

“Neoliberalism, the Decline of Diplomacy, and the Rise of the Global Right”¹

Essay by Penny M. Von Eschen, Cornell University

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In 1993, the Czechoslovakian poet-and-playwright-turned-president Václav Havel declared that “the fate of the so-called West is today being decided in the so-called East.” Havel warned that “if the West does not find the key to us...or to those somewhere far away who have extricated themselves from communist domination, it will ultimately lose the key to itself. If, for instance, it looks on passively at “Eastern” or Balkan nationalism, it will give the green light to its own potentially destructive nationalisms, which it was able to deal with so magnanimously in the era of the communist threat.”²

Havel’s plea, for the most part, fell on deaf ears. At that time, many were celebrating the West’s victory in the Cold War through military might and the superiority of free market capitalism. Today, with the election of Donald Trump, a U.S. president who exudes contempt for the democratic institutions and norms that Havel and his fellow reformers risked their lives for, Havel’s warning appears sadly prescient.

Less than two months into his presidency, Trump has pulled a Ronald Reagan redux in proposing a 54 billion dollar increase for defense spending, while slashing funding for social programs, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the State Department.³ This planned massive increase in military spending followed recent promises to forswear international entanglements and put ‘America first,’ and an attempted ban on immigrants and refugees from predominantly Muslim countries (an act which was declared unconstitutional by federal and state courts). That nativist agenda is echoed by Trump’s rhetoric promising to build a wall

¹ This essay draws in part from my book in progress, *Rebooting the Cold War: Nostalgia, Triumphalism, and Global Disorder Since 1989* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2018).

² Václav Havel, “The Co-responsibility of the West, written for *Foreign Affairs*, 22 December 1993, in Havel, *The Art of the Impossible*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) 141.

³ Helene Cooper, “Buoyed by Trump Budget, Pentagon Draws up a Shopping List,” *The New York Times*, 16 March 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/16/us/politics/trump-budget-pentagon-defense-department.html>.

along the Mexican border. Delivering on promises to upend settled U.S. foreign policies and time-honored values, Trump has staunchly defended Russian President Vladimir Putin and Wikileaks against the CIA and other intelligence communities. Trump has attacked his own foreign policy establishment, seems intent on hollowing out the State Department, proposing a budget reduction of 31% as critical posts go unfilled, and has turned a blind eye to Russia's interference in the U.S. elections.⁴ With U.S. officials reporting that they have uncovered evidence that Trump's associates were in "repeated contact with Russian officials – including people linked to Russian intelligence," FBI director James B. Comey announced on 19 March 2017 that "the agency is investigating whether members of President Trump's campaign colluded with Russia to influence the election."⁵ Trump's authoritarian resolve to strengthen the military and unleash federal border control enforcement agents, as well as his executive orders and zealous pursuit of the evisceration of regulatory agencies are consistent with his pro-Kremlin policies and his campaign's coordination with Russian and Wikileaks interference in the U.S. presidential campaign.⁶ Trump's xenophobic vision of a garrison state is closely aligned with the wave of right-wing nationalist movements sweeping Europe. Trump and his allies question the very legitimacy of democracy.⁷ Despite the unprecedented nature of Trump's actions, I want to suggest that the political conditions making Trump's election possible were long in the making. Trump's contempt for diplomacy, his bellicose militarism, his wanton shattering of rules and norms, and his xenophobic white nationalism—all of these can be traced, as Havel discerned, to developments after the collapse of the eastern bloc.

Post-1989 developments

In the early 1990s, triumphalists across the political spectrum assumed that liberal capitalist democracy would survive the collapse of communism. But to echo Havel, the end of the East portended the end of the West. In the Cold-War competition over which system could best deliver the good life to the masses, if the East was found wanting in most regards, it had arguably kept the West on its toes in delivering on the social compact of affordable consumer goods, cheap gas, and a social safety net. In the wake of the collapse of the eastern bloc, U.S. policymakers searched frantically for a new enemy. These academic and political big thinkers proposed new internal as well as external targets, and in the ensuing years bipartisan political norms rapidly eroded. Just as significantly, the collapse of the eastern bloc resulted in an unfettered neo-liberalism—a set of economic ideas based on free market fundamentalism and an ideology of technocratic governance that was dedicated to weakening state apparatuses and organized labor. Democracy requires strong, transparent, and

⁴ Glen Thrush and Coral Davenport, "Donald Trump Slashes Funds for E.P.A. and State Department," *The New York Times*, 15 March 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/us/politics/budget-epa-state-department-cuts.html>.

