

Special Counsel Mueller: Disingenuous and Dishonest

Larry C. Johnson sees real meat on the bone for Barr's upcoming investigation of spying by law enforcement and intelligence on the Trump campaign. And Trump has tweeted about it.

On Wednesday Donald Trump tweeted:

"Former CIA analyst Larry Johnson accuses United Kingdom Intelligence of helping Obama Administration Spy on the 2016 Trump Presidential Campaign."
[@OANN](#) WOW! It is now just a question of time before the truth comes out, and when it does, it will be a beauty!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [April 24, 2019](#)

A spokesperson for the GCHQ, Britain's electronic spying agency, reacted in a statement: "As we have previously stated, the allegations that GCHQ was asked to conduct 'wire tapping' against the then-president elect are nonsense. They are utterly ridiculous and should be ignored."

Johnson developed his theory on his blog, republished here.

By [Larry C Johnson](#)

Sic Semper Tyrannis



While President Donald Trump is correct to celebrate the Mueller report's conclusion that no one on Trump's side of the ledger attempted to or succeeded in collaborating or colluding with the Russian government or Russian spies, there remains a dark cloud behind the silver lining. And I am not referring to the claims of alleged obstruction of justice.

A careful reading of the report reveals that Mueller has issued findings that are both disingenuous and dishonest. The report is a failed hatchet job. Part of the failure can be attributed to the amount of material that Attorney General William Barr allowed to be released. It appears that Bill Barr's light editing may have been intended to expose the bias and sloppiness of Special Counsel Robert Mueller and his team.

Let us start with the case of trying to build a Trump Tower in Moscow. If you were to believe that the Steele Dossier accurately reported Russian President Vladimir Putin's attitude towards Trump, then a Trump real estate deal in Moscow was a slam dunk. According to one of Christopher Steele's breathless reports:

"The Kremlin's cultivation operation on TRUMP also had comprised offering him various lucrative real estate development business deals in Russia, especially in relation to the ongoing 2018 World Cup soccer tournament. However, so far, for reasons unknown, TRUMP had not taken up any of these."

Then there is reality. The impetus, the encouragement for the Moscow project came from one man – [Felix Sater](#). Here from page 69 of the Mueller Report:

In the late summer of 2015, the Trump Organization received a new inquiry about pursuing a Trump Tower project in Moscow. In approximately September 2015, Felix Sater . . . contacted Cohen on behalf of I.C. Expert Investment Company (I.C. Expert), a Russian real-estate

development corporation controlled by Andrei Vladimirovich Rozov. J07 Sater had known Rozov since approximately 2007 and, in 2014, had served as an agent on behalf of Rozov during Rozov's purchase of a building in New York City. 30S Sater later contacted Rozov and proposed that I.C. Expert pursue a Trump Tower Moscow project in which I.C. Expert would license the name and brand from the Trump Organization but construct the building on its own. Sater worked on the deal with Rozov and another employee of I.C. Expert.

To reiterate – if the Steele Dossier were based on truthful intelligence then the Trump Organization only had to sit back, stretch out its hands and seize the moment. Instead, little Felix Sater keeps coming back to the well. In January 2016, according to the Mueller report:

Sater then sent a draft invitation for Cohen to visit Moscow to discuss the Trump Moscow project, along with a note to “[t]ell me if the letter is good as amended by me or make whatever changes you want and send it back to me.”

After a further round of edits, on January 25, 2016, Sater sent Cohen an invitation- signed by Andrey Ryabinskiy of the company MHJ- to travel to “Moscow for a working visit” about the “prospects of development and the construction business in Russia,” “the various land plots available suited for construction of this enormous Tower,” and “the opportunity to co-ordinate a follow up visit to Moscow by Mr. Donald Trump.

This produced nothing. No deal, no trip. But Sater

persisted, targeting Michael Cohen, Trump's personal lawyer and an executive in the Trump Organization:

Beginning in late 2015, Sater repeatedly tried to arrange for Cohen and candidate Trump, as representatives of the Trump Organization, to travel to Russia to meet with Russian government officials and possible financing partners. . . .

Into the spring of 2016, Sater and Cohen continued to discuss a trip to Moscow in connection with the Trump Moscow project. On April 20, 2016, Sater wrote Cohen, "[t]he People wanted to know when you are coming?"

On May 4, 2016, Sater followed up:

"I had a chat with Moscow. ASSUMING the trip does happen the question is before or after the convention. I said I believe, but don't know for sure, that's it's probably after the convention. Obviously the pre-meeting trip (you only) can happen anytime you want but he 2 big guys where [sic) the question. I said I would confirm and revert."

On May 5, 2016, Sater wrote to Cohen:

"Peskov would like to invite you as his guest to the St. Petersburg Forum which is Russia's Davos it's June 16-19. He wants to meet there with you and possibly introduce you to either Putin or Medvedev, as they are not sure if 1 or both will be there. This is perfect. The entire business class of Russia will be there as well."

On June 14, 2016, Cohen met Sater in the lobby of the Trump Tower in New York and informed him that he would not

be traveling at that time.

Why was Felix Sater the one repeatedly identified pushing to arrange deals with the Russians and yet did not face any subsequent charges by the Mueller team? Sater had been working as part of the Trump team since 2003. Why is it that the proposed deals and travel to Moscow came predominantly from Felix Sater? As I noted in my previous piece – [The FBI Tried and Failed to Entrap Trump](#) – Sater was an active FBI undercover informant. He had been working with the FBI since 1998. When he agreed to start working as an undercover informant aka cooperator in December 1998 guess who signed off on the deal? Andrew Weissman, a member of Mueller's special counsel team. You can see the [deal here](#). It was signed Dec. 10, 1998.

An honest prosecutor would have and should have disclosed this fact. He, Sater, was the one encouraging the Trump team to cozy up to Russia. Mueller does not disclose one single instance of Trump or Cohen or any of the Trump kids calling Sater on the carpet and chewing his ass for not bringing them deals and not opening doors in Russia. Omitting this key fact goes beyond simple disingenuity. It is a conscious lie.

The circumstantial evidence indicates that Sater was doing this at the behest of FBI handlers. We do not yet know who they are.

But Sater's behavior and status as an FBI Informant was not an isolated incident. We also have the case of Michael Caputo and Roger Stone being approached by a Russian gangster named Henry Greenberg. According

to democratdossier.com:

Greenberg's birth name is Gennady Vasilievich Vostretsov, the son of Yekatrina Vostretsova and Vasliy Vostretsov. He later adopted new names twice as a result of two different marriages and became Gennady V. Arzhanik and later Henry Oknyansky. Henry Greenberg is not a legal alias, but he uses it quite commonly in recent years.

But you would not know this from reading the Mueller report. Mr. Disingenuous strikes again:

In the spring of 2016, Trump campaign advisor Michael Caputo learned through a Florida-based Russian business partner that another Florida-based Russian, Henry Oknyansky (who also went by the name Henry Greenberg), claimed to have information pertaining to Hillary Clinton. Caputo notified Roger Stone and brokered communication between Stone and Oknyansky.

Oknyansky and Stone set up a May 2016 in-person meeting.²⁶⁰ Oknyansky was accompanied to the meeting by Alexei Rasin, a Ukrainian associate involved in Florida real estate. At the meeting, Rasin offered to sell Stone derogatory information on Clinton that Rasin claimed to have obtained while working for Clinton. Rasin claimed to possess financial statements demonstrating Clinton's involvement in money laundering with Rasin's companies. According to Oknyansky, Stone asked if the amounts in question totaled millions of dollars but was told it was closer to hundreds of thousands. Stone refused the offer, stating that Trump would not pay for opposition research.

How does a guy like Vorkretsov/Greenberg, with an extensive criminal record and circumstantial ties to the Russian mob gain entrance into the United States? Very simple answer. He too [was an FBI informant, according to the democrat dossier:](#)

In an affidavit, Vostretsov explained to an immigration judge he worked for the FBI for 17 years throughout the world, including in the US, Iran and North Korea. He explained in the same paperwork the FBI granted him several temporary visas to visit the US in exchange for information about criminal activities.

Please take time to read the full dossier at [democrat dossier.](#)

This is more than an odd coincidence. This is a pattern. The FBI was targeting the Trump campaign and personnel in a deliberate effort to implicate them in wanting to work with Russians.

And there is more. [George Papadopoulos](#), a member of the Trump campaign, was entrapped by individuals linked to British MI-6 and the CIA with offers to provide meetings with Russians and Putin. The Mueller account is a lie. Here is another section of it:

In late April 2016, Papadopoulos was told by London-based professor Joseph Mifsud, immediately after Mifsud 's return from a trip to Moscow, that the Russian government had obtained "dirt" on candidate Clinton in the form of thousands of emails. One week later, on May 6, 2016, Papadopoulos suggested to a representative of a foreign

government that the Trump Campaign had received indications from the Russian government that it could assist the Campaign through the anonymous release of information that would be damaging to candidate Clinton.

Papadopoulos shared information about Russian “dirt ” with people outside of the Campaign, and the Office investigated whether he also provided it to a Campaign official. Papadopoulos and the Campaign officials with whom he interacted told the Office that they did not recall that Papadopoulos passed them the information. Throughout the relevant period of time and for several months thereafter, Papadopoulos worked with Mifsud and two Russian nationals to arrange a meeting between the Campaign and the Russian government. That meeting never came to pass.

Once again, the Mueller team treats the provocateur – i.e., Joseph Mifsud – as some simple guy with ties to Russia’s political elites. Another egregious lie. Mifsud was not working on behalf of Russia. He was deployed by MI-6. *Disobedient Media* has been on the forefront of exposing Mifsud’s ties to Western intelligence in general and the Brits in particular. Quoting now from *Disobedient Media*:

Mifsud’s alleged links to Russian intelligence are summarily debunked by his close working relationship with Claire Smith, a major figure in the upper echelons of British intelligence. A number of Twitter users recently observed that Joseph Mifsud had been photographed standing next to Claire Smith of the U.K. Joint Intelligence Committee at Mifsud’s LINK campus in Rome. *Newsman* and *Buzzed* later reported that the professor’s name and biography had been removed from the campus website,

writing that the mysterious removal took place after Mifsud had served the institution for “years.”

WikiLeaks Editor-in-Chief Julian Assange likewise noted the connection between Mifsud and Smith in a Twitter thread, additionally pointing out his connections with Saudi intelligence: “[Mifsud] and Claire Smith of the UK Joint Intelligence Committee and eight-year member of the UK Security Vetting panel both trained Italian security services at the Link University in Rome and appear to both be present in this [photo].”

The photograph in question originated on Geodiplomatics.com, where it specified that Joseph Mifsud is indeed standing next to Claire Smith, who was attending a: “...Training program on International Security which was organised by Link Campus University and London Academy of Diplomacy.” The event is listed as taking place in October 2012.

This is not a mere matter of Mueller and his team “failing” to disclose some important facts. If they were operating honestly, they should have investigated Mifsud, Greenberg and Sater. But they did not. Two of the three alleged Russian stooges – Sater and Greenberg – have ties to the FBI. And Mifsud has been living and working in the belly of the intelligence community.

When you put these facts together it is clear that there is real meat on the bone for Barr’s upcoming investigation of the “spying” that was being done on the Trump campaign by law enforcement and intelligence. These facts must become a part of the public consciousness. The foreign country that

worked feverishly to meddle in the 2016 presidential election and the subsequent rule of Donald Trump is the United Kingdom. Russia is the patsy.

Larry C. Johnson is a former CIA analyst and counterterrorism official at the State Department. This article first appeared on [*Sic Semper Tyrannis*](#).

Consortium News' Record on Russia-gate—How CN Covered the 'Scandal': No. 4—'The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate'

As Russia-gate continues to buffet the Trump administration, we now know that the “scandal” started with Democrats funding the original dubious allegations of Russian interference, wrote Joe Lauria on Oct. 29, 2017.

The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate

By Joe Lauria

Special to Consortium News

The two sources that originated the allegations claiming that Russia meddled in the 2016 election – without providing convincing evidence – were both *paid for* by the Democratic National Committee, and in one instance also by the Clinton campaign: the Steele dossier and the CrowdStrike analysis of the DNC servers. Think about that for a minute.

We have long known that the DNC did not allow the FBI to examine its computer server for clues about who may have hacked it – or even if it was hacked – and instead turned to CrowdStrike, a private company co-founded by a virulently anti-Putin Russian. Within a day, CrowdStrike blamed Russia on dubious evidence.

And, it has now been disclosed that the Clinton campaign and the DNC paid for opposition research memos written by former British MI6 intelligence agent Christopher Steele using hearsay accusations from anonymous Russian sources to claim that the Russian government was blackmailing and bribing Donald Trump in a scheme that presupposed that Russian President Vladimir Putin foresaw Trump's presidency years ago when no one else did.

