

# American Pravda: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead in San Bernardino

By Ron Unz - May, 2024

Being a college town, Palo Alto once offered a multitude of excellent new and used bookstores, perhaps as many as a dozen or so. But the rise of Amazon produced a great extinction in that business sector, and I think only two now survive, probably still more than for most towns of comparable size.

Amazon and its rivals have obviously become hugely beneficial book-buying resources that I frequently use, but they fail to offer the benefit of randomly browsing shelves and occasionally stumbling across something serendipitous. So I regularly stop by the monthly used book sale put on by Friends of the Palo Alto Library, whose offerings are also very attractively priced, with good quality paperbacks often going for as little as a quarter.

While browsing that sale a couple of weeks ago, I noticed a hardcover copy of *Newsroom Confidential*, a short 2022 insider account of mainstream journalism by Margaret Sullivan, who had spent four years as the Public Editor of the *New York Times*. I'd occasionally read her columns in that paper and had seen one or two favorable reviews of the book, so despite its pricey cost—a full \$3—I bought and read it, hoping to get a sense of what she'd observed during her term as the designed reader-advocate at our national newspaper of record.

As she told her story, prior to joining the *Times* she had spent her entire career at the far smaller *Buffalo News* of her native city, eventually rising to become its editor. Although she'd been happy in that position, after eight years she decided to apply for an opening at the *Times*, and jumped at the offer when she received it.

Based upon her narrative, Sullivan seems very much a moderate liberal in her views, not too different from most others in her journalistic profession despite being raised in a family of more conservative blue-collar Catholics in Upstate New York. She opened the Prologue of her book by denouncing Donald Trump's infamous "Stop the Steal" DC rally of early 2021 and she described the invasion of our Capitol by outraged Trumpists as "one of the most appalling moments in all of American history," sentiments probably shared by at least 90% of her mainstream colleagues.

Born in 1957, Sullivan explained that as a first grader she and everyone else in her community had been horrified by the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, our first Catholic president. Less than a decade later, she was transfixed by the Watergate Scandal and the subsequent Senate hearings that led to the fall of President Richard Nixon. Like so many others of her generation, she had idolized Woodward and Bernstein, the crusading young reporters who broke the case and brought down a crooked president, especially admiring their portrayal by movie stars Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman in

the film version of *All the President's Men*. Along with many other idealistic young Americans, Sullivan decided to embark upon a journalistic career as a consequence.

As far as I can tell, Sullivan seems to have been a committed and honest professional during the decades that followed, describing some of her mundane minor conflicts with colleagues but generally trying to tell their side of the story as well. As a lateral hire from a smallish Upstate newspaper, she had moved rather cautiously after joining the illustrious *Times*, and although she sometimes took a bit of pride in a few of her columns that attracted considerable readership or were widely Tweeted out, none of these much stuck in my mind.

As the end of her four year tenure approached, the *Times* tried to persuade her to extend it, but she preferred to move over to the *Washington Post* and become one of their media columnists.

The various tidbits of gossip she reported from those newspapers were hardly earth-shattering. She'd had a private dinner with top *Times* editor Jill Abramson one evening only to be shocked the next morning when the latter was summarily fired by the publisher, so she passed along the speculation about what combination of factors might have been responsible for that sudden purge. Abramson had been the first woman to serve as executive editor of the *Times*, and she was replaced by her deputy Dean Baquet, who became the first black to hold that post. Sullivan explained that the two had long had a contentious relationship, and many members of the newsroom speculated that Baquet had demanded that the *Times* leadership choose between the two of them. Apparently Abramson had a difficult personality while Baquet was much more charming, so even though he sometimes threw "temper tantrums" he was able to get away with such behavior, and he came out on top.

Although Sullivan never broke a major story nor won any important journalistic prize, she seemed very much a solid team-player rather than a prima donna and got along well with her professional colleagues. Therefore, I was hardly surprised that she was chosen to join the Pulitzer Prize Board in 2011 and eventually became executive director of a Columbia University center for journalist ethics.

