

# Obama's Petulant World War II Snub of Russia's V-Day Commemoration

By [Ray McGovern](#)

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*Russia celebrated the Allied victory over Nazism on Saturday without U.S. President Obama and other Western leaders present, as they demean the extraordinary sacrifice of the Russian people in winning World War II – a gesture intended to humiliate President Putin, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.*

President Barack Obama's decision to join other Western leaders in snubbing Russia's weekend celebration of the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe looks more like pouting than statesmanship, especially in the context of the U.S. mainstream media's recent anti-historical effort to downplay Russia's crucial role in defeating Nazism.

Though designed to isolate Russia because it had the audacity to object to the Western-engineered coup d'état in Ukraine on Feb. 22, 2014, this snub of Russia's President Vladimir Putin – like the economic sanctions against Russia – is likely to backfire on the U.S. and its European allies by strengthening ties between Russia and the emerging Asian giants of China and India.

Notably, the dignitaries who will show up at this important commemoration include the presidents of China and India, representing a huge chunk of humanity, who came to show respect for the time seven decades ago when the inhumanity of the Nazi regime was defeated – largely by Russia's stanching the advance of Hitler's armies, at a cost of 20 to 30 million lives.

Obama's boycott is part of a crass attempt to belittle Russia and to cram history itself into an anti-Putin, anti-Russian alternative narrative. It is difficult to see how Obama and his friends could have come up with a pettier and more gratuitous insult to the Russian people.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel – caught between Washington's demand to "isolate" Russia over the Ukraine crisis and her country's historic guilt in the slaughter of so many Russians – plans to show up a day late to place a wreath at a memorial for the war dead.

But Obama, in his childish display of temper, will look rather small to those who know the history of the Allied victory in World War II. If it were not for the Red Army's costly victories against the German invaders, particularly the tide-turning battle at Stalingrad in 1943-1944, the prospects for the later D-Day victory in Normandy in June 1944 and the subsequent defeat of Adolf Hitler would have been much more difficult if not impossible.

Yet, the current Russia-bashing in Washington and the mainstream U.S. media overrides these historical truths. For instance, a New York Times article by Neil MacFarquhar on Friday

begins: “The Russian version of Hitler’s defeat emphasizes the enormous, unrivaled sacrifices made by the Soviet people to end World War II ...” But that’s not the “Russian version”; that’s the history.

For its part, the Washington Post chose to run an Associated Press story out of Moscow reporting: “A state-of-the-art Russian tank ... on Thursday ground to a halt during the final Victory Day rehearsal. ... After an attempt to tow it failed, the T-14 rolled away under its own steam 15 minutes later.” (Subtext: Ha, ha! Russia’s newest tank gets stuck on Red Square! Ha, ha!).

This juvenile approach to pretty much everything that’s important — not just U.S.-Russia relations — has now become the rule. From the U.S. government to the major U.S. media, it’s as if the “cool kids” line up in matching fashions creating a gauntlet to demean and ridicule whoever the outcast of the day is. And anyone who doesn’t go along becomes an additional target of abuse.

That has been the storyline for the Ukraine crisis throughout 2014 and into 2015. Everyone must agree that Putin provoked all the trouble as part of some Hitler-like ambition to conquer much of eastern Europe and rebuild a Russian empire. If you don’t make the obligatory denunciations of “Russian aggression,” you are called a “Putin apologist” or “Putin bootlicker.”

### Distorting the History

So, the evidence-based history of the Western-sponsored coup in Kiev on Feb. 22, 2014, must be forgotten or covered up. Indeed, about a year after the events, the New York Times published a major “investigative” article that ignored all the facts of a U.S.-backed coup in declaring there was no coup.

The Times didn’t even mention the notorious, [intercepted phone call](#) between Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt in early February 2014 in which Nuland was handpicking the future leaders, including her remark “Yats is the guy,” a reference to Arseniy Yatsenyuk who – after the coup – quickly became prime minister. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “[NYT Still Pretends No Coup in Ukraine](#).”]

