



Senate takes insane action against Russia, Iran and Trump

Special to the AAS

On 15 June the United States Senate, by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 98-2, imposed new sanctions on Iran and Russia, thereby moving to sabotage any prospects of improved US relations with Russia. At the same time, the Senate action was an act of economic warfare against leading European allies of the United States, in that it threatened sanctions against European firms that attempt to complete the joint gas pipeline venture with Russia called Nord Stream 2, and secondary sanctions against those who engage in certain other trade with Russia.

S-722, the “Countering Iran’s Destabilising Actions Act of 2017”, was designed to impose new sanctions against Iran, including against any Western firms working with Iranians who are involved in that country’s ballistic missile program, or doing business with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which was listed in the bill as an international terrorist organisation. The legislation was amended on the Senate floor, through a deal between the Senate Republican and Democratic leaders, to add the additional sanctions against Russia.

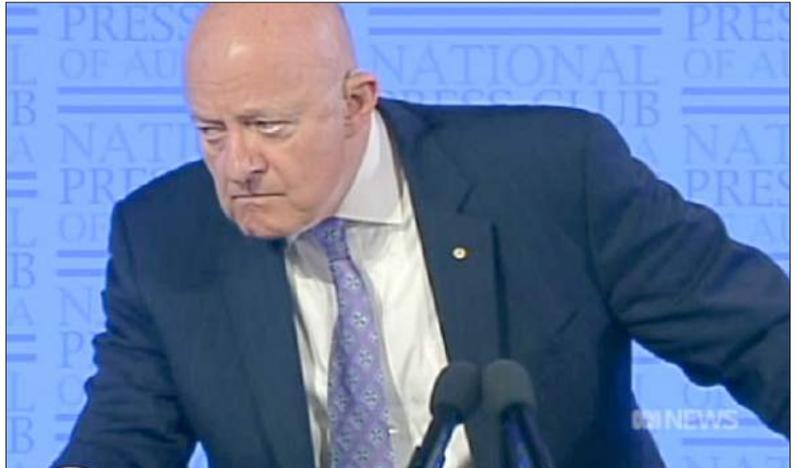
The new sanctions are part of a direct attack on the Trump Administration, which has been seeking ways to improve relations with Russia, including possible reduction of some sanctions imposed on Russia during the final months of the Obama Administration, based on intelligence evaluations that Russia was interfering in the Presidential elections. Under the amended bill, which was opposed only by Senators Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) and Bernie Sanders (Independent-Vermont), the Obama sanctions, which had been imposed by executive order, were made a part of the legislation. Other provisions added to the bill explicitly block the Trump Administration from lifting any of those sanctions without Congressional review and approval.

The Senate bill must still pass the US House of Representatives, where a similar bipartisan “Get Russia” mood is dominant. The Trump Administration, speaking through Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, warned that the bill could “close the channels off” for dialogue and improved collaboration with Russia at a critical moment.

President Trump is expected to have his first face-to-face meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the G20 summit meeting on 7-8 July in Hamburg, Germany. Tillerson is scheduled to meet with Russian Foreign Ministry representatives to prepare the Trump-Putin talks, in the coming days.

Sabotaging administration diplomacy

Russian-American military-to-military contacts were almost entirely shut down, on Washington’s initiative, in 2014 as punishment for Russia’s supporting Crimea’s movement and referendum to secede from Ukraine after the neo-Nazi-led coup there, and to join the Russian Federation. As the Obama Administration continued and augmented those sanctions, an exception was the so-called “deconfliction” efforts in Syria, which involve lines of communi-



James Clapper listens to a question from a reporter after his National Press Club speech, which peddled the prevailing Washington hysteria against Russia. Photo: Screenshot

cation to prevent direct clashes between military aircraft of Russia (in Syria on invitation by the government) and the United States (flying in support of armed opposition units seeking to overthrow that government). US military sources directly involved in American activity in and around Syria report that there has been extensive coordination and cooperation between US and Russian military forces at the operational level there. (As we go to press, the de-confliction channels are in jeopardy, after US forces downed a Syrian military jet on 18 June. In a 19 June statement the Russian Defence Ministry announced that it has “ended its interaction with the US side under a memorandum on preventing incidents and providing for safe flights during operations in Syria”. See p. 9 for details.) The USA sent a senior diplomat as an observer to recent talks in Astana, Kazakhstan, aimed at achieving a permanent cease-fire in Syria between the Syrian government forces and the rebels, with the sole exception of the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda-linked factions. Those talks are sponsored by Russia, Turkey and Iran.

The inclusion of the Russia sanctions in the Iran bill was especially pernicious. It puts Trump and his Administration in a bind. While Trump has often stated his goal of improving ties with Russia, he and his national security team have remained adamant about escalating pressure against Iran over its involvement in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and the Gulf. By tacking the Russia sanctions onto the Iran bill, the Senate—with the full backing of the Senate Republican leadership—has made Administration Russia policy hostage to its harsh and foolish Iran policy.

Coming less than a month after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani won a significant re-election victory against hard-line rivals backed by the IRGC, the Iran sanctions will work only to strengthen the hands of the very Iranian hardliners who oppose Iran’s normalisation of relations and economic re-engagement with the rest of the world.

During his first overseas trip as President, Trump made the mistake of using his visit to Saudi Arabia as an occasion for accusing Tehran of being the major state sponsor of international terrorism. Those remarks were interpreted by Saudi leaders as a “green light” to escalate a

campaign against Iran, starting with attempts to squeeze fellow Gulf Cooperation Council member-state Qatar into falling in line behind a sectarian attack on the Iranians. Saudi Arabia has used economic pressure to get Egypt, Yemen's government-in-exile in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the UAE, other Arab states, and Niger to break diplomatic ties with Qatar, creating a regional diplomatic crisis which has, ironically, boosted Iran's position with Qatar, Oman and Turkey.

