

REMEMBERING YALTA

By

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss a theory being talked about in the United Kingdom regarding President Donald Trump's possible plans for his relationship with Russia. At first glance this plan is so absurd as to be laughable. However, given that we are now living in Donald Trump's world, and given his unpredictability and his lust for chaos and the dramatic, it might not be quite so laughable after all.

By now, it is crystal clear that Trump, aided and abetted by Steve Bannon and Steve Miller, are intent on blowing up the existing world order and, so far, they are doing a pretty good job of doing just that.

However, one big question still haunts us. How do they plan to deal with Russia?

A few days ago, I heard a discussion on TV by a British journalist who referred to Trump's possible plan as the Yalta plan. The discussion was quite brief and she was very sketchy on details. However, she did say enough to pique my curiosity and to allow me to fill in some of the blanks. And, on my own, I have tried to fill in a few more blanks.

I have concluded that while the plan is very far-fetched and, hopefully unlikely to go anywhere, it does have a certain rationale which could definitely appeal to Trump and Messrs. Bannon and Miller.

Let's begin by looking at the current state of play in Trump's world.

First, while Trump has been extremely critical of many countries and transnational alliances across the world he has, in most cases, adopted a somewhat laissez faire attitude about their roles and their importance in the world scheme of things. While he continues to make threats and condemn everybody and everything, his bark has actuality been much worse than his bite.

For instance, he says the United Nations is nothing more than a “club” for “people to get together, talk and have good time”. He has expressed doubts about the worth of the European Economic Community saying he “does not care about the EU’s future”. He also said “I don’t think it matters much for the United States”. He has threatened to withdraw support of NATO because it is obsolete and a free loader. He has trashed NAFTA and vows that he is against any multilateral trade deals preferring to enter into deals with individual countries where, presumably, he feels the United States would have the upper hand. Remember, he loves to make deals where he is always the winner.

Admittedly, he has withdrawn from the Trans Pacific Partnership Trade deal and, recently, introduced a crude and bungled ban on Muslims. However, beyond these two initiatives, he has been all talk and little action.

I think it is increasingly clear that Trump feels that this array of transnational institutions and alliances are impediments to his goal of not only making America great again but in maintaining world dominance. To him, these institutions and alliances are not just an irritant but are dispensable and can be cast aside if it suits his purposes.

Having said all this, it is of course very strange that he has remained so quiet on China. During the campaign, China was a constant target of his litany of complaints but since the election not so much. More significantly, he is doing some things which play directly into China’s hands. His withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership Trade deal opens the door for China to move into the vacuum he created and become the dominant trading country in the Far East. For the time being, however, his approach to relations with China is very passive and, strategically, this could prove to be a huge mistake down the road. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, he has chosen not to join battle with China at this time.

But, the strangest thing of all is his treatment of Russia which, to say the least, is most puzzling. At the moment Russia in his eyes can do no wrong whether hacking U.S. election data, stirring up trouble in the Ukraine, cuddling up to Hungary, etc. etc. Admittedly, Nikki Haley gave a strong speech in the UN condemning Russia’s incursion into the Ukraine. However, heretofore, Trump has been mostly silent on this issue and he has yet to make any strong statement endorsing her views.

His profuse praise of Putin is also strange. This admiration certainly creates the impression that he is very envious of the power Putin wields and wishes he had the same power. Members of his own party are reminding Trump that Putin is an autocrat and a killer but

this seems to have no impact on Trump's admiration for the man. Surprisingly, he recently made a comment on Fox News implying that there is a moral equivalency between the U.S. and Russia and that remark is causing uproar.

Not surprisingly, speculation is again rife that Putin has some embarrassing information from Trump's past.

All of this love-in is happening despite Putin's well known determination to do whatever is necessary to become a world power. If Trump's aim is to "make America great again", Putin's aim is to "make Russia great again" even though that status was largely illusionary in days gone by. High on his list of priorities is his goal to resurrect the USSR thereby once more giving him political control of many eastern European and Balkan countries.

Next, it must be remembered that under the U.S. Constitution the President has considerable power when it comes to foreign affairs and can take considerable action without requiring approval or ratification from Congress. This is particularly true of non-military actions. Therefore, if he wishes to reshape America's international relationships to his own liking, there is little to stop him.

Finally, when trying to determine Trump's intentions, it is necessary to take the measure of the man. Here, we have a number of clues which certainly ring alarm bells.

He very much wants to be loved by everybody and goes to great lengths to prove to himself this is true. Next, he is an extreme egotist and cannot conceive of being accused of being wrong. To the contrary, he believes he alone can make anything happen and that, therefore, he can cure all the world's problems. Finally, he sees himself as a pivotal player on the world stage and, in my view, is determined to create a memorable legacy for himself in the history books.