Even George Friedman, the president of the Washington-Establishment-friendly think-tank STRATFOR, has said publicly in late 2014: “Russia calls the events that took place at the beginning of this year a coup d’état organized by the United States. And it truly was the most blatant coup in history.”

Beyond simply ignoring facts, the U.S. mainstream media has juggled the time line to make Putin’s reaction to the coup – and the threat it posed to the Russian naval base in Crimea – appear to be, instead, evidence of his instigation of the already unfolding conflict.

For example, in a “we-told-you-so” headline on March 9, the Washington Post declared: “Putin had early plan to annex Crimea.” Then, quoting AP, the Post reported that Putin himself had just disclosed “a secret meeting with officials in February 2014 ... Putin said that after the meeting he told the security chiefs that they would be ‘obliged to start working to return Crimea to Russia.’ He said the meeting was held Feb. 23, 2014, almost a month before a referendum in Crimea that Moscow has said was the basis for annexing the region.”

So there! Gotcha! Russian aggression! But what the Post neglected to remind readers was

that the U.S.-backed coup had occurred on Feb. 22 and that Putin has consistently said that a key factor in his actions toward Crimea came from Russian fears that NATO would claim the historic naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea, representing a strategic threat to his country.

Putin also knew from opinion polls that most of the people of Crimea favored reunification with Russia, a reality that was underscored by the March referendum in which some 96 percent voted to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia.

But there was not one scintilla of reliable evidence that Putin intended to annex Crimea before he felt his hand forced by the putsch in Kiev. The political reality was that no Russian leader could afford to take the risk that Russia's only warm-water naval base might switch to new NATO management. If top U.S. officials did not realize that when they were pushing the coup in early 2014, they know little about Russian strategic concerns – or simply didn't care.

Last fall, John Mearsheimer, a pre-eminent political science professor at the University of Chicago, stunned those who had been misled by the anti-Russian propaganda when he placed an article in the Very-Establishment journal *Foreign Affairs* entitled "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault."

You did not know that such an article was published? Chalk that up to the fact that the mainstream media pretty much ignored it. Mearsheimer said this was the first time he encountered such widespread media silence on an article of such importance.

### The Sole Indispensable Country

Much of this American tendency to disdain other nations' concerns, fears and points of pride go back to the Washington Establishment's dogma that special rules or (perhaps more accurately) no rules govern U.S. behavior abroad – American exceptionalism. This arrogant concept, which puts the United States above all other nations like some Olympian god looking down on mere mortals, is often invoked by Obama and other leading U.S. politicians.

That off-putting point has not been missed by Putin even as he has sought to cooperate with Obama and the United States. On Sept. 11, 2013, a week after Putin bailed Obama out, enabling him to avoid a new war on Syria by persuading Syria to surrender its chemical weapons, Putin wrote in an op-ed published by the *New York Times* that he appreciated the fact that "My working and personal relationship with President Obama is marked by growing trust."

Putin added, though, "I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism," adding: "It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. ... We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal."

More recently, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov drove home this point in the context of World War II. This week, addressing a meeting to mark the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe, Lavrov included a pointed warning: "Today as never before it is important not to forget the lessons of that catastrophe and the terrible consequences that spring from faith

in one's own exceptionalism."

The irony is that as the cameras pan the various world leaders in the Red Square reviewing stand on Saturday, Obama's absence will send a message that the United States has little appreciation for the sacrifice of the Russian people in bearing the brunt – and breaking the back – of Hitler's conquering armies. It is as if Obama is saying that the "exceptional" United States didn't need anyone's help to win World War II.

President Franklin Roosevelt was much wiser, understanding that it took extraordinary teamwork to defeat Nazism in the 1940s, which is why he considered the Soviet Union a most important military ally. President Obama is sending a very different message, a haughty disdain for the kind of global cooperation which succeeded in ridding the world of Adolf Hitler.

*Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A specialist on Russia, he served as chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch during his 27 years as a CIA analyst. He now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).*

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