The recent White House decision to speed the deployment of an aircraft carrier battle group and other military assets to the Persian Gulf has led many in Washington and elsewhere to assume that the U.S. is gearing up for war with Iran. As in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, U.S. officials have cited suspect intelligence data to justify elaborate war preparations. On May 13, acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan presented top White House officials with plans to send as many as 120,000 troops to the Middle East for possible future combat with Iran and its proxies. Later reports indicated that the Pentagon might be making plans to send even more soldiers than that.

Hawks in the White House, led by National Security Advisor John Bolton, see a war aimed at eliminating Iran’s clerical leadership as a potentially big win for Washington. Many top officials in the U.S. military, however, see the matter quite differently — as potentially a giant step backward into exactly the kind of low-tech ground war they’ve been unsuccessfully enmeshed in across the Greater Middle East and northern Africa for years and would prefer to leave behind.

Make no mistake: if President Donald Trump ordered the U.S.
military to attack Iran, it would do so and, were that to happen, there can be little doubt about the ultimate negative outcome for Iran. Its moth-eaten military machine is simply no match for the American one. Almost 18 years after Washington’s war on terror was launched, however, there can be little doubt that any U.S. assault on Iran would also stir up yet more chaos across the region, displace more people, create more refugees, and leave behind more dead civilians, more ruined cities and infrastructure, and more angry souls ready to join the next terror group to pop up. It would surely lead to another quagmire set of ongoing conflicts for American soldiers. Think: Iraq and Afghanistan, exactly the type of no-win scenarios that many top Pentagon officials now seek to flee. But don’t chalk such feelings up only to a reluctance to get bogged down in yet one more war-on-terror quagmire. These days, the Pentagon is also increasingly obsessed with preparations for another type of war in another locale entirely: a high-intensity conflict with China, possibly in the South China Sea.

After years of slogging it out with guerrillas and jihadists across the Greater Middle East, the U.S. military is increasingly keen on preparing to combat “peer” competitors China and Russia, countries that pose what’s called a “multi-domain” challenge to the United States. This new outlook is only bolstered by a belief that America’s never-ending war on terror has severely depleted its military, something obvious to both Chinese and Russian leaders who have taken advantage of Washington’s extended preoccupation with counterterrorism to modernize their forces and equip them with advanced weaponry.
For the United States to remain a paramount power — so Pentagon thinking now goes — it must turn away from counterterrorism and focus instead on developing the wherewithal to decisively defeat its great-power rivals. This outlook was made crystal clear by then-Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in April 2018. “The negative impact on military readiness resulting from the longest continuous period of combat in our nation’s history [has] created an overstretched and under-resourced military,” he insisted. Our rivals, he added, used those same years to invest in military capabilities meant to significantly erode America’s advantage in advanced technology. China, he assured the senators, is “modernizing its conventional military forces to a degree that will challenge U.S. military superiority.” In response, the United States had but one choice: to reorient its own forces for great-power competition. “Long-term strategic competition — not terrorism — is now the primary focus of U.S. national security.”

This outlook was, in fact, already enshrined in the “National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” the Pentagon’s overarching blueprint governing all aspects of military planning. Its $750 billion budget proposal for fiscal year 2020, unveiled on March 12, was said to be fully aligned with this approach. “The operations and capabilities supported by this budget will strongly position the U.S. military for great-power competition for decades to come,” acting Secretary of Defense Shanahan said at the time.

In fact, in that budget proposal, the Pentagon made sharp
distinctions between the types of wars it sought to leave behind and those it sees in its future.

“Deterring or defeating great-power aggression is a fundamentally different challenge than the regional conflicts involving rogue states and violent extremist organizations we faced over the last 25 years,” it noted. “The FY 2020 Budget is a major milestone in meeting this challenge,” by financing the more capable force America needs “to compete, deter, and win in any high-end potential fight of the future.”

**Girding for ‘High-End’ Combat**

If such a high-intensity war were to break out, Pentagon leaders suggest, it would be likely to take place simultaneously in every domain of combat – air, sea, ground, space, and cyberspace – and would feature the widespread utilization of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and cyberwarfare. To prepare for such multi-domain engagements, the 2020 budget includes $58 billion for advanced aircraft, $35 billion for new warships – the biggest shipbuilding request in more than 20 years – along with $14 billion for space systems, $10 billion for cyberwar, $4.6 billion for AI and autonomous systems, and $2.6 billion for hypersonic weapons. You can safely assume, moreover, that each of those amounts will be increased in the years to come.

Planning for such a future, Pentagon officials envision clashes first erupting on the peripheries of China and/or Russia, only to later extend to their heartland expanses
(but not, of course, America’s). As those countries already possess robust defensive capabilities, any conflict would undoubtedly quickly involve the use of front-line air and naval forces to breach their defensive systems—which means the acquisition and deployment of advanced stealth aircraft, autonomous weapons, hypersonic cruise missiles, and other sophisticated weaponry. In Pentagon-speak, these are called anti-access/area-defense (A2/AD) systems.

As it proceeds down this path, the Department of Defense is already considering future war scenarios. A clash with Russian forces in the Baltic region of the former Soviet Union is, for instance, considered a distinct possibility. So the U.S. and allied NATO countries have been bolstering their forces in that very region and seeking weaponry suitable for attacks on Russian defenses along that country’s western border.

Still, the Pentagon’s main focus is a rising China, the power believed to pose the greatest threat to America’s long-term strategic interests. “China’s historically unprecedented economic development has enabled an impressive military buildup that could soon challenge the U.S. across almost all domains,” Admiral Harry Harris Jr., commander of the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) and now the U.S. ambassador to South Korea, typically testified in March 2018. “China’s ongoing military modernization is a core element of China’s stated strategy to supplant the U.S. as the security partner of choice for countries in the Indo-Pacific.”

As Harris made clear, any conflict with China would probably first erupt in the waters off its eastern coastline and
would involve an intense U.S. drive to destroy China’s A2/AD capabilities, rendering that country’s vast interior essentially defenseless. Harris’s successor, Admiral Philip Davidson, as commander of what is now known as the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, or USINDOPACOM, described such a scenario this way in testimony before Congress in February 2019: “Our adversaries are fielding advanced anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems, advanced aircraft, ships, space, and cyber capabilities that threaten the U.S. ability to project power and influence into the region.” To overcome such capabilities, he added, the U.S. must develop and deploy an array of attack systems for “long-range strike[s]” along with “advanced missile defense systems capable of detecting, tracking, and engaging advanced air, cruise, ballistic, and hypersonic threats from all azimuths.”

If you read through the testimony of both commanders, you’ll soon grasp one thing: that the U.S. military — or at least the Navy and Air Force — are focused on a future war-scape in which American forces are no longer focused on terrorism or the Middle East, but on employing their most sophisticated weaponry to overpower the modernized forces of China (or Russia) in a relatively brief spasm of violence, lasting just days or weeks. These would be wars in which the mastery of technology, not counterinsurgency or nation building, would — so, at least, top military officials believe — prove the decisive factor.

**The Pentagon’s Preferred Battleground**

Such Pentagon scenarios essentially assume that a conflict with China would initially erupt in the waters of the South
China Sea or in the East China Sea near Japan and Taiwan. U.S. strategists have considered these two maritime areas America’s “first line of defense” in the Pacific since Admiral George Dewey defeated the Spanish fleet in 1898 and the U.S. seized the Philippines. Today, USINDOPACOM remains the most powerful force in the region with major bases in Japan, Okinawa, and South Korea. China, however, has visibly been working to erode American regional dominance somewhat by modernizing its navy and installing along its coastlines short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, presumably aimed at those U.S. bases.

By far its most obvious threat to U.S. dominance in the region, however, has been its occupation and militarization of tiny islands in the South China Sea, a busy maritime thoroughfare bounded by China and Vietnam on one side, Indonesia and the Philippines on the other. In recent years, the Chinese have used sand dredged from the ocean bottom to expand some of those islets, then setting up military facilities on them, including airstrips, radar systems, and communications gear. In 2015, China’s President Xi Jinping promised President Barack Obama that his country wouldn’t take such action, but satellite imagery clearly shows that it has done so. While not yet heavily fortified, those islets provide Beijing with a platform from which to potentially foil U.S. efforts to further project its power in the region.

“These bases appear to be forward military outposts, built for the military, garrisoned by military forces, and designed to project Chinese military power and capability across the breadth of China’s disputed South China Sea
claims,” Admiral Harris **testified** in 2018. “China has built a massive infrastructure specifically – and solely – to support advanced military capabilities that can deploy to the bases on short notice.”

To be clear, U.S. officials have never declared that the Chinese must vacate those islets or even remove their military facilities from them. However, for some time now, they’ve been making obvious their displeasure over the buildup in the South China Sea. In May 2018, for instance, Secretary of Defense Mattis **disinvited** the Chinese navy from the biennial “Rim of the Pacific” exercises, the world’s largest multinational naval maneuvers, **saying** that “there are consequences” for that country’s failure to abide by Xi’s 2015 promise to Obama. “That’s a relatively small consequence,” he added. “I believe there are much larger consequences in the future.”

What those consequences might be, Mattis never said. But there is no doubt that the U.S. military has given careful thought to a possible clash in those waters and has contingency plans in place to attack and destroy all the Chinese facilities there. American warships regularly sail provocatively within a few miles of those militarized islands in what are **termed** “freedom of navigation operations,” or FRONOPS, while U.S. air and naval forces periodically conduct large-scale military exercises in the region. Such activities are, of course, closely monitored by the Chinese. Sometimes, they even attempt to **impede** FRONOPS operations, leading more than once to near-collisions. In May 2018, Admiral Davidson caused consternation at the Pentagon by **declaring**, “China is now capable of controlling
the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States” — a comment presumably intended as a wake-up call, but also hinting at the kinds of conflicts U.S. strategists foresee arising in the future.

