

The Tragicomedy of Russiagate

The whole election-meddling distraction is remarkable in both comic and tragic ways. The tragedy can be summed up in three words: New Cold War. At a time when the U.S. and Russian governments ought to be working toward nuclear disarmament, relations are deteriorating dangerously. As the estimable Australian writer Caitlin Johnstone, notes, despite Donald Trump's campaign promise of detente with Russia,

This administration has already killed Russians in Syria, greatly escalated nuclear tensions with Russia, allowed the sale of arms to Ukraine (a move Obama refused for fear of angering Moscow), established a permanent military presence in Syria with the goal of effecting regime change, forced RT and Sputnik to register as foreign agents, expanded NATO with the addition of Montenegro, assigned Russia hawk Kurt Volker as special representative to Ukraine, shut down a Russian consulate in San Francisco and expelled Russian diplomats as part of continued back-and-forth hostile diplomatic exchanges.

We are already at an extremely dangerous point in the ongoing trend of continuous escalations with a country that is armed with thousands of nuclear warheads. [Johnstone's links.]

Would Trump have done these things without the pressure of Russiagate? I don't know, but Russiagate hasn't helped. And what more would Hillary Clinton have done by this point? Johnstone argues that Russiagate is all about putting Russia in its place and securing the American ruling elite's geopolitical and economic interests — not about getting Trump:

America's unelected power establishment doesn't care about impeaching Trump, it cares about hobbling Russia in order to prevent the rise of a potential rival superpower in its ally China. All this lunacy makes perfect sense when you realize this. The U.S. deep state is using the hysterical cult of anti-Trumpism to manufacture support for increasing escalations with Russia, and the anti-Trumpists are playing

right along under the delusion that pushing for moves against Russia will hurt Trump.

Of course, removing Trump from office would be a cherry on top. If the drivers of Russiagate can't have that, at least they can leave the impression that Hillary Clinton would be president today were it not for the diabolically cunning Vladimir Putin and the inherently depraved Russia in cahoots with their tool, Donald Trump. (Putin's opponents in Russia are irritated that Americans portray Putin as virtually omnipotent.) Russiagate promoters in the Democratic Party deny they intend to right the wrong of 2016, but I don't believe them. Surely they are trying to delegitimize the election on the grounds that Trump and Putin stole it from its rightful owner. (For the record, I think all elections are illegitimate but not because of foreign involvement.)

The anti-Russia campaign has certainly gone well beyond overboard. Former Director of National Intelligence James (Yeah, I lied. What you gonna do about?) Clapper, on "Meet the Press," said the Russians "are typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique." (Beg your pardon, I linked to RT. Here's an American site for anyone concerned about having RT in their browser history.) Johnstone points out that Clapper has said such things before, including: "But as far as our being intimate allies, trusting buds with the Russians that is just not going to happen. It is in their genes to be opposed, diametrically opposed to the United States and to Western democracies." As I recall, former CIA Director John Brennan said something similar.

On the comic side, Russiagate is a new theater of the absurd, featuring Americans running around with their hair on fire over *alleged* official Russian actions that amount to nothing significant: it was an act of war — another Pearl Harbor — no wait, another 9/11!

Let's assume — purely for the sake of discussion since no evidence has been made public — that the Russians did it. Note, first, that the "it" looks like the product of the gang that couldn't shoot straight. I'm not going to do what Johnstone, Glenn Greenwald, Aaron Maté, and the late Robert Parry have done so well so many times, namely, catalog all the inane acts the Putin-guided Russian intel agencies are said to have committed in order to bring down America. (Start here.) Suffice it to say that if *that's* the best Putin can come up with, we have little to worry about. Of course, the very inanity of this so-called campaign to destroy America — the ridiculous discrepancy between means and alleged end, the sheer clownish ineptitude — furnishes sufficient grounds for skepticism, at least, about the Russiagate narrative. (See David Stockman's explanation of the ineptitude. SPOILER ALERT: It wasn't a Russian intel operation. The man who we are to believe sought to subvert America's democracy is a freelance pro-Putin Russian food-industry oligarch employing a

bunch of minimum-wage keyboard jockeys who didn't pay attention to the United States until the 2014 U.S.-sponsored coup in Ukraine, i.e., before there was a Trump campaign.)

Another comic aspect is the national arrogance of it all. How dare anyone interfere with our election! What's so funny is that some people who express such outrage really have no idea how many times the U.S. government has interfered in other countries' elections (including Russia's), not to mention far worse things, like perpetrating assassinations and coups. (See Stephen Kinzer's *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*.)

Americans generally do not know the nefarious things "their" government has done over many, many years. This is partly due to what Bryan Caplan in *The Myth of the Rational Voter* calls "rational irrationalism." Americans embrace a nationalism that is impervious to facts. Even vivid accounts of the systematic wholesale slaughter of the Indians wouldn't shake it. People generally don't like to venture outside their comfort zones to shake up their worldview, and even if they did so, what would change? Each person has only one vote, and the chance that one vote will make a difference is close to zero. So why not indulge one's nationalist biases? It's not as though there's an opportunity cost to doing so.

On the other hand, politicians and pundits do have some idea of America's long record of intervening in other countries. (Maybe I'm being too charitable.) What's their excuse for being so offended by even the possibility of meddling in an U.S. election? One explanation is the "exceptional nation" dogma of the American creed, or what I call the American chosen-people complex. Even secular American nationalists believe America has been anointed — by history if not by a deity — to lead the world. (This goes back to the founding generation, by the way. It's no post-World War II phenomenon. See *America's Counter-Revolution: The Constitution Revisited*.)

Thus, we have a moral inequivalence on our hands. It's okay if we do it to "them" (whoever), but it's not okay if "they" do it to us. Moreover, we can do it to ourselves, but if anyone else tries it, there'll be hell to pay.

Any way you look at it, Russiagate is ridiculous. Of course it serves some people's interests. But it harms the rest of us, most of all by bringing us closer to conflict with Russia, perhaps even to nuclear war.