

Americans Are Exceptional, Mr. Putin

By [Gary Shapiro](#)

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During U.S. President Barack Obama's address to the nation Sept. 10, he stressed that U.S. military action against Syria is still an option. He also mentioned American exceptionalism, saying: "Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong. But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act. That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional."

The next day, The New York Times published an op-ed by President Vladimir Putin in which he objected to American exceptionalism. Putin's comment that people should not be told they are exceptional is anchored in the old socialist mantra of conformism and that everyone should experience equal outcomes. This is the complete antithesis of the U.S. model of success, where exceptionalism is rewarded and encouraged. Whether in sports or business, research or acting, aspiring to excellence — to exceptionalism — is the fuel that motivates Americans to succeed in almost every area of endeavor.

This success is self-evident in many areas: from Hollywood, Silicon Valley, Amazon, Apple

to Xilinx, Zynga, biotech, Internet and space exploration. The U.S. leads the world in extraordinary creations, inventions, ingenuity and breakthrough innovation.

It's not just our democracy that explains this high level of success. After all, there are several great democracies around the world. Exceptionalism is inherent in American culture.

The U.S. embraces many different cultures, religious beliefs and backgrounds. It is the most diverse country in the world. This diversity fosters different opinions rather than consensus and conformity.

The U.S. is a nation of hard workers who have the courage to follow their passions and dreams. Working harder and challenging the status quo is in the blood of Americans. After all, the U.S. was formed by European immigrants who wanted a better and freer life.

The country encourages lemonade-stand entrepreneurship, risk-taking and excellence. The U.S. gives awards when they are earned, Americans keep score in games and recognize that greatness and breakthroughs require a culture of risk. Taking risks also means that some win and others lose, but they can come back and try another day. While other nations punish entrepreneurs who mess up, in the U.S. business failure is considered a learning experience rather than a mark of shame.

The U.S. is bolstered by its Constitution, which encourages risk-taking. When breakthrough innovations threaten status-quo companies and industries, our First Amendment allows us to support the innovator, and due process blocks government from simply shutting down new businesses.

This is the United States' competitive strength and national strategy. The U.S. has every right to celebrate its exceptionalism and exceptional success.

So, Mr. Putin, while Russians can benefit from U.S.-invented smartphones and tablets, the U.S.-invented Internet, search engines and apps, you also can promote your message through a great U.S. newspaper that is a product of the rich U.S. institution of free speech.

Encouraging Americans to see their nation as exceptional is what has made the U.S. great and benefits all nations.

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