

# 'Getting Trump' with the New McCarthyism

**Special Report:** Many Democrats and progressives are embracing a New McCarthyism in their drive to negate last November's election and remove President Trump from office, but is that right, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Yes, I get it. A lot of people want to remove Donald Trump from the presidency for a lot of understandable reasons: his breathtaking incompetence, his relentless narcissism, his destructive policies, etc. But he was elected under the U.S. constitutional system. He may have lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by nearly three million ballots but he did prevail in the Electoral College.

And, unlike George W. Bush, who also lost the popular vote, Trump didn't have to steal Florida – and thus the White House – by enlisting Republican justices on the U.S. Supreme Court to stop the vote count prematurely. We now know that if all the ballots considered legal under Florida law had been counted Al Gore would have won regardless of which standard of "chad" was used. But Trump didn't have to resort to such bald-faced cheating.

And, yes, of course, there were many other problems with the election, such as Republican efforts to suppress African-American and other minority votes. But it's not as if the U.S. electoral process has ever been the gold standard of democracy that some Americans like to believe. The system has now – and always has had – serious shortcomings, but it also has enabled the diverse United States to function for more than two centuries without major political violence, with the exception of the Civil War when the process broke down over the South's insistence on slavery.

So, whether one likes it or not – and many people really don't like it – Donald Trump is the constitutionally elected President of the United States. And, despite the many imperfections in that electoral process, the idea of negating a presidential election is very serious business.

Whatever the hurt feelings of the editors at The New York Times and The Washington Post, whatever snarky jokes are told on late-night TV, whatever connect-the-dots conspiracy theories are popular on MSNBC, the idea of telling 63 million Americans that their votes don't count, that the elites know best, that the President who won under the rules of the game must be ridden out of Washington on a rail will not go down as easily as some people think.

## New McCarthyism

National Democrats and many progressives are also embracing a troubling New McCarthyism to justify what amounts to a “soft coup” against Trump.

In a normal world – after Tuesday’s testimony before the House Intelligence Committee – former CIA Director John Brennan would have been led away in a straitjacket or given the role of General Jack D. Ripper in a remake of the Cold War dark comedy, “Dr. Strangelove.” Instead, Brennan’s Russo-phobic ramblings were made the lead story in the Times, the Post and other major American newspapers.

While General Ripper worried about Russian operatives polluting our “precious bodily fluids,” Brennan warned that any conversation with a Russian or some Russian intermediary might put Americans on a treasonous path even if they “do not even realize they are on that path until it gets too late.”

He also testified, “I know what the Russians try to do. They try to suborn individuals and try to get individuals, including U.S. individuals, to act on their behalf, wittingly or unwittingly.” In other words, any American who has some contact with Russia or Russians may be a spy or mole whether he or she knows it or not. Subversion or possible subversion is everywhere. Trust no one.

Yes, I’m sure those devious Russ-kies do what all intelligence agencies, including the CIA, seek to do. And, in many cases, there is nothing wrong with the process. Unofficial give-and-take between adversaries can increase understanding – and that can be especially important to the future of humankind when the United States and Russia are still armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons.

Indeed, such informal contacts may have helped avert nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis when Washington-based KGB station chief Aleksandr Feklisov approached ABC News correspondent John Scali with a plan to dismantle missile bases in Cuba in return for a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba. Though there remain historical questions about the significance of that initiative, it shows the value that such contacts can have despite the alarmist concerns raised by the likes of Brennan. In the New Cold War, we’d have to investigate Scali’s loyalty.

Despite the paranoid fantasies, Brennan’s testimony was widely praised as he suggested that any dealing with Russia or Russians or Russian businesses or possible Russian cutouts could put an American under counterintelligence suspicions because, hey, you never know.

“We see that Russian intelligence agencies do not hesitate at all to use private

companies and Russian persons who are unaffiliated with the Russian government to support their objectives,” Brennan warned.

### **No Edward R. Murrow**

There was a time when some Democrats, some Republicans and a few courageous journalists objected to this kind of broad-brush challenge to the patriotism of American citizens. CBS News correspondent Edward R. Murrow famously stood up to Sen. Joe McCarthy and his Red Scare in the 1950s. It was then-Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton who chastised President George H.W. Bush during a 1992 presidential debate for making an issue of Clinton’s student trip to Moscow during the Cold War.

After Bush referenced Clinton’s Moscow visit, Clinton hit back: “When Joe McCarthy went around this country attacking people’s patriotism, he was wrong. He was wrong, and a senator from Connecticut stood up to him, named Prescott Bush. Your father was right to stand up to Joe McCarthy. You were wrong to attack my patriotism.”

But that was then. These days, Hillary Clinton and her Democratic allies have led the smearing of Trump supporters as possible Kremlin agents, albeit without proof of the so-called “collusion” or even clear evidence that Russia did “meddle” in last November’s election.

And the backdrop for this New Cold War is that since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 – and the end of the Old Cold War – many Americans have done business in Russia and many Russians have invested in the United States. A Russian oligarch, Mikhail Prokhorov, even owns the Brooklyn Nets of the National Basketball Association.

The recent tensions are also not entirely the making of Russia or its President Vladimir Putin. The past several U.S. administrations have exploited the disarray from the Soviet collapse to push NATO up to Russia’s borders.

U.S. officials also encouraged the violent 2014 putsch in Ukraine that overthrew elected President Viktor Yanukovich. Actively involved in Yanukovich’s overthrow were senior U.S. officials, including Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, and Sen. John McCain. Several weeks before the coup, Nuland and Pyatt were caught on an unsecure phone line discussing who should take over the Ukrainian government and musing how to “midwife” or “glue this thing.”

The coup also followed the specific targeting of Ukraine as “the biggest prize” by neocon Carl Gershman, the president of the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy, which sponsored scores of political and media

operations inside Ukraine. (Gershman is now calling for regime change in Russia.)

But the U.S. mainstream media essentially ignored this evidence of U.S. complicity in the Ukraine coup and accepted the State Department's propaganda line that the post-coup resistance to Yanukovich's overthrow among ethnic Russians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine was simply the result of "Russian aggression." The New York Times even denied that there had been a coup in an article that studiously ignored the evidence that there had been a coup, including the Nuland-Pyatt phone call.

### **Swallowing U.S. Propaganda**

Similarly, the mainstream U.S. media has swallowed every evidence-free claim from the Obama administration's intelligence agencies without any skepticism. Indeed, the MSM has hyped those claims beyond even what the Obama team says by ignoring factual admissions from former CIA Director Brennan and former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper about the limited nature of the intelligence "assessment" on Russian election interference.

The MSM has so enjoyed claiming that the Russian "meddling" allegations are the consensus judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies that a blind eye and a deaf ear have been turned to Brennan and Clapper contradicting that beloved groupthink.

In recent testimony, Clapper and Brennan acknowledged that the Jan. 6 report alleging Russian "meddling" was actually the work of hand-picked analysts from only four agencies – the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation under the oversight of the DNI's office. But that fact continues to be ignored by the MSM, with the Post on Wednesday castigating Trump for refusing "to fully accept the unanimous conclusion of U.S. intelligence agencies."

If a non-MSM news outlet had published such a misleading claim from a different perspective – after U.S. senior officials had denied it – we would be hearing charges of "fake news" or perhaps accusations of "Russian disinformation." But clearly the Post doesn't want to give up on this formulation of unanimity among the 17 intelligence agencies even if it's not true.

The Post must feel that it's less impressive to say that the Russia-did-it conclusion was reached by "hand-picked" analysts at four agencies while other intelligence agencies, which could have supplied important context, such as the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, were excluded.

What has also been remarkable about the months-long investigations into alleged

Russian “meddling” is how little evidence has been evinced to support the accusations. While there has been a parade of Obama appointees testifying before Congress – making broad accusations while demurring whenever evidence is requested on the grounds of secrecy or privacy – we haven’t heard from any of the people accused of having these untoward contacts with Russians, even though some have volunteered to testify.

“I’m not going to identify the individuals [under suspicion] because this is information that, again, is based on classified sources and intelligence,” Brennan said on Tuesday, although the identities of the suspected “traitors” have been widely publicized through leaks to the major U.S. news media.

### **Speaking Up**

One of those Americans, onetime Trump foreign policy adviser Carter Page, responded to Brennan’s testimony in a letter to the House Intelligence Committee.

Page noted he was “an unpaid, informal” adviser to the campaign and “throughout my interactions with the Russians in 2016, I consistently made it crystal clear that all of my benign statements and harmless actions in Moscow as well as elsewhere overseas were solely made as a scholar and a business person speaking only on behalf of myself. In other words, in no way connected to then-candidate Trump. Both in Russia and in countries around the world, this was precisely the same position I had maintained stretching back over a decade.”

Regarding Brennan’s demurrals about naming names, Page pointed out that it has been widely reported that he was put under a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant. According to press accounts, that was, in part, because of a speech he made in Moscow in 2016. His identity, in communications intercepted by U.S. intelligence, had already been “unmasked” or exposed to the public, but whatever evidence there is against him has been hidden.

Page wrote: “underscoring what a complete mockery this process has become, my identity has already been publicly revealed in the wake of the felonies committed [by the Obama administration, including] baseless FISA warrant, Male-1 unmasking, etc.).

“Serving as a loyal Clinton/Obama regime surrogate, Brennan’s spineless practice of hiding behind this lame confidentiality excuse rather than taking any responsibility for their illegal actions only stirs up more misunderstanding and illegitimate fears which continue to damage our great country. This further underscores the urgent need for the public disclosure of these related documents.”

## Joining the Stampede

Yet, congressional Democrats have recognized the political gain that they can extract from this New McCarthyism, as reflected in an exchange between Rep. Jim Himes, D-Connecticut, and Brennan at Tuesday's hearing. Himes cited a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a leading think tank for the Military-Industrial Complex.

Himes said: "I want to use my five minutes to try to paint a more specific picture around the methods and mechanisms that the Russians used to suborn ... our democracy and our electoral process. And I want to start with a quote by a report I know you're familiar with, CSIS' report, 'The Kremlin Playbook' in which they say that Russia, quote, 'Seeks to corrode democracy from within by deepening political divides,' unquote.

"The Russians stir the pot, heighten anxieties and know that when they trigger chaos, even if it ends up negatively affecting them, that they are serving the purpose of weakening us. I want to talk about people because you made reference to people and I don't want to do it specifically, I want to do it in the abstract.

"'The Kremlin Playbook' ... says further that Russia looks to corrode democracy by, quote, 'Investing in rising politicians, cultivating relationships with prominent businessmen, or helping to ensure that its business affiliates become well-positioned in government.'

"Mr. Brennan, assuming that you agree with that, how specifically has the Kremlin gone about cultivating relationships with key Americans in an effort ... to influence our policy?"

Brennan: "It is traditional intelligence collection tradecraft ... to identify individuals that you think are either very influential or rising stars, and you will try to develop a relationship with them and the Russians frequently will do that through cutouts or through false-flag operations. They won't identify themselves as Russians or as members of Russian government. They will try to develop a personal relationship and then over time they will try to get individuals to do things on their behalf.

"And that's why again, having been involved in a lot of counterintelligence cases over the years and seeing this pattern over and over again, my radar goes up when I see that the Russians are actively involved in a particular intelligence operational campaign and that U.S. persons are being contacted by Russian officials. ... these are contacts that might've been totally, totally innocent and benign as well as those that might have succumbed somehow to those

Russian efforts. ...”

