

# Protecting the Shaky Russia-gate Narrative

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

By Robert Parry

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

House – the core narrative of Russia-gate.

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

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

### **Leaving Out Context**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The 17-Agencies Canard**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Scary Void Inside Russia-gate

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

By Stephen F. Cohen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Flynn and the FBI**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Removing Tillerson**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# Lavishing Money on the Pentagon

**Exclusive:** It seems like it's always Christmastime at the Pentagon where the stockings are full and budget-cutting is for those domestic social-program guys, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

Wise parents who celebrate Christmas advise their young children not to make unreasonably grandiose requests of Santa. After all, he has to squeeze down a rather narrow chimney to deliver their presents.

But as Christmas approaches this year, leaders of Congress, the Pentagon, and the Trump White House seem to have forgotten that lesson. Their wish list for the U.S. military, if taken seriously, will bust the federal budget at the very time Republicans are ramming through tax legislation that will shrink Uncle Sam's savings account by more than a trillion dollars over the next decade.

President Trump this week signed into law a \$700 billion blueprint for military spending in the current fiscal year. The 2018 National Defense Authorization Act includes funding for more troops, more weapons, more interventions abroad, and more active wars, with Trump's enthusiastic blessing. "We need our military," he declared at a White House signing ceremony.

In addition to lavish spending on new weapons – like \$10 billion for purchases of the disastrous F-35 Joint Strike Fighter – this Christmas legislation for the military includes all sorts of smaller presents, including billions of dollars to fund NATO's European Deterrence Initiative (whatever happened to Trump's demand that our allies pay for their own defense?), missile defense systems of doubtful efficacy, and development of a new cruise missile that would violate the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia.

The bill also earmarks \$350 million for military aid to Ukraine, including lethal weaponry – a highly provocative measure that Arizona Senator John McCain has long promoted. Independent analysts, including prominent conservative foreign policy experts, warn that such lethal aid would be destabilizing, provocative, and "extraordinarily foolish."

Under the arcane rules of Congress, the House and Senate must still translate this blueprint into actual budget appropriations. Therein lies the rub. Back in the days when Republicans still claimed to believe in balanced budgets, they led the way in enacting limits on federal spending.

Current law caps core defense spending at \$549 billion in fiscal year 2018. The

defense authorization bill, in contrast, pegs the request for core Pentagon operations at \$634 billion, with another \$66 billion to fight ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and other hot spots. The latter funds are not subject to budget caps.

At his signing ceremony, Trump called on Congress to overturn its spending cap on the military. Many Republicans would be amenable, but Democrats may demand a parallel relaxation of budget limits on domestic spending, a non-starter for conservatives.

Supporters of increased military spending, led by the Pentagon, point to how overworked the armed services are in today's world environment.

"We aren't big enough to do everything we're being tasked to do," complained Admiral William Moran, vice chief of naval operations, in recent congressional testimony.

### **Policing the World**

Moran was right: it's a lot harder to police the world with 300 ships than it was several decades ago with nearly 600 vessels and only one serious foe.

Seen another way, however, budgetary realities might be sending us a message that it's no longer feasible, or in the national interest, to maintain nearly a quarter million troops in more than 170 countries and territories abroad.

Nor is it necessary for our defense to carry out vast military exercises from the Baltic States to the Sea of Japan in order to maintain dominance in Central Europe, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, North Africa, and any number of other locations – all while conducting live military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Niger, and other war zones.

Those who can't see their way to setting limits on runaway military spending should reflect on the fact that the roughly \$65 billion a year the Pentagon spends on active war-fighting, through the "Overseas Contingency Operations" fund, is roughly equal to Russia's entire military budget. Only China spends more than that amount. And after those two countries, the next 15 biggest military spenders are all U.S. allies or reasonably friendly toward the United States.

### **Where Does the Money Go?**

Taxpayers should also reflect on the fact that the Pentagon has never passed a full audit and has only a foggy idea of where all its money goes.

“The United States Army’s finances are so jumbled it had to make trillions of dollars of improper accounting adjustments to create an illusion that its books are balanced,” Reuters reported last year.

“The Defense Department’s Inspector General . . . said the Army made \$2.8 trillion in wrongful adjustments to accounting entries in one quarter alone in 2015, and \$6.5 trillion for the year. Yet the Army lacked receipts and invoices to support those numbers or simply made them up. . .

“For years, the Inspector General – the Defense Department’s official auditor – has inserted a disclaimer on all military annual reports. The accounting is so unreliable that ‘the basic financial statements may have undetected misstatements that are both material and pervasive.’”

