

April 22, 2018

A couple of items concerning Trump and his Secretaries of State have appeared. They shine some light on DC's swamp. David Goldman in Pajamas Media is first. ... *The whole preposterous allegation that Trump somehow colluded with Russia is designed to sabotage diplomacy between Washington and Moscow.*

*To reiterate my own longstanding view: Russia is a nasty place and Vladimir Putin is a nasty man, of the ilk that always has ruled Russia, a country where nobody talks about Ivan the Reasonable. On my OGRE-ometer, Putin barely registers a 1.9 against Stalin's 9.8. Russia is NOT our friend and NOT a prospective ally. But we have two choices. One is to attempt to bring Putin down and bring in a government we like, and the other is to strike a deal with Putin that we can live with. The first is delusional, but pervasive in a foreign policy establishment that still believes that we can reshape the world in America's image. If you don't believe that the foreign policy establishment is that crazy, please read my review of Condoleezza Rice's new book, *Democracy*, in the current issue of the Claremont Review of Books. Rice foisted Rex Tillerson on an unsuspecting Trump as a "Texas oilman" rather than as a cut-out for the George W. Bush wing of the Republican Party.*

*The utopian wing of the Republican Party (George W. Bush, Condi Rice, McCain&Graham, Mitt Romney) have an objective: Isolate, weaken and destabilize Russia with the ultimate goal of regime change. That will simply push Russia closer to China, Russia's biggest customer for oil and gas, and cement a Eurasian alliance hostile to the United States. It will also encourage Russia to act as a spoiler in the Middle East.*

*The alternative is to reach some sort of agreement with Russia (and China) which serves our basic interests and gives our competitors something in return. I sketched the parameters of a prospective agreement in a Dec. 17, 2016 essay for Asia Times, "How the US Should Engage Russia and China." That is what President Trump wants to do, according to numerous media reports, but the foreign policy establishment is doing everything in its power to prevent him from doing so. ...*

*... Without knowing the details of the national security meetings at the White House during the past several months, I can't judge the details, but it seems clear that President Trump personally overruled his advisers and decided on his own not to impose new sanctions on Russia. His instincts are exactly right. Whether he has a team willing to act on his instincts is another matter.*

*Ultimately American power depends on technological dominance. President Trump is the first American president ever to recognize the strategic threat posed by China. But his Administration has done little to restore American supremacy in technology, as I argued in a recent address to Hillsdale College.*

Matthew Continetti writes on the Dem refusal to confirm Pompeo as Secretary. *What on earth are the Democrats doing? President Trump has nominated CIA director Mike Pompeo, eminently qualified by any reasonable standard, to be America's seventieth secretary of state. And yet the Senate Democrats, led by Chuck Schumer, have perverted the advice and consent clause of the Constitution into a license to obstruct this solid nominee for one of the most important cabinet offices. The Democratic rationales for opposition are neither consistent*

*nor compelling. But the party is heedlessly and recklessly trying to capsize the nomination anyway, without giving second thought to the potential consequences of its actions. If this doesn't count as a symptom of Trump derangement syndrome, I don't know what does.*

*In the coming months, President Trump will have to deal with the fallout from his strike on Syria, the growing conflict between Israel and Iran, the future of the Iran nuclear agreement, Chinese belligerence toward Taiwan, the planned summit with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, and whatever unexpected international crises that erupt. Even if you accept the critique of Trump as someone who has no fixed worldview, little in the way of principle, and is dangerously enamored of the "madman" theory of strategic ambiguity, you would therefore want him, it seems to me, to be surrounded by personnel who are experienced, knowledgeable, capable, and steadfast—individuals who can serve as ballast, who can tether the president to geopolitical reality.*

*The slightest glance at Pompeo's official biography is enough to confirm that he is such a man. How many senators, Republican or Democrat, graduated at the top of their class at West Point, served as a cavalry officer, graduated from Harvard Law School and edited the Harvard Law Review, then went on to become a successful businessman? These are precisely the qualities that led the Senate in January 2017 to confirm Pompeo as CIA director in a bipartisan 66-32 vote. ...*

