

Russia & the US Press: The Article the CJR Didn't Publish

Thursday 23 February 2023, by [CAMPBELL Duncan](#) (Date first published: 4 February 2023).

Two and a half years ago, the Columbia Journalism Review refused to publish Duncan Campbell's investigation into The Nation magazine and its apparent support for Vladimir Putin. It is published here in full

In 2018, Duncan Campbell was commissioned by the “voice of journalism” and “watchdog of the press”, *Columbia Journalism Review*, to write an investigation into the venerable New York magazine *The Nation*, and its apparent support for Russia's territorial ambitions. In 2020, after a full fact check, legal review and edit, the article was cancelled two days before the scheduled publication. In 2022, months after Putin's full invasion of Ukraine, the *CJR* again refused to publish the article. *Byline Times* is publishing the final agreed copy here, and Duncan Campbell explains what happened in a follow-up article: [Who Watches the Watchdog](#).

***The Nation* 's Russia Problem**

One afternoon, five weeks before Election Day in 2016, on the 21st floor of a tower overlooking Manhattan's Eighth Avenue, members of *The Nation*'s editorial advisory board gathered for a twice-annual meeting. Katrina vanden Heuvel—the magazine's editor, publisher, and owner—invited attendees to hear from a special guest, who had come to warn them that criticizing Donald Trump's involvements with Russia, or his relationship with Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, could trigger global nuclear annihilation. Vanden Heuvel, who was 56, gestured to her husband, Stephen F. Cohen, then 77, a retired professor of Russian studies. Russia and the United States “were closer to war than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis,” he told the board. He also derided Democrats and American media organizations for “demonization of Russian President Putin.”

Philip Green, a political theorist who had been on the board for forty years, listened with skepticism. Cohen's theory, “presented with deadly and urgent seriousness,” he thought, appeared to be channeling the paranoia of the far-right. Others felt the same way. But afterward, Green says, “It became the party line.”

Cohen would go on to make the same argument in at least 160 *Nation* articles; more than a hundred talk radio show appearances; and on Russia's state-owned international channel, *Russia Today* (RT). In many cases, his articles were “essentially transcribed radio programs that were unedited and did not go through other editorial filters,” according to Robert Dreyfuss, a *Nation* contributing editor and investigative journalist. Accusing the Russian government of committing an act of war by hacking the Democratic National Committee, Cohen warned, might mean “[the necessity of actual war, conceivably nuclear war, against Russia](#).” He wrote that “villainizing the Kremlin—without much evidence—is increasing the possibility of a US-Russian war.” Once Trump took office, Cohen branded media investigations of Russia's involvement with the Trump campaign as “[neo-McCarthyism](#)” and “[Kremlin-baiting](#).”

For these critiques, Cohen won praise from outlets such as *Fox News* and *Breitbart*, anathema to

The Nation readership; soon, he began making periodic appearances on *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. “Today, in my scholarly, long-term judgment, relations between the United States and Russia are more dangerous than they have ever—let me repeat, ever—been, including the Cuban missile crisis,” Cohen told Carlson in 2018.

Nation employees became uneasy about Cohen’s assertions and who was airing his ideas. “The people who work there, especially the younger staff, are disgruntled about the Russia coverage,” Adam Shatz, a former *Nation* writer and literary editor, says. A joke began circulating around the office: “We tried to fact check Steve’s pieces but we couldn’t find any facts to check.” (Vanden Heuvel denies that her husband’s work was not checked by normal standards, saying that whether or not something is checked “depends on the complexity of the piece.”)

Some left *The Nation* or stopped writing for it. Anne Nelson, a former war correspondent now teaching at Columbia University, came to feel that the magazine’s stance on Russia “is destroying a valuable institution on the left.” Subscribers and donors, too, expressed displeasure with *The Nation*’s Russia pieces. One reader tweeted: “Sounds like the Nation has a pee tape out there somewhere.”

After Trump entered the White House, Green wrote to vanden Heuvel, complaining at least thirty-five articles in the magazine had denounced investigations of Trump and Russia as being driven by a new cold war, Kremlin-baiting, or neo-McCarthyite hysteria. He argued that nuclear annihilation “should not become a weapon to be brandished whenever people begin to take concerns about oppression and human rights too seriously.” He went on, “Such language, especially when it comes as editorials, has the effect of stating an official position, drawing a line in the sand and leaving many genuine progressives on the other side of that line.”

