

# After Pressure on Twitter, Christine Assange's Account is Restored; Venezuela's Telesur Now Hit

UPDATED: The Twitter account of Julian Assange's mother was restored on Wednesday night after her supporters sent a flood of messages to Twitter.

## Telesur English Hit By Same Restrictions

Christine Assange, the mother of WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange, had her Twitter account restored more than 24 hours after it was abruptly restricted by the social media company.

Hundreds of tweets were sent to the San Francisco-based company by supporters demanding that she regain access to her account.

Ms. Assange tweeted at 10:33 p.m. U.S. Eastern time on Wednesday: "Back on deck! Many thanks to everyone contacting [@Twitter](#) on my behalf. Thanks to [@Twitter](#) for responding with a reconnect."



Ms. Assange told *Consortium News* by phone that she has had no contact with Twitter and still does not know why her account was restricted and precisely why it was restored. She was unable to post new Tweets or read anyone else's while the restriction was in place.

Outrage at the restriction was expressed by many Assange supporters in tweets to Twitter and its CEO, Jack Dorsey.

**CatChi** 🇲🇾 🇮🇳 🇪🇬 🇸🇩 @Mizzkat1 · 21h

Replying to @Consortiumnews

@TwitterSupport please explain your decision to the public or restore her account. We know you won't, you've proved yourselves to be the long arm of the Gov't for quite a while.

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**The Bestest Intern** @\_penguin182 · 23h

Replying to @Consortiumnews @trentlapinski

"Free speech". Right @jack? Time to break up this company or get some oversight ..... with teeth.

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**Jenni Hall** @\_jenni\_hall · 22h

Replying to @Consortiumnews

Oh my @TwitterSupport ... please explain.

@UNWomenWatch Mrs Assange has been tirelessly campaigning for the release of her son. Mrs Assange deserves a medal for bravery not a suspension from twitter. @ForbesWomen @WomenintheWorld @voguemagazine and no thanks to you @guardian

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**Cecalli Helper** @Cecalli\_Helper · 22h



Replying to @Consortiumnews

@TwitterSupport @jack - I reviewed Julian Assange's mother's tweets and found nothing suspect or unusual. Please restore access to @AssangeMrs asap.  
@wikileaks

Another supporter wrote: “The only unusual activity is not seeing a mother fight for her child. It’s unnatural and cowardly to think that her tweets are unusual.”



**Mrs. Christine Assange** @AssangeMrs · 3h



Im thankful my communications are restored.

Now it's time to restore my son's!

Cut off from the world & gagged for one year!

Convicted criminals are granted more communications than a multi-award winning, uncharged journalist/ political asylee & current Nobel Prize nominee.

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On Thursday, @TelesurEnglish, the Venezuelan state broadcaster’s English service, was hit with the same restrictions by Twitter as had Ms. Assange, who tweeted a complaint about it:



Mrs. Christine Assange @AssangeMrs · 7h

Note:

@TelesurEnglish account has been supportive of my son, arbitrarily gagged & tortured journalist Julian Assange.

They have been one of the few media to factually update the public on his plight & the political context behind his persecution.



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## Twitter Restricts Account of Julian Assange's Mother

The social media giant has given no reason to Christine Assange who had turned to Twitter to campaign for the liberty of her son.

