

What American Defeat Looks Like

If the United States is ever to be eclipsed as a major power, defeat might begin with foreign “leaders”—all dictators, actually—having ready access to the American people via our own mass media. Recently, Russian strongman Vladimir Putin was welcomed to the editorial pages of that “newspaper of record,” *The New York Times*.

There, the Kremlin chief held forth on his vision for Mideast peace and a solution to Syria’s ongoing civil war and, for good measure, lectured us on how dangerous it is for any nation to think of itself as “exceptional.” *Amerika, you’re no more exceptional*, he seemed to be saying, *than Russia, Belarus or even Chechnya*.

Following Putin’s debut as an ex-KGB agent turned *Times*-man, both Iran’s new president, Hasan Rouhani, and Syria’s boss, Bashar Assad, were captured by American journalists for what was breathlessly billed as “exclusive” interviews.

Rouhani’s session was conducted by *The Washington Post*’s veteran deep thinker David Ignatius, while Assad parried light jabs from Fox News questioners—namely, the serious and sonorous Greg Palkot (sans helmet) and the always-entertaining Dennis Kucinich.

President Obama has a known aversion to dealing with foreign crises, and this shaping of American public opinion by foreign dictators is a dangerous trend. If all men are created equal, why shouldn’t all opinions by all “leaders” be treated equally? We have our view of world events. The world has different views. Let’s hear from them about their views.

Let’s be broad-minded. It can’t hurt to talk, after all.

Except that the people in those countries who disagree with the views expressed by their “leaders” have an alarming tendency to wind up dead. Pesky journalists in Moscow have been warned by the shooting of those who asked too many impertinent questions. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have died in the ongoing civil war there. And Hasan Rouhani—that self-described “moderate”—never uttered a peep of protest when Iran’s mullahs were shooting down opposition voters in the streets of Tehran in 2009. After all, if he had protested the killing of opponents by the mullahs’ regime, he would never have been permitted to run for president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

We Americans seem to have been lulled into a stupor. It’s strangely like those years the locusts ate in the mid-70s. That’s when Jimmy Carter urged us to get over our “inordinate fear of communism.” Taking Carter’s University of Notre Dame speech as a starter gun, the Soviets and their cats’ paws ran freely in Africa and Latin America.

During the Cold War, there were occasional efforts to alert Americans to their peril. A few rock-’em, sock-’em movies such as *Red Dawn* and *The Hunt for Red October* were screened. But those tended to be independent efforts.

The novels of John Le Carre represented the mainstream liberal view. To illustrate this point, Mark Steyn once described his lunch with the late conservative paladin Bill Buckley:

“Bill was talking of how he’d created Blackie [CIA agent Blackford Oakes] as an antidote to the John Le Carre ethos, in which there’s no good, between east and west, and thus between their respective warriors at the KGB and in the western intelligence agencies. And once you accept this view the conflict is necessarily trivial: it’s just a game between opposing bureaucracies whose machinations and maneuvers are their own justification. Le Carre was profoundly wrong but a good enough writer that his became the default there’s no bad,

there's just shades of gray and total moral equivalence template of spy fiction, and, because life imitates art, of far too many real intelligence types at the CIA and MI6 toward the end of the Cold War."

President Obama was schooled in moral equivalence of East and West. We've never asked to see his grades at Columbia or Harvard, but it would be instructive to know at least which courses he took at those Ivy League liberal bastions. He has acknowledged attending Marxist scholars' conferences as a college student, but how many of the actual courses he took would have equipped him to understand American exceptionalism?

He has expressed decidedly mixed views himself about American exceptionalism. At his first G-20 summit, he said he did believe in American exceptionalism—but quickly added that the Brits and the Greeks doubtless believe their own nations exceptional. More recently, he took to the airwaves to tell us American exceptionalism might require us to intervene militarily in the Syrian civil war.

It would have been nice if our own president had defended this country's good name from the contemptuous jabs of Vladimir Putin. Mr. Obama might have said that Russia's culture has enriched the world, but Russian rule has always been despotic.

Our president might have offered the Kremlin's boss this challenge: If you don't think America is exceptional, then tell us: When the Berlin Wall fell, which way did your captive people run?

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