Himes: “do Americans who are suborned in such a way ... do they necessarily need to know that they are doing Russia’s bidding?”

Brennan: “No, many times they do not. They do not even know that the person that they’re interacting with is a Russian. Many times they know that individuals may be Russian officials, but they don’t know that there is an intelligence connection or intelligence motive for behind it. ...”

### **No Doubts**

Himes: “There’s hardly anyone left today who doubts that Russia attacked us, but we have to realize the true thrust of the Russian attack is what they have triggered in us, the partisanship. Every time we refuse to face facts, every time we attack the messenger rather than confront the actions that happened, every time we undercut our allies in our alliances and our values, I think we’re playing precisely in the Russians fondest hopes.

“We’re doing something about that in my opinion, the gray, cold warriors, be it Ronald Reagan or Harry Truman would never have allowed.”

Responding to Hines’s comments, Page wrote: “This offers a precise depiction of the Clinton/Obama regime’s playbook based on their continued false evidence regarding former Trump campaign supporters such as myself, in the wake of their sad disappointment as sore losers. Immediate disclosure of their falsified FISA warrant documents upon which these same tactics were based last year is an essential way to cease this process which has been weakening all Americans.”

Page added, “Other gray, cold warriors of bygone eras had J. Edgar Hoover and Joseph McCarthy to do precisely this dirty work: attacking the messengers. In other words, attacking those who wanted to see positive changes in their country’s policies based on realistic strategies which can benefit all citizens while creating a viable pathway to increased peace around the world.”

A core problem with what Brennan and other Obama administration officials have set in motion is that the suspicions are so vague at this point – even some 10 months into the investigation – that a paranoia has taken over. There is a McCarthyistic element to these allegations, including guilt by association regarding any contact with any Russian or even some intermediary who might somehow be a Russian “false-flag.” Anyone or everyone might be a Russian “mole.”

So, yes, I get the desire to get rid of Trump because of his unfitness and ineptness. But the “Russia thing” – as Trump calls it – is unleashing an ugliness that many of us thought was a thing of the past, an era of evidence-

free accusations of disloyalty and a crazed hostility toward the other nuclear superpower that could end in a miscalculation that could end life on the planet. Is this really what Democrats and progressives want to embrace?

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

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## New Cracks in Russia-gate 'Assessment'

**Exclusive:** President Obama's ex-intelligence chiefs admit they limited input into the Russia-gate "assessment," which was handled by "hand-picked" analysts, raising the specter of politicized intelligence, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

At the center of the Russia-gate scandal is a curious U.S. intelligence "assessment" that was pulled together in less than a month and excluded many of the agencies that would normally weigh in on such an important topic as whether Russia tried to influence the outcome of a U.S. presidential election.

The Jan. 6 [report](#) and its allegation that Russia "hacked" Democratic emails and publicized them through WikiLeaks have been treated as gospel by the mainstream U.S. media and many politicians of both parties, but two senior Obama administration intelligence officials have provided new information that raises fresh doubts about the findings.

On Tuesday, former CIA Director John Brennan told the House Intelligence Committee that only four of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies took part in the assessment, relying on analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the oversight of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Brennan said the report "followed the general model of how you want to do something like this with some notable exceptions. It only involved the FBI, NSA and CIA as well as the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. It wasn't a full inter-agency community assessment that was coordinated among the 17 agencies, and for good reason because of the nature and the sensitivity of the information trying, once again, to keep that tightly compartmented."



But Brennan's excuse about "tightly compartmented" information was somewhat disingenuous because other intelligence agencies, such as the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), could have been consulted in a limited fashion, based on their areas of expertise. For instance, INR could have weighed in on whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would have taken the risk of trying to sabotage Hillary Clinton's campaign, knowing that – if she won as expected and learned of the operation – she might have sought revenge against him and his country.

The Jan. 6 report argued one side of the case – that Putin had a motive for undermining Clinton because he objected to her work as Secretary of State when she encouraged anti-Putin protests inside Russia – but the report ignored the counter-argument that the usually cautious Putin might well have feared infuriating the incoming U.S. President if the anti-Clinton ploy failed to block her election.

A balanced intelligence assessment would have included not just arguments for believing that the Russians did supply the Democratic emails to WikiLeaks but the reasons to doubt that they did.

### **Pre-Cooked Intelligence**

However, the restricted nature of the Jan. 6 report – limiting it to analysts from CIA, NSA and FBI – blocked the kind of expertise that the State Department, the Defense Department, the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies might have provided. In other words, the Jan. 6 report has the look of pre-cooked intelligence.

That impression was further strengthened by the admission of former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on May 8 that "the two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies."

Yet, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you "hand-pick" the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion. For instance, if the analysts were known to be hard-liners on Russia or supporters of Hillary Clinton, they could be expected to deliver the one-sided report that they did.

In the history of U.S. intelligence, we have seen how this approach has worked, such as the determination of the Reagan administration to pin the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II and other acts of terror on the Soviet Union.

CIA Director William Casey and Deputy Director Robert Gates shepherded the desired findings through the process by putting the assessment under the control of pliable analysts and sidelining those who objected to this politicization of

intelligence.

The point of enlisting the broader intelligence community – and incorporating dissents into a final report – is to guard against such “stove-piping” of intelligence that delivers the politically desired result but ultimately distorts reality.

Another painful example of politicized intelligence was President George W. Bush’s 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq’s WMD that removed INR’s and other dissents from the declassified version that was given to the public.

### **Lacking Evidence**

The Jan. 6 report – technically called an Intelligence Community Assessment (or ICA) – avoided the need to remove any dissents by excluding the intelligence agencies that might have dissented and by hand-picking the analysts who compiled the report.

However, like the declassified version of the Iraq NIE, the Russia-gate ICA lacked any solid evidence to support the conclusions. The ICA basically demanded that the American public “trust us” and got away with that bluff because much of the mainstream U.S. news media wanted to believe anything negative about then-President-elect Trump.

Because of that, the American people were repeatedly – and falsely – informed that the findings about Russian “hacking” reflected the collective judgment of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies, making anyone who dared question the conclusion seem like a crackpot or a “Russian apologist.”

Yet, based on the testimonies of Clapper and Brennan, we now know that the ICA represented only a hand-picked selection of the intelligence community – four, not 17, agencies.

There were other biases reflected in the ICA, such as a bizarre appendix that excoriated RT, the Russian television network, for supposedly undermining Americans’ confidence in their democratic process.

This seven-page appendix, dating from 2012, accused RT of portraying “the US electoral process as undemocratic” and offered such “proof” as RT’s staging of a debate among third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Republican-Democratic debates between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama.

“RT broadcast, hosted and advertised third-party candidate debates,” the report said, as if allowing political figures in the United States who were not part of the two-party system to express their views, was somehow anti-democratic, when

you might think that letting Americans hear alternatives was the essence of democracy.

“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 report continued. 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, So, the implicit RT criticism of the U.S. political process is certainly not out of the ordinary.

The 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).

### **Assessing or Guessing**

But at least the appendix offered up some “evidence” – as silly as those examples might have been. The main body of the report amounted to one “assessment” after another with no verifiable evidence included, at least in the unclassified version that the American people were allowed to see.

The report also contained a warning about how unreliable these “assessments” could be: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

In other words, “assessing” in intelligence terms often equates with “guessing” – and if the guessers are hand-picked by political appointees – it shouldn’t be surprising that they would come up with an “assessment” that would please their bosses, in this case, President Obama and his appointees at CIA, NSA, FBI and ODNI.

The timing and speed of the Jan. 6 report also drew some attention at Tuesday’s House Intelligence Committee hearing, where Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-New York, noted that President Obama requested the ICA on Dec. 9 and the last entry was dated Dec. 29.

“This report was produced in just 20 days in December,” Stefanik said, adding: “It’s of concern to me that there was a two-month lag” between when Obama’s intelligence agencies first alleged Russian “hacking” of Democratic emails and when Obama ordered the ICA.

Of course, the ICA's flaws do not mean that Russia is innocent or that WikiLeaks is telling the truth when it asserts that the two batches of Democratic emails – one from the Democratic National Committee and the other from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta – did not come from the Russians.

But the Jan. 6 report has served as the foundation for a series of investigations that have hobbled the Trump administration and could lead to the negation of a U.S. presidential election via the impeachment or forced resignation of President Trump.

The seriousness of that possibility would seem to demand the most thorough examination and the fullest vetting of the evidence. Even just the appearance that the ICA might be one more case of politicized intelligence would do more to destroy Americans' faith in their democratic system than anything that Putin might dream up.

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## US Journalism's New 'Golden Age'?

**Exclusive:** The Washington Post and other big media are hailing a new journalistic "golden age" as they punish President Trump for disparaging them, but is this media bias a sign of good journalism or itself a scandal, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The mainstream U.S. media is congratulating itself on its courageous defiance of President Trump and its hard-hitting condemnations of Russia, but the press seems to have forgotten that its proper role within the U.S. democratic structure is not to slant stories one way or another but to provide objective information for the American people.

By that standard – of respecting that the people are the nation's true sovereigns – the mainstream media is failing again. Indeed, the chasm between what America's elites are thinking these days and what many working-class

Americans are feeling is underscored by the high-fiving that's going on inside the elite mainstream news media, which is celebrating its Trump- and Russia-bashing as the "new golden age of American journalism."

The New York Times and The Washington Post, in particular, view themselves as embattled victims of a tyrannical abuser. The Times presents itself as the brave guardian of "truth" and the Post added a new slogan: "Democracy dies in darkness." In doing so, they have moved beyond the normal constraints of professional, objective journalism into political advocacy – and they are deeply proud of themselves.

In a Sunday column entitled "How Trump inspired a golden age," Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank wrote that Trump "took on the institution of a free press – and it fought back. Trump came to office after intimidating publishers, barring journalists from covering him and threatening to rewrite press laws, and he has sought to discredit the 'fake news' media at every chance. Instead, he wound up inspiring a new golden age in American journalism.

"Trump provoked the extraordinary work of reporters on the intelligence, justice and national security beats, who blew wide open the Russia election scandal, the contacts between Russia and top Trump officials, and interference by Trump in the FBI investigation. Last week's appointment of a special prosecutor – a crucial check on a president who lacks self-restraint – is a direct result of their work."

### **Journalism or Hatchet Job?**

But has this journalism been professional or has it been a hatchet job? Are we seeing a new "golden age" of journalism or a McCarthyistic lynch mob operating on behalf of elites who disdain the U.S. constitutional process for electing American presidents?

For one thing, you might have thought that professional journalists would have demanded proof about the predicate for this burgeoning "scandal" – whether the Russians really did "hack" into emails of the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta and then slip the information to WikiLeaks to influence the outcome of the 2016 election.

You have surely heard and read endlessly that this conclusion about Russia's skulduggery was the "consensus view of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies" and thus only some crazy conspiracy theorist would doubt its accuracy even if no specific evidence was evinced to support the accusation.

But that repeated assertion is not true. There was no National Intelligence Estimate (or NIE) that would compile the views of the 17 intelligence agencies.

Instead, as President Obama's Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on May 8, the Russia-hacking claim came from a "special intelligence community assessment" (or ICA) produced by selected analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation, or as Clapper put it, "a coordinated product from three agencies – CIA, NSA, and the FBI – not all 17 components of the intelligence community."

Further, as Clapper explained, the "ICA" was something of a rush job beginning on President Obama's instructions "in early December" and completed by Jan. 6, in other words, a month or less.

