

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in October dealt with the impact of climate change, the Saudi role in Mideast bloodshed, and the ongoing Russia-gate melodrama and what it means to journalism.

["Galveston's BioLab Amid Global Warming"](#) by Joe Lauria, Oct. 2, 2017

["America Not Immune from Chaos"](#) by Ann Wright, Oct. 3, 2017

["How 2nd Amendment Distortions Kill"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 3, 2017

["The Mystery of the Russia-gate Puppies"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 4, 2017

["Shielding Saudis on Yemen Atrocities"](#) by Shireen Al-Adeimi, Oct. 5, 2017

["The Spiraling Crisis of Puerto Rico"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Oct. 5, 2017

["Recalling Japan's 'Comfort Women' Rapes"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Oct. 6, 2017

["President Zigzag"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 6, 2017

["The Rise of Britain's 'New Politics'"](#) by John Pilger, Oct. 6, 2017

["Kurdish Referendum Roils the Mideast"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Oct. 7, 2017

["Agent Orange: Vietnam's Ongoing Calamity"](#) by Marjorie Cohn & Jonathan Moore, Oct. 9, 2017

["Anti-Nuke Activists Win Nobel Prize"](#) by Elizabeth Murray, Oct. 9, 2017

["Russia-gate Jumps the Shark"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 10, 2017

["The Osage Indian Murder Mystery"](#) by James DiEugenio, Oct. 11, 2017

["Catalonia and the 'Europe of Regions'"](#) by Andrew Spannaus, Oct. 11, 2017

["Why North Korea Wants Nuke Deterrence"](#) by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Oct. 12, 2017

["Trump's War for Coal Raises Risks"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Oct. 13, 2017

["The Legacy of Reagan's Civilian 'Psyops'"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 13, 2017

["Trump's North Korea Delusions"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Oct. 14, 2017

["Fueling More Bloodshed in Ukraine"](#) by James W. Carden, Oct. 14, 2017

["How Netanyahu Pulls Trump's Strings"](#) by Robert Parry, Oct. 15, 2017

"Iraqi Forces Clash with Kurdish Militia" by Joe Lauria, Oct. 16, 2017

"Why the Vengeance Toward Sgt. Bergdahl" by Matthew Hoh, Oct. 17, 2017

"Blaming Russia for the Internet 'Sewer'" by Robert Parry, Oct. 18, 2017

"The Indonesia Massacre's Historic Message" by Jonathan Marshall, Oct. 19, 2017

"Man Bites Dog: NYT Does Journalism" by Robert Parry, Oct. 19, 2017

"Clinton, Assange and the War on Truth" by John Pilger, Oct. 20, 2017

"As Trump Prens, Puerto Rico Still Suffers" by Dennis J. Bernstein, Oct. 23, 2017

"Russia-China Tandem Changes the World" by Gilbert Doctorow, Oct. 23, 2017

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"Getting the Left to Embrace US 'Exceptionalism'" by James W. Carden, Oct. 24, 2017

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"What Did Hillary Clinton Know?" by Robert Parry, Oct. 25, 2017

"Iraqi Kurds Suffer Major Setback" by Joe Lauria, Oct. 25, 2017

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"The Ploy to Shift 9/11 Blame to Iran" by Kristen Breitweiser, Oct. 26, 2017

"Russia-gate Breeds 'Establishment McCarthyism'" by Robert Parry, Oct. 26, 2017

"Guardians of the Magnitsky Myth" by Robert Parry, Oct. 28, 2017

"The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate" by Joe Lauria, Oct. 29, 2017

"The Deep State's JFK Triumph Over Trump" by Ray McGovern, Oct. 30, 2017

"How America Spreads Global Chaos" by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Oct. 30, 2017

"Sorting Out the Russia Mess" by Robert Parry, Oct. 31, 2017

"Blaming the Afghan War Failure on – Russia" by Jonathan Marshall, Oct. 31, 2017

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The Lost Journalistic Standards of Russia-gate

Exclusive: The Russia-gate hysteria has witnessed a widespread collapse of journalistic standards as major U.S. news outlets ignore rules about how to treat evidence in dispute, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A danger in both journalism and intelligence is to allow an unproven or seriously disputed fact to become part of the accepted narrative where it gets widely repeated and thus misleads policymakers and citizens alike, such as happened during the run-up to war with Iraq and is now recurring amid the frenzy over Russia-gate.

For instance, in a Russia-gate story on Saturday, The New York Times reported as flat fact that a Kremlin intermediary “told a Trump campaign aide, George Papadopoulos, that the Russians had ‘dirt’ on Mr. Trump’s rival, Hillary Clinton, in the form of ‘thousands of emails.’” The Times apparently feels that this claim no longer needs attribution even though it apparently comes solely from the 32-year-old Papadopoulos as part of his plea bargain over lying to the FBI.

Beyond the question of trusting an admitted liar like Papadopoulos, his supposed Kremlin contact, professor Joseph Mifsud, a little-known academic associated with the University of Stirling in Scotland, denied knowing anything about Democratic emails.

In an interview with the U.K. Daily Telegraph, Mifsud acknowledged meeting with Papadopoulos but disputed having close ties to the Kremlin and rejected how Papadopoulos recounted their conversations. Specifically, he denied the claim that he mentioned emails containing “dirt” on Clinton.

Even New York Times correspondent Scott Shane noted late last month – after the

criminal complaint against Papadopoulos was unsealed – that “A crucial detail is still missing: Whether and when Mr. Papadopoulos told senior Trump campaign officials about Russia’s possession of hacked emails. And it appears that the young aide’s quest for a deeper connection with Russian officials, while he aggressively pursued it, led nowhere.”

Shane added, “the court documents describe in detail how Mr. Papadopoulos continued to report to senior campaign officials on his efforts to arrange meetings with Russian officials, ... the documents do not say explicitly whether, and to whom, he passed on his most explosive discovery – that the Russians had what they considered compromising emails on Mr. Trump’s opponent.

“J.D. Gordon, a former Pentagon official who worked for the Trump campaign as a national security adviser [and who dealt directly with Papadopoulos] said he had known nothing about Mr. Papadopoulos’ discovery that Russia had obtained Democratic emails or of his prolonged pursuit of meetings with Russians.”

Missing Corroboration

But the journalistic question is somewhat different: why does the Times trust the uncorroborated assertion that Mifsud told Papadopoulos about the emails – and trust the claim to such a degree that the newspaper would treat it as flat fact? Absent corroborating evidence, isn’t it just as likely (if not more likely) that Papadopoulos is telling the prosecutors what he thinks they want to hear?

If the prosecutors working for Russia-gate independent counsel Robert Mueller had direct evidence that Mifsud did tell Papadopoulos about the emails, you would assume that they would have included the proof in the criminal filing against Papadopoulos, which was made public on Oct. 30.

Further, since Papadopoulos was peppering the Trump campaign with news about his Russian outreach in 2016, you might have expected that he would include something about how helpful the Russians had been in obtaining and publicizing the Democratic emails.

But none of Papadopoulos’s many emails to Trump campaign officials about his Russian contacts (as cited by the prosecutors) mentioned the hot news about “dirt” on Clinton or the Russians possessing “thousands of emails.” This lack of back-up would normally raise serious doubts about Papadopoulos’s claim, but – since Papadopoulos was claiming something that the prosecutors and the Times wanted to believe – reasonable skepticism was swept aside.

What the Times seems to have done is to accept a bald assertion by Mueller’s prosecutors as sufficient basis for jumping to the conclusion that this disputed

claim is undeniably true. But just because Papadopoulos, a confessed liar, and these self-interested prosecutors claim something is true doesn't make it true.

Careful journalists would wonder, as Shane did, why Papadopoulos who in 2016 was boasting of his Russian contacts to make himself appear more valuable to the Trump campaign wouldn't have informed someone about this juicy tidbit of information, that the Russians possessed "thousands of emails" on Clinton.

Yet, the prosecutors' statement regarding Papadopoulos's guilty plea is strikingly silent on corroborating evidence that could prove that, first, Russia did possess the Democratic emails (which Russian officials deny) and, second, the Trump campaign was at least knowledgeable about this core fact in the support of the theory about the campaign's collusion with the Russians (which President Trump and other campaign officials deny).

Of course, it could be that the prosecutors' "fact" will turn out to be a fact as more evidence emerges, but anyone who has covered court cases or served on a jury knows that prosecutors' criminal complaints and pre-trial statements should be taken with a large grain of salt. Prosecutors often make assertions based on the claim of a single witness whose credibility gets destroyed when subjected to cross-examination.

That is why reporters are usually careful to use words like "alleged" in dealing with prosecutors' claims that someone is guilty. However, in Russia-gate, all the usual standards of proof and logic have been jettisoned. If something serves the narrative, no matter how dubious, it is embraced by the U.S. mainstream media, which – for the past year – has taken a lead role in the anti-Trump "Resistance."

