

# Democrats and Trump Bid Up Militarism

With Democrats lusting for a new and costly Cold War with Russia – and President Trump countering by hiring generals and shoveling more money into the Pentagon – the prospects for peace and rationality are dim, notes William Blum.

By William Blum

Conservatives have had a very hard time getting over President Trump's much-repeated response to *Fox News* anchor Bill O'Reilly's calling Russian president Vladimir Putin "a killer." Replied Trump: "There are a lot of killers. We have a lot of killers. You think our country is so innocent?"

One could almost feel a bit sorry for O'Reilly as he struggled to regain his composure in the face of such blasphemy. Had any American establishment media star ever heard such a thought coming from the mouth of an American president? From someone on the radical left, yes, but from the President?

Senator John McCain on the floor of Congress, referring to Putin, tore into attempts to draw "moral equivalency between that butcher and thug and KGB colonel and the United States of America."

Ah yes, the infamous KGB. Can anything good be said about a person associated with such an organization? We wouldn't like it if a U.S. president had a background with anything like that. Oh, wait, a president of the United States was not merely a CIA "colonel", but was the Director of the CIA! I of course speak of George Herbert Walker Bush. And as far as butchery and thuggery ... How many Americans remember the December 1989 bombing and invasion of the people of Panama carried out by the same Mr. Bush? Many thousands killed or wounded; thousands more left homeless. Try and match that, Vladimir!

And in case you're wondering for what good reason all this was perpetrated? Officially, to arrest dictator Manuel Noriega on drug charges. How is that for a rationalization for widespread devastation and slaughter? It should surprise no one that only shortly before the invasion Noriega had been on the CIA payroll.

It's the "moral equivalency" that's so tough to swallow for proud Americans like O'Reilly and McCain. Republican Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell also chipped in with: "And no, I don't think there's any equivalency between the way the Russians conduct themselves and the way the United States does." Other Senators echoed the same theme, all inspired by good ol' "American exceptionalism", drilled into the mind of every decent American from childhood on ... Who would dare to compare the morals of (ugh!) Russia with those of God's

chosen land, even in Moscow's current non-communist form?

The communist form began of course with the October 1917 Russian Revolution. By the summer of 1918, some 13,000 American troops could be found in the newly born state, the future Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Two years and thousands of casualties later, the American troops left, having failed in their mission to "strangle at its birth" the Bolshevik state, as Winston Churchill so charmingly put it.

## **A Historical Summary**

U.S. foreign policy has not been much more noble-minded since then. I think, dear students, it's time for me to once again present my concise historical summary:

Since the end of World War 2, the United States has:

–Attempted to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments most of which were democratically-elected.

–Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.

–Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.

–Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.

–Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.

–Though not as easy to quantify, has also led the world in torture; not only the torture performed directly by Americans upon foreigners, but providing torture equipment, torture manuals, lists of people to be tortured, and in-person guidance by American instructors.

Where does the United States get the nerve to moralize about Russia? Same place they get the nerve to label Putin a "killer" ... a "butcher" ... a "thug". It would be difficult to name a world-renowned killer, butcher, or thug – not to mention dictator, mass murderer, or torturer – of the past 75 years who was not a close ally of Washington.

So why then does the American power elite hate Putin so? It can be dated back to the period of Boris Yeltsin.

During the Western financial looting of the dying Soviet Union, the U.S. could be found meddling in favor of Yeltsin in the election held in 1996. Under Yeltsin's reign, poverty exploded and life expectancy for men actually decreased by five years, all in the name of "shock therapy." The U.S./Western-backed

destabilization of the Soviet Union allowed global capitalism to spread its misery unfettered by any inconvenient socialism. Russia came under the control of oligarchs concerned only for their own enrichment and that of their billionaire partners in the West.

The transition of power to Vladimir Putin in the Twenty-first Century led to a number of reforms that curbed the disastrous looting of the nation by the oligarchic bandits. Putin and his allies vowed to build an independent, capitalist Russia that was capable of determining its own affairs free from U.S. and Western domination. Such an orientation placed Putin in direct confrontation with U.S. imperialism's plans for unipolar global hegemony.

