

Laughter Over the Left Shoulder at Russia's Tragedy

The West is trying to undermine Russia's historic achievements by demeaning and vilifying its people, culture, religion, and way of life. Why?

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The recent appearance in some Western media sources of insults, jokes, and unfounded accusations in response to tragedies affecting the Russian people is shocking in its coarseness and barbarity, disturbing in its lack of compassion for fellow human beings, and irresponsible in its professional ethics.

Concerning the suicide bombing in the St. Petersburg metro of 3 April 2017, in which 13 people were killed and 45 wounded, an article from *Consortium News* cites numerous examples of high-profile individuals and media sources who blamed the bombing on Pres. Putin (ostensibly in order to increase his power or to deflect attention from last week's very likely foreign-staged protests in Russia against Prime Minister Medvedev).¹ Such reasoning defies logic and is nothing more than mean-spirited and ideologically-infused. Blaming the overwhelmingly popular leader of a sovereign country for terrorist attacks that have brought suffering to that country's people can benefit only those seeking to undermine the people's support for their president. Clearly the misguided and ill-wishing pundits want to drive a wedge between Putin and Russia. And to what end?

Terrorist attacks have occurred in recent years in several cities in Germany, the UK, Belgium, and France. If the mainstream media were to write about and accuse the leaders of those European countries of masterminding terrorism against their own people, there would be a sustained outcry. This would be classified as racism, prejudice, unacceptable to "freedom-loving people." But it is inconvenient for the West to promote anything but outdated stereotypes of Russia, to frame any incident in Russia as somehow worse than if the same incident were to occur in a European country.

Another example of the West's insensitivity and lack of compassion, described in the same *Consortium News* article, relates to the airline crash on 27 December 2016 near Sochi, Russia; this flight carried many members of the Alexandrov Ensemble (Red Army Choir). The beloved, distinguished, and internationally known ensemble consisting of Russian singers, dancers, and musicians brought ethereally beautiful and noble-spirited performances to people all over the world in fine acts of cultural diplomacy. In the air tragedy 64 members of the ensemble were killed; they were traveling to perform for Russian troops stationed in Latakia, Syria. *The Hill* website noted the cynicism and inhumanity of France's *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, describing three cartoons the *Hebdo* editors printed about the plane crash:

One cartoon shows a choir member singing "AAAAAA" as the plane is going down. The caption says the Russian choir has expanded its repertoire.

Another cartoon illustrates the whole choir singing to fish at the bottom of the Black Sea with the downed plane in the background. The caption reads, "Red Army choir conquers a new audience."

A third cartoon shows the plane nosediving with the words: "Bad news ... Putin was not on board."ⁱⁱ

This is not humor; it is pure evil. Would the U.S. find amusing jokes created by European countries about the bombing of the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the lives lost on 11 September 2001?

The West's double standard regarding Russia goes back at least as far as World War II, when Russia lost more people than all other countries combined, and Russia was treated by Hitler far worse than he treated the European countries he invaded. J.T. Dykman explains:

Unlike his earlier conquests, Hitler ordered his generals in 1941 to conduct the war against the USSR as one of annihilation rather than capture and coercion . . . The results of Hitler's beliefs concerning the Jewish populations is widely known because of the Holocaust, but his dark convictions concerning peoples he called Slavs are much less well known in the west. Every reputable biography of Hitler and his own writings and speeches confirm that he regarded them as subhuman . . . This was not just the looting of art or precious metals that went on in Europe; this was stripping the land for depopulation by starvation.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the 1990s, after the Soviet government decided to disband the Soviet Union and evolve a more democratic style of government, the economic reforms imposed on Russia by then U.S. Pres. Bill Clinton, with the acquiescence of Russian Pres. Boris Yeltsin, were so severe that no American would ever have accepted them. The "economic genocide" that resulted has been called worse than the Great Depression in the U.S. of the late 1920s and early 1930s. According to medical authorities in Russia at that time, the nation was on the verge of a "demographic apocalypse." Stephen F. Cohen termed the effects of the U.S.'s actions in the 1990s towards Russia "the literal demodernization of a twentieth-century country":

When the infrastructures of production, technology, science, transportation, heating, and sewage disposal disintegrate; when tens of millions of people do not receive earned salaries, some 75 percent of society lives below or barely above the subsistence level, and millions of them are actually starving; when male life expectancy has plunged as low as fifty-eight years, malnutrition has become the norm among schoolchildren . . . when even highly educated professionals must grow their own food in order to survive and well over half the nation's economic transactions are barter . . .^{iv}

These policies brought about an enormous tragedy and seemed designed to destroy, rather than rebuild a country struggling to make a transition to a more viable political system. If a foreign government were to impose such drastic policies on the American people, one can only imagine the result. Once again, a double standard with respect to Russia: what is acceptable for Russia would be unacceptable for the U.S.

The question arises whether the U.S. and Western Europe view Russia in racist terms, as

somehow less ‘civilized’ or not as ‘advanced.’ The West’s comparisons usually elevate materialism and money, while not considering as equally or more valuable the spiritual or educational levels, or human values, of Russian society.

But the real irritant is that Russia will not bow down to Western dictates. The very fact that Western sanctions have not crippled and destroyed Russia makes Western leaders irate. In a surprising, though understandable way, the sanctions have helped the Russian home-grown production of goods to flourish. After all, Russia must make its own decisions for the survival of its people. It is the West’s growing irrelevance to Russia, which it itself caused, that enrages its governments.

Another irritant to the West is that, despite NATO’s expansion, the Russian government has maintained a patient and consistent posture, refusing to plunge the nation into another war: World War II and the 1990s were enough. NATO in its provocations right at Russia’s doorstep—on the territory on which Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941—rubs salt in the wounds felt by the Russian people. Can the U.S. not understand how it would react if an enemy, say, from Mars, were to position tanks, weapons, and other war materiel along Canada’s southern border? Can the U.S. not imagine how it would react if a combined naval fleet of multiple countries hostile to it were to institute and increase naval drills in the Gulf of Mexico—as NATO currently practices and plans to increase naval drills in the Black Sea, one of the cornerstones of Russia’s national security? It is so obvious. The politicians in decision-making positions are blinded by their lust for power, the military-industrial complex whose lobbies support them, and what has to be a deep-seated prejudice against Russia—Russophobia.

Economic and financial sanctions do adversely affect people, their standard of living, their ability to buy food, medicine, household goods. They are not just a theoretical proposition, a political tool aimed at specific targets. But despite the fact that sanctions hurt the Russian people, they live by more than “bread alone” and desire to be treated with dignity and empathy: the deeper injury inflicted by other countries’ laughter and ridicule at their suffering is longer-lasting.

What Western Europe, and in particular the U.S. government, are in effect trying to do is undermine Russia’s historic achievements by demeaning and vilifying its people, culture, religion, and way of life. The reader can only wonder why.

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Notes

i <https://consortiumnews.com/2017/04/06/the-ugly-underbelly-of-russia-gate/>

ii <http://thehill.com/homenews/media/312154-russians-slam-charlie-hebdo-for-plane-crash-cartoons>

iii http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/about/living_history/wwii_soviet_experience.dot

iv Stephen F. Cohen, Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia (W.W. Norton, 2001), 194, 169-170.

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