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FROM PUTIN & UKRAINE TO

TRUMP & RUSSAGATE

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Prologue

The Putin Specter—Who He Is Not

“Putin is an evil man, and he is intent on evil deeds.”

—Senator John McCain¹

“[Putin] was a KGB agent. By definition, he doesn't have a soul.”

“If this sounds familiar, it's what Hitler did back in the 1930s.”

—2016 Democratic Presidential Nominee Hillary Clinton^{2,3}

THE SPECTER OF AN EVIL-DOING VLADIMIR PUTIN HAS loomed over and undermined US thinking about Russia for at least a decade. Inescapably, it is therefore a theme that runs through this book. Henry Kissinger deserves credit for having warned, perhaps alone among prominent American political figures, against this badly distorted image of Russia's leader since 2000: “The demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy. It is an alibi for not having one.”⁴

But Kissinger was also wrong. Washington has made many policies strongly influenced by the demonizing of Putin—a personal vilification far exceeding any ever applied to Soviet Russia's latter-day Communist leaders. Those policies spread from growing complaints in the early 2000s to US-Russian proxy wars in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, and eventually even at home, in Russiagate allegations. Indeed, policy-makers adopted an earlier formulation by the late Senator John McCain as an integral part of a new and more dangerous Cold War: “Putin [is] an unreconstructed Russian imperialist and

War With Russia?

Stephen F. Conen

happened without his approval since this would indicate that he is not completely in charge.”

• Putin is not a Kremlin leader who “reveres Stalin” and whose “Russia is a gangster shadow of Stalin’s Soviet Union.”^{13,14} These assertions are so far-fetched and uninformed about Stalin’s terror-ridden regime, Putin, and Russia today, they barely warrant comment. Stalin’s Russia was often as close to unfreedom as imaginable. In today’s Russia, apart from varying political liberties, most citizens are freer to live, study, work, write, speak, and travel than they have ever been. (When vocational demonizers like David Kramer allege an “appalling human rights situation in Putin’s Russia,”¹⁵ they should be asked: compared to when in Russian history, or elsewhere in the world today?)

Putin clearly understands that millions of Russians have and often express pro-Stalin sentiments. Nonetheless, his role in these still-ongoing controversies over the despot’s historical reputation has been, in one unprecedented way, that of an anti-Stalinist leader. Briefly illustrated, if Putin reveres the memory of Stalin, why did his personal support finally make possible two memorials (the excellent State Museum of the History of the Gulag and the highly evocative “Wall of Grief”) to the tyrant’s millions of victims, both in central Moscow? The latter memorial monument was first proposed by then-Kremlin leader Nikita Khrushchev, in 1961. It was not built under any of his successors—until Putin, in 2017.

• Nor did Putin create post-Soviet Russia’s “kleptocratic economic system,” with its oligarchic and other widespread corruption. This too took shape under Yeltsin during the Kremlin’s shock-therapy “privatization” schemes of the 1990s, when the “swindlers and thieves” still denounced by today’s opposition actually emerged.

Putin has adopted a number of “anti-corruption” policies over the years. How successful they have been is the subject of legitimate debate. As are how much power he has had to rein in fully both Yeltsin’s oligarchs and his own, and how sincere he has been. But branding Putin “a kleptocrat”¹⁶ also lacks context and is little more than barely informed demonizing.

A recent scholarly book finds, for example, that while they may be “corrupt,” Putin “and the liberal technocratic economic team on which he relies have also skillfully managed Russia’s economic fortunes.”¹⁷ A former IMF director goes further, concluding that Putin’s current economic team does not “tolerate corruption” and that “Russia now ranks 35th out of 190 in the World Bank’s Doing Business ratings. It was at 124 in 2010.”¹⁸

Viewed in human terms, when Putin came to power in 2000, some 75

percent of Russians were living in poverty. Most had lost even modest legacies of the Soviet era—their life savings; medical and other social benefits; real wages; pensions; occupations; and for men life expectancy, which had fallen well below the age of 60. In only a few years, the “kleptocrat” Putin had mobilized enough wealth to undo and reverse those human catastrophes and put billions of dollars in rainy-day funds that buffered the nation in different hard times ahead. We judge this historic achievement as we might, but it is why many Russians still call Putin “Vladimir the Savior.”

• Which brings us to the most sinister allegation against him: Putin, trained as “a KGB thug,” regularly orders the killing of inconvenient journalists and personal enemies, like a “mafia state boss.” This should be the easiest demonizing axiom to dismiss because there is no actual evidence, or barely any logic, to support it. And yet, it is ubiquitous. *Times* editorial writers and columnists—and far from them alone—characterize Putin as a “thug” and his policies as “thuggery” so often—sometimes doubling down on “autocratic thug”¹⁹—that the practice may be specified in some internal manual. Little wonder so many politicians also routinely practice it, as did US Senator Ben Sasse: “We should tell the American people and tell the world that we know that Vladimir Putin is a thug. He’s a former KGB agent who’s a murderer.”²⁰

Few, if any, modern-day world leaders have been so slurred, or so regularly. Nor does Sasse actually “know” any of this. He and the others imbibe it from reams of influential media accounts that fully indict Putin while burying a nullifying “but” regarding actual evidence. Thus another *Times* columnist: “I realize that this evidence is only circumstantial and well short of proof. But it’s one of many suspicious patterns.”²¹ This, too, is a journalistic “pattern” when Putin is involved.

Leaving aside other world leaders with minor or major previous careers in intelligences services, Putin’s years as a KGB intelligence officer in then-East Germany were clearly formative. Many years later, at age 67, he still spoke of them with pride. Whatever else that experience contributed, it made Putin a Europeanized Russian, a fluent German speaker, and a political leader with a remarkable, demonstrated capacity for retaining and coolly analyzing a very wide range of information. (Read or watch a few of his long interviews.) Not a bad leadership trait in very fraught times.

• Moreover, no serious biographer would treat only one period in a subject’s long public career as definitive, as Putin demonizers do. Why not instead the period after he left the KGB in 1991, when he served as deputy to the mayor of St. Petersburg, then considered one of the two or three most democratic leaders in Russia? Or the years immediately following in Moscow, where he

saw first-hand the full extent of Yeltsin-era corruption? Or his subsequent years, while still relatively young, as president?

As for being a "murderer" of journalists and other "enemies," the list has grown to scores of Russians who died, at home or abroad, by foul or natural causes—all reflexively attributed to Putin. Our hallowed tradition puts the burden of proof on the accusers. Putin's accusers have produced none, only assumptions, innuendoes, and mistranslated statements by Putin about the fate of "traitors." The two cases that firmly established this defamatory practice were those of the investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was shot to death in Moscow in 2006; and Alexander Litvinenko, a shadowy one-time KGB defector with ties to aggrieved Yeltsin-era oligarchs, who died of radiation poisoning in London, also in 2006.

Not a shred of actual proof points to Putin in either case. The editor of Politkovskaya's paper, the devoutly independent *Novaya Gazeta*, still believes her assassination was ordered by Chechen officials, whose human-rights abuses she was investigating. Regarding Litvinenko, despite frenzied media claims and a kangaroo-like "hearing" suggesting that Putin was "probably" responsible, there is still no conclusive proof even as to whether Litvinenko's poisoning was intentional or accidental. The same paucity of evidence applies to many subsequent cases, notably the shooting of the opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, "in [distant] view of the Kremlin," in 2015.

About Russian journalists, there is, however, a significant overlooked statistic. According to the American Committee to Protect Journalists, as of 2012, 77 had been murdered—41 during the Yeltsin years, 36 under Putin. By 2018, the total was 82—41 under Yeltsin, the same under Putin. This strongly suggests that the still—partially corrupt post-Soviet economic system, not Yeltsin or Putin personally, led to the killing of so many journalists after 1991, most of them investigative reporters. The former wife of one journalist thought to have been poisoned concludes as much: "Many Western analysts place the responsibility for these crimes on Putin. But the cause is more likely the system of mutual responsibility and the culture of impunity that began to form before Putin, in the late 1990s."²²

• More recently, there is yet another allegation: Putin is a fascist and white supremacist. The accusation is made mostly, it seems, by people wishing to deflect attention from the role being played by neo-Nazis in US-backed Ukraine. Putin no doubt regards it as a blood slur, and even on the surface it is, to be exceedingly charitable, entirely uninformed. How else to explain Senator Ron Wyden's solemn warnings, at a hearing on November 1, 2017, about "the current fascist leadership of Russia"? A young

scholar recently dismantled a senior Yale professor's nearly inexplicable pro-pounding of this thesis.²³ My own approach is compatible, though different.

Whatever Putin's failings, the fascist allegation is absurd. Nothing in his statements over nearly 20 years in power are akin to fascism, whose core belief is a cult of blood based on the asserted superiority of one ethnicity over all others. As head of a vast multi-ethnic state—embracing scores of diverse groups with a broad range of skin colors—such utterances or related acts by Putin would be inconceivable, if not political suicide. This is why he endlessly appeals for harmony in "our entire multi-ethnic nation" with its "multi-ethnic culture," as he did once again in his re-inauguration speech in 2018.²⁴

Russia has, of course, fascist-white supremacist thinkers and activists, though many have been imprisoned. But a mass fascist movement is scarcely feasible in a country where so many millions died in the war against Nazi Germany, a war that directly affected Putin and clearly left a formative mark on him. Though he was born after the war, his mother and father barely survived near-fatal wounds and disease, his older brother died in the long German siege of Leningrad, and several of his uncles perished. Only people who never endured such an experience, or are unable to imagine it, can conjure up a fascist Putin.

There is another, easily understood, indicative fact. Not a trace of anti-Semitism is evident in Putin. Little noted here but widely reported both in Russia and in Israel, life for Russian Jews is better under Putin than it has ever been in that country's long history.²⁵

• Finally, at least for now, there is the ramifying demonization allegation that, as a foreign-policy leader, Putin has been exceedingly "aggressive" abroad and his behavior has been the sole cause of the new cold war.²⁶ At best, this is an "in-the-eye-of-the-beholder" assertion, and half-blind. At worst, it justifies what even a German foreign minister characterized as the West's "war-mongering" against Russia.²⁷

In the three cases widely given as examples of Putin's "aggression," the evidence, long cited by myself and others, points to US-led instigations, primarily in the process of expanding the NATO military alliance since the late 1990s from Germany to Russia's borders today. The proxy US-Russian war in Georgia in 2008 was initiated by the US-backed president of that country, who had been encouraged to aspire to NATO membership. The 2014 crisis and subsequent proxy war in Ukraine resulted from the longstanding effort to bring that country, despite large regions' shared civilization with Russia, into NATO. And Putin's 2015 military intervention in Syria was

done on a valid premise: either it would be Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus or the terrorist Islamic State—and on President Barack Obama's refusal to join Russia in an anti-ISIS alliance. As a result of this history, Putin is often seen in Russia as a belatedly reactive leader abroad, as a not sufficiently "aggressive" one.

Embedded in the "aggressive Putin" axiom are two others. One is that Putin is a neo-Soviet leader who seeks to restore the Soviet Union at the expense of Russia's neighbors. He is obsessively misquoted as having said, in 2005, "The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century," apparently ranking it above two World Wars. What he actually said was "a major geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century," as it was for most Russians.

Though often critical of the Soviet system and its two formative leaders, Lenin and Stalin, Putin, like most of his generation, naturally remains in part a Soviet person. But what he said in 2010 reflects his real perspective and that of very many other Russians: "Anyone who does not regret the break-up of the Soviet Union has no heart. Anyone who wants its rebirth in its previous form has no head."^{28,29}

The other fallacious sub-axiom is that Putin has always been "anti-Western," specifically "anti-American," has "always viewed the United States" with "smoldering suspicions."—so much that eventually he set into motion a "Plot Against America."^{30,31} A simple reading of his years in power tells us otherwise. A Westernized Russian, Putin came to the presidency in 2000 in the still prevailing tradition of Gorbachev and Yeltsin—in hope of a "strategic friendship and partnership" with the United States.

How else to explain Putin's abundant assistant to US forces fighting in Afghanistan after 9/11 and continued facilitation of supplying American and NATO troops there? Or his backing of harsh sanctions against Iran's nuclear ambitions and refusal to sell Tehran a highly effective air-defense system? Or the information his intelligence services shared with Washington that if heeded could have prevented the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2012?

Or, until he finally concluded that Russia would never be treated as an equal and that NATO had encroached too close, Putin was a full partner in the US-European clubs of major world leaders? Indeed, as late as May 2018, contrary to Russiagate allegations, he still hoped, as he had from the beginning, to rebuild Russia partly through economic partnerships with the West: "To attract capital from friendly companies and countries, we need good relations with Europe and with the whole world, including the United States."³²

Given all that has happened during the past nearly two decades—particularly what Putin and other Russian leaders perceive to have happened—it would be remarkable if his views of the West, especially America, had not changed. As he remarked in 2018, "We all change."³³ A few years earlier, Putin remarkably admitted that initially he had "illusions" about foreign policy, without specifying which. Perhaps he meant this, spoken at the end of 2017: "Our most serious mistake in relations with the West is that we trusted you too much. And your mistake is that you took that trust as weakness and abused it."³⁴

If my refutation of the axioms of Putin demonization is valid, where does that leave us? Certainly, not with an apologia for Putin, but with the question, "Who is Putin?" Russians like to say, "let history judge," but given the perils of the new Cold War, we cannot wait. We can begin at least with a few historical truths. In 2000, a young and little-experienced man became the leader of a vast state that had precipitously disintegrated, or "collapsed," twice in the twentieth century—in 1917 and again in 1991—with disastrous consequences for its people. And in both instances it had lost its "sovereignty" and thus its security in fundamental ways.

These have been recurring themes in Putin's words and deeds. They are where to begin an understanding. No one can doubt that he is already the most consequential "statesman" of the twenty-first century, though the word is rarely, if ever, applied to him in the United States. And what does "consequential" mean? Even without the pseudo-minuses spelled out above, a balanced evaluation will include valid ones.

For example, at home, was it necessary to so strengthen and expand the Kremlin's "vertical" throughout the rest of the country in order to pull Russia back together? Should not the historic experiment with democracy have been given equal priority? Abroad, were there alternatives to annexing Crimea, even given the perceived threats? And did Putin's leadership really do nothing to reawaken fears in small East European countries victimized for centuries by Russia? These are only a few questions that might yield minuses alongside Putin's deserved pluses.

Whatever the approach, whoever undertakes a balanced evaluation should do so, to paraphrase Spinoza, not in order to demonize, not to mock, not to hate, but to understand.

Patriotic Heresy vs. Cold War

August 27, 2014

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inside the Beltway. In my long lifetime, I do not recall such a failure of American democratic discourse in any comparable time of crisis.

I want to speak generally about this dire situation—almost certainly a fateful turning point in world affairs—as a participant in what little mainstream media debate has been permitted but also as a longtime scholarly historian of Russia and of US-Russian relations and informed observer who believes there is still a way out of this terrible crisis.

Regarding my episodic participation in the very limited mainstream media discussion, I will speak in a more personal way than I usually do. From the outset, I saw my role as twofold.

