

Ukraine Factions Vie for Lobbying Edge

Exclusive: Though many Ukrainians live in poverty, government officials and oligarchs lavish millions on Washington insiders to buy influence, another example of how foreign lobbying can fuel a crisis, Jonathan Marshall reports.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the sixth and final installment of a series on foreign lobbying.)

Donald Trump doesn't just have a Russia problem, in the eyes of his critics. He also has a big – and related – Ukraine problem. His 2016 campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, was forced to resign last August amid a flurry of media exposés about Manafort's lobbying for former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Russia following violent protests against his government in February 2014.



"Any presidential candidate should properly vet the backgrounds of and moral decisions of the people he picks to advise him," said Atlantic Council deputy director Alina Polyakova last year, declaring that Manafort's work in Ukraine "absolutely should cast a shadow on Trump's campaign."

Either she or the reporter forgot to mention that two of her influential think tank's top 10 contributors are the U.S. State Department, which applauded the ouster of Yanukovich, and the Ukrainian World Congress, a diaspora organization that attacked him as well. The UWC now works to promote Ukraine's integration into the European Union, a key issue that helped cause Yanukovich's downfall and led to the ongoing crisis with Russia over Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

That small detail exemplifies the complexity of Ukrainian influence campaigns over the last few years. Although Trump's campaign manager attracted enormous public attention for his work in Ukraine, other prominent lobbyists in the Yanukovich camp were connected to high-level Obama administration officials. Still others took money from Yanukovich's political foes, or from independent

billionaire oligarchs with their own agendas.

The only common denominators are money, influence and lack of transparency.

Paul Manafort exemplifies those characteristics to the nth degree. A Republican adviser to the campaigns of Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bob Dole, he also represented a string of foreign dictators and warlords, including Philippines strongman Ferdinand Marcos, Zaire kleptocrat Mobutu Sese Seko, Angolan guerrilla leader Jonas Savimbi, Somali dictator Siad Barre, and Saudi Arabia.

A 1992 report by the Center for Public Integrity named his firm as one of the top five members of the “Torturer’s Lobby” in Washington. His former partner Roger Stone, the infamous political operative for Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, boasted that their firm “lined up most of the dictators of the world we could find.”

Manafort and Stone also represented the Trump Organization in the late 1980s. Trump reportedly met Manafort and Stone through Roy Cohn, the New York mafia lawyer and former hatchet man for Sen. Joseph McCarthy.

Another long-time Manafort client, the Kashmiri American Council, was exposed by U.S. prosecutors as a “scam” and a front group for Pakistani military intelligence, allegedly created to deflect public attention “away from the involvement of Pakistan in sponsoring terrorism in Kashmir and elsewhere.”

The Ukrainian Gold Mine

A *New York Times* exposé in July 2016 revealed that Trump’s campaign manager first got involved in Ukraine in the mid-2000s as an image consultant to billionaire oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, who was widely suspected of being an organized crime leader (a charge he has always denied).

Soon Manafort began advising Akhmetov’s favored presidential candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, and his Party of Regions. Manafort’s advice was credited by at least one Yanukovich ally with helping the candidate win Ukraine’s 2010 presidential election.

The original *Times* story also noted that “Mr. Manafort has not registered as a lobbyist representing Ukraine, which would require disclosing his earnings.” Two weeks later, the paper reported the existence of handwritten ledgers, produced by Ukraine’s National Anti-Corruption Bureau, showing that Manafort had received \$12.7 million in undisclosed cash payments from Yanukovich’s Party of Regions from 2007 to 2012. Manafort denied receiving the cash.

A follow-up story in the *Washington Post* reported that Manafort lobbied “State Department officials and other opinion leaders” on behalf of Yanukovich, failed to file official reports, and “did not officially close his business in Kiev until April 2016, the month after he joined the Trump campaign.” Manafort left the Trump campaign a day later.

Recent document disclosures confirm Manafort’s lobbying activities for the Party of Regions. They also confirm that he was aided by former Republican Congressman Vin Weber, whose lobbying firm Mercury Public Affairs earned more than \$1.2 million on the Ukraine account from 2012 to 2014.

“Our goal as Americans and Westerners was to bring Ukraine into the E.U.,” said Weber, who also represents Qatar and Turkey. “Our explicit work was anti-Russian.”

In the spirit of bipartisanship, Manafort also enlisted the services of Podesta Group Inc. – co-founded by John Podesta (President Clinton’s former chief of staff, President-elect Obama’s transition team chief, and Hillary Clinton’s campaign chairman) – to help influence Congress for a fee of about \$1 million.

Podesta Group last year also signed on as lobbyists to help lift sanctions against Russia’s largest financial institution, Sberbank, which the United States imposed after Russia intervened in Ukraine following the violent ouster of Yanukovich in 2014.

In the run-up to the overthrow of Yanukovich, anti-government Ukrainian protestors assembled on K Street – lobbyist row in Washington, D.C. – with signs saying, “Podesta Group Takes Blood Money.”

It wasn’t the first time critics had called attention to the firm’s choice of clients. For its services to such notorious human rights violators as Azerbaijan, Egypt, Thailand and Vietnam, Podesta Group was paid more than \$7 million from 2010 to 2015, according to the Center for Public Integrity.

Mercury and Podesta Group didn’t just lobby for Yanukovich; they also fought proposals in Washington to pressure his government to release his political rival, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, from prison on corruption charges.

She, in turn, was represented in Washington by several powerful lobbyists, including former Rep. Jim Slattery, D-Kansas. His law firm received \$920,000 over two years from Tymoshenko’s husband to pressure the Kiev government to free her. She was finally released in February 2014, after the successful *putsch* against Yanukovich.

"A lot of people are making a lot of money off Ukraine's political competition," observed Bruce Jackson, president of the Project on Transitional Democracies, in late 2013, noting that he and his group, which promoted democratic change in Eastern Europe, did not lobby.

That was rich coming from Jackson, a former vice president at Lockheed Martin, who had been a director of the infamous, neo-conservative Project for the New American Century, founder of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, and co-founder of the U.S. Committee to Expand NATO. It was NATO's 2008 commitment to expand into Ukraine that helped trigger the current crisis with Russia.

Biden and Kerry Connections

Another Democrat who cashed in on the Ukraine crisis was Vice President Joe Biden's son Hunter. In May 2014 he joined the board of Burisma Holdings, a private Ukrainian oil and gas company owned by a former government minister.

Also joining its board was Devon Archer, a Democratic fundraiser and former adviser to John Kerry, then Secretary of State. A week later, David Leiter, former Senate chief of staff to Kerry, came aboard as a lobbyist for the company, to promote "a stable and secure energy future for Ukraine," independent of Russia.

Time magazine commented at the time, "By taking a job with Burisma, the younger Biden has put himself in the middle of a struggle between the United States and Russia, which currently provides the bulk of the natural gas supplies to Ukraine. . . . Since Hunter Biden took the new job, his father, Vice President Joe Biden, has continued to serve as the Obama Administration's point person on Ukraine."

Although experts agreed that it appeared no one had broken any laws, a pundit at one Washington think tank observed, "It's unhelpful when we are trying to get across to the Ukrainians to clean up corruption and special deals for special folks. It maybe sends the wrong message that Westerners are just hypocritical."

Since Trump's election, money is pouring in to well-heeled Republican lobbyists. The Ukrainian government said in January that it had hired BGR Group as its Washington lobbyist to "help open lines of communication" with Congress, the administration, and other influential groups with the "goals of strengthening US-Ukrainian relations and increasing US business investment in Ukraine."

Translated, that means the lobbyists will urge members of Congress and the administration to tighten economic sanctions against Russia until it pulls out of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Ukraine also seeks more financial and military aid as it struggles to make ends meet. BGR Group is on a retainer worth \$50,000

a month. Its past foreign clients have included Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The “B” in BGR is former Republican Party leader and Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour. The “R” is Ed Rogers, a former White House official in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations and protégé of take-no-prisoners campaigner Lee Atwater. Rogers’s ongoing column in the *Washington Post* has come under fire for failing to disclose numerous conflicts of interest with his firm’s clients.

