

WILLIAM BLUM: Sucking Liberals into a New Cold War

Out of fury against President Trump, many liberals have enlisted in the ranks of the New Cold War against Russia, seeming to have forgotten the costs to rationality and lives from the first Cold War, warned the late William Blum.

*A memorial service was held on Sunday in Washington for William Blum, a former State Department official whose disillusionment with the Vietnam War turned him into a fierce critic of U.S. foreign policy. In books such as Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II; Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire and Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower, as well as on his blog, [The Anti-Empire Report](#), Blum educated a generation of Americans about the rapacious aims of the U.S. abroad, debunking the myth of Washington's good intentions for the peoples of the world. Blum died on December 9, 2018. He was a contributor to **Consortium News** and we reprint one of his last articles that appeared here. Originally published on Dec. 6, 2017.*

By [William Blum](#)

Cold War Number One: 70 years of daily national stupidity.
Cold War Number Two: Still in its youth, but just as stupid.

“He said he absolutely did not meddle in our election. He did not do what they are saying he did.” – President Trump re Russian President Vladimir Putin after their meeting in Vietnam. [*Washington Post*, Nov.e 12, 2017]

Putin later added that he knew “absolutely nothing” about

Russian contacts with Trump campaign officials. "They can do what they want, looking for some sensation. But there are no sensations."

Numerous U.S. intelligence agencies have said otherwise. Former Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, responded to Trump's remarks by declaring: "The president was given clear and indisputable evidence that Russia interfered in the election."

As we'll see below, there isn't too much of the "clear and indisputable" stuff. And this of course is the same James Clapper who made an admittedly false statement to Congress in March 2013, when he responded, "No, sir" and "not wittingly" to a question about whether the National Security Agency was collecting "any type of data at all" on millions of Americans. Lies don't usually come in any size larger than that.

Virtually every member of Congress who has publicly stated a position on the issue has criticized Russia for interfering in the 2016 American presidential election. And it would be very difficult to find a member of the mainstream media who has questioned this thesis.

What is the poor consumer of news to make of these gross contradictions? Here are some things to keep in mind:

How do we know that the tweets and advertisements "sent by Russians" -- those presented as attempts to sway the vote -- were actually sent by Russians? The Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), composed of National Security Agency and CIA veterans, recently declared that the CIA knows how to disguise the origin of emails and tweets.

The *Washington Post* has as well reported that Twitter “makes it easy for users to hide their true identities.”
[Washington Post, Oct. 10, 2017]

Russians! Russians! Russians!

Even if these communications were actually sent from Russia, how do we know that they came from the Russian government, and not from any of the other 144.3 million residents of Russia?

Even if they were sent by the Russian government, we have to ask: Why would they do that? Do the Russians think the United States is a Third World, under-developed, backward Banana Republic easily influenced and moved by a bunch of simple condemnations of the plight of blacks in America and the Clinton “dynasty”? Or clichéd statements about other controversial issues, such as gun rights and immigration? If so, many Democratic and Republican officials would love to know the secret of the Russians’ method. Consider also that Facebook has stated that 90 percent of the alleged-Russian-bought content that ran on its network did not even mention Trump or Clinton. [Washington Post, Nov. 15, 2017]

On top of all this is the complete absence of even the charge, much less with any supporting evidence, of Russian interference in the actual voting or counting of votes.

After his remark suggesting he believed Putin’s assertion that there had been no Russian meddling in the election, Trump – of course, as usual – attempted to backtrack and distance himself from his words after drawing criticism at home; while James Clapper declared: “The fact the president of the United States would take Putin at his word over that

of the intelligence community is quite simply unconscionable.” [Reuters, Nov. 12, 2017]

Given Clapper’s large-size lie referred to above, can Trump be faulted for being skeptical of the intelligence community’s Holy Writ? Purposeful lies of the intelligence community during the first Cold War were legendary, many hailed as brilliant tactics when later revealed. The CIA, for example, had phony articles and editorials planted in foreign newspapers (real Fake News), made sex films of target subjects caught *in flagrante delicto* who had been lured to Agency safe houses by female agents, had Communist embassy personnel expelled because of phony CIA documents, and much more.

The *Post* recently published an article entitled “How did Russian trolls get into your Facebook feed? Silicon Valley made it easy.” In the midst of this “exposé,” The *Post* stated: “There’s no way to tell if you personally saw a Russian post or tweet.” [Washington Post, Nov. 2, 2017]

A Case or Not?

So ... Do the Cold Warriors have a case to make or do they not? Or do they just want us to remember that the Russkis are bad? So it goes.

An organization in Czechoslovakia with the self-appointed name of European Values has produced a lengthy report entitled “The Kremlin’s Platform for ‘Useful Idiots’ in the West: An Overview of RT’s Editorial Strategy and Evidence of Impact.” It includes a long list of people who have appeared on the Russian-owned TV station RT (formerly *Russia Today*), which can be seen in the U.S., the U.K. and other countries.

Those who've been guests on RT are the "idiots" useful to Moscow. (The list is not complete. I've been on RT about five times, but I'm not listed. Where is my Idiot Badge?)

RT's YouTube channel has more than two million followers and claims to be the "most-watched news network" on the video site. Its Facebook page has more than 4 million likes and followers. Can this explain why the powers-that-be forget about a thing called freedom-of-speech and treat the station like an enemy? The U.S. government recently forced *RT America* to register as a foreign agent and has cut off the station's Congressional press credentials.

The Cold War strategist, George Kennan, wrote prophetically: "Were the Soviet Union to sink tomorrow under the waters of the ocean, the American military-industrial establishment would have to go on, substantially unchanged, until some other adversary could be invented. Anything else would be an unacceptable shock to the American economy."

Writer John Wight has described the new Cold War as being "in response to Russia's recovery from the demise of the Soviet Union and the failed attempt to turn the country into a wholly owned subsidiary of Washington via the imposition of free market economic shock treatment thereafter."

So let's see what other brilliance the New Cold War brings us. ... Ah yes, another headline in the *Post* (Nov. 18, 2017): "British alarm rising over possible Russian meddling in Brexit." Of course, why else would the British people have voted to leave the European Union? But wait a moment, again, one of the British researchers behind the report "said that the accounts they analyzed – which claimed Russian as their

language when they were set up but tweeted in English – posted a mixture of pro-‘leave’ and pro-‘remain’ messages regarding Brexit. Commentators have said that the goal may simply have been to sow discord and division in society.”

Was there ever a time when the *Post* would have been embarrassed to be so openly, amateurishly biased about Russia? Perhaps during the few years between the two Cold Wars.

In case you don’t remember how stupid Cold War Number One was ...

- 1948: The *Pittsburgh Press* published the names, addresses, and places of employment of about 1,000 citizens who had signed presidential-nominating petitions for former Vice President Henry Wallace, running under the Progressive Party. This, and a number of other lists of “communists,” published in the mainstream media, resulted in people losing their jobs, being expelled from unions, having their children abused, being denied state welfare benefits, and suffering various other punishments.
- Around 1950: The House Committee on Un-American Activities published a pamphlet, “100 Things You Should Know About Communism in the U.S.A.” This included information about what a communist takeover of the United States would mean: ?Q: What would happen to my insurance?? A: It would go to the Communists.? Q: Would communism give me something better than I have now?? A: Not unless you are in a penitentiary serving a life sentence at hard labor.
- 1950s: Mrs. Ada White, member of the Indiana State

Textbook Commission, believed that Robin Hood was a Communist and urged that books that told the Robin Hood story be banned from Indiana schools.

- As evidence that anti-communist mania was not limited to the lunatic fringe or conservative newspaper publishers, here is Clark Kerr, president of the University of California at Berkeley in a 1959 speech: "Perhaps 2 or even 20 million people have been killed in China by the new [communist] regime." One person wrote to Kerr: "I am wondering how you would judge a person who estimates the age of a passerby on the street as being 'perhaps 2 or even 20 years old.' Or what would you think of a physician who tells you to take 'perhaps 2 or even twenty teaspoonsful of a remedy'?"
- Throughout the cold war, traffic in phony Lenin quotes was brisk, each one passed around from one publication or speaker to another for years. Here's *S. News and World Report* in 1958 demonstrating communist duplicity by quoting Lenin: "Promises are like pie crusts, made to be broken." Secretary of State John Foster Dulles used it in a speech shortly afterward, one of many to do so during the cold war. Lenin actually did use a very similar line, but he explicitly stated that he was quoting an English proverb (it comes from Jonathan Swift) and his purpose was to show the unreliability of the bourgeoisie, not of communists. "First we will take Eastern Europe, then the masses of Asia, then we will encircle the United States, which will be the last bastion of capitalism. We will not have to attack. It will fall like an overripe fruit into our hands." This Lenin "quotation" had the usual wide circulation, even

winding up in the *Congressional Record* in 1962. This was not simply a careless attribution; this was an out-and-out fabrication; an extensive search, including by the Library of Congress and the United States Information Agency failed to find its origin.

- A favorite theme of the anti-communists was that a principal force behind drug trafficking was a communist plot to demoralize the United States. Here's a small sample: Don Keller, District Attorney for San Diego County, California in 1953: "We know that more heroin is being produced south of the border than ever before and we are beginning to hear stories of financial backing by big shot Communists operating out of Mexico City." Henry Giordano, Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, 1964, interviewed in the *American Legion Magazine*: Interviewer: "I've been told that the communists are trying to flood our country with narcotics to weaken our moral and physical stamina. Is that true?" Giordano: "As far as the drugs are concerned, it's true. There's a terrific flow of drugs coming out of Yunnan Province of China. ... There's no question that in that particular area this is the aim of the Red Chinese. It should be apparent that if you could addict a population you would degrade a nation's moral fiber." Fulton Lewis, Jr., prominent conservative radio broadcaster and newspaper columnist, 1965: "Narcotics of Cuban origin – marijuana, cocaine, opium, and heroin – are now peddled in big cities and tiny hamlets throughout this country. Several Cubans arrested by the Los Angeles police have boasted they are communists." We were also told that along with drugs another tool of

the commies to undermine America's spirit was fluoridation of the water.

- Mickey Spillane was one of the most successful writers of the 1950s, selling millions of his anti-communist thriller mysteries. Here is his hero, Mike Hammer, in "One Lonely Night," boasting of his delight in the grisly murders he commits, all in the name of destroying a communist plot to steal atomic secrets. After a night of carnage, the triumphant Hammer gloats, "I shot them in cold blood and enjoyed every minute of it. I pumped slugs into the nastiest bunch of bastards you ever saw. ... They were Commies. ... Pretty soon what's left of Russia and the slime that breeds there won't be worth mentioning and I'm glad because I had a part in the killing. God, but it was fun!"
- 1952: A campaign against the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) because it was tainted with "atheism and communism," and was "subversive" because it preached internationalism. Any attempt to introduce an international point of view in the schools was seen as undermining patriotism and loyalty to the United States. A bill in the U.S. Senate, clearly aimed at UNESCO, called for a ban on the funding of "any international agency that directly or indirectly promoted one-world government or world citizenship." There was also opposition to UNESCO's association with the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights on the grounds that it was trying to replace the American Bill of Rights with a less liberty-giving covenant of human rights.
- 1955: A U.S. Army 6-page pamphlet, "How to Spot a Communist," informed us that a communist could be

spotted by his predisposition to discuss civil rights, racial and religious discrimination, the immigration laws, anti-subversive legislation, curbs on unions, and peace. Good Americans were advised to keep their ears stretched for such give-away terms as "chauvinism," "book-burning," "colonialism," "demagogy," "witch hunt," "reactionary," "progressive," and "exploitation." Another "distinguishing mark" of "Communist language" was a "preference for long sentences." After some ridicule, the Army rescinded the pamphlet.

- 1958: The noted sportscaster Bill Stern (one of the heroes of my innocent youth) observed on the radio that the lack of interest in "big time" football at New York University, City College of New York, Chicago, and Harvard "is due to the widespread acceptance of Communism at the universities."
- 1960: U.S. General Thomas Power speaking about nuclear war or a first strike by the U.S.: "The whole idea is to *kill* the bastards! At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win!" The response from one of those present was: "Well, you'd better make sure that they're a man and a woman."
- 1966: The Boys Club of America is of course wholesome and patriotic. Imagine their horror when they were confused with the Dubois Clubs. (W.E.B. Du Bois had been a very prominent civil rights activist.) When the Justice Department required the DuBois Clubs to register as a Communist front group, good loyal Americans knew what to do. They called up the Boys Club to announce that they would no longer contribute any money, or to threaten violence against them; and sure enough an

explosion damaged the national headquarters of the youth group in San Francisco. Then former Vice President Richard Nixon, who was national board chairman of the Boys Club, declared: "This is an almost classic example of Communist deception and duplicity. The 'DuBois Clubs' are not unaware of the confusion they are causing among our supporters and among many other good citizens."

