

Liars Lying About Nearly Everything

Donald Trump turns out to be a pretty good liar, even if he frequently has no idea what he's talking about, says Phil Giraldi in this commentary. But the prize for lying has to go to the British.

By Phil Giraldi



At least since the time of Marcus Tullius Cicero in the late Roman Republic everyone has certainly understood that politicians lie all the time. To be sure, President Donald Trump has been exceptional in that he has followed through on some of the promises he made in his campaign, insisting periodically that he has to do what he said he would do.

Unfortunately, those choices he has made to demonstrate his accountability to his supporters have been terrible, including moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, threatening to end the Iran nuclear agreement and building a wall along the Mexican border. Following through on some other pledges has been less consistent. He has increased U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan and turned the war over to the generals while also faltering in his promise to improve relations with Russia.

The potential breakthrough offered by promising exchanges during phone calls to Vladimir Putin have been negated by subsequent threats, sanctions and expulsions to satisfy hysterical congressmen and the media.

Concerning Syria, Trump last Tuesday said "I want to get out," promising to [pull U.S. troops out](#) very soon, but was quickly brought to heel by pressure from Congress and a phone call from Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu that compelled him to change his mind within 24 hours. Israel wants chaos in Syria and its instrument of choice is the American military. Netanyahu has Congress to do his bidding and, for whatever reason, appears to also have Trump under his thumb.

A Pretty Good Liar

So Donald Trump turns out to be a pretty good liar, even if one has to take into account the fact that he frequently has no idea what he is talking about. But the prize for lying at a high level has to go to the British as related to what has been going on both in the Middle East, with Russia, and also in Britain itself.

Former Prime Minister Tony Blair was the first master at dissimulation in 2002 when his intelligence chief Sir Richard Dearlove told him that the Bush White House had decided on war and “the intelligence and facts were being around the policy” regarding Iraq, meaning that it was ignoring the information that did not support its desire to create a pretext for invading the country and removing Saddam Hussein.

Blair presumably could have derailed the ill-fated invasion by refusing to go along with the venture, which was a war crime, but instead he fully supported George W. Bush in the attack. He thereby had a hand in America’s worst foreign policy disaster ever. In 2016 an official British government inquiry determined that Bush and Blair had indeed rushed to war together. The Global Establishment has nevertheless [rewarded Tony Blair](#) for his loyalty with Clintonesque generosity. He has enjoyed a number of well-paid sinecures and is now worth in excess of \$100 million.

Creating a Foreign Crisis

Moving along to the present, we have Prime Minister Theresa May. May has been in serious trouble, politically speaking. After losses suffered in the recent parliamentary elections, she is clinging to power and is increasingly unpopular even within her own Conservative Party. So what do you do when you are in trouble at home? You create a foreign crisis that you have to deal with.

If you are someone as venal as former American President and bottom feeder Bill Clinton you accomplish that end by firing off a few cruise missiles at a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan and at some mud huts in Afghanistan. If you are May, you up the ante considerably, coming up with a powerful enemy who is threatening you, enabling you to appear both resolute and strong in confronting a formidable foe. That is precisely what we have been seeing over the past month relating to the alleged poisoning of former Russian double-agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia.

There is quite a bit that is odd about the Skripal case. Even the increasingly neoconnish *Guardian* newspaper [has conceded that](#) “the British case [against Russia] has so far relied more heavily in public on circumstantial evidence and secret intelligence.” And secret intelligence, so called, has all too often been the last refuge of a scoundrel whenever a government is selling snake oil to the public. In this case, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson rushed to judgement on Russia less than forty-eight hours after the Skripals were found unconscious on a bench in Salisbury, England, too soon for any chemical analysis of the alleged poisoning to have taken place.

Blaming the Kremlin, Again

May addressed Parliament shortly thereafter to blame the Kremlin and demand a Russian official response to the event in 36 hours, even though she had to prevaricate significantly, saying that the apparent poisoning was “very likely” caused by a made-in-Russia nerve agent referred to by its generic name Novichok. She nevertheless rallied the backbenchers in Parliament, who responded with a lot of hearty “Hear! Hear!” endorsements.

When Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn attempted to slow the express train down by suggesting that it might be wise to wait and see what the police investigation uncovered, he was hooted down. The British media was soon on board with a vengeance, spreading the government line that such a highly sensitive operation would require the approval of President Vladimir Putin himself. The expulsion of Russian diplomats soon followed.

One of the strangest aspects of the Skripal case is that daughter Yulia was released from hospital on Tuesday. She has been held incommunicado and is being “protected” in a secret location by the British government. It is

impossible to know if she wants to return to her life in Russia and is being held against her will, not so much to protect her as to silence her.

Sergei is no longer in critical condition. A cousin Viktoria Skripal [has offered to fly in](#) from Moscow to provide support for her family, but was denied a British visa. Russian television aired a [recording of a phone call](#) between the two cousins in which Yulia said that she was disoriented but improving and that neither she nor her father had suffered permanent damage from the poisoning. The call ended abruptly and Viktoria Skripal believes that it was scripted by the British government on a controlled phone line.

Repeated requests by Russia to obtain a sample of the alleged nerve agent for testing have been rejected by the British government in spite of the fact that a military grade nerve agent would have surely killed both the Skripals as well as anyone else within 100 yards. As the latest British account of the location of the alleged poison places it on the door handle of the Skripals’ residence, the timetable element is also unconvincing. That means that the two would have spent three hours, including a stop at a pub and lunch, before succumbing on a park bench. Military grade nerve agents kill instantly and this one is said to be 8 times more powerful than VX.