Also jumping on the Ukraine gravy train this year was Monica Crowley, a former Fox News commentator who had to pass up an appointment as director of strategic communications for Trump’s National Security Council after CNN revealed that she had plagiarized portions of her dissertation and a subsequent book.

Crowley now represents Ukrainian oligarch Victor Pinchuk in Washington policy circles on unspecified “issues of concern” to him. In a bipartisan spirit, Pinchuk also pays Democratic pollster Doug Shoen \$40,000 per month to facilitate conversations with U.S. policy makers “regarding Democratization in Ukraine and European integration.”

Pinchuk, a billionaire with interests in steel, pipelines, media and banking, ingratiated himself into the Clinton camp by contributing millions of dollars to the Clinton Foundation and hosting a visit to Ukraine by Chelsea Clinton and her husband. Two years ago, he paid the Trump Foundation \$150,000 in return for the Republican upstart appearing on video at an annual European strategy meeting held by Pinchuk.

Last but not least, Pinchuk’s foundation – along with the Ukrainian World Congress, as noted above – is a leading funder of the influential Atlantic Council, which promotes collaboration with other NATO powers to combat “Kremlin aggression in Ukraine.”

The Atlantic Council’s lavish funding of position papers, op-ed columns, conferences and other persuasive vehicles by agents of anti-Russian Ukrainians is not so very different – although somewhat less transparent – than pro-Russian propaganda disseminated by RT or Sputnik News. The Atlantic Council’s efforts show up as columns by think-tank experts in the *Washington Post* and other papers, while what appears on RT or Sputnik News is branded by Western officials as “information warfare.”

The American public, their elected officials, and Washington bureaucrats have a hard enough time sorting out the complex issues of foreign relations without the additional challenge of not knowing who is paying for their news and information. That’s why full disclosure is so vital. And that’s why the United

States badly needs not just an investigation into Russian political interference, but an in-depth probe into the activities of all foreign agents of influence in the United States.

[This is the sixth and last article in a series on foreign lobbying. The previous installments were [“The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying”](#); [“How China Lobby Shaped America”](#); [“Israel Pays the Political Piper”](#); and [“Saudis Win Hearts by Lining Pockets”](#); and [“Turkey’s Varied Tactics of US Lobbying.”](#)]

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Growing Poverty Fuels Europe’s Extremism

The European Union’s neoliberal economic orthodoxy has spread income inequality and even poverty across the Continent, spurring extremist movements to challenge this system, reports Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

The rise of protest movements across Europe, with increasing support for extremist candidates and political parties, comes against the backdrop of a growing sense of insecurity for the middle and lower classes across the continent.

Less stable employment conditions and the stagnation or regression of salaries have created the fertile ground for populist movements on the right in particular, which now mix their traditional nationalist and anti-immigrant rhetoric, with criticism of the economic orthodoxy of the supranational European Union (E.U.) institutions.

In recent years the prevailing response from economists has been that many Western nations are simply unable to compete in sectors dominated by low costs and the high efficiency unleashed by globalization. This narrative, however, is used to hide a more troubling reality: government institutions have contributed directly to the economic difficulties with their own actions, driving down living standards through multiple waves of austerity and blocking attempts to break from the neoliberal principles that dominate among E.U. institutions.

The latest Economic Bulletin from the European Central Bank (ECB) presents a range of statistics that highlight the worsening of living conditions even among the wealthiest countries on the continent. First of all, the ECB admits that the

official unemployment rate, high but improving, fails to account for categories such as workers who are part-time for economic reasons or who are no longer actively searching for a job. As we have known in the U.S. for years, broader measures of unemployment can make the actual rate practically double, taking into account problems that the headline statistic easily masks.

According to Prometeia, a respected Italian economic research institute, this alternative view of the weakness of the labor market may explain “why poverty levels are not following a descending path, since official labor market statistics may have hidden underemployment.”

The growth in the poverty rate across Europe confirms this impression, and shows that the vaunted social welfare state that European countries are known for has failed to protect citizens from the effects of the economic crisis.

In aggregate terms, for the entire Eurozone (the 19 countries using the common currency), poverty increased from 16.1 percent of the population in 2007, to 17.2 percent in 2015. This includes rises in wealthy countries, such as Italy, France, the Netherlands and Germany. The biggest surprise is found in the figures for Germany: poverty jumped by 1.5 percent over the cited time period, three times the increase in Italy and France.

Although it may not seem like a large rise, this statistic is notable because it goes against the common narrative of the strength of Germany as the leading economy in Europe. Germany has a large budget surplus (currently around 8 percent) and is a major player in industrial exports, in particular to new markets in Asia.

Based on this strength, German politicians often take a hard line on budget restrictions at the E.U. level, demanding that countries with greater difficulties cut spending and avoid violating the monetary parameters established for the Eurozone, which prohibit running deficits in order to boost public investment. “If only they were virtuous like us,” the attitude is, “then they also would see economic growth and more social cohesion.”

Expanding the ‘Working Poor’

The statistics on poverty undercut this argument. Germany’s economy has certainly continued to expand, but one of the side-effects has been the impoverishment of large segments of the population. If we go further into the numbers, we find that Germany has seen a big jump in working poor over the past 10 years. From a level below 5 percent in 2007, the figure reached 10 percent in 2014, before leveling off.

Clearly, one of the competitive advantages of the German economy has been

blocking wage growth, and even reducing salaries and social protections for much of the population. Whereas in some other countries the gains from increased productivity have been shared with workers, in Germany the benefits have gone mostly to the top.

The main factor in creating this situation was the series of labor market reforms conceived in the early 2000s under the Hartz Commission. Peter Hartz, the Personnel Director of Volkswagen, was called on by then-Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to come up with a plan to address the high unemployment rate. The resulting proposals concentrated on increasing flexibility in the labor market, in particular changing the structure of subsidies for unemployment and welfare services.

The most severe measures came under "Hartz IV," implemented in 2005, which forces those who are out of work to accept any offers they receive from the Federal Employment Office, on penalty of losing the meager benefits they already receive. This work requirement means that qualified professionals can find themselves earning 1 or 2 Euros an hour in "mini-jobs," reduced to menial labor in arguably the most advanced country in Europe.

The social and political effects of the Hartz reforms are evident. Approximately 6 million people are in the subsidy system, and entire areas have come to be known as "Hartz IV neighborhoods," dominated by people who feel trapped by a system that has provided flexibility for employers, but caused accelerating economic inequality.

Not surprisingly, it is in these areas that populist movements such as Alternative for Germany (AfD), or parties at the left or right extreme of the political spectrum, get their highest vote totals.

'Success' at a Cost

From a certain standpoint, Germany's success in improving its economic indicators through the impoverishment of part of its population actually appears preferable to other alternatives under current E.U. economic policy.

Given the strict budget rules prohibiting large-scale public investment, it has become mandatory to enact "structural reforms" aimed at achieving labor market flexibility, and allowing the entry of private capital into markets previously restricted by public regulations. Germany acted in advance, and also gave a massive public bailout to its banks; now it is held up as an example for others.

A worse scenario has played out in other European countries since 2010: not only structural reforms based on neoliberal ideology, but massive levels of austerity that "cut out the middle man," so to speak, directly reducing living standards

through tax hikes and deep cuts in social services.

When the real estate bubble burst in Spain starting in 2008-2009, for example, the country was forced to implement harsh budget cuts, raise the retirement age, and cut social services. Unemployment rose to almost 25 percent, with youth unemployment close to 50 percent, while the banks were bailed out under an agreement with the E.U., the IMF and the ECB (known as the “Troika”). After years of austerity the economy is now growing again; in this case as well, the cost has been the impoverishment of large swaths of the population.

