

# US Journalism's New 'Golden Age'?

**Exclusive:** The Washington Post and other big media are hailing a new journalistic “golden age” as they punish President Trump for disparaging them, but is this media bias a sign of good journalism or itself a scandal, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The mainstream U.S. media is congratulating itself on its courageous defiance of President Trump and its hard-hitting condemnations of Russia, but the press seems to have forgotten that its proper role within the U.S. democratic structure is not to slant stories one way or another but to provide objective information for the American people.

By that standard – of respecting that the people are the nation’s true sovereigns – the mainstream media is failing again. Indeed, the chasm between what America’s elites are thinking these days and what many working-class Americans are feeling is underscored by the high-fiving that’s going on inside the elite mainstream news media, which is celebrating its Trump- and Russia-bashing as the “new golden age of American journalism.”

The New York Times and The Washington Post, in particular, view themselves as embattled victims of a tyrannical abuser. The Times presents itself as the brave guardian of “truth” and the Post added a new slogan: “Democracy dies in darkness.” In doing so, they have moved beyond the normal constraints of professional, objective journalism into political advocacy – and they are deeply proud of themselves.

In a Sunday column entitled “How Trump inspired a golden age,” Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank wrote that Trump “took on the institution of a free press – and it fought back. Trump came to office after intimidating publishers, barring journalists from covering him and threatening to rewrite press laws, and he has sought to discredit the ‘fake news’ media at every chance. Instead, he wound up inspiring a new golden age in American journalism.

“Trump provoked the extraordinary work of reporters on the intelligence, justice and national security beats, who blew wide open the Russia election scandal, the contacts between Russia and top Trump officials, and interference by Trump in the FBI investigation. Last week’s appointment of a special prosecutor – a crucial check on a president who lacks self-restraint – is a direct result of their work.”

## Journalism or Hatchet Job?

But has this journalism been professional or has it been a hatchet job? Are we seeing a new “golden age” of journalism or a McCarthyistic lynch mob operating on behalf of elites who disdain the U.S. constitutional process for electing American presidents?

For one thing, you might have thought that professional journalists would have demanded proof about the predicate for this burgeoning “scandal” – whether the Russians really did “hack” into emails of the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta and then slip the information to WikiLeaks to influence the outcome of the 2016 election.

You have surely heard and read endlessly that this conclusion about Russia’s skulduggery was the “consensus view of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” and thus only some crazy conspiracy theorist would doubt its accuracy even if no specific evidence was evinced to support the accusation.

But that repeated assertion is not true. There was no National Intelligence Estimate (or NIE) that would compile the views of the 17 intelligence agencies. Instead, as President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on May 8, the Russia-hacking claim came from a “special intelligence community assessment” (or ICA) produced by selected analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation, or as Clapper put it, “a coordinated product from three agencies – CIA, NSA, and the FBI – not all 17 components of the intelligence community.”

Further, as Clapper explained, the “ICA” was something of a rush job beginning on President Obama’s instructions “in early December” and completed by Jan. 6, in other words, a month or less.

Clapper continued: “The two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.” However, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you “hand-pick” the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion.

You can say the analysts worked independently but their selection, as advocates for one position or another, could itself dictate the outcome. If the analysts were hardliners on Russia or hated Trump, they could be expected to deliver the conclusion that Obama and Clapper wanted, i.e., challenging the legitimacy of Trump’s election and blaming Russia.

The point of having a more substantive NIE is that it taps into a much broader network of U.S. intelligence analysts who have the right to insert dissents to

the dominant opinions. So, for instance, when President George W. Bush belatedly ordered an NIE regarding Iraq's WMD in 2002, some analysts – especially at the State Department – inserted dissents (although they were expunged from the declassified version given to the American people to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq).

### **An Embarrassing Product**

Obama's "ICA," which was released on Jan. 6, was a piece of work that embarrassed many former U.S. intelligence analysts. It was a one-sided argument that lacked any specific evidence to support its findings. Its key point was that Russian President Vladimir Putin had a motive to authorize an information operation to help Hillary Clinton's rival, Donald Trump, because Putin disdained her work as Secretary of State.

But the Jan. 6 report failed to include the counter-argument to that *cui bono* assertion, that it would be an extraordinary risk for Putin to release information to hurt Clinton when she was the overwhelming favorite to win the presidency. Given the NSA's electronic-interception capabilities, Putin would have to assume that any such undertaking would be picked up by U.S. intelligence and that he would likely be facing a vengeful new U.S. president on Jan. 20.

While it's possible that Putin still took the risk – despite the daunting odds against a Trump victory – a balanced intelligence assessment would have included such contrary arguments. Instead, the report had the look of a prosecutor's brief albeit without actual evidence pointing to the guilt of the accused.

Further, the report repeatedly used the word "assesses" – rather than "proves" or "establishes" – and the terminology is important because, in intelligence-world-speak, "assesses" often means "guesses." The report admits as much, saying, "Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents."

In other words, the predicate for the entire Russia-gate scandal, which may now lead to the impeachment of a U.S. president and thus the negation of the Constitution's electoral process, is based partly on a lie – i.e., the claim that the assessment comes from all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies – and partly on evidence-free speculation by a group of "hand-picked" analysts, chosen by Obama's intelligence chiefs.

Yet, the mainstream U.S. news media has neither corrected the false assertion about the 17 intelligence agencies nor demanded that actual evidence be made

public to support the key allegation that Russia was the source of WikiLeaks' email dumps.

By the way, both Russia and WikiLeaks deny that Russia was the source, although it is certainly possible that the Russian government would lie and that WikiLeaks might not know where the two batches of Democratic emails originated.

### **A True 'Golden Age'?**

Yet, one might think that the new "golden age of American journalism" would want to establish a firm foundation for its self-admiring reporting on Russia-gate. You might think, too, that these esteemed MSM reporters would show some professional skepticism toward dubious claims being fed to them by the Obama administration's intelligence appointees.

That is unless, of course, the major U.S. news organizations are not abiding by journalistic principles, but rather see themselves as combatants in the anti-Trump "resistance." In other words, if they are behaving less as a Fourth Estate and more as a well-dressed mob determined to drag the interloper, Trump, from the White House.

The mainstream U.S. media's bias against Putin and Russia also oozes from every pore of the Times' and Post's reporting from Moscow. For instance, the Times' [article](#) on Putin's comments about supposed secrets that Trump shared with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the White House had the headline in the print editions: "Putin Butts In to Claim There Were No Secrets..." The article by Andrew Higgins then describes Putin "asserting himself with his customary disruptive panache" and "seizing on foreign crises to make Russia's voice heard."

Clearly, we are all supposed to hate and ridicule Vladimir Putin. He is being demonized as the new "enemy" in much the way that George Orwell foresaw in his dystopian novel, *1984*. Yet, what is perhaps most troubling is that the major U.S. news outlets, which played instrumental roles in demonizing leaders of Iraq, Syria and Libya, believe they are engaged in some "golden age" journalism, rather than writing propaganda.

### **Contempt for Trump**

Yes, I realize that many good people want to see Trump removed from office because of his destructive policies and his buffoonish behavior – and many are eager to use the new *bête noire*, Russia, as the excuse to do it. But that still does not make it right for the U.S. news media to abandon its professional responsibilities in favor of a political agenda.

On a political level, it may not even be a good idea for Democrats and progressives who seem to be following the failed strategy of Hillary Clinton's campaign in seeking to demonize Trump rather than figuring out how to speak to the white working-class people who voted for him, many out of fear over their economic vulnerability and others out of anger over how Clinton dismissed many of them as "deplorables."

And, by the way, if anyone thinks that whatever the Russians may have done damaged Clinton's chances more than her colorful phrase disdaining millions of working-class people who understandably feel left behind by neo-liberal economics, you may want to enroll in a Politics 101 course. The last thing a competent politician does is utter a memorable insult that will rally the opposition.

In conversations that I've had recently with Trump voters, they complain that Clinton and the Democrats weren't even bothering to listen to them or to talk to them. These voters were less enamored of Trump than they were conceded to Trump by the Clinton campaign. These voters also are not impressed by the endless Trump- and Russia-bashing from The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and MSNBC, which they see as instruments of the elites.

The political danger for national Democrats and many progressives is that mocking Trump and thus further insulting his supporters only extends the losing Clinton strategy and cements the image of Democrats as know-it-all elitists. Thus, the Democrats risk losing a key segment of the U.S. electorate for a generation.

Not only could that deny the Democrats a congressional majority for the foreseeable future, but it might even get Trump a second term.

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

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## Saudis Win Hearts by Lining Pockets

**Exclusive:** By achieving an odd-couple alliance with Israel, Saudi Arabia has cleared away U.S. political resistance to the massive arms build-up that President Trump just embraced, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the fourth in a series on foreign lobbying.)

Families of the victims and survivors of the 9/11 terrorist attacks have asked the Department of Justice to open “an immediate national security investigation” into a “massive Saudi-funded foreign agent offensive” to “delude Congress” into “shield[ing] the Kingdom from any inquiry into the involvement of its agents in supporting the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.”

The complaint marks what is perhaps the most frontal public assault on Saudi influence peddling in Washington since 1981, when pro-Israel critics blasted Riyadh’s successful campaign to win congressional approval for its controversial purchase of AWACS surveillance planes.

The families’ complaint targets Saudi Arabia’s lavishly funded attempts to water down the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA). Passed into law last fall, against opposition from the Obama administration, the act gives Americans the right to sue foreign governments that provide “material support” to terrorist groups.

The complaint asserts that after the law passed, “the Kingdom went on a foreign agent spending spree, hiring . . . more than 100 foreign agents to work on its behalf to wage an assault on JASTA. No expense has been spared in the Kingdom’s unparalleled campaign to build a state of the art and nationwide lobbying and propaganda apparatus for the sole purpose of bending U.S. legislative process to its will.”

It also claims that Saudi Arabia and its lobbyists have potentially committed “widespread criminal violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act” by, among other things, concealing their role in mobilizing veterans under false pretenses to back repeal of the law.

