



Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution

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In the tradition of Hedrick Smith's *The Russians*, Robert G. Kaiser's *Russia: The People and the Power*, and David Remnick's *Lenin's Tomb* comes an eloquent and eye-opening chronicle of Vladimir Putin's Russia, from this generation's leading Moscow correspondents.

With the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia launched itself on a fitful transition to Western-style democracy. But a decade later, Boris Yeltsin's handpicked successor, Vladimir Putin, a childhood hooligan turned KGB officer who rose from nowhere determined to restore the order of the Soviet past, resolved to bring an end to the revolution. *Kremlin Rising* goes behind the scenes of contemporary Russia to reveal the culmination of Project Putin, the secret plot to reconsolidate power in the Kremlin.

During their four years as Moscow bureau chiefs for *The Washington Post*, Peter Baker and Susan Glasser witnessed firsthand the methodical campaign to reverse the post-Soviet revolution and transform Russia back into an authoritarian state. Their gripping narrative moves from the unlikely rise of Putin through the key moments of his tenure that re-centralized power into his hands, from his decision to take over Russia's only independent television network to the Moscow theater siege of 2002 to the "managed democracy" elections of 2003 and 2004 to the horrific slaughter of Beslan's schoolchildren in 2004, recounting a four-year period that has changed the direction of modern Russia.

But the authors also go beyond the politics to draw a moving and vivid portrait of the Russian people they encountered -- both those who have prospered and those barely surviving -- and show how the political flux has shaped individual lives. Opening a window to a country on the brink, where behind the gleaming new shopping malls all things Soviet are chic again and even high school students wonder if Lenin was right after all, *Kremlin Rising* features the personal stories of Russians at all levels of society, including frightened army deserters, an imprisoned oil billionaire, Chechen villagers, a trendy Moscow restaurant king, a reluctant underwear salesman, and anguished AIDS patients in Siberia.

With shrewd reporting and unprecedented access to Putin's insiders, *Kremlin Rising* offers both unsettling new revelations about Russia's leader and a compelling inside look at life in the land that he is building. As the first major book on Russia in years, it is an extraordinary contribution to our understanding of the country and promises to shape the debate about Russia, its uncertain future, and its relationship with the United States.

Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution Details

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Antigone says

Rude awakenings, these watershed moments. This outright interference. Just when you think you've got it under control.

You've fired all the political holdovers in your government and replaced them with fellow FSB operatives guaranteed to share your world view. You've commandeered the media outlets; not one issue is raised that you haven't approved. You've bounced those upstart oligarchs out of town. You've scorched the earth of Chechnya. These charities, these NGOs, righteously exiled under suspicion of espionage! Every single troublemaker is either dead or on the run. Democracy, this chaotic idea, like a wild horse you've finally hobbled. The clock is turning back, so reassuringly, to a familiar ideal; to a place of safety. Safe enough now to recover those territories that should never have been permitted to split apart. Safe enough now to recover all that was lost. Until some idiot rebel uses that missile launcher you so generously provided to shoot down a Malaysian passenger jet.

And now you've got to remember that you don't own the media in the wider world, and you're not in control of the investigation, and there are many leaders with comparable resources and comparable powers who simply aren't those fellow FSB operatives willing to strong-arm the facts and spin the realities for the greater Russian good. And all the theories you float to calm them down, to alert them, to inform them, to generate this more palatable truth, are sinking to the bottom of the bloody Black Sea. You're actually being accused. You're actually being *chastised*.

He must hate this world and the infuriating way it blocks him at every turn.

Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, Moscow bureau chiefs for *The Washington Post* from January 2001 to November 2004, present a highly-accessible and engaging account of Putin's rise to power and subsequent consolidation of same. Here you will find a thumbnail bio, the career path, the elections. The crises of the *Kursk* submarine, the Beslan school, and Moscow's *Nord-Ost* theater tragedy are illuminated alongside Putin's disturbingly ineffective course of anti-engagement. Chechnya, AIDS, the courts, the malls, the oil, the censorship of television stations, newspapers, history books; every forum of report and opinion - all of this is touched upon.

Kremlin Rising is a fine primer for those interested in Putin's Russia. Definitely a good place to start.

Kotinka says

It's particularly interesting to read this book 10 years after it's original publication. Looking back, what we have seen since the key tenets of 'managed democracy' were introduced by Putin during 2000-2005, has been a stagnation of a system whose pillars have effectively been in place for a decade now. Russians have on the whole been accepting of this way of being ruled by their government. Certain borders have been reached in the way that for example freedom of expression is curtailed, media controlled, law treated as an instrument for the furthering of government's interest, in for example the selective use of punishment for corruption, all

as a means of control. In reality the government has not been encroached much further on these points than it already was when this book went to press, with other remaining freedoms such as internet access and freedom of travel left largely untouched.

