

# How Netanyahu Pulls Trump's Strings

**Special Report:** It turns out that Hillary Clinton was partly correct: President Trump is a “puppet,” but his puppet master isn't Russian President Putin but Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In the final presidential debate of 2016, Hillary Clinton famously called Donald Trump the “puppet” of Russian President Vladimir Putin. But what's increasingly clear is that Trump has a more typical puppet master for a U.S. politician – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Since Sept. 18, when the two men met in New York around the United Nations General Assembly, Netanyahu has been pulling Trump's strings on almost every foreign policy issue. Arguably, the puppet/puppeteer relationship began much earlier, but I've been told that Trump bridled early on at Netanyahu's control and even showed a few signs of rebellion.

For instance, Trump initially resisted Netanyahu's demand for a deeper U.S. commitment in Syria by ordering the shutdown of the CIA operation supporting anti-government rebels, along with the Trump administration's statement that U.S. policy no longer sought “regime change” in Damascus.

Immediately after that announcement, Netanyahu had some success in getting Trump to reverse direction and fire 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian air base on April 6. The attack followed what one intelligence source told me was a staged chemical weapons incident by Al Qaeda operatives in the rebel-controlled town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province, possibly using sarin delivered via drone from a Saudi/Israeli special operations base in Jordan. Yet, although apparently duped by the subterfuge into the missile strike, Trump still balked at a complete reversal of his Syrian policy.

Then, in May, Trump picked Saudi Arabia and Israel as his first overseas trip as president – essentially following the advice of his son-in-law Jared Kushner – but I'm told he came away feeling somewhat humiliated by the over-the-top treatment that involved him getting pulled into a ceremonial sword dance in Saudi Arabia and facing condescension from Netanyahu.

So, over the summer, Trump listened to advice about a possible major overhaul of U.S. foreign policy that would have checked Israeli/Saudi regional ambitions, opened diplomatic doors to Iran, and addressed the Korean crisis by brokering negotiations between the North and the South over some form of loose

confederation.

There was even the possibility of a Nixon-goes-to-China moment with tough-guy Trump meeting with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and the two countries restoring diplomatic ties, a process that could have given U.S. companies a better chance to compete in the Iranian market.

Those proposed moves had the advantage of reducing international tensions, saving the U.S. government money on future military adventures, and freeing U.S. corporations from the tangle of economic sanctions – exactly the “America First” strategy that Trump had promised his working-class base.

However, instead Netanyahu succeeded in pulling Trump’s strings during their conversations on Sept. 18 in New York, although exactly how is still a mystery to some people close to these developments. One source said the Kushner family real-estate company has exposure to substantial Israeli financing that could be yanked, although Jared Kushner’s financial disclosure form only lists a \$5 million unsecured line of credit, held jointly with his father, from the Israel Discount Bank.

Trump also has major pro-Netanyahu donors to his political war chest and his legal defense fund who are strong advocates for war with Iran, including casino tycoon Sheldon Adelson, who has plowed \$35 million into the pro-Trump Super PAC Future 45 and has publicly called for dropping a nuclear bomb on Iran as a negotiating tactic. So, Netanyahu had a number of potential strings to pull.

### **Going on Rants**

Whatever the precise reasons, on Sept. 19, Trump turned his maiden speech to the U.N. General Assembly into a war-like rant, personally insulting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as “Rocket Man,” threatening to “totally destroy” his nation of 25 million people, and parroting Netanyahu’s calls for another regime change project aimed at Iran.

Most diplomats in the audience sat in stunned silence as Trump threatened aggressive war from the podium of an organization created to prevent the scourge of war. The one notable exception was Netanyahu who enthusiastically applauded his success in jerking Trump into the neocon camp.

So, rather than shift U.S. policy away from confrontation, Trump jettisoned the diplomatic strategy although it already had dispatched intermediaries to make contacts with the Iranians and North Koreans. Instead, Trump opted for the classic neocon approach favored by Netanyahu, albeit with Trump dressing up his neocon surrender in some “America First” rhetoric.

The U.N. speech left some of the U.S. intermediaries scrambling to explain to their contacts in Iran and North Korea why Trump had repudiated the messages that they had been carrying. Privately, Trump explained to one that he just liked to “zigzag” and that the intended end point hadn't change.

Some of these tensions surfaced in late September when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took the extraordinary step of announcing the behind-the-scenes contacts with North Korea during a state visit to China.

“We are probing, so stay tuned,” Tillerson said. “We ask, ‘Would you like to talk?’ We have lines of communications to Pyongyang – we’re not in a dark situation, a blackout.” Tillerson added, “We have a couple, three channels open to Pyongyang ... We do talk to them. , , , Directly. We have our own channels.”

In reaction to Tillerson's efforts to salvage the backchannel initiatives, Trump showed that his obeisance to Netanyahu and the neocons outweighed loyalty to either his Secretary of State or the intermediaries who had ventured into dicey situations on Trump's behalf.

In Twitter messages, Trump belittled the idea of a dialogue with North Korea, tweeting: “I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man.”

“Save your energy Rex,” Trump added, before slipping in another thinly veiled threat of a military strike: “we'll do what has to be done!”

While on the surface, Trump's repudiation of Tillerson might have been viewed as another “zigzag,” it is now clear that Trump's “zigzag” explanation was just another lie. Rather than zigzagging, he is instead following a straight line marked out by Netanyahu.

Meanwhile, in Syria, Netanyahu seems to have won more concessions from Trump. The U.S. military appears to be helping the remnants of Islamist forces still fighting the government, according to Russian officials. Their accusation is that the U.S. is secretly aiding the Islamist terror groups with weapons, tactical advice and aerial reconnaissance.

In other words, Trump appears to be continuing U.S. military intervention in Syria – just as Netanyahu desires.

### **Falling in Line**

Trump further showed that he is following Netanyahu's marching orders with the extremist speech about Iran on Friday, essentially repeating all the Israeli propaganda lines against Iran and burning whatever bridges remained toward a

meaningful diplomatic approach.

Trump's Iran speech was so ludicrous it almost defies serious analysis. It ranks with the reckless rhetoric of President George W. Bush when he pronounced an "axis of evil," with the incongruous linking of Iraq and Iran (two bitter enemies) and North Korea accompanied by Bush's bogus claims about Iraq's WMD and Iraq's alleged collaboration with Al Qaeda.

In Friday's speech, which looked like the handiwork of John Bolton, one of Bush's neocon advisers who was seen entering the White House last week, Trump repeated all the nonsense tying Iran to Al Qaeda, presumably thinking that the American people still don't understand that Al Qaeda is a fanatical Sunni terror group that targets both the West and Shiites, the dominant Muslim faith in Iran, as heretics deserving death.

The inconvenient truth is that Al Qaeda has long been connected to Saudi Arabia, which has supported these fanatics since the 1980s when Saudi citizen Osama bin Laden was supported in his jihad against Soviet troops in Afghanistan, who were there trying to protect a secular regime.

Though officially the Saudi monarchy insists that it is opposed to Al Qaeda, Saudi intelligence has used Al Qaeda as essentially an unconventional fighting force deployed to destabilize and terrorize adversaries in the region and around the world. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "The Need to Hold Saudi Arabia Accountable."]

As the Israelis have developed a de facto alliance with Saudi Arabia in recent years, they also have expressed a preference for an Al Qaeda victory in Syria if necessary to destroy what Michael Oren, former Ambassador to the U.S. and now a deputy minister under Netanyahu, has described as the Shiite "strategic arc" running from Tehran through Damascus to Beirut.

One of the frequent Israeli complaints about Iran is that it has assisted the sovereign government of Syria in defeating Al Qaeda and its militant allies (as well as Al Qaeda's spinoff Islamic State), which should tell you a lot about where Netanyahu's loyalties lie.

### **A Compromised Media**

Yet, as dishonest as Trump's Iran speech was, the U.S. mainstream media won't criticize it as harshly as it deserves because virtually all the important journalists and talking heads have swallowed Israel's anti-Iran propaganda whole. They have frequently repeated the canard about Iran as "the world's chief sponsor of terrorism" when that title clearly should go to the Saudis and the Qataris if not others.

The West's major news outlets also have ingested all the sophisticated propaganda against the Assad government in Syria, particularly the claims about chemical weapons attacks while ignoring evidence that Al Qaeda's operatives and their "civil defense" collaborators have staged attacks with the goal of provoking a direct U.S. military intervention. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[A New Hole in Syria-Sarin Certainty.](#)"]

In his Friday speech, Trump also touted one of the [earliest canards about Iranian "terrorism,"](#) the attack by Lebanese Shiite militants on the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 killing 241 Americans.

When that attack happened, I was working at The Associated Press as an investigative reporter specializing in national security issues. While the precise Iranian role was not clear, what should have been obvious was that the attack was not "terrorism," which is classically defined as violence toward civilians to achieve a political goal.

Not only were the Marines not civilians but the Reagan administration had made them belligerents in the Lebanese war by the decision to order the USS New Jersey to shell Muslim villages. Reagan's National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, who [often represented Israel's interests](#) inside the administration, was the spark plug for this mission creep, which killed Lebanese civilians and convinced Shiite militants that the United States had joined the war against them.

Shiite militants struck back, sending a suicide truck bomber through U.S. security positions, demolishing the high-rise Marine barracks in Beirut. Reagan soon repositioned the surviving U.S. forces offshore. At the AP, I unsuccessfully argued against calling the Beirut attack "terrorism," a word that other news organizations also sloppily applied. But even senior Reagan officials recognized the truth.

"When the shells started falling on the Shiites, they assumed the American 'referee' had taken sides," Gen. Colin Powell wrote in his memoir, *My American Journey*. In other words, Powell, who was then military adviser to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, recognized that the actions of the U.S. military had altered the status of the Marines in the eyes of the Shiites.

(Although this "terrorism" is always blamed on Hezbollah, the group did not officially come into existence until 1985 as a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon which did not end until 2000.)

## **Opposed to Putin**

So, Trump is now on the path to wars with both North Korea and Iran, neither of

which Russian President Putin favors. Putin, who played a key role in helping President Obama achieve the Iran-nuclear agreement, now sides with the Europeans in opposition to Trump's decertification.

Putin also favors a prompt end to the Syrian conflict with the defeat of Al Qaeda and its allies, and he wants peaceful negotiations with North Korea over its desire for security against threatened American aggression. Trump is on the opposite side of all these Putin priorities.

In other words, not only does the Russia-gate hysteria have core evidentiary problems – both on the issues of “hacking” Democratic emails and claims about suspected “Russia-linked” entities paying for an infinitesimal number of ads on social media (including some about puppies and another promoting a critical documentary about Donald Trump's golf course in Scotland) – but Trump is behaving in ways that are directly contrary to Putin's desires and interests.

If indeed Clinton were right that Trump was Putin's “puppet,” then he would have agreed to negotiations to address the North Korean crisis; would have accepted constructive diplomacy toward Iran; and would have ended all U.S. support for the Syrian militants and encouraged a quick end to the bloodletting.

Instead, Trump is moving in opposite directions, lining up with Netanyahu and the neocons, whom some European allies refer to as “America's Israeli agents.” Although dressing up his capitulation to Netanyahu in tough-guy phrasing, Trump is doing what most U.S. politicians do – they grovel before Bibi Netanyahu.

And, if you have any doubts about that reality, you can watch how often both Republicans and Democrats jump to their feet when Netanyahu addresses a joint session of Congress, an honor that he has received three times, tying him with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Those moments of American humiliation – as almost all 535 members of Congress act like puppets on invisible strings – represent the actual subservience of the U.S. government to a foreign power. And that power is not Russia.

President Trump is just the latest American politician to have his strings yanked by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

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

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# Russia-gate Jumps the Shark

**Exclusive:** Russia-gate has jumped the shark with laughable new claims about a tiny number of “Russia-linked” social media ads, but the U.S. mainstream media is determined to keep a straight face, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A key distinction between propaganda and journalism is that manipulative propaganda relies on exaggeration and deceit while honest journalism provides context and perspective. But what happens when the major news outlets of the world’s superpower become simply conveyor belts for warmongering propaganda?

That is a question that the American people now face as The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and virtually the entire mainstream media hype ridiculously minor allegations about Russia’s “meddling” in American politics into front-page hysteria.

For instance, on Tuesday, the major news outlets were filled with the latest lurid chapter of Russia-gate, how Google, the Internet’s dominant search engine, had detected suspected “Russia-linked” accounts that bought several thousand dollars worth of ads.

The Washington Post ran this item as front-page news entitled “Google finds links to Russian disinformation in its services,” with the excited lede paragraph declaring: “Russian operatives bought ads across several of Google’s services without the company’s knowledge, the latest evidence that their campaign to influence U.S. voters was as sprawling as it was sophisticated in deploying the technology industry’s most powerful tools.”

Wow! That sounds serious. However, if you read deeply enough into the story, you discover that the facts are a wee bit less dramatic. The Post tells us:

“Google’s internal investigation found \$4,700 of search ads and display ads that the company believes are Russian-connected, and found \$53,000 of ads with political content that were purchased from Russian Internet providers, building addresses or with Russian currency, people familiar with the investigation said.

...

“One Russian-linked account spent \$7,000 on ads to promote a documentary called ‘You’ve Been Trumped,’ a film about Donald Trump’s efforts to build a golf course in Scotland along an environmentally sensitive coastline, these people said. Another spent \$30,000 on ads questioning whether President Obama needed to

resign. Another bought ads to promote political merchandise for Obama.”

A journalist – rather than a propagandist – would immediately follow these figures with some context, i.e., that Google’s net digital ad sales revenue is about \$70 billion annually. In other words, these tiny ad buys – with some alleged connection to Russia, a nation of 144 million people and not all Vladimir Putin’s “operatives” – are infinitesimal when put into any rational perspective.