Recalling the American adage "There are two sides to every story," I sought to explain Moscow's view of the Ukrainian crisis, which is almost entirely missing in US mainstream coverage. What, for example, did Putin mean when he said Western policy-makers were "trying to drive us into some kind of corner," "have lied to us many times" and "have crossed the line" in Ukraine? Second, having argued since the 1990s, in my books and *Nation* articles, that Washington's bipartisan Russia policies could lead to a new Cold War and to just such a crisis, I wanted to bring my longstanding analysis to bear on today's confrontation over Ukraine.

As a result, I have been repeatedly assailed—even in purportedly liberal publications—as Putin's No. 1 American "apologist," "useful idiot," "dupe," "best friend," and, perhaps a new low in immature invective, "toady." I expected to be criticized, as I was during nearly twenty years as a CBS News commentator, but not in such personal and scurrilous ways. (Something has changed in our political culture, perhaps related to the Internet, but I think more generally.)

Until now, I have not replied to any of these defamatory attacks. I do so today because I now think they are directed at many of us in this room and indeed at anyone critical of Washington's Russia policies, not just me. Re-reading the attacks, I have come to the following conclusions:

None of these character assassins present any factual refutations of anything I have written or said. They indulge instead in ad hominem slurs based on distortions and on the general premise that any American who seeks to understand Moscow's perspectives is a "Putin apologist" and thus unpatriotic. Such a premise only abets the possibility of war.

Some of these writers, or people who stand behind them, are longtime proponents of the twenty-year US policies that have led to the Ukrainian crisis. By defaming us, they seek to obscure their complicity in the unfolding

disaster and their unwillingness to rethink it. Failure to rethink dooms us to the worst outcome.

Equally important, these kinds of neo-McCarthyites are trying to stifle democratic debate by stigmatizing us in ways that make our views unwellcome on mainstream television and radio broadcasts and op-ed pages—and to policy-makers. They are largely succeeding.

Let us be clear. This means that we, not the people on the left and the right who defame us, are the true American democrats and the real patriots of US national security. We do not seek to ostracize or silence the new cold warriors, but to engage them in public debate. And we, not they, understand that current US policy may have catastrophic consequences for international and American security.

The perils and costs of another prolonged Cold War will afflict our children and grandchildren. If nothing else, this reckless policy, couched even at high levels in a ritualistic demonizing of Putin, is already costing Washington an essential partner in the Kremlin in vital areas of US security—from Iran, Syria, and Afghanistan to efforts to counter nuclear proliferation and international terrorism.

But we ourselves are partially to blame for the one-sided, or nonexistent, public debate. As I said, we are not organized. Too often, we do not publicly defend each other. . . . And often we do not speak boldly enough. (We should not worry, for example, as do too many silent critics, if our arguments sometimes coincide with what Moscow is saying. Doing so results in self-censorship.)

Some people who privately share our concerns—in Congress, the media, universities, and think tanks—do not speak out at all. For whatever reason—concern about being stigmatized, about their career, personal disposition—they are silent. But in our democracy, where the cost of dissent is relatively low, silence is no longer a patriotic option.

We should, however, exempt young people from this imperative. They have more to lose. A few have sought my guidance, and I always advise, "Even petty penalties for dissent in regard to Russia could adversely affect your career. At this stage of life, your first obligation is to your family and thus to your future prospects. Your time to fight lies ahead." Not all of them heed my advice.

Finally, in connection with our struggle for a wiser American policy, I have come to another conclusion. Most of us were taught that moderation in thought and speech is always the best principle. But in a fateful crisis such

as the one now confronting us, moderation for its own sake is no virtue. It becomes conformism, and conformism becomes complicity.

I recall this issue being discussed long ago in a very different context—by Soviet-era dissidents when I lived among them in Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s. . . . A few people have called us “American dissidents,” but the analogy is imperfect: my Soviet friends had far fewer possibilities for dissent than we have and risked much worse consequences.

Nonetheless, the analogy is instructive. Soviet dissidents were protesting an entrenched orthodoxy of dogmas, vested interests, and ossified policy-making, which is why they were denounced as heretics by Soviet authorities and media. Since the 1990s, beginning with the Clinton administration, exceedingly unwise notions about post-Soviet Russia and the political correctness of US policy have congealed into a bipartisan American orthodoxy. The natural, historical response to orthodoxy is heresy. So let us be patriotic heretics, regardless of personal consequences, in the hope that many others will join us, as has often happened in history.

I turn now, in my capacity as a historian, to that orthodoxy. The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously said: “Everyone is entitled to his own opinions, but not to his own facts.” The US establishment’s new Cold War orthodoxy rests almost entirely on fallacious opinions. Five of these fallacies are particularly important today.

Fallacy No. 1: Ever since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, Washington has treated post-Communist Russia generously as a desired friend and partner, making every effort to help it become a democratic, prosperous member of the Western system of international security. Unwilling or unable, Russia rejected this American altruism, emphatically under Putin.

Fact: Beginning in the 1990s with the Clinton administration, every American president and Congress has treated post-Soviet Russia as a defeated nation with inferior legitimate rights at home and abroad. This triumphalist, winner-take-all approach has been spearheaded by the expansion of NATO—accompanied by non-reciprocal negotiations and now missile defensè—into Russia’s traditional zones of national security, while excluding Moscow from Europe’s security system. Early on, Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, Georgia were Washington’s “great prize.”

Fallacy No. 2: There exists a “Ukrainian people” who yearn to escape centuries of Russian influence and join the West.

Fact: Ukraine is a country long divided by ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, economic, and political differences—particularly its western and

eastern regions, but not only those. When the current crisis began in late 2013, Ukraine was one state, but it was not a single people or a united nation. Some of these divisions were made worse after 1991 by a corrupt elite, but most of them had developed over centuries.

Fallacy No. 3: In November 2013, the European Union, backed by Washington, offered Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich a benign association with European democracy and prosperity. Yanukovich was prepared to sign the agreement, but Putin bullied and bribed him into rejecting it. Thus began Kiev’s Maidan protests and all that has since followed.

Fact: The EU proposal was a reckless provocation compelling the democratically elected president of a deeply divided country to choose between Russia and the West. So too was the EU’s rejection of Putin’s counterproposal for a Russian-European-American plan to save Ukraine from financial collapse. On its own, the EU proposal was not economically feasible. Offering little financial assistance, it required the Ukrainian government to enact harsh austerity measures and would have sharply curtailed its longstanding and essential economic relations with Russia. Nor was the EU proposal entirely benign. It included protocols requiring Ukraine to adhere to Europe’s “military and security” policies—which meant in effect, without mentioning the alliance, NATO. Again, it was not Putin’s alleged “aggression” that initiated today’s crisis but instead a kind of velvet aggression by Brussels and Washington to bring all of Ukraine into the West, including (in fine print) into NATO.

Fallacy No. 4: Today’s civil war in Ukraine was caused by Putin’s aggressive response to the peaceful Maidan protests against Yanukovich’s decision.

Fact: In February 2014, the radicalized Maidan protests, strongly influenced by extreme nationalist and even semi-fascist street forces, turned violent. Hoping for a peaceful resolution, European foreign ministers brokered a compromise between Maidan’s parliamentary representatives and Yanukovich. It would have left him as president, with less power, of a coalition reconciliation government until early elections in December. Within hours, violent street fighters aborted the agreement. Europe’s leaders and Washington did not defend their own diplomatic accord. Yanukovich fled to Russia. Minority parliamentary parties representing Maidan and, predominantly, western Ukraine—among them Svoboda, an ultranationalist movement previously anathematized by the European Parliament as incompatible with European values—formed a new government. Washington and Brussels endorsed the coup and have supported the outcome ever since. Everything that followed, from Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the spread of rebellion

in southeastern Ukraine to the civil war and Kiev's "anti-terrorist operation," was triggered by the February coup. Putin's actions were mostly reactive.

Fallacy No. 5: The only way out of the crisis is for Putin to end his "aggression" and call off his agents in southeastern Ukraine.

Fact: The underlying causes of the crisis are Ukraine's own internal divisions, not primarily Putin's actions. The essential factor escalating the crisis has been Kiev's "anti-terrorist" military campaign against its own citizens, mainly in Luhansk and Donetsk. Putin influences and no doubt aids the Donbass "self-defenders." Considering the pressure on him in Moscow, he is likely to continue to do so, perhaps even more directly, but he does not fully control them. If Kiev's assault ends, Putin probably can compel the rebels to negotiate. But only the Obama administration can compel Kiev to stop, and it has not done so.

In short, twenty years of US policy have led to this fateful American-Russian confrontation. Putin may have contributed to it along the way, but his role during his fourteen years in power has been almost entirely reactive—a complaint frequently directed against him by more headline forces in Moscow.

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In politics as in history, there are always alternatives. The Ukrainian crisis could have at least three different outcomes. The civil war escalates and widens, drawing in Russian and possibly NATO military forces. This would be the worst outcome: a kind of latter-day Cuban Missile Crisis. In the second outcome, today's de facto partitioning of Ukraine becomes institutionalized in the form of two Ukrainian states—one allied with the West, the other with Russia. This would not be the best outcome, but neither would it be the worst.

The best outcome would be the preservation of a united Ukraine. It will require good-faith negotiations between representatives of all of Ukraine's regions, including leaders of the rebellious southeast, probably under the auspices of Washington, Moscow, the European Union, and eventually the UN. Putin and his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, have proposed this for months. Ukraine's tragedy continues to grow. Thousands of innocent people have already been killed or wounded.

Alas, there is no wise leadership in Washington. President Barack Obama has vanished as a statesman in the Ukrainian crisis. Secretary of State John Kerry speaks publicly more like a secretary of war than as our top diplomat.

The Senate is preparing even more bellicose legislation. The establishment media rely uncritically on Kiev's propaganda and cheerlead for its policies. American television rarely, if ever, shows Kiev's military assaults on Luhansk, Donetsk, or other Ukrainian rebel cities, thereby arousing no public qualms or opposition.

And so we patriotic heretics remain mostly alone and often defamed. The most encouraging perspective I can offer is to remind you that positive change in history frequently begins as heresy. Or to quote the personal testimony of Mikhail Gorbachev, who said of his struggle for change in the late 1980s inside the even more rigidly orthodox Soviet nomenklatura: "Everything new in philosophy begins as heresy and in politics as the opinion of a minority." As for patriotism, here is Woodrow Wilson: "The most patriotic man is sometimes the man who goes in the direction he thinks right even when he sees half of the world against him."

Distorting Russia

February 12, 2014

THE DEGRADATION OF MAINSTREAM AMERICAN PRESS COVERAGE OF RUSSIA, a country still vital to US national security, has been under way for many years. If the recent tsunami of shamefully unprofessional and politically inflammatory articles in leading newspapers and magazines—most recently about the Sochi Olympics, Ukraine, and, as usual, Russian President Vladimir Putin—is an indication, this media malpractice is now pervasive and the new norm.

There are notable exceptions, but a general pattern has developed. Even in the venerable *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, news reports, editorials, and commentaries no longer adhere rigorously to traditional journalistic standards, often failing to provide essential facts and context; make a clear distinction between reporting and analysis; require at least two different

a critical point. The allegations include not only the Panama Papers investigation of Kremlin offshore investments but also apartments purchased for Putin's daughters, his "suspected" involvement in the Washington death of a former top Russian official, and even a rumored romance between the Russian president and Rupert Murdoch's ex-wife.

Whether or not this is an organized "information war" is unclear, but similar anti-Kremlin "news" appeared regularly during the preceding 40-year Cold War when relations seemed headed toward détente. This is such a moment in the new Cold War, as negotiations between Secretary of State Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov suddenly seem promising, especially in regard to the Syrian ceasefire and possibly even Ukraine.

Why, then, in the aftermath of the Syrian-Russian victory over the Islamic State at Palmyra and elsewhere, are "moderate oppositionists" backed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey violating the ceasefire agreement by attacking Syrian forces? And why the sudden spate of news reports, apparently inspired by the Obama administration, about Putin's alleged personal "corruption"? They can only be intended to present him as an unfit US ally in Syria or anywhere else.

But the Panama Papers did more political damage to Petro Poroshenko, president of the Washington-backed government in Kiev. They revealed that he had personally established offshore accounts and, still worse, while his Ukrainian army was suffering a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Russian-backed rebels in Eastern Ukraine in August 2014. (Unlike Putin, Poroshenko and his offshore accounts were named in the investigation.)

With the Kiev government already in deep political and economic crisis, this is a further blow to Poroshenko's standing with the Ukrainian elite and people. There are already calls for his impeachment. How will the Obama administration deal with this latest crisis of its "Ukrainian project," as it is sometimes derisively termed, which has all but wrecked Washington's relations with Moscow?

Among the current American presidential candidates, only Donald Trump continues to say anything meaningful and critical about US bipartisan foreign policy. In effect, he has asked five fundamental (and dissenting) questions. Should the United States always be the world's leader and policeman? What is NATO's proper mission today, 25 years after the end of the Soviet Union and when international terrorism is the main threat to the West? Why does Washington repeatedly pursue a policy of regime change—in Iraq, Libya, Ukraine, and now in Damascus, even though it always ends in "disaster"? Why is the United States treating Putin's Russia as an enemy and

not as a security partner? And should US nuclear-weapons doctrine adopt a no-first use pledge?

Trump's foreign policy questions are fundamental and urgent. Instead of engaging them, his opponents (including President Obama) and the mainstream media dismiss them as ignorant and dangerous. Some of his outraged critics are even branding him "the Kremlin's Candidate"—thereby anathematizing alternative views and continuing to shut off the debate our country so urgently needs.

The Crisis of the US "Ukrainian Project"

April 13

UKRAINE REMAINS THE POLITICAL EPICENTER of a new Cold War that prevents Washington and Moscow from cooperating on issues of vital national security, most recently mounting threats of terrorism, potentially nuclear terrorism, in Europe and, soon no doubt, elsewhere.

Petro Poroshenko, president of the US-backed Kiev government, has suffered a recent succession of political blows, including right-wing and "liberal" threats to overthrow him; an inability to appoint a new prime minister; a Dutch referendum vote against giving his government the European Union partnership he wants; the Panama Papers revelations about his personal offshore accounts; and more. The US political-media establishment blames Poroshenko's problems on Ukraine's rampant financial corruption and on the "aggression" of Russian President Putin, but the underlying cause is the real political history of Poroshenko's "Maidan Revolution" regime.

As the second anniversary of Ukraine's civil war (and US-Russian proxy war) approaches, we need to recall some of the disgraceful episodes of the proclaimed "Revolution of Dignity." That history includes the following episodes:

- The violent overthrow of Ukraine's constitutionally elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, in February 2014.
- Kiev's refusal to seriously investigate the "Maidan snipers," whose

killings precipitated Yanukovich's ouster, assassins who now seem to have been not his agents, as initially alleged, but those of right-wing Maidan forces.

- The new government's similar refusal to prosecute extreme nationalists behind the subsequent massacre of pro-Russian protesters in Odessa shortly later in 2014.
- And the new Maidan government's unwillingness to negotiate with suddenly disenfranchised regions of Eastern Ukraine, which had largely voted for Yanukovich, and instead to launch an "anti-terrorist" military assault on them.
- Even Poroshenko's subsequent election as president was questionably democratic, opposition regions and parties having been effectively banned.

All this was done, and not done, officially in the name of "European values" and in order to "join Europe," and with the full support of the West, particularly the Obama administration. Two years later, the Ukrainian civil war has taken nearly 10,000 lives, created perhaps 2 million refugees, empowered armed quasi-fascist forces that threaten to overthrow Poroshenko, and left the country in near economic and social ruin.

