

Protecting the Shaky Russia-gate Narrative

Exclusive: The New York Times continues its sorry pattern of falsifying the record on Russia-gate, giving its readers information that the newspaper knows not to be true, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If Russia-gate is the massive scandal that we are told it is by so many Important People – across the U.S. mainstream media and the political world – why do its proponents have to resort to lies and exaggerations to maintain the pillars supporting the narrative?

A new example on Thursday was The New York Times' statement that a Russian agency “spent \$100,000 on [Facebook’s] platform to influence the United States presidential election last year” – when the Times knows that statement is not true.

According to Facebook, only 44 percent of that amount appeared *before* the U.S. presidential election in 2016 (i.e., \$44,000) and few of those ads addressed the actual election. And, we know that the Times is aware of the truth because it was acknowledged in a Times article in early October.

As part of that article, Times correspondents Mike Isaac and Scott Shane reported that the ads also covered a wide range of other topics: “There was even a Facebook group for animal lovers with memes of adorable puppies that spread across the site with the help of paid ads.”

As nefarious as the Times may think it is for Russians to promote a Facebook page about “adorable puppies,” the absurdity of that concern – and the dishonesty of the Times then “forgetting” what it itself reported just two months ago about the timing and contents of these “Russian-linked ads” – tells you a great deal about Russia-gate.

On Thursday, the Times chose to distort what it already knew to be true presumably because it didn’t want to make the \$100,000 ad buy (which is not a particularly large sum) look even smaller and less significant by acknowledging the pre-election total was less than half that modest amount – and even that total had little to do with the election.

Why would the Times lie? Because to tell the truth would undercut the narrative of evil Russians defeating Hillary Clinton and putting Donald Trump in the White

House – the core narrative of Russia-gate.

Another relevant fact is that Facebook failed to find any “Russian-linked” ads during its first two searches and only detected the \$100,000 after a personal visit from Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia, the vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a leading legislator on Internet regulation.

In other words, Facebook’s corporate executives dredged up something to appease Warner. That way, Warner and the Democrats could blame Russia for the Trump presidency, sparing further criticism of Clinton’s dreadful campaign (in which she labeled half of Trump’s voters “deplorables”) and her neo-liberal economic policies (and neo-conservative foreign policies) that have alienated much of America’s working class as well as many progressives.

Leaving Out Context

The Times also might have put the \$100,000 in “Russian-linked” ads over a two-year period in the context of Facebook’s \$27 billion in annual revenue, but the Times didn’t do that – apparently because it would make even the full \$100,000 look like a pittance.

Trimming the total down to \$44,000 and admitting that only a few of those ads actually dealt with Clinton and Trump would be even worse for the Russia-gate narrative.

Ironically, the Times’ latest false depiction of the \$100,000 in ads as designed “to influence” the 2016 election appeared in an article about Facebook determining that other Russian-linked ads, which supposedly had a powerful effect on Great Britain’s Brexit vote, totaled just three ads at the cost of 97 cents. (That is not a misprint.)

According to Facebook, the three ads, which focused on immigration, were viewed some 200 times by Britons over four days in May 2016. Of course, the response from British parliamentarians who wanted to blame the Brexit vote on Moscow was to assert that Facebook must have missed something. It couldn’t be that many Britons had lost faith in the promise of the European Union for their own reasons.

We have seen a similar pattern with allegations about Russian interference in German and French elections, with the initial accusations being widely touted but not so much the later conclusions by serious investigations knocking down the claims. [See, for instance, Consortiumnews.com’s “German Intel Clears Russia on Interference.”]

The only acceptable conclusion, it seems, is “Russia Guilty!”

These days in Official Washington, it has become almost forbidden to ask for actual evidence that would prove the original claim that Russia “hacked” Democratic emails, even though the accusation came from what President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper acknowledged were “hand-picked” analysts from the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

These “hand-picked” analysts produced the evidence-lite Jan. 6 “assessment” about Russia “hacking” the emails and slipping them to WikiLeaks – a scenario denied by both WikiLeaks and Russia.

When that “assessment” was released almost a year ago, even the Times’ Scott Shane noticed the lack of proof, writing: “What is missing from the [the Jan. 6] public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

But the Times soon “forgot” what Shane had inconveniently noted and began reporting the Russian “hacking” as accepted wisdom.

The 17-Agencies Canard

Whenever scattered expressions of skepticism arose from a few analysts or non-mainstream media, the doubts were beaten back by the claim that “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” concurred in the conclusion that Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered the hacking to hurt Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump. And what kind of nut would doubt the collective judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies!

Though the 17-agency canard was never true, it served an important purpose in establishing the Russia-gate groupthink. Wielding the “all 17 intelligence agencies” club, the U.S. mainstream media pounded politicians and policymakers into line, making any remaining skeptics seem more out of step and crazy.

So, in May 2017, when Clapper (along with former CIA Director John Brennan) admitted in congressional testimony that it wasn’t true that all 17 agencies concurred in the Russian hacking conclusion, those statements received very little attention in the mainstream media.

The New York Times among other major news outlets just continued asserting the 17-agency falsehood until the Times was finally pressured to correct its lie in late June, but that only led to the Times shifting to slightly different but still misleading wording, citing a “consensus” among the intelligence agencies without mentioning a number or by simply stating the unproven hacking claim as flat fact.

Even efforts to test the Russian-hack claims through science were ignored or ridiculed. When former NSA technical director William Binney conducted experiments that showed that the known download speed of one batch of DNC emails could not have occurred over the Internet but matched what was possible for a USB-connected thumb drive – an indication that a Democratic insider likely downloaded the emails and thus that there was no “hack” – Binney was mocked as a “conspiracy theorist.”

Even with the new disclosures about deep-seated anti-Trump bias in text messages exchanged between two senior FBI officials who played important early roles in the Russia-gate investigation, there is no indication that Official Washington is willing to go back to the beginning and see how the Russia-gate story might have been deceptively spun.

In a recently released Aug. 15, 2016 text message from Peter Strzok, a senior FBI counterintelligence official, to his reputed lover, senior FBI lawyer Lisa Page, Strzok referenced an apparent plan to keep Trump from getting elected before suggesting the need for “an insurance policy” just in case he did. A serious investigation into Russia-gate might want to know what these senior FBI officials had in mind.

But the Times and other big promoters of Russia-gate continue to dismiss doubters as delusional or as covering up for Russia and/or Trump. By this point – more than a year into this investigation – too many Important People have bought into the Russia-gate narrative to consider the possibility that there may be little or nothing there, or even worse, that it is the “insurance policy” that Strzok envisioned.

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 Scary Void Inside Russia-gate

Despite a lack of evidence at its core – and the risk of nuclear conflagration as its by-product – Russia-gate remains the go-to accusation for “getting” the Trump administration, explains Russia scholar Stephen F. Cohen.

By Stephen F. Cohen

The foundational accusation of Russia-gate was, and remains, charges that Russian President Putin ordered the hacking of Democratic National Committee e-mails and their public dissemination through WikiLeaks in order to benefit Donald Trump and undermine Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election, and that Trump and/or his associates colluded with the Kremlin in this “attack on American democracy.”

As no actual evidence for these allegations has been produced after nearly a year and a half of media and government investigations, we are left with Russia-gate without Russia. (An apt formulation perhaps first coined in an e-mail exchange by *Nation* writer James Carden.) Special counsel Mueller has produced four indictments: against retired Gen. Michael Flynn, Trump’s short-lived national-security adviser, and George Papadopolous, a lowly and inconsequential Trump “adviser,” for lying to the FBI; and against Paul Manafort and his partner Rick Gates for financial improprieties. None of these charges has anything to do with improper collusion with Russia, except for the wrongful insinuations against Flynn.

Instead, the several investigations, desperate to find actual evidence of collusion, have spread to “contacts with Russia” – political, financial, social, etc. – on the part of a growing number of people, often going back many years before anyone imagined Trump as a presidential candidate. The resulting implication is that these “contacts” were criminal or potentially so.

This is unprecedented, preposterous, and dangerous, potentially more so than even Joe McCarthy’s search for “Communist” connections. It would suggest, for example, that scores of American corporations doing business in Russia today are engaged in criminal enterprise.

More to the point, advisers to U.S. policy-makers and even media commentators on Russia must have many and various contacts with Russia if they are to understand anything about the dynamics of Kremlin policy-making. I myself, to take an individual example, was an adviser to two (unsuccessful) presidential campaigns, which considered my wide-ranging and longstanding “contacts” with Russia to be an important credential, as did the one sitting president whom I advised.

