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OUR VIEW

Trump makes Russia great again

Does the United States have a president anymore?

It was hard to tell Monday as Donald Trump gave a mortifying, humiliating account of himself in Finland alongside Russian president Vladimir Putin. Trump's fealty in the face of a man credibly accused of using his country's military to meddle in U.S. elections was disgraceful.

Just last week, the U.S. Justice Department charged 12 Russian military officers with hacking computers and accounts tied to Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and the Democratic Party. When asked directly whether he believed Putin's denials of Russian involvement or his own intelligence agencies and justice department, Trump quickly changed the subject and demanded to know why the FBI did not examine the hacked computer servers of the Democratic National Committee.

"Where are those servers?" Mr. Trump said. "Where are Hillary Clinton's emails?"

He continued: "I will say this: I don't see any reason why it would be (Russia that was responsible for the election hacking) ... I have great confidence in my intelligence people, but I will tell you that President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today."

Putin smiled from behind his podium. How could he ask for more?

You could add it to the rooftop evacuation of Saigon, or the bloody disaster of the Bay of Pigs, as moments



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais
U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin shake hands at the beginning of a meeting at the Presidential Palace in Helsinki, Finland, Monday.

when the U.S. looked utterly weak and beaten, outsmarted by a foreign adversary.

At least in Havana and Saigon it took bullets to stop American interests, misguided as they may have been. In the case of Trump's capitulation, we must still wonder what exactly the Kremlin has over him. But it's becoming more clear that whatever it is, he places its importance over the country he was elected to lead.

This is not a partisan argument. Anyone who understands what is at stake here sounded the alarm. Trump's devotion to Russian interests is now a national security issue for the United States.

Republican Senator Newt Gingrich tweeted: "President Trump must clarify his statements in Helsinki on our intelligence system and Putin. It is the

most serious mistake of his presidency and must be corrected — immediately."

"Today's press conference in Helsinki was one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president in memory," wrote John McCain (R-Ariz.)

"There is no question that Russia interfered in our election and continues attempts to undermine democracy here and around the world," House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wisc.) said in a statement.

"Russia interfered in the 2016 election. Our nation's top intelligence agencies all agree on that point. From the President on down, we must do everything in our power to protect our democracy by securing future elections from foreign influence and interference, regardless of what Vladimir Putin or any other Russian operative says," said

Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah).

Despite all these clear facts, Trump wilted like a flower when he had the opportunity to stand up to Russia and Putin.

We do not need nor want an arms race, another cold war or hot one. But the world needed a full-throated defense of democracy, of respect for elections, of the ability to distinguish truth from lies. Trump is counting on the fact that his actions will not be questioned by many of his supporters — those in his base who do not believe the media, the military, the FBI, the CIA, the special counsel, the House Committee on Intelligence, the U.S. Justice Department and on down the line.

Trump tweeted Monday: "Our relationship with Russia has NEVER been worse thanks to many years of U.S. foolishness and stupidity and now, the Rigged Witch Hunt!"

Trump demeans our country daily. He abhors the institutions built specifically to guide this country peacefully through times of political upheaval. He professes admiration for dictators like Putin days after denouncing the European Union as our number one "foe."

Here is how you can help make America great again: You can support an unbiased, unfettered, thorough investigation of meddling and foreign collusion into the 2016 election. You can vow to protect it. Otherwise, you're working for the Russians and against America and her interests.

OTHER VIEWS

Trump and Putin vs. America

From the beginning of his administration, President Donald Trump has responded to every new bit of

evidence from the CIA, FBI and NSA that Russia intervened in our last election on his behalf by either attacking Barack Obama or the Democrats for being too lax — never President Vladimir Putin of Russia for his

unprecedented cyberhit on our democratic process. Such behavior by an American president is so perverse, so contrary to American interests and values, that it leads to only one conclusion: Donald Trump is either an asset of Russian intelligence or really enjoys playing one on TV.

Everything that happened in Helsinki on Monday only reinforces that conclusion. My fellow Americans, we are in trouble and we have some big decisions to make. This was a historic moment in the entire history of the United States.

