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## ***Trump's Helsinki Press Conference and Public Disgrace***

Samuel Johnson famously declared, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." It is surely the first recourse of those hell-bent on toppling Donald Trump as U.S. president, not for the many, many right reasons, but to use ingrained Cold War Russophobia to achieve the goal.

The verdict is near-unanimous. Trump made a fool out of himself in Helsinki. He embarrassed himself and the nation. He insulted U.S. intelligence services. He was shameful. He betrayed his country. He elevated and legitimated Putin while diminishing himself. He committed treason.

The Washington Post, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, all condemnatory. Similarly CNN and MSNBC.

"An extraordinary and dark day," announced objective journalist Anderson Cooper on CNN Monday night. "There's no question this is a sad day," declared eminently mainstream CNN anchor Chris Cuomo minutes later.

The always growling Jake Tapper just asked his CNN audience: "How will the Helsinki Surrender affect public opinion?" This is the anchor of both the weekday show "The Lead with Jake Tapper" and the Sunday "State of the Union" program. A veteran of ABC and the White House Correspondents' Association. A supposedly objective journalist, reporting straight- (and grim-) faced about a "surrender."

MSNBC observed that "all Americans will always remember where they were" when they heard Trump's remarks in front of Putin Monday, July 16, 2018. Like Pearl Harbor. Like

9/11. The day the U.S. president publicly caved into the Soviet—oops Russian—dictator, crediting his statements over those of his intelligence team

Et tu, Fox News? the president must have thought, watching on the way home on Air Force One. Neil Cavuto called Trump's performance "disgusting." Bret Baier, Fox's sour-faced "chief political anchor," called it "almost surreal at points."

Sober-looking analysts learnedly opine that Monday is as important as 1919 and 1945. It's like 9/11. It's one of those days that everyone will recall, someone declares on MSNBC, remembering where they were when they heard Trump say those outrageous things in his press conference Monday. Some are counting Monday as Day One towards Trump's impeachment.

"Nothing short of treasonous," says former CIA chief John Brennan on MSNBC. (He also just said Putin "has decades of KGB experience." False. Putin was a KGB operative from age 23 to age 39, at which point the USSR dissolved. As Nina L. Khrushcheva, granddaughter of Nikita Khrushchev and professor of international affairs at the New School in New York City, observes, the KGB link has been overdrawn. And to hear career CIA people condemn former KGB officers, whose amoral functions precisely mirror their own, makes me want to puke.)

"Morning Joe" calls in Madeleine Albright—family friend of co-host Mika Brzezinski, and war criminal—to warn against fascism and promote her book designed to link popular antipathy to Trump to fears of a Nazified America. Harvard's Jeff Sachs wonders aloud whether Trump suffers from dementia or psychopathy and "shows signs of deep personality disorder traits. Absolutely shocking!"

A news conference in which the U.S. president stood with the Russian president, declining to publicly slam him, condemn him for "proven" Russian attacks on the U.S. election system, and declining to demand the Russian return of Ukraine, withdrawal from Syria, etc. has become the most promising pretext for the president's removal. Joe with his personal resentment of Trump, based on the latter's insults towards him and Mika, is plainly horned up to promote Trump's fall.

Top-ranking Republicans led by Lindsey Graham, John McCain, Jeff Flake and Newt Gingrich criticize the news conference, mildly (repeating State Department demands for Crimean withdrawal, regretting Trump's failure to condemn electoral interference, etc.) to wildly. They have to, to show their automatic, second-nature, ostentatious political patriotism. Usually Trump stands for the flag, using (for example) black athletes' taking of the knee during the National Anthem as a way to divide using this last refuge of fools.

Now he's portrayed by some as a virtual traitor. This could eat away at his flag-waving base.

It's depressing to think that this administration—that deserves to be toppled for so many reasons—might be brought down on the grounds that it was insufficiently anti-Russian, and that in its wake there could be an escalation of Cold War-type tensions under a more conventionally Russophobic regime. One headed by Mike Pence for example.

This Trump era shows how the decades of Cold War brainwashing retain deep residual effects—for me, a child of the 60s, unexpectedly deep. Mainstream “experts” lecture the people about how Russia is an adversary, just as it's always been (from the 1917 Revolution? from 1945, when the Soviets defeated the Nazis, took Berlin and established a zone of satellites in the east while the U.S. established its zone in the west? 2008, when Russia invaded Georgia?).

If the Republican Party has become the party of, in George Will's words, the Helsinki Republicans, the Democratic has become the Russophobe Party, the Cold War Party, condemning any Trump departure from Bush-Obama foreign policy. Trump wants to pull out of Syria? Horrors! Capitulation to Putin, patron of that Assad beast! (Isn't it obvious that mature, responsible policy would be to promote regime change as Hillary did with such gusto?)