Her book was a rather short one, so although I didn't really get much out of it, it also hardly absorbed too many hours of my time. But what struck me in reading it was how a longtime editor and media columnist could have lived through some of the most shocking and dramatic events of the last sixty years without ever seeming to seriously question any of them. The Kennedy Assassinations of the 1960s, the 9/11 Attacks and the long War on Terror, the 2016 Russian election interference that put Donald Trump in the White House, the global Covid epidemic beginning in early 2020 and the massive social upheaval following the police murder of George Floyd later that same year—all those seminal incidents were discussed in her text yet she never seemed to entertain the slightest doubts about those standard narratives.

At one point she noted the striking collapse of public confidence in the honesty and reliability of American journalism, which had plummeted from around 72% soon after Watergate to just 36% these days. But she never asked herself whether the public might have a sound basis for such rapidly growing distrust of our media.

In reading Sullivan's account of her journalistic career, two names from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* came to mind: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Those two Danish courtiers had remained totally oblivious to the enormous events taking place around them and suffered a dire fate as a consequence, though they later became the protagonists of Tom Stoppard's absurdist play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Although fifteen or twenty years ago, I might have shared Sullivan's tendency to ignore any deeper realities of modern American history, her book was published in 2022 and I wondered whether she had ever seriously explored the full range of information available on the Internet during the decades she had spent as an editor and a media columnist.

As she casually described some of the watershed events of her lifetime, always seeming to take them entirely at face value, I smiled a bit since over the years I had carefully analyzed most of them in my own *American Pravda series* and usually come to very different conclusions. But what jumped out at me was her discussion of a much smaller incident from near the end of her tenure at the *Times*. Although that story has been almost totally forgotten, it filled nearly four pages of her short book, occupying almost as much space as Watergate and far more than the 9/11 Attacks.

In December 2015, terrorist gunmen had attacked the public employees of San Bernardino, California at their offices, killing fourteen and wounding more than twenty, the worst mass shooting in America since Sandy Hook three years earlier. Within hours, a massive local police mobilization had located, shot, and killed the Islamic fanatics responsible and all the details of the case are provided in a very comprehensive [Wikipedia article](#) that runs more than 19,000 words.

Sullivan became involved in a controversy over whether the pro-jihadi social media posts left by one of the killers had been correctly described by an anonymous government source, whose information was the basis of a provocative front page *Times* story that became an important element in the political debate. Her critical column made waves and even drew the involvement of her newspaper's top editor before the matter was ultimately settled to her complete satisfaction.

At the time of that mass shooting, I was heavily focused upon the final stages of preparing my ultimately unsuccessful campaign for the Harvard Board of Overseers, but certain elements of that incident stuck in my mind, and although Sullivan never seemed to have questioned any of its strange details, I certainly did.

During the previous few years I'd grown increasingly suspicious of many of the watershed events of our country's modern history, but I hadn't yet launched my

American Pravda series nor even published a single article outlining any of my conspiratorial views. **However, certain elements of this mass shooting raised red flags in my mind, and I soon republished a short column by longtime libertarian writer Gary North highlighting some of those issues.**

**On December 2nd, public employees of San Bernardino County were holding a day-long training exercise and holiday party at their offices when a deadly attack suddenly began. According to all the eyewitnesses, three large white men, wearing ski masks and dressed head-to-toe in military-style commando-outfits suddenly burst into the gathering and began raking the terrified victims with gunfire from their assault-rifles, killing fourteen and wounding more than twenty others. Although after nine years many of the YouTube videos providing the statements of survivors are no longer available, the *CBS Evening News* phone interview with a seemingly very credible eyewitness is still on the Internet and worth viewing.**

***Another witness interviewed by NBC News similarly reported seeing “3 white males” in military gear fleeing the scene of the shooting, and a later Time Magazine article seemed to confirm those same reports by all the early eyewitnesses. So three large white men dressed in commando-gear had apparently committed the brutal massacre, then escaped the scene in a black SUV.***

Some 300 local law enforcement officers were quickly mobilized and although they arrived too late to catch the perpetrators, they began patrolling the vicinity, hoping to find the killers before they struck again. Their efforts were soon rewarded and four hours later they located the black SUV driving less than two miles away, and after a massive gun-battle with hundreds of rounds fired, they shot the terrorists to death. Yet oddly enough, the slain culprits turned out to be a young Pakistani Muslim married couple living nearby, Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, whose six-month-old baby girl had fortunately been left at the home of her grandmother when the parents said they needed to drive to a doctor's appointment.

