

Have British Spies Been Hacking the EU?

The European Union has accused British intelligence agencies of disrupting Brexit negotiations—creating a new public dispute that could poison further an already toxic situation, says Annie Machon.

**By Annie Machon
in Brussels**

Special to Consortium News



Just after midnight on Aug. 16, I was called by LBC Radio in London for a comment on a breaking story on the front page of *The Daily Telegraph* about British spies hacking the EU. Even though I had just retired to bed, the story was just too irresistible, but a radio interview is always too short to do justice to such a convoluted tale. Here are some longer thoughts.

For those who cannot get past the *Telegraph* paywall, the gist is that that the European Union has accused the British intelligence agencies of hacking the EU's side of the Brexit negotiations. Apparently, some highly sensitive and negative EU slides about British Prime Minister Theresa May's plan for Brexit, the Chequers Plan, had landed in the lap of the British government, which then lobbied the EU to suppress publication.

Of course, this could be a genuine leak from the Brussels sieve, as British sources are claiming (well, they would say that, wouldn't they?). However, it is plausible that this is the work of the spies, either by recruiting a paid-up agent well placed within the Brussels bureaucracy, or through electronic surveillance.

The Ugly Truth of Spying

Before dismissing the latter option as conspiracy theory, the British spies do have experience. In the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003, the United States and the United Kingdom were desperate to get a United Nations Security Council resolution to invade Iraq, thus providing a fig leaf of apparent legitimacy to the illegal war. However, some countries within the UN had their doubts (including France and Germany), and the U.S. asked Britain's listening post, GCHQ, to step up its surveillance game. Forewarned is forearmed in delicate international negotiations.

How do we know this? A brave GCHQ whistleblower named Katharine Gun leaked the information to *The Observer*. For her pains, she was threatened with prosecution under the draconian terms of the UK's 1989 Official Secrets Act and faced two

years in prison. The case was only dropped three weeks before her trial was due to begin, partly because of the feared public outcry, but mainly because her lawyers threatened to use the legal defense of “necessity”—a defense won only three years before during the case of MI5 whistleblower David Shayler. Tangentially, a film is being made about Gunn’s story this year.

We also have confirmation from one of the early 2013 Edward Snowden disclosures that GCHQ had hacked its way into the Belgacom network—the national telecommunications supplier in Belgium. Even back then, there was an outcry from the EU bodies, worried that the UK (and by extension its closest intelligence buddy, the U.S.), would gain leverage with stolen knowledge.

So, yes, it is perfectly feasible that the UK *could* have done this, even though it was illegal back in the day. GCHQ’s incestuous relationship with America’s National Security Agency gives it massively greater capabilities than other European intelligence agencies. The EU knows this well, which is why it is concerned to retain access to the UK’s defense and security powers post-Brexit, and also why it has jumped to these conclusions about hacking.

Somebody Needs to Watch the Watchers

But that was then, and this is now. On Jan. 1, 2017, the UK government finally signed a law called the Investigatory Powers Act, governing the legal framework for GCHQ to snoop. The IPA gave GCHQ the most draconian and invasive powers of any Western democracy. Otherwise known in the British media as the “snoopers’ charter,” the IPA had been defeated in Parliament for years, but Theresa May, then home secretary, pushed it through in the teeth of legal and civil society opposition. This year, the High Court ordered the UK government to redraft the IPA as it is incompatible with European law.

The IPA legalized what GCHQ previously had been doing illegally post-9/11, including bulk metadata collection, bulk data hacking, and bulk hacking of electronic devices.

It also gave the government greater oversight of the spies’ actions, but these measures remain weak and offer no protection if the spies choose to keep quiet about what they are doing. So if GCHQ did indeed hack the EU, it is feasible that the foreign secretary and the prime minister remained ignorant of what was going on, despite being legally required to sign off on such operations. In which case the spies would be running amok.

It is also feasible that they were indeed fully briefed, and that would have been proper protocol. GCHQ and the other spy agencies are required to protect “national security and the economic well-being” of Great Britain, and I can

certainly see a strong argument could be made that they were doing precisely that (provided they had prior written permission for such a sensitive operation) if they tried to get advance intelligence about the EU's Brexit strategy.

This argument becomes even more powerful when you consider the problems around the fraught issue of the border between the UK's Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland, an issue about which the EU is being particularly intransigent. If a deal is not made, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement could be under threat and civil war might break out again in Northern Ireland. You cannot get much more "national security" than that, and GCHQ would be justified in this work, provided it has acquired the necessary legal sign-offs from its political masters.

Our Complicated World

However, these arguments will do nothing to appease the enraged EU officials. The UK government will continue to state that this was a leak from a Brussels insider, and publicly at least, oil will be seen to have been poured on troubled diplomatic waters.

Behind the scenes, though, this action will multiply the mutual suspicion and no doubt unleash a witch hunt through the corridors of EU power, with top civil servant Martin Selmayr (aka "The Monster") cast as witchfinder general. With him on your heels, you would have to be a brave leaker, whistleblower or even paid-up agent working for the Brits to take such a risk.

So, perhaps this is indeed a GCHQ hack. However justifiable the move might be under the nebulous concept of "national security," this event will poison further the already toxic Brexit negotiations. As Angela Merkel famously, if disingenuously, said after the Snowden revelation that the U.S. had hacked her mobile phone: "No spying among friends." But perhaps this is an outdated concept—and the EU has not been entirely friendly to Brexit Britain.

I am just waiting for the first hysterical claim that it was the Russians instead or, failing them, former Trump strategist in chief, Steve Bannon, reportedly on a mission to build a divisive alt-right movement across Europe.

Annie Machon is a former intelligence officer in the UK's domestic MI5 Security Service.

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Trump's Criticism of NATO Ignores the Real Questions

Donald Trump's bluster at the NATO summit only has to do with money, not whether the alliance serves any genuine security purpose, says Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Special to Consortium News



The usual NATO summit begins and ends with U.S. and European leaders issuing platitudes about the unbreakable bonds between Western democracies. The two-day summit that began Wednesday is not the usual NATO summit. President Donald Trump came to Brussels armed with a barrage of insults and Twitter blasts against his ostensible allies.

He gave a public tongue-lashing to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, saying it was unfair for the U.S. to pay the most for protecting Europe while Germany agreed to a new pipeline to import natural gas from Russia. "Germany, as far as I'm concerned, is captive to Russia," Trump said. "Germany is totally controlled by Russia." But Germany turned to Russia after the Trump administration threatened sanctions on Europeans who buy Iranian natural gas. The U.S. also wants to sell more expensive natural gas to Germany.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel responded bluntly to Trump. "I've experienced myself a part of Germany controlled by the Soviet Union," she told reporters, "and I'm very happy today that we are united in freedom as the Federal Republic of Germany and can thus say that we can determine our own policies and make our own decisions and that's very good."

Trump set the stage for his trademark political brawl at a recent rally in North Dakota, where he declared, "Sometimes our worst enemies are our so-called friends or allies, right?" On the same Western swing, he he told supporters in Montana that Europe "kills us with NATO." As he left the White House for Europe, the President further trolled America's traditional allies, noting that between NATO, the UK, and Putin—the three subjects of his visit—"Putin may be the easiest of them all. Who would think?"

Though he has for decades complained that other countries have been taking advantage of the U.S., the key to understanding Trump's performance toward NATO may be recognizing that it is just that, a performance intended not for European leaders, but his home political base.

Trump's supporters cheer his macho, nationalist rhetoric. His "politically incorrect" rejection of traditional diplomatic language tells them that he's the real deal—even as his actual military and security policies remain mostly mainstream. His bullying attitude reaffirms his commitment to the so-called Trump Doctrine: "We're America, Bitch."

Despite Trump's confrontational bluster, he joined other NATO leaders in signing off on their previously drafted summit declaration, including measures to upgrade alliance readiness and capabilities in Europe, create new NATO commands in Germany and the United States, promote cybersecurity, and train security forces in Iraq.

The declaration includes a plan by U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis for NATO to assemble 30 land battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels capable of deploying in 30 days or less by the year 2020, to defend against a supposed threat from Russia. Moscow sees the plan instead as an offensive provocation.

Despite Trump agreeing to all this, his anti-NATO rhetoric is having a political effect, and not just on the mood of rattled Europeans. In the U.S., support for the NATO alliance among Republicans fell five percentage points in the last year to only 47 percent. In contrast, 78 percent of registered Democrats, reflecting the mirror-image polarization of American politics, now support NATO, a gain of 20 percentage points in one year.

Raising Legitimate Questions

Trump's attacks on NATO—full of misinformation and distortions—have distracted critical attention from legitimate issues about the alliance. What is its mission in the years since the fall of the Soviet Union? Quite apart from the question of cost sharing, does it advance U.S. security and political interests? Could it be replaced without jeopardizing democracies on both sides of the Atlantic?

In the wake of Trump's attacks, defenders of NATO have tried to educate Americans about its value. (One writer for *The Daily Beast* associated the alliance with "the greatest achievement of American history.") What's most notable, however, is how unconvincing these defenses are.

The *New York Times*, for example, declares that NATO's worthy "new purpose" in the post-9/11 era has been "helping the United States fight terrorists in Afghanistan, Iraq, Africa and elsewhere." These interventions outside of NATO territory have all been violations of Article 6 of NATO's charter, which only authorizes military activity inside member states.

Quite forgotten are previous editorials condemning "deluded thinking about what

could be accomplished" if NATO committed more troops to Afghanistan after more than 16 years of war, acknowledging that "the Iraq war was unnecessary, costly and damaging on every level," and lamenting the many costs of "America's Forever Wars" in Africa and other theaters since 2001.

From those perspectives, NATO's support for reckless U.S. interventions abroad should be considered a bug to be erased, not a feature to boast about. And that's without even considering the disastrous fallout from NATO's mendacious attacks on Libya, which left that country a failed state, drove jihadists into Syria, unleashed terrorism in Western Europe, and produced a tidal wave of refugees that put the future of the Europe Union at risk.

Similarly unpersuasive argument made in "What America Gets Out of NATO" by former NATO ambassador Nicholas Burns. Burns asserts that "NATO's formidable conventional and nuclear forces are the most effective way to protect North America and Europe . . . from attack" by Russian meddling with American elections. What would a few hundred million dollars—the price of two or three new F-35 jets—do to harden our voting machines against intrusion by hackers?

And lest you worry about a conventional Russian attack, consider that NATO's European members are budgeting \$286 billion for military spending this year, more than four times as much as Russia.

The "second reason for maintaining the trans-Atlantic alliance is America's economic future," Burns says. "The European Union is our country's largest trade partner, and its largest investor." But wouldn't it be easier, and cheaper, to support that relationship by calling off trade wars and reaffirming America's commitment to the World Trade Organization?

"Third," he continues, "future American leaders will find Europe is our most capable and willing partner in tackling the biggest threats to global security" like climate change. Maybe joining the Paris climate agreement, and joining Europe in curbing greenhouse gas emissions, would be a more effective way to address that truly enormous threat.

Is NATO a Liability?

The intellectual poverty behind support for NATO suggests that bureaucratic and special interests (think defense contractors) have had more to do with the alliance's survival after 1989 than legitimate security threats. But NATO has become more than an expensive relic. It is now a major security liability.

NATO's relentless Eastward expansion since 1989, growing from 16 member countries to 29 members—most recently with its accession of Lilliputian Montenegro—violated firm promises made by Western leaders to Russia at the time

of Germany's reunification. That march to the East was championed by the aptly named Committee to Expand NATO, a hot-bed of neo-conservatives led by Bruce Jackson, then vice president for planning and strategy at Lockheed Martin, the largest U.S. military contractor.

George Kennan, the dean of U.S. diplomats during the Cold War, predicted accurately that NATO's reckless expansion could only lead to "a new Cold War, probably ending in a hot one, and the end of the effort to achieve a workable democracy in Russia."

Proposals for further expansion of NATO to countries such as Georgia and Ukraine along Russia's borders, as well as its deployment of destabilizing anti-missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, have fed escalating tensions between NATO and Russia and raised the specter of accidental war.

NATO's vow to bring Ukraine—the largest country on Russia's western border—into the Western military alliance also contributed to Putin's decision to partially intervene there in 2014, after a violent putsch ousted the elected, pro-Russian government in Kiev. That intervention, ironically, has become one of the greatest threats cited by NATO supporters to justify its continued existence.

In his 1957 tome *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, Harvard professor Henry Kissinger declared that "An alliance is effective only to the extent that it . . . represents an accretion of strength to its members." To that insight one might add this corollary: An alliance is worth keeping only to the extent that it reduces threats to its members.

By supporting reckless interventions far from NATO's home, and by provoking needless confrontations with Russia, the Western alliance fails that test. Thoughtful Americans—and Europeans—should step back from President Trump's rhetoric and NATO's knee-jerk defenders to consider whether the time has come for a wholesale revamping of the Western alliance.

Jonathan Marshall has been a frequent contributor to Consortium News on NATO and U.S. security.

Immigration Divides Europe and the

German Left

A battle between regulated immigration and a utopian vision in line with international finance is splitting the German Left Party, giving an opening to the right, as Diana Johnstone explains.

By Diana Johnstone

in Paris

Special to Consortium News



Freedom of movement is the founding value of the European Union. The “four freedoms” are inscribed in the binding EU treaties and directives: free movement of goods, services, capital and persons (labor) among the Member States.

Of course, the key freedom here is that of capital, the indispensable condition of neoliberal globalization. It enables international finance to go and do whatever promises to be profitable, regardless of national boundaries. The European Union is the kernel of the worldwide “Open Society”, as promoted by financier George Soros.

However, extended to the phenomenon of mass immigration, the doctrine of “free movement” is disuniting the Union.

A German Crisis

Starting in 2011, millions of Syrian refugees fled to neighboring Turkey as a result of the Western-sponsored war to overthrow the Assad regime. By 2015, Turkish president Erdogan was insisting that Europe must share the burden, and soon was threatening the European Union with opening the floodgates of refugees if his conditions were not met.

In August 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany would accept all genuine refugees. Germany had already taken in over 400,000 refugees, and another 400,000 were assumed to be on the way – if not more. Although addressed to Syrians, Merkel’s invitation was widely interpreted as an unlimited invitation to anyone who wanted to come Germany for whatever reason. In addition to a smaller number of refugee families, long lines of young men from all points east streamed through the Balkans, heading for Germany or Sweden.