Since then, the U.S. intelligence community has struggled to corroborate Steele's allegations, but those suspicions still colored the thinking of President Obama's intelligence chiefs who, according to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, "hand-picked" the analysts who produced the Jan. 6 "assessment" claiming that Russia interfered in the U.S. election.

In other words, possibly all of the Russia-gate allegations, which have been taken on faith by Democratic partisans and members of the anti-Trump Resistance, trace back to claims paid for or generated by Democrats.

If for a moment one could remove the sometimes justified hatred that many people feel toward Trump, it would be impossible to avoid the impression that the scandal may have been cooked up by the DNC and the Clinton camp in league

with Obama's intelligence chiefs to serve political and geopolitical aims.

Absent new evidence based on forensic or documentary proof, we could be looking at a partisan concoction devised in the midst of a bitter general election campaign, a manufactured "scandal" that also has fueled a dangerous New Cold War against Russia; a case of a dirty political "opposite" serving American ruling interests in reestablishing the dominance over Russia that they enjoyed in the 1990s, as well as feeding the voracious budgetary appetite of the Military-Industrial Complex.

Though lacking independent evidence of the core Russia-gate allegations, the "scandal" continues to expand into wild exaggerations about the impact of a tiny number of social media pages suspected of having links to Russia but that apparently carried very few specific campaign messages. (Some pages reportedly were devoted to photos of puppies.)

'Cash for Trash'

Based on what is now known, Wall Street buccaneer Paul Singer paid for GPS Fusion, a Washington-based research firm, to do opposition research on Trump during the Republican primaries, but dropped the effort in May 2016 when it became clear Trump would be the GOP nominee. GPS Fusion has strongly denied that it hired Steele for this work or that the research had anything to do with Russia.

Then, in April 2016 the DNC and the Clinton campaign paid its Washington lawyer Marc Elias to hire Fusion GPS to unearth dirt connecting Trump to Russia. This was three months before the DNC blamed Russia for hacking its

computers and supposedly giving its stolen emails to WikiLeaks to help Trump win the election.

“The Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee retained Fusion GPS to research any possible connections between Mr. Trump, his businesses, his campaign team and Russia, court filings revealed this week,” *The New York Times* reported on Friday night.

So, linking Trump to Moscow as a way to bring Russia into the election story was the Democrats’ aim from the start.

Fusion GPS then hired ex-MI6 intelligence agent Steele, it says for the first time, to dig up that dirt in Russia for the Democrats. Steele produced classic opposition research, not an intelligence assessment or conclusion, although it was written in a style and formatted to look like one.

It’s important to realize that Steele was no longer working for an official intelligence agency, which would have imposed strict standards on his work and possibly disciplined him for injecting false information into the government’s decision-making. Instead, he was working for a political party and a presidential candidate looking for dirt that would hurt their opponent, what the Clintons used to call “cash for trash” when they were the targets.

Had Steele been doing legitimate intelligence work for his government, he would have taken a far different approach. Intelligence professionals are not supposed to just give their bosses what their bosses want to hear. So, Steele would have verified his information. And it would have gone through a process of further verification by other intelligence analysts in his and perhaps other intelligence

agencies. For instance, in the U.S., a National Intelligence Estimate requires vetting by all 17 intelligence agencies and incorporates dissenting opinions.

Instead Steele was producing a piece of purely political research and had different motivations. The first might well have been money, as he was being paid specifically for this project, not as part of his work on a government salary presumably serving all of society. Secondly, to continue being paid for each subsequent memo that he produced he would have been incentivized to please his clients or at least give them enough so they would come back for more.

Dubious Stuff

Opposition research is about getting dirt to be used in a mud-slinging political campaign, in which wild charges against candidates are the norm. This “oppo” is full of unvetted rumor and innuendo with enough facts mixed in to make it seem credible. There was so much dubious stuff in Steele's memos that the FBI was unable to confirm its most salacious allegations and apparently refuted several key points.

Perhaps more significantly, the corporate news media, which was largely partial to Clinton, did not report the fantastic allegations after people close to the Clinton campaign began circulating the lurid stories before the election with the hope that the material would pop up in the news. To their credit, established media outlets recognized this as ammunition against a political opponent, not a serious document.

Despite this circumspection, the Steele dossier was shared

with the FBI at some point in the summer of 2016 and apparently became the basis for the FBI to seek Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants against members of Trump's campaign. More alarmingly, it may have formed the basis for much of the Jan. 6 intelligence "assessment" by those "hand-picked" analysts from three U.S. intelligence agencies – the CIA, the FBI and the NSA – not all 17 agencies that Hillary Clinton continues to insist were involved. (Obama's intelligence chiefs, DNI Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan, publicly admitted that only three agencies took part and *The New York Times* printed a correction saying so.)

If in fact the Steele memos were a primary basis for the Russia collusion allegations against Trump, then there may be no credible evidence at all. It could be that because the three agencies knew the dossier was dodgy that there was no substantive proof in the Jan. 6 "assessment." Even so, a summary of the Steele allegations were included in a secret appendix that then-FBI Director James Comey described to then-President-elect Trump just two weeks before his inauguration.

Five days later, after the fact of Comey's briefing was leaked to the press, the Steele dossier was published in full by the sensationalist website BuzzFeed behind the excuse that the allegations' inclusion in the classified annex of a U.S. intelligence report justified the dossier's publication regardless of doubts about its accuracy.

Please make your tax-deductible

donation to our Spring Fund Drive today!

Russian Fingerprints

The other source of blame about Russian meddling came from the private company CrowdStrike because the DNC blocked the FBI from examining its server after a suspected hack. Within a day, CrowdStrike claimed to find Russian “fingerprints” in the metadata of a DNC opposition research document, which had been revealed by an Internet site called DCLeaks, showing Cyrillic letters and the name of the first Soviet intelligence chief. That supposedly implicated Russia.

CrowdStrike also claimed that the alleged Russian intelligence operation was extremely sophisticated and skilled in concealing its external penetration of the server. But CrowdStrike’s conclusion about Russian “fingerprints” resulted from clues that would have been left behind by extremely sloppy hackers or inserted intentionally to implicate the Russians.

CrowdStrike’s credibility was further undermined when *Voice of America* reported on March 23, 2017, that the same software the company says it used to blame Russia for the hack wrongly concluded that Moscow also had hacked Ukrainian government howitzers on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine.

“An influential British think tank and Ukraine’s military are disputing a report that the U.S. cyber-security firm CrowdStrike has used to buttress its claims of Russian

hacking in the presidential election,” VOA reported. Dimitri Alperovitch, a CrowdStrike co-founder, is also a senior fellow at the anti-Russian Atlantic Council think tank in Washington.

More speculation about the alleged election hack was raised with WikiLeaks’ Vault 7 release, which revealed that the CIA is not beyond covering up its own hacks by leaving clues implicating others. Plus, there’s the fact that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has declared again and again that WikiLeaks did not get the Democratic emails from the Russians. Buttressing Assange’s denials of a Russian role, WikiLeaks associate Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, said he met a person connected to the leak during a trip to Washington last year.

And, William Binney, maybe the best mathematician to ever work at the National Security Agency, and former CIA analyst Ray McGovern have [published a technical analysis](#) of one set of Democratic email metadata showing that a transatlantic “hack” would have been impossible and that the evidence points to a likely leak by a disgruntled Democratic insider. Binney has further stated that if it were a “hack,” the NSA would have been able to detect it and make the evidence known.

Fueling Neo-McCarthyism

Despite these doubts, which the U.S. mainstream media has largely ignored, Russia-gate has grown into something much more than an election story. It has unleashed a neo-McCarthyite attack on Americans who are accused of being dupes of Russia if they dare question the evidence of the

Kremlin's guilt.

Just weeks after last November's election, *The Washington Post* [published a front-page story](#) touting a blacklist from an anonymous group, called PropOrNot, that alleged that 200 news sites, including ***Consortiumnews.com*** and other leading independent news sources, were either willful Russian propagandists or "useful idiots."

Last week, a [new list](#) emerged with the names of over 2,000 people, mostly Westerners, who have appeared on RT, the Russian government-financed English-language news channel. The list was part of a report entitled, "The Kremlin's Platform for 'Useful Idiots' in the West," put out by an outfit called European Values, with a [long list](#) of European funders.

Included on the list of "useful idiots" absurdly are CIA-friendly Washington Post columnist David Ignatius; David Brock, Hillary Clinton's opposition research chief; and U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

The report stated: "Many people in Europe and the US, including politicians and other persons of influence, continue to exhibit troubling naïveté about RT's political agenda, buying into the network's marketing ploy that it is simply an outlet for independent voices marginalised by the mainstream Western press. These 'useful idiots' remain oblivious to RT's intentions and boost its legitimacy by granting interviews on its shows and newscasts."

The intent of these lists is clear: to shut down dissenting voices who question Western foreign policy and who are

usually excluded from Western corporate media. RT is often willing to provide a platform for a wider range of viewpoints, both from the left and right. American ruling interests fend off critical viewpoints by first suppressing them in corporate media and now condemning them as propaganda when they emerge on RT.

Geopolitical Risks

More ominously, the anti-Russia mania has increased chances of direct conflict between the two nuclear superpowers. The Russia-bashing rhetoric not only served the Clinton campaign, though ultimately to ill effect, but it has pushed a longstanding U.S.-led geopolitical agenda to regain control over Russia, an advantage that the U.S. enjoyed during the Yeltsin years in the 1990s.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Wall Street rushed in behind Boris Yeltsin and Russian oligarchs to asset strip virtually the entire country, impoverishing the population. Amid widespread accounts of this grotesque corruption, Washington intervened in Russian politics to help get Yeltsin re-elected in 1996. The political rise of Vladimir Putin after Yeltsin resigned on New Year's Eve 1999 reversed this course, restoring Russian sovereignty over its economy and politics.

That inflamed Hillary Clinton and other American hawks whose desire was to install another Yeltsin-like figure and resume U.S. exploitation of Russia's vast natural and financial resources. To advance that cause, U.S. presidents have supported the eastward expansion of NATO and have deployed 30,000 troops on Russia's border.

In 2014, the Obama administration helped [orchestrate](#) a coup that toppled the elected government of Ukraine and installed a fiercely anti-Russian regime. The U.S. also undertook the risky policy of aiding jihadists to overthrow a secular Russian ally in Syria. The consequences have brought the world closer to nuclear annihilation than at [any time since](#) the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

In this context, the Democratic Party-led Russia-gate offensive was intended not only to explain away Clinton's defeat but to stop Trump – possibly via impeachment or by inflicting severe political damage – because he had talked, insincerely it is turning out, about detente with Russia. That did not fit in well with the plan at all.

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](#) .

Consortium News' Record on Russia-gate—How CN Covered the 'Scandal': No. 3—'The Tangled Threads of Russia-gate'

Once a Washington groupthink takes hold, as it has in the fervent belief about Russia-gate, respect for facts and logic fly out the window since all these important people can't be wrong, wrote Robert Parry on Dec. 5, 2017.

The Tangled Threads of Russia-gate

By Robert Parry

Special to Consortium News

A curious feature about the Russia-gate “scandal” is that its proponents ignore the growing number of moments when their evidence undercuts their narrative. Instead, they press ahead toward a predetermined destination in much the way that true-believing conspiracy theorists are known to do.

For instance, *The New York Times* ran [a story](#) on Monday, entitled “Operative Offered Trump Campaign Access to Putin,” detailing how a conservative operative “told a Trump adviser that he could arrange a back-channel meeting between Donald J. Trump and Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian president, according to an email sent to the Trump campaign” – and apparently described to the Times by a helpful source on Capitol Hill.

The *Times* quoted the email from National Rifle Association member Paul Erickson to Trump campaign adviser Rick Dearborn as saying, “Putin is deadly serious about building a good relationship with Mr. Trump. ... [Putin] wants to extend an invitation to Mr. Trump to visit him in the Kremlin before the election.”

An NRA conference in Louisville, Kentucky, was supposed to be the location for the “first contact” between the Russians and the Trump campaign, according to the email.

The *Times* treated its new information as further confirmation of nefarious connections between the Trump campaign and the Russian government. Immediately after introducing this May 2016 email, which had the subject line, "Kremlin Connection," the *Times* reprised the background of former FBI Director Robert Mueller conducting a special-prosecutor investigation into "Russian interference in the election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign."

Note how the *Times*' reference to "Russian interference" was treated as flat fact although the *Times* still hedges on "possible collusion" between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign. Like much of the U.S. mainstream media, the *Times* no longer bothers to use "alleged" in front of "Russian interference" even though no solid evidence of a coordinated Kremlin effort has been presented.

