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RUSSIA NEWSLETTER #5

March 10, 2017.

<http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2017/03/russia-newsletter-5-from-violence-to.html>

Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace,
Justice, and Ecology.

(#1 March 21, 2014; #2 April 10, 2014; #3 May 16, 2014; #4, July 22, 2014)

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What's at Stake: While Sovietphobic and Russophobic US leaders and their still Cold War mainstream media decry Russian aggressiveness, the US and NATO ring Russia with allies and weapons. Nuclear war is the possible result. The peace movement must focus and push for alternatives to confrontation.

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WHO'S THE THREAT? SURROUNDING RUSSIA

FINLAND AND US SIGN MILITARY ACCORD

By Dick Bennett

Back in August when I learned that Sweden, the other Nordic country to have remained outside NATO, had signed a military cooperation agreement with the US in June, my respiration remained steady. But when I read that Finland was nearing a security deal with US, I jerked forward for my map of Europe to gaze again at that long border with Russia. A US military pact with a country whose contiguous border with Russia stretches hundreds of miles! And Putin had warned Finland against doing it. Imagine US reactions to military pacts between Russia and Mexico and Canada.

Now on October 8, 2016, we learn that the US and Finland had signed the military accord. With that border in my mind's eye, my first thought was, how would the mainstream mainly imperial US media fit that into the official narrative of Russian aggression against the West? The brief AP story from Helsinki just gives the facts; that is, from the US and Finnish point of view: "the U.S. presence in and around the Baltic Sea undergirds stability in the region. . . ." The Finnish Defense Minister Jussi Niinisto added this flourish: suspicion of Russian fighter jets violating Finnish air space. "U.S., Finland Sign Accord on Defense." *NADG* (October 8, 2016).

<http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2016/oct/08/us-finland-sign-accord-defense/>

William Blum, The Anti-Empire Report #148

By William Blum. February 4, 2017.

Who's the Threat?

“Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” – Alice in Wonderland

Since Yalta, we have a long list of times we've tried to engage positively with Russia. We have a relatively short list of successes in that regard. – *General James Mattis, the new Secretary of Defense*

If anyone knows where to find this long list please send me a copy.

This delusion is repeated periodically by American military officials. A year ago, following the release of Russia's new national security document, naming as threats both the United States and the expansion of the NATO alliance, a Pentagon spokesman declared: “They have no reason to consider us a threat. We are not looking for conflict with Russia.”

Meanwhile, in early January, the United States embarked upon its biggest military buildup in Europe since the end of the Cold War – 3,500 American soldiers landed, unloading three shiploads, with 2,500 tanks, trucks and other combat vehicles. The troops were to be deployed in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary and across the Baltics. Lt. Gen. Frederick Hodges, commander of US forces in Europe, said, “Three years after the last American tanks left the continent, we need to get them back.”

The measures, General Hodges declared, were a “response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea. This does not mean that there necessarily has to be a war, none of this is inevitable, but Moscow is preparing for the possibility.” (See previous paragraph.)

This January 2017 buildup, we are told, is in response to a Russian action in Crimea of January 2014. The alert reader will have noticed that critics of Russia in recent years, virtually without exception, condemn Moscow's Crimean action and typically nothing else. Could that be because they have nothing else to condemn about Russia's foreign policy? At the same time they invariably fail to point out what preceded the Russian action – the overthrow, with Washington's indispensable help, of the democratically-elected, Moscow-friendly Ukrainian government, replacing it with an anti-Russian, neo-fascist (literally) regime, complete with Nazi salutes and swastika-like symbols.

Ukraine and Georgia, both of which border Russia, are all that's left to complete the US/NATO encirclement. And when the US overthrew the government of Ukraine, why shouldn't Russia have been alarmed as the circle was about to close yet tighter? Even so, the Russian military appeared in Ukraine only in Crimea, where the Russians already had a

military base with the approval of the Ukrainian government. No one could have blocked Moscow from taking over all of Ukraine if they wanted to.