According to *The Hill*, the Saudi government now employs 14 lobbying firms, at an estimated cost of well over \$1.3 million a month, more than it spent in all of 2000. Their hired guns include Podesta Group, co-founded by Tony Podesta, one of the Democratic Party’s top fundraisers, and his brother John Podesta, who was Hillary Clinton’s national campaign chairman in 2016; BGR Group, whose name partners include the former head of the Republican Party; and former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Mississippi.

Besides supporting specific legislative goals like rolling back JASTA, Saudi Arabia cultivates allies in Washington to “keep the focus on what a great ally it is in the Middle East, not on issues like what women are and aren’t allowed to do there,” said a spokeswoman the Center for Responsive Politics in Washington, D.C.

Saudi Arabia's agents go to great lengths to play down the country's human rights abuses, including its many beheadings and cruel floggings of dissidents. According to Lee Fang,

"When Nimr al-Nimr, a peaceful government critic, was executed in January (2016), the Podesta Group helped the regime shape media coverage, providing a quote to the *New York Times* to smear Nimr as a 'terrorist.' Other American consultants working for the Saudi Embassy used social media and other efforts to attack Nimr and justify the execution. . . .

"The influence also extends to promotion of Saudi Arabia's controversial role in the Middle East, including the Saudi-led invasion of Yemen and the country's failure to address private financiers of radical Islamic groups such as ISIS."

### **Taking Care of Friends**

Saudi Arabia manages to exert influence, particularly over the Executive Branch, for a number of economic and geopolitical reasons apart from lobbying. No president can afford to overlook its immense importance as a market for U.S. arms makers or its ability to influence the world price of oil.

Successive administrations have curried favor with the monarchy to reward its conservative influence in a region that has long been rocked by fiery ideologues like Nasser, Arafat and Khomeini. Saudi Arabia is also valued as an ally in other regions, for example its off-the-books financial support for the Afghan mujahedeen and Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s.

More recently, Saudi Arabia has won strong support from the Obama and Trump administrations for organizing a coalition of Sunni Arab states to oppose the expansion of Iran's influence in the Middle East. In the name of containing Iran, Washington has kept quiet about Saudi responsibility for killing thousands of civilians in Yemen, and putting millions there at risk of starvation.

In its quest for influence, however, Saudi Arabia takes no chances and spares no expense. Since the 1940s, when their country became an oil superpower, the Saudis have handed out vast sums of cash on a bipartisan basis to powerful and soon-to-be powerful Americans.

When Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton was nominated for president in 1992, Saudi business tycoons donated \$3.5 million to endow the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Arkansas. That November, the King of Saudi Arabia called to congratulate President-elect Clinton – and gave another \$20 million to the university.

Years later, as Hillary Clinton was mulling her future campaign for president,

the Saudi kingdom donated more than \$10 million to the Clinton Foundation. Kuwait and other Gulf interests chipped in many millions on top, no doubt solely because of their shared commitment to fighting AIDS.

Republicans have fared even better. Rich Saudis close to the royal family reportedly invested \$80 million in Carlyle Group, the world's largest private equity firm, after it hired former President H. W. Bush and former Secretary of State James Baker as senior advisers.

Earlier, a billionaire Saudi banker raised eyebrows by rescuing Harken Energy after it appointed George W. Bush to its board of directors. Deals like these made the relationship between the Bush family and the royal family almost legendary, particularly after George W. Bush turned a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's support for radical Islamists, even after 9/11.

The Bushes and the Clintons were far from unique. In the words of former CIA officer Robert Baer, "finding a high-ranking former U.S. government official who isn't at least tangentially bound to Saudi Arabia is like searching for a teetotaler at a Phi Gam toga party. . . . Aware that government bureaucrats can't retire comfortably on a federal pension, the Saudis put out the message: You play the game – keep your mouth shut about the kingdom – and we'll take care of you, find you a job, fund a chair at a university for you, maybe even present you with a Lexus and a town house in Georgetown."

One of Saudi Arabia's most influential ambassadors to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, reportedly told an associate, "If the reputation . . . builds that the Saudis take care of friends when they leave office, you'd be surprised how much better friends you have who are just coming into office."

### **The Arab Lobby vs. the Israel Lobby**

Recalling that quote, Alan Dershowitz, the pugnacious Harvard law professor and champion of Israel, once commented, "Yes Virginia, there is a big bad lobby that distorts U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East way out of proportion to its actual support by the American public. . . . But the offending lobby is not AIPAC, which supports Israel, but rather the Arab lobby, which opposes the Jewish state."

Yet for all its funding, the Saudi (or broader Arab) Lobby doesn't compare in clout to the Israel Lobby. Its most significant victory – narrowly winning congressional support for Riyadh's purchase of AWACS surveillance planes in 1981 – was achieved more by lobbying from President Reagan and aerospace contractors than from the desert kingdom's hired help.

Saudi Arabia's failure to head off passage of JASTA last year highlights its



limited ability to defeat grassroots coalitions that threaten its interests. For all its funding, the pro-Arab lobby has no significant public support in the United States. Arab-Americans are politically much less well organized – or focused on Mideast issues – than their counterparts (including Christian Zionists) in the pro-Israel lobby.

In addition, Americans are much less sympathetic to the Saudi national story of desert Bedouins striking it rich with oil, than to the Israeli story of Holocaust survivors establishing the Middle East's "only democracy" and making the desert bloom.

However, the old game of comparing the clout of these rival lobbies is no longer relevant. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states today enjoy relatively strong support from Democratic and Republican legislators alike because they have become de facto allies of Israel, pursuing a common campaign of isolating Iran and destabilizing the Assad regime in Syria.

In October 2013, during the height of the impassioned debate over Iran's nuclear program, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu told the U.N. General Assembly, "The dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran and the emergence of other threats in our region have led many of our Arab neighbors to recognize, finally recognize, that Israel is not their enemy. And this affords us the opportunity to overcome the historic animosities and build new relationships, new friendships, new hopes."

Reports soon emerged of *sub rosa* meetings between Israeli security officials and the powerful Saudi princes Bandar bin Sultan and Turki al-Faisal, both former heads of Saudi intelligence and ambassadors to the United States. Such meetings reportedly produced secret strategic agreements between Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as joint propaganda campaigns in the United States.

Israel's staunch supporters in the United States quickly followed Netanyahu's lead and applauded Saudi Arabia as a great friend.

Soon after the Prime Minister's U.N. speech, for instance, journalist Robert Parry observed that "American neocons are rallying to the new Israeli-Saudi alliance by demanding that President Barack Obama engage more aggressively against the two countries' foes in the Middle East, thus 'bolstering Israeli and Saudi confidence,' as the *Washington Post's* deputy editorial-page editor Jackson Diehl declared."

Neoconservatives ranging from Max Boot to the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial board hammered away at that theme, publishing a steady stream of articles calling on the United States to join Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to "stop the new Persian Empire."

One manifestation of the new alliance is the fact that U.S. arms deliveries to Saudi Arabia soared 280 percent from the five-year period 2005-10 to 2011-16. Such massive arming of Riyadh simply would not have been possible without the support of pro-Israel members of Congress.

Defenders of the Israel and Saudi lobbies will claim that they are not subverting the U.S. political system but rather supporting U.S. national interests by promoting the containment of Iran, which they misleadingly brand the world's "chief sponsor of terrorism."

In truth, however, the policies they endorse have little genuine public support and have proven dangerous and fabulously expensive to Americans.

The failure to press for a lasting solution to the plight of Palestinians continues to fuel anti-Americanism in the Middle East and other parts of the world. The destabilization of Syria has produced millions of desperate refugees and provided haven for thousands of hardened Islamist fighters. The war in Yemen, supported by Washington in the name of resisting Iran, has become one of the world's great humanitarian crises.

The Israeli-Saudi ongoing proxy wars with Iran create obstacles to achieving peaceful settlements in the theaters of America two biggest recent wars, Iraq and Afghanistan. Washington's silence on the human rights violations of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states makes a mockery of its universal moral claims. And the failure to squarely address Saudi Arabia's contributions to the growth of Islamist militancy heightens the insecurity of all nations threatened by misguided jihadists.

Reversing these disastrous policies will require years of continued debate and political organizing. But it will also require public exposure and genuine discussion of the malign influence of foreign money and propaganda on the U.S. political system, not just the current focus on alleged Russian activities.

[This is the fourth in a series on foreign lobbying. The previous installments were "The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying"; "How China Lobby Shaped America"; and "Israel Pays the Political Piper." Next: The Turkish Lobby.]

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## Israel Lobby Pays the Political Piper

**Exclusive:** The Israel Lobby is so powerful that for years it insisted it didn't

exist – and Official Washington went along with the lie. Today, President Trump scrambles to secure the lobby’s blessings, Jonathan Marshall observes.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the third part of a series on foreign lobbying.)

In this age of rancorous hyper-partisanship, getting members of Congress to agree on anything beyond the naming of a post office is a challenge. Yet in late April, all 100 members of the U.S. Senate signed a tough letter to the U.N. Secretary General, demanding that the organization end its “unwarranted attacks” on Israel’s human rights record.

Three months earlier, members of the House voted overwhelmingly to condemn a U.N. Security Council resolution critical of Israel’s relentless expansion of settlements on occupied lands. Like dozens of other Democrats, House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer of Maryland blasted President Obama for abstaining from the U.N. vote, saying it “sent the wrong signal to our ally Israel.” In the Senate, leading progressives like Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders offered no support for President Obama, either.

Their votes and rhetoric did not simply reflect public opinion. Although Americans sympathize with Israel far more than the Palestinians, two-thirds of adults surveyed in in 2015 said the United States should not take sides in the Middle East conflict. Fewer than half say they consider Israel an ally.

Those congressional actions instead illustrated the power of the pro-Israel Lobby, a highly organized and well-funded coalition that works to give Israeli leaders freedom to operate with unquestioned U.S. diplomatic, economic and military support. Its influence helps account for the quarter trillion dollars in aid (adjusted for inflation) that the United States has given Israel since 1948.

When it comes to influencing American politics, Russia runs far behind highly motivated supporters of Israel. President Obama experienced that first hand when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, representing a state of just 8.6 million people, received rousing, bipartisan acclaim in no fewer than three addresses before Congress and nearly blocked approval of the Iran nuclear deal, perhaps the signature foreign policy initiative of Obama’s administration.