To suggest that such contacts are in any way criminal is to slur hundreds of reputations and to leave U.S. policy-makers with advisers laden with ideology and no actual expertise. It is also to suggest that any quest for better relations with Russia, or détente, is somehow suspicious, illegitimate, or impossible, as expressed recently by Andrew Weiss in *The Wall Street Journal* and by *The Washington Post*, in an editorial. This is one reason why I have, in a previous commentary, argued that Russia-gate and its promoters have become the gravest threat to American national security.

Russia-gate began sometime prior to June 2016, not after the presidential election in November, as is often said, as an anti-Trump political project. (Exactly why, how, and by whom remain unclear, and herein lies the real significance of the largely bogus “dossier” and the still murky role of top U.S. intel officials in the creation of that document.)

That said, the mainstream American media have been largely responsible for inflating, perpetuating, and sustaining the sham Russia-gate as the real political crisis it has become, arguably the greatest in modern American presidential and thus institutional political history. The media have done this by increasingly betraying their own professed standards of verified news reporting and balanced coverage, even resorting to tacit forms of censorship by systematically excluding dissenting reporting and opinions.

(For inventories of recent examples, see [Glenn Greenwald at *The Intercept*](#) and [Joe Lauria at *Consortiumnews*](#). Anyone interested in exposures of such truly “fake news” should visit these two sites regularly, the latter the product of the inestimable veteran journalist Robert Parry.)

Still worse, this mainstream malpractice has spread to some alternative-media publications once prized for their journalistic standards, where expressed disdain for “evidence” and “proof” in favor of allegations without any actual facts can sometimes be found. Nor are these practices merely the ordinary occasional mishaps of professional journalism.

As Greenwald points out, all of the now retracted stories, whether by print media or cable television, were zealous promotions of Russia-gate and virulently anti-Trump. They, too, are examples of Russia-gate without Russia.

Flynn and the FBI

Leaving aside possible financial improprieties on the part of General Flynn, his persecution and subsequent prosecution is highly indicative. Flynn pled guilty to having lied to the FBI about his communications with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, on behalf of the incoming Trump administration, discussions that unavoidably included some references, however vague, to sanctions imposed on Russia by President Obama in December 2016, just before leaving office.

Those sanctions were highly unusual – last-minute, unprecedented in their seizure of Russian property in the United States, and including a reckless veiled threat of unspecified cyber-attacks on Russia. They gave the impression that Obama wanted to make even more difficult Trump’s professed goal of improving relations with Moscow.

Still more, Obama’s specified reason was not Russian behavior in Ukraine or

Syria, as is commonly thought, but Russia-gate – that is, Putin’s “attack on American democracy,” which Obama’s intel chiefs had evidently persuaded him was an entirely authentic allegation. (Or which Obama, who regarded Trump’s victory over his designated successor, Hillary Clinton, as a personal rebuff, was eager to believe.)

But Flynn’s discussions with the Russian ambassador – as well as other Trump representatives’ efforts to open “back-channel” communications with Moscow – were anything but a crime. As I pointed out in another commentary, there were so many precedents of such overtures on behalf of presidents-elect, it was considered a normal, even necessary practice, if only to ask Moscow not to make relations worse before the new president had a chance to review the relationship.

When Henry Kissinger did this on behalf of President-elect Nixon, his boss instructed him to keep the communication entirely confidential, not to inform any other members of the incoming administration. Presumably Flynn was similarly secretive, thereby misinforming Vice President Pence and finding himself trapped – or possibly entrapped – between loyalty to his president and an FBI agent. Flynn no doubt would have been especially guarded with a representative of the FBI, knowing as he did the role of Obama’s Intel bosses in Russia-gate prior to the election and which had escalated after Trump’s surprise victory.

In any event, to the extent that Flynn encouraged Moscow not to reply in kind immediately to Obama’s highly provocative sanctions, he performed a service to U.S. national security, not a crime. And, assuming that Flynn was acting on the instructions of his president-elect, so did Trump. Still more, if Flynn “colluded” in any way, it was with Israel, not Russia, having been asked by that government to dissuade countries from voting for an impending anti-Israel U.N. resolution.

Removing Tillerson

Finally, and similarly, there is the ongoing effort by the political-media establishment to drive Secretary of State Rex Tillerson from office and replace him with a fully neocon, anti-Russian, anti-détente head of the State Department. Tillerson was an admirable appointee by Trump – widely experienced in world affairs, a tested negotiator, a mature and practical-minded man.

Originally, his role as the CEO of Exxon Mobil who had negotiated and enacted an immensely profitable and strategically important energy-extraction deal with the Kremlin earned him the slur of being “Putin’s pal.” This preposterous allegation has since given way to charges that he is slowly restructuring, and trimming, the long bloated and mostly inept State Department, as indeed he should do.

Numerous former diplomats closely associated with Hillary Clinton have raced to influential op-ed pages to denounce Tillerson's undermining of this purportedly glorious frontline institution of American national security. Many news reports, commentaries, and editorials have been in the same vein. But who can recall a major diplomatic triumph by the State Department or a Secretary of State in recent years?

The answer might be the Obama administration's multinational agreement with Iran to curb its nuclear-weapons potential, but that was due no less to Russia's president and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which provided essential guarantees to the sides involved. Forgotten, meanwhile, are the more than 50 career State Department officials who publicly protested Obama's rare attempt to cooperate with Moscow in Syria. Call it by what it was: the sabotaging of a president by his own State Department.

In this spirit, there are a flurry of leaked stories that Tillerson will soon resign or be ousted. Meanwhile, however, he carries on. The ever-looming menace of Russia-gate compels him to issue wildly exaggerated indictments of Russian behavior while, at the same time, calling for a "productive new relationship" with Moscow, in which he clearly believes. (And which, if left unencumbered, he might achieve.)

Evidently, Tillerson has established a "productive" working relationship with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, the two of them having just announced North Korea's readiness to engage in negotiations with the United States and other governments involved in the current crisis.

Tillerson's fate will tell us much about the number-one foreign-policy question confronting America: cooperation or escalating conflict with the other nuclear superpower, a détente-like diminishing of the new Cold War or the growing risks that it will become hot war. Politics and policy should never be over-personalized; larger factors are always involved. But in these unprecedented times, Tillerson may be the last man standing who represents the possibility of some kind of détente. Apart, that is, from President Trump himself, loathe him or not. Or to put the issue differently: Will Russia-gate continue to gravely endanger American national security?

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The Foundering Russia-gate ‘Scandal’

Exclusive: Taking on water from revealed FBI conflicts of interest, the foundering Russia-gate probe – and its mainstream media promoters – are resorting to insults against people who note the listing ship, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The disclosure of fiercely anti-Trump text messages between two romantically involved senior FBI officials who played key roles in the early Russia-gate inquiry has turned the supposed Russian-election-meddling “scandal” into its own scandal, by providing evidence that some government investigators saw it as their duty to block or destroy Donald Trump’s presidency.

As much as the U.S. mainstream media has mocked the idea that an American “deep state” exists and that it has maneuvered to remove Trump from office, the text messages between senior FBI counterintelligence official Peter Strzok and senior FBI lawyer Lisa Page reveal how two high-ranking members of the government’s intelligence/legal bureaucracy saw their role as protecting the United States from an election that might elevate to the presidency someone as unfit as Trump.

In one Aug. 6, 2016 text exchange, Page told Strzok: “Maybe you’re meant to stay where you are because you’re meant to protect the country from that menace.” At the end of that text, she sent Strzok a link to a David Brooks [column](#) in The New York Times, which concludes with the clarion call: “There comes a time when neutrality and laying low become dishonorable. If you’re not in revolt, you’re in cahoots. When this period and your name are mentioned, decades hence, your grandkids will look away in shame.”

Apparently after reading that stirring advice, Strzok replied, “And of course I’ll try and approach it that way. I just know it will be tough at times. I can protect our country at many levels, not sure if that helps.”

At a House Judiciary Committee hearing on Wednesday, Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, criticized Strzok’s boast that “I can protect our country at many levels.” Jordan said: “this guy thought he was super-agent James Bond at the FBI [deciding] there’s no way we can let the American people make Donald Trump the next president.”

In the text messages, Strzok also expressed visceral contempt for working-class Trump voters, for instance, writing on Aug. 26, 2016, “Just went to a southern Virginia Walmart. I could SMELL the Trump support. ... it’s scary real down here.”