But there is a bigger problem with this "scoop": If the Russia-gate narrative were correct – that the Kremlin had identified Trump years earlier as a likely U.S. president and undertook a multi-year campaign to bribe and blackmail him to be Moscow's Manchurian candidate or Putin's "puppet" as Hillary Clinton charged – the Russians wouldn't need some little-known "conservative operative" to serve as an intermediary in May 2016 to set up a back-channel meeting.

The Contradiction

In other words, assuming that the *Times*' story is correct, the email suggests the opposite of the impression that the *Times* wants its readers to get. The email is either meaningless in that it led to no actual meeting or it contradicts the storyline about a longstanding Russian

operation to plant a patsy in the White House.

Times reporter Nicholas Fandos noted that it was unclear what Dearborn did in response to this overture, although the *Times* reported that Dearborn had forwarded a similar proposal by Christian conservative activist Rick Clay to Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who rebuffed the offer.

On Monday, I read the rest of the *Times* email story looking for some acknowledgement of the problems with its implied scenario, but found none. Fandos made references to other low-level efforts by Russians to make contact with Trump's advisers (without noticeable success, I might add), but again these examples actually run counter to the image of Trump as the Kremlin's prized chump.

If Putin had several years ago foreseen what no one else did – that Trump would become the U.S. president – then these ad hoc contacts with members of Trump's entourage in 2016 would not have been needed.

The *Times*' scoop parallels the story of the plea deal that Russia-gate prosecutors struck with low-level Trump foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos who admitted lying about his contacts with an obscure academic in Stirling, Scotland, who supposedly offered to be another intermediary between Trump's team and the Kremlin.

According to court documents, Papadopoulos, a 30-year-old campaign aide, got to know a professor of international relations who claimed to have "substantial connections with Russian government officials," with the professor identified in press reports as Joseph Mifsud, who is associated with the University of Stirling.

The first contact between Mifsud and Papadopoulos supposedly occurred in mid-March 2016 in Italy, with a second meeting in London on March 24 when the professor purportedly introduced Papadopoulos to a Russian woman whom the young campaign aide believed to be Putin's niece, an assertion that Mueller's investigators determined wasn't true.

Trump, who then was under pressure for not having a foreign policy team, included Papadopoulos as part of a list drawn up to fill that gap, and Papadopoulos participated in a campaign meeting on March 31 in Washington at which he suggested a meeting between Trump and Putin, a prospect that other senior aides reportedly slapped down.

In other words, at least based on the reporting about the Dearborn email and the Papadopoulos overture, there is no reason to believe that Trump was colluding with Moscow or had any significant relationship at all.

If these developments point to anything, it is to the opposite; that Russia was fishing for some contacts with what – however implausibly – was starting to look like a possible future U.S. president, but with whom they were not well-connected.

Gotcha Moments

There have been similar problems with other Russia-gate “gotcha” moments, such as disclosures of a possible Trump hotel deal in Moscow with Mikhail Fridman of Russia's Alfa Bank. Though Trump's presumed financial tie-ins to Russian oligarchs close to Putin were supposed to be fundamental to the Russia-gate narrative, the outcome of the hotel deal turned out to be a big nothing.

One source knowledgeable about the proposed deal told me it fell apart because Trump was willing to put little on the table beyond the branding value of the Trump name. However, if Putin were actually trying to buy Trump's loyalty, money presumably would have been no obstacle. Indeed, you would think that the more money used to line Trump's pockets the better. But the hotel deal collapsed; there is no Trump hotel in Moscow.

Other Russia-gate cases are equally disconnected from what had been the original narrative about senior Russians spending years cultivating Trump as their Manchurian candidate.

The accusations against Trump's onetime campaign chief Paul Manafort focus on his alleged failure to report income from – and pay taxes on – work that he did for the elected government of Ukraine before any involvement in the Trump campaign.

Last week's guilty plea from former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn related to purportedly false statements and omissions that he made when questioned by FBI agents about calls to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the transition, i.e., after Trump had been elected.

Despite the breathless coverage on MSNBC and the *Times*' excited headlines about how the "inquiry grows," there remain other core problems for the narrative. No matter how often the U.S. mainstream media asserts the suspicion of Russian "hacking" of Democratic emails as flat fact, no solid proof has yet been presented – and the claim has been denied by both the Russian government and WikiLeaks, which

published the key emails.

Sleight of Hand

The *Times* and other mainstream media outlets play their sleight of hand on this key point by asserting that “U.S. intelligence agencies” have “concluded” that Russian intelligence services “hacked” the emails from the Democratic National Committee and Clinton’s campaign chief John Podesta, but that summary ignores the specifics.

First of all, by using this summary of the facts, the *Times* and other outlets continue to give the false impression that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the conclusion, a false claim that Hillary Clinton and the mainstream press have asserted over and over, although it is now clear that no such consensus ever existed.

Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified that the Jan. 6 report on alleged Russian interference was produced by “hand-picked” analysts from only three organizations: the FBI, CIA and National Security Agency.

And, even those “hand-picked” analysts stipulated that they were not asserting Russian guilt as fact but only as their best guess. They included the disclaimer: “Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Even *New York Times* reporter Scott Shane initially noted the absence of evidence, writing: “What is missing from the

public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies' claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack. ... Instead, the message from the agencies essentially amounts to 'trust us.'"

Former senior U.S. intelligence officials, including the NSA's ex-technical director William Binney, have raised further doubts about whether a "hack" occurred. Binney conducted tests on download speeds and determined that the extraction of one known batch of Democratic emails was not possible over the Internet, but did match the speed of a USB download onto a thumb drive, suggesting a leak from a Democratic insider.

So, rather than the many disparate strings of Russia-gate coming neatly together more than a year after last year's election, the various threads either are becoming hopelessly tangled or flying off in different directions.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s.

Dismantling the Doomsday Machines

Dan Ellsberg has given us a book that shows the urgency of re-engaging on nuclear disarmament, writes John V. Walsh.

With Two Minutes to Midnight, Time Is Running Out

By John V. Walsh

Anti-war.com

“From a technical point of view, he [director Stanley Kubrick] anticipated many things. ... Since that time, little has changed, honestly. The only difference is that modern weapons systems have become more sophisticated, more complex. But this idea of a retaliatory strike and the inability to manage these systems, yes, all of these things are relevant today. It [controlling the weapons] will become even more difficult and more dangerous.”

– Russian President Vladimir Putin commenting on the film, “Dr. Strangelove: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb,” in an interview with Oliver Stone, May 11, 2016. Putin had not seen the movie and did not know of it before Stone showed it to him.

The “Doomsday Machine,” the title of Daniel Ellsberg’s superb book, is not an imaginary contraption from a movie masterpiece. A Doomsday Machine uncannily like the one described in “Dr. Strangelove” exists right now. In fact, there are two such machines, one in U.S. hands and one in Russia’s. The U.S. seeks to hide its version, but Ellsberg has revealed that it has existed since the 1950s. Russia has quietly admitted that it has one, named it formally, “Perimetr,” and also tagged it with a frighteningly apt nickname “Dead Hand.” Because the U.S. and Russia are the only nations with Doomsday Machines to date we shall restrict this discussion to them.

Ellsberg’s terrifying message in the book has failed to provoke action in the year since its publication. Instead, on Jan. 24 the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* kept its

Doomsday Clock at two minutes to midnight, poised perilously close to Armageddon for a second year, marking a “new abnormal.”

The first component of a Doomsday Machine is a mechanism of launching nuclear weapons with a command structure not always in the hands of a president in either country, something carefully hidden from the U.S. public.

The second component is a weapon of such destructive force that it can kill billions at once and then more gradually the entire human race and perhaps all animal life on earth.

Here is a brief consideration of Ellsberg’s views as a reminder of the nuclear peril we face along with a plan of action that he and others suggest.

Launch and Command

Russia and the U.S. each have the ability to strike the other with great force, destroy the other’s cities and industrial and military bases.

The essence of this first-strike capacity is the ability to wipe out the deterrent of the other side or weaken it so that the remaining force could be intercepted for the most part.

How can a targeted nation respond to such a capability? It must convince the adversary that such a strike is futile because it will not destroy the deterrent of the targeted nation. The attacker must understand that the nuclear force of the targeted nation, its nuclear deterrent, will survive, and the attacker will be annihilated.

The first approach to ensure this survivability is to build ever more nuclear weapons. Thus, when the U.S. pioneered its first-strike capability in the Cold War, the Soviet Union responded with a buildup. Quite quickly both had a first-strike capacity with the competitive buildup reaching the insane levels shown [here](#). Each side also took the following additional measures.

The first measure to prevent the loss of deterrence is to put the nuclear force on Launch on Warning, which is also described as [Hair Trigger Alert](#).

Most of us have heard about this, but we ought to quake in our boots every time it comes to mind. Since the time to respond to a first strike is only tens of minutes for an ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) attack, which takes about 30 minutes to travel between the U.S. and Russia, and even less time for a short or intermediate range missile, a targeted country must have its nuclear force loaded onto delivery vehicles and capable of being launched on warning of a nuclear attack.

Nuclear warheads that are loaded onto delivery vehicles are said to be “deployed.” They are ready to be launched in minutes. On each side –both in [Russia](#) and in the [U.S.](#) – roughly 1,600 such warheads were loaded onto long-range delivery vehicles in 2018. (There are several thousand more warheads in reserve on each side but not “deployed.”) It is easy to see the danger inherent in this situation.

The second measure to prevent loss of deterrence is “delegation.” This is not widely known or understood.

One aspect of a first strike would be an attempt to knock

out known command centers so that a retaliatory strike could not be ordered. This is known as “decapitation.” The antidote to decapitation is “delegation,” that is, others besides the presidents and their immediate successors are authorized to press “the button.” It works this way. These “others” are located in secret command centers far from Washington or the Strategic Air Command Base in Colorado, both of which will be targeted in a decapitation strike. If these secret centers find themselves cut off from communication with Washington or Moscow, then the assumption is made that a decapitating nuclear strike has occurred. In that event these “others” removed from the centers of power are authorized to press the nuclear button. These others are not elected officials and in fact we do not know who they are. What Ellsberg discovered is that some of these “others” are military people who are concerned that they too could be hit in a decapitating strike. So they also have the authority to delegate.

In fact, no one, perhaps not even the president, nor his circle of advisors, knows who can launch the nuclear weapons. Is it possible that one might be like the fictional General Jack D. Ripper, the psychotic, delusional fellow who gives the launch order in Dr. Strangelove, or someone lusting after the Rapture?

In summary, first-strike capability is the source of the problem. It leads to a nuclear arms buildup, launch on warning and delegation. The idea of having such a capability is deeply imbedded in U.S. “strategic” thinking and will be hard to dislodge.

Weapons of Human Extinction

The second component of a Doomsday Machine is the weaponry. What is the destructive power of the nuclear weapons used in a first strike? In 1961, when Ellsberg was among those working on nuclear-war fighting strategy for the Kennedy administration, he requested an estimate from the Pentagon of the deaths due to a first strike as the war planners had mapped it out then. To his surprise the estimate came back at once – the Pentagon had made it and kept it hidden. At a time when the global population was about 3 billion, a first strike by the U.S. would result in the deaths of 1.2 billion from explosions, radiation and fire. That number was deaths only, not injuries. And it was only the result of U.S. weapons; it did not include deaths from a Soviet response if they managed one. The deaths would be concentrated in targeted countries, then and now the U.S. and Russia. Ellsberg was stunned to learn that the Pentagon would coolly make plans for such a gargantuan and immediate genocide. And so should we all be.

But the damage does not stop there. This is the surprise that the Pentagon did not understand at the time. The ash from the fires of burning cities would be cast up into the stratosphere so high that it would not be rained out. There it would remain for at least a decade, blocking enough sunlight to prevent crops from growing for 10 years. That is sufficient to cause total starvation and wipe out the entire human race, with only a handful at most able to survive. Nuclear winter was publicized in the 1980s and encountered some initial skepticism.

Now with the interest in global warming, better computer

models have been developed. When the results of a nuclear first strike are put into these models, nuclear winter again makes its appearance as Brian Toon, Alan Robock and others have shown. The TED talks of Toon and of Robock describing their findings are well worthwhile; they are brief and well-illustrated. We are confronted with a genocide of all or nearly all humanity, an "Omnicide."

The launch of the 1600 "deployed" warheads of either the U.S. or Russia is sufficient to give us nuclear winter. So we in the U.S. have put in place a weapon system on hair-trigger alert commanded by we know not whom that can kill virtually all Americans – along with most everyone else on the planet.

