

BuzzFeed Writer Fails Again

Chalk up another failure for a rabid media desperately trying to prove the Russia-gate story, this time a piece by a reporter with a history of failure, as Joe Lauria reports.

In their haste to prove they are right after going out on a limb many times in the Russia-gate saga, reporters have made numerous, egregious errors or have produced unsubstantiated reports that have nonetheless not deterred them from future mistakes. There are at least 50 examples. The Washington Post in Dec. 2016 erroneously reported that Russia had hacked into a Vermont power grid.

CNN fired its newly created investigative unit in June 2017 when it wrongly connected Donald Trump to a Russian bank. In Dec. 2017, CNN, CBS and MSNBC all botched the date of an email which led them to falsely report that WikiLeaks had somehow offered Donald Trump Jr. advanced copies of the DNC emails.

Guardian reporter Luke Harding, desperate for proof to back up his bestseller "Collusion," reported in Nov. 2018 that Paul Manafort, briefly Trump's campaign manager, had met three times with WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange in the Ecuador embassy in London in a story that provided zero evidence and hasn't been confirmed by anyone else.

In Nov. 2017, reporter Jason Leopold reported for BuzzFeed that Moscow had sent \$30,000 to the Russian embassy in Washington "to finance [the] election campaign of 2016," only for it to be revealed that the money was to pay for Russian citizens in the U.S. to vote in the 2016 Duma elections. Now Leopold has done it again. His report last week, with Anthony Cormier, that Trump had told his lawyer to perjure himself before Congress was refuted by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

After Brian Ross of ABC News wrongly reported in Dec. 2017 that Michael Flynn, President Trump's choice for national security advisor, had met with Russia's ambassador during the campaign

rather than after the election, Ross was forced to resign. Yet Leopold, despite his long history of getting it wrong, continues to be employed. Leopold has had more success with stories based on FOIA requests than with unnamed sources. **Consortium News** Editor-in-Chief Joe Lauria had the following encounter with Leopold in 2006, which he wrote about in The Washington Post.

My Unwitting Role in the Rove 'Scoop'

By **Joe Lauria**

The Washington Post Sunday, June 18, 2006



The May 13 story on the Web site Truthout.org was explosive: Presidential adviser Karl Rove had been indicted by Special Counsel Patrick J. Fitzgerald in connection with his role in leaking CIA officer Valerie Plame's name to the media, it blared. The report set off hysteria on the Internet, and the mainstream media scrambled to nail it down. Only . . . it wasn't true.

As we learned last week, Rove isn't being indicted, and the supposed Truthout scoop by reporter Jason Leopold was wildly off the mark. It was but the latest installment in the tale of a troubled young reporter with a history of drug addiction whose aggressive disregard for the rules ended up embroiling me in a bizarre escapade – and raised serious questions about journalistic ethics.

In his nine-year reporting career, Leopold has managed, despite his drug abuse and a run-in with the law, to work with such big-time news organizations as the Los Angeles

Times, Dow Jones Newswire and Salon. He broke some bona fide stories on the Enron scandal and the CIA leak investigation. But in every job, something always went wrong, and he got the sack. Finally, he landed at Truthout, a left-leaning Web site.

I met Leopold once, three days before his Rove story ran, to discuss his recently published memoir, "News Junkie." It seems to be an honest record of neglect and abuse by his parents, felony conviction, cocaine addiction – and deception in the practice of journalism.

Leopold says he gets the same rush from breaking a news story that he did from snorting cocaine. To get coke, he lied, cheated and stole. To get his scoops, he has done much the same. As long as it isn't illegal, he told me, he'll do whatever it takes to get a story, especially to nail a corrupt politician or businessman. "A scoop is a scoop," he trumpets in his memoir. "Other journalists all whine about ethics, but that's a load of crap."

I disagree, but I felt some sympathy for the affable, seemingly vulnerable 36-year-old. Before we parted, I told him a bit about myself – that I freelance for numerous newspapers, including the Sunday Times of London. His publicist had earlier given him my cellphone number.

Three days later, Leopold's Rove story appeared. I wrote him a congratulatory e-mail, wondering how long it would be before the establishment media caught up.

But by Monday there was no announcement. No one else published the story. The blogosphere went wild. Leopold said on the radio that he would out his unnamed sources if it

turned out that they were wrong or had misled him. I trawled the Internet looking for a clue to the truth. I found a blog called Talk Left, run by Jeralyn Merritt, a Colorado defense lawyer.

Merritt had called Mark Corallo, a former Justice Department spokesman who is now privately employed by Rove. She reported that Corallo said he had "never spoken with someone identifying himself as 'Jason Leopold.'" He did have conversations Saturday and Sunday . . . but the caller identified himself as Joel something or other from the Lunday [sic] Sunday Times. . . . At one point . . . he offered to call Joel back, and was given a cell phone number that began with 917. When he called the number back, it turned out not to be a number for Joel."

A chill went down my back. I freelance for the Sunday Times. My first name is often mistaken for Joel. My cellphone number starts with area code 917.

I called Corallo. He confirmed that my name was the one the caller had used. Moreover, the return number the caller had given him was off from mine by one digit. Corallo had never been able to reach me to find out it wasn't I who had called. He said he knew who Leopold was but had never talked to him.

I called Leopold. He gave me a profanity-filled earful, saying that he'd spoken to Corallo four times and that Corallo had called him to denounce the story after it appeared.

When he was done, I asked: "How would Corallo have gotten my phone number, one digit off?"

“Joe, I would never, ever have done something like that,” Leopold said defiantly.