Another text message suggested that other senior government officials – alarmed at the possibility of a Trump presidency – joined the discussion. In an apparent reference to an August 2016 meeting with FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, Strzok wrote to Page on Aug. 15, 2016, “I want to believe the path you threw out for consideration in Andy’s office – that there’s no way he gets elected – but I’m afraid we can’t take that risk.”

Strzok added, “It’s like an insurance policy in the unlikely event that you die before you’re 40.”

It’s unclear what strategy these FBI officials were contemplating to ensure Trump’s defeat, but the comments mesh with what an intelligence source told me after the 2016 election, that there was a plan among senior Obama administration officials to use the allegations about Russian meddling to block Trump’s momentum with the voters and – if elected – to persuade members of the Electoral College to deny Trump a majority of votes and thus throw the selection of a new president into the House of Representatives under the rules of the Twelfth Amendment.

The scheme involved having some Democratic electors vote for former Secretary of State Colin Powell (which did happen), making him the third-place vote-getter in the Electoral College and thus eligible for selection by the House. But the plan fizzled when enough of Trump’s electors stayed loyal to their candidate to officially make him President.

After that, Trump’s opponents turned to the Russia-gate investigation as the vehicle to create the conditions for somehow nullifying the election, impeaching Trump, or at least weakening him sufficiently so he could not take steps to improve relations with Russia.

In one of her text messages to Strzok, Page made reference to a possible Watergate-style ouster of Trump, writing: “Bought all the president’s men. Figure I needed to brush up on watergate.”

As a key feature in this oust-Trump effort, Democrats have continued to lie by claiming that “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred” in the assessment that Russia hacked the Democratic emails last year on orders from President Vladimir Putin and then slipped them to WikiLeaks to undermine Hillary Clinton’s campaign.

That canard was used in the early months of the Russia-gate imbroglio to silence any skepticism about the “hacking” accusation, and the falsehood was repeated again by a Democratic congressman during Wednesday’s hearing of the House Judiciary Committee.

But the “consensus” claim was never true. In May 2017 testimony, President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper acknowledged that the Jan. 6 “Intelligence Community Assessment” was put together by “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies: the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

Biased at the Creation

And, the new revelations of high-level FBI bias puts Clapper’s statement about “hand-picked” analysts in sharper perspective, since any intelligence veteran will tell you that if you hand-pick the analysts you are effectively hand-picking the analysis.

Although it has not yet been spelled out exactly what role Strzok and Page may have had in the Jan. 6 report, I was told by one source that Strzok had a direct hand in writing it. Whether that is indeed the case, Strzok, as a senior FBI counterintelligence official, would almost surely have had input into the selection of the FBI analysts and thus into the substance of the report itself. [For challenges from intelligence experts to the Jan. 6 report, see Consortiumnews.com’s “More Holes in the Russia-gate Narrative.”]

If the FBI contributors to the Jan. 6 report shared Strzok’s contempt for Trump, it could explain why claims from an unverified dossier of Democratic-financed “dirt” on Trump, including salacious charges that Russian intelligence operatives videotaped Trump being urinated on by prostitutes in a five-star Moscow hotel, was added as a classified appendix to the report and presented personally to President-elect Trump.

Though Democrats and the Clinton campaign long denied financing the dossier – prepared by ex-British spy Christopher Steele who claimed to rely on second- and third-hand information from anonymous Russian contacts – it was revealed in October 2017 that the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign shared in the costs, with the payments going to the “oppo” research firm, Fusion GPS, through the Democrats’ law firm, Perkins Coie.

That discovery helped ensnare another senior Justice Department official, Associate Attorney General Bruce Ohr, who talked with Steele during the campaign and had a post-election meeting with Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson. Recently, Simpson has acknowledged that Ohr’s wife, Nellie Ohr, was hired by Fusion GPS last year to investigate Trump.

Bruce Ohr has since been demoted and Strzok was quietly removed from the Russia-gate investigation last July although the reasons for these moves were not publicly explained at the time.

Still, the drive for “another Watergate” to oust an unpopular – and to many

insiders, unfit – President remains at the center of the thinking among the top mainstream news organizations as they have scrambled for Russia-gate “scoops” over the past year even at the cost of making serious reporting errors.

For instance, last Friday, CNN – and then CBS News and MSNBC – trumpeted an email supposedly sent from someone named Michael J. Erickson on Sept. 4, 2016, to Donald Trump Jr. that involved WikiLeaks offering the Trump campaign pre-publication access to purloined Democratic National Committee emails that WikiLeaks published on Sept. 13, nine days later.

Grasping for Confirmation

Since the Jan. 6 report alleged that WikiLeaks received the “hacked” emails from Russia – a claim that WikiLeaks and Russia deny – the story seemed to finally tie together the notion that the Trump campaign had at least indirectly colluded with Russia.

This new “evidence” spread like wildfire across social media. As The Intercept’s Glenn Greenwald wrote in an article critical of the media’s performance, some Russia-gate enthusiasts heralded the revelation with graphics of cannons booming and nukes exploding.

But the story soon collapsed when it turned out that the date on the email was actually Sept. 14, 2016, i.e., the day *after* WikiLeaks released the batch of DNC emails, not Sept. 4. It appeared that “Erickson” – whoever he was – had simply alerted the Trump campaign to the public existence of the WikiLeaks disclosure.

Greenwald noted, “So numerous are the false stories about Russia and Trump over the last year that I literally cannot list them all.”

Yet, despite the cascade of errors and grudging corrections, including some belated admissions that there was no “17-intelligence-agency consensus” on Russian “hacking” – The New York Times made a preemptive strike against the new documentary evidence that the Russia-gate investigation was riddled with conflicts of interest.

The Times’ lead editorial on Wednesday mocked reporters at Fox News for living in an “alternate universe” where the Russia-gate “investigation is ‘illegitimate and corrupt,’ or so says Gregg Jarrett, a legal analyst who appears regularly on [Sean] Hannity’s nightly exercise in presidential ego-stroking.”

Though briefly mentioning the situation with Strzok’s text messages, the Times offered no details or context for the concerns, instead just heaping ridicule on anyone who questions the Russia-gate narrative.

“To put it mildly, this is insane,” the Times declared. “The primary purpose of Mr. Mueller’s investigation is not to take down Mr. Trump. It’s to protect America’s national security and the integrity of its elections by determining whether a presidential campaign conspired with a foreign adversary to influence the 2016 election – a proposition that grows more plausible every day.”

The Times fumed that “roughly three-quarters of Republicans still refuse to accept that Russia interfered in the 2016 election – a fact that is glaringly obvious to everyone else, including the nation’s intelligence community.” (There we go again with the false suggestion of a consensus within the intelligence community.)

The Times also took to task Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, for seeking “a Special Counsel to investigate ALL THINGS 2016 – not just Trump and Russia.” The Times insisted that “None of these attacks or insinuations are grounded in good faith.”

But what are the Times editors so afraid of? As much as they try to insult and intimidate anyone who demands serious evidence about the Russia-gate allegations, why shouldn’t the American people be informed about how Washington insiders manipulate elite opinion in pursuit of reversing “mistaken” judgments by the unwashed masses?

Do the Times editors really believe in democracy – a process that historically has had its share of warts and mistakes – or are they just elitists who think they know best and turn away their noses from the smell of working-class people at Walmart?

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

Trump’s Lethal Decision on Jerusalem

President Trump has won praise from Christian Zionists and many staunch supporters of Israel for declaring Jerusalem Israel’s capital, but critics say it only makes peace a more distant goal, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Protests have broken out across the Middle East against President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital – and Western critics complain that the move adds one more brick in the wall against the prospects for peace.

Professor Francis Boyle, who teaches international law at the University of Illinois College of Law and served as a long-time legal adviser to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), calls Trump's announcement a "symbolic but still critical step in Israeli designs to control not just Jerusalem, but all of historic Palestine." I spoke with Boyle on Dec. 6.

Dennis Bernstein: What was your initial response to the announcement by President Trump that the United States will be moving its embassy to Jerusalem?

Francis Boyle: It is always a sad day when you know that people are going to die. It is a defeat for the human spirit. In the last intifada [September 2000-February 2005], about 3,000 Palestinians died and 1,000 Israelis. I don't know what will happen this time. The Palestinians have called for "three days of rage." Trump could very well set off a third intifada here.

Dennis Bernstein: Trump says this doesn't get in the way of the US being an honest broker, that the vision is for peace. From the legal perspective, how do you see this?

Francis Boyle: First of all, the United States has never been an honest broker here. I was legal advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace Negotiations from 1991, when they began, to the signing of Oslo. It was very clear that the United States was always serving as Israel's lawyer. You had Miller, Ross, and Kurtzer, all three American Jews, two of them orthodox.

