My last posting was almost two years ago. With the 2016 election I became tremendously dismayed. I had worked so hard to spread the knowledge of Communistic terror (aka Russian terror). My efforts ended up worthless. The US threw itself into being an accomplice of Russian dictatorship.

Today, Max Boot, summarized the events that have taken place over the past few years and the total degeneration of the Republican party.

Everything he writes is true. All of the opinions and emotions that he expresses are also mine.

Audrius V. Plioplys MD, FRCPC

The Republicans have become the party of Russia. This makes me sick.

Max Boot

<u>Washington Post</u>, December 4, 2019

Of all the changes that have occurred in our politics since the rise of Donald Trump, the most gut-wrenching for me personally is to see the Republican Party transformed into the Kremlin's "useful idiots." As a young refugee from the Soviet Union growing up in Southern California in the 1980s, I was attracted to the GOP because it was the party of moral clarity — the party willing to stand up to the "evil empire." How far we have come — in the wrong direction.

Today, we have a Republican president who, while reluctantly acceding to sanctions against Russia, incessantly praises its dictator, Vladimir Putin ("a terrific person"); tries to bring Putin back to the Group of Seven; conceals the details of their meetings; undermines Ukraine, a victim of Russian aggression, by harping on its corruption while ignoring Russia's own kleptocracy; allows the Russians to take possession of U.S. bases in Syria; and propagates Russian propaganda blaming Ukraine for 2016 election interference. Trump is joined in spreading Russian disinformation by his secretary of state and other supporters, such as Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) and Sen. John Neely Kennedy (R-La.), even though the U.S. intelligence community has exposed claims of Ukrainian election interference as a "fictional narrative."

Fox News host Tucker Carlson, one of the biggest stars on the president's favorite television network and an informal adviser to the president, goes even further in expressing his admiration for Russia. Last week, he said: "Why do I care what is going on in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia?! And I'm serious. Why do I care? Why shouldn't I root for Russia? Which I am." Carlson claimed to be joking. But then this week, he said: "We should probably take the side of Russia if we have to choose between Russia and Ukraine. That's my view."

How did we get to the point where a "conservative" TV star openly sides with an anti-American dictatorship over a pro-American democracy? Most, but not all, of the blame lies with Trump. His affinity for Russia is as deep as it is mysterious. Has he been compromised by Russian intelligence? Is he financially dependent on Russian business partners? Or does he simply admire the way that Putin has destroyed Russian democracy? We still don't know, because special counsel Robert S. Mueller III did not release any findings from the FBI's counterintelligence investigation.

But while Trump's motives remain murky, his admiration for Russia has been clear from the start. Almost exactly four years ago — on Dec. 18, 2015 — Trump was asked by MSNBC's Joe Scarborough about Putin's habit of killing journalists and invading neighboring countries. Trump defended Putin as "a leader, unlike what we have in this country," and said, "Our country does plenty of killing, too, Joe."

Republicans knew this but nominated Trump anyway. Then, during the summer of 2016, came the Russian hack of the Democratic National Committee, a social media blitz, and other actions designed to change the outcome of the U.S. election. Trump made full use of the stolen DNC emails and he invited Russian intelligence to hack Hillary Clinton's emails, too ("Russia, if you're listening"). He also hired a campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, who had a long history of corrupt dealings with Russian oligarchs, and gutted the language concerning Russia in the Republican platform.

The Republican Party could not have cared less. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) refused to join the Obama administration in condemning Russia's attack on our election. The GOP thus became complicit in Russian election interference.

In for a kopek, in for a ruble: The Republicans continued defending Trump even after it emerged that he had tried to build a Trump Tower in Moscow while running for president and that members of his campaign's high command had met with Russian emissaries promising dirt on Clinton. Republicans were not even fazed when Trump fired FBI Director James B. Comey in May 2017 to stop the investigation of "this Russia thing," or when in July 2018 he was utterly supine before Putin in Helsinki.

While Republicans are primarily motivated by Trump toadyism, there is also an element of ideological affinity for Russia. While all Republicans were staunchly opposed to the "godless" Soviet regime, some of them admire Putin's fascist regime, which combines crony capitalism with ultra-nationalism. Putin has marketed himself to credulous conservatives as a champion of Christianity, traditional values and the white race. As my Post colleague Christian Caryl noted, this propaganda has no basis in fact: To take but two examples, Russia has much stricter gun control laws than the United States and a much higher rate of abortion. But Republican Russophilia is so strong that a Russian agent had no difficulty in infiltrating the National Rifle Association. A high-level NRA delegation visited Moscow in 2015 and a group of Republican lawmakers visited Moscow on the Fourth of July 2018.

The percentage of Republicans who view Russia as an ally has nearly doubled since Trump took office. The party's transformation into a Russian lickspittle makes me sick; "GOP" might as well stand for "Gang of Putin."

That so many Republicans are just fine with it is yet another sign of how a once-grand party has lost its way. By turning into apologists and advocates for a Russian dictator, the Republican Party has become all that it once despised.