Once it became clear that his ill-chosen words in Riyadh had triggered the regional crisis, Trump had Tillerson intervene to patch up the escalating conflict among the GCC states, with Washington now offering to mediate between the Saudis and the Qataris to bring the dispute to a peaceful end.

The actions by the US Senate, in sanctioning both Iran and Russia, only add to the diplomatic mess.

The strange 'genes' of James Clapper

By Rachel Douglas

The first time I heard it asserted that "17 intelligence agencies" of the United States, civilian and military, had "all" concluded that the Kremlin ordered cyber-attacks on the US elections, it came from Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, in her third debate with Donald Trump last October. Who could imagine that seventeen investigations of Russia had been going on, and we hadn't heard about them!

At a Senate hearing on 6 May 2017, however, James Clapper finally clarified that there were only three: the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Security Agency (NSA). And the 7 October 2016 statement upon which Clinton's script-writers based her wild claim had been issued by only two agencies: the Department of Homeland Security and then-Director of National Intelligence Clapper's own office. It was Clapper himself who opened the door to the "17 agencies" formulation—which to this day continues to be repeated early and often by Russia-bashing members of Congress—by saying in that October release, "US Intelligence Community (USIC) is confident that the Russian Government directed the recent compromises of emails from US persons and institutions, including from US political organisations." The USIC formally includes 17 agencies, such as subsections of the Defence Department and State Department, most of which had nothing to do with the "Russian meddling" probe.

As for the CIA-FBI-NSA report "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections", released 6 January of this year, its weakness on all points has been discussed in the AAS (18 January 2017) and many other publications, and is not the subject of this brief commentary.

What alarms me now, is how a person who states that "It is in their [the Russians'] genes to be opposed, diametrically opposed to the United States" (transcript, p. 14) could ever have held a post called "Director of National Intelligence" in any country at all, never mind in the USA itself!

During the Cold War, my colleagues and I used to point out that US Intelligence, relying on "SIGINT" (signals intelligence), might know what Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev had for breakfast, but was unable to discern what he was thinking. The problem was lack of knowledge of political and cultural history. Ex-DNI James Clapper has now taken that ignorance to an extreme, with his "genetic" analysis of the existence of an inevitable adversarial relationship between Russia and the United

The hysteria against Russia was spelled out by former US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in a 7 June appearance at the National Press Club in Canberra (p. 14), where he launched into an attack on Trump for thinking that there could ever be an alliance between the United States and Russia. Ignoring hundreds of years of history, extending through World War II, Clapper claimed that it was in Russia's DNA to hate the United States and seek America's downfall.

The prejudice expressed by Clapper is now dominant in Congress and the national security elites. Trump's belief that it is possible to forge a cooperative relationship with Moscow has set off the biggest political rampage in recent memory. If the House of Representatives follows the lead of the Senate and passes the sanctions bill by a likewise veto-proof majority, it could spark a chain of events leading to world war.

States. Contrary to Clapper's imaginings, for some two and a half centuries the best thinkers and statesmen in both these transcontinental nations have recognised a natural affinity between them, which has been brought to life for mutual benefit (and the world's) many times. A few of the major moments of Russian-American cooperation, together with some that remained only proposals, are summarised here.

1780-83: the League of Armed Neutrality. Empress Catherine II of Russia headed the League of Armed Neutrality during the American War of Independence from Great Britain. This alliance of small powers acted to protect ships of their countries from being raided or seized by the British Navy for allegedly carrying French goods, when France was allied with the Americans.

1807: Hamilton published in Russia. A group of intellectuals and statesmen brought out a Russian edition of Alexander Hamilton's 1791 "Report on the Usefulness of the Manufactories in Relation to Trade and Agriculture" ("Report on Manufactures")—one of the founding documents of the American System of Political Economy, which enabled the young republic to develop and remain free. Tsar Alexander I's Minister of Finance D.A. Guryev sponsored the pamphlet, while educator V. Malinovsky wrote in the introduction: "The similarity of the American United Provinces [States] with Russia appears both in the expanse of the land, climate and natural conditions, in the size of population disproportionate to the space, and in the general youthfulness of various generally useful institutions; therefore all the rules, remarks and means proposed here are suitable for our country."

1809-12: the Adams-Rumyantsev dialogues. In the early phase of Russian-American diplomatic relations, which were opened in 1807, US Ambassador John Quincy Adams, the future President and proponent of a doctrine of "community of interests" among sovereign nations, conducted a years-long dialogue on affairs of state, foreign relations and trade, with Russian Chancellor Count Nikolai Rumyantsev. In the wake of Adams's diplomatic success in getting Tsar Alexander to intercede with Denmark to stop detaining American ships as "British", Rumyantsev told Adams, "Our attachment to the United States is obstinate". In 1812 Rumyantsev proposed that Russia join the USA in an anti-colonial policy of developing trade with the rebellious Spanish colonies in South America. Adams reported that the State Council's rejection of Rumyantsev's proposal was due to "a lurking English influence". When ousted

from office in 1813, Rumyantsev told Adams, "I could say that my guts are American; and were it not for my age and infirmities, I would go now to that country."

1842-51: construction of the St. Petersburg-Moscow railway. Under Tsar Nicholas I, the committee in charge of building Russia's second railway (and first major one), from St. Petersburg to Moscow, hired a team of American engineers for the project. In particular, the Russian committee leaders Crown Prince Alexander (the future Tsar Alexander II) and engineer Pavel Melnikov invited George Washington Whistler as a consultant. He was an engineering graduate of the US Military Academy at West Point, and a world-famous railroad engineer at that time. He died in St. Petersburg in 1849 during the project, leaving a legacy of Russian-American collaboration on developing railway technologies, which continued to have an impact throughout the century.

