

The Right's Second Amendment Lies

From the Archive: In the wake of the latest gun massacre in the United States, we republish an article by Robert Parry debunking some of the right-wing myths about the Second Amendment that have prevented common sense gun laws.

By Robert Parry (first published December 21, 2012)

Right-wing resistance to meaningful gun control is driven, in part, by a false notion that America's Founders adopted the Second Amendment because they wanted an armed population that could battle the U.S. government. The opposite is the truth, but many Americans seem to have embraced this absurd, anti-historical narrative.

The reality was that the Framers wrote the Constitution and added the Second Amendment with the goal of creating a strong central government with a citizens-based military force capable of putting down insurrections, not to enable or encourage uprisings. The key Framers, after all, were mostly men of means with a huge stake in an orderly society, the likes of George Washington and James Madison.

The men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 weren't precursors to France's Robespierre or Russia's Leon Trotsky, believers in perpetual revolutions. In fact, their work on the Constitution was influenced by the experience of Shays' Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786, a populist uprising that the weak federal government, under the Articles of Confederation, lacked an army to defeat.

Daniel Shays, the leader of the revolt, was a former Continental Army captain who joined with other veterans and farmers to take up arms against the government for failing to address their economic grievances.

The rebellion alarmed retired Gen. George Washington who received reports on the developments from old Revolutionary War associates in Massachusetts, such as Gen. Henry Knox and Gen. Benjamin Lincoln. Washington was particularly concerned that the disorder might serve the interests of the British, who had only recently accepted the existence of the United States.

On Oct. 22, 1786, in a letter seeking more information from a friend in Connecticut, Washington wrote: "I am mortified beyond expression that in the moment of our acknowledged independence we should by our conduct verify the predictions of our transatlantic foe, and render ourselves ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of all Europe."

In another letter on Nov. 7, 1786, Washington questioned Gen. Lincoln about the spreading unrest. "What is the cause of all these commotions? When and how will they end?" Lincoln responded: "Many of them appear to be absolutely so [mad] if an attempt to annihilate our present constitution and dissolve the present government can be considered as evidence of insanity."

However, the U.S. government lacked the means to restore order, so wealthy Bostonians financed their own force under Gen. Lincoln to crush the uprising in February 1787. Afterwards, Washington expressed satisfaction at the outcome but remained concerned the rebellion might be a sign that European predictions about American chaos were coming true.

"If three years ago [at the end of the American Revolution] any person had told me that at this day, I should see such a formidable rebellion against the laws & constitutions of our own making as now appears I should have thought him a bedlamite – a fit subject for a mad house," Washington wrote to Knox on Feb. 3, 1787, adding that if the government "shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws anarchy & confusion must prevail."

Washington's alarm about Shays' Rebellion was a key factor in his decision to take part in and preside over the Constitutional Convention, which was supposed to offer revisions to the Articles of Confederation but instead threw out the old structure entirely and replaced it with the U.S. Constitution, which shifted national sovereignty from the 13 states to "We the People" and dramatically enhanced the power of the central government.

A central point of the Constitution was to create a peaceful means for the United States to implement policies favored by the people but within a structure of checks and balances to prevent radical changes deemed too disruptive to the established society. For instance, the two-year terms of the House of Representatives were meant to reflect the popular will but the six-year terms of the Senate were designed to temper the passions of the moment.

Within this framework of a democratic Republic, the Framers criminalized taking up arms against the government. Article IV, Section 4 committed the federal government to protect each state from not only invasion but "domestic Violence," and treason is one of the few crimes defined in the Constitution as "levying war against" the United States as well as giving "Aid and Comfort" to the enemy (Article III, Section 3).

But it was the Constitution's drastic expansion of federal power that prompted strong opposition from some Revolutionary War figures, such as Virginia's Patrick Henry who denounced the Constitution and rallied a movement known as the Anti-Federalists. Prospects for the Constitution's ratification were in such

doubt that its principal architect James Madison joined in a sales campaign known as the Federalist Papers in which he tried to play down how radical his changes actually were.

To win over other skeptics, Madison agreed to support a Bill of Rights, which would be proposed as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Madison's political maneuvering succeeded as the Constitution narrowly won approval in key states, such as Virginia, New York and Massachusetts. The First Congress then approved the Bill of Rights which were ratified in 1791. [For details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

Behind the Second Amendment

The Second Amendment dealt with concerns about "security" and the need for trained militias to ensure what the Constitution called "domestic Tranquility." There was also hesitancy among many Framers about the costs and risks from a large standing army, thus making militias composed of citizens an attractive alternative.

So, the Second Amendment read: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Contrary to some current right-wing fantasies about the Framers wanting to encourage popular uprisings over grievances, the language of the amendment is clearly aimed at maintaining order within the country.

That point was driven home by the actions of the Second Congress amid another uprising which erupted in 1791 in western Pennsylvania. This anti-tax revolt, known as the Whiskey Rebellion, prompted Congress in 1792 to expand on the idea of "a well-regulated militia" by passing the Militia Acts which required all military-age white males to obtain their own muskets and equipment for service in militias.

In 1794, President Washington, who was determined to demonstrate the young government's resolve, led a combined force of state militias against the Whiskey rebels. Their revolt soon collapsed and order was restored, demonstrating how the Second Amendment helped serve the government in maintaining "security," as the Amendment says.

Beyond this clear historical record that the Framers' intent was to create security for the new Republic, not promote armed rebellions there is also the simple logic that the Framers represented the young nation's aristocracy. Many, like Washington, owned vast tracts of land. They recognized that a strong central government and domestic tranquility were in their economic interests.

So, it would be counterintuitive as well as anti-historical to believe that

Madison and Washington wanted to arm the population so the discontented could resist the constitutionally elected government. In reality, the Framers wanted to arm the people at least the white males so uprisings, whether economic clashes like Shays' Rebellion, anti-tax protests like the Whiskey Rebellion, attacks by Native Americans or slave revolts, could be repulsed.

However, the Right has invested heavily during the last several decades in fabricating a different national narrative, one that ignores both logic and the historical record. In this right-wing fantasy, the Framers wanted everyone to have a gun so they could violently resist their own government. To that end, a few incendiary quotes are cherry-picked or taken out of context.

This "history" has then been amplified through the Right's powerful propaganda apparatus Fox News, talk radio, the Internet and ideological publications to persuade millions of Americans that their possession of semi-automatic assault rifles and other powerful firearms is what the Framers intended, that today's gun-owners are fulfilling some centuries-old American duty.

The mythology about the Framers and the Second Amendment is, of course, only part of the fake history that the Right has created to persuade ill-informed Tea Partiers that they should dress up in Revolutionary War costumes and channel the spirits of men like Washington and Madison.

But this gun fable is particularly insidious because it obstructs efforts by today's government to enact commonsense gun-control laws and thus the false narrative makes possible the kinds of slaughters that erupt periodically across the United States, most recently in Newtown, Connecticut, where 20 schoolchildren and six teachers were murdered in minutes by an unstable young man with a civilian version of the M-16 combat rifle.

While it's absurd to think that the Founders could have even contemplated such an act in their 18th Century world of single-fire muskets that required time-consuming reloading right-wing gun advocates have evaded that obvious reality by postulating that Washington, Madison and other Framers would have wanted a highly armed population to commit what the Constitution defined as treason against the United States.

Today's American Right is drunk on some very bad history, which is as dangerous as it is false.

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

A Note to Our Readers

As Consortiumnews.com forges ahead with publishing incisive articles offering fresh takes on current events, we also continue to develop a long-term strategy to ensure that Robert Parry's vision for independent journalism lives on.

By Nat Parry

For the past few weeks, since Robert Parry's health issues led to his hospitalization and to his untimely passing, his assistant editor, Chelsea Gilmour, and I have been handling the daily editing and upkeep of this website. We greatly appreciate the committed group of writers my dad has worked with over the years, who have continued to contribute quality content and offer unique perspectives on the most pressing issues of the day.

With Robert's passing, Consortiumnews lost not only its editor but also its most prolific writer. Therefore we have tried to not only uphold his high editorial standards, but also to fill the gap in content by reaching out to new contributors, who have for the most part been warmly received by this website's dedicated readership. Naturally, with any changes also come criticism, and we have experienced our share – including from a small but vocal clique of trolls on Twitter.

I suppose this comes with the territory when publishing a website that covers controversial topics, and particularly in the overheated political environment in the United States these days, it should be expected that any contrarian views will be met with hostility from various sectors.

Even with that in mind, it has been surprising to see some of the vitriol, which I can't help but chalk up to the general state of hysteria that is gripping the United States these days. This is the result, it seems, of both the Russiagate controversy and the general trauma of the Donald Trump presidency. I have lived in Denmark the past ten years and don't get back to the U.S. as much as I used to. The last time I was there, before heading back in mid-January to be with my dad as he dealt with his health issues, was during the election in November 2016. The atmosphere at that time was of course pretty heated with Americans coping with a highly divisive election campaign and coming to terms with the reality of a Trump presidency.

Following the news closely since the election, even from abroad, it was obvious that the Russiagate story was taking on a hysterical tone reminiscent of the Joe

McCarthy era of the 1950s. We were seeing independent political movements like Black Lives Matter, the Standing Rock water protectors, and the Green Party being dragged through the mud and tarred with the “Russian agent” epithet. It was also clear that Russiagate was claiming a disproportionate amount of attention in the U.S., even as major issues like climate change and questions of war and peace were downplayed or ignored.

It wasn't until I visited in January, however, that I realized how all-encompassing the Trump/Russia story is within the context of U.S. politics. Dividing my time between hospital visits to see my dad and working on the upkeep of Consortiumnews.com, I didn't have a lot of free time for TV watching, but every time that I did turn the TV on and flipped to a cable “news” channel, it was nothing but nonstop Russiagate coverage.

No matter how long I watched – whether 15 minutes, an hour, or two hours – the subject matter was always the same: all Russia, all the time. And of course, the coverage was highly slanted – always taking at face value the underlying allegations made by the intelligence community, despite their well-known track record for deceit. It's not clear to me whether Americans realize how abnormal this environment is.

Robert Parry did realize it though, and it was in this environment that he tried to build a home for independent journalism that took a fresh look at the big issues. His approach was always in the spirit of trying to present at least two sides to the story – and sometimes more than two sides. As he recalled in Consortiumnews.com's mission statement, as a young reporter, he was “expected to seek out those alternative views, not dismiss them or pretend they didn't exist.”

“But the major Western news outlets began to see journalism differently,” he wrote. “It became their strange duty to shut down questioning of the Official Story, even when the Official Story had major holes and made little sense, even when the evidence went in a different direction and serious analysts were disputing the groupthink.”

In this spirit, Consortiumnews has attracted a talented and knowledgeable team of writers who contribute from a variety of perspectives – as journalists, activists, academics, whistleblowers, and former intelligence officials who have grown weary of the politicization of their profession. This site has always been about the right of people to know what's real and what's not, what's proven and what's unproven. We hope that even in Robert's absence, this independent approach can carry on.

Although Chelsea and I are now handling the editing and day-to-day operations of

the website, the Board of the Consortium for Independent Journalism – which publishes Consortiumnews.com – is currently conducting a search for a full-time editor-in-chief who would take over the responsibilities on a more long-term basis.

During this transition period, we appreciate the continued support of readers who engage in lively debates on these pages and the writers who provide such interesting content on a daily basis. We will try to keep readers in the loop regarding next steps.

Thanks for your support.

Did Al Qaeda Dupe Trump on Syrian Attack?

From the Archive: As the U.S. blames Damascus and Moscow for recent chlorine gas attacks in Syria, we re-publish a report by Robert Parry providing useful context regarding a chemical attack last April.

By Robert Parry (first published Nov. 9, 2017)

A new United Nations-sponsored report on the April 4 sarin incident in an Al Qaeda-controlled town in Syria blames Bashar al-Assad's government for the atrocity, but the report contains evidence deep inside its "Annex II" that would prove Assad's innocence.

If you read that far, you would find that more than 100 victims of sarin exposure were taken to several area hospitals *before* the alleged Syrian warplane could have struck the town of Khan Sheikhoun.

Still, the Joint Investigative Mechanism [JIM], a joint project of the U.N. and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons [OPCW], brushed aside this startling evidence and delivered the Assad guilty verdict that the United States and its allies wanted.

The JIM consigned the evidence of a staged atrocity, in which Al Qaeda operatives would have used sarin to kill innocent civilians and pin the blame on Assad, to a spot 14 pages into the report's Annex II. The sensitivity of this evidence of a staged "attack" is heightened by the fact that President Trump rushed to judgment and ordered a "retaliatory" strike with 59 Tomahawk missiles on a Syrian airbase on the night of April 6-7. That U.S. attack reportedly

killed several soldiers at the base and nine civilians, including four children, in nearby neighborhoods.

So, if it becomes clear that Al Qaeda tricked President Trump not only would he be responsible for violating international law and killing innocent people, but he and virtually the entire Western political establishment along with the major news media would look like Al Qaeda's "useful idiots."

Currently, the West and its mainstream media are lambasting the Russians for not accepting the JIM's "assessment," which blames Assad for the sarin attack. Russia is also taking flak for questioning continuation of the JIM's mandate. There has been virtually no mainstream skepticism about the JIM's report and almost no mention in the mainstream of the hospital-timing discrepancy.

Timing Troubles

To establish when the supposed sarin attack occurred on April 4, the JIM report relied on witnesses in the Al Qaeda-controlled town and a curious video showing three plumes of smoke but no airplanes. Based on the video's metadata, the JIM said the scene was recorded between 0642 and 0652 hours. The JIM thus puts the timing of the sarin release at between 0630 and 0700 hours.

