
Subject: Re: Empire

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Thu, 06 Mar 2025 16:18:52 GMT

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Not to belabor this point - I've made it enough, I think - but while I agree with you that we have some really ugly problems in America with greed and power, they aren't the same thing as what happened and is still happening in Russia.

First though, to your point about problems here at home, I always thought it slimy that career politicians in USA could become millionaires. If a family gets paychecks of say \$200K/year, then they should never be able to amass hundreds of millions of dollars. It's just not ethically or legally possible. Their net worth over a lifetime should be in the low millions, if they've invested well.

A career politician with more than a few million dollars is prima facie evidence of foul play. If a politician has other incomes prior to entering public service, that's possibly a path to wealth, but even then, it seems rife with ethical dilemmas.

But certainly, a person that enters politics early in life and then does nothing else has no ethical or legal way to generate an income that leaves them with more than an upper-middle-class retirement nest egg. There's no way to become a multi-millionaire. Yet we see dozens of people that fit that description, and I think it's wrong.

Now then, let's compare that with Russia. First, remember what I said about the novi-russki.

Those are the people that are called "oligarchs" today. I call them "novi-russki" because that's the pejoratively slang term used by Russians, themselves. That's what the population of Russia calls these guys. They started calling them that in the 1990s.

The majority of Russians (and Ukrainians and Moldovans and Belarusians, etc.) are a lot like Americans. They're proud of their culture. They value fairness. They value strength and are proud of themselves, but they also value kindness. They do not like seeing someone win by unfair behavior. And because of that, they are somewhat untrusting of government. They do not consider culture and nation to be synonymous with politics. They usually keep their political opinions to themselves, largely out of prudence. Better to stay out of it, and not voice an opinion.

Not everyone is like that, but most are. The ones that speak out are people with high risk tolerance. When you get 'em alone - behind closed doors - there isn't anyone in any of the former Soviet states that sees novi-russki any differently than I've described here. They all see novi-russki as powerful, dangerous spoiled brats.

Don't mistake a comparison with the "spoiled brats" you see here. In America, there are thousands of truly famous "influencers" that have never done a thing. But it's worse than that there. Novi-russki are seen as dangerously violent spoiled brats that made their money off the backs of hardworking people. Novi-russki are literally hated there. They have a lot of power in every city and most every company, so they are feared. They're something like the robber-barons of America in the 1800s, but worse because of their criminal beginnings.

And by the way - if you like Jeffrey Sachs and you trust his opinions - you may want to look back through what he has said through the years because he recounts this too.

In Russia and Ukraine, the novi-russki were the mobsters from back when the Soviet Union still existed. They were local criminals, some that had local power in their cities. They were like Al Capone, selling guns and drugs, and pimping out young girls that became addicted. They became interwoven in local politics, and they occasionally killed people that crossed them or didn't pay "protection" or black-market debts.

Consider the fact of life for every "comrade" in the Soviet days. It was different than here, so we sometimes forget the fact that a person didn't do stuff to make money. They didn't try to better themselves financially. They didn't run their own businesses, and they didn't have mutual funds, stock or retirement accounts. They were given a very tiny paycheck, and that was used to buy things like food, vodka and cigarettes. Major items weren't purchased - they were assigned.

Every person went to school, were assigned a career, and they then performed their task under penalty of law. Most people wanted to work and be useful, so I'm not saying they hated their lives or anything like that. As with everyone else, sometimes you like your work and sometimes you don't. But my point is that they had no understanding of private company ownership, of stock markets or even of what it is like to be a salesman. Most people just had no concept of owning or selling anything more valuable than a wristwatch.

So when the Soviet Union collapsed, one of the things that happened was every company in the nation issued ownership stock to its employees. That was one of the things the former Soviet Union did in an attempt to become a free-market nation. It was a great idea, in my opinion.

The only problem is that most people didn't understand the value of stock, and they were desperate enough to need cash. It was easy to convince them to sell their stock, because most of the population didn't understand the benefit in owning it. They needed food, electricity and heating oil. So they sold their stock. And who were there to buy that stock? Who had cash? The novi-russki.

Again, this is something Jeffrey Sachs has said. He wishes we in America had done more to help with the transition. We could have educated the people, and we could have invested in the private companies. Maybe that would have been taking advantage of the situation, I don't know. Or maybe it wouldn't have been wrong to take advantage. Again, I don't know. But I know that we didn't do that. We didn't involve ourselves. We were busy in the Middle East during that time.

So the novi-russki took over. Yeltsin saw this as a growing problem, and for some reason he thought Putin could help. Putin had a lot of experience with novi-russki in St. Petersburg.

But Putin ended up simply bringing all the novi-russki together as one big organization of mob families. The few dissenting novi-russki that legitimized themselves - wanting to make Russia a proud country of law-abiding citizens - those people were imprisoned or killed. Look at Mikhail Khodorkovsky, for an example.

Not all novi-russki were thugs, and some of those that started off slimy wanted to reform themselves. Some truly wanted a better country, and to do legitimate business. But if they didn't tow the Putin line, those were imprisoned or killed. And this even spanned out away from Russia, into other former Soviet states that had gained independence from Russia.

So what is left is a country of thugs. They aren't just "fat cats" - they are hit men. They murder political opponents. It's pretty bad over there. Lots of political poisonings, lots of political incarcerations that result in death and lots of other kinds of murders. It's a whole other level than the ethics problems you see here.

Ukraine has struggled with this too. I've watched it since the 1990s, up close and personal. The people of Ukraine largely want to be associated with the west - with Europe and with the USA. They always vote for politicians that are pro-western. The pro-Russia politicians in Ukraine get very low votes. I've also seen popular pro-western politicians in Ukraine be poisoned and disfigured. It's been messy, and there is only one reason for that - Putin and his thugs. But Ukraine still hangs on.

I hope Ukraine stays pro-American. Recent events over here have shocked their population. Many of them feel betrayed by us now. I'm fairly sure they'll stay pro-western, but I hope they also stay pro-American. It's nice to have former Soviet states that prefer American values.