The pro-Israel Lobby has been the subject of much informal comment and a critical academic study by two of America’s most distinguished political scientists, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, an ardent disparager of their work, recently offered a backhanded acknowledgement of its thesis during a talk to an Orthodox synagogue in affluent Scarsdale, New York:

“People write a book called the Israel lobby and complain that AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] is one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington. My response to that is, that’s not good enough. We should be the most powerful lobby in Washington. . . . We are entitled to use our power. We have contributed disproportionately to the success of this country. . . . We are a very influential community. We deserve our influence.”

Contrary to the implication of his remarks, however, AIPAC and similar organizations do not comprise an ethnic Jewish lobby, though major Jewish organizations are primary constituents. Many U.S. Jews either question Israeli government policies or have little interest in promoting them.

A 2013 Pew survey found that only 30 percent of American Jews were “very attached” emotionally to Israel, and a substantial plurality believed that continued building of Jewish settlements hurts Israel’s security. A large majority of Jews voted for President Obama, despite his strained relations with the Israeli government. Most American Jews also supported his nuclear deal with Iran, in defiance of most pro-Israel organizations.

Further reflecting the pro-Israel lobby’s political rather than ethnic focus, it derives much support from Christian Zionists, some of them outright anti-Semites, who believe that the return of Jews to Israel foreshadows the Second Coming of Christ.

The pro-Israel camp today features even the likes of White House counterterrorism adviser Sebastian Gorka, “despite his controversial ties to allies of the Nazis,” and Austria’s Freedom Party, “a movement of anti-immigrant, right-wing nationalists founded in part by former Nazis.”

### **Follow the Money**

Unlike most other foreign lobbies, the pro-Israel lobby draws much of its strength from grass-roots support. With little organized opposition, it can influence Congress more readily than better-funded business lobbies that face stiff competition. However, the single biggest source of its power is not voters – only a tiny percentage make Israel their top political priority – but campaign funds.

In a revealing comment, Stephanie Schriock of Emily’s List confessed last year, “the money ... is a big piece of this story and cannot be overlooked at all.”

“I have written more Israel papers that you can imagine,” she explained. “I’m from Montana. I barely knew where Israel was until I looked at a map, and the poor campaign manager would come in, or the policy director, and I’d be like, ‘Here is your paper on Israel. This is our policy.’ We’ve sent it all over the

country because this is how we raise money. ... This means that these candidates who were farmers, school teachers, or businesswomen, ended up having an Israel position without having any significant conversations with anybody.”

Hillary Clinton’s pandering to the pro-Israel lobby during the 2016 election – promising AIPAC that she would take relations with Israel “to the next level” and that she would meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during her first month in office – reflected her financial dependence on pro-Israel funders. Chief among them was billionaire donor Haim Saban, a hawkish Israeli-American who famously said, “I’m a one-issue guy, and my issue is Israel.”

*New Yorker* correspondent Connie Bruck reported that Saban, speaking at a 2009 conference in Israel, described the “three ways to be influential in American politics” as donating to political parties, creating think tanks, and buying up influential media.

“In 2002,” she observed, “he contributed seven million dollars toward the cost of a new building for the Democratic National Committee – one of the largest known donations ever made to an American political party. That year, he also founded the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, in Washington, D.C. He . . . tried to buy *Time* and *Newsweek*, . . . acquired Univision in 2007, and he has made repeated bids for the Los Angeles *Times*.”

*Mother Jones* reported that “After the launch of the Saban Center, the billionaire began pouring more and more of his fortune into Israeli causes. He donated \$10 million to support the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces. . . . He also made seven-figure gifts to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the hawkish Israeli lobbying group.”

Saban, who was invited to stay overnight in the Lincoln bedroom at the White House during Bill Clinton’s presidency, takes credit for helping launch Hillary Clinton’s run for that office as early as 2004. Over the years he hosted several lavish fundraisers for her, including a dinner in 2016. With an entry price of \$100,000 per couple, it raised more than \$5 million for Clinton’s campaign. Saban and his wife gave more than \$10 million to a super-PAC that supported her as well.

And those donations don’t include the \$7 million paid by the Saban Family Foundation to the Clinton Foundation during Hillary’s four-year stint in the Obama administration, the \$30 million more that it pledged, the \$5 million donation to the Clinton Library, or the \$250,000 fee paid to Bill Clinton for a 15-minute promotional event in 2015.

## **The Republican Purse**

As Israel pursues ever more extreme policies grounded in ethnic and religious nationalism, the pro-Israel lobby has become increasingly aligned with the Republican Party.

A recent national poll showed sympathy for Israel falling 10 points among Democrats to 33 percent from April 2016 to January 2017. In contrast, a near-record 74 percent of Republican now support Israel. Similarly, a Brookings poll last fall found that just over half of Democrats think that “the Israeli government has too much influence” in the United States, compared to just over a quarter of Republicans.

Republicans, who traditionally looked mainly to big oil, finance, real estate and other business sectors for campaign cash, increasingly rely on billionaires with a passion for Israel, such as Wall Street hedge fund owner Paul Singer, Florida auto dealer Norman Braman, casino mogul Sheldon Adelson, and Hobby Lobby founder David Green (a Christian Zionist).

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, mulling over a potential presidential run in 2015, crassly told a reporter, “If I put together a finance team that will make me financially competitive enough to stay in this thing . . . I may have the first all-Jewish cabinet in America because of the pro-Israel funding. [Chuckles.] Bottom line is, I’ve got a lot of support from the pro-Israel funding.”

Graham earned that support the usual way – by promising to put Israel first. During an obligatory visit to Jerusalem the previous December, Graham, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Appropriations Subcommittee, promised Netanyahu that “Congress will follow your lead” on imposing economic sanctions against Iran.

The most notable among the pro-Israel GOP mega-donors is Sheldon Adelson. Blurring the lines between American supporters and Israeli leaders, Adelson also spent millions to buy an election for the American-educated Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the right-wing Likud party.

Adelson, an ideological ally of Netanyahu, reportedly called the Palestinians “an invented people” whose “purpose ... is to destroy Israel,” and advocated vaporizing Tehran if necessary to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. Adelson captured the Republican Party’s attention in 2012 by contributing an astonishing \$150 million to conservative candidates in that election, including Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney.

Romney, who promised to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem “if Israel’s leaders thought that a move of that nature would be helpful to their efforts,” also won

the favor of Netanyahu's closest political adviser, the American-born Ron Dermer.

Dermer also liked Gingrich. As a young man, before taking Israeli citizenship, Dermer helped the House Speaker promote his 1994 "Contract With America."

Dermer became Israel's ambassador to Washington in 2013. The following year, in a blatant violation of diplomatic protocol, he attended a series of GOP candidate screening sessions held by Adelson in Las Vegas, which became known as the "Adelson primary."

The same year, Ambassador Dermer publicly endorsed Netanyahu's reelection as prime minister, for which he was reprimanded by Israel's Civil Service Commission. He then went on in 2015 to arrange the infamous invitation from Republican leaders to Netanyahu to address Congress on the perils of dealing with Iran, a speech that was arranged without consulting the White House.

### **Onward with Donald Trump**

Through Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, a major contributor to AIPAC, Dermer influenced the Republican candidate's tough speech to that organization during the 2016 campaign. AIPAC attendees cheered when Trump applauded the end of President Obama's administration and called him "maybe the worst thing to ever happen to Israel."

Adelson soon endorsed Trump in an email to dozens of Republican Jewish donors, saying "he will be a tremendous president when it comes to the safety and security of Israel." Playing the odds shrewdly, Adelson donated \$35 million or more to the Trump campaign.

Israel and its U.S. supporters have since discovered, like everyone else, that Trump is mercurial and not easily managed. After swearing fealty to the Jewish state during the campaign, he has put the brakes on his promise to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, called for restraint on further building of settlements, and met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

On the other hand, he appointed the most right-wing, pro-settlements ambassador in history, and will make Israel the second foreign visit of his presidency, just after Saudi Arabia.

Far more important to the Netanyahu government, and to its neoconservative supporters in the United States, is the fact that Trump has surrounded himself with anti-Iran hardliners. He himself has falsely called into question Iran's compliance with the nuclear agreement, contrary to the State Department's own certification.

As Brookings analyst Suzanne Maloney commented recently, “Donald Trump has the Islamic Republic of Iran in his sights . . . neither restraint nor continuity on Iran is really in the offing. . . . Trump has elevated a national security team that shares an Iran-centric interpretation of the problems that plague the Middle East and threaten vital American interests there. . . . The Trump administration has begun to replace accommodation with confrontation as the guiding principle of U.S. policy toward Tehran, seeking to counter Iran through a multi-front campaign of diplomatic, economic, and military pressure.”

No one, presumably including Trump himself, can predict where this hostility will lead. But the hard-liners in Israel and the United States who lost out to President Obama on Iran – their first significant defeat in many years – are back in the saddle. Never count the pro-Israel lobby out.

[This is the third in a series on foreign lobbying. The previous installments were “The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying” and “How China Lobby Shaped America.” Next: The Saudi Lobby.]

**Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to ConsortiumNews.com.**

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## How China Lobby Shaped America

**Exclusive:** A prototype of the modern foreign lobby in Washington was the China Lobby, bribing and bending U.S. politicians to serve the will of the Nationalists who fled to Taiwan and helped fuel McCarthyism, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the second in a series on foreign lobbies.)

One of the first big foreign lobbies to blossom after passage of the 1938 Foreign Agents Registration Act was the infamous China Lobby, defined by William Safire in his political dictionary as an “attack phrase used against those urging support of Chiang Kai-shek against Mao Zedong, and later pressing for aid to Chiang on Taiwan.”

Testifying to the China Lobby’s seminal importance – actually what would more accurately be called the Taiwan Lobby – Safire credited it with inspiring the term “Israel lobby” to describe the equally formidable support network for another equally tiny country.

The China Lobby demanded – and won – billions of dollars in military and



economic aid for Chiang's dictatorship, first on mainland China and then on Taiwan. Exploiting the wave of anti-Communism during the McCarthy era, it also ruthlessly suppressed any criticism of Nationalist China's shortcomings or any moves toward diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China.

