

Breaking the Silence

Twenty-seven writers, journalists, film-makers, artists, academics, former intelligence officers and democrats call on the government of Ecuador in this letter to allow Julian Assange his right of freedom of speech.

THE ISOLATION OF JULIAN ASSANGE IS THE SILENCING OF US ALL

If it was ever clear that the case of Julian Assange was never just a legal case, but a struggle for the protection of basic human rights, it is now.

Citing his critical tweets about the recent detention of Catalan president Carles Puigdemont in Germany, and following pressure from the US, Spanish and UK governments, the Ecuadorian government has installed an electronic jammer to stop Assange communicating with the outside world via the internet and phone.

As if ensuring his total isolation, the Ecuadorian government is also refusing to allow him to receive visitors. Despite two UN rulings describing his detention as unlawful and mandating his immediate release, Assange has been effectively imprisoned since he was first placed in isolation in Wandsworth prison in London in December 2010. He has never been charged with a crime. The Swedish case against him collapsed and was withdrawn, while the United States has stepped up efforts to prosecute him. His only "crime" is that of a true journalist – telling the world the truths that people have a right to know.

Under its previous president, the Ecuadorian government bravely stood against the bullying might of the United States and granted Assange political asylum as a political refugee. International law and the morality of human rights was on its side.

Today, under extreme pressure from Washington and its collaborators, another government in Ecuador justifies its gagging of Assange by stating that "Assange's behavior, through his messages on social media, put at risk good relations which this country has with the UK, the rest of the EU and other nations."

This censorious attack on free speech is not happening in Turkey, Saudi Arabia or China; it is right in the heart of London. If the Ecuadorian government does not cease its unworthy action, it, too, will become an agent of persecution rather than the valiant nation that stood up for freedom and for free speech. If the EU and the UK continue to participate in the scandalous silencing of a true dissident in their midst, it will mean that free speech is indeed dying in Europe.

This is not just a matter of showing support and solidarity. We are appealing to all who care about basic human rights to call on the government of Ecuador to continue defending the rights of a courageous free speech activist, journalist and whistleblower.

We ask that his basic human rights be respected as an Ecuadorian citizen and internationally protected person and that he not be silenced or expelled.

If there is no freedom of speech for Julian Assange, there is no freedom of speech for any of us – regardless of the disparate opinions we hold.

We call on President Moreno to end the isolation of Julian Assange now.

List of signatories (in alphabetic order):

Pamela Anderson, actress and activist

Jacob Appelbaum, freelance journalist

Renata Avila, International Human Rights Lawyer

Sally Burch, British/Ecuadorian journalist

Alicia Castro, Argentina's ambassador to the United Kingdom 2012-16

Naomi Colvin, Courage Foundation

Noam Chomsky, linguist and political theorist

Brian Eno, musician

Joseph Farrell, WikiLeaks Ambassador and board member of The Centre for Investigative Journalism

Teresa Forcades, Benedictine nun, Montserrat Monastery

Charles Glass, American-British author, journalist, broadcaster

Chris Hedges, journalist

Srecko Horvat, philosopher, Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25)

Jean Michel Jarre, musician

John Kiriakou, former CIA counterterrorism officer and former senior investigator, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Lauri Love, computer scientist and activist

Ray McGovern, former CIA analyst, Presidential advisor

John Pilger, journalist and film-maker

Angela Richter, theater director, Germany

Saskia Sassen, sociologist, Columbia University

Oliver Stone, film-maker

Vaughan Smith, English journalist

Yanis Varoufakis, economist, former Greek finance minister

Natalia Viana, investigative journalist and co-director of Agencia publica, Brazil

Ai Weiwei, artist

Vivienne Westwood, fashion designer and activist

Slavoj Žižek, philosopher, Birkbeck Institute for Humanities

Questioning the Conventional Wisdom of Russian Spy's Poisoning

The recent poisoning of a Russian spy has started a tit-for-tat of expelling diplomats between the US and Russia, an escalation of tensions that deserves serious questioning, explained former ambassador Craig Murray in an interview with Dennis J Bernstein and Randy Credico.

By Dennis J Bernstein and Randy Credico

Former UK Ambassador Craig Murray found out very quickly what happens when one contradicts the conventional wisdom regarding the recent poisoning of former Russian spy and double agent Sergei Skripal, and his daughter Yulia, in the English city of Salisbury on March 4.

Ambassador Murray, who in the following interview raises compelling questions about who may be responsible for the attacks, other than the Russians, has been the butt of a full-scale cyber attack on his website over many days.

Meanwhile, the usual suspects in the US and Western corporate press continue to

fan the flames of a new cold war with Russia. Indeed, Russia will expel 60 US diplomats and has ordered the shuttering of the US consulate in St. Petersburg, according to an announcement by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Lavrov, who made the announcement in Moscow on Thursday, March 29, summoned US ambassador Jon Huntsman to the Russian Foreign Ministry to confirm the action.

Dennis J. Bernstein and Randy Credico interviewed Ambassador Murray on March 26th, 2018.

Dennis Bernstein: President Trump ordered the expulsion of 60 Russian officials from the United States and the closing of the Russian consulate in Seattle. The move follows the alleged poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the English city of Salisbury on March 4. Joining us is someone who knows a great deal about the matter and has come under fire for taking an oppositional position, former UK ambassador, author and activist, Craig Murray. Mr. Murray, everyone says the Russians did it, no doubt about it, but you disagree.

Craig Murray: I'm not saying the Russians didn't do it, I am saying there are other possibilities. We are not supposed to assign responsibility for crime in this way, saying there is a bad guy in the neighborhood and therefore it must be him. So far, there has been no real evidence at all that it was the Russian state that did it.

I find it remarkable that the very day this happened the British government was announcing that it was the Russian state that was behind this. They couldn't possibly have had time to analyze any of the evidence. It is as though this is being used as a trigger to put prearranged anti-Russian measures into place and to "up" the Cold War rhetoric. You can't help get the feeling that they are rather pleased this has happened and were even expecting it to happen.

DB: This is coming out of the European Union today: "The European Union strongly condemns the attack that took place against Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, England on March 4 that also left a police officer seriously ill. The lives of many citizens were threatened by this reckless and illegal action. The European Union takes extremely seriously the UK government's assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible."

CM: This phrase "highly likely" admits that they don't have the evidence to back this up. It's a speculation.

DB: They say that the poison is consistent with what the Russians have used in the past.

CM: The claim is that this is one of a group of nerve agents known as a

Novichok. The Novichok program was being run in the 1980's by the Soviets. The idea was to develop chemical weapons which could be quickly put together from commercial pesticides and fertilizers. They came up with a number of theoretical designs for such weapons.

Until now, the official position of the British government and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was that there was doubt as to whether they actually produced any of these. As of now, they haven't been put on the banned list, precisely because the scientific community has doubted their existence. So the British government's ability on day-one to identify this was quite remarkable.

Novichok is not a particular weapon but a class of weapon. Russia is by no means the only country capable of producing this kind of weapon. In 2016, the Iranians succeeded in producing several Novichok weapons and they reported their results to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Their motivation was that they were concerned that they themselves might be attacked by chemical weapons, possibly from Israel. There are at least a couple dozen countries who have the technical capability to create this type of nerve agent.

In order to take blood samples from the Skripals, who were both in a coma, doctors had to get court approval. And in giving evidence to the High Court, two scientists stated that the Skripals had been poisoned by a Novichok nerve agent or a "closely related agent." It looks to many people like this may just be a silly amateur mixture of different insecticides.

Other questions arise. The British government has been telling us that this is ten times more powerful than a standard nerve agent. Thankfully, so far, nobody has been killed. Why isn't this deadly agent more effective? Why is it that the doctor who administered first aid to Yulia Skripal was completely unaffected, even though he had extensive physical contact with her?

DB: But some people will say that the only country that would want to silence a former Russian spy would be Russia.

CM: Our foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, has gone on record as saying that the Russians have been secretly stockpiling this chemical weapon for a decade and have had a secret program of assassination techniques. But if you were Vladimir Putin and you had this secret nerve agent, why would you blow your cover by using it on this retired spy who you released from prison years ago? The whole scenario is utterly implausible.

Why would Russia wish to ruin its international reputation with this entirely gratuitous violence against an old spy? Skripal was exchanged as part of a spy

swap. If people are going to swap spies and then kill them, there won't be any spy swaps in the future. A KGB person like Putin is the last person who is going to destroy the system of spy swaps.

Randy Credico: Mr. Murray, there has been a concerted effort to defame you and undermine your credibility. What effect has this had on you and your family?