⁵ Matt Appuzo, Matthew Rosenberg, Emmarie Huettelman, F.B.I. is Investigating Trump's Russia Ties, Comey Confirms," *The New York Times*, 20 March 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/20/us/politics/fbi-investigation-trump-russia-comey>.

⁶ Nicholas Kristof, "Connecting Trump's Dots To Russia," *The New York Times*, 9 March 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/opinion/connecting-trumps-dots-to-russia.html?src=me>.

⁷ Michael Crowley, "The Man Who Wants to Unmake the West," *Politico*, March/April 2017, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/trump-steve-bannon-destroy-eu-european-union-214889?em_pos=large&ref=headline.

accountable states. In 1993, as Havel cautioned the West, liberal capitalist institutions may have appeared robust, even if they were imposed on the global south and were required as the precondition for aid to the former Soviet bloc. But as neo-liberal market fundamentalism conflated democracy and capitalism, it changed the rules of politics. Shrinking state capacity, deregulation and privatization, in tandem with accelerating economic inequality, undermined public infrastructure, public education, daily newspapers and independent media, as well as the mechanisms of free elections, all of which are crucial ingredients for a healthy democracy.

Moreover, in a global order shaped by neo-liberalism, with weakened state sovereignty, foreign policy-making defaults to unconventional actors, whose influence stems from their unaccountability to nation states. Foreign policy-makers, as described in the conception of empire advanced by Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri, are everywhere and nowhere, a congeries of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), popular culture producers, corporations, and social media sites—all rivaling the influence of nation states.⁸ First visible in crises involving failed states but echoing throughout the developed world, private actors and NGOs increasingly provide relief and social services that states are no longer able or willing to undertake. But at the same time, as Jan Eckel has argued, what many NGO and human rights activists consider an “ethical imperative of intervention” often entails working for “profound changes in the political systems and even social practices of foreign countries.”⁹

The assertion of U.S. power abroad has historically worked through a partnership between corporations and private citizens on the one hand, and foreign policy officials and the State Department on the other, with no dearth of examples of direct U.S. interference in the affairs of sovereign nations whether by coups or other means. The neo-liberal post-Soviet order however, has allowed new tools for the intervention of U.S. “soft power,” including involvement in elections in the post-Soviet sphere of U.S. politicians, NGOs, and human rights groups.

More recently, the U.S. state has become vulnerable to external destabilization as well as internal capture by authoritarian figures such as Donald Trump, who hacked American democracy by manipulating corporate media (24-hour cable news) and exploited weaknesses inherent in partisan politics and the electoral system.¹⁰ Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, Trump’s consistent praise of Putin, and the Kremlin’s influence over Trump’s campaign and subsequent actions are but a twist in a broader drama involving new techniques of intelligence and information warfare in an era of weakened states and polarized public constituencies.

Against the backdrop of weakened states and rising economic inequality, I want to highlight some of the significant manifestations of the erosion of U.S. democratic practices and norms. Let us return to the post-Cold War search for new internal as well as external enemies and the consequences of that preoccupation for

⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁹ Jan Eckel, “The Rebirth of Politics from the Spirit of Morality,” 257, in Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, eds., *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Both a set of economic ideas and an ideology of managerial governance, neo-liberalism was disputed at every turn. It is critical to keep an eye on roads not taken, and what neo-liberalism was displacing.

U.S. political culture. Second, I want to describe the discrediting of diplomacy in the wake of newly constructed foreign antagonists, focusing on the 2008 presidential campaign.