**Government officials and their media allies all soon declared the case closed, explaining that the Pakistani couple had apparently self-radicalized themselves by reading Islamicist tracts on the Internet and becoming followers of the dread ISIS terrorist movement. ISIS had been much in the news during 2015, allegedly responsible for staging numerous attacks all across Western countries.**

But the total divergence between the two descriptions of the suspects seemed quite remarkable, especially once the news media revealed that Malik was a very short woman, standing barely five feet tall. In conversations and later posted comments, I joked that America's ISIS foes were formidable indeed if they possessed the magical power to transform themselves from one very short woman into two large men and then back again.

Eyewitness testimony at horrific events is notoriously unreliable and although the shooters had been described as white based upon visible portions of their skin, the commando-outfits they were wearing would have concealed most of that, so such identification might have easily been mistaken. Perhaps many of the County employees were relatively short individuals from a Hispanic, Asian, or Middle Eastern immigrant background and they merely assumed that someone large and tall was more likely to be of white European ancestry. But a tiny woman looks very different from a large man and it's hard to confuse two shooters with three. Even after the official narrative had congealed into its final form, the eyewitness interviewed by *CBS News* stuck to her story when later questioned by *ABC News*, saying "I know what I saw."

**The background of the terrorist couple also seemed quite odd. According to news accounts, Farouk had spent the previous five years working as a County food inspector, generally known as someone who got along well with others, with baffled co-workers saying that the young couple were "living the American dream." Meanwhile, although she'd originally trained as a pharmacist, Malik had become a stay-at-home mom, apparently still nursing her six-month-old baby girl. While I suppose it's possible that a young, nursing mother has sometimes gone on a wild terrorist rampage, I'd never previously heard of such a case.**

A few years earlier I'd become friendly with a prominent mainstream academic and had been shocked to discover that for decades he had become a strong if silent believer in all sorts of "conspiracy theories." Later that month I happened to have lunch with him and learned that he was also very skeptical of the official story of that terrorist massacre. He'd come of age during the Vietnam War era and served in the ROTC while a student at Harvard, training on weapons during those years. So he explained that a tiny woman such as Malik would have had a very hard time handling a powerful assault-rifle such as an AR-15, revealing another major hole in the official story.

We were also told that after staging their brutal massacre, the two married terrorists had behaved in a strange way. Instead of either fleeing the area or committing other attacks, they had apparently changed back into their civilian clothes and were later caught by the swarming law enforcement officers while slowly driving their vehicle a mile and a half from the crime scene. According to the media accounts, the Bonnie and Clyde terrorist couple had gone out in a blaze of glory, killed after engaging in a huge shootout with the pursuing police. But the photos seemed to show that the windows of their bullet-riddled SUV were tightly closed, and surely they would have rolled them down if they were firing their weapons at the officers chasing them.

**Given these severe inconsistencies, some conspiratorially-minded individuals naturally suggested that the two Pakistani Muslims had been selected as patsies for a terrorist false-flag attack organized by our government or its allies. But that hypothesis also seemed to make little sense to me. Why would the government stage a false-flag massacre involving three large gunmen and then try to pin the blame on a Pakistani immigrant and his very short wife?**

Nine years have now passed and much of the video evidence has disappeared, so determining exactly what happened seems quite difficult. But at the time I believed that a completely unrelated shooting incident in the Los Angeles area a couple of years earlier provided some important insights for this case and I still think the same today.

During February 2013, a black former LAPD officer named Charles Dornier became outraged over what he regarded as his unfair treatment and he began an assassination campaign against other police officers and their families, eventually killing four victims and wounding three more before he was finally trapped in a huge manhunt and committed suicide. During the ten days of his rampage, police departments across much of Southern California were in a state of extremely high alert, mobilizing officers for guard duty outside the homes of those officials and their families that they believed might be among his next targets. But their trigger-happy fears of that deadly cop-killer led to some unfortunate accidents.