We have on hair trigger alert a weapon that is in fact suicidal. Even if we neglect the effects of nuclear winter, the nuclear attacks would be concentrated on Russia and the U.S. So most of us would be consumed. Thus MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) is replaced with SAD (Self-Assured Destruction).

Abandoning First-Strike Policy & Capacity

Dismantling the Doomsday Machine with its hair-trigger alert and system of delegation means abandoning a first-strike policy *and* capacity. And right now, only two countries have such first strike capacity and only one, the U.S., refuses to take the right to use it "off the table" even when not under attack

What does the elimination of first-strike capacity mean in practice? This involves two basic steps for the U.S. First, the land-based ICBMs, the Minuteman III, must be

entirely dismantled, not refurbished as is currently being undertaken at enormous cost. These missiles, the land-based part of the Strategic Triad, are highly accurate but fixed in place like “sitting ducks.” They are only good for a first strike, for they will be destroyed in a successful first strike by an adversary. [Former Secretary of Defense William Perry](#) and [James E. Cartwright](#), formerly head of the Strategic Air Command and formerly vice chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have both [called for](#) dismantling the Minuteman III. The second step is to reduce the Trident Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) force to the level where it cannot destroy the entire Russian land-based missile force.

Russia would also need to execute similar measures, taking into account the specifics of its arsenal. Here negotiations, treaties and verification are necessary. But these are impossible in the current atmosphere of Russiagate and Russophobia, which is why both are existential threats and must be surmounted. We must talk despite our differences, real or perceived.

An additional measure has also been proposed. All nuclear warheads should be removed from deployed status by Russia and the U.S. (The anodyne term is “de-alerting.”) That is, the warheads should be removed from their delivery vehicles and stored in a way that would take days or even weeks to deploy – that is to remount. This has been proposed by the Global Zero [Commission on Nuclear Risk Reduction](#) whose plan is laid out [here](#).

The Work Ahead

Total abolition should be the ultimate goal because no human hand should be allowed to wield species-destroying power. But it seems that an intermediate goal is not only needed to give us the breathing space to get to zero nuclear weapons. An intermediate and readily achievable goal can call attention to the problem and motivate large numbers of people. The [Nuclear Freeze movement](#) of the 1980s is a very successful example of this sort of effort; it played a big role in making the Reagan-Gorbachev accords possible.

The effort to kill the Doomsday Machines might well be called something like “Step Away from Doomsday” or simply “Step Away.” At two minutes to midnight we must make haste to do this. Abolishing nuclear weapons will require a breakthrough in the way countries deal with one another, especially nuclear armed countries. Let us give ourselves the breathing space to accomplish that.

An earlier version of this article appeared on [Anti-war.com](#).

John V. Walsh can be reached at john.endwar@gmail.com. He writes about issues of war, peace and empire, and about health care, for [Antiwar.com](#), [Consortium News](#), [DissidentVoice.org](#) and other outlets. Now living in the East Bay, he was until recently professor of physiology and cellular neuroscience at a medical school in New England.

PEPE ESCOBAR: MAGA Misses the Eurasia Train

While China and Russia solidify their economic and political alliance, the U.S. is missing an historic chance to join a

multilateral world, clinging instead to military empire, argues Pepe Escobar.

By **Pepe Escobar**

in Milan

Special to Consortium News



We should know by now that the heart of the 21st Century Great Game is the myriad layers of the battle between the United States and the partnership of Russia and China.

Even the U.S. National Defense Strategy says so: “The central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition by ... revisionist powers.” The recently published assessment on U.S. defense implications of China’s global expansion says so too.

The clash will frame the emergence of a possibly new, post-ideological, strategic world order amidst an extremely volatile unpredictability in which peace is war and an accident may spark a nuclear confrontation.

The U.S. vs. Russia and China will keep challenging the West’s obsession in deriding “illiberalism,” a fearful, rhetorical exercise that equates Russian democracy with China’s one party rule, Iran’s demo-theocracy and Turkey’s neo-Ottoman revival.

It’s immaterial that Russia’s economy is one-tenth of China’s. From boosting trade that bypasses the U.S. dollar, to increasing joint military exercises, the Russia-China symbiosis is poised to advance beyond political and

ideological affinities.

China badly needs Russian know-how in its military industry. Beijing will turn this knowledge into plenty of dual use, civilian-military innovations.

The long game indicates Russia and China will break down language and cultural barriers to lead Eurasian integration against American economic hegemony backed by military might.

One could say the Eurasian century is already upon us. The era of the West shaping the world at will (a mere blip of history) is already over. This is despite Western elite denials and fulminations against the so-called “morally reprehensible,” “forces of instability” and “existential threats.”

Standard Chartered, the British financial services company, using a mix of purchasing power exchange rates and GDP growth, has projected that the top five economies in 2030 will be China, the U.S., India, Japan and Russia. These will be followed by Germany, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey and the UK. Asia will extend its middle class as they are slowly killed off across the West.

Hop on the Trans-Eurasia Express

A case can be made that Beijing's elites are fascinated at how Russia, in less than two decades, has returned to semi-superpower status after the devastation of the Yeltsin years.

That happened to a large extent due to science and technology. The most graphic example is the unmatched, state-of-the-art weaponry unveiled by President Vladimir

Putin in his March 1, 2018 speech.

In practice, Russia and China will be advancing the alignment of China's New Silk Roads, or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with Russia's Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU).

There's ample potential for a Trans-Eurasia Express network of land and maritime transport corridors to be up and running by the middle of next decade, including, for instance, road and railway bridges connecting China with Russia across the Heilongjiang River.

Following serious trilateral talks involving Russia, India and Iran last November, closer attention is being paid to the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC), a 7,200-km long lane mixing sea and rail routes essentially linking the Indian Ocean with the Persian Gulf through Iran and Russia and further on down the road, to Europe.

Imagine cargo transiting from all over India to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, then overland to Bandar Anzali, an Iranian port on the Caspian Sea, and then on to the Russian southern port of Astrakhan, and after that to Europe by rail. From New Delhi's point of view, that means shipping costs reduced by up to 40 percent, and Mumbai-to-Moscow in only 20 days.

Down the line, INSTC will merge with BRI – as in Chinese-led corridors linked with the India-Iran-Russia route into a global transport network.

This is happening just as Japan is looking at the Trans-

Siberian Railway – which will be upgraded throughout the next decade – to improve its connections with Russia, China and the Koreas. Japan is now a top investor in Russia and at the same time very much interested in a Korea peace deal. That would free Tokyo from massive defense spending conditioned by Washington's rules. The EAEU free trade agreements with ASEAN can be added to that.

Especially over these past four years, Russia has also learned how to attract Chinese investment and wealth, aware that Beijing's system mass-produces virtually everything and knows how to market it globally, while Moscow needs to fight every block in the book dreamed up by Washington.

The Huawei-Venezuela "Axis of Evil"

While Washington remains a bipartisan prisoner to the Russophobic Platonic cave – where Cold War shadows on the wall are taken as reality – MAGA is missing the train to Eurasia.

A many-headed hydra, MAGA, stripped to the bone, could be read as a non-ideological antidote to the Empire's global adventurism. Trump, in his non-strategic, shambolic way, proposed at least in theory the return to a social contract in the U.S. MAGA in theory would translate into jobs, opportunities for small businesses, low taxes and no more foreign wars.

It's nostalgia for the 1950s and 60s before the Vietnam quagmire and before "Made in the USA" was slowly and deliberately dismantled. What's left are tens of trillions of national debt; a quadrillion in derivatives; the Deep State running amok; and a lot of pumped up fear of evil

Russians, devious Chinese, Persian mullahs, the troika of tyranny, the Belt and Road, Huawei, and illegal aliens.

More than a Hobbesian “war of all against all” or carping about the “Western rules-based system” being under attack, the fear is actually of the strategic challenge posed by Russia and China, which seeks a return to rule by international law.

MAGA would thrive if hitched to a ride on the Eurasia integration train: more jobs and more business opportunities instead of more foreign wars. Yet MAGA won’t happen – to a large extent because what really makes Trump tick is his policy of energy dominance to decisively interfere with Russia and China’s development.

The Pentagon and the “intel community” pushed the Trump administration to go after Huawei, branded as a nest of spies, while pressuring key allies Germany, Japan and Italy to follow. Germany and Japan permit the U.S. to control the key nodes in the extremities of Eurasia. Italy is essentially a large NATO base.

The U.S. Department of Justice requested the extradition of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou from Canada last Tuesday, adding a notch to the Trump administration’s geopolitical tactic of “blunt force trauma.”

Add to it that Huawei – based in Shenzhen and owned by its workers as shareholders – is killing Apple across Asia and in most latitudes across the Global South. The real the battle is over 5G, in which China aims to upstage the U.S., while upgrading capacity and production quality.

The digital economy in China is already larger than the GDP of France or the UK. It's based on the BATX companies (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Xiaomi), Didi (the Chinese Uber), e-commerce giant JD.com and Huawei. These Big Seven are a state within a civilization – an ecosystem they've constructed themselves, investing fortunes in big data, artificial intelligence (AI) and the internet. American giants – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Google – are absent from this enormous market.

Moreover, Huawei's sophisticated encryption system in telecom equipment prevents interception by the NSA. That helps account for its extreme popularity all across the Global South, in contrast to the Five Eyes (U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) electronic espionage network.

The economic war on Huawei is also directly connected to the expansion of BRI across 70 Asian, European and African nations, constituting a Eurasia-wide network of commerce, investment and infrastructure able to turn geopolitical and geo-economic relations, as we know them, upside down.

Greater Eurasia Beckons

Whatever China does won't alter the Deep State's obsession about "an aggression against our vital interests," as stated by the National Defense Strategy. The dominant Pentagon narrative in years to come will be about China "intending to impose, in the short term, its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region, and catch the United States off-guard in order to achieve future global pre-eminence." This is mixed with a belief that Russia wants to "crush NATO" and "sabotage the

democratic process in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.”

During my recent travels along the northern part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), I saw once again how China is upgrading highways, building dams, railways and bridges that are useful not only for its own economic expansion but also for its neighbors’ development. Compare it to U.S. wars – as in Iraq and Libya – where dams, railways and bridges are destroyed.

Russian diplomacy is all but winning the New Cold War – as diagnosed by Prof. Stephen Cohen in his latest book, War with Russia: From Putin and Ukraine to Trump and Russiagate.

Moscow mixes serious warnings with diverse strategies, such as resurrecting the South Stream gas pipeline to supply Europe as an extension of Turk Stream after the Trump administration also furiously opposed the Nord Stream 2 pipeline with sanctions on Russia. Meanwhile, Moscow ramps up energy exports to China.

The advance of the Belt and Road Initiative is linked to Russian security and energy exports, including the Northern Sea Route, as an alternative future transportation corridor to Central Asia. Russia emerges then as the top security guarantee for Eurasian trade and economic integration.

Last month in Moscow, I discussed Greater Eurasia– by now established as the overarching concept of Russian foreign policy – with top Russian analysts. They told me Putin is on board. He referred to Eurasia recently as “not a chessboard or a geopolitical playground, but our peaceful and prosperous home.”

Needless to say, U.S. think tanks dismiss the idea as “abortive”. They ignore Prof. Sergey Karaganov, who as early as mid-2017 was arguing that Greater Eurasia could serve as a platform for “a trilateral dialogue on global problems and international strategic stability between Russia, the United States and China.”

As much as the Beltway may refuse it, “The center of gravity of global trade is now shifting from the high seas toward the vast continental interior of Eurasia.”

Beijing Skirts the Dollar

Beijing is realizing it can't meet its geo-economic goals on energy, security, and trade without bypassing the U.S. dollar.

According to the IMF, 62 percent of global central bank reserves were still held in U.S. dollars by the second quarter of 2018. Around 43 per cent of international transactions on SWIFT are still in U.S. dollars. Even as China, in 2018, was the single largest contributor to global GDP growth, at 27.2 percent, the yuan still only accounts for 1 percent of international payments, and 1.8 per cent of all reserve assets held by central banks.

It takes time, but change is on the way. China's cross-border payment network for yuan transactions was launched less than four years ago. Integration between the Russian Mir payment system and Chinese Union Pay appears inevitable.

Bye Bye Drs. K and Zbig

Russia and China are developing the ultimate nightmare for those former shamans of U.S. foreign policy, Henry Kissinger

and the late Zbigniew “Grand Chessboard” Brzezinski.

Back in 1972 Kissinger was the mastermind – with logistical help from Pakistan – of the Nixon moment in China. That was classic Divide and Rule, separating China from the USSR. Two years ago, before Trump’s inauguration, Dr. K’s advice dispensed at Trump Tower meetings consisted of a modified Divide and Rule: the seduction of Russia to contain China.

