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Fear and Trembling about the Trump-Putin Summit



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Why does the announcement of a Trump-Putin summit occasion such fear and trembling, such weeping and gnashing of teeth? (“Hold on to your Alaska,” glares MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow, intimating that Trump might give it back in Helsinki.)

For the same reason the Trump-Kim summit has met with disdain, if not alarm. (Isn’t North Korea a Russian ally?)

For the same reason Trump's refusal to maintain support for the armed, al-Qaeda (al-Nusra/al-Sham)-linked opposition in Syria meets with contempt. (Isn't Assad a Russian ally?)

Anything that Trump does that can be depicted as a concession to the "adversary"—the term mainstream journalists use to describe Russia, as though some higher power had somehow established this and commanded them to repeat it constantly as fact—is used by the mainstream media and Democratic Party to slam him. They're all trying to compete to show how clear they are on Russia's adversarial character, and how important it is to challenge its relentless aggression (Syria and Ukraine being the current putative examples) and revive or maintain a Cold War atmosphere. What can be more heretical to Americanness itself than to call for friendship with Russia (if it doesn't cave in to U.S. demands beforehand)?

Think of it this way. During his presidential campaign Trump was taken to task for comments that were offensive, outrageous, puzzling, stupid, wrong, racist, bigoted, and misogynistic. He was also taken to task for asking the simplest of rational questions: "Why can't we get along with Russia?"

This was generally treated, along with his open question of NATO's continued relevance, as an indication of dangerous naivete. But at the time it drew less attention than his truly ridiculous remarks about Mexicans, Muslims, women and humans in general, and the fake press (as enemy of the people). Since he was unlikely to be elected, his idiosyncratic comments on Russia were not a big issue.

Wild-eyed Hillary in the debates accused Trump of being a Putin puppet, mainly because he hadn't embraced her neocon-like militarism and failed to denounce Russia—as she so loved to do at every turn. I suspect most people watching dismissed this accusation as just more Hillary BS.

After the election a shell-shocked mainstream media first blamed Hillary's defeat on James Comey. But then Obama ordered an investigation of "Russian election meddling." and the intelligence community produced the Jan. 6, 2017 report attempting to prove that there was some indeed meddling. From that point the media has continuously encouraged speculation that Trump is somehow beholden to Putin. That is, the real reason Hillary lost is because Russia supported Trump.

Increasingly, the idea that Putin has evidence of a hotel sexual encounter with rather embarrassing content (part of the Christopher Steele dossier) is being lent credence. What was once treated gingerly is now mentioned matter of factly.

This is how to bring him down. By the Russian connection! Isn't it clear he's giving away the store? Trump's proposition that Russia rejoin the G7 met with howls of execration. Now some are speculating that he'll agree to withdraw U.S. troops from Poland, where they're stationed near the Russian border. Wouldn't that be terrible?

People one associates with progressive politics lead the charge against Trump—the charge of a “strange,” hard-to-explain disinclination to criticize Putin. That assassin. That invader. That guy who wants to restore the Soviet Union as he threatens his neighbors in the Baltics. Joy Reid and Rachel Maddow have the list memorized.

For my part, I don't care if Trump has avoided conflict with Russia because Putin has some kompromat on him. (It would just be another instance of Hegel's “cunning of history.” If an embarrassing incident in a Moscow hotel in 2013 leads to the dissolution of NATO, it's fine with me.)

I'm glad that Trump just referred to NATO as being “as bad as NAFTA.” Wow! We know how he feels about NAFTA: it's “the worst trade deal in the history of the world.” That's significant, on the eve of the Brussels meet.

I am glad he will confer with Putin soon after what will likely be a tense NATO summit.

I would be delighted if Trump and Putin agreed that due to the provocative expansion of NATO (under Trump's predecessors, from who he wishes to dissociate himself), and the pro-NATO coup in Ukraine in 2014, Russia needed to take over Crimea to maintain its naval bases there. Understanding this the U.S. could agree to lift sanctions and to encourage other nations to do so too.

Would be awesome if the two nations would agree that NATO won't expand to include either Ukraine or Georgia. The U.S. could agree to support the rights of ethnic Russians in the (NATO member) Baltic states and not depict Russian support for those rights as constituting a military threat. The two nations could agree to suspend large-scale military drills in eastern Europe indefinitely. (The German foreign minister has actually referred to these “provocative war-mongering.”)

I'd love to hear that the two leaders agree that the Syrian Arab Army backed by Russian forces is winning and should win the conflict in Syria. Because the alternative would be Iraq-like chaos or firm rule by child-beheaders, temple-destroyers, and guys who burn people alive in cages. They could agree that the uninvited U.S. forces will withdraw from Syria since their stated goal of defeating ISIL has largely been met.

I'd welcome Trump's repetition of his proposal at the G7 meeting that Russia be readmitted to the group. Not because I like imperialist forums in general but because I

think Russian involvement in this one would reduce world tensions and the likelihood of war war.

All of this would be very rational, but surely provoke demands for Trump's impeachment. Trump is somewhat constrained by what Putin politely calls "domestic politics" and in the face of the Mueller investigation cannot appear to give Putin too many "concessions" in Helsinki, especially since he's accused of doing so to Kim in Singapore.

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CNN reports two more indications that Trump wants to challenge existing international alliances. During his summit with Emmanuel Macron in April, Trump urged the French president to leave the EU, as Britain had done. (Non, was the answer.) And he apparently is questioning U.S. membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) which has 164 members and 23 observers. Only North Korea, Uzbekistan, Eritrea, 6 Pacific island nations and two European micro-states are non-participant states. A U.S. departure would seem unthinkable.

But then, so did a U.S. pull-out from the Paris Accord, or from the Iran deal. Trump is full of surprises. The Atlantic Alliance could rupture in the near future. That's impossible, you say? Well, most people thought Trump's nomination much less election was impossible. As the Fairy Godmother sings in Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella: "Impossible things are happening everyday." So let's just imagine.

Trump will not give back Alaska (which as you know, was purchased from Russia by the U.S. in 1867). But the Putin-Trump summit could produce a deal that produces some relief from the sanctions imposed in 2014—in return for some Russian shift on Syria or Ukraine that could be depicted as a serious concession by Trump's State Department. Europe could then embrace the deal and follow suite in lifting sanctions (to the delight of European farmers and manufacturers), and even agree to Russia's readmission into the G7/G8. Or Europe could disagree, and the Atlantic Alliance (continue to) fray.

Either prospect fills the mainstream media with fear and trembling. Any concession to Russia at Helsinki will be treated as treason (likely in response to blackmail). If the Europeans follow Trump's leadership, it will be a major victory for him (and Putin). If they don't, the U.S. media may tend to generally support Europe versus the president, expanding on the theme of Russian meddling in U.S. politics and denouncing Trump for damaging ties with the U.S.'s closest allies.

Or the summit will be a total failure, both leaders looking grim at the end. I have the feeling that that's what Rachel Maddow wants. Rachel was great during the Iraq War, but

then became a Hillary follower and hawk. These days her Russophobia corrupts her every utterance. She does appear to gnash her teeth at times as she speaks of Trump and Russia. But she is only one extreme example of mainstream media's journalists and commentators eager to bring Trump down due to his supposed Russian connections. For them that project overrides concern about small matters like world peace.