

Consortium News' Record on Russia-gate—How CN Covered the 'Scandal': No. 3—'The Tangled Threads of Russia-gate'

Once a Washington groupthink takes hold, as it has in the fervent belief about Russia-gate, respect for facts and logic fly out the window since all these important people can't be wrong, wrote Robert Parry on Dec. 5, 2017.

The Tangled Threads of Russia-gate

By Robert Parry

Special to Consortium News

A curious feature about the Russia-gate “scandal” is that its proponents ignore the growing number of moments when their evidence undercuts their narrative. Instead, they press ahead toward a predetermined destination in much the way that true-believing conspiracy theorists are known to do.

For instance, *The New York Times* ran [a story](#) on Monday, entitled “Operative Offered Trump Campaign Access to Putin,” detailing how a conservative operative “told a Trump adviser that he could arrange a back-channel meeting between Donald J. Trump and Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian president, according to an email sent to the Trump campaign” – and apparently described to the Times by a helpful source on Capitol Hill.

The *Times* quoted the email from National Rifle Association

member Paul Erickson to Trump campaign adviser Rick Dearborn as saying, “Putin is deadly serious about building a good relationship with Mr. Trump. ... [Putin] wants to extend an invitation to Mr. Trump to visit him in the Kremlin before the election.”

An NRA conference in Louisville, Kentucky, was supposed to be the location for the “first contact” between the Russians and the Trump campaign, according to the email.

The *Times* treated its new information as further confirmation of nefarious connections between the Trump campaign and the Russian government. Immediately after introducing this May 2016 email, which had the subject line, “Kremlin Connection,” the *Times* reprised the background of former FBI Director Robert Mueller conducting a special-prosecutor investigation into “Russian interference in the election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign.”

Note how the *Times*’ reference to “Russian interference” was treated as flat fact although the *Times* still hedges on “possible collusion” between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign. Like much of the U.S. mainstream media, the *Times* no longer bothers to use “alleged” in front of “Russian interference” even though no solid evidence of a coordinated Kremlin effort has been presented.

But there is a bigger problem with this “scoop”: If the Russia-gate narrative were correct – that the Kremlin had identified Trump years earlier as a likely U.S. president and undertook a multi-year campaign to bribe and blackmail him to be Moscow’s Manchurian candidate or Putin’s “puppet” as Hillary Clinton charged – the Russians wouldn’t need some

little-known “conservative operative” to serve as an intermediary in May 2016 to set up a back-channel meeting.

The Contradiction

In other words, assuming that the *Times*' story is correct, the email suggests the opposite of the impression that the *Times* wants its readers to get. The email is either meaningless in that it led to no actual meeting or it contradicts the storyline about a longstanding Russian operation to plant a patsy in the White House.

Times reporter Nicholas Fandos noted that it was unclear what Dearborn did in response to this overture, although the *Times* reported that Dearborn had forwarded a similar proposal by Christian conservative activist Rick Clay to Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who rebuffed the offer.

On Monday, I read the rest of the *Times* email story looking for some acknowledgement of the problems with its implied scenario, but found none. Fandos made references to other low-level efforts by Russians to make contact with Trump's advisers (without noticeable success, I might add), but again these examples actually run counter to the image of Trump as the Kremlin's prized chump.

If Putin had several years ago foreseen what no one else did – that Trump would become the U.S. president – then these ad hoc contacts with members of Trump's entourage in 2016 would not have been needed.

The *Times*' scoop parallels the story of the plea deal that Russia-gate prosecutors struck with low-level Trump foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos who admitted lying about

his contacts with an obscure academic in Stirling, Scotland, who supposedly offered to be another intermediary between Trump's team and the Kremlin.

According to court documents, Papadopoulos, a 30-year-old campaign aide, got to know a professor of international relations who claimed to have "substantial connections with Russian government officials," with the professor identified in press reports as Joseph Mifsud, who is associated with the University of Stirling.

The first contact between Mifsud and Papadopoulos supposedly occurred in mid-March 2016 in Italy, with a second meeting in London on March 24 when the professor purportedly introduced Papadopoulos to a Russian woman whom the young campaign aide believed to be Putin's niece, an assertion that Mueller's investigators determined wasn't true.

Trump, who then was under pressure for not having a foreign policy team, included Papadopoulos as part of a list drawn up to fill that gap, and Papadopoulos participated in a campaign meeting on March 31 in Washington at which he suggested a meeting between Trump and Putin, a prospect that other senior aides reportedly slapped down.

In other words, at least based on the reporting about the Dearborn email and the Papadopoulos overture, there is no reason to believe that Trump was colluding with Moscow or had any significant relationship at all.

If these developments point to anything, it is to the opposite; that Russia was fishing for some contacts with what – however implausibly – was starting to look like a possible future U.S. president, but with whom they were not

well-connected.

Gotcha Moments

There have been similar problems with other Russia-gate “gotcha” moments, such as disclosures of a possible Trump hotel deal in Moscow with Mikhail Fridman of Russia’s Alfa Bank. Though Trump’s presumed financial tie-ins to Russian oligarchs close to Putin were supposed to be fundamental to the Russia-gate narrative, the outcome of the hotel deal turned out to be a big nothing.

One source knowledgeable about the proposed deal told me it fell apart because Trump was willing to put little on the table beyond the branding value of the Trump name. However, if Putin were actually trying to buy Trump’s loyalty, money presumably would have been no obstacle. Indeed, you would think that the more money used to line Trump’s pockets the better. But the hotel deal collapsed; there is no Trump hotel in Moscow.

Other Russia-gate cases are equally disconnected from what had been the original narrative about senior Russians spending years cultivating Trump as their Manchurian candidate.

The accusations against Trump’s onetime campaign chief Paul Manafort focus on his alleged failure to report income from – and pay taxes on – work that he did for the elected government of Ukraine before any involvement in the Trump campaign.

Last week’s guilty plea from former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn related to purportedly false

statements and omissions that he made when questioned by FBI agents about calls to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the transition, i.e., after Trump had been elected.

Despite the breathless coverage on MSNBC and the *Times*' excited headlines about how the "inquiry grows," there remain other core problems for the narrative. No matter how often the U.S. mainstream media asserts the suspicion of Russian "hacking" of Democratic emails as flat fact, no solid proof has yet been presented – and the claim has been denied by both the Russian government and WikiLeaks, which published the key emails.

Sleight of Hand

The *Times* and other mainstream media outlets play their sleight of hand on this key point by asserting that "U.S. intelligence agencies" have "concluded" that Russian intelligence services "hacked" the emails from the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chief John Podesta, but that summary ignores the specifics.

First of all, by using this summary of the facts, the *Times* and other outlets continue to give the false impression that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the conclusion, a false claim that Hillary Clinton and the mainstream press have asserted over and over, although it is now clear that no such consensus ever existed.

Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified that the Jan. 6 report on alleged Russian interference was produced by "hand-picked" analysts from only three organizations: the FBI, CIA and National Security Agency.

And, even those “hand-picked” analysts stipulated that they were not asserting Russian guilt as fact but only as their best guess. They included the disclaimer: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Even *New York Times* reporter Scott Shane initially noted the absence of evidence, writing: “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to ‘trust us.’”

Former senior U.S. intelligence officials, including the NSA’s ex-technical director William Binney, have raised further doubts about whether a “hack” occurred. Binney conducted tests on download speeds and determined that the extraction of one known batch of Democratic emails was not possible over the Internet, but did match the speed of a USB download onto a thumb drive, suggesting a leak from a Democratic insider.

So, rather than the many disparate strings of Russia-gate coming neatly together more than a year after last year’s election, the various threads either are becoming hopelessly tangled or flying off in different directions.

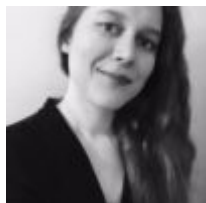
Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s.

A Year of Silencing Julian Assange

On this date in 2018, the Wikileaks publisher was cut off from the work of journalism, reports Elizabeth Vos.

By [Elizabeth Vos](#)

Special to Consortium News



One year ago Thursday, Ecuador's government under President Lenin Moreno silenced Julian Assange.

WikiLeaks wrote on [Twitter](#) Wednesday: "... March 28, marks one year that *WikiLeaks* publisher Julian Assange has been illegally gagged from doing journalism—any writing that expresses a 'political opinion'? even on his own treatment, after pressure from the U.S. on Ecuador."

On this date in 2018 Moreno imposed on Assange what Human Rights Watch's legal counsel Dinah Pokempner [described](#) as looking "more and more like solitary confinement." Moreno cut off Assange's online access and restricted visitors to the Ecuador embassy in London where Assange has had legal political asylum since 2012.

Moreno cited Assange's critical social media remarks about Ecuador's allies, the U.S. and Spain. Assange's near-total isolation, with the exception of visits from legal counsel during week days, has been augmented by the Ecuadorian government's imposition of a complex ["protocol,"](#) which, although eased slightly in recent months in respect of visits allowed, has not improved Assange's overall status over the last 12 months. In some respects, it seems to have

worsened.

WikiLeaks' [Courage Foundation](#) described the terms of the protocol:

“Explicit threats to revoke Julian’s asylum if he, or any visitors, breach or are perceived to breach, any of the 28 ‘rules’ in the protocol. The ‘protocol’ forbids Julian from undertaking journalism and expressing his opinions, under threat of losing his asylum. The rules also state that the embassy can seize Julian’s property or his visitors’ property and hand these to the UK police, and report visitors to the UK authorities. The protocol also requires visitors to provide the IMEI codes and serial numbers of electronic devices used inside the embassy, and states that this private information may be shared with undisclosed agencies.”

The protocol does not spell out all the restrictions imposed on Assange and his supporters over the last year. A bombshell report by [Cassandra Fairbanks](#) on Tuesday revealed Ecuador’s demand that Assange and his lawyer be scanned before entering a “highly bugged and monitored” conference room with a journalist.

Describing her experience, Fairbanks said she had been: “Locked in a cold, surveilled room for over an hour by Ecuadorian officials, as a furious argument raged between the country’s ambassador and Julian Assange.”

The argument reportedly centered on Assange’s refusal to submit to a body scan in order to enter the conference room, where Fairbanks waited. Fairbanks [reported](#) that Assange

shouted at the Ecuadorian ambassador, accusing the latter of acting as an agent of the United States government. The ambassador then told Assange to “shut up,” she reported.

WikiLeaks, writing via social media, has confirmed the “factual elements” of Fairbanks’ story.

Subject to Body Scans

Assange and his lawyers are now subjected to body scans in addition to conditions that, in the opinion of Ecuador’s former President Rafael Correa, already amounted to torture. In his argument with the ambassador, Assange protested that he was being treated like “a prisoner” and not a political asylee.

Assange’s supporters have claimed that rather than risk a public-relations fallout by removing Assange from the embassy by force, the U.S., UK and Ecuador are acting to hasten Assange’s physical and mental demise in hopes he will be forced to leave the embassy or become incapacitated.

WikiLeaks’ new Editor-in-Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson told *RT* in a televised interview: “We, of course, know that Lenin Moreno in Ecuador is willing to sacrifice Julian Assange for debt relief, that was reported by *The New York Times* in early December.”

The Courage Foundation summarized Assange’s plight:

“Julian Assange is the only publisher and journalist in the EU formally found to be arbitrarily detained by the UN human rights system. He is in dire circumstances, faces imminent termination of his asylum, extradition and life

in a US prison for publishing the truth about US wars, and has been gagged and isolated since 28 March 2018. He has been kept in the UK from his young family in France for eight years (where he lived before being arbitrarily detained in the UK), has not seen the sun for almost seven years, and has been found by the United Nations to be subjected to “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.”

On Thursday Ecuador’s foreign minister threatened additional “‘firm and sustained’ measures against Assange after [@WikiLeaks](#) reports on the [@INAPapers](#) offshore scandal involving the president and his brother,” [WikiLeaks tweeted](#).