‘Showing the Flag’

The U.S. Navy sends a missile-armed destroyer close to one of those Chinese-occupied islands just about every few weeks. It’s what the U.S. high command likes to call “showing the flag” or demonstrating America’s resolve to remain a dominant power in that distant region (though were the Chinese to do something similar off the U.S. West Coast it would be considered the scandal of the century and a provocation beyond compare). Just about every time it happens, the Chinese authorities warn off those ships or send out their own vessels to shadow and harass them.

On May 6, for example, the U.S. Navy sent two of its guided-missile destroyers, the USS Preble and the USS Chung Hoon, on a FRONOPS mission near some of those islands, provoking a fierce complaint from Chinese officials. This deadly game of chicken could, of course, go on for years without shots being fired or a major crisis erupting. The odds of avoiding such an incident are bound to drop over time, especially as, in the age of Trump, U.S.-China tensions over other matters — including trade, technology, and human rights — continue to grow. American military leaders have clearly been strategizing about the possibility of a conflict erupting in this area for some time and, if Admiral Davidson’s remark is any indication, would respond to such a possibility with considerably more relish than most of them do to a possible war with Iran.
Yes, they view Iran as a menace in the Middle East and no doubt would like to see the demise of that country’s clerical regime. Yes, some Army commanders like General Kenneth McKenzie, head of the U.S. Central Command, still show a certain John Bolton-style relish for such a conflict. But Iran today — weakened by years of isolation and trade sanctions — poses no unmanageable threat to America’s core strategic interests and, thanks in part to the nuclear deal negotiated by the Obama administration, possesses no nuclear weapons. Still, can there be any doubt that a war with Iran would turn into a messy quagmire, as in Iraq after the invasion of 2003, with guerrilla uprisings, increased terrorism, and widespread chaos spreading through the region — exactly the kind of “forever wars” much of the U.S. military (unlike John Bolton) would prefer to leave behind?

How this will all play out obviously can’t be foreseen, but if the U.S. does not go to war with Iran, Pentagon reluctance may play a significant role in that decision. This does not mean, however, that Americans would be free of the prospect of major bloodshed in the future. The very next U.S. naval patrol in the South China Sea, or the one after that, could provide the spark for a major blowup of a very different kind against a far more powerful — and nuclear-armed — adversary. What could possibly go wrong?

Michael T. Klare, a TomDispatch regular, is the five-college professor emeritus of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College and a senior visiting fellow at the Arms Control Association. His most recent book is “The Race for What’s Left.” His next book, “All Hell Breaking Loose: Why the Pentagon Sees Climate Change as a Threat to American
American foreign policy can be so retro, not to mention absurd. Despite being bogged down in more military interventions than it can reasonably handle, the Trump team recently picked a new fight — in Latin America. Uncle Sam kicked off a sequel to the Cold War with some of our southern neighbors, while resuscitating the boogeyman of socialism. In the process, National Security Advisor John Bolton treated us all to a new phrase, no less laughable than Bush-the-younger’s 2002 “axis of evil” (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea). He labeled Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua a “troika of tyranny.”

Alliteration no less! The only problem is that the phrase ridiculously overestimates both the degree of collaboration among those three states and the dangers they pose to their hegemonic neighbor to the north. Bottom line: in no imaginable fashion do those little tin-pot tyrannies offer either an existential or even a serious threat to the United States. Evidently, however, the phrase was meant to conjure up enough ill will and fear to justify the Trump team’s
desire for sweeping regime change in Latin America. Think of it as a micro-version of Cold War 2.0.

Odds are that Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, both unrepentant neocons, are the ones driving this Latin American Cold War reboot, even as, halfway across the planet, they’ve been pushing for war with Iran. Meanwhile, it’s increasingly clear that President Donald Trump gets his own kick out of being a “war president” and the unique form of threat production that goes with it.

Since it’s a recipe for disaster, strap yourself in for a bumpy ride. After all, the demonization of Latin American “socialists” and an ill-advised war in the Persian Gulf have already been part of our lived experience. Under the circumstances, remember your Karl Marx: history repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce.

And add this irony to the grim farce to come: you need only look to the Middle East to see a genuine all-American troika of tyranny. I’m thinking about the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the military junta in Egypt, and the colonizing state of Israel — all countries that eschew real democracy and are working together to rain chaos on an already unstable region.

America’s Favorite Kingdom

The Saudi royals are among the worst despots around. Yet Washington has long given them a pass. Sure, they possess oodles of oil, black gold upon which the U.S. was once but no longer is heavily dependent. American support for those royals reaches back to World War II, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt took a detour after the Yalta Conference
to meet King Ibn Saud and first struck the devilish deal that, in the decades to come, would keep the oil flowing. In return, Washington would provide ample backing to the kingdom and turn a blind eye to its extensive human rights abuses.

Ultimately, this bargain proved as counterproductive as it was immoral. Sometimes the Saudis didn’t even live up to their end of the bargain. For example, they shut the oil spigot during the 1973 Yom Kippur War to express collective Arab frustration with Washington’s favoritism toward Israel. The royals also used their continual oil windfall to build religious schools and mosques throughout the Muslim world in order to spread the regime’s intolerant Wahhabi faith. From there, it was a relatively short road to the 9/11 attacks in which 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals (and not one was an Iranian).

More recently, in the Syrian civil war, Saudi Arabia even backed the al-Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda franchise. That’s right, an American partner funded an offshoot of the very organization that took down the twin towers and damaged the Pentagon. For this there have been no consequences.

In other words, Washington stands shoulder to shoulder with a truly abhorrent regime, while simultaneously complaining bitterly about the despotism and tyranny of nations of which it’s less fond. The hypocrisy should be (but generally isn’t) considered staggering here. We’re talking about a Saudi government that only recently allowed women to drive automobiles and still beheads them for “witchcraft and sorcery.” Indeed, mass execution is a staple of the regime. Recently, the kingdom executed 37 men in a single day. (One
of them was even reportedly crucified.) Most were not the “terrorists” they were made out to be, but dissidents from Saudi Arabia’s Shia minority convicted, as Amnesty International put it, “after sham trials that… relied on confessions extracted through torture.”

During the Arab Spring of 2011, the Saudi royals certainly proved anything but friends to the budding democratic movements brewing across the region. Indeed, its military even invaded a tiny neighbor to the east, Bahrain, to suppress civil-rights protests by that country’s embattled Shia majority. (A Sunni royal family runs the show there.) In Yemen, the Saudis continue to terror bomb civilians in its war against Houthi militias. Tens of thousands have died – the exact number isn’t known – under a brutal bombing campaign and at least 85,000 Yemeni children have already starved to death thanks to the war and a Saudi blockade of what was already the Arab world’s poorest country. The hell unleashed on Yemen has been dubbed the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. It has already produced millions of refugees and, at present, the world’s worst cholera epidemic.

Through it all, Washington stood by its royals time and again, with The Donald far more gleefully pro-Saudi than his predecessors. His first foreign excursion, after all, was to that kingdom’s capital, Riyadh, where the president seemed to relish joining the martial pageantry of a Saudi “sword dance.” He also let it be known that the cash would keep flowing from the kingdom into military-industrial coffers in this country, announcing a supposedly record $110 billion set of arms deals (including a number closed by the Obama
administration and ones that may never come to fruition). Son-in-law Jared Kushner even continues to maintain a bromance with the ambitious and brutal ruling Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

In other words, with full support from Washington, sophisticated American weapons, and a boatload of American cash, Saudi Arabia continues to unleash terror at home and abroad. This much is certain: if you’re looking for a troika of tyrants, that country should top your list.

**America’s Favorite Military Autocracy**

The U.S. also backs — and Trump seems to love — Egypt’s military ruler Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. At a press conference at the White House in September 2017, the president leaned toward the general and announced that he was “doing a great job.” Hardly anyone inside the Beltway, in the media, or even on Main Street batted an eye. Washington has, of course, long supported Egypt’s various tyrants, including the brutal Hosni Mubarak who was overthrown early in the Arab Spring. Cairo remains the second largest annual recipient of American military aid at $1.3 billion annually. In fact, 75 percent of such aid goes to just two countries, the other being Israel. In a sense, Washington simply bribes both states not to fight each other. Now, that’s diplomacy for you!

So, how’s Egypt’s military using all the guns and butter the U.S. sends its way? Brutally, of course. After Mubarak was overthrown in 2011, Mohammed Morsi won a free and fair election. Less than two years later, the military, which abhors his Muslim Brotherhood organization, seized power in
a coup. Enter General el-Sisi. And when Morsi supporters rallied to protest the putsch, the general, who had appointed himself president, promptly ordered his troops to open fire. At least 900 protesters were killed in what came to be known as the 2013 Rabaa Massacre. Since then, el-Sisi has ruled with an iron fist, extending his personal power, winning a sham reelection with 97.8 percent of the vote, and pushing through major constitutional changes that will allow the generalissimo to stay in power until at least 2030. Washington, of course, remained silent.

El-Sisi has run a veritable police state, replete with human rights abuses and mass incarceration. Last year, he even had a show trial of 739 Muslim Brotherhood-associated defendants, 75 of whom were sentenced to death in a single day. He also uses “emergency” counterterrorism laws to jail peaceful dissidents. Thousands of them have gone before military courts. In addition, in U.S.-backed Egypt most forms of independent organization and peaceful assembly remain banned. Cairo even collaborates with its old enemy Israel to maintain a stranglehold of a blockade on the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which the United Nations has termed “inhumane.”

