

Paul Krugman attacks Trump from the right on Russia

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In an op-ed piece published Friday, *New York Times* columnist and economist Paul Krugman attacks Donald Trump on the question of Russia, going so far as to suggest that the Republican presidential candidate is a covert agent of Vladimir Putin.

Krugman's column is provocatively titled "The Siberian Candidate," a takeoff on the Cold War-era political thriller *The Manchurian Candidate*, which featured a Korean War prisoner of war brainwashed into serving as a sleeper assassin to be used in effecting a Soviet-orchestrated political coup in America.

The column charges that Trump would "follow a pro-Putin foreign policy, at the expense of America's allies and her own self-interest." He suggests that there exists "some specific channel of influence" involving Trump's alleged "murky involvement with wealthy Russians." He concludes, "There's something very strange and disturbing going on here, and it should not be ignored."

In drawing on such themes, which echo the language and methods of McCarthyism, Krugman manages to attack the fascistic Trump from the right, no mean feat.

The *Times* columnist has carved out a reputation as the academic standard-bearer of what passes for the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. An inveterate and shameless opportunist and careerist, he has dedicated his journalistic efforts to touting the record of Barack Obama, whom he ludicrously casts as a crusader against social inequality, and promoting the candidacy of Hillary Clinton. In the service of the latter, he penned a series of lying, unprincipled and right-wing columns attacking her Democratic opponent Bernie Sanders.

Now it appears Krugman is branching out from his calling as an intellectual apologist for the Obama administration and the Democratic Party. With Friday's column attacking Trump, he has undertaken a mission on behalf of the US military and intelligence complex in defense of Washington's core imperialist war strategy.

What provoked the column was an interview on foreign policy issues that Trump gave the *Times* during the Republican National Convention in Cleveland. Asked point-blank whether as president he would come to the "immediate military aid" of the Baltic states in the event of a Russian incursion, the candidate gave an equivocal answer.

That the vast majority of Americans have no idea that Washington is prepared to go to war with Russia, possibly nuclear war, over three tiny former Soviet republics, all of them ruled by virulently right-wing and reckless anti-Russian regimes, is a matter of indifference to media pundits like Krugman. What matters is that the US commitment to militarily intervene in the event that one of these regimes, all NATO members, claims to have been attacked by Russia is central to US global strategy.

Krugman is not the only journalistic scoundrel to respond to the alarm bells Trump's statement triggered within sections of the US state apparatus. Under the headline, "It's Official: Hillary Clinton is Running Against Vladimir Putin," Jeffrey Goldberg of the *Atlantic* wrote: "The Republican nominee for president, Donald J. Trump, has chosen this week to unmask himself as a de facto agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, a KGB-trained dictator who seeks to rebuild the Soviet empire by undermining the free nations of Europe, marginalizing NATO, and ending America's reign as the world's sole superpower."

Goldberg was a leading media advocate of the 2003 US war of aggression against Iraq, advancing and embellishing upon the Bush administration's lies about nonexistent Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction" and ties to Al Qaeda. He concludes his piece, which seems to be based on the same talking points as Krugman's, by warning, "Donald Trump, should he be elected president, would bring an end to the postwar international order, and liberate dictators, first and foremost his ally Vladimir Putin, to advance their own interests."

A third piece, published before the *Times* interview, is nevertheless based on the same concerns within the ruling establishment. Titled "If Trump wins, a coup isn't impossible in the US," it was written for the *Los Angeles Times* by James Kirchick. Like Krugman and Goldberg, Kirchick stresses that Trump's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, previously worked as a lobbyist for Victor Yanukovych, the pro-Russian Ukrainian president ousted in the US-orchestrated and fascist spearheaded coup of 2014. He also claims that Trump representatives watered down language on Ukraine in the Republican platform.

“Trump is not only patently unfit to be president, but a danger to America and the world,” Kirchick writes. “Voters must stop him before the military has to.”

