

Trump Can Prove He's Not a Putin Puppet by Blowing Up the World

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Four weeks into Donald Trump's presidency, New York Times columnist Paul Krugman [wrote](#) that "nothing he has done since the inauguration allays fears that he is in effect a Putin puppet." The liberal pundit concluded with a matter-of-fact reference to "the Trump-Putin axis."

Such lines of attack have become routine, citing and stoking fears that the president of the United States is a Kremlin stooge. The meme is on the march — and where it will end, nobody knows.

Actually, it could end with a global nuclear holocaust.

The incessant goading and denunciations of Trump as a Kremlin flunky are escalating massive pressure on him to prove otherwise. Exculpatory behavior would involve setting aside possibilities for detente and, instead, confronting Russia — rhetorically and militarily.

Hostile behavior toward Russia is what much of the U.S. media and political establishment have been fervently seeking. It's also the kind of behavior that could drag us all over the brink into thermonuclear destruction.

But c'mon, why worry about that?

For countless media commentators and partisan Democrats including many avowed progressives — as well as for some [Republican hawks](#) aligned with the likes of Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham — the benefits of tarring Trump as a Russian tool are just too alluring to resist.

To be clear: For a vast number of reasons, the Trump administration is repugnant. And the new president's flagrant violations of the U.S. Constitution's foreign and domestic emoluments clauses are solid grounds for impeaching him. I'm glad to be involved with a nationwide [petition](#) campaign — which already has 890,000 signers — urging Congress to begin impeachment proceedings. We should go after Trump for well-grounded reasons based on solid facts.

At the same time, we should refuse to be stampeded by the nonstop drumbeats from partisan talking points and mainline media outlets — as well as "the intelligence community." It wasn't mere happenstance when the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, openly [lied](#) at a Senate committee hearing in early 2013, replying "No sir" to a pivotal question from Sen. Ron Wyden: "Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?" The lie was exposed three months

later when Edward Snowden made possible the release of key NSA documents.

Yet now we're supposed to assume straight-arrow authoritative honesty can be found in a flimsy 25-page [report](#) "assessing Russian activities and intentions," issued in early January under the logo of Clapper's Office of the Director of National Intelligence. That report has been critiqued and demolished by [one](#) astute analyst after [another](#).

As investigative journalist Gareth Porter [noted](#), "In fact, the intelligence community had not even obtained evidence that Russia was behind the publication by WikiLeaks of the e-mails [of the] Democratic National Committee, much less that it had done so with the intention of electing Trump. Clapper had testified before Congress in mid-November and again in December that the intelligence community did not know who had provided the e-mails to WikiLeaks and when they were provided."

More broadly and profoundly, many cogent analyses have emerged to assess the proliferating anti-Russia meme and its poisonous effects. For instance: "[Why We Must Oppose the Kremlin-Baiting Against Trump](#)" by Stephen F. Cohen at *The Nation*; "[The Increasingly Unhinged Russia Rhetoric Comes From a Long-Standing U.S. Playbook](#)" by Glenn Greenwald at *The Intercept*; and "[The Did-You-Talk-to-Russians Witch Hunt](#)" by Robert Parry at *ConsortiumNews*.

The frenzy to vilify Russia and put the kibosh on the potential for detente is now undermining open democratic discourse about U.S. foreign policy — while defaming advocates of better U.S.-Russia relations in ways that would have made Joe McCarthy proud. So, President Trump's expressions of interest in improving relations with Russia — among his few lucid and constructive statements about anything — are routinely spun and smeared as corroborations of the meme that he's in cahoots with the Russian government.

Many organizations that call themselves progressive are culpable. One of the largest, MoveOn, blasted out an email alert on February 10 with a one-sentence petition calling for a congressional investigation of Trump — [flatly declaring](#) that he has "ties to the Russian government."

Consider these words from President Trump at his February 16 news conference:

* "Look, it would be much easier for me to be tough on Russia, but then we're not going to make a deal. Now, I don't know that we're going to make a deal. I don't know. We might. We might not. But it would be much easier for me to be so tough — the tougher I am on Russia, the better. But you know what? I want to do the right thing for the American people. And to be honest, secondarily, I want to do the right thing for the world."

* "They're a very powerful nuclear country and so are we. If we have a good relationship with Russia, believe me, that's a good thing, not a bad thing."

* "By the way, it would be great if we could get along with Russia, just so you understand that. Now tomorrow, you'll say 'Donald Trump wants to get along with Russia, this is terrible.' It's not terrible. It's good."

Rather than being applauded and supported, such talk from Trump is routinely depicted as further indication that — in Krugman's words — Trump "is in effect a Putin puppet."

And how could President Trump effectively allay fears and accusations that he's a Kremlin flunky? How could he win cheers from mainstream newsrooms and big-megaphone pundits and CIA headquarters? He could get in a groove of decisively denouncing Russian President Vladimir Putin. He could move U.S. military forces into more confrontational stances and menacing maneuvers toward Russia.

Such brinkmanship would occur while each country has upward of 4,000 nuclear warheads deployed or stockpiled for potential use. Some are attached to missiles on "hair-trigger alert" — which, the Union of Concerned Scientists [explains](#), "is a U.S. military policy that enables the rapid launch of nuclear weapons. Missiles on hair-trigger alert are maintained in a ready-for-launch status, staffed by around-the-clock launch crews, and can be airborne in as few as 10 minutes."

Those who keep goading and baiting President Trump as a puppet of Russia's government are making nuclear war more likely. If tensions with the Kremlin keep escalating, what is the foreseeable endgame? Do we really want to push the U.S. government into potentially catastrophic brinkmanship with the world's other nuclear superpower?

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