

How Vladimir Putin Sees the World

Exclusive: The mainstream U.S. media has assumed the role of protecting the American people from alternative viewpoints, which is why Oliver Stone's long-form interviews with Vladimir Putin are such a concern, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There was a time when I thought that it was the responsibility of an American journalist to hear all sides of a dispute and then explain the issue as fairly as possible to the American people, so they would be armed with enough facts to make their own judgments and act as the true sovereigns in a democracy.

I realize how naïve that must sound today as American journalism has shifted to a new paradigm in which the major news outlets view it as their duty to reinforce whatever the establishment narrative is and to dismiss or discredit any inconvenient facts or alternative analyses.

Today, The New York Times, The Washington Post and the rest of the mainstream media permit only the narrowest of alternative views to be expressed or they just pile into the latest groupthink whole hog.

So, that is why director Oliver Stone's four-part series of interviews with Russian President Vladimir Putin on "Showtime" will surely draw near-universal outrage and ridicule from the big U.S. media. How dare anyone let Putin explain how he views the challenges facing the world? Can you believe that any right-thinking American would treat the Russian leader with civility and – god forbid – respect?

The new American media paradigm requires either endlessly insulting Putin to his face or aggressively blacking out his explanations, especially if they are based on information that puts the U.S. government in a negative light. The American people must be protected from this "Russian propaganda and disinformation."

In other words, with the mainstream "guardians of truth" forewarning the American people not to watch Stone's "The Putin Interviews," the series will probably draw a relatively small viewership and the demonizing of Putin and Russia will continue unabated.

The American public can thus be spared some disturbing historical revelations and the unsettling vertigo that comes from hearing information that disrupts "what everyone knows to be true."

In the "director's cut" or long-form version of the four-part series that I

watched, Stone does allow Putin to offer detailed explanations of his thinking on current crises, but also draws from Putin acknowledgements that might be surprising coming from a Russian leader. He also puts Putin in some uncomfortable binds.

—Regarding the Soviet Union’s development of the nuclear bomb in the late 1940s, Putin said Russian and German scientists were working on the project but got help from participants in the U.S. nuclear program:

“Our intelligence also received a lot of information from the United States. Suffice it to remember the Rosenberg spouses who were electrocuted. They didn’t acquire that information, they were just transferring that information. But who acquired it? The scientists themselves – those who developed the atomic bomb.

“Why did they do that? Because they understood the dangers. They let the genie out of the bottle. And now the genie cannot be put back. And this international team of scientists, I think they were more intelligent than the politicians. They provided this information to the Soviet Union of their own volition to restore the nuclear balance in the world. And what are we doing right now [with the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty]? We’re trying to destroy this balance. And that’s a great mistake.”

—Regarding the origins of modern Islamist terrorism, Putin said: “Al Qaeda is not the result of our activities. It’s the result of the activities of our American friends. It all started during the Soviet war in Afghanistan [in the 1980s] when the American intelligence officers provided support to different forms of Islamic fundamentalism, helping them to fight the Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

“So the Americans themselves nurtured both Al Qaeda and [Osama] bin Laden. But it all spun out of control. And it always happens. And our partners in the United States should have known about that. So they’re to blame.”

Stone noted how President Reagan’s CIA Director William Casey sought to exploit Islamic fundamentalism to destabilize Muslim parts of the Soviet Union and to achieve regime change in Moscow.

Putin added: “Those ideas are still alive. And when those problems in Chechnya and the Caucasus emerged [after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991], the Americans, unfortunately, supported those processes. We [Russians] assumed the Cold War was over, that we had transparent relations, with the rest of the world, with Europe and the U.S. And we certainly counted on support, but instead, we witnessed that the American Intelligence services supported terrorists.

“I’m going to say something very important, I believe. We had a very confident opinion back then, that our American partners in words were talking about support to Russia, the need to cooperate, including fighting terrorism, but in reality they were using those terrorists to destabilize the internal political situation in Russia.”

–Regarding NATO expansion into Eastern Europe,” Putin said, “There was a deal not to expand NATO eastward. [But] this deal was not enshrined in paper. It was a mistake made by Mr. Gorbachev [the last president of the Soviet Union]. In politics, everything must be enshrined in paper.

