

Reality Check: Is Trump a Stooge of Putin?

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Donald Trump's unorthodox approach to the conduct of diplomatic relations has been a persistent thorn in the side of America's national security establishment for the last four years. Like a typical American, he regards America's allies, like Boris Johnson, Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel and Justin Trudeau, as subordinates beholden to him personally; whereas he treats adversaries, such as Russian President Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, as independent leaders deserving (from a public relations standpoint) a semblance of "equal treatment and respect".

The conspiracy theories perpetuated by the establishment-controlled media that Trump is Putin's stooge and alleged Russian interference in America's domestic politics are brazen fabrications.

Russian netizens indeed lent moral support to the Trump campaign in the run-up to the 2016 US presidential race but simply because they despised Hillary Clinton, who the Russians regarded as an interventionist hawk responsible for initiating proxy wars in Libya and Syria in 2011 as Obama's secretary of state, and also because she was the wife of Bill Clinton who was responsible for the break-up of former Yugoslavia in the nineties.

Despite the alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US elections, Trump lost the popular vote to Hillary by a margin of 2.87 million votes. Had it not been for the archaic electoral college system and James Comey, then the director of FBI, opening last-minute investigation into Hillary Clinton using personal computers for official communications, Hillary was the favorite to win the elections.

According to Washington's own intelligence estimates, three powers are currently vying for interference in upcoming presidential elections slated for November 3. Two of those, China and Iran, favor Joe Biden because Trump initiated the trade war with China and cancelled the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018, whereas Russia allegedly supports Trump.

Trump is a conservative, and it's a known empirical observation that conservatives typically are considerably more patriotic than liberals. Collaborating with foreign powers to undermine one's national interest doesn't appeal to the conservative mindset. Throughout its four-year tenure, the Trump administration has continued with the policy of its predecessors. If anything, diplomatic relations between Washington and Moscow have significantly worsened during Trump's tenure.

In Syria, for instance, the Trump administration has continued with the policy of its predecessor Obama administration. In order to understand the backdrop of the proxy war in Syria, when Russia deployed its forces and military hardware to Syria in September 2015, the militant proxies of Washington and its regional clients were on the verge of drawing a wedge between Damascus and the Alawite heartland of coastal Latakia, which could have

led to the imminent downfall of the Bashar al-Assad government.

With the help of the Russian air power, the Syrian government has since reclaimed most of Syria's territory from the insurgents, excluding Idlib in the northwest occupied by the Turkish-backed militants and Deir al-Zor and the Kurdish-held areas in the east, thus inflicting a humiliating defeat on Washington and its regional clients.

Moreover, several momentous events have taken place in the Syrian theater of proxy wars and on the global stage that have further soured the diplomatic relations between Moscow and Washington.

On February 7, 2018, the US B-52 bombers and Apache helicopters struck a contingent of Syrian government troops and allied forces in Deir al-Zor province of eastern Syria that [reportedly](#) [1] killed and wounded scores of Russian military contractors working for the Russian private security firm, the Wagner Group.

The survivors described the bombing as an absolute massacre, and Moscow lost more Russian nationals in one day than it had lost during its entire military campaign in support of the Syrian government since September 2015.

Washington's objective in striking Russian contractors was that the US-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – which is mainly comprised of Kurdish YPG militias – had reportedly handed over the control of some areas east of the Euphrates River to Deir al-Zor Military Council (DMC), which was the Arab-led component of SDF, and had relocated several battalions of Kurdish YPG militias to Afrin and along Syria's northern border with Turkey in order to defend the Kurdish-held areas against the onslaught of the Turkish armed forces and allied Syrian militant proxies during Ankara's "Operation Olive Branch" in Syria's northwest that lasted from January to March 2018.

Syrian forces with the backing of Russian contractors took advantage of the opportunity and crossed the Euphrates River to capture an oil refinery located to the east of the Euphrates River in the Kurdish-held area of Deir al-Zor.

The US Air Force responded with full force, knowing well the ragtag Arab component of SDF – mainly comprised of local Arab tribesmen and mercenaries to make the Kurdish-led SDF appear more representative and inclusive in outlook – was simply not a match for the superior training and arms of the Syrian troops and Russian military contractors, consequently causing a carnage in which scores of Russian nationals lost their lives.

