

Demonizing Russia in the US Mainstream Media: The Washington Post's "Putinology"

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The Washington Post accused Vladimir Putin (cc photo: WEF/Sebastian Derungs)

We're supposed to know by now that Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) is a really bad guy—so bad that anything that he says is further proof of his screeching hostility to the United States.

The Washington Post reported ([10/24/14](#)) on a recent Putin speech with this blistering lead sentence:

Making clear that the Kremlin has no intention of backing down from the worst Russia/Western crisis since the Cold War, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the United States on Friday of trying to “reshape the whole world” for its benefit, in a fiery speech that was one of the most anti-American of his 15 years as Russia’s paramount leader.

Fiery anti-Americanism!

It's not hard to believe that Putin was highly critical of the US foreign policy, but what precisely did he say? The Post called it “a bitter distillation of Putin’s anti-American rhetoric.” The Post Karoun Demirjian> and Michael Birnbaum reported that the address was an

unsmiling, straightforward worldview that blasted the United States as taking advantage of its powerful post-Cold War position to dictate misguided terms to the rest of the world. Putin faulted the United States for a rise in global terrorism, a resumption of a global arms race and a general worsening of global security.

“It never ceases to amaze me how our partners have been guilty of making the same mistakes time and again,” Putin said, accusing the United States of breeding terrorists by upsetting the established order in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

OK, so fiery anti-Americanism is the belief that the United States desires a unipolar world where it calls the shots. Does anyone doubt [US elites](#) think otherwise?

And the US, he thinks, bears some responsibility for fueling the global arms race. The United States is, according to some less than fiery and not particularly anti-American news outlets, the leading supplier of arms in the world (“US Arms Sales Make Up Most of Global

Market,” New York Times, [8/26/12](#); “US Doubles Down on Foreign Military Sales,” Defense News, [7/19/14](#)).

On the subject of nuclear arms, a key issue in US/Russia relations, the New York Times ([9/21/14](#)) recently reported on the US plan to increase its nuclear arsenal—a “nationwide wave of atomic revitalization” that could cost well over a trillion dollars.

And it’s hard to argue with Putin’s critique of US foreign policy accomplishments in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya; those countries have suffered extreme violence and instability due to US military actions. Would there [even be an ISIS](#) without the US invasion of Iraq?

None of that should be mistaken as an endorsement of anything Putin or Russia has done. But if the Post means to show us that a foreign leader is a fiery, bitter anti-American, it might want to make a stronger case.

The news article, though, was nothing compared to the Post’s editorial ([10/27/14](#)). Under the Web headline “Putinoia on Full Display,” the paper blasted Putin for his

poisonous mix of lies, conspiracy theories, thinly veiled threats of further aggression and, above all, seething resentment toward the United States.

Again, that’s a pretty serious charge. It’s not hard to imagine a politician telling lies; which ones did Putin tell?



The Post doesn’t seem to want to tell us. It does say Putin claimed that the United States has

promoted a “unipolar world [that] is simply a means of justifying dictatorship over people and countries.” According to Mr. Putin, Washington has created chaos across the world by conspiring to foment revolutions, including what he views as an armed “coup d’etat” in Ukraine.

Image, right: Protesters violently overthrew the elected government of Ukraine—but if you call it a “coup,” the Washington Post will call you a liar. (cc photo: Mstyslav Chernov/Wikimedia)

Again, the United States does see itself as the world’s lone superpower, with a dominant military and an obvious record of attempting to use military force, directly or otherwise, to change the world to its liking (though these efforts are not always successful). In Ukraine, in particular, Washington certainly supported the [violent overthrow](#) of an elected government—whether you want to call that a “coup d’etat” or not.

The editorial began with this observation:

Anyone wondering what Western leaders have been up against when they try to reason with Vladimir Putin need only read the transcript of the Russian ruler's three-hour performance at the [annual Valdai conference](#) in Sochi on Friday.

The thing is, if you're going to say someone is a poisonous liar who traffics in conspiracy theories, then you should show that. That the Post doesn't seem to feel the need to do so either means the evidence isn't there, or that the burden of proof is very low when it comes to official enemies.

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