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Donald Trump's Fake News Conference

By Mel Gurtov
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The media waited with bated breath for Donald Trump's first news conference in 167 days. But I'm sure many journalists knew what was coming: a show, orchestrated by The Apprentice executive director so as to reveal precisely nothing but used instead to revile his critics. Vladimir Putin couldn't have done better.

Trump was true to form, and character: He spent very little time answering (actually avoiding) questions, he brought along a small crowd of flatterers to applaud his lines, he had three people (his communications spokesman, his vice president-elect, and his tax lawyer) stand in to defend him, and he bragged about how many jobs he will create and how he had turned down a \$2 billion business opportunity with Dubai.

Probably sometime early in his youth, Trump learned that the best defense is to attack. He denounced two media outlets (BuzzFeed and CNN) for daring to publish a report about a questionable Russian dossier on him—the work of an ex-British spy—that other media had decided not to publish. Trump refused to allow the CNN representative to ask a question, angrily saying “you are fake news.” But that remains to be determined, for in fact the intelligence people who briefed him and Obama think the dossier *might* contain reliable information. Trump is compromised enough by his kissy-kissy relationship with Putin—and if there's a shred of truth in the dossier, Trump will be in jeopardy.

Trump attacked on other fronts as well. He once again insisted Mexico will pay for a wall—“not a fence”—in one way or another. He allowed that the Russians probably were responsible for hacking the Democratic National Committee; but once more he veered away from acknowledging the intelligence finding that Putin himself had ordered the hacking and that Putin’s aim was to help his campaign and hurt Hillary Clinton’s. And his statement that he had “nothing to do with Russia” is patently false. As the Washington Post points out, Trump’s Russian connections go back 30 years, mainly related to his pursuit of real estate opportunities. Still to be determined is whether or not Trump’s associates met with Russian counterparts during and after the campaign, as the dossier alleges.

Trump also tried to preempt further discussion of his financial conflicts of interest by putting the Trump Organization in the hands of his two sons. As various ethics specialists in and out of government have pointed out, that decision is no solution. As one of them said, Trump will be in violation of the Constitution on the day he takes office. He actually had the audacity to say that he has every right to run both his organization and the presidency—implying that we should be grateful for his choice not to do so, as though we don’t already know that he has every intention to remain in charge of his empire. He again refused to release his tax returns, saying that only the press wants him to do so. Trump’s attitude is clear: I’m the president and I’ll do what I want; try to stop me.

In short, what did we learn from the press conference?

First, that Trump will be the same blustering, haughty president that he was on the campaign trail.

Second, that access to him will be extremely limited and produce very little news.

Third, that any news he dislikes will be labeled fake, and the messenger will pay a price.

Fourth, that Trump will completely disregard ethical guidelines at home just as he disregards them abroad.