

Drain this Swamp!

What happens when top U.S. peace negotiator in Caucasus becomes Putin's apologist?

By Alex Raufoglu

WASHINGTON. November 29, 2016:

Dear American Democracy,

In case you puzzled why Trump happened—why the country just voted for a populist leader who campaigned on targeting "the corporate lobbyists and elite," basing a large amount of his platform on "ridding Washington of corruption," here is an interesting story for you to consider:

Early last week, top U.S. peace negotiator in Caucasus, whose mandate includes working with local leaders to seek a long term peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, announced on his Twitter account that he will "step down on December 31," to become "a partner in Russia's largest and most prestigious law firm."

No, you didn't hear me wrong.

Ambassador James Warlick, a career U.S. diplomat with more than three decades of experience, who has spent his last three years representing the U.S. as a peacemaker in the Caucasus, will join a leading Russian law firm thought to be associated with the main troublemaker—Vladimir Putin.

The name of the Russian firm is Egorov Puginsky Afanasiev & Partners, or EPA&P.

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The name of the Russian firm is Egorov Puginsky Afanasiev & Partners, or EPA&P.

It is the largest and perhaps the most powerful legal company in Putin's Russia, which, according to local analysts who were contacted for this story, attributing its power to alleged connections with Putin.

Nikolai Egorov, the founding partner of EPA&P, is known as a close friend and a classmate of Putin back from the time they had studied together at the Petersburg Law School.

The connections between EPA&P and the Russian government were underscored in shadowy assignments performed by the law firm, such as defending Russian spies arrested on charges of assassinating Chechen leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev in Qatar in February 2004.

Putin and Egorov

In September 2011, EPA&P staff received a presidential citation by Putin "for active work on protection of interests of the Russian Federation."

The company has a representative office in Washington D.C.—known as EPAM USA—with focus on attracting U.S. leading lobbying firms.

Following the media coverage about his announcement, Ambassador Warlick later deleted his tweet about EPA&P, however the company in a statement announced that the top diplomat would join their Washington team in January. "He will be responsible for working with U.S. and international clients, development of strategic client relationships, legislation, and public policy," a statement said.

"He is one of the most respected senior U.S. diplomats, with decades of experience as a special envoy, negotiator, policy advisor, and program manager. He has worked extensively with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other

CIS countries, and has experience in emerging markets around the world.

Back in the Caucasus, where Ambassador Warlick recently visited as the top U.S. negotiator, this news certainly raised questions among many observers over how dependent are American fundamental values—values such as a commitment to democracy, rule of law, and other international norms that clash with what the Putin government seems to stand for—on the diplomats this nation chooses to represent us.

Analysts also question whether there should be a best practice guideline for some time gap between the U.S. government services and work in any private firm, especially when it comes to a firm with ties to the Kremlin.

As the new Administration turns to governing in January, the question how can we connect the dots between our democracy's aspirations and its proffered solutions must be made apparent—Some of the top ten items on the list of proposals announced by the president-elect Donald Trump known as "Drain the Swamp", which would supposedly implement new ethics reforms to reduce the corrupting influence of special interests on our politics. Trump also proposed 5-year lobbying ban for administration officials and a lifetime ban on senior executive branch officials from lobbying for foreign governments. While we cannot claim Ambassador Warlick is going to be a registered Russia lobbyist in Washington, but what he's doing looks a lot like lobbying, and lobbying for a regime that has an appalling human rights record and is dedicated to destabilizing Europe in an effort to erode US power... P.S. This also suggest that the State Department should immediately suspend Ambassador James Warlick's mandate or dismiss him, as the Minsk Group co-chairs are set to gather in Hamburg next week for the upcoming Nagorno-Karabakh peace meeting in a frame of the OSCE Ministerial Council summit. Why to wait until January? A soon-to-be potential Putin apologist can't and shouldn't be allowed to represent our taxpayers even for a single day. It's that simple! -0-

Alex Raufoglu is a Washington D.C.-based journalist covering Eurasia