

## **Putin versus democracy**

*By Eric Terashima, Guest Columnist [Brunswick Beacon](#), 03.10.22*

In my 30 years of commissioned service as a Marine, the GOP went from fighting Russia's "evil empire" to helping Putin rebuild it.

Putin's strategy was "divide and conquer." He tried to weaken NATO, divide Americans, and destroy our faith in democracy. Trump obliged by ridiculing NATO, stoking fear between Americans, and trying to overthrow a democratic election.

But Putin no longer has an ally as President. He invaded Ukraine now to take advantage of America's polarization and prevent us from rebuilding NATO. Americans must come together to stop him.

### **NO TEAM AMERICA FOR TRUMP**

Fiona Hill was Trump's senior Russia advisor. She says Trump envies Putin because "he has no checks and balances." Hill says Trump emboldened Putin to invade Ukraine. Trump praised Putin, threatened to leave NATO, and tried to blackmail Ukraine into smearing Biden by withholding military aid. She said Trump was never driven by America's national interest, but by his personal interest instead. "There's no Team America for Trump. Not once did I see him do anything to put America first. Not once. Not for a single second."

### **GRAVE COUNTERINTELLIGENCE THREAT**

During the 2016 campaign, Trump defended Putin for murdering journalists, saying "at least he's a leader" and "our country does plenty of killing, too." A Republican-led committee headed by North Carolina's Sen. Burr issued a 1,000-page report describing numerous contacts between Trump's campaign and Putin's operatives. Sen. Marco Rubio said, "We found irrefutable evidence of Russian meddling." The report concluded that the Trump campaign's dealings with Putin's intelligence services posed "a grave counterintelligence threat."

### **TRUMP GAVE RUSSIA CLASSIFIED INTELLIGENCE**

President Trump tried to kill the FBI's investigation of his campaign's Russian dealings. When Director Comey resisted, Trump fired him. The next day, Trump met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. U.S. Intelligence says Trump gave Lavrov classified code-word intelligence and "revealed more information to the Russian ambassador than we have shared with our own allies."

U.S. Intelligence concluded that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to help Trump. At the 2018 Helsinki summit Putin denied it. Shockingly, Trump took Putin's side against American Intelligence.

### **TRUMP V. UKRAINE**

In his 2016 campaign, Trump excused Putin's first invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. "The people of Crimea, from what I've heard, would rather be with Russia than where they were." Trump also dropped a promise from the 2016 GOP platform to arm Ukraine against Russia.

Putin blamed Ukraine for interfering in the 2016 election, and Trump repeated Putin's false charges. In 2019, while Ukrainian soldiers were fighting Russian forces, Trump froze \$391 million in military aid to coerce Ukraine into manufacturing dirt on Biden. Hill said: "All this did was say to Russia that Ukraine was a playground."

Before Putin's current invasion of Ukraine, Bill O'Reilly asked Trump, "Is Putin ready to start a war?" Trump replied, "I think he has a great way; he's tough and smart and funny." After Putin hurled his tanks and missiles at peaceful Ukrainians, Trump called it "wonderful," and "pretty savvy," exclaiming "This is genius!"

### **BIDEN UNITES NATO**

Trump has eagerly promoted Putin's agenda. That continues to hurt America's effort to keep Putin from gobbling up Ukraine, the largest country in Europe not named Russia. NATO was created to contain Russia. It's vital to America's security. After Trump told his Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, that he would withdraw from NATO if he won a second term, Esper told colleagues he hoped Biden would win.

Biden is rapidly rebuilding NATO. The Wall Street Journal reports: "The Biden administration is getting high marks in Europe for its strong stand" against Putin. George W. Bush's Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "He's managed to unite NATO in ways I didn't think I would ever see again."

Biden's leadership convinced Germany to shut down Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline and all of NATO to impose sweeping sanctions. Sweden and Finland are now more eager to join NATO, which has proven to be the only safeguard against Russian aggression.

Putin gambled that Trump had so weakened NATO that he could invade Ukraine with impunity. Biden proved that to be an epic miscalculation.

### **PUTIN'S USEFUL IDIOTS**

Lenin tried to weaken the West using what he called “useful idiots.” Putin uses Trump and some Republicans the same way. A dozen Republican senators refused to sanction Russia.

Trump’s Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, said, “I have enormous respect” for Putin. Tucker Carlson asked, “Why do I care what’s going on between Ukraine and Russia? I’m serious. Why shouldn’t I root for Russia? Which I am.”

Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley advocates caving to Putin’s demand that Ukraine be barred from NATO. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene headlined a white supremacist, anti-Semitic, pro-Putin event whose attendees cheered Putin and chanted his name shortly before she was introduced.

Daily Beast columnist Julia Davis monitors Russian state media. She reports, “They are thrilled with those statements, they replay them ad nauseam, and to them, it is a sign of total weakness, that even Americans are not united.”

### **PUTIN’S PLAN**

Putin called the end of the Russian empire a “catastrophe” and wants to rebuild it. To do this, he needs to weaken NATO and divide Americans using propaganda and disinformation. U.S. Intelligence examined foreign attempts to influence the 2020 election and concluded that Putin launched a propaganda operation to demonize Biden and Democrats. He sabotaged faith in our elections and inflamed distrust in each other. He’s still doing it.

### **WHAT WE CAN DO**

- 1) Reject politicians who disgraced democracy, like the 147 Republicans, including Congressman David Rouzer, who voted to overturn a free and fair election.
- 2) Retire politicians who minimize and excuse the violent Jan. 6 Insurrection that ended our tradition of a peaceful transition of power.
- 3) Renounce politicians who pass voter suppression laws and draw gerrymandered maps that divide Americans into those who matter and those who don’t. Putin’s divisive propaganda and Republican voter suppression laws serve the same purpose. They stoke fear of the “other” to magnify what divides us, and blind us to how much more we have in common.

We thought we won the Cold War, but Putin refuses to concede. We need to make our choice. We can follow Trump’s lead by helping Putin’s propaganda divide us, destroy our faith in Democracy, and put an end to the great American experiment. Or we can defend

Democracy. How? By electing public servants who unite us, tell us the truth, respect the will of the people and champion voting rights for all Americans.

As a former Marine, I choose Democracy. Will you?

*Eric Terashima recently resigned as chairman of the Brunswick County Democratic Party to file as a candidate for NC House District 7*