Some of its American operatives were opportunistic lawyer-lobbyists like Thomas Corcoran, a former New Dealer who turned his talents to money-making intrigues. Some were anti-communist militants like Gen. Claire Chennault of Flying Tigers fame, who founded a CIA-controlled airline (Civil Air Transport) with Corcoran's help to support Chiang's armies and run covert operations in the Far East.

Many were partisan Republicans who rejected criticism of Chiang's corrupt regime and attacked the Truman administration for not sending enough financial and military aid to prevent the "fall of China."

In 1949, two members of Congress called for an investigation of the lobby's "brazen power." Rep. Mike Mansfield, a Montana Democrat who would later become Senate majority leader, accused Nationalist Chinese officials – who had fled the mainland for Taiwan that year in the wake of the communist revolution – of diverting U.S. aid to fund political propaganda in the United States.

Ironically, a timely dispensation of \$800,000 from Nationalist Chinese officials in Taiwan to their New York office financed a successful campaign to squelch that proposed investigation.

A few intrepid reporters worked hard to fill the information gap. In April 1952, *Reporter* magazine ran two successive issues devoted to exposing the China Lobby.

"While what is left of Chiang's army is rusting in Formosa [another name for Taiwan], the Lobby's operators are employing all their mental and financial resources in the United States," observed editor Max Ascoli. "In the last couple of years, they have had remarkable success. Once more the big lie has proved to be unanswerable and undebatable."

Commenting on the China Lobby's ruthless methods, including McCarthyite demagoguery and the purge of liberal China experts from government, the magazine called it "the nearest thing to an effective Communist Party our country has ever had. There is no other outfit to which the China Lobby can be compared, with its hard core of fanatical, full-time operators, its underground, its legion of naïve, misled fellow travelers, its front organizations, and its foreign officials, in Washington with diplomatic immunity, who dutifully report to central headquarters."

## **CIA Support**

The *Reporter* series likely had the support of officials in the Truman administration, and was substantially reported by a veteran U.S. intelligence officer who went to work for *Time* magazine after serving as the CIA's first station chief in Paris.

His co-author gave an advance briefing to the assistant to the director of the CIA in March 1952, offering up one explosive detail kept out of the published version: "the Nationalist government pumped more than \$2,000,000 into the Republican campaign in 1948."

The success of Republicans in the 1952 elections, however, forced the CIA more into line with the China Lobby. Pro-Taiwan organizations like the Committee to Defend America by Aiding Anti-Communist China and the Committee on National Affairs included among their officers or directors notable front-men for CIA propaganda operations, such as William Donovan, former head of the Office of Strategic Services, Jay Lovestone, a CIA-funded labor organizer, and Cord Meyer, who took charge of the Agency's International Organizations Division in 1954.

The CIA also covertly funded anti-communist organizations such as the Free Asia Committee and Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals (ARCI), which reinforced the China Lobby's messages.

The executive chairman of ARCI, Christopher Emmet, lauded its role in "making Americans more aware of the Chinese anti-Communist cause. . . . The reason is that the humanitarian appeal for relief incidentally permits giving all the political facts about persecution, etc. . . . It does not invite argument and attack as in the case of direct political propaganda."

The first academic study of this pressure campaign finally appeared – ever so briefly – in 1960. In the introduction to his *The China Lobby in American Politics*, political scientist Ross Koen made the blockbuster allegation that "There is . . . considerable evidence that a number of [Nationalist] Chinese officials engaged in the illegal smuggling of narcotics into the United States with the full knowledge and connivance of the Nationalist Chinese Government. The evidence indicates that several prominent Americans have participated in and profited from these transactions. It indicates further that the narcotics business has been an important factor in the activities and permutations of the China Lobby."

An energetic publicist for the China Lobby got hold of advance proofs of the book and shared them with allies in the Eisenhower administration. Together they brought heavy legal and political pressure to bear on the publisher, Macmillan, to withdraw the book. The book was not reissued until 1974, by Harper & Row.

## **Richard Nixon and the China Lobby**

Through its hard-hitting propaganda campaigns, the China Lobby prevented U.S. diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China – the most populous country on Earth – for more than two decades. Its stranglehold on U.S. foreign policy was not broken until 1972, when President Nixon finally opened talks with Beijing to help end the Vietnam War.

Ironically, Nixon had long been one of the China Lobby's most ardent supporters. He won election to the Senate from California in 1950 in part by exploiting popular dissatisfaction with the Truman administration's "loss" of China and the subsequent bloody war in Korea.

Washington columnist Drew Pearson later published the fact that Nixon took a large cash payoff from one of Chiang's nephews to help fund his successful 1950 campaign against the liberal Democratic incumbent, Helen Gahagan Douglas. Pearson also learned – but did not publish – the fact that a Nationalist Chinese agent supplied \$500,000 in cash to fund the campaign expenses of other Republican senators nationwide.

Years later, during the 1968 presidential election campaign, Nixon used the services of China Lobby notable Anna Chennault – widow of the late American general Claire Chennault and a prodigious Republican fundraiser in her own right – as his private emissary to the president of South Vietnam.

Through her, Nixon secretly blocked President Johnson's proposal for peace talks between North and South Vietnam, in order to slow momentum for Hubert Humphrey's campaign. Johnson, learning of the Nixon/Chennault intervention through top-secret intelligence sources, said nothing publicly but complained bitterly to Senate Republican Leader Everett Dirksen, "This is treason."

## **The China Lobby's Legacy**

That same year, the China Lobby inspired a parallel lobby supporting the military dictatorship of South Korea, a close anti-communist ally of Taiwan. In 1968, Richard Hanna, a Taiwan supporter and Democratic congressman from Orange County – Nixon's home ground – "instructed" South Korea's prime minister "on how to lobby the U.S. Congress effectively by emulating the successful models set by Israel and Taiwan."

Following his advice, a South Korean businessman, working with the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, began recycling commissions from U.S. rice sales to Korea to pay for lavish entertainment and outright bribes to "congressmen, cabinet members, and other influential persons" in Washington, including Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, during the Nixon years.

In late 1970, a CIA “bug” in the office of South Korea’s president implicated him in a scheme to spend upward of a million dollars a year to pay off dozens of U.S. officials, but the Nixon administration took no action.

In 1973, one member of Congress who later escaped prosecution for bribery because of the statute of limitations, wrote South Korea’s president a letter of appreciation, commenting, “you have an extremely competent team working on your behalf and making things come out right for your country. Nothing, as you know, happens without a great deal of work and support.”

The South Korean businessman who disbursed the bribes eventually testified before Congress in 1978, a decade after the “Koreagate” conspiracy began, under a grant of full immunity. Although he implicated some 30 members of Congress, only about 10 resigned or faced criminal charges.

Taiwan, meanwhile, continued to maintain a formidable lobby in Washington during the 1970s, despite President Nixon’s betrayal in recognizing mainland China. The lobby continued to win the hearts and minds of conservative Republicans, including Ronald Reagan. Among other vehicles, it used the services of the public relations firm Deaver and Hannaford, which also represented the military dictatorships of Argentina and Guatemala.

Partner Michael Deaver, a former aide to Governor Reagan, became President Reagan’s Deputy Chief of Staff in 1981. Much to Beijing’s displeasure, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan proceeded to soar, from \$312 million in 1981 to a high of \$709 million in 1985. An appreciative Taiwan, along with South Korea, provided covert support for the anti-Communist “Contras” fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua during these years.

In 1987, Deaver was convicted of perjuring himself before Congress and a federal grand jury regarding his use of the White House for lobbying activities.

The China Lobby lives on, with diminished clout, in today’s Republican Party. Its 2016 platform called for increased arms sales to Taiwan, reinstating it in international organizations, and a committing to its defense in case of a military showdown with China.

During the presidential campaign, candidate Donald Trump named several strong supporters of the island to his transition team. In December 2016, President-elect Trump held his notorious call with Taiwan’s leader to celebrate their respective elections and laud the “close economic, political, and security ties” between the United States and Taiwan.

Since then, of course, President Trump has reversed himself on this as on so many other policies, burning bridges with Taiwan to cultivate President Xi

Jinping of China. But don't count Taiwan out. If Xi fails to deliver on North Korea, or if U.S.-China military confrontations rise anew in the South China Sea, the small island that once commanded an army of U.S. supporters may roar yet again in Washington.

*Next: The Israel Lobby*

**Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.**

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## Iran's Victory for Moderation

Iranian President Rouhani's solid reelection victory clears the way for Iran to continue its efforts to reengage with the global community and expand freedoms domestically, reports Trita Parsi.

By Trita Parsi

The Iranian population's political sophistication continues to impress. Despite a highly flawed political system where the elections are neither fair nor free, the overwhelmingly majority chose a non-violent path to bring about progress.

They massively participated in the elections with a 75 percent turnout – compare that to the turnout in the U.S. elections in 2016, 56 percent – and handed the incumbent moderate President Hassan Rouhani a landslide victory with 57 percent of the vote.

In a regional context, this election is even more remarkable. In most of the Middle East, elections are not even held. Take Saudi Arabia for instance, President Donald Trump's choice for his first foreign trip.

There are a few things we can say about the meaning of the Iranian people's collective action.

First of all, once again, Iranians voted against the candidate who was believed to be favored by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This is now a strong pattern.

Secondly, the Iranians rebuked exiled opposition groups and Washington hawks and neocons who called on the Iranian people to either boycott the elections or vote for the hardline candidate Ebrahim Raisi in order to hasten a confrontation.

Clearly, these elements have no following in Iran.

Third, despite Trump's undermining of the nuclear deal with Iran, and despite significant problems with the sanctions relief process which has left many Iranians disappointed in the nuclear deal, Iranians still chose diplomacy, detente and moderation over the confrontational line of previous Iranian administrations. Iran is today one of the few countries in the world where a message of moderation and anti-populism secures you a landslide election victory.

### **Human Rights Mandate**

Fourth, despite Rouhani falling short on his promises to improve the human rights situation in Iran, Iranians and the leaders of the Green Movement leaders gave him a second chance. But now he has a stronger mandate – and fewer excuses. Now is the time for him to deliver on the promises that inspired tens of millions of Iranians to elect him twice as president.