Since Assange was cut off from the outside world, efforts by the United States to prosecute Assange and *WikiLeaks* have been exposed. That Assange had already been charged was inadvertently [revealed](#) by a cut-and-paste error by the U.S. attorney’s office of the Eastern District of Virginia. The [prosecution](#) of the publisher pertains to *WikiLeaks*’ Chelsea Manning-era publications, and possibly Vault 7, not to the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Manning Back in Jail

Thursday also marks the passage of Manning’s third week of imprisonment for her refusal to testify before a grand jury convened to prosecute *WikiLeaks* and Assange. Since being jailed, Manning’s supporters have [reported](#) that she has been kept in solitary confinement, where she will remain indefinitely until either the grand jury is disbanded or she agrees to testify without legal counsel and under a veil of secrecy.

Presumably, prosecutors hope to coerce Manning to backtrack on her testimony during her court-martial in 2013, in which she testified she acted alone, and instead indicate that Assange worked to incite or aid her in retrieving leaked material. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist [Chris Hedges](#) described the situation as “the new inquisition.”

The end of the collusion conspiracy theory came as a victory for Assange and WikiLeaks. Special Counsel Robert Mueller made it clear there would be no indictments against either for their roles during the 2016 election.

However, the damage has been significant, with Assange unable to comment and WikiLeaks saddled with residual, unresolved smears. Over the last three years, cable news pundits endlessly vilified *WikiLeaks* and Assange by claiming the publisher coordinated with the Trump presidential campaign and became an instrument of the Kremlin in 2016.

Meanwhile, *The Guardian* has allowed its [outlandish](#) story alleging that secret meetings took place between Assange and Paul Manafort in Ecuador’s London embassy three times between 2013 and 2016 to go un-retracted and unexplained. [WikiLeaks](#) has called the story “an intentional front page fabrication,” and launched a [Gofundme campaign](#) to raise funds to sue the newspaper. Hrafnsson [confirmed](#) the lawsuit is progressing.

On March 28 last year, friends and supporters of Assange spontaneously came together on hearing the news that he had been cut off from the outside world by the Ecuadorian government. For more than 10 hours, participants and viewers from across the planet raised their voices to [protest the](#)

injustice of Assange having been gagged.

The initial “Reconnect Julian” event led to subsequent “Unity4J” vigils. Over the past 12 months, demonstrations of support have unfolded across the globe, including many events organized by the Socialist Equality Party and a plethora of unaffiliated actions in solidarity with Assange.

The *WikiLeaks* founder’s mother, Christine Assange, wrote via social media: “At critical times throughout history, leaders have emerged to lead the fight for freedom. They risk their lives and liberty to do so. Most of us don’t have their courage, but we can unite to protect them. #FreeAssange #FreeManning”

Earlier Thursday, trucks emblazoned with supportive messages for Assange and Manning appeared in London and Washington, D.C.

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Three Lessons From ‘Failed’ Mueller Inquiry

Jonathan Cook analyzes what progressives can glean from a major squabble between different wings of the same neoliberal establishment.

By **JonathanCook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



Here are three important lessons for the progressive left to consider now that it is clear the inquiry by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Russia-gate is never going to uncover collusion between Donald Trump's camp and the Kremlin in the 2016 presidential election.

No. 1: Painting the Pig's face

The left never had a dog in this race. This was always an in-house squabble between different wings of the establishment. Late-stage capitalism is in terminal crisis, and the biggest problem facing our corporate elites is how to emerge from this crisis with their power intact. One wing wants to make sure the pig's face remains painted, the other is happy simply getting its snout deeper into the trough while the food lasts.

Russia-gate was never about substance, it was about who gets to image-manage the decline of a turbo-charged, self-harming neoliberal capitalism.

The leaders of the Democratic Party are less terrified of Trump and what he represents than they are of us and what we might do if we understood how they have rigged the political and economic system to their permanent advantage.

For them, it may look like Russia-gate was a failure, but it was actually a success. It deflected the left's attention from endemic corruption within the leadership of the Democratic Party, which supposedly represents the left. It

diverted the left's political energies towards the convenient bogeymen targets of Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

What Mueller found – all he was ever going to find – was marginal corruption in the Trump camp. And that was inevitable because Washington is mired in corruption. In fact, what Mueller revealed was the most exceptional forms of corruption among Trump's team while obscuring the run-of-the-mill stuff that would have served as a reminder of the endemic corruption infecting the Democratic leadership too.

An anti-corruption investigation would have run much deeper and exposed far more. It would have highlighted the Clinton Foundation, and the role of mega-donors such as James Simons, George Soros and Haim Saban who funded Hillary's campaign with one aim in mind: to get their issues into a paid-for national "consensus."

Further, in focusing on the Trump camp – and relative minnows such as Paul Manafort and Roger Stone – the Russia-gate inquiry actually served to shield the Democratic leadership from an investigation into the much worse corruption revealed in the content of the Democratic National Committee emails. It was the leaking / hacking of those emails that provided the rationale for Mueller's investigations. What should have been at the front and center of any inquiry was how the Democratic Party sought to rig its primaries to prevent party members selecting anyone but Hillary as their presidential candidate.

So, in short, Russia-gate has been two years of wasted energy by the left, energy that could have been spent both

targeting Trump for what he is really doing rather than what it is imagined he has done, and targeting the Democratic leadership for its own, equally corrupt practices.

No. 2: Trump Empowered

But it's far worse than that. It is not just that the left wasted two years of political energy on Russia-gate. At the same time, it empowered Trump, breathing life into his phony arguments that he is the anti-establishment president, a people's president the elites are determined to destroy.

Trump faces opposition from within the establishment not because he is "anti-establishment" but because he refuses to decorate the pig's snout with lipstick. He is tearing the mask off late-stage capitalism's greed and self-destructiveness. And he is doing so not because he wants to reform or overthrow turbo-charged capitalism but because he wants to remove the last, largely cosmetic constraints on the system so that he and his friends can plunder with greater abandon – and destroy the planet more quickly.

The other wing of the neoliberal establishment, the one represented by the Democratic Party leadership, fears that exposing capitalism in this way – making explicit its inherently brutal, wrist-slitting tendencies – will awaken the masses, that over time it will risk turning them into revolutionaries. Democratic Party leaders fear Trump chiefly because of the threat he poses to the image of the political and economic system they have so lovingly crafted so that they can continue enriching themselves and their children.

Trump's genius – his only genius – is to have appropriated, and misappropriated, some of the language of the left to

advance the interests of the 1 percent. When he attacks the corporate “liberal” media for having a harmful agenda, for serving as propagandists, he is not wrong. When he rails against the identity politics cultivated by “liberal” elites over the past two decades – suggesting that it has weakened the U.S. – he is not wrong. But he is right for the wrong reasons.

The corporate media, and the journalists they employ, are propagandists – for a system that keeps them wealthy. When Trump was a Republican primary candidate, the entire corporate media loved him because he was TV’s equivalent of clickbait, just as he had been since reality TV began to usurp the place of current affairs programs and meaningful political debate.

The handful of corporations that own the U.S. media – and much of corporate America besides – are there both to make ever-more money by expanding profits and to maintain the credibility of a political and economic system that lets them make ever more money.

The “liberal” corporate media shares the values of the Democratic Party leadership. In other words, it is heavily invested in making sure the pig doesn’t lose its lipstick. By contrast, Fox News and the shock-jocks, such as Trump, prioritize making money in the short term over the long-term credibility of a system that gives them license to make money. They care much less whether the pig’s face remains painted.

So Trump is right that the “liberal” media is undemocratic and that it is now propagandizing against him. But he is

wrong about why. In fact, all corporate media – whether “liberal” or not, whether against Trump or for him – is undemocratic. All of the media propagandizes for a rotten system that keeps the vast majority of Americans impoverished. All of the media cares more for Trump and the elites he belongs to than it cares for the 99 percent.

Similarly, with identity politics. Trump says he wants to make (a white) America great again, and uses the left’s obsession with identity as a way to energize a backlash from his own supporters.

Just as too many on the left sleep-walked through the past two years waiting for Mueller – a former head of the FBI, the U.S. secret police, for chrissakes! – to save them from Trump, they have been manipulated by liberal elites into the political cul-de-sac of identity politics.

Just as Mueller put the left on standby – into waiting-for-the-Messiah mode – so simple-minded, pussy-hat-wearing identity politics has been cultivated in the supposedly liberal bastions of the corporate media and Ivy League universities – the same universities that have turned out generations of Muellers and Clintons – to deplete the left’s political energies. While we argue over who is most entitled and most victimized, the establishment has carried on raping and pillaging Third World countries, destroying the planet and siphoning off the wealth produced by the rest of us.

These liberal elites long ago worked out that if we could be made to fight among ourselves about who was most entitled to scraps from the table, they could keep gorging on the main course.

The “liberal” elites exploited identity politics to keep us divided by pacifying the most marginalized with the offer of a few additional crumbs. Trump has exploited identity politics to keep us divided by inflaming tensions as he reorders the hierarchy of “privilege” in which those crumbs are offered. In the process, both wings of the elite have averted the danger that class consciousness and real solidarity might develop and start to challenge their privileges.

No. 3: The Corbyn Experience

But the most important lesson of all for the left is that support among its ranks for the Mueller inquiry against Trump was foolhardy in the extreme.

Not only was the inquiry doomed to failure – in fact, not only was it designed to fail – but it has set a precedent for future politicized investigations that will be used against the progressive left should it make any significant political gains. And an inquiry against the real left will be far more aggressive and far more “productive” than Mueller was.

If there is any doubt about that look to the U.K. Britain now has within reach of power the first truly progressive politician in living memory, someone seeking to represent the 99 per cent, not the 1 percent. But Jeremy Corbyn’s experience as the leader of the Labour Party – massively swelling the membership’s ranks to make it the largest political party in Europe – has been eye-popping.

I have documented Corbyn’s travails regularly in this blog over the past four years at the hands of the British

political and media establishment. You can find many examples [here](#).

Corbyn, even more so than the small, new wave of insurgency politicians in the U.S. Congress, has faced a relentless barrage of criticism from across the U.K.'s similarly narrow political spectrum. He has been attacked by both the rightwing media and the supposedly "liberal" media. He has been savaged by the ruling Conservative Party, as was to be expected, and by his own parliamentary Labour Party. The U.K.'s two-party system has been exposed as just as hollow as the one in the U.S.

The ferocity of the attacks has been necessary because, unlike the Democratic Party's success in keeping a progressive left-winger away from the presidential campaign, the U.K. system accidentally allowed a socialist to slip past the gatekeepers. All hell has broken out ever since.

What is so noticeable is that Corbyn is rarely attacked over his policies – mainly because they have wide popular appeal. Instead he has been hounded over fanciful claims that, despite being a life-long and very visible anti-racism campaigner, he suddenly morphed into an outright anti-Semite the moment party members elected him leader.

I will not reprise again how implausible these claims are. Simply look through these [previous blog posts](#) should you be in any doubt.

But what is amazing is that, just as with the Mueller inquiry, much of the British left – including prominent figures like Owen Jones and the supposedly countercultural Novara Media – have sapped their political energies in

trying to placate or support those leading the preposterous claims that Labour under Corbyn has become “institutionally anti-Semitic.” Again, the promotion of a simple-minded identity politics – which pits the rights of Palestinians against the sensitivities of Zionist Jews about Israel – was exploited to divide the left.

The more the left has conceded to this campaign, the angrier, the more implacable, the more self-righteous Corbyn’s opponents have become – to the point that the Labour Party is now in serious danger of imploding.

Were the U.S. to get its own Corbyn as president, he or she would undoubtedly face a Mueller-style inquiry, and one far more effective at securing the president’s impeachment than this one was ever going to be.

That is not because a leftwing U.S. president would be more corrupt or more likely to have colluded with a foreign power. As the U.K. example shows, it would be because the entire media system – from *The New York Times* to *Fox News* – would be against such a president. And as the U.K. example also shows, it would be because the leaderships of both the Republican and Democratic parties would work as one to finish off such a president.

