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Aug 6, 2025 · 21 tweets · [P_Kallioniemi/status/1953092828516499715](#)

In today's Vatik Soup, I'll cover the autocratic concept of "Good Tsar, Bad Boyars": the idea that the leader is wise and just, but constantly sabotaged by corrupt advisors. This narrative shields the ruler from blame, and it's used by both Putin and Trump today.

1/20



The phrase "Good Tsar, Bad Boyars" (Царь хороший, бояре плохие), also known as Naïve Monarchism, refers to a long-standing idea in Russian political culture: the ruler is good and benevolent, but his advisors are corrupt, incompetent and responsible for all failures.

2/20



From this perception, any positive action taken by the government is viewed as being an accomplishment of the benevolent leader, whereas any negative one is viewed as being caused by lower-level bureaucrats or “boyars”, without the approval of the leader.



ОДЕЖДА БОЯРСКАЯ XVIII СТ.
ПОРТРЕТЫ КНЯЗЕЙ РЕПНИНЫХ.

This narrative helps protect the leader from criticism by shifting blame to his subordinates. It originates from the Russian empire, but it was also used extensively by Soviet leaders (Khrushchev's secret speech was the shocking exception) and now by Vladimir Putin.



In the Soviet Union, the idea of the “good leader misled by bad advisors” dominated. Under Stalin’s Great Purge, victims would write him “Comrade Stalin, there’s been a terrible mistake”, believing he’d fix it if only he knew — but he was usually the one who ordered it.

ROBERT W. THURSTON

Fear and Belief in the USSR's "Great Terror": Response to Arrest, 1935–1939

Numerous scholars and survivors of the USSR's "Great Terror," a common designation for the years 1935–1939, have described the period as one of sweeping or even total fear among the Soviet population.¹ To quote one memoirist, Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, himself arrested in 1940, after 1935 "only fear" served to motivate Soviet people.² Supporters of this position generally argue that the purges "affected everybody from the Politburo member down to the street cleaner," as one leading authority on Stalin put it.³ Another school of thought,

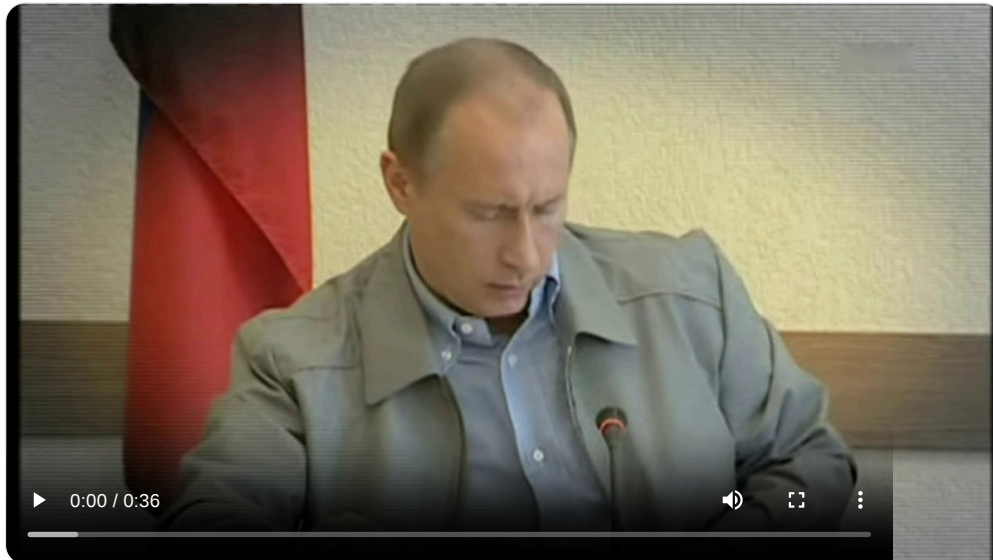
I would like to thank Stephen F. Cohen for comments on an earlier draft and Roberta T. Manning and Robert C. Tucker for conversations on this subject, the University of Texas at El Paso's Mini-grant and University Research Grant programs for financial help, and the Summer Research Laboratory of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for resource assistance and support.

1. For such assessments by scholars see, for example, Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin: The Man and his Era* (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 433; and Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 375–376 and 429–430. For treatments of the Terror that take this view and set the USSR into the theoretical context of totalitarianism, see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 169; and Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), p. 5. Terror and fear are seen as integral parts, even the most essential characteristics, of totalitarian systems by Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship*, p. 15 and passim; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1966), p. 344; and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Permanent Purge: Politics in Soviet Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 17 and 27.

2. Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, *The Time of Stalin: Portrait of a Tyranny*, trans. George Saunders, with an Introduction by Stephen F. Cohen (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 216. For similar assessments in the memoir literature see Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, *Hope against Hope: A Memoir*, trans. Max Hayward (New York: Scribner, 1970), p. 57; Viktor Kravchenko, *I Chose Justice* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 154–155; and D. Kramarev, "Kak zhivut russkie krest'iane v kolkhodzakh," David Dalin [sic] papers, Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European History and Culture, Columbia University [hereafter BA], p. 8.

3. Ulam, *Stalin*, p. 409. See also Conquest, *Great Terror*, pp. 427–428. Earlier works that concluded that a "system of terror" existed were often based upon the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, in which thousands of former Soviet citizens took part. Of this sample, up to 80 percent (the figures vary from author to author) reported either their own arrest or that of a relative in the 1930s. See, for example, Barrington Moore, Jr., *Terror and Progress USSR: Some Sources of Change and Stability in the Soviet Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 155–156. However, "a very high proportion" of the sample consisted of people who were "well placed in Soviet life," Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 13. As will be shown, highly placed people were much more likely to be arrested. Moreover, on the basis of the same sample Alex Inkeles and Raymond Bauer concluded in their *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 37, that "although arrest affected one's hostility toward things specifically Soviet, prejudiced somewhat his

Since Putin rose to power in 1999, the "good Tsar, bad boyars" idea has shaped his public image. He presents himself as a just leader undermined by corrupt officials, often humiliating them publicly to show he's above the system.



Even the 2023 Wagner rebellion was initially based on the “good Tsar, bad boyars” idea. Prigozhin claimed Putin was misled into invading Ukraine by corrupt elites, viewing him as a well-meaning leader deceived by untrustworthy oligarchs and incompetent generals like Shoigu.

NEWS > DEFENSE

Wagner chief to Putin: Don't trust your top generals

Yevgeny Prigozhin renews feud with Kremlin's military chiefs.

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In the US, a version of this myth surrounds Trump. Supporters see him as a lone fighter betrayed by corrupt insiders: deep state, fake Republicans, globalists... His "drain the swamp" slogan reinforced the image of a pure leader surrounded by disloyal, self-serving elites.

8/20





When policies fail or scandals hit, Trump blames others. Even close allies like Mike Pence and William Barr were quickly cast as traitors. Trump himself stays “clean and pure” while those around him are labeled weak, corrupt, or disloyal.

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POLITICS | UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Trump urges MAGA supporters to forget about Epstein files

Karl Sexton with AFP, AP, Reuters
07/15/2025

A US Department of Justice and the FBI memo concluded that Jeffrey Epstein did not maintain a client list involving high-profile associates. It frustrated Trump's supporters who criticized Attorney General Pam Bondi.

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Trump has pushed back against his supporters who want Bondi to be fired

Image: Yuri Gripas/abaca/picture alliance

US President Donald Trump has urged his supporters to stop attacking his administration over files related to late disgraced financier and sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Who Was Subpoenaed Over Epstein Files?



00:57

LIVE

Aug 05, 2025 at 4:56 PM EDT

Bill and Hillary Clinton Subpoenaed Over Epstein Files

By Amanda Castro
Live Blog Editor

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Pence says Trump 'endangered my family' on Jan. 6



FILE - Former Vice President Mike Pence speaks at a Coolidge and the American Project luncheon in the Madison Building of the Library of Congress, Feb. 16, 2023, in Washington. On Saturday, March 11, Pence harshly criticized former President Donald Trump for his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol, furthering the rift between the two men as they prepare to battle over the Republican nomination in next year's election. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File)

BY ZEKE MILLER AND CHRIS MEGERIAN

Published 5:30 AM GMT+3, March 12, 2023

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William Barr's stunning evolution from Trump loyalist to nemesis





Analysis by Stephen Collinson, CNN
7 min read · Updated 8:03 AM EDT, Tue June 14, 2022







