covering Washington politics – was the result of undiagnosed pancreatic cancer that he had been unknowingly living with for the past 4-5 years.

He unfortunately suffered two more debilitating strokes in recent weeks and after the last one, was moved to hospice care on Tuesday. He passed away peacefully Saturday evening. He was 68.

Those of us close to him wish to sincerely thank readers for the kind comments and words of support posted on recent articles regarding Bob's health issues. We read aloud many of these comments to him during his final days to let him know how much his work has meant to so many people and how much concern there was for his well-being.

I am sure that these kindnesses meant a lot to him. They also mean a lot to us as family members, as we all know how devoted he was to the mission of independent journalism and this website which has been publishing articles since the earliest days of the internet, launching all the way back in 1995.

With my dad, professional work has always been deeply personal, and his career as a journalist was thoroughly intertwined with his family life. I can recall kitchen table conversations in my early childhood that focused on the U.S.-backed wars in Central America and complaints about how his editors at The Associated Press were too timid to run articles of his that – no matter how well-documented – cast the Reagan administration in a bad light.

One of my earliest memories in fact was of my dad about to leave on assignment in the early 1980s to the war zones of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and the heartfelt good-bye that he wished to me and my siblings. He warned us that he was going to a very dangerous place and that there was a possibility that he might not come back.

I remember asking him why he had to go, why he couldn't just stay at home with us. He replied that it was important to go to these places and tell the truth about what was happening there. He mentioned that children my age were being killed in these wars and that somebody had to tell their stories. I remember asking, "Kids like me?" He replied, "Yes, kids just like you."

Bob was deeply impacted by the dirty wars of Central America in the 1980s and in many ways these conflicts – and the U.S. involvement in them – came to define the rest of his life and career. With grisly stories emerging from Nicaragua (thanks partly to journalists like him), Congress passed the Boland Amendments from 1982 to 1984, which placed limits on U.S. military assistance to the contras who were attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government through a variety of terrorist tactics.

The Reagan administration immediately began exploring ways to circumvent those legal restrictions, which led to a scheme to send secret arms shipments to the revolutionary and vehemently anti-American government of Iran and divert the profits to the contras. In 1985, Bob wrote the first stories describing this operation, which later became known as the Iran-Contra Affair.

Contra-Cocaine and October Surprise

Parallel to the illegal arms shipments to Iran during those days was a cocaine trafficking operation by the Nicaraguan contras and a willingness by the Reagan administration and the CIA to turn a blind eye to these activities. This, despite the fact that cocaine was flooding into the United States while Ronald Reagan was proclaiming a "war on drugs," and a crack cocaine epidemic was devastating communities across the country.

Bob and his colleague Brian Barger were the first journalists to report on this story in late 1985, which became known as the contra-cocaine scandal, and became the subject of a congressional investigation led by then-Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.) in 1986.

Continuing to pursue leads relating to Iran-Contra during a period in the late 80s when most of Washington was moving on from the scandal, Bob discovered that there was more to the story than commonly understood. He learned that the roots of the illegal arm shipments to Iran stretched back further than previously known – all the way back to the 1980 presidential campaign.

That electoral contest between incumbent Jimmy Carter and challenger Ronald Reagan had come to be largely dominated by the hostage crisis in Iran, with 52 Americans being held at the U.S. embassy in Tehran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Iranian hostage crisis, along with the ailing economy, came to

define a perception of an America in decline, with former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan promising a new start for the country, a restoration of its status as a “shining city on a hill.”

The hostages were released in Tehran moments after Reagan was sworn in as president in Washington on January 20, 1981. Despite suspicions for years that there had been some sort of quid pro quo between the Reagan campaign and the Iranians, it wasn't until Bob uncovered a trove of documents in a House office building basement in 1994 that the evidence became overwhelming that the Reagan campaign had interfered with the Carter administration's efforts to free the hostages prior to the 1980 election. Their release sooner – what Carter hoped would be his “October Surprise” – could have given him the boost needed to win.

Examining these documents and being already well-versed on this story – having previously travelled three continents pursuing the investigation for a PBS *Frontline* documentary – Bob became increasingly convinced that the Reagan campaign had in fact sabotaged Carter's hostage negotiations, possibly committing an act of treason in an effort to make sure that 52 American citizens continued to be held in a harrowing hostage situation until after Reagan secured the election.

Needless to say, this was an inconvenient story at a time – in the mid-1990s – when the national media had long since moved on from the Reagan scandals and were obsessing over new scandals, mostly related to President Bill Clinton's sex life and failed real estate deals. Washington also wasn't particularly interested in challenging the Reagan legacy, which at that time was beginning to solidify into a kind of mythology, with campaigns underway to name buildings and airports after the former president.

At times, Bob had doubts about his career decisions and the stories he was pursuing. As he wrote in *Trick or Treason*, a book outlining his investigation into the October Surprise Mystery, this search for historical truth can be painful and seemingly thankless.

“Many times,” he wrote, “I had regretted accepting *Frontline*'s assignment in 1990. I faulted myself for risking my future in mainstream journalism. After all, that is where the decent-paying jobs are. I had jeopardized my ability to support my four children out of an old-fashioned sense of duty, a regard for an unwritten code that expects reporters to take almost any assignment.”

Nevertheless, Bob continued his efforts to tell the full story behind both the Iran-Contra scandal and the origins of the Reagan-Bush era, ultimately leading to two things: him being pushed out of the mainstream media, and the launching of Consortiumnews.com.

I remember when he started the website, together with my older brother Sam, back in 1995. At the time, in spite of talk we were all hearing about something called “the information superhighway” and “electronic mail,” I had never visited a website and didn’t even know how to get “on line.” My dad called me in Richmond, where I was a sophomore at Virginia Commonwealth University, and told me I should check out this new “Internet site” he and Sam had just launched.

He explained over the phone how to open a browser and instructed me how to type in the URL, starting, he said, with “http,” then a colon and two forward slashes, then “www,” then “dot,” then this long address with one or two more forward slashes if I recall. (It wasn’t until years later that the website got its own domain and a simpler address.)

I went to the computer lab at the university and asked for some assistance on how to get online, dutifully typed in the URL, and opened this website – the first one I had ever visited. It was interesting, but a bit hard to read on the computer screen, so I printed out some articles to read back in my dorm room.

I quickly became a fan of “The Consortium,” as it was called back then, and continued reading articles on the October Surprise Mystery as Bob and Sam posted them on this new and exciting tool called “the Internet.” Sam had to learn HTML coding from scratch to launch this online news service, billed as “the Internet’s First Investigative ‘Zine.” For his efforts, Sam was honored with the Consortium for Independent Journalism’s first Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015.

X-Files and Contra-Crack

At some point along the way, Bob decided that in addition to the website, where he was not only posting original articles but also providing the source documents that he had uncovered in the House office building basement, he would also take a stab at traditional publishing. He compiled the “October Surprise X-Files” into a booklet and self-published it in January 1996.

He was also publishing a newsletter to complement the website, knowing that at that time, there were still plenty of people who didn’t know how to turn a computer on, much less navigate the World Wide Web. I transferred from Virginia Commonwealth University to George Mason University in the DC suburbs and started working part-time with my dad and Sam on the newsletter and website.

We worked together on the content, editing and laying it out with graphics often culled from books at our local library. We built a subscriber base through networking and purchasing mailing lists from progressive magazines. Every two weeks we would get a thousand copies printed from Sir Speedy and would spend

Friday evening collating these newsletters and sending them out to our subscribers.

The launching of the website and newsletter, and later an even-more ambitious project called *I.F. Magazine*, happened to coincide with the publication in 1996 of Gary Webb's "Dark Alliance" series at the *San Jose Mercury-News*. Webb's series reopened the contra-cocaine controversy with a detailed examination of the drug trafficking networks in Nicaragua and Los Angeles that had helped to spread highly addictive crack cocaine across the United States.

The African-American community, in particular, was rightly outraged over this story, which offered confirmation of many long-standing suspicions that the government was complicit in the drug trade devastating their communities. African Americans had been deeply and disproportionately affected by the crack epidemic, both in terms of the direct impact of the drug and the draconian drug laws and mandatory minimum sentences that came to define the government's approach to "the war on drugs."

For a moment in the summer of 1996, it appeared that the renewed interest in the contra-cocaine story might offer an opportunity to revisit the crimes and misdeeds of the Reagan-Bush era, but those hopes were dashed when the "the Big Media" decided to double down on its earlier failures to cover this story properly.

Big Papers Pile On

The *Los Angeles Times* launched the attack on Gary Webb and his reporting at the *San Jose Mercury-News*, followed by equally dismissive stories at the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. The piling on from these newspapers eventually led *Mercury-News* editor Jerry Ceppos to denounce Webb's reporting and offer a mea culpa for publishing the articles.

The onslaught of hostile reporting from the big papers failed to address the basic premises of Webb's series and did not debunk the underlying allegations of contra-cocaine smuggling or the fact that much of this cocaine ended up on American streets in the form of crack. Instead, it raised doubts by poking holes in certain details and casting the story as a "conspiracy theory." Some of the reporting attempted to debunk claims that Webb never actually made – such as the idea that the contra-cocaine trafficking was part of a government plot to intentionally decimate the African-American community.

Gary Webb and Bob were in close contact during those days. Bob offered him professional and personal support, having spent his time also on the receiving end of attacks by journalistic colleagues and editors who rejected certain

stories – no matter how factual – as fanciful conspiracy theories. Articles at The Consortium website and newsletter, as well as *I.F. Magazine*, offered details on the historical context for the “Dark Alliance” series and pushed back against the mainstream media’s onslaught of hostile and disingenuous reporting.

Bob also published the book *Lost History* which provided extensive details on the background for the “Dark Alliance” series, explaining that far from a baseless “conspiracy theory,” the facts and evidence strongly supported the conclusion that the Reagan-Bush administrations had colluded with drug traffickers to fund their illegal war against Nicaragua.

But sadly, the damage to Gary Webb was done. With his professional and personal life in tatters because of his courageous reporting on the contra-cocaine story, he committed suicide in 2004 at the age of 49. Speaking about this suicide later on *Democracy Now*, Bob noted how painful it is to be ridiculed and unfairly criticized by colleagues, as his friend had experienced.

“There’s a special pain when your colleagues in your profession turn on you, especially when you’ve done something that they should admire and should understand,” he said. “To do all that work and then have the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* attack you and try to destroy your life, there’s a special pain in that.”

In consultation with his family, Bob and the Board of Directors for the Consortium for Independent Journalism launched the Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015.

The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush

The presidency of George W. Bush was surreal for many of us, and no one more so than my dad.

In covering Washington politics for decades, Bob had traced many stories to “Dubya’s” father, George H.W. Bush, who had been implicated in a variety of questionable activities, including the October Surprise Mystery and Iran-Contra. He had also launched a war against Iraq in 1991 that seemed to be motivated, at least in part, to help kick “the Vietnam Syndrome,” i.e. the reluctance that the American people had felt since the Vietnam War to support military action abroad.

As Bob noted in his 1992 book *Fooling America*, after U.S. forces routed the Iraqi military in 1991, President Bush’s first public comment about the victory expressed his delight that it would finally put to rest the American reflex against committing troops to far-off conflicts. “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all,” he exulted.

The fact that Bush-41's son could run for president largely on name recognition confirmed to Bob the failure of the mainstream media to cover important stories properly and the need to continue building an independent media infrastructure. This conviction solidified through Campaign 2000 and the election's ultimate outcome, when Bush assumed the White House as the first popular-vote loser in more than a century.

Despite the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court had halted the counting of votes in Florida, thus preventing an accurate determination of the rightful winner, most of the national media moved on from the story after Bush was sworn in on Jan. 20, 2001. Consortiumnews.com continued to examine the documentary record, however, and ultimately concluded that Al Gore would have been declared the winner of that election if all the legally cast ballots were counted.

At Consortiumnews, there was an unwritten editorial policy that the title "President" should never precede George W. Bush's name, based on our view that he was not legitimately elected. But beyond those editorial decisions, we also understood the gravity of the fact that had Election 2000 been allowed to play out with all votes counted, many of the disasters of the Bush years – notably the 9/11 tragedy and the Iraq War, as well as decisions to withdraw from international agreements on arms control and climate change – might have been averted.

As all of us who lived through the post-9/11 era will recall, it was a challenging time all around, especially if you were someone critical of George W. Bush. The atmosphere in that period did not allow for much dissent. Those who stood up against the juggernaut for war – such as Phil Donahue at MSNBC, Chris Hedges at the *New York Times*, or even the Dixie Chicks – had their careers damaged and found themselves on the receiving end of death threats and hate mail.

While Bob's magazine and newsletter projects had been discontinued, the website was still publishing articles, providing a home for dissenting voices that questioned the case for invading Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003. Around this time, former CIA analyst Ray McGovern and some of his colleagues founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity and a long-running relationship with Consortiumnews was established. Several former intelligence veterans began contributing to the website, motivated by the same independent spirit of truth-telling that compelled Bob to invest so much in this project.

At a time when almost the entire mainstream media was going along with the Bush administration's dubious case for war, this and a few other like-minded websites pushed back with well-researched articles calling into question the rationale. Although at times it might have felt as though we were just voices in the

wilderness, a major groundswell of opposition to war emerged in the country, with historic marches of hundreds of thousands taking place to reject Bush's push for war.

Of course, these antiwar voices were ultimately vindicated by the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the fact that the war and occupation proved to be a far costlier and deadlier enterprise than we had been told that it would be. Earlier assurances that it would be a "cakewalk" proved as false as the WMD claims, but as had been so often the case in Washington, there was little to no accountability from the mainstream media, the think tanks or government officials for being so spectacularly wrong.

In an effort to document the true history of that era, Bob, Sam and I co-wrote the book *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, which was published in late 2007. The book traced the work of Consortiumnews, juxtaposing it against the backdrop of mainstream media coverage during the Bush era, in an effort to not only correct the record, but also demonstrate that not all of us got things so wrong.

We felt it was important to remind readers – as well as future historians – that some of us knew and reported in real time the mistakes that were being made on everything from withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol to invading Iraq to implementing a policy of torture to bungling the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Obama Era

By the Obama presidency, Consortiumnews.com had become a home to a growing number of writers who brought new perspectives to the website's content. While for years, the writing staff had been limited primarily to Bob, Sam and me, suddenly, Consortiumnews was receiving contributions from journalists, activists and former intelligence analysts who offered a wide range of expertise – on international law, economics, human rights, foreign policy, national security, and even religion and philosophy.

One recurring theme of articles at the website during the Obama era was the enduring effect of unchallenged narratives, how they shaped national politics and dictated government policy. Bob observed that even a supposedly left-of-center president like Obama seemed beholden to the false narratives and national mythologies dating back to the Reagan era. He pointed out that this could be at least partially attributed to the failure to establish a strong foundation for independent journalism.

In a 2010 piece called "Obama's Fear of the Reagan Narrative," Bob noted that Obama had defended his deal with Republicans on tax cuts for the rich because

there was such a strong lingering effect of Reagan's messaging from 30 years earlier. "He felt handcuffed by the Right's ability to rally Americans on behalf of Reagan's 'government-is-the-problem' message," Bob wrote.

He traced Obama's complaints about his powerlessness in the face of this dynamic to the reluctance of American progressives to invest sufficiently in media and think tanks, as conservatives had been doing for decades in waging their "the war of ideas." As he had been arguing since the early 1990s, Bob insisted that the limits that had been placed on Obama – whether real or perceived – continued to demonstrate the power of propaganda and the need for greater investment in alternative media.

He also observed that much of the nuttiness surrounding the so-called Tea Party movement resulted from fundamental misunderstandings of American history and constitutional principles. "Democrats and progressives should be under no illusion about the new flood of know-nothingism that is about to inundate the United States in the guise of a return to 'first principles' and a deep respect for the U.S. Constitution," Bob warned.