A History of Bias

This tendency to succumb to "confirmation bias," i.e., to believe the worst about some demonized figure, has inflicted grave damage in other recent situations as well.

One example is described in the Senate Intelligence Committee's 2006 study of the false intelligence that undergirded the case for invading Iraq in 2003. That inquiry discovered that previously discredited WMD claims kept reemerging in finished U.S. intelligence analyses as part of the case for believing that Iraq was hiding WMD.

In the years before the Iraq invasion, the U.S. government had provided tens of millions of dollars to Iraqi exiles in the Iraqi National Congress, and the INC, in turn, produced a steady stream of "walk-ins" who claimed to be Iraqi government "defectors" with knowledge about Saddam Hussein's secret WMD

programs.

Some U.S. intelligence analysts – though faced with White House pressure to accept this “evidence” – did their jobs honestly and exposed a number of the “defectors” as paid liars, including one, who was identified in the Senate report as “Source Two,” who talked about Iraq supposedly building mobile biological weapons labs.

CIA analysts caught Source Two in contradictions and issued a “fabrication notice” in May 2002, deeming him “a fabricator/provocateur” and asserting that he had “been coached by the Iraqi National Congress prior to his meeting with western intelligence services.”

But the Defense Intelligence Agency never repudiated the specific reports that were based on Source Two’s debriefings. Source Two also continued to be cited in five CIA intelligence assessments and the pivotal National Intelligence Estimate in October 2002, “as corroborating other source reporting about a mobile biological weapons program,” the Senate Intelligence Committee report said.

Thus, Source Two became one of four human sources referred to by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his United Nations speech on Feb. 5, 2003, making the case that Iraq was lying when it insisted that it had ended its WMD programs. (The infamous “Curve Ball” was another of these dishonest sources.)

Losing the Thread

After the U.S. invasion and the failure to find the WMD caches, a CIA analyst who worked on Powell’s speech was asked how a known “fabricator” (Source Two) could have been used for such an important address by a senior U.S. government official. The analyst responded, “we lost the thread of concern as time progressed I don’t think we remembered.”

A CIA supervisor added, “Clearly we had it at one point, we understood, we had concerns about the source, but over time it started getting used again and there really was a loss of corporate awareness that we had a problem with the source.”

In other words, like today’s Russia-gate hysteria, the Iraq-WMD groupthink had spread so widely across U.S. government agencies and the U.S. mainstream media that standard safeguards against fake evidence were discarded. People in Official Washington, for reasons of careerism and self-interest, saw advantages in running with the Iraq-WMD pack and recognized the dangers of jumping in front of the stampeding herd to raise doubts about Iraq’s WMD.

Back then, the personal risk to salary and status came from questioning the Iraq-WMD groupthink because there was always the possibility that Saddam Hussein

indeed was hiding WMD and, if so, you'd be forever branded as a "Saddam apologist"; while there were few if any personal risks to agreeing with all those powerful people that Iraq had WMD, even if that judgment turned out to be disastrously wrong.

Sure, American soldiers and the people of Iraq would pay a terrible price, but your career likely would be safe, a calculation that proved true for people like Fred Hiatt, the editorial-page editor of The Washington Post who repeatedly reported Iraq's WMD as flat fact and today remains the editorial-page editor of The Washington Post.

Similarly, Official Washington's judgment now is that there is no real downside to joining the Resistance to Trump, who is widely viewed as a buffoon, unfit to be President of the United States. So, any means to remove him are seen by many Important People as justified – and the Russian allegations seem to be the weightiest rationale for his impeachment or forced resignation.

Professionally, it is much riskier to insist on unbiased standards of evidence regarding Trump and Russia. You'll just stir up a lot of angry questions about why are you "defending Trump." You'll be called a "Trump enabler" and/or a "Kremlin stooge."

However, basing decisions on dubious information carries its own dangers for the nation and the world. Not only do the targets end up with legitimate grievances about being railroaded – and not only does this prejudicial treatment undermine faith in the fairness of democratic institutions – but falsehoods can become the basis for wider policies that can unleash wars and devastation.

We saw the horrific outcome of the Iraq War, but the risks of hostilities with nuclear-armed Russia are far graver; indeed, billions of people could die and human civilization end. With stakes so high, The New York Times and Mueller's prosecutors owe the public better than treating questionable accusations as flat fact.

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).

Russia-gate Spreads to Europe

Exclusive: The Russia-gate hysteria has jumped the Atlantic with Europeans

blaming Russia for Brexit and Catalanian discontent. But what about Israeli influence operations or, for that matter, American ones, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Ever since the U.S. government dangled \$160 million last December to combat Russian propaganda and disinformation, obscure academics and eager think tanks have been lining up for a shot at the loot, an unseemly rush to profit that is spreading the Russia-gate hysteria beyond the United States to Europe.

Now, it seems that every development, which is unwelcomed by the Establishment – from Brexit to the Catalonia independence referendum – gets blamed on Russia! Russia! Russia!

The methodology of these “studies” is to find some Twitter accounts or Facebook pages somehow “linked” to Russia (although it’s never exactly clear how that is determined) and complain about the “Russian-linked” comments on political developments in the West. The assumption is that the gullible people of the United States, United Kingdom and Catalonia were either waiting for some secret Kremlin guidance to decide how to vote or were easily duped.

Oddly, however, most of this alleged “interference” seems to have come *after* the event in question. For instance, more than half (56 percent) of the famous \$100,000 in Facebook ads in 2015-2017 supposedly to help elect Donald Trump came *after* last year’s U.S. election (and the total sum compares to Facebook’s annual revenue of \$27 billion).

Similarly, a new British study at the University of Edinburgh blaming the Brexit vote on Russia discovered that more than 70 percent of the Brexit-related tweets from allegedly Russian-linked sites came after the referendum on whether the U.K. should leave the European Union. But, hey, don’t let facts and logic get in the way of a useful narrative to suggest that anyone who voted for Trump or favored Brexit or wants independence for Catalonia is Moscow’s “useful idiot”!

This week, British Prime Minister Theresa May accused Russia of seeking to “undermine free societies” and to “sow discord in the West.”

What About Israel?

Yet, another core problem with these “studies” is that they don’t come with any “controls,” i.e., what is used in science to test a hypothesis against some base line to determine if you are finding something unusual or just some normal occurrence.

In this case, for instance, it would be useful to find some other country that,

like Russia, has a significant number of English speakers but where English is not the native language – and that has a significant interest in foreign affairs – and then see whether people from that country weigh in on social media with their opinions and perspectives about political events in the U.S., U.K., etc.

Perhaps, the U.S. government could devote some of that \$160 million to, say, a study of the Twitter/Facebook behavior of Israelis and whether they jump in on U.S./U.K. controversies that might directly or indirectly affect Israel. We could see how many Twitter/Facebook accounts are “linked” to Israel; we could study whether any Israeli “trolls” harass journalists and news sites that oppose neoconservative policies and politicians in the West; we could check on whether Israel does anything to undermine candidates who are viewed as hostile to Israeli interests; if so, we could calculate how much money these “Israeli-linked” activists and bloggers invest in Facebook ads; and we could track any Twitter bots that might be reinforcing the Israeli-favored message.

No Chance

If we had this Israeli baseline, then perhaps we could judge how unusual it is for Russians to voice their opinions about controversies in the West. It’s true that Israel is a much smaller country with 8.5 million people compared to Russia’s 144 million, but you could adjust for those per capita numbers – and even if you didn’t, it wouldn’t be surprising to find that Israel’s interference in U.S. policymaking still exceeds Russian influence.

It’s also true that Israeli leaders have often advocated policies that have proved disastrous for the United States, such as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s encouragement of the Iraq War, which Russia opposed. Indeed, although Russia is now regularly called an American enemy, it’s hard to think of any policy that President Vladimir Putin has pushed on the U.S. that is even a fraction as harmful to U.S. interests as the Iraq War has been.

And, while we’re at it, maybe we could have an accounting of how much “U.S.-linked” entities have spent to influence politics and policies in Russia, Ukraine, Syria and other international hot spots.

But, of course, neither of those things will happen. If you even tried to gauge the role of “Israeli-linked” operations in influencing Western decision-making, you’d be accused of anti-Semitism. And if that didn’t stop you, there would be furious editorials in The New York Times, The Washington Post and the rest of the U.S. mainstream media denouncing you as a “conspiracy theorist.” Who could possibly think that Israel would do anything underhanded to shape Western attitudes?

And, if you sought the comparative figures for the West interfering in the affairs of other nations, you'd be faulted for engaging in "false moral equivalence." After all, whatever the U.S. government and its allies do is good for the world; whereas Russia is the fount of evil.

So, let's just get back to developing those algorithms to sniff out, isolate and eradicate "Russian propaganda" or other deviant points of view, all the better to make sure that Americans, Britons and Catalonians vote the right way.

