



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on May 8, 2017

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Obama's Big Brother "Nudge Squads"

The U.S. government created a disinformation program to propagandize, to embarrass, to frame, and to discredit its enemies — everyday Americans, not criminals and terrorists.



"The [Obama] administration's war on leaks and other efforts to control information are the most aggressive I've seen since the Nixon administration, when I was one of the editors involved in The Washington Post's investigation of Watergate. The 30 experienced Washington journalists at a variety of news organizations whom I interviewed for this report could not remember any precedent."

The quotation above is taken from a special investigative report published in 2013 by the Committee to Protect Journalists entitled *The Obama Administration and the Press*. The author of the report, Leonard Downie, Jr., a former executive editor of the *Washington Post*, lamented the fact that President Obama had repeatedly broken his "promise that his administration would be the most open and transparent in American history."

"In the Obama administration's Washington, government officials are increasingly afraid to talk to the press," Downie said, pointing to the administration's "Insider Threat Program" that greatly stepped up the use of lie-detector tests and scrutiny of federal employee telephone and e-mail records. The program, he reported, "requires all federal employees to help" by "monitoring the behavior of their colleagues."

However, the Obama administration's eight-year run not only clamped down on federal employees and whistleblowers, but also greatly expanded the already very dangerous Big Brother surveillance and propaganda programs it had inherited from the Bush administration. In 2013, leaks revealed that the American National Security Agency (NSA) and its British counterpart, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), had collaborated in illegal mass-surveillance activities and the bulk mining and processing of personal data. Of equal, if not greater, importance was the revelation the same year that the NSA and GCHQ also were (and may still be) collaborating on an illegal and Orwellian-sounding propaganda and cyber-espionage program that employs disinformation, "dirty tricks," and behavior-modification psychology to "nudge" the public into accepting the policies and programs that the political-class rulers deem are in the "public interest." The Obama administration referred to this totalitarian brainchild as its "Behavioral Insights Team," which it explicitly stated was modeled on the British organization of the same name. The Behavioral Insights Team draws much of its inspiration from two "experts" who are notorious as advocates for authoritarian agendas: Obama "Energy Czar" John Holdren and former Obama "Regulatory Czar" Cass Sunstein, co-author of *Nudge: Improving Decisions*



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About Health, Wealth, and Happiness.

“Destroy, Deny, Degrade, Disrupt”

While the term “Behavioral Insights Team” sounds fairly innocuous, leaked documents show the frightening nature and potential of the apparatus, instructing government agents on methods to “destroy, deny, degrade [and] disrupt” targeted individuals, companies, and organizations. It should be noted that the activities and tactics these “Nudge Squads” use are not meant to be employed against hostile foreign powers, enemy combatants, terrorists, drug cartels, and the like; they are to be used against people who have not been charged, tried, or convicted of crime.

One of the leaked documents, a manual ominously entitled *The Art of Deception: Training for a New Generation of Online Covert Operations*, is discussed on journalist Glenn Greenwald’s website, *The Intercept*, in an article entitled “How Covert Agents Infiltrate the Internet to Manipulate, Deceive, and Destroy Reputations.” *The Art of Deception* was produced by the formerly super-secret department of the GCHQ known as JTRIG (Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group). Greenwald’s article details how other JTRIG manuals provide tips on how to “discredit a target” and “disrupt” his life. JTRIG proposes, for example, using a “honey-trap” (a well-known term in spy tradecraft referring to sexual entrapment) and planting fake news stories and fake e-mails, and changing the target’s webpage to discredit/incriminate him. The article shows a page from a JTRIG document with the headline “Discredit a Target” that instructs agents to:

- Set up a honey-trap
- Change their photos on social networking sites
- Write a blog purporting to be one of their victims
- Email/text their colleagues, neighbours [sic], friends, etc.

Another GCHQ/JTRIG report is entitled “Behavioural Science Support for JTRIG’s Effects and Online HUMINT Operations.” It carries a cover date of “10 March 2011” and is stamped “TOP SECRET.” The author is given as Mandeep K. Dhami, Ph.D., of the “Human Systems Group, Information Management Department, Dstl.”

“All of JTRIG’s operations are conducted using cyber technology,” the report states. “Staff described a range of methods/techniques that have been used to-date for conducting effects operations.” These included, says the report:

- Uploading YouTube videos containing “persuasive” communications (to discredit, promote distrust, dissuade, deter, delay or disrupt)
- Setting up Facebook groups, forums, blogs and Twitter accounts that encourage and monitor discussion on a topic (to discredit, promote distrust, dissuade, deter, delay or disrupt)....
- Sending spoof e-mails and text messages from a fake person or mimicking a real person (to discredit, promote distrust, dissuade, deceive, deter, delay or disrupt)
- Providing spoof online resources such as magazines and books that provide inaccurate information (to disrupt, delay, deceive, discredit, promote distrust, dissuade, deter or denigrate/degrade)....
- Providing online access to uncensored material (to disrupt)



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- Interrupting (i.e., filtering, deleting, creating or modifying) communications between real customers and traders (to deny, disrupt, delay, deceive, dissuade or deter)
- Taking over control of online websites (to deny, disrupt, discredit or delay)...
- Hosting targets' online communications/websites for collecting SIGINT (to disrupt, delay, deter or deny)
- Contacting host websites asking them to remove material (to deny, disrupt, delay, dissuade or deter)

On March 31, 2017 WikiLeaks released "Vault 7-'Marble,'" including 676 source code files for the CIA's secret anti-forensic *Marble Framework*. Marble, WikiLeaks explained, is used to hamper forensic investigators and anti-virus companies from attributing viruses, trojans, and hacking attacks to the CIA. In other words, the Marble revelations further confirm that the CIA and other intelligence agencies have developed the ability to hack computers and plant viruses and malware (or incriminating false e-mails, photos, or documents) and effectively cover their trail so that it either will be untraceable, or will be attributed to another actor (say, for instance, Russia, China, Iran, ISIS, or a private citizen).

How widely are these techniques, tactics, and technologies already being deployed by our "intelligence community"? Only a very tiny minority of government operatives on the inside of these agencies knows for sure. The rest of us must speculate and infer, and try to make sensible determinations about the real world from a confusing overload of information, misinformation, and disinformation swirling about us. We will be hopelessly lost if we allow those with their hands on the levers of power in government also to possess the power to deceive us at will, and thus lead us into increasing acceptance of limitations on our freedoms. That is a path that leads inevitably to tyranny.

Photo: AP Images

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