He must take decisive action to protect the human rights and civil liberties of the Iranian people, pursue improved relations with the world, and promote economic growth for the Iranian people. The hardline forces behind Iran's arbitrary arrests and spiking executions may not answer to Rouhani directly, but the Iranian people who elected him expect him to do more in his second term to bring about change.

Failure to do so risks disenchanting a generation of Iranians from the belief that their voice can make a difference, potentially ceding Iran's future to the hardline voices who would take the country back to isolationism and confrontation with the West.

Fifth, while Saudi Arabia is hosting Trump and pushing him to return to a policy of complete isolation of Iran, the European Union Foreign Policy head Federica Mogherini congratulated Rouhani on his election victory and recommitted the E.U. to the nuclear deal. The election results will strengthen the E.U.'s dedication to ensuring the deal's survival as well as its commitment to an inclusive security framework for the Middle East.

Consequently, the E.U. will oppose Trump and Saudi Arabia's attempt to stage a confrontation with Iran. This puts the Trump administration once again out of synch with Europe and the U.S.'s Western allies on a key security issue.

### **Diplomacy Over War**

Sixth, Iranians have once again endorsed a policy of dialogue with the West, but the question is if Trump will unclench his fist and embrace this window for

diplomacy. Just as the nuclear crisis was resolved through negotiations, the remaining points of conflict between the U.S. and Iran can also be resolved diplomatically, including Syria and Yemen. This is what the Middle East needs now – more diplomacy, not more arms sales.

Seventh, Congress should avoid undermining the clear pro-engagement message sent by the Iranian people and empowering hardliners by pushing forward provocative sanctions legislation in the wake of the election results. New Senate sanctions are scheduled to be marked-up in committee this coming week. What a horrible response to the Iranian people after they voted for diplomacy and moderation.

Finally, the power struggle in Iran will increasingly shift towards the question of who will succeed Ayatollah Khamenei and become Iran's next Supreme Leader. It is widely believed that Rouhani is eyeing this position. With his landslide victory, he has improved his prospects. To some extent, this is what this presidential election was really about.

**Trita Parsi is the founder and president of the National Iranian American Council and an expert on US-Iranian relations, Iranian foreign politics, and the geopolitics of the Middle East. He is an award-winning author of two books, *Treacherous Alliance – The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US* (Yale University Press, 2007) and *A Single Roll of the Dice – Obama's Diplomacy with Iran* (Yale University Press, 2012). He tweets at [@tparsi](https://twitter.com/tparsi).**

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## The Gaping Holes of Russia-gate

Between Russia-gate and President Trump's potential impeachment, Washington is blending the thrill of McCarthyism and the excitement of Watergate, as ex-U.S. intelligence officials Ray McGovern and William Binney explain.

By Ray McGovern and William Binney

Official Washington got to relive the excitement of Watergate in a “gotcha” moment after President Trump fired FBI Director James Comey. There were fond recollections of how righteous the major newspapers felt when condemning President Nixon over his “Saturday Night Massacre” firing of special prosecutor Archibald Cox.

But the overriding question from “this Russia thing, with Trump and Russia” – as President Trump calls it – is whether there is any there there. The President labeled it a “made-up story” and, by all appearances from what is known at this

time, he is mostly correct.

A few days before Comey's firing, the FBI Director reportedly had asked for still more resources to hunt the Russian bear for supposedly "interfering" with last year's election to hurt Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump. And so the firing allowed the Watergate-recalling news outlets to trot out the old trope that "the cover-up is worse than the crime."

But can that argument bear close scrutiny, or is it the "phony narrative" that Senate Republican Whip John Cornyn of Texas claims it to be? Cornyn quipped that, if impeding the investigation was Trump's aim, "This strikes me as a lousy way to do it. All it does is heighten the attention given to the issue."

Truth is, President Trump had ample reason to be fed up with Comey, in part for his lack of enthusiasm toward investigating actual, provable crimes related to "Russia-gate" – like the flood of sensitive national security leaks, such as the highly sensitive intercepted communications used to precipitate the demise of Trump aide Michael Flynn.

The retired Army lieutenant general was "caught" talking with Russia's ambassador last December, a normal undertaking for a person designated as the incoming National Security Adviser. But Obama administration holdovers twisted that into a supposed violation of the archaic 1799 Logan Act and then used a transcript of the phone call to trip up Flynn because he didn't have perfect recollection of the conversation.

So, a trumped-up federal case was used to help get Flynn fired, but an apparent criminal act – the Flynn leak among many other leaks – was apparently ignored. We suspect that one reason for Comey's disinterest was that he already knows who was responsible.

In contrast to Comey's see-no-evil reaction to criminal leaking, the FBI Director evinced strong determination to chase after ties between Russia and the Trump campaign until the cows came home. The investigation (already underway for 10 months) had the decided advantage of casting doubt on the legitimacy of Trump's presidency and putting the kibosh on his plans to forge a more workable relationship with Russia, a win-win for the Establishment, the Military-Industrial Complex, and the FBI/CIA/NSA "Deep State"; a lose-lose for the President – and arguably the American people and the world, both of whom might benefit from fewer big-power tensions and lower spending on an arms race.

### **An Evidence Shortage**

What has been particularly noteworthy about this "scandal" is how much spooky



music we've heard and how many sinister suspicions have been raised versus actual "evidence" of the core allegations. So far, it has been smoke and mirrors with no chargeable offenses and not a scintilla of convincing proof of Russian "meddling" in the election.

The oft-cited, but evidence-free, CIA/FBI/NSA report of Jan. 6 – crafted by selected senior analysts, according to then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – is of a piece with the "high-confidence," but fraudulent, National Intelligence Estimate 15 years ago about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

But what about the "Russian hacking," the centerpiece of the accusations about Kremlin "interference" to help Trump? Surely, we know that happened. Or do we?

On March 31, 2017, WikiLeaks released original CIA documents – almost completely ignored by the mainstream media – showing that the agency had created a program allowing it to break into computers and servers and make it look like others did it by leaving telltale signs (like Cyrillic markings, for example). The capabilities shown in what WikiLeaks calls the "Vault 7" trove of CIA documents required the creation of hundreds of millions of lines of source code. At \$25 per line of code, that amounts to about \$2.5 billion for each 100 million code lines. But the Deep State has that kind of money and would probably consider the expenditure a good return on investment for "proving" the Russians hacked into Democratic Party emails.

In other words, it is altogether possible that the hacking attributed to Russia was actually one of several "active measures" undertaken by a cabal consisting of the CIA, FBI, NSA and Clapper – the same agencies responsible for the lame, evidence-free report of Jan. 6.

Comey displayed considerable discomfort on March 20, explaining to the House Intelligence Committee why the FBI did not insist on getting physical access to the Democratic National Committee's computers in order to do its own proper forensics, but chose to rely on the examination done by the DNC's private contractor, CrowdStrike. The firm itself has conflicts of interests in its links to the pro-NATO and anti-Russia think tank, the Atlantic Council, through Dmitri Alperovitch, who is an Atlantic Council senior fellow and the co-founder of CrowdStrike.

Given the stakes involved in the Russia-gate investigation – now including a possible impeachment battle over removing the President of the United States – wouldn't it seem logical for the FBI to insist on its own forensics for this fundamental predicate of the case? Or could Comey's hesitancy to demand access to the DNC's computers be explained by a fear that FBI technicians not fully

briefed on CIA/NSA/FBI Deep State programs might uncover a lot more than he wanted?

President Trump has entered into a high-stakes gamble in confronting the Deep State and its media allies over the accusations of his colluding with Russia. Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat, publicly warned him of the risk earlier this year. "You take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you," Schumer told MSNBC's Rachel Maddow on Jan. 3.

If Mr. Trump continues to "take on" the Deep State, he will be fighting uphill, whether he's in the right or not. It is far from certain he will prevail.

**Ray McGovern (rrmcgovern@gmail.com) was a CIA analyst for 27 years; he briefed the president's daily brief one-on-one to President Reagan's most senior national security officials from 1981-85. William Binney (williambinney0802@comcast.net) worked for NSA for 36 years, retiring in 2001 as the technical director of world military and geopolitical analysis and reporting; he created many of the collection systems still used by NSA.**

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## The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying

**Exclusive:** Russia-gate has focused attention on requirements for U.S. citizens acting as "foreign agents" to register with the Justice Department, but these rules have been sporadically or selectively enforced for decades, Jonathan Marshall writes in the first of a series.

By Jonathan Marshall

The alleged hacking of the Hillary Clinton campaign's emails and the numerous contacts of Donald Trump's circle with Russian officials, oligarchs and mobsters have triggered any number of investigations into Moscow's alleged efforts to influence the 2016 election and the new administration. With U.S.-Russian relations at their lowest point since the Cold War, however, it would be tough to argue that Moscow has achieved any leverage in Washington.

In contrast, as journalist Robert Parry recently noted, American politicians and the media have been notably silent about other examples of foreign interference in U.S. national politics. In part that's because supporters of more successful foreign pressure groups have enough clout to downplay or deny their very existence. In part it's also because America's political system is so riddled with big money that jaded insiders rarely question the status quo of influence

peddling by other nations.

That wasn't the case a century ago. In the run-up to U.S. entry into World War I, millions of Americans became wildly alarmed by the potential influence of pro-German fifth columnists. The success of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 shifted much of that paranoia toward the Soviet Union, prompting the infamous Red Scare.

Two decades later, Americans again became troubled by the growing influence of fascist and Communist propaganda in this country. In response, Congress in 1938 passed a law regulating "foreign agents" and requiring disclosure of their political and public relations activities and spending. Willful failure to register can be punished by up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Since the end of World War II, however, enforcement of the Foreign Agents Registration Act has been notably lax. Its effectiveness has been stymied by political resistance from lobby supporters as well as by the law's many loopholes – including Justice Department's admission that FARA "does not authorize the government to inspect records of those not registered under the Act."

A 2016 audit by the inspector general of the Department of Justice determined that half of FARA registrations and 62 percent of initial registrations were filed late, and 15 percent of registrants simply stopped filing for periods of six months or more. It also determined that the Department of Justice brought only seven criminal cases under FARA from 1966 to 2015, and filed no civil injunctions since 1991.