*... More likely, Trump, as he has done in other areas of the bureaucracy for the last 16 months, won't nominate anyone at all. He will leave the office of secretary of state unfilled while he and Pompeo manage diplomacy from the Oval Office and Langley, respectively. What this scenario achieves for the Democrats or the country, I do not know.*

*Perhaps the Democratic game plan is to make it impossible for Trump to govern in any capacity until the Democrats control Congress in January 2019. But that strategy assumes an awful lot, as well. Say the Democrats win the House but not the Senate, where the opposition faces tougher odds. With McConnell in control, Trump could recess appoint a secretary of state until the end of his term. Maybe it would be Pompeo. Or maybe it would be someone who offends progressive sensibilities even more.*

*"Secretary of State John Bolton" sure has a ring to it.*



**Pajamas Media - Spengler**  
**[President Trump vs. the Foreign Policy Swamp](#)**  
by David P. Goldman

President Trump's decision to postpone new economic sanctions against Russia on Monday brought some clarity to the foreign policy fight in Washington. The issue isn't whether UN Ambassador Nikki Haley gets confused, as she waspishly denied, but the fact that the president is fighting the swamp single-handed. Here's the Financial Times' snarky Edward Luce in a blast email this morning:

*"The explanation is simple. Everyone in the Trump administration is really hawkish on Russia. Except the president. On most days the train simply keeps running without him. People such as Haley talk to Jim Mattis, the defence secretary, John Bolton, the national security advisor, Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary, and so on, and agree on what ought to be done."*

Under the headline "Trump, a reluctant hawk, has battled his top aides on Russia and lost," The Washington Post reported April 15 that the White House national security bamboozled the president about last month's expulsion of Russian diplomats. Trump was told that he had to expel 60 Russians to match what the Europeans were doing.

*"The next day, when the expulsions were announced publicly, Trump erupted, officials said. To his shock and dismay, France and Germany were each expelling only four Russian officials — far fewer than the 60 his administration had decided on... Trump insisted that his aides had misled him about the magnitude of the expulsions. "There were curse words," the official said, "a lot of curse words."*

*The incident reflects a tension at the core of the Trump administration's increasingly hard-nosed stance on Russia: The president instinctually opposes many of the punitive measures pushed by his Cabinet that have crippled his ability to forge a close relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin."*

When the dust settles, I believe, the president will conclude that he was duped into launching last Friday's missile strike on Syria. As Angelo Codevilla, the dean of conservative foreign policy analysts, wrote yesterday at American Greatness, we do not know whether poison gas was used at the Syrian village of Douma or who used it. "The U.S. government's claim that the Assad regime used chlorine gas and sarin together (that would be a first) against civilians separately from movement of ground troops (military nonsense) may or may not be correct. The government presented no evidence except videos. When it does have evidence, it usually crows."

The whole preposterous allegation that Trump somehow colluded with Russia is designed to sabotage diplomacy between Washington and Moscow.

To reiterate my own longstanding view: Russia is a nasty place and Vladimir Putin is a nasty man, of the ilk that always has ruled Russia, a country where nobody talks about Ivan the Reasonable. On my Ogre-ometer, Putin barely registers a 1.9 against Stalin's 9.8. Russia is NOT our friend and NOT a prospective ally. But we have two choices. One is to attempt to bring Putin down and bring in a government we like, and the other is to strike a deal with Putin that we can live with. The first is delusional, but pervasive in a foreign policy establishment that still believes that we can reshape the world in America's image. If you don't believe that the foreign policy establishment is that crazy, please read my review of Condoleezza Rice's new book, *Democracy*, in the current issue of the Claremont Review of Books. Rice foisted Rex Tillerson on an unsuspecting Trump as a "Texas oilman" rather than as a cut-out for the George W. Bush wing of the Republican Party.

The utopian wing of the Republican Party (George W. Bush, Condi Rice, McCain&Graham, Mitt Romney) have an objective: Isolate, weaken and destabilize Russia with the ultimate goal of regime change. That will simply push Russia closer to China, Russia's biggest customer for oil and gas, and cement a Eurasian alliance hostile to the United States. It will also encourage Russia to act as a spoiler in the Middle East.