In the combined success-failure of the Mueller inquiry, the left has an opportunity to understand in a much more sophisticated way how real power works and in whose favor it is exercised. It is a moment that should be clarifying – if we are willing to open our eyes to Mueller’s real lessons.

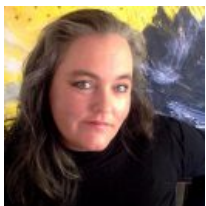
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Trump Is Going to Thank MSNBC Until November 2020

Peddlers of Russia-gate have boosted the U.S. president's re-election campaign, writes Caitlin Johnstone.

By [Caitlin Johnstone](#)

[CaitlinJohnstone.com](#)



After [news broke](#) that Robert Mueller had turned in his final report without recommending any further indictments, *MSNBC's* Rachel Maddow [began frantically retweeting](#) blue-checkmarked Twitter pundits who claimed that since nobody knows the contents of the report yet, the news that the number of Americans indicted for conspiring with the Russian government is set at zero doesn't matter.

Well guess what, Rachel? We know what the report contains now.

U.S. Attorney General William Barr has sent a letter to congressional officials which [you can read here](#). It contains the following unequivocal quote:

“The Special Counsel’s investigation did not find that the Trump campaign or anyone associated with it conspired or coordinated with Russia in its efforts to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election. As the report states: “[T]he investigation did not establish that members of the Trump Campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities.”

A footnote on the document clarifies that the Mueller investigation defined coordination with the Russian government very broadly, to include not just overt coordination but any “agreement – tacit or express – between the Trump Campaign and the Russian government on election interference.” No such agreement, tacit or otherwise, was found to have taken place.

So that’s it then. The central and foundational claim of the Russia-gate conspiracy theory has been found to have been completely baseless. The report asserts that Russia hacked and distributed Democratic Party emails (a claim for which the public has yet to see any hard evidence), and “did not draw a conclusion – one way or the other” whether Trump committed obstruction of justice in the investigation of baseless collusion allegations. But the central and foundational Russia-gate claim that Trump and the Kremlin conspired to steal the 2016 election has been killed. Finito. Case closed. Debate over.

And Trump is loving every second of it.

No Collusion, No Obstruction, Complete and Total EXONERATION. KEEP AMERICA GREAT!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) March 24, 2019

“No Collusion, No Obstruction, Complete and Total EXONERATION. KEEP AMERICA GREAT!” tweeted America’s reality TV star president exactly as you would expect him to, taking some creative license with the actual contents of Barr’s letter.

This is your life for the next 594 days, America. You can

expect to hear over and over and over again, from today until November 2020, that the president was victimized for over two years by a "WITCH HUNT" which was "COMPLETE and TOTAL FAKE NEWS!" All Trump will have to do to get re-elected is keep his economy narrative going and repeat the claim that he's been unjustly persecuted by the establishment "swamp."

It Will Work

And it will work, because that claim will not be unfounded. As much of a corrupt establishment crony as Trump has proven himself to be, he does indeed have all the facts he needs to successfully sell the narrative that the political/media class has spent over two years pushing a baseless conspiracy theory that the highest levels of the U.S. government had been infiltrated by the Kremlin, and he can indeed claim persecution and victimization in the process. He can easily leverage this into sympathy and support in his reelection campaign, and can use it to reinforce his tarnished image as an enemy of the beltway swamp. Those who've been selling the Russia-gate narrative handed him this weapon.

So thanks, Rachel Maddow. Thanks Adam Schiff, Maxine Waters and Eric Swalwell. Thanks *CNN* and *MSNBC*, *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. Thanks supposed progressives like Bernie Sanders and *The Young Turks*. Thank you to everyone who spent the first half of Trump's term helping to push the Russiagate narrative, thereby helping to ensure another four years of this asshole advancing longstanding establishment agendas of war, nuclear brinkmanship and ecocide. Thank you so much for helping to inflict that upon our planet with no regard for the inevitable consequences of your actions.

Here's @mtaibbi: "WMD was a pimple compared to Russiagate. The sheer scale of the errors and exaggerations this time around dwarfs the last mess."

<https://t.co/ebPl0DW9rs>

– Brian Stelter (@brianstelter) [March 23, 2019](#)

So are any of the aforementioned offenders admitting any fault on this? Actually, it's a surprisingly mixed bag.

Sure, you've got more Russiagaters than I can count moving the goalposts to possible financial crimes and frantically grasping at the straws of Mueller's words in Barr's letter regarding potential obstruction of justice, "while this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him." You've got MSNBC analyst and "[Saint Mueller Preserve Us](#)" t-shirt salesman Malcolm Nance [starting up a whole new conspiracy theory](#) that Barr has committed the "greatest scandal in history to coverup the greatest scandal in history," I guess implying that Barr is lying about the contents of a report that will with absolute certainty will be viewed and verified by other people. You've got some [trying to pretend](#) that Russia-gaters never cared about Russia-gate at all anyway.

Notable Admissions

But you've also got CNN's *Reliable Sources* host Brian Stelter [sharing](#) Matt Taibbi's excellent article titled "[It's official: Russiagate is this generation's WMD](#)," which describes the mass media's spectacular failures to ask the questions that needed to be asked and demand the evidence that needed to be demanded for the claims advanced in the Russiagate narrative. You've got NBC's Ken Dilanian,

an actual CIA asset who has been eagerly advancing the establishment Russia narrative, saying that “this is a total legal exoneration of the president. Congress will want to know more, of course. But the topline: No conspiracy, no obstruction.” This is highly unusual behavior from such stalwart empire loyalists, and it may be taken as a turning point of sorts on this particular aspect of this particular subject, due solely to the total destruction of any basis for their previous narrative.

But, of course, the damage is already done. Trump has been handed a powerful political weapon which may have ensured his reelection to the White House, and, far, far worse, a new Cold War with Russia is now underway which threatens the life of every organism on this earth, facilitated by a political/media class who convinced the public that they could hurt the president by demanding that he take a more hawkish posture toward Russia. That Pandora’s box won’t be un-opened by these new revelations.

Congratulations to Russia-obsessed Democrats for being the single-most valuable contributors to the Donald J. Trump 2020 re-election campaign!

– Michael Tracey (@mtracey) March 24, 2019

This should be the end of the mass media. In anything resembling a sane world, Rachel Maddow would be unloading her desk into a cardboard box today, and Aaron Maté would become the most respected and highest-paid journalist in America.

This should be the end of the Democratic party. This dismal state of affairs is their fault, from the content of the

leaked emails to their handling of it. They have had choices on the way to clean up their act but, they have blankly refused at every juncture. Not one thing has changed since the emails revealed that the DNC rigs its primaries, and yet here we are in the middle of another fake primary with everyone going along with it like it's a real thing. It's weird. In a healthy democratic republic the party would be dead already, and a new one would've taken its place fueled by fresh energy and enthusiasm but the donor-class corruption is so deeply entrenched that that possibility has seemed like a fantasy.

For now. The next couple of days are going to be very important. As the clamoring din of Russia-gate falls into the memory hole, a large empty space will open up. As the pundits scramble to find the Next Big Thing to blare through the screens, the people will be left to their own devices for a few precious moments. They won't know what to think. They may even have some of their own thoughts for once. The media landscape will resemble a demolition site. So why not use this space to push forward some new exciting ideas. Space means possibilities. Space means something new can be built. After the crushing disappointment of finally finding out that the whole thing was a bust, two years have been lost to the bumbling ineptitude of Pelosi and Schumer, and now impeachment is off the table, what has anyone got to lose? Let's try something new.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly [at Medium](#). Follow her work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#). She has a [podcast](#) and a new book ["Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers."](#) This

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A Prediction 3 Days Before the 2016 Election on How the Democrats Would Use Russia-gate to Try to Depose Trump

Consortium News Editor Joe Lauria predicted on Nov. 5, 2016 that should Clinton lose, the Democrats would blame Russia to try to remove Trump from office, even without evidence. It was the birth of Russia-gate.

Joe Lauria wrote that if Hillary Clinton lost to Donald Trump the Democrats would blame Russia, even without evidence, and on that basis try to get the Electoral College or Congress to overturn the results of the election. In fact the Democrats tried these tactics but failed on both counts. Yet for two and a half years they obsessively tried to keep the Russia-gate narrative alive to undermine or depose Trump.

Hillary Clinton's Ace-in-the-Hole: Russia

By [Joe Lauria](#)

[The Huffington Post](#)

Nov. 5, 2016

If Hillary Clinton loses a very tight election her ace-in-the-hole could be Russia.

Corporate media reacted harshly when Donald Trump said in the last debate that he would wait and see what happens before accepting the election results. “I will keep you in suspense,” he said. Trump has alleged that the vote will be rigged.

If Trump loses by a razor thin margin we can expect a demand for recounts and possible legal challenges. Some of his more violent supporters have also threatened trouble.

But what if Clinton loses a close election? In the wake of Wikileaks and FBI revelations Clinton’s sizable lead has evaporated and a tight result is looking more and more possible.

On her campaign plane a few hours after the last debate Clinton was asked if she would pledge to accept the results. She ignored the question and instead launched into an attack on what Trump had said.

If Clinton should lose a squeaker, she has two options to try to overturn the election and make herself president—and both involve blaming Russia. She can try to influence America’s bizarre electoral college system, or get at least two allies in Congress to challenge its certification of the election.

America’s Indirect Suffrage

Unknown to most people outside the United States, and to many within, the U.S. president is not chosen by a national

popular vote. Instead the U.S. presidential election is really 50 separate state elections. The candidate that wins a state's popular vote is awarded a number of electors based on population size.

These are actual persons who vote for president on behalf of the people. Slates of electors are chosen by both major political parties before the election. Whichever party wins a state's popular vote gets the votes of that state's electors. There are 538 electors and a candidate must get 270 electoral votes to be elected president. *

This system ignores the national popular vote so that a candidate may win more votes nationwide but still lose the election. It has happened four times, the last being in 2000 when Al Gore won the popular vote but lost the election to George W. Bush.

Several states, such as New York and California, usually vote Democratic, while others, such as many in the West and South, are normally in the Republican column. But there are states that could go either way, so-called swing states, and that's where the most intense campaigning takes place.

According to one scenario, the four electoral votes in Maine could decide this election.

That's why Trump campaigned there last week. Maine and Nebraska are the only two states that proportion some of their electors. One candidate could get one of the four electoral votes if he or she wins a congressional district.

Influencing the College by Blaming Russia

The Clinton camp's accusation after the first WikiLeaks revelations, just before the Democratic Convention, that Russian intelligence was behind the leak was later amplified in early October by James Clapper, director of national intelligence, who blamed "Russia's senior-most officials" for intending to "interfere with the U.S. election process" by authorizing the hack of the Democratic National Committee.

Clapper went significantly further, however, claiming that a Russian company was behind attempted hacks of electoral computer systems in various states.

The Obama administration's claim was widely accepted by the news media even though no evidence of Russian tampering was publicly given. With just days to go to the election the story has been revived by the pro-Clinton media. CNN Anchor Jake Tapper on Friday incorrectly said the U.S. was accusing the Russian government, not a company, of threatening election computers.

In the last debate, Clinton said the hack "has come from the highest levels of the Russian government. Clearly from Putin himself in an effort, as 17 of our intelligence agencies have confirmed, to influence our election." The 17 agencies were represented by Clapper. Clinton also offered no evidence.

If Clinton loses by a few electoral votes she could challenge the results by claiming that Russia tampered with

the election. The public has been prepared with unproven allegations that are widely disseminated by corporate media and widely believed. With the media not previously demanding evidence of such a claim and if the intelligence agencies back her up, her only challenge might be to convince the needed number of Republican electors to change their votes to put her over the top.

There are only 26 states that require electors by law to vote for the candidate who won the state's popular vote. Virginia has issued only an advisory to do so. The other 24 states have no such laws, freeing electors to vote their conscience and against their own party.