The Palestinians had to go hat-in-hand to present their case to American Jews. Nothing has changed: We now have Kushner, Greenblatt and Friedman, all three of whom are orthodox Jews. The whole thing has been preposterous from the beginning. We have always been in favor of Israel, using lies, threats and intimidation to force the Palestinians to accept whatever the Israelis are giving them. That is international diplomacy for you, conducted by the United States, not only in the Middle East but all over the world.

Dennis Bernstein: Would you say that what is going on here is not just Israel trying to control Jerusalem but all of Palestine?

Francis Boyle: That has always been Israel's policy. I had a conversation with the chair of the Palestinian Delegation to the Middle East peace negotiations. He told me that the Zionists have not changed their position since the Basel

Convention of 1897. They want all of Palestine. What is happening now in Jerusalem is a step in that direction.

If you look at the recently leaked so-called peace plan that was presented to [Palestinian President Mahmoud] Abbas in Saudi Arabia, he was basically given an ultimatum to either accept some tiny bantustan or forget it. It is very clear that they want all of Palestine, all of the West Bank, all of Jerusalem. They want the Golan Heights and maybe even some more of Syria.

Dennis Bernstein: We have revelations now that Jared Kushner, our chief peace negotiator in the Middle East, failed to disclose in ethics filings his role as director of a family foundation that funded Israeli settlements. Do you think that is a problem?

Francis Boyle: Of course, because basically he is aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity in Palestine.

Dennis Bernstein: Is the United States participating in illegal actions in Israel, or doesn't it matter anymore?

Francis Boyle: For most of the Arab and Muslim world, it matters. Here in the United States, apart from the BDS movement, we have basically thrown in our lot with the Israeli government. Congress has been bought and paid for by the Israel lobby. During his campaign, Trump made explicit promises in order to secure Jewish funding and votes.

We arm, equip, supply and train Israel. What is going on in Gaza right now is a form of genocide. They are being strangled to death. The 1948 Genocide Convention, to which both Israel and the United States are parties, says that "deliberately inflicting on a people conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction in whole or in part" is genocide. That is exactly what is going on in Gaza today.

Dennis Bernstein: How would you assess the situation now? Is a two-state solution at all viable?

Francis Boyle: That is for the Palestinians to decide. Their right of self determination is at stake here. As of today, their official position is two states with their capital in East Jerusalem. There have been hints that they might go back to the one-state solution, which was their position before the Palestinian Declaration of Independence of December 15, 1988, when they officially accepted a two-state solution. Since then they have gotten nothing. Every day Israel just steals more land and drives out more Palestinians.

Dennis Bernstein: Are there any options for the Palestinians in the

international arena, for example, at the United Nations?

Francis Boyle: I have advised them to invoke the “Uniting for Peace” resolution adopted by the general assembly in 1950, so that they can be admitted to the UN General Assembly as a full-fledged UN member state, recognizing their capital as East Jerusalem. And, as you know, after Palestine became a UN observer state, you and I discussed the concept of a “legal intifada” that the Palestinians could pursue.

My advice to the Palestinians is a full-court press in all specialized United Nations agencies and affiliated organizations, using all available legal mechanisms. This would include suing Israel at the International Court of Justice, which I have offered to do for them. And of course they have filed a complaint against Israel for war crimes and crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court. According to press reports, they are meeting right now to decide what to do and President Abbas will soon be addressing the Palestinian people.

Dennis Bernstein: I suppose it is important to emphasize the fact that this could turn very violent.

Francis Boyle: I am afraid so. This could turn into the third intifada. The First Intifada, which took place in 1987, was spontaneous. The Second Intifada [September 2000-February 2005] was provoked when Ariel Sharon went to the Al-Aqsa mosque with a couple hundred soldiers. Eventually, about 3,000 Palestinians lost their lives as a result.

Now we have Trump provoking the situation. His people, including Bannon and Flynn, know exactly what they are doing. They believe in Sam Huntington’s concept of “the clash of civilizations.” They truly believe that they are leading a crusade against the Muslim world. This is being done very deliberately.

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

Russia-gate’s Litany of Corrections

Exclusive: As much as the U.S. mainstream media insists that the Russia-gate scandal is growing, what is undeniably growing is the list of major corrections that news outlets have been forced to issue, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. mainstream media's year-long hysteria over Russia's alleged role in the election of Donald Trump has obliterated normal reporting standards leading to a rash of journalistic embarrassments that have both disgraced the profession and energized Trump's backers over new grievances about the MSM's "fake news."



Misguided groupthink is always a danger when key elements of the Washington establishment and the major news media share the same belief – whether that is Iraq's supposed possession of WMD or the need to bring down some foreign or domestic leader unpopular with the elites.

Yet, we have rarely witnessed such a cascading collapse of journalistic principles as has occurred around the Russia-gate "scandal." It is hard to keep track of all the corrections or to take note of all the dead ends that the investigation keeps finding.

But anyone who dares note the errors, the inconsistencies or the illogical claims is either dismissed as a "Kremlin stooge" or a "Trump enabler." The national Democrats and the mainstream media seem determined to keep hurtling down the Russia-gate roadway assuming that the evidentiary barriers ahead will magically disappear at some point and the path to Trump's impeachment will be clear.

On Friday, the rush to finally prove the Russia-gate narrative led CNN – and then CBS News and MSNBC – to trumpet an email supposedly sent from someone named Michael J. Erickson on Sept. 4, 2016, to Donald Trump Jr. that involved WikiLeaks offering the Trump campaign pre-publication access to purloined Democratic National Committee emails that WikiLeaks published on Sept. 13, nine days later.

With CNN finally tying together the CIA's unproven claim that WikiLeaks collaborates with Russia and the equally unproven claim that Russian intelligence "hacked" the Democratic emails, CNN drew the noose more tightly around the Trump campaign for "colluding" with Russia.

After having congressional reporter Manu Raju lay out the supposed facts of the scoop, CNN turned to a panel of legal experts to pontificate about the crimes that the Trump campaign may have committed now that the "evidence" proving

Russia-gate was finally coming together.

Not surprisingly the arrival of this long-awaited “proof” of Russian “collusion” exploded across social media. As The Intercept’s Glenn Greenwald noted in an article critical of the media’s performance, some Russia-gate enthusiasts heralded the CNN revelation with graphics of cannons booming and nukes exploding.

The problem, however, was that CNN and other news outlets that jumped on the story misreported the date of the email; it was Sept. 14, 2016, i.e., the day *after* WikiLeaks released the batch of DNC emails, not Sept. 4. In other words, it appeared that “Erickson” – whoever he was – was simply alerting the Trump campaign to the WikiLeaks disclosure.

CNN later issued a quiet correction to its inflammatory report – and not surprisingly people close to Trump cited the false claim as yet another example of “fake news” being spread by the mainstream media, which has put itself at the forefront of the anti-Trump Resistance over the past year.

But this sloppy journalism – compounded by CNN’s rush to put the “Sept. 4 email” in some criminal context and with CBS and MSNBC panting close behind – was not a stand-alone screw-up. A week earlier, ABC News made a similar mistake in claiming that candidate Donald Trump instructed Michael Flynn to contact Russian officials during the campaign, when Trump actually made the request after the election when Flynn was national security adviser-designate, a thoroughly normal move for a President-elect to make. That botched story led ABC News to suspend veteran investigative reporter Brian Ross.

Another inaccurate report from Bloomberg News, The Wall Street Journal and other news outlets – that Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller had subpoenaed Deutsche Bank records of President Trump and his family – was denied by Trump’s lawyer and later led to more corrections. The error apparently was that the bank records were not those of Trump and his family but possibly other associates.

A Pattern of Bias

But it wasn’t just a bad week for American mainstream journalism. The string of errors followed a pattern of earlier false and misleading reporting and other violations of journalistic standards, a sorry record that has been the hallmark of the Russia-gate “scandal.” Many stories have stirred national outrage toward nuclear-armed Russia before petering out as either false or wildly exaggerated. [See, for instance, Consortiumnews.com’s “Russia-gate Jumps the Shark.”]

As Greenwald noted, “So numerous are the false stories about Russia and Trump over the last year that I literally cannot list them all.”

The phenomenon began in the weeks after Trump's shocking victory over Hillary Clinton as Democrats and the mainstream media looked for people to blame for the defeat of their much-preferred candidate.