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America's Righteous Russia-gate Censorship

Exclusive: Arriving behind the anti-Trump "resistance" and the Russia-gate "scandal" is a troubling readiness to silence dissent in the U.S., shutting down information that challenges Official Narratives, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A stark difference between today's Washington and when I was here as a young Associated Press correspondent in the late 1970s and the early 1980s is that then – even as the old Cold War was heating up around the election of Ronald Reagan – there were prominent mainstream journalists who looked askance at the excessive demonization of the Soviet Union and doubted wild claims about the dire threats to U.S. national security from Nicaragua and Grenada.

Perhaps the Vietnam War was still fresh enough in people's minds that senior editors and national reporters understood the dangers of mindless groupthink inside Official Washington, as well as the importance of healthy skepticism toward official pronouncements from the U.S. intelligence community.

Today, however, I cannot think of a single prominent figure in the mainstream news media who questions any claim – no matter how unlikely or absurd – that vilifies Russian President Vladimir Putin and his country. It is all Russia-bashing all the time.

And, behind this disturbing anti-Russian uniformity are increasing assaults

against independent and dissident journalists and news outlets outside the mainstream. We're not just entering a New Cold War and a New McCarthyism; we're also getting a heavy dose of old-style Orwellianism.

Sometimes you see this in individual acts like HuffingtonPost taking down a well-reported story by journalist Joe Lauria because he dared to point out that Democratic money financed the two initial elements of what's now known as Russia-gate: the forensic examination of computers at the Democratic National Committee and the opposition research on Donald Trump conducted by ex-British spy Christopher Steele.

HuffingtonPost never contacted Lauria before or after its decision to retract the story, despite a request from him for the reasons why. HuffPost editors told a BuzzFeed reporter that they were responding to reader complaints that the article was filled with factual errors but none have ever been spelled out, leaving little doubt that Lauria's real "error" was in defying the Russia-gate groupthink of the anti-Trump Resistance. [[A version of Lauria's story](#) appeared at Consortiumnews.com before Lauria posted it at HuffPost. If you want to sign a petition calling on HuffPost to restore Lauria's article, [click here.](#)]

Muzzling RT

Other times, the expanding American censorship is driven by U.S. government agencies, such as the Justice Department's demand that the Russian news outlet, RT, register under the restrictive Foreign Agent Registration Act, which requires such prompt, frequent and detailed disclosures of supposed "propaganda" that it could make it impossible for RT to continue to function in the United States.

This attack on RT was rationalized by [the Jan. 6 "Intelligence Community Assessment"](#) that was, in reality, prepared by a handful of "hand-picked" analysts from the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency. Their report included a seven-page addendum from 2012 accusing RT of spreading Russian propaganda – and apparently this Jan. 6 report must now be accepted as gospel truth, no questions permitted.

However, if any real journalist actually read the Jan. 6 report, he or she would have discovered that RT's sinister assault on American democracy included such offenses as holding a debate among third-party candidates who were excluded from the Republican-Democratic debates in 2012. Yes, allowing Libertarians and Greens to express their points of view is a grave danger to American democracy.

Other RT "propaganda" included reporting on the Occupy Wall Street protests and examining the environmental dangers from "fracking," issues that also have been

widely covered by the domestic American media. Apparently, whenever RT covers a newsworthy event – even if others have too – that constitutes “propaganda,” which must be throttled to protect the American people from the danger of seeing it.

If you bother to study the Jan. 6 report’s addendum, it is hard not to conclude that these “hand-picked” analysts were either stark-raving mad or madly anti-Russian. Yet, this “Intelligence Community Assessment” is now beyond questioning unless you want to be labeled a “Kremlin stooge” or “Putin’s useful idiot.” [An earlier State Department attack on RT was equally ridiculous or demonstrably false.]

And, by the way, it was President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper who testified under oath that the analysts from the three agencies were “hand-picked.” That means that they were analysts personally selected by Obama’s intelligence chiefs from three agencies – not “all 17” as the American public was told over and over again – and thus were not even a full representation of analysts from those three agencies. Yet, this subset of a subset is routinely described as “the U.S. intelligence community,” even after major news outlets finally had to retract their “all 17” canard.

So, the myth of the intelligence community’s consensus lives on. For instance, in an upbeat article on Tuesday about the U.S. government’s coercing RT into registering as a foreign agent, Washington Post reporters Devlin Barrett and David Filipov wrote, “U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that the network and website push relentlessly anti-American propaganda at the behest of the Russian government.”

In the old days, even during the old Cold War and President Reagan’s ranting about “the Evil Empire,” some of us would have actually examined the Jan. 6 report’s case against RT and noted the absurdity of these claims about “relentlessly anti-American propaganda.” Whether you want to hear the views of the Greens and Libertarians or not – or whether you like “fracking” and hate Occupy Wall Street – the opportunity to hear this information doesn’t constitute “relentlessly anti-American propaganda.”

The U.S. government’s real beef with RT seems to be that it allows on air some Americans who have been blacklisted from the mainstream media – including highly credentialed former U.S. intelligence analysts and well-informed American journalists – because they have challenged various Official Narratives.

In other words, Americans are not supposed to hear the other side of the story on important international conflicts, such as the proxy war in Syria or the civil war in Ukraine or Israel’s mistreatment of Palestinians. Only the State

Department's versions of those events are permitted even when those versions are themselves propagandistic if not outright false.

For example, you're not supposed to hear about the huge holes in the Syria-sarin cases, nor about Ukraine's post-coup regime arming neo-Nazis to kill ethnic-Russian Ukrainians, nor about Israel's evolution into an apartheid state. All right-thinking Americans are to get only a steady diet of how righteous the U.S. government and its allies always are. Anything else is "propaganda."

Also off limits is any thoughtful critique of that Jan. 6 report – or apparently even Clapper's characterization of it as a product of "hand-picked" analysts from only three agencies. You're not supposed to ask why other U.S. intelligence agencies with deep knowledge about Russia were excluded and why even other analysts from the three involved agencies were shut out.

No, you must always think of the Jan. 6 report as the "consensus" assessment from the entire "U.S. intelligence community." And you must accept it as flat fact – as it now is treated by The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and other mainstream news outlets. You shouldn't even notice that the Jan. 6 report itself doesn't claim that Russian election meddling was a fact. The report explains, that "Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact."

But even quoting from the Jan. 6 report might make an American reporter some kind of traitorous "Russian mole" whose journalism must be purged from "responsible" media and who should be forced to wear the journalistic equivalent of a yellow star.

The Anti-Trump/Russia Hysteria

Of course, much of this anti-Russian hysteria comes from the year-long fury about the shocking election of Donald Trump. From the first moments of stunned disbelief over Hillary Clinton's defeat, the narrative was put in motion to blame Trump's victory not on Clinton and her wretched campaign but on Russia. That also was viewed as a possible way of reversing the election's outcome and removing Trump from office.

The major U.S. news media quite openly moved to the forefront of the Resistance. The Washington Post adopted the melodramatic and hypocritical slogan, "Democracy Dies in Darkness," as it unleashed its journalists to trumpet the narrative of some disloyal Americans spreading Russian propaganda. Darkness presumably was a fine place to stick people who questioned the Resistance's Russia-gate narrative.

An early shot in this war against dissenting information was fired last

Thanksgiving Day when the Post published a front-page article citing an anonymous group called PropOrNot smearing 200 Internet news sites for allegedly disseminating Russian propaganda. The list included some of the most important sources of independent journalism, including Consortiumnews.com, apparently for the crime of questioning some of the State Department's narratives on international conflicts, particularly Syria and Ukraine.

Then, with the anti-Russia hysteria building and the censorship ball rolling, Congress last December approved \$160 million for think tanks and other non-governmental organizations to combat Russian propaganda. Soon, reports and studies were flying off the shelves detecting a Russian behind every article, tweet and posting that didn't toe the State Department's line.

The New York Times and other leading news organizations have even cheered plans for Google, Facebook and other technology companies to deploy algorithms that can hunt down, marginalize or eliminate information that establishment media deems "fake" or "propaganda." Already Google has put together a First Draft coalition, consisting of mainstream media and establishment-approved Web sites to decide what information makes the cut and what doesn't.

Among these arbiters of truth is the fact-check organization PolitiFact, which judged the falsehood about "all 17 intelligence agencies" signing off on the Russian "hacking" claim to be "true." Even though the claim was never true and is now clearly established as false, PolitiFact continues to assert that this lie is the truth, apparently filled with the hubris that comes with its power over determining what is true and what is false.

But what is perhaps most troubling to me about these developments is the silence of many civil liberties advocates, liberal politicians and defenders of press freedom who might have been counted on in earlier days to object to this censorship and blackballing.

