

The Perils of a Putin-Trump Summit

Opinion

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When the President goes into a summit with Putin saying his goal is simply to have a good relationship, it is dangerous to the United States and our allies. It is not a policy.

Commentary by STEVEN L. HALL, July 9, 2018 As a former member of the CIA's Senior Intelligence Service, I'm worried about the upcoming summit between the Chekist former KGB officer, President Vladimir Putin, and the former real estate businessman and reality show personality, President Donald Trump. My concerns center around the fact that Russia has much to gain, and from my perspective, the United States profits little, if at all. The very fact that Putin has scored a meeting with the President of the United States helps the Russian leader immensely with his urgent desire to demonstrate that Russia is still a central player on the world stage. There is no reverse benefit of that, however, for the U.S., meaning that neither the U.S. nor our allies have much to gain from the face-to-face sit down. Let's just take a look at President Trump's recent statements, and I'm not talking about his old commentary ("Crimea actually wanted to be part of Russia" and "NATO may be obsolete"), but rather new comments Trump uttered to the press on June 29th aboard Air Force One: (Regarding general topics of discussion for the summit): "I'll talk to him (Putin) about everything… we'll be talking about Ukraine, we're going to be talking about Syria, we're going to be talking about elections. And we don't want anybody tampering with elections". (Regarding loosening sanctions on Russia): "We'll see what Russia does". (Regarding NATO): "NATO is very interesting… but (NATO allies) have to spend more… it's unfair about what they've done to the United States… we're being treated unfairly." (Regarding international diplomacy): "I think having a relationship with China, Russia, and everybody else is a good thing, not a bad thing…". As we lay this out to determine if there is a strategy and what it might be, let's begin with the last comment about having a relationship (assumedly good, which Trump has indicated in the past) with Russia. While it is quickly becoming hackneyed, it is nevertheless true to say that the United States needs to have a more nuanced policy towards Putin's Russia beyond simply "having a good relationship". Such an approach is akin to stating, in the face of your teenager coming home drunk, getting thrown out of school, and trashing his room, that you as a parent "want to have a good relationship…" with your offspring. That kind of wishful thinking, flying in the face of facts, is not a good substitute for a specific, thoughtful plan and set of policy goals. Dealing with a teenager by saying you just want to have a good relationship with them might accurately be referred to as naïve or bad parenting. When the President goes into a summit with Putin saying his goal is simply to have a good relationship, it is dangerous to the United States and our allies. It is not a policy. […] https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column...e71&mc_eid=2fcf6507b0