The Kissinger doctrine rules that, geopolitically, the U.S. is just “an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia.” Domination “by a single power of either of Eurasia’s two principal spheres – Europe or Asia – remains a good definition of strategic danger for America, Cold War or no Cold War,” as Kissinger said. “For such a grouping would have the capacity to outstrip America economically and, in the end, militarily.”

The Zbig doctrine ran along similar lines. The objectives were to prevent collusion and maintain security among the EU-NATO vassals; keep tributaries pliant; keep the barbarians (a.k.a. Russians and allies) from coming together; most of all prevent the emergence of a hostile coalition (as in today’s Russia-China alliance) capable of challenging U.S. hegemony; and submit Germany, Russia, Japan, Iran, and China to permanent Divide and Rule.

Thus the despair of the current National Security Strategy, forecasting China displacing the United States “to achieve global preeminence in the future,” through BRI’s supra-continental reach.

The “policy” to counteract such “threats” is sanctions,

sanctions, and more unilateral sanctions, coupled with an inflation of absurd notions peddled across the Beltway – such as that Russia is aiding and abetting the re-conquest of the Arab world by Persia. Also that Beijing will ditch the “paper tiger” “Made in China 2025” plan for its major upgrade in global, high-tech manufacturing just because Trump hates it.

Once in a blue moon a U.S. report actually gets it right, such as in Beijing speeding up an array of BRI projects; as a modified Sun Tzu tactic deployed by President Xi Jinping.

At the June 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Professor Xiang Lanxin, director of the Centre of One Belt and One Road Studies at the China National Institute for SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation, defined BRI as an avenue to a “post-Westphalian world.” The journey is just beginning; a new geopolitical and economic era is at hand. And the U.S. is being left behind at the station.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [2030](#). Follow him on [Facebook](#).

If you enjoyed this original article please consider [making a donation](#) to Consortium News so we can bring you more stories like this one.

The New York Times as Judge and Jury

Seeking to maintain its credibility, The New York Times dispenses with the criminal justice system and basic principles of journalism to weigh in again on Russia-gate, reports Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

Special to Consortium News



We've seen it before: a newspaper and individual reporters get a story horribly wrong but instead of correcting it they double down to protect their reputations and credibility—which is all journalists have to go on—and the public suffers.

Sometimes this maneuver can contribute to a massive loss of life. The most egregious example was the reporting in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. Like nearly all Establishment media, *The New York Times* got the story of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction—the major *casus belli* for the invasion—dead wrong. But the *Times*, like the others, continued publishing stories without challenging their sources in authority, mostly unnamed, who were pushing for war.

The result was a disastrous intervention that led to hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths and continued instability in Iraq, including the formation of the Islamic State.

In a massive *Times*' [article](#) published on Thursday, entitled, “‘A Plot to Subvert an Election: Unravelling the Russia Story So Far,” it seems that reporters Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti have succumbed to the same thinking that doubled down on Iraq.

They claim to have a “mountain of evidence” but what they offer would be invisible on the Great Plains.

With the mid-terms looming and Special Counsel Robert Mueller unable to so far come up with any proof of collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign to steal the 2016 election—the central Russia-gate charge—the *Times* does it for him, regurgitating a Russia-gate Round-Up of every unsubstantiated allegation that has been made—deceptively presented as though it's all been proven.

This is a reaffirmation of the faith, a recitation of what the Russia-gate faithful want to believe is true. But mere repetition will not make it so.

The *Times*' unsteady conviction is summed up in this paragraph, which the paper itself then contradicts only a few paragraphs later:

“What we now know **with certainty**: The Russians carried out a landmark intervention that will be examined for decades to come. Acting on the personal animus of Mr. Putin, public and private instruments of Russian power moved with daring and skill to harness the currents of American politics. Well-connected Russians worked aggressively to recruit or influence people inside the Trump

campaign.”

But this schizoid approach leads to the admission that “no public evidence has emerged showing that [Trump’s] campaign conspired with Russia.”

The *Times* also adds: “There is a plausible case that Mr. Putin succeeded in delivering the presidency to his admirer, Mr. Trump, though it cannot be proved or disproved.”

This is an extraordinary statement. If it cannot be “proved or disproved” what is the point of this entire exercise: of the Mueller probe, the House and Senate investigations and even of this very *New York Times* article?

Attempting to prove this constructed story without proof is the very point of this piece.

A Banner Day

The 10,000-word article opens with a story of a pro-Russian banner that was hung from the Manhattan Bridge on Putin’s birthday, and an anti-Obama banner hung a month later from the Memorial Bridge in Washington just after the 2016 election.

On public property these are constitutionally-protected acts of free speech. But for the *Times*, “The Kremlin, it appeared, had reached onto United States soil in New York and Washington. The banners may well have been intended as visual victory laps for the most effective foreign interference in an American election in history.”

Why? Because the *Times* tells us that the “earliest promoters” of images of the banners were from social media accounts linked to a St. Petersburg-based click-bait farm, a company called the Internet Research Agency. The company is not legally connected to the Kremlin and any political coordination is pure speculation. IRA has been explained convincingly as a commercial and not political operation. Its aim is get and sell “eyeballs.”

For instance the company conducted pro and anti-Trump rallies and social media messages, as well as pro and anti-Clinton. But the *Times*, in classic omission mode, only reports on “the anti-Clinton, pro-Trump messages shared with millions of voters by Russia.” Sharing with “millions” of people on social media does not mean that millions of people have actually seen those messages. And if they had there is little way to determine whether it affected how they voted, especially as the messages attacked and praised both candidates.

The *Times* reporters take much at face value, which they then themselves undermine. Most prominently, they willfully mistake an indictment for a

conviction, as if they do not know the difference.

This is in the category of Journalism 101. An indictment need not include evidence and under U.S. law an indictment is not evidence. Juries are instructed that an indictment is merely an accusation. That the *Times* commits this cardinal sin of journalism to purposely confuse allegations with a conviction is not only inexcusable but strikes a fatal blow to the credibility of the entire article.

It actually reports that "Today there is **no doubt** who hacked the D.N.C. and the Clinton campaign. A detailed indictment of 12 officers of Russia's military intelligence agency, filed in July by Mr. Mueller, documents their every move, including their break-in techniques, their tricks to hide inside the Democrats' networks and even their Google searches."

Who needs courts when suspects can be tried and convicted in the press?

What the *Times* is not taking into account is that Mueller knows his indictment will never be tested in court because the GRU agents will never be arrested, there is no extradition treaty between the U.S. and Russia and even if it were miraculously to see the inside of a courtroom Mueller can invoke states secrets privilege to show the "evidence" to a judge with clearance in his chambers who can then emerge to pronounce "Guilty!" without a jury having seen that evidence.

This is what makes Mueller's indictment more a political than a legal document, giving him wide leeway to put whatever he wants into it. He knew it would never be tested and that once it was released, a supine press would do the rest to cement it in the public consciousness as a conviction, just as this *Times* piece tries to do.

Errors of Commission and Omission

There are a series of erroneous assertions and omissions in the *Times* piece, omitted because they would disturb the narrative:

-Not mentioning that the FBI was never given access to the DNC server but instead gullibly believing the assertion of the anti-Russian private company CrowdStrike, paid for by the DNC, that the name of the first Soviet intelligence chief found in metadata proves Russia was behind the hack. Only someone wanting to be caught would leave such a clue.

-Incredibly believing that Trump would have launched a covert intelligence operation on live national television by asking Russia to get 30,000 missing emails.

-Ignoring the possible role of the MI6, the CIA and the FBI setting up Trump

campaign members George Papadopoulos and Carter Page as “colluders” with Russia.

–Repeating misleading statements about the infamous Trump Tower meeting, in which Trump’s son did not seek dirt on Clinton but was offered it by a music promoter, not the Russian government. None was apparently produced. It’s never been established that a campaign receiving opposition research from foreigners is illegal (though the *Times* has decided that it is) and only the Clinton campaign was known to have obtained any.

–Making no mention at all of the now discredited opposition research dossier paid for by the Clinton campaign and the DNC from foreign sources and used by the FBI to get a warrant to spy on Carter Page and potentially other campaign members.

–Dismissing the importance of politicized text messages between FBI agents Peter Strzok and Lisa Page because the pair were “skewered regularly on Mr. (Sean) Hannity’s show as the ‘Trump-hating F.B.I. lovebirds.’”

–Putting down to “hyped news stories” the legitimate fear of a new McCarthyism against anyone who questions the “official” story being peddled here by the *Times*.

–Seeking to get inside Putin’s head to portray him as a petulant child seeking personal revenge against Hillary Clinton, a tale long peddled by Clinton and accepted without reservation by the *Times*.

–Pretending to get into Julian Assange’s head as well, saying he “shared Mr. Putin’s hatred of Mrs. Clinton and had a soft spot for Russia.” And that Assange “also obscured the Russian role by fueling a right-wing conspiracy theory he knew to be false.”

–Ignoring findings backed by the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity that the DNC emails were leaked and not hacked.

–Erroneously linking the timing of WikiLeaks’ Podesta emails to deflect attention from the “Access Hollywood” tape, as debunked in Consortium News by Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, who worked with WikiLeaks on those emails.

Distorts Geo-Politics

The piece swallows whole the Establishment’s geo-strategic Russia narrative, as all corporate media do. It buys without hesitation the story that the U.S. seeks to spread democracy around the world, and not pursue its economic and geo-strategic interests as do all imperial powers.

The *Times* reports that, “The United States had backed democratic, anti-Russian

forces in the so-called color revolutions on Russia's borders, in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004." The *Times* has also spread the erroneous story of a democratic revolution in Ukraine in 2014, omitting crucial evidence of a U.S.-backed coup.

The *Times* disapprovingly dismisses Trump having said on the campaign trail that "Russia was not an existential threat, but a potential ally in beating back terrorist groups," when an objective view of the world would come to this very conclusion.

The story also shoves aside American voters' real concerns that led to Trump's election. For the *Times*, economic grievances and rejection of perpetual war played no role in the election of Trump. Instead it was Russian influence that led Americans to vote for him, an absurd proposition defied by a Gallup poll in July that showed Americans' greatest concerns being economic. Their concerns about Russia were statistically insignificant at less than one percent.

Ignoring Americans' real concerns exposes the class interests of *Times* staffers and editors who are evidently above Americans' economic and social suffering. The *Times* piece blames Russia for social "divisions" and undermining American democracy, classic projection onto Moscow away from the real culprits for these problems: bi-partisan American plutocrats. That also insults average Americans by suggesting they cannot think for themselves and pursue their own interests without Russia telling them what to do.

Establishment reporters insulate themselves from criticism by retreating into the exclusive Establishment club they think they inhabit. It is from there that they vicariously draw their strength from powerful people they cover, which they should instead be scrutinizing. Validated by being close to power, Establishment reporters don't take seriously anyone outside of the club, such as a website like Consortium News.

But on rare occasions they are forced to take note of what outsiders are saying. Because of the role *The New York Times* played in the catastrophe of Iraq its editors took the highly unusual move of apologizing to its readers. Will we one day read a similar apology about the paper's coverage of Russia-gate?

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter @unjoe .

If you valued this original article please consider making a donation to Consortium News so we can bring you more stories like this one.

The West Against the Rest or The West Against Itself?

The West's illiberal-bashing frenzy has reduced what should be a crucial debate about a fearful West Against the Rest, to the more pressing issue of The West Against Itself, writes Pepe Escobar.

By Pepe Escobar

in Paris

Special to Consortium News



What is the bigger story? The West Against the Rest or The West Against Itself?

The Illiberal Quartet of Xi, Putin, Rouhani and Erdogan is in the line of fire of haughty homilies about Western “values.”

Illiberalism is arrogantly and provocatively depicted in the West repeatedly as a Tartar Invasion 2.0. But closer to home Illiberalism is responsible for the social, civil war in the U.S. as Trump's America has long ago forgotten what the European Enlightenment was all about.

The Western view is a maelstrom of a Judaeo-Greco-Roman, pseudo-philosophy steeped in Hegel, Toynbee, Spengler and obscure biblical references decrying an Asian attack on the “enlightened” West's *mission civilisatrice*.

The maelstrom stunts critical thinking to evaluate Xi's Confucianism, Putin's Eurasianism, Rouhani's realpolitik and “non-Westoxified” Shi'ite Islam, as well as Erdogan's quest to guide the global Muslim Brotherhood.

Instead the West give us phony “analyses” of how NATO should be praised for not allowing Libya to become a Syria, which it indeed has.

Meanwhile a golden rule prevails about one Asian power: never criticize the House of Saud, which happens to be the ultimate manifestation of Illiberalism. They get a free pass because after all they are “our bastards.”