### **A Dangerous Hysteria**

But rationality is not what the Post and other U.S. mainstream news outlets are engaged in here. They are acting as propagandists determined to whip up a dangerous hysteria about being at “war” with nuclear-armed Russia and to delegitimize Trump’s election last year.

It doesn’t seem to matter that the facts don’t fit the desired narrative. First of all, none of this content, detected by Google, is “disinformation” as the Post claims, unless you consider a critical documentary about Trump’s Scottish golf course to be “disinformation,” or for that matter criticism and/or support for President Obama.

And, by the way, how does any of this material reveal a Russian plot to put Trump in the White House and to ensure Hillary Clinton’s defeat, which was the original Russia-gate narrative? Now, we’re being told that any Internet ads bought by Russians or maybe even by Americans living in Russia are part of some nefarious Kremlin plot even if the content is an anti-Trump documentary or some ads for or against President Obama, but nothing attacking Hillary Clinton.

This surely does not seem like evidence of a “sophisticated” campaign to influence U.S. politics, as the Post tells us; it is either an indication of a totally incoherent campaign or no campaign at all, just some random ads taken out by people in Russia possibly to increase clicks on a Web site or to sell some merchandise or to express their own opinions.

And, if you think that this latest Post story is an anomaly – that maybe some editor was having a bad day and just forgot to include the requisite perspective and balance – you’d be wrong.

The same journalistic failures have appeared in similar articles about Facebook and Twitter, which like Google didn’t detect any Russian operation until put under intense pressure by influential members of Congress and then “found” a tiny number of “Russia-linked” accounts.

At Facebook, after two searches found nothing – and after a personal visit from



Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a key legislator on the high-tech industry – the social media company turned up \$100,000 in “Russia-linked” ads spread out over three years (compared to its annual revenue of \$27 billion). Facebook also reported that only 44 percent of the ads appeared *before* the 2016 election.

Facing similar pressures from key members of Congress, Twitter identified 201 “Russia-linked” accounts (out of Twitter’s 328 million monthly users).

### **Tiny Pebbles**

However, rather than include the comparative numbers which would show how nutty Russia-gate has become, the U.S. mainstream media systematically avoids any reference to how tiny the “Russia-linked” pebbles are when compared to the size of the very large lake into which they were allegedly tossed.

The mainstream Russia-gate narrative also keeps running up against other inconveniently contrary facts that then have to be explained away by the “responsible media.” For instance, The New York Times discovered that one of the “Russia-linked” Facebook groups was devoted to photos of “adorable puppies.” That left the “newspaper of record” musing about how nefarious the Russians must be to cloak their sinister operations behind puppies. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “The Mystery of the Russia-gate Puppies.”]

The alternative explanation, of course, is unthinkable at least within the confines of “acceptable thought”; the alternative being that there might be no sinister Kremlin campaign to poison American politics or to install Trump in the White House, that what we are witnessing is a mainstream stampede similar to what preceded the Iraq War in 2003.

In the run-up to that disastrous invasion, every tidbit of suspicion about Saddam Hussein hiding WMD was trumpeted loudly across the front pages of The New York Times, The Washington Post and other major U.S. news outlets. The handful of dissenters who questioned the groupthink were ignored or dismissed as “Saddam apologists”; most were essentially banned from the public square.

Another similarity is that in both cases the U.S. government was injecting large sums of money that helped finance the pro-war propaganda. In the Iraq case, Congress funded the Iraqi National Congress, which helped generate false WMD claims that were then accepted credulously by the U.S. mainstream media.

In the Russia-gate case, Congress has authorized tens of millions of dollars to combat alleged Russian “propaganda and disinformation,” a sum that is creating a feeding frenzy among “scholars” and other “experts” to produce reports that support the anti-Russia narrative. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “The Slimy Business

of [Russia-gate.](#)”]

Of course, the big difference between Iraq in 2003 and Russia in 2017 is that as catastrophic as the Iraq invasion was, it pales against the potential for thermo-nuclear war that could lie at the end of this latest hysteria.

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## Russia-gate’s Shaky Foundation

**Special Report:** The Russia-gate hysteria now routinely includes rhetoric about the U.S. being at “war” with nuclear-armed Russia, but the shaky factual foundation continues to show more cracks, as historian Daniel Herman describes.

By Daniel Herman

Anyone who watches the news knows that Russian hackers gave Democratic National Committee documents to WikiLeaks and hacked voter databases in 21 states. Prominent Democrats call these shenanigans “a political Pearl Harbor.”

On the blog Daily Kos, one contributor cries “we were robbed!” (arguing that somehow Russian meddling gave Trump a victory in North Carolina, where his margin was 180,000, and where no evidence whatsoever indicates a successful hack of voter databases).

In a new video propametary, er, docuganda, or something like that, Morgan Freeman declares “we have been attacked. We are at war. This is no movie script.”

Before we hop on the Morgan Freeman train, we might want to consider some history. In 1898, the American press – taking the word of naval investigators – reported that a Spanish mine had destroyed the battleship, U.S.S. Maine. Leading newspapers promptly called for war, and the U.S. government obliged.

Finally, the U.S. became an imperial power with the acquisition of Cuba and the Philippines and a few other odds and ends, at the bargain cost of 2,500 American soldiers dead, plus another 4,000 lost in the Filipino rebellion that followed, not to mention the lives of tens of thousands of Filipino opposition fighters. Only later did it come to light that the Maine was destroyed by a boiler

explosion.

In 1915, leading newspapers again whipped up the American public by announcing that a German submarine had sunk the unarmed passenger ship, Lusitania. Two years later – and in part due to lingering outrage over the Lusitania – the U.S. went to war, this time costing 116,000 American lives and over 200,000 wounded, not to mention creating a patriotic frenzy at home that led to beatings, lynchings, and attacks on civil liberties. Decades later, divers proved that the Lusitania was carrying arms to Britain – contrary to government assurances – thus violating international law. German naval intelligence had proved correct.

In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed he had a list of men in the State Department who were communists. A credulous press played up his accusations, despite the fact that the numbers on his supposed list kept shifting. McCarthy and his allies in Congress recklessly charged Americans in Hollywood and in government with being either communists or “fellow travelers,” often ruining their careers.

Congress meanwhile passed the McCarran Internal Security Act, which required suspected “subversives” to register with the government. It also permitted the government to round up and hold those same suspected “subversives” on the order of the President. McCarthy, of course, had no real list, and finally ruined his own reputation by accusing Army brass of communist sympathies. McCarthy’s many allies, however, paid no penalty for overreach.

### **Fake Intelligence**

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson announced that the North Vietnamese had attempted a second torpedo attack on an American destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, then used the incident to get Congress to give him the power to make war.

Thanks to the press endorsing the war effort and cheerleading on the nightly news (at least until the Tet Offensive four years later), the Vietnam War led to 58,000 American deaths and over a million war deaths altogether. Covert U.S. forces, meanwhile, kick-started a civil war in Cambodia that ended in genocide after the Khmer Rouge took power. Cambodia lost over half of its population of 7 million between 1970 and 1980.

It later became clear that there had been no second attack on the destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin; its crew had misread radar signals.

In 2002, U.S. intelligence, via George W. Bush’s administration, told the American public that Iraq had a hand in planning the 9/11 attacks and, moreover, that Iraq secretly maintained an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction that

might be shared with Al Qaeda. Both claims were utterly false, yet the American press – particularly the New York Times, the Washington Post, and CNN – led Americans to believe they were true. Far from questioning authority, the press became its servant. The result: 4,500 American war deaths; at least 110,000 Iraqi deaths (some estimates put the figure at over a million); and a destabilized Middle East, wherein both Iran and ISIS (who are bitter enemies) were empowered. In all likelihood, moreover, there would have been no Syrian war had there been no Iraq War.

When the American press and American political leaders loudly accuse another country of “an act of war,” in short, the American public needs to be on the alert. Rather than marginalizing and belittling skeptics, the press and public should give them a fair hearing. Far better to have a spirited debate now than to come to the realization in the future that groupthink created catastrophe.

### **Hack or Leak? It's Worth Asking**

With all that history in mind, we should be grateful that William Binney, the National Security Agency's former technical director, is shouting with everything he can muster that the U.S. intelligence community has no solid evidence that Russians hacked the Democratic National Committee. The NSA, he says, would have a record of any overseas exfiltration and could release that data without danger to national security; yet the NSA hasn't. Though Binney left the NSA 16 years ago, he should know: he created the powerful cyber-vacuum that the NSA still uses.

Binney's organization, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), has produced [a report](#) in which they argue that forensic evidence from documents produced by Guccifer 2.0 (G2) suggests – strongly – that G2 was a hoaxer. Skip Folden, a VIPS associate and a former elite tech executive with IBM, has issued [his own report](#) that buttresses the VIPS report. [Adam Carter](#) (a pseudonymous investigator) and [Forensicator](#) (another pseudonymous investigator) have also buttressed the VIPS Report, as have cybersecurity expert [Jeffrey Carr](#) and former U.N. weapons inspector [Scott Ritter](#) (Ritter disagrees with VIPS in part but not on the basic charge of insufficient evidence).

To the extent they mention the skeptics, American journalists dismiss them as fringe. Yet the skeptics deserve a hearing. Among the important points they make is that U.S. intelligence has only identified the Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) groups (APT 28 and 29 to be precise) associated with the hacking, and not the hackers themselves. An APT is a set of common parameters – tools, modes of operation, target patterns – used by hackers. But how certain are our intelligence agencies that Russians stand behind APT 28/29?

It happens that Dimitri Alperovitch of CrowdStrike – the cybersecurity entity that analyzed DNC servers – was asked that question in June 2016. His answer: “medium-level of confidence that FancyBear is [Russian intelligence agency] GRU... low-level of confidence that CozyBear is [Russian intelligence agency] FSB.”

Skip Folden suggests that Alperovitch’s estimates equal a 37-38 percent probability that Russian intelligence stands behind APT 28/29. It’s not clear how Folden came up with that figure. We should note here that Alperovitch subsequently raised his confidence levels to “high,” but then had to reduce them again in March 2017 after realizing that his new assessment was based on phony data published by a Russian blogger. Meanwhile, in January, Director of National of Intelligence James Clapper’s hand-picked team had used Alperovitch’s “high confidence” assessment of Russian hacking of the DNC, which every major network reported dutifully without so much as a blink.

It’s hard to say what additional evidence the NSA/CIA team might have had – or whether there was any – though there are rumors that a Kremlin mole working for Latvia confirmed that Putin ordered his cyber-warriors into action. The NSA, however, didn’t consider the source fully trustworthy (remember Curveball, the wonderful gift of German intelligence?), hence it committed itself to only “moderate confidence” even as the CIA stated “high confidence.” At any rate, the January report lacked both solid technical evidence and more traditional evidence confirming Russian hacking.

### **Not Making Sense**

Several other oddities stand out: first, why would G2 announce himself two days after the DNC reported being hacked, brag he was the hacker, and add that he had given his material to WikiLeaks? WikiLeaks exists for one reason: to give whistleblowers deniability. Normally, people don’t give material to WikiLeaks and then brag about it publicly.

Least of all would Russian intelligence do such a thing, assuming – as some allege – that they routinely use WikiLeaks to disseminate hacked data. Why would Russia implicate its proxy? Why, indeed, would Russia not only cast aspersions on Julian Assange’s honesty, but also cast doubt on the authenticity of the DNC data, given that intelligence services are known to doctor hacked documents? Why, moreover, would G2 give information to WikiLeaks in the first place, given that he had the ability to curate it and disseminate it on his own, as he showed by distributing “choice” (but actually innocuous) data to journalists?

Then there’s the forensic evidence, which shows that (1) G2 put DNC documents into a Russian template; and (2) G2 made those changes on the computer in an

East Coast U.S. time zone. Plus, linguistic evidence suggests that G2 showed none of the typical speech idiosyncrasies of a native Russian speaker.

Metadata can be fudged, so it's possible that (1) and (2) don't matter. If that is the case, however, one must explain why G2 would drop deliberate clues indicating that he's Russian – including leaving the name of the founder of the Soviet secret police in one document, along with Cyrillic error messages in another – while also dropping deliberate clues indicating he's an American leaker. Tricky indeed.

Then there's another important piece of forensic evidence: the transfer speed, which corresponds to the speed of a download to a local thumb drive rather than to an overseas exfiltration. Critics – including a few VIPS dissenters – promptly insisted that the VIPS report was wrong to assume that such speeds could not be attained in an overseas exfiltration in 2016. Signers of the original VIPS report, however, subsequently conducted multiple experiments to prove or disprove that hypothesis; not once did they achieve a transfer speed anywhere close to that indicated in the DNC metadata.

Critics have also argued that the DNC documents transfer speed may refer to a download to a thumb drive *after* the initial hack, yet the download would nevertheless have had to have been done on the East Coast of the U.S., since transfer speed metadata correlate to time stamp data. Why would a hacker exfiltrate data to Romania or Russia, then return to the U.S. to download the material to a thumb drive?

### **Inconsistencies and Uncertainties**

The above inconsistencies, I should add, apply to the DNC data, not the Podesta emails. No one, so far as I know, has cast doubt on the theory that the Podesta emails were phished via APT 28. Still, the same rules of caution apply. As Alperovitch himself testified in June 2016, APT 28 does not necessarily prove Russia involvement, and even if it did, no one has proven that Russians gave the Podesta emails to WikiLeaks. There are many other possibilities.

The Wall Street Journal, for instance, reported that Republican operatives were desperately reaching out to the hacking community to locate Hillary Clinton's 30,000 missing emails. They made contact with several hacking groups including some that claimed to have the emails and even sent samples. The Republicans told the hackers to turn over the emails to WikiLeaks, but – supposedly – offered no payment. It's not inconceivable, however, that the same Republican dirt-diggers – or others – indeed did pay hackers to turn over materials to WikiLeaks. Even if that occurred, however, the hackers might well have been non-state actors who occasionally work with Russian intelligence, but who otherwise work

independently (more on that later), and who were not under orders from Putin. Or, they may have been hackers who have no connection to Russia whatsoever.

