

# UK Blurring Two Very Different Extradition Claims

The Swedish and U.S. claims are vastly different, writes Jonathan Cook. But the public conversation in the U.K. is simply about which has first dibs on Assange.

By [JonathanCook](#)

[Jonathan-Cook.net](#)



In a previous blog post, I [warned](#) that the media and political class would continue with their long-running deceptions about Julian Assange now that he has been dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy. They have wasted no time in proving me right.

The first thrust in their campaign of deceit was set out on *The Guardian's* front page on Friday, April 12, the day after Assange was imprisoned.

There should have been wall-to-wall outrage from public figures in the U.K. at the United States creating a new crime of “doing journalism” and a new means of arrest for those committing this “crime” overseas, what I have termed “media rendition.”

Remember that all of the information contained in the U.S. charge sheet against Assange – the supposed grounds for his extradition – were [known](#) to the previous Obama administration as far back as 2010. But President Barack Obama never dared approve the current charges against Assange because legally there was no way to stop them being turned against “respectable” journalists, like those at *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*.

This was the same Obama administration that had the worst record on prosecuting whistleblowers. Obama was no friend to investigative journalism but he understood that it would be unwise to so overtly subvert the notion of a free western press.

That the Trump administration has cast all this aside to get Assange behind bars should have every journalist in the world quaking in their boots, and loudly decrying what the U.S. is seeking to do.

And yet the reaction has been either quiet acceptance of the U.S. extradition request as a simple law enforcement measure or gentle mockery of Assange – that the scruffy outlaw dragged from the embassy was looking even scruffier after seven years of extreme house arrest and “arbitrary detention.” What a laugh!

### **Narrative Collusion**

Now we can see how the media is going to collude in a narrative crafted by the political class to legitimize what the Trump administration is doing.

Rather than focus on the gross violation of Assange’s fundamental human rights, the wider assault on press freedoms and the attack on Americans’ First Amendment Rights, U.K. politicians are “debating” whether the U.S. extradition claim on Assange should take priority over earlier Swedish extradition proceedings for a sexual-assault investigation that was publicly dropped back in 2017.

In other words, the public conversation in the U.K., sympathetically reported by *The Guardian*, supposedly

Britain's only major liberal news outlet, is going to be about who has first dibs on Assange.

Here's the first paragraph of *The Guardian's* [front-page article](#):

“Political pressure is mounting on [Home Secretary] Sajid Javid to prioritise action that would allow Julian Assange to be extradited to Sweden, amid concerns that US charges relating to Wikileaks' activities risked overshadowing longstanding allegations of rape.”

So, the concern is not that Assange is facing rendition to the U.S. It is that the U.S. claim might “overshadow” an outstanding legal case in Sweden.

The 70 MPs who signed the letter to Javid hope to kill two birds with one stone.

First, they are legitimizing the discourse of the Trump administration. This is no longer about an illegitimate U.S. extradition request on Assange we should all be loudly protesting. It is a competition between two legal claims, and a debate about which one should find legal remedy first.

It weighs a woman's sexual assault allegation against Assange and *WikiLeaks'* exposure of war crimes committed by the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan. It suggests that both are in the same category, that they are similar potential crimes.

## **Unequivocal Response**



But there should only be one response to the U.S. extradition claim on Assange: It is entirely illegitimate. No debate. Anything less, any equivocation is to collude in the Trump administration's narrative.

The Swedish claim, if it is revived, is an entirely separate matter.

That *The Guardian* and the MPs are connecting the two should come as no surprise.

In another article on Assange last Friday, the *The Guardian*—echoing a common media refrain — reported as fact a demonstrably false claim: “Assange initially took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden.”

Assange and *WikiLeaks* always said that he entered the embassy to claim *political* asylum so as to avoid extradition to the U.S.

There could be no possible reason for its reporters to make this elementary mistake other than that *The Guardian* is still waging its long-running campaign against Assange, the information revolution he represents and the challenge he poses to the corporate media of which *The Guardian* is a key part.

**Seven Years of Derision**

For seven years the political and media establishments have been deriding the suggestion that Assange faced any threat from the U.S., despite the mounting private and public evidence that he did. Assange again has been proved conclusively right by current events, and they decisively wrong.

*The Guardian* knows that Assange did not need political asylum to avoid a sex case. So reporting this not as a *claim* by his detractors but as an indisputable *fact* is simple, Trump-supporting propaganda meant to discredit Assange – propaganda that happily treats any damage to the cause of journalism as collateral damage.

Second, the only major politicians prepared to highlight the threats to Assange's personal rights and wider press freedoms posed by the U.S. extradition request are opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his ally, Diane Abbott, the Labour shadow home secretary. They have rightly noted that the U.S. is using the extradition demand to silence Assange and intimidate any other journalists who might think about digging up evidence of the crimes committed by the U.S. national security state.

Abbott commented last Friday that Assange's current arrest was not about "the rape charges, serious as they are, it is about *WikiLeaks* and all of that embarrassing information about the activities of the American military and security services that was made public."

Abbott has faced a storm of criticism for her statement, accused of not giving enough weight to the Swedish case. In fact, her only mistake was to give it more weight than it

currently deserves. She spoke of “rape charges,” but there are in fact no such charges. (Additionally, although the case is classed broadly as a rape allegation in Sweden, in the U.K. it would be classed at most as sexual assault. Forgotten too is that the evidence was considered too weak by the original prosecutor to bring any charges, Assange was allowed to leave Sweden and the investigation was dropped.)

### **Assange Did Not Flee Questioning**

Rather, Assange was previously wanted for questioning, and has never been charged with anything. If the Swedish extradition request is revived, it will be so that he can be questioned about those allegations. I should also point out, as almost no one else is, that Assange did not “flee” questioning. He offered Swedish prosecutors to question him at the embassy.

Even though questioning overseas in extradition cases is common – Sweden has done it dozens of times – Sweden repeatedly refused in Assange’s case, leading the Swedish appeal court to criticize the prosecutors. When he was finally questioned after four years of delays, Swedish prosecutors violated his rights by refusing access to his Swedish lawyer.

Further, the MPs and media getting exercised that Assange “took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden” are forgetting that he did not object to extradition as long as he received a promise that he would not then be extradited on to the U.S. Sweden refused to offer such assurances. We can now see only too clearly that Assange had every reason to insist on such assurances.

I don't have space here to analyze the Swedish case on this occasion (that's maybe for another time), though it is worth briefly noting that most of the problematic details of the case have been disappeared down the memory hole.

Given that the political and media class are still speaking in terms of "charges," rather than questions about allegations, we should recall that there were glaring problems with the evidence in the Swedish case. Not least, the key piece of evidence against Assange – a torn condom produced by the woman – was found to contain not a trace of DNA from either Assange or from her.

Those at the forefront of the attacks on Abbott and Corbyn, echoed by *The Guardian*, are the same Blairite Labour MPs who have been trying to oust Corbyn as Labour party leader, despite his twice being elected overwhelmingly by the membership.

These MPs, who dominate the Labour parliamentary party, have spent the past four years focusing on smears that Labour is "institutionally anti-Semitic" in an obvious effort to terminally wound Corbyn. Now they have found another possible route to achieve the same end.

They are suggesting that Corbyn and Abbott are disregarding the Swedish woman's right to justice. The clear subtext of their arguments is that the pair are rape apologists.

As I have pointed out, Abbott has actually overstated the current status of the Swedish case, not sidelined it at all.

But what Corbyn and Abbott have done is to make a clear political, legal and moral demarcation between the Swedish

case, which must be resolved according to accepted legal principles, and the U.S. extradition, which has no legal or moral merit whatsoever.

What these U.K. MPs and *The Guardian* have done in this front-page story is muddy the waters yet further, with enthusiastic disregard for the damage it might do to Assange's rights, to Corbyn's leadership and to the future of truth-telling journalism.

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## VIPS Fault Mueller Probe, Criticize Refusal to Interview Assange

The bug in Mueller's report released on Thursday is that he accepts that the Russian government interfered in the election. Trump should challenge that, says VIPS.





**MEMORANDUM FOR:** The President

**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

**SUBJECT:** The Fly in the Mueller Ointment

April 16, 2019

Mr. President:

The song has ended but the melody lingers on. The release Thursday of the redacted text of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's "Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election" nudged the American people a tad closer to the truth on so-called "Russiagate."

But the Mueller report left unscathed the central-but-unproven allegation that the Russian government hacked into the DNC and Podesta emails, gave them to *WikiLeaks* to publish, and helped you win the election. The thrust will be

the same; namely, even if there is a lack of evidence that you colluded with Russian President Vladimir Putin, you have him to thank for becoming president. And that melody will linger on for the rest of your presidency, unless you seize the moment.

Mueller has accepted that central-but-unproven allegation as gospel truth, apparently in the lack of any disinterested, independent forensic work. Following the odd example of his erstwhile colleague, former FBI Director James Comey, Mueller apparently has relied for forensics on a discredited, DNC-hired firm named CrowdStrike, whose credibility is on a par with “pee-tape dossier” compiler Christopher Steele. Like Steele, CrowdStrike was hired and paid by the DNC (through a cutout).

We brought the lack of independent forensics to the attention of Attorney General William Barr on March 13 in a [Memorandum](#) entitled “Mueller’s Forensic-Free Findings”, but received no reply or acknowledgement. In that Memorandum we described the results of our own independent, agenda-free forensic investigation led by two former Technical Directors of the NSA, who avoid squishy “assessments,” preferring to base their findings on fundamental principles of science and the scientific method. Our findings remain unchallenged; they reveal gaping holes in CrowdStrike’s conclusions.

We do not know if Barr shared our March 13 Memorandum with you. As for taking a public position on the forensics issue, we suspect he is being circumspect in choosing his battles carefully, perhaps deferring until later a rigorous examination of the dubious technical work upon which Mueller seems to have relied.

## **Barr's Notification to Congress**

As you know, the big attention-getter came on March 24 when Attorney General William Barr included in his four-page summary a quote from Mueller's report: "The investigation did not establish that members of the Trump campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities." Understandably, that grabbed headlines – the more so, since most Americans had been convinced earlier by the media that the opposite was true.

There remains, however, a huge fly in the ointment. The Mueller report makes it clear that Mueller accepts as a given – an evidence-impooverished given – that the Russian government interfered in the election on two tracks:

**Track 1** involves what Barr, echoing Mueller, claims "a Russian organization, the Internet Research Agency (IRA)" did in using social media "to sow social discord, eventually with the aim of interfering with the election." A careful look at this allegation shows it to be without merit, despite Herculean efforts by *The New York Times*, for example, to put lipstick on this particular pig. After some rudimentary research, award winning investigative reporter Gareth Porter promptly put that pig out of its misery and brought home the bacon. We do not believe "Track 1" merits further commentary.