But the first admissions of victims to area hospitals began as early as 0600 hours, the JIM found, meaning that these victims could not have been poisoned by the alleged aerial bombing (even if the airstrike really did occur).

According to the report's Annex II, "The admission times of the records range between 0600 and 1600 hours." And these early cases – arriving *before* the alleged airstrike – were not isolated ones.

"Analysis of the ... medical records revealed that in 57 cases, patients were admitted in five hospitals before the incident in Khan Shaykhun," Annex II said.

Plus, this timing discrepancy was not limited to a few hospitals in and around Khan Sheikhoun, but was recorded as well at hospitals that were scattered across the area and included one hospital that would have taken an hour or so to reach.

Annex II stated: "In 10 such cases, patients appear to have been admitted to a hospital 125 km away from Khan Shaykhun at 0700 hours while another 42 patients appear to have been admitted to a hospital 30 km away at 0700 hours."

In other words, more than 100 patients would appear to have been exposed to sarin *before* the alleged Syrian warplane could have dropped the alleged bomb and the victims could be evacuated, a finding that alone would have destroyed the JIM's case against the Syrian government.

But the JIM seemed more interested in burying this evidence of Al Qaeda staging the incident – and killing some expendable civilians – than in following up this timing problem.

“The [JIM] did not investigate these discrepancies and cannot determine whether they are linked to any possible staging scenario, or to poor record-keeping in chaotic conditions,” the report said. But the proffered excuse about poor record-keeping would have to apply to multiple hospitals over a wide area all falsely recording the arrival time of more than 100 patients.

The video of the plumes of smoke also has come under skepticism from Theodore Postol, a weapons expert at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who noted that none of the three plumes matched up with damage to buildings (as viewed from satellite images) that would have resulted from aerial bombs of that power.

Postol’s finding suggests that the smoke could have been another part of a staging event rather than debris kicked up by aerial bombs.

The JIM also could find no conclusive evidence that a Syrian warplane was over Khan Sheikhoun at the time of the video although the report claims that a plane could have come within about 5 kilometers of the town.

A History of Deception

Perhaps even more significantly, the JIM report ignored the context of the April 4 case and the past history of Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front staging chemical weapons attacks with the goal of foisting blame on the Syrian government and tricking the U.S. military into an intervention on the side of Nusra and its Islamic-militant allies.

On April 4, there was a strong motive for Al Qaeda and its regional allies to mount a staged event. Just days earlier, President Trump’s administration had shocked the Syrian rebels and their backers by declaring “regime change” was no longer the U.S. goal in Syria.

So, Al Qaeda and its regional enablers were frantic to reverse Trump’s decision, which was accomplished by his emotional reaction to videos on cable news showing children and other civilians suffering and dying in Khan Sheikhoun.

On the night of April 6-7, before any thorough investigation could be conducted, Trump ordered 59 Tomahawk missiles fired at the Syrian air base that supposedly had launched the sarin attack.

At the time, I was told by an intelligence source that at least some CIA analysts believed that the sarin incident indeed had been staged with sarin

possibly flown in by drone from a Saudi-Israeli special operations base in Jordan.

This source said the on-the-ground staging for the incident had been hasty because of the surprise announcement that the Trump administration was no longer seeking regime change in Damascus. The haste led to some sloppiness in tying down all the necessary details to pin the atrocity on Assad, the source said.

But the few slip-ups, such as the apparent failure to coordinate the timing of the hospital admissions to *after* the purported airstrike, didn't deter the JIM investigators from backing the West's desire to blame Assad and also create another attack line against the Russians.

Similarly, other U.N.-connected investigators downplayed earlier evidence that Al Qaeda's Nusra was staging chemical weapons incidents after President Obama laid down his "red line" on chemical weapons. The militants apparently hoped that the U.S. military would take out the Syrian military and pave the way for an Al Qaeda victory.

For instance, U.N. investigators learned from a number of townspeople of Al-Tamanah about how the rebels and allied "activists" staged a chlorine gas attack on the night of April 29-30, 2014, and then sold the false story to a credulous Western media and, initially, to a U.N. investigative team.

"Seven witnesses stated that frequent alerts [about an imminent chlorine weapons attack by the government] had been issued, but in fact no incidents with chemicals took place," the U.N. report said. "While people sought safety after the warnings, their homes were looted and rumours spread that the events were being staged. ... [T]hey [these witnesses] had come forward to contest the widespread false media reports."

Dubious Evidence

Other people, who did allege that there had been a government chemical attack on Al-Tamanah, provided suspect evidence, including data from questionable sources, according to the report.

The report said, "Three witnesses, who did not give any description of the incident on 29-30 April 2014, provided material of unknown source. One witness had second-hand knowledge of two of the five incidents in Al-Tamanah, but did not remember the exact dates. Later that witness provided a USB-stick with information of unknown origin, which was saved in separate folders according to the dates of all the five incidents mentioned by the FFM [the U.N.'s Fact-Finding Mission]."

“Another witness provided the dates of all five incidents reading it from a piece of paper, but did not provide any testimony on the incident on 29-30 April 2014. The latter also provided a video titled ‘site where second barrel containing toxic chlorine gas was dropped tamanaa 30 April 14’”

Some other witnesses alleging a Syrian government attack offered curious claims about detecting the chlorine-infused “barrel bombs” based on how the device sounded in its descent.

The U.N. report said, “The eyewitness, who stated to have been on the roof, said to have heard a helicopter and the ‘very loud’ sound of a falling barrel. Some interviewees had referred to a distinct whistling sound of barrels that contain chlorine as they fall. The witness statement could not be corroborated with any further information.”

However, the claim itself is absurd since it is inconceivable that anyone could detect a chlorine canister inside a “barrel bomb” by “a distinct whistling sound.”

The larger point, however, is that the jihadist rebels in Al-Tamanah and their propaganda teams, including relief workers and activists, appear to have organized a coordinated effort at deception complete with a fake video supplied to U.N. investigators and Western media outlets.

For instance, the Telegraph in London reported that “Videos allegedly taken in Al-Tamanah ... purport to show the impact sites of two chemical bombs. Activists said that one person had been killed and another 70 injured.”

The Telegraph quoted supposed weapons expert Eliot Higgins, the founder of Bellingcat and a senior fellow at the fiercely anti-Russian Atlantic Council, as endorsing the Al-Tamanah claims.

“Witnesses have consistently reported the use of helicopters to drop the chemical barrel bombs used,” said Higgins. “As it stands, around a dozen chemical barrel bomb attacks have been alleged in that region in the last three weeks.”

The Al-Tamanah debunking in the U.N. report received no mainstream media attention when the U.N. findings were issued in September 2016 because the U.N. report relied on rebel information to blame two other alleged chlorine attacks on the government and that got all the coverage. But the case should have raised red flags given the extent of the apparent deception.

If the seven townspeople were telling the truth, that would mean that the rebels and their allies issued fake attack warnings, produced propaganda videos to fool

the West, and prepped “witnesses” with “evidence” to deceive investigators. Yet, no alarms went off about other rebel claims.

The Ghouta Incident

A more famous attack – with sarin gas on the Damascus suburb of Ghouta on Aug. 21, 2013, killing hundreds – was also eagerly blamed on the Assad regime, as The New York Times, Human Rights Watch, Higgins’s Bellingcat and many other Western outlets jumped to that conclusion despite the unlikely circumstances. Assad had just welcomed U.N. investigators to Damascus to examine chemical attacks that he was blaming on the rebels.

Assad also was facing the “red line” threat from President Obama warning him of possible U.S. military intervention if the Syrian government deployed chemical weapons. Why Assad and his military would choose such a moment to launch a deadly sarin attack outside Damascus, killing mostly civilians, made little sense.

But this became another rush to judgment in the West that brought the Obama administration to the verge of launching a devastating air attack on the Syrian military that might have helped Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate and/or the Islamic State win the war.

Eventually, however, the case blaming Assad for the 2013 sarin attack collapsed.

An analysis by genuine weapons experts – such as Theodore Postol, an MIT professor of science, technology and national security policy, and Richard M. Lloyd, an analyst at the military contractor Tesla Laboratories – found that the missile that delivered the sarin had a very short range placing its likely firing position in rebel territory.

Later, reporting by journalist Seymour Hersh implicated Turkish intelligence working with jihadist rebels as the likely source of the sarin.

We also learned in 2016 that a message from the U.S. intelligence community had warned Obama how weak the evidence against Assad was. There was no “slam-dunk” proof, said Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. And Obama cited his rejection of the Washington militaristic “playbook” to bomb Syria as one of his proudest moments as President.

With this background, there should have been extreme skepticism when jihadists and their allies made new claims about the Syrian government engaging in chemical weapons attacks. But there wasn’t.

The broader context for these biased investigations is that U.N. and OPCW

investigators have been under intense pressure to confirm accusations against Syria and other targeted states.

Right now, the West is blaming Russia for the collapsing consensus behind U.N. investigations, but the problem really comes from Washington's longtime strategy of coercing U.N. organizations into becoming propaganda arms for U.S. geopolitical strategies.

The U.N.'s relative independence in its investigative efforts was decisively broken early this century when President George W. Bush's administration purged U.N. agencies that were not onboard with U.S. hegemony, especially on interventions in the Middle East.

Through manipulation of funding and selection of key staff members, the Bush administration engineered the takeover or at least the neutralizing of one U.N.-affiliated organization after another.

For instance, in 2002, Bush's Deputy Under-Secretary of State John Bolton spearheaded the takeover of the OPCW as Bush planned to cite chemical weapons as a principal excuse for invading Iraq.

OPCW Director General Jose Mauricio Bustani was viewed as an obstacle because he was pressing Iraq to accept OPCW's conventions for eliminating chemical weapons, which could have undermined Bush's WMD rationale for war.

Though Bustani was just reelected to a new term, the Brazilian diplomat was forced out, to be followed in that job by more pliable bureaucrats, including the current Director General Ahmet Uzumcu of Turkey, who not only comes from a NATO country but served as Turkey's ambassador to NATO and to Israel. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "U.N. Enablers of 'Aggressive War.'"]

Since those days of the Iraq invasion, the game hasn't changed. U.S. and other Western officials expect the U.N. and related agencies to accept or at least not object to Washington's geopolitical interventions.

The only difference now is that Russia, one of the five veto-wielding members of the Security Council, is saying enough is enough – and Russia's opposition to these biased inquiries is emerging as one more dangerous hot spot in the New Cold War.

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).

Do We Really Want Nuclear War with Russia?

From the Archive: With Moscow saying that U.S. proposals in its new Nuclear Posture Review to develop “tactical” nukes are “confrontational” and “anti-Russian,” we republish a 2016 article by Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry (first published on Oct. 3, 2016)

Through an endless barrage of ugly propaganda, the U.S. government and the mainstream American press have put the world on course for a potential nuclear showdown with Russia, an existential risk that has been undertaken cavalierly amid bizarre expressions of self-righteousness from Western institutions.

This extraordinarily dangerous moment reflects the insistence of the Establishment in Washington that it should continue to rule the world and that it will not broach the possibility of other nations asserting their own national interests even in their own neighborhoods.

Rather than adjust to a new multi-polar world, the powers-that-be in Washington have deployed a vast array of propaganda assets that are financed or otherwise encouraged to escalate an information war so aggressively that Russia is reading this onslaught of insults as the conditioning of the Western populations for a world war.

While that may not be the intention of President Obama, who in his recent United Nations address acknowledged the risks from imposing uni-polar order on the world, a powerful bureaucratic machinery is in place to advance U.S. propaganda goals. It is operating on a crazed auto-pilot hurtling toward destruction but beyond anyone’s ability to turn it off.

This machinery consists not just of outlets and activists funded by U.S. tax dollars via the National Endowment for Democracy or the U.S. Agency for International Development or NATO’s Strategic Communications Command, but like-minded “human rights” entities paid for by billionaire currency speculator George Soros or controlled by neoconservative ideologues who now run major U.S. newspapers, such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

This propaganda apparatus now has so many specialized features that you get supposedly “progressive” and “anti-war” organizations promoting a major U.S. invasion of Syria under the guise of sweet-sounding policies like “no-fly zones” and “safe zones,” the same euphemisms that were used as the gateway to bloody

“regime change” wars in Iraq and Libya.

There exists what intelligence veterans call a Mighty Wurlitzer, an organ with so many keys and pedals that it’s hard to know where all the sounds come from that make up the powerful harmony, all building to the same crescendo. But that crescendo may now be war with nuclear-armed Russia, which finds in all this demonizing the prelude to either a destabilization campaign aimed at “regime change” in Moscow or outright war.

Yet, the West can’t seem to muster the sanity or the honesty to begin toning down or even showing skepticism toward the escalating charges aimed at Russia. We saw similar patterns in the run-up to war in Iraq in 2002-2003 and in justifying the ouster, torture and murder of Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Western propaganda also has enveloped the conflict in Syria to such an extent that the American people don’t understand that the U.S. government and its regional “allies” have been supporting and arming jihadist groups fighting under the command of Al Qaeda and even the Islamic State. The propaganda has focused on demonizing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while downplaying or ignoring the real nature of the “moderate” opposition.

Taking Aim at Putin

In many ways, the Western insistence on “regime change” in Syria ties in directly to the extraordinary escalation of that strategy to seek “regime change” in Russia. In August-September 2013, America’s neocons and liberal war hawks were salivating over the prospect of a U.S. military bombing campaign to devastate Assad’s army as punishment for his alleged role in a sarin gas attack outside Damascus.