There is overwhelming evidence that our president, for the first time in our history, is deliberately or through gross negligence or because of his own twisted personality engaged in treasonous behavior — behavior that violates his oath of office to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Trump vacated that oath on Monday, and Republicans can no longer run and hide from that fact. Every single Republican lawmaker will be — and should be — asked on the election trail: Are you with Trump and Putin or are you with the CIA, FBI and NSA?

It started with the shocking tweet that Trump issued before

he even sat down with Putin this morning: "Our relationship with Russia has NEVER been worse thanks to many years of U.S. foolishness and stupidity and now, the Rigged Witch Hunt!" The official Twitter account of the Russian foreign ministry — recognizing a useful idiot when it saw one — immediately "liked" Trump's tweet and later added: "We agree."

I'll bet they do.

It only got worse when, in his joint news conference with Putin, Trump was asked explicitly if he believed the conclusion of his intelligence agencies that Russia hacked our elections. The president of the United States basically threw his entire intelligence establishment under a bus, while throwing out a cloud of dust about Hillary Clinton's server to disguise what he was doing.

Trump actually said on the question of who hacked our election, "I don't see any reason why it would be" Russia. And in a bit of shocking moral equivalence, Trump added of the United States and Russia: "We are all to blame ... both made some mistakes." Trump said that it was actually the American probe into the Russian hacking that has "kept us apart."

To watch an American president dis his own intelligence agencies, blame both sides for the Russian hacking of our election — and deliberately try to confuse the fact that there is still no solid proof of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia with the fact that Russia had its own interest in trying to defeat the anti-Putin Hillary Clinton — actually made me sick to my stomach. I completely endorse former CIA Director John O. Brennan's tweet after the news conference: "Donald Trump's news conference performance in Helsinki rises to & exceeds the threshold of 'high crimes &

misdeemeanors.' It was nothing short of treasonous. Not only were Trump's comments imbecilic, he is wholly in the pocket of Putin. Republican Patriots: Where are you???"

Trump is insanely obsessed with what happened in the last election. But now he is president, and the fact that he may not have colluded with the Russians doesn't mean he does not, as president, have a responsibility to ensure that the Russians be punished for interfering in our last election and be effectively deterred from doing so in the future. That is his job.

Listening to Trump, it was as if Franklin Roosevelt had announced after Pearl Harbor: "Hey, both sides are to blame. Our battleships in Hawaii were a little provocative to Japan — and, by the way, I had nothing to do with the causes for their attack. So cool it."

There is only one message Trump should have sent Putin in this meeting: "You have attacked our democracy, as well as two core pillars of the global economic and security order that have kept the peace and promoted prosperity since World War II — the European Union and NATO. We are not interested in any of



It was d-e-t-e-r-r-e-n-c-e — deterrence of a Russia that has been increasingly reckless and destabilizing.

In the past few years what has Putin done to deserve an American president sucking up to him for an "extraordinary" relationship? Putin has seized Crimea, covertly invaded Ukraine, provided the missiles that shot down a civilian Malaysian airliner over Ukraine, bombed tens of thousands of refugees out of Syria into Europe, destabilizing Europe, been involved in the death of a British woman who accidentally handled a Russian nerve agent deployed to kill ex-Russian agents in England and deployed misinformation to help tip the vote in Britain toward exiting and fracturing the European Union.

Most of all, Putin unleashed a cyberattack on America's electoral process, aimed at both electing Trump — with or without Trump's collusion — and sowing division among U.S. citizens.

Our intelligence agencies have no doubt about this: Last week, America's director of national intelligence, Dan Coats, described Putin's cybercampaign as one designed "to exploit America's openness in order to undermine our long-term competitive advantage."

I am not given to conspiracy theories, but I cannot help wondering if the first thing Trump said to Putin in their private one-on-one meeting in Helsinki, before their aids were allowed to enter, was actually: "Vladimir, we're still good, right? You and me, we're still good?"

And that Putin answered: "Donald, you have nothing to worry about. Just keep being yourself. We're still good."

Thomas Friedman, a New York Times columnist, has won two Pulitzer Prizes.

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