How US Flooded the World with Psyops

Special Report: The mainstream U.S. media obsesses over Russian “propaganda” yet the U.S. government created a “psyops” bureaucracy three decades ago to flood the world with dubious information, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Newly declassified documents from the Reagan presidential library help explain how the U.S. government developed its sophisticated psychological operations capabilities that – over the past three decades – have created an alternative reality both for people in targeted countries and for American citizens, a structure that expanded U.S. influence abroad and quieted dissent at home.

The documents reveal the formation of a psyops bureaucracy under the direction of Walter Raymond Jr., a senior CIA covert operations specialist who was assigned to President Reagan’s National Security Council staff to enhance the importance of propaganda and psyops in undermining U.S. adversaries around the world and ensuring sufficient public support for foreign policies inside the United States.

Raymond, who has been compared to a character from a John LeCarré novel slipping easily into the woodwork, spent his years inside Reagan’s White House as a shadowy puppet master who tried his best to avoid public attention or – it seems – even having his picture taken. From the tens of thousands of photographs from meetings at Reagan’s White House, I found only a couple showing Raymond – and he is seated in groups, partially concealed by other officials.

But Raymond appears to have grasped his true importance. In his NSC files, I found a doodle of an organizational chart that had Raymond at the top holding what looks like the crossed handles used by puppeteers to control the puppets below them. Although it’s impossible to know exactly what the doodler had in mind, the drawing fits the reality of Raymond as the behind-the-curtains operative who was controlling the various inter-agency task forces that were responsible for implementing various propaganda and psyops strategies.

Until the 1980s, psyops were normally regarded as a military technique for undermining the will of an enemy force by spreading lies, confusion and terror. A classic case was Gen. Edward Lansdale – considered the father of modern psyops – draining the blood from a dead Filipino rebel in such a way so the dead rebel’s superstitious comrades would think that a vampire-like creature was on the prowl. In Vietnam, Lansdale’s psyops team supplied fake and dire astrological predictions for the fate of North Vietnamese and Vietcong leaders.

Essentially, the psyops idea was to play on the cultural weaknesses of a target population so they could be more easily manipulated and controlled. But the challenges facing the Reagan administration in the 1980s led to its determination that peacetime psyops were also needed and that the target populations had to include the American public.

The Reagan administration was obsessed with the problems left behind by the 1970s' disclosures of government lying about the Vietnam War and revelations about CIA abuses both in overthrowing democratically elected governments and spying on American dissidents. This so-called "Vietnam Syndrome" produced profound skepticism from regular American citizens as well as journalists and politicians when President Reagan tried to sell his plans for intervention in the civil wars then underway in Central America, Africa and elsewhere.

While Reagan saw Central America as a "Soviet beachhead," many Americans saw brutal Central American oligarchs and their bloody security forces slaughtering priests, nuns, labor activists, students, peasants and indigenous populations. Reagan and his advisers realized that they had to turn those perceptions around if they hoped to get sustained funding for the militaries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras as well as for the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, the CIA-organized paramilitary force marauding around leftist-ruled Nicaragua.

So, it became a high priority to reshape public perceptions to gain support for Reagan's Central American military operations both inside those targeted countries and among Americans.

A 'Psyops Totality'

As Col. Alfred R. Paddock Jr. wrote in an influential November 1983 paper, entitled "Military Psychological Operations and US Strategy," "the planned use of communications to influence attitudes or behavior should, if properly used, precede, accompany, and follow all applications of force. Put another way, psychological operations is the one weapons system which has an important role to play in peacetime, throughout the spectrum of conflict, and during the aftermath of conflict."

Paddock continued, "Military psychological operations are an important part of the 'PSYOP Totality,' both in peace and war. … We need a program of psychological operations as an integral part of our national security policies and programs. … The continuity of a standing interagency board or committee to provide the necessary coordinating mechanism for development of a coherent, worldwide psychological operations strategy is badly needed."

Some of Raymond's recently available handwritten notes show a focus on El

Salvador with the implementation of “Nation wide multi-media psyops” spread through rallies and electronic media. “Radio + TV also carried Psyops messages,” Raymond wrote. (Emphasis in original.) Though Raymond’s crimped handwriting is often hard to decipher, the notes make clear that psyops programs also were directed at Honduras, Guatemala and Peru.

One declassified “top secret” document in Raymond’s file – dated Feb. 4, 1985, from Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger – urged the fuller implementation of President Reagan’s National Security Decision Directive 130, which was signed on March 6, 1984, and which authorized peacetime psyops by expanding psyops beyond its traditional boundaries of active military operations into peacetime situations in which the U.S. government could claim some threat to national interests.

“This approval can provide the impetus to the rebuilding of a necessary strategic capability, focus attention on psychological operations as a national – not solely military – instrument, and ensure that psychological operations are fully coordinated with public diplomacy and other international information activities,” Weinberger’s document said.

This broader commitment to psyops led to the creation of a Psychological Operations Committee (POC) that was to be chaired by a representative of Reagan’s National Security Council with a vice chairman from the Pentagon and with representatives from the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department and the U.S. Information Agency.

“This group will be responsible for planning, coordinating and implementing psychological operations activities in support of United States policies and interests relative to national security,” according to a “secret” addendum to a memo, dated March 25, 1986, from Col. Paddock, the psyops advocate who had become the U.S. Army’s Director for Psychological Operations.

“The committee will provide the focal point for interagency coordination of detailed contingency planning for the management of national information assets during war, and for the transition from peace to war,” the addendum added. “The POC shall seek to ensure that in wartime or during crises (which may be defined as periods of acute tension involving a threat to the lives of American citizens or the imminence of war between the U.S. and other nations), U.S. international information elements are ready to initiate special procedures to ensure policy consistency, timely response and rapid feedback from the intended audience.”

Taking Shape

The Psychological Operations Committee took formal shape with a “secret” memo

from Reagan's National Security Advisor John Poindexter on July 31, 1986. Its first meeting was called on Sept. 2, 1986, with an agenda that focused on Central America and "How can other POC agencies support and complement DOD programs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama." The POC was also tasked with "Developing National PSYOPS Guidelines" for "formulating and implementing a national PSYOPS program." (Underlining in original)

Raymond was named a co-chair of the POC along with CIA officer Vincent Cannistraro, who was then Deputy Director for Intelligence Programs on the NSC staff, according to a "secret" memo from Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Craig Alderman Jr. The memo also noted that future POC meetings would be briefed on psyops projects for the Philippines and Nicaragua, with the latter project codenamed "Niagara Falls." The memo also references a "Project Touchstone," but it is unclear where that psyops program was targeted.

Another "secret" memo dated Oct. 1, 1986, co-authored by Raymond, reported on the POC's first meeting on Sept. 10, 1986, and noted that "The POC will, at each meeting, focus on an area of operations (e.g., Central America, Afghanistan, Philippines)."

The POC's second meeting on Oct. 24, 1986, concentrated on the Philippines, according to a Nov. 4, 1986 memo also co-authored by Raymond. "The next step will be a tightly drafted outline for a PSYOPS Plan which we will send to that Embassy for its comment," the memo said. The plan "largely focused on a range of civic actions supportive of the overall effort to overcome the insurgency," an addendum noted. "There is considerable concern about the sensitivities of any type of a PSYOPS program given the political situation in the Philippines today."

Earlier in 1986, the Philippines had undergone the so-called "People Power Revolution," which drove longtime dictator Ferdinand Marcos into exile, and the Reagan administration, which belatedly pulled its support from Marcos, was trying to stabilize the political situation to prevent more populist elements from gaining the upper hand.

But the Reagan administration's primary attention continued to go back to Central America, including "Project Niagara Falls," the psyops program aimed at Nicaragua. A "secret" Pentagon memo from Deputy Under Secretary Alderman on Nov. 20, 1986, outlined the work of the 4th Psychological Operations Group on this psyops plan "to help bring about democratization of Nicaragua," by which the Reagan administration meant a "regime change." The precise details of "Project Niagara Falls" were not disclosed in the declassified documents but the choice of codename suggested a cascade of psyops.

Other documents from Raymond's NSC file shed light on who other key operatives in the psyops and propaganda programs were. For instance, in undated notes on efforts to influence the Socialist International, including securing support for U.S. foreign policies from Socialist and Social Democratic parties in Europe, Raymond cited the efforts of "Ledeen, Gershman," a reference to neoconservative operative Michael Ledeen and Carl Gershman, another neocon who has served as president of the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED), from 1983 to the present. (Underlining in original.)

Although NED is technically independent of the U.S. government, it receives the bulk of its funding (now about $100 million a year) from Congress. Documents from the Reagan archives also make clear that NED was organized as a way to replace some of the CIA's political and propaganda covert operations, which had fallen into disrepute in the 1970s. Earlier released documents from Raymond's file show CIA Director William Casey pushing for NED's creation and Raymond, Casey's handpicked man on the NSC, giving frequent advice and direction to Gershman. [See Consortiumnews.com's "CIA's Hidden Hand in 'Democracy' Groups."]

Another figure in Raymond's constellation of propaganda assets was media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who was viewed as both a key political ally of President Reagan and a valuable source of funding for private groups that were coordinating with White House propaganda operations. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Rupert Murdoch: Propaganda Recruit."]

In a Nov. 1, 1985 letter to Raymond, Charles R. Tanguy of the "Committees for a Community of Democracies – USA" asked Raymond to intervene in efforts to secure Murdoch's funding for the group. "We would be grateful … if you could find the time to telephone Mr. Murdoch and encourage him to give us a positive response," the letter said.

Another document, entitled "Project Truth Enhancement," described how $24 million would be spent on upgrading the telecommunications infrastructure to arm "Project Truth, with the technical capability to provide the most efficient and productive media support for major USG policy initiatives like Political Democracy." Project Truth was the overarching name of the Reagan administration's propaganda operation. For the outside world, the program was billed as "public diplomacy," but administration insiders privately called it "perception management." [See Consortiumnews.com's "The Victory of Perception Management."]

The Early Years

The original priority of "Project Truth" was to clean up the images of the Guatemalan and Salvadoran security forces and the Nicaraguan Contras, who were

led by ousted dictator Anastasio Somoza's ex-National Guard officers. To ensure steady military funding for these notorious forces, Reagan's team knew it had to defuse the negative publicity and somehow rally the American people's support.

At first, the effort focused on weeding out American reporters who uncovered facts that undercut the desired public images. As part of that effort, the administration denounced New York Times correspondent Raymond Bonner for disclosing the Salvadoran regime's massacre of about 800 men, women and children in the village of El Mozote in northeast El Salvador in December 1981. Accuracy in Media and conservative news organizations, such as The Wall Street Journal's editorial page, joined in pummeling Bonner, who was soon ousted from his job. But such efforts were largely ad hoc and disorganized.

CIA Director Casey, from his years crisscrossing the interlocking worlds of business and intelligence, had important contacts for creating a more systematic propaganda network. He recognized the value of using established groups known for advocating "human rights," such as Freedom House.

One document from the Reagan library showed senior Freedom House official Leo Cherne running a draft manuscript on political conditions in El Salvador past Casey and promising that Freedom House would make requested editorial "corrections and changes" – and even send over the editor for consultation with whomever Casey assigned to review the paper.

In a "Dear Bill" letter dated June 24, 1981, Cherne, who was chairman of the Freedom House's executive committee, wrote: "I am enclosing a copy of the draft manuscript by Bruce McColm, Freedom House's resident specialist on Central America and the Caribbean. This manuscript on El Salvador was the one I had urged be prepared and in the haste to do so as rapidly as possible, it is quite rough. You had mentioned that the facts could be checked for meticulous accuracy within the government and this would be very helpful. …

"If there are any questions about the McColm manuscript, I suggest that whomever is working on it contact Richard Salzmann at the Research Institute [an organization where Cherne was executive director]. He is Editor-in-Chief at the Institute and the Chairman of the Freedom House's Salvador Committee. He will make sure that the corrections and changes get to Rita Freedman who will also be working with him. If there is any benefit to be gained from Salzmann's coming down at any point to talk to that person, he is available to do so."

By 1982, Casey also was lining up some powerful right-wing ideologues to help fund the "perception management" project both with money and their own media outlets. Richard Mellon Scaife was the scion of the Mellon banking, oil and aluminum fortune who financed a variety of right-wing family foundations – such

as Sarah Scaife and Carthage – that were financial benefactors to right-wing journalists and think tanks. Scaife also published the Tribune Review in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

A more comprehensive "public diplomacy" operation began to take shape in 1982 when Raymond, a 30-year veteran of CIA clandestine services, was transferred to the NSC. Raymond became the sparkplug for this high-powered propaganda network, according to an unpublished draft chapter of the congressional Iran-Contra investigation that was suppressed as part of the deal to get three moderate Republican senators to sign on to the final report and give the inquiry a patina of bipartisanship.

Though the draft chapter didn't use Raymond's name in its opening pages, apparently because some of the information came from classified depositions, Raymond's name was used later in the chapter and the earlier citations matched Raymond's known role. According to the draft report, the CIA officer who was recruited for the NSC job had served as Director of the Covert Action Staff at the CIA from 1978 to 1982 and was a "specialist in propaganda and disinformation."

"The CIA official [Raymond] discussed the transfer with [CIA Director] Casey and NSC Advisor William Clark that he be assigned to the NSC as [Donald] Gregg's successor [as coordinator of intelligence operations in June 1982] and received approval for his involvement in setting up the public diplomacy program along with his intelligence responsibilities," the chapter said. Gregg was another senior CIA official who was assigned to the NSC before becoming Vice President George H.W. Bush's national security adviser.

"In the early part of 1983, documents obtained by the Select [Iran-Contra] Committees indicate that the Director of the Intelligence Staff of the NSC [Raymond] successfully recommended the establishment of an inter-governmental network to promote and manage a public diplomacy plan designed to create support for Reagan Administration policies at home and abroad."

War of Ideas

During his Iran-Contra deposition, Raymond explained the need for this propaganda structure, saying: "We were not configured effectively to deal with the war of ideas."

One reason for this shortcoming was that federal law forbade taxpayers' money from being spent on domestic propaganda or grassroots lobbying to pressure congressional representatives. Of course, every president and his team had vast resources to make their case in public, but by tradition and law, they were

restricted to speeches, testimony and one-on-one persuasion of lawmakers. But President Reagan saw the American public's "Vietnam Syndrome" as an obstacle to his more aggressive policies.

Along with Raymond's government-based organization, there were outside groups eager to cooperate and cash in. Back at Freedom House, Cherne and his associates were angling for financial support.

In an Aug. 9, 1982 letter to Raymond, Freedom House executive director Leonard R. Sussman wrote that "Leo Cherne has asked me to send these copies of Freedom Appeals. He has probably told you we have had to cut back this project to meet financial realities. … We would, of course, want to expand the project once again when, as and if the funds become available. Offshoots of that project appear in newspapers, magazines, books and on broadcast services here and abroad. It's a significant, unique channel of communication" – precisely the focus of Raymond's work.

On Nov. 4, 1982, Raymond, after his transfer from the CIA to the NSC staff but while still a CIA officer, wrote to NSC Advisor Clark about the "Democracy Initiative and Information Programs," stating that "Bill Casey asked me to pass on the following thought concerning your meeting with [right-wing billionaire] Dick Scaife, Dave Abshire [then a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board], and Co. Casey had lunch with them today and discussed the need to get moving in the general area of supporting our friends around the world.