The criminal destruction of the government of Libya in 2011 opened the floodgates to immigrants from Africa and beyond. The distinction between refugees and economic migrants was lost in the crowd.

Germans themselves were sharply polarized between those who welcomed the commitment to Christian charity and those who dreaded the probable effects. The differences were too highly charged emotionally, too subjective to be easily discussed in a rational way. Finally, it depends on whether you think of immigrants as individuals or as a mass. Concerning individuals, compassion reigns. You want to get to know that person, make a friend, help a fellow human being.

As a mass, it is different because you have to think also of social results and you do not know whom you are getting. On the one hand, there are the negative effects: labor market competition which lowers wages, the cost of caring for people with no income, the potential for antisocial behavior on the part of alienated individuals, rivalry for housing space, cultural conflicts, additional linguistic and educational problems. But for those whose ideal is a world without borders, the destruction of the oppressive nation state and endless diversity, unlimited immigration is a welcome step in the direction of their utopia.

These conflicting attitudes rule out any consensus.

As other EU countries were called upon to welcome a proportionate share of the refugee influx, resentment grew that a German chancellor could unilaterally make such a dramatic decision affecting them all. The subsequent effort to impose quotas of immigrants on member states has run up against stubborn refusal on the part of Eastern European countries whose populations, unlike Germany, or Western countries with an imperialist past, are untouched by a national sense of guilt or responsibilities toward inhabitants of former colonies.

After causing a growing split between EU countries, the immigrant crisis is now threatening to bring down Merkel's own Christian Democratic (CDU) government. Her own interior minister, Horst Seehofer, from the conservative Bavarian Christian Social Union, has declared that he "can't work with this woman" (Merkel) on immigration policy and favors joining together with Austria and Italy in a tough policy to stop migration.

The conflict over immigration affects even the relatively new leftist party, Die Linke (The Left).

A good part of the European left, whatever its dissatisfaction with EU performance, is impregnated with its free movement ideology, and has interiorized "open borders" as a European "value" that must be defended at all costs. It is forgotten that EU "freedom of movement" was not intended to apply to migrants from outside the Union. It meant freedom to move from one EU state to another. As an internationally recognized human right, freedom of movement

refers solely to the right of a citizen to leave and return to her own country.

In an attempt to avoid ideological polarization and define a clear policy at the Left party's congress early this month, a working group presented a long paper setting out ideas for a "humane and social regulated leftist immigration policy". The object was to escape from the aggressive insistence on the dichotomy: either you are for immigration or you are against it, and if you are against it, you must be racist.

The group paper observed that there are not two but three approaches to immigration: for it, against it, and regulation. Regulation is the humane and socially beneficial way.

While reiterating total support for the right of asylum including financial and social aid for all persons fleeing life-threatening situations, the paper insisted on the need to make the distinction between asylum seekers and economic migrants. The latter should be welcomed within the capacity of communities to provide them with a decent life: possibilities of work, affordable housing and social integration. They noted that letting in all those who hope to improve their economic standing might favor a few individual winners but would not favor the long-term interests either of the economic losers or of the country of origin, increasing its dependence and even provoking a brain drain as educated professionals seek advancement in a richer country.

There was hope that this would settle the issue. This did not happen. Instead, the party's most popular leader found herself the target of angry emotional protests due to her defense of this sensible approach.

Sahra and Oskar

As elsewhere in Europe, the traditional left has drastically declined in recent years. The long-powerful German Social Democratic Party (SPD) has lost its working-class base as a result of its acceptance, or rather, promotion of neoliberal socioeconomic policies. The SPD has been absorbed by the Authoritarian Center, reduced to junior partner in Angela Merkel's conservative government.

Die Linke, formed in 2007 by the merger of leftist groups in both East and West Germany, describes itself as socialist but largely defends the social democratic policies abandoned by the SPD. It is the obvious candidate to fill the gap. In elections last September, while the SPD declined to 20%, Die Linke slightly improved its electoral score to almost 10%. But its electorate is largely based in the middle class intelligentsia. The party that captured the most working-class votes was the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), considered far right

populist – largely because its growing success at the polls is due to popular rejection of mass immigration.

There are two way of looking at this.

One way, the Clintonite way, is to dismiss the working class as a bunch of deplorables who do not deserve to have their interests defended. If they oppose immigration, it can only be because they have impure souls, besmirched by racism and “hate”.

Another way is to consider that the grievances of ordinary people need to be listened to, and that they need to be presented with clear, well-defined, humane political choices, instead of being dismissed and insulted.

This is the viewpoint of Sahra Wagenknecht, currently co-leader of Die Linke in the Bundestag.

Wagenknecht was born in East Germany 48 years ago to an Iranian father and German mother. She is highly educated, with a Ph.D. in economics and is author of books on the young Marx’s interpretation of Hegel, on “The Limits of Choice: Saving Decisions and Basic Needs in Developed Countries” and “Prosperity Without Greed”. The charismatic Sahra has become one of the most popular politicians in Germany. Polls indicate that a quarter of German voters would vote for her as Chancellor.

But there is a catch: her party, Die Linke. Many who would vote for her would not vote for her party, and many in her own party would be reluctant to support her. Why? Immigration.

Sahra’s strongest supporter is Oskar Lafontaine, 74, her partner and now her husband. A scientist by training with years of political experience in the leadership of the SPD, Lafontaine was a strong figure in the 1980s protest movement against nuclear missiles stationed in Germany and remains an outspoken critic of U.S. and NATO militarism – a difficult position in Germany. In 1999 he resigned as finance minister because of his disagreement with the neoliberal policy turn of SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. He is a consistent critic of financial capitalism and the euro, calling for a change of European monetary policy that would permit selective devaluation and thus relieve the economically weaker member states of their crushing debt burden.

After leaving the SPD in 2005, Lafontaine went on to co-found Die Linke, which absorbed the post-East German Party of Democratic Socialism led by lawyer Gregor Gysi. A few years later he withdrew into the political background, encouraging the rising career of his much younger partner Sahra Wagenknecht.

Lafontaine can be likened to Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Jean-Luc Mélenchon as a left leader who has retained basic social and antiwar principles from the past and aspires to carry them into the future, against the rising right-wing tide in Europe.

The Wagenknecht-Lafontaine couple advocate social policies favorable to the working class, demilitarization, peaceful relations with Russia and the rest of a multipolar world. Both are critical of the euro and its devastating effects on Member State economies. They favor regulated immigration. Critical of the European Union, they belong to what can be called the national left, which believes that progressive policies can still be carried out on the national level.

The Globalizing Left

Die Linke is split between the national left, whose purpose is to promote social policies within the framework of the nation-state, and the globalization left, which considers that important policy decisions must be made at a higher level than the nation.

As co-leader of the Linke fraction in the Bundestag, Wagenknecht champions the national left, while another woman, the party co-chair Katja Kipping, also an academic of East German origin, speaks for the globalization left.

In a July 2016 [article](#) criticizing Brexit, Kipping made it clear that for her the nation is an anachronism unsuitable for policy making. Like others of her persuasion, she equates the nation with “nationalism”. She also immediately identifies any criticism of mass immigration with scapegoating: “Nationalism doesn’t improve our lives, it makes the poor only poorer, it takes nothing from the rich, but instead blames refugees and migrants for all present misery.”

The idea that social reform must henceforth take place only on the European level has paralyzed left parties for decades. The most extreme of the globalizing left shove their expectations even beyond the European Union in hopes of eventual revolution at the global level, as preached by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in their joint books *Empire* and *Multitude*.

According to Negri, an alarmingly influential Italian theorist who has been dead wrong ever since the 1970s, the final great global revolution will result from the spontaneous self-liberation of the “multitude”. This is a sort of pie in the sky, projecting hopes beyond the here and now to some desirable future made inevitable by the new immaterial means of production (Negri’s boneless imitation of Marxism). Whether or not they have read him, many anarchist anti-globalist notions of The End Times are in harmony with Negri’s optimistically prophetic

view of globalization: it may be bad now, but if it goes far enough, it will be perfect.

Since the globalization left considers the nation state inapt to make the revolution, its abolition is seen as a step in the right direction – which happens to coincide with the worldwide takeover of international financial capital. Its core issue, and the one it uses to condemn its adversaries in the national left, is immigration. Katya Kipping advocates “open borders” as a moral obligation. When critics point out that this is not a practical suggestion, the globalization left replies that it doesn’t matter, it is a principle that must be upheld for the future.

To make her policy line even more unrealistic, Kipping calls for *both* “open borders” *and* a guaranteed minimum income for everyone.

It is easy to imagine both the enthusiastic response to such a proposal in every poor country in the world and its horrified rejection by German voters.

What can motivate leaders of a political party to make such flagrantly unpopular and unrealizable proposals, guaranteed to alienate the vast majority of the electorate?

One apparent source of such fantasy can be attributed to a certain post-Christian, post-Auschwitz bad conscience prevalent in sectors of the intelligentsia, to whom politics is more like a visit to the confession booth than an effort to win popular support. Light a candle and your sins will be forgiven! Many local charitable organizations actually put their beliefs in practice by providing material aid to migrants. But the task is too great for volunteers; at present proportions it requires governmental organization.

Another, more virulent strain of the open border advocates is found among certain anarchists, conscious or unconscious disciples of Hardt and Negri, who see open borders as a step toward destroying the hated nation state, drowning despised national identities in a sea of “minorities”, thereby hastening the advent of worldwide revolution.

The decisive point is that both these tendencies advocate policies which are perfectly compatible with the needs of international financial capital. Large scale immigration by diverse ethnic communities unwilling or unable to adapt the customs of the host country (which is often the case in Europe today, where the host country may be despised for past sins), weakens the ability of society to organize and resist the dictates of financial capital. The newcomers may not only destabilize the situation of already accepted immigrant populations, they can introduce unexpected antagonisms and conflicts. In both France and Germany,

groups of Eritrean migrants have come to blows with Afghan migrants, and other prejudices and vendettas lurk, not to mention dangerous elements of religious fanaticism.

In foreign policy, the globalization left tends to accept the political and media mainstream criticism of Wagenknecht as a Putin apologist for her position regarding Syria and Russia. The globalist left sometimes seems to be more intent on arranging the rest of the world to suit their standards than finding practical solutions to problems at home. Avoiding war is also a serious problem to be dealt with at the national level.

Despite the acrimonious debates at the June 8 to 10 party congress, Die Linke did not split. But faced with the deadlock on important questions, Wagenknecht and her supporters are planning to launch a new trans-party movement in September, intended to attract disenchanted fugitives from the SPD among others in order to debate and promote specific issues rather than to hurl labels at each other. For the left, the question today is not merely the historic, "What is to be done?" but rather a desperate, Can *anything* be done?

And if they don't do it, somebody else will.

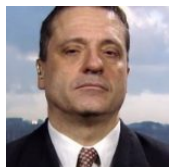
Diana Johnstone is the author of Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO, and Western Delusions. Her new book is Queen of Chaos: the Misadventures of Hillary Clinton. The memoirs of Diana Johnstone's father Paul H. Johnstone, From MAD to Madness, was published by Clarity Press, with her commentary. She can be reached at diana.johnstone@wanadoo.fr .

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Letter From Britain: An Establishment Blinded By Russophobia

A British elite challenged by large parts of the British population is rallying around trumped-up fear of Russia as a means of protecting its interests, as Alexander Mercouris explains.

By Alexander Mercouris *Special to Consortium News*
in London



Hostility to Russia is one of the most enduring, as well as one of the most destructive, realities of British life. Its persistence is illustrated by one of the most interesting but least reported facts about the Skripal affair.

This is that Sergey Skripal, the Russian former GRU operative who was the main target of the recent Salisbury poisoning attack, was recruited by British intelligence and became a British spy in 1995, four years after the USSR collapsed, at a time when the Cold War was formally over.

In 1995 Boris Yeltsin was President of Russia, Communism was supposedly defeated, the once mighty Soviet military was no more, and a succession of pro-Western governments in Russia were attempting unsuccessfully to carry out IMF proposed 'reforms'. In a sign of the new found friendship which supposedly existed between Britain and Russia the British Queen toured Moscow and St. Petersburg the year before.

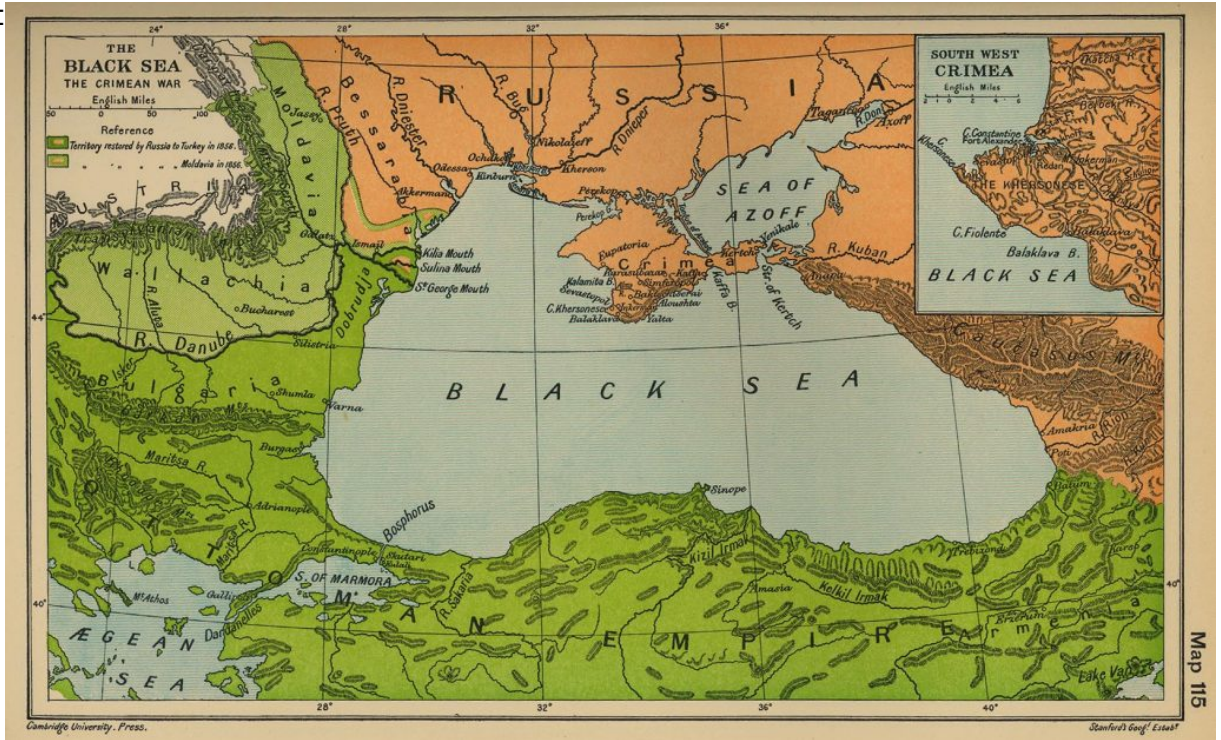
Yet notwithstanding all the appearances of friendship, and despite the fact that Russia in 1995 posed no conceivable threat to Britain, it turns out that British intelligence was still up to its old game of recruiting Russian spies to spy on Russia.