The swing state with the most electoral votes that doesn't bind its electors by law is Pennsylvania, with 20 electoral votes. Other states in play such as Arizona, Utah, Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, Nevada and New Hampshire also have no laws to keep an elector from changing his or her vote. Ohio and Florida, the two biggest swing states, do bind the electors by law.

Clinton's camp would be faced with turning a number of electors around to vote against the Republican candidate and switch their vote to her. Clinton has to convince them that a changed vote would uphold American democracy against the interference of a supposedly hostile state that threw the election for Trump.

Clinton has to convince such so-called "Faithless Electors" to vote against their state's popular will. This has

happened in seven previous elections. In each of them only one elector changed his or her vote. This occurred in 1948, 1956, 1960, 1968, 1972, 1976, and 1988. But no Faithless Elector has ever decided a presidential election before.

The 2016 Election, one of the strangest in memory, could add to the craziness by becoming the first.

The Second Option

If she fails to convince enough electors to change their votes there is one last chance for Clinton. At 1 p.m. on January 6, both houses of Congress meet to certify the election. However, an 1887 law allows any member of Congress to formally object to the result.

An objection must be put in writing and signed by at least one Senator and one Representative. The Joint Session is recessed and both Houses have two hours to separately consider the objection. Then each House votes on it. If both agree, the electoral votes are not counted.

There have only been two objections and both times, in 1969 and 2005, they were rejected.

If Clinton succeeds and the objections are accepted, vacating Trump's electoral votes because of alleged Russian interference in certain states, it could bring him below the required 270 electoral votes. But it would not give Clinton that number either.

If neither candidate reaches 270 electoral votes the Constitution says the election is decided by a vote in the House of Representatives. Each state delegation gets one vote and a simple majority is required. The House is currently controlled by the Republicans. But many Republicans do not support Trump.

The House has decided a presidential election only two times before. In 1800 Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr tied with 73 electoral votes each. After 36 ballots over six days, the House chose Jefferson as the third president. In the 1824 election Andrew Jackson received 99 electoral votes, 32 short of a majority, to John Quincy Adams's 85, but the House chose Adams.

It would certainly be a long shot for Clinton to try either of these tactics to overturn a close loss to Trump. But given everything else that has happened in this election campaign, would anyone really be surprised?

*The system was a compromise between Congress and voters (at first only propertied white men) selecting the president. It also gave less populated Southern slave states a greater say in a presidential election. It was established in 1789, at a time when the Holy Roman Emperor was chosen by an electoral college. From 1849 to 1918 Prussian voters chose electors to decide on deputies for the House of Representatives in a system of indirect suffrage. The French and Irish Senates are today chosen by an electoral college. The Pope is still elected by a College of Cardinals.

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe) .

Consortium News' Record on Russia-gate—A Series of Articles on How CN Covered the 'Scandal': No. 1—'The Sleazy Origins of Russia-gate'

From the “scandal’s” outset, **Consortium News** adopted journalistic skepticism, led by founding editor, the late Robert Parry, with Ray McGovern, Daniel Lazare, Patrick Lawrence, Gareth Porter, Joe Lauria & VIPS debunking much of the mania that seized the land.

In the wake of Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s final report in which no one was accused of “colluding” with Russia to steal the 2016 U.S. presidential election, we begin a series of republication of articles originally appearing at Consortium News that called the entire fiasco into question. Bob Parry was in the forefront of Russia-gate skepticism, recognizing its domestic and geopolitical dangers.

We begin with this article by Bob Parry published on March 29, 2017.

The Sleazy Origins of

Russia-gate

By Robert Parry

Special to Consortium News

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

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

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

Steele, who had worked for Britain's MI-6 in Russia, said he tapped into ex-colleagues and unnamed sources inside Russia,

including leadership figures in the Kremlin, to piece together a series of sensational reports that became the basis of the current congressional and FBI investigations into Trump's alleged ties to Moscow.

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

Lewd Allegations

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

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

But Steele's June report also reflected the telephone-tag

aspects of these allegations: "Speaking to a trusted compatriot in June 2016 sources A and B, a senior Russian Foreign Ministry figure and a former top level Russian intelligence officer still active inside the Kremlin respectively, the Russian authorities had been cultivating and supporting US Republican presidential candidate, Donald TRUMP for a least 5 years.

"Source B asserted that the TRUMP operation was both supported and directed by Russian President Vladimir PUTIN. Its aim was to sow discord and disunity both within the US itself, but more especially within the Transatlantic alliance which was viewed as inimical to Russia's interests. ... In terms of specifics, Source A confided that the Kremlin had been feeding TRUMP and his team valuable intelligence on his opponents, including Democratic presidential candidate Hillary CLINTON, for several years. ...

"The Kremlin's cultivation operation on TRUMP also had comprised offering him various lucrative real estate development business deals in Russia, especially in relation to the ongoing 2018 World Cup soccer tournament. However, so far, for reasons unknown, TRUMP had not taken up any of these."

Besides the anonymous and hearsay quality of the allegations, there are obvious logical problems, especially the point that five years ago, you could have gotten astronomical odds about Trump's chances to win the U.S. presidency, although perhaps there is more an astrological explanation. Maybe the seemingly logical Putin went to some stargazing soothsayer to see the future.

There also may have been a more mundane reason why Trump's hotel deal fell through. A source familiar with those negotiations told me that Trump had hoped to get a half interest in the \$2 billion project but that Russian-Israeli investor Mikhail Fridman, a founder of Russia's Alfa Bank, balked because Trump was unwilling to commit a significant investment beyond the branding value of the Trump name.

Yet, one would assume that if the supposedly all-powerful Putin wanted to give a \$1 billion or so payoff to his golden boy, Donald Trump, whom Putin just knew would become President in five years, the deal would have happened.

Whetting the Appetite

Despite the dubious quality of Steele's second- and third-hand information, the June report appears to have won the breathless attention of Team Clinton. And once the bait was taken, Steele continued to produce his conspiracy-laden reports, totaling at least 17 through Dec. 13, 2016.

The reports not only captivated the Clinton political operatives but influenced the assessments of Obama's appointees in the U.S. intelligence community. In the last weeks of the Obama administration, I was told that the outgoing intelligence chiefs had found no evidence to verify Steele's claims but nevertheless believed them to be true.

Still, a careful analysis of Steele's reports would have discovered not only apparent factual inaccuracies, such as putting Trump lawyer Michael Cohen at a meeting with a Russian official in Prague (when Cohen says he's never been to Prague), but also the sort of broad conspiracy-mongering that the mainstream U.S. news media usually loves to

ridicule.

For instance, Steele's reports pin a range of U.S. political attitudes on Russian manipulation rather than the notion that Americans can reach reasonable conclusions on their own. In one report dated Sept. 14, 2016, Steele claimed that an unnamed senior official in President Vladimir Putin's Presidential Administration (or PA) explained how Putin used the alleged Russian influence operation to generate opposition to Obama's Pacific trade deals.

Steele wrote that Putin's intention was "pushing candidate CLINTON away from President OBAMA's policies. The best example of this was that both candidates [Clinton and Trump] now openly opposed the draft trade agreements, TPP and TTIP, which were assessed by Moscow as detrimental to Russian interests."

In other words, the Russians supposedly intervened in the U.S. presidential campaign to turn the leading candidates against Obama's trade deals. But how credible is that? Are we to believe that American politicians – running the gamut from Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren through former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to President Donald Trump – have all been tricked by the Kremlin to oppose those controversial trade deals, which are also broadly unpopular with the American people who are sick and tired of trade agreements that cost them jobs?

Steele's investigative dossier suggests that we can't really think for ourselves. We are all Putin's puppets.

Greater Skepticism?

Normally, such a ludicrous claim – along with the haziness of the sourcing – would demand greater skepticism about the rest of Steele’s feverish charges, but a curious aspect of the investigations into Russia’s alleged “meddling” in Election 2016 is that neither Steele nor the “oppo research” company, Fusion GPS, that hired him – reportedly with funding from Clinton allies – has been summoned to testify.

Usually, official investigations begin with testimony from the people who are making the allegations, so their credibility and motives can be tested in an adversarial setting. Plus, some baseline information should be established: Who, for instance, paid for the contract? How much was the total and how much went to Steele? How much did Steele then pay his Russian contacts and did they, in turn, pay the alleged Russian insiders for information? Or are we supposed to believe that these “insiders” risked being identified as spies out of a commitment to the truth?

None of these answers would necessarily discredit the information, but they could provide important context as to whether this “oppo” team had a financial motive to sex-up the reports to keep Clinton’s friends coming back for more. Arguably the funders of this “oppo” research should be called to testify as well regarding whether they would have kept ponying up more money if Steele’s reports had concluded that there were no meaningful contacts between Trump’s people and the Russians. Were they seeking the truth or just dirt to help Hillary Clinton win?

Since last November’s election, Steele has ducked public inquiries and Glenn Simpson, the former Wall Street Journal journalist who heads Fusion GPS, has refused to divulge who

hired his firm or answer other relevant questions. That means we still don't know which Clinton friends paid for the dirt and how much money was given to subcontractors like Steele and his Russian associates. (One source told me it may have totaled around \$1 million.)

According to various press reports, Fusion GPS first worked for a Republican opponent of Trump's, but then switched over to the Clinton side after Trump won the Republican race. With Steele generating his reports every few days or every few weeks, people close to Clinton's campaign saw the Russia allegations as a potential game-changer. They reached out to reporters to persuade them to publish Steele's allegations even if they could not be verified.

Before the election, a longtime Clinton operative briefed me on aspects of Steele's investigation, including the "golden shower" allegations, and urged me to at least publish the accusations as a rumor citing the fact that some major news organizations were looking into the charges, an offer that I declined.

In a different setting – when Gov. Bill Clinton was seeking the presidency and Republican "oppo" researchers were pushing various wild and salacious allegations about him – the Clinton team dismissed such claims and the motivations of the people behind them as "cash for trash."

Following the Storyline

Yet, Schiff's opening statement at the hearing on March 20 relied heavily on Steele's narrative and the supposed credibility of the ex-British spy and his anonymous Russian sources, even to the point of naming Americans who

presumably joined in a scheme to collaborate with the Russians to help rig the U.S. election, an act that some commenters have compared to treason.

The California Democrat said, "Russian sources tell [Steele] that [Carter] Page [a Trump foreign policy adviser who made a public trip to Russia in early July 2016] also had a secret meeting with Igor Sechin, CEO of Russian gas giant Rosneft. ... According to Steele's Russian sources, Page is offered brokerage fees by Sechin on a deal involving a 19 percent share of the company."

These "Russian sources" also tell Steele, according to Schiff, that "the Trump campaign is offered documents damaging to Hillary Clinton, which the Russians would publish through an outlet that gives them deniability, like Wikileaks. The hacked documents would be in exchange for a Trump Administration policy that de-emphasizes Russia's invasion of Ukraine and instead focuses on criticizing NATO countries for not paying their fare share."

Schiff continued: "Is it a coincidence that the Russian gas company Rosneft sold a 19 percent share after former British Intelligence Officer Steele was told by Russian sources that Carter Page was offered fees on a deal of just that size? Is it a coincidence that Steele's Russian sources also affirmed that Russia had stolen documents hurtful to Secretary Clinton that it would utilize in exchange for pro-Russian policies that would later come to pass?"

However, is it also not possible that Steele and his profit-making colleagues made their reports conform to details that already were known or that they had reason to believe would

occur, in other words, to match up their claims with independently known facts to give them greater credibility? That is a classic way for conmen to establish “credibility” with marks who are either gullible or simply want to believe.

Also, clever prosecutors in presenting a “circumstantial case” – as Schiff was doing on March 20 – can make innocent coincidences look suspicious. For instance, though Trump’s resistance to escalating tensions with Russia was well known through the primary campaign, Schiff made a big deal out of the fact that Trump’s people opposed a plank in the Republican platform that called for shipping lethal military supplies to Ukraine for the government’s war against ethnic Russian rebels in the east. Schiff presents that as the quo for the quid of the Russians supplying purloined emails from the Democratic National Committee to WikiLeaks (although WikiLeaks denies getting the emails from the Russians).