He pointed out that despite the Tea Partiers' claimed reverence for the Constitution, they actually had very little understanding of the document, as revealed by their ahistorical claims that federal taxes are unconstitutional. In fact, as Bob observed, the Constitution represented "a major power grab by the federal government, when compared to the loosely drawn Articles of Confederation, which lacked federal taxing authority and other national powers."

Motivated by a desire to correct falsified historical narratives spanning more than two centuries, Bob published his sixth and final book, *America's Stolen Narrative: From Washington and Madison to Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes to Obama*, in 2012.

Along with revenues from book sales, growing donations from readers enabled Bob to not only pay writers but also to hire an assistant, Chelsea Gilmour, who began working for Consortiumnews in 2014. In addition to providing invaluable administrative support, Chelsea also performed duties including research, writing and fact-checking.

Political Realignment and the New McCarthyism

Although at the beginning of the Obama era – and indeed since the 1980s – the name Robert Parry had been closely associated with exposing wrongdoing by Republicans, and hence had a strong following among Democratic Party loyalists, by the end of Obama's presidency there seemed to be a realignment taking place among some of Consortiumnews.com's readership, which reflected more generally

the shifting politics of the country.

In particular, the U.S. media's approach to Russia and related issues, such as the violent ouster in 2014 of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, became "virtually 100 percent propaganda," Bob said.

He noted that the full story was never told when it came to issues such as the Sergei Magnitsky case, which led to the first round of U.S. sanctions against Russia, nor the inconvenient facts related to the Euromaidan protests that led to Yanukovich's ouster – including the reality of strong neo-Nazi influence in those protests – nor the subsequent conflict in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

Bob's stories on Ukraine were widely cited and disseminated, and he became an important voice in presenting a fuller picture of the conflict than was possible by reading and watching only mainstream news outlets. Bob was featured prominently in Oliver Stone's 2016 documentary "Ukraine on Fire," where he explained how U.S.-funded political NGOs and media companies have worked with the CIA and foreign policy establishment since the 1980s to promote the U.S. geopolitical agenda.

Bob regretted that, increasingly, "the American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the 'other side of the story.'" Indeed, he said that to even suggest that there might be another side to the story is enough to get someone branded as an apologist for Vladimir Putin or a "Kremlin stooge."

This culminated in late 2016 in the blacklisting of Consortiumnews.com on a dubious website called "PropOrNot," which was claiming to serve as a watchdog against undue "Russian influence" in the United States. The PropOrNot blacklist, including Consortiumnews and about 200 other websites deemed "Russian propaganda," was elevated by the *Washington Post* as a credible source, despite the fact that the neo-McCarthyites who published the list hid behind a cloak of anonymity.

"The *Post's* article by Craig Timberg," Bob wrote on Nov. 27, 2016, "described PropOrNot simply as 'a nonpartisan collection of researchers with foreign policy, military and technology backgrounds [who] planned to release its own findings Friday showing the startling reach and effectiveness of Russian propaganda campaigns.'"

As Bob explained in an article called "Washington Post's Fake News Guilt," the paper granted PropOrNot anonymity "to smear journalists who don't march in lockstep with official pronouncements from the State Department or some other

impeccable fount of never-to-be-questioned truth.”

The *Post* even provided an unattributed quote from the head of the shadowy website. “The way that this propaganda apparatus supported [Donald] Trump was equivalent to some massive amount of a media buy,” the anonymous smear merchant said. The *Post* claimed that the PropOrNot “executive director” had spoken on the condition of anonymity “to avoid being targeted by Russia’s legions of skilled hackers.”

To be clear, neither Consortiumnews nor Robert Parry ever “supported Trump,” as the above anonymous quote claims. Something interesting, however, did seem to be happening in terms of Consortiumnews’ readership in the early days of the Trump presidency, as could be gleaned from some of the comments left on articles and social media activity.

It did appear for some time at least that a good number of Trump supporters were reading Consortiumnews, which could probably attributed to the fact that the website was one of the few outlets pushing back against both the “New Cold War” with Russia and the related story of “Russiagate,” which Bob didn’t even like referring to as a “scandal.” (As an editor, he preferred to use the word “controversy” on the website, because as far as he was concerned, the allegations against Trump and his supposed “collusion” with Russia did not rise to the level of actual scandals such as Watergate or Iran-Contra.)

In his view, the perhaps understandable hatred of Trump felt by many Americans – both inside and outside the Beltway – had led to an abandonment of old-fashioned rules of journalism and standards of fairness, which should be applied even to someone like Donald Trump.

“On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump ‘Resistance,’” Bob wrote in his final article for Consortiumnews.

“The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster,” he said. “Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.”

He marveled that even senior editors in the mainstream media treated the unproven Russiagate allegations as flat fact.

“No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government’s institutions,” Bob wrote. “Anti-Trump ‘progressives’ were posturing as the true patriots

because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.”

An Untimely End and the Future of Consortiumnews

My dad’s untimely passing has come as a shock to us all, especially since up until a month ago, there was no indication whatsoever that he was sick in any way. He took good care of himself, never smoked, got regular check-ups, exercised, and ate well. The unexpected health issues starting with a mild stroke Christmas Eve and culminating with his admission into hospice care several days ago offer a stark reminder that nothing should be taken for granted.

And as many Consortiumnews readers have eloquently pointed out in comments left on [recent articles](#) regarding Bob’s health, it also reminds us that his brand of journalism is needed today more than ever.

“We need free will thinkers like you who value the truth based on the evidence and look past the group think in Washington to report on the real reasons for our government’s and our media’s actions which attempt to deceive us all,” wrote, for example, “FreeThinker.”

“Common sense and integrity are the hallmarks of Robert Parry’s journalism. May you get better soon for you are needed more now than ever before,” wrote “T.J.”

“We need a new generation of reporters, journalists, writers, and someone always being tenacious to follow up on the story,” added “Tina.”

As someone who has been involved with this website since its inception – as a writer, an editor and a reader – I concur with these sentiments. Readers should rest assured that despite my dad’s death, every effort will be made to ensure that the website will continue going strong.

Indeed, I think that everyone involved with this project wants to uphold the same commitment to truth-telling without fear or favor that inspired Bob and his heroes like George Seldes, I.F. Stone, and Thomas Paine.

That commitment can be seen in my dad’s pursuit of stories such as those mentioned above, but also so many others – including his investigations into the financial relationship of the influential *Washington Times* with the Unification Church cult of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the truth behind the Nixon campaign’s alleged efforts to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson’s Paris peace talks with Vietnamese leaders in 1968, the reality of the chemical attack in Syria in 2013, and even detailed examinations of the evidence behind the so-called “Deflategate” controversy that he felt unfairly branded his favorite football

team, the New England Patriots, as cheaters.

Reviewing these journalistic achievements, it becomes clear that there are few stories that have slipped under Consortiumnews.com's radar, and that the historical record is far more complete thanks to this website and Bob's old-fashioned approach to journalism.

But besides this deeply held commitment to independent journalism, it should also be recalled that, ultimately, Bob was motivated by a concern over the future of life on Earth. As someone who grew up at the height of the Cold War, he understood the dangers of allowing tensions and hysteria to spiral out of control, especially in a world such as ours with enough nuclear weapons to wipe out all life on the planet many times over.

As the United States continues down the path of a New Cold War, my dad would be pleased to know that he has such committed contributors who will enable the site to remain the indispensable home for independent journalism that it has become, and continue to push back on false narratives that threaten our very survival.

Thank you all for your support.

In lieu of flowers, Bob's family asks you to please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Consortium for Independent Journalism.

The Crazy Imbalance of Russia-gate

Exclusive: If the U.S. government and mainstream media are really concerned about foreign influence in American politics, they might look at Israel and other nations with much more clout than Russia, notes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The core absurdity of the Russia-gate frenzy is its complete lack of proportionality. Indeed, the hysteria is reminiscent of Sen. Joe McCarthy warning that "one communist in the faculty of one university is one communist too many" or Donald Trump's highlighting a few "bad hombres" raping white American women.

It's not that there were no Americans who espoused communist views at universities and elsewhere or that there are no "bad hombre" rapists; it's that these rare exceptions were used to generate a dangerous overreaction in service of a propagandistic agenda. Historically, we have seen this technique used often

when demagogues seize on an isolated event and exploit it emotionally to mislead populations to war.

Today, we have The New York Times and The Washington Post repeatedly publishing front-page articles about allegations that some Russians with “links” to the Kremlin bought \$100,000 in Facebook ads to promote some issues deemed hurtful to Hillary Clinton’s campaign although some of the ads ran after the election.

Initially, Facebook could find no evidence of even that small effort but was pressured in May by Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia. The Washington Post reported that Warner, who is spearheading the Russia-gate investigation in the Senate Intelligence Committee, flew to Silicon Valley and urged Facebook executives to take another look at possible ad buys.

Facebook responded to this congressional pressure by scouring its billions of monthly users and announced that it had located 470 suspect accounts associated with ads totaling \$100,000 – out of Facebook’s \$27 billion in annual revenue.

Here is how the Times described those findings: “Facebook officials disclosed that they had shut down several hundred accounts that they believe were created by a Russian company linked to the Kremlin and used to buy \$100,000 in ads pushing divisive issues during and after the American election campaign.” (It sometimes appears that every Russian – all 144 million of them – is somehow “linked” to the Kremlin.)

Last week, congressional investigators urged Facebook to expand its review into “troll farms” supposedly based in Belarus, Macedonia and Estonia – although Estonia is by no means a Russian ally; it joined NATO in 2004.

“Warner and his Democratic counterpart on the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Adam B. Schiff of California, have been increasingly vocal in recent days about their frustrations with Facebook,” the Post reported.

Facebook Complies

So, on Thursday, Facebook succumbed to demands that it turn over to Congress copies of the ads, a move that has only justified more alarmist front-page stories about Russia! Russia! Russia!

In response to this political pressure – at a time when Facebook is fending off possible anti-trust legislation – its chief executive Mark Zuckerberg added that he is expanding the investigation to include “additional Russian groups and other former Soviet states.”

So, it appears that not only are all Russians “linked” to the Kremlin, but all

former Soviet states as well.

But why stop there? If the concern is that American political campaigns are being influenced by foreign governments whose interests may diverge from what's best for America, why not look at countries that have caused the United States far more harm recently than Russia?

After all, Saudi Arabia and its Sunni Wahabbi leaders have been pulling the U.S. government into their sectarian wars with the Shiites, including conflicts in Yemen and Syria that have contributed to anti-Americanism in the region, to the growth of Al Qaeda, and to a disruptive flow of refugees into Europe.

And, let's not forget the 8,000-pound gorilla in the room: Israel. Does anyone think that whatever Russia may or may not have done in trying to influence U.S. politics compares even in the slightest to what Israel does all the time?

Which government used its pressure and that of its American agents (i.e., the neocons) to push the United States into the disastrous war in Iraq? It wasn't Russia, which was among the countries urging the U.S. not to invade; it was Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Indeed, the plans for "regime change" in Iraq and Syria can be traced back to the work of key American neoconservatives employed by Netanyahu's political campaign in 1996. At that time, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and other leading neocons unveiled a seminal document entitled "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," which proposed casting aside negotiations with Arabs in favor of simply replacing the region's anti-Israeli governments.

However, to make that happen required drawing in the powerful U.S. military, so after the 9/11 attacks, the neocons inside President George W. Bush's administration set in motion a deception campaign to justify invading Iraq, a war which was to be followed by more "regime changes" in Syria and Iran.

A Wrench in the Plans

Although the military disaster in Iraq threw a wrench into those plans, the Israeli/neocon agenda never changed. Along with Israel's new regional ally, Saudi Arabia, a proxy war was fashioned to remove Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

As Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren explained, the goal was to shatter the Shiite "strategic arc" running from Iran through Syria to Lebanon and Israel's Hezbollah enemies.

How smashing this Shiite "arc" was in the interests of the American people – or

even within their consciousness – is never explained. But it was what Israel wanted and thus it was what the U.S. government enlisted to do, even to the point of letting sophisticated U.S. weaponry fall into the hands of Syria's Al Qaeda affiliate.

Israel's influence over U.S. politicians is so blatant that presidential contenders queue up every year to grovel before the Israel Lobby's conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. In 2016, Donald Trump showed up and announced that he was not there to "pander" and then pandered his pants off.

And, whenever Prime Minister Netanyahu wants to show off his power, he is invited to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress at which Republicans and Democrats compete to see how many times and how quickly they can leap to their feet in standing ovations. (Netanyahu holds the record for the number of times a foreign leader has addressed joint sessions with three such appearances, tied with Winston Churchill.)

Yet, Israeli influence is so engrained in the U.S. political process that even the mention of the existence of an "Israel Lobby" brings accusations of anti-Semitism. "Israel Lobby" is a forbidden phrase in Washington.

However, pretty much whenever Israel targets a U.S. politician for defeat, that politician goes down, a muscle that Israel flexed in the early 1980s in taking out Rep. Paul Findley and Sen. Charles Percy, two moderate Republicans whose crime was to suggest talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

So, if the concern is the purity of the American democratic process and the need to protect it from outside manipulation, let's have at it. Why not a full-scale review of who is doing what and how? Does anyone think that Israel's influence over U.S. politics is limited to a few hundred Facebook accounts and \$100,000 in ads?

A Historical Perspective

And, if you want a historical review, throw in the British and German propaganda around the two world wars; include how the South Vietnamese government collaborated with Richard Nixon in 1968 to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson's Paris peace talks; take a serious look at the collusion between Ronald Reagan's campaign and Iran thwarting President Jimmy Carter's efforts to free 52 American hostages in Tehran in 1980; open the books on Turkey's covert investments in U.S. politicians and policymakers; and examine how authoritarian regimes of all stripes have funded important Washington think tanks and law firms.

If such an effort were ever proposed, you would get a sense of how sensitive this topic is in Official Washington, where foreign money and its influence are

rampant. There would be accusations of anti-Semitism in connection with Israel and charges of conspiracy theory even in well-documented cases of collaboration between U.S. politicians and foreign interests.

So, instead of a balanced and comprehensive assessment of this problem, the powers-that-be concentrate on the infinitesimal case of Russian “meddling” as the excuse for Hillary Clinton’s shocking defeat. But the key reasons for Clinton’s dismal campaign had virtually nothing to do with Russia, even if you believe all the evidence-lite accusations about Russian “meddling.”

The Russians did not tell Clinton to vote for the disastrous Iraq War and play endless footsy with the neocons; the Russians didn’t advise her to set up a private server to handle her State Department emails and potentially expose classified information; the Russians didn’t lure Clinton and the U.S. into the Libyan fiasco nor suggest her ghastly joke in response to Muammar Gaddafi’s lynching (“We came, we saw, he died”); the Russians had nothing to do with her greedy decision to accept millions of dollars in Wall Street speaking fees and then try to keep the speech contents secret from the voters; the Russians didn’t encourage her husband to become a serial philanderer and make a mockery of their marriage; nor did the Russians suggest to Anthony Weiner, the husband of top Clinton aide Huma Abedin, that he send lewd photos to a teen-ager on a laptop also used by his wife, a development that led FBI Director James Comey to reopen the Clinton-email investigation just 11 days before the election; the Russians weren’t responsible for Clinton’s decision not to campaign in Wisconsin and Michigan; the Russians didn’t stop her from offering a coherent message about how she would help the struggling white working class; and on and on.

But the Russia-gate investigation is not about fairness and balance; it’s a reckless scapegoating of a nuclear-armed country to explain away – and possibly do away with – Donald Trump’s presidency. Rather than putting everything in context and applying a sense of proportion, Russia-gate is relying on wild exaggerations of factually dubious or relatively isolated incidents as an opportunistic means to a political end.