The post-Cold-War Search for Enemies

Trump's penchant for deception, disinformation, and the propagation of 'alternate realities' has clear precedents. Long before the 2016 election, a host of non-state actors, from lobbyists to NGOs and popular culture producers, arguably unsettled the terrain of public discourse and power relations by conjuring a new public constituency, eager for geopolitical intervention based not on facts, but a socially constructed "tabloid geopolitical imaginary."¹¹ A contempt for diplomacy—the rejection of political solutions to conflict over military ones—was fully evident in the 2008 Republican presidential campaign. That campaign also served as a dress rehearsal for the conflation of fact and fiction that may have proved decisive in the 2016 campaign and the early days of the Trump administration. In 2008, the John McCain–Sarah Palin Republican ticket anticipated the victorious Trump campaign with the angry populism of Palin's rallies, the Islamophobic smears of Democratic candidate Barack Obama, and the winking disregard for facts, expertise, and the very idea of the truth among McCain-Palin supporters and surrogates. While McCain admirably contested bigoted attempts at character assassination against Obama, the former prisoner of war elevated the crisis in the Georgian republic to the center of his campaign, revealing the dynamics of a re-booted Cold War with Russia.

The ascendancy of Trump-style authoritarian populism depended on an Aryan nationalist vision of the United States as besieged from without by nonwhite immigrants and Muslims and from within by racialized minorities viewed as undeserving beneficiaries of government largesse. This recasting of Cold War 'us versus them' binaries—once directed against infiltration and subversion by Soviets and their agents—shows Trump's having effectively activated binaries to mobilize hatred among his supporters and to sow fear among targeted populations. The utter demonization of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, Trump's wanton lying, and the authoritarian spectacle witnessed at his campaign rallies, represented a rupture in U.S. political norms, but it was not a sudden rupture. Rather it was the outcome—and display—of a global process long underway, where the voters in weakened western industrial democracies, with governments that are unable and often unwilling to protect citizen/workers from the destructive effects of 'globalization,' have turned to right wing authoritarian leaders. I put 'globalization' in quotation marks to emphasize that the process was not inevitable, not driven by supposedly inexorable market forces. Rather, the way that global economic integration occurred, accelerating in the 1970s, then taking new forms after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, was the result of the deliberate decisions and deregulatory policies of U.S. and western politicians, bankers, and financiers, whose highly profitable actions deepened economic inequality within their societies and globally.

In the U.S. context, with an external Cold-War enemy purportedly vanquished, U.S. norms of political compromise and acceptance of the legitimacy of the opposition party eroded quickly. Republican Party politics embraced partisan anti-government warfare predicated on scapegoating enemies within. The litany of post-Cold War attacks on internal enemies includes Republican Vice Presidential candidate Dan Quayle's targeting of poor African Americans and single women in his family values and law and order speech of May

¹¹ Frédéric Gagnon, "Invading your Hearts and Minds: *Call of Duty*[®] and the (Re)Writing of Militarism in U.S. Digital Games and Popular Culture," *European Journal of American Studies* 5:3 (Summer 2010), <https://ejas.revues.org/8831>.

1992. That same year, Republican candidate Patrick Buchanan declared that the ‘culture wars’ had replaced the Cold War. Following hysteria over Bill Clinton’s 1993 health care proposal, with critics likening it to communism and ‘cradle to grave slavery,’ Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s scorched-earth Contract With American partisanship culminated in his 1995 and 1996 shut down of the government over Republican attempts to slash government spending.

From the late 1980s conception of outlaw, rouge states to the post-9/11 formulation of the ‘Axis of Evil,’ Republican (and sometimes Democratic) foreign policy rhetoric resorted to a similar Manichaeism, a parallel re-articulation of external enemies that questioned the legitimacy of diplomacy when employed with those judged as being hostile to U.S. interests. In part, the rejection of diplomacy drew on the triumphalist story of the U.S. supposedly having won the Cold War through the assertion of military might. But conceiving of outlaw states as existing ‘beyond the family of nations’ also placed them beyond the pale; once deemed illegitimate, the only acceptable goal for these states was destruction or regime change.