A former writer for Radio Free Europe, Kirchick emerged as a specialist in baiting the Putin government on the issue of gay rights. He is now a fellow with the Foreign Policy Initiative, which is run by Republican right-wing ideologues such as *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol, former Iraq occupation spokesman Dan Se  r and Project for a New American Century co-founder Robert Kagan. Kagan is married to US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, who played a leading role in the 2014 Ukrainian coup. These layers are either explicitly or tacitly throwing their support to Hillary Clinton as the candidate best prepared to serve as “commander-in-chief,” based on her intimate involvement in US war crimes from Iraq to Libya, Syria and beyond.

The vitriol unleashed against Trump—up to and including the suggestion that he should be overthrown by the military if elected—is a measure of how central the military buildup and war preparations against Russia are to US imperialist policy around the globe.

It also provides a window into the real character of the Democratic Party and the Clinton campaign. At its heart, it consists of a fusion of identity politics—the relentless promotion of race, gender and sexual orientation as the motive forces of US society—and a viciously pro-war imperialist policy. The objective of this poisonous mix is to sow divisions in the working class while fashioning a new constituency for imperialist war from among privileged layers of the upper-middle class and the pseudo-left satellites of the Democratic Party.

When the Democratic Party convenes in Philadelphia on Monday, the Democrats and their media advocates will be cheering “inclusion” and “diversity,” while the Democratic president continues slaughtering Syrian and Iraqi civilians by the hundreds in US air strikes and contemplates his next move after the failed US-backed coup in Turkey.

Trump to some extent harkens back to an older, noxious tradition within the US political right. His use of the slogan “America First” is no doubt a conscious invocation of the politics of the America First Committee, which was formed in 1940 with the stated aim of keeping the US out of the Second World War and reaching a negotiated peace with Germany’s Third Reich.

The committee included not only right-wing businessmen, anti-Semites and Hitler admirers like its principal spokesman, aviator Charles Lindbergh, but also opportunists and reformists like Norman Thomas of the American Socialist Party. The latter elements were of the left, but rejected any form of revolutionary opposition to imperialism based on the working class. Instead, they held their noses and formed a thoroughly reactionary and politically impermissible alliance with elements of big business, the right and semi-fascists.

The efficacy of such an organization for preventing war was made clear with the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which saw the committee declare its support for the US war effort and summarily dissolve itself.

Anyone taking Trump’s rhetoric professing opposition to wars for regime change and “nation-building,” or his sympathetic remarks about Putin, for good coin is in for a rude awakening. One can be certain that should he be elected president, if not during the campaign itself, the massive American military and intelligence apparatus will set him straight. Kirchick’s coup won’t be necessary.

In any case, his position is shot through with contradictions. The policies of Fortress America and economic nationalism he espouses lead inevitably and rapidly to war. Moreover, the platform upon which he is running is bellicose in the extreme. “We will meet the return of Russian belligerence with the same resolve that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union,” it states. “We will not accept any territorial change in Europe imposed by force, in Ukraine, Georgia, or elsewhere...” The document goes on to denounce the Obama administration for an insufficiently aggressive policy, calling for a vast military buildup, particularly of the US nuclear arsenal.

The uproar over Trump’s remarks on the Baltics is a clear warning of the immense dangers confronting the working class in the United States and around the world. Amid the virtual silence of the media and the political establishment, plans for new and far more horrific wars are well advanced and will begin to be implemented once the elections are over—if not before—no matter whether Clinton or Trump is the victor.

The only principled and objective basis for opposing imperialist war is the building of a revolutionary socialist and internationalist movement within the working class. The Socialist Equality Party and its candidates, Jerry White and Niles Niemuth, have intervened in the 2016 presidential election precisely to build such a movement, exposing the war drive of the ruling elite and mobilizing workers and youth in a struggle against war and the capitalist system that is its source. We urge all our readers to support and help build this campaign



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