CM: It has been really quite unpleasant. The mainstream media has permitted no doubt at all. All of them are just printing government propaganda. I went on social media to post my doubts about this story being too convenient and too easy. My first piece on this, "Russian to Judgment," had millions of viewers. That brought upon me the wrath of the establishment. I became the recipient of hundreds of pieces of Twitter abuse in which I was called a nut and a conspiracy theorist.

RC: Who stands to benefit from this attack?

CM: It adds fuel to the new Cold War. The armaments industry are the primary people who benefit. This kind of thing is very good for defense budgets. It is very good news for the spies and security services. Here in the UK the industry employs over 100,000 people. In a country of 60 million, this is a strong and very highly paid interest group. All of these people are seeing a major ramping up of their budgets. When the people feeding-in the intelligence are the same people who are benefiting financially from that story, then you have to worry. And particularly for right-wing politicians this is a cheap way of getting support.

DB: Mr. Murray, I don't think that we can separate this from the so-called "Russiagate frenzy." Can you state unequivocally that there were substantial leaks from the DNC, as opposed to hacks?

CM: I can promise you that what came out of the DNC were leaks. They were from somebody who legally had access to the information. It was not an outside hack, not by the Russians, not by anyone.

DB: What if you were subpoenaed before Congress, would you take the fifth or would you tell that story?

CM: I've actually been in touch with them, saying I know what happened here and could perhaps save them a lot of time. But they haven't replied and I don't expect them to. If called, I would turn up and I would gladly tell them what I have told you: That I know for sure that this wasn't a Russian hack but a leak. I would not give any further details because that might compromise others.

The other thing about the Skripal case, of course, is the connection to Orbis

Intelligence and Christopher Steele and Pablo Miller. The person who wrote the dossier on Donald Trump for the Clinton campaign was Christopher Steele of Orbis Intelligence. He was in MI6 in the Russian Embassy in Moscow at the time when Skripal was a key double agent. The guy who was responsible for handling Skripal on a day-to-day basis was Pablo Miller. Pablo Miller also worked for Orbis Intelligence. The MI6 has never had the close-up access to Putin that that dossier claims to have. Plainly, a great deal of it is fabrication.

I strongly suspect that Mr. Skripal was involved in the production of that dossier about Donald Trump. I admit that this is circumstantial, but that dossier was produced while Pablo Miller was working for Orbis Intelligence.

Like Mr. Steele, Pablo Miller was a former MI6 agent in Russia. And Pablo Miller was also living in Salisbury, within a short distance of Skripal. If you are going to produce a dossier which invents a lot of stuff about Donald Trump and his connections to the circle around Putin, you need a Russian source who can give you names and lend the dossier a degree of authenticity. I believe that that kind of detail is what Skripal provided to the Steele dossier.

This would seem a much more plausible lead in investigating this case. The idea that you kill someone for something that happened twelve years ago is frankly much less compelling than something that is happening now. Of course, there is a possibility that Skripal revealed something in the dossier which the Russians didn't want revealed, that they decided he was still a danger and should be eliminated.

The other possibility is that Mr. Skripal was a double agent who worked for money. He sold to the British names of Russian officers and agents serving abroad. So he is not the most principled of people. And once you've become a double agent, it's not hard to become a triple agent. And if Skripal knows that this dossier is full of lies, he might come out and confess to fabricating all of this in hopes of making financial gain.

DB: You feel that you are under attack for taking this position?

CM: Yes, and it is not just the nasty tweets and emails. My website has been under attack, at a rate of millions of hits per minute.

RC: Have any of the mainstream media in Britain reported anything other than the government line?

CM: Strangely enough, after I posted it, the BBC reported the fact that Skripal's handler in Russia was now working for Steele and that Skripal and Pablo Miller lived in the same town. But the BBC contacted Orbis and they said that wasn't true. That was the end of that.

RC: You have been attacked by foreign minister Boris Johnson.

CM: Interestingly, when talking to journalists, Boris Johnson and others have stated clearly that this poison must have come from Russia, but in their formal statements to Parliament and the United Nations Security Council, they write that it was “a weapon of a type developed by Russia.” That is very different from saying that it is a Russian weapon.

RC: Are you concerned that this might be leading to nuclear war?

CM: I think that the Russians have the sense not to overreact. All they have done so far is to match what is done rather than up the ante. So when we expelled 23 diplomats, the Russians expelled 23 diplomats. And it looks like this sort of tit for tat will result from the other expulsions.

But I strongly believe that this is happening because there are a lot of people—in the military, in the weapons industry—who miss the Cold War. They are seeing a threat to their budgets. We are entering a period where there is not going to be a lot of international cooperation and we are going to see a lot of militaristic posturing. Of course, there is always the prospect that something can go wrong.

DB: What do you think of John Bolton being appointed National Security Advisor? This is someone who has said that he would be happy if North Korea disappeared. He doesn't seem to be someone who would support the ongoing arrangement with Iran.

CM: I think it is very scary. Bolton obviously is the hawk of hawks and he bore a huge responsibility for the Iraq War. It is a very strange and irresponsible appointment. A couple days ago, I was reviewing Trump's term in office and I realized that one good thing is that he hasn't initiated a war till now. I'm not convinced Hillary wouldn't have gotten us into an armed conflict by this point. But then, now Trump appoints John Bolton, which leads me to suspect that war might not be far off.

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

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in February focused on the release of the so-called

"Nunes Memo", the US system of perpetual warfare, and the growing risk of confrontations in Syria, North Korea and Iran.

"Outpouring of Support Honors Robert Parry" Feb. 1, 2018

"U.S. Media's Objectivity Questioned Abroad" by Andrew Spannaus, Feb. 2, 2018

"Nunes Memo Reports Crimes at Top of FBI and DOJ" by Ray McGovern, Feb. 2, 2018

"'Duck and Cover' Drills Exacerbate Fears of N. Korea War" by Ann Wright, Feb. 3, 2018

"Do We Really Want Nuclear War with Russia?" by Robert Parry, Feb. 4, 2018

"Recipe Concocted for Perpetual War is a Bitter One" by Robert Wing and Coleen Rowley, Feb. 4, 2018

"WMD Claims in Syria Raise Concerns over U.S. Escalation" by Rick Sterling, Feb. 4, 2018

"Connecticut Court Decision Highlights U.S. Educational Failures" by Dennis J. Bernstein, Feb. 5, 2018

"Understanding Russia, Un-Demonizing Putin" by Sharon Tennison, Feb. 6, 2018

"Did Al Qaeda Dupe Trump on Syrian Attack?" by Robert Parry, Feb. 6, 2018

"No Time for Complacency over Korea War Threat" by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 7, 2018

"'This is Nuts': Liberals Launch 'Largest Mobilization in History' in Defense of Russiagate Probe" by Coleen Rowley and Nat Parry, Feb. 9, 2018

"A Note to Our Readers" by Nat Parry, Feb. 10, 2018

"Donald Trump v. the Spooks" by Annie Machon, Feb.23, 2018

"How Establishment Propaganda Gaslights Us Into Submission" by Caitlin Johnstone, Feb. 12, 2018

"Budget Woes Sign of a Dysfunctional Empire" by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 13, 2018

"The Right's Second Amendment Lies" by Robert Parry, Feb. 16, 2018

"NYT's 'Really Weird' Russiagate Story" by Daniel Lazare, Feb. 16, 2018

"Russians Spooked by Nukes-Against-Cyber-Attack Policy" by Ray McGovern and William Binney, Feb. 16, 2018

[“Nunes: FBI and DOJ Perps Could Be Put on Trial”](#) by Ray McGovern, Feb. 19, 2018

[“U.S. Empire Still Incoherent After All These Years”](#) by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Feb. 20, 2018

[“Time to Admit the Afghan War is ‘Nonsense’”](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 22, 2018

[“Selective Outrage Undermines Human Rights in Syria”](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 23, 2018

[“The Mueller Indictments: The Day the Music Died”](#) by Daniel Lazare, Feb. 24, 2018

[“Growing Risk of U.S.-Iran Hostilities Based on False Pretexts, Intel Vets Warn”](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Feb. 26, 2018

[“Who Benefits from Russia’s ‘Peculiar’ Doping Violations?”](#) by Rick Sterling, Feb. 26, 2018

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The Strange Case of the Russian Spy Poisoning

Applying the principle of *cui bono* – who benefits? – to the case of Sergei Skripal might lead investigators away from the Kremlin as the prime suspect and towards Western intelligence agencies, argues James O’Neill.

