

It's Okay to Constructively Criticize Russia, Even President Putin Does It!

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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The Alt-Media's "politically correct" "glorification" of all things Russia-related is a "well-intended" but knee-jerk response to the rampant Russophobia of the Mainstream Media, but it nevertheless results in the generation of an overly "perfect" and therefore inaccurate version of the country that's at odds with reality and was just debunked by none other than President Putin himself.

Misreading Russia

President Putin's [keynote speech](#) to the nation last week naturally captured the attention of the global media, with the Mainstream Media (MSM) intensifying their relentless fear mongering campaign by over exaggerating decontextualized statements about Russia's hypersonic weapons program while the Alt-Media was swooning over the President's announcement and framed it as another "5D chess move" that forever put a stop to America's aggression abroad as per their hero's "master plan". Both reactions are hyperbolic in their own way and predicated on appealing to each of their respective audiences. The MSM has an interest in pushing the "Russia threat" narrative because it reinforces the "Russiagate" paranoia and "justifies" Trump's gargantuan military budget that he earlier unveiled as part of his Pentagon-centric "America First" foreign policy. As for the Alt-Media Community, many of its casual members, "formal" figures, and outlets (which does not refer to its publicly financed ones) have all but "deified" President Putin already, with the latter two doing so in order to appeal to the "wishful thinking" fantasies of the desperate masses in order to remain relevant by reinforcing their "flock's" groupthink.

Neither MSM nor Alt-Media, however, tended to pay much attention to the bulk of the President's speech focusing on domestic issues, as they each seem to have independently arrived at the same conclusion that such topics aren't "sexy" enough for their audience and isn't what the general public outside of Russia is interested in. In a sense, Russia might have proverbially dodged a bullet because there's a lot in its leader's speech that could be exploited by the MSM in the same way as the hypersonic weapons announcement was. At the same time, however, the argument can also be made that Alt-Media inadvertently deprived its audience of hearing about key facts, quotes, and strategies that they wouldn't otherwise be aware of had they not read the transcript of President Putin's extensive speech but which could have given them a more accurate view of the country that many of them have hitherto placed on par with "paradise". It's in the interests of reporting on and analyzing objective facts, whatever the consequences may be on one's own perception of Russia, that the present analysis was written.

Why Alt-Media Gets Russia Wrong

Russia, like any country in the world, isn't "perfect", but just like the object of anyone's desire, its devotees have a tendency of seeing it that way regardless, especially if they're not from there themselves but are attracted to it for geopolitical reasons or simply as a statement of principled opposition against the policies of their home country. Whatever the reason may be, and it's irrelevant in this context to conduct a psychoanalysis of this trend, the end result is that many people across the world who truly appreciate Russia's efforts to forge a [Multipolar World Order](#) that's fairer and more just than the unipolar one that it seeks to replace often overlook some of the country's unpleasant realities. This is more often than not due to both a combination of cognitive dissonance in refusing to accept that their "deified" "role model" doesn't rule over "paradise" and a deliberate move to avoid unintentionally playing into the runaway Russophobia that's come to dominate the general discussion. For however "noble" this may or may not be, it nevertheless has fed into a growing online cottage industry that wrongly portrays Russia as having no problems at all.

This artificial narrative has gone viral to the point where an increasing number of people in the Alt-Media Community adhere to it as though it's a "secular religion", complete with its own "churches" (certain websites and forums), "priests" (narrative writers and promoters), "congregation" (their fellow "believers"), and "heathens" (those who "sacrilegiously" question the "sanctity" of Russia's "infallibility"). There's nothing innately "wrong" with this so long as the "cult members" keep their beliefs to themselves and don't "proselytize", but the issue arises once they attempt to aggressively enforce their views onto others and/or disseminate them as indisputable "truths" that axiomatically form the basis of International Relations. The warped perception of Russia that's beginning to take shape in the Alt-Media Community as a result of this "secular religion's" growing popularity (provoked to a large degree as a response to the MSM's Russophobia) must urgently be corrected before it gets out of control and creates an Alternative Reality fully detached from real life. If those who want to truly understand and help Russia don't have an accurate idea of what it even is, then their plans and efforts will inevitably be for naught.

