

attitudes on the notion of the mother's natural duty as primary caregiver. Utrata draws a connection between the greater prevalence of the ideal of involved fatherhood in the West and the fact Western grandmothers are less involved in care for their grandchildren. Paradoxically, notwithstanding the fact that gender division actually renders marriage fragile, in Russia marital union is endorsed by the state ideology as the best solution for single mothers. Hence, the question to which Utrata leads her readership is truly acute: as rising longevity intersects with the neoliberal discourse on "productive ageing," will the new Russia be ready to cope in the event that Russian *babushki* become less involved in care for their grandchildren?

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Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin*. New York: Knopf, 2015. 592 pp.

Recently, quite a few books have been published about Russian President Vladimir Putin, but this is probably the best of them. Steven Lee Myers works for the *New York Times* and spent seven years in Moscow. He has written a highly readable political biography of Putin.

This book consists of five parts with a total of 25 chapters. It has an appropriate thematic-chronological structure, covering Putin's whole life until 2015. Lee Myers succeeds in satisfying both an academic audience and a broader interested public, by offering a detailed narrative in the style of Bob Woodward but also being highly accurate. While this is a journalistic book, it is very well researched and impressively erudite.

The author has used an excellent trick that we all should do more. Putin publishes an amazing volume of personal statements *ad verbatim* on his official website, www.kremlin.ru. Each year, he makes three major annual statements: his address to the Federal

Assembly, his big press conference, and his big phone-in program for the Russian people. Of course, these events are highly edited, but clearly Putin's technique is to throw out the most controversial issues in his annual press conference and phone-in program at once to minimize negative publicity. Lee Myers has woven his many interesting comments into their relevant contexts, letting Putin himself comment on many statements made in the book and his numerous quotes are accurate. These quotes lend authenticity and liveliness to his account. The reader gets a sense of knowing Putin, although the author passes judgments rather sparingly.

The picture of Putin that arises is a skillful and ruthless operator, hardly a man with whom you would like to drink tea. His rise is presented as quite unpleasant. The author leaves no doubt that Putin's aim was his own rise. Power and wealth motivate Putin, not ideology. Although ideas must not be ignored, they serve as little but a backdrop. In hindsight, it is obvious that Putin wanted to abolish democracy and freedom of the media.

While in St. Petersburg in the early 1990s, Putin was not very wealthy, but his company was dubious or even criminal. Lee Myers is right in making clear that Aleksei Kudrin helped Putin to Moscow and not Anatoly Chubais, who was not very close to Putin and actively opposed his ascendancy to prime minister in August 1999.

Lee Myers presents Putin as less accidental and a much more active and influential actor in his own rise to power from 1998 to 2000 than other accounts. This remains an outstanding dispute, but my suspicion is that this version will gain credence. The FSB (Federal Security Service) and Putin's role in it looms suitably large in this book.

As could be expected from a correspondent of the *New York Times*, Lee Myers is judicious for good and bad. He passes a judgment only when he finds it definitely proven. Some readers might find this irritating. He does not put the blame on Putin for the bloody house bombings in the fall of 1999 that brought him to power, which John Dunlop and David Satter have done in convincing books. But he avoids mistakes.

A reader of Karen Dawisha's excellent book *Putin's Kleptocracy* would find Lee Myers's presentation of Putin in St.

Petersburg as soft but not wrong, and he gets the assessment of St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly Sobchak right: “a brilliant orator and terrible manager” (89). In 1993, I attended an event with Sobchak, Kudrin and Putin in St. Petersburg. After having made an eloquent speech that floored the audience, the hapless Sobchak enjoyed his success so much that he made the same speech once again, receiving considerably less applause. Clearly Putin manipulated rather than obeyed Sobchak, which is clear in this book.

The weakest part of this book is the few pages devoted to Ukraine and Georgia. They reflect the persistent Moscow bias towards other former Soviet Republics. To dismiss Ukraine’s President Leonid Kuchma as a “kleptocrat” (259) does not quite do justice to him. But this is a small part of the book and the reader can just ignore them.

Readers highly critical of Putin might find the first parts of this volume soft but not incorrect. The last part of the book sets the record straight. Lee Myers has a devastating narrative of the Yukos confiscation, the Litvinenko murder, Putin’s cronies and the corruption. In his journalistic fashion, he notes that Russia’s Goebbels, “Dmitri Kiselyov compared [Putin] to Stalin and meant it as a compliment” (421). Using such citations, you can afford to be judicious and still make clear what kind of a character Putin is.

This is an outstanding account of what Putin’s rule in Russia is and it is likely to hold.

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Thomas W Simons, Jr (ed.) *Islam in Eurasia: A Policy Volume*. Cambridge MA: Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, 2015. 95 pp.

This collection presents four policy papers presented at a 2013 conference to discuss the implications of Islam in Eurasia for American foreign policy. As with most collected volumes, the overarching argument and the link between the chapters may not be as obvious as the editor might assume. In and by themselves,