Such constructions of the enemy fueled a popular geopolitical imaginary that not only views military operations, and particularly special-force covert operations, as the default mode of international relations, but also exudes contempt for diplomacy. McCain (and Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary) voiced such disdain for diplomacy during the 2008 presidential campaign. McCain claimed that his rival, Barack Obama, would “condone the positions of our enemies,” and “legitimize illegal behavior by sitting down for negotiations without preconditions.” Perhaps deliberately misunderstanding the word negotiation, he lamented that Obama “thinks that he can negotiate with Iran and get anything he wants.”¹²

The Rise of the Unqualified and the Decline of Diplomacy: the legacy of the 2008 presidential campaign

The 2008 campaign unveiled the renunciation of political expertise and procedures in yet another way. In putting forward an inexperienced, charismatic vice-presidential candidate in Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, the campaign seemed to reject knowledge, facts, and logic as basic qualifications for a ‘leader of the free world.’ In her ‘authentic’ demeanor and syntax, Palin’s evident weaknesses, combined with her evangelical fervor, only enhanced her appeal to many Republicans. To the astonishment of political observers, Palin’s deficiencies and skewed sense of reality resonated with a broad swath of the Republican base. There would be more astonishment to come, as Palin was in important ways a precursor to Donald Trump, stumping for the Tea Party as she led the charge that the GOP establishment had abandoned its base.¹³

In the 2008 campaign, McCain took up the cause of Georgia to promote the isolation of Russia and the expansion of NATO. The deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations accelerated in tandem with NATO expansion and U.S. oil pipeline projects in the former Soviet bloc, which was pushed aggressively by the U.S. oil industry from at least 1995 onward. The Republicans’ 1995 ‘Contract With America’ made expanding NATO a central tenet of the party’s foreign policy demands along with its goal of limiting U.S. involvement in actions by the United Nations’ (UN). A *New York Times* 1995 editorial discussed the “Cold War

¹² <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/09/26/debate.mississippi.transcript/>.

¹³ John Hayward, “Sarah Palin: Trump Movement Began With the GOP’s ‘Shocking Betrayals’ of Tea Party Voters,” Breitbart, 25 November 2016, <http://www.breitbart.com/radio/2016/11/25/sarah-palin-trump-movement-began-with-the-gop-establishments-shocking-betrayals-of-tea-party-voters/>.

Nostalgia” of Republican legislators, who “press[ed] ahead with a mischievous piece of legislation that would undo the Clinton’s Administration’s modest efforts to adjust U.S. national policy to post-cold war realities.” The legislation, the *Times* outlined, “would increase pressure for higher defense spending, revive efforts to develop star wars missile defense systems, encourage reckless expansion of NATO defense guarantees to Eastern Europe and hobble U.S. participation in United Nations peacekeeping.”¹⁴

Four years later, in 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland became the first former Soviet bloc states to Join NATO. Certainly, membership in NATO was desired and pursued by leaders of these countries. After first questioning the relevance of NATO and the Warsaw Pact as irrelevant cold war creations, Havel had come to see NATO’s expansion as an important form of cooperation that would stabilize Europe, perhaps a concession prize for losing his original dream of a robust de-militarized multilateralism. Yet NATO’s 1999 expansion set in motion dynamics leading to the 2002 invitation to seven countries to join NATO—Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia—helping to set off first “new Cold War with Russia.”¹⁵

By 2005, scholars such as Stephen F. Cohen, and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev himself criticized U.S. triumphalism and squandered opportunities for improved U.S.-Russian relations, warning of a new Cold War.¹⁶ In 2006, Gorbachev said that “Americans have a severe disease—worse than AIDS. It’s called the winner’s complex.”¹⁷ As tensions continued to mount, Gorbachev declared in 2008: “We had 10 years after the Cold War to build a new world order and yet we squandered them.” Gorbachev, like James Baker, Secretary of State at the time when President George H. W. Bush and Gorbachev declared the at the end of the Cold War on 3 December 1989 at the Malta Summit, believed that there had been a clear understanding that NATO, an explicitly Cold-War organization, would not expand, and certainly not to Russia’s borders. For Gorbachev, promises to Georgia and Ukraine about future NATO membership signaled an attempt to extend the U.S. sphere of influence into Russia’s backyard.¹⁸

¹⁴ “Cold War Nostalgia,” *New York Times* editorial, 3 February 1995.

¹⁵ Uwe Klußmann, Matthias Schepp, Klaus Wiegrefe, NATO’s Eastern Expansion: Did the West Break it’s Promise to Moscow?” *Der Spiegel International*, 26 November 2009; <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-s-eastward-expansion-did-the-west-break-its-promise-to-moscow-a-663315.html>; See, also the BBC timeline on NATO; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1543000.stm

¹⁶ Stephen F. Cohen, “The New American Cold War with Russia” *The Nation*, 10 July 2006, republished with a new introduction by the author, 8 June 2007.

