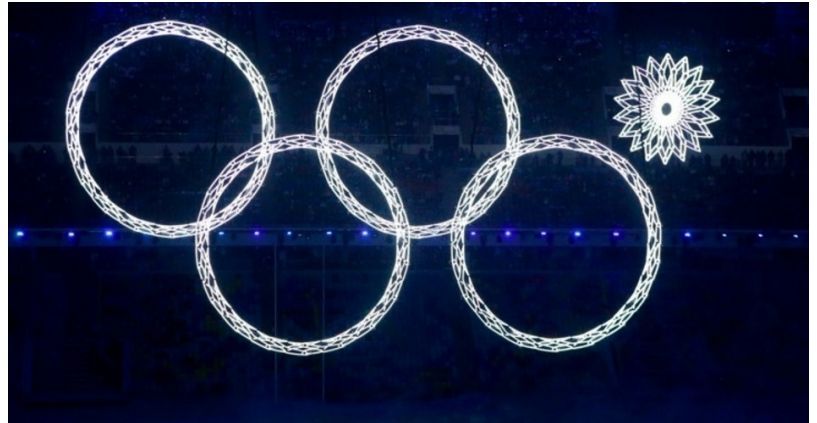




Written by [Alex Newman](#) on February 11, 2014

## Sochi Olympics: Propaganda and Theft Amid PR “Disaster” for Putin

Before the \$51 billion games began, the increasingly discredited establishment media tried desperately to make the Sochi Olympics about homosexuals and a Russian law banning sexual propaganda to minors. The real stories, though, were largely overlooked — at least until Olympians began arriving with cameras and Twitter accounts. Now, as fears grow, the games are being variously portrayed as a joke, a propaganda stunt, a bonanza of corruption, and a serious danger — and in some cases, a testament to the supposed glory of former KGB man Vladimir Putin and the Russia he rules.



Almost incredibly, some elements of the misleadingly labeled “mainstream” U.S. press were busy glorifying Russia and its Soviet past, prompting outrage and ridicule among analysts. “Russia transcends. Through every stage of its story, it’s resisted any notion of limitation,” swooned Peter Dinklage on NBC during the Olympics’ opening ceremony, omitting any mention of communist gulags or mass murder. The blood-drenched revolution that led to the creation of one of the most barbaric slave states, Dinklage continued, “birthed one of modern history’s pivotal experiments.”

Separately, NBC’s Bob Costas is being ridiculed for portraying Putin as some sort of exalted “peace” maker. “Just in the past year, Putin brokered a deal to allow Syria to avoid a U.S. military strike by giving up its chemical weapons,” he said as pictures of Putin appeared on the screen. “And helped bring Iran to the negotiating table over its nuclear intentions.” Critics said NBC was sounding more and more like a Russian propaganda network or a “Putin cheerleader,” with analysts pointing out that it is hardly the first time NBC has deceived viewers by painting a rosy picture of Russia’s barbaric Soviet era.

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Outside of NBC programming, though — where the biggest pseudo-controversy appears to be a law banning sexual propaganda to children — reality was slowly setting in. Surrounded by pictures of “President” Putin — similar to familiar sights across Third World dictatorships — journalists and athletes from around the world have been providing non-stop photographic evidence that the 2014 Olympics are a “disaster.” BBC Moscow bureau chief Kevin Bishop, for example, sent out a tweet saying that while his hotel did not yet have the floor finished, it did have a picture of Putin (apparently not suitable for sleeping).

The problems are so bad — many have been tweeted with the popular hash tag #SochiProblems — that the Winter Games are already being dubbed the “most corrupt” Olympics ever. The plumbing and the toilets do not work. The hotels and infrastructure are crumbling. There are not enough pillows. Corruption is running rampant, along with stray dogs and cats. Yoghurt for U.S. athletes is stuck in limbo. Major security concerns, including “instantly hacked” laptops and the threat of terrorism, refuse



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to subside.

According to news reports, by the time visitors to Sochi connect their laptops or phones to Russian networks, it is probably too late to protect the data. "Visitors to Russia can expect to be hacked," reported NBC's Brian Williams before the games. "And as Richard Engel found out upon his arrival there, it's not a matter of if, but when." The U.S. State Department has also warned that Sochi attendees should have no expectation of privacy — even in their hotel rooms.