We may not know for sure where the money goes, but we know it amounts to a vast sum every year. Since 9/11, Americans have paid nearly \$5 *trillion* for its foreign wars, according to Brown University’s Cost of War project – or about \$25,000 per taxpayer. If Congress really wants to ease the tax burden on middle-class Americans, putting an end to our permanent state of war would be a good place to start.

**Jonathan Marshall writes frequently on Pentagon programs, including “US Arms Makers Invest in a New Cold War,” “New Navy Ship Leaking Tax Dollars,” “Trump Adds to Washington’s ‘Swamp’,” “Learning to Love – and Use – the Bomb,” and “Rising Budget Stakes for Space Warfare.”**

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## What’s at Stake in Honduran Election

Protests continue over the disputed Honduran presidential election after a solid lead by a progressive was wiped out amid gross irregularities and the right-wing incumbent was declared the winner, reports Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

For seven months in 1969, I hitch-hiked around the U.S., Mexico and Central America with my best friend from high school. Some class-mates from our school in Vancouver Canada saved their money then travelled to Europe or Australia but Ollie and I headed south. It was an eye-opening experience for two middle-class Canadians.

We had a lot of learning experiences in the U.S., but today I want to talk about Honduras because it is in crisis as I write this: the Honduran election took place on Nov. 26 yet the results are still in contention. Will the current right-wing government manage to retain power?

When we visited the capital Tegucigalpa in 1969 we went to the university campus to meet and hang out with young Hondurans. They told us about the recent visit of President Richard Nixon who had taken office a few months before and then travelled to Latin America. The Vietnam War was still raging in 1969 and people protested against the war and Nixon wherever he went.

The young Hondurans told us that when Nixon visited Tegucigalpa there had been a big protest. Several students who had been protesting from the top of a university building had been shot dead. It made an impression as did the warm and friendly people we met, some living in shacks along the banks of the Choluteca River running through the capital.

In Nicaragua, we heard more eye-opening stories from the youth there. They told us about the Somoza family dictatorship, how corrupt it was, and how they came to power through U.S. Marines. They also told us about the death of Cesar Sandino who fought for Nicaraguan independence but was killed by Somoza's National Guard in 1934. The Nicaraguan youth told us that when the U.S. asked for proof of Sandino's death, Somoza shipped Sandino's head in a box to Washington.

Those and many other experiences changed my life. Over the coming decades I kept an interest in Central America.

In 1979, when Nicaraguans overthrew the Somoza dictatorship, it seemed like a good thing. But President Ronald Reagan did not like an independent Nicaragua. Violating international law, the U.S. organized a mercenary army called the "Contras" to destabilize and upend the Sandinista government. The mercenaries were trained in Honduras with U.S. funding, supplies and weapons.

The U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, John Negroponte, oversaw the mercenary army attacking Nicaragua and the emergence of death squads in El Salvador. Tens of thousands of peasants and opposition activists were killed with impunity. In Honduras itself, there was widespread repression and murder of those challenging the status quo.

In 1998, Honduras was hit by Hurricane Mitch. The second worst Atlantic hurricane ever recorded caused huge destruction and death, especially in poor communities with weak infrastructure. The shacks and modest dwellings along the river bank in Tegucigalpa were all ripped and washed away. Over 7,000 Hondurans

died, including people we had met three decades before.

Six years later, in 2004, I was again reminded of the U.S. role in Honduras when the same John Negroponte who had overseen the Contra operations went to Baghdad to take over management of the Iraq occupation. Newsweek magazine said he was coming with a new strategy, which they dubbed the "Salvador option."

Over the next year, sectarian death squads emerged to provoke sectarian bloodshed. Negroponte's right-hand man in Iraq, Robert S. Ford, was later appointed as U.S. Ambassador to Syria in 2010 where he helped fuel the uprisings in that country. Thus there is direct connection between U.S. interference and aggression in Central America and the Middle East.

### **Honduran Control**

For decades Honduras was alternately ruled by two political parties representing different branches of the country's oligarchy. They traded power back and forth, effectively preventing alternative perspectives.

But things began to change in Honduras in 2006. President Manuel Zelaya came from the oligarchy but started to initiate changes benefiting the poor. He called for real land reform, raising the minimum wage and he questioned the need for US military bases. That was too much. In June 2009, President Zelaya was kidnapped in the middle of the night and flown from the capital to the U.S. military air base called Soto Cano, only 48 miles away. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had been in Honduras just weeks before. She disapproved of Zelaya and his policies. The coup went ahead.