Very early one morning, the seven police officers guarding the home of an LAPD official noticed a nearby pickup truck driving in a suspicious manner. So mistakenly believing that it matched the description of Dornier's vehicle, they fired without warning and riddled it with more than 100 bullets. But instead of Dornier, the occupants turned out to be an elderly Hispanic woman and her middle-aged daughter, who were out delivering the *Los Angeles Times* in that neighborhood as they did every morning. Less than a half-hour later, other police officers opened fire on another misidentified vehicle, injuring a white surfer who had been on his way to the beach. Fortunately, the victims of those mistaken police shootings all survived and they eventually received multi-million-dollar settlements from their lawsuits.

**I think we should at least consider the possibility that Farook and Malik died for similar reasons. Their fatal mistake may have been that they were driving a black SUV that closely resembled the getaway vehicle of the attackers and doing so in an area filled with hundreds of fearful officers on the lookout for terrorist commandoes armed with assault weapons. The limited visual evidence seems to show their SUV was proceeding quietly along the road at normal speed before being attacked and perforated by hundreds of bullets from the police vehicles tailing them.**

Obviously, this reconstruction is quite speculative, and Wikipedia summarizes the long list of media reports providing a cornucopia of highly-incriminating evidence. These describe the enormous arsenal of weapons and home-made bombs that the young immigrant couple had allegedly amassed in preparation for their terrorist rampage. So interested readers should weigh that supposed evidence against the seemingly contrary facts that I have described above.

However, consider that the massacre prompted President Barack Obama to broadcast a rare Oval Office address, his first in five years. Given our ongoing international war against the terroristic ISIS movement of the Middle East, any admission that our police had mistakenly shot and killed a young Pakistani couple with an infant daughter might have been hugely damaging to American

national security. The alternate choice of fabricating a case against two already dead foreigners would hardly have been the worst crime ever committed by a government desperate to hide its severe embarrassment.

The number of victims in the San Bernardino attack had not been that large, but wider fears of international Islamicist terror attacks had probably been responsible for Obama's national address on the incident. Indeed, 2015 produced a bumper-crop of such terrorist assaults, with the Wikipedia page devoted to the topic showing nearly 100 such incidents, far more than for any other year. Moreover, many of these attacks occurred in the West, stoking the enormous fears of domestic terrorism that may have helped explain the massive, trigger-happy local police response in San Bernardino.

**Probably the highest-profile 2015 attack had taken place in early January at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical French magazine. That Jewish-dominated publication had long directed the crudest and most vicious insults against the deep religious beliefs of Christians and Muslims, and although the former took those barbs in stride, threats from the latter had been so numerous that the government stationed a police guard outside the premises. But when the attack finally came on January 7th, he proved helpless against the two assailants, clad in commando-outfits and heavily armed with assault-rifles. They forced their way into the building and quickly executed a dozen of the staff while wounding a similar number, then shot the guard on the street while escaping. The choice of dress, weapons, and style of the two attackers seemed rather similar to those who would attack the public employees of San Bernardino eleven months later.**

Nearly all of France's political class treated the brutal killing of the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists and writers as an outrageous assault against France's long Voltairean tradition of freedom of speech and the incident was widely described as France's own "9/11 Attack." Within a couple of days, the Islamicist killers responsible had been identified by the police, tracked down, and killed but the political reverberations continued. Two days later, Paris saw a gigantic march of two million protesting the attacks and denouncing Islamic extremism. More than 40 world leaders led that procession, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu taking a prominent but controversial place at the front, and similar protests of some 1.7 million additional people occurred elsewhere in the country. France contained a large Muslim population with immigrant roots and French leaders united to endorse a severe political crackdown on perceived Islamic extremism and those who supported it. The standard account of all these events is provided in the Wikipedia page that runs around 17,000 words.

