

NATO's Strange Addition of Montenegro

Exclusive: Official Washington's New Cold Warriors are painting NATO's admission of tiny Montenegro in the stark black-and-white colors of a heroic stand against "Russian aggression" but that misses the real reasons why it's a bad idea, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Any day now, Arizona Senator John McCain promises, the U.S. Senate will vote to approve the incorporation of Montenegro as the 29th member state in the NATO alliance. Though few Americans likely know where to find the tiny Balkan nation on a map, Montenegro has become another dubious focal point of the West's new confrontation with Russia.

At first glance, the case for extending NATO's umbrella over a country with fewer than 2,000 troops isn't obvious. Its seven helicopters are unlikely to make America safer. The Obama administration, which championed this latest in a long line of recent additions to the alliance, actually offered as a rationale the fact that Montenegro had donated some mortar rounds to the anti-ISIS coalition in Iraq and \$1.2 million to NATO's operations in Afghanistan over three years.

That sum is less than a third of what U.S. taxpayers spend in Afghanistan per hour. One critic quipped, "if the West's survival depends on Montenegro's inclusion in NATO, we should all be heading for the bunkers."

Maybe that's why hawks are citing the mere fact of Russia's predictable opposition as a prime reason to support Montenegro's accession. "Backing Montenegro's membership is not only the right thing for the Senate to do, it would send a clear signal that no third party has a veto over NATO enlargement decisions," argues the Heritage Foundation.

And two advocates at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, declared recently that Montenegro will be the key test of whether President Trump and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson "kowtow to their friend Russian President Vladimir Putin" and "acquiesce . . . in another Yalta" or stand up for "core U.S. goals."

Raising the specter of Putin and Yalta diverts attention from troubling questions about Montenegro's political suitability as a partner – and whether it has anything of military value to offer.

NATO ostensibly conditions its acceptance of new members on strict criteria,

which include “demonstrating a commitment to the rule of law and human rights; establishing democratic control of armed forces; and promoting stability and well-being through economic liberty, social justice and environmental responsibility.”

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Carpenter assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last September that Montenegro supported NATO’s “values of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law.” He must have missed the report from Freedom House, which gave the country a rating of only “partly free” for both political rights and civil liberties.

The organization cited “restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly” and “years of harassment and discrimination against LGBT people.” It also noted “ongoing concerns . . . about the independence of the judiciary and the public broadcaster, as well as numerous failures to effectively prosecute past attacks against media workers.” The country suffers from “a lack of trust in the electoral process among voters,” it added.

Carpenter must also have missed the State Department’s human rights report, which accused Montenegro of numerous violations, including “impunity for war crimes, mistreatment by law enforcement officers of persons in their custody, overcrowded and dilapidated prisons and pretrial detention facilities, violations of the right to peaceful assembly,” and “selective prosecution of political and societal opponents.”

A Bastion of Corruption

As for the “rule of law,” consider that Montenegro’s ruler for nearly three decades, Milo Djukanovi?, was given the 2015 Organized Crime and Corruption “Person of the Year” Award by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), an organization of several hundred investigative journalists who report on corruption in Europe and Central Asia (and are partly financed by USAID).

Citing his success in “creating an oppressive political atmosphere and an economy choked by corruption and money laundering,” the OCCRP said Djukanovi? “has built one of the most dedicated kleptocracies and organized crime havens in the world.”

The organization pointed to his alleged role in cigarette smuggling with notorious Italian crime syndicates; his family’s takeover of a former state bank, which became a money laundry for organized crime; his controversial sale of major stretches of the country’s coastline to shady foreign oligarchs; and his offer of citizenship to a notorious regional drug kingpin.

Djukanović knows the money is greener to the west of Montenegro than to the east. That's why he's an ardent advocate of joining NATO. (Fewer than 40 percent of Montenegrins in a recent poll agreed – in part because alliance warplanes bombed the country during NATO's campaign against Serbia in 1999.) President Obama congratulated Djukanović on his stand during an official reception in September.

Following national elections in October, Djukanović finally stepped down as prime minister, but he remains head of the ruling party. Taking his place as the country's current prime minister was his hand-picked deputy, Dusko Markovic.

"Markovic, a former state security chief, is considered one of Djukanović's closest confidantes," reported OCCRP. "He was publicly accused by a former head of the country's anti-organized crime police last year of involvement in cigarette smuggling, but was never charged." In 2014, Markovic was also charged by the head of a government investigative commission with obstructing a probe into the murder of a prominent newspaper editor and critic of Djukanović.

Western media have largely ignored such troubling facts. Instead, what little coverage there is of Montenegro focuses on the government's sensational claim that Russians plotted to assassinate Djukanović at the time of the October election.

Markovic recently told Time magazine that his security services at the last minute uncovered a "criminal organization" formed by two Russian military intelligence agents, who planned on election day "to provoke incidents . . . and also possibly an armed conflict" as a pretext for taking power.

The prosecutor in charge of the case says "Russian state authorities" backed the plot to "prevent Montenegro from joining NATO." He vows to indict two alleged Russian plotters and 22 others, including a group of Serbian nationalists, by April 15. Russia's foreign minister called the allegations "baseless," but refuses to extradite any suspects. An independent expert, citing numerous anomalies in the official story, argues the plot was a "rogue operation" by Serbian and Russian nationalist freelancers.

Russia, which has long considered the Balkans to be in its sphere of influence, has a history of intruding in Montenegro's affairs. But absent persuasive supporting evidence for the government's case, outsiders should bear in mind the cautionary observation by Freedom House that "[Montenegro's] intelligence service has faced sustained criticism from international observers for a perceived lack of professionalism."

Still, it should come as no surprise that anti-Russia hawks haven't let

ambiguous evidence deter them from demanding the expansion of NATO.

A *Wall Street Journal* [editorial](#) said the alleged coup plot “gives a good taste of Russia’s ambitions – and methods – in Eastern and Central Europe” and concluded with a call for accepting Montenegro’s bid to join NATO: “Western security is best served by supporting democratic governments of any size facing pressure from regional bullies. The alternative is to deliver another country into Moscow’s grip, and whet its appetite to take another.”

Time magazine [commented](#) even more breathlessly that “The aborted coup was a reminder that a new battle for Europe has begun. From the Baltics to the Balkans and the Black Sea to Great Britain, Vladimir Putin is seeking to rebuild Russia’s empire more than 25 years after the fall of the Soviet Union.” Trump’s past criticism of NATO, the magazine warned, has “raised flags that the U.S. might accept Russia’s territorial grab.”

Such inflammatory comments are stoking the political fires burning around Trump, including investigations of his campaign contacts with Russians, assertions of Moscow’s interference with the election, and questions about business connections or personal indiscretions that make him vulnerable to Putin. Trump’s stand on Montenegro – still to be determined – will signal whether he remains a critic of NATO or is caving to the New Cold Warriors.

Jonathan Marshall is author of many recent articles on arms issues, including [“Obama’s Unkept Promise on Nuclear War,”](#) [“How World War III Could Start,”](#) [“NATO’s Provocative Anti-Russian Moves,”](#) [“Escalations in a New Cold War,”](#) and [“Ticking Closer to Midnight.”](#)

A Nazi Skeleton in the Family Closet

Exclusive: Canada’s fiercely anti-Russian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland says her Ukrainian grandfather struggled “to return freedom and democracy to Ukraine,” but she leaves out that he was a Nazi propagandist justifying the slaughter of Jews, writes Arina Tsukanova.

By Arina Tsukanova

On Jan. 10, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau replaced Foreign Minister Stephane Dion with [Chrystia Freeland](#), a former journalist proud of her Ukrainian roots and well-known for her hostility toward Russia. At the time, a big question in Ottawa was why. Some analysts believed that Trudeau’s decision may have started when it still seemed likely that Hillary Clinton would become the

new U.S. president and a tough line against Moscow was expected in Washington.

However, by the time the switch was made, Donald Trump was on his way into the White House and Trudeau's choice meant that Canada was allying itself more with the mounting hostility toward Russia inside the European Union than with President Trump's hopes for a more cooperative relationship with the Kremlin. With Freeland running Canada's Foreign Ministry, the chance for a shared view between Ottawa and Washington suddenly seemed remote.

People who have followed Freeland's career were aware that her *idée fixe* for decades has been that Ukraine must be ripped out of the Russian sphere of influence. Her views fit with the intense Ukrainian nationalism of her maternal grandparents who immigrated to Canada after World War II and whom she has portrayed as victims of Josef Stalin and the Red Army.

So, Freeland celebrated the Soviet collapse in 1991, which enabled Ukraine to gain its independence. Freeland, then in her early 20s, was working in Kiev as a stringer for The Financial Times and The Washington Post, shining with delight over the emergence of a "New Ukraine."

By the next decade, working as the U.S. managing editor of The Financial Times, she proudly interviewed then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, who had won control as a result of the 2004 "Orange Revolution." In her approach to journalism, Freeland made clear her commitment to foment Ukrainian-Russian tensions in any possible way. Indeed, during her journalistic career, which ended in 2013 when she won a seat in Canada's parliament, Freeland remained fiercely anti-Russian.

In 2014, Yushchenko's rival Viktor Yanukovich was Ukraine's elected president while Canadian MP Freeland urged on the "Euro-Maidan" protests against Yanukovich and his desire to maintain friendly relations with Moscow. On Jan. 27, 2014, as the protests grew more violent with ultra-nationalist street fighters moving to the forefront and firebombing police, Freeland visited Kiev and published an op-ed in The Globe and Mail blaming the violence on Yanukovich.

"Democratic values are rarely challenged as directly as they are being today in Ukraine," Freeland wrote, arguing that the protesters, not the elected president, represented democracy and the rule of law. "Their victory will be a victory for us all; their defeat will weaken democracy far from the Euromaidan. We are all Ukrainians now. Let's do what we can – which is a lot – to support them."

Ukraine's 'Regime Change'

Freeland's op-ed appeared at about the same time as her ideological ally, U.S.

Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, was caught on an insecure phone line discussing with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt who the new leaders of Ukraine should be. “Yats is the guy,” Nuland said about Arseniy Yatsenyuk while dismissing the E.U.’s less aggressive approach to the crisis with the pithy remark, “Fuck the E.U.” Nuland and Pyatt then pondered how to “glue this thing” and “midwife this thing.”

Several weeks later, on Feb. 20, a mysterious sniper shot both police and protesters, touching off a day of bloody mayhem. On Feb. 22, armed rioters seized government buildings and forced Yanukovych to flee for his life. He was then impeached without the constitutional rules being followed. Yatsenyuk became prime minister, and Western governments quickly pronounced the new regime “legitimate.”

The new xenophobic regime in Kiev – bristling with hostility toward ethnic Russian Ukrainians – did not embarrass Freeland. As Canada’s newly appointed minister of international trade, Freeland met frequently with Ukrainian officials, more so than with many of Canada’s leading trade partners.

But the more troubling question is whether Freeland’s devotion to Ukrainian nationalism is rooted not in her commitment to the “rule of law” or “democratic values” or even the well-being of the Ukrainian people whose living standards have declined sharply since the Feb. 22, 2014 putsch (amid continued government corruption), but in her devotion to her Ukrainian grandparents whom she still views as victims of Stalin and the Red Army.

Last Aug. 24, reflecting on so-called Black Ribbon Day, which lumps together the crimes of Josef Stalin and Adolf Hitler (with Stalin getting top billing), she wrote on Twitter, “Thinking of my grandparents Mykhailo & Aleksandra Chomiak on Black Ribbon Day. They were forever grateful to Canada for giving them refuge and they worked hard to return freedom and democracy to Ukraine. I am proud to honour their memory today.”



In her autobiography, Freeland presents her grandparents in the following way: “My maternal grandparents fled western Ukraine after Hitler and Stalin signed their non-aggression pact in 1939. They never dared to go back, but they stayed

in close touch with their brothers and sisters and their families, who remained behind.”



According to Freeland, her grandfather Mykhailo Chomiak was “a lawyer and journalist before the Second World War, but they [her grandparents] knew the Soviets would invade western Ukraine (and) fled.” After the war, her mother was born in a refugee camp in Germany before the family immigrated to western Canada, Freeland wrote.

Freeland’s grandfather was allegedly able to get a visa only thanks to his sister who had crossed the ocean before the war. The family story told by Freeland portrays her grandparents as World War II victims, but that is not the real or full story.

Chrystia Freeland’s dark family secret is that her grandfather, Mykhailo Chomiak, faithfully served Nazi Germany right up to its surrender, and Chomiak’s family only moved to Canada after the Third Reich was defeated by the Soviet Union’s Red Army and its allies – the U.S. and Great Britain.

Mykhailo Chomiak was not a victim of the war – he was on the side of the German aggressors who collaborated with Ukrainian nationalists in killing Russians, Jews, Poles and other minorities. Former journalist Freeland chose to whitewash her family history to leave out her grandfather’s service to Adolf Hitler. Of course, if she had told the truth, she might never have achieved a successful political career in Canada. Her fierce hostility toward Russia also might be viewed in a different light.