As reckless as President Trump has been, the supposedly wise men and wise women of Washington are at least his match.

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).

Forgetting the ‘Dirty Dossier’ on Trump

Exclusive: The new Russia-gate furor is over Donald Trump Jr. meeting a Russian who claimed to have dirt on Hillary Clinton, but the Clinton team’s Russian cash-for-trash search against Trump Sr. is all but forgotten, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Yes, I realize that the editors of The New York Times long ago cast aside any journalistic professionalism to become charter members of the #Resistance against Donald Trump. But the latest frenzy over a meeting between Donald Trump Jr. and a Russian lawyer who was dangling the possibility of information about the Democrats receiving money from Russians represents one of the more remarkable moments of the entire Russia-gate hysteria.

Essentially, Trump’s oldest son is being accused of taking a meeting with a foreign national who claimed to have knowledge of potentially illegal activities by Trump’s Democratic rivals, although the promised information apparently turned out to be a dud.

Yet, on Monday, the Times led its newspaper with a story about this meeting – and commentators on MSNBC and elsewhere are labeling Trump Jr. a criminal if not a traitor for hearing out this lawyer.

Yet, no one seems to remember that Hillary Clinton supporters paid large sums of money, reportedly about \$1 million, to have ex-British spy Christopher Steele use his Russian connections to dig up dirt on Trump inside Russia, resulting in a salacious dossier that Clinton backers eagerly hawked to the news media.

Also, the two events – Trump Jr.’s meeting with the Russian lawyer and the Clinton camp’s commissioning of Steele’s Russia dossier – both occurred in June 2016, so you might have thought it would be a journalistic imperative to incorporate a reference or two to the dossier.

But the closest the Times came to that was noting: “Political campaigns collect opposition research from many quarters but rarely from sources linked to foreign governments.” That would have been an opportune point to slide in a paragraph about the Steele dossier, but nothing.

The Times doesn’t seem to have much historical memory either. There actually have been a number of cases in which American presidential campaigns have ventured overseas to seek out “opposition research” about rivals.

For instance, in 1992, President George H.W. Bush took a personal role in trying to obtain derogatory information about Bill Clinton's 1970 student trip to Eastern Europe, including to Moscow.

That effort started out by having senior State Department officials rifle through the passport files of Clinton and his mother, looking for a purported letter in which some Republican operatives thought Clinton might have renounced his U.S. citizenship.

Bush and his team were called out on that caper, which became known as "Passport-gate." During the Oct. 11, 1992 debate, Clinton even compared Bush's tactics to Joe McCarthy's during the 1950s Red Scare. But the Bush campaign didn't let the issue entirely go.

Czech-ing on Bill

In the days after the debate, phone records revealed a flurry of calls from Bush's campaign headquarters to Czechoslovakia, another stop on Clinton's student tour. There were also fax transmissions on Oct. 14 and 15, 1992, according to a later official investigation.

On Oct. 16, what appears to have been a return call was placed from the U.S. Embassy in Prague to the office of ad man Sig Rogich, who was handling anti-Clinton themes for the Bush campaign.

Following those exchanges, stories about Clinton's Prague trip began popping up in Czech newspapers. On Oct. 24, 1992, three Czech newspapers ran similar stories about Clinton's Czech hosts. The *Cesky Denik* story had an especially nasty headline: "Bill Was With Communists."

The Czech articles soon blew back to the United States. Reuters distributed a summary, and *The Washington Times*, over three consecutive days, ran articles about Clinton's Czech trip. The Clinton campaign responded that Clinton had entered Czechoslovakia under normal procedures for a student and stayed with the family of an Oxford friend.

Despite those last-minute efforts to revive Clinton's loyalty issue, the Democrat held on to defeat Bush in a three-way race (with Ross Perot).

You also could go back to Republican contacts with South Vietnamese officials to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace talks in 1968 and similar meetings with Iranian emissaries to frustrate President Jimmy Carter's Iran hostage negotiations in 1980, including a curious meeting involving senior Ronald Reagan campaign aides at the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in Washington, D.C.

But the Steele dossier is a more immediate and direct example of close Hillary Clinton supporters going outside the United States for dirt on Trump and collaborating with foreign nationals to dig it up – allegedly from Kremlin insiders. Although it is still not clear exactly who footed the bill for the Steele dossier and how much money was spread around to the Russian contacts, it is clear that Clinton supporters paid for the opposition research and then flacked the material to American journalists.

The Mystery Dossier

As I wrote on March 29, “An irony of the escalating hysteria about the Trump camp’s contacts with Russians is that one presidential campaign in 2016 did exploit political dirt that supposedly came from the Kremlin and other Russian sources. Friends of that political campaign paid for this anonymous hearsay material, shared it with American journalists and urged them to publish it to gain an electoral advantage. But this campaign was not Donald Trump’s; it was Hillary Clinton’s.

“And, awareness of this activity doesn’t require you to spin conspiracy theories about what may or may not have been said during some seemingly innocuous conversation. In this case, you have open admissions about how these Russian/Kremlin claims were used.

“Indeed, you have the words of Rep. Adam Schiff, the ranking Democratic member of the House Intelligence Committee, in his opening statement at [a] public hearing on so-called ‘Russia-gate.’ Schiff’s seamless 15-minute narrative of the Trump campaign’s alleged collaboration with Russia followed the script prepared by former British intelligence officer Christopher Steele who was hired as an opposition researcher last June [2016] to dig up derogatory information on Donald Trump.

“Steele, who had worked for Britain’s MI-6 in Russia, said he tapped into ex-colleagues and unnamed sources inside Russia, including leadership figures in the Kremlin, to piece together a series of sensational reports that became the basis of the current congressional and FBI investigations into Trump’s alleged ties to Moscow.

“Since he was not able to go to Russia himself, Steele based his reports mostly on multiple hearsay from anonymous Russians who claim to have heard some information from their government contacts before passing it on to Steele’s associates who then gave it to Steele who compiled this mix of rumors and alleged inside dope into ‘raw’ intelligence reports.

“Besides the anonymous sourcing and the sources’ financial incentives to dig up

dirt, Steele's reports had numerous other problems, including the inability of a variety of investigators to confirm key elements, such as the salacious claim that several years ago Russian intelligence operatives secretly videotaped Trump having prostitutes urinate on him while he lay in the same bed in Moscow's Ritz-Carlton used by President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.

"That tantalizing tidbit was included in Steele's opening report to his new clients, dated June 20, 2016. Apparently, it proved irresistible in whetting the appetite of Clinton's mysterious benefactors who were financing Steele's dirt digging and who have kept their identities (and the amounts paid) hidden. Also in that first report were the basic outlines of what has become the scandal that is now threatening the survival of Trump's embattled presidency."

The Trump Jr. Meeting

So, compare that with what we know about the June 9, 2016 meeting at Trump Tower in New York City, which Donald J. Trump Jr. says he agreed to because someone was claiming knowledge about Russian payments helping Hillary Clinton.

Trump Jr. said Russian lawyer Natalie Veselnitskaya "stated that she had information that individuals connected to Russia were funding the Democratic National Committee and supporting Mrs. Clinton. Her statements were vague, ambiguous and made no sense. No details or supporting information was provided or even offered. It quickly became clear that she had no meaningful information."

According to Trump Jr.'s account, Veselnitskaya then turned the conversation to President Vladimir Putin's cancellation of an adoption program which had sent Russian children to American parents, a move he took in reaction to the so-called Magnitsky Act, a 2012 punitive law passed by the U.S. Congress in retaliation for the 2009 death of Sergei Magnitsky in a Russian jail.

The death became a Western cause célèbre with Magnitsky, the accountant for hedge-fund executive William Browder, hailed as a martyr in the cause of whistleblowing against a profoundly corrupt Russian government. After Magnitsky's death from a heart attack, Browder claimed that his "lawyer" Magnitsky had been tortured and murdered to cover up official complicity in a \$230 million tax-fraud scheme involving companies ostensibly under Browder's control.

Because of Browder's wealth and political influence, he succeeded in getting the European Parliament and the U.S. Congress to buy into his narrative and move to punish the presumed villains in the tax fraud and in Magnitsky's death. The U.S.-enacted Magnitsky Act in 2012 was an opening salvo in what has become a new

Cold War between Washington and Moscow.

Only One Side Heard

The Magnitsky narrative has now become so engrained in Western geopolitical mythology that the storyline apparently can no longer be questioned or challenged. The New York Times reports Browder's narrative as flat fact, and The Washington Post took pleasure in denouncing a 2016 documentary that turned Browder's version of events on its head.

The documentary, entitled "The Magnitsky Act. Behind the Scenes," was essentially blocked for distribution in the West, with the European Parliament pulling the plug on its planned premiere in Brussels shortly before it was scheduled for showing.

When the documentary got a single showing at the Newseum in Washington, a Washington Post editorial branded the documentary Russian "agit-prop."

The Post sought to discredit the filmmaker, Andrei Nekrasov, without addressing his avalanche of documented examples of Browder's misrepresenting both big and small facts in the case. Instead, the Post accused Nekrasov of using "facts highly selectively" and insinuated that he was merely a pawn in the Kremlin's "campaign to discredit Mr. Browder and the Magnitsky Act."

The Post concluded smugly: "The film won't grab a wide audience, but it offers yet another example of the Kremlin's increasingly sophisticated efforts to spread its illiberal values and mind-set abroad. In the European Parliament and on French and German television networks, showings were put off recently after questions were raised about the accuracy of the film, including by Magnitsky's family.

"We don't worry that Mr. Nekrasov's film was screened here, in an open society. But it is important that such slick spin be fully exposed for its twisted story and sly deceptions."

Given the fact that virtually no one in the West was allowed to see the film, the Post's gleeful editorial had the feel of something you might read in a totalitarian society where the public only hears about dissent when the Official Organs of the State denounce some almost unknown person for saying something that almost no one heard.

What the Post didn't want you to know was that Nekrasov started off his project with the goal of producing a docu-drama that accepted Browder's self-serving narrative. However, during the research, Nekrasov uncovered evidence that revealed that Magnitsky was neither a "lawyer" nor a whistleblower; that the

scam involving Browder's companies had been exposed by a woman employee; and that Magnitsky, an accountant for Browder, was arrested as a conspirator in the fraud.

As the documentary unfolds, you see Nekrasov struggling with his dilemma as Browder grows increasingly abusive toward his erstwhile ally. Nekrasov painfully concludes that Browder had deceived him.

But, don't worry, as a citizen in the Free World, you probably will never have to worry about viewing this documentary, since it has been effectively flushed down the memory hole. Official references to Magnitsky are back in the proper form, treating him as a Martyr for Truth and a victim of the Evil Russians.

Plus, if you rely on The New York Times, The Washington Post, MSNBC, CNN and the rest of the U.S. mainstream media for your news, you won't have to think about the far more substantive case of the Steele Dossier in which Hillary Clinton's allies spent gobs of money seeking out sources in Russia to serve up dirt on Donald Trump.

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](#)).

Russia-gate Is No Watergate or Iran-Contra

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

By Robert Parry

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

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

unfolding now.

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

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

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

After Nixon’s narrow victory over Vice President Hubert Humphrey in the 1968 election, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover informed Nixon that Johnson had a secret file, complete with wiretapped phone calls, detailing the Nixon campaign’s backchannel messages to South Vietnamese officials convincing them to boycott Johnson’s Paris peace talks. Later, Nixon learned that this incriminating file had disappeared from the White House.

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

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

Iran-Contra Parallels

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grasping the Watergate Narrative

Still, the Times and other major news outlets have failed to factor this belated admission into the larger Watergate narrative. If you understand that Nixon did

sabotage President Johnson's Vietnam War peace talks and that Nixon was aware that Johnson's file on what LBJ called Nixon's "treason" had disappeared from the White House, the early "Watergate tapes" from 1971 suddenly make sense.

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

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

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

"Do we have it?" Nixon asked Haldeman. "I've asked for it. You said you didn't have it."

Haldeman: "We can't find it."

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

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

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

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

Nixon: "Where?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Forming the Burglars

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

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

Haldeman: "Make an inspection of the safe."

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

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

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

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

Through 1972 – and the early days of the Watergate scandal – former President Johnson had stayed silent about Nixon's sabotage of the Paris peace talks. But

the ex-President became livid when – after Nixon’s reelection in 1972 – Nixon’s men sought to pressure Johnson into helping them shut down the Watergate investigation, in part, by noting that Johnson, too, had deployed wiretaps against Nixon’s 1968 campaign to obtain evidence about the peace-talk sabotage.

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

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

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

A Failed Investigation

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

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

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

But – from the start of Iran-Contra – there was a strong pushback from

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

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

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

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

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

In a PBS interview nearly a decade later, Nicholas Veliotis, Reagan's assistant secretary of state for the Middle East, said he looked into the incident by talking to top administration officials.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another Failed Investigation

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

And, with the congressional inquiry largely in the hands again of Rep. Hamilton, the Democrats timidly folded their tent despite a growing body of evidence that the Reagan team was indeed guilty.

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

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

Andelman said deMarenches ordered that the secret meetings be kept out of his memoirs because the story could otherwise damage the reputations of his friends, William Casey and George H.W. Bush. Andelman's testimony corroborated

longstanding claims from a variety of international intelligence operatives about a Paris meeting involving Casey and Bush. But the Task Force report brushed this testimony aside, paradoxically terming it “credible” but then claiming it was “insufficiently probative.”

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

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

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

The Russian Report

Ironically, another piece of late-arriving evidence was a January 1993 report from a national security committee of the Russian parliament about the Kremlin’s intelligence data confirming that key Republicans, including George H.W. Bush and William Casey, had met with Iranian officials in Europe regarding the hostages during the 1980 campaign.

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

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

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

The naivete of this decision was underscored years later when I located a memo

at Bush's presidential library stating that the State Department had informed the White House counsel's office that Casey had traveled to Madrid in 1980, corroborating a key October Surprise allegation.

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

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

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

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

"We found no evidence to confirm Casey's trip to Madrid," Hamilton told me. "We couldn't show that. The [George H.W. Bush] White House did not notify us that he did make the trip. Should they have passed that on to us? They should have because they knew we were interested in that."

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

Not Moving the Needle

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

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

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

October Surprise?”

“Of course, it was,” Shamir responded without hesitation. “It was.”

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

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

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

In a *Christian Science Monitor* commentary, Bani-Sadr wrote, “Ayatollah Khomeini and Ronald Reagan had organized a clandestine negotiation which prevented the attempts by myself and then-U.S. President Jimmy Carter to free the hostages before the 1980 U.S. presidential election took place. The fact that they were not released tipped the results of the election in favor of Reagan.”

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

Compare and Contrast

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Railroading Flynn

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

The Logan Act, which has never resulted in a prosecution in 218 years, was enacted during the period of the Alien and Sedition Acts to bar private citizens

from negotiating on their own with foreign governments. It was never intended to apply to a national security adviser of an elected President, albeit before he was sworn in.

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

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

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

Trump may have thought that tossing Flynn overboard to the circling sharks would calm down the sharks but the blood in the water only excited them more. According to then-FBI Director James Comey, Trump talked to him one-on-one the next day, Feb. 14, and said, “I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go. He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go.”

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

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

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

Curb the Enthusiasm

Another contrast between the earlier scandals (Watergate and Iran-Contra) and

Russia-gate is the degree of enthusiasm and excitement that the U.S. mainstream media and congressional Democrats have shown today as opposed to 1972 and 1986.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In other words, what is driving Russia-gate – for both the mainstream news media

and the Democrats – appears to be a political agenda, i.e., the desire to remove Trump from office while also ratcheting up a New Cold War with Russia, a priority for Washington’s neoconservatives and their liberal-interventionist sidekicks.