Britain's Long History of Russophobia

This has in fact been the constant pattern of Anglo-Russian relations ever since the Napoleonic Wars.

Brief periods of seeming friendship – often brought about by a challenge posed by a common enemy – alternating with much longer periods of often intense hostility.

This host



Russia has never invaded or directly threatened Britain. On the only two occasions when Britain and Russia have fought each other – during the Crimean War of 1854 to 1856, and during the Russian Civil War of 1918 to 1921 – the fighting has all taken place on Russian territory, and has been initiated by Britain.

Nonetheless, despite its lack of any obvious cause, British hostility to Russia is a constant and enduring fact of British political and cultural life. The best that can be said about it is that it appears to be a predominantly elite phenomenon.

British Russophobia Peaks

If British hostility to Russia is a constant, it is nonetheless true that save possibly for the period immediately preceding the Crimean War, it has never been as intense as it is today.

Moreover, not only has it reached levels of intensity scarcely seen before, but it is becoming central to Britain's politics in ways which are now doing serious harm.

This harm is both domestic, in that it is corrupting British politics, and international, in that it is not only marginalising Britain internationally but is also poisoning the international atmosphere.

Why is this so?

Elite British Consensus

For Britain's elite, riven apart by Brexit and increasingly unsure of the hold it has over the loyalty of the British population, hostility to Russia has become the one issue it can unite around. As a result hostility to Russia is now serving an essential integrating role within Britain's elite, binding it together at a time when tensions over Brexit risk tearing it apart.

To get a sense of this consider two articles that have both appeared recently in the British media, one in the staunchly anti-Brexit *Guardian*, the other in the equally staunchly pro-Brexit *Daily Telegraph*.

The article in the *Guardian*, by Will Hutton and Andrew Adonis, is intended to refute a narrative of British distinctiveness supposedly invented by the pro-Brexit camp. As such the article claims (rightly) that Britain has historically always been closely integrated with Europe.

However when developing this argument the article engages in some remarkable historical misrepresentation of its own. Not surprisingly, Russia is the subject. Just consider for example this paragraph:

"...note for devotees of Darkest Hour and Dunkirk: Britain was never "alone" and could not have triumphed [in the Second World War against Hitler] had it been so. Even in its darkest hour Britain could call on its then vast empire and, within 18 months, on the Americans, too."

Russia's indispensable contribution to the defeat of Hitler is deleted from the whole narrative. The U.S., which became involved in the war against Hitler in December 1941, is mentioned. Russia, which became involved in the war against Hitler in June 1941, i.e. before the U.S., and whose contribution to the defeat of Hitler was much greater, is not.

Whilst claiming to refute pro-Brexit myths about the Second World War the article creates myths of its own, turning the fact that Russia was an ally of Britain in that war into a non-fact.

The article does however have quite a lot to say about Russia:

"Putin's Russia is behaving like the fascist regimes of the 1930s, backed by sophisticated raids from online troll factories. Citizens – and ominously younger voters in some European countries – are more and more willing to tolerate the subversion of democratic norms and express support for authoritarian alternatives."

Oleg Kalugin, former major general of the Committee for State Security (the KGB), has described sowing dissent as “the heart and soul” of the Putin state: not intelligence collection, but subversion – active measures to weaken the west, to drive wedges in the western community alliances of all sorts, particularly Nato, to sow discord among allies, to weaken the United States in the eyes of the people of Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and thus to prepare ground in case the war really occurs. To make America more vulnerable to the anger and distrust of other peoples.”

History is turned on its head. Not only is the fact that Russia was Britain’s ally in the war against Nazi Germany now a non-fact, but Russia it turns out is Nazi Germany’s heir, a fascist regime like Nazi Germany once was, posing a threat to Britain and the West like Nazi Germany once did.

Moreover who does not agree, and who does not see facing up to Russia as the priority, is at best a fool:

“In Brexit-voting Weymouth, Captain Malcolm Shakesby of Ukip is unruffled by Putin or European populism. He inhabits the cartoon world of British exceptionalism, and his main concern today is Mrs May’s “sellout” of the referendum result.”

Compare these comments about Russia in the staunchly anti-Brexit *Guardian* with these comments about Russia by [Janet Daley](#) in the staunchly pro-Brexit *Daily Telegraph*.

Janet Daley does not quite say like Hutton and Adonis that Russia is a “fascist regime”. However in her depiction of it she comes pretty close:

“The modern Russian economy is a form of gangster capitalism largely unencumbered by legal or political restraint. No one in the Kremlin pretends any longer that Russia’s role on the international stage is to spread an idealistic doctrine of liberation and shared wealth.

When it intervenes in places such as Syria, there is no pretence of leading that country toward a great socialist enlightenment. Even the pretext of fighting Isil has grown impossibly thin. All illusions are stripped away and the fight is reduced to one brutal imperative: Assad is Putin’s man and his regime will be defended to the end in order to secure the Russian interest. But what is that interest? Simply to assert Russia’s power in the world – which is to say, the question is its own answer.”

Though Moscow has made clear in both word and action that intervention in Syria at Syria's invitation was to prevent it becoming a failed state and a terrorist haven, Russia it turns out is focused on only one thing: gaining as much power as possible. This is true both of its domestic politics ("gangster capitalism largely unencumbered by legal or political restraint") and in its foreign policy ("what is that [Russian] interest? Simply to assert Russia's power in the world – which is to say, the question is its own answer")

As a result it must be construed as behaving in much the same way as Nazi Germany once did:

"....we now seem to have the original threat from a rogue rampaging Russia back on the scene, too. A Russia determined to reinstate its claim to be a superpower, but this time without even the moral scruples of an ideological mission: the country that had once joined the respectable association of modern industrialised nations to make it the G8, rather than the G7, prefers to be an outlaw."

On the question of the threat from Russia both the pro and anti-Brexit wings of the British establishment agree. Standing up to it is the one policy they can both agree on. Not surprisingly at every opportunity that is what they do.

Intolerance of Dissent Construed as a "Threat from Russia"

In this heavy atmosphere anyone in Britain who disagrees risks being branded either a traitor or a fool.

Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader, who is known to favour dialogue with Russia, recently had to endure an ugly media campaign which insinuated that he had been recruited as in effect a Communist agent in the 1980s by Czech intelligence.

That claim eventually collapsed when a British MP went too far and said openly what up to then had only been insinuated. As a result he was forced to retract his claims and pay compensation under threat of a law suit. However the question mark over Corbyn's loyalty is never allowed to go away.

During last year's general election Corbyn also had to endure an article in the *Telegraph* by none other than Sir Richard Dearlove, the former head of Britain's external intelligence agency MI6 (the British equivalent of the CIA). Dearlove also insinuated that Corbyn had been at least a Communist sympathiser or fellow traveller during the Cold War whose sympathies were with the Eastern Bloc and therefore with the various anti-Western and supposedly Communist backed terrorist groups which the Eastern Bloc had supposedly supported:

“Today, Britain goes to the polls. And frankly, I’m shocked that no one has stood up and said, unambiguously, how profoundly dangerous it would be for the nation if Jeremy Corbyn becomes Prime Minister. So let me be clear, the leader of the Labour Party is an old-fashioned international socialist who has forged links with those quite ready to use terror when they haven’t got their way: the IRA, Hizbollah, Hamas. As a result he is completely unfit to govern and Britain would be less safe with him in No 10.

I can give an indication of just how serious this is: if Jeremy Corbyn was applying to join any of this country’s security services – MI5, GCHQ or the service I used to run, MI6 – he would not be cleared to do so. He would be rejected by the vetting process. Far from being able to get into MI5, in the past MI5 would actively have investigated him. And yet this is the man who seeks the very highest office, who hopes in just 24 hours time to run our security services.

Young people in Britain have been terribly affected by recent terror attacks. It is only natural that they should be desperately worried about security problems, and to me it is just such a great shame that they don’t understand the political antecedents of the Labour leader. It is these young people, in particular, I am keen to address. I want to explain just what Corbyn’s whole movement has meant.

During the Cold War the groups he associated with hung out in Algeria, and moved between East Germany and North Korea. It is hard, today, to understand the significance of that. When I talk to students about the Cold War, they assume I am just talking about history. But it has a direct bearing on our security today. Only a walk along the armistice line between North and South Korea, with its astonishing military build up, might give some idea of what was at stake.

.....Jeremy Corbyn represents a clear and present danger to the country.”

In light of this the crescendo of criticism Corbyn came under during the peak of the uproar in March following the

Salisbury poisoning attack on Sergey and Yulia Skripal is entirely unsurprising.

Corbyn’s call – alone amongst senior politicians – for the investigation to be allowed to take its course and for due process to be followed, simply confirmed the doubts about his loyalty and his sympathy for Russia already held by the British establishment and previously expressed by people like Dearlove. His call was not seen as an entirely reasonable one for proper procedure to be followed. Rather it was seen as further proof that Corbyn’s sympathies are with Russia,

which is Britain's enemy.

Corbyn is not the only person to be targeted in this way. As I write this Britain is in the grip of a minor scandal because the right-wing businessman Arron Banks, who partly funded the Leave campaign during the 2016 Brexit referendum, is now revealed to have had several meetings with the Russian ambassador and to have discussed a business deal with a Russian businessman.

Though Banks claims to have reported these contacts to the CIA, and though there is not the slightest evidence of impropriety in any of these contacts (the proposed business deal never materialised) the mere fact that they took place is enough for doubts to be expressed about Banks's reasons for supporting the Leave campaign. Perhaps even more worrying for Banks is that scarcely anyone is coming forward to speak up for him.

Even a politically inconsequential figure like the pop singer Robbie Williams is now in the frame. Just over a year ago Williams gained wide applause for a song "Party like a Russian" which some people interpreted (wrongly in my opinion) as a critique of contemporary Russia. Today he is being roundly criticised for performing in Russia during the celebrations for the World Cup.

Russophobia Undermining British Democracy

The result of this intolerance is a sharp contraction in the freedom of Britain's public space, with those who disagree on British policy towards Russia increasingly afraid to speak out.

Since establishment opinion in Britain conceives of itself as defending liberal democracy from attack by Russia, and since establishment opinion increasingly conflates liberal democracy with its own opinions, it follows that in its conception any challenge to its opinions is an attack on liberal democracy, and must therefore be the work of Russia.

This paranoid view has now become pervasive. No part of the traditional media is free of it. It has gained a strong hold on the BBC and it is fair to say that all the big newspapers subscribe to it. Anyone who does not has no future in British journalism.

This is disturbing in itself, but as with all forms of institutional paranoia, it is also having a damaging effect on the functioning of Britain's institutions.

Amid Growing Influence of Intelligence

One obvious way in which this manifests itself is in the extraordinary growth in

both the visibility and influence of Britain's intelligence services.

Historically the intelligence services in Britain have operated behind the scenes to the point of being almost invisible. Until the 1980s the very fact of their existence was in theory a state secret.

Today, as Dearlove's article about Corbyn in the *Daily Telegraph* shows, their leaders and former leaders are not only public personalities, but the intelligence services have come increasingly to fill the role of gatekeepers, deciding who can be trusted to hold public office and who cannot.

Corbyn is far from being the only British politician to find himself under this sort of scrutiny.

Boris Johnson, some time before he became Britain's Foreign Secretary, made what I am sure he now considers the mistake of writing an article in the *Telegraph* praising Russia's role in the liberation of the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria from ISIS.

The result was that on his appointment as foreign secretary, Johnson had a meeting with British intelligence chiefs who 'persuaded' him of the need to follow a tough line with Russia. He has in fact followed a tough line with Russia ever since.

Russophobia Infects the Legal System

Establishment hostility to Russia is also enabling interference by the intelligence services in the British legal process.

There is a widespread and probably true belief that the British intelligence services actively lobbied for the grant of asylum to the fugitive Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky, who they seem to have considered some sort of 'agent of influence' in Russia. This despite the fact that it is now widely acknowledged that Berezovsky's background and activities in Russia should have denied him asylum in Britain.

However what is still largely rumour in Berezovsky's case is indisputable fact in the Alexander Litvinenko case and in the Skripal cases.

I have previously explained how in the Litvinenko case the claim of Russian state involvement in Litvinenko's murder made by the British public inquiry is not supported by the publicly available evidence.

What has now become clear is that the main evidence of Russian state involvement in Litvinenko's murder was not the publicly available evidence, but evidence provided to the public inquiry in private by the British intelligence services.

This evidence was seen only by the Judge who headed the inquiry, but seems to have had a decisive effect in forming his view of the case and shaping his report.

American readers may be interested to learn that this evidence was put together by none other than Christopher Steele, the person who gave us the “golden showers” dossier, which has played such an outsized role in the Russiagate affair.

How strong or reliable this evidence is it is impossible to say since, as it is secret, it cannot be independently scrutinised. All I would say is that on two other occasions when Steele is known to have produced similar reports about Russian state activities subsequent enquiries have failed to support them. One is Steele’s “golden showers” dossier, which the FBI has admitted it cannot verify, and which scarcely anyone any longer believes to be true. The other is a report produced by Steele which alleged that Russia had bought the 2018 World Cup by bribing FIFA officials, which subsequent investigation has found was untrue.