“It represents a turning away from a path of principle-speaking truth to power—to one of abject surrender to power.”

- Philip Green

Green’s critique had no discernible effect on Cohen’s output in *The Nation*. But vanden Heuvel made a peace offering: she granted two established *Nation* writers one-shot opportunities to criticize the stance that Cohen was pushing: Katha Pollitt, who devoted her column, “[Subject to Debate](#),” to Russia (“I don’t understand this magazine’s adamant skepticism” about Russian interference in the election, she wrote. “If we don’t know what happened...how can we be so sure that it didn’t matter?”) and [Joshua Holland](#) (“It’s possible to take skepticism too far”). After their columns ran, *The Nation*’s messaging on Russia and Trump resumed as before.

Nation staffers were exasperated. “I thought it was bad for the magazine’s reputation and its stated principles,” Shatz tells me. He and thirteen colleagues drafted a letter of concern to their boss. Downplaying the Trump administration’s conduct “is a dereliction of our responsibility as progressive journalists,” it read. “The magazine is not only playing into the hands of the Trump administration, but doing a dishonor to its best traditions.” The letter reached vanden Heuvel’s desk in mid-June 2017; soon, it was [leaked to The Washington Post](#).

Vanden Heuvel convened a meeting. Dreyfuss, a national security specialist, expressed his particular concerns. A few years earlier, after Dreyfuss had published a few pieces highly critical of Russia, vanden Heuvel told him to stay off the subject. It was an unusual request—she seldom communicated directly with writers handled by other editors—and Cohen had exerted influence over the decision. (“I did not agree with what Dreyfuss was writing,” Cohen tells me.) At the time,

Dreyfuss had chosen to abandon writing for *The Nation* altogether; now he was upset as a reader. At the meeting, vanden Heuvel was “courteous and listened to everyone,” he recalls. They agreed that he would write a weekly column about Trump and Russia. Vanden Heuvel’s aim, she tells me, was “to foster, not police, debate.”

Still, tensions continued. In April 2019, *The Nation* announced that vanden Heuvel would move sideways, to become “Editorial Director.” After twenty-four years leading the magazine, she would remain publisher and “edit select writers and contribute regular commentary,” according to a press release. Her tenure as editor—which spanned the Clinton impeachment and George W. Bush’s 2000 election; 9/11 and the Iraq invasion; Hurricane Katrina, the financial crisis, and Donald Trump—provided ample challenges, many of which she met. Her colleagues, even her critics, have spoken to her intelligence and kindness. Her many admirable qualities as an editor, they tell me, make it all the more frustrating that, on Russia, she has had a blind spot. “She happens to be married to a very strongly opinionated expert on Russia,” Kai Bird, a *Nation* contributing editor, says. Vanden Heuvel’s baton was passed to D.D. “Don” Guttenplan, a former *Village Voice* writer and editor-in-chief of [Jewish Quarterly](#), based in London. He took over last year, with none of this behind him.

Controversy and internal schisms over *The Nation*’s Russia coverage go back generations. The oldest weekly magazine in the US, *The Nation* was established fifty years before the Russian revolution. Guttenplan [has written about](#), as the Bolsheviks seized power, Oswald Garrison Villard, the owner and editor of *The Nation* until 1935, veered hard left and employed “one of Stalin’s most energetic apologists,” Louis Fischer, as the magazine’s Moscow correspondent. Fischer covered up Stalin’s extermination of Ukraine by famine, in 1932, and [falsely denied reports of starvation in Russia a year later](#). (Leon Trotsky described Fischer a “merchant of lies.”) In 1945, Fischer left *The Nation* after turning against communism and feuding with a new editor. He went on to teach Soviet studies at Princeton, where he would eventually overlap with Cohen.