Although the intelligence was weak regarding Assad’s “guilt” – and subsequent evidence has pointed to a likely provocation by radical jihadists using home-made sarin and a jerry-rigged rocket – Official Washington was rubbing its hands at the prospect of a retaliatory bombing operation that would punish Assad and advance the cause of “regime change.”

At the last minute, however, President Obama listened to the doubts from his intelligence advisers and rejected what he later called the Washington “playbook” of a military response to a complex problem. To the annoyance of Washington insiders, Obama then collaborated with President Putin in a diplomatic settlement in which Syria surrendered all its chemical weapons while still denying any role in the sarin attack. Obama was accused of weakness for not “enforcing his red line” against chemical weapons use.

The despair over Obama’s failure to bomb the Syrian government and open the path

for a long-desired “regime change” in Damascus led to a search for other villains, the most obvious one being Putin, who then became the focus of neocon determination to make him share their pain and disappointment.

National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman took to the op-ed page of *The Washington Post* in late September 2013 to declare that Ukraine was now “the biggest prize” and represented an important interim step toward eventually toppling Putin in Russia.

Gershman, who is essentially a neocon paymaster dispensing \$100 million a year in U.S. taxpayers’ money to activists, journalists and various other operatives, wrote: “Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

Within weeks, U.S. neocons – including Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and Sen. John McCain – were encouraging right-wing Ukrainian nationalists to overthrow Ukraine’s elected President Viktor Yanukovich, a coup accomplished on Feb. 22, 2014, touching off a civil war between Ukraine’s west and east.

As part of that Western propaganda barrage, the Ukraine coup ousting the elected president was hailed as a victory for “democracy” and Yanukovich’s supporters in the south and east who resisted this imposition of illegitimate authority in Kiev became the target of a U.S.-backed “Anti-Terrorism Operation” or ATO.

Led by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, the Western media fell in line behind the preferred narrative that there was “no coup,” that there were “no neo-Nazis” spearheading the non-coup (or maybe just a few), that the “Heavenly Hundred” who died in the putsch against Yanukovich had given their lives for Ukraine’s “freedom” even though some of the “heavenly” inconveniently were neo-Nazi street fighters, part of a paramilitary force that had killed some 16 police officers.

Killing ‘Terrorists’

Given the West’s pro-coup propaganda themes, it became necessary to justify the thousands of eastern Ukrainians slaughtered in the ATO as the killing of “terrorists” or Russian “stooges,” getting what they deserved. The 96 percent vote in Crimea’s referendum to reunify with Russia had to be a “sham” since the West’s narrative held that the Ukrainian people were thrilled with the putsch, so the Crimeans must have voted that way at Russian gunpoint.

The explanation of Crimea’s secession from Ukraine was that Russia “invaded” and “annexed” Crimea although there were no images of an invasion (no tanks crossing Crimea’s borders, no amphibious landings, no paratroopers descending from the

sky – because Russian troops were already in Crimea as part of a basing agreement and helped protect Crimea’s inhabitants so they could hold their vote which did represent their desires).

Because the Western propaganda insisted that the new authorities in Kiev were wearing white hats, the Russians had to be fitted with black hats. Every bad thing that happened was automatically Putin’s fault. So, when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, the West’s propaganda machinery whirred into action, blaming Russia for supposedly giving the ethnic Russian rebels powerful Buk anti-aircraft missiles.

The propaganda momentum was so strong by then that there was no Western support for Russia’s request for a United Nations investigation. Instead the inquiry was largely turned over to the torture-implicated Ukrainian intelligence service, the SBU, upon which the Dutch and Australians, the other two principal members, became increasingly dependent (by their own admissions). Belgium and Malaysia played lesser roles.

The Joint Investigation Committee (JIT) considered no serious alternatives to the Russians and the rebels being responsible. For instance, when the JIT released its “report” on Sept. 28, 2016, there was no explanation offered for why Dutch intelligence (i.e. NATO intelligence) had concluded that the only missile systems in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, capable of shooting down MH-17 were controlled by the Ukrainian military. The JIT “report” was silent about where those Ukrainian Buk missile systems were at the time of the shoot-down.

It’s also a bit of a misnomer to describe the JIT’s findings as a “report” since they were really expressed in a series of videos featuring computer-generated graphics supposedly showing a Russian Buk crew driving around Ukraine, mixed in with a few photos from social media of a Buk convoy.

Key to the JIT’s findings were phone intercepts provided by the SBU and assembled to reinforce the impression of Russian guilt. The problem, however, was that except for one intercept in which someone said he’d like to have Buks, the word “Buk” is not mentioned; nor the word “missiles”; nor the word “aircraft”; nor any discussion about shooting down a plane. That was all supposition with an authoritative narrator filling in the gaps.

Ignoring Contrary Evidence

The JIT also ignored evidence that contradicted its conclusions, such as other intercepts reporting that a Ukrainian convoy had penetrated close to the eastern city of Luhansk. The significance of that revelation is that it confirms a point

that has been largely ignored, that the Ukrainian military could move almost at will across “rebel-controlled territory.” The notion that the Ukrainian civil war was like World War I with fixed trench lines was simply a fallacy.

The JIT also had to impose a bizarre route for the Russian Buk battery to follow on its way to the supposed firing location south of the remote eastern town of Snizhne. Because the “social media” photos show the Buk convoy heading east toward Russia, not west from Russia, the JIT had to map out a journey that ignored a simple, direct and discreet route from the Russian border to Snizhne in favor of a trip more than twice as long roaming around eastern Ukraine all the way to Donetsk before turning eastward past a number of heavily populated areas where the Buk convoy, supposedly on a highly secret mission, could be photographed.

The alleged firing location also conflicts with the alleged reason for the Russians taking the extraordinary risk of introducing a Buk system – that it was needed to defend rebel soldiers then fighting mostly in the north against Ukrainian troops and aircraft. For that purpose, the positioning of a Buk battery far to the southeast makes little sense, nor does the decision for a Russian Buk crew to shoot down a commercial airliner flying at 33,000 feet.

JIT’s account of the post-crash exfiltration of the Buk convoy back to Russia also is curious, since again the shortest, easiest and least populated route was ignored in favor of one that went far to the north past Luhansk, the alleged site of the supposed “getaway” video (although the supposed location of the “getaway” video was misplaced by Western media groups trying to pin the blame on Russia).

The confirmed parts of the Buk convoy’s route, i.e., along highways east of Donetsk, would fit better with a scenario that, I’m told, received serious consideration from U.S. intelligence analysts, that a Ukrainian Buk system under the control of a rogue military unit loyal to a fiercely anti-Putin oligarch traveled east into what was considered “rebel-controlled territory” to fire on what was hoped to be Putin’s official plane returning from a state visit to South America, i.e. to kill Putin.

A source briefed by these analysts said the missile was fired despite the unit’s doubt that the plane was Putin’s. Although it’s unclear to me exactly what the U.S. intelligence consensus ultimately turned out to be on MH-17 (since I have been refused official updates), there would be logic in a Ukrainian hardliner staging such an audacious missile attack deep inside “rebel territory,” since any assassination of Putin would have to be explained as an accidental attack by his own allies, i.e., the ultimate case of Putin being hoisted on his own petard.

To evaluate which scenario makes more sense – that the Russians dispatched a Buk missile battery on a wild ride across eastern Ukraine or that a Ukrainian Buk battery penetrated into supposedly rebel-controlled territory with the intent of attacking a civilian plane (although not MH-17) – it would be crucial to have an explanation of where the Ukrainian Buk batteries were located on July 17, 2014.

Silence on Dutch Intelligence

Some of the Russia-did-it crowd have dismissed claims that Ukrainian Buk systems were in the area as Russian disinformation, but their presence was confirmed by a report from the Dutch intelligence service, MIVD, relying on NATO information to explain why commercial airliners were still being allowed over the war zone.

The MIVD's explanation was that the only anti-aircraft missiles that could hit a plane at 33,000 feet were controlled by Ukraine, which was presumed to have no interest in attacking commercial aircraft, and that the rebels lacked any missile system that could reach that high. Clearly, there was an intelligence failure because either some Ukrainian Buk operators did have an intent to strike a civilian plane or the rebels did have a Buk system in the area.

If the JIT were operating objectively, it would have included something about this intelligence failure, either by showing that it had investigated the possibility that Ukrainian Buk missiles were used by a rogue unit or explaining how Western intelligence could have missed Russia's introduction of a Buk system into eastern Ukraine.

Instead, there was just this video that includes cryptic phone intercepts, assertions about unnamed witnesses and computer-generated graphics "showing" the movement of a Russian Buk convoy along darkened roads in Ukraine.

Despite the unusual nature of this "indictment," it was widely accepted in Western media as the final proof of Russian perfidy. The evidence was called "overwhelming" and "conclusive."

Rather than treating the video report as a prosecutor's brief – a set of allegations yet to be proved – Western journalists accepted it as flat fact, much as they did Secretary of State Colin Powell's similar presentation on Feb. 5, 2003, "proving" that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction. (Powell also used computer-generated images – of Iraq's "mobile chemical weapons labs" that, in reality, didn't exist.)

The day after the JIT video report was issued, The New York Times' lead editorial was headlined, "Mr. Putin's Outlaw State." It read:

"President Vladimir Putin is fast turning Russia into an outlaw nation. As one

of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, his country shares a special responsibility to uphold international law. Yet, his behavior in Ukraine and Syria violates not only the rules intended to promote peace instead of conflict, but also common human decency.

“This bitter truth was driven home twice on Wednesday [Sept. 28]. An investigative team led by the Netherlands concluded that the surface-to-air missile system that shot down a Malaysia Airlines plane over Ukraine in July 2014, killing 298 on board, was sent from Russia to Russian-backed separatists and returned to Russia the same night. ...

“Russia has tried hard to pin the blame for the airline crash on Ukraine. But the new report, produced by prosecutors from the Netherlands, Australia, Belgium, Malaysia and Ukraine, confirms earlier findings. It uses strict standards of evidence and meticulously documents not only the deployment of the Russian missile system that caused the disaster but also Moscow’s continuing cover-up. ...

“President Obama has long refused to approve direct military intervention in Syria. And Mr. Putin may be assuming that Mr. Obama is unlikely to confront Russia in his final months and with an American election season in full swing. But with the rebel stronghold in Aleppo under threat of falling to the government, administration officials said that such a response is again under consideration.

“Mr. Putin fancies himself a man on a mission to restore Russia to greatness. Russia could indeed be a great force for good. Yet his unconscionable behavior – butchering civilians in Syria and Ukraine, annexing Crimea, computer-hacking American government agencies, crushing dissent at home – suggests that the furthest thing from his mind is becoming a constructive partner in the search for peace.”

Rich Irony

Granted, there is some rich irony in a major U.S. newspaper, which helped justify illegal aggression against Iraq with false reporting about Iraq buying aluminum tubes for nuclear centrifuges, pontificating about international law.

Indeed, the very idea that any serious person in the United States would lecture other countries about international law would be laughable if the hypocrisy were not delivered in such a serious set of circumstances. For decades now, the United States has been a law unto itself, deciding which countries should be bombed and who should be assassinated.

President Obama himself has acknowledged authorizing military strikes in seven

countries during his presidency and many of those attacks were done outside international law. Indeed, the Times editorial appears to urge Obama to launch illegal military strikes against the Syrian government and, not surprisingly, doesn't mention the U.S. airstrike that killed some 62 Syrian government soldiers just last month, delivering a death blow to the partial ceasefire.

Instead, you get a medley of the Times' greatest anti-Russian propaganda hits while ignoring the U.S. role in destabilizing and overthrowing Ukraine's elected government in favor of a harshly anti-Russian nationalist regime that then began slaughtering thousands of ethnic Russians who resisted the coup.

Nor does the Times mention that Russia is operating inside Syria by invitation of the sovereign government, while the U.S. has no such authority. And the Times leaves out how the U.S. government and its allies have covertly armed and funded jihadist rebels who have inflicted many of the hundreds of thousands of dead in Syria. Not everyone, including Syrian soldiers, was killed by Assad and the Russians, although that's the impression the Times leaves.

A more nuanced account would reflect this murky reality in which sophisticated U.S. weapons, such as TOW missiles, have ended up in the possession of Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate and its jihadist allies. It would acknowledge that many sides are at fault for these tragedies in Syria and Ukraine – not to mention all the bloodshed that has followed the U.S.-led and U.S.-enabled wars that have torn apart the Middle East over the past decade and a half.

The Times might also admit that Putin was helpful in resolving the 2013 sarin crisis in Syria and achieving a breakthrough on the Iran nuclear talks in 2014. But that would not fit the propaganda need to demonize Putin and ready the American people for another, even more terrifying "regime change," this time in Moscow.

What we can now expect are a series of legal actions brought against Russia in connection with the MH-17 case and other controversies. The goal will be to further demonize Putin and to destabilize Russia, a process already underway with economic sanctions that have helped throw Russia's economy into recession.

The neocon plan is to ratchet up tensions and pain so Putin's elected government will somehow collapse with the neocons hoping that some U.S. lackey will take over and allow another round of "shock therapy," i.e. the plunder of Russia's resources to the benefit of a few favored oligarchs and their American consultants.

However, given the dreadful experience that the average Russian faced from the earlier round of "shock therapy" in the 1990s – including a stunning decline in

life expectancy – the more likely outcome from even a successful neocon scheme of “regime change” would be the emergence of a much more hard-line Russian nationalist than Putin.