1853-56: the Crimean War. During the Crimean War of 1853-56, as Russian MP Alexander Fomenko wrote in a 2007 article, "when Russia found itself alone against the Ottoman Empire and all of Europe", and under attack by England, the USA not only sold arms to Russia, but was "prepared to dispatch volunteers to help Russia to defend [the Crimean port of] Sevastopol" against the British.

1860-65: Russia in the American Civil War. Reciprocating, Russia after its defeat by the British Empire in the Crimean War, allied with the United States of President Abraham Lincoln during the US Civil War, when Britain was supporting the Confederacy secessionists and their slave-labour plantation system. Tsar Alexander II sent fleets of the Russian Navy to defend the ports of New York and San Francisco. In 1866, when Alexander received him as part of a delegation of American public figures to Russia, the writer Mark Twain told him, "America owes much to Russia, in many respects, especially for the firm friendly assistance at the moment we required it most of all."

1867: the sale of Alaska. When Russia sold Alaska to the United States after negotiations held in secret between Secretary of State William Seward (an ally of Lincoln, who had been assassinated in 1865) and Russian representative Eduard de Stoeckl, the London *Times* openly worried about "a strange sympathy between Russia and the United States." In Russia, supporters of the sale argued that Russia and the United States were natural allies in the Pacific basin, and that if Great Britain were to attempt to seize "Russian America" (Alaska), the USA would be in a better

position to defend it than Russia would.

1891-1916: building the Trans-Siberian Railway. Count Sergei Witte, Russian minister of transport, minister of finance, and then prime minister, was an advocate of the American System (called National Economy by Witte), who launched the project to build the Trans-Siberian Railway. For the World's Columbian Exposition, held in 1893 in



Left: The sale of Alaska in 1867. Right: Marshal Georgi Zhukov (left) and General Dwight Eisenhower. Photos: Wikipedia; Pinterest

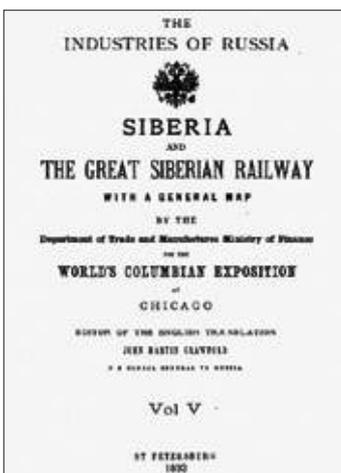


Chicago, Witte commissioned his staff to prepare a book on Russia's industrialisation and the Trans-Siberian project. Through cooperation with American consuls in Russia at that time, the five-volume *The Industries of Russia* was published in English and delivered to the exposition.

1941-45: World War II. While the Soviet Union bore the greatest brunt fighting to stop the fascist Nazi invaders, losing some 27 million people during the war, American assistance to the Eastern Front became critical and was greatly appreciated in Russia. Under the Lend-Lease program, 120 ships brought 450,000 tonnes of materiel from American West Coast ports to the Soviet Arctic, for forwarding to the front. At the close of World War II Marshal Georgi Zhukov, the famous Russian commander, said to American Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, "If the United States and Russia will only stand together through thick and thin, success is certain for the United Nations. If we are partners, there are no other countries in the world that would dare to go to war when we forbade it."

1993: the "Trust" anti-missile proposal. Just two years after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Russians prepared for a summit between President Boris Yeltsin and President Bill Clinton, in Vancouver, Canada, a proposal for a joint Russian-American ballistic missile defence (BMD) program called "Trust". It echoed the ideas of Lyndon LaRouche, embodied in President Ronald Reagan's 1983 Strategic Defence Initiative, for ending the reign of "mutual assured destruction" nuclear-war doctrine, in favour of strategic defence based on "new physical principles". The Soviet leadership had rejected Reagan's offer of cooperation and technology-sharing under his SDI, and Russian experts said that the "Trust" design, using lasers to generate ionised structures called plasmoids, and then to direct them against missiles, had stemmed from a secret Soviet program for an unconventional response to the SDI. Moscow now proposed that Russia and the United States develop these technologies in tandem.

2001: the 9/11 attacks. As the first foreign leader to phone President George W. Bush on 11 September 2001, with New York and Washington under attack by Saudi-backed terrorists, Russian President Vladimir Putin was informed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that US nuclear forces were on high alert. "We already know", replied Putin, "and we have cancelled our exercises and brought our alert levels down". Nonetheless, three months later Bush gave Russia notice that the USA was withdrawing from the 1973 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and the war party of Vice-President Dick Cheney began the scheme to build a global BMD system based on anti-missile missiles, behind the protection of which nuclear-missile attacks on Russia and China might ultimately be attempted. In the years that followed, Russia renewed proposals for joint Russian-American work on BMD, but the Bush and Obama Administrations ploughed ahead with their unilateral program.



Obama's chief spook brings China- and Russia-bashing to Australia

Former US Director of National Intelligence Gen. James Clapper addressed Australia's National Press Club on 8 June 2017, evidently for the purpose of keeping Australia on side with the Anglo-American intelligence operation against President Donald Trump's forging of a cooperative relationship with Russia. Clapper, who served under President Barack Obama, is notorious for his false testimony in March 2013, when he claimed that the National Security Agency does not spy on Americans. It was seeing Clapper "lie under oath to Congress" that prompted whistleblower Edward Snowden to go public with documentation of NSA domestic spying. Thus Clapper is not the concerned American patriot he presents himself to be, but a dishonest shill for the so-called "intelligence community" of the "Five Eyes" (USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand). This apparatus is the single greatest obstacle to world peace, responsible as it is for the rise of the al-Qaeda and ISIS terrorist menace, and for fabricating the blatant lies used to justify launching disastrous wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria, which fuelled more terrorism. This Anglo-American faction remains committed to a showdown against Russia and China, which can turn into a hot war.

