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Weekly Wrap: Selfies, Yoga and Fake Whiskey (Op-Ed)

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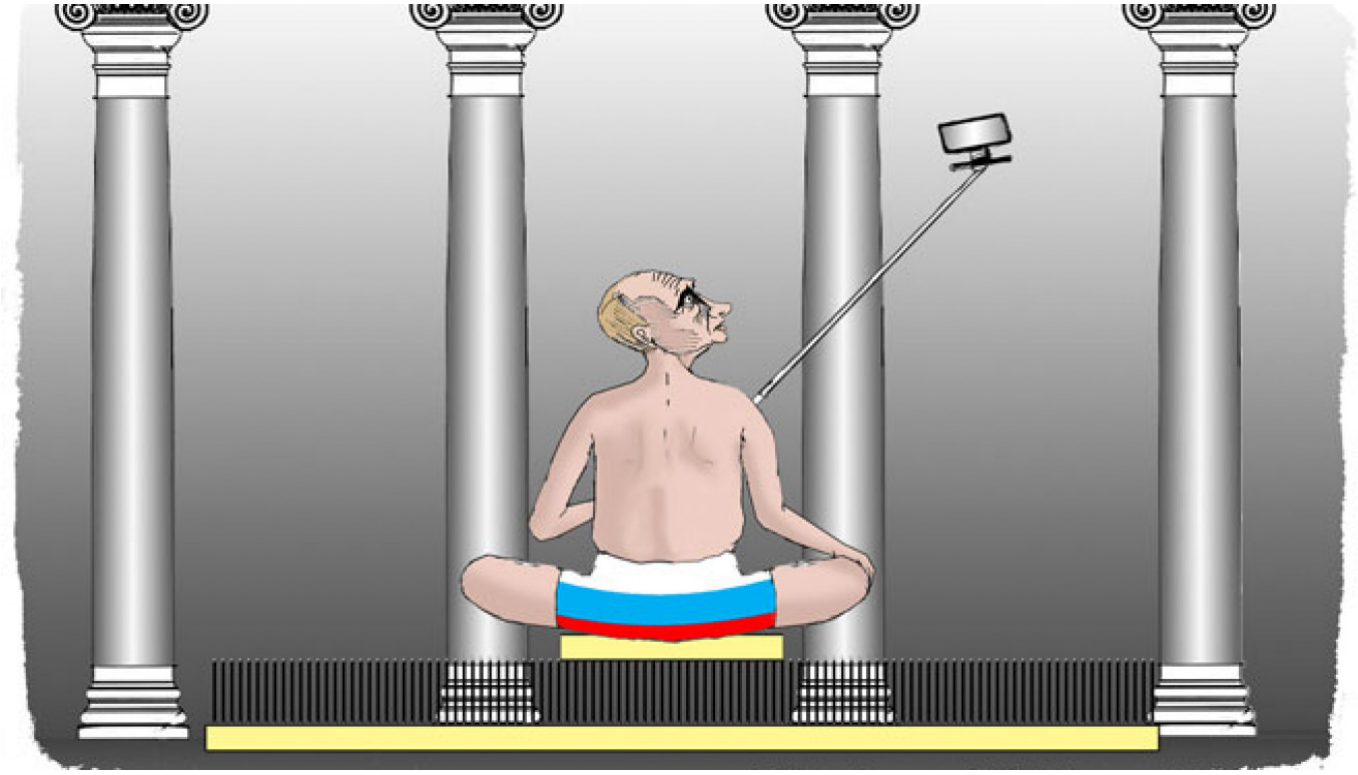

Russia hosted the twin BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization summits last week. The esteemed member states have about half the world's population between them, and a sizable chunk of the global GDP. So it's a real shame nobody noticed them.

But nobody cared — all eyes were on Greece and the Iran talks. And let's face it — a small country like Greece leaving the EU is much more important than any acronym shifts at the BRICS, and Iran can play with the Shanghai Organization all day long, but it has no impact on those reactors and oil tankers ready to go West.