"By this definition he is including both 'building democracy' … and helping invigorate international media programs. The DCI [Casey] is also concerned about strengthening public information organizations in the United States such as Freedom House. … A critical piece of the puzzle is a serious effort to raise private funds to generate momentum. Casey's talk with Scaife and Co. suggests they would be very willing to cooperate. … Suggest that you note White House interest in private support for the Democracy initiative."

The importance of the CIA and White House secretly arranging private funds was that these supposedly independent voices would then reinforce and validate the administration's foreign policy arguments with a public that would assume the endorsements were based on the merits of the White House positions, not influenced by money changing hands. Like snake-oil salesmen who plant a few cohorts in the crowd to whip up excitement for the cure-all elixir, Reagan administration propagandists salted some well-paid "private" individuals around Washington to echo White House propaganda "themes."

The role of the CIA in these initiatives was concealed but never far from the surface. A Dec. 2, 1982 note addressed to "Bud," a reference to senior NSC

official Robert “Bud” McFarlane, described a request from Raymond for a brief meeting. “When he [Raymond] returned from Langley [CIA headquarters], he had a proposed draft letter … re $100 M democ[racy] proj[ect],” the note said.

While Casey pulled the strings on this project, the CIA director instructed White House officials to hide the CIA’s hand. “Obviously we here [at CIA] should not get out front in the development of such an organization, nor should we appear to be a sponsor or advocate,” Casey said in one undated letter to then-White House counselor Edwin Meese III as Casey urged creation of a “National Endowment.”

But the formation of the National Endowment for Democracy, with its hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. government money, was still months down the road. In the meantime, the Reagan administration would have to line up private donors to advance the propaganda cause.

“We will develop a scenario for obtaining private funding,” NSC Advisor Clark wrote to Reagan in a Jan. 13, 1983 memo, adding that U.S. Information Agency Director “Charlie Wick has offered to take the lead. We may have to call on you to meet with a group of potential donors.”

Despite Casey’s and Raymond’s success in bringing onboard wealthy conservatives to provide private funding for the propaganda operations, Raymond worried about whether a scandal could erupt over the CIA’s involvement. Raymond formally resigned from the CIA in April 1983, so, he said, “there would be no question whatsoever of any contamination of this.” But Raymond continued to act toward the U.S. public much like a CIA officer would in directing a propaganda operation in a hostile foreign country.

Raymond fretted, too, about the legality of Casey’s ongoing role. Raymond confided in one memo that it was important “to get [Casey] out of the loop,” but Casey never backed off and Raymond continued to send progress reports to his old boss well into 1986.

It was “the kind of thing which [Casey] had a broad catholic interest in,” Raymond shrugged during his Iran-Contra deposition. He then offered the excuse that Casey undertook this apparently illegal interference in domestic politics “not so much in his CIA hat, but in his adviser to the president hat.”

Peacetime Propaganda

Meanwhile, Reagan began laying out the formal authority for this unprecedented peacetime propaganda bureaucracy. On Jan. 14, 1983, Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 77, entitled “Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security.” In NSDD-77, Reagan deemed it “necessary to

strengthen the organization, planning and coordination of the various aspects of public diplomacy of the United States Government."

Reagan ordered the creation of a special planning group within the National Security Council to direct these "public diplomacy" campaigns. The planning group would be headed by Walter Raymond and one of its principal outposts would be a new Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America, housed at the State Department but under the control of the NSC. (One of the directors of the Latin American public diplomacy office was neoconservative Robert Kagan, who would later co-found the Project for the New American Century in 1998 and become a chief promoter of President George W. Bush's 2003 invasion of Iraq.)

On May 20, 1983, Raymond recounted in a memo that $400,000 had been raised from private donors brought to the White House Situation Room by U.S. Information Agency Director Charles Wick. According to that memo, the money was divided among several organizations, including Freedom House and Accuracy in Media, a right-wing media attack organization.

When I wrote about that memo in my 1992 book, *Fooling America*, Freedom House denied receiving any White House money or collaborating with any CIA/NSC propaganda campaign. In a letter, Freedom House's Sussman called Raymond "a second-hand source" and insisted that "this organization did not need any special funding to take positions … on any foreign-policy issues."

But it made little sense that Raymond would have lied to a superior in an internal memo. And clearly, Freedom House remained central to the Reagan administration's schemes for aiding groups supportive of its Central American policies, particularly the CIA-organized Contra war against the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Plus, White House documents released later revealed that Freedom House kept its hand out for funding.

On Sept. 15, 1984, Bruce McColm – writing from Freedom House's Center for Caribbean and Central American Studies – sent Raymond "a short proposal for the Center's Nicaragua project 1984-85. The project combines elements of the oral history proposal with the publication of The Nicaraguan Papers," a book that would disparage Sandinista ideology and practices.

"Maintaining the oral history part of the project adds to the overall costs; but preliminary discussions with film makers have given me the idea that an Improper Conduct-type of documentary could be made based on these materials," McColm wrote, referring to a 1984 film that offered a scathing critique of Fidel Castro's Cuba. "Such a film would have to be the work of a respected Latin American filmmaker or a European. American-made films on Central America are simply too abrasive ideologically and artistically poor."

McColm's three-page letter reads much like a book or movie pitch, trying to interest Raymond in financing the project: "The Nicaraguan Papers will also be readily accessible to the general reader, the journalist, opinion-maker, the academic and the like. The book would be distributed fairly broadly to these sectors and I am sure will be extremely useful. They already constitute a form of Freedom House samizdat, since I've been distributing them to journalists for the past two years as I've received them from disaffected Nicaraguans."

McColm proposed a face-to-face meeting with Raymond in Washington and attached a six-page grant proposal seeking $134,100. According to the grant proposal, the project would include "free distribution to members of Congress and key public officials; distribution of galleys in advance of publication for maximum publicity and timely reviews in newspapers and current affairs magazines; press conferences at Freedom House in New York and at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.; op-ed circulation to more than 100 newspapers …; distribution of a Spanish-language edition through Hispanic organizations in the United States and in Latin America; arrangement of European distribution through Freedom House contacts."

The documents that I found at the Reagan library did not indicate what subsequently happened to this specific proposal. McColm did not respond to an email request for comment about the Nicaraguan Papers plan or the earlier letter from Cherne (who died in 1999) to Casey about editing McComb's manuscript. Freedom House did emerge as a leading critic of Nicaragua's Sandinista government and also became a major recipient of money from the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy, which was founded in 1983 under the umbrella of the Casey-Raymond project.

The more recently released documents – declassified between 2013 and 2017 – show how these earlier Casey-Raymond efforts merged with the creation of a formal psyop bureaucracy in 1986 also under the control of Raymond's NSC operation. The combination of the propaganda and psyop programs underscored the powerful capability that the U.S. government developed more than three decades ago for planting slanted, distorted or fake news. (Casey died in 1987; Raymond died in 2003.)

Over those several decades, even as the White House changed hands from Republicans to Democrats to Republicans to Democrats, the momentum created by William Casey and Walter Raymond continued to push these "perception management/psyops" strategies forward. In more recent years, the wording has changed, giving way to more pleasing euphemisms, like "smart power" and "strategic communications." But the idea is still the same: how you can use propaganda to sell U.S. government policies abroad and at home.

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

Democrats Trade Places on War and McCarthyism

Exclusive: The anti-Russia hysteria gripping the Democratic Party marks a "trading places" moment as the Democrats embrace the New Cold War and the New McCarthyism, flipping the script on Republicans, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Caught up in the frenzy to delegitimize Donald Trump by blaming his victory on Russian meddling, national Democrats are finishing the transformation of their party from one that was relatively supportive of peace to one pushing for war, including a confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

This "trading places" moment was obvious in watching the belligerent tone of Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee on Monday as they impugned the patriotism of any Trump adviser who may have communicated with anyone connected to Russia.

Ranking Democrat, Rep. Adam Schiff of California, acknowledged that there was no hard evidence of any Trump-Russia cabal, but he pressed ahead with what he called "circumstantial evidence of collusion," a kind of guilt-by-association conspiracy theory that made him look like a mild-mannered version of Joe McCarthy.

Schiff cited by name a number of Trump's aides and associates who – as The New York Times reported – were "believed to have some kind of contact or communications with Russians." These Americans, whose patriotism was being questioned, included foreign policy adviser Carter Page, Trump's second campaign manager Paul Manafort, political adviser Roger Stone and Trump's first national security adviser retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn.

In a 15-minute opening statement, Schiff summed up his circumstantial case by asking: "Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated and nothing more than an entirely unhappy coincidence? Yes, it is possible. But it is also possible, maybe more than possible, that they are not

coincidental, not disconnected and not unrelated.”

As an investigative journalist who has covered (and uncovered) national security scandals for several decades, I would never accuse people of something as serious as betraying their country based on nothing more than coincidences that, who knows, might not be coincidental.

Before we published anything on such topics, the news organizations that I worked for required multiple layers of information from a variety of sources including insiders who could describe what had happened and why. Such stories included Nicaraguan Contra cocaine smuggling, Oliver North’s secret Contra supply operation, and the Reagan campaign’s undermining of President Carter’s Iran-hostage negotiations in 1980.

For breaking those stories, we still took enormous heat from Republicans, some Democrats who wanted to show how bipartisan they were, and many establishment-protecting journalists, but the stories contained strong evidence that misconduct occurred – and we were highly circumspect in how the allegations were framed.

Going Whole-Hog

By contrast, national Democrats, some super-hawk Republicans and the establishment media are going whole-hog on these vague suspicions of contacts between some Russians and some Americans who have provided some help or advice to Trump.

Given the paucity of evidence – both regarding the claims that Russia hacked Democratic emails and slipped them to WikiLeaks, and the allegations that somehow Trump’s advisers colluded in that process – it would appear that what is happening is a political maneuver to damage Trump politically and possibly remove him from office.

But those machinations require the Democratic Party’s continued demonization of Russia and implicitly put the Democrats on the side of escalating New Cold War tensions, such as military support for the fiercely anti-Russian regime in Ukraine which seized power in a 2014 U.S.-backed putsch overthrowing elected President Viktor Yanukovych.

One of the attack lines that Democrats have used against Trump is that his people toned down language in the Republican platform about shipping arms to the Ukrainian military, which includes battalions of neo-Nazi fighters and has killed thousands of ethnic Russian Ukrainians in the east in what is officially called an Anti-Terrorism Operation (or ATO).

The Democratic Party leaders have fully bought into the slanted Western narrative justifying the violent overthrow of Yanukovych. They also have ignored the human rights of Ukraine's ethnic Russian minorities, which voted overwhelmingly in Crimea and the Donbass to secede from post-coup Ukraine. The more complex reality is simply summed up as a "Russian invasion."

Key Democrats also have pressed for escalation of the U.S. military attacks inside Syria to force "regime change" on Bashar al-Assad's secular government even if that risks another military confrontation with Russia and a victory by Al Qaeda and other Sunni extremists.

In short, the national Democratic Party is turning itself into the more extreme war party. It's not that the Republicans have become all that dovish; it's just that the Democrats have become all that hawkish. The significance of this change can hardly be overstated.

Questioning War

Since late in the Vietnam War, the Democrats have acted as the more restrained of the two major parties on issues of war, with the Republicans associated with tough-guy rhetoric and higher military spending. By contrast, Democrats generally were more hesitant to rush into foreign wars and confrontations (although they were far from pacifists).

Especially after the revelations of the Pentagon Papers in the 1971 revealing the government deceptions used to pull the American people into the Vietnam War, Democrats questioned shady rationalizations for other wars.

Some Democratic skepticism continued into the 1980s as President Ronald Reagan was modernizing U.S. propaganda techniques to whitewash the gross human rights crimes of right-wing regimes in Central America and to blacken the reputations of Nicaragua's Sandinistas and other leftists.

The Democratic resolve against war propaganda began to crack by the mid-to-late 1980s – around Reagan's Grenada invasion and George H.W. Bush's attack on Panama. By then, the Republicans had enjoyed nearly two decades of bashing the Democrats as "weak on defense" – from George McGovern to Jimmy Carter to Walter Mondale to Michael Dukakis.

But the Democratic Party's resistance to dubious war rationalizations collapsed in 1991 over George H.W. Bush's Persian Gulf War, in which the President rebuffed less violent solutions (even ones favored by the U.S. military) to assure a dramatic ground-war victory after which Bush declared, "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all."

Fearful of being labeled disloyal to “the troops” and “weak,” national Democrats scrambled to show their readiness to kill. In 1992, Gov. Bill Clinton left the campaign trail to return to Arkansas to oversee the execution of the mentally impaired Ricky Ray Rector.

During his presidency, Clinton deployed so-called “smart power” aggressively, including maintaining harsh sanctions on Iraq even as they led to the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children. He also intervened in the Yugoslavian civil war by bombing civilian targets in Belgrade including the lethal destruction of the Serb TV station for the supposed offense of broadcasting “propaganda.”

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, many leading congressional Democrats – including presidential hopefuls John Kerry, Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton – voted to authorize President George W. Bush to invade Iraq. Though they offered various excuses (especially after the Iraq War went badly), the obvious real reason was their fear of being labeled “soft” in Republican attack ads.

The American public’s revulsion over the Iraq War and the resulting casualties contributed to Barack Obama’s election. But he, too, moved to protect his political flanks by staffing his young administration with hawks, such as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. (and later CIA Director) David Petraeus. Despite receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Obama also became comfortable with continuing Bush’s wars and starting some of his own, such as the bombing war against Libya and the violent subversion of Syria.

By nominating Hillary Clinton in 2016, the Democratic Party completed its transformation into the Party of War. Clinton not only ran as an unapologetic hawk in the Democratic primaries against Sen. Bernie Sanders – urging, for instance, a direct U.S. military invasion of Syria to create “no fly zones” – but positioned herself as a harsh critic of Trump’s hopes to reduce hostilities with Russia, deeming the Republican nominee Vladimir Putin’s “puppet.”

Ironically, Trump’s shocking victory served to solidify the Democratic Party’s interest in pushing for a military confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. After all, baiting Trump over his alleged “softness” toward Russia has become the centerpiece of Democratic hopes for somehow ousting Trump or at least crippling his presidency. Any efforts by Trump to ease those tensions will be cited as prima facie evidence that he is Putin’s “Manchurian candidate.”

Being Joe McCarthy

National Democrats and their media supporters don’t even seem troubled by the

parallels between their smears of Americans for alleged contacts with Russians and Sen. Joe McCarthy's guilt-by-association hearings of the early Cold War. Every link to Russia – no matter how tenuous or disconnected from Trump's election – is trumpeted by Democrats and across the mainstream news media.

But it's not even clear that this promotion of the New Cold War and the New McCarthyism will redound to the Democrats' political advantage. Clinton apparently thought that her embrace of a neoconservative foreign policy would bring in many "moderate" Republicans opposed to Trump's criticism of the Bush-Obama wars, but exit polls showed Republicans largely rallying to their party's nominee.

Meanwhile, there were many anti-war Democrats who have become deeply uncomfortable with the party's new hawkish persona. In the 2016 election, some peace Democrats voted for third parties or didn't vote at all for president, although it's difficult to assess how instrumental those defections were in costing Clinton the key states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

More broadly, the Democratic obsession with Russia and the hopes for somehow exploiting those investigations in order to oust Trump have distracted the party from a necessary autopsy into why the Democrats have lost so much ground over the past decade.

