

Russia: Idiots, No Longer Useful

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Angry patriots may pay the price for their loyalty

“They can, but we can’t.” We had to repeat this for many months, when left-wing and liberal oppositionists were detained and sent to trial for the mere word “war” uttered in connection with military operations on the territory of Ukraine, while Igor Strelkov and his associates criticized words of the military leadership, complained about defeats at the front, and talked openly about the terrible state of affairs in military units. Of course, they got away with it because they did not question the very need for military action. At first, Putin was not called by name and was not directly scolded. The government was reproached only for not being severe enough. With regard to Ukraine, they strictly adhered to the opinion that a country with such a name should not exist.

But everything has changed. On July 21 at 11:30 they came for Strelkov, FSB officers detaining the founder of the Angry Patriots Club. Earlier, charges were brought against retired colonel Vladimir Kvachkov, another well-known member of the Club. He is to be punished for discrediting the Russian army.

Of course, Strelkov crossed certain unwritten lines by making insulting remarks about Putin. But more importantly, the situation has changed.

Angry Patriots can justly be accused of aggressiveness and bloodthirstiness (and against the background of his comrades-in-arms, Strelkov is even one of the most moderate). Yet their main problem is not with their views per se, but in their monstrous political naivety and economic illiteracy, which just led them to where they are today. They did not understand that military operations have been conducted as competently and effectively as the current Russian state is capable of doing. They did not want to accept that the goals of this conflict had nothing to do with official statements (which, in any case, constantly contradicted themselves), or with beautiful dreams of restoring the Russian Empire or the USSR, about which the Angry Patriots continue to rave. The authorities, they say, have done everything right, and solved their problems as best they could. If you want it differently, then you need to change the state system and policy goals. But the trouble is, any sufficient changes would leave no room for either the current oligarchy, or for a “patriotic” agenda aimed at returning to an imaginary past.

A unique quality of the Russian elite is that it not only refuses to admit its mistakes, but also does not wish to be aware of the existence of objective problems (particularly those problems generated by its own actions). Instead of recognizing problems, the authorities only see threats, and they react to these threats in only one of two ways - by either lying on TV, or repression. The one, of course, is inseparable from the other.

The lies of modern Kremlin propagandists are radically different from what we saw in the USSR. In those days, propaganda was at least aimed at solving real strategic problems, at mobilizing support and public participation. Today, only an immediate justification of the current situation is required, while a change in course requires no explanation whatsoever, but only a refusal to recognize one’s

own past statements - they just didn't exist! The practice satirically described by Mr. Orwell in 1984 has become our daily routine. Nothing is required of society except political amnesia.

Strelkov and his Angry Patriots began to pose a threat not at the moment when they began to criticize the course of hostilities, but when they began to take seriously the rhetoric they'd been fed over the past year and a half.

We do not need to think about the regime's justification for why this whole operation was started. The authorities clearly don't take these seriously, as are clearly preparing for a major about-face. Officials at all different levels are well aware that it is necessary to leave the territory of Ukraine, the sooner the better. How this will be done, and most importantly by whom, we do not yet know. Putin clearly does not fit into these change of plans, but after the rebellion of Yevgeny Prigozhin, it is no secret to anyone that his reign is nearing its end. In the meantime, Angry Patriots can be silenced under the pretext of disrespect for the ruler. They have become much more dangerous than the left and liberal opposition, not because they offer some kind of alternative, or because they want or can change something, but because they stubbornly cling to the old agenda at the very moment when the ruling elites themselves are preparing to change this agenda. Angry Patriots create an ideological ferment for a conservative revolt. They cannot organize anything themselves, and they are not going to. But you never know how your own words will echo! What if people who have seen enough of TV will take the burdensome slogans that were proclaimed earlier too seriously? Respect for power in Russia today requires not support for its constantly changing official goals that contradict each other and contradict reality, but requires humility. A loyal public must be ready to be loyal to any decision. Then they will try to crush sincere patriots, admirers of the tsarist empire, militarists, nostalgic for the USSR, and simply those who memorized yesterday's mantras too tightly.

Yesterday's opposition may gloat today. But there is nothing good in this. No matter how wrong the Angry Patriots may be, no matter what terrible statements they make, they are punished not for their sins, not even for their principles, but for the fact that they have principles at all. Even if such measures herald an overdue change in policy, there is not the slightest reason to think that the next turn will be any more successful than the previous one. Problems are not only not solved, but they are not even recognized. Those in power are now beginning to understand that they still have to get out of the Ukrainian trap, into which they happily jumped a year and a half ago. But after that, the whole huge burden of other unresolved problems will fall on their - and our - heads.

However, if someone seriously tried to solve these problems in the sphere of economy, politics, management, social life, and international relations, there would be no Ukrainian campaign, no current situation, no Angry Patriots Club.

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