

'Startling Russian Fiction' Used to Justify Actions in Ukraine, U.S. Says

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The U.S. State Department joined media pundits and social networks in lambasting Moscow's public statements about Ukraine, by calling them the most "startling Russian fiction" in about 150 years.

"As Russia spins a false narrative to justify its illegal actions in Ukraine, the world has not seen such startling Russian fiction since Dostoyevsky wrote: 'The formula "two plus two equals five" is not without its attractions,'" the State Department said Wednesday in an online statement, referring to a quote from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novella "Notes from the Underground," published in 1864.

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Points of contention included statements that Putin made at a press conference this week about protecting the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, about the legal status of the ousted and current administrations in Kiev, and the legitimacy of increased Russian military presence in Crimea.

The State Department also called out the Russian president for denying that the armed men in military uniforms without insignia, who carry automatic rifles, were Russian soldiers.

"Strong evidence suggests that members of Russian security services are at the heart of the highly organized anti-Ukraine forces in Crimea," the State Department statement said. "While these units wear uniforms without insignia, they drive vehicles with Russian military license plates and freely identify themselves as Russian security forces."

Much of what Putin said during the Tuesday news conference has already received its fair share of derision from professional pundits in U.S. media.

"Putin's press conference reveals that we may have reached the weird moment when the dictator believes his own propaganda," Anne Applebaum, a columnist for the Washington Post, said in a Twitter message after the press conference.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who spoke with Putin by phone after he dispatched Russian troops to Crimea last week, reportedly told U.S. President Barack Obama later that she was not sure the Russian leader was in touch with reality, The New York Times reported, citing officials briefed on the call.

In a blog article for the website of The New Republic, journalist Julia Ioffe said "Putin's press conference proved Merkel right: He's lost his mind." She then presented a sarcastic summary of Putin's remarks:

"Viktor Yanukovich is still the acting president of Ukraine, but he can't talk to Ukraine because Ukraine has no president. Ukraine needs elections, but you can't have elections because there is already a president. And no elections will be valid given that there is terrorism in the streets of Ukraine," Ioffe wrote.

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