Except that he has done things like that. His memoir is full of examples. He did break big stories, but he lied to get many of them. He admits lying to the lawyers for Enron executives Jeffrey Skilling and Andrew Fastow, making up stories to get them to spill more beans. “I was hoping to get both sides so paranoid that one was going to implicate the other,” he wrote.

I don't really know why Leopold may have pretended to be me to Corallo. I can only speculate that he either was trying to get a reaction and thought Corallo would be more likely to respond to a conservative-leaning mainstream paper, or he was trying to get Corallo to acknowledge that Rove had been indicted by bluffing that the Sunday Times had confirmed the story. In fact, Corallo told me that “Joel” told him that he had Fitzgerald's spokesman on the record about the indictment. He has also said he believes Leopold made up the whole story.

Leopold still stubbornly stands by the story, claiming that something happened behind the scenes to overturn the indictment. Marc Ash, Truthout's executive director, said last week that his site will “defer to the nation's leading publications” on the Rove story, but he declared his continuing faith in Leopold.

We may never know what really happened. Most mainstream news organizations have dismissed the Leopold story as egregiously wrong. But even if he had gotten it right and scooped the world on a major story, his methods would still

raise a huge question: What value does journalism have if it exposes unethical behavior unethically? Leopold seems to assume, as does much of the public, that all journalists practice deception to land a story. But that's not true. I know dozens of reporters, but Leopold is only the second one I've known (the first did it privately) to admit to doing something illegal or unethical on the job.

After reading his memoir – and watching other journalists, such as Jayson Blair at the New York Times and Jack Kelley at USA Today, crash and burn for making up stories or breaking other rules of newsgathering – I think there's something else at play here. Leopold is in too many ways a man of his times. These days it is about the reporter, not the story; the actor, not the play; the athlete, not the game. Leopold is a product of a narcissistic culture that has not stopped at journalism's door, a culture facilitated and expanded by the Internet.

In the end, whatever Jason Leopold's future, he got what he appears to be crying out for: attention.

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Watch Replay of 13th Vigil for Assange

Watch Friday's broadcast here on **Consortium News** that discussed the latest news on WikiLeaks founder Julian

Assange.

The WikiLeaks publisher continues to resist pressure to leave the Ecuador Embassy and be sent to the U.S. for prosecution, even as he has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and Donald Trump's lawyer says he should not be charged with any crime.

Julian Assange's is an historic test-case for press freedom.

Guests that appeared to discuss the latest news about Julian Assange and issues related to WikiLeaks included Bill Binney, former NSA technical director; Brian Becker, radio host of "Loud and Clear;" Ray McGovern, former CIA analyst; activist Kevin Zeese; author and activist David Swanson.

Past participants have included academics, journalists, politicians and activists, including Daniel Ellsberg, Chris Hedges, John Kiriakou, George Galloway, Craig Murray, Francis Boyle, former U.S. Senator Mike Gravel, Andrew Fowler, Caitlin Johnstone, Tim Black, Jimmy Dore, Lee Camp, Margaret Kimberley, Vivian Kubrick and more.

CN Editor-in-Chief Joe Lauria conducted the interviews and moderated the discussion. The [Unity4J](#) online vigil was broadcast live at unity4j.com, on YouTube, on Periscope.

Now a weekly event, the vigil has moved to a new time slot to accommodate participants and viewers around the world. It will air every Friday from 4pm to 7pm in the U.S. Eastern time zone; from 9 pm to midnight in the UK; from 10 pm to 1 am in continental Europe; from 11 pm to 2 am in the Middle East and Africa; from midnight to 3 am in Moscow, Istanbul and Baghdad; from

8 am to 11 a.m. on Saturday in Australia and from 10 am to 1 pm on Saturday in New Zealand.

Because we lost the stream during the program, the recording is in two parts. You can watch Part Two here live. Part One is below:

The Twitter Smearing of Corbyn and Assange

Historian and U.K. analyst Mark Curtis checks out the Twitter accounts of journalists whose names have been associated with the Integrity Initiative, a British “counter disinformation” program.

By Mark Curtis

British Foreign Policy Declassified



The U.K.-financed Integrity Initiative, managed by the Institute for Statecraft, is ostensibly a “counter disinformation” program to challenge Russian information operations. However, it has been revealed that the Integrity Initiative Twitter handle and some individuals associated with this program have also been tweeting messages attacking Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. This takes on special meaning in light of the numerous U.K. military and intelligence personnel associated

with the program, documented in an important [briefing by academics](#) in the Working Group on Syria Propaganda and Media.

Several journalists have been named as associated with the Integrity Initiative, either in program “clusters” or having been invited to an Integrity Initiative event, in the documents that have been posted online. (For more on this see [section 7.1](#) of this briefing note, the [“UK” section](#) of the “Xcountry” document and journalists invited to speak at an Integrity Initiative event in London in November 2018.)

Analysis of 11 of these individuals has been undertaken to assess to what extent their tweets have linked Corbyn unfairly (for a definition see below) to Russia. The results show two things:

- first, the smearing of Corbyn about Russia is more extensive than has been revealed so far;
- second, many of the same individuals have also been attacking a second target – Julian Assange, trying to also falsely link him to the Kremlin.

Many of these 11 individuals are associated with *The Times* and *The Guardian* in the U.K. and the Atlantic Council in the U.S. The research does not show, however, that these tweets are associated with the Integrity Initiative (see further below).

