

Vladimir Putin Again
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When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Cold War ended with the United States the winner. Pundits worried about the world with just one superpower, but for a time our model of representative government and free market economics inspired much of the world to give it a try.

Russia emerged naked from its collapse, most of its former captive empire declaring independence. But it didn't take long for the Russians to re-take its Central Asian colonies by placing Soviet-trained authoritarians to head them. And Russia itself still extended over 11 time zones, all across northern Asia to the Pacific.

After a short period of attempts to join the rest of the western world with elections, free press, and free economy, it appeared that Russian society was not ready. A former KGB officer, Vladimir Putin, took over the rule of his country, surrounded himself with others of the same background, and began the process of robbing the country blind and step by step disabling the new western institutions. But he also reestablished order, which most Russians desperately wanted.

At that time, nobody could see that Putin would become a virtual President for Life by intimidating the parliament, planting rubber-stamp judges, and murdering journalists. This "republic," including its very conservative religion, resembles the old Russian Empire more than the former Soviet Union.

Oligarchs have replaced the former nobility. However, there isn't even the pretense of restoring the ideals of the Communist Soviet Union. Communism has always had the pretense of a just system of equality, although it never had the practice.

Putin, always vindictive, knows that his country is in big trouble. The population is declining, even more because of his mishandling of COVID 19. Russia's only exports of value are petrochemicals, primarily gas. Soon even that product will be replaced by non-polluting energy. His economy is notoriously bad, with perhaps half the transactions under the table for ordinary people. Russia shows no signs of thriving.

Putin's spiteful response is to get even with the US and Europe by attacking our democracies. He has one very inexpensive tool: the criminal computer hacking gangs (who undoubtedly make kickbacks to him). He uses the hacking and computer-generated conspiracy theories to sow dissent, an old practice that dates back to the Russian Empire, whose secret police originated that game (disinformation).

The New Russian Cold War has achieved a number of objectives: undermining the new and wobbly democracies of Poland and Hungary, which are now growing autocracies. He tricked the British into withdrawing from the EU (Brexit), to the detriment of both the UK and EU. And he patiently cultivated Donald Trump all the way from beauty pageant days through his run for President and played on Trump's hunger for admiration to use him as an asset in the White House. Let us remember that almost every foreign policy initiative during the Trump presidency was on Putin's priority list, not ours.

Putin has sown division and dissent, damaged the free press, the judiciary, and even the Intelligence agencies in the US and Europe. He has fomented conspiracy theories against science, turning the most gullible among us into angry armed proto-insurgents. Unfortunately for him, this anti-science campaign is also killing the Russians who stupidly distrust the COVID vaccination and masking.

Most dangerous of all, he has done what has never been done in America's history: cast suspicion on our voting system, the bedrock of democracy. Through his continued support for his puppet, Trump, he has even managed to defang his oldest enemy, the Republican Party. They cower and abet Putin's campaign to flatter Trump.

Lest you think that I give Putin too much credit, Andrew McCabe, James Clapper, John O. Brennan, Malcom Nance, and James Comey, Intelligence Professionals, have written books that describe the Intelligence Community's battles against both Russian criminal gangs and Putin's clandestine manipulation of the White House.

Former Ambassador Michael McFaul saw Putin up close; journalists and historians Woodward and Costa documented the Putin-Trump connection. And in Midnight in Washington, Adam Schiff covers the near catastrophe in the insurgency on January 6, when Trump incited this coup attempt.

Know thy enemy.

686 words

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