Yet Egypt gets a hall pass from the Trump administration. It matters not at all that few places on the planet suppress free speech as effectively as Egypt now does – not since it buys American weaponry and generally does as Washington wants in the region. In other words, a diplomatic state of marital (and martial) bliss protects the second member of the real troika of tyranny.

America’s Favorite Apartheid State
Some will be surprised, even offended, that I include Israel in this imaginary troika. Certainly, on the surface, Israel’s democracy bears no relation to the political worlds of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Still, scratch below the gilded surface of Israeli life and you’ll soon **unearth** staggering civil liberties abuses and a penchant for institutional oppression. After all, so extreme have been the abuses of ever more right-wing Israeli governments against the stateless Palestinians that even some mainstream foreign leaders and scholars now **compare** that country to apartheid South Africa.

And the label is justified. Palestinians are essentially isolated in the equivalent of open-air prisons in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – not unlike the **bantustans** of South Africa in the years when that country was white-ruled. In the impoverished, refugee-camp atmosphere of these state-lets, Palestinians lack anything resembling civil rights. They can’t even vote for the Israeli prime ministers who lord it over them. What’s more, the Palestinian citizens of Israel (some 20 percent of the population), despite technically possessing the franchise, are systematically **repressed** in a variety of ways.

Evidence of an apartheid-style state is everywhere apparent in the Palestinian territories. In violation of **countless** international norms and U.N. resolutions, Israel imposes its own version of a police state – functionally, a military occupation of land legally possessed by Arabs. It has begun a de facto **annexation** of Palestinian land by building a “security wall” through Palestinian villages. Its military constructs special
“Jewish only” roads in the West Bank linking illegal Israeli settlements, while further fracturing the fiction of Palestinian contiguity. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not only refused to withdraw those settlements or halt the colonization of Palestinian territory by Jewish Israelis, but during the recent Israeli election promised to begin the actual annexation of the West Bank in his new term.

Israeli military actions are regularly direct violations of the principles of proportionality in warfare, which means that the ratio of Israeli to Palestinian casualties is invariably absurdly disproportionate. Since last spring, at least 175 Palestinians (almost all unarmed) have been shot to death by Israeli soldiers along the Gaza Strip fence line, while 5,884 others were wounded by live ammunition. Ninety-four of those had to have a limb amputated. A staggering 948 of the wounded were minors. In that period, just one Israeli died and 11 were wounded in those same clashes.

Life in blockaded Gaza is almost unimaginably awful. So stringent are the sanctions imposed that one prominent official in a leaked diplomatic cable admitted that Israeli policy was to “keep Gaza’s economy on the brink of collapse.” In fact, back in 2012, one of that country’s military spokesmen even indicated that food was being allowed into the blockaded strip on a 2,300 calories a day count per Gazan – just enough, that is, to avoid starvation.

Through it all, with Trump at the wheel, Netanyahu can feel utterly assured of the near limitless backing of the United States. The Trump team has essentially sanctioned all
Israeli behavior, thereby legitimizing the present state of Palestinian life. Trump has moved the U.S. embassy to contested Jerusalem – admitting once and for all that Washington sees the holy city as the sole property of the Jewish state – recognized the illegal Israeli annexation of the conquered Syrian Golan Heights, and increased the flow of military aid and arms to Israel, already the number-one recipient of such American largesse.

Sometimes, in the age of Trump, it almost seems as if “Bibi” Netanyahu were the one guiding American policy throughout the Middle East. No wonder Israel rounds out that troika of tyranny.

Wag the Dog?

Beyond their wretched human rights records and undemocratic tendencies, that troika has another particularly relevant commonality as the U.S. reportedly prepares for a possible war with Iran. Two of those countries – Israel and Saudi Arabia – desperately desire that the American military take on their Iranian nemesis. The third, Egypt, will go along with just about anything as long as Uncle Sam keeps the military aid flowing to Cairo. Think of it as potentially the ultimate “wag the dog” scenario, with Washington taking on the role of the dog.

This alone should make Washington officials cautious. After all, war with Iran would surely prove disastrous (whatever damage was done to that country). If you don’t think so, you haven’t been living through the last 17-plus years of this country’s forever wars. Unfortunately, no one should count on such caution from John Bolton, Mike Pompeo, or even
Donald Trump.

So settle into your seats folks and prepare to watch the empire swallow the republic whole.

Danny Sjursen, a TomDispatch regular, is a retired U.S. Army major and former history instructor at West Point. He served tours with reconnaissance units in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has written a memoir of the Iraq War, “Ghost Riders of Baghdad: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Myth of the Surge.” He lives in Lawrence, Kansas. Follow him on Twitter at @SkepticalVet and check out his podcast “Fortress on a Hill,” co-hosted with fellow vet Chris ‘Henri’ Henriksen.

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The Real Bob Mueller

Robert Mueller Wednesday implied he would have indicted Donald Trump if he could have, resurrecting his saint-like status among Democrats who will now likely go for impeachment. But who is the real Bob Mueller? Ex-FBI official Coleen Rowley explained on June 6, 2017.

By Coleen Rowley

Special to Consortium News

June 6, 2017

Mainstream commentators display amnesia when they describe former FBI Directors Robert Mueller and James Comey as stellar and credible law enforcement figures. Perhaps if they included J.
Edgar Hoover, such fulsome praise could be put into proper perspective.

Although these Hoover successors, now occupying center stage in the investigation of President Trump, have been hailed for their impeccable character by much of Official Washington, the truth is, as top law enforcement officials of the George W. Bush Administration (Mueller as FBI Director and James Comey as Deputy Attorney General), both presided over post-9/11 cover-ups and secret abuses of the Constitution, enabled Bush-Cheney fabrications used to launch wrongful wars, and exhibited plain vanilla incompetence.

TIME Magazine would probably have not called my own disclosures a “bombshell memo” to the Joint Intelligence Committee Inquiry in May 2002 if it had not been for Mueller’s having so misled everyone after 9/11. Although he bore no personal responsibility for intelligence failures before the attack, since he only became FBI Director a week before, Mueller denied or downplayed the significance of warnings that had poured in yet were all ignored or mishandled during the Spring and Summer of 2001.

Bush Administration officials had circled the wagons and refused to publicly own up to what the 9/11 Commission eventually concluded, “that the system had been blinking red.” Failures to read, share or act upon important intelligence, which a FBI agent witness termed “criminal negligence” in later trial testimony, were therefore not fixed in a timely manner. (Some failures were never fixed at all.)
Worse, Bush and Cheney used that post 9/11 period of obfuscation to “roll out” their misbegotten “war on terror,” which only served to exponentially increase worldwide terrorism.

Unfulfilled Promise

I wanted to believe Director Mueller when he expressed some regret in our personal meeting the night before we both testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee. He told me he was seeking improvements and that I should not hesitate to contact him if I ever witnessed a similar situation to what was behind the FBI’s pre 9/11 failures.

A few months later, when it appeared he was acceding to Bush-Cheney’s ginning up intelligence to launch the unjustified, counterproductive and illegal war on Iraq, I took Mueller up on his offer, emailing him my concerns in late February 2003. Mueller knew, for instance, that Vice President Dick Cheney’s claims connecting 9/11 to Iraq were bogus yet he remained quiet. He also never responded to my email.

Beyond ignoring politicized intelligence, Mueller bent to other political pressures. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Mueller directed the “post 9/11 round-up” of about 1,000 immigrants who mostly happened to be in the wrong place (the New York City area) at the wrong time. FBI Headquarters encouraged more and more detentions for what seemed to be essentially P.R. purposes. Field offices were required to report daily the number of detentions in order to supply grist for FBI press releases about FBI “progress” in fighting terrorism. Consequently, some of the detainees
were brutalized and jailed for up to a year despite the fact that none turned out to be terrorists.

A History of Failure

Long before he became FBI Director, serious questions existed about Mueller’s role as Acting U.S. Attorney in Boston in effectively enabling decades of corruption and covering up of the FBI’s illicit deals with mobster Whitey Bulger and other “top echelon” informants who committed numerous murders and crimes. When the truth was finally uncovered through intrepid investigative reporting and persistent, honest judges, U.S. taxpayers footed a $100 million court award to the four men framed for murders committed by (the FBI-operated) Bulger gang.

Current media applause omits the fact that former FBI Director Mueller was the top official in charge of the Anthrax terror fiasco investigation into those 2001 murders, which targeted an innocent man (Steven Hatfill) whose lawsuit eventually forced the FBI to pay $5 million in compensation. Mueller’s FBI was also severely criticized by Department of Justice Inspector Generals finding the FBI overstepped the law improperly serving hundreds of thousands of “national security letters” to obtain private (and irrelevant) metadata on citizens, and for infiltrating nonviolent anti-war groups under the guise of investigating “terrorism.”

For his part, Deputy Attorney General James Comey, too, went along with the abuses of Bush and Cheney after 9/11 and signed off on a number of highly illegal programs including warrantless surveillance of Americans and torture of
Comey also defended the Bush Administration’s three-year-long detention of an American citizen without charges or right to counsel.

Up to the March 2004 night in Attorney General John Ashcroft’s hospital room, both Comey and Mueller were complicit with implementing a form of martial law, perpetrated via secret Office of Legal Counsel memos mainly written by John Yoo and predicated upon Yoo’s singular theories of absolute “imperial” or “war presidency” powers, and requiring Ashcroft every 90 days to renew certification of a “state of emergency.”