Following is an excerpt of Clapper's speech. The text posted by the ANU, where Clapper is currently giving a course of lectures, has been annotated by the AAS: *Italicised comments are ours, as are phrases in square brackets, added for clarity. The subheads and parentheses are in the released text.*

The scope of the alliance

Despite what you may hear, the United States is Australia's leading economic partner, with our bilateral economic engagement at \$1.9 trillion and growing. A similar point was made recently by my colleagues at the National Security College. They point out that the United States remains Australia's largest source of foreign investment and the number one destination for Australian investment overseas. ...

AAS: Clapper is taking aim at Australia's economic relationship with China.

Concerns about the US

There is well-founded concern here about our current administration and its emerging foreign policy generally, toward this region, and specifically toward Australia. And that is one reason I wanted to come here, and one reason why I want to speak publicly. It is, in fact, quite liberating to be free of the government "harness". Some truth in advertising at this point is appropriate: I have toiled in the trenches of US intelligence for every President since and including John F. Kennedy; 34 years of that were in the US military, and, in a variety of civilian capacities since I left the military some 21 plus years ago. My professional instincts have always included loyalty to the President, particularly in his capacity as Commander-In-Chief, whoever it has been, above all else. I have served as a political appointee in both Republican and Democratic administrations. So, it is not easy for me to be critical of a president, but as I said in a CNN interview a couple of weeks ago, now as a private citizen I am very concerned about the assaults on our institutions, coming from both an external source (read Russia), and an internal source (read the President himself).

So let me speak briefly first about the source of the external assault:



James Clapper testifying before Congress under oath that the NSA did not spy on Americans; his lie provoked Edward Snowden to leak the truth about the NSA. Photo: Screenshot

Russia

Russia embarked on a campaign to interfere with our presidential election, which was unprecedented in its directness and aggressiveness. The Russians have a long history of interfering in elections—theirs and others.

AAS: Clapper failed to mention the USA's history of interfering in elections, most notoriously, in this context, to boost the re-election of Boris Yeltsin in the Presidential election of 1996.

They have tried to interfere in ours going back to the sixties, but let me stress, never like this. Apart from the infamous hacking of the Democratic National Committee, their campaign had many other dimensions: social media trolls planting false information; orchestrated "fake news" which many other news outlets picked up (either wittingly or unwittingly); and a very sophisticated campaign by the regime-funded propaganda arm RT, against Hillary Clinton, and for Donald Trump.

AAS: Whether the "infamous hack" was a Russian government operation, or even if it was a hack and not a leak, has not been proven.

Their first objective, though, was to sow doubt, discontent, and discord about our political system. They achieved, I am sure, beyond their wildest expectations. Given their success, they have only been emboldened to be even more aggressive in the future. This is not, let me emphasise, "fake news." The Russians are not our friends; they (Putin specifically) are avowedly opposed to our democracy and values, and see us as the cause of all their frustrations.

AAS: In making this unsubstantiated claim, Clapper demonised Putin by using language normally reserved for ISIS and radical Islamism.

I would also point out some things about Russia that many in the United States have not kept in perspective. The Russians are embarked on a very aggressive and disturbing program to modernise their strategic forces—notably their submarine and land-based nuclear forces. They have also made big investments in their counter-space capabilities. They do all this—despite their economic challenges—with only one adversary in mind: the United States. And, just for good measure, they are also in active violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty....

AAS: Russian defence spending is approximately one-tenth that of the United States. Moscow disputes the charge of INF violations.

As a consequence of all this, I have had a very hard time reconciling the threat the Russians pose to the

United States—and, for that matter, western democracies in general—with the inexplicably solicitous stance the Trump administration (or at least, he himself as opposed to others in his administration) has taken with respect to Russia.

Internal assault

Let me move to the internal assault on our institutions. I will share two examples, among many.

Then President-elect Trump disparaged the Intelligence Community's high-confidence assessment of the magnitude and diversity of the Russian interference by characterising us as "Nazis". This was prompted by his and his team's extreme paranoia about, and resentment of, any doubt cast on the legitimacy of his election. When he made this absurd allegation, I felt an obligation to defend the men and women of the United States intelligence community, so I called him on 11 January. Surprisingly, he took my call. I tried, naively it turned out, to appeal to his "higher instincts"—by pointing out that the intelligence community he was about to inherit is a national treasure, and that the people in it were committed to supporting him and making him successful. Ever transactional, he simply asked me to publicly refute the infamous "dossier", which I could not and would not do...

AAS: The Washington Insider column "US Intelligence delivers political construct, not analytical report on 'Russian hacking'" in our 11 Jan. 2017 issue took apart Clapper's "high-confidence assessment", while "The foreign power corrupting US politics is London, not Moscow", AAS, 18 Jan. 2017 covers the "dodgy dossier" compiled by "former" MI6 officer Christopher Steele.

China

Finally, as long as I am into controversial things, I do want to say a word about China, since I realise it is much more of a pre-occupation here than Russia is, but I see some striking parallels between what our two countries are experiencing at the hand of these two countries.

I have seen just this week compelling evidence of potentially nefarious foreign interference in your democratic institutions, and from where that interference apparently originates.