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

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

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

The Push for Trump’s Impeachment

Exclusive: Establishment voices are escalating their calls for President Trump’s impeachment, even without any public evidence that his campaign colluded with Russia, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Russia-gate affair has taken a strange turn as advocates for President Trump’s removal say his ouster should take precedence over completing the investigation and actually seeing how much there is there – whereas at least one target of the inquiry wants the U.S. government to put its cards on the table.

Carter Page, a former foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign who is reportedly under an FBI counterintelligence investigation for his contacts with Russians, has called on Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who is overseeing the investigation, to immediately release “any documents related to [the Obama administration’s] alleged wiretapping of me.”

In Page’s view, it was the Obama administration’s spreading of allegations about the Trump campaign’s connections to Russia that represented “government meddling

in the 2016 election,” rather than Russia’s alleged hacking Democratic emails and publicizing them via WikiLeaks, a claim made by President Obama’s intelligence chiefs but denied by WikiLeaks and Russia.

Yet, what has been perhaps most remarkable about the entire Russia-gate affair is that it has been conducted with almost no evidence being shared with the American people. Thus, we have the prospect of a duly elected President of the United States being targeted for removal by the political and media Establishment without the citizens being let in on exactly what evidence exists and how significant it is.

The impeachment spotlight has already shifted from the underlying issue of whether the Trump campaign colluded with Russians to President Trump’s inept firing of FBI Director James Comey, who played a key role in sinking Hillary Clinton’s campaign by reopening an investigation into possible security breaches in her use of a private email server while Secretary of State – before Comey took another star turn in pursuing the Trump campaign’s possible ties to Russia.

Trump, whose fitness for the presidency was always a profound concern to many American voters, again displayed his incompetence in firing Comey. You might have thought that Trump – as a former reality-TV star whose trademark line was “you’re fired!” – would have had the process down, but apparently not.

Trump didn’t even fire Comey face to face, but rather clumsily at long distance. Then, Trump had his subordinates justify Comey’s abrupt removal as a response to the FBI director’s violation of Justice Department protocols in announcing the politically sensitive investigation of Clinton in a way that appeared to influence a national election. But Trump undercut that rationale by blurting out comments that seemed to tie Comey’s removal to his lack of loyalty and to the Russian inquiry.

This latest botched move again showed that Trump can’t follow one of the most elementary rules of politics: stick to your own talking points. When one considers what Republicans did with the Obama administration’s initial confusion about the causes for the 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, you might think that Trump would have learned the lesson about getting a story straight before telling it, but apparently not.

Whatever the justification for Comey’s firing, what Trump did was shift the Russia-gate “scandal” from the actual facts of the case to the process of the investigation. One of Official Washington’s favorite slogans is “the cover-up is worse than the crime” – although that’s usually a cop-out for journalists and members of Congress who don’t have the skills to investigate the underlying crime or determine if one even exists.

A 'Soft Coup'

While the Establishment's outrage over Comey's firing has been widespread, one might have thought there would be a countervailing concern about the FBI and other U.S. intelligence agencies intervening to affect electoral outcomes, whether that was torpedoing Clinton or now sinking Trump.

The curious role of the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the FBI in spearheading the Russia-gate investigation – including having handpicked “senior analysts” from the three agencies produce a clearly biased and nearly evidence-free report on Jan. 6 – has raised concerns of a “soft coup” or “deep-state coup” to negate the 2016 election.

Considering the seriousness of such a move in a constitutional republic that prides itself as the gold standard of democracy, it might have been expected that the law-enforcement and intelligence agencies would go the extra mile in sharing their evidence with the American people whose electoral judgment would, in effect, be made meaningless: both by Comey's late intervention against Clinton and now the pressure to impeach Trump.

Yet, instead of a commitment to openness, the intelligence community is telling the citizens that we must accept the fact of Russian “meddling” as “a given,” sans evidence. In addition, influential voices are emerging to declare that Trump's impeachment should proceed even without the results of the Russia-gate investigation of possible Trump-Russia collusion being known to the public.

On Sunday, The Washington Post published an opinion article by Harvard University law professor Laurence H. Tribe declaring: “The time has come for Congress to launch an impeachment investigation of President Trump for obstruction of justice. ... Now the country is faced with a president whose conduct strongly suggests that he poses a danger to our system of government.”

Tribe continued: “Ample reasons existed to worry about this president, and to ponder the extraordinary remedy of impeachment, even before he fired FBI Director James B. Comey and shockingly admitted on national television that the action was provoked by the FBI's intensifying investigation into his campaign's ties with Russia.”

Grave Threat

According to Tribe, Trump's threat to the system is so grave that his removal should precede any conclusions from the Russia-gate investigation. Tribe wrote that immediate impeachment could have been fashioned around other issues, “even without getting to the bottom of what Trump dismissed as ‘this Russia thing’,” though Tribe acknowledged that such an extreme step might have seemed premature

at the time.

“No longer,” Tribe continued. “To wait for the results of the multiple investigations underway is to risk tying our nation’s fate to the whims of an authoritarian leader. Comey’s summary firing will not stop the inquiry, yet it represented an obvious effort to interfere with a probe involving national security matters vastly more serious than the ‘third-rate burglary’ that Nixon tried to cover up in Watergate.

“The question of Russian interference in the presidential election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign go to the heart of our system and ability to conduct free and fair elections.”

Like many mainstream “experts,” Tribe doesn’t seem to understand what Watergate was really about; recent historical discoveries show it to be an outgrowth of Nixon’s cover-up of his 1968 sabotage of President Lyndon Johnson’s Vietnam peace talks, a maneuver that secured Nixon the presidency but extended the war for four more years. Nixon’s fear that his dirty trick might get leaked led to formation of the Watergate “plumbers.”

Tribe also ignores the fact that the “Russian interference” still remains a “question,” not a proven fact, and no investigator has cited any evidence of the Trump campaign’s collusion. To skirt that problem, Tribe focuses on the firing of Comey as the grounds for impeachment:

“To say that this does not in itself rise to the level of ‘obstruction of justice’ is to empty that concept of all meaning. Obstruction of justice was the first count in the articles of impeachment against Nixon and, years later, a count against Bill Clinton. In Clinton’s case, the ostensible obstruction consisted solely in lying under oath about a sordid sexual affair that may have sullied the Oval Office but involved no abuse of presidential power as such.

“But in Nixon’s case, the list of actions that together were deemed to constitute impeachable obstruction reads like a forecast of what Trump would do decades later – making misleading statements to, or withholding material evidence from, federal investigators or other federal employees; trying to interfere with FBI or congressional investigations; trying to break through the FBI’s shield surrounding ongoing criminal investigations; dangling carrots in front of people who might otherwise pose trouble for one’s hold on power.

“It will require serious commitment to constitutional principle, and courageous willingness to put devotion to the national interest above self-interest and party loyalty, for a Congress of the president’s own party to initiate an impeachment inquiry. It would be a terrible shame if only the mounting prospect

of being voted out of office in November 2018 would sufficiently concentrate the minds of representatives and senators today.

“But whether it is devotion to principle or hunger for political survival that puts the prospect of impeachment and removal on the table, the crucial thing is that the prospect now be taken seriously, that the machinery of removal be reactivated, and that the need to use it become the focus of political discourse going into 2018.”

Lay Out the Evidence

There is, of course, another alternative: the FBI and other intelligence agencies could expedite whatever investigations they’re doing and let the American people in on the evidence.

The key question, as Russia-gate was first being formulated as a political scandal, was whether some member of the Trump campaign colluded with Russian intelligence operatives to deliver, by memory stick or other means, hacked Democratic emails to WikiLeaks.

Yet, beyond the fact that the Jan. 6 report offered no government evidence that the Russians even hacked the Democratic emails, there also seems to be no rush to question the “usual suspects” from the Trump campaign – Roger Stone, Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn and Page – about what they might know regarding the possible delivery of the emails to WikiLeaks.

Nor has there been any public testimony regarding another source of the Russia-gate allegations, ex-British spy Christopher Steele who prepared a series of opposition research reports on Trump and Russia apparently funded by Clinton supporters. It’s still not even known who paid for the Steele dossier.

Typically, the FBI and Justice Department refuse to discuss investigations until they’ve reached a conclusion, but that rule has already been broken by Comey, who justified announcing both the Clinton and Trump investigations because of their political significance.

In the Clinton case, Comey was urged to expedite his work so Clinton could be cleared before the election and he appeared to do so, terminating the reopened investigation of her email server two days before the Nov. 8 election. Today, the public interest in wrapping up the Russian inquiry is arguably even stronger.

In congressional testimony, Comey announced that the FBI began the Russia investigation last July, so it’s not as if the investigators haven’t had time to assess the evidence and decide what to do.

An Open Process

Carter Page's suggestion – in effect waiving his privacy rights to get out in the open whatever evidence was used by the Obama administration to justify a reported Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant against him – could be a start.

Congressional committees also could call as many willing Trump campaign people as possible to testify about their knowledge of any collusion with Russia. So far, the only witnesses have been law enforcement and intelligence officials appointed by President Obama, who have presented various allegations while refusing to offer back-up on the grounds that the evidence is “classified.”

While Professor Tribe and other advocates for impeaching Donald Trump may not care whether the Russia-gate evidence is ever released, they should recognize that – for better or worse – nearly 63 million Americans voted for Trump and – under the U.S. political process – he won the election (although Clinton got about 3 million more votes nationwide).

For the past several days, I've been traveling through Trump country of West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio and have talked to several Trump voters along the way. Some indicated that they voted more against Clinton and the “elites” than enthusiastically for Trump. And some criticized Trump for his egotistical excesses. But they wanted him to be given a fair chance to govern.

It's hard to know how angry these citizens would be if their judgment is overturned by the same “elites” whom they blamed for foisting on them the unpopular choice of Clinton versus Trump.

Reversing – or “correcting” – the result of the presidential election may seem like an obvious move for the editors of The New York Times and for Professor Tribe, but it is a deadly serious proposition that demands as full a release of evidence as possible, not long-running secret investigations or an impeachment based on an alleged “cover-up” of a crime that may or may not exist.

Negating the will of the voters as expressed through the constitutional process – as flawed as that process may be – requires its own process that is perceived as open and fair, not some star chamber or kangaroo court where the intelligence community gets to hide the evidence as “classified” and tells the citizenry to “trust us.”

As unfit and inept as Donald Trump may be, he was elected – and no one should underestimate how dangerous it could be for Washington insiders and other Establishment figures to undo the electoral choice through a process cloaked in secrecy.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Watergate Redux or 'Deep State' Coup](#)" and "[The Soft Coup of Russia-gate.](#)"]

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](#)).

Why Not a Probe of 'Israel-gate'?

Special Report: As Official Washington fumes about Russia-gate, Israel's far more significant political-influence-and-propaganda campaigns are ignored. No one dares suggest a probe of Israel-gate, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The other day, I asked a longtime Democratic Party insider who is working on the Russia-gate investigation which country interfered more in U.S. politics, Russia or Israel. Without a moment's hesitation, he replied, "Israel, of course."

Which underscores my concern about the hysteria raging across Official Washington about "Russian meddling" in the 2016 presidential campaign: There is no proportionality applied to the question of foreign interference in U.S. politics. If there were, we would have a far more substantive investigation of Israel-gate.

The problem is that if anyone mentions the truth about Israel's clout, the person is immediately smeared as "anti-Semitic" and targeted by Israel's extraordinarily sophisticated lobby and its many media/political allies for vilification and marginalization.

So, the open secret of Israeli influence is studiously ignored, even as presidential candidates prostrate themselves before the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. [Hillary Clinton](#) and [Donald Trump](#) both [appeared](#) before AIPAC in 2016, with Clinton promising to take the U.S.-Israeli relationship "to the next level" – whatever that meant – and Trump vowing not to "pander" and then pandering like crazy.

Congress is no different. It has given Israel's controversial Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [a record-tying three invitations](#) to address joint sessions of Congress (matching the number of times British Prime Minister Winston Churchill

appeared). We then witnessed the Republicans and Democrats competing to see how often their members could bounce up and down and who could cheer Netanyahu the loudest, even when the Israeli prime minister was instructing the Congress to follow his position on Iran rather than President Obama's.

Israeli officials and AIPAC also coordinate their strategies to maximize political influence, which is derived in large part by who gets the lobby's largesse and who doesn't. On the rare occasion when members of Congress step out of line – and take a stand that offends Israeli leaders – they can expect a well-funded opponent in their next race, a tactic that dates back decades.

Well-respected members, such as Rep. Paul Findley and Sen. Charles Percy (both Republicans from Illinois), were early victims of the Israeli lobby's wrath when they opened channels of communication with the Palestine Liberation Organization in the cause of seeking peace. Findley was targeted and defeated in 1982; Percy in 1984.

Findley recounted his experience in a 1985 book, *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby*, in which Findley called the lobby "the 700-pound gorilla in Washington." The book was harshly criticized in a New York Times review by Adam Clymer, who called it "an angry, one-sided book that seems often to be little more than a stringing together of stray incidents."

Enforced Silence

Since then, there have been fewer and fewer members of Congress or other American politicians who have dared to speak out, judging that – when it comes to the Israeli lobby – discretion is the better part of valor. Today, many U.S. pols grovel before the Israeli government seeking a sign of favor from Prime Minister Netanyahu, almost like Medieval kings courting the blessings of the Pope at the Vatican.

During the 2008 campaign, then-Sen. Barack Obama, whom Netanyahu viewed with suspicion, traveled to Israel to demonstrate sympathy for Israelis within rocket-range of Gaza while steering clear of showing much empathy for the Palestinians.

In 2012, Republican nominee Mitt Romney tried to exploit the tense Obama-Netanyahu relationship by stopping in Israel to win a tacit endorsement from Netanyahu. The 2016 campaign was no exception with both Clinton and Trump stressing their love of Israel in their appearances before AIPAC.

Money, of course, has become the lifeblood of American politics – and American supporters of Israel have been particularly strategic in how they have exploited that reality.

One of Israel's most devoted advocates, casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, has poured millions of dollars in "dark money" into political candidates and groups that support Israel's interests. Adelson, who has advocated dropping a nuclear bomb inside Iran to coerce its government, is a Trump favorite having donated a record \$5 million to Trump's inaugural celebration.

Of course, many Israel-connected political donations are much smaller but no less influential. A quarter century ago, I was told how an aide to a Democratic foreign policy chairman, who faced a surprisingly tough race after redistricting, turned to the head of AIPAC for help and, almost overnight, donations were pouring in from all over the country. The chairman was most thankful.

The October Surprise Mystery

Israel's involvement in U.S. politics also can be covert. For instance, the evidence is now overwhelming that the Israeli government of right-wing Prime Minister Menachem Begin played a key role in helping Ronald Reagan's campaign in 1980 strike a deal with Iran to frustrate President Jimmy Carter's efforts to free 52 American hostages before Election Day.

Begin despised Carter for the Camp David Accords that forced Israel to give back the Sinai to Egypt. Begin also believed that Carter was too sympathetic to the Palestinians and – if he won a second term – would conspire with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to impose a two-state solution on Israel.

Begin's contempt for Carter was not even a secret. In a 1991 book, *The Last Option*, senior Israeli intelligence and foreign policy official David Kimche explained Begin's motive for dreading Carter's reelection. Kimche said Israeli officials had gotten wind of "collusion" between Carter and Sadat "to force Israel to abandon her refusal to withdraw from territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Kimche continued, "This plan prepared behind Israel's back and without her knowledge must rank as a unique attempt in United States's diplomatic history of short-changing a friend and ally by deceit and manipulation."