In Greece, the situation is even more dramatic. Under fire for presenting misleading or false budget numbers – with the help of international banks such as Goldman Sachs – and criticized for widespread tax evasion and an overly generous social state, the Greek people have been subjected to continuous austerity. As a result approximately 15 percent of the population now lives in extreme poverty; a classic case of the cure being worse than the disease.

The E.U. and the IMF have cheered Greece’s commitment to fiscal responsibility, while being forced to admit that this “progress” has “taken a heavy toll on the society and tested its endurance.” (IMF report, Feb. 7, 2017).

One might think that these three examples of increased poverty in countries with very different images both inside and outside of Europe would lead to a profound reappraisal of the austerity policies implemented in recent years. For now, however, the leading players in the E.U. institutions have shown no intention to make a fundamental change; the “reforms” must go on.

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New Cracks in Russia-gate ‘Assessment’

Exclusive: President Obama’s ex-intelligence chiefs admit they limited input into the Russia-gate “assessment,” which was handled by “hand-picked” analysts, raising the specter of politicized intelligence, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

At the center of the Russia-gate scandal is a curious U.S. intelligence

“assessment” that was pulled together in less than a month and excluded many of the agencies that would normally weigh in on such an important topic as whether Russia tried to influence the outcome of a U.S. presidential election.

The Jan. 6 report and its allegation that Russia “hacked” Democratic emails and publicized them through WikiLeaks have been treated as gospel by the mainstream U.S. media and many politicians of both parties, but two senior Obama administration intelligence officials have provided new information that raises fresh doubts about the findings.

On Tuesday, former CIA Director John Brennan told the House Intelligence Committee that only four of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies took part in the assessment, relying on analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the oversight of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Brennan said the report “followed the general model of how you want to do something like this with some notable exceptions. It only involved the FBI, NSA and CIA as well as the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. It wasn’t a full inter-agency community assessment that was coordinated among the 17 agencies, and for good reason because of the nature and the sensitivity of the information trying, once again, to keep that tightly compartmented.”

But Brennan’s excuse about “tightly compartmented” information was somewhat disingenuous because other intelligence agencies, such as the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), could have been consulted in a limited fashion, based on their areas of expertise. For instance, INR could have weighed in on whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would have taken the risk of trying to sabotage Hillary Clinton’s campaign, knowing that – if she won as expected and learned of the operation – she might have sought revenge against him and his country.

The Jan. 6 report argued one side of the case – that Putin had a motive for undermining Clinton because he objected to her work as Secretary of State when she encouraged anti-Putin protests inside Russia – but the report ignored the counter-argument that the usually cautious Putin might well have feared infuriating the incoming U.S. President if the anti-Clinton ploy failed to block her election.

A balanced intelligence assessment would have included not just arguments for believing that the Russians did supply the Democratic emails to WikiLeaks but the reasons to doubt that they did.

Pre-Cooked Intelligence

However, the restricted nature of the Jan. 6 report – limiting it to analysts from CIA, NSA and FBI – blocked the kind of expertise that the State Department, the Defense Department, the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies might have provided. In other words, the Jan. 6 report has the look of pre-cooked intelligence.

That impression was further strengthened by the admission of former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on May 8 that “the two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.”

Yet, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you “hand-pick” the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion. For instance, if the analysts were known to be hard-liners on Russia or supporters of Hillary Clinton, they could be expected to deliver the one-sided report that they did.

In the history of U.S. intelligence, we have seen how this approach has worked, such as the determination of the Reagan administration to pin the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II and other acts of terror on the Soviet Union.

CIA Director William Casey and Deputy Director Robert Gates shepherded the desired findings through the process by putting the assessment under the control of pliable analysts and sidelining those who objected to this politicization of intelligence.

The point of enlisting the broader intelligence community – and incorporating dissents into a final report – is to guard against such “stove-piping” of intelligence that delivers the politically desired result but ultimately distorts reality.

Another painful example of politicized intelligence was President George W. Bush’s 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq’s WMD that removed INR’s and other dissents from the declassified version that was given to the public.

Lacking Evidence

The Jan. 6 report – technically called an Intelligence Community Assessment (or ICA) – avoided the need to remove any dissents by excluding the intelligence agencies that might have dissented and by hand-picking the analysts who compiled the report.

However, like the declassified version of the Iraq NIE, the Russia-gate ICA lacked any solid evidence to support the conclusions. The ICA basically demanded that the American public “trust us” and got away with that bluff because much of the mainstream U.S. news media wanted to believe anything negative about then-

President-elect Trump.

Because of that, the American people were repeatedly – and falsely – informed that the findings about Russian “hacking” reflected the collective judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies, making anyone who dared question the conclusion seem like a crackpot or a “Russian apologist.”

Yet, based on the testimonies of Clapper and Brennan, we now know that the ICA represented only a hand-picked selection of the intelligence community – four, not 17, agencies.

There were other biases reflected in the ICA, such as a bizarre appendix that excoriated RT, the Russian television network, for supposedly undermining Americans’ confidence in their democratic process.

This seven-page appendix, dating from 2012, accused RT of portraying “the US electoral process as undemocratic” and offered such “proof” as RT’s staging of a debate among third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Republican-Democratic debates between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama.

“RT broadcast, hosted and advertised third-party candidate debates,” the report said, as if allowing political figures in the United States who were not part of the two-party system to express their views, was somehow anti-democratic, when you might think that letting Americans hear alternatives was the essence of democracy.

“The RT hosts asserted that the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a ‘sham,’” the report continued. Yet, polls have shown that large numbers of Americans would prefer more choices than the usual two candidates and, indeed, most Western democracies have multiple parties, So, the implicit RT criticism of the U.S. political process is certainly not out of the ordinary.

The report also took RT to task for covering the Occupy Wall Street movement and for reporting on the environmental dangers from “fracking,” topics cited as further proof that the Russian government was using RT to weaken U.S. public support for Washington’s policies (although, again, these are topics of genuine public interest).

Assessing or Guessing

But at least the appendix offered up some “evidence” – as silly as those examples might have been. The main body of the report amounted to one “assessment” after another with no verifiable evidence included, at least in the unclassified version that the American people were allowed to see.

The report also contained a warning about how unreliable these “assessments” could be: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

In other words, “assessing” in intelligence terms often equates with “guessing” – and if the guessers are hand-picked by political appointees – it shouldn’t be surprising that they would come up with an “assessment” that would please their bosses, in this case, President Obama and his appointees at CIA, NSA, FBI and ODNI.

The timing and speed of the Jan. 6 report also drew some attention at Tuesday’s House Intelligence Committee hearing, where Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-New York, noted that President Obama requested the ICA on Dec. 9 and the last entry was dated Dec. 29.

“This report was produced in just 20 days in December,” Stefanik said, adding: “It’s of concern to me that there was a two-month lag” between when Obama’s intelligence agencies first alleged Russian “hacking” of Democratic emails and when Obama ordered the ICA.

Of course, the ICA’s flaws do not mean that Russia is innocent or that WikiLeaks is telling the truth when it asserts that the two batches of Democratic emails – one from the Democratic National Committee and the other from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta – did not come from the Russians.

But the Jan. 6 report has served as the foundation for a series of investigations that have hobbled the Trump administration and could lead to the negation of a U.S. presidential election via the impeachment or forced resignation of President Trump.

The seriousness of that possibility would seem to demand the most thorough examination and the fullest vetting of the evidence. Even just the appearance that the ICA might be one more case of politicized intelligence would do more to destroy Americans’ faith in their democratic system than anything that Putin might dream up.

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](#)).

Turkey's Varied Tactics of US Lobbying

Exclusive: Turkey has built one of the premier foreign lobbies in Washington by paying powerful politicians, spreading around money to arms manufacturers, and teaming up with the Israel Lobby, writes Jonathan Marshall.