"FARA is violated more or less daily in Washington and largely ignored by authorities unless it involves someone without political connections," commented Matt Taibbi of *Rolling Stone*. "An awful lot of important people in Washington who appear to be making fortunes lobbying for foreign countries are merely engaged in 'litigation support,' if you ask them."

In addition, foreign governments find it easy to circumvent the act by tactics such as investing in influential foreign policy think tanks like the Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, and Center for Strategic and International Studies – buying credibility for their views without full disclosure.

In a rare exception to normal practice, the Atlantic Council's foreign ties briefly came under close scrutiny in 2013, when its chairman, Chuck Hagel, was nominated to become President Obama's Secretary of Defense. The Atlantic Council's major funders include the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, several Turkish entities, the Ukrainian World Congress, Kazakhstan, and several of the

biggest U.S. defense corporations. Yet good luck finding any such disclosures at the end of the many op-ed columns its staff publish in the *Washington Post* and other outlets on relevant issues of U.S. foreign policy.

The combination of lax enforcement and tremendously high stakes – including billions of dollars in foreign aid, arms sales, and economic sanctions – has led to intense foreign lobbying in the United States, some of it financed with recycled U.S. aid. But there's nothing new about this trend.

Forty years ago, in their book *The Power Peddlers*, Russell Warren Howe and Sarah Hays Trott reported that “the foreign lobby network is a high growth industry, both in terms of numbers and cash; there are at least fifteen thousand persons already engaged in foreign lobby activity . . . in Washington – thirty for every Member of Congress.”

Despite the serious implications for U.S. foreign policy and American democracy, such investigations of foreign lobbying have been few and far between. Perhaps the most far-reaching official probe was launched by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright in 1963, led by special counsel Walter Pincus, who went on to a long career as an investigative reporter at the *Washington Post*. Among other things, the hearings exposed the lucrative, secretive work of lobbyists for various Caribbean nations to jack up U.S. purchases of their sugar exports at above-market prices. Their efforts put millions of dollars in the pockets of ruthless dictators like Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic.

After Trujillo's assassination in 1961, his former intelligence chief disclosed that Trujillo bought the votes of leading members of Congress for a bigger sugar quota with millions of dollars in bribes and the services of prostitutes. Those members of Congress went unprosecuted, but the Kennedy Justice Department nailed Hearst society columnist Igor Cassini – brother of the First Lady's favorite dress designer – for acting as an unregistered agent of the Trujillo regime. Three years earlier, the head of the Mutual Broadcasting System pleaded no contest to charges of accepting \$750,000 from Trujillo to act as another unregistered agent.

### **Unmasking the Pro-Israel Lobby**

In 1962, the Justice Department also took rare aim at the pro-Israel lobby by forcing the American Zionist Council, formed in 1949 as a tax-exempt umbrella of American Jewish groups, to register as a foreign agent. Weeks later, supporters did an end run by folding AZC and incorporating the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to continue acting as a de facto lobby – but without Israeli money and without filing as a foreign agent.

The Fulbright committee did not drop the case, however. It subpoenaed records of the AZC and determined that it had been “ostensibly controlled by American citizens but had its budget approved in Jerusalem.” Over a period of eight years, the committee learned, AZC took more than \$5 million from the Jewish Agency, a semi-official arm of the Israeli government, to disseminate pro-Israeli propaganda in the United States.

Grant Smith, a pioneering researcher on the origins of the pro-Israel lobby, has asked “what might be different today if AIPAC in particular had been properly registered under the Act.”

“When AIPAC director Morris Amitay was caught red-handed mishandling classified missile secrets in 1975, he could have been prosecuted under FARA. When AIPAC and an Israeli diplomat purloined the entire 300-page book of classified trade secrets compiled from 70 U.S. industry groups opposed to unilateral trade concessions for Israel in 1984, they could have been prosecuted for failing to report their clandestine subversion of due process. When in 2005 [AIPAC officials] Steven J. Rosen and Keith Weissman met with Israeli diplomats during efforts to pass classified information to the press they thought could trigger a U.S attack on Iran, FARA consequences would have awaited them all.

“However, because the U.S. Department of Justice has unilaterally abrogated its responsibility to enforce FARA, people, ideas, money and propaganda campaigns continue to secretly slosh freely between Tel Aviv and Israeli fronts in America with taxpayer funds thrown into the toxic brew.”

The issue of foreign agents and their role in U.S. politics resurfaced as a major issue in 2016, with speculation about Russian connections to the Trump campaign and reports of possible FARA violations by Trump’s campaign manager and chief foreign policy adviser. The American people are long overdue for another Fulbright-style investigation into foreign lobbies and the adequacy of current enforcement measures. To highlight some of the critical issues at stake, Consortiumnews.com over the next few days will publish a series of articles on some of the workings of lobbyists, pressure groups and agents working on behalf of Taiwan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

*Next: The China Lobby*

**Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.**

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# Donald Trump at a Lonely Crossroads

Battered for months by Russia-gate innuendo, Donald Trump finds his unlikely presidency at a dangerous crossroads with no clear-cut path ahead, writes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

It is time to pause, take a deep breath, and reflect. It is very clear that Trump's Presidency is at a crossroads. This is not because there is any evidence of any wrongdoing. To date, there is a torrent of innuendo, but zero "evidence." Rather, events have converged at a point of inflection, not because the President might be impeached – that is improbable because the bar in terms of evidence, and of Congressional votes required, is very high – but because recent days have unmasked the sheer breadth and visceral animosity of the forces determined to "take down" the President, by whatever means present themselves.

President Trump faces a mainstream media (MSM) that has become hysterical in perceiving collusion with Russia everywhere – even to the extent of querying how Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Ambassador, and a Russian photographer could have been allowed access to the Oval Office, thereby compromising American "security." Trump faces a coalition of Clintonites, "corporate" Republicans, neocons, and more significantly, a fifth column within the intelligence services which regards any attempt at détente with Russia to constitute *prima facie* treason.

In response to a question from Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, who asked FBI Director James Comey in the Senate Judiciary Committee "what kind of threat" Russia presents "to the democratic process" (that is to say Graham's question was not about Russia's military capabilities, but on the threat to Western democracies), Comey answered: "Certainly, in my view, the greatest threat of any nation on Earth, given their [Russia's] intention and their capability."

One might reasonably conclude then, that Trump inevitably will be overwhelmed by this onslaught. Certainly the noise from the East Coast media bubble is overwhelming. And that, precisely, is the threat to the President: the drip, drip, of innuendo that Professor Stephen Cohen has dubbed "the accusation of treason."

"And", Cohen added, "we have a whole array of allegations that Putin helped him [Trump] get in the White House – to his [Trump's] associates doing wrong things with Russians ... This, [the allegations lacking any solid evidence] is beyond belief now ... This has become a national security threat to us, in and

of, itself.”

## **A Paralyzed Administration**

And now a Special Prosecutor has been appointed. One commentator summed it up thus: “That’s how special prosecutors work ... they hobble the president, drain away his political credibility, separate him from his supporters, and paralyze his administration. No legislator is willing to lend his support for fear of what the prosecutor might find. Each one will run for cover rather than work with Trump to get something done. In appointing a prosecutor, [Deputy Attorney General Rod] Rosenstein has killed this Administration’s ability to function. No health care overhaul. No tax cuts. No government reform. All while we await the results of a nothing investigation into a nothing scandal.”

The noise is overwhelming, but it is nearly all emanating from the coastal élites who inevitably speak the loudest. Polls may say that Trump’s favorability rating is slipping. That is so; but the polls also speak to the growing polarity between the Republican base, and the coastal Establishment: 81 percent of Clinton voters support impeaching the President, but 83 percent of Trump voters adamantly oppose it. Equally 91 percent of Clinton supporters “disapprove” of Trump, whereas 86 percent of the Trump base “support” him. There is evidence that the “deplorables” have been deeply angered by the impeachment talk.

And here lies the “inflection point”: President Trump’s base is pretty clear in identifying the “game plan” (it is widely dissected on the New Right, and Alt Right sites): The onslaught is not about finding the “evidence” (which probably doesn’t exist): The “Russian interference” meme emerged primarily from the Democratic National Committee email leaks that were originally attributed to a Russian “hack” (rather than a “leak” by Seth Rich, since murdered), via a private company, Crowd Strike, (evidence that experts now contest); from the discredited “dirty dossier” of ex-British spy Christopher Steele; and from unmasked intercepts of Trump aides (which have as yet shown no evidence of electoral collusion).

It is rather the drip, drip of innuendo which is intended – the Trump base avers – to collapse the President’s ratings (among his base) to the point at which even the Republican members of Congress will abandon the President, and join the “movement” to remove him, via one or other of the provisions of the U.S. Constitution.

Obstruction of Justice is unlikely to serve: As George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley has said, former FBI Director James Comey’s memo offers “no proof for impeachment” of Trump. Turley noted: “Indeed, it raises as many questions for Comey as it does Trump in terms of the alleged underlying

conduct.

“A good place to start would be with the federal law, specifically 18 U.S.C. 1503. The criminal code demands more than what Comey reportedly describes in his memo. There are dozens of different variations of obstruction charges ranging from threatening witnesses to influencing jurors. None would fit this case. That leaves the omnibus provision on attempts to interfere with the ‘due administration of justice.’

“However, that still leaves the need to show that the effort was to influence ‘corruptly’ when Trump could say that he did little but express concern for a longtime associate. The term ‘corruptly’ is actually defined differently under the various obstruction provisions, but it often involves a showing that someone acted ‘with the intent to secure an unlawful benefit for oneself or another.’ Encouraging leniency or advocating for an associate is improper but not necessarily seeking an unlawful benefit for him.”

What the point of inflection calls for (Trump’s supporters’ say), is to insist that the FBI investigation be concluded expeditiously, and that a counter-attack on the leaders of those forces (whomsoever they are), and on their “moles” – “embedded insurgents committed to forcing Trump from office” – who are leaking innuendo to the MSM, be prosecuted.