The Comey/Mueller Myth

What’s not well understood is that Comey’s and Mueller’s joint intervention to stop Bush’s men from forcing the sick Attorney General to sign the certification that night was a short-lived moment. A few days later, they all simply went back to the drawing board to draft new legal loopholes to continue the same (unconstitutional) surveillance of Americans.

The mythology of this episode, repeated endlessly throughout the press, is that Comey and Mueller did something significant and lasting in that hospital room. They didn’t. Only the legal rationale for their unconstitutional actions was tweaked.

Mueller was even okay with the CIA conducting torture programs after his own agents warned against participation. Agents were simply instructed not to document such torture, and any “war crimes files” were made to disappear. Not only did “collect it all” surveillance and torture programs...
continue, but Mueller’s (and then Comey’s) FBI later worked to prosecute NSA and CIA whistleblowers who revealed these illegalities.

Neither Comey nor Mueller — who are reported to be “joined at the hip” — deserve their current lionization among politicians and mainstream media. Instead of Jimmy Stewart-like “G-men” with reputations for principled integrity, the two close confidants and collaborators merely proved themselves, along with former CIA Director George “Slam Dunk” Tenet, reliably politicized sycophants, enmeshing themselves in a series of wrongful abuses of power along with official incompetence.

It seems clear that based on his history and close “partnership” with Comey, called “one of the closest working relationships the top ranks of the Justice Department have ever seen,” Mueller was chosen as Special Counsel not because he has integrity but because he will do what the powerful want him to do.

Mueller didn’t speak the truth about a war he knew to be unjustified. He didn’t speak out against torture. He didn’t speak out against unconstitutional surveillance. And he didn’t tell the truth about 9/11. He is just “their man.”

Coleen Rowley, a retired FBI special agent and division legal counsel whose May 2002 memo to then-FBI Director Robert Mueller exposed some of the FBI’s pre-9/11 failures, was named one of TIME magazine’s “Persons of the Year” in 2002. Her 2003 letter to Robert Mueller in opposition to launching the Iraq War is archived in full text on the NYT and her 2013 op-ed entitled “Questions for the FBI
Nominee” was published on the day of James Comey’s confirmation hearing. This piece will also be cross-posted on Rowley’s Huffington Post page.

Relevant links:

http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20020603,00.html


http://www.truth-out.org/archive/component/k2/item/68973:the-iraq-effect-war-has-increased-terrorism-sevenfold-worldwide


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http://www.ocregister.com/2017/05/21/comey-mueller-bungled-big-anthrax-case-together/


http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/government_programs-jan-june0
Professional Assange Smearers Finally Realize His Fate Is Tied To theirs

Rachel effing Maddow, the Queen Mother of all tinfoil pussyhat-wearing Russiagate insanity is suddenly supporting Julian Assange after his Espionage Act indictment, as Caitlin Johnstone explains.
Rachel Maddow has aired a segment condemning the new indictment against Julian Assange for 17 alleged violations of the Espionage Act.

Yes, that Rachel Maddow.

MSNBC’s top host began the segment after it was introduced by Chris Hayes, agreeing with her colleague that it’s surprising that more news outlets aren’t giving this story more “wall to wall” coverage, given its immense significance. She recapped Assange’s various legal struggles up until this point, then accurately described Assange’s new Espionage Act charges for publishing secret documents.

“And these new charges are not about stealing classified information or outsmarting computer systems in order to illegally obtain classified information,” Maddow said. “It’s not about that. These new charges are trying to prosecute Assange for publishing that stolen, secret material which was obtained by somebody else. And that is a whole different kettle of fish than what he was initially charged with.”

“By charging Assange for publishing that stuff that was taken by Manning, by issuing these charges today, the Justice Department has just done something you might have otherwise thought was impossible,” Maddow added after explaining the unprecedented nature of this case.

“The Justice Department today, the Trump administration today, just put every journalistic institution in this
country on Julian Assange’s side of the ledger. On his side of the fight. Which, I know, is unimaginable. But that is because the government is now trying to assert this brand new right to criminally prosecute people for publishing secret stuff, and newspapers and magazines and investigative journalists and all sorts of different entities publish secret stuff all the time. That is the bread and butter of what we do.”

Maddow carefully explained to her audience that these new charges have nothing at all to do with the 2016 election or any of the Russiagate nonsense the MSNBC pundit has been devoting her life to, correctly calling what the Trump administration is doing with Assange “a novel legal effort to punch a huge hole in the First Amendment.”

She tied this in with Trump’s common references to the mass media as the “enemy of the people”, finally taking mainstream liberalism into a direct confrontation with Trump’s actual war on the press instead of nonsense about his tweeting mean things about Jim Acosta. She rightly highlighted the dangers of allowing a president with a thick authoritarian streak the ability to prosecute journalists he doesn’t like, and discussed the possibility that the UK may not comply with this new agenda in extradition proceedings.

“I think these 17 espionage charges against the WikiLeaks guy are a huge deal, and a very dark development,” Maddow concluded. “Chris Hayes this evening called it a ‘four alarm development’, and I absolutely share that.”

“And, you know, I know you,” Maddow continued, pointing to
“Given everything else that we know about the WikiLeaks guy, I can feel through the television right now your mixed feelings about what I am saying. I can feel what may be, perhaps, a certain lack of concern about Julian Assange’s ultimate fate, given his own gleeful and extensive personal role in trying to help a hostile foreign government interfere in our election in order to install their chosen president with WikiLeaks’ help. Okay? I know. Okay, I feel ya. I got it. But, it is a recurring theme in history, heck, it is a recurring theme in the Bible, that they always pick the least sympathetic figures to try this stuff on first. Despite anyone’s feelings about this spectacularly unsympathetic character at the center of this international drama, you are going to see every journalistic institution in this country, every First Amendment supporter in this country, left, right and center, swallow their feelings about this particular human and denounce what the Trump administration is trying to do here. Because it would fundamentally change the United States of America.”

Wow. Make no mistake, this is a hugely significant development. This isn’t just some columnist for The New York Times or The Guardian, this is Rachel effing Maddow, the Queen Mother of all tinfoil pussyhat-wearing Russiagate insanity. This same pundit was just a couple of months ago not just smearing but outright lying about Assange, deceitfully telling her audience that the new legal rings closing around Assange were about his 2016 publications then
instructing viewers not to Google anything about it because they’ll get computer viruses. Now that she’s recognized that this could actually hurt her and her network directly, she’s finally feeding her audience a different narrative out of sheer enlightened self-interest.

The fact that such a hugely influential figure in mainstream liberal media is now pushing back against Assange’s prosecution, and doing so in a way that her mainstream liberal anti-Trump audience can relate to, cannot be over-appreciated. Maddow’s credulous audience would eat live kittens if she told them to, so the way she’s pushing back against a dangerous legal precedent in language they can understand will make a difference in the way American liberals think about Assange’s predicament. It won’t make them like him, it won’t make them value the things he’s done, but it will get them to finally begin resisting something that badly needs to be resisted. And that’s huge.

The danger has always been that this fatal blow to journalism would be meted out with total compliance and support from a population hammered into docility by the ongoing narrative war which has been waged on Assange’s and WikiLeaks’ reputations with the help of the mass media. There was a very real danger that thought leaders like Maddow were going to choose their feelings over reasoning when the foot finally fell and the charges that criminalize journalism as “espionage” were finally put into play.

I don’t think anyone would have been surprised if she’d applied that giant intellect of hers into making it possible to ignore it without upsetting her audience, and try and
figure it out later when it was too late and the legal precedent was set. It would have been so easy to keep feeding into the dominant “Assange is bad so everything bad that happens to him is good” sentiment, but she didn’t. She directly contradicted it.

She actually chose to do the right thing. I’m gobsmacked, and it’s not an exaggeration to say that my hope for humanity sparked up a little today.

If the resting smugfaced apex of liberal psychosis is getting this one right, then many more will surely follow. And indeed, many already are. In addition to Hayes’ coverage of the story, MSNBC’s Ari Melber also did a segment harshly criticizing the implications of Trump administration’s new charges. We’re seeing multiple segments from CNN about the grave dangers of the legal precedent that is being set with the superseding indictment, as well as urgent warnings about the new charges from major publications like The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Guardian. The outlets which have been smearing Assange relentlessly are now finding themselves forced to defend him.

A typical comment under Maddow’s YouTube share of this segment reads “This is very strange. Very alarming! There we go again. The GOP is preparing the country for a Dictatorship.” And okay, that’s not exactly what is happening (this has been a bipartisan push and it’s not just preparations, we’re in full swing), but whatever, now this viewer can actually see the monster’s outlines. Finally the Maddow crowd which has been fruitlessly expending all their energy so far on punching at Russian shadows will actually
be attacking a real thing.

And I’m quietly excited about that. I’m eager to see what happens to the #Resistance if it actually starts #Resisting something. It doesn’t matter that this is only happening because mainstream liberal media outlets realized that they might be next on the chopping block; it matters that it’s happening, period.

For years mainstream liberals have been fixating on the fake Russiagate psyop and rending their garments about Trump’s rude tweets while commentators like me desperately implored them to pay attention to the actual dangerous agendas that this administration is actually advancing. They’ve been in a holding pattern of adamantly refusing to do that, and now, because it’s threatening them personally, we’re suddenly seeing a sharp deviation from that holding pattern.

As Bill Murray said at the end of *Groundhog Day*, something is different. Anything different is good.