Freeland’s Grandfather

According to Canadian sources, Chomiak graduated from Lviv University in western Ukraine with a Master’s Degree in Law and Political Science. He began a career with the Galician newspaper *Dilo* (Action), published in Lviv. After the start of World War II, the Nazi administration appointed Chomiak to be editor of the newspaper *Krakivski Visti* (News of Krakow).

So the truth appears to be that Chomiak moved from Ukraine to Nazi-occupied Poland in order to work for the Third Reich under the command of Governor-

General Hans Frank, the man who organized the Holocaust in Poland. Chomiak's work was directly supervised by Emil Gassner, the head of the press department in the Polish General Government.

Mikhailo Chomiak comfortably settled his family into a former Jewish (or Aryanized) apartment in Krakow. The editorial offices for *Krakivski Visti* also were taken from a Jewish owner, Krakow's Polish-language Jewish newspaper *Nowy Dziennik*. Its editor at the time was forced to flee Krakow for Lviv, where he was captured following the occupation of Galicia and sent to the Belzec extermination camp, where he was murdered along with 600,000 other Jews.

So, it appears Freeland's grandfather – rather than being a helpless victim – was given a prestigious job to spread Nazi propaganda, praising Hitler from a publishing house stolen from Jews and given to Ukrainians who shared the values of Nazism.

On April 24, 1940, *Krakivski Visti* published a full-page panegyric to Adolf Hitler dedicated to his 51st birthday (four days earlier). Chomiak also hailed Governor-General Hans Frank: "The Ukrainian population were overjoyed to see the establishment of fair German authority, the bearer of which is you, Sir Governor-General. The Ukrainian people expressed this joy not only through the flowers they threw to the German troops entering the region, but also through the sacrifices of blood required to fight Polish usurpers." (Because of Frank's role in the Holocaust, the Nuremberg Tribunal found him guilty of crimes against humanity and executed him.)

Beyond extolling Hitler and his henchmen, Chomiak rejoiced over Nazi military victories, including the terror bombings of Great Britain. While praising the Third Reich, *Krakivski Visti* was also under orders by the German authorities to stir up hatred against the Jewish population. Editorial selections from Chomiak's newspaper can be found in Holocaust museums around the world, such as the one in Los Angeles, California.

The Nov. 6, 1941 issue of *Krakivski Visti* ecstatically describes how much better Kiev is without Jews. "There is not a single one left in Kiev today, while there were 350,000 under the Bolsheviks," the newspaper wrote, gloating that the Jews "got their comeuppance."

That "comeuppance" refers to the mass shooting of Kiev's Jewish population at Babi Yar. In just two days, Sept. 29-30, 1941, a total of 33,771 people were murdered, a figure that does not include children younger than three years old. There were more shootings in October, and by early November, *Krakivski Visti* was enthusing over a city where the Jewish population had "disappeared" making Kiev "beautiful, glorious." Chomiak's editorials also described a Poland "iinfected

by Jews."

According to John-Paul Himka, a Canadian historian of Ukrainian origin, *Krakivski Visti* stirred up emotions against Jews, creating an atmosphere conducive to mass murder. In 2008, the Institute of Historical Research at Lviv National University published a paper co-authored by Himka entitled "What Was the Attitude of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists toward the Jews?" The paper states that, by order of the German authorities, *Krakivski Visti* published a series of articles between June and September 1943 under the title "*Yids in Ukraine*" that were written in an extremely anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi vein. The Canadian historian writes that Jews were portrayed as criminals, while Ukrainians were portrayed as victims.

Refuge in Canada

As the war turned against the Nazis and the Red Army advanced across Ukraine and Poland, Nazi propagandist Emil Gassner took Mykhailo Chomiak in 1944 to Vienna where *Krakivski Visti* continued to publish. As the Third Reich crumbled, Chomiak left with the retreating German Army and surrendered to the Americans in Bavaria, where he was placed with his family in a special U.S. military intelligence facility in Bad Wörishofen, a cluster of hotels situated 78 kilometers from Munich in the foothills of the Alps.

The Chomiak family was given accommodations, living expenses and health care. In her biography, Freeland refers to it only as "a refugee camp." In September 1946, Mikhailo Chomiak's daughter Halyna was born in that spa town. In May 1948, the facility was closed and Chomiak, the former Nazi editor, departed for Canada.

While it is true that the sins of a grandfather should not be visited on his descendants, Freeland should not have misled the public on history of such importance, especially when her deceptions also concealed how she partly developed her world view. The family's deep hostility toward Russia appears to have been passed down from Mikhailo Chomiak's generation to his granddaughter Chrystia Freeland.

Like many of today's Ukrainian nationalists, including pockets of post-World War II immigrants in Canada and the United States, Freeland glosses over the violent abuses of the current regime in Kiev toward ethnic Russians, including the fatal firebombing of the Trade Union Building in Odessa and enlistment of neo-Nazi militias to prosecute the so-called "Anti-Terror Operation" against ethnic Russian rebels in the Donbass region. Overall, the conflict has killed some 10,000 people, including many ethnic Russian civilians.

But Freeland only sees “Russian aggression” and vows to maintain an unrelentingly hard line to punish Moscow. So, the pressing question about Freeland is whether her family history makes her incapable of an objective assessment of this dangerous New Cold War crisis. Is a person who describes her Nazi-collaborating grandfather as someone who “worked hard to return freedom and democracy to Ukraine” fit to represent Canada to the world?

Arina Tsukanova is a Russian Ukrainian journalist from Kiev currently living in Crimea. Before the Euromaidan she used to work for several Ukrainian newspapers, now closed.

Trump’s Embattled ‘Revolution’

President Trump’s domestic “revolution” on behalf of “forgotten” Americans requires a complementary foreign policy of reduced warfare and a weaker dollar, explains ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

Pat Buchanan – perhaps the U.S. politician with the greatest feel (as a thrice-times U.S. presidential candidate himself) for what President Trump is trying to achieve – tells us compellingly, just why Trump is now the US President:

[Simply,] ...“He [Trump], read the nation and the world, better than his rivals. He saw the surging power of American nationalism at home, and of ethno-nationalism in Europe. And he embraced Brexit. While our bipartisan establishment worships diversity, Trump saw Middle America recoiling from the demographic change brought about by Third World invasions. And he promised to curb them.

“While our corporatists burn incense at the shrine of the global economy, Trump went to visit the working-class casualties. And those forgotten Americans in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin, responded. And while Bush II and President Obama plunged us into Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Trump saw that his countrymen wanted to be rid of the endless wars, and start putting America first. [And] He offered a new foreign policy ... Putin’s Russia is not ‘our number one geopolitical foe.’”

That’s it. That’s Trump’s domestic, and his foreign policy, in one.

What we all presently are obsessed with, is the bellicosity and hysteria to

which Trump and his agenda has given rise: Is détente with Russia now effectively dead, as a consequence of the new Russo-phobic McCathyism? Or, is that which we are witnessing nothing more than “a mere tantrum by a clutch of ‘spooks’ whose jobs are under threat ... along with the liberal press having a ‘parallel tantrum’: [not believing] that they lost the election to Donald Trump” – as one American commentator told MK Bhadrakumar? Or, are we seeing a brittle American Establishment splitting apart, in a more profound way?

We do not know the answer. The notion of removing Trump from office seems somewhat far-fetched (see here). Certainly, America is deeply divided: Trump plainly evokes strong, emotional reactions. Three-fourths of Americans react to him strongly – either positively or negatively.

The *Pew Research Center*’s latest survey shows that only eight percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents approve Trump’s job performance, which is the lowest rating for any new president from the opposing party in more than three decades. But interestingly, Pew also finds that *84 percent* of Republicans and Republican-leaning, regard Trump’s initial job performance as president “favorably.”

A Divided Administration

But then, Gilbert Doctorow relates, as the new Administration got underway, “came a stunning about-face in the early roll-out of Donald Trump’s new foreign policy, which looked a lot like Barack Obama’s old foreign policy. We heard presidential press secretary Sean Spicer say Trump ‘expected the Russian government to ... return Crimea’ to Ukraine.

“Then we heard Defense Secretary James Mattis in Brussels (NATO headquarters), Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in Bonn (G20 Foreign Ministers meeting) and Vice President Pence in Munich (Security Conference) collectively pledge unswerving loyalty to the NATO alliance, insist that any new talks with Russia must be conducted from ‘a position of strength,’ and vow to hold Russia accountable for the full implementation of the Minsk Accords, meaning all sanctions stay in place pending that achievement which the Ukrainian government has consistently blocked, while blaming Moscow.

“Amid these signals of surrender from the Trump Administration – suggesting continuation of the disastrous foreign policy of the last 25 years – the newly revived enemies of détente on Capitol Hill added more anti-Russian sanctions and threats. In response to alleged violations by the Kremlin of the Treaty on Intermediate and Short-range Missiles (INF) dating back to 1987, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Arkansas, introduced a bill enabling the re-installation of American nuclear-tipped cruise missiles in Europe. If enacted, this would undo the main

achievements of disarmament from the Reagan years, and bring us back to a full-blown Cold War.”

This has unnerved Trump supporters; apparently disappointed some in Moscow; and also failed to reassure anxious Europeans at the Munich Security Conference. They are puzzling over which Administration faction to believe more correctly reflects future U.S. policy: the Pence/Mattis/Haley ‘wing’, that Europeans would like to hope is dominant; or, the Trump/Bannon/Miller triumvirate, which Steve Bannon hints views the European Union as a flawed construct, and who foresees conducting future relations with Europe, on a bilateral basis.

Which of these two, reflects America’s likely path, more accurately? Has the Establishment now succeeded in walking-back Trump’s agenda? Who now speaks for the President?

The answer is not hard to fathom: return to Pat Buchanan’s clear explanation of how Trump became President: “He saw the surging power of American nationalism at home, and of ethno-nationalism in Europe. And he embraced Brexit. While our bipartisan establishment worships diversity, Trump saw Middle America recoiling from the demographic change, brought about by Third World invasions. And he promised to curb them.”

Obviously, it is the Trump-Bannon wing. Were Trump to abandon his reading of the nation and of the Europeans that brought him to the Presidency, he might as well throw in the towel now. He will not be re-elected.

Weakening the Dollar

And Mr. Trump is showing no signs of reversing (for all the mixed messaging that has emanated from his diverse team). So, back to basics. What then is his foreign policy? Simply this: If President Trump wishes to keep his 84 percent (Republican) approval rating – and stay elected – there is only one way that he can do that: he must continue to carry “the working-class casualties and those forgotten Americans” (as Buchanan called them) of the Midwest, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

And the only way to do that is to bring back manufacturing jobs to this (white), Middle America, (hurting) constituency. And the only way you can bring those jobs back, is with a weak dollar. A strong dollar would be deadly to Trump’s project.

Today, the dollar is too strong to allow any real return of manufacturing to the U.S. Trump needs to staunch any propensity for the dollar to rise. And, in his very first interview upon taking office (with the Wall Street Journal), Trump’s main point, was that he wanted the U.S. dollar “down.”

Here it is, then: Trump's main foreign policy objective is the return of jobs to Middle America – and that means, in practical terms, avoiding a strong dollar. Secondly, the ultimate point of détente with Russia – apart from Trump's reading that Middle America is experiencing war fatigue – is that détente can release a "peace dividend" which would be vital for the task of rebuilding America's frayed infrastructure. (His tax proposals ultimately will have to be revenue neutral if Trump is to avoid an ugly row with his Tea Party supporters, who are aggressively fiscal conservative.)

Again, détente with Russia *is a domestic need*, required to attend to the rebuilding of the frayed structures of the communities who voted him into office. It is not anchored in any particular foreign policy ideology, but merely in a sense of peoples' fatigue.

Of course, wanting a weaker dollar *and* wanting détente with Russia, does not mean that Trump will get either; he will continue to face stiff internal resistance and filibustering. But these two aims, as it were, may be seen to constitute the overriding prism by which Trump views his foreign policy aims, in the longer term.

In the shorter term – perhaps – what we are seeing now, is a tactical pause, dictated by the malicious leaks from within the system, and by the unrelenting "war" being waged by the mainstream media – a pause to allow Trump to get on with sorting out his Administration – purging the leaks, putting in place his people, and contending with certain of the mainstream media.

It seems the purge is slowly happening (it must be a huge process, and be imposing a heavy demand on time). It is however, simply not very realistic for Trump to pursue an accord with either Russia or China while he is under siege, and when his very survival is being widely questioned. And, as is now widely known, Trump believes in negotiating from a position of strength, and not weakness. Pence and Mattis may well have been dispatched to Europe to apply some anaesthetizing balm, while the difficulties of the first month are being resolved.

