



## Trump, Clinton and the « Dictator Question ». Is Donald an « Unwitting Agent » of Vladimir Putin?

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*Righteousness is rarely endearing, and when concocted in a brew of hypocrisy, it becomes noxious. US political campaigning tends to overflow in it, a mixture of rights, noisily championed liberties and supposed exceptionalism.*

To that end, Donald Trump is enigmatic. He does, to a large extent fit that bill, only in so far as he assumes making money is a patriotic duty. But in being macho and prone to the business side of things, he shows how capitalism lacks a country.

That sentiment has its advantages. A world where Russia's Vladimir Putin would be shaking the hands of a US president warmly is a hard one to contemplate, though it might be better for peace. Trump has promised that, were he to snatch victory come November, that would happen.



This point has meant that Putin is figuring more than he generally would in a US election.

Editorials regularly feature Cold War re-runs, pointing the finger at business interests that would place Trump at odds with the dictates of US foreign policy were he to charge into the White House. "It is unclear," suggested University of New Haven professor Matthew Schmidt, "there wouldn't be a continuing stream of conflict of interest either directly from his own holdings or his advisers if he had to deal with Russia in a place like Syria, for instance." [1]

Given that US politicians have, during the course of the republic's history, linked money interests to those of serving the US people, the point is hardly worth mentioning.

Casting a warm glance the way of the Kremlin has tickled the entire Hillary Clinton campaign. "We're trying elect a president," proclaimed Clinton at a rally in California, "not a dictator." Advisors have busied themselves meeting various leaders in swing states of

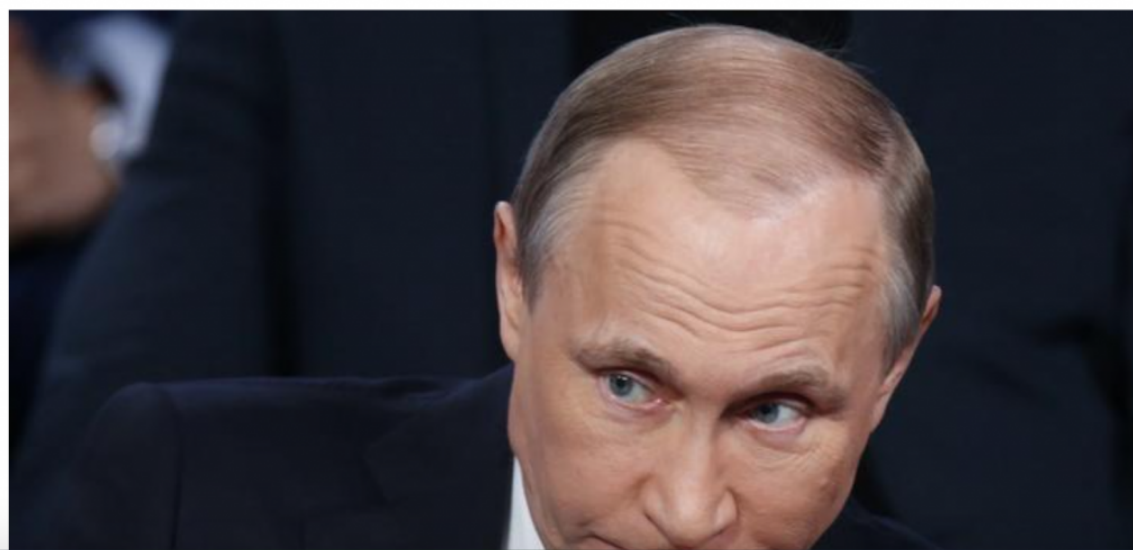
“Eastern European descent” in an effort to stir the pot of anti-Russian resentment.[2]

As Katie Glueck, writing for *Politico*, explains, the Clinton effort is part of a ploy to get deep into traditional Republican territory, one historically sympathetic to GOP causes and suspicious of the Russian Bear. Trump’s pro-Putin talk, accompanied by lukewarm backing for NATO had “alarmed voters with close ties to Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia and other Eastern European countries”.

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With a misplaced sense of purity, the Clintons insist on the idea that Trump’s lust for business, notably with the unwashed, makes him somewhat less that patriotic, following the money when he should be following the Stars and Stripes.

One would have thought that a voracious appetite for the bank account made him quintessentially American.

The Clinton critique does not get away from the obvious issue that every age, every period, finds its authoritarian figure to do business with. For decades, US international interests were, and continue to be, aligned with the ruthless and anti-democratic. The only question worth asking there is which dictator was preferred over another. The world of money, the eternal drive of transactions, continues with unmitigated enthusiasm, indifferent to the vices of strong men, the authoritarian bugbears.

Chile’s ruthless Augusto Pinochet and Milton Friedman are forever linked in a discourse of monetary bliss, the former thrilled by the economic advice dished out by the Chicago School, with Washington’s blessing. What does matter for the Clinton side of the argument is that democrats must at least put up some pretence for respecting human rights, as long as they worship before the crudely crafted effigy of Realpolitik.

The Clintons were never been immune to the world of the shady deal and backing characters of ill-repute. Goldman Sachs is hardly a saintly corporation, but is very much part of the Clinton fan club, having paid her ample sums for a string of speeches. Does that put

her at odds with making decent regulatory policy on rapacious banking practices? Not in Clinton's moral universe, where corruption takes place in open sight. The now deposed Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak, along with his wife, were openly described as "friends of my family" despite a ruthless military rule that collapsed before the flood of the Arab Spring. The current strong man, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has been doing his best to butter relations with the Clintons, despite a spate of forced disappearances and instances of torture.[3]

Then there is the nasty matter of Saudi Arabia, going about its good business of bombing Yemen with US supplied fighter jets. During Clinton's time as Secretary of State, weapons transfers worth billions found their way to the kingdom. The favour has been repaid in the form of donations to the Clinton Foundation. One person's authoritarian is another person's calculating donor.

While Trump is hardly cherubic on this score, he is distinctly aware that any glass house in this matter is broken. All is shattering, and it is time to shatter more. Making deals with dictators, if they be called that, took place before, as it will in future. Moral sanctimony from any side in US politics will hardly hide that point.

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#### Notes

- [1] [http://www.bostonherald.com/news/us\\_politics/2016/09/expert\\_trump\\_does\\_himself\\_no\\_favors\\_complimenting\\_putin](http://www.bostonherald.com/news/us_politics/2016/09/expert_trump_does_himself_no_favors_complimenting_putin)
- [2] <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/donald-trump-russia-vladimir-putin-swing-states-228930>
- [3] <https://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/egypt-officially-you-do-not-exist-disappeared-and-tortured-in-the-name-of-counter-terrorism>

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