



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on February 8, 2011

## Political Repression On the Rise in Russia

Boris Nemtsov is a name that may not seem significant to those actively engaged in the struggle for liberty and freedom against statism and oppression. His fate is one which has gone largely unnoticed by those in the West, but is a story that reads like a Cold War thriller, as Nemtsov is the latest high-profile victim of persecution by the Russian Federation and its head of state, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.



Nemtsov was formerly the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia from 1997 to 1998, and is one of the founders of Russia's only true right-wing party, the Union of Right Forces. He is also considered "Enemy Number One" of Vladimir Putin and his regime of heinous and deceptive political maneuverings and machinations, as he has been an ardent critic of Putin's government.

His plight is not only an indication of the fundamental lack of individual freedoms in Russia, but also demonstrates that Soviet tactics of resorting to any means of denouncing one's political opponents are still a vital aspect of Russian political life. Nemtsov lingered in the dark chasms of his modern day gulag, Moscow's Tverskoy District Prison, for over two weeks, all for the "crime" of criticizing Putin's government and expressing political and economic beliefs vastly different than that of Putin.

Putin is the de facto leader of the United Russia bloc, which encompasses 315 of the 450 seats in the Russian Duma, and is known for a record of cracking down on his political opponents, including Boris Nemtsov and countless others. Exposing Putin's retention of Soviet-era human rights abuses was the late journalist [Anna Politkovskaya](#), who was murdered on Putin's birthday, in what murdered KGB defector Alexander Litvinenko described as a "Putin-sanctioned contract killing." In her book *Putin's Russia*, she describes the ruthless authoritarianism characteristic of Putin's rule over Russia, including charges of corruption, graft, repression of dissidents, and even war crimes.

A December 2009 article in [Bloomberg World News](#) reports that dissidents believe that the repression under Putin's Russia is actually **greater** than under the Soviet Union:

"We live in the Soviet Union, only a modernized, improved one," Sergei Kovalyov, 79, said at a conference in Moscow marking the 20th anniversary of the death of dissident and Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrei Sakharov.

There were "much fewer" killings of dissidents during the communist era, said Lyudmila Alexeyeva, 82, who was forced to emigrate to the U.S. in the 1970s because of her anti-Soviet views.

Legal pressure on government critics such as billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky, in jail for more



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than six years, has replaced the Soviet gulag, said Kovalyov, who served time in prison camps for his opposition to the Soviet regime.”

It is within this context of brutality that Boris Nemtsov found himself under the repressive thumb of the state. Nemtsov’s “crime” was that he was a founder and the leader of a party which Putin, a former KGB agent, finds repugnant.

The Union of Right Forces currently has no representation, and its platform finds itself at the opposite end of “Putinism,” which includes among its tenets the belief that “Stalin and the Soviet regime were successful in creating a great country,” according to [dissident](#) Irina Flinge.

The party is committed to western-style free-market capitalism, laissez faire economics, privatization, and a foreign policy that favors the West and closer relations with the United States. The party also opposes the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and opposes the authoritarian policies and human rights abuses associated with Vladimir Putin.

It also believes that the Russian National Anthem should be the anthem “Patriotic Song” which was used from 1991 to 2002, and should not be the Soviet National Anthem, which, in 2002, Putin had reinstated, albeit with some lyrical modifications. It counts among its members and leaders many of Russia’s new capitalist class of entrepreneurs and the middle class, and describes itself as follows, in its [platform](#):

The Union of Right Forces (SPS) consistently stands for liberal principles in politics and economy. The purposes of SPS are assistance to strengthening of civil society and democratic legal state in Russia, following the constitutional principles of federalism and local self-government, promotion of democratic and liberal values in public mentality, development of democratic and liberal reforms.

The party is also the Russian member of the International Democratic Union (IDU), the international alliance of classically-liberal, free market, and center-right political parties, including the Republican National Committee (RNC).

Nemtsov was born to two Jewish parents in the height of the Cold War, and in 1991, he was elected Governor of the Nizhny Novgorod region, on a platform of startling reforms, including the implementation of a wide-ranging, chaotic free market reform program which resulted in significant economic growth for the region, earning praise from former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who visited the region in 1993.

During the 2004 elections in Ukraine, he supported the pro-Western, anti-communist candidate Viktor Yushchenko, and he later became one of the leaders of the “Putin Must Go” movement, for which he would suffer the wrath of the state. He was first arrested in November 2007 for his protests against Putin’s political repression, and was again put under arrest on December 31, 2010 for his opposition to Putin and his policies, and his support of policies radically differing from those of Putin.