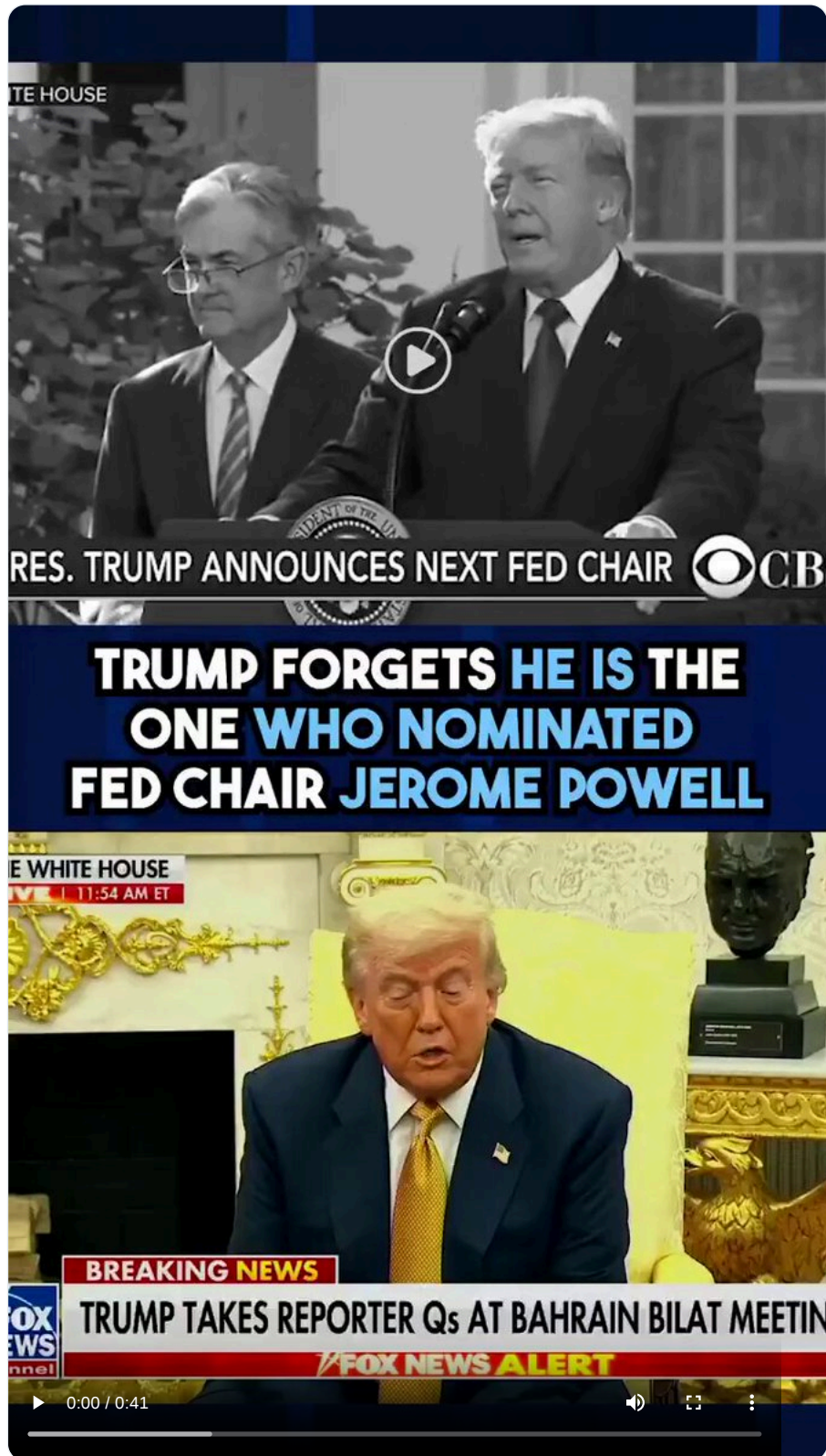




'The claims of fraud were bulls**t!': Former AG Barr slams Trump's election fraud claims

02:34

Trump often turns on the very “bad boyars” he personally appointed. He repeatedly threatened to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell for not aligning with his economic messaging, despite having nominated him in 2017 and once calling him a “good man.”



Trump went through people quickly in his first term, and by 2018, nearly half of top White House roles had already changed. Today, almost no one from his original inner circle remains. Many former allies have either distanced themselves or become targets of his attacks.

Trump says he only hires the 'best people.' His record suggests otherwise.

Trump promised his Cabinet would resemble the boardrooms of “The Apprentice.” But what we ended up with was closer to an episode of “Survivor.”