So, how might this "foreign policy" be conducted in practice? Well, if Trump were to impose protectionist measures on other states (China, say), this would likely result in their currencies depreciating, as a consequence. A 30 percent tax might result in a 30 percent currency devaluation. We have seen something of the sort happening with the peso, in the case of Mexico. And, *ipso facto*, if the Mexican or Chinese currency weakens, the dollar appreciates (thus weakening U.S. capacity to compete).

There are two possible routes ahead: one is for Trump to negotiate bilaterally

with (say) Germany, Japan, China and others, to warn them that either they revalue their currencies (or, at minimum, hold their foreign exchange value stable), or else to suffer the consequences of a U.S.-imposed protectionism, which would badly damage the health of their economies.

Or, Trump can revert to the Reagan tactic of the mid-1980s, when the then the U.S. President pulled together all the main global central banks and finance ministers in Paris, to instruct that the dollar was not to be allowed to rise in value any further (after its rapid appreciation in the early 1980s). This was known as the "Plaza Accord."

Going with 'Bilateralism'

It seems that Trump will pursue the first course (bilateralism), as he has already made it clear that he wants to negotiate on a fuller field than just the stability of foreign exchange values. Specific trade deals, and inward investment into the U.S., will be on the agenda – as well as his declared aim of leveraging U.S. defense provision as a bilaterally negotiated *quid pro quo*, in return further economic benefit to the U.S. – rather than having the U.S. defense umbrella being provided as a highly subsidized "good."

The implications of this bilateral approach are significant. It does not imply, *per se*, that Trump should want to split Russia from China. Trump, by his own logic, would not want, ultimately, to resort to protectionism against China (other than as a negotiating ploy). Imposing punitive tariffs on China would likely lead to a strengthening of the dollar, and risk a devaluation of the yuan – even possibly a maxi-devaluation of the yuan. Rather, he wants *a deal*. One that would bring additional jobs and Chinese infrastructure investment to America.

The notion that America needs to divide Russia from China (or Iran) for strategic reasons (though one probably embraced by some of his team) is essentially "old think." It belongs to the neoconservative era, which held that America must remain as a global defense and financial hegemon. And therefore must contain and weaken any contending rising power.

Russia will not, in any case, break with China. But in the Trumpian logic, why should that matter, so long as Trump has achieved satisfactory commercial deals with each? (Kissinger though, may try to persuade Trump otherwise.)

Again, pursuing the war on radical Islam (for which Trump has called for proposals from the Pentagon) would not necessarily call for decisive military U.S. interventions in the Middle East, on this logic. A change in policy, *and in ethos*, by a reformed CIA – away from using radical Islam as "a tool" by which to

pursue its “interests” (as it has from Afghanistan in the 1980s to Syria in recent years), would *in and of itself*, bring about a profound change. It would quickly percolate through to European intelligence services – and more slowly – marinate Gulf thinking.

Changing the ‘Group Think’

Pat Lang, a former senior U.S. Defense Intelligence officer, notes how a small shift in bureaucratic “group think” from one paradigm to another can bring crucial change, simply by virtue of approaching a problem from a different direction:

“1. General Dunford, USMC, the uniformed head of the US armed forces, is meeting the week at Baku in Azarbaijan with General Gerasimov, the head of the Russian General Staff.

“2. My sources tell me that US and Russian air forces are increasingly coordinating and de-conflicting their air actions in Syria and Iraq. This can clearly be seen in USAF and US Navy air attacks on ‘moderate’ (in fact jihadi forces) in Idlib Province. These obviously have been coordinated with Russian air defenses.

“3. *The CIA has stopped providing assistance to aforesaid ‘moderate’ jihadi and FSA forces in Syria. They would not have done that without instructions from outside and above CIA.*

All of that tells me that sanity reigns in the Trump Administration no matter what lunatics like Schumer, Waters and McCain may do, think or say.” (*emphasis added*).

What then are the major risks to the Trump “paradigm”? They are not negligible. Any increase in international tension usually will lead to a flight to the “safety” of the U.S. dollar – thus to a “strengthening” of the dollar. (One good reason why Trump may stick with *rhetoric* against Iran, rather than *action*).

Secondly, although Trump has been trying to “talk down” the value of the U.S. dollar, most of his policies (de-offshoring of corporate cash, de-regulation and tax cuts) are seen as inflationary – and therefore are pushing the dollar upwards. So, too, are pronouncements by the Federal Reserve about the prospects for an interest rate hike next month. It is not clear that Trump will be able to keep the dollar weak, against a general sense that interest rates are heading upwards. David Stockman’s inflation index for the U.S., which uses more realistic values for energy, food, shelter and medical insurance than the official CPI index, is now rising at better than a 4 percent annual rate.

And thirdly, China may yet undo Trump's plans. As one well-versed economic commentator notes:

"I strongly contend that a more than one-half Trillion (\$) one-month Chinese Credit expansion in early 2017 will exert divergent inflationary impacts to those from early 2016...

"Inflationary biases evolve significantly over time...Liquidity will tend to further inflate the already inflating asset class(s); 'hot money' will chase the hottest speculative Bubble. Inflationary surges in Credit growth can, as well, have profoundly different impacts depending on inflationary expectations, economic structure and the nature of financial flows.

"I would argue that Chinese officials today face a more daunting task of containing mounting financial leverage and imbalances than just a few months ago. *The clock continues to tick, with rising odds that Beijing will be forced to take the types of forceful measures that risk an accident.*"

These inflationary risks threaten Trump, more than the unlikely prospect of impeachment. He has been consistent in warning that whomsoever won this Presidential election, would, sooner or later, face a financial crisis – and then possibly a concomitant social crisis. Like most revolutions, Trump's revolution cannot afford to stand still: if it cannot, or does not, go forward, it will go backwards. We will return to the past. Trump, no doubt, grasps this.

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.

Who's Behind US Downward-Mobility?

President Trump blames Mexicans, Chinese and other foreigners for the plight of downwardly mobile Americans but the real culprits are his corporatist pals who grab the lion's share of the wealth from U.S. global dominance, says JP Sottile.

By JP Sottile

Donald Trump kicked-off his presidency with the bold accusation that the "wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed across the entire world." It was a logical follow-up to a campaign rooted in selling voters on a grand global conspiracy of wily Chinese, cunning Mexicans, lollygagging NATO welfare queens and nefarious "global elites" who've gotten fat

and rich off of the weakness, stupidity and complicity of American leadership.

This international cabal of money-making interlopers has, according to the steroidal economic nationalism manufactured by Steve Bannon and peddled by President Trump, systematically denuded the American economy, liquidated American manufacturing, transgressed the Middle Class and wreaked a unique form of “carnage” on unwitting American workers. After he was inaugurated, Trump claimed the tentacles of this global conspiracy to deprive Americans of their economic “birthright” even reached into the world of prescription drugs.

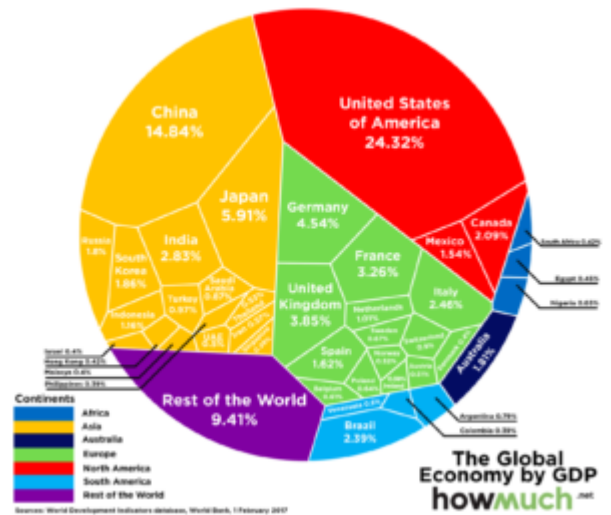
Oddly enough, before he delivered his “American Carnage” speech, Trump campaigns against Big Pharma’s big profits from exorbitantly-priced drugs. He even said they were “getting away with murder.” In response, he promised to impose the type of “bulk buying” that makes drugs so darn cheap in places like Canada, France and the rest of the civilized world. But now that he’s got the Executive Branch under his tiny thumb, Trump now blames a “very unfair” cabal of international bulk-buying crooks who’ve connived to make American consumers pay high prices for drugs ... so they can pay far less.

In effect, the world’s bulk buying system is a conspiracy to make Americans pay the high cost of developing the drugs they can then buy in bulk from the pharmaceutical industry at reduced cost. At least, that’s what he told a group of Big Pharma executives when they came to visit him.

That new bulk-buying enemy of the people joins Trump’s list of usual suspects, global gougers and assorted “enemies of the American people.” Public enemy number one is, of course, the horde of job-stealing immigrants who’ve displaced what’s left of America’s depleted employment market. They’ve come to wrest away the cooking jobs, the cleaning jobs, the agricultural jobs, the construction jobs, the landscaping jobs and all the other jobs Americans are apparently denied because countries like Mexico are purposefully sending their people across the border to take advantage of America’s stupidity.

This is the embittered narrative of “America agonistes” that Trump keeps on selling to his supporters. It’s a world in which Uncle Sam is the ultimate mark in a great global game of economic Three-card Monty. It’s a world where the global system of trade deals, capital flows, currency trades, high-speed financial transactions, hydrocarbon extraction and military alliances is, in effect, a giant wealth removal mechanism that specifically targets “real” Americans and forestalls America’s rightful return to greatness. But there is just one problem with Trump’s grand vision. It’s a funny little thing called “reality” and, thanks to this snazzy chart, we can see exactly how far from

reality The Donald does not fear to tread:



That's the world's economy as tabulated by the World Bank and, thanks to howmuch.net, impressively illustrated into a starkly effective Voronoi diagram. As this breakdown clearly shows, Uncle Sam is not really getting taken to the cleaners by the rest of the world. Far from it, in fact. This World Bank data shows that America's economy is the "roughly equivalent in size to the total GDPs of #3 through #10 (that's Japan, Germany, the UK, France, India, Italy, Brazil and Canada – combined)." Although it is true that China is "catching up" with the United States, it is still well-behind America.

Could it be that Trump doesn't know that America remains the disproportionately wealthy king of the global economic hill? According to this data, "the United States (24.3%) generates almost a quarter of global GDP and is almost 10 percentage points ahead of China (14.8%), in second place, and more than 18 percentage points ahead of Japan (4.5%) on three." That means that Americans control nearly a quarter of the world's GDP despite the fact that Americans only make up 4.4% of planet Earth's total population. Sorry, Donald ... but that's a whole lot of what it takes to get along in the world.

And that total is eerily similar to the America's energy consumption. According to the Worldwatch Institute, America's 4.4% uses about a quarter of the world's fossil fuel resources – burning up nearly 25 percent of the coal, 26 percent of the oil, and 27 percent of the world's natural gas. And how has America guaranteed access to the lion's share of the world energy and resources?

Military Dominance

Surprise! It's also home to the world's largest military budget which is, not coincidentally, "almost as much as the next 14 countries put together and far larger than the rest of the world," according to a 2016 report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. So, 4.4 percent of the world's population accounts for "more than a third of global military spending." But

that's not all.

As CNNMoney reported, Uncle Sam is also “by far the world’s biggest arms exporter, accounting for 33% of all weapons exports in the five years through 2016.” The SIPRI report that story was based on also found that America is literally and figuratively making a killing by selling weapons to ... Mexico! That’s right, those thieving Mexicans have been, as CNSNews aptly stated, on a “buying spree with transfers of weaponry and equipment into the country growing by 184 percent between the 2007-2011 period and the 2012-2016 period.”

America’s supermarket of military hardware is wide open for business and, like so many of the world’s nations, Mexico is availing itself of the Uncle Sam’s leading export – a bountiful array of weaponry.

So, to recap ... America is 4.4 percent of the world’s population. It accounts for more than 33 percent of the global total of military spending and it sells 33 percent of all the world’s weapons while, at the same time, it is targeting Mexico with a profitable flood of military-grade arms and materiel. That’s the same Mexico the President accuses of intentionally sending bad dudes from drug cartels to infiltrate the America with drugs and ravage it with rape and murder. And, in the world according to Trump, that’s what his vaunted wall is meant to stop – the gangs, the crime and the drugs.

However, a recent CNBC investigation found that like everything else, Americans have a disproportionate appetite for drugs ... but not drugs coming from Mexico. Rather, Americans consume “approximately 80 percent of the global opioid supply” of “300 million pain prescriptions” which amounts to a \$24 billion market. Opioid addiction is widely seen as the leading catalyst of the heroin crisis sweeping many rural areas and small towns as users in Trump-loving Red States seek a cheap, readily available alternative to potent prescription painkillers.

