

Demonization of Putin's Leadership of Russia Is a Big Hurdle in the Path of Peace

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If anyone wants to identify the most aggressive country during the 21st century so far, then this can be done most easily by finding out which country's wars have been responsible for the most number of deaths.

The wars fought under the War on Terror by the USA have directly and indirectly caused about 4.5 million deaths, according to Brown University's estimates which do not cover all the 'wars of terror' for the full period. In addition the USA has been involved in several other wars and conflicts to various extent, and if all its proxy wars are added and the violence related to coups and regime change efforts is also added, then the number of deaths will increase much more.

The wars initiated by no other country come even close to this. However in western media and propaganda, it is Putin-led Russia which is frequently identified as the aggressor that must be most condemned.

It is a matter much more serious than merely tarnishing the reputation of a country, its leaders and people. Once false demonization without evidence has proceeded beyond a point, it adversely affects efforts for government to government and people to people friendly relations among great powers and thereby prospects of world peace are harmed.

False propaganda over a long time can sometimes result in serious problems in policy making as policy makers are forced to respond not to realities but to the false notions spread among people as a result of the propaganda effort of the same authorities.

Image is from CovertAction Magazine



Something similar has happened in the context of the devilish image of Putin promoted by western propaganda over the years. Due to this it has become extremely difficult, if not impossible, to raise the important issue of improving relations with Russia or stopping the disastrous, destructive Ukraine war as early as possible. To move in the direction of peace it is important to seriously consider what the other side or its most important leader is saying in an unbiased way, but this has become difficult due to the propaganda created image of the top Russian leader. As a result we have one escalation after another instead of moving towards peace. This is of course harmful for Ukraine and Russia but this can also ultimately prove very harmful for the west.

Mature democracies are supposed to be keen to hear to hear all points of view, including those of opponents, so it is curious to see the very widespread opposition in the west to the very idea of mainstream platforms being used to hear the views of the Russian President Putin, as was seen at the time of Tucker Carlson's interview of Putin some time back. As Chidanand Rajghatta (February 8) reported in The Times of India,

“America's national security establishment and its mainstream media is in a total meltdown over an upcoming interview with Russian President Putin by former Fox news host Tucker Carlson...Rants and allegations about Carlson being 'Putin's puppet' flew thick and fast on February 7 with unsubtle threats from some quarters, including from some European lawmakers, about sanctioning him.”

What kind of democracy is this, what kind of free media? What is wrong with people hearing the views of a leader even though he is widely regarded to be hostile by the West? What is wrong with the people having an opportunity to hear the point of view of the Russian leader as well?

What is more, isn't the space for hearing and considering differing points of views shrinking fast in the West? As the news report quoted above points out, “the American press has a long history of interviewing leaders Washington regards as hostile”, going back to Barbara Walters interviewing Fidel Castro at the height of the US-Cuba estrangement. So what is happening now? Why is US media discouraged so much to present Putin's point of view?

The wider issue of demonizing Putin to such an extent that a rational consideration of his views or the Russian point of view is just not on the table should be a serious concern for western democracies.

In fact the west needs to seriously re-examine various aspects of its perceptions of President Putin. One aspect is to examine his role as a national leader of Russia, whether he has been good for Russia and for the welfare of Russian people. The second aspect should be to re-examine whether internationally he has been as aggressive as he has been often portrayed in the West, more specifically to what extent he is responsible for the Ukraine war.

Putin took over the leadership of Russia at a time when its development had been disrupted during the decade of 1990-2000 to such an extent that various development indicators had fallen sharply and even life-expectancy had declined. This had happened during a decade when western advisers had been active in Russia, leading to sale of Russian assets to private businesses, including foreigners as well as Russian oligarchs, at cheap rates, resulting in huge profits for a few but also in terrible disruptions in the economy.

It may surprise many people to know that the years of Putin's leadership have been a time

when the country could make a remarkable recovery in terms of human development indicators, to the extent that some of these are now better than or almost equal to those of the USA.

Child mortality, or under five years of age mortality, measured per 1000 live births, is widely considered to be an important indicator of health in any country. In this context it is useful to see the UN data which tells us that for the latest year 2021 the child mortality rate was 5.1 in the Russian federation, while it was 6.2 in the USA. Hence Russia has been able to achieve a lower child mortality rate despite being confronted with very difficult conditions compared to the USA which enjoyed the most favorable and even hegemonic conditions at the world level.

If we see this data for the period 2000-2021, then in the USA this declined from 8 in year 2000 to 6.2 in 2021, while in Russia this declined from 20 to 5.1, a very significant reduction. In comparative terms, Russia was much behind USA in this respect but surged ahead over the 20 years of Putin's leadership.

