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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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14.07.2020

The Russiagate Spectacle: Season 2?



If it's an election year, there must be a Russiagate story. The Clintons and their neoliberal progeny, including the current standard bearer for corporate liberalism, have turned the Democratic Party into a branch office of the Deep State Inc., whose propaganda drones, the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, and MSNBC act like hired guns for the Office of War Information.

There's nothing new about the mainstream media (MSM) being teammates with the State Department and the CIA. Carl Bernstein published a major investigative report back in 1977 that revealed that the Times and their fellow travelers had been functioning as the overseas eyes and ears of the Agency, what was called "Operation Mockingbird," since 1948. The MSM were practically owned by the CIA.

The Times still goes to "The Company" before reporting events abroad. Given that the largest section of Americans still depends on television for news, and TV in turn relies heavily on the New York Times for the international news agenda, the CIA is able to feed its propaganda to the public through establishment media, even though this violates its charter. The CIA also influences public opinion through its entertainment industry liaison program, established in the mid-1990s, that in effect co-directs many American film and television productions.

The warmongers in the liberal media are more gung-ho than even the president. Interviewing Mike Pence last year after Trump threatened to obliterate Iran, CNN's Jake Tapper expressed the concern that "Iran would get the wrong message from the president's restraint." The cowboy pundit asked Pence, "Is he willing to pull the trigger," salivating at the prospect of war.

The Wall Street Journal, employing the media's "highly likely" style of negative analysis reserved for enemy states like Iran, Syria, Venezuela, and Russia, ran the headline: "U.S. says Iran likely behind ship attacks." NBC News joined the party with an online story: "U.S. officials: 'Highly likely' Iran carried out tanker attacks," as did CBS News: "US officials: Iran likely behind new tanker attacks." Other news media just accused Iran outright, based on nothing but anonymous sources.

The hysteria over Russia continues unabated, particularly by prominent Democrats such as Adam Schiff and Jerrold Nadler in the House and Nancy Pelosi, Charles Schumer, and Richard Blumenthal in the Senate. The latest claim about Russia, that it sponsored a Taliban assassination program in Afghanistan, has been carried by all the troll farm mainstream media despite the absence of any confirmed evidence. On its face, the story is absurd, as Russia has been extremely hostile to the Taliban – among other reasons for the fundamentalist Islamic group's active support of the Chechnyan uprising inside Russia.

The US needs a scapegoat for its disastrous defeat in Afghanistan, and for professional liars-of-record that role falls on Russia. However, as the Washington Post revealed a year ago, despite deploying more than 775,000 troops to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2019,

and suffering 2,300 dead and 20,585 wounded in action soldiers, and more than 100,000 killed or wounded Afghan civilians, at a financial cost of nearly \$1 trillion during that time, the Democratic leadership and their right-wing allies in the other party refuse to quit without imposing conditions that the Taliban will never accept. If they have to quit, the Russians are available for US face-saving.

As the US military's own secret study on the Afghanistan invasion has revealed, successive US governments have lied to the American people about the situation year after year since 2001. This reminds one of Chomsky's comment that if the Nuremberg laws had been universally enforced, every post-war US president would have been hanged for crimes against humanity.

How can anyone accept the CIA as a legitimate source of information on the Russiagate saga, especially given its notorious history of transmitting disinformation? In a frank admission of the deep state's clandestine policy of lying to the American public, former CIA director Mike Pompeo told an audience at Texas A&M University: "I was a CIA director, [and] we lied, we cheated we stole... like, we had entire training courses [on it]. It reminds you of the glory of the American experiment." And Donald Trump conceded in an interview with Fox last May: "And don't kid yourself. You do have a military-industrial complex. They do like war."

Is Russia the enemy in Afghanistan? Russia scholar Stephen Cohen noted in 2011: "Putin's Kremlin did more than any NATO government to assist the U.S. war effort against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and to save American lives, by giving it valuable intelligence, a Moscow-trained Afghan combat force, and unhindered access to crucial air bases in former Soviet Central Asia." Cohen has since been marginalized in the media and academia by the cancel culture.

That kind of censorship does not apply to former acting CIA director Michael Morell, who went on TV in 2016 to call for the covert murder of Russians and Iranians in Syria, i.e., an assassination program. Speaking to Charlie Rose, he called for outright terror tactics to "send a message" to Russia. The message apparently had a "return to sender" stamp. Morell was an active supporter of Hillary (Syria no fly zone) Clinton for president in 2016.

Moreover, the MSM and the establishment Democrats have short memories about Jimmy Carter's extensive military support to the Afghan mujahedin (which morphed into the Taliban) during the Soviet intervention in that country in the 1970s and '80s. And further to the matter of foreign interference, they might also be a bit more self-conscious about

the fact that it was Bill Clinton and the Harvard “shock therapy” specialists who gave extensive regime support to the corrupt autocrat Boris Yeltsin and the oligarchs he appointed to take over former state-run industries.