A request to have the testing done by the politically neutral Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is in progress, but there is little enthusiasm from the British side, which does not want a Russian observer to participate in the process. The May government has already established its own narrative and certainly would have plenty to lose if the whole affair turns out

to be fabricated. And fabricated it might have been as the nerve agent, if it actually exists, could have been manufactured almost anywhere.

The head of Britain's own chemical weapons facility Porton Down [has contradicted claims](#) made by May, Johnson, and British Ambassador in Moscow Laurie Bristow. The lab's chief executive, Gary Aitkenhead, has testified that he does not know if the nerve agent was actually produced in Russia, a not surprising observation as the chemical formula was revealed to the public in a scientific paper in 1992 and there are an estimated twenty countries capable of producing it. There are also possible stocks of Novichok remaining in independent countries that once were part of the Soviet Union, to include Russia's enemy *du jour* Ukraine, while a false flag operation by the British themselves, the CIA or Mossad, is not unthinkable.

Orwellian Govspeak

The resort to official Orwellian gov speak by the British is remarkable throughout the process, but is particularly painful reading regarding the treatment of the Skripals' pets, two guinea pigs and a cat. A spokesman for the Department of the Environment [reported that](#) *"The property in Wiltshire was sealed as part of the police investigation. When a vet was able to access the property, two guinea pigs had sadly died. A cat was also found in a distressed state and a decision was taken by a veterinary surgeon to euthanize the animal to alleviate its suffering. This decision was taken in the best interests of the animal and its welfare."*

So the presence of squadrons of technicians and cops in the residence did not permit anyone to take a minute to feed the cat and guinea pigs. And the cat was killed as a purely humanitarian gesture – it's "best interest" was apparently to die. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Finally, the best argument against the British government's evasions about what took place in Salisbury on March 4 remains the question of motive.

The British would have one believe that Putin personally ordered the killing of a former British double agent who had been released from a Kremlin prison in a spy swap and who was no longer capable of doing any damage to Russia. He did that in spite of the fact that he had an election coming up and would be the host of the World Cup in the summer, an event that he would want to go smoothly. So he deliberately shot himself in the foot on both counts, allegedly because he wanted to send a message to traitors and also because he just can't help himself since he is a vindictive KGB type whose impulses are pure evil. Does that make sense to the reader? It doesn't to me.

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Philip Giraldi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest.

Growing Risk of U.S.-Iran Hostilities Based on False Pretexts, Intel Vets Warn

As President Donald Trump prepares to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week, a group of U.S. intelligence veterans offers corrections to a number of false accusations that have been levelled against Iran.

February 26, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: War With Iran

INTRODUCTION

In our [December 21st Memorandum to you](#), we cautioned that the claim that Iran is currently the world's top sponsor of terrorism is unsupported by hard evidence. Meanwhile, other false accusations against Iran have intensified. Thus, we feel obliged to alert you to the virtually inevitable consequences of war with Iran, just as we warned President George W. Bush six weeks before the U.S. attack on Iraq 15 years ago.

In [our first Memorandum in this genre](#) we told then-President Bush that we saw "no compelling reason" to attack Iraq, and warned "the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic." The consequences will be far worse, should the U.S. become drawn into war with Iran. We fear that you are not getting the straight story on this from your intelligence and national security officials.

After choosing "War With Iran" for the subject-line of this Memo, we were reminded that we had used it before, namely, for [a Memorandum to President Obama on August 3, 2010](#) in similar circumstances. You may wish to ask your staff to give you that one to read and ponder. It included a startling quote from then-Chairman of President Bush Jr.'s Intelligence Advisory Board (and former national security adviser to Bush Sr.) Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who told the *Financial Times* on October 14, 2004 that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had

George W. Bush “mesmerized;” that “Sharon just has him wrapped around his little finger.” We wanted to remind you of that history, as you prepare to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week.

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Rhetoric vs. Reality

We believe that the recent reporting regarding possible conflict with nuclear-armed North Korea has somewhat obscured consideration of the significantly higher probability that Israel or even Saudi Arabia will take steps that will lead to a war with Iran that will inevitably draw the United States in. Israel is particularly inclined to move aggressively, with potentially serious consequences for the U.S., in the wake of the recent incident involving an alleged Iranian drone and the shooting down of an Israeli aircraft.

There is also considerable anti-Iran rhetoric in U.S. media, which might well facilitate a transition from a cold war-type situation to a hot war involving U.S. forces. We have for some time been observing with some concern the growing hostility towards Iran coming out of Washington and from the governments of Israel and Saudi Arabia. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster is warning that the “time to act is now” to thwart Iran’s aggressive regional ambitions while U.S. United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley sees a “wake-up” call in the recent shooting incident involving Syria and Israel. Particular concern has been expressed by the White House that Iran is exploiting Shi’a minorities in neighboring Sunni dominated states to create unrest and is also expanding its role in neighboring Iraq and Syria.

While we share concerns over the Iranian government’s intentions vis-à-vis its neighbors, we do not believe that the developments in the region, many of which came about through American missteps, have a major impact on vital U.S. national interests. Nor is Iran, which often sees itself as acting defensively against surrounding Sunni states, anything like an existential threat to the United States that would mandate the sustained military action that would inevitably result if Iran is attacked.

