

I'm Sick and Tired of the Kremlin's Blatant Lies

By [Jamison Firestone](#)

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Last week, anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny was arrested and sentenced to 15 days in jail for protesting election fraud.

I am angry.

Alexei is someone I admire greatly, not just because he has fought against the people who are implicated in the death of Sergei Magnitsky, who worked as a partner in my law firm, but because he has risked his personal security and bravely fought on all of our behalf against corruption.

I once asked Alexei how long he intended to keep fighting, and he said, "Forever, because I hate the bastards who are destroying our country."

I am not Russian, but for years I have felt as though I am. Twice in my life I have seen things

where all I could say is: "If this hurts me so much, what must a Russian be feeling now?"

The first time I felt this way was when the tanks fired on the White House in 1993.

I was in Moscow during the August 1991 putsch, and I remember the incredible sense of relief, victory, freedom, optimism and pride when it failed. I remember the remarkable pride of the people who said, "Look what we did! If we can do this, we can do anything!"

I remember how the White House became a symbol of the people — a symbol of a free Russia and what the will of the people could accomplish.

And I remember looking at the White House in 1993 after it had been fired on by tanks. I recall the complete and utter shock of seeing that symbol of the people's triumph and pride shelled and burned. I imagine it would have been akin to the U.S. Army firing on the Capitol building.

During this time, I was thinking how much stronger these emotions would be if I were Russian. I really couldn't imagine it.

The second big moment when I wondered how much more intensely I would feel if I were Russian occurred when Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced to the world that his switch with President Dmitry Medvedev had been arranged years ago.

I was shocked to hear Putin say this. Did he have no respect for the people?

In one small sentence, Putin completely invalidated the four Medvedev years as president. In one phrase — "it was all decided years ago" — he made fools out of all of us. Almost everyone was offended.

Do Medvedev's key programs of anti-corruption, modernization and building democratic institutions have any meaning any more? Why do Russians go to the polls if none of this matters?

It was Navalny who gave people an answer, an answer why people must go to the polls — an answer that millions of people who don't even read his blog figured out on their own. They should go to the polls to vote against United Russia — vote for anyone other than the party of power to show that they do not agree with "the party of crooks and thieves."

And the people went to the polls on Dec. 4. Can you imagine how bad United Russia's losses would have been if there were honest elections? Can you imagine how bad their losses would have been if other parties had the same access to the three government-controlled television stations?

Navalny believed that the Russian people were entitled to honest elections. For protesting the sham elections, he and many like-minded people were sentenced to jail for 15 days.

Kremlin first deputy chief of staff Vladislav Surkov then informed an outraged public that the government is sympathetic and that the country needs a "mass liberal party" to give upset educated urban dwellers parliamentary representation. Great! Another government-controlled sham opposition party. Do the political elite even realize how out of touch they are?

I am an American and have no right to tell Russians how they should feel or what they should do. But I am sharing my feelings because I love Russia and because so much of my own personal fate has been tied up with the recent history of the country.

I, like millions of Russians, feel angry at being tricked and lied to by the authorities. For three years now, my colleagues and I have been fighting against terrible corruption in the government.

Maybe we were fools, but for a time we actually believed Medvedev was real and that he could help Russia become more democratic and law-abiding. After Magnitsky was arrested and killed while being held in pretrial detention, I and many of my colleagues had to leave the country we love, and now all of us have been informed that there never really was any Medvedev government.

Navalny is a true Russian patriot. He was arrested opposing sham elections. He was arrested saying Russia deserves better than this.

I no longer live in Russia and I deeply regret that I could not attend the demonstration on Saturday on Bolotnaya Ploshchad. I would have heard my Russian friends who had avoided politics before screaming, "This is our country!" and I would have been proud.

Had I not been forced to leave the country, I would have been at the demonstration to show my own disagreement with government officials who lie, steal and kill. I would have expressed my solidarity with Navalny and with the hundreds of others who are still sitting in cells with him.

We are all tired of the Russian government treating us like fools.

Jamison Firestone is an attorney and Sergei Magnitsky's former boss.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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