While many Democratic leaders and activists are sliding into full-scale conspiracy-mode over the Russia-Trump story, they are not looking at the party's many mistakes and failings, such as:

–Why did party leaders push so hard to run an unpopular establishment candidate in a strongly anti-establishment year? Was it the fact that many are beholden to the Clinton cash machine?

–How can Democrats justify the undemocratic use of "super-delegates" to make many rank-and-file voters feel that the process is rigged in favor of the establishment's choice?

–What can the Democratic Party do to reengage with many working-class voters, especially downwardly mobile whites, to stop the defection of this former Democratic base to Trump's populism?

–Do national Democrats understand how out of touch they are with the future as they insist that the United States must remain the sole military superpower in a uni-polar world when the world is rapidly shifting toward a multi-polar reality?

Yet, rather than come up with new strategies to address the future, Democratic leaders would rather pretend that Putin is at fault for the Trump presidency and

hope that the U.S. intelligence community – with its fearsome surveillance powers – can come up with enough evidence to justify Trump's impeachment.

Then, of course, the Democrats would be stuck with President Mike Pence, a more traditional Religious Right Republican whose first step on foreign policy would be to turn it over to neocon Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, a move that would likely mean a new wave of "regime change" wars.

At such a point, that might put the Democrats and Republicans in sync as two equally warmongering parties, but what good that would do for the American people and the world is hard to fathom.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon" and "Democrats Are Now the Aggressive War Party.]

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

David Rockefeller & October Surprise Case

From the Archive: David Rockefeller's death at age 101 brought effusive eulogies, but no recollection of his mysterious role in the Iran hostage crisis of 1980, which helped sink President Carter's reelection, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry (Originally published April 15, 2005)

On March 23, 1979, late on a Friday afternoon, Chase Manhattan Bank Chairman David Rockefeller and his longtime aide Joseph Verner Reed arrived at a town house in the exclusive Beekman Place neighborhood on New York's East Side. They were met inside by a small, intense and deeply worried woman who had seen her life turned upside down in the last two months.

Iran's Princess Ashraf, the strong-willed twin sister of the Iran's long-time ruler, had gone from wielding immense behind-the-scenes clout in the ancient nation of Persia to living in exile – albeit a luxurious one. With hostile Islamic fundamentalists running her homeland, Ashraf also was troubled by the plight of her ailing brother, the ousted Shah of Iran, who had fled into exile, first to Egypt and then Morocco.

Now, she was turning for help to the man who ran one of the leading U.S. banks, one which had made a fortune serving as the Shah's banker for a quarter century and handling billions of dollars in Iran's assets. Ashraf's message was straightforward. She wanted Rockefeller to intercede with Jimmy Carter and ask the President to relent on his decision against granting the Shah refuge in the United States.

A distressed Ashraf said her brother had been given a one-week deadline to leave his current place of refuge, Morocco. "My brother has nowhere to go," Ashraf pleaded, "and no one else to turn to." [See David Rockefeller, *Memoirs*]

Spurned Appeals

Carter had been resisting appeals to let the Shah enter the United States, fearing that admitting him would endanger the personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Teheran and other U.S. interests. In mid-February 1979, Iranian radicals had overrun the embassy and briefly held the staff hostage before the Iranian government intervened to secure release of the Americans.

Carter feared a repeat of the crisis. Already the United States was deeply unpopular with the Islamic revolution because of the CIA's history of meddling in Iranian affairs. The U.S. spy agency had helped organize the overthrow of an elected nationalist government in 1953 and the restoration of the Shah and the Pahlavi family to the Peacock Throne. In the quarter century that followed, the Shah kept his opponents at bay through the coercive powers of his secret police, known as the SAVAK.

As the Islamic Revolution gained strength in January 1979, however, the Shah's security forces could no longer keep order. The Shah – suffering from terminal cancer – scooped up a small pile of Iranian soil, boarded his jet, sat down at the controls and flew the plane out of Iran to Egypt.

A few days later, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an ascetic religious leader who had been forced into exile by the Shah, returned to a tumultuous welcome from crowds estimated at a million strong, shouting "Death to the Shah." The new Iranian government began demanding that the Shah be returned to stand trial for human rights crimes and that he surrender his fortune, salted away in overseas accounts.

The new Iranian government also wanted Chase Manhattan to return Iranian assets, which Rockefeller put at more than $1 billion in 1978, although some estimates ran much higher. The withdrawal might have created a liquidity crisis for the bank, which already was coping with financial troubles.

Ashraf's personal appeal put Rockefeller in what he described, with

understatement, as “an awkward position,” according to his autobiography *Memoirs*.

“There was nothing in my previous relationship with the Shah that made me feel a strong obligation to him,” wrote the scion of the Rockefeller oil and banking fortune who had long prided himself in straddling the worlds of high finance and public policy. “He had never been a friend to whom I owed a personal debt, and neither was his relationship with the bank one that would justify my taking personal risks on his behalf. Indeed, there might be severe repercussions for Chase if the Iranian authorities determined that I was being too helpful to the Shah and his family.”

Later on March 23, after leaving Ashraf’s residence, Rockefeller attended a dinner with Happy Rockefeller, the widow of his brother Nelson who had died two months earlier. Also at the dinner was former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a long-time associate of the Rockefeller family.

Discussing the Shah’s plight, Happy Rockefeller described her late husband’s close friendship with the Shah, which had included a weekend stay with the Shah and his wife in Teheran in 1977. Happy said that when Nelson learned that the Shah would be forced to leave Iran, Nelson offered to pick out a new home for the Shah in the United States.

The dinner conversation also turned to what the participants saw as the dangerous precedent that President Carter was setting by turning his back on a prominent U.S. ally. What message of American timidity was being sent to other pro-U.S. leaders in the Middle East?

‘Flying Dutchman’

The dinner led to a public campaign by Rockefeller – along with Kissinger and former Chase Manhattan Bank Chairman John McCloy – to find a suitable home in exile for the Shah. Country after country had closed their doors to the Shah as he began a humiliating odyssey as what Kissinger would call a modern-day “Flying Dutchman,” wandering in search of a safe harbor.

Rockefeller assigned his aide, Joseph Reed, “to help [the Shah] in any way he could,” including serving as the Shah’s liaison to the U.S. government. McCloy, one of the so-called Wise Men of the post-World War II era, was representing Chase Manhattan as an attorney with Milbank, Tweed, Hadley and McCloy. One of his duties was to devise a financial strategy for staving off Iran’s withdrawal of assets from the bank.

Rockefeller also pressed the Shah’s case personally with Carter when the opportunity presented itself. On April 9, 1979, at the end of an Oval Office

meeting on another topic, Rockefeller handed Carter a one-page memo describing the views of many foreign leaders disturbed by recent U.S. foreign policy actions, including Carter's treatment of the Shah.

"With virtually no exceptions, the heads of state and other government leaders I saw expressed concern about United States foreign policy which they perceived to be vacillating and lacking in an understandable global approach," Rockefeller's memo read. "They have questions about the dependability of the United States as a friend." An irritated Carter abruptly ended the meeting.

Temporary Havens

Despite the mounting pressure from influential quarters, Carter continued to rebuff appeals to let the Shah into the United States. So the Shah's influential friends began looking for alternative locations, asking other nations to shelter the ex-Iranian ruler.

Finally, arrangements were made for the Shah to fly to the Bahamas and – when the Bahamian government turned out to be more interested in money than humanitarianism – to Mexico.

"With the Shah safely settled in Mexico, I had hopes that the need for my direct involvement on his behalf had ended," Rockefeller wrote in *Memoirs*. "Henry [Kissinger] continued to publicly criticize the Carter administration for its overall management of the Iranian crisis and other aspects of its foreign policy, and Jack McCloy bombarded [Carter's Secretary of State] Cyrus Vance with letters demanding the Shah's admission to the United States."

When the Shah's medical condition took a turn for the worse in October, Carter relented and agreed to let the Shah fly to New York for emergency treatment. Celebrating Carter's reversal, Rockefeller's aide Joseph Reed wrote in a memo, "our 'mission impossible' is completed. … My applause is like thunder."

When the Shah arrived in New York on October 23, 1979, Reed checked the Shah into New York Hospital under a pseudonym, "David Newsome," a play on the name of Carter's undersecretary of state for political affairs, David Newsom.

Embassy Crisis

The arrival of the Shah in New York led to renewed demands from Iran's new government that the Shah be returned to stand trial.

In Teheran, students and other radicals gathered at the university, called by their leaders to what was described as an important meeting, according to one of the participants whom I interviewed years later.

The students gathered in a classroom which had three blackboards turned toward the wall. A speaker told the students that they were about to undertake a mission supported by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's spiritual leader and the *de facto* head of the government.

"They said it would be dangerous and that anyone who didn't want to take part could leave now," the Iranian told me. "But no one left. Then, they turned around the blackboards. There were three buildings drawn on the blackboards. They were the buildings of the U.S. embassy."

The Iranian said the target of the raid was not the embassy personnel, but rather the embassy's intelligence documents.

"We had believed that the U.S. government had been manipulating affairs inside Iran and we wanted to prove it," he said. "We thought if we could get into the embassy, we could get the documents that would prove this. We hadn't thought about the hostages. We all went to the embassy. We had wire cutters to cut through the fence. We started climbing over the fences. We had expected more resistance. When we got inside, we saw the Americans running and we chased them."

Marine guards set off tear gas in a futile attempt to control the mob, but held their fire to avoid bloodshed. Other embassy personnel hastily shredded classified documents, although there wasn't time to destroy many of the secret papers. The militant students found themselves in control not only of the embassy and hundreds of sensitive U.S. cables, but dozens of American hostages as well.

An international crisis had begun, a hinge that would swing open unexpected doors for both American and Iranian history.

Hidden Compartments

David Rockefeller denied that his campaign to gain the Shah's admittance to the United States had provoked the crisis, arguing that he was simply filling a vacuum created when the Carter administration balked at doing the right thing.

"Despite the insistence of journalists and revisionist historians, there was never a 'Rockefeller-Kissinger behind-the-scenes campaign' that placed 'relentless pressure' on the Carter administration to have the Shah admitted to the United States regardless of the consequences," Rockefeller wrote in *Memoirs*. "In fact, it would be more accurate to say that for many months we were the unwilling surrogates for a government that had failed to accept its full responsibilities."

But within the Iranian hostage crisis, there would be hidden compartments within hidden compartments, as influential groups around the world acted in what they perceived to be their personal or their national interests.

Rockefeller was just one of many powerful people who felt that Jimmy Carter deserved to lose his job. With the hostage crisis started, a countdown of 365 days began toward the 1980 elections. Though he may have been only dimly aware of his predicament, Carter faced a remarkable coalition of enemies both inside and outside the United States.

In the Persian Gulf, the Saudi royal family and other Arab oil sheiks blamed Carter for forsaking the Shah and feared their own playboy life styles might be next on the list for the Islamic fundamentalists. The Israeli government saw Carter as too cozy with the Palestinians and too eager to cut a peace deal that would force Israel to surrender land won in the 1967 war.

European anti-communists believed Carter was too soft on the Soviet Union and was risking the security of Europe. Dictators in the Third World – from the Philippines and South Korea to Argentina and El Salvador – were bristling at Carter's human rights lectures.

Inside the United States, the Carter administration had made enemies at the CIA by purging many of the Old Boys who saw themselves as protectors of America's deepest national interests. Many CIA veterans, including some still within the government, were disgruntled. And, of course, the Republicans were determined to win back the White House, which many felt had been unjustly taken from their control after Richard Nixon's landslide victory in 1972.

This subterranean struggle between Carter, trying desperately to free the hostages before the 1980 election, and those who stood to benefit by thwarting him became known popularly as the "October Surprise" controversy.

The nickname referred to the possibility that Carter might have ensured his reelection by arranging the hostage return the month before the presidential election as an October Surprise, although the term came ultimately to refer to clandestine efforts to stop Carter from pulling off his October Surprise.

CIA Old Boys

When the hostage crisis wasn't resolved in the first few weeks and months, the attention of many disgruntled CIA Old Boys also turned toward the American humiliation in Iran, which they found doubly hard to take since it had been the site of the agency's first major victory, the restoration of the Shah to the Peacock Throne.

A number of veterans from that operation of 1953 were still alive in 1980. Archibald Roosevelt was one of the Old Boys from the Iranian operation. He had moved on to become an adviser to David Rockefeller at Chase Manhattan Bank.

Another was Miles Copeland, who had served the CIA as an intermediary to Arab leaders, including Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser. In his autobiography, *The Game Player*, Copeland claimed that he and his CIA chums prepared their own Iranian hostage rescue plan in March 1980.

When I interviewed Copeland in 1990 at his thatched-roofed cottage outside Oxford in the English countryside, he said he had been a strong supporter of George H.W. Bush in 1980. He even had founded an informal support group called "Spooks for Bush."

Sitting among photos of his children who included the drummer for the rock group, The Police, and the manager for the rock star, Sting, Copeland explained that he and his CIA colleagues considered Carter a dangerous idealist.

"Let me say first that we liked President Carter," Copeland told me "He read, unlike President Reagan later, he read everything. He knew what he was about. He understood the situation throughout the Middle East, even these tenuous, difficult problems such as Arabs and Israel.

"But the way we saw Washington at that time was that the struggle was really not between the Left and the Right, the liberals and the conservatives, as between the Utopians and the realists, the pragmatists. Carter was a Utopian. He believed, honestly, that you must do the right thing and take your chance on the consequences. He told me that. He literally believed that."

Copeland's deep Southern accent spit out the words with a mixture of amazement and disgust. To Copeland and his CIA friends, Carter deserved respect for a first-rate intellect but contempt for his idealism.

"Most of the things that were done [by the United States] about Iran had been on a basis of stark realism, with possibly the exception of letting the Shah down," Copeland said. "There are plenty of forces in the country we could have marshaled. … We could have sabotaged [the revolution, but] we had to establish what the Quakers call 'the spirit of the meeting' in the country, where everybody was thinking just one way. The Iranians were really like sheep, as they are now."

Altar of Ideals

But Carter, troubled by the Shah's human rights record, delayed taking decisive action and missed the moment of opportunity, Copeland said. Infuriating the

CIA’s Old Boys, Carter had sacrificed an ally on the altar of idealism.

“Carter really believed in all the principles that we talk about in the West,” Copeland said, shaking his mane of white hair. “As smart as Carter is, he did believe in Mom, apple pie and the corner drug store. And those things that are good in America are good everywhere else.”

Veterans of the CIA and Republicans from the Nixon-Ford administrations judged that Carter simply didn’t measure up to the demands of a harsh world.

“There were many of us – myself along with Henry Kissinger, David Rockefeller, Archie Roosevelt in the CIA at the time – we believed very strongly that we were showing a kind of weakness, which people in Iran and elsewhere in the world hold in great contempt,” Copeland said. “The fact that we’re being pushed around, and being afraid of the Ayatollah Khomeini, so we were going to let a friend down, which was horrifying to us. That’s the sort of thing that was frightening to our friends in Saudi Arabia, in Egypt and other places.”

But Carter also bent to the moral suasions of the Shah’s friends, who argued on humanitarian grounds that the ailing Shah deserved admission to the United States for medical treatment. “Carter, I say, was not a stupid man,” Copeland said. Carter had even a greater flaw: “He was a principled man.”

So, Carter decided that the moral act was to allow the Shah to enter the United States for treatment, leading to the result Carter had feared: the seizure of the U.S. Embassy.