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

For all the furor over retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn's ties to Russia, which got him fired after just 24 days on the job as President Trump's first national security adviser, his biggest legal risks may relate to his unregistered lobbying for agents of the Turkish government. A federal grand jury has subpoenaed all records of that work as part of a major ongoing investigation of Flynn's foreign ties.

Although details of Flynn's work on the account remain murky, and his own story has characteristically shifted over time, his job put him in crowded company. The Turkish lobby has long been one of the most active and unrestrained in Washington. An article in *Politico* last fall called Turkey "the poster child when it comes to foreign lobbying opportunities for former members of both parties."

In the past few years, the article noted, "the country's increasingly autocratic government has employed an army of lobbyists, including [former Missouri Democrat and House Minority Leader Richard] Gephardt, [former Mississippi Republican and Senate Majority Leader Trent] Lott, [former Louisiana Democrat and Senator John] Breaux, former House Speaker-elect Bob Livingston (R-La.), the late Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), former House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), former CIA director and longtime House member Porter Goss (R-Fla.) and former Reps. Albert Wynn (D-Md.) and Jim McCrery (R-La.)."

Turkey has also multiplied its lobbying clout by allying with various "defense contractors, finance and energy corporations, trade groups . . . and a well-financed network of domestic advocacy nonprofits," according to the Sunlight Foundation.

Cognizant of Turkey's importance as a major NATO arms market, for example, the Aerospace Industries Association helped coordinate lobbying by major military contractors such as Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Textron on issues important to Turkey.

The American Turkish Council, which promotes "stronger U.S.-Turkey relations," is chaired by retired Gen. James L. Jones, former U.S. national security adviser

and commander of NATO. Its board members have included representatives of Lockheed Martin, PepsiCo., Pfizer, Boeing, General Electric, Raytheon, and Bechtel.

Another friend in Washington is the Atlantic Council, a widely quoted, pro-NATO think tank, whose vice chairman, Stephen Hadley, was national security adviser to President George W. Bush. The Atlantic Council's top financial supporters include no fewer than five major Turkish government and business organizations, along with Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and other large military contractors.

The Atlantic Council's annual Istanbul Summit drew fire this year for allegedly excluding critical journalists and opposition politicians, at the request of the Erdogan regime. The council's CEO said that it supported Turkey in today's turbulent times, adding, "the Atlantic Council is not a fair weather friend."

Fighting the Armenian Genocide Resolution

One longstanding issue for Turkey has been fighting perennial efforts in Congress to adopt a resolution condemning as genocide the mass killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, starting in 1915. A study published in 2009 by ProPublica and the Sunlight Foundation reported that Turkey was the fifth biggest spender on foreign lobbying, at more than \$3.5 million. Turkey ranked number one in contacts with members of Congress, as a result of its ongoing fight to block the genocide resolution.

A big chunk of the \$1.7 million raked in by former Rep. Gephardt from the Turkish government in 2015 was dedicated to that end. Buying his services was a real coup for Ankara. During his long career in Congress, Gephardt had been a champion of the Armenian-American community's campaign to officially recognize the genocide of their ancestors.

Turkey found a powerful ally for its genocide denial campaign in the Israel Lobby, which backed Ankara out of gratitude for the Muslim state's recognition of Israel. In 2007, as they had for many years, the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, and Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs joined Turkey in opposing the congressional genocide resolution.

Abraham Foxman, longtime head of the Anti-Defamation League, told one reporter bluntly, "Our focus is Israel. If helping Turkey helps Israel, then that's what we're in the business of doing."

"Since the 1990s, Turkey has turned into a key strategic ally," explained *Jerusalem Post* writer Herb Keiron. "What Israel gets from Turkey is clear: a friendly Muslim face in a sea of hostility; a geographical asset; a huge market

for military wares and other products. . . . And what do the Turks get? Firstly, they benefit from our geography, just as we do from theirs. Both countries box in Syria for the other, and Syrian-Turkish relations, put mildly, have known their ups and downs. Secondly, they buy our arms. . . .

“And the final thing the Turks ‘get’ from Israel is access to the Jewish lobby in Washington. . . . Turkey looks to these organizations to put in a good word in Congress or with the administration when issues of importance to Ankara – such as issues regarding the Armenians or Cyprus – make their way to those bodies.”

Years of genocide denial by major American Jewish organizations finally caused a furor in 2007, not only among Armenian-Americans but among many progressive Jews who decried the cynicism of their community leaders.

Rep. Adam Schiff, a Jewish Democrat from California and lead sponsor of the genocide resolution, condemned Israel’s interference and said, “I cannot see how major Jewish American organizations can in good conscience and in any way support efforts to deny the undeniable.” (Today Schiff is the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee’s investigation of possible Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.)

Leaders of conservative Jewish groups began changing their tune in 2010 – after Ankara condemned Israel for killing nine Turkish citizens aboard a flotilla bound for Gaza. In 2016, under more progressive new leadership, the Anti-Defamation League finally officially recognized the 1915 massacre of Armenians as “unequivocally genocide.”

The Sibel Edmonds Affair

The Turkish lobby hasn’t always played by the rules, according to former FBI-translator-turned-whistleblower Sibel Edmonds. She testified that over the years 1996 to 2002, she had access to FBI counterintelligence wiretaps that implicated former House Speaker Dennis Hastert in taking “large sums” of cash – roughly half a million dollars in bribes – “to do certain favors . . . (for the) Turkish government’s interest.”

It is a matter of record that after leaving Congress in 2007, Hastert went on the payroll of the Turkish government as a registered lobbyist, earning \$35,000 a month. In 2016, he was convicted of bank fraud relating to allegations that years earlier he sexually abused boys he coached in high school wrestling.

Edmonds also claimed that former Rep. Stephen Solarz, who also became a registered lobbyist for Turkey, “acted as conduit to deliver or launder contributions and other bribe(s) to certain members of Congress.” She accused

Rep. Tom Lantos, a California Democrat, of “bribe(ry)” and “disclosing [the] highest level protected U.S. intelligence and weapons technology information both to Israel and to Turkey [and] other very serious criminal conduct.” And she alleged that Turkish agents filmed a member of the House Intelligence Committee who was lured into a sexual affair.

Most explosively, Edmonds told a reporter that former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Deputy Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman sold nuclear technology to Turkish agents acting for Pakistani military intelligence, and that he revealed to Turkish diplomats the identify of a CIA front company engaged in gathering intelligence on nuclear proliferation.

Grossman strongly denied her claims, but the London *Sunday Times* found them credible enough to run a major story in 2008 (without identifying Grossman by name). Former FBI counterintelligence and counterespionage manager John Cole later went on the record, saying, “I am fully aware of the FBI’s decade-long investigation of . . . Marc Grossman, which ultimately was buried and covered up. It is long past time to investigate this case and bring about accountability.”

Evidently other officials in Washington did not find her allegations credible, however. In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appointed Grossman to replace Richard Holbrooke as special U.S. envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It should also be noted that Edmonds’s initial allegations, given some credence by the Department of Justice’s inspector general and “60 Minutes,” concerned mainly potential espionage by a co-worker and general incompetence in the FBI’s translation department, not the much more explosive charges against major politicians. Nor is it clear how she would have had access to so many highly sensitive investigative files involving members of Congress.

The Michael Flynn Affair

President Trump’s former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, is reportedly under investigation by at least two congressional committees, the Pentagon’s inspector general, and a federal grand jury not only for his relations with Russia, but also about his payments from a Turkish organization while he was a top foreign policy adviser to Trump’s campaign.

Investigators say they have found no evidence that Flynn sought permission from the Departments of Defense or State for his foreign payments. Flynn’s consulting firm, Flynn Intel Group, did not register as a foreign lobbyist until last September, a month past the start of its work for Turkish interests.