Oct. 25, 2024, 1:00 PM GMT+3

By Ali Velshi

This is an adapted excerpt from the [Oct. 20](#) episode of "Velshi."

[Donald Trump](#) has said repeatedly that he only hires the “best people.” The claim started as a line on the campaign trail during his first presidential run.

In June 2015, far before he took over the Republican Party, [Trump told a crowd in South Carolina](#): “I know the best people. I know the best managers. I know the best dealmakers. I know people who will make us so strong. I know guys that are so good.”

AA

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AMERICAS

'You're fired': Some of the ex-officials Trump sacked in his first term

During his first tenure, Trump frequently used social media to criticize and dismiss officials that he had appointed, often targeting those who disagreed with his policies

Muhammed Enes Calli | 14.11.2024 - Update : 22.11.2024



Donald Trump

f

ISTANBUL

X

During Donald Trump's first term as US president, many high-ranking officials came and went from his administration as disagreements over time led to their dismissal.

📅

His unorthodox management style saw many of these dismissals announced on social media, generating widespread media attention and controversy.

✉

World

China supports Brazil against 'arbitrary' US tariffs, says top diplomat Wang

OceanGate used 'intimidation tactics' to bypass regulation, US Coast Guard says

US arrests 2 Chinese for allegedly illegally selling sensitive microchips used in AI applications to China

US could pursue death penalty for man accused of fatally shooting 2 Israeli Embassy staffers

In his second term, Trump surrounds himself exclusively with loyalists. MAGA-aligned think tanks like the Heritage Foundation support this model, calling for mass firings, loyalty tests, and full presidential control over the federal bureaucracy from day one.

Donald Trump

This article is more than 8 months old

Trump's early second-term choices fuel fears of extremist agenda

Trump has chosen loyalists and hardliners to lead departments that will shape US policy on immigration, defense and more

Anna Betts

Wed 13 Nov 2024 22.09 CET

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Kristi Noem, Elise Stefanik and Stephen Miller are slated to have significant influence in Donald Trump's new administration. Composite: Reuters, Getty Images

Donald Trump may have won a second term in the White House just last week, but his recent administration appointments have already heightened fears among some who believe his return to the White House will lead to an extremist agenda.

BBC

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Who is on Trump's top team?

26 February 2025

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The new team entrusted with delivering Donald Trump's agenda is in place, featuring several contentious picks.

Project 2025 outlines this plan clearly: expand presidential power, purge civil servants, replace judges who block Trump's executive orders. The aim is a government where qualifications or constitutionality don't matter, only loyalty does. America's own "Tsarist" model.

13/20



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REPORTOCT 1, 2024

Project 2025 Would Destroy the U.S. System of Checks and Balances and Create an Imperial Presidency

Far-right extremists have a plan to shatter democracy's guardrails, giving presidents almost unlimited power to implement policies that will hurt everyday Americans and strip them of fundamental rights.

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Trump's master plan for a radical reformation of the US government




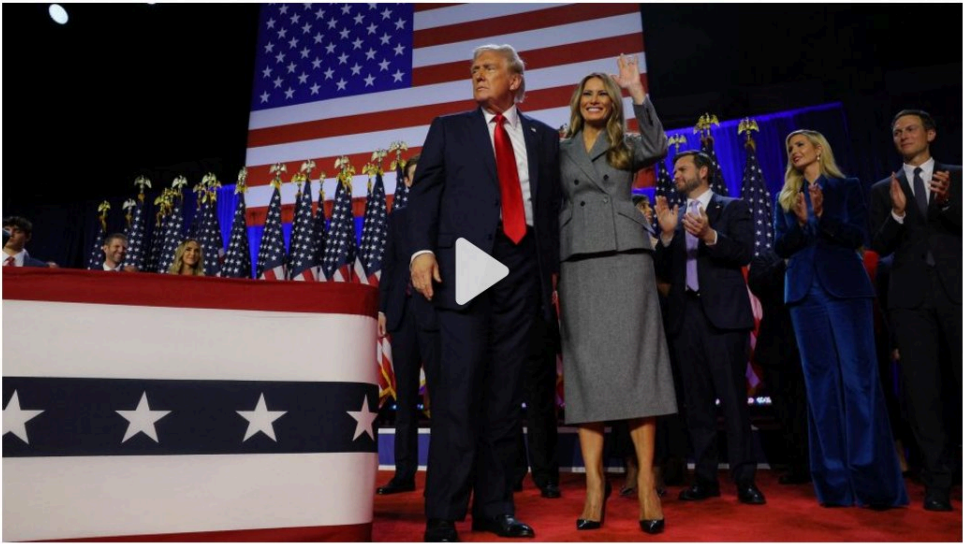
Analysis by Zachary B. Wolf, CNN
6 min read · Updated 6:56 PM EST, Thu November 7, 2024