But Begin recognized that the scheme required Carter winning a second term in 1980 when, Kimche wrote, "he would be free to compel Israel to accept a settlement of the Palestinian problem on his and Egyptian terms, without having to fear the backlash of the American Jewish lobby."

In a 1992 memoir, *Profits of War*, former Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe also noted that Begin and other Likud leaders held Carter in contempt.

“Begin loathed Carter for the peace agreement forced upon him at Camp David,” Ben-Menashe wrote. “As Begin saw it, the agreement took away Sinai from Israel, did not create a comprehensive peace, and left the Palestinian issue hanging on Israel’s back.”

So, in order to buy time for Israel to “change the facts on the ground” by moving Jewish settlers into the West Bank, Begin felt Carter’s reelection had to be prevented. A different president also presumably would give Israel a freer hand to deal with problems on its northern border with Lebanon.

Ben-Menashe was among a couple of dozen government officials and intelligence operatives who described how Reagan’s campaign, mostly through future CIA Director William Casey and past CIA Director George H.W. Bush, struck a deal in 1980 with senior Iranians who got promises of arms via Israel in exchange for keeping the hostages through the election and thus humiliating Carter. (The hostages were finally released on Jan. 20, 1981, after Reagan was sworn in as President.)

Discrediting History

Though the evidence of the so-called October Surprise deal is far stronger than the current case for believing that Russia colluded with the Trump campaign, Official Washington and the mainstream U.S. media have refused to accept it, deeming it a “conspiracy theory.”

One of the reasons for the hostility directed against the 1980 case was the link to Israel, which did not want its hand in manipulating the election of a U.S. president to become an accepted part of American history. So, for instance, the Israeli government went to great lengths to discredit Ben-Menashe after he began to speak with reporters and to give testimony to the U.S. Congress.

When I was a Newsweek correspondent and first interviewed Ben-Menashe in 1990, the Israeli government initially insisted that he was an impostor, that he had no connection to Israeli intelligence.

However, when I obtained documentary evidence of Ben-Menashe’s work for a military intelligence unit, the Israelis admitted that they had lied but then insisted that he was just a low-level translator, a claim that was further contradicted by other documents showing that he had traveled widely around the world on missions to obtain weapons for the Israel-to-Iran arms pipeline.

Nevertheless, the Israeli government along with sympathetic American reporters and members of the U.S. Congress managed to shut down any serious investigation into the 1980 operation, which was, in effect, the prequel to Reagan’s Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal of 1984-86. Thus, U.S. history was miswritten.

[For more details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative; Secrecy & Privilege*; and *Trick or Treason*.]

Looking back over the history of U.S.-Israeli relations, it is clear that Israel exercised significant influence over U.S. presidents since its founding in 1948, but the rise of Israel's right-wing Likud Party in the 1970s – led by former Jewish terrorists Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir – marked a time when Israel shed any inhibitions about interfering directly in U.S. politics.

Much as Begin and Shamir engaged in terror attacks on British officials and Palestinian civilians during Israel's founding era, the Likudniks who held power in 1980 believed that the Zionist cause trumped normal restraints on their actions. In other words, the ends justified the means.

In the 1980s, Israel also mounted spying operations aimed at the U.S. government, including those of intelligence analyst Jonathan Pollard, who fed highly sensitive documents to Israel and – after being caught and spending almost three decades in prison – was paroled and welcomed as a hero inside Israel.

A History of Interference

But it is true that foreign interference in U.S. politics is as old as the American Republic. In the 1790s, French agents – working with the Jeffersonians – tried to rally Americans behind France's cause in its conflict with Great Britain. In part to frustrate the French operation, the Federalists passed the Alien and Sedition Acts.

In the Twentieth Century, Great Britain undertook covert influence operations to ensure U.S. support in its conflicts with Germany, while German agents unsuccessfully sought the opposite.

So, the attempts by erstwhile allies and sometimes adversaries to move U.S. foreign policy in one direction or another is nothing new, and the U.S. government engages in similar operations in countries all over the world, both overtly and covertly.

It was the CIA's job for decades to use propaganda and dirty tricks to ensure that pro-U.S. politicians were elected or put in power in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa, pretty much everywhere the U.S. government perceived some interest. After the U.S. intelligence scandals of the 1970s, however, some of that responsibility was passed to other organizations, such as the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

NED, USAID and various “non-governmental organizations” (NGOs) finance activists, journalists and other operatives to undermine political leaders who are deemed to be obstacles to U.S. foreign policy desires.

In particular, NED has been at the center of efforts to flip elections to U.S.-backed candidates, such as in Nicaragua in 1990, or to sponsor “color revolutions,” which typically organize around some color as the symbol for mass demonstrations. Ukraine – on Russia’s border – has been the target of two such operations, the Orange Revolution in 2004, which helped install anti-Russian President Viktor Yushchenko, and the Maidan ouster of elected pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.

NED president Carl Gershman, a neoconservative who has run NED since its founding in 1983, openly declared that Ukraine was “the biggest prize” in September 2013 – just months before the Maidan protests – as well as calling it an important step toward ousting Russian President Vladimir Putin. In 2016, Gershman called directly for regime change in Russia.

The Neoconservatives

Another key issue related to Israeli influence inside the United States is the role of the neocons, a political movement that emerged in the 1970s as a number of hawkish Democrats migrated to the Republican Party as a home for more aggressive policies to protect Israel and take on the Soviet Union and Arab states.

In some European circles, the neocons are described as “Israel’s American agents,” which may somewhat overstate the direct linkage between Israel and the neocons although a central tenet of neocon thinking is that there must be no daylight between the U.S. and Israel. The neocons say U.S. politicians must stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel even if that means the Americans sidling up to the Israelis rather than any movement the other way.

Since the mid-1990s, American neocons have worked closely with Benjamin Netanyahu. Several prominent neocons (including former Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, Meyrav Wurmser and Robert Loewenberg) advised Netanyahu’s 1996 campaign and urged a new strategy for “securing the realm.” Essentially, the idea was to replace negotiations with the Palestinians and Arab states with “regime change” for governments that were viewed as troublesome to Israel, including Iraq and Syria.

By 1998, the Project for the New American Century (led by neocons William Kristol and Robert Kagan) was pressuring President Bill Clinton to invade Iraq, a plan that was finally put in motion in 2003 under President George W. Bush.

But the follow-on plans to go after Syria and Iran were delayed because the Iraq War turned into a bloody mess, killing some 4,500 American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Bush could not turn to phase two until near the end of his presidency and then was frustrated by a U.S. intelligence estimate concluding that Iran was not working on a nuclear bomb (which was to be the pretext for a bombing campaign).

Bush also could pursue “regime change” in Syria only as a proxy effort of subversion, rather than a full-scale U.S. invasion. President Barack Obama escalated the Syrian proxy war in 2011 with the support of Israel and its strange-bedfellow allies in Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni-ruled Gulf States, which hated Syria’s government because it was allied with Shiite-ruled Iran – and Sunnis and Shiites have been enemies since the Seventh Century. Israel insists that the U.S. take the Sunni side, even if that puts the U.S. in bed with Al Qaeda.

But Obama dragged his heels on a larger U.S. military intervention in Syria and angered Netanyahu further by negotiating with Iran over its nuclear program rather than bomb-bomb-bombing Iran.

Showing the Love

Obama’s perceived half-hearted commitment to Israeli interests explained Romney’s campaign 2012 trip to seek Netanyahu’s blessings. Even after winning a second term, Obama sought to appease Netanyahu by undertaking a three-day trip to Israel in 2013 to show his love.

Still, in 2015, when Obama pressed ahead with the Iran nuclear agreement, Netanyahu went over the President’s head directly to Congress where he was warmly received, although the Israeli prime minister ultimately failed to sink the Iran deal.

In Campaign 2016, both Clinton and Trump wore their love for Israel on their sleeves, Clinton promising to take the relationship to “the next level” (a phrase that young couples often use when deciding to go from heavy petting to intercourse). Trump reminded AIPAC that he had a Jewish grandchild and vowed to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Both also bristled with hatred toward Iran, repeating the popular falsehood that “Iran is the principal source of terrorism” when it is Saudi Arabia and other Sunni sheikdoms that have been the financial and military supporters of Al Qaeda and Islamic State, the terror groups most threatening to Europe and the United States.

By contrast to Israel’s long history of playing games with U.S. politics, the

Russian government stands accused of trying to undermine the U.S. political process recently by hacking into emails of the Democratic National Committee – revealing the DNC’s improper opposition to Sen. Bernie Sanders’s campaign – and of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta – disclosing the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street and pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton Foundation – and sharing that information with the American people via WikiLeaks.

Although WikiLeaks denies getting the two batches of emails from the Russians, the U.S. intelligence community says it has high confidence in its conclusions about Russian meddling and the mainstream U.S. media treats the allegations as flat-fact.

The U.S. intelligence community also has accused the Russian government of raising doubts in the minds of Americans about their political system by having RT, the Russian-sponsored news network, hold debates for third-party candidates (who were excluded from the two-party Republican-Democratic debates) and by having RT report on protests such as Occupy Wall Street and issues such as “fracking.”

The major U.S. news media and Congress seem to agree that the only remaining question is whether evidence can be adduced showing that the Trump campaign colluded in this Russian operation. For that purpose, a number of people associated with the Trump campaign are to be hauled before Congress and made to testify on whether or not they are Russian agents.

Meanwhile, The Washington Post, The New York Times and other establishment-approved outlets are working with major technology companies on how to marginalize independent news sources and to purge “Russian propaganda” (often conflated with “fake news”) from the Internet.

It seems that no extreme is too extreme to protect the American people from the insidious Russians and their Russia-gate schemes to sow doubt about the U.S. political process. But God forbid if anyone were to suggest an investigation of Israel-gate.

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).

Mainstream Media as Arbiters of Truth

Exclusive: An angry mainstream U.S. media is shaking its fist at anyone who won't clamber onboard the Russia-gate groupthink bandwagon, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The mainstream U.S. media is never more unctuous and unprofessional as when it asserts that it alone must be the arbiter of what is true and what is not, regardless of what the evidence shows or doesn't show.

For instance, New York Times columnist Charles W. Blow declared on Monday that the public can no longer debate whether Russia leaked to WikiLeaks the emails from the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta despite the failure of the U.S. government or private researchers to present evidence that establishes that claim as fact.

Blow acknowledged that "We are still not conclusively able to connect the dots on the question of whether there was any coordination or collusion between members of Donald Trump's campaign and the Russians ... but those dots do continue to multiply at an alarming rate."

But Blow also asserted that "It is absolutely clear that the Russians did interfere in our election. This is not a debatable issue. This is not fake news. This is not a witch hunt. This happened."

Blow chastised people who still wanted evidence of this now non-debatable issue, seeing them at fault "because this fact [of the Russian meddling] keeps getting obscured in the subterfuge of deflection, misdirection and ideological finger-pointing about what has yet to be proven."

So, if you insist on asking for proof of the core allegation in Russia-gate, you are guilty of "subterfuge..., misdirection and ideological finger-pointing."

And if that indictment doesn't quiet you up, there's the column by The Washington Post's E.J. Dionne Jr. who explains that the real victims in Russia-gate are the accusers who have promoted this guilt-by-association scandal that has impugned the integrity of a growing number of Americans who either talked to Russians or who expressed doubts about the investigation.

While the Russia-gate accusers have essentially deemed these Americans "traitors" or the Kremlin's "useful idiots" or some other derogatory phrase, Dionne sees the much greater offense coming from the people so accused who have

complained about what they see as McCarthyism. Dionne writes:

“These days, any liberal who raises alarms about Trump’s relationship with Russia confronts charges of McCarthyism, hysteria and hypocrisy. The inclination of many on the left to assail [Russian President Vladimir] Putin is often ascribed to partisan anger over his success in undermining Clinton’s candidacy.

“There’s no doubt that liberals are angry, but ask yourself: Shouldn’t everyone, left, right and center, be furious over Russia’s efforts to inject calumny and falsehood into the American political bloodstream?”

So, Dionne suggests that people who question the credibility of the Russia-gate allegations are somehow un-American by favoring the injection of “calumny and falsehood into the American political bloodstream.” But that mainstream hostility toward skepticism has been at the heart of the Russia-bashing campaign that we have witnessed for the past several years.

Blacklisting Journalists

And, that campaign indeed has been replete with McCarthyism. You even have The Washington Post promoting a blacklist of 200 Internet news sites (including Consortiumnews.com and other prominent independent-minded outlets) as guilty of “Russian propaganda” for reporting skeptically on some State Department claims about the New Cold War.

But Dionne also is dishonest in claiming that the alleged leaks blamed on Russia are false. The central allegation in Russia-gate is that the Russians obtained two batches of Democratic emails and released them to the American public via WikiLeaks. Even if that is the case, nothing in those emails was fabricated.

The emails represented real news including evidence that the DNC displayed improper bias against Sen. Bernie Sanders’s insurgent campaign; excerpts of Hillary Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street that she was trying to hide from the voters; and revelations about pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton Foundation’s dealing with foreign entities.

So, even if the Russians did give the emails to WikiLeaks – although WikiLeaks denies that the Russians were the source – the core reality is that the emails provided real information that the American people had a genuine right to know. But Dionne and the mainstream U.S. media have conflated this truth-telling with cases of “fake news,” i.e., made-up stories that investigations have shown had no connection to Russia, simply to sleazy entrepreneurs seeking to make some money via lots of clicks. In other words, Dionne is lying or engaging in “fake news” himself.

Such phony journalism is reminiscent of other shameful chapters of the mainstream media's history of serving as propaganda conduits and marginalizing independent reporters who displayed professional skepticism toward the dangerous groupthinks of Official Washington.

A pivotal moment in the chaos that is now consuming the planet came on Feb. 6, 2003, when The Washington Post's editorial and op-ed pages presented a solid phalanx of misguided consensus that ruled out any further dissent about the existence of Iraq's WMD after Secretary of State Colin Powell presented his slam-dunk case before the United Nations the day before.

The Post's editorial board – led by editorial page editor Fred Hiatt – judged Powell's WMD case “irrefutable,” an opinion echoed across the Post's op-ed page.

“The evidence he [Powell] presented to the United Nations – some of it circumstantial, some of it absolutely bone-chilling in its detail – had to prove to anyone that Iraq not only hasn't accounted for its weapons of mass destruction but without a doubt still retains them,” wrote Post columnist Richard Cohen. “Only a fool – or possibly a Frenchman – could conclude otherwise.”

The Post's senior foreign policy columnist Jim Hoagland then demanded the surrender of any WMD-doubting holdouts: “To continue to say that the Bush administration has not made its case, you must now believe that Colin Powell lied in the most serious statement he will ever make, or was taken in by manufactured evidence. I don't believe that. Today, neither should you.”

This enforced WMD consensus contributed to arguably the most disastrous U.S. foreign policy decision in history as President George W. Bush launched an illegal invasion of Iraq that got nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers killed along with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and spread bloody chaos across the Middle East and now into Europe. There was also the problem that no hidden caches of WMD were discovered.

So, you might assume that editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt and other prominent mainstream journalists who pushed the bogus WMD claims and pushed the few dissenters to the fringes of the public debate, received some appropriate punishments – at least being unceremoniously fired in disgrace. Of course, if you thought that, you don't understand how the U.S. mainstream media works. To this day, Fred Hiatt is still the editorial-page editor of The Washington Post.

Slandering Dr. King

One might note, however, that historically the mainstream U.S. media has performed no better than it has in recent years.

