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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

You Thought This Was Rock Bottom, America, But the Russians Are Knocking From Below

Sad as it was, Donald Trump's first press conference as president-elect was a laugh riot in Russia

By Kevin Rothrock

January 12, 2017



Kremlin Press Service

This Wednesday, for the first time since his stunning election win in November, Donald Trump held a press conference. During that spectacle, Trump breathed into a microphone what he's told the world over Twitter for the last several weeks, berating major news outlets for spreading "fake news" supposedly fabricated to undermine his presidency.

At one point, the president-elect shouted down CNN's Jim Acosta and then took a soft-ball question from the right-wing website Breitbart about "all the problems that we've seen

throughout the media."

Trump's press conference was as rowdy as his campaign to take the White House, and responses on social media indicate that his confrontational relationship with the press still has liberals fuming and conservatives celebrating.

In Russia, the independent media has gradually eroded under a president who seems to share Donald Trump's disdain for disruptive journalism. But Russian Twitter users who tuned in to watch Trump's meeting with the press weren't partying or seething — for the most part, they were laughing.

So what was so funny?

The World Has Gone Topsy-Turvy

For years, the United States has been an inescapable presence in Russian politics. American plots and pernicious influence permeate the political rhetoric in Moscow, where no problem is too big or too small to blame on Washington and President Obama. Throughout this time, Russia barely registered in the United States, even after Moscow redrew the map of Europe by annexing Crimea from Ukraine.

Fast-forward to Wednesday, Jan. 11, when a room full of top reporters mobbed the U.S. president-elect with questions about the Kremlin and how America should confront Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Vladimir Varfolomeyev, a deputy editor with the liberal radio station Ekho Moskvy, joked that the multipolar world often touted by the Kremlin has finally arrived:

Embed:

> Все первые вопросы Трампу - про Россию. В российской части Твиттера основная тема - Трамп. Это, видимо, и есть тот самый многополярный мир)
>
> — Владимир Варфоломеев (@Varfolomeev) January 11, 2017

All the first questions to Trump are about Russia. Among Russian Twitter users, the main topic is Trump. This, apparently, is the long-awaited multipolar world. :)

Political analyst Stanislav Apetyan wrote that State Duma deputy Yevgeny Fyodorov, who leads the ultra-right-wing National Liberation Movement, has apparently misjudged U.S.-Russian relations. Fyodorov is notorious for claiming that the U.S. government has controlled the Russian Federation since the collapse of the Soviet Union, reducing Russia to a "colony."

Embed:

> Судя по вопросам на пресс-конференции Трампа, США - это такая криптоколония России. Депутат Федоров все перепутал!
>
> — Stanislav Apetyan (@politrash) January 11, 2017

Judging by the questions are Trump's press conference, the United States is some kind of crypto-colony of Russia. Deputy Fedorov got it all backwards!

The Journalists Are Still Trying

Many prominent Russian Twitter users seemed to think the most amusing aspect of Trump's confrontation with the press was the fact that reporters actually asked him tough questions, sometimes quite aggressively. This is a far cry from the tone at Vladimir Putin's annual press conferences, where a room packed mostly with sycophants pampers the president with praise, disguised as questions, and opportunities to impress the nation, framed as requests for presidential intervention.

One of the lamest questions put to Putin at last month's press conference came from a reporter based in Crimea, who asked the president what he would name the Kerch Bridge, which will connect the peninsula to the Russian mainland, when it's finished. ("You just said it — the Kerch Bridge," Putin answered the man.)

Embed:

> То есть Трампа ни разу не спросили, как правильно называть Керченский мост? Это не журналисты.
>
> — ivan davydov (@ivan_f_davydov) January 11, 2017

So not even once did anybody ask Trump what we're supposed to call the Kerch bridge? These people aren't journalists.