By **Joe Lauria**

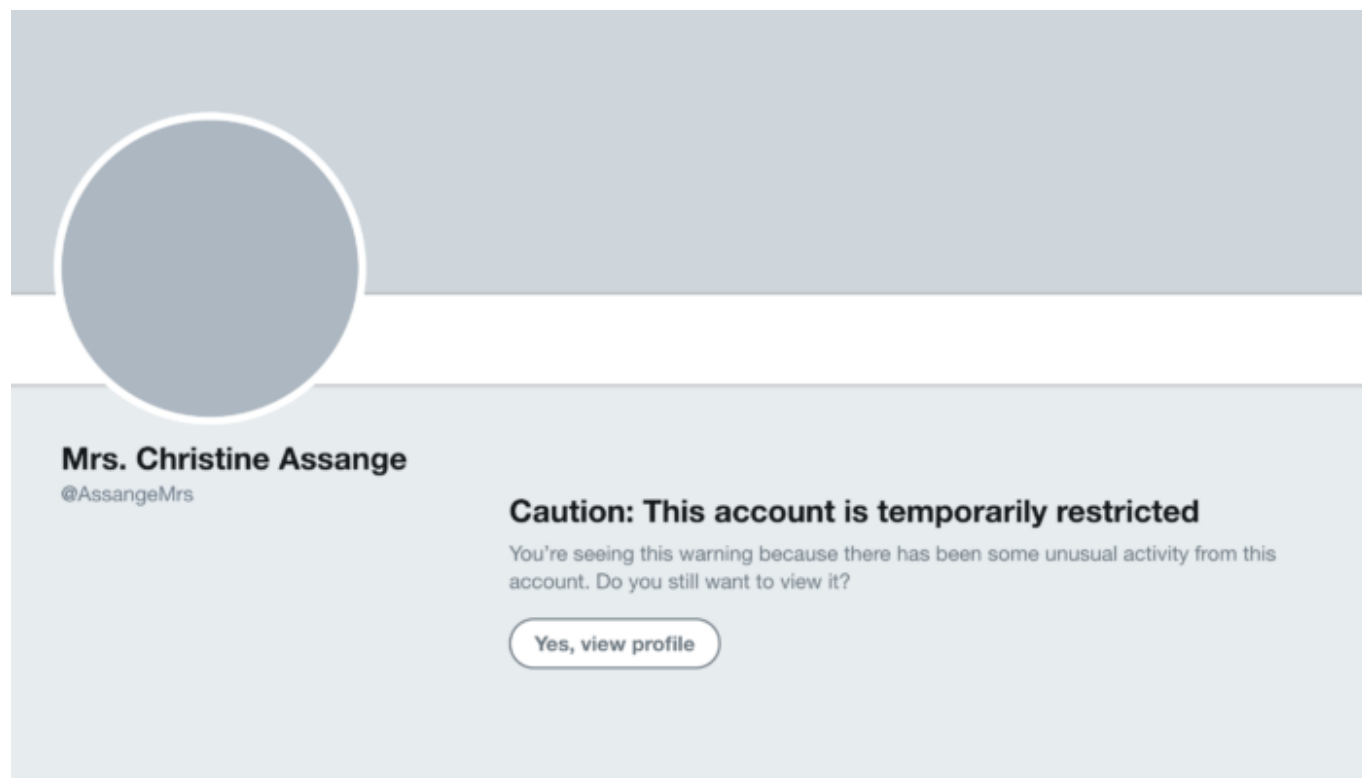
*Special to Consortium News*

The Twitter account of Christine Assange, the mother of the arbitrarily detained founder of WikiLeaks, has been restricted, she told **Consortium News** on Tuesday.

"My Twitter account has been 'blocked due to 'unusual activity,'" Ms. Assange wrote in a text message. Twitter, however, has provided her no reason for its action.

Ms. Assange is a prolific user of Twitter in her campaign to free her son who has been a refugee in the Ecuador embassy in London since 2012.

Twitter has posted the following message on her [page](#):



While a user can access her page by agreeing to view her profile, Ms. Assange told **Consortium News** she is unable to post new Tweets to her account nor see anyone else's.

Her last post, at 11:55 am on Tuesday in Australia, where she lives, is a retweet of an [article](#) published about her son. She posted 12 tweets in the past 24 hours. "Interesting that it followed on from a day of my tweets about free speech and calling on journalists globally to stand up for Julian," Ms. Assange said in a text message.

## **Clinton and Bolton**

In the past ten days, Ms. Assange tweeted direct replies to Hillary Clinton and John Bolton, the U.S. national security

adviser. Bolton had tweeted on March 9: “US military should use [#Wikileaks](#) for cyber warfare target practice. Take down their capabilities & prevent further harm to nat’l security.”

Ms. Assange’s reply to Bolton is no longer visible under his tweet. Nine replies to Bolton are now “unavailable.” Ms. Assange said in a text message that her reply began by calling Bolton’s tweet, “Fascist talk!”

In response to the New Zealand massacre, Clinton tweeted on March 15: “My heart breaks for New Zealand & the global Muslim community. We must continue to fight the perpetuation and normalization of Islamophobia and racism in all its forms.”

Ms. Assange directly replied to Clinton: “Hang on Hillary! My son, published your pre Presidential run bragsheet ‘Tick Tock’ (email) on [#Libya!](#) As a result of your trophy War in Libya, you were responsible for 40,000 deaths, ISIS expansion, womens slave market in Libya, & the subsequent refugee crisis in Europe!”

Clinton was “in nauseating false sympathy,” Ms. Assange said in a text message.

## **Under Congressional Pressure**

Twitter uses algorithms unknown to the public to remove, block, suspend or restrict accounts of its users. Like other social media companies, Twitter has also come under intense U.S. congressional [pressure](#) to censor accounts deemed hostile to U.S. interests.

Julian Assange has remained in the embassy to avoid arrest

by British authorities for skipping bail from an investigation by Sweden that has since been dropped. He has not been charged with a crime by either Sweden or Britain.

Assange was granted political asylum by the previous government of Ecuador seven years ago. The current government, however, has made it known it wants him to leave and has made various moves to force him out. His contact with the outside world has been restricted. Twitter deleted his account on March 28, 2018. British authorities have not permitted him to leave the embassy for urgent medical treatment without being arrested.

Assange fears that if he is arrested by London police once he leaves the embassy that he will be extradited to the United States where a secret grand jury is preparing an indictment against him, most likely under the Espionage Act. Grand jury proceedings are still underway in an Alexandria, Virginia courtroom.

**Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at [joelauria@consortiumnews.com](mailto:joelauria@consortiumnews.com) and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe) .**

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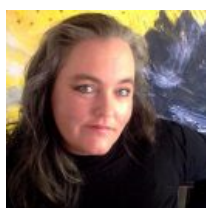
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## Narrative Control Firm Targeting Alternative Media

NewsGuard is led by some of the most virulently pro-imperialist individuals in America and its agenda to shore up narrative control for the ruling power establishment is clear, writes Caitlin Johnstone.

**By Caitlin Johnstone**

[CaitlinJohnstone.com](http://CaitlinJohnstone.com)



The frenzied, hysterical Russia narrative being promoted day in and day out by Western mass media has had two of its major stories ripped to shreds in the last three days.

A [report](#) seeded throughout the mainstream media by anonymous intelligence officials back in September claimed that U.S. government workers in Cuba had suffered concussion-like brain damage after hearing strange noises in homes and hotels with the most likely culprit being “sophisticated microwaves or another type of electromagnetic weapon” from Russia. A recording of one such highly sophisticated attack was analyzed by scientists and [turned out to be the mating call of the male indies short-tailed cricket](#). Neurologists and other brain specialists [have challenged the claim](#) that any U.S. government workers suffered any neurological damage of any kind, saying test results on the alleged victims were misinterpreted. The actual story, when stripped of hyperventilating Russia panic, is that some government



workers heard some crickets in Cuba.

