

The Russian meddling fraud: Weapons of mass destruction revisited

Andre Damon, Joseph Kishore
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Fifteen years ago, on February 5, 2003, against the backdrop of worldwide mass demonstrations in opposition to the impending invasion of Iraq, then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell argued before the United Nations that the government of Saddam Hussein was rapidly stockpiling “weapons of mass destruction,” which Iraq, together with Al Qaeda, was planning to use against the United States.

In what was the climax of the Bush administration’s campaign to justify war, Powell held up a model vial of anthrax, showed aerial photographs and presented detailed slides purporting to show the layout of Iraq’s “mobile production facilities.”

There was only one problem with Powell’s presentation: it was a lie from beginning to end.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, in an editorial board statement published the next day, declared the brief for war “the latest act in a diplomatic charade laced with cynicism and deceit.” War against Iraq, the WSWS wrote, was not about “weapons of mass destruction.” Rather, “it is a war of colonial conquest, driven by a series of economic and geo-political aims that center on the seizure of Iraq’s oil resources and the assertion of US global hegemony.”

The response of the American media, and particularly its liberal wing, was very different. Powell’s litany of lies was presented as the gospel truth, an unanswerable indictment of the Iraqi government.

Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen, who rushed off a column before he could have examined Powell’s allegations, declared, “The evidence he presented to the United Nations—some of it circumstantial, some of it absolutely bone-chilling in its detail—had to prove to anyone that Iraq not only hasn’t accounted for its weapons of mass destruction but without a doubt still retains them. Only a fool—or possibly a Frenchman—could conclude otherwise.”

The editorial board of the *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller was at the center of the Bush administration’s campaign of lies—declared one week later that there “is ample evidence that Iraq has produced highly toxic VX nerve gas and anthrax and has the capacity to produce a lot more. It has concealed these materials, lied about them, and more recently failed to account for them to the current inspectors.”

Subsequent developments would prove who was lying. The Bush administration and its media accomplices conspired to drag the US into a war that led to the deaths of more than one million people—a colossal crime for which no one has yet been held accountable.

Fifteen years later, the script has been pulled from the closet and dusted off. This time, instead of “weapons of mass destruction,” it is “Russian meddling in the US elections.” Once again, assertions by US intelligence agencies and operatives are treated as fact. Once again, the media is braying for war. Once again, the cynicism and hypocrisy of the American government—which intervenes in the domestic politics of every state on the planet and has been relentlessly expanding its operations in Eastern Europe—are ignored.

The argument presented by the American media is that the alleged existence of a fly-by-night operation, employing a few hundred people, with a budget amounting to a minuscule fraction of total election spending in the US, constitutes a “a virtual war against the United States through 21st-century tools of disinformation and propaganda” (*New York Times*).

In the countless articles and media commentary along this vein, nowhere can one find a serious analysis of the Mueller indictment of the Russians itself, let alone an examination of the real motivations behind the US campaign against Russia. The fact that the indictment does not even involve the Russian government or state officials is treated as a nonissue.

While the present campaign over Russian “meddling” has much in common with the claims about “weapons of mass destruction,” the implications are far more ominous. The “war on terror” is exhausted, in part because the US is allied in Syria and elsewhere with the Islamic fundamentalist organizations it was purportedly fighting.

More fundamentally, the quarter-century of invasions and occupations that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union is rapidly developing into a conflict between major nuclear-armed powers. The effort of the American ruling class to offset its economic decline using military force is leading mankind to the brink of another world war. As the National Defense Strategy, published less than a month before the release of the indictments, declared, “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security.”

Russia is seen by dominant sections of the military-intelligence apparatus as a principal obstacle to US efforts to control the Middle East and to take on China—and it is this that has been at the center of the conflict between the Democratic Party and the Trump administration.

There have already been a series of clashes in recent weeks between the world’s two largest nuclear-armed powers. On February 3, a Russian close-air support fighter was shot down by al-Nusra Front fighters, which are indirectly allied with the United States in its proxy war against the government of Bashar Al-Assad. Then, on February 7 and 8, Russian soldiers were killed in US air and artillery barrages in Deir Ezzor, in what survivors called a “massacre.” Both the US and Russian governments have sought to downplay the scale of the clash, but some sources have reported the number killed to be in the hundreds.

Even as US and Russian forces clashed in Syria, representatives of the Kremlin and the Pentagon sparred at the Munich security conference this weekend over the deployment and development of nuclear weapons. While accusing Russia of violating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, Washington this month issued a nuclear posture review envisioning a massive expansion of the deployment of battlefield nuclear weapons.

The Mueller indictment is intended to provide an appropriate “narrative” for military aggression motivated by different aims. At the same time, it serves as a ready-made pretext for censorship and domestic repression that goes far beyond the extraordinary measures adopted under the framework of the “war on terror.” Russia, the American people are supposed to believe, uses domestic

social opposition to weaken the United States, rendering political dissent effectively treasonous.

Already, this campaign has led the major US technology firms to implement far-reaching measures to censor political speech on the Internet. Google is manipulating its search results and Facebook is manipulating its news feeds, while seeking to turn the social media platform it has developed into an instrument of corporate-state surveillance.

Even more extreme measures are being planned and implemented, motivated by the basic principle that the greater the lie, the more aggressive the methods required to enforce it. The target of the repressive measures is not Russia, but the American working class. The ruling elite is well aware that as it plots war abroad, it stands upon a social powder keg at home.

The working class must draw the necessary conclusions from its past experiences. In 2003, the Democratic Party supported the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq and provided it with the necessary political cover. Now, the Democrats, along with their appendages among the organizations of the upper-middle class, are at the forefront of the campaign for war, employing neo-McCarthyite tactics to criminalize opposition while seeking to subordinate all popular opposition to the Trump administration to its right-wing and militarist agenda.

The urgent task is to mobilize the working class, in the United States and internationally, against the entire apparatus of the capitalist ruling elite. The fight against war and dictatorship is at the same time the fight against inequality and exploitation, for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a global socialist society.



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