It appears that the ends of taking down Donald Trump and demonizing Vladimir Putin justify whatever means, no matter the existential danger of nuclear war with Russia or the McCarthyistic (even Orwellian) threats to freedom of speech, press and thought.

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Did Al Qaeda Dupe Trump on Syrian Attack?

Special Report: Buried deep inside a new U.N. report is evidence that could exonerate the Syrian government in the April 4 sarin atrocity and make President Trump look like an Al Qaeda dupe, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

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 Sheikhou, 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](#)).

Trump and Democrats Misread Mandates

Exclusive: Neither the Democrats nor President Trump learned the right lessons from the 2016 election, leaving the nation divided at home and bogged down in wars abroad, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

One year ago, the American electorate delivered a confused but shocking result, the election of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton, a quirky outcome in the Electoral College that put Trump in the White House even though Clinton got three million more votes nationally. But neither party appears to have absorbed

the right lessons from that surprise ending.

The Democrats might have taken away from their defeat the warning that they had forgotten how to speak to the white working class, which had suffered from job losses via “free trade” and felt willfully neglected as Democrats looked toward the “browning of America.”

The choice of Clinton had compounded this problem because she came across as elitist and uncaring toward this still important voting bloc with her memorable description of half of Trump’s voters as “deplorables,” an insult that stung many lower-income whites and helped deliver Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin to Trump.

For more than a decade, some Democratic strategists had promoted the notion that “demography is destiny,” i.e., that the relative growth of Latino, Asian and African-American populations in comparison to whites would ensure a future Democratic majority. That prediction seemed to have been validated by Barack Obama’s winning coalition in 2008 and 2012, but it also had the predictable effect of alienating many whites who felt disrespected and resentful.

So, while the Democrats and Clinton looked to a multicultural future, Trump used his experience in reality TV to communicate with this overlooked demographic group. Trump sold himself as a populist and treated the white working class with respect. He spoke to their fears about economic decline and gave voice to their grievances. He vowed to put “America First” and pull back from foreign military adventures that often used working-class kids as cannon fodder.

But much of Trump’s message, like the real-estate mogul himself, was phony. He really didn’t have policies that would address the needs of working-class Americans. Still, his promises of a massive infrastructure plan, good health-care for all, and rejection of unfair trade deals rang the right bells with enough voters to flip some traditionally Democratic blue-collar states to Republican red.

Staying Blind

You might have thought that the Democrats would respond to Trump’s shocking victory, which also left Republicans in charge of Congress and most statehouses around the country, by launching an apologetic listening tour to reconnect with working-class whites.

There also might have been a clear-eyed evaluation of the weaknesses of the Democratic presidential nominee who came to personify the corrupt insider-culture of Official Washington, exploiting government service for financial gain by raking in millions of dollars for speeches to Wall Street and other special

interests.

Clinton also offended many peace voters because of her support for aggressive war, both as a U.S. senator backing the disastrous invasion of Iraq and as Secretary of State pushing for U.S. military interventions in Libya and Syria. Her apology for voting for the Iraq War came across as opportunistic and insincere, and her undisguised delight over Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's grisly murder ("We came; we saw; he died!") seemed ghoulish.

And, whether fairly or not, many Americans were turned off by the Democratic Party's emphasis on "identity politics," the assumption that people would vote based on their gender, race or sexual orientation, rather than on bread-and-butter policies and war-or-peace issues.

In other words, the Democratic Party could have looked in the mirror and seen what many Americans found unappealing about the modern version of a party that had done so much to build the country, from the New Deal during the Great Depression through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and taking a leading role in addressing environmental, health-care and other national challenges.

But today's Democrats instead chose to blame their plight largely on Russia and its alleged "meddling" in U.S. politics, a strategy that not only made little sense – given the many other reasons why voters turned away from Clinton and her party – but delivered a message to white working-class voters who had gone over to Trump that they were "stupid" and had been "duped."

Whatever one thinks about white working-class voters who favored Trump, calling people gullible is not an effective way to woo back a voting bloc that already feels insulted and alienated.

Missing a Chance

So, when Trump was sworn in last Jan. 20, the ball was largely in his court. He could have focused on rebuilding America's infrastructure; or he could have proposed a serious plan for improving access to health care; or he could have moved pragmatically to resolve a host of international conflicts that President Obama had left behind.

Instead, President Trump squandered his first days in office by getting into absurd arguments about his inaugural crowd size compared to Obama's and denying that Clinton had won the national popular vote. His "alternative facts" made him a laughingstock.

Last spring, when I spoke with a group of Trump voters in West Virginia, they were still faithful to their choice – and wanted Washington to give him a chance

– but they already were complaining about Trump’s personal outbursts on Twitter; they wanted him to concentrate on their real needs, not his petty squabbles.

But Trump wasn’t listening. He couldn’t kick his Twitter habit. He kept putting his giant ego in the way.

As his presidency stumbled forward, Trump also brushed aside suggestions that he reverse his image as a person who had no regard for facts by declassifying information about the conflicts in Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere – to reveal situations where Obama and his team played propaganda games, rather than tell the truth.

And, lacking sufficient knowledge about the world, Trump failed when presented with sophisticated plans for reshaping U.S. policies in the Middle East to become less dependent on Israel and Saudi Arabia. Instead, Trump jumped into the arms of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi King Salman.

Pandering to Israeli-Saudi desires – and trying to show how tough he was – Trump fired off 59 Tomahawk missiles at Syria over a dubious chemical-weapons incident; threatened more Mideast strife against Iran; and escalated the 16-year-old war in Afghanistan.

Plus, he blustered about war against North Korea and personally insulted the country’s leader, Kim Jong Un, as “little rocket man.” Rather than rein in neoconservative aggression, he continued to unleash it.

When Trump did address domestic policy, he defined himself as basically just another right-wing Republican, supporting a health-care scheme that would have made matters worse for millions of Americans and backing a tax-cut plan that would mostly benefit the rich while blowing an even bigger hole in the deficit. All that red ink, in turn, drowned any hopes for investments in a modern infrastructure.

In other words, Trump exposed himself as the narcissistic incompetent that his critics said he was. He proved incapable of even acting presidential, let alone showing that he could use his power to make life better for average Americans. He was left with little to boast about beyond the economy that was bequeathed to him by Obama.

Republicans also had little to brag about, explaining why Ed Gillespie, the GOP’s gubernatorial nominee in Virginia in 2017, opted for ugly socially divisive attack ads as the best hope for defeating Democrat Ralph Northam, a Gillespie strategy called “Trumpism without Trump.”

But Gillespie’s approach backfired with a surprisingly strong turnout of

Virginia's voters putting Northam into the governor's mansion and almost erasing the solid Republican majority in the state legislature.

Trump was left to tweet about how the Virginia results, which were echoed in other states' elections on Tuesday, weren't a reflection on his own popularity, ignoring his unprecedentedly low approval ratings for a president nine months into his first term.

So, the new political question is whether Trump can belatedly learn from his failures and finally undertake some actions at home and abroad that actually serve the interests of the American people and the world. Or will he continue to bumble and stumble along?

A parallel question is whether the Democrats will misinterpret their strong showing on Tuesday as encouragement to continue ignoring their own political and institutional shortcomings – and to keep on using Russia to bash Trump. Neither side has shown much aptitude for learning.

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Learning to Love McCarthyism

Special Report: Many American liberals who once denounced McCarthyism as evil are now learning to love the ugly tactic when it can be used to advance the Russia-gate “scandal” and silence dissent, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times has finally detected some modern-day McCarthyism, but not in the anti-Russia hysteria that the newspaper has fueled for several years amid the smearing of American skeptics as “useful idiots” and the like. No, the Times editors [are accusing](#) a Long Island Republican of McCarthyism for linking his Democratic rival to “New York City special interest groups.” As the Times laments, “It’s the old guilt by association.”

Yet, the Times sees no McCarthyism in the frenzy of Russia-bashing and guilt by association for any American who can be linked even indirectly to any Russian who might have some ill-defined links to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

On Monday, in the same edition that expressed editorial outrage over that Long Island political ad's McCarthyism, the Times ran two front-page articles under the headline: "A Complex Paper Trail: Blurring Kremlin's Ties to Key U.S. Businesses."

The two subheads read: "Shipping Firm Links Commerce Chief to Putin 'Cronies'" and "Millions in Facebook Shares Rooted in Russian Cash." The latter story, which meshes nicely with the current U.S. political pressure on Facebook and Twitter to get in line behind the New Cold War against Russia, cites investments by Russian Yuri Milner that date back to the start of the decade.

Buried in the story's "jump" is the acknowledgement that Milner's "companies sold those holdings several years ago." But such is the anti-Russia madness gripping the Establishment of Washington and New York that any contact with any Russian constitutes a scandal worthy of front-page coverage. On Monday, The Washington Post published a page-one article entitled, "9 in Trump's orbit had contacts with Russians."

