

What Pundits Missed About the Trump-Putin Press Conference in Helsinki

When Presidents Trump and Vladimir Putin ended their joint press conference in Helsinki, the punditocracy predictably swarmed all over it like ants around a pile of crumbs. Was Trump [winking](#) at Putin? Did he really say he believes Putin more than he believes Robert Mueller about whether Russia interfered in the 2016 election? Former Gus Hall enthusiast John Brennan, off his meds again, [tweeted](#) that the presser was “treasonous.” Professional chatterer [Anderson Cooper said](#) it was “perhaps one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president at a summit.”

Every phrase, every gesture of the event will be picked apart and second-guessed to death in the next few days. I’ll leave them to the carrion.

Would You Rather Fight?

To my mind, the chief point was enunciated by [Winston Churchill in 1954](#): “Meeting jaw to jaw is better than war.”

As President Trump repeatedly put it during his 2016 campaign, it would be a good thing, not a bad thing, to get along better with Russia. Let me stipulate that I think that Vladimir Putin is a murderous thug. He has demonstrated time and again that while you can take the lout out of the KGB, it’s much more difficult to take the KGB out of the lout.

That said, Russia is a world power that commands an enormous nuclear arsenal. Which means we cannot—or at least we should not—simply take our marbles out of the game and go home in a snit because they do things of which we do not approve.

As Trump and Putin both frankly acknowledged, there are issues

on which they diverge—the [fate of Crimea](#) may lead the list—but there are also many areas in which our national interests intersect. It is a mark of the realistic and far-seeing diplomat to seize and build upon the latter while trying to find common ground about the former. This is what both men are trying to do.

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