Trump can accept Russian annexation of Crimea? He might want to lift the sanctions imposed on Russia (after the Feb. 2014 U.S.-backed pro-NATO, anti-Russian putsch and Russia countermoves)? Horrors again! Isn't it more logical to continue to punish Russia for something it's never going to undo, (any more than the U.S. is going to give back Kosovo to Serbia, from which it was wrenched through war with NATO in 1999).

The Democratic Party and the mass media, in general, are less interested in rapprochement with Russia than with trivializing that object, noting repeatedly that Russia is not, contrary to Trump's claims, a “competitor” in that it's GDP is a fraction of the U.S.'s, as its its military budget. Their message is that closer ties with Russia are not urgent; the status quo of imperialist alliances especially NATO is sacred; normal relations with, much less kind words for, the Russian leader are virtually treasonous.

Thus the “liberal” party on social issues is McCarthyite on the world. (Look at what once anti-war Rachel Maddow has turned into: a Goldwater Girl like her hero, the cackling Libya-destroyer Hillary Clinton.) It wants confrontation with Russia as a patriotic imperative. It regrets the decline of U.S. “global leadership” in the world (given what Republicans and Democrats alike accept religiously as “American exceptionalism,” i.e. the

right of the United States, appointed as it is by God, as peopled as it is by uniquely virtuous souls shaped by democratic institutions, to topple governments and bully others into towing the line) and asks for more pushback on (alleged) Russian advances.

Part of the argument is that Putin is a continuation of Lenin and Stalin (if not a life-long agent of the KGB, although that was disbanded in 1991), that the present oligarch-dominated capitalist economy of Russia is actually a continuation of the Soviet system, that Putin hates democracy and (while offering no alternative to bourgeois democracy, like Marxist democratic socialism, as the Soviet leaders would have done) favors right-wing anti-immigrant parties in Europe in order to “undermine democracy” because he for some reason “hates democracy.” This is piss-poor history.

The fact of the matter (which would be obvious to people if the media discussed the matter) is that the Russian government very rationally fears the expansion of the NATO military alliance to encircle itself. Trump’s opponents hoping to bring him down over this issue ignore or obfuscate it, hoping to convey to the people the idea that NATO is a benign organization like UNESCO, whose virtues should not to be questioned and whose expansion is as natural as the expansion of the EU or UN.

Trump boasts that NATO is stronger than ever thanks to his ability to extort \$ 38 billion more in spending commitments from partners who despise him and resent his crude public arm-twisting. It would be tragic if Trump falls only to indeed strengthen the Atlantic Alliance and generate more U.S.-Russian confrontation, especially over Ukraine.

Trump is taking heat for his tweet 9:27 Tuesday morning: “Some people HATE the fact that I got along well with President Putin of Russia. They would rather go to war than see this. It’s called Trump Derangement Syndrome!” He’s mocked on cable for sensationalizing, with his talk of war. But he’s right. “Liberal” anchors who despise Trump in general offer praise and express relief when he blows something up in Afghanistan or Syria; it comforts them to know he too has the traditional patriotic courage to kill big-time to “advance U.S. interests.”

But let’s think optimistically, and suppose that Trump has already so badly split the Atlantic Alliance that common imperialist action against Russia becomes problematic. Let there be splits between the U.S. and Germany, U.S. and France. Let anti-NATO feeling increase in Europe. A poll taken in 2017 showed that less than half the German, British and Spanish people would support joint action against Russia in the event of war. The idea that “our European allies” are panicking at the idea of a U.S. abandonment of a defensive deal (that they themselves supposedly initiated in 1949) and are chafing at Trump’s betrayal is

inaccurate. What clueless Trump has accidentally done is to make people re-think, and in particular reconsider the ongoing utility of what's become a loveless marriage.

Let the Cold War die not with a bang but with a whimper.

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Did you notice that yon Tuesday the EU and Japan signed a trade agreement omitting 99% of the tariffs between the parties? It's received a few seconds of reference in passing on CNN as of Tuesday morning.

It's an admitted move against Trump's protectionism. The pact cover six billion people and creates the world's largest free-trade area. Aluminum and steel among other products will flow back and forth.

"We are sending a clear message that we stand against protectionism," declared European Council President Donald Tusk in Tokyo. "The EU and Japan remain open for cooperation."

"There are rising concerns about protectionism, but I want Japan and the EU to lead the world by bearing the flag of free trade," Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe chimed in.

The message? We are heading towards a multi-lateral world, in which several powerful players, including the EU, Japan, China, and Russia interact under new rules necessitated by the U.S. president's madness. His bizarre behavior and remarks make him less relevant as a partner, while his weakness and the U.S. government's general disarray allow others to take new initiatives.

Expect a Russian-Japanese deal on the disputed Kuril Islands soon, ending the formal state of war between Russia and Japan and leading to a massive expansion of trade in such goods as Siberian timber. Expect Japanese engagement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and China's New Silk Road projects.

Trump is not thinking of these things. Good. Let him concentrate on Montenegro's admission to NATO.