Take It From The Man Himself

Personal testimonies from Russians and foreigners living within the country about some of the state's shortcomings are no longer effective in conveying the truth of the situation, as they're merely dismissed as "Soros propaganda", "fake news", or "someone with an axe to grind", nor are factual news reports from Russia's publicly financed media outlets like TASS sufficient in this task either. The only way to destroy the dogmatic and ultimately dangerous thinking about Russia's "infallibility" that's taken hold of the Alt-Media Community is to use President Putin's own words to debunk this fake narrative once and for all, since it follows that "believers" will be forced to accept whatever their "deity" says no matter how much they'd otherwise resist doing so if the message came from anyone else. Accordingly, given the wealth of material presented in President Putin's recent landmark speech to the nation and the global attention that this event produced, it's fitting to quote from the man himself in drawing attention to some of the country's problems that are utterly ignored by the Alt-Media Community.

It should be prefaced that the following will intentionally focus on the constructive criticisms that President Putin made about his country in order to raise awareness about the true state of affairs in Russia, but that the country's leader impressively listed off a staggering amount of facts and strategies in proving that much progress that has already been made since the turn of the century. So as not to "preach to the choir", and understanding that the MSM audience will probably never read this analysis, the decision was made to engage in "shock

therapy” by quoting the parts of President Putin’s speech that will probably come off as “surprising” and “unbelievable” to the Alt-Media masses who have “deified” the man and proclaimed his country “perfect”. Again, the intention in doing so is to set the record straight about Russia so that those who follow its affairs can have the most accurate picture in their minds about the reality in which it operates. Accepting its shortcomings is key to understanding its limitations in the present day and accordingly forecasting its most likely actions in the future.

Having gotten the “caveats” out of the way, here are the most “politically incorrect” and “sacrilegious” messages that President Putin conveyed in his latest speech that powerfully shatter the Alt-Media delusions about Russia’s “infallibility”:

No More Procrastinating

Quote:

“We have no right to allow a situation when the stability that has been achieved would lead to complacency, all the more so as many problems remain unresolved...It is high time we take a number of tough decisions that are long overdue. We need to get rid of anything that stands in the way of our development and prevents people from fully unleashing their potential.”

Interpretation:

Russia has been holding off on doing what’s needed for far too long, and it can’t afford another moment to needlessly waste. The days of procrastinating because of perceived complacency (apathy, which is sometimes linked to the Russian cultural trait of “[avos](#)”) are over, and the country must recognize this before it’s too late.



Russia Is “Falling Behind”

Quote:

“It is not a question of someone conquering or devastating our land. No, that is not the danger. The main threat and our main enemy is the fact that we are falling behind. If we are unable to reverse this trend, we will fall even further behind. This is like a serious chronic disease that steadily saps the energy from the body and destroys it from within step by step. Quite often, this destructive process goes unnoticed by the body.”

Interpretation

External enemies are no longer Russia’s main threat because they’ll be kept at bay by the nation’s military and its recently unveiled hypersonic weaponry that restored the global strategic balance. Instead, the chief threat to the country is its lack of development. Russia hasn’t risen to the occasion in capitalizing off of new trends and therefore it’s falling behind. If it doesn’t correct its course, it’ll be destroyed before it even knows what happened to it.

The Employment Structure Is Broken

Quote:

"We need to upgrade the employment structure that has become inefficient and archaic, provide good jobs that motivate people, improve their well-being and help them uncover their talents. We need to create decent well-paid jobs."

Interpretation:

Russia has amazingly lifted millions of people out of poverty and slashed unemployment, but the jobs that its citizens have aren't inspiring them enough to fulfill their potential, both personally and economically. The whole structure is broken and must be reformed.

Pensioners Are Just As Poor As They're Made Out To Be

Quote:

"We will also strive to reduce the gap between the size of pensions and pre-retirement wages."

Interpretation:

Pensioners live in poverty and struggle to maintain respectable living standards.

Life Expectancy In Russia Is Still Less Than In The G7

Quote:

"Life expectancy levels have increased by over seven years and now total 73 years. But, of course, this is not enough either. Today, we must set an entirely new goal. By the end of the next decade, Russia must confidently join the club of countries posting a life expectancy of 80-plus years, which includes Japan, France and Germany."

Interpretation:

Russians shouldn't be satisfied that they now live longer than they did during the chaotic 1990s when life expectancy was "just over 65 years, with men's life expectancy falling below 60 years", but should aspire to match and even surpass the length of life that their G7 peers enjoy if they're serious about giving the new generation a better future.



Housing Is Too Expensive And Corrupt

Quote:

"Urban renovation should be supported by the introduction of state-of-the-art construction technology and materials, modern architectural solutions, digital technology for social services, transport and utilities sectors. Among other things, this would make the housing and utilities sector more transparent and efficient, so that people receive quality services at a reasonable cost."