After the 2009 coup, conditions in Honduras deteriorated rapidly. Tegucigalpa became the homicide capital of the world. Tens of thousands of youth have fled the country as it has been wracked by drug wars, corruption, and police or paramilitary repression. Alongside this, there has been widespread popular resistance.

In 2011, I returned to Honduras to see the conditions first hand. With a delegation organized by Alliance for Global Justice and Task Force on the Americas, I visited peasants in the fertile Aguan Valley, indigenous communities in the mountains and workers and church activists in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

We talked with a hard-working activist named Berta Caceres (who was assassinated five years later) and others in her indigenous organization COPINH. We learned that these communities were still actively resisting the coup and forming a new political party to challenge the right-wing coup government not with guns but with votes.

In 2013, I returned again to Honduras, this time as an election observer. In the contest, the new LIBRE party surpassed the traditional Liberal Party and made a strong challenge to the right-wing National Party. There were many examples of election malfeasance but Juan Orlando Hernandez of the right-wing National Party was anointed as the new President.

Since then social and economic conditions have not changed. The Hernandez regime governs to the benefit of rich Hondurans and international corporations. He has a strong military alliance with the U.S. military and is very friendly with President Trump's Chief of Staff, retired Marine Gen. John Kelly.

### **Wiping Out a Lead**

That has set the stage for the most recent events. Days before the election. The Economist ran an article describing a National Party training session in cheating techniques. The election was held on Sunday, Nov. 26. On election night, with 57 percent of the votes counted, the opposition challenger was ahead by over 5 percentage points.

Then strange things began to happen. The election commission stopped updating the vote tally for 36 hours. The head of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal said on Monday they were still missing 6,000 tally sheets from different polling places. A few hours later, he said they were missing 7500 tally sheets. When the vote count resumed on Tuesday, the existing President Hernandez was gaining votes, cutting the opposition lead and then winning. It all looked very fishy, even to the OAS monitors.

The situation is rapidly coming to a head. Initially, the opposition demanded a full and complete review of all the 18,000 tally sheets. Now they are calling for the annulment of the election and a new election under international supervision.

The Honduran government is either stonewalling or is paralyzed. Hundreds of thousands of Hondurans have protested in the streets, with at least 12 protesters killed. However in a dramatic change, the elite paramilitary COBRA security forces have started to refuse orders, saying their job is not to repress their own communities.

The repercussions of what happens in Honduras could also reach across Latin America. Just as the 2009 coup in Honduras was a setback for the entire region, the outcome of the current crisis will have wide-reaching consequences, too. As reported in Foreign Policy magazine, "The US has a lot riding on the Honduran election"; the U.S. foreign policy establishment wants the continuation of the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez.

Despite all the indications of electoral malfeasance and human rights abuses, the Trump Administration has praised the conservative government. Meanwhile, some North American reporters, analysts and activists are doing what they can to support Honduran popular forces and to stop the theft of the Honduran election.

The coming days may be momentous. I have explained why it personally matters to me. But this is more important than one person's connection to a country. It should matter to anyone concerned with progress, justice, respect and international law. .

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## The Foundering Russia-gate 'Scandal'

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

By Robert Parry

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

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

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

grandkids will look away in shame.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

### **Biased at the Creation**

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

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

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

Though Democrats and the Clinton campaign long denied financing the dossier – prepared by ex-British spy Christopher Steele who claimed to rely on second- and third-hand information from anonymous Russian contacts – it was revealed in

October 2017 that the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign shared in the costs, with the payments going to the “oppo” research firm, Fusion GPS, through the Democrats’ law firm, Perkins Coie.

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

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

Still, the drive for “another Watergate” to oust an unpopular – and to many insiders, unfit – President remains at the center of the thinking among the top mainstream news organizations as they have scrambled for Russia-gate “scoops” over the past year even at the cost of making serious reporting errors.

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

### **Grasping for Confirmation**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book,**

*America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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## Trump's Illegal Syrian Mission Creep

Even as the Islamic State's "caliphate" in Syria collapses, the U.S. government is keeping about 2,000 soldiers in-country despite lacking any legal right to be there, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar discusses.

By Paul R. Pillar

The other day [we learned](#) that there are four times more U.S. troops in Syria than any earlier official figure had acknowledged. The discrepancy did not get much public attention, perhaps because the numbers are small compared to some other U.S. military deployments: about 2,000 troops in Syria, with the earlier official figure being 500.

The incomplete count evidently had omitted personnel on short-term assignments and some others performing sensitive missions. A Pentagon spokesman said that release of the newer, more complete figure is part of an effort by Secretary of Defense James Mattis to be more transparent.