Iran’s alleged desire to stitch together a sphere of influence consisting of an arc of allied nations and proxy forces running from its western borders to the Mediterranean Sea has been frequently cited as justification for a more assertive policy against Tehran, but we believe this concern to be greatly exaggerated. Iran, with a population of more than 80 million, is, to be sure, a major regional power but militarily, economically and politically it is highly vulnerable.

Limited Military Capability

Tehran's Revolutionary Guard is well armed and trained, but much of its "boots on the ground" army consists of militiamen of variable quality. Its Air Force is a "shadow" of what existed under the Shah and is significantly outgunned by its rivals in the Persian Gulf, not to mention Israel. Its navy is only "green water" capable in that it consists largely of smaller vessels responsible for coastal defense supplemented by the swarming of Revolutionary Guard small speedboats.

When Napoleon had conquered much of continental Europe and was contemplating invading Britain it was widely believed that England was helpless before him. British Admiral Earl St Vincent was unperturbed: "I do not say the French can't come, I only say they can't come by sea." We likewise believe that Iran's apparent threat is in reality decisively limited by its inability to project power across the water or through the air against neighboring states that have marked superiority in both respects.

The concern over a possibly developing "Shi'ite land bridge," also referred to as an "arc" or "crescent," is likewise overstated. It ignores the reality that Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon all have strong national identities and religiously mixed populations. They are influenced – some of them strongly – by Iran but they are not puppet states. And there is also an ethnic division that the neighboring states' populations are very conscious of– they are Arabs and Iran is Persian, which is also true of the Shi'a populations in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

Majority Shi'a Iraq, for example, is now very friendly to Iran but it has to deal with considerable Kurdish and Sunni minorities in its governance and in the direction of its foreign policy. It will not do Iran's bidding on a number of key issues, including Baghdad's relationship with Washington, and would be unwilling to become a proxy in Tehran's conflicts with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Iraqi Vice President Osama al-Nujaifi, the highest-ranking Sunni in the Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi government, has, for example, recently called for the demobilization of the Shi'ite Popular Mobilization Forces or militias that have been fighting ISIS because they "have their own political aspirations, their own [political] agendas. ... They are very dangerous to the future of Iraq."

Nuclear Weapons Thwarted

A major concern that has undergirded much of the perception of an Iranian threat is the possibility that Tehran will develop a nuclear weapon somewhere down the road. We believe that the current Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, even if imperfect, provides the best response to that Iranian proliferation problem. The

U.N. inspections regime is strict and, if the agreement stands, there is every reason to believe that Iran will be unable to take the necessary precursor steps leading to a nuclear weapons program. Iran will be further limited in its options after the agreement expires in nine years. Experts believe that, at that point, Iran is not likely to choose to accumulate the necessary highly enriched uranium stocks to proceed.

The recent incident involving the shoot-down of a drone alleged to be Iranian, followed by the downing of an Israeli fighter by a Syrian air defense missile, resulted in a sharp response from Tel Aviv, though reportedly mitigated by a warning from Russian President Vladimir Putin that anything more provocative might inadvertently involve Russia in the conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is said to have moderated his response but his government is clearly contemplating a more robust intervention to counter what he describes as a developing Iranian presence in Syria.

In addition, Netanyahu may be indicted on corruption charges, and it is conceivable that he might welcome a "small war" to deflect attention from mounting political problems at home.

Getting Snookered Into War

We believe that the mounting Iran hysteria evident in the U.S. media and reflected in Beltway groupthink has largely been generated by Saudi Arabia and Israel, who nurture their own aspirations for regional political and military supremacy. There are no actual American vital interests at stake and it is past time to pause and take a step backwards to consider what those interests actually are in a region that has seen nothing but disaster since 2003. Countering an assumed Iranian threat that is minimal and triggering a war would exacerbate instability, likely leading to a breakdown in the current political alignment of the entire Middle East. It would be costly for the United States.

Iran is not militarily formidable, but its ability to fight on the defensive against U.S. naval and air forces is considerable and can cause high casualties. There appears to be a perception in the Defense Department that Iran could be defeated in a matter of days, but we would warn that such predictions tend to be based on overly optimistic projections, witness the outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, Tehran would be able again to unleash terrorist resources throughout the region, endangering U.S. military and diplomats based there as well as American travelers and businesses. The terrorist threat might easily extend beyond the Middle East into Europe and also the United States, while the dollar costs of a major new conflict and its aftermath could break the bank, literally.

Another major consideration before ratcheting up hostilities should be that a war with Iran might not be containable. As the warning from President Vladimir Putin to Netanyahu made clear, other major powers have interests in what goes on in the Persian Gulf, and there is a real danger that a regional war could have global consequences.

In sum, we see a growing risk that the U.S. will become drawn into hostilities on pretexts fabricated by Israel and Saudi Arabia for their actual common objective ("regime change" in Iran). A confluence of factors and misconceptions about what is at stake and how such a conflict is likely to develop, coming from both inside and outside the Administration, has, unfortunately, made such an outcome increasingly likely.

We have seen this picture before, just 15 years ago in Iraq, which should serve as a warning. The prevailing perception of threat that the Mullahs of Iran allegedly pose directly against the security of the U.S. is largely contrived. Even if all the allegations were true, they would not justify an Iraq-style "preventive war" violating national as well as international law. An ill-considered U.S. intervention in Iran is surely not worth the horrific humanitarian, military, economic, and political cost to be paid if Washington allows itself to become part of an armed attack.