**Track 2** does need informed commentary, since it is more technical and – to most Americans – arcane. In Barr's words: "The Special Counsel found that Russian government actors successfully hacked into computers and obtained emails from

persons affiliated with the Clinton campaign and Democratic Party organizations, and publicly disseminated those materials through various intermediaries, including *WikiLeaks*. Based on these activities, the Special Counsel brought criminal charges against a number of Russian military officers for conspiring to hack into computers in the United States for purposes of influencing the election.”

We are eager to see if Mueller’s report contains more persuasive forensic evidence than that which VIPS has already debunked. In Barr’s summary, the only mention of forensics refers to “forensic accountants” – a far cry from the kind of forensic investigators needed to provide convincing proof of “hacking” by the Russian government.

### **But They Were Indicted!**

Circular reasoning is not likely to work for very long, even with a U.S. populace used to being brainwashed by the media. Many Americans had mistakenly assumed that Mueller’s indictment of Russians – whether they be posting on FaceBook or acting like intelligence officers – was proof of guilt. But, as lawyers regularly point out, “one can easily indict a ham sandwich” – easier still these days, if it comes with Russian dressing.

Chances have now increased that the gullible folks who had been assured that Mueller would find collusion between you and Putin may now be a bit more circumspect – skeptical even – regarding the rest of the story-line of the “Russian hack,” and that will be even more likely among those with some technical background. Such specialists will have a field day, IF – and it is a capital “IF” – by some miracle,

word of VIPS' forensic findings gets into the media this time around.

The evidence-impoverished, misleadingly labeled "Intelligence Community Assessment" of January 6, 2017 had one saving grace. The authors noted: "The nature of cyberspace makes attribution of cyber operations difficult but not impossible. Every kind of cyber operation – malicious or not – leaves a trail." Forensic investigators can follow a trail of metadata and other technical properties. VIPS has done that.

### **A "High-Class Entity?"**

If, as we strongly suspect, Mueller is relying for forensics solely on CrowdStrike, the discredited firm hired by the DNC in the spring of 2016, he is acting more in the mold of Inspector Clouseau than the crackerjack investigator he is reputed to be. It simply does not suffice for Mueller's former colleague James Comey to tell Congress that CrowdStrike is a "high-class entity." It is nothing of the sort and, in addition to its documented incompetence, it is riddled with conflicts of interest. Comey needs to explain why he kept the FBI away from the DNC computers after they were said to have been "hacked."

And former National Intelligence Director James Clapper needs to explain his claim last November that "the forensic evidence was overwhelming about what the Russians had done." What forensic evidence? From CrowdStrike? We at VIPS, in contrast, are finding more and more forensic evidence that the DNC emails were leaked, not hacked by the Russians or anyone else – and that "Guccifer 2.0" is an out-and-out

fraud. Yes, we can prove that from forensics too.

### **But the Talking Heads Say ...**

Again, if Mueller's incomplete investigation is allowed to assume the status of Holy Writ, most Americans will continue to believe that – whether you colluded the Russians or not – Putin came through for you big time. In short, absent President Putin's help, you would not be president.

Far too many Americans will still believe this because of the mainstream-media fodder – half-cooked by intelligence leaks – that they have been fed for two and a half years. The media have been playing *the* central role in the effort of the MICIMATT (the Military-Industrial-Congressional-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think-Tank) complex to stymie any improvement in relations with Russia. We in VIPS have repeatedly demonstrated that the core charges of Russian interference in the 2016 election are built on a house of cards. But, despite our record of accuracy on this issue – not to mention our pre-Iraq-war warnings about the fraudulent intelligence served up by our former colleagues – we have gotten no play in mainstream media.

Most of us have chalked up decades in the intelligence business and many have extensive academic and government experience focusing on Russia. We consider the issue of “Russian interference” of overriding significance not only because the allegation is mischievously bogus and easily disproven. More important, it has brought tension with nuclear-armed Russia to the kind of dangerous fever pitch not seen since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, when the Russian provocation was real – authentic, not synthetic.

Sober minds resolved that crisis more than a half-century ago, and we all got to live another day. These days sober minds seem few and far between and a great deal is at stake. On the intelligence/forensics side, we have proved that the evidence adduced to “prove” that the Russians hacked into the DNC and Podesta emails and gave them to *WikiLeaks* is spurious. For example, we have examined metadata from one key document attributed to Russian hacking and shown that it was synthetically tainted with “Russian fingerprints.”

### **Who Left the Bread Crumbs?**

So, if it wasn't the Russians, who left the “Russian” breadcrumb “fingerprints?” We do not know for sure; on this question we cannot draw a conclusion based on the principles of science – at least not yet. We suspect, however, that cyber warriors closer to home were responsible for inserting the “tell-tale signs” necessary to attribute “hacks” to Russia. We tacked on our more speculative views regarding this intriguing issue onto the end of our July 24, 2017 [Memorandum](#) to you entitled “Intelligence Veterans Challenge Russia Hack Evidence.”

We recall that you were apprised of that Memorandum's key findings because you ordered then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo to talk to William Binney, one of our two former NSA Technical Directors and one of the principal authors of that Memorandum. On October 24, 2017, Pompeo began an hour-long meeting with Binney by explaining the genesis of the odd invitation to CIA Headquarters: “You are here because the president told me that if I really wanted to know about Russian hacking I needed to talk to you.”

On the chance Pompeo has given you no report on his meeting with Binney, we can tell you that Binney, a plain-spoken, widely respected scientist, began by telling Pompeo that his (CIA) people were lying to him about Russian hacking and that he (Binney) could prove it. Pompeo reacted with disbelief, but then talked of following up with the FBI and NSA. We have no sign, though, that he followed through. And there is good reason to believe that Pompeo himself may have been reluctant to follow up with his subordinates in the Directorate of Digital Innovation created by CIA Director John Brennan in 2015. CIA malware and hacking tools are built by the Engineering Development Group, part of that relatively new Directorate.

### **'Obfuscation'**

A leak from within the CIA, published on March 31, 2017 by *WikiLeaks* as part of the so-called "Vault 7" disclosures, exposed a cyber tool called "Marble," which was used during 2016 for "obfuscation" (CIA's word). This tool can be used to conduct a forensic attribution double game (aka a false-flag operation); it included test samples in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, and Russian. *Washington Post* reporter Ellen Nakashima, to her credit, immediately penned an informative article on the Marble cyber-tool, under the catching (and accurate) headline "WikiLeaks' latest release of CIA cyber-tools could blow the cover on agency hacking operations." That was apparently before Nakashima "got the memo." Mainstream media have otherwise avoided like the plague any mention of Marble.

Mr. President, we do not know if CIA's Marble, or tools like it, played some kind of role in the campaign to blame Russia



for hacking the DNC. Nor do we know how candid the denizens of CIA's Directorate of Digital Innovation have been with the White House – or with former Director Pompeo – on this touchy issue. Since it is still quite relevant, we will repeat below a paragraph included in our July 2017 Memorandum to you under the sub-heading "Putin and the Technology:"

*"We also do not know if you have discussed cyber issues in any detail with President Putin. In his interview with NBC's Megyn Kelly, he seemed quite willing – perhaps even eager – to address issues related to the kind of cyber tools revealed in the Vault 7 disclosures, if only to indicate he has been briefed on them. Putin pointed out that today's technology enables hacking to be "masked and camouflaged to an extent that no one can understand the origin" [of the hack] ... And, vice versa, it is possible to set up any entity or any individual that everyone will think that they are the exact source of that attack. Hackers may be anywhere," he said. "There may be hackers, by the way, in the United States who very craftily and professionally passed the buck to Russia. Can't you imagine such a scenario? ... I can."*

As we told Attorney General Barr five weeks ago, we consider Mueller's findings fundamentally flawed on the forensics side and *ipso facto* incomplete. We also criticized Mueller for failing to interview willing witnesses with direct knowledge, like *WikiLeaks'* Julian Assange.

**Political Enemies & Mainstream Media (Forgive the Redundancy)**

You may be unaware that in March 2017 lawyers for Assange and the Justice Department (acting on behalf of the CIA) reportedly were very close to an agreement under which Assange would agree to discuss “technical evidence ruling out certain parties” in the leak of the DNC emails and agree to redact some classified CIA information, in exchange for limited immunity. According to the investigative reporter John Solomon of *The Hill*, Sen. Mark Warner, (D-VA) vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, learned of the incipient deal and told then-FBI Director Comey, who ordered an abrupt “stand down” and an end to the discussions with Assange.

Why did Comey and Warner put the kibosh on receiving “technical evidence ruling out certain parties” [read Russia]? We won’t insult you with the obvious answer. Assange is now in prison, to the delight of so many – including Mrs. Clinton who has said Assange must now “answer for what he has done.”

But is it too late to follow up somehow on Assange’s offer? Might he or his associates be still willing to provide “technical evidence” showing, at least, who was *not* the culprit?

You, Mr. President, could cause that to happen. You would have to buck strong resistance at every turn, and there all manner of ways that those with vested interests and a lot of practice in sabotage can try to thwart you – with the full cooperation of most media pundits. By now, you know all too well how that works.

But you are the president. And there may be no better time

than now to face them down, show the spurious nature of the concocted “evidence” attempting to put you in “Putin’s pocket,” and – not least – lift the cloud that has prevented you from pursuing a more decent relationship with Russia.

*For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity*

**William Binney**, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

**Bogdan Dzakovic**, former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security (ret.) (associate VIPS)

**Philip Giraldi**, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

**Mike Gravel**, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

**James George Jatras**, former U.S. diplomat and former foreign policy adviser to Senate leadership (Associate VIPS)

**Larry Johnson**, former CIA Intelligence Officer & former State Department Counter-Terrorism Official, (ret.)

**Michael S. Kearns**, Captain, USAF (ret.); ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC)

**John Kiriakou**, former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former Senior Investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

**Karen Kwiatkowski**, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at

Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

**Clement J. Laniewski**, LTC, U.S. Army (ret.)

**Linda Lewis**, WMD preparedness policy analyst, USDA (ret.)

**Edward Loomis**, NSA Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

**David MacMichael**, former Senior Estimates Officer, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

**Ray McGovern**, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA presidential briefer (ret.)

**Elizabeth Murray**, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East & CIA political analyst (ret.)

**Todd E. Pierce**, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

**Peter Van Buren**, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

**Robert Wing**, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (former) (associate VIPS)

**Ann Wright**, U.S. Army Reserve Colonel (ret) and former U.S. Diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Iraq War

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## 7 Years of Lies About Assange Won't Stop Now

One of the few towering figures of our time was reduced to nothing more than a sex pest and scruffy bail-skipper, writes Jonathan Cook.

By **Jonathan Cook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



For seven years, from the moment Julian Assange sought refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London, they have been telling us we were wrong, that we were paranoid conspiracy theorists. We were told there was no real threat of Assange's extradition to the United States, that it was all in our fevered imaginations.

For seven years, we have had to listen to a chorus of journalists, politicians and "experts" telling us that Assange was nothing more than a fugitive from justice, and that the British and Swedish legal systems could be relied on to handle his case in full accordance with the law. Barely a "mainstream" voice was raised in his defense in all that time.