The Dutch referendum was not the first sign that the European Union is wearying of the disaster it helped to create. Two of its top officials had already stated that Kiev actually had no chance of joining the European Union for "20 to 25 years." More and more Europeans are asking why their leaders forced Kiev in 2013 to choose between the EU and its traditional trading partner, Russia, instead of embracing Putin's proposal for a three-way economic arrangement that would have included Russia.

In Cold-War Washington and its media, the question as to why the Obama administration also imposed the choice on Ukraine is not even raised. There is only more blaming of "Putin's Russia" for a tragedy that continues to unfold. For a truer understanding, look back to its origins.

Is War With Russia Possible?

May 4

DURING THE PAST TWO WEEKS, THE Obama administration appears to have been undermining cooperation with Moscow on three new Cold War fronts.

It has refused to accept President Putin's compelling argument that the Syrian army and its allies are the only "boots on the ground" fighting the Islamic State effectively, currently around the pivotal city of Aleppo. Instead, Washington and its compliant media are condemning the Syrian-Russian military campaign against "moderate" anti-Assad fighters in the area, many of them actually also jihadists. At risk are the Geneva peace negotiations brokered by Secretary of State Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov.

Regarding the confrontation over Ukraine, where Kiev's political and economic crisis grows ever worse, the best hope for ending that civil and proxy war, the Minsk Accords, was virtually sabotaged at the UN, where US Ambassador Samantha Power claimed the accords require Russia returning Crimea to Ukraine. In fact, Crimea is not even mentioned in the Minsk agreement.

And in Europe, where opinion mounts favoring an end to the economic sanctions against Russia—as evidenced by the Dutch referendum against admitting Ukraine to the European Union and by the French Parliament's vote in favor of ending the sanctions—the Obama administration (not only Ambassador Power but President Obama himself) is lobbying hard against such a step when the issue comes up for a vote this summer.

Meanwhile, US-led NATO continues to increase its land, sea, and air build-up on or near Russia's borders. Not surprisingly, Moscow responds by sending its planes to inspect a US warship sailing not far from Russia's military-naval base at Kaliningrad. Preposterously, having for two decades steadily moved NATO's military presence from Berlin to Russia's borders, and now escalating it, Washington and Brussels accuse Moscow of "provocations against NATO." But who is "provoking"—"aggressing" against—whom? The NATO buildup can only stir in Russians memories of the Nazi

German invasion in 1941, the last time such hostile military forces mobilized on the country's frontier. Some 27.5 million Soviet citizens died in the aftermath.

Though not reported in the US media, an influential faction in Kremlin politics has long insisted, mostly but not always behind closed doors, that the US-led West is preparing an actual hot war against Russia, and that Putin has not prepared the country adequately at home or abroad. During the past two weeks, this conflict over policy has erupted in public with three prominent members of the Russian elite charging, sometimes implicitly but also explicitly, that Putin has supported his "fifth column" government headed by Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev. Critics are not seeking to remove Putin; there is no alternative to him and his public approval ratings, exceeding 80 percent, are too high.

But they do want the Medvedev government replaced and their own policies adopted. Those policies include a Soviet-style mobilization of the economy for war and more proactive military policies abroad, especially in Ukraine. In this context, we should ask whether US and NATO policy-makers are sleepwalking toward war with Russia or whether they actively seek it.

Stalin Resurgent, Again

June 1

IN ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF UNINFORMED COVERAGE of Russia, American media are misrepresenting the current upsurge of pro-Stalin sentiments as unique to the Putin era. In public opinion surveys, nearly 60 percent of Russians asked now view the despot as a positive figure in their country's history.

Having studied and written about the Stalin era and its legacy for many decades, most recently in my book *The Victims Return*, I have often explained

that Russia has been deeply divided over Stalin's historical role ever since his death in 1953, 63 years ago.

Looking back, Russians see two towering mountains, each informed by contested history. On one side, a mountain of Stalin's achievements in the form of industrialization and modernization in the 1930s, however draconian, that prepared the country, they insist, for the great victory over Nazi Germany in 1941-1945. And on the other, a mountain of human victims resulting from Stalin's brutal forced collectivization of the peasantry and Great Terror with its Gulag of torture prisons, mass executions, and often murderous forced labor camps, both of which killed millions of people.

Russian and Western historians, with access since the 1990s to long closed archives, are still trying to strike a scholarly balance, but for ordinary Russians the balance is more directly affected by their perceptions of their own well-being at home and of Russia's national security. Positive views of Stalin do not mean they want a new Stalin in the Kremlin or a recapitulation of Stalinism, but that the despot is for many a historical, and still relevant, symbol of a strong state, law and order, and national security.

These conflicts over Stalin's reputation began publicly long ago, in the 1950s under Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who assailed the personal cult created by Stalin. They continued under Leonid Brezhnev when the disputes were muffled by tightened censorship. They burst fully into the open during Gorbachev's attempted anti-Stalinist reformation known as glasnost and perestroika in the late 1980s and during the Yeltsin 1990s, when economic and social hard times afflicted most Russian citizens and caused Stalin's popular ratings to surge again. And, of course, they continue under Putin.

There are three American media misrepresentations regarding the most recent resurgence of pro-Stalin sentiments. Under Putin, the Stalinist past is not again being censored. Anti-Stalinist historians, journalists, filmmakers, TV producers, and others continue to present their work to the public. Today, the horrors of the Stalin era are widely known in Russia. Second, nothing remotely akin to historical Stalinism is present or unfolding in Russia today, contrary to assertions by several leading US newspapers.

And third, Putin, who has had to try politically to straddle and unite profoundly conflicting eras in Russian history—Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet—is not himself, in words or deeds, a Stalinist. To the contrary, due to his personal support there is now in Moscow a large, modern State Museum of the History of the Gulag and currently under construction a national monument memorializing Stalin's victims, first called for by Khrushchev in 1961,

especially in a presidential electoral year. The mainstream media has all but banned it with neo-McCarthyite allegations against Trump. Will the mainstream media now play their obligatory role or continue to promote the new Cold War?

Who's Making US Foreign Policy?

September 21

THE PRECEDING 40-YEAR COLD WAR WITNESSED many instances of high-level attempts to sabotage détente policies of US and Soviet leaders. It is happening again in the new Cold War, as evidenced when American war planes unexpectedly attacked Syrian Army forces.

The attack blatantly violated preconditions of the Obama-Putin plan for a US-Russian alliance against terrorist forces in Syria. Considering that US military intelligence knew the area very well and that the Department of Defense, headed by Ashton Carter, had openly expressed opposition to the Obama-Putin plan, the attack was almost certainly not "accidental," as DOD claims and as American media similarly reports.

If the attack was intentional, we are reminded of the power of the American war party, which is based not only in DOD but in segments of the intelligence agencies, State Department, Congress, and in the mainstream media, notably the *Washington Post*. Judging by Ambassador Samantha Power's tirade against Russia at the UN, not even Obama's own team fully supports his overtures to Moscow, undertaken in part perhaps to enhance his desultory foreign policy legacy.

Why is the war party so adamantly opposed to any cooperation with Russia anywhere in the world when it is manifestly in US interests, as in Syria? Several considerations play a role. Among them, only Russian President Putin, of major foreign leaders, has politically opposed the neocon/liberal

interventionist aspiration for a US-dominated "world order." Hence the incessant demonizing of Putin.

Still more, Russia's return as an international great power, 25 years after the end of the Soviet Union, contradicts and offends the ideological premises of this aspiration. Another but little-noted example is Moscow's recent plan to mediate the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a diplomatic initiative based on increasingly warm relations between Putin's government and Israel. Any cooperation with Moscow would therefore validate the "resurgent Russia" phenomenon so resented by the American war party.

One way American cold warriors challenge Russia's role in world affairs today is to denigrate its elections, as though they are mere replicas of Soviet-era charades. Several little-noted results of the September Russian parliamentary (Duma) elections are therefore worth emphasizing.

The elections were relatively "free and fair." (As everywhere, such judgments should be in the context of a country's own history, not our own.) This said while understanding that going back to the "democratic" Yeltsin years, the Kremlin has regularly redistributed some 5 to 10 percent of the votes to its own party or to other parties it wishes to play a minority role in the Duma.

This time those votes seem to have been taken from the only real nationwide opposition party, the Communist Party, which probably received closer to 20 percent of the votes than the just over 13 percent registered, and given to the Kremlin party and to a minority party. (The latter, unlike the Communists, habitually votes for the Kremlin's economic and social legislation.) Contrary to most preelection polling, the Kremlin party got 54 percent, a "constitutional majority," as it is called, suggesting that the Putin leadership may be planning major policy changes at home.

One other result should be emphasized. The several "liberal," pro-Western parties, without any help or harm by the Kremlin, garnered a total of barely 4 percent of the vote. This may be the most authentic result of the election: there is no longer any electoral base for such politics in Russia.

Most American commentators blame the outcome on Putin's repression, but a much larger factor has been US Cold War policies, which are deeply resented by a large majority of Russians. Indeed, a number of independent Russian commentators concluded that the electoral results were a reaffirmation of popular support for Putin and against US-led assaults on his leadership and reputation.

Slouching Toward War?

October 6

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION HAS TERMINATED MONTHS-LONG negotiations with Moscow for a joint US-Russian campaign against jihadist terrorist forces in Syria. Cooperation in Syria would have been the first major episode of détente in the new Cold War, indeed the first US-Russian military alliance since World War II. Its spirit might have spread to the dangerous conflicts in Ukraine and on Russia's border with Eastern Europe, where NATO continues to build up its forces.

The Syrian agreement was sabotaged not by Russia, as is alleged in Washington and by the mainstream media, but by American enemies of détente, first and foremost in the Department of Defense. DOD's opposition was so intense that one of its spokesmen told the press it might disobey an Obama presidential order to share intelligence with Moscow, as called for by the agreement.

It was a flagrant threat to disregard the US constitution. A *New York Times* editorial not only failed to protest the threat but appeared to endorse it. Other major media seemed not even to notice the possibility of a constitutional crisis, another indication of how badly the new Cold War, and the demonization of Russian President Putin, has degraded the US political-media establishment.

The consequences of thwarted diplomacy in Syria are already evident. American politicians and media are calling for military action against Russian-Syrian forces, in particular, imposition of a "no-fly zone," which would almost certainly lead to war with Russia. Others call for more economic sanctions against Russia, perhaps to ward off growing West European attitudes favoring an end to existing sanctions.

In any event, developments in Syria have now deepened the new Cold War in words and deeds. This is the case in Moscow as well. Putin, who has long pursued negotiations with the West over the objections of his own hardliners, now seems resolved to destroy the jihadist forces encamped in Aleppo without the American partner he had hoped for. Meanwhile, talk of war also fills Russian media, and the Putin government has just begun a

Washington Warmongers, Moscow Prepares

October 12

WE SHOULD BE "SHOCKED" LESS BY Donald Trump's sexual antics or by Hillary Clinton's misdeeds as secretary of state than by the entire US political-media establishment's indifference to Washington's drift toward war with Russia.

Since the breakdown of the Obama-Putin agreement to cooperate militarily against terrorists in Syria—a failure for which the Obama administration is primarily responsible—Washington has escalated its warfare rhetoric against the Kremlin and particularly Russian President Putin. The man with whom the Obama administration proposed to partner with in Syria only two weeks ago is now denounced as a "war criminal" for Russia's fight against terrorists in Aleppo, which was to be "liberated" by the now aborted US-Russian military alliance. The ever-bellicose *Washington Post* was more specific, publishing a leaked account of how Putin might be arrested outside of Russia and put on trial.

But the first victim might have been Secretary of State Kerry, who negotiated and advocated the proposed alliance and who now must level "war crimes" accusations against Russia, dealing a considerable blow to his own reputation. Putting another nail in the coffin of its jettisoned cooperation with the Kremlin, the White House also officially accused the Putin leadership of trying to undermine the American electoral system through systematic hacking, though it presented no real evidence.

Meanwhile, mainstream media continue to base their coverage of US national security in this regard on unrelenting vilification of Putin, not on actual US interests. Any talk of partnership with Russia, though still advocated by Donald Trump, is being widely traduced as "insanity," as, for example, by MSNBC's unabashedly Russophobic Rachel Maddow.

Moscow is reacting in kind to Washington's words and deeds. The reaction includes unusually harsh speeches by Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov (formerly Kerry's partner); an unusual nationwide civil-defense exercise; a proposal

to give military officials control over regional political leaders in the event of war; and a beefing up of Russian ground-to-air missile defense systems in Syria. While Lavrov spoke of an American policy driven by "aggressive Russophobia," Putin said normal relations could be restored only by Washington reversing all of its Cold War policies in recent years, from NATO expansion to Russia's borders to economic sanctions. Though clearly Putin did not mean this literally, it seems to have been his most expansive condition to date.

For those of us with historical memory, there is a precedent for a way out in dark times in US-Russian relations. Only a generation ago, in the mid- and late 1980s, President Ronald Reagan decided to meet halfway in very fraught times repeatedly with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. A breakthrough as achieved by Reagan and Gorbachev is urgently needed, but no such leader seems likely to occupy the White House any time soon, unless it might be Trump.

Did the White House Declare War on Russia?

October 19

A STATEMENT BY VICE PRESIDENT JOSEPH BIDEN ON NBC's *Meet the Press* on October 16, pre-released on October 14, stunned Moscow, though it was scarcely noted in the American media. In response to a question about alleged Kremlin hacking of Democratic Party headquarters in order to disrupt the presidential election and throw it to Donald Trump, Biden said the Obama administration was preparing to send Putin a harsh "message," presumably in the form of some kind of cyber-attack.

The Kremlin spokesman and several leading Russian commentators characterized Biden's announcement as a virtual "American declaration of war

on Russia" and as the first ever in history. At this potentially explosive stage in the new Cold War, Biden's statement, which must have been approved by the White House, could scarcely have been more dangerous or reckless.

Biden was reacting, of course, to official US charges of Kremlin political hacking. No actual evidence for this allegation has yet been produced, only suppositions or, as Glenn Greenwald has pointed out, "unproven assertions." While the political-media establishment has uncritically stated the allegation as fact, a MIT expert, Professor Theodore Postol, has written there is "no technical way that the US intelligence community could know who did the hacking if it was done by sophisticated nation-state actors." Instead, the charges, leveled daily by the Clinton campaign as part of its neo-McCarthyite Kremlin-baiting of Trump, are mostly political. We should ask why some US intelligence officials have permitted themselves to be used for this unprofessional purpose.

Still more, the warlike context includes a stunning reversal of the American political-media establishment's narrative of the ongoing battle for the Syrian city of Aleppo. Only a few weeks ago, as I pointed out, President Obama had agreed with Putin on a joint US-Russian military campaign against "terrorists" in Aleppo. That agreement collapsed primarily due to an attack by US warplanes on Syrian forces. Russia and its Syrian allies continued their air assault on east Aleppo but now, according to Washington and its mainstream media, against anti-Assad "rebels."

Where have the jihad terrorists gone? They have been deleted from the US narrative, which now accuses Russia of "war crimes" in Aleppo for the same military campaign in which Washington was to have been a full partner. Equally obscured is that west Aleppo, largely controlled by Assad's forces, is also being assaulted—by "rebels"—and children are dying there as well.