So, on Thanksgiving Day, just weeks after the election, The Washington Post published a front-page story based on an anonymous group called PropOrNot accusing 200 Web sites of acting as propaganda agents for Russia. The list included some of the Internet's leading independent news sources, including Consortiumnews, but the Post did not bother to contact the slandered Web sites nor to dissect the dubious methodology of the unnamed accusers.

Apparently, the "crime" of the Web sites was to show skepticism toward the State Department's claims about Syria and Ukraine. In conflating a few isolated cases of "fake news" in which people fabricated stories for political or profitable ends with serious dissent regarding the demonizing of Russia and its allies, the Post was laying down a marker that failure to get in line behind the U.S. government's propaganda on these and other topics would get you labeled a "Kremlin tool."

As the Russia-gate hysteria built in the run-up to Trump's inauguration during the final weeks of the Obama administration, the Post also jumped on a claim from the Department of Homeland Security that Russian hackers had penetrated into the nation's electrical grid through Vermont's Burlington Electric.

As journalist Gareth Porter noted, "The Post failed to follow the most basic rule of journalism, relying on its DHS source instead of checking with the Burlington Electric Department first. The result was the Post's sensational Dec. 30 story under the headline 'Russian hackers penetrated U.S. electricity grid through a utility in Vermont, U.S. officials say.' ...

"The electric company quickly issued a firm denial that the computer in question was connected to the power grid. The Post was forced to retract, in effect, its claim that the electricity grid had been hacked by the Russians. But it stuck by its story that the utility had been the victim of a Russian hack for another three days before admitting that no such evidence of a hack existed."

The Original Sin

In other cases, major news outlets, such as The New York Times, reported dubious Russia-gate claims from U.S. intelligence agencies as flat fact, rather than unproven allegations that remain in serious dispute. The Times and others reported Russian "hacking" of Democratic emails as true even though WikiLeaks denied getting the material from the Russians and the Russians denied providing it.

For months into 2017, in dismissing or ignoring those denials, the U.S. mainstream media reported routinely that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the conclusion that Russia was behind the disclosure of Democratic emails as part of a plot initiated by Russian President Vladimir Putin to help elect Trump. Anyone who dared question this supposed collective judgment of all the U.S. intelligence agencies risked being called a “conspiracy theorist” or worse.

But the “consensus” claim was never true. Such a consensus judgment would have called for a comprehensive National Intelligence Estimate, which was never commissioned on the Russian “hacking” issue. Instead there was something called an “Intelligence Community Assessment” on Jan. 6 that – according to testimony by President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in May 2017 – was put together by “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies: the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

Even after Clapper’s testimony, the “consensus” canard continued to circulate. For instance, in The New York Times’ White House Memo of June 25, correspondent Maggie Haberman mocked Trump for “still refus[ing] to acknowledge a basic fact agreed upon by 17 American intelligence agencies that he now oversees: Russia orchestrated the attacks, and did it to help get him elected.”

Finally, the Times ran a correction appended to that article. The Associated Press ran a similar “clarification” applied to some of its fallacious reporting which used the “17-intelligence-agencies” meme.

After the correction, however, the Times simply shifted to other deceptive wording to continue suggesting that U.S. intelligence agencies were in accord on Russian “hacking.” Other times, the Times just asserted the claim of Russian email hacking as flat fact. All of this was quite unprofessional, since the Jan. 6 “assessment” itself stated that it was not asserting Russian “hacking” as fact, explaining: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact.”

Even worse than the Times, the “fact-checking” site Politifact, which is part of Google’s First Draft Coalition for deciding what the search engine’s algorithms will promote as true and what information will be disappeared as false, simply decided to tough it out and continued insisting that the false “consensus” claim was true.

When actual experts, such as former National Security Agency technical director William Binney, sought to apply scientific analysis to the core claim about Russian “hacking,” they reached the unpopular conclusion that the one known download speed of a supposed “hack” was not possible over the Internet but

closely matched what would occur via a USB download, i.e., from someone with direct access to the Democratic National Committee's computers using a thumb drive. In other words, the emails more likely came from a DNC insider, not an external "hack" from the Russians or anyone else.

You might have thought that the U.S. news media would have welcomed Binney's discovery. However, instead he was either ignored or mocked as a "conspiracy theorist." The near-religious belief in the certainty of the Russian "hack" was not to be mocked or doubted.

'Hand-picked' Trouble

In recent days, former DNI Clapper's reference to "hand-picked" analysts for the Jan. 6 report has also taken on a more troubling odor, since questions have been raised about the objectivity of the Russia-gate investigators and – as any intelligence expert will tell you – if you "hand-pick" analysts known for their personal biases, you are hand-picking the conclusion, a process that became known during the Reagan administration as "politicizing intelligence."

Though little is known about exactly who was "hand-picked" by President Obama's intelligence chiefs to assess the Russian "hacking" suspicions, Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller has been forced to reassign Peter Strzok, one of the top FBI investigators who worked on both the Hillary Clinton email-server case and the Trump-Russia inquiry, after it was discovered that he exchanged anti-Trump and pro-Clinton text messages with a lawyer who also works at the FBI.

Last week, Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee sought answers from new FBI Director Christopher Wren about Strzok's role in clearing Hillary Clinton of criminal wrongdoing in her use of a private unsecured email server to handle official State Department communications while Secretary of State. They also wanted to know what role in the Russia-gate probe was played by a Democratic-funded "opposition research" report from ex-British intelligence officer Christopher Steele, which included unverified hearsay claims by unnamed Russians about Trump.

Wren avoided direct answers by citing an ongoing Inspector General's review and Mueller's criminal investigation, but Republicans expressed displeasure at this evasiveness.

The Republican questions prompted E.J. Dionne Jr., a liberal columnist at The Washington Post, to publish a spirited attack on the GOP committee members, accusing them of McCarthyistic tactics in questioning the FBI's integrity.

Dionne's straw man was to postulate that Republicans – because of this discovery

of anti-Trump bias – would discount evidence that proves Trump’s collusion with Russia: “if Strzok played some role in developing [the] material. ... Trump’s allies want us to say: Too bad the president lied or broke the law or that Russia tried to tilt our election. This FBI guy sending anti-Trump texts is far more important, so let’s just forget the whole thing. Really?”

But the point is that no such evidence of Russian collusion has been presented and to speculate how people might react if such evidence is discovered is itself McCarthyistic, suggesting guilt based on hypotheticals, not proof. Whatever one thinks of Trump, it is troubling for Dionne or anyone to imply treasonous activities based on speculation. That is the sort of journalistic malfeasance that has contributed to the string of professional abuses that pervades Russia-gate.

What we are witnessing is such an intense desire by mainstream journalists to get credit for helping oust Trump from office that they have forgotten that journalism’s deal with the public should be to treat everyone fairly, even if you personally disdain the subject of your reporting.

Journalists are always going to get criticized when they dig up information that puts some politician or public figure in a negative light, but that’s why it’s especially important for journalists to strive for genuine fairness and not act as if journalism is just another cover for partisan hatchetmen.

The loss of faith among large swaths of Americans in the professionalism of journalists will ultimately do severe harm to the democratic process by transforming information into just one more ideological weapon. Some would say that the damage has already been done.

It was, if you recall, the U.S. mainstream media that started the controversy over “fake news,” expanding the concept from the few low-lives who make up stories for fun and profit into a smear against anyone who expressed skepticism toward State Department narratives on foreign conflicts. That was the point of The Washington Post’s PropOrNot story.

But now many of these same mainstream outlets are livid when Trump and his backers throw the same “fake news” epithet back at the major media. The sad truth is that The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, MSNBC and other leading news organizations that have let their hatred of Trump blind them from their professional responsibilities have made Trump’s job easy.

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](#)

National Democrats Resist Reforms

Still refusing to face why Donald Trump and the Republicans won in 2016, the national Democratic Party rebuffs proposals from progressives to make the party more democratic and less corporate-dominated, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

With the Democratic Party's "Unity Reform Commission" now history, major political forces are entering a new stage of contention over the future of the party. Seven months after the commission's first meeting – and nine months after Hillary Clinton backer Tom Perez won a close election over Bernie Sanders supporter Keith Ellison to become chair of the Democratic National Committee – the battle lines are coming into focus for next year.

The commission's final meeting adjourned on Saturday after a few steps toward democratizing the party had won approval – due to the grassroots strength of progressives. But the recommendations from the commission will go to the Rules and Bylaws Committee, which was one of the DNC decision-making bodies that Perez subjected to a purge two months ago. Now, in the words of Jim Zogby (who was removed from the Executive Committee by Perez), "There are virtually no Bernie supporters on the Rules and Bylaws Committee."