FOR THE STEERING GROUP, VETERAN INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS FOR SANITY

William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA's Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard Black, Virginia State Senator; former Marine officer in Vietnam, later Army Judge Advocate General officer, retiring as Colonel after 31 years

Kathleen Christison, CIA, Senior Analyst on Middle East (ret.)

Graham E. Fuller, Vice-Chair, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC Iraq; Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry C. Johnson, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF; ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC) (ret.)

John Brady Kiesling, Foreign Service Officer; resigned Feb. 27, 2003 as

Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy, Athens, in protest against the U.S. attack on Iraq (ret.)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Edward Loomis, Jr., former NSA Technical Director for the Office of Signals Processing (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Estimates Officer (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst; CIA Presidential briefer (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Near East (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Greg Thielmann, former Director of the Strategic, Proliferation, and Military Affairs Office, State Department Bureau of Intelligence & Research (INR), and former senior staffer on Senate Intelligence Committee (ret.)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.)

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), former Chief of Staff for Secretary of State; Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army (ret.); also Foreign Service Officer who, like Political Counselor John Brady Kiesling, resigned in opposition to the war on Iraq

Russiagate Narrative Undercut by Nunes Memo

The key allegations of election meddling at the heart of Russiagate continue to

lack supporting evidence, while on the other hand, evidence of overreach by investigators undermines the narrative of Trump-Russia collusion, reports Philip Giraldi.

By Philip Giraldi

The so-called Nunes Memo prepared for the Republican majority on the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee – even if possibly overblown – provides strong reason to believe that there was unwarranted and quite possibly illegal FBI surveillance of a former Trump staffer over completely legal Russian business dealings. Meanwhile, regarding the key allegations of election meddling at the heart of Russiagate, the nine month-long investigation of Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Moscow's possible interference has so far only shown that it was Israel rather than Russia that meddled with the campaign by meeting with Trump associates and seeking favors.

Notably missing is any evidence that the Russian government did anything beyond the usual probing that intelligence agencies worldwide do when confronted by important developments in another country that is either a competitor or adversary.

An aspect of the Republican memo that has been scarcely commented upon in the avalanche of news reporting centered on the story is how the mainstream media is continuing to exercise a dangerous obsession with Russia and is insisting that the Russiagate inquiry should continue even more aggressively in spite of the concerns that the entire process has been politicized. There is nothing in the memo itself that indicates that Moscow actually tried to recruit any Trump associate as an agent or interfere in the U.S. election. The *raison d'être* for both the Congressional and Special Counsel Robert Mueller investigations therefore appears to be lacking. It might eventually emerge that Russia did little or even nothing beyond the usual probing and nosing around that intelligence agencies routinely do.

President Donald Trump, who had campaigned on a sensible pledge to seek better relations with Moscow, has provided only feeble resistance to the onslaught of the media and political class. He has recently allowed the Justice Department and Treasury to punish Russia's two major news outlets operating in the United States, RT America and Sputnik. They both have been forced to register as foreign agents, even though no other non-American news service operating in the United States has been compelled to do the same, while new allegations about perfidious Moscow surface weekly.

Two recent news reports illustrate perfectly just how out-of-control the Russia

inquiry has become. At the end of January, the U.S. Treasury Department released the names of 210 alleged Kremlin insiders, including government ministers, who were being included on a list for possible sanctions, though it was also announced that no sanctions would be put in place pending further ongoing review of the behavior of those individuals under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

The so-called "Kremlin List" was clearly designed to put pressure on the inner circle of the Russian government as many of those named have major business ties with the United States and Western Europe that could be severely damaged through sanctions. The intention may have been to encourage those individuals to lessen their support for President Vladimir Putin in the upcoming Russian national elections on March 18.

The Kremlin List has significantly impacted internal Russian politics ahead of a major election and therefore could be seen as the U.S.'s own attempt at election-meddling. It comes on top of a British government claim that Moscow intends to rip British "infrastructure apart, actually cause thousands and thousands and thousands of deaths," and create "total chaos within the country," as well as a U.S. Senate report that alleges a two decade-long assault by Putin "on democratic institutions, universal values, and the rule of law across Europe and in his own country."

The second story, which is more bizarre than the first, describes how Congressman Adam Schiff told a University of Pennsylvania audience that Russian-promoted ads during the 2016 election encouraged people to exercise their Second Amendment rights to own guns. Per Schiff, "the Russians would be thrilled if we were doing nothing but killing each other very day, and sadly we are." So now the Russians, apparently, are responsible not only for Donald Trump getting elected, but also for the U.S. epidemic of gun violence.

Neither Congressman Schiff's meanderings nor the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act serve any conceivable United States national interest – and the Nunes Memo demonstrates, if anything, that the evidence for Russian interference in the U.S. election is elusive at best.

If the alleged Russiagate conspiracy is never actually demonstrated, which looks increasingly likely, it would certainly disappoint the many American talking heads and media "experts" who have been building careers off of bashing Moscow 24/7, but it might also provide a window for the White House to fulfill its electoral promise to fix the Russia relationship.

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Do High-Level Leaks Suggest a Conspiracy?

Widespread concern inside Official Washington about President Trump's unfitness for the job is fueling a campaign of high-level leaks that is taking on the look of a "soft coup," says ex-CIA officer Philip Giraldi.

By Philip Giraldi

Back in my time in the CIA, there were two places in the headquarters building one could go that were free speech zones – places where it was safe to vent about senior management without necessarily being admonished or even reported. They were the Historical Intelligence Collection room off the library, where no one ever went to look at the books, and the office supplies storage room in the basement.