The anti-Russian madness has reached such extremes that even when you say something that's obviously true – but that RT, the Russian television network, also reported – you are attacked for spreading "Russian propaganda."

We saw that when former Democratic National Committee chairwoman Donna Brazile disclosed in her new book that she considered the possibility of replacing Hillary Clinton on the Democratic ticket after Clinton's public fainting spell and worries about her health.

Though there was a video of Clinton's collapse on Sept. 11, 2016, followed by her departure from the campaign trail to fight pneumonia – not to mention her earlier scare with blood clots – the response from a group of 100 Clinton supporters was to question Brazile's patriotism: "It is particularly troubling and puzzling that she would seemingly buy into false Russian-fueled propaganda, spread by both the Russians and our opponents about our candidate's health."

In other words, the go-to excuse for everything these days is to blame the Russians and smear anyone who says anything – no matter how true – if it also was reported on RT.

Pressing the Tech Companies

Just as Sen. Joe McCarthy liked to haul suspected "communists" and "fellow-travelers" before his committee in the 1950s, the New McCarthyism has its own witch-hunt hearings, such as last week's Senate grilling of executives from Facebook, Twitter and Google for supposedly allowing Russians to have input into the Internet's social networks.

Trying to appease Congress and fend off threats of government regulation, the rich tech companies displayed their eagerness to eradicate any Russian taint.

Twitter's general counsel Sean J. Edgett told the Senate Judiciary subcommittee on crime and terrorism that Twitter adopted an "expansive approach to defining what qualifies as a Russian-linked account."

Edgett said the criteria included "whether the account was created in Russia, whether the user registered the account with a Russian phone carrier or a Russian email address, whether the user's display name contains Cyrillic characters, whether the user frequently Tweets in Russian, and whether the user has logged in from any Russian IP address, even a single time. We considered an account to be Russian-linked if it had even one of the relevant criteria."

The trouble with Twitter's methodology was that none of those criteria would connect an account to the Russian government, let alone Russian intelligence or some Kremlin-controlled "troll farm." But the criteria could capture individual Russians with no link to the Kremlin as well as people who weren't Russian at all, including, say, American or European visitors to Russia who logged onto Twitter through a Moscow hotel.

Also left unsaid is that Russians are not the only national group that uses the Cyrillic alphabet. It is considered a standard script for writing in Belarus, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbo-Croatia and Ukraine. So, for instance, a Ukrainian using the Cyrillic alphabet could end up falling into the category of "Russian-linked" even if he or she hated Putin.

Twitter's attorney also said the company conducted a separate analysis from information provided by unidentified "third party sources" who pointed toward accounts supposedly controlled by the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA), totaling 2,752 accounts. The IRA is typically described in the U.S. press as a "troll farm" which employs tech-savvy employees who combat news and opinions that are hostile to Russia and the Russian government. But exactly how those specific accounts were traced back to this organization was not made clear.

And, to put that number in some perspective, Twitter claims 330 million active monthly users, which makes the 2,752 accounts less than 0.001 percent of the total.

The Trouble with 'Trolling'

While the Russia-gate investigation has sought to portray the IRA effort as exotic and somehow unique to Russia, the strategy is followed by any number of governments, political movements and corporations – sometimes using enthusiastic

volunteers but often employing professionals skilled at challenging critical information or at least muddying the waters.

Those of us who operate on the Internet are familiar with harassment from “trolls” who may use access to “comment” sections to inject propaganda and disinformation to sow confusion, to cause disruption, or to discredit the site by promoting ugly opinions and nutty conspiracy theories.

As annoying as this “trolling” is, it’s just a modern version of more traditional strategies used by powerful entities for generations – hiring public-relations specialists, lobbyists, lawyers and supposedly impartial “activists” to burnish images, fend off negative news and intimidate nosy investigators. In this competition, modern Russia is both a late-comer and a piker.

The U.S. government fields legions of publicists, propagandists, paid journalists, psy-ops specialists, contractors and non-governmental organizations to promote Washington’s positions and undermine rivals through information warfare.

The CIA has an entire bureaucracy dedicated to propaganda and disinformation, with some of those efforts farmed out to newer entities such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) or paid for by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). NATO has a special command in Latvia that undertakes “strategic communications.”

Israel is another skilled player in this field, tapping into its supporters around the world to harass people who criticize the Zionist project. Indeed, since the 1980s, Israel has pioneered many of the tactics of computer spying and sabotage that were adopted and expanded by America’s National Security Agency, explaining why the Obama administration teamed up with Israel in a scheme to plant malicious code into Iranian centrifuges to sabotage Iran’s nuclear program.

It’s also ironic that the U.S. government touted social media as a great benefit in advancing so-called “color revolutions” aimed at “regime change” in troublesome countries. For instance, when the “green revolution” was underway in Iran in 2009 after the reelection of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Obama administration asked Twitter to postpone scheduled maintenance so the street protesters could continue using the platform to organize against Ahmadinejad and to distribute their side of the story to the outside world.

During the so-called Arab Spring in 2011, Facebook, Twitter and Skype won praise as a means of organizing mass demonstrations to destabilize governments in

Tunisia, Egypt and Syria. Back then, the U.S. government denounced any attempts to throttle these social media platforms and the free flow of information that they permitted as proof of dictatorship.

Social media also was a favorite of the U.S. government in Ukraine in 2013-14 when the Maidan protests exploited these platforms to help destabilize and ultimately overthrow the elected government of Ukraine, the key event that launched the New Cold War with Russia.

Swinging the Social Media Club

The truth is that, in those instances, the U.S. governments and its agencies were eagerly exploiting the platforms to advance Washington's geopolitical agenda by disseminating American propaganda and deploying U.S.-funded non-governmental organizations, which taught activists how to use social media to advance "regime change" scenarios.

While these uprisings were sold to Western audiences as genuine outpourings of public anger – and there surely was some of that – the protests also benefited from U.S. funding and expertise. In particular, NED and USAID provided money, equipment and training for anti-government operatives challenging regimes in U.S. disfavor.

One of the most successful of these propaganda operations occurred in Syria where anti-government rebels operating in areas controlled by Al Qaeda and its fellow Islamic militants used social media to get their messaging to Western mainstream journalists who couldn't enter those sectors without fear of beheading.

Since the rebels' goal of overthrowing President Bashar al-Assad meshed with the objectives of the U.S. government and its allies in Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, Western journalists uncritically accepted the words and images provided by Al Qaeda's collaborators.

The success of this propaganda was so extraordinary that the White Helmets, a "civil defense" group that worked in Al Qaeda territory, became the go-to source for dramatic video and even was awarded the short-documentary Oscar for an informational produced for Netflix – despite evidence that the White Helmets were staging some of the scenes for propaganda purposes.

Indeed, one argument for believing that Putin and the Kremlin might have "meddled" in last year's U.S. election is that they could have felt it was time to give the United States a taste of its own medicine.

After all, the United States intervened in the 1996 Russian election to ensure

the continued rule of the corrupt and pliable Boris Yeltsin. And there were the U.S.-backed street protests in Moscow against the 2011 and 2012 elections in which Putin strengthened his political mandate. Those protests earned the “color” designation the “snow revolution.”

However, whatever Russia may or may not have done before last year’s U.S. election, the Russia-gate investigations have always sought to exaggerate the impact of that alleged “meddling” and molded the narrative to whatever weak evidence was available.

The original storyline was that Putin authorized the “hacking” of Democratic emails as part of a “disinformation” operation to undermine Hillary Clinton’s candidacy and to help elect Donald Trump – although no hard evidence has been presented to establish that Putin gave such an order or that Russia “hacked” the emails. WikiLeaks has repeatedly denied getting the emails from Russia, which also denies any meddling.

Further, the emails were not “disinformation”; they were both real and, in many cases, newsworthy. The DNC emails provided evidence that the DNC unethically tilted the playing field in favor of Clinton and against Sen. Bernie Sanders, a point that Brazile also discovered in reviewing staffing and financing relationships that Clinton had with the DNC under the prior chairwoman, Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

The purloined emails of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta revealed the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street (information that she was trying to hide from voters) and pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

A Manchurian Candidate?

Still, the original narrative was that Putin wanted his Manchurian Candidate (Trump) in the White House and took the extraordinary risk of infuriating the odds-on favorite (Clinton) by releasing the emails even though they appeared unlikely to prevent Clinton’s victory. So, there was always that logical gap in the Russia-gate theory.

Since then, however, the U.S. mainstream narrative has shifted, in part, because the evidence of Russian election “meddling” was so shaky. Under intense congressional pressure to find something, Facebook reported \$100,000 in allegedly “Russian-linked” ads purchased in 2015-17, but noted that only 44 percent were bought before the election. So, not only was the “Russian-linked” pebble tiny – compared to Facebook’s annual revenue of \$27 billion – but more than half of the pebble was tossed into this very large lake after Clinton had already lost.