And why is there no US government or media concern about the children who will almost certainly die in the American-backed campaign to recapture Mosul, in Iraq? Here too the stenographic American media has gone from the fog of cold war to falsification.

Trump Could End the New Cold War

November 16

WILL, OR CAN, A PRESIDENT TRUMP enact a policy of détente—replacing elements of conflict with elements of cooperation—in US relations with Russia? As we saw earlier, détente had a long 20th-century history. Indeed, its major episodes were initiated by Republican presidents, from Eisenhower and Nixon to, most spectacularly, Reagan in 1985.

The history of détente teaches that at least four prerequisites are required: a determined American president who is willing to fight for the policy against a fierce mainstream political opposition, including in his own party; a leader who can rally some public support by prominent figures who did not support his presidential candidacy; a president with like-minded appointees at his side; and a White House occupant who has a pro-détente partner in the Kremlin, as Reagan had with Soviet leader Gorbachev.

Whether or not he knows the history of détente, Trump seems determined. During his primary and presidential campaigns, he alone repeatedly called for cooperation with Moscow for the sake of US national security and refused to indulge in today's fact-free vilification of Russian President Putin. Trump also seems little impressed by the bipartisan foreign-policy establishment, even contemptuous of its record during the preceding two decades. The establishment's certain opposition is unlikely to deter him.

Less clear is whether or not many of Trump's previous opponents in either party will support détente or whether he will have in his inner circle of appointees—particularly a secretary of state and ambassador to Moscow—who will wisely advise and assist him in this vital pursuit, as Reagan had. As for a partner in the Kremlin, Putin is clearly ready for détente. He has said and demonstrated as much many times, contrary to commentary about him in the American media.

In many respects, as we have seen, the new Cold War is more dangerous than was the preceding 40-year Cold War. Three of its current fronts—Ukraine, the Baltic region, and Syria—are ever more fraught with the possibility of hot war. Détente succeeds, however, when mutual national interests are agreed upon and negotiated.

The Ukrainian civil and proxy war has become a disaster for Washington,

Moscow, and for the Ukrainian people themselves. Ending it is therefore a common interest, but perhaps the most difficult to negotiate. NATO's ongoing buildup up in the Baltic region and in Poland, and Russia's counter-buildup on its Western borders, are fraught with accidental or intentional war. Avoiding war, as Reagan and Gorbachev agreed, is an existential common interest.

If Trump is determined, he has the power to end the buildup and even reverse it, though the new eastern-most members of NATO will loudly protest. On the other hand, despite claims to the contrary, Russia represents no military threat to these countries, as wise Trump advisers will assure him. Agreement on Syria should be the easiest. Both Trump and Putin have insisted that the real threat there is not Syrian President Assad but the Islamic State and other terrorists. The first major step of a new détente might well be the US-Russian military alliance against terrorist forces that even President Obama once proposed but abandoned.

There are, of course, other new Cold War conflicts, large and smaller ones. Some could be easily and quickly negotiated in order to build elite and popular support for détente in the US. This could begin with the "banomania" both sides have enacted since 2014. For example, Putin could end the ban on American adoptions of Russian orphans, which wrecked the hopes of scores of American families and Russian children. Such a good-will step would give détente a human face and soften opposition in the US.

The largest ban is, of course, US and European economic sanctions on Russia, which Putin wants ended. A more complex issue, this is likely to come to the fore only if or when détente progresses. On the other hand, a number of European countries, which have suffered economically from Russia's counter-sanctions, also want them ended. Trump will not be without allies if he moves in this direction.

There are other considerations. History shows that successful, stable détente requires the give-and-take of diplomacy, something not practiced by the White House with Russia for several years. The standard version of why Obama's détente ("reset") failed, to take an often-cited example, is untrue. Putin did not wreck it. The Obama administration took Moscow's major concessions while making almost none of its own. In this regard, Trump's businessman model of negotiations may be an asset. Businessmen understand that a mutual interest (profit) is gained only when both sides make concessions.

There is also a larger question. As I explained previously, détente rests on what was formerly called "parity," in particular recognition that both sides

have legitimate national interests. For many years, due largely to the demonization of Putin, the American political-media establishment has implied that Russia has no legitimate national interests of its own conception, not even on its borders. Trump seems to think otherwise, but as with many of his other elliptical statements, time will tell.

And there is this. Reagan and Gorbachev began with nuclear and other military issues. Trump and Putin might do so as well—for example, by agreeing to take nuclear warheads off high-alert and adopting a mutual doctrine of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, which Obama also briefly proposed but also abandoned. Given current toxic relations between the two countries, however, more political steps may be needed first.

Whether or not Trump vigorously pursues détente with Russia may tell us more about his presidency generally if only because an American president usually has more freedom of action in foreign affairs than in other policy realms. And no issue is now more important than the state of US-Russian relations.

The Friends and Foes of Détente, II

November 23

ANTI-DÉTENTE OPPOSITION HAS QUICKLY EXPRESSED ITSELF in response to President-elect Trump's still elliptical indications that he may seek a strategic partner in Russian President Putin. The opposition is led in the Senate by the usual Cold-War bipartisan axis that includes John McCain, Lindsay Graham, and Benjamin Cardin, and in the print media by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Their thinking and goals are expressed by one of their stenographers, *Post* columnist Josh Rogin. He warns readers that détente is both impermissible and unattainable because of Putin's "long-term strategy to undermine the stability and confidence of liberal Western democracies."

There is, of course, no evidence that this is Putin's goal. The allegation

surreptitiously in December 1991; the all-but-unprecedented decision by Russia's first post-Soviet president, Boris Yeltsin, to use tank/cannons to abolish a popularly elected parliament—indeed, an entire constitutional order—in October 1993 and to replace it with one with fewer checks on what became a super-presidency; Yeltsin's brutal wars against the breakaway province of Chechnya; the rigging of his reelection in 1996; and the oligarchic plundering of Russia and attendant impoverishment of a majority of Russian citizens while he was in power. Again, these, and other developments under Yeltsin in the 1990s, are the essential starting point for any analysis of Putin's role in the reversal of Russia's democratization initiated by Gorbachev. For many American commentators, however, the Yeltsin 1990s remain a rose-tinted period of “democratic transition” and US-Russian solidarity.

Are Gorbachev's lost alternatives retrievable? It's hard to be optimistic. We are probably closer to actual war with Russia today than ever before in history. President Trump, who seemed to want to reverse bipartisan US policies that contributed so significantly to the new Cold War, is said to have been defeated or dissuaded in this regard by “adults” who themselves represent those previous policies.

The absence of debate and glasnost in the mainstream American media encourages silent opponents of Washington's Cold War policies to remain mute. Western Europe may, for various reasons, eventually rebel against Washington's anti-Russian policies and adopt its own approach to Moscow. But as Gorbachev demonstrated, leaders are needed for transformational alternatives. And time is running out.

Meanwhile, Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, having lived long beyond his greatest achievements, watches and hopes, however faintly.

Does Putin Really Want to “Destabilize the West”?

September 6

AT THE CENTER OF RUSSIA-GATE AND near abolition of US diplomacy toward Russia today is the accusation that Putin wants to “destabilize

Western democracies,” from America to Europe. As with so many other new Cold War narratives, there is no persuasive historical evidence or political logic for this sweeping allegation.

Putin came to power in 2000 with the expressed mission of rebuilding, modernizing, and stabilizing Russia, which had collapsed into near-anarchy and widespread misery during the decade following the end of the Soviet Union. He sought to do so, in very large measure, through expanding good political and economic relations with democratic Europe.

Until the Ukrainian crisis erupted in 2014, much of Putin's success, and domestic popularity was based on an unprecedented expansion of Russia's economic relations with Europe and, to a lesser extent, with the United States. Russia provided a third or more of the energy needs of several European Union countries while thousands of European producers, from farmers to manufacturers, found large new markets in Russia, as did scores of US corporations. As late as 2013, the Kremlin was employing an American public-relations firm and recruiting Goldman Sachs to help “brand” Russia as a profitable and safe place for Western investment. Along the way, Putin emerged, despite some conflicts, as a partner among European leaders and even American ones, with good working relations with President Bill Clinton and (initially) with President George W. Bush.

Why, then, would Putin want to destabilize Western democracies that were substantially funding Russia's rebirth at home and as a great power abroad while accepting his government as a legitimate counterpart? Putin never expressed such a goal or had such a motive. From the outset, in his many speeches and writings, which few American commentators bother to read—even though they are readily available in English at Kremlin.ru—he constantly preached the necessity of “stability” both at home and abroad.

Putin's vilifiers regularly cite questionable “evidence” for the allegation that he has long, even always, been “anti-American” and “anti-Western.” They say he previously had a career in the Soviet intelligence services. But so did quite a few Western-oriented Russian reformers during the Gorbachev years. They say Putin opposed the US invasion of Iraq. But so did Germany and France. They say he fought a brief war in 2008 against the US-backed government of the former Soviet republic of Georgia. But a European investigation found that Georgia's president, not the Kremlin, began the war.³⁵

Putin is also accused of pursuing a number of non-Western and thus, it is said, anti-Western policies at home. But this perspective suggests that all foreign “friends” and allies of America must be on America's historical clock, sharing its present-day understanding of what is politically and

socially "correct." If so, Washington would have considerably fewer allies in the world, not only in the Middle East. Putin's reply is the non-Soviet principle of national and civilizational "sovereignty." Each nation must find its own way at home within its own historical traditions and current level of social consensus.

In short, had Putin left office prior to 2014, he would have done so as having been, certainly in the Russian context, a "pro-Western" leader—a course he generally pursued despite NATO's expansion toward Russia's borders, US regime-change policies in neighboring countries, and criticism in high-level Russian circles that he had "illusions about the West" and was "soft" in his dealings with it, especially the United States.

Everything changed with the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, as a result of which, it is asserted, Russia "aggressively" annexed Crimea and supported Donbass rebels in the ensuing Ukrainian civil war. Here began the sweeping allegation that Putin sought to undermine democracy everywhere, and eventually the American presidential election in 2016. Here too the facts hardly fit, as we have already seen but need to recall.

Throughout 2013, as the European Union and Washington wooed Ukraine's elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, with a bilateral economic partnership, Putin proposed a tripartite agreement including Russia, Ukraine's largest trading partner. The EU and Washington refused. The crisis erupted when Yanukovich asked for more time to consider the EU's financial terms, which also included ones involving adherence to NATO's policies.

Putin watched as initially peaceful protests on Kiev's Maidan Square devolved by February 2014 into Western-applauded armed street mobs that caused Yanukovich, still the constitutional president, to flee and put in power an ultranationalist, anti-Russian government. It seemed to threaten, not only vocally, ethnic Russians and other native Russian-speakers in Eastern Ukraine as well as the historical and still vital Russian naval base at Sevastopol, in Crimea, and that province's own ethnic Russian majority. Given those circumstances, which were imposed on him, Putin seemed to have had little choice. Nor would have any imaginable Kremlin leader.

A vital episode amid the February 2014 crisis has been forgotten—or deleted. The foreign ministers of three EU countries (France, Germany, and Poland) brokered a compromise agreement between the Ukrainian president and party leaders of the street protesters. Yanukovich agreed to an early presidential election and to form with opposition leaders an interim coalition government. That is, a democratic, peaceful resolution of the crisis. In

a phone talk, President Obama told Putin he would support the agreement. Instead, it perished within hours when rejected by ultranationalist forces in Maidan's streets and occupied buildings. Neither Obama nor the European ministers made any effort to save the agreement. Instead, they fully embraced the new government that had come to power through a violent street coup.

The rest, as the cliché goes, is history. But if Ukraine is indicative, who actually destabilized its flawed, even corrupt, but legal constitutional democracy in 2014? Putin or the Western leaders who imposed an untenable choice on Ukraine and then abandoned their own negotiated agreement?

Will Russia Leave the West?

September 13

SOME FATEFUL QUESTIONS ARE RARELY, IF EVER, discussed publicly. One is this: As the established post-1991 "liberal world order" disintegrates and a new one struggles to emerge, where will Russia, the world's largest territorial country, end up politically? The outcome will be fateful, for better or worse.

Geographically, of course, Russia cannot leave the West. Its expanses include vast Far Eastern territories and peoples and a long border with China, but also major European cities such as St. Petersburg and Moscow. For that reason alone, Russia has long been, to varying degrees at various times, both a European and non-European country. Geography, it is said, is destiny, but history is more complex.

The deep divide among Russia's political and intellectual elites between Slavophiles, who saw Russia's true destiny apart from the West, and Westernizers, who saw it with the West, originally debated passionately in the 19th century, has never ended. Arguably, it was only exacerbated by the country's subsequent political history.

It was apparent in the Soviet Communist Party in the 1920s, when

Has NATO Expansion Made Anyone Safer?

October 18

TWENTY YEARS AGO, IN 1997, PRESIDENT Bill Clinton made the decision to expand NATO eastward. In order to placate post-Soviet Russia, then weak but heralded in Washington as America's "strategic friend and partner," the Russian-NATO Founding Act was also adopted. It promised that expansion would not entail any "permanent stationing of substantial combat forces." Today they are encamped on Russia's borders and growing. Have twenty years of NATO's expansion actually created the international security it promised?

The expansion of the US-led military alliance, which began in Germany with 13 member states and now stretches to Russia with 29, is the largest and fastest growth of a "sphere of influence" (American) in modern peacetime history. Throughout the process, with hypocrisy that does not go unnoticed in Moscow, Russia has been repeatedly denounced for seeking any sphere of security of its own, even on its own borders.

NATO expansion included two broken promises that the Kremlin has not forgotten. In 1990, the Bush administration and other Western powers assured Soviet leader Gorbachev that, in return for Russia agreeing to a united Germany in NATO, the alliance would "not expand one inch to the east." (Though denied by a number of participants and pro-NATO commentators, the assurance has been confirmed by other participants and by archive researchers.)

The other broken promise is unfolding today as NATO builds up its permanent land, sea, and air power near Russian territory, along with missile-defense installations. NATO "enlargement," as its promoters benignly termed it, continues. Montenegro became a member in 2017 and the "door remains open," Western officials say repeatedly, to the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine.

NATO is more than the world's largest military alliance. With lavishly funded offices, representatives, think tanks, and other advocates not only in Brussels but in many Western capitals, it is also a powerful

political-ideological-lobbying institution—perhaps the world's most powerful corporation, taking into account its multitude of bureaucratic employees in Brussels and elsewhere.

NATO is also very big business. New members must purchase Western-made weapons, primarily US ones. The alliance has, that is, diverse corporate interests that it vigorously promotes. In the United States alone, scarcely a week passes without promotional "news" and commentary produced by NATO-affiliated institutes and authors or based on NATO sources. (The Atlantic Council is an especially prolific source of these media products.)