¹⁷ Claire Shipman, “Gorbachev: ‘American’s Have a Severe Disease,’” ABC News, 12 July 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=2182020&page=1>; “Gorbachev: Americans Have ‘Winner’s’ Disease, *truthdig*, 12 July 2006, http://www.truthdig.com/eartothe-ground/item/20060712_gorbachev_americans_severe_disease.

¹⁸ Adrian Blomfield and Mike Smith in Paris, “Gorbachev: U.S. Could Start a New Cold War: Mikhail Gorbachev has accused the U.S. of mounting an imperialist conspiracy against Russia that could push the world into a new Cold War,” 6 May 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1933223/Gorbachev-US-could-start-new-Cold-War.html>.

Later, as tensions over Ukraine led to the effective collapse of the Obama administration's 2009 'reset' with Russia, former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack Matlock Jr., argued that the "U.S. and Europe brought on this whole mess in the first place by trying to place military bases outside of Russia." Comparing active American organizing in Kiev to the prospect of foreigners leading Occupy Wall Street movements, Matlock argued that American policy had provoked Russia by essentially telling Ukrainians and Georgians, "You can join NATO, and that will solve your problems for you."¹⁹ For these critics, the problem was that the U.S. was taking sides in internal disputes and actively fomenting dissent rather than leaving countries to work out their own paths and choices about political and economic reform.

The display of NGOs and aspiring politicians running their own foreign policy—not to mention lapses in diplomatic imagination—surfaced in the 'going rogue' foreign policy celebrated by Palin and advanced by Republican candidates and McCain during the 2008 presidential campaign. As Palin announced her willingness to attack Russia if she were in the Oval office, McCain's involvement in the 2008 Georgia crisis prompted questions of propriety from the media, the Obama campaign, and even President George W. Bush.

The Georgia crisis erupted into war on 7 August 2008 when the Georgian government launched an attack on a rebel group based in the city of Tskhinvali, South Ossetia, a province that had been part of Georgia within the USSR. South Ossetia had declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 as a sovereign state. Georgia attempted to establish control, leading to the 1991-1992 war, which ended in the de facto secession of South Ossetia as well as Abkhazia.

To this day, U.S. press accounts of the 2008 conflict nearly always omit the fact that Georgia attacked before Russia did, narrating the war as a simple act of Russian aggression. And indeed, Russians look back at the Georgia crisis as the time they lost the information war—with international media showing Georgian tanks invading but attributing them to Russia—a lesson that Russians would not forget as they vowed to step up their efforts at information wars.²⁰ In fact, in response to the Georgian attack, Russian troops repulsed the Georgian military in Tskhinvali and occupied part of Georgia including the city of Gori until August 23. A European Union commission ruled a year later that Georgia had initiated the conflict by invading South Ossetia in violation of international law. Finding fault with all three parties, the EU report categorically rejected the claim by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili that Russian had launched attack before the Georgian attack and also found no evidence that a Russian attack was pending. At the same time, the report

¹⁹ "Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia: Ukraine situation result of US and EEU aggression toward Russia," 20 March 2014 Democracy Now interview, Amy Goodman and Juan González with Jack Matlock Jr., (with Vice President Joe Biden participating.); Jack F. Matlock Jr., "Who is the Bully? The U.S. has treated Russia like a loser since the end of the Cold War," 14 March 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/who-is-the-bully-the-united-states-has-treated-russia-like-a-loser-since-the-cold-war/2014/03/14/b0868882-aa06-11e3-8599-ce7295b6851c_story.html.

Uwe Klußmann, Matthias Schepp, Klaus Wiegrefe, NATO's Eastern Expansion: Did the West Break it's Promise to Moscow?", 26 November 2009; <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-s-eastward-expansion-did-the-west-break-its-promise-to-moscow-a-663315.html>.