So, where does all this lead to? I believe that looking at all the available evidence he is intent on reaching a detente with Russia as a major priority in achieving his goals..

I believe he has convinced himself that reaching a detente with Russia would be a landmark achievement which would guarantee world peace for years to come. Ergo, he would become a hero in everybody's eyes and everyone would love him.

The question becomes, therefore, how would he plan to do it?

It is this question that has given rise to the theory that is going the rounds in the United Kingdom. And, this is the link to Yalta.

Those of us in our golden years remember Yalta. We remember that Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin met in Yalta in early February, 1945 to “shape a post second world war peace”. We remember that they signed an Agreement to politically carve up Eastern Europe and the Balkans which basically partitioned these countries from Western Europe. Finally, we remember that in the long run the consequences of that Agreement were disastrous.

As we know, Germany was divided into two countries. Berlin was divided into four sectors and placed under the control of four separate countries. Stalin was given oversight authority over a number of Eastern European and Balkan counties and promised to hold free elections but soon reneged on this promise and created the Soviet bloc of satellite nations. He then imposed authoritative communism on these nations. The USSR, as it became known, alienated itself from the rest of the world and the Cold War was born. The divide between most of the Western world and the Soviet empire was complete and each group felt they were entitled to govern without any obstruction or criticism from the other group.

This was the sad outcome of the Yalta accord.

Remember as well, that throughout this period the people living in the USSR lost their freedom and suffered from a very poor standard of living. As well, their countries fell behind the western world economically and this perpetuated their plight.

So, all in all, this effort by a strong leader to hive off a significant part of the world was an absolute disaster.

This brings us back to Mr. Trump and his intentions.

Certainly, he is unable to enter into any formal agreement like the Yalta Agreement. But there is a concern that given the latitude he has under the U.S. Constitution, he could reach an “accommodation” with Mr. Putin, which would embody many concepts from the Yalta Agreement and thereby accede to Putin’s objective to achieve his own goals.

In effect, he would say to Mr. Putin.....“If you stay out of my back yard, I’ll stay out of yours”. Effectively, he would stand aside and give Putin a blank cheque to pursue his goal of political expansion just as Stalin was able to do.

Under this arrangement, each country would be free to pursue their own agendas without interference or obstruction by the other. They would be able to pursue their own political and economic but hopefully not military objectives, in jurisdictions of their own choosing. They would be free to impose or withdraw sanctions. They would be free to enter into alliances with other countries or to create political blocs. In many ways such an arrangement could look like a mini Yalta agreement, partitions and all.

In order to temper the expected negative reaction to such a deal, the two leaders could agree to co-operate on a number of feel -good issues such as fighting ISIL, denouncing torture, attacking child hunger, controlling nuclear proliferation, to name a few possible candidates

Regrettably, it is more than likely such an accommodation would hold great appeal for the hard core Trump faithful. It could convince the faithful that Trump is a legitimate world leader and someone to be reckoned with on the world stage. It would be seen as weakening the bargaining power of many countries, especially Europe, in trade matters. This would bring cheers from the faithful because it would allow the U.S. to negotiate individual trade deals that impose its terms on its weakened trade partners. It could appease their concerns about the influence of transnational institutions. It would make it easier for the U.S. to further back off any serious attempts at dealing with climate warming. In other words, to the faithful it would Make America Great Again. All of this could be red meat to Trump’s supporters.

Unfortunately, in the long run, it could also give new life to Russia and perhaps lead to an expanded stable of Russian satellite nations ruled by autocratic leaders who could, once again, wreck havoc on an established world order. We must never lose sight of Putin’s grand plan.

Very definitely, such an accommodation would be fiercely condemned by many countries and alienate almost all of America’s allies and supporters. Europeans especially have too many bad memories of the situation that existed for so many years under two regimes and certainly remember the impact of the cold war. They will quickly realize that they are being stranded in between two powerful entities and left to fend for themselves with reduced

power of their own. Their situation would be even worse if the EU should collapse or NATO should disintegrate.

The rest of the world would be just as upset. In my view, they would also quickly realize that this new alignment would once again be a real threat to an established world order and object very strongly to such a rearrangement of world affairs.

As I said at the beginning of this paper this whole concept is very far-fetched and is most unlikely to succeed and I agree. However, the fact that people are talking about it, if only in hushed tones, is a cause for concern. Also, given the tenor of Mr. Trump's remarks in the last few days, we have to worry about his true intentions and this plan in his mind may not be too far-fetched at all.

We can only hope the Republican Party and others will come to their senses and rein Trump in before it is too late.