Yet, the United States is right. Russia is a threat. A threat to American world dominance. And Americans can't shake their upbringing. Here's veteran National Public Radio newscaster Cokie Roberts bemoaning Trump's stated desire to develop friendly relations with Russia: "This country has had a consistent policy for 70 years towards the Soviet Union and Russia, and Trump is trying to undo that." Heavens! Nuclear war would be better than that!

US Foreign Policy Interventionist Straightjacket, Ukraine and the Maiden Agreement

James Carden, "A Foreign Policy Held Hostage." *The Nation* (Nov. 14, 2016). Carden's main thesis is that the US is confined by its "foreign policy orthodoxy" that eventuates in "seemingly endless interventions abroad." That bipartisan orthodoxy operates "inside" by one administration after the other and "outside" by its mainstream media allies (he doesn't discuss the reinforcing military industrial complex or the numerous pro-empire think tanks.) This orthodoxy, branding "Putin's Russia an outlaw state," supported the "Maidan" agreement (2013-) for association between the Ukraine and the European Union. The agreement "effectively wrenched Ukraine from Russia's traditional sphere of influence, and it was pursued regardless of the consequences, which have included the violent overthrow of Ukraine's democratically elected president and a civil war that has killed nearly 10,000 people" (18).

WHO NEEDS TO BE CONTAINED?

Edward S. Herman, "Foreign Engagement v. Aggression." *Z Magazine* (June 2016). Herman is a foremost critic of the inside/outside orthodoxy Carden sets forth. In article after article in this magazine, he exposes their dogmas and collaboration. In this article he familiarly explains US "us and them" double standards--the US engaged, opponents (often "enemies") aggressive, to lead into the story of the Ukrainian civil war. So blinding, so memory-expunging is the double-standard of our international misbehavior, that regarding the Ukraine Secretary Kerry "stated in 2015 that "'You just don't in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on a completely trumped-up pretext.'" That was the orthodoxy inside speaking. "And "no U.S. mainstream publication chortled at Kerry's Orwellian performance" (28). So where will Herman begin this story? Not with newspaper

Russo-Putin-phobia Rather we are reminded “that NATO has been steadily expanding and encircling Russia since 1996.”

BEYOND CONTAINMENT

Editor and publisher of *The Nation*, Katrina vanden Heuvel, reports the inside/outside orthodoxy and offers concrete remedies. “Brexit’s Benefits,” *The Nation* (July 18/25, 2016). The “reckless” “US decision to expand NATO to Russia’s borders” has caused much harm and may lead to multiple dangers. But the US and NATO “have compelling reasons to cooperate with Russia.” Thus a reassessment of Western foreign policy orthodoxy is urgently needed to consider, among other initiatives, the West and Russia joining in “building a zone of peace on Russia’s borders” that would “acknowledge Russia’s security concerns.”

Noam Chomsky: First Understand Your “Enemy’s” Point of View

Chomsky discusses Russia throughout *Who Rules the World?* and in his final chapter (23, “Masters of Mankind”) he summarizes Russia’s point of view with the kind of empathy often achieved by former Senator J. William Fulbright as Chairman of the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee during the 1960s. The Western response to the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War in 1991 “was triumphalist. . . .NATO enlargement began at once, in violation of verbal assurances to Gorbachev. . . .” NATO invited Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, which “Putin viewed as ‘a direct threat to Russia’s core interests.’” (Chomsky is quoting favorably an article by John Mearsheimer.) “‘Who can blame him?’ After all, as everyone knows, ‘The United States does not tolerate distant great powers deploying military forces anywhere in the Western hemisphere, much less on its border’. . . .We need not ask how the United States would have reacted had the countries of Latin America joined the Warsaw Pact. . . .one does not have to regard Putin’s moves and motives favorably to understand the logic behind them, nor to grasp the importance of understanding that logic instead of issuing imprecations against it. As in the case of China, a great deal is at stake, reaching as far--literally--as questions of survival” (pp. 246-249).

MORE THREATS FROM RUSSIA?

TRUMP AND RUSSIA

Why We Must Oppose the Kremlin-Baiting Against Trump

By [Stephen F. Cohen](#). *The Nation*, FEBRUARY 22, 2017. [The title I read is “Against Kremlin-Baiting” (March 13, 2017).