The second instalment of this fascinating book may well have to be written soon however, as a deteriorating Russian economy, a more restless economic elite and a country looking at years of international isolation ahead, including from their nearest neighbours such as Georgia previously and now Ukraine, take their burden on an ageing Putin and his outdated system. Should the pressure mount, it's an interesting question as to whether Putin would introduce more liberal reforms to allow society to let off some steam or double down against any opposition. As someone always who at heart is a pragmatist rather than an ideolog, it would be wrong to dismiss the chances of the former.

Alluded to in the Afterword of the 2007 edition, the disinformation being spewed into the public domain about external threats, namely that Western liberal democracies are against Russia per se rather than against the authoritarian and illiberal bent of Putin's government, will help prop up a corrupt regime for some years ahead. Ultimately however, as this book addresses only indirectly, the system is sadly yet another example of unsustainable and backward rule for Russia and the question is of when and not if the false dawn of Putinism makes way for the next chapter in this country's tumultuous history.

Michael Gerald says

A scathing attack on Putin, his cronies, and their wishful thinking to revive Soviet "glories"- a euphemism for eroding democracy. It deserves to be read, especially these days when more Russians are finally opposing Putin's hubris.

katie says

people should give putin a chance. poor putin. he goes and has a few people "offed" and now everyone is jumping down his throat. come on, people.

King says

The Washington Post is "my" newspaper, the one I grew up reading as a kid in the suburbs of Northern Virginia. This book's authors were, until a couple years ago, the Post's Moscow bureau chiefs (I remember reading the article versions of some of these chapters). Anyway, even with a new Russian president-elect set to take the reigns in a few months, the book's exploration of Putin's tactics remains relevant. The writing is crisp and offers both insight and interesting trivia. It's one thing to read about events like the sinking of the Kursk in the form of newspaper articles; quite another to get the detailed behind the scenes action of such an event (a bit like the difference between snapshots and movies). I look forward to the sequel, which will likely fall on the shoulders of the Post's latest Moscow bureau chief, Peter Finn. :-)

Francine Uenuma says

Baker and Glasser used to be bureau chiefs in Moscow, and describe Putin's gradual repression of many of the freedoms gained in Russia post-Cold War. Not a comprehensive history but makes for a quick read.

Tandy says

This book covers the current situation in Russia really well. It is well written and written at a level that anyone can pick it up and read it without having background knowledge of Russia and her politics. It is well researched it covers things I have read about in newspapers and other books and puts them in this one book. I recommend this book as a place to turn to get up to speed on what is going on in Russia and with Russia's elections coming up a lot of people might want to read about the events leading up to the election.

Bubba says

For those of us in the West, and in its former satellites, who cheered the demise of the Soviet Union, it may be hard to make sense of Russia's current political trajectory. But, for those poor folks who saw their proud Empire turn into a chaotic mess under Yeltsin's experiments in Democracy and market economics, the brittle authoritarianism of Putin has its benefits. If you want to know what's up in Russia since the rise of Putin, you should read this book. A Soviet premier he is not, but neither is he a democrat. His country is not a police-state yet. The future will tell where it will go. Suffice it to say that Russia has suffered under autocrats for 10 centuries, endured horrible famines, devastating invasions, revolutionary upheavals, and more blood, chaos and oppression than, probably, any other country. Its future doesn't look much brighter.

Nick says

It is common now to ask whether American Presidential candidates can "handle Putin and the Chinese", so it is of the greatest interest to see the mutual compliments given each other by the Master Negotiator and the Russian potentate. After all, Putin expressed admiration for Trump and since that is all that matters in his view, Trump returned the compliment. Which reminds me of the last time an American politician and Putin slapped each other on the back, when then-President Bush saw into the Russian's soul, calling him "an honest, straightforward man" in public and "one cool dude" in private, as Peter Baker and Susan Glasser reveal in "Kremlin Rising". Baker and Glasser implicitly make the case that Putin sized up and manipulated the American President by wearing a cross that he said was preserved when the Russian's dacha burned to the ground. That of course was well before the Ukraine and Syria, but not before Putin's tendencies toward authoritarian tendencies began to show, not to mention the disregard for the fate of individual Russians, foreshadowed by his initial indifference to the sinking of the submarine Kursk and later bungled rescue of its sailors. Baker and Glasser weave back and forth between Putin's Moscow-centered construction of what was early on called "managed democracy" (an oxymoron worthy of standing beside the Marxist "centralized democracy", perhaps as offspring) and the individual citizens failing to reform the judiciary or the army, attempting to teach young students, or even just trying to survive economically in a nation where businesses need "protection". The overall impression is that what Putin has sold the Russian people is a bargain in which they cede their rights (which never took root during the corrupt Yeltsin years anyway) for the

