

Putin the Angry
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Putin is a fascinating man. He is enjoying what he appears most hungry for: attention. Russia experts suggest motives and intentions that seem to explain his actions and the world watches anxiously. The Russian people, however, are only given a diet of lying Russian media, almost all controlled today by the leader of their pretend republic.

A dictator's playbook does not permit scrutiny, criticism, or contradiction, therefore the press cannot carry out its mandate in liberal democracies: speaking truth to power. Life expectancy for journalists in Russia is short and punishments nasty.

Putin, a high-ranking KGB officer whose final posting in Germany, on the night that the Berlin Wall was breached, showed him what people really thought of the Soviet Union and Communist East Germany. He frantically phoned Moscow, and found nobody answering the phones. The USSR died with scarcely a whimper.

In a government full of drunks (the Yeltsin cabal of corrupt leaders of the New Russia), the sober Putin was like the one-eyed man in the land of the blind. He gathered the remnant of KGB and elite ex-Communists and under his leadership, they divided up the wealth of the Soviet Union in the biggest heist in history.

The liberal democracy that had a brief life in the New Russia fooled the West into thinking that indeed, democracy won. Other urgent issues made us abandon our earlier efforts to help the New Russia's birth pangs, and Putin took Russia through a careful process of step-by-step dismantling of the new institutions (free press, fair elections, independent judiciary, uncorrupt parliament, and economy tied to the US-created global system).

From the beginning of his rule as an elected leader, he began the process of securing for himself the role of president for life. Russian leaders have always had the long game, from the time that Czar Peter the Great realized that Russia was very backward and vulnerable to being invaded and taken over by Sweden. He began the process of bringing Russia into the developing world of Europe, which was then in the Renaissance and just beginning the industrial revolution.

Peter the Great used force to suppress the reactionary Orthodox Church, which opposed his new laws. He also undercut the conservative nobility by taking their sons and sending them abroad for education. Russia began to modernize, but only at the top levels. The mass of peasants and the first industrial workers lived lives of poverty and misery. Over the next two centuries, this misery fed the Communist Revolution of 1918 and the collapsed Russian Empire morphed into the Marxist USSR empire.

Putin was part of that Soviet Empire, and its collapse left him embittered, with the view that the greatest catastrophe in the 20th century was the end of the USSR. (Not World War II?)

The questions about what motivates Putin today, a powerful man in a weak country, is: does he aspire to be another Stalin or Lenin? The best Russia scholars say no: that he sees himself as a new Peter the Great. Unlike the wonderful cultural flowering of 19th century Russia that gave the world so many writers, artists, and musicians, Putin doesn't care about Russia being admired and loved. He wants it respected and feared.

We don't know what he thinks about the longevity of his campaign. Does he care that Russia's birthrate has plummeted, that aside from petrochemicals and weapons, nobody wants Russia's products, and that in a world where people vote with their feet (fleeing to western Europe and the US), nobody flees to Russia?

Is he repeating the mistake of other autocrats who ignore the mistake of the French aristocrats on the eve of the French revolution: After me the deluge? Is he angry enough to use those nuclear weapons currently stored somewhere, if he feels threatened enough?

Will his inner circle and the increasingly fed up Russian young people finally bring him down? Why does Putin have a food taster? Why does he seclude himself, apparently fearing COVID and assassination? And finally, his birthdays keep coming, and his body sends him messages of his mortality. Poor Putin.

685 words

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