Linking Corbyn to Russia

The Integrity Initiative said in a tweet, “we are not ‘anti-Russian’ and do not ‘target’ Mr Corbyn.” However, that tweet was preceded by the following tweets:

- “Skripal poisoning: It’s time for the Corbyn left to confront its Putin problem.”
- “An alleged British Corbyn supporter wants to vote for Putin.”
- “‘Mr Corbyn was a ‘useful idiot’, in the phrase apocryphally attributed to Lenin. His visceral anti-Westernism helped the Kremlin cause, as surely as if he had been secretly peddling Westminster tittle-tattle for money.’” This tweet was a quote from an article by Edward Lucas in *The Times*, “[Corbyn’s sickening support of Soviet Empire.](#)”

Here are examples of tweets from the 11 individuals.

Times columnist Edward Lucas has published an article on the Integrity Initiative website and been quoted as saying that his work with the Initiative has not been paid or involved anything improper. (See [section 7.1.3](#) of this briefing note.) On Twitter, he has accused Corbyn of having blind spots on Putin’s plutocracy and Kremlin imperialism.”

In which I blast [@jeremycorbyn](#) for his blind spot on Putin's plutocracy
<http://t.co/UOWeAa0iLL>

– Edward Lucas (@edwardlucas) [August 26, 2015](#)

Lucas has also tweeted:

- “Why does Corbyn not see that Russia is imperialist and Ukrainians are victims?” and “It’s not just Corbyn. Here’s Swedish leftie [@AsaLinderborg](#) explaining why Nato not Putin is the real threat to peace” – linking to the latter’s article in a Swedish newspaper.

- “German hard-leftist GDR-loving wall-defending @SWagenknecht congratulates Corbyn on win” [in the Labour leadership contest]
- “More excellent stuff on Corbyn’s love of plutocrats so long as they are Russian.”

In another tweet, he praised as brilliant [an article](#) about Corbyn “playing into Russia’s hands on the Scribal poisoning.”

Deborah Haynes, until recently [defence](#) editor of *The Times* and now foreign affairs editor at *Sky News*, has tweeted:

. [@jeremycorbyn](#) talking tough, v quick to demand end to UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia after [#Khashoggi](#) death in stark contrast to his feeble response towards Russia over [#Skripal](#) attack

– Deborah Haynes (@haynesdeborah) [October 22, 2018](#)

Haynes has also tweeted about Corbyn “displaying staggering naivety and a complete failure to understand this state-sponsored attack by Russia on the UK. Appalling. Is he for real?”

Haynes has also tweeted: “Incredible that [@jeremycorbyn](#) is attempting to score party-political points in wake of hugely significant statement by [@theresa_may](#) on Skripal attack by Russia.”

Washington Post columnist Anne Applebaum has tweeted that Corbyn is a “useful idiot” of Russia; about a “precise echo of Kremlin propaganda from Corbyn,” and that “Surprise! Russia sides with Corbyn against Cameron.”

Below is another.

Jeremy Corbyn isn't anti-war. He's just anti-West <https://t.co/2Z50p3qBds>

– Anne Applebaum (@anneapplebaum) [November 19, 2015](#)

David Clark, a former adviser to the late Labour PM, Robin Cook, has tweeted that Corbyn is an “apologist” for Putin. Below is another of Clark's tweets.

It is an article of ideological faith for Corbyn and people like him that everything wrong with the world is the fault of the capitalist West. Therefore, nothing can be the fault of anyone else.

– David Clark (@David_K_Clark) [September 6, 2018](#)

Anders Aslund of the Atlantic Council in the U.S. has tweeted, referring to Corbyn: “Once a communist always so.”

His colleague at the Atlantic Council, Ben Nimmo, sent the following three tweets on Corbyn's candidacy for the Labour leadership in August 2015:

- “Why Russia loves Corbyn, in one headline”
- “Russia's certainly pushing Corbyn's candidacy”
- “From Russia with coverage – how RT is campaigning for Jeremy Corbyn.” Here's one more, promoting a [piece he wrote for the Daily Beast](#):

How #Putin's @RT_com is backing Jeremy Corbyn – my piece in @thedailybeast <http://t.co/PqNcPYMRQu> pic.twitter.com/irIa8kIrcZ

– Ben Nimmo (@benimmo) [August 17, 2015](#)

Natalie Nougayrede, Guardian columnist and on its editorial board, has tweeted this:

"the time for equivocation, given the sinister nature of Mr Putin's regime, is over"

Guardian editorial on shameful [#Corbyn](#) & Co reaction to [#Russia](#) behaviour & chemical weapon use <https://t.co/ALmpGCoKh5>

– Natalie Nougayrède (@nnougayrede) [March 15, 2018](#)

Nougayrede also retweeted an article by [Nick Cohen](#), headlined "[Jeremy Corbyn isn't anti-war. He's just anti-West.](#)"

Three *Guardian/Observer*-linked journalists were invited to speak at an Integrity Initiative event in London in November 2018: Carole Cadwalladr, Nick Cohen and James Ball.

Cadwalladr has tweeted that "Labour has a Russia problem," that Corbyn adviser Seumas Milne is "pro-Putin" and that "Milne's support for Putin has made him a Russian propaganda tool." One of Cadwalladr's tweets noted:

- "Here's Corbyn's principal advisor Seamus Milne on RT explaining why it was the fault of NATO aggression that Russia invaded Ukraine.