- 1966: "Rhythm, Riots and Revolution: An Analysis of the Communist Use of Music, The Communist Master Music Plan," by David A. Noebel, published by Christian Crusade Publications, (expanded version of 1965 pamphlet: "Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles"). Some chapters: Communist Use of Mind Warfare ... Nature of Red Record Companies ... Destructive Nature of Beatle Music ... Communist Subversion of Folk Music ... Folk Music and the Negro Revolution ... Folk Music and the College Revolution
- 1968: William Calley, U.S. Army Lieutenant, charged with overseeing the massacre of more than 100 Vietnamese civilians in My Lai in 1968, said some years later: "In all my years in the Army I was never taught that communists were human beings. We were there to kill ideology carried by – I don't know – pawns, blobs, pieces of flesh. I was there to destroy communism. We never conceived of old people, men, women, children, babies."
- 1977: Scientists theorized that the earth's protective ozone layer was being damaged by synthetic chemicals called chlorofluorocarbons. The manufacturers and users of CFCs were not happy. They made life difficult for the lead scientist. The president of one aerosol manufacturing firm suggested that criticism of CFCs was

“orchestrated by the Ministry of Disinformation of the KGB.”

- 1978: Life inside a California youth camp of the ultra anti-communist John Birch Society: Five hours each day of lectures on communism, Americanism and “The Conspiracy”; campers learned that the Soviet government had created a famine and spread a virus to kill a large number of citizens and make the rest of them more manageable; the famine led starving adults to eat their children; communist guerrillas in Southeast Asia jammed chopsticks into children’s ears, piercing their eardrums; American movies are all under the control of the Communists; the theme is always that capitalism is no better than communism; you can’t find a dictionary now that isn’t under communist influence; the communists are also taking over the Bibles.
- The Reagan administration declared that the Russians were spraying toxic chemicals over Laos, Cambodia and Afghanistan – the so-called “yellow rain” – and had caused more than ten thousand deaths by 1982 alone, (including, in Afghanistan, 3,042 deaths attributed to 47 separate incidents between the summer of 1979 and the summer of 1981, so precise was the information). Secretary of State Alexander Haig was a prime dispenser of such stories, and President Reagan himself denounced the Soviet Union thusly more than 15 times in documents and speeches. The “yellow rain,” it turned out, was pollen-laden feces dropped by huge swarms of honeybees flying far overhead.
- 1982: In commenting about sexual harassment in the Army, General John Crosby stated that the Army doesn’t care

about soldiers' social lives – “The basic purpose of the United States Army is to kill Russians,” he said.

- 1983: The U.S. invasion of Grenada, the home of the Cuban ambassador is damaged and looted by American soldiers; on one wall is written “AA,” symbol of the 82nd Airborne Division; beside it the message: “Eat shit, commie faggot.” ... “I want to fuck communism out of this little island,” says a marine, “and fuck it right back to Moscow.”
- 1984: During a sound check just before his weekly broadcast, President Reagan spoke these words into the microphone: “My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you I have signed legislation to outlaw Russia, forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.” His words were picked up by at least two radio networks.
- 1985: October 29 BBC interview with Ronald Reagan: asked about the differences he saw between the U.S. and Russia, the President replied: “I’m no linguist, but I’ve been told that in the Russian language there isn’t even a word for freedom.” (The word is “svoboda.”)
- 1986: Soviet artists and cultural officials criticized Rambo-like American films as an expression of “anti-Russian phobia even more pathological than in the days of McCarthyism.” Russian filmmaker Stanislav Rostofsky claimed that on one visit to an American school “a young girl trembled with fury when she heard I was from the Soviet Union, and said she hated Russians.”
- 1986: Roy Cohn, who achieved considerable fame and notoriety in the 1950s as an assistant to the communist-witch-hunting Sen. Joseph McCarthy, died, reportedly of AIDS. Cohn, though homosexual, had denied that he was

and had denounced such rumors as communist smears.

- 1986: After American journalist Nicholas Daniloff was arrested in Moscow for “spying” and held in custody for two weeks, New York Mayor Edward Koch sent a group of 10 visiting Soviet students storming out of City Hall in fury. “The Soviet government is the pits,” said Koch, visibly shocking the students, ranging in age from 10 to 18 years. One 14-year-old student was so outraged he declared: “I don’t want to stay in this house. I want to go to the bus and go far away from this place. The mayor is very rude. We never had a worse welcome anywhere.” As matters turned out, it appeared that Daniloff had not been completely pure when it came to his newsgathering.
- 1989: After the infamous Chinese crackdown on dissenters in Tiananmen Square in June, the U.S. news media was replete with reports that the governments of Nicaragua, Vietnam and Cuba had expressed their support of the Chinese leadership. Said the *Wall Street Journal*: “Nicaragua, with Cuba and Vietnam, constituted the only countries in the world to approve the Chinese Communists’ slaughter of the students in Tiananmen Square.” But it was all someone’s fabrication; no such support had been expressed by any of the three governments. At that time, as now, there were few, if any, organizations other than the CIA which could manipulate major Western media in such a manner. [Sources for almost all of this section can be found in William Blum, *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire* (2005), chapter 12; or the author can be queried at bblum6@aol.com]

NOTE: It should be remembered that the worst consequences of

anti-communism were not those discussed above. The worst consequences, the ultra-criminal consequences, were the abominable death, destruction, and violation of human rights that we know under various names: Vietnam, Chile, Korea, Guatemala, Cambodia, Indonesia, Brazil, Greece, Afghanistan, El Salvador, and many others.

William Blum (1933-2018) was an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <https://williamblum.org/> .]

U.S. and China Redefining the Terms of War

Today, war means so much more than military combat, writes Michael T. Klare. It can take place even as the leaders of the warring powers meet to negotiate.

By **[Michael T. Klare](#)**

[TomDispatch.com](#)



In his highly acclaimed 2017 book, "[Destined for War](#)," Harvard professor Graham Allison assessed the likelihood that the United States and China would one day find themselves at war. Comparing the U.S.-Chinese relationship to great-power rivalries all the way back to the Peloponnesian War of the fifth century B.C., he concluded that the future risk of a conflagration was substantial. Like much current analysis of U.S.-Chinese

relations, however, he missed a crucial point: for all intents and purposes, the United States and China are already at war with one another. Even if their present slow-burn conflict may not produce the immediate devastation of a conventional hot war, its long-term consequences could prove no less dire.

To suggest this means reassessing our understanding of what constitutes war. From Allison's perspective (and that of so many others in Washington and elsewhere), "peace" and "war" stand as polar opposites. One day, our soldiers are in their garrisons being trained and cleaning their weapons; the next, they are called into action and sent onto a battlefield. War, in this model, begins when the first shots are fired.

Well, think again in this new era of growing great-power struggle and competition. Today, war means so much more than military combat and can take place even as the leaders of the warring powers meet to negotiate and share dry-aged steak and whipped potatoes (as President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping did at Mar-a-Lago in 2017). That is exactly where we are when it comes to Sino-American relations. Consider it war by another name, or perhaps, to bring back a long-retired term, a burning new version of a cold war.

Even before Trump entered the Oval Office, the U.S. military and other branches of government were already gearing up for a long-term quasi-war, involving both growing economic and diplomatic pressure on China and a buildup of military forces along that country's periphery. Since his arrival, such initiatives have escalated into Cold War-

style combat by another name, with his administration committed to defeating China in a struggle for global economic, technological and military supremacy.

This includes the president's much-publicized "trade war" with China, aimed at hobbling that country's future growth; a techno-war designed to prevent it from overtaking the U.S. in key breakthrough areas of technology; a diplomatic war intended to isolate Beijing and frustrate its grandiose plans for global outreach; a cyber war (largely hidden from public scrutiny); and a range of military measures as well. This may not be war in the traditional sense of the term, but for leaders on both sides, it has the feel of one.

Why China?

The media and many politicians continue to focus on U.S.-Russian relations, in large part because of revelations of Moscow's meddling in the 2016 American presidential election and the ongoing Mueller investigation. Behind the scenes, however, most senior military and foreign policy officials in Washington view China, not Russia, as the country's principal adversary. In eastern Ukraine, the Balkans, Syria, cyberspace, and in the area of nuclear weaponry, Russia does indeed pose a variety of threats to Washington's goals and desires. Still, as an economically hobbled petro-state, it lacks the kind of might that would allow it to truly challenge this country's status as the world's dominant power. China is another story altogether. With its vast economy, growing technological prowess, intercontinental "Belt and Road" infrastructure project, and rapidly modernizing military, an emboldened China could someday match or even exceed U.S. power on a global scale, an

outcome American elites are determined to prevent at any cost.

Washington's fears of a rising China were on full display in January with the release of the 2019 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, a synthesis of the views of the Central Intelligence Agency and other members of that "community." Its conclusion: "We assess that China's leaders will try to extend the country's global economic, political, and military reach while using China's military capabilities and overseas infrastructure and energy investments under the Belt and Road Initiative to diminish U.S. influence."

To counter such efforts, every branch of government is now expected to mobilize its capabilities to bolster American – and diminish Chinese – power. In Pentagon documents, this stance is summed up by the term "overmatch," which translates as the eternal preservation of American global superiority vis-à-vis China (and all other potential rivals). "The United States must retain overmatch," the administration's National Security Strategy insists, and preserve a "combination of capabilities in sufficient scale to prevent enemy success," while continuing to "shape the international environment to protect our interests."

In other words, there can never be parity between the two countries. The only acceptable status for China is as a distinctly lesser power. To ensure such an outcome, administration officials insist, the U.S. must take action on a daily basis to contain or impede its rise.

In previous epochs, as Allison makes clear in his book, this

equation – a prevailing power seeking to retain its dominant status and a rising power seeking to overcome its subordinate one – has almost always resulted in conventional conflict. In today's world, however, where great-power armed combat could possibly end in a nuclear exchange and mutual annihilation, direct military conflict is a distinctly unappealing option for all parties. Instead, governing elites have developed other means of warfare – economic, technological, and covert – to achieve such strategic objectives. Viewed this way, the United States is already in close to full combat mode with respect to China.

Trade War

When it comes to the economy, the language betrays the reality all too clearly. The Trump administration's economic struggle with China is regularly described, openly and without qualification, as a "war." And there's no doubt that senior White House officials, beginning with the president and his chief trade representative, [Robert Lighthizer](#), see it just that way: as a means of pulverizing the Chinese economy and so curtailing that country's ability to compete with the United States in all other measures of power.

Ostensibly, the aim of Trump's May 2018 decision to impose \$60 billion in tariffs on Chinese imports ([increased](#) in September to \$200 billion) was to rectify a trade imbalance between the two countries, while protecting the American economy against what is described as China's malign behavior. Its trade practices "plainly constitute a grave threat to the long-term health and prosperity of the United States economy," as the president [put it](#) when announcing the second round of tariffs.

An examination of the demands submitted to Chinese negotiators by the U.S. trade delegation last May suggests, however, that Washington's primary intent hasn't been to rectify that trade imbalance but to impede China's economic growth. Among the stipulations Beijing must acquiesce to before receiving tariff relief, according to [leaked documents](#) from U.S. negotiators that were spread on Chinese social media:

- halting all government subsidies to advanced manufacturing industries in its Made in China 2025 program, an endeavor that covers 10 key economic sectors, including aircraft manufacturing, electric cars, robotics, computer microchips, and artificial intelligence;
- accepting American restrictions on investments in sensitive technologies without retaliating;
- opening up its service and agricultural sectors – areas where Chinese firms have an inherent advantage – to full American competition.

In fact, this should be considered a straightforward declaration of economic war. Acquiescing to such demands would mean accepting a permanent subordinate status vis-à-vis the United States in hopes of continuing a profitable trade relationship with this country. “The list reads like the terms for a surrender rather than a basis for negotiation,” was [the way](#) Eswar Prasad, an economics professor at Cornell University, accurately described these developments.

Technological Warfare

As suggested by America's trade demands, Washington's intent is not only to hobble China's economy today and tomorrow but for decades to come. This has led to an intense, far-ranging campaign to deprive it of access to advanced technologies and to cripple its leading technology firms.

Chinese leaders have long realized that, for their country to achieve economic and military parity with the United States, they must master the cutting-edge technologies that will dominate the 21st-century global economy, including artificial intelligence (AI), fifth-generation (5G) telecommunications, electric vehicles, and nanotechnology. Not surprisingly then, the government has invested in a major way in science and technology education, subsidized research in pathbreaking fields, and helped launch promising startups, among other such endeavors – all in the very fashion that the Internet and other American computer and aerospace innovations were originally financed and encouraged by the Department of Defense.

Chinese companies have also demanded technology transfers when investing in or forging industrial partnerships with foreign firms, a common practice in international development. India, to cite a recent example of this phenomenon, expects that significant technology transfers from American firms will be one outcome of its agreed-upon purchases of advanced American weaponry.

In addition, Chinese firms have been accused of stealing American technology through cybertheft, provoking widespread outrage in this country. Realistically speaking, it's difficult for outside observers to determine to what degree China's recent technological advances are the product of

commonplace and legitimate investments in science and technology and to what degree they're due to cyberespionage. Given Beijing's massive investment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education at the graduate and post-graduate level, however, it's safe to assume that most of that country's advances are the result of domestic efforts.

