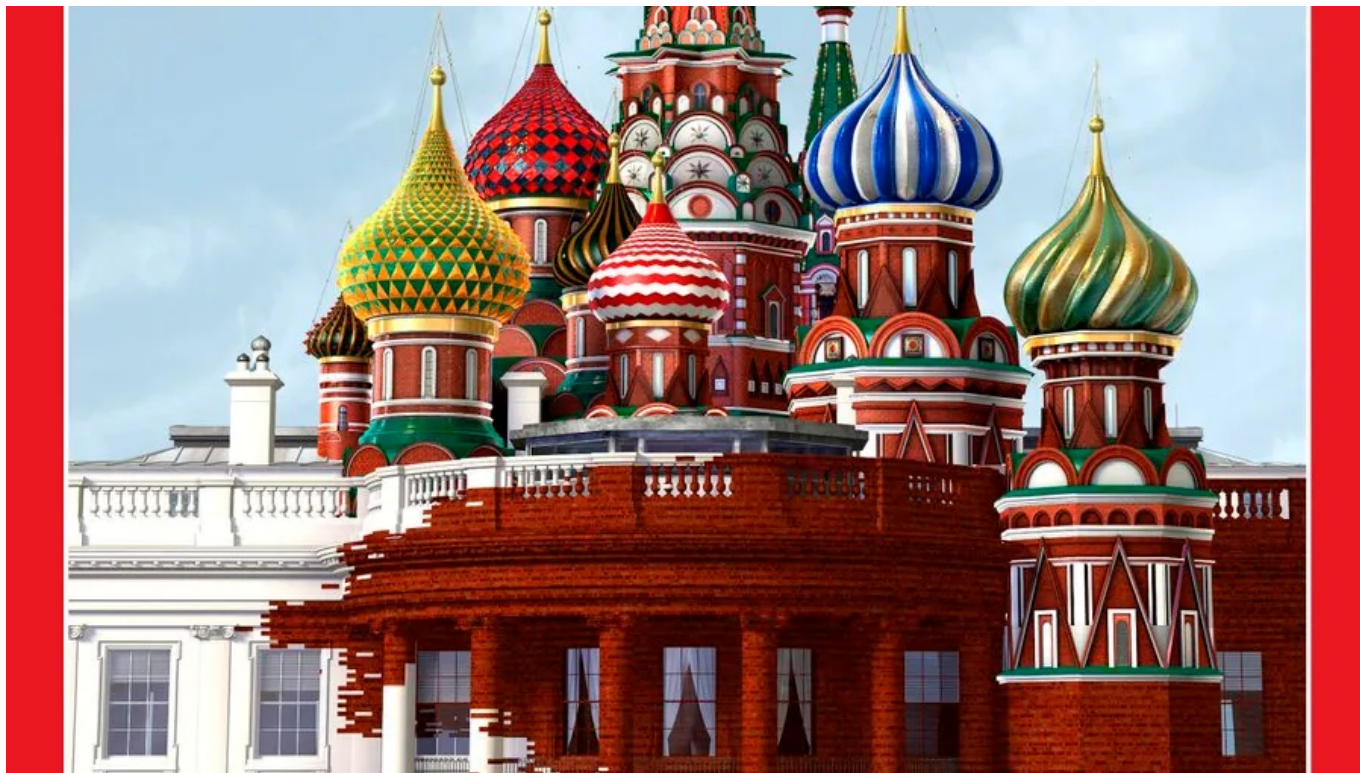


Russia! Russia! Forever: An Anatomy of a Left-wing Obsession

Collusion about Collusion



by Victor Davis Hanson

The more candidate Trump in 2016 trolled the Clinton campaign (e.g., “Russia, if you’re listening, I hope you’re able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing, I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press”), the more the irate left bought into hysterical conspiracy theories.

Finally, the left became completely unhinged after the 2016 victory. An Obama-era Pentagon lawyer published an essay exploring the chance for a military coup. Retired lieutenant colonels called for a Pentagon intervention. Retired four-stars could not decide whether he was Hitler-like, Mussolini, or the architect of Auschwitz. Celebrities competed to find

the most savage image of eliminating Trump—whether by combustion, incineration, decapitation, lethal shooting, or stabbing.

Since then, the press has run with lurid stories about Trump, from having syphilis sores on his hands to “proof” of him beating up Melania. But amid the unhinged hatred, nothing has quite reached the absurdity of the Russia! Russia! obsessions.

In 2016, the country went through crackpot leftist charges of Russian collusion that helped to destroy the lives of innocents like Lt. Gen. Mike Flynn, Carter Page, and George Papadopoulos. Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s lawyers (gushed over by pundits as the “dream team/all-stars/hunter-killer team”), despite all the pre-investigational hype and hagiography, spent 22 months and \$40 million to find no evidence that the Russians swung the election to Trump.