The Russia-connected allegations have created an atmosphere of hysteria amounting to McCarthyism.

The bipartisan, nearly full-political-spectrum tsunami of factually unverified allegations that President Trump has been seditiously “compromised” by the Kremlin, with scarcely any nonpartisan pushback from influential political or media sources, is deeply alarming. Begun by the Clinton campaign in mid-2016, and exemplified now by *New York Times* columnists (who write of a “Trump-Putin regime” in Washington), strident MSNBC hosts, and unbalanced CNN commentators, the practice is growing into a latter-day McCarthyite hysteria. Such politically malignant practices should be deplored wherever they appear, whether on the part of conservatives, liberals, or progressives.

The allegations are driven by political forces with various agendas: the Hillary Clinton wing of the Democratic Party, which wants to maintain its grip on the party by insisting that she didn’t

lose the election but that it was stolen by Russian President Vladimir Putin for Trump; by enemies of Trump's proposed détente with Russia, who want to discredit both him and Putin; and by Republicans and Democrats stunned that Trump essentially ran and won without either party, thereby threatening the established two-party system. Whatever the motivation, the ensuing slurs against Trump, which are already producing calls for his impeachment, pose grave threats to US and international security and to American democracy itself.

So far, no facts have been presented to back up the allegations. (Without facts, all of us are doomed to malpractice or worse.) An impartial investigation might search for such facts, if any exist, which should then be evaluated objectively—but neither may be possible in the current political atmosphere, only a witch hunt.

For now, six allegations pass as evidence that Trump has been compromised, or worse, by the Kremlin:

1. The president has “lavished praise” on Putin. All Trump has said in this regard is that Putin is “a strong leader” and “very smart” and that it would be good “to cooperate with Russia.” These are empirically true statements. They pale in comparison with the warm words of previous US presidents for Russia's leaders, including those of Franklin Roosevelt about Joseph Stalin, those of Richard Nixon about Leonid Brezhnev, and particularly those of Bill Clinton about Boris Yeltsin, whom Clinton compared favorably to George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt. Only against the backdrop of the unrelenting US political-media establishment's demonization of Putin could Trump's “praise” be considered lavish. Instead, unlike virtually every other mainstream American political figure and media outlet, Trump simply refuses to vilify Putin—declining to characterize him as a “killer” of personal enemies, for which there is also no evidence.

2. Trump and his associates have had, it is charged, business dealings in Russia and with Russian “oligarchs.” Perhaps, but so have many major American corporations, including Boeing, Pfizer, Ford, General Electric, Morgan Stanley, McDonald's, and Starbucks. Their Russian partners are often “oligarchs.” Moreover, unlike many international hotel corporations, Trump tried but failed to build his signature enterprise in Russia. The “Russian assets” about which his son spoke seem to have been from selling condos and co-ops in the United States to cash-bearing Russians in search of a luxury brand—hardly delegitimizing. It is said that Trump's tax returns, if revealed, would expose nefarious Russian influence. Perhaps, but considering the financial documents of ownership he has made public, that seems unlikely. Regardless, this remains an allegation, not a fact.

3. Trump's “associate” and, briefly, campaign manager, Paul Manafort, is alleged to have been “pro-Russian” when he advised Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, later deposed unconstitutionally during the Maidan “revolution” in February 2014. This makes no sense. A

professional political expert, Manafort was presumably well paid, like other American electoral experts hired abroad. But he seems to have urged Yanukovich to tilt toward the ill-fated European Union partnership agreement and away from Russia—as Yanukovich did—in order to win the votes of Ukrainians outside his constituency in southeastern regions. (Yanukovich, whom Putin loathed for this and other reasons, had fallen out of favor with the Kremlin until late 2013.)

4. A “dossier” purporting to show how the Kremlin could blackmail Trump was leaked to CNN and published by *BuzzFeed*. Compiled by a former British intelligence official in the opposition-research business, its 30-odd pages are a compilation of the innocent, the unverified, and the kind of trash for sale in Moscow and elsewhere. More recently, CNN exclaimed that its own intelligence leakers had “confirmed” some elements of the dossier, but thus far none that actually compromise Trump.