Certainly, given what's publicly known about Chinese cybertheft activities, it's reasonable for American officials to apply pressure on Beijing to curb the practice. However, the Trump administration's drive to blunt that country's technological progress is also aimed at perfectly legitimate activities. For example, the White House seeks to ban Beijing's government subsidies for progress on artificial intelligence at the same time that the Department of Defense is pouring billions of dollars into AI research at home. The administration is also acting to block the Chinese acquisition of U.S. technology firms and of exports of advanced components and know-how.

In an example of this technology war that's made the headlines lately, Washington has been actively seeking to sabotage the efforts of Huawei, one of China's most prominent telecom firms, to gain leadership in the global deployment of 5G wireless communications. Such wireless systems are important in part because they will transmit colossal amounts of electronic data at far faster rates than now conceivable, facilitating the introduction of self-driving cars, widespread roboticization, and the universal application of AI.

Second only to Apple as the world's supplier of smartphones

and a major producer of telecommunications equipment, Huawei has sought to take the lead in the race for 5G adaptation around the world. Fearing that this might give China an enormous advantage in the coming decades, the Trump administration has tried to prevent that. In what is widely described as a “tech Cold War,” it has put enormous pressure on both its Asian and European allies to bar the company from conducting business in their countries, even as it sought the arrest in Canada of Huawei’s chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, and her extradition to the U.S. on charges of tricking American banks into aiding Iranian firms (in violation of Washington’s sanctions on that country). Other attacks on Huawei are in the works, including a potential ban on the sales of its products in this country. Such moves are regularly described as focused on boosting the security of both the United States and its allies by preventing the Chinese government from using Huawei’s telecom networks to steal military secrets. The real reason – barely disguised – is simply to block China from gaining technological parity with the United States.

Cyberwarfare

There would be much to write on this subject, if only it weren’t still hidden in the shadows of the growing conflict between the two countries. Not surprisingly, however, little information is available on U.S.-Chinese cyberwarfare. All that can be said with confidence is that an intense war is now being waged between the two countries in cyberspace. American officials accuse China of engaging in a broad-based cyber-assault on this country, involving both outright cyberespionage to obtain military as well as corporate

secrets and widespread political meddling. “What the Russians are doing pales in comparison to what China is doing,” said Vice President Mike Pence last October in a speech at the Hudson Institute, though – typically on the subject – he provided not a shred of evidence for his claim.

Not disclosed is what this country is doing to combat China in cyberspace. All that can be known from available information is that this is a two-sided war in which the U.S. is conducting its own assaults. “The United States will impose swift and costly consequences on foreign governments, criminals, and other actors who undertake significant malicious cyber activities,” the 2017 National Security Strategy affirmed. What form these “consequences” have taken has yet to be revealed, but there’s little doubt that America’s cyber warriors have been active in this domain.

Diplomatic and Military Coercion

Completing the picture of America’s ongoing war with China are the fierce pressures being exerted on the diplomatic and military fronts to frustrate Beijing’s geopolitical ambitions. To advance those aspirations, China’s leadership is relying heavily on a much-touted Belt and Road Initiative, a trillion-dollar plan to help fund and encourage the construction of a vast new network of road, rail, port, and pipeline infrastructure across Eurasia and into the Middle East and Africa. By financing – and, in many cases, actually building – such infrastructure, Beijing hopes to bind the economies of a host of far-flung nations ever closer to its own, while increasing its political influence across the Eurasian mainland and Africa. As Beijing’s leadership sees it, at least in terms of orienting

the planet's future economics, its role would be similar to that of the Marshall Plan that cemented U.S. influence in Europe after World War II.

And given exactly that possibility, Washington has begun to actively seek to undermine the Belt and Road wherever it can – discouraging allies from participating, while stirring up unease in countries like Malaysia and Uganda over the enormous debts to China they may end up with and the heavy-handed manner in which that country's firms often carry out such overseas construction projects. (For example, they typically bring in Chinese laborers to do most of the work, rather than hiring and training locals.)

“China uses bribes, opaque agreements, and the strategic use of debt to hold states in Africa captive to Beijing's wishes and demands,” National Security Advisor John Bolton claimed in a December speech on U.S. policy on that continent. “Its investment ventures are riddled with corruption,” he added, “and do not meet the same environmental or ethical standards as U.S. developmental programs.” Bolton promised that the Trump administration would provide a superior alternative for African nations seeking development funds, but – and this is something of a pattern as well – no such assistance has yet materialized.

In addition to diplomatic pushback, the administration has undertaken a series of initiatives intended to isolate China militarily and limit its strategic options. In South Asia, for example, Washington has abandoned its past position of maintaining rough parity in its relations with India and Pakistan. In recent years, it's swung sharply towards a strategic alliance with New Dehli, attempting to enlist it

fully in America's efforts to contain China and, presumably, in the process punishing Pakistan for its increasingly enthusiastic role in the Belt and Road Initiative.

In the Western Pacific, the U.S. has stepped up its naval patrols and forged new basing arrangements with local powers – all with the aim of confining the Chinese military to areas close to the mainland. In response, Beijing has sought to escape the grip of American power by establishing miniature bases on Chinese-claimed islands in the South China Sea (or even constructing artificial islands to house bases there) – moves widely condemned by the hawks in Washington.

To demonstrate its ire at the effrontery of Beijing in the Pacific (once known as an “American lake”), the White House has ordered an increased pace of so-called freedom-of-navigation operations (FRONOPs). Navy warships regularly sail within shooting range of those very island bases, suggesting a U.S. willingness to employ military force to resist future Chinese moves in the region (and also creating situations in which a misstep could lead to a military incident that could lead... well, anywhere).

In Washington, the warnings about Chinese military encroachment in the region are already reaching a fever pitch. For instance, Admiral Philip Davidson, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, described the situation there in recent congressional testimony this way: “In short, China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States.”

A Long War of Attrition

As Admiral Davidson suggests, one possible outcome of the ongoing cold war with China could be armed conflict of the traditional sort. Such an encounter, in turn, could escalate to the nuclear level, resulting in mutual annihilation. A war involving only “conventional” forces would itself undoubtedly be devastating and lead to widespread suffering, not to mention the collapse of the global economy.

Even if a shooting war doesn't erupt, however, a long-term geopolitical war of attrition between the U.S. and China will, in the end, have debilitating and possibly catastrophic consequences for both sides. Take the trade war, for example. If that's not resolved soon in a positive manner, continuing high U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports will severely curb Chinese economic growth and so weaken the world economy as a whole, punishing every nation on Earth, including this one. High tariffs will also increase costs for American consumers and endanger the prosperity and survival of many firms that rely on Chinese raw materials and components.

This new brand of war will also ensure that already sky-high defense expenditures will continue to rise, diverting funds from vital needs like education, health, infrastructure, and the environment. Meanwhile, preparations for a future war with China have already become the number one priority at the Pentagon, crowding out all other considerations. “While we're focused on ongoing operations,” acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan reportedly told his senior staff on his first day in office this January, “remember China, China, China.”

Perhaps the greatest victim of this ongoing conflict will be

planet Earth itself and all the creatures, humans included, who inhabit it. As the world's top two emitters of climate-altering greenhouse gases, the U.S. and China must work together to halt global warming or all of us are doomed to a hellish future. With a war under way, even a non-shooting one, the chance for such collaboration is essentially zero. The only way to save civilization is for the U.S. and China to declare peace and focus together on human salvation.

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The Twitter Smearing of Corbyn and Assange

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

[By Mark Curtis](#)

[British Foreign Policy Declassified](#)



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

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

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

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

Many of these 11 individuals are associated with *The Times*

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

Linking Corbyn to Russia

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

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

Here are examples of tweets from the 11 individuals.

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

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

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

Lucas has also tweeted:

- “Why does Corbyn not see that Russia is imperialist and Ukrainians are victims?” and “It’s not just Corbyn. Here’s Swedish leftie @AsaLinderborg explaining why Nato not Putin is the real threat to peace” – linking to the latter’s article in a Swedish newspaper.
- “German hard-leftist GDR-loving wall-defending @SWagenknecht congratulates Corbyn on win” [in the Labour leadership contest]
- “More excellent stuff on Corbyn’s love of plutocrats so long as they are Russian.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Below is another.

Jeremy Corbyn isn't anti-war. He's just anti-West <https://t.co/2Z5Qp3qBds>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cadwalladr has tweeted that “Labour has a Russia problem,” that Corbyn adviser Seumas Milne is “pro-Putin” and that “Milne’s support for Putin has made him a Russian propaganda

tool.” One of Cadwalladr’s tweets noted:

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

Another by Cadwalladr:

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

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

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

Here is another:

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

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

James Ball has tweeted a link to his own article in the New Statesman saying that Corbyn is “playing into Russia’s hands

on the Skripal poisoning” and accusing Corbyn to the effect that he “took money from Russia Today.”

Linking Assange to the Kremlin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In addition, Cadwalladr has tweeted several times that “Assange was in direct communication with Russian

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

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

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

Need for further research

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

First, some of the tweets made by these individuals on Corbyn and Assange, not all of which are included here, are fair comment, even if, in my view, they are usually wrong. But others go beyond this, inferring that Corbyn (and Assange) are in effect agents of Russia and/or are willingly

and knowingly amplifying Russia's agenda, as little more than "tools" – with no evidence provided (understandably, since there is none). There is also sometimes the association of Corbyn with former communists. These areas are held to constitute smearing.

Second, it is not known and certainly not proven that these tweets are associated with the Integrity Initiative. Little is known of the internal workings of the Initiative. It is possible that some of the individuals may have been chosen by the Integrity Initiative to be associated with it precisely because of their pre-existing criticism of Russia or their willingness to accuse figures such as Corbyn with association with Russia. While I am not suggesting that these individuals' tweets are necessarily linked to their role in the Integrity Initiative, there does appear to be something of a pattern among these people of smearing both Corbyn and Assange.

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

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

Russia 'Novichok' Hysteria Proves Politicians and Media Haven't Learned the Lessons of Iraq

The current state of anti-Russia hysteria is reminiscent of earlier dark chapters of American history, including the rush to war in Iraq of the early 2000s and McCarthyism of the 1950s, Patrick Henningsen observes.

By Patrick Henningsen

If there's one thing to be gleaned from the current atmosphere of anti-Russian hysteria in the West, it's that the US-led sustained propaganda campaign is starting to pay dividends. It's not only the hopeless political classes and media miscreants who believe that Russia is hacking, meddling and poisoning our progressive democratic utopia – with many pinning their political careers to this by now that's it's too late for them to turn back.

As it was with Iraq in 2003, these dubious public figures require a degree of public support for their policies, and unfortunately many people do believe in the grand *Russian conspiracy*, having been sufficiently brow-beaten into submission by around-the-clock fear mongering and official fake news disseminated by government and the mainstream media.

What makes this latest carnival of warmongering more frightening is that it proves that the political and media classes never actually learned or internalized the basic lessons of Iraq, namely that the cessation of diplomacy and the declarations of sanctions (a prelude to war) against another sovereign state should not be based on half-baked intelligence and mainstream fake news. But that's exactly what is happening with this latest Russian 'Novichok' plot.

Admittedly, the stakes are much higher this time around. The worst case scenario is unthinkable, whereby the bad graces of men like John Bolton and other military zealots, there may just be a thin enough mandate to short-sell another military conflagration or proxy war – this time against another nuclear power and UN Security Council member.

Enter stage right, where US President Donald Trump announced this week that the US is moving closer to war footing with Russia. It's not the first time Trump has made such a hasty move in the absence any forensic evidence of a crime. Nowadays, hearsay, conjecture and social media postings are enough to declare war. Remember last April with the alleged "Sarin Attack" in Khan Sheikhoun,

when the embattled President squeezed off 59 Tomahawk Cruise missiles against Syria – a decision, which as far as anyone can tell, was based solely on a few YouTube videos uploaded by the illustrious White Helmets. Back then Trump learned how an act of war against an existential enemy could take the heat off at home and translate into a bounce in the polls. Even *La Résistance* at CNN were giddy with excitement and threw their support behind Trump, with some pundits describing his decision to act as “presidential.”

As with past high-profile western-led WMD allegations against governments in Syria and Iraq (the US and UK are patently unconcerned with multiple allegations of ‘rebel’ terrorists in Syria caught using chemical weapons), an identical progression of events appears to be unfolding following the alleged ‘Novichok’ chemical weapon poisoning of retired British-Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, Wiltshire on March 4.

Despite a lack of evidence presented to the public other than the surreptitious “highly likely” assessments of British Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, President Trump once again has caved into pressure from Official Washington’s anti-Russian party line and ordered the expulsion of 60 Russian diplomats – whom he accused of being spies. Trump also ordered the closure of the Russian consulate in Seattle, citing speculative fears that Russia might be spying on a nearby Boeing submarine development base. It was the second round of US expulsions of Russian officials, with the first one ordered by the outgoing President Obama in December 2016, kicking out 35 Russian diplomats and their families (including their head chef) and closing the Russian Consulate in San Francisco, with some calling it “a den of spies”.