When the latest Unity Reform Commission meeting got underway, Perez talked a lot about unity. But kicking Sanders supporters off of key DNC committees is the ugly underside of an ongoing dual discourse. (Are we supposed to believe Perez's soothing words or our own eyes?) And party unity behind a failed approach – internally undemocratic and politically hitched to corporate wagons – would hardly be auspicious.

"Emerging sectors of the electorate are compelling the Democratic Party to come to terms with adamant grassroots rejection of economic injustice, institutionalized racism, gender inequality, environmental destruction and corporate domination," says the recent report "[Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis](#)" (which I co-authored). The report adds: "Siding with the people who constitute the base isn't truly possible when party leaders seem to be afraid of them."

DNC Chairman Perez and allied power brokers keep showing that they're afraid of the party's progressive base. No amount of appealing rhetoric changes that

reality.

“We pride ourselves on being inclusive and welcoming to all,” the Democratic National Committee proclaimed anew at the start of this month, touting the commission meeting as “open to the public.” Yet the DNC delayed and obscured information about the meeting, never replying to those who filled out an online RSVP form – thus leaving them in the dark about the times of the meeting. In short, the DNC went out of its way to suppress public turnout rather than facilitate it.

Rebuking the DNC

One member of the task force that wrote the Autopsy, Karen Bernal, is the chair of the Progressive Caucus of the California Democratic Party. After traveling across the country and sitting in the sparse audience during the first day of the Unity Reform Commission meeting, she took the liberty of speaking up as the second day got underway. Bernal provided a firm rebuke of the DNC’s efforts to suppress public attendance.

“For all of the talk about wanting to improve and reform and make this party more transparent, the exact opposite has happened,” Bernal told the commission. (Her intervention, which lasted a little more than two minutes, aired in full on C-SPAN.)

On Sunday, a mass email from Zogby via Our Revolution summed up: “We are fighting for racial, social, economic, and environmental justice. The Democratic Party needs everyone, regardless of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, country of origin, language, or socioeconomic status, to be deeply involved in order to change the course of this country.”

For those reasons, he added, “we are calling for an end to superdelegates, [for] open primaries and caucuses, [for] same-day registration, and [for] more transparent, fair, and accountable leadership at the helm of the DNC.”

Overall, the commission approved some recommendations that were partial victories for progressives. Among the most notable: It called for reducing the number of notoriously undemocratic superdelegates to the national convention from 712 to about 300, while the only democratic number would be zero. [Superdelegates are party insiders who are not chosen through a primary or caucus but nevertheless get to vote for the party’s nominees. In 2016, they broke overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton.]

The commission somewhat improved transparency for often-dubious DNC contracts with high-paid consultants and vendors, while defeating sensible amendments by commission member Nomiki Konst – who spoke with notable clarity about the need

to clamp down on financial conflicts of interest among DNC decision-makers.

The eight Sanders appointees – Konst, Zogby, Larry Cohen, Lucy Flores, Jane Kleeb, Gus Newport, Nina Turner and Jeff Weaver – put up a good fight as members of the Unity Reform Commission. They were outnumbered, and on key issues were often outvoted, by the 13 who'd been selected by Clinton or Perez. Next year, the odds to overcome will be much worse.

With the purged Rules and Bylaws Committee now overwhelmingly stacked against progressives, only massive pressure from the grassroots will be able to sustain momentum toward a democratic Democratic Party. Meanwhile, corporate forces will do all they can to prevent the Democratic Party from living up to its first name.

Norman Solomon, the national coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org, is a member of the task force that wrote "Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis." His books include *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.

Missing the Significance of Israel-gate

Amid the U.S. mainstream media's hyping of Russia-gate, there has been much less attention given to what some call "Israel-gate," evidence that Israel was wielding much more behind-the-scenes influence, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

President Trump's decision to begin moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to the disputed city of Jerusalem – and disclosure that first-son-in-law Jared Kushner failed to disclose his role in a foundation funding Israeli settlements and lobbied against a United Nations' resolution critical of those settlements during the transition – are reminders that the foreign government with truly broad influence over U.S. politics is Israel.

Trump's Jerusalem announcement also threatened to touch off more disorder in the Middle East, which Ali Abunimah, co-founder of the Electronic Intifada, says reflected the Trump administration's determination to demand a full capitulation by the Palestinians. I spoke with Abunimah on Dec. 5.

Dennis Bernstein: We turn our attention back to occupied Palestine. We have now seen the kind of policy we are going to get from the Trump administration.

Jared Kushner has described bringing peace to the region as his dream. We are going to talk about that in the context of his investment in settlements there. I suppose the central issue in Palestine this week is whether the embassy is going to be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and what will the timing be, as in, will it happen some time soon?

Ali Abunimah: Actually, it will not be moved any time soon. Trump will announce tomorrow [Dec. 6] that the US is recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital but he will also sign a waiver delaying the move for another six months and the whole process will likely take years.

Dennis Bernstein: How bad is the situation now? We know that settlements are being built apace, that the repression continues in the Gaza Strip, where life is barely livable.

Ali Abunimah: It is interesting that no one is actually talking about what is happening on the ground in Jerusalem, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians there are facing systematic ethnic cleansing by Israel. This includes home demolitions, revocation of residency rights, land confiscations.

In the words of B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, since the occupation of East Jerusalem began in 1967, Israel has treated Palestinians in the city as "unwanted immigrants" and worked systematically to drive them out of the area.

Whatever Trump announces tomorrow will not change the situation. The so-called international community is doing nothing about it and is letting Israel get away with it.

Dennis Bernstein: Jared Kushner is a broker for illegal settlements.

Ali Abunimah: He is a donor to illegal settlements, a philanthropist for illegal settlements. How many headlines have been devoted to Kushner failing to disclose important information in his government ethics filings? The latest is that he failed to disclose the fact that he was a director of his family's foundation, which has donated to building settlements in the occupied West Bank, particularly the settlement of Beit El, the same settlement that receives philanthropic donations from David Friedman, Trump's ambassador in Tel Aviv.

Kushner, who is supposedly charged with coming up with a peace plan, is actually busy funding settlements. Kushner's family are close friends of Benjamin Netanyahu. It is just farcical to pretend that anyone like Jared Kushner could ever be an honest broker.

Dennis Bernstein: Is all of this legal?

Ali Abunimah: That's questionable. Actually, in the past year there were

lawsuits filed challenging this massive multi-billion dollar flow of tax-deductible, so-called charitable funds for illegal purposes, including the construction of settlements and massive donations to groups like Friends of the IDF.

Another issue is this whole business of what Jared Kushner was doing during the transition, when he was trying to undermine the policy of the sitting Obama administration and stop the UN Security Council resolution passed last December condemning Israeli settlements. This all came out in the context of the Mueller investigation and Michael Flynn's guilty plea, which revealed not so much a collusion with Russia as a very close collusion between the Trump transition and Israel.

Dennis Bernstein: You would think then that MSNBC, which makes a living on pumping up Russiagate, would want to jump into this case of collusion.

Ali Abunimah: The Michael Flynn revelation did not show collusion with Russia and certainly did not show any interference in the US election. What Flynn pled guilty to was lying about two meetings. Flynn is a serial liar, he lied about his work for the Turkish government.

The facts that were filed in the documents with his plea show that a "very senior member" of the Trump transition team, who has since been identified as Jared Kushner, had ordered Flynn to contact every member of the UN Security Council to try to defeat this resolution criticizing Israel. It was also reported in The New York Times that Kushner had acted at the urging of Netanyahu.

None of this has anything to do with Russian interference in the elections. What it does show is clear collusion at the highest level with a foreign government [Israel] to undermine and sabotage the policy of the sitting administration.

Dennis Bernstein: It doesn't appear that Arab outrage is going to have much influence over what happens with this plan to move the capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Ali Abunimah: On the contrary, I think that it has actually been facilitated by the fact that Saudi Arabia, which markets itself as the guardian of Islam, has been engaging in this major rapprochement with Israel, pressuring the Palestinians to accept what amounts to surrender, in order to get them out of the way so that Saudi Arabia and Israel can embrace each other and go to war together against Iran.

The New York Times reported details of the so-called Trump peace plan that Jared

Kushner has been putting together, which basically creates a Palestinian state in name only. The Palestinians would have very limited autonomy in very small non-contiguous areas of the West Bank. They would have no control, no sovereignty, no capital in East Jerusalem, no right of return for refugees, and so on. But they would be free to call this a Palestinian state if they want to.