The subject of Flynn’s work was well disguised. His client was an obscure Dutch

firm. An enterprising reporter who checked Dutch records discovered that its founder was military contractor and real estate magnate Ekim Alptekin, “an ally of Erdogan’s who is director of the Turkey-U.S. Business Council, a non-profit arm of Turkey’s Foreign Economic Relations Board. . . . In the role, Alptekin helped coordinate [President] Erdogan’s visit to the U.S. [in 2016].”

Three months after signing with Alptekin’s firm – on Election Day 2016, no less – Flynn published an opinion column in *The Hill* lauding Turkey as “vital to U.S. interests” and “our strongest ally” against ISIS. He denounced the coup attempt that summer, which he had once praised, and supported Turkey’s controversial request for the extradition of exiled Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara accuses of inspiring the coup.

In March 2017, a month after Flynn resigned as national security adviser for lying about his contacts with Russian officials, the White House finally admitted, in the words of CNN, that “President Donald Trump’s transition team was aware that retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn engaged in work that would likely require him to register his consulting firm as a foreign agent before Flynn was tapped to serve as national security adviser.”

A few days later, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that back in September, Flynn had met with senior Turkish government officials to discuss “the political climate in Turkey.” One attendee, former CIA Director James Woolsey, claimed that when he walked into the meeting, they were reviewing options for kidnapping Gulen to avoid the extradition process. Woolsey said he “found the topic startling and the actions being discussed possibly illegal.”

Flynn denied Woolsey’s account. But he did belatedly file foreign agent registration papers with the Justice Department this March, acknowledging that the \$530,000 his firm received from August to mid-November “could be construed to have principally benefitted the Republic of Turkey.”

Members of the House Oversight Committee from both parties have since said that Flynn’s failure to get permission for those payments from Turkey could subject him to criminal prosecution for violating a constitutional ban on retired military officers taking payments from foreign governments.

Trump and Turkey

Something of Flynn’s support for Turkey seems to have rubbed off on Donald Trump. The U.S. President called Turkey’s President Recep Erdogan to congratulate him after the success of April’s controversial national referendum, which greatly expanded the powers of the Turkish presidency. Trump was apparently oblivious to allegations of electoral fraud, warnings about the death

of Turkish democracy, and the fate of more than 113,000 people detained since last year's coup attempt.

Critics of Trump's embrace of Erdogan recalled what Trump had to say on Steve Bannon's radio show, *Breitbart News Daily*, on Dec. 1, 2015: "I have a little conflict of interest 'cause I have a major, major building in Istanbul. It's a tremendously successful job. It's called Trump Towers – two towers, instead of one, not the usual one, it's two." Trump was no doubt grateful to Erdogan for presiding over the opening of Trump Towers in 2012.

In mid-May, President Trump also honored Erdogan as one of the first foreign leaders received this year at the White House. But while Trump lauded Turkey's "legendary" courage in wartime, and Erdogan hailed Trump's "legendary triumph" in the 2016 election, no one was fooled. The two countries have grave differences over how to handle the military campaign against ISIS in Syria and Turkey's request to extradite Gulen.

In short, Turkey's millions of dollars have bought it a few seats at the table, not a guarantee of winning its case in either Congress or the White House. But every seat counts in politics, and as the international stakes keep rising, so will Turkey's investment in shaping policies in Washington.

[This is the fifth in a series on foreign lobbying. The previous installments were "The Open Secret of Foreign Lobbying"; "How China Lobby Shaped America"; "Israel Pays the Political Piper"; and "Saudis Win Hearts by Lining Pockets." Next: The Ukraine Lobby.]

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to ConsortiumNews.com.

Trump Lets Saudis Off on 9/11 Evidence

Like his predecessors, President Trump made nice with the rich royals of Saudi Arabia, despite damning evidence that they have supported Islamic terrorists, including the 9/11 attackers, notes 9/11 widow Kristen Breitweiser.

By Kristen Breitweiser

President Trump has cut a \$110 billion arms deal with the Saudis. As someone who is trying to hold the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accountable for the mass murder of 3,000 on 9/11 (of which my husband Ron was an innocent victim), I'd think President Trump would be up in arms with the Saudis, not selling arms to them –

especially given the information set forth below.

Many people know the explicit evidence found from 2009 that Saudi Arabia was, “a critical financial support base for al Qaeda, the Taliban, LeT and other terrorist groups.”

Just like many know the more recent and far more damning 2016 revelation that Saudi Arabia continues to provide “clandestine financial and logistical support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups” in the Middle East.

[Also, see Consortiumnews.com’s “The Long-Hidden 9/11 Saudi Trail” and “America First or Saudi Arabia First?”]

And, anyone who cares about women’s rights and human rights should also know about the latest human rights report produced by Rex Tillerson’s own State Department that details, “Saudi Arabia’s restrictions on universal rights, such as freedom of expression, including on the internet, and the freedoms of assembly, association, movement and religion, as well as the country’s pervasive gender discrimination.”

Indeed, according to Wikipedia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is consistently ranked among the “worst of the worst” in Freedom House’s annual survey of political and civil rights, among the 11 least free nations in the world giving the country a score of 10 out of 100 on its freedom index. Interestingly, Iran is ranked better on human rights issues than Saudi Arabia; Iran’s Freedom House ranking is 17.

Zubaydah’s Admissions

But perhaps what many – including President Trump and his advisers – might not know about Saudi Arabia is the information surrounding the capture and interrogation of Al Qaeda’s Abu Zubaydah, who currently remains in custody at the Guantanamo Bay prison. I’d like to share some of that information – chronicled in Gerald Posner’s Why America Slept: The Failure to Prevent 9/11 – with the hope that learning this information might further crystalize why the 9/11 families are so driven to hold the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accountable for its alleged role in the 9/11 attacks.

As Posner reported, Abu Zubaydah “was long considered to be a key member of al Qaeda’s inner circle. He was born in Saudi Arabia in 1971 but grew up in the Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip. After early involvement with Hamas, he was recruited by al Zawahiri’s Islamic Jihad and when al Zawahiri fused his group with bin Laden’s al Qaeda in 1996, Zubaydah was appointed chief of operations. Zubaydah was in charge of the eastern Afghanistan camps responsible for training thousands of Muslim radicals. Bin Laden trusted Zubaydah, and put

him in charge of the Millennium plot to bomb the Radisson Hotel in Jordan and Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Day, 2000. Zubaydah also served as the field commander for the USS Cole Attack."

Thankfully, Zubaydah was captured by U.S. Special Forces in 2002. During the capture, Zubaydah was severely injured and required medical care. He was given medical attention and placed on intravenous fluids including pain killers – and sodium pentothal.

At the time, U.S. intelligence decided to play a trick on Zubaydah. This trick entailed leading Zubaydah to believe that the U.S. was ready to hand him over to Saudi intelligence officials for further (even more severe) interrogation since Zubaydah wasn't "fully cooperating" with U.S. interrogators. The Saudis' reputation for interrogation was rather severe – it included extreme torture and sometimes death. U.S. intelligence surmised that in facing the threat of being handed over to the Saudis, Zubaydah would want to stay with the U.S. interrogators who were giving him medical attention and, therefore, Zubaydah might be more willing to "talk."

What happens next is what few people know. When "handed over to the Saudis" (who were really just U.S. intelligence agents pretending to be Saudi intelligence), Zubaydah was actually relieved and started demanding to talk to his contact within Saudi intelligence – in addition to several members of the Saudi Royal Family.

According to Posner's account, "when confronted with men passing themselves off as Saudi security officers, Zubaydah's reaction was not fear, but instead relief. The prisoner, who had been reluctant even to confirm his identity to his American captors, suddenly started talking animatedly. He was happy to see them, he said, because he feared the Americans would torture and kill him. Zubaydah asked his interrogators to call a senior member of the ruling Saudi Royal family. He then provided the home number and cell phone number from memory. "He will tell you what to do."