Opioid addiction numbers have spiked to two million Americans who are, quite shockingly, often being treated by the health care system with ... more opioid prescriptions. In 2015, overdose deaths related to prescription pain relievers spiked to 20,101 and another 12,990 deaths were heroin-related, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

So, who are those biggest beneficiaries of this opioid-related carnage? Mexicans? The Chinese? Radical Islamic Terrorists, perhaps? Well, the “top five” beneficiaries are, as CNBC detailed, “Purdue Pharma, Johnson & Johnson, Insys Therapeutics, Mylan and Depomed.” And where are these companies located? Purdue is based in Stamford, Connecticut. Johnson & Johnson is based in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Insys Therapeutics is based in Chandler, Arizona. Mylan is registered in the Netherlands, but their global headquarters in Canonsburg,

Pennsylvania. And Depomed is located in Newark, California. Somehow, that roster doesn't actually look like a roadmap to uncovering a global conspiracy to stick it to American consumers or a swarthy cartel seeking to exploit an open border.

No, like so much of Trumps' grievance-obsessed nationalism, all roads inevitably lead to home. And that's perhaps the saddest part of this sordid tale. Because real people are really struggling in hard-hit places that used to hum along in America's industrial heartland. But the amazing industrial engine that emerged from World War II and powered that glorious Middle Class moment in the 1950s and 1960s has long since run out of gas.

And although the unfettered capital flows of globalization hastened the decline in many places, the simple fact is that the people who benefitted the most from a global labor market were American corporate captains and Wall Street's financial tricksters and big box retailers like Walmart. Some of those beneficiaries now populate Trump's cabinet and many others are now riding high on the profitable wave of a trumped-up stock market.

To America's Benefit

Frankly, since the end of World War II, the entire global system – the financialized economy, the alliances, the trade deals, the global network of military bases – have all overwhelmingly benefited America and its oil companies and defense companies and financial companies and retail companies and on and on and on.

The real problem hasn't been the world ripping off the Middle Class. The problem is that the people at the top of these industries – and hyper-financialized go-getters in Wall Street who wheel and deal and leverage their debts – have increasingly hoarded the wealth so disproportionately created by America's global spanning power and economic dominance.

This is not about a global conspiracy hatched abroad. This is about conscious decisions by high-powered Americans here at home to keep more and more of everything. They created obscene levels of wealth and income inequality by inflating their compensation packages, by gaming the market for short-term payoffs, by gutting collective bargaining rights and, just as The Donald did with his own vast array of branded goods, by seeking higher profit margins from cheap offshore labor.

The simple fact is that Trump's scapegoating of global economic thieves is a big phony baloney that, in the end, only helps his cronies. That's why he didn't mention collective bargaining rights when he met with union leaders who, truth be told, seemed happy just to be invited to his table ... even if all he's really

offering are the crumbs and scraps left over from an economic ideology rooted in the past. Sadly, that's all they'll get because, at the same time, Trump's Republican allies plan to gut what's left of unions with ever-expanding "right to work" laws.

But perhaps the worst of all is his crackdown on immigrants who, as the American Conservative's Jon Basil Utley painstakingly detailed, drive so many parts of America's economic engine – from undocumented workers on the dairy farms of Wisconsin to Indian-generated startups in California, Texas, New York and Massachusetts to "thousands of tiny lunch shops" to Asian and Latina child care workers and, most notable, to the "half of all the *Fortune* 500 largest companies in America" that were "founded by immigrants or children of immigrants."

Instead, we get a self-described "military operation" under the guise of extricating "bad dudes" in drug-dealing gangs and Mexican cartels. This histrionic plan conveniently obfuscates the perfectly legal drug dealers of Big Pharma who are the real culprits behind the "carnage" decimating America. That, along with his attack on the bulk-buying ways of health care systems around the world, is yet another dangerous, if potentially profitable distraction from the stark reality being lived every day by people who struggle to afford medication or battle to live another day with a Pharma-engineered addiction.

Really, it's no different than putting an oil industry shill in charge of the EPA, a slick oil salesman in charge of the State Department, a private school profiteer in charge of the Education Department, a health industry stock speculator in charge of Health and Human Services ... and Goldman Sachs alums in charge of Treasury and the whole economic enchilada. These folks represent that same elite movers and shakers who've benefited from America's position as the world's richest nation, while also driving policies that make it the one of the developed world's most unequal – right behind Chile and (of course) Mexico.

Even worse, the top 1 percent now takes home "more than 20% of all U.S. income" and the "bottom 50% went from capturing over 20% of national income for much of the 1970s to earning barely 12% today," according to CNNMoney. But The Donald doesn't talk about making America more equal again. Instead he's blowing a smokescreen for the crony capitalists who see big profits and big tax breaks ahead while they leave those Americans struggling to keep up with the heady pace of technological change further and further behind.

Still, they got the hat and they've got some hope and, as evidenced by the chart above, America still enjoys the bulk of the world's benefits. But If America was ever truly "great," it was that fleeting moment when the fruits of America's global dominance were shared more broadly with the parents and grandparents of the people who voted to make it great again.

JP Sottile is a freelance journalist, radio co-host, documentary filmmaker and former broadcast news producer in Washington, D.C. He blogs at [Newsvandal.com](http://www.newsvandal.com) or you can follow him on Twitter, <http://twitter/newsvandal>.

Israel's Dead-End Dilemma

President Trump says he's okay with a one- or two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – whatever the two parties want – but without forceful U.S. intervention, neither option is feasible, says John Chuckman.

By John Chuckman

With its steady encroachment on Palestinian lands, Israel has created a problem that it can't solve. That is why it has always been the case that the United States must pretty much dictate a solution, but it is unable to do so because it is paralyzed by the heavy influence of Israel on the U.S. political process and the power of America's own apologists for Israel.

Trump's suggestion of a one-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict is welcomed by some because Israel's settler policy is said to have made two states impossible, as it was most certainly intended to do. However, a little reflection on hard facts makes it clear that a one-state solution is just as near impossible as a two-state solution.

A single-state solution would be acceptable to all reasonable minds, but you only have to follow the news to know that Israel contains a good many unreasonable minds. Its early advocates and founders were, quite simply, fanatics, and its policies and attitudes were shaped by that fanaticism.

The Israeli establishment could simply not accept a Palestinian population with equal rights and the franchise as part of Israel. They could not do so because they have embraced an almost mystical concept of Israel as "the Jewish state." Of course, the de facto reality of today's combined population of Israel and its occupied territories is that Palestinians, who importantly include not just Muslims but many Christians, are already about half of the total.

And there are physical realities forming huge barriers against a single state, factors that many people don't know. Very importantly, fertility rates in Arab populations are considerably higher than in the European Ashkenazi population, which forms Israel's elite. That has nothing to do with ethnic characteristics. It is a result of much lower levels of affluence influencing the behavior of

people having children. It is a universal reality we see.

That's why Arabic populations are such relatively young populations with a high proportion of children. When Israel bombs a place like Gaza or Lebanon, as it does periodically (in "mowing the grass operations"), it always kills many hundreds of children because they make a big share of the population. An advanced country like Japan has low fertility and traditionally is averse to much migration. It faces a future with an aging and declining population.

All older European and North American countries have fertility rates too low to replace their otherwise declining populations. America, France, Israel or similar states simply do not have enough babies to replace their populations. That's a fundamental reality of advanced, affluent society. People in such societies know that their children have a much better chance to survive than children in poor countries.

That's the real reason behind most countries' immigration policies, not generosity or kindness. They need young workers to maintain strong levels of productivity. But, of course, Israel has a serious problem with immigration, too. As the "Jewish state" it is open to only one category of migrant, and that category of people makes a tiny fraction of the world's population. Further, most Jews live in comfortable, affluent places and enjoy easier lives than people in Israel do – places like America, Canada, Australia, Britain, France, etc.

Irrational Beliefs

So, a single-state Israel would combine low fertility Europeans with higher fertility Arabic people, thus creating a long-term trajectory for a minority-Jewish state, a reality which would be repellent to right-wing Jews and many others in light of the founding notion of Israel as a refuge from anti-Semitism, plus the vaguely-defined but emotionally-loaded notion of a "Jewish state" and the biblical myths of God's having given the land exclusively to Jews.

You simply cannot make rational sense out of that bundle of attitudes and prejudices, yet you cannot get a rational solution to a massive problem otherwise. It is also a problem of Israel's own deliberate making in the Six Day War. Likely, when Israel's leadership started that war, they calculated that Palestinians would come to feel so miserable under occupation that they'd just pick up and leave over time.

Moshe Dayan, one of the architects of the war, actually spoke along those very lines of keeping the Palestinians miserable so they would leave. But their calculations were wrong. Most people, anywhere, do not pick-up and leave their

native place. Otherwise the world would a constant whirlwind of migrations.

Although Israel does not discuss the issue of the relative population growth rates in public, authorities and experts there are keenly aware of the reality. It is difficult to imagine them ever embracing a single state for this reason. When you found a state on ideology and myths, as Israel was founded, you very soon bump up against some unhappy realities.

So, if there is not to be a Palestinian state, what are Israel's other options? There seem to be only two.

One is to deport all or most Palestinians, an ugly idea which is probably also unworkable, although it has been seriously discussed among educated Israelis periodically. Apart from the Nazi-like connotations around such an act, there is the dilemma of who is going to take literally millions of people from Israel? In the past, Israeli ideologues have suggested the country of Jordan and parts of Egypt contiguous with Israel as possibilities.

But can any realistic person believe those states stand ready to take millions of people in? No, of course not, but that hasn't stopped the ideologues of Israel from going back to the idea again and again. Of course, there is the pure ethical problem of moving millions of people against their wills and seizing all their property, but ethics have never featured large in Israel's policies from the beginning.

The other solution is to re-create apartheid South Africa's Bantustans, little enclaves of land with often undesirable characteristics into which you crowd all the people that you don't want and declare that these are their new countries. We see this already in Israel, notably in Gaza, which really is a giant refugee camp resembling a concentration camp with high fences and automated machine-gun towers surrounding it. The residents are permitted almost no freedom of movement or even economic activity, as for example Gaza's fishermen being fired on by Israeli gunboats if they stray even slightly beyond tight boundaries in the sea.

The world would not long tolerate that approach no matter how much heavy-handed influence the United States might exert. After all, for a long time, the United States protected and cooperated with apartheid South Africa, always regarding it as an important bulwark against communism. At the time, anti-communism was the fervent secular religion of the day in America. This was so much the case that the U.S. even overlooked what it absolutely had to know about apartheid South Africa's acquisition of a small arsenal of nuclear weapons with the assistance of Israel. Israel always was keen to keep good access to South Africa's mineral wealth.

Clearly, those two options – ethnic cleansing and full-scale apartheid – are not solutions. Realities demand either a legitimate two-state solution, which Israel's leaders have never truly accepted while giving it time-buying lip-service, or a one-state solution that is probably even more unacceptable to Israel's leaders and much of its population, guaranteeing, as it does, the eventual minority status of Jews.

Israel has created this terrible problem and is incapable of solving it. That is why the United States would have to basically dictate a solution, but Israel and its American supporters have invested so heavily in lobbying and pressuring the U.S. political process that American leaders shy away from asserting such a role. So, in effect, the world just goes around and around never doing anything decisively.

The macabre dance of Israel and the United States that we've had for decades yields today's de facto reality of Israel existing as a protected American colony in the Middle East, one in which all kinds of international norms and laws are ignored or suspended, one where millions live with no rights and no citizenship.

John Chuckman is former chief economist for a large Canadian oil company.

Palestinians See More of the Same

President Trump has offered mixed signals about precisely what his attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be, but Palestinians see little prospects for meaningful improvement, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent visit to Washington reaffirmed one thing in terms of U.S./Israeli relations: that not much will change in the United States' massive one-sided support for Israel, says Palestinian author and activist Ramzy Baroud.

The U.S. will continue to support, arm and publicly defend the ongoing Israeli policy of ethnic cleansing, as things go from bad to worse, Baroud adds, noting that Israel – with U.S. support – has already reduced the Gaza Strip to a fenced-in prison, where well over a million Palestinians don't even have access to the basics such as food and clean water. Now, the Israeli government has turned its full attention to the West Bank, which is under siege with new

Israeli settlements.

I spoke to Ramzy Baroud about the Netanyahu visit, the illegal settlement boom on the West Bank with its concurrent upsurge in settler violence, the implications of moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, and the general daily brutalities of living under the iron fist of Israeli occupation.

Baroud is an internationally-syndicated columnist, a media consultant, and the founder of PalestineChronicle.com. His latest book is *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story*.

Dennis Bernstein: It is good to speak with you on the heels of the visit to the U.S. by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. [...]

This is sort of how the visit, and, I guess, the story of Palestine and Israel, is being framed by the corporate press. This is coming off the BBC, but it's typical: U.S. President Donald Trump has asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "hold off on settlements" in a joint press conference.

Mr. Trump also promised to deliver "a great peace deal" but said Israel and the Palestinians must both compromise. So that's the BBC's characterization. How would you frame the current visit?

Ramzy Baroud: Well, the current visit, really, is a culmination of a whole bunch of events that have been taking place for months now prior to Trump coming to office, and the inauguration, and the aftermath. There's a great sense of euphoria, a great deal of euphoria, among the Israeli political elites. The whole two state solution enterprise is dead. The whole era of being told what to do, or being pressured in any way, or being censured, even in the slightest, most gentle way by previous administrations, that era is over, done with.