The alternative is to reach some sort of agreement with Russia (and China) which serves our basic interests and gives our competitors something in return. I sketched the parameters of a prospective agreement in a Dec. 17, 2016 essay for Asia Times, "[How the US Should Engage Russia and China](#)." That is what President Trump wants to do, according to numerous media reports, but the foreign policy establishment is doing everything in its power to prevent him from doing so.

Russia is a nasty place, but--as I have argued in print numerous times--most of what Putin has done in the Middle East is precisely what I would have done in his place. By imposing majority Shi'ite rule in Iraq, the George W. Bush Administration forced Iraq's Sunnis into the hands of non-state actors, namely al-Qaeda and ISIS. By supporting the "Arab Spring" rebellion against Assad, the United States created a Petri dish for terrorist training drawing in tens of thousands of Sunni jihadists from the Russian Caucasus, China's Western Xinjiang province, Western Europe, and other places. This threatened Russia and China, almost all of whose Muslims are Sunnis (and one in seven Russians is a Muslim). Russia intervened in Syria for several reasons, but its most important motivation was to quash a jihadist movement supported by the Obama Administration. Turkey and Saudi Arabia supported the Sunni jihadists fighting Assad as well.

Of course, Russia is not squeamish about means: Its ally Basher al-Assad killed half a million of his own citizens and displaced about 10 million, while Iran sent 80,000 Shi'ite mercenaries from Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan into Syria to fight next to its own Revolutionary Guard Corps. That is how we got into the present mess.

It is hard to untangle this mess without an agreement with Putin. Russians and Persians have been fighting since the Russo-Persian Wars of the early 18th century, and are allies of convenience. How can we persuade Putin to distance himself from his Iranian partner? The obvious trade-off, which I have discussed for a decade, would legitimize Russia's takeover of Crimea in return for Russia's help with Iran. That is anathema to the [foreign policy establishment](#): The 2004 "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine was a pet project of then Secretary of State Condi Rice, and the Obama State Department supported the 2014 Maidan coup in the belief that regime change in Kiev would lead to regime change in Russia.

If Russia wants to make trouble for us in the Middle East, it has a number of means to do so, for example, by providing top-of-the-line air defense technology to the Iranians and Syrians. Iran already has Russia's S-300 system, but we do not know which version it has. Russia's latest air-defense batteries are formidable, the older versions maybe not so much. That is a concern for Israel, which faces the prospect that Russia might break its control over Syrian air space.

If we really wanted to make Putin squirm, we would launch a Manhattan Project to defeat Russian air defenses, e.g. via drone swarms. Tossing cruise missiles into Syria is a waste of time, and the president was ill-advised to do so. In its aftermath, Turkey's rogue president Erdogan has emerged stronger, and has cut backdoor deals with Russia as well as Iran, as I [wrote yesterday](#) in Asia Times. The president was badly advised to turn his back on our Kurdish allies, who did most of the bloody work of suppressing ISIS. The Kurds fought for us, and we promised them backing in their strongholds in northern Syria. Then we allowed Turkey to bomb them and invade northern Syria, because the Turkish lobby at the Pentagon is terrified that Turkey will leave NATO.

That leaves Iran free to extend its territorial control right up to the Israeli border, something Israel has said that it cannot tolerate. Hit-and-run missile attacks from Iranian proxies in Syria would force Israel to spend vast resources to suppress a plethora of minor attacks. Iran's

strategy is war of attrition, and Israel's inevitable response will be to choose a big war sooner rather than later.

Without knowing the details of the national security meetings at the White House during the past several months, I can't judge the details, but it seems clear that President Trump personally overruled his advisers and decided on his own not to impose new sanctions on Russia. His instincts are exactly right. Whether he has a team willing to act on his instincts is another matter.

Ultimately American power depends on technological dominance. President Trump is the first American president ever to recognize the strategic threat posed by China. But his Administration has done little to restore American supremacy in technology, as I argued in a recent address to [Hillsdale College](#).