5. The crux of the allegations against Trump was, and remains, that Putin ordered the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and the dissemination of stolen e-mails through WikiLeaks in order to undermine the Clinton campaign and put Trump in the White House. A summary of these “facts” was presented in a declassified report released by the “intelligence community” and widely discussed in January. Though it quickly became axiomatic proof for Trump’s political and media enemies, almost nothing in the report is persuasive. About half are “assessments” based on surmised motivations, not factual evidence of an actual Kremlin operation on Trump’s behalf. The other half is standard whining about the Kremlin-funded television network RT, which is at worst an above-average “propaganda” outlet. Moreover, a number of American cyber-experts insist that Russian state hackers would have left no fingerprints, as US intelligence officials claim they had. Indeed, the group Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity believes that the DNC documents were not hacked but rather leaked by an insider. If so, this had nothing to do with Russia. (The CIA and the FBI were “highly confident” about the report’s findings, but the National Security Agency, which alone has the capacity to fully monitor e-mails, was only “moderately confident.”) Still more, at his final presidential press conference, Barack Obama referred to the DNC scandal as a leak and said he didn’t know WikiLeaks’ exact role in the scandal—this despite the allegations by his own intelligence agencies. Nor is it clear that Putin so favored the erratic Trump that he would have taken such a risk. Judging from debates in Kremlin-connected Russian newspapers, there was serious doubt as to which US candidate might be best—or least bad—for Russia.

6. Finally, there is the firing of Gen. Michael Flynn as Trump’s national-security adviser for having communicated with the Russian ambassador about the sanctions imposed by Obama just before he left the White House and Trump was inaugurated. So far as is actually known, Flynn did nothing unprecedented or incriminating. Communications, including meetings, between representatives of US presidents-elect and foreign capitals, particularly Moscow, have been “common practice” over the years, according to Jack Matlock, ambassador to Russia for Presidents Reagan and Bush; Matlock had previously arranged meetings in

Moscow for President-elect Carter's transition team. Moreover, Obama's own Russia adviser, Michael McFaul, told *The Washington Post* recently that he visited Moscow in 2008, even before that year's election, for talks with Russian officials. The *Post* implied that this was "appropriate contact." So, it seems, was Flynn's, though perhaps inept. Indeed, if Flynn's purpose was to persuade the Kremlin not to overreact to Obama's last-minute sanctions, which were accompanied by a highly provocative threat to launch a cyber-attack on Moscow, his urging was wise and in America's national interest. In fact, **it is not Putin who is threatening American democracy, but rather these Kremlin-baiting allegations against President Trump.** It is not Putin who is endangering US and international security, but rather the high-level political and intelligence enemies of détente. Similarly, it is not Putin who is degrading the US media with "fake news." Nor is it Putin who is subverting the American political process, but rather the US intelligence leakers who are at war against their own president.

President Eisenhower eventually stopped Joseph McCarthy. Who will stop the new McCarthyism before it spreads further into the "soul of democracy," so revered by liberals and progressives? Facts might do so. But in lieu of facts, there are only professional ethics, decency, and patriotism.

9:56 AM (10 minutes to me
ago)

Joyce Hale

1-9-17

What is the objective of focusing on Russia? It looks like Chris Hedges may have seen through it all.

Joyce

The Real Purpose of the U.S. Government's Report on Alleged Hacking by Russia

Posted on Jan 8, 2017

By [Chris Hedges](#)

http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_real_purpose_of_the_us_governments_report_on_alleged_hacking_by_russi

Some thoughts on “Russia’s Influence Campaign Targeting the 2016 US Presidential Election,” the newly released declassified report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

1. The primary purpose of the declassified report, which offers no evidence to support its assertions that Russia hacked the U.S. presidential election campaign, is to discredit Donald Trump. I am not saying there was no Russian hack of John Podesta’s emails. I am saying we have yet to see any tangible proof to back up the accusation. This charge—Sen. John McCain has likened the alleged effort by Russia to an act of war—is the first salvo in what will be a relentless campaign by the Republican and Democratic establishment, along with its corporatist allies and the mass media, to destroy the credibility of the president-elect and prepare the way for impeachment.

