

# Which News Is Faker?

by Richard Kostelanetz

Local radio told me today that the *Washington Post*, increasingly more dubious in its anti-Trump hysteria, reports that Obama last summer told Trump to tell Putin to stop interfering in the forthcoming election. The glib conclusion is that Trump must have acknowledged, if not supported, Putin's activities. Obama was reportedly citing some secret intelligence documents that were shown to him before being returned to their unknown source.

What's wrong with this story? Why wasn't it "news" before? Remember that more than seven months have passed since the election and even longer since Trump's purported meeting with Obama took place. Did that meeting actually happen? If so, what else was discussed?

A further reason for making me wonder if this conversation ever took place is that I can't imagine a previous lame duck president doing likewise by the other party's candidate before an election. Can anyone imagine Bill Clinton meeting with Dubya, Dubya with Obama, or Dwight Eisenhower with John Kennedy? Now it's true that Obama made unprecedented moves, even breaking presidential rules, but this one puzzles me. Can we know exactly when this meeting happened and what else was discussed?

However, the real problem here is that Obama's claim that some unidentified "intelligence" operatives claim that the Russian hacking had occurred doesn't mean that it actually did. Since the "intelligence" documents are not available, whatever they might have said, whatever "evidence" they might have contained, cannot be verified. To some guardians of journalistic standards, they shouldn't have been mentioned at

all. Respecting yet higher standards, no reputable historian would cite documents he hadn't seen first hand.

This latest "headline" strikes me as part of a continuing anti-democratic effort of Hillary supporters to reverse the results of the 2016 presidential election. This depends upon two myths I find hard to accept: 1.) That Russian leaders/oligarchs preferred Trump, obviously a loose cannon, over the Hillary they knew. 2.) That alleged Russian tampering affected voters in those Midwestern states that Democrats expected to win to take the electoral college. The latter is particularly ludicrous. If anyone believes either of these, try speaking them to yourself before a mirror without looking down or smirking. This is called The Straight Face test.

I'm old enough to remember Joseph McCarthy, the evil senator from Wisconsin, whose trick was to invent a fake charge that newspapers and radio would publicize until it was refuted. At that time McCarthy would fabricate another scurrilous charge that would likewise have a short life. So the cycle would be repeated until the press refused to accept his bait.

Considering now the trail of false charges against Donald Trump, I find the McCarthyite process being repeated today, albeit with different characters and other biases. The delay in discovering and reporting this latest "story" makes me doubt it even more. In my judgment, simply, McCarthyism is no more acceptable today than it was six decades ago.

P.S. I wrote this solely based on radio reports that, admittedly, I didn't hear accurately while doing housework, inventing one major detail; but as an essentially literary man, I'm responding to a credible fiction with another credible fiction.