One of the strangest things about Putin's press conferences is that the guests are permitted to bring signs and posters, where they spell out the essence of what questions they'd like to ask. This policy makes for an arena-like scene, where a room full of adults jockeys desperately for the president's attention.

At least one Russian Twitter user made a small tweak to a photo from Putin's press conference to imagine how Trump might have enjoyed it.

Embed:

> Первая пресс-конференция избранного президента США Дональда Трампа pic.twitter.com/BPINAcZmjE
>
> — Дядюшка Шу (@Shulz) January 11, 2017

The first press conference of U.S. President Donald Trump.

Others pretended to mock the reporters who confronted Trump, complaining that they failed to ask the soft-ball questions that have become mainstays of Vladimir Putin's December interactions with journalists.

Embed:

> За всю прессуху никто не попросил Трампа заасфальтировать дорогу или провести газ. Зачем собирались?
>
> — ТЕТЯ РОЗА (@ANAKOYHER) January 11, 2017

Throughout the entire press conference, nobody asked Trump to pave a road or deliver gas utilities. When did they even bother with this thing?

Embed:

> Американская журналистика мертва, т.к. никто не спрашивает у Трампа, где он будет отмечать Старый новый год и что у него будет на столе.
>
> — Серый Кардинал (@slevo4kin) January 11, 2017

American journalism is dead, insofar as nobody asked Trump where he's going to spend New Year's and what he'll have on his holiday dinner table.

Embed:

> Что это за пресс-конференция президента такая, после которой никому не дали новую квартиру, а американской девочке не подарили милого щенка?
>
> — Дядюшка Шу (@Shulz) January 11, 2017

What's the idea of having a press conference where nobody gets a new apartment at the end, and a cute American girl isn't even gifted a little puppy?

Embed:

> Почему у Трампа не спрашивают про дороги? Я вчера в Аризоне был, там пара ям точно есть.
>
> — Wylsacom (@wylsacom) January 11, 2017

Why aren't they asking Trump about the roads? I was in Arizona yesterday, and there were definitely a couple of potholes.

Embed:

> - Да, вот вы девушка из MSNBC
> - Дональд Фредович, у нас в Мичигане автобусы старые, можете повлиять на губернатора?
> - Спасибо, садитесь
>
> — ВП (@sranysovok) January 11, 2017

"Yes, the young woman from MSNBC." "Mr. Trump, in Michigan, our transit buses are very old. Would you be able to pressure our governor to fix it?" "Thank you. Now sit down."

U.S. Journalists Have Less to Fear

A more bittersweet comedy captured the fact that American journalists can afford to offend the commander-in-chief, without risking the dismantling of their publication. Russian journalists don't have this luxury, and staff who have worked at independent Russian news outlets like Dozhd, Lenta.ru, RBC, and others know all too well that falling afoul of the Kremlin means you could lose your broadcasting contracts, your office lease, or your chief editors.

For a laugh, some Russian Twitter users joked about a world where Russia's harsh media landscape extended to the United States.

Embed:

> Полагаю, Трамп закроет Базфид теперь и сменит главного редактора CNN

— I.K. (@Vorewig) January 11, 2017

I suspect that Trump will now close down BuzzFeed and replace the chief editor at CNN.

Another Twitter user referred to Vladimir Putin's executive decree in December 2013 to liquidate the relatively independent state news agency RIA Novosti and replace it with a more propagandistic entity partly under the control of Margarita Simonyan, the chief editor of Russia Today.

Embed:

а новым главным редактором BuzzFeed назначут Маргариту Симоньян

— Atticus Flinch (@atticus_flinch) January 11, 2017

Margarita Simonyan will be appointed the next chief editor of BuzzFeed.

Though she's unlikely to be offered the job at BuzzFeed, Simonyan certainly has the moxy needed to draw traffic in the era of Donald Trump. On Twitter, while people watched the president-elect abuse journalists he says spread "fake news," Simonyan mocked CNN, Meryl Streep, and the U.S. intelligence community.

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