Regarding Roger Stone's infamous remark that "it will soon be Podesta's time in the barrel," which has been cited as proof that Stone had foreknowledge of WikiLeaks' publication of Podesta's emails, Stone explained on Tuesday that he was referring to his own research on Podesta's consulting work for foreign governments in the context of similar complaints being lodged against Stone's friend and Trump's erstwhile campaign manager Paul Manafort.

### **Questioning the Investigation**

There are worrisome implications here. First, if we are "at war with Russia"; if the hacking was "the crime of the century"; if it's "bigger than Watergate"; why didn't the FBI examine the DNC server, given that James Comey admitted that was "best practice"? Why did he rely on CrowdStrike's analysis, especially given CrowdStrike's strong ties to the Atlantic Council (created solely to support NATO and heavily funded by foreign entities) and CrowdStrike's grossly mistaken charges of Russian hacking in other contexts?

Second, why has there been no comprehensive or coordinated Intelligence Community Assessment or a full-scale National Intelligence Estimate – weighing evidence of Russian culpability against contrary theories – by the U.S. intelligence community, given that it has known about alleged Russian election hacking of both the DNC and state voter databases for well over a year?

What we got in January was a hurried intelligence assessment put together by a "hand-picked" team from three agencies, not a consensus of "17 agencies," as the U.S. press wrongly blared for months. If Russia had committed an "act of war," then surely President Obama would have ordered the fullest assessment of intelligence that the U.S. is capable of producing; yet he didn't.

Third, why would Putin order an enormous campaign against Hillary Clinton, knowing that she would very likely win anyway (and did win the popular vote). Would Putin risk the likelihood of President Hillary Clinton finding out about his shenanigans? What implications would that have for the repeal of the Magnitsky Act, for additional sanctions, for Syria, for Ukraine, for NATO funding, for the possibility of renewed Cold War? Perhaps – as James Comey contends – Putin hated Clinton so much that he was willing to play "Russian roulette." Yet one wonders.

### **Has the Press Fed Hysteria?**

Why, moreover, has the U.S. press barely mentioned the fact that U.S. intelligence services – and the press itself – wrongly accused Russia of the

Macron hack? France's head of cyber intelligence, after finding no evidence of Russian hacking, said this: "Why did [NSA Director Michael] Rogers say that, like that, at that time? It really surprised me. It really surprised my European allies. And to be totally frank, when I spoke about it to my NSA counterparts and asked why did he say that, they didn't really know how to reply either."

Think about those words for a moment; they were not meant to be diplomatic. They were unabashedly chastening.

Why, too, has the U.S. press barely mentioned the fact that German intelligence, after a months-long investigation, found no Russian meddling in its recent election (and moreover, found that the supposed Russian hack of the Bundestag in 2015 was likely a leak after all), despite U.S. intelligence agencies' insistence that Germany was Russia's next target?

Why do we not hear that Britain found no evidence of Russian efforts to influence Brexit, despite allegations to that effect? Why has the U.S. press wrongly reported a Russian hack of a Vermont utility; a Russian hack of an Illinois water pump; a Russian hack of north Texas voter rolls; a Russian hack of Qatari news media? Add to those examples the latest round of debunkings: there was no Russian attempt to hack Wisconsin voter rolls, nor any Russian attempt to hack California's. Despite all the debunked stories, the U.S. press eagerly reports new Russia-done-it stories every time some anonymous source breathes a leak.

Here's a test you can do at home: Type "Germany Russia hacking" into your search engine and see what comes up. Then type "Brexit Russia hacking." Then try "France Russia hacking." You'll get an absolute barrage of stories – hundreds of links – that melodramatically attest to Russian hacking and/or meddling in all three situations, but you'll struggle mightily to find stories refuting those charges.

One can readily see why some curious soul sitting at home who takes it upon himself to do a little internet research would come away utterly convinced of Russian perfidy. Google here becomes an instrument not of truth-finding, but of algorithmic fake news.

Why, too, did former Assistant Secretary of Department of Homeland Security for Cybersecurity, Andy Ozment, insist in September 2016 that hacking attempts on voter rolls were not of Russian origin, but rather were criminal attempts to steal identification data for sale on the dark net? Why did DHS say as late as October that they lacked evidence to blame Russians? Were they simply protecting the nation against mass hysteria that could cast doubt on the presidential vote?



And yet the basic evidence pattern for attributing the attempted hacks to Russia (or anyone else) hasn't changed; it's not as if some new damning piece of evidence emerged after September. Even Reality Winner's leaked NSA document from June 2017 notes uncertainty about the identity of the hackers. If one looks at the leaked chart showing details of the flow of hacked information, one notes that the final arrow on the left pointing to Russian intelligence (GRU) is marked "probably." [Click here](#) and scroll down to see the blown-up chart.

Incidentally, if you think the case of Reality Winner is a bit suspect – i.e., a cleverish ruse to undermine *The Intercept* (publisher of the "Winner leak") and puff up the Russia hysteria – you might want to check out [this story](#). I withhold judgment, personally.

### **What I Am Arguing**

Am I implicating Obama in a conspiracy? No way. Am I suggesting that G2 was a DNC actor seeking to blame Russia for a damaging insider leak to Assange? Not necessarily, but not "not necessarily," either. There is reason for suspicion at least.

Am I suggesting that U.S. intelligence agencies are lying in order to protect massive U.S. funding for NATO and to force Russia to loosen its ties to Iran and Syria, not to mention lay off Ukraine? *No, I am not suggesting any deliberate lie, though yes, wishes can father thoughts.* Certainly Trump's campaign talk of defunding NATO, friendship with Russia, and leaving Syria to Assad ruffled feathers in the intelligence community.

I am far from being a cyber-security expert, let alone knowledgeable about IT, so I write all this in modesty. And yet I find myself agreeing with experts who say that APT associations are not grounds for "high confidence" intelligence assessments, and that the American public deserves to see strong evidence not just of hacking – but of actual *Russian* hacking – given the magnitude of the issue.

I also find myself agreeing with cyber-security experts who tell us that U.S. intelligence agencies – as well as private cyber-security firms like CrowdStrike – tend to build the evidence around hypotheses, rather than letting the evidence lead to its own conclusions.

I don't think there's a conspiracy; I think there's bias, groupthink, and boss-pleasing – in both the press and the intelligence agencies – just as there was in the Iraq WMD fiasco.

As Folden points out, there are numerous international crime organizations (an \$800 billion industry last year) that might well stand behind APT 28/29. Given

the sloppiness of the DNC and Podesta hacks (assuming they were hacks), what's probable is that Russia isn't doing the work directly, but might be paying a third party that sells its wares to bidders. Or, perhaps Russia isn't involved.

As Folden notes, numerous states and international crime organizations have strong economic and/or strategic interests in both internal U.S. campaign information and in U.S. elections outcomes. The same observation goes for allegations of hacked voter databases. Any number of entities have both the wherewithal to employ APT 28/29 and an economic interest in harvesting voter identification data.

We should pause to note here that almost all the state database attacks were just that – attacks – not breaches. Unsuccessful attacks cannot be traced to APT groups, only to IP addresses, which are highly unreliable evidence. What few confirmed breaches there were (e.g., Illinois), moreover, did not change election results, and – as with the alleged DNC hack – can only be traced to APTs, not to actual hackers.

Here's an aside just for fun: why would Russian hackers imagine for a second they could turn Illinois into a Trump state? Clinton won that state by a million votes. Sure, one can understand why Russians might want to meddle with voter roles in a swing state, but Illinois? More likely the hackers were criminals seeking voter identification info, which is precisely why they downloaded 90,000 registration records. The FBI absurdly claimed that Russians needed all those records to figure out precisely how Illinois voter registration works, thus to improve their dirty work. Really? They needed 90,000 records for that?

### **Pressuring Facebook**

Of course, if the voter database attacks turn out to be no-big-deal, the press still will find some new way to exploit the Russia hysteria. The Washington Post and the New York Times – along with the House and Senate Intelligence Committees – are now investigating Russian attempts to use Facebook ads and posts to help Trump win the election. Facebook – thanks to subpoenas from Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller and pressure from congressional Democrats – has turned up \$100,000 of suspicious ad buys from phony accounts.

Think of that for a moment: Russians (supposedly) mustered fully \$100,000 for ads in a presidential campaign that cost \$2.4 billion. Talk about bang for your buck! The current allegation is that over the past three years, a few hundred Russian trolls armed with \$100,000 and 470 Facebook accounts (compared to Facebook's \$27 billion in annual revenue and 2 billion monthly users) deployed issues ads (not primarily attack ads against specific candidates) to out-brigade millions of ordinary Americans who posted campaign pieces on Facebook every day,

not to mention Clinton's public relations army.

Poor David Brock paid a million dollars for his own pro-Clinton troll brigade, but they were children compared to these nefarious Russians. It's a feat right up there with Xenophon's *Anabasis* ... a tiny force of foreigners, slashing their way through the Persian hordes! Someone get an epic poet!

Of course Sen. Mark Warner, a hawkish vice-chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, informs us that the \$100,000 is just the "tip of the iceberg." Who knows, maybe the Russians spent \$200,000.

Even if these propaganda charges turn out to be 100 percent true – and even if the Russians were clever enough to target voters in the Upper Midwest – it is highly unlikely that they had more influence on the election than a host of other factors, ranging from Clinton's bad campaign decisions to emailgate to anti-establishment fervor to Trump's 4-Chan volunteers (did he really need several hundred Russians? Surely he had plenty of home-grown trolls).

### **Silencing Dissent**

So, maybe the Russians did play some small role on Facebook – though I suspect this suspicion, too, will be challenged – but should we therefore conclude that we're at war, as Morgan Freeman declares? Should we demand that Facebook and Google continue to rework algorithms to shut down posts or ads deemed pro-Russian? Doesn't that remind anyone of the anti-German hysteria – and censorship – during World War I?

Should we demand, moreover, that the tiny Russian-owned media outlet RT register as a foreign agent – as the Atlantic Council has insisted, and as the Justice Department is now demanding – but not require the same of the BBC and CBC, which are financed by the British and Canadian governments respectively?

What about the Atlantic Council itself, which, receives much of its funding from foreign nations that seek to strengthen NATO? Should the Atlantic Council be required to register as a foreign agent? Does anyone seriously think the Atlantic Council doesn't propagandize for NATO and for hawkish policies more generally? Or what about the hawkish Brookings Institution, or a host of other think tanks that welcome money from foreign powers?

The unspoken assumption here is that only Russia propagandizes; no other nation is so shifty. Surely Saudi Arabia wouldn't do such a thing, nor Israel, nor Ukraine, nor countless other nations that seek to influence American policy. After all, they have their paid lobbyists and press buddies working for them every day; they don't need several hundred trolls.

Let's be honest, we live in a world in which foreign powers seek to influence American public opinion, just as we seek to influence public opinion in other nations. Which brings to mind a bill that President Obama signed in December, at the outset of the Russia hysteria: "The Countering Disinformation and Propaganda Act," which created the State Department's "Global Engagement Center," which seeks to "recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interests."

The act also offers grants to organizations (think news agencies and research groups) that promise to "counter efforts by foreign entities to use disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda to influence the policies and social and political stability" of the U.S. and allied nations. (Shout out to Rob Reiner; did you apply for one of those grants? Might be a good opportunity for you.)

Does no one see a problem with this? What exactly is foreign propaganda? Is it RT's occasional charges that the U.S. press treats Trump unfairly? Is it RT's penchant for left-wing, anti-establishment commentary, e.g., Chris Hedges, Thom Hartmann, and Lee Camp? Our intelligence elites certainly think so, judging from the seven pages they dedicated to RT's supposed rascally programming in the January intelligence assessment.

And what exactly will it mean to "counter ... foreign ... disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda"? Will it mean countering any news or commentary deemed anti-NATO or pro-Russian? Any news or commentary deemed pro-Iranian? How exactly will our government define "foreign propaganda"? How, moreover, will it define "national security"? What lengths will it take to deny the American public – not to mention foreigners – access to legitimate opinions?

### **Alien and Sedition Acts**

Perhaps the real analogue here isn't World War I after all, but the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. Of course it wasn't Russians that President John Adams worried about; it was hot-blooded Irish radicals and French émigrés with their revolutionary idealism, which was ostensibly corrupting the nation. Ordinary Americans were suddenly refusing to vote for their Federalist political betters, and those betters determined to make them pay. Far better to jail Jeffersonian editors and drive out foreigners than to let them endanger America's "national security."

We are forsooth reliving the age of Hamilton, I fear, when political elites dance to Wall Street theatricals about anti-democrats while feeling virtuous about opposing "deplorables." Just don't expect them to care about free speech.

Thanks to our government's push against so-called fake news, both Google and Facebook have already altered algorithms to such an extent that they have pushed down readership for one old and revered progressive venue, AlterNet, by fully 40 percent (other progressive venues have seen similar declines), thus starving them for ad revenue. Meanwhile neoconservative researchers are trumpeting in-depth investigations into supposed Russian propagandizing that – thanks to vast funding – may get churned out for years to come.

Let's not kid ourselves; this project isn't about shutting down "fake news." From the moment the Washington Post ran its infamous PropOrNot story in November 2016, the message has been clear: the real threat isn't Russians, it's any media outlet that fuels anti-establishment politics.

### **The Universality of Hacking**

All that said, it is still very possible that CrowdStrike and the intelligence community are correct to attribute at least some DNC exfiltration of data to Russians or to loose-leashed teams working as subcontractors, or, alternatively, criminal organizations that sometimes answer to Russia. The one thing that the skeptics (of whom I am obviously one) have not answered is why the CrowdStrike investigation found uniquely modified X-TUNNEL source code in DNC servers, which would seem to have been created for this particular hack.