As these important French events unfolded, I'd been reading very detailed coverage in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, and initially accepted this entire narrative without question. But I soon discovered that others took a much more conspiratorial line, and a series of email exchanges that same well-connected academic friend of mine brought those surprising possibilities to my attention, gradually winning me over to his perspective. Based upon some of his discussions with knowledgeable friends in France, he

believed that there was a strong possibility that the attacks may have been some sort of government false-flag operation, aimed at justifying a sharp crackdown against political dissent, though the exact details were not at all clear. He also said that such suspicions were very widespread in certain French intellectual and political circles, but almost no one dared voice them in public.

Prompted by those claims coming from someone whose opinion I respected, I began noticing certain elements of the story that greatly multiplied my suspicions.

**Much like their later counterparts in San Bernardino, the two terrorist attackers had been wearing face-masks and commando-outfits, and after killing their victims with bursts of assault-weapons gunfire they had easily escaped long before the French police could respond. The only reason that they were quickly identified and caught was that one of the terrorists had carelessly left his ID card behind in an abandoned getaway vehicle, a crucial fact oddly excluded from the very comprehensive Wikipedia article. This seemed a remarkably suspicious detail, eerily similar to the undamaged hijacker passport found on the streets of NYC after the fiery crash of the jetliners into the WTC towers during on September 11th, or the how the lost luggage of 9/11 ringleader Mohammed Atta later provided a wealth of incriminating background material regarding the terrorist plot and his motives.**

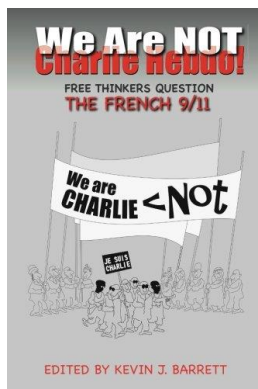
For many decades, former Presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen had been the leader of France's Far Right anti-Muslim political movement, and he had strong personal connections to the country's military and security circles. Based upon his ideological beliefs, he might have been expected to welcome the anti-Muslim crackdown prompted by the terrorist massacre, but *in an interview with Britain's Daily Telegraph he said that the attacks seemed extremely suspicious to him and might have been a false-flag operation by some intelligence service. No other major English-language publication reported his surprising views and just a week or so later, Le Pen narrowly escaped death when his house suddenly caught on fire, with that story also only being reported in the Telegraph.* I later discussed these surprising developments in several comments, but the original articles themselves have now apparently vanished from the *Telegraph* archives, seemingly underscoring their significance. Naturally none of this information appears in the comprehensive Wikipedia articles on either the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks or Le Pen himself.

***Wikipedia did devote a single sentence to another very odd development in the case. One day after the terrorist attack, the French police commissioner responsible for the investigation suddenly decided to commit suicide at his government office while preparing his official report, choosing to shoot himself in the head.***

In the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, France's entire political leadership class declared themselves the absolute guarantors of the country's freedom of speech and thought against the Islamic militants who challenged those sacred

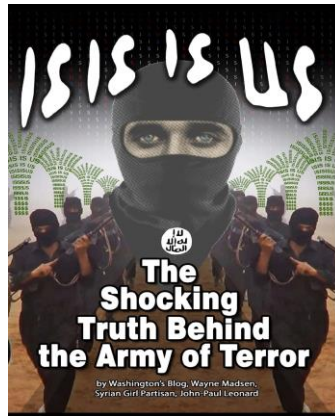


values. But the actual consequences that followed were somewhat different. Over the years France's large Muslim population had become increasingly hostile to Israeli policy and Jewish influence, and such sentiments were now outlawed as constituting sympathy for terrorism, given that the alleged terrorists had come from that community and background. These harsh new prohibitions were enforced by a huge wave of arrests and investigations.



As an example of this ironic situation, consider the case of Dieudonné M'bala M'bala, a French-born citizen of half-African ancestry. Although he was one of the France's most popular comedians, over the years his stinging criticism of overwhelming Jewish influence had caused him enormous legal and professional difficulties. So a few days after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, he posted some mocking comments on his Facebook page, noting that the same authorities who now loudly proclaimed their support for free speech had regularly persecuted him for his humor, and he was quickly arrested on charges of publicly supporting terrorism.

