

Russia-Hack Story against Donald Trump, Another Media Failure

By [Joe Lauria](#)

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President Obama [admitted](#) in his press conference on Friday that his government hasn't released any evidence yet of Russian interference in the election, but he said some would be coming.

That's proof that an uncritical press has already printed stories as if true without any evidence just on the say-so of the Central Intelligence Agency, an organization long dedicated to deception, disinformation and meddling in other countries' elections, not to mention arranging coups to overthrow elected governments.

Forty years ago, the established press would have been skeptical to buy anything the CIA was selling after a series of Congressional committees [exposed](#) a raft of criminal acts and [abuses](#) of power by the CIA and other intelligence agencies. Today's journalists work for newspapers that fraudulently still bear the names New York Times and Washington Post, but they are no longer the same papers.

The vast U.S. news media also is not the same. The working journalist today is living off the reputation for skepticism and determination to get beyond government pronouncements that was established by their papers decades ago. Rather than add to that reputation, the credibility of the biggest newspapers continues to erode.

Both the Times and the Post should today be stained by their credulous reporting of official lies about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Instead of showing professional skepticism, the big papers became cheerleaders for an illegal invasion that killed hundreds of thousands of people and left behind a disaster that still reverberates today. Neither the Times nor the Post suffered any consequences and have picked up where they left off, still uncritically reporting anonymous U.S. officials without demanding proof.

On the contrary, any reporter who did demand evidence was in danger of career consequences. An editor for a newspaper chain that I was reporting for called me to chew me out because he said my stories were not in support of the Iraq war effort. He told me his son was a Marine. I told him I was sure he was proud but that my job was to report the news based on the evidence. On the very day when the invasion began, I was fired.

Of course, the television networks, including CNN, were most egregious for selling the war. I was shocked when I heard reporter Kyra Philips from aboard a U.S. warship in the Persian Gulf gleefully announce: "Welcome to Shock and Awe!" just after a cruise missile was shown being fired. The people it killed on the receiving end were almost never mentioned.

CNN, which has accepted Russian interference in the U.S. election as a given, is also living

off its reputation of a once very serious news organization. On its very first [broadcast](#) on June 1, 1980, Cable News Network aired as its second story a lengthy investigative report on faulty fuel gauges in commercial airliners. It broadcast an in-depth live report from the Middle East, and veteran newsman Daniel Schorr interviewed and challenged President Jimmy Carter.

But 1980 was when the period of skeptical, professional journalism that demanded proof from its own government started to decline as Ronald Reagan was elected. He worked to stamp out the skepticism bred from Watergate, Vietnam and the Congressional intelligence hearings. Reagan did this, in part, by resurrecting the most obvious and adolescent myths about America. And he worked with the CIA to manage America's perceptions away from the critical thinking of the 1970s, as journalist Robert Parry has extensively [reported](#).

There have been a few periods in American journalism when demanding proof from government was expected. The muckraking period led by Lincoln Steffens of the Progressive Era was one. The 1970s was another. But mostly it has been a business filled with careerists who live vicariously through the powerful people they cover, disregarding the even greater power the press has to cut the powerful down to size.

Egregious Case

The reporting on the supposed Russian hack of the elections is one of the most egregious examples of unprofessional journalism since 2003, particularly because of the stakes involved.



Russian President Vladimir Putin, following his address to the UN General Assembly on Sept. 28, 2015. (UN Photo)

There have now been a slew of stories, each of which seems to offer a new promise of evidence, such as [one](#) under the ludicrous New York Times headline, "C.I.A. Judgment on Russia Built on Swell of Evidence." But when you read the piece, its only sources are still unnamed intelligence officials. A later 8,000-word Times article was the same, as though the length by itself was supposed to lend it more credibility.

If there were any doubts, Obama wiped them away with his admission that no evidence had been released. Worse still, perhaps, is that counter-evidence has been suppressed, another consistent feature of today's journalism.

The former British diplomat Craig Murray, has written and told at least two [radio](#) interviewers

that the Democratic National Committee and John Podesta emails were not obtained by WikiLeaks through hacks, but instead from leaks by American insiders.