What the illiberal-bashing frenzy does accomplish is to reduce what should be a crucial debate about a fearful West Against the Rest, to the more pressing issue

of The West Against Itself. This intra-West battle is being manifested in several ways: Viktor Orban in Hungary, eurosceptic coalitions in Austria and Italy, the advance of the ultra right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and the Sweden Democrats. In short it's The Revenge of the European Deplorables.

Bannon's 'Paradise' Regained

Into this European fray steps Steve Bannon, the master strategist who elected Donald Trump and is now taking the continent by storm. He is about to launch his own think tank, The Movement, in Brussels, to foment no less than a right-wing populist revolution.

It comes replete with Bannon spooking assorted EU lands by paraphrasing Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "I prefer to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."

Bannon's growing influence in Europe has reached the Venice Biennale, where director Errol Morris presented a documentary on Bannon, *American Dharma*, based on 18 hours of interviews with Trump's *Svengali* himself.

Bannon held court two weeks ago in Rome supported by Mischaël Modrikamen, the president of the Popular Party in Belgium, who is slated to lead The Movement. In Rome Bannon again met Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini – whom he had previously advised "for hours" to finally break a political coalition with fading star Silvio "Bunga Bunga" Berlusconi. Salvini and Berlusconi though are now horse-trading again.

Bannon has correctly identified Italy as the vortex of post-politics, spearheading the crusade to defeat the EU. The game-changer should be the May 2019 European Parliament elections, which Bannon reads as a certified victory for Right populism and nationalist movements.

In this do-or-die battle between populism and the Davos Party, Bannon wants to play The Undertaker against a puny George Soros.

Bannon is even seducing cynics in France by designating self-described "Jupiter" Emmanuel Macron, now in public opinion free fall, as public enemy number one. A faded U.S. newsweekly declared Macron to be The Last Man Standing between "European values" and, well, fascism. Bannon is more realistic: Macron is "a Rothschild banker who never made money – the definition of a loser...He imagines himself to be a new Napoleon."

Bannon is connecting across Europe because he has identified how the West peddles "socialism for the very rich and the very poor" and "a brutal form of Darwinian capitalism for everybody else." Quite a few Europeans easily grasp his simplistic concept of Right populism, according to which citizens must be able

to get jobs, something impossible when illegal immigration is used as a scam to depress workers' salaries.

The political strategy underlining The Movement is to unite all European nationalist vectors – a currently fragmented mess featuring sovereignists, neoliberals, radicalized nationalists, racists, conservatives and extremists on a quest for respectability.

To his credit, Bannon viscerally understood how the EU is a vast, de facto “un-sovereignty” space held hostage to economic austerity. The EU bureaucracy can easily be construed as Illiberalism Central: It was never a democracy.

There's no question Bannon impressed on Salvini the need to keep hammering over and over again how the Germany-France leadership of the EU is anti-democratic. But there's a huge problem: The Movement, and the Right populism galaxy, center almost exclusively on the role of illegal migrants – leading non-ideological cynics to suspect this might be little else than State xenophobia posing as a revolt of the masses.

Meanwhile, in Plato's Cave...

Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe, teaching at the University of Westminster and a darling of the multicultural café society, could easily be depicted as the anti-Bannon. She does identify the “crisis of neoliberal hegemony” and is capable of outlining how post-politics is all about Right and Left wallowing together in a conceptual swamp.

The political impasse of the whole West once again revolves around TINA: There Is No Alternative, in this case to neoliberal globalization. The Goddess of the Market is Athena and Venus rolled into one. The question is how to organize a politically strong reaction against the all-out marketization of life.

Mouffe at least understands that just demonizing Right populism as irrational – while despising the “deplorables” – is not good enough. Yet she places too much hope in the fuzzy political strategy of Podemos in Spain, La France Insoumise in France, or Bernie Sanders in the U.S. Arguably the only progressive politician in Europe who has a clear shot at government is Jeremy Corbyn – who's consuming all his energy fighting a nasty demonization campaign.

Sanders has just launched a manifesto calling for a Progressive International – capable of outlining a New Deal 2.0 and a new Bretton Woods.

For his part, Yanis Varoufakis, former Greek finance minister and co-founder of the DiEM25 democratic movement, laments the triumph of a Nationalist International – at least stressing that they “sprang out of the cesspool of

financialized capitalism”.

Yet he resorts to the same old players when it comes to pushing for a Progressive International: Sanders, Corbyn and his own DiEM25.

Mouffe’s conceptual solution is to bet on what she describes as Left populism, which can be construed as anything from “democratic socialism” to “participatory democracy”, depending “on the different national context.”

This implies that populism – relentlessly demonized by the neoliberal elites – is far from a toxic perversion of democracy, and can be authentically progressive.

Slavoj Zizek, in [The Courage of Hopelessness](#), couldn’t agree more, when he stresses that when the masses “not convinced by ‘rational’ capitalist discourse” prefer a “populist anti-elitist stance,” this has nothing to do with “lower-class primitivism”.

In fact Noam Chomsky, way back in 1991, in [Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies](#), had brilliantly shown how Western “democracy” really works: “It is only when the threat of popular participation is overcome that democratic forms can be safely contemplated.”

“So what does Europe want?” Zizek asks. He holds the merit of identifying the “principal contradiction” of what he qualifies as “The New World Order” (actually we’re still under the slow burn of the Old World Disorder). Zizek succinctly depicts the contradiction as “the structural impossibility of finding a global political order that could correspond to the global capitalist economy.”

And that’s why the “change” spectrum is so limited, and for the moment totally captured by Right populism. Nothing substantial can happen without a real socio-economic transformation, a new world-system replacing casino capitalism.

Taking the shadowplay in their Platonic – Russophobic – cave for reality, while mourning [“the end of Atlanticism,”](#) the champions of “Western values” prefer to adopt a diversionist tactic.

They keep on summoning fear of “illiberal” Putin and his “malign behavior” undermining the EU, coupled with “debt trap” neo-colonialism inflicted on unsuspecting customers by those devious Chinese.

These elites could not possibly understand they face a plight of their own making, courtesy of free market populism, which happens to be the apex of Western Illiberalism.

Pepe Escobar is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [2030](#). Follow him on [Facebook](#).

If you enjoyed this original article please consider [making a donation to Consortium News](#) so we can bring you more stories like this one.

Why the U.S. Seeks to Hem in Russia, China and Iran

America's three principal adversaries signify the shape of the world to come: a post-Western world of coexistence. But neoliberal and neocon ideology is unable to accept global pluralism and multipolarity, argues Patrick Lawrence.

By Patrick Lawrence

Special to Consortium News



The Trump administration has brought U.S. foreign policy to the brink of crisis, if it has not already tipped into one. There is little room to argue otherwise. In Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, and in Washington's ever-fraught relations with Russia, U.S. strategy, as reviewed in [my previous column](#), amounts to little more than spoiling the efforts of others to negotiate peaceful solutions to war and dangerous standoffs in the interests of an orderly world.

The bitter reality is that U.S. foreign policy has no definable objective other than blocking the initiatives of others because they stand in the way of the further expansion of U.S. global interests. This impoverished strategy reflects Washington's refusal to accept the passing of its relatively brief post-Cold War moment of unipolar power.

There is an error all too common in American public opinion. Personalizing Washington's regression into the role of spoiler by assigning all blame to one man, now Donald Trump, deprives one of deeper understanding. This mistake was made during the steady attack on civil liberties after the Sept. 11 tragedies and then during the 2003 invasion of Iraq: namely that it was all George W. Bush's fault. It was not so simple then and is not now. The crisis of U.S. foreign policy—a series of radical missteps—are systemic. Having little to do with personalities, they pass from one administration to the next with little variance other than at the margins.

Let us bring some history to this question of America as spoiler. What is the

origin of this undignified and isolating approach to global affairs?

It began with that hubristic triumphalism so evident in the decade after the Cold War's end. What ensued had various names.

There was the "end of history" thesis. American liberalism was humanity's highest achievement, and nothing would supersede it.

There was also the "Washington consensus." The world was in agreement that free-market capitalism and unfettered financial markets would see the entire planet to prosperity. The consensus never extended far beyond the Potomac, but this sort of detail mattered little at the time.

The neoliberal economic crusade accompanied by neoconservative politics had its intellectual ballast, and off went its true-believing warriors around the world.

Failures ensued. Iraq post-2003 is among the more obvious. Nobody ever planted democracy or built free markets in Baghdad. Then came the "color revolutions," which resulted in the destabilization of large swathes of the former Soviet Union's borderlands. The 2008 financial crash followed.

I was in Hong Kong at the time and recall thinking, "This is not just Lehman Brothers. An economic model is headed into Chapter 11." One would have thought a fundamental rethink in Washington might have followed these events. There has never been one.

The orthodoxy today remains what it was when it formed in the 1990s: The neoliberal crusade must proceed. Our market-driven, "rules-based" order is still advanced as the only way out of our planet's impasses.

A Strategic and Military Turn

Midway through the first Obama administration, a crucial turn began. What had been an assertion of financial and economic power, albeit coercive in many instances, particularly with the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, took on further strategic and military dimensions. The NATO bombing campaign in Libya, ostensibly a humanitarian mission, became a regime-change operation—despite Washington's promises otherwise. Obama's "pivot to Asia" turned out to be a neo-containment policy toward China. The "reset" with Russia, declared after Obama appointed Hillary Clinton secretary of state, flopped and turned into the virulent animosity we now live with daily. The U.S.-cultivated coup in Kiev in 2014 was a major declaration of drastic turn in policy towards Moscow. So was the decision, taken in 2012 at the latest, to back the radical jihadists who were turning civil unrest in Syria into a campaign to topple the Assad government in favor of another Islamist regime.

Spoilage as a poor excuse for a foreign policy had made its first appearances.

I count 2013 to 2015 as key years. At the start of this period, China began developing what it now calls its Belt and Road Initiative—its hugely ambitious plan to stitch together the Eurasian landmass, Shanghai to Lisbon. Moscow favored this undertaking, not least because of the key role Russia had to play and because it fit well with President Vladimir Putin's Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), launched in 2014.

In 2015, the last of the three years I just noted, Russia intervened militarily and diplomatically in the Syria conflict, in part to protect its southwest from Islamist extremism and in part to pull the Middle East back from the near-anarchy then threatening it as well as Russia and the West.

Meanwhile, Washington had cast China as an adversary and committed itself—as it apparently remains—to regime change in Syria. Three months prior to the treaty that established the EAEU, the Americans helped turn another case of civil unrest into a regime change—this time backing not jihadists in Syria but the crypto-Nazi militias in Ukraine on which the government now in power still depends.

That is how we got the U.S.-as-spoiler foreign policy we now have.

If there is a president to blame—and again, I see little point in this line of argument—it would have to be Barack Obama. To a certain extent, Obama was a creature of those around him, as he acknowledged in his interview with Jeffrey Goldberg in *The Atlantic* toward the end of his second term. From that "Anonymous" opinion piece published in *The New York Times* on Sept. 5, we know Trump is too, to a greater extent than Obama may have feared in his worst moments.

The crucial question is why. Why do U.S. policy cliques find themselves bereft of imaginative thinking in the face of an evolving world order? Why has there been not a single original policy initiative since the years I single out, with the exception of the now-abandoned 2015 accord governing Iran's nuclear programs? "Right now, our job is to create quagmires until we get what we want," an administration official told *The Washington Post's* David Ignatius in August.

Can you think of a blunter confession of intellectual bankruptcy? I can't.

Global 'Equals' Like Us?

There is a longstanding explanation for this paralysis. Seven decades of global hegemony, the Cold War notwithstanding, left the State Department with little to think about other than the simplicities of East-West tension. Those planning and

executing American diplomacy lost all facility for imaginative thinking because there was no need of it. This holds true, in my view, but there is more to our specific moment than mere sclerosis within the policy cliques.

As I have argued numerous times elsewhere, parity between East and West is a 21st century imperative. From Woodrow Wilson to the post-World War II settlement, an equality among all nations was in theory what the U.S. considered essential to global order.

Now that this is upon us, however, Washington cannot accept it. It did not count on non-Western nations achieving a measure of prosperity and influence until they were “just like us,” as the once famous phrase had it. And it has not turned out that way.

Think of Russia, China, and Iran, the three nations now designated America’s principal adversaries. Each one is fated to become (if it is not already) a world or regional power and a key to stability—Russia and China on a global scale, Iran in the Middle East. But each stands resolutely—and this is not to say with hostile intent—outside the Western-led order. They have different histories, traditions, cultures, and political cultures. And they are determined to preserve them.