Washington's disdain for Putin increased when he derided U.S. war propaganda leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Then, the Russian leader played a crucial role in getting Iran to curtail its nuclear program and arranging for Syria to surrender its stockpiles of chemical weapons. Washington's powerful neoconservatives had been lusting for direct U.S. military strikes against those two countries, leading to regime change, not diplomatic agreements that left the governments in place.

Lastly, after the United States overthrew the Ukrainian government in 2014, Putin was obliged to intervene on behalf of threatened ethnic Russians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. That, in turn, was transformed by the Western media into a "Russian invasion".

### **Who Murders Journalists?**

The same Western media has routinely charged Putin with murdering journalists but doesn't remind its audience of the American record in this regard. The American military, in the course of its wars in recent decades, has been responsible for the deliberate deaths of many journalists.

In Iraq, for example, there's the WikiLeaks 2007 video, exposed by Chelsea Manning, of the cold-blooded murder of two Reuters journalists; the 2003 U.S. air-to-surface missile attack on the offices of Al Jazeera in Baghdad that left three journalists dead and four wounded; and the American firing on Baghdad's Hotel Palestine, a known journalist residence, the same year that killed two foreign news cameramen.

(It's also worth remembering how President Bill Clinton authorized the deliberate bombing of the Serb TV station in Belgrade during NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999, killing at least 16 people and wounding many others. The rationalization was that NATO considered the Serb TV broadcasts to be "propaganda.")

The Trump honeymoon is over for me. It was never actually love; hardly more than an intriguing curiosity; mainly that he wasn't Hillary Clinton; that he was unlikely to start a war with Russia or close down the *Russia Today* (RT) TV station in the U.S., which I and many others depend on daily; and that he was not politically correct when it came to fighting the Islamic State.

Trump's "moral equivalency" remark above gave me some hope. But this all vanished with his appointment to high office of one war-loving, bemedalled general after another, intermingled with one billionaire Goldman-Sachs official after another; his apparent confirmation of his Mexican Wall; and, worst of all, his increasing the military budget by \$54 billion (sic, sick) ... this will certainly be at the expense of human life and health and the environment. What manner of man is this who walks amongst us?

The word is "narcissism." *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni (Feb. 28) captures this well: "Why do I get the sense that fighter jets are Donald Trump's biceps, warships are his pectorals and what he's doing with his proposed \$54 billion increase for the Pentagon is flexing?"

Will there ever be an end to the never-ending American wars?

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## Official Washington Hails an Anti-Russia Hawk

**Exclusive:** President Trump's complaint that Official Washington is trying to block his policies, including détente with Russia, is underscored by the praise heaped on a departing State Department official, writes James W Carden.

By James W Carden

It's probably safe to wager that few people outside of Washington, and perhaps even quite a few people inside it, have ever heard of Ambassador Daniel Fried – at least not until very recently.

The longtime Ambassador, a 40-year veteran of the U.S. State Department,

recently made headlines in Time, Newsweek, Reuters, Politico and NPR for a farewell speech he made to his State Department colleagues during which he took a parting shot at President Trump for the latter's widely assumed (but yet to be acted upon) desire to come to an accommodation with Russia.

Fried's address won praise from Establishment figures like former Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken (a "powerful defense of liberal international order"), Atlantic Council executive Damon Wilson ( a "clarion call for the U.S. to believe in itself and lead [a] liberal order") and New York Times columnist Roger Cohen ("a superb summation of everything worth fighting for to keep this planet fit for human habitation").