**Caitlin Johnstone** is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at [Medium](https://medium.com). Follow her work on [Facebook](https://facebook.com), [Twitter](https://twitter.com), or her website. She has a [podcast](https://podcast.com) and a new book “Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers.” This article was re-published with permission.
THE ANGRY ARAB: Iran’s Military Options

As’ad AbuKhalil weighs Iran’s position at a dangerous point in U.S. relations, but says the prospects of war are not as high as Gulf regimes and Israel want them to be.

By As`ad AbuKhalil

Special to Consortium News

The crisis in Iranian-U.S. relations has reached a dangerous point, and Israel and its Gulf allies are hoping for a major U.S.-Iranian war. The Iranian regime clearly has limited options available to it since it is tied by the nuclear agreement, while reaping diminishing rewards from it with the reimposition of U.S. sanctions. But it has some options, nevertheless, especially in the event of military confrontation.

Its enemies have been operating on the assumption that the sanctions would either drive the regime to surrender or will lead to a popular revolution, which would end the Islamic regime. Neither of the two scenarios are likely in the foreseeable future, and the regime – if it faces a threat to its survival – will fight ruthlessly (and the Iranian regime has more of a popular base than the Syrian regime). But the prospects of war are not as high as Gulf regimes and Israel want them to be.
The Trump administration came on an agenda of exclusive focus on domestic politics, and President Donald Trump has long opposed U.S. military intervention in the Middle East. He criticized President George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq early on, when many Democrats were marching to that beat.

Trump comes from a traditional Republican isolationist foreign policy although his administration is staffed with an odd mix of neo-conservatives and interventionist conservatives. (National Security Advisor John Bolton bristles at the suggestion that he is a neo-conservative because it implies he was once a Democrat, which he never was).

But Trump’s appointments in foreign policy and defense can’t be read as an indication of his foreign policy agenda or “doctrine” because he alienated so many members of the Republican foreign policy establishment that he couldn’t hire from the traditional Republican rolodex, and he seems to put personal loyalty and flattery way ahead of any ideological litmus test.

**Trump’s Intentions Unclear**

It has not been clear what exactly Trump wants from Iran. Even in the Middle East: he started his campaign by calling for a “neutral” U.S. stance toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, and yet exhibited from the White House the most pro-Israeli bias ever seen in the Oval Office (continuing the pattern of every U.S. president becoming more pro-Israeli and anti-Palestinian than his predecessor, with the exception of the team of President George H.W. Bush and
Secretary of State James Baker).

On Iran, Trump simply railed against the Iran nuclear deal without offering any specific criticisms (it is doubtful that he read the agreement or even listened to a detailed briefing). Just like the health care issue, Trump is less concerned about substance and public policy and more about his own brand name and legacy, and the desire to dismantle what is perceived — rightly or wrongly — as the achievements of the Obama administration.

Iran has been aware of the Israeli plotting in all this; of its eagerness to provoke Iranian forces in Syria into a confrontation. And consistently, the Iranian regime has resisted Israeli provocations but maintained its presence in Syria. It has continued to supply Hizbullah and Iraq Hashd militias with support and financing (despite the exaggerated reports by The Washington Post’s Liz Sly and other Western correspondents who seem to talk exclusively to foes of Iran and Hizbullah in the Middle East).

Iran is also aware that some factions in the Trump administration are aligned with Israeli-Saudi plans for a major military confrontation with Iran.

**Unthinkable Notion**

But the notion that the U.S. would go to war against Iran is rather unthinkable. The war against Iraq, an exhausted country, suffering from two successive major wars and from crippling U.S.-imposed sanctions, resulted in the debacle that spawned a variety of terrorist organizations. A war against Iran would cost (in human and financial terms) far more than the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Also, unlike
Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran does indeed have supporters, allies, and clients throughout the region who would come to its defense in the case of a major war. There can’t be a limited war against Iran.

The Iranian regime is also split along ideological lines. President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif had promised prosperity and stability if talks with the U.S. proceeded and if a nuclear agreement were reached.

But the Rouhani-Zarif team, which prides itself on its knowledge and familiarity with Western thinking, made major mistakes in its negotiations with the team of President Barack Obama. It should have known that an agreement with a president in his last two years would not necessarily last if he is replaced by a president from the other party (in other words, they presumed that a Democrat would succeed Trump and would stick to the agreement). But the Iranian negotiators – who, incidentally, are far more skilled and shrewd than the negotiators for the Palestinian Authority, from Oslo until the last round of negotiations – failed in two major ways.

No. 1) They didn’t reach an official treaty, which would have required ratification by the U.S. Senate (which would have been unlikely under Obama).

No. 2) They didn’t include in the agreement a clause that would specifically reward Iran (or punish the U.S.) if Washington unilaterally decided to violate the agreement, which had the international juridical support of the UN Security Council.

The Rouhani-Zarif team always clashed with a hardline team
in Iran, which did not put faith in talks with the U.S. The Supreme leader identified with the hardline team yet wound up going along with the plan by Rouhani-Zarif.

**Tehran Must Be Frustrated**

Tehran, today, must be frustrated: While it clings to the deal and adheres to its terms, the Europeans have failed to engineer an alternative financial mechanism to allow Iran to buy and sell on the international market. U.S. sanctions have become more effective, and U.S. global bullying has intimidated countries and corporations from doing business with Iran.

There was reason to expect this might happen. The Republican Party made its position on the agreement quite clear when it invited a foreign leader, Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu, to list a litany of complaints before the U.S. Congress (where the Democrats were too afraid of the Israeli lobby to register disapproval and the Obama White House typically too meek to respond).

The hardline faction in Iran – whatever that means – does not seem to have an alternative to talks with the U.S. Recent interviews with Zarif in the U.S. were intended to articulate a new policy of Iran, in which the government expresses willingness to talk to the administration.

Zarif counters skeptics in Iran by distinguishing between Trump and what he calls “Team B” (Bolton and company). And if Iran wants to preserve the deal and has no alternative plan, talks with the Trump administration may become inevitable.
Trump is not a stickler for issues or policy details but he prefers to have his name and personal imprint on any international agreement. The administration added to its list of demands for denuclearization an insistence that talks with Iran would cover No. 1) ballistic missiles; No. 2) regional issues; No. 3) Iran’s support for groups classified as terrorist groups (which now includes the Revolutionary Guards – i.e. the U.S. would like Iran to stop supporting its own armed forces).

The Obama administration already tried to put all those on the agenda in the last negotiations and Tehran adamantly refused. The Supreme Leader just last week indicated his government’s refusal to discuss those issues as well, which may be a signal that the Supreme Leader could be open to a new round of negotiations with the Trump administration but strictly over nuclear issues.

What happened last week may indicate the Iranian course of action in the event of military assault on its forces. It could easily strike at targets in Saudi Arabia and the UAE before striking at targets in Israel because their responses will be less severe and they are far more easily intimidated.

Just a few years ago, when an official UAE envoy met with a Hizbullah leader and sent messages about Hizbullah behavior in the region, he received a stern message about possible war scenarios that would include targets in the UAE, which left that envoy ashen-faced (I learned this from a well-placed source).

Saudi and UAE media seemed less eager for war than they were
two weeks ago (with the exception of the English-language Arab News, which is directed to a Western audience). The attacks on the ships and the oil installation may have been sufficient to scare the two regimes. The prospects for war are not high, but if Israel and Saudi Arabia get their way with an American war, its ramifications would destabilize the entire regional order, an order which is highly beneficial to U.S. interests. For that—and given his own proclivities, Trump may think twice.

As’ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the “Historical Dictionary of Lebanon” (1998), “Bin Laden, Islam and America’s New War on Terrorism” (2002), and “The Battle for Saudi Arabia” (2004). He tweets as @asadabukhalil

Palestinian Authority No Longer Crying Wolf

Jonathan Cook reports on the bind that Netanyahu has created by withholding tax transfers as a reelection tactic.

By JonathanCook

Jonathan-Cook.net

We have been here many times before. However, on this occasion even the principal actors understand that the Palestinian Authority is not crying wolf as it warns of imminent collapse.

Keen to pander to hawkish public opinion in the run-up to
last month’s election, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu struck a severe blow against Mahmoud Abbas and his government-in-permanent-waiting.

He announced that Israel would withhold a portion of the taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinians, and which it is obligated under the Oslo accords to pass on to the PA, based in the West Bank.

The money deducted is the sum the PA transfers as stipends to the families of political prisoners and those killed and maimed by the Israeli army.
This is an incendiary issue, as Netanyahu well knows, given that Palestinians view these families as having made the ultimate sacrifice in the struggle to liberate their people from brutal Israeli occupation.

Abbas cannot be seen to back down, and so has refused to accept any of the monthly tax transfers until the full sum is reinstated, amounting to nearly two-thirds of the PA’s revenues.

Given how precarious Palestinian finances are, after decades of resource theft and restrictions on development imposed by Israel, the PA is already on the brink of bankruptcy.

The problem for Netanyahu and Washington is that the PA was established – under the 25-year-old Oslo accords – to take the pressure and costs off Israel of policing the Palestinian population under occupation.

If the PA collapses, so do the Palestinian security forces that have been keeping order in the West Bank as Israel has continued to plunder Palestinian land and resources.

UN Warning

Late last month the United Nations warned that the standoff had left the PA facing “unprecedented financial, security and political challenges.” Which means that, despite his recent electoral triumph, Netanyahu is in a serious bind. He cannot be seen by his even more rightwing coalition partners to be climbing down and restoring stipends to people Israelis view simply as “terrorists.” Equally, he dares not risk a Palestinian uprising in the West Bank. That would be a real possibility if the Palestinian economy implodes and
there are no Palestinian security forces to suppress the resulting wave of popular anger.