Since I don't have years to become a cyber-security expert, I'll leave the technical experts to further argue that question. However, I am left to wonder whether X-TUNNEL indeed betrays a Russian hack of at least some DNC emails, but that another party altogether – a leaker – was nevertheless responsible for handing the full complement of DNC documents to Wikileaks.

None of the skeptics are claiming that the Russians for certain didn't hack the DNC (which wouldn't be that surprising, really; we probably hack their political entities, too). The skeptics are only claiming that G2 was an insider who downloaded documents onto a thumb drive. Both claims can be true.

I'll add – just to be clear – that I am quite certain that the U.S. intelligence community is correct that the Russian government is engaged in broad hacking attempts aimed at targets all over the world, many of them associated with APT 28/29. But that doesn't mean they carried out the particular hacks at issue here (or, at least, it doesn't mean that Russian state actors were behind the WikiLeaks releases, or the attacks on state databases).

And it certainly doesn't mean – contrary to what over-wrought bloggers claim – that Russians changed 2016 vote tallies. The answer isn't to shout "war" and create hysteria; the answer is to secure U.S. infrastructure.

I'll also add that even "high confidence" that Russia hacked the DNC, Podesta, and/or state databases is insufficient grounds for aggressive policy – e.g., harsh sanctions and diplomatic ejections, not to mention military action – let alone grounds for announcing "we are at war." Suppose for the sake of argument that "high confidence" is 75 percent probability. Would we convict an accused murderer on 75 percent probability?

If we did that – and if the accused were then put to death – we would be knowingly killing 25 innocents out of every 100 we adjudge. The same logic should apply to foreign policy. We should not be taking punitive measures unless we can assess culpability with greater certitude, else we risk harming millions of people who had no role in the original crime.

### **Where We Stand**

It seems to me that we are in uncharted waters. Not everyone can be a cyber-security expert; we must trust those who are. And yet in doing so, we put enormous powers into the hands of unelected technocrats with their own biases and agendas. As others have noted, moreover, the cyber-war community is at odds with the cyber-security community.

On the one hand, intelligence operatives are constantly developing new tools to exploit cyber vulnerabilities of other nations and criminal actors. On the other hand, cyber-security people (e.g., DHS) seek to patch those same vulnerabilities to protect U.S. infrastructure. The problem is that the people who know how to exploit the vulnerabilities don't want to report those vulnerabilities because it means years of work down the drain. Why make your tools obsolete?

We need to resolve these contradictions in favor of security, not cyberwar.

I cannot say this loudly enough. This whole episode isn't just about Hillary Clinton losing the election, or Russian hacking of the DNC, or Deep State bias and boss-pleasing. The upshot is that we are entering a cyber-arms race that is going to become ever more byzantine, hidden, and dangerous to democracy, not just because elections can be stolen, but because in guarding against that, we are handing over power to unelected technocrats and shutting down dissenting speech. We are entering a new era; this won't be the last time that hacking enters political discourse.

We might already be in the midst of a cyber Cold War, though the American public has no idea – flat zero – what sort of offensive gamesmanship our own cyber-warriors are engaging in. (One interesting theory: The Russians deliberately implicated themselves in the DNC hack in order to send a warning to U.S. cyber-warriors: we can play dirty, too).

Presumably not even our cyber-security experts at the DHS and FBI know what the CIA and NSA's cyber-warriors are up to. Thus Russian hacking becomes "Pearl Harbor" rather than an unsurprising reciprocal response. Both the State Department and the CIA, after all, have been in the foreign propaganda business for decades; the American public, however, has not the vaguest idea of what they do.

We might also be on the brink of something else nightmarish: an international cyber-war with multiple parties participating – attacking one another while no-one-knows-who-did-what.

The intelligence community's whispered "trust us, we're the experts" simply isn't good enough. If we don't demand hard evidence, then we're following the same path we took in 1898, 1915, 1950, 1964, and 2003. Let's not go there.

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## WPost Pushes More Dubious Russia-bashing

**Special Report:** The Washington Post has published another front-page story about Russia maybe placing some ads on Facebook, but the article violates a host of journalistic principles in hyping its case, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Some people are calling the anti-Russian hysteria being whipped up across the U.S. mainstream news media a new "golden age of American journalism," although it looks to me more like a new age of yellow journalism, prepping the people for more military spending, more "information warfare" and more actual war.

Yes, without doubt, President Trump is a boorish and dangerous demagogue, now highlighted by his reckless speech before the United Nations last week, his schoolyard Tweet taunts toward North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, and his ugly denunciation of black athletes for protesting against police killings of often unarmed African-Americans.

And, yes, I know that some people feel that the evidence-lite and/or false allegations about "Russian meddling" are the golden ticket to Trump's impeachment. But the unprofessional behavior of The New York Times, The Washington Post and pretty much the entire mainstream media regarding Russia-

gate cannot be properly justified by the goal of removing Trump from office.

Ethically in journalism, the ends – however much you might wish them to succeed – cannot justify the means, if those means involve violating rules of evidence and principles of fairness. Journalism should be a place where all sides get a fair shake, not where some get a bum's rush.

But the U.S. mainstream media has clearly joined the anti-Trump Resistance and hates Russian President Vladimir Putin, too. So, we are given such travesties of journalism as appeared as a banner headline across the front page of Monday's Washington Post, another screed about how Russia supposedly used Facebook ads to flip last November's election for Trump.

The article purports to give the inside story of how Facebook belatedly came to grips with how the "company's social network played a key role in the U.S. election," but actually it is a story about how powerful politicians bullied Facebook into coming up with something – anything – to support the narrative of "Russian meddling," including direct interventions by President Obama and Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee and a key legislator regarding regulation of high-tech industries.

### **Finding the 'Evidence'**

In other words, Facebook was sent back again and again to find what Obama and Warner wanted the social media company to find. Eventually, Facebook turned up \$100,000 in ads from 2015 into 2017 that supposedly were traced somehow to Russia. These ads apparently addressed political issues in America although Facebook has said most did not pertain directly to the presidential election and some ads were purchased after the election.

Left out of the Post's latest opus is what a very small pebble these ads were – even assuming that Russians did toss the \$100,000 or so in ad buys into the very large lake of billions of dollars in U.S. political spending for the 2016 election cycle. It also amounts to a miniscule fraction of Facebook's \$27 billion in annual revenue.

So the assertion that this alleged "meddling" – and we've yet to see any evidence connecting these ads to the Russian government – "played a key role in the U.S. election" is both silly and outrageous, especially given the risks involved in stoking animosities between nuclear-armed Russia and nuclear-armed America.

Even the Post's alarmist article briefly acknowledges that it is still unclear who bought the ads, referring to the purchasers as "suspected Russian operatives." In other words, we don't even know that the \$100,000 in ads over



three years came from Russians seeking to influence the U.S. election. (By comparison, many Facebook advertisers – even some small businesses – spend \$100,000 per day on their ads, not \$100,000 over three years.)

But this diminutive effort by “suspected Russian operatives” doesn’t stop the Post from going on and on about “fake news” and “disinformation,” albeit again without offering evidence or specifics of any Russian “fake news” or “disinformation.”

It has simply become Official Washington’s new groupthink to say that everything linked to Russia or its international TV network RT is “fake news” or “disinformation” even though examples are lacking or often turn out to be false accusations themselves.

For instance, there is nothing in the Post’s article acknowledging that nothing from the various Democratic email disclosures, which have been blamed on Russia (again without real evidence), has been identified as untrue. So, how can truthful information, whether you like how it was obtained or not, be “fake news” or “disinformation”?

### **Falsehood as Fact**

But Monday’s Post exposé simply asserts the claim as flat fact. Or as the article asserts: “what Russian operatives posted on Facebook was, for the most part, indistinguishable from legitimate political speech. The difference was the accounts that were set up to spread the misinformation and hate were illegitimate.”

In responsible journalism, such an accusation would be followed by a for-instance, giving an example of “the misinformation and hate” that the “Russian operatives” – note how they have been magically transformed from “suspected Russian operatives” to simply “Russian operatives” – were disseminating.

But there is no example of the Russian “misinformation and hate,” a classic violation of the reporting principle of “show, don’t tell.” In this story, it’s all tell and no show.

Indeed, what is shown in the article is often contradictory to the story’s conclusion. The article says, for instance, “A review by the company found that most of the groups behind the problematic pages had clear financial motives, which suggested that they weren’t working for a foreign government. But amid the mass of data the company was analyzing, the security team did not find clear evidence of Russian disinformation or ad purchases by Russian-linked accounts.”

So, Facebook initially – after extensive searching – did not find evidence of a

Russian operation. Then, after continued pressure from high-level Democrats, Facebook continued to scour its system and again found nothing, or as the Post article acknowledged, Facebook “had searched extensively for evidence of foreign purchases of political advertising but had come up short.”

That prompted Warner to fly out to Silicon Valley to personally press Facebook executives to come up with the evidence to support the Democrats’ theory about Russia paying for carefully targeted anti-Clinton ads in key districts.

The Post’s article reported that “Finally, [Facebook Chief Security Officer Alex] Stamos appealed to Warner for help: If U.S. intelligence agencies had any information about the Russian operation or the troll farms it used to disseminate misinformation, they should share it with Facebook. The company is still waiting, people involved in the matter said.”

### **Under Pressure**

Still, faced with extraordinary pressure from senior Democrats, Facebook finally delivered the desired results, or as the Post reported, “By early August, Facebook had identified more than 3,000 ads addressing social and political issues that ran in the United States between 2015 and 2017 and that appear to have come from accounts associated with the [St. Petersburg, Russia-based] Internet Research Agency.”

So, the ads covering three years, including post-election 2017, only “appear” to be “associated” with some private Russian operation that only allegedly has ties to the Kremlin. And the total sums of the ad buys are infinitesimal compared to what it actually takes to have any real impact on Facebook or in a U.S. presidential election.

If the context of this story were changed slightly – say, it was about the U.S. government trying to influence public opinion in another country (which actually does happen quite a bit) – the Post would be among the first news outlets to laugh off such allegations or dismiss the vague accusations as a conspiracy theory, but since these allegations fit with the prejudices of the Post’s editors, an entirely different set of journalistic standards is applied.

What the article also ignores is the extraordinary degree of coercion that such high-level political pressure can put on a company that recognizes its vulnerability to government regulation.

As Facebook has acknowledged in corporate filings, ***“Action by governments to restrict access to Facebook in their countries could substantially harm our business and financial results.”*** It is possible that governments of one or more countries may seek to censor content available on Facebook in their country,

restrict access to Facebook from their country entirely, or impose other restrictions that may affect the accessibility of Facebook in their country for an extended period of time or indefinitely. ...

“In the event that access to Facebook is restricted, in whole or in part, in one or more countries or our competitors are able to successfully penetrate geographic markets that we cannot access, our ability to retain or increase our user base and user engagement may be adversely affected, we may not be able to maintain or grow our revenue as anticipated, and our financial results could be adversely affected.”

### **Avoiding Reality**

In other words, another way to have framed this story is that powerful politicians who could severely harm Facebook’s business model were getting in the face of Facebook executives and essentially demanding that they come up with something to support the Democratic Party’s theory of “Russian meddling.”

The Democratic leaders wanted this finding as an explanation for Hillary Clinton’s stunning defeat, rather than going through the painful process of examining why the party has steadily lost ground in white working-class areas across the country.

What is missed in these Russia-bashing articles is that the Democratic brand has been sinking for years, including massive losses in statehouses across the country as well as in Congress. The party’s decline was not a one-off event with Donald Trump suddenly snaking away with significant parts of the white working class because the Russians bought some Facebook ads.

However, instead of looking in the mirror, national Democrats demanded that Facebook executives ferret out whatever tiny or imaginary information there might be about some Russians buying Facebook ads – and then allow those coerced findings to be fed into the excuse industry for why Hillary Clinton lost.

And, what about the Post’s repeated accusations about Russia engaging in “disinformation” and “fake news” without offering a single example? Apparently, these assertions have become such articles of faith in the U.S. mainstream media that they don’t require any proof.

However, honest journalism demands examples and evidence, not just vague accusations. The reality is that the U.S. government has stumbled again and again when seeking to paint RT as a disinformation outlet or a vehicle for undermining American democracy.

For instance, the [Jan. 6 report](#) on alleged Russian “cyber operations,” released

by Obama's Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, included a lengthy appendix, dated from 2012, which decried RT for such offenses as allowing a debate among third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Republican-Democratic debates; covering the Occupy Wall Street protests; and citing the environmental dangers from "fracking."

The idea that American democracy is threatened by allowing third-party candidates or other American dissidents to have a voice is at best an upside-down understanding of democracy and, more likely, an exercise in hypocritical propaganda.

### **False Accusations**

Another misfired attempt to discredit RT came from Obama's Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Richard Stengel, who issued a "Dipnote" in April 2014, which helped establish the narrative of RT as a source of Russian disinformation.

For instance, Stengel claimed that RT reported a "ludicrous assertion" that the United States had spent \$5 billion to produce Ukraine's "regime change" in February 2014.

But what Stengel, a former managing editor of Time magazine, apparently failed to understand was that RT was referring to a public speech by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland to U.S. and Ukrainian business leaders on Dec. 13, 2013, in which she told them that "we have invested more than \$5 billion" in what was needed for Ukraine to achieve its "European aspirations." In other words, the RT report wasn't "ludicrous" at all.

Nuland also was a leading proponent of "regime change" in Ukraine who personally cheered on the Maidan demonstrators, even passing out cookies. In an intercepted pre-coup phone call with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, Nuland discussed who should run the new government and pondered with Pyatt how to "glue" or "midwife this thing."