It is a crossroads. Trump has to halt the drumbeat, or see his Presidency crumble into dust. And the blade of “defamation politics” can be two-edged: Hillary Clinton was no paragon of virtue.

### **An Elusive Achievement**

In this context, Trump now needs a policy achievement more than ever. A legislative success in the domestic arena is – evidently – not in prospect, but rather the political convulsions in D.C. may finally spook a somnolent and supine Wall Street to think about risk again (VIX, a litmus of market volatility, has been at historic lows) – especially as market insiders are warning their clients “not to expect to [be] bailed out by the Fed this time.” Indeed the entire Trump reflation program looks as if will be a long time coming (if it comes at all, this year).

At such times, foreign policy may come to the fore. We have already noted that the Astana Process has witnessed a White House, more ready than Obama’s, to work with Russia, Turkey and Iran, to reach some sort of settlement in Syria. The triumph of the “defeat” of ISIS in Raqqa and Mosul might constitute just such an achievement to rally Trump’s base.

Trump was politically courageous in inviting Lavrov into the Oval Office (at a



time when “the drumbeat” of Russia collusion was reaching a crescendo). It seems that Russia and its allies are ready to concede to Trump the taking of Raqa’a, (the Syrian Foreign Minister has effectively acknowledged this); and in return, Russia and Iran have been put on test by the White House.

The hostile rhetoric from Washington on Iran, has been notably absent since Astana, and the secondary sanctions waiver in connection with the JCPOA (the nuclear agreement) has been renewed. It seems Trump has realized that Generals James Mattis (Defense Secretary) and H.R. McMaster (National Security Adviser) were intent on leading the President back into a series of (unwinnable) wars – at least that seems to be the message of Astana which has put two negotiators, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson firmly in the driver’s seat.

But here too, the onslaught on the President, and on the Astana political process is likely to continue. Recall that President Obama, who was ever more hesitant than Trump – (never fully endorsing) Secretary of State John Kerry’s and FM Lavrov’s negotiating marathons – witnessed those political efforts sabotaged by his own Pentagon (the “accident” at Dier Azor, killing 68 Syrian Army soldiers defending their besieged base against ISIS militants), and Defense Secretary Ashton Carter’s public equivocation about sharing intelligence on ISIS and al-Qae’da with the Russians).

Already the signs of similar sabotage are present: i.e. the Acting Assistant Secretary of State Stuart Jones’s dubious announcement – on the eve of a Geneva round of Syria talks – that the U.S. had found evidence of a crematorium at a Syrian prison, in which the remains of mass executions of prisoners were burned. Two days later Jones resigned from the State Department, with a colleague noting that while Jones was retiring early for personal reasons, his departure was a case of “another senior government official with real competence leaving.” (Or, in other words another anti-Trump dissident leaving the ship.)

Even Anne Barnard of the *New York Times* noted that the timing of the crematorium allegations seemed “political.” Yes, indeed political, but directed at the Russians or at Trump? There are also reports that a contingent of U.S. and British Special Forces are operating in southern Syria to stymie any Syrian army or Hezbollah advance in order to regain control of the Syrian-Iraqi border. On Thursday, a U.S.-led airstrike hit Syrian military forces that were deemed too close to the U.S.-British base.

So President Trump should beware. Peace settlements require huge efforts to assemble, but can be undone in a moment. And Saudi Defense Minister Prince Mohammad bin Salman should note: Trump just might be more interested in defeating ISIS at this moment, than suffering a further Saudi lecture on the

misdeeds of Iran. Though President Trump will be happy to receive whatever boodle with which the Saudis may care to shower him. Rumors say up to \$300 billion – \$400 billion in arms deals! “Quite nice,” as the Donald might say.

**Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.**

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## Do High-Level Leaks Suggest a Conspiracy?

Widespread concern inside Official Washington about President Trump’s unfitness for the job is fueling a campaign of high-level leaks that is taking on the look of a “soft coup,” says ex-CIA officer Philip Giraldi.

By Philip Giraldi

Back in my time in the CIA, there were two places in the headquarters building one could go that were free speech zones – places where it was safe to vent about senior management without necessarily being admonished or even reported. They were the Historical Intelligence Collection room off the library, where no one ever went to look at the books, and the office supplies storage room in the basement.

The supplies room had a lot of dark corners and concealing shelves where it was possible to be anonymous and it was completely unsupervised in the belief that true-blue CIA officers would never stoop to taking even a single pencil more than was actually needed to get the job done.

I don’t know if those rooms still exist, but I sometimes think of them when the subject of government conspiracies come up. I have this vision of two or three conspirators huddled in the corner behind the staplers back in 1975 discussing how one would go about eliminating the likes of Senator Frank Church, who at that time was heading a major congressional investigation into CIA improprieties.

If there had been such a gathering, I would imagine that the *Washington Post* would have found out about it on the next day as intelligence officers are gregarious and like to talk. This has been my principal problem with the debate in some quarters about the 9/11 Commission. Their report did indeed miss many important angles in order to protect certain governmental interests, but if

there had been a genuine conspiracy involving what must have been hundreds of people to demolish the Twin Towers with explosives, it surely would have leaked long ago.

Two months ago, I would have dismissed as fantasy any thoughts of a conspiracy based in America's national security agencies to bring down Donald Trump. But now I am not so sure. Many of my friends who are former intelligence officers are increasingly asking questions. It is worth pointing out that none of us are fans of what the White House has been doing and saying – quite the contrary.

### **Defense of the Constitution**

Still, alerting the country to concerns over what might be a developing soft coup orchestrated by the intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to nullify the results of a national election in no way equates to trying to protect Donald Trump and his uncouth and ill-informed behavior. It is rather a defense of the Constitution.

Donald Trump said on Wednesday that “This is the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history!” He might be right. He was referring to Deputy Attorney General Rob Rosenstein's appointment of the highly-respected Robert Mueller as independent counsel to investigate “any links and/or coordination between Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump, and any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation.”

Trump's bombast puts everyone but his most tone-deaf supporters on edge, but there are two points that he has been making repeatedly that are essential to any understanding of what is going on.

First, the investigation into Russia and the Trumpsters has been a high priority at FBI and also in Congress for nearly a year. Yet so far no one has produced evidence that anyone broke any law or even that someone did something wrong.

Second, and more importantly, the vilification of Trump and Russia has been driven by a series of leaks that come from the very top of the national security apparatus, leaks that appear not to have been seriously investigated.

This involvement of FBI and CIA in the campaign, whether inadvertently or by design, was particularly evident in the various reports that surfaced and were leaked to the press during the campaign and right up to the inauguration. The leaks of that type of information, to include technical intelligence and Special Access Program “codeword” material, require top-level access as well as the ability to arrange clandestine contacts with major players in the media, something far beyond the reach of most employees at CIA or the FBI.

## **The Lavrov Leak**

Similar leaks have been appearing since that time. I confess to finding Monday's detailed account of what President Trump discussed with Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov, which included corroborating material that likely did more damage than the information that was actually shared, highly suggestive of the possibility that something like a conspiracy is, in fact, functioning.

Given the really tight-security control of that transcript after it was determined that it contained sensitive information, one might reasonably assume that the leaks to the media came directly out of Donald Trump's own National Security Council or from the highest levels of the office of the DNI, CIA, or FBI.

On Wednesday, the anonymous sources struck again, revealing that "Michael Flynn and other advisers to Donald Trump's campaign were in contact with Russian officials and others with Kremlin ties in at least 18 calls and emails during the last seven months of the 2016 presidential race." That sort of information had to come from the top level of the FBI and would have been accessible to only a few, but even though the leaks of what constitutes highly-classified information have been recurring for many months, no one has been fired or arrested.

The emphasis on Russia derives from the government and media consensus that Moscow was behind the hacking of Democratic National Committee (DNC) computers that led to the exposure of what the DNC was doing to destroy the candidacy of Bernie Sanders. There is also a related consensus that the Russian hacking was intended to damage American democracy and also to help the Trump campaign, a narrative that the President has described as a "made-up thing," a view that I share. All of these assertions are regarded as unquestionably true as measured by inside-the-beltway groupthink, with even the White House now conceding that there was Russian interference in the election.

Sometimes the hysteria over Russia produces over-the-top stories in the mainstream media, including last week's completely speculative piece wondering whether the entourage of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had sought to sneak a recording device into the White House during his White House visit. It was the type of tale that might have been inspired by a leak from someone in the National Security Council who personally observed the context of the meeting and was able to provide corroborating details.

## **Where's the Beef?**

Nevertheless, in spite of the overwhelming groupthink, it has been repeated *ad*

*nauseam* by people like myself that no actual evidence has been produced to support any of the claims being made about Russia and Trump. There is more evidence that the White House was penetrated by Ankara – through the good services of Michael Flynn – than by Moscow, but Congress has not called for an investigation into Turkey's lobbying.

Ray McGovern, a former senior CIA analyst, is even speculating that the Agency might have been the actual hacker into the DNC, leaving a trail behind that would have suggested that it was done by the Russians. His concern arises from the recent WikiLeaks revelation that the CIA had developed cyber-warfare capabilities to do just that.

McGovern, like myself, is also asking why former CIA Director John Brennan has not been summoned by the Senate Committee looking into Russia-gate. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has testified twice, while former FBI Director James Comey, current NSA Director Mike Rogers, and former Justice Department senior official Sally Yates have all appeared once. Brennan's absence is conspicuous as he was the senior national security official most closely tied to the Obama Administration, may have had the tools at hand to fake the Russian connection, and has also been plausibly linked to "encouraging" British Intelligence to provide damaging information on Michael Flynn.

I now suspect that there is indeed a group at the top of the U.S. national security system that wants to remove Donald Trump and has wanted to do so for quite some time. If that is true, I believe that they have been operating with that goal in mind for at least the past year. It is not a traditional conspiracy or cabal in that it does not meet and conspire together, but I suspect the members know what they are doing in a general sense and are intervening whenever they can to keep Trump off balance.

Their program is simple: convince the nation that the President and his team colluded with the Russians to rig the 2016 election in his favor, which, if demonstrable even if not necessarily true, would provide grounds for impeachment. They are motivated by the belief that removing Trump must be done "for the good of the country" and they are willing to do what they consider correcting a mistake made by the American voters. They are assisted in their effort by the mainstream media, which agrees with both the methods employed and the overall objective and is completely on board with the process.

