



Pollak: Joe Biden Got Nothing in Geneva Summit with Russia's Vladimir Putin

Description

President Joe Biden gave Russian President Vladimir Putin almost everything he could have wanted at their Geneva summit. He elevated Putin above other leaders, including American allies; and failed to force any real concessions on Russian policy.

The degree to which the summit was a disaster became evident when Putin emerged for his press conference — alone with a forum all to himself.

The Biden team did not want to appear with Putin at a joint conference after the meeting— both because Biden would look frail next to Putin, and because of the media dogma that President Donald Trump had somehow done something terrible by behaving cordially when appearing alongside Putin in Helsinki, Finland, in 2018.

Putin fielded softball questions from Russian news agencies, but he also welcomed hostile questions from the U.S. media. (In fact, Putin, an enemy of press freedom, was more polite than Biden would be, and took far tougher questions.)

The opportunity to defend his own position, and to attack the United States, without fear of contradiction was a massive gift to the Russian president. He used the old Soviet tactic of pointing to American problems as a way of deflecting from questions about human rights and political opposition.

He did so without fear of contradiction: when he [cited](#) the Black Lives Matter movement as an example of human rights abuses in the U.S., he knew no American journalist would object.

Biden tried to use his own press conference to make all kinds of claims about tough talk to the Russian president during their two-hour meeting. (Biden claimed, falsely, that a meeting of that length was unprecedented between two heads of state: in fact, Trump [met](#) with Putin for two hours in 2017.)

It was impossible to verify Biden's claims without Putin there to respond — and Biden has a history of exaggerating his own bravery when citing conversations with foreign leaders.

Reporters pressed the two leaders, separately, to reveal what commitments, if any, Putin had made to

change Russia's aggressive behavior. But there were none.

Putin walks away from Geneva with no significant response to cyberattacks; with the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which Trump had opposed; and with no real pushback against his aggression in Ukraine. Notably, Biden met with Putin before meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky — meeting TBA.

The response of the American media echoed Biden's posture of appeasement. CNN, which had raised the alarm when Trump and Putin appeared to get along with one another, [gushed](#) about Biden's "optimistic" tone at the summit, and how wonderful it was that Biden and Putin seemed to have had a friendly conversation.

At one point, the two leaders were so cozy that the White House had to [walk back](#) an apparent nod by Biden when he was asked if he trusted Putin.

Biden seemed unwilling to use any leverage against Putin — a fact that even the American media noted, with one journalist desperately asking whether the administration might consider using the U.S. military to stop cyberattacks. Biden's strategy toward Putin seems to be that he can be convinced to behave more responsibly if he is told that he needs a better global image if he wants to be taken seriously by the media and American investors.

What Biden does not get — and what President Barack Obama did not get, and then-Secretary of State John Kerry did not get — is that Putin does not care. Putin cares about oil, and guns, and currency, and power. He plays by what Kerry once complained — after the Russian invasion of Crimea — are "19th century" rules. Biden does not know how to do the same.

During the 2020 campaign, Biden claimed that Trump was "unwilling to take on Putin." But Putin leaves Geneva a winner, and Joe Biden got nothing.

by Joel B. Pollak

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