

Russia after 2020: Looking ahead after Two Decades of Putin

By J. Laurence Black

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Vladimir Putin, the pre-eminent decision maker in Russia from 1999 to the time the book was prepared for publication, is mentioned throughout the book as the author underlines in the introduction. The focus of the book is the constitutional amendment package that Putin put to a referendum in 2020. Specifically, the book discusses the amendment of Article 81, paragraph 3 of the Russian Constitution, enabling Putin to serve as President for two more terms. Through this constitutional amendment, Putin did not only make changes in social and political issues in Russia but also the legal infrastructure. The authors discuss the different dimensions of how Putin's re-election was built. In fact, with this constitutional amendment, Putin will be able to participate, as a candidate, in the presidential elections to be held in 2024 and, if he is elected, he will be able to hold the reins of power, as the President of Russia, for two more terms (twelve years) until 2036.

The author emphasizes that, unlike other studies, this book deals with the subject impartially, without prejudice to Russia and Putin (p. 2). In general, the book has not foreseen any obvious changes in Russia's foreign policy after the pandemic. In terms of trade, investment, and technology, the author argues that Russia's increasing dependence on China and India and its continued isolation from the West could be a major threat to Russia's ambi-



tions to become a global player. In the first part of the book, while it is emphasized that Putin used all of his constitutional powers while governing Russia, it is discussed why there is a need for constitutional amendments. While Putin was needed for the post-Soviet recovery period in Russia which started 18 years ago,

18 years later the question of who, if not Putin, started to be discussed by the Russian public (p. 9). In other words, it can be inferred from this chapter that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's recovery process has not been completed yet.

In chapter 2, the author claims that the 2020 constitutional amendment paved the way for adding new regions to the Russian Federation. Putin is aware that Russia is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural nation. In this chapter, the author states that the Putin perspective is behind the steps taken by Russia. He claims that Putin's perspective can be described as the mixing of different ethnic groups and cultural diversity within the Russian cultural accumulation (p. 59). In addition, the author states that Putin's ex-intelligence experience was effective in shaping the state.

As a matter of fact, new unit representatives were created, just like in intelligence, called Presidential envoys. Such envoys are special officials who monitor governors on behalf of the President. This method made a great con-

tribution to Putin's central authority (p. 17). In chapter 3, the legal framework of post-Putin period and political parties are analyzed. In addition, it is emphasized that with the 2020 constitutional amendment, important units within the Russian Federation have become more important for the center due to geopolitical and strategic reasons. In addition, it is highlighted that the authorities who manage these units gain a lot of power, which paves the way for making wrong decisions (p. 77).

Chapter 4 explains how Russia developed economically under Putin and how it will be affected by sanctions (what sanctions? which sanctions? Uncertainty on this subject). One of the main issues that increase Putin's acceptance in Russian society is the feeling of economic prosperity in the society. Likewise, the Russian government's rapid sale of U.S. Treasury bonds and the reduction of Russia's U.S. debt at the end of May 2018 are the topics covered in this section (p. 133). In chapter 5, attention is drawn to the satisfaction of the Russian people with the economic and political empowerment of Russia. As a matter of fact, the emphasis that Russian Law is superior to international agreements with the 2020 constitutional amendment can be considered as a message given to the Russian society. In this chapter, the author foregrounds the reactions of the Russian people to the international sanctions against Russia's political moves. Chapter 6 explores the Kremlin's relationship with the White House and focuses on its relations with China. In this part, the author draws attention to Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. It is emphasized that this speech is important in determining Moscow's attitude toward the Russian-American relationship (p. 240). In chapter 7, Russia's war preparations are discussed. The author explains Putin's military goals during his first two decades in office.

In this part, the author addresses Putin's perspective on nuclear and other weapons control agreements (p. 317). Chapter 8 focuses on the social manifestations of the "siege mentality" in Russian foreign policy since the 1990s. The author emphasizes how Russian society has been affected by historical processes, and the post-Soviet struggles over the control of information distribution in the social context, the direction of science and education, and progress in the fields of human rights (p. 352).

In chapter 9, the author draws attention to the contradictions created by the increasing income inequality while focusing on the pandemic process in Russia. Accordingly, he analyzes some of the Kremlin's actions in international relations from a realpolitik perspective. As a matter of fact, the author emphasizes that Russia's actions, in the global arena, did not take place in a vacuum because it is not disconnected from the international system. He even argues that if Russia's security interests are seriously threatened, the Kremlin can use force to ensure its own security. In this context, he emphasizes that Moscow can set aside traditional diplomacy to protect its geopolitical interests (p. 380). In the concluding part, the author analyzes the failure of the social opposition to overthrow the political power during the Putin rule. The author considers the timing success of the government in making concessions that the Russian society, in general, would not say no to as the biggest reason for this. However, he emphasizes that the 2020 constitutional amendment divides society in two. In addition, it was also highlighted that the first target of some requests and oppositional reactions of the Russian society was not to overthrow Putin from power.

As an editorial work, which makes it difficult for the book to be discussed as a whole, it can be emphasized, in some parts of the book, that

the frequent handling of geopolitical reasons in understanding Putin and Russian foreign policy causes the study to fall into repetition in some aspects. The non-laborious language of the book allowed the subjects to be dealt with in depth. In addition, transliteration, spelling, punctuation, and references are shared with the readers at the beginning of the book. An

extensive information note is given on the use of English, Russian, and Arabic concepts. This is a non-negligible point showing that the author has worked meticulously to reach the readers of the book. In this respect, the book can be considered useful and important work for students, analysts, and policymakers who are interested in Putin's Russia.