Another report which dominated news for a day recently claimed that former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort (the same Paul Manafort who the *Guardian* falsely claimed met with Julian Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy) had shared polling data with a Russian associate and asked him to pass it along to Oleg Deripaska, who is often labeled a “Russian oligarch” by western media. The polling data was mostly public already, and the rest was just more polling information shared in the spring of 2016, but Deripaska’s involvement had Russiagateers burning the midnight oil with breathless excitement. *Talking Points Memo’s* Josh Marshall went so far as to publish an article titled “The ‘Collusion’ Debate Ended Last Night,” substantiating his click-generating headline with the claim that “What’s crystal clear is that the transfer to Kilimnik came with explicit instructions to give the information to Deripaska. And that’s enough.”

Except Manafort didn’t give any explicit instructions to share the polling data with Deripaska, but with two *Ukrainian* oligarchs (who are denying it). The *New York Times* was forced to print this embarrassing correction to the story it broke, adding in the process that Manafort’s motivation was likely not collusion, but money.

Aw, shucks. Well at least the new names are also complicated and Slavic, so readers can still draw their preferred sinister inferences  
<https://t.co/1NPNC5EN4m> [pic.twitter.com/P2dhAN8eQg](https://pic.twitter.com/P2dhAN8eQg)

– Michael Tracey (@mtracey) January 9, 2019

These are just the latest debacles as reporters eager to demonstrate their fealty to the U.S.-centralized empire fall all over themselves to report any story that makes Russia look bad without practicing due diligence. The only voices who have been questioning the establishment Russia narrative that is being fed to mass media outlets by secretive government agencies have been those which the mass media refuses to platform. Alternative media outlets are the only major platforms for dissent from the authorized narratives of the plutocrat-owned political/media class.

Imagine, then, how disastrous it would be if these last strongholds of skepticism and holding power to account were removed from the media landscape. Well, that's exactly what a shady organization called NewsGuard is trying to do, with some success already.

A [report](#) by journalist Whitney Webb for *MintPress News* details how NewsGuard is working to hide and demonetize alternative media outlets like *MintPress*, marketing itself directly to tech companies, social media platforms, libraries and schools. NewsGuard is led by some of the most virulently pro-imperialist individuals in America, and its agenda to shore up narrative control for the ruling power establishment is clear.

EXCLUSIVE: As Newsguard's project advances, it will soon become almost impossible to avoid this neocon-approved news site's ranking systems on any technological device sold in the United States.

[@\\_whitneywebbhttps://t.co/ftH6QnVlDn](#)

– MintPress News (@MintPressNews) [January 9, 2019](#)

The product that NewsGuard markets to the general public is

a browser plugin which advises online media consumers whether a news media outlet is trustworthy or untrustworthy based on a formula with a very pro-establishment bias which sees outlets like Fox News and the U.S. propaganda outlet Voice of America getting trustworthy ratings while outlets like RT get very low ratings for trustworthiness. This plugin dominates the bulk of what comes up when you start researching NewsGuard, but circulating a plugin that individual internet users can voluntarily download to help their rulers control their minds is not one of the more nefarious agendas being pursued by this company. The [full MintPress article](#) gives a thorough breakdown of NewsGuard's activities, but here's a summary of five of its more disturbing revelations:

No. 1 The company has created a service called BrandGuard, billed as a "brand safety tool aimed at helping advertisers keep their brands off of unreliable news and information sites while giving them the assurance they need to support thousands of Green-rated [i.e., NewsGuard-approved] news and information sites, big and small." Popularizing the use of this service will attack the advertising revenue of unapproved alternative media outlets which run ads. NewsGuard is aggressively marketing this service to "ad tech firms, leading agencies, and major advertisers".

No. 2 NewsGuard's advisory board reads like the fellowships list of a neocon think tank, and indeed one of its CEOs, Louis Gordon Crovitz, is a Council on Foreign Relations member who has worked with the American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation. Members of

the advisory board include George W Bush's Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, deep intelligence community insider Michael Hayden, and the Obama administration's Richard Stengel, who once publicly supported propaganda in the U.S. (see the Tweet below for a direct quote.) All of these men have appeared in influential think tanks geared toward putting a public smiley face on sociopathic warmongering agendas.

At a Council on Foreign Relations forum about "fake news," former Editor at Time Magazine Richard Stengel directly states that he supports the use of propaganda on American citizens – then shuts the session down when challenged about how propaganda is used against the third world  
[pic.twitter.com/ClAT5P0v7G](https://pic.twitter.com/ClAT5P0v7G)

– William Craddick (@williamcraddick) May 11, 2018

No. 3 Despite one of its criteria for trustworthy sources being whether or not they are transparent about their funding, the specifics of NewsGuard's financing is kept secret.

No. 4 NewsGuard is also planning to get its news-ranking system integrated into social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter, pursuing a partnership which will make pro-establishment media consumption a part of your experience at those sites regardless of whether or not you download a NewsGuard app or plugin.

Really excited to see NewsGuard now built into the latest beta of Edge on iOS ???. Smart service. There's also an extension for Edge on Windows 10.

[pic.twitter.com/Pqq9diNR8F](https://pic.twitter.com/Pqq9diNR8F)

– Daniel Rubino (@Daniel\_Rubino) [January 4, 2019](#)

No. 5 NewsGuard markets itself to state governments in order to get its plugin installed in all of that state's public schools and libraries to keep internet users from consuming unauthorized narratives. It has already succeeded in accomplishing this in the state of Hawaii, with all of its library branches now running the NewsGuard plugin.

Really excited to see NewsGuard now built into the latest beta of Edge on iOS ???. Smart service. There's also an extension for Edge on Windows 10.

