

# The media bought Vladimir Putin's flattering lies: Devine



Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke highly of President Joe Biden after their meeting in Geneva, Switzerland last week. EPA/ALEKSEY NIKOLSKYI / SPUTNIK / KREMLIN / POOL

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Russian disinformation is so yesterday. Vladimir Putin speaks the gospel truth, now that he's declared Joe Biden is not the senile old fool he's been painted to be by a hostile media, especially in Russia.

Biden is a "professional" who is "completely knowledgeable on all issues," the former KGB case officer told an audience of college graduates last week after his meeting in Geneva with our 78-year-old president.

"You need to be very careful when working with him so as not to miss something. He himself does not miss a thing, I assure you, and this was absolutely clear to me.

“He is focused, he knows what he wants to achieve and does it very skillfully, and you can instantly sense it.”

In China there is an expression for this sort of shameless puffery: “peng sha,” praising someone in order to destroy them.

In most cultures, flattery is viewed with suspicion as a potential prelude to hubris, particularly in Russia and China. But US media outlets such as CNN took Putin’s praise at face value because it is precisely what they wanted to hear. It reflected the White House narrative they themselves were pushing when they gushed sincerely about Biden’s “seasoned air of confidence” in Europe, his “reputation as a foreign-policy wise man” and his “fluidity on the world stage,” while papering over his obvious weakness and frequent befuddlement on tour.

Putin did not once crack a smile as he waxed lyrical about Biden’s cognitive skills last week, but he was having a lot of fun all the same, as became clear when he made what at first appeared to be a baffling reference to White House press secretary Jen Psaki, who was not present at talks between the two leaders and was irrelevant to proceedings.

“So what that [Biden] sometimes confuses things,” Putin said. “His press secretary is a young, educated, beautiful woman — she herself constantly confuses things.

“It is not because she is poorly educated or has a bad memory, it’s just that when people think that some things are secondary, they don’t focus too much attention on them.

“Americans think that nothing is more important than themselves,” he added, with a typically arrogant flourish.

President Joe Biden with Vladimir Putin in Geneva, Switzerland on June 16, 2021. AP Photo/Patrick Semansky, File

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The reference to Psaki was a dead giveaway that Putin was taking the mickey, because Psaki is a comic legend in Russia, especially among Putin’s nationalist base, and not in a good way.

When she was John Kerry's spokeswoman during the Obama administration, she made a number of glaring gaffes that made her the favorite punching bag of Russia's Internet trolls.

For instance, in a 2014 press conference, she mixed up her directions when she said natural gas flowed from Western Europe to Russia.

"There are flows of gas . . . that go through from Western Europe through Ukraine to Russia, and we — or I'm sorry, the other way — from Russia through Ukraine to Western Europe."

Although she quickly corrected herself, the Russian Internet used the initial misstatement to portray her as an ignoramus.

Another favorite flub was Psaki listing a series of State Department objections to an election in Ukraine that she said included "carousel voting," a form of multiple voting. When asked by an Associated Press reporter what that meant, she had no clue.

Psaki lit up the Russki Internet again when she defended a Ukrainian foreign minister, who had called Putin a "f-ker" on camera, by saying he was "encouraging calm."

Video mashes and photoshopped images of Psaki started going viral after her press conferences. Russians couldn't get enough of her.

There even was a new verb coined in her honor: to "Psaki," defined by the Russian blogosphere as "when someone makes a dogmatic statement about something they don't understand, mixes facts up, and then doesn't apologize."

Putin brought up White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki while talking about Biden getting confused. -REUTERS/Leah Millis

Of course, the propaganda motive was to undermine American efforts to defend Ukraine from Russian aggression.

During the feeble foreign-policy era of the Obama administration, Psaki and her hapless boss, Kerry, were trolled mercilessly by Russia's urbane and tricky Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who was by Putin's side inside last week's summit in Geneva, sizing up Biden and his neophyte counterpart, Anthony Blinken, and no doubt advising the Russian president how best to outsmart them.

It's a case of déjà vu for the Russians.

Back in January 2014, during meetings with Kerry in Paris, Lavrov presented Psaki with a pink Russian fur hat adorned with the Communist red star and hammer-and-sickle, and then got her and Kerry to pose with him for a photo, which was promptly posted on Twitter by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the bland caption: "Hat gifted to [Psaki] to stay warm and fancy."

But if there were any doubt about the propaganda intent, Lavrov's spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who also was in the photo, would repost the image in 2018, with the caption: "Today this photo is exactly 4 years old. Masterpiece in every sense. Soldiers of the information war."

All very funny, just not for us.

Putin's excessive praise last week for Biden, choosing compliments that are the exact opposite of a reality that is clear for all to see — but which reflect the White House's fervent in-house narrative — was a sign of trouble.

He was winking at America's enemies and signaling they should make hay while the sun shines.

## **Yang's healthy insight**

If Andrew Yang previously had shown the insight and fortitude he did when speaking about the mentally ill homeless during the latest mayoral debate, he would be doing a lot better in the polls.

"Mentally ill homeless men are changing the character of our neighborhoods," he said, citing a friend of his wife in her Hell's Kitchen moms' group who was punched in the face by a lunatic.

"This is happening in New York City and we're not talking enough about it. Families are leaving as a result. In East Harlem . . . the Upper West Side, the neighborhood has been changed . . . Yes, mentally ill people have rights, but [so do] the people and families of the city. We have the right to walk the street and not fear for our safety because a mentally ill person is going to lash out at us."

Mayoral candidate Andrew Yang spoke out on the problem of homeless people in

Yang was late to recognize that law and order is the priority for New York voters, but at least he finally told the truth about this rapidly deteriorating city.

It's not for lack of money or housing, considering Mayor de Blasio has thrown billions at the problem and the homeless have had free room and board in nice hotel rooms for a year.

I asked a wise psychiatrist friend if there was a solution, because there's nothing compassionate about leaving the mentally ill to live in chaos. In a nutshell, he advocates a type of Marshall Plan with an army of mental health counselors dispensing psychiatric medication, as needed, along with long-acting naltrexone or Antabuse to block the effect of drugs and alcohol. Any mentally ill homeless person who commits a crime is sentenced to locked hospitalization followed by long probation with drug testing. There's more to it for a future airing, but good for Yang for breaking ranks.

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