

U.S. Senator Slams Putin for Protest Crackdown

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U.S. Senator John McCain

Outspoken U.S. Senator John McCain has criticized President Vladimir Putin for a recent crackdown on protesters, as well as for oligarchy, corruption and activities in the Baltics and Ukraine.

In an [interview](#) with the Voice of America's Russian service, McCain said Putin had to "understand that there is great resistance to the way he governs," "the way the elections were held" and how "demonstrators were being cracked down" on last week.

"People in Russia are very unhappy with this oligarchy and corruption that goes from top to bottom," McCain said in the interview Friday, adding that liberal opposition politician Boris Nemtsov had told him that the protest movement was "not gonna be stopped."

McCain also said U.S. concern should be expanded to Putin's activities in Ukraine, the three Baltic states and the "military buildup" in Kaliningrad.

He said a recent declaration by Russian military officials that a planned U.S. anti-missile shield in Europe would be cause for Russia to attack a third country was "not rational behavior."

Turning to human rights, the senator defended the Sergei Magnitsky bill, which would bar Russians accused of human rights abuses in Russia from entering the United States. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov complained last month that the United States was interfering in Russia's domestic issues with the legislation, drafted in response to the 2009 jail death of Magnitsky, a lawyer who was jailed by Interior Ministry officials after he accused them of defrauding the government of millions of dollars. No one has been convicted in connection with the case. McCain said in the interview that the United States "always stands up for human rights."

Putin made no immediate public comment about McCain's criticism, but in December he said the senator was "nuts" after being captured during the Vietnam War and "sitting in a pit for several years." Putin was responding to a warning from McCain of an Arab Spring-style uprising in Russia.

McCain on Friday shrugged off Putin's comment. "I respectfully disagree with that characterization," he said.

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