From the moment he sought asylum, Assange was cast as an outlaw. His work as the founder of *Wikileaks* – a digital platform that for the first time in history gave ordinary people a glimpse into the darkest recesses of the most secure vaults in the deepest of Deep States – was erased from the record.

Assange was reduced from one of the few towering figures of our time – a man who will have a central place in history books, if we as a species live long enough to write those books – to nothing more than a sex pest, and a scruffy bail-skipper.

The political and media class crafted a narrative of half-truths about the sex charges Assange was under investigation

for in Sweden. They overlooked the fact that Assange had been allowed to leave Sweden by the original investigator, who dropped the charges, only for them to be revived by another investigator with a well-documented political agenda.

They failed to mention that Assange was always willing to be questioned by Swedish prosecutors in London, as had occurred in dozens of other cases involving extradition proceedings to Sweden. It was almost as if Swedish officials did not want to test the evidence they claimed to have in their possession.

The media and political courtiers endlessly emphasized Assange's bail violation in the U.K., ignoring the fact that asylum seekers fleeing legal and political persecution don't usually honor bail conditions imposed by the very state authorities from which they are seeking asylum.

### **Ignoring Mounting Evidence**

The political and media establishment ignored the mounting evidence of a secret grand jury in Virginia formulating charges against Assange, and ridiculed *Wikileaks'* concerns that the Swedish case might be cover for a more sinister attempt by the U.S. to extradite Assange and lock him away in a high-security prison, as had happened to whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

They belittled the 2016 verdict of a panel of United Nations legal scholars that the U.K. was "arbitrarily detaining" Assange. The media were more interested in the welfare of his cat.

They ignored the fact that after Ecuador changed presidents – with the new one keen to win favor with Washington – Assange was placed under more and more severe forms of solitary confinement. He was denied access to visitors and basic means of communications, violating both his asylum status and his human rights, and threatening his mental and physical wellbeing.

Equally, they ignored the fact that Assange had been given diplomatic status by Ecuador, as well as Ecuadorean citizenship. Britain was obligated to allow him to leave the embassy, using his diplomatic immunity, to travel unhindered to Ecuador. No “mainstream” journalist or politician thought this significant either.

They turned a blind eye to the news that, after refusing to question Assange in the U.K., Swedish prosecutors had decided to quietly drop the case against him in 2015. Sweden had kept the decision under wraps for more than two years.

It was a freedom of information request by an ally of Assange, not a media outlet, that unearthed documents showing that Swedish investigators had, in fact, wanted to drop the case against Assange back in 2013. The UK, however, insisted that they carry on with the charade so that Assange could remain locked up. A British official emailed the Swedes: “Don’t you dare get cold feet!!!”

### **Documents Destroyed**

Most of the other documents relating to these conversations were unavailable. They had been destroyed by the U.K.’s Crown Prosecution Service in violation of protocol. But no one in the political and media establishment cared, of

course.

Similarly, they ignored the fact that Assange was forced to hole up for years in the embassy, under the most intense form of house arrest, even though he no longer had a case to answer in Sweden. They told us – apparently in all seriousness – that he had to be arrested for his bail infraction, something that would normally be dealt with by a fine.

And possibly most egregiously of all, most of the media refused to acknowledge that Assange was a journalist and publisher, even though by failing to do so they exposed themselves to the future use of the same draconian sanctions should they or their publications ever need to be silenced. They signed off on the right of the U.S. authorities to seize any foreign journalist, anywhere in the world, and lock him or her out of sight. They opened the door to a new, special form of rendition for journalists.

This was never about Sweden or bail violations, or even about the discredited Russia-gate narrative, as anyone who was paying the vaguest attention should have been able to work out. It was about the U.S. Deep State doing everything in its power to crush WikiLeaks and make an example of its founder.

It was about making sure there would never again be a leak like that of “Collateral Murder,” the military video released by *Wikileaks* in 2007 that showed U.S. soldiers celebrating as they murdered Iraqi civilians. It was about making sure there would never again be a dump of U.S. diplomatic cables, like those released in 2010 that revealed



the secret machinations of the U.S. empire to dominate the planet whatever the cost in human rights violations.

Now the pretense is over. The British police invaded the diplomatic territory of Ecuador – invited in by Ecuador after it tore up Assange's asylum status – to smuggle him off to jail. Two vassal states cooperating to do the bidding of the U.S. empire. The arrest was not to help two women in Sweden or to enforce a minor bail infraction.

No, the British authorities were acting on an extradition warrant from the U.S. And the charges the U.S. authorities have concocted relate to Wikileaks' earliest work exposing the U.S. military's war crimes in Iraq – the stuff that we all once agreed was in the public interest, that British and U.S. media clamored to publish themselves.

Still the media and political class is turning a blind eye. Where is the outrage at the lies we have been served up for these past seven years? Where is the contrition at having been gulled for so long? Where is the fury at the most basic press freedom – the right to publish – being trashed to silence Assange? Where is the willingness finally to speak up in Assange's defense?

It's not there. There will be no indignation at the *BBC*, or the *Guardian*, or *CNN*. Just curious, impassive – even gently mocking – reporting of Assange's fate.

And that is because these journalists, politicians and experts never really believed anything they said. They knew all along that the U.S. wanted to silence Assange and to crush *Wikileaks*. They knew that all along and they didn't care. In fact, they happily conspired in paving the way for

today's kidnapping of Assange.

They did so because they are not there to represent the truth, or to stand up for ordinary people, or to protect a free press, or even to enforce the rule of law. They don't care about any of that. They are there to protect their careers, and the system that rewards them with money and influence. They don't want an upstart like Assange kicking over their applecart.

Now they will spin us a whole new set of deceptions and distractions about Assange to keep us anaesthetized, to keep us from being incensed as our rights are whittled away, and to prevent us from realizing that Assange's rights and our own are indivisible. We stand or fall together.

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## RAY McGOVERN: Unaccountable Media Faced with Dilemma in Next Phase of Deep State-gate

Now that the media has been exposed for wrongly siding with the intelligence agencies, how will it handle Devin Nunes's criminal referrals in Deep State-gate?, asks Ray McGovern.

**By [Ray McGovern](#)**

*Special to Consortium News*



Readers of *The Washington Post* on Monday were treated to more of the same from editorial page chief Fred Hiatt. Hiatt, who won his spurs by promoting misleading “intelligence” about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and suffered no consequences, is at it again.

This time he is trying to adjust to the fading prospect of a Deus ex Mueller to lessen Hiatt’s disgrace for being among the most shameless in promoting the Trump-Russia collusion narrative.

He is not giving up. When you are confident you will not lose your job so long as you adhere to the agenda of the growing Military-Industrial-Congressional-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think-Tank complex (MICIMATT if you will), you need not worry about being a vanguard for the corporate media. It is almost as though Hiatt is a tenured professor in an endowed chair honoring Judith Miller, the *New York Times* reporter who perhaps did most to bring us Iraqi WMD.

In his Monday column Hiatt warned: “Trump was elected with the assistance of Russian spies and trolls, which he openly sought and celebrated. But he did not (or so we are told) secretly conspire with them.” In effect, Hiatt is saying, *soto voce*: “Fie on former (now-de-canonized) Saint Robert of Mueller; we at the *Post* and our colleagues at *The New York Times*, CNN et al. know better, just because we’ve been saying so for more than two years.”

*Times* executive editor Dean Baquet said, about the backlash to the *Times*’ “collusion” coverage: “I have no regrets. It’s not our job to determine whether or not there was

illegality.” CNN President Jeff Zucker said: “We are not investigators. We are journalists.” (One wonders what investigative journalist Bob Parry, who uncovered much of Iran-Contra and founded this site, would have thought of that last one.)

## **Going in Circles**

Hiatt’s circular reasoning is all too familiar. It is the kind a former director of national intelligence excels at when he’s not lying, sometimes under oath. For instance, James Clapper was hawking his memoir at the Carnegie Endowment last year when he was confronted by unexpectedly direct questions from the audience.

Asked about the misleadingly labeled, rump “Intelligence Community Assessment” (ICA) of Jan. 6, 2017, which he orchestrated, and which blamed Russia for interfering in the 2016 election, Clapper gave an ipse dixit response: The ICA simply had to be correct because that’s what he had told President Barack Obama and President-elect Donald Trump.

In fact, that “Intelligence Community Assessment” stands out as the most irresponsible, evidence-free and at the same time consequential crock of intelligence analysis since the National Intelligence Estimate of Oct. 2002 claimed there was WMD in Iraq. Recall that that one was shaped by out-and-out fraudulent intelligence to “justify” an attack on Iraq six months later.

Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), as chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, described the main thrust of the committee’s five-year bipartisan report, stating, “In making the case for war, the [Bush] Administration repeatedly

presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent.”

Hiatt was one of the media’s major offenders, feeding on what the Cheney/Bush folks told him. When no “weapons of mass destruction” were found in Iraq, Hiatt conceded during an interview with *The Columbia Journalism Review* that, “If you look at the editorials we write running up [to the war], we state as flat fact that he [Saddam Hussein] has weapons of mass destruction ... If that’s not true, it would have been better not to say it.” [CJR, March/April 2004] As Parry wryly observed at the time in a piece calling for Hiatt’s dismissal, “Yes, that is a common principle of journalism, that if something isn’t real, we’re not supposed to confidently declare that it is.”

### **The Morning After**

The media set the prevailing tone the day after the ICA was published. The banner headline atop page one of the *Times* read: “Putin Led Scheme to Aid Trump, Report Says.” That put in motion more than two years of Dick Cheney-like chicanery in the media.

Buried inside the *Times* that same day was a cautionary paragraph written by staff reporter Scott Shane who noted, “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the [three] agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. That is a significant omission.” Indeed it was; and remains so.

(Sadly, Shane was then given his marching orders and fell in line with many other formerly reputable journalists in what

has been the most miserable performance by the mainstream media since they helped pave the way for war on Iraq.)

Clapper and Hiatt are kindred souls when it comes to the “profound effect” of Russian election interference. In his column, Hiatt asserted as flat fact that: “Trump was elected with the assistance of Russian spies and trolls ...” At the Carnegie event in November, Clapper opined:

“As a private citizen, understanding the magnitude of what the Russians did and the number of citizens in our country they reached and the different mechanisms that, by which they reached them, to me it stretches credulity to think they didn’t have a profound impact on election on the outcome of the election.”

### **Hiatt: Captain of Cheerleaders**

Hiatt emulated peppy, preppy cheerleader George W. Bush in leading Americans to believe that war on Iraq was necessary. Appointed *Washington Post* editorial page editor in 2000, he still runs the page – having not been held accountable for gross misfeasance, if not malfeasance, on Iraq. Shades of Clapper, whom President Obama allowed to stay on as director of national intelligence for three and a half years after Clapper lied under oath to the Senate Intelligence Committee about NSA surveillance of U.S. persons.