In his opening statement, Schiff said: “In the middle of July, Paul Manafort, the Trump campaign manager and someone who was long on the payroll of pro-Russian Ukrainian interests, attends the Republican Party convention. Carter Page, back from [a business meeting in] Moscow, also attends the convention.

“According to Steele, it was Manafort who chose Page to serve as a go-between for the Trump campaign and Russian interests. [Russian] Ambassador [Sergey] Kislyak, who presides over a Russian embassy in which diplomatic personnel would later be expelled as likely spies, also attends the Republican Party convention and meets with Carter Page and additional Trump Advisors J.D. Gordon and

Walid Phares. It was J.D. Gordon who approved Page's trip to Moscow.

"Ambassador Kislyak also meets with Trump campaign national security chair and now Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Sessions would later deny meeting with Russian officials during his Senate confirmation hearing. Just prior to the convention, the Republican Party platform is changed, removing a section that supports the provision of 'lethal defensive weapons' to Ukraine, an action that would be contrary to Russian interests.

"Manafort categorically denies involvement by the Trump campaign in altering the platform. But the Republican Party delegate who offered the language in support of providing defensive weapons to Ukraine states that it was removed at the insistence of the Trump campaign. Later, J.D. Gordon admits opposing the inclusion of the provision at the time it was being debated and prior to its being removed."

Problems with the Conspiracy

So, not only is Schiff relying on Steele to provide key links in the conspiracy chain but Schiff ignores the surrounding reality that Trump had long opposed the idea of escalating the confrontation with Russia in Ukraine – as, by the way, did President Obama who resisted pressure to send lethal military hardware to Ukraine.

Plus, Schiff ignores other logical points, including that party platforms are essentially meaningless and that the savvy Putin would not likely take the huge risk of offending the odds-on winner of the presidential race, Hillary Clinton, for something as pointless as a word change in the

GOP platform.

There is also the point that if Trump were a true "Manchurian candidate," he would have taken the more politically popular position of bashing Russia during the campaign and only reverse course after he got into the White House. That's how the scheme is supposed to work. (And, of course, all embassies including American ones have spies assigned to them, so there is nothing unusual about Ambassador Kislyak presiding at an embassy with spies.)

Other independent-minded journalists have noted various chronological problems with Steele's narrative, such as Marcy Wheeler at her emptywheel.net Web site.

In other words, there are huge holes in both the evidence and the logic of Schiff's conspiracy theory. But you wouldn't know that from watching and reading the fawning commentary about Schiff's presentation in the mainstream U.S. news media, which has been almost universally hostile to Trump (which is not to say that there aren't sound reasons to consider the narcissistic, poorly prepared Trump to be unfit to serve as President of the United States).

The journalistic problem is that everyone deserves to get a fair shot from reporters who are supposed to be objective and fair regardless of a person's popularity or notoriety or what the reporter may personally feel. That standard should apply to everyone, whether you're a foreign leader despised by the U.S. government or a politician detested for your obnoxious behavior.

There is no professional justification for journalists joining in a TV-and-print lynch mob. We also have seen too

often where such wrongheaded attitudes lead, such as to the groupthink that Iraq's hated dictator Saddam Hussein was hiding WMDs, or in an earlier time to the McCarthyism that destroyed the lives of Americans who were smeared as unpatriotic because of their dissident political views.

So, yes, even Donald Trump deserves not to be railroaded by a mainstream media that wants desperately – along with other powerful forces in Official Washington – to see him run out of town on a rail and will use any pretext to do so, even if it means escalating the risks of a nuclear war with Russia.

And, if mainstream media commentators truly want a thorough and independent investigation, they should be demanding that it start by summoning the people who first made the allegations.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s.

VIPS: Mueller's Forensics-Free Findings

The final Mueller report should be graded "incomplete," says VIPS, whose forensic work proves the speciousness of the story that DNC emails published by WikiLeaks came from Russian hacking.

March 13, 2019

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Attorney General

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Mueller's Forensics-Free Findings

Executive Summary

Media reports are predicting that Special Counsel Robert Mueller is about to give you the findings of his probe into any links and/or coordination between the Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump. If Mueller gives you his "completed" report anytime soon, it should be graded "incomplete." Major deficiencies include depending on a DNC-hired cybersecurity company for forensics and failure to consult with those who have done original forensic work, including us and the independent forensic investigators with whom we have examined the data. We stand ready to help.

We veteran intelligence professionals (VIPS) have done enough detailed forensic work to prove the speciousness of the prevailing story that the DNC emails published by WikiLeaks came from Russian hacking. Given the paucity of evidence to support that story, we believe Mueller may choose to finesse this key issue and leave everyone hanging. That would help sustain the widespread belief that Trump owes his victory to President Vladimir Putin, and strengthen the hand of those who pay little heed to the unpredictable consequences of an increase in tensions with nuclear-armed Russia.

There is an overabundance of "assessments" but a lack of hard evidence to support that prevailing narrative. We believe that there are enough people of integrity in the Department of Justice to prevent the outright manufacture or distortion of "evidence," particularly if they become aware

that experienced scientists have completed independent forensic study that yield very different conclusions. We know only too well – and did our best to expose – how our former colleagues in the intelligence community manufactured fraudulent “evidence” of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

We have scrutinized publicly available physical data – the “trail” that every cyber operation leaves behind. And we have had support from highly experienced independent forensic investigators who, like us, have no axes to grind. We can prove that the conventional-wisdom story about Russian-hacking-DNC-emails-for-WikiLeaks is false. Drawing largely on the unique expertise of two VIPS scientists who worked for a combined total of 70 years at the National Security Agency and became Technical Directors there, we have regularly published our findings. But we have been deprived of a hearing in mainstream media – an experience painfully reminiscent of what we had to endure when we exposed the corruption of intelligence before the attack on Iraq 16 years ago.

This time, with the principles of physics and forensic science to rely on, we are able to adduce solid evidence exposing mistakes and distortions in the dominant story. We offer you below – as a kind of *aide-memoire*– a discussion of some of the key factors related to what has become known as “Russia-gate.” And we include our most recent findings drawn from forensic work on data associated with WikiLeaks’ publication of the DNC emails.

We do not claim our conclusions are “irrefutable and undeniable,” a la Colin Powell at the UN before the Iraq

war. Our judgments, however, are based on the scientific method – not “assessments.” We decided to put this memorandum together in hopes of ensuring that you hear that directly from us.

If the Mueller team remains reluctant to review our work – or even to interview willing witnesses with direct knowledge, like WikiLeaks’ Julian Assange and former UK Ambassador Craig Murray, we fear that many of those yearning earnestly for the truth on Russia-gate will come to the corrosive conclusion that the Mueller investigation was a sham.

In sum, we are concerned that, at this point, an incomplete Mueller report will fall far short of the commitment made by then Acting Attorney General Rod Rosenstein “to ensure a full and thorough investigation,” when he appointed Mueller in May 2017. Again, we are at your disposal.

Discussion

The centerpiece accusation of Kremlin “interference” in the 2016 presidential election was the charge that Russia hacked Democratic National Committee emails and gave them to WikiLeaks to embarrass Secretary Hillary Clinton and help Mr. Trump win. The weeks following the election witnessed multiple leak-based media allegations to that effect. These culminated on January 6, 2017 in an evidence-light, rump report misleadingly labeled “Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA).” Prepared by “handpicked analysts” from only three of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies (CIA, FBI, and NSA), the assessment expressed “high confidence” in the Russia-hacking-to-WikiLeaks story, but lacked so much as a

hint that the authors had sought access to independent forensics to support their “assessment.”

The media immediately awarded the ICA the status of Holy Writ, choosing to overlook an assortment of banal, full-disclosure-type caveats included in the assessment itself – such as:

“When Intelligence Community analysts use words such as ‘we assess’ or ‘we judge,’ they are conveying an analytic assessment or judgment. ...Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. ... Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary ... High confidence in a judgment does not imply that the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong.”

To their credit, however, the authors of the ICA did make a highly germane point in introductory remarks on “cyber incident attribution.” They 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.”*** [Emphasis added.]

Forensics

The imperative is to get on that “trail” – and quickly, before red herrings can be swept across it. The best way to establish attribution is to apply the methodology and processes of forensic science. Intrusions into computers leave behind discernible physical data that can be examined scientifically by forensic experts. Risk to “sources and methods” is normally not a problem.

Direct access to the actual computers is the first requirement – the more so when an intrusion is termed “an act of war” and blamed on a nuclear-armed foreign government (the words used by the late Sen. John McCain and other senior officials). In testimony to the House Intelligence Committee in March 2017, former FBI Director James Comey admitted that he did not insist on physical access to the DNC computers even though, as he conceded, “best practices” dictate direct access.

In June 2017, Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Richard Burr asked Comey whether he ever had “access to the actual hardware that was hacked.” Comey answered, “In the case of the DNC ... we did not have access to the devices themselves. We got relevant forensic information from a private party, a high-class entity, that had done the work. ...” Sen. Burr followed up: “But no content? Isn’t content an important part of the forensics from a counterintelligence standpoint?” Comey: “It is, although what was briefed to me by my folks ... is that they had gotten the information from the private party that they needed to understand the intrusion by the spring of 2016.”

The “private party/high-class entity” to which Comey refers is CrowdStrike, a cybersecurity firm of checkered reputation and multiple conflicts of interest, including very close ties to a number of key anti-Russian organizations. Comey indicated that the DNC hired CrowdStrike in the spring of 2016.

Given the stakes involved in the Russia-gate investigation – including a possible impeachment battle and greatly increased tension between Russia and the U.S. – it is

difficult to understand why Comey did not move quickly to seize the computer hardware so the FBI could perform an independent examination of what quickly became the major predicate for investigating election interference by Russia. Fortunately, enough data remain on the forensic “trail” to arrive at evidence-anchored conclusions. The work we have done shows the prevailing narrative to be false. We have been suggesting this for over two years. Recent forensic work significantly strengthens that conclusion.

We Do Forensics

Recent forensic examination of the Wikileaks DNC files shows they were created on 23, 25 and 26 May 2016. (On June 12, Julian Assange announced he had them; WikiLeaks published them on July 22.) We recently discovered that the files reveal a FAT (File Allocation Table) system property. ***This shows that the data had been transferred to an external storage device, such as a thumb drive, before WikiLeaks posted them.***

FAT is a simple file system named for its method of organization, the File Allocation Table. It is used for storage only and is not related to internet transfers like hacking. Were WikiLeaks to have received the DNC files via a hack, the last modified times on the files would be a random mixture of odd-and even-ending numbers.

Why is that important? The evidence lies in the “last modified” time stamps on the Wikileaks files. When a file is stored under the FAT file system the software rounds the time to the nearest even-numbered second. Every single one of the time stamps in the DNC files on WikiLeaks’ site ends

in an even number.

We have examined 500 DNC email files stored on the Wikileaks site. All 500 files end in an even number—2, 4, 6, 8 or 0. If those files had been hacked over the Internet, there would be an equal probability of the time stamp ending in an odd number. The random probability that FAT was not used is 1 chance in 2 to the 500th power. Thus, these data show that the DNC emails posted by WikiLeaks went through a storage device, like a thumb drive, and were physically moved before Wikileaks posted the emails on the World Wide Web.

This finding alone is enough to raise reasonable doubts, for example, about Mueller's indictment of 12 Russian intelligence officers for hacking the DNC emails given to WikiLeaks. A defense attorney could easily use the forensics to argue that someone copied the DNC files to a storage device like a USB thumb drive and got them physically to WikiLeaks – not electronically via a hack.