Less transparent than the new data about numbers of U.S. troops is the reason any of those troops are staying in Syria. The one uncontested rationale for the deployment in Syria has been to combat the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), which is an unconventional non-state actor but presented conventional sorts of military targets when it established a state-like entity occupying significant territory in Syria and Iraq.

The ISIS mini-state is now all but eliminated. Nonetheless, the U.S. military presence in Syria, although down from its peak strength, shows no sign of ending. Mattis has said that the United States "won't just walk away" from its efforts in Syria.

### Signs of Mission Creep

The United States is exhibiting mission creep in Syria, with new rationales being spun to replace the mission of armed combat against the ISIS caliphate. Underlying the mission creep are some familiar patterns of thinking that have been behind other U.S. military expeditions as well. Donald Trump did not originate these patterns but his administration has slid into them.

Mattis's comment about not walking away from where the United States already has been involved points to one of those American habits of thought, which is to believe that the United States is best equipped, and should be most responsible, for setting right any troubled country in which the United States has had more than a passing interest. To believe this about Syria goes well beyond the mission of combating ISIS and gets into pacification and even some elements of nation-building.

Other patterns of thinking about the Syrian case entail amnesia about recent relevant experiences and the lessons that should have been drawn from them but evidently weren't. American attitudes toward ISIS, the Syrian regime, and Syria's Russian and Iranian allies are all involved.

The dominant American perspective toward counterterrorism, and thus toward ISIS, has been a heavily militarized one inherent in the notion of a "war on terror." Use of the military instrument has been appropriate insofar as ISIS, as a mini-state, presented military targets. But ISIS, which lives on as more of a clandestine movement and ideology, no longer presents many such targets. Non-military counterterrorist instruments are now relatively more important.

Too often forgotten is how much war itself, and specifically the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, was a boon to ISIS. Also too often forgotten is how much the collateral casualties and damage that are almost unavoidable byproducts of U.S. military action in complicated conflicts tend to boost rather than reduce anti-U.S. extremism, including extremism that takes the form of international terrorism.

### **'Regime Change' Dreams**

One habitual thought about ISIS has been that Assad must be toppled if there is to be any hope of killing off ISIS. Max Abrahms and John Glaser catalog the many iterations, voiced over the past two years, of the theme that defeating ISIS would require defeating Assad. Today's situation, with the ISIS caliphate extinguished while Assad remains ensconced in Damascus, demonstrates how erroneous that argument was.

Many who propounded the argument are among those now pushing for continuation and expansion of the U.S. military expedition in Syria, with no acknowledgment of how wrong was their earlier assessment. This demonstrates anew how little accountability there is for faulty policy analysis among the Washington chattering classes.

The dream of felling Assad does not die, even though with the help of his friends he does not appear to be going anywhere in the foreseeable

future. Persistence of the dream involves more amnesia, in at least two respects. One is to forget the consequences of earlier U.S. or U.S.-backed efforts at regime change in the region. These include the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which gave birth to the group that we later came to know as ISIS, and the chaos-fomenting ouster of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

There also seems to be forgetfulness of how long the Assads – including the father Hafez, who put down internal opposition at least as brutally as his son Bashar – have been in power. Forty-seven years, to be exact. Anyone arguing that continuation of Bashar Assad in power is intolerable needs to answer the question “why now?” and to explain how the world and U.S. interests somehow have survived nearly a half century of the Assads.

As for Bashar Assad’s Russian and Iranian friends, the dominant American perspective is the zero-sum assumption that any presence or influence of either Iran or Russia is *ipso facto* bad and contrary to U.S. interests. This perspective makes no effort to sort out the respects in which Russian or Iranian actions conflict with U.S. interests, parallel U.S. interests, or are irrelevant to those interests.

This absence of effort persists despite the glaring example (not just in Syria, but also in Iraq and beyond), of the fight against ISIS as a parallel interest. Joined to this habitual perspective is the also habitual use of the misleading vacuum metaphor, according to which not just U.S. involvement but physical and preferably military involvement to fill a space is needed to counter bad-by-definition Iranian or Russian influence in that same space.

These habits of thinking, taken together, close off an escape route from Syria. They imply no end to the U.S. military expedition there. They preclude declaring victory (that is, a military victory against ISIS) and going home. Vladimir Putin, more conscious than most American pundits are of the hazards of indefinitely being stuck in Syria, is doing that now.