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That Obama appointed Clapper to lead the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election speaks volumes.

Clapper claims to have expertise on Russia and has made no effort to disguise his views on “the Russians.” Two years ago, he told Chuck Todd on *Meet the Press*:

“... in context with everything else we knew the Russians were doing to interfere with the election, and just the historical practices of the Russians, who are typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique ... we were concerned.”

It beggars belief that Obama could have been unaware of Clapper’s bizarre views on “the Russians.” Clearly, Obama was bowing yet again to pressure from powerful Deep State actors arguing that Clapper was the ideal man for the job.

And there is now documentary evidence that, from the Deep State point of view, indeed he was. In the text exchanges between discredited FBI sleuth Peter Strzok and his girlfriend, Lisa Page, a lawyer working for the FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, it seems clear that Obama wanted to be kept apprised of the FBI’s behind-the-scenes machinations. In a Sept. 2, 2016 text to Strzok, Page writes that she was preparing talking points because the president “wants to know everything we’re doing.”

### **A Sweaty Pate?**

Clapper is aware now that he is going to have to sweat it out. He may believe he can ignore White House press secretary Sarah Sanders, who has said that he and other former intelligence officials should be investigated after special counsel Mueller did not establish

collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia.

But recent statements by members of the House and Senate intelligence committees cannot be dismissed so easily. In his media appearances, the supremely confident, hero-of-many-liberals Clapper has been replaced by a squirming (but-Obama-made-me-do-it) massager of facts. He may find it harder this time to avoid being held accountable.

Devin Nunes (R-CA), the House Intelligence Committee ranking member, has gone on the offensive, writing Friday that committee Republicans “will soon be submitting criminal referrals on numerous individuals involved ... in the abuse of intelligence for political purposes. These people must be held to account to prevent similar abuses from occurring in the future.”

On Sunday, Nunes told Fox News he’s preparing to send eight criminal referrals to the Department of Justice this week concerning alleged misconduct during the Trump-Russia investigation. This will include leaks of “highly classified material” and conspiracies to lie to Congress and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court. It’s no-holds-barred for Nunes, who has begun to talk publicly about prison for those whom DOJ might indict and bring to trial.

Nunes’s full-speed-ahead offensive is being widely ignored in “mainstream” media (with the exception of Fox), giving the media the quality of “The Dog That Did Not Bark in the Night.” The media has put its ducks in a row, such as they are, to try to rip Attorney General William Barr apart this coming week when he releases the redacted text of the Mueller report that so disappointed the Democratic



Party/media coalition.

But how will they cover criminal referrals of the “heroes” who have leaked so much to them, providing grist for their Russia-gate mill? They will likely find a way, eventually, but the media silence about Nunes is depriving oxygen to the story.

On Sunday, Nunes said,

“They [the Democrats] have lied multiple times to the American people. All you have to do is look at their phony memos. They have had the full support of the media, 90 percent of the media in this country. They all have egg on their face. And so the fact of the matter remains, is there going to be – is justice going to be served or is justice going to be denied? And that’s why we’re sending over these criminal referrals.”

Nunes is, of course, trying to project an image of confidence, but he knows he is fighting uphill. There is no more formidable foe than the MICIMATT, with the media playing *the* crucial role in these circumstances. How will the American people be able to see egg on anyone’s face if the “mainstream media” find ways to wipe it off and turn the tables on Nunes, as they have successfully done in the past?

Though the Democrats now control the House, they have lost some key inside-the-Deep-State allies.

By all appearances, House Democrats still seem to be banking on help from the usual suspects still on duty in the FBI, CIA, and the Justice Department. Lacking that they seem

ready to go down with the Schiff–Rep. Adam Schiff of California, perhaps the most virulent Russia-gater that there’s been.

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Clapper is no long in position to help from the inside, and there’s no knowing how his sleepy replacement, Dan Coates, will react, if and when he wakes up long enough to learn chapter and verse about the machinations and dramatic personae of 2016.

Of course, there is a new sheriff in town running the Department of Justice. Attorney General William Barr, for better or ill, is a far cry from Jeff Sessions, who let himself be diddled into recusing himself. He’s not Rod Rosenstein either, whose involvement in this affair may have already earned him a prominent place on Nunes’s list of referrals.

### **What Did Obama Know, and When Did He Know It?**

BREAKING: A high-level source tells me it was Brennan who insisted that the unverified and fake Steele dossier be included in the Intelligence Report... Brennan should be asked to testify under oath in Congress ASAP.

– Senator Rand Paul (@RandPaul) March 27, 2019

On top of this, Sen. Rand Paul (R, KY) has called for an investigation into the origins of Mueller’s probe, including on the dicey question of how witting President Obama was of the Deep State chicanery during the last months of his administration. Page did tell Strzok in that Sept. 2, 2016 text that the president “wants to know everything we’re

doing.”

Sen. Paul has also tweeted information from “a high-level source” that it was former CIA Director John Brennan who “insisted that the unverified and fake Steele dossier be included in the Intelligence Report... Brennan should be asked to testify under oath in Congress ASAP.”

### **Vying for Media Attention**

If, as expected, Nunes discloses the names of those being criminally referred to DOJ, and Barr releases a redacted text of the Mueller report, the “mainstream” media will have a fresh challenge on their hands. The odds would seem to favor the media covering the Democrats’ predictable criticism of Barr – and perhaps even of Mueller, now that he has been defrocked.

The *Post*’s Hiatt should be counted on, as always, to play a leading role.

At the same time, there are signs the America people are tired of this. It would be difficult though for the media to avoid reporting on criminal referrals of very senior law enforcement and intelligence officials. Given the media’s obvious preference for siding with the intelligence agencies and reporting on Russia-gate rather than Deep-State-gate, it would be even harder for the media to explain why these officials would be in trouble.

Things appear to be unraveling but, as always, much will depend on whether the media opts to remain the “dog that didn’t bark,” and succeeds again in hoodwinking too many people.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years and prepared the President's Daily Brief for Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. He is on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

**We got Russia-gate right. Help us to keep on going.**

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## Russia-gate's Successor Gambit

Now the propaganda crusade has been initiated to defame the AG, writes James Howard Kunstler.

By **James Howard Kunstler**

*Clusterfuck Nation*



**H**aving disgraced themselves with full immersion in the barren Russia-gate “narrative,” the Resistance is now tripling down on Russia-gate’s successor gambit: obstruction of justice where there was no crime in the first place. What exactly was that bit of mischief Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller inserted in his final report, saying that “...while this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him?”

It’s this simple: prosecutors are charged with finding crimes. If there is insufficient evidence to bring a case, then that is the end of the matter. Prosecutors, special or

otherwise, are not authorized to offer hypothetical accounts where they can't bring a criminal case. But Mueller produced a brief of arguments pro-and-con about obstruction for others to decide upon. In doing that, he was out of order, and maliciously so.

Of course, Attorney General William Barr took up the offer and declared the case closed, as he properly should where the prosecutor could *not conclude that a crime was committed*. One hopes that the AG also instructed Mueller and his staff to shut the f... up vis-à-vis further ex post facto "anonymous source" speculation in the news media. But, of course, the Mueller staff – which inexplicably included lawyers who worked for the Clinton Foundation and the Democratic National Committee – at once started insinuating to [New York Times](#) reporters that the full report would contain an arsenal of bombshells reigniting enough suspicion to fuel several congressional committee investigations.

The objective apparently is to keep President Donald Trump burdened, hobbled, and disabled for the remainder of his term, and especially in preparation for the 2020 election against whomever emerges from the crowd of lightweights and geriatric cases now roistering through the primary states. It also leaves the door open for the Resistance to prosecute an impeachment case, since that is a political matter, not a law enforcement action.

### **Setting up the AG**

This blog is not associated with any court other than public opinion, and I am free to hypothesize on the meaning of Mueller's curious gambit, so here goes: Barr, long before

being considered for his current job, published his opinion that there was no case for obstruction of justice in the Russia-gate affair. By punting the decision to Barr, Mueller sets up the AG for being accused of prejudice in the matter – and, more to the point, has managed to generate a new brushfire in the press.

Barr could see this coming from a thousand miles away. I suspect he's pissed off about being set up like this. I suspect further that he knows this brushfire is intended to produce a smokescreen to obscure the rash of grand jury referrals coming down in the weeks and months ahead against the many government employees who concocted the Russia-gate scandal. Personally, I think Mueller himself deserves to be in that roundup for destroying evidence (the Strzok / Page cell phones) and for malicious prosecution against [General Michael Flynn](#), among other things.

The reason Mueller did not bring an obstruction-of-justice charge against Trump is that the evidence didn't support it. He didn't have a case. In a trial – say, after Trump was impeached or left office – the discovery process could bring to light evidence that might embarrass and even incriminate Mueller and his staff, and cast further opprobrium on the federal justice agencies. For instance: why did Mueller drag out his inquiry for two years when he must have known by at least the summer of 2017 that the Steele dossier was a fraud perpetrated by the Clinton campaign?

Now the propaganda crusade has been initiated to defame Barr. The idiots running the budding new congressional inquiries are going to pile on him, with the help of the news media. Though he is said to be an “old friend” of

Robert Mueller's, I believe they have become adversaries, perhaps even enemies. Mueller is not in a position of strength in this battle. He has now officially exited the stage as his mandate expires, so he has no standing to oppose further consequences in the aftermath of Russia-gate. What remains is a dastardly and seditious hoax as yet unadjudicated and an evidence trail a mile wide, and no amount of jumping up and down crying "woo woo woo" by Democratic lawmakers Jerrold Nadler, Maxine Waters, and Adam Schiff is going to derail that choo-choo train a'chuggin' down the tracks.

**James Howard Kunstler is author of "The Geography of Nowhere," which he says he wrote "Because I believe a lot of people share my feelings about the tragic landscape of highway strips, parking lots, housing tracts, mega-malls, junked cities, and ravaged countryside that makes up the everyday environment where most Americans live and work." He has written several other works of nonfiction and fiction. Read more about him [here](#). This article first appeared on his blog, [ClusterfuckNation](#).**

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## On the Pavement with Wikileaks

When Julian Assange does leave the embassy, it will be important to try to focus a hostile media on why it is Assange is actually wanted for extradition, Craig Murray comments.

By **Craig Murray**

*CraigMurray.org.uk*



Entirely unexpectedly, I have been down in London this last three days outside and around the Ecuadorean Embassy, following WikiLeaks' announcement that their sources indicate Julian might be expelled within hours or days. Plainly Julian's position within the Embassy has deteriorated fundamentally, to the extent he is now treated openly as a closely guarded prisoner. I still have not myself been granted permission to visit him and he is now very isolated.

Nothing has happened so far this weekend, though I stated from the start that if the police were going to move in, the most likely time would be 4am on Monday morning. There is a thought that the massive media presence occasioned by WikiLeaks' announcement may have succeeded in deterring President Lenin Moreno from the expulsion. Let us hope that will prove the case.

