

US Media: Treating Putin Like a Lunatic

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When reading the New York Times on many foreign policy issues, it doesn't take a savant to figure out what the newspaper's bias is. Anything, for instance, relating to Russian President Vladimir Putin drips of contempt and hostility.

Rather than offer the Times' readers an objective or even slightly fair-minded account of Putin's remarks, we are fed a steady diet of highly prejudicial language, such as we find in Saturday's [article](#) about Putin's comments at a conference in which he noted U.S. contributions to chaos in countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Ukraine.

That Putin is correct appears almost irrelevant to the Times, which simply writes that Putin "unleashed perhaps his strongest diatribe against the United States yet" with his goal "to sell Moscow's view that American meddling has sparked most of the world's recent crises."

Rather than address the merits of Putin's critique, the Times' article by Neil MacFarquhar uncritically cites the "group think" of Official Washington:

"Russia is often accused of provoking the crisis in Ukraine by annexing Crimea, and of prolonging the agony in Syria by helping to crush a popular uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, Moscow's last major Arab ally. Some analysts have suggested that Mr. Putin seeks to restore the lost power and influence of the Soviet Union, or even the Russian Empire, in a bid to prolong his own rule."



Image: Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses a crowd on May 9, 2014, celebrating the 69th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany and the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Crimean port city of Sevastopol from the Nazis. (Russian government photo)

Yes, "some analysts" can be cited to support nearly any claim no matter how wrongheaded,

or you can use the passive tense – “is often accused” – to present any charge no matter how unfair. But a more realistic summary of the various crises afflicting the world would note that Putin is correct when he describes past U.S. backing for various extremists, from Islamic fundamentalists in the Middle East and Central Asia to neo-Nazis in Ukraine.

For example, during the 1980s, the Reagan administration consciously encouraged Islamic fundamentalism as a strategy to cause trouble for “atheistic communism” in Afghanistan and in the Muslim provinces of the Soviet Union.

To overthrow a Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan, the CIA and its Saudi collaborators financed the mujahedeen “holy warriors” who counted among their supporters Saudi extremist Osama bin Laden. Some of those Islamists later blended into the Taliban and al-Qaeda with dire consequences for the United States on Sept. 11, 2001.

By invading Iraq in 2003, President George W. Bush toppled a secular dictator, Saddam Hussein, but saw him replaced by what amounted to a Shiite theocracy which pushed Iraq’s Sunni minority into the arms of “Al-Qaeda in Iraq,” which has since rebranded itself as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or simply the Islamic State. Those extremists now control large swaths of Iraq and Syria and have massacred religious minorities and Western hostages, prompting another U.S. military intervention.

Obama’s Interventions

In Libya in 2011, President Barack Obama acquiesced to demands from “liberal interventionists” in his administration and authorized an air war to overthrow another secular autocrat, Muammar Gaddafi, whose ouster and murder have sent Libya spiraling into political chaos amid warring Islamist militias. It turns out Gaddafi was not wrong when he warned of Islamist terrorists operating around Benghazi.

Similarly, Official Washington’s embrace of protests and violence aimed at removing another secular Arab leader, Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, contributed to the bloody civil war that has devastated that country and created fertile ground for the Islamic State and the Nusra Front, the official al-Qaeda affiliate.

Though Obama balked at [demands from neocons](#) and “liberal interventionists” that he launch an air war against the Syrian military in 2013, he did authorize secret shipments of weapons and training for the [supposedly “moderate” Syrian rebels](#) who have generally sided with Islamist fighters affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Many of these same neocons and “liberal interventionists” have been eager to ratchet up the confrontation with Iran over its nuclear program, including neocon dreams to “bomb, bomb, bomb Iran,” also a desire of hardliners in Israel.

In some of these crises, one of the few international leaders who has cooperated with Obama to tamp down tensions has been Putin, who helped negotiate conflict-avoiding agreements with Syria and Iran. But those peaceful interventions made Putin an inviting target for the neocons who began in fall 2013 [arranging a coup d’état in Ukraine](#) on Russia’s border.

As Obama and Putin each paid too little attention to these maneuvers, neocons such as National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman, Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona,

and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland went to work on the Ukrainian coup.

However to actually overthrow Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich, the coup makers had to collaborate [with neo-Nazi militias](#) which were organized in western Ukraine and dispatched to Kiev where they provided the muscle for the Maidan uprising. Neo-Nazi leaders were given several ministries in the new government, and neo-Nazi militants were incorporated into the National Guard and "volunteer" militias dispatched to crush the ethnic Russian resistance in the east.

Putin for the Status Quo

The underlying reality of the Ukraine crisis was that Putin actually supported the country's status quo, i.e. maintaining the elected president and the constitutional process. It was the United States along with the European Union that sought to topple the existing system and pull Ukraine from Russia's orbit into the West's.

Whatever one thinks about the merits of that change, it is factually wrong to accuse Putin of initiating the Ukraine crisis or to extrapolate from Official Washington's false conventional wisdom and conclude that Putin is a new Hitler, an aggressor seeking to reestablish the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire.

But the Times and other major U.S. news outlets have wedded themselves to that propaganda theme and now cannot deviate from it. So, when Putin states the obvious – that the U.S. has meddled in the affairs of other nations and that Russia did not pick the fight over Ukraine – his comments must be treated like the ravings of a lunatic unleashing some "diatribe."

Among Putin's ranting was his observation, according to the Times article, that "the United States supports 'dubious' groups ranging from 'open neo-fascists to Islamic radicals.'

"'Why do they support such people,' he asked the annual gathering known as the Valdai Club, which met this year in the southern resort town of Sochi. 'They do this because they decide to use them as instruments along the way in achieving their goals, but then burn their fingers and recoil.'

"The goal of the United States, he said, was to try to create a unipolar world in which American interests went unchallenged. ...

"Mr. Putin ... specifically denied trying to restore the Russian Empire. He argued Russia was compelled to intervene in Ukraine because that country was in the midst of a 'civilized dialogue' over its political future when the West staged a coup to oust the president last February, pushing the country into chaos and civil war.

"'We did not start this,' he said. 'Statements that Russia is trying to reinstate some sort of empire, that it is encroaching on the sovereignty of its neighbors, are groundless.'"

Of course, all the "smart people" of Official Washington know how to react to such statements from Putin, with a snicker and a roll of the eyes. After all, they've been reading the narratives of these crises as fictionalized by the New York Times, the Washington Post, etc.

Rationality and realism seem to have lost any place in the workings of the mainstream U.S. news media.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America's Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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