Trump’s move followed an earlier UK action on March 14th, which expelled 23 Russian diplomats also accused of being spies. This was in retaliation for the alleged poisoning of a retired former Russian-British double agent in Salisbury, England.

The ‘Collective’ Concern

It’s important to understand how this week’s brash move by Washington was coordinated in advance. The US and the UK are relying on their other NATO partners, including Germany, Poland, Italy, Canada, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Estonia and Lithuania – to create the image of a united front against perceived ‘Russian aggression.’ As with multilateral military operations, multilateral diplomatic measures like this are not carried out on a whim.

Aside from this, there are two seriously worrying aspects of this latest US-led multilateral move against Russia. Firstly, this diplomatic offensive against

Russia mirrors a NATO collective defense action, and by doing so, it tacitly signals towards an invocation of Article 5. According to AP, one German spokesperson called it a matter of 'solidarity' with the UK. Statements from the White House are no less encouraging:

"The United States takes this action in conjunction with our NATO allies, and partners around the world in response with Russia's use of a military grade chemical weapon on the soil of the United Kingdom – the latest in its ongoing pattern of destabilizing activities around the world," the White House said. "Today's actions make the United States safer by reducing Russia's ability to spy on Americans, and to conduct covert operations that threaten America's national security."

What this statement indicates is that any Russian foreign official or overseas worker in the West should be regarded as possible agents of espionage. In other words, the Cold War is now officially back on.

Then came this statement: "With these steps, the United States and our allies and partners make clear to Russia that its actions have consequences."

In an era of power politics, this language is anything but harmless. And while US and UK politicians and media pundits seem to be treating it all as a school yard game at times, we should all be reminded that this is how wars start.

The second issue with the Trump's diplomatic move against Russia is that it extends beyond the territorial US – and into what should be regarded as the neutral zone of the United Nations. As part of the group of 60 expulsions, the US has expelled 12 Russian diplomats from the United Nations in New York City. While this may mean nothing to jumped-up political appointees like Nikki Haley who routinely threaten the UN when a UNGA vote doesn't go her way, this is an extremely dangerous precedent because it means that the US has now created a diplomatic trap door where legitimate international relations duties are being carelessly rebranded as *espionage* – done on a whim and based on no actual evidence.

By using this tactic, the US is casting aside decades of international resolutions, treaties and laws. Such a move directly threatens to undermine a fundamental principle of the United Nations which is its diplomatic mission and the right for every sovereign nation to have diplomatic representation. Without it, there is no UN forum and countries cannot talk through their differences and negotiate peaceful settlements. This is why the UN was founded in the first place. Someone might want to remind Nikki Haley of that.

On top of this, flippant US and UK officials are already crowing that Russia

should be kicked off the UN Security Council. In effect, Washington is trying to cut the legs out from a fellow UN Security Council member and a nuclear power. This UNSC exclusion campaign has been gradually building up since 2014, where US officials have been repeatedly blocked by Russia over incidents in Syria and the Ukraine. Hence, Washington and its partners are frustrated with the UN framework, and that's probably why they are so actively undermining it.

Those boisterous calls, as irrational and ill-informed as they might be, should be taken seriously because as history shows, these signs are a prelude to war.

Also, consider the fact that both the US and Russia have military assets deployed in Syria. How much of the Skripal case and the subsequent fall-out has to do with the fact that US Coalition and Gulf state proxy terrorists have lost their hold over key areas in Syria? The truly dangerous part of this equation is that the illegal military occupation by the US and its NATO ally Turkey of northeastern Syria is in open violation of international law, and so Washington and its media arms would like nothing more than to be history's actor and bury its past indiscretions under a new layer of US-Russia tension in the Middle East.

Another WMD Debacle?

Is it really possible to push East-West relations over the edge on the basis of anecdotal evidence?

Former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, highlighted the recent British High Court judgement which states in writing that the government's own chemical weapons experts from the Porton Down research facility could not categorically confirm that a Russian 'Novichok' nerve agent was actually used in the Salisbury incident. Based on this, Murray believes that both British Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, and Britain's deputy UN representative Jonathan Allen – have all lied to the public and the world when making their public statements that the Russians had in fact launched a deadly chemical weapons attack on UK soil. Murray states elaborates on this key point:

“This sworn Court evidence direct from Porton Down is utterly incompatible with what Boris Johnson has been saying. The truth is that Porton Down have not even positively identified this as a 'Novichok', as opposed to “a closely related agent”. Even if it were a 'Novichok' that would not prove manufacture in Russia, and a 'closely related agent' could be manufactured by literally scores of state and non-state actors.

“This constitutes irrefutable evidence that the government have been straight out lying – to Parliament, to the EU, to NATO, to the United Nations, and above

all to the people – about their degree of certainty of the origin of the attack. It might well be an attack originating in Russia, but there are indeed other possibilities and investigation is needed. As the government has sought to whip up jingoistic hysteria in advance of forthcoming local elections, the scale of the lie has daily increased.”

Murray has been roundly admonished by the UK establishment for his views, but he is still correct to ask the question: how could UK government leaders have known ‘who did it’ in advance of any criminal forensic investigation or substantive testing by Porton Down or an independent forensic investigation by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)?

One would hope we could all agree that it’s this sort of question which should have been given more prominence in the run-up to the Iraq War. In matters of justice and jurisprudence, that’s a fundamental question and yet, once again – it has been completely bypassed.

Murray is not alone. A number of scientists and journalists have openly questioned the UK’s hyperbolic claims that Russia had ordered a ‘chemical attack’ on British soil. In her recent report for the New Scientist, author Debora MacKenzie reiterates the fact that several countries could have manufactured a ‘Novichok’ class nerve agent and used it in the chemical attack on Russians Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury.

“British Prime Minister Theresa May says that because it was Russia that developed Novichok agents, it is ‘highly likely’ that Russia either attacked the Skripals itself, or lost control of its Novichok to someone else who did. But other countries legally created Novichok for testing purposes after its existence was revealed in 1992, and a production method has even been published.”

The New Scientist also quotes Ralf Trapp, a chemical weapons consultant formerly with the OPCW, who also reiterates a point worth reminding readers of – that inspectors are only able to tell where molecules sampled in Salisbury have come from if they have reference samples for the ingredients used.

“I doubt they have reference chemicals for forensic analysis related to Russian CW agents,” says Trapp. “But if Russia has nothing to hide they may let inspectors in.”

Even if they can identify it as Novichok, they cannot say that it came from Russia, or was ordered by the Russian government, not least of all because the deadly recipe is available on Amazon for only \$28.45.

It should be noted that a substantial amount of evidence points to only two

countries who are the most active in producing and testing biological and chemical weapons WMD – the United States and Great Britain. Their programs also include massive ‘live testing’ on both humans and animals with most of this work undertaken at the Porton Down research facility located only minutes away from the scene of this alleged ‘chemical attack’ in Salisbury, England.

Problems with the Official Story

If we put aside for the moment any official UK government theory, which is based on speculation backed-up by a series of hyperbolic statements and proclamations of Russian guilt, there are still many fundamental problems with the official story – maybe too many to list here, but I will address what I believe are a few key items of interest.

The UK police have now released a statement claiming that the alleged ‘Novichok’ nerve agent was somehow administered at the front door of Sergie Skripal’s home in Wiltshire. This latest official claim effectively negates the previous official story because it means that the Skripals would have been exposed at home at the latest around 13:00 GMT on March 4th, and then drove into town, parking their car at Sainsbury’s car park, then having a leisurely walk to have drinks at The Mill Pub, before ordering and eating lunch at Zizzis restaurant, and then finally leaving the Zizzis and walking before finally retiring on a park bench – where emergency services were apparently called at 16:15 GMT to report an incident.

Soon after, local police arrived on the scene to find the Skripals on the bench in an “extremely serious condition.” Based on this story, the Skripals would have been going about their business for 3 hours before finally falling prey to the deadly WMD ‘Novichok’. From this, one would safely conclude that whatever has poisoned the pair was neither lethal *nor* could it have been a military grade WMD. Even by subtracting the home doorway exposure leg of this story, the government’s claim hardly adds up – as even a minor amount of any real lethal military grade WMD would have effected many more people along this timeline of events. Based on what we know so far, it seems much more plausible that the pair would have been poisoned at Zizzis restaurant, and not with a military grade nerve agent.

When this story initially broke, we were also told that the attending police officer who first arrived on the scene of this incident, Wiltshire Police Detective Sgt. Nick Bailey – was “fighting for his life” after being exposed to the supposed ‘deadly Russian nerve agent’. As it turned out, officer Bailey was treated in hospital and then discharged on March 22, 2018. To our knowledge, no information or photos of Bailey’s time in care are available to the public so we cannot know the trajectory of his health, or if he was even exposed to the said

“Novichok’.

In the immediate aftermath, the public were also told initially that approximately 40 people were taken into medical care because of “poison exposure”. This bogus claim was promulgated by some mainstream media outlets, like Rupert Murdoch’s Times newspaper. In reality, no one showed signs of “chemical weapons” exposure, meaning that this story was just another example of mainstream corporate media fake news designed to stoke tension and fear in the public. We exposed this at the time on the UK Column News here:

To further complicate matters, this week we were told that Yulia Skripal has now turned the corner and is in recovery, and is speaking to police from her hospital bed. If this is true, then it further proves that whatever the alleged poison agent was which the Skripals were exposed to – it was not a lethal, military grade nerve agent. If it had been, then most likely the Skripals and many others would not be alive right now.

Unfortunately, in this new age of state secrecy, we can expect that most of the key information relating to this case may be sealed indefinitely under a national security letter. In the case of Porton Down scientist David Kelly, the key information is sealed (hidden) for another 60+ years (if we’re lucky, we might get to see it in the year 2080). This means that we just have to take their word for it, or to borrow the words of the newly crowned UK Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson – any one asking questions, “should just go away and shut up.” Such is the lack of decorum and transparency in this uncomfortably Orwellian atmosphere.

While Britain insists that it has ‘irrefutable proof’ that Russia launched a deadly nerve-gas attack to murder the Skripals, the facts simply do not match-up to the rhetoric.

The Litvinenko Conspiracy

It’s important to note that as far as public perceptions are concerned, the official Skripal narrative has been built directly on top of the Litvinenko case.

In order to try and reinforce the government’s speculative arguments, the UK establishment has resurrected the trial-by-media case of another Russian defector, former FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko, who is said to have died after being poisoned with radioactive polonium-210 in his tea at a restaurant in London’s Mayfair district in late 2006.

Despite not having any actual evidence as to who committed the crime, the British authorities and the mainstream media have upheld an almost religious

belief that the Russian FSB (formerly KGB), under the command of Vladimir Putin, had ordered the alleged radioactive poisoning of Litvinenko.

The media mythos was reinforced in 2016, when a British Public Inquiry headed by Sir Robert Owen accused senior Russian officials of 'probably having motives to approve the murder' of Litvinenko. Again, this level of guesswork and speculation would never meet the standard of an actual forensic investigation worthy of a real criminal court of law, but so far as apportioning blame to another nation or head of state is concerned – it seems fair enough for British authorities.

Following the completion of the inquiry, Sir Robert had this to say: "Taking full account of all the evidence and analysis available to me, I find that the FSB operation to kill Litvinenko was probably approved by Mr Patrushev and also by President Putin."

Contrary to consensus reality (popular belief), Owen's inquiry was not at all definitive. Quite the opposite in fact, and in many ways it mirrors how the Skripal case has been presented to the public. Despite offering no evidence of any criminal guilt, Owen's star chamber maintained that Vladimir Putin "probably" approved the operation to assassinate Litvinenko. Is "probably" really enough to assign guilt in a major international crime? When it comes to high crimes of state, the answer seems to be yes.

According to Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, that UK inquiry was "neither transparent nor public" and was "conducted mostly behind doors, with classified documents and unnamed witnesses contributing to the result..."

Zakharova highlighted the fact that two key witnesses in the case – Litvinenko's chief patron, a UK-based anti-Putin defector billionaire oligarch named Boris Berezovsky, and the owner of Itsu restaurant in London's Mayfair where the incident is said to have taken place, had both suddenly died under dubious circumstances.

The British authorities went on to accuse two Russian men in the Litvineko murder – businessman Andrey Lugovoy and Dmitry Kovtun. Both have denied the accusations. Despite the lack of any real evidence, the United States Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control blacklisted both Lugovoi and Kovtun, as well as Russian persons Stanislav Gordievsky, Gennady Plaksin and Aleksandr I. Bastrykin – under the Magnitsky Act, which freezes their assets held in American financial institutions, and bans them from conducting any transactions or traveling to the United States.

Notice the familiar pattern: even if the case is inconclusive, or collapses due to a lack of evidence, the policies remain in place.

Despite all the pomp and circumstance however, Owen's official conspiracy theory failed to sway even Litvinenko's own close family members. While Litvinenko's widow Marina maintains that it was definitely the Russian government who killed her husband, Alexander's younger brother Maksim Litvinenko, based in Rimini, Italy, believes the British report "ridiculous" to blame the Kremlin for the murder of his brother, stating that he believes British security services had more of a motive to carry out the assassination.