They signify the shape of the world to come—a post-Western world in which the Atlantic alliance must coexist with rising powers outside its orbit. Together, then, they signify precisely what the U.S. cannot countenance. And if there is one attribute of neoliberal and neoconservative ideology that stands out among all others, it is its complete inability to accept difference or deviation if it threatens its interests.

This is the logic of spoilage as a substitute for foreign policy. Among its many consequences are countless lost opportunities for global stability.

Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the International Herald Tribune, is a columnist, essayist, author, and lecturer. His most recent book is *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century* (Yale). Follow him @thefloutist. His web site is www.patricklawrence.us. Support his work via www.patreon.com/thefloutist.

If you valued this original article, please consider [making a donation to Consortium News](#) so we can bring you more stories like this one.

The Real Russian Interference in US Politics

If Russia were trying to interfere in U.S. domestic politics, it wouldn't be attempting to change the U.S. system but to prevent it from trying to change Russia's, argues Diana Johnstone.

By **Diana Johnstone**



The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was ostensibly a conflict between two ideologies and two socio-economic systems.

All that seems to be over. The day of a new socialism may dawn unexpectedly, but today capitalism rules the world. At first glance, it may seem to be a classic clash between rival capitalists. And yet, once again an ideological conflict is emerging, one which divides capitalists themselves, even in Russia and in the United States itself. It is the conflict between American unipolar dominance and a multipolar world.

The defeat of communism was brutally announced in a certain “capitalist manifesto” dating from the early 1990s that actually proclaimed: “Our guiding light is Profit, acquired in a strictly legal way. Our Lord is His Majesty, Money, for it is only He who can lead us to wealth as the norm in life.” The authors of this bold tract were Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who went on to become the richest man in Russia (before spending ten years in a Russian jail) and his business partner at the time, Leonid Nevzlin, who has since retired comfortably to Israel.

Loans for Shares

Those were the good old days in the 1990s when the Clinton administration was propping up Yeltsin as he let Russia be ripped off by the joint efforts of such ambitious well-placed Russians and their Western sponsors, notably using the “loans for shares” trick.

In a 2012 *Vanity Fair* article on her hero, Khodorkovsky, the vehemently anti-Putin journalist Masha Gessen frankly summed up how this worked:

“The new oligarchs—a dozen men who had begun to exercise the power that money brought—concocted a scheme. They would lend the government money, which it

badly needed, and in return the government would put up as collateral blocks of stock amounting to a controlling interest in the major state-owned companies. When the government defaulted, as both the oligarchs and the government knew it would, the oligarchs would take them over. By this maneuver the Yeltsin administration privatized oil, gas, minerals, and other enterprises without parliamentary approval.”

This worked so well that from his position in the Communist youth organization, Khodorkovsky used his connections to get control of Russia’s petroleum company Yukos and become the richest oligarch in Russia, worth some \$15 billion, of which he still controls a chunk despite his years in jail (2003-2013).

His arrest made him a hero of democracy in the United States, where he had many friends, especially those business partners who were helping him sell pieces of Yukos to Chevron and Exxon. Khodorkovsky, a charming and generous young man, easily convinced his American partners that he was Russia’s number one champion of democracy and the rule of law, especially of those laws which allow domestic capital to flee to foreign banks, and foreign capital to take control of Russian resources.

Vladimir Putin didn’t see it that way. Without restoring socialism, he dispossessed Khodorkovsky of Yukos and essentially transformed the oil and gas industry from the “open society” model tolerated by Yeltsin to a national capitalist industry. Khodorkovsky and his partner Platon Lebedev were accused of having stolen all the oil that Yukos had produced in the years 1998 to 2003, tried, convicted and sentenced to 14 years of prison each. This shift ruined U.S. plans, already underway, to “balkanize” Russia between its many provinces, thereby allowing Western capital to pursue its capture of the Russian economy.

The dispossession of Khodorkovsky was certainly a major milestone in the conflict between President Putin and Washington. On November 18, 2005, the Senate unanimously adopted [Resolution 322](#) introduced by Senator Joe Biden denouncing the treatment of the Khodorkovsky and Lebedev as politically motivated.

Who Influences Whom?

There is an alternative view of the history of Russian influence in the United States to the one now getting constant attention. It is obvious that a Russian who can get the Senate to adopt a resolution in his favor has a certain influence. But when the “deep state” and the corporate media today growl about Russian influence, they aren’t talking about Khodorkovsky. They are talking about alleged collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign. They are seizing,

for example, on a joking response Trump made to a reporter's snide question during the presidential campaign. In a variation of the classic "when did you stop beating your wife?" the reporter asked if he would call on Russian President Vladimir Putin to "stay out" of the election.

Since a stupid question does not deserve a serious answer, Trump said he had "nothing to do with Putin" before adding, "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 [Hillary Clinton] e-mails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press."

Many Trump opponents think this proves collusion. Irony appears to be almost as unwelcome in American politics as honesty.

When Trump revoked his security clearance earlier this month, former CIA chief John Brennan got his chance to spew his hatred in the complacent pages of *The New York Times*. Someone supposed to be smart enough to head an intelligence agency actually took Trump's joking invitation as a genuine request. "By issuing such a statement," Brennan wrote, "Mr. Trump was not only encouraging a foreign nation to collect intelligence against a United States citizen, but also openly authorizing his followers to work with our primary global adversary against his political opponent."

As America's former top intelligence officer, Brennan had to know that (even if it were true that Trump was somehow involved) it is ludicrous to suggest that Trump would have launched a covert intelligence operation on national television. If this were a Russian operation to hack Clinton's private server it would have been on a need-to-know basis and there is no evident need for Trump or his campaign team to have known.

Besides, Clinton's private server on the day Trump uttered this joke, July 27, 2016, had already been about nine months in possession of the Department of Justice, and presumably offline as it was being examined.

Since Brennan knows all this he could only have been lying in *The New York Times*.

The Russians, Brennan went on, "troll political, business and cultural waters in search of gullible or unprincipled individuals who become pliant in the hands of their Russian puppet masters."

But which Russians do that? And who are those "individuals?"

'The Fixer-in-Chief'

To understand the way Washington works, one can focus on the career of lawyer

Jonathan M. Winer, who proudly says that in early 2017 the head of the Carnegie Endowment, Bill Burns, referred to him as “The Fixer-in-Chief.” Let’s see what the fixer has fixed.

Winer served in the Clinton State Department as its first Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Law Enforcement from 1994-1999. One may question the selectivity of Bill Clinton’s concern for international law enforcement, which certainly did not cover violating international law by bombing defenseless countries.

In any case, in 1999 Winer received the State Department’s second highest award for having “created the capacity of the Department and the U.S. government to deal with international crime and criminal justice as important foreign policy functions.” The award stated that “the scope and significance of his achievements are virtually unprecedented for any single official.”

After the Clinton administration, from 2008 to 2013, Winer worked as a high-up consultant at one of the world’s most powerful PR and lobbying firms, APCO Worldwide. As well as the tobacco industry and the Clinton Foundation, APCO also works for Khodorkovsky. To be precise, according to public listings, the fourth biggest of APCO’s many clients is the Corbiere Trust, owned by Khodorkovsky and registered in Guernsey. The trust tends and distributes some of the billions that the oligarch got out of Russia before he was jailed.

Corbiere money was spent to lobby both for Resolution 322 (supporting Khodorkovsky after his arrest in Russia) and for the Magnitsky Act. APCO president Margery Kraus is a member of the Institute of Modern Russia, which is headed by Khodorkovsky’s son Pavel, with the ostensible purpose of “promoting democratic values” – in other words, of building political opposition to Putin.

When John Kerry replaced Hillary Clinton as secretary of state, allowing Hillary to prepare her presidential campaign, Winer went back to the State Department. Winer’s extracurricular activities at State brought him into the public spotlight early this year when House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes (R-CA) named him as part of a network promoting the notorious “Steele Dossier,” which accused Trump of illicit financial dealing and compromising sexual activities in Russia, in a word, “collusion” with Moscow.

By Winer’s own [account](#), he had been friends with former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele since his days at APCO. Back at State, he regularly [channeled](#) Steele reports, ostensibly drawn from contacts with friendly Russian intelligence agents, to Victoria Nuland, in charge of Russian affairs, as well as to top Russia experts. Among these reports was the infamous “Steele dossier,” opposition research on Trump financed by the Clinton campaign and the Democratic

National Committee.

But dirt seemed to pass the other way too. According to a Feb. 6 *Washington Post* story, Winer passed on to Steele the story of Trump being urinated on by prostitutes in a Moscow hotel with Russian agents allegedly filming it for blackmail material. The *Post* says the story was written by Cody Shearer, a Clinton confidante. A lawyer for Winer told the paper that Winer “was concerned in 2016 about information that a candidate for the presidency may have been compromised by a hostile foreign power. Any actions he took were grounded in those concerns.” Shearer did not respond to a request for comment from Consortium News. (Full disclosure: Cody Shearer is a member of the advisory board of the Consortium for Independent Journalism, which publishes Consortium News, and has been asked to resign.)

All this Democrat paid-for and created dirt was spread through government agencies and mainstream media before being revealed publicly just before Trump’s inauguration. The Steele dossier was used by the Obama Justice Department to get a warrant to spy on the Trump campaign.

Winer and the Magnitsky Act

Winer played a major role in Congress’s adoption of the “Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012” (the Magnitsky Act), a measure that effectively ended post-Cold War hopes for normal relations between Washington and Moscow. This act was based on a highly contentious version of the November 16, 2009 death in prison of accountant Sergei Leonidovich Magnitsky as told to Congress by hedge fund manager Bill Browder. According to Browder, Magnitsky was a lawyer beaten to death in prison as a result of his crusade for human rights.

However, as convincingly established by dissident Russian film-maker Andrei Nekrasov’s investigative documentary (blacklisted in the U.S.), Magnitsky was neither a human rights crusader, nor a lawyer, nor beaten to death. He was an accountant jailed for his role in Browder’s business dealings, who died of natural causes as a result of inadequate prison care. The case was hyped as a major human rights drama by Browder in order to discredit Russian tax fraud charges against himself.

By adopting a law punishing Magnitsky’s alleged persecutors, the U.S. Congress acted as a supreme court judging internal Russian legal issues.

The Magnitsky Act also condemns legal prosecution of Khodorkovsky. Browder, on a

much smaller scale, also made a fortune ripping off Russians during the Yeltsin years, and later got into trouble with Russian tax collectors. Since Browder had given up his U.S. citizenship in order to avoid paying U.S. taxes, he had reason to fear Russian efforts to extradite him for tax evasion and other financial misdeeds.

It was Winer who found a solution to Browder's predicament. As Winer wrote in *The Daily Beast*:

"When Browder consulted me, he wanted to know what he could do to hold those involved in the case accountable. As Browder describes in his book, *Red Notice*, I suggested creating a new law to impose economic and travel sanctions on human-rights violators involved in grand corruption. Browder decided this could secure a measure of justice for Magnitsky. He initiated a campaign that led to the enactment of the Magnitsky Act. Soon other countries enacted their own Magnitsky Acts, including Canada, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and most recently, the United Kingdom."

Meanwhile, Russian authorities have been trying for years to pursue their case against Browder. Putin brought up the case in his press conference following the Helsinki meeting with Trump. Putin suggested allowing U.S. authorities to question the 12 Russian GRU military intelligence agents named in the Mueller indictment in exchange for allowing Russian officials to question individuals involved in the Browder case, including Winer and former U.S. ambassador to Moscow Michael McFaul, among others. Putin observed that such an exchange was possible under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty signed between the two countries in 1999, back in the Yeltsin days when America was posing as Russia's best friend.

But the naïve Russians underestimated the craftiness of American lawyers.

As Winer wrote, "Under that treaty, Russia's procurator general can ask the U.S. attorney general ... to arrange for Americans to be ordered to testify to assist in a criminal case. But there is a fundamental exception: The attorney general can provide no such assistance in a *politically motivated* case (my emphasis). I know this because I was among those who helped put it there. Back in 1999, when we were negotiating the agreement with Russia, I was the senior State Department official managing U.S.-Russia law-enforcement relations."

The clever treaty is a perfect Catch-22. It doesn't apply to a case if it is politically motivated, and if it is Russian, it must be politically motivated. (The irony is that Mueller's indictment of 12 GRU Russian military intelligence agents appears to be more a political than a legal document. For one thing, it accused the agents of interfering in a U.S. election but never charges them

under U.S. electoral law.)

On July 15, 2016, Browder's Heritage Capital Management firm registered a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice accusing both American and Russian opponents of the Magnitsky Act of violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA); adopted in 1938 with Nazis in mind.