Frozen Assets

As the crisis dragged on, the Carter administration cranked up the pressure on the Iranians. Along with diplomatic initiatives, Iran’s assets were frozen, a move that ironically helped David Rockefeller’s Chase Manhattan Bank by preventing the Iranians from cleaning out their funds from the bank’s vaults.

In *Memoirs*, Rockefeller wrote that the Iranian "government did reduce the balances they maintained with us during the second half of 1979, but in reality they had simply returned to their historic level of about $500 million," Rockefeller wrote. "Carter's 'freeze' of official Iranian assets protected our position, but no one at Chase played a role in convincing the administration to institute it."

In the weeks that followed the embassy seizure, Copeland said he and his friends turned their attention to figuring a way out of the mess.

"There was very little sympathy for the hostages," Copeland said. "We all have served abroad, served in embassies like that. We got additional pay for danger. I think, for Syria, I got fifty percent extra in salary. So it's a chance you take. When you join the army, you take a chance of getting in a war and getting shot. If you're in the diplomatic service, you take a chance on having some horror like this descend on you.

"But on the other hand, we did think that there were things we could do to get them out, other than simply letting the Iranians, the students, and the Iranian administration know that they were beating us," Copeland said. "We let them know what an advantage they had. That we could have gotten them out is something that all of us old professionals of the covert action school, we said from the beginning, 'Why don't they let us do it?'"

According to *The Game Player*, Copeland met his old friend, ex-CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton, for lunch. The famed spy hunter "brought to lunch a Mossad chap who confided that his service had identified at least half of the 'students,' even to the extent of having their home addresses in Teheran," Copeland wrote. "He gave me a rundown on what sort of kids they were. Most of them, he said, were just that, kids."

Periphery Strategy

The Israeli government was another deeply interested player in the Iran crisis. For decades, Israel had cultivated covert ties with the Shah's regime as part of a Periphery Strategy of forming alliances with non-Arab states in the region to prevent Israel's Arab enemies from focusing all their might against Israel.

Though losing an ally when the Shah fell and offended by the anti-Israeli rhetoric from the Khomeini regime, Israel had gone about quietly rebuilding relations with the Iranian government. One of the young Israeli intelligence agents assigned to this task was an Iranian-born Jew named Ari Ben-Menashe, who had immigrated to Israel as a teen-ager and was valuable because he spoke fluent Farsi and still had friends in Iran, some of whom were rising within the new

revolutionary bureaucracy.

In his own 1992 memoirs, *Profits of War*, Ben-Menashe said the view of Israel's Likud leaders, including Prime Minister Menachem Begin, was one of contempt for Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s.

"Begin loathed Carter for the peace agreement forced upon him at Camp David," Ben-Menashe wrote. "As Begin saw it, the agreement took away Sinai from Israel, did not create a comprehensive peace, and left the Palestinian issue hanging on Israel's back."

After the Shah fell, Begin grew even more dissatisfied with Carter's handling of the crisis and alarmed over the growing likelihood of an Iraqi attack on Iran's oil-rich Khuzistan province. Israel saw Iraq's Saddam Hussein as a far greater threat to Israel than Iran's Khomeini. Ben-Menashe wrote that Begin, recognizing the *realpolitik* needs of Israel, authorized shipments to Iran of small arms and some spare parts, via South Africa, as early as September 1979.

After the U.S. hostages were taken in November 1979, the Israelis came to agree with Copeland's hard-headed skepticism about Carter's approach to the hostage issue, Ben- Menashe wrote. Even though Copeland was generally regarded as a CIA "Arabist" who had opposed Israeli interests in the past, he was admired for his analytical skills, Ben-Menashe wrote.

"A meeting between Miles Copeland and Israeli intelligence officers was held at a Georgetown house in Washington, D.C.," Ben-Menashe wrote. "The Israelis were happy to deal with any initiative but Carter's. David Kimche, chief of Tevel, the foreign relations unit of Mossad, was the senior Israeli at the meeting. … The Israelis and the Copeland group came up with a two-pronged plan to use quiet diplomacy with the Iranians and to draw up a scheme for military action against Iran that would not jeopardize the lives of the hostages."

In late February 1980, Seyeed Mehdi Kashani, an Iranian emissary, arrived in Israel to discuss Iran's growing desperation for aircraft spare parts, Ben-Menashe wrote. Kashani, whom Ben-Menashe had known from their school days in Teheran, also revealed that the Copeland initiative was making inroads inside Iran and that approaches from some Republican emissaries had already been received, Ben-Menashe wrote.

"Kashani said that the secret ex-CIA-Miles-Copeland group was aware that any deal cut with the Iranians would have to include the Israelis because they would have to be used as a third party to sell military equipment to Iran," according to Ben-Menashe. In March, the following month, the Israelis made their first direct military shipment to Iran, 300 tires for Iran's F-4 fighter jets, Ben-

Menashe wrote.

Rescue Plans

In the 1990 interview at his house in the English countryside, Copeland told me that he and other CIA old-timers developed their own hostage-rescue plan. Copeland said the plan – which included cultivating political allies within Iran and using disinformation tactics to augment a military assault – was hammered out on March 22, 1980, in a meeting at his Georgetown apartment.

Copeland said he was aided by Steven Meade, the ex-chief of the CIA's Escape and Evasion Unit; Kermit Roosevelt, who had overseen the 1953 coup in Iran; and Archibald Roosevelt, the adviser to David Rockefeller.

"Essentially, the idea was to have some Iranians dressed in Iranian military uniform and police uniform go to the embassy, address the students and say, 'Hey, you're doing a marvelous job here. But now we'll relieve you of it, because we understand that there's going to be a military force flown in from outside. And they're going to hit you, and we're going to scatter these [hostages] around town. Thanks very much."

Copeland's Iranians would then move the hostages to the edge of Teheran where they would be loaded onto American helicopters to be flown out of the country.

To Copeland's chagrin, his plan fell on deaf ears in the Carter administration, which was developing its own rescue plan that would rely more on U.S. military force with only modest help from Iranian assets in Teheran. So, Copeland said he distributed his plan outside the administration, to leading Republicans, giving sharper focus to their contempt for Carter's bungled Iranian strategy.

"Officially, the plan went only to people in the government and was top secret and all that," Copeland said. "But as so often happens in government, one wants support, and when it was not being handled by the Carter administration as though it was top secret, it was handled as though it was nothing. … Yes, I sent copies to everybody who I thought would be a good ally. …

"Now I'm not at liberty to say what reaction, if any, ex-President Nixon took, but he certainly had a copy of this. We sent one to Henry Kissinger, and I had, at the time, a secretary who had just worked for Henry Kissinger, and Peter Rodman, who was still working for him and was a close personal friend of mine, and so we had these informal relationships where the little closed circle of people who were, a, looking forward to a Republican President within a short while and, b, who were absolutely trustworthy and who understood all these inner workings of the international game board."

By April 1980, Carter's patience was wearing thin, both with the Iranians and some U.S. allies. After discovering that the Israelis had made a secret shipment of 300 tires to Iran, Carter complained to Prime Minister Begin.

"There had been a rather tense discussion between President Carter and Prime Minister Begin in the spring of 1980 in which the President made clear that the Israelis had to stop that, and that we knew that they were doing it, and that we would not allow it to continue, at least not allow it to continue privately and without the knowledge of the American people," Carter's press secretary Jody Powell told me. "And it stopped" – at least temporarily.

Questioned by congressional investigators a dozen years later, Carter said he felt that by April 1980, "Israel cast their lot with Reagan," according to notes I found among the unpublished documents in the files of a House Task Force, which had examined the October Surprise controversy. Carter traced the Israeli opposition to his reelection to a "lingering concern [among] Jewish leaders that I was too friendly with Arabs."

Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski also recognized the Israeli hostility. In an interview, Brzezinski told me that the Carter White House was well aware that the Begin government had "an obvious preference for a Reagan victory."

Desert One

Encircled by growing legions of enemies, the Carter administration put the finishing touches on its own hostage-rescue operation in April. Code named "Eagle Claw," the assault involved a force of U.S. helicopters that would swoop down on Teheran, coordinate with some agents on the ground and extract the hostages.

Carter ordered the operation to proceed on April 24, but mechanical problems forced the helicopters to turn back. At a staging area called Desert One, one of the helicopters collided with a refueling plane, causing an explosion that killed eight American crewmen.

Their charred bodies were then displayed by the Iranian government, adding to the fury and humiliation of the United States. After the Desert One fiasco, the Iranians dispersed the hostages to a variety of locations, effectively shutting the door on another rescue attempt, at least one that would have any chance of returning the hostages as a group.

By summer 1980, Copeland told me, the Republicans in his circle considered a second hostage-rescue attempt not only unfeasible, but unnecessary. They were talking confidently about the hostages being freed after a Republican victory in

November, the old CIA man said.

“There was no discussion of a Kissinger or Nixon plan to rescue these people, because Nixon, like everybody else, knew that all we had to do was wait until the election came, and they were going to get out,” Copeland said. “That was sort of an open secret among people in the intelligence community, that that would happen. … The intelligence community certainly had some understanding with somebody in Iran in authority, in a way that they would hardly confide in me.”

Copeland said his CIA friends had been told by contacts in Iran that the mullahs would do nothing to help Carter or his reelection.

“At that time, we had word back, because you always have informed relations with the devil,” Copeland said. “But we had word that, ‘Don’t worry.’ As long as Carter wouldn’t get credit for getting these people out, as soon as Reagan came in, the Iranians would be happy enough to wash their hands of this and move into a new era of Iranian-American relations, whatever that turned out to be.”

In the interview, Copeland declined to give more details, beyond his assurance that “the CIA within the CIA,” his term for the true protectors of U.S. national security, had an understanding with the Iranians about the hostages. (Copeland died on January 14, 1991, before I could interview him again.)

Much of the controversy over the October Surprise mystery has centered on several alleged secret meetings in Europe between senior Republicans – including then-Reagan campaign chief William Casey and Reagan’s running mate George H.W. Bush – and Iranian officials, including senior cleric Mehdi Karrubi.

A variety of witnesses, including Iranian officials and international intelligence operatives, have described these contacts, which have been denied by Bush and other top Republicans. Though official U.S. investigations have generally sided with the Republicans, a substantial body of evidence – much of it kept hidden from the American people – actually supports the October Surprise allegations.

[For a summary of the evidence on the Reagan campaign’s interference, go to “Second Thoughts on October Surprise.” For more detailed accounts, see Robert Parry’s *Trick or Treason*, *Secrecy & Privilege* and *America’s Stolen Narrative*.]

Rockefeller’s Visit

Evidence from Reagan-Bush campaign files also points to undisclosed contacts between the Rockefeller group and Casey during Carter’s hostage negotiations.

According to a campaign visitor log for September 11, 1980, David Rockefeller

and several of his aides who were dealing with the Iranian issue signed in to see Casey at his campaign headquarters in Arlington, Virginia.

With Rockefeller were Joseph Reed, whom Rockefeller had assigned to coordinate U.S. policy toward the Shah, and Archibald Roosevelt, the former CIA officer who was monitoring events in the Persian Gulf for Chase Manhattan and who had collaborated with Miles Copeland on the Iran hostage-rescue plan. The fourth member of the party was Owen Frisbie, Rockefeller's chief lobbyist in Washington.

In the early 1990s, all the surviving the participants – Rockefeller, Reed and Frisbie – declined to be interviewed about the Casey meeting. Rockefeller made no mention of the meeting in *Memoirs*.

Henry Kissinger, another Rockefeller associate, also was in discreet contact with campaign director Casey during this period, according to Casey's personal chauffeur whom I interviewed. The chauffeur, who asked not to be identified by name, said he was sent twice to Kissinger's Georgetown home to pick up the former Secretary of State and bring him to Arlington, Virginia, for private meetings with Casey, meetings that were not recorded on the official visitor logs.

On September 16, 1980, five days after the Rockefeller visit to Casey's office, Iran's acting foreign minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh publicly cited Republican interference on the hostages.

"Reagan, supported by Kissinger and others, has no intention of resolving the problem," Ghotbzadeh said. "They will do everything in their power to block it."

In the weeks before Election 1980, FBI wiretaps picked up other evidence that connected Rockefeller associates with two of the key suspects in the October Surprise mystery, Iranian banker Cyrus Hashemi and longtime Casey business associate John Shaheen.

According to the FBI wiretaps hidden in Hashemi's New York offices in September 1980, Hashemi and Shaheen were involved in the intrigue surrounding the Iran hostage crisis while simultaneously promoting murky financial schemes.

Hashemi was supposedly acting as an intermediary for President Carter for secret approaches to Iranian officials about getting the hostages released. But Hashemi also appears to have been playing a double game, serving as a backchannel for the Reagan-Bush campaign, through Shaheen, who had known Casey since their World War II days together in the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's forerunner.

The FBI wiretaps revealed that Hashemi and Shaheen also were trying to establish

a bank with Philippine interests in either the Caribbean or in Hong Kong. In mid-October 1980, Hashemi deposited “a large sum of money” in a Philippine bank and planned to meet with Philippine representatives in Europe, an FBI intercept discovered.

The negotiations led Shaheen to an agreement with Herminio Disini, an in-law of Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos, to establish the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty Company. Disini also was a top moneyman for Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos.

The $20 million used as starting capital for the bank came through Jean A. Patry, David Rockefeller’s lawyer in Geneva, Switzerland. But the original source of the money, according to two Shaheen associates I interviewed, was Princess Ashraf, the Shah’s twin sister.

Reagan’s Victory

On November 4, 1980, one year to the day after the Iranian militants seized the U.S. Embassy in Teheran, Ronald Reagan routed Jimmy Carter in the U.S. presidential elections. In the weeks after the election, the hostage negotiations continued.

As Reagan’s Inauguration neared, Republicans talked tough, making clear that Ronald Reagan wouldn’t stand for the humiliation that the nation endured for 444 days under Carter. The Reagan-Bush team intimated that Reagan would deal harshly with Iran if it didn’t surrender the hostages.

A joke making the rounds of Washington went: “What’s three feet deep and glows in the dark? Teheran ten minutes after Ronald Reagan becomes President.”

On Inauguration Day, January 20, 1981, just as Reagan was beginning his inaugural address, word came from Iran that the hostages were freed. The American people were overjoyed. The coincidence in timing between the hostage release and Reagan’s taking office immediately boosted the new President’s image as a tough guy who wouldn’t let the United States be pushed around.

The reality, however, appears to have been different, with U.S. weapons soon flowing secretly to Iran through Israel and participants in the October Surprise mystery seeming to get in line for payoffs.

The bank deal that Cyrus Hashemi and John Shaheen had discussed for months took final shape two days after Reagan’s Inauguration. On January 22, 1981, Shaheen opened the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty Bank with $20 million that had been funneled to him through Jean Patry, the Rockefeller-connected lawyer in Geneva who was fronting for Princess Ashraf.

Why, I asked one of Shaheen's associates, would Ashraf have invested $20 million in a bank with these dubious characters? "It was funny money," the associate answered. He believed it was money that the Islamic revolutionary government was claiming as its own.

A second Shaheen associate said Shaheen was particularly secretive when asked about his relationship with the deposed princess. "When it comes to Ashraf, I'm a cemetery," Shaheen once said.

From 1981 to 1984, Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty pulled in hundreds of millions of petrodollars. The bank also attracted high-flying Arabs to its board of directors.

