

Russian journalist Ivan Golunov released after campaign against his arrest

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On Friday, June 6, the well-known investigative journalist Ivan Golunov was arrested in the center of Moscow and charged with the illegal consumption and distribution of drugs. After several days in confinement, during which he was physically abused, Golunov was released and put under house arrest on Monday. He was released from the house arrest and the charges against him were dropped on Tuesday.

The 36-year-old Golunov, who had earlier worked for the business newspapers *Forbes*, *Vedomosti* and *Kommersant*, and now writes for the Latvia-based outlet *Meduza*—all of them close to the liberal opposition—was arrested in broad daylight in the center of Russia’s capital on Thursday. Police claimed that they found five packages of the amphetamine mephedrone on him during the arrest, and they found more drugs at his home, including packages of cocaine.

Golunov insists that he is innocent and that the drugs were planted on him to persecute him for political reasons. In his work, Golunov has exposed corruption cases involving the mayor and the vice-mayor of Moscow, as well as numerous other figures close to Putin. His outlet *Meduza* reported that Golunov had been receiving threats in recent months.

According to *Meduza*, Golunov was deprived of sleep for two days, and severely beaten during interrogation. On Saturday, he had to be hospitalized with doctors noting, among other things, a concussion and a broken rib.

Despite Golunov’s demands, the police refused for several days to test him for drugs. A drug test on Monday for a court hearing found that Golunov had not consumed any illegal substances. A district court in Moscow released Golunov on Monday and put him under house arrest for two months. Pictures released by the Interior Ministry that allegedly showed drugs at

Golunov’s home were later proven to have been taken in other houses during drug raids by the police. The frame-up character of Golunov’s arrest has been so obvious that even the state-sponsored media raised questions about it.

The Moscow ombudsman, the capital’s head of the Interior Ministry and the State Prosecutor General all became involved in the case, and an advisor of Russian President Vladimir Putin asked to receive reports on it.

Several hundred people reportedly protested on Saturday for Golunov’s release; further protests are planned for Wednesday, June 12, which is a national holiday in Russia. On Monday, *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti* and *RBC* all carried the same front page, entitled “I/We are Ivan Golunov.” A joint editorial declared that Golunov might have been arrested because of his “professional activity” and demanded that the actions of the Interior Ministry be investigated. The issues of the three newspapers sold out within a few hours and are now being auctioned off online. Famous Russian artists, journalists, rappers and comedians joined a video denouncing Golunov’s arrest.

Hashtags like #IamIvanGolunov and #FreeGolunov found significant support on Twitter. According to social media statistics, the name Ivan Golunov was mentioned more often than any other name on social media on Tuesday, including that of President Putin.

Apparently stunned by the blowback and fearing that the opposition to Golunov’s arrest could escalate and trigger a larger movement against the Putin regime, the Interior Ministry decided on Tuesday to have all the charges dropped and announced that Golunov would be released from house arrest. The policemen involved in his case were suspended.

There is little question that the arrest of Golunov was

politically motivated and constitutes an assault on free speech and other basic democratic rights. It occurred under conditions of a global war on journalism, which has been spearheaded by the illegal persecution of WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange. It struck, not least of all, because of that context, a core in Russian society.

However, the political forces opposing Golunov's arrest are thoroughly reactionary and do so not in the interest of "free speech," but for the purposes of advancing the imperialist-led anti-Putin campaign. They include the right-wing, pro-US Russian oppositionist Alexei Navalny, who has participated in fascist-led "Russian Marches," British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and various mouthpieces of US imperialism, including the *New York Times*.

In an exercise of shameless hypocrisy, the same politicians and media that have fully supported the persecution, torture and illegal detention of Julian Assange, and the censorship of the Internet, now decry the arrest of Golunov as an assault on free speech and media freedom.

In a particularly stark example, British Foreign Secretary Hunt, who had denounced a UN report exposing the systematic torture of Julian Assange as "wrong" and has publicly endorsed Assange's extradition to the United States, tweeted: "Very concerned by arrest of Russian investigative journalist, Ivan Golunov of @meduzaproject. Journalists must be free to hold power to account without fear of retribution. We are following his case closely. #FreeGolunov #DefendMediaFreedom."

On Tuesday, the *New York Times*, which has blacked out almost entirely the US-led persecution of Assange and Chelsea Manning and the protests internationally against their detention, reported extensively on the arrest of Golunov and protest actions against it under the headline "Reporter's Arrest Sets Off Widespread Protests in Russia." By Monday, the newspaper had already run another long article on "free speech" in Russia, quoting one figure associated with the liberal opposition after another, to decry the assault on free speech under Putin and praise the opposition's activities on YouTube.

It is not difficult to understand the reasons for the *New York Times*' concern with "free speech" in Russia: it directly coincides with the interests of US

imperialism, which for years has been engaged in a massive campaign aimed at pressuring, undermining and ultimately toppling the Putin regime in Russia.

In the case of Golunov, the defense of "free speech" by the US media and Western politicians is facilitated by the fact that he, like many Russian journalists close to the liberal opposition, has focused his investigations on corruption cases involving figures that were close to or politically aligned with the Russian president, including former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich who was toppled in a US- and German-backed coup in Kiev in February 2014. His journalistic work thus could be easily exploited for the anti-Putin campaign in the Western media and by the pro-US liberal opposition in Russia.

Had Golunov dared expose war crimes of US imperialism or any other major imperialist power, these outlets would have no doubt maintained near-complete silence about his case, as they have done with regard to the persecution of Assange and Manning, and the charges brought against a French journalist who exposed French arms sales to Saudi Arabia for the criminal war in Yemen.



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