Fifty years ago, on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave one of the most important speeches in U.S. history, taking to task American militarism and the Vietnam War. Famously and courageously, King denounced his own government as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”

King, whose life was increasingly at risk, was then put at even greater risk by being denounced by The New York Times and The Washington Post. The Post blasted King for spreading what today we might call “fake news,” accusing him of “sheer inventions of unsupported fantasy.” The Times chimed in that King’s words were “facile” and “slander” while urging him to focus instead on “the intractability of slum mores and habits,” i.e. those lazy and immoral black folks. (Exactly a year later, King was shot dead.)

But you might ask, don’t the Post and Times at least get the big investigative stories right and thus warn the American people about abuses to their democratic process? Well, not exactly.

Take, for example, the case of Richard Nixon conspiring with South Vietnamese leaders to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson’s Paris peace talks in fall 1968 so Nixon could eke out a victory over Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Nixon’s manipulation of that election – while half a million American soldiers were in the war zone – was treated by the Post and Times as a conspiracy theory for nearly half a century, even as honest journalists chipped away at Nixon’s denials by uncovering evidence of the deal that continued the war for another four years.

Some reporters, such as the Christian Science Monitor’s Beverly Deepe, were onto the story in real time. Others, including Seymour Hersh, advanced knowledge about these events over the decades. Five years ago, I uncovered a top secret file that Johnson’s National Security Adviser Walt Rostow dubbed “The X-Envelope” which contained wiretap proof of what Johnson called Nixon’s “treason.” Besides writing up the details, I posted the documents on the Internet so anyone could see for themselves.

Yet, as recently as last October, The New York Times ignored all this evidence when referencing the supposed “October Surprise” of 1968, citing – instead of Nixon’s peace-talk sabotage – the fact that Johnson had ordered a bombing halt of North Vietnam. In other words, the Times was still promoting Nixon’s version of the story nearly a half century later.

Only early this year, when a scholar uncovered some cryptic notes by Nixon’s chief of staff H.R. Haldeman that seemed to reference Nixon’s instructions regarding the sabotage did the Times finally deign to acknowledge the reality

(because the Times published the finding on its op-ed page, which I guess makes it true). But the Times did so without acknowledging all the hard work that journalists had done over the years so the cryptic notes would fit into a complex puzzle that made sense.

Nor did the Times acknowledge its own role in obscuring this history for so long.

Rumor-Mongers

To add insult to the historical injury, the Times pretended that it was right to have ignored the earlier work. Times columnist Nicholas Kristof dismissively treated those decades of investigative journalism by writing: “Nixon’s initiative, long rumored but confirmed only a few months ago, was meant to improve his election chances that year.”

“Long rumored”? The reality was that Nixon’s perfidy had long ago been proven by independent-minded journalists but their work was ignored by The New York Times and pretty much everyone else in the mainstream media until the self-proclaimed truth monitors decided that the discovery of one new piece of the mosaic was the appropriate time to proclaim that the reality could now be accepted as a reality.

To explain the near half-century gap in the Times’ failure to investigate this historic act of treason, the Times then smeared the journalists who had done the investigating as rumor-mongers.

So, in light of the mainstream media’s dismal performance over the decades, what is one to make of the dictate now that we must accept that the Russians did leak the emails to WikiLeaks even if no one is showing us the evidence? It also appears that we are supposed to dismiss the contents of the emails as “fake news” (even though they are genuine) so that will buttress the narrative that Russia is undermining our democracy by disseminating “fake news.”

Perhaps getting people to accept this false narrative is crucial to giving credibility to the Times’ full-page ads professing the newspaper’s undying love of the truth and to The Washington Post’s new melodramatic slogan, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.”

While there’s no doubt that truth is important to an informed electorate, there is something scary when the mainstream media, which has such a checkered history of misreporting the truth, asserts that it is the one that gets to decide what the truth is.

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](#)).

David Rockefeller & October Surprise Case

From the Archive: David Rockefeller's death at age 101 brought effusive eulogies, but no recollection of his mysterious role in the Iran hostage crisis of 1980, which helped sink President Carter's reelection, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry (Originally published April 15, 2005)

On March 23, 1979, late on a Friday afternoon, Chase Manhattan Bank Chairman David Rockefeller and his longtime aide Joseph Verner Reed arrived at a town house in the exclusive Beekman Place neighborhood on New York's East Side. They were met inside by a small, intense and deeply worried woman who had seen her life turned upside down in the last two months.

Iran's Princess Ashraf, the strong-willed twin sister of the Iran's long-time ruler, had gone from wielding immense behind-the-scenes clout in the ancient nation of Persia to living in exile – albeit a luxurious one. With hostile Islamic fundamentalists running her homeland, Ashraf also was troubled by the plight of her ailing brother, the ousted Shah of Iran, who had fled into exile, first to Egypt and then Morocco.

Now, she was turning for help to the man who ran one of the leading U.S. banks, one which had made a fortune serving as the Shah's banker for a quarter century and handling billions of dollars in Iran's assets. Ashraf's message was straightforward. She wanted Rockefeller to intercede with Jimmy Carter and ask the President to relent on his decision against granting the Shah refuge in the United States.

A distressed Ashraf said her brother had been given a one-week deadline to leave his current place of refuge, Morocco. "My brother has nowhere to go," Ashraf pleaded, "and no one else to turn to." [See David Rockefeller, *Memoirs*]

Spurned Appeals

Carter had been resisting appeals to let the Shah enter the United States, fearing that admitting him would endanger the personnel at the U.S. Embassy in

Teheran and other U.S. interests. In mid-February 1979, Iranian radicals had overrun the embassy and briefly held the staff hostage before the Iranian government intervened to secure release of the Americans.

Carter feared a repeat of the crisis. Already the United States was deeply unpopular with the Islamic revolution because of the CIA's history of meddling in Iranian affairs. The U.S. spy agency had helped organize the overthrow of an elected nationalist government in 1953 and the restoration of the Shah and the Pahlavi family to the Peacock Throne. In the quarter century that followed, the Shah kept his opponents at bay through the coercive powers of his secret police, known as the SAVAK.

As the Islamic Revolution gained strength in January 1979, however, the Shah's security forces could no longer keep order. The Shah – suffering from terminal cancer – scooped up a small pile of Iranian soil, boarded his jet, sat down at the controls and flew the plane out of Iran to Egypt.

A few days later, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an ascetic religious leader who had been forced into exile by the Shah, returned to a tumultuous welcome from crowds estimated at a million strong, shouting "Death to the Shah." The new Iranian government began demanding that the Shah be returned to stand trial for human rights crimes and that he surrender his fortune, salted away in overseas accounts.

The new Iranian government also wanted Chase Manhattan to return Iranian assets, which Rockefeller put at more than \$1 billion in 1978, although some estimates ran much higher. The withdrawal might have created a liquidity crisis for the bank, which already was coping with financial troubles.

Ashraf's personal appeal put Rockefeller in what he described, with understatement, as "an awkward position," according to his autobiography *Memoirs*.

"There was nothing in my previous relationship with the Shah that made me feel a strong obligation to him," wrote the scion of the Rockefeller oil and banking fortune who had long prided himself in straddling the worlds of high finance and public policy. "He had never been a friend to whom I owed a personal debt, and neither was his relationship with the bank one that would justify my taking personal risks on his behalf. Indeed, there might be severe repercussions for Chase if the Iranian authorities determined that I was being too helpful to the Shah and his family."

Later on March 23, after leaving Ashraf's residence, Rockefeller attended a dinner with Happy Rockefeller, the widow of his brother Nelson who had died two

months earlier. Also at the dinner was former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a long-time associate of the Rockefeller family.

Discussing the Shah's plight, Happy Rockefeller described her late husband's close friendship with the Shah, which had included a weekend stay with the Shah and his wife in Teheran in 1977. Happy said that when Nelson learned that the Shah would be forced to leave Iran, Nelson offered to pick out a new home for the Shah in the United States.

The dinner conversation also turned to what the participants saw as the dangerous precedent that President Carter was setting by turning his back on a prominent U.S. ally. What message of American timidity was being sent to other pro-U.S. leaders in the Middle East?

'Flying Dutchman'

The dinner led to a public campaign by Rockefeller – along with Kissinger and former Chase Manhattan Bank Chairman John McCloy – to find a suitable home in exile for the Shah. Country after country had closed their doors to the Shah as he began a humiliating odyssey as what Kissinger would call a modern-day "Flying Dutchman," wandering in search of a safe harbor.

Rockefeller assigned his aide, Joseph Reed, "to help [the Shah] in any way he could," including serving as the Shah's liaison to the U.S. government. McCloy, one of the so-called Wise Men of the post-World War II era, was representing Chase Manhattan as an attorney with Milbank, Tweed, Hadley and McCloy. One of his duties was to devise a financial strategy for staving off Iran's withdrawal of assets from the bank.

Rockefeller also pressed the Shah's case personally with Carter when the opportunity presented itself. On April 9, 1979, at the end of an Oval Office meeting on another topic, Rockefeller handed Carter a one-page memo describing the views of many foreign leaders disturbed by recent U.S. foreign policy actions, including Carter's treatment of the Shah.

"With virtually no exceptions, the heads of state and other government leaders I saw expressed concern about United States foreign policy which they perceived to be vacillating and lacking in an understandable global approach," Rockefeller's memo read. "They have questions about the dependability of the United States as a friend." An irritated Carter abruptly ended the meeting.

Temporary Havens

Despite the mounting pressure from influential quarters, Carter continued to rebuff appeals to let the Shah into the United States. So the Shah's influential

friends began looking for alternative locations, asking other nations to shelter the ex-Iranian ruler.

Finally, arrangements were made for the Shah to fly to the Bahamas and – when the Bahamian government turned out to be more interested in money than humanitarianism – to Mexico.

“With the Shah safely settled in Mexico, I had hopes that the need for my direct involvement on his behalf had ended,” Rockefeller wrote in *Memoirs*. “Henry [Kissinger] continued to publicly criticize the Carter administration for its overall management of the Iranian crisis and other aspects of its foreign policy, and Jack McCloy bombarded [Carter’s Secretary of State] Cyrus Vance with letters demanding the Shah’s admission to the United States.”

When the Shah’s medical condition took a turn for the worse in October, Carter relented and agreed to let the Shah fly to New York for emergency treatment. Celebrating Carter’s reversal, Rockefeller’s aide Joseph Reed wrote in a memo, “our ‘mission impossible’ is completed. ... My applause is like thunder.”

When the Shah arrived in New York on October 23, 1979, Reed checked the Shah into New York Hospital under a pseudonym, “David Newsome,” a play on the name of Carter’s undersecretary of state for political affairs, David Newsom.

Embassy Crisis

The arrival of the Shah in New York led to renewed demands from Iran’s new government that the Shah be returned to stand trial.

In Teheran, students and other radicals gathered at the university, called by their leaders to what was described as an important meeting, according to one of the participants whom I interviewed years later.

The students gathered in a classroom which had three blackboards turned toward the wall. A speaker told the students that they were about to undertake a mission supported by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran’s spiritual leader and the *de facto* head of the government.

“They said it would be dangerous and that anyone who didn’t want to take part could leave now,” the Iranian told me. “But no one left. Then, they turned around the blackboards. There were three buildings drawn on the blackboards. They were the buildings of the U.S. embassy.”

The Iranian said the target of the raid was not the embassy personnel, but rather the embassy’s intelligence documents.

“We had believed that the U.S. government had been manipulating affairs inside

Iran and we wanted to prove it," he said. "We thought if we could get into the embassy, we could get the documents that would prove this. We hadn't thought about the hostages. We all went to the embassy. We had wire cutters to cut through the fence. We started climbing over the fences. We had expected more resistance. When we got inside, we saw the Americans running and we chased them."

Marine guards set off tear gas in a futile attempt to control the mob, but held their fire to avoid bloodshed. Other embassy personnel hastily shredded classified documents, although there wasn't time to destroy many of the secret papers. The militant students found themselves in control not only of the embassy and hundreds of sensitive U.S. cables, but dozens of American hostages as well.

An international crisis had begun, a hinge that would swing open unexpected doors for both American and Iranian history.

Hidden Compartments

David Rockefeller denied that his campaign to gain the Shah's admittance to the United States had provoked the crisis, arguing that he was simply filling a vacuum created when the Carter administration balked at doing the right thing.

"Despite the insistence of journalists and revisionist historians, there was never a 'Rockefeller-Kissinger behind-the-scenes campaign' that placed 'relentless pressure' on the Carter administration to have the Shah admitted to the United States regardless of the consequences," Rockefeller wrote in *Memoirs*. "In fact, it would be more accurate to say that for many months we were the unwilling surrogates for a government that had failed to accept its full responsibilities."

But within the Iranian hostage crisis, there would be hidden compartments within hidden compartments, as influential groups around the world acted in what they perceived to be their personal or their national interests.

Rockefeller was just one of many powerful people who felt that Jimmy Carter deserved to lose his job. With the hostage crisis started, a countdown of 365 days began toward the 1980 elections. Though he may have been only dimly aware of his predicament, Carter faced a remarkable coalition of enemies both inside and outside the United States.

In the Persian Gulf, the Saudi royal family and other Arab oil sheiks blamed Carter for forsaking the Shah and feared their own playboy life styles might be next on the list for the Islamic fundamentalists. The Israeli government saw Carter as too cozy with the Palestinians and too eager to cut a peace deal that

would force Israel to surrender land won in the 1967 war.

European anti-communists believed Carter was too soft on the Soviet Union and was risking the security of Europe. Dictators in the Third World – from the Philippines and South Korea to Argentina and El Salvador – were bristling at Carter's human rights lectures.

Inside the United States, the Carter administration had made enemies at the CIA by purging many of the Old Boys who saw themselves as protectors of America's deepest national interests. Many CIA veterans, including some still within the government, were disgruntled. And, of course, the Republicans were determined to win back the White House, which many felt had been unjustly taken from their control after Richard Nixon's landslide victory in 1972.

This subterranean struggle between Carter, trying desperately to free the hostages before the 1980 election, and those who stood to benefit by thwarting him became known popularly as the "October Surprise" controversy.

The nickname referred to the possibility that Carter might have ensured his reelection by arranging the hostage return the month before the presidential election as an October Surprise, although the term came ultimately to refer to clandestine efforts to stop Carter from pulling off his October Surprise.

CIA Old Boys

When the hostage crisis wasn't resolved in the first few weeks and months, the attention of many disgruntled CIA Old Boys also turned toward the American humiliation in Iran, which they found doubly hard to take since it had been the site of the agency's first major victory, the restoration of the Shah to the Peacock Throne.

A number of veterans from that operation of 1953 were still alive in 1980. Archibald Roosevelt was one of the Old Boys from the Iranian operation. He had moved on to become an adviser to David Rockefeller at Chase Manhattan Bank.

Another was Miles Copeland, who had served the CIA as an intermediary to Arab leaders, including Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser. In his autobiography, *The Game Player*, Copeland claimed that he and his CIA chums prepared their own Iranian hostage rescue plan in March 1980.

When I interviewed Copeland in 1990 at his thatched-roofed cottage outside Oxford in the English countryside, he said he had been a strong supporter of George H.W. Bush in 1980. He even had founded an informal support group called "Spooks for Bush."

Sitting among photos of his children who included the drummer for the rock group, The Police, and the manager for the rock star, Sting, Copeland explained that he and his CIA colleagues considered Carter a dangerous idealist.

“Let me say first that we liked President Carter,” Copeland told me “He read, unlike President Reagan later, he read everything. He knew what he was about. He understood the situation throughout the Middle East, even these tenuous, difficult problems such as Arabs and Israel.

“But the way we saw Washington at that time was that the struggle was really not between the Left and the Right, the liberals and the conservatives, as between the Utopians and the realists, the pragmatists. Carter was a Utopian. He believed, honestly, that you must do the right thing and take your chance on the consequences. He told me that. He literally believed that.”

Copeland’s deep Southern accent spit out the words with a mixture of amazement and disgust. To Copeland and his CIA friends, Carter deserved respect for a first-rate intellect but contempt for his idealism.