Interpretation:

It's not just enough to build new and better homes for Russians, but this process must be more "transparent" (a euphemism for "free from corruption"), and people mustn't be charged a proverbial "arm and a leg" for buying a home or paying for utilities. Moreover, everything must be efficient, which evidently isn't the case right now otherwise the President wouldn't stress this point.

Local Bureaucrats Ignore The People's Will And Must Be Held To Account By Their Constituents

Quote:

"Of course, a lot will depend on municipal and local authorities and whether they will be receptive to new ideas. The ability to respond to the diverse needs of various generations, including families with children, retirees and people with disabilities, will also be instrumental. People must have a decisive say in the future of their cities and villages. We have discussed this many times, including at meetings with heads of municipalities. Today, I am not saying it just to check the box. I ask you to bring it to the attention of decision-makers at all levels."

Interpretation:

President Putin knows that he's only one man and his words can only do so much in a country that inherited millions of lackadaisical bureaucrats from the communist era, many of whom are still working within state structures and may have even entrenched their outdated and counterproductive mentalities into their "workplace culture". Russia will not develop and catch up to the West (and increasingly, Asia as well) at the pace that's urgently needed unless the population holds these figures to account by doing more than just voting. They need to resort to "bottom-up" pressure when needed.

Not Enough Russians Have Their Own Home

Quote:

"I understand how important it is for everyone, for every family, to have their own house, their own home. I know this is the problem of problems in Russia. It lingers from decade to decade. How many times governments promised and tried, sincerely tried to resolve it. But we can and must do it now...I see three key factors for increasing the affordability of housing. The first is the growth of people's incomes. I have spoken about this in the past, and we must ensure this. Next, a decrease in mortgage interest rates and, of course, an increased supply in the housing market."

Interpretation :

Russians, just like anyone else in the world, dream of having their own homes and moving away from their families once they reach a certain age or get married. This is unfortunately very difficult to do, especially in Moscow and other big cities due to the excessive costs involved, inadequate compensation from their jobs, dysfunctional financial system, and endemic corruption that makes everything worse.



The Financial System Must Be Fixed

Quote:

"In December, the average interest rate on ruble loans for the first time decreased to below 10 percent. We know, of course, that loan terms are individual and may differ from one borrower to another. But we must continue to lower the average interest rate to 7-8 percent. We held long discussions on the figure I should say here. I am sure that the target figure should be 7 percent. In the next six years, mortgage loans must become accessible to the majority of Russian families, working people and young professionals."

Interpretation:

Interest rates are prohibitively high for the majority of Russians, thus making it difficult for them to take out loans, which in turn negatively impacts on their spending habits in boosting the economy through consumer purchases and real estate, for example. The financial system must therefore be fixed in order to make loans more accessible to the populace and stimulate steady economic growth within the country, as this could help remedy some of the problems that Russia is presently experiencing in housing and other spheres.

The Property Tax Is Unfair And Unaffordable

Quote:

"I also propose revising the personal property tax. It must be fair and affordable. Some people, including those in this hall, tried to convince me that this tax should be based on the market value of property. They told me that using obsolete valuation by the Technical Inventory Bureau is an anachronism. But it turned out in reality that cadastral value, which should be comparable to market value, often exceeded it by far. This was not the agreement. And the people did not expect this from us. We must revise the mechanism for calculating the tax and also the calculation of the cadastral value of property. One way or another, it must not exceed the real market value. All decisions regarding this must be taken without delay in the first six months of this year."

Interpretation:

Be it through corruption, inept bureaucratic inertia, inefficiency, misunderstandings of complex bureaucratic law, or whatever else, the property tax that citizens are required to pay is evidently excessive and doesn't correlate with the market value of the property. This has caused a lot of frustration among the people and resentment towards the authorities, undermining the public's trust in the state. If Russia is to develop and expand its housing market by making it more accessible to the average person, then it also has to correspondingly improve upon this issue as well.

The Condition With Local Roads Is "Completely Unacceptable"

Quote:

"We have overhauled federal roads. Now we must modernise regional and local routes. I am not going to talk about the figures now, but I know them. It is a fact that federal roads have mostly been renovated. The situation is somewhat worse with regional

roads, and it is completely unacceptable with local roads.”

Interpretation:

Connectivity is one of the buzzwords of the 21st century, and while Russia’s overhaul of federal roads will enable it to more efficiently link Western Europe with East Asia, the situation with regional and local routes remains lacking. The latter, in fact, leave a lot to be desired, which President Putin believes is “completely unacceptable” and must be addressed as soon as possible.