As for Russian lawyers attempting to bring their case against the Act to the U.S., the Heritage Capital Management brief declared:

"While lawyers representing foreign principals are exempt from filing under FARA, this is only true if the attorney does not try to influence policy at the behest of his client. By disseminating anti-Magnitsky material to Congress, [lawyer Natalia] Veselnitskaya is clearly trying to influence policy and is therefore in violation of her filing requirements under FARA."

Veselnitskaya was at the infamous Trump Tower meeting in the summer of 2016 to lobby a possible incoming Trump administration to oppose the Magnitsky Act. A British music promoter, not a spokesman for the Russian government, offered dirt on Clinton in an email to Donald Trump Jr. No dirt was apparently produced and Don Jr. saw it as a lure to get him to the meeting on Magnitsky. Democrats are furiously trying to prove that this meeting was "collusion" between the Trump camp and Russia, though it was the Clinton campaign that paid for opposition research and received it from foreigners, while the Trump campaign neither solicited nor apparently received any at that meeting.

The Ideological Conflict Today

Needless to say, Khodorkovsky's Corbiere Trust lobbied hard to get Congress to pass the Magnitsky Act. This type of "Russian interference intended to influence policy" goes unnoticed while U.S. authorities scour cyberspace for evidence of trolls.

The basic ideological conflict here is between Unipolar America and Multipolar Russia. Russia's position, as Putin made clear in his historic speech at the Munich security conference in 2007, is to allow countries to enjoy national sovereignty and develop in their own way. The current Russian government is against interference in other countries' politics on principle. It would naturally prefer an American government willing to do the same.

The United States, in contrast, is in favor of interference in other countries on principle: because it seeks a Unipolar world, with a single "democratic" system, and considers itself the final authority as to which regime a country should have and how it should run its affairs.

So, if Putin were trying to interfere in U.S. domestic politics, he would not be trying to change the U.S. system but to prevent it from trying to change his own.

U.S. policy-makers practice interference every day. And they are perfectly willing to allow Russians to interfere in American politics – so long as those Russians like Khodorkovsky, who aspire to precisely the same unipolar world sought by the State Department. Indeed, the American empire depends on such interference from Iraqis, Libyans, Iranians, Russians, Cubans – all those who come to Washington to try to get U.S. power to settle old scores or overthrow the government in the country they came from and put themselves in power. All those are perfectly welcome to lobby for a world ruled by America.

Russian interference in American politics is totally welcome so long as it helps turn public opinion against “multipolar” Putin, glorifies American democracy, serves U.S. interests, including the military industries, helps break down national borders (except those of the United States and Israel) and puts money in appropriate pockets in the halls of Congress.

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 .

If you enjoyed this original article please consider [making a donation to Consortium News](#) so we can bring you more stories like this one.

For Italy, Trump Represents a ‘Populist’ Opportunity

The new Italian government is taking comfort in some of Trump's positions, especially on migration, trade and Russia, says Andrew Spannaus.

**By Andrew Spannaus
in Milan**

Special to Consortium News



During the 2016 United States election campaign, most of Italy's political class and media adopted the standard line about how Donald Trump was a grave threat to the stability of the Western world.

Unlike previous Italian governments, which toed the pro-globalization line, the new government in Rome, supported by the anti-system Five Star Movement and the right-wing League, seems ready to view Trump as an opening, not a disaster.

For the new Italian leaders, Trump's victory presents a number of opportunities for Italy. It has opened a way to potentially link the anti-establishment vote in both countries and across Europe by addressing the negative effects of globalization on the middle and lower classes, as well as challenge disastrous "regime change" policies that breed instability.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte began revealing his hand at the G-7 summit in Charlevoix, Canada in June, shortly after he was chosen by the two populist parties as a compromise figure to lead the government. At the summit, he was the only other leader to support Trump's call to allow Russia to rejoin the group. Conte also refused to join with other European leaders in railing against the threat of tariffs wielded by Washington to obtain concessions on trade. During Conte's visit to the White House on July 30, he confirmed this position, seeking ways the two countries could work more closely together.

The Libya Disaster

The first common issue is how to deal with the chaos in Libya. In 2011, French President Nicolas Sarkozy—with the help of then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—successfully convinced President Barack Obama to launch a "humanitarian intervention" that led to the ouster and killing of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. What followed was a period of instability that persists to this day. For Italy in particular, the war has been disastrous on two fronts: it has hit its economic interests and increased human trafficking and the flow of

refugees and migrants across the Mediterranean.

Italy is the Western country with the strongest ties to Libya, a former Italian colony. Italy has invested heavily there, including through the construction of transport, military and housing infrastructure in the form of reparations for colonialism under a 2008 agreement with Gaddafi. Ties are strong in the energy sector as well, as the Italian conglomerate Eni manages numerous oil and gas fields there, providing about 20 percent of the company's overall hydrocarbon production.

When NATO bombs were unleashed in 2011, the French military had included Eni infrastructure among its targets, according to then Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. The Italian oil assets were apparently never hit. But armed groups continue to attack oil pipelines and hinder oil exports, including Eni's.

The targeting of Eni infrastructure has led to a belief in Italy that one goal of the Libyan war for France was to wrest control of Italy's Libyan energy resources. Corroboration has come from the Clinton emails published first by WikiLeaks, and subsequently released in part by the State Department itself. Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal sent intelligence assessments regarding Sarkozy's motives in attacking Libya, which included "a desire to gain a greater share of Libya oil production." Other emails show this meant cancelling existing oil concessions (such as those granted to Eni), and reassigning them to France's Total. (Another major goal was to stop Gaddafi from creating a new pan-African currency which would supplant the CFA, the French franc used in French-speaking African countries.)

Italy also has borne the brunt of the increase in immigration passing through Libya. The north African country has become a hub for migrant and refugee passage, with ruthless traffickers exploiting and torturing people who hope to make it to Europe.

The elimination of the Gaddafi regime contributed strongly to the wave of desperate humans trying to make it to Italy, with over 90 percent of them arriving from Libya.

The political result has been strong anti-immigrant sentiment in Italy that contributed significantly to the League's March election success. The new Italian government has sought to block all arrivals not controlled by its coast guard and force other European countries to share the burden of those who are granted entry. This has led to claims that Italy is ignoring the humanitarian needs of desperate people. The Italians counter that European neighbors are refusing to do their part, having closed their borders within Europe despite their obligations under the Schengen Agreement that guarantees free movement of peoples throughout the EU.

Not surprisingly, Trump has offered his support to Conte, praising the Italian government's approach and suggesting that Europe as a whole should reintroduce strong borders. Trump's support on Libya can be of most help to Italy.

France continues to seek dominance in Western policy on Libya, while Italy aims to regain its leading role in the area, despite being seen as a second-tier power in Europe. After the bilateral meeting at the White House, sources told the Italian press that Italy could count on U.S. support for the Libya conference Conte is organizing in Rome this fall. Trump said: "We recognize Italy's leadership role in the stabilization of Libya and North Africa."

To Russia With Love

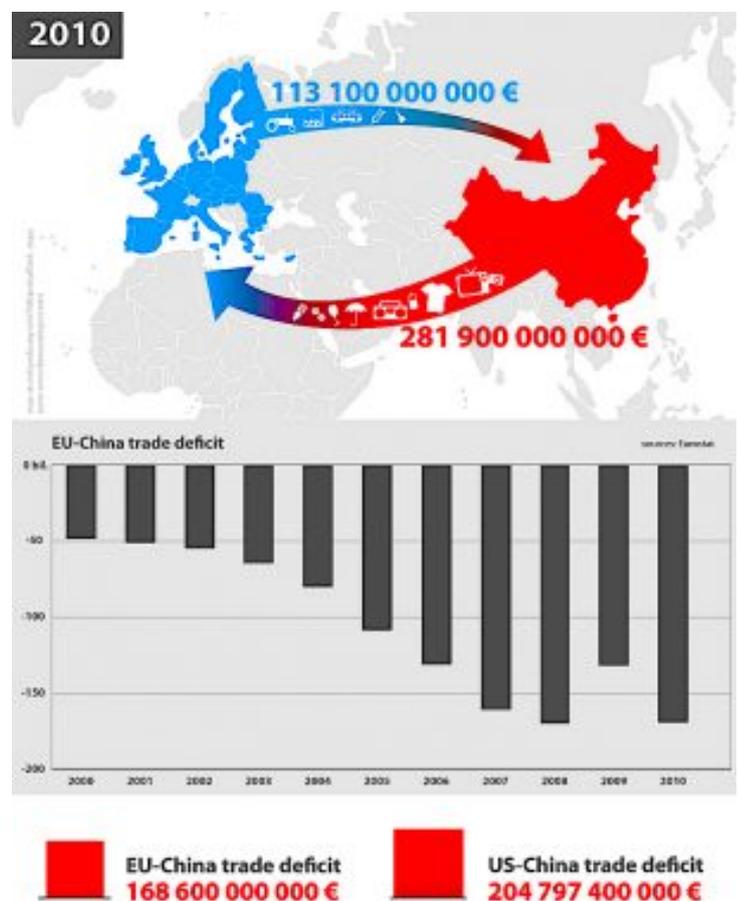
Trump and the Italian government also see eye to eye on Russia. Few people in Italy appear to support continuing the sanctions and deploying additional military personnel and equipment toward the East. Many Italians also would seem to welcome a shift away from the New Cold War mentality, but without rupturing the Western alliance.

So far, Trump's openness to diplomacy with Russian President Vladimir Putin hasn't brought much actual change. In fact, last month's NATO summit produced a series of commitments for further NATO deployments toward Russia's borders. But Italy's desire for better relations with Russia, without alienating the U.S., is being facilitated by Trump's approach to Moscow.

Conte and Trump skirted the Iran nuclear deal, over which Italy and the U.S. disagree. Italy has long been a major economic partner of the Islamic Republic. Though there is debate within institutions in Rome over the best approach to Iran, there's no question many Italian companies stand to lose from Trump's decision to reimpose sanctions.

Trade With China

On trade with Europe Trump has followed his usual method: talk tough and make threats, hoping to obtain concessions. The first shot was Trump's imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum, prompting Brussels to retaliate on a raft of American imports, including bourbon, motorcycles and numerous food items. Then Trump threatened 20 percent tariffs on European automobiles unless the EU reduced barriers to U.S. products.



The European Commission responded with a threat of over \$300 billion in tariffs on American goods. Ultimately, a deal was reached in which the two sides committed to "work together towards zero tariffs." The White House claimed victory after EU concessions in the energy and

food sectors. More significantly, Europe appears to be siding with Trump over China on trade.

After his July 30 meeting with Trump, Conte agreed on the need to review the terms of China's participation in the World Trade Organization. China still is accorded the status of a developing nation, which allows it to maintain higher tariffs and restrictions than its Western counterparts in many sectors. China has made great strides in improving living conditions for its population, but has a long way to go to deal with internal imbalances and inequality.

While the growth of the Chinese middle class represents an important opportunity for European industry, low-cost production from China and other developing nations has cost millions of jobs in developed countries, supplanting many Western industries during the process of globalization in recent decades.

Italy maintains a competitive advantage in many advanced manufacturing sectors—as do other European countries, led by Germany—but that advantage is waning as other nations reach higher levels of development. Italy must compete on quality, not quantity, overcoming the negative effects of unbalanced competition with China with its low costs and disparities in rules and regulations.

Limits of the EU

The populist Italian government is also seeking a more general challenge to the decades-old neoliberal economic system, which the Trump administration has supported. It is premature to think that Italy and the U.S. have established a new partnership, given uncertainty on both sides. Even on rare occasions when Trump pursues reasonable goals, he is inconsistent and must do battle with many sides in the U.S.—even within his own administration. The Italian government is in a similar situation, with the European establishment putting roadblocks in the way to prevent wholesale changes in economic policy.

Seeking U.S. support outside the confines of the EU is in Italy's interest, but raises concerns among those who look with disdain on

Trump and his mistrust of supranational institutions. If EU countries act on their own, the idea of a common foreign policy loses credibility, strengthening the arguments of those who oppose further integration.

The problem is that the pro-EU forces so far have failed to address the issues leading to the populist revolt, whether economic or in foreign policy. Repeating the mantra that European nations must act as a bloc doesn't solve the fundamental problems facing the member states. If Brussels won't face its own failures, more conflict will be inevitable, and the alliance between populist forces will likely continue to grow.

Andrew Spannaus is a journalist and strategic analyst based in Milan, Italy. He was elected chairman of the Milan Foreign Press Association in March 2018. He has published the books “Perché vince Trump” (“Why Trump is Winning” – June 2016) and “La rivolta degli elettori” (“The Revolt of the Voters” – July 2017).

If you enjoyed this original article please consider [making a donation](#) to Consortium News so we can bring you more stories like this one.