“Most of the things that were done [by the United States] about Iran had been on a basis of stark realism, with possibly the exception of letting the Shah down,” Copeland said. “There are plenty of forces in the country we could have marshaled. ... We could have sabotaged [the revolution, but] we had to establish what the Quakers call ‘the spirit of the meeting’ in the country, where everybody was thinking just one way. The Iranians were really like sheep, as they are now.”

Altar of Ideals

But Carter, troubled by the Shah’s human rights record, delayed taking decisive action and missed the moment of opportunity, Copeland said. Infuriating the CIA’s Old Boys, Carter had sacrificed an ally on the altar of idealism.

“Carter really believed in all the principles that we talk about in the West,” Copeland said, shaking his mane of white hair. “As smart as Carter is, he did believe in Mom, apple pie and the corner drug store. And those things that are good in America are good everywhere else.”

Veterans of the CIA and Republicans from the Nixon-Ford administrations judged that Carter simply didn’t measure up to the demands of a harsh world.

“There were many of us – myself along with Henry Kissinger, David Rockefeller, Archie Roosevelt in the CIA at the time – we believed very strongly that we were showing a kind of weakness, which people in Iran and elsewhere in the world hold in great contempt,” Copeland said. “The fact that we’re being pushed around, and

being afraid of the Ayatollah Khomeini, so we were going to let a friend down, which was horrifying to us. That's the sort of thing that was frightening to our friends in Saudi Arabia, in Egypt and other places."

But Carter also bent to the moral suasions of the Shah's friends, who argued on humanitarian grounds that the ailing Shah deserved admission to the United States for medical treatment. "Carter, I say, was not a stupid man," Copeland said. Carter had even a greater flaw: "He was a principled man."

So, Carter decided that the moral act was to allow the Shah to enter the United States for treatment, leading to the result Carter had feared: the seizure of the U.S. Embassy.

Frozen Assets

As the crisis dragged on, the Carter administration cranked up the pressure on the Iranians. Along with diplomatic initiatives, Iran's assets were frozen, a move that ironically helped David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank by preventing the Iranians from cleaning out their funds from the bank's vaults.



In *Memoirs*, Rockefeller wrote that the Iranian "government did reduce the balances they maintained with us during the second half of 1979, but in reality they had simply returned to their historic level of about \$500 million," Rockefeller wrote. "Carter's 'freeze' of official Iranian assets protected our position, but no one at Chase played a role in convincing the administration to institute it."

In the weeks that followed the embassy seizure, Copeland said he and his friends turned their attention to figuring a way out of the mess.

"There was very little sympathy for the hostages," Copeland said. "We all have served abroad, served in embassies like that. We got additional pay for danger. I think, for Syria, I got fifty percent extra in salary. So it's a chance you take. When you join the army, you take a chance of getting in a war and getting

shot. If you're in the diplomatic service, you take a chance on having some horror like this descend on you.

"But on the other hand, we did think that there were things we could do to get them out, other than simply letting the Iranians, the students, and the Iranian administration know that they were beating us," Copeland said. "We let them know what an advantage they had. That we could have gotten them out is something that all of us old professionals of the covert action school, we said from the beginning, 'Why don't they let us do it?'"

According to *The Game Player*, Copeland met his old friend, ex-CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton, for lunch. The famed spy hunter "brought to lunch a Mossad chap who confided that his service had identified at least half of the 'students,' even to the extent of having their home addresses in Teheran," Copeland wrote. "He gave me a rundown on what sort of kids they were. Most of them, he said, were just that, kids."

Periphery Strategy

The Israeli government was another deeply interested player in the Iran crisis. For decades, Israel had cultivated covert ties with the Shah's regime as part of a Periphery Strategy of forming alliances with non-Arab states in the region to prevent Israel's Arab enemies from focusing all their might against Israel.

Though losing an ally when the Shah fell and offended by the anti-Israeli rhetoric from the Khomeini regime, Israel had gone about quietly rebuilding relations with the Iranian government. One of the young Israeli intelligence agents assigned to this task was an Iranian-born Jew named Ari Ben-Menashe, who had immigrated to Israel as a teen-ager and was valuable because he spoke fluent Farsi and still had friends in Iran, some of whom were rising within the new revolutionary bureaucracy.

In his own 1992 memoirs, *Profits of War*, Ben-Menashe said the view of Israel's Likud leaders, including Prime Minister Menachem Begin, was one of contempt for Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s.

"Begin loathed Carter for the peace agreement forced upon him at Camp David," Ben-Menashe wrote. "As Begin saw it, the agreement took away Sinai from Israel, did not create a comprehensive peace, and left the Palestinian issue hanging on Israel's back."

After the Shah fell, Begin grew even more dissatisfied with Carter's handling of the crisis and alarmed over the growing likelihood of an Iraqi attack on Iran's oil-rich Khuzistan province. Israel saw Iraq's Saddam Hussein as a far greater threat to Israel than Iran's Khomeini. Ben-Menashe wrote that Begin, recognizing

the *realpolitik* needs of Israel, authorized shipments to Iran of small arms and some spare parts, via South Africa, as early as September 1979.

After the U.S. hostages were taken in November 1979, the Israelis came to agree with Copeland's hard-headed skepticism about Carter's approach to the hostage issue, Ben-Menashe wrote. Even though Copeland was generally regarded as a CIA "Arabist" who had opposed Israeli interests in the past, he was admired for his analytical skills, Ben-Menashe wrote.

"A meeting between Miles Copeland and Israeli intelligence officers was held at a Georgetown house in Washington, D.C.," Ben-Menashe wrote. "The Israelis were happy to deal with any initiative but Carter's. David Kimche, chief of Tevel, the foreign relations unit of Mossad, was the senior Israeli at the meeting. ... The Israelis and the Copeland group came up with a two-pronged plan to use quiet diplomacy with the Iranians and to draw up a scheme for military action against Iran that would not jeopardize the lives of the hostages."

In late February 1980, Seyeed Mehdi Kashani, an Iranian emissary, arrived in Israel to discuss Iran's growing desperation for aircraft spare parts, Ben-Menashe wrote. Kashani, whom Ben-Menashe had known from their school days in Teheran, also revealed that the Copeland initiative was making inroads inside Iran and that approaches from some Republican emissaries had already been received, Ben-Menashe wrote.

"Kashani said that the secret ex-CIA-Miles-Copeland group was aware that any deal cut with the Iranians would have to include the Israelis because they would have to be used as a third party to sell military equipment to Iran," according to Ben-Menashe. In March, the following month, the Israelis made their first direct military shipment to Iran, 300 tires for Iran's F-4 fighter jets, Ben-Menashe wrote.

Rescue Plans

In the 1990 interview at his house in the English countryside, Copeland told me that he and other CIA old-timers developed their own hostage-rescue plan. Copeland said the plan – which included cultivating political allies within Iran and using disinformation tactics to augment a military assault – was hammered out on March 22, 1980, in a meeting at his Georgetown apartment.

Copeland said he was aided by Steven Meade, the ex-chief of the CIA's Escape and Evasion Unit; Kermit Roosevelt, who had overseen the 1953 coup in Iran; and Archibald Roosevelt, the adviser to David Rockefeller.

"Essentially, the idea was to have some Iranians dressed in Iranian military uniform and police uniform go to the embassy, address the students and say,

'Hey, you're doing a marvelous job here. But now we'll relieve you of it, because we understand that there's going to be a military force flown in from outside. And they're going to hit you, and we're going to scatter these [hostages] around town. Thanks very much.'

Copeland's Iranians would then move the hostages to the edge of Teheran where they would be loaded onto American helicopters to be flown out of the country.

To Copeland's chagrin, his plan fell on deaf ears in the Carter administration, which was developing its own rescue plan that would rely more on U.S. military force with only modest help from Iranian assets in Teheran. So, Copeland said he distributed his plan outside the administration, to leading Republicans, giving sharper focus to their contempt for Carter's bungled Iranian strategy.

"Officially, the plan went only to people in the government and was top secret and all that," Copeland said. "But as so often happens in government, one wants support, and when it was not being handled by the Carter administration as though it was top secret, it was handled as though it was nothing. ... Yes, I sent copies to everybody who I thought would be a good ally. ...

"Now I'm not at liberty to say what reaction, if any, ex-President Nixon took, but he certainly had a copy of this. We sent one to Henry Kissinger, and I had, at the time, a secretary who had just worked for Henry Kissinger, and Peter Rodman, who was still working for him and was a close personal friend of mine, and so we had these informal relationships where the little closed circle of people who were, a, looking forward to a Republican President within a short while and, b, who were absolutely trustworthy and who understood all these inner workings of the international game board."

By April 1980, Carter's patience was wearing thin, both with the Iranians and some U.S. allies. After discovering that the Israelis had made a secret shipment of 300 tires to Iran, Carter complained to Prime Minister Begin.

"There had been a rather tense discussion between President Carter and Prime Minister Begin in the spring of 1980 in which the President made clear that the Israelis had to stop that, and that we knew that they were doing it, and that we would not allow it to continue, at least not allow it to continue privately and without the knowledge of the American people," Carter's press secretary Jody Powell told me. "And it stopped" – at least temporarily.

Questioned by congressional investigators a dozen years later, Carter said he felt that by April 1980, "Israel cast their lot with Reagan," according to notes I found among the unpublished documents in the files of a House Task Force, which had examined the October Surprise controversy. Carter traced the Israeli

opposition to his reelection to a “lingering concern [among] Jewish leaders that I was too friendly with Arabs.”

Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski also recognized the Israeli hostility. In an interview, Brzezinski told me that the Carter White House was well aware that the Begin government had “an obvious preference for a Reagan victory.”

Desert One

Encircled by growing legions of enemies, the Carter administration put the finishing touches on its own hostage-rescue operation in April. Code named “Eagle Claw,” the assault involved a force of U.S. helicopters that would swoop down on Teheran, coordinate with some agents on the ground and extract the hostages.

Carter ordered the operation to proceed on April 24, but mechanical problems forced the helicopters to turn back. At a staging area called Desert One, one of the helicopters collided with a refueling plane, causing an explosion that killed eight American crewmen.

Their charred bodies were then displayed by the Iranian government, adding to the fury and humiliation of the United States. After the Desert One fiasco, the Iranians dispersed the hostages to a variety of locations, effectively shutting the door on another rescue attempt, at least one that would have any chance of returning the hostages as a group.

By summer 1980, Copeland told me, the Republicans in his circle considered a second hostage-rescue attempt not only unfeasible, but unnecessary. They were talking confidently about the hostages being freed after a Republican victory in November, the old CIA man said.

“There was no discussion of a Kissinger or Nixon plan to rescue these people, because Nixon, like everybody else, knew that all we had to do was wait until the election came, and they were going to get out,” Copeland said. “That was sort of an open secret among people in the intelligence community, that that would happen. ... The intelligence community certainly had some understanding with somebody in Iran in authority, in a way that they would hardly confide in me.”

Copeland said his CIA friends had been told by contacts in Iran that the mullahs would do nothing to help Carter or his reelection.

“At that time, we had word back, because you always have informed relations with the devil,” Copeland said. “But we had word that, ‘Don’t worry.’ As long as Carter wouldn’t get credit for getting these people out, as soon as Reagan came

in, the Iranians would be happy enough to wash their hands of this and move into a new era of Iranian-American relations, whatever that turned out to be.”

In the interview, Copeland declined to give more details, beyond his assurance that “the CIA within the CIA,” his term for the true protectors of U.S. national security, had an understanding with the Iranians about the hostages. (Copeland died on January 14, 1991, before I could interview him again.)

Much of the controversy over the October Surprise mystery has centered on several alleged secret meetings in Europe between senior Republicans – including then-Reagan campaign chief William Casey and Reagan’s running mate George H.W. Bush – and Iranian officials, including senior cleric Mehdi Karrubi.

A variety of witnesses, including Iranian officials and international intelligence operatives, have described these contacts, which have been denied by Bush and other top Republicans. Though official U.S. investigations have generally sided with the Republicans, a substantial body of evidence – much of it kept hidden from the American people – actually supports the October Surprise allegations.

[For a summary of the evidence on the Reagan campaign’s interference, go to [“Second Thoughts on October Surprise.”](#) For more detailed accounts, see Robert Parry’s [*Trick or Treason, Secrecy & Privilege*](#) and [*America’s Stolen Narrative*](#).]

Rockefeller’s Visit

Evidence from Reagan-Bush campaign files also points to undisclosed contacts between the Rockefeller group and Casey during Carter’s hostage negotiations.

According to a campaign visitor log for September 11, 1980, David Rockefeller and several of his aides who were dealing with the Iranian issue signed in to see Casey at his campaign headquarters in Arlington, Virginia.

With Rockefeller were Joseph Reed, whom Rockefeller had assigned to coordinate U.S. policy toward the Shah, and Archibald Roosevelt, the former CIA officer who was monitoring events in the Persian Gulf for Chase Manhattan and who had collaborated with Miles Copeland on the Iran hostage-rescue plan. The fourth member of the party was Owen Frisbie, Rockefeller’s chief lobbyist in Washington.

In the early 1990s, all the surviving the participants – Rockefeller, Reed and Frisbie – declined to be interviewed about the Casey meeting. Rockefeller made no mention of the meeting in *Memoirs*.

Henry Kissinger, another Rockefeller associate, also was in discreet contact

with campaign director Casey during this period, according to Casey's personal chauffeur whom I interviewed. The chauffeur, who asked not to be identified by name, said he was sent twice to Kissinger's Georgetown home to pick up the former Secretary of State and bring him to Arlington, Virginia, for private meetings with Casey, meetings that were not recorded on the official visitor logs.

On September 16, 1980, five days after the Rockefeller visit to Casey's office, Iran's acting foreign minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh publicly cited Republican interference on the hostages.

"Reagan, supported by Kissinger and others, has no intention of resolving the problem," Ghotbzadeh said. "They will do everything in their power to block it."

In the weeks before Election 1980, FBI wiretaps picked up other evidence that connected Rockefeller associates with two of the key suspects in the October Surprise mystery, Iranian banker Cyrus Hashemi and longtime Casey business associate John Shaheen.

According to the FBI wiretaps hidden in Hashemi's New York offices in September 1980, Hashemi and Shaheen were involved in the intrigue surrounding the Iran hostage crisis while simultaneously promoting murky financial schemes.

Hashemi was supposedly acting as an intermediary for President Carter for secret approaches to Iranian officials about getting the hostages released. But Hashemi also appears to have been playing a double game, serving as a backchannel for the Reagan-Bush campaign, through Shaheen, who had known Casey since their World War II days together in the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's forerunner.

The FBI wiretaps revealed that Hashemi and Shaheen also were trying to establish a bank with Philippine interests in either the Caribbean or in Hong Kong. In mid-October 1980, Hashemi deposited "a large sum of money" in a Philippine bank and planned to meet with Philippine representatives in Europe, an FBI intercept discovered.

The negotiations led Shaheen to an agreement with Herminio Disini, an in-law of Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos, to establish the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty Company. Disini also was a top moneymen for Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos.

The \$20 million used as starting capital for the bank came through Jean A. Patry, David Rockefeller's lawyer in Geneva, Switzerland. But the original source of the money, according to two Shaheen associates I interviewed, was Princess Ashraf, the Shah's twin sister.

Reagan's Victory

On November 4, 1980, one year to the day after the Iranian militants seized the U.S. Embassy in Teheran, Ronald Reagan routed Jimmy Carter in the U.S. presidential elections. In the weeks after the election, the hostage negotiations continued.