JUST NOW: Heavily armed UK diplomatic police question driver of "free speech" truck outside of Ecuadorian embassy in London [pic.twitter.com/tJan24DlbW](https://pic.twitter.com/tJan24DlbW)

– WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) [April 5, 2019](#)

I am very exhausted, having been more or less on 24 hour watch for three days. It was also somewhat difficult to tell Nadira her birthday celebration had shifted without notice from a restaurant in Edinburgh to a wet pavement in London. But I was very pleased to have a very fruitful in depth conversation with Kristin Hrafnsson, editor in chief of Wikileaks. Our thoughts ran along these lines, and as this



does not involve secrets but rather media handling, I see no harm in sharing these thoughts with you.

When Julian does leave the Embassy, whatever the circumstances in which he does that, it will be for a day or two the largest media story in the world and undoubtedly will lead all the news bulletins across every major country. The odds are that he will be leaving and facing a fight against extradition to the United States, on charges arising from the Chelsea Manning releases which revealed a huge amount about U.S. war crimes and other illegal acts.



It will be very important to try to focus a hostile media on why it is Julian is actually wanted for extradition. Not for the non-existent collusion with Russia to assist Trump, which is an entirely fake narrative. Not for meetings with Paul Manafort which never happened. Not for the allegations in Sweden which fell apart immediately they were subject to rational scrutiny. And not for any nonsense about whether he hacked the communications in the Embassy or cleaned up the cat litter.

This is not going to be an easy task because pretty well all of the Western media is going to want to focus on these false anti-Assange narratives, and they will be determined to give as little attention as possible to the fact he is a publisher facing trial for publishing leaked state documents which revealed state wrongdoing.

It is a classic and fundamental issue of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Drawing together a team that can get this message across in such MSM windows as are afforded, as well as through social media, is an important task. The team needs to be in readiness and to be backed by a suitable support infrastructure that can be dusted off and sprung into action. The public framing of Julian's position will undoubtedly impact on the final outcome; that is why the MSM have put in such a consistent effort to demonise one of the most interesting figures and original thinkers of our time.

If the balloon really had gone up this weekend, we would have been woefully unprepared to deal with the task of explaining the true story. If nothing else, this weekend's alarm has been very helpful in concentrating minds on the size of the task.

**Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010.**

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Consortium News' Record on Russia-

## gate—How CN Covered the ‘Scandal’: No. 5—‘Spooks Spooking Themselves’

On Thursday Daniel Lazare wrote a review of a book about how intelligence agents set up aspects of the “collusion” story. But in May 2018 Lazare had already begun figuring out the story for himself.

**By Daniel Lazare**

*Special to Consortium News*



With the news that a Cambridge academic-cum-spy named Stefan Halper infiltrated the Trump campaign, the role of the intelligence agencies in shaping the great Russiagate saga is at last coming into focus.

It’s looking more and more massive. The intelligence agencies initiated reports that Donald Trump was colluding with Russia, they nurtured them and helped them grow, and then they spread the word to the press and key government officials. Reportedly, they even tried to use these reports to force Trump to step down prior to his inauguration. Although the corporate press accuses Trump of conspiring with Russia to stop Hillary Clinton, the reverse now seems to be the case: the Obama administration intelligence agencies worked with Clinton to block “Siberian candidate” Trump.

The template was provided by ex-MI6 Director Richard Dearlove, Halper’s friend and business partner. Sitting in winged chairs in London’s venerable Garrick Club, according to *The Washington Post*, Dearlove told fellow MI6 veteran Christopher Steele, author of the famous “golden showers”

opposition research dossier, that Trump “reminded him of a predicament he had faced years earlier, when he was chief of station for British intelligence in Washington and alerted US authorities to British information that a vice presidential hopeful had once been in communication with the Kremlin.”

Apparently, one word from the Brits was enough to make the candidate in question step down. When that didn't work with Trump, Dearlove and his colleagues ratcheted up the pressure to make him see the light. A major scandal was thus born – or, rather, a very questionable scandal.

Besides Dearlove, Steele, and Halper, a bon-vivant known as “The Walrus” for his impressive girth, other participants include:

- Robert Hannigan, former director Government Communications Headquarters, GCHQ, UK equivalent of the NSA.
- Alexander Downer, top Australian diplomat.
- Andrew Wood, ex-British ambassador to Moscow.
- Joseph Mifsud, Maltese academic.
- James Clapper, ex-US Director of National Intelligence.
- John Brennan, former CIA Director (and now NBC News analyst).

## **In-Bred**

A few things stand out about this august group. One is its in-bred quality. After helping to run an annual confab known as the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar, Dearlove and Halper are now partners in a private venture calling itself “The Cambridge Security Initiative.” Both are connected to

another London-based intelligence firm known as Hakluyt & Co. Halper is also connected via two books he wrote with Hakluyt representative [Jonathan Clarke](#) and Dearlove has a close personal friendship with Hakluyt founder Mike Reynolds, yet another MI6 vet. Alexander Downer [served](#) a half-dozen years on Hakluyt's international advisory board, while Andrew Wood is linked to Steele via Orbis Business Intelligence, the private research firm that Steele helped found, and which produced the anti-Trump dossier, and where Wood now serves as an [unpaid advisor](#).

Everyone, in short, seems to know everyone else. But another thing that stands out about this group is its incompetence. Dearlove and Halper appear to be old-school paranoids for whom every Russian is [a Boris Badenov or a Natasha Fatale](#). In February 2014, Halper notified US intelligence that Mike Flynn, Trump's future national security adviser, had grown overly chummy with an Anglo-Russian scholar named Svetlana Lokhova whom Halper suspected of being a spy – suspicions that Lokhova [convincingly argues](#) are absurd.

In December 2016, Halper and Dearlove both resigned from the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar because they suspected that a company footing some of the costs was tied up with Russian intelligence – suspicions that Christopher Andrew, former chairman of the Cambridge history department and the seminar's founder, regards as ["absurd"](#) as well.

As head of Britain's foreign Secret Intelligence Service, as MI6 is formally known, Dearlove played a major role in drumming up support for the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq even while confessing at a secret Downing Street

meeting that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the [regime-change] policy.” When the search for weapons of mass destruction turned up dry, Clapper, as then head of the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, argued that the Iraqi military must have smuggled them into neighboring Syria, a charge with absolutely no basis in fact but which helped pave the way for US regime-change efforts in that country too.

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Brennan was meanwhile a high-level CIA official when the agency was fabricating evidence against Saddam Hussein and covering up Saudi Arabia’s role in 9/11. Wood not only continues to defend the Iraqi invasion, but dismisses fears of a rising fascist tide in the Ukraine as nothing more than “a crude political insult” hurled by Vladimir Putin for his own political benefit. Such views now seem distressingly misguided in view of the alt-right torchlight parades and spiraling anti-Semitism that are now a regular feature of life in the Ukraine.

The result is a diplo-espionage gang that is very bad at the facts but very good at public manipulation – and which therefore decided to use its skill set out to create a public furor over alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

### **It Started Late 2015**

The effort began in late 2015 when GCHQ, along with intelligence agencies in Poland, Estonia, and Germany, began

monitoring what they said were “suspicious ‘interactions’ between figures connected to Trump and known or suspected Russian agents.”

Since Trump was surging ahead in the polls and scaring the pants off the foreign-policy establishment by calling for a rapprochement with Moscow, the agencies figured that Russia was somehow behind it. The pace accelerated in March 2016 when a 30-year-old policy consultant named George Papadopoulos joined the Trump campaign as a foreign-policy adviser. Traveling in Italy a week later, he ran into Mifsud, the London-based Maltese academic, who reportedly set about cultivating him after learning of his position with Trump. Mifsud claimed to have “substantial connections with Russian government officials,” according to prosecutors. Over breakfast at a London hotel, he told Papadopoulos that he had just returned from Moscow where he had learned that the Russians had “dirt” on Hillary Clinton in the form of “thousands of emails.”

This was the remark that supposedly triggered an FBI investigation. *The New York Times* describes Mifsud as “an enthusiastic promoter of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia” and “a regular at meetings of the Valdai Discussion Club, an annual conference held in Sochi, Russia, that Mr. Putin attends,” which tried to suggest that he is a Kremlin agent of some sort. But WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange later tweeted photos of Mifsud with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and a high-ranking British intelligence official named Claire Smith at a training session for Italian security agents in Rome. Since it’s unlikely that British intelligence would rely on a Russian



agent in such circumstances, Mifsud's intelligence ties are more likely with the UK.

After Papadopoulos caused a minor political ruckus by telling a reporter that Prime Minister David Cameron should apologize for criticizing Trump's anti-Muslim pronouncements, a friend in the Israeli embassy put him in touch with a friend in the Australian embassy, who introduced him to Downer, her boss. Over drinks, Downer advised him to be more diplomatic. After Papadopoulos then passed along Mifsud's tip about Clinton's emails, Downer informed his government, which, in late July, informed the FBI.

### **Was Papadopoulos Set Up?**

Suspicious are unavoidable but evidence is lacking. Other pieces were meanwhile clicking into place. In late May or early June 2016, Fusion GPS, a private Washington intelligence firm employed by the Democratic National Committee, hired Steele to look into the Russian angle.

On June 20, he turned in the first of eighteen memos that would eventually comprise the Steele dossier, in this instance a three-page document asserting that Putin "has been cultivating, supporting and assisting TRUMP for at least 5 years" and that Russian intelligence possessed "kompromat" in the form of a video of prostitutes performing a "golden showers" show for his benefit at the Moscow Ritz-Carlton. A week or two later, Steele briefed the FBI on his findings. Around the same time, Robert Hannigan flew to Washington to brief CIA Director John Brennan about additional material that had come GCHQ's way, material so



sensitive that it could only be handled at “director level.”

One player was filling Papadopoulos’s head with tales of Russian dirty tricks, another was telling the FBI, while a third was collecting more information and passing it on to the bureau as well.

On July 7, 2016 Carter Page delivered a lecture on U.S.-Russian relations in Moscow in which he complained that “Washington and other western capitals have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption, and regime change.” Washington hawks expressed “unease” that someone representing the presumptive Republican nominee would take Russia’s side in a growing neo-Cold War.

Stefan Halper then infiltrated the Trump campaign on behalf of the FBI as an informant in early July, weeks before the FBI launched its investigation. Halper had 36 years earlier infiltrated the Carter re-election campaign in 1980 using CIA agents to turn information over to the Reagan campaign. Now Halper began to court both Page and Papadopoulos, independently of each other.

On July 11, Page showed up at a Cambridge symposium at which Halper and Dearlove both spoke. In early September, Halper sent Papadopoulos an email offering \$3,000 and a paid trip to London to write a research paper on a disputed gas field in the eastern Mediterranean, his specialty. “George, you know about hacking the emails from Russia, right?” Halper asked when he got there, but Papadopoulos said he knew nothing. Halper also sought out Sam Clovis, Trump’s national

campaign co-chairman, with whom he chatted about China for an hour or so over coffee in Washington.