By James O’Neill

The suspected nerve agent attack upon former Russian intelligence officer Sergei Skripal, which also affected his daughter in the English city of Salisbury last Sunday, has given rise to too much speculation, too much hysteria, and too little analysis or insight. It has provided ammunition for the Russophobic

Western media to make accusations that it was another example of Russia in general and Vladimir Putin in particular disposing of a supposed enemy of the Kremlin.

As with the Mueller investigation into the alleged Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election there are accusations with varying degrees of wildness, but little or no actual evidence that would get past first base in any independent court of law.

First, what are the known facts, only some of which have been accurately reported in the western mainstream media? The victim (assuming it was a deliberate attack upon him and his daughter) was formerly a Colonel in the Russian military intelligence service (the GRU). This is the largest of the Russian intelligence agencies and, as with its western equivalents, has a wide variety of functions, of which "spying" is only one.

In the early 1990s Skripal was recruited by an MI6 agent Pablo Miller, whom the British media declined to name. Miller was an MI6 agent in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Miller's main task was recruiting Russians to provide information about their country to the British. An interesting fact, possibly coincidental, was that the MI6 officer under diplomatic cover in Moscow at this time was Christopher Steele. Steele was later to become better known as the principal author of the infamous Trump dossier.

When Steele returned to London, he ran MI6's Russia desk between the 2006 and 2009. The information that Skripal disclosed would have been given to Steele, first in Moscow and later in London.

Skripal was arrested in 2004. In 2006 he was convicted of treason and sentenced to 18 years imprisonment. In 2010 he was released as part of a prisoner exchange deal with Russian spies in U.S. jails. He went to live in the United Kingdom where he has lived in supposed retirement ever since. Another interesting fact, although again possibly coincidental, is that Salisbury, where Skripal lived, is only about 12 kilometres from Porton Down, the U.K.'s principal research centre for nerve agents.

If the Russians had wanted to kill him, they had ample opportunity to do so during the years when he was imprisoned or the eight years he lived in retirement in Salisbury. If they did wish to kill him, it is not a very credible that they would do so very publicly and by a means that could not be bought off the shelf in the local pharmacy. The handling and the administering of these very dangerous substances require professional expertise. The obvious candidates for the attempted murder are therefore government agencies, but which government is the unanswered question.

This is where the facts become thinner, but the interesting connections of Skripal offer scope for some tentative hypotheses. While living in Salisbury, Skripal became friendly, according to a report in the UK newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, with none other than the aforementioned Pablo Miller – whom the Telegraph declined to name but has since been identified on the web.

Miller is now working with a British security consultancy named Orbis Business Intelligence. Again according to the Telegraph, Miller's association with this company has now been removed from Miller's LinkedIn profile.

The obvious question again is: why do so now?

Orbis is the same private intelligence agency as that of Christopher Steele. It seems more than a mere coincidence that the same three men who had personal and professional links going back to the 1990s should have a continuing association at the same time as the Steele dossier was being compiled and later as the so-called Russiagate inquiry was imploding. Former FBI Director James Comey described the Steele dossier as "salacious and unverified" in a Senate hearing.

The former British ambassador Craig Murray has suggested on his blog that a motive for the attempted murder of Skripal and his daughter was to further promote the anti-Russian hysteria that inflicts the Western media and the body politic.

That is certainly plausible, and it has certainly been one of the consequences, as the abysmal coverage of the ABC among other outlets makes clear. But an alternative hypothesis presents itself in the light of the above facts, and this hypothesis has not even been mentioned, let alone discussed by our major media.

My admittedly speculative hypothesis (but I would argue, not an unreasonable one) is that Skripal was likely involved in the production of the Steele dossier. He was therefore in a position to offer potentially very damaging information into the circumstances of the Steele dossier. As noted above, that particular narrative has not only spectacularly collapsed, but the revelations reflect very badly on, among others, the U.S. intelligence community, the FBI, the Democratic National Committee, the Obama White House and the Clinton campaign.

In any major criminal enquiry one of the basic questions the investigation asks is: who had the means, the motive and the opportunity? Framed in that light, the Russians come a distant fourth behind the other prime suspects; the U.S. and U.K. intelligence agencies themselves, and those elements of the deep state that sought to prevent Trump winning, and subsequently to undermine his presidency. The primary motive being ascribed to the Russians is revenge for Skripal's

treachery more than a decade ago.

A second major question asked in any criminal investigation is *cui bono* – who benefits? It is difficult to perceive a credible argument that Russia is a beneficiary of Skripal's poisoning.

Further support for the hypothesis that this was a false flag operation comes in this statement that British Prime Minister to Theresa May made to the UK Parliament. The statement was frankly absurd and could only have been made when the intention was to further demonize and punish Russia, rather than any attempt to establish the truth and apply ordinary principles of evidence and factual analysis.

May's argument is thoroughly deconstructed on the Moon of Alabama website, which pointed out that Russia had destroyed all left over stocks from the Soviet Union's chemical weapon program and does not currently produce chemical weapons. Further, there are any number of governments capable of carrying out the Salisbury attack. "If someone is run-over by a BMW is it 'highly likely' that the German government is responsible for it?" the Moon of Alabama asks.

The obfuscations of the British reinforce in the view that Skripal was dangerous to the anti-Trump forces and the authorities therefore sought to have them removed. There is ample precedent for such actions and those familiar with the "suicide" of Dr. David Kelly will recognize the parallels.

The chances of the truth emerging have become vanishingly small at the same time as a serious conflict with Russia becomes correspondingly greater.

James O'Neill is a Barrister at Law and geopolitical analyst. He can be reached at joneill@qldbar.asn.au.

Is MSNBC Now the Most Dangerous Warmonger Network?

A recent study revealed that MSNBC's coverage of 'Russiagate' vastly outweighs its coverage of other issues, such as the US-backed humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and the network's refusal to correct the disparity could lead to dangerous conclusions, notes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

The evidence is damning. And the silence underscores the arrogance.

More than seven weeks after a devastating report from the media watch group FAIR, top executives and prime-time anchors at MSNBC still refuse to discuss how the network's obsession with Russia has thrown minimal journalistic standards out the window.

FAIR's study, "MSNBC Ignores Catastrophic U.S.-Backed War in Yemen," documented a picture of extreme journalistic malfeasance at MSNBC:

- "An analysis by FAIR has found that the leading liberal cable network did not run a single segment devoted specifically to Yemen in the second half of 2017. And in these latter roughly six months of the year, MSNBC ran nearly 5,000 percent more segments that mentioned Russia than segments that mentioned Yemen."
- "Moreover, in all of 2017, MSNBC only aired one broadcast on the U.S.-backed Saudi airstrikes that have killed thousands of Yemeni civilians. And it never mentioned the impoverished nation's colossal cholera epidemic, which infected more than 1 million Yemenis in the largest outbreak in recorded history."
- "All of this is despite the fact that the U.S. government has played a leading role in the 33-month war that has devastated Yemen, selling many billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia, refueling Saudi warplanes as they relentlessly bomb civilian areas and providing intelligence and military assistance to the Saudi air force."

Meanwhile, MSNBC's incessant "Russiagate" coverage has put the network at the media forefront of overheated hyperbole about the Kremlin. And continually piling up the dry tinder of hostility toward Russia boosts the odds of a cataclysmic blowup between the world's two nuclear superpowers.

In effect, the programming on MSNBC follows a thin blue party line, breathlessly conforming to Democratic leaders' refrains about Russia as a mortal threat to American democracy and freedom across the globe. But hey—MSNBC's ratings have climbed upward during its monochrome reporting, so why worry about whether coverage is neglecting dozens of other crucial stories? Or why worry if the anti-Russia drumbeat is worsening the risks of a global conflagration?

FAIR's report, written by journalist Ben Norton and published on Jan. 8, certainly merited a serious response from MSNBC and the anchors most identified by the study, Rachel Maddow and Chris Hayes. Yet no response has come from them or network executives. (Full disclosure: I'm a longtime associate of FAIR.)

In the aftermath of the FAIR study, a petition gathered 22,784 signers and 4,474

individual comments—asking MSNBC to remedy its extreme imbalance of news coverage. But the network and its prime-time luminaries Maddow and Hayes refused to respond despite repeated requests for a reply.

The petition was submitted in late January to Maddow and Hayes via their producers, as well as to MSNBC senior vice president Errol Cockfield and to the network's senior manager in charge of media relations for "The Rachel Maddow Show" and "All In with Chris Hayes."