Clapper continued: "The two dozen or so analysts for this task were hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies." However, as any intelligence expert will tell you, if you "hand-pick" the analysts, you are really hand-picking the conclusion.

You can say the analysts worked independently but their selection, as advocates for one position or another, could itself dictate the outcome. If the analysts were hardliners on Russia or hated Trump, they could be expected to deliver the conclusion that Obama and Clapper wanted, i.e., challenging the legitimacy of Trump's election and blaming Russia.

The point of having a more substantive NIE is that it taps into a much broader network of U.S. intelligence analysts who have the right to insert dissents to the dominant opinions. So, for instance, when President George W. Bush belatedly ordered an NIE regarding Iraq's WMD in 2002, some analysts – especially at the State Department – inserted dissents (although they were expunged from the declassified version given to the American people to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq).

### **An Embarrassing Product**

Obama's "ICA," which was released on Jan. 6, was a piece of work that embarrassed many former U.S. intelligence analysts. It was a one-sided argument that lacked any specific evidence to support its findings. Its key point was that Russian President Vladimir Putin had a motive to authorize an information operation to help Hillary Clinton's rival, Donald Trump, because Putin disdained her work as Secretary of State.

But the Jan. 6 report failed to include the counter-argument to that *cui bono* assertion, that it would be an extraordinary risk for Putin to release information to hurt Clinton when she was the overwhelming favorite to win the presidency. Given the NSA's electronic-interception capabilities, Putin would

have to assume that any such undertaking would be picked up by U.S. intelligence and that he would likely be facing a vengeful new U.S. president on Jan. 20.

While it's possible that Putin still took the risk – despite the daunting odds against a Trump victory – a balanced intelligence assessment would have included such contrary arguments. Instead, the report had the look of a prosecutor's brief albeit without actual evidence pointing to the guilt of the accused.

Further, the report repeatedly used the word “assesses” – rather than “proves” or “establishes” – and the terminology is important because, in intelligence-world-speak, “assesses” often means “guesses.” The report admits as much, saying, “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

In other words, the predicate for the entire Russia-gate scandal, which may now lead to the impeachment of a U.S. president and thus the negation of the Constitution's electoral process, is based partly on a lie – i.e., the claim that the assessment comes from all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies – and partly on evidence-free speculation by a group of “hand-picked” analysts, chosen by Obama's intelligence chiefs.

Yet, the mainstream U.S. news media has neither corrected the false assertion about the 17 intelligence agencies nor demanded that actual evidence be made public to support the key allegation that Russia was the source of WikiLeaks' email dumps.

By the way, both Russia and WikiLeaks deny that Russia was the source, although it is certainly possible that the Russian government would lie and that WikiLeaks might not know where the two batches of Democratic emails originated.

### **A True ‘Golden Age’?**

Yet, one might think that the new “golden age of American journalism” would want to establish a firm foundation for its self-admiring reporting on Russia-gate. You might think, too, that these esteemed MSM reporters would show some professional skepticism toward dubious claims being fed to them by the Obama administration's intelligence appointees.

That is unless, of course, the major U.S. news organizations are not abiding by journalistic principles, but rather see themselves as combatants in the anti-Trump “resistance.” In other words, if they are behaving less as a Fourth Estate and more as a well-dressed mob determined to drag the interloper, Trump, from the White House.

The mainstream U.S. media's bias against Putin and Russia also oozes from every pore of the Times' and Post's reporting from Moscow. For instance, the Times' [article](#) on Putin's comments about supposed secrets that Trump shared with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the White House had the headline in the print editions: "Putin Butts In to Claim There Were No Secrets..." The article by Andrew Higgins then describes Putin "asserting himself with his customary disruptive panache" and "seizing on foreign crises to make Russia's voice heard."

Clearly, we are all supposed to hate and ridicule Vladimir Putin. He is being demonized as the new "enemy" in much the way that George Orwell foresaw in his dystopian novel, *1984*. Yet, what is perhaps most troubling is that the major U.S. news outlets, which played instrumental roles in demonizing leaders of Iraq, Syria and Libya, believe they are engaged in some "golden age" journalism, rather than writing propaganda.

### **Contempt for Trump**

Yes, I realize that many good people want to see Trump removed from office because of his destructive policies and his buffoonish behavior – and many are eager to use the new *bête noire*, Russia, as the excuse to do it. But that still does not make it right for the U.S. news media to abandon its professional responsibilities in favor of a political agenda.

On a political level, it may not even be a good idea for Democrats and progressives who seem to be following the failed strategy of Hillary Clinton's campaign in seeking to demonize Trump rather than figuring out how to speak to the white working-class people who voted for him, many out of fear over their economic vulnerability and others out of anger over how Clinton dismissed many of them as "deplorables."

And, by the way, if anyone thinks that whatever the Russians may have done damaged Clinton's chances more than her colorful phrase disdaining millions of working-class people who understandably feel left behind by neo-liberal economics, you may want to enroll in a Politics 101 course. The last thing a competent politician does is utter a memorable insult that will rally the opposition.

In conversations that I've had recently with Trump voters, they complain that Clinton and the Democrats weren't even bothering to listen to them or to talk to them. These voters were less enamored of Trump than they were conceded to Trump by the Clinton campaign. These voters also are not impressed by the endless Trump- and Russia-bashing from The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and MSNBC, which they see as instruments of the elites.



The political danger for national Democrats and many progressives is that mocking Trump and thus further insulting his supporters only extends the losing Clinton strategy and cements the image of Democrats as know-it-all elitists. Thus, the Democrats risk losing a key segment of the U.S. electorate for a generation.

Not only could that deny the Democrats a congressional majority for the foreseeable future, but it might even get Trump a second term.

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

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## When the Trump Coup-makers Cometh

**Exclusive:** As President Trump prepares for his first foreign trip, the turbulent political waters around him are rising and the tidal wave of a “soft coup” may be just over the horizon, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

So what did you think a U.S.-styled “soft coup” would look like? What we’re seeing regarding the intended removal of President Trump is not that much different from what has happened in dozens of other countries, whether Iran in 1953 or Ukraine in 2014 or Brazil in 2016. This one just has a few extra American touches.

Like other coups, there are often vague and unproven accusations leveled against the target and his or her entourage. Even though hard evidence is usually lacking, “process crimes,” such as making misstatements to prosecutors or obstructing justice, are developed as a substitute under the popular saying: “the cover-up is worse than the crime.” Whatever the case, a complicit media then trumpets alleged wrongdoing into grave and impeachable offenses.

And, if you had any doubts about what is looming, you should read Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne Jr.’s [op-ed](#), entitled in print editions “A quick end would be better,” which states:

“There is really only one issue in American politics at this moment: Will we accelerate our way to the end of the [Trump story](#), or will our government remain

mired in scandal, misdirection and paralysis for many more months – or even years? ...

“Nothing could be worse than slow-walking the Trump inquiries. The evidence is already overwhelming that he is temperamentally and intellectually incapable of doing the job he holds. He is indifferent to acquiring the knowledge the presidency demands and apparently of the belief that he can improvise hour to hour. He will violate norms whenever it suits him and cross ethical lines whenever he feels like it.”

### **The History of Coups**

As this American coup against Trump progresses, one commonality of coups around the world – whether “hard coups” of military tanks or “soft coups” of “constitutional” removals – is that the coup’s target is not some perfect human being. He or she has likely made political mistakes or cut some corners or had associates who lined their pockets.

But the difference between those misdeeds being treated as politics as usual or becoming the stuff of “scandal” has more to do with the interests of powerful interests – a domestic “deep state” or an outside “superpower” – than any evenhanded pursuit of justice.

To say that Trump is an imperfect messenger for whatever populist message he thinks he’s carrying stretches beyond the breaking point any normal definition of the word “imperfect.” Indeed, Trump may be the perfectly imperfect messenger.

Yet, what’s really at stake in any coup is power and the direction that a country will take. In the case of Donald Trump, there appear to be several factors at play: he is regarded by many establishment figures as too incompetent and uncouth to serve as America’s President; he also defies the neoconservative orthodoxy over U.S. foreign policy; and perhaps most significantly, he doesn’t believe in the New Cold War, which will assure the Military-Industrial Complex years of expensive new weapons systems by making Russia the new/old “enemy.”

There is, of course, some truth to all these concerns. Trump is an egotistical buffoon who doesn’t seem to know what he doesn’t know. Often his brain doesn’t connect to his tongue – or his Twitter fingers. He is more a Kardashian “reality star,” saying stuff to get attention and to attract eyeballs, than a sober leader who holds his cards close and chooses his words carefully.

Though many Americans voted for him because they viewed him as a no-nonsense businessman, he was actually someone who ran what amounted to a family business without the kind of accountability that often comes with managing a large public corporation.

Puffing up his own importance, Trump even has bragged about his impunity. During the 2016 campaign, he was revealed as the kind of jerk who boasts about grabbing women by the “pussy” and getting away with it because of his star status and personal power.

So, yes, Trump is both incompetent and uncouth. But he is hardly the first president to bring unseemly personal baggage or an inadequate skill set into the Oval Office. Bill Clinton was known as an insatiable hound dog preying on vulnerable women, and George W. Bush was shockingly unqualified for the demands of the presidency.

While Barack Obama had the intellectual skills and behaved commendably in his personal conduct, he had little experience in managing a complex organization – and it showed in some of his disastrous personnel decisions, such as appointing the hawkish Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State and keeping Bush loyalist Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense.

In other words, Trump’s skill limitations were not by themselves disqualifying. With the proper advice and a modicum of self-control, Trump could have performed acceptably as Chief Executive. But he failed to recruit wise advisers and couldn’t discipline either his tongue or his Twitter fingers.

Even staunch Trump supporters whom I’ve spoken with wish he could have parked his large but fragile ego at the White House gate rather than bringing it into the Oval Office.

### **Foreign Policy Dissent**

Still, Trump’s larger vulnerability was his failure to accept the foreign policy parameters prescribed by the neocon-dominated Establishment. He started out insulting powerful neocons by challenging their self-exculpatory narrative of the Iraq War – that it was a great idea sabotaged by poor execution but then salvaged by the “surge” before being betrayed by Obama.

Trump also belittled some of the neocon champions, such as old-lion Sen. John “No Hero” McCain and rising star Sen. Marco “Little Marco” Rubio. It would have been a neocon dream to have the 2016 campaign a match-up between Marco Rubio and Hillary Clinton, but the former fell to Trump in the primaries and the latter lost to Trump in the general election.

But Trump’s greatest sin was his refusal to buy into Official Washington’s big-ticket Russia-bashing, the goal of making Moscow an implacable enemy that then required massive new spending on both propaganda (supposedly to combat Russian “propaganda”) and military projects (including NATO expansion up to Russia’s borders and new weapons systems to deter Russian “aggression”).

Despite his simple-mindedness (or perhaps because of it), Trump couldn't understand why the United States had to demonize Russia when he saw many areas of possible cooperation (such as the fight against terrorism).

Trump and a few of his advisers were so out-of-step on the "Russia thing" that Official Washington developed a new groupthink that the only possible explanation was that Trump and his team must be somehow on the Kremlin's payroll. Any alleged "connection" to Russia – no matter how tenuous or seemingly innocuous – became front-page news.

For instance, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn's speakers bureau negotiated a relatively modest speaking fee of \$45,386 for him to address the tenth anniversary of RT, the Russian network, in December 2015, with RT even whittling down his fee – and that speech became a major cause celebre.