“My impression is that in order to justify its existence, NATO has a need of an external foe, there is a constant search for the foe, or some acts of provocation to name someone as an adversary.”

–Regarding NATO missile bases being installed in Eastern Europe, Putin said: “And what are we supposed to do. In this case we have to take countermeasures. We have to aim our missile systems at facilities that are threatening us. The situation becomes more tense. ...

“There are two threats for Russia. The first threat, the placement of these anti-ballistic missiles in the vicinity of our border in the Eastern European countries. The second threat is that the launching pads of these anti-ballistic missiles can be transformed within a few hours into offensive missile launching pads. Look, if these anti-ballistic missiles are placed in Eastern Europe, if those missiles are placed on water, patrolling the Mediterranean and Northern Seas, and in Alaska, almost the whole Russian territory would be encircled by these systems.

“As you can see, that is another great strategic mistake made by our partners [a word that Putin uses to refer to the United States]. Because all these actions are going to be adequately answered by Russia. And this means nothing else but a new cycle of an arms race. ...

“When the Soviet Union collapsed, they [American leaders] were under the illusion that the U.S. was capable of anything, and they could [act] with impunity. That’s always a trap, because in this situation the person or the country begins to commit mistakes. There is no need to analyze the situations, or think about the consequences. And the country becomes inefficient. One mistake follows another. And I think that is the trap the U.S. has found itself in.”

–Regarding the prospect of nuclear war, Putin said, “I don’t think anyone would survive such a conflict.” Regarding U.S. plans for creating a missile shield, he

said, "There is a threat deriving from the illusion of being protected, and this might lead to more aggressive behavior. That is why it is so important to prevent unilateral actions. That is why we propose to work jointly on the anti-ballistic missile system."

—Regarding the American neoconservatives who now dominate the U.S. foreign policy establishment and the major news media, Stone described "the neoconservative element as being so hungry to make their point, to win their case that it's dangerous." Putin responded, "I fear them too."

—In an interview on Feb. 16, 2016, Stone asked about the U.S. presidential campaign to which Putin replied, "We are going to be ready to work with whoever gets elected by the people of the United States. I said that on several occasions and that's the truth. I believe nothing is going to change no matter who gets elected. ... The force of the United States bureaucracy is very great. And there are many facts that are not visible to the candidates until they become President. And the moment one gets to real work, he or she feels the burden. ..."

"My colleague, Barack Obama, promised to close Guantanamo. He's failed to do that. But I'm convinced that he sincerely wanted to do that. ... Unlike many partners of ours, we never interfere within the domestic affairs of other countries. That is one of the principles we stick to in our work."

—In a February 2017 interview, which was added amid the escalation of charges that Russia interfered in the U.S. election, Stone noted that Donald Trump is "your fourth president" and asked, "what changes?"

"Almost nothing," Putin said with a wry smile. "Life makes some changes for you. But on the whole, everywhere, especially in the United States, the bureaucracy is very strong. And bureaucracy is the one that rules the world."

Asked about alleged Russian interference to help Trump, Putin responded: "You know, this is a very silly statement. Certainly, we liked President Trump and we still like him because he publicly announced that he was ready to restore American-Russian relations. ... Certainly, we've got to wait and see how, in reality, in practice, the relations between our two countries are going to develop. ..."

Stone: "So why did you bother to hack the election then?"

Putin: "We did not hack the election at all. It would be hard to imagine any other country – even a country such as Russia would be capable of seriously influencing the electoral campaign or the outcome of an election. ... any talk about our influencing the outcome of the U.S. election is all lies. They are

doing it for a number of reasons.

“First, they are trying to undermine the legitimacy of President Trump, create conditions that must preclude us from normalizing our relations, and they want to create additional instruments to wage an internal political war. And Russia-U.S. relations in this context are just a mere instrument in the internal political fight in the U.S. ... We know all their tricks.”

—Regarding cyber-war and the possibility that U.S. intelligence planted malware and back-doors in software sold to Russia, Putin said, “Well, you will probably not believe me, but I’m going to say something strange. Since the early 1990s, we have assumed that the Cold War is over. We thought there was no need to take any additional protective measures because we viewed ourselves as an integral part of the world community.