The Rosetta Stone

Upon further questioning by his "Saudi interrogators," Zubaydah raised his voice and unleashed a "torrent of information that one investigator refers to as the Rosetta Stone of 9/11" or what he claimed was his work for senior Saudi and Pakistani officials.

According to Posner, Zubaydah said, "he was present in 1996 in Pakistan when bin Laden struck a deal with Mushaf Ali Mir, a highly placed military officer with close ties to some of the most pro-Islamist elements in the Pakistani ISI. It

was a relationship that was still active in 2002 and provided bin Laden and al Qaeda protection, arms, and supplies. And that military deal with al Qaeda was blessed by the Saudis, claimed Zubaydah. Bin Laden had personally told Zubaydah of the early 1991 meeting he had with Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki, and again, Zubaydah claimed he was personally present several times when Turki and bin Laden met in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the 1990s.

“According to Zubaydah, he was the al Qaeda representative in Kandahar in the summer of 1998 when Prince Turki and Taliban officials struck a deal in which Turki gave assurances that more Saudi aid would flow to the Taliban and that the Saudis would never ask for bin Laden’s extradition, so long as al Qaeda kept its long-standing promise of directing fundamentalism away from the Kingdom.”

Posner reported that Zubaydah “insisted that the Saudis not only sent money regularly to al Qaeda, but that he personally dealt through a series of intermediaries with several members of the Royal family. He then gave more private telephone numbers from memory for a businessman and former military pilot, Prince Sultan bin Faisal bin Turki al Saud, another nephew of King Fahd’s and a friend of Prince Fahd’s, and also for a contemporary to his own age, another distant relative of King Fahd’s, twenty-five-year-old Prince Fahd bin Turki bin Saud al Kabir.”

The Saudi Cover-up

Shocked to learn this information about their Saudi and Pakistani “allies,” CIA officials investigated the claims put forth by Zubaydah. And then they decided to pass some of the information to their Saudi and Pakistani counterparts hoping to gain a better understanding of the situation.

Posner continues, “The Agency was as interested in monitoring the behind-the-scenes responses of its two allies as in what they officially replied on the record. U.S. officials were already frustrated with the lack of Saudi assistance on the hijackers, fifteen of whom were citizens of the Kingdom. Saudi authorities had released no information about them. And that all of them evaded detection by Saudi internal security forces, who maintain massive domestic files, had puzzled American officials.”

Of course, the Saudis denied all the information, secret deals, and connections put forth by Zubaydah. Soon thereafter, interestingly (and rather unfortunately), all of the individuals named by Zubaydah during his interrogation turned up dead – except, of course, Prince Turki who was removed from his post as head of Saudi intelligence and named as Saudi Ambassador to Britain.

Posner reported, “on July 22, 2002, less than four months after Zubaydah’s revelations, the Saudis announced the unexpected death of Prince Ahmed. He was forty-three. The cause of death was a heart attack, said the official Saudi news agency. The following day, the second man named by Zubaydah, forty-one year old Prince Sultan bin Faisal bin Turki al Saud was killed in a car accident as he was driving from the resort of Jeddah to Riyadh for the funeral of his cousin, Prince Ahmed. According to Saudi police, speed was the likely cause of the accident which did not involve another car.

“One week later, the third person named by Zubaydah, twenty-five year old Prince Fahd bin Turki bin Saud al Kabir was also found dead. He died while on a trip in the province of Remaah, fifty-five miles east of Riyadh. The Saudi Royal Court announced his death, saying the prince who was traveling during the height of the Saudi summer heat had ‘died of thirst.’”

Months later, Mushaf Ali Mir, the Pakistani “loose end” named by Zubaydah, was killed with several others in a plane crash. Case closed. Problem solved.

A Distracted America

Unfortunately, at the time that the Zubaydah information initially became public in fall 2003, the United States was a nation with a President preoccupied with a war in Iraq. Neither the Bush Administration nor the American public paid proper attention to the Zubaydah information and/or the alleged Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks.

Since that time, the obvious questions raised by the Zubaydah information have yet to be properly and/or publicly investigated and/or answered. All the while, Abu Zubaydah remains in U.S. custody and at least somewhat willing to talk as a prisoner at GTMO. [Similar unanswered questions were raised by another Al Qaeda member in U.S. custody, Zacarias Moussaoui, who testified about his own collaboration with Saudi officials.]

And that’s why President Trump should be up in arms – and perhaps even twisting arms – in Saudi Arabia, not selling them arms. Because the record and facts surrounding the 9/11 attacks (whether provided in the so-called “28 pages,” the 9/11 Commission report and its voluminous footnotes, or other sources like Posner’s book) all point a very strong finger at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its role in the 9/11 attacks. The Saudis should be held accountable for that alleged role in a court of law.

Sixteen years post-9/11, the 9/11 families are still earnestly trying to receive a modicum of justice in a court of law by providing all the evidence we have gathered against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We simply want our day in court.

We certainly hope President Trump and Congress will continue to support us in our path to justice in holding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accountable for its alleged financial and logistical role in the murder of our loved ones.

Kristen Breitweiser is a 9/11 widow and activist who – working with other 9/11 widows known collectively as the “Jersey Girls” – pressured the U.S. government to conduct a formal investigation into the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Follow Kristen Breitweiser on Twitter: www.twitter.com/kdbreitweiser. [A version of this article originally appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost.]

US Journalism’s New ‘Golden Age’?

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

By Robert Parry

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

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

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

In a Sunday column entitled “How Trump inspired a golden age,” Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank wrote that Trump “took on the institution of a free press

– and it fought back. Trump came to office after intimidating publishers, barring journalists from covering him and threatening to rewrite press laws, and he has sought to discredit the ‘fake news’ media at every chance. Instead, he wound up inspiring a new golden age in American journalism.

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

Journalism or Hatchet Job?

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

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

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

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

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

Clapper continued: “The two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked,

seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.” However, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you “hand-pick” the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion.

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

The point of having a more substantive NIE is that it taps into a much broader network of U.S. intelligence analysts who have the right to insert dissents to the dominant opinions. So, for instance, when President George W. Bush belatedly ordered an NIE regarding Iraq’s WMD in 2002, some analysts – especially at the State Department – inserted dissents (although they were expunged from the declassified version given to the American people to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq).

An Embarrassing Product

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

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

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

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

often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

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

Yet, the mainstream U.S. news media has neither corrected the false assertion about the 17 intelligence agencies nor demanded that actual evidence be made public to support the key allegation that Russia was the source of WikiLeaks’ email dumps.

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

A True ‘Golden Age’?

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

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

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

Clearly, we are all supposed to hate and ridicule Vladimir Putin. He is being demonized as the new “enemy” in much the way that George Orwell foresaw in his dystopian novel, *1984*. Yet, what is perhaps most troubling is that the major

U.S. news outlets, which played instrumental roles in demonizing leaders of Iraq, Syria and Libya, believe they are engaged in some “golden age” journalism, rather than writing propaganda.

Contempt for Trump

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and [barnesandnoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com)).

Saudis Win Hearts by Lining Pockets

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to *The Hill*, the Saudi government now employs 14 lobbying firms, at an estimated cost of well over \$1.3 million a month, more than it spent in all of

2000. Their hired guns include Podesta Group, co-founded by Tony Podesta, one of the Democratic Party's top fundraisers, and his brother John Podesta, who was Hillary Clinton's national campaign chairman in 2016; BGR Group, whose name partners include the former head of the Republican Party; and former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Mississippi.

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

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

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

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

Taking Care of Friends

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

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

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

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

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

Years later, as Hillary Clinton was mulling her future campaign for president, the Saudi kingdom donated more than \$10 million to the Clinton Foundation. Kuwait and other Gulf interests chipped in many millions on top, no doubt solely because of their shared commitment to fighting AIDS.