And now we are entering into a new era in which Israel single-handedly dictates everything it needs to dictate. Not just on Palestinians but on the United States, thus the so-called international community. So I see this kind of as a celebration of the Israeli political triumph, over the American foreign policy, and the balancing act that they have been playing in the Middle East for, really, in the last 25 years since the Madrid peace talks in '91, until today. It's the end of all of that, and it's ushered in our new era, and that's an Israeli era, for sure.

DB: Well, just to set the tone. You say that ...Trump's pick for the U.S. Ambassador to Israel [David Friedman], is to the right of Netanyahu. You want to say a little bit about that choice, and his desire to move the Embassy to Jerusalem?

RB: Well, that's right. There was a recent article by a Professor Rashid Khalidi in the New Yorker, in which he said this is the first time in the history of U.S./Israeli relations that you could actually swap both ambassadors, the Israeli and American ambassadors, back and forth and you can't even tell which one is there to defend Israel's interests, and which one is there for American interests. There is this cohesion that is happening at last. And it's a perfect scenario for Israel.

The new pick for the ambassador [Friedman] is someone who is very much pro-settlements, does not even refer to the West Bank by its internationally recognized name. He refers to the occupied territories as Judea and Samaria. It's the land with the biblical reference, made by right-wing ultra-nationalists and religious Jewish politicians. So we are seeing something that's really unprecedented. The attempt at kind of dilly-dallying around this issue is over as far as American foreign policy is concerned.

American foreign policy, now, is exactly what Israel says it is. And I think it was really interesting what Trump said today in the press conference, when he said "I don't care, two states, one state, it's what you guys decide."

But the interesting part about it, is that when you have an occupier and an occupied, someone with powerful military and someone who's, you know, just in a constant state of self-defense, and someone that is commanding one of the Middle East's, the strongest economy, and others who are living in a South African apartheid-like Bantustan, well guess what? You can't really decide equally. One would have to impose his vision on the other.

And that is precisely what Trump is doing. He is giving Israel free hand to behave in any way that is consistent with its interests. And as you heard, what Netanyahu was saying was pretty dark and terrifying actually.

DB: Now, clearly Israel has always been given the gold from the United States. There's always been that kind of relationship. I guess Obama signed off on that deal for \$38 billion ... in aid—the most [to a foreign nation] ever. That certainly was a demonstration of U.S. friendship, if you will. But, how do you see this proceeding? If they go into Jerusalem, if they put the Embassy in Jerusalem, what happens next? How does that reverberate within the Palestinian community? Is it possible that they could just stand by?

RB: Of course not. They will not stand by. And that's what Trump does not understand. I think there's a couple of important points that will have to be stated. The first one is that the U.S. did not put any expectations on Israel, whatsoever.

The \$38 billion and whatever political support and financial backing that they have received through all these years, they haven't put any expectations, except one single expectation. And that is to allow the U.S. the prestige, the leadership, the ability to come and impose itself as the "honesty spokesman," if you will.

Because the peace process was essential for American foreign policy. It is more important than we can possibly imagine. It is that kind of soaked power opportunity to impose themselves, not just on the Palestinians in the occupied territories, but on the rest of the Arabs. If you play along you're a moderate, if you are against us, you are a radical. That's all the United States expected from Israel. Just use the language of peace, just entertain this discourse and we will give you exactly what you want.

Even that proved to be too much for Israel. They don't want that, and Trump is willing to completely move away from that entire discourse. I think this is really interesting, and I think, eventually, it's going to alter America's standing in the Middle East altogether. What Trump doesn't understand, he is... it's all about making the deal... it's all about business, it's all about looking at who is the powerful party? Who is the weaker party? And he is just thinking of it in terms of dollars and cents. Now, it doesn't work that way in the Middle East.

Even the supposedly powerless and unarmed Palestinians could actually prove to be... their reaction could prove to be truly consequential, as far as American foreign policy is concerned. Palestinians are most likely to react, to mobilize. There are a great deal of efforts at forging a new Palestinian political outlook. They are looking for alternative leadership. They have their alternative allies. They had a meeting in Moscow, between Hamas and Fatah recently.

But also, you could see that entire region as far as destabilizing against the Americans, who are trying to, kind of, maintain their status and their influence in Syria, and Libya, over the Gulf, and so forth. And they find themselves in this huge anti-American backlash, as a result of their blatant support for Israel. Then Trump is going to actually realize, "Okay, this is not as straightforward as I thought it would be." What works in business might not actually work in politics, after all.

DB: What are the realities, at this time, in terms of settlement buildings? How much has been built? How does that look at this point?

RB: Actually, it was interesting what Trump said to Netanyahu when he kind of leaned, you know, sideways and he said very gently, "If you could just hold off

on the settlements, just a little bit.” The problem is they have already issued approval of 6,000 settlement units throughout Jerusalem and the West Bank. And this number of units goes beyond any assumption of natural growth of settlements. It’s way beyond that. It means that they are really now looking into expanding settlements beyond the fast streak it has experienced in the last eight years.

Not just that: they are now talking about legalizing all the illegal settlement outposts, which range from anywhere from 100 to 200 outposts, even more. If you are going to legalize these illegal outposts, it also means... and, of course, by saying legalize, I mean from an Israeli government, from an Israeli officials point of view, as you know, all Israeli settlements are illegal under international law.... But if they are to do so, it means that they would have to provide protection. The army would have to be deployed. There would have to be expansion. There would have to be fortification of these settlements.

So we are really talking about an unprecedented land grab here, on the West Bank. It doesn’t matter what happens to the Palestinians in the process. Let’s take as much as we can, and let’s do that fast because this is the perfect opportunity to do so.

The last point I want to make is, for the first time in 20 years there was a brand new settlement, that has been approved. This is also new, in the sense that Israel has been justifying the expansion of the growth of settlements based on what they call natural expansion. But if they are issuing orders for new settlements, it means they are going back to the 1967 mentality of “This is part of the land of Israel. This is part of Yehudi and Santa Maria. It’s our biblical land, and therefore Palestinians have no rights in this land anymore.” So, not only the language itself is changing, but there are actually parts on the ground that prove that the action itself is also fundamentally being altered.

DB: Can I ask you to say a little bit about the relationship between the settlements and the military? How the military, if they do use the settlements... because we hear a lot about torture. You reported in your service, in the palestinechronicle.com, you are reporting about the torture of Palestinian teens. How does the settler movement play into this, sort of, growing use of torture, which, obviously, Trump thinks works.

RB: That’s right. Well, I think it’s important that we delineate this. There are no separate enterprises, the army enterprise and the settlement enterprise. Sometimes the media makes the mistakes of trying to make it look like the settlements are, kind of, behaving at odds with Israeli official policy. They actually don’t. And we actually have been saying this from the very, very beginning, that this is a charade in Israel’s name. And, the fact that they have

just approved and legalized right after... all the settlements that have been built supposedly illegally... the fact that they have done so, it's an indication that this has all been part of the Israeli official program, all along. So, this is really important that we remember.

And also, we need to remember that in 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, there were two settlement movements happening. One that was commissioned by the government, as for some strategic reason. And the other one was the religious settlements, that were built for spiritual reasons. At the end of the day, as far as Palestinians are concerned, it makes no difference whatsoever. This is land grab, our land, private property, lands being confiscated, whether for spiritual reasons or whether for strategic political reasons, it makes no difference. So as far as Palestinians are concerned, they are all working together, it's all one and the same.

The issue of torture, this is related to Gaza, Dennis. In order for anyone from Gaza to leave to Israel, to be treated in Israeli hospitals, or West Bank hospitals, or Jerusalem hospitals, they have to go through the Israeli border area, which is the Arab checkpoint. The Arab checkpoint means they have to meet the intelligence, the Shin Bet, the Israeli internal intelligence, which is equivalent to the FBI. And quite often they are bargain. If you want to get through, you have to divulge information, you have to give us names. Many people refuse to do so, many people get tortured in the process, and many people actually go home, and die as a result.

DB: I think one of the things that isn't at all reported through the corporate press, in any way, shape or form, rarely even a mention... doesn't get into the New York Times, or anywhere. But the way in which... it sort of, you know, you've got the wall, right? That is so tall, you can see it from space, as sort of the anvil. And then you've got the expanding settler movement, as the hammer.

And I say that in the context of thinking about the violence imposed by the settlers, on the peoples whose land they are stealing. That story, which is a continual drumbeat of violence beyond the torture of children, which we... there's a peek through every once in awhile, in a human rights report. Could you talk about that?

RB: That's right. And it is sad that we never hear about it. I just feel like, I've been doing this for a long time, Dennis. And I know you have been doing it for a long time, as well. And we are yet to register any fundamental shift in how mainstream media really perceives the situation in Palestine/Israel. To the contrary, I think it's becoming even more consolidated behind Israel, which is entirely immoral and inexcusable, especially at a time when that country is now really ruled by ultra-nationalists and some, even, fascists like Avigdor

Lieberman and others.

And by any political standards these men are fascists. And yet they rarely get any serious criticism in American media. While the settlement movement, I think this is really interesting, Dennis, is the fact that we are... we have seen how the settlers change their political position within Israeli politics from being on the margins, many years ago, in the post-1967, to becoming the center, most important component in the formulation of Israeli...

DB: ... the soul. The soul of the future of Israel.

RB: Absolutely. No question about it. And they have a great deal of influence in the army. They can actually sway Israeli politics, altogether. In some strange way, the life of Netanyahu, as right-wing as he is, he's actually on the left side of those who are truly capable of destroying his coalition at any given moment. They don't care about politics anymore. They are not the savvy Zionists of the past. They are right and they take exactly what we want.

That's why the settlers are being empowered, at this point. They are empowered in the sense that they are getting exactly what they want ... and the Palestinians are paying the price for it.

So, Palestinians are falling victim, not just for Israeli army violence but for settler violence as well. The land that the settlers are usurping from Palestinians, well it has owners and sometimes these owners try to defend their land, and they pay the price for it. And, I don't know if your audience is aware of ... the whole process of how a settlement is even constructed in the first place. But it is a very, very simple process.

The settlers come and they push the people out of the area. And then they claim it as their own, the army is involved. They make it a military zone, they fence it, starts growing, we see caravans moving in, trailers moving in, fences going higher and higher. And eventually it becomes a settlement. Well, Palestinians usually fight back for their land, their olive groves, the schools, for the roads, for the villages. And they pay a very heavy price.

DB: Yes, they do. That's sort of the front line of the suffering. We mentioned the word Gaza. Your most recent book *My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story*, and again when you... it must be absolutely maddening, I know it is, to see what's happening on the ground in Gaza, and hear the way in which, the character of this story, that these are a bunch of fenced-in terrorists, that we have to go to war against to defend Israel's right to exist. That is the theme, that still reverberates in the press.

And with Trump coming in... and I can imagine him using Israel as a model, "See I

told you torture works, and the Israelis prove it time and again. It works, that's where they use it. That's why they're so effective blah, blah." Have you been thinking about that?

RB: It is sad to see that the United States at this point in its history, where they really need to have as much sensible policies at home and abroad as possible to stave off various crisis, they actually look at Israel for inspiration. And this is what Trump said today. "Israel is absolutely the most inspiring model." I mean, this is a crisis. It's a moral crisis, but it's political as well.

A place like Gaza has been under siege since 2006. Of course, it has been under occupation since 1967, but under a hermetic siege, for ten years. People are malnourished, people are suffering, they are digging tunnels under various fences in order for them to get food and supplies. Egypt is part of the siege, not just Israel. And not just the siege alone. But there are these intermittent wars that have been taking place in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014.

Thousands of Palestinians perished, tens of thousands have been wounded. Nearly a quarter of the Gaza Strip has been destroyed. And yet we didn't hear anything of that, yesterday. There's no humanitarian process throughout. If this happened in any other part of the world it would really be the headline in every newspaper. But, in Gaza, somehow, this is so irrelevant, so unimportant.

And the one that really need protection is the one whose imposing destruction on other people. It's Israel that needs our protection. It's Israel's security that really matters. Not the security of those desperate, poor souls that have been suffering year after year after year, crying for help, and getting very little, of it. And this is why we really need to keep the focus on this issue, Dennis. Gaza is a central piece to this discussion, and the suffering of the people there is getting worse with time.

DB: People have trouble getting clean, clear water, fresh water. Kids are sick because of that.

RB: The United Nations has decided... rendered Gaza, it's not suitable for human habitation in 2020. Others have actually said it is already not suitable ... because of the issue of the polluted water, and the depleted uranium, as a result of the war, the fact that 100,000 people are still homeless, the fact that half of the population is unemployed, and so forth. With no political horizon, and no respite, whatsoever.

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Trump's One-State Openness on Israel

The ugly reality in Israel/Palestine is that the Zionist leaders are engaging in a slow-walk ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, a crime that can only be averted now by a secular singular state, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

Just because Donald Trump said it doesn't mean it has to be wrong. During the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington, President Trump publicly stated he is not necessarily wedded to a "two-state solution" in Palestine.

