

Democrats Chase Red Herring of Russia-gate

The Democrats' demagogic use of Russia-gate to "resist" President Trump is putting progressives in league with warmongers and war contractors while postponing a serious assessment of the party's political problems, warns Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

The Trump administration has already done enormous harm to the United States and the planet. Along the way, President Trump has also caused many prominent progressives to degrade their own political discourse. It's up to us to challenge the corrosive effects of routine hyperbole and outright demagoguery.

Consider the rhetoric from one of the most promising new House members, Democrat Jamie Raskin, at a rally near the Washington Monument over the weekend. Reading from a prepared text, Raskin warmed up by declaring that "Donald Trump is the hoax perpetrated on the Americans by the Russians."

Soon the congressman named such varied countries as Hungary, the Philippines, Syria and Venezuela, and immediately proclaimed: "All the despots, dictators and kleptocrats have found each other, and Vladimir Putin is the ringleader of the unfree world."

Later, asked about factual errors in his speech, Raskin floundered during a filmed interview with The Real News. What is now boilerplate Democratic Party bombast about Russia has little to do with confirmed facts and much to do with partisan talking points.

The same day that Raskin spoke, the progressive former Labor Secretary Robert Reich featured at the top of his website an article he'd written with the headline "The Art of the Trump-Putin Deal." The piece had striking similarities to what progressives have detested over the years when coming from right-wing commentators and witch-hunters. The timeworn technique was dual track, in effect: *I can't prove it's true, but let's proceed as though it is.*

The lead of Reich's piece was clever. Way too clever: "Say you're Vladimir Putin, and you did a deal with Trump last year. I'm not suggesting there was any such deal, mind you. But if you are Putin and you *did* do a deal, what did Trump agree to do?" From there, Reich's piece was off to the conjectural races.

Propaganda Techniques

Progressives routinely deplore such propaganda techniques from right-wingers, not only because the Left is being targeted but also because we seek a political culture based on facts and fairness rather than innuendos and smears. It's painful now to see numerous progressives engaging in hollow propaganda.

Likewise, it's sad to see so much eagerness to trust in the absolute credibility of institutions like the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency – institutions that previously earned wise distrust. Over the last few decades, millions of Americans have gained keen awareness of the power of media manipulation and deception by the U.S. foreign-policy establishment. Yet now, faced with an ascendant extreme right wing, some progressives have yielded to the temptation of blaming our political predicament more on a foreign "enemy" than on powerful corporate forces at home.

The over-the-top scapegoating of Russia serves many purposes for the military-industrial complex, Republican neocons, and kindred "liberal interventionist" Democrats. Along the way, the blame-Russia-first rhetoric is of enormous help to the Clinton wing of the Democratic Party – a huge diversion lest its elitism and entwinement with corporate power come under greater scrutiny and stronger challenge from the grassroots.

In this context, the inducements and encouragements to buy into an extreme anti-Russia frenzy have become pervasive. A remarkable number of people claim certainty about hacking and even "collusion" – events that they cannot, at this time, truly be certain about. In part that's because of deceptive claims endlessly repeated by Democratic politicians and news media.

One example is the rote and highly misleading claim that "17 U.S. intelligence agencies" reached the same conclusion about Russian hacking of the Democratic National Committee – a claim that journalist Robert Parry effectively debunked in an [article](#) last week.

What Americans Want

During a recent appearance on CNN, former Ohio State Senator Nina Turner offered a badly needed perspective on the subject of Russia's alleged intrusion into the U.S. election. People in Flint, Michigan, "wouldn't ask you about Russia and Jared Kushner," she [said](#). "They want to know how they're gonna get some clean water and why 8,000 people are about to lose their homes."

Turner noted that "we definitely have to deal with" allegations of Russian interference in the election, "it's on the minds of American people, but if you want to know what people in Ohio – they want to know about jobs, they want to know about their children." As for Russia, she said, "We are preoccupied with

this, it's not that this is not important, but every day Americans are being left behind because it's Russia, Russia, Russia."

Like corporate CEOs whose vision extends only to the next quarter or two, many Democratic politicians have been willing to inject their toxic discourse into the body politic on the theory that it will be politically profitable in the next election or two. But even on its own terms, the approach is apt to fail. Most Americans are far more worried about their economic futures than about the Kremlin. A party that makes itself more known as anti-Russian than pro-working-people has a problematic future.

Today, 15 years after George W. Bush's "axis of evil" oratory set the stage for ongoing military carnage, politicians who traffic in unhinged rhetoric like "Putin is the ringleader of the unfree world" are helping to fuel the warfare state – and, in the process, increasing the chances of direct military conflict between the United States and Russia that could go nuclear and destroy us all.

But such concerns can seem like abstractions compared to possibly winning some short-term political gains. That's the difference between leadership and demagoguery.

Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.