Signers responded to outreach from three organizations—Just Foreign Policy, RootsAction.org (which I coordinate), and World Beyond War—calling for concerned individuals to "urge Rachel Maddow, Chris Hayes, and MSNBC to correct their failure to report on the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen and the direct U.S. military role in causing the catastrophe by signing our petition." (The petition is still gathering signers.)

As the cable news network most trusted by Democrats as a liberal beacon, MSNBC plays a special role in fueling rage among progressive-minded viewers toward Russia's "attack on our democracy" that is somehow deemed more sinister and newsworthy than corporate dominance of American politicians (including Democrats), racist voter suppression, gerrymandering and many other U.S. electoral defects all put together.

At the same time, the anti-Russia mania also services the engines of the current militaristic machinery.

It's what happens when nationalism and partisan zeal overcome something that could be called journalism.

"The U.S. media's approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propaganda," the independent journalist Robert Parry wrote at the end of 2017, in the last article published before his death. "Does any sentient human being read the New York Times' or the Washington Post's coverage of Russia and think that he or she is getting a neutral or unbiased treatment of the facts?"

Parry added that "to even suggest that there is another side to the story makes you a 'Putin apologist' or 'Kremlin stooge.' Western journalists now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonizing of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many 'liberals' who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the U.S. intelligence community feeds us, even if we're told to accept the assertions on faith."

Across a U.S. media landscape where depicting Russia as a fully villainous enemy is now routine, MSNBC is a standout. The most profound dangers from what Rachel

Maddow and company are doing is what they least want to talk about—how the cumulative effects and momentum of their work are increasing the likelihood that tensions between Washington and Moscow will escalate into a horrendous military conflict.

Even at the height of the Cold War during the 1960s, when Soviet Communists ruled Russians with zero freedom of speech or press, most U.S. political and media elites recognized the vital need for détente. They applauded the “Spirit of Glassboro” when the top leadership of the United States and Russia met at length. Now, across most of the U.S. media spectrum, no such overtures to the Kremlin are to be tolerated.

The U.S. government’s recently released “Nuclear Posture Review” underscores just how unhinged the situation has become.

Consider the assessment from the head of a first-rate research organization in the nuclear weapons field, the Los Alamos Study Group. Its executive director, Greg Mello, said: “What is most ‘missing in action’ in this document is civilian leadership. Trump is not supplying that. In part the fault for this comes from Democrats—who, allied with the intelligence community and other military-industrial interests, insist that the U.S. must have an adversarial relationship with Russia. There is no organized senior-level opposition to the new Cold War, which is intensifying week by week. This document reflects, and is just one of many policies embodying, the new and very dangerous Cold War.”

But—with everyone’s survival at stake—none of that seems to matter much to those who call the shots at MSNBC.

Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.” Solomon was a member of the independent task force that wrote the recent report “Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis.” [This article was originally published at Truthdig (www.truthdig.com).]

Katharine Gun’s Risky Truth-telling

From the Archive: On March 2, 2003, British intelligence official Katharine Gun blew the whistle on a pre-Iraq War ploy. On today’s 15-year anniversary of that event, we republish a 2014 article about Gun’s truth-telling by Sam Hussein.

By Sam Hussein (first published Nov. 19, 2014)

"I felt it was explosive, it really made me angry when I read it. ... I genuinely hoped that the information would strengthen the people's voice. ... It could derail the entire process for war." So said Katharine Gun recently when asked about information she leaked shortly before the invasion of Iraq.

It wasn't self-serving hyperbole. Daniel Ellsberg, who himself leaked the Pentagon Papers, has called Katharine Gun's leak "the most important and courageous leak I have ever seen. No one else – including myself – has ever done what Gun did: tell secret truths at personal risk, before an imminent war, in time, possibly, to avert it."

And indeed, Ellsberg had asked for such a leak during this period. He had been saying during the run-up to the Iraq invasion: "Don't wait until the bombs start falling. ... If you know the public is being lied to and you have documents to prove it, go to Congress and go to the press. ... Do what I wish I had done before the bombs started falling [in Vietnam] ... I think there is some chance that the truth could avert war."

Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers – internal documents which showed a pattern of U.S. government deception about the Vietnam War – in 1971, though he had the information earlier. And while the Pentagon Papers, the leaks by Chelsea Manning to WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden's National Security Agency leaks were all quite massive, the Katharine Gun leak was just 300 words. Its power came from its timeliness.

In October of 2002, the U.S. Congress passed the so-called Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002. In November, the U.S. government had gotten the United Nations Security Council to pass a threatening resolution on Iraq, but in most people's view, it stopped short of actually authorizing force.

The U.S. ambassador to the U.N. at the time, John Negroponte, said when resolution 1441 was adopted unanimously: "There's no 'automaticity' and this is a two-stage process, and in that regard we have met the principal concerns that have been expressed for the resolution." That is, the U.S. would intend to come back for a second resolution if Iraq didn't abide by a "final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations."

On Feb. 5, 2003, Colin Powell claimed in his infamous presentation at the UN that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. Feb. 15, 2003 saw the greatest global protests in history, with millions around the world rallying against the impending Iraq invasion, including over a million near the UN headquarters in

New York City.

It was around this time that Katharine Gun, who worked as a language specialist at the Government Communications Headquarters, the British equivalent of the NSA, got a memo from the NSA and then decided to – through intermediaries – leak it to the media. The brief email read in part:

“As you’ve likely heard by now, the Agency is mounting a surge particularly directed at the UN Security Council (UNSC) members (minus US and GBR of course) for insights as to how to membership is reacting to the on-going debate RE: Iraq, plans to vote on any related resolutions, what related policies/ negotiating positions they may be considering, alliances/ dependencies, etc – the whole gamut of information that could give US policymakers an edge in obtaining results favorable to US goals or to head off surprises. ... to revive/ create efforts against UNSC members Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Bulgaria and Guinea, as well as extra focus on Pakistan UN matters.”

The memo outlined that U.S. and British assets should focus on getting information to pressure member of the UN Security Council to go vote for a war resolution – material for blackmail to put it bluntly. This internal government document could show people – especially those who tend to put stock in government pronouncements – that what President George W. Bush was claiming at the time: “We are doing everything we can to avoid war in Iraq” – was exactly backwards. The U.S. government in fact was doing virtually everything it possibly could to ensure war.

When the British reporters writing the story called the author of the memo, Frank Koza, a top official at the NSA, they were put through to his office. When they shared the nature of their phone call, they were told by an assistant they had “the wrong number.” The reporters noted: “On protesting that the assistant had just said this was Koza’s extension, the assistant repeated that it was an erroneous extension, and hung up.”

The story was ignored by the U.S. media, though we at the Institute for Public Accuracy put out a string of news releases about it. Gun has commented that Martin Bright, one of the reporters who broke the story for the British *Observer*, had been booked on several U.S. TV networks just after the story was published but they had all quickly cancelled. [See video of an interview with Gun and Larry Wilkerson, former chief of staff for Colin Powell, on German TV from last year.]

However, the story did cause headlines around the world – especially in the countries on the Security Council that the memo listed as targets of the surveillance. Through whatever combination of authentic anger or embarrassment

at their subservience to the U.S. government being exposed, most of these governments apparently peeled away from the U.S., and no second UN resolution was sought by the war planners.

Rather, George W. Bush started the Iraq war with unilateral demands that Saddam Hussein and his family leave Iraq (and then indicated that the invasion would commence in any case.)

In 2004, the *Observer* reported that “surveillance played a role in derailing a compromise UN resolution in the weeks before the Iraq war. Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, Mexico’s UN ambassador at the time, has charged that the U.S. spied on a private meeting of six swing countries on the Security Council aimed at a compromise. Zinser told the *Observer*: ‘The meeting was in the evening. They [U.S. diplomats] call us in the morning before the meeting of the Security Council and they say: “We appreciate you trying to find ideas, but this is not a good idea.”’”

Meanwhile, Katharine Gun had been found out as the leaker shortly after the memo was published – she has a talent for telling the truth, not so much for covering up apparently – and spent many months awaiting trial. England has no First Amendment that might have protected Gun. It does have a repressive Official Secrets Act, under which she was being prosecuted by the Blair government.

Marcia Mitchell, co-author of *The Spy Who Tried to Stop a War: Katharine Gun and the Secret Plot to Sanction the Iraq Invasion*, notes however that at the last minute, the Blair government, which was about to face elections “with her signed confession in hand, chose not to present evidence that the invasion of Iraq was, in fact, legal, a demand by the Defense.”

