

Macron's Maneuvers on the New Cold War, Paris-Moscow Rapprochement?

Official Washington's hawks are blocking President Trump's desired detente with Russia, but that has opened a path for France's new President Macron to mediate the New Cold War, Diana Johnstone tells Dennis J Bernstein.

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French President Emmanuel Macron has positioned himself as a possible go-between in facilitating a reduction of tensions between the U.S. and Russia, a move that makes sense for France but may anger Official Washington's hawks who want to escalate the New Cold War.

I interviewed Paris-based journalist and historian Diana Johnstone about Trump's recent visit to Paris. Johnstone is the author of *From Mad to Madness: Inside the Pentagon's Nuclear War Planning Machine*, recounting the experiences of her father, Paul Johnstone, as a senior analyst in the Pentagon's Strategic Weapons Evaluation Group and a co-author of the Pentagon Papers. I spoke to her by telephone in France on July 19.

Dennis Bernstein: Diana, please give us your response to the recent Trump visit to Paris to meet with Emmanuel Macron.

Diana Johnstone: Well, first of all, it is clear that Emmanuel Macron has seen an advantage in being the only friend of the friendless Trump. It is clear that this can strengthen Macron's hand in dealing with Germany, the main part of his mandate being to influence Germany in changing EU policy.

Also, Macron is in a position to be an intermediary in this rapprochement between Trump and Putin, which of course the War Party in Washington is doing everything to obstruct. So Macron has situated himself in an interesting position.

I think that any of the contenders in the recent French election would have followed the same path. It was absolutely in the cards for France to change its foreign policy. The intellectuals in the government — the diplomats and so on — realize that this Syria policy isn't working and, at the same time, that sanctions against Russia are very harmful to the French and European economies, while they benefit the US. So what Macron is doing is just what the intellectual community was going to do, regardless of which candidate won the election.

DB: Give us your analysis of this Russia-gate madness.

DJ: Well, I am not a psychiatrist, but seen from over here in Europe, it's unbelievable. I just saw Tucker Carlson's interview with Max Boot on Fox News. This raving maniac on foreign

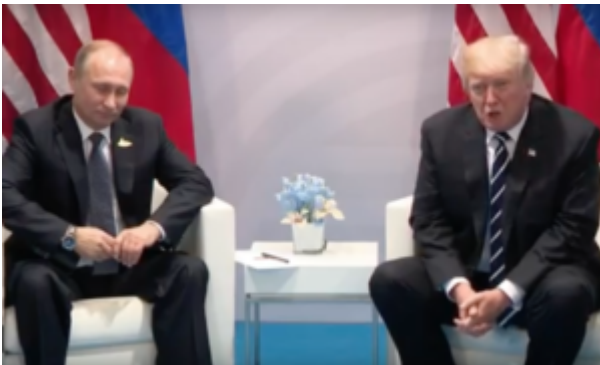
affairs is on the Council of Foreign Relations, when he ought to be undergoing psychiatric treatment.

Of course, the Clinton machine has taken over the Democratic Party and made it into the War Party. What in the world is wrong with people talking to members of another country? The whole idea that it is something traitorous to talk to Russians is completely insane. At every time in history, even when governments were actually at war with each other, they had some sort of contact, just for simple intelligence reasons.

To try to criminalize and ban any contact at a more or less official level with the Russians goes beyond what is diplomatic practice even in war time. I think that the real problem in Washington is that there is a real War Party who welcome a nuclear war with Russia if that is what it takes to prevent them from becoming as strong as we are.

DB: The big story at the G-20 was that Trump spoke to Putin and therefore should be tried for treason, along with his whole family.

DJ: I am sure that the Russians draw the conclusion that we are preparing for war. How else can they take this? We are doing everything to convince the Russians that we want war with them no matter what. Of course, this means they are going to start a military build-up in order to be able to strike back. Putin has consistently made friendly moves to the United States and they are simply dismissed. The only possible explanation is that we are bent on war.



President Trump meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin at G-20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, on July 7, 2017. (Screenshot from Whitehouse.gov)

Unfortunately, in 2013, Obama painted himself into a corner with his “red line” rhetoric, requiring that the US strike if it detects any use of chemical weapons in Syria. Of course, since then, it has been well established by very serious investigators, including Seymour Hersh, that this use of chemical weapons was a false flag.

The Russians, instead of insisting that this was a false flag, very tactfully suggested that the answer was to take away all of Syria’s chemical weapons, which actually worked. Now everyone in the NATO machine points to this as a sign of Obama’s weakness in not punishing the perpetrators and forget about this chemical weapons deal that was successful. Instead, the official line is that Obama was too weak and we have to be strong.

DB: Give us your thoughts on the recent G-20 meeting in Hamburg and the people's response.

DJ: Well, I don't think that the people's response was very well thought out. Many don't realize that the G-20 is, in fact, a step away from Western domination because it includes third-world countries with large populations—Russia, China, Indonesia, and so on. The reaction was just, "This is power and we are against it." No discrimination about issues. So the demonstration turned out to be much greater than it was for the G-8 or other meetings. All this violence was directed against a meeting which was actually working toward an improved form of international communication.

DB: What do you make of the controversy around the European Union and the role of France?

DJ: The European Union has become completely unbalanced because Germany is now a low-labor-cost export nation, maintaining a large trade imbalance with its partners. The other three candidates for the French presidency were all very critical of the EU and floated the possibility of getting out of the Euro.

