

Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Simon & Schuster, UK Ltd, 2015), 533.

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The New Tsar: the Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin, is a comprehensive and informative biography of the Russian President Vladimir Putin. Steven Myers, the author of the book has served in Russia as a *The New York Times* correspondent for almost seven years and, provides an unparalleled look into Putin's life. It is divided into five parts and recounts events like the September 11, Russia's war in Georgia in 2008, the 2014 annexation of Crimea as well as the Ukraine conflict.

Myers provides an edifying insight into Vladimir Putin's life. The book not only captures Putin's rise in Russia but also his hardscrabble childhood, his education, youth and his service at the KGB. The book builds a historical picture of Putin's slow and steady rise to power; it tells a tale of a man's emergence in almost a Shakespearian fashion, from deprivation to one of the most influential leaders in modern times.

The book showcases Putin as a clever and a calculated man who, on one hand, is bringing reforms in the country by cutting taxes and expanding property rights, reflecting a liberalist approach, and on the other, his government's move towards a new era of authoritarianism: building a new Russia and extending its influence in the Eastern Europe and the Middle East. It debates the rising tension between the West and Russia, involving areas from the Baltic to the Ukraine and the escalating threats of nuclear force.

Myers, in his book, candidly talks about Putin's mistrust towards everyone except his close friends who are known as 'siloviki' that also make up his political team. On many occasions, Myer characterizes and quotes Putin as 'the wheeler and dealer' and 'enabler' of foreign investments in Russia. He is termed as the ultimate authority in Russia even before his rise as the President of Russia. Putin's reign has brought

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Russia out of the time of troubles and has given hope to the masses; his popularity is unnerving for the West.

The author writes about Putin's urge to sought out his differences with the US after the September 11 attack, and he was the first world leader to call and convey his condolences to the US President calling the event as "an unprecedented act of aggression". Putin's act left many, in the US, wondering whether "the Cold War was really over". However, the dream came to an end with the US expulsion of 50 Russian diplomats in 2001, when FBI discovered a US official working covertly for the Russians. The Russians also retaliated by expelling 50 US diplomats. The Cold War atmosphere took another turn when the two leaders met in June of 2001 to diffuse the tensions and broke the ice and as a result Russia closed most of its posts overseas and softened its opposition towards the enlargement of NATO. Post-US Afghan invasion, Putin provided not only Russian Intelligence, but also weapon and money to the Northern Alliance to fight the Taliban. It also let the US attain military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which was heavily opposed by the Russian military and denounced as 'weak' or 'aloof'.

The author writes that, despite the growing amity between Russia and the US, Putin opposed the US war in Iraq as it drastically endangered Russia's oil contracts through which the Russian businessmen and politicians were making millions. Nonetheless, Putin made the choice not to support the US in its invasion of Iraq and later requested the United Nations to intervene whilst citing options and "alternative to war." Soon after, Myer writes, Putin started to slowly step back from the US and began to see it through the Cold War lens.

The book is thoroughly researched and best for those who want to understand Putin and the power politics in Russia. The book, in a nutshell, provides a narration of events in the most interesting manner before as well as after Putin's rise as a leader. Myer, as the title suggests, has covered every aspect of Putin's life from his rise to reign. The book ends with a compelling narrative that Putin has been able to build a new Russia containing characteristics of both the Soviet Union and the Tsarist empire.