

The Did-You-Talk-to-Russians Witch Hunt. “A Ministry of Truth”

By [Robert Parry](#)

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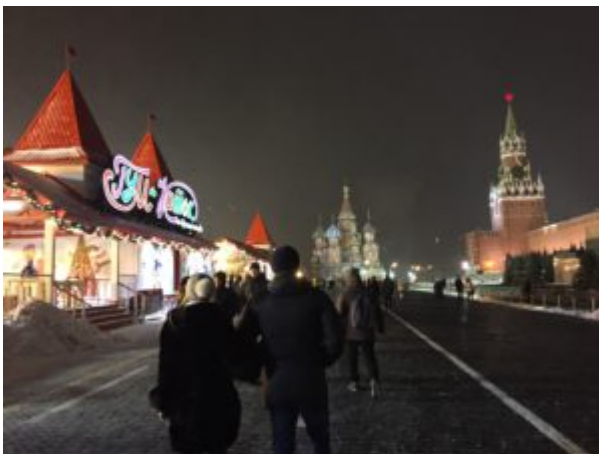
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Democrats, liberals and media pundits – in their rush to take down President Trump – are pushing a New McCarthyism aimed at Americans who have talked to Russians, risking a new witch hunt, reports Robert Parry.

In the [anti-Russian frenzy](#) sweeping American politics and media, Democrats, liberals and mainstream pundits are calling for an investigative body that could become a new kind of House Un-American Activities Committee to hunt down Americans who have communicated with Russians.



Red Square in Moscow with a winter festival to the left and the Kremlin to the right.
(Photo by Robert Parry)

The proposed commission would have broad subpoena powers to investigate alleged connections between Trump’s supporters and the Russian government with the apparent goal of asking if they now have or have ever talked to a Russian who might have some tie to the Kremlin or its intelligence agencies.

Such an admission apparently would be prima facie evidence of disloyalty, a guilt-by-association “crime” on par with Sen. Joe McCarthy’s Cold War pursuit of “communists” who supposedly had infiltrated the U.S. government, the film industry and other American institutions.

Operating parallel to McCarthy’s Red Scare hearings was the House Un-American Activities Committee (or HUAC), a standing congressional panel from 1945-1975 when it was best known for investigating alleged communist subversion and propaganda. One of its top

achievements was the blacklisting of the “Hollywood Ten” whose careers in the movie industry were damaged or destroyed.

Although the Cold War has long been over – and Russia has often cooperated with the U.S. government, especially on national security issues such as supplying U.S. troops in Afghanistan – Democrats and liberals seem ready to force Americans to again prove their loyalty if they engaged in conversations with Russians.

Or perhaps these “witnesses” can be entrapped into perjury charges if their recollections of conversations with Russians don’t match up with transcripts of their intercepted communications, a tactic similar to ones used by Sen. McCarthy and HUAC to trip up and imprison targets over such secondary charges.

Ousted National Security Advisor Michael Flynn has already encountered such a predicament because he couldn’t recall all the details of a phone conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak on Dec. 29, 2016, after Flynn took [the call while vacationing](#) in the Dominican Republic.

When Obama administration holdovers at the Justice Department decided to gin up a legal premise to go after Flynn, they cited the Logan Act, a law enacted in 1799 to prohibit private citizens from negotiating with foreign adversaries but never used to convict anyone. The law also is of dubious constitutionality and was surely never intended to apply to a president-elect’s advisers.

However, based on that flimsy pretext, FBI agents – with a transcript of the electronic intercept of the Kislyak-Flynn phone call in hand – tested Flynn’s memory of the conversation and found his recollections incomplete. Gotcha – lying to the FBI!

Under mounting [media and political pressure](#), President Trump fired Flynn, apparently hoping that tossing Flynn overboard to the circling sharks would somehow calm the sharks down. Instead, blood in the water added to the frenzy.

Iran-Contra Comparison

Some prominent Democrats and liberals have compared Trump-connected contacts with Russians to President Richard Nixon’s Watergate scandal or President Reagan’s Iran-Contra Affair, an issue that I know a great deal about having helped expose it as a reporter for The Associated Press in the 1980s.



President Ronald Reagan, delivering his Inaugural Address on Jan. 20, 1981.

The key difference is that Iran-Contra was an unconstitutional effort by the Reagan administration to finance an illegal war against Nicaragua's Sandinista government in defiance of a congressional ban. The Trump-connected communications with Russians – to the degree they have occurred – appear to have been aimed at preventing a new and dangerous Cold War that could lead to a nuclear holocaust.