For America, though, I consider China more benignly than I do Russia. Their economy is inextricably bound with ours, as well as with yours. With all the challenges that poses, I do think that fact serves to moderate China's behaviour. But we, and you, I think, need to be very wary. A few factoids on the growth of China's economic power, some of them lesser known, are illustrative:

In 2004, 7 of the 10 largest companies in the world were American. There were no Chinese companies on the top ten list until 2010.

In 2016, it was 4 Chinese, 5 American, 1 Japanese.

And, 12 of the 15 largest Chinese companies are state-owned—and, are, accordingly, potential intelligence platforms.

In telecommunications the 7 largest Chinese smartphone companies control 1/3 of the market world-wide, more than twice the market share of Apple.

This is not just about market share, this is about intelligence-gathering, since Chinese law allows and implicitly encourages their intelligence services to use any and all communications and IT equipment for intelligence collection.

AAS: In 2013 the NSA was exposed for using the private telephone company Verizon to conduct domestic surveillance on millions of US citizens, which fact proved Clapper had lied under oath to Congress a few months earlier.

In the summer of 2016, the United States was surpassed by China as number one in the world for super-computing. Even more startling was the suddenness of China's jump, with FIVE times the manufacturing of supercomputers compared to just one year earlier. This has huge implications, for many reasons.

And regarding foreign investment, since 2014 Chinese companies have acquired US companies in 39 of our 50 states. Chinese investment tripled in 2016, compared to 2015 (Total: almost \$46B).

I cite this litany not to sermonise, but to share, since China poses somewhat similar challenges for both our nations. The issue for both of us is how China employs this economic muscle, and how we conduct ourselves accordingly.

As [former ASIO boss] Dennis Richardson forthrightly acknowledged—and as your news media has exposed this week—it is no secret that China is very active in intelligence activities directed against Australia, just as they are against us, and that China is increasingly aggressive in attempting to gain influence in your political processes, as Russia is in ours.

In light of all this, Australia, in my humble view, should engage with China with both caution and confidence, eyes wide open, weighing its strategic and economic interests, never forgetting the importance of its democratic institutions and values that you share with us.

Dennis summed it all up very succinctly and accurately: Australia's relationship with China and the United States will continue to be "friends with both, allies with one."... Attorney General Brandis recently sounded a profoundly important warning, which, I think also applies equally to both our countries: "The threat of political interference by foreign intelligence services is a problem of the highest order, and it is getting worse.... It can cause immense harm to our national sovereignty, to the safety of our people, our economic prosperity, and to the very integrity of our democracy."

I think it says it all.

Questions

Chris Uhlmann, ABC News: ... The thing among many inexplicable things we find watching Donald Trump from this distance is why is it that his administration seems so keen to be courting Russia? I don't think at least that part is denied. Can you explain that?

James Clapper: No, I can't, and in my remarks I characterised that as inexplicable—I do not understand it. There is, of course, now an investigation under the auspices of Bob Mueller [the former FBI director, named as special counsel on "Russian meddling"]... and as I have often said, it is absolutely crucial for the United States and, for that matter for the world, as well as for this presidency, for the Republicans, for the Democrats and for our nation at large, that we get to the bottom of this.

Is there a smoking gun with all the smoke? And I don't know the answer to that. I think it's vital, though, that we find that out.

During my one and only, first and last ever, I'm sure, sojourn to Trump Tower, the President-elect said, "Wouldn't it be good if we could [get] along with the Russians?"

I said, "Sure. When our interests converge, and they do occasionally, fine." But as far as our being intimate allies, trusting buds with the Russians that is just not going to happen. It is in their genes to be opposed, diametrically opposed to the United States and to Western democracies.

AAS: Clapper's insidious caricature of Russia as genetically anti-American is debunked on pp. 12-13.



Is President Trump being set up to target Iran?

Special to the AAS

Some close allies of President Donald Trump are pushing for much bolder action against Iran, leading to eventual regime change. While the bulk of the pressure is coming from conservative Washington think tanks and ultra-conservative Republican members of Congress, some senior Administration officials are also making statements hinting at regime change.

In recent House Appropriations Committee hearings on the State Department FY2018 budget, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did not shy away from the issue. Asked by Rep. Ted Poe, a Texas Republican, if the Trump Administration would support a “philosophy of regime change” in Iran, Tillerson said that the Administration was prepared to work with opposition groups for a “peaceful transition of that government”. He clarified, however, that a policy review is still under way and that no specific plan of action had been formulated.

National Security Council spokesman Michael Anton told Politico’s Michael Crowley, “An explicit affirmation of regime change in Iran as a policy is not really on the table”. But he, too, mentioned that the policy review was incomplete.

Last year CIA Director Mike Pompeo, then a member of Congress, pressed for tough sanctions against Iran to “change Iranian behaviour, and, ultimately, the Iranian regime”. The Middle East director of the National Security Council, Col. Derek Harvey, was a harsh critic of the P5+1 agreements with Iran, and argued, prior to coming to the NSC, that the very “nature and character” of the Iranian regime meant that there could never be cooperation with Iran. P5+1 refers to the group of five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, UK and USA), plus Germany, which reached an accord with Iran in 2016 on limiting the country’s nuclear program, while sanctions against it were lifted at the same time.

One of the staunchest promoters of Iran regime change is Sen. Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican who communicates with President Trump regularly and is one of his best defenders in Congress. Cotton told Politico, “The policy of the United States should be regime change in Iran. I don’t see how anyone can say America can be safe as long as you have in power a theocratic despotism.” Cotton has called for a combination of covert operations, economic boycotts, diplomatic isolation and “support for internal domestic dissent”. He has specifically pointed to ethnic minorities—Azeris, Baluchis and Turkmens who “aren’t enthusiastic about living in a Persian Shiite despotism”.

