

Russian Officials Riled by Obama's State of the Union Address

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U.S. President Barack Obama (C) delivers his State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress, as Vice President Joe Biden (L) and House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) applaud on Capitol Hill in Washington.

U.S. President Barack Obama's claim that Western sanctions have isolated Russia and left its economy “in tatters” at his annual State of the Union address on Tuesday has ruffled feathers among Russia's political elite.

The United States and its Western allies have imposed several rounds of sanctions against Russia in response to its annexation of Crimea and its alleged support of pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. Russia has reacted with tit-for-tat sanctions, which included an import ban on a series of Western food products.

“We're upholding the principle that bigger nations can't bully the small — by opposing Russian aggression, supporting Ukraine's democracy, and reassuring our NATO allies,”

Obama said.

“Last year, as we were doing the hard work of imposing sanctions along with our allies, as we were reinforcing our presence with frontline states, Mr. Putin’s aggression it was suggested was a masterful display of strategy and strength,” Obama said. “Well, today, it is America that stands strong and united with our allies, while Russia is isolated with its economy in tatters. That’s how America leads — not with bluster, but with persistent, steady resolve.”

In Russia, the official reaction was swift. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov lambasted Obama's claims about Russia, saying they demonstrated that the United States sees itself as the “number one” country in the world.

“[The speech] shows that the U.S. still wants to dominate, and not even be first among equals,” Lavrov said Wednesday at his annual press conference. “They have a more aggressive foreign policy philosophy.”

Lavrov also expressed the belief that attempts at isolating Russia were pointless and that U.S. foreign policy attitudes would eventually change course.

Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich also moved to debunk Obama's claim that Russia had been isolated by Western sanctions.

“We are going through a difficult period in our relations with the United States and Europe, but not with the whole world,” Dvorkovich was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency, likely referring to Russia's enhanced cooperation with other regions, such as Asia and Latin America. “On a practical, working level, we are maintaining contact with our European partners, with national authorities and with Brussels.”

Other Russian officials adopted a more defiant stance against Obama's assertions, publishing inflammatory statements on their social media pages.

Notorious for his anti-Western tirades, Alexei Pushkov, the head of the Duma's international affairs committee, tweeted Wednesday that Obama had forgotten about the “4,800 civilians killed by Kiev in eastern Ukraine. The Islamic State has killed fewer people,” his tweet read.

Notably, the United Nations reported that more than 4,800 lives have been lost in east Ukraine since the start of the conflict, but did not distinguish a breakdown in that number of soldier versus civilian casualties, and did not distinguish how many of those casualties were the fault of Kiev-loyal forces, as opposed to separatist forces.

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin also chimed in with unflattering words for Obama, saying that he was a “dreamer” for thinking he had shattered the Russian economy.

The Duma's deputy speaker, Sergei Neverov, told RIA Novosti that Obama's comments about Russia were being used to distract the American public from issues at home, while Duma lawmaker Frants Klintsevich, of the ruling United Russia party, said they attested to the theory that the United States was displeased that Russia was serving as a counterweight to its ambitions to maintain a unipolar world order.

Russia's criticism of broader U.S. policy has also proliferated since Obama's State of the Union

address. The Foreign Ministry published a statement Wednesday condemning certain European governments for their complicity in torture allegedly carried out in secret CIA detention centers located on their territory. The statement deplored the fact that claims made in a recent Amnesty International report about Europe's purported role in supporting CIA torture had not prompted an international investigation.

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