

All Roads Lead to Putin  
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House speaker Nancy Pelosi noted recently that in the Trump Whitehouse, all roads lead to Putin. This is, of course, one of the elements in the Trump impeachment investigation: if our President is in the thrall of a "foreign prince" (founding fathers warning), accepting gifts or bribes, or violating the constitution to the benefit of such foreign prince, he must be impeached and removed from office.

From the 2016 election campaign to this moment, Trump has shown a peculiar devotion to Vladimir Putin and has admitted that he believes Putin over his own Intelligence Community. The most touchy issue here is the fact that Russia interfered in that election and is interfering again in the upcoming 2020 election. If so, Trump cannot accept this truth because that would mean he didn't win the election on his own merits.

To determine if Putin is influencing Trump, we need to assess what Putin's policy objectives are. Putin, authoritarian that he is, presides over a country much diminished from its giant footprint during most of the 20th century, when Russia was the USSR. He was in Berlin, as KGB station chief, when the USSR collapsed. Michael Gorbachev was unwilling to shed blood to save the USSR.

Putin managed to get power in the new Russia, surrounded by a group of former KGB officers, who raided the Russian treasury and grabbed the assets from all the State properties (oil, gas, mining). These oligarchs now control half the country's wealth. The other half struggles along in an underground economy, avoiding taxes.

Despite his political power, he is presiding over a country with a very dim future. It no longer has an ideology like Marxist Communism, which was a great seller for a time. The population has plummeted by half since the beginning of World War II and shows no sign of increasing. And Russia's geography does them no favor: too far north, too cold for agriculture to feed themselves, and wide open to foreign invasions such as those that plagued their past.

Since Russia no longer has anything to seduce the world, their only choice is to destabilize it. Putin used to be a wrestler. He well knows that the wrestler's best tool is to put his opponent off balance. He has made this gambit the key element of his foreign policy: destabilize the enemy. He has taken on all the elements of global unity that the winner of the Cold War, the US, laboriously put together. We have produced a world order that includes monetary uniformity, trade organizations, the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, and a rising tide of liberal democracies promoting rule of law. Putin has laboriously gone about destroying all these institutions, and short of that, sowing such chaos that democracies seem tainted and failing.

The war he is waging on global stability is not being fought with weapons of mass destruction (yet), but uses one of Russia's oldest tools: disinformation. They have made use of clever lies, conspiracy theories, and the modern computer media that are fodder for the gullible less educated classes, not schooled in critical thinking.

To make his propaganda effective, he has found the weak spots in democracies that can arouse underclasses already resentful about their loss of jobs, loss of conservative values, and resentment of foreigners and "elites." Using these tools to disrupt elections has been useful for him. He has polluted elections in Ukraine and Georgia, but failed in France and Germany. He succeeded in the UK, promoting the Brexit vote to separate Britain from the EU. Many British are now aware of this and are sorry, knowing this will finally reduce them to a third-rate country.

He found a soulmate (or puppet) in Donald Trump, whose election was Russian aided. Trump has obliged by trashing our allies, removing us from international treaties, and disdaining NATO and global trade organizations. Even his promotion of gas and oil production benefits Russia's one export: climate destroying petrochemicals. And in the caldron of the Middle East, Trump has deserted a devoted ally, the Kurds, with Putin the beneficiary.

With Trump, all roads lead to Putin.

687 words

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