So, Stengel was the one disseminating false information, not RT.

Similarly, senior U.S. politicians, including Hillary Clinton, and the U.S. mainstream media have falsely asserted that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies signed off on the Russia-did-it hacking claims.

For months, that canard was used to silence skepticism. After all, how could you question something that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies confirmed to be true?

But it turned out that – as DNI Clapper, himself a hardline Russia-basher,

belatedly acknowledged – the Jan. 6 report on the alleged Russian hacking was the work of “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies, the CIA, FBI and NSA, and the “assessment” itself admitted that it was not asserting the Russian conclusion as fact, only the analysts’ opinion.

The New York Times finally retracted its use of the fake claim about “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” in late June 2017 although it wouldn’t let the lie lie, so instead the Times made misleading references to a “consensus” among U.S. intelligence agencies without using the number.

Recent studies by former U.S. intelligence experts have punched more holes in the certainty by raising doubts that the email downloads could have been accomplished over the Internet at the recorded speeds and more likely were achieved by an insider downloading onto a thumb drive.

### **Deciding What’s Real**

So who is guilty of “fake news” and “disinformation”?

One positive from the current PBS series, “The Vietnam War,” is that despite its bend-over-backwards attempts to make excuses for the “good faith” decisions by U.S. politicians, no one can watch the series without encountering the chasm between the upbeat Official Story being peddled by the U.S. government and the ghastly on-the-ground reality.

Yet, given how little accountability was meted out then for journalists who served as conveyor belts for pro-war propaganda in Vietnam – or more recently over the fraudulent reporting that rationalized the U.S. aggressive war against Iraq – it is perhaps not surprising that similar false group thinks would coalesce around Russia now.

Careerist journalists understand that there is no danger in running with the pack – indeed, there is safety in numbers – but there are extraordinary risks to your career if you challenge the conventional wisdom even if you turn out to be right. As one establishment journalist once told me, “there’s no honor in being right too soon.”

So, for the Post reporters responsible for the latest journalistic violation of standards – Adam Entous, Elizabeth Dvoskin and Craig Timberg – there will be no penalty for the offense of telling about Russia’s alleged “disinformation” and “fake news” – rather than showing, i.e., providing actual examples. When it comes to Russia these days – as with the Vietcong in the 1960s or Iraq in 2002-03 – you can pretty much write whatever you want. All journalistic standards are gone.

Yet, what is perhaps most insidious about what we are seeing is that – in the name of defending democracy – the U.S. mainstream media is trampling a chief principle of the Enlightenment, the belief that the marketplace of ideas is the best way to determine the truth and to create an informed populace.

The new U.S. mainstream media paradigm is that only establishment-approved views can be expressed; everything else must be suppressed, purged and punished.

For instance, if you question the State Department's narrative on alleged Syrian government sarin attacks – by noting contrary evidence that points to staged incidents by Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate – you are called an "apologist" for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

If you question the one-sided State Department narrative regarding the Ukraine coup in 2014 – indeed even if you use the word "coup" – you are denounced as a "Kremlin stooge."

### **No 'Other' Side**

It is now not okay to even consider the other side of these stories, just as it was anathema to suggest that Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government may have been telling the truth in 2002-03 when it declared repeatedly that it had destroyed its WMDs. That made you a "Saddam apologist."

The hostility toward Americans who dare question the current anti-Russian hysteria was highlighted by an article last Thanksgiving Day by one of the authors of the new Post article, Craig Timberg.

In another front-page Post story, Timberg allowed an anonymous group called PropOrNot to malign the professionalism and patriotism of 200 Web sites, including our own Consortiumnews, that were lumped together in a McCarthyistic smear that they were somehow guilty of disseminating "Russian propaganda."

The unnamed accusers – granted anonymity by the Post – acknowledged that they had no evidence that the sites were part of some grand Russian conspiracy but made the judgment based on PropOrNot's analysis of the Web sites' content.

In other words, if you questioned the State Department's narratives on Ukraine or Syria – regardless of how well-supported those critiques were – you got smeared as a "Russian propagandist" – and the Post, which didn't even bother to contact the accused, considered that sort of analysis to be worthy of its front page.

The story fed into another frenzy about the need to use algorithms and artificial intelligence to hunt down and suppress or purge such dissenting views

from the Internet, supposedly to protect the sanctity of American democracy and spare Americans from exposure to “fake news.”

So, well-meaning Americans who may hope that Russia-gate will somehow bring down Trump are getting recruited into a movement that intends to silence dissent and allow the U.S. establishment to dictate what information you will get to see and hear.

And that officially approved “information” will surely lead to new global tensions, more military spending. and additional warfare up to and possibly including nuclear war with Russia.

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

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## The Crazy Imbalance of Russia-gate

**Exclusive:** If the U.S. government and mainstream media are really concerned about foreign influence in American politics, they might look at Israel and other nations with much more clout than Russia, notes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The core absurdity of the Russia-gate frenzy is its complete lack of proportionality. Indeed, the hysteria is reminiscent of Sen. Joe McCarthy warning that “one communist in the faculty of one university is one communist too many” or Donald Trump’s highlighting a few “bad hombres” raping white American women.

It’s not that there were no Americans who espoused communist views at universities and elsewhere or that there are no “bad hombre” rapists; it’s that these rare exceptions were used to generate a dangerous overreaction in service of a propagandistic agenda. Historically, we have seen this technique used often when demagogues seize on an isolated event and exploit it emotionally to mislead populations to war.

Today, we have The New York Times and The Washington Post repeatedly publishing front-page articles about allegations that some Russians with “links” to the Kremlin bought \$100,000 in Facebook ads to promote some issues deemed hurtful to

Hillary Clinton's campaign although some of the ads ran after the election.

Initially, Facebook could find no evidence of even that small effort but was pressured in May by Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia. The Washington Post reported that Warner, who is spearheading the Russia-gate investigation in the Senate Intelligence Committee, flew to Silicon Valley and urged Facebook executives to take another look at possible ad buys.

Facebook responded to this congressional pressure by scouring its billions of monthly users and announced that it had located 470 suspect accounts associated with ads totaling \$100,000 – out of Facebook's \$27 billion in annual revenue.

Here is how the Times described those findings: "Facebook officials disclosed that they had shut down several hundred accounts that they believe were created by a Russian company linked to the Kremlin and used to buy \$100,000 in ads pushing divisive issues during and after the American election campaign." (It sometimes appears that every Russian – all 144 million of them – is somehow "linked" to the Kremlin.)

Last week, congressional investigators urged Facebook to expand its review into "troll farms" supposedly based in Belarus, Macedonia and Estonia – although Estonia is by no means a Russian ally; it joined NATO in 2004.

"Warner and his Democratic counterpart on the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Adam B. Schiff of California, have been increasingly vocal in recent days about their frustrations with Facebook," the Post reported.

### **Facebook Complies**

So, on Thursday, Facebook succumbed to demands that it turn over to Congress copies of the ads, a move that has only justified more alarmist front-page stories about Russia! Russia! Russia!

In response to this political pressure – at a time when Facebook is fending off possible anti-trust legislation – its chief executive Mark Zuckerberg added that he is expanding the investigation to include "additional Russian groups and other former Soviet states."

So, it appears that not only are all Russians "linked" to the Kremlin, but all former Soviet states as well.

But why stop there? If the concern is that American political campaigns are being influenced by foreign governments whose interests may diverge from what's best for America, why not look at countries that have caused the United States far more harm recently than Russia?



After all, Saudi Arabia and its Sunni Wahabbi leaders have been pulling the U.S. government into their sectarian wars with the Shiites, including conflicts in Yemen and Syria that have contributed to anti-Americanism in the region, to the growth of Al Qaeda, and to a disruptive flow of refugees into Europe.

And, let's not forget the 8,000-pound gorilla in the room: Israel. Does anyone think that whatever Russia may or may not have done in trying to influence U.S. politics compares even in the slightest to what Israel does all the time?

Which government used its pressure and that of its American agents (i.e., the neocons) to push the United States into the disastrous war in Iraq? It wasn't Russia, which was among the countries urging the U.S. not to invade; it was Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Indeed, the plans for "regime change" in Iraq and Syria can be traced back to the work of key American neoconservatives employed by Netanyahu's political campaign in 1996. At that time, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and other leading neocons unveiled a seminal document entitled "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," which proposed casting aside negotiations with Arabs in favor of simply replacing the region's anti-Israeli governments.

However, to make that happen required drawing in the powerful U.S. military, so after the 9/11 attacks, the neocons inside President George W. Bush's administration set in motion a deception campaign to justify invading Iraq, a war which was to be followed by more "regime changes" in Syria and Iran.

### **A Wrench in the Plans**

Although the military disaster in Iraq threw a wrench into those plans, the Israeli/neocon agenda never changed. Along with Israel's new regional ally, Saudi Arabia, a proxy war was fashioned to remove Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

As Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren explained, the goal was to shatter the Shiite "strategic arc" running from Iran through Syria to Lebanon and Israel's Hezbollah enemies.

How smashing this Shiite "arc" was in the interests of the American people – or even within their consciousness – is never explained. But it was what Israel wanted and thus it was what the U.S. government enlisted to do, even to the point of letting sophisticated U.S. weaponry fall into the hands of Syria's Al Qaeda affiliate.

Israel's influence over U.S. politicians is so blatant that presidential contenders queue up every year to grovel before the Israel Lobby's conference of

the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. In 2016, Donald Trump showed up and announced that he was not there to “pander” and then pandered his pants off.

And, whenever Prime Minister Netanyahu wants to show off his power, he is invited to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress at which Republicans and Democrats compete to see how many times and how quickly they can leap to their feet in standing ovations. (Netanyahu holds the record for the number of times a foreign leader has addressed joint sessions with three such appearances, tied with Winston Churchill.)

Yet, Israeli influence is so engrained in the U.S. political process that even the mention of the existence of an “Israel Lobby” brings accusations of anti-Semitism. “Israel Lobby” is a forbidden phrase in Washington.

However, pretty much whenever Israel targets a U.S. politician for defeat, that politician goes down, a muscle that Israel flexed in the early 1980s in taking out Rep. Paul Findley and Sen. Charles Percy, two moderate Republicans whose crime was to suggest talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

So, if the concern is the purity of the American democratic process and the need to protect it from outside manipulation, let’s have at it. Why not a full-scale review of who is doing what and how? Does anyone think that Israel’s influence over U.S. politics is limited to a few hundred Facebook accounts and \$100,000 in ads?

### **A Historical Perspective**

And, if you want a historical review, throw in the British and German propaganda around the two world wars; include how the South Vietnamese government collaborated with Richard Nixon in 1968 to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson’s Paris peace talks; take a serious look at the collusion between Ronald Reagan’s campaign and Iran thwarting President Jimmy Carter’s efforts to free 52 American hostages in Tehran in 1980; open the books on Turkey’s covert investments in U.S. politicians and policymakers; and examine how authoritarian regimes of all stripes have funded important Washington think tanks and law firms.

If such an effort were ever proposed, you would get a sense of how sensitive this topic is in Official Washington, where foreign money and its influence are rampant. There would be accusations of anti-Semitism in connection with Israel and charges of conspiracy theory even in well-documented cases of collaboration between U.S. politicians and foreign interests.

So, instead of a balanced and comprehensive assessment of this problem, the powers-that-be concentrate on the infinitesimal case of Russian “meddling” as the excuse for Hillary Clinton’s shocking defeat. But the key reasons for

Clinton's dismal campaign had virtually nothing to do with Russia, even if you believe all the evidence-lite accusations about Russian "meddling."

The Russians did not tell Clinton to vote for the disastrous Iraq War and play endless footsy with the neocons; the Russians didn't advise her to set up a private server to handle her State Department emails and potentially expose classified information; the Russians didn't lure Clinton and the U.S. into the Libyan fiasco nor suggest her ghastly joke in response to Muammar Gaddafi's lynching ("We came, we saw, he died"); the Russians had nothing to do with her greedy decision to accept millions of dollars in Wall Street speaking fees and then try to keep the speech contents secret from the voters; the Russians didn't encourage her husband to become a serial philanderer and make a mockery of their marriage; nor did the Russians suggest to Anthony Weiner, the husband of top Clinton aide Huma Abedin, that he send lewd photos to a teen-ager on a laptop also used by his wife, a development that led FBI Director James Comey to reopen the Clinton-email investigation just 11 days before the election; the Russians weren't responsible for Clinton's decision not to campaign in Wisconsin and Michigan; the Russians didn't stop her from offering a coherent message about how she would help the struggling white working class; and on and on.

But the Russia-gate investigation is not about fairness and balance; it's a reckless scapegoating of a nuclear-armed country to explain away – and possibly do away with – Donald Trump's presidency. Rather than putting everything in context and applying a sense of proportion, Russia-gate is relying on wild exaggerations of factually dubious or relatively isolated incidents as an opportunistic means to a political end.

As reckless as President Trump has been, the supposedly wise men and wise women of Washington are at least his match.

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## The Killing of History

PBS' "The Vietnam War" may show some of the conflict's horrors but still soft-pedals the horrific war crimes that America inflicted on Vietnam, fitting with a corporate-dependent documentary project, writes John Pilger.

By John Pilger

One of the most hyped “events” of American television, “The Vietnam War,” has started on the PBS network. The directors are Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. Acclaimed for his documentaries on the Civil War, the Great Depression and the history of jazz, Burns says of his Vietnam films, “They will inspire our country to begin to talk and think about the Vietnam War in an entirely new way.”

In a society often bereft of historical memory and in thrall to the propaganda of its “exceptionalism,” Burns’s “entirely new” Vietnam War is presented as an “epic, historic work.” Its lavish advertising campaign promotes its biggest backer, Bank of America, which in 1971 was burned down by students in Santa Barbara, California, as a symbol of the hated war in Vietnam.