²⁰ On Russian lessons from Georgia, see Evan Osnos, David Remnick, "Trump, Putin, and the New Cold War," *The New Yorker*, 6 March 2017, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/06/trump-putin-and-the-new-cold-war.

branded the secession of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia to have been “illegal and Russian recognition of the two ‘states’ in violation of international law.”²¹

In the midst of the 2008 crisis, on August 12, McCain told Saakashvili “I know I speak for every American when I say ... today we are all Georgians.”²² As the statement prompted critical rejoinders including journalist Rod Dreher’s, “spare me. You couldn’t find one American in a thousand who could find Georgia on a map,” McCain reported that had he reassured Saakashvili that “the thoughts and prayers and support of the American people are with that brave little nation as they struggle for their freedom and independence.”²³ As McCain ridiculed Obama’s call for diplomacy to resolve the crisis, he emphasized his past trips and experience in the region. At the same time, Saakashvili reported speaking with McCain several times a day. In McCain’s accusations of Obama’s inexperience and naiveté, the Arizona Senator signaled his role as a relentless critic of Obama. Further inquiry into McCain’s Georgia policy reveals the stakes that shaped his bellicose stance and the non-state actors involved.²⁴

Randy (Randall James) Scheunemann, McCain’s principal foreign policy advisor during his campaign, was a board member of the neoconservative Project for the New American Century, (PNAC), and had served as President of PNAC’s Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. In the months when he worked for McCain campaign, earning \$70,000, his two-man lobbying firm Orion Strategies received \$270,000 from the Georgian regime of Saakashvili, with explicit marching orders to get Georgia a NATO war guarantee.²⁵ In fact, Scheunemann’s firm had received \$800,000 since 2004 to get Georgia in the NATO alliance, and was paid by Romania and Latvia to do the same.”²⁶

The inability to imagine diplomatic solutions mirrored the assault on facts. In the 2008 elections, the subjective experiences of Republican Presidential Candidate John McCain as a Prisoner of War in North

²¹ Ian Traynor, “International: Georgia blamed for starting Russia war; Tbilisi launched assault on South Ossetia – EU inquiry; Both sides accused of lies and breaking laws of war,” *The Guardian*, 1 October 2009, 23.

²² Adam Aigner-Treworgy, “McCain: ‘We are all Georgians,’” NBC News, 12 August 2008, <http://firstread.nbcnews.com/news/2008/08/12/4431528-mccain-we-are-all-georgians>.

²³ Rod Dreher, “We are Not All Georgians Now,” *Real Clear Politics*, 26 August 2008, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/08/we_are_not_all_georgians_now.html; see also, <http://firstread.nbcnews.com/news/2008/08/12/4431528-mccain-we-are-all-georgians>.

²⁴ Dan Eggen and Robert Barnes, “McCain’s Focus on Georgia Raises Question of Propriety,” *Washington Post*, 15 August 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/14/AR2008081403332.html>; Rod Dreher, “We are Not All Georgians Now,” 26 August 2008, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/08/we_are_not_all_georgians_now.html.

²⁵ Pat Buchanan “Georgia’s man in the McCain camp,” Opinion, *The Toronto Star*, 2 September 2008. AA06.

²⁶ Matthew Mosk and Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, “While Aide Advised McCain, His Firm Lobbied for Georgia,” *The Washington Post*, 13 August 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/12/AR2008081202932.html>; Pat Buchanan “Georgia’s man in the McCain camp,” Opinion, *The Toronto Star*, 2 September 2008. AA06.

Vietnam were elevated to status of knowledge about the truth of war and foreign policy, for which any political/historical analysis was simply irrelevant. Prior to 2000, McCain had invoked his torture as a POW to vehemently defend his right to use the racist epithet “gook” to refer to his Vietnamese prison guards.²⁷ In discussions of foreign policy, McCain invoked his authority as a veteran and former POW. McCain believed that the American war in Vietnam had been winnable and that the war in Iraq was winnable. He charged that Obama “would rather lose a war in order to win a political campaign” than commit to a U.S. victory in Iraq. McCain insisted on the untestable assumption that the U.S. could win any war if only the will to do so existed.²⁸ For McCain, evidence to the contrary was simply an argument for appeasement.