But in that sordid process, we learned the following: that a felonious FBI lawyer Kevin Clinesmith was convicted of doctoring a court document to mislead a FISA court in efforts to surveil an innocent man; that the FBI director James Comey recorded and leaked via a third party to the New York Times a private, confidential, and likely classified conversation with the President and lied to the president that he was not the subject of a federal investigation; and that he preposterously claimed amnesia or ignorance on 245 occasions under oath to a congressional committee about the various skullduggery of the FBI under his watch.

Comey was outdone by special counsel Robert Mueller. He claimed under oath that he knew almost nothing about Fusion GPS or the Steele dossier, the twin catalysts that had led to his very appointment.

We learned in addition that Christopher Steele was hired by Hillary Clinton (whose campaign was fined \$113,000 for federal campaign finance violations), albeit behind three stealthy

paywalls (the DNC, Perkins Coie law firm, and Fusion GPS) to disguise her role.

The British ex-spy Steele's mission was to find dirt on her presidential opponent, Trump. He did so by compiling a "dossier" of fakery and smears. Ironically, many of the most scurrilous charges might have reached Steele through Russian sources.

Yet the left and cable anchors cited as gospel the dossier chapter and verse—until they didn't, once the weight of its ridiculousness finally crushed their assertions. Steele, remember, was at one time a paid FBI informant, and as a foreign national, was supposed to be barred by statute from being hired by a presidential campaign.

In one of the notable political scandals in recent history, the present National Security Advisor and former Clintonite campaign operative, Jake Sullivan, used various surrogates to promote the lie that there was some sort of secret "backchannel" electronic "ping" communications between the Russian Alfa Bank and the Trump campaign and Trump Organization. The concocted myth was considered useful in advancing the "collusion" lie throughout the media, until even MSNBC and CNN quietly dropped the accusation.

Note "Russian collusion" destroyed the careers of three former FBI chiefs and a host of others. The amnesiac Mueller was discredited to the point of embarrassment in his congressional testimony. James Comey's machinations finally entrapped him in a web of deceit and partisanship. Andrew McCabe committed career suicide by lying on at least three occasions to federal officials and allegedly co-dreaming up the ridiculous "wire" caper with Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to secretly tape the President of the United States in efforts to prove him unhinged and thus to remove him via the 25th Amendment.

FBI counsel James Baker was instrumental in trying to seed the

fake dossier with the media before resigning and being hired by Twitter for a multimillion-dollar salary as deputy general counsel. Twitter, remember, was contracted in 2020 by the FBI to help suppress news accounts deemed unfavorable to the Biden project. Adam Schiff's House Intelligence Committee's "minority report" on collusion is now regarded as one of utter fantasy, despite being treated at its release as the final word on collusion.

Disinformation about Disinformation

Given the sordid Russia! Russia! conduct of 2016, one would have thought the left would have dropped the "collusion" caper. But instead, like an addict, they resumed their fixation again in 2020—as "collusion" now transmogrified into "disinformation." When Hunter Biden abandoned his Biden-incriminating laptop at a repair shop and its contents reached the media, despite the best efforts of the FBI to suppress it, the administrative state went into action with another Russia! Russia! hoax.

Another member of the current Biden national security team (is there a pattern here?), current Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, called up former acting CIA Director Michael Morrell to round up more than 50 former senior intelligence officials and "authorities" to sign and release on October 19—just three days before the final Biden-Trump debate and less than three weeks before Election Day—a collective letter. In it, the signed "experts" claimed that the released emails on Hunter Biden's laptop (it was then currently in FBI possession and the agency knew it was genuine) had "all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation."

Only it had none.

That was a demonstrable lie and soon proved to be—but only conveniently after the election. Note that no one in the FBI challenged that accusation despite, again, being in possession

of the contents of the laptop. The laptop farce enabled Joe Biden three days later to assert in the debate:

“There are 50 former national intelligence folks who said that what he’s accusing me of is a Russian plant. They have said that this has all the ... five former heads of the CIA, both parties, say what he’s saying is a bunch of garbage. Nobody believes it except him and his good friend, Rudy Giuliani.”

Biden failed to remind Trump that his own campaign flack, Blinken, had helped to cook up the entire scheme to arm Biden in the debate.

Two years later, in August 2022, the Technometrica Institute of Policy and Politics polled 1,335 adults and found that almost four out of five Americans who reported that they followed the elected felt that an honest reporting of the laptop scandal would have altered the result of the 2020 presidential election.

Seventy-four percent of those polled felt that the FBI had deliberately misled the public when it falsely claimed that the laptop was part of Russian “disinformation.” Note that the FBI went further still, enlisting Twitter and other social media platforms before the election to censor any news account that accurately stated the laptop was authentic.

Note also that Hunter and his lawyers, in surreal fashion, are currently suing the repairman for “invasion of privacy” violations—without admitting that Hunter’s laptop is Hunter’s laptop. Hunter, in interviews, has not denied it was his, only that he was unsure. Yet he would never deny his ownership under oath, since he knows it is demonstrably his laptop, along with the contents inside it. So exposing his own abandoned laptop is an “invasion of privacy,” but Hunter does not claim the laptop is or is not his?

