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Putin Criticizes U.S. Coronavirus Response, Condemns 'Mayhem and Rioting' at Anti-Racism Protests

In a major interview, Vladimir Putin discussed anti-racism protests in the U.S. and Europe

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Russian President Vladimir Putin said protests sweeping the U.S. were a sign of "deep-seated internal crises" in the country. **Kremlin.ru**

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Sunday that the U.S. anti-racism protests were a sign of deep crises in the country, criticizing the protests for sparking violence, and raising questions over Donald Trump's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Russian leader stressed he supported black Americans' struggle for equality, calling this "a long-standing problem of the United States," but spoke out against "mayhem and rioting."

"If this fight for natural rights, legal rights, turns into mayhem and rioting, I see nothing

good for the country," Putin said in an interview with state-run TV channel Rossiya-1 to be broadcast in full Sunday evening.

"We always in the U.S.S.R. and in modern Russia had a lot of sympathy for the struggle of African-Americans for their natural rights," he insisted.

But Putin added that "when — even after crimes are committed — this takes on elements of radical nationalism and extremism, nothing good will come of this."

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The Russian leader went on to say the pulling down of statues in Europe and the U.S. was "undoubtedly a destructive phenomenon," and suggested that African-American protesters wanted only African-American doctors to treat them — adding this would be impossible in "multi-ethnic Russia."

The Russian television channel has posted an extract from the interview, billed as Putin's first interview since the start of the pandemic.

Putin has rode out much of the coronavirus pandemic from his residence outside Moscow and has drawn criticism for keeping a relatively low profile during the pandemic. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin was appointed to lead the government's coronavirus task force, and there have been reports of friction between him and Putin over Russia's strategy to deal with the coronavirus.

In the interview, Putin connected the protests in the U.S. to poor handling of the pandemic, pointing to "deep-seated internal crises."

"It shows there are problems. Things connected to the fight with the coronavirus have shone a spotlight on general problems."

He contrasted the virus situation in the U.S. and Russia, saying that while "we are exiting the coronavirus situation steadily with minimal losses, God willing, in the States it isn't happening that way."

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Russia on Sunday confirmed 8,835 new virus cases, taking its total to 528,964, the third highest in the world, while the U.S. has the largest number of cases by far at 2.07 million.

Putin criticized a lack of strong leadership on the virus situation in the U.S., saying that "the president says we need to do such-and-such but a governor somewhere tells him where to go."

"I think the problem is that group interests, party interests are put higher than the interests of the whole of society and the interests of the people."

In Russia, "I doubt anyone in the government or the regions would say 'we're not going to do

what the government says, what the president says, we think it's wrong,'" Putin said of the virus strategy.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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