It turns out that the evidence used to support the British claim of Russian guilt in the Skripal case is the same: evidence provided in private by British intelligence, which is not subject to independent scrutiny. As in the Litvinenko case, the British authorities have nonetheless not hesitated to use this evidence to declare publicly that Russia is guilty. This whilst a police investigation is still underway and before any suspect has been identified.

Indeed in the Skripal case the violation of due process has been so gross that it is not even denied. Instead articles have appeared in the British media which say that due process does not apply in cases involving Russia.

That there can be no rule of law without due process, and that excluding cases involving Russia from the need to follow due process is racist and discriminatory appears to concern no one.

Discrimination in Britain Against Russians

Where the intelligence services have led the way, others have been keen to follow.

Recently a House of Commons committee published a report which openly puts pressure on British law firms to refuse business from Russian clients. The best account of this has been provided by the Canadian academic Paul Robinson:

“.....that leads me onto the thing which really struck me about this document

[The House of Commons committee report – AM]. This was a statement about the British law firm Linklaters, which managed the flotation of EN+. Shortly before this, the report says ‘Both the EN+ IPO [Initial Public Offering] and the sale of Russian debt in London appear to have been carried out in accordance with the relevant rules and regulatory systems, and there is no obvious evidence of impropriety in a legal sense.’ Yet, it then goes on to say the following:

“We asked Linklaters to appear before the committee to explain their involvement in the flotation of EN+ ... They refused. We regret their unwillingness to engage with our inquiry and must leave others to judge whether their work at ‘the forefront of financial, corporate and commercial developments in Russia’ has left them so entwined in the corruption of the Kremlin and its supporters that they are no longer able to meet the standards expected of a UK-regulated law firm.”

This is quite outrageous, and also cowardly. The committee in effect accuses Linklaters of corruption, while avoiding complaints of libel by use of the weasel words ‘we leave to others to judge’ – a way of making an accusation while claiming that one hasn’t. What’s so outrageous about the statement is that comes straight after a confession that the EN+ flotation was completely above board. Linklaters didn’t do anything wrong, and the House of Commons committee knows it. Nevertheless, it sees fit to suggest that the company is ‘no longer able to meet the standards expected of a UK-regulated law firm.’

The implication here is that any company which has extensive dealings with Russian enterprises is ‘entwined in the corruption of the Kremlin’ and so unfit to do business. I cannot interpret this as anything other than an attempt by the committee to threaten British companies and intimidate them into dropping their lawful activities. I consider this disgraceful.

The committee’s attitude can be seen again towards the end of the report, when it writes that ‘instead of participating in the rules-based system, President Putin’s regime uses asymmetric methods to achieve its goals, and others – so-called useful idiots – magnify that effect by supporting its propaganda. So, there you have it. People who do with business with Russia are to be publicly shamed as unworthy of the standards expected of the British people, while those who would dare to point this sort of thing out are to be denounced as ‘useful idiots’. Having any dealings with Russia makes one a Kremlin stooge.”

Taking their cue from the House of Commons committee, identical pressure on British law firms to refuse to act for

Russian clients is now coming from the media, as explained in this [article](#) by the *Guardian's* Nick Cohen, which talks of potential Russian clients in these terms:

“In this conflict, it’s no help to think of oligarchs as businessmen. They are closer to the privileged servants of a warlord or mafia boss. Their wealth is held at Putin’s discretion. If they are told to buy influence in the Balkans or fund an alt-news website, they obey. Companies that raise funds on the London markets or oligarchs who move into Kensington mansions may look like autonomous organisations and individuals but, as Garry Kasparov told the committee: “They are agents of a rogue Russian regime, not businessmen. They are complicit in Putin’s countless crimes. Their companies are not international corporations, but the means to launder money and spread corruption and influence.”

To which I would add that in law-governed states even criminals have the right of legal representation and advice. In Britain, if the House of Commons committee and Nick Cohen gets their way, Russians – whether criminals or not – will be the exception.

What is so bizarre about this is that the spectre of massive Russian economic penetration of Britain conjured up by the House of Commons committee is so far removed from reality. *The Economist* (no friend of Russia) provides the actual figures:

“...the high profile of London’s high-rolling Russians belies the relatively small role that their money plays in the wider economy. Foreigners hold roughly £10 trillion of British assets. Russia’s share of that is just 0.25%, a smaller proportion than that of Finland and South Korea.

Parts of west London have acquired many new Russian residents, and shops to serve them (including an outfitter of armoured luxury cars). Yet even in “prime” London – that is, the top 5-10% of the market – buyers from eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union account for only 5% of sales, according to data from Savills, a property firm. Outside the capital’s swankiest districts, Russians’ influence is minuscule. The departure of oligarchs might affect prices on some streets in Kensington, but not beyond.

The same is true of Britain’s private schools. Some have done well out of Russian parents. But of the 53,678 foreign pupils who attend schools that belong to the Independent Schools Council, only 2,806 are Russian. China, by contrast, sends 9,008 pupils from its mainland, and a further 5,188 from Hong

Kong.

Looking at these figures it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it is the mere presence of Russians, not their number or their wealth or the illicit way in which some of them supposedly came by their money, which for the British establishment is the problem.”

Quite simply, Russians are not welcome, not because they are wealthy or because they are corrupt, but because they are Russians.

Against Russian Media

The same discriminatory approach appears to inform the persistent attacks launched by the British authorities against the Russian television broadcaster RT.



Over the last two years RT has had to repel an attempt by the British authorities to close down its British bank account, has been forced to respond to a succession of complaints from the British media regulator Ofcom, has faced threats of having its British broadcasting licence withdrawn, and has had to endure a campaign of vilification aimed in part at dissuading British public figures from appearing as guests on its programmes.

As to what exactly RT has done – other than vague and unspecific claims that it is a ‘propaganda’ channel – which justifies this treatment, has never been fully explained.

Again it is difficult to avoid the impression that the British establishment’s fundamental problem with RT is that it is simply a Russian channel broadcasting

in Britain that scrutinizes establishment policies and actions – a fundamental responsibility of journalism, which is largely missing in British media.

Free speech is a human right in Britain except apparently for Russians.

This discriminatory approach towards Russia and Russians replicates the increasingly ugly and frankly racist way in which Russians are regularly depicted in Britain today.

As to the general effect of that on British society, I repeat here what I wrote back in 2016:

“Racial stereotyping is always something to complain about. It is dehumanising, intolerant and ugly. It is racist and profoundly offensive of its target. This is so whenever it is used to mock or label any ethnicity or national or cultural group. Russians are not an exception.

A society that indulges in it, and which tolerates those who do, forfeits its claim to anti-racism and interracial tolerance. The fact that it is treating just one ethnic group – Russians – in this way, denying them the moral and legal protection which it accords others, in no way diminishes its racism and intolerance. It emphasises it.”

British society is not just the poorer for it. It is deeply corrupted by it, and this corruption now touches every aspect of British life.

Britain Becoming Marginalised

If the result of the British establishment’s paranoia about Russia is deeply corrosive within Britain itself, its effect on British foreign policy has been entirely negative.

At its most basic level it has meant a total breakdown in relations between Britain and Russia.

British and Russian leaders no longer talk to each other, and summit meetings between British and Russian leaders have come to a complete stop. Boris Johnson’s last visit to Russia is universally acknowledged to have been a complete failure, and following the Skripal affair British officials and members of Britain’s Royal Family are now even boycotting the World Cup in Russia.

Indeed British public statements about the World Cup have been all of a piece with the British establishment hostility to Russia, with Johnson recently comparing it to Hitler’s 1936 Olympics and with another House of Commons

committee warning British fans of the supposed dangers of going to to Russia to watch them.

This complete absence of dialogue with Russia is a serious problem for Britain as some British officials quietly acknowledge.

Russia is after all a powerful nation and any state which still wishes to exercise influence on world affairs must engage with Russia in order to achieve it. The British establishment's hostility to Russia however makes that impossible.

The result is that major international questions such as the Ukrainian crisis, the Syrian conflict and the gathering crisis in the Middle East caused by the U.S.'s withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal – in all of which Russia is centrally involved – are being handled without British involvement.

Where Angela Merkel of Germany and Emmanuel Macron of France talk to Russia and have thereby managed to carve out for themselves important roles in world affairs, Britain's Theresa May is a bit player.

However, instead of drawing the obvious conclusion from this, which is that refusing to talk to the Russians is the high road to nowhere, the British have doubled down, seeking to regain relevance by leading an international crusade against Moscow.

The strategy – which bears the unmistakable imprint of Johnson – was set out in grandiose terms in a recent article in *The Guardian*:

“The UK will use a series of international summits this year to call for a comprehensive strategy to combat Russian disinformation and urge a rethink over traditional diplomatic dialogue with Moscow, following the Kremlin's aggressive campaign of denials over the use of chemical weapons in the UK and Syria.

British diplomats plan to use four major summits this year – the G7, the G20, Nato and the European Union – to try to deepen the alliance against Russia hastily built by the Foreign Office after the poisoning of the former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal in Salisbury in March.

“The foreign secretary regards Russia's response to Douma and Salisbury as a turning point and thinks there is international support to do more,” a Whitehall official said. “The areas the UK are most likely to pursue are countering Russian disinformation and finding a mechanism to enforce accountability for the use of chemical weapons.”

Former Foreign Office officials admit that an institutional reluctance to call out Russia once permeated British diplomatic thinking, but say that after the poisoning of Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, that attitude is evaporating....

Ministers want to pursue a broad Russian containment strategy at the coming summits covering cybersecurity, Nato's military posture, sanctions against Vladimir Putin's oligarchs and a more comprehensive approach to Russian disinformation."

It has taken no more than a few weeks since that article appeared on 3 May 2018 for this whole grandiose strategy to fall apart.

Not only have Merkel and Macron each visited Russia since the article was published, but Italy now has a new Russia-friendly government, and Spain may soon do so also. Adding insult to injury, Germany is now casting doubt on Britain's actions following the Salisbury poisoning attack,

All of this however is eclipsed by Donald Trump's comments at the G7 saying that Russia should be readmitted to the G7 and having his officials inform the British media that he is becoming increasingly irritated by the British prime minister's lectures.

In the event not only did Trump fail to meet May one-to-one at the G7 summit, but he refused to agree the summit's final communique, which criticised Russia.

Needless to say, amidst the collapse of the summit, the plan May had apparently intended to unveil at the summit for a new international rapid response unit to respond to Russian-backed assassinations and cyber attacks fell by the wayside.

Far from gaining relevance by leading an international crusade against Russia, the British are increasingly finding that no one else is interested and that May's and the British establishment's obsession with Russia instead of enhancing Britain's importance is making Britain increasingly irrelevant.

Poisoning the International Atmosphere

The British establishment is in fact making the fundamental mistake of thinking that other countries not only share their obsession with Russia, but that they necessarily value their relations with Britain more than with Russia.

This is a strange view given that Russia is arguably a more powerful nation than Britain.

It is nonetheless true that the British establishment's anti-Russian fixation is having an internationally damaging effect.

Many Western governments have their own issues with Russia, and in such a situation it is not surprising that British paranoia about Russia finds a ready echo.

The most recent example of this is of course the orchestrated expulsion by various Western governments of Russian diplomats in the immediate aftermath of the Salisbury poisoning attack.

However the most damage has been done in the U.S.

Britain and Russia-gate

The full extent of the British role in the Russiagate scandal is not yet clear, but there is no doubt that it was both extensive and crucial.

The individual who arguably has played the single biggest role in generating the scandal is Christopher Steele, the compiler of the “golden showers” dossier, who is not only British but who is a former British intelligence officer.

It is now becoming increasingly clear – as Joe Lauria wrote last year in Consortium News– that the dossier has played a key role in the whole scandal, being accepted for many months by U.S. investigators – including it turns out by Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigators – as providing the ‘frame-narrative’ for the case of alleged collusion between the Russians and the Trump campaign.

The Steele dossier is in fact very much of a piece with the paranoid conception of Russia which has taken hold in Britain, though (as I have pointed out previously) the dossier’s description of how government decisions are made in Russia is absurd.

Critics of the dossier in the United States rightly draw attention to the fact that it is ‘research’ paid for by Donald Trump’s political opponents in the Hillary Clinton campaign, whilst there is also a view popular amongst some Republicans (wrongly in my opinion) that it is a provocation concocted by Russian intelligence in order to disrupt the U.S. election process and embarrass Trump.

By contrast, insufficient attention is paid, in my opinion, to the fact that it is a British compilation put together in Britain by a former British spy at a time when Britain is in the grip of a particularly bad bout of Russia paranoia.

Steele himself is someone who by all accounts has fully bought into this paranoia. Indeed his previous role in preparing reports about Russia’s supposed role in Litvinenko’s murder and the World Cup bid, and also apparently in the

Ukrainian crisis, suggests that he has played no small role in creating it.

Steele is not however the only British official or former official to have played an active role in Russia-gate.

Steele himself is known for example to have a close connection to Dearlove, the former MI6 Director who called Corbyn “a clear and present danger.” It seems that Dearlove and Steele discussed the “golden showers” dossier at a meeting in London’s Garrick Club at roughly the same time that Steele was in contact about it with the FBI.

Another far more more important British official to have taken an active role in the Russiagate affair was Robert Hannigan, the head of GCHQ – Britain’s equivalent to the NSA – who visited the U.S. in the summer of 2016 to brief the CIA about British concerns over alleged contacts between the Russians and Trump’s campaign.

Though Hannigan’s trip to Washington in the summer of 2016 was first spoken of in April 2017, it has never been confirmed that the Steele dossier, which he brought with him to show to the CIA, was part of the evidence of supposed contacts between the Russians and Trump’s campaign. That it was, however, is strongly suggested by an article in *The Washington Post* on June 23, 2017, which amongst other things said the following:

“Early last August, an envelope with extraordinary handling restrictions arrived at the White House. Sent by courier from the CIA, it carried “eyes only” instructions that its contents be shown to just four people: President Barack Obama and three senior aides.