Why all the excitement? Well for one, Fried's farewell hit the many of Establishment's erogenous zones:

*–NATO expansion as an unalloyed good: NATO and the E.U. – grew to embrace 100 million liberated Europeans... this great achievement is now under assault by Russia*

*–Realists just don't "get it": George Kennan didn't think much of what he termed America's moralistic-legalistic tradition. But this foreign policy exceptionalism was the heart of our Grand Strategy through two World Wars, the Cold War and the post-1989 era, and it was crowned with success.*

*–And then there is Fried's tendentious (and among neoconservatives and liberal interventionists widely shared) rendering of history and his puzzling conflation of the world situations as they obtained in 1940 and as it obtains currently, in 2017: In 1940, Germany offered Britain a sphere of influence deal: German recognition of the British Empire in exchange for London's recognition of Germany dominance of continental Europe. Churchill didn't take the deal then; we should not take similar deals now.*

While there can be little doubt that Fried served loyally, with distinction and was in all likelihood an exemplary functionary of the U.S. foreign policy apparatus, what else explains the outpouring of praise for Fried?

Part of it of course is that in Washington, you get points for longevity regardless of your record. Recall the encomiums heaped upon Andrew Marshall a couple years ago when Marshall, who spent his career as the Pentagon's chief policy hand, retired after four decades in 2015.

The Washington Post reverentially called Marshall "the Pentagon's Yoda"; The Economist praised him as "the quiet American"; and that year a flattering book was released about Marshall entitled *The Last Warrior: Andrew Marshall and the Shaping of Modern American Defense Strategy*. In a review of the book, Notre Dame

political scientist Michael Desch tartly noted that “at the end of the day, Marshall was not a saint but rather a public official who served too long and whose record was more mixed than his incense burners are prepared to admit.”

## **#Resistance to Trump**

Another reason for the current praise for Fried’s address is that it combined two of the essential ingredients of the #Resistance that is currently so in vogue in today’s Washington: opposition to Trump and hostility to Russia – never mind whether the policy implications of such a stance are necessary or wise.

Days after he retired, Fried sat down with another tried-and-true Russia critic, former Moscow correspondent for The Washington Post Susan Glasser, and said that in his opinion, “Russia despises the West. And it is doing what it can to weaken the West.” Trump should not, said Fried, “be so desperate to rub up against a Russia which is busy trying to do us in all over the world.”

That Fried’s carries these opinions on Russia is unsurprising; a look at his career in the Foreign Service shows a diplomat who took the most hawkish positions possible regarding Russia in the post-Cold War period. Fried was a vocal champion of NATO enlargement, arguing, as U.S. Ambassador to Poland in January 1998 that “NATO membership had a stabilizing effect on Western Europe’s ‘ethnic rivalries’ and the prospect of membership in ‘the West’ has strengthened political moderates and weakened nationalists throughout Central Europe, to U.S. benefit.”

This assessment looks rather less than prescient in light of the recent rise in ethno-nationalist regimes in Poland, Hungary and, of course, Ukraine.

As U.S. Assistant Secretary for Europe under George W Bush, Fried declared that Russia’s defense of the ethnic Russian enclave of South Ossetia against the neoconservative puppet government of Mikheil Saakashvili was “not the sign of a strong nation. It is the sign of a weak one.”

Russia, said Fried, anticipating many of the same talking points we hear today, told The Washington Post in August 2008, “Russia is going to have to come to terms with the reality; it can either integrate with the world or it can be a self-isolated bully. But it can’t be both.”

Fried was one of the lead architects of U.S. sanctions against Russia in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis and Crimean annexation. Having served as the State Department’s coordinator of sanctions policy, he recently argued that “without the sanctions the situation might well be much worse. And if you don’t think it can be worse then I think you just lack imagination. The Russians could have driven deeper into Ukraine and they could have tried to seize Mariupol or

driven on land all the way to Crimea or attack Harkhiv. The sanctions may have stopped the Russians from going further.”

This summation is, to put it mildly, open to question, given that there is little evidence that the Russians even want the small part of Donetsk and Luhansk that they currently help to subsidize and support.

In the end, in judging the supposed wisdom of Fried’s recent fusillades against Trump and Russia we might look to the record of the man rather than his rhetoric.

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