Whereas Putin is a calculating and rational leader, the guy who follows him might well be an ideologue ready to use nuclear weapons to protect Mother Russia’s honor. After all, it’s not as if one of these neocon “regime change” calculations has ever gone wrong before.

Yet, whichever way things go, Official Washington – and its complicit mainstream media – now appear determined to push Russia into a corner with military encroachments from NATO on Russia’s borders and with criminal accusations before biased international “investigations.” Any misstep in this dangerous game could quickly end life as we know it.

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](#)).

Outpouring of Support Honors Robert Parry

In appreciation for the flood of condolences and tributes to Consortiumnews.com founder Robert Parry, we publish a sampling here.

By Nat Parry

Robert Parry’s family has been deeply touched by the flood of messages mourning his loss. As a father, grandfather, uncle, cousin, brother, husband, and yes, as a journalist, Bob touched so many lives and we will be processing and coming to terms with his loss for a long time to come.

In appreciation for the outpouring of support we have received, we’re collecting here some of the many articles, radio segments and YouTube videos that have appeared in recent days. To read the hundreds of reader comments left following his passing, please visit [my article](#), “Robert Parry’s Legacy and the Future of Consortiumnews.”

My apologies to those who have penned tributes that haven’t made it into this compilation.

Filmmaker – and friend of Bob’s – [Oliver Stone](#) wrote on Facebook Tuesday: “Robert Parry’s death Saturday night leaves a giant hole in American journalism. To my mind, he exists now alongside I.F. Stone, Drew Pearson, George Seldes, Gary Webb, and others as seekers of truth at the steep price you seem to have to pay to follow your common sense and your integrity when they are in direct opposition to the tyranny of mainstream media conformity.”

Intercept journalist Jon Schwarz has been a supporter and promoter of Bob’s work for many years. His blog [A Tiny Revolution](#) often included recommendations of Bob’s books and included links to Consortiumnews.

In a [tweet](#) following his death, Schwarz wrote, “Robert Parry was one of the best and most independent-minded American reporters of the past 50 years. Not surprisingly, this meant he got 2% of the recognition of DC’s endless supply of hacks, and was forced to start his own publication.”

Katrina vanden Heuvel, *The Nation* magazine editor and publisher, [tweeted](#) “RIP Robert Parry– your independent journalism is needed more than ever.”

In a [touching tribute at Medium](#), journalist Caitlin Johnstone wrote,

“I would suggest that it is [an] underlying devotion to the plight of mankind which allowed Robert Parry to become Robert Parry. It wasn’t his connections, his political opinions, his ideas, or even his raw talent; it was the fact that he cared so much. The fact that he couldn’t dissociate himself from the horrors of this world, the evil things humans are doing to one another and the omnicidal trajectory we appear to be headed along. He saw it all, he felt it all, and he let it move him.”

“Robert Parry’s death is a profound loss to our country as a political and intellectual community,” wrote Jim Kavanagh today [at Counterpunch](#). “It’s a shame that most Americans don’t know that – and, indeed, don’t even know who Robert Parry is. That ignorance is a sign of how impoverished our political and intellectual community has already become.”

At Alternet, former *New Republic* editor Jefferson Morley [reflected](#) on his impressions of Bob when they got to know each other in the mid-1980s.

“Parry was rare among reporters of [the Reagan] era in that he did not take his cues from the White House or defer to Reagan’s popularity,” Morley wrote. “While others tried to spin U.S. support for death squads as a defense of democracy, Parry penetrated the veil of official secrecy.”

YouTube vlogger Ryan Dawson [posted a video](#) Monday in which he described the influence that Bob’s work has had on his understanding of the world. “Robert

Parry was a go-to writer for me," he said. "The man was on top of it, right until his last days."

Another video at YouTube from the "Fault Lines" program delves into some of the unfair attacks that Bob has experienced in his career, including after his death. One of the hosts, Garland Nixon, reported that the anonymous smear merchants of the shadowy PropOrNot website continued to attack Bob after he passed away. "These people are slime," Nixon correctly pointed out.

The Peter B. Collins radio show devoted half an hour to remembering Robert Parry's work, discussing Bob's passing with his friend Ray McGovern. "He was a really good example to me of someone who doggedly pursued the truth and suffered the marginalization. They made him a pariah. They called him a Putin puppet," McGovern said.

I appeared on Dennis Bernstein's "Flashpoints" radio program Monday along with journalist John Pilger, which you can listen to here. Pilger expressed appreciation for Bob's steadfast commitment to evidence-based journalism and pushing back against assertions and fact-free claims promoted by the mainstream media, whether related to Russiagate or the Syrian civil war. "What Bob Parry did most effectively was to produce the evidence," Pilger said.

A tribute by Jim Naureckas at Fair.org, the website of Fairness in Accuracy and Reporting – an invaluable outfit with which Bob had a longstanding relationship – noted Monday that "journalism lost one of its most valuable investigators when Robert Parry died from pancreatic cancer on January 27, at the age of 68."

"He was a pioneer in bringing maverick journalism to the Internet," FAIR founder Jeff Cohen wrote after Bob's death. "Bob was a refugee from mainstream media who, like Izzy Stone, went on to build an uncensored and uncensorable outlet."

The Young Turks correspondent Michael Tracey tweeted: "The death of Robert Parry leaves such a void for those who see the main function of journalism as challenging horde logic. Many posture as being committed to such, but parrot propaganda when it's politically convenient. Hence, he won't get the mainstream recognition he deserves."

Michael Tracey, it turns out, was only partly right, as some mainstream outlets, including the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* – papers that Bob had often criticized for promoting propaganda and "groupthink" – published grudgingly respectful obituaries.

"In 1995, frustrated with what he saw as dwindling venues for serious investigative reporting, Mr. Parry founded the Consortium for Independent Journalism," wrote the Post.

However, the *Post* couldn't resist getting in a jab implying that Bob's brand of journalism isn't financially viable: "Its website, Consortiumnews.com, sought to provide a home for such reporting in the early days of the Internet, although it struggled financially and relied on contributions."

The *NYT* noted that Bob was considered something of a pariah by "the major established news organizations, which he viewed as constituting a kind of parallel 'permanent government.'"

(The *Times* obit was tweeted out by Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, who observed: "Obituaries are one of the few remaining journalistic spaces sanctified enough to tell inconvenient truths without fancy footwork.")

One of the most unique tributes – and one which Bob would have been tickled by, I'm sure – was pulled together by the website Muckrock, which works to promote transparency in government. Muckrock compiled the CIA's files relating to Bob Parry's journalism, noting that "the Central Intelligence Agency archives contain over 100 of his articles, primarily focused on his Associated Press work from the mid-to-late '80s."

"While the sheer volume of material speaks to the impact Parry's reporting was having on the Agency internally," wrote Muckrock's J. Pat Brown, "perhaps the single greatest indicator of how the CIA felt about Parry is summed up by this handwritten note from the Agency's Director of Public Affairs."



The note, from 1984, circled a passage regarding the CIA's assassination manual that it had been distributing to Nicaraguan contras, and included one word denoting the source of this story: "Bob"

"If there's any one takeaway to be gleaned from Parry's legacy," Brown wrote, "it is that we should all strive to have the CIA know us on a terrified first-name basis."

Robert Parry's Legacy and the Future of Consortiumnews

Robert Parry, editor and publisher of Consortiumnews.com, died peacefully Saturday evening. In this tribute, his son Nat Parry describes Robert's unwavering commitment to independent journalism.

By Nat Parry

It is with a heavy heart that we inform Consortiumnews readers that Editor Robert Parry has passed away. As regular readers know, Robert (or Bob, as he was known to friends and family) suffered a stroke in December, which – despite his own speculation that it may have been brought on by the stress of covering Washington politics – was the result of undiagnosed pancreatic cancer that he had been unknowingly living with for the past 4-5 years.

He unfortunately suffered two more debilitating strokes in recent weeks and after the last one, was moved to hospice care on Tuesday. He passed away peacefully Saturday evening. He was 68.

Those of us close to him wish to sincerely thank readers for the kind comments and words of support posted on [recent articles](#) regarding Bob's health issues. We read aloud many of these comments to him during his final days to let him know how much his work has meant to so many people and how much concern there was for his well-being.

I am sure that these kindnesses meant a lot to him. They also mean a lot to us as family members, as we all know how devoted he was to the mission of independent journalism and this website which has been publishing articles since the earliest days of the internet, launching all the way back in 1995.

With my dad, professional work has always been deeply personal, and his career as a journalist was thoroughly intertwined with his family life. I can recall kitchen table conversations in my early childhood that focused on the U.S.-backed wars in Central America and complaints about how his editors at The Associated Press were too timid to run articles of his that – no matter how well-documented – cast the Reagan administration in a bad light.

One of my earliest memories in fact was of my dad about to leave on assignment in the early 1980s to the war zones of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and the heartfelt good-bye that he wished to me and my siblings. He warned us that he was going to a very dangerous place and that there was a possibility that he might not come back.

I remember asking him why he had to go, why he couldn't just stay at home with us. He replied that it was important to go to these places and tell the truth about what was happening there. He mentioned that children my age were being killed in these wars and that somebody had to tell their stories. I remember asking, "Kids like me?" He replied, "Yes, kids just like you."

Bob was deeply impacted by the dirty wars of Central America in the 1980s and in many ways these conflicts – and the U.S. involvement in them – came to define the rest of his life and career. With grisly stories emerging from Nicaragua (thanks partly to journalists like him), Congress passed the Boland Amendments from 1982 to 1984, which placed limits on U.S. military assistance to the contras who were attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government through a variety of terrorist tactics.

The Reagan administration immediately began exploring ways to circumvent those legal restrictions, which led to a scheme to send secret arms shipments to the revolutionary and vehemently anti-American government of Iran and divert the profits to the contras. In 1985, Bob wrote the first stories describing this operation, which later became known as the Iran-Contra Affair.

Contra-Cocaine and October Surprise

Parallel to the illegal arms shipments to Iran during those days was a cocaine trafficking operation by the Nicaraguan contras and a willingness by the Reagan administration and the CIA to turn a blind eye to these activities. This, despite the fact that cocaine was flooding into the United States while Ronald Reagan was proclaiming a "war on drugs," and a crack cocaine epidemic was devastating communities across the country.

Bob and his colleague Brian Barger were the first journalists to report on this story in late 1985, which became known as the contra-cocaine scandal, and became the subject of a congressional investigation led by then-Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.) in 1986.

Continuing to pursue leads relating to Iran-Contra during a period in the late 80s when most of Washington was moving on from the scandal, Bob discovered that there was more to the story than commonly understood. He learned that the roots of the illegal arm shipments to Iran stretched back further than previously known – all the way back to the 1980 presidential campaign.

That electoral contest between incumbent Jimmy Carter and challenger Ronald Reagan had come to be largely dominated by the hostage crisis in Iran, with 52 Americans being held at the U.S. embassy in Tehran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Iranian hostage crisis, along with the ailing economy, came to

define a perception of an America in decline, with former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan promising a new start for the country, a restoration of its status as a “shining city on a hill.”

The hostages were released in Tehran moments after Reagan was sworn in as president in Washington on January 20, 1981. Despite suspicions for years that there had been some sort of quid pro quo between the Reagan campaign and the Iranians, it wasn't until Bob uncovered a trove of documents in a House office building basement in 1994 that the evidence became overwhelming that the Reagan campaign had interfered with the Carter administration's efforts to free the hostages prior to the 1980 election. Their release sooner – what Carter hoped would be his “October Surprise” – could have given him the boost needed to win.

Examining these documents and being already well-versed on this story – having previously travelled three continents pursuing the investigation for a PBS *Frontline* documentary – Bob became increasingly convinced that the Reagan campaign had in fact sabotaged Carter's hostage negotiations, possibly committing an act of treason in an effort to make sure that 52 American citizens continued to be held in a harrowing hostage situation until after Reagan secured the election.

Needless to say, this was an inconvenient story at a time – in the mid-1990s – when the national media had long since moved on from the Reagan scandals and were obsessing over new scandals, mostly related to President Bill Clinton's sex life and failed real estate deals. Washington also wasn't particularly interested in challenging the Reagan legacy, which at that time was beginning to solidify into a kind of mythology, with campaigns underway to name buildings and airports after the former president.

At times, Bob had doubts about his career decisions and the stories he was pursuing. As he wrote in *Trick or Treason*, a book outlining his investigation into the October Surprise Mystery, this search for historical truth can be painful and seemingly thankless.

“Many times,” he wrote, “I had regretted accepting *Frontline*'s assignment in 1990. I faulted myself for risking my future in mainstream journalism. After all, that is where the decent-paying jobs are. I had jeopardized my ability to support my four children out of an old-fashioned sense of duty, a regard for an unwritten code that expects reporters to take almost any assignment.”

Nevertheless, Bob continued his efforts to tell the full story behind both the Iran-Contra scandal and the origins of the Reagan-Bush era, ultimately leading to two things: him being pushed out of the mainstream media, and the launching of Consortiumnews.com.

I remember when he started the website, together with my older brother Sam, back in 1995. At the time, in spite of talk we were all hearing about something called “the information superhighway” and “electronic mail,” I had never visited a website and didn’t even know how to get “on line.” My dad called me in Richmond, where I was a sophomore at Virginia Commonwealth University, and told me I should check out this new “Internet site” he and Sam had just launched.

He explained over the phone how to open a browser and instructed me how to type in the URL, starting, he said, with “http,” then a colon and two forward slashes, then “www,” then “dot,” then this long address with one or two more forward slashes if I recall. (It wasn’t until years later that the website got its own domain and a simpler address.)