Domestic Air Connectivity Must Be Improved

Quote:

“We will renovate and expand the network of regional airports across Russia. In six years, half of the regions will be connected between each other by direct flights. The situation where you had to make a connection in Moscow when flying to a neighbouring region will become a thing of the past. We are already working on this.”

Interpretation:

As surprising as it may sound, President Putin is correct – sometimes Russians have to first fly far away to Moscow en route to a neighboring region, which might sound absurd but reflects the reality of the contemporary situation. The government is making progress on improving this, but it still remains a time-consuming annoyance.

Public Wages Risk Stagnating

Quote

“We must not lose the positions we have already attained. I am referring to the level of wages. Wages in the public sector must continue growing, as well as the quality of work and skills of the people working in healthcare, education and other areas that define people’s wellbeing.”

Interpretation:

President Putin is worried that public wages might stagnate, thus inhibiting the country’s growth by depriving its public employees of the incentive that most people need to improve the quality of their work and skills. Although unstated, the solution is for the state to commit more money to this sphere.

Some Administrative Hospital Changes Have Been Disastrous

Quote:

“In recent years, we have optimised the hospital network in the country. This was done in order to build an effective healthcare system. However, in some case, I have to say this today, too many administrative changes were introduced: hospitals in small towns

and villages have been closed. No one proposed an alternative, and people were left with practically no medical aid. The only advice they were given was, "Go to the city to get treatment there." I must say that this is unacceptable. They forgot about the main thing: the people, their interests and needs, equal opportunities and justice."

Interpretation:

Almost as unbelievable as having to sometimes fly halfway across the country to Moscow in order to reach a neighboring Russian region is the fact that some small towns and villages don't have any hospitals. The locals are instead forced to travel elsewhere in order to receive healthcare services, and the local officials contemptuously don't care about their plight. Like President Putin said, "this is unacceptable", and it goes along with his call for people to hold bureaucrats to account beyond election season.

Environmental Challenges Still Persist

Quote:

"We have tightened environmental requirements for companies, which should reduce industrial pollution. Starting in 2019, 300 industrial enterprises with a negative impact on the environment must convert to the best available environmentally friendly technology, and all enterprises in the high environmental risk group must do this starting in 2021. We had a go at this problem many times, and every time our companies complained about the difficulties involved. There is no going back now. I want everyone to know that we will not delay this programme any longer."

Interpretation:

Pollution is a problem in Russia, and the government seems to have previously caved in to corporate pressure in delaying the enforcement of various requirements. That's not going to happen anymore, and President Putin made it clear that he's serious about enforcing new standards and ensuring that they're complied with on time. This might even be an oblique message to the "oligarchy" that wields enormous influence in this sphere.



Not Everyone Has Reliable Access To Drinking Water

Quote:

"We must seriously improve the quality of drinking water. In some small towns, water is only available for several hours a day. We must use defence industry technologies to settle these problems."

Interpretation:

This might strike some people as shocking, but the fact is that a (presumably small) portion of Russians don't have reliable access to drinking water, a problem stereotypically associated with countries of the "Global South".

Citizenship Must Be Easier To Attain:

Quote:

"I also propose creating the most convenient and attractive conditions for talented young people from other countries to enroll at our universities. They already come to study here. But we also need to create conditions for the best foreign graduates of our universities to work in Russia. This fully applies to foreign scientists and qualified specialists. I think we need to seriously improve the procedure for granting Russian citizenship. The focus should be on the foreign nationals Russia needs: on young, healthy and well-educated people. For them, we need to create a simplified system for obtaining Russian citizenship."

Interpretation:

Russia has one of the strictest migration policies in the world, which has unfortunately prevented it from capitalizing on the enormous foreign talent that arrives in the country every year to learn. Once these students graduate, they mostly leave Russia and never have any opportunity to return unless it's on a tourist visa, which is a pity for those who sincerely love the country and want to settle down there. One of the reasons why the West was so successful in the past is that it was able to flexibly incorporate foreign experts into its framework by offering them citizenship, something that Russia has finally realized that it needs to do as well.

Labor Productivity Is Still Lagging

Quote:

"First of all, it is important to increase labour productivity on a new technological, managerial and personnel basis. We are still lagging noticeably behind in terms of this indicator. It is necessary to ensure that labour productivity in medium-sized and large enterprises of basic industries, such as manufacturing, construction, transport, agriculture and trade, grows at a rate of at least 5 percent per year, which will allow us to reach the level of the leading world economies by the end of the next decade."