Asking whether "enlarged" NATO has actually resulted in more insecurity than security requires considering the consequences of several wars it led or in which some of its member states participated since 1997:

- The Serbian war in 1999 resulted in NATO's occupation and annexation of Kosovo, a precedent cited by subsequent annexationists, including Russia when it took back Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.
- The 2003 Iraq War was a catastrophe for all involved and a powerful factor behind expanding organized terrorism, including the Islamic State, and not only in the Middle East. The same was true of the war against Libya in 2011, no lessons of Iraq having been learned.
- NATO promises that Georgia might one day become a member state was an underlying cause of the Georgian-Russian war of 2008, in effect a US-Russian proxy war. The result was the near ruination of Georgia, where NATO remains active today.
- Similarly persistent NATO overtures to Ukraine underlay the crisis in that country in 2014. It resulted in Russia's annexation of Crimea, the still ongoing Ukrainian civil war in Donbass, and another US-Russian proxy war. Meanwhile, US-backed Kiev remains in deep economic and political crisis, and Ukraine fraught with the possibility of a direct US-Russian military conflict.

• There is also, of course, Afghanistan, initially a NATO war effort, but now the longest (and possibly most un-winnable) war in American history. Any rational calculation of the outcomes of these NATO wars adds up to far more military and political insecurity than security—at most a pseudo-security of simmering crises.

NATO expansion has also bred political-ideological insecurities. The alliance's incessant, ubiquitous media saturation and lobbying in Western capitals, particularly in the United States, has been a major driving force behind the new Cold War and its rampant Russophobia. One result has been the near-end of American diplomacy toward Russia and the almost total

militarization of US-Russian relations. This alone is a profound source of insecurity—including the possibility of war with Russia.

During these same 20 years, the enormous resources devoted to NATO expansion have scarcely contributed anything to resolving real international crises, among them economic problems in Europe that have helped inspire its own secessionist movements; international terrorism in the Middle East and the refugee crisis; the danger of nuclear proliferation, which NATO has abetted by spurring a new nuclear arms race with Russia; and others.

Nor has NATO's vast expansion resolved its own internal crises. They include growing military cooperation between NATO member Turkey and Russia; and undemocratic developments in other member states such as Hungary and Poland. And this leaves aside the far-reaching implications of the emerging anti-NATO alliance centering around Russia, China, and Iran—itsself a result of NATO's 20-year expansion.

Now consider arguments made by NATO- expansion promoters over the years:

- They say the small Baltic and other Eastern European countries previously victimized by Soviet Russia still felt threatened by Russia and therefore had to be brought into the alliance. This makes no empirical sense. In the 1990s; Russia was in shambles and weak, a threat only to itself. And if any perceived or future threat existed, there were alternatives: acting on Gorbachev's proposed "Common European Home"—a security agreement including all of Europe and Russia; bilateral security guarantees to those once-victimized nations, along with diplomacy on their own part to resolve lingering conflicts with Russia, particularly the disadvantaged status of their ethnic Russian citizens. This argument makes no historical sense either. The tiny Baltic states nearest to Russia were among the last to be granted NATO membership.

- It is also said that every qualified nation has a "right" to NATO membership. This too is illogical. NATO is not a non-selective college fraternity or the AARP. It is a security organization whose sole criterion for "enlargement" should be whether or not new eastern members enhance the security of its current members. From the outset, it was clear, as many Western critics pointed out, it would not.

- Now, it is belatedly argued, Russia has become a threat under Vladimir Putin. But much of what is decried as "Putin's aggression" abroad has been the Kremlin's predictable responses to US and NATO expansionist policies. There is a related negative consequence. Moscow's perception that it is increasingly encircled by an "aggressive" US-led NATO has had lamentable,

and also predictable, influence on Russia's internal politics. As NATO expanded, space for democracy in Russia diminished.

For the sake of international security, NATO expansion must end. But is there a way to undo the 20-year folly? Member states taken in since the late 1990s cannot, of course, be expelled. NATO expansion could, however, be demilitarized, its forces withdrawn back to Germany, from which they crept to Russia's borders.

This may have been feasible in the late 1990s or early 2000s, as promised in 1997. Now it may seem to be a utopian idea, but one without which the world is in ever graver danger—a world with less and less real security.

More Double Standards

October 25

MOSCOW AND WASHINGTON HAVE CONFLICTING NARRATIVES—EXPRESSED regularly in their mass media and periodic diplomacy—regarding the history, causes, and nature of the new Cold War. Not surprisingly, both narratives are often self-serving and unbalanced. But the near-consensual US version features an array of double standards that ought to be of grave concern.

I have previously commented on some of these double standards. Moscow is condemned for wanting a sphere of security, or absence of Western military bases, near its borders, while the US-led NATO military alliance has expanded from Germany to countries directly on Russia's borders. (Imagine a Russian-Chinese "sphere" in Canada or Mexico.) NATO's military buildup around Russia is frequently justified by "Putin's lies and deceptions." But Kremlin complaints about American "lies and deceit" can hardly be challenged, including the 1990 promise that NATO would "not expand one inch to the east" and the Obama administration's pledge in 2011 that a UN Security Council resolution permitting use of force against Libya would not

seek to remove its leader Gaddafi, who was tracked down and assassinated. And then there is professed alarm over Moscow's very few military bases abroad while Washington has some 800:

Now we have more American double standards. When Russian air power and the Syrian army "liberated" the Syrian city of Aleppo from terrorists last year, the US political-media establishment denounced the operation as "Russian war crimes." No such characterizations appeared in coverage of the subsequent US-led "liberation" of the Iraqi city Mosul or Syria's Raqqa, where destruction and civilian casualties may have been considerably greater than in Aleppo. Indeed, on October 19, *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius was awed by "the overwhelming, pitilessly effective military power of the United States" displayed in Raqqa.

Moscow's nonviolent "annexation" of Crimea in 2014—the Kremlin and most Russian citizens regarded it as "reunification"—continues to inspire anti-Russian sanctions by Washington. American media explain that Crimea was the first forcible modern-day realignment of borders and territory. This narrative omits the Balkan wars in the 1990s and the fate of what was once Yugoslavia, and particularly the US-led NATO annexation of the Serbian province of Kosovo, after a long bombing campaign, in 1999. It also omits secession movements since Crimea—Brexiteer and the recent Catalonia and Kurdish referenda.

As an outgrowth of their Russiagate coverage, US media now allege that the Kremlin, using its foreign broadcast outlets and social media everywhere, has promoted white-supremacist, neo-Nazi movements in the West, particularly in the United States. Some of this commentary gives the impression that the Kremlin actually created racial conflict in America or is primarily responsible for "exacerbating" it. Meanwhile, the US establishment has virtually nothing to say about the truly ominous growth of extreme-right-wing, even neo-Nazi, movements in US-backed Ukraine.

We will return to this phenomenon later, but briefly stated: with the tacit support, indifference, or impotence of the Kiev government, these movements, some well-armed, are rehabilitating and memorializing Ukrainian Jew-killers during the World War II German occupation—rewriting history in their favor, erecting memorials and renaming public places in their honor, occasionally directly threatening Ukrainian Jews.

Though well-reported in foreign and alternative media, these signs of a rebirth of fascism in a large European country—one supported politically, financially, and militarily by Washington—are rarely, if ever, covered by American mainstream media, notably the *New York Times* and the *Washington*

Post. Where is the balance between these unreported realities and daily allegations of some murky "Russian" divisive posts in American social media?

Finally, also almost daily, American media report that the Kremlin "meddled" in the US 2016 presidential election, warning, "They will be back!" There is as yet no actual evidence in these hyperbolic media accounts, nor any historical balance. Leave aside that Washington and its representatives have "meddled" in nearly every Russian election since the early 1990s. Leave aside even the Clinton administration's large-scale, on-site involvement in Russian President Yeltsin's reelection in 1996. Do note, however, the recent scholarly finding—reported in the *Post* on September 7, 2016—that from 1946 to 2000 (prior to Putin), the United States and Russia interfered in 117 foreign elections.

When pointed out, our new Cold Warriors denounce criticism of these US double standards as "moral equivalence" and pro-Kremlin "whataboutism." But facts being facts, their self-apologetics are really an extreme expression of "American exceptionalism."

The Unheralded Putin — Official Anti-Stalinist No. 1

November 8

IN NOVEMBER 1961, AT THE FIRST SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS that publicly condemned Stalin's crimes, the leader, Nikita Khrushchev, unexpectedly called for a national memorial to the tens of millions of victims of the despot's nearly 25-year reign. During the following decades, a fierce political struggle raged between anti-Stalinists and pro-Stalinists, sometimes publicly but often hidden inside the ruling Communist Party, over whether the victims should be memorialized or deleted from history through repression and censorship.

Russia Is Not the "No. 1 Threat"

November 27

IN THE 1990S, THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION embraced post-Soviet Russia as America's "strategic partner and friend." Twenty years later, twenty-six since the end of the Soviet Union, the US policy establishment, from liberals to conservatives, insists that "Putin's Russia" is the No. 1 threat to American national security. The primary explanation for how this bipartisan axiom came about, as I have long argued, is to be found in Washington, not Moscow. Whatever the full explanation, it is myopic and itself a threat to US national security.

Threats can be real, uninformed misperceptions, or manufactured by vested interests. In today's real world, Russia is not even among the top five, which are these:

1. Russiagate. Since the late 1940s, when both the United States and the Soviet Union acquired atomic and then nuclear weapons, the first existential duty of an American president has been to avoid the possibility of war with Russia, a conflagration that could result in the end of modern civilization. Every American president has been politically empowered to discharge that duty, even during the most perilous crises, until now.

The still unverified but ever-more-persistent allegations that President Trump has somehow been compromised by the Kremlin and may even be its agent are the number-one threat to America because they hinder, if not cripple, his ability to carry out that existential duty. Recently, for example, his negotiations with Russian President Putin to replace US-Russian conflicts in Syria with cooperation were treated as "treasonous"—not by a successor publication of the John Birch Society but in the pages of the *New York Times* and by other leading media.

Still more, Russiagate alleges that "we were attacked by Russia" during the 2016 presidential election, an act likened to a "political Pearl Harbor." What could be more reckless than to insist we are already at war with the other nuclear superpower? Lest there is any doubt about the gravity of the national-security threat represented by Russiagate, imagine President John F. Kennedy so burdened with such allegations during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. It is unlikely he could have negotiated its peaceful resolution as he did.

2. The demonization of Putin. This too, as I have documented, is unprecedented. No Soviet or post-Soviet leader was ever so wildly, baselessly vilified as Putin has increasingly been for more than a decade. Demonizing Putin has become so maniacal that leading "opinion-makers" seem to think he is a Communist. Joy Reid of MSNBC actually said so, but more telling is the breathless warning on March 30 by *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank about "the red menace of Vladimir Putin's Russia."

Mainstream media consumers may be excused for thinking that somehow the Soviet Communist "menace" has been reborn in Moscow, and as an even more fearsome threat. Trump's own CIA Director at the time, Mike Pompeo, evidently believes this uninformed nonsense, or wishes us to do so. Warning that "we still face a threat from the Russians," he explains: "They're Russians, they're Soviets.... pick a name."³⁷

Demonizing Putin and "Putin's Russia" as a ramifying threat. It is hard to imagine the plausibility of Russiagate without such a master villain in the Kremlin. And it all but excludes, in effect delegitimizes, the national-security partner most needed by Washington—whoever sits in the Kremlin—in the nuclear age.

3. ISIS and other international terrorist organizations in pursuit of radioactive material to lace with their explosives. This threat would be number one if the US political-media establishment had not conjured up the preceding ones.

Little more needs be said about the looming danger. Imagine even small quantities of radioactive material aboard the planes of 9/11, mixed with the bombs of Paris, Boston, and many other cities, spewed in the air by the fiery explosions and borne by the wind—and wonder if those areas would be inhabitable today. Now consider the value and willingness of Moscow, so often a target of terrorism, as a security partner in this regard given its experiences, sprawling presence between East and West, and exceptional intelligence capabilities. Unlike Russiagate allegations, the threat of terrorism has been amply verified.

4. The proliferation of states with nuclear weapons. In 1949, there were two. Today there are nine. In a new era of transnational ethnic and religious hatreds and wars, such fanaticisms could easily overwhelm the taboo against using forbidden weapons. Iran and North Korea are not the only states capable of acquiring nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. (Every time the United States militarily attacks a non-nuclear state, others feel the imperative to acquire them as a deterrent.) US-Russian cooperation is essential for preventing more proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction, but threats No. 1 and 2 are preventing Trump from achieving this, even if he wants to do so.

5. Climate change—the science is sound—along with global income inequality, which breeds misery, resentments, fanaticism, and thus terrorism

around the world. (According to a report by Scott Shane and others in the *New York Times* on November 7, "The richest 1 percent of the world's population now owns more than half of global wealth, and the top 10 percent owns about 90 percent.") These growing threats rank below the others only because of what a US-Russian bilateral partnership could achieve now. These two require a much larger international alliance and considerably more time.

Why are neither Russia nor China on this list? Russia—because it represents no threat to the United States at all (apart from a nuclear accident or miscalculation) except those Washington and NATO have themselves created. China—because its historical moment as a very great power has come. It may be an economic and regional rival to the United States, but an actual threat (at least thus far) only if Washington also makes it one. The expanding alliance between Russia and China, itself significantly a result of unwise Washington policy-making, is a separate subject.

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ink America Is Them er 20

FOR 18 MONTHS, MUCH OF THE US establishment has told us, posterously and without real evidence, that "Russia attacked America" during the 2016 president election. On the other hand, many Russians—in the policy elite, the educated middle class, and ordinary citizens—believe "America has been at war with Russia" for 25 years, and for understandable reasons.

US commentators attribute these views to "Kremlin propaganda." It is true that Russians, like Americans, are strongly influenced by the mass media, especially television. It is also true that Russian television news reporting and commentary are no less politicized than their US counterparts. But elite and educated Russians are generally better informed and more

independent-minded about our political life than most of us are about theirs. They have much more regular access to American news and opinions—from cable and satellite TV, US-funded Russian-language broadcasts and Internet sites, and from Russian sites, such as inosmi.ru, that translate scores of US media articles daily. (Recent prohibiting steps taken by the Department of Justice against RT and Sputnik can only further diminish American information about Russia.)

Above all, Russians are strongly influenced by what they call "living history." They remember the history of US policy toward post-Soviet Russia since the early 1990s, especially episodes they perceived as having been warlike or acts of "betrayal and deceit"—promises and assurances made to Moscow by Washington and subsequently violated, such as the following:

Presidents Reagan and George H. W. Bush negotiated with the last Soviet Russian leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, what they said was the end of the Cold War on the shared, expressed premise that it was ending "with no losers, only winners." (For this crucial mutual understanding, see two books by Jack F. Matlock Jr., both presidents' ambassador to Moscow: *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* and *Superpower Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray—And How to Return to Reality*.) But readers will recall that in 1992, during his reelection campaign against Bill Clinton, Bush suddenly declared, "We won the Cold War." This anticipated the triumphalism of the Clinton administration and the implication that post-Soviet Russia should be treated as a defeated adversary, as Germany and Japan were after World War II. For many knowledgeable Russians, including Gorbachev himself, this was the first American betrayal.

For the next eight years, in the 1990s, the Clinton administration based its Russia policy on that triumphalist premise, with wanton disregard for how it was perceived in Russia or what it might portend. The catastrophic "shock therapy" economics imposed on Russia by President Boris Yeltsin was primarily his responsibility, but that draconian policy was emphatically insisted on and (meagerly) funded by Washington. The result was the near ruination of Russia—the worst economic depression in peacetime, the disintegration of the highly professionalized Soviet middle classes, mass poverty, plunging life expectancy, the fostering of an oligarchic financial elite, the plundering of Russia's wealth, and more.