He is the first U.S. president to commit the heresy of questioning that sacred article of faith in U.S.-Middle East policy. Indeed, a serious rethink is long overdue in recognizing the bankruptcy – indeed the cruel cynicism – of the defunct two-state scheme.

Many honorable people have dedicated the bulk of their professional lives to the tedious minutiae and sad diplomatic history of the Palestinian-Israeli morass. Sadly, none of those efforts have brought any resolution whatsoever to a gangrenous issue – in many respects the granddaddy of so many of the Middle East's contemporary ills.

Trouble is, apart from a few dedicated diplomats and scholars who had hopes of one day truly accomplishing something, the two-state solution in practice is by now revealed as essentially a fraud. Yes, a few wiser Israeli leaders in the past just possibly might have believed in that ideal, but for decades now the "two-state scheme" has simply been cynically exploited by newer Israeli leaders, especially by Bibi Netanyahu – the long-serving and most right-wing Prime Minister in Israel's history.

Netanyahu has been backed by a formidable and wealthy pro-Zionist cheering section in the U.S. The goal is to conceal their true agenda – the ultimate Israeli annexation of all of Palestine. They themselves have been subtly but systematically torpedoing the "two-state solution" behind the scenes to that end.

None of my observations here on the hoax of the two-state solution are new or

original. Many liberal Israeli observers have been stating the self-evident for years now. But those voices never get heard in the U.S. where it constitutes an unmentionable. But there should be no doubt: the concept of a “two-state solution” – a Palestinian and an Israeli state sharing historical Palestine and living side by side in sovereignty and dignity – is dead. It is almost inconceivable that it can now ever be resuscitated: nearly all the operative forces within Israel are systematically working to prevent it from ever coming about.

Facts on the Ground

The harsh reality is that Israel, through a relentless process of “creating facts on the ground,” is now decades deep into the process of taking over illegally, step-by-step, the totality of Palestine. Israel has scant regard for any international law in this respect, and never has had.

Washington, apart from a few periodic pathetic bleats, has ended up functionally supporting this cynical scheme all the way, perhaps unwilling to confront the painful reality of what is really taking place, along with its dangerous political repercussions at home.

Israel is extending day-by-day its control – indeed ownership – of Palestinian lands through expansion of illegal Jewish settlements and the dispossession of the rightful owners of these Palestinian lands. Put simply, there is little left of Palestinian land out of which ever to fashion a “two-state solution.” That leaves us with only one alternative: the “one-state solution.” Indeed, Israel’s actions have already created the preconditions that make the “one-state solution” an unacknowledged but virtual fait accompli.

Honest observers know full well that the mantra of preserving “the peace process” for the two-state solution is now little more than a cover for full Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands. The sooner we all acknowledge this ugly reality, the better. That will then require Israel, the Palestinians, and the world to get on with dealing with the complex challenge of crafting the bi-national state – the one-state solution.

The calculations of the hard-line Zionists – who are now largely in control of Israeli state mechanisms – are unyielding.

1) Israel should functionally take over all of Palestinian territory and permit full Jewish settlement therein. 2) Israel should still play the “two-state solution” game with visiting foreign diplomats to reduce pressure on Israel, to play for time while it quietly establishes the irreversible facts on the ground that shut out any possible viable Palestinian state.

3) Make life harsh enough for Palestinians that, bit by bit, they will grow bitter and weary, give up and go elsewhere, leaving all the land for Zionist settlers. 4) If Palestinians “stubbornly” resist, predictable periodic military and security crises in Palestine over the longer run will enable Israel to rid Palestine of all Palestinians – a gradual process of ethnic cleansing that returns all the land promised by God to the Jews.

A Secular State?

Some liberal Israelis actually do accept the idea of a “one-state solution” in their own liberal vision of a future Israel – one in which Israelis and Palestinians live as equal citizens in a secular, democratic, binational, multi-cultural state enjoying equal rights, rather than the increasingly religiously dominated state that it is. And the liberal ideal makes sense: the country is already well on the way to becoming bi-lingual – and Hebrew and Arabic are closely-related languages. Both are Semitic peoples with ancient ties to the same land.

The problem is, ardent Zionists don’t want a binational Palestinian-Jewish state. They want a “Jewish state” and demand that the world accept that term. Yet, in today’s world isn’t the term “Jewish state” strikingly discordant? Who speaks of an “English” or “French” state? The world would freak out if tomorrow Berlin started calling itself “the German State.” Or Spain a “Christian state.”

So what do we make of a state that is dedicated solely to Jews and Judaism? Such concepts are remnants of Nineteenth Century movements that promoted the creation of ethnically and/or religiously pure states. Indeed it was precisely that kind of ugly religious and ethnic nationalism that caused Jews to flee from Eastern Europe in the first place to find their own homeland.

The true historical task of Israel, with the support of the world, is now to begin the challenging work of introducing the range of major reforms that will transform Israel into just such a multi-ethnic and bi-lingual state of equal citizens enjoying equal rights under secular law. It is not a question of “allowing Palestinians” into Israel, they are already there and have been for millennia, in far greater numbers than Jews. Palestinians now seek full legal equality of treatment under secular law in Israel.

So let’s acknowledge the useful truth that Trump has blundered onto. Let’s abandon the naive and cynical rhetoric about the “two-state solution” that will never come about – in any just and acceptable form. Half of Israel never believed in it in the first place. It has served only as a cover for building an apartheid Jewish state – a term used frequently by liberal Israeli commentators.

Netanyahu and the right-wing Zionists clearly want all of Palestine. But they're not ready yet to admit it. They want all the land, but without any of its people. But despite Zionist hopes, the Palestinians aren't going to abandon their lands. And so the logical outcome of Israel's take-over all of Palestine leads by definition to an ultimate single binational state.

The challenge to Israelis and Palestinians is huge. It entails a deep Palestinian rethink of their options and their future destiny in a new order, and the need to fight for those democratic rights in a binational state. It involves Israeli evolution away from "God-given rights" in a state solely for Jews and Judaism that can only be forever oppressive and undemocratic as it now stands. The process will be a slow and difficult one. But it also represents an evolution consonant with emerging contemporary global values.

We expect a democratic multi-cultural state from Germany and France, or from Britain, Canada and the United States – why not from Israel?

Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is *Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American's crisis of conscience in Pakistan*. (Amazon, Kindle) grahamefuller.com

Trump's Foreign Policy: Retreat or Rout?

With President Trump's foreign-policy team sounding a lot like President Obama's, the new question is whether Trump has caved in to Official Washington's powers-that-be or is biding his time for a big move, asks Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

After President Trump abruptly fired National Security Advisor Michael Flynn a week ago and senior Trump officials flew to Europe to unveil a foreign-policy agenda that sounded a lot like President Obama's, even some Trump supporters wondered if Washington's "shadow government" or "deep state" had triumphed over their hero.

But another interpretation is possible, that Trump understands that he first must gain control of the national-security and foreign-policy bureaucracies before he can press ahead with plans for détente with Russia and downsizing America's vast web of military bases and geopolitical commitments. In other words, what we're seeing may be a tactical retreat rather than a wholesale rout.

The latest crisis to hit the young Trump administration began on Feb. 13 with Trump's firing of Flynn, a move that Trump seemed to regret almost immediately as he assessed how Flynn's ouster had been engineered.

The orchestration of Flynn's removal entailed illegal use of his wiretapped conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak on Dec. 29 at a time when Flynn was still a private citizen and government rules require "minimization" (or redaction) of an American's intercepted communications.

Holdovers from President Obama's Justice Department then concocted a pretext for an FBI investigation based on the Logan Act, a dusty relic from 1799 that has never been used to prosecute anyone. Flynn was further tripped up because he didn't have total recall of what was said in the conversation and then details of the case were selectively leaked to the press to buttress the narrative of illicit ties between Trump and Moscow.

But what was perhaps even more remarkable about this ambush of Flynn, who had made powerful enemies as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency overseeing its criticism of Obama's Syrian war policies, was the collusion between U.S. intelligence agencies and a mainstream media intent on bringing down President Trump – or at least preventing him from redirecting U.S. foreign policy away from "regime change" wars in the Middle East and toward a détente with Russia.

When Trump hastily demanded Flynn's resignation – at least in part to appease Vice President Mike Pence who complained that Flynn hadn't been fully forthcoming with him – a media feeding frenzy followed. Even Hillary Clinton came out of hiding to radiate pleasure at the announcement of Flynn's firing. (At the Republican National Convention, he had joined chants of "lock her up.") We heard similar delight from media standard-bearers of the "dump Trump" movement – CNN and *The New York Times* – as well as among Trump's former rivals in the Republican primaries who continue to hold key positions on Capitol Hill.

The Early Roll-Out

Next came a stunning about-face in the early roll-out of Donald Trump's new foreign policy, which looked a lot like Barack Obama's old foreign policy. We heard presidential press secretary Sean Spicer say Trump "expected the Russian government to ... return Crimea" to Ukraine.

Then we heard Defense Secretary James Mattis in Brussels (NATO headquarters), Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in Bonn (G20 Foreign Ministers meeting) and Vice President Pence in Munich (Security Conference) collectively pledge unswerving loyalty to the NATO alliance, insist that any new talks with Russia must be conducted from "a position of strength," and vow to hold Russia

accountable for the full implementation of the Minsk Accords, meaning all sanctions stay in place pending that achievement which the Ukrainian government has consistently blocked while blaming Moscow.

Amid these signals of surrender from the Trump Administration – suggesting continuation of the disastrous foreign policy of the last 25 years – the newly revived enemies of détente on Capitol Hill added more anti-Russian sanctions and threats. In response to alleged violations by the Kremlin of the Treaty on Intermediate and Short-range Missiles (INF) dating back to 1987, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Arkansas, introduced a bill enabling the re-installation of American nuclear-tipped cruise missiles in Europe. If enacted, this would undo the main achievements of disarmament from the Reagan years and bring us back to a full-blown Cold War.

These developments have unnerved even Trump's long-time loyalists. Some friendly pundits have claimed that Flynn was the sole adviser to Donald Trump urging accommodation with the Russians and that his departure dealt a fatal blow to détente. Others have urged the President to reconsider what they see as a collapse of will under intense pressure from the powerful neoconservatives and their liberal-hawk allies. Trump's backers reminded him of the disasters that the policies of American global hegemony have created in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Implicit in this well-meaning and sometimes condescending advice is a failure to understand the political acumen of Donald Trump and his entourage. He did not win the election on Nov. 8 by chance. It was the fruit of a more sophisticated calculation of voter support and Electoral College arithmetic than anyone else could muster. Trump also did not get his most contentious cabinet appointments – Rex Tillerson at State, Betsy DeVos at Education and Jeff Sessions as Attorney General – through the Senate confirmation hearings by luck. It was the fruit of hard work and brains in striking “deals” with political friends and foes.

No White Flag

Consequently, I view the present backtracking on Russia and retreat on a new foreign policy as a tactical repositioning, not the waving of a white flag. It is obvious that no progress on Trump's less-interventionist foreign policy is possible until the subversive plotters in the State Department, the Justice Department, the National Security Agency, the CIA and the FBI are sent packing. Arguably, some who broke the law in their haste to hobble Trump's presidency should be held legally accountable. Only if and when his back is secure can Trump begin changing policy.

With the end of the Obama presidency on Jan. 20, there was what might be called

addition by subtraction at the State Department with the departures of political appointees who favored the neoconservative/liberal-hawk agenda, people such as Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, a key architect of the Ukraine crisis, and Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, a chief advocate for the “regime change” war in Syria.

During Secretary Tillerson’s maiden diplomatic voyage to Europe, more pink slips have been passed out to high-level officials on the State Department’s “seventh floor,” home to the post-9/11 “shadow government” first put in place by Vice President Dick Cheney and then more deeply entrenched during Hillary Clinton’s stint as Secretary of State. On a related front, The New York Times has reported that Trump plans to appoint businessman Stephen Feinberg to evaluate and recommend reorganization of the intelligence agencies, viewed as a shake-up to restore order and loyalty to the Chief Executive.

At the same time, we may expect President Trump to rally public opinion around his administration and its policies, both domestic and foreign. His appearance at the Melbourne, Florida airport this weekend where thousands gathered to hear Trump is surely only the first of many such public demonstrations by his supporters.

Donald Trump remains in close contact with his supporter base across the country not only via social media but using weekly, at times daily questionnaires delivered by email and asking the respondents to prioritize his next possible moves. Surely, this grassroots support gives him the confidence to wage battles against the Establishment in a bold manner.

It also must be emphasized that Trump’s pre-electoral and post-electoral commitment to détente is not an aberration in his political thinking. What so many people, including supporters, fail to understand is that detente is as essential to Trump for the sake of his domestic programs as detente was critical for Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to implement his new thinking domestically in the 1980s.