Thus Syria is becoming one more place, like Afghanistan, in which the United States endlessly wages a war. Meanwhile the Russians will keep reminding everyone that they were there at the invitation of the incumbent government and the United States is not. The Turks will keep getting angry about U.S. tactical cooperation with Kurds. Sunni extremists will keep exploiting for propaganda and recruitment any damage done by the United States or its local clients. And the Pentagon may or may not tell us how many U.S. troops are actually there.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is author most recently of Why America Misunderstands the World. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The**

## North Korea's Understandable Fears

By escalating threatening rhetoric – and staging provocative military maneuvers – President Trump may believe he can intimidate North Korea into capitulation but history would tell you something else, writes David William Pear.

By David William Pear

Like Pavlov's dog, the mainstream media slobbers predicable reactions every time North Korea launches another test missile. Listening to the blather one would think that once Kim Jong Un has a missile capable of reaching the U.S., he is going to use it in an unprovoked nuclear attack on the U.S. mainland killing millions of Americans.

However, for Kim to attack the U.S., he would have to be insane, paranoid, and suicidal. Top officials in the U.S. intelligence agencies say he is not. Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats has said publicly that Kim is acting very rationally; Secretary of State Rex Tillerson says that Kim is "not insane"; the CIA deputy director of the Korea Mission Center, Yong Suk Lee, says that Kim is not suicidal, either.

So we can rest fairly assured that Kim Jong Un is highly unlikely to wake up one morning and nuke America because he can. According to Yong, Kim "wants to rule for a long time and die peacefully in his own bed."[CNN, October 6, 2017]. Everyone in the mainstream media knows this or should.

And, North Korea has long had more reasons to fear the U.S. than vice versa. North Korea is not an existential threat to the U.S. national security; but the opposite is not the case – and the U.S. government is not shy about reminding North Korea of that fact. The U.S. regularly practices nuclear attacks on North Korea by air, land and sea, which draw the predictable response from Kim.

Yet, North Korea has offered to stop testing nuclear bombs, if the U.S. would stop playing nuclear war games on its border [The Guardian]. The reality is that the U.S. has been threatening North Korea for over 70 years.

While the U.S. mainstream media excites the U.S. public with warnings about "crazy" Kim Jong Un, what should frighten the American people is the long history of U.S. crazies who seriously contemplated and/or implicitly threatened

to start a nuclear war with a variety of countries. President Trump is not the first president who cannot be trusted with the nuclear button. It is only by sheer luck that the world has escaped a nuclear war or a cataclysmic nuclear accident. There have been many close calls, and one day there may be one too many.

The U.S. keeps gambling with nuclear roulette, threatening North Korea, Iran, Russia, and the enemy *du jour*. One of the favorite U.S. verbal threats is to say that “all options are on the table,” which adversaries understand to include the nuclear option. The U.S. has even used nuclear bombs twice against civilian populations in 1945, and according to many historians unnecessarily, because Japan had already offered to surrender. Hundreds of thousands of Japanese died mostly so that President Harry Truman could impress Soviet leader Josef Stalin with a terrifying show of U.S. military might.

During the Korean War (1950 to 1953). President Truman publicly threatened to use the atomic bomb, and the military planned, practiced and shipped nuclear bombs to Asia to be dropped on North Korea. General Douglas MacArthur wanted to use 26 nuclear bombs and start a war with China, too [[History News Network](#)].

Truman gave General Matthew Ridgeway pre-authorization to use nuclear bombs, even after MacArthur was relieved of his command. Instead, the [U.S. chose to destroy North Korea](#) with conventional bombs and napalm, killing an estimated 20 percent to 30 percent of the population.

The Korean War is called the “Forgotten War” for a number of reasons, including that the U.S. military suffered what amounted to a humiliating defeat with some 37,000 American soldiers killed while they were being used essentially as negotiating chips. They “died for a tie,” where to draw the Military Demarcation Line between the North and South; and South Korea, too, was largely “destroyed to save it” from communism.

The South Koreans deserve a lot of credit for rebuilding a modern highly advanced society in all categories such as education, healthcare, technology, and their standard of living. But contrary to propaganda mythology, they did not develop under capitalist free-trade and democracy. The South Korean “miracle on the Han River” was achieved under a U.S.-backed military dictatorship, a highly planned economy, and billions of dollars from U.S. aid, loans and direct investment. [[“Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism”](#), by Ha-Joon Chang].

### **Very Good Reasons**

So, Kim Jong Un has very good reasons to fear U.S. threats. He knows that the



U.S. is ruthless enough to kill millions of his people and destroy his country (along with gruesomely dispatching its leaders), much like the U.S. did in Iraq and Libya.

Sen. John McCain's daughter Meghan McCain said on Fox News that the U.S. should assassinate the "Crazy Fat Kid". Words like that along with Trump's insults ("Little Rocket Man"), threats and nuclear war games are sure to draw bombastic verbal reactions by Kim Jong Un and cause him to redouble his nuclear and missile programs. [The Nation].

