

## Can the US Media be trusted?

Commentary by Steve Leeper, *in italics*

### Can Putin be trusted?

### US weighs sanctions pullback as Russia shifts course on Ukraine

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June 24, 2014: Russian President Vladimir Putin is shown in Vienna, Austria.AP

The Obama administration could reconsider a looming package of sanctions on the Russian economy as Vladimir Putin makes an about-face and signals a willingness to ease the crisis Moscow helped create in Ukraine.

*Moscow helped to create the crisis in Ukraine? What about Washington? We have the US ambassador on tape planning the downfall of one president and the installation of the next, but it's Moscow that created the crisis?*

In recent days, Putin has worked with lawmakers in Moscow toward rescinding a parliamentary resolution authorizing him to use the Russian military in Ukraine -- the parliament's upper house canceled it on Wednesday. Putin also urged the new Ukrainian government to extend a weeklong cease-fire and called for talks between Ukraine and pro-Russian rebels who are widely believed to be backed by the Kremlin.

Asked about the developments, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest floated the possibility of reining in sanctions.

"The goal of sanctions was to accomplish a couple of things," he said Tuesday. "The first is to further isolate the Russians and to put pressure on them to take the kind of action that would be conducive to de-escalating tensions in the neighboring country of Ukraine."

*The goal of sanctions is to look tough to the fools who think the US should always look like it runs the world.*

He added: "Obviously, if we started to see a change in the behavior of the Russian government and we saw some concrete steps along the lines that we've been calling for ... that would be a positive development and it would make additional sanctions less likely."

*Right. If the Russians do what we want them to do, we won't have to punish them – maybe. The important principle here is that everyone should always do what the US tells them to do, or else.*

But Obama administration officials are "reserving judgment," he said, as they wait to see whether Putin's words are matched with actions.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State John Kerry said Moscow still needs to stop the flow of weapons across the border and urged Putin to publicly call on separatists to "lay down their arms."

*Is the US supplying any arms to anyone in Ukraine? The Republicans want it to; it has been seriously considering it. But it's not? Even indirectly? What about intelligence? What about advice? What about instructions? What about money with which to buy arms? The writer or this article has no idea whether the US is providing arms to Ukraine or not.*

Putin's turnaround comes at a curious time -- as the United States and European allies are set to finalize a package of sanctions with the goal of putting them in place as early as this week.

*Yup, looks like Putin is scared of this new package of sanctions. A clear victory for the US. If this were true, it should not be said. We should be trying to be friends, not winners. But again, the important thing is for the US to look like a winner who must be obeyed.*

The U.S. and Europe already have sanctioned Russian individuals and entities, including some with close ties to Putin, but have so far stayed away from the broader penalties, in part because of concern from European countries that have close economic ties with Russia.

*We are applying some weak and arbitrary sanctions in order to look tough to the Republicans and other Neanderthals. We are refraining from applying broader, stricture sanctions because Russia could initiate a devastating retaliation. Putin is not a helpless servant of the US.*

But with the crisis in Ukraine stretching on, a senior U.S. official said the U.S. and Europe are moving forward on "common sanctions options" that would affect several areas of the Russian economy. A Western diplomat said those options included Russia's energy industry, as well as Moscow's access to world financial markets.

*Here we see the whole point of the Ukraine machinations—to weaken Russia's energy sector and shift some European customers from Russia to the US. Shutting Russia out of financial markets would hasten its attack on the dollar and collapse the whole house of cards. Just talking about it is idiocy.*

Obama administration officials, though, told the Associated Press that economic sanctions could be delayed given Putin's change in behavior.

Putin's moves came one day after he talked by phone with President Obama, their first known conversation in more than two weeks.

*So Putin and Obama got together and decided that tensions are high enough. They have scared the world into higher military budgets. They have prevented any outbreak of peace, so they should de-escalate before the situation actually gets dangerous.*

The threat of sector sanctions may be driving Putin to try to avoid penalties that could have a devastating impact on the already shaky Russian economy. However, there were no guarantees that Moscow would abide by the West's requests to pull back its troops from the Ukrainian border, stop arming separatists and negotiate seriously with Kiev.

*So the Russian economy is shaky but the US economy, which has just experienced its biggest contraction since 2008, is not? The whole world is a shaky economy that does not need any form of economic warring between Russia and "the West."*

Indeed, there were signs Tuesday of just how fragile the situation on the ground remains. Hours after Putin called for the cease-fire to be extended, pro-Moscow separatists shot down a Ukrainian military helicopter, killing nine servicemen.

*Sure enough. Build up tensions, get the hungry and frustrated masses upset, and things can get out of hand.*

Vice President Joe Biden spoke to Ukraine's new president, Petro Poroshenko, for the third time in as many days and offered his condolences for the deaths. The White House said Biden also underscored the importance of having monitors in place in Ukraine to verify violations of the cease-fire, as well as the need to stop the supply of weapons and militants from flowing across the Russian border.

*Need to watch those crafty and deceitful Russians. That's why we have to spend 700 billion dollars a year on the Pentagon plus however much it costs for the NSA to eavesdrop on every phone and computer in the world.*

At the State Department, spokeswoman Marie Harf said the situation entailed "two steps forward, one step back."

"We do see some positive signs on the ground," she told reporters. "The cease-fire, some separatists have accepted it, but the same day some other separatists shot down a helicopter. That President Putin says he'll go to the Duma, that's good, but then they continue the military buildup."

Even if the U.S. and European Union decide not to levy sector sanctions this week, they could outline clearer intentions to ultimately take that step. In Europe, the 28 nations that form the EU may at least agree on the details of a package of sanctions so the penalties could be levied quickly, according to the Western diplomat, who like other officials insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the internal deliberations by name.

*The EU is very tough. Getting ready to punish Russia at any moment. The Russians are shaking in their boots.*

Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron discussed Ukraine on Tuesday, including the possible implementation of "additional coordinated measures to impose costs on Russia" should Russia fail to make positive changes, the White House said.

*Obama and Cameron are also very tough. Ready to "impose costs" on Russia if they fail to do what they are told.*

Although American officials have examined the possibility of unilateral action, they are still trying to do everything in concert with European countries.

*This is great. American TRIES to play well with others, but always on the basis that the US will do whatever it wants regardless. America is the boss of the world. Everyone should just get used to it.*

Officials said implementing restrictions on American companies exporting oil and gas exploration technology to Russia, for example, without similar rules for European competitors risks harming major U.S. players in Russia's burgeoning energy sector such as ExxonMobil and Halliburton.

*Now we're getting to the heart of it. Russia needs to be punished for threatening harm to ExxonMobil and Halliburton. Refreshing candor, but what we read here still has nothing to do with what is really going on in this power play.*

Several U.S. businesses are worried about the prospect of imminent sector sanctions on Russia and have held meetings with senior administration officials over the past 10 days.

*I'm worried about the prospect of a total collapse of the dollar if the US and Russia really get into it. I wonder if anyone else is.*

Given their reliance on Moscow for fuel supplies and far deeper economic integration with Russia, European countries are unlikely to go along with any far-reaching energy sector action. So if the U.S. moves ahead on its own, the Obama administration fears Russia would be able to escape punishment by shifting business from U.S. firms to European energy giants such as BP, Total or Royal Dutch Shell.

*Yeah, really, it would be wise for the US not to go it alone applying sanctions that its allies don't want and can't enforce and that would cause Russia to retaliate in ways that could make the Great Depression look like good times.*

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

*The Associated Press should be ashamed of contributing to one-sided, superficial drivel like this.*