Fischer’s role was eventually taken over by Walter Duranty—a reporter who had been fired by *The New York Times* [in 1940 for misreporting the Russian famine and Stalin’s infamous show trials](#). On November 2, 1946, *The Nation* published Duranty’s account of Stalin’s first postwar purge. He gave readers assurance that it was “a general cleaning out of the cobwebs and mess which accumulate in any house.” (In 1988, Russian historians estimated that [a million citizens were arrested](#).)

During World War Two, *The Nation*’s opposition to fascism and avowed support for Stalin temporarily positioned the magazine as mainstream and patriotic. When Freda Kirchwey, the editor at the time, celebrated her twenty-fifth anniversary at the magazine, in 1944, she was honored with a dinner attended by 1,300 people, including Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Albert Einstein.

A decade later, however, Kirchwey, who continued to support Stalin and advocated detente with the Soviet Union, would become a target of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and face the House Un-American Activities Committee—a turn of events that, past and present *Nation* writers say, fostered reflexive distrust of federal intelligence agencies at the magazine.

The Nation’s current succession began in 1977, when Victor Navasky, backed financially by a twenty-six year-old Harvard graduate named Hamilton Fish III, [acquired the magazine for \\$150,000](#) and raised nearly \$1 million more for a relaunch. As editor, Navasky established an internship program, aiming to form a meticulous fact-checking department. Guttenplan began at *The Nation* in this role, in 1979, as did vanden Heuvel, in 1980. Being an intern, vanden Heuvel tells me, “introduced me to *The Nation*’s courage.”

After earning her college degree—from Princeton, in 1982—and spending a couple of years as a

production assistant at ABC News, vanden Heuvel was hired on staff at *The Nation*. She rose quickly, becoming an assistant editor at twenty-five. In 1989, she was promoted to editor-at-large and extensively covered the USSR. “Katrina is smart,” George Black, a former foreign editor of *The Nation*, recalls, “but was always a little embarrassed that [people would think that] she had got there because she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth.” Vanden Heuvel’s maternal grandfather, Jules Stein, founded the Music Corporation of America, in 1924, which earned him a fortune; she always knew a life of privilege. “Victor groomed her very early to be the ascension, to be the designated editor eventually,” Black says.

Navasky’s recollection is different; he says that he didn’t pick her as his successor until the 1990s, but was pleased to hire a standout former intern. She understood the magazine, shared its political values, and would be reliable, Navasky tells me. It “didn’t hurt,” he adds, that she was young, smart, wealthy. By the time he chose vanden Heuvel, she was married to Cohen, whom she had met as a student—she had majored in politics and he had been her mentor in Russian studies. Several times a year, they traveled to Moscow; they lived there “off and on three to four months a year, from ‘85 to ‘91,” she remembers. “Part of my coverage of Russiagate has been informed by my experience covering Russia.” Between 1982 and 1987, Cohen wrote about fifty “Sovieticus” columns for *The Nation*. He became so close to the Soviet leadership that, on May Day 1989, President Mikhail Gorbachev invited him [to address the country’s elite and a global TV audience. “I spoke live from Red Square, in Russian,” Cohen recalls. “It was nerve-racking.”](#) Later, President George H.W. Bush consulted Cohen about Gorbachev.

In 1995, at the age of thirty-six, vanden Heuvel succeeded Navasky as editor of *The Nation*, and in 2005 as publisher. (One of her first acts was placing Cohen on the masthead as a contributing editor.) She also bought the company, known since 2015 as The Nation LLC. Like all American media outlets, the magazine has had times of financial struggle; since the seventies, in Navasky’s recollection, there has only been one year in which the company turned a profit. Aside from subscriptions and other sales—there is a *Nation* shop, a wine club, and a travel program—funding comes from thousands of individual donations, including from vanden Heuvel herself, who covers any and all deficits. “It can range from 500,000 dollars to a bit more,” she says. Over time, she settled into total control of the magazine.

For Cohen, however, the end of Soviet communism meant that media attention on him (and other Russia experts) fell off a cliff. After 1990, his contributions to *The Nation* dropped to less than one a year, including a short essay on golfing. By the mid-nineties, enrollment in his Russian studies classes shrunk dramatically; in 1998 he left Princeton for New York University. He continued to write occasional pieces. For *Newsweek*, Cohen contributed a column praising Vladimir Putin’s first two terms as Russia’s president, headlined “The Savior.”