Two directors were Ghanim Al-Mazrouie, an Abu Dhabi official who controlled 10 percent of the corrupt Bank of Credit and Commerce International, and Hassan Yassin, a cousin of Saudi financier Adnan Khashoggi and an adviser to BCCI principal Kamal Adham, the former chief of Saudi intelligence.

Though Cyrus Hashemi's name was not formally listed on the roster of the Hong Kong bank, he did receive cash from BCCI, al-Mazrouie's bank. An FBI wiretap of Hashemi's office in early February 1981 picked up an advisory that "money from BCCI [is] to come in tomorrow from London on Concorde," a reference to the supersonic commercial airliner favored by wealthy travelers. (In 1984, the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty collapsed and an estimated $100 million disappeared.)

Langley Meeting

Early in the Reagan-Bush administration, Joseph Reed, the aide to David Rockefeller, was appointed and confirmed as the new U.S. ambassador to Morocco. Before leaving for his posting, he visited the CIA and its new director, William Casey. As Reed arrived, CIA official Charles Cogan was getting up and preparing to leave Casey's office.

Knowing Reed, Cogan lingered at the door. In a "secret" deposition to congressional investigators in 1992, Cogan said he had a "definite memory" of a comment Reed made about disrupting Carter's "October Surprise" of a pre-election release of the 52 American hostages in Iran.

But Cogan said he couldn't recall the precise verb that Reed had used. "Joseph Reed said, 'we' and then the verb [and then] something about Carter's October Surprise," Cogan testified. "The implication was we did something about Carter's October Surprise, but I don't have the exact wording."

One congressional investigator, who discussed the recollection with Cogan in a less formal setting, concluded that the verb that Cogan chose not to repeat was

an expletive relating to sex – as in “we fucked Carter’s October Surprise.”

During Cogan’s deposition, David Laufman, a Republican lawyer on the House October Surprise Task Force and a former CIA official, asked Cogan if he had since “had occasion to ask him [Reed] about this” recollection?

Yes, Cogan replied, he recently had asked Reed about it, after Reed moved to a protocol job at the United Nations. “I called him up,” Cogan said. “He was at his farm in Connecticut, as I recall, and I just told him that, look, this is what sticks in my mind and what I am going to say [to Congress], and he didn’t have any comment on it and continued on to other matters.”

“He didn’t offer any explanation to you of what he meant?” asked Laufman.

“No,” answered Cogan.

“Nor did he deny that he had said it?” asked another Task Force lawyer Mark L. Shaffer.

“He didn’t say anything,” Cogan responded. “We just continued on talking about other things.”

And so did the Task Force lawyers at this remarkable deposition on December 21, 1992. The lawyers even failed to ask Cogan the obvious follow-up: What did Casey say and how did Casey react when Reed allegedly told Reagan’s ex-campaign chief that “we fucked Carter’s October Surprise.”

Discovered Documents

I found Cogan’s testimony and other incriminating documents in files left behind by the Task Force, which finished its half-hearted investigation of the October Surprise controversy in January 1993.

Among those files, I also discovered the notes of an FBI agent who tried to interview Joseph Reed about his October Surprise knowledge. The FBI man, Harry A. Penich, had scribbled down that “numerous telephone calls were placed to him [Reed]. He failed to answer any of them. I conservatively place the number over 10.”

Finally, Penich, armed with a subpoena, cornered Reed arriving home at his 50-acre estate in Greenwich, Connecticut. “He was surprised and absolutely livid at being served at home,” Penich wrote. “His responses could best be characterized as lashing out.”

Reed threatened to go over Penich’s head. In hand-written “talking points” that Penich apparently used to brief an unnamed superior, the FBI agent wrote: “He

[Reed] did it in such a way as to lead a reasonable person to believe he had influence w/you. The man's remarks were both inappropriate and improper."

But the hard-ball tactics worked. When Reed finally consented to an interview, Task Force lawyers just went through the motions.

Penich took the interview notes and wrote that Reed "recalls no contact with Casey in 1980," though Reed added that "their paths crossed many times because of Reed's position at Chase." As for the 1981 CIA visit, Reed added that as the newly appointed U.S. ambassador to Morocco, he "would have stopped in to see Casey and pay respect."

But on whether Reed made any remark about obstructing Carter's October Surprise, Reed claimed he "does not specifically know what October Surprise refers to," Penich scribbled down.

The Task Force lawyers didn't press hard. Most strikingly, the lawyers failed to confront Reed with evidence that would have impeached his contention that he had "no contact with Casey in 1980." According to the sign-in sheets at the Reagan-Bush campaign headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, which the Task Force had obtained, Reed saw Casey on September 11, 1980, less than two months before the election.

When the official House Task Force report was issued on January 13, 1993, the Task Force largely cleared the Republicans of the longstanding October Surprise charges, but that conclusion was based on tendentious interpretations of the published evidence and the withholding of many incriminating documents.

Among the evidence that was never shared with the American people was the fascinating connection between the powerful friends of David Rockefeller and the shadowy operatives who had maintained clandestine contacts with the Iranian mullahs during the long hostage crisis.

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

The Missing Logic of Russia-gate

Exclusive: Russia-bashing and innuendos about disloyal Americans were all the rage at Monday's House Intelligence Committee hearing on alleged Russian

“hacking” of the presidential election, but logic is often missing, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As Rep. Adam Schiff tries out for the lead role in a remake of the Joe McCarthy hearings by maligning specific Americans as suspected Russian moles, some of the actual evidence argues against the Democratic notion that the Russians own President Trump and other key Republicans.

For instance, last week, Democrats circulated a report showing that retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who served briefly as President Donald Trump’s national security adviser, had received payments from several Russia-related entities, totaling nearly $68,000.

The largest payment of $45,386 came for a speech and an appearance in Moscow in 2015 at the tenth anniversary dinner for RT, the international Russian TV network, with Flynn netting $33,750 after his speakers’ bureau took its cut. Democrats treated this revelation as important evidence about Russia buying influence in the Trump campaign and White House. But the actual evidence suggests something quite different.

Not only was the sum a relative trifle for a former senior U.S. government official compared to, say, the fees collected by Bill and Hillary Clinton, who often pulled in six to ten times more, especially for speeches to foreign audiences. (Former President Clinton received $500,000 for a Moscow speech from a Russian investment bank with ties to the Kremlin, The New York Times reported in 2015,)

Yet, besides Flynn’s relatively modest speaking fee, The Washington Post reported that RT negotiated Flynn’s rate downward.

Deep inside its article on Flynn’s Russia-connected payments, the Post wrote, “RT balked at paying Flynn’s original asking price. ‘Sorry it took us longer to get back to you but the problem is that the speaking fee is a bit too high and exceeds our budget at the moment,’ Alina Mikhaleva, RT’s head of marketing, wrote a Flynn associate about a month before the event.”

So, if you accept the Democrats’ narrative that Russian President Vladimir Putin is engaged in an all-out splurge to induce influential Americans to betray their country, how do you explain that his supposed flunkies at RT are quibbling with Flynn over a relatively modest speaking fee?

Wouldn’t you think that Putin would have told RT’s marketing department that the

sky was the limit in paying off Flynn because the ever-prescient Russian president knew from his Ouija board in 2015 that Flynn would be the future national security adviser under President Trump?

After all, it's become one of Official Washington's favorite groupthinks that RT is nothing but a Russian propaganda front designed to destroy the faith that Americans have in their democratic process – as if the sleazy and shameful political campaigns financed with hundreds of millions of dollars from billionaires need any help from RT.

Anti-Democracy Debates

But RT-bashing is always in season. The Director of National Intelligence's report on Jan. 6, with its evidence-free "assessments" that Russia was engaged in undermining American democracy included a seven-page appendix dating from 2012 that described how RT was contributing toward that goal by portraying "the US electoral process as undemocratic."

The "proof" behind the DNI's accusation included RT's articles on "voting machine vulnerabilities" although virtually every major U.S. news organizations ran similar stories in that time frame. The DNI report also took RT to task for covering the Occupy Wall Street movement and for reporting on the environmental dangers from "fracking," topics cited as further proof that the Russian government was using RT to weaken U.S. public support for Washington's policies (although, again, these are topics of genuine public interest).

To further demonstrate how RT was carrying out the Kremlin's goal of spoiling Americans' faith in the U.S. democratic process, the DNI report noted that "RT broadcast, hosted and advertised third-party candidate debates."

Apparently, the DNI's point was that showing Americans that there are choices beyond the two major parties was somehow seditious. "The RT hosts asserted that the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a 'sham,'" the DNI's report said.

Yet, polls have shown that large numbers of Americans would prefer more choices than the usual two candidates and, indeed, most Western democracies have multiple parties. But somehow RT's suggestion that other voices should be heard constituted an assault on American democracy.

As for Flynn, the report on his finances showed that he also received payments of $11,250 from the U.S. subsidiary of Kaspersky Lab, a Russian cyber-security firm, and $11,250 from a U.S. air cargo company associated with the Volga-Dnepr Group, owned by a Russian businessman.

Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Maryland, who was the chief defender of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she was subjected to the Republicans' over-the-top Benghazi investigations, switched positions in publicizing the news about Flynn's post-government work related to Russia. Cummings was suddenly the accuser.

"I cannot recall any time in our nation's history when the President selected as his National Security Advisor someone who violated the Constitution by accepting tens of thousands of dollars from an agent of a global adversary that attacked out democracy," Cummings wrote in a letter to President Trump, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and FBI Director James Comey.

Heating Up the New Cold War

Cummings thus became another Democrat pouring gasoline on the smoldering tensions between nuclear-armed Russia and the United States. For the Democrats, any dealing with any entity that had some connection to Russia is now prima facie evidence of disloyalty.

The context of these contacts has become almost irrelevant, subordinated to the larger goal of ousting Trump, whatever the cost, even transforming the Democratic Party into the party of the New Cold War and the New McCarthyism.

Yet, further undercutting the new certainty that Putin lined Trump's pockets with rubles as a way to ensure his allegiance to the Kremlin is the story of Trump's failed luxury hotel project intended to be built in Moscow several years ago.

A source familiar with those negotiations told me that Trump had hoped to get a half interest in the $2 billion project but that Russian-Israeli investor Mikhail Fridman, a founder of Russia's Alfa Bank, balked because Trump was unwilling to commit a significant investment beyond the branding value of the Trump name.

Again, if the Democratic narrative is to be believed – that Putin controls all the businesses in Russia and wanted to pay off Trump – it's hard to understand why the hotel deal fell through. Or, for that matter, why RT was nickel-and-diming Flynn.

The other problem with the Democratic narrative is that it always assumes that Putin could foretell that Trump would rise in 2016 to win the U.S. presidential election and thus there was value in corrupting Trump and his entourage with money and other favors.

The fact that almost no political pundit in the United States shared that

prediction even last year would seem to demonstrate the kookiness of the Democratic assumptions and the flaws in the U.S. Intelligence Community's "assessments" about alleged Russian "hacking" and distribution of Democratic emails.

Those "assessments" also assume that Putin's motives were to hurt Hillary Clinton's campaign, boost Trump and – as FBI Director Comey added on Monday – turn Americans against their democracy.

But there is a counter-argument to that thinking: Assuming that Putin read the polls like everyone else, would he risk infuriating the likely next President of the United States – Hillary Clinton – by embarrassing her with an email leak that would amount to a pinprick? Clinton herself blamed her surprise defeat on FBI Director Comey's decision to briefly reopen the investigation into whether she endangered national security by using a private email server as Secretary of State.

Unless one assumes that Putin's Ouija board also predicted Comey's actions or perhaps that Comey is another Russian mole, wouldn't it be a huge risk for Putin to anger Clinton without ensuring her defeat? There's the old saying that "if you strike a king, you must kill him," which would seem to apply equally to a queen. But logical thinking no longer applies to what's going on in Official Washington.

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NYT's 'Tinfoil Hat' Conspiracy Theory

Exclusive: There is a "tinfoil-hat" quality to The New York Times' pushing its "Donald Trump Is Russia's Manchurian Candidate" conspiracy theory as the newspaper sinks deeper into a New McCarthyism, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There are real reasons to worry about President Donald Trump's foreign policy, including his casual belligerence toward Iran and North Korea and his failure to rethink U.S. alliances with Saudi Arabia and Israel, but The New York Times obsesses on Trump's willingness to work with Russia.

On Saturday, the Times devoted most of its op-ed page to the Times' favorite conspiracy theory, that Trump is Vladimir Putin's "Manchurian candidate" though evidence continues to be lacking.

The op-ed package combined a "What to Ask About Russian Hacking" article by Louise Mensch, a former Conservative member of the British Parliament who now works for Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, and a connect-the-dots graphic that when filled out shows the Kremlin sitting atop the White House. But the featured article actually revealed how flimsy and wacky the Times' conspiracy theory is.

Usually, an investigation doesn't begin until there is specific evidence of a crime. For instance, the investigative articles that I have written over the years have always had information from insiders about how the misconduct had occurred before a single word was published.

In the early 1990s, for the investigation that I conducted for PBS "Frontline" into the so-called "October Surprise" case – whether Ronald Reagan's campaign colluded with Iranians and others to sabotage President Jimmy Carter's negotiations to free 52 American hostages in 1980 – we had some two dozen people providing information about those contacts from multiple perspectives – including from the U.S., Iran, Israel and Europe – before we aired the allegations.

We didn't base our documentary on the suspicious circumstance that the Iranians held back the hostages until after Ronald Reagan was inaugurated President on Jan. 20, 1981, or on the point that Iran and the Republicans had motives to sandbag Carter. We didn't casually throw out the names of a bunch of people who might have committed treason.

When we broadcast the documentary in April 1991, there was a strong evidentiary case of the Reagan's campaign guilt – and even then we were highly circumspect in how we presented the story.

Ultimately, the 1980 "October Surprise" case came down to whether you believed the Republican denials or the two dozen or so witnesses who described how this operation was carried out with the help of the Israeli government, French intelligence, and former and current CIA officers – along with former CIA Director George H.W. Bush and future CIA Director William Casey.

In the end, Official Washington was never willing to accept that the beloved Ronald Reagan could have done something as dastardly as conspire with Iranians to delay the release of 52 American hostages. It didn't matter what the evidence was or that Reagan quickly approved arms shipments to Iran via Israel in 1981, a prequel to the later Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal of 1985-86.

No Direct Evidence

By contrast, what the current “Russia Owns Trump” allegations are completely lacking is an insider who describes any nefarious collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia to arrange the Kremlin’s help in defeating Hillary Clinton and electing Donald Trump.

What we do have is President Barack Obama’s outgoing intelligence chiefs putting out evidence-free “assessments” that Russia was responsible for the “hacking” and the publicizing of two batches of Democratic emails, one from the Democratic National Committee and one from Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta.

The DNC emails revealed that top Democratic Party officials had violated their duty to remain neutral during the primaries and instead tilted the playing field in favor of Hillary Clinton and against Sen. Bernie Sanders. The Podesta emails exposed the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from voters, as well as some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

When published by WikiLeaks last year, the emails embarrassed the Clinton campaign but were not regarded as a major factor in her defeat, which she blamed primarily on FBI Director James Comey’s decision to briefly reopen the investigation into whether she endangered national security by using a private email server while Secretary of State.

However, after the shock of Donald Trump’s election, Clinton supporters looked for reasons to block Trump’s inauguration or to set the stage for his impeachment. That was when Obama’s intelligence chiefs began circulating claims that Russia was behind the leaking of the Democratic emails as part of a scheme to put their favored candidate, Trump, in the White House.