Burns says he is grateful to “the entire Bank of America family” which “has long supported our country’s veterans.” Bank of America was a corporate prop to an invasion that killed perhaps as many as four million Vietnamese and ravaged and poisoned a once bountiful land. More than 58,000 American soldiers were killed, and around the same number are estimated to have taken their own lives.

I watched the first episode in New York. It leaves you in no doubt of its intentions right from the start. The narrator says the war “was begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings, American overconfidence and Cold War misunderstandings.”

The dishonesty of this statement is not surprising. The cynical fabrication of “false flags” that led to the invasion of Vietnam is a matter of record – the Gulf of Tonkin “incident” in 1964, which Burns promotes as true, was just one. The lies litter a multitude of official documents, notably the *Pentagon Papers*, which the great whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg released in 1971.

There was no good faith. The faith was rotten and cancerous. For me – as it must be for many Americans – it is difficult to watch the film’s jumble of “red peril” maps, unexplained interviewees, ineptly cut archive and maudlin American battlefield sequences. In the series’ press release in Britain – the BBC will show it – there is no mention of Vietnamese dead, only Americans.

“We are all searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy,” Novick is quoted as saying. How very post-modern.

All this will be familiar to those who have observed how the American media and popular culture behemoth has revised and served up the great crime of the second half of the Twentieth Century: from “The Green Berets” and “The Deer Hunter” to “Rambo” and, in so doing, has legitimized subsequent wars of aggression. The revisionism never stops and the blood never dries. The invader is pitied and

purged of guilt, while “searching for some meaning in this terrible tragedy.”  
Cue Bob Dylan: “Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?”

### What ‘Decency’ and ‘Good Faith’?

I thought about the “decency” and “good faith” when recalling my own first experiences as a young reporter in Vietnam: watching hypnotically as the skin fell off napalmed peasant children like old parchment, and the ladders of bombs that left trees petrified and festooned with human flesh. General William Westmoreland, the American commander, referred to people as “termites.”

In the early 1970s, I went to Quang Ngai province, where in the village of My Lai, between 347 and 500 men, women and infants were murdered by American troops (Burns prefers “killings”). At the time, this was presented as an aberration: an “American tragedy” (*Newsweek*). In this one province, it was estimated that 50,000 people had been slaughtered during the era of American “free fire zones.” Mass homicide. This was not news.

To the north, in Quang Tri province, more bombs were dropped than in all of Germany during the Second World War. Since 1975, unexploded ordnance has caused more than 40,000 deaths in mostly “South Vietnam,” the country America claimed to “save” and, with France, conceived as a singularly imperial ruse.

The “meaning” of the Vietnam War is no different from the meaning of the genocidal campaign against the Native Americans, the colonial massacres in the Philippines, the atomic bombings of Japan, the leveling of every city in North Korea. The aim was described by Colonel Edward Lansdale, the famous CIA man on whom Graham Greene based his central character in *The Quiet American*.

Quoting Robert Taber’s *The War of the Flea*, Lansdale said, “There is only one means of defeating an insurgent people who will not surrender, and that is extermination. There is only one way to control a territory that harbours resistance, and that is to turn it into a desert.”

Nothing has changed. When Donald Trump addressed the United Nations on Sept. 19 – a body established to spare humanity the “scourge of war” – he declared he was “ready, willing and able” to “totally destroy” North Korea and its 25 million people. His audience gasped, but Trump’s language was not unusual. His rival for the presidency, Hillary Clinton, had boasted she was prepared to “totally obliterate” Iran, a nation of more than 80 million people. This is the American Way; only the euphemisms are missing now.

Returning to the U.S., I am struck by the silence and the absence of an opposition – on the streets, in journalism and the arts, as if dissent once tolerated in the “mainstream” has regressed to a dissidence: a metaphoric

underground.

## **Missing What Trump Means**

There is plenty of sound and fury at Trump the odious one, the “fascist,” but almost none at Trump as the symptom and caricature of an enduring system of conquest and extremism. Where are the ghosts of the great anti-war demonstrations that took over Washington in the 1970s? Where is the equivalent of the Freeze Movement that filled the streets of Manhattan in the 1980s, demanding that President Reagan withdraw battlefield nuclear weapons from Europe?

The sheer energy and moral persistence of these great movements largely succeeded; by 1987 Reagan had negotiated with Mikhail Gorbachev an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) that effectively ended the Cold War.

Today, according to secret NATO documents obtained by the German newspaper, *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, this vital treaty is likely to be abandoned as “nuclear targeting planning is increased.” The German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel has warned against “repeating the worst mistakes of the Cold War. ... All the good treaties on disarmament and arms control from Gorbachev and Reagan are in acute peril. Europe is threatened again with becoming a military training ground for nuclear weapons. We must raise our voice against this.”

But not in America. The thousands who turned out for Sen. Bernie Sanders’s “revolution” in last year’s presidential campaign are collectively mute on these dangers. That most of America’s violence across the world has been perpetrated not by Republicans, or mutants like Trump, but by liberal Democrats, remains a taboo.

Barack Obama provided the apotheosis, with seven simultaneous wars, a presidential record, including the destruction of Libya as a modern state. Obama’s overthrow of Ukraine’s elected government has had the desired effect: the massing of American-led NATO forces on Russia’s western borderland through which the Nazis invaded in 1941.

Obama’s “pivot to Asia” in 2011 signaled the transfer of the majority of America’s naval and air forces to Asia and the Pacific for no purpose other than to confront and provoke China. The Nobel Peace Laureate’s worldwide campaign of assassinations is arguably the most extensive campaign of terrorism since 9/11.

What is known in the U.S. as “the Left” has effectively allied with the darkest recesses of institutional power, notably the Pentagon and the CIA, to prevent a peace deal between Trump and Vladimir Putin and to reinstate Russia as an enemy, on the basis of no evidence of its alleged interference in the 2016 presidential

election.

The true scandal is the insidious assumption of power by sinister war-making vested interests for which no American voted. The rapid ascendancy of the Pentagon and the surveillance agencies under Obama represented an historic shift of power in Washington. Daniel Ellsberg rightly called it a coup. The three generals running Trump are its witness.

All of this fails to penetrate those “liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics,” as Luciana Bohne noted memorably. Commodified and market-tested, “diversity” is the new liberal brand, not the class people serve regardless of their gender and skin color: not the responsibility of all to stop a barbaric war to end all wars.

“How did it fucking come to this?” says Michael Moore in his Broadway show, *Terms of My Surrender*, a vaudeville for the disaffected set against a backdrop of Trump as Big Brother.

I admired Moore’s film, *Roger & Me*, about the economic and social devastation of his hometown of Flint, Michigan, and *Sicko*, his investigation into the corruption of healthcare in America.

The night I saw his show, his happy-clappy audience cheered his reassurance that “we are the majority!” and calls to “impeach Trump, a liar and a fascist!” His message seemed to be that had you held your nose and voted for Hillary Clinton, life would be predictable again.

He may be right. Instead of merely abusing the world, as Trump does, Clinton, the Great Obliterator, might have attacked Iran and lobbed missiles at Putin, whom she likened to Hitler: a particular profanity given the 27 million Russians who died in Hitler’s invasion.

“Listen up,” said Moore, “putting aside what our governments do, Americans are really loved by the world!”

There was a silence.

**John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist based in London. Pilger’s Web site is: [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com). His new film, “The Coming War on China,” is available in the U.S. from [www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com)**

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# Has the NYT Gone Collectively Mad?

**Special Report:** Crossing a line from recklessness into madness, The New York Times published a front-page opus suggesting that Russia was behind social media criticism of Hillary Clinton, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

For those of us who have taught journalism or worked as editors, a sign that an article is the product of sloppy or dishonest journalism is that a key point will be declared as flat fact when it is unproven or a point in serious dispute – and it then becomes the foundation for other claims, building a story like a high-rise constructed on sand.

This use of speculation as fact is something to guard against particularly in the work of inexperienced or opinionated reporters. But what happens when this sort of unprofessional work tops page one of The New York Times one day as a major “investigative” article and reemerges the next day in even more strident form as a major Times editorial? Are we dealing then with an inept journalist who got carried away with his thesis or are we facing institutional corruption or even a collective madness driven by ideological fervor?

What is stunning about the lede story in last Friday’s print edition of The New York Times is that it offers no real evidence to support its provocative claim that – as the headline states – “To Sway Vote, Russia Used Army of Fake Americans” or its subhead: “Flooding Twitter and Facebook, Impostors Helped Fuel Anger in Polarized U.S.”

In the old days, this wildly speculative article, which spills over three pages, would have earned an F in a J-school class or gotten a rookie reporter a stern rebuke from a senior editor. But now such unprofessionalism is highlighted by The New York Times, which boasts that it is the standard-setter of American journalism, the nation’s “newspaper of record.”

In this case, it allows reporter Scott Shane to introduce his thesis by citing some Internet accounts that apparently used fake identities, but he ties none of them to the Russian government. Acting like he has minimal familiarity with the Internet – yes, a lot of people do use fake identities – Shane builds his case on the assumption that accounts that cited references to purloined Democratic emails must be somehow from an agent or a bot connected to the Kremlin.

For instance, Shane cites the fake identity of “Melvin Redick,” who suggested on June 8, 2016, that people visit DCLeaks which, a few days earlier, had posted



some emails from prominent Americans, which Shane states as fact – not allegation – were “stolen ... by Russian hackers.”

Shane then adds, also as flat fact, that “The site’s phony promoters were in the vanguard of a cyberarmy of counterfeit Facebook and Twitter accounts, a legion of Russian-controlled impostors whose operations are still being unraveled.”

### **The Times’ Version**

In other words, Shane tells us, “The Russian information attack on the election did not stop with the hacking and leaking of Democratic emails or the fire hose of stories, true, false and in between, that battered Mrs. Clinton on Russian outlets like RT and Sputnik. Far less splashy, and far more difficult to trace, was Russia’s experimentation on Facebook and Twitter, the American companies that essentially invented the tools of social media and, in this case, did not stop them from being turned into engines of deception and propaganda.”

Besides the obvious point that very few Americans watch RT and/or Sputnik and that Shane offers no details about the alleged falsity of those “fire hose of stories,” let’s examine how his accusations are backed up:

“An investigation by The New York Times, and new research from the cybersecurity firm FireEye, reveals some of the mechanisms by which suspected Russian operators used Twitter and Facebook to spread anti-Clinton messages and promote the hacked material they had leaked. On Wednesday, Facebook officials disclosed that they had shut down several hundred accounts that they believe were created by a Russian company linked to the Kremlin and used to buy \$100,000 in ads pushing divisive issues during and after the American election campaign. On Twitter, as on Facebook, Russian fingerprints are on hundreds or thousands of fake accounts that regularly posted anti-Clinton messages.”

Note the weasel words: “suspected”; “believe”; “linked”; “fingerprints.” When you see such equivocation, it means that these folks – both the Times and FireEye – don’t have hard evidence; they are speculating.

And it’s worth noting that the supposed “army of fake Americans” may amount to hundreds out of Facebook’s two billion or so monthly users and the \$100,000 in ads compare to the company’s annual ad revenue of around \$27 billion. (I’d do the math but my calculator doesn’t compute such tiny percentages.)

So, this “army” is really not an “army” and we don’t even know that it is “Russian.” But some readers might say that surely we know that the Kremlin did mastermind the hacking of Democratic emails!

That claim is supported by the Jan. 6 “intelligence community assessment” that

was the work of what President Obama's Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called "hand-picked" analysts from three agencies – the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation. But, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you hand-pick the analysts, you are hand-picking the conclusions.

### **Agreeing with Putin**

But some still might protest that the Jan. 6 report surely presented convincing evidence of this serious charge about Russian President Vladimir Putin personally intervening in the U.S. election to help put Donald Trump in the White House. Well, as it turns out, not so much, and if you don't believe me, we can call to the witness stand none other than New York Times reporter Scott Shane.

Shane wrote at the time: "What is missing from the [the Jan. 6] public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies' claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to 'trust us.'"

So, even Scott Shane, the author of last Friday's opus, recognized the lack of "hard evidence" to prove that the Russian government was behind the release of the Democratic emails, a claim that both Putin and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who published a trove of the emails, have denied. While it is surely possible that Putin and Assange are lying or don't know the facts, you might think that their denials would be relevant to this lengthy investigative article, which also could have benefited from some mention of Shane's own skepticism of last January, but, hey, you don't want inconvenient details to mess up a cool narrative.

Yet, if you struggle all the way to the end of last Friday's article, you do find out how flimsy the Times' case actually is. How, for instance, do we know that "Melvin Redick" is a Russian impostor posing as an American? The proof, according to Shane, is that "His posts were never personal, just news articles reflecting a pro-Russian worldview."

As it turns out, the Times now operates with what must be called a neo-McCarthyistic approach for identifying people as Kremlin stooges, i.e., anyone who doubts the truthfulness of the State Department's narratives on Syria, Ukraine and other international topics.

### **Unreliable Source**

In the article's last section, Shane acknowledges as much in citing one of his experts, "Andrew Weisburd, an Illinois online researcher who has written

frequently about Russian influence on social media.” Shane quotes Weisburd as admitting how hard it is to differentiate Americans who just might oppose Hillary Clinton because they didn’t think she’d make a good president from supposed Russian operatives: “Trying to disaggregate the two was difficult, to put it mildly.”

According to Shane, “Mr. Weisburd said he had labeled some Twitter accounts ‘Kremlin trolls’ based simply on their pro-Russia tweets and with no proof of Russian government ties. The Times contacted several such users, who insisted that they had come by their anti-American, pro-Russian views honestly, without payment or instructions from Moscow.”