On Dec. 29, 2016, after the election and as the national security adviser-designate, Flynn took a phone call from Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak while Flynn was on vacation in the Dominican Republic, and Flynn later offered an incomplete account of the conversation, which the National Security Agency knew because it had intercepted the phone call.

Instead of people shrugging their shoulders and giving Flynn the benefit of the doubt, Obama's holdovers in the Justice Department literally made a federal case out of it, invoking the archaic and virtually-never-used 1799 Logan Act (which bars private citizens from negotiating with foreigners) and then advancing the absurd argument that somehow the discrepancies in Flynn's recollection made him vulnerable to Russian blackmail to get Trump to fire Flynn.

Then, Trump's alleged suggestion to then-FBI Director James Comey that Flynn was a good guy who had served his country and had suffered enough – and that it might be best to "let it go" – has now become the latest argument for impeaching Trump.

### **In Deep Water**

Whether he knows it or not, Trump is now in very deep water and has no idea how to dog-paddle back to the shore. His aides seem to think that a nine-day foreign trip will do him good, but it is more likely to make him grovel before Saudi King Salman and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, knowing that any offense that those leaders might take would simply expedite Trump's political doom.

Trump is surely in no position to tell the Saudis to cut out their covert funding for Al Qaeda and other Sunni terrorist groups – or to insist that they stop bombing Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East. Nor could Trump dare

challenge Netanyahu on the Israeli abuse of the Palestinians, the Prime Minister's obstruction of the peace process, and his blatant efforts to manipulate U.S. politics in favor of bloody neocon interventions across the region. Trump will be the desperate supplicant hoping for a reassuring pat on the head.

There is one – and perhaps only one – winning move that Trump has left. He could authorize CIA Director Mike Pompeo to prepare for release U.S. intelligence information regarding turning-point moments in recent years, such as the truth about [the 2013 sarin incident](#) in Syria and the 2014 Malaysia Airlines shoot-down in eastern Ukraine. [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

If – as I'm told – the Obama administration systematically misrepresented the intelligence on those catastrophes to register propaganda gains (against the Syrian government in 2013 and Russia in 2014), the U.S. government's internal information could shift those key narratives in more peaceful directions.

But whatever the truth is, Trump could shift his own image from a compulsive liar who disdains facts into a champion for transparency and honesty in government. He could turn the tables on The New York Times (which has set itself up as the great hero for Truth) and The Washington Post (which has fashioned a new melodramatic slogan, "Democracy Dies in Darkness"). He could point out their hypocritical lack of aggressiveness in challenging the Obama administration's excessive secrecy.

Trump would also give his dispirited supporters something to rally around. Many blue-collar voters backed Trump because they thought he was at least addressing their economic fears of lost work and lost status, while Hillary Clinton – in their view – treated them with disregard and disdain, even calling many of them "deplorables."

But Trump's promises of recovered jobs were largely hollow. Whatever improvement Americans might be feeling in their pocketbooks, it is more the result of Obama's careful economic management and the normal recovery from Bush's Wall Street crash and the Great Recession than anything Trump can or will do.

So, revealing hidden truths – where the American people may have been misled – would not only be the right thing to do for democracy, it also could be the smart thing to do. When the Establishment coup-makers come for Trump – as they now almost certainly will – he can at least say that he tried to do something to return the U.S. government to the American people.

That might not save his presidency but it would at least elevate his purpose and possibly create some positive legacy to attach to the Trump name. As the

situation stands now, Trump appears headed for a humiliating exit that won't just strip him of the presidency but would strip away any luster for the Trump brand.

In other words, his impulsive foray into politics might not just make him one of the most reviled U.S. presidents in history but take down the Trump businesses, too.

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## The Push for Trump's Impeachment

**Exclusive:** Establishment voices are escalating their calls for President Trump's impeachment, even without any public evidence that his campaign colluded with Russia, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Russia-gate affair has taken a strange turn as advocates for President Trump's removal say his ouster should take precedence over completing the investigation and actually seeing how much there is there – whereas at least one target of the inquiry wants the U.S. government to put its cards on the table.

Carter Page, a former foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign who is reportedly under an FBI counterintelligence investigation for his contacts with Russians, has called on Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who is overseeing the investigation, to immediately release “any documents related to [the Obama administration's] alleged wiretapping of me.”

In Page's view, it was the Obama administration's spreading of allegations about the Trump campaign's connections to Russia that represented “government meddling in the 2016 election,” rather than Russia's alleged hacking Democratic emails and publicizing them via WikiLeaks, a claim made by President Obama's intelligence chiefs but denied by WikiLeaks and Russia.

Yet, what has been perhaps most remarkable about the entire Russia-gate affair is that it has been conducted with almost no evidence being shared with the American people. Thus, we have the prospect of a duly elected President of the

United States being targeted for removal by the political and media Establishment without the citizens being let in on exactly what evidence exists and how significant it is.

The impeachment spotlight has already shifted from the underlying issue of whether the Trump campaign colluded with Russians to President Trump's inept firing of FBI Director James Comey, who played a key role in sinking Hillary Clinton's campaign by reopening an investigation into possible security breaches in her use of a private email server while Secretary of State – before Comey took another star turn in pursuing the Trump campaign's possible ties to Russia.

Trump, whose fitness for the presidency was always a profound concern to many American voters, again displayed his incompetence in firing Comey. You might have thought that Trump – as a former reality-TV star whose trademark line was “you're fired!” – would have had the process down, but apparently not.

Trump didn't even fire Comey face to face, but rather clumsily at long distance. Then, Trump had his subordinates justify Comey's abrupt removal as a response to the FBI director's violation of Justice Department protocols in announcing the politically sensitive investigation of Clinton in a way that appeared to influence a national election. But Trump undercut that rationale by blurting out comments that seemed to tie Comey's removal to his lack of loyalty and to the Russian inquiry.

This latest botched move again showed that Trump can't follow one of the most elementary rules of politics: stick to your own talking points. When one considers what Republicans did with the Obama administration's initial confusion about the causes for the 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, you might think that Trump would have learned the lesson about getting a story straight before telling it, but apparently not.

Whatever the justification for Comey's firing, what Trump did was shift the Russia-gate “scandal” from the actual facts of the case to the process of the investigation. One of Official Washington's favorite slogans is “the cover-up is worse than the crime” – although that's usually a cop-out for journalists and members of Congress who don't have the skills to investigate the underlying crime or determine if one even exists.

### **A 'Soft Coup'**

While the Establishment's outrage over Comey's firing has been widespread, one might have thought there would be a countervailing concern about the FBI and other U.S. intelligence agencies intervening to affect electoral outcomes, whether that was torpedoing Clinton or now sinking Trump.

The curious role of the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the FBI in spearheading the Russia-gate investigation – including having handpicked “senior analysts” from the three agencies produce a clearly biased and nearly evidence-free report on Jan. 6 – has raised concerns of a “soft coup” or “deep-state coup” to negate the 2016 election.

Considering the seriousness of such a move in a constitutional republic that prides itself as the gold standard of democracy, it might have been expected that the law-enforcement and intelligence agencies would go the extra mile in sharing their evidence with the American people whose electoral judgment would, in effect, be made meaningless: both by Comey’s late intervention against Clinton and now the pressure to impeach Trump.

Yet, instead of a commitment to openness, the intelligence community is telling the citizens that we must accept the fact of Russian “meddling” as “a given,” sans evidence. In addition, influential voices are emerging to declare that Trump’s impeachment should proceed even without the results of the Russia-gate investigation of possible Trump-Russia collusion being known to the public.

On Sunday, The Washington Post published an opinion article by Harvard University law professor Laurence H. Tribe declaring: “The time has come for Congress to launch an impeachment investigation of President Trump for obstruction of justice. ... Now the country is faced with a president whose conduct strongly suggests that he poses a danger to our system of government.”

Tribe continued: “Ample reasons existed to worry about this president, and to ponder the extraordinary remedy of impeachment, even before he fired FBI Director James B. Comey and shockingly admitted on national television that the action was provoked by the FBI’s intensifying investigation into his campaign’s ties with Russia.”

### **Grave Threat**

According to Tribe, Trump’s threat to the system is so grave that his removal should precede any conclusions from the Russia-gate investigation. Tribe wrote that immediate impeachment could have been fashioned around other issues, “even without getting to the bottom of what Trump dismissed as ‘this Russia thing’,” though Tribe acknowledged that such an extreme step might have seemed premature at the time.

“No longer,” Tribe continued. “To wait for the results of the multiple investigations underway is to risk tying our nation’s fate to the whims of an authoritarian leader. Comey’s summary firing will not stop the inquiry, yet it represented an obvious effort to interfere with a probe involving national



security matters vastly more serious than the 'third-rate burglary' that Nixon tried to cover up in Watergate.

"The question of Russian interference in the presidential election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign go to the heart of our system and ability to conduct free and fair elections."

Like many mainstream "experts," Tribe doesn't seem to understand what Watergate was really about; recent historical discoveries show it to be an outgrowth of Nixon's cover-up of his 1968 sabotage of President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace talks, a maneuver that secured Nixon the presidency but extended the war for four more years. Nixon's fear that his dirty trick might get leaked led to formation of the Watergate "plumbers."

Tribe also ignores the fact that the "Russian interference" still remains a "question," not a proven fact, and no investigator has cited any evidence of the Trump campaign's collusion. To skirt that problem, Tribe focuses on the firing of Comey as the grounds for impeachment:

"To say that this does not in itself rise to the level of 'obstruction of justice' is to empty that concept of all meaning. Obstruction of justice was the first count in the articles of impeachment against Nixon and, years later, a count against Bill Clinton. In Clinton's case, the ostensible obstruction consisted solely in lying under oath about a sordid sexual affair that may have sullied the Oval Office but involved no abuse of presidential power as such.

"But in Nixon's case, the list of actions that together were deemed to constitute impeachable obstruction reads like a forecast of what Trump would do decades later – making misleading statements to, or withholding material evidence from, federal investigators or other federal employees; trying to interfere with FBI or congressional investigations; trying to break through the FBI's shield surrounding ongoing criminal investigations; dangling carrots in front of people who might otherwise pose trouble for one's hold on power.

"It will require serious commitment to constitutional principle, and courageous willingness to put devotion to the national interest above self-interest and party loyalty, for a Congress of the president's own party to initiate an impeachment inquiry. It would be a terrible shame if only the mounting prospect of being voted out of office in November 2018 would sufficiently concentrate the minds of representatives and senators today.

"But whether it is devotion to principle or hunger for political survival that puts the prospect of impeachment and removal on the table, the crucial thing is that the prospect now be taken seriously, that the machinery of removal be

reactivated, and that the need to use it become the focus of political discourse going into 2018.”

### **Lay Out the Evidence**

There is, of course, another alternative: the FBI and other intelligence agencies could expedite whatever investigations they’re doing and let the American people in on the evidence.

The key question, as Russia-gate was first being formulated as a political scandal, was whether some member of the Trump campaign colluded with Russian intelligence operatives to deliver, by memory stick or other means, hacked Democratic emails to WikiLeaks.

Yet, beyond the fact that the Jan. 6 report offered no government evidence that the Russians even hacked the Democratic emails, there also seems to be no rush to question the “usual suspects” from the Trump campaign – Roger Stone, Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn and Page – about what they might know regarding the possible delivery of the emails to WikiLeaks.