Another by Cadwalladr:

"What he has done, wittingly or unwittingly, is to work with the Kremlin's agenda." Extraordinary quote from MP & expert on Russian active measures [@IoWBobSeely](#) in this incredible in-depth profile on Seamus Milne – [@jeremycorbyn](#)'s chief advisor <https://t.co/NNc9verN57>

– Carole Cadwalladr (@carolecadwalla) [November 25, 2018](#)

Nick Cohen has tweeted that “Labour is led by Putin fans” and: “What is worse? Farage and Corbyn and twitter trolls divert attention from Russia’s political assassinations because they believe Putin is innocent or because they are morally corrupt?” He has also retweeted an Observer article of his claiming that Labour leaders have promoted “endorsements of Russian imperialism” and that Corbyn’s policy has given Russia “a free pass” in Syria.

Here is another:

Here's the political problem. Tories don't want to investigate Russia/Brexit because it undermines the referendum result. Labour doesn't because it is led by Putin fans <https://t.co/MFZwBmmkqA>

– Nick Cohen (@NickCohen4) [January 11, 2018](#)

James Ball has tweeted a link to his own article in the New Statesman saying that Corbyn is “playing into Russia’s hands on the Skripal poisoning” and accusing Corbyn to the effect that he “took money from Russia Today.”

Linking Assange to the Kremlin

Many of the same individuals have also been tweeting false statements about Julian Assange and Russia.

The Integrity Initiative twitter site itself retweeted a Guardian smear article about a lawyer, Adam Waldman, visiting the Wikileaks founder.

US lobbyist for Russian oligarch visited Julian Assange nine times last year <https://t.co/pcvsATION0>

– Integrity Initiative (@InitIntegrity) [June 20, 2018](#)

It also tweeted: "If you still believe Assange is some kind of hero, you deserve pity at best."

Anders Aslund has tweeted that Assange "represents certain Russian agencies" that "Wikileaks, Assange & Snowden are nothing but highly successful Russian special operations" and "Kremlin agents" and that "Assange is collaborating w[ith] Russia Today as program host. Would be strange if not full-fledged agent."

Cadwalladr has also sought to overtly link Assange to the Kremlin. She has tweeted that "Assange & Milne... are both Russian propaganda tools," that Assange is a "special friend" of Russian intelligence and that Wikileaks has "colluded with...the Kremlin."

In addition, Cadwalladr has tweeted several times that "Assange was in direct communication with Russian intelligence in 2016" and that "Wikileaks sought assistance from Russian intelligence officers to disrupt the US presidential election." Cadwalladr is here claiming that Wikileaks knowingly colluded with Russian intelligence by releasing the files on the Democratic Party in 2016: in fact, this is not known or proven at all, while numerous media outlets also published or had contacts with Guccifer 2.0 and DCLeaks in 2016 – though do not figure as targets in her attacks.

Nick Cohen has also made many smears against Julian Assange, variously calling him a "Russian stooge," a "Putin agent," "pro-Putin," a "Russian toady", that he "works for Russia propaganda machine" while "Wikileaks will think whatever Putin tells it to think."

David Leask, chief reporter of The Herald (Scotland), has described Assange as a “Kremlin proxy” while Anne Applebaum tweeted: “Wikileaks is a front for Russian intelligence,” linking to an article of the same headline. Edward Lucas retweeted his Times article suggesting that Assange and Wikileaks are part of the “Kremlin-loving camp” while David Clark has tweeted that “Assange is an active accomplice” of autocrats such as Putin.

Need for further research

There are some key points to be made about this analysis.

First, some of the tweets made by these individuals on Corbyn and Assange, not all of which are included here, are fair comment, even if, in my view, they are usually wrong. But others go beyond this, inferring that Corbyn (and Assange) are in effect agents of Russia and/or are willingly and knowingly amplifying Russia’s agenda, as little more than “tools” – with no evidence provided (understandably, since there is none). There is also sometimes the association of Corbyn with former communists. These areas are held to constitute smearing.

Second, it is not known and certainly not proven that these tweets are associated with the Integrity Initiative. Little is known of the internal workings of the Initiative. It is possible that some of the individuals may have been chosen by the Integrity Initiative to be associated with it precisely because of their pre-existing criticism of Russia or their willingness to accuse figures such as Corbyn with association with Russia. While I am not suggesting that these individuals’ tweets are necessarily linked to their

role in the Integrity Initiative, there does appear to be something of a pattern among these people of smearing both Corbyn and Assange.

Third, and equally important, this is not a full analysis of these individuals' outputs: it is limited to their tweets. Neither is it a full analysis of the false linking to Russia by individuals associated with the Integrity Initiative: several other journalists and figures named in the documents are not analysed here. Again, further research is needed.

Mark Curtis is an historian and analyst of U.K. foreign policy and international development and the author of six books, the latest being an updated edition of "Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam."

Watch the 12th Vigil for Julian Assange Here

Consortium News broadcast the 12th Unity4J online vigil for WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange on Friday, hosted by **Consortium News** Editor Joe Lauria.

Julian Assange is a wanted man because he published classified information that revealed the crimes and corruption of government officials around the world, not just in the United States.

But it is the U.S., the supposed beacon of freedom and democracy (and press freedom) around the world that has indicted him and wants him extradited to the United States for the crime of publishing.

That's why Julian Assange has been a refugee in the Ecuadorian

embassy in London for the past six years. He knows that the second he steps back onto British territory he will be arrested and sent to the U.S. where he is unlikely to receive a fair trial and would likely spend the rest of his life in prison.