Only via détente – meaning an end to the permanent wars abroad with their heavy operational costs and the dismantling of the vast global network of U.S. military bases – can Trump free up budgetary resources to finance his plans for massive U.S. infrastructure investments, modernizing the military, and addressing the needs of veterans. The sums involved are on the order of \$600 billion annually which presently go to maintain some 800 military bases in 70 countries, bases which generate much anti-Americanism and entangle the U.S. in regional conflicts.

Gorbachev ultimately failed, squeezed between Moscow’s own “deep state”

resisting change and a “new order” of greedy opportunists who saw a chance to plunder Russia’s riches. For Trump to succeed, he must not only overcome Washington’s “deep state” with its vested interests in protecting the status quo but he must enlist the capitalist world’s best minds to rebuild America’s infrastructure and restore a more broad-based prosperity.

Whether Trump can accomplish such a daunting task is debatable, but he has shown over a long business career the ability to attract and motivate a small team of not more than a dozen devoted assistants to run a multi-billion-dollar real estate empire. Obviously running an enterprise as large and complex as the U.S. government – and its interconnections with the domestic and global economies – is far more difficult. But if he is to succeed, Trump will have to press ahead with his earlier plans for a new and less costly foreign and defense policy.

Gilbert Doctorow is a Brussels-based political analyst. His latest book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015.

The Did-You-Talk-to-Russians Witch Hunt

Exclusive: Democrats, liberals and media pundits – in their rush to take down President Trump – are pushing a New McCarthyism aimed at Americans who have talked to Russians, risking a new witch hunt, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In the anti-Russian frenzy sweeping American politics and media, Democrats, liberals and mainstream pundits are calling for an investigative body that could become a new kind of House Un-American Activities Committee to hunt down Americans who have communicated with Russians.

The proposed commission would have broad subpoena powers to investigate alleged connections between Trump’s supporters and the Russian government with the apparent goal of asking if they now have or have ever talked to a Russian who might have some tie to the Kremlin or its intelligence agencies.

Such an admission apparently would be prima facie evidence of disloyalty, a guilt-by-association “crime” on par with Sen. Joe McCarthy’s Cold War pursuit of “communists” who supposedly had infiltrated the U.S. government, the film industry and other American institutions on behalf of an international communist conspiracy.

Operating parallel to McCarthy's Red Scare hearings was the House Un-American Activities Committee (or HUAC), a standing congressional panel from 1945-1975 when it was best known for investigating alleged communist subversion and propaganda. One of its top achievements was the blacklisting of the "Hollywood Ten" whose careers in the movie industry were damaged or destroyed.

Although the Cold War has long been over – and Russia has often cooperated with the U.S. government, especially on national security issues such as supplying U.S. troops in Afghanistan – Democrats and liberals seem ready to force Americans to again prove their loyalty if they engaged in conversations with Russians.

Or perhaps these "witnesses" can be entrapped into perjury charges if their recollections of conversations with Russians don't match up with transcripts of their intercepted communications, a tactic similar to ones used by Sen. McCarthy and HUAC to trip up and imprison targets over such secondary charges.

Ousted National Security Advisor Michael Flynn has already encountered such a predicament because he couldn't recall all the details of a phone conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak on Dec. 29, 2016, after Flynn took the call while vacationing in the Dominican Republic.

When Obama administration holdovers at the Justice Department decided to gin up a legal premise to go after Flynn, they cited the Logan Act, a law enacted in 1799 to prohibit private citizens from negotiating with foreign adversaries but never used to convict anyone. The law also is of dubious constitutionality and was surely never intended to apply to a president-elect's advisers.

However, based on that flimsy pretext, FBI agents – with a transcript of the electronic intercept of the Kislyak-Flynn phone call in hand – tested Flynn's memory of the conversation and found his recollections incomplete. Gotcha – lying to the FBI!

Under mounting media and political pressure, President Trump fired Flynn, apparently hoping that tossing Flynn overboard to the circling sharks would somehow calm the sharks down. Instead, blood in the water added to the frenzy.

Iran-Contra Comparison

Some prominent Democrats and liberals have compared Trump-connected contacts with Russians to President Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal or President Reagan's Iran-Contra Affair, an issue that I know a great deal about having helped expose it as a reporter for The Associated Press in the 1980s.

The key difference is that Iran-Contra was an unconstitutional effort by the

Reagan administration to finance an illegal war against Nicaragua's Sandinista government in defiance of a congressional ban. The Trump-connected communications with Russians – to the degree they have occurred – appear to have been aimed at preventing a new and dangerous Cold War that could lead to a nuclear holocaust.

In other words, Iran-Contra was about enabling a paramilitary force to continue its brutal marauding inside a country that was no threat to the United States while the current "scandal" is about people trying to avoid hostilities between two nuclear superpowers, an existential threat that many mainstream and liberal pundits don't want to recognize.

Indeed, there is a troubling denial-ism about the risks of an accidental or intentional war with Russia as the U.S. media and much of Official Washington's establishment have lots of fun demonizing Russian President Vladimir Putin and jabbing the Russians by shoving NATO troops up to their borders and deploying anti-ballistic missiles in Eastern Europe. For some crazy reason, the Russians feel threatened.

False Narratives

This Russia-bashing and Russia-baiting have been accompanied by false narratives presented in the major U.S. newspapers, including The New York Times and The Washington Post, to justify increased tensions.

For instance, the Post's senior foreign affairs writer Karen DeYoung on Friday described the civil war in Ukraine this way: "That conflict began when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014, then backed separatists in eastern Ukraine in what has become a grinding war, despite a deal to end it, called the Minsk agreement, negotiated with Putin by the leaders of France and Germany."

But DeYoung's synopsis is simply not true. The crisis began in the fall of 2013 when Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich backed out of what he regarded as a costly and unacceptable association agreement with the European Union, a move which prompted protests by Ukrainians in Kiev's Maidan square.

The Obama administration's State Department, U.S. neocon politicians such as Sen. John McCain, and various U.S.-backed "non-governmental organizations" then stoked those protests against Yanukovich, which grew violent as trained ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi street fighters poured in from western Ukraine.

In early 2014, a coup to overthrow the democratically elected Yanukovich took shape under the guidance of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt who were caught in a phone call in late January or early February 2014 conspiring to impose new leadership inside

Ukraine.

Nuland disparaged a less extreme strategy favored by European diplomats with the pithy remark: “Fuck the E.U.” and went on to declare “Yats is the guy,” favoring Arseniy Yatsenyuk as the new leader. Nuland then pondered how to “glue this thing” while Pyatt ruminated about how to “midwife this thing.”

On Feb. 20, 2014, a mysterious sniper apparently firing from a building controlled by the ultranationalist Right Sektor killed both police and protesters, setting off a day of violence that left about 70 people dead including more than a dozen police.

The next day, three European governments struck a deal with Yanukovych in which he agreed to early elections and accepted reduced powers. But that political settlement wasn’t enough for the U.S.-backed militants who stormed government buildings on Feb. 22, forcing Yanukovych and his officials to flee for their lives.

Instead of standing by the Feb. 21 agreement, which the European nations had “guaranteed,” Nuland pushed for and got U.S. allies to accept the new post-coup regime as “legitimate,” with Yatsenyuk becoming prime minister and several top government posts given to the ultranationalists and neo-Nazis.

Spreading Violence

In the ensuing days, the right-wing violence spread beyond Kiev, prompting Crimea’s legislature to propose secession from Ukraine and readmission to Russia, whose relationship to the peninsula dated back to Catherine the Great.

Crimea scheduled a referendum that was opposed by the new regime in Kiev. Russian troops did not “invade” Crimea because some 20,000 were already stationed there as part of a basing agreement at the Black Sea port of Sevastopol. The Russians did provide security for the referendum but there was no evidence of intimidation as the citizens of Crimea voted by 96 percent to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a move that Putin and the Russian duma accepted.

Eastern Ukrainians tried to follow Crimea’s lead with their own referendum, but Putin and Russia rejected their appeals to secede. However, when the Kiev regime launched an “Anti-Terrorism Operation” against the so-called Donbass region – spearheaded by ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi militias – Russia provided military assistance so these ethnic Russians would not be annihilated.

Karen DeYoung also framed the Minsk agreement as if it were imposed on Putin when he was one of its principal proponents and architects, winning its approval

in early 2015 at a time when the Ukrainian military was facing battlefield reversals.

But Assistant Secretary Nuland, working with Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and the Ukrainian parliament, sabotaged the agreement by requiring the Donbass rebels to first surrender which they were unwilling to do, having no faith in the sincerity of the Kiev regime to live up to its commitment to grant limited autonomy to the Donbass.

In other words, Kiev inserted a poison pill to prevent a peaceful resolution, but the Western media and governments always blame the Minsk failure on Putin.

If Karen DeYoung wanted to boil all this history down to one paragraph, it might go: "The Ukraine conflict began when U.S. officials supported the violent overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich, prompting Crimea to rejoin Russia and causing ethnic Russians in the east to rise up against the U.S.-backed coup regime in Kiev, which then sought to crush the rebellion. The Kiev regime later torpedoed a peace deal that had been hammered out by Russian, Ukrainian and European negotiators in Minsk."

But such a summary would not have the desired propaganda effect on the American people. It would not present the U.S.-backed side as the "white hats" and the pro-Russia side as the "black hats."

The simple truth is that the story of Ukraine is far more complex and multi-sided than The Washington Post, The New York Times and most mainstream U.S. news outlets want to admit. They simply start the clock at the point of Crimea's rejection of the post-coup regime and distort those facts to present the situation simply as a "Russian invasion."

A Whipped-Up Hysteria

The major media's distortion is so egregious that you could call it a lie, but it is a lie that has proved very useful in whipping up the current anti-Russian hysteria that is sweeping Official Washington and that has given birth to a New Cold War, now accompanied by a New McCarthyism that deems anyone who doesn't accept the "groupthink" a "Russian apologist" or a "Moscow stooge."

Since last November's election, this New McCarthyism has merged with hatred toward Donald Trump, especially after the outgoing Obama administration lodged unproven accusations that Russia undercut Hillary Clinton's campaign by hacking into the emails of the Democratic National Committee and those of her campaign chairman John Podesta – and slipped that information to WikiLeaks.

Those emails showed how the DNC undercut the rival campaign of Sen. Bernie

Sanders and revealed the contents of Clinton's speeches to Wall Street banks as well as pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton Foundation, information that Clinton wanted to keep from the voters.

But no one thought the emails were a major factor in the Clinton-Trump race; indeed, Clinton blamed her stunning defeat on FBI Director James Comey's last-minute decision to reopen and then re-close his investigation into security concerns about her use of a private email server as Secretary of State.

But the script on how Clinton lost was flipped during the Trump transition as President Obama's intelligence agencies floated the Russia-hacked-the-election scenario although presenting no public evidence to support the claims. WikiLeaks representatives also denied getting the material from Russia, suggesting instead that it was leaked by two different American insiders.

A Ministry of Truth

Still, during the post-election period, the anti-Russian hysteria continued to build. In November, The Washington Post highlighted claims by an anonymous group called PropOrNot accusing some 200 Web sites, including Consortiumnews.com and other major independent media outlets, of disseminating Russian "propaganda."

The New York Times joined in the frenzy by calling for leading technology companies to marginalize Web sites that are deemed to be publishing "fake news," a vague term that was applied not just to intentionally false stories but to information that questioned official narratives, no matter how dubious those narratives were. The New McCarthyism was morphing into a New Orwellianism.

The movement toward a Ministry of Truth gained further momentum in December when Congress passed and President Obama signed a military authorization bill that included a new \$160 million bureaucracy to identify and counter alleged "Russian propaganda."

The anger of Democrats and liberals toward President Trump in his first month has added more fuel to the Russia-bashing with some Democrats and liberals seeing it as a possible route toward neutralizing or impeaching Trump. Thus, the calls for a full-scale investigation with subpoena power to demand documents and compel testimony.

While the idea of getting to the full truth has a superficial appeal, it also carries dangers of launching a witch hunt that would drag American citizens before inquisitors asking about any contacts – no matter how innocuous – with Russians.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, HUAC also claimed that all it wanted was the

truth about whether some Americans were allied with or sympathetic to Moscow. Sen. Joe McCarthy offered a similar rationale when he was trying to root out “disloyal” Americans with the question, “are you now or have you ever been a communist?”

That Democrats and liberals who hold the McCarthy era in understandable disdain would now seek to rekindle something similar reeks of rank opportunism and gross hypocrisy – doing whatever it takes to “get Trump” and build an activist movement that can revive the Democratic Party’s flagging political hopes.

But this particular opportunism and hypocrisy also carries with it the prospect of blindly ramping up tensions with Russia, diverting more taxpayer money into the Military-Industrial Complex and conceivably sparking – whether planned or unplanned – a nuclear Armageddon that could eliminate life on the planet. Perhaps this anti-Trump strategy should be rethought.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Democrats, Liberals Catch McCarthyistic Fever

Exclusive: Democrats and liberals are so angry about President Trump that they are turning to McCarthyistic tactics without regard to basic fairness or the need to avoid a costly and dangerous New Cold War, notes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

America is a strange place and the blow-up over Mike Flynn’s conversation with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak is making it even stranger. Liberals are sounding like conservatives, and conservatives like liberals.