Inside was an intelligence bombshell, a report drawn from sourcing deep inside the Russian government that detailed Russian President Vladimir Putin’s direct involvement in a cyber campaign to disrupt and discredit the U.S. presidential race.

But it went further. The intelligence captured Putin’s specific instructions on the operation’s audacious objectives – defeat or at least damage the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, and help elect her opponent, Donald Trump....

The CIA breakthrough came at a stage of the presidential campaign when Trump had secured the GOP nomination but was still regarded as a distant long shot. Clinton held comfortable leads in major polls, and Obama expected that he would be transferring power to someone who had served in his Cabinet.

The intelligence on Putin was extraordinary on multiple levels, including as a feat of espionage.

For spy agencies, gaining insights into the intentions of foreign leaders is among the highest priorities. But Putin is a remarkably elusive target. A former KGB officer, he takes extreme precautions to guard against surveillance, rarely communicating by phone or computer, always running sensitive state business from deep within the confines of the Kremlin.”

This almost certainly refers to the early entries of Steele’s dossier, which is the only report known to exist which claims to have been “sourc[ed from] deep inside the Russian government [and to have detailed] Russian President Vladimir Putin’s direct involvement in a cyber campaign to disrupt and discredit the US Presidential race”.

The Washington Post says that the CIA’s report to Obama drew on “critical technical intelligence on Russia provided by another country”.

That points to Hannigan being the source, with Hannigan being known to have visited the U.S. and to have briefed the CIA at about the time the CIA sent its report to Obama.

Hannigan likely provided the CIA with a mix of wiretap evidence and the first entries of the dossier.

The wiretap evidence probably detailed the confused but ultimately innocuous contacts the young London- based Trump campaign aide George Papadopoulos was having at this time with the Russians. It is highly likely the British were keeping an eye on him at the request of the U.S., which the British would have been able to do for the U.S. without a FISA warrant since Papadopoulos was based in Britain.

Taken together with the first entries of the dossier, the details of Papadopoulos’s activities could easily have been misconstrued to conjure up a compelling case of collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russians. Given the paranoid atmosphere about Russia in Britain it would not be surprising if this alarmed Hannigan.

Needless to say if extracts from the dossier really were provided to the CIA by the head of one of Britain’s most important intelligence agencies, then it becomes much easier to understand why the CIA and the rest of the U.S. intelligence community took it so seriously.

Then there is the case of Stefan Halper, an American academic lecturing at

Cambridge University, who is friends and a business partner with Dearlove.

Halper was inserted by the FBI into the Trump campaign in early July 2016 to befriend Papadopoulos in London. In 1980, the CIA inserted Halper into Jimmy Carter's reelection campaign to help the Reagan camp by stealing information, including a Carter briefing book before a presidential debate.

Suffice to say that just as the British origin of the dossier has in my opinion been overlooked, so has the extent to which it circulated and was given credence in top circles within Britain before it made its full impact in the United States.

Overall, though the extent of the British role in the Russiagate affair is still not fully known, what information exists points to it being very substantial and important. In fact it is unlikely that the Russiagate scandal as we know it would have happened without it.

As such the Russiagate scandal serves as a good example of how British paranoia about Russia can infect the political process in another Western country, in this case the U.S.

Campaigning against Russia

Russia-gate is in fact only the most extreme example of the way that Britain's anti-Russian obsession has damaged the international environment, though because of the effect it has had on the development of domestic politics in the United States it is the most important.

There have been countless others. The British have for example been the most implacable supporters amongst the leading Western powers of the ongoing sanctions drive against Russia. Britain for instance is known to have actively – though so far unsuccessfully – lobbied for Russian banks to be cut off from the SWIFT interbank payments system, which were it ever to happen would be by far the most severe sanction imposed by the West on Russia to date.

Beyond the effect on the international climate of the constant anti-Russian lobbying of the British government, there is the further effect of the ceaseless drumbeat of anti-Russian agitation which pours out of the British media and various British-based organisations and NGO.

These extend from well-established organisations like Amnesty International – which misrepresented the case against the Pussy Riot performers by claiming that they had been jailed for “holding a gig in a church” – to other less established organisations such as Bellingcat and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, both of which are based in Britain. As it happens, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is known to have received funding from the British government, as

apparently have the White Helmets.

In addition Bill Browder, the businessman who successfully lobbied the U.S. Congress to pass the Magnitsky Act, and who has since then pursued a relentless campaign against Russia, is now also based in Britain and has British citizenship.

The great international reach of the British media – the result of the worldwide use of the English language and the international respect some parts of British media such as the BBC still command – means that this constant stream of anti-Russian publicity pouring out of Britain has a worldwide impact and is having an effect that has to be taken into account in any study of current international relations.

The Price of an Obsession

The British establishment's obsession with Russia is something of a puzzle.

Britain today is not a geopolitical rival of Russia's as it was in the nineteenth century and as the U.S. is today. British antagonism to Russia cannot therefore be explained as the product of a geopolitical conflict.

Russia is not a military or political threat to Britain. There is no history of Russia threatening or invading Britain. Russia is not an economic rival, and Russian penetration of the British economy is minimal and vastly exaggerated.

It is sometimes said that there are things about modern Russia that the British find culturally, ideologically or politically distasteful, and that this is the reason for Britain's intense hostility to Russia. However Britain has no difficulty being best of friends with all sorts of countries such as the Gulf Monarchies or China which are culturally, ideologically and politically far more different from Britain than Russia is. Logically that should make them more distasteful to Britain than Russia is, but it doesn't seem to do so. In these cases economic interests clearly take precedence over any concerns for human rights.

Ultimately however the precise cause of the British establishment's obsession with Russia does not actually matter. What does matter is that it is an obsession, which should be recognised as such, and that like all other obsessions is ultimately destructive.

In Britain's case the obsession is not only corrupting Britain's domestic politics and the working of its institutions.

It is also marginalising Britain, limiting its options, and causing growing

exasperation amongst some of its friends.

In addition it blinds the British to their opportunities. If the British were able to put their obsession with Russia behind them they might notice that at a time when they are quitting the European Union Russia potentially has a great deal to offer them.

It is sometimes said that Britain produces very little that Russia needs, and it is indeed the case that trade between Russia and Britain is very small, and that most of Russia's import needs are met by countries like Germany and China.

However Britain is able to provide Russia with the single thing that Russia arguably needs most at this stage in its development. This is not machinery or technology, all of which it is perfectly capable of producing itself, but the one thing it is truly short of: investment capital.

In the nineteenth century British capital played a key role in the industrialisation of America and in the opening up of the American West. There is no logical reason why it could not do something similar today in Russia. Indeed the marriage between Europe's biggest financial centre (Britain) and Europe's potentially most productive economy (Russia) is an obvious one.

In the twentieth century Britain's long history of economic involvement in the U.S. paid handsome political dividends. Perhaps the same might one day be the case between Britain and Russia. Regardless of that, economic engagement with Russia would at least provide Britain with a plan for an economic future outside the EU, something which because of Brexit it urgently needs but which currently it completely lacks.

For anything like that to happen the British will first have to address the reality of their obsession, and the damage it is doing to them. At that point they might even start to do something about it. Britain's relative success since the 1960s in overcoming other forms of racism and prejudice which had long existed in Britain shows that such a thing is possible if the problem is recognised and addressed. However I have to say that there is no sign of it happening at the moment.

In the meantime the rest of the world needs to understand that when it comes to Russia, the British are suffering from a serious affliction. Failing to do that risks the infection spreading, with the disastrous consequences we have seen with the Russia-gate scandal in the US.

There is even a chance that refusing to listen to the British about Russia might have a good effect on Britain. If the British realise that the world is no longer listening to them then they might start to understand the extent of their

own problem.

If so than the world would be doing Britain a favour, even if at the moment the British cannot see it.

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The EU Will Not Stand by Iran

While European leaders have made noises that they will defy Donald Trump's reneging on the Iran nuclear deal and resist U.S. sanctions, in the end the Europeans will give in to U.S., argues Alexander Mercouris in this commentary.

By Alexander Mercouris



Ever since Donald Trump's announcement that the U.S. would pull out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ("JCPOA") with Iran and would unilaterally impose across-the-board sanctions on that country, a procession of European leaders including the leaders of the U.S.'s most powerful European allies – Britain, France and Germany – have publicly declared their intention to stand by the JCPOA.

There is also brave talk of the EU creating safeguards for European companies which in defiance of the U.S. continue to trade or do business with Iran.

President Rouhani of Iran – who has a big personal stake in the JCPOA, which he personally negotiated – has for his part said that Iran will for the time being abide by the terms of the JCPOA whilst it waits to see how Europe will react.

In the meantime the talk of the EU standing up to the U.S. over the JCPOA has increased talk – or hope – that a corner in U.S.-EU relations has been turned, and that the EU will henceforth increasingly defy the U.S., making Donald Trump's decision to pull out of the JCPOA a further step in the decline of U.S. power. These [words of Craig Murray's](#) may stand as a good example:

"We are yet to see the detail, but by all precedent Trump's Iran sanctions will also sanction third country companies which trade with Iran, at the least through attacking their transactions through U.S. financial institutions and by sanctioning their U.S. affiliates.

But at a time when U.S. share of the world economy and world trade is steadily shrinking, this encouragement to European and Asian companies to firewall and minimise contact with the U.S. is most unlikely to be long term beneficial to the U.S. In particular, in a period where it is already obvious that the years of the U.S. dollar's undisputed dominance as the world currency of reference are drawing to a close, the incentive to employ non-U.S. linked means of financial transaction will add to an already highly significant global trend.

In short, if the U.S. fails to prevent Europe and Asia's burgeoning trade with Iran – and I think they will fail – this moment will be seen by historians as a key marker in U.S. decline as a world power.”

I do not share these expectations or these hopes.

Whilst there is no doubt European leaders are deeply shocked by Trump's announcement of a pullout from an international agreement in negotiating which the EU played a large part, I strongly doubt that they will find the courage or the willpower to defy the U.S. by in effect encouraging their companies to continue to do business with Iran.

Market Size Matters

It should be said that even with such active encouragement it is unlikely in my opinion that big European companies like Daimler or Airbus will risk U.S. fines by continuing to do business with Iran. Even if European governments were to guarantee them against any losses caused by such fines, they would worry about losing access to the U.S. market, which utterly dwarfs Iran's.

Given the head of steam that has built up inside the Trump administration against Iran, only if the EU were to threaten publicly to impose reciprocal sanctions on U.S. businesses doing business in the European Single Market might there be a real possibility of the US being deterred from imposing penalties on European companies which continue to do business with Iran.

Frankly I think there is no prospect of that happening because there is no unanimity within the EU behind it (Poland and the Baltic States would certainly oppose it) whilst I am sure that even the big EU states – Britain, Germany, France, and Italy – would in the end be unwilling to risk an all out rupture with the U.S. on such an issue.

Quite simply, though the Europeans are anxious to trade with Iran and to do business with Iran, Iran is not big enough, and trade with Iran is not important enough, to make the risk of an all-out rupture with the U.S. worthwhile.

I am sure that the Europeans – angry though they certainly are – will therefore in the end knuckle down, and do as the U.S. tells them to do.

That almost certainly means that the JCPOA is doomed. The Iranians have made clear that they will not stick with it if there are no economic benefits to them from doing so. I expect within a few weeks – as it becomes increasingly clear that the EU is not prepared to defy the U.S. – that the Iranian nuclear programme will resume with a vengeance.

At that point the danger of a U.S., Israeli and Saudi attack on Iran will grow.

In fact this episode has been a profoundly humiliating one for Europe, exposing the extent of its powerlessness.

Not only did Trump ignore pleas to stand by the JCPOA from the U.S.'s closest European allies – Merkel, Macron and May – but he apparently did not even inform them in advance of the sweeping sanctions on Iran which he had decided to impose.

The European leader who has come out worst from this affair is France's vain and foolish President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron appears to have genuinely believed that he had forged some sort of personal relationship with Trump, and that France's contribution to the U.S.'s recent strike on Syria had made this bond even stronger.

In reality what Macron's recent trip to Washington has done is simply expose the extent to which Trump and the U.S. take neither him nor France seriously. All his pleas were ignored, whilst his fawning behaviour towards Trump apparently went down badly back home.

As for Angela Merkel, she at least avoided in her trip to Washington the disastrous optics of Macron's visit. She is far too skilled and experienced a politician to be caught out in that way.

However no-one should be in any doubt that it is Merkel's disastrous leadership of Germany and of Europe which has brought Europe to this pass.

Merkel, Macron and May, Not Maggie

Ever since she became German Chancellor she has repeatedly sacrificed European and German interests in order to avoid rocking the boat with the U.S.

In July 2014 she took the fateful step of supporting the U.S.'s demand for sectoral sanctions against Russia even though these were contrary to German economic interests, in effect legitimising the U.S. practice of imposing

unilateral sanctions without the agreement of the UN Security Council. That makes it all but impossible to see how she can realistically oppose such sanctions now.

The contrast with Margaret Thatcher – who in the 1980s vigorously opposed unilateral U.S. sanctions intended to block Russian pipeline projects – is instructive.

In fact European behaviour over the JCPOA has been a textbook case of appeasement.

Instead of telling Donald Trump that a unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA would be contrary to international law – which it is – and that Europe would strongly oppose US withdrawal from an international agreement which was not only working but with which Iran is abiding, European leaders like Merkel, Macron and May instead told Trump that they agreed with him that the JCPOA was in some way “imperfect” and would have to be “improved”.

Needless to say that not only failed to persuade Donald Trump to stick with the JCPOA; it almost certainly emboldened him, convincing him that he is right to pull out of it.

Trump’s decision to pull out of the JCPOA and to impose sweeping unilateral sanctions on Iran will undoubtedly embitter European opinion against the U.S. It is also likely to make Europe more resistant to any further U.S. pressure to ramp up sanctions against Russia. Unlike trade with Iran, European and especially German trade with Russia is indispensable for the European and German economies, which explains why constant U.S. pressure on Germany to pull out of the Nord Stream 2 project has been resisted.

In the longer term this episode probably will harden further the anti-U.S. trend in voting on the part of European electorates, though it is worth pointing out that some of the right wing ‘populist’ European politicians who have benefitted from this process are not friends of Iran’s.

