

PROVOKING RUSSIA

Two Moscow Memos Confirm Three Decades of Provocations Against Russia

by Harley Schlanger

Dec. 27—On March 28, 1994, as the British-United States “shock therapy” economic policy was depopulating post-Soviet Russia, a critique of that policy was drafted by the chief political analyst at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. The memo, drafted by E. Wayne Merry, was not distributed, and remained suppressed for thirty years. It was said by some at the Embassy that it was buried for fear that it “might give Larry Summers a heart attack.” Summers was at the time the Under Secretary for International Affairs in President Bill Clinton’s Treasury Department, running the “Harvard mafia” of economists pushing the radical privatization, neoliberal “shock therapy” approach to transform the post-Soviet economy.

Following an FOIA suit filed by the National Security Archive, Merry’s memo was published on Dec. 18, 2024, under the title “The Long Telegram of the 1990s: ‘Whose Russia Is It Anyway? Toward a Policy of Benign Respect.’”¹ The original “Long Telegram” was drafted by George Kennan from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and circulated on February 22, 1946; Kennan warned of the dangers of an aggressive post-war Soviet Union, laying out in his memo what became the policy of “containment.”

In his summary, Merry writes that “democratic forces” in Russia are in trouble. “We are not helping with a misguided over-emphasis on market economics. There is no reason to believe the Russian economy is capable of rapid market reform.” He criticized those who attacked the choices of the Russian government and argued instead for imposing policies which go against the will of the majority, in much the same way as those today in the European Union overrule the democratic

choices of voters in Hungary and Romania. He attacks the idea of an aggressive response toward a government “when the economic choices of that democracy do not achieve an American standard of ‘success.’... If Russia elects to follow a non-Anglo-American school of economics, it will be in excellent company.” America should be concerned, he continued, with “the fate of Russian democracy but not to the choices that democracy may make about the distribution of its own wealth and about the organization of its means of production and finance.”

This summary is followed by a succession of paragraphs outlining why the imposition of an Anglo-American model goes against the desires of the Russian people who, he writes, “view the ‘market’ as alien and threatening, as the preserve of ‘exploiters’ and ‘speculators’...” Pushing the radical free market model takes the risk, he concludes, of recreating an adversarial relationship between Russia and the West.

Merry’s critique of the imposition of a radical free-market transformation of Russia parallels that

of U.S. economist and statesman Lyndon LaRouche, though in a milder form, and lacking the alternative program LaRouche advocated. LaRouche was known as a leading critic of the IMF floating-exchange-rate system introduced after President Richard Nixon’s administration jettisoned the gold reserve for the dollar on August 15, 1971, which opened an era of Ponzi-scheme style speculation; LaRouche viewed the shock therapy policy as coherent with the efforts of the IMF and global financial institutions to maintain their control over what became the Unipolar Order, as demanded then by the Bush networks and later by the administrations of President Barack Obama and President Joe Biden.



^{VoA}
E. Wayne Merry, whose 1994 critique of “shock therapy” economic policy is finally public.

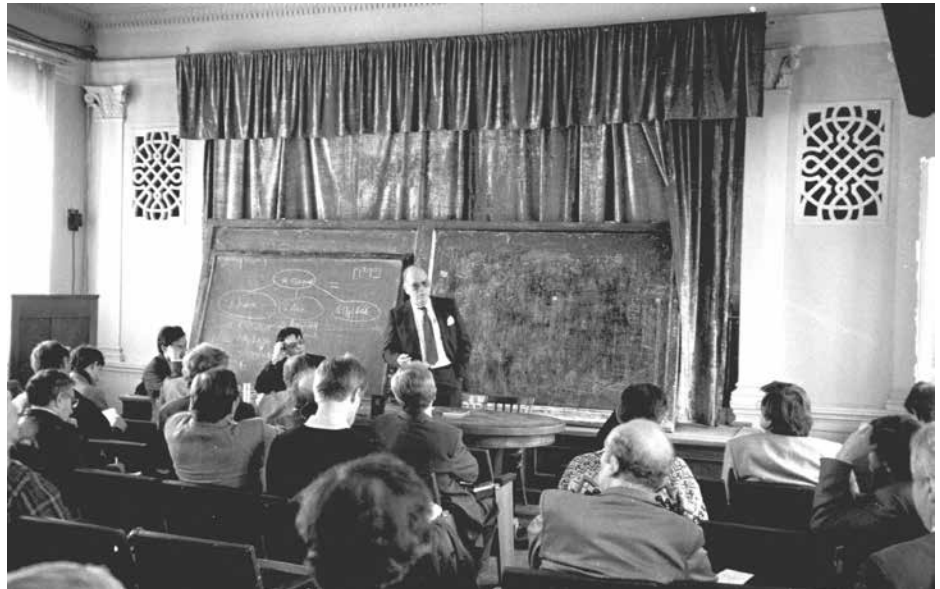
LaRouche was released from prison just two months prior to the drafting of Merry’s memo, framed up precisely due to his effective opposition to the imperial policy of the Bush neoliberals. LaRouche’s release was largely due to an international mobilization led by his wife, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, which generated calls from political, religious, civic and government officials from many countries to set him free, both due to recognition of the unjust prosecution against him, and to allow him to provide guidance for a reorganization of the post-Bretton Woods financial and economic system. LaRouche’s proposal from

1975 to replace the International Monetary Fund with an International Development Bank had provoked a global dialogue about his conception of replacing the neoliberal speculative system with one emphasizing cooperation for development based on scientific and technological progress. His ideas had special resonance among scientific networks and policy makers in Russia, who were engaged in the transformation of the Soviet system, and rejected the radical shock therapy policies demanded by Western monetarists and free market ideologues.