The allegations in the report, amplified in breathtaking pronouncements by a compliant corporate media that operates in a non-fact-based universe every bit as pernicious as that inhabited by Trump, are designed to make Trump look like Vladimir Putin’s useful idiot. An orchestrated and sustained campaign of innuendo and character assassination will be directed against Trump. When impeachment is finally proposed, Trump will have little public support and few allies and will have become a figure of open ridicule in the corporate media.

2. The second task of the report is to bolster the McCarthyist smear campaign against independent media, including Truthdig, as witting or unwitting agents of the Russian government. The demise of the English programming of Al-Jazeera and TeleSur, along with the collapse of the nation’s public broadcasting, designed to give a voice to those not beholden to corporate or party interests, leaves RT America and Amy Goodman’s Democracy Now! as the only two electronic outlets with a national reach that are willing to give a platform to critics of corporate power and imperialism such as Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, Ralph Nader, Medea Benjamin, Cornel West, Kshama Sawant, myself and others.

Seven pages of the report were dedicated to RT America, on which I have a show called “On Contact.” The report vastly inflated the cable network’s reach and influence. It also included a few glaring errors, including the statement that “RT introduced two new shows—‘Breaking the Set’ on 4 September and ‘Truthseeker’ on 2 November—both overwhelmingly focused on criticism of the US and Western governments as well as the promotion of radical discontent.” “Breaking the Set,” with Abby Martin, was taken off the air two years ago. It could hardly be tarred with costing Hillary Clinton the election.

The barely contained rage of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper at the recent Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on foreign cyber threats was visible when he spat out that RT was “promoting a particular point of view, disparaging our system, our alleged hypocrisy about human rights, et cetera.” His anger was a glimpse into how the establishment seethes with hatred for dissidents. Clapper has lied in the past. He perjured himself in March 2013 when, three months before the revelations of wholesale state surveillance leaked by Snowden, he assured Congress that the National Security Agency was not collecting “any type of data” on the American public. After the corporate state shuts down RT, it will go after Democracy Now! and the handful of progressive sites, including this one, that give these dissidents space. The goal is censorship.

3. The third task of the report is to justify the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization beyond Germany, a violation of the promise Ronald Reagan made to the Soviet Union’s Mikhail Gorbachev after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Expanding NATO in Eastern Europe opened up an arms market for the war industry. It made those businesses billions of dollars. New NATO members must buy Western arms that can be integrated into the NATO arsenal. These sales, which are bleeding the strained budgets of countries such as Poland, are predicated on potential hostilities with Russia. If Russia is not a threat, the arms sales plummet. War is a racket.

4. The final task of the report is to give the Democratic Party plausible cover for the catastrophic election defeat it suffered. Clinton initially **blamed FBI Director James Comey** for her loss before switching to the more easily demonized Putin. The charge of Russian interference essentially boils down to the absurd premise that perhaps hundreds of thousands of Clinton supporters suddenly decided to switch their votes to Trump when they read the leaked emails of Podesta. Either that or they tuned in to RT America and decided to vote for the Green Party.

The Democratic Party leadership cannot face, and certainly cannot publicly admit, that its callous betrayal of the working and middle class triggered a nationwide revolt that resulted in the election of Trump. It has been pounded since President Barack Obama took office, losing 68 seats in the House, 12 seats in the Senate and 10 governorships. It lost more than 1,000 elected positions between 2008 and 2012 nationwide. Since 2010, Republicans have replaced 900 Democratic state legislators. If this was a real party, the entire leadership would be sacked. But it is not a real party. It is the shell of a party propped up by corporate money and hyperventilating media.

The Democratic Party must maintain the fiction of liberalism just as the Republican Party must maintain the fiction of conservatism. These two parties, however, belong to one party—the corporate party. They will work in concert, as seen by the alliance between Republican leaders such as McCain and Democratic leaders such as Sen. Chuck Schumer, to get rid of Trump, silence all dissent, enrich the war industry and promote the farce they call democracy.

Welcome to our *annus horribilis*.

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END RUSSIA NEWSLETTER #5,

Dick Bennett

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