I went to the computer lab at the university and asked for some assistance on how to get online, dutifully typed in the URL, and opened this website – the first one I had ever visited. It was interesting, but a bit hard to read on the computer screen, so I printed out some articles to read back in my dorm room.

I quickly became a fan of “The Consortium,” as it was called back then, and continued reading articles on the October Surprise Mystery as Bob and Sam posted them on this new and exciting tool called “the Internet.” Sam had to learn HTML coding from scratch to launch this online news service, billed as “the Internet’s First Investigative ‘Zine.” For his efforts, Sam was honored with the Consortium for Independent Journalism’s first Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015.

X-Files and Contra-Crack

At some point along the way, Bob decided that in addition to the website, where he was not only posting original articles but also providing the source documents that he had uncovered in the House office building basement, he would also take a stab at traditional publishing. He compiled the “October Surprise X-Files” into a booklet and self-published it in January 1996.

He was also publishing a newsletter to complement the website, knowing that at that time, there were still plenty of people who didn’t know how to turn a computer on, much less navigate the World Wide Web. I transferred from Virginia Commonwealth University to George Mason University in the DC suburbs and started working part-time with my dad and Sam on the newsletter and website.

We worked together on the content, editing and laying it out with graphics often culled from books at our local library. We built a subscriber base through networking and purchasing mailing lists from progressive magazines. Every two weeks we would get a thousand copies printed from Sir Speedy and would spend

Friday evening collating these newsletters and sending them out to our subscribers.

The launching of the website and newsletter, and later an even-more ambitious project called *I.F. Magazine*, happened to coincide with the publication in 1996 of Gary Webb's "Dark Alliance" series at the *San Jose Mercury-News*. Webb's series reopened the contra-cocaine controversy with a detailed examination of the drug trafficking networks in Nicaragua and Los Angeles that had helped to spread highly addictive crack cocaine across the United States.

The African-American community, in particular, was rightly outraged over this story, which offered confirmation of many long-standing suspicions that the government was complicit in the drug trade devastating their communities. African Americans had been deeply and disproportionately affected by the crack epidemic, both in terms of the direct impact of the drug and the draconian drug laws and mandatory minimum sentences that came to define the government's approach to "the war on drugs."

For a moment in the summer of 1996, it appeared that the renewed interest in the contra-cocaine story might offer an opportunity to revisit the crimes and misdeeds of the Reagan-Bush era, but those hopes were dashed when the "the Big Media" decided to double down on its earlier failures to cover this story properly.

Big Papers Pile On

The *Los Angeles Times* launched the attack on Gary Webb and his reporting at the *San Jose Mercury-News*, followed by equally dismissive stories at the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. The piling on from these newspapers eventually led *Mercury-News* editor Jerry Ceppos to denounce Webb's reporting and offer a mea culpa for publishing the articles.

The onslaught of hostile reporting from the big papers failed to address the basic premises of Webb's series and did not debunk the underlying allegations of contra-cocaine smuggling or the fact that much of this cocaine ended up on American streets in the form of crack. Instead, it raised doubts by poking holes in certain details and casting the story as a "conspiracy theory." Some of the reporting attempted to debunk claims that Webb never actually made – such as the idea that the contra-cocaine trafficking was part of a government plot to intentionally decimate the African-American community.

Gary Webb and Bob were in close contact during those days. Bob offered him professional and personal support, having spent his time also on the receiving end of attacks by journalistic colleagues and editors who rejected certain

stories – no matter how factual – as fanciful conspiracy theories. Articles at The Consortium website and newsletter, as well as *I.F. Magazine*, offered details on the historical context for the “Dark Alliance” series and pushed back against the mainstream media’s onslaught of hostile and disingenuous reporting.

Bob also published the book *Lost History* which provided extensive details on the background for the “Dark Alliance” series, explaining that far from a baseless “conspiracy theory,” the facts and evidence strongly supported the conclusion that the Reagan-Bush administrations had colluded with drug traffickers to fund their illegal war against Nicaragua.

But sadly, the damage to Gary Webb was done. With his professional and personal life in tatters because of his courageous reporting on the contra-cocaine story, he committed suicide in 2004 at the age of 49. Speaking about this suicide later on *Democracy Now*, Bob noted how painful it is to be ridiculed and unfairly criticized by colleagues, as his friend had experienced.

“There’s a special pain when your colleagues in your profession turn on you, especially when you’ve done something that they should admire and should understand,” he said. “To do all that work and then have the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* attack you and try to destroy your life, there’s a special pain in that.”

In consultation with his family, Bob and the Board of Directors for the Consortium for Independent Journalism launched the Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award in 2015.

The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush

The presidency of George W. Bush was surreal for many of us, and no one more so than my dad.

In covering Washington politics for decades, Bob had traced many stories to “Dubya’s” father, George H.W. Bush, who had been implicated in a variety of questionable activities, including the October Surprise Mystery and Iran-Contra. He had also launched a war against Iraq in 1991 that seemed to be motivated, at least in part, to help kick “the Vietnam Syndrome,” i.e. the reluctance that the American people had felt since the Vietnam War to support military action abroad.

As Bob noted in his 1992 book *Fooling America*, after U.S. forces routed the Iraqi military in 1991, President Bush’s first public comment about the victory expressed his delight that it would finally put to rest the American reflex against committing troops to far-off conflicts. “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all,” he exulted.

The fact that Bush-41's son could run for president largely on name recognition confirmed to Bob the failure of the mainstream media to cover important stories properly and the need to continue building an independent media infrastructure. This conviction solidified through Campaign 2000 and the election's ultimate outcome, when Bush assumed the White House as the first popular-vote loser in more than a century.

Despite the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court had halted the counting of votes in Florida, thus preventing an accurate determination of the rightful winner, most of the national media moved on from the story after Bush was sworn in on Jan. 20, 2001. Consortiumnews.com continued to examine the documentary record, however, and ultimately concluded that Al Gore would have been declared the winner of that election if all the legally cast ballots were counted.

At Consortiumnews, there was an unwritten editorial policy that the title "President" should never precede George W. Bush's name, based on our view that he was not legitimately elected. But beyond those editorial decisions, we also understood the gravity of the fact that had Election 2000 been allowed to play out with all votes counted, many of the disasters of the Bush years – notably the 9/11 tragedy and the Iraq War, as well as decisions to withdraw from international agreements on arms control and climate change – might have been averted.

As all of us who lived through the post-9/11 era will recall, it was a challenging time all around, especially if you were someone critical of George W. Bush. The atmosphere in that period did not allow for much dissent. Those who stood up against the juggernaut for war – such as Phil Donahue at MSNBC, Chris Hedges at the *New York Times*, or even the Dixie Chicks – had their careers damaged and found themselves on the receiving end of death threats and hate mail.

While Bob's magazine and newsletter projects had been discontinued, the website was still publishing articles, providing a home for dissenting voices that questioned the case for invading Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003. Around this time, former CIA analyst Ray McGovern and some of his colleagues founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity and a long-running relationship with Consortiumnews was established. Several former intelligence veterans began contributing to the website, motivated by the same independent spirit of truth-telling that compelled Bob to invest so much in this project.

At a time when almost the entire mainstream media was going along with the Bush administration's dubious case for war, this and a few other like-minded websites pushed back with well-researched articles calling into question the rationale. Although at times it might have felt as though we were just voices in the

wilderness, a major groundswell of opposition to war emerged in the country, with historic marches of hundreds of thousands taking place to reject Bush's push for war.

Of course, these antiwar voices were ultimately vindicated by the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the fact that the war and occupation proved to be a far costlier and deadlier enterprise than we had been told that it would be. Earlier assurances that it would be a "cakewalk" proved as false as the WMD claims, but as had been so often the case in Washington, there was little to no accountability from the mainstream media, the think tanks or government officials for being so spectacularly wrong.

In an effort to document the true history of that era, Bob, Sam and I co-wrote the book *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, which was published in late 2007. The book traced the work of Consortiumnews, juxtaposing it against the backdrop of mainstream media coverage during the Bush era, in an effort to not only correct the record, but also demonstrate that not all of us got things so wrong.

We felt it was important to remind readers – as well as future historians – that some of us knew and reported in real time the mistakes that were being made on everything from withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol to invading Iraq to implementing a policy of torture to bungling the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Obama Era

By the Obama presidency, Consortiumnews.com had become a home to a growing number of writers who brought new perspectives to the website's content. While for years, the writing staff had been limited primarily to Bob, Sam and me, suddenly, Consortiumnews was receiving contributions from journalists, activists and former intelligence analysts who offered a wide range of expertise – on international law, economics, human rights, foreign policy, national security, and even religion and philosophy.

One recurring theme of articles at the website during the Obama era was the enduring effect of unchallenged narratives, how they shaped national politics and dictated government policy. Bob observed that even a supposedly left-of-center president like Obama seemed beholden to the false narratives and national mythologies dating back to the Reagan era. He pointed out that this could be at least partially attributed to the failure to establish a strong foundation for independent journalism.

In a 2010 piece called "Obama's Fear of the Reagan Narrative," Bob noted that Obama had defended his deal with Republicans on tax cuts for the rich because

there was such a strong lingering effect of Reagan's messaging from 30 years earlier. "He felt handcuffed by the Right's ability to rally Americans on behalf of Reagan's 'government-is-the-problem' message," Bob wrote.

He traced Obama's complaints about his powerlessness in the face of this dynamic to the reluctance of American progressives to invest sufficiently in media and think tanks, as conservatives had been doing for decades in waging their "the war of ideas." As he had been arguing since the early 1990s, Robert insisted that the limits that had been placed on Obama – whether real or perceived – continued to demonstrate the power of propaganda and the need for greater investment in alternative media.

He also observed that much of the nuttiness surrounding the so-called Tea Party movement resulted from fundamental misunderstandings of American history and constitutional principles. "Democrats and progressives should be under no illusion about the new flood of know-nothingism that is about to inundate the United States in the guise of a return to 'first principles' and a deep respect for the U.S. Constitution," Bob warned.

He pointed out that despite the Tea Partiers' claimed reverence for the Constitution, they actually had very little understanding of the document, as revealed by their ahistorical claims that federal taxes are unconstitutional. In fact, as Bob observed, the Constitution represented "a major power grab by the federal government, when compared to the loosely drawn Articles of Confederation, which lacked federal taxing authority and other national powers."

Motivated by a desire to correct falsified historical narratives spanning more than two centuries, Bob published his sixth and final book, *America's Stolen Narrative: From Washington and Madison to Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes to Obama*, in 2012.

Along with revenues from book sales, growing donations from readers enabled Bob to not only pay writers but also to hire an assistant, Chelsea Gilmour, who began working for Consortiumnews in 2014. In addition to providing invaluable administrative support, Chelsea also performed duties including research, writing and fact-checking.

Political Realignment and the New McCarthyism

Although at the beginning of the Obama era – and indeed since the 1980s – the name Robert Parry had been closely associated with exposing wrongdoing by Republicans, and hence had a strong following among Democratic Party loyalists, by the end of Obama's presidency there seemed to be a realignment taking place among some of Consortiumnews.com's readership, which reflected more generally

the shifting politics of the country.

In particular, the U.S. media's approach to Russia and related issues, such as the violent ouster in 2014 of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, became "virtually 100 percent propaganda," Bob said.

He noted that the full story was never told when it came to issues such as the Sergei Magnitsky case, which led to the first round of U.S. sanctions against Russia, nor the inconvenient facts related to the Euromaidan protests that led to Yanukovich's ouster – including the reality of strong neo-Nazi influence in those protests – nor the subsequent conflict in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

Bob's stories on Ukraine were widely cited and disseminated, and he became an important voice in presenting a fuller picture of the conflict than was possible by reading and watching only mainstream news outlets. Bob was featured prominently in Oliver Stone's 2016 documentary "Ukraine on Fire," where he explained how U.S.-funded political NGOs and media companies have worked with the CIA and foreign policy establishment since the 1980s to promote the U.S. geopolitical agenda.

Bob regretted that, increasingly, "the American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the 'other side of the story.'" Indeed, he said that to even suggest that there might be another side to the story is enough to get someone branded as an apologist for Vladimir Putin or a "Kremlin stooge."

This culminated in late 2016 in the blacklisting of Consortiumnews.com on a dubious website called "PropOrNot," which was claiming to serve as a watchdog against undue "Russian influence" in the United States. The PropOrNot blacklist, including Consortiumnews and about 200 other websites deemed "Russian propaganda," was elevated by the *Washington Post* as a credible source, despite the fact that the neo-McCarthyites who published the list hid behind a cloak of anonymity.

"The *Post*'s article by Craig Timberg," Bob wrote on Nov. 27, 2016, "described PropOrNot simply as 'a nonpartisan collection of researchers with foreign policy, military and technology backgrounds [who] planned to release its own findings Friday showing the startling reach and effectiveness of Russian propaganda campaigns.'"

As Bob explained in an article called "Washington Post's Fake News Guilt," the paper granted PropOrNot anonymity "to smear journalists who don't march in lockstep with official pronouncements from the State Department or some other

impeccable fount of never-to-be-questioned truth.”

The *Post* even provided an unattributed quote from the head of the shadowy website. “The way that this propaganda apparatus supported [Donald] Trump was equivalent to some massive amount of a media buy,” the anonymous smear merchant said. The *Post* claimed that the PropOrNot “executive director” had spoken on the condition of anonymity “to avoid being targeted by Russia’s legions of skilled hackers.”

