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Limited US Foreign Policy Establishment Realism

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Appearing in the April 2016 edition of The Atlantic, Jeffrey Goldberg's lengthy [piece](#) «*The Obama Doctrine*», presents US President Barack Obama as a moderate, standing up to those favoring a more aggressive American foreign policy. More accurately put, Obama is a relative moderate, who has considered and taken some not so pragmatic pursuits. As [quoted](#) in TASS, the Russian government gave a mildly brief response to the Goldberg piece.

Goldberg's long winded feature overlooks a number of [particulars](#) relating to Russia's military action in Syria. In a rather propagandistic manner, Goldberg begins his piece by characterizing a brutish Syrian government willfully killing its citizenry. There's no acknowledgement of a [flip side](#), having to do with brutal manner among some of the anti-Syrian government opposition – an observation that can't be legitimately dismissed in full as faulty propaganda.

Goldberg's depiction is akin to CNN host Wolf Blitzer [attributing](#) all of the [Syrian Civil War casualties](#) to the Syrian government. Over the years, the Israelis have noted the collateral damage matter when attacking armed adversaries in civilian areas. Blitzer and Goldberg would disagree with blaming Israel for all of the deaths related to its action regarding the Palestinians. Detailing the hypocrisy of America's adversaries (real or otherwise), typically excludes an

acknowledgement of the hypocrisy evident in US mass media. Another whataboutism notes the horrid reaction to the simplicity of just comparing the number of WW II American civilian deaths by Japanese action, versus the greater number of Japanese citizens killed by US air raids.

Further down Goldberg's article is this excerpt:

«The president's unwillingness to counter the baiting by American adversaries can feel emotionally unsatisfying, I said and I told him that every so often, I'd like to see him give Vladimir Putin the finger. It's atavistic, I said understanding my audience...

'The truth is actually, Putin, in all of our meetings, is scrupulously polite, very frank. Our meetings are very businesslike. He never keeps me waiting two hours like he does a bunch of these other folks ... He's constantly interested in being seen as our peer and as working with us, because he's not completely stupid. He understands that Russia's overall position in the world is significantly diminished. And the fact that he invades Crimea or is trying to prop Assad doesn't suddenly make him a player...Putin acted in Ukraine in response to a client state that was about to slip out of its grip. And he improvised in a way to hang on to his control there... He has done the exact same thing in Syria, at enormous cost to the well-being of his own country. And the notion that somehow Russia is in a stronger position now, in Syria or in Ukraine, than they were before they invaded Ukraine or before he had to deploy military force to Syria is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of power in foreign affairs or in the world generally. Real power means you can get what you want without having to exert violence. Russia was much more powerful when Ukraine looked like an independent country but was a kleptocracy that he could pull the strings on.'

Obama's theory here is simple: Ukraine is a core Russian interest but not an American one, so Russia will always be able to maintain escalatory dominance there.

'The fact that Ukraine, which is a non-NATO country, is going to be vulnerable to military domination by Russia no matter what we do.' he said.

But what if Putin were threatening to move against, say, Moldova - another vulnerable post-Soviet state? Wouldn't it be helpful for Putin to believe that Obama might get angry and irrational about that?»

* * *

Such is Goldberg's arrogantly ignorant and hypocritical stance, in line with Obama saying that Putin isn't «*completely stupid*». Like Putin has actually done something to really offend Goldberg. If anything, the insults aren't primarily Russian instigated. Goldberg's piece has content that serves to encourage anti-Americanism. I very much caution non-Americans to not take his delivery as reflecting all Americans. By now, the relatively objective and well informed observer can see thru the faulty spin – which isn't always true with many Americans, having a secondary interest in the issues covered by Goldberg.

Upon the 9/11 tragedy, Russia was the first nation to reach out to the US. Before the overthrow of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, the Russian and Ukrainian governments supported a coordinated Russia-West route in developing Ukraine's very troubled economy. In contrast, the West took more of a zero sum game (Russia or the West) approach.

The Goldberg and Obama bit on Russia invading Crimea is simplistically propagandistic. There was a coup in Kiev against the democratically elected Yanukovich, followed by a series of [anti-Russian actions](#). The pro-Russian majority in Crimea can't be legitimately faulted for preferring Russia over a kleptocratic Kiev regime with increased anti-Russian influences. In other parts of the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, there's considerable anti-Russian and pro-Russian discontent with the Kiev regime. On the subject of changed territorial statuses in the post-Soviet era, Goldberg and Obama seem more willing to accept Kosovo's separation from Serbia, in contradiction to a standing UN resolution and the preference of Belgrade.