All the while, as we have seen, the Clinton administration lauded Yeltsin as its "democrat" and clung to him, as did most leading US political figures, media, and many other influential Americans. Re-making post-Soviet Russia became an American project, as countless American "advisers" encamped to

Moscow and other cities. So many that Russians sometimes said their country had been "occupied." (I treated this subject at the time in my book *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Soviet Russia*.)

In 1999, Clinton made clear that the crusade was also a military one. He began the still-ongoing eastward expansion of NATO, now directly on Russia's borders. That so many Russians see NATO's unrelenting creep from Berlin to within artillery range of St. Petersburg as "war on Russia" hardly needs explanation. Moreover, herein lies the second "betrayal and deceit" that has not been forgotten.

As readers already know, in 1990, in return for Gorbachev's agreement that a reunited Germany would be a NATO member, all of the major powers involved, particularly the first Bush administration, promised that NATO "would not expand one inch to the east." Many US participants later denied that such a promise had been made, or claimed that Gorbachev misunderstood. But documents just published by the National Security Archive in Washington, on December 17, prove that the assurance was given on many occasions by many Western leaders, including the Americans. The only answer they can now give is that "Gorbachev should have gotten it in writing," implying that American promises to Russia are nothing more than deceit in pursuit of domination.

In 1999, Clinton made clear that NATO expansion was not the non-combat policy Russia had been told it would be. For three months, US-led NATO war planes bombed tiny Serbia, Russia's traditional Slav ally, in effect annexing its province of Kosovo. Visiting Moscow at the time, I heard widely expressed shock, dismay, anger, and perceptions of yet another betrayal, especially by young Russians, whose views of America were rapidly changing from ones of a benign well-wisher to a warlike enemy. Meanwhile, also under Clinton, Washington began its still-ongoing campaign to diminish Moscow's energy sales to Europe, thereby also belying US wishes for Russia's economic recovery.

George W. Bush's administration continued Clinton's winner-take-all approach to post-Soviet Russia. More than any NATO member, Putin's government assisted the United States in its war against the Taliban in Afghanistan after the events of 9/11, saving American lives. In return, Putin expected a genuine US-Russian partnership in place of the pseudo-one Yeltsin had received.

Instead, by 2002, Bush had resumed intrusive "democracy promotion"—interference, or, in today's Russiagate parlance, "meddling"—in Russian politics and NATO expansion eastward. No less fatefully, Bush unilaterally

withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the cornerstone of Russian nuclear security. That led to the ongoing process of ringing Russia with anti-missile installations, now formally a NATO project.

In 2008, President Bush tried to fast-track Georgia and Ukraine—both former Soviet republics and Moscow's "red lines" into NATO. Though vetoed by Germany and France, a NATO summit that same year promised both eventual membership. Hardly unrelated, in August Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, a Washington protégé, launched a sudden military assault on the Russian protectorate of South Ossetia, inside Georgia, killing a number of Russian citizens. Seeing Saakashvili as an American proxy, the Kremlin intervened.

President Obama came to office promising a "new era of American diplomacy," but his approach to Russia was no different and arguably even more militarized and intrusive than that of his predecessors. During the White House's short-lived "reset" of relations with the Kremlin, then occupied by President Dmitri Medvedev, Obama's vice president, Joseph Biden, told a Moscow public audience, and then Putin himself, that Putin should not return to the presidency. (In effect, Obama and Biden were "colluding" with their imagined partner Medvedev against Putin.)

Other "meddling" was also under way. The Obama administration, notably Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, stepped up intrusive "democracy promotion" by publicly criticizing Russia's parliamentary and presidential elections. Though welcomed by Putin's street opponents, many Russians saw her remarks as characteristic American arrogance.

By 2011, the Obama administration, presumably having lost interest in its own "reset," now betrayed its own partner, President Medvedev, by breaking its promise not to use a UN Security Council resolution in order to depose Libyan leader Gaddafi. Readers will recall that he was tracked by US-NATO war planes and murdered—sodomized with a bayonet—in the streets, a gruesome end Mrs. Clinton later laughingly rejoiced over. All the while, Obama, like his predecessors, pushed NATO expansion ever closer to Russia, eventually to its borders.

Given this history, the fateful events in Kiev in 2014 seem almost inevitable. For anti-Russian NATO expansionists in Washington, Ukraine remained "the biggest prize" in their march from Berlin to Russia, as Carl Gershman, head of the official US regime-change institution, the National Endowment for Democracy, candidly proclaimed in the *Washington Post* on September 26, 2013.

The ensuing crisis led to yet another broken US commitment. In February

Four Years of Maidan Myths

January 3

THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS, WHICH UNFOLDED IN late 2013 and early 2014, again requires our attention. It has become a seminal political event of the early 21st century, leading to Russia's annexation of Crimea and to the ongoing US-Russian proxy war in Donbass. It militarized and rooted the epicenter of the new Cold War on Russia's borders, indeed inside a civilization shared for centuries by Russia and large parts of Ukraine. It implanted a toxic political element in American, Russian, Ukrainian, and European politics, possibly in ways we do not yet fully understand. And it has left Ukraine in near-economic ruin, with thousands dead, millions displaced, and others still struggling to regain their previous quality of life.

The events of 2014 also led to NATO's ongoing buildup on Russia's western border, in the Baltic region, yet another new Cold War front fraught with the possibility of hot war. Making things only worse, in late 2017, the Trump administration announced it would supply the Kiev government with more, and more sophisticated, weapons, a step that even the Obama administration, which played a large detrimental role in the 2014 crisis, declined to take.

There are, as we already saw, two conflicting narratives of the Ukrainian crisis. One, promoted by Washington and the US-backed government in Kiev, blames only "aggression" by the Kremlin and specifically by Russian President Putin. The other, promoted by Moscow and rebel forces in eastern Ukraine, which it supports, blames "aggression" by Washington and the European Union. There are enough bad intent, misconceptions, and

misperceptions to go around, but on balance Moscow's narrative, almost entirely deleted from US mass media, is closer to the historical realities of 2013–2014.

One myth has been particularly tenacious in Western accounts: what occurred on Kiev's Maidan Square in February 2014 was a "democratic revolution." Whether or not it eventually turns out to have been a "revolution" can be left to future historians, but it hardly seems like one now. Most of the oligarchic powers that afflicted Ukraine before 2014 remain in place four years later, along with their corrupt practices. As for "democratic," removing a legally elected president by threatening his life, as happened to Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014, did not qualify. Nor did the preemptory way the new government was formed, the constitution changed, and pro-Yanukovich parties banned. Yanukovich's overthrow involved people in the streets, but it was a coup.

How much of it was spontaneous and how much directed, or inspired, by high-level actors in the West remains unclear, but a related myth again needs to be dispelled. The rush to seize Yanukovich's residence was triggered by snipers who killed some 80 or more protesters and policemen on Maidan. It was long said that the snipers were sent by Yanukovich, but it has now been virtually proven that the shooters were instead from Right Sector, a neo-Nazi group that was among the protesters on the square.³⁸

The anti-democratic origins of today's Kiev regime continue to afflict it. Its president, Petro Poroshenko, is intensely unpopular at home, as are his leading would-be successors. The government remains pervasively corrupt. Its Western-financed economy continues to flounder. And for the most part, Kiev still refuses to implement its obligations under the 2015 Minsk II peace accords, above all granting the rebel Donbass territories enough home rule to keep them in a unified Ukrainian state.

Meanwhile, Poroshenko's government remains semi-hostage to armed ultranationalist battalions, whose ideology and symbols include proudly neo-fascist ones—forces that hate Russia and Western "civilizational" values, to which Maidan was said to aspire, almost equally. The Donbass rebel "republics" have their own ugly traits, but they fight only in defense of their own territory against Kiev's armies and are not sponsored by the US government.

Making things worse, the Trump administration now promises to supply Kiev with more weapons. The official pretext is plainly contrived: to deter Putin from "further aggression against Ukraine," for which he has shown no desire or intention whatsoever. Nor does it make any geopolitical or

strategic sense. Neighboring Russia can easily upgrade its weapons to the rebel provinces.

There is also the danger that Kiev's wobbly regime will interpret the American arms as a signal from Washington to launch a new offensive against Donbass in order to regain support at home, but which is likely to end again in military disaster for Kiev. If so, it could bring neo-fascists, who may acquire some of the American weapons, closer to power and the new US-Russian Cold War closer to direct war between the nuclear superpowers. (US trainers will need to be sent with the weapons, adding to the some 300 already there. If any are killed by Russian-backed rebel forces, even unintentionally, what will be Washington's reaction?)

Why would Trump, who wants to "cooperate with Russia," take such a reckless step, long urged by Washington's hawks but resisted even by President Obama? Assuming it was Trump's decision, no doubt to disprove Russiagate allegations that he is a lackey of the Kremlin—accusations he hears and reads daily not only from damning commentary on MSNBC and CNN, but from the once-distinguished academic Paul Krugman, who told his *New York Times* readers on November 17, 2017: "There's really no question about Trump/Putin collusion, and Trump in fact continues to act like Putin's puppet."

Even though there is every "question" and as yet no "in fact" at all, Trump is understandably desperate to end the unprecedented allegations that he is a "treasonous" president—to demonstrate there was "no collusion, no collusion, no collusion." We have here yet another example of how Russiagate has become the No. 1 threat to American national security, certainly in regard to nuclear Russia.

If the media insists on condemning Trump based on dubious narratives and foreign connections, they might focus instead on former vice president Joseph Biden. President Obama put him in charge of the administration's "Ukrainian project," in effect making him pro-consul overseeing the increasingly colonized Kiev. Biden, who is clearly already seeking the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, bears a heavy personal responsibility for the four-year-old Ukrainian crisis, though he shows no sign of any rethinking or remorse.

In an article in *Foreign Affairs*, Biden and his coauthor, Michael Carpenter, string together a medley of highly questionable, if not outright false, narratives regarding "How to Stand Up to the Kremlin," many involving the years he was vice president. Along the way, Biden repeatedly berates Putin for meddling in Western elections. This is the same Joe Biden who told

Putin not to return to the Russian presidency during Obama's purported "reset" with then President Dmitri Medvedev, and who, in February 2014, told Ukraine's democratically elected President Yanukovich to abdicate and flee the country.

Russia "Betrayed" Not "News That's Fit to Print"

January 10

US MAINSTREAM MEDIA MALPRACTICE IN COVERING Russia has a long history. There have been three major episodes.

The first was when American newspapers, particularly the *New York Times*, misled readers into thinking the Communists could not possibly win the Russian Civil War of 1918–1920, as detailed in a once famous study by Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz and published as a supplement to the *New Republic*, August 4, 1920. (Once canonical, the study was for years assigned reading at journalism schools, but no longer, it seems.)

The second episode was in the 1990s, when virtually the entire mainstream America print and broadcast media covered the US-backed "reforms" of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, which plundered the state and brought misery to its people, as a benevolent "transition to democracy and capitalism" and to "the kind of Russia we want."³⁹

The third and current episode of journalistic malpractice grew out of the second and spread quickly through the media in the early 2000s with the demonization of Vladimir Putin, Yeltsin's successor. It is now amply evident in mainstream coverage of the new Cold War, Russiagate allegations that "Russia attacked American democracy" in 2016, and by much else. Today's rendition may be the worst; certainly it is the most dangerous.

Media malpractice has various elements—among them, selective use of

facts, some unverified; questionable narratives or reporting based on those "facts"; editorial commentary passed off as "analysis"; carefully selected "expert sources," often anonymous; and amplifications by chosen opinion-page contributors. Throughout is the systematic practice of excluding developments (and opinion) that do not conform to the *Times*' venerable front-page motto, "All the News That's Fit to Print." When it comes to Russia, the *Times* often decides politically what is fit and what is not.

And thus the most recent but exceedingly important example of malpractice. In 1990, as readers know, Soviet Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev agreed not only to the reunification of Germany, whose division was the epicenter of that Cold War, but also, at the urging of the Western powers, particularly the United States, that the new Germany would be a member of NATO. (Already embattled at home, Gorbachev was further weakened by this decision, which probably contributed to the attempted coup against him in August 1991.) Gorbachev made the decision based on assurances by his Western "partners" that in return NATO would never be expanded "one inch eastward" toward Russia. Today, having nearly doubled its member countries, the world's largest military alliance sits on Russia's western borders.

At the time, it was known that President George H.W. Bush had especially persuaded Gorbachev through Secretary of State James Baker's "not one inch" promise and other equally emphatic guarantees. Ever since Bush's successor, President Bill Clinton, began the still ongoing process of NATO expansion, its promoters and apologists have repeatedly insisted there was no such promise to Gorbachev, that it had all been "myth" or "misunderstanding."

Now, however, the National Security Archive at George Washington University has established the historical truth by publishing, on December 12, 2017, not only a detailed account of what Gorbachev was promised in 1990–1991 but the relevant documents themselves. The truth, and the promises broken, are much more expansive than previously known: all of the Western powers involved—the US, the UK, France, Germany itself—made the same promise to Gorbachev on multiple occasions and in various emphatic ways. If we ask when the West, particularly Washington, lost Moscow as a potential strategic partner after the end of the Soviet Union, this is where an explanation begins.

And yet, nearly a month after publication of the National Security Archive documents, neither the *Times* nor the *Washington Post*, which profess to be the nation's most important and indispensable political newspapers,

The election should also discredit the growing number of American commentators who equate Putin's Russia with Stalin's "totalitarianism." Proponents of this preposterous equation again reveal themselves as knowing (or caring) little about Russia's political realities today and nothing about Stalin's long terroristic rule, which destroyed millions of Soviet families.

In reality, to emphasize again, the Russian political system today is a mix of authoritarian and democratic elements, what political scientists call "soft authoritarianism." The real discussion should be the relative weight of the two components and what this may bode for Russia's future and for US-Russian relations. One thing is certain and borne out by history: Russian democratic reformers stand very little chance in conditions of Cold War and no chance at all if the new Cold War results in actual war.

Coincidentally or not, the reported assassination attempt against Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the UK has given Putin demonizers another opportunity to denigrate his reputation, no matter what Russian voters think. There are some parallels with Russiagate in the United States. Both scandals are said by high officials to have been "an act of war." Both are said to have been ordered by Putin personally. And in both cases, there are as yet no verified facts, only allegations.

As for the appalling act committed in the Skripal case, not only are there no facts, there is no common sense. Putin had no possible motive, certainly not on the eve of the Russian presidential election, with the World Cup competition in Russia upcoming, and with the toxicity of Russiagate already poisoning relations with the West. Nor did Putin ever say, as he is widely mistranslated, that "traitors" should be killed. They will, he said instead, eventually "shrivel up" (*zagnutisia*) and wither away from the self-inflicted guilt and shame of their act of betrayal. Moreover, quite a few better-known Russian intelligence defectors have lived safely in the West, sometimes publishing accounts of their feats.

Contrary to many media accounts, nor was Skripal a "Russian spy." He was a British spy, having covertly gone to work for UK intelligence in the 1990s, been arrested and convicted in 2004, and made part of an exchange of captured Russian and Western spies in 2010, which resulted in Skripal's residence in the UK. If Putin wanted him dead, why not kill him in Russia or why let him leave for the West? And if some high-placed state assassin wanted Skripal dead, why try to kill him with a lethal nerve agent that might be traceable and could harm many other people? Why not a gun, a knife, or a car "accident"?