The New York Times and other mainstream news outlets, which were strongly hostile to Trump, seized on the allegations, making them front-page news for the past several months despite the paucity of actual evidence that any collusion occurred or that the Russians were even the ones who obtained and distributed the emails.

WikiLeaks denied getting the material from the Russians, suggesting instead that two different American insiders were the sources.

A Witch Hunt?

How thin the Russia-Trump case is becomes evident in reading the Times’ op-ed by Louise Mensch. After introducing herself as someone who has “followed the Russian hacking story closely,” she lists 25 people by name, including various

Trump advisers as well as Internet moguls Mark Zuckerberg and Peter Thiel, who should be hauled before the House Intelligence Committee for interrogation along with unnamed executives of several corporations and banks.

“There are many more who need to be called but these would be a first step,” Mensch wrote. In reviewing Mensch’s long article, it’s unclear if she’s proposing only a “fishing expedition” or would prefer a full-fledged “witch hunt.”

At one point earlier in this process, I wrote an article warning that the “investigation” could become something of a “did-you-talk-to-a-Russian” inquisition. Some readers probably felt I was going too far, but that now appears to be exactly what is happening.

Many of Mensch’s suggestions pertain to people associated with the Trump campaign who gave speeches in Moscow or otherwise communicated with Russians. It appears any contact with a Russian, any discussion of disagreements between the U.S. and Russia, or any political comment that in any way echoes what some Russian may have said becomes “evidence” of collusion and treason.

The extremism of Mensch’s tendentious article is further illustrated by her suggestion that Trump should be impeached if there is any truth to his widely discredited tweet that Obama had ordered wiretaps on Trump Tower. She wrote:

“If … the president tweeted real news, he revealed the existence of intercepts that cover members of his team in a continuing investigation. That would be obstruction of justice, potentially an impeachable offense.”

Most of us who have reported on Trump’s bizarre “tapp” tweet have criticized him for making a serious charge without evidence (as well as his poor spelling), but Mensch seems to believe that the more serious offense would be if Trump somehow were telling the truth. She wants any truth-telling on this issue to be grounds for Trump’s impeachment, even though he may have been referring, in part, to her November article reporting on the FISA warrant that supposedly granted permission for members of Trump’s team to be put under electronic surveillance.

A Tinfoil Hat

To dramatize her arguments further, Mensch then demonstrates a thorough lack of knowledge about recent American history. She claims, “Never in American history has a president been suspected of collaborating with a hostile foreign power to win an election.”

Whatever you want to think about the 1980 October Surprise case – and there is substantial evidence that it was real – it definitely constituted an example in

American history when a president was “suspected of collaborating with a hostile foreign power to win an election.”

Another case in 1968, which now even The New York Times grudgingly accepts, involved Richard Nixon colluding with the South Vietnamese government to torpedo President Lyndon Johnson’s Paris peace talks to assure Nixon’s election. Although South Vietnam was then an ally, the allegations about Nixon also included outreach to North Vietnam, although Hanoi ended up sending a delegation to Paris while Saigon did not.

Yet, what is perhaps most shocking about Mensch’s op-ed and its prominent placement by the Times is that the story has all the elements of a “tinfoil-hat” conspiracy. It’s the sort of wild-eyed smearing of American citizens that the Times would normally deride as an offensive fantasy that would be mentioned only to mock the conspiracists.

But the Times is now so deep into its campaign to demonize Russia and to destroy Trump that all normal journalistic standards have long ago been tossed out the window.

While there are many valid reasons to protest Trump and his policies, this descent into a New McCarthyism is both grotesque (because it impugns the patriotism of Americans without evidence, only breathless questions) and dangerous (because it escalates the New Cold War with Russia, a confrontation that could stumble into a nuclear holocaust).

At such moments, supposedly serious newspapers like The New York Times should show extraordinary caution and care, not a reckless disregard for truth and fairness. But no one in Official Washington seems willing to play the role of attorney Joseph Welch when he finally stood up to Sen. Joe McCarthy with the famous question, “At long last, have you left no sense of decency?”

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

In Case You Missed…

Some of our special stories in February focused on the contentious beginning of the Trump presidency, the growing hysteria over Russia and the dangers of the New Cold War.

“**Dangers of Democratic Putin-Bashing**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 1, 2017

“**Ukraine Sabotages Trump’s Russia Detente**” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 1, 2017

“**‘Deflategate’ Cloud over the Super Bowl**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 2, 2017

“**The Irony of Trump’s Immigration Ban**” by Lawrence Davidson, Feb. 2 2017

“**Trump Veers Off Course with Iran Threats**” by Alastair Crooke, Feb. 2, 2017

“**A Reprise of the Iraq-WMD Fiasco?**” by James W Carden, Feb. 3, 2017

“**Trump Bends to Neocon Pressures**” by Andrew Spannaus, Feb. 3, 2017

“**Steering Trump Back to Endless War**” by Daniel Lazare, Feb. 4, 2017

“**How US Believes Impossible Things**” by William Blum, Feb. 5, 2017

“**What Trump’s ‘Great Wall’ Misses**” by William Blum, Feb. 6, 2017

“**Castigating Trump for Truth-Telling**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 7, 2017

“**Trump’s ‘Great Wall’ and the ‘Drug War’**” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 8, 2017

“**A Deadly Legacy: CIA’s Covert Laos War**” by Don North, Feb. 8, 2017

“**Trump’s Foreign Policy at a Crossroads**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 9, 2017

“**The Neocons’ Back-Door to Trump**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 10, 2017

“**Amnesty International Stokes Syrian War**” by Rick Sterling, Feb. 11, 2017

“**Deciphering Trump’s Opaque Foreign Policy**” by Alastair Crooke, Feb. 11, 2017

“**A Documentary You’ll Likely Never See**” by James DiEugenio, Feb. 13, 2017

“**The Negotiation Option with North Korea**” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 14, 2017

“**Trump Caves on Flynn’s Resignation**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 14, 2017

“**Trump’s Dysfunctional White House**” by Lawrence Davidson, Feb. 15, 2017

“**A Dangerous Hysteria on Russia**” by James W Carden, Feb. 15, 2017

“**German Intel Clears Russia on Interference**” by Ray McGovern, Feb. 15, 2017

“**Toxic Policies of ‘President Agent Orange’**” by Marjorie Cohn, Feb. 16, 2017

“**Tulsi Gabbard vs. ‘Regime Change’ Wars**” by Col. Ann Wright, Feb. 16, 2017

“**Making Puppy Mills Great Again**” by JP Sottile, Feb. 16, 2017

“**‘Deep State’ Has Trump on the Menu**” by Alastair Crooke, Feb. 17, 2017

“**Democrats, Liberals Catch McCarthyistic Fever**” by Daniel Lazare, Feb. 17, 2017

“**The Did-You-Talk-to-Russians Witch Hunt**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 18, 2017

“**Democratic Ex-Dove Proposes War on Iran**” by Nicolas J S Davies, Feb. 19, 2017

“**Challenging Klobuchar on Ukraine War**” by Mike Madden, Feb. 19, 2017

“**Was Thomas Jefferson a Rapist?**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 20, 2017

“**Trump’s Foreign Policy: Retreat or Rout?**” by Gilbert Doctorow, Feb. 20, 2017

“**The West’s Moral Hypocrisy on Yemen**” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 21, 2017

“**NYT’s Fake News about Fake News**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 22, 2017

“**California Resists Trump on Immigration**” by Dennis J Bernstein, Feb. 22, 2017

“**How Trump Could Be a Truth-teller**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 23, 2017

“**Israel’s Dead-End Dilemma**” by John Chuckman, Feb. 23, 2017

“**Syrian War Propaganda at the Oscars**” by Rick Sterling, Feb. 24, 2017

“**Who’s Behind US Downward-Mobility?**” by JP Sottile, Feb. 24, 2017

“**How ‘New Cold Warriors’ Cornered Trump**” by Gareth Porter, Feb. 25, 2016

“**A Nazi Skeleton in the Family Closet**” by Arina Tsukanova, Feb. 27, 2017

“**The Risk of Baiting Trump on Russia**” by Norman Solomon, Feb. 27, 2017

“**NATO’s Strange Addition of Montenegro**” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 28, 2017

“**Mainstream Media’s ‘Victimhood’**” by Robert Parry, Feb. 28, 2017

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The Kagans Are Back; Wars to Follow

Exclusive: The neocon royalty Kagans are counting on Democrats and liberals to be the foot soldiers in the new neocon campaign to push Republicans and President Trump into more “regime change” wars, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Kagan family, America’s neoconservative aristocracy, has reemerged having recovered from the letdown over not gaining its expected influence from the election of Hillary Clinton and from its loss of official power at the start of the Trump presidency.

Back pontificating on prominent op-ed pages, the Family Kagan now is pushing for an expanded U.S. military invasion of Syria and baiting Republicans for not joining more enthusiastically in the anti-Russian witch hunt over Moscow’s alleged help in electing Donald Trump.

In a Washington Post op-ed on March 7, Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century and a key architect of the Iraq War, jabbed at Republicans for serving as “Russia’s accomplices after the fact” by not investigating more aggressively.

Then, Frederick Kagan, director of the Critical Threats Project at the neocon American Enterprise Institute, and his wife, Kimberly Kagan, president of her own think tank, Institute for the Study of War, touted the idea of a bigger U.S. invasion of Syria in a Wall Street Journal op-ed on March 15.

Yet, as much standing as the Kagans retain in Official Washington’s world of think tanks and op-ed placements, they remain mostly outside the new Trump-era power centers looking in, although they seem to have detected a door being forced open.

Still, a year ago, their prospects looked much brighter. They could pick from a large field of neocon-oriented Republican presidential contenders or – like Robert Kagan – they could support the establishment Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, whose “liberal interventionism” matched closely with neoconservatism, differing only slightly in the rationalizations used for justifying wars and more wars.

There was also hope that a President Hillary Clinton would recognize how sympatico the liberal hawks and the neocons were by promoting Robert Kagan’s neocon wife, Victoria Nuland, from Assistant Secretary of State for European

Affairs to Secretary of State.

Then, there would have been a powerful momentum for both increasing the U.S. military intervention in Syria and escalating the New Cold War with Russia, putting "regime change" back on the agenda for those two countries. So, early last year, the possibilities seemed endless for the Family Kagan to flex their muscles and make lots of money.

A Family Business

As I noted two years ago in an article entitled "A Family Business of Perpetual War": "Neoconservative pundit Robert Kagan and his wife, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, run a remarkable family business: she has sparked a hot war in Ukraine and helped launch Cold War II with Russia and he steps in to demand that Congress jack up military spending so America can meet these new security threats.

"This extraordinary husband-and-wife duo makes quite a one-two punch for the Military-Industrial Complex, an inside-outside team that creates the need for more military spending, applies political pressure to ensure higher appropriations, and watches as thankful weapons manufacturers lavish grants on like-minded hawkish Washington think tanks.

"Not only does the broader community of neoconservatives stand to benefit but so do other members of the Kagan clan, including Robert's brother Frederick at the American Enterprise Institute and his wife Kimberly, who runs her own shop called the Institute for the Study of War."

But things didn't quite turn out as the Kagans had drawn them up. The neocon Republicans stumbled through the GOP primaries losing out to Donald Trump and then – after Hillary Clinton muscled aside Sen. Bernie Sanders to claim the Democratic nomination – she fumbled away the general election to Trump.

After his surprising victory, Trump – for all his many shortcomings – recognized that the neocons were not his friends and mostly left them out in the cold. Nuland not only lost her politically appointed job as Assistant Secretary but resigned from the Foreign Service, too.

With Trump in the White House, Official Washington's neocon-dominated foreign policy establishment was down but far from out. The neocons were tossed a lifeline by Democrats and liberals who detested Trump so much that they were happy to pick up Nuland's fallen banner of the New Cold War with Russia. As part of a dubious scheme to drive Trump from office, Democrats and liberals hyped evidence-free allegations that Russia had colluded with Trump's team to rig the U.S. election.

New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman spoke for many of this group when he compared Russia's alleged "meddling" to Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor and Al Qaeda's 9/11 terror attacks.

On MSNBC's "Morning Joe" show, Friedman demanded that the Russia hacking allegations be treated as a casus belli: "That was a 9/11 scale event. They attacked the core of our democracy. That was a Pearl Harbor scale event." Both Pearl Harbor and 9/11 led to wars.

So, with many liberals blinded by their hatred of Trump, the path was open for neocons to reassert themselves.

Baiting Republicans

Robert Kagan took to the high-profile op-ed page of The Washington Post to bait key Republicans, such as Rep. Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee who was pictured above the Post article and its headline, "Running interference for Russia."

Kagan wrote: "It would have been impossible to imagine a year ago that the Republican Party's leaders would be effectively serving as enablers of Russian interference in this country's political system. Yet, astonishingly, that is the role the Republican Party is playing."

Kagan then reprised Official Washington's groupthink that accepted without skepticism the claims from President Obama's outgoing intelligence chiefs that Russia had "hacked" Democratic emails and released them via WikiLeaks to embarrass the Clinton campaign.

Though Obama's intelligence officials offered no verifiable evidence to support the claims – and WikiLeaks denied getting the two batches of emails from the Russians – the allegations were widely accepted across Official Washington as grounds for discrediting Trump and possibly seeking his removal from office.

Ignoring the political conflict of interest for Obama's appointees, Kagan judged that "given the significance of this particular finding [about Russian meddling], the evidence must be compelling" and justified "a serious, wide-ranging and open investigation."

But Kagan also must have recognized the potential for the neocons to claw their way back to power behind the smokescreen of a New Cold War with Russia.

He declared: "The most important question concerns Russia's ability to manipulate U.S. elections. That is not a political issue. It is a national security issue. If the Russian government did interfere in the United States'

electoral processes last year, then it has the capacity to do so in every election going forward. This is a powerful and dangerous weapon, more than warships or tanks or bombers.

“Neither Russia nor any potential adversary has the power to damage the U.S. political system with weapons of war. But by creating doubts about the validity, integrity and reliability of U.S. elections, it can shake that system to its foundations.”

A Different Reality

As alarmist as Kagan’s op-ed was, the reality was far different. Even if the Russians did hack the Democratic emails and somehow slipped the information to WikiLeaks – an unsubstantiated and disputed contention – those two rounds of email disclosures were not that significant to the election’s outcome.

Hillary Clinton blamed her surprise defeat on FBI Director James Comey briefly reopening the investigation into her use of a private email server while serving as Secretary of State.

Further, by all accounts, the WikiLeaks-released emails were real and revealed wrongdoing by leading Democrats, such as the Democratic National Committee’s tilting of the primaries against Sen. Bernie Sanders and in favor of Clinton. The emails of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta disclosed the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street, which she was trying to hide from voters, as well as some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

In other words, the WikiLeaks’ releases helped inform American voters about abuses to the U.S. democratic process. The emails were not “disinformation” or “fake news.” They were real news.

A similar disclosure occurred both before the election and this week when someone leaked details about Trump’s tax returns, which are protected by law. However, except for the Trump camp, almost no one thought that this illegal act of releasing a citizen’s tax returns was somehow a threat to American democracy.