“We didn’t have any equipment of our own. Our companies, our state institutions and administrative departments, they were buying everything – hardware and software. And we’ve got much equipment from the U.S., from Europe, and equipment is used by the Intelligence Services and by the Defense Ministry. But recently we certainly have become aware of the threat that all of that poses.

“Only during recent years, have we started to think about how we can ensure technological independence, as well as security. Certainly we give it much thought, and we take appropriate measures. ... We had to catch up with others.”

In an aside to Putin’s translator within earshot of Putin, Stone remarked: “He’s acting funny about this story, like he’s guilty a bit.”

—Regarding the dangers to Russia from U.S. cyber-warfare, Putin said: “It is almost impossible to sow fear among the Russian citizens. ... And secondly, the economies that are more sophisticated, in technological terms, they are more vulnerable to this type of attack. But in any case, this is a very dangerous trend. A very dangerous avenue for competition to pursue and we need some rules to be guided by.”

When Stone raised the possibility of a treaty, Putin said, “I don’t want to say that, but you are simply drawing this information from me. You make me say that. One and a half years ago, in Autumn 2015, we came up with a proposal that was submitted to our American counterparts. We suggested that we should work these issues through and arrive at a treaty, an agreement on the rules to be guided by in this field. The Americans didn’t respond, they kept silence, they didn’t give us any reply.”

—Regarding allegations of Putin’s wealth, Stone asked, “Is there somehow you could make your personal wealth clearer?”

Putin responded indirectly: "I remember when I moved to Moscow from St. Petersburg [in the 1990s], I was astounded and shocked by how many crooks had gathered here in Moscow and their behavior was so astounding, I couldn't get used to it for a very long time. Those people didn't have any scruples at all. ... My task was to differentiate between power and money."

Stone: "So there are no bank accounts in Cyprus?"

Putin: "No, and never have been. That's just nonsense, and if that were the case we would have had to face it a long time ago."

—Although Putin remained disciplined and controlled during the long sit-downs with Stone, the Russian president appeared most uncomfortable when Stone pressed him about his future plans and the risk of a leader viewing himself as indispensable to a nation.

Citing the possibility that Putin would have been in power – as either prime minister or president – for 24 years if he were to run for president again and win, Stone asked, "Do you feel that Russia needs you that badly?"

Putin: "The question you have asked whether Russia needs anyone that bad – Russia itself will decide. An alteration in power certainly has to exist. ... In the end, let me reiterate – the citizens of Russia are going to make the final decision. Concerning the 2018 elections, I'd like to say there are things, things that should have some intrigue and mystery. So I am not going to answer that part of the question."

Stone: "I said if..."

Putin: "We shouldn't speak in the subjunctive mood."

Stone then suggested more transparency in the next election.

A stern Putin responded: "Do you think our goal is to prove anything to anyone? Our goal is to reinforce our country."

Stone: "That is a dangerous argument. It works both ways. Those who abuse power always say it's a question of survival."

Putin: "We are not talking about survival and we are not trying to justify ourselves. Certainly taking into account all the negative tendencies you've been talking about – the Soviet legacy, the Imperialist legacy, it's something in the past. But we also have to think about the positive legacy. Russia has been built for a thousand years; it has its own traditions. We have our notions of what is just and unjust, we have our own understanding of what defines an efficient government."

“This is not a question of helping someone cling to power or to claim it for myself. This is about ensuring economic growth and sustaining it, improving our defense capabilities, and not just during periods of crisis and difficulties.”

Stone: “Mr. Putin, I don’t doubt for one moment your pride in serving Russia or that you are a son of Russia to me, and you have done very well by her. We all know the price of power. When we’re in power too long no matter what, the people need us but at the same time we’ve changed and we don’t even know it.”

Putin: “Indeed, this is a very dangerous state. If a person in power feels that they have lost it, this bond connecting this person to the country and to the rank-and-file citizens of the country, then it’s time for them to go.”

More to come regarding Putin’s account of the Ukraine crisis. Regarding Stone’s style and strategy in interviewing Putin, [click here](#).

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).