The US shipped over campaign spin doctors to run a rigged Yeltsin election in 1996, which sent the country into a massive depression: “the military was in shambles, the economy had collapsed, crime was rampant, massive poverty pervaded the country, and Russians were experiencing the worst mortality crisis since World War II. Russia was on the verge of being a failed state.” It was Yeltsin’s successor, Vladimir Putin, who pulled the country out of economic and social disaster.

Most of the American political class in their broadest imagination paint Putin as a ruthless dictator, forgetting that the US supported a corrupt autocrat in Boris Yeltsin, whom Bill Clinton called “Russia’s Abraham Lincoln” for his brutal suppression of the Chechnyan rebellion. They also have amnesia about the voluminous list of dictators US governments have supported for over a century. But as FDR is alleged to have said of Trujillo in the 1930s, pointedly capturing the US duplicitous imperial attitude, “he may be a son-of-a-bitch, but he’s our son-of-a-bitch!”

There is no question that Putin is no liberal democrat, and Russia is ranked low in press freedom, but it’s easy to forget that Russia has never been a liberal democracy. From that vantage point, with multiple functioning opposition parties, media, and street protests under Putin, he is almost without doubt (this is hard for gut-level Russia haters to swallow) at least in relative terms the most liberal political leader in Russian history. And despite his general stupidity about most matters, Trump seems to understand that it’s in the interest of the United States to work with Putin, a position seen by others as threatening to the national security state and the war machine.

It is also worth remembering that despite the outrage over Russia’s alleged interference in the 2016 US election, the premier interventionist in “rigging polls, supporting military coups, channeling funds and spreading political propaganda in other countries” is Uncle Sam. As George Bush Sr. and every president succeeding him, violating an oral agreement with Gorbachev to the contrary, placed aggressive NATO forces in the countries along nearly the entire Russian perimeter, is it reasonable to expect Russia to look the other way? Hence the preemptive annexation, with the strong endorsement of the local populace, of the next intended NATO peg, Crimea (and the Sevastopol naval facility), an old Russian territory, following the Maidan coup in 2014.

The Deep State-Democrat-MSM axis is blinded by their Russiagate narrative. And the Trump-Putin conspiracy thesis is not a winner for the Democrats in 2020, as they will be measured by their lack of policy making during the last 4 years and their failure to take down the president. Indeed, in poll after poll by Gallup and others, the Russiagate tale doesn't even register as even a minor concern with the American people.

However, when the question is posed by Gallup in 2020 as to whether Russia's military is a "critical threat" to the US, more than half (52%) of those polled said it was, compared to just 18% in 2004. On the other hand, given the daily barrage of fearmongering news the past 3 years about the so-called Russia threat, it is remarkable that almost half of Americans don't take the threat seriously.

Putin's latest opinion poll, which has been dropping over the last three years, currently in the midst of a major coronavirus epidemic in that country, still registers at 59% approval, according to the independent polling agency Levada. Of the last four US presidents, the average approval numbers are well below that figure. Obama averaged 47.9%; GW Bush 49.4%; Trump 40%, and Clinton, the highest, 55.1%.

As the Canadian-born journalist Aaron Maté points out, in all their flailing about Trump's supposed bromance with Putin, the Democrats put up little criticism of the Trump tax cuts, but complained instead about Trump's firing of the racist Jeff Sessions. Meanwhile, their MSM voice boxes, such as Rachel Maddow on MSNBC, continue to beat the drum against Russia in hopes of tearing down Trump, who, to his credit, has been unwilling to militarily confront Russia.

Second, it doesn't hurt that Maddow's network-approved rants pay her a salary of \$7 million. Being anti-Russia in the American media has no downsides. Any sort of unadorned propaganda on the subject passes the litmus test of "news."

"The hawkish mindset that liberals have embraced," Maté writes, "threatens not just their own political fortunes but also global peace." Instead of cutting back on defense spending, the Democrats demanded an increase higher than what Trump requested; instead of working for peace, the Democrats align themselves with super hawk John Bolton, a Dr. Strangelove if there ever was one. This is an ally who said on a national TV program in 2010: "Now I want to make the case for secrecy in government when it comes to the conduct of national security affairs, and possibly for deception where that's appropriate."

The failed impeachment effort was a gift to Trump of higher approval ratings. At least 50% of the public said in February 2020 that he deserved four more years. Then came the tides of March. If there's one thing that could defeat him in November, it's the unforeseen deus ex machina of Covid-19 and Trump's utter failure to take it seriously.

US foreign policy is stuck in time back to the era of the Cold War. The Soviet Union not only challenged the US ideologically, socialism versus capitalism, but, perhaps more importantly, it resisted the idea of a single power center ruling the world. Jodi Dean has written that "the practices imbricated in institutions and technologies relieve us of our duty to believe. They do it for us." The Cold War, like racism, is institutionalized in the fabric of the modern American capitalist project, its technological infrastructure, and the media stenographers.

Whoever wins the 2020 election, one thing is almost certain. As long as there is a military-industrial-deep state-media complex, the sun will never set on the Cold War.

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CounterPunch 13.07.2020