This story was totally ignored by established media until the Daily Mail in London reported it online, but incorrectly said Murray had himself received the leak. In the U.S., only The Washington Times reported the story, quoting the Mail. But that story took a swipe at Murray's reputation, merely saying he was "removed from his diplomatic post amid allegations of misconduct." In fact, Murray was let go for blowing the whistle on U.K. use of evidence extracted by torture by the corrupt Karimov administration in Uzbekistan. The rest of the Washington Times story just repeats what every other reporter has written about Russian interference.

Two Obstacles

Even if it were proven that Russian government operatives hacked these emails as part of their intelligence gathering, there remains the additional evidentiary hurdle that they then supplied the data to WikiLeaks, when the recipients, including WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, say the source or sources weren't Russians.



WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange at a media conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. (Photo credit: New Media Days / Peter Erichsen)

It's also noteworthy that none of the information in the emails has been shown to be false. The leaks provided real insights into how the DNC favored Hillary Clinton over Sen. Bernie Sanders and revealed some shady practices of the Clinton Foundation as well as the contents of Clinton's speeches to Wall Street bankers that she had tried to hide. In other words, the leaks gave voters more information about Hillary Clinton, confirming what many voters already believed: that she was beholden to the financial sector and benefited from her insider connections. But none of that was particularly news.

It is important to note, too, that Obama himself in his press conference said there is zero evidence Russia tried to hack into the electronic voting systems. In fact it now emerges from dogged [reporting](#) by a local Atlanta TV station that the Department of Homeland Security appears to have been behind earlier attempted hacks of voting systems in several states.

So, it would be virtually impossible to prove that the DNC and Podesta emails were the deciding factor in the election. Indeed, before the election, pro-Clinton corporate media downplayed the email-related stories and Podesta said the emails may have been faked (although none of them appears to have been made up).

The emails also revealed numerous instances of reporters [colluding](#) with the Clinton campaign before publishing stories, something no hard-boiled editor from an earlier era would have stood for.

Democratic Misdirection

By focusing on the alleged Russian role now, Democrats also have diverted attention from other factors that likely were far more consequential to the outcome, such as Clinton largely

ignoring the Rust Belt and not going once to Wisconsin or her calling many Trump supporters “deplorables” and “irredeemable.” Further, Clinton was a quintessential Establishment candidate in an anti-Establishment year.



Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

And, there was the fact that in the campaign’s final week, FBI Director James Comey briefly reopened the investigation into Clinton’s use of a private email server while Secretary of State, a move that reminded many Americans why they distrusted Clinton.

Yet, as the mainstream U.S. media now hypes as flat fact the supposed Russian role, there remains the inconvenient truth that the Obama administration’s intelligence community has presented no verifiable evidence that the Russians were the source of the leaks.

Demanding to see the evidence on Russia, the Republican-led House Intelligence Committee called the CIA, FBI and Office of the Director of National Intelligence to a closed-door briefing. Though these agencies are obligated to show up in response to requests from their Congressional oversight committees, the three agencies flatly [refused](#). Then, DNI James Clapper refused to brief concerned Electoral College voters whose votes for or against Trump may have been influenced by the news media frenzy about alleged Russian interference. Clapper reportedly is preparing a report on Russia’s “hacking” for Congress.

Political Strategy

The Russia fiasco appears to have been part of a political strategy that I first [wrote](#) about on Nov. 5 – three days before the election – that a fallback plan, if Trump won a narrow victory, would be to influence the electors to reject Trump when they assemble in state capitals on Dec. 19. Playing the Russian card was designed to appeal to the electors’ patriotism to defend their country against foreign interference.



President-elect Donald Trump in an MSNBC interview.

Assuming that Electoral College long shot failed, there would be one more chance for Clinton to stop Trump: on Jan. 6, when Congress meets to certify the election. The Clinton camp needs one Senator and one Representative to sign an objection to Trump's certification (no doubt citing Russia) forcing a vote by both chambers.

If Trump loses – and there are a number of anti-Trump Republicans in Congress – the election would be thrown to the House where Clinton or a more conventional Republican could be selected as President.

Given those stakes for the American democracy and the risks inherent in U.S. relations with nuclear-armed Russia, the fact that the most influential establishment media has bought into this extremely flimsy story about Russian hacking should condemn them further in the minds of the public.

Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist based at the U.N. since 1990. He has written for the Boston Globe, the London Daily Telegraph, the Johannesburg Star, the Montreal Gazette, the Wall Street Journal and other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@gmail.com and followed on Twitter at @unjoe.

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