[pic.twitter.com/Pqq9diNR8F](https://pic.twitter.com/Pqq9diNR8F)

– Daniel Rubino (@Daniel\_Rubino) [January 4, 2019](#)

We may be certain that NewsGuard will continue giving a positive, trustworthy ranking to the *New York Times* no matter how many spectacular flubs it makes in its coverage of the establishment Russia narrative, because the agenda to popularize anti-Russia narratives lines up perfectly with the neoconservative, government agency-serving agendas of the powers behind NewsGuard. Any attempt to advance the hegemony of the U.S.-centralized power establishment will be rewarded by its lackeys, and any skepticism of it will be punished.

We need to use every inch of our ability to communicate with each other to make these manipulations clearly understood.

**Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia**

prepper who publishes regularly [at Medium](#). Follow her work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#). She has a [podcast](#) and a new book [“Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers.”](#) This article was re-published with permission.

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## The Twitter Smearing of Corbyn and Assange

Historian and U.K. analyst Mark Curtis checks out the Twitter accounts of journalists whose names have been associated with the Integrity Initiative, a British “counter disinformation” program.

By [Mark Curtis](#)

[British Foreign Policy Declassified](#)



The U.K.-financed Integrity Initiative, managed by the Institute for Statecraft, is ostensibly a “counter disinformation” program to challenge Russian information operations. However, it has been revealed that the Integrity Initiative Twitter handle and some individuals associated with this program have also been tweeting messages [attacking Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn](#). This takes on special meaning in light of the numerous U.K. military and intelligence personnel associated with the program, documented in an important [briefing by academics](#) in the Working Group on Syria Propaganda and Media.

Several journalists have been named as associated with the Integrity Initiative, either in program “clusters” or having

been invited to an Integrity Initiative event, in the documents that have been posted online. (For more on this see [section 7.1](#) of this briefing note, the [“UK” section](#) of the “Xcountry” document and journalists invited to speak at an Integrity Initiative event in London in November 2018.)

Analysis of 11 of these individuals has been undertaken to assess to what extent their tweets have linked Corbyn unfairly (for a definition see below) to Russia. The results show two things:

- first, the smearing of Corbyn about Russia is more extensive than has been revealed so far;
- second, many of the same individuals have also been attacking a second target – Julian Assange, trying to also falsely link him to the Kremlin.

Many of these 11 individuals are associated with *The Times* and *The Guardian* in the U.K. and the Atlantic Council in the U.S. The research does not show, however, that these tweets are associated with the Integrity Initiative (see further below).

### **Linking Corbyn to Russia**

The Integrity Initiative said in a tweet, “we are not ‘anti-Russian’ and do not ‘target’ Mr Corbyn.” However, that tweet was preceded by the following tweets:

- “Skripal poisoning: It’s time for the Corbyn left to confront its Putin problem.”
- “An alleged British Corbyn supporter wants to vote for Putin.”
- “‘Mr Corbyn was a ‘useful idiot’, in the phrase

apocryphally attributed to Lenin. His visceral anti-Westernism helped the Kremlin cause, as surely as if he had been secretly peddling Westminster tittle-tattle for money.’” This tweet was a quote from an article by Edward Lucas in *The Times*, “[Corbyn’s sickening support of Soviet Empire.](#)”

Here are examples of tweets from the 11 individuals.

*Times* columnist Edward Lucas has published an article on the Integrity Initiative website and been quoted as saying that his work with the Initiative has not been paid or involved anything improper. (See [section 7.1.3](#) of this briefing note.) On Twitter, he has accused Corbyn of having blind spots on Putin’s plutocracy and Kremlin imperialism.”

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In which I blast [@jeremycorbyn](#) for his blind spot on Putin's plutocracy  
<http://t.co/UOWeAa0iLL>

– Edward Lucas (@edwardlucas) [August 26, 2015](#)

Lucas has also tweeted:

- “Why does Corbyn not see that Russia is imperialist and Ukrainians are victims?” and “It’s not just Corbyn. Here’s Swedish leftie [@AsaLinderborg](#) explaining why Nato not Putin is the real threat to peace” – linking to the latter’s article in a Swedish newspaper.
- “German hard-leftist GDR-loving wall-defending [@SWagenknecht](#) congratulates Corbyn on win” [in the Labour leadership contest]
- “More excellent stuff on Corbyn’s love of plutocrats so



long as they are Russian.”

In another tweet, he praised as brilliant [an article](#) about Corbyn “playing into Russia’s hands on the Skripal poisoning.”

Deborah Haynes, until recently [defence](#) editor of *The Times* and now foreign affairs editor at *Sky News*, has tweeted:

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. [@jeremycorbyn](#) talking tough, v quick to demand end to UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia after [#Khashoggi](#) death in stark contrast to his feeble response towards Russia over [#Skripal](#) attack

– Deborah Haynes ([@haynesdeborah](#)) [October 22, 2018](#)

Haynes has also tweeted about Corbyn “displaying staggering naivety and a complete failure to understand this state-sponsored attack by Russia on the UK. Appalling. Is he for real?”

Haynes has also tweeted: “Incredible that [@jeremycorbyn](#) is attempting to score party-political points in wake of hugely significant statement by [@theresa\\_may](#) on Skripal attack by Russia.”

*Washington Post* columnist Anne Applebaum has tweeted that Corbyn is a “useful idiot” of Russia; about a “precise echo of Kremlin propaganda from Corbyn,” and that “Surprise! Russia sides with Corbyn against Cameron.”

Below is another.

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Jeremy Corbyn isn’t anti-war. He’s just anti-West <https://t.co/2Z50p3qBds>

– Anne Applebaum (@anneapplebaum) [November 19, 2015](#)

David Clark, a former adviser to the late Labour PM, Robin Cook, has tweeted that Corbyn is an “apologist” for Putin. Below is another of Clark’s tweets.