One of Weisburd’s “Kremlin trolls” turned out to be 66-year-old Marilyn Justice who lives in Nova Scotia and who somehow reached the conclusion that “Hillary’s a warmonger.” During the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, she reached another conclusion: that U.S. commentators were exhibiting a snide anti-Russia bias perhaps because they indeed were exhibiting a snide anti-Russia bias.

Shane tracked down another “Kremlin troll,” 48-year-old Marcel Sardo, a web producer in Zurich, Switzerland, who dares to dispute the West’s groupthink that Russia was responsible for shooting down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine on July 17, 2014, and the State Department’s claims that the Syrian government used sarin gas in a Damascus suburb on Aug. 21, 2013.

Presumably, if you don’t toe the line on those dubious U.S. government narratives, you are part of the Kremlin’s propaganda machine. (In both cases, there actually are serious reasons to doubt the Western groupthinks which again lack real evidence.)

But Shane accuses Sardo and his fellow-travelers of spreading “what American officials consider to be Russian disinformation on election hacking, Syria, Ukraine and more.” In other words, if you examine the evidence on MH-17 or the Syrian sarin case and conclude that the U.S. government’s claims are dubious if not downright false, you are somehow disloyal and making Russian officials “gleeful at their success,” as Shane puts it.

But what kind of a traitor are you if you quote Shane’s initial judgment after reading the Jan. 6 report on alleged Russian election meddling? What are you if you agree with his factual observation that the report lacked anything approaching “hard evidence”? That’s a point that also dovetails with what Vladimir Putin has been saying – that “IP addresses can be simply made up. ... This is no proof”?

So is Scott Shane a “Kremlin troll,” too? Should the Times immediately fire him

as a disloyal foreign agent? What if Putin says that 2 plus 2 equals 4 and your child is taught the same thing in elementary school, what does that say about public school teachers?

Out of such gibberish come the evils of McCarthyism and the death of the Enlightenment. Instead of encouraging a questioning citizenry, the new American paradigm is to silence debate and ridicule anyone who steps out of line.

You might have thought people would have learned something from the disastrous groupthink about Iraqi WMD, a canard that the Times and most of the U.S. mainstream media eagerly promoted.

But if you're feeling generous and thinking that the Times' editors must have been chastened by their Iraq-WMD fiasco but perhaps had a bad day last week and somehow allowed an egregious piece of journalism to lead their front page, your kind-heartedness would be shattered on Saturday when the Times' editorial board penned a laudatory reprise of Scott Shane's big scoop.

Stripping away even the few caveats that the article had included, the Times' editors informed us that "a startling investigation by Scott Shane of The New York Times, and new research by the cybersecurity firm FireEye, now reveal, the Kremlin's stealth intrusion into the election was far broader and more complex, involving a cyberarmy of bloggers posing as Americans and spreading propaganda and disinformation to an American electorate on Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. ...

"Now that the scheming is clear, Facebook and Twitter say they are reviewing the 2016 race and studying how to defend against such meddling in the future. ... Facing the Russian challenge will involve complicated issues dealing with secret foreign efforts to undermine American free speech."

But what is the real threat to "American free speech"? Is it the possibility that Russia – in a very mild imitation of what the U.S. government does all over the world – used some Web sites clandestinely to get out its side of various stories, an accusation against Russia that still lacks any real evidence?

Or is the bigger threat that the nearly year-long Russia-gate hysteria will be used to clamp down on Americans who dare question fact-lite or fact-free Official Narratives handed down by the State Department and The New York Times?

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# U.N. Enablers of ‘Aggressive War’

**Special Report:** U.N. investigative reports, like a new one condemning Syria for alleged sarin use, are received as impartial and credible, but are often just more war propaganda from compromised bureaucrats, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Many people still want to believe that the United Nations engages in impartial investigations and thus is more trustworthy than, say, self-interested governments, whether Russia or the United States. But trust in U.N. agencies is no longer well placed; whatever independence they may have once had has been broken, a reality relevant to recent “investigations” of Syrian chemical weapons use.



There is also the larger issue of the United Nations’ peculiar silence about one of its primary and original responsibilities, shouldered after the horrors of World War II – to stop wars of aggression, which today include “regime change” wars organized, funded and armed by the United States and other Western powers, such as the Iraq invasion in 2003, the overthrow of the Libyan government in 2011, and a series of proxy wars including the ongoing Syrian conflict.

After World War II, the Nuremberg Tribunals declared that a “war of aggression ... is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

That recognition became a guiding principle of the United Nations Charter, which specifically prohibits aggression or even threats of aggression against

sovereign states.

The Charter declares in Article One that it is a chief U.N. purpose “to take effective collective measures ... for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace.” Article Two, which defines the appropriate behavior of U.N. members, adds that “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state...”

However, instead of enforcing this fundamental rule, the United Nations has, in effect, caved in to the political and financial pressure brought to bear by the United States and its allies. A similar disregard for international law also pervades the U.S. mainstream media and much of the European and Israeli press as well.

There is an assumption that the United States and its allies have the right to intervene militarily anywhere in the world at anytime solely at their own discretion. Though U.S. diplomats and mainstream journalists still voice outrage when adversaries deviate from international law – such as denunciations of Russia over Ukraine’s civil war – there is silence or support when a U.S. president or, say, an Israeli prime minister orders military strikes inside another country. Then, we hear only justifications for these attacks.

### **Shielding Israel**

For instance, on Friday, The New York Times published an article about Israel conducting a bombing raid inside Syria that reportedly killed two Syrians. The article is notable because it contains not a single reference to international law and Israel’s clear-cut violation of it. Instead, the article amounts to a lengthy rationalization for Israel’s aggression, framing the attacks as Israeli self-defense or, as the Times put it, “an escalation of Israel’s efforts to prevent its enemies from gaining access to sophisticated weapons.”

The article also contains no reference to the fact that Israel maintains a sophisticated nuclear arsenal and is known to possess chemical and biological weapons as well. Implicit in the Times article is that the U.S. and Israel live under one set of rules while countries on the U.S.-Israeli enemies list must abide by another. Not to state the obvious but this is a clear violation of the journalistic principle of objectivity.

But the Times is far from alone in applying endless double standards. Hypocrisy now permeates international agencies, including the United Nations, which instead of pressing for accountability in cases of U.S. or Israeli aggression has become an aider and abettor, issuing one-sided reports that justify further

aggression while doing little or nothing to stop U.S.-backed acts of aggression.

For instance, there was no serious demand that U.S. and British leaders who organized the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, should face any accountability for committing the “supreme international crime” of an aggressive war. As far as the U.N. is concerned, war-crimes tribunals are for the little guys.

This breakdown in the integrity of the U.N. and related agencies has developed over the past few decades as one U.S. administration after another has exploited U.S. clout as the world’s “unipolar power” to ensure that international bureaucrats conform to U.S. interests. Any U.N. official who deviates from this unwritten rule can expect to have his or her reputation besmirched and career truncated.

So, while harshly critical of alleged abuses by the Syrian military, U.N. officials are notoriously silent when it comes to condemning the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Israel and other countries that have been “covertly” backing anti-government “rebels” who have engaged in grave crimes against humanity in Syria.

The U.S. and its allies have even mounted overt military operations inside Syrian territory, including airstrikes against the Syrian military and its allies, without permission of the internationally recognized government in Damascus. Yet, the U.N. does nothing to curtail or condemn these clear violations of its own Charter.

### **Breaking the Independence**

The reason is that, for much of this century, the U.S. government has worked to bring key agencies, such as the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), under U.S. control and domination.

This drive to neutralize the U.N.’s independence gained powerful momentum after the 9/11 attacks and President George W. Bush’s launching of his “global war on terror.” But this effort continued under President Obama and now under President Trump.

In 2002, after opening the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and effectively waiving the Geneva Convention’s protections for prisoners of war, Bush bristled at criticism from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary C. Robinson.

Soon, Robinson was targeted for removal. Her fierce independence, which also

included criticism of Israel, was unacceptable. The Bush administration lobbied hard against her reappointment, leading to her retirement in 2002.

Also, in 2002, the Bush administration engineered the firing of OPCW's Director General Jose Mauricio Bustani who was viewed as an obstacle to the U.S. plans for invading Iraq.

Bustani, who had been reelected unanimously to the post less than a year earlier, described his removal in [a 2013 interview](#) with Marlise Simons of The New York Times, citing how Bush's emissary, Under-Secretary of State John Bolton, marched into Bustani's office and announced that he (Bustani) would be fired.

"The story behind [Bustani's] ouster has been the subject of interpretation and speculation for years, and Mr. Bustani, a Brazilian diplomat, has kept a low profile since then," wrote Simons. "But with the agency [OPCW] thrust into the spotlight with news of the Nobel [Peace] Prize [in October 2013], Mr. Bustani agreed to discuss what he said was the real reason: the Bush administration's fear that chemical weapons inspections in Iraq would conflict with Washington's rationale for invading it. Several officials involved in the events, some speaking publicly about them for the first time, confirmed his account."

The official U.S. explanation for getting rid of Bustani was incompetence, but Bustani and the other diplomats close to the case reported that Bustani's real offense was drawing Iraq into acceptance of the OPCW's conventions for eliminating chemical weapons, just as the Bush administration was planning to pin its propaganda campaign for invading Iraq on the country's alleged secret stockpile of WMD.

Bustani's ouster gave President Bush a clearer path to the invasion by letting him frighten Americans with the prospect of Iraq sharing its chemical weapons and possibly a nuclear bomb with Al Qaeda terrorists.

Dismissing Iraq's insistence that it had destroyed its chemical weapons and didn't have a nuclear weapons project, Bush launched the invasion in March 2003, only for the world to discover later that the Iraqi government was telling the truth.

### **Compliant Replacements**

In comparison to the independent-minded Bustani, the [biography](#) of the current OPCW director general, Ahmet Uzumcu, a career Turkish diplomat, suggests that the OPCW could be expected to slant its case against the Syrian government in the current Syrian conflict.



Not only has Turkey, a NATO ally of the United States, been a key player in supporting the proxy war to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, but Uzumcu also served as Turkey's ambassador to Israel, which has long sought regime change in Syria and has publicly come out in favor of the anti-government rebels.

Another one-time thorn in the side of the U.S. "unipolar power" was the IAEA when it was under the control of Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, an Egyptian. The IAEA challenged the Bush administration's claims about Iraq having a nuclear program, when one really didn't exist.

However, being right is no protection when U.S. officials want to bring an agency into line with U.S. policy and propaganda. So, early in the Obama administration – as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was pushing for a hardline on Iran over its nascent nuclear program – the U.S. government engineered the insertion of a pliable Japanese diplomat, Yukiya Amano, into the IAEA's top job.

Before his appointment, Amano had portrayed himself as an independent-minded fellow who was resisting U.S.-Israeli propaganda about the Iranian nuclear program. Yet behind the scenes, he was meeting with U.S. and Israeli officials to coordinate on how to serve their interests (even though Israel is an actual rogue nuclear state, not a hypothetical or fictional one).

Amano's professed doubts about an Iranian nuclear-bomb project, which even the U.S. intelligence community agreed no longer existed, was just a theatrical device to intensify the later impact if he were to declare that Iran indeed was building a secret nuke, thus justifying the desire of Israeli leaders and American neoconservatives to "bomb-bomb-bomb" Iran.

But this U.S. ploy was spoiled by Pvt. Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning's leaking of hundreds of thousands of pages of U.S. diplomatic cables. Among them were reports on Amano's hidden collaboration with U.S. and Israeli officials; his agreement with U.S. emissaries on who to fire and who to retain among IAEA officials; and even Amano's request for additional U.S. financial contributions.

The U.S. embassy cables revealing the truth about Amano were published by the U.K. Guardian in 2011 (although ignored by The New York Times, The Washington Post and other mainstream U.S. news outlets). Despite the silence of the major U.S. news media, Internet outlets, such as Consortiumnews.com, highlighted the Amano cables, meaning that enough Americans knew the facts not to be fooled again. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "Did Manning Help Avert War with Iran?"]

## A Collective Collapse

So, over the years, there has been a collective collapse of the independence at U.N.-related agencies. An international bureaucrat who gets on the wrong side of the United States or Israel can expect to be fired and humiliated, while those who play ball can be assured of a comfortable life as a “respected” diplomat.

But this reality is little known to most Americans so they are still inclined to be influenced when a “U.N. investigation” reaches some conclusion condemning some country that already is on the receiving end of negative U.S. propaganda.

The New York Times, CNN and other major U.S. news outlets are sure to trumpet these “findings” with great seriousness and respect and to treat any remaining doubters as outside the mainstream. Of course, there’s an entirely different response on the rare occasion when some brave or foolhardy human rights bureaucrat criticizes Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. Then, the U.N. finding is just a sign of anti-Israeli bias and should be discounted.

In the far more frequent cases when a U.N. report is in line with U.S. propaganda, American journalists almost never turn a critical eye toward the quality of the evidence or the leaps of logic. We saw that happen this week with a thinly sourced and highly dubious U.N. report blaming the Syrian government for an alleged sarin incident on April 4. A major contradiction in the evidence – testimony given to OPCW investigators undercutting the conclusion that a Syrian warplane could have dropped a sarin bomb – was brushed aside by the U.N. human rights investigators and was ignored by the Times and other major U.S. news outlets.

But what is perhaps most troubling is that these biased U.N. reports are now used to justify continued wars of aggression by stronger countries against weaker ones. So, instead of acting as a bulwark to protect the powerless from the powerful as the U.N. Charter intended, the U.N. bureaucracy has turned the original noble purpose of the institution on its head by becoming an enabler of the “supreme international crime,” wars of aggression.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “How US Pressure Bends UN Agencies.”]

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

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# How 'Regime Change' Wars Led to Korea Crisis

**Exclusive:** The U.S.-led aggressions against Iraq and Libya are two war crimes that keep on costing, with their grim examples of what happens to leaders who get rid of WMDs driving the scary showdown with North Korea, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It is a popular meme in the U.S. media to say that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is "crazy" as he undertakes to develop a nuclear bomb and a missile capacity to deliver it, but he is actually working from a cold logic dictated by the U.S. government's aggressive wars and lack of integrity.

