

Biden's Tough-guy Flexing at 'Soulless Killer' Putin Would be Funny if the Consequences Weren't So Serious

By [Scott Ritter](#)

Global Research, March 19, 2021
[RT Op-Ed](#) 17 March 2021

Region: [Russia and FSU, USA](#)
Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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Joe Biden's effort to label Vladimir Putin as a “soulless killer” is the latest in a series of fact-free allegations that define US-Russian relations today. The real aim is to make Biden look like the strong leader he isn't.

Former President Donald Trump was fond of bragging about how tough he was when it came to Russia. “There's never been a president as tough on Russia as I have been,” [Trump crowed](#) in 2018. He wasn't wrong—[according to Daniel Vajdich](#), a senior analyst with the Atlantic Council, the Trump administration was “much tougher on Russia than any in the post-Cold War era.” Despite the tough reality of his Russian policy, however, Trump was not opposed to bettering relations, [publicly proclaiming](#) that “it would be great if we could get along with Russia.”

As for his relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump [has noted](#) that “I like Putin, he likes me.” Indeed, Marina Gross, the State Department interpreter who worked on many of the calls between Trump and Putin, [has reportedly said](#) that “listening to their conversations often felt like eavesdropping on two friends chatting in a bar.” Indeed, Trump famously bristled at Fox's Bill O'Reilly, [who said of the Russian president](#), “Putin's a killer.” Trump responded, “There are a lot of killers. We've got a lot of killers. What, do you think our country's so innocent?”

President Biden has made it clear that he plans to deal with Russia in a far more aggressive manner than his predecessor. Moreover, there would be no more talk about “friendship” or “getting along.” In [a recent interview](#) with ABC News' George Stephanopoulos, Biden was given a bite from the same apple O'Reilly had offered Trump. “So, you know Vladimir Putin,” Stephanopoulos asked. “You think he's a killer?” Without a moment's hesitation, Biden responded, “Mmm-hmm, I do.”

Tall tales to stand out

To anyone who has followed the career of Joe Biden, this reply does not signify anything other than crass political opportunism, a chance to swing away at a softball question deliberately tossed out to allow the president to create the perception of separation

between himself and the policies and postures of his predecessor. Biden's negative opinion of Russia under Putin is well established, perhaps [best articulated](#) by Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Endowment's Moscow Center, as *"a country in enormous decline, an oil-based economy and a second-rate military power, unable to compete with the West and saddled with depressive demographics and a kleptocratic regime run by KGB thugs."*

Any student of Russia would understand that Biden's perception misses the mark – widely. But any attempt to try to bridge the gulf between reality and Biden's perception of things is an exercise in futility. Biden has never been about the facts, but rather about how he can twist the facts in a manner that sustains his greatest passion: self-promotion. This became apparent during the ABC interview, when Biden repeated his 2014 claim, [made to the New Yorker](#), regarding a meeting he had with Putin at the Kremlin during a March 2011 visit. According to Biden, he was alone with Putin in his office, where he brought up the topic of Putin's lack of a human soul. *"I said, 'I looked in your eyes and I don't think you have a soul,'"* Biden told Stephanopoulos, *"and he [Putin] looked back and said, 'We understand each other.'" (The New Yorker story differed only in that Biden claimed Putin smiled when responding.)*

Biden's storytelling served a purpose. *"The most important thing when dealing with foreign leaders,"* he told Stephanopoulos, *"is just to know the other guy."* Here, Biden was trying to distinguish himself from another American president, George W. Bush, [who famously said](#) of his initial meeting with Putin, back in June 2001, that *"I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy,"* adding *"I was able to get a sense of his soul."*

There is another difference between the statement made by Bush, and that offered up by Biden, regarding their respective meetings with Vladimir Putin. Bush's was part of the public record, Biden's was not. Indeed, the likelihood of the Biden-Putin meeting occurring as described by Joe Biden is slim to none. When Biden [made his trip to the Kremlin](#) in 2011, he was fronting for the Obama administration's "reset" with Russia. There was no opportunity, or need, for Biden's faux machismo. The two men did meet, but as part of delegations discussing the possibility for improving relations. Not only would Biden's insulting verbal flexing have been wildly inappropriate and inconsistent with the larger policy objectives of his visit, but it ran counter to his own feelings, expressed at the time, about Russia. *"Russia has the best engineers in the world,"* Biden said in a press conference after his meeting with Putin (who was serving as Russia's prime minister, not president, at the time.) *"Russia has intellectual capital. Russia is a great nation."* These are not words one utters after telling a Russian leader in private that he has *"no soul."*