In other words, Iran-Contra was about enabling a paramilitary force to continue its brutal marauding inside a country that was no threat to the United States while the current "scandal" is about people trying to avoid hostilities between two nuclear superpowers, an existential threat that many mainstream and liberal pundits don't want to recognize.

Indeed, there is a troubling denial-ism about the risks of an accidental or intentional war with Russia as the U.S. media and much of Official Washington's establishment have lots of fun demonizing Russian President Vladimir Putin and jabbing the Russians by shoving NATO troops up to their borders and deploying anti-ballistic missiles in Eastern Europe. For some crazy reason, the Russians feel threatened.

False Narratives

This Russia-bashing and Russia-baiting have been accompanied by false narratives presented in the major U.S. newspapers, including The New York Times and The Washington Post, to justify increased tensions.



The Washington Post building in downtown Washington, D.C. (Photo credit: Washington Post)

For instance, the Post's senior foreign affairs writer Karen DeYoung on Friday [described](#) the civil war in Ukraine this way: "That conflict began when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014, then backed separatists in eastern Ukraine in what has become a grinding war, despite a deal to end it, called the Minsk agreement, negotiated with Putin by the leaders of France and Germany."

But DeYoung's synopsis is simply not true. The crisis began in the fall of 2013 when Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovych backed out of what he regarded as a costly and unacceptable association agreement with the European Union, a move which prompted protests by Ukrainians in Kiev's Maidan square.

The Obama administration's State Department, U.S. neocon politicians such as Sen. John McCain, and various U.S.-backed "non-governmental organizations" then stoked those protests against Yanukovych, which grew violent as trained ultra-nationalist and [neo-Nazi street fighters poured in](#) from western Ukraine.

In early 2014, a coup to overthrow the democratically elected Yanukovych took shape under the guidance of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt who were caught in [a phone call](#) in late January or early February 2014 conspiring to impose new leadership inside Ukraine.

Nuland disparaged a less extreme strategy favored by European diplomats with the pithy remark: "Fuck the E.U." and went on to declare "Yats is the guy," favoring Arseniy Yatsenyuk as the new leader. Nuland then pondered how to "glue this thing" while Pyatt ruminated about how to "midwife this thing."

On Feb. 20, 2014, a mysterious sniper apparently firing from a building controlled by the ultranationalist Right Sektor killed both police and protesters, setting off a day of violence that left about 70 people dead including more than a dozen police.

The next day, three European governments struck a deal with Yanukovych in which he

agreed to early elections and accepted reduced powers. But that political settlement wasn't enough for the U.S.-backed militants who stormed government buildings on Feb. 22, forcing Yanukovich and his officials to flee for their lives.

Instead of standing by the Feb. 21 agreement, which the European nations had "guaranteed," Nuland pushed for and got U.S. allies to accept the new post-coup regime as "legitimate," with Yatsenyuk becoming prime minister and [several top government posts](#) given to the ultranationalists and neo-Nazis.

Spreading Violence

In the ensuing days, the right-wing violence spread beyond Kiev, prompting Crimea's legislature to propose secession from Ukraine and readmission to Russia, whose relationship to the peninsula dated back to Catherine the Great.



Nazi symbols on helmets worn by members of Ukraine's Azov battalion.
(As filmed by a Norwegian film crew and shown on German TV)

Crimea scheduled a referendum that was opposed by the new regime in Kiev. Russian troops did not "invade" Crimea because some 20,000 were already stationed there as part of a basing agreement at the Black Sea port of Sevastopol. The Russians did provide security for the referendum but there was no evidence of intimidation as the citizens of Crimea [voted by 96 percent](#) to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a move that Putin and the Russian duma accepted.

Eastern Ukrainians tried to follow Crimea's lead with their own referendum, but Putin and Russia rejected their appeals to secede. However, when the Kiev regime launched an "Anti-Terrorism Operation" against the so-called Donbass region - [spearheaded by ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi militias](#) - Russia provided military assistance so these ethnic Russians would not be annihilated.

Karen DeYoung also framed the Minsk agreement as if it were imposed on Putin when he was one of its principal proponents and architects, winning its approval in early 2015 at a time when the Ukrainian military was facing battlefield reversals.



Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland during a press conference at the U.S. Embassy in Kiev, Ukraine, on Feb. 7, 2014. (U.S. State Department photo)

But Assistant Secretary Nuland, working with Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and the Ukrainian parliament, [sabotaged the agreement](#) by requiring the Donbass rebels to first surrender which they were unwilling to do, having no faith in the sincerity of the Kiev regime to live up to its commitment to grant limited autonomy to the Donbass.