Trump's cult-like status among the MAGA base ensures that anyone he fires or disowns is instantly recast as a traitor. His supporters rarely question him. Instead, they redirect blame to the "bad boyars," reinforcing his image as a wise, benevolent, and infallible leader.



Like in Russia, the goal is to build a leader-centered system where the president is never to blame. If anything fails, it's the boyars — often podcasters, pundits, political allies or kids with little experience in the jobs they're handed.

The Tsar is always good.

Updated Aug 2, 2025 - Economy

Trump fires labor statistics chief after weak jobs report



Neil Irwin



President Trump this week. Photo: Andrew Harnik/Getty Images

President Trump said he has fired the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics after the independent government agency reported [weak jobs numbers](#) for July and the preceding month.

DEFENSE

'Who the f--k is this guy?': Defense world reacts to Trump's surprise Pentagon pick

"Hegseth is undoubtedly the least qualified nominee for SecDef in American history," one veterans' advocate said.



U.S. Marine Corps Brig. Gen. David Walsh (left), Commander of Marine Corps System Command, and Pete Hegseth, a Fox and Friends co-host, conduct a cake cutting ceremony live during a Fox and Friends morning broadcast in New York City, Nov. 10, 2023. | U.S. Marine Corps image by Staff Sgt. Theodore Bergan

By JOE GOULD, ROBBIE GRAMER, PAUL MCLEARY, CONNOR O'BRIEN and JACK DETSCH

11/12/2024 10:10 PM EST

Updated: 11/12/2024 10:35 PM EST



President-elect Donald Trump's Tuesday night surprise pick of a conservative commentator and television host as his Pentagon chief shocked Washington, which had expected the nominee to be a seasoned lawmaker or someone with defense policy experience.

POLITICS

Trump's Anti-Terror Gardener, 22, Humiliated by His Own Boss

ROLE REVERSAL

Kristi Noem's department flips its story on "leadership" role of young Trump superfan.



Tom Latchem
Reporter

Updated Jul. 22 2025 5:13PM EDT
Published Jul. 22 2025 1:28PM EDT



Meanwhile, back in Russia, the "Good Tsar" system demands total loyalty. Even top officials can't freely resign. Elvira Nabiullina, head of the Central Bank, reportedly tried to quit after the Ukraine invasion, but Putin refused, forcing her to stay.

Russia central banker tried to quit over Ukraine; Putin said no

Much of Nabiullina's legacy came undone in a matter of hours after sanctions laid siege to Russia's economy.



Elvira Nabiullina, favoured by investors and hailed by publications as one of the world's best monetary policymakers, now faces a wartime economy isolated by international sanctions and starved for investment [File: Andrey Rudakov/Bloomberg]

By **Bloomberg News** | **Bloomberg**

23 Mar 2022



In Putin's system, loyalty is expected indefinitely. Those who fail or fall out of favor are often arrested, or they die under suspicious circumstances. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has also been rumored to have asked to resign multiple times, only to be blocked by Putin.

17/20



Is Sergei Lavrov looking for a way out?

BY BETHANY ELLIOTT



RUSSIA

SERGEI LAVROV

UKRAINE

VLADIMIR PUTIN





Newsroom JANUARY 16, 2023 - 10:30AM

Since the Ukraine invasion, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has been an ardent cheerleader for the Kremlin's 'special military operation'. In February, he likened talking with then-UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to "speaking to a deaf person", while at the UN Security Council in September he called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky a "bastard" before departing early. With apparently no limits to his ambition, last month, Lavrov even sparred with the Pope, labelling him "un-Christian".

The Boyars now don't get a choice, they HAVE to stay and be bad for the Tsar to be good. This serves a dual purpose: it makes Putin appear more moderate, and protects them by being too unhunged to be a serious alternative to the Tsar. Sidekicks like Lavrov and Medvedev...