The rightwing Federalist website speculates that Halper was working with Steele to flesh out a Sept. 14 memo claiming that “Russians do have further ‘kompromat’ on CLINTON (e-mails) and [are] considering disseminating it.” Clovis believes that Halper was trying “to create an audit trail back to those [Clinton] emails from someone in the campaign ... so they could develop a stronger case for probable cause to continue to issue warrants and to further an investigation.” Reports that Halper apparently sought a permanent post in the new administration suggest that the effort was meant to continue after inauguration.

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Notwithstanding Clovis’s nutty rightwing politics, his description of what Halper may have been up to makes sense as does his observation that Halper was trying “to build something that did not exist.” Despite countless hyper-ventilating headlines about mysterious Trump Tower meetings and the like, the sad truth is that Russiagate after all these months is shaping up as even more of a “nothing-burger” than Obama administration veteran Van Jones said it was back in mid-2017. Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller has indicted Papadopoulos and others on procedural grounds, he has indicted former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort for corruption, and he has charged a St. Petersburg company known as the Internet Research Agency with violating US election laws.

But the corruption charges have nothing to do with Russian collusion and nothing in the indictment against IRA indicates that either the Kremlin or the Trump campaign were involved. Indeed, the activities that got IRA in trouble in the first place are so unimpressive – just \$46,000 worth of Facebook ads that it purchased prior to election day, some pro-Trump, some anti, and some with no particular slant at all – that Mueller probably wouldn't even have bothered if he hadn't been under intense pressure to come up with anything at all.

The same goes for the army of bots that Russia supposedly deployed on Twitter. As *The Washington Post* noted in an oddly, cool-headed Dec. 2 article, 2,700 suspected Russian-linked accounts generated just 202,000 tweets in a six-year period ending in August 2017, a drop in a bucket compared to the one billion election-related tweets sent out during the fourteen months leading up to Election Day.

The Steele dossier is also underwhelming. It declares on one page that the Kremlin sought to cultivate Trump by throwing “various lucrative real estate development business deals” his way but says on another that Trump's efforts to drum up business were unavailing and that he thus “had to settle for the use of extensive sexual services there from local prostitutes rather than business success.”

Why would Trump turn down business offers when he couldn't generate any on his own? The idea that Putin would spot a U.S. reality-TV star somewhere around 2011 and conclude that he was destined for the Oval Office five years later is ludicrous. The fact that the Democratic National Committee funded the dossier via its law firm Perkins Coie

renders it less credible still, as does the fact that the world has heard nothing more about the alleged video despite the ongoing deterioration in US-Russian relations. What's the point of making a blackmail tape if you don't use it?

Even Steele is backing off. In a legal paper filed in response to a libel suit last May, he said the document "did not represent (and did not purport to represent) verified facts, but were raw intelligence which had identified a range of allegations that warranted investigation given their potential national security implications." The fact is that the "dossier" was opposition research, not an intelligence report. It was neither vetted by Steele nor anyone in an intelligence agency. Opposition research is intended to mix truths and fiction, to dig up plausible dirt to throw at your opponent, not to produce an intelligence assessment at taxpayer's expense to "protect" the country. And Steele was paid for it by the Democrats, not his government.

### **Using it Anyway**

Nonetheless, the spooks have made the most of such pseudo-evidence. Dearlove and Wood both advised Steele to take his "findings" to the FBI, while, after the election, Wood pulled Sen. John McCain aside at a security conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to let him know that the Russians might be blackmailing the president-elect. McCain dispatched long-time aide David J. Kramer to the UK to discuss the dossier with Steele directly.

Although Kramer denies it, *The New Yorker* found a former national-security official who says he spoke with him at the

time and that Kramer's goal was to have McCain confront Trump with the dossier in the hope that he would resign on the spot. When that didn't happen, Clapper and Brennan arranged for FBI Director James Comey to confront Trump instead. Comey later testified that he didn't want Trump to think he was creating "a J. Edgar Hoover-type situation – I didn't want him thinking I was briefing him on this to sort of hang it over him in some way."

But how could Trump think otherwise? As *Consortium News* founding editor Robert Parry observed a few days later, the maneuver "resembles a tactic out of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's playbook on government-style blackmail: I have some very derogatory information about you that I'd sure hate to see end up in the press."

Since then, the Democrats have touted the dossier at every opportunity, *The New Yorker* continues to defend it, while *Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg cites it as well, saying it's a "rather obvious possibility that Trump is being blackmailed." CNN, for its part, suggested not long ago that the dossier may actually be Russian disinformation designed to throw everyone off base, Republicans and Democrats alike.

It sounds more like CIA paranoia raised to the *nth* degree. But that's what the intelligence agencies are for, i.e. to spread fear and propaganda in order to stampede the public into supporting their imperial agenda. In this case, their efforts are so effective that they've gotten lost in a fog of their own making. If the corporate press fails to point this out, it's because reporters are too befogged themselves to notice.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as *Jacobin* and *The American Conservative*.

We got **Russia-gate** right. Help us to **keep on going**.

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## The Tale of a ‘Deep State Target’

Daniel Lazare reviews George Papadopoulos’s book about his misadventures with a nest of intelligence agents.

By **Daniel Lazare**

*Special to Consortium News*



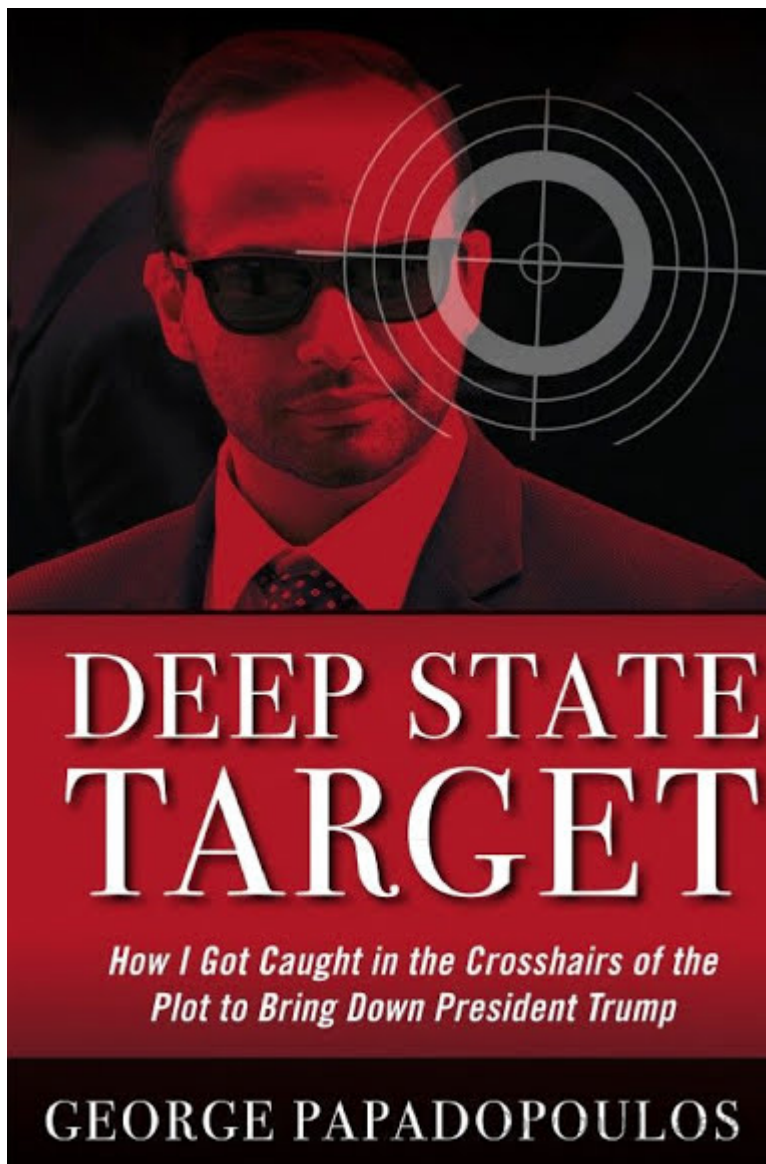
Now that Russian collusion is dead and buried thanks to Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller, the big question is how and why such charges arose.

George Papadopoulos’s “Deep State Target: How I Got Caught in the Crosshairs of the Plot to Bring Down President Trump” doesn’t tell the whole story. But this account by one of the crusade’s first victims pulls the covers off a few important aspects.

It describes a lengthy entrapment scheme that began when Papadopoulos told co-workers that presidential candidate

Donald Trump was about to appoint him to his foreign-policy advisory team.

The time was March 2016, the place the London Centre of International Law Practice, where Papadopoulos was working as an energy consultant, a job that mainly involves meeting with diplomats and going out for a dinner and drinks. Regarding the LCILP, he recalls it as a “strange operation” where there’s “no actual law practice going on that I can see” and which he later suspects is an intelligent front.



The reaction to his announcement was not good. “You should not be working with Trump,” one of Papadopoulos’s bosses tells him. “He’s a threat to society. He’s a racist. He’s anti-Muslim.”

But the tone changes when another LCILP director insists that he join him for a three-day conference at Link Campus University, a privately-owned educational center in Rome. There he is introduced to a well-dressed Maltese academic in his mid-fifties named Joseph Mifsud.



“He asks about my background,” Papadopoulos writes. “He asks if I have Russian contacts. I shake my head. ‘I heard you have connections,’ I say. ‘And that you might be able to help me with the campaign.’”

“Oh yes, absolutely,” Mifsud replies. “Let’s talk tonight. Let’s go to dinner.”

### **Into the Rabbit Hole**

With that, the author enters into a rabbit hole filled with twists and turns in which he found himself in the middle of a deep-state intelligence war over Trump’s alleged Kremlin ties and by the end of which he had served a 12-day sentence in a medium-security federal prison.

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In late April, Mifsud takes him to breakfast at a London hotel and informs him that he had just returned from Russia where officials say they have “dirt” on Hillary Clinton. “Emails of Clinton,” Mifsud says. “They have thousands of emails.” Papadopoulos writes it off as idle chitchat by a dubious diplomatic networker whom he has come to see as all talk and no action.

A friend from the Australian embassy introduces him to a top Aussie diplomat named Alexander Downer, who tells him over gin-and-tonics that his foreign-policy ideas are all wet.



A British foreign-ministry official takes him out for still more drinks and grills him about Russia.

Stefan Halper, an old CIA hand turned Cambridge academic, contacts him out of the blue and pesters him about Russia as well.

A mysterious Belorussian-American name Sergei Millian offers him a secret \$30,000-a-month PR job but only if he continues working for Trump.

An Israeli-American businessman named Charles Tawil buys him lunch at a steakhouse in Skokie, Ill. Later, in Greece, they go clubbing together in Mykonos, and then Tawil flies Papadopoulos to Israel where he presents him with \$10,000 in cash – money that a wary Papadopoulos leaves with a lawyer in Thessaloniki.