The Foundation for the Defence of Democracy (FDD), one of the most hawkish neoconservative think tanks in Washington, has devised a detailed plan for subversion in Iran, which was submitted to the National Security Council soon after President Trump’s inauguration. Written by FDD President Mark Dubowitz, the seven-page memo called on the United States to foment popular unrest in Iran. “Iran”, the memo stated, “is susceptible to a strategy of coerced democratisation because it lacks popular support and relies on fear to sustain its power. The very structure of the regime invites instability, crisis and possibly collapse. No one has greater power to mobilise dissent abroad than the American President.” President Trump, the memo concluded, should define as a policy goal the overthrow of the Islamic Republic and the creation of a “tolerant government that adheres to global norms”.

The memo, which was passed to the White House prior to the May 2017 Iranian elections, called for the USA to plot

covertly for the defeat of President Hassan Rouhani, arguing that Rouhani “has managed to mislead world leaders” that his Presidency has been “a force for moderation and pragmatism”.

While a full-blown strategy of regime change in Iran is not likely to be a top Trump policy priority, the Administration is under pressure from Congress to declare Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) an international terrorist organisation, which would automatically trigger severe sanctions. The IRGC has had a strong grip on the Iranian economy since the Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-13).

Legislation labelling the IRGC an international terrorist organisation passed the US Senate in June by a vote of 98-2. That sanctions bill also included a provision for sanctions against Russia, and had language giving Congress the ability to block Trump from lifting them without Congressional approval.

In what may prove to be a stumbling block for passage of that set of provocative sanctions, the Trump Administration has announced that it opposes sections of the Senate bill that limit Presidential authority to make foreign policy. The House of Representatives leadership has joined in the pushback, arguing that the Senate bill, the Countering Iran’s Destabilising Activities Act, violated the Constitution by including revenue-raising provisions—a power exclusively vested in the House.

Will the Trump Administration use these procedural and technical problems to kill the bill altogether? That is unlikely. House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Edward Royce, a California Republican, and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan have both voiced support for the Senate bill, with minor fixes, and wish to fast-track it through the House before the August Congressional recess.

Trump is carefully avoiding new accusations that he is out to kill the bill because of the anti-Russia provisions, claiming through White House sources that the issue is strictly constitutional, and has nothing to do with his upcoming first face-to-face meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on 7 July, on the sidelines of the G20 heads of state summit near Hamburg, Germany.

Whether that is true or not, the issue of escalating confrontation with Iran is a growing danger. Saudi Arabia has targeted Qatar, one of six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, for veering closer to Iran and refusing to join a Saudi-Israeli coalition against Tehran. The United States is boosting forces in southeast Syria, near the Jordanian and Iraqi borders, to block Iranian-backed forces and the Syrian Army from securing control over that vital border area following the defeat of the Islamic State.

While Defence Secretary Jim Mattis and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, both retired generals, are cautious about drawing the United States into new strategic conflicts, both are harsh critics of what they claim to be Iran’s regional expansionist activities.

Trump has given Mattis broad authority to make military decisions without White House micro-management. The recent downing of a Syrian government fighter jet and the bombing of the Syrian air force base following the alleged chemical weapons attack in April (which remains unproven to this day) were both reflective of the power of Mattis to make “tactical” decisions without consulting the President.

This is a slippery slope, indeed.



A long-overdue wake-up call from Congress

Special to the AAS

On 29 June Representative Barbara Lee (Democrat, California) introduced an amendment to the Defence Appropriations Bill, which read: “The Authorisation for the Use of Military Force (Public Law 107-40; 50 U.S.C. 1541 note) is hereby repealed. The repeal contained in subsection (a)–(1) takes effect on the date that is 240 days after the enactment of this Act; and (2) applies with respect to each operation or other action that is being carried out pursuant to the Authorisation for the Use of Military Force initiated before such effective date.”

Representative Lee has introduced the same amendment repeatedly over the nearly 16 years since Congress passed the Authorisation for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), in the immediate aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. That AUMF has been used to justify 37 military actions and countless covert operations, still kept secret from the American people. The abuse of the AUMF has been a key feature of the erosion of Congressional power and the steady capitulation to the Executive Branch’s over-reach on the issue of declaring war, a prerogative assigned to the Congress under the US Constitution.

What was stunning about the 29 June debate is that the majority of members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee, in charge of the defence budget, voted with Rep. Lee to repeal that AUMF. The subcommittee vote is a long way from a full Congressional cancellation of the AUMF, but it marked a dramatic reversal of Congress’s decade-and-a-half-long surrender of its Constitutional authority.

A group of House Republicans on the subcommittee, including two war veterans, sided with Lee against the objections of subcommittee chair Kay Granger, a Texas Republican. First, Rep. Tom Cole, an eight-term Republican Congressman from Oklahoma, rose to announce his support for the Lee amendment, declaring that “this is something where Congress has avoided taking collective responsibility for years”. Next, Utah Republican Chris Stewart, a US Air Force veteran, added his support, noting that “I feel like my world is rocked, because I see these two that have very different opinions, yet I agree with you.” He noted that American military officials have complained for years that Congress has been AWOL (“absent without leave”) on the vital issue of who gets to declare war. “They noticed that Congress doesn’t have the guts to stand up and have this debate.” Virginia Republican Scott Taylor, a former Navy SEAL, added, “I believe that we owe them the debate.”