To be clear, neither Consortiumnews nor Robert Parry ever “supported Trump,” as the above anonymous quote claims. Something interesting, however, did seem to be happening in terms of Consortiumnews’ readership in the early days of the Trump presidency, as could be gleaned from some of the comments left on articles and social media activity.

It did appear for some time at least that a good number of Trump supporters were reading Consortiumnews, which could probably attributed to the fact that the website was one of the few outlets pushing back against both the “New Cold War” with Russia and the related story of “Russiagate,” which Bob didn’t even like referring to as a “scandal.” (As an editor, he preferred to use the word “controversy” on the website, because as far as he was concerned, the allegations against Trump and his supposed “collusion” with Russia did not rise to the level of actual scandals such as Watergate or Iran-Contra.)

In his view, the perhaps understandable hatred of Trump felt by many Americans – both inside and outside the Beltway – had led to an abandonment of old-fashioned rules of journalism and standards of fairness, which should be applied even to someone like Donald Trump.

“On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump ‘Resistance,’” Bob wrote in his final article for Consortiumnews.

“The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster,” he said. “Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.”

He marveled that even senior editors in the mainstream media treated the unproven Russiagate allegations as flat fact.

“No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government’s institutions,” Bob wrote. “Anti-Trump ‘progressives’ were posturing as the true patriots

because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.”

An Untimely End and the Future of Consortiumnews

My dad’s untimely passing has come as a shock to us all, especially since up until a month ago, there was no indication whatsoever that he was sick in any way. He took good care of himself, never smoked, got regular check-ups, exercised, and ate well. The unexpected health issues starting with a mild stroke Christmas Eve and culminating with his admission into hospice care several days ago offer a stark reminder that nothing should be taken for granted.

And as many Consortiumnews readers have eloquently pointed out in comments left on [recent articles](#) regarding Bob’s health, it also reminds us that his brand of journalism is needed today more than ever.

“We need free will thinkers like you who value the truth based on the evidence and look past the group think in Washington to report on the real reasons for our government’s and our media’s actions which attempt to deceive us all,” wrote, for example, “FreeThinker.”

“Common sense and integrity are the hallmarks of Robert Parry’s journalism. May you get better soon for you are needed more now than ever before,” wrote “T.J.”

“We need a new generation of reporters, journalists, writers, and someone always being tenacious to follow up on the story,” added “Tina.”

As someone who has been involved with this website since its inception – as a writer, an editor and a reader – I concur with these sentiments. Readers should rest assured that despite my dad’s death, every effort will be made to ensure that the website will continue going strong.

Indeed, I think that everyone involved with this project wants to uphold the same commitment to truth-telling without fear or favor that inspired Bob and his heroes like George Seldes, I.F. Stone, and Thomas Paine.

That commitment can be seen in my dad’s pursuit of stories such as those mentioned above, but also so many others – including his investigations into the financial relationship of the influential *Washington Times* with the Unification Church cult of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the truth behind the Nixon campaign’s alleged efforts to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson’s Paris peace talks with Vietnamese leaders in 1968, the reality of the chemical attack in Syria in 2013, and even detailed examinations of the evidence behind the so-called “Deflategate” controversy that he felt unfairly branded his favorite football

team, the New England Patriots, as cheaters.

Reviewing these journalistic achievements, it becomes clear that there are few stories that have slipped under Consortiumnews.com's radar, and that the historical record is far more complete thanks to this website and Bob's old-fashioned approach to journalism.

But besides this deeply held commitment to independent journalism, it should also be recalled that, ultimately, Bob was motivated by a concern over the future of life on Earth. As someone who grew up at the height of the Cold War, he understood the dangers of allowing tensions and hysteria to spiral out of control, especially in a world such as ours with enough nuclear weapons to wipe out all life on the planet many times over.

As the United States continues down the path of a New Cold War, my dad would be pleased to know that he has such committed contributors who will enable the site to remain the indispensable home for independent journalism that it has become, and continue to push back on false narratives that threaten our very survival.

Thank you all for your support.

In lieu of flowers, Bob's family asks you to please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Consortium for Independent Journalism.

George W. Bush: Dupe or Deceiver?

From the Archive: With six in ten Americans – including a majority of Democrats – now holding favorable views of George W. Bush, we republish an analysis by Robert Parry from 2010, when the revisionist history of Bush's presidency began with publication of his memoirs.

By Robert Parry (first published on November 20, 2010)

George W. Bush's memoir, *Decision Points*, is without doubt a self-serving defense of his presidency – and Bush's own words condemn him as a liar – but there is another nagging question that surrounds this curious book: Has the U.S. media/political system become so polluted with falsehoods that even people at the top now believe the propaganda?

It is not clear which is the more troubling answer: that Bush and his advisers were bald-faced liars confident that their elite status lets them deceive at will, or that they have wallowed so long in a Washington's hot tub of spin that

their brains can no longer separate fact from fiction.

In general, I assume that political leaders know the truth and just believe that the rest of us are easily manipulated by clever propaganda or can be readily bullied into line. As long as the leaders stick to their story (no matter how false it is), they can rely on their Establishment credentials to tough it out against the few skeptics who dare call out the lies.

But there were moments in reading Bush's memoir when I began wondering whether – at least for him – the other explanation was more plausible, that he was clinically delusional in the sense that he could no longer distinguish between what was real and what had been created by others to appeal to his preconceptions, biases and vanity.

Under this scenario, Bush was the amiable front man who was handled by those around him, by the neoconservatives who wanted to prove their mettle to the Israeli Right with a demonstration of American shock-and-awe against hostile Arabs in Iraq, or by the oil men who saw U.S. military domination of the Middle East as the ticket to trillions of dollars in energy reserves.

These groups grew skilled at baiting Bush with misinformation and exaggeration, knowing what would rile him up and push his buttons. The intellectually lazy but egotistical Bush would then come to think that the plans that they planted in his mind were his and that he was the true Decider.

However, there are other indications in the book that Bush was part of this lying clique and that the American people were the targets of the falsehoods. In this scenario, Bush grew so confident before an obsequious Washington press corps that he felt he could lie with impunity and that the capital's pundit class would simply nod in acceptance.

An example that supports the Bush-is-a-deceiver scenario emerged several months after the invasion of Iraq, when it became clear that there were no WMD stockpiles. So, Bush began insisting that Iraq's Saddam Hussein "chose war" by refusing to allow UN weapons inspectors back into his country – even though the public had seen the inspectors rushing around Iraq in their white vans for months in late 2002 and early 2003.

Nevertheless, at a White House press briefing on July 14, 2003, Bush told reporters: "We gave him [Saddam Hussein] a chance to allow the inspectors in, and he wouldn't let them in. And, therefore, after a reasonable request, we decided to remove him from power."

Facing no contradiction from the obsequious White House press corps, Bush repeated this lie in varied forms until the last days of his presidency.

Jarring Admission

The only possible defense of Bush's clear-cut lie was that he might have forgotten that Saddam Hussein had allowed the inspectors to return in fall 2002, giving them unfettered access to suspected WMD sites, and that it was Bush who forced them to leave in March 2003.

However, in his memoir, Bush jarringly acknowledges that he was aware that the UN inspectors were roaming around Iraq during the lead-up to the war.

"Some believed we could contain Saddam by keeping the inspectors in Iraq," Bush wrote. "But I didn't see how. If we were to tell Saddam he had another chance – after declaring this was his last chance – we would shatter our credibility and embolden him."

Bush also recounts the central role that the reintroduction of the UN inspectors had played in April 2002 when he was convincing British Prime Minister Tony Blair to support "coercive diplomacy" against Iraq. Bush wrote:

"Tony suggested that we seek a UN Security Council resolution that presented Saddam with a clear ultimatum: allow weapons inspectors back into Iraq, or face serious consequences. I didn't have a lot of faith in the UN. The Security Council had passed sixteen resolutions against Saddam to no avail. But I agreed to consider his idea."

Ultimately, the UN Security Council did approve Resolution 1441 demanding that Iraq reveal what it had done with its prior weapons programs and allow UN inspectors back in. In fall 2002, Iraq complied with both demands, letting inspectors return and turning over a 12,000-page declaration explaining how Iraq's WMD stockpiles had been eliminated.

Despite Iraq's submission of these records, leading neocons who were itching for war, the likes of Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, mocked Iraq's efforts, a disdain that Bush cited favorably in his memoir, recalling:

"Joe Lieberman was more succinct. He said the declaration was a 'twelve-thousand-page, one-hundred-pound lie.'"

Though Bush stayed on course for war, he portrays himself in his memoir as a reluctant warrior, forced to launch an aggressive war because of the Saddam Hussein's belligerence. Bush wrote:

"Whenever I heard someone claim that we had rushed to war, I thought back to this period. It had been more than a decade since the Gulf War resolutions had demanded that Saddam disarm, over four years since he had kicked out the weapons

inspectors, six months since I had issued my ultimatum at the UN, four months since Resolution 1441 had given Saddam his 'final opportunity,' and three months past the deadline to fully disclose his WMD. Diplomacy did not feel rushed. It felt like it was taking forever."

There is, of course, some madness in Bush's argument as well as contempt for the factual record. The truth was that Iraq had disarmed and had tried to comply with Resolution 1441; Saddam Hussein had responded to his "final opportunity" by letting the UN inspectors back in; and he couldn't "fully disclose his WMD" because he didn't have any to disclose.

Peace Lover

Bush devotes a large segment of his memoir to fabricating a false history so the American people will see him as a peace lover who was left with only one option: war.

"I remembered the shattering pain of 9/11, a surprise attack for which we had received no warning," Bush wrote. "This time we had a warning like a blaring siren. Years of intelligence pointed overwhelmingly to the conclusion that Saddam had WMD. He had used them in the past. He had not met his responsibility to prove their destruction.

"He had refused to cooperate with the inspectors, even with the threat of an invasion on his doorstep. The only logical conclusion was that he was hiding WMD. And given his support of terror and his sworn hatred of America, there was no way to know where those weapons would end up."

Yet, even amid these lies and rationalizations, there remains the possibility that Bush was more the duped dauphin than the wily prince. He surely had plenty of conniving counselors whispering in his ear from behind his throne.

Just days after the 9/11 attacks, Bush described a meeting of his national security team at which Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, an arch-neoconservative, "suggested that we consider confronting Iraq as well as the Taliban" in Afghanistan. So, the idea of invasion was planted early.

Bush, however, insisted that he was reluctant to go in that direction, writing:

"Unless I received definitive evidence tying Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 plot, I would work to resolve the Iraq problem diplomatically. I hoped unified pressure by the world might compel Saddam to meet his international obligations. The best way to show him we were serious was to succeed in Afghanistan."

Bungling Tora Bora

Despite Bush's protestations about not rushing to war with Iraq and needing to succeed first in Afghanistan, Bush notes in passing the key moment when he pivoted prematurely from finishing off Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda's leadership at Tora Bora in fall 2001 and instead focusing the U.S. military on Iraq war plans. Bush wrote:

"Two months after 9/11, I asked Don Rumsfeld to review the existing battle plans for Iraq. We needed to develop the coercive half of coercive diplomacy. Don tasked General Tommy Franks [then in charge of the Central Command covering the Middle East and Central Asia] with updating the plans. Just after Christmas 2001, Tommy came to Crawford to brief me on Iraq."

What Bush left out of that narrative was what was later revealed by a Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigation, that Franks was overseeing the military operation aimed at capturing or killing bin Laden when Rumsfeld relayed Bush's order to freshen up the invasion plan for Iraq.

According to the committee's analysis of the Tora Bora battle, the small team of American pursuers believed they had bin Laden trapped at his mountain stronghold at Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan and called for reinforcements to seal off possible escape routes to Pakistan.

But Bush was already turning his attention to Iraq, as his neocon advisers wanted. The Senate report said:

"On November 21, 2001, President Bush put his arm on Defense Secretary [Donald] Rumsfeld as they were leaving a National Security Council meeting at the White House. 'I need to see you,' the president said. It was 72 days after the 9/11 attacks and just a week after the fall of Kabul. But Bush already had new plans" for freshening up the invasion plans for Iraq.

In his memoir, American General, Gen. Franks said he got a phone call from Rumsfeld on Nov. 21, after the Defense Secretary had met with the President, and was told about Bush's interest in an updated Iraq war plan.

At the time, Franks said he was in his office at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida working with one of his aides on arranging air support for the Afghan militia who were under the guidance of the U.S. Special Forces in charge of the assault on bin Laden's Tora Bora stronghold.

Franks told Rumsfeld that the Iraq war plan was out of date, prompting the Defense Secretary to instruct Franks to "dust it off and get back to me in a week."

"For critics of the Bush administration's commitment to Afghanistan," the Senate

report noted, “the shift in focus just as Franks and his senior aides were literally working on plans for the attacks on Tora Bora represents a dramatic turning point that allowed a sustained victory in Afghanistan to slip through our fingers. Almost immediately, intelligence and military planning resources were transferred to begin planning the next war in Iraq.”

Futile Appeals

The CIA and Special Forces teams, calling for reinforcements to finish off bin Laden and al-Qaeda, “did not know what was happening back at CentCom, the drain in resources and shift in attention would affect them and the future course of the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan,” the report said.

Henry Crumpton, who was in charge of the CIA’s Afghan strategy, made direct appeals to Franks to move more than 1,000 Marines to Tora Bora to block escape routes to Pakistan. But the CentCom commander rebuffed the request, citing logistical and time problems, the report said.