Discussing the following headlines from the past week were former U.S. Senator Mike Gravel from Monterrey, California; journalist Cassandra Fairbanks in Washington; Greg Barnes, a member of Assange's legal team speaking from Cape Town, South Africa and former Australian Broadcasting Corporation correspondent Andrew Fowler from Sydney:

1. Nobel Peace Laureate Mairead Maguire on Monday [nominated](#) JA for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize.
2. Former Australian ambassador Tony Kevin has reiterated his support for Julian Assange. He tweeted on Dec. 31: "I have always called for [#Assange's](#) release and his safely escorted return home to Australia in RAAF aircraft. This innocent man is being treated so badly by Ecuador, UK and US govts."We hope to have Amb. Kevin join us later in the program.
3. Cassandra Fairbanks, a frequent guest on these vigils, visited Julian Assange last Monday and reports that his Living Conditions are More Akin to a Dissident in Stasi-Era Germany Than an Award-Winning Publisher With Asylum
4. On Wednesday, [WikiLeaks issued official denial](#) of Trump election contacts, saying that the organization never provided election information to Donald Trump campaign adviser Roger Stone or to Jerome Corsi, a conservative author and conspiracy advocate.
5. Yanis Varoufakis' DiEM25 on Jan 4 launched a petition calling on governments of Ecuador and the UK to prevent the extradition of Julian Assange to the US. It has more than 8,000 signatures.
6. Greg Barnes a member of the JA's Australian legal team spoke to the Unity4J vigil yesterday in a pre-recorded interview that was

aired at the start of the program.

You can watch the recorded broadcast here. There is a musical break from 00:38 minute mark to 1:12, when the discussion resumes with an interview of Australian journalist Andrew Fowler about the state of the media and its impact on Assange.

A Look Back at Clapper's Jan. 2017 'Assessment' on Russia-gate

On the 2nd anniversary of the "assessment" blaming Russia for interfering in the 2016 election there is still no evidence other than showing the media "colluded" with the spooks, says Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



The banner headline atop page one of *The New York Times* print edition two years ago today, on January 7, 2017, set the tone for two years of Dick Cheney-like chicanery: "Putin Led Scheme to Aid Trump, Report Says."

Under a media drumbeat of anti-Russian hysteria, credulous Americans were led to believe that Donald Trump owed his election victory to the president of Russia, whose "influence campaign" according to the *Times* quoting the intelligence report, helped "President-elect Trump's election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton."

Hard evidence supporting the media and political rhetoric has been as elusive as proof of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in 2002-2003. This time, though, an alarming increase in the possibility of war with nuclear-armed Russia has ensued – whether by design, hubris, or rank stupidity. The possible consequences for the world are even more dire than 16 years of war and destruction in the Middle East.

If It Walks Like a Canard...

The CIA-friendly *New York Times* two years ago led the media quacking in a campaign that wobbled like a duck, *canard* in French.

A glance at the title of the Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA) (which was not endorsed by the whole community) – “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections” – would suffice to show that the widely respected and independently-minded State Department intelligence bureau should have been included. State intelligence had demurred on several points made in the Oct. 2002 Estimate on Iraq, and even insisted on including a footnote of dissent. James Clapper, then director of national intelligence who put together the ICA, knew that all too well. So he evidently thought it would be better not to involve troublesome dissenters, or even inform them what was afoot.

Similarly, the Defense Intelligence Agency should have been included, particularly since it has considerable expertise on the G.R.U., the Russian military intelligence agency, which has been blamed for Russian hacking of the DNC emails. But DIA, too, has an independent streak and, in fact, is

capable of reaching judgments Clapper would reject as anathema. Just one year before Clapper decided to do the rump “Intelligence Community Assessment,” DIA had formally blessed the following heterodox idea in its “December 2015 National Security Strategy”:

“The Kremlin is convinced the United States is laying the groundwork for regime change in Russia, a conviction further reinforced by the events in Ukraine. Moscow views the United States as the critical driver behind the crisis in Ukraine and believes that the overthrow of former Ukrainian President Yanukovich is the latest move in a long-established pattern of U.S.-orchestrated regime change efforts.”

Any further questions as to why the Defense Intelligence Agency was kept away from the ICA drafting table?

Handpicked Analysts

With help from the *Times* and other mainstream media, Clapper, mostly by his silence, was able to foster the charade that the ICA was actually a bonafide product of the entire intelligence community for as long as he could get away with it. After four months it came time to fess up that the ICA had not been prepared, as Secretary Clinton and the media kept claiming, by “all 17 intelligence agencies.”

In fact, Clapper went one better, proudly asserting – with striking naiveté – that the ICA writers were “handpicked analysts” from only the FBI, CIA, and NSA. He may have thought that this would enhance the ICA’s credibility. It is a no-brainer, however, that when you want handpicked

answers, you better handpick the analysts. And so he did.

Why is no one interested in the identities of the handpicked analysts and the hand-pickers? After all, we have the names of the chief analysts/managers responsible for the fraudulent NIE of October 2002 that greased the skids for the war on Iraq. Listed in the NIE itself are the principal analyst Robert D. Walpole and his chief assistants Paul Pillar, Lawrence K. Gershwin and Maj. Gen. John R. Landry.

The Overlooked Disclaimer

Buried in an inside page of the *Times* on Jan. 7, 2017 was a cautionary paragraph in an [analysis](#) by reporter Scott Shane. It seems he had read the ICA all the way through, and had taken due note of the derriere-protecting caveats included in the strangely cobbled together report. Shane had to wade through nine pages of drivel about “Russia’s Propaganda Efforts” to reach Annex B with its curious disclaimer:

“Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents. ... High confidence in a judgment does not imply that the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong.”

Small wonder, then, that Shane noted: “What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies’ claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. That is a significant omission...”

