

Putin Rising

by G. Murphy Donovan (November 2015)

“Whoever does not miss the Soviet Union has no heart. Whoever wants it back has no brain.”



Saint Basils, Moscow

Human history is about a lot of things, but mostly it's about the right men or women at the right place and time. Jefferson, Madison, Adams, and Washington for instance are examples of what might be called American success synergy. Lincoln, Lee, and Grant were indispensable too in their own way, for victory and reconciliation after America's most costly war. And just as surely, a successful conclusion to WWII might have been impossible without Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin.

We remember great men because, as Pericles prophesied, great men do great things and then live on in the hearts of other men. “The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding go out to meet it.”

Reputation is immortality in deed.

A great man, alas, is not necessarily good or popular. History is not kind to necessary villains. Stalin might be the best example from the WWII pantheon. Good and necessary are very different virtues. Josef Stalin was nonetheless one of those indispensable men who made victory and Russian national survival possible. Ruthless men make good soldiers.

Vladimir Putin may be such a man. The American president is not.

The European Union today suffers too from a deficit of great men and women. England, France, and Germany may someday be known to history as the timid troika that finally surrendered Europe to Mohammed's fantasy. Who knew that Europe could be overrun by rubber flip flops and plastic backpacks fleeing religious and ethnic chaos?

Putin is unique among world leaders today. He alone swims against the receding tide of European, dare we say, Western culture. Europe and America seem to have forgotten what made them great for millennia. Putin, in contrast, plays to the best that is Russian including pride, history, nationalism, patriotism, and Christianity. If we can borrow a tag line, Putin wants to make Russia great again.

He has indeed reversed the fortunes of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, albeit at some cost to democracy as we know it. Yet, if we review the domestic and foreign policy contretemps in the West for the past 50 years, social democracy is something less than a role model for Russians or anyone else for that matter. Indeed, social, fiscal, and multicultural excesses are [swamping](#) Europe and America as we speak.

Putin came to power at the turn of the century when the old Soviet empire was in free fall. You could say he rescued fair *Rodina* from the clutches of an alcoholic Slavic stereotype, Boris Yeltsin. Call it a revolution without guns. Since then, the former KGB officer has tried to restore almost every institution in which Russians take pride; art venues, historic Czarist properties, churches, monasteries, and even the Moscow Metro.



Moscow Metro

Small things matter when culture and civility is at risk. Compare public transport in Moscow to New York or Washington, DC. The Russian tube is a preserved work of art. The NYC Subway system is a spray painted [eyesore](#), a safety and health hazard.

True culture is best defined as pride in public institutions.



NYC subway track soup

Putin seems to be taking the best of what was Czarist and Communist and shaping a new Russian future. Call it managing the dialectics of national history. Unlike Brussels and Washington, the Russian president has, for good or ill, that leader's "vision" of which Pericles spoke so fondly.

Recently, we see the Russian president meeting with [Netanyahu](#), raising his profile in Syria, and at the UN lecturing Obama about the abuse of American power in the third world. More than one observer has suggested that Putin is now more [relevant](#) than the American president.

Putin now draws a bright red line in Syria, challenging America's spastic and disastrous regime change policies. The Russians are creating an [alternative](#) fighting coalition in the Levant, partnering with Syria and Iran – and putting boots on the ground too.

The Russian plan has several advantages that contrast with team Obama's now chronic bumbling.

The Russian presence is legal. They were invited. The Putin plan has domestic support in Russia too. The Federation Council has approved military operations. And most important, Putin's army has a relationship with Assad's Army which should make any air/ground support effective.

The American "coalition" against ISIS, in contrast, is a global [joke](#). Presently, over ninety nations send recruits to Baghdadi while a two or three Arab "allies" provide a few airstrikes to the ISIS fight. Indeed, the richest Sunni Arabs, those with the most to lose, do not fight the Islamic State on the ground nor do they accept civilian refugees from the fight. Such are America's Arab allies, a cabal of mostly corrupt, selfish cowards.