While the U.S. constantly talks about a denuclearized Korean peninsula, it is the U.S. that first nuclearized it, starting with President Harry Truman's threats in 1951. Then in July 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower unilaterally withdrew from section 13(d) of the 1953 Armistice Agreement, which made the introduction of any new weapon systems in the Korean peninsula forbidden to both sides. The U.S. broke the promise so that it could "equip U.S. forces in Korea with modern weapons;" dual capability (nuclear-conventional) weapons, such as the Honest John and the 280 mm. cannon, i.e. tactical nuclear weapons [National Security Council Report].

All during the rest of the Cold War the U.S. stationed at least 950 nuclear weapons in South Korea. The U.S. may have withdrawn its nuclear weapons from South Korea in 1991 as it says, but it still has plenty in Guam and elsewhere that it uses to constantly threaten North Korea with a nuclear attack.

While the U.S. mainstream media ponders how to get North Korea to sit down at the negotiating table, it is the U.S. that refuses to talk. North Korea has often offered to sign a permanent peace treaty and non-aggression agreement, but the U.S. has consistently rebuffed the offers. The State Department has repeatedly said in news conferences that it will not negotiate with North Korea unless North Korean officials meet unspecified preconditions first [U.S. Department of State]. What is puzzling is what the preconditions are, and how to get the U.S. to sit down at the table. Yet, the U.S. and its media constantly say it is North Korea that refuses to talk.

### **Understandable Paranoia**

Unless there is a diplomatic solution, Kim Jong Un is rationally following in his father's footsteps by developing a credible nuclear deterrent against threatened U.S. aggression.

In 2000, George W. Bush scoffed at President Clinton's nuclear agreement with North Korea, and then, as President in 2002, Bush intensified threats with his "Axis of Evil" speech, which put North Korea on an enemies list with Iraq and

Iran. Bush followed that speech by invading Iraq in 2003 with "Shock and Awe," leaving the cradle of human civilization in ruins and later hanging Saddam Hussein.

Bush did not plan to stop with Iraq. Retired Gen. Wesley Clark says he was told at the Pentagon that Bush planned to invade seven countries in five years: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran [[YouTube](#)].

It is the U.S. that has been paranoid, unpredictable and insane during the Twenty-first Century. And the problem did not start with Trump. After the initial U.S. invasion of Iraq, a smug-looking Bush got out of the passenger seat of a fighter jet that the pilot had landed on the USS Abraham Lincoln. He strutted over to the microphone in his flight suit and gave a premature "Mission Accomplished" speech.

[Lisa Schiffren gushed](#) in the Wall Street Journal that Bush's performance made him look hot and sexy in his flight suit, adding with admiration that Bush is "credible as a Commander in Chief." The mainstream media has been the cheerleader for all of the Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Obama, Clinton and Kerry wars. The media is now inciting the U.S. public with propaganda for war with North Korea, Iran and Russia.

What can be said of Trump is that he seems to take pride in acting even crazier than his predecessors. So, Kim Jong Un is not paranoid to be fearful of what the U.S. might do and he has been acting predictably. The U.S. has left him little choice other than to defend his country with the deterrent of nuclear weapons.

As part of the "Axis of Evil" strategy, President George W. Bush sabotaged the negotiated nuclear agreement that the U.S. and North Korea had made under President Bill Clinton in the 1990s. That is what precipitated North Korea withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and resuming its nuclear program.

### **Lessons Learned**

Other countries tried submissive tactics to mollify Washington. For instance, in 2003, Bush persuaded Libya's Muammar Gaddafi to abandon his nuclear program. At the time, Bush encouraged North Korea to follow suit, saying "we want to have lessons learned, because we want Libya to be a model for other countries" to unilaterally disarm.

So, North Korea was paying close attention in 2011 when President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton backed a military campaign that exploited Libya's defenselessness, destroyed the country, and led to Gaddafi's torture-murder. In a TV interview, Clinton gloated "[we came, we saw, he died!, hahaha!](#)"

The lesson of Libya, according to Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, is that “unfortunately, if you have nukes, never give them up – if you don’t have them, get them.”

Based on that history, the North Koreans are not going to trust a U.S. agreement again. They will trust in themselves, as they did when Kim’s grandfather Kim Il-sung led the guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. Korea’s historical philosophy is based on the principle of self-sufficiency and resistance against foreign domination, especially in the North.

