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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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by GERALD SUSSMAN

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Russiagate is Dead! Long Live Russiagate!



Drawing by Nathaniel St. Clair

Now that Mueller's \$40 million Humpty Trumpty investigation is over and found wanting of its original purpose (to retire Trump), perhaps the ruling class can return without interruption to the business of destroying the world with ordnance, greenhouse gases, and regime changes. A few more CIA-organized blackouts in Venezuela (it's a simple trick if one follows the Agency's "[Freedom Fighter's Manual](#)"), and the US will come to the rescue, Grenada style, and set up yet another neoliberal regime. There is a small solace that with Trump, Pompeo,

and Bolton, there is at least a semblance of transparency in their reckless interventions. The assessed value of Guaido and Salman, they forthrightly admit, is in their countries' oil reserves. And Russians better respect the Monroe Doctrine and manifest destiny if they know what's good for them. Crude as they may be, Trump's men tell it like it is. And when [Bolton](#) speaks of "the Western Hemisphere's shared goals of democracy, security, and the rule of law," he is of course referring to US-backed coups, military juntas, debt bondage, invasions, embargoes, assassinations, and other forms of gunboat diplomacy.

That the US is not already formally at war with Russia (even with NATO forces all along its borders) has only to do with the latter's nuclear arsenal deterrent. Since World War II, a period some describe as a "[a period of unprecedented peace](#)," the US war machine has wiped out some 20 million people, including more than 1 million in Iraq since 2003, engaged in regime change of at least 36 governments, intervened in at least 82 foreign elections, including Russia (1996), planned more than 50 assassinations of foreign leaders, and bombed over 30 countries. This is documented [here](#) and [here](#).

Despite unending US and US-supported assaults on Africa and western and central Asia, the authors who see postwar unprecedented peace argue that it Russia and China, not the US, that represent the real threats to peace and deserve to be treated as "outcasts." That NATO has warships plying the Black Sea and making port calls at the ethnically Russian Ukraine city of Odessa and is conducting war games from Latvia to Bulgaria and Ukraine represents unprecedented peace? While NATO, which together has 20 times the military spending of Russia and includes member states along virtually the entire perimeter of Russia, in Western propaganda Russia is the aggressor.

Although the US corporate media may have missed the news, the rest of the world gets the fact that the greatest threat to peace on the planet is Uncle Sam. In 2013, a [WIN/Gallup International poll](#) of 66,000 people in 65 countries found that the US was considered by far the most dangerous state on earth (24% of respondents), while Russia didn't even register statistically on that poll. In 2017, a [Pew](#) poll found the same perception of US power and that such a view had increased to 38% and had grown in 21 of 30 countries compared to 2013. Even America's neighbors, Canada and Mexico, see the US as a major threat to their countries, worse than either China or Russia. The mainstream media (MSM) stenographers' myopia in failing to cover this story is not an oversight. Carl Bernstein, of Watergate exposé fame, [documented](#) in 1977 the fact that from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, the MSM (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, NBC, ABC, CBS, and the rest) had regularly served as overseas informers for the CIA. It would be hard to believe that those ties are not still intact

given the level of collaboration among the CIA, the MSM, and the Democratic Party in the Russiagate conspiracy drama.

Context is everything. In blaming others for the instability of the Middle East, it is important to bear in mind that for 36 years since Reagan launched air attacks on Beirut and parts of Syria, the US, and its ally Israel, has been using the greater Middle East region as a testing ground for its weapons systems. This has meant repeated bombing and droning of Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Iran, Yemen, Kuwait, and Sudan, and increased weapons sales to the region to assure continuous instability and profits. The US has “special forces” operating in two-thirds of the world’s countries and non-special forces stationed in three-quarters of them, altogether over 800 military bases and installations in as many as 130 countries (the Pentagon refuses to give the exact number). By comparison, apart from several bases in some of the former Soviet republics, Russia has a naval resupply facility in Vietnam and small temporary leased naval and airport stations in Syria. China opened a combined naval and army base in Djibouti in 2017 and an “unofficial military presence” in Tajikistan. There is nothing remotely close to equivalence.

