

IS PUTIN CRAZY? IS HE HITLER

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Rick Salutin, [The Toronto Star](#) on Thu Mar 07 2014

Is Vladimir Putin crazy? Former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright says Putin is “delusional.” Germany's Angela Merkel says he's “out of touch with reality.”

I have no idea if he's crazy and I don't think it matters. According to The Psychopath Test, numerous CEOs and politicians make the cut based on criteria like their ability to blithely take decisions that wreck millions of lives. And if you look at what he's actually done, I doubt it matters either. If you designed a computer program to react “rationally” on the model of great power leaders pursuing what's consensually viewed as the National Interest, it would probably “behave” as Putin has, or perhaps more drastically.

When the Soviet Union broke up, the West said it wouldn't advance against Russia militarily. **Since then it's tightened a NATO noose around Russia's neck:** Poland, Hungary, the Baltic states, the threat of missiles based near Russian borders. **When the Soviets put missiles in Cuba in 1962, the U.S. went berserk,** metaphorically or literally, blithely promising to incinerate the planet in response. Was John F. Kennedy delusional? Does it matter? It's how great powers behave, especially in their own backyard.

I think this is wretched, immoral bullying — maybe I should put that in caps: THIS IS ODIIOUS BEHAVIOUR — and bullied nations like Ukraine are right to protest, just as people in Latin America hate it when the U.S. does it. But it's normal great power activity, crazy or not. By the way, Madeleine Albright, who's presumably non-delusional, was asked in 1996 if half a million dead Iraqi kids was a “price” worth paying to assert U.S. power in far-off Iraq. She said: “We think the price is worth it.” Please note her use of “we” — indicating a possible collective psychosis.

Is he Hitler? It's always springtime for Hitler analogies. Hillary Clinton has done it, also U.S. Senators John McCain, Marco Rubio, Lindsey Graham and lesser luminaries. But the only government leaders who've taken that plunge are Stephen Harper and Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird. I think the distinction is significant. Out of power, you can say anything since your only purpose is to get elected or re-elected. When you hold power, like Harper and Baird, you might actually have an effect so you tend to be more cautious and less stupid. Except for our guys.

I'd say what this shows is that Harperites have simply abandoned foreign policy as anything except a way to sweep up votes. They've already made themselves irrelevant in forums like global climate conferences or the UN; they just don't give a damn. If you want to become a Canadian diplomat, forget working your way up or getting degrees in global affairs. Become head of the PM's security detail or shill for the Israeli government instead. This must be discouraging for generations of civil servants. I agree with Yves Engler that Canadian diplomats were never neutral “brokers”; they acted mostly in the interest of the U.S. But that was sometimes useful, offering a little distance from the boss. That's all gone, too.

The dilemma of the squares. There have always been spontaneous outbreaks of democratic will, like the Paris Commune or slave revolts. There's a collective as well as an individual need to control one's life. But recently the eruption and takeover of public spaces — in Tunis, Cairo, Madrid, Wall St., Kyiv's Maidan — seem more coherent and continuous, perhaps due to social media.

These movements are the lifeblood of democratic renewal. They're also susceptible to manipulation. Ukraine's Orange Revolution of 2004 seemed far more stage-managed by western forces like the U.S.'s National Endowment for Democracy or George Soros' Open Society Institute than the Maidan has been. But there's no doubt the same forces still operate. See the phone intercepts from U.S. diplomat Victoria Nuland. They make these eruptions vulnerable to charges of being illegitimate fakes.

The trick is finding a way to link the genuine popular outbursts to institutionalized, constitutional, representative forms. I know that's a mouthful but I don't think anyone's come up with a solution. Yet who wants to be stuck with merely voting in the occasional election, then going to sleep for another four years? If anyone has the answer, please write or call.

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