“At the end of November, Crumpton went to the White House to brief President Bush and Vice President [Dick] Cheney and repeated the message that he had delivered to Franks,” the report said. “Crumpton warned the president that the Afghan campaign’s primary goal of capturing bin Laden was in jeopardy because of the military’s reliance on Afghan militias at Tora Bora. ...

“Crumpton questioned whether the Pakistani forces would be able to seal off the escape routes and pointed out that the promised Pakistani troops had not arrived yet.”

Crumpton also told Bush that the Afghan militia were not up to the job of assaulting al-Qaeda’s bases at Tora Bora and warned the President, “we’re going to lose our prey if we’re not careful,” the report said, citing journalist Ron Suskind’s *The One Percent Doctrine*.



But the Iraq-obsessed Bush still didn’t act. Finally, in mid-December 2001, the small U.S. Special Forces team convinced the Afghan militia fighters to undertake a sweep of the mountainous terrain, but they found it largely deserted.

The Senate report said bin Laden and his bodyguards apparently departed Tora Bora on Dec. 16, 2001, adding: “With help from Afghans and Pakistanis who had

been paid in advance, the group made its way on foot and horseback across the mountain passes and into Pakistan without encountering any resistance.

“The Special Operations Command history (of the Afghan invasion) noted that there were not enough U.S. troops to prevent the escape, acknowledging that the failure to capture or kill ... bin Laden made Tora Bora a controversial battle.”

Though excluding those details from his memoir, Bush tries to rebut the criticism that he bungled the battle of Tora Bora. He wrote:

“Years later, critics charged that we allowed bin Laden to slip the noose at Tora Bora. I sure didn’t see it that way. I asked our commanders and CIA officials about bin Laden frequently. They were working around the clock to locate him, and they assured me they had the troop levels and resources they needed. If we had ever known for sure where he was, we would have moved heaven and earth to bring him to justice.”

The reality, however, was that the neocons, who saw Iraq as a more serious threat to Israel, and the oil men, who lusted after Iraq’s petroleum reserves, persuaded Bush to concentrate more on getting rid of Saddam Hussein than Osama bin Laden.

Macho Talk

To do that, some advisers played on Bush’s macho self-image. In his memoir, Bush recalled one of his weekly lunches with Vice President Cheney (the former head of the Halliburton oil-drilling company), who was urging him to get on with the business of eliminating Saddam Hussein.

“Dick asked me directly, ‘Are you going to take care of this guy, or not?’ That was his way of saying he thought we had given diplomacy enough time. I appreciated Dick’s blunt advice. I told him I wasn’t ready to move yet. ‘Okay, Mr. President, it’s your call,’ he said.”

However, even as he was being prodded by Cheney and the neocons to act, Bush was using similar macho rhetoric – about having “the balls” to go to war – to ensure that Prime Minister Blair would commit British forces when the time came. In one melodramatic passage in *Decision Points*, Bush recounts a discussion with Blair:

“We both understood what the decision meant. Once we laid out our position at the UN, we had to be willing to follow through with the consequences. If diplomacy failed, there would be only one option left. ‘I don’t want to go to war,’ I told Tony, ‘but I will do it.’

“Tony agreed. After the meeting, I told Alastair Campbell, one of Tony’s top

aides, 'Your man has got cojones.' I'm not sure how that translated to the refined ears of 10 Downing Street. But to anyone from Texas, its meaning was clear."

But Bush's memoir also has indications that he was not just swept up by the manly excitement of blasting apart some nearly defenseless nation, but he was carried along by intelligence reports which were themselves being manipulated by a combination of Cheney/neocon pressure and CIA analysts who cared more for their jobs than the truth. Bush wrote:

"One intelligence report summarized the problem: 'Since the end of inspections in 1998, Saddam has maintained the chemical weapons effort, energized the missile program, made a bigger investment in biological weapons, and has begun to try to move forward in the nuclear area.'"

The Zarqawi Myth

The memoir also contains references in which it's ambiguous whether Bush is the manipulator or the one being manipulated.

For instance, Bush cites the case of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a brutal terrorist who was operating in an area of Iraq that was protected by the U.S. and British "no-fly zone," which prevented Saddam Hussein's ruthless counter-terror operations from targeting anti-government Islamic militants like Zarqawi.

Though U.S. intelligence knew that the secular Sunni Saddam Hussein was a bitter enemy of these Islamic fundamentalists, the Bush administration exploited for propaganda purposes the fact that Zarqawi was located inside Iraq and had slipped into Baghdad for some medical treatment.

In his memoir, Bush cites the Zarqawi case to defend his decision to invade, but it's unclear whether the existence of the known terrorist in Iraq was also used to bait Bush.

"In the summer of 2002, I received a startling piece of news. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist who had experimented with biological weapons in Afghanistan, was operating a lab in northeastern Iraq.

"Suspect facility in this area may be producing poisons and toxins for terrorist use,' the briefing read. 'Al-Zarqawi is an active terrorist planner who has targeted U.S. and Israeli interests: Sensitive reporting from a [classified] service indicates that al-Zarqawi has been directing efforts to smuggle an unspecified chemical material originating in northern Iraq into the United States.'

"We couldn't say for sure whether Saddam knew Zarqawi was in Iraq. We did have intelligence indicating that Zarqawi had spent two months in Baghdad receiving medical treatment and that other al Qaeda operatives had moved to Iraq.

"The CIA had worked with a major Arab intelligence service to get Saddam to find and extradite Zarqawi. He refused." [It was later revealed that Saddam Hussein's police had searched for Zarqawi in Baghdad but failed to locate him.]

At another point in the memoir, Bush portrays himself as something of an innocent victim, deceived by erroneous intelligence in late 2002. He wrote:

"I asked George Tenet and his capable deputy, John McLaughlin, to brief me on what intelligence we could declassify to explain Iraq's WMD programs. A few days before Christmas, John walked me through their first effort. It was not very convincing.

"I thought back to CIA briefings I had received, the NIE that concluded Saddam had biological and chemical weapons, and the data the CIA had provided for my UN speech in September. 'Surely we can do a better job of explaining the evidence against Saddam,' I said. George Tenet agreed. 'It's a slam dunk,' he said.

"I believed him. I had been receiving intelligence briefings on Iraq for nearly two years."

No More Delays

By March 2003, Bush claims he had exhausted all peaceful efforts to resolve the issues regarding Iraq's WMD and was left with only one choice, to invade Iraq:

"For more than a year, I had tried to address the threat from Saddam Hussein without war. We had rallied an international coalition to pressure him to come clean about his weapons of mass destruction programs. We had obtained a unanimous United Nations Security Council resolution making clear there would be serious consequences for continued defiance.

"We had reached out to Arab nations about taking Saddam into exile. I had given Saddam and his sons a final forty-eight hours to avoid war. The dictator rejected every opportunity. The only logical conclusion was that he had something to hide, something so important that he was willing to go to war for it."

Of course, the other logical conclusion would be that Iraq had no WMD stockpiles, that it had done its best to convince the outside world of that fact, and that it trusted that the international community would uphold the principles enshrined at the post-World War II Nuremberg Tribunals and in the UN

Charter, making aggressive war the supreme international crime.

Instead, recognizing that the Security Council was overwhelmingly opposed to an invasion, Bush withdrew a second resolution seeking explicit authorization to use force, got the UN inspectors to flee Iraq, and turned to his “coalition of the willing.”.

In his memoir, Bush describes what happens next in the most heroic and melodramatic terms.

“On Wednesday, March 19, 2003, I walked into a meeting I had hoped would not be necessary,” he wrote. “I turned to [Defense Secretary] Don Rumsfeld. ‘Mr. Secretary,’ I said, ‘for the peace of the world and the benefit and freedom of the Iraqi people, I hereby give the order to execute Operation Iraqi Freedom. May God bless the troops.’”

“Tommy [Franks] snapped a salute. ‘Mr. President,’ he said, ‘may God bless America.’”

Within three weeks, the invasion had ousted Saddam Hussein’s government. A few weeks later, Bush flew onto the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln and gave his infamous “Mission Accomplished” speech. Eventually, Bush even had the satisfaction of having U.S. troops deliver Hussein to the scaffold where he was hanged in late 2006. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Bush Silences a Dangerous Witness.”](#)]

But the war also drove Iraq into seven years (and counting) of a living hell, with the death toll now estimated in the hundreds of thousands, with many more maimed, and with millions of Iraqis displaced from their homes and living in degradation and squalor.

Losing Afghanistan

The consequences for Afghanistan – from Bush’s premature pivot away from that war to the one ardently desired by the neocons – were also devastating. Rather than stabilizing Afghanistan and ensuring that al-Qaeda and its allies could not reestablish bases there, Bush watched as the Taliban mounted a comeback and the U.S. military remained bogged down in Iraq. He wrote:

“My CIA and military briefings included increasingly dire reports about Taliban influence. The problem was crystallized by a series of color-coded maps I saw in November 2006. The darker the shading, the more attacks had occurred in that part of Afghanistan.

“The 2004 map was lightly shaded. The 2005 map had darker areas in the southern

and eastern parts of the country. By 2006, the entire southeastern quadrant was black. In just one year, the number of remotely detonated bombs had doubled. The number of armed attacks had tripled. The number of suicide bombings had more than quadrupled.”

The situation also was deteriorating in Iraq, with various Iraqi nationalist forces taking up arms against the U.S. military occupation and a sectarian civil war breaking out between the Sunnis, who represented the previous ruling elite, and the Shiites, who had risen to power since the invasion.

Though Bush had suggested before the war that the presence of Zarqawi and a few al-Qaeda operatives was a key justification for invading Iraq, he acknowledges in his memoir that it was only after the invasion that al-Qaeda began focusing on Iraq. He wrote:

“When al Qaeda lost its safe haven in Afghanistan, the terrorists went searching for a new one. After we removed Saddam in 2003, bin Laden exhorted his fighters to support the jihad in Iraq. In many ways, Iraq was more desirable for them than Afghanistan. It had oil riches and Arab roots.

“Over time, the number of extremists affiliated with al Qaeda in Afghanistan declined to the low hundreds, while the estimated number in Iraq topped ten thousand.”

Bush also confirms some key facts about his decision to beef up U.S. forces in 2007, the “surge.” His account demonstrates how wrong the U.S. press corps and the congressional Democrats were in their interpretation of events in late 2006, when – after the Democratic victory in congressional elections – Bush fired Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and replaced him with former CIA Director Robert Gates.

The immediate conventional wisdom was that the shakeup represented a victory for the realist doves over the ideological hawks, that the pragmatic Gates would oversee a rapid drawdown of U.S. forces and that Rumsfeld had remained an unrepentant hardliner on the war.

Consortiumnews.com was one of the few outlets that reported that the conventional wisdom was upside down, that the reality was that Rumsfeld was backing U.S. commanders who wanted to dramatically reduce the U.S. “footprint” in Iraq and that Gates was so eager to resume a prominent position in Washington that he had acquiesced to an escalation.

Neocons Push the Surge

That is essentially the account that Bush offers in his memoir, in the context

of presenting the “surge” as one of his finest hours as the Decider, albeit with the guidance of leading neocons.

In June 2006, Bush wrote, he received a special briefing from outside experts:

“Fred Kagan, a military scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, questioned whether we had enough troops to control the violence. Robert Kaplan, a distinguished journalist, recommended adopting a more aggressive counterinsurgency strategy.

“Michael Vickers, a former CIA operative who helped arm the Afghan Mujahideen in the 1980s, suggested a greater role for Special Operations. Eliot Cohen, the author of *Supreme Command*, a book about the relationship between presidents and their generals ..., told me I needed to hold my commanders accountable for results.”

In other words, the seeds of the “surge” came from neocons, including “journalist” Robert Kaplan, who took it upon themselves to advise the commander-in-chief on escalating the killing in Iraq.

This neocon advice clashed with the judgment of the commanders in the field, whose recommendations Bush famously pronounced he would follow.

By mid-2006, the commanders were seeing a turning point in the violence that was ripping Iraq apart. Sunni militants had begun rejecting al-Qaeda extremists; Zarqawi was killed in an air raid; the sectarian violence had caused a de facto ethnic cleansing with Sunni and Shiites retreating to safer enclaves; a classified program was targeting and killing insurgents in greater numbers.

The field commanders, including the senior general in Iraq, George Casey, favored an accelerated drawdown of U.S. forces and an exit plan for combat troops, rather than an expanded and open-ended stay. The commanders had Rumsfeld’s support.

Bush wrote: “General [George] Casey told me we could succeed by transferring responsibility to the Iraqis faster. We needed to ‘help them help themselves,’ Don Rumsfeld said. That was another way of saying that we needed to take our hand off the bicycle seat.

“I wanted to send a message to the team that I was thinking differently. ‘We must succeed,’ I said. ‘If they can’t do it, we will. If the bicycle teeters, we’re going to put the hand back on. We have to make damn sure we do not fail.’”

To impose this new strategy, Bush sought new leadership both in Iraq and at the Pentagon, sounding out Gates as a replacement for Rumsfeld.

“The weekend before the midterms, I met with Bob Gates in Crawford to ask him to become secretary of defense. Bob had served on the Baker-Hamilton Commission, a panel chartered by Congress to study the situation in Iraq. He told me he had supported a troop surge as one of the group’s recommendations.”

Sealing the Deal

Once Rumsfeld was dumped and Gates was appointed (to the misguided acclaim of Official Washington), Bush and the neocons pressed ahead with the escalation. Bush wrote:

“Over weeks of intense discussion in November and December, most of the national security team came to support the surge. Dick Cheney, Bob Gates, Josh Bolten, and Steve Hadley and his NSC warriors were behind the new approach.”