Later that same year, Kevin Barrett released *We Are NOT Charlie Hebdo*, his edited collection of about two dozen essays highlighting many of the strange and suspicious aspects of that important terrorist incident. I finally read it a couple of years ago and I would strongly recommend it as a very helpful balance to the version of events provided by the mainstream media and codified in Wikipedia. In doing so I am merely seconding the favorable verdict of Prof. Richard Falk of Princeton University, an eminent expert on international law and human rights policy. Around that same time I also read two other books released by *Progressive Press*, a small alternative publisher located in Southern California. These both provided a highly-conspiratorial counter-narrative to the mainstream account of our struggle against the Islamicist terrorists of the Middle East.



A decade ago, the terroristic forces of ISIS had become notorious throughout that region and the entire world for their brutal atrocities. These were demonstrated in the videos they regularly released showing the horrific beheadings they inflicted upon their enemies in Syria and Iraq, and ISIS supporters were usually blamed for terrorist attacks in the West, including those in France and San Bernardino. As a result, ISIS allegedly became the primary target of American military operations in the Middle East, but our efforts seemed surprisingly ineffective.

**However, a 2016 collection of articles and essays descriptively entitled ISIS Is Us told a very different story. A number of alternative writers and bloggers presented arguments that the CIA and our own regional allies such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel had actually been responsible for creating and equipping that fanatical group of Sunni Muslim jihadists, then deploying them as a means of overthrowing Syria's Shiite-aligned government, an important Iranian ally.**

Indeed, that project came very close to success until Russian military intervention in September 2015 helped to turn the tide, along with the ground forces already committed by the Shiite Hezbollah militia of Southern Lebanon. Although I'd regularly seen these arguments floating around in corners of the Internet, I found it useful to have them presented in the pages of a book.

Over the last couple of decades French journalist Thierry Meyssan has become an influential figure in left-wing, conspiratorial circles, and his 2002 book 9/11: The Big Lie was one of the earliest works attacking the official 9/11 narrative, quickly becoming a huge best-seller in France and soon translated into English. That publishing success led him to establish the VoltaireNet website in Lebanon, which has maintained a strong focus on Middle Eastern issues while being sharply critical of Western policies.

In early 2019 he published Before Our Very Eyes: Fake Wars and Big Lies, adopting a very similar approach to the story of the "Arab Spring" and the Western use of Muslim Jihadists in attempts to overthrow the governments of Libya and Syria, with the former effort being successful. Although some of his claims were already known to me and seemed solidly documented, others were much more surprising. But although he provided a vast number of specific

statements about important matters, he usually did so without providing any sources for his material, so it was difficult for me to judge its credibility. I assume that much of his information came from his personal contacts with various regional intelligence organizations, who obviously would have had vested interests in promoting their desired narratives, whether or not those happened to be true.

In many respects, I think these three books constituted the photographic inverse-image of Margaret Sullivan's text, focusing exactly upon the conspiratorial elements of all the major stories that she herself had carefully avoided noticing during her decades of mainstream journalism. So I suspect that the truth lies somewhere between those two extremes.

It's also quite possible that Sullivan knows or at least suspects far more than she indicated in her book and she was being less than candid with her readers. Positions in elite mainstream journalism or academia are difficult to obtain and can easily be lost if someone strays outside accepted boundaries. After all Jill Abramson had held the top position in all of American journalism and then was suddenly fired for unclear reasons. *Times* Opinion Editor [James Bennet](#) had been a leading candidate to run his newspaper but had suddenly been forced to resign merely for publishing a controversial op-ed by a leading Republican Senator. The forty-year *Times* career of prominent science journalist Donald McNeil came to an end when he made [a few incautious remarks](#) at an extracurricular student outing in Peru. All these individuals far outranked Sullivan and their transgressions were very minor ones compared to the deadly journalistic sin of becoming a suspected "conspiracy theorist." Indeed, if Sullivan had raised any of dangerous points I have discussed above, I doubt her manuscript would have even been accepted for publication.