In other words, Kiev inserted a poison pill to prevent a peaceful resolution, but the Western media and governments always blame the Minsk failure on Putin.

If Karen DeYoung wanted to boil all this history down to one paragraph, it might go: “The Ukraine conflict began when U.S. officials supported the violent overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich, prompting Crimea to rejoin Russia and causing ethnic Russians in the east to rise up against the U.S.-backed coup regime in Kiev, which then sought to crush the rebellion. The Kiev regime later torpedoed a peace deal that had been hammered out by Russian, Ukrainian and European negotiators in Minsk.”

But such a summary would not have the desired propaganda effect on the American people. It would not present the U.S.-backed side as the “white hats” and the pro-Russia side as the “black hats.”

The simple truth is that the story of Ukraine is far more complex and multi-sided than The Washington Post, The New York Times and most mainstream U.S. news outlets want to admit. They simply start the clock at the point of Crimea’s rejection of the post-coup regime and distort those facts to present the situation simply as a “Russian invasion.”

A Whipped-Up Hysteria

The major media’s distortion is so egregious that you could call it a lie, but it is a lie that has proved very useful in whipping up the current anti-Russian hysteria that is sweeping Official Washington and that has given birth to a New Cold War, now accompanied by a New McCarthyism that deems anyone who doesn’t accept the “groupthink” a “Russian apologist” or a “Moscow stooge.”



Wintery scene at Red Square in Moscow, Dec. 6, 2016. (Photo by Robert Parry)

Since last November's election, this New McCarthyism has merged with hatred toward Donald Trump, especially after the outgoing Obama administration [lodged unproven accusations](#) that Russia undercut Hillary Clinton's campaign by hacking into the emails of the Democratic National Committee and those of her campaign chairman John Podesta – and slipped that information to WikiLeaks.

Those emails showed how the DNC undercut the rival campaign of Sen. Bernie Sanders and revealed the contents of Clinton's speeches to Wall Street banks as well as pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton Foundation, information that Clinton wanted to keep from the voters.

But no one thought the emails were a major factor in the Clinton-Trump race; indeed, Clinton blamed her stunning defeat on FBI Director James Comey's last-minute decision to reopen and then re-close his investigation into security concerns about her use of a private email server as Secretary of State.

But the script on how Clinton lost was flipped during the Trump transition as President Obama's intelligence agencies floated the Russia-hacked-the-election scenario although presenting no public evidence to support the claims. WikiLeaks representatives also [denied getting the material from Russia](#), suggesting instead that it was leaked by two different American insiders.

A Ministry of Truth

Still, during the post-election period, the anti-Russian hysteria continued to build. In November, The Washington Post [highlighted claims by an anonymous group](#) called PropOrNot accusing some 200 Web sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other major independent media outlets, of disseminating Russian "propaganda."



New York Times building in New York City. (Photo from Wikipedia)

The New York Times [joined in the frenzy](#) by calling for leading technology companies to marginalize Web sites that are deemed to be publishing “fake news,” a vague term that was applied not just to intentionally false stories but to information that questioned official narratives, no matter how dubious those narratives were. The [New McCarthyism was morphing into a New Orwellianism](#).

The movement toward a Ministry of Truth gained further momentum in December when Congress passed and President Obama signed a military authorization bill that included [a new \\$160 million bureaucracy](#) to identify and counter alleged “Russian propaganda.”

The anger of Democrats and liberals toward President Trump in his first month has added more fuel to the Russia-bashing with some Democrats and liberals seeing it as a possible route toward neutralizing or impeaching Trump. Thus, the calls for a full-scale investigation with subpoena power to demand documents and compel testimony.

While the idea of getting to the full truth has a superficial appeal, it also carries dangers of launching a witch hunt that would drag American citizens before inquisitors asking about any contacts – no matter how innocuous – with Russians.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, HUAC also claimed that all it wanted was the truth about whether some Americans were allied with or sympathetic to Moscow. Sen. Joe McCarthy offered a similar rationale when he was trying to root out “disloyal” Americans with the question, “are you now or have you ever been a communist?”

That Democrats and liberals who hold the McCarthy era in understandable disdain would now seek to rekindle something similar reeks of rank opportunism and gross hypocrisy – doing whatever it takes to “get Trump” and build an activist movement that can revive the Democratic Party’s flagging political hopes.

But this particular opportunism and hypocrisy also carries with it the prospect of blindly ramping up tensions with Russia, diverting more taxpayer money into the Military-Industrial Complex and conceivably sparking – whether planned or unplanned – a nuclear Armageddon that could eliminate life on the planet. Perhaps this anti-Trump strategy should be rethought.

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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