This elevation of the authority of the agent/individual in telling the story of the Cold War and as the final arbiter of truth is fundamentally anti-political. In this world of “knowledge,” there is no room for politics, for negotiation, or for considering the possibility that any interests of one’s opponent might be legitimate. The dissolution of boundary between fact and performance was dramatically documented in the 2008 U.S. presidential elections and in the fierce partisan battles that have followed. ‘Women warrior’ politicians such as the Palin and Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, can simply make up things up, such as the claim that Barack Obama was not a U.S. citizen, or that Obama was a Muslim, with no repercussions. Following the 2008 campaign when Palin argued that humans have not influenced changes in climate, she stepped up her role as a climate change denier. Confusing climate with weather, she posted on Facebook “Global warming my gluteus maximus,” pointing to a picture of her daughter Piper in the snow after her May graduation.²⁹ In a world of unhinged referents where social knowledge is replaced by the subjective, such politicians as Palin, Bachman, and Trump (from his persistent “birtherism” charges that Obama was not born in the United States through the 2016 campaign and into the Trump administration) have severed political speech from truth.

If McCain had tried to outdo Bush in his aggression toward Russia, the 2009 reset of U.S.-Russian relations announced by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama was undone by a similar cast of characters in the crisis in Ukraine, albeit with a twist.³⁰ As the crisis developed in late 2013 and into 2014, the U.S. State Department, led by US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, former U.S. Ambassador to NATO and a former adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney, actively pushed Ukraine EU integration and

²⁷ Bob Collins, “The “g” word,” NewsCut (blog), Minnesota Public Radio News, 23 July 2008, http://blogs.mprnews.org/newscut/2008/07/the_g_word.

²⁸ Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Wars of John McCain,” *The Atlantic* (October 2008), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/10/the-wars-of-john-mccain/306991/>.

²⁹ Nick Wing, “Sarah Palin: It Snowed In Alaska In May, So There Is No Global Warming,” *The Huffington Post*, 20 May 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/20/sarah-palin-global-warming_n_3306867.html.

³⁰ See, James L. Goldgeiger, “A Realistic Reset with Russia,” August/September 2009, Council on Foreign Relations; and “U.S.-Russian Relations “Reset” Fact Sheet, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-russia-relations-reset-fact-sheet>.

supported the opposition leader Vitaly Klitschoko.”³¹ At the same time, Paul Manafort, Trump’s first campaign manager, had already been working for the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich (president from February 2010 until his removal in February 2014) for years. A long-time Republican operative and lobbyist, Manafort had first butted heads with the State Department in 2006, when “the American ambassador to Ukraine asked Manafort to ask his client [Yanukovich] to stop bad-mouthing NATO. Manafort flatly refused.”³²

Marginalized by his international ties, Manafort lay low until he resurfaced in the Trump campaign. But Manafort had essentially been doing what McCain’s top adviser and other U.S. lobbyists had been doing all along, aggressively promoting the interests of his clients in the U.S. Congress. The problem was not that Manafort acted as an agent of a foreign government per se, the problem was that his client had been on the wrong side of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

During the crisis, experts on the region such as the historian Tarik Amar argued for diplomacy, calling for the U.S. “to decode the sabre-rattling of Putin—and to prevent Ukraine from turning into a proxy battlefield.” Amar cautioned that warnings to Putin “without any face-saving offers would be more than useless” and also needed to be balanced by appeals for restraint on the part of the Ukrainian leadership.”³³ Instead, McCain goaded Putin by stating that “Russia is a gas station masquerading as a country.”³⁴ (President Obama piled on by calling Russia a regional power) Escalating information wars and the brave new world of unconventional foreign policy actors during the expansion of NATO has produced an anti-American ‘fever’ in Russia that outpaces the antagonism of the Soviet era. Anger toward the United States, reported *The Washington Post* in 2015, is “at its worst since opinion polls began tracking it,” with more than 80% of Russians holding negative views of the United States.³⁵ Russian journalists have documented a widespread perception that after 1989, Russians had modeled themselves after the West, but had “experienced humiliation and hardship in return.” Evgeny Tarlo, a member of Russia’s upper house of parliament, argued that after Russia had reoriented toward the West, we expected that “they would finally hug and kiss us and we would emerge in ecstasy.” Instead, he argued, the West has been trying to destroy Russia.³⁶

³¹ F. William Engdahl, “Ukraine Protests Carefully Orchestrated: The Role of CANVAS, US-Financed “Color Revolution Training Group,” *Global Research*, 16 March 2014, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/ukraine-protests-carefully-orchestrated-the-role-of-canvas-us-financed-color-revolution-training-group/5369906>

³² Robert Kolker, “Paul Manafort is Back: The King of K Street is ready for the new Washington,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-11-28/paul-manafort-is-back>.