In March 2008, Cohen made his first appearance on *RT*, during which he criticized US missile defense plans. (Vanden Heuvel’s *RT* debut followed that November, when she signaled *The Nation*’s support for Barack Obama.) In December, [Cohen returned to RT](#), to say that US-Russia relations were “worse than during the Cold War—and that Obama would be no help.” The same month, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev awarded Cohen [Russia’s Order of Friendship](#) “for his large contribution to strengthening Russian-American cooperation.” Early in 2009, with his wife in attendance, Cohen received the award from Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov, Russia’s foreign minister, during a ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow.

Cohen has proclaimed a “new Cold War” in the pages of *The Nation* for almost two decades. After Russian forces annexed Crimea and moved to destabilize eastern Ukraine, in March 2014, he became increasingly vociferous, attacking NATO and the US and supporting President Putin. His output in *The Nation* began a dramatic uptick, to what became seventy pieces a year, reversing a

twenty-year decline in media visibility.

As Cohen raised his profile, he faced criticism. “I am disappointed in Cohen’s blithe disregard for the truth when it doesn’t suit whatever goals he is pursuing,” Steve Hochstadt, a professor of history at Illinois College, wrote in a letter-to-the-editor published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. In a letter to the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), Cohen lamented, “I have been repeatedly assailed in leading publications and on the internet as Putin’s American apologist [[New Republic](#)],’ ‘useful idiot [[HuffPost](#)],’ ‘dupe [[New York magazine](#)],’ ‘best friend [[The Daily Beast](#)],’ and ‘Toady [[New Republic](#), again].” He could have added “Putin’s pal” [[Slate](#)] and “Putin’s Patsy” [[Free Beacon](#)]. (In his letter, he also criticized ASEEES for seeking to rename a fellowship honoring Cohen and his mentor that vanden Heuvel’s KAT Charitable Foundation had funded with \$413,000 over three years. Her foundation annually donates about a million dollars to organizations including *The Nation* Institute and Columbia University.) When I speak to Cohen, he accepts that he has, at times, made mistakes: “I could get things wrong or misremember.” But in terms of his overall views on Russia, he says, “I’m an outlier but am not alone.”

It’s true that, even as *The Nation* has promoted a uniquely defensive stance on Russia, some on the left—including journalists—have joined Trump supporters and the right in pushing pro-Putin information and theories. In June 2014, a group of like-minded commentators met at the World Russia Forum, first on Capitol Hill and then at a reception in the Russian Federation’s DC Embassy, hosted by Ambassador Sergei Kislyak. Cohen spoke alongside James Carden, a writer for the Trump-supporting *National Interest*. In *The American Conservative*, he wrote “Vladimir Putin is playing a strong hand well.” After Carden praised Cohen as “the country’s foremost scholar of Russian studies”, Vanden Heuvel hired him as a contributing writer.

At the next year’s World Russia Forum, vanden Heuvel chaired a session during which she accused mainstream media of being “very dangerous for the security of our country.” She described the Washington Post, to which she contributes a weekly column, as “like Pravda on the Potomac—it is a regime change newspaper.” She and Cohen were joined by Gilbert “Gil” Doctorow, an early contributor to *Russia Insider*, a site that platforms pro-Russian, homophobic, and anti-Semitic propaganda—and a two-time writer for *The Nation*. Doctorow then penned that Cohen’s “voice and reasoning struggles to be heard” by a wide audience.

Russia Insider, like other pro-Putin and anti-Semitic sites, such as [jewworldorder.org](#), has amplified Cohen’s takes on Russia for radical right audiences and conspiracy theorists, dragging along *The Nation*’s reputation. “I have been reprinted by the *Daily Stormer* at least two or three times,” Cohen tells me. When I ask vanden Heuvel about this, she says, “It’s just the way the Internet works.” In January 2018, about three years after she became aware that *Nation* pieces were being posted on *Russia Insider*, her attorneys sent a cease-and-desist letter, which she shared with CJR. Vanden Heuvel tells me that Cohen has since parted ways with Doctorow, “largely around the *Russia Insider* situation,” she explains. “Steve thought that was not sustainable, to say the least.” Still, when I check *Russia Insider*, the homepage leads with a link to a podcast by Stephen Cohen.

