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The United States and the Russian devil: 1917-2017

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Conservatives have had a very hard time getting over President Trump’s much-repeated response to *Fox News* anchor Bill O’Reilly’s calling Russian president Vladimir Putin “a killer”. Replied Trump: “There are a lot of killers. We have a lot of killers. You think our country is so innocent?”

One could almost feel a bit sorry for O’Reilly as he struggled to regain his composure in the face of such blasphemy. Had any American establishment media star ever heard such a thought coming from the mouth of an American president? From someone on the radical left, yes, but from the president?

Senator John McCain on the floor of Congress, referring to Putin, tore into attempts to draw “moral equivalency between that butcher and thug and KGB colonel and the United States of America.”

Ah yes, the infamous KGB. Can anything good be said about a person associated with such an organization? We wouldn’t like it if a US president had a background with anything like that. Oh, wait, a president of the United States was not merely a CIA “colonel”, but was the Director

of the CIA! I of course speak of George Herbert Walker Bush. And as far as butchery and thuggery ... How many Americans remember the December 1989 bombing and invasion of the people of Panama carried out by the same Mr. Bush? Many thousands killed or wounded; thousands more left homeless.

Try and match that, Vladimir!

And in case you're wondering for what good reason all this was perpetrated? Officially, to arrest dictator Manuel Noriega on drug charges. How is that for a rationalization for widespread devastation and slaughter? It should surprise no one that only shortly before the invasion Noriega had been on the CIA payroll.

It's the "moral equivalency" that's so tough to swallow for proud Americans like O'Reilly and McCain. Republican Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell also chipped in with: "And no, I don't think there's any equivalency between the way the Russians conduct themselves and the way the United States does." Other Senators echoed the same theme, all inspired by good ol' "American exceptionalism", drilled into the mind of every decent American from childhood on ... Who would dare to compare the morals of (ugh!) Russia with those of God's chosen land, even in Moscow's current non-communist form?

The communist form began of course with the October 1917 Russian Revolution. By the summer of 1918 some 13,000 American troops could be found in the newly-born state, the future Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Two years and thousands of casualties later, the American troops left, having failed in their mission to "strangle at its birth" the Bolshevik state, as Winston Churchill so charmingly put it.

US foreign policy has not been much more noble-minded since then. I think, dear students, it's time for me to once again present my concise historical summary:

Since the end of World War 2, the United States has:

- Attempted to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which were democratically-elected.
- Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.
- Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.
- Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.
- Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.
- Though not as easy to quantify, has also led the world in torture; not only the torture performed directly by Americans upon foreigners, but providing torture equipment, torture manuals, lists of people to be tortured, and in-person guidance by American instructors.

Where does the United States get the nerve to moralize about Russia? Same place they get the nerve to label Putin a "killer" ... a "butcher" ... a "thug". It would be difficult to name a world-

renowned killer, butcher, or thug – not to mention dictator, mass murderer, or torturer – of the past 75 years who was not a close ally of Washington.

So why then does the American power elite hate Putin so? It can be dated back to the period of Boris Yeltsin.

During the Western financial looting of the dying Soviet Union the US could be found meddling in favor of Yeltsin in the election held in 1996. Under Yeltsin's reign, poverty exploded and life expectancy for men actually decreased by five years, all in the name of "shock therapy." The US/Western-backed destabilization of the Soviet Union allowed global capitalism to spread its misery unfettered by any inconvenient socialism. Russia came under the control of oligarchs concerned only for their own enrichment and that of their billionaire partners in the West. The transition of power to Vladimir Putin in the 21st century led to a number of reforms that curbed the disastrous looting of the nation by the oligarchic bandits. Putin and his allies vowed to build an independent, capitalist Russia that was capable of determining its own affairs free from US and Western domination. Such an orientation placed Putin in direct confrontation with US imperialism's plans for unipolar global hegemony.

Washington's disdain for Putin increased when he derided US war propaganda leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Then, the Russian leader played a crucial role in getting Iran to curtail its nuclear program and arranging for Syria to surrender its stockpiles of chemical weapons. Washington's powerful neo-conservatives had been lusting for direct US military strikes against those two countries, leading to regime change, not diplomatic agreements that left the governments in place.

Lastly, after the United States overthrew the Ukrainian government in 2014, Putin was obliged to intervene on behalf of threatened ethnic Russians in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. That, in turn, was transformed by the Western media into a "Russian invasion".

The same Western media has routinely charged Putin with murdering journalists but doesn't remind its audience of the American record in this regard. The American military, in the course of its wars in recent decades, has been responsible for the deliberate deaths of many journalists. In Iraq, for example, there's the Wikileaks 2007 video, exposed by Chelsea Manning, of the cold-blooded murder of two Reuters journalists; the 2003 US air-to-surface missile attack on the offices of Al Jazeera in Baghdad that left three journalists dead and four wounded; and the American firing on Baghdad's Hotel Palestine, a known journalist residence, the same year that killed two foreign news cameramen.

