

The ‘Credibility’ Illusion. Iraq, Syria, Ukraine: “Sticking with the Lie”

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Global Research, April 15, 2016

[Consortium News](#) 14 April 2016

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#), [SYRIA](#), [UKRAINE REPORT](#)

What surprised me most about the Iraq War wasn't how wrong the expectation of happy Iraqis showering American troops with flowers was or even how badly the war would turn out – all that was predictable and indeed [was predicted](#). But what I didn't expect was that the U.S. government would ever admit that there were no WMD stockpiles.

I assumed that the U.S. government would do what it usually does: continue the lie to protect its “credibility.” Because that is what “credibility” has become, powerful institutions and people maintaining the aura of being right even when they're completely wrong.

There is even a national security argument to be made: If the U.S. government must justify its actions to the American people and the world with propaganda themes, it can't simply admit that previous ones were lies because then it would lose all “credibility.” The next time, the public might not be as open to the propaganda. The people might catch on.

And that would present a problem to the U.S. government, which feels [it needs the approval or at least the confused acquiescence of the American people](#) and to a lesser extent the world before charging off to war or starting some expensive confrontation with a foreign power.



Image: President George W. Bush announcing the start of his invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003.

So, in a sick kind of way, it makes more sense to stick with the lie and rely on a corrupted mainstream media to hold the line. Anyone who dares challenge the falsehoods then can be

discredited or marginalized.

That's why I was surprised when the U.S. government admitted that there were no WMD stockpiles in Iraq and no active nuclear-weapons program, either. I was expecting that President George W. Bush's team would assemble some buckets of chemicals found at Baghdad swimming pools – pile them up in front of a credulous media – and announce, “we got here just in time!”

After all, the U.S. government rarely corrects its misstatements and outright lies, no matter how significant they may be. For instance, there's never been a formal admission that the Gulf of Tonkin claims, which launched the Vietnam War, were false.

On a smaller scale, I encountered something similar when I was covering the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983. The Reagan administration massively exaggerated the discovery of some useless World War I era rifles in a musty-smelling warehouse to claim that the little Caribbean island was about to be transformed into the hub of terrorism for the Western Hemisphere.

As absurd as the claim was, it worked well enough amid a well-staged propaganda campaign complete with American students kissing the tarmac when they returned to the United States and members of Congress waving around some Grenada government contracts — in Russian.

Dig in the Heels

We are now seeing similar dig-in-the-heels strategies regarding Syria and Ukraine. Though I'm told that U.S. intelligence knows that the Obama administration's propaganda is no longer operative on the 2013 sarin gas attack outside Damascus and the 2014 shoot-down of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in eastern Ukraine, the storylines won't be retracted or corrected.



Image: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. (Photo credit: Fabio Rodrigues Pozzebom / ABr)

To do so – to say that President Bashar al-Assad's forces weren't responsible for the sarin attack and that the Russians weren't behind the MH-17 catastrophe – would destroy the

propaganda narratives that have been useful in justifying the shipment of arms to Syrian rebels and the launching of a new Cold War against Moscow.

If the American people and the world public were informed that they had been misled on such sensitive topics – and that the real guilty parties might include people getting American support – that could devastate U.S. government “credibility” and disrupt future plans.

Therefore, mounting evidence that Assad didn’t cross President Obama’s “red line” against using chemical weapons on Aug. 21, 2013, must be brushed aside or forgotten.

In a classic show of cognitive dissonance, The Atlantic’s Jeffrey Goldberg recently reported that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told Obama that U.S. intelligence had no “slam dunk” evidence of Assad’s guilt. But Goldberg then [continued his long article on Obama’s foreign policy as if Clapper’s warning never happened](#) and as if Assad were indeed guilty.

Since then, major American columnists writing about Goldberg’s article [have simply ignored](#) the Clapper revelation, which tended to confirm earlier reporting at some independent Web sites, including Consortiumnews.com, and by investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, who [traced the sarin to a likely operation by Islamic radicals aided by Turkish intelligence](#). But those Assad-didn’t-do-it reports were almost universally ignored, except for the occasional ridicule.

The problem for the columnists – and for the rest of Official Washington’s insider community – was that Everyone Who Mattered had already declared as flat fact that Assad crossed Obama’s “red line” with the sarin attack. So what would happen to their “credibility” if they admitted that they were wrong again, since many also had been famously wrong about Iraq’s WMD?