Indeed, the current North Korea crisis, which could end up killing millions of people, can be viewed as a follow-on disaster to President George W. Bush's Iraq War and President Barack Obama's Libyan intervention. Those wars came after the leaders of Iraq and Libya had dismantled their dangerous weapons programs, leaving their countries virtually powerless when the U.S. government chose to invade.

In both cases, the U.S. government also exploited its power over global information to spread lies about the targeted regimes as justification for the invasions – and the world community failed to do anything to block the U.S. aggressions.

And, on a grim personal note, the two leaders, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, were then brutally murdered, Hussein by hanging and Gaddafi by a mob that first sodomized him with a knife.

So, the neoconservatives who promoted the Iraq invasion supposedly to protect the world from Iraq's alleged WMDs – and the liberal interventionists who pushed the Libya invasion based on false humanitarian claims – may now share in the horrific possibility that millions of people in North Korea, South Korea, Japan and maybe elsewhere could die from real WMDs launched by North Korea and/or by the United States.

Washington foreign policy "experts" who fault President Trump's erratic and bellicose approach toward this crisis may want to look in the mirror and consider how they contributed to the mess by ignoring the predictable consequences from the Iraq and Libya invasions.

Yes, I know, at the time it was so exciting to celebrate the Bush Doctrine of preemptive wars even over a “one percent” suspicion that a “rogue state” like Iraq might share WMDs with terrorists – or the Clinton Doctrine hailed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s acolytes enamored by her application of “smart power” to achieve “regime change” in Libya.

However, as we now know, both wars were built upon lies. Iraq did not possess WMD stockpiles as the Bush administration claimed, and Libya was not engaged in mass murder of civilians in rebellious areas in the eastern part of the country as the Obama administration claimed.

Post-invasion investigations knocked down Bush’s WMD myth in Iraq, and a British parliamentary inquiry concluded that Western governments misrepresented the situation in eastern Libya where Gaddafi forces were targeting armed rebels but not indiscriminately killing civilians.

But those belated fact-finding missions were no comfort to either Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi, nor to their countries, which have seen mass slaughters resulting from the U.S.-sponsored invasions and today amount to failed states.

There also has been virtually no accountability for the war crimes committed by the Bush and Obama administrations. Bush and Obama both ended up serving two terms as President. None of Bush’s senior advisers were punished – and Hillary Clinton received the 2016 Democratic Party’s nomination for President.

As for the U.S. mainstream media, which behaved as boosters for both invasions, pretty much all of the journalistic war advocates have continued on with their glorious careers. To excuse their unprofessional behavior, some even have pushed revisionist lies, such as the popular but false claim that Saddam Hussein was to blame because he pretended that he did have WMDs – when the truth is that his government submitted a detailed 12,000-page report to the United Nations in December 2002 describing how the WMDs had been destroyed (though that accurate account was widely mocked and ultimately ignored).

### **Pervasive Dishonesty**

The dishonesty that now pervades the U.S. government and the U.S. mainstream media represents another contributing factor to the North Korean crisis. What sensible person anywhere on the planet would trust U.S. assurances? Who would believe what the U.S. government says, except, of course, the U.S. mainstream media?

Remember also that North Korea’s nuclear program had largely been mothballed before George W. Bush delivered his “axis of evil” speech in January 2002, which linked Iran and Iraq – then bitter enemies – with North Korea. After that, North

Korea withdrew from earlier agreements on limiting its nuclear development and began serious work on a bomb.

Yet, while North Korea moved toward a form of mutual assured destruction, Iraq and Libya chose a different path.

In Iraq, to head off a threatened U.S.-led invasion, Hussein's government sought to convince the international community that it had lived up to its commitments regarding the destruction of its WMD arsenal and programs. Besides the detailed declaration, Iraq gave U.N. weapons inspectors wide latitude to search on the ground.

But Bush cut short the inspection efforts in March 2003 and launched his "shock and awe" invasion, which led to the collapse of Hussein's regime and the dictator's eventual capture and hanging.

### **Gaddafi's Gestures**

In Libya, Gaddafi also sought to cooperate with international demands regarding WMDs. In late 2003, he announced that his country would eliminate its unconventional weapons programs, including a nascent nuclear project.

Gaddafi also sought to get Libya out from under economic sanctions by taking responsibility for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103 over Scotland, although he and his government continued to deny carrying out the terror attack that killed 270 people.

But these efforts to normalize Libya's relations with the West failed to protect him or his country. In 2011 when Islamic militants staged an uprising around Benghazi, Gaddafi moved to crush it, and Secretary of State Clinton eagerly joined with some European countries in seeking military intervention to destroy Gaddafi's regime.

The United Nations Security Council approved a plan for the humanitarian protection of civilians in and around Benghazi, but the Obama administration and its European allies exploited that opening to mount a full-scale "regime change" war.

Prominent news personalities, such as MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell, cheered on the war with the claim that Gaddafi had American "blood on his hands" over the Pan Am 103 case because he had accepted responsibility. The fact that his government continued to deny actual guilt – and the international conviction of Libyan Abdelbaset al-Megrahi was a judicial travesty – was ignored. Almost no one in the West dared question the longtime groupthink of Libyan guilt.

By October 2011, Gaddafi had fled Tripoli and was captured by rebels in Sirte. He was tortured, sodomized with a knife and then executed. Clinton, whose aides felt she should claim credit for Gaddafi's overthrow as part of a Clinton Doctrine, celebrated his murder with a laugh and a quip, "We came; we saw; he died."

But Gaddafi's warnings about Islamist terrorists in Benghazi came back to haunt Clinton when on Sept. 11, 2012, militants attacked the U.S. consulate and CIA station there, killing Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

The obsessive Republican investigation into the Benghazi attack failed to demonstrate many of the lurid claims about Clinton's negligence, but it did surface the fact that she had used a private server for her official State Department emails, which, in turn, led to an FBI investigation which severely damaged her 2016 presidential run.

### **Lessons Learned**

Meanwhile, back in North Korea, the young dictator Kim Jong Un was taking all this history in. According to numerous sources, he concluded that his and North Korea's only safeguard would be a viable nuclear deterrent to stave off another U.S.-sponsored "regime change" war – with him meeting a similar fate as was dealt to Hussein and Gaddafi.

Since then, Kim and his advisers have made clear that the surrender of North Korea's small nuclear arsenal is off the table. They make the understandable point that the United States has shown bad faith in other cases in which leaders have given up their WMDs in compliance with international demands and then saw their countries invaded and faced grisly executions themselves.

Now, the world faces a predicament in which an inexperienced and intemperate President Trump confronts a crisis that his two predecessors helped to create and make worse. Trump has threatened "fire and fury" like the world has never seen, suggesting a nuclear strike on North Korea, which, in turn, has vowed to retaliate.

Millions of people on the Korean peninsula and Japan – and possibly elsewhere – could die in such a conflagration. The world's economy could be severely shaken, given Japan's and South Korea's industrial might and the size of their consumer markets.

If such a horror does come to pass, the U.S. government and the U.S. mainstream media will surely revert to their standard explanation that Kim was simply "crazy" and brought this destruction on himself. Trump's liberal critics also might attack Trump for bungling the diplomacy.

But the truth is that many of Washington's elite policymakers – both on the Republican and Democratic sides – will share in the blame. And so too should the U.S. mainstream media.

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

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## The Last of the Mad Pirates?

**Exclusive:** President Trump's erratic behavior and careless bellicosity could have dire consequences for the world, but he also demonstrates the need to rethink America's global power, notes David Marks.

By David Marks

There is clear evidence of a world increasingly steeped in conflict and violence: The degradation of U.S.-Russian relations, territorial tensions in the South China Sea, the hostile rhetoric between North Korea and the United States, an escalation of the border conflict between China and India, growing tension between Israel and Iran, and the continuing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Ukraine; among other hostilities around the globe yielding death and destruction.

Yet there is some indication that what we may be witnessing is darkness before a new dawn.

In his historical essay of 1968, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, Buckminster Fuller, futurist and inventor of the geodesic dome, describes the conquest and colonization of the planet by Europeans as the age of the *great pirates*. He marks the end of that era with World War I, followed with a subsequent attempt by lesser pirates taking advantage of a time when the planet's fate was precarious.

Fuller concluded that the later events of the Twentieth Century and beyond would be determined by the wisdom and strength of those who recognized that *Spaceship Earth* has limited resources that need to be appreciated and protected. As with others who consider our predicament, he saw only two possibilities:

"We are not going to be able to operate our Spaceship Earth successfully nor for

much longer unless we see it as a whole spaceship and our fate as common. It has to be everybody or nobody.”

The reign of the last of the pirates in their final self-destructive, single-minded grasp for profits would either destroy human life as we know it or be countered with a new sustainable relationship with the Earth.

The struggle between the conflict generating profiteers and those who recognize that reducing conflict is the only path to sustaining human life on the planet, is coming to a head. Despite hard evidence that environmental traumas are increasing and will dominate the near future, the modern pirates are in defiant denial, leading their final charge against anything that might get in the way of gargantuan treasure chests. They must lie, cheat, pillage or kill in order to maintain the facade that everything is okay with the planet.

One of the most critical tools of the great pirates and their modern heirs is the ability to prey on the ignorant and misinformed.

The pirates of old applied the sword to abscond with valuables; and more often committed genocide to steal land and resources from the indigenous.

### **Propaganda Power**

Modern pirates inherited these tools and became specialists in others. They deceive, entice and encourage scapegoating to obtain treasures or protect their fortunes. Ignorance is fertile ground for their work. Anyone opposing these marauders and their skewed vision of the world become the objects of derision, ridicule and threats of violence.

Yes, this tale may sound familiar as we watch world events unfold. In that sense, the Trump presidency is a dramatic test of the planet’s fate; the last desperate, inane, final gasps of piracy confront us all.

Some recent U.S. Presidents, other world leaders, corporations and industrialists bear some resemblance to the pirates of old, and certainly there are current conflicts that are fueled outside the scope of U.S. influence. But Trump is straight out of Central Casting. And in contrast to his self-aggrandizement, he is not the heroic leader, but rather the mad, despised black pirate awash in his own darkness and loathing.

The glimmer of light comes because President Trump, pirate extraordinaire, is unwittingly doing everything to ensure that no one will ever tolerate a pirate again.

Because he is great at alienating others, Trump’s enemies begin to unite. Some



of his previous supporters and loyalists have mutinied in reaction to his unwillingness to condemn racism and his willingness to pardon political allies. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recently spoke an amazing phrase to encapsulate and isolate the so-called leader of the free world: “The President speaks for himself.”

The greatest danger, which was noted by some before he was elected and is just being recognized by those who have been on board his ship until now, is Trump’s proclivity to embrace violence, however and wherever it might suit him, such as his rush-to-judgment missile strike against a Syrian airbase in April. Many an eyebrow was raised at Trump’s “fire and fury like the world has never seen” threat against North Korea – suggesting a nuclear strike – but very few have broached the touchy subject of taking away his role as commander in chief, including his nuclear sword, via impeachment or the Twenty-fifth Amendment’s provision for declaring the President “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office” (requiring a finding by the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet).

### **A Pattern of Violence**

Veiled hope percolates that Trump’s words are no more than bluster – and it must be acknowledged that Trump’s predecessors resorted to violence repeatedly around the world, including Nobel Peace laureate Barack Obama, who acknowledged bombing seven countries, and George W. Bush, who invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and lusted for more wars, and that Trump’s rival last year, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, may have surpassed even Trump in her hawkishness, having pushed for the invasion of Libya in 2011 and supporting the bloody proxy war in Syria.

But the current mad pirate, if nothing else, excels at unpredictability. The world watches in amazement as a buccaneer steers the most powerful ship on the planet with egoistic lunacy. How might this precarious tale have a happy end?

If we manage to survive these dangers, the Trump presidency could engender a new era of consensus. Perhaps with the maddest of the pirates gone, recognition of the causes of his ascendancy might be considered. First and foremost: the last U.S. presidential election presented only a choice between an unsustainable status quo and a role of the dice.

In that sense, it is not enough for Trump simply to be replaced by another pirate, even one with a calmer disposition and a better vocabulary. For the U.S., a period of serious self-criticism is warranted. Without that, it is hard to envision how candidates seeking a more peaceful future can succeed.

President Trump’s crass destructiveness – and the more suave advocacy of

violence by Bush, Obama and Clinton – should be a mirror for all Americans to reflect upon. The image of Trump is more garish and thus more obvious in its ugliness, but that may finally shake Americans of all ideological persuasions awake in the recognition of the viciousness that has absorbed American politics and society.

Trump's unintended contribution is that he makes obvious how dangerous it is for the planet to have mad pirates at the helm. He has given re-birth to a concept that Fuller succinctly expressed: "If humanity does not opt for integrity we are through completely. It is absolutely touch and go. Each one of us could make the difference."

Perhaps – once Americans are awake to this reality – simple things might be prioritized; like reducing violence between nations and religions, reversing the abuses that have bruised the planet and polluted its atmosphere. And maybe working to ensure that everyone on *Spaceship Earth* is fed, sheltered and educated.

Unlikely, naive and idealistic you say? Perhaps, but the moral health of the United States is a strong influence on the rest of the world. The direction that the U.S. takes after Trump will be a key factor in future global stability, both politically and environmentally.

The veil hasn't quite lifted and the pirates still dominate, but there's potential for recognizing we're all on a mother ship worth protecting.

**David Marks is a veteran documentary filmmaker and investigative reporter. His work includes films for the BBC and PBS, including *Nazi Gold*, on the role of Switzerland in WWII and biographies of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Sinatra.**

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