Goldberg repeats a standard line about Russia «threatening» Moldova, when something more nuanced is at play. As I previously [noted](#):

«The former Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (former Moldavian SSR for short) has been periodically referenced as having similar circumstances as Ukraine. Among other examples, Josh Rogin's April 23, 2014 Daily Beast [article](#) on the former Moldavian SSR «Is This Putin's Next Target?», is misleading sensationalism...

There has been no dramatic change in the status of the disputed pro-Russian former Moldavian SSR territory of Pridnestrovie (aka Transnistria and closely related spellings). The main reason for this has to do with an ongoing situation that isn't as threatening when compared to what Crimea saw when a democratically elected Ukrainian president was overthrown, with an increased anti-Russian political stance in Kiev.

Within the rest of the former Moldavian SSR, a cross section of pro-EU and pro-Russian parties have converged to oppose a Moldovan political establishment that's seen by many as ineffective and corrupt. In the long run, can these different East-West sympathies agree on the benefit of a mutually pro-Russian and pro-West course? This very preference is what the last pre-Euromaidan Ukrainian government sought along with Russia - a sharp contrast from the zero sum game (Russia or the West approach) taken by the EU and Obama administration, before the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich».

* * *

It wouldn't surprise if Goldberg's Moldova quip was influenced by Rogin, who (in addition to his Daily Beast piece) had hustled the same line in a [CNN segment](#) with Blitzer. On Russia related matters, Rogin comes across like he could be a mouthpiece for neocon to neoliberal advocates favoring a flawed tougher line towards Russia.

Rogin's [Bloomberg article](#) of this past March 11, «Hawks See Obama's NATO Pick as Soft on Russia», highlights the slanted US foreign policy establishment takes. The appointee in question, Rose Gottemoeller is at best a relative moderate, along the lines of Obama and US Secretary of State John Kerry. As one of several examples, [Gottemoeller's Twitter account](#) uncritically features Tweets from John McCain and Samantha Power, in support of Nadiya Savchenko, a pro-Kiev regime combatant, who is facing a trial in Russia. For McCain and Power, the trial of Savchenko is a farce with no direct rebuttals to the [counter claim](#) of that view.

(In the coming days, look for this story to get increased coverage. A verdict on Savchenko is scheduled on March 21. Concerning her status, Kerry and the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova recently had a [sharp exchange](#). With [Jeffrey Gedmin](#), [Masha Gessen](#), [Brian Whitmore](#), [UNIAN](#) and some others in mind, there has been a good deal of overly partisan coverage with limited specifics.

Without further elaboration, the [cell phone billing](#) presented in Savchenko's defense doesn't come across as being foolproof. Can a billing statement of this type get manipulated? Did Savchenko always have exclusivity to the cell phone in question?

The claim that Savchenko was captured before the two Russian journalists were killed doesn't mean that she wasn't a «spotter», as such activity can monitor the whereabouts of a given target over an extended period – before the hit is made. Was an alleged spotter spotted? Were the journalists specifically targeted, or were they victims of collateral damage?

Some of Savchenko's comments and her association with an [extremist militia](#), likely involved in war crimes, makes one hesitant to view her as a heroine. A Lugansk Archpriest's [stated experience](#) with Savchenko, portrays the latter as a sadistically violent individual.)

Some observers like the acclaimed historian [Stephen Cohen](#), have portrayed Kerry as a moderate, who is outnumbered. According to Goldberg's Atlantic piece, Obama withstood Kerry's desire for a more aggressive US role in Syria. Kerry was also in favor of the Clinton administration led NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999.

When he ran for president in 2004, Kerry suggested that his opponent George Bush was soft on Russia. In more recent times, Kerry has [bashed RT](#), the Russian government funded 24/7 trilingual (English, Spanish and Arabic) TV news station, in addition to being [quite hardline](#) at the 2016 Munich Security Conference. The case can be made that Kerry isn't as extreme as Obama foreign policy appointees Victoria Nuland, Samantha Power, Daniel Fried and Ash Carter. At the same time, Kerry isn't going to rock the boat too much (if at all), because he isn't that radically different from them as his past reveals.

A bit of a digression notes Mitt Romney suggesting that Obama was soft on Russia during the last US presidential race between the two. Russia is probably not a primary interest of Obama and whoever his successor will be. What seems to happen with US presidents is their becoming beholden to the existing foreign policy establishment structure favoring a limited scope of

perspectives – the kind that get favored by the likes of Fareed Zakaria on his *CNN* show and *The Atlantic*.