No “authority” who signed the letter—not John Brennan, not James Clapper, not Leon Panetta—has ever apologized for spreading disinformation on the eve of a debate and election to alter the results.

For a party that lectures ad nauseam about saving democracy and “election interference,” it is hard to imagine greater interference than a campaign rounding up sympathetic intelligence authorities to mislead the country to warp an election, even as the FBI and social media were doing the same work through censoring news accounts.

What was Russian Reset?

But who exactly did go soft on Putin’s dictatorship?

On March 6, 2009, in Geneva, to great fanfare, Hillary Clinton, the U.S. Secretary of State, gave Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov a red plastic button with the word “reset” in English and, sort of, in Russian, to mark a supposed new partnership. The Obama administration subtext was that the prior militarist, President George W. Bush, had reacted too strongly to the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia over territorial disputes in Ossetia. Indeed, for years after, Hillary Clinton characterized the appeasement of Putin that followed as a “brilliant stroke.”

Yet the story of reset for the next five years was serial U.S. concessions to Putin coupled with naïve expectations of Russian reform. Five years later, Vice President Joe Biden admitted that ‘reset’ was an utter failure, given the 2014 Russian invasions of the Donbass and the Crimea, serial Russian hacking of American institutions, and Russian buzzing of American planes and ships. Vladimir Putin had adjudicated the Obama/Biden naivete as frailty to be manipulated rather than an olive branch to be reciprocated.

Or, as Biden put it:

“All of us, we all invested in a type of Russia we hoped—and still hope—will emerge one day: a Russia integrated into the world economy; more prosperous, more invested in the international order.”

Recall the now-infamous Obama hot mic exchange in Seoul, South Korea, in March 2012, an election year, with then-Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. The latter is now known mostly in the West as Putin’s obsequious megaphone, who routinely threatens Ukraine, Europe, and the United States with nuclear retaliation. Obama, in his message to Putin, seemed to assume reset still constituted quid pro quo understandings, as the transcript of the hoc mic exchange demonstrates:

Obama: “On all these issues, but particularly missile defense, this, this can be solved, but it’s important for him to give me space.”

Medvedev: “Yeah, I understand. I understand your message about space. Space for you...”

Obama: “This is my last election. After my election, I have more flexibility.”

Medvedev: “I understand. I will transmit this information to Vladimir.”

Despite all the “fact checker” denials, what is often missed is that the proposed bargain was more than met: Obama continued to dismantle plans for Eastern European-American cooperation to protect from long- and short-range missiles, and so was more than “flexible” on killing a project that might well have given the Europeans some peace of mind after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In exchange, Putin cooperated by giving Obama “space” during his “last election” by not humiliating his foreign policy failures by invading yet another one of Russia’s neighbors.

But after Obama was reelected and after missile defense was cancelled, Putin felt unbound again and invaded both Crimea and the Donbass in 2014, correctly expecting no retaliation at all.

Obama-Biden versus Trump on Russia

Amid all the narratives of Trump's "collusion" and collaboration with Putin, there remains one truth that not even the postmodern media can erase. Putin invaded his neighbors in 2008, 2014, and 2022, or in three out of the last four administrations, but, notably, not during the Trump years of 2017-21.

Trump had killed more Russian combatants—perhaps 300 of the Wagner group mercenaries in Syria—than at any time during the Cold War. In August 2019, Trump withdrew American participation from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty on grounds—supported by the Europeans—that Russians had repeatedly violated the agreements without serious American objections.

Trump sanctioned the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and warned the Germans that their dependency on Russian natural gas was self-defeating and undermined NATO solidarity. Such sanctions were overturned quickly once Biden entered office.

Trump sold offensive weapons—javelins included—to Ukraine, weapons systems previously tabled by Obama. In 2021, Biden froze \$100 million in military aid to Ukraine, including offensive weaponry, after falling for Putin's feints and lies that he was drawing down Russian troops from the Ukrainian border.

Biden, remember, asked Putin not to hack American humanitarian institutions. He said his reaction to a Putin invasion would hinge on whether it was a major or minor one, and offered to fly Ukrainian President Zelensky out of Kyiv when the Russians attacked.

Trump's 'drill baby, drill' policy of flooding markets with cheap petroleum crashed the world price and cut deeply into Russian export income. In 2018, Trump hit more Russian officials, oligarchs, and companies with new sanctions.

One might conclude that Putin enjoys trash-talking and sermonizing American presidents who are careful never to confront him, while he is more wary of unpredictable presidents who say occasional nice things about him, even while they make his agendas impossible to implement.

2024

As this year's election nears, expect the Russia! Russia! fantasies to heat up again to mask a failing administration and its indefensible record of a lethally open border, inflation, crime waves, foreign policy implosions, crackpot energy agendas, the weaponization of our institutions, and deteriorating race relations.