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Late Night Comics Undermine Suffering of Ukrainian and Russian People

By Robert Weiner and Lori Salazar



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"Ukrainians have united the world in condemnation of Russia and inspired the world to place one of the harshest measures available." Stephen Colbert, host of *The Late-Night Show* (CBS), begins his segm

ent discussing how sanctions have cut off the country's ties with the international bank, SWIFT. Colbert explains how sanctions have led the Russian stock market to crash, causing Russian civilians to worry about how to provide for their families. "It is never good when your financial graph looks like someone knocked over the printer." Colbert and other comedians' jokes trivialize real issues that Russian civilians go through while a tyrannical dictator decimates their nation and kills their people while forcing millions into exile.

Colbert states that "effect of these sanctions have doubled Russia's central bank's interest rates and devastated their stock market," tanking Russian currency. He jokes that "Putin finally fulfilled his dream of bringing back the Soviet Union because that's a lot of people waiting in line for some bread." His attempt at humorizing the conflict is not only rude but cruel, as innocent civilians face starvation, homelessness, or death.

Colbert continues to discuss how Russian civilians are unable to "use monetary apps like Google Pay" to pay for public transport. He tries to elicit a laugh from his audience as he exclaims "eat sucky morning commute, Ruskis," and says that "if you don't get out of Ukraine, next we're sending the worst from our subway: the guy with the garbage bag full of sandwiches that he is giving up for 'donations' and a kid who bangs on a bucket." He trivializes real issues blameless civilian Russians face while dealing with the backlash of economic sanctions and living under a cruel dictatorship.

On April 20th, 2022, the flagship Russian warship *Moskva* was sunk by two Ukrainian Neptune missiles. "I'm surprised they're called Neptune missiles," Colbert exclaims, "because Russia, Ukraine's kicking Uranus."

It's easy for comedians to joke about the sinking of the warship, but what they might not know about this event is that one Russian officer was confirmed dead, and 27 others are presumed missing.

On *Late Night with Seth Myers* (NBC), Seth Myers jokes about Putin's intention to invade Ukraine, saying that "Putin reportedly made the decision somewhere around his ninth birthday to start war... he was a fun kid."

"We all remember when our war in Iraq was supposed to end in a three-day weekend," Myers remarks when comparing Putin's plans to overrun Ukraine. "You're like that guy who thinks he is going to have one drink with his old college friends" and yells "No! You're going to wake up at dawn in a karaoke booth with socks on your hands saying 'Oh, man, did I do 'Islands in the Stream' with sock puppets?'" While Putin's regime assumed the war would end in a matter of days, the Ukrainian war has lasted for over four months.

The Russian military is cutting off access to Ukrainian port cities, causing a global food shortage. Odesa, a once thriving seaport, has over 20 million tons of grain stuck on the city's coastline. President Zelenskyy stated in a video address at June's TIME100 Gala that this amount of "stalled food could triple in size unless Putin's forces end the blockade."

When mocking issues affecting both Russians and Ukrainians, *The Tonight Show's* Jimmy Fallon (NBC) laughs that "they get two hours of sunlight and eat potatoes every meal, what are you going to take away from them?" Unfortunately, Ukrainians living in conflict zones have had to rely on humanitarian aid groups to obtain food and other essentials. Zelenskyy commented that he believes "the best way to beat Putin's attacks and end the blockade is to use force with an advanced missile system" that is going to be supplied by the United States. Zelenskyy states that "heavy weaponry could be used to help boats with food" and other necessities be able to have safe passage through the Black Sea.

Trevor Noah used his segment to discuss Putin's tyrannical war efforts saying that he "is getting his nuclear team ready" and that "every crazy world leader needs a pasty son-in-law by his side to keep him in check." Although Noah pokes fun at former President Donald Trump's relationship with Jared Kushner, he quickly exclaims to the audience that "yes, we might be at the brink of World War III, but on the bright side when was the last time you thought about COVID?"

As comedians make jokes about Putin's regime, it is easy for individuals who live thousands of miles away from Ukraine and Russia to make ill-fitting jokes about the suffering both Russian and Ukrainian people face while dealing with thousands of deaths, decimated cities, millions of displacements citizens, military rapes, and tortures of real war.

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