However in the immediate term Iran’s economic salvation as it finds itself under renewed sanctions pressure will come not from Europe but from Russia and China and the other Eurasian states.

This commentary originally appeared on [The Duran](#).

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How Merkel's Win May Hide Rising Discontent

Exclusive: With German Chancellor Merkel expected to win reelection on Sunday, the European elites may celebrate having turned back a populist surge, but their neo-liberal policies continue to fuel discontent, says Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

The citizens of Germany will head to the polls this Sunday, in the last of a series of elections in major European countries this year. Before the voting began, there were fears that populist, anti-system parties could actually win in some cases, in the wake of the victory of last year's Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. That hasn't happened, as Marine Le Pen of the National Front was defeated in a run-off in France, and Geert Wilders' Freedom Party failed to break through in Holland.

Germany is also expected to weather the populist storm, with Chancellor Angela Merkel set to be re-elected. Her Christian Democratic Party (CDU/CSU) now holds a comfortable lead over its main competitor, the Social Democrats (SPD), with the other opposition parties far behind. That will give Merkel, a reserved but effective politician who grew up in Communist East Germany, the chance to approach Helmut Kohl's record as the country's longest serving leader.

Due to the parliamentary system, which allows numerous smaller parties to send representatives to Berlin, neither of the large parties can win outright, which means that Merkel will need to form a coalition. Her preference would be to take on her party's historical ally, the Free Democrats, but it is possible she will be forced to continue with a "grand coalition" agreement between the CDU and SPD to share power in the name of stability, while keeping out the parties seen as more extreme.

The most feared of the smaller groupings is the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a "populist" party that has grown rapidly in recent years, drawing on economic and social discontent in the mold of other anti-system parties around Europe. The AfD is expected to draw slightly more than 10 percent of the vote, well below the totals for Marine Le Pen in France (21 percent in the first round) or the Five-Star Movement in Italy (25 percent in 2013), and closer to the level of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party in Holland (13 percent in the March elections).

Nevertheless, the AfD's growth has caused consternation around Europe, as the governing elites struggle to explain why even in the country with the

continent's strongest economy, where unemployment is low, and productivity and budget surpluses are high, there has been a rapid increase in populist fervor.

The standard explanation, of course, is xenophobia and racism. Indeed the AfD plays to nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment, and has increasingly identified itself with right-wing issues. As immigration from the Middle East and Africa has soared in recent years, European countries have struggled with accepting and integrating the new arrivals, causing considerable social tensions.

Germany was at the center of this crisis in 2015, when Merkel went against the grain of public opinion and announced that her country would accept hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers in order to do its part for those less fortunate, in particular refugees from the war in Syria.

It didn't take long for that policy to change though, as less than a year later Germany was decisive in reaching a deal with President Erdogan of Turkey that ended up limiting immigration by closing the land route towards Europe through the Balkans. The result has been a shift of migrant flows to the sea routes from Northern Africa primarily to Italy and Greece, accompanied by a notable change in attitudes among the respective populations.

Economic Inequality

As with most populist movements throughout the Western world, the issues of immigration and race tell only a part of the story. The Brexit vote was fueled by a reaction against neo-liberal economic policies, effectively summed up by the headline of an article in the English newspaper The Guardian shortly after the referendum in June 2016: "If you've got money, you vote in... if you haven't got money, you vote out." Decades of economic decline had produced the desire to stick it to the governing elites, and the Brexit vote provided an excellent opportunity to do so.

In addition, there has even been academic research demonstrating the obvious, that racial attitudes are influenced by economic hardship, which provides fertile ground for the growth of extremist parties.

The same can be said for the United States, of course, as Donald Trump's victory was based in large part on his appeal to voters who feel left behind by globalization, and left out by a political system that has favored those at the top. Racist and anti-immigrant sentiment is clearly present, but Trump's decisive margin came from sectors of the population such as union workers in the Rust Belt, not pro-Confederates in the South.

As for Germany, the question is where the impetus comes for the rise of anti-

system political forces, beyond the standard explanation involving immigration and right-wing social issues. With the country considered to be doing so well economically, the narrative doesn't seem to fit as well.

A clear-eyed analysis, however, makes it clear that the conditions for a revolt of the voters based on economic hardship are present there as well. First there is the eastern part of the country, the former "German Democratic Republic" which belonged to the Communist bloc dominated by the Soviet Union. Despite the claims of great success in the years following German reunification, the reality is that much of the industry in the East was cannibalized by western companies, and a large segment of the population lives on welfare.

The economy of the former Communist country was obviously inefficient and required modernization, but the approach taken by the West was to shut down and sell off whatever was available, leaving the East in a perpetual state of inferiority.

Annual reports published by the German government show that significant disparities persist between the two areas of the country, with higher unemployment, lower wages and less investment in the East. The ownership and control of Germany's considerable industrial capacity also remains principally in the West.

Exploiting the Unemployed

A second major factor is the system of labor market and welfare reforms introduced in Germany in the 2000s. The most famous is the "Hartz IV" law, which provides unemployment subsidies of just 280 euros (\$330) a month, and forces people to accept whatever jobs they are offered, even at only 1-2 euros an hour.

German companies have done very well with this system, that allows them to exploit extremely cheap and flexible labor. Critics points to this as one – although certainly not the only – factor contributing to the great success of German industry in Europe.

For the six million citizens trapped in the system though, things aren't so great. There are entire areas called "Hartz IV neighborhoods," indicating widespread socio-economic difficulties among the local population. If we add the high level of "working poor," a category that has reached 9 percent of the population in Germany, it becomes clear where the populist movements can look for votes on economic issues.

What scares the elites in Europe is that political parties that criticize European Union economic policies will eventually break through, thanks to support among these segments of the population. The E.U. is in fact rightly

associated with the monetarist and neo-liberal policies that have contributed to producing greater inequality and thus causing hardship for many across Europe.

In the end, Holland, France and Germany will succeed in keeping the populist parties out of government this year. (Italy will vote in 2018, and the 5-Star Movement is still challenging for the top spot.) The risk is that the European elites may take this as an opportunity to continue with their neo-liberal policies of recent years, which will ultimately only make the situation worse.

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How Trump Defines the Future

President Trump has defined the future as a battle between old-style nationalism and neoliberal globalism, a challenge that the West's elites mock at their own peril, as ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke describes.

By Alastair Crooke

Europe, the *Guardian* [tells us](#), has its old “mojo” back. There is a new optimistic mood – “or even a triumphalist mood, in much of Europe.” German Chancellor Angela Merkel is praised for achieving a “nuanced” final statement at the recent G20 meeting, and for “standing up” to President Trump, on behalf of the “liberal international order.” Really? If this is the “mood,” so be it, but even the *Guardian* op-ed writer argues that the narrative that Europe somehow “is back” – having beaten back the “populist wave” – is flawed: “the spirit of cohesion is overstated.”

Actually, the Euro-élites must have had their attention fixed elsewhere. For the “Great Disrupter,” as David Stockman calls President Trump, threw a hefty stone into the liberal pond: It is fine to ignore it, but what is happening is that the old division between those inside the supposedly democratic, globalist “sphere,” and those of the delinquent “regimes” outside it – and lying beyond its civilized walls – is being, bit-by-bit, dissolved.

The “war” that used to be between one sphere and another is being overtaken by the insurgency *within spheres*. The bitterness and polarization so induced is

having its effect: the “international liberal order” (as the *Guardian* terms it), may no longer work as the highly centralized, quasi-cohesive establishment that it has been for the last six decades. There is no more a “center”; no more a cohesive certainty; nor a common directionality, or purposiveness.

If Europe wants to present the G20 deliberation as the clever finessing of discordant views, that is understandable. But whereas Europe included in the declaration the commitment to “free” trade, U.S. negotiators parried this with a “right” – the right to protect against unfair trade practices, and to consider the imposition of tariffs, where appropriate (i.e. on steel products).

On climate change, the G19 stood by the Paris accord, but America, by contrast, retained its decision to *withdraw* from it. The consensus stood by carbon-reduction measures, but found this juxtaposed – uncomfortably – with an American call (rather), to use fossil fuels more cleanly. It was agreement, I would suggest, to disagree, rather than some Merkel-made synthesis.

Trump’s Biggest Rock

But the biggest rock thrown by Trump in the G20 pond, passed almost unnoticed. But potentially, it can hurt the Europeans in the spot, just where it hurts most. And this did not even occur at Hamburg. It occurred on the way there.

Conservative commentator Pat Buchanan summarizes: “Calling the Polish people ‘the soul of Europe,’ [Trump] related how, in the Miracle of the Vistula in 1920, Poland, reborn after 12 decades of subjugation, drove back the invading Red Army of Leon Trotsky.

[Then Trump] described the gang rape of Poland by Nazis and Soviets after the Hitler-Stalin pact. He cited the Katyn Forest massacre of the Polish officer corps by Stalin, and the rising of the Polish people against their Nazi occupiers in 1944.

“When the Polish Pope, John Paul II, celebrated his first Mass in Victory Square in 1979, said Trump, ‘a million Polish men, women and children raised their voices in a single prayer ... “We want God” ...’

“What enabled the Poles to endure [all their tribulations] was an unshakable belief in and a willingness to fight for, who they were – a people of God and country, faith, families, and freedom – with the courage and will to preserve a nation built on the truths of their ancient tribe and Catholic traditions.

“ ‘The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do

we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it? [emphasis added].

“ ‘We can have the largest economies and the most lethal weapons anywhere on Earth, but if we do not have strong families and strong values, then we will be weak and we will not survive.’”

Ignoring the Point

Did the G20 élites miss the point? Trump is asking the Europeans whether “*you* [still] have *the will*, the steadfastness, the clear-sightedness and strength, by which ‘to take back’ your culture, your way-of-being, your values” – your nations? The message was, I believe, not directed so much at the Poles, but rather, at other Europeans. Trump implicitly targeted the part where it hurts Europe the most: the immigration issue, at diversity and politics, and at the fear of Europeans for their cultural submersion, under the wave of immigration. (The G20 offered no solutions to this crucial question).

Did Merkel – the media-designated new “Leader of the West” – impress with her “resolute” response to mobs rioting in Germany’s second city, Buchanan asks, rather pointedly? The scenes from Hamburg, perhaps, he implied, reinforced Trump’s point.

Many in Europe may be offended by Trump’s words, perceiving them to be wholly contrary to everything for which they stand. They too, may dislike Trump, viscerally. But these feelings should not blind them to the very key point that he – rightly or wrongly – is pressing: Is diversity and identity politics our strength (as we are told), or is the possession of some sort of historical and cultural (including a spiritual) legacy, something which binds us, and gives a people its inner strength?

It is, at the very least, a valid question. And, it is the sides which are taken on this issue, which represent the new fault line that is displacing the old “good guy” globalist, versus the delinquent, “bad guy,” non-global sphere. This new insurgency is in-house. And the “center” has gone – bifurcated possibly irreparably, into two.

Meeting with Putin

And so, to Trump’s final symbolic “act of disruption”: the prolonged and warm encounter with President Putin. If not on exactly the same page as Trump, Russia nonetheless, has been pursuing a parallel path of political and cultural re-sovereignty. The lengthy meeting with the Russian President disconcerted and outraged many (see [here](#), for example). But the provoking of such an (over)

reaction of outrage precisely would be viewed as its main merit by many Trump supporters, who value disruption of the old paradigm.

Trump was not as alone and as isolated as the mainstream media portrayed him: the élites may revile and deprecate his abdication of American global leadership, and for dangerously insisting that job losses resulting from unfair trade practices must be redressed, but there is, however, a constituency within Europe that is entirely in sympathy with his approach.

Trump's questioning of the orthodoxy that the U.S. must retain hegemony over the global order, and his sense that the free trade system simply has lost America its manufacturing base, possesses a self-evident content for many ordinary Americans and Europeans. Trump says simply enough: "We (the U.S.), can no longer afford it. We are up to the ceiling, and out of the windows, piled high in debts, and we anyway get zilch in return from all these ingrates who shelter under our bankrupting global security umbrella. Let us not go on trying to impose this on others; we shall rebuild ourselves, and pursue our own, culturally distinct, American way-of-being – and let them pursue theirs'. It is simple; it is plain; it has appeal.

Whether one thinks Trump is right or wrong on these issues, is beside the point. The essential point is that the key components – the Poland speech, the G20 dissidence, and the warm Putin meeting – do form a concerted, strategic whole. Too, the atmospherics were better at the G20, than at the G7 meeting in Sicily in May – President Trump seemed actually to be enjoying himself in Hamburg at dinner, (and why not). But two summits into Trump's Presidency, it is hard to escape two conclusions:

Firstly, that things have changed – maybe permanently. Surprisingly, of all people, it was "globalist" Emmanuel Macron, who best caught this sense when he remarked: "Our world has never been so divided; centrifugal forces have never been so powerful; our common goods have never been so threatened."

And secondly, the immediate relapse on the President's return to Washington into the Donald Trump Jr. Russia "hysteria" over a "faux scandal" as an Op-Ed in the *Washington Post* describes it (whatever the whys and wherefores of the affair), reinforces the conclusion (as Mike Krieger notes) "that America may no longer work as the largely centralized, semi-cohesive unit it has been for our entire lives." Maybe he puts it too mildly. To outsiders, Americans seem to be eating each other alive.

Aptly, Krieger quotes William Yeats:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

*The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

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.

Taming or Tiptoeing Around Trump

Donald Trump's emotional shortcomings and lack of knowledge about the world have forced nations to adopt new strategies for maneuvering around the increasingly erratic U.S. superpower, writes Michael Brenner.

By Michael Brenner

The Trump presidency presents a unique challenge to other governments. Never before in modern times has a major power, much less the world's paramount power, been led by so erratic and unbalanced an individual. His total lack of experience, knowledge and interest in anything beyond narcissistic self-promotion compounds the problem of figuring out how to deal with him. Understandably – friend, foe and neutral find themselves equally perplexed.

As they grope for a strategic response, we are beginning to see the vague outlines of three types of approaches. The first is predicated on the proposition that Trump's mind is vacant – it's terra incognita to be explored, so let's try to colonize it. This in effect is the approach taken by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mohammed bin-Salman (MBS), the Saudi Crown Prince and power behind the throne in Riyadh. Each hurried to Washington, elbowing his way to the head of the queue with the intention of imprinting on Trump's brain their preferred cognitive map of the world – most especially the Middle East.