That is, the British government was afraid of what could come out about the legality of the Iraq war in a trial. And so Gun, who was newly married when she exposed the NSA/GCHQ’s activities, was able to avoid jail and continue as a language instructor. She has since been supportive of Edward Snowden and others who expose government wrongdoing.

At the UN

The subject of spying at the UN was again highlighted in 2010 from cables leaked to WikiLeaks by Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning. Reuters reported at the time: “According to one cable, the State Department asked U.S. envoys at U.N. headquarters and elsewhere to procure credit card and frequent flyer numbers, mobile phone numbers, email addresses, passwords and other confidential data from top U.N. officials and foreign diplomats.”

Of course, spying on UN missions by the U.S. is illegal, Vienna Convention on

Diplomatic Relations says: "The receiving State shall permit and protect free communication on the part of the mission for all official purposes... The official correspondence of the mission shall be inviolable."

Similarly, in 2013, the *Guardian* reported as G8 leaders meet in Northern Ireland: "Turkey, South Africa and Russia have reacted angrily to the British government demanding an explanation for the revelations that their politicians and senior officials were spied on and bugged during the 2009 G20 summit in London." The governments were responding to the *Guardian* story: "GCHQ Intercepted Foreign Politicians' Communications at G20 Summits," based on Edward Snowden's NSA leaks.

Lessons Learned

The Katharine Gun case give us many lessons. First off, it's a great example to rebut anyone parroting the establishment line that the NSA's activities are based on stopping terrorism, or that they are merely overzealous efforts at ensuring security, or perhaps typical diplomatic games. Here, the NSA and GCHQ were spying to try to facilitate an aggressive war – the highest war crime under the Nuremberg statutes.

Similarly, it highlights what great ideals some "whistleblowers" – the term doesn't really do justice – are motivated by. And of course, such revealers are much more threatening to war-makers and others when they are acting in parallel with movements. Those movements may also help ward off the government attempting to imprison the whistleblower.

The "rebuttal" that everybody spies and therefore it's no big deal when the U.S. or some other government is caught doing so similarly doesn't hold up. Yes, virtually every government spies – but you're not supposed to get caught. And if a government does get caught, it's an indication that it's own people – the very people who are paid to carry out the surveillance – don't believe in it and are willing to put themselves at risk to expose the spying and the underlying wrongdoing.

Perhaps most importantly, the lesson is not that Katharine Gun's leak was futile because the U.S. invaded Iraq – any more than the lesson is that the Feb. 15 global protests were in vain. Rather, more of both could have really changed things. If global protests had started in 2002, then the congressional authorization for war in late 2002 could have been prevented. If more people within the war-making governments had their consciences moved by such movements and had leaked more critical information, war could have been forestalled.

And, even if the Iraq invasion happened, if global protests had continued and

global solidarity were better coordinated, when it became clear to all that the WMDs not in Iraq were a contrived pretext for aggression, a sustained revulsion against the invasion could have led to the war-makers being held accountable, preventing much suffering in Iraq and elsewhere – and laying the basis for a world free of war.

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Intel-for-Hire Undermines U.S. Intelligence (Part 2)

Intel-for-Hire is a multilayered phenomenon that's undermining the integrity of U.S. intelligence, argues George Eliason. In this installment, he looks at the second tier of this system. ([Click here for part one](#). [Part three is here](#).)

By George Eliason

In [part one of this series](#), we looked at the top level of the privatized intelligence community showing that large for-profit companies and individual actors have other interests in mind than the public good. Work that was previously considered inherently governmental is routinely contracted out to people who only serve their own self-interest, which may be at odds with what most people might expect from intelligence – for example, unbiased information to guide sensible policy-making decisions.

Now we'll look at the next level down – the smaller companies, specialty companies, and practitioners that service the top level. We'll see how they fit in the picture and work in real life.



In 2016, Tim Shorrock [wrote an article](#) describing the five intelligence giants that control domestic policy, foreign policy, military, and civilian leaders with the products they sell. They create the information, analyze the information, and decide who the President of the United States will see as an

enemy and who as a friend.

The smaller companies provide the resources for them to work with and base their reports on. In the digital age intelligence has become a buyer's market. If the larger company profits more by finding Russian influence at work at a grammar school Christmas play, then that's the conclusion that will be drawn. If you aren't up to the task, someone else will provide the "proof." After all, that's where the money is.

One of the main players in this process is the Chertoff Group, founded by former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff. From the Chertoff Group, through the Alliance for Securing Democracy, through the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and through the Hamilton 68 Dashboard – which purports to track "Russian influence operations on Twitter" – the information is distilled and passed down to the mid-level players.

Michael Chertoff from 2005-2009 ran the massive Department of Homeland Security, where he was criticized for exempting the DHS from following laws on everything from the environment to religious freedom. A report issued by the Congressional Research Service said at the time that the delegation of unchecked powers to Chertoff was unprecedented. He was also known for railing against international law, warning that treaties such as the Geneva Conventions were placing undue constraints on U.S. actions abroad.

As a long-time insider – in both the public and private sector – he is one of the top figures in the U.S. intelligence-security complex.

U.S. (and Foreign) Government Contractors

Private sector services mirror what they do for government including Intel-for-Hire, espionage, information operations, direct action, and state-sized propaganda operations. This is work that the government has stated on many occasions needs to remain with the agencies that can be held responsible to the public – and not to private companies that aren't.

The contractors and companies work both inside and outside U.S. government circles. They sometimes work for foreign governments. When they are in the private sector, they have no problem attacking and harassing U.S. citizens as well as the rest of the global community. Wherever their clients point, they fire.

This is the part some of the worst offenders take very seriously. In their world, they are James Bond and destroying the reputations of innocent people is a service to their country, and keeps their bank accounts flush with money. In their minds, they are this generation's super-patriots, when in fact, as soon as

what they do is opened to inspection, they are common criminals.

People with no security clearances and radical political agendas have state-sized cyber tools at their disposal and can use them for their own political agendas, private business, and personal vendettas the same way they use CIA's Vault 7 hacking tools for state projects. And this has been going on for years.

In a Sept. 2013 Reuters article, Jameel Jaffer, deputy legal director at the American Civil Liberties Union, said the reported incidents of NSA employees' violations of the law are likely "the tip of the iceberg" of lax data safeguards. The laws guiding the NSA's spying authority in the first place are a bigger issue, he said. "If you only focus on instances in which the NSA violated those laws, you're missing the forest for the trees," Jaffer said. "The bigger concern is not with willful violations of the law but rather with what the law itself allows."

The companies and individual actors sell information. For some, this is the basis of how they market their services. They spy on other companies – on regular people – commit espionage and run legally dubious information operations against civilians.

But because of the work they do for both the U.S. government and private corporations, few restrictions are placed on them. Where they are supposed to be supervised by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), in some cases they are supervising themselves and other companies and training DNI agencies to act like them.

Anything marked as "intelligence" is also designated top secret by the all of the DNI agencies, so even something that is originally open-source information becomes "top secret" once it is earmarked for an agency. This is being done on a regular basis at different levels.

Legal Gray Zones

Although some laws are in place restricting these activities, there are legal gray zones that these intelligence players skirt around and operate in when committing acts against the American people. They have identified the key areas of the law and made sure there are built-in loopholes, which Congress keeps in place following hearings at which these people often testify as expert witnesses.

In some cases, they wear their chutzpah on their sleeves.

On September 21, 2015, Joel Harding, who describes himself as an "Information Warfare and IO expert, Strategic Communications, Cyberwar, Ex-Special Forces,"

posted an advertisement making clear the brazenness with which these privatized spooks operate.

“Ladies, Gentlemen, and everyone in between,” he wrote. “I am building a database of planners, operators, logisticians, hackers, and anyone wanting to be involved with special activities I will call ‘inform and influence activities’.”

He noted that he had received various suggestions to help organize operations against “anti-Western elements.”

“No government approval, assistance or funding,” he claimed. “This skirts legalities. This is not explicitly illegal and it may not even be legal, at this point. That grey area extends a long way.” In soliciting resumes, he told prospective partners that if they “have hands on experience of a less than legal nature, you might not want to admit illegal work.”

The first industry hotshot to jump up to help was Andrew Weisburd.

Together with Clint Watts and J.M. Berger, Weisburd has testified to Congress as an expert from the intelligence and security industry. To advance their industry’s profitability, they work with friendly lawmakers to widen those legal gray areas.

Lawmakers, in turn, collect hefty campaign contributions from the industry. In addition, they sometimes get to hear and see intelligence that they may not be authorized to hear and see. Since senators and congressmen are not permitted to look at classified intelligence outside of their mandates on particular intelligence committees, the system of Intel-for-Hire enables privately gathered intelligence to make it to congressional eyes before it is classified.