Rep. Steve King, an Iowa Republican who serves on the House Judiciary Committee, made perfect sense when he [remarked on CNN](#) concerning the intelligence leaks that are now turning into a flood: “We’ve got to have some facts to work with here. And what troubles me is that ... there are people within the intelligence community that disagree with President Trump [and] that don’t want to see his administration succeed. ... General Flynn has been subject to a political assassination here regardless of what he did or didn’t say to President Trump or

Vice President Pence.”

Quite right. Breitbart News’ Joel B. Pollak sounded similarly sensible in asking “whether our nation’s intelligence services were involved in what amounts to political espionage against the newly-elected government.” So did right-wing talk-show host Michael Savage in describing “the demonization of Putin, Russia, and Flynn” on the part of “neocons, the intel community, and Democrats who want constant antagonism with Russia.”

Considering the craziness we usually get from such sources, it was all disconcertingly ... sane. On the liberal side, however, the hysteria has been non-stop. In full prosecutorial mode, *The New Yorker*’s Ryan Lizza demanded to know:

“Did Trump instruct Flynn to discuss a potential easing of sanctions with Russia? Did Flynn update Trump on his calls with the Russian Ambassador? Did Trump know that Flynn lied to Pence about those contacts? What did the White House counsel do with the information that he received from [Acting Attorney General Sally] Yates about Flynn being vulnerable to blackmail?”

At *The Nation*, Joan Walsh was thrilled to hear the media asking “the old Watergate question about what the president knew and when.”

“We’ve said it before and we’ll say it again,” declared Bill Moyers and Michael Winship at Alternet: “there MUST be an investigation by an independent, bipartisan commission of Russia’s ties to Donald Trump and his associates and that nation’s interference in our elections.”

At *The Intercept*, the perennially self-righteous Glenn Greenwald said intelligence agents are “wholly justified” in leaking inside information because “[a]ny leak that results in the exposure of high-level wrongdoing – as this one did – should be praised, not scorned and punished.”

Over the Top

Finally, there was *The New York Times*, which, in Thursday’s lead editorial, compared the Flynn contretemps to Watergate and Iran-Contra, expressed “shock and incredulity that members of Mr. Trump’s campaign and inner circle were in repeated contact with Russian intelligence officials,” and called for a congressional investigation into whether the White House has been taken over by Moscow:

“Coming on top of credible information from America’s intelligence agencies that Russia tried to destabilize and influence the 2016 presidential campaign, these latest revelations are more than sufficient reason for Congress to investigate what Moscow has been up to and whether people at the highest levels of the

United States government have aided and abetted the interests of a nation that has tried to thwart American foreign policy since the Cold War.”

High-level wrongdoing! Colluding with the enemy! Shock and incredulity! It’s enough to make a concerned citizen reach for the nearest bottle of 151-proof rum. But it’s all nonsense. Liberals are working themselves into a crisis mode on the basis of zero evidence.

Let’s begin with what *The Nation’s* Joan Walsh regards as the key issue: what do we know and when did we know it?

Well, we know that on Thursday, Dec. 29, Barack Obama expelled 35 suspected Russian intelligence operatives for allegedly interfering with the presidential election and imposed sanctions on Russia’s two leading intelligence services. We also know that Flynn had called the Russian ambassador a day earlier to discuss sanctions in general and that although he “never made explicit promises of sanctions relief,” according to unnamed government officials cited by the *Times*, he “appeared to leave the impression it would be possible.”

In *Times*-speak, “appeared to leave the impression” means that the paper is unable to pin down anything that Flynn did that was specifically wrong, but still believes that the conversation was somehow unseemly.

According to *The Washington Post*, the key phone call came after Obama’s Dec. 29 decision to expel the Russian diplomats when Kislyak reached Flynn by phone while the national security advisor-designate and his wife were vacationing at a beachside resort in the Dominican Republic. “As a veteran intelligence officer,” *The Post* said, “...Flynn must have known that a call with a Russian official in Washington would be intercepted by the U.S. government, pored over by FBI analysts and possibly even shared with the White House.”

In any event, whatever he told Kislyak must have been reassuring since Vladimir Putin announced later that day that he would not engage in a tit-for-tat retaliation by expelling U.S. diplomats.

Getting Payback

Irritated by such maturity, the American “state security organs,” as the KGB and other Soviet intelligence services were once called, pounced. Having intercepted the Russian ambassador’s phone call, the FBI relayed the contents to Obama’s Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates, who authorized it to interrogate Flynn about the conversation. Flynn may have lied or not given a complete account or forgotten some of the details about what he and Kislyak discussed. He also may have given a similarly incomplete account to Vice President Mike Pence, which apparently upset Pence and led to Flynn being tossed overboard.

But if Trump and his team thought that would satisfy the sharks, they were wrong. The press went into a feeding frenzy. But the substance of the complaint against Flynn adds up to very little.

As Obama administration holdovers in the Justice Department searched for a legal justification with which to accuse Flynn of wrongdoing, the only thing they could come up with was the Logan Act of 1799 forbidding private citizens from negotiating with a foreign government that is in dispute with the United States. Adopted during the presidency of John Adams, the law was prompted by Dr. George Logan's unauthorized negotiations with France, contacts that were praised by the Jeffersonians but anathema to the Federalists.

But invoking the Logan Act in any instance is a stretch, much less this one. It has never been used to prosecute anyone; it has never been tested in a court of law; and its constitutionality couldn't be more questionable. Moreover, if the law is dubious when used to threaten a private citizen engaged in unauthorized diplomacy, then using it to go after a designated official of an incoming presidential administration that has been duly elected is many times more so.

As journalist Robert Parry points out, the Logan Act has mainly been "exploited in a McCarthyistic fashion to bait or discredit peace advocates" such as Jesse Jackson for visiting Cuba or House Speaker Jim Wright for trying to end the Contra war in Nicaragua. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Trump Caves on Flynn's Resignation.](#)"]

Of course, the Obama holdovers at Justice also said that Flynn might be vulnerable to Russian blackmail. But if Flynn assumed that the U.S. intelligence was listening in, then the Russians probably did also, which means that both sides knew that there was no secret dirt to be used against him.

In other words, there's no there there. Yet anti-Trump liberals are trying to convince the public that it's all "worse than Watergate."

Strangelovian Flynn

This is not to make Flynn into a martyr of some sort. To the contrary, the man is every bit as nutty as critics say. [The Field of Fight: How to Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies](#), the book he co-wrote last year with neocon "intellectual" Michael Ledeen, is a paranoid fantasy about Muslim extremists ganging up with North Korea, Russia, China, Cuba and Venezuela to bring down the United States and Israel.

Flynn's appearance at a Feb. 7 White House press briefing in which he announced that "we are officially putting Iran on notice" over a missile test – and then stalked off without taking a single question – was so bizarre as to be

positively Strangelovian.

But whether Flynn is a criminal is another matter. As Ronn Blitzer observed in a smart article at Lawnewz.com: “Between the details of the communications being unclear and the complete lack of historical guidance for prosecutors to work off of, chances are slim that he’ll face any legal repercussions.”

Lying to the FBI is another matter, of course. But grilling someone about whether he violated a moldy old law that should have been repealed centuries ago is the equivalent of giving someone the third degree over whether he washed his hands after using a public restroom. It raises questions about civil liberties and prosecutorial abuse that used to concern liberals – before, that is, they went bonkers over Russia.

Moreover, taking a call from the Russian ambassador is not only legal but, with the inauguration only three weeks away, precisely what one would expect a newly designated national security advisor to do. If the call indeed happened while Flynn was on vacation – and hence without the usual staff support – it’s not that surprising that he might not have had total recall of what was discussed. For FBI agents to question him weeks later and test his memory against their transcript of the conversation seems closer to entrapment than a fair-minded inquiry.

The whole area is a gray zone regarding what is and isn’t proper for a candidate or an incoming administration to do. Eight years earlier, Barack Obama reached out to foreign leaders to discuss policy changes before he was even elected.

In July 2008, candidate Obama visited Paris to confer with then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy about Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan and NATO. In late November – after the election, that is, but before the oath of office – he telephoned Afghan President Hamid Karzai to discuss how his country might achieve greater stability.

Yet as Robert Charles notes at the conservative Townhall.com website, no one thought to mention the Logan Act or accuse Obama of overstepping his bounds by engaging in private diplomacy.

As to whether it was Trump who instructed Flynn to talk to the Russian ambassador – what Politico calls “the key question” and what *Times* columnist Gail Collins says would be “super-illegal” if true – that is also standard operating procedure.

Poor Donald Trump is getting it from both sides, from those who claim that he was unprepared for his new responsibilities (which he was) and from those who claim that he was too “pro-active” in reaching out to key international players

before taking office.

The Crime of Peace

As to Glenn Greenwald's charge that what Flynn did was not only illegal but wrong, all one can say is: what on earth is so terrible about trying to reduce U.S.-Russian tensions? Of all the things that Trump said on the campaign trail, one of the few that was not completely stupid was his call for better relations with Moscow.

After all, Obama had gotten himself into a serious pickle by the end of his administration in the "intermarium" between the Baltic and the Black Sea. This is where Obama found himself beholden to dangerous nationalist provocateurs from Estonia to Ukraine, where a major NATO arms build-up was making observers increasingly nervous and where serious fighting is now underway. But while one would think that liberals would approve of attempts to defuse a dangerous confrontation, Flynn is under assault for merely giving it a try.

(And what about Greenwald's usual concern about intrusive electronic surveillance? Isn't the Flynn case a classic example of law-enforcement agencies using powers to entrap an individual into a possible criminal violation by seeing if his recollection diverges from the official transcript of a wire-tapped conversation?)

Finally there is the *New York Times* editorial, a farrago of half-truths and unsubstantiated assertions. For instance:

—No matter how many times the "paper of record" insists that "Russia tried to destabilize and influence the 2016 presidential campaign," **it** should realize that saying something doesn't make it so. In fact, the Director of National Intelligence's Jan. 6 report on the alleged hacking was so skimpy that even the *Times* conceded that it "contained no information about how the agencies had collected their data or had come to their conclusions" and was therefore "bound to be attacked by skeptics."

—The charge of "repeated contact with Russian intelligence officials" is similarly evidence-free. The *Times* made the charge in a front-page exposé on Tuesday that was heavy on innuendo but short on facts. It said that Trump associates had "repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officials" without saying what those contacts were or whether the individuals in question were even aware of whom they were talking to. It added, moreover, that there was "no evidence of ... cooperation" with Russian intelligence and that it was "unclear whether the conversations had anything to do with Mr. Trump himself." There's no there there as well.

—As for aiding and abetting “a nation that has tried to thwart American foreign policy since the Cold War,” all one can say is that the *Times* is engaging in classic McCarthyism by crying treason with zero data to back it up.

Opportunism and Confusion

So, what’s going on? The simple answer is that Democrats are seizing on Russia because it’s an easy target in a capital city where war fever is already rising precipitously. Little thought seems to have been given to where this hysteria might lead. What if Dems get their way by forcing the administration to adopt a tougher policy on Russia? What if something horrendous occurs as a consequence such as a real live shooting exchange between U.S. and Russian troops? Will that make Democrats happy? Is that really what they want?

The truth is that America is in disarray not only politically but ideologically. Once Sen. Bernie Sanders dropped out of the race last summer, voters were faced with a choice between two right-of-center candidates, one (Hillary Clinton) seemingly bent on a pro-war policy regardless of the consequences and another (Donald Trump) who uttered isolationist inanities but nonetheless seemed to sense that a course change was in order with regard to Russia, Syria, and perhaps one or two other hot spots.

Since the election, both parties have responded by going even farther to the right, Trump by surrounding himself with billionaires and ultra-right fanatics and the Democrats by trying to out-hawk the GOP.

Sanity is in such short supply that the voices of reason now belong to Republicans like Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, who told the *Washington Post*, “The big problem I see here is that you have an American citizen who had his phone calls recorded,” or House Speaker Paul Ryan who says that reaching out to the Russian ambassador was “entirely appropriate.”

Even Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, seems oddly rational in indicating that he will block legislation seeking to prevent Trump from rolling back anti-Russian sanctions.

All in all, it’s the worst Democratic performance since the *Washington Post* complained in 1901 that Teddy Roosevelt had “fanned the flames of negro aspiration” by inviting Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House. What’s the point of an opposition when it’s even more irresponsible than the party in power?

As Phil Ochs sang about unprincipled liberals back in the 1960s:

Once I was young and impulsive

I wore every conceivable pin

Even went to the socialist meetings

Learned all the old union hymns

But I've grown older and wiser

And that's why I'm turning you in

So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal.

Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).