Since then, Shane has evidently realized what side his bread

is buttered on and has joined the ranks of Russia-gate aficionados. Decades ago, he did some good reporting on such issues, so it was sad to see him decide to blend in with the likes of David Sanger and promote the NYT official Russia-gate narrative. An embarrassing feature, “The Plot to Subvert an Election: Unraveling the Russia Story So Far,” that Shane wrote with NYT colleague Mark Mazzetti in September, is full of gaping holes, picked apart in two pieces by **Consortium News**.

Shades of WMD

Sanger is one of the intelligence community’s favorite go-to journalists. He was second only to the disgraced Judith Miller in promoting the canard of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq before the U.S. invasion in March 2003. For example, in a July 29, 2002 article, “U.S. Exploring Baghdad Strike As Iraq Option,” co-written by Sanger and Thom Shanker, the existence of WMD in Iraq was stated as flat fact no fewer than seven times.

The Sanger/Shanker article appeared just a week after then-CIA Director George Tenet confided to his British counterpart that President George W. Bush had decided “to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.” At that critical juncture, Clapper was in charge of the analysis of satellite imagery and hid the fact that the number of confirmed WMD sites in Iraq was zero.

Despite that fact and that his “assessment” has never been proven, Clapper continues to receive praise.

During a “briefing” I attended at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington several weeks ago, Clapper displayed master circular reasoning, saying in effect, that the assessment had to be correct because that’s what he and other intelligence directors told President Barack Obama and President-elect Donald Trump.

I got a chance to question him at the event. His disingenuous answers brought a painful flashback to one of the most shameful episodes in the annals of U.S. intelligence analysis.

Ray McGovern: My name is Ray McGovern. Thanks for this book; it’s very interesting [Ray holds up his copy of Clapper’s memoir]. I’m part of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity. I’d like to refer to the Russia problem, but first there’s an analogy that I see here. You were in charge of imagery analysis before Iraq.

James Clapper: Yes.

RM: You confess [in the book] to having been shocked that no weapons of mass destruction were found. And then, to your credit, you admit, as you say here [quotes from the book], “the blame is due to intelligence officers, including me, who were so eager to help [the administration make war on Iraq] that we found what wasn’t really there.”

Now fast forward to two years ago. Your superiors were hell bent on finding ways to blame Trump’s victory on the Russians. Do you think that your efforts were guilty of the same sin here? Do you think that you found a lot of things that weren’t really there? Because that’s what our conclusion is, especially from the technical end. There was

no hacking of the DNC; it was leaked, and you know that because you talked to NSA.

JC: Well, I have talked with NSA a lot, and I also know what we briefed to then-President Elect Trump on the 6th of January. And in my mind, uh, I spent a lot of time in the SIGINT [signals intelligence] business, the forensic evidence was overwhelming about what the Russians had done. There's absolutely no doubt in my mind whatsoever. The Intelligence Community Assessment that we rendered that day, that was asked, tasked to us by President Obama – and uh – in early December, made no call whatsoever on whether, to what extent the Russians influenced the outcome of the election. Uh, the administration, uh, the team then, the President-Elect's team, wanted to say that – that we said that the Russian interference had no impact whatsoever on the election. And I attempted, we all did, to try to correct that misapprehension as they were writing a press release before we left the room.

However, as a private citizen, understanding the magnitude of what the Russians did and the number of citizens in our country they reached and the different mechanisms that, by which they reached them, to me it stretches credulity to think they didn't have a profound impact on election on the outcome of the election.

RM: That's what the *New York Times* says. But let me say this: we have two former Technical Directors from NSA in our movement here, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity; we also have forensics, okay?

Now the President himself, your President, President Obama

said two days before he left town: The conclusions of the intelligence community – this is ten days after you briefed him – with respect to how WikiLeaks got the DNC emails are “inconclusive” *end quote*. Now why would he say that if you had said it was conclusive?

JC: I can't explain what he said or why. But I can tell you we're, we're pretty sure we know, or knew at the time, how WikiLeaks got those emails. I'm not going to go into the technical details about why we believe that.

RM: We are too [pretty sure we know]; and it was a leak onto a thumb drive – gotten to Julian Assange – really simple. If you knew it, and the NSA has that information, you have a duty, you have a duty to confess to that, as well as to [Iraq].

JC: Confess to what?

RM: Confess to the fact that you've been distorting the evidence.

JC: I don't confess to that.

RM: The Intelligence Community Assessment was without evidence.

JC: I do not confess to that. I simply do not agree with your conclusions.

William J. Burns (Carnegie President): Hey, Ray, I appreciate your question. I didn't want this to look like Jim Acosta in the White House grabbing microphones away. Thank you for the questioning though. Yes ma'am [Burns recognizes the next questioner].

The above exchange can be seen starting at 28:45 in this [video](#).

Not Worth His Salt

Having supervised intelligence analysis, including chairing National Intelligence Estimates, for three-quarters of my 27-year career at CIA, my antennae are fine-tuned for canards. And so, at Carnegie, when Clapper focused on the rump analysis masquerading as an “Intelligence Community Assessment,” the scent of the duck came back strongly.

Intelligence analysts worth their salt give very close scrutiny to sources, their possible agendas, and their records for truthfulness. Clapper flunks on his own record, including his performance before the Iraq war – not to mention his giving sworn testimony to Congress that he had to admit was “clearly erroneous,” when documents released by Edward Snowden proved him a perjurer. At Carnegie, the questioner who followed me brought that up and asked, “How on earth did you keep your job, Sir?”

The next questioner, a former manager of State Department intelligence, posed another salient question: Why, he asked, was State Department intelligence excluded from the “Intelligence Community Assessment”?