"My father and I are sure that the Russian authorities are not involved. It's all a set-up to put pressure on the Russian government," said Litvinenko to the Mirror newspaper, and that such reasoning can explain why the UK waited almost 10 years to launch the inquiry his brother's death.

Maxim also said that Britain had more reason to kill his brother than the Russians, and believes that blaming Putin for the murder was part of a wider effort to smear Russia. Following the police investigation, Alexander's father Walter Litvinenko, also said that he had regretted blaming Putin and the Russian government for his son's death and did so under intense pressure at the time.

For anyone skeptical of the official proclamations of the British state and the mainstream media on the Litvinenko case, it's worth reading the work of British journalist Will Dunkerly here.

With so many questions hanging over the actually validity of the British state's accusations against Russia, it's somewhat puzzling that British police would say they are still 'looking for similarities' between the Skripal and Litvinenko cases in order to pinpoint a modus operandi.

The admission by the British law enforcement that their investigation may take months before any conclusion can be drawn also begs the question: how could May have been so certain so quick? The answer should be clear by now: she could not have known it was a 'Novichok' agent, no more than she could know the 'Russia did it.'

A Plastic Cold War

Historically speaking, in the absence of any real mandate or moral authority, governments suffering from an identity crisis, or a crisis of legitimacy will often try and define themselves not based on what they stand for, but rather what (or who) they are in opposition to. This profile suits both the US and UK perfectly at the moment.

Both governments are limping along with barely a mandate, and have orchestrated two of the worst and most hypocritical debacles in history with their illegal wars in both Syria and Yemen. With their moral high-ground a thing of the past, these two countries require a common existential enemy in order to give their international order legitimacy. The cheapest, easiest option is to reinvigorate a framework which was already there, which is the Cold War framework: *Reds under the bed. The Russian are coming, etc.*

It's cheap and it's easy because it has already been seeded with 70 years of Cold War propaganda and institutionalized racism in the West directed against Russians. If you don't believe me, just go look at some of the posters, watch the TV propaganda in the US, or read about the horrific McCarthyist blacklists and political witch hunts. I remember growing up in America and being taught "never again" and "we're past all of that now, those days of irrational paranoia are behind us, we're better than that now." But that madness of the past was not a fringe affair – it was a *mainstream* madness, and one which was actively promoted by government and mainstream media.

You would have to be at the pinnacle of ignorance to deny that this is exactly what we are seeing today, albeit a more plastic version, but just as immoral and dangerous. Neocons love it, and now liberals love it too.

Dutifully fanning the flaming of war, Theresa May has issued her approval of the NATO members diplomatic retaliation this week exclaiming, "We welcome today's actions by our allies, which clearly demonstrate that we all stand shoulder to shoulder in sending the strongest signal to Russia that it cannot continue to flout international law."

But from an international law perspective, can May's 'highly likely' assurances really be enough to position the west on war footing with Russia? When Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn asked these same fundamental questions on March 14th, he was shouted down by the Tory bench, and also by the hawkish Blairites sitting behind him.



Afterwards, the British mainstream press launched yet another defamation campaign against Corbyn, this time with the UK's Daily Mail calling the opposition leader a "Kremlin Stooge", followed by British state broadcaster the BBC who went through the effort of creating a mock-up graphic of Corbyn in front of the Kremlin (pictured above) apparently wearing a Russian hat, as if to say he was a *Russian agent*. It was a new low point in UK politics and media.

Considering the mainstream media's Corbyn smear alongside the recent insults hurled at Julian Assange by Tory MP Sir Alan Duncan who stood up in front of Parliament and called the Wikileaks founder a "miserable worm", what this really says is that anyone who dares defy the official state narrative will be beaten down and publicly humiliated. In other words, dissent in the political ranks will not be tolerated. It's almost as if we are approaching a one party state.

Would a UN Security Council member and nuclear power really be so brazen as to declare *de facto* war on another country without presenting any actual evidence or completing a genuine forensic investigation?

So why the apparent rush to war? Haven't we been here before, in 2003? Will the people of the West allow it to happen again?

As with Tony Blair's WMD's in 2003, the British public are meant to take it on faith and never question the official government line. And just like in 2003, the UK has opened the first door on the garden path, with the US and its 'coalition' following safely behind, *shoulder to shoulder*. In this latest version of the story, Tony Blair is being played by Theresa May, and Jack Straw is being played by Boris Johnson.

On the other side of the pond, a hapless Bush is hapless Trump. Both Blair and Straw, along with the court propagandist Alastair Campbell – are all proven to have been liars of the highest order, and if there were any real accountability or justice, these men and their collaborators in government should be in prison right now. The fact they aren't is why the door has been left wide open for the exact same scam to be repeated again, and again.

Iraq should have taught us all to be skeptical about official claims of chemical weapons evidence, and to face the ugly truth about how most major wars throughout history have waged by the deception – and by western governments. What does it tell us about today's society if people still cannot see this?

That's why it was wrong to let Blair, Bush and others off the hook for war crimes. By doing so, both the British and Americans are inviting a dark phase of history to repeat itself again, and again.

It's high time that we break the cycle.

Author Patrick Henningsen is a global affairs analyst and founder of independent news and analysis site 21st Century Wire, and host of the SUNDAY WIRE weekly radio show broadcast globally over the Alternate Current Radio Network (ACR).

The Rush to a New Cold War

From the Archive: The U.S. and Russia are expelling dozens of each other's diplomats, bringing bilateral relations to a new low. In this 2015 interview with Dennis Bernstein, the late Robert Parry explained the origins of the New Cold War.

By Dennis J. Bernstein (first published June 29, 2015)

A new Cold War has taken shape between nuclear-armed Russia and the United States with very little public debate, just a return to hostile rhetoric and military moves and counter-moves over Ukraine, an issue that journalist Robert Parry has followed over the past year and a half.

Parry, a longtime Washington-based investigative reporter and editor of Consortiumnews.com, was interviewed about the crisis by Dennis J. Bernstein for Pacifica Radio's Flashpoint program.

DB: It looks like the U.S., with Barack Obama leading the charge, has entered what you call "the second cold war." What do you mean by the second cold war?

RP: There has been a sharp increase in tension, obviously, between the United States and Russia. We've seen a very divergent way of looking at the problem. The United States and mainstream media have taken a very propagandist view of what occurred in Ukraine. The Russians have taken a very different view, which, perhaps to our amazement, is more accurate than what the United States is saying.

Because of these two divergent narratives, the countries have essentially plunged back into a cold war, where there's a lot of hostility, threats of military escalations, with the U.S. sending military teams to essentially parade along the western border of Russia. Some of those countries are NATO allies, and others, like Ukraine, may want to become a NATO ally.

So these tensions are building up, that oddly don't have much direct connection to U.S. national interests, but have become a kind of *cause celebre* in Official Washington where everyone just wants to stand tough against the Russians and bash Putin. It's become almost a self-perpetuating dynamic.

The Russians have taken a very different perspective, which is that the United States is encroaching on its borders and threatening them in a strategic manner. They also look at what happened in Ukraine very differently. They see a U.S.-backed *coup d'etat* in February 2014 that ousted an elected president and put in a regime that is very supportive of free market, neoliberal policies, but

also includes very strong right-wing elements, including neo-Nazis and far-right nationalists. A crisis was created and tensions continue to spiral out of control.

DB: Let's talk about the origins of this cold war rhetoric. First, we have Barack Obama leading the charge. He has become a real cold warrior, hasn't he?

RP: He's certainly allowed some of his underlings to use very aggressive rhetoric against the Russians, particularly Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, who led the charge in supporting the *coup* in Ukraine in early 2014.

DB: When you say *coup*, most people don't know that occurred. Was there a *coup*?

RP: Of course there was. There was an armed uprising that involved some very far right neo-Nazi militias that had been organizing and penetrating into what became the Maidan protests against the decision by the elected President Yanukovich not to go ahead quickly with an association with the European Union. That became increasingly violent; including some mysterious sniper attacks killing police and demonstrators, and getting the two sides to go at each other.

There was a political effort on Feb. 21, 2014, where Yanukovich agreed to reduce his powers and have early elections so he could be elected out of office. It was signed by three European countries to guarantee it. The next day there was a *coup*. These right-wing groups surged forward, seizing buildings, and Yanukovich barely escaped with his life.

Very quickly, despite the very unconstitutional nature of this change of power, the United States and European Union recognized this as legitimate. But it was obviously something the ethnic Russians, especially those in the eastern and southern Ukraine, found objectionable. They were the bases of support for Yanukovich, so they began to rise up, and this *coup d'etat* then merged into a civil war.

DB: You have previously said the U.S. played an active role in this *coup*.

RP: There's no question. The U.S. was supporting, through the National Endowment for Democracy, scores of political organizations that were working to overthrow the elected government. There were other U.S. entities, like USAID, as well as members of the U.S. government. Sen. John McCain went to Kiev, spoke to this very right-wing group, and said the U.S. supports you and what you are doing.

Then there was the famous phone conversation that was intercepted between Assistant Secretary of State Nuland and Ambassador Jeffrey Pyatt where they

discussed who was going to take over after the change of power. Nuland put forward that Yatsenyuk "is the guy," who after the *coup* became the prime minister. There were all the markings of a *coup d'état*. More neutral observers, who have looked at this, including the head of the Stratfor think tank (George Friedman), have called it the most obvious *coup* he's ever seen.

That was the reality, but the U.S. news media and U.S. government chose to present it in a very different way. The Yanukovych government just left the scene, or something, is how the New York Times presented it. That wasn't real, but that's how they sold it to the American people.

We have two very distinct ways of looking at this. One is the ethnic Russians of Ukraine who saw their president violently overthrown, and the other is the western Ukrainians, backed by the U.S., and in some degree the European Union, saying they got rid of a corrupt leader, through a revolution, if you will. That became the core problem between the U.S. and Russians. Instead of finding common factual points to agree on, there are these two distinctly different narratives about what went on there.

DB: In Germany, recently, Obama himself carried this forward.

RP: Obama has been all over the map on this. In May, he sent Secretary of State Kerry to meet with President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov in Sochi, Russia. Those meetings, by all accounts, went very well in that Kerry was looking for Russian help on a variety of international problems, including Syria, Libya, the Iranian nuclear talks, and so forth. These are areas where Putin has been very helpful in the past in terms of U.S. policy. There was a general meeting of the minds, it seemed.

But after Kerry returned, Obama seemed to swing back, to go more with his hardliners. That was followed by the recent G7 Summit in Bavaria, at which Obama pushed for a continuation of economic sanctions against Russia. He continued to blame Russia for all the problems of Ukraine. He pretended that the Russians were the problem for why the Minsk 2 Peace Accord had not been going forward, even though the accord was essentially Putin's idea that he sold to the Germans and the French. It's really the Kiev regime that has tried to derail the Minsk 2 agreement from the very time it was signed.

Yet Obama took aggressive positions in Bavaria, including personal insults directed at Putin. Now we are back into this idea that we must have a confrontation with Russia. We're seeing this play out not just at the government level, but now also at the media level. At the more popular level, the *New York Times* and other major news organizations essentially are acting as propaganda agents for the U.S. government, by simply conveying whatever the government says

as fact, and not something to be checked out.

DB: You are saying this as somebody who is based outside the Beltway, correct?

RP: No, I'm actually inside the Beltway.

DB: Good, I feel better now that you're in there. Where could this kind of policy lead? You've expressed concerns that we are dealing with two major nuclear powers. We have a man in Russia who will not be fooled with public relations, given that he was a master of it as head of the KGB. So where is this going?

RP: It has very dangerous possibilities. One hopes, of course, that cooler heads will prevail. But we see that when people paint themselves into corners, they sometimes don't want to get into the embarrassment of getting themselves out. The more rhetoric and propaganda you throw into this, the harder it is for people to come to some common ground, reach an agreement and work things out.

There's been this idea among the neoconservatives in Washington, for some time now, that the real goal here is to oust Putin. As Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy, said back in 2013, Ukraine is "the biggest prize." But he made clear that it was simply a stepping-stone to removing Putin as the President of Russia, doing some sort of regime change in Moscow.

What the neocons often fail to understand, as we've seen very painfully in places like Iraq, is they think things are going to be easy, they can simply put in somebody like Chalabi in Baghdad and everything will work out fine. But that often isn't the way it goes. In the case of Russia, the great danger is that if the U.S. could destabilize Russia, somehow create a political crisis there, it's very possible that instead of an easily manipulated person like Yeltsin, there would be a super hard-line nationalist taking over, taking a harder line than Putin. Then you can get into a situation where a nuclear confrontation would become a very real possibility.

To deal with that kind of dangerous reality and be reasonable, the U.S. needs to realize that the ethnic Russians in Ukraine have a legitimate beef, and they are not simply part of a Russian invasion or aggression. Both sides have some argument here. All the truth does not rest in Washington DC and I would argue that less of it rests in Washington DC. If you don't deal with people honestly and straightforwardly, and try to understand their concern, a manageable crisis can turn into one that spins out of control.