Two months later, an alleged chemical weapons attack took place in Douma, Syria, on April 7, 2018, and Donald Trump ordered a cruise missile strike in Syria on April 14, 2018, in collaboration with the Theresa May government in the UK and the Emmanuel Macron administration in France. The strike took place little over a year after a similar cruise missile strike on al-Shayrat airfield on April 6, 2017, after an alleged chemical weapons attack in Khan Sheikhoun, though both cruise missile strikes didn't accomplish anything and were nothing more than a show of force.

But the fact that out of 105 total cruise missiles deployed in the April 14, 2018, strikes against a military research facility in the Barzeh district of Damascus and two alleged chemical weapons storage facilities in Homs, 85 were launched by the US, 12 by the French and 8 by the UK aircraft demonstrated the unified resolve of the Western powers against

Russia.

It bears mentioning that the American air and missile strikes in Syria are not only illegal under the international law but are also unlawful according to the American laws. While striking the Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria, Washington availed itself of the war on terror provisions in the US laws, known as the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), but those laws do not give the president the power to order strikes against the Syrian government targets without prior approval of the US Congress which has the sole authority to declare war.

The Intercept [reported last year](#) [2] that the Trump administration had derived the authority to strike the Syrian government targets based on a “top secret” memorandum of the Office of Legal Counsel that even the US Congress couldn’t see. Complying with the norms of transparency and the rule of law were never the strong points of the American democracy but the Trump administration has done away with even the pretense of accountability and checks and balances in the conduct of international relations.

Moreover, over the years, Israel has not only provided medical aid and material support to the militant groups battling Damascus – particularly to various factions of the Free Syria Army (FSA) and al-Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate al-Nusra Front in Daraa and Quneitra bordering the Israel-occupied Golan Heights – but Israel’s air force has virtually played the role of the air force of Syrian militants and conducted hundreds of airstrikes in Syria during the eight-year conflict.

In an [interview to New York Times](#) [3] in January last year, Israel’s outgoing Chief of Staff Lt. General Gadi Eisenkot confessed that the Netanyahu government approved his shift in strategy in January 2017 to step up airstrikes in Syria. Consequently, more than 200 Israeli airstrikes were launched against the Syrian targets in 2017 and 2018, as [revealed](#) [4] by the Israeli Intelligence Minister Israel Katz in September 2018.

In 2018 alone, Israel’s air force dropped 2,000 bombs in Syria. The purpose of Israeli airstrikes in Syria has been to degrade Iran’s guided missile technology provided to Damascus and its Lebanon-based proxy, Hezbollah, which poses an existential threat to Israel’s regional security.

Though after Russia provided S-300 missile system to the Syrian military after a Russian surveillance aircraft was shot down by Syrian air defenses during an Israeli incursion into the Syrian airspace, on September 2018, killing 15 Russians onboard, the Israeli airstrikes in Syria have been significantly scaled down.

Following the incident, though Israel has conducted occasional airstrikes in Daraa and Quneitra in southern Syria and Deir al-Zor in eastern Syria, Israeli airstrikes in northwest Syria, which is within the range of missile defense systems deployed at Hmeimim Air Base near coastal Latakia, have almost entirely ceased.

Taking cover of the Israeli airstrikes, Washington has conducted several airstrikes of its own on targets in Syria and Iraq and blamed them on Israel, which frequently mounts air and missile strikes against Iranian operatives and Hezbollah militia in Syria and Lebanon.

Besides the airstrikes on the missile storage facilities of Iran-backed militias in Iraq, it is suspected that the US air force was also behind an airstrike last year at the newly built

Imam Ali military base in eastern Syria at al-Bukamal-Qaim border crossing alleged to be hosting the Iranian Quds Force operatives. In the nutshell, if Trump is a stooge of Putin, he must be the most ingrate and treacherous stooge who has stabbed his benefactor in the back.

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Notes

[1] Russian toll in Syria battle was 300 killed and wounded:

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-casualtie/russian-toll-in-syria-battle-was-300-killed-and-wounded-sources-idUKKCN1FZ2EI>

[2] Donald Trump ordered Syria strike based on a secret legal justification even Congress can't see:

<https://theintercept.com/2018/04/14/donald-trump-ordered-syria-strike-based-on-a-secret-legal-justification-even-congress-cant-see/>

[3] An interview with Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot, Israel's chief of staff:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/11/opinion/gadi-eisenkot-israel-iran-syria.html>

[4] Israel Katz: Israel conducted 200 airstrikes in Syria in 2017 and 2018:

<https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/benjamin-netanyahu-admits-israel-to-blame-for-damascus-strikes-1.812590>

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