Among the dubious reasons Clapper gave was the claim, “We only had a month, and so it wasn’t treated as a full-up National Intelligence Estimate where all 16 members of the intelligence community would pass judgment on it.” Clapper then tried to spread the blame around (“That was a deliberate decision that we made and that I agreed with”), but as director of national intelligence the decision was

his.

Given the questioner's experience in the State Department's intelligence, he was painfully aware of how quickly a "full-up NIE" can be prepared. He knew all too well that the October 2002 NIE, "Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction," was ginned up in less than a month, when Cheney and Bush wanted to get Congress to vote for war on Iraq. (As head of imagery analysis, Clapper signed off on that meretricious estimate, even though he knew no WMD sites had been confirmed in Iraq.)

It's in the Russians' DNA

The criteria Clapper used to handpick his own assistants are not hard to divine. An Air Force general in the mold of Curtis LeMay, Clapper knows all about "the Russians." And he does not like them, not one bit. During an [interview](#) with NBC on May 28, 2017, Clapper referred to "the historical practices of the Russians, who typically, are almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique." And just before I questioned him at Carnegie, he muttered, "It's in their DNA."

Even those who may accept Clapper's bizarre views about Russian genetics still lack credible proof that (as the ICA concludes "with high confidence") Russia's main military intelligence unit, the G.R.U., created a "persona" called Guccifer 2.0 to release the emails of the Democratic National Committee. When those disclosures received what was seen as insufficient attention, the G.R.U. "relayed material it acquired from the D.N.C. and senior Democratic officials

to WikiLeaks,” the assessment said.

At Carnegie, Clapper cited “forensics.” But forensics from where? To his embarrassment, then-FBI Director James Comey, for reasons best known to him, chose not to do forensics on the “Russian hack” of the DNC computers, preferring to rely on a computer outfit of tawdry reputation hired by the DNC. Moreover, there is zero indication that the drafters of the ICA had any reliable forensics to work with.

In contrast, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, working with independent forensic investigators, examined metadata from a July 5, 2016 DNC intrusion that was alleged to be a “hack.” However, the metadata showed a transfer speed far exceeding the capacity of the Internet at the time. Actually, all the speed turned out to be precisely what a thumb drive could accommodate, indicating that what was involved was a copy onto an external storage device and not a hack – by Russia or anyone else.

WikiLeaks had obtained the DNC emails earlier. On June 12, 2016 Julian Assange announced he had “emails relating to Hillary Clinton.” NSA appears to lack any evidence that those emails – the embarrassing ones showing that the DNC cards were stacked against Bernie Sanders – were hacked.

Since NSA’s dragnet coverage scoops up everything on the Internet, NSA or its partners can, and do trace all hacks. In the absence of evidence that the DNC was hacked, all available factual evidence indicates that earlier in the spring of 2016, an external storage device like a thumb drive was used in copying the DNC emails given to WikiLeaks.

Additional investigation has proved Guccifer 2.0 to be an out-and-out fabrication – and a faulty basis for indictments.

A Gaping Gap

Clapper and the directors of the CIA, FBI, and NSA briefed President Obama on the ICA on Jan. 5, 2017, the day before they briefed President-elect Trump. At Carnegie, I asked Clapper to explain why President Obama still had serious doubts. On Jan. 18, 2017, at his final press conference, Obama saw fit to use lawyerly language to cover his own derriere, saying: "The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive as to whether WikiLeaks was witting or not in being the conduit through which we heard about the DNC e-mails that were leaked."

So we end up with "inconclusive conclusions" on that admittedly crucial point. In other words, U.S. intelligence does not know how the DNC emails got to WikiLeaks. In the absence of any evidence from NSA (or from its foreign partners) of an Internet hack of the DNC emails the claim that "the Russians gave the DNC emails to WikiLeaks" rests on thin gruel. After all, these agencies collect everything that goes over the Internet.

Clapper answered: "I cannot explain what he [Obama] said or why. But I can tell you we're, we're pretty sure we know, or knew at the time, how WikiLeaks got those emails."

Really?

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27-year CIA career he supervised intelligence analysis as Chief of Soviet Foreign Policy Branch, as editor/briefer of the *President's Daily Brief*, as a member of the Production Review Staff, and as chair of

National Intelligence Estimates. In retirement he co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

(Clarification: After a reader's comment, this article was amended to show that the *Times* was quoting from the ICA and that the Shane article, which the author said was buried inside, was not the same as the paper's front page story.)

Watch the 11th Online Vigil for Julian Assange

Consortium News broadcast the 11th Unity4J vigil for WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange on Friday night. You can watch it here.

Ecuador tries to find a legal way out of its commitment to Assange's asylum in its London embassy, while Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani says Assange should not be charged.

Watch the three-hour broadcast here:

Giuliani Says Assange Should Not Be Prosecuted

Donald Trump's lawyer said on Monday that WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange should not be prosecuted and he compared WikiLeaks publications to the Pentagon Papers.

By Joe Lauria

Special to Consortium News

Rudy Giuliani, a lawyer for President Donald Trump, said Monday that WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange had not done “anything wrong” and should not go to jail for disseminating stolen information just as major media does.

“Let’s take the Pentagon Papers,” Giuliani told Fox News. “The Pentagon Papers were stolen property, weren’t they? It was in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Nobody went to jail at *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.”

Giuliani said there were “revelations during the Bush administration” such as Abu Ghraib. “All of that is stolen property taken from the government, it’s against the law. But once it gets to a media publication, they can publish it,” Giuliani said, “for the purpose of informing people.”

“You can’t put Assange in a different position,” he said. “He was a guy who communicated.”