Following his release, LaRouche held a [series of meetings](#) with leading Russian scientists and economists, in which he presented his economic method of forecasting, and how his method enabled the development of an alternative based on the American System of physical economy. LaRouche’s proposals emphasized adopting an economic policy incorporating the Russian scientific tradition, especially in infrastructure, including energy and space.

More than two years before Merry drafted his memo, LaRouche stated;

If Yeltsin, for example, and his government were to go for a reform of the type which Sachs and Sachs’ co-thinkers demand—chiefly from the Anglo-American side—then the result in Russia would be chaos. In such a case, the overthrow of Yeltsin, or somebody, by a dictatorship and the



EIRNS/Rachael Douglas

Lyndon LaRouche, at one of a series of lectures he gave in Russia after his release from prison. Here at a session of P.G. Kuznetsov’s “President” program at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

restoration of a form of what is called totalitarianism would probably occur. In that case, then we have a strategic threat.²

What actually happened was fortunately not the emergence of a totalitarian regime, but Vladimir Putin who replaced Boris Yeltsin as President of the Russian Federation, leading a revival of Russian nationalism in an attempt to recover from the devastating demographic crisis created by the shock therapy policy.³ In spite of the Anglo-American role in causing the demographic collapse, Putin continues to insist that he would prefer a partnership with the west rather than confrontation.

Merry did not drop his opposition to the Anglo-American policy after his memo was suppressed. He is quoted as saying that with shock therapy, “We created a virtual open shop for thievery at a national level and for capital flight in terms of hundreds of billions of dollars, and the raping of natural resources and industries on a scale which I doubt has ever taken place in human history.”

‘Nyet Means Nyet’

The decision to suppress Merry’s memo is not the only time U.S. State Department officials blocked a broader discussion of provocations against Russia from the West. On February 1, 2008, U.S. Ambassador to Russia, William Burns, drafted a memo warning of the blowback from Russia which will accompany the

discussion of NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. Aware that such a discussion of bringing the two countries into NATO would occur at the April 2008 summit in Bucharest, Burns titled his memo, “Nyet Means Nyet: Russia’s NATO Enlargement Red-lines.”⁴

He wrote that—

Ukraine and Georgia’s NATO aspirations not only touch a raw nerve in Russia, they engender serious concerns about the consequences for stability in the region. Not only does Russia perceive encirclement, and efforts to undermine Russia’s influence in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests. Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face.

The Burns’ memo was brought to light by Wikileaks, which published it on February 9. Burns’ analysis has been fully vindicated by events related to Ukraine’s admission to NATO, including the U.S.-backed February 2014 Maidan coup; the bloody attacks by Ukrainian forces against the population in Eastern Ukraine; the fraud of the Minsk Accords, later admitted by France’s President François Hollande and Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel; and the refusal of President Biden to seriously address the legitimate security concerns raised by President Putin in the December 2021 to February 2022 period preceding the launch of Russia’s Special Military Operation (SMO). One should not forget the broken promise made in negotiations over the reunification of Germany, beginning in 1990, that NATO would move “not one inch eastward.”

The policies pursued by the Anglo-Americans through shock therapy were shaped by the imperial ideology of Halford Mackinder’s geopolitical doctrine,



UNHCR/ J.M Ferré/ September 2013

William Burns, U.S. Ambassador to Russia in 2008.

as seen in the post-World War II division of the world into two adversarial alliances, and later confirmed by Zbigniew Brzezinski’s insistence, in his 1997 diatribe, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, that for the U.S. to reign as the sole superpower, it could not allow the emergence of a rival power in Eurasia.

These two memos are evidence that the collective West knew, or should have known, that Russian leaders would see the application of shock therapy to the post-Soviet economy and NATO eastward expansion as part of a geopolitical

commitment to weaken, or break apart Russia. They also prove conclusively that Putin’s decision to launch the SMO was not unprovoked, but a long-postponed reaction to a series of provocations. It is evident that the consistent pattern of lies and betrayals has eroded trust between Russia and the collective West. Peace in Ukraine may require a full repudiation by western leaders of these policies, as a starting point to building the trust necessary to forge a durable peace.

End Notes

1. National Security Archive full report on Merry’s memo is at this [link](#).

2. Jeffrey Sachs was a prominent adviser to the Yeltsin government, working with a team coordinating the policy of shock therapy to end the “statist” model of the Soviet system, beginning in December 1991. He withdrew as an adviser to the Yeltsin government in January 1994, shortly before Merry completed his memo. An [article](#) in the *Harvard Crimson* newspaper at the time reports on his reasons for leaving his post.

3. For a detailed report on the destruction wrought by the neoliberal shock therapy policy, see Sergei Glazyev, *Genocide: Russia and the New World Order*, EIR News Service, 1999.

4. The [title](#) is translated as “No Means No.” Burns, currently serving as President Joe Biden’s CIA Director, seems to have had an opportunistic-driven “change of mind” regarding NATO expansion, as he presently defends the West’s arming and funding Ukraine in its war against Russia as a move toward its eventual membership in the NATO alliance.