Though the nerve agent loosely termed "Novichok" was developed in the

Soviet Union decades ago, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons certified in 2017 that Russia had fully destroyed all of its stockpiles and facilities for making such weapons.³² Still more, the formula for "Novichok" was published years ago and could have been replicated by any number of competent states or individuals. And if the nerve agent was so quickly "lethal," why are the Skripals and others said to have been affected still alive and out of hospital?

There is also this crucial consideration. When Russia and the United States recruit spies in the other country, or send them there, they assure them, in so many words, "If you are caught, we will try to get you out, to bring you home." For decades, this has resulted in the kind of spy swaps of which Skripal was part in 2010. If either side seriously harms an exchanged spy, the efficacy of such exchanges and the sanctity of such intelligence agency promises are undermined, if not made invalid. As a former intelligence official, Putin above all would have understood this and thus still less have had any motive.

Which is to say, Putin's electoral victory was mostly authentic; the official version of what happened to the Skripals may not be.

Russophobia

April 4

ANALYZING WHY THE NEW COLD WAR is more dangerous than was its 40-year predecessor, I seem to have minimized the role of Russophobia. I understood its strength among some nationalities of the former Tsarist and Soviet empires now in the West, but Russophobia had not been a large causal factor, unlike anti-Communism, in the preceding Cold War. I've long been influenced by the compassionate words of George Kennan, the architect of containment, published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1951 about the Russian people:

170
WUT WUT RUSSIA

"Give them time; let them be Russians; let them work out their internal problems in their own manner... towards dignity and enlightenment in government."

But recent Russophobic statements by former chief US intelligence officials and other influential American opinion-makers have caused me to reconsider this factor. Here are some examples:

- Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper spoke on NBC national television about "the Russians, who typically, are almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor." And former CIA Director John Brennan warned that Russians "try to suborn individuals and they try to get individuals, including US citizens, to act on their behalf either wittingly or unwittingly." Former FBI director James Comey added, "They're coming after America."^{53,54,55} How would we react if these intelligence chiefs had said the same about another ethnic people? Or if Senator John McCain repeatedly characterized another nation as "a gas station masquerading as a country?"
- Russia's presidential election, a kind of referendum on Putin's 18 years as leader, gave him, as we saw, a resounding, nearly 77 percent endorsement. The election was widely dismissed by leading US media outlets as "a sham," which denigrates, of course, the integrity of Russian voters. Indeed, a leading Putin demonizer earlier characterized Russian public opinion as a "mob's opinion."⁵⁶

- A *Rolling Stone* writer goes further, explaining that "Russia experts" think "much of what passes for civil society in modern Russia is, in fact, controlled by Putin."⁵⁷ Civil society means, of course, non-state groups and associations, that is, society itself.

- A *Washington Post* editorial headline on April 3, 2018 asks: "Is It a Crime to Worship God? According to Russia, Yes." This about a country where the Orthodox Church is flourishing and Jews are freer than they have ever been in Russian history.

- On March 7, 2018, the *Post's* international columnist, David Ignatius, downplayed the personal causality of the Kremlin leader because "President Vladimir Putin embodies this Russian paranoid ethic."

- Even a *Post* sports columnist is so afflicted that, referring to Olympic doping allegations, he characterizes Russian 2018 medal winners as representatives of "a shamed nation."⁵⁸

- A *New York Times* columnist quotes approvingly a *Post* columnist, an expert on Russia, for asserting that "Putin's Russia" is "an anti-Western power with a different, darker vision of global politics...[a] norm-violating power."⁵⁹

- The title of an article by CNN's Russia expert begins: "Russia's Snark."⁶⁰
- Another prominent media commentator advises, "Treat Russia Like the Terrorist It Is." Yet another terms Russia "Gangster's Paradise."^{61,62}
- A leading policy expert on Russia and former US official has decided that the West doesn't have a Putin problem: "In fact, it has a Russia problem."⁶³

- Deploring Russia, the Harvard policy intellectual Graham Allison has a regret: "The brute fact is that we cannot kill this bastard without committing suicide."⁶⁴

- According to a longtime *Fox News* Russia expert, Ralph Peters, now a guest on CNN, Putin behaves as he does "because they are Russians."⁶⁵

- A *Post* book editor tells readers that Russians tolerate "tyrants like Stalin and Putin" because "it probably seems normal."⁶⁶

- A prominent Russia expert and NPR commentator wonders "whether Russia can ever be normal."⁶⁷

- And impossible to overlook, there are the ubiquitous cartoons depicting Russia as a menacing rapacious bear and alternatively as an octopus whose grasping tentacles ensnare the globe.

How to explain this rampant Russophobia? Three important but little noted books provide useful history and analyses: David S. Foglesong's *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire"*; Andrei P. Tsygankov's *Russophobia*; and, most recently, Guy Mettan's *Creating Russophobia*, which equates it with "Russo-madness."

They examine various factors: ethnic peoples, now independent states with large diasporas, and with historical grievances against both the Tsarist and Soviet empires; historical developments and immigration beginning in the 19th century; today's US military-industrial complex's budgetary need for an "enemy" after the end of the Soviet Union; other present-day anti-Russian lobbies in the United States and the absence of any pro-Russian ones.

All need to be considered, but three circumstances are certain. American attitudes toward Russia are not historically or genetically predetermined, as evidenced by the "Gorbymania" that swept the United States in the late 1980s when Soviet President Gorbachev and US President Reagan tried to end the previous Cold War. The unprecedented demonization of the current Kremlin leader, Putin, has expanded to Russia more generally. And Russophobia is much more widespread and deeper among American political and media elites than among ordinary citizens. It was, after all, elites, not the American people, who gave us the new Cold War.

negotiate with a Kremlin leader in such dire circumstances, as Trump has discovered every time he has tried. Or, in an existential crisis, to avert nuclear war the way President Kennedy did in 1962.

Given the escalating Cold war dynamics evidenced in recent months, not only in Syria, this generalization may be tested sooner rather than later. It doesn't help, of course, that Trump has surrounded himself with appointees who apparently do not share his opinion that it is imperative "to cooperate with Russia," but instead "adults" who seem to personify the worst aspects of Cold War zealotry and lack elementary knowledge of US-Russian relations over the years.

As President Reagan liked to say, it takes two to tango. In Moscow's policy elite, there are influential people who believe "America has been at war against Russia"—political, economic, and military—for more than a decade. Their views are often mirror images of those of Lindsey Graham and other US establishment zealots.

In this decision-making context, Putin still appears to be, in words and deeds, the moderate, calling Western leaders "our partners and colleagues," asking for understanding and negotiations, being far less "aggressive" than he could be. Our legions of Putin demonizers will say this is a false analysis, but it too should not be tested.

Criminalizing Russia

April 25

FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, THE US political-media establishment has increasingly demonized, delegitimized, and now criminalized the Russian state and its leadership. This began with the personal vilification of President Putin and has grown into a general indictment of Russia as a nation. As President Obama's former intelligence chiefs John Brennan and

James Clapper and other US authorities have told us, any Russian "linked to the Kremlin," Moscow officialdom generally, "oligarchs," or certain traits is inherently suspicious.

"Crimes" said to be committed by today's Kremlin, from America and the UK to Syria, have expanded the indictment beyond charges once leveled against Soviet Russia. The newly minted world affairs pundit Joe Scarborough, who believes the United States alone "spent the past 100 years inventing the modern age," devotes a column warning *Washington Post* readers multiple times that "our democracy is under attack by the Russians."^{68,69}

There are many weightier and more far-reaching allegations. Canada's foreign minister, echoing Washington, indicts Russia for its "malign behavior in all of its manifestations...whether it is cyberwarfare, whether it's disinformation, assassination attempts, whatever it happens to be."⁷⁰

On April 20, the Democratic National Committee, still mourning its defeat in 2016, went farther. It is seeking a formal indictment of "whatever it happens to be" by suing the Russian government for conspiring with the Trump campaign to deprive Hillary Clinton of her rightful victory in the 2016 presidential election. Central figures in this "act of unprecedented treachery" are stated to be "people believed to be affiliated with Russia."⁷¹

It follows, of course, that a criminal Russia—frequently termed a "mafia state," also incorrectly—can have no legitimate national interests anywhere, not on its own borders or even at home. And with such a state, it also follows, there should be no civil relations, including diplomacy, only warfare ones. Thus when a group of US senators visited Moscow in early July, another *Post* columnist, Dana Milbank, who seemed not to know or care there were precedents for the timing, indicted them for "visiting your foe on the Fourth of July" and equated it with "meeting with wounded Taliban fighters on Veterans Day."⁷²

Lost, forgotten, or negated in this mania is why Russia was generally understood to matter so greatly to US national security during the 40-year Cold War that the result was myriad forms of growing and prolonged cooperation, even official episodes of détente. The reasons also apply to Russia today.

Even middle-school children presumably know the most existential reason. Like the United States, Russia possesses enormous arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear ones. A conventional US-Russian war—as both sides are now flirting with in Syria and may soon do so in Ukraine or the Baltic region—could slip into nuclear war. As I reported

earlier, at a recent meeting of Washington's highly respected Center for the National Interest, several well-informed experts thought that on a scale of 1 to 10, the chances of war with Russia today are 5 to 7.⁷³

Today's Cold War includes another existential danger in the form of international terrorists in pursuit of radioactive materials to make their attacks immeasurably more devastating and the consequences more enduring. Ask real experts the chances of that happening in a major city, and of the importance of the Kremlin's full cooperation in preventing it.

Almost equally important is the reason called "geopolitical." Even after the Soviet Union, Russia remains the largest territorial country in the world. It possesses a disproportionate share of the planet's natural resources, from energy, iron ore, nickel, timber, diamonds, and gold to fresh water. It is also one of the world's leading exporters of weapons. Still more, Russia is located squarely between East and West, whose civilizations are in conflict, and part of both. Months ago, I raised the possibility that Russia might "leave the West," driven out by the new Cold War or by choice. That possibility is now said by a top Kremlin aide and ideologist to be inescapable.

Herein lies more myopia constantly perpetuated by the American media: sanctioned, criminal Russia is "isolated from the international community." This is an Anglo-American conceit. Multi-dimensional relations between "Putin's Russia" and non-Western countries such as China, Iran, India, and other BRIC nations are thriving. And it is there that most of the world's territory, people, resources, and growing markets are located. For them, Russia is not criminal but an eagerly sought partner.

Given all the warfare talk emanating from the US political-media establishment, consider also Russia's renewed military capabilities or, as strategists like to say, "capacity to project power." There is no reason to doubt Putin's March 1 inventorying of Moscow's new weapons systems. The Kremlin demonstrated its formidable military capabilities by destroying ISIS's entrenched grip on Syria following Russia's intervention in September 2015, even though most US pundits and other professed experts falsely claim this was Washington's achievement.

When there is military parity between Washington and Moscow, as during the preceding Cold War and now again, it is imperative to cooperate, not to ostracize. Otherwise, as President Reagan said when he decided to meet the Kremlin halfway in the late 1980s, there will be no winners.

There are also Moscow's under-rated capabilities for conflict resolution, not only its vote on the UN Security Council. Various recent examples could be cited, but remember Russia's essential role in the nuclear-weapons

agreement with Iran; its behind-the-scenes part today in attempts to resolve the conflict with North Korea; its potential as a deciding partner in bringing peace to Syria; and the role it is likely to play when the United States finally decides to leave Afghanistan. If not criminalized, Russia can be a vital peacemaker, and there is ample reason to think that the Kremlin is ready to do so again.

Long ago, when I first developed my own "contacts" and "ties" with "Communist" Russian society and, yes, with Kremlin and many other officials, I often said and wrote, "The road to American national security runs through Moscow." The same is no less true today. This necessity may now seem futile, as US political-media elites mindlessly criminalize Russia.

On the other hand, President Trump's ambassador to Russia, Jon Huntsman, stated publicly on April 24: "My president has said repeatedly that he wants a better relationship with Russia...with Putin.... You can call it a desire for détente."⁷⁴ If so, it is imperative to support the president's initiative, even if only this one.

America's Collusion With Neo-Nazis

May 2

WE MUST RETURN YET AGAIN to Ukraine because of what the orthodox US political-media narrative continues to omit—the still growing role of neo-Nazi forces in territories governed by US-backed Kiev. Even Americans who follow international news may not know the following:

- That the snipers who killed scores of protestors and policemen on Kiev's Maidan Square in February 2014—triggering a professed "democratic revolution" that overthrew the elected president, Viktor Yanukovych, and brought to power a virulent anti-Russian, pro-American regime—were sent not by Yanukovych, as is still widely reported, but almost certainly by the neo-fascist organization Right Sector and its co-conspirators.⁷⁵

death of ethnic Russians and Russian-
er in 2014 reawakened memories of
ring World War II has been all but
narrative even though it remains a
Ukrainians.

3,000 well-armed fighters, which
Ukrainian civil war and now is an
ces, is avowedly "partially" pro-Na-
and programmatic statements, and
national monitoring organizations.
d Azov from receiving U.S. military
new weapons recently sent to Kiev
kraine's rampant network of corrup-
ty ministries.

ays, Roma, women feminists, elder-
citizens are widespread throughout
at marches reminiscent of those that
nd 1930s. That a sacred Holocaust
d and looted.⁷⁶ And that police and
prevent these neo-fascist acts or to
as officially encouraged this violence
yn memorializing leading Ukrainian
ination pogroms during World War
onor, building monuments to them,
ore.

upport on anti-Semitism around the
idents had doubled in Ukraine and
ne incidents reported throughout the
the report meant the total in all of
s of the Soviet Union.⁷⁷

Ukraine and tacit US support or tol-
read outrage, but Americans cannot
They are very rarely reported and still
ers or on television. To learn about
o alternative media and their inde-

American writer. He is best known
ight *Crates of Vodka*, a deeply moving
e as a young boy brought to America

by his immigrant parents from Eastern Ukraine, a place now torn by tragic
civil and proxy war. But Golinkin has also been an unrelenting and meticu-
lous reporter of neo-fascism in "our" Ukraine and defender of others who try
to chronicle and oppose its growing crimes, including Ukrainian Jews.

For the record, this did not begin under President Trump but under
President George W. Bush, when then President Viktor Yushchenko's
"Orange Revolution" began rehabilitating Ukraine's wartime killers of Jews.
It grew under President Obama, who, along with Vice President Biden, were
deeply complicit in the 2014 Maidan coup and what followed. Then too the
American mainstream media scarcely noticed.

Even avid followers of US news probably missed this, for example. When
the co-founder of a neo-Nazi party and now repackaged speaker of the
Ukrainian parliament, Andrei Parubiy, visited Washington in 2016, 2017,
and 2018, he was widely feted. He spoke at leading think tanks, met with
Senator John McCain, Rep. Paul Ryan, and Senator Chuck Schumer, as
well as with the editorial boards of the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street
Journal*.⁷⁸ Imagine the message this official embrace sent back to Ukraine—
and elsewhere.

Fascist or neo-Nazi revivalism is under way today in many countries, from
Europe to the United States, but the Ukrainian case is of special importance
and a particular danger. A large, growing, well-armed fascist movement has
reappeared in a large European country that is the political epicenter of the
new Cold War—a movement that not so much denies the Holocaust as glo-
rifies it.