Team Obama is now isolated in the Levant for good reason too. America cannot be trusted! With Pentagon approval, Turkey now flies F-16 airstrikes [against](#) the Kurds, heretofore one of the few reliable US allies in the area. When national integrity is exchanged for base rights in places like Turkey, American foreign/military policies become lonely hookers. Say what you will about Putin and the Kremlin, unlike Obama and the Pentagon, Russia has been a reliable ally for Syria.

The real terrorists in the Middle East are Turks, Saudis, and Emirate Sunnis, all of whom are playing both sides of the street; on the one hand faking an anti-terror coalition and with the other hand [providing](#) refuge, arms, and finance to ISIS and other Sunni jihadists.

Oil rich Arabia and the Sunni *Ummah* have the best American and European allies

that money can buy.

The military vacuity on team America is underlined also by the recent resignation of General John Allen, USMC. Allen was supposed to be training those elusive Arab “moderates” in Iraq, a half billion dollar tactical boondoggle. You might best remember Allen as General Petraeus’ bimbo-phone-tag colleague whilst both were stationed at CENTCOM in Tampa, Florida.

At Ashton Carter’s Pentagon, you do not need to be honest, win wars, or even battles, to achieve flag rank. You do, however, need to be politically correct about the Kremlin, cult religion, race quotas, feminist [demands](#), and sex preference recruiting. Indeed, “cultural” sensitivities on the E-Ring are now [expanded](#) to protect homosexual pedophiles among Muslim “partners” in places like Afghanistan and Arabia.

Child abuse is now another artifact of Muslim culture protected by DOD policy.

Withal, it’s not difficult to understand why team Obama obsesses endlessly about Assad’s chemicals and barrel bombs and ignores a host of other moral, military, and morale failures like Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, or Yemen.

Putin, in contrast, lives in the real world. Syria without a chap like Assad is likely to be ravished by Islamic theocracy. Baghdadi is not just the only alternative to Assad on the Sunni horizon; the new Islamic Caliph is knocking on the door at Baghdad and Damascus. A lesser of two evils, like Assad, is often the best of choices in a world swirling again in a toilet of religious fanaticism.

Few polemicists in America, Left or Right, seem to get what is happening in the *Ummah*, America, or Russia. The great turning point of recent history was not the fall of the Soviet Union. The theocratic [revolution](#) in Persia was much more consequential, the starting gun for modern religious irredentism, the simultaneous global jihad against apostates and infidels.

Both Shia and Sunni now travel on parallel sanguinary roads towards marginally different religious illusions of [monoculture](#).

A fourth of the world’s population may be racing backward towards theocracy or caliphate. America is frozen by inertia, apathy, or incompetence. And Russia,

like China, is pressing on with visions of political sugar plums and a new world order.

Putin is a lot of things; a foot in the old Soviet Union and a foot in the new Russia. Whatever he is today, there are several things he is not. He is not Stalin, Hitler, [a new Czar](#), Count Dracula, or, unlike many politicians in the West, anybody's fool either.

In his own words, "Whoever does not miss the Soviet Union has no heart. Whoever wants it back has no brain."

The Kremlin has legitimate concerns for the millions of Russian speaking Soviet citizens that were stranded in no-man's land outside of Russia by the Soviet collapse. It hasn't helped that NATO encourages anti-Russian, if not neo-Nazi [thugs](#), in former Warsaw Pact states all along the new Russian border. NATO expansion is both a breach of the Reagan trust and a poke in Moscow's eye.

Like America, the European Union doesn't have a clue about what to do with a very real Islamist threat, thus a Russian straw man is now required to justify larger military budgets and a larger military alliance.

Ironically, any European strategy that might address the metastasizing Islamist threat is already hamstrung by Turkey, Erdogan's fifth column in NATO.

Withal, Putin is not some third world crackpot. Push back, or prudent border humanitarian/security concerns, does not equate to some new Russian imperialism.

