

Obama's Flak Demeans Putin's Posture

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The demonizing of Russia's President Vladimir Putin appears to know no bounds, with the White House and The New York Times going out of their way to mock his request for a meeting with President Barack Obama and then larding on insults about Putin's looks and posture

Indeed, what is perhaps most remarkable about the Times publishing [an article](#) bristling with such crude insults toward a world leader is that it almost passes without notice these days in Official Washington. One can only hope that Putin has an extraordinarily thick skin and doesn't stoop to the level of the White House - and the Times - in dishing back insults about Obama and America's newspaper of record.

If he did, there would surely be hell to pay with renewed demands from prominent American pols and pundits for "regime change" in Moscow. It's as if everyone in Official Washington wants to play games with the possibility of thermonuclear war - to look really, really tough.

The article on Friday was co-written by Michael R. Gordon, the Times' neoconservative national security correspondent who helped promote the Iraq War by peddling a bogus story in 2002 (co-written with Judith Miller) about Iraq obtaining aluminum tubes for nuclear centrifuges - though it turned out the tubes were unsuitable for that purpose. Miller later left the Times but Gordon is still there, pushing for evermore "regime changes."

It is in that context that Gordon and White House correspondent Peter Baker produced an article in which Obama's spokesman went to extraordinary lengths to distance the President from Putin - all the better to shield the timid Obama from a hail of criticism for deigning to meet with Putin.

Rather than simply defend the principle of meeting with foreign leaders with whom the U.S. has policy differences, Obama dispatched press secretary Josh Earnest to disparage and insult Putin, portraying the Russian leader as "desperate" for a meeting with Obama.

"It is fair for you to say that based on the repeated requests we've seen from the Russians, that they are quite interested in having a conversation with President Obama," Earnest said. But he did not stop there. He commented in a derogatory fashion about Putin's appearance in a meeting this week with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

As the Times wrote:

"the White House seemed to go out of its way on Thursday not to show deference. At one point during his daily briefing, Mr. Earnest noted Mr. Putin's habit of slouching while meeting with counterparts, pointing to a recent photo of him with Israel's prime minister. 'President Putin was striking a now-familiar

pose of less-than-perfect posture and unbuttoned jacket and, you know, knees spread far apart to convey a particular image,' he said."

Clearly, such a casual posture in Netanyahu's presence is shocking to U.S. officials who normally take on the appearance of trained seals, sitting at rapt attention waiting for Netanyahu to toss them some rhetorical tidbit and then jumping up to applaud. So, perhaps, the White House was just stunned not to see Putin acting in a similar way.

But what the photos of the meeting actually show is that both men had their suit coats open and both sat with their legs apart at least for part of the time. Putin also doesn't appear to be "slouching." Yet, the White House directed its Miss Manners' finger-waving about proper posture only at Putin, not at Netanyahu.

Fear of Criticism

The White House wanted to make a public point by insulting Putin, the leader of a major nuclear power, because Obama is scared of criticism from neocons and their liberal-interventionist sidekicks for agreeing to any kind of face-to-face meeting with the Russian president.

Yet, even during Josef Stalin's brutal reign and during the height of the Cold War, American presidents regularly met with their Soviet counterparts. They did so in a mature and respectful way despite serious disputes between the two nations. From Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan, presidents recognized the need to coordinate on important geopolitical issues whatever their personal feelings about the Soviet leaders.

Given the fact that both nations still have vast nuclear arsenals, one might think there should still be at least a modicum of decorum between the two sides. But Obama apparently feels that the Putin demonization in Official Washington is so powerful that he must insulate himself from attacks for just talking to Putin.

In a Times [editorial](#) on Monday, Obama's team let it be known that Obama considers Putin a "thug." For his part, Putin has refrained from returning this name-calling in kind, even continuing to describe American and European officials as his "partners."

Though Obama has spoken with Putin on the sidelines of some recent international conferences, their last formal meeting was in June 2013. That fall, Obama canceled a summit meeting because Putin gave refuge to National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden, who had revealed legally questionable bulk collection of data about Americans. Obama wanted Snowden prosecuted and imprisoned for the disclosures.

U.S.-Russian relations worsened in February 2014 when neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland helped orchestrate a coup d'etat in Ukraine, on Russia's border, overthrowing democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich and installing a regime hostile to Russia and to ethnic Russians living in Ukraine.

The coup - and the resulting Ukrainian nationalist violence directed against ethnic Russians - sparked a referendum in which the residents of Crimea voted by 96 percent to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a development that was treated by the Obama administration and The New York Times as a "Russian invasion."

When ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine also resisted the new order in Kiev, the coup regime announced an “Anti-Terror Operation” and dispatched troops including neo-Nazi, Islamist and other irregular militias to crush the rebels. Some 8,000 or more people were killed, mostly ethnic Russian civilians. When Russia supplied help to this resistance, the Obama administration and the Times deemed the assistance “Russian aggression.”

So, according to the latest “group think” of Official Washington, the current Ukrainian regime is a paragon of virtue, reform and human rights – despite its continued corruption and its deployment of neo-Nazis and Islamists to kill ethnic Russian Ukrainians – and Putin is the fount of all evil for not permitting the slaughter to go on unchallenged.

Though I’m told that Obama understands how inaccurate this black-and-white depiction is, he feels that he must go with the flow to avoid being denounced by the neocons and liberal interventionists as “weak.” Thus, Press Secretary Earnest was dispatched to describe Putin as “desperate” and lacking good posture.

Update: For their part, the Russians denied that Putin was “desperate” for a meeting with Obama and added that the Obama administration on Sept. 19 proposed the meeting between the two heads of state either on Monday or Tuesday.

According to Yuri Ushakov, a top foreign policy adviser to Putin, the Kremlin opted for Monday when Putin was scheduled to be in New York to address the United Nations General Assembly. “We do not refuse contacts that are proposed,” Ushakov said. “We support maintaining constant dialogue at the highest level.”

(The Kremlin’s statement included no insults about Obama’s appearance.)

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America’s Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America’s Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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