Role of NSA

For more than two years, we strongly suspected that the DNC emails were copied/leaked in that way, not hacked. And we said so. We remain intrigued by the apparent failure of NSA's dragnet, collect-it-all approach – including “cast-iron” coverage of WikiLeaks – to provide forensic evidence (as opposed to “assessments”) as to how the DNC emails got to WikiLeaks and who sent them. Well before the telling evidence drawn from the use of FAT, other technical evidence led us to conclude that the DNC emails were not hacked over the network, but rather physically moved over, say, the Atlantic Ocean.

Is it possible that NSA has not yet been asked to produce the collected packets of DNC email data claimed to have been hacked by Russia? Surely, this should be done before Mueller competes his investigation. NSA has taps on all the transoceanic cables leaving the U.S. and would almost certainly have such packets if they exist. (The detailed slides released by Edward Snowden actually show the routes that trace the packets.)

The forensics we examined shed no direct light on who may have been behind the leak. The only thing we know for sure is that the person had to have direct access to the DNC computers or servers in order to copy the emails. The apparent lack of evidence from the most likely source, NSA, regarding a hack may help explain the FBI's curious preference for forensic data from CrowdStrike. No less puzzling is why Comey would choose to call CrowdStrike a "high-class entity."

Comey was one of the intelligence chiefs briefing President Obama on January 5, 2017 on the "Intelligence Community Assessment," which was then briefed to President-elect Trump and published the following day. That Obama found a key part of the ICA narrative less than persuasive became clear at his last press conference (January 18), when he told the media, "The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive ... as to how 'the DNC emails that were leaked' got to WikiLeaks.

Is Guccifer 2.0 a Fraud?

There is further compelling technical evidence that undermines the claim that the DNC emails were downloaded

over the internet as a result of a spearphishing attack. William Binney, one of VIPS' two former Technical Directors at NSA, along with other former intelligence community experts, examined files posted by Guccifer 2.0 and discovered that those files could not have been downloaded over the internet. It is a simple matter of mathematics and physics.

There was a flurry of activity after Julian Assange announced on June 12, 2016: "We have emails relating to Hillary Clinton which are pending publication." On June 14, DNC contractor CrowdStrike announced that malware was found on the DNC server and claimed there was evidence it was injected by Russians. On June 15, the Guccifer 2.0 persona emerged on the public stage, affirmed the DNC statement, claimed to be responsible for hacking the DNC, claimed to be a WikiLeaks source, ***and posted a document that forensics show was synthetically tainted with "Russian fingerprints."***

Our suspicions about the Guccifer 2.0 persona grew when G-2 claimed responsibility for a "hack" of the DNC on July 5, 2016, which released DNC data that was rather bland compared to what WikiLeaks published 17 days later (showing how the DNC had tipped the primary scales against Sen. Bernie Sanders). As VIPS reported in a wrap-up Memorandum for the President on July 24, 2017 (titled "Intel Vets Challenge 'Russia Hack' Evidence)," forensic examination of the July 5, 2016 cyber intrusion into the DNC showed it NOT to be a hack by the Russians or by anyone else, but rather a copy onto an external storage device. It seemed a good guess that the July 5 intrusion was a contrivance to preemptively taint anything WikiLeaks might later publish from the DNC, by

“showing” it came from a “Russian hack.” WikiLeaks published the DNC emails on July 22, three days before the Democratic convention.

As we prepared our July 24 memo for the President, we chose to begin by taking Guccifer 2.0 at face value; i. e., that the documents he posted on July 5, 2016 were obtained via a hack over the Internet. Binney conducted a forensic examination of the metadata contained in the posted documents and compared that metadata with the known capacity of Internet connection speeds at the time in the U.S. This analysis showed a transfer rate as high as 49.1 megabytes per second, which is much faster than was possible from a remote online Internet connection. The 49.1 megabytes speed coincided, though, with the rate that copying onto a thumb drive could accommodate.

Binney, assisted by colleagues with relevant technical expertise, then extended the examination and ran various forensic tests from the U.S. to the Netherlands, Albania, Belgrade and the UK. The fastest Internet rate obtained – from a data center in New Jersey to a data center in the UK – was 12 megabytes per second, which is less than a fourth of the capacity typical of a copy onto a thumb drive.

The findings from the examination of the Guccifer 2.0 data and the WikiLeaks data does not indicate who copied the information to an external storage device (probably a thumb drive). But our examination does disprove that G.2 hacked into the DNC on July 5, 2016. Forensic evidence for the Guccifer 2.0 data adds to other evidence that the DNC emails were not taken by an internet spearphishing attack. The data breach was local. The emails were copied from the network.

Presidential Interest

After VIPS' July 24, 2017 Memorandum for the President, Binney, one of its principal authors, was invited to share his insights with Mike Pompeo, CIA Director at the time. When Binney arrived in Pompeo's office at CIA Headquarters on October 24, 2017 for an hour-long discussion, the director made no secret of the reason for the invitation: "You are here because the President told me that if I really wanted to know about Russian hacking I needed to talk with you."

Binney warned Pompeo – to stares of incredulity – that his people should stop lying about the Russian hacking. Binney then started to explain the VIPS findings that had caught President Trump's attention. Pompeo asked Binney if he would talk to the FBI and NSA. Binney agreed, but has not been contacted by those agencies. With that, Pompeo had done what the President asked. There was no follow-up.

Confronting James Clapper on Forensics

We, the *hoi polloi*, do not often get a chance to talk to people like Pompeo – and still less to the former intelligence chiefs who are the leading purveyors of the prevailing Russia-gate narrative. An exception came on November 13, when former National Intelligence Director James Clapper came to the Carnegie Endowment in Washington to hawk his memoir. Answering a question during the Q&A about Russian "hacking" and NSA, Clapper said:

"Well, I have talked with NSA a lot ... And in my mind, I spent a lot of time in the SIGINT business, ***the forensic evidence was overwhelming about what the Russians had***

done. There's absolutely no doubt in my mind whatsoever."
[Emphasis added]

Clapper added: "... 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."

(A transcript of the interesting Q&A can be found [here](#) and a commentary on Clapper's performance at Carnegie, as well as on his longstanding lack of credibility, is [here](#).)

Normally soft-spoken Ron Wyden, Democratic senator from Oregon, lost his patience with Clapper last week when he learned that Clapper is still denying that he lied to the Senate Intelligence Committee about the extent of NSA surveillance of U.S. citizens. In an unusual outburst, Wyden said: "James Clapper needs to stop making excuses for lying to the American people about mass surveillance. To be clear: I sent him the question in advance. I asked him to correct the record afterward. He chose to let the lie stand."

The materials brought out by Edward Snowden in June 2013 showed Clapper to have lied under oath to the committee on March 12, 2013; he was, nevertheless, allowed to stay on as Director of National Intelligence for three and half more years. Clapper fancies himself an expert on Russia, telling *Meet the Press* May 28, 2017 that Russia's history shows that Russians are "typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever."

Clapper ought to be asked about the "forensics" he said were

“overwhelming about what the Russians had done.” And that, too, before Mueller completes his investigation.

For the steering group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity:

William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA’s Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard H. Black, Senator of Virginia, 13th District; Colonel US Army (ret.); Former Chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS)

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 C. Johnson, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

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

Edward Loomis, Cryptologic Computer Scientist, former Technical Director at NSA (ret.)

David MacMichael, Ph.D., former senior estimates officer, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst; CIA Presidential briefer (ret.)

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

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

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

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

Ann Wright, retired U.S. Army reserve colonel and former U.S. diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Iraq War

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) is made up of former intelligence officers, diplomats, military officers and congressional staffers. The organization, founded in 2002, was among the first critics of Washington's justifications for launching a war against Iraq. VIPS advocates a US foreign and national security policy based on

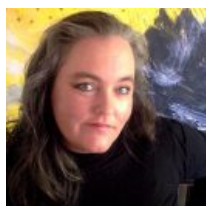
genuine national interests rather than contrived threats promoted for largely political reasons. An [archive](#) of VIPS memoranda is available at Consortiumnews.com.

Russia-gate Grand Wizard Deceives Audience About Assange

Obsessed Russia-gaters just can't accept that the Assange indictment has nothing to do with the 2016 election, writes Caitlin Johnstone.

By [Caitlin Johnstone](#)

[Caitlinjohnstone.com](#)



When it was first [revealed in November](#) that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange [is under secret charges](#) by the Trump administration, I spent the next few days being told by Russia-gaters that this was proof that I have been wrong about their demented cold war cult all along, because #MuellerTime is fast approaching. At long last, they vehemently assured me, Assange was going to prison for working with Russia to deprive Queen Hillary of her rightful throne.

None of those people have come back to apologize or admit that they were wrong when subsequent evidence disproved their claims. None of them ever do.

As it turns out, whistleblower Chelsea Manning has been subpoenaed to testify before a grand jury in a secret case investigating Assange for his 2010 role in the WikiLeaks publication of military war logs and diplomatic cables.

Manning served seven years in prison for leaking those documents to the transparency advocacy outlet before her sentence was commuted by President Obama, meaning, obviously, that this sealed case has nothing to do with the 2016 leaks Russiagateers have been fiendishly obsessing over. Indeed, [The Washington Post reported Tuesday](#) that “U.S. officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of grand jury secrecy, say the case is based on [Assange’s] pre-2016 conduct, not the election hacks that drew the attention of special counsel Robert S. Mueller III.”

So there you have it. Democrats like [Center for American Progress president Neera Tanden](#) who have been cheering for Assange’s arrest have actually been cheering on the Trump administration’s prosecution of a journalist for publishing facts about Bush administration war crimes. They thought they were supporting the agenda to punish Assange for publishing leaks that hurt the Hillary campaign, but in reality they were defending two Republican administrations while helping to manufacture support for a prosecution that would [set a devastating precedent](#) for press freedoms throughout the entire world.

If you are unfamiliar with the work of Russia-gate Grand Wizard Rachel Maddow, you might think she would report the revelation that an unfounded belief held by many of her acolytes has been completely and thoroughly disproven once and for all. If you are a bit more familiar with her, you might assume that she would completely ignore this revelation [like](#) she [normally does](#) when her conspiratorial ramblings are disproven by facts and evidence. But if you know Rachel really, really well, you might guess what she

actually did on her show last night.

That's right, she flat out lied about it.

On Tuesday night's episode of MSNBC's most popular show, Maddow blatantly deceived her audience by weaving this story about the Chelsea Manning subpoena into her conspiratorial Russia-gate ramblings about Roger Stone, despite those stories having absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with one another.

Maddow began by gushing about investigations into Roger Stone's alleged connections to WikiLeaks, of course not mentioning the fact that the only known interactions between Stone and WikiLeaks consist of WikiLeaks telling Stone to stop lying about having connections to them. Maddow smoothly weaved this into the news that the House Judiciary Committee has formally requested documents pertaining to WikiLeaks (among many other things) from dozens of Trump associates, with a gigantic grin on her face and a tone of immense significance in her voice. Then, without pausing, Maddow began talking about the sealed case against Assange and the Manning subpoena, falsely suggesting that these had something to do with the things she'd just been speaking about.

"And because of the criminal case against Roger Stone, you should also know that today, in federal court in Virginia, little bit of drama," Maddow said. "Today in federal court in Virginia, the U.S. attorney *himself*, the top of that prosecutor's office, the EDVA U.S. attorney himself, personally turned up in court for a sealed hearing today that appears to be about some sort of legal case potentially

involving WikiLeaks and/or Julian Assange.”

Maddow then went on to describe November’s revelation via court filing error about Assange’s sealed criminal complaint with her trademarked conspiratorial “you can’t tell me this is a coincidence” histrionics. She then cited a *Daily Beast* report that former WikiLeaks volunteer David House had accepted an immunity deal in exchange for his testimony before this grand jury, completely omitting the fact that the report explicitly states that this testimony pertained to the 2010 leak drop and not anything to do with 2016.