Nemtsov is a true prisoner of conscience, and his cause has been taken up by Amnesty International and other human rights groups. According to [The Economist](#), Nemtsov did not even violate any Russian laws or regulations amid his protests:

The mistreatment of him seems pointlessly malevolent. He poses no threat to the government. The rally was authorized and he was on his way home when the police stopped him. He was charged with disobeying the police and swearing, despite video-footage that showed him asking the police



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to “calm down”. A judge would not admit this as evidence. The court disregarded witness statements supporting him and would not let him appeal against his conviction. What is this about? Presumably it is a display of brute power by Vladimir Putin, Russia’s prime minister.

Boris Nemtsov was imprisoned as yet another casualty of the bitter yoke of Soviet oppression, and his plight, as well as the plight of all other persecuted dissidents in Russia, vindicates the claims of those who believe that the Soviet power apparatus never collapsed, but has merely assumed new and befuddling forms, such as KGB defector Anatoliy Golitsyn, author of *New Lies for Old* and *The Perestroika Deception*.

His sentence lasted for 15 days, beginning on January 2 of this year, after being imprisoned at a New Year’s Eve rally in opposition to Putin’s regime, for the “crime” of “disobedience.” Adding insult to injury, the political prisoner was defamed by Putin, who in addition to imprisoning Nemtsov without any substantial cause, accused him of stealing billions of rubles while in office in the 1990s. [RIA Novosti](#) reports that on his December 16, 2010 radio call-in show, Putin alleged that Nemtsov and other opposition figures would “sell out the entire country” if they ever gained power, a direct attack against the perceived “Western, Capitalist enemy.”

One could hear from Vladimir Putin the same rhetoric heard from Vladimir Lenin.

Putin is accusing Nemtsov of what many have accused him of, a pathetic use of the Freudian defense mechanism known as projection, in which individuals accuse others of what they themselves are guilty of.

In addition, Nemtsov had released an expository report on Putin and his pernicious network of oligarchs entitled “Putin: Results after Ten Years,” highlighting Putin’s cronyism, corruption, and corporatism (as previously highlighted in Marshall Goldman’s *Petrostate: Putin, Power, and the New Russia*), and in a bizarre, Orwellian moment, shortly after his release from prison, Nemtsov was [fined](#) for defamation against the state in a suit brought by Putin ally Gennady Timchenko. The Zamoskvoretsky District Court in Moscow ordered Nemtsov to pay a fine of 100,000 rubles (\$3,400), in punishment for charges of libel in drawing attention to Putin’s corruption and abuses against freedom.

Not only does one go to jail for criticizing the Russian government, but after their imprisonment, they are further punished for “defaming the state” for criticizing the same regime which persecutes them in the first place.

Indeed, several *WikiLeaks* cables indicate that Russia is still a “Virtual Mafia State” under the oppressive thumb of Putin. [The First Post](#) reports that according to Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Russia’s government is “an oligarchy run by the security services,” and “Putin understands that under the system he has created there is no real rule of law and that at any time anyone can be arrested or businesses destroyed.”

Another cable reveals that according to Spanish Special Prosecutor for Corruption and Organized Crime, Jose “Pepe” Grinda Gonzalez, Russia is a “mafia state,” in which “one cannot differentiate between the activities of the government and [organized crime] groups”.

According to [The Guardian](#):

Arms trafficking, money laundering, personal enrichment, protection for gangsters, extortion and kickbacks, suitcases full of money and secret offshore bank accounts in Cyprus: the cables paint a bleak picture of a political system in which bribery alone totals an estimated \$300 Billion a year,



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and in which it is often hard to distinguish between the activities of the government and organized crime.

The cables also reveal that law enforcement agencies such as the police, spy agencies and the prosecutor's office operate a de facto protection racket for criminal networks, and that rampant bribery acts like a parallel tax system for the personal enrichment of police, officials and the KGB's successor, the federal security service (FSB).

Such criminal tactics are still the guiding force behind Russia's governance, and it is this mafia mentality which not only inspired such ruthless dictators as Lenin and Stalin, but still continues to inspire Vladimir Putin, a former KGB official.

Boris Nemtsov is merely the latest victim of Russian kleptocracy, and his imprisonment and the state's subsequent defamation suit against him paint a very bleak picture, albeit one which demonstrates what has been long known by many defectors and defenders of freedom the world over: the Soviet Union and its heinous tactics continue to flourish, well into the 21st century.

*Photo: Opposition leader Boris Nemtsov faces the media in Moscow on Jan. 17, 2011, after being released from detention: AP Images*



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