Nor has there been any public testimony regarding another source of the Russia-gate allegations, ex-British spy Christopher Steele who prepared a series of opposition research reports on Trump and Russia apparently funded by Clinton supporters. It’s still not even known who paid for the Steele dossier.

Typically, the FBI and Justice Department refuse to discuss investigations until they’ve reached a conclusion, but that rule has already been broken by Comey, who justified announcing both the Clinton and Trump investigations because of their political significance.

In the Clinton case, Comey was urged to expedite his work so Clinton could be cleared before the election and he appeared to do so, terminating the reopened investigation of her email server two days before the Nov. 8 election. Today, the public interest in wrapping up the Russian inquiry is arguably even stronger.

In congressional testimony, Comey announced that the FBI began the Russia investigation last July, so it’s not as if the investigators haven’t had time to assess the evidence and decide what to do.

### **An Open Process**

Carter Page’s suggestion – in effect waiving his privacy rights to get out in the open whatever evidence was used by the Obama administration to justify a reported Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant against him – could be a

start.

Congressional committees also could call as many willing Trump campaign people as possible to testify about their knowledge of any collusion with Russia. So far, the only witnesses have been law enforcement and intelligence officials appointed by President Obama, who have presented various allegations while refusing to offer back-up on the grounds that the evidence is “classified.”

While Professor Tribe and other advocates for impeaching Donald Trump may not care whether the Russia-gate evidence is ever released, they should recognize that – for better or worse – nearly 63 million Americans voted for Trump and – under the U.S. political process – he won the election (although Clinton got about 3 million more votes nationwide).

For the past several days, I’ve been traveling through Trump country of West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio and have talked to several Trump voters along the way. Some indicated that they voted more against Clinton and the “elites” than enthusiastically for Trump. And some criticized Trump for his egotistical excesses. But they wanted him to be given a fair chance to govern.

It’s hard to know how angry these citizens would be if their judgment is overturned by the same “elites” whom they blamed for foisting on them the unpopular choice of Clinton versus Trump.

Reversing – or “correcting” – the result of the presidential election may seem like an obvious move for the editors of The New York Times and for Professor Tribe, but it is a deadly serious proposition that demands as full a release of evidence as possible, not long-running secret investigations or an impeachment based on an alleged “cover-up” of a crime that may or may not exist.

Negating the will of the voters as expressed through the constitutional process – as flawed as that process may be – requires its own process that is perceived as open and fair, not some star chamber or kangaroo court where the intelligence community gets to hide the evidence as “classified” and tells the citizenry to “trust us.”

As unfit and inept as Donald Trump may be, he was elected – and no one should underestimate how dangerous it could be for Washington insiders and other Establishment figures to undo the electoral choice through a process cloaked in secrecy.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Watergate Redux or ‘Deep State’ Coup” and “The Soft Coup of Russia-gate.”]

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in April focused on the continuing Russia-gate imbroglio, President Trump's missile strike on Syria, and the danger of the mainstream media mediating "truth."

["Democrats' Blind Obsession on Russia-gate"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Apr. 1, 2017

["Trump's Foreign Policy Incoherence"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 3, 2017

["MLK's Warning of America's Spiritual Death"](#) by Gary G. Kohls, Apr. 4, 2017

["Mainstream Media as Arbiters of Truth"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 4, 2017

["Team Trump Ponders Climate 'Engineering'"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Apr. 5, 2017

["Another Dangerous Rush to Judgment in Syria"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 5, 2017

["The Ugly Underbelly of Russia-gate"](#) by James W Carden, Apr. 6, 2017

["NYT Retreats on 2013 Syria-Sarin Claims"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 6, 2017

["Dashed Hopes for Trump's Foreign Policy"](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Apr. 7, 2017

["Trump's 'Wag the Dog' Moment"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 7, 2017

["Trampling the US Constitution for War"](#) by Daniel C Maguire, Apr. 8, 2017

["Trump's 59-Tomahawk 'Tweet'"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Apr. 8, 2017

["Luring Trump into Mideast Wars"](#) by Daniel Lazare, Apr. 8, 2017

["Where Was CIA's Pompeo on Syria?"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 8, 2017

["Bill Maher's Muddled Attacks on Islam"](#) by JP Sottile, Apr. 9, 2017

["Trump Plunges Toward World War III"](#) by Norman Solomon, Apr. 10, 2017

["How Media Bias Fuels Syrian Escalation"](#) by Rick Sterling, Apr. 10, 2017

["Neocons Have Trump on His Knees"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 10, 2017

**"Trump Should Rethink Syria Escalation"** by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Apr. 11, 2017

**"Trump's Syria Attack Trampled Many Laws"** by Marjorie Cohn, Apr. 11, 2017

**"Russia's Disdain for Tillerson and Trump"** by Gilbert Doctorow, Apr. 11, 2017

**"To Russia with More Russia-Bashing"** by Nat Parry, Apr. 12, 2017

**"Trump Withholds Syria-Sarin Evidence"** by Robert Parry, Apr. 12, 2017

**"Trump Finds His Groove with Warmaking"** by Dennis J Bernstein, Apr. 12, 2017

**"Pushing Australia into War with China"** by John Pilger, Apr. 12, 2017

**"Tillerson's Bad Hand in Kremlin Showdown"** by Gilbert Doctorow, Apr. 13, 2017

**"Trump Lurches into Chaos and Conflict"** by Alastair Crooke, Apr. 14, 2017

**"Did Al Qaeda Fool the White House Again?"** by Robert Parry, Apr. 14, 2017

**"Handing Killer Drones to Donald Trump"** by Jesselyn Radack, Apr. 15, 2017

**"Neocons Point Housebroken Trump at Iran"** by Jonathan Marshall, Apr. 15, 2017

**"Obama/Trump: Contrasting Deceivers"** by Sam Hussein, Apr. 16, 2017

**"Trump Uses Tiny Nation to Insult Russia"** by Ted Snider, Apr. 16, 2017

**"What Russia-gate Has Wrought"** by Robert Parry, Apr. 16, 2017

**"A Personal Look Inside Modern Islam"** by Arnold R. Isaacs, Apr. 17, 2017

**"Through the 'War on Terror' Looking Glass"** by Nicolas JS Davies, Apr. 17, 2017

**"Dropping the (Non-Nuclear) Big One"** by Dennis J Bernstein, Apr. 18, 2017

**"NYT Mocks Skepticism on Syria-Sarin Claims"** by Robert Parry, Apr. 18, 2017

**"Erdogan's Neo-Fascist Turkish Allies"** by Jonathan Marshall, Apr. 19 2017

**"Why Hillary Clinton Really Lost"** by Robert Parry, Apr. 19, 2017

**"Russia-Bashing Helps Wall Street Democrats"** by Norman Solomon, Apr. 20, 2017

**"Why Not a Probe of 'Israel-gate'?"** by Robert Parry, Apr. 20, 2017

**"Populism v. Elites in French Election"** by Andrew Spannaus, Apr. 21, 2017

**"How US Race Laws Inspired Nazism"** by David Swanson, Apr. 22, 2017

[“Coal Miners’ Futures in Renewable Energy”](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Apr. 22, 2017

[“The Pro-War Twist of the ‘Resistance’”](#) by James W Carden, Apr. 24, 2017

[“The Risk of Brushing Aside Intelligence”](#) by Lawrence Davidson, Apr. 25, 2017

[“Donald Trump’s Failing Presidency”](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 25, 2017

[“France Circles Back to Status Quo”](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Apr. 26, 2017

[“Intel Vets Voice Doubts on Syrian Crisis”](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Apr. 26, 2017

[“More NYT ‘Spin’ on the Syria-Sarin Case”](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 28, 2017

[“The Existential Question of Whom to Trust”](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 30, 2017

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## The ‘Soft Coup’ of Russia-gate

**Special Report:** The Russia-gate hysteria has grown stronger after President Trump’s firing of FBI Director Comey, but the bigger question is whether an American “soft coup” is in the works, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Where is Stanley Kubrick when we need him? If he hadn’t died in 1999, he would be the perfect director to transform today’s hysteria over Russia into a theater-of-the-absurd movie reprising his Cold War classic, “Dr. Strangelove,” which savagely satirized the madness of nuclear brinkmanship and the crazed ideology behind it.

To prove my point, The Washington Post on Thursday published [a lengthy story](#) entitled in the print editions “Alarm at Russian in White House” about a Russian photographer who was allowed into the Oval Office to photograph President Trump’s meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The Post cited complaints from former U.S. intelligence officials who criticized the presence of the Russian photographer as “a potential security breach” because of “the danger that a listening device or other surveillance equipment could have been brought into the Oval Office while hidden in cameras or other electronics.”

To bolster this alarm, the Post cited a Twitter comment from President Obama’s last deputy CIA director, David S. Cohen, stating “No, it was not” a sound decision to admit the Russian photographer who also works for the Russian news agency, Tass, which published the photo.

One could picture Boris and Natasha, the evil spies in the Bullwinkle cartoons, disguised as photographers slipping listening devices between the cushions of the sofas.

Or we could hear how Russians are again threatening to “impurify all of our precious bodily fluids,” as “Dr. Strangelove” character, Gen. Jack D. Ripper, warned us in the 1964 movie.

Watching that brilliant dark comedy again might actually be a good idea to remind us how crazy Americans can get when they’re pumped up with anti-Russian propaganda, as is happening again now.

### **Taking Down Trump**

I realize that many Democrats, liberals and progressives hate Donald Trump so much that they believe that any pretext is justified in taking him down, even if that plays into the hands of the neoconservatives and other warmongers. Many people who detest Trump view Russia-gate as the most likely path to achieve Trump’s impeachment, so this desirable end justifies whatever means.

Some people have told me that they even believe that it is the responsibility of the major news media, the law enforcement and intelligence communities, and members of Congress to engage in a “soft coup” against Trump – also known as a “constitutional coup” or “deep state coup” – for the “good of the country.”

The argument is that it sometimes falls to these Establishment institutions to “correct” a mistake made by the American voters, in this case, the election of a largely unqualified individual as U.S. president. It is even viewed by some anti-Trump activists as a responsibility of “responsible” journalists, government officials and others to play this “guardian” role, to not simply “resist” Trump but to remove him.

There are obvious counter-arguments to this view, particularly that it makes something of a sham of American democracy. It also imposes on journalists a need

to violate the ethical responsibility to provide objective reporting, not taking sides in political disputes.

But The New York Times and The Washington Post, in particular, have made it clear that they view Trump as a clear and present danger to the American system and thus have cast aside any pretense of neutrality.

The Times justifies its open hostility to the President as part of its duty to protect “the truth”; the Post has adopted a slogan aimed at Trump, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.” In other words, America’s two most influential political newspapers are effectively pushing for a “soft coup” under the guise of defending “democracy” and “truth.”

But the obvious problem with a “soft coup” is that America’s democratic process, as imperfect as it has been and still is, has held this diverse country together since 1788 with the notable exception of the Civil War.

If Americans believe that the Washington elites are removing an elected president – even one as buffoonish as Donald Trump – it could tear apart the fabric of national unity, which is already under extraordinary stress from intense partisanship.

That means that the “soft coup” would have to be carried out under the guise of a serious investigation into something grave enough to justify the President’s removal, a removal that could be accomplished by congressional impeachment, his forced resignation, or the application of Twenty-fifth Amendment, which allows the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet to judge a President incapable of continuing in office (although that could require two-thirds votes by both houses of Congress if the President fights the maneuver).