We can expect a continuing outcasting of Russia, either under a second Trump presidency or, if the long dark shadow of the Clintons prevails, a Joe Biden White House. Biden claims without the benefit of evidence that currently “[the Russian government is brazenly assaulting the foundations of Western democracy around the world](#),” as if the huge imbalance of military forces and the long history of US interventions against liberal democracies and socialist states were unknown or irrelevant. In his (and the establishment’s) heavy-handed uses of propaganda, Biden has learned well the tactics of Goebbels – repeat the lies often enough to make the imperial state appear as the victim.

With regard to a brazen assault on democracy, Biden might take a cue from Clinton, who knew how to capitalize on her power position by signing off on huge arms sales to the Saudis (e.g., a [\\$29 billion sale](#) of fighter jets to that country to be used against Yemen) and other Gulf States while securing tens of millions of dollars in donations from the sheikhs (\$25 million from Saudi Arabia alone) to her private foundation, run by her husband. This is all the more contemptuous given that [she acknowledged](#) in 2013: “The Saudis and others are shipping large amounts of weapons... clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups in the region...and pretty indiscriminately – not at all targeted toward the people that we think would be the more moderate, least likely, to cause problems in the future.”

In other words, she knew the Saudis and other Gulf dictators were arming ISIS (ISIL) and other caliphate actors but continued to keep them as allies and patrons. She also took \$800 thousand for her 2016 campaign (almost double what Trump received) and some \$3 million for her private foundation from [oil and gas companies](#) after approving lucrative gas pipeline in the Canadian tar sands. Part of the foundation staff's business was to arrange meetings of top donors meetings with the then secretary of state. Following Clinton and Obama's lead and without a second thought, Trump has authorized US energy companies to sell the Saudi monarchy nuclear power technology and assistance.

In foreign policy, indeed, it's hard to see any meaningful difference between Republican and Democratic administrations. Obama and John Kerry sent Undersecretary of State for Europe and Eurasia [Victoria Nuland](#) to Kiev's Maidan to cheer on the 2014 coup, hand out sandwiches to protesters, and give marching orders to her ambassador there to arrange for Yatsenyuk to be prime minister and to "fuck the EU." Poroshenko, a regular informer at the US embassy, as WikiLeaks revealed, was already in the bag for president. Biden was brought in to "midwife" and "help glue this thing" by pressuring the still-ruling Yanukovich to step down in favor of the US-designated coup leaders. Along the same lines, Trump's then ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, joined Venezuelan protesters outside UN headquarters in New York, using a megaphone to publicly call for a coup against Maduro. "I will tell you," she told the group, "the U.S. voice is going to be loud."

Both the Ukraine and Venezuela interventions are in part a grand strategy to isolate Russia. However, the orchestration of a new Cold War against Russia and to implicate Trump as a Kremlin puppet has failed, and the problem for Russiagate propagandists is how to keep the conspiracy theory alive now that Mueller's unsuccessful hunt for 5th columnists is in the dustbin. The leading Russia scholar, [Stephen Cohen](#), who has been professionally marginalized because of his skepticism toward the CIA narrative, sees the impact of a larger scandal – the corruption of the Democratic Party and its minions in the media that formed an alliance with the spooks. He asks: "what about the legions of high-ranking intelligence officials, politicians, editorial writers, television producers, and other opinion-makers, and their eager media outlets that perpetuated, inflated, and prolonged this unprecedented political scandal in American history...?"

Another question is, how would the mainstream media financially survive an ending of Russiagate, if indeed the media moguls allow it to end? This spectacular failure of the "fourth estate" in covering the Clinton and Democrats' defeat in 2016 greatly weakened their trust status, which has been in quite steady decline since the 1970s, especially among Republicans.

Democrats tend to look more favorably on the largely partisan liberal MSM for obvious reasons. However, as of December 2018, according to an [IPSOS/Reuters poll](#), only 44% of Americans has much (16%) or some (28%) confidence in the MSM, compared to hardly any (48%). On whether MSM news organizations are more interested in making money than telling the truth, 59% agreed with the former assessment. No known organization has published findings on MSM trust since the completion of the Mueller debacle.

What is to be made politically of the Russia obsession? Russiagate, which Matt Taibbi calls “this generation’s WMD,” can be seen as serving three broad major purposes. It has given the Democratic Party leadership and its partners in the CIA and MSM a cause célèbre in order to salvage the status and image of the party and distract from its disastrous electoral defeats from 2008 to 2016. It thereby serves as an alternative reality to the widespread recognition that the ruling forces in the party have no genuine popular agenda and represent corporate, banking, neoliberal, and neoconservative militarist projects designed under Bill Clinton’s New Democrat agenda.