While flying back to the U.S. in July 2017, Papadopoulos runs into a squad of FBI agents as he is changing planes. “And then, finally, it dawns on me as they are going through my bags,” he writes. “Charles Tawil and the money. They are looking for \$10,000 in undeclared cash! That fucking guy was setting me up.”

“I’ve barely slept in two days,” he goes on after appearing before a judge. “I’m wearing the same shirt that I left Athens in. I smell like garbage. I look like garbage. I’m disoriented – because while I’ve just finally heard the charges, I still don’t really understand any of it.” To his horror, he learns that he is facing 25 years in prison on charges of obstruction of justice and lying to the FBI.

What was going on? Although Papadopoulos doesn’t go into

the pre-history, we know from other sources that, by late 2015, intelligence agencies were buzzing over reports that Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin were reaching out to one another behind the scenes.

### **Three Mood-Setting Events**

Spooks are paranoid by profession, but three recent events had put them particularly on edge. One was the Euromaidan uprising in Kiev in early 2014, which, by driving out an allegedly pro-Russian president, sparked a parallel revolt among Russian speakers in the east. Another was in Syria where U.S. backing of Islamist rebels had prompted Russia to intervene in support of President Bashar al-Assad. The third was on the U.S. campaign trail where Trump was thoroughly shocking foreign-policy “experts” by sounding off against regime change and making friendly noises toward Putin.

“But I think that I would probably get along with him very well,” Trump said of the Russian president in October 2015. When *CNN* host John Dickerson asked about Russian air assaults, he replied: “And as far as him attacking ISIS, I’m all for it. If he wants to be bombing the hell out of ISIS, which he’s starting to do, if he wants to be bombing ISIS, let him bomb them, John. Let him bomb them. I think we [can] probably work together much more so than right now.”

Intelligence agencies might have conceded that the U.S. was wrong to encourage far-right elements in Kiev and that it was equally mistaken in giving backhanded support to Al Qaeda and ISIS in the Middle East. They might have granted that Trump, for all his reality-TV bluster, had a point.

But western intelligence agencies don't do self-criticism. What they did was blame Putin for messing up their plans for a clean coup in Kiev and an equally neat ouster of Assad and then blamed Trump for arguing in his behalf. From there, it was a very short step to concluding that Trump was not only siding with Putin, but conspiring with him.

Individual intelligence assets went into action to prove this theory correct and, if need be, to invent a conspiracy where none existed. Joseph Mifsud was apparently among them. "Deep State Target" devotes a fair amount of space to his background. Although Mueller's indictment says Mifsud had "substantial connections to Russian government officials," a wealth of data indicates the opposite.

### **'Only One Master'**

Stephan Roh, a Swiss-German lawyer who employed Mifsud as a consultant, writes in a self-published book that he has "only one master: the Western Political, Diplomatic, and Intelligence World, his only home, of which he is still deeply dependent." Mifsud has been photographed with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and veteran diplomat Claire Smith, a top British intelligence official. Indeed, Mifsud taught a course with Smith for Italian military and law-enforcement personnel at the same Link Campus where he'd met Papadopolous.

Mifsud's ties with western intelligence are thus multifarious and deep. The same goes for the other people with whom ran Papadopoulos had contact.

Alexander Downer, the Aussie diplomat with whom he had drinks, turns out to be a director of a London private

intelligence firm known as Hakluyt & Co., which counts among its close associates Halper, the Cambridge academic who was ex-CIA, and Sir Richard Dearlove, ex-director of MI6, the British equivalent of the CIA. These two – Dearlove and Halper – ran an intelligence seminar at Cambridge and are also partners in a private venture calling itself “The Cambridge Security Initiative.” (See [“Spooks Spooking Themselves,” Consortium News](#), May 31, 2018.)

Millian, the man who offered Papadopoulos \$30,000 a month, turns out to be a [source](#) for the notorious Steele Dossier, compiled by ex-MI6 agent Christopher Steele. Steele, in turn, [sought counsel](#) at one point from fellow Cambridge man Dearlove on how to spread his findings. According to one of Willian’s buddies, Millian works for the FBI as well.

All of which is enough to get anyone’s conspiratorial juices flowing.

As for Charles Tawil, he arouses Papadopoulos’s fears of an intelligence link once he arrives in Mykonos by boasting of his friendship with Uganda President Yoweri Museveni and then-South African President Jacob Zuma, and declaring of convicted Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard, “it wasn’t our fault he got caught.” In Israel, he brags about helping to wiretap Syrian strong man Hafez al-Assad, father of the current president. “We could have killed him at any time,” he says. Finally, Papadopoulos reveals a private diplomatic cable [citing](#) Tawil as a U.S. intelligence asset back in 2006.

Five intelligence assets were thus hounding Papadopoulos at every turn while a sixth was compiling the dossier that

would send Russia-gate into overdrive. It added up to the greatest propaganda campaign since the furor over Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and, like those nonexistent WMDs, turns out to have been manufactured out of thin air.

### **Full-Court Press**

“Deep State Target” is vague about many details and Papadopoulos doesn’t have all the answers about Russia-gate.

No one at this point does. But his book leaves little doubt that he was the victim of a full-court press by intelligence assets in and around the FBI, CIA, and MI6.

Like everyone, Mifsud knew about Clinton’s emails – the ones she stored on her private server, not those that Wikileaks would later release – and fed Papadopoulos tidbits about a supposed Russia connection in the hope, no doubt, that he would pass them along to the Trump campaign. When he didn’t, Downer nonetheless reported back to Canberra that Papadopoulos had told him something along those lines. (Papadopoulos does not remember saying any such thing.) Once Canberra told Washington, the FBI investigation, dubbed Crossfire Hurricane, was on.

Halper tried to get him to admit to working with Russia: “It’s great that Russia is helping you and the campaign, right, George? George, you and your campaign are involved in hacking and working with Russia, right? It seems like you are a middleman for Trump and Russia, right? I know you know about the emails.”

Millian sends him an email shortly before the election telling him to “[p]lease be very cautious these last few days. Even to the point of not leaving your food and drinks

out of eye sight.”

“Obviously a Greek Orthodox guy like you has close ties to Russia,” Charles Tawil, observes, leaving it to Papadopoulos to fill in the blanks.

Diehard Russia-truthers will point out that, even though the charge that Papadopoulos obstructed justice by misleading the FBI was dropped, Papadopoulos is still a convicted liar who pled guilty to misleading the FBI about the exact timing of his meetings with Mifsud. But he says that he was frightened and nervous and didn't have his lawyer present and that he didn't even remember what he had said until he read it in the indictment.

He also says he now regrets taking his then-lawyers' advice to cop a plea: “There was never any pre-trial discovery. We never saw – or at least I hadn't seen – the transcript of my interview, so all we had was the prosecutor's word regarding what I had said. And we caved.” But he was an amateur running out of money while doing battle with a prosecutor with a [\\$25-million budget](#). He had little choice. Russia-gate was unstoppable – until the collusion theory finally collapsed.

**Daniel Lazare is the author of “The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy” (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde diplomatique* and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at [Daniellazare.com](#).**

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can bring you more stories like this one.

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## We Were Right on Russia-gate; Now Help Us Keep Our Work Going

For more than two years, led by our founding editor, Bob Parry, *Consortium News* consistently challenged the Russia-gate “collusion” story, which has now been officially dismissed. Please support us to keep our record of unique journalism going as we launch our annual Spring Fundraising Drive today.

**Aaron Maté**, one of the leading, independent journalists who debunked the Russia-gate collusion “scandal” tweeted last week:

The late, legendary Robert Parry’s contribution at [@Consortiumnews](#) has gone seriously under-appreciated. He & Greenwald both pushed back right from the start. I joined in many months later, inspired by both of them. <https://t.co/zC9pbi6qq7>

– Aaron Maté (@aaronjmate) [March 27, 2019](#)

Indeed, Parry blazed the trail of Russia-gate skepticism on this trail-blazing website he founded in 1995, very likely the first independent news website in history. Following his long experience as an investigative reporter at the Associated Press and *Newsweek* magazine, Bob simply applied professional journalistic standards and ethics to every story he ever covered. The Russia-gate saga was no different. Some people call it “evidence-based” journalism,

or even “scientific” journalism. Bob would have called it just journalism.

Being devoid of ideology or partisan bias, Bob covered the Russia-gate story by demanding evidence, and when none was found he said so. When the corporate media became unmoored in reporting this story, Bob also said so, pointing out how the media had abandoned the bedrock principles of journalism, which begins with skepticism. He set the story in its geo-political and domestic contexts, pointing out how dangerous the wild speculation masquerading as fact was to a world still at risk of nuclear conflict between Russia and the United States.

Depends on what your definition of ‘from the start’ is. Parry was one of the very few tracking the larger propaganda campaign of anti Russian hysteria since Ukraine in 2014. Most people only jumped on after the 2016 election, after the overall narrative had been building for 2yrs

– Morph (@FluorescentGrey) [March 27, 2019](#)

As he had been in skeptically reporting the WMD fiasco that led to the disastrous invasion of Iraq, Bob was attacked, this time for being a Kremlin stooge, a Putin puppet, and a Trump supporter, simply for keeping his head and doing his job. Bob was soon joined by other writers at **Consortium News** in making this website a leading publication in factual reporting about the burgeoning “scandal.” Some publications or online video sites had one or two skeptical writers or presenters.

But Bob made **Consortium News** a welcoming place for a host of experienced writers who took apart various aspects of the collusion conspiracy theory, including Ray McGovern, Gareth



Porter, Daniel Lazare, Patrick Lawrence and Joe Lauria. *Consortium News* is also the exclusive home of the Veterans Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, who published a series of groundbreaking memos challenging the Russia-gate story.

*Consortium News* pays its writers for their excellent work and is exclusively reader-supported. We depend on our audience to keep us going, so that when the dominant corporate media next tries to lead millions of Americans and people around the world astray, we'll be there to set the record straight.

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Thank you.

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Consortium News' Record on Russia-gate—How CN Covered the 'Scandal': No. 4—'The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate'

As Russia-gate continues to buffet the Trump administration, we now know that the "scandal" started with Democrats funding the original dubious allegations of Russian

interference, wrote Joe Lauria on Oct. 29, 2017.

## The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate

By Joe Lauria

*Special to Consortium News*

The two sources that originated the allegations claiming that Russia meddled in the 2016 election – without providing convincing evidence – were both *paid for* by the Democratic National Committee, and in one instance also by the Clinton campaign: the Steele dossier and the CrowdStrike analysis of the DNC servers. Think about that for a minute.

We have long known that the DNC did not allow the FBI to examine its computer server for clues about who may have hacked it – or even if it was hacked – and instead turned to CrowdStrike, a private company co-founded by a virulently anti-Putin Russian. Within a day, CrowdStrike blamed Russia on dubious evidence.