At *The Nation* office early in August 2017, vanden Heuvel received a copy of a story claiming to present “hard evidence” that the DNC had not been hacked during the recent presidential race. The author was Patrick Lawrence. Two years earlier, Lawrence had participated in the session on American media that vanden Heuvel had hosted in the Senate. Much of his writing, lately for *Salon*, had matched Cohen’s views and Russia’s foreign policy objectives. Of Cohen, he had written, “a place may await him among America’s many prophets without honor among their own.” After press reports broke news of the DNC hack, in July 2016, Lawrence had written a piece for *Salon* arguing that Democrats had fabricated a “Russian Hacker Conspiracy.” If shown evidence that a hacking had happened, he advised, “Join me, please, in having absolutely none of it. There is no ‘Russian actor’ at

the bottom of this swamp, to put my position bluntly. You will never, ever be offered persuasive evidence otherwise.” Six weeks later, vanden Heuvel announced that she was hiring Lawrence for *The Nation*.

When vanden Heuvel saw his new piece, it seemed, she was hooked. “Katrina was fast-tracking,” according to a staff member present at the time. Backchannel messages expressing concern about the story spread around the office—“It was suggested, let’s go a little slower,” a former *Nation* staffer recalls—but vanden Heuvel was not deterred. (The staffers I spoke with asked not to be quoted by name, fearing that their comments would prejudice current and future employers.) Several said that the two most senior editors who were shown Lawrence’s copy before publication—Executive Editor Richard Kim, who has since left, and Managing Editor Roane Carey—both advised against running it.

When I speak to vanden Heuvel, she confirms that she guided the Lawrence story directly to publication without fact-checking the substance of Lawrence’s claims. She says that her assistant checked that quotes from a report had been copied correctly in the text, but nothing more. She denies rushing the story out, however, and says that the two editors I’d been told had advised against publishing had, in fact, not. (Richard Kim has declined to comment. Roane Carey says that he advised vanden Heuvel to fact-check the article before publication and “to get an expert to review the article before publishing to evaluate the technical claims made.”)

The piece, “[A New Report Raises Big Questions About Last Year’s DNC Hack](#),” with a sub-headline stating that it was “an inside job,” ran on the website of *The Nation* on August 9, 2017. “Forensic investigators, intelligence analysts, system designers, program architects, and computer scientists of long experience and strongly credentialed [sic] are now producing evidence disproving the official version of key events last year,” Lawrence wrote, of information retrieved from DNC headquarters. “Their work is intricate and continues at a kinetic pace as we speak.”

Lawrence invented situations and people, got facts wrong, and made far-reaching claims without substantiation. Information that Lawrence described as “hard evidence” had, in reality, been manufactured by members of a Trump-supporting website, Disobedient Media, founded in 2017 by William Craddick, a former law student who claimed to have started the “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory. The primary source in Lawrence’s story, cited eighteen times, was an anonymous figure, a supposed forensic expert known as “Forensicator.” That name was created by Disobedient Media in consultation with Tim Leonard, a British hacker, as an identity through which to present the “Forensicator report,” the document purporting to substantiate the “inside job” theory.

The report’s contention, that stolen DNC files were “likely downloaded by a person with physical access to a computer possibly connected to the informal DNC network,” was dynamite if true, appearing to support the Seth Rich conspiracy theory popularized by *Fox News*. Rich, a Democratic Party voting specialist, was murdered in Washington in July 2016; Sean Hannity told *Fox News* viewers that Rich had sent hacked emails from the DNC to Wikileaks. (Sued by Rich’s family, *Fox* withdrew the claim. Dreyfuss debunked the Rich allegation in *The Nation*.)

In his piece, Lawrence cited former intelligence officials, members of a group called Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), stating that they endorsed the report’s claims. “It’s QED, theorem demonstrated,” William Binney, a former technical director at the National Security Agency, was quoted as saying. Five days after the *Nation* story ran, Binney went on [Tucker Carlson Tonight](#) to say that official hacking reports were “not backed up by facts.” The appearance attracted the attention of President Trump, who instructed [Mike Pompeo](#), head of the Central Intelligence Agency, to meet with Binney. (Nothing came of their discussion.)