Giuliani said, “We may not like what [Assange] communicates, but he was a media facility. He was putting that information out,” he said. “Every newspaper and station grabbed it, and published it.”

The U.S. government has admitted that it has indicted Assange for publishing classified information, but it is battling in court to keep the details of the indictment secret. As a lawyer and close advisor to Trump, Giuliani could have influence on the president’s and the Justice Department’s thinking on Assange.

Giuliani also said there was no coordination between the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks. “I was with Donald Trump day in and day out during the last four months of the campaign,”

he said. "He was as surprised as I was about the WikiLeaks disclosures. Sometimes surprised to the extent of 'Oh my god, did they really say that?' We were wondering if it was true. They [the Clinton campaign] never denied it."

Giuliani said: "The thing that really got Hillary is not so much that it was revealed, but they were true. They actually had people as bad as that and she really was cheating on the debates. She really was getting from Donna Brazile the questions before hand. She really did completely screw Bernie Sanders."

"Every bit of that was true," he went on. "Just like the Pentagon Papers put a different view on Vietnam, this put a different view on Hillary Clinton."

Giuliani said, "It was not right to hack. People who did it should go to jail, but no press person or person disseminating that for the purpose of informing did anything wrong."

Assange has been holed up as a refugee in the Ecuador embassy in London for the past six years fearing that if he were to leave British authorities would arrest him and extradite him to the U.S. for prosecution.

You can watch the entire Fox News interview with Giuliani here:

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

Watch Replay of 10th Online Vigil for Julian Assange

Consortium News on Friday night broadcast live the 10th online vigil for WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange. Among the guests was Francis Boyle, a University of Illinois international law professor, who spoke about his experiences with the U.S.-British extradition treaty.

Other guests were radio host Scott Horton, activists Cathy Vogan and Vivian Kubrick, journalist Nozomi Hayase, priest and boxer Father Dave, radio journalist Ann Garrison, CIA analyst Ray McGovern and journalist and historian Gareth Porter. If you missed the live broadcast you can watch the entire replay here, which ends with a video of a talk given by Julian Assange:

VIDEO: Pilger Says Assange Denies Meeting Manafort

The Guardian has claimed Paul Manafort visited Julian Assange at the Ecuador embassy. John Pilger visited Assange and tells CN's Joe Lauria Assange strongly denied any such meeting.

Pilger: 'Julian is a touchstone for opposition'

By Joe Lauria

Special to Consortium News

WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange has vehemently denied that he ever met Donald Trump's former campaign manager, according to journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, who met with Assange at Ecuador's embassy in London last week.

Pilger said Assange told him the story published by *The Guardian* on Nov. 27 was a "total fabrication." Pilger told **Consortium News** in an interview for the Unity4J vigil on Friday that "I personally can confirm that did not happen. He said it was a fabrication. It was not possible. The way internal security works at that embassy, it was not possible."

Pilger called *The Guardian* story "an indication of a kind of degradation of the media today and especially of the 'respectable' media. We discussed that a great deal."

Pilger said Assange had been the target of attacks "over the years" that have come "thick and fast." He said: "And for one man to cope with them is an extraordinary feat. Only occasionally does he express anger—he does it as anyone of us would feel—say on an attack like *The Guardian's* utterly false story."

First Visit Since March

Pilger had not visited Assange since before March, when the

Ecuadorian government imposed a ban on his internet and phone connection, and limited visitors to his lawyers and family members.

Pilger's impression on seeing him again is that Assange has lost no sharpness of mind after more than six years confined to a small space in the embassy, and now nine months cut off from the outside world.

"He's in very good spirits," Pilger said. "The extraordinary resilience of this man is something to behold. In his own personality, intellectually he is Julian."

"I can't say what he's feeling. His health is probably holding steady but he urgently needs comprehensive diagnostic work done," said Pilger.

"But people should know that Julian's spirits, his whole sense of 'to hell with them,' and his own resolve to stand up to those who would want to do a great injustice to him is undiminished," he said. "He's not leaving, they will have to throw him out. He's not going anywhere."

The United States government has admitted that it has indicted Assange for publishing classified documents that revealed apparent U.S. war crimes and corruption. Assange fears that if he leaves the embassy British authorities would arrest him on bail skipping charges and then extradite him to the U.S. for prosecution.

Touchstone of Opposition

Pilger said *The Guardian* story was the best example he could think of that expresses today's Cold War. "I've never known it to be as explicit as it is now. And that fabricated

Guardian story ... is an example of that.”

He said: “In the first Cold War there was an opposition in those days. There isn’t a popular opposition now. The so-called liberal opposition is so confused, so disorientated, and so, almost wretched, in its uncertainty of its true allegiances, in its collusion, that there isn’t a major anti-war movement.”

“In many ways, Julian is a touchstone for opposition to so much of what is happening in our world,” said Pilger. “Of all the cases that illustrate resistance to that, there is none like that of Julian Assange.

“And he needs public, popular support. He needs people to go into the street outside the embassy. To go in the streets all over the world, as they have done in the past,” Pilger said.

You can watch the entire, original video of the 20 minute interview with John Pilger here:

Watch the 9th Vigil for Julian Assange with John Pilger, John Kiriakou and Ray McGovern

Consortium News broadcast the 9th Online Vigil for Julian Assange Friday night. Among the special guests were journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, who visited Assange at the Ecuador embassy in London. Watch the replay here.

The Unity4J vigil in support of WikiLeaks publisher Julian

Assange began with CN Editor Joe Lauria interviewing John Pilger, who's just been to see Assange. Other guests were former CIA agent and whistleblower John Kiriakou, and former CIA analyst Ray McGovern.