The Trump honeymoon is over for me. It was never actually love; hardly more than an intriguing curiosity; mainly that he wasn't Hillary Clinton; that he was unlikely to start a war with Russia or close down the *Russia Today* (RT) TV station in the US, which I and many others depend on daily; and that he was not politically correct when it came to fighting the Islamic State. Trump's "moral equivalency" remark above gave me some hope. But this all vanished with his appointment to high office of one war-loving, bemedalled general after another, intermingled with one billionaire Goldman-Sachs official after another; his apparent confirmation of his

Mexican Wall; and, worst of all, his increasing the military budget by \$54 billion (sic, sick) ... this will certainly be at the expense of human life and health and the environment. What manner of man is this who walks amongst us?

The word is “narcissism”. *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni (February 28, 2017) captures this well: “Why do I get the sense that fighter jets are Donald Trump’s biceps, warships are his pectorals and what he’s doing with his proposed \$54 billion increase for the Pentagon is flexing?”

Will there ever be an end to the never-ending American wars?

How should we react to terrorism?

I hadn’t planned on returning to this subject so soon, if ever, because of the distasteful experience of last summer when at least 50 of my subscribers canceled because I said that terrorism carried out by Islamics was to some extent motivated by their religion, an hypothesis rejected by what I see as the “politically correct” who took it to be an unjust attack upon an ancient and noble religion. The fact that I, a leftist, a comrade, would say such a thing was especially hard for them to take.

Since then I have regularly received emails pointing out that neither I nor the media have the right to categorically condemn brutal terrorist actions because the terrorists are reacting to decades of Western, particularly American, violence against the Muslims of the Middle East and elsewhere; and that if only the West would stop their bombing they would stop creating new terrorists. Liberal columnists often echo these sentiments, but at the same time cannot accept the role played by radical Islamic beliefs in instigating the Islamic terror.

Not every American soldier in World War II was a knowledgeable and convinced anti-fascist; nor were all of those fighting in Vietnam knowledgeable and convinced anti-communists; but they deeply believed in American exceptionalism. I proceed from the assumption that Islamic terrorists deeply believe in the leading tenets of Islam though many of them may have been drawn to ISIS for a variety of reasons and may have only a passing knowledge of the Koran and may only rarely enter a mosque.

Why is it that terrorists routinely shout “Allah Akhbar” (“God is great”) while carrying out a bloody attack?

Why is it that so much of Islam teaches that non-Muslims are the enemy, that “disbelievers” are to be executed?

Why do they speak of their duty to perform “jihad”, which is usually defined as a struggle against the enemies of Islam or against the “infidels”?

Why do they speak of “martyrs”, which is often used as an honorific for Muslims who have died fulfilling a religious commandment, especially those who die waging jihad, or historically in the military expansion of Islam?

Why do they speak of martyrs going to paradise after dying and receiving heavenly rewards? Even being resurrected on earth, to once again die as a martyr, going again to paradise.

Yes, yes, I know about the terrible crimes of the IRA Catholics and the Israeli Jews, but on the scale of human moral evolution they don’t compare to the routine cutting off of heads; the whippings; demolishing 2000-year-old monuments; sternly banning alcohol, music, gays and sex; covering up women’s faces; forcibly imposing religious law; and on and on, including the worst of all: the never-ending horrific suicide bombings. ISIS has done the impossible: It has made American foreign policy look almost halfway decent.

Occasionally I reply to critics with something to this effect: Even if I completely accepted your premises, I’d still feel that it was too late. We can’t undo the harm that US foreign policy and the West have caused. The barn door is wide open and all the horses have escaped. There is an entire generation, or two generations, in the Muslim world totally committed to gaining bloody revenge against the West. It appears to be that it’s either us or them.

Explaining the cause of terrorism is not the same as excusing it.

It might be different if the terrorists focused on killing only those in the West responsible for the horror carried out against their people, but their acts of violence are largely indiscriminate; they attack Westerners at random, often with Muslim victims included; often with *only* Muslim victims.

As I’ve pointed out in the past, we should consider this: From the 1950s to the 1980s the United States carried out all kinds of very harmful policies against Latin America, including numerous bombings, without the natives ever resorting to the uncivilized, barbaric kind of retaliation as employed by ISIS. Latin American leftists generally took their revenge out upon concrete representatives of the American empire: diplomatic, military and corporate targets – not markets, theatres, nightclubs, hospitals, schools, restaurants or churches.

France, the site of numerous terrorist attacks, has experimented with deradicalization centers in an attempt to combat homegrown extremism. The centers subjected those they housed to intense courses in French history and philosophy. But after five months the experiment has been abandoned as a complete failure. My guess is that one reason for the failure is that French officials, like their American counterparts, were too politically correct when it came to questions of religion. If I were a teacher at one of these centers I would ask the students how they know – I mean really *know* – that “martyrs” go to paradise. They are, after all, considering sacrificing their lives for this belief. Seriously confronting this question for perhaps the first time ever, the students’ minds may well become somewhat confused, leaving them open for other challenging questions and thoughts.

For the record: I don't support the US fighting ISIS in Syria. I don't trust the Pentagon's motivation, or their choice of bombing targets. They're probably still into regime change. I'd leave the job to Russia and its allies.