The supplies room had a lot of dark corners and concealing shelves where it was possible to be anonymous and it was completely unsupervised in the belief that true-blue CIA officers would never stoop to taking even a single pencil more than was actually needed to get the job done.

I don't know if those rooms still exist, but I sometimes think of them when the subject of government conspiracies come up. I have this vision of two or three conspirators huddled in the corner behind the staplers back in 1975 discussing how one would go about eliminating the likes of Senator Frank Church, who at that time was heading a major congressional investigation into CIA improprieties.

If there had been such a gathering, I would imagine that the *Washington Post* would have found out about it on the next day as intelligence officers are gregarious and like to talk. This has been my principal problem with the debate in some quarters about the 9/11 Commission. Their report did indeed miss many important angles in order to protect certain governmental interests, but if there had been a genuine conspiracy involving what must have been hundreds of people to demolish the Twin Towers with explosives, it surely would have leaked long ago.

Two months ago, I would have dismissed as fantasy any thoughts of a conspiracy based in America's national security agencies to bring down Donald Trump. But

now I am not so sure. Many of my friends who are former intelligence officers are increasingly asking questions. It is worth pointing out that none of us are fans of what the White House has been doing and saying – quite the contrary.

Defense of the Constitution

Still, alerting the country to concerns over what might be a developing soft coup orchestrated by the intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to nullify the results of a national election in no way equates to trying to protect Donald Trump and his uncouth and ill-informed behavior. It is rather a defense of the Constitution.

Donald Trump said on Wednesday that “This is the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history!” He might be right. He was referring to Deputy Attorney General Rob Rosenstein’s appointment of the highly-respected Robert Mueller as independent counsel to investigate “any links and/or coordination between Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump, and any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation.”

Trump’s bombast puts everyone but his most tone-deaf supporters on edge, but there are two points that he has been making repeatedly that are essential to any understanding of what is going on.

First, the investigation into Russia and the Trumpsters has been a high priority at FBI and also in Congress for nearly a year. Yet so far no one has produced evidence that anyone broke any law or even that someone did something wrong.

Second, and more importantly, the vilification of Trump and Russia has been driven by a series of leaks that come from the very top of the national security apparatus, leaks that appear not to have been seriously investigated.

This involvement of FBI and CIA in the campaign, whether inadvertently or by design, was particularly evident in the various reports that surfaced and were leaked to the press during the campaign and right up to the inauguration. The leaks of that type of information, to include technical intelligence and Special Access Program “codeword” material, require top-level access as well as the ability to arrange clandestine contacts with major players in the media, something far beyond the reach of most employees at CIA or the FBI.

The Lavrov Leak

Similar leaks have been appearing since that time. I confess to finding Monday’s detailed account of what President Trump discussed with Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov, which included corroborating material that likely did more damage

than the information that was actually shared, highly suggestive of the possibility that something like a conspiracy is, in fact, functioning.

Given the really tight-security control of that transcript after it was determined that it contained sensitive information, one might reasonably assume that the leaks to the media came directly out of Donald Trump's own National Security Council or from the highest levels of the office of the DNI, CIA, or FBI.

On Wednesday, the anonymous sources struck again, revealing that "Michael Flynn and other advisers to Donald Trump's campaign were in contact with Russian officials and others with Kremlin ties in at least 18 calls and emails during the last seven months of the 2016 presidential race." That sort of information had to come from the top level of the FBI and would have been accessible to only a few, but even though the leaks of what constitutes highly-classified information have been recurring for many months, no one has been fired or arrested.

The emphasis on Russia derives from the government and media consensus that Moscow was behind the hacking of Democratic National Committee (DNC) computers that led to the exposure of what the DNC was doing to destroy the candidacy of Bernie Sanders. There is also a related consensus that the Russian hacking was intended to damage American democracy and also to help the Trump campaign, a narrative that the President has described as a "made-up thing," a view that I share. All of these assertions are regarded as unquestionably true as measured by inside-the-beltway groupthink, with even the White House now conceding that there was Russian interference in the election.

Sometimes the hysteria over Russia produces over-the-top stories in the mainstream media, including last week's completely speculative piece wondering whether the entourage of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had sought to sneak a recording device into the White House during his White House visit. It was the type of tale that might have been inspired by a leak from someone in the National Security Council who personally observed the context of the meeting and was able to provide corroborating details.

Where's the Beef?

Nevertheless, in spite of the overwhelming groupthink, it has been repeated *ad nauseam* by people like myself that no actual evidence has been produced to support any of the claims being made about Russia and Trump. There is more evidence that the White House was penetrated by Ankara – through the good services of Michael Flynn – than by Moscow, but Congress has not called for an investigation into Turkey's lobbying.

Ray McGovern, a former senior CIA analyst, is even speculating that the Agency might have been the actual hacker into the DNC, leaving a trail behind that would have suggested that it was done by the Russians. His concern arises from the recent WikiLeaks revelation that the CIA had developed cyber-warfare capabilities to do just that.

McGovern, like myself, is also asking why former CIA Director John Brennan has not been summoned by the Senate Committee looking into Russia-gate. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has testified twice, while former FBI Director James Comey, current NSA Director Mike Rogers, and former Justice Department senior official Sally Yates have all appeared once. Brennan's absence is conspicuous as he was the senior national security official most closely tied to the Obama Administration, may have had the tools at hand to fake the Russian connection, and has also been plausibly linked to "encouraging" British Intelligence to provide damaging information on Michael Flynn.

