

# LAWFARE DISAPPEARS DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT FOR CENTRIST FAILURES TO CLAIM A “SEA- CHANGE” BECAUSE OF RUSSIA

In a piece that calls Max Blumenthal – author of three books of original journalism – an “activist,” Lawfare’s Quinta Jurecic attempts to lay out how the left has split on its response to Russia’s interference in last year’s election. She does a fine job avoiding generalizations about the *current* stance of the various parts of the left she portrays. But she creates a fantasy past, in which even the center-left has been distrustful of the intelligence community, to suggest the center-left’s embrace of the Russia investigation represents a “sea-change” in its comfort with the spooks.

The story of the American left under Trump, as in the larger story, is one of bifurcation and polarization. It’s a story of a profound emerging divide over the role of patriotism and the intelligence community in the left’s political life. To put the matter simply, some on the left are actively revisiting their long-held distrust of the security organs of the American state; and some are rebelling against that rapprochement.

[snip]

But these arguments have taken place against the backdrop of a much greater and more visible embrace of the investigation on the part of the center-left—and a concurrent embrace by many center-left commentators of actively

patriotic vocabulary that is traditionally the province of the right, along with a skepticism about Russia that has not been in fashion in Democratic circles since the Scoop Jackson wing of the party bolted. As Trump has attacked and belittled the intelligence community's assessment of Russian election interference, the center-left has embraced not only the report but also the intelligence community itself.

[snip]

Political leaders of the center-left always had a quiet peace with the national security apparatus. But the peace was a quiet one, generally speaking, one without overly demonstrative displays of affection or support.

[snip]

[B]roadly speaking, the center-left these days sounds a lot like the mainstream right of the last few decades before Trump came along: hawkish towards Russia and enthusiastic about the U.S. intelligence apparatus as one of the country's key lines of defense. And the mainstream right sounds a lot like the center-left on the subject—which is to say very quiet.

This new posture for the center-left, to some degree anyway, has politicians speaking the language of the intelligence world: the language of active patriotism.

Perhaps Jurecic has been asleep since 9/11, and has overlooked how aggressively supportive centrist Democrats have been of the National Security establishment? There's no sea-change on the center left – none. What she actually presents evidence for is a sea-change *on the*

*right*, with increased skepticism from some of those (like Devin Nunes) who have been the intelligence community's biggest cheerleaders in the past.

To create this fantasy past, the foreign policy history Jurecic focuses on is that of the Cold War (a history that stops short of NATO expansion), not more recent history in which members of the center-left voted for a disastrous Iraq War (which Russia opposed), misrepresented (to both Russia and the left) the regime change goals of the Libya intervention, and applauded the CIA effort to back (al Qaeda allied) rebels to carry out regime change in Syria. To say nothing of the center-left's failure to hold banks accountable for crashing the world economy. The only place those policies show up is in Jurecic's explanation why "younger" people are more isolationist than their elders.

There's another stream of thought too, from voices who tend to be younger and more focused on left-wing domestic policy, rather than Cold War-inflected foreign policy—people whose formative political experience dates to the Iraq War, rather than anything to do with the Soviet Union. This stream tends toward isolationism.

It's not just that the Iraq War and the Wall Street crash, not the Cold War, provided the formative moment for these young people (though many of Jurecic's claims about the young are immediately supported by descriptions of Glenn Greenwald or other old farts). It's that these were disastrous policies. And through all of them, the center-left that Jurecic portrays as distrusting the IC were instead enabling and often — certainly for the entire Obama Administration — directing them.

Jurecic's fantasy of past skepticism about the IC relies on the Democrats' changing views towards Jim Comey, particularly the treatment of

him (and to a lesser degree Robert Mueller) as messiahs.

As Americans gathered to watch James Comey testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee, a meme emerged on certain corners of the left-leaning internet: people had a crush on the former FBI director. It was his patriotism, his scrupulousness, his integrity that did it. "Get you a man who loves you like [C]omey loves the FBI," wrote one commenter. "Is COMEY ... attractive?" asked another. Declared one: "Comey should be the next Bachelor."

The trend may have started with Comey, but it hasn't ended with him. Earlier this month, *Vogue* reported that special counsel Robert Mueller, too, has been transformed into an unlikely object of adoration.

The point of these outbursts of affection—whatever level of queasiness or amusement they might inspire—is not actually that anyone finds the former FBI director or the special counsel attractive. In the odd parlance of the internet, this kind of language is a way to express intense emotional involvement with an issue. Half-jokingly and with some degree of self-awareness, the many people who profess their admiration are projecting their swirling anxiety and anticipation over the Russia investigation and the fate of the Trump presidency onto Mueller and Comey.

Not only does Jurecic ignore the wild swing Democrats exhibited about Comey, whom many blamed for Hillary's loss (something both I and, later, Lawfare predicted). But she makes no mention of what happened in 2013 with Jim Comey's confirmation process, in which a man who signed off on torture and legitimized an illegal dragnet by strong-arming the FISA Court was

pushed through by Democrats with one after another fawning statement of admiration, where the only procedural or voting opposition came from Republicans.

You don't approve Comey with no probing questions about his hawkish past if you're at all embarrassed about your support for the IC. Yet that's what the allegedly skeptical Democratic party did.

There's a reason all this matters, especially given the way Jurecic wields the concept of patriotism in her invention of a sea-change in center-left support for spooks.

I'm on the more progressive ("hard") left that Jurecic generally portrays as opposing the Russia investigation. Yet I may have written more, myself, than all of Lawfare about it. I think it is real and important. I support the investigations into Russian interference and Trump's tolerance for it.

But I also think that as part of that review, the center-left – and institutions of centrist policy, starting with Brookings – need to reflect on how their own epic policy failures have discredited centrist ideology and created an opportunity that both Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin found all too easy to exploit.

Trump succeeded, in part, because he deceitfully promised to reinvest in the crumbling US interior, rather than overseas. Putin has attracted support in a Europe still paying for the German banks' follies, a Europe struggling to accommodate refugees escaping a destabilized Middle East. That doesn't make either of them positive forces. Rather, it makes them opportunists capitalizing on the failures of centrist hegemony. But until the center is either replaced or offers policies that haven't already failed, Trump and Putin will continue to exploit those failures.

I consider myself a patriot. But true patriotism – as opposed to the messianism she celebrates as patriotism on the center-left – requires honest

criticism of America's disastrous economic and foreign policy failures. Messianism, by contrast, is a position of impotence, where necessary work is supplanted by hope that a strong man will rescue us all.

Ben Wittes and Lawfare generally are right that caricatures of them as handmaidens of the Deep State are too simple. But Jurecic's analysis is associated with a think tank paid for by funders that include entities that have backed disastrous destabilizing policies in the Middle East – like Qatar, UAE, Haim Saban – as well as those who profit from them – like Northrop Grumman. It was paid for by the banks that centrists didn't hold accountable for the crash, including JP Morgan and Citi. It was paid for by big oil, including Exxon. It was even paid for by Dianne Feinstein, the Democrat who presided over the solicitous Comey confirmation process. Jurecic completely disappeared from her narrative of Democrats embracing Comey.

That a Brookings-affiliated analyst has just invented a fantasy past skepticism for spooks on the center-left – the center-left that has championed failed policies – even as she deems the tribalism she portrays as “patriotism” is itself part of the problem. It dodges the work of true patriotism: ensuring America is strong enough to offer the rest of the world something positive to support, rather than something that demagogues like Trump and Putin can effectively consolidate power over.