Outsourcing Intelligence

Despite lacking professional credentials, a commitment to public service, or the minimum amount of vetting that would go into a security clearance background check, these private-sector spies collect intelligence that is passed along and ultimately may be included in the President’s Daily Briefing.

In other words, consultants and “public affairs professionals” with little actual experience in the professional intelligence community – some of whom may have an axe to grind or are just trying to make a buck – can help decide who is an enemy of the state. That’s the reality we are left with even though it sounds like a surreal B-grade movie.

If Weisburd or his partner Clint Watts sound familiar it’s because it is their work testifying in front of Congress in the spring of 2017 on Russian influence

on the 2016 election and in social media that is pushing policy and leading us into a new Cold War.

Weisburd and Watts have also established much of the groundwork on which every other Russian menace story – attacking Ukraine, hacking elections, etc. – is based on. Their idea of countering Russian influence has been to take out American, Canadian, and European English language websites owned by citizens of those countries. As Joel Harding's slogan makes clear, it is a strategy based on information warfare: "To Inform is to Influence."

Here's how the parts tie together.

These experts are the "small players" that developed the Hamilton 68 Dashboard for the German Marshall Fund, which is part of the Alliance for Securing Democracy that Michael Chertoff advises.

The dashboard is "an interactive dashboard displaying the near-real-time output of Russian Influence Operations on Twitter—or RIOT, if you're a fan of on-the-nose acronyms," according to J.M. Berger. He says that it's the product of a research collaboration that includes himself, Clint Watts, Andrew Weisburd, Jonathon Morgan and the German Marshall Fund.

So now we have Michael Chertoff advising and supporting the work of Weisburd, Watts, Berger, and possibly Weisburd partner Joel Harding.

It's just a fact of life at some point, somehow, somewhere, someone is going to take a look at the quality of the work you do and decide if it was worth hiring you or if you are just another scam story trying to stay on the federal dole.

This is that day for the Hamilton 68 Dashboard crew.

Upon closer inspection, it's a safe bet that many of the people called "Russian trolls" that are allegedly destroying American democracy aren't Russian or on Russian payrolls at all. They are Americans expressing political views and sharing articles.

The sampling that Clint Watt's and Andrew Weisburd's failed Hamilton 68 Dashboard uses is tiny and easily skewed. If a handful of people can generate the second highest hash tag position, the "real time" tracking of Russian propaganda is totally undermined.

More troubling, in recent years more of these Intel-for-Hire contractors have gone offline working with direct action units in other countries that are committing murder. More on this in a later installment.

George Eliason is an American journalist who lives and works in the Donbass

region of Ukraine. For part three of this series, please [click here](#).

Ten Commonsense Suggestions for Making Peace, Not War

President Trump's first year in office brought an escalation of military aggression abroad as he built on the interventions of previous administrations, but there are steps America can take to move towards a more peaceful future, writes retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel William J. Astore at TomDispatch.

By William J. Astore

Whether the rationale is the need to wage a war on terror [involving 76 countries](#) or renewed preparations for a struggle against peer competitors [Russia and China](#) (as Defense Secretary James Mattis suggested recently while introducing America's new [National Defense Strategy](#)), the U.S. military is engaged globally.

A network of [800](#) military bases spread across [172 countries](#) helps enable its wars and interventions. By the count of the Pentagon, at the end of the last fiscal year about [291,000 personnel](#) (including reserves and Department of Defense civilians) were deployed in 183 countries worldwide, which is the functional definition of a military [uncontained](#). Lady Liberty may [temporarily close](#) when the U.S. government grinds to a halt, but the country's foreign military commitments, especially its wars, just keep humming along.

As a student of history, I was warned to avoid the notion of inevitability.

Still, given such data points and [others](#) like them, is there anything more predictable in this country's future than [incessant warfare](#) without a true victory in sight? Indeed, the last clear-cut American victory, the last true "mission accomplished" moment in a war of any significance, came in 1945 with the end of World War II.

Yet the lack of clear victories since then seems to faze no one in Washington.

In this century, presidents have regularly boasted that the U.S. military is the [finest fighting force](#) in human history, while no less regularly demanding that the most powerful military in today's world be ["rebuilt"](#) and funded at ever more staggering levels. Indeed, while on the campaign trail, Donald Trump [promised](#) he'd invest so much in the military that it would become "so big and so strong and so great, and it will be so powerful that I don't think we're ever going to have to use it."

As soon as he took office, however, he promptly appointed a set of generals to key positions in his government, stored the mothballs, and went back to war.

Here, then, is a brief rundown of the first year of his presidency in war terms.

Trump's First Year of War-Making

In 2017, Afghanistan saw a mini-surge of roughly 4,000 additional U.S. troops (with more to come), a major spike in air strikes, and an onslaught of munitions of all sorts, including MOAB (the mother of all bombs), the never-before-used largest non-nuclear bomb in the U.S. arsenal, as well as precision weapons fired by B-52s against suspected Taliban drug laboratories. By the Air Force's own count, 4,361 weapons were "released" in Afghanistan in 2017 compared to 1,337 in 2016. Despite this commitment of warriors and weapons, the Afghan war remains – according to American commanders putting the best possible light on the situation – "stalemated," with that country's capital Kabul currently under siege.

How about Operation Inherent Resolve against the Islamic State? U.S.-led coalition forces have launched more than 10,000 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria since Donald Trump became president, unleashing 39,577 weapons in 2017. (The figure for 2016 was 30,743.) The "caliphate" is now gone and ISIS deflated but not defeated, since you can't extinguish an ideology solely with bombs.

Meanwhile, along the Syrian-Turkish border a new conflict seems to be heating up between American-backed Kurdish forces and NATO ally Turkey.

Yet another strife-riven country, Yemen, witnessed a sixfold increase in U.S. airstrikes against al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (from 21 in 2016 to more than 131 in 2017). In Somalia, which has also seen a rise in such strikes against al-Shabaab militants, U.S. forces on the ground have reached numbers not seen since the Black Hawk Down incident of 1993. In each of these countries, there are yet more ruins, yet more civilian casualties, and yet more displaced people.

Finally, we come to North Korea. Though no real shots have yet been fired, rhetorical shots by two less-than-stable leaders, "Little Rocket Man" Kim Jong-un and "dotard" Donald Trump, raise the possibility of a regional bloodbath.

Trump, seemingly favoring military solutions to North Korea's nuclear program even as his administration touts a new generation of more usable nuclear warheads, has been remarkably successful in moving the world's doomsday clock ever closer to midnight.

Clearly, his "great" and "powerful" military has hardly been standing idly on the sidelines looking "big" and "strong." More than ever, in fact, it seems to

be lashing out across the Greater Middle East and Africa. Seventeen years after the 9/11 attacks began the Global War on Terror, all of this represents an eerily familiar attempt by the U.S. military to kill its way to victory, whether against the Taliban, ISIS, or other terrorist organizations.

This kinetic reality should surprise no one. Once you invest so much in your military – not just financially but also culturally (by continually celebrating it in a fashion which has come to seem like a quasi-faith) – it's natural to want to put it to use. This has been true of all recent administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, as reflected in the infamous question Madeleine Albright posed to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell in 1992: "What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?"

With the very word "peace" rarely in Washington's political vocabulary, America's never-ending version of war seems as inevitable as anything is likely to be in history. Significant contingents of U.S. troops and contractors remain an enduring presence in Iraq and there are now 2,000 U.S. Special Operations forces and other personnel in Syria for the long haul. They are ostensibly engaged in training and stability operations. In Washington, however, the urge for regime change in both Syria and Iran remains strong – in the case of Iran implacably so. If past is prologue, then considering previous regime-change operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, the future looks grim indeed.

Despite the dismal record of the last decade and a half, our civilian leaders continue to insist that this country must have a military not only second to none but globally dominant. And few here wonder what such a quest for total dominance, the desire for absolute power, could do to this country. Two centuries ago, however, writing to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams couldn't have been clearer on the subject. Power, he said, "must never be trusted without a check."

The question today for the American people: How is the dominant military power of which U.S. leaders so casually boast to be checked? How is the country's almost total reliance on the military in foreign affairs to be reined in? How can the plans of the profiteers and arms makers to keep the good times rolling be brought under control?