A preview of the difficulties in store was given at the start of the month, when more than 600 rockets were fired out of Gaza, threatening the cancellation of the Eurovision song contest in Israel later this month. By May 5, four Israelis were reported dead, while 20 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli airstrikes. The Palestinian fatalities included two pregnant women and a toddler.

There is also the danger, from Israel’s point of view, that if Abbas’s PA collapses, the void in the West Bank will be filled by his Hamas rivals, who run Gaza. Israel has been delighted to keep the Palestinian territories divided under feuding Fatah and Hamas leaderships.

A way out – or a change of tack – is urgently required.

Israel has tried twice to quietly make partial tax transfers to the PA’s bank account, in the hope the money would be accepted. The PA returned it.

Then, the European Union stepped in. Ostensibly an “honest broker,” it appears to be occupying a role the Trump administration has formally abandoned. The EU proposed this month that the PA accept the transfers on a “provisional basis,” until the crisis can be resolved.

PA officials were dismissive. “Let the people take to the streets,” one said. “We have our backs to the wall.” The PA line is that in the current climate, if it backtracks, Israel will simply intensify unilateral measures harming the Palestinian cause.
Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at Jonathan Cook.net.

Leaked Document Pokes More Holes in Establishment Syria Narrative

Caitlin Johnstone looks at the latest revelation about a chemical attack in Douma last April that was pinned on Damascus.

By Caitlin Johnstone
CaitlinJohnstone.com

“It is hard to overstate the significance of this revelation,” tweets former British MP George Galloway of a new report by the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media (WGSPM). “The war-machine has now been caught red-handed in a staged chemical weapons attack for the purposes of deceiving our democracies into what could have turned into a full-scale war amongst the great-powers.”

“An important #Douma #Syria ‘Assad chemical weapon attack’ development and yet more evidence to suggest the ‘attack’ was staged, as it’s now revealed that @OPCW suppressed expert engineers report that found the cylinders were likely not dropped from the air,” tweets former Scotland Yard detective and counterterrorism intelligence officer Charles Shoebridge.

“The engineering assessment confirms our earlier conclusion,” the excellent Moon of Alabama blog writes. “The
whole scene as depicted by ‘rebels’ and propaganda organs was staged. The more than 34 dead on the scene were murdered elsewhere under unknown circumstances.”

An important #Douma #Syria ‘Assad chemical weapon attack’ development and yet more evidence to suggest the ‘attack’ was staged, as it’s now revealed that @OPCW suppressed expert engineers report that found the cylinders were likely not dropped from the air https://t.co/hZCP2Ujlbk

– Charles Shoebridge (@ShoebridgeC) May 13, 2019

The report has grabbed the attention of those who’ve expressed skepticism of establishment Syria narratives because it casts serious doubts on the official story we’ve been told to believe about an alleged chemical attack in Douma, Syria, in April of last year. A document titled “Engineering Assessment of two cylinders observed at the Douma incident” has been leaked to the WGSPM which reveals that an engineering sub-team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) fact-finding mission in Douma came to conclusions which differ wildly from the OPCW’s official findings on the Douma incident, yet we the public were never permitted to see this assessment.

The assessment’s findings, which you can locate on pages five through eight of the document, put forward multiple hypothetical scenarios in which two gas cylinders could have wound up in the locations (Location 2 and Location 4) where they were found. The assessment concludes that “The dimensions, characteristics and appearance of the cylinders, and the surrounding scene of the incidents, were inconsistent with what would have been expected in the case
of either cylinder being delivered from an aircraft. In each case the alternative hypothesis produced the only plausible explanation for observations at the scene.”

The assessment says more thoroughly and technically what I argued in an article last year, that the physics of the air-dropped cylinder narrative make no sense whatsoever. This is a problem, because the reason we were given for the U.S., U.K. and France launching airstrikes on Syrian government targets in April of 2018 was that two cylinders full of poison gas had been dropped from aircraft by the Syrian air force and killed dozens of civilians.

The assessment is signed by Ian Henderson, who the WGSPM were able to verify as a longtime OPCW-trained inspection team leader. The OPCW reportedly denied that Henderson was involved in its Douma fact-finding mission, but the WGSPM counters that “This statement is false. The engineering sub-team could not have been carrying out studies in Douma at Locations 2 and 4 unless they had been notified by OPCW to the Syrian National Authority (the body that oversees compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention) as FFM inspectors: it is unlikely that Henderson arrived on a tourist visa.”

So far this is the establishment narrative management machine’s only attempt at refuting the latest revelations indicating that the #Douma attack last year was staged. It basically boils down to “They’re conspiracy theorists and the official narrative disagrees with them.”

— Caitlin Johnstone ⏳ (@caitoz) May 13, 2019

Just as interesting as this new report has been the response of the usual establishment Syria narrative managers to it,
or rather the lack thereof. NATO narrative management firm Bellingcat, which normally jumps all over these kinds of revelations in an attempt to discredit them, has been maintaining radio silence as of this writing. Its founder, Eliot Higgins, has had nothing to say on the matter other than to retweet a pathetic rebuttal by his mini-me Scott Lucas and take a few childish jabs at me for highlighting this fact.

Scott Lucas’ Facebook post on the WGSPM report remains as of this writing the only attempt from the Syria narrative management machine to address it, and it boils down to nothing more than assertions that the report contradicts the official OPCW narrative (duh) and that the WGSPM are conspiracy theorists. Lucas may have thought it a good idea to author this post believing that he had a more substantial argument than he actually had, but it was pointed out shortly after publication that his claim about Henderson refusing to consider other possible scenarios in his assessment is directly contradicted by the words that are in the assessment, and Lucas was forced to make a hasty revision.

There will be other counter-narratives released by the Syria narrative management machine, to be sure, but the fact that this report has been out for the better part of the day with nary a peep from that lot reveals a great deal about the difficulties they’re having with this one.

We are being lied to about Syria. Anyone who believes unproven assertions about governments targeted for toppling by the US-centralized empire has failed to learn the lessons of history. The Syrian government had literally nothing to
gain strategically from using chemical weapons in Douma, a battle it had already won, and knew full well that doing so would provoke an attack from the empire. Douma was occupied by the Al Qaeda-linked Jaysh Al-Islam, who had at that point nothing to lose and everything to gain by staging a false flag attack in a last-ditch attempt to get NATO powers to function as its air force.

If you still believe at this point that the Syrian government dropped poison gas on Douma last year, then I’ve got some Iraqi WMDs to sell you.

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

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Russia-gate’s Monstrous Offspring

Russia-gate has shed any premise of being about Russian interference, writes Daniel Lazare, but the idea that America may in anyway be responsible for its own fate is of course unthinkable.

By Daniel Lazare
Special to Consortium News

Americans used to think that Russia-gate was about a plot to hack the 2016 election. They were wrong. Russia-gate is really about an immense conspiracy to do four things:
No. 1: Ratchet up tensions with Russia to ever more dangerous levels;
No. 2: Show that Democrats are even more useless than people imagined;
No. 3: Persecute Julian Assange;
No. 4: Re-elect Donald Trump as president.

This was the takeaway from Mitch McConnell’s devastating “case closed” speech last week in which the Senate majority leader jeered at President Barack Obama for mocking Mitt Romney’s claim (seven years ago now) that Russia was America’s “number one geopolitical foe.” As Obama famously replied during that presidential debate: “The 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because the Cold War’s been over for 20 years.”

But that was so 2012. Now, says McConnell, it looks like Romney was right:

“We’d have been better off if the administration hadn’t swept [Russian President Vladimir] Putin’s invasion and occupation of Georgia under the rug or looked away as Russia forced out western NGO’s and cracked down on civil society. If President Obama hadn’t let Assad trample his red line in Syria or embraced Putin’s fake deal on chemical weapons, if the Obama administration had responded firmly to Putin’s invasion and occupation of Ukraine in 2014, to the assassination of Boris Nemtsov in 2015, and to Russia intervention in Syria — maybe stronger leadership would have left the Kremlin less emboldened,
maybe tampering with our democracy wouldn’t have seemed so very tempting.

“Instead,” McConnell went on, “the previous administration sent the Kremlin a signal they could get away with almost anything, almost anything. So is it surprising that we got the brazen interference detailed in special counsel Mueller’s report?”

Lies and Distortions

Like so much out of Congress these days, this was a farrago of lies and distortions. It wasn’t Moscow that started the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, but Tbilisi. While Russia has indeed cracked down on U.S.-backed NGO’s, Washington has done the same by forcing Russia’s highly successful news agency RT to register as a foreign agent and by sentencing Maria Butina, a Russian national studying at American University, to 18 months in prison for the crime of hobnobbing with members of the National Rifle Association. The charge that Syrian President Bashar al Assad “trampled” Obama’s red line by using chemical weapons is hardly as clear-cut as imperial propagandists like to believe – to say the least – while the agreement between Putin and former Secretary of State John Kerry to rid Syria of chemical weapons was not fake at all, but an example, increasingly rare unfortunately, of diplomacy being used to prevent an international crisis from getting out of hand.

And so on ad nauseum. But what could Democrats say in response given that they’ve spent the last three years trying to out-hawk the GOP? Answer: nothing. All they could do was try to turn tables on McConnell by charging him
with not being anti-Russian enough. Thus, New York’s Sen. Chuck Schumer accused him of “aiding and abetting” Moscow while Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin accused him of running interference for Putin because he “feels the Russians were on the side of the Republicans in 2016 and just might be again in 2020.”