And, it has now been disclosed that the Clinton campaign and the DNC paid for opposition research memos written by former British MI6 intelligence agent Christopher Steele using hearsay accusations from anonymous Russian sources to claim that the Russian government was blackmailing and bribing Donald Trump in a scheme that presupposed that Russian President Vladimir Putin foresaw Trump's presidency years ago when no one else did.

Since then, the U.S. intelligence community has struggled to corroborate Steele's allegations, but those suspicions still

colored the thinking of President Obama's intelligence chiefs who, according to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, "hand-picked" the analysts who produced the Jan. 6 "assessment" claiming that Russia interfered in the U.S. election.

In other words, possibly all of the Russia-gate allegations, which have been taken on faith by Democratic partisans and members of the anti-Trump Resistance, trace back to claims paid for or generated by Democrats.

If for a moment one could remove the sometimes justified hatred that many people feel toward Trump, it would be impossible to avoid the impression that the scandal may have been cooked up by the DNC and the Clinton camp in league with Obama's intelligence chiefs to serve political and geopolitical aims.

Absent new evidence based on forensic or documentary proof, we could be looking at a partisan concoction devised in the midst of a bitter general election campaign, a manufactured "scandal" that also has fueled a dangerous New Cold War against Russia; a case of a dirty political "oppo" serving American ruling interests in reestablishing the dominance over Russia that they enjoyed in the 1990s, as well as feeding the voracious budgetary appetite of the Military-Industrial Complex.

Though lacking independent evidence of the core Russia-gate allegations, the "scandal" continues to expand into wild exaggerations about the impact of a tiny number of social media pages suspected of having links to Russia but that apparently carried very few specific campaign messages.

(Some pages reportedly were devoted to photos of puppies.)

## 'Cash for Trash'

Based on what is now known, Wall Street buccaneer Paul Singer paid for GPS Fusion, a Washington-based research firm, to do opposition research on Trump during the Republican primaries, but dropped the effort in May 2016 when it became clear Trump would be the GOP nominee. GPS Fusion has strongly denied that it hired Steele for this work or that the research had anything to do with Russia.

Then, in April 2016 the DNC and the Clinton campaign paid its Washington lawyer Marc Elias to hire Fusion GPS to unearth dirt connecting Trump to Russia. This was three months before the DNC blamed Russia for hacking its computers and supposedly giving its stolen emails to WikiLeaks to help Trump win the election.

"The Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee retained Fusion GPS to research any possible connections between Mr. Trump, his businesses, his campaign team and Russia, court filings revealed this week," *The New York Times* reported on Friday night.

So, linking Trump to Moscow as a way to bring Russia into the election story was the Democrats' aim from the start.

Fusion GPS then hired ex-MI6 intelligence agent Steele, it says for the first time, to dig up that dirt in Russia for the Democrats. Steele produced classic opposition research, not an intelligence assessment or conclusion, although it was written in a style and formatted to look like one.

It's important to realize that Steele was no longer working

for an official intelligence agency, which would have imposed strict standards on his work and possibly disciplined him for injecting false information into the government's decision-making. Instead, he was working for a political party and a presidential candidate looking for dirt that would hurt their opponent, what the Clintons used to call "cash for trash" when they were the targets.

Had Steele been doing legitimate intelligence work for his government, he would have taken a far different approach. Intelligence professionals are not supposed to just give their bosses what their bosses want to hear. So, Steele would have verified his information. And it would have gone through a process of further verification by other intelligence analysts in his and perhaps other intelligence agencies. For instance, in the U.S., a National Intelligence Estimate requires vetting by all 17 intelligence agencies and incorporates dissenting opinions.

Instead Steele was producing a piece of purely political research and had different motivations. The first might well have been money, as he was being paid specifically for this project, not as part of his work on a government salary presumably serving all of society. Secondly, to continue being paid for each subsequent memo that he produced he would have been incentivized to please his clients or at least give them enough so they would come back for more.

### **Dubious Stuff**

Opposition research is about getting dirt to be used in a mud-slinging political campaign, in which wild charges against candidates are the norm. This "oppo" is full of

unvetted rumor and innuendo with enough facts mixed in to make it seem credible. There was so much dubious stuff in Steele's memos that the FBI was unable to confirm its most salacious allegations and apparently refuted several key points.

Perhaps more significantly, the corporate news media, which was largely partial to Clinton, did not report the fantastic allegations after people close to the Clinton campaign began circulating the lurid stories before the election with the hope that the material would pop up in the news. To their credit, established media outlets recognized this as ammunition against a political opponent, not a serious document.

Despite this circumspection, the Steele dossier was shared with the FBI at some point in the summer of 2016 and apparently became the basis for the FBI to seek Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants against members of Trump's campaign. More alarmingly, it may have formed the basis for much of the Jan. 6 intelligence "assessment" by those "hand-picked" analysts from three U.S. intelligence agencies – the CIA, the FBI and the NSA – not all 17 agencies that Hillary Clinton continues to insist were involved. (Obama's intelligence chiefs, DNI Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan, publicly admitted that only three agencies took part and *The New York Times* printed a correction saying so.)

If in fact the Steele memos were a primary basis for the Russia collusion allegations against Trump, then there may be no credible evidence at all. It could be that because the three agencies knew the dossier was dodgy that there was no

substantive proof in the Jan. 6 “assessment.” Even so, a summary of the Steele allegations were included in a secret appendix that then-FBI Director James Comey described to then-President-elect Trump just two weeks before his inauguration.

Five days later, after the fact of Comey’s briefing was leaked to the press, the Steele dossier was published in full by the sensationalist website BuzzFeed behind the excuse that the allegations’ inclusion in the classified annex of a U.S. intelligence report justified the dossier’s publication regardless of doubts about its accuracy.

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### **Russian Fingerprints**

The other source of blame about Russian meddling came from the private company CrowdStrike because the DNC blocked the FBI from examining its server after a suspected hack. Within a day, CrowdStrike claimed to find Russian “fingerprints” in the metadata of a DNC opposition research document, which had been revealed by an Internet site called DCLeaks, showing Cyrillic letters and the name of the first Soviet intelligence chief. That supposedly implicated Russia.

CrowdStrike also claimed that the alleged Russian intelligence operation was extremely sophisticated and

skilled in concealing its external penetration of the server. But CrowdStrike's conclusion about Russian "fingerprints" resulted from clues that would have been left behind by extremely sloppy hackers or inserted intentionally to implicate the Russians.

CrowdStrike's credibility was further undermined when *Voice of America* reported on March 23, 2017, that the same software the company says it used to blame Russia for the hack wrongly concluded that Moscow also had hacked Ukrainian government howitzers on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine.

"An influential British think tank and Ukraine's military are disputing a report that the U.S. cyber-security firm CrowdStrike has used to buttress its claims of Russian hacking in the presidential election," *VOA* reported. Dimitri Alperovitch, a CrowdStrike co-founder, is also a senior fellow at the anti-Russian Atlantic Council think tank in Washington.

More speculation about the alleged election hack was raised with WikiLeaks' Vault 7 release, which revealed that the CIA is not beyond covering up its own hacks by leaving clues implicating others. Plus, there's the fact that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has declared again and again that WikiLeaks did not get the Democratic emails from the Russians. Buttressing Assange's denials of a Russian role, WikiLeaks associate Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, said he met a person connected to the leak during a trip to Washington last year.

And, William Binney, maybe the best mathematician to ever work at the National Security Agency, and former CIA analyst



Ray McGovern have [published a technical analysis](#) of one set of Democratic email metadata showing that a transatlantic “hack” would have been impossible and that the evidence points to a likely leak by a disgruntled Democratic insider. Binney has further stated that if it were a “hack,” the NSA would have been able to detect it and make the evidence known.

## **Fueling Neo-McCarthyism**

Despite these doubts, which the U.S. mainstream media has largely ignored, Russia-gate has grown into something much more than an election story. It has unleashed a neo-McCarthyite attack on Americans who are accused of being dupes of Russia if they dare question the evidence of the Kremlin’s guilt.

Just weeks after last November’s election, *The Washington Post* [published a front-page story](#) touting a blacklist from an anonymous group, called PropOrNot, that alleged that 200 news sites, including ***Consortiumnews.com*** and other leading independent news sources, were either willful Russian propagandists or “useful idiots.”

Last week, a [new list](#) emerged with the names of over 2,000 people, mostly Westerners, who have appeared on RT, the Russian government-financed English-language news channel. The list was part of a report entitled, “The Kremlin’s Platform for ‘Useful Idiots’ in the West,” put out by an outfit called European Values, with a [long list](#) of European funders.

Included on the list of “useful idiots” absurdly are CIA-friendly Washington Post columnist David Ignatius; David

Brock, Hillary Clinton's opposition research chief; and U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

The report stated: "Many people in Europe and the US, including politicians and other persons of influence, continue to exhibit troubling naïveté about RT's political agenda, buying into the network's marketing ploy that it is simply an outlet for independent voices marginalised by the mainstream Western press. These 'useful idiots' remain oblivious to RT's intentions and boost its legitimacy by granting interviews on its shows and newscasts."

The intent of these lists is clear: to shut down dissenting voices who question Western foreign policy and who are usually excluded from Western corporate media. RT is often willing to provide a platform for a wider range of viewpoints, both from the left and right. American ruling interests fend off critical viewpoints by first suppressing them in corporate media and now condemning them as propaganda when they emerge on RT.

### **Geopolitical Risks**

More ominously, the anti-Russia mania has increased chances of direct conflict between the two nuclear superpowers. The Russia-bashing rhetoric not only served the Clinton campaign, though ultimately to ill effect, but it has pushed a longstanding U.S.-led geopolitical agenda to regain control over Russia, an advantage that the U.S. enjoyed during the Yeltsin years in the 1990s.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Wall Street rushed in behind Boris Yeltsin and Russian oligarchs to

asset strip virtually the entire country, impoverishing the population. Amid widespread accounts of this grotesque corruption, Washington intervened in Russian politics to help get Yeltsin re-elected in 1996. The political rise of Vladimir Putin after Yeltsin resigned on New Year's Eve 1999 reversed this course, restoring Russian sovereignty over its economy and politics.

That inflamed Hillary Clinton and other American hawks whose desire was to install another Yeltsin-like figure and resume U.S. exploitation of Russia's vast natural and financial resources. To advance that cause, U.S. presidents have supported the eastward expansion of NATO and have deployed 30,000 troops on Russia's border.

In 2014, the Obama administration helped orchestrate a coup that toppled the elected government of Ukraine and installed a fiercely anti-Russian regime. The U.S. also undertook the risky policy of aiding jihadists to overthrow a secular Russian ally in Syria. The consequences have brought the world closer to nuclear annihilation than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

In this context, the Democratic Party-led Russia-gate offensive was intended not only to explain away Clinton's defeat but to stop Trump – possibly via impeachment or by inflicting severe political damage – because he had talked, insincerely it is turning out, about detente with Russia. That did not fit in well with the plan at all.

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