The general feeling was that Americans have a right to know such details about someone seeking the White House. I agree, but doesn’t it equally follow that we had a right to know about the DNC abusing its power to grease the skids for Clinton’s nomination, about the contents of Clinton’s speeches to Wall Street bankers, and about foreign governments seeking pay-to-play influence by contributing to the Clinton Foundation?

Yet, because Obama’s political appointees in the U.S. intelligence community “assess” that Russia was the source of the WikiLeaks emails, the assault on U.S.

democracy is a reason for World War III.

More Loose Talk

But Kagan was not satisfied with unsubstantiated accusations regarding Russia undermining U.S. democracy. He asserted as "fact" – although again without presenting evidence – that Russia is "interfering in the coming elections in France and Germany, and it has already interfered in Italy's recent referendum and in numerous other elections across Europe. Russia is deploying this weapon against as many democracies as it can to sap public confidence in democratic institutions."

There's been a lot of handwringing in Official Washington and across the Mainstream Media about the "post-truth" era, but these supposed avatars for truth are as guilty as anyone, acting as if constantly repeating a fact-free claim is the same as proving it.

But it's clear what Kagan and other neocons have in mind, an escalation of hostilities with Russia and a substantial increase in spending on U.S. military hardware and on Western propaganda to "counter" what is deemed "Russian propaganda."

Kagan recognizes that he already has many key Democrats and liberals on his side. So he is taking aim at Republicans to force them to join in the full-throated Russia-bashing, writing:

"But it is the Republicans who are covering up. The party's current leader, the president, questions the intelligence community's findings, motives and integrity. Republican leaders in Congress have opposed the creation of any special investigating committee, either inside or outside Congress. They have insisted that inquiries be conducted by the two intelligence committees.

"Yet the Republican chairman of the committee in the House has indicated that he sees no great urgency to the investigation and has even questioned the seriousness and validity of the accusations. The Republican chairman of the committee in the Senate has approached the task grudgingly.

"The result is that the investigations seem destined to move slowly, produce little information and provide even less to the public. It is hard not to conclude that this is precisely the intent of the Republican Party's leadership, both in the White House and Congress. …

"When Republicans stand in the way of thorough, open and immediate investigations, they become Russia's accomplices after the fact."

Lying with the Neocons

Many Democrats and liberals may find it encouraging that a leading neocon who helped pave the road to war in Iraq is now by their side in running down Republicans for not enthusiastically joining the latest Russian witch hunt. But they also might pause to ask themselves how they let their hatred of Trump get them into an alliance with the neocons.

On Wednesday in The Wall Street Journal, Robert Kagan's brother Frederick and his wife Kimberly dropped the other shoe, laying out the neocons' long-held dream of a full-scale U.S. invasion of Syria, a project that was put on hold in 2004 because of U.S. military reversals in Iraq.

But the neocons have long lusted for "regime change" in Syria and were not satisfied with Obama's arming of anti-government rebels and the limited infiltration of U.S. Special Forces into northern Syria to assist in the retaking of the Islamic State's "capital" of Raqqa.

In the Journal op-ed, Frederick and Kimberly Kagan call for opening a new military front in southeastern Syria:

"American military forces will be necessary. But the U.S. can recruit new Sunni Arab partners by fighting alongside them in their land. The goal in the beginning must be against ISIS because it controls the last areas in Syria where the U.S. can reasonably hope to find Sunni allies not yet under the influence of al Qaeda. But the aim after evicting ISIS must be to raise a Sunni Arab army that can ultimately defeat al Qaeda and help negotiate a settlement of the war.

"The U.S. will have to pressure the Assad regime, Iran and Russia to end the conflict on terms that the Sunni Arabs will accept. That will be easier to do with the independence and leverage of a secure base inside Syria. … President Trump should break through the flawed logic and poor planning that he inherited from his predecessor. He can transform this struggle, but only by transforming America's approach to it."

A New Scheme on Syria

In other words, the neocons are back to their clever word games and their strategic maneuverings to entice the U.S. military into a "regime change" project in Syria.

The neocons thought they had almost pulled off that goal by pinning a mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, on the Syrian government and mousetrapping Obama into launching a major U.S. air assault on the Syrian military.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin stepped in to arrange for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to surrender all his chemical weapons even as Assad continued to deny any role in the sarin attack.

Putin's interference in thwarting the neocons' dream of a Syrian "regime change" war moved Putin to the top of their enemies' list. Soon key neocons, such as National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman, were taking aim at Ukraine, which Gershman deemed "the biggest prize" and a steppingstone toward eventually ousting Putin in Moscow.

It fell to Assistant Secretary Victoria "Toria" Nuland to oversee the "regime change" in Ukraine. She was caught on an unsecured phone line in late January or early February 2014 discussing with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt how "to glue" or "to midwife" a change in Ukraine's elected government of President Viktor Yanukovych.

Several weeks later, neo-Nazi and ultranationalist street fighters spearheaded a violent assault on government buildings forcing Yanukovych and other officials to flee for their lives, with the U.S. government quickly hailing the coup regime as "legitimate."

But the Ukraine putsch led to the secession of Crimea and a bloody civil war in eastern Ukraine with ethnic Russians, events that the State Department and the mainstream Western media deemed "Russian aggression" or a "Russian invasion."

So, by the last years of the Obama administration, the stage was set for the neocons and the Family Kagan to lead the next stage of the strategy of cornering Russia and instituting a "regime change" in Syria.

All that was needed was for Hillary Clinton to be elected president. But these best-laid plans surprisingly went astray. Despite his overall unfitness for the presidency, Trump defeated Clinton, a bitter disappointment for the neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks.

Yet, the so-called "#Resistance" to Trump's presidency and President Obama's unprecedented use of his intelligence agencies to paint Trump as a Russian "Manchurian candidate" gave new hope to the neocons and their agenda.

It has taken them a few months to reorganize and regroup but they now see hope in pressuring Trump so hard regarding Russia that he will have little choice but to buy into their belligerent schemes.

As often is the case, the Family Kagan has charted the course of action – batter Republicans into joining the all-out Russia-bashing and then persuade a softened Trump to launch a full-scale invasion of Syria. In this endeavor, the Kagans

have Democrats and liberals as the foot soldiers.

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

When 'Disinformation' Is Truth

Exclusive: Democrats and liberals have climbed into bed with the neocons to push the "Russia-did-it" conspiracy theory as a way to "get Trump," but this New McCarthyism has grave dangers, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The anti-Russian McCarthyism that has spread out from the United States to encompass the European Union, Canada and Australia has at its core an implicit recognition that neoliberal economics and neoconservative foreign policy have failed.

When I recently asked a European journalist why this anti-Russian hysteria had taken root among mainstream European political parties, he answered with a question: "Do you think they can run on their success in handling the recession and the refugees?"

In other words, European voters are angry about the painful economic conditions that followed the Wall Street crash of 2008 and the destabilizing surge of immigrants fleeing from Western "regime change" wars in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan.

So, like the Democratic Party that doesn't want to engage in a soul-searching self-examination about Donald Trump's victory, the European "establishment" parties need a handy excuse to divert criticism – and that excuse is Russia, a blame-shifting that has allowed nearly every recent criticism of an establishment government official to be sloughed off as "Russian disinformation."

It doesn't even matter anymore that the criticism may be based on solid fact. Even truthful information is now deemed "Russian disinformation" or Russian-inspired "fake news."

We saw that in the Canadian mainstream media's denunciations of

Consortiumnews.com for running an article that pointed out that Canada's Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland had misrepresented her family history to white-out her maternal grandfather's role editing a Nazi newspaper in Poland that demonized Jews and justified the Holocaust.

Virtually every mainstream outlet in Canada rallied to Freeland's side when she dismissed our article as Russian disinformation. Only later did a few newspapers grudgingly acknowledge that our story was true and that Freeland knew it was true. Still, the attacks on us continued. We were labeled "Russian disinformationists," with no evidence needed to support the slander and no defense allowed.

Though arguably a small example, the Freeland story reflects what is happening across the Western mainstream news media. Almost every independent-minded news article that questions the establishment narratives on international affairs is dismissed as "Russian propaganda." The few politicians, academics and journalists who don't march in the establishment's parade are "Moscow stooges" or "Putin apologists."

The Russian Resistance

This anti-Russian hysteria began some years ago when Russian President Vladimir Putin made clear that Russia would no longer bow to dictates from Washington and Brussels. Russia bristled at the encroachment of NATO on its borders, rejected the neoconservative agenda of "regime change" wars in Muslim countries, and resisted the U.S.-backed putsch ousting Ukraine's elected president in 2014.

But the anti-Russian frenzy gained unstoppable momentum with the U.S. election in 2016. The Democrats, liberals and neoconservatives were horrified at the shocking upset of their presidential choice, Hillary Clinton, by the boorish and buffoonish Donald Trump.

After this bitter defeat, the losers looked for scapegoats rather than order up a serious autopsy on how they lost to the "unelectable" Trump, i.e, by choosing a corporate candidate who was associated with neoliberal economics and neoconservative war policies. Blaming Russia became the easy excuse that could unify the various pro-Clinton camps.

So, the Obama administration – in an unprecedented step – sought to poison the well for its successor by having the U.S. intelligence community put out evidence-lacking allegations about Russian "meddling" in the U.S. election to elect Trump.

The promoters of this Russia-did-it narrative merged with the "#Resistance" movement to do whatever was necessary to push Trump out of office. It didn't

seem to matter that there was very little evidence that the Russians actually did meddle in the election.

The chief claim was that the Russians gave WikiLeaks the Democratic emails revealing the Democratic National Committee's sabotage of Sen. Bernie Sanders's campaign and the emails of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta exposing the contents of Clinton's hidden speeches to Wall Street and some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

WikiLeaks denied getting the material from the Russians, but – more to the point – there was no evidence of collusion between Moscow and the Trump campaign, as even Obama's Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman have acknowledged. (The WikiLeaks disclosures also were not a major factor in Clinton's defeat, which she primarily blamed on FBI Director James Comey briefly reopening the investigation of her using a private email server while Secretary of State.)

Still, the absence of evidence has not deterred Democrats, liberals and neocons from spinning a vast Russian conspiracy theory that ties together Trump's past business dealings in Russia with the notion that somehow Putin foresaw that Trump would become U.S. president, an eventuality that nearly every American pundit considered an impossibility as recently as last year.

But skeptics of the Trump/Russia conspiracy – if they dare note that Putin would have needed the world's best Ouija board to foresee Trump's victory – must then prove that they are not "Russian propaganda/disinformation agents" for having these doubts.

New McCarthyism and Maddow

Given the emergence of this New Cold War, I suppose it made sense that we would soon have a New McCarthyism, although it may have come as a surprise that this witch-hunting is being led by the liberals and the mainstream media, albeit with important assistance from the neoconservatives who have long engaged in smearing the patriotism of anyone who doubted their geopolitical genius.

Remember back in 1984 when U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick, an early neocon, denounced traitorous Americans who would "blame America first."

But it appears now that many liberals and even progressives are so blinded by their hatred of Trump that they haven't thought through the wisdom of their new alliance with the neocons – or the fairness of smearing fellow Americans as "Putin apologists."

Meanwhile, mainstream news organizations have abandoned even the pretense of professional objectivity in their propagandistic approach toward anything related to Russia or Trump. For instance, I would defy anyone reading The New York Times' coverage of Russia to assess it as fair and balanced when it is clearly snarky and sneering.

It also turns out that this New McCarthyism has become profitable for its leading practitioners. The New York Times reported on Monday that the ratings for MSNBC's Rachel Maddow are soaring with her frequent anti-Russian rants.

"Now, rattled liberals are surging back [to network television], seeking catharsis, solidarity and relief," the Times wrote, citing a Kentucky woman explaining why she has become a devotee of Maddow: "She's always talking about the Russians!"

Frankly, for the past dozen years, I've wondered about Maddow. I first heard her on the radio in August 2005 when she was a summer fill-in at Air America reporting on President George W. Bush's Katrina fiasco, which she partly blamed on the deployment of Louisiana National Guard units to Iraq, so they couldn't help evacuate flooded New Orleans.

It was clear that Maddow was talented and her excoriation of the Iraq War was on point, although – by summer 2005 – it didn't require a huge amount of journalistic courage to slam Bush over the Iraq War. As I watched her career rise through a regular Air America gig to her show on MSNBC and then to stardom as an anchor on the network's election coverage, I always wondered whether she would put her lucrative corporate acceptance at risk and go against the grain at a tough journalistic moment.

Now, Maddow's behavior in becoming a modern-day mainstream-media Joe McCarthy has put my doubts to rest. She is riding high in the ratings by keeping her whip hand coming down hard on the bash-Russia steed. She is putting her career or her politics ahead of journalism.

Like so many other Democrat/liberal/neocon activists, Maddow not only ignores the evidentiary gaps in the Russia-did-it conspiracy theory but she seems oblivious to the dangers of her opportunism. By stirring up this McCarthyistic frenzy, she and her "never-Trump" allies make a rational policy toward nuclear-armed Russia nearly impossible. Thus, she is contributing to the real risk of a hot war with Russia that could lead to the annihilation of life on the planet.

Thin-Skinned Trump

One of the bitter ironies here is that Trump's critics correctly noted that his thin-skinned temperament made him unfit to possess the nuclear button, but they

are now egging him into a mano-a-mano confrontation with Putin. If Trump doesn't get the better of Putin in every situation, Trump will face renewed pummeling for "selling out" to the Russians.

Already, neocon Sen. Lindsey Graham has declared, "2017 is going to be a year of kicking Russia in the ass in Congress." If Trump doesn't go along, he will face battering from the likes of Maddow, The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and pretty much every mainstream news outlet. So, Trump may have no political choice but to get tough. But what happens when Putin pushes back?

In the past when I've made this point about the recklessness of Russia-bashing, I've been told that I'm being alarmist, that "kicking Russia in the ass" and baiting Trump to join in the kicking won't lead to a nuclear war, that the Russians aren't that stupid. Yeah, let's hope not.

On the upside of this anti-Russia strategy, the anti-Trump activists insist it is the most promising route to get rid of Trump, which they view as justifying almost any action. It's not for them to prove that Trump did conspire with Putin to rig the U.S. presidential election; it's enough to raise the suspicion and use it to push for Trump's impeachment.

As someone who has covered national security scandals since the 1980s, I am familiar with the kind of evidence that should be required for making serious allegations. For instance, when Brian Barger and I wrote the first story about Nicaraguan Contra drug trafficking in 1985 for The Associated Press, we had about two dozen sources, plus documents. Most of the sources were insiders – i.e., inside the Contra movement and inside the Reagan administration – who described how the operation was run. We had this evidence before we made any public accusation.

In the case of the Russia-Trump conspiracy theory, the U.S. intelligence community has presented almost no evidence of Russian "hacking" and admits that it has no evidence of Trump's collusion with the Russians. As far as we know, there is no insider who has described how this alleged conspiracy occurred.

That is not to say that some evidence might not eventually surface that confirms the Russia-Trump suspicions, but that is true of all conspiracy theories. Who knows, maybe Joe McCarthy was right about all those Communists inside the U.S. government secretly working for the Kremlin? Maybe he did have a real list of names. But that is what "witch hunts" are all about – investigations designed to prove a point whether true or not.

In this current case, however, the downside is not "just" the destruction of people's careers and a few imprisonments. The downside of playing chicken with

nuclear-armed Russia is the end of life as we know it. At such a moment, journalists and politicians should demand the highest standards of proof, not no proof at all.