Playing nuclear chicken with Russian nationalism is a fool's game too, especially while Washington and Brussels are in the hands of milquetoast militants.

Russia could be very helpful on any number problems; hot spots like Afghanistan and Syria, and issues such as terrorism, theocratic imperialism, energy, WMD proliferation, and space science.

Indeed, given the economic pinch of Crimea sanctions, it's a wonder Moscow hasn't cut the American Afghan supply line, turned off the heat in Europe, and told America to levitate for the next Space Station mission.

A fool makes unnecessary enemies while the prudent man cultivates helpful

allies. Russia makes a better friend than foe.

Unfortunately, political panderers in the West, Right and Left, have taken to Russophobia with a vengeance. Kremlin bashing is already a staple of the 2016 US presidential election.

Vladimir Putin argues for sanity at the UN whilst Hillary Clinton postures with an anti-Putin “Pussy [Rioters](#)’ at feminist forums.



Birds of a feather

There are today, nonetheless, a few faint political, diplomatic, and academic voices that argue for sanity.

Among these we should mention Congressman Dana [Rohrabacher](#), Ambassador Jack Matlock, and Professor Steven Cohen. Rohrabacher has bucked the Republican Party and Foggy Bottom on Russophobia. Former ambassador Jack Matlock has consistently [argued](#) for a pragmatic approach to Moscow since the new Cold War began. And Stephen Cohen has put his academic career at risk for challenging the self-serving [bias](#) of Radio Liberty and the American political science community.

Beltway bandits like the [RAND](#) Corporation and American academia may be reading the funding tea leaves too, anticipating an American neo-conservative sweep in 2016. When it comes to grant, study, and research funding; it pays for “science” to be on the right side of domestic and foreign politics. Russophobia seems to be the once and future cash cow.

Since WWII, America’s foreign policy has been defined by small wars, indeed a series of often calamitous proxy wars in places like Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Georgia, Ukraine, and now Syria. Throughout, the enemy morphed from the Communist menace, to the now defunct Warsaw Pact, to Russia, and now to personalities like bin Laden, Baghdadi, or Putin.

Small wonder then that the Kremlin might believe that the true objective of today’s proxy shenanigans is regime change in Moscow too. Ironically, since Soviet Communism collapsed, it seems like the West can’t take yes for an answer. As for emergent personalities like Vladimir Putin, Henry Kissinger put it best, “demonization is not policy.”

Contemporary views of Russia and the Kremlin may be driven by domestic American politics. Neither American political party knows what to do about Islamofascism, a true [global threat](#). Consequently, in order to avoid tough choices, both Republicans and Democrats have resurrected a Cold War with Russia. In America today, Putin is every Press and political nitwit's favorite whipping boy. The [NY Times](#), John McCain, and Hillary Clinton take bows here.

Small wonder then that Russia's top gun just picked up the leadership mantle in the Levant. If Putin wants to ride point in the Middle East, he will. For openers, the Russian coalition, unlike the American fakir coalition, is already in the fight.

If leadership matters, Putin is no dithering Obama. The Russian chief might just be ruthless enough to win. Vladimir's track record with the so-called Caucasus caliphate is [exemplary](#). While it took ten years for America to find and kill bin Laden, it took Putin a year to kill Shamil Baseyev along with any Islamist delusions in Russia. We don't hear much about "freedom fighters" in Afghanistan, the Chechen *jihad*, or a Caucasus caliphate these days.

Leadership matters.

If real threats are to be neutralized abroad, then cold warrior poseurs must give way to effective hot warriors. Vladimir Putin might be such a man. Obama, Cameron, Hollande, and Merkel, in contrast, are timid – indecisive orators who have permitted compassion and tolerance to be weaponized.

The West now has three choices: continue the "moderate" coalition charade, cooperate with the Russians, or withdraw and yield to a new initiative – and a decisive leader.

Those who cannot or will not lead in the Middle East need to step aside. The Islamic State and the Muslim *jihad* at home and abroad will not be defeated with words – or indulgence.

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