**Democrats Feed the Super Hawks**

The result: a Democratic consensus that Russia can’t be trusted and that America must put itself on a war footing to prevent Putin from “toppling the mighty oak that has been our republic for two hundred years,” as Schumer put it. It’s an across-the-board agreement that the long-awaited Mueller report has only strengthened by regurgitating the intelligence-community line that “[t]he Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion” and then cherry-picking the facts to fit its preconceived thesis. (See “Top Ten Questions About the Mueller Report,” May 6.)

Democrats claim to oppose National Security Advisor John Bolton, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Vice President Mike Pence, but the anti-Russian hysteria they promote strengthens the hand of such super-hawks. It makes military conflict more likely, if not with Russia then with perceived Russian surrogates such as Venezuela or Iran.

Simultaneously, it backfires on Democrats by making them look weak and foolish as they argue that even though the Mueller report says “the investigation did not establish that members of the Trump Campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government,” somehow “significant evidence
of collusion” still exists, as an increasingly unhinged Rep. Adam Schiff maintains. In the Alice-in-Wonderland world of congressional Democrats, no evidence does not mean no evidence. In fact, it means the opposite.

Voters are unmoved. Ten times more Americans – 80 versus 8 percent – care about healthcare than about Russia according to a recent survey. When CNN pollsters asked a thousand people in mid-March to name the issues that matter most, not one mentioned Russia or the Mueller probe. If they didn’t care when collusion was still an open question, they care even less now that the only issue is obstruction plus a phony constitutional crisis that desperate Democrats have conjured up out of thin air.

**Trump the Chief Beneficiary**

Besides Fox News – whose ratings have soared while Russia-obsessed CNN’s have plummeted – the chief beneficiary is Trump. Post-Mueller, the man has the wind in his sails. Come 2020, Sen. Bernie Sanders could cut through his phony populism with ease. But if Jeff Bezos’s *Washington Post* succeeds in tarring him with Russia the same way it tried to tar Trump, then the Democratic nominee will be a bland centrist whom the incumbent will happily bludgeon.

Former Vice President Joe Biden – the John McCain-loving, speech-slurring, child-fondler who was for a wall along the Mexican border before he was against it – will end up as a bug splat on the Orange One’s windshield.

Beto O’Rourke, the rich-kid airhead who declared shortly before the Mueller report was released that Trump, “beyond the shadow of a doubt, sought to … collude with the Russian
government,” will not fare much better. Sen. Elizabeth Warren meanwhile seems to be tripping over her own two feet as she predicts one moment that Trump is heading to jail, declares the next that voters don’t care about the Mueller report because they’re too concerned with bread-and-butter issues, and then calls for dragging Congress into the impeachment morass regardless.

Such “logic” is lost on voters, so it seems to be a safe bet that enough will stay home next Election Day to allow the rough beast to slouch towards Bethlehem yet again.

Assange Convicted in Eyes of Press

Then there’s Julian Assange, currently serving a 50-week sentence in a supermax prison outside of London after being ejected from the Ecuadorian Embassy. By claiming that the WikiLeaks founder was “dissembling” by denying that Russia was the source of the mammoth Democratic National Committee leak in July 2016, Special Counsel Robert Mueller has effectively convicted him in the eyes of Congress and the press.

The New York Times thus reports that Mueller has “revealed” that Russian intelligence was the source while, in a venomous piece by Middlebury College professor Allison Stanger, The Washington Post declared that Assange “is neither whistleblower nor journalist,” but someone who helped Russian intelligence interfere in “the American electoral process.”

Schumer thus greeted Assange’s April 11 arrest by tweeting his “hope [that] he will soon be held to account for his meddling in our elections on behalf of Putin and the Russian
government,” while, in a truly chilling statement, Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia declared that “[i]t will be really good to get him back on United States soil [so] we can get the facts and the truth from him.”

Now that Julian Assange has been arrested, I hope he will soon be held to account for his meddling in our elections on behalf of Putin and the Russian government.

— Chuck Schumer (@SenSchumer) April 11, 2019

Assange is guiltier than ever. If Washington gets its hands on him, he’ll no doubt be hauled before some sort of Star Chamber and then clapped in a dungeon somewhere until he confesses that Russian intelligence made him do it, even though a careful reading of the Mueller report strongly suggests the opposite. (See “The ‘Guccifer 2.0’ Gaps in Mueller’s Full Report,” April 18.)

Assange languishing behind bars, war breaking out in Latin America or the Persian Gulf, Trump in the Oval Office for four years more – it’s the worst of all possible worlds, and the Democratic Party’s bizarre fixation with Vladimir Putin is what’s pushing it.

Ultimately, Russia-gate is yet a variation on the tired old theme of American innocence. If something goes wrong, it can’t be the fault of decent Americans who, as we all know, are too good for our deeply flawed world. Rather, it must be the fault of dastardly foreigners trying to hack our democracy. It’s a deep-rooted form of xenophobia that has fueled everything from the criminalization of marijuana (smuggled in by evil Mexicans) to the 1950s Red Scare (a
reaction to Communism smuggled in by evil Russians), and the war on terrorism (the work of evil Muslims). The idea that America may in anyway be responsible for its own fate is of course unthinkable.

But Russia-gate may be the greatest delusion of all. After decades of celebrating Donald Trump as the essence of American flash and hustle, the corporate media have decided that the only way he could have gotten into the White House is if Putin put him there. The upshot is a giant conspiracy to force Americans to turn their back on reality, an effort that can only end in disaster for all concerned, Democrats first and foremost.

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

US State Dept Deletes Sadistic Hit List Boasting of Venezuela’s Ruin

Grayzone has obtained a list of “key outcomes” that include wrecking the nation’s economy, destabilizing its military and puppeteering its political opposition, reports Anya Parampil.

By Anya Parampil
Grayzone
On April 24, six days before self-proclaimed Venezuelan “interim president” Juan Guaidó’s attempt to violently overthrow Venezuela’s democratically elected government alongside a handful of military defectors, the U.S. State Department published a fact sheet that boasted of Washington’s central role in the ongoing coup attempt. After realizing the incriminating nature of its error, the State Department quickly acted to remove the page.

The Grayzone has obtained a full copy of the expunged report. The deleted page puts to bed any claims of Guaidó’s independence from Washington, as the State Department emphasizes the fact that he “announced his interim presidency… in January” at the top of a section dedicated to breaking down “key outcomes” of U.S. efforts with regard to Venezuela.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Kimberly Breier recently took to Twitter to claim that “since he became acting president, Juan Guidó has given tangible results to the people of Venezuela.” Her tweet was accompanied with an infographic detailing alleged accomplishments of the powerless coup administration based on data compiled by the legally defunct National Assembly, the only governing body actually controlled by Guaidó.

Since becoming Interim President, @JGuaido has delivered tangible results for the people of Venezuela. #EstamosUnidosVE https://t.co/hOkfd9DEkF pic.twitter.com/spblSnooEa

– Kimberly Breier (@WHAasstSecty) May 1, 2019
But the Venezuela fact sheet posted and then deleted days earlier by the State Department told a dramatically different story.

Read the entire expunged fact sheet here [PDF] and at the end of this article.

Economic Hit List

Entitled “U.S. Actions on Venezuela,” the document boasted that U.S. policy had effectively prevented the Venezuelan government from participating in the international market and has led to the freezing of its overseas assets. It read like a sadistic celebration of Washington’s retribution against the Venezuelan population as a whole, the kind of collective punishment which is illegal according to Article 33 of the Geneva Conventions.

The State Department gloated in the deleted fact sheet that its policy had ensured that the Maduro government “cannot rely on the U.S. financial system” to conduct business, noting “key outcomes” of U.S. actions include the fact that “roughly $3.2 billion of Venezuela’s overseas are frozen.” It went on to boast that “Venezuela’s oil production fell to 736,000 barrels per day in March... substantially reducing” government revenue.

US Department of State Deleted Venezuela Hit List by Max Blumenthal on Scribd
“If I were the State Department I wouldn’t brag about causing a cut in oil production to 763,000 barrels per day—which is a 36 percent drop, in just the two months of February and March this year,” Mark Weisbrot, co-director at the Center For Economic and Policy Research, told The Grayzone. “This means even more premature deaths than the tens of thousands that resulted from sanctions last year.”

Weisbrot recently co-authored a bracing report which found that 40,000 Venezuelans died between 2017 and 2018 as a
direct result of U.S. sanctions. The State Department patted itself on the back for announcing its preparedness “to provide an additional $20 million in initial humanitarian assistance” to Venezuela, however, the CEPR report concluded that Trump Administration sanctions implemented in August 2017 resulted in “a loss of $6 billion in oil revenue over the ensuing year” alone.

While the State Department praised the opposition for “providing medical and hygiene attention to over 6,000” Venezuelans, those numbers dwarf in comparison to the 300,000 people CEPR “estimated to be at risk because of lack of access to medicines or treatment… [including] 80,000 people with HIV who have not had antiretroviral treatment since 2017, 16,000 people who need dialysis, 16,000 people with cancer, and 4 million with diabetes and hypertension.”

In other words, the supposed “Venezuela Crisis Response Assistance” touted by the State Department is not even a band-aid over the gaping wound that U.S. unilateral coercive measures have inflicted on the country.

In Weisbrot’s view, the “policy” and “outcomes” promoted by the State Department in the disappeared document will merely lead to “more cuts in imports of medicine, food, medical equipment, and inputs necessary to maintain water, health, and sanitation infrastructure.”

Having denied the Venezuelan government the ability to provide for its own population, the U.S. has essentially promised that thousands more deaths will occur.