As a start, consider one of Donald Trump's favorite generals, Douglas MacArthur, speaking to the Sperry Rand Corporation in 1957:

"Our swollen budgets constantly have been misrepresented to the public. Our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear – kept us in a continuous stampede of patriotic fervor – with the cry of grave national emergency. Always

there has been some terrible evil at home or some monstrous foreign power that was going to gobble us up if we did not blindly rally behind it by furnishing the exorbitant funds demanded. Yet, in retrospect, these disasters seem never to have happened, seem never to have been quite real.”

No peacenik MacArthur. Other famed generals like Smedley Butler and Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke out with far more vigor against the corruptions of war and the perils to a democracy of an ever more powerful military, though such sentiments are seldom heard in this country today. Instead, America’s leaders insist that other people judge us by our words, our stated good intentions, not our murderous deeds and their results.

Perpetual Warfare Whistles Through Washington

Whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere in the war on terror, the U.S. is now engaged in generational conflicts that are costing us trillions of dollars, driving up the national debt while weakening the underpinnings of our democracy. They have led to foreign casualties by the hundreds of thousands and created refugees in the millions, while turning cities like Iraq’s Mosul into wastelands.

In today’s climate of budget-busting “defense” appropriations, isn’t it finally time for Americans to apply a little commonsense to our disastrous pattern of war-making? To prime the pump for such a conversation, here are 10 suggestions for ways to focus on, limit, or possibly change Washington’s now eternal war-making and profligate war spending:

1. Abandon the notion of perfect security. You can’t have it. It doesn’t exist. And abandon as well the idea that a huge military establishment translates into national safety. James Madison didn’t think so and neither did Dwight D. Eisenhower.
2. Who could have anything against calling the Pentagon a “defense” department, if defense were truly its focus? But let’s face it: the Pentagon is actually a war department. So let’s label it what it really is. After all, how can you deal with a problem if you can’t even name it accurately?
3. Isn’t it about time to start following the Constitution when it comes to our “wars”? Isn’t it time for Congress to finally step up to its constitutional duties? Whatever the Pentagon is called, this country should no longer be able to pursue its many conflicts without a formal congressional declaration of war. If we had followed that rule, the U.S. wouldn’t have fought any of its wars since the end of World War II.
4. Generational wars – ones, that is, that never end – should not be considered a measure of American resolve, but of American stupidity. If

you wage war long, you wage it wrong, especially if you want to protect democratic institutions in this country.

5. Generals generally like to wage war. Don't blame them. It's their profession. But for heaven's sake, don't put them in charge of the Department of "Defense" (James Mattis) or the National Security Council (H.R. McMaster) either – and above all, don't let one of them (John Kelly) become the gatekeeper for a volatile, vain president. In our country, civilians should be in charge of the war makers, end of story.
6. You can't win wars you never should have begun in the first place. America's leaders failed to learn that lesson from Vietnam. Since then they have continued to wage wars for less-than-vital interests with predictably dismal results. Following the Vietnam example, America will only truly win its Afghan War when it chooses to rein in its pride and vanity – and leave.
7. The serious people in Washington snickered when, as a presidential candidate in 2004 and 2008, Congressman Dennis Kucinich called for a Department of Peace. Remind me, though, 17 years into our latest set of wars, what was so funny about that suggestion? Isn't it better to wage peace than war? If you don't believe me, ask a wounded veteran or a Gold Star family.
8. Want to invest in American jobs? Good idea! But stop making the military-industrial complex the preferred path to job creation. That's a loser of a way to go. It's proven that investments in "butter" create double or triple the number of jobs as those in "guns." In other words, invest in education, health care, and civilian infrastructure, not more weaponry.
9. Get rid of the very idea behind the infamous Pottery Barn rule – the warning Secretary of State Colin Powell offered George W. Bush before the invasion of Iraq that if the U.S. military "breaks" a country, somehow we've "bought" it and so have to take ownership of the resulting mess. Whether stated or not, it's continued to be the basis for this century's unending wars. Honestly, if somebody broke something valuable you owned, would you trust that person to put it back together? Folly doesn't decrease by persisting in it.
10. I was an officer in the Air Force. When I entered that service, the ideal of the citizen-soldier still held sway. But during my career I witnessed a slow, insidious change. A citizen-soldier military morphed into a professional ethos of "warriors" and "warfighters," a military that saw itself as better than the rest of us. It's time to think about how to return to that citizen-soldier tradition, which made it harder to fight those generational wars.

Consider retired General John Kelly, who, while defending the president in a

controversy over the president's words to the mother of a dead Green Beret, refused to take questions from reporters unless they had a personal connection to fallen troops or to a Gold Star family. Consider as well the way that U.S. politicians like Vice President Mike Pence are always so keen to exalt those in uniform, to speak of them as above the citizenry. ("You are the best of us.")

Isn't it time to stop praising our troops to the rooftops and thanking them endlessly for what they've done for us – for fighting those wars without end – and to start listening to them instead? Isn't it time to try to understand them not as "heroes" in another universe, but as people like us in all their frailty and complexity? We're never encouraged to see them as our neighbors, or as teenagers who struggled through high school, or as harried moms and dads.

Our troops are, of course, human and vulnerable and imperfect. We don't help them when we put them on pedestals, give them flags to hold in the breeze, and salute them as icons of a feel-good brand of patriotism. Talk of warrior-heroes is worse than cheap: it enables our state of permanent war, elevates the Pentagon, ennobles the national security state, and silences dissent. That's why it's both dangerous and universally supported in rare bipartisan fashion by politicians in Washington.

So here's my final point. Think of it as a bonus 11th suggestion: don't make our troops into heroes, even when they're in harm's way. It would be so much better to make ourselves into heroes by getting them out of harm's way.

Be exceptional, America. Make peace, not war.

William Astore, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and history professor, is a TomDispatch regular. He blogs at Bracing Views. [This article originally appeared at TomDispatch.com and is republished with permission.]

Biggest Nunes Memo Revelations Have Little To Do With Its Content

The most important revelations of the Nunes Memo relate not to its content, but the political establishment's response to its release, argues Caitlin Johnstone.

By Caitlin Johnstone

It's fitting that the ever-tightening repetitive loops of America's increasingly schizophrenic partisan warfare finally hit peak shrillness and skyrocketed into

a white noise singularity on Groundhog Day. Right now, we're right about at the part of the movie where Bill Murray is driving over a cliff in a pickup truck with a large rodent behind the wheel.

If you only just started paying attention to U.S. politics in 2017 what I'm about to tell you will blow your mind, so you might want to sit down for this: believe it or not, there was once a time when both of America's mainstream political parties weren't screeching every single day that there was news about to break any minute now which would obliterate the other party forever. No Russiagate, no Nunes memo, no Rachel Maddow red yarn graphs, no Sean Hannity "tick tock," no nothing. People screaming that the end is nigh and it's all about to come crashing down were relegated to street corners and the occasional Infowars appearance, not practicing mainstream political punditry for multimillion dollar salaries on MSNBC and Fox News.

I'm not saying it's a bad thing that Americans are starting to look critically at the power dynamics in their country, but the partisan filters they've pulled over their eyes are causing mass confusion and delusion. Now everyone who questions the CIA is a Russian agent and the term "deep state" suddenly means "literally anyone who doesn't like Donald Trump." Your take on the contents of the Nunes memo will put you in one of two radically different political dimensions depending on which mainstream cult you've subscribed to, and it will cause you to completely miss the point of the entire ordeal.

The part of the memo that has everyone talking today reads as follows: "Furthermore, Deputy Director McCabe testified before the Committee in December 2017 that no surveillance warrant would have been sought from the FISC without the Steele dossier information."

This refers to a surveillance warrant requested by the FBI's then-Deputy Director Andrew McCabe from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court seeking permission to spy on the communications of Carter Page, a member of the 2016 Trump campaign. The controversy revolves around the claim that this surveillance warrant would never have even been requested if not for the clearly biased, Clinton-funded, and error-riddled Christopher Steele dossier which is acknowledged even by its former MI6 author to be 10 to 30 percent inaccurate.

Combine that with the fact that this has never been made clear to the public, and baby you've got yourself a scandal. The FBI knowingly using extremely tainted evidence from one presidential campaign to get permission to spy on another would indeed be a very big deal.

There are some problems with the "BOOM! Bigger than Watergate!" exclamations that pro-Trump partisans have been parading around about this, however. The

first is that the memo is only an internal communication between Republican congressmen; it's not a sworn testimony or legal transcript or anything legally binding. It's basically just some Republican ideas about what happened. The assertions made therein are reportedly being hotly contested by Democrats with knowledge of the situation, which is in turn being disputed by Republicans.