## Washington Free Beacon

### [Confirm Pompeo](#)

*The president deserves his excellent choice for secretary of state*

by Matthew Continetti



What on earth are the Democrats doing? President Trump has nominated CIA director Mike Pompeo, eminently qualified by any reasonable standard, to be America's seventieth secretary of state. And yet the Senate Democrats, led by Chuck Schumer, have perverted the advice and consent clause of the Constitution into a license to obstruct this solid nominee for one of the most important cabinet offices. The Democratic rationales for opposition are neither consistent nor compelling. But the party is heedlessly and recklessly trying to capsize the nomination anyway, without giving second thought to the potential consequences of its actions. If this doesn't count as a symptom of Trump derangement syndrome, I don't know what does.

In the coming months, President Trump will have to deal with the fallout from his strike on Syria, the growing conflict between Israel and Iran, the future of the Iran nuclear agreement, Chinese belligerence toward Taiwan, the planned summit with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, and whatever unexpected international crises that erupt. Even if you accept the critique of Trump as

someone who has no fixed worldview, little in the way of principle, and is dangerously enamored of the "madman" theory of strategic ambiguity, you would therefore want him, it seems to me, to be surrounded by personnel who are experienced, knowledgeable, capable, and steadfast—individuals who can serve as ballast, who can tether the president to geopolitical reality.

The slightest glance at Pompeo's [official biography](#) is enough to confirm that he is such a man. How many senators, Republican or Democrat, graduated at the top of their class at West Point, served as a cavalry officer, graduated from Harvard Law School and edited the *Harvard Law Review*, then went on to become a successful businessman? These are precisely the qualities that led the Senate in January 2017 to confirm Pompeo as CIA director in a bipartisan [66-32 vote](#).

A position in which, by the high standards of administration critics, Pompeo has excelled. "When it came to representing the judgments of the CIA, he was scrupulous," former CIA director Michael Hayden, no friend of Trump's, [said recently](#). "I've seen no indication whatsoever that he's done anything but fairly describe what it is his analysts believe to be true and that includes the hypercharged, politically sensitive third-rail issue of what the Russians did in 2016."

So Pompeo is credentialed, succeeded in a tough position, and represented intelligence straightforwardly to President Trump. And yet none of this is enough for the Democrats, including those who supported Pompeo's nomination for CIA director, for the specious reason that the president shouldn't have a secretary of state who agrees with him. The Senate Democrats are operating under the assumption that it is disqualifying for a nominee to hold views shared by the duly elected president and majorities in both houses of Congress. They say Pompeo is too hawkish, despite his personal meeting with Kim Jong Un. Or they say Pompeo is dishonest for not revealing to them his classified visit to North Korea. Or they attack Pompeo for holding the same position on same-sex marriage as Barack Obama circa 2012. Or they worry that Pompeo is too worried about Islamism, and not worried enough about climate change. Next they'll complain that he's never donated to Planned Parenthood.

Yes, it's true: Mike Pompeo is not a liberal Democrat. Knock me over with a feather.

Of course, the real reason Democrats are circling the wagons against this nomination has nothing to do with Pompeo's politics. It's because the Democrats recognize the political weakness of the Trump administration ahead of the midterm elections and want to cripple it further. But have they paused for a moment to consider what might happen if their wish is granted and Pompeo is *not* confirmed? Who do they think Trump will nominate then? Lena Dunham?

More likely, Trump, as he has done in other areas of the bureaucracy for the last 16 months, won't nominate anyone at all. He will leave the office of secretary of state unfilled while he and Pompeo manage diplomacy from the Oval Office and Langley, respectively. What this scenario achieves for the Democrats or the country, I do not know.

Perhaps the Democratic game plan is to make it impossible for Trump to govern in any capacity until the Democrats control Congress in January 2019. But that strategy assumes an awful lot, as well. Say the Democrats win the House but not the Senate, where the opposition faces tougher odds. With McConnell in control, Trump could recess appoint a secretary of state until the end of his term. Maybe it would be Pompeo. Or maybe it would be someone who offends progressive sensibilities even more.

"Secretary of State John Bolton" sure has a ring to it.