It is an article of ideological faith for Corbyn and people like him that everything wrong with the world is the fault of the capitalist West. Therefore, nothing can be the fault of anyone else.

– David Clark (@David\_K\_Clark) [September 6, 2018](#)

Anders Aslund of the Atlantic Council in the U.S. has tweeted, referring to Corbyn: “Once a communist always so.”

His colleague at the Atlantic Council, Ben Nimmo, sent the following three tweets on Corbyn’s candidacy for the Labour leadership in August 2015:

- “Why Russia loves Corbyn, in one headline”
- “Russia’s certainly pushing Corbyn’s candidacy”
- “From Russia with coverage – how RT is campaigning for Jeremy Corbyn.” Here’s one more, promoting a [piece he wrote for the Daily Beast](#):

How #Putin's @RT\_com is backing Jeremy Corbyn – my piece in @thedailybeast  
<http://t.co/PqNcPYMRQu> [pic.twitter.com/irIa8kIrcZ](http://pic.twitter.com/irIa8kIrcZ)

– Ben Nimmo (@benimmo) [August 17, 2015](#)

Natalie Nougayrede, Guardian columnist and on its editorial

board, has tweeted this:

"the time for equivocation, given the sinister nature of Mr Putin's regime, is over"

Guardian editorial on shameful #Corbyn & Co reaction to #Russia behaviour & chemical weapon use <https://t.co/ALmpGCoKh5>

– Natalie Nougayrède (@nnougayrede) [March 15, 2018](#)

Nougayrède also retweeted an article by [Nick Cohen](#), headlined "[Jeremy Corbyn isn't anti-war. He's just anti-West.](#)"

Three *Guardian/Observer*-linked journalists were invited to speak at an Integrity Initiative event in London in November 2018: Carole Cadwalladr, Nick Cohen and James Ball.

Cadwalladr has tweeted that "Labour has a Russia problem," that Corbyn adviser Seumas Milne is "pro-Putin" and that "Milne's support for Putin has made him a Russian propaganda tool." One of Cadwalladr's tweets noted:

- "Here's Corbyn's principal advisor Seamus Milne on RT explaining why it was the fault of NATO aggression that Russia invaded Ukraine.

Another by Cadwalladr:

"What he has done, wittingly or unwittingly, is to work with the Kremlin's agenda." Extraordinary quote from MP & expert on Russian active measures [@IoWBobSeely](#) in this incredible in-depth profile on Seamus Milne – [@jeremycorbyn's](#) chief advisor <https://t.co/NNc9verN57>

– Carole Cadwalladr (@carolecadwalla) [November 25, 2018](#)

Nick Cohen has tweeted that “Labour is led by Putin fans” and: “What is worse? Farage and Corbyn and twitter trolls divert attention from Russia’s political assassinations because they believe Putin is innocent or because they are morally corrupt?” He has also retweeted an Observer article of his claiming that Labour leaders have promoted “endorsements of Russian imperialism” and that Corbyn’s policy has given Russia “a free pass” in Syria.

Here is another:

Here's the political problem. Tories don't want to investigate Russia/Brexit because it undermines the referendum result. Labour doesn't because it is led by Putin fans <https://t.co/MFZwBmmkqA>

– Nick Cohen (@NickCohen4) [January 11, 2018](#)

James Ball has tweeted a link to his own article in the New Statesman saying that Corbyn is “playing into Russia’s hands on the Skripal poisoning” and accusing Corbyn to the effect that he “took money from Russia Today.”

### **Linking Assange to the Kremlin**

Many of the same individuals have also been tweeting false statements about Julian Assange and Russia.

The Integrity Initiative twitter site itself retweeted a Guardian smear article about a lawyer, Adam Waldman, visiting the Wikileaks founder.

US lobbyist for Russian oligarch visited Julian Assange nine times last year <https://t.co/pcvsATION0>

– Integrity Initiative (@InitIntegrity) [June 20, 2018](#)

It also tweeted: "If you still believe Assange is some kind of hero, you deserve pity at best."

Anders Aslund has tweeted that Assange "represents certain Russian agencies" that "Wikileaks, Assange & Snowden are nothing but highly successful Russian special operations" and "Kremlin agents" and that "Assange is collaborating w[ith] Russia Today as program host. Would be strange if not full-fledged agent."

Cadwalladr has also sought to overtly link Assange to the Kremlin. She has tweeted that "Assange & Milne... are both Russian propaganda tools," that Assange is a "special friend" of Russian intelligence and that Wikileaks has "colluded with...the Kremlin."

In addition, Cadwalladr has tweeted several times that "Assange was in direct communication with Russian intelligence in 2016" and that "Wikileaks sought assistance from Russian intelligence officers to disrupt the US presidential election." Cadwalladr is here claiming that Wikileaks knowingly colluded with Russian intelligence by releasing the files on the Democratic Party in 2016: in fact, this is not known or proven at all, while numerous media outlets also published or had contacts with Guccifer 2.0 and DCLeaks in 2016 – though do not figure as targets in her attacks.

Nick Cohen has also made many smears against Julian Assange, variously calling him a "Russian stooge," a "Putin agent," "pro-Putin," a "Russian toady", that he "works for Russia propaganda machine" while "Wikileaks will think whatever Putin tells it to think."

David Leask, chief reporter of The Herald (Scotland), has described Assange as a “Kremlin proxy” while Anne Applebaum tweeted: “Wikileaks is a front for Russian intelligence,” linking to an article of the same headline. Edward Lucas retweeted his Times article suggesting that Assange and Wikileaks are part of the “Kremlin-loving camp” while David Clark has tweeted that “Assange is an active accomplice” of autocrats such as Putin.