On foreign policy, Russiagate puts the Democrats to the right of the Republicans, similar to the way that John Kennedy in the 1960 campaign accused the Eisenhower (and VP Nixon) administration of weakening America’s defenses, which presently enables the energy and defense industries and their lobbyists to unduly influence the perception of international threats and flashpoints. Democrats in the House and Senate voted overwhelmingly for the 2019 \$716 billion defense budget, over and above what even Trump requested. In 2018, five military contractors – Northrup Grumman, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, and Raytheon – provided key political leaders in both parties with \$14.4 million in addition to \$94 million spent on lobbying efforts that year. Oil & gas spent \$89 million on the election campaign and \$125 million on lobbying. And, third, it serves to stifle the political left in and outside the party and the demands for progressive legislative changes activated by Bernie Sanders in 2016 and by newer members like Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, and Tulsi Gabbard.

Where is the center of public political confidence these days? Certainly not with the mainstream media, which is even lower than that for Trump. Even in terms of its vaunted claims of press freedom, the US fares quite badly. Reporters Without Borders ranked the US number 45th worldwide (of 180 countries cited) in press freedom in its 2018 report. Tory-led Britain slid from 33rd in 2014 to 40th – only Italy and Greece were behind the UK among western European countries. And although Trump hasn’t helped with his attacks on the media (and more than reciprocated by the media’s extraordinarily hostile coverage of the president),

the situation wasn't much better under Obama, who threatened whistle blowers in the press with enforcing the 1917 Espionage Act. This is law that may be pressed against the journalist Julian Assange. There still exists no "shield law" guaranteeing journalists the right to protect their sources' identities. Journalism students should be concerned for another reason as well: Newspaper employment between 2001 and 2016 has been cut by more than half, from 412,000 to 174,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

William Arkin, who quit NBC News as a political commentator last January, accused the station of peddling "ho-hum reporting" that "essentially condones" an endless US war presence in the Middle East and Africa. He also took the network to task for not reporting "the failures of the generals and national security leaders," and essentially becoming "a defender of the government against Trump" and a "cheerleader for open and subtle threat mongering."

In his parting comments, he wrote: "I'm alarmed at how quick NBC is to mechanically ... be in favor of policies that just spell more conflict and more war.... Even on Russia, though we should be concerned about the brittleness of our democracy that it is so vulnerable to manipulation, do we really yearn for the Cold War?"

It may be whistling in the wind, but there are more important things to worry about than whether "the Russians" exposed the DNC's perfidious behavior in 2016. It would be more worthwhile for Democrats to demand programs that eliminate child poverty, which is at 20% in the US, compared to an OECD average of 13%. It might also be useful to concentrate a bit more on the white working class and working poor that went to Trump in 2016, whose kids make up 31% of the child poverty bracket (black children are 24%, and Latino children are 36%).

And while they're at it, they might try to change the fact that the US ranks 25th out of 29 industrialized countries in investments in early childhood education or the fact that the disgraceful American infant mortality rate at 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births is 50% higher than the OECD average (3.9%). Many of the parents of these less privileged children are serving long sentences in prison for non-violent crimes, the discarded citizens who form the highest incarceration rate in the world. Overall, the Stanford Center on Inequality and Poverty ranked the US 18th out of 21 wealthy countries on measures of labor markets, poverty rates, safety nets, wealth inequality, and economic mobility. On the other hand, the US has more than 25% of the world's 2,208 billionaires. This is American exceptionalism at its worst.

The corporate-run market system and the calamities it is bringing to the world depends on such distractions. As the *New York Times* journalist and defender of US global supremacy, Thomas Friedman, has noted, “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the U.S. Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.” In his view, the system needs protecting, for which his “journalism” and most of the MSM are certainly doing their part.

Unless the rather soft left within the Democratic Party can somehow capture the public imagination, the Democrats’ political agenda, the MSM and their cohorts in the deep state will likely continue to report fake Russian conspiracies around the world. Russiagate is a propaganda industry that keeps on giving. In the *longue durée* of American elections, the question is what discourse will dominate the next campaign – social justice and a rational foreign policy or more aggressive polemics about Russia aimed at a steady pathway to nuclear war?

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