So, the storyline was transformed into some vague Russian scheme to exacerbate social tensions in the United States by taking different sides of hot-button issues, such as police brutality against blacks. The New York Times reported that one of these “Russian-linked” pages featured photos of cute puppies, which the Times speculated must have had some evil purpose although it was hard to fathom. (Oh, those devious Russians!).

The estimate of how many Americans may have seen one of these “Russian-linked” ads also keeps growing, now up to as many as 126 million or about one-third of the U.S. population. Of course, the way the Internet works – with any item possibly going viral – you might as well say the ads could have reached billions of people.

Whenever I write an article or send out a Tweet, I too could be reaching 126 million or even billions of people, but the reality is that I’d be lucky if the number were in the thousands. But amid the Russia-gate frenzy, no exaggeration is too outlandish or too extreme.

Another odd element of Russia-gate is that the intensity of this investigation is disproportionate to the lack of interest shown toward far better documented cases of actual foreign-government interference in American elections and policymaking.

For instance, the major U.S. media long ignored the extremely well-documented case of Richard Nixon colluding with South Vietnamese officials to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson’s Vietnam War peace talks to gain an advantage for Nixon in the 1968 election. That important chapter of history only gained The New York Times’ seal of approval earlier this year after the Times had dismissed the earlier volumes of evidence as “rumors.”

In the 1980 election, Ronald Reagan’s team – especially his campaign director William Casey in collaboration with Israel and Iran – appeared to have gone behind President Jimmy Carter’s back to undercut Carter’s negotiations to free 52 American hostages then held in Iran and essentially doom Carter’s reelection hopes.

There were a couple of dozen witnesses to that scheme who spoke with me and other investigative journalists – as well as documentary evidence showing that President Reagan did authorize secret arms shipments to Iran via Israel shortly after the hostages were freed during Reagan’s inauguration on Jan. 20, 1981.

However, since Vice President (later President) George H.W. Bush, who was implicated in the scheme, was well-liked on both sides of the aisle and because Reagan had become a Republican icon, the October Surprise case of 1980 was pooh-

poohed by the major media and dismissed by a congressional investigation in the early 1990s. Despite the extraordinary number of witnesses and supporting documents, Wikipedia listed the scandal as a “conspiracy theory.”

Israeli Influence

And, if you’re really concerned about foreign interference in U.S. elections and policies, there’s the remarkable influence of Israel and its perceived ability to effect the defeat of almost any politician who deviates from what the Israeli government wants, going back at least to the 1980s when Sen. Chuck Percy and Rep. Paul Findley were among the political casualties after pursuing contacts with the Palestinians.

If anyone doubts how Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has continued to pull the strings of U.S. politicians, just watch one of his record-tying three addresses to joint sessions of Congress and count how often Republicans and Democrats jump to their feet in enthusiastic applause. (The only other foreign leader to get the joint-session honor three times was Great Britain’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill.)

So, what makes Russia-gate different from the other cases? Did Putin conspire with Trump to extend a bloody war as Nixon did with the South Vietnamese leaders? Did Putin lengthen the captivity of U.S. hostages to give Trump a political edge? Did Putin manipulate U.S. policy in the Middle East to entice President George W. Bush to invade Iraq and set the region ablaze, as Israel’s Netanyahu did? Is Putin even now pushing for wider Mideast wars, as Netanyahu is?

Indeed, one point that’s never addressed in any serious way is why is the U.S. so angry with Russia while these other cases, in which U.S. interests were clearly damaged and American democracy compromised, were treated largely as non-stories.

Why is Russia-gate a big deal while the other cases weren’t? Why are opposite rules in play now – with Democrats, many Republicans and the major news media flogging fragile “links,” needling what little evidence there is, and assuming the worst rather than insisting that only perfect evidence and perfect witnesses be accepted as in the earlier cases?

The answer seems to be the widespread hatred for President Trump combined with vested interests in favor of whipping up the New Cold War. That is a goal valued by both the Military-Industrial Complex, which sees trillions of dollars in strategic weapons systems in the future, and the neoconservatives, who view Russia as a threat to their “regime change” agendas for Syria and Iran.

After all, if Russia and its independent-minded President Putin can be beaten back and beaten down, then a big obstacle to the neocon/Israeli goal of expanding the Mideast wars will be removed.

Right now, the neocons are openly lusting for a “regime change” in Moscow despite the obvious risks that such turmoil in a nuclear-armed country might create, including the possibility that Putin would be succeeded not by some compliant Western client like the late Boris Yeltsin but by an extreme nationalist who might consider launching a nuclear strike to protect the honor of Mother Russia.

The Democrats, the liberals and even many progressives justify their collusion with the neocons by the need to remove Trump by any means necessary and “stop fascism.” But their contempt for Trump and their exaggeration of the “Hitler” threat that this incompetent buffoon supposedly poses have blinded them to the extraordinary risks attendant to their course of action and how they are playing into the hands of the war-hungry neocons.

A Smokescreen for Repression

There also seems to be little or no concern that the Establishment is using Russia-gate as a smokescreen for clamping down on independent media sites on the Internet. Traditional supporters of civil liberties have looked the other way as the rights of people associated with the Trump campaign have been trampled and journalists who simply question the State Department’s narratives on, say, Syria and Ukraine are denounced as “Moscow stooges” and “useful idiots.”

The likely outcome from the anti-Russian show trials on Capitol Hill is that technology giants will bow to the bipartisan demand for new algorithms and other methods for stigmatizing, marginalizing and eliminating information that challenges the mainstream storylines in the cause of fighting “Russian propaganda.”

The warning from powerful senators was crystal clear. “I don’t think you get it,” Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, warned social media executives last week. “You bear this responsibility. You created these platforms, and now they are being misused. And you have to be the ones who do something about it. Or we will.”

As this authoritarian if not totalitarian future looms and as the dangers of nuclear annihilation from an intentional or unintentional nuclear war with Russia grow, many people who should know better are caught up in the Russia-gate frenzy.

I used to think that liberals and progressives opposed McCarthyism because they

regarded it as a grave threat to freedom of thought and to genuine democracy, but now it appears that they have learned to love McCarthyism except, of course, when it rears its ugly head in some Long Island political ad criticizing New York City.

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](#)).

Sorting Out the Russia Mess

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media finally has its “smoking gun” on Russia-gate – incriminating information from a junior Trump campaign adviser – but a closer look reveals serious problems with the “evidence,” writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller has turned up the heat on President Trump with the indictment of Trump’s former campaign manager for unrelated financial crimes and the disclosure of a guilty plea from a low-level foreign policy adviser for lying to the FBI.

While longtime Republican fixer Paul Manafort, who helped guide Trump’s campaign to the GOP nomination in summer 2016, was the big name in the news on Monday, the mainstream media focused more on court documents related to George Papadopoulos, a 30-year-old campaign aide who claims to have heard about Russia possessing Hillary Clinton’s emails before they became public on the Internet, mostly via WikiLeaks.

While that would seem to bolster the Russia-gate narrative – that Russian intelligence “hacked” Democratic emails and President Vladimir Putin ordered the emails be made public to undermine Clinton’s campaign – the evidentiary thread that runs through Papadopoulos’s account remains tenuous.

That’s in part because his credibility has already been undermined by his guilty plea for lying to the FBI and by the fact that he now has a motive to provide something the prosecutors might want in exchange for leniency. Plus, there is the hearsay and contested quality of Papadopoulos’s supposed information, some of which already has turned out to be false.

According to the court documents, Papadopoulos got to know a professor of international relations who claimed to have “substantial connections with Russian government officials,” with the professor identified in press reports as Joseph Mifsud, a little-known academic associated with the University of Stirling in Scotland.

The first contact supposedly occurred in mid-March 2016 in Italy, with a second meeting in London on March 24 when the professor purportedly introduced Papadopoulos to a Russian woman whom the young campaign aide believed to be Putin’s niece, an assertion that Mueller’s investigators determined wasn’t true.

Trump, who then was under pressure for not having a foreign policy team, included Papadopoulos as part of a list drawn up to fill that gap, and Papadopoulos participated in a campaign meeting on March 31 in Washington at which he suggested a meeting between Trump and Putin, a prospect that other senior aides reportedly slapped down.

The ‘Email’ Breakfast

But Papadopoulos continued his outreach to Russia, according to the court documents, which depict the most explosive meeting as an April 26 breakfast in London with the professor (Mifsud) supposedly saying he had been in Moscow and “learned that the Russians had obtained ‘dirt’ on then-candidate Clinton” and possessed “thousands of emails.” Mainstream press accounts concluded that Mifsud must have been referring to the later-released emails.

However, Mifsud told The Washington Post in an email last August that he had “absolutely no contact with the Russian government” and described his ties to Russia as strictly in academic fields.