### **Need for further research**

There are some key points to be made about this analysis.

First, some of the tweets made by these individuals on Corbyn and Assange, not all of which are included here, are fair comment, even if, in my view, they are usually wrong. But others go beyond this, inferring that Corbyn (and Assange) are in effect agents of Russia and/or are willingly and knowingly amplifying Russia’s agenda, as little more than “tools” – with no evidence provided (understandably, since there is none). There is also sometimes the association of Corbyn with former communists. These areas are held to constitute smearing.

Second, it is not known and certainly not proven that these tweets are associated with the Integrity Initiative. Little is known of the internal workings of the Initiative. It is possible that some of the individuals may have been chosen by the Integrity Initiative to be associated with it precisely because of their pre-existing criticism of Russia or their willingness to accuse figures such as Corbyn with association with Russia. While I am not suggesting that these individuals’ tweets are necessarily linked to their

role in the Integrity Initiative, there does appear to be something of a pattern among these people of smearing both Corbyn and Assange.

Third, and equally important, this is not a full analysis of these individuals' outputs: it is limited to their tweets. Neither is it a full analysis of the false linking to Russia by individuals associated with the Integrity Initiative: several other journalists and figures named in the documents are not analysed here. Again, further research is needed.

**Mark Curtis is an historian and analyst of U.K. foreign policy and international development and the author of six books, the latest being an updated edition of "Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam."**

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## AUDIO: Shady Claims by NYT on Russia-gate: Peter B. Collins interviews Gareth Porter

Gareth Porter discusses with radio host Peter B. Collins his Consortium News [article](#) exposing exaggerated claims of Russian skulduggery on Facebook in 2016.

**By Peter B. Collins**



Journalist and historian Gareth Porter returned to the Peter B. Collins [show](#) to discuss his new article, exposing exaggerated claims of Russian skulduggery on Facebook in 2016. Porter's [article](#) was published last week at **Consortium News**, showing inaccurate claims in the late-September [recap of Russia-gate](#) by *New York Times* reporters Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti.

Both Porter and your humble host consider Shane to be a credible reporter, and credit him with caveats in stories on Russia-gate, including the quote from the

September 26 report that these claims “can neither be proven nor disproven.”

We note how many “progressive” media figures, including Thom Hartmann, claim that Mueller’s convictions and plea deals amount to proof of “collusion”, even though Manafort and the others have not been tried on such charges.

Porter explains that the numbers cited by the *Times* about Facebook are grossly exaggerated, with “potential impressions” being treated as click-throughs. He notes that Facebook estimates that only 1 out of 10 posts in a news feed are actually read by the user. When you compare the modest traffic attributed to all Russians, including government actors, it’s infinitesimal compared to the \$80 million-plus the Trump campaign spent on dark-targeted Facebook ads.

Porter also looks at the role of Twitter bots in amplifying tweets by the candidates, and argues that the impacts cited by Shane and Mazzetti are not significant. Listen to Peter B. delve deep into the deceptions of Russia-gate with Gareth Porter. Running time 35:14.

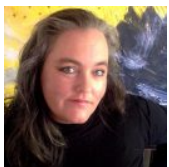
**Peter B. Collins, a veteran radio host on the airwaves in the San Francisco Bay Area, is host of the [Peter B. Collins Show](#).**

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## In A Corporatist System Of Government, Corporate Censorship Is State Censorship

In a corporatist system of government, wherein there is no meaningful separation between corporate power and state power, corporate censorship is state censorship, argues Caitlin Johnstone in this commentary.

**By Caitlin Johnstone**



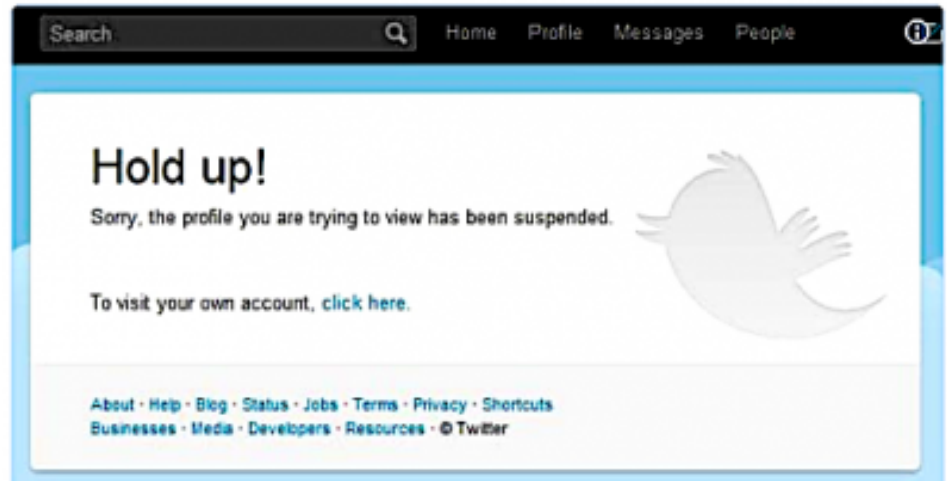
Last year, representatives of Facebook, Twitter, and Google were instructed on the US Senate floor that it is their responsibility to “quell information rebellions” and adopt a “mission statement” expressing their commitment to “prevent the fomenting of discord.”

“Civil wars don’t start with gunshots, they start with words,” the representatives were told. “America’s war with itself has already begun. We all must act now on the social media battlefield to quell information rebellions that can quickly lead to violent confrontations and easily transform us into the Divided States of America.”



Yes, this really happened.