DB: I have always thought that to some degree that the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, on foreign policy issues, particularly East and West, have often acted as a wing, an arm, a public relations division of the State

Department. Is that getting worse?

RP: Yes, it's been a problem. In 2002 and 2003, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* essentially led the drive for believing that Saddam Hussein had WMDs and the only answer was to invade Iraq. We've seen what that led to. The great irony here is that as much as the Washington press corps pretends it stands for truth and all these good things, there was virtually no accountability assessed upon people who misreported that story.

It's true that there's safety in numbers. All the important journalists got the story wrong and almost none of them were punished. They were allowed to go on, many in the same positions that they held then. Michael Gordon is still the Pentagon correspondent for the *New York Times*. He was one of the co-authors of the famous aluminum tube story, that these tubes being used for nuclear centrifuges, when they weren't fit for that at all. Fred Hiatt, the editorial page editor of the *Washington Post*, said as flat fact that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction back in 2002 and 2003. He's still in the same job.

There's a problem of no accountability, so many of these news organizations go from one catastrophic inability to report honestly about what is going on in the world, to the next. Now they've upped the ante to a possible confrontation between nuclear-armed Russia and nuclear-armed United States. We are now back into the cold war mentality. The *New York Times* had a piece this week essentially suggesting that anybody who doesn't go along with the U.S. version of events must be working for Moscow.

We are starting to see McCarthyism rear its ugly head as well. Once you get into these kinds of propaganda wars, anyone who challenges or questions them has their patriotism questioned. We saw that somewhat in Iraq when people who questioned the WMD story early were called Saddam apologists. Now we're seeing something similar happening. If you point out some of these inconvenient facts that don't make the Kiev regime look too good, you're accused of being a stooge of Moscow.

DB: I am concerned that this kind of policy is going to continue. And it's not Saddam Hussein now, but Vladimir Putin, who has extreme experience, about how to play public relations games. And he has a nuclear arsenal, so it's a whole different game here.

RP: The American propaganda barrage has not at all swayed the Russian people and government. Of course, the U.S. says they are all being propagandized by *Russia Today* and other Russian networks. Frankly, one can argue with some ways some things have been reported by *RT* or other Russian sources, but they have been doing a more accurate, on-the-ground job than the U.S. press corps has been.

You can point to a number of egregious major mistakes made by the major U.S. news organizations. The *New York Times* went along with a bogus photograph from spring 2014 supposedly showing Russian troops in Ukraine. It turned out that some of the photographs were misrepresented and did not show what they were supposed to show. They [the Times writers] were forced to retract that.

You can point to factual errors on both sides, but it's not something where the U.S., as the *New York Times* tries to present it, is perfect and hasn't presented anything improperly, while the Russian media are all lies and propaganda. It's not true. But it's getting to the point where you cannot be a reasonable person, or look at things objectively, because you are pushed into taking sides.

That's where journalism is a very dangerous thing – especially here. There was a lot of dangerous reporting during the cold war that in some cases pushed the two sides into dangerous confrontations. That can happen again. We were lucky to escape the '60s without a nuclear war. Now we are rushing ourselves back into something that William Polk, a writer and former diplomat of the Kennedy administration, has called a possible Cuban missile crisis in reverse.

This time we're the ones pushing our military forces onto the Russian border, rather than the Russians putting missiles onto a place like Cuba. We know how Americans reacted to that. Now the Russians are facing something very similar.

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

Dems Kept Cheerleading Bush-Era Neocons – Now There's One In The White House

Dems are criticizing Trump's National Security Advisor pick, not because he's a warmonger who was one of the original members of the Project for a New American Century, but because he's allegedly too soft on Russia, Caitlin Johnstone explains.

By Caitlin Johnstone

As so many of us [have been dreading](#), PNAC's favorite bloodthirsty child killer John Bolton [has been added to the Trump administration](#). And as many half-jokingly predicted, Democrats seized on this opportunity to accuse Bolton of being a Kremlin agent.

That's right, John Bolton, the guy who has been trying to start a war with Russia since long before the name Vladimir Putin meant anything to the average Democrat, is being accused of colluding with Russia. Count on Democrats to oppose the most virulent neocon in Washington by accusing him of not being hawkish enough.

"John Bolton once suggested Russian hack of DNC may have been a false flag operation by Obama Admin," fretted lead Democratic Russiagate Adam Schiff, mistaking brazen partisan hackery for actual skepticism about a likely intelligence community false flag.

"Don't forget the reason for H.R. McMaster's departure: He criticized Russia," added Democratic Coalition co-founder Scott Dworkin. "McMaster said publicly that Russia needed to face serious consequences for what they've done in Syria & for the gas attack in the UK. John Bolton would never say anything like that."

"Trump has outdone himself by selecting Bolton," Democratic Rep. Ted Deutch tweeted with a link to a story about Bolton having appeared in a 2013 video for a Russian gun rights group. "In one appointment, he simultaneously increased the influence of the NRA in his Admin. & found another way to tie himself to Russia. Does he still claim he hires the best people? #TrumpRussia."

"Bolton is *pre-indictment* for many crimes against America," tweeted renowned professional intelligence LARPer Eric Garland.

Was he referring to Bolton's unforgivable war crimes? Of course not.

"He's owned by Russia," Garland explained.

There are of course many, many, many extremely legitimate reasons to criticize John Bolton, and none of them involve being too soft on Russia. Not only is he a PNAC signatory who played a major role in manufacturing the lies that led to the Iraq invasion, but he still insists that that invasion was a great idea. He's advocated for escalations and acts of military violence against every single government that is in any way oppositional to U.S. hegemony including Venezuela, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Russia and China, and account after account of his personal behavior toward people he's worked with indicate that he is in all likelihood an actual, literal psychopath.

But Democratic opposition to Bolton, even when it doesn't get sucked up into idiotic Russia conspiracy theory, appears to be receiving a relatively lukewarm response from mainstream America. It certainly isn't attracting the urgent attention it should be, and certainly isn't eliciting the level of viral interest as a new "bombshell" Russiagate revelation. And why should it?

Propagandists have been pacing rank-and-file Democrats into embracing Iraq-raping Bush-era neocons for more than a year now.

In addition to Democrats being forced to spend 2016 gaslighting themselves into believing that a warmongering neocon who supported the Iraq war would make a great First Female President, they have also been manipulated by the cult of blind anti-Trumpism into accepting neoconservative death worshippers like Bill Kristol, David Frum and Max Boot into their #Resistance fold.

“One of the most amazing outcomes of the Trump administration is the number of neo-conservatives that are now my friends and I am aligned with,” MSNBC pundit Joy Reid openly admitted in an interview last year. “I found myself agreeing on a panel with Bill Kristol. I agree more with Jennifer Rubin, David Frum, and Max Boot than I do with some people on the far left. I am shocked at the way that Donald Trump has brought people together.”

Just as Bolton has cozied up to the Trump crowd by disguising his brazen neoconservative globalism as libertarian-leaning nationalism, neocons like Frum, Boot and Kristol who helped decimate Iraq have been cozying up to mainstream Democrats by posing as woke progressives, and now they’re in like Flynn. Dems had to stretch and compartmentalize their thinking to accommodate the other Bush-era neocons, and even Bush himself to a large extent, so why would a few experts saying “Uh seriously this Bolton guy is deeply terrifying” have any influence over them? They already had to gaslight themselves into believing the bloodshed caused by neoconservatism is fine.

So the American mainstream has been successfully manipulated on both sides of the artificial political divide into supporting vestigial Bush neocons, with #TheResistance proudly retweeting depraved death cultists like Bill Kristol while a majority of the #MAGA crowd support Trump’s elevation of Bolton, and now there’s no one left but us homeless nonpartisans to point and scream about where this all seems to be headed.

Partisan hack Trump supporters are worthless. Partisan hack Democrats are equally worthless. Only those who have awakened from the relentless barrage of mass media psy-ops and seen beyond the fake uni-party trap can see what’s going on. It’s up to us to awaken everyone else.

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

Intel Committee Rejects Basic Underpinning of Russiagate

The assumption underpinning Russiagate – that Vladimir Putin preferred Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton – is not supported by the facts, according to “Initial Findings” of the House Intelligence Committee, as Ray McGovern reports.

By Ray McGovern

Let’s try to make this simple: The basic rationale behind charges that Russian President Vladimir Putin interfered in the 2016 U.S. election to help candidate Donald Trump rests, of course, on the assumption that Moscow preferred Trump to Hillary Clinton. But that is wrong to assume, says the House Intelligence Committee, which has announced that it does not concur with “Putin’s supposed preference for candidate Trump.”

So, the House Intelligence Committee Republican majority, which has been pouring over the same evidence used by the “handpicked analysts” from just the CIA, FBI, and NSA to prepare the rump Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA) of Jan. 6, 2017, finds the major premise of the ICA unpersuasive. The committee’s “Initial Findings” released on Monday specifically reject the assumption that Putin favored Trump.

This puts the committee directly at odds with handpicked analysts from only the FBI, CIA, and NSA, who assessed that Putin favored Trump – using this as their major premise and then straining to prove it by cobbling together unconvincing facts and theories.

Those of us with experience in intelligence analysis strongly criticized the evidence-impoverished ICA as soon as it was released, but it went on to achieve Gospel-like respect, with penance assigned to anyone who might claim it was not divinely inspired.

Until now.

Rep. K. Michael Conway (R-Texas), who led the House Committee investigation, has told the media that the committee is preparing a separate, in-depth analysis of the ICA itself. Good.

The committee should also take names – not only of the handpicked analysts, but the hand-pickers. There is ample precedent for this. For example, those who shepherded the fraudulent National Intelligence Estimate on weapons of mass

destruction in Iraq 15 years ago were named in the NIE. Without names, it is hard to know whom to hold accountable.

Here's the key ICA judgment with which the House committee does not concur: "We assess Putin, his advisers, and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump over Secretary Clinton." Not to be picky, but if House investigators have been unable to find enough persuasive evidence to convince them that "Putin's supposed preference" was Trump, there is little reason to take seriously the ICA's adolescent observations – like Putin held a "grudge" against Clinton because she called him nasty names – and other tortured reasoning in an Intelligence Community Assessment that, frankly, is an embarrassment to the profession of intelligence analysis.

I recall reading the ICA as soon as it was published. I concluded that no special expertise in intelligence analysis was needed to see how the assessment had been cobbled together around the "given" that Putin had a distinct preference for Trump. That was a premise with which I always had serious trouble, since it assumed that a Russian President would prefer to have an unpredictable, mercurial, lash-out-at-any-grievance-real-or-perceived President with his fingers on the nuclear codes. This – not name-calling – is precisely what Russian leaders fear the most.

Be that as it may, the ICA's evidence adduced to demonstrate Russian "interference" to help Trump win the election never passed the smell test. Worse still, it was not difficult to see powerful political agendas in play. While those agendas, together with the media which shared them, conferred on the ICA the status of Holy Writ, it had clearly been "writ" to promote those agendas and, as such, amounted to rank corruption of intelligence by those analysts "handpicked" by National Intelligence Director James Clapper to come up with the "right" answer.

Traces of the bizarre ideological – even racial – views of Intelligence Dean Clapper can also be discerned between the lines of the ICA. It is a safe bet that the handpicked authors of the ICA were well aware of – and perhaps even shared – the views Clapper later expressed to NBC's Chuck Todd on May 28, 2017 about Russians: "[P]ut that in context with everything else we knew the Russians were doing to interfere with the election," he said. "And just the historical practices of the Russians, who typically, are almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique. So, we were concerned."

Always Read the Fine Print

What readers of the intelligence assessment might have taken more seriously was

the CYA in the ICA, so to speak, the truth-in-advertising cautions wedged into its final page. The transition from the lead paragraph to the final page – from “high confidence” to the actual definition of “high confidence” is remarkable. As a reminder, here’s how ICA starts:

“Putin Ordered Campaign To Influence US Election: We assess with high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election, the consistent goals of which were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. ...”

But wait, the fair warning on page 13 explains: “High confidence ... does not imply that the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong. ... Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that show something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Questionable Logic

The “logic” referred to rests primarily on assumptions related to Trump’s supposed friendliness with Putin, what Clinton Campaign Manager John Podesta called in 2015 a “bromance.” It assumes that Trump has been more than willing to do the Kremlin’s bidding from the White House, whether due to financial relationships Trump has with the Russians, or because he “owes them” for helping him get elected, or whether he is being blackmailed by “the pee tape” that Christopher Steele alluded to in his “dodgy dossier.”

This is the crux of the whole “treason” aspect of the Russiagate conspiracy theory – the idea that Trump is a Manchurian (or as some clever wags among Russiagaters claim, a *Siberian*) candidate who is directly under the influence of the Kremlin.