In an interview with the U.K. Daily Telegraph after Monday’s disclosures, Mifsud acknowledged meeting with Papadopoulos but disputed the contents of the conversations as cited in the court papers. Specifically, he denied knowing anything about emails containing “dirt” on Clinton and called the claim that he introduced Papadopoulos to a “female Russian national” as a “laughingstock.”

According to the Telegraph interview, Mifsud said he tried to put Papadopoulos in touch with experts on the European Union and introduced him to the director of a Russian think tank, the Russian International Affairs Council.

It was the latter contact that the court papers presumably referred to in saying that on May 4, the Russian contact with ties to the foreign ministry wrote to Papadopoulos and Mifsud, reporting that ministry officials were “open for cooperation,” a message that Papadopoulos forwarded to a senior campaign official, asking whether the contacts were “something we want to move forward

with.”

However, even an article in The New York Times, which has aggressively pushed the Russia-gate “scandal” from the beginning, noted the evidentiary holes that followed from that point.

The Times’ Scott Shane wrote: “A crucial detail is still missing: Whether and when Mr. Papadopoulos told senior Trump campaign officials about Russia’s possession of hacked emails. And it appears that the young aide’s quest for a deeper connection with Russian officials, while he aggressively pursued it, led nowhere.”

Shane added, “the court documents describe in detail how Mr. Papadopoulos continued to report to senior campaign officials on his efforts to arrange meetings with Russian officials, ... the documents do not say explicitly whether, and to whom, he passed on his most explosive discovery – that the Russians had what they considered compromising emails on Mr. Trump’s opponent.

“J.D. Gordon, a former Pentagon official who worked for the Trump campaign as a national security adviser and helped arrange the March 31 foreign policy meeting, said he had known nothing about Mr. Papadopoulos’ discovery that Russia had obtained Democratic emails or of his prolonged pursuit of meetings with Russians.”

Reasons to Doubt

If prosecutor Mueller had direct evidence that Papadopoulos had informed the Trump campaign about the Clinton emails, you would assume that the proof would have been included in Monday’s disclosures. Further, since Papadopoulos was flooding the campaign with news about his Russian outreach, you might have expected that he would say something about how helpful the Russians had been in publicizing the Democratic emails.

The absence of supporting evidence that Papadopoulos conveyed his hot news on the emails to campaign officials and Mifsud’s insistence that he knew nothing about the emails would normally raise serious questions about Papadopoulos’s credibility on this most crucial point.

At least for now, those gaps represent major holes in the storyline. But Official Washington has been so desperate for “proof” about the alleged Russian “election meddling” for so long, that professional skepticism has been unwelcome in most media outlets.

There is also another side of the story that rarely gets mentioned in the U.S. mainstream media: that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has repeatedly denied

that he received the two batches of purloined Democratic emails – one about the Democratic National Committee and one about Clinton’s campaign chairman John Podesta – from the Russians. While it is surely possible that the Russians might have used cutouts to pass on the emails, Assange and associates have suggested that at least the DNC emails came from a disgruntled insider.

Also, former U.S. intelligence experts have questioned whether at least one batch of disclosed emails could have come from an overseas “hack” because the rapid download speed is more typical of copying files locally onto a memory stick or thumb drive.

What I was told by an intelligence source several months ago was that Russian intelligence did engage in hacking efforts to uncover sensitive information, much as U.S. and other nations’ intelligence services do, and that Democratic targets were included in the Russian effort.

But the source said the more perplexing question was whether the Kremlin then ordered release of the data, something that Russian intelligence is usually loath to do and something that in this case would have risked retaliation from the expected winner of the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton.

But such questions and doubts are clearly not welcome in the U.S. mainstream media, most of which has embraced Mueller’s acceptance of Papadopoulos’s story as the long-awaited “smoking gun” of Russia-gate.

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Guardians of the Magnitsky Myth

Exclusive: In pursuit of Russia-gate, the U.S. mainstream media embraces any attack on Russia and works to ensure that Americans don’t hear the other side of the story, as with the Magnitsky myth, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As Russia-gate becomes the go-to excuse to marginalize and suppress independent and dissident media in the United States, a warning of what the future holds is the blacklisting of a documentary that debunks the so-called Magnitsky case.

The emerging outlines of the broader suppression are now apparent in moves by major technology companies – under intense political pressure – to unleash algorithms that will hunt down what major media outlets and mainstream “fact-checkers” (with their own checkered histories of getting facts wrong) deem to be “false” and then stigmatize that information with pop-up “warnings” or simply make finding it difficult for readers using major search engines.

For those who believe in a meaningful democracy, those tactics may be troubling enough, but the Magnitsky case, an opening shot in the New Cold War with Russia, has demonstrated how aggressively the Western powers-that-be behave toward even well-reported investigative projects that unearth inconvenient truth.

Throughout the U.S. and Europe, there has been determined effort to prevent the American and European publics from seeing this detailed documentary that dissects the fraudulent claims at the heart of the Magnitsky story.

The documentary – “The Magnitsky Act: Behind the Scenes” – was produced by filmmaker Andrei Nekrasov, who is known as a fierce critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin but who in this instance found the West’s widely accepted, anti-Russian Magnitsky storyline to be a lie.

However, instead of welcoming Nekrasov’s discoveries as an important part of the debate over the West’s policies toward Russia, the European Parliament pulled the plug on a premiere in Brussels and – except for a one-time showing at the Newseum in Washington – very few Americans have been allowed to see the documentary.

Instead, we’re fed a steady diet of the frothy myth whipped up by hedge-fund investor William Browder and sold to the U.S. and European governments as the basis for sanctioning Russian officials. For years now, Browder has been given a free hand to spin his dog-ate-my-homework explanation about how some of his firms got involved a \$230 million tax fraud in Russia.

Browder insists that some “corrupt” Russian police officers stole his companies’ corporate seals and masterminded a convoluted conspiracy. But why anyone would trust a hedge-fund operator who got rich exploiting Russia’s loose business standards is hard to comprehend.

The answer is that Browder has used his money and political influence to scare off and silence anyone who dares point to the glaring contradictions and logical gaps in his elaborate confection.

So, the hedge-fund guy who renounced his U.S. citizenship in favor of a British passport gets the royal treatment whenever he runs to Congress. His narrative just fits so neatly into the demonization of Russia and the frenzy over stopping

“Russian propaganda and disinformation” by whatever means necessary.

This summer, Browder testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee and argued that people involved in arranging the one-time showing of Nekrasov’s documentary should be prosecuted for violating the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA), which carries a five-year prison term.

Meanwhile, the U.S. mainstream media helps reinforce Browder’s dubious tale by smearing anyone who dares question it as a “Moscow stooge” or a “useful idiot.”

Magnitsky and Russia-gate

The Magnitsky controversy now has merged with the Russia-gate affair because Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, who traveled to America to challenge Browder’s account, arranged a meeting with Donald Trump Jr. and other Trump campaign advisers in June 2016 to present this other side of the story.

Though nothing apparently came from that meeting, The New York Times, which always treats Browder’s account as flat fact, led its Saturday editions with a breathless story entitled, “A Kremlin Link to a Memo Taken to Trump Tower,” citing similarities between Veselnitskaya’s memo on the Magnitsky case and an account prepared by “one of Russia’s most powerful officials, the prosecutor general Yuri Y. Chaika.” Cue the spooky music as the Times challenges Veselnitskaya’s honesty.

Yet, the Times article bows to Browder as the ultimate truth-teller, including repetition of his assertion that Sergei Magnitsky was a whistleblowing “tax lawyer,” rather than one of Browder’s accountants implicated in the tax fraud.

While Magnitsky’s profession may seem like a small detail, it gets to the heart of the mainstream media’s acceptance of Browder’s depiction of Magnitsky – as a crusading lawyer who died of medical neglect in a Russian prison – despite overwhelming evidence that Magnitsky was really a clever accountant caught up in the scheme.

The “lawyer” falsehood – so eagerly swallowed by the Times and other mainstream outlets – also bears on Browder’s overall credibility: If he is lying about Magnitsky’s profession, why should anyone believe his other self-serving claims?

As investigative reporter Lucy Komisar noted in a recent article on the case, Browder offered a different description when he testified under oath in a New York court deposition in a related federal civil case.

In that adversarial setting, when Browder was asked if Magnitsky had a law degree, Browder said, “I’m not aware that he did.” When asked if Magnitsky had

gone to law school, Browder answered: “No.”

Yet, the Times and the rest of the mainstream media accept that Magnitsky was a “lawyer,” all the better to mislead the American public regarding his alleged role as a whistleblower.

The rest of Browder’s story stretches credulity even more as he offers a convoluted explanation of how he wasn’t responsible for bogus claims made by his companies to fraudulently sneak away with \$230 million in refunded taxes.

Rather than show any skepticism toward this smarmy hedge-fund operator and his claims of victimhood, the U.S. Congress and mainstream media just take him at his word because, of course, his story fits the ever-present “Russia bad” narrative.