When I met with Binney the next month, however, he told me that, when the Lawrence piece was published, the VIPS had not actually checked the evidence or reasoning in the Forensicator report. When Binney eventually looked into one of its key claims—that the stolen data could be proven to have been copied directly at a computer on the east coast—he changed his mind. There was “no evidence to prove where the copy was done”, he told me. The data “Forensicator” had given to VIPS had been “manipulated”, Binney said, and was “a fabrication”.

But by then, *The Nation* had made the Forensicator report mainstream news. Upon the story’s publication, a firestorm erupted inside and outside *The Nation*’s offices—including waves of enthusiasm from Trump supporters. Pro-Russian social network accounts and right-wing outlets such as *Breitbart* chimed in to celebrate that a venerable magazine had exculpated Russian hackers. (“These are our friends now? Pollitt asked in the *Washington Post*.) “There was a clamor from outside writers and readers and from editors to have it retracted,” Dreyfuss says. “For many people, it was the final straw.”

As Lawrence’s article made the rounds, he went on Twitter to post that he believed in the Seth Rich conspiracy. That caught the notice of the *Washington Post*; a reporter called seeking comment from vanden Heuvel, who said that she was “appalled.”

Vanden Heuvel consulted Gutfenplan about what to do. “I said that I would not have published the Lawrence article,” he remembers saying to her. “The tone of certainty was a mistake.” Soon, Roane Carey started a belated fact-check of Lawrence’s piece and asked Nathan Freitas, a hacking and security expert at Harvard’s Berkman-Klein Center, to independently review the story. After two weeks, Freitas told Carey and Vanden Heuvel that Lawrence had published “claims without data.” As he tells me, “Any statement that it had to be a leak was just wrong.” VIPS members, too, began writing to *The Nation*, saying that there was “no evidence from the available metadata that can definitively state when the transfer or copying of the data took place,” or that would suggest the files were leaked from the DNC.

In response, vanden Heuvel decided to air all the competing views. She made no alteration to Lawrence’s story, but rather inserted an editor’s note justifying her thought process in publishing it. Online now, her note states that Freitas “does not rule out” a leak, conceding only that “we should have made certain that several of the article’s conclusions were presented as possibilities, not as certainties.” She adds, “*The Nation* hopes to encourage further inquiry into the crucial questions of how, why, and by whom the DNC e-mails were made public.” From there, *Nation* readers can follow links to another page to find a full statement by Freitas and an explanation from critical VIPS members that the “inside job” notion was unsupported by evidence. Along with those refutations, Vanden Heuvel also published lengthy commentary by a VIPS member arguing that analyses contradicting Lawrence “are contingent on a fallacy.”

Vanden Heuvel’s note ends, “We especially hope that other people with special expertise or knowledge will come forward.” Of course, people *did* come forward—from the Department of Justice. On July 13, 2018, the answers that vanden Heuvel wanted were published by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, in an indictment of twelve Russian officers. The document, which was made public, provided names and explained in technical detail how Russian agents had penetrated thirty-three DNC computers to steal data and pass it to Wikileaks and others. Later, in Mueller’s report on Russian interference in the 2016 elections, he revealed even more astonishing information about how the hacking was carried out.

The Nation ignored all that; to this day, evidence of hacking has never been mentioned in its pages. (Vanden Heuvel says that the magazine has covered the indictment and Mueller’s conclusions about the hack, but an exhaustive search of *The Nation*’s website finds only pieces asserting “no evidence”

that Russia was at fault.) “Many people were astonished,” Dreyfuss tells me, by vanden Heuvel’s non-response to the Lawrence debacle, and “beside themselves with her stubborn refusal to acknowledge reality.” Other *Nation* staffers, past and present, are dismayed that the article remains available, circulating misinformation.

“I stand by my editor’s note,” vanden Heuvel tells me. “My note is careful to lay out why Lawrence’s claim is, in my judgment, unwarranted. The main thrust of the article was put into deep question.” When I ask her about continuing to platform Lawrence’s argument, she says she consulted with trusted colleagues about that. Guttenplan, for one, thought “there was something Orwellian about removing it, just taking it down.”

