

Still Spinning at the U.S. State Department

by Michael Curtis

Have the Obama White House, the US State Department and part of the Washington media, press and TV, been engaged in a vast left-wing conspiracy to lie and deceive the American public and then cover up misleading statements by officials made for political reasons to sell the nuclear deal with Iran? One might think so since no U.S. official or politician has been held responsible for the tangle of lies, attempt at censorship, and linguistic equivocations on the issue.

Censorship and control over publications and speech is a familiar practice in the world, in London, Moscow, and Washington, D.C. as elsewhere. One stunning example of ingenious censorship is a two page written on July 13, 1944 to George Orwell by T.S Eliot, in his capacity as a director of the London publisher, Faber & Faber, recently been made public by the British Library. This letter explains why his firm was rejecting Orwell's book *Animal Farm* though he thought it was a distinguished piece of writing and the fable was very skillfully handled.

Animal Farm was rejected by four London publishers for reasons similar to those given by Eliot. The book, an allegory and satire both of Stalinism with Stalin as a traitor to the Russian Revolution, and of the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union, was found too controversial. Eliot doubted that "this was the right point of view from which to criticize the political situation at the present time." Indirectly, he was referring to the wartime alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union. Eliot also informed Orwell that his point of view, "which I take to be generally Trotskyite, is not convincing."

Eliot in the literary arena had done what Josef Stalin, the Soviet dictator, had brutally done in real life. Not only did he remove his rivals by murdering Leon Trotsky, next to Vladimir Lenin the key figure in the Bolshevik capture of power in Russia in 1917, as well as many other Communist leaders, including even Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the NKVD, the secret police. He also murdered them figuratively by eliminating their presence in history. The Soviet so-called "enemies of the people" had their images removed from photos and documents as if they had never existed.

Though Orwell and other critics of the Soviet Union knew about them, it took many years for the full extent of the crimes and elimination of people by Lenin as well as Stalin to be revealed. The brutality of the despotism in Moscow only fully came to light when the Russian archives were finally opened to the public. The story of the despotism employed by Stalin to remain in power was not only one of extreme brutality, ruthless murder and assassination but also one of manipulation and removal of evidence.

No one is likely to compare the Stalinist era with London or Washington today. Murder and assassination are not exactly customary in the White House or anywhere in official Washington, D.C. or Britain. But deception, spinning, providing misleading information, and removal of evidence, is not unknown. In Washington, as in the Soviet Union, there have been recent attempts to control the present and to change the past.

The great Machiavelli observed, "occasionally, words must veil the facts. But let this happen in a way that no one become aware of it." This seemed to have been the objective of Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security adviser in the White House. Finally, he revealed that in his role as spin doctor he had deliberately mislead the media, the Washington foreign policy establishment that called "The Blob," and the country as a whole, over the nature of U.S. negotiations with Iran

over the nuclear deal.

Rhodes coopted part of the willing press corps and created what he called an “echo chamber” of journalists to convey a narrative that the US had opened negotiations because a more moderate Iranian government had come into office after the seemingly moderate Hassan Rouhani was elected President of Iran in 2013.

But in fact he lied. Secret negotiations had started more than two years earlier in 2011 in Muscat Oman, when the extreme anti-American Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was still President of Iran. The talks were attended by then Senator John Kerry, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi with the knowledge, if not perhaps the approval of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini.

It was not the U.S, but Salehi, who broke the story of the meeting saying that he became aware in 2011 of President Barack Obama’s desire to meet bilaterally with Iran. This meeting was followed by another one, lower level preparatory talks, on July 7, 2012 in Oran that was attended by Jake Sullivan, deputy chief of staff to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Not coincidentally, the MIT educated Salehi became president of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, and was the Iranian party to the nuclear deal.

Connected with this issue is the shameful story concerning the attitude of the U.S. State Department towards the Fox journalist James Rosen and its evasions of the truth. Rosen, at a press conference in December 2013, had asked the State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki a simple straight forward question, “Is it the policy of the State Department, where the preservation or the secrecy of secret negotiations is concerned to lie in order to achieve that goal?” He asked the question because of the statement made earlier in February 2013, by then State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland that there were no secret, direct talks with Iran at the time

on a government to government level. Salehi's information directly contradicts Nuland's statement.

Psaki replied to Rosen, "I think there are times where diplomacy needs privacy in order to progress. This is a good example of that." Some time later, Fox News found that the exchange, about eight minutes, between Psaki and Rosen had been deleted from the State Department's official website.

At first in May 2016, the erasure of the exchange was explained by Elizabeth Trudeau, director of the State Department press office, as a "glitch." A few days later on June 1, 2016, the current spokesperson Rear Admiral John Kirby admitted that it was not a glitch but that the video had been censored and deliberately erased. He did not know by whom but he did know that an official in the State Department public affairs office had made a special request to a technician to remove the eight minutes. It is hard to believe that no one in the White House or the State Department recalls the individual involved in ordering the decision to delete the eight minutes of the video.

Interestingly, Admiral Kirby thanked James Rosen, and by implication Fox News for bringing the whole matter to his attention. Equally interesting, the parties involved have not been reprimanded but have been promoted. For herself, Jen Psaki, who stated she had no knowledge of nor would she have approved of any form of editing or cutting any briefing transcript on any subject while at the State Department, is now White House Communications Director.

Victoria Nuland, former ambassador to NATO, is presently Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs.

Ben Rhodes told at least part of the truth when he finally confessed there were discreet channels of communications established between the U.S. and Iran in 2012.

But Rhodes is still at the White House spinning the fable that the Iran nuclear deal was beneficial for the United States. In view of the now revealed censorship, lies, and misleading statements concerning the Iran nuclear deal, it is important to inquire into two issues: the exact concessions made by the US in reaching the deal; and the nature of the spinning by the “echo chamber” on other issues.