Among those voting for the Lee amendment was Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, a New Jersey Republican who chairs the full House Appropriations Committee and will



Above: US forces in Afghanistan, the first of the 37 military actions that the USA engaged in under the Authorisation for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) law passed after 9/11. Representative Barbara Lee (right), one of the few to vote against the AUMF in 2001, is finally winning support for her 16-year battle to have the law repealed, so the sitting president has to follow the Constitution and get Congressional approval to go to war. Photos: Wikipedia



be responsible for shepherding the defence appropriations bill through the committee and the full House of Representatives.

In the end, the Lee amendment passed by an overwhelming voice vote with only two dissents.

Over in the United States Senate, there is similar bipartisan movement, although no vote has yet taken place. Senator Tim Kaine, the Virginia Democrat who was Hillary Clinton’s Vice Presidential running mate, and Senator Jeff Flake, an Arizona Republican, have introduced a resolution to repeal and replace the 14 September 2001 AUMF with a new, and much more restricted AUMF (<https://www.scribd.com/document/349417741/5-25-17-AUMF-Resolution>). Both are members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and both have strenuously argued, like Rep. Lee, that the Congress has abandoned its Constitutional responsibilities as the only body allowed to declare war.

The Senate Joint Resolution supersedes the existing 2001 AUMF and the subsequent 2002 AUMF, which authorised the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. It limits the authorisation for US military action to operations taken against al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is expected to hold a second hearing on the Kaine-Flake resolution, at which Secretary of State Rex Tillerson would testify.

The 'Trump Effect'

The surprise actions by the House Republicans, in stampeding support for the Barbara Lee amendment, was at least in part motivated by growing concerns among Republicans in both Houses of Congress, that the Trump Administration is unpredictable and prone to acting without due deliberation.

Lawmakers have voiced two, apparently paradoxical, concerns about national security deliberations within the Trump Administration.

Some have expressed concern that the national security team is top-heavy with military flag officers, who tend to think in military terms, and may miss opportunities for diplomatic war-avoidance opportunities. The national security adviser, the President's top aide on all military and national security issues, is active-duty three-star Army General H.R. McMaster. He has staffed the National Security Council with a preponderance of active-duty and retired military personnel, including Middle East director Derek Harvey, a retired Army colonel, and Asia-Pacific director Matthew Pottinger, a retired Marine officer. Defence Secretary James Mattis, a recently retired four-star Marine general, had to get a special waiver from the Senate in order to take the top civilian defence post; and John Kelly, another retired four-star Marine general, is the secretary of homeland security. He got the job at the personal recommendation of Defence Secretary Mattis. CIA Director Mike Pompeo is a West Point graduate and retired Army cavalry officer.

Other lawmakers have expressed concern that, while the national security team is highly professional, experienced, and cautious about taking military action, President Trump has already, on several occasions, overruled those advisers and used force.

Retired Admiral John Kirby, who served during the Obama years as press spokesman for the Pentagon and

then the State Department, is now with CNN. He commented 1 July on the Congressional push-back: "I think we are seeing a growing dose of scepticism by members of Congress—notably in the President's own party—about Trump's ability and willingness to grasp the complexities of key national security problems and his unique responsibilities as commander-in-chief."

Not all of the Congressional push-back is for the good. The attempt to adopt new Russia sanctions on the eve of Trump's scheduled 7 July summit meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Hamburg, Germany was counterproductive in the extreme. After that 98-2 Senate vote, the White House intervened to slow down the process and got support from some House Republicans. As the result, Congress went on its Fourth of July recess without a House vote on the amendment in question, and there is still a chance that it will be killed altogether.

But the bipartisan, long overdue effort to repeal and replace the abused AUMF is a welcome and needed action by Congress. It goes to the heart of the thinking of the Founding Fathers, who were intent on preventing one single person from having the power to declare war. Rather than place that imperial power in the hands of the President, the Founders, when they gathered in Philadelphia in 1787, entrusted the authority to declare war with the "people's branch", the House of Representatives. They made that decision, after much debate (as reported by James Madison, who was the unofficial scribe of the Constitutional Convention), to entrust the sole authority to declare war to the most representative and most divided branch of the Federal government.

The fact that both Representatives and Senators have cited 37 instances of foreign military actions for which the 2001 AUMF was invoked by the President, and on which there was no Congressional debate, is just one indication of how overdue this action is.



Russia warns: al-Qaeda is planning a sarin gas attack in Syria

3 July—A military-diplomatic source told *Sputnik* on 2 July that the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham terrorist group, the current incarnation of al-Qaeda in Syria, is reportedly preparing provocations at a storage facility in Syria's Idlib province which contains sarin gas, which they intend to use in the towns of Khan Sheikhoun and Kefraya.

"According to the obtained information, a preparation for organising a provocation with the use of the sarin poisonous chemical is being carried out in the al-Magarah settlement [in Idlib province], in a big technological building. The shells with this poisonous gas are presumably held in this storage", the source said. "There are reasons to believe that this provocation will be committed in the settlements of Khan Sheikhoun and Kefraya. Its goal is to discredit the Syrian government and to wreck the Astana negotiation process scheduled for 4-5 July", the source added.

First Deputy Chairman of Russia's Federation Council Committee on Defence and Security, Frants Klintsevich, stated that he considered the intelligence reliable, and linked the planned provocation to the presence of the American aircraft carrier *USS George H.W. Bush* in the eastern Mediterranean.

"As soon as [the group] arrives, the provocation with the use of chemical weapons will occur and the United States will launch an air attack", he predicted to *Sputnik*. The

USS George H.W. Bush was launching air strikes in Syria until this past weekend, when it put into port in Haifa, Israel, for a port call from which it is scheduled to leave on 5 July.