Though Bush credits his decision to order the “surge” as the turning point in Iraq, he also includes facts that support the opposite conclusion, that the tide was already turning against al-Qaeda extremists before the 30,000 extra U.S. troops arrived in 2007. He wrote:

“The people of Anbar [province] had a look at life under al Qaeda, and they didn’t like what they saw. Starting in mid-2006, tribal sheikhs banded together to take their province back from the extremists. The Awakening drew thousands of recruits.”

Nevertheless, the neocons – who remain extraordinarily influential in Washington to this day – spun the “surge” as the singular explanation for the gradual decline in violence in Iraq. This new conventional wisdom was enthusiastically pushed by the Bush administration and accepted by the Washington press corps. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Gen. Petraeus and the Surge Myth.”](#)]

Not surprisingly, Bush’s memoir also embraces the “surge-did-it” conventional wisdom. After all, it finally made him out to be the great war-time Decider that he always envisioned, a self-image that the neocons and his other advisers carefully nurtured and exploited as the key to their own influence.

Yet, after finishing *Decision Points*, I still wasn’t sure where the line was between Bush being the one getting manipulated and the one manipulating the rest of us. Had he drunk his own Kool-Aid or had he cynically instructed his ghost writer to fashion some old talking points into a memoir designed to rehabilitate himself and his powerful family?

The only certainty is that within the many miscalculations of his presidency, many people died unnecessary deaths, many more faced severe personal hardships that didn’t need to happen, and the United States was left in a fiscal, economic

and strategic mess.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and *Newsweek*, and since 1995 has published Consortiumnews.com. His books, including *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, [can be purchased here](#).

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An Update to Our Readers on Editor Robert Parry

As many Consortiumnews.com readers know, Editor Robert Parry recently suffered a stroke, as he described in [this article](#) posted New Year's Eve. With some ongoing related health issues Robert is currently hospitalized working on recovery.

It is difficult to say when Consortiumnews.com might be up and running with regular publishing again but we wanted to inform readers – as well as contributors – of the situation and ask for your patience and understanding during this challenging time.

Robert greatly appreciates all the support from readers over the years, knowing that without you, this valuable forum for independent journalism would not be possible. All of us involved in this project over the years – as readers, writers, or donors – greatly value this website and we can assure you that every effort will be made to continue providing a home for independent journalism.

Thank you for your patience, understanding and support.

– Nat Parry, former Associate Editor of Consortiumnews.com and co-author of *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*

An Apology and Explanation

From Editor Robert Parry: For readers who have come to see Consortiumnews as a daily news source, I would like to extend my personal apology for our spotty production in recent days. On Christmas Eve, I suffered a stroke

that has affected my eyesight (especially my reading and thus my writing) although apparently not much else. The doctors have also been working to figure out exactly what happened since I have never had high blood pressure, I never smoked, and my recent physical found nothing out of the ordinary. Perhaps my personal slogan that "every day's a work day" had something to do with this.

Perhaps, too, the unrelenting ugliness that has become Official Washington and national journalism was a factor. It seems that since I arrived in Washington in 1977 as a correspondent for The Associated Press, the nastiness of American democracy and journalism has gone from bad to worse. In some ways, the Republicans escalated the vicious propaganda warfare following Watergate, refusing to accept that Richard Nixon was guilty of some extraordinary malfeasance (including the 1968 sabotage of President Johnson's Vietnam peace talks to gain an edge in the election and then the later political dirty tricks and cover-ups that came to include Watergate). Rather than accept the reality of Nixon's guilt, many Republicans simply built up their capability to wage information warfare, including the creation of ideological news organizations to protect the party and its leaders from "another Watergate."

So, when Democrat Bill Clinton defeated President George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election, the Republicans used their news media and their control of the special prosecutor apparatus (through Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Appeals Court Judge David Sentelle) to unleash a wave of investigations to challenge Clinton's legitimacy, eventually uncovering his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The idea had developed that the way to defeat your political opponent was not just to make a better argument or rouse popular support but to dredge up some "crime" that could be pinned on him or her. The GOP success in damaging Bill Clinton made possible George W. Bush's disputed "victory" in 2000 in which Bush took the presidency despite losing the popular vote and almost certainly losing the key state of Florida if all ballots legal under state law were counted. Increasingly, America – even at the apex of its uni-power status – was taking on the look of a banana republic except with much higher stakes for the world.

Though I don't like the word "weaponized," it began to apply to how "information" was used in America. The point of Consortiumnews, which I founded in 1995, was to use the new medium of the modern Internet to allow the old principles of journalism to have a new home, i.e., a place to pursue important facts and giving everyone a fair shake. But we were just a tiny pebble in the ocean. The trend of using journalism as just another front in no-holds-barred political warfare continued – with Democrats and liberals adapting to the

successful techniques pioneered mostly by Republicans and by well-heeled conservatives.

Barack Obama's election in 2008 was another turning point as Republicans again challenged his legitimacy with bogus claims about his "Kenyan birth," a racist slur popularized by "reality" TV star Donald Trump. Facts and logic no longer mattered. It was a case of using whatever you had to diminish and destroy your opponent.

We saw similar patterns with the U.S. government's propaganda agencies developing themes to demonize foreign adversaries and then to smear Americans who questioned the facts or challenged the exaggerations as "apologists." This approach was embraced not only by Republicans (think of President George W. Bush distorting the reality in Iraq in 2003 to justify the invasion of that country under false pretenses) but also by Democrats who pushed dubious or downright false depictions of the conflict in Syria (including blaming the Syrian government for chemical weapons attacks despite strong evidence that the events were staged by Al Qaeda and other militants who had become the tip of the spear in the neocon/liberal interventionist goal of removing the Assad dynasty and installing a new regime more acceptable to the West and to Israel.

More and more I would encounter policymakers, activists and, yes, journalists who cared less about a careful evaluation of the facts and logic and more about achieving a pre-ordained geopolitical result – and this loss of objective standards reached deeply into the most prestigious halls of American media. This perversion of principles – twisting information to fit a desired conclusion – became the modus vivendi of American politics and journalism. And those of us who insisted on defending the journalistic principles of skepticism and evenhandedness were increasingly shunned by our colleagues, a hostility that first emerged on the Right and among neoconservatives but eventually sucked in the progressive world as well. Everything became "information warfare."

The New Outcasts

That is why many of us who exposed major government wrongdoing in the past have ended up late in our careers as outcasts and pariahs. Legendary investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, who helped expose major crimes of state from the My Lai massacre to the CIA's abuses against American citizens, including illegal spying and LSD testing on unsuspecting subjects, has literally had to take his investigative journalism abroad because he uncovered inconvenient evidence that implicated Western-backed jihadists in staging chemical weapons attacks in Syria so the atrocities would be blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The anti-Assad group think is so intense in the West that even strong evidence of staged events, such as the first patients arriving at hospitals before government

planes could have delivered the sarin, was brushed aside or ignored. The Western media and the bulk of international agencies and NGOs were committed to gin up another case for “regime change” and any skeptics were decried as “Assad apologists” or “conspiracy theorists,” the actual facts be damned.

So Hersh and weapons experts such as MIT’s Theodore Postol were shoved into the gutter in favor of hip new NATO-friendly groups like Bellingcat, whose conclusions always fit neatly with the propagandist needs of the Western powers.

The demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia is just the most dangerous feature of this propagandist process – and this is where the neocons and the liberal interventionists most significantly come together. The U.S. media’s approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propagandist. Does any sentient human being read the New York Times’ or the Washington Post’s coverage of Russia and think that he or she is getting a neutral or unbiased treatment of the facts? For instance, the full story of the infamous Magnitsky case cannot be told in the West, nor can the objective reality of the Ukraine coup in 2014. The American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the “other side of the story.” Indeed to even suggest that there is another side to the story makes you a “Putin apologist” or “Kremlin stooge.”

Western journalists now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonizing of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many “liberals” who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the U.S. intelligence community feeds us, even if we’re told to accept the assertions on faith.

The Trump Crisis

Which brings us to the crisis that is Donald Trump. Trump’s victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton has solidified the new paradigm of “liberals” embracing every negative claim about Russia just because elements of the CIA, FBI and the National Security Agency produced a report last Jan 6 that blamed Russia for “hacking” Democratic emails and releasing them via WikiLeaks. It didn’t seem to matter that these “hand-picked” analysts (as Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called them) evinced no evidence and even admitted that they weren’t asserting any of this as fact.

The hatred of Trump and Putin was so intense that old-fashioned rules of journalism and fairness were brushed aside. On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump “Resistance.” The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his

ouster. Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.

Other people, including senior editors across the mainstream media, began to treat the unproven Russia-gate allegations as flat fact. No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government's institutions. Anti-Trump "progressives" were posturing as the true patriots because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Hatred of Trump had become like some invasion of the body snatchers – or perhaps many of my journalistic colleagues had never believed in the principles of journalism that I had embraced throughout my adult life. To me, journalism wasn't just a cover for political activism; it was a commitment to the American people and the world to tell important news stories as fully and fairly as I could; not to slant the "facts" to "get" some "bad" political leader or "guide" the public in some desired direction.

I actually believed that the point of journalism in a democracy was to give the voters unbiased information and the necessary context so the voters could make up their own minds and use their ballot – as imperfect as that is – to direct the politicians to take actions on behalf of the nation. The unpleasant reality that the past year has brought home to me is that a shockingly small number of people in Official Washington and the mainstream news media actually believe in real democracy or the goal of an informed electorate.

Whether they would admit it or not, they believe in a "guided democracy" in which "approved" opinions are elevated – regardless of their absence of factual basis – and "unapproved" evidence is brushed aside or disparaged regardless of its quality. Everything becomes "information warfare" – whether on Fox News, the Wall Street Journal editorial page, MSNBC, the New York Times or the Washington Post. Instead of information provided evenhandedly to the public, it is rationed out in morsels designed to elicit the desired emotional reactions and achieve a political outcome.

As I said earlier, much of this approach was pioneered by Republicans in their misguided desire to protect Richard Nixon, but it has now become all pervasive and has deeply corrupted Democrats, progressives and mainstream journalism. Ironically, the ugly personal characteristics of Donald Trump – his own contempt for facts and his crass personal behavior – have stripped the mask off the broader face of Official America.

What is perhaps most alarming about the past year of Donald Trump is that the mask is now gone and, in many ways, all sides of Official Washington are revealed collectively as reflections of Donald Trump, disinterested in reality, exploiting “information” for tactical purposes, eager to manipulate or con the public. While I’m sure many anti-Trumpers will be deeply offended by my comparison of esteemed Establishment figures with the grotesque Trump, there is a deeply troubling commonality between Trump’s convenient use of “facts” and what has pervaded the Russia-gate investigation.

My Christmas Eve stroke now makes it a struggle for me to read and to write. Everything takes much longer than it once did – and I don’t think that I can continue with the hectic pace that I have pursued for many years. But – as the New Year dawns – if I could change one thing about America and Western journalism, it would be that we all repudiate “information warfare” in favor of an old-fashioned respect for facts and fairness – and do whatever we can to achieve a truly informed electorate.

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

In Case You Missed ...

Some of our special stories in November dealt with logical and evidentiary failings of the Russia-gate investigation and President Trump’s bombing of Syria over a dubious chemical-weapons attack.

[“Rearranging the Watergate Myth”](#) by James DiEugenio, Nov. 1, 2017

[“The Legacy of Dennis Banks”](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Nov. 4, 2017

[“How US Blunders Strengthened Iran”](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 5, 2017

[“Learning to Love McCarthyism”](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 6, 2017

[“The Dangerous Business of Journalism”](#) by Don North, Nov. 7, 2017

[“The Politics of Sexual Harassment and War”](#) by David Marks, Nov. 7, 2017

[“Trump and Democrats Misread Mandates”](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 8, 2017

["Did Al Qaeda Dupe Trump on Syrian Attack?"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 9, 2017

["The Saudi Hand in Lebanon's Crisis"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Nov. 10, 2017

["Behind the Saudi Troublemaking"](#) by Paul Cochrane, Nov. 11, 2017

["Remaking Armistice Day into Veterans Day"](#) by Gary Kohls, Nov. 12, 2017

["Mocking Trump Doesn't Prove Russia's Guilt"](#) by Ray McGovern, Nov. 13, 2017

["America's Righteous Russia-gate Censorship"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 14, 2017

["Trump Adds to Washington's 'Swamp'"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 15, 2017

["The Charmed, Doomed Life of Barry Seal"](#) by James DiEugenio, Nov. 15, 2017

["America's Renegade Warfare"](#) by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Nov. 16, 2017

["Russia-gate Spreads to Europe"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 16, 2017

["Trump's Saudi Scheme Unravels"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Nov. 17, 2017

["Signs of U.K. Misconduct in Assange Case"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Nov. 18, 2017

["Israel's Ploy Selling a Syrian Nuke Strike"](#) by Gareth Porter, Nov. 18, 2017

["How Syrian-Nuke Evidence Was Faked"](#) by Gareth Porter, Nov. 19, 2017

["The Lost Journalistic Standards of Russia-gate"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 20, 2017

["Trump Resists Progress on Global Warming"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 24, 2017

["The Struggles of 'A Good American'"](#) by James DiEugenio, Nov. 28, 2017

["Russia-gate Inquisitors Subpoena Journalist"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Nov. 28, 2017

["US Bows to Israeli/Saudi Alliance in Blaming Iran"](#) by Ted Snider, Nov. 29, 2017

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