

Russians Savor Kerry's Description of 'Stupid' Americans

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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Kerry waving upon his arrival to meet French President Francois Hollande at Paris' Elysee Palace on Wednesday. **Francois Mori**

A first meeting between new U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov might have been a key development in tense U.S.-Russian ties this week, but Russian media instead savored a declaration by Kerry that Americans have "the right to be stupid."

Two prominent Russian personalities told The Moscow Times on Wednesday that they think Americans do tend to be too narrow-minded.

Kerry, making his first foreign trip as the United States' top diplomat, made the comment while talking to German students ahead of the meeting with Lavrov in Berlin on Wednesday.

"As a country, as a society, we live and breathe the idea of religious freedom and religious tolerance, whatever the religion, and political freedom and political tolerance, whatever

the point of view," Kerry said in comments posted on [YouTube](#).

"People have sometimes wondered about why our Supreme Court allows one group or another to march in a parade even though it's the most provocative thing in the world and they carry signs that are an insult to one group or another," he said. "The reason is that's freedom, freedom of speech. In America, you have a right to be stupid — if you want to be."

The comment elicited laughter from the audience.

Kerry's remarks resonated with Maxim Shevchenko, a conservative television host on Channel One, who said many ordinary Americans practice their right to be stupid because they are "not interested in anything" and believe what they see on television.

"Most Americans do not overburden their brains with anything that isn't directly related to their private lives," Shevchenko said by telephone.

Sergei Markov, a member of the Public Chamber and a former State Duma deputy with United Russia, said Americans may not be stupid but they do lack broad-based knowledge. He said he has spoken with many ordinary Americans and found that instead they are "very developed" in moral principles, pragmatism and leadership qualities.

Russian media had a field day with Kerry's comments. The official government newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta ran the headline "U.S. Secretary of State: Every American Has the Right to Be Stupid," and Novye Izvestia declared "U.S. Secretary of State, After Making Up Kyrzakhstan, Endorses the Stupidity of Americans."

Last week, Kerry [told students](#) in Virginia that the State Department supports democracy in "Kyrzakhstan," a nonexistent state and an apparent mix of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Kerry meant to say Kyrgyzstan, according to an official State Department transcript of Kerry's remarks that did not reflect the mistake.

Kerry himself is well-educated and has broad professional experience, so his seeming slips of the tongue must be intentional and aimed at showing his human side to voters, Shevchenko said.

Kerry, 69, graduated from Yale University and received his law degree from Boston College Law School. He served for 28 years in U.S. Senate before being appointed to his current post by President Barack Obama [last month](#).

"Kerry is playing to the myth that Americans are stupid, as if to say, 'Yes, we are stupid, and we will keep doing what we are doing,'" Markov said, in a reference to U.S. foreign policy.

Kerry's "Kyrzakhstan" gaffe was not the first mishap the Obama administration has had in its dealings with Soviet successor states. In 2009, Kerry predecessor Hillary Clinton presented Lavrov with a symbolic button to mark a reset in U.S.-Russian relations. But the Cyrillic text on the button read "overload" instead of "reset."

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