Lawrence went on to write fifteen more features for *The Nation* over the next thirteen months, occasionally making dismissive reference to the Russia-Trump investigations. After that, his byline stopped appearing. When I ask vanden Heuvel about Lawrence, she replies, “He’s been off our masthead for almost a year. Don’t you know that? That’s 101, please. I mean, really. To link him to us at this stage.”

Still, Cohen has cited Lawrence’s DNC “leak” claim at least three times in *Nation* articles. None of the pieces appears to have been fact-checked. Although “seriously contested,” he wrote in November 2017, the leak theory “[cannot be lightly dismissed](#).” In April 2019, he linked to a VIPS memo as evidence that e-mails stolen from the DNC “[were not a hack but an inside job](#).” After the Mueller report was made public, Cohen complained that Mueller did not “[mention the alternative finding by VIPS that they were stolen and leaked by an insider](#).” An article about a radio appearance with vanden Heuvel was headlined “[Liberals Are Digging Their Own Grave With Russiagate](#).”

Dreyfuss was the lone voice covering the Trump-Russia saga for *The Nation*. But in May 2018, he gave up. Vanden Heuvel “brought in a whole series of writers to debunk, ridicule, denounce, and oppose the point of view that I was expressing,” he says. “I stopped doing it because I felt I was constantly running uphill.” One of those writers was Aaron Maté of *The Real News Network*, who joined Cohen in aiming to discredit the Mueller report. (In January, Green was dismissed from the editorial board.)

Since Guttenplan moved into the editor’s chair, there has been no sign of *The Nation* changing its tune on Russia. Cohen continues writing. A week after the official editor’s pen hand-off, Cohen ran a column that accused Democrats of suffering from a delusion called “Trump Derangement Syndrome,” a jibe invented by the right. (The term was coined “to belittle people like me,” a New York reader complained in a letter-to-the-editor.) The only discernable difference these days is that *The Nation* no longer runs write-ups of Cohen’s radio interviews. “I am completely free to edit,” Guttenplan tells me. Still, he adds, “Katrina remains my editorial director—she hired me and she can fire me. It’s not ‘Do what you like, there will be no consequences.’” Before the coronavirus pandemic, she’d come into the office most days, and they’d talk. “We see the world the same way,” he says.

When I ask Guttenplan about the controversy surrounding the Lawrence piece, he replies, “Water has gone under the bridge. I am comfortable.” He adds, “*The Nation* is a beacon for progressive ideas, democratic politics, women’s rights, racial and economic justice, and open debate between liberals and radicals.” Any damage done to the reputation of the magazine is minor, he argues, compared to all of the good it has done. What about the objections of his staff? “I don’t see the point of obsessing about it,” Guttenplan concludes. “Get a life!”

The Nation, it would seem, has not seized on its leadership transition as an opportunity to change its line on Russia. At the close of last year, Guttenplan and vanden Heuvel jointly praised Cohen’s work;

he continues to write pieces, as do James Carden and Aaron Maté. No one at the magazine has been critical of Putin's management of the coronavirus. Lately, Maté has published more attacks on "Russiagate" in *Nation* articles; he has also tweeted and broadcast dismissing stories about Russia's offer of rewards for killing US personnel in Afghanistan as "Bountygate." According to Dreyfuss, *The Nation's* coverage of the bounty story "falls well within the don't-tread-on-Russia ethos of the magazine's leadership."

Green remains distraught. "The editorial position of the magazine appears to be that the only way to move toward nuclear arms reduction and peace is not to antagonize the kleptocratic thug in the Kremlin; and not to distract the raging sociopath in the White House. This notion is so delusional as to be beneath serious discussion," he says. "It represents a turning away from a path of principle-speaking truth to power—to one of abject surrender to power."

Duncan Campbell is an investigative journalist who has covered security, surveillance and politics since the 1970s.

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Byline Times

<https://bylinetimes.com/2023/02/04/russia-and-the-us-press-the-article-the-cjr-didnt-publish/>