In the case of infant mortality (or mortality under 1 year of age per 1000 births), according to Macrotrends data, the infant mortality in Russia declined in a big way from 19 in 2000 to 4.8 in 2023, while during the same period infant mortality in the USA declined from 7.2 to 5.4, so that Russia which had been far behind the USA surged ahead of it during the Putin leadership years, despite all the difficult conditions the Russian Federation faced.

In the case of maternal mortality rate or MMR (reported per 100,000 births), according to UN data, from year 2000 to 2020, this declined very significantly in Russia from 52 to 14, while that of the USA actually increased from 12 to 21. Thus during this period, according to UN data, Russia was recording a very big decline of 6.66% per year while the USA was recording not a decline, but instead an increase of 2.88% per year in maternal mortality rate.

According to Macrotrends data, from 2000 to 2017, the maternal mortality rate of the Russian Federation declined from 56 to 17, while this rate increase in the context of the USA from 12 to 19.

In both these sets of data, it is common that the Russian Federation starts at MMR much higher than that of the USA, and despite facing difficult conditions, reaches a lower MMR than the USA within two decades or even earlier.

During 2000-2019 according to UN data the life-expectancy in the Russian Federation increased significantly from 65.3 years to 73.2 years. According to Macrotrends data, this increase was from 65.4 in 2000 to 72.98 in 2023.

The increase of income or GNI per capita in Russia during this period was very significant—from \$1710 in year 2000 to \$4450 in 2005 to \$9980 in 2010 to \$11,610 in 2021. On the contrary when the Russian economy was acting much under western influence earlier during year 1991 to year 2000, there was a huge decline from \$3440 to \$1710.

The literacy rate for the Russian federation is around 99%, according to the available data.

The Human Development Index of Russia has improved from 720 in 2000 to 822 in 2021.

Thus as far as the welfare and progress of the people of the Russian Federation is

concerned, Russia in the years of Putin's leadership in the 21st century appears to have done remarkably well, despite many hurdles being placed its path by the most powerful countries, despite constant vilification and criticism.

However some people say that the progress of Putin-led Russia in terms of democracy has not been good. This is true. However only a part of the blame for this should fall on Russia, the other part should be assigned to those powerful western countries which all the time have been using the openings made available in various democratic systems to topple governments, as in Ukraine, leading to the tightening of controls on opposition forces as a defensive measure. Also it should be noted that even according to polls which the western countries trust, the approval ratings of Putin have been consistently higher than those polled by several prominent western leaders, including the present and recent US Presidents.

However the critics of Putin may still say that Putin has been very aggressive. However here too they should carefully note the entire recent history where they will find, as confirmed by several leading western diplomats and experts, that Putin tried repeatedly earlier to avoid conflict and to find a place of self-respect for Russia within Europe, that he made huge investments in ensuring cheap energy supply to Europe, that he repeatedly pleaded with the West to honor commitments made earlier regarding not moving the NATO and its weapon systems too close to Russia, that he took the Minsk accords very seriously while prominent western leaders later said that they were merely buying time for Ukraine to be armed better, that even in late 2021 he made very reasonable peace proposals, that he was very keen to clinch peace deals being made at a very early stage of the Ukraine war in March 2022 till these were sabotaged by the UK and the USA. There is adequate documentation for all this, confirmed by reputed western diplomats and experts.

However, all this is not at all to suggest that Putin led Russia has not suffered from some serious flaws. Certainly much more should have been done for democracy and human rights, for environment protection and peace, for reducing inequalities in a big way and improving the overall development model. While there remain so many areas which need improvement, clearly the record of Putin-led Russia has been good from the point of view of protecting the interests of the Russian Federation and the Russian people.

At a time when there is need for standing up to hegemony, the courage of Putin and his colleagues regarding this has helped the cause of a multipolar world. To that extent Putin has played an important positive role in recent history.

While balanced and evidence-based criticism of certain aspects of Putin-led Russia is welcome and will be helpful in bringing further improvement, on the basis of its present record the widespread and highly exaggerated criticisms of Putin-led Russia are not at all justified.

The mobilization of almost the entire military might of the west and the NATO to encircle and defeat Russia is not justified at all and must be condemned. Considerations of justice, peace, safety and environment protection demand that immediately the West should give up its entirely unjustified confrontation against Russia and extend a hand of friendship, provide Russia a place of dignity in world and in Europe, paving the path for very quickly ending the Ukraine conflict and starting a big program of reconstruction and rehabilitation there with the help and cooperation of all countries and the UNO.

Of course our sympathies are very much also with the suffering people of Ukraine. They are victims of an entirely avoidable proxy war that started way back in 2014 with a USA-instigated coup in Ukraine. One important way out of these years of sufferings and distress of people is to have an immediate end to the Russia-Ukraine fighting while peace negotiations can continue later to settle all contentious issues.

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Featured image: Russian President Vladimir Putin in June, during the St Petersburg International Economic Forum. (Ramil Sitdikov, RIA Novosti Host Photo Agency, Kremlin)

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