The North Koreans now call their historical philosophy “Juche.” North Korea is determined to follow the principle of Juche to the “realization of independence in politics, self-sufficiency in the economy and self-reliance in national defence.” [[official DPRK Juche link](#)].

Now, President Trump has slammed the door shut on negotiations with Kim Jong Un by threatening to totally destroy North Korea with “fire and fury” and insulting him as the “Little Rocket Man.”

Kim takes it seriously when the U.S. repeatedly threatens to destroy his country. Trump’s insults also caused Kim to “lose face ([kibun](#)),” a very serious affront in Korean culture. The natural reaction for a Korean who has been disrespected is to become infuriated. It is predictable, and the U.S. knows it.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley’s latest outburst that “if war comes, the North Korean regime will be utterly destroyed” is a further provocation, which the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called “a really bloodthirsty tirade.”

But Lavrov added that “Moscow has been closely working with the U.S. on the North Korean issue, with several meetings being held between the countries’ diplomats in the Russian capital, and other venues.”

### **Vast Bloodshed**

In the late Twentieth and early Twentieth-first centuries, U.S. wars and embargoes have killed millions of people around the planet, according to some estimates. Besides deploying devastating high-tech military weapons, the U.S. has interdicted food and medical supplies as part of total-war concepts.

As President Bill Clinton’s U.N. Ambassador (and later Secretary of State) [Madeleine Albright](#) once said, [500,000 dead children in Iraq – victims of U.S. sanctions – were “worth it”](#) to punish the Iraqi government’s behavior. That is what the U.S. sanctions are now doing to North Korea. But as Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) said, “North Korea will ‘eat grass’ before giving up nukes.”

The Koreans know the history of U.S. war-making well. The U.S. first contact with Korea in the Nineteenth Century involved a U.S. military expedition in support of a U.S. trade mission that challenged Korea's isolation, self-sufficiency and refusal to trade. The appearance of U.S. warships sparked a conflict that led to the Americans killing some 243 Koreans at the cost of three American lives. When Japan colonized and annexed Korea in 1910, the Western colonial powers including the U.S. cheered approval.

All Korea has ever wanted was to be left alone. During its 4,000-year history, Korea has not been an aggressive expansionist country. To the contrary, Korea has been invaded by China, Mongolia, Japan, Russia and the U.S. Historically, Korea has resisted contact with foreigners because foreigners had always brought invasions.

Like his Korean ancestors, Kim Jong Un wants North Korea to be left alone for the Korean people to determine their own future.

**David William Pear is a Senior Editor for OpEdNews.com and a Senior Contributing Editor for The Greenville Post. He is a Vietnam veteran having served as a member of the 5th Special Forces Group as a combat advisor to the Army of the Republic of (South) Viet Nam. [First Published at [opednews.com](http://opednews.com)]**

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## Trump, N. Korea & the Phony 'Terror List'

Seeing what happened to the leaders of Iraq and Libya, North Korea's Kim Jong Un won't surrender his nuclear bombs – and getting put on the U.S. "terrorism list" won't change that, as Independent Institute's Ivan Eland explains.

By Ivan Eland

In an effort to further tighten the screws on North Korea in what is likely to be another failed U.S. attempt to convince North Korea to give up its nuclear program, President Trump put that country back on its list of countries sponsoring terrorism. North Korea will join Iran, Sudan and Syria on the list. In response, North Korea has conducted another ballistic missile test.

Originally, some justification existed for putting North Korea on this list in 1988. In 1987, according to a North Korean agent, Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un's father and predecessor as North Korean leader, directed that a bomb be placed on a South Korean passenger jet, which resulted in the deaths of 115 civilians.

Although for years after that incident, North Korea remained a quirky, despotic country trying to get nuclear weapons, it did not commit any acts that objectively could be called terrorism, if that term is used to describe deliberate attacks on civilians to attempt to scare them into pressuring their government for changes in policy. Showing that the U.S. terrorism list has a large political element to it, North Korea was only removed about 20 years later when President George W. Bush was trying to save a deal with North Korea that would have stopped its nuclear program—something that had nothing to do with whether North Korea was committing or sponsoring acts of terrorism.

Of course, President Trump's re-imposing the moniker of "state sponsor of terrorism" on North Korea is also political. The move is designed to increase only symbolic pressure against a regime that is unlikely to give up its nuclear program, which among other things, is designed to deter the United States from ousting Kim Jong-un from power – just as the U.S. has done with the leaders of non-nuclear nations, such as Haiti, Panama, Serbia, Iraq, and Libya.

Although North Korea certainly gets accused of mischief making – shelling a South Korean island, sinking a South Korean Navy vessel, conducting a cyber attack on Sony Pictures, and assassinating a member of the North Korean "royal family" who could someday have taken Kim Jong-un's job – none of these includes the mass slaughter of civilians for political purposes.