The principal features that they worked at etching on his grey matter were these: Israel/Saudi Arabia is your trustworthy ally who is the key to bringing order to the region in a way that will protect the United States. Israel/Saudi Arabia had proven itself trustworthy and dedicated over the decades. We are anchors of stability in an unruly Middle East.

That is why we were offended by the shabby treatment we received from Barack Obama. No gratitude or understanding of our vulnerable position. We are under threat from an aggressive Iran above all. Those diabolical mullahs have mounted campaigns against America as well as us on every front: Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Libya They are surrounding us. Yet, Obama coddled the mullahs. He let them off the hook with that weak nuclear deal and his repeated appeals for dialogue. That's outright appeasement.

The focal points are nicely chosen. Trump has made a major issue of the "catastrophic" nuclear treaty – threatening to rescind it. He's tightening the screws on sanctions. Iran is his G-spot on all matters Middle Eastern. It inflames the nerve ends still quivering from the recurrent stimulation of terrorism. Linking the two has been recurrent method for playing on the taut strings of the American body politic.

For the Israelis and Saudis, this point of concentration provides a beachhead onto the Trumpian mind that can flare out to other sensitive spots already identified: Russia, unleashing the American military to conform to his chest-thumping rhetoric – e.g. the Tomahawk attacks in Syria, and feeding the national appetite for violent action. The fact that Jerusalem and Riyadh are working in tandem these days adds a nice synergistic touch to the campaign.

The Marx Brothers Syndrome

A second approach toward dealing with Trump emphasizes nimbleness and improvisation. Its point of departure is that there is no way of knowing what will emanate from the White House since Trump himself doesn't know. Its inner workings evoke images of the Marx Brothers in *A Night At The Opera*.

Coping strategies for managing in an environment of high uncertainty come down to three options. One is to disengage. Since I can't figure out what is happening, and certainly have no idea as to what might happen tomorrow, avoidance is the safest course of non-action. Of course, some governments will find that easier than others.

Vanuatu, Lesotho and most other tiny nations are essentially bystanders to world events. Control over their own fate is minimal in the best of times. So, their diplomats can just chill out – amuse themselves perusing *The New York Times'*

funny pages while sipping a cappuccino. Some others don't have that luxury and/or will not admit to themselves that functionally they are little different from the micro-states. Western Europeans and Japan fall into this category.

In theory, they could follow the other two methods for dealing with their Trump predicament whose hallmark are tumult and uncertainty. Increase your ability to foresee by acquiring better access to information OR process more effectively the information you have. The former is precluded by the mental vacuity noted earlier. The latter is liable to result in the stripping of mental gears as the intellectual machine cannot operate without lubricating oil and the nourishment of information.

The last alternative is to gain more leverage over policy-making in Washington. However, it is unrealistic to attempt an imitation of the Israelis or Saudis. No other governments have the access, the status or the tools to insert themselves into the turbid world of Trump and his White House. In truth, they don't have the audacity either.

The situation of the Europeans is complicated by the awkwardness of having to maneuver simultaneously as national governments and as participants in the institutional mechanism of the European Union. The E.U. is both an opportunity to augment power through concertation and a readily available device for avoiding taking risky actions. The latter invariably prevails in relations with the overweening United States.

The Europeans do a few things extremely well: talking and holding meetings. The instinctive, habitual response to crisis or challenge is to add to the already weighty meeting schedule and to form task forces. In these activities, they surpass even the practices of American universities – no small feat.

As one Old World cynic has wearily opined: "the Americans fight pointless wars; we hold pointless meetings. Who's the wiser?"

Tiptoeing Carefully

Consequently, European governments (and likewise Japan for some similar and some different reasons) have been largely inert in front of the Trump dilemma. British Prime Minister Theresa May did dash to Washington (actually beating out both Netanyahu and MBS) to ingratiate herself with the new jefe in the White House. Her keenness to declare herself the leading member of the groupie gang was animated by the fanciful idea that the U.S. somehow could save her and Britain from the full consequences of the Brexit folly. Other European leaders held back until they could summon the courage to come within reach of his grasp and expect to return safely home.

The particularities of the fraught issues at the top of everyone's crisis list have been an additional inhibiting factor. In the Middle East, all the allies have signed on to the American formulation of the Syrian war – and its foundation stone: currying favor with the Saudis and Israel. They have joined Washington, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and conviction, in stigmatizing the Assad regime as the source of all that has befallen the country. They have called for his ouster as the sine qua non for moving toward a resolution, they refrain from uttering a word of criticism at Turkey (which at any moment can reopen the refugee flood gates), Saudi Arabia and Qatar for their crucial backing of ISIS and of Al Qaeda in Syria (whose very existence they deny in echoing the American line) and express an aversion to engaging earnestly with the Russians in the search for a way out.

Trump's sudden acknowledgement that Assad was likely to stay in Damascus was reversed so quickly as to spare them the headache of agreeing, disagreeing or explaining. Indeed, nearly the entire European political class is emulating its American counterparts in ignoring the cardinal truth about Syria: either Assad stays around or the jihadis will rule Syria.

Surpassing even Syria as a combustible problem, and with grave implications, is Ukraine. Here, there were discernible differences between the major Western European powers and the U.S. While condemnation of Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea was shared, Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Francois Hollande were equivocal about moving toward a confrontation with Russia. (Even more uneasy was Premier Matteo Renzi of Italy). They dragged their heels over full-spectrum sanctions, and lent mainly silent support to the NATO build-up that brought Western forces to the Russian border.

Most important, the pair took the initiative in brokering the Minsk I and Minsk II accords that sought to lay the basis for a Russo-Ukrainian peaceful freezing of the crisis. It has been the Petro Poroshenko government in Kiev that has stymied the plan by its failure to meet any of the main conditions regarding: constitutional changes, disengagement of troops, and planned referenda. The Obama administration refusal to pressure Kiev emboldened Poroshenko who anyway has been under enormous pressure from the ultra-nationalists who hold his fragile government hostage.

Merkel and Hollande issued a few tame words of concern and then abandoned the diplomatic field to Washington. They also began to echo the American denouncement of Putin as a reckless adventurer and threat to continental peace.

When Trump shifted the rhetoric regarding both the man and the country, neither jumped in to second him or to encourage him. Hence, as his administration has moved the U.S. back into a more hostile position, they have kept the same low

profile. Of course, there were other factors in the equation: elections were on tap in both countries, the immigration crisis sucked up all the political oxygen, and terrorism had taken over the headlines. Hollande soon was on the way to oblivion, and Merkel vulnerable.

Turkey's Own Wild Card

As for the Turks, they are on their own, irregular course. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is as erratic and feckless as Trump. He does know what he wants – but he can't get there without squaring circles and fitting square pegs into round holes. Hence, tactics are constantly changing.

The Sultan's ambition has been to create a facsimile of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. That means grabbing the northern part of Syria along with Mosul in Iraq while being acknowledged as the Guide by the Sunni Arabs. Toward that fantastic end, he has encouraged and succored the Takfiris: both ISIS and al-Qaeda/al-Nusra & Assoc. They could not have organized and sustained themselves as they have without crucial Turkish support on Turkish territory. The parlous scheme totally unraveled when the Russians entered the fray.

Erdogan still wants to be the power broker in post-war Syria. And above all, he is desperate to block the Kurds' move to dominate the Syrian-Turkish borderlands. A weakening hand means that he constantly comes up with new maneuvers – trying to play all parties. To date, his greatest accomplishment is to alienate just about everyone and to isolate Turkey. What does that imply for Erdogan's approach toward Trump?

Erdogan gives the impression of being so puzzled by Trump that he has given up any effort to discern the White House's plans or to anticipate its actions. Anyway, so wrapped is he in his own convoluted strategizing that he finds it hard, if not unnatural, to take the bearings of another statesman – even a sober one. That is evident in his erratic dealings with Putin, the Iranians, the Saudis, and the ISIS leadership who are now as much threat as surrogate.

In other words, an implicit abstention from clever machinations aimed at influencing Trump's attitudes. Instead, he will press ahead with his own initiatives regardless – even if that risks conflict with Washington over the aggressive role of the YPG Kurds around Raqqa.

A Clash of Egomania

What will happen when these two ego-maniacal, impulsive men encounter each other next Tuesday in Washington? Will Erdogan insult Trump with charges that the CIA was behind last year's abortive coup? Will he insist that the U.S. hand over Fethullah Gülen – or else? Does he hope to force a trade of curbing the Kurds in

exchange for continued access to Incirlik airbase?

How will Trump react? Will he back off this past week's pledge to arm the Kurds in the teeth of Erdogan's denunciations? Will he silently accept humiliation as Defense Secretary (retired General) James Mattis did a few weeks ago in Ankara in the face of a Turkish harangue – or throw a tantrum? If a tantrum, will it come during or after the meeting?

More likely, they will reach a quiet understanding whereby the Americans pledge to rein in the Kurds once ISIS is disposed of. Such an arrangement would not trouble the Iraqi Kurdistan Region whose President, Masoud Barzani, heads the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDP) which has a long-standing rivalry with the PKK/YPG. Moreover, Barzani profits from a commercial partnership with Turkey that provides an economic lifeline for the landlocked region. As for Turkish sponsorship of the Takfiris other than ISIS, it will continue. Washington will continue to find it convenient to ignore since these selfsame groups have been America's own tacit allies. In a dialogue of the blind and the deaf, it matters nothing that Erdogan and Trump speak the same unintelligible language.

The Third Alternative

Brain sculpting a la Jerusalem and Riyadh is a restricted patent. Passivity is not viable for countries that have big stakes in the global order and a combination of means and ambition to take an interest in shaping it. That means Russia and China. They have had to find a different way.

Moscow harbored hopes that Trump would deviate from the course of implacable hostility followed by Obama and marked out by Hillary, too. Given her brutal language, including a direct comparison of Putin to Hitler, Russia had good reason to prefer the alternative. Too realistic to reach the facile judgment that Trump had actually thought through alternative policies and had chosen the wiser course, they did interpret the consistency of his words as inclining toward accommodation and pragmatic cooperation. Putin's likely hope was that a pattern of business-like dialogue could be opened, grounded on the principles of: a recognition of Russia's legitimate concerns (in Europe) and its interests (in the Middle East); an appreciation that Moscow and Washington had convergent interests in countering Islamic terrorism and in the stabilization of world energy markets; and a sober restraint in pressing a values agenda that had proven dangerously destabilizing.

A multilateral diplomacy guided by that sort of low-key realism long has been Putin's goal. He has articulated it on multiple occasions with rare candor and specificity. Washington, and Western leaders generally, seem never to have paid

it any attention – assuming that they have read them.

The White House's newfound tack in the direction of antagonism and confrontation creates a quandary for Moscow. They will not yield – as demanded by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Trump's phalanx of generals – or bow to American suzerainty. Instead, they will hold fast, temporize, make practical proposals such as the no-conflict zones in Syria – and keep their fingers crossed that Trump is not pushed into doing something fatally stupid.

In the longer run, there is always the possibility that the political winds whistling through the desolate open spaces of Trump's mind might uncover a small oasis of sanity in the mental wilderness, and clarify a vision of the world that permits the sort of engagement they'd prefer.

China's Long View

China is in analogous position – with some cardinal differences. For one, there are no ominous flashpoints where friction between the two powers runs the risk of leading to open conflict. No counterpart of Ukraine; no proxy fights as in Syria. Disputes over the contested, energy-rich isles in the South China Sea may raise blood pressure, may stir the planners to game great air-sea battles a la WW II, may prompt the New York Times to publish half-a-dozen stories a week highlighting China's alleged deep-seated problems (a classic case of projection cum sublimation). But no one is going to war in the nuclear age over spits of sand.

Moreover, Washington and Beijing share a genuine worry about North Korea. Each recognizes that it must coordinate with the other in order to neutralize the danger. As for Taiwan, Trump's misstep was quickly corrected when Beijing coolly reminded him that such a thing as history exists and that he does not operate in a world environment that accommodates his unbridled exercise of free will.

In the economic realm, the logic of interdependence is overwhelming. Commercial cum financial wars would ruin both countries. China's possession of \$1.5 trillion in U.S. Treasury notes and America's vast market for Chinese goods creates the economic parallel to a condition of Mutual Assured Destruction. In addressing specific, nettlesome issues like the Trump charge of Chinese currency manipulation or restrictions on American companies in China, Xi et al will prove as tough yet calculating as any businessman Trump or his Goldman Sachs advisers have met.

The Chinese have the advantages of knowing exactly what they want, the confidence that they will reach their objectives, and the savviness to play the game. Above all, they know that time is on their side – so patience is in order.

Moreover, the Chinese leaders are dexterous. That was evident at Xi's meeting with Trump in Florida. Unlike many others (in the U.S. and abroad), the Chinese seem to have understood that Trump was an empty-headed ignoramus. His bombast was taken as a sign of immaturity. So, too, was his party trick of employing a chocolate cake to highlight the Tomahawk attack. They are aware that he is allergic to hard thinking. They know that his narcissistic ego prevents him from relying on truly able people to whom he might cede authority. To them, he is the quintessential barbarian – the kind of barbarian they've been handling for more than 2,000 years. A Yi with nuclear weapons.

They will play in and on his mind. Not in the blunt manner of Netanyahu and MBS. Their approach will be subtler. Honor him by sharing things that a man of his strength and power should know: e.g. Korean history a la Chinoise. Humor him but don't defer to him. Habituate him to the mores of mutual respect. Don't make threats, or even issue prophecies; rather nudge him toward the apprehension of wisdom that he believes is his own revelation. Massage his dispositions and inclinations rather than instruct – knowing all along who will earn the Mandate of Heaven. For Trump marks the ordained descent of the United States.

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German Intel Clears Russia on Interference

Exclusive: Mainstream U.S. media only wants stories of Russian perfidy, so when German intelligence cleared Moscow of suspected subversion of German democracy, the silence was deafening, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

After a multi-month, politically charged investigation, German intelligence agencies could find no good evidence of Moscow-directed cyber-attacks or a disinformation campaign aimed at subverting the democratic process in Germany. Undaunted, Chancellor Angela Merkel has commissioned a new investigation.