Another thing putting a damper on the GOP's "KABOOM!" parade is the fact that the memo's contents are not even entirely new; CNN reported way back in April of last year that sources had informed them that the Steele dossier had been used to get a FISA warrant on the Trump campaign. Additionally, even if every single allegation in the memo is true, the revelations are still arguably far less earth shattering than the Edward Snowden revelations of 2013 exposing the NSA's sprawling domestic espionage network, so the expectation that these less significant new revelations would cause a radical transformation in U.S. politics when the Snowden revelations did not seems highly unrealistic.

Nonetheless, there have been some extremely important revelations as a result of this memo; they just haven't come from the contents of the memo itself. In the same way that cybersecurity analysts observe the metadata underlying hacked files rather than the contents of the files themselves, political analysts have been pointing out that a lot can be learned about the political establishment by looking at its response to the possibility of the memo's release.

"Memo is clearly not a blockbuster. We can tell so by reading it. Which makes Dems' frantic efforts to prevent anyone from reading it seem even more bizarre," observed TYT's Michael Tracey. "Veracity of memo's claims aside, we were told that its release would undermine the rule of law. So, just checking: is the rule of law still in tact?" he added later.

"Now it is clear to all," WikiLeaks' Julian Assange tweeted. "The claims about how the 'Nunes' memo would destroy 'national security' were lies. Classification stickers are used by bureaucrats trying to obtain 'political security' for their cronies."

"One effect of the memo – it's an example of how extensively we overclassify information," wrote National Review's David French. "I'm highly dubious that any information disclosed threatens national security in any way, shape, or form. I'd be willing to bet the Dem response is similarly harmless. Release it."

Indeed, both the FBI and high-profile Democrats have been claiming that the memo's unredacted release would pose a national security threat, with California Congressman (and virulent Russiagate) Eric Swalwell going so far to call it "brainwashing." A CNN panelist wandered completely off the paddock and suggested that yesterday may have been America's last day as a democracy. Why

were they all flipping out so hysterically over a release of information that plainly poses no threat to the American people?

In addition to Assange's assertion that government secrecy has far less to do with national security than political security (a claim he has made before which seems to be proving correct time and time again), there's the jarring question posed by Republican Congressman Thomas Massie: "who made the decision to withhold evidence of FISA abuse until after Congress voted to renew FISA program?"

Whoa, Nelly. Hang on. What is he talking about?

It would be understandable if you were unaware of the debate over the reauthorization of FISA surveillance which resulted in unconditional bipartisan approval last month – the mainstream media barely touched it. In point of fact, though, the very surveillance practices alleged to have been abused in this hotly controversial memo are the same which was waved through by both the House and the Senate, and by the very same people promoting the memo in many cases.

The McCabe testimony was in December. FISA was renewed in January. Why is all this just coming out now? If the Republicans truly believed that McCabe said what the memo claims he said, why wasn't the public informed before their elected representatives renewed the intelligence community's dangerously intrusive surveillance approval? Was this information simply forgotten about until after those Orwellian powers had been secured?

Of course not. Don't be an idiot.

This makes the kicking, screaming, wailing and gnashing of teeth by the political establishment make a lot more sense, doesn't it? Now suddenly we're looking at a he-said, she-said partisan battle over an issue which can only be resolved with greater and greater transparency of more and more government documents, and we can all see where that's headed. In their rush to win a partisan battle and shield their president from the ongoing Russiagate conspiracy theory, the Republicans may have exposed too much of the establishment foundation upon which both parties are built.

The term "deep state" does not mean "Democrats and Never-Trumpers" as Republican pundits would have you believe, nor does the term refer to any kind of weird, unverifiable conspiracy theory. The deep state is in fact not a conspiracy theory at all, but simply a concept used in political analysis for discussing the undeniable fact that unelected power structures exist in America, and that they tend to form alliances and work together in some sense.

There is no denying the fact that plutocrats, intelligence agencies, defense

agencies and the mass media are both powerful and unelected, and there is no denying the fact that there are many convoluted and often conflicting alliances between them. All that can be debated is the manner and extent to which this is happening.

The deep state is America's permanent government, the U.S. power structures that Americans don't elect. These power structures plainly have a vested interest in keeping America's Orwellian surveillance structures in place, as evidenced by the intelligence community's menacingly urgent demand for FISA renewal back in December. If there's any thread to be pulled that really could make waves in the way Official Washington (hat tip to the late Robert Parry) operates, it is in the plot holes between the bipartisan scramble toward unconditional surveillance renewal and the highly partisan battle over exposing the abuse of those very powers.

If we're going to see a gap in the bars of our cages, that's a great place to keep our eyes trained, so keep watching. Watch what happens in a partisan war where both parties have a simultaneous interest in revealing as little of the game as possible and exposing the other party. Things could get very interesting.

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.

Nunes Memo Reports Crimes at Top of FBI and DOJ

Exclusive: The newly released "Nunes Memo" reveals felony wrongdoing by top members of the FBI and DOJ for misrepresenting evidence to obtain a FISA warrant and may implicate other intelligence officials, writes Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

The long-awaited House Intelligence Committee report made public today identifies current and former top officials of the FBI and the Department of Justice as guilty of the felony of misrepresenting evidence required to obtain a court warrant before surveilling American citizens. The target was candidate Donald Trump's adviser Carter Page.

The main points of what is widely known as the "Nunes Memo," after the House

Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), have been nicely summarized by blogger Publius Tacitus, who noted that the following very senior officials are now liable for contempt-of-court charges; namely, the current and former members of the FBI and the Department of Justice who signed off on fraudulent applications to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court: James Comey, Andy McCabe, Sally Yates, Dana Boente and Rob Rosenstein. The following is Publius Tacitus's summary of the main points:

- The dubious but celebrated Steele Dossier played a critical role in obtaining approval from the FISA court to carry out surveillance of Carter Page according to former FBI Deputy Director Andy McCabe.
- Christopher Steele was getting paid by the DNC and the FBI for the same information.
- No one at the FBI or the DOJ disclosed to the court that the Steele dossier was paid for by an opposition political campaign.
- The first FISA warrant was obtained on October 21, 2016 based on a story written by Michael Isikoff for Yahoo News based on information he received directly from Christopher Steele – the FBI did not disclose in the FISA application that Steele was the original source of the information.
- Christopher Steele was a long-standing FBI “source” but was terminated as a source after telling Mother Jones reporter David Corn that he had a relationship with the FBI.
- The FBI signers of the FISA applications/renewals were James Comey (three times) and Andrew McCabe.
- The DOJ signers of the FISA applications/renewals were Sally Yates, Dana Boente and Rod Rosenstein.
- Even after Steele was terminated by the FBI, he remained in contact with Deputy Attorney General Bruce Ohr, whose wife worked for FUSION GPS, a contractor that was deeply involved with the Steele dossier.

From what Michael Isikoff reported in September 2016 it appears that the CIA and the Director of National Intelligence (as well as the FBI) are implicated in spreading the disinformation about Trump and Russia. Isikoff wrote:

“U.S. intelligence officials are seeking to determine whether an American businessman identified by Donald Trump as one of his foreign policy advisers has opened up private communications with senior Russian officials – including talks about the possible lifting of economic sanctions if the Republican nominee becomes president, according to multiple sources who have been briefed on the issue. [...]

“But U.S. officials have since received intelligence reports that during that same three-day trip, Page met with Igor Sechin, a longtime Putin associate and

former Russian deputy prime minister who is now the executive chairman of Rosneft, Russian's leading oil company, a well-placed Western intelligence source tells Yahoo News."

Who were the "intelligence officials" briefing the select members of the House and Senate? That will be one of the next shoes to drop. We are likely to learn in the coming days that John Brennan and Jim Clapper were also trying to help the FBI build a fallacious case against Trump, adds Tacitus.

Indeed, Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR), Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has already indicated that his disclosures in the Nunes Memo represent just "one piece of a probably much larger mosaic of what went on."

The Media Will Determine What Comes Next

As for Congressman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, it is now abundantly clear why he went to ridiculous lengths, as did the entire Democratic congressional leadership, to block or impugn the House Intelligence Committee report.

Until the mid-December revelations of the text messages between FBI lovers Peter Strzok and Lisa Page turned Russia-gate into FBI/DOJ-gate, Schiff had been riding high, often hiding behind what he said "he could not tell" the rest of us.

With the media, including what used to be the progressive media, fully supporting the likes of Adam Schiff, and the FBI/CIA/NSA deep state likely to pull out all the stops, the die is now cast. We are in for a highly interesting time over the next months.

Ray McGovern works with the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years and co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).