I now suspect that there is indeed a group at the top of the U.S. national security system that wants to remove Donald Trump and has wanted to do so for quite some time. If that is true, I believe that they have been operating with that goal in mind for at least the past year. It is not a traditional conspiracy or cabal in that it does not meet and conspire together, but I suspect the members know what they are doing in a general sense and are intervening whenever they can to keep Trump off balance.

Their program is simple: convince the nation that the President and his team colluded with the Russians to rig the 2016 election in his favor, which, if demonstrable even if not necessarily true, would provide grounds for impeachment. They are motivated by the belief that removing Trump must be done "for the good of the country" and they are willing to do what they consider correcting a mistake made by the American voters. They are assisted in their effort by the mainstream media, which agrees with both the methods employed and the overall objective and is completely on board with the process.

Saving the country from Trump is certainly an attractive notion. I suspect the Comeys, Clappers, and Brennans, together with a host of former senior officers who appear regularly on television, if they were involved, see themselves as great patriots. But they must understand that the blunt instrument they are using is far more dangerous than the current occupant of the White House.

A soft coup engineered by the national security and intelligence agencies would be far more threatening to our democracy than anything Donald Trump or even the Russians can do.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for

the National Interest. [This article is re-posted with the author's permission. It first appeared at The American Conservative at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/do-high-level-leaks-suggest-a-conspiracy/>]

Obama Urged to Fire DNI Clapper

Last March before Edward Snowden revealed the NSA's sweeping collection of phone and other data Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said no such operation existed. Now, a group of ex-national security officials urge President Obama to fire Clapper.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Fire James Clapper

We wish to endorse the call by Rep. James Sensenbrenner Jr., Chair of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, Committee on the Judiciary, that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper should be removed and prosecuted for lying to Congress. "Lying to Congress is a federal offense, and Clapper ought to be fired and prosecuted for it," the Wisconsin Republican said in an interview with The Hill. "The only way laws are effective is if they're enforced."

Sensenbrenner added, "If it's a criminal offense, and I believe Mr. Clapper has committed a criminal offense, then the Justice Department ought to do its job."

This brief Memorandum is to inform you that we agree that no intelligence director should be able to deceive Congress and suffer no consequences. No democracy that condones such deceit at the hands of powerful, secretive intelligence directors can long endure.

It seems clear that you can expect no help from Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, to which Clapper has apologized for giving "clearly erroneous" testimony, and who, at the height of the controversy over his credibility, defended him as a "direct and honest" person.

You must be well aware that few amendments to the U.S. Constitution are as clear as the fourth:

“The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”

Even the cleverest lawyers cannot square with the Fourth Amendment many of the NSA activities that Clapper and Feinstein have defended, winked at, or lied about.

Only you can get rid of James Clapper. We suspect that a certain awkwardness – and perhaps also a misguided sense of loyalty to a colleague – militate against your senior staff giving you an unvarnished critique of how badly you have been served by Clapper. And so we decided to give you a candid reminder from us former intelligence and national security officials with a total of hundreds of years of experience, much of it at senior levels, in the hope you will find it helpful.

Statements by DNI Clapper re Eavesdropping on Americans

March 12, 2013

Sen. Ron Wyden: “Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?”

Clapper: “No, Sir.”

Wyden: “It does not?”

Clapper: “Not wittingly. There are cases where they could inadvertently, perhaps, collect but not, not wittingly.”

(7-minute segment of Clapper testimony; link below)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwiUVUJmGjs>

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June 6, 2013

In a telephone interview with Michael Hirsh of the National Journal:

Clapper: “What I said [to the Senate Intelligence Committee on March 12] was, the NSA does not voyeuristically pore through U.S. citizens’ e-mails. I stand by that.”

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June 8, 2013

Excerpt of interview with NBC's Andrea Mitchell:

Mitchell: "Senator Wyden made quite a lot out of your exchange with him last March during the hearings. Can you explain what you meant when you said that there was not data collection on millions of Americans?"

Clapper: "... in retrospect, I was asked 'When are you going to start- stop beating your wife' kind of question, which is meaning not - answerable necessarily by a simple yes or no. So I responded in what I thought was the most truthful, or least untruthful manner by saying No. ...

"And this has to do with of course somewhat of a semantic, perhaps some would say too too cute by half. But it is - there are honest differences on the semantics of what when someone says 'collection' to me, that has a specific meaning, which may have a different meaning to him."

(See link below to full NBC transcript)

<http://www.nbcuni.com/corporate/newsroom/nbc-news-exclusive-transcript-of-andrea-mitchells-interview-with-director-of-national-intelligence-james-clapper/>

(Full video 27 min.) <http://www.nbcnews.com/video/nightly-news/52158136> (27 min.)

(Most relevant segment) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbZt1zLQ11E>

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June 9, 2013

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chair of Senate Intelligence Committee on "This Week" with George Stephanopoulos (after he showed video of Clapper testimony on March 12, 2013, denying that NSA collects "any type of data" on Americans):

Stephanopoulos: "Senator Feinstein, I have to confess, I have a hard time squaring that answer with what we learned [from the Snowden disclosures] this week."

Feinstein: "Well, I think this is very hard. There is no more direct or honest person than Jim Clapper. ... You can misunderstand the question."

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-sen-dianne-feinstein-rep-mike-rogers/story?id=19343314&page=4>

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June 11, 2013

Sen. Ron Wyden issued the following statement regarding statements made by Clapper about collection on Americans:

“One of the most important responsibilities a Senator has is oversight of the intelligence community. This job cannot be done responsibly if Senators aren’t getting straight answers to direct questions.