All of this sounds familiar to people who have followed this issue because this is a rehashing of the kind of schemes that have been put forward since the 1990's. What is different this time is that Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority leader, was called to Riyadh last month and told by Mohammad bin Salman that he was going to accept this or else. The thinking behind it is that the Palestinian issue is a thorn in the side of the Saudi/Israeli alliance that wants to escalate the catastrophic confrontation with Iran.

Dennis Bernstein: How does the crisis with the prime minister in Lebanon play into all of this?

Ali Abunimah: The Saudis have been behind so many of the regional disasters, including escalating the situation in Syria by funding a proxy war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people. For two years they have been bombing the poorest Arab country, Yemen, with millions suffering famine and tens of thousands killed and injured. Saudi Arabia has been unable to defeat the people resisting them in Yemen. They were trying to destabilize Lebanon and that failed because [Prime Minister] Hariri went home and rescinded his forced resignation under pressure from the Saudis.

Dennis Bernstein: I guess maybe the one silver lining in all of this is the boycott/divestment movement. There is not much else going on in terms of global resistance to the brutality in occupied Palestine.

Ali Abunimah: I suppose it is possible to look at all of this and just feel immobilized and hopeless. But I think it is important to feel hope as well. Even in Jerusalem, Palestinians have been standing up to Israel and winning victories, as they did this summer when they forced Israel to back down from its efforts to impose stricter control on entrance to the al-Aqsa mosque compound. That was a real victory for people power in Jerusalem against one of the strongest armies in the world.

Despite a twenty-fold increase in lobbying, Israel has not been able to stop the "impressive growth" of the Palestine solidarity movement, particularly the boycott/divestment/sanctions movement. So it's not time to be hopeless, it's time to get on with the work, because there is lots to do and people power is still winning victories.

Dennis Bernstein: I guess you could say that proof of those victories is the amount of repression and clamp-down of Palestinian students and their supporters all over the country.

Ali Abunimah: And it is across the board now, including the effort of the big Silicon Valley companies who are helping the establishment to censor and limit the reach of independent media like us. They know that people are listening and we are powerful, even though we may sometimes feel small in the face of the forces that are trying to reshape the world.

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

Russia-gate’s Reach into Journalism

The investigation to somehow blame Russia for Donald Trump’s election has now merged with another establishment goal of isolating and intimidating whistleblowers and other dissidents, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The Russia-gate investigation has reached into the ranks of journalism with the House Intelligence Committee’s subpoena of Randy Credico, who produced a series about WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for Pacifica Radio and apparently is suspected of having passed on early word about leaked Democratic emails to Donald Trump’s supporter Roger Stone.

The Credico subpoena, after he declined a request for a “voluntary” interview, underscores how the investigation is moving into areas of “guilt by association” and further isolating whistleblowers who defy the powers-that-be through unauthorized release of information to the public, a point made by National Security Agency whistleblower Thomas Drake in an interview.

Drake knows well what it means to blow the whistle on government misconduct and get prosecuted for it. A former senior NSA executive, Drake complained about a multi-billion-dollar fraud, waste, and widespread violation of the rights of civilians through secret mass surveillance programs. As a result, the Obama administration indicted Drake in 2010, “as the first whistleblower since Daniel Ellsberg charged with espionage,” according to the Institute for Public Accuracy.

In 2011, the government's case against him, which carried a potential 35 years in prison, collapsed. Drake went free in a plea deal and was awarded the 2011 Ridenhour Truth Telling Prize.

I interviewed Drake about the significance of Credico's subpoena, which Credico believes resulted from his journalism about the persecution of Julian Assange for releasing information that powerful people would prefer kept hidden from the public. (I had a small role in Credico's 14-part radio series, *Julian Assange: Countdown to Freedom*. It was broadcast first as part of his Live on the Fly Series, over WBAI and later on KPFA and across the country on community radio.)

Credico got his start as a satirist and became a political candidate for mayor of New York City and later governor of New York, making mainstream politicians deal with issues they would rather not deal with.

I spoke to Thomas Drake by telephone on Nov. 30, 2017.

Dennis Bernstein: How do you look at Russiagate, based on what you know about what has already transpired in terms of the movement of information? How do you see Credico's role in this?

Thomas Drake: Information is the coin of the realm. It is the currency of power. Anyone who questions authority or is perceived as mocking authority—as hanging out with “State enemies”—had better be careful. But this latest development is quite troubling, I must say. This is the normalization of everything that has been going on since 9/11. Randy is a sort of 21st century Diogenes who is confronting authority and pointing out corruption. This subpoena sends a chilling message. It's a double whammy for Randy because, in the eyes of the US government, he is a media figure hanging out with the wrong media figure [Julian Assange].

Dennis Bernstein: Could you say a little bit about what your work was and what you tried to do with your expose?

Thomas Drake: My experience was quite telling, in terms of how far the government will go to try to destroy someone's life. The attempt by the government to silence me was extraordinary. They threw everything they had at me, all because I spoke the truth. I spoke up about abuse of power, I spoke up about the mass surveillance regime. My crime was that I made the choice to go to the media. And the government was not just coming after me, they were sending a really chilling message to the media: If you print this, you are also under the gun.

Dennis Bernstein: We have heard the charges again and again, that this was a Russian hack. What was the source? Let's trace it back as best we can.

Thomas Drake: In this hyper-inflated, politicized environment, it is extremely difficult to wade through the massive amount of disinformation on all sides.

Hacking is something all modern nation-states engage in, including the United States, including Russia. The challenge here is trying to figure out who the players are, whose ox is being gored, and who is doing the goading.

From all accounts, Trump was duly elected. Now you have the Mueller investigation and the House investigation. Where is this all leading? The US intelligence agency hasn't done itself any favors. The ICA provides no proof either, in terms of allegations that the Russians "hacked" the election. We do have the evidence disclosed by Reality Winner that maybe there was some interference. But the hyper-politicization is making it extraordinarily difficult.

The advantage that intelligence has is that they can hide behind what they are doing. They don't actually have to tell the truth, they can shade it, they can influence it and shape it. This is where information can be politicized and used as a weapon. Randy has found himself caught up in these investigations by virtue of being a media figure and hanging out with "the wrong people."

Dennis Bernstein: It looks like the Russiagateers in Congress are trying to corner Randy. All his life he has spoken truth to power. But what do you think the role of the press should be?

Thomas Drake: The press amplifies just about everything they focus on, especially with today's 24-hour, in-your-face social media. Even the mainstream media is publishing directly to their webpages. You have to get behind the cacophony of all that noise and ask, "Why?" What are the intentions here?

I believe there are still enough independent journalists who are looking further and deeper. But clearly there are those who are hell-bent on making life as difficult as possible for the current president and those who are going to defend him to the hilt. I was not surprised at all that Trump won. A significant percentage of the American electorate were looking for something different.

Dennis Bernstein: Well, if you consider the content of those emails...Certainly, the Clinton folks got rid of Bernie Sanders.

Thomas Drake: That would have been an interesting race, to have Bernie vs. Trump. Sanders was appealing, especially to young audiences. He was raising legitimate issues.

Dennis Bernstein: In Clinton, they had a known quantity who supported the national security state.

Thomas Drake: The national security establishment was far more comfortable having Clinton as president. Someone central to my own case, General Michael Hayden, just a couple days ago went apoplectic because of a tweet from Trump taking on the mainstream media. Hayden got over 100,000 likes on his response. Well, Hayden was central to what we did in deep secrecy at the highest levels of government after 9/11, engaging in widespread surveillance and then justifying it as “raw executive authority.”

Now you have this interesting dynamic where the national security establishment is effectively undermining a duly elected president of the United States. I recognize that Trump is vulnerable, but these types of investigations often become highly politicized. I worry that what is really happening is being sacrificed on the altar of entertainment and the stage of political theater.

What is happening to Randy is symptomatic of a larger trend. If you dare speak truth to power, you are going to pay the price. Is Randy that much of a threat, just because he is questioning authority? Are we afraid of the press? Are we afraid of having the uncomfortable conversations, of dealing with the inconvenient truths about ourselves?

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Franken’s Opportunism on the Iraq War

Sen. (and former comedian) Al Franken was a rising Democratic Party star before sexual harassment allegations brought him down to earth, but was he really ever a progressive hero, asks William Blum at Anti-Empire Report.

By William Blum

Poor Al, who made us laugh for years on Saturday Night Live, is now disgraced as a woman molester – not one of the worst of the current pathetic crop, but he still looks bad. However, everything is relative, and it must be pointed out that the Senator is guilty of a worse moral transgression.