As Reagan's Inauguration neared, Republicans talked tough, making clear that Ronald Reagan wouldn't stand for the humiliation that the nation endured for 444 days under Carter. The Reagan-Bush team intimated that Reagan would deal harshly with Iran if it didn't surrender the hostages.

A joke making the rounds of Washington went: "What's three feet deep and glows in the dark? Teheran ten minutes after Ronald Reagan becomes President."

On Inauguration Day, January 20, 1981, just as Reagan was beginning his inaugural address, word came from Iran that the hostages were freed. The American people were overjoyed. The coincidence in timing between the hostage release and Reagan's taking office immediately boosted the new President's image as a tough guy who wouldn't let the United States be pushed around.

The reality, however, appears to have been different, with U.S. weapons soon flowing secretly to Iran through Israel and participants in the October Surprise mystery seeming to get in line for payoffs.

The bank deal that Cyrus Hashemi and John Shaheen had discussed for months took final shape two days after Reagan's Inauguration. On January 22, 1981, Shaheen opened the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty Bank with \$20 million that had been funneled to him through Jean Patry, the Rockefeller-connected lawyer in Geneva who was fronting for Princess Ashraf.

Why, I asked one of Shaheen's associates, would Ashraf have invested \$20 million in a bank with these dubious characters? "It was funny money," the associate answered. He believed it was money that the Islamic revolutionary government was claiming as its own.

A second Shaheen associate said Shaheen was particularly secretive when asked about his relationship with the deposed princess. "When it comes to Ashraf, I'm a cemetery," Shaheen once said.

From 1981 to 1984, Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty pulled in hundreds of millions of petrodollars. The bank also attracted high-flying Arabs to its board of directors.

Two directors were Ghanim Al-Mazrouie, an Abu Dhabi official who controlled 10

percent of the corrupt Bank of Credit and Commerce International, and Hassan Yassin, a cousin of Saudi financier Adnan Khashoggi and an adviser to BCCI principal Kamal Adham, the former chief of Saudi intelligence.

Though Cyrus Hashemi's name was not formally listed on the roster of the Hong Kong bank, he did receive cash from BCCI, al-Mazrouie's bank. An FBI wiretap of Hashemi's office in early February 1981 picked up an advisory that "money from BCCI [is] to come in tomorrow from London on Concorde," a reference to the supersonic commercial airliner favored by wealthy travelers. (In 1984, the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty collapsed and an estimated \$100 million disappeared.)

Langley Meeting

Early in the Reagan-Bush administration, Joseph Reed, the aide to David Rockefeller, was appointed and confirmed as the new U.S. ambassador to Morocco. Before leaving for his posting, he visited the CIA and its new director, William Casey. As Reed arrived, CIA official Charles Cogan was getting up and preparing to leave Casey's office.

Knowing Reed, Cogan lingered at the door. In a "secret" deposition to congressional investigators in 1992, Cogan said he had a "definite memory" of a comment Reed made about disrupting Carter's "October Surprise" of a pre-election release of the 52 American hostages in Iran.

But Cogan said he couldn't recall the precise verb that Reed had used. "Joseph Reed said, 'we' and then the verb [and then] something about Carter's October Surprise," Cogan testified. "The implication was we did something about Carter's October Surprise, but I don't have the exact wording."

One congressional investigator, who discussed the recollection with Cogan in a less formal setting, concluded that the verb that Cogan chose not to repeat was an expletive relating to sex – as in "we fucked Carter's October Surprise."

During Cogan's deposition, David Laufman, a Republican lawyer on the House October Surprise Task Force and a former CIA official, asked Cogan if he had since "had occasion to ask him [Reed] about this" recollection?

Yes, Cogan replied, he recently had asked Reed about it, after Reed moved to a protocol job at the United Nations. "I called him up," Cogan said. "He was at his farm in Connecticut, as I recall, and I just told him that, look, this is what sticks in my mind and what I am going to say [to Congress], and he didn't have any comment on it and continued on to other matters."

"He didn't offer any explanation to you of what he meant?" asked Laufman.

"No," answered Cogan.

"Nor did he deny that he had said it?" asked another Task Force lawyer Mark L. Shaffer.

"He didn't say anything," Cogan responded. "We just continued on talking about other things."

And so did the Task Force lawyers at this remarkable deposition on December 21, 1992. The lawyers even failed to ask Cogan the obvious follow-up: What did Casey say and how did Casey react when Reed allegedly told Reagan's ex-campaign chief that "we fucked Carter's October Surprise."

Discovered Documents

I found Cogan's testimony and other incriminating documents in files left behind by the Task Force, which finished its half-hearted investigation of the October Surprise controversy in January 1993.

Among those files, I also discovered the notes of an FBI agent who tried to interview Joseph Reed about his October Surprise knowledge. The FBI man, Harry A. Penich, had scribbled down that "numerous telephone calls were placed to him [Reed]. He failed to answer any of them. I conservatively place the number over 10."

Finally, Penich, armed with a subpoena, cornered Reed arriving home at his 50-acre estate in Greenwich, Connecticut. "He was surprised and absolutely livid at being served at home," Penich wrote. "His responses could best be characterized as lashing out."

Reed threatened to go over Penich's head. In hand-written "talking points" that Penich apparently used to brief an unnamed superior, the FBI agent wrote: "He [Reed] did it in such a way as to lead a reasonable person to believe he had influence w/you. The man's remarks were both inappropriate and improper."

But the hard-ball tactics worked. When Reed finally consented to an interview, Task Force lawyers just went through the motions.

Penich took the interview notes and wrote that Reed "recalls no contact with Casey in 1980," though Reed added that "their paths crossed many times because of Reed's position at Chase." As for the 1981 CIA visit, Reed added that as the newly appointed U.S. ambassador to Morocco, he "would have stopped in to see Casey and pay respect."

But on whether Reed made any remark about obstructing Carter's October Surprise, Reed claimed he "does not specifically know what October Surprise refers to,"

Penich scribbled down.

The Task Force lawyers didn't press hard. Most strikingly, the lawyers failed to confront Reed with evidence that would have impeached his contention that he had "no contact with Casey in 1980." According to the sign-in sheets at the Reagan-Bush campaign headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, which the Task Force had obtained, Reed saw Casey on September 11, 1980, less than two months before the election.

When the official House Task Force report was issued on January 13, 1993, the Task Force largely cleared the Republicans of the longstanding October Surprise charges, but that conclusion was based on tendentious interpretations of the published evidence and the withholding of many incriminating documents.

Among the evidence that was never shared with the American people was the fascinating connection between the powerful friends of David Rockefeller and the shadowy operatives who had maintained clandestine contacts with the Iranian mullahs during the long hostage crisis.

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](#)).

NYT's 'Tinfoil Hat' Conspiracy Theory

Exclusive: There is a "tinfoil-hat" quality to The New York Times' pushing its "Donald Trump Is Russia's Manchurian Candidate" conspiracy theory as the newspaper sinks deeper into a New McCarthyism, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There are real reasons to worry about President Donald Trump's foreign policy, including his casual belligerence toward Iran and North Korea and his failure to rethink U.S. alliances with Saudi Arabia and Israel, but The New York Times obsesses on Trump's willingness to work with Russia.

On Saturday, the Times devoted most of its op-ed page to the Times' favorite conspiracy theory, that Trump is Vladimir Putin's "Manchurian candidate" though evidence continues to be lacking.

The op-ed package combined a "What to Ask About Russian Hacking" [article](#) by

Louise Mensch, a former Conservative member of the British Parliament who now works for Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, and a connect-the-dots graphic that when filled out shows the Kremlin sitting atop the White House. But the featured article actually revealed how flimsy and wacky the Times' conspiracy theory is.

Usually, an investigation doesn't begin until there is specific evidence of a crime. For instance, the investigative articles that I have written over the years have always had information from insiders about how the misconduct had occurred before a single word was published.

In the early 1990s, for the investigation that I conducted for PBS "Frontline" into the so-called "October Surprise" case – whether Ronald Reagan's campaign colluded with Iranians and others to sabotage President Jimmy Carter's negotiations to free 52 American hostages in 1980 – we had some two dozen people providing information about those contacts from multiple perspectives – including from the U.S., Iran, Israel and Europe – before we aired the allegations.

We didn't base our documentary on the suspicious circumstance that the Iranians held back the hostages until after Ronald Reagan was inaugurated President on Jan. 20, 1981, or on the point that Iran and the Republicans had motives to sandbag Carter. We didn't casually throw out the names of a bunch of people who might have committed treason.

When we broadcast the documentary in April 1991, there was a strong evidentiary case of the Reagan's campaign guilt – and even then we were highly circumspect in how we presented the story.

Ultimately, the 1980 "October Surprise" case came down to whether you believed the Republican denials or the two dozen or so witnesses who described how this operation was carried out with the help of the Israeli government, French intelligence, and former and current CIA officers – along with former CIA Director George H.W. Bush and future CIA Director William Casey.

In the end, Official Washington was never willing to accept that the beloved Ronald Reagan could have done something as dastardly as conspire with Iranians to delay the release of 52 American hostages. It didn't matter what the evidence was or that Reagan quickly approved arms shipments to Iran via Israel in 1981, a prequel to the later Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal of 1985-86.

No Direct Evidence

By contrast, what the current "Russia Owns Trump" allegations are completely lacking is an insider who describes any nefarious collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia to arrange the Kremlin's help in defeating Hillary Clinton

and electing Donald Trump.

What we do have is President Barack Obama's outgoing intelligence chiefs putting out evidence-free "assessments" that Russia was responsible for the "hacking" and the publicizing of two batches of Democratic emails, one from the Democratic National Committee and one from Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta.

The DNC emails revealed that top Democratic Party officials had violated their duty to remain neutral during the primaries and instead tilted the playing field in favor of Hillary Clinton and against Sen. Bernie Sanders. The Podesta emails exposed the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from voters, as well as some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

When published by WikiLeaks last year, the emails embarrassed the Clinton campaign but were not regarded as a major factor in her defeat, which she blamed primarily on FBI Director James Comey's decision to briefly reopen the investigation into whether she endangered national security by using a private email server while Secretary of State.

However, after the shock of Donald Trump's election, Clinton supporters looked for reasons to block Trump's inauguration or to set the stage for his impeachment. That was when Obama's intelligence chiefs began circulating claims that Russia was behind the leaking of the Democratic emails as part of a scheme to put their favored candidate, Trump, in the White House.

The New York Times and other mainstream news outlets, which were strongly hostile to Trump, seized on the allegations, making them front-page news for the past several months despite the paucity of actual evidence that any collusion occurred or that the Russians were even the ones who obtained and distributed the emails.

WikiLeaks denied getting the material from the Russians, suggesting instead that two different American insiders were the sources.

A Witch Hunt?

How thin the Russia-Trump case is becomes evident in reading the Times' op-ed by Louise Mensch. After introducing herself as someone who has "followed the Russian hacking story closely," she lists 25 people by name, including various Trump advisers as well as Internet moguls Mark Zuckerberg and Peter Thiel, who should be hauled before the House Intelligence Committee for interrogation along with unnamed executives of several corporations and banks.

"There are many more who need to be called but these would be a first step,"

Mensch wrote. In reviewing Mensch's long article, it's unclear if she's proposing only a "fishing expedition" or would prefer a full-fledged "witch hunt."

At one point earlier in this process, I wrote an article warning that the "investigation" could become something of a "did-you-talk-to-a-Russian" inquisition. Some readers probably felt I was going too far, but that now appears to be exactly what is happening.

Many of Mensch's suggestions pertain to people associated with the Trump campaign who gave speeches in Moscow or otherwise communicated with Russians. It appears any contact with a Russian, any discussion of disagreements between the U.S. and Russia, or any political comment that in any way echoes what some Russian may have said becomes "evidence" of collusion and treason.

The extremism of Mensch's tendentious article is further illustrated by her suggestion that Trump should be impeached if there is any truth to his widely discredited tweet that Obama had ordered wiretaps on Trump Tower. She wrote:

"If ... the president tweeted real news, he revealed the existence of intercepts that cover members of his team in a continuing investigation. That would be obstruction of justice, potentially an impeachable offense."

Most of us who have reported on Trump's bizarre "tapp" tweet have criticized him for making a serious charge without evidence (as well as his poor spelling), but Mensch seems to believe that the more serious offense would be if Trump somehow were telling the truth. She wants any truth-telling on this issue to be grounds for Trump's impeachment, even though he may have been referring, in part, to her November article reporting on the FISA warrant that supposedly granted permission for members of Trump's team to be put under electronic surveillance.

A Tinfoil Hat

To dramatize her arguments further, Mensch then demonstrates a thorough lack of knowledge about recent American history. She claims, "Never in American history has a president been suspected of collaborating with a hostile foreign power to win an election."

Whatever you want to think about the 1980 October Surprise case – and there is substantial evidence that it was real – it definitely constituted an example in American history when a president was "suspected of collaborating with a hostile foreign power to win an election."

Another case in 1968, which now even The New York Times grudgingly accepts, involved Richard Nixon colluding with the South Vietnamese government to torpedo

President Lyndon Johnson's Paris peace talks to assure Nixon's election. Although South Vietnam was then an ally, the allegations about Nixon also included outreach to North Vietnam, although Hanoi ended up sending a delegation to Paris while Saigon did not.

Yet, what is perhaps most shocking about Mensch's op-ed and its prominent placement by the Times is that the story has all the elements of a "tin-foil-hat" conspiracy. It's the sort of wild-eyed smearing of American citizens that the Times would normally deride as an offensive fantasy that would be mentioned only to mock the conspiracists.

But the Times is now so deep into its campaign to demonize Russia and to destroy Trump that all normal journalistic standards have long ago been tossed out the window.

While there are many valid reasons to protest Trump and his policies, this descent into a New McCarthyism is both grotesque (because it impugns the patriotism of Americans without evidence, only breathless questions) and dangerous (because it escalates the New Cold War with Russia, a confrontation that could stumble into a nuclear holocaust).

At such moments, supposedly serious newspapers like The New York Times should show extraordinary caution and care, not a reckless disregard for truth and fairness. But no one in Official Washington seems willing to play the role of attorney Joseph Welch when he finally stood up to Sen. Joe McCarthy with the famous question, "At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"

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

How the NYT Plays with History

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

By Robert Parry

Whenever The New York Times or some other mainstream news outlet holds itself

out as a paragon of professional journalism – by wagging a finger at some pro-Trump “fake news” or some Internet “conspiracy theory” – I cringe at the self-delusion and hypocrisy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Definitive Evidence

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

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

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

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

“President Lyndon Baines Johnson announced a halt to bombing of North Vietnam, based on his claim that peace talks had ‘entered a new and a very much more hopeful phase,’ and he invited the government of South Vietnam and the Viet Cong to take part in negotiations. Raising hopes that the war might end soon, the announcement appeared to bolster the standing in the polls of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, the Democratic presidential nominee, but Humphrey still fell short in the election against former Vice President Richard M. Nixon, the Republican.”

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

The Times got the story upside-down by failing to reexamine the case in light of

convincing new evidence that had been available for years, albeit circulating outside the mainstream.

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

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

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

Monkey Wrench It

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

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

Though Farrell's discovery is certainly newsworthy, its greatest significance may be that it has served as a tipping point that finally has forced the Times and the mainstream media to move past their longstanding dismissals of this “conspiracy theory.”

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

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

of decades.

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

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

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

A Reprise

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

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

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

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

Several years ago, I uncovered documents from the Bush presidential library in College Station, Texas, showing how Bush’s White House staff organized a cover-

up to conceal key evidence and hide a key witness from the investigation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contra-Cocaine Scandal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lies as Truth

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

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

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

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

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

The end result, however, is to push more and more Americans into a state of confusion regarding what to believe. While some citizens may seek out honest independent journalism to get what they’re missing, others will surely fall prey to fake news and conspiracy theories.

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