Saving the country from Trump is certainly an attractive notion. I suspect the Comeys, Clappers, and Brennans, together with a host of former senior officers who appear regularly on television, if they were involved, see themselves as great patriots. But they must understand that the blunt instrument they are using is far more dangerous than the current occupant of the White House.

A soft coup engineered by the national security and intelligence agencies would be far more threatening to our democracy than anything Donald Trump or even the Russians can do.

**Philip Giraldi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest. [This article is re-posted with the author's permission. It first appeared at The American Conservative at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/do-high-level-leaks-suggest-a-conspiracy/> ]**

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## When the Trump Coup-makers Cometh

**Exclusive:** As President Trump prepares for his first foreign trip, the turbulent political waters around him are rising and the tidal wave of a “soft coup” may be just over the horizon, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

So what did you think a U.S.-styled “soft coup” would look like? What we’re seeing regarding the intended removal of President Trump is not that much different from what has happened in dozens of other countries, whether Iran in 1953 or Ukraine in 2014 or Brazil in 2016. This one just has a few extra American touches.

Like other coups, there are often vague and unproven accusations leveled against the target and his or her entourage. Even though hard evidence is usually lacking, “process crimes,” such as making misstatements to prosecutors or obstructing justice, are developed as a substitute under the popular saying: “the cover-up is worse than the crime.” Whatever the case, a complicit media then trumpets alleged wrongdoing into grave and impeachable offenses.

And, if you had any doubts about what is looming, you should read Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne Jr.’s [op-ed](#), entitled in print editions “A quick end would be better,” which states:

“There is really only one issue in American politics at this moment: Will we accelerate our way to the end of the [Trump story](#), or will our government remain mired in scandal, misdirection and paralysis for many more months – or even years? ...

“Nothing could be worse than slow-walking the Trump inquiries. The evidence is

already overwhelming that he is temperamentally and intellectually incapable of doing the job he holds. He is indifferent to acquiring the knowledge the presidency demands and apparently of the belief that he can improvise hour to hour. He will violate norms whenever it suits him and cross ethical lines whenever he feels like it.”

## **The History of Coups**

As this American coup against Trump progresses, one commonality of coups around the world – whether “hard coups” of military tanks or “soft coups” of “constitutional” removals – is that the coup’s target is not some perfect human being. He or she has likely made political mistakes or cut some corners or had associates who lined their pockets.

But the difference between those misdeeds being treated as politics as usual or becoming the stuff of “scandal” has more to do with the interests of powerful interests – a domestic “deep state” or an outside “superpower” – than any evenhanded pursuit of justice.

To say that Trump is an imperfect messenger for whatever populist message he thinks he’s carrying stretches beyond the breaking point any normal definition of the word “imperfect.” Indeed, Trump may be the perfectly imperfect messenger.

Yet, what’s really at stake in any coup is power and the direction that a country will take. In the case of Donald Trump, there appear to be several factors at play: he is regarded by many establishment figures as too incompetent and uncouth to serve as America’s President; he also defies the neoconservative orthodoxy over U.S. foreign policy; and perhaps most significantly, he doesn’t believe in the New Cold War, which will assure the Military-Industrial Complex years of expensive new weapons systems by making Russia the new/old “enemy.”

There is, of course, some truth to all these concerns. Trump is an egotistical buffoon who doesn’t seem to know what he doesn’t know. Often his brain doesn’t connect to his tongue – or his Twitter fingers. He is more a Kardashian “reality star,” saying stuff to get attention and to attract eyeballs, than a sober leader who holds his cards close and chooses his words carefully.

Though many Americans voted for him because they viewed him as a no-nonsense businessman, he was actually someone who ran what amounted to a family business without the kind of accountability that often comes with managing a large public corporation.

Puffing up his own importance, Trump even has bragged about his impunity. During the 2016 campaign, he was revealed as the kind of jerk who boasts about grabbing women by the “pussy” and getting away with it because of his star status and

personal power.

So, yes, Trump is both incompetent and uncouth. But he is hardly the first president to bring unseemly personal baggage or an inadequate skill set into the Oval Office. Bill Clinton was known as an insatiable hound dog preying on vulnerable women, and George W. Bush was shockingly unqualified for the demands of the presidency.

While Barack Obama had the intellectual skills and behaved commendably in his personal conduct, he had little experience in managing a complex organization – and it showed in some of his disastrous personnel decisions, such as appointing the hawkish Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State and keeping Bush loyalist Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense.

In other words, Trump's skill limitations were not by themselves disqualifying. With the proper advice and a modicum of self-control, Trump could have performed acceptably as Chief Executive. But he failed to recruit wise advisers and couldn't discipline either his tongue or his Twitter fingers.

Even staunch Trump supporters whom I've spoken with wish he could have parked his large but fragile ego at the White House gate rather than bringing it into the Oval Office.

### **Foreign Policy Dissent**

Still, Trump's larger vulnerability was his failure to accept the foreign policy parameters prescribed by the neocon-dominated Establishment. He started out insulting powerful neocons by challenging their self-exculpatory narrative of the Iraq War – that it was a great idea sabotaged by poor execution but then salvaged by the "surge" before being betrayed by Obama.

Trump also belittled some of the neocon champions, such as old-lion Sen. John "No Hero" McCain and rising star Sen. Marco "Little Marco" Rubio. It would have been a neocon dream to have the 2016 campaign a match-up between Marco Rubio and Hillary Clinton, but the former fell to Trump in the primaries and the latter lost to Trump in the general election.

But Trump's greatest sin was his refusal to buy into Official Washington's big-ticket Russia-bashing, the goal of making Moscow an implacable enemy that then required massive new spending on both propaganda (supposedly to combat Russian "propaganda") and military projects (including NATO expansion up to Russia's borders and new weapons systems to deter Russian "aggression").

Despite his simple-mindedness (or perhaps because of it), Trump couldn't understand why the United States had to demonize Russia when he saw many areas



of possible cooperation (such as the fight against terrorism).

Trump and a few of his advisers were so out-of-step on the “Russia thing” that Official Washington developed a new groupthink that the only possible explanation was that Trump and his team must be somehow on the Kremlin’s payroll. Any alleged “connection” to Russia – no matter how tenuous or seemingly innocuous – became front-page news.

For instance, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn’s speakers bureau negotiated a relatively modest speaking fee of \$45,386 for him to address the tenth anniversary of RT, the Russian network, in December 2015, with RT even whittling down his fee – and that speech became a major cause celebre.

On Dec. 29, 2016, after the election and as the national security adviser-designate, Flynn took a phone call from Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak while Flynn was on vacation in the Dominican Republic, and Flynn later offered an incomplete account of the conversation, which the National Security Agency knew because it had intercepted the phone call.

Instead of people shrugging their shoulders and giving Flynn the benefit of the doubt, Obama’s holdovers in the Justice Department literally made a federal case out of it, invoking the archaic and virtually-never-used 1799 Logan Act (which bars private citizens from negotiating with foreigners) and then advancing the absurd argument that somehow the discrepancies in Flynn’s recollection made him vulnerable to Russian blackmail to get Trump to fire Flynn.

Then, Trump’s alleged suggestion to then-FBI Director James Comey that Flynn was a good guy who had served his country and had suffered enough – and that it might be best to “let it go” – has now become the latest argument for impeaching Trump.

### **In Deep Water**

Whether he knows it or not, Trump is now in very deep water and has no idea how to dog-paddle back to the shore. His aides seem to think that a nine-day foreign trip will do him good, but it is more likely to make him grovel before Saudi King Salman and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, knowing that any offense that those leaders might take would simply expedite Trump’s political doom.

Trump is surely in no position to tell the Saudis to cut out their covert funding for Al Qaeda and other Sunni terrorist groups – or to insist that they stop bombing Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East. Nor could Trump dare challenge Netanyahu on the Israeli abuse of the Palestinians, the Prime Minister’s obstruction of the peace process, and his blatant efforts to

manipulate U.S. politics in favor of bloody neocon interventions across the region. Trump will be the desperate supplicant hoping for a reassuring pat on the head.

There is one – and perhaps only one – winning move that Trump has left. He could authorize CIA Director Mike Pompeo to prepare for release U.S. intelligence information regarding turning-point moments in recent years, such as the truth about [the 2013 sarin incident](#) in Syria and the 2014 Malaysia Airlines shoot-down in eastern Ukraine. [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

If – as I’m told – the Obama administration systematically misrepresented the intelligence on those catastrophes to register propaganda gains (against the Syrian government in 2013 and Russia in 2014), the U.S. government’s internal information could shift those key narratives in more peaceful directions.

But whatever the truth is, Trump could shift his own image from a compulsive liar who disdains facts into a champion for transparency and honesty in government. He could turn the tables on The New York Times (which has set itself up as the great hero for Truth) and The Washington Post (which has fashioned a new melodramatic slogan, “Democracy Dies in Darkness”). He could point out their hypocritical lack of aggressiveness in challenging the Obama administration’s excessive secrecy.

Trump would also give his dispirited supporters something to rally around. Many blue-collar voters backed Trump because they thought he was at least addressing their economic fears of lost work and lost status, while Hillary Clinton – in their view – treated them with disregard and disdain, even calling many of them “deplorables.”

But Trump’s promises of recovered jobs were largely hollow. Whatever improvement Americans might be feeling in their pocketbooks, it is more the result of Obama’s careful economic management and the normal recovery from Bush’s Wall Street crash and the Great Recession than anything Trump can or will do.

So, revealing hidden truths – where the American people may have been misled – would not only be the right thing to do for democracy, it also could be the smart thing to do. When the Establishment coup-makers come for Trump – as they now almost certainly will – he can at least say that he tried to do something to return the U.S. government to the American people.

That might not save his presidency but it would at least elevate his purpose and possibly create some positive legacy to attach to the Trump name. As the situation stands now, Trump appears headed for a humiliating exit that won’t just strip him of the presidency but would strip away any luster for the Trump

brand.

In other words, his impulsive foray into politics might not just make him one of the most reviled U.S. presidents in history but take down the Trump businesses, too.

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

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