Could such forces come to power in Kiev? Its American deniers and min-
imizers say never, because it has too little public support (though perhaps
more than Ukrainian President Poroshenko). The same was said of Lenin's
party and Hitler's until Russia and Germany descended into chaos and law-
lessness. Ominously, a recent Amnesty International article reports that
Kiev is losing control over these radical groups and over the state's monopoly
on the use of force.⁷⁹

For four years, the U.S. political-media establishment, including promi-
nent American Jews and their organizations, has at best ignored or tolerat-
ed Ukrainian neo-Nazism and at worst abetted it by unqualified support for
Kiev. Typically, the *New York Times* may report at length on corruption in
Ukraine, but not on the very frequent manifestations of neo-fascism. And
when George Will laments the resurgence of anti-Semitism today, he cites
the British Labor Party but not Ukraine.

When Ukrainian fascism is occasionally acknowledged, a well-placed

"Informant" Echoes of Dark Past

May 23

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

of the Clinton administration, American electoral advisers encamped in Moscow to help rig Russian President Boris Yeltsin's reelection in 1996.

And that's the more conspicuous "meddling" apart from the decades-long "propaganda and disinformation" churned out by both sides, often via forbidden short-wave broadcasts to Soviet listeners. Unless some conclusive evidence appears, Russian social media and other meddling in the 2016 presidential election was little more than old habits in modern-day forms. (Not incidentally, the *Times* story suggests that US Intel had been hacking the Kremlin, or trying to do so, for many years. This too should not shock us.)

The real novelty of Russiagate is the allegation that a Kremlin leader, Putin, personally gave orders to affect the outcome of an American presidential election. In this regard, Russiagate has produced even less evidence, only suppositions without facts or much logic. With the Russiagate narrative being frayed by time and fruitless investigations, the "mole in the Kremlin" may have seemed a ploy needed to keep the conspiracy theory moving forward toward Trump's removal from office by whatever means. Hence the temptation to play the mole card again now as yet more investigations generate smoke but no smoking gun.

The pretext of the *Times* story is that Putin is preparing an attack on the November 2018 elections, but the once "vital," now silent, moles are not providing the "crucial details." Even if the story is entirely bogus, consider the damage it is doing. Russiagate allegations have already delegitimized a presidential election and a presidency in the minds of many Americans. The *Times'* expanded version may do the same to congressional elections and the next Congress. If so, there is an "attack on American democracy"—not by Putin or Trump, as we saw previously, but by whoever godfathered and repeatedly inflated Russiagate.

As I have argued earlier, such evidence that exists seems to point to John Brennan and James Clapper, President Obama's head of the CIA and of National Intelligence respectively, even though attention has been focused on the FBI. If nothing else, the *Times'* new "mole" story reminds us of how central "intelligence" actors have been in this saga.

Arguably, Russiagate has brought us to the worst American political crisis since the Civil War and the most dangerous relations with Russia in history. Until Brennan, Clapper, their closest collaborators, and others deeply involved are required to testify under oath about the real origins of Russiagate, these crises will continue to grow.

Afterword

"The Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk."

—Hegel

W*ar With Russia?*, LIKE A BIOGRAPHY of a living person, is a book without an end. The title is a warning—akin to what the late Gore Vidal termed "a journalistic alert-system"¹¹²—not a prediction. Hence the question mark. I cannot foresee the future. The book's overarching theme is informed by past and current facts, not by any political agenda, ideological commitment, or magical prescience.

To restate that theme: The new US-Russian Cold War is more dangerous than was its 40-year predecessor, which the world survived. The chances are even greater, as I hope readers already understand, that this one could result, inadvertently or intentionally, in actual war between the two nuclear superpowers. Herein lies another ominous indication. During the preceding Cold War, the possibility of nuclear catastrophe was in the forefront of American mainstream political and media discussion, and of policy-making. During the new one, it rarely seems to be even a concern.

As I finish *War With Russia?*, the facts and mounting crises they document grow worse, especially in the US political-media establishment where, as readers also understand, I think the new Cold War originated and has been repeatedly escalated. Consider finally a few examples from the latter months of 2018, some of them not unlike political and media developments during the run-up to the US war in Iraq or, historians have told us, when the great powers "sleepwalked" into World War I:

• Russiagate's core allegations, none of them yet proven, had become a central part of the new Cold War. If nothing else, they severely constrained President Trump's capacity to conduct crisis-negotiations with Moscow while they further vilified Russian President Putin for having, it was widely asserted, personally ordered "an attack on America" during the 2016 presidential campaign. Hollywood liberals, it will be recalled, quickly omitted the question mark, declaring, "We are at war." In October 2018, the would-be titular head of the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, added her voice to this reckless allegation, flatly stating that the United States was "attacked by a foreign power" and equating it with "the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks."¹¹³

Clinton may have been prompted by another outburst of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* malpractice. On September 20 and 23 respectively, those exceptionally influential papers devoted thousands of words, illustrated with sinister prosecutorial graphics, to special retellings of the Russiagate narrative they had assiduously promoted for nearly two years, along with the narrative's serial fallacies, selective and questionable history, and factual errors. (In the front of its issue, the *Times* reporters explained that "the goal of the project... was to bring people back to a story they might have abandoned.")

Again, for example, the now-infamous Paul Manafort was said to have been "pro-Kremlin" during the period at issue when in fact he was pro-European Union. Again, the disgraced General Michael Flynn was accused of "troubling" contacts when he did nothing wrong or unprecedented in having conversations with a Kremlin representative on behalf of President-elect Trump. Again, the two papers criminalized the idea that "the United States and Russia should look for areas of mutual interest," once the premise of détente. And again, the *Times*, while assuring readers its "Special Report" was "what we now know with certainty," buried the nullifying acknowledgment deep in its some 10,000 words: "No public evidence has emerged showing that [Trump's] campaign conspired with Russia." (The white-collar criminal indictments and guilty pleas cited were so unrelated they again added up to Russiagate without Russia.)

Astonishingly, neither paper gave any credence to an emphatic statement by Bob Woodward—normally considered the most authoritative chronicler of Washington's political secrets—that after two years of research he had found "no evidence of collusion" between Trump and Russia. Endorsing the *Post* version, a prominent historian even assured his readers that the widely discredited anti-Trump Steele dossier—the source of so many allegations—was "increasingly plausible."^{114,115}

Not were the *Times*, *Post*, and other print media alone in these practices,

which continued to slur dissenting opinions. CNN's leading purveyor of Russiagate allegations tweeted that an American third-party presidential candidate had been "repeating Russian talking points on its interference in the 2016 election and on US foreign policy."¹¹⁶ Another prominent CNN figure was, so to speak, more geopolitical, warning, "Only a fool takes Vladimir Putin at his word in Syria," thereby ruling out US-Russian cooperation in that war-torn country.¹¹⁷ Much the same continued almost nightly on MSNBC.

For most mainstream media outlets, Russiagate had become, it seemed, a kind of cult journalism that no counter-evidence or analysis could dent—though I try in this book—and thus itself increasingly a major contributing factor to the new Cold War. Still more, what began two years earlier as complaints about Russian "meddling" in the US presidential election became by October 2018, for the *New Yorker*¹¹⁸ and other publications, including the *Times* and the *Post*, an accusation that the Kremlin had actually put Donald Trump in the White House. For this seditious charge, there was also no convincing evidence—nor any precedent in American history.

• At a higher level, by fall 2018, current and former US officials were making nearly unprecedented threats against Moscow. The ambassador to NATO threatened to "take out" any Russian missiles she thought violated a 1987 treaty, a step that would certainly risk nuclear war.¹¹⁹ The Secretary of the Interior threatened a "naval blockade" of Russia.¹²⁰ In yet another Russophobic outburst, the soon-to-retire ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, declared that "lying, cheating and rogue behavior" are a "norm of Russian culture."¹²¹

These may have been outlandish statements by untutored political appointees, though they inescapably again raised the question: who was making Russia policy in Washington—President Trump with his avowed policy of "cooperation" or someone else?

But how to explain, other than as unbridled extremism, comments by a former US ambassador to Moscow, himself a longtime professor of Russian politics and favored mainstream commentator? According to him, Russia had become a "rogue state," its policies "criminal actions," and the "world's worst threat." It had to be countered by "preemptive sanctions that would go into effect automatically"—"every day," if deemed necessary.¹²² Considering "crushing" sanctions then being prepared by a bipartisan group of US senators "to punish" Moscow¹²³, this would be nothing less than a declaration of permanent war against Russia: economic war, but war nonetheless.

• Meanwhile, other new Cold War fronts were becoming more fraught with hot war, none more so than Syria. On September 15, 2018, Syrian

missiles accidentally shot down an allied Russian surveillance aircraft, killing all fifteen crew members. The cause was combat subterfuge by Israeli warplanes in the area. The reaction in Moscow was indicative—and potentially ominous.

At first, Putin, who had developed good relations with Israel's political leadership, said the incident was an accident caused by the fog of war. His own Defense Ministry, however, loudly protested that Israel was responsible. Putin quickly retreated to a more hardline position, and in the end vowed to send to Syria Russia's highly effective S-300 surface-to-air defense system, a prize long sought by both Syria and Iran.

Clearly, Putin was not the ever "aggressive Kremlin autocrat" unrelentingly portrayed by US mainstream media. Still a moderate in the Russian context, he again made a major decision by balancing conflicting groups and interests. In this instance, he accommodated longstanding hardliners ("hawks") in his own security establishment.

The result was yet another Cold War tripwire. With the S-300s installed in Syria, Putin could in effect impose a "no-fly-zone" over large areas of the country, which had been ravaged by war due, in no small part, to the combat presence of several foreign powers. (Russia and Iran were there legally; the United States and Israel were not.) If so, it meant a new "red line" that Washington and its ally Israel would have to decide whether or not to cross. Considering the mania in Washington and in the mainstream media, it was hard to be confident restraint would prevail.

All this unfolded around the third anniversary of Russia's military intervention in Syria in September 2015. At that time, Washington pundits denounced Putin's "adventure" and were sure it would fail. Three years later, "Putin's Kremlin" had destroyed the vicious Islamic State's grip on significant parts of Syria, for which it still got no credit in Washington; all but restored President Assad's control over most of the country; and made itself the ultimate arbiter of Syria's future. In keeping with his Russia policy, President Trump probably was inclined to join Moscow's peace process, though it was unlikely the mostly Democratic Russiagate party would permit him to do so. (For perspective, recall that, in 2016, presidential candidate Hillary Clinton called for a US no-fly zone over Syria to defy Russia.)

• As I finish this book, another Cold War front also became more fraught. The US-Russian proxy war in Ukraine acquired a new dimension. In addition to the civil war in Donbass, Moscow and Kiev began challenging the other's ships in the Sea of Azov, near the vital Ukrainian port of Mariupol. Trump was being pressured to supply Kiev with naval and other weapons to

wage this evolving maritime war, yet another potential tripwire. Here too the president should instead have put his administration's weight behind the long-stalled Minsk peace accords. But that approach also seemed ruled out by Russiagate, which by October 2018 included yet another *Times* columnist, Frank Bruni, branding all such initiatives by Trump "pimping for Putin."¹²⁴

After five years of extremism exemplified by these more recent examples of risking war with Russia, there remained, for the first time in decades of Cold War history, no countervailing forces in Washington—no pro-détente wing of the Democratic or Republican Party, no influential anti-Cold War opposition anywhere, no real public debate. There was only Trump, with all the loathing he inspired, and even he had not reminded the nation or his own party that the presidents who initiated major episodes of détente in the 20th century were also Republicans—Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan. This too seemed to be an inadmissible "alternative fact."

And so the eternal question, not only for Russians: what is to be done? There was a ray of light, though scarcely more. In August 2018, Gallup asked Americans what kind of policy toward Russia they favored. Even amid the torrent of vilifying Russiagate allegations and Russophobia, 58 percent wanted "to improve relations with Russia" as opposed to 36 percent preferring "strong diplomatic and economic steps against Russia."¹²⁵

This reminds us that the new Cold War, from NATO's eastward expansion and the Ukrainian crisis to Russiagate, has been an elite project. Why, after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, US elites ultimately chose Cold War rather than partnership with Russia is a question beyond the limits of this book and perhaps my ability to answer. As for the role of US intelligence elites, what I have termed Intelgate, efforts are still under way to disclose it fully, and being thwarted.¹²⁶

A full explanation of the Cold War choice would include the political-media establishment's needs—ideological, foreign-policy, budgetary, among others—for an "enemy."¹²⁷ Or, Cold War having prevailed for more than half of US-Russian relations during the century since 1917, maybe it was habitual. Substantial "meddling" in the 2016 election by Ukraine and Israel, to illustrate the point, did not become a political scandal.¹²⁸ In any event, once this approach to post-Soviet Russia began, promoting it was not hard. The legendary humorist Will Rogers quipped back in the 1930s, "Russia is a country that no matter what you say about it, it's true." Back then, before the 40-year Cold War and nuclear weapons, the quip was funny, but no longer.

Whatever the full explanation, many of the consequences I have analyzed

along the way continue to unfold, not a few unintended and unfavorable to America's real national interests. Russia's turn away from the West, its "pivot to China," is now widely acknowledged and embraced by many Moscow policy thinkers.¹²⁹ Even European allies occasionally stand with Moscow against Washington.¹³⁰ The US-backed Kiev government still covers up who was really behind the 2014 Maidan "snipers' massacre" that brought it to power.¹³¹ Mindless US sanctions have helped Putin to repatriate oligarchic assets abroad, an estimated \$90 billion already in 2018.¹³² Mainstream media persist in distorting Putin's foreign policies into something "that even the Soviet Union never dared to try."¹³³ And when an anonymous White House "insider" exposed in the *Times* "the president's amorality," the only actual policy he or she singled out was Russia policy.¹³⁴

I have focused enough on the surreal demonizing of Putin—the *Post* even managed to characterize popular support for his substantial contribution to improving life in Moscow as "a deal with the devil"—but it is important to note that this "derangement" is far from world-wide.¹³⁵ Even a *Post* correspondent conceded that "the Putin brand has captivated anti-establishment and anti-American politicians all over the world."¹³⁶ A worldly British journalist confirmed that as a result "many countries in the world now look for a reinsurance policy with Russia."¹³⁷ And an American journalist living in Moscow reported that "ceaseless demonization of Putin personally has in fact sanctified him, turned him into the Patron Saint of Russia."¹³⁸

Again, in light of all this, what can be done? Sentimentally, and with some historical precedents, we of democratic beliefs traditionally look to "the people" to voters, to bring about change. But foreign policy has long been the special prerogative of elites. In order to change Cold War policy fundamentally, leaders are needed. When the times beckon, they may emerge out of established, even deeply conservative, elites, as did unexpectedly Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s. But given the looming danger of war with Russia, is there time? Is any leader visible on the American political landscape who will say to his or her elite and party, as Gorbachev did, "If not now, when? If not us, who?"

We also know that such leaders, though embedded in and insulated by their elites, hear and read other, non-conformist voices, other thinking. The once-venerated American journalist Walter Lippmann observed, "When all think alike, no one is thinking." This book is my modest attempt to inspire more thinking.

Endnotes

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