“Late Thursday, Manning revealed that she’s fighting a subpoena to testify before a grand jury that’s been investigating Julian Assange for nearly nine years,” the *Daily Beast* article reads in its second paragraph. “But Manning isn’t the only one being dragged into the aging probe of WikiLeaks’ first big haul. A former WikiLeaks volunteer who was also personal friends with Manning was subpoenaed last May.”

Maddow knew this, and willfully distorted it to fit her narrative.



Aaron Maté 
@aaronjmate



And that something "is based on [Assange's] pre-2016 conduct, not the election hacks" investigated by Mueller ([washingtonpost.com/local/legal-is...](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-is-...)). But @Maddow omits that inconvenient part of the WP article, going instead w/ Stone-Cohen innuendo to falsely suggest this pertains to Mueller:

Maddow Blog  @MaddowBlog

Something appears to be happening in federal court that pertains to WikiLeaks and Julian Assange...



“So, all of this to say between that court filing error in November, the reporting around that error that suggested that it was weird that he was in that case and it was a mistake but the information was true, and then what we saw today in Virginia, something appears to be happening in federal court that pertains to WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. And this is happening as the president’s longtime advisor Roger Stone goes to trial for lying to Congress and witness tampering, allegedly, about his supposed communications with WikiLeaks during the campaign. It happens potentially as he’s going to jail for violating the gag order in that case. It happens as tons of people associated with the president and his campaign are being asked detailed questions by the Judiciary Committee about their interactions with WikiLeaks, including during the

campaign, and it happens within a week of Trump's longtime personal lawyer Michael Cohen testifying before Congress that the president, himself, was personally notified by phone in advance about WikiLeaks' plans to dump stolen material that Russia hacked from the Democrats during the campaign."

So she just plain lied. By suggesting that the Virginia grand jury has anything at all to do with Roger Stone's walking clickbait shenanigans, the House Judiciary Committee's investigations into possible Trump malfeasance, and Cohen's testimony that Trump had advance knowledge of the (already publicly announced) upcoming WikiLeaks drops, Maddow knowingly deceived her tinfoil pussyhat-wearing audience into holding out hope that legal proceedings will soon be vindicating their cult.

Maddow then kicked it up into ultra-mega-Super-Saiyan-galaxy-brain Russiavaping by telling her audience not to Google any of the things she was telling them, because they'll get computer viruses if they try.

"Now I will warn you," Maddow said with a laugh, "if you are an interested news consumer who is interested in following this part of the story, I will warn you: just about everything that pertains to WikiLeaks, Julian Assange and Roger Stone is basically un-Googleable. All the online trash that relates to these characters, put your virus protection on. But something does appear to be happening there in federal court."

Needless to say, this also is completely false. Google algorithms are slanted in favor of mainstream news media, not toward websites that will give you a “virus”, so the top results you get when you type in WikiLeaks or Assange’s name will always be news stories from conventional sites, many of which today refute Maddow’s claim that the Manning subpoena and grand jury have anything to do with the 2016 Trump campaign.

And of course, that’s the point. Narrative management is Rachel Maddow’s job, for which she is extremely well-compensated, and the more isolated she can keep her audience within a tight, narrow echo chamber, the better she can do that job. Rachel Maddow is nothing other than a cold war propagandist, rewarded like all her colleagues for promoting falsehoods to keep mainstream liberals supporting longstanding U.S. government agendas against noncompliant nations while still letting them feel like rebels.

In today’s media landscape, powerful and opaque government agencies are scrutinized and criticized far, far less than a lone political prisoner in an embassy who revealed inconvenient facts about those agencies. The campaign to smear, silence and imprison Assange tells you all you need to know about the governments that WikiLeaks has exposed, and the mass media’s complicity in that campaign tells you all you need to know about them as well.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at Medium. Follow her work on Facebook, Twitter, or her website. She has a podcast and a new book “Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers.” This article was re-published with permission.

The Real Motive Behind the FBI Plan to Investigate Trump as a Russian Agent

Coverage of this episode by *The New York Times* and *CNN* further stigmatizes any dissent from new Cold War policy toward Russia, writes Gareth Porter.

By [Gareth Porter](#)

Special to Consortium News



The New York Times and *CNN* led media coverage last month of discussions among senior FBI officials in May 2017 of a possible national security investigation of President Donald Trump himself, on the premise that he may have acted as an agent of Russia.

The episode has potentially profound political fallout, because the *Times* and *CNN* stories suggested that Trump may indeed have acted like a Russian agent. [The New York Times story](#) on Jan. 11 was headlined, “F.B.I. Opened Inquiry into Whether Trump Was Secretly Working on Behalf of Russia.” [CNN followed three days later](#) with: “Transcripts detail how FBI debated whether Trump was ‘following directions’ of Russia.”

By reporting that Russia may have been able to suborn the president of the United States, these stories have added an even more extreme layer to the dominant national political narrative of a serious Russian threat to destroy U.S. democracy. An analysis of the FBI’s idea of Trump as possible Russian agent reveals, moreover, that

it is based on a devious concept of “unwitting” service to Russian interests that can be traced back to former CIA director John O. Brennan.

The Proposal That Fell Apart

The FBI discussions that drove these stories could have led to the first known investigation of a U.S. president as a suspected national security risk. It ended only a few days after the deliberations among the senior FBI officials when on May 19, 2017, the Justice Department chose Robert Mueller, a former FBI director, to be special counsel. That put control over the Trump-Russia investigation into the hands of Mueller rather than the FBI.

Peter Strzok, who led the bureau’s counter-espionage section, was, along with former FBI General Counsel James A. Baker, one of those involved in the May 2017 discussions about investigating Trump. Strzok initially joined Mueller’s team but was fired after a couple of months when text messages that he had written came to light exposing a deep animosity towards Trump that cast doubt over his impartiality.

The other FBI officials behind the proposed investigation of Trump have also since left the FBI; either fired or retired.

The entirety of what was said at the meetings of five or six senior FBI officials in the immediate aftermath of Trump’s firing of James Comey as FBI director on May 9, 2017, remains a mystery.

Closed-door Testimony

The CNN and *Times* stories were based on transcripts either

obtained or, in the case of the *Times*, on portions read to it, of private testimony given to the House Judiciary and Government Oversight and Reform committees last October by Baker, one of the participants in the discussions of Trump as a possible Russian agent.

Excerpts of Baker's testimony published by CNN make it clear that the group spoke about Trump's policy toward Russia as a basis for a counter-intelligence investigation. Baker said they "discussed as [a] theoretical possibility" that Trump was "acting at the behest of [Russia] and somehow following directions, somehow executing their will."

Baker went on to explain that this theoretical possibility was only "one extreme" in a range of possibilities discussed and that "the other extreme" was that "the President is completely innocent."

He thus made it clear that there was no actual evidence for the idea that he was acting on behalf of Russia.

Baker also offered a simpler rationale for such an investigation of Trump: the president's firing of FBI Director Comey. "Not only would [firing Comey] be an issue of obstructing an investigation," he said, "but the obstruction itself would hurt our ability to figure what the Russians had done, and that is what would be the threat to national security."

But the idea that Comey's firing had triggered the FBI's discussions had already been refuted by a text message that Strzok, who had been leading the FBI's probe into the Trump campaign's contacts with Russians, sent immediately after the firing to Lisa Page, then legal counsel to Andrew

McCabe, formerly the bureau's deputy director who was then acting director.

"We need to open *the case we've been waiting on* now while Andy is acting," Strzok wrote, referring to McCabe.

As Page later confirmed to congressional investigators, according to the CNN story, Strzok's message referred to their desire to launch an investigation into possible collusion between Trump and the Russians. Strzok's message also makes clear he, and others intent on the investigation, were anxious to get McCabe to approve the proposed probe before Trump named someone less sympathetic to the project as the new FBI director.

Why the FBI Wanted to Investigate

The New York Times story argued that the senior FBI officials' interest in a counter-intelligence investigation of Trump and the Russians sprang from their knowledge of the sensational charges in the opposition research dossier assembled by British ex-spy Christopher Steele (paid for by the DNC and the Clinton campaign) that the Putin government had "tried to obtain influence over Mr. Trump by preparing to blackmail and bribe him."

But the *Times* writers must have known that Bruce Ohr, former associate deputy attorney general, had already given McCabe, Page and Strzok information about Steele and his dossier that raised fundamental questions about its reliability.

Ohr's first contacts at FBI headquarters regarding Steele and his dossier came Aug. 3, 2016, with Page and her boss McCabe. Ohr later met with Strzok.

Ohr said he told them that Steele's work on the dossier had been financed by the Clinton campaign through the Perkins-Cole law firm. He also told them that Steele, in a July 30, 2016 meeting, told him he was "desperate that Donald Trump not get elected and was passionate about him not being president," according to Ohr's contemporaneous notes of the meeting.

So, key figures in the discussion of Trump and Russia in May 2017 knew that Steele was acting out of both political and business motives to come up with sensational material.

Strzok and Page may have started out as true believers in the idea that the Russians were using Trump campaign officials to manipulate Trump administration policy. However, by May 2017, Strzok had evidently concluded that there was no real evidence.

In a text message to Page on May 19, 2017, Strzok said he was reluctant to join the Mueller investigation, because of his "gut sense and concern" that "there's no big there there."

Why, then, were Strzok, Page, McCabe and others so determined to launch an investigation of Trump at about the same time in May 2017?

A *CNN* article about the immediate aftermath of the Comey firing reported that Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and senior FBI officials "viewed Trump as a leader who needed to be reined in, according to two sources describing the sentiment of the time."

That description by anti-Trump law enforcement officials

suggests that the proposed counter-intelligence investigation of Trump served as a means to maintain some leverage over his treatment of the FBI in regard to the Russia issue.

That motivation would be consistent with the decision by McCabe on May 15, 2017 – a few days after the discussions in question among the senior FBI officials – to resume the bureau's relationship with Steele.

The FBI had hired Steele as a paid source when it had earlier launched its investigation of Trump campaign official's contacts with Russians in July 2016. But it had suspended and then terminated the relationship over Steele's unauthorized disclosure of the investigation to David Corn of *Mother Jones* magazine in October 2016. So, the decision to resume the relationship with Steele suggests that the group behind the new investigation were thinking of seizing an opportunity to take off the gloves against Trump.

The 'Unwitting Collaboration' Ploy

The discussion by senior FBI officials of a counter-intelligence investigation of Trump has become part of the political struggle over Trump mainly because of the stories in the *Times* and *CNN*.

The role of the authors of those stories illustrates how corporate journalists casually embraced the ultimate conspiracy theory – that the president of the United States was acting as a Russian stooge.

The reporters of the *CNN* story – Jeremy Herb, Pamela Brown and Laura Jarrett – wrote that the FBI officials were

“trying to understand why [Trump] was acting in ways that seemed to benefit Russia.”

The New York Times story was more explicit. Co-authors Adam Goldman, Michael S. Schmidt and Nicholas Fandos wrote that the FBI officials “sought to determine whether Mr. Trump was knowingly working for Russia or had unwittingly fallen under Moscow’s influence.”

The same day the *Times* story was published, the lead author on the piece, Adam Goldman, was interviewed by *CNN*. Goldman referred to Trump’s interview with *NBC*’s Lester Holt in the days after the Comey firing as something that supposedly pushed the FBI officials over the edge. Goldman declared, “The FBI is watching him say this, and they say he’s telling us why he did this. He did it on behalf of Russia.”

But Trump said nothing of kind. What he actually said – as the *Times* itself quoted Trump, from the *NBC* interview –was: “[W]hen I decided just to do it, I said to myself – I said, you know this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story.” The *Times* article continued: “Mr. Trump’s aides have said that a fuller examination of his comments demonstrates that he did not fire Mr. Comey to end the Russia inquiry. ‘I might even lengthen out the investigation, but I have to do the right thing for the American people,’ ” Mr. Trump added. ‘He’s the wrong man for that position.’ ” Goldman was evidently trying to sell the idea of Trump as a suspected agent of Russia.