### **Politicized List**

Castros' Cuba also remained on the list of state sponsors of terrorism long after it stopped sponsoring such acts, simply because the United States did not like the Cuban government and wanted to keep maximum pressure on it. Laudably, President Obama, as part of his warming of relations with Cuba, finally took that country off the list in 2015.

In addition, the other countries remaining – Iran, Syria, and Sudan – and many groups on the terrorism list don't really focus their attacks on the United States. However, continuing its expensive role as the world's policeman, despite having a national debt north of \$20 trillion, the United States insists on making new enemies worldwide by calling out groups and nations that don't focus their attacks on the United States – that is, fighting other countries' battles for them.

And the expanding war on terrorism is not just to be found on paper. For example, to show he is tougher than Barack Obama, President Trump has unilaterally approved new authorities to attack miscreants across the globe. Obama had enlarged George W. Bush's illegal and unending wars on terror in the developing world, and Trump is now trying to one-up Obama by further expanding

these unconstitutional authorities. For example, in Somalia, the United States is escalating the attacks on the Islamist Shabab group.

Even in Afghanistan, in which the Congress passed a post-9/11 authority for the use of military force (AUMF), the Trump administration has expanded the authorities to attack opium labs that fund the militant Taliban insurgency. Let's hope this war on narcotics goes better than the colossal waste of taxpayer dollars that the war on drugs in Latin America has become. And all of this escalation despite terrorism experts' constant refrain that it difficult to kill your way out of an insurgency.

The war on terror failed long ago during the George W. Bush administration; expanding it both on paper and in the field may look tough, but it's just doubling down on a dubiously counterproductive policy.

**Ivan Eland is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center on Peace & Liberty at the Independent Institute. [This article also appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost and at <http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=9219>]**

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## Trump's Lethal Decision on Jerusalem

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

By Dennis J Bernstein

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

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

Dennis Bernstein: What was your initial response to the announcement by

President Trump that the United States will be moving its embassy to Jerusalem?

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

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

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

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

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

Francis Boyle: That has always been Israel's policy. I had a conversation with the chair of the Palestinian Delegation to the Middle East peace negotiations. He told me that the Zionists have not changed their position since the Basel Convention of 1897. They want all of Palestine. What is happening now in Jerusalem is a step in that direction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dennis Bernstein: Are there any options for the Palestinians in the international arena, for example, at the United Nations?

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

My advice to the Palestinians is a full-court press in all specialized United Nations agencies and affiliated organizations, using all available legal mechanisms. This would include suing Israel at the International Court of Justice, which I have offered to do for them. And of course they have filed a complaint against Israel for war crimes and crimes against humanity before the



International Criminal Court. According to press reports, they are meeting right now to decide what to do and President Abbas will soon be addressing the Palestinian people.

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

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

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

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

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## Russia-gate's Litany of Corrections

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

By Robert Parry

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



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

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

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

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

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

After having congressional reporter Manu Raju lay out the supposed facts of the scoop, CNN turned to a panel of legal experts to pontificate about the crimes that the Trump campaign may have committed now that the “evidence” proving Russia-gate was finally coming together.

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

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

campaign to the WikiLeaks disclosure.

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

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

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

### **A Pattern of Bias**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The Original Sin**

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

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

But the “consensus” claim was never true. Such a consensus judgment would have called for a comprehensive National Intelligence Estimate, which was never

commissioned on the Russian “hacking” issue. Instead there was something called an “Intelligence Community Assessment” on Jan. 6 that – according to testimony by President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in May 2017 – was put together by “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies: the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency.

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

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

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

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

When actual experts, such as former National Security Agency technical director William Binney, sought to apply scientific analysis to the core claim about Russian “hacking,” they reached the unpopular conclusion that the one known download speed of a supposed “hack” was not possible over the Internet but closely matched what would occur via a USB download, i.e., from someone with direct access to the Democratic National Committee’s computers using a thumb drive. In other words, the emails more likely came from a DNC insider, not an external “hack” from the Russians or anyone else.

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

## **'Hand-picked' Trouble**

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the point is that no such evidence of Russian collusion has been presented and to speculate how people might react if such evidence is discovered is itself McCarthyistic, suggesting guilt based on hypotheticals, not proof. Whatever one

thinks of Trump, it is troubling for Dionne or anyone to imply treasonous activities based on speculation. That is the sort of journalistic malfeasance that has contributed to the string of professional abuses that pervades Russia-gate.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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