Even as U.S.-Russian relations drop to historic lows – with tensions approaching Cuban Missile Crisis levels – amazingly, there are still those promoting this theory, including some in the supposedly “progressive” alternative media like The Young Turks (TYT). Following Putin’s announcement on developments in Russia’s nuclear program earlier this month, TYT’s Cenk Uygur slammed Trump for not being more forceful in denouncing Putin, complaining that Trump “never criticizes Putin.” Uygur even speculated: “I’m not sure that Trump represents our interests above Putin’s.”

This line of thinking ignores a preponderance of evidence that the U.S posture against Russian interests has only hardened over the past year-plus of the Trump

administration – perhaps in part as a result of Trump’s perceived need to demonstrate that he is not in “Putin’s pocket.”

The U.S. has intensified its engagement in Syria, for one thing, reportedly killing several Russians in recent airstrikes – a dangerous escalation that could lead to all-out military confrontation with Moscow and hardly the stuff of an alleged “bromance” between Trump and Putin. Then there was the Trump administration’s recent decision to provide new lethal weapons to the Ukrainian military – a major reversal of the Obama administration’s more cautious approach and an intensification of U.S. involvement in a proxy war on Russia’s border. The Russian foreign ministry angrily denounced this decision, saying the U.S. had “crossed the line” in the Ukraine conflict and accused Washington of fomenting bloodshed.

On other major policy issues, the Trump administration has also been pushing a hard anti-Russian line, reiterating recently that it would never recognize Crimea as part of Russia, criticizing Russia for allegedly enabling chemical attacks in Syria, and identifying Moscow as one of the U.S.’s major adversaries in the global struggle for power and influence.

“China and Russia,” the administration stated in its recent National Security Strategy, “challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.” In the recently issued Nuclear Posture Review, the U.S. identifies Russia as a “contemporary threat,” and has a chapter outlining “A Tailored Strategy for Russia.” The document warns that Russia has “decided to return to Great Power competition.”

How does this in any way indicate that Trump is representing “Putin’s interests” above “ours,” as Uygur claims?

In short, there is no evidence to back up the theory that Putin helped Trump become president in order to do the Kremlin’s bidding, and no one pushing this idea should be taken seriously. In this respect, the Republicans’ “Initial Findings” – particularly the rejection of “Putin’s supposed preference for candidate Trump” have more credibility than most of the “analysis” put out so far, including the Jan. 6, 2017 ICA that has been held up as sacrosanct.

Democrats Angry

The irrepressible Congressman Adam Schiff, Ranking Member of the House Intelligence Committee, and his fellow Democrats are in high dudgeon over the release of the Committee’s “Initial Findings” after “only” one year of investigation. So, of course, is NBC’s Rachel Maddow and other Russiagate aficionados. They may even feel a need to come up with real evidence – rather

than Clapperisms like “But everyone knows about the Russians, and how, for example, they just really hated it when Mrs. Clinton called Putin Hitler.”

I had the opportunity to confront Schiff personally at a think tank in Washington, DC on January 25, 2017. President Obama, on his way out of office, had said something quite curious at his last press conference just one week earlier about inconclusive conclusions: “The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive” regarding WikiLeaks. In other words, the intelligence community had no idea how the DNC emails reached WikiLeaks.

Schiff had just claimed as flat fact that the Russians hacked the DNC and Podesta emails and gave them to WikiLeaks to publish. So I asked him if he knew more than President Obama about how Russian hacking had managed to get to WikiLeaks.

Schiff used the old, “I can’t share the evidence with you; it’s classified.” OK, I’m no longer cleared for classified information, but Schiff is; and so are all his colleagues on the House Intelligence Committee. The Republican majority has taken issue with the cornerstone assumption of those who explain Russian “hacking” and other “meddling” as springing from the “obvious fact” that Putin favored Trump. The ball is in Schiff’s court.

Last but not least, the committee’s Initial Finding that caught most of the media attention was that there is “no evidence of collusion, coordination, or conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russians.” This, of course, poured cold water on what everyone listening to mainstream media “knows” about Russian “meddling” in the 2016 election. But, in the lack of persuasive evidence that President Putin preferred candidate Trump, why should we expect Russian “collusion, coordination, conspiracy” with the Trump campaign?

Ah, but the Russians want to “sow discord.” Sounds to me like a Clapperism.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27-year career at CIA, he was Chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch and preparer/briefer of the President’s Daily Brief under Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Trump Promotes Longtime Russia Hawk Just

as Russiagate Loses Momentum

The fact-free and logic-challenged allegations of Trump-Russia collusion have further lost credibility with the appointment of a virulently anti-Russia hawk to replace Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Caitlin Johnstone points out.

By Caitlin Johnstone

Rex Tillerson, whose hotly scrutinized ties to Russia have been a centerpiece of Rachel Maddow's conspiratorial ravings for many months, has been fired. Replacing him as Secretary of State will be Mike Pompeo, who has been a consistent and longstanding Russia hawk for years, going so far as accusing President Obama of endangering America by simply agreeing to meet with Vladimir Putin in 2015.

Like pretty much everything that happens anywhere ever, this occurrence is being cited as evidence of collusion between Donald Trump and the Russian government.

"Tillerson Fired by Trump Hours After Blaming Russia for Chemical Attack in U.K.," blared a headline from the increasingly pro-establishment Intercept, referring to a comment Tillerson had made about the plot hole-riddled claims of the UK government that a Russian double agent had been poisoned by the Kremlin.

"By firing Tillerson one day after he publicly stated that Russia behind a WMD attack on British soil, we now have proof Trump is colluding with Putin," tweeted Vanity Fair editor and tentacle porn connoisseur Kurt Eichenwald. "I don't know if he did in the election. But he is doing it NOW in front of our eyes. He is Kremlin-owned."

"Interesting that Tillerson's ouster came one day after he very publicly broke with the official WH line and said the poisoning of Sergei Skripal 'clearly' came from Russia," said a popular tweet from The Atlantic's Natasha Bertrand.

"WH saying Tillerson was informed Friday, but State Dept statement today seems to indicate he just found out today. Which *really* makes one wonder about the role of the Russia statement yesterday," chimed in MSNBC's Chris Hayes.

This is plainly stupid, and the exact opposite is likely the case. Rex Tillerson had been making comments against Russia throughout his brief career as Secretary of State just like Pompeo and many others in Trump's cabinet, recently blaming Moscow for chemical attacks in Syria and warning of future interference in US elections in the 2018 midterms. He was not replaced by a far more virulently anti-Russia hawk because he sided with the establishment narrative on Russia as he had many times before.

For his part, Trump told reporters “it sounds to me like it would be Russia” in response to questions about who was responsible for the UK poisoning, and cited differences with Tillerson on the Iran nuclear deal as a reason for his firing. If you take Trump on his word (not that I am suggesting anyone should ever do such a thing), his administration is likely to side with the UK on any escalations it chooses to make against the Russian Federation, and he fired Rex Tillerson because this administration and its allies want to advance a more aggressive agenda against Iran.

And that could very well be among the reasons for Tillerson’s firing; Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did reportedly talk “Iran, Iran, and Iran” in their recent meeting. It could also have something to do with the possibility that Pompeo is being groomed for a 2020 presidential candidacy, as sources have reportedly told WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Julian Assange.

I think another possibility worth considering is the timing of the fatal blow the Russiagate narrative has suffered as House Intelligence Committee Republicans officially ended their investigation with the conclusion that there is no evidence of Trump-Russia collusion, and no evidence that Vladimir Putin tried to help Trump win the election. The Mueller investigation still continues, as does the Senate Intelligence Committee investigation, with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer stating that “We have a responsibility to get to the very bottom of what happened in the 2016 elections and to report on those findings in an unbiased way. If the House isn’t going to do it, the Senate must.”

But going by what we’re hearing from the Senate Intelligence Committee it looks like their investigation might be heading in the same direction, with Senate Intelligence Chairman Richard Burr telling CNN on Monday that he’s seen no evidence of collusion either.

“I’ve read a lot about it, but haven’t seen any,” Burr said.

It is worth weighing the possibility that now that the American public has been paced into supporting new cold war escalations with Russia, the Russiagate psyop which was used to harness rank-and-file Democrats’ fear of Trump to inflame fears of Putin is no longer necessary, and is now being let go in place of more brazen hawkishness. As far as the US intelligence community and its allies are concerned, Russiagate’s only purpose has been to manufacture public support for escalations against Russia to secure strategic regions and ultimately hobble the Russia-China tandem, and that scaffolding can safely be removed if Russia hysteria no longer requires fear of Trump collusion to be sustained.

The soulless Mike Pompeo would be a fine overseer of that agenda, and as

Secretary of State, the position Hillary Clinton used so effectively to spearhead the decimation of Libya, he'd be in an excellent position to do so.

Also noteworthy is the fact that Trump just promoted a torture supporter in Mike Pompeo and an actual torturer in his replacement as CIA Director Gina Haspel, yet leading Democrats are largely concerned that the administration won't be "tough" enough.

"If he's confirmed, we hope that Mr. Pompeo will turn over a new leaf and will start toughening up our policies towards Russia and Putin," said Chuck Schumer, arguably the most powerful Democrat in America, who recently sparked controversy for citing religious voodoo in defense of the oppression and warmongering of the Israeli state.

This administration is continuing and expanding all of Bush and Obama's most bloodthirsty agendas, and if it attacks Iran it will likely surpass both of them in terms of psychopathic bloodshed, and yet they're worried he's not "tough" enough. They criticize Trump for weakness over his willingness to meet for peace talks with Kim Jong Un after feigning shock at his obnoxious tweets about the North Korean leader, and they blast him for being too cuddly wuddly with Russia despite this administration's already having caved to the longstanding neoconservative agenda to arm Ukraine against Russia, killed Russians in Syria as part of its insane regime change occupation of that country, adopted a Nuclear Posture Review with greatly increased aggression toward Russia and blurred lines between when nuclear strikes are and are not appropriate, sent war ships into the Black Sea "to counter Russia's increased presence there," forced RT and Sputnik to register as foreign agents, expanded NATO with the addition of Montenegro, assigned Russia hawk Kurt Volker as special representative to Ukraine, shut down a Russian consulate in San Francisco and thrown out Russian diplomats.

In short, both parties appear to be doing everything in their power to get as many people killed as possible, and nobody seems to have their foot anywhere near the brake pedal. Heads up.

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

Gang of Four: Senators Call for Tillerson to Enter into Arms Control Talks with the Kremlin

Four United States senators are urging a new approach to U.S.-Russian relations based on renewed arms control efforts, but you probably haven't heard about it from the mainstream media, Gilbert Doctorow and Ray McGovern report.

By Gilbert Doctorow and Ray McGovern

In a sad commentary on the parlous state of the U.S. media, a letter to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson from four United States Senators dated March 8 calling for opening arms control talks with the Kremlin ASAP is nowhere to be found in mainstream newspapers a day after its release on the Senate home page of one of the authors, Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.).



Nothing in the *New York Times*. Nothing in the *Washington Post*. And so, it is left to alternative media to bring to the attention of its readership a major development in domestic politics, a significant change in what its own senior politicians are saying should be done about Russia that was brought to our attention bythe Russian mainstream media including the agency RIA Novosti, RBK, Tass within hours of initial posting.

What we have is, first, a genuine man bites dog story. Two of the senators who penned the letter, Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont), have in recent months been among the most vociferous promoters of the unproven allegations of Trump collusion with the Russians. Now they are putting aside for the moment their attacks on Trump and members of his entourage who dared shake hands or share a joke with a Russian ambassador. They are openly calling upon the Secretary of State to send U.S. personnel to negotiate with Putin's minions over our survival on this planet.

The authors were in a tough spot explaining their new marching orders for State. And they have done their best to impose consistency on what is patently a new policy direction holding great promise for sanity to be restored in U.S.-Russian relations.

First, they cover their backsides by the lengthy recitation of Russia's bad

deeds, including alleged election meddling in the 2016 presidential election, violation of international law in Ukraine and the like.

Secondly, they make the proposed arms talks look like a walk down the Rose Garden, with the Russians being told what to do from a position of strength. The objective is focused on inserting two of Russia's latest weapons systems described by Vladimir Putin in his March 1 speech into the framework of the START treaty as it comes up for renewal. That and to resolve issues over alleged Russian violation of the Intermediate Range Missiles convention.

However, buried in this mumbo jumbo is that reference to Putin's speech and the new weapons systems he described, which actually numbered six among them several never heard about before inside the Beltway and looking pretty ominous. So, one may conclude that Putin's intended "shock and awe" speech did have some effect in DC, even if so far no one is saying so, and even if so far, our leading newspapers have called time out till they can decide how to deal with the unwelcome news.

Wittingly or not, the Gang of Four has just opened a breach in the wall of contempt and loathing for Putin and Russia that has been building in Washington for months if not years now. The immediate task is for word of this development to go out to the broad public and for the relics of our once formidable arms negotiations teams to be brought out of mothballs to face Russian counterparts who have been waiting keenly for this moment.

Democratic Fissures

The unusual way in which the letter was made public – and the evident uncertainty on the part of the mainstream media as to how to play it – reflects widening fissures among Democrats.