Macron was put in by the establishment to save the European Union. It is clear that Macron's mission is to persuade the Germans to shift the policy to one that will allow other countries to grow economically instead of being strangled, which is what is happening now. I don't know whether he will succeed at that, but this is one reason why he wants Trump and Putin on his side, to replace Merkel as the dominant figure in the EU.



Daniel Ellsberg on the cover of Time after leaking the Pentagon Papers (Source: Consortiumnews)

DB: You have just come out with an incredibly important book titled *From Mad to Madness: Inside the Pentagon's Nuclear War Planning Machine*. Your father, Paul Johnstone, was a senior analyst in the Strategic Weapons Evaluation Group at the Pentagon. You have taken your father's memoirs and written commentaries on them. You know, when Daniel Ellsberg released the Pentagon Papers, he did an incredibly important thing. But he didn't write the Pentagon Papers, they came from the war planners. Your father was one of the co-authors. Could you describe what your father's job was while working for the Pentagon?

DJ: One of his projects was something called "critical incident studies," which was intended to inform the leaders on how to analyze crisis situations. Two of these crisis studies are in the book, one on Laos and one on the Berlin crisis. Interestingly, afterwards there was so much security that he couldn't get access back to it himself, and so he did this from memory. Basically, his idea was to try to educate these leaders in the uncertainty involved in what they were doing.

You see, everyone is doing contingency planning and the only thing that gets to the leaders is an executive summary, which usually tries to put a positive face on things and make the case that "we'll win for sure." In fact, top leaders tend not to be very well informed about what they are likely to get the country into. The Pentagon Papers was a study commissioned by Robert McNamara to try to determine how the hell we got into the mess of Vietnam. So

while the Pentagon Papers were a major revelation to the public, the establishment already knew that they couldn't win that war. Of course, it dragged on nevertheless for several more years.

DB: You write in the book, "Theorizing about nuclear war was a sort of virtuoso exercise in creating an imaginary world wherein all statements must be consistent with each other but nothing need be consistent with reality, because there was no reality to be checked against."

DJ: That is my father's description of what they were doing. He was obviously more aware of that than most of his colleagues. He knew Paul Nitze [US government official who helped shape Cold War policies] pretty well and liked him personally. But he couldn't understand how someone as educated as Nitze could be so blind about the Soviet Union, thinking that they are planning to attack us all the time.

We see the same mentality now, people who seem to be intelligent who are absolutely paranoid about Russia. You know, the left thought it learned something from Vietnam, but now we have the War Party which has only learned how to better control such movements. No very serious opposition exists.

DB: One of the important points you make in the book is that, whatever any analyst has to say about who is likely to prevail, nuclear war means mutual destruction.



The Pentagon, headquarters of the U.S. Defense Department, as viewed with the Potomac River and Washington, D.C., in the background. (Defense Department photo)

DJ: Sometimes analysts would recognize this but then they would come out and say, "But the US will prevail." It was and is insanity. The unreality of what goes on in the Pentagon seems small when compared with the unreality you have in the Washington establishment now. There's the madness of the war planning at the Pentagon—"We have these weapons, now let's decide how to use them"—and so on. And at the same time a growing madness has taken possession of the political class which says, "Yeah, great, just do it!"

It is an incredibly dangerous situation and people just seem to be asleep. We have these women on the streets because of some remark that Trump made at one time or another but they don't do a thing to prevent the world from being blown up at any minute. It seems to me there is a lack of priorities in the United States among those people who remain sane and moral.

DB: The first part of your book is titled “The World of Target Planning.”

DJ: That’s how my father got into this. He was in the Department of Agriculture with Henry Wallace when the country started gearing up for another war and later found itself never getting out of this business of war.

The religion of the United States has become the total destruction of the enemy. With us, it is always unconditional surrender. It’s not enough to defeat an enemy, you have to destroy them. This is closely linked to the possession of nuclear weapons, the idea of total destruction rather than simply defeat. It is a part of the extreme arrogance built into the American culture: We must never lose, we must always win. [...]

Very important studies on strategic bombing in World War II concluded that it wasn’t the strategic bombing that won the war. However, this myth has been perpetuated ever since, that strategic bombing wins wars. It continues because the Air Force needs a lot of money to stay in business.

During the Vietnam war, the question was put to experts as to what would be the effect of bombing the north. They concluded that it would “only unite the enemy against us.” But the Air Force wanted to bomb and they got what they wanted. They wanted a piece of the action. Washington politics plays a huge role in getting us into these wars. So even in cases where the intelligence community manages to produce something that makes sense, it typically gets ignored.

All this seemed to subside somewhat with the recognition of the concept of “mutual assured destruction.” The trouble is, since the Soviet Union collapsed, the arrogance of the United States—which made Truman, for example, decide to drop the atomic bomb on Japan after Japan was already defeated—has come back, as you said, on steroids.

When Putin, in 2007, said that he wanted a multipolar rather than a unipolar world, from then on Russia and Putin have been the enemy. Besides, we have got God and the Dollar on our side and we can do anything. During the Cold War you had some measure of caution at the top. Now all caution has gone to the winds. Someone like Steven Cohen, for example, a top expert [on Russia], is effectively marginalized because he is not on the administration line.

DB: There’s a section in your book called “Imagining Doomsday”, which describes efforts by the Weapons Systems Evaluation Group to study the implications of radioactive fallout. I imagine they are now going back over this stuff, this is the information they need to know.

DJ: Well, supposedly they are at work revising the weapons to make them more powerful and less radioactive. All this business about putting up a “shield” in Eastern Europe is obviously meant to give the United States a first-strike capacity. It won’t work, but that is the latest illusion. It isn’t meant to shield us from Russian aggression, it is meant to shield us from Russian retaliation.

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