Plus, these influential people have repeated the falsehoods so often and suppressed contrary evidence with such arrogance that they apparently feel that they get to define reality, which – in many ways – is what they want to do in the future by exploiting the Russia-gate hysteria to restore their undisputed role as the “gatekeepers” on “approved” information.

Which is why Americans and Europeans should demand the right to see the Nekrasov documentary and make their own judgments, possibly with Browder given a chance after the show to rebut the overwhelming evidence of his deceptions.

Instead, Browder has used his wealth and connections to make sure that almost no one gets to see the deconstruction of his fable. And The New York Times is okay with that.

[For details on the Nekrasov documentary, see Consortiumnews.com’s “[A Blacklisted Film and the New Cold War.](#)”]

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Russia-gate Breeds ‘Establishment McCarthyism’

Exclusive: As Russia-gate gives cover for an Establishment attack on Internet freedom and independent news, traditional defenders of a free press and civil

liberties are joining the assault or staying on the sidelines, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In the past, America has witnessed “McCarthyism” from the Right and even complaints from the Right about “McCarthyism of the Left.” But what we are witnessing now amid the Russia-gate frenzy is what might be called “Establishment McCarthyism,” traditional media/political powers demonizing and silencing dissent that questions mainstream narratives.

This extraordinary assault on civil liberties is cloaked in fright-filled stories about “Russian propaganda” and wildly exaggerated tales of the Kremlin’s “hordes of Twitter bots,” but its underlying goal is to enforce Washington’s “groupthinks” by creating a permanent system that shuts down or marginalizes dissident opinions and labels contrary information – no matter how reasonable and well-researched – as “disputed” or “rated false” by mainstream “fact-checking” organizations like PolitiFact.

It doesn’t seem to matter that the paragons of this new structure – such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and, indeed, PolitiFact – have a checkered record of getting facts straight.

For instance, PolitiFact still rates as “true” Hillary Clinton’s false claim that “all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies” agreed that Russia was behind the release of Democratic emails last year. Even the Times and The Associated Press belatedly ran corrections after President Obama’s intelligence chiefs admitted that the assessment came from what Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called “hand-picked” analysts from only three agencies: CIA, FBI and NSA.

And, the larger truth was that these “hand-picked” analysts were sequestered away from other analysts even from their own agencies and produced “stove-piped intelligence,” i.e., analysis that escapes the back-and-forth that should occur inside the intelligence community.

Even then, what these analysts published last Jan. 6 was an “assessment,” which they specifically warned was “not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact.” In other words, they didn’t have any conclusive proof of Russian “hacking.”

Yet, the Times and other leading newspaper routinely treat these findings as flat fact or the unassailable “consensus” of the “intelligence community.” Contrary information, including WikiLeaks’ denials of a Russian role in

supplying the emails, and contrary judgments from former senior U.S. intelligence officials are ignored.

The Jan. 6 report also tacked on a seven-page addendum smearing the Russian television network, RT, for such offenses as sponsoring a 2012 debate among U.S. third-party presidential candidates who had been excluded from the Republican-Democratic debates. RT also was slammed for reporting on the Occupy Wall Street protests and the environmental dangers from “fracking.”

How the idea of giving Americans access to divergent political opinions and information about valid issues such as income inequality and environmental dangers constitutes threats to American “democracy” is hard to comprehend.

However, rather than address the Jan. 6 report’s admitted uncertainties about Russian “hacking” and the troubling implications of its attacks on RT, the Times and other U.S. mainstream publications treat the report as some kind of holy scripture that can’t be questioned or challenged.

Silencing RT

For instance, on Tuesday, the Times published a front-page story entitled “YouTube Gave Russians Outlet Portal Into U.S.” that essentially cried out for the purging of RT from YouTube. The article began by holding YouTube’s vice president Robert Kyncki up to ridicule and opprobrium for his praising “RT for bonding with viewers by providing ‘authentic’ content instead of ‘agendas or propaganda.’”

The article by Daisuke Wakabayashi and Nicholas Confessore swallowed whole the Jan. 6 report’s conclusion that RT is “the Kremlin’s ‘principal international propaganda outlet’ and a key player in Russia’s information warfare operations around the world.” In other words, the Times portrayed Kyncki as essentially a “useful idiot.”

Yet, the article doesn’t actually dissect any RT article that could be labeled false or propagandistic. It simply alludes generally to news items that contained information critical of Hillary Clinton as if any negative reporting on the Democratic presidential contender – no matter how accurate or how similar to stories appearing in the U.S. press – was somehow proof of “information warfare.”

As Daniel Lazare wrote at Consortiumnews.com on Wednesday, “The web version [of the Times article] links to an RT interview with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange that ran shortly before the 2016 election. The topic is a September 2014 email obtained by Wikileaks in which Clinton acknowledges that ‘the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia ... are providing clandestine financial and logistic

support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups in the region.’”

In other words, the Times cited a documented and newsworthy RT story as its evidence that RT was a propaganda shop threatening American democracy and deserving ostracism if not removal from YouTube.

A Dangerous Pattern

Not to say that I share every news judgment of RT – or for that matter The New York Times – but there is a grave issue of press freedom when the Times essentially calls for the shutting down of access to a news organization that may highlight or report on stories that the Times and other mainstream outlets downplay or ignore.

And this was not a stand-alone story. Previously, the Times has run favorable articles about plans to deploy aggressive algorithms to hunt down and then remove or marginalize information that the Times and other mainstream outlets deem false.

Nor is it just the Times. Last Thanksgiving, The Washington Post ran a fawning front-page article about an anonymous group PropOrNot that had created a blacklist of 200 Internet sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other independent news sources, that were deemed guilty of dispensing “Russian propaganda,” which basically amounted to our showing any skepticism toward the State Department’s narratives on the crises in Syria or Ukraine.

So, if any media outlet dares to question the U.S. government’s version of events – once that storyline has been embraced by the big media – the dissidents risk being awarded the media equivalent of a yellow star and having their readership dramatically reduced by getting downgraded on search engines and punished on social media.

Meanwhile, Congress has authorized \$160 million to combat alleged Russian “propaganda and disinformation,” a gilded invitation for “scholars” and “experts” to gear up “studies” that will continue to prove what is supposed to be proved – “Russia bad” – with credulous mainstream reporters eagerly gobbling up the latest “evidence” of Russian perfidy.

There is also a more coercive element to what’s going on. RT is facing demands from the Justice Department that it register as a “foreign agent” or face prosecution. Clearly, the point is to chill the journalism done by RT’s American reporters, hosts and staff who now fear being stigmatized as something akin to traitors.

You might wonder: where are the defenders of press freedom and civil liberties?

Doesn't anyone in the mainstream media or national politics recognize the danger to a democracy coming from enforced groupthinks? Is American democracy so fragile that letting Americans hear "another side of the story" must be prevented?

A Dangerous 'Cure'

I agree that there is a limited problem with jerks who knowingly make up fake stories or who disseminate crazy conspiracy theories – and no one finds such behavior more offensive than I do. But does no one recall the lies about Iraq's WMD and other U.S. government falsehoods and deceptions over the years?

Often, it is the few dissenters who alert the American people to the truth, even as the Times, Post, CNN and other big outlets are serving as the real propaganda agents, accepting what the "important people" say and showing little or no professional skepticism.

And, given the risk of thermo-nuclear war with Russia, why aren't liberals and progressives demanding at least a critical examination of what's coming from the U.S. intelligence agencies and the mainstream press?

The answer seems to be that many liberals and progressives are so blinded by their fury over Donald Trump's election that they don't care what lines are crossed to destroy or neutralize him. Plus, for some liberal entities, there's lots of money to be made.

For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union has made its "resistance" to the Trump administration an important part of its fundraising. So, the ACLU is doing nothing to defend the rights of news organizations and journalists under attack.

When I asked ACLU about the Justice Department's move against RT and other encroachments on press freedom, I was told by ACLU spokesman Thomas Dresslar: "Thanks for reaching out to us. Unfortunately, I've been informed that we do not have anyone able to speak to you about this."

Meanwhile, the Times and other traditional "defenders of a free press" are now part of the attack machine against a free press. While much of this attitude comes from the big media's high-profile leadership of the anti-Trump Resistance and anger at any resistors to the Resistance, mainstream news outlets have chafed for years over the Internet undermining their privileged role as the gatekeepers of what Americans get to see and hear.

For a long time, the big media has wanted an excuse to rein in the Internet and break the small news outlets that have challenged the power – and the

profitability – of the Times, Post, CNN, etc. Russia-gate and Trump have become the cover for that restoration of mainstream authority.

So, as we have moved into this dangerous New Cold War, we are living in what could be called “Establishment McCarthyism,” a hysterical but methodical strategy for silencing dissent and making sure that future mainstream groupthinks don’t get challenged.

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