Even among the most rabid fans of Hillary Clinton (and haters of President Trump) there is a growing sense that, for example, Congressman Adam "trust-me-the-Russians-hacked-our election" Schiff (D-Calif.) may not be able to deliver anything beyond the "trust me." And many are beginning to question whether the sainted Special Counsel, Robert Mueller may not be able to come up with much more than click-bait farms in St. Petersburg and dirt to put dubious characters like Paul Manafort in jail on charges unrelated to Russiagate. (After all, Mueller has already been at it a very long time.)

And what would that mean for the re-election prospects of candidates like the superannuated Democratic-machine product Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), whose prospects are already waning?

Not to be ruled out is the possibility that the four senators may also be

motivated by a new appreciation of the dangers of blaming everything on Russia, with the possible result of U.S.-Russia relations falling into a state of complete disrepair. The key question is whether President Putin can be de-demonized. That will depend on the mainstream media, which, alas, is not accustomed to reassessing and silencing the bellicose drums – even in the face of new realities like the petering out of Russiagate and Putin’s entirely credible declaration of strategic parity.

Gang of Four Letter to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson

As posted on the [website of Senator Merkley](#)

March 8, 2018

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

We write to urge the State Department to convene the next U.S.-Russia Strategic Dialogue as soon as possible.

A U.S.-Russia Strategic Dialogue is more urgent following President Putin’s public address on March 1st when he referred to several new nuclear weapons Russia is reportedly developing including a cruise missile and a nuclear underwater drone, which are not currently limited by the New START treaty, and would be destabilizing if deployed. There is no doubt we have significant disagreements with Russia, including Russia’s brazen interference in the 2016 U.S. elections; continued violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF); invasion of Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea; and destabilizing actions in Syria. However, it is due to these policy rifts, not in spite of them, that the United States should urgently engage with Russia to avoid miscalculation and reduce the likelihood of conflict.

First, we encourage the administration to propose alternative solutions to address Russia’s violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov admitted to the existence of this ground launched cruise missile (GLCM), but contended that the system was INF Treaty compliant.

Senior officials from the United States and Russia have said that the INF Treaty plays an “important role in the existing system of international security.” As such, we urge the State Department to resolve Russia’s violation through

existing INF Treaty provisions or new mutually acceptable means.

Second, we urge the United States to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). The Trump administration's own 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) references Russia's robust nuclear modernization program as a main justification behind the U.S. need to recapitalize its three legs of the nuclear triad. An extension of New START would verifiably lock-in the Treaty's Central Limits – and with it – the reductions in strategic forces Russia has made.

The New START Treaty, which entered into force in 2011, provides transparency and predictability into the size and location of Russia's strategic nuclear delivery systems, warheads, and facilities. New START's robust verification architecture involves thousands of data exchanges and regular on-site inspections. The United States confirmed in February that Russia met New START's Central Treaty Limits and it stated that "implementation of the New START Treaty enhances the safety and security of the United States." These same Central Treaty Limits could also govern two of the new types of nuclear weapons referenced by President Putin on March 1st – a case the United States can argue through the Treaty's Biannual Consultative Commission (BCC).

Lastly, as the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review notes, Russia maintains a numerical advantage to the United States in the number of non-strategic nuclear weapons. The Senate, in its Resolution of Ratification on New START in 2010, took stock of this imbalance and called upon the United States to commence negotiations that would "secure and reduce tactical nuclear weapons in a verifiable manner." Attempts by the Obama administration to negotiate an agreement on this class of weapons met resistance from Russia. However, even absent the political space for a formal agreement or binding treaty with Russia, we urge the State Department to discuss ways to enhance transparency on non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Extending New START, resolving Russia's INF violation, and enhancing transparency measures relating to non-strategic nuclear weapons will also help quiet growing calls from many countries that the United States is not upholding its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations. The Treaty's three mutually reinforcing pillars: non-proliferation, peaceful uses of the atom, and disarmament can only be advanced through U.S. leadership on all three.

There is no guarantee that we can make progress with Russia on these issues. However, even at the height of Cold War tensions, the United States and the Soviet Union were able to engage on matters of strategic stability. Leaders from both countries believed, as we should today, that the incredible destructive force of nuclear weapons is reason enough to make any and all efforts to lessen the chance that they can never be used again.

Sincerely,

Senators Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont)

Gilbert Doctorow is an independent political analyst based in Brussels. His latest book, *Does the United States Have a Future?* was published in October 2017. Both paperback and e-book versions are available for purchase on www.amazon.com and all affiliated Amazon websites worldwide.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served in Army and CIA intelligence analysis for 30 years and, after retiring, co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Putin Claims Strategic Parity, Respect

Vladimir Putin's announcement of new weapons systems to achieve nuclear parity was the result of the erosion of arms control regimes, such as the ill-advised U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty in 2002, Ray McGovern explains.

By Ray McGovern

Russian President Vladimir Putin's State-of-the-Nation speech Thursday represents a liminal event in the East-West strategic balance – and an ominous one.

That the strategic equation is precarious today comes through clearly in Putin's words. The U.S. and Russia have walked backwards over the threshold of sanity first crossed in the right direction by their predecessors in 1972 with the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Amid the "balance of terror" that reigned pre-1972, sensible statesmen on both sides concluded and implemented the ABM treaty which, in effect, guaranteed "mutual assured destruction" – the (altogether fitting) acronym was MAD – if either side attempted a nuclear attack on the other. MAD might not sound much better than "balance of terror," but the ABM treaty introduced a significant degree of stability for 30 years.

The treaty itself was the result of painstaking negotiation with considerable understanding and good faith shown by both sides. The formidable task challenging us intelligence specialists was to be able to assure President Nixon

that, if he decided to trust, we could monitor Soviet adherence and promptly report any violations. (Incidentally, the Soviets did cheat. In mid-1983 we detected a huge early warning radar installation at Krasnoyarsk in Siberia – a clear violation of the ABM treaty. President Reagan called them on it, and the Soviets eventually tore it down.)

During the U.S.-Soviet negotiations on the ABM treaty, a third of the CIA Soviet Foreign Policy Branch, which I led at the time, was involved in various supporting roles. I was in Moscow on May 26, 1972 for the treaty signing by President Richard Nixon and Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. I recall not being able to suppress an audible sigh of relief. MAD, I believed, would surely be preferable to the highly precarious strategic situation that preceded it. It was.

Cornerstone of Stability

In his speech on March 1, President Putin included an accurate tutorial on what happened after three decades, noting that Moscow was “categorically against” the U.S. decision in 2002 to withdraw from the ABM treaty. He described the treaty as “the cornerstone of the international security system.”

Putin explained that under the treaty, “the parties had the right to deploy ballistic missile defense systems in only one of its regions. Russia deployed these systems around Moscow, and the U.S. around its Grand Forks land-based ICBM base [in North Dakota].” (He did not mention the aborted attempt to deploy a second installation at Krasnoyarsk.)

The Russian President explained: “The ABM treaty not only created an atmosphere of trust, but also prevented either party from recklessly using nuclear weapons ... because the limited number of ballistic missile defense systems made the potential aggressor vulnerable to a response strike.”

Putin was saying, in effect, that no matter how bad – even mad – the MAD concept may seem, it played a huge stabilizing role. He added that the U.S. rejected all Russian proposals toward constructive dialogue on the post-ABM treaty situation, and grossly underestimated Russia’s ability to respond. The Russian President then gave chapter and verse, cum video clips, on an array of new Russian weaponry which, he claimed, rendered missile defense systems “useless.” The show-and-tell segment of Putin’s speech has been widely reported.

New York Times Skeptical

David Sanger, the *New York Times*’ go-to guy on key issues, who is among the best in the trade on reporting as “flat facts” things like WMD in Iraq and “Russian meddling,” wrote the lede on Putin’s speech in Friday’s *NY Times* together with

Neil MacFarquhar. The meme this time is not flat fact, but skepticism: “Do these weapons really exist? Or is Putin bluffing?”

In support of their skepticism, Sanger and MacFarquhar blithely report that “analysts writing on Facebook and elsewhere leaned toward the bluff theory.” So, QED!

And echoing former National Intelligence Director James Clapper’s insight that Russians are “typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever,” Sanger and MacFarquhar remind NYT readers that “deception lies at the heart of current Russian military doctrine.”

The two NYT journalists did get one thing right at the very end of their article; namely, “For years, Mr. Putin has chafed at the perceived disrespect showed to him and Russia by the United States. ‘Nobody listened to Russia,’ he said near the end of his speech, to huge applause. ‘Well, listen now.’”

Russians, like all proud and gifted people, resent attempts to demean or marginalize them. Putin may have seen his speech, in part, as a blistering response to former President Barack Obama’s dismissive comments that “Russia doesn’t make anything” and is no more than “a regional power.”

Door Still Open to Talks

It is to be hoped that the Marine generals running U.S. defense policy, rather than calling Putin’s bluff, will now encourage President Donald Trump to take up Putin’s latest offer to “sit down at the negotiating table” and “work together ... to ensure global security” – taking into account that “strategic parity” is now a reality.

Referring to what he called “our duty to inform our partners” about Russia’s claimed ability to render ABM systems “useless,” Putin added: “When the time comes, foreign and defense ministry experts will have many opportunities to discuss all these matters with them, if of course our partners so desire.”

Putin also said, “We are greatly concerned by certain provisions of the revised Nuclear Posture Review,” which envisages a nuclear response to “conventional arms attacks and even to a cyber threat.”

He described Russia’s military doctrine, as “very clear and specific”: “Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons solely in response to a nuclear attack, or an attack with other weapons of mass destruction against the country or its allies, or an act of aggression against us with the use of conventional weapons that threatens the very existence of the state.”

With burgeoning threats against Iran and Syria, it is to be hoped that someone in Washington thinks to ask Putin which countries he includes among Russia's allies.

White Lies Nobody Believes

Dana White, Pentagon spokeswoman, told reporters Thursday, "Our missile defense has never been about" Russia. Now, as Harry Truman would have put it, the Russians "weren't born yesterday." Putin has been extremely derisive toward those promoting the bromide that ABM installations in and around Europe are designed to defend against missiles from Iran – or North Korea.

In an unusually candid remark on missile defense on April 17, 2014, the day before Crimea was annexed, Putin told a national TV audience: "*Missile defense ... is no less, and probably even more important, than NATO's eastward expansion. Incidentally, our decision on Crimea was partially prompted by this.*" (Emphasis added)

To take some liberties with Shakespeare, "The fault is not in our stars, but in our Star Wars." Ever since President Ronald Reagan was sold on the notion that a "Star Wars" ABM system could provide the U.S. with complete protection from missile attack, exceptional opportunities to restrain – or even put an end to – the nuclear arms race have been squandered. Victory has gone to the arms profiteers – those whom Pope Francis described to Congress as the "blood drenched arms merchants."

The ABM project has been called, with justification, the world's largest corporate welfare program. Jonathan Marshall today explains quite well what should scare us – still more billions likely to be thrown at the makers of systems that, most serious scientists and engineers agree, can always be defeated, and comparatively cheaply, way or another.

Three Decade-Old Conundrum

During the mid-80s, I had a front-row seat watching President Ronald Reagan blow what appeared to be a golden chance for a comprehensive peace. I had spent most of my CIA career focusing on Soviet foreign policy and was able to tell the senior U.S. officials I was briefing that Mikhail Gorbachev, in my view, was the real deal. Even so, I was hardly prepared for how far Gorbachev was willing to go toward disarmament. At the 1986 summit with President Ronald Reagan in Reykjavik, Iceland, Gorbachev proposed that all nuclear weapons be eliminated within ten years.

Reagan reportedly almost rose to the occasion, but was counseled to reject Gorbachev's condition that any research on anti-ballistic missiles be confined

to laboratories for that decade. “Star Wars,” the largest and most wasteful defense-industry program in recent memory, won the day.

I know the characters who, for whatever reason, danced to the tune of “Star Wars,” Reagan’s benighted, wistful wish for an airtight defense against strategic missiles.

The naysayers to peace included ideologues like CIA Director William Casey and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, windsocks like CIA Deputy Director Robert Gates and one of his proteges, Fritz Ermarth, a viscerally anti-Russian functionary and former Northrop Corporation employee, during Reykjavik.

According to author Jim Mann, several years after Reykjavik, Ermarth reflected on how he had been wrong in being overly suspicious of Gorbachev and how the intuition of Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz had been more perceptive.

What Now?

By all appearances, President Putin is as interested in stemming the strategic arms race as was Gorbachev. On Thursday, Putin talked about this particular moment being liminal – he called it “a turning point for the entire world.” Will there be anyone in Washington at the other end of the phone, if Moscow calls? If, in effect, the military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-media complex answers, ABM developers will continue to fatten their purses and squander our children’s future.

It may be time to recall the admonition of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in a speech he gave 65 years ago:

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. ...

We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people. ... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron. [...] Is there no other way the world may live?

‘Nuff said.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. He served 30 years as an U.S. Army

Intelligence and CIA analyst, and in retirement co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).