“When NSA Director Alexander failed to clarify previous public statements about domestic surveillance, it was necessary to put the question to the Director of National Intelligence. So that he would be prepared to answer [in his testimony on March 12], I sent the question to Director Clapper’s office a day in advance.

“After the hearing was over my staff and I gave his office a chance to amend his answer. Now public hearings are needed to address the recent disclosures and the American people have the right to expect straight answers from the intelligence leadership to the questions asked by their representatives.”

<http://www.wyden.senate.gov/news/press-releases/wyden-statement-responding-to-director-clappers-statements-about-collection-on-americans>

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July 2, 2013

Clapper sends a letter to Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Dianne Feinstein, in which he refers to his March 12 testimony denying that NSA collects “any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans.”

Clapper: “My response was clearly erroneous for which I apologize.”

A spokesman for Wyden, Tom Caiazza, said that a staff member in the Senator’s office had asked Clapper to correct the public record after the March hearing, which he “refused” to do. Caiazza explained:

“Senator Wyden had a staff member contact the Office of the Director of National Intelligence on a secure phone line soon after the March hearing to address the inaccurate statement regarding bulk collection on Americans.

“The ODNI acknowledged that the statement was inaccurate but refused to correct the public record when given the opportunity. Senator Wyden’s staff informed the ODNI that this was a serious concern. Senator Wyden is deeply troubled by a number of misleading statements senior officials have made about domestic surveillance in the past several years.”

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Mr. President, are you not also troubled by those misleading statements? We strongly believe you must fire Jim Clapper for his lies to the Congress and the American people and that you must appoint someone who will tell the truth.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Coleen Rowley, retired FBI agent and former Minneapolis Division legal counsel

Daniel Ellsberg, former State and Defense Department official

Ray McGovern, retired CIA analyst

David MacMichael, Ph.D., former senior estimates officer, National Intelligence Council

Todd Pierce, MAJ, U.S. Army, Judge Advocate (ret.), Military Commissions Defense Counsel

Thomas Drake, Senior Executive, NSA (former)

William Binney, former technical director at NSA

Larry Johnson, CIA and State Department (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy NIO for the Near East, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Ann Wright, Retired US Army Reserve Colonel and former US Diplomat

Fixing Intel Around the Syria Policy

Exclusive: Senior U.S. intelligence analysts disagreed with the Obama administration's certainty that the Syrian government was behind the Aug. 21 chemical weapons attack, but that dissent was suppressed amid the rush to a near war, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

After the Aug. 21 chemical weapons incident in Syria, a number of senior U.S. intelligence analysts disagreed with the Obama administration's rush to judgment

blaming the Syrian government, but their dissent on this question of war or peace was concealed from the American people.

The administration kept the dissent secret by circumventing the normal intelligence process and issuing on Aug. 30 something called a "Government Assessment," posted at the White House press office's Web site and fingering the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad as the guilty party.

Normally, such an important issue – a possible U.S. military engagement – would be the focus of a National Intelligence Estimate, but that would also cite the disagreements expressed within the intelligence community. By avoiding an NIE, the Obama administration was able to keep the lid on how much dissent there was over the Assad-did-it conclusion.

Once the "Government Assessment" was issued, Secretary of State John Kerry was put forward to present the case for launching a military strike against Syria, an attack that was only averted because President Barack Obama abruptly decided to ask congressional approval and then reached a diplomatic agreement, with the help of the Russian government, in which the Syrian government agreed to dispose of its chemical weapons arsenal (while still denying that it was responsible for the Aug. 21 attack).

Although war was averted, the Obama administration's deception of the American public by pretending that there was a government-wide consensus regarding Syrian government guilt when there wasn't was reminiscent of the lies and distortions used by President George W. Bush to trick the nation into war with Iraq over bogus WMD claims in 2003.

The behavior of the rest of Official Washington and the mainstream U.S. news media also shows that little has changed from a decade ago. Obvious indications of a deception were ignored and the few voices who raised the alarm were treated with the same mocking contempt that greeted skeptics of Bush's case for invading Iraq.

Writers for Consortiumnews.com were among the few in the American media who noted the glaring flaws in the Obama administration's case, including its refusal to release any of its supposed proof to support its conclusions and the curious absence of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper from the public presentation of the administration's *casus belli*.

The reason for keeping the DNI on the sidelines was that he otherwise might have been asked if there was a consensus in the intelligence community supporting the administration's certitude that Assad's regime was responsible. At that point, Clapper would have had to acknowledge the disagreement from rank-and-file

analysts (or face the likelihood that they would speak out).

Inspectors' Doubts

Similarly, it appears that on-the-ground inspectors for the United Nations had their own doubts about the Syrian government's responsibility, especially since Assad's regime had allowed a UN team into Damascus on Aug. 18 to investigate what the regime claimed was evidence of rebels using chemical weapons.

It never made sense to some of these inspectors that Assad just three days later would launch a chemical weapons attack on the outskirts of Damascus just a few miles from the hotel where the UN inspectors were staying. Assad would have known that the Aug. 21 incident would mean serious trouble for his government, very possibly drawing the U.S. military into the Syrian civil war on the side of the rebels.

The UN inspectors also failed to find Sarin or other chemical agents at one of the two sites that they subsequently examined near Damascus, and they inserted a qualification in their report about apparent tampering at the one area where Sarin was found.

