

The Urgency of a Trump-Putin Summit

James George Jatrás is a former U.S. diplomat and former adviser to the Republican Senate Leadership. This is his address to the Schiller Institute conference, “Dona Nobis Pacem—Grant Us Peace, Through Economic Development,” convened in New York City on Saturday, June 9, 2018. He spoke on Panel 2 of the conference, titled “Choosing Creativity—Not Tragedy—In Economics and Statecraft.”



Schiller Institute

James George Jatrás

Thank you, Mr. Speed. I appreciate your presentation. It greatly expanded my own understanding of where we really need to be thinking about going, positively, in the current global climate. Unfortunately, a lot of what I have to say, reflects more of what is going wrong in the current global climate, and the utter urgency of trying to do something about it. I thank the Schiller Institute for inviting me to make a few remarks here, today, and I really appreciate that my good friend, State Senator from Virginia Richard Black, will also be speaking today.

The topic I want to focus on is that there is a move,

at long last, for a summit between President Donald Trump and President Vladimir Putin. This is absolutely essential. As we know, early in his Presidency, Mr. Trump did meet with his Chinese counterpart, President Xi Jinping, and that was a very positive development, but the broader international system, if it's going to have a positive stability, has to have three legs on the stool: And that's the United States, it's China, it's Russia. That's not to say other countries, Japan, India, Europe, don't matter, but without

those three, we don't have anything approaching stability.

For various reasons, it's possible for the American President to meet with the Chinese President with no real problem. It hasn't been possible for Donald Trump to do that with Mr. Putin—not in the sense of a formal summit, but only in side-bar meetings at this or that international conference. That is not sufficient.

I think it's important to take a step back and describe why this is. But first, a few words about my own background. I'm a son of a career Air Force officer, a fighter

pilot. The closest thing I have to a hometown is Bitburg Air Force Base in Germany. I'm the original Cold War baby, so to speak.

After I left law school, I served as a foreign service officer at the State Department, in what was then called the Office of Soviet Union Affairs—the Soviet desk. Interestingly, my father was the U.S. Air Force attaché in Moscow at the same time, so we saw the same U.S. government operations toward the Soviet Union during those days.

Unlike most other people at the time, I was convinced that it was quite possible we would see the emergence of a non-communist government in Moscow, in the fairly near future. I can tell you, nobody else at the State Department thought like that in those days. They simply assumed that communism and the Soviet Union was a forever phenomenon, and that we needed to reconcile ourselves to that “fact,” whereas it occurred to me that a free, non-communist Russia was a distinct possibility and a desirable one.

In a rather naive way, I had a sense that if such a transformation were to happen in the Soviet Union, the great conflicts of the 20th Century would finally be over, and we would return to something like a non-ideological world, of peace and progress that existed before 1914. That didn't happen. And the reason it didn't happen, wasn't so much about the Russians. It was unfortunately about the nature of the people running our foreign policy establishment, here in the United States.

They Want to Dismember Russia

I can remember when I was in Moscow for about a month in early 1993, as part of a parliamentary exchange between the U.S. Senate and the Russian Duma. People in Russia were not just pro-American: They were giddy pro-American. They were crazy pro-American. They were naively pro-American. And it is interesting the extent to which their pro-Americanism turned into a crashing disappointment, when we then expanded NATO in the mid-1990s, when we expanded it again, of course, in 2004, under the second Bush administration.

But I think one of the real clinchers was the Kosovo war in 1999. How many people in Russia would say to me, “We never believed anything the Soviet Union said about you. We knew it was all lies. But when we saw that, when we saw that NATO aggression, then we real-

ized it was all true; that everything that the communists said about you was true.” It was a real shot of cold water in the face, for them to feel that.