Russia's warning follows a 27 June statement by the US White House that caught the whole world by surprise, including the US military, which announced the USA knew Assad was planning a new chemical attack. "The United States has identified potential preparations for another chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime that would likely result in the mass murder of civilians, including innocent children", White House spokesman Sean Spicer's statement read. "If Mr Assad conducts another mass murder attack using chemical weapons, he and his military will pay a heavy price." Russia immediately warned that this statement gave al-Qaeda the cover to commit such an attack in order to blame it on Assad. Now Russia is warning that preparations for such an attack are underway.



The al-Qaeda-linked White Helmets tweeted this image from the last alleged sarin attack on 4 April, which they blamed on Assad. Photos: Twitter

Will Washington ditch INF Treaty?

26 June—Moves are afoot in the United States Congress to force a US withdrawal from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which bans ground-launched nuclear cruise or ballistic missiles with a range of 500-5,500 km, and there is a “fierce debate” within the Trump Administration over the issue, *Politico* reported on 24 June. These moves are based on US accusations dating back to the Obama Administration in 2014 that Russia has developed and deployed new ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) in violation of the treaty—a charge for which Obama produced no evidence, and which Russia has denied. The logic behind the calls for US withdrawal is that if Russia now has weapons that violate the treaty, the USA should free itself to develop corresponding weapons of its own.

Russia in turn has repeatedly voiced its own, much more credible concerns about the Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defence systems the United States has positioned in Poland and Romania in recent years. Moscow argues that these installations breach the INF Treaty because they use the US Navy’s Mark 41 Vertical Launching System, which can also launch nuclear-capable Tomahawk cruise missiles, which have a range of 1,300-2,500 km depending on the model—effectively converting them into GLCMs.

The draft defence authorisation bill in the House Armed Services Committee already contains language providing the framework for a US withdrawal from the INF Treaty. It would require the Pentagon to establish a program of record to develop a dual-capable (both conventional and nuclear) road-mobile GLCM system with a range of 500-5,500 kilometres. It would declare Russia in “material breach” of the treaty. It would require the President to make a determination whether or not Russia has engaged in noncompliant activities; and if such determination is made, it would provide that the United States is no longer bound by the limitations of the treaty. It would also prohibit the expansion or extension of the 2010 “New START” (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) agreement if Russia is determined to be in violation

of the INF Treaty.

Republican Senators Tom Cotton (Arkansas), Ron Johnson (Wisconsin) and Marco Rubio (Florida) introduced a resolution containing similar terms in February. It is currently before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Loud voices both within and outside the government are against withdrawal, however. Both the Pentagon and the State Department oppose exiting the treaty, reports *Politico*, while former Clinton Administration Defence Secretary William Perry warned that to do so “can only lead to greater danger. The chance of blundering into a nuclear conflict is greater [with such missiles] than with long-range missiles because they are not based on our shores.” Perry warns that it’s not just the INF Treaty that’s on the line, but the entire system of arms control, including New START. Alexandra Bell, a former State Department official who is senior policy director for the Centre for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, told *Politico*, “These missiles are highly destabilising, they’re capable of reaching Moscow within 15 minutes. Withdrawing from the INF Treaty would be a terrible mistake.”

The Russian response to the *Politico* report has so far been limited to Members of Parliament and military experts. “We will closely monitor the actions of our colleagues in Congress and draw conclusions”, said Viktor Ozerov, the chairman of the Committee on Defence and Security of the Federation Council. “If the withdrawal from the treaty takes place and entails the military build-up, the new deployment of missiles in Europe, we will not turn a blind eye to it, we will take retaliatory measures.” Vladimir Shamanov, head of the State Duma Defence Committee, told Sputnik: “We should wait for the decision. Without a doubt, we have an appropriate response [to the withdrawal].” Russian military expert and journalist Igor Korotchenko told Sputnik that the allegations of Russian violations of the treaty are groundless: “Russia is not interested in pulling out from the INF Treaty. Moscow hopes that the Donald Trump administration will also take a balanced approach to observing the deal.”

Lavrov: Liberal model of globalisation is obsolete

Speaking at the Primakov Readings International Forum in Moscow on 30 June, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov issued a sharp attack on the West’s responsibility for the disastrous global crisis the world is in, dating from the collapse of the Soviet Union.

“Russia did its homework diligently in clearing up the Cold War debris”, Lavrov said, “and worked hard to build up confidence and mutual understanding in the Euro-Atlantic region and the rest of the world. One of its biggest contributions was its decisive role in the reunification of Germany and the withdrawal of its troops from Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries. We did this with our cards on the table, without a hidden agenda or double standards....”

“Regrettably, the world has not become more stable or predictable. We more than once pointed to the reasons for deterioration in the international situation, the frailty of the unipolar world concept, counterproductive unilateral actions and the risks entailed in undermining international law and the associated growth in the use of force in international affairs.”

He then hit on the core reality: “It has become obvious that the liberal model of globalisation, which was developed in the early 1990s, primarily its economic element that is designed to secure leadership for a small group of countries at the expense of the rest of the world, has exhausted its potential. Despite the seemingly noble goals, this model turned out to be vulnerable to various challenges and incapable of dealing with numerous problems.”

Lavrov was referring to the wave of neoliberal economic reforms that the British Crown’s Mont Pelerin Society directed around the world in the 1980s and 1990s, to deregulate markets and privatise economic functions. These reforms reduced the economic role of governments, which concentrated economic power in the City of London and Wall Street. However, the deindustrialisation that resulted from the economic reforms shrank the productive physical economy upon which the banks of Wall Street and London fed, so the banks resorted to increasingly exotic and dangerous financial speculation, which ended in disaster in 2008, from which the trans-Atlantic financial system has not recovered.