Today Twitter has silenced three important anti-war voices on its platform: it has suspended Daniel McAdams, the executive director of the Ron Paul Institute, suspended Scott Horton of the *Scott Horton Show*, and completely removed the account of prominent Antiwar.com writer Peter Van Buren.



I'm about to talk about the censorship of Alex Jones and Infowars now, so let me get the "blah blah I don't like Alex Jones" thing out of the way so that my social media notifications aren't inundated with people saying "Caitlin didn't say the 'blah blah I don't like Alex Jones' thing!" I shouldn't have to, because this isn't actually about Alex Jones, but here it is:

I don't like Alex Jones. He's made millions saying the things disgruntled right-wingers want to hear instead of telling the truth; he throws in disinfo with his info, which is the same as lying all the time. He's made countless false predictions and his sudden sycophantic support for a US president has helped lull the populist right into complacency when they should be holding Trump to his non-interventionist campaign pledges, making him even more worthless than he was prior to 2016.

But this isn't about defending Alex Jones. He just happens to be the thinnest edge of the wedge.

Infowars has been censored from Facebook, Youtube (which is part of Google), Apple, Spotify, and now even Pinterest, all within hours of each other. This happens to have occurred at the same time Infowars was circulating a petition with tens of thousands of signatures calling on President Trump to pardon WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Julian Assange, who poses a much greater threat to establishment narratives than Alex Jones ever has. Assange's mother also reports that this mass removal of Infowars' audience occurred less than 48 hours after she was approached to do an interview by an Infowars producer.

In a corporatist system of government, wherein there is no meaningful separation between corporate power and state power, corporate censorship is state censorship. Because legalized bribery in the form of corporate lobbying and campaign donations has given wealthy Americans the ability to control the U.S. government's policy and behavior while ordinary Americans have no effective influence whatsoever, the U.S. unquestionably has a corporatist system of government. Large, influential corporations are inseparable from the state, so their use of censorship is inseparable from state censorship.

This is especially true of the vast mega-corporations of Silicon Valley, whose extensive ties to U.S. intelligence agencies are well-documented. Once you're assisting with the construction of the US military's drone program, receiving grants from the CIA and NSA for mass surveillance, or having your site's content regulated by NATO's propaganda arm, you don't get to pretend you're a private, independent corporation that is separate from government power. It is possible in the current system to have a normal business worth a few million dollars, but if you want to get to billions of dollars in wealth control in a system where money translates directly to political power, you need to work with existing power structures like the CIA and the Pentagon, or else they'll work with your competitors instead of you

### **Censorship Through Private Proxy**

And yet every time I point to the dangers of a few Silicon Valley plutocrats controlling all new media political discourse with an iron fist, Democratic Party loyalists all turn into a bunch of hardline free market Ayn Rands. "It's not censorship!" they exclaim. "It's a private company and can do whatever it wants with its property!"

They do this because they know their mainstream, plutocrat-friendly "centrist" views will never be censored. Everyone else is on the chopping block, however. Leftist sites have already had their views slashed by a manipulation of Google's algorithms, and it won't be long before movements like BDS and Antifa and skeptics of the establishment Syria and Russia narratives can be made to face mass de-platforming on the same exact pretext as Infowars.

This is a setup. Hit the soft target so your oligarch-friendly censorship doesn't look like what it is, then once you've manufactured consent, go on to shut down the rest of dissenting media bit by bit.

Don't believe that's the plan? Let's ask sitting US Senator Chris Murphy: "Infowars is the tip of a giant iceberg of hate and lies that uses sites like Facebook and YouTube to tear our nation apart," Murphy tweeted in response to the news. "These companies must do more than take down one website. The

survival of our democracy depends on it.”



That sure sounds an awful lot like the warnings issued to the Silicon Valley representatives on the Senate floor at the beginning of this article, no? This is headed somewhere dark.

We're going to have to find a way to keep the oligarchs from having their cake and eating it too. Either (A) corporations are indeed private organizations separate from the government, in which case the people need to get money out of politics and government agencies out of Silicon Valley so they can start acting like it, and insist that their owners can't be dragged out on to the Senate floor and instructed on what they can and can't do with their business, or (B) these new media platforms get treated like the government agencies they function as, and the people get all the First Amendment protection that comes with it. Right now the social engineers are double-dipping in a way that will eventually give the alliance of corporate plutocrats and secretive government agencies the ability to fully control the public's access to ideas and information.

If they accomplish that, it's game over for humanity. Any hope of the public empowering itself over the will of a few sociopathic, ecocidal, omnicidal oligarchs will have been successfully quashed. We are playing for all the chips right now. We have to fight this. We have no choice.

*This commentary was originally published on [CaitlinJohnstone.com](http://CaitlinJohnstone.com) .*

**Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at [Medium](https://medium.com/@caitlinjohnstone). Follow her work on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/caitlinjohnstone), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/caitlinjohnstone), or her [website](http://caitlinjohnstone.com). She has a [podcast](https://www.podtrac.com/hosts/12111) and a new book [Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers](https://www.amazon.com/Woke-A-Field-Guide-for-Utopia-Preppers/dp/1616967000). This article was re-published with permission.**

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# Consortium News Radio— Episode 1: Peter Van Buren

**INTRODUCING** Consortium News Radio, an ongoing series of radio interviews with newsmakers and Consortium News writers intended to delve deeper into stories published on Consortium News.

On the premiere edition of Consortium News Radio we speak with Peter Van Buren, a former State Department official, whistleblower and victim of Twitter censorship. Van Buren speaks about his experiences in Iraq, the critical book he wrote about those experiences and how the Obama State Department eventually attempted to have him tried under the Espionage Act. This week Van Buren had his Twitter account permanently shut down and seven years of his Tweets wiped from the record. Why? Because he challenged mainstream journalists who contested a Tweet from journalist Glenn Greenwald that mainstream reporters support America's wars and help bring them about. One corporate journalist decided to silence Van Buren by complaining to Twitter, which, within two days, and with no due process, obliged. Joe Lauria, editor-in-chief of Consortium News, interviewed Van Buren on Wednesday, August 8 for 40 minutes.

