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When Russian Artillery Shells its Own People

It is not Ukraine that needs fictional "denazification," it is Russia that needs real de-Stalinization.

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Putin's system cannot be improved, reformed, modernized, or even simply normalized. It leads to the destruction of Russia. If there is anti-Russian system, it is Putinism. If there is a symbol of anti-patriotism, oblivion and perversion of the basic foundations of the nation, it is Putin's elite.

It is impossible to put an equal sign between the state and the people. But Putinism leads to a situation where a rogue state turns its citizens into rogue people.

No one knows better than the Russians themselves that a cornered autocrat becomes even

more dangerous — for the world, but above all, for the citizens of Russia. Artillery is hitting its own people, not only from outside Russia's borders to the West, but also inside the country.

Putin has killed the historical righteousness of the nation that was based on the sacred memory of the 1945 victory in the Great Patriotic War. Putin's government kept this memory as a historical shield. But after it fired on Kyiv and Kharkiv, it lost that moral shield. Exploiting that victory seems especially cynical.

Putinism has lost its historical foundation, its historical self-determination. It has shredded, reduced the memory of the Great War to fictional paradigms and threats, to the odious "denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine." This is an astonishing historical example of a political regime getting rid of part of the basis for its own historical legitimacy.

It is not Ukraine that needs fictional "denazification," it is Russia that needs real de-Stalinization. Work was not done to overcome the difficult past, and now this past is destroying the nation, its sense of self, its self-identification. What is left is defensiveness, as if the nation were under siege in a fortress and suffering from Stockholm syndrome, bonding with the jailer.

When a country that claims a leading role as an empire, albeit an imaginary one, bombs itself, even the imaginary empire disappears. A real empire must have soft power, not hard power. The strikes on Kyiv were the final destruction of the right to self-legitimacy at the expense of the memory of the Great Patriotic War. The regime never had the right to do this. The people did, but the regime did not.

The "high-precision" hit at Babi Yar had a symbolic meaning that had nothing to do with "neo-Nazism." The point was to show that if the military could hit Babi Yar, it could also hit Chernobyl with the same "high-precision" accuracy.

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Russia's allies are now the army and navy, Eritrea and North Korea. In the political and economic suicide of the Putin regime, it has lowered Russia to the same level as North Korea. This was done with the tacit, cowardly consent of the elites.

A great power that became a member of international communities and organizations, a country that had made its way to a market economy and a democratic constitution, was reduced to being a global spoiler and then a threat to the entire world.

But the Russian economy does not exist outside of the global economy. No "import substitution" is possible without global components and seed stock, container transportation and technological imports. "Import substitution" does not exist because the market economy,

like science, has no nationality and can only function as a world economy.

The first thing the government did after the start of the "special operation" was to prohibit the transfer and export of money so that citizens would not run away but be forced to share the consequences of their decisions with the elites — so they'd have to tighten their belts at home, not fasten their seatbelts on the last plane leaving for the cursed West.

Putin wanted to speak to world leaders as equals, and as a result no one is talking to him. He was condemned at the UN General Assembly by 141 nations, and even big brother China may be looking at its neighbor with some apprehension.

Russians have no choice but to "cultivate their own garden," that is, to feed themselves from their own garden. There's no help to be had. The artillery is hitting its own people.

A version of this commentary in Russian was first published in The New Times*.*

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