I actually think that there exists evidence that some elite journalists may have much broader views on various issues than they would ever admit in print.

A couple of months after the very suspicious case of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, I decided to publish a highly-controversial analysis of Sen. John McCain's Vietnam War record, an article that represented something of a sequel to Sydney Schanberg's seminal expose of McCain's role in the POW cover-up.

Although all my facts were drawn from fully mainstream sources—much of it from the *Times* itself—my analysis and conclusions were quite explosive, as indicated by a couple of my closing paragraphs:

***Today when we consider the major countries of the world we see that in many cases the official leaders are also the leaders in actuality: Vladimir Putin calls the shots in Russia, Xi Jinping and his top Politburo colleagues do the same in China, and so forth. However, in America and in some other Western countries, this seems to be less and less the case, with top national figures merely being attractive front-men selected for their popular appeal and their political malleability, a development that may eventually have dire consequences for the nations they lead. As an extreme example, a drunken Boris Yeltsin freely allowed the looting of***

***Russia's entire national wealth by the handful of oligarchs who pulled his strings, and the result was the total impoverishment of the Russian people and a demographic collapse almost unprecedented in modern peacetime history.***

An obvious problem with installing puppet rulers is the risk that they will attempt to cut their strings, much like Putin soon out maneuvered and exiled his oligarch patron Boris Berezovsky. One means of minimizing such risk is to select puppets who are so deeply compromised that they can never break free, knowing that the political self-destruct charges buried deep within their pasts could easily be triggered if they sought independence. I have sometimes joked with my friends that perhaps the best career move for an ambitious young politician would be to secretly commit some monstrous crime and then make sure that the hard evidence of his guilt ended up in the hands of certain powerful people, thereby assuring his rapid political rise.

My piece received a very favourable response in alternative media circles. But to my considerable surprise, a week or two later I was contacted by a *Times* editor who solicited my participation in a symposium on college reform, my first appearance in several years. And the favourable reaction to my piece arguing that our elite college should abolish tuition prompted me to launch my campaign for the Harvard Board of Overseers at the end of that year.

***Similarly, my enormous suspicions that our media was hiding the truth about both the Charlie Hebdo and San Bernardino terrorist attacks gradually convinced me that many other important stories were also being concealed or distorted by our mainstream media and I began thinking of expanding my original 2013 American Pravda article into an entire series. The July 2016 death of Sydney Schanberg prompted me to launch that series, which opened with the following paragraphs, perhaps helping to explain much of the bland and blinkered material in Sullivan's book:***

***The death on Saturday of Sydney Schanberg at age 82 should sadden us not only for the loss of one of our most renowned journalists but also for what his story reveals about the nature of our national media.***

***Syd had made his career at the New York Times for 26 years, winning a Pulitzer Prize, two George Polk Memorial awards, and numerous other honors. His passing received the notice it deserved, with the world's most prestigious broadsheet devoting nearly a full page of its Sunday edition to his obituary, a singular honor that in this degraded era is more typically reserved for leading pop stars or sports figures. Several photos were included of his Cambodia reporting, which had become the basis for the Oscar-winning film *The Killing Fields*, one of Hollywood's most memorable accounts of our disastrous Indo-Chinese War.***

***But for all the 1,300 words and numerous images charting his long and illustrious journalistic history, not even a single mention was made of the biggest story of his career, which has seemingly vanished down the memory hole without trace. And therein lies a tale.***

*Could a news story ever be “too big” for the media to cover? Every journalist is always seeking a major expose, a piece that not merely reaches the transitory front pages but also might win a journalistic prize or even change the history books. Stories such as these appear rarely but can make a reporter’s career, and it is difficult to imagine a writer turning one down, or an editor rejecting it.*

*But what if the story is so big that it actually reveals dangerous truths about the real nature of the American media, portrays too many powerful people in a very negative light, and perhaps leads to a widespread loss of faith in our major news media? If readers were to see a story like that, they might naturally begin to wonder “why hadn’t we ever been told?” or even “what else might be out there?”*