However, instead of noting the many holes in the U.S. "Government Assessment" and the UN report, the mainstream U.S. news media simply joined the rush to judgment, hyping dubious claims from both U.S. government officials and non-governmental organizations favoring U.S. military intervention in Syria.

The New York Times and other major news outlets that swallowed Bush's false claims about Iraq WMD a decade ago also began reporting Obama's dubious assertions about Syria as flat fact, not as issues in serious dispute. As I wrote on Oct. 25, one typically credulous Times story accepted "as indisputable fact that the Syrian government was behind the Aug. 21 attack on a suburb of Damascus despite significant doubts among independent analysts, UN inspectors and, I'm told, U.S. intelligence analysts."

New details of the rebellion among the intelligence analysts have just been reported by former CIA officer Philip Giraldi for the American Conservative magazine. According to Giraldi's account, a "mass resignation of a significant number of analysts" was threatened if the Obama administration issued an NIE without acknowledging their dissent.

A "hurriedly updated" NIE had reflected the Syrian government's suspected use of chemical weapons against rebels and civilians, "while conceding that there was no conclusive proof," Giraldi wrote, adding:

"There was considerable dissent from even that equivocation, including by many

analysts who felt that the evidence for a Syrian government role was subject to interpretation and possibly even fabricated. Some believed the complete absence of U.S. satellite intelligence on the extensive preparations that the government would have needed to make in order to mix its binary chemical system and deliver it on target was particularly disturbing.

“These concerns were reinforced by subsequent UN reports suggesting that the rebels might have access to their own chemical weapons. The White House, meanwhile, considered the somewhat ambiguous conclusion of the NIE to be unsatisfactory, resulting in considerable pushback against the senior analysts who had authored the report.”

Demands from Above

When Obama’s National Security Council demanded more corroborative evidence to establish Syrian government guilt, “Israel obligingly provided what was reported to be interceptions of telephone conversations implicating the Syrian army in the attack, but it was widely believed that the information might have been fabricated by Tel Aviv, meaning that bad intelligence was being used to confirm other suspect information, a phenomenon known to analysts as ‘circular reporting,’” Giraldi wrote.

“Other intelligence cited in passing by the White House on the trajectories and telemetry of rockets that may have been used in the attack was also somewhat conjectural and involved weapons that were not, in fact, in the Syrian arsenal, suggesting that they were actually fired by the rebels.

“Also, traces of Sarin were not found in most of the areas being investigated, nor on one of the two rockets identified. Whether the victims of the attack suffered symptoms of Sarin was also disputed, and no autopsies were performed to confirm the presence of the chemical.

“With all evidence considered, the intelligence community found itself with numerous skeptics in the ranks, leading to sharp exchanges with the Director of Central Intelligence John Brennan and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. A number of analysts threatened to resign as a group if their strong dissent was not noted in any report released to the public, forcing both Brennan and Clapper to back down.”

The Obama administration’s “solution” to this analyst revolt was to circumvent the normal intelligence process and issue a white paper that would be called a “Government Assessment,” declaring the Syrian government’s guilt as indisputable fact and leaving out the doubts of the intelligence community.

While this subterfuge may have satisfied the institutional concerns of the

intelligence community which didn't want another Iraq-War-style violation of its procedural protocols on how NIEs are handled it still left the American people vulnerable to a government deception on a question of war or peace.

Yes, there was no scene comparable to the positioning of CIA Director George Tenet behind Secretary of State Colin Powell as he delivered his deceptive Iraq War speech to the UN Security Council on Feb. 5, 2003. Both Clapper and Brennan were absent from the administration's testimony to Congress, leaving Secretary Kerry to do most of the talking with Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Martin Dempsey bracketing Kerry as mostly silent wing men.

And, yes, one could argue that the Obama administration's hyping of its case against the Assad regime had a happy ending, the Syrian government's agreement to eliminate its entire CW arsenal. Indeed, most of the grousing about the Syrian outcome has come from neocons who wanted to ride the rush to judgment all the way to another regime-changing war.

Dogs Not Barking

But Americans should be alarmed that a decade after they were deceived into a disastrous war in Iraq based on bogus intelligence and the complete breakdown of Official Washington's checks and balances a very similar process could unfold that brought the country to the brink of another war.

Besides the disturbing fact that the Obama administration refused to release any actual evidence to support its case for war, there was the gullibility (or complicity) of leading news outlets in failing to show even a modicum of skepticism.

The New York Times and other major news organizations failed to note the dogs not barking. Why, for instance, was there no NIE? Why were the U.S. government's top intelligence officials absent from public presentations of what amounted to an intelligence issue? It shouldn't have required a Sherlock Holmes to sniff out the silenced intelligence analysts.

When a government leader refuses to reveal any of his supposed proof for a claim and conceals the professionals who don't agree with his claim, any reasonably savvy person should draw the conclusion that the government leader doesn't really have a case.

Though some Americans may cite the work of a few Web sites, like our own Consortiumnews.com, as having challenged the misguided conventional wisdom on Syria as we also did on Iraq, they should not draw too much comfort from this. After all, our readership is tiny when compared to the many sources of

misinformation being disseminated to the broad American public.

The dangerous reality is that the United States remains vulnerable to the kinds of stampedes in judgment that can end up crushing people around the world.

[Here is some of our earlier reporting on the Syrian crisis: "[A Dodgy Dossier on Syrian War](#)"; "[Murky Clues From UN's Syria Report](#)"; "[Obama Still Withholds Syria Evidence](#)"; "[How US Pressure Bends UN Agencies](#)."]]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