Plus, who could force these Important People to face up to their own misfeasance and malfeasance? Does anyone expect that Secretary of State John Kerry, who sought war against Syria in retaliation for the sarin attack, will retract what he claimed repeatedly that “we know” about Assad’s guilt? What would that do to Kerry’s “credibility”?

Kerry also was on the front lines pointing the finger of blame at Russia for the MH-17 shoot-down on July 17, 2014. He rushed off to the Sunday TV shows just three days after the tragedy over eastern Ukraine that killed 298 people and made the case that Moscow and the ethnic Russian rebels were to blame.

A source who had been briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts in that same time frame was telling me that it was already clear to them that an element of the Ukrainian military was responsible. But hanging the slaughter of all those innocents around Russian President Vladimir Putin’s neck was just too tempting – and served U.S. propaganda needs to get Europe to join in economic sanctions against Russia and to let the U.S. government rev up a new and costly Cold War.

Going Dutch

But those U.S. propaganda desires have put the Dutch in a difficult spot, since they are leading the investigation into the crash which departed from Amsterdam and carried many

Dutch citizens en route to Kuala Lumpur. Part of the Dutch problem is that [Dutch intelligence has confirmed](#) that the only Buk or other anti-aircraft missiles in eastern Ukraine capable of hitting a commercial airliner at 33,000 feet belonged to the Ukrainian military.



Image: Quinn Schansman, a dual U.S.-Dutch citizen killed aboard Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 on July 17, 2014. (Photo from Facebook)

Recently, the Obama administration also had to decide how to [respond to a letter](#) from Thomas Schansman, the father of the only U.S. citizen killed in the crash, Quinn Schansman. In [a letter](#) dated Jan. 5, 2016, Schansman asked Secretary Kerry to release the radar and other evidence that he claimed to have in summer 2014 that supposedly showed where the missile was fired, a basic fact that the Dutch investigation has yet to nail down.

One of the many anomalies of the MH-17 case was Kerry's assertion within three days of the crash that the U.S. government had precise information about the launch but then has left Dutch investigators struggling to figure out that detail for nearly two years.

On July 20, 2014, Kerry appeared on NBC's "[Meet the Press](#)" and declared,

"we picked up the imagery of this launch. We know the trajectory. We know where it came from. We know the timing. And it was exactly at the time that this aircraft disappeared from the radar."

At a news conference on Aug. 12, 2014, Kerry made similar claims:

"We saw the take-off. We saw the trajectory. We saw the hit. We saw this airplane disappear from the radar screens. So there is really no mystery about where it came from and where these weapons have come from."



Image: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Aug. 30, 2013, claims to have proof that the Syrian government was responsible for a chemical weapons attack on Aug. 21, but that evidence failed to materialize or was later discredited. [State Department photo]

As the months wore on – passing the first anniversary of the crash and then after last October's inconclusive report by the Dutch Safety Board – Thomas Schansman finally reached out to Kerry directly with his Jan. 5 letter. More weeks and months passed before Schansman received Kerry's reply on March 24, although the [letter](#) was curiously dated

March 7.

The letter offered no new information as Kerry stuck to the old story. Recently, I was told that a possible explanation for the delay in the letter's delivery was that a discussion was underway inside the Obama administration about whether to finally come clean about MH-17 even if that would clear Russia and the ethnic Russian rebels and shift the blame onto a rogue or poorly disciplined unit of the Ukrainian military.

But the decision was made to stand pat, the source said, explaining that otherwise "the narrative would be reversed," throwing the U.S.-backed Ukrainian government on the defensive and negating some of the propaganda advantages gained against Russia.

Plus, if the U.S. government admitted that it had played such a cynical propaganda game, which also smacks of obstruction of justice by giving the actual culprits nearly two years to make their escape and cover their tracks, there would be a loss of "credibility" in Washington.

Apparently, it made more geopolitical sense to keep the heat on Russia and then to lean on the Dutch authorities to fit their investigative findings around the needs of the NATO alliance. That is, after all, how the U.S. government usually operates. It's also why I was so surprised that the truth finally was told about Iraq not possessing the WMD.

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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