Putin sorry for Lavrov's claim Hitler was part Jewish - Israel PM

6 May 2022

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Mr Putin spoke to the Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett

Russia's President Vladimir Putin has apologised after his foreign minister said that Nazi leader Adolf Hitler had "Jewish blood", Israel says.

Mr Putin made the apology in a call with Israeli PM Naftali Bennett, his office said in a statement.

Russia's account of the conversation did not mention an apology.

Sergei Lavrov made the initial comments to try to justify Russia's portrayal of Ukraine as "Nazi" despite the fact that its president is Jewish.

... reinforce Putin's Good Tsar status through their blunders. They make provocative statements or extreme, often absurd threats, like nuclear war or invading Poland. Putin then steps in, the voice of reason, calms his boyars down, makes them apologize.

The Tsar is Good.



Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

Did I hear Former President Medvedev, from Russia, casually throwing around the “N word” (Nuclear!), and saying that he and other Countries would supply Nuclear Warheads to Iran? Did he really say that or, is it just a figment of my imagination? If he did say that, and, if confirmed, please let me know, IMMEDIATELY. The “N word” should not be treated so casually. I guess that’s why Putin’s “THE BOSS.” By the way, if anyone thinks our “hardware” was great over the weekend, far and away the strongest and best equipment we have, 20 years advanced over the pack, is our Nuclear Submarines. They are the most powerful and lethal weapons ever built, and just launched the 30 Tomahawks — All 30 hit their mark perfectly. So, in addition to our Great Fighter Pilots, thank you to the Captain and Crew!

7.23k ReTruths 31.9k Likes

Jun 23, 2025, 11:27 AM



Dmitry Medvedev



@MedvedevRussiaE · Jun 24



Regarding President Trump's concerns: I condemn the US strike on Iran – it failed to achieve its objectives. However, Russia has no intention of supplying nuclear weapons to Iran because, unlike Israel, we are parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

I know quite well what this would entail, having overseen our nuclear forces as president. But other countries might – and that’s what was said.

And we definitely shouldn’t be arguing over who has more nukes. All the more so because the New START treaty, which I once signed with a US president, is still in force — for now. The question is: what comes next?



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Donald J. Trump ✓ +

@realDonaldTrump

I don't care what India does with Russia. They can take their dead economies down together, for all I care. We have done very little business with India, their Tariffs are too high, among the highest in the World. Likewise, Russia and the USA do almost no business together. Let's keep it that way, and tell Medvedev, the failed former President of Russia, who thinks he's still President, to watch his words. He's entering very dangerous territory!

4 ReTruths 17 Likes

7/30/25, 9:00 PM



Donald J. Trump ✓ +

@realDonaldTrump

Based on the highly provocative statements of the Former President of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, who is now the Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, I have ordered two Nuclear Submarines to be positioned in the appropriate regions, just in case these foolish and inflammatory statements are more than just that. Words are very important, and can often lead to unintended consequences, I hope this will not be one of those instances. Thank you for your attention to this matter!

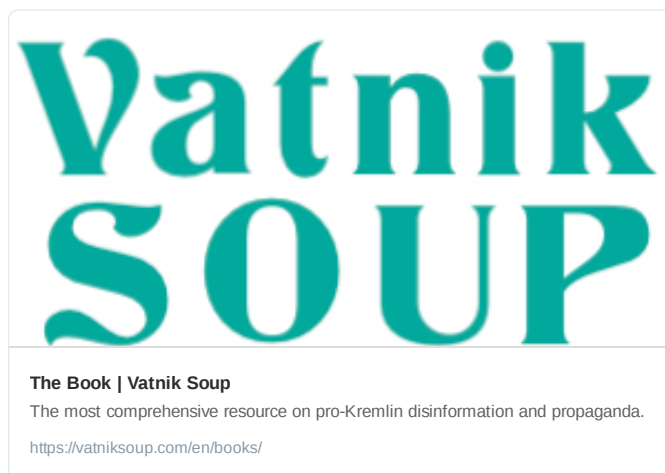
To conclude: both Trump and Putin use the “Good Tsar, Bad Boyars” model to build a system where blame is never theirs. Failures are pinned on advisors, bureaucrats, or made-up enemies. Successes, real or staged, are credited solely to their strength, wisdom, and leadership.

20/20



The 2nd edition of “Vatnik Soup — The Ultimate Guide to Russian Disinformation” is officially out!

You can order your copy here:



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