Here is the first episode of Consortium News Radio:

*If you enjoyed this original interview please consider making a donation to Consortium News so we can bring you more like this.*

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VIPS Asks Twitter to Restore Van Buren's

# Account

The Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity in a memo to the Twitter board of directors questions its decision to suspend the account of one of its members without due process.

August 8, 2018

**TO:** Twitter Board of Directors

**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

**SUBJECT:** Suspension of VIPS Associate Peter Van Buren's Twitter Account

We at Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) are greatly disturbed by the recent decision of your management to permanently suspend the Twitter account @WeMeantWell of our colleague Peter Van Buren. Peter is a highly respected former Foreign Service Officer possessing impeccable credentials for critiquing current developments that might lead to a new war in Eastern Europe or Asia, something which we Americans presumably all would like to avoid.

In 2011 our colleague Peter published a book, *We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People*, about the poor decision-making by both civilians and military that led to the disastrous occupation and faux-democracy development in Iraq. It is Peter's concern that our country may well be proceeding down that same path again – possibly with Iran, Syria and other countries in the Middle East region.

It is our understanding that Peter became involved in an acrimonious Twitter exchange with several mainstream journalists over the theme of government lying. One of the parties to the exchange, reported to be Jonathan Katz of @KatzOnEarth – possibly joined by some of his associates – complained. Subsequently, and without any serious investigation or chance for rebuttal regarding the charges, Peter was suspended by you for “harass[ing], intimidate[ing], or us[ing] fear to silence someone else's voice.” Peter absolutely denies that anything like that took place.

We have also learned that Daniel McAdams, Executive Director of the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity and a highly respected former Congressional staffer, weighed in to defend Peter and was also suspended by you. And Scott Horton, editorial director of Antiwar.com Radio, was suspended for use of “improper language” against Katz. Horton and McAdams cannot add new tweets while under suspension, but Peter's “permanent” suspension included deletion of all of his seven years' archive of tweets, so the actual exchanges leading up to his

punishment cannot currently be examined.

Your action suggests three possibilities – all of which are quite plausible given that your system for punishing users is far from transparent. First, you may be engaged in systematic manipulation if some of your users are able to complain and have their friends do likewise in order to sully the reputation of a Twitter user who is doing little more than engaging in heated debate over issues that concern all of us.

Second, there is a distinct possibility that you are responding to either deep pocketed or particularly strident advocacy groups that may themselves have agendas to silence opposition voices. We note that Google is currently working with some powerful foundations to censor content they object to which comes up in search engine results.

Finally – third – we also suspect a possible government hand in that companies like yours, to include Facebook, have become very sensitive to alleged “subversive” content, deleting accounts and blocking users. Kowtowing to government suggestions to silence critics of administration policies may well be considered a desirable proactive step by your management as well as by other social media companies, but censorship is censorship, no matter how you dress it up.

We Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity believe that systematic and/or institutionalized censorship of tweets and account users is fundamentally the wrong way to go unless there are very explicit and sustained threats of violence or other criminal behavior. The internet should be free, to include most particularly the ability to post commentary that is not mainstream or acceptable to the Establishment. That is what Peter has been doing and we applaud him for it. We respectfully request that you examine the facts in the case with the objective of reconsidering and possibly restoring the suspension of Peter Van Buren’s twitter account. Thank you.

*For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity:*

**William Binney**, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

**Richard H. Black**, Senator of Virginia, 13<sup>th</sup> District; Colonel US Army (ret); former chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS) (@SenRichardBlack)

**Marshall Carter-Tripp**, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) and Division Director, State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research

**Bogdan Dzakovic**, former team leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security (ret.) (associate VIPS)

**Philip Giraldi**, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.) (@infangenetheof)

**Larry C. Johnson**, former CIA and State Department Counterterrorism Officer (ret.)

**Michael S. Kearns**, Captain, USAF (ret.); Wing Commander, RAAF (ret.); former intelligence officer and master SERE instructor (@msk6793)

**John Kiriakou**, former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee (@johnkiriakou)

**Karen Kwiatkowski**, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

**Linda Lewis**, WMD preparedness policy analyst, USDA (ret.) (associate VIPS) (@usalinda)

**Edward Loomis**, NSA, cryptologic computer scientist (ret.)

**David MacMichael**, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

**Ray McGovern**, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.) (@raymcgovern)

**Annie Machon**, former intelligence officer in the UK's MI5 domestic security service (affiliate VIPS) (@anniemachon)

**Elizabeth Murray**, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, CIA and National Intelligence Council (ret.) (@elizabethmurra)

**Todd E. Pierce**, Maj, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.) (@ToddEPierce)

**Scott Ritter**, former Maj., USMC; former UN weapons inspector, Iraq (@RealScottRitter)

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

**J. Kirk Wiebe**, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.) (@kirkwiebe)

**Sarah Wilton**, Commander, US Naval Reserve (ret.) and Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

**Robert Wing**, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

**Ann Wright**, US Army Reserve Colonel (Ret) and former US Diplomat

**Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) is made up of former intelligence officers, diplomats, military officers and congressional staffers. The organization, founded in 2002, was among the first critics of Washington's justifications for launching a war against Iraq. VIPS advocates a US foreign and national security policy based on genuine national interests rather than contrived threats promoted for largely political reasons. An archive of VIPS memoranda is available at Consortiumnews.com.**

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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).**

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