I think it was quite clear, that unfortunately, even though the Russian side had left the Cold War in the past, they'd withdrawn their troops from Eastern Europe, and they said OK to German reunification; but the people running our government, and also—let's be honest, as I think this group well knows—in cahoots, with their friends over in the United Kingdom, and in some other countries as well, were more than happy to prosecute that Cold War further. The only Russia they could tolerate was, at best, a puppet regime, as we had in the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin. The more preferable route, as Zbigniew Brzezinski laid out, would be breakup of Russia into at least three smaller states that would be much more easily manageable.

It came as a real shock to that establishment, when Vladimir Putin became President, and he pursued a course that I would describe as enlightened national self-interest—not at all closing the door to cooperation with the Western countries, but realizing that something was terribly wrong, that Russia had to take steps to secure its own sovereignty and its own interests. I think this is also what, of course, led to the very close collaboration, now, between Russia and China, which is the essence of Eurasian integration, which of course the Washington establishment sees as a great and terrible threat, whereas it really should be seen as the bridge to a real, cooperative future, and the building of an integrated, global economic system that can benefit everyone.

That is not the vision that we find here in Washington.

Trump vs. the Brit-Allied Establishment

This relates to something that Dennis said earlier, the place of the President in making policy—you only have to convince one man. As it happened, as we know, in 2016, there were populist rebellions in both the Republican and Democratic parties. The Democratic Party had Bernie Sanders, who was cut out of the action through foul means by the Democratic establishment. Donald Trump, through some alchemy that I don't think ever has been adequately explained, managed to beat the establishment in the Republican Party, and he made it very clear that he



Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and U.S. President Donald Trump meet on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit, July 7, 2017, in Hamburg, Germany.

wanted to improve ties with Moscow. This was one of his number-one priorities.

And that is exactly the reason why so much of the establishment, especially in the GOP, has been fighting tooth and claw, to first keep him from taking office; secondly to neuter him and possibly remove him from office; but above all, to make sure he cannot take this step in reconciling with Russia, which is essential. When we look at some of these conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, many other places, it is clear we have to have U.S.-Russian cooperation. Sometimes people ask me, “Why don’t we team up with Russia, where we have a common interest in fighting the global jihad terrorism, Islamic radicalism?” The short answer is, “Because for the last half-century, we have been using that very same terrorism as a tool, first against the Soviet Union and now against Russia. It really would mean America switching sides.”

I hope we are close to that. I hope we’ve gotten to the point now with the collapse of the so-called Russia-gate narrative, the growth of what really is “Spygate”—the extent to which our government spies on people, inserts **agents provocateurs** into other people’s business to try to pin criminal charges on them. I hope that that’s becoming clear now, and that the door is finally opening, to where we can have some positive trajectory

forward in U.S.-Russia relations.

So, as I say, there is a petition on the White House website. I hope people will sign it: <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/president-donald-trump-should-hold-early-summit-russian-president-vladimir-putin>

I do think a Summit with Putin is something Trump wants to do. It’s unfortunate that there’s virtually nobody around him, whom he has appointed, who seems to share the same vision. You do wonder why he appoints people who do not agree with some of his fundamental positions. I have to take that as a sign that he is still very em-

battled, even here in Washington, with the swamp all around him and the swamp critters who would very much like to bring him down.

We also have to keep in mind that the establishment that has been fighting him the whole way, even if they seem to be losing ground, will not “go gentle into that good night.” I think we have to be very concerned about some provocation somewhere, whether it’s in Ukraine, or Syria—another phony chemical weapons attack, something of that sort; perhaps an offensive by Kiev against the Donbas. These people are capable of doing anything to try to bust this up, which is what Dennis pointed out.

I have to tell you, ever since I endorsed Donald Trump on March 6, 2016, I have been very concerned that these people always have one solution to a problem like that: Get rid of the man who’s a problem. We saw this with Jack Kennedy, we saw it with Bobby Kennedy, we saw it with Martin Luther King. I am very concerned, I have to tell you, about Donald Trump’s personal safety, because so much hangs on the fate of one man and what he can do.

We live in a very critical moment, not only in American history, but in terms of the fate of the history of the world, a very critical juncture right now. [applause]