Interpretation:

Russia's transition away from its erstwhile energy exporting-dependency and towards a more sustainable real-sector economy has already made phenomenal progress but its full development will still take some time. It's absolutely imperative that the country improve its labor productivity in order to become competitive with the world's leading economies and then ultimately remain so, otherwise it will continue to lag behind them and undermine President Putin's comprehensive vision of Trump-like socio-economic reform in Russia.



Post-Soviet Russia's Economy Is Still Too State-Controlled

Quote:

"The state must gradually reduce its share in the economy. In this connection, it has to be noted that the state has taken over a number of financial assets in an effort to revive the banking sector. These initiatives are headed in the right direction and have my support. That said, these assets should be put on the market and sold without delay."

Interpretation:

Russia must open up its economy to private investment and allow businessmen to exert more influence over the country's overall dynamics. The state has previously provided support to the financial sector, but it's now time for the government to give up its control over these said assets and sell them on the open market as soon as possible. To be succinct, Russia's economy [has to liberalize](#) sooner than later.

Corrupt Officials And Cops Are Intimidating Businesses

Quote:

"We need to get rid of everything that enables corrupt officials and law enforcement officers to pressure businesses. The Criminal Code should not serve as a tool for settling corporate disputes. These should be referred to administrative and arbitration courts."

Interpretation:

Under no circumstances should corrupt officials and cops abuse the law, especially when this holds back economic development. It sets a terrible precedent and is completely contrary to everything that President Putin stands for. Russia cannot improve its international position unless this changes.

Legal Double Standards Must Be Done Away With

Quote:

"At the same time, criminal law should be strictly enforced in the case of offences infringing upon the interests of citizens or society or violating economic freedoms. I am referring to offences against property and assets held by citizens, illegal takeovers, competition law violations, tax evasion and embezzlement of public funds."

Interpretation:

Corruption is eating away at Russia's efficiency and also costing it untold sums of money that could otherwise be invested into the economy for everyone's benefit. Nobody should ever be above the law, but unfortunately some people have been for quite a while now and it's such a widespread problem that President Putin used his national podium to address it.

The Government Could Do "A Lot" More To Help Businesses

Quote:

"Now I would like to address all representatives of Russian business, those who run their own small business, a family enterprise or a farm, an innovative company or a large industrial enterprise. I know, I know we still have a lot to do."

Interpretation:

One of President Putin's main themes in his speech was to emphasize that the government has finally heard the complaints of the citizenry and will be responding to their problems. The structural shortcomings that have held Russia back since independence won't be allowed to persist.

Some Government Officials Are Unfocused And Inefficient

Quote:

“Government officials of all levels should be interested in improving their efficiency and be strictly focused on obtaining concrete results...This line of thinking should be used to rebuild the public service system, where appropriate, and to introduce project work methods.”

Interpretation :

President Putin boldly said what no other official would previously dare to say in public, and it's that part of the public service system must be “rebuilt” because it's broken beyond repair. To that end, like the Russian leader suggested, officials absolutely have to become more focused and efficient.



Concluding Thoughts

All of the abovementioned messages, quotes, and interpretations provide raw insight into the real situation in Russia today, which is that of a rising Great Power that has nevertheless been held back by many serious domestic difficulties – some of them systemic – but which finally recognizes what needs to urgently change in order for it to catch up with its competitors and succeed. None of the points that were made should ever be abused to denigrate Russia, nor should anyone exaggerate them in order to fit a decontextualized narrative about its level of socio-economic, institutional, and infrastructural development, but these “inconvenient facts” also shouldn't be omitted from any objective analysis about the country and its capabilities because their absence prevents people from devising the appropriate solutions to fixing them.

Russia has come a long way since 1991, but it still has a ways to go too, as President Putin emphasized, and it's precisely because of his “political incorrectness” in calling out his country's problems that he's the best suited for tackling them. His striking example in fearlessly addressing Russia's problems should serve as the perfect example to all of its international friends that it's absolutely okay to constructively criticize the country so long as one's intentions are to identify what's wrong in order to fix it. Overemphasizing various shortcomings in order to advance a hostile narrative is unacceptable and manipulative, but if Alt-Media sincerely aspires to accurately reflect the true state of affairs in Russia today, then it must inevitably broach this topic in a measured and respectful way.

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Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare.

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About the author:

Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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