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Obama's Russia Policy after Canceling Moscow Summit

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U.S. President Barack Obama signaled through his press secretary Jay Carney that he would be discussing the recent cancellation by the United States of Obama's Moscow summit meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Obama's press conference, meant to clear the air on U.S.-Russian relations and U.S. intelligence mass surveillance of private communications, left more questions than answers. Obama's answers to press questions were all over the map, confusing, and at times, deceptive...

Obama's decision to nix the Moscow meeting prior to attending the G20 Summit in St. Petersburg was said to be a result of Russia's decision to grant temporary political asylum to National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden. However, there are other fractious issues between Washington and Moscow that prompted Obama to abruptly cancel the meeting with Putin.

America's neo-conservative war hawks in Congress, including Republican Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee and Democratic Representative Eliot Engel of New York, used the summit cancellation to push for renewed development on the U.S. missile "defense" shield that Obama put on the back burner after his re-election. War hawks are now demanding that Obama ignore Russian anxieties over the U.S. ballistic missile shield and begin deployment along Russia's western borders.

Obama's press conference came amid talks in Washington between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, so any abrupt change on the U.S. missile shield was not likely as long as the top Russian foreign and defense policy chiefs were talking to their American counterparts.

Obama's mid-afternoon press conference was held simultaneous to Lavrov's press conference at the Russian embassy. Reports on the so-called 2+2 meetings between Kerry, Lavrov, Hagel, and Shoigu were billed as constructive even though Obama was planning to engage in childish personal attacks on the Russian president. Obama's attacks on Putin began a few days earlier when Obama appeared on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno show on NBC. Obama reminded Leno's viewers that Putin was a former KGB agent. Leno is a failed "B movie" actor and stand-up comedian who is leaving as host of the night time program over declining ratings. Obama also used his appearance on the Tonight Show to deny that America was spying on anyone.

Although Obama launched into an almost unprecedented undiplomatic attack on Putin, referring to him as a "bored schoolboy in the back of the classroom" because of Putin's

slouched appearance at the last bilateral meeting at the G8 Summit in Northern Ireland. Obama also accused Putin of looking back to an era of Cold War rhetoric even though it has been Obama who has launched Lyndon Johnson-, Richard Nixon-, Ronald Reagan-, and Bush I and II-like military attacks on other nations in a manner reminiscent of the Cold War era.

Obama has also been strongly critical of Russia's policies on gay rights. A rainbow-haloed picture of Obama was once featured on the cover of*Newsweek* with the title "The First Gay President," Obama's administration has been the most gay-friendly in the history of the United States, with more openly gay individuals serving as U.S. ambassadors and in sub-Cabinet ranks than at any time in previous history. Therefore, Obama is willing to damage U.S.-Russian relations in order to placate a vocal domestic political pressure group. Obama places gays having their feelings hurt over an internal Russian policy that has a clear majority of support among the Russian population, thereby U.S. national security interests. In fact, at his news conference on August 9, Obama said he was "personally offended" by Russia's policy on gays.

Although Obama said he opposed any boycott of the Sochi Winter Olympics, he said he hoped gay and lesbian contestants brought home gold, silver, and bronze medals. Obama has never said that he has been "personally offended" by the misogynist policies of Saudi Arabia, the anti-Shi'a repression by Bahrain, or the brutal anti-Christian policies of U.S.-armed Syrian, Egyptian, and Libyan rebels. Obama has always had a peculiar affectation, some claim obsession, for gay issues.

Other factors that have led to a steady downward spiral in relations between the Obama administration and Moscow have included the U.S. Magnitsky Law that imposes sanctions and U.S. visa bans for Russian government officials involved in the prosecution of accused Russian tax swindler Sergei Magnitsky who died while in prison in 2009.

The Obama administration was further upset after Russia enacted the Dima Yakovlev law named after a young Russian baby, adopted by American parents, who died after being locked up in an oven-hot car in 2008. The Russian government banned all further adoptions of Russian children by American parents amid multiple reports of similar child abuse and neglect.

Obama's press conference in the East Room of the White House on the anniversary of Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974 was Nixonesque in obfuscation and evading questions, especially about the NSA surveillance program. Obama appeared to be arguing with himself on whether NSA's surveillance powers were legal or unconstitutional. Although Obama claimed Snowden was no patriot he also implied that there would have been no national debate on surveillance without Snowden's disclosures of classified information.

In defending the legal massive surveillance by NSA, Obama also criticized the surveillance operations of other countries that are critical of the NSA operations. Obama said countries lacking legal oversight for their own spying operations were in no position to criticize the United States. It is clear Obama was referring to Russia and China. Snowden passed through China's Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong before arriving in Moscow.

Obama said he was open to a review of America's current surveillance policies but, in fact, he announced no sweeping changes. Obama's claim that there was a previous review of NSA powers conducted by his administration before Snowden's revelations was scoffed at by

groups like the American Civil Liberties Union that said they were unaware of any such presidential review of NSA. Some privacy experts went so far as to suggest Obama lied about the review.

Obama stated that he was open to possible reform of the way the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court approves surveillance warrants.

Obama claimed Snowden could argue his case in a U.S. court. But Obama declared Snowden's fellow whistleblower, Army Private First Class Bradley Manning, guilty even before the trial of the soldier who was charged with and found guilty of disclosing a quarter million mostly classified State Department documents to WikiLeaks. Obama claims to have taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago, however, his command influence in the Manning case and executive branch animosity toward Snowden are indications that Mr. Obama has very little knowledge of the U.S. Constitution when it comes to presidential influence of prosecutions.

Wayne Madsen is an investigative journalist, author and syndicated columnist. He has some twenty years experience in security issues. As a U.S. Naval Officer, he managed one of the first computer security programs for the U.S. Navy. He has been a frequent political and national security commentator on Fox News and has also appeared on ABC, NBC, CBS, PBS, CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, and MS-NBC. He has been invited to testify as a witness before the US House of Representatives, the UN Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and an terrorism investigation panel of the French government. A member of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and the National Press Club. Lives in Washington, D.C.

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