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

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

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

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

The Arab Lobby vs. the Israel Lobby

Recalling that quote, Alan Dershowitz, the pugnacious Harvard law professor and champion of Israel, once commented, "Yes Virginia, there is a big bad lobby that

distorts U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East way out of proportion to its actual support by the American public. . . . But the offending lobby is not AIPAC, which supports Israel, but rather the Arab lobby, which opposes the Jewish state.”

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

Saudi Arabia's failure to head off passage of JASTA last year highlights its limited ability to defeat grassroots coalitions that threaten its interests. For all its funding, the pro-Arab lobby has no significant public support in the United States. Arab-Americans are politically much less well organized – or focused on Mideast issues – than their counterparts (including Christian Zionists) in the pro-Israel lobby.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to ConsortiumNews.com.

Trump Panders to the Saudi Royals

President Trump's speech to the Islamic world amounted to a pander to his regal Saudi hosts and a blindness toward the realities of Mideast terrorism, explains ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The bar for Donald Trump's [speech in Riyadh](#) had been set so low that it was scraping the sand. How much could be expected from a notorious exploiter of Islamophobia speaking to a gathering of leaders of majority Muslim countries? Getting through the experience without causing major new damage should perhaps be considered a success. Perhaps Trump and his speechwriters were wise not to attempt anything more. The Hippocratic principle applies: first do no (more) harm.

Most Muslims hearing the speech, especially the more knowledgeable ones who have followed Trump's candidacy and presidency, know his qualities, know he is capable of delivering a scripted speech without falling on his face, and are unlikely to have had the speech change any of their perceptions of Trump, his administration, or the United States. They will not be surprised, once Trump is back in Washington, to hear of more exploitation of Islamophobia regarding travel bans or something else.

Trump's speech evidently was crafted to appeal to a very narrow audience: the Saudi regime, along with some similar ruling brethren in places such as the United Arab Emirates, while coloring the appeal with some distinctively Trumpian touches.

The kind of compliments that had pride of place in the speech – up near the front, along with Trump's usual and inevitable assertions about how back home he had "created almost a million new jobs" and "lifted the burdens on American industry" – focused on glitz: the "grandeur" of the conference hall, the Saudis' "soaring achievements in architecture," and the UAE's having reached "incredible heights with glass and steel."

A Narrow Appeal

These are not the sorts of observations likely to have much resonance with the man in the street in Riyadh, let alone the streets of countless other majority Muslim cities. The narrowness of the appeal in the speech exacerbated the narrowness in the selection of Saudi Arabia as the place for a first presidential visit that was supposedly representative of an entire religion. Certainly there will be little positive resonance among the whole Shia branch of Islam.

Speaking of Shia, the speech had, of course, the obligatory excoriation of Iran. That passage reads like the response to a “cue the anti-Iran invective” direction given to the speechwriters; it is awkwardly divorced from the context of both the surrounding parts of the speech itself and what has been transpiring in the real world. After talking about violent extremism that is mostly the extremist Sunni variety spearheaded by ISIS, the anti-Iran passage asserts that Iran is “the government” that gives “terrorists” everything they need to do their evil deeds, assertions oblivious to how Iran is on the opposite side from ISIS and Al Qaeda throughout the region, including Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

In the same passage, Trump said that “until the Iranian regime is willing to be a partner for peace, all nations of conscience must work together to isolate it.” There was no mention anywhere in the speech of the laboriously negotiated multilateral agreement that limits Iran’s nuclear program. Participation in that negotiation doesn’t count as willingness to be a partner for peace? The nuclear program was the one thing Iran was doing that, before negotiation of the agreement, the anti-Iran rhetoricians were most vehement about highlighting as a supposed threat to peace.

Trump also said everyone should “pray for the day when the Iranian people have the just and righteous government they so richly deserve” while saying nothing that suggested any awareness or acknowledgement of how, just two days earlier, Iranians had voted in a presidential election, re-elected the reformist candidate, and rejected by a landslide margin the leading hardline candidate. Trump was exhibiting a kind of diplomatic autism that takes no heed of the sentiments, objectives, and even actions of the other party.

Music to Saudi Ears

All this, especially the anti-Iran part, was music to the ears of the Saudi rulers. But besides acting like a guest who is pleasing to the hosts, what else did this speech accomplish? What else, that is, besides avoiding any new Trumpian disasters? A major speech by a U.S. president to foreign audiences should do more than suck up to the rulers of whatever is the speech’s venue.

The ideal speech should deftly convey messages to the multiple audiences who will be listening, to address questions that are meaningful and important to each of the audiences in a way that indicates understanding of their problems, and to use persuasion to move those audiences in a direction conducive to U.S. interests and international peace and security and in which they would not otherwise have moved, or moved as much.

The most useful lines in Trump's speech acknowledged that Muslims are the most numerous victims of terrorism, noted the need for religious leaders to counter extremist exploitation of their religions, and appealed for religious tolerance. But by throwing himself so fully into the arms of the Saudi regime, it is hard to identify how the speech is likely to move the needle in a positive direction as far as the behavior of either that regime or other regimes is concerned.

The speech conveyed a very crude and simplistic explanation of terrorism and political violence in the Middle East. As Trump describes it, terrorism is all just a matter of good versus evil. And his exhortation to his audience of rulers was: "A better future is only possible if your nations drive out the terrorists and drive out the extremists. Drive them out. Drive them out of your places of worship. Drive them out of your communities. Drive them out of your holy land. And drive them out of this earth."

Ignoring Saudi Complicity

There was barely any hint of awareness about political, economic, and social conditions that have much to do with how much terrorism there will be in the years ahead and how many drivable terrorists there will be in the first place. But it is in affecting those conditions that regimes such as the Saudi regime could do the most good. They don't need exhortations about "driving out." The Saudis used to have a policy of driving extremists out of the kingdom, which was just a way of sloughing the problem off on someone else and did nothing to solve the problem.

The speech's approach to interstate relations was similarly crude and similarly unlikely to shape behavior in a favorable direction. The Saudis and other Gulf Arab regimes don't need any encouragement to be staunchly anti-Iran. What is needed, in the interests of regional peace and security and thus in U.S. interests, is greater efforts at reconciling competing interests in nonviolent ways.

If we or they do not like something Iran is doing and that we regard as irregular and illegitimate, then it behooves us and our partners, as well as the Iranians, to promote peaceful, legitimate diplomacy as a means of reconciliation

– rather than exhortations that promote more hostility and isolation.

Trump got through his speech without adding to self-inflicted damage of the sort that awaits him back in Washington. But the speech does more to divide than to unite, and it does more to stoke conflict in the Middle East than to reduce it.

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 National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.) .

Israel Lobby Pays the Political Piper

Exclusive: The Israel Lobby is so powerful that for years it insisted it didn't exist – and Official Washington went along with the lie. Today, President Trump scrambles to secure the lobby's blessings, Jonathan Marshall observes.

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

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

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

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

Those congressional actions instead illustrated the power of the pro-Israel Lobby, a highly organized and well-funded coalition that works to give Israeli leaders freedom to operate with unquestioned U.S. diplomatic, economic and

military support. Its influence helps account for the quarter trillion dollars in aid (adjusted for inflation) that the United States has given Israel since 1948.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The pro-Israel camp today features even the likes of White House counterterrorism adviser Sebastian Gorka, "despite his controversial ties to

allies of the Nazis,” and Austria’s Freedom Party, “a movement of anti-immigrant, right-wing nationalists founded in part by former Nazis.”

Follow the Money

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

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

“I have written more Israel papers that you can imagine,” she explained. “I’m from Montana. I barely knew where Israel was until I looked at a map, and the poor campaign manager would come in, or the policy director, and I’d be like, ‘Here is your paper on Israel. This is our policy.’ We’ve sent it all over the country because this is how we raise money. ... This means that these candidates who were farmers, school teachers, or businesswomen, ended up having an Israel position without having any significant conversations with anybody.”

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

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

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

Mother Jones reported that “After the launch of the Saban Center, the billionaire began pouring more and more of his fortune into Israeli causes. He donated \$10 million to support the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces. . . .