Evidence need not apply

Biden's [struggle with the truth](#) is well known, so it should come as no surprise to anyone that he possibly made up a meeting with Putin. Biden has been caught plagiarizing a speech delivered by former British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock, lied about his academic record and accomplishments, and manufactured from whole cloth a narrative that has him participating in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Biden's lies all have one goal in common: to make him out to be that which he is not. So, too, his apparent lie about calling Putin soulless. Biden is desperate to be a 'tough guy'. But for that reputation to stick vis-à-vis Putin, there had to be a 'showdown' moment, where the good guy faced off against the bad guy and called him out. Since no such event exists, Biden had to make one up. And, like most of his lies, Biden repeats them long enough and often enough that they take on a life

of their own, embraced as fact by unquestioning journalists.

The present need for the 78-year-old American president to be flexing on the issue of Russia is driven by the conclusions of [a report released by the director of national intelligence](#) (DNI), which assesses that Russia interfered in the 2020 US presidential election. *“Russian President Putin authorized,”* the report noted, *“and a range of Russian government organizations conducted, influence operations aimed at denigrating President Biden’s candidacy and the Democratic Party, supporting former President Trump, undermining public confidence in the electoral process, and exacerbating sociopolitical divisions in the US.”* The report homed in on the role played by Ukrainian “proxies,” [in particular Andrii Derkach](#), accused by the US of being a Russian agent. According to the DNI report, Russian intelligence services used Derkach and others to help spread an anti-Biden narrative while giving Moscow *“plausible deniability.”*

For its part, the Russian government [has denied the allegations](#), describing them as *“another set of groundless accusations against our country of interfering in American internal political processes,”* and noting that the report was based *“solely [on] the confidence of the intelligence services of their self-righteousness,”* and that *“no facts or specific evidence of such claims were provided.”* The allegations outlined in the report cover no new ground, and represent the ideological extension of [similar claims](#) dating back to the 2016 US presidential election, when the US intelligence community published an assessment on the role played by RT in influencing American public opinion that predated the events in question.

Worst superhero ever

It does not matter that the DNI assessment serves as a slap in the face to every free-thinking American, carrying the connotation that the average citizen is easily swayed by the opinions of outsiders. The notion that the Russian government, acting directly or via proxy, could be more skilled in manipulating US voter opinions than the armies of seasoned political operatives who spend hundreds of millions of dollars in pursuit of a similar outcome is not only laughable, but deeply insulting. Again, what is important here are not the facts attached to this claim, but rather the perception-based narrative being painted by President Biden. On January 26 of this year, Biden made his initial phone call to Vladimir Putin. According to a White House statement released afterwards, *“President Biden made clear that the United States will act firmly in defense of its national interests in response to actions by Russia that harm us or our allies,”* noting that among the specific issues raised by Biden was the issue of 2020 election interference by Russia.

In his interview with Stephanopoulos, Biden raised the findings of the DNI report, and his conversation with Putin. *“He will pay a price. We had a long talk, he and I. I know him relatively well and the conversation started off [like this]: I said, ‘I know you and you know me. If I establish this occurred, then be prepared.’”*

Biden does not know Putin well at all. If he did, he would know that the last thing that would give the Russian leader pause were the fanciful tough-guy posturing of a geriatric president. There is little doubt that the Biden administration will impose additional sanctions against Russia in the days and weeks to come, citing the report as justification. There is also little doubt that these sanctions will have no impact whatsoever on the policies and practices of the Russian government. But that is not the point. Biden is not flexing for the benefit of Putin. His audience is the American people, and part and parcel of a coordinated campaign

designed to drive home his mantra that “America is back.”

The fact that Biden’s posturing is all fluff and no substance is beside the point. His words and visage will be disseminated across the width and breadth of the American media establishment, helping cement as fact yet another chapter in the ongoing work of fiction that defines the US’ newest superhero, Joe Biden. This would be comical if the potential consequences of Biden’s actions were not so serious. In a world where Russian and American nuclear weapons are but one push of a button away from ending life as we know it, perhaps playing the tough guy is not the best look.

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Scott Ritter is a former US Marine Corps intelligence officer and author of '[SCORPION KING: America’s Suicidal Embrace of Nuclear Weapons from FDR to Trump.](#)' He served in the Soviet Union as an inspector implementing the INF Treaty, in General Schwarzkopf’s staff during the Gulf War, and from 1991-1998 as a UN weapons inspector. Follow him on Twitter [@RealScottRitter](#)

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