### **A Big Enough ‘Scandal’**

That is where Russia-gate comes in. The gauzy allegation that Trump and/or his advisers somehow colluded with Russian intelligence officials to rig the 2016 election would probably clear the threshold for an extreme action like removing a President.

And, given the determination of many key figures in the Establishment to get rid of Trump, it should come as no surprise that no one seems to care that no actual government-verified evidence has been revealed publicly to support any of the Russia-gate allegations.

There’s not even any public evidence from U.S. government agencies that Russia did “meddle” in the 2016 election or – even if Russia did slip Democratic emails to WikiLeaks (which WikiLeaks denies) – there has been zero evidence that the



scheme resulted from collusion with Trump's campaign.

The FBI has been investigating these suspicions for at least nine months, even reportedly securing a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant against Carter Page, an American whom Trump briefly claimed as a foreign policy adviser when Trump was under fire for not having any foreign policy advisers.

One of Page's alleged offenses was that he gave a speech to an academic conference in Moscow in July 2016 that was mildly critical of how the U.S. treated countries from the former Soviet Union. He also once lived in Russia and met with a Russian diplomat who – apparently unbeknownst to Page – had been identified by the U.S. government as a Russian intelligence officer.

It appears that is enough, in these days of our New McCarthyism, to get an American put under a powerful counter-intelligence investigation.

The FBI and the Department of Justice also reportedly are including as part of the Russia-gate investigation Trump's stupid campaign joke calling on the Russians to help find the tens of thousands of emails that Hillary Clinton erased from the home server that she used while Secretary of State.

On July 27, 2016, Trump said, apparently in jest, "I will tell you this, Russia: if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing."

The comment fit with Trump's puckish, provocative and often tasteless sense of humor, but was seized on by Democrats as if it were a serious suggestion – as if anyone would use a press conference to seriously urge something like that. But it now appears that the FBI is grabbing at any straw that might support its investigation.

The (U.K.) Guardian reported this week that "Senior DoJ officials have declined to release the documents [about Trump's comment] on grounds that such disclosure could 'interfere with enforcement proceedings'. In a filing to a federal court in Washington DC, the DoJ states that 'because of the existence of an active, ongoing investigation, the FBI anticipates that it will ... withhold all records'.

"The statement suggests that Trump's provocative comment last July is being seen by the FBI as relevant to its own ongoing investigation."

### **The NYT's Accusations**

On Friday, in the wake of Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey and the President's characterization of Russia-gate as "a total hoax," The New York Times reprised what it called "The Trump-Russia Nexus" in a lead editorial

trying to make the case of some fire behind the smoke.

Though the Times acknowledges that there are “many unknowns” in Russia-gate and the Times can’t seem to find any evidence of collusion, such as slipping a Russian data stick to WikiLeaks, the Times nevertheless treats a host of Trump advisers and family members as traitors because they’ve had some association with Russian officials, Russian businesses or Russian allies.

Regarding Carter Page, the Times wrote: “American officials believe that Mr. Page, a foreign policy adviser, had contacts with Russian intelligence officials during the campaign. He also gave a pro-Russia speech in Moscow in July 2016. Mr. Page was once employed by Merrill Lynch’s Moscow office, where he worked with Gazprom, a government-owned giant.”

You might want to let some of those words sink in, especially the part about Page giving “a pro-Russia speech in Moscow,” which has been cited as one of the principal reasons for Page and his communications being targeted under a FISA warrant.

I’ve actually read Page’s speech and to call it “pro-Russia” is a wild exaggeration. It was a largely academic treatise that faulted the West’s post-Cold War treatment of the nations formed from the old Soviet Union, saying the rush to a free-market system led to some negative consequences, such as the spread of corruption.

But even if the speech were “pro-Russia,” doesn’t The New York Times respect the quaint American notion of free speech? Apparently not. If your carefully crafted words can be twisted into something called “pro-Russia,” the Times seems to think it’s okay to have the National Security Agency bug your phones and read your emails.

### **The Ukraine Case**

Another Times’ target was veteran political adviser Paul Manafort, who is accused of working as “a consultant for a pro-Russia political party in Ukraine and for Ukraine’s former president, Viktor Yanukovich, who was backed by the Kremlin.”

Left out of that Times formulation is the fact that the Ukrainian political party, which had strong backing from ethnic Russian Ukrainians – not just Russia– competed in a democratic process and that Yanukovich won an election that was recognized by international observers as free and fair.

Yanukovich was then ousted in February 2014 in a violent putsch that was backed by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador

Geoffrey Pyatt. The putsch, which was spearheaded by right-wing nationalists and even neo-Nazis, touched off Ukraine's civil war and the secession of Crimea, the key events in the escalation of today's New Cold War between NATO and Russia.

Though I'm no fan of U.S. political hired-guns selling their services in foreign elections, there was nothing illegal or even unusual about Manafort advising a Ukrainian political party. What arguably was much more offensive was the U.S. support for an unconstitutional coup that removed Yanukovich even after he agreed to a European plan for early elections so he could be voted out of office peacefully.

But the Times, the Post and virtually the entire Western mainstream media sided with the Ukrainian coup-makers and hailed Yanukovich's overthrow. That attitude has become such a groupthink that the Times has banished the thought that there was a coup.

Still, the larger political problem confronting the United States is that the neoconservatives and their junior partners, the liberal interventionists, now control nearly all the levers of U.S. foreign policy. That means they can essentially dictate how events around the world will be perceived by most Americans.

The neocons and the liberal hawks also want to continue their open-ended wars in the Middle East by arranging the commitment of additional U.S. military forces to Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria – and perhaps a new confrontation with Iran.

Early in Obama's second term, it became clear to the neocons that Russia was becoming the chief obstacles to their plans because President Barack Obama was working closely with President Vladimir Putin on a variety of projects that undermined neocon hopes for more war.

Particularly, Putin helped Obama secure an agreement from Syria to surrender its chemical weapons stockpiles in 2013 and to get Iran to accept tight constraints on its nuclear program in 2014. In both cases, the neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks were lusting for war.

Immediately after the Syria chemical-weapons deal in September 2013, key U.S. neocons began focusing on Ukraine as what National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman called "the biggest prize" and a first step toward unseating Putin in Moscow.

Gershman's grant-giving NED stepped up its operations inside Ukraine while Assistant Secretary Nuland, the wife of arch-neocon Robert Kagan, began pushing for regime change in Kiev (along with other neocons, including Sen. John

McCain).

The Ukraine coup in 2014 drove a geopolitical wedge between Obama and Putin, since the Russian president couldn't just stand by when a virulently anti-Russian regime took power violently in Ukraine, which was the well-worn route for invasions into Russia and housed Russia's Black Sea fleet at Sevastopol in Crimea.

Rather than defend the valuable cooperation provided by Putin, Obama went with the political flow and joined in the Russia-bashing as key neocons raised their sights and put Putin in the crosshairs.

### **An Unexpected Obstacle**

For the neocons in 2016, there also was the excited expectation of a Hillary Clinton presidency to give more momentum to the expensive New Cold War. But then Trump, who had argued for a new détente with Russia, managed to eke out an Electoral College win.

Perhaps Trump could have diffused some of the hostility toward him but his narcissistic personality stopped him from extending an olive branch to the tens of millions of Americans who opposed him. He further demonstrated his political incompetence by wasting his first days in office making ridiculous claims about the size of his inaugural crowds and disputing the fact that he had lost the popular vote.

Widespread public disgust over his behavior contributed to the determination of many Americans to "resist" his presidency at all junctures and at all costs.

Russia-gate, the hazy suggestion that Putin put Trump in the White House and that Trump is a Putin "puppet" (as Clinton claimed), became the principal weapon to use in destroying Trump's presidency.

However, besides the risks to U.S. stability that would come from an Establishment-driven "soft coup," there is the additional danger of ratcheting up tensions so high with nuclear-armed Russia that this extreme Russia-bashing takes on a life – or arguably many, many deaths – of its own.

Which is why America now might need a piercing satire of today's Russia-phobia or at least a revival of the Cold War classic, "Dr. Strangelove," subtitled "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb."

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "Watergate Redux or 'Deep State' Coup."]

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for**

The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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## Watergate Redux or 'Deep State' Coup?

**Exclusive:** Official Washington is abuzz, comparing President Trump's ouster of FBI Director Comey to President Nixon's Watergate cover-up, but there is a darker "deep state" interpretation of these events, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

President Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey on Tuesday reflected a growing concern inside the White House that the long-rumored scheme by "deep state" operatives to overturn the results of the 2016 election may have been more than just rumors.

The fear grew that Comey and other senior officials in the U.S. intelligence community [had concluded last year](#) that neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump was a suitable future president, albeit for different reasons. I'm told that Clinton was seen as dangerously hawkish and Trump as dangerously unqualified, opinions privately shared by then-President Barack Obama.

So, according to this account, plans were made last summer to damage both Clinton and Trump, with the hope of putting a more stable and less risky person in the Oval Office – with key roles in this scheme played by Comey, CIA Director John Brennan and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper.

When I first heard about this supposed cabal in the middle of last year, I dismissed it as something more fitting a Jason Bourne movie than the real world. But – to my amazement – the U.S. intelligence community then began intervening in the presidential campaign in unprecedented ways.

On July 5, 2016, Director Comey dealt a severe blow to Clinton by holding a press conference to denounce her use of a private email server while Secretary of State as "extremely careless," yet he announced that no legal action would follow, opening her to a damaging line of attack that she jeopardized national security but that her political status gave her special protection.

Then, on Oct. 28, just ten days before the election, Comey reopened the investigation because of emails found on the laptop of disgraced former Rep.

Anthony Weiner, the husband of Clinton's close aide Huma Abedin. That move re-injected Clinton's email controversy into the campaign, along with the unsavory issues surrounding Weiner's sexting scandal, and reminded voters about the sex-related scandals that have swirled around Bill Clinton for years.

To make matters worse, Comey closed the investigation again just two days before the election, once more putting the Clinton email controversy in front of voters. That also reaffirmed the idea that Clinton got special treatment because of her political clout, arguably the most damaging image possible in an election year dominated by voter anger at "elites."

Clinton herself has said that if the election had been held on Oct. 27 – the day before Comey reopened the email inquiry – she would have won. In other words, whether Comey's actions were simply clumsy or possibly calculated, the reality is that he had an outsized hand in drowning Clinton's candidacy, a point that Trump's Justice Department also noted on Tuesday in justifying Comey's firing.

### **Russia-gate Probe**

And, we now know that Comey was leading a parallel investigation into possible Russian collusion with the Trump campaign, instigated at least in part by a dossier prepared by ex-British spy Christopher Steele, paid for by Clinton supporters and containing allegations about secret meetings between Trump aides and influential Russians.

Last July, the FBI reportedly secured a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant against former Trump foreign policy adviser Carter Page. Page was mentioned in the Steele dossier and gave an academic speech in Moscow on July 7 mildly critical of U.S. policies toward Russia and other nations of the former Soviet Union, two apparent factors in justifying the FISA warrant.

Before the election, people close to Clinton also tried to get the U.S. media to publicize the Steele dossier and particularly its anonymous claims about Trump cavorting with prostitutes in a Moscow hotel while Russian intelligence agents supposedly filmed him. However, because media outlets could not confirm Steele's allegations and because some details turned out to be wrong, the dossier remained mostly under wraps prior to the election.