Something good came out of it, though — President Vladimir Putin promised to take up yoga after meeting with the Indian prime minister. Yes, that's the same practice that was banned by Siberian officials the week before as occult.

Since it is inconceivable that Russia could be run by an evil necromancer overlord, this must mean that those officials will get off yoga's case, so hit that Vrksasana pose and feel close

to the president.

Putin said he is only doing the spiritual part of yoga for now. But he is bound to move to the physical thing — at which point, he will inevitably become a true ascetic, shrivel up, live forever and — our forecast — eventually pick up a lightsaber.

Imitation Game

As the leader flexed his spiritual muscle, his subjects flexed their economic wit in the battle against sanctions. The latest blow to the EU-U.S. hydra comes from booze makers — who flooded the Russian market with whiskey, rum and gin imitations.

The stuff is legal, marketed as "gin/rum-tasting" and, in some cases, even contains traces of the actual booze on the label. One recipe lists stuff like coffee, clover and cardamom — in addition to ethanol. Glenfiddich makers must be hiding their faces in their kilts.

And yet it makes perfect sense, does it not? Russia already has fake politics, fake elections, factory-made politicians (I mean, look at them), fake people on the Internet swarming around your favorite comments section like a Mongol horde on vacation in Samarkand.

There are bikers riding fake Russian motorcycles made in Italy, and a phony war that does not exist even though soldiers are court-marshaled for refusing to fight in it — while the decadents gorge themselves on Norwegian-tasting salmon from landlocked Belarus.

So, fake rum? Make mine a double, honey, and add some extra cardamom!

A Game of Kick-the-Prez

Meanwhile in Siberia, a bunch of men kicked U.S. President Barack Obama in the face. You could actually also kick him in the shins or groin at your leisure, but you got the best score for a quality heel to the nose of the 44th president of the United States of America.

Luckily, the POTUS was a cardboard cutout displayed during public festivities. Authorities in the city of Bratsk quickly washed their hands of the whole thing, saying it was a grassroots effort by a local man who wanted to promote karate at the same time as making a political statement (which he definitely did).

Obama is admittedly not much of a fighter — though he still gave a good account of himself: One kick-the-POTUS attempt ended in the attacker landing on his butt, judging from a witness video. (Imitation whiskey might have been involved.)

But in any case, these young Siberian gentlemen are fighting a cardboard cutout of a man they have never met. Don't they have better things to do?

There is a more sinister side to the thing, though, and this is sympathetic magic. You know, the kind when you paint a bison on the wall of your cave, spear it, and hey presto! Bison steak in the evening.

Obama sports no black eye, so the magic must have failed. But the important question is, how can you have sympathetic magic in a 21st century, allegedly Christian, country? Unless there

really is an evil warlock overlord in charge, of course. In which case it's probably OK as long as you kick the right president.

Selfie With Darwin

The true damage done to humanity by the anti-Russian sanctions became clear last week, when the country announced a helpline for selfie addicts. Well, it is really just a general addiction hotline, but Russia's chief narcologist said they would help you if you can't stop taking narcissistic snapshots. They've had 200 calls so far.

Selfies, as you know, are a bad practice in Charles Darwin's ledger book: In Russia alone, people have suffered or perished photographing themselves on bridges, roofs and train car tops, or from holding things like vipers, land mines and loaded guns (bang!).

And therein lies the drama, for Russians are not the only ones to take selfies. The global body count from selfies is over 50 this year, and if you've ever been in a place with an old church or palace recently, you know the pandemic has swept the world.

But tourism is in decline in Russia, thanks to the sanctions (well, and the war, and the Kremlin's isolationist venom-spewing). All those people could have finally become aware of the danger that lurks in their smartphone, learnt not to pose with vipers, and spread the word. But because of this pesky Cold War 2.0, they will remain in the dark and poised for an urgent meeting with Mr. Darwin.

Dear Mr. Obama, please lift the sanctions. Think of the selfies!

Unfair Observer is the pen name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

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