He also made seven-figure gifts to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the hawkish Israeli lobbying group.”

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

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

The Republican Purse

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

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

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

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

Graham earned that support the usual way – by promising to put Israel first. During an obligatory visit to Jerusalem the previous December, Graham, the

ranking Republican on the Foreign Appropriations Subcommittee, promised Netanyahu that “Congress will follow your lead” on imposing economic sanctions against Iran.

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

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

Romney, who promised to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem “if Israel’s leaders thought that a move of that nature would be helpful to their efforts,” also won the favor of Netanyahu’s closest political adviser, the American-born Ron Dermer.

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

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

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

Onward with Donald Trump

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

Adelson soon endorsed Trump in an email to dozens of Republican Jewish donors, saying “he will be a tremendous president when it comes to the safety and

security of Israel.” Playing the odds shrewdly, Adelson donated \$35 million or more to the Trump campaign.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to ConsortiumNews.com.

Not Remembering the USS Liberty

Desperately seeking some praise, President Trump surely won’t remind Israeli

Prime Minister Netanyahu about the USS Liberty, which Israel nearly sank a half century ago killing 34 sailors, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern recalls.

By Ray McGovern

It is safe to assume that when President Donald Trump lands in Israel Monday, he will not have been briefed on the irrefutable evidence that, nearly 50 years ago – on June 8, 1967 – Israel deliberately attacked the USS Liberty in international waters, killing 34 U.S. sailors and wounding more than 170 other crew. All of Trump's predecessors – Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama – have refused to address the ugly reality and/or covered up the attack on the Liberty.

It is not too late for someone to fill Trump in on this shameful episode, on the chance he may wish to show more courage than former presidents and warn the Israelis that this kind of thing will not be tolerated while he is president.

A new book by Philip Nelson titled: *Remember the Liberty: Almost Sunk by Treason on the High Seas*, is a must-read for anyone wishing to understand what actually happened to the Liberty and to contemplate the implications.

As I wrote in the book's Foreword: Even today, scandalously few Americans have heard of the deliberate Israeli attack on the USS Liberty, because the cowardly U.S. political, military, and media establishments have managed to hide what happened. No one "important" wanted to challenge Israel's lame "oops-mistake" excuse. Intercepted Israeli communications show beyond doubt it was no "mistake."

Chief Petty Officer J.Q. "Tony" Hart, who monitored conversations between then-Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Sixth Fleet Carrier Division Commander Rear Admiral Lawrence Geis, reported McNamara's instructive reply to Geis, who had protested the order to recall the U.S. warplanes on their way to engage those attacking the Liberty. McNamara: "President Johnson is not going to go to war or embarrass an American ally (sic) over a few sailors."

The late Adm. Thomas Moorer after interviewing the commanders of the U.S. aircraft carriers America and Saratoga confirmed that McNamara ordered the aircraft back to their carriers. Moorer called it "the most disgraceful act I witnessed in my entire military career."

Thanks to this book, those who care about such things can learn what actually happened 50 years ago:

(1) On June 8, 1967, Israel attempted to sink the US Navy intelligence collection ship USS Liberty and leave no survivors. The attack came by aircraft and torpedo boat, in full daylight in international waters during the Six-Day Israeli-Arab War;

(2) The U.S. cover-up taught the Israelis that they could *literally* get away with murder; they killed 34 U.S. sailors (and wounded more than 170 others); and

(3) As part of an unconscionable government cover-up, the Navy threatened to court martial and imprison any survivor who so much as told his wife what had actually happened. (This, incidentally, put steroids to the PTSD suffered by many of the survivors.)

One Stab at Truth

The only investigation worth the name was led by Adm. Moorer, who had been Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He led a blue-ribbon, independent commission to examine what happened to the Liberty. Among the findings announced by the commission on October 2003:

“...Unmarked Israeli aircraft dropped napalm canisters on the USS Liberty bridge, and fired 30mm cannon and rockets into the ship; survivors estimate 30 or more sorties were flown over the ship by a minimum of 12 attacking Israeli planes. ...

“...The torpedo boat attack involved not only the firing of torpedoes, but machine-gunning of Liberty’s firefighters and stretcher-bearers. ... The Israeli torpedo boats later returned to machine-gun at close range three of the Liberty’s life rafts that had been lowered into the water by survivors to rescue the most seriously wounded.”

Shortly before he died in February 2004, Adm. Moorer strongly appealed for the truth to be brought out and pointed directly at what he saw as the main obstacle: “I’ve never seen a President ... stand up to Israel. ... If the American people understood what a grip these people have on our government, they would rise up in arms.” [As quoted by Richard Curtiss in *A Changing Image: American Perception of the Arab-Israeli Dispute*.]

Echoing Moorer, former U.S. Ambassador Edward Peck, who served many years in the Middle East, condemned Washington’s attitude toward Israel as “obsequious, unctuous subservience ... at the cost of the lives and morale of our own service members and their families.”

And the Six-Day War? Most Americans believe the Israelis were forced to defend against a military threat from Egypt. Not so, admitted former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin 35 years ago: “In June 1967, we had a choice. The

Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [Egyptian President] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him." [The New York Times quoting an August 1982 Begin speech.]

Adm. Moorer kept asking why our government continues to subordinate American interests to those of Israel. It is THE question.

The War in Syria

Fast forward to the catastrophe that is now Syria. U.S. policy support for illusory "moderate rebels" there – including false-flag chemical attacks blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad – can only be fully understood against the mirror of U.S. acquiescence to Israeli objectives.

New York Times Jerusalem Bureau Chief in 2013, Jodi Rudoren, received an unusually candid response when she asked senior Israeli officials about Israel's preferred outcome in Syria. In a New York Times article on September 6, 2013, titled "Israel Backs Limited Strike Against Syria," Rudoren reported the Israeli view that the best outcome for Syria's civil war was no outcome:

"For Jerusalem, the status quo, horrific as it may be from a humanitarian perspective, seems preferable to either a victory by Mr. Assad's government and his Iranian backers or a strengthening of rebel groups, increasingly dominated by Sunni jihadis.

"'This is a playoff situation in which you need both teams to lose, but at least you don't want one to win – we'll settle for a tie,' said Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul general in New York. 'Let them both bleed, hemorrhage to death: that's the strategic thinking here. As long as this lingers, there's no real threat from Syria.'"

Obama may have read or been briefed on Rudoren's article. In any event, last year he told journalist Jeffrey Goldberg how proud he is at having resisted strong pressure from virtually all his advisors to fire cruise missiles on Syria in September 2013. Instead, Obama chose to take advantage of Russian President Vladimir Putin's offer to get the Syrians to surrender their chemical weapons for destruction, verified by the U.N., aboard a U.S. ship configured for such destruction. President Trump, in contrast, chose to go with his "mad-dog" advisors. It is not yet clear whether he was successfully mousetrapped, or whether he saw the April 4 chemical incident in Syria as an opportunity to "retaliate," and get a bump in popularity.

There are wider ramifications of rank dishonesty and cover-up, at which Establishment Washington excels. Have we not seen this movie before? Think

Iraq. Once again, the “intelligence” is being “fixed.”

Back to the Liberty, Adm. Moorer is right in saying that, if Americans were told the truth about what happened on June 8, 1967, they might be more discriminating in seeing through Israel’s rhetoric and objectives. Moorer insisted that we owe no less to brave men of the USS Liberty, but also to every man and woman who is asked to wear the uniform of the United States. And he is right about that too.

This book makes a huge contribution toward those worthy ends.

[For more on this topic, see [“Navy Vet Honored, Foiled Israeli Attack”](#); [“Still Waiting for USS Liberty’s Truth”](#); [“A USS Liberty’s Hero’s Passing”](#)]

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as a CIA analyst for 27 years, and was “on duty” when the USS Liberty was attacked.