However, after Trump's surprising victory on Nov. 8, President Obama and his intelligence chiefs escalated their efforts to undermine Trump's legitimacy. The Obama administration leaked an intelligence assessment that Russian President Vladimir Putin had orchestrated the hacking of Democratic emails and their publication by WikiLeaks to undermine Clinton and help Trump.

The intelligence community's assessment set the stage for what could have been a

revolt by the Electoral College in which enough Trump delegates might have refused to vote for him to send the election into the House of Representatives, where the states would choose the President from one of the top three vote-getters in the Electoral College.

The third-place finisher turned out to be former Secretary of State Colin Powell who got three votes from Clinton delegates in Washington State. The idea of giving votes to Powell was that he might be an acceptable alternative to House members over either Clinton or Trump, a position that I'm told Obama's intelligence chiefs shared. But the Electoral College ploy failed when Trump's delegates proved overwhelmingly faithful to the GOP candidate on Dec. 19.

### **Expanding Russia-gate**

Still, the effort to undermine Trump did not stop. President Obama reportedly authorized an extraordinary scheme to spread information about Russia's purported assistance to Trump across the federal bureaucracy and even overseas.

Comey, Brennan and Clapper also set in motion a hasty intelligence assessment by hand-picked analysts at the CIA, the FBI and the National Security Agency, producing a report on alleged Russian electoral interference that was released on Jan. 6.

Though Clapper had promised to release a great deal of the evidence, the declassified version of the report amounted mostly to "trust us" along with a one-sided analysis of Putin's alleged motive, citing his well-known disdain for Clinton.

But the report failed to note the other side of that coin, that Putin would be taking a great risk by trying to hurt Clinton and failing, given Clinton's odds as the prohibitive favorite to defeat Trump. Putin would have to assume that the NSA with its powerful surveillance capabilities would pick up a Russian initiative and inform an irate President Hillary Clinton.

In other words, the Jan. 6 report was not some careful analysis of the pros and cons for believing or doubting that Russia was behind the WikiLeaks disclosures. It amounted to a prosecutor's brief, albeit without any public evidence to support the Russia-did-it charge.

We learned later that the report's classified appendix included a summary of Steele's dossier that was then briefed to President Obama, President-elect Trump and to members of Congress, guaranteeing that its damaging but unproven allegations would finally get widely circulated in the mainstream media, as indeed promptly happened.

## **Hobbling Trump's Presidency**

So, going into the Inauguration, Russia-gate was dominating the front pages of newspapers as well as the endless chat shows on cable TV despite the fact that no real evidence was presented proving Russia was responsible for the WikiLeaks' posts – and WikiLeaks denied getting the material from Russia. There was also no evidence that Trump's campaign had colluded with the Russians in this endeavor.

But those suspicions quickly hardened into a groupthink among many Democrats, liberals and progressives. Their hatred of Trump and their dread about his policies convinced some that the ends of removing Trump justified whatever means were employed, even if those means had more than a whiff of McCarthyism.

On Inauguration Day, many anti-Trump protesters carried signs accusing Trump of being Putin's boy. Sensing a political opportunity, congressional Democrats joined the #Resistance and escalated their demands for a sweeping investigation of any connections between Trump's team and Russia. Their clear hope was something might turn up that could be exploited in an impeachment proceeding.

As the principal intelligence holdover from the Obama administration, Comey assumed an essential role in this operation. It would be up to the FBI to secure the financial records from Trump and his associates that could provide a foundation for at least suspicions of a sinister relationship between them and Russia.

Trump may have thought that he bought some political space by complying with political pressure to fire National Security Adviser Michael Flynn on Feb. 13 over what exactly was said in a pre-Inauguration phone conversation between Flynn and the Russian Ambassador. Trump also got the Russia-gate pressure to lessen when, on April 6, he fired 59 Tomahawk missiles at Syria over an alleged chemical attack. But he soon came to realize that those respites from Russia-gate were brief and that an incipient constitutional coup might be underway with him as the target.

However, if those coup suspicions have any truth – and I realize many Americans do not want to accept the notion that their country has a “deep state” – firing Comey may fuel Trump's troubles rather than end them.

Trump clearly is unpopular not only among Democrats but many Republicans who see him as an unprincipled interloper with a nasty Twitter finger. The Comey firing is sure to spark new demands for a special prosecutor or at least more aggressive investigations by Congress and the press.

## **Watergate Comparisons**



Although Democrats had condemned Comey for his interference in the Clinton campaign, they now are rallying to Comey's side because they viewed him as a key instrument for removing Trump from office. After Comey's firing, from The New York Times to CNN, the mainstream media was filled with comparisons to Richard Nixon's Watergate cover-up.

One of the few voices commending Trump for his action, not surprisingly, came from Carter Page, who briefly served as a Trump foreign policy adviser and has found himself in the crosshairs of a high-powered counterintelligence investigation as a result.

"It is encouraging that further steps toward restoring justice in America have been taken with the termination and removal from office of FBI Director James Comey," Page said in a statement.

"Although I have never met President Trump, his strength and judgment in holding senior officials accountable for wrongdoing stands in stark contrast to last year when ordinary private citizens outside of Washington like myself were targeted for exercising their Constitutional rights.

"Under James Comey's leadership in 2016, I was allegedly the subject of an intensive domestic political intelligence operation instigated by the FBI and based on completely false allegations in a FISA warrant application."

Yet, despite what Page and other Trump advisers caught up in the Russia-gate probe may hope, the prospects that Comey's firing will end their ordeal are dim. The near certainty is that whatever Obama and his intelligence chiefs set in motion last year is just beginning.

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

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## Turning Gen. Flynn into Road Kill

**Exclusive:** Although no actual evidence was presented, two ex-Obama administration officials destroyed the reputation of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, portraying him as a liar and a potential traitor, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Not to defend retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn for his suspect judgment, but it should be noted that his case represents a disturbing example of how electronic surveillance and politicized law enforcement can destroy an American citizen's life in today's New McCarthyism.

The testimony on Monday by former acting Attorney General Sally Yates and former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper offered no evidence of Flynn's wrongdoing – those facts were deemed “classified” – yet the pair thoroughly destroyed Flynn's reputation, portraying him as both a liar and a potential traitor.

That Senate Democrats, in particular, saw nothing troubling about this smearing of the former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency and, briefly, President Trump's national security adviser was itself troubling. Republicans were a bit more skeptical but no one, it seemed, wanted to be labeled as soft on Russia.

So, there was no skepticism toward Yates's curious assertion that Flynn's supposed lying to Vice President Mike Pence about the details of a phone call with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak somehow opened Flynn to Russian blackmail – her core explanation for why she rushed to Trump's White House with warnings of this allegedly grave danger.

Yates also talked ominously about “underlying” information that raised further questions about Flynn's patriotism, but that evidence, too, couldn't be shared with the American people; it was classified, leaving it to your imagination the depth of Flynn's perfidy.

Despite the thinness of Yates's charges – and the echoes of Sen. Joe McCarthy with his secret lists of communists that he wouldn't release – the mainstream U.S. news media has bestowed on Yates a hero status without any concern that she might be exaggerating the highly unlikely possibility that the Russians would have blackmailed Flynn.

Her supposition was that since Vice President Mike Pence's account of the Kislyak-Flynn conversation deviated somewhat from the details of what was actually said, the Russians would seize on the discrepancy to coerce Flynn to do their bidding.

But that really makes no sense, in part, because even if the Russians did pick up the discrepancy, they would assume correctly that U.S. intelligence had its own transcript of the conversation, so there would be no basis for blackmail.

Yates's supposed alarm might make for a good spy novel but it has little or no basis in the real world. But it is hard for Americans to assess her claims

because all the key facts are classified.

### **Ignorance Is Strength**

The public does not even know what was said between Kislyak and Flynn on Dec. 29, 2016, when Kislyak called Flynn, who was on vacation in the Dominican Republic. The two apparently discussed the worsening U.S.-Russian relations, since President Obama had just imposed new sanctions on Russia, but it's unclear how specific the references to the sanctions were.

The details are important here, as is the fact that Flynn might well have failed to recall all the details because he was not at his office and did not have staff support for note-taking or recording. For all we know, Flynn was in his bathing suit, Pina Colada in hand.

So, the assumption that Flynn was intentionally lying when he later briefed Pence and other colleagues is a stretch. Yet he is being convicted in the court of public opinion without the evidence being presented or without him getting a serious chance to defend himself.

Yates's own motives might also deserve examination. Her behavior has the look of a partisan prosecutor who likely would have been in line for a top job under President Hillary Clinton. Would that influence her eagerness to twist facts to destroy Flynn and hurt Flynn's boss?

After all, the mood inside the Obama administration in its final days was one of doing whatever it could to strengthen the "resistance" to the incoming Trump administration. After the Inauguration, there were massive anti-Trump protests with calls for Obama holdovers to join the #Resistance. Yates, as an Obama holdover and acting Attorney General, was in a perfect position to "resist."

While the anti-Trump sentiment was understandable in a political sense, it created a motive for Yates to exaggerate an alleged threat and thus initiate an immediate crisis inside the Trump administration, a goal that she accomplished.

There was also a payback factor against Flynn who had infamously joined in the Republican National Convention's chant of "lock her up." Thus, Clinton partisans had a strong motive to create the circumstances to lock Flynn up, which now seems quite possible.

### **Rush to Judgment**

Yet, amid this rush to judgment on Russia-gate, the American public hasn't had a chance to hear from Flynn or the other Trump advisers who have been portrayed as Russian agents based on innuendo, including the contents of an opposition

research dossier compiled by a former British intelligence officer and apparently funded by unknown Clinton supporters.

Taking another step backward, we don't even know the evidence behind the allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 campaign. To back up those charges, President Obama's intelligence chiefs issued a sketchy report on Jan. 6, 2017, that offered no evidence – only assertions – about Russian operatives hacking into Democratic email accounts and then somehow slipping the information to WikiLeaks.

The Russian government and WikiLeaks both deny that scenario, and the Jan. 6 report does little more than repeat over and over how confident its writers are that Russia is guilty.

On Monday, former DNI Clapper did clarify one point that Democrats have consistently misstated: that the report was not the consensus judgment of the 17 U.S. intelligence agencies, but rather was the work of just three of the agencies: Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation.

But the bigger problem with the Jan. 6 report is that it was entirely one-sided, citing reasons to believe the Russians were guilty but ignoring equally strong reasons to doubt the Russians' guilt.

For instance, the report focused on Russia's presumed motive for "hacking" and distributing emails harmful to Hillary Clinton's campaign, citing Russian President Vladimir Putin's concern that Clinton would be a threat to worsen the already frayed relationship between the two nuclear superpowers.

But 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 Democratic 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 U.S. president a personal reason to take revenge on him and his country. Historically, Russia has been very circumspect in such situations, usually holding its intelligence collections for internal purposes only, 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 DNI 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.

The DNI report also included a seven-page appendix, dating from 2012, that is an argumentative attack on RT, the Russian government-backed television network, which is accused of portraying "the US electoral process as undemocratic."

The proof for that accusation includes RT's articles on "voting machine vulnerabilities" although virtually every major U.S. news organization has run similar stories, including some during the last campaign on the feasibility of Russia hacking into the actual voting process, something that even U.S. intelligence says didn't happen.

The report adds that further undermining Americans' faith in the U.S. democratic process, "RT broadcast, hosted and advertised third-party candidate debates." Apparently, the DNI's point is that showing Americans that there are choices beyond the two major parties is 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 report said. Yet, polls have shown exactly that sentiment, that large numbers of Americans would prefer more choices than the usual two candidates and, indeed, most Western democracies have multiple parties.