Goldman also gave an interview to *The New Yorker*’s Isaac Chotiner, in which the interviewer pressed him on the weakest point of the Trump-as-Russian-agent theory. “What

would that look like if the President was an unwitting agent of a foreign power?" asked Chotiner.

The *Times* correspondent, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the alleged Russian efforts to influence the 2016 election, responded: "It is hard to say what that would look like." Goldman then reiterated the concept. "People were very careful to tell me that: 'It is wittingly or unwittingly.'" And in answer to a follow-up question, Goldman referred to evidence he suggested might be held by the FBI that "perhaps suggests that the President himself may be acting as a foreign agent, either wittingly or unwittingly...."

The idea that American citizens were somehow at risk of being led by an agent of the Russian government "wittingly or unwittingly" did not appear spontaneously. It had been pushed aggressively by former CIA Director John O. Brennan both during and after his role in pressing for the original investigation.

When Brennan testified before the House Intelligence Committee in May 2017, he was asked whether he had intelligence indicating that anyone in the Trump campaign was "colluding with Moscow." Instead of answering the question directly, Brennan said he knew from past experience that "the Russians try to suborn individuals, and they try get them to act on their behalf either wittingly or unwittingly." And he recalled that he had left the government with "unresolved questions" about whether the Russians had been successful in doing so in regard to unidentified individuals in the case of the 2016 elections.

Brennan's notion of "unwitting collaboration" with Russian subversion is illogical. Although a political actor might accidentally reveal information to a foreign government that is valuable, real "collaboration" must be mutually agreeable. A policy position or action that may benefit a foreign government, but is also in the interest of one's own government, does not constitute "unwitting collaboration."

The real purpose of that concept is to confer on national security officials and their media allies the power to cast suspicion on individuals on the basis of undesirable policy views of Russia rather than on any evidence of actual collaboration with the Russian government.

The "witting or unwitting" ploy has its origins in the unsavory history of extreme right-wing anti-communism during the Cold War. For example, when the House Un-American Activities Committee was at its height in 1956, Chairman Francis E. Walter declared that "people who are not actually Communist Party members are witting or unwitting servants of the Communist cause."

The same logic – without explicit reference to the phrase – has been used to impugn the independence and loyalty of people who have contacts with Russia.

It has also been used to portray some independent media as part of a supposedly all-powerful Russian media system.

The revelation that it was turned against a sitting president, however briefly, is a warning signal that national security bureaucrats and their media allies are now moving more aggressively to delegitimize any opposition to the new Cold War.

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Dismantling the Doomsday Machines

Dan Ellsberg has given us a book that shows the urgency of re-engaging on nuclear disarmament, writes John V. Walsh.

With Two Minutes to Midnight, Time Is Running Out

[By John V. Walsh](#)

[Anti-war.com](#)

“From a technical point of view, he [director Stanley Kubrick] anticipated many things. ... Since that time, little has changed, honestly. The only difference is that modern weapons systems have become more sophisticated,

more complex. But this idea of a retaliatory strike and the inability to manage these systems, yes, all of these things are relevant today. It [controlling the weapons] will become even more difficult and more dangerous.”

– Russian President Vladimir Putin commenting on the film, “Dr. Strangelove: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb,” in an [interview with Oliver Stone, May 11, 2016](#). Putin had not seen the movie and did not know of it before Stone showed it to him.

The [“Doomsday Machine,”](#) the title of [Daniel Ellsberg’s](#) superb book, is not an imaginary contraption from a movie masterpiece. A Doomsday Machine uncannily like the one described in “Dr. Strangelove” exists right now. In fact, there are two such machines, one in U.S. hands and one in Russia’s. The U.S. seeks to hide its version, but Ellsberg has revealed that it has existed since the 1950s. Russia has quietly admitted that it has one, named it formally, “Perimetr,” and also tagged it with a frighteningly apt nickname “Dead Hand.” Because the U.S. and Russia are the only nations with Doomsday Machines to date we shall restrict this discussion to them.

Ellsberg’s terrifying message in the book has failed to provoke action in the year since its publication. Instead, on Jan. 24 the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* kept its [Doomsday Clock](#) at two minutes to midnight, poised perilously close to Armageddon for a second year, marking a “new abnormal.”

The first component of a Doomsday Machine is a mechanism of launching nuclear weapons with a command structure not always in the hands of a president in either country,

something carefully hidden from the U.S. public.

The second component is a weapon of such destructive force that it can kill billions at once and then more gradually the entire human race and perhaps all animal life on earth.

Here is a brief consideration of Ellsberg's views as a reminder of the nuclear peril we face along with a plan of action that he and others suggest.

Launch and Command

Russia and the U.S. each have the ability to strike the other with great force, destroy the other's cities and industrial and military bases.

The essence of this first-strike capacity is the ability to wipe out the deterrent of the other side or weaken it so that the remaining force could be intercepted for the most part.

How can a targeted nation respond to such a capability? It must convince the adversary that such a strike is futile because it will not destroy the deterrent of the targeted nation. The attacker must understand that the nuclear force of the targeted nation, its nuclear deterrent, will survive, and the attacker will be annihilated.

The first approach to ensure this survivability is to build ever more nuclear weapons. Thus, when the U.S. pioneered its first-strike capability in the Cold War, the Soviet Union responded with a buildup. Quite quickly both had a first-strike capacity with the competitive buildup reaching the insane levels shown [here](#). Each side also took the following additional measures.

The first measure to prevent the loss of deterrence is to put the nuclear force on Launch on Warning, which is also described as Hair Trigger Alert.

Most of us have heard about this, but we ought to quake in our boots every time it comes to mind. Since the time to respond to a first strike is only tens of minutes for an ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) attack, which takes about 30 minutes to travel between the U.S. and Russia, and even less time for a short or intermediate range missile, a targeted country must have its nuclear force loaded onto delivery vehicles and capable of being launched on warning of a nuclear attack.

Nuclear warheads that are loaded onto delivery vehicles are said to be “deployed.” They are ready to be launched in minutes. On each side –both in Russia and in the U.S. – roughly 1,600 such warheads were loaded onto long-range delivery vehicles in 2018. (There are several thousand more warheads in reserve on each side but not “deployed.”) It is easy to see the danger inherent in this situation.

The second measure to prevent loss of deterrence is “delegation.” This is not widely known or understood.

One aspect of a first strike would be an attempt to knock out known command centers so that a retaliatory strike could not be ordered. This is known as “decapitation.” The antidote to decapitation is “delegation,” that is, others besides the presidents and their immediate successors are authorized to press “the button.” It works this way. These “others” are located in secret command centers far from Washington or the Strategic Air Command Base in Colorado,

both of which will be targeted in a decapitation strike. If these secret centers find themselves cut off from communication with Washington or Moscow, then the assumption is made that a decapitating nuclear strike has occurred. In that event these "others" removed from the centers of power are authorized to press the nuclear button. These others are not elected officials and in fact we do not know who they are. What Ellsberg discovered is that some of these "others" are military people who are concerned that they too could be hit in a decapitating strike. So they also have the authority to delegate.

In fact, no one, perhaps not even the president, nor his circle of advisors, knows who can launch the nuclear weapons. Is it possible that one might be like the fictional [General Jack D. Ripper](#), the psychotic, delusional fellow who gives the launch order in Dr. Strangelove, or someone lusting after the [Rapture?](#)

In summary, first-strike capability is the source of the problem. It leads to a nuclear arms buildup, launch on warning and delegation. The idea of having such a capability is deeply imbedded in U.S. "strategic" thinking and will be hard to dislodge.

Weapons of Human Extinction

The second component of a Doomsday Machine is the weaponry. What is the destructive power of the nuclear weapons used in a first strike? In 1961, when Ellsberg was among those working on nuclear-war fighting strategy for the Kennedy administration, he requested an estimate from the Pentagon of the deaths due to a first strike as the war planners had

mapped it out then. To his surprise the estimate came back at once – the Pentagon had made it and kept it hidden. At a time when the global population was about 3 billion, a first strike by the U.S. would result in the deaths of 1.2 billion from explosions, radiation and fire. That number was deaths only, not injuries. And it was only the result of U.S. weapons; it did not include deaths from a Soviet response if they managed one. The deaths would be concentrated in targeted countries, then and now the U.S. and Russia. Ellsberg was stunned to learn that the Pentagon would coolly make plans for such a gargantuan and immediate genocide. And so should we all be.

But the damage does not stop there. This is the surprise that the Pentagon did not understand at the time. The ash from the fires of burning cities would be cast up into the stratosphere so high that it would not be rained out. There it would remain for at least a decade, blocking enough sunlight to prevent crops from growing for 10 years. That is sufficient to cause total starvation and wipe out the entire human race, with only a handful at most able to survive. Nuclear winter was publicized in the 1980s and encountered some initial skepticism.

Now with the interest in global warming, better computer models have been developed. When the results of a nuclear first strike are put into these models, nuclear winter again makes its appearance as Brian Toon, Alan Robock and others have shown. The TED talks of Toon and of Robock describing their findings are well worthwhile; they are brief and well-illustrated. We are confronted with a genocide of all or

nearly all humanity, an "Omnicide."

The launch of the 1600 "deployed" warheads of either the U.S. or Russia is sufficient to give us nuclear winter. So we in the U.S. have put in place a weapon system on hair-trigger alert commanded by we know not whom that can kill virtually all Americans – along with most everyone else on the planet.

We have on hair trigger alert a weapon that is in fact suicidal. Even if we neglect the effects of nuclear winter, the nuclear attacks would be concentrated on Russia and the U.S. So most of us would be consumed. Thus MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) is replaced with SAD (Self-Assured Destruction).

Abandoning First-Strike Policy & Capacity

Dismantling the Doomsday Machine with its hair-trigger alert and system of delegation means abandoning a first-strike policy *and* capacity. And right now, only two countries have such first strike capacity and only one, the U.S., refuses to take the right to use it "off the table" even when not under attack

What does the elimination of first-strike capacity mean in practice? This involves two basic steps for the U.S. First, the land-based ICBMs, the Minuteman III, must be entirely dismantled, not refurbished as is currently being undertaken at enormous cost. These missiles, the land-based part of the Strategic Triad, are highly accurate but fixed in place like "sitting ducks." They are only good for a first strike, for they will be destroyed in a successful first strike by an adversary. Former Secretary of Defense

[William Perry](#) and [James E. Cartwright](#), formerly head of the Strategic Air Command and formerly vice chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have both [called for](#) dismantling the Minuteman III. The second step is to reduce the Trident Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) force to the level where it cannot destroy the entire Russian land-based missile force.

Russia would also need to execute similar measures, taking into account the specifics of its arsenal. Here negotiations, treaties and verification are necessary. But these are impossible in the current atmosphere of Russiagate and Russophobia, which is why both are existential threats and must be surmounted. We must talk despite our differences, real or perceived.

An additional measure has also been proposed. All nuclear warheads should be removed from deployed status by Russia and the U.S. (The anodyne term is “de-alerting.”) That is, the warheads should be removed from their delivery vehicles and stored in a way that would take days or even weeks to deploy – that is to remount. This has been proposed by the Global Zero [Commission on Nuclear Risk Reduction](#) whose plan is laid out [here](#).

The Work Ahead

Total abolition should be the ultimate goal because no human hand should be allowed to wield species-destroying power. But it seems that an intermediate goal is not only needed to give us the breathing space to get to zero nuclear weapons. An intermediate and readily achievable goal can call attention to the problem and motivate large numbers of

people. The [Nuclear Freeze movement](#) of the 1980s is a very successful example of this sort of effort; it played a big role in making the Reagan-Gorbachev accords possible.

The effort to kill the Doomsday Machines might well be called something like “Step Away from Doomsday” or simply “Step Away.” At two minutes to midnight we must make haste to do this. Abolishing nuclear weapons will require a breakthrough in the way countries deal with one another, especially nuclear armed countries. Let us give ourselves the breathing space to accomplish that.

An earlier version of this article appeared on [Anti-war.com](#).

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