

The New York Times' hypocrisy over protests in Russia

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30 March 2017

In an editorial titled “President Putin Under Pressure,” the *New York Times* weighed in on last Sunday’s protests in Russia, posturing as the champion of democracy and hailing the “the spirit and courage of Russian citizens who are willing to risk retribution to resist the excesses of his [Putin’s] regime.”

“When it comes to modern authoritarian leaders, President Vladimir Putin ranks high for ruthlessness and repression,” the *Times* editorial begins its screed.

The *Times* feigns sympathy for the issues that drew thousands to participate in the protests, including a slick video indicting Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev for corruption and amassing wealth that includes “fancy estates, vineyards and yachts in Russia and overseas.” It adds that “The protests also reflected broader public discontents, including unhappiness with the economy and the government’s suppression of peaceful demonstrations.”

Who do the *Times* editors think they’re kidding? They speak as representatives of a US political establishment headed by Donald Trump, who occupied the White House over the opposition of the majority of those who cast ballots in November 2016, not to mention the majority that rejected both him and the *Times*’ own favored candidate, Hillary Clinton, by refusing to vote. Medvedev’s holdings pale in comparison to the worldwide estates, yachts and golf courses of Trump, who personifies the wholesale corruption, parasitism and backwardness of America’s capitalist ruling class.

As for Putin ranking high in terms of ruthlessness and repression, the *Times* exhibits a selective attitude toward “human rights” which is the stock in trade of US imperialism and the US State Department. It seems to forget that the principal pillars of US policy in the Middle East consist of Egypt, which has slaughtered thousands of protesters and jailed tens of thousands more, Saudi Arabia, which routinely beheads critics of the royal

family, and Israel, which exercises apartheid-style repression against the entire Palestinian population. In Africa it is the same story, with Ethiopia, a favored US proxy, mowing down some 1,000 protesters last year, and Uganda not only ruthlessly repressing opponents of the US-backed regime, but banning the country’s media from even reporting on their activities.

The *Times* has shown no inclination to salute the “spirit and courage” of those who have risked and sacrificed their lives defying these US-backed dictatorships.

Within the US itself, a “democracy” that imprisons more of its citizens than any other major country in the world, in which police killings take place roughly three times a day and a campaign of ruthless repression is being waged against immigrants, is hardly a beacon of hope to those chafing against Putin’s repression. Demonstrations in the US, moreover, are routinely met with police violence and arrests.

As for supposed sympathy with “broader public discontents, including unhappiness with the economy,” here too the *Times* editorial is suffused with hypocrisy. While it is true that younger Russians joined the protests, largely motivated by hostility to rampant social inequality--the same cause of widespread popular discontent in the US itself--and declining living standards, the fact is that the *Times*, as the voice of the US ruling elite, has been a stalwart supporter of the actions and policies that have created these very conditions. It enthusiastically backed the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism a quarter of a century ago, which gave rise to the rule of the criminal capitalist oligarchs whose interests Putin’s regime ultimately defends.

Moreover, the *Times* has supported the economic sanctions that were imposed against Russia following the Western-backed Ukrainian coup of 2014, which have contributed to the sharp decline in living standards for the

Russian working class.

The *Times* has no interest in altering these conditions; it only wants them administered by a new regime that is fully subordinate to the interests of US imperialism, facilitating its looting of Russia's considerable resources and ultimately the dismembering of the vast country, turning its constituent parts into semi-colonies of Washington.

To this end, the newspaper enthusiastically promotes the extreme right-wing, pro-Western opposition politician Alexei Navalny, who has sought to exploit popular dissatisfaction to further his own reactionary aims.

The *Times* early on identified Navalny as a suitable candidate for spearheading regime change in Russia. In 2013, Bill Keller, the newspaper's former executive editor and longtime man in Moscow, wrote a glowing tribute to Navalny, describing him as a "potential political leader," who was "young (36), thoughtful, politically astute, crowd-pleasing and apparently unafraid."

Keller praised Navalny for employing "a mild dose of nationalist sloganeering," describing it as a "shrewd" maneuver that shielded him from charges that he is a "Western stooge." What he was referring to was Navalny's political alliance with extreme right-wing Russian nationalists, anti-immigrant fanatics and outright fascists. The "liberal" *Times* has no problem supporting such elements, and did so enthusiastically the next year, in the regime change operation executed in Ukraine.

In the end, the *Times* has no more interest in promoting democracy in Russia than anywhere else in the world, including the US itself. It merely wishes to exploit the protests to further the agenda of that section of the American ruling class that seeks a more direct intervention against Russia, including by means of military aggression, and which has come into conflict with Trump and other sections of the ruling establishment that see the main enemy as China.

To these ends, the *Times* has been at the forefront of a hysterical anti-Russian campaign that has revived the foul politics of the period of the McCarthyite witch-hunts of the 1940s and early 1950s. Unsubstantiated charges of Russian intervention in the US election are combined with various conspiracy theories. In its editorial, the *Times* cites a CNN report stating ominously that "Over the past five months, some eight high-profile Russians, including five diplomats, have died, some in suspicious circumstances."

In point of fact, one of those cited in the report, a Russian lawyer, is alive, having suffered serious but not

critical injuries after falling from a window. Others include the Russian ambassador to Turkey, who was gunned down in front of video cameras by a supporter of Syria's Al Qaeda, as well as Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Ivanovich Churkin, who died of a heart attack in New York City last month. Three other diplomats, one in New York, one in Greece and one in India, died of illnesses in what local police said were circumstances lacking in suspicion. No matter. When it comes to anti-Russian propaganda and the demonization of Putin, facts are of no importance.

The *Times* editorial further indicts Putin for having "been aggressive on the international stage with his annexation of Crimea and military involvement in Syria on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad." It makes this charge as the Pentagon is ruthlessly escalating US military interventions in Iraq and Syria that are resulting in massive civilian casualties.

Moreover, the *Times* editorial appeared on the same day that the chief of the US European Command, Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, told the House Armed Service Committee that he wants another full US armored division permanently deployed on Russia's western borders, along with an increased presence of US warships near the country's shores. "It would be wonderful to have a carrier support group with amphibious forces," he told the Congressional panel.

The coincidence between the editorial and Scaparrotti's testimony is hardly an accident. In the final analysis, the *Times* functions as a mouthpiece for the CIA and the State Department. Its empty pretense of concern for democracy in Russia is merely another form of war propaganda.



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