So, RT's implicit criticism of the U.S. political process is certainly not out of the ordinary. It is extraordinary, however, that the U.S. intelligence community would consider that by allowing American third-party nominees to express their opinions, RT was somehow subverting the American democratic process.

The report also takes 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).

Given the weakness – indeed the absurdity – of these attacks on RT, Americans might have reason to wonder how strong the evidence is regarding the 2016 election, too. But we are not allowed to see that evidence at all. It's classified.

As for Michael Flynn, there may well be legitimate criticism of him for agreeing to give a paid speech at RT's tenth anniversary in 2015, apparently without clearing it with the Pentagon.

I'm also told that Flynn made friends with some Russian military officers whom he met amid Russia's cooperation with the U.S. military campaigns in Afghanistan and in the fight against terrorism.

Of course, President Obama himself developed a cooperative relationship with President Putin and his predecessor Dmitri Medvedev. Putin played a key role in persuading Iran to accept tight constraints on its nuclear program, an agreement that Obama considered his greatest foreign policy achievement.

It was only after the U.S.-orchestrated putsch in Ukraine in early 2014 and Russia's reaction to a new hostile regime on its borders that the U.S.-Russia relationship became clearly antagonistic. Though most U.S. politicians and the media solely blame Putin and Russia, an objective assessment would put blame on the U.S. side as well.

But objectivity is in very short supply in today's Washington, especially since the embittered Democrats saw in Trump's hopes for restoring a more cooperative relationship with Russia a political vulnerability that could be exploited with the prospect that the scandal could be expanded into possible impeachment.

In Official Washington's view, Michael Flynn becomes just road kill in the larger competition for power.

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## The McCarthyism of Russia-gate

**Exclusive:** Civil-liberties nightmares about the Surveillance State are coming true, but – since the victims are former Donald Trump advisers – many of the usual civil-liberties defenders are strikingly silent, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Congressional demands for personal and business information from several of Donald Trump's campaign advisers demonstrate how the Russia-gate investigation

continues to spill over into a new breed of McCarthyism infringing on civil liberties, including freedom of speech and freedom of association.

The original thinking had been that congressional and other investigations would concentrate on specific concerns from alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 election, such as whether a Trump intermediary somehow conveyed purloined Democratic emails to WikiLeaks for publication on the Internet.

WikiLeaks denies getting the leaked emails from Russians and the Trump campaign denies colluding with Russians, but President Obama's intelligence chiefs claimed that Russian agents hacked the emails and then used intermediaries to get the material to WikiLeaks – although no real evidence of that has been presented publicly.

However, instead of zeroing in on that central question, the Senate investigation appears engaged in a fishing expedition looking at virtually every contact between Trump advisers and Russians, who may or may not have ties to the government. The demands are so broad that they could entrap the targets for perceived obstruction of an official investigation if some name or contact is left off, intentionally or by accident.

For instance, the Senate Intelligence Committee has demanded from ex-Trump foreign policy adviser Carter Page, who has extensive business dealings and personal contacts in Russia, the names and details of pretty much anyone he contacted over an 18-month period who could be a Russian official or somehow connected to a Russian business.

In a letter dated April 28, the committee's top Republican, Richard Burr of North Carolina, and top Democrat, Mark Warner of Virginia, gave Page until May 9 to provide: "A list of all meetings between you and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests which took place between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017. For each meeting listed, please include the date, location, all individuals present, and complete copies of any notes taken by you or on your behalf."

### **Meetings with Campaign**

Further, the committee set a deadline of May 19 for Page to also supply: "A list of all meetings of which you are aware between any individual with the Trump campaign and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests which took place between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017. For each meeting listed please include the date, location, and all individuals present."

By the same deadline, the committee demanded: "All communications records, including electronic communications records such as e-mail or text messages,

written correspondence, and phone records of communications which took place between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017, to which you and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests was a party.

“All communications records, including electronic communications records such as e-mail or text message, written correspondence, and phone records, of communications related in any way to Russia, conducted between you and members and advisors of the Trump campaign.

“All information regarding your financial and real estate holdings related to Russia between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017, including those financial securities or real estate holdings which you sold or from which you divested in that time period.”

Similar information requests reportedly have been sent to other Trump campaign advisers, including Roger Stone, Paul Manafort and Michael Flynn.

Given the extent of Page’s dealings in Russia, which included having lived there for several years, the broad information demand amounts to a perjury trap because even if Page tried his best to supply all the personal, phone and email contacts, he would be sure to miss something or someone, thus setting him up for prosecution for obstructing an investigation or lying to investigators.

#### **A FISA Warrant**

Also, since the Obama administration reportedly obtained a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant against Page last summer, the U.S. government may well have more complete records of Page’s contacts and communications than he would, thus putting him into even greater legal jeopardy for an omission.

The FISA warrant was allegedly obtained, in part, because of a speech that Page delivered in Russia on July 7, 2016, that was mildly critical of U.S. foreign policy toward the countries of the former Soviet Union. Beginning in late July, that FBI investigation then expanded into a much wider probe of people connected to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign with possible links to Russia.

In an article about the origins of the investigation of Page and other Trump advisers, The New York Times characterized Page’s July speech to the New Economic School in Moscow as critical of “American policy toward Russia in terms that echoed the position of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.”

The Times then quoted one line from the speech in which Page said, “Washington and other Western capitals have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption and regime change.”



The Times article by Scott Shane, Mark Mazzetti and Adam Goldman added: “His [Page’s] remarks accorded with Mr. Trump’s positive view of the Russian president, which had prompted speculation about what Mr. Trump saw in Mr. Putin – more commonly denounced in the United States as a ruthless, anti-Western autocrat.”

In reality, Page’s speech was much more nuanced than the Times presented. His central point was that the hasty transformation of the former Soviet Union from state-controlled to free market economies led to unintended consequences, including increased corruption.

“As the state remained dominant and new markets were simultaneously established following the breakup of the Soviet Union, members of these societies devised other methods and means of survival through corruption,” Page said, adding that the West was not entirely innocent of similar problems:

“These approaches mirror several corrupt tendencies at times found in Western societies. Some may be clear-cut such as the Bernard Madoff scandal in financial markets and Enron in the energy sector, while others are more subtle such as the perceived societal injustices highlighted by the Occupy Wall Street movement.”

In other words, Page’s comments fell well within a reasonable assessment of the troubles that have occurred within the countries of the former Soviet Union. Page also recognized that the West – despite its sometimes holier-than-thou attitude toward less-developed nations – has its own problems with both criminal corruption and the more subtle variety of Wall Street machinations. After all, the 2008 financial crisis stripped common citizens of both America and Europe of trillions of dollars in lost assets and costs from government bailouts.

### **Echoing Putin?**

But note how The New York Times characterized Page’s remarks as having “echoed the position of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia,” suggesting that Page, a former U.S. Navy officer, was somehow demonstrating disloyalty.

The Times also suggested that Page’s opinions as expressed in his speech contributed to the Obama administration’s decision to seek and obtain a FISA warrant that allowed the U.S. government to monitor his communications as a suspected foreign agent.

Normally, such intrusive government action against a citizen for expressing his opinions – whether they “echoed” the views of President Putin or not – would alarm defenders of civil liberties. However, since Page briefly served as a foreign policy adviser to Trump – and much of the civil liberties community has

enlisted in the #Resistance to Trump over his presumed threats to civil liberties – there has been extraordinary silence about the McCarthyistic treatment of Page and other Trump advisers.

Retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who served briefly as President Trump's national security adviser, has already had a taste of how the U.S. government's surveillance powers can entrap a citizen in a "process" crime, such as lying to investigators or obstructing justice.

On Dec. 29, 2016, several weeks before Trump's inauguration, Flynn – while vacationing in the Dominican Republic – took a phone call from Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak in which they apparently discussed mounting tensions between Washington and Moscow, as U.S. intelligence officials surreptitiously listened in.

Because Flynn was not officially part of the government at the time of the call, Obama administration appointees at the Justice Department created a pretext for a criminal investigation by citing the Logan Act, a law enacted in 1799 to prohibit private citizens from negotiating with foreign adversaries but never used to convict anyone, ever. The law also is of dubious constitutionality and was surely never intended to apply to a president-elect's advisers.

However, based on that flimsy pretext, FBI agents – with a transcript of the electronic intercept of the Kislyak-Flynn phone call in hand – tested Flynn's memory of the conversation and found his recollections incomplete. Flynn also has come under criticism for giving a paid speech in 2015 to a dinner in Moscow honoring the tenth anniversary of the Russian television station, RT. Under mounting media and political pressure, President Trump fired Flynn.

### **The New McCarthyism**

So, while one can legitimately criticize Flynn's judgment, the larger civil-liberties issue surrounding the Russia-gate investigation is the prospect of criminalizing otherwise innocuous contacts with Russia and punishing American citizens for resisting the New Cold War.

Many Democrats, liberals and even some progressives appear excited over the prospect of wielding this new McCarthyism against Trump's advisers with the hope that Russia-gate can be built up into a case for Trump's impeachment.

But the precedents that are being set could be very dangerous for the long term. If Americans can be put under invasive FISA warrants for going abroad and criticizing U.S. policies or if intercepted phone calls can be used to test the memories of citizens during FBI interviews, many of the warnings from civil libertarians about the dangers of "war on terror" surveillance powers being

applied more broadly may be coming true.

After receiving the sweeping congressional demands for documents and other data, Carter Page, who is an oil industry consultant with numerous foreign contacts including in Russia, responded by taking note of the reported FISA surveillance of him, writing to Senators Burr and Warner:

“I remain committed to helping the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in any way that I can. But please note that any records I may have saved as a private citizen with limited technology capabilities will be miniscule in comparison to the full database of information which has already been collected under the direction of the Obama Administration during last year’s completely unjustified FISA warrant that targeted me for exercising my First Amendment rights, both in 2016 as well as in years prior.

“As a starting point for this latest step in the witch hunt which you suggested per the cumbersome chores defined in your ... letter, I would request that you please begin by sharing [with me] the same information which you currently have ... Based on the database of my personal information already collected during the Obama Administration’s domestic political intelligence operations which reportedly began at some point last year, it seems clear that many of the weighty task[s] you assigned will have already been largely completed.

“As a lone individual, I can assure you that my personal administrative capabilities pale in comparison to the clerical juggernaut represented by the numerous staff in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the U.S. Government which have heretofore been allegedly involved in this unscrupulous surveillance for many months on end.”

Whether justified or not, the FISA surveillance of Page – and thus likely others whom he contacted – may create the basis for some kind of criminal charges against him. Other Trump advisers may be tripped up on various process crimes, such as failure to report properly under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, another law that gets enforced selectively mostly against people without political pull.

In an interview on Friday, Page told me that he was a small player who was innocent of violating any laws but who became an “obvious” target for the Obama administration’s effort to undermine the Trump campaign.

“I don’t have [political] protection and I have genuine, deep Russian connections,” he said, adding that compliance with the Senate’s demands would require him reviewing “thousands of emails and hundreds of phone calls. ... It defies all logic and common sense.”

But the reality of Official Washington is that once momentum builds up around a “scandal,” someone has to get convicted of something – or all the Important People who have weighed in on the “affair” will look stupid. In Russia-gate, however, important principles about the right to dissent, the right to privacy and the right to associate freely are getting trampled.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Did-You-Talk-to-Russians Witch-hunt.”](#)]

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

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