

Putin slaps down Obama, again

By Jennifer Rubin, Updated: July 1, 2013

You have to hand it to Vladimir Putin. He manages to humiliate the United States and gain access to the treasure trove of secrets that Edward Snowden is lugging around, all while expressing his concern for his American “partners.”

[The Post reports:](#)

President Vladimir Putin, speaking to reporters and sounding as if he were opening the way for asylum without appearing too provocative, made a surprising statement.

Putin said that if Snowden, a former National Security Agency contractor, sought refuge in Russia, he could stay — as long as he avoided making harmful disclosures about the United States from Russian territory.

“If he wants to stay here,” Putin said, “there is one condition: He has to stop his work undermining our U.S. partners, as odd as it may sound coming from me.”

It is not odd at all. Having Snowden and his secrets to himself, Putin gains nothing by letting everyone else in on U.S. secrets. In any case, Snowden is not going back to the United States, Putin vows. (“Russia never extradites anyone anywhere and is not going to extradite anyone.”)

[Another Russian official](#) was even more biting and contemptuous of President Obama: “I join the opinion that we by no means should expel him. I think Snowden is a great pacifist. This man has done no less to get the Nobel Peace Prize than U.S. President Barack Obama.” He shouldn’t give extreme libertarians in the United States any ideas.

This was an entirely foreseeable response to the president’s shrug of the shoulders last week, when he defensively told reporters that he shouldn’t have to call Putin about the issue and that he’s “not going to be scrambling jets to get a 29-year-old hacker.” Perhaps Putin would have thought twice about his gamesmanship if the administration communicated that the United States has lots of ways other than “scrambling jets” to make its displeasure known and that Putin will put September’s G-8 meeting in St. Petersburg at risk if he continues this behavior.

Obama has an uncanny knack of simultaneously demonstrating a lack of spine and a lack of tact. In this case, that knack has proved doubly embarrassing. It is in this light that we should evaluate his recent pledge to cut our nuclear arsenal in hopes that Russia will follow suit. It was daft when he said it and it’s more so now that we see vividly how Putin operates.

In the future, it may be good for a president to avoid going on bended knee to the Russian autocrats to bail the United States of a geopolitical loss (as Obama did on Syria), entering into

arms agreements the Russians have no intention of abiding by, slashing our armed forces and promising to cut unilaterally our nuclear arsenal. Russian leaders tend to regard such behavior as unserious or downright foolish, which is precisely how Putin now sees Obama.

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