Journalists on the scene had harsh words about Sochi, too. "My hotel has no water," tweeted Stacy St. Clair with the *Chicago Tribune*. "If restored, the front desk says, 'do not use on your face because it contains something very dangerous.'" Those posts were followed by a picture of glasses filled with a suspiciously colored liquid. "Water restored, sorta," she added. Yahoo! Sports columnist Dan Wetzel, meanwhile, was on Twitter trying to exchange three light bulbs for a single working door handle. "This offer is real," he tweeted.

Responding to all of the negative publicity about the games, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak, responsible for the Olympics, made a startling claim. "We have surveillance video from the hotels that shows people turn on the shower, direct the nozzle at the wall and then leave the room for the whole day," he was quoted as saying by the *Wall Street Journal*. Despite later denials by Russian officials, numerous reports suggested the statement was an admission that authorities were secretly spying on guests with secret cameras — even in bathrooms.

While NBC was glorifying Russia and sports enthusiasts and media consumers from around the world were laughing at the humorous pictures, analysts suggested that well-connected members of the Russian political class were laughing all the way to the bank. Contrary to the widespread ridicule of the Sochi games as a PR "disaster" for the Kremlin, Moscow-based law and business teacher Mark Nuckols noted that for Russia's "kleptocratic" rulers, the Olympics have been a bonanza — "an immense success."

"Of the \$50 billion that has been spent for the games, it is widely estimated that as much as \$30 billion was stolen," Nuckols observed in an opinion piece published by the *San Francisco Gate*. "And of the other \$20 billion, it is likely that \$10 billion to \$15 billion was simply wasted through incompetence or in overcoming the severe challenges of staging a winter sports event in a subtropical setting." Sochi, of course, is a fairly warm sea-side resort once popular with mass-murderer Joseph Stalin.

The real pain, he said, would be felt by ripped-off citizens, who have grown accustomed to lawless government plundering the nation's wealth. "In short, as much as 90 percent of the spending on Sochi was pure waste and graft. And from the Kremlin's perspective, this is highly cost-effective," Nuckols wrote. "Sochi was grand theft from the beginning, and the Winter Games merely the pretext for the crime."

Even former officials have decried the theft and widespread embezzlement of public funds. Boris Nemtsov, who served as "deputy prime minister" in the Boris Yeltsin regime, estimated that some 15 percent of the budget had gone to companies owned by just two Putin cronies, the Rotenberg brothers. "This is a festival of corruption," he said, adding that the Olympics should have cost half of what they did. "The remainder consists of embezzlement and kickbacks."

Of course, many activists and analysts assumed that Putin would seek to use the Sochi Olympics as a propaganda opportunity to promote his regime and the supposedly "new and improved" Russia. Apparently, at least in the eyes of Russian dissidents, the U.S. television network NBC has been helping



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out the cause, even serving as what critics said was a “mouthpiece” for Kremlin talking points.

“Everyone needs diversion, and sports are one of the best,” wrote Garry Kasparov, a prominent Russian activist and chess grandmaster. “But when sports are exploited for authoritarian propaganda, it’s important to resist.” He also joked that to represent Putin coming to power as part of the Russian history segment in the opening ceremony, “all spectators will be searched and interrogated.” NBC, he added, was doing “propaganda, not sports” with its slobbering coverage of Russia and Putin amid the games.

It appears that a clever operation aimed at enriching Putin cronies while building up the image of Putin’s government via propaganda has been a mixed success. Yes, huge amounts of taxpayer resources were embezzled by kleptocrats. And yes, critics say NBC and other establishment media outlets have been playing their pathetic role as Putin “cheerleaders” fairly well. At the same time, though, anybody following the news about the games can see that Sochi has become what countless analysts are now referring to as a “disaster.”

Perhaps Pyongyang or Havana 2018 would work well?

*Photo of the Olympic Rings during the Feb. 7 opening ceremony, when one of the rings failed to open: AP Images*

*Alex Newman, a foreign correspondent for The New American, is normally based in Europe. He can be reached at [anewman@thenewamerican.com](mailto:anewman@thenewamerican.com).*

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