

“The Red Menace”. First They Came for Our Democracy, ... Russiagate Has Jumped the Shark

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Global Research, October 04, 2018

Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

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“It’s almost election time, and lest you forget, American democracy has never been in greater peril. Not from [inaccurate, insecure](#) voting machines a [schoolchild can hack](#); nor from [bought-off candidates](#) who [leave voters cold](#); but from Russian agents probing the fabric of our society, looking for weaknesses. It is up to us, as patriotic Americans, to defend our beloved institutions against the Red Menace.” [So writes](#) Susan Landau, a “cybersecurity expert” with links to Big Tech and the military-industrial complex.

Landau warns that the same Russians whose interference in the 2016 presidential election was never conclusively proven are burrowing further into American society, emboldened by the absence of a decisive response to their prior meddling.

Perhaps realizing that Americans are running low on fear – twenty years fighting a losing War on Terror have inured us to the threat of *jihad*, and it was only through appeals to Cold War-era [pop culture](#) that our Russophobia was so easily resuscitated – Landau plays dirty with the one card left in her propagandist’s deck. The Russians aren’t just targeting our “civil society” organizations; they want our *boy scouts*.

Such allegations are calculated for maximum emotional impact. Even the most avowedly liberal American parents feel a twinge of discomfort at the rapid pace of social change over the last decade, and the scouts – no longer [boy scouts](#) in our brave new world – have been [ground zero](#) for much of this change.

America has morphed from a society that guardedly accepts sexual variation into a neurotically permissive society terrified of offending members of genders not yet invented. Facebook offers the user over 70 gender options, an all-you-can-be buffet of identity politics. To question this paradigm is considered intolerant.

By linking the gender-neutral Scouts with the Red Menace, Landau is offering progressive parents a “get out of bigotry free” card. It’s OK to be uncomfortable with the queering of the Boy Scouts, as long as the Russians are behind it!

Almost exactly a year ago, she [wrote a piece](#) for *Foreign Policy* warning that the Russians were plotting an assault on our cherished civil institutions and that should they succeed in infiltrating them, they might...cause us to lose trust in our government! That threat clearly didn’t galvanize the Resistance, because this year, she’s kicking things up a notch: it’s now “extremely likely” that Russians are targeting civil society groups, which are the only thing standing between us and abject barbarism.

Landau has no proof that Russians have captured our institutions, as gay scoutmasters or otherwise, but she won't let that stand in the way of a good story. Lacking Russian examples, she claims Facebook turned a German town into refugee-attacking hatemongers and points to a spoofed text sent to undocumented supporters of Texas senate candidate Beto O'Rourke as something Russia "could" do. In an effort to bridge these logical chasms, she links to a [Brookings Institute report](#) that depicts Russian use of US social media platforms in terms normally used to describe thermonuclear war ("An attack on western critical infrastructure seems inevitable").

Like the January 2017 "[Intelligence Community Assessment](#)" from which she derives her certainty that Russians are infiltrating civil society organizations, Landau's article treats Russian interference in the 2018 election as a foregone conclusion despite the lack of evidence, pointing to [Microsoft's claim](#) that Russia "hacked" two conservative think tanks and two Democratic senate campaigns as proof that Putin has "our democracy" by the throat yet again.

New Russian Hacking Targeted Republican Groups, Microsoft Says



Microsoft said it had seized fake websites, linked to a Russian military intelligence unit, meant to trick people into thinking they were sites for Republican-leaning think tanks that have criticized President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. Gulshan Khan/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

By David E. Sanger and Sheera Frenkel

Aug. 21, 2018



Screengrab from The New York Times

Coverage of Microsoft's "discovery" reads like a press release for its new AccountGuard initiative, seemingly designed to profit off candidates' fears of Russian meddling while offering no proof of actual Russian involvement. The company also called for greater

cooperation between corporations and the government, though as the first eager collaborator with the NSA's Orwellian [PRISM program](#) way back in 2007, Microsoft could hardly cooperate any more than it already has.

The most disturbing outgrowth of the entire Russian bot narrative is the adoption of "sowing discord" as a new social sin, a crime worthy of de-platforming citizens from social media – or worse. The phrase is relatively new to the American lexicon, but one finds it in authoritarian countries like Saudi Arabia or Kazakhstan, where it is used as a catch-all charge to imprison journalists and activists whose work inconveniences the regime.

With McCarthyite organizations like PropOrNot collaborating with the mainstream media to smear independent journalists as useful idiots and traitors, the US doesn't need Russians to sow discord. Years of dishonest divide-and-conquer media narratives have completely alienated us from our fellow man. Nothing – not even the threat of Boris and Natasha filling our children's heads with gender theory around the campfire – can rescue our national solidarity. 2016's status-quo candidate, Hillary Clinton, said as much when she denounced half the electorate as a "basket of deplorables" – and conservatives took that ball and ran with it, denouncing the Left as mentally ill "snowflakes" and violent Antifa goons.

As if Big Tech's censorship wasn't onerous enough, Landau implores Americans to censor themselves online so as not to contribute to the Russian discord-sowing operation. It's the same line we were fed when the bogeyman was Islamic terrorism: *They hate us for our freedom! So we're going to take away your freedom in the hope they'll go away!* Or, in her words, "It's time for Americans to change their behavior." We're supposed to keep our politics to ourselves, lest it get back to Putin that American civilization has its discontents.

Landau is right about one thing. It reflects poorly on American society that all that is needed to bring the whole house of cards down is for a few well-placed "wrongthink" social media posts to go viral. But this is less the fault of Russia than of America's homegrown oligarchs, who have exploited the people so thoroughly that even the robust psychological defense mechanisms we're taught as children to combat cognitive dissonance can only keep reality at bay for so long. Everyone has their breaking point, and America's is fast approaching. Blame-the-Russians propaganda is the last gasp of an empire in decline, and even propagandists like Landau don't believe it anymore. A propagandist with no audience is just a liar.

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