

Boycott America, Not Russia

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President Obama's personal boycott of the Winter Olympics is the height of hypocrisy. Washington provides arms, aid and diplomatic protection to some of the most homophobic regimes on earth. "There are at least ten nations considered American allies that have anti-gay laws far more harsh than Russia's."

In 2013 the Russian Federation passed legislation that prohibits the "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors." The official bigotry rightly received worldwide condemnation and in anticipation of the Winter Olympic games taking place in Sochi, Russia, spawned calls for official boycotts of the event.

This columnist is unequivocally opposed to discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, or any other status. But the vehemence with which Russia has been castigated should raise other issues for Americans, who think of themselves as living in the freest, most democratic country on earth. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Russian president Vladimir Putin doesn't claim the right to kill his citizens without charge or trial but United States president Barack Obama does. Not only does he claim the right to execute any one he wants, but he has perverted the very document he swore to uphold in order to justify his wrong doing. The United States Constitution guarantees a right to due process, but according to the Obama administration that is not true all of the time.

The chief law enforcement officer of this country, Attorney General Eric Holder, announced that the right to due process is not the same as the right to judicial process, and therefore the president [can kill at will](#). If those words are confusing it is because they are utter nonsense and the hallmark of countries that Americans generally vilify as dictatorships.

Of the two countries, which spends more of its resources on the military? Of course the answer is the United States, which not only spends more on defense than any other country but more than the rest of the world combined. Russia [ranks 6th](#) in defense expenditures, behind the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France and Japan. So, it is America that uses more of its resources for making war than for benefitting humanity.

Instead of looking at how their most vulnerable citizens are treated, Americans prefer to look at the rest of the world and condemn whomever their government tells them to. When two of the musician activists in the group Pussy Riot visited New York they were celebrated for enduring two years in prison as a result of protesting against Putin's government.

The sentence was inhumane and so are Russian laws against "hooliganism" which can mean anything that government wants it to mean. But it is the United States that is uniquely

inhumane among the world's nations in its incarceration policies. The country with the dubious distinction of being the world's largest jailer is, of course, the worst at dispensing justice. In the United States there are 3,278 people serving sentences of life imprisonment after being convicted of [non-violent offenses](#). Of these 3,278 people, 65 percent are black, which is further proof of the systemic racism which is still rampant in this country.

While Barack Obama claims the [right to kill](#) anyone he wants, he is simultaneously pretending to be high minded on the issue of the Russian LGBT community. He and other heads of state have announced their own personal boycotts of the Winter Olympics and won't attend. Obama says he has "no patience" for the Russian law but actively opposed the efforts of 5,000 people imprisoned as a result of [draconian drug laws](#) who sought to request resentencing.

Of course Obama doesn't care about gay people at all. There are at least ten nations considered American allies that have anti-gay laws [far more harsh](#) than Russia's. Saudi Arabia, America's partner in international crime, actually executes people because they are gay. Homosexuality is [not illegal](#) in Russia, no one has been imprisoned as a result of the propaganda legislation and perpetrators of anti-gay hate crimes have been punished. Meanwhile the sorry record of American states and localities choosing not to punish the white people who kill a black person every 28 hours should be worthy of international boycotts.

The fury directed against Russia is more a result of our government's propaganda than of any true need for protest. The reaction is also a result of willful ignorance about America's extreme shortcomings in the treatment of its own citizens.

Russia has spoken out against U.S. imperialism, given sanctuary to Edward Snowden and prevented a U.S. attack on Syria. That is why our government is angry with Vladimir Putin and why the corporate media follows suits. There is less of an excuse for ordinary citizens to follow along blindly because a president wants free rein in the world. When presidents and the media tell us whom we should hate and vilify, our reaction should be one of skepticism.

If there is a country deserving of boycotts of sports or other events, it is the United States. There is no other way that the country leading in violence and inhumanity ought to be treated by the civilized world.

Margaret Kimberley's *Freedom Rider* column appears weekly in BAR, and is widely reprinted elsewhere. She maintains a frequently updated blog as well as at <http://freedomrider.blogspot.com>.

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