

Putin's Fascism Lite

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December 21, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

There are two reasons for the outbreak of ultranationalist violence in Russia. The first is Caucasus fascism, which is a serious problem for Russia in the same way that Islamic fascism is for the West.

Chechnya is taking revenge on Russia for the war and genocide the Kremlin has waged against it over the past 20 years and beyond. That revenge has taken the form of lawlessness and violence on Moscow's streets.

Recall the recent incident at Moscow's Yevropeisky shopping center when a security guard refused entry to an armed 32-year-old man from the Chechen city of Shali. The man later returned with a group of friends and beat the guards with baseball bats.

The main difference between Russian and Chechen fascism is that 99 percent of the Russian elite consider the statement "I am Russian and therefore better than others" to be anathema, whereas for the Chechen elite the declaration "I am Chechen and therefore better than others" is accepted as fact.

Modern liberals refuse to discuss or even acknowledge the problem of nationalism because they are afraid of appearing politically incorrect, and they believe in the Pollyannish principle that all people are equal.

The problem is that Nazism is a natural phenomenon for any traditional society — especially when it clashes with a more civilized open society. “I am a Somali or Chechen or Arab,” they say. “I have a family and honor. I keep a tight hold on my women and will kill any daughter who soils her virtue before marriage. That is why I am better than those dirty, infidel pigs that have no sense of honor.”

Savages always outdo civilized men in terms of violence. The trouble is that rather than trying to make savages more civilized, civilized societies all too often find excuses for their savagery and justify it as a “local cultural trait.”

Russian fascism is the second reason for the surge in violence. If Nazism is natural for tribal peoples, then for Russians, Nazism should be a marginal phenomenon.

Nazism was marginal under President Boris Yeltsin. Even when most Russians were poor and miserable during the “wild 1990s,” Nazism was marginal. But under the 10-year rule of Vladimir Putin, racially based violence — often murder — became commonplace.

This is happening because the ideology of the Putin regime is essentially “fascism lite.” This is when the people responsible for legitimizing the ruling kleptocracy splurge on a luxury shopping weekend in London or Rome, and then they come back to Russia and speak at a pro-Putin rally at Lake Seliger, telling the poor and disenfranchised rabble that a great nation like Russia needs a great leader like Putin. They also remind everyone how the West is trying to undermine and weaken Russia.

Kremlin first deputy chief of staff Vladislav Surkov is now facing the same problem that most Arab states are facing. As in Russia, Arab leaders did not implement reforms and became multibillionaires at the people’s expense. They justify their strong hold on power on the grounds that they are devout Muslims and have the people’s best interests in mind. But then along came Osama bin Laden who said, “I and my brothers-in-arms are true Muslims, and all the rest are infidels and scum.”

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Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/12/21/putins-fascism-lite-a3925>