Last year, Berlin's two main intelligence agencies, the BND and BfV (counterparts of the CIA and FBI) launched a joint investigation to substantiate allegations that Russia was meddling in German political affairs and attempting to shape the outcome of Germany's elections next September.

Like the vast majority of Americans malnourished on “mainstream media,” most Germans have been led to believe that, by hacking and “propaganda,” the Kremlin interfered in the recent U.S. election and helped Donald Trump become president.

German intelligence agencies rarely bite the hand that feeds them and realize that the most bountiful part of the trough is at the CIA station in Berlin with ultimate guidance coming from CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. But this time, in an unusual departure from past practice, analysts at the BND and BfV decided to act like responsible adults.

Whereas former CIA Director John Brennan prevailed on his analysts to resort to anemic, evidence-light reasoning “assessing” that Russia tried to tip the U.S. election to Donald Trump, Berlin’s intelligence agencies found the evidence lacking and have now completed their investigation.

Better still, the conclusions have been reported in a mainstream German newspaper, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, apparently because a patriotic insider thought the German people should also know.

Lemmings No Longer?

If BND President Bruno Kahl thought that his own analysts could be depended upon to follow their American counterparts lemming-like and find evidence – Curveball-style – to support the U.S. allegations, he now has had a rude awakening.

When the joint investigation was under way with his analysts doing their best to come up with reliable evidence of Russian perfidy, Kahl had behaved like his BND predecessors, parroting the charges made by his CIA counterpart, that the Russians were fomenting uncertainty and instability in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

In a rare interview with the mainstream newspaper, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, on Nov. 28, 2016, Kahl went out on what he probably thought was a safe limb, denouncing subversive “interference” by the Russians (“as they did in the U.S.”). He was just a few months into his job and may have been naïve enough to consider what John Brennan said as gospel truth. (If he really is that gullible, Kahl is in the wrong profession.)

In the interview, Kahl played the puppet-doll Charlie McCarthy with Brennan in the role of Charlie’s ventriloquist Edgar Bergen. Kahl told the *Sueddeutsche* that he agreed with the U.S. intelligence “assessment” that the Kremlin was behind the cyber attacks aimed at influencing the U.S. election.

He added: “We know that cyber attacks are taking place and that they have no

purpose other than to produce political instability. ... Not only that. The perpetrators are interested in delegitimizing the democratic process itself. ... I have the impression that the outcome of the American election has evoked no sadness in Russia so far. ...

“Europe is [now] the focus of these disruption experiments, and Germany especially. ... The pressure on the public discourse and on democracy is unacceptable.” Sound familiar?

Still, one might excuse the novice BND president for assuming his analysts would remember which side their bread is buttered on and follow past precedent in coming up with conclusions known to be desired by their masters in Berlin and the CIA.

So it must have come as an unwelcome surprise to Kahl when he found out that, this time, BND analysts would stand on principle and refuse to be as malleable as their Washington counterparts. His analysts could find no proof that the Kremlin was working hard to undermine the democratic process in Germany, and said so.

Worse still from the U.S. point of view, the two German intelligence agencies resisted the usual pressure from some senior leaders in Berlin (perhaps including Kahl himself) to jam whatever innocuous information they could find into the anti-Russian mosaic that Washington was constructing, a kind of Cubist version of distorted reality.

And So, a Do-Over

So, what do powerful officials do when the bureaucracy comes up with “incorrect” conclusions? They send the analysts and investigators back to work until they come up with “correct” answers. This turned out to be no exception. Absent evidence of hacking directed by the Kremlin, the Germans now have opted for an approach by which information can be fudged more easily.

According to the *Sueddeutsche*, “Chancellor Merkel’s office has now ordered a new inquiry. Notably, a ‘psychological operations group’ jointly run by the BND and BfV will specifically look at Russian news agencies’ coverage in Germany.” We can expect that any articles that don’t portray Vladimir Putin in a devil’s costume will be judged “Russian propaganda.”

For guidance, Merkel may well give the new “investigators” a copy of the evidence-free CIA/FBI/NSA “Assessment: Russia’s Influence Campaign Targeting the 2016 US Presidential Election.” Released on Jan. 6, the report was an eyesore and embarrassment to serious intelligence professionals. The lame “evidence” presented, together with all the “assessing” indulged in by U.S. analysts, was

unable to fill five pages; filler was needed – preferably filler that could be made to look like analysis.

And so, seven more pages were tacked onto the CIA/FBI/NSA Assessment, even though the information presented in them had nothing to do with the *cause celebre* of Russian hacking. No problem: The additional seven pages bore the ominous title: “Annex A: Russia – Kremlin’s TV Seeks To Influence Politics, Fuel Discontent in US.”

The extra pages, in turn, were then used to support the following indictment: “Russia’s state-run propaganda machine contributed to the influence campaign by serving as a platform for Kremlin messaging to Russian and international audiences.”

Did an Insider Leak?

It is not clear how the German daily Sueddeutsche acquired the conclusions of the joint investigation or even whether it has the full 50-page copy of the final report. The newspaper did make it clear, though, that it now realizes it was played by Kahl with his unsupported accusations last November.

From what the newspaper was told, the analysts seemed willing to give the boss what he had already declared to be his desired conclusion, but the evidence simply wasn’t there. The article quotes one security expert saying, “We would have been happy to give Russia a yellow card,” a soccer metaphor referring to improper conduct. A cabinet source lamented, “We found no smoking gun.”

Initially, the BND and BfV planned to release excerpts of their still classified inquiry, the Sueddeutsche reported, but it’s now not clear when, if ever, the full report will be released.

The day after the Sueddeutsche story appeared, some other media outlets reported on it – briefly. Newsweek and Politico gave the scoop all of three sentences each. Not fitting with the preferred “Russia-is-guilty-of-everything” narrative, it then died a quick death. I have been unable to find the story mentioned at all in major U.S. “mainstream media” outlets.

If Americans became aware of the story, it was probably via RT – the *bête noire* of the abovementioned CIA/FBI/NSA report condemning Russian “propaganda.” Can it become any clearer why RT America and RT International are despised by the U.S. government and the “mainstream media?” Many Americans are slowly realizing they cannot count on American network and cable TV for accurate news and are tuning in to RT at least for the other side of these important stories.

It was from a early morning call from RT International that I first learned of

the Feb. 7 *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* report on Germany's failed hunt for evidence of Russian electoral interference.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. An intelligence analyst for 30 years, McGovern was CIA's senior representative to the Analysis Department of the BND during the late 1970s.

German Resistance to Russia Detente

The German political hierarchy and major media remain hostile to any détente with Russia, but the ground may be shifting under the feet of Chancellor Merkel and her allies, reports Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

As German Chancellor Angela Merkel's government is staggered by security lapses that may have permitted a fatal terrorist attack on a Christmas market in Berlin, the question many inside and outside Germany are asking is how this may affect the chances of her CDU party and its junior affiliate in Bavaria (CSU) to dominate the 2017 parliamentary elections and form the next government.

Her personal standing has weathered a number of crises in the past year, and polls before the terror attack gave her about a 50 percent approval rating. Moreover, within the CDU itself, she received more than 89 percent backing at the party convention in Essen a couple of weeks ago to remain at the helm and fight for another term as Chancellor next October.

That being said, the party has not done as well as Merkel. It lost several regional elections this past fall and the leader of her Bavarian affiliate, Herr Seehofer, was nipping at her heels over her continued hardline economic sanctions against Russia relating to the Ukraine crisis and more particularly over her lenient admission of around one million Mideast immigrants.

One of the widely noted features of Angela Merkel's ten-years-plus in office is that she has sidelined all possible competitors, not only within her party but even in the leading opposition party, the Socialists (SPD) with whom she has shared a coalition government.

Just what this means in practice I saw firsthand last Friday when I was in Berlin for an event organized and attended by SPD party officials and

supporters. The event was a press briefing at the Bundestag announcing the European launch of Détente Now! (or “Neue Entspannungspolitik Jetzt!” in German) after its U.S. debut with an op-ed in The Nation. The launch on two continents was meant to draw attention to the overarching objective of establishing a new peaceful Atlanticism to replace the neocon-dominated Atlantic Alliance that has developed over the past two decades in a malignant way, bringing us into a New Cold War and, in the estimation of some of us, to the brink of a hot war.

Judged as a “press briefing,” the meeting was a failure. Out of the 20 or so participants, there were just three journalists. One came from Deutsche Welle – not to prepare a report or do interviews but to ask insulting questions, such as why Russian President Vladimir Putin’s signature was not on the appeal to reinstate the policy of rapprochement with Moscow that German Chancellor Willy Brandt had championed nearly a half century ago.

Explaining the History of Détente

The significance of the event lay elsewhere as several organizers of Détente Now! met with representatives of German church groups, pacifist movements, one former Greens politician, and American friends of the initiative (myself and one other). But the single most important politician in the room was SPD Bundestag member Ute Finckh-Kraemer, a longtime supporter of peaceful coexistence who keeps the memory of détente’s great thinker Egon Bahr shining bright.

Ute Finckh-Krämer is on the Bundestag’s Foreign Affairs Committee and is Deputy Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Arms Control and Disarmament. In that context, it was illuminating to hear her response to a somewhat hostile question: namely how can you consider implementing détente with Russia when Putin is doing so many nasty things like flying military aircraft around the Baltic Sea with their transponders turned off?

Finckh-Kraemer reminded the questioner of just how Entspannungspolitik originally came about, not at a time of easy relations with Moscow but amid dangerous tensions. Détente toward Moscow was first implemented by Willie Brandt in 1969 in response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia the preceding August to oust a reformist regime. Instead of imposing sanctions on the Soviet Union, Brandt sent his assistant, Egon Bahr, to Moscow for extensive talks with the Kremlin with plans to draw closer to them and seek to influence their behavior from within.

Finckh-Kraemer argued that what is urgently needed today is precisely what Brandt undertook in 1969, a policy of de-escalating tensions without preconditions. With her comments, Finckh-Kraemer demonstrated that within the SPD there are very able defenders of détente who understand with great clarity

why it's needed.

The problem is that the party as a whole is enthralled to discipline of the coalition government with the CDU and to its own internal hierarchy, where the most senior voices of the party, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Sigmar Gabriel, lack charisma and seem to lack as well the courage to openly challenge the "group think" coming from Washington and passing down through Merkel to the whole German government.

The apologists for Steinmeier explained that he, like Merkel, helped frame the still-uncompleted Minsk-2 accords regarding the Ukraine crisis in 2015 out of fear that the then-imminent defeat of Ukrainian forces in the Debaltsevo Cauldron might cause the United States to step up its military support for Kiev, risking an all-out proxy war with Russia that could spread the conflagration into Central Europe.

Since then, it would appear that Steinmeier and Merkel have remained fearful of breaking with Washington over the anti-Russian sanctions or over Syria lest the Obama administration do something reckless in its final weeks in office.

That is a different approach from what is happening in France where Republican candidate Francois Fillon – emboldened by Donald Trump's U.S. victory – made improved relations with Russia a key element in his successful primary campaign in November.

Can Germany Shift?

In Germany, the question is: will the timorous SPD and the pigheaded CDU continue to hold to these New Cold War policies during the fall 2017 federal elections? The answer seems to be yes, unless the issue is seriously addressed now and a constituency arises favoring a more constructive approach toward Russia.

Within the SPD, the two main contenders for party leadership as candidates for Chancellor are Sigmar Gabriel, who is presently serving as Deputy Chancellor for Economics, and Martin Schulz, the outgoing President of the European Parliament. Of the two, Schulz is arguably the more "charismatic" if that is taken to mean outwardly self-confident, even strident. But Schulz brings with him the baggage of his association with the increasingly unpopular European Union bureaucracy.

During his years in the European Union's institutions, Schulz was a defender of what is called "democracy promotion," the West's funding and training of activists who then challenge – through media propaganda and street protests – governments that are regarded as insufficiently liberal. In that context, Schulz has been arrogant and censorious towards Russia, very much in line with the

policy that developed in Berlin over the same period.

Gabriel is less involved in foreign policy and lacks his own message regarding future relations with Russia.

Meanwhile, from my correspondence with leading experts on Russia within the SPD's main think tank, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, I must conclude that people with a distinctly neocon or "liberal interventionist" viewpoint continue to rule the roost there. One does not get very far in the think tank by calling for a change of direction on Russia without being labeled "Putin Versteher," a pejorative that roughly translates to "Putin sympathizer" and is fatal to any political career.

The same holds true for the Foundation's foreign relations magazine, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* (IPG). Reading through the issues since the U.S. presidential election, you could easily assume that the journal is edited by frustrated members of Hillary Clinton's campaign. Its featured articles and authors are all anti-Trump and anti-détente. With this think tank and magazine, it's hard to see how the SPD can develop a new foreign policy that deviates from Merkel's anti-Russian orthodoxy.

Of course, there is more to German politics than the CDU and SPD, which together in the last elections gathered less than 60 percent of the votes. But the other parties also do not give much reason for hope that Germany can change direction.

Die Linke (the Left) has some very courageous thinkers and politicians on the issue of foreign policy, none more so than Bundestag Member Sahra Wagenknecht. But Die Linke is split internally and engaged in petty wrangling, so that its electoral performance remains well below its potential.

Meanwhile, the German Greens have been – from their very beginning, going back to the days of Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Joscha Fischer – a virulently anti-Russian force. There are signs that the party has some dissenting voices today on the Russia issue, but not enough to shift the course of German foreign policy.

That leaves the far-right *Alternativ fuer Deutschland*, which, like the Front National in France, is unequivocally in favor of normalizing relations with Russia. But the anti-immigration and other social issues espoused by the nationalist and xenophobic AfD puts them out of play for any coalition formations.

For all of the above reasons, it will take a small miracle for the *Entspannungspolitik* initiative to move forward and capture the imagination of the SPD and win at the polls in the autumn of 2017. That miracle could come either from France, where a veto on current E.U. foreign policy is virtually

certain following the April elections and will position France as a direct competitor to Germany for leadership in the E.U. Or it may come from the U.S., depending on how the Trump administration handles relations with Germany and the E.U.

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