"protection" that the strong man offers. Yet, in key moments that protective element has failed, not just with the submarine, but in the government's approach to terrorist attacks on a theater in Moscow and a school in Beslan; it seems like the least that a people could ask of its government is not to respond to dire emergencies in a way that causes even more bloodshed. And by any measure of the effort to create a modern nation--a functioning democracy, an independent judiciary, media that is not an arm of the governing faction, armed forces that don't brutalize their recruits almost as much as the enemy, a public health system that actually seeks to prevent citizens from becoming ill and cares for them when they do--the protection trade-off has failed. Not that the Yeltsin decade was much better; if anything, the failure of that regime to replace the Soviets with anything better than violence, chaos, and corruption is in some ways the best argument for Putin. Baker and Glasser try to be fair; they are skeptical of the oligarch and latter-day democrat Mikhail Khodorkovsky and of the Yeltsin circle in general, and note Putin's tentative nods and eventual retreats from judicial and army reform. But the overall impression is of darkness gathering, inventing as it goes along means of leashing the media, rigging the electoral system, rewarding friends and punishing enemies, a graceless but increasingly forceful show of strength in a world where that is the greatest value. This is an image from after "Kremlin Rising" was published but I remember the long opening sequence of the Olympics, which treated hammer and sickle as just another historical era, praising Russia's industrialization. There was also a plea that Russians reverse their long demographic shrinkage (Lenin noted that the Russian soldiers of the First World War I voted with their feet; evidently, their descendants are voting with their rates of reproduction and emigration). And the Games took place in Sochi, the resort at which Putin could not be bothered to cut short his vacation during the Kursk crisis. All that said, the endurance of the Putin regime cannot be ascribed to manipulation; the oil economy that has aided regimes from Chavez' Venezuela to the Gulf states has given Putin both an argument for staying in power and a weapon against European states reliant on Russian gas. That power-for-growth equation has been altered, one would think for the worse, by the current oil glut. Thus in part, the Ukraine and Syria.

Sarah says

THE best post soviet history of russia I have read. Wonderful!

Rachael says

This is an excellent analysis and presentation of the current state of Russian politics and society. It is very comprehensive and accessible to readers who might not follow Russian current events as closely as dorks like me. I only wish I had read this closer to the beginning of my time in Russia.

Justin Tapp says

If you love Russia, or know someone who does, or have concern for someone who lives there then this book is for you. A great record of what's happened in the last 6 years under Putin. Things are getting worse and less free in Russia, not better. People who say "the verdict is still out on Putin," should probably read this book. In the past few years most "free" speech has been virtually outlawed, all TV media is now state-owned, oil and gas have been renationalized, the quagmire in Chechnya has continued, and all political parties and elections are now controlled by Putin and his party. My personal belief is that in 5-10 years you will no longer see Western missionaries allowed to live in Russia.

I found a good example of the censorship that the book talks about just yesterday. One of the websites that I used to frequent for information on Chechnya and to chat with Caucasus peoples was shut down. Kafkazcenter.com was housed in Sweden, where the Russian embassy allegedly convinced Swedish authorities to raid their offices and confiscate their servers for inciting terrorism. The site is very pro-Islam, and anti-Russian authority. You can find info on rebel attacks there that you won't see on any other news source. It's back up and running, for now, on Lithuanian servers.

Douglas Graney says

I read this in anticipation of bringing my students to the Embassy of Russia and/or a meeting with a State Dept official regarding Russia.

Prior to either or both of those taking place, the author Peter Baker agreed to talk to my students about his book. That will probably happen in October or November.

As for the book, I read it with the plan to make excerpts for my students. I will be using quite a bit of this book. Some of the areas I didn't feel I would use and skimmed through those. That being said, if you want to know what Putin's time in power was like (at least through most of the last decade) this is THE source.

It will also make recent events much more understandable.

James says

It seems more of us should have read this when it was published in 2005. It's depressing to see the authors' early pessimism about Putin's rule in Russia turn out to be so justified.

Sandy says

A revealing and provocative look at the developments going on in post-Soviet Russia under Vladimir Putin. As an aspiring scholar of Russia myself, I was strongly impressed with the depth of the disturbing trends revealed by Baker and Glasser in this book. The pair demonstrate the crackdown on democracy and free speech, the brutality of the war in Chechnya, the disturbing realities of the health and legal systems and the corruption rife in contemporary society in, at times, disturbing detail.

The book shows a Russia which is resurgent on the international stage but decaying from the inside out in terms of political institutions and public well-being, and shows a government increasingly willing to explicitly lie to and deceive its own people for the sake of political expediency.

A very readable book, I would recommend this to anyone who has an interest in what's going on in Russia today and how Putin's leadership, for good or ill, has transformed Russian society.