The erstwhile comedian would like you to believe that he was against the war in Iraq since it began. But he went to that sad country at least four times to entertain American troops. Does that make sense? Why does the Defense Department bring entertainers to military bases? To lift the soldiers’ spirits of course.

And why does the military want to lift the soldiers' spirits? Because a happier soldier does his job better. And what is the soldier's job? For example, all the charming war crimes and human-rights violations in Iraq that have been documented in great detail for many years. Didn't Franken know what American soldiers do for a living?

Country singer Darryl Worley, who leans "a lot to the right," as he puts it, said he was far from pleased that Franken was coming along on the tour to Iraq. "You know, I just don't understand – why would somebody be on this tour if they're not supportive of the war? If he decides to play politics, I'm not gonna put up with it."

A year after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Franken criticized the Bush administration because they "failed to send enough troops to do the job right." What "job" did the man think the troops were sent to do that had not been performed to his standards because of lack of manpower? Did he want them to be more efficient at killing Iraqis who resisted the occupation? The volunteer American troops in Iraq did not even have the defense of having been drafted against their wishes.

Franken has been lifting soldiers' spirits for a long time. In 2009, he was honored by the United Service Organization (USO) for his ten years of entertaining troops abroad. That includes Kosovo in 1999, as imperialist an occupation as you'll ever want to see. He called his USO experience "one of the best things I've ever done." Franken has also spoken at West Point (2005), encouraging the next generation of imperialist warriors. Is this a man to challenge the militarization of America at home and abroad?

Tom Hayden wrote this about Franken in 2005 when Franken had a regular program on the Air America radio network: "Is anyone else disappointed with Al Franken's daily defense of the continued war in Iraq? Not Bush's version of the war, because that would undermine Air America's laudable purpose of rallying an anti-Bush audience. But, well, Kerry's version of the war, one that can be better managed and won, somehow with better body armor and fewer torture cells."

While in Iraq to entertain the troops, Franken declared that the Bush administration "blew the diplomacy so we didn't have a real coalition," then failed to send enough troops to do the job right. "Out of sheer hubris, they have put the lives of these guys in jeopardy."

Franken was implying that if the United States had been more successful in bribing and threatening other countries to lend their name to the coalition fighting the war in Iraq the United States would have had a better chance of WINNING the war.

Is this the sentiment of someone opposed to the war? Or in support of it? It is actually the mind of an American liberal in all its depressing mushiness.

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

Roy Moore and the Triumph of Partisanship

Partisanship has reached such extremes in U.S. politics that Republicans are prepared to brush aside multiple allegations that Roy Moore preyed on teen-age girls to keep a Democrat from winning in Alabama, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

Amid all the craziness surrounding Roy Moore's race for the U.S. Senate and the seeming willingness of Alabama's likely voters to send a man of such dubious merit and morality to Capitol Hill (where, admittedly, the bar already is pretty damned low), I keep thinking of a line from the Randy Newman song "Rednecks."

It's the lead piece on his classic '70s album *Good Old Boys*, and begins with a Southern man lamenting how the north-of-the-Mason-Dixon-line media types make fun of former Georgia Gov. Lester Maddox, the arch-segregationist notorious for using an ax handle to threaten those who tried to integrate his fried chicken restaurant.

"Well, he may be a fool but he's our fool," Newman sings, and yep, there's the upcoming Alabama election in a nutshell. Outsiders are resented and tribalism reigns, no matter how irrational or destructive to self-interest.

"Thank God for Mississippi" is the old joke: No matter how bad things were in Alabama, there always was a state right next door where things were often worse. Alabama is the third "hungriest" state in the nation, with 18 percent of its population food insecure, behind Louisiana and, yes, Mississippi. It's the sixth-poorest state, with some 18.5 percent living in poverty, and the third-highest state when it comes both to murders and the number of citizens behind bars per 100,000 members of population. According to the Centers for Disease Control, opioids are prescribed in Alabama more than in any other state,

and a Center for Health Statistics report notes that Alabama's rate of overdose deaths from opioids has doubled since 2011.

But no, instead of campaigning about how to get the federal government to help his state pull itself from the clutches of such poverty, hunger and addiction, Roy Moore acts like a crackpot false prophet, preaching Islamophobia, homophobia and the dominance of "God's law" over the Constitution; denying the allegations of the many women who say he assaulted or harassed or stalked them when they were teenagers (on Tuesday, a Moore spokesperson described the accusers as "criminals") and all the time hammering away at his Democratic opponent Doug Jones on abortion.

Moore wants all abortion to be illegal and supports the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. Jones has declared he is against "anything that is going to infringe on a woman's right and her freedom to choose," but also has said that he supports "current law" that restricts abortion after 20 weeks unless pregnancy threatens the health of the mother.

Moore's wife has attacked Jones for supporting "full-term" abortion, which is wildly and deliberately misleading. What's more, the website AL.com reports, "An examination of statistics compiled by the Alabama Department of Public Health shows that late-term procedures are almost nonexistent in the state. Three out of 6,642 abortions performed in Alabama in 2016 occurred after 20 weeks, according to the agency."

Damn Yankee-ness

Admittedly, I write all this as one of those Northern media types, but also as one with a Southern mother and at least one great-grandfather from Alabama. Not that it grants me much immunity, if any, from my innate damn Yankee-ness, but I put it out there just to suggest that genetically at least I may not be a total hostage to Eastern seaboard prejudices and pointy-headed intellectualism.

Besides, these symptoms of self-righteous bigotry and callousness hardly are limited to Alabama. This knee-jerk tribal impulse that afflicts so much of the state's politics is just a pure, concentrated and poisonous microcosm of the Republican Party's Trumpism, right up to and including the race and gender prejudice, religious bias and sheer *chutzpah*, although that's not a word one imagines in Moore's Jesus-wants-me-for-a-sunbeam vocabulary.

And let's not forget opportunism. National Republicans pay far more heed to poll numbers than Moore's Ten Commandments. That's why we've witnessed the appallingly cynical backflips on his behalf from Donald Trump, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and the Republican National Committee (RNC) as Moore's

percentages seem to have bounced back from an initial drop after the first allegations of his unchristian-like behavior with teenagers.

And so you have a morally compromised president who now shouts “Go get ‘em, Roy,” to a fellow misogynist and birther, as well as an RNC that has resumed cash transfusions for the Moore campaign. You have a woman governor in Alabama, Kay Ivey, who says, “There’s never an excuse for or rationale for sexual misconduct or sexual abuse” but who will vote for Moore anyway because “we need to have a Republican in the United States Senate to... make major decisions.”

Then there’s Tully Borland, philosophy professor at a Baptist university in Arkansas, convolutedly writing in *The Federalist* that relations between older men and teenage girls are “not without some merit if one wants to raise a large family,” but adding, “Moore was a dirtbag and is currently lying about his actions rather than confessing the truth and asking for forgiveness.” And then adding, “That being said, I don’t think it’s wrong to vote for Moore.” As they used to say on *Monty Python*, “There! I’ve run rings around you logically.”

No wonder my head hurts. Conservative columnist Jennifer Rubin recently wrote that the GOP contortions are “the final result of years of win-at-all-cost politics in which no evil (Child molestation? Murder?) compares to the ‘evil’ of electing a perfectly competent, patriotic member of the other party to office. ...

“Republicans will tell you they support Moore and Trump as vehicles to policy goals. That assumes (falsely) that their policy goals are noble when they are actually unrealistic, unpopular, inconsistent and unconservative... In truth, the goals these Republicans care about, if they ever did, have long ago been sublimated (they certainly changed them entirely) to the goal of holding power, of winning. When that is the highest calling they’ll vote for alleged child predators, racists and just about anyone else with an ‘R’ next to his or her name.”

According to Greg Sargent at *The Washington Post*, Democrats are planning to publicly hold Republicans responsible for supporting Moore. GOP Senate candidates will be asked if they agree with the decision and whether they’re willing to serve with Moore if he wins. Well-clad feet will be held to fires.

But it could be too late. Sargent suggests Trump’s behavior may already have degraded all of our politics beyond the point of no return. And he has given right-wing Republicans the chance they’ve sought for years: trying to gut every social policy achievement of the last eight decades while further enriching the oligarchs (including the Trump clan) as he distracts the rest of us with his unhinged, oafish behavior.

He may be a fool but he's our fool. Trump and his many accomplices, including and especially Roy Moore, only succeed if we keep letting them.

Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of *Moyers & Company* and *BillMoyers.com*. Follow him on Twitter: [@MichaelWinship](https://twitter.com/MichaelWinship). [This article first appeared at <http://billmoyers.com/story/moore-alabama-senate-race/>]