³³ Tarik Cyril Amar, “This is no second cold war: Ukraine’s territorial integrity must remain intact,” *The Guardian*, 28 February 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/vladimir-putin.

³⁴ “John McCain: Russia “is a gas station masquerading as a country,” 14 March 2014, *The Week*, <http://theweek.com/speedreads/456437/john-mccain-russia-gas-station-masquerading-country>.

³⁵ Michael Birnbaum, “Russia’s anti-American fever goes beyond the Soviet Era’s,” *The Washington Post*, 8 March 2015.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The sense of betrayal caused by what many Russians view as U.S. attempts to isolate Russia diplomatically and economically led intelligence services to strike back. In the 2016 U.S. election, Russian intelligence officials hacked Democratic Party emails and conducted information warfare against the U.S. electorate with a deluge of fake news. There was no shortage of ‘useful idiots’ susceptible to Russian meddling in the election. Hyperpartisan GOP Congressional scrutiny of Hillary Clinton’s use of a private email server as Secretary of State now pales in comparison to confirmed contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian intelligence officials. Those contacts, flatly denied from the start by Trump and his associates, have been unearthed by investigative journalism. Such skepticism and effective reporting was all too rare during the campaign, as credulous U.S. corporate media organizations reported the steady drip of negative stories about the Clinton campaign obtained from Wikileaks. Capitalizing on its reputation on the left as a whistleblower, Wikileaks, by releasing hacked emails of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), convinced many progressive Democrats that the primary was rigged for Clinton against her rival, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders (never mind that Sanders was a newcomer to the Democratic Party and should have expected no favors from the DNC). And FBI Director James Comey’s unprecedented intrusions, whether motivated by bias or poor judgment, played no small part in Russia’s hack of the election. Rebooting the Cold War in cyber-space, Russian intelligence and its legion of hackers left the U.S. flat-footed in a manner reminiscent of the Sputnik satellite launch in 1957, showing that they too, can play at cyber war and at the projection of alternate realities.

It is impossible to determine the extent of the damage done to Hillary Clinton’s campaign by Russian hacking and FBI Director Comey’s interference in the campaign just 11 days before the campaign. However bizarre the circumstances leading to Trump’s election, a pre-condition for the candidate’s success, despite vitriolic attacks against the military and abysmal personal conduct, was the ongoing undermining of norms of diplomacy and political compromise at home. Throughout his campaign, and in the first months of his presidency, Trump has wielded executive power, bypassing legislative and governing processes altogether—the state is him. Contemptuous of precedent or procedure, Trump willfully sows chaos and contemplates dismantling government regulatory agencies. And in predictable Orwellian fashion, the administration and its allies accuse the bureaucrats and government employees, who do the unsung and essential work of keeping the wheels of government turning, of functioning as a hostile “deep state,” a concept mostly invoked by left critics of U.S. foreign policy to criticize the activities of a covert, unaccountable alliance of military contractors and intelligence operatives without the oversight of elected officials.³⁷ If during the Cold War the U.S. government claimed legitimacy by offering citizens the benefits of consumerism and the social safety net, and the NATO alliance abroad, the Trump administration now demands payment from allies and assures the abandoned citizens/subjects that they will be taken care of by an authority figure, only to engage in constant kleptocratic deal-making at his luxury offices and estates, subsidized by taxpayers.

Penny M. Von Eschen is L. Sanford and Jo Mills Reis Professor of Humanities, Department of History, Cornell University. She received her Ph.D. from the department of History, Columbia University in 1994. Her books and essays include *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, (Harvard University Press 2004), and *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism 1937-1957* (Cornell

³⁷ Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Rumblings of a ‘Deep State’ Undermining Trump: It was once a foreign concept,” March 6, 2017; <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/us/politics/deep-state-trump>.

University Press, 1997). She is currently finishing a book titled *Rebooting the Cold War: Nostalgia, Triumphalism, and Global Disorder since 1989*, forthcoming Harvard University Press, 2018.

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