The State Department did not respond to The Grayzone’s request for a comment on the fact sheet it deleted.
‘List of Confessions’

In a recent interview with Grayzone, Venezuela’s ambassador to the United Nations, Samuel Moncada, characterized the deleted State Department fact sheet as “a list of confessions.”

“Imagine if any other country says... it’s proud of saying that we are destroying the economy of our neighbor; we are proud that we destroyed the political system of our neighbor; we are proud that they are suffering. They are saying we are waging war against Venezuela,” Moncada emphasized.

The ambassador went on to accuse the U.S. of engaging in “bullying” rather than international diplomacy.

The State Department’s own fact sheet appears to support this accusation, as it asserts “diplomatic pressure resulted in fewer markets for Venezuelan gold.” The document further highlighted U.S. actions that have supposedly led “more than 1,000 members of the military [to recognize] Juan Guaido as interim President” and defect to Colombia, as well as stranding “an estimated 25 crude oil tankers with 12 million barrels” off Venezuela’s coast.

“They [say] it’s our ‘key’ achievements,” Moncada commented. “They are saying that they are causing trouble in our military and inducing a military coup, [which] so far they haven’t achieved, but they are working towards.”

“If any other person says that themselves,” the ambassador concluded, “and you take that confession to court, they would be in prison.”
The State Department’s fact sheet even frames recent decisions by the Organization of American States, Lima Group, Inter-American Development Bank, and European Union to either recognize or support Guaidó’s shadow administration as a U.S. achievement, highlighting Washington’s outsized influence within each of these supposedly international governing bodies. The decision to mention the E.U. and Lima Group is particularly noteworthy considering the United States is not a member of either organization.

“They are so far out of any normal parameters of decency, morality, legality, reason, that really they are dangerous,” Moncada said of the Trump administration. “They are a real threat to international peace, and they are a real threat to my people.”

Anya Parampil is a Washington-based journalist. She previously hosted a daily progressive afternoon news program called “In Question” on RT America. She has produced and reported several documentaries, including on the ground reports from the Korean peninsula and Palestine.

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The Real Mueller-Gate Scandal

Craig Murray blasts the special counsel for naming and condemning people without ever interviewing them.

By Craig Murray

CraigMurray.org.uk
Special Counsel Robert Mueller is either a fool, or deeply corrupt. I do not think he is a fool.

I did not comment instantly on the Mueller report as I was so shocked by it, I have been waiting to see if any other facts come to light in justification. Nothing has. I limit myself here to that area of which I have personal knowledge – the leak of Democratic National Committee and John Podesta emails to WikiLeaks. On the wider question of the corrupt Russian 1 percent having business dealings with the corrupt Western 1 percent, all I have to say is that if you believe that is limited in the U.S. by party political boundaries, you are a fool.

On the DNC leak, Mueller started with the prejudice that it was “the Russians” and he deliberately and systematically excluded from evidence anything that contradicted that view.

Mueller, as a matter of determined policy, omitted key steps which any honest investigator would undertake. He did not commission any forensic examination of the DNC servers. He did not interview Bill Binney, a retired technical director at the National Security Agency, the $14 billion a year U.S. surveillance organization. He did not interview Julian Assange, publisher of WikiLeaks. His failure to do any of those obvious things renders his report worthless.

There has never been, by any U.S. law enforcement or security service body, a forensic examination of the DNC servers, despite the fact that the claim those servers were hacked is the very heart of the entire investigation.
Instead, the security services simply accepted the “evidence” provided by the DNC’s own IT security consultants, Crowdstrike, a company which is politically aligned to the Clintons.

That is precisely the equivalent of the police receiving a phone call saying:

“Hello? My husband has just been murdered. He had a knife in his back with the initials of the Russian man who lives next door engraved on it in Cyrillic script. I have employed a private detective who will send you photos of the body and the knife. No, you don’t need to see either of them.”

No Honest Policeman

There is no honest policeman in the world who would agree to that proposition, and neither would Mueller were he remotely an honest man.

Two facts compound this failure.

The first is the absolutely key word of Bill Binney, an acknowledged world leader in cyber surveillance who is infinitely more qualified than Crowdstrike. Binney states that the download rates for the “hack” given by Crowdstrike are at a speed – 41 megabytes per second – that could not even nearly be attained remotely at the location: thus the information must have been downloaded to a local device, eg a memory stick. Binney has further evidence regarding formatting that supports this.

Mueller’s identification of “DC Leaks” and “Guccifer 2.0” as Russian security services is something Mueller attempts to carry off by simple assertion. Mueller shows DNC Leaks to
have been the source of other, unclassified emails sent to WikiLeaks that had been obtained under a Freedom of Information request and then Mueller simply assumes, with no proof, the same route was used again for the leaked DNC material. His identification of the Guccifer 2.0 persona with Russian agents is so flimsy as to be laughable. Nor is there any evidence of the specific transfer of the leaked DNC emails from Guccifer 2.0 to WikiLeaks. Binney asserts that had this happened, the packets would have been instantly identifiable to the NSA.

Bill Binney is not a “deplorable.” He is a former technical director of the NSA. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met him to hear his expertise on precisely this matter. Binney offered to give evidence to Mueller. Yet did Mueller call him as a witness? No. Binney’s voice is entirely unheard in the report.

Mueller’s refusal to call Binney and consider his evidence was not the action of an honest man.

Vault 7 Release

The second vital piece of evidence we have is from WikiLeaks Vault 7 release of CIA material, in which the CIA themselves outline their capacity to “false flag” hacks, leaving behind misdirecting clues including scraps of foreign script and language. This is precisely what Crowdstrike claim to have found in the “Russian hacking” operation.

So here we have Mueller omitting the key steps of independent forensic examination of the DNC servers and hearing Bill Binney’s evidence. Yet this was not for lack of time. While deliberately omitting to take any steps to
obtain evidence that might disprove the “Russian hacking” story, Mueller had boundless time and energy to waste in wild goose chases after totally non-existent links between WikiLeaks and the Trump campaign, including the fiasco of interviewing Roger Stone and Randy Credico.

It is worth remembering that none of the charges against Americans arising from the Mueller inquiry have anything to do with Russian collusion or Trump-WikiLeaks collusion, which simply do not exist. The charges all relate to entirely extraneous matters dug up, under the extraordinary U.S. system of “justice,” to try to blackmail those charged with unrelated crimes turned up by the investigation, into fabricating evidence of Russian collusion. The official term for this process of blackmail is of course “plea-bargaining.”

Mueller has indicted 12 Russians he alleges are the GRU agents responsible for the “hack.” The majority of these turn out to be real people who, ostensibly, have jobs and lives which are nothing to do with the GRU. Mueller was taken aback when, rather than simply being in absentia, a number of them had representation in court to fight the charges. Mueller had to back down and ask for an immediate adjournment as soon as the case opened, while he fought to limit disclosure. His entire energies since on this case have been absorbed in submitting motions to limit disclosure, individual by individual, with the object of ensuring that the accused Russians can be convicted without ever seeing, or being able to reply to, the evidence against them. Which is precisely the same as his attitude to contrary evidence in his report.
Mueller’s failure to examine the servers or take Binney’s evidence pales into insignificance compared to his attack on Julian Assange. Based on no conclusive evidence, Mueller accuses Assange of receiving the emails from Russia. Most crucially, he did not give Assange any opportunity to answer his accusations. For somebody with Mueller’s background in law enforcement, declaring somebody in effect guilty, without giving them any opportunity to tell their side of the story, is plain evidence of malice.

Inexplicably, for example, the Mueller report quotes a media report of Assange stating he had “physical proof” the material did not come from Russia, but Mueller simply dismisses this without having made any attempt at all to ask Assange himself.

It is also particularly cowardly as Assange was and is held incommunicado with no opportunity to defend himself. Assange has repeatedly declared the material did not come from the Russian state or from any other state. He was very willing to give evidence to Mueller, which could have been done by video-link, by interview in the Ecuadorian embassy or by written communication. But as with Binney and as with the DNC servers, the entirely corrupt Mueller was unwilling to accept any evidence which might contradict his predetermined narrative.

‘Courier’ Ignored

Mueller’s section headed “The GRU’s Transfer of Stolen Material to Wikileaks” is a ludicrous farrago of internet contacts between WikiLeaks and persons not proven to be Russian, transferring material not proven to be the DNC
leaks. It too is destroyed by Binney and so pathetic that, having pretended he had proven the case of internet transfer, Mueller then gives the game away by adding “The office cannot rule out that stolen documents were transferred by intermediaries who visited during the summer of 2016.” He names Andrew Muller-Maguhn as a possible courier. Yet again, he did not ask Muller-Maguhn to give evidence. Nor did he ask me, and I might have been able to help him on a few of these points.

To run an “investigation” with a pre-determined idea as to who are the guilty parties, and then to name and condemn those parties in a report, without hearing the testimony of those you are accusing, is a method of proceeding that puts the cowardly and corrupt Mueller beneath contempt.

Mueller gives no evidence whatsoever to back up his simple statement that Seth Rich was not the source of the DNC leak. He accuses Julian Assange of “dissembling” by referring to Seth Rich’s murder. It is an interesting fact that the U.S. security services have shown precisely the same level of interest in examining Seth Rich’s computers that they have shown in examining the DNC servers. It is also interesting that this murder features in a report of historic consequences like that of Mueller, yet has had virtually no serious resource put into finding the killer.

Mueller’s condemnation of Julian Assange for allegedly exploiting the death of Seth Rich, would be infinitely more convincing if the official answer to the question “who murdered Seth Rich?” was not “who cares?”

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights
activist. He was British ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. This article first appeared on his website.