Sometimes, I envision the argument that I would hear as the mushroom clouds begin rising over U.S. and Russian cities. If not incinerated in the first moments of the cataclysm, the "smart" people of the mainstream U.S. media (and their liberal and neocon allies) would be insisting that it wasn't their fault; it was someone else's fault; blame-shifting to the end.

So, as the Democrats and liberals join with the neocons in launching this New McCarthyism over Russia – and with people like Rachel Maddow leading the charge – what is arguably the most depressing fact is that there appears to be no Edward R. Murrow, a mainstream journalist with a conscience, anywhere on the horizon.

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

Another Russia 'Fake News' Red Herring

Exclusive: In the West, it's now common for politicians to shout Russian "fake news" when embarrassing facts come out – as happened with Canada's new foreign minister hiding a Nazi family skeleton, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

On Feb, 27, Consortiumnews.com published an article describing misrepresentations by Canada's new Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland about her Ukrainian maternal grandfather whom she has portrayed as a hero who struggled "to return freedom and democracy to Ukraine" but left out that he was a Nazi propagandist whose newspaper justified the slaughter of Jews.

Over the next week, the article entitled "A Nazi Skeleton in the Family Closet" by journalist Arina Tsukanova (which I personally edited and fact-checked) circulated enough that Freeland was asked about it by the Canadian news media. As often happens these days, Freeland chose not to tell the truth but rather portrayed the article as part of a Russian propaganda and disinformation campaign.

Freeland told reporters, “I don’t think it’s a secret. American officials have publicly said, and even [German Chancellor] Angela Merkel has publicly said, that there were efforts on the Russian side to destabilize Western democracies, and I think it shouldn’t come as a surprise if these same efforts were used against Canada. … I think that Canadians and indeed other Western countries should be prepared for similar efforts to be directed at them.”

Though Freeland did not comment directly on the truthfulness of our article, her office denied that her grandfather was a Nazi collaborator.

Other leaders of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s government joined in the counterattack. Citing the danger of Russian disinformation, Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale, said, “The situation is obviously one where we need to be alert.”

In an article on March 6, Canada’s Globe and Mail also rallied to Freeland’s defense claiming that she was “being targeted by allegations in pro-Moscow websites that her maternal Ukrainian grandfather was a Nazi collaborator.”

The newspaper also reached out to other experts to add their denunciations of Consortiumnews.com and other news sites that either reposted our story or ran a similar one.

“It is the continued Russian modus operandi that they have. Fake news, disinformation and targeting different individuals,” said Paul Grod, president of the Canadian Ukrainian Congress. “It is just so outlandish when you hear some of these allegations – whether they are directed at minister Freeland or others.”

The Globe and Mail also quoted Ukraine’s ambassador to Canada, Andriy Shevchenko, citing our supposedly fake news as “another reason … we should realize that Russia is waging a war against the free world. It is not just about Ukraine.”

The ambassador then offered some advice about standing up to the Russians and their disinformationists: “I am absolutely sure they will seek new targets in the free world so I would encourage our Canadian friends to be prepared for that, to stay strong and we will be happy to share our experience in how to deal with all these information wars.”

A Second-Day Story

The only problem with all these righteous condemnations was that the information about Freeland’s grandfather was true – and Freeland knew that it was true.

In a second-day story, The Globe and Mail had to revisit the issue, reporting that “Freeland knew for more than two decades that her maternal Ukrainian grandfather was the chief editor of a Nazi newspaper in occupied Poland that vilified Jews during the Second World War.”

In other words, not only was our story accurate but Freeland knowingly launched a deceptive attack on us and other news outlets to punish us for writing the truth.

And not only was our story correct but it was newsworthy, given Freeland’s fierce support for Ukrainian nationalism and her deep hatred of Russia. Canadians have a right to know what drives those passions in their Foreign Minister. In this case, her worldview derived from her grandparents who sided with Adolf Hitler and who fled to the West as the Soviet Red Army defeated the Nazis.

Yet, instead of fessing up and acknowledging these facts, Freeland chose to dissemble and slander journalists who were doing their job. And the smears didn’t entirely stop.

Even as the Globe and Mail admitted the reality about Freeland’s grandfather, it continued to disparage the journalists who had exposed the facts. The second line of the newspaper’s second-day article read: “Ms. Freeland’s family history has become a target for Russian forces seeking to discredit one of Canada’s highly placed defenders of Ukraine.”

This pattern has become all too common in the West, to insult and discredit anyone who doesn’t accept the “groupthinks” about the New Cold War. Just as the major news media marched in lockstep over the Iraq-WMD falsehoods, so it has been toeing the line on the hysteria over supposed “Russian propaganda” and “fake news.”

Hidden History

In its second bite at the apple, the Globe and Mail noted that “Ms. Freeland, who has paid tribute to her maternal grandparents in articles and books, helped edit a scholarly article in the Journal of Ukrainian Studies in 1996 that revealed her grandfather, Michael Chomiak, was a Nazi propagandist for Krakivski Visti (Krakow News).

“Krakivski Visti was set up in 1940 by the German army and supervised by German intelligence officer Emil Gassert. Its printing presses and offices were confiscated by the Germans from a Jewish publisher, who was later murdered at the Belzec concentration camp.” All of that was reported in our Feb. 27 article.

The Journal of Ukrainian Studies article was written by Freeland's uncle, John-Paul Himka, a professor emeritus at the University of Alberta, who credits help from Freeland in the foreword. However, as the Globe and Mail wrote, "Ms. Freeland has never acknowledged that her grandfather was a Nazi collaborator and suggested on Monday that the allegation was part of a Russian disinformation campaign."

Some members of Freeland's family have tried to recast the storyline to portray Chomiak as something of a double agent, but Himka said he was never able to verify this information, which he called "fragmentary and one-sided," the Globe and Mail reported.

Himka added that he never knew that Chomiak had worked for the Nazis until after his father-in-law died and left behind copies of Krakivski Visti in his personal papers.

The day after her initial comments on our article, Freeland's office offered a brief statement: "Dating back many years, the Minister has supported her uncle's efforts to study and publish on this difficult chapter in her late grandfather's past."

But Freeland, who has a background as a journalist herself, did not explain why she chose initially to dissemble about her grandfather and to slander journalists who were telling the truth.

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

Fresh Doubts about Russian 'Hacking'

Exclusive: The gauzy allegations of Russia "hacking" the Democrats to elect Donald Trump just got hazier with WikiLeaks' new revelations about CIA cyber-spying and the capability to pin the blame on others, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

WikiLeaks' disclosure of documents revealing CIA cyber-spying capabilities underscores why much more skepticism should have been applied to the U.S. intelligence community's allegations about Russia "hacking" last year's American

presidential election. It turns out that the CIA maintains a library of foreign malware that could be used to pin the blame for a “hack” on another intelligence service.

That revelation emerged from documents that WikiLeaks published on Tuesday from a CIA archive that WikiLeaks said had apparently been passed around within a community of former U.S. government hackers and contractors before one of them gave WikiLeaks some of the material.

The documents revealed that the CIA can capture the content of encrypted Internet and cell-phone messages by grabbing the material in the fraction of a second before the words are put through encryption.

Another program called “Weeping Angel” can hack Samsung “smart” TVs with built-in Internet connections, allowing the CIA and British intelligence to covertly use the TVs as listening devices even when they appear to be turned off.

Besides the *1984*-ish aspects of these reported capabilities – Orwell’s dystopia also envisioned TVs being used to spy on people in their homes – the WikiLeaks’ disclosures add a new layer of mystery to whether the Russians were behind the “hacks” of the Democratic Party or whether Moscow was framed.

For instance, the widely cited Russian fingerprints on the “hacking” attacks – such as malware associated with the suspected Russian cyber-attackers APT 28 (also known as “Fancy Bear”); some Cyrillic letters: and the phrase “Felix Edmundovich,” a reference to Dzerzhinsky, the founder of a Bolsheviks’ secret police – look less like proof of Russian guilt than they did earlier.

Or put differently – based on the newly available CIA material – the possibility that these telltale signs were planted to incriminate Moscow doesn’t sound as farfetched as it might have earlier.

A former U.S. intelligence officer, cited by The Wall Street Journal on Wednesday, acknowledged that the CIA’s “Umbrage” library of foreign hacking tools could “be used to mask a U.S. operation and make it appear that it was carried out by another country…. That could be accomplished by inserting malware components from, say, a known Chinese, Russian or Iranian hacking operation into a U.S. one.”

While that possibility in no way clears Moscow in the case of the Democratic “hack,” it does inject new uncertainty into the “high confidence” that President Obama’s intelligence community expressed in its assessment of Russian culpability. If the CIA had this capability to plant false leads in the data, so too would other actors, both government and private, to cover their own tracks.

Dubious Forensics

Another problem with the U.S. intelligence community's assessment is that the forensics were left to private contractors working for the Democrats, not conducted independently by U.S. government experts.

That gap in the evidentiary trail widens when one notes that CrowdStrike, the Democratic Party's consultant, offered contradictory commentary about the skills of the hackers.

CrowdStrike praised the hackers' tradecraft as "superb, operational security second to none" and added: "we identified advanced methods consistent with nation-state level capabilities including deliberate targeting and 'access management' tradecraft – both groups were constantly going back into the environment to change out their implants, modify persistent methods, move to new Command & Control channels and perform other tasks to try to stay ahead of being detected."

In other words, CrowdStrike cited the sophistication of the tradecraft as proof of a state-sponsored cyber-attack, yet it was the sloppiness of the tradecraft that supposedly revealed the Russian links, i.e. the old malware connections, the Cyrillic letters and the Dzerzhinsky reference.

As Sam Biddle wrote for The Intercept, "Would a group whose 'tradecraft is superb' with 'operational security second to none' really leave behind the name of a Soviet spy chief imprinted on a document it sent to American journalists? Would these groups really be dumb enough to leave cyrillic comments on these documents? Would these groups that 'constantly [go] back into the environment to change out their implants, modify persistent methods, move to new Command & Control channels' get caught because they precisely *didn't* make sure not to use IP addresses they'd been associated [with] before?

"It's very hard to buy the argument that the Democrats were hacked by one of the most sophisticated, diabolical foreign intelligence services in history, and that we know this because they screwed up over and over again."

Sources and Methods

The WikiLeaks' disclosures on Tuesday also demonstrate that the pro-transparency Web site has a well-placed source with access to sensitive U.S. intelligence data.

That reinforces the suggestion from WikiLeaks' associate, former British Ambassador Craig Murray, that the emails purloined from Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta originated from U.S. intelligence intercepts and

were then leaked by an American insider to WikiLeaks, not obtained via a “hack” directed by the Russian government.

Podesta’s association with the international lobbying firm, the Podesta Group, could justify U.S. intelligence monitoring his communications as a way to glean information about the strategies of Saudi Arabia and other foreign clients.

Murray suggested that the earlier WikiLeaks’ release of Democratic National Committee emails came from a Democratic insider, not from Russia. In addition, WikiLeaks’ founder Julian Assange has denied that Russia was the source of either batch of Democratic emails, although he refused to say who was.

Of course, it would be possible that Russia used American cutouts to launder the emails without WikiLeaks knowing where the material originated. And some cyber-experts, who were cited in press reports about the new WikiLeaks’ disclosures on Tuesday, speculated, without evidence, that perhaps Russia was the source of them, too.

Still, there are now fresh reasons to doubt the Official Narrative that Russia “hacked” into Democratic emails in a covert operation intended to throw the U.S. election to Donald Trump.

Those doubts already existed – or should have – because the U.S. intelligence community refused to release any hard proof that the Russians were responsible for the purloined Democratic emails.

On Jan. 6, just one day after Director of National Intelligence James Clapper vowed to go to the greatest possible lengths to supply the public with the evidence behind the accusations, his office released a 25-page report that contained no direct evidence that Russia delivered hacked emails from the DNC and Podesta to WikiLeaks.

The DNI report amounted to a compendium of reasons to suspect that Russia was the source of the information – built largely on the argument that Russia had a motive for doing so because of its disdain for Democratic nominee Clinton and the potential for friendlier relations with Republican nominee Trump.

A Big Risk

But the DNI’s case, as presented, was one-sided, ignoring other reasons why the Russians would not have taken the risk.

For instance, while it is true that many Russian officials, including President Putin, considered Clinton to be a threat to worsen the already frayed relationship between the two nuclear superpowers, the report ignores the

downside for Russia trying to interfere with the U.S. election campaign and then failing to stop Clinton, which looked like the most likely outcome until Election Night.

If Russia had accessed the DNC and Podesta emails and slipped them to WikiLeaks for publication, Putin would have to think that the National Security Agency, with its exceptional ability to track electronic communications around the world, might well have detected the maneuver and would have informed Clinton.

So, on top of Clinton's well-known hawkishness, Putin would have risked handing the expected incoming president a personal reason to take revenge on him and his country. Historically, Russia has been very careful in such situations, holding its intelligence collections for internal purposes only and not sharing them with the public.

While it is conceivable that Putin decided to take this extraordinary risk in this case – despite the widely held view that Clinton was a shoo-in to defeat Trump – an objective report would have examined this counter argument for him not doing so.

But the DNI report was not driven by a desire to be evenhanded; it was, in effect, a prosecutor's brief, albeit one that lacked any real evidence that the accused is guilty.

Though it's impossible for an average U.S. citizen to know precisely what the U.S. intelligence community may have in its secret files, some former NSA officials who are familiar with the agency's eavesdropping capabilities say Washington's lack of certainty suggests that the NSA does not possess such evidence.

That's the view of William Binney, who retired as NSA's technical director of world military and geopolitical analysis and who created many of the collection systems still used by NSA.

Binney, in an article co-written with former CIA analyst Ray McGovern, said, "With respect to the alleged interference by Russia and WikiLeaks in the U.S. election, it is a major mystery why U.S. intelligence feels it must rely on 'circumstantial evidence,' when it has NSA's vacuum cleaner sucking up hard evidence galore. What we know of NSA's capabilities shows that the email disclosures were from leaking, not hacking."

Released last summer – around the time of the Democratic National Convention – the DNC emails revealed senior party officials showing a preference for former Secretary of State Clinton over Sen. Bernie Sanders although the DNC was supposed to remain neutral.

Later in the campaign, the Podesta leak exposed the contents of speeches that Clinton gave to Wall Street banks, which she wanted to keep secret from the American voters, and the existence of pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

News articles based on the WikiLeaks' material embarrassed the DNC and the Clinton campaign, but the rupture of secrets was not considered a very important factor in Clinton's loss to Donald Trump. Clinton herself blamed that surprising outcome on FBI Director James Comey's last-minute decision to briefly reopen the investigation into her improper use of a private server for her emails as Secretary of State.

After Comey's move, Clinton's poll numbers cratered and she seemed incapable of reversing the trend. More generally, Clinton faced criticism for running an inept campaign that included her insulting many Trump supporters by calling them "deplorables" and failing to articulate a clear, hopeful vision for the future.

However, after the shock of Trump's stunning victory began to wear off, the outgoing Obama administration and angry Democrats began singling out Putin as a chief culprit in Clinton's defeat.

Despite the appearance that they were scapegoating America's old adversary – the Russkies – liberals and Democrats have used the allegations to energize their base and put the young Trump administration on the defensive, even though hard evidence to support the accusations is still lacking.

The liberals and Democrats also don't seem to care that they are using these dubious allegations to ratchet up tensions between the world's two nuclear superpowers, thus putting the future of the world at risk.

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