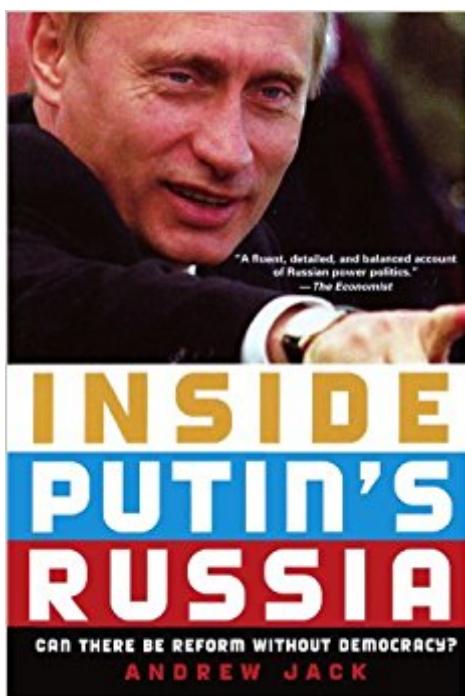


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Inside Putin's Russia: Can There Be Reform Without Democracy?



Synopsis

International views of Russia have changed drastically in the last decade, due in part to the leadership of the decidedly pro-Western President Yeltsin. It was not without concern that we saw the next elected leader pulled from the ranks of the former KGB. Andrew Jack, former Moscow bureau chief for the Financial Times, uses in-depth research and years of journalistic experience to bring us the first full picture of Vladimir Putin. Jack describes how Putin grew to become the most powerful man in Russia, defying domestic and foreign expectations and presiding over a period of strong economic growth, significant restructuring, and rising international prestige. Despite criticism of his handling of the war in Chechnya and of the controls he introduced on parliament and the media, Putin has united Russian society and maintained extraordinarily high popularity. Inside Putin's Russia digs behind the rumors and speculation, illuminating Putin's character and the changing nature of the Russia he leads. It highlights some of the more troubling trends as he consolidates his leadership during a second presidential term marred by the Beslan tragedy, the attacks on Yukos and Russian policy towards Ukraine. Now with a new Epilogue by the author, this invaluable book offers important insights for anyone interested in the past, present, and future of Russia.

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Customer Reviews

In assessing Vladimir Putin's first term as Russia's president, Jack, Moscow bureau chief of the Financial Times, answers a very limited "yes" to the subtitle's question. His finely wrought political

record of the country's last four years argues that a detailed understanding of Russia's particular combination of circumstances—“Cold War security-state trauma; out-of-control crony capitalism; a simmering, terror-centered civil war”—make Putin's autocracy more comprehensible, if not palatable or sustainable. A familiar introductory profile of a smart, engaged Putin; sketches of gulag survivor culture; Putin's rise from Petersburg-based bureaucrat to Yeltsin's handpicked successor, then autocratic ruler; and Chechnya's role in shaping Putin's rule since his appointment to the presidency in 2000 (with subsequent elections) form the book's succinct first half. The book's second half finely renders the fallout from Russia's disastrous privatization in the 1990s; in chapters like “Autumn of the Oligarchs,” Jack (The French Exception) sees Putin as attempting to get the power brokers created by Yeltsin to serve the country with a combination of shrewd legislation, media control and raw power. It can be tough to keep track of the players in the shady doings of Yukos, Lukoil and other energy companies still in the news, but Jack's familiarity with and skepticism of them makes for directed reading. The result is an excellent (and wary) political and economic overview of an often opaque U.S. ally. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“In the most comprehensive account of Putin's first term in office now in print, Jack presents a judicious account of his achievements: tax reform, balanced budgets, sharply reduced international lending and a booming economy.” --Michael McFaul, Washington Post Book World “Jack's book is, as the title suggests, an attempt to see Russia from within, to understand it on its own terms. Jack is not sympathetic to the regime, but he is fascinated by the country.... We learn a huge amount about Putin's Russia along the way.... The restraint and the skepticism that run through Jack's book do even more credit to the author now that Putin's credentials are going up in smoke.” --Robert Cottrell, New York Review of Books “Lively, fluent and well-informed.” --Guardian “Andrew Jack has been responsible for some of the best coverage of Russian affairs in recent years. Inside Putin's Russia is intelligent, meticulously researched and readable: everything a political biography should be.” --Sunday Times “A fluent, detailed and balanced account of Russian power politics, with a lively emphasis on the Kremlin's onslaught against independent media and stroppy tycoons.” --The Economist “An excellent (and wary) political and economic overview of an often opaque U.S. ally.” --Publishers Weekly

When I first got this book from the public library I was so astounded by the information that I had to buy a second, permanent copy (from). This inside look of Russia after the fall of Communism and

the (dangerous) rise of Vladimir Putin to the head of this dying thugocracy is one of the best books written about modern day Russia. The author has gained (nasty) details on what is really happening inside Russia, information that the mainstream media won't bother to tell you. A well written book; excellent! Buy it today!

Andrew Jack is Moscow bureau chief of the Financial Times, which is a pro-Big business UK paper. The paper hasn't been particularly focused or interested in Russia, except occasion critical outbursts of FT columnist Quentin Peel. The author is one of the whole crew of young Anglo-American correspondents who felt compelled to write a book after several years in Russia. The sweep of the book is broad - it is the Russia's business elite, GULAG, transitional economy, KGB, communism, city of Moscow, Russian political system, and Chechnya. It is impressive for anyone to cover all these topics in one swift stroke, but inevitably questions arise about a depth of such a book and its usefulness in predicting the Russia's future. The book didn't impress me very much on either of these counts. The author, who is essentially an investigative reporter, has undeniable strengths, which are in his knowledge of details: a date, a name, an event, some important personal detail. But a solid big picture unfortunately is not among them. The book is filled with little nuggets of information about Russia, Russian 'oligarchs', and politicians, but I don't think it has a real depth, nor I am convinced that the book offers an objective portrait of 'Putin's Russia'. In the book Russia is portrayed essentially as an imperfect, if not unsuccessful, disciple of laissez-faire capitalism practiced by US and UK. Also, the author does not appear to be as peeved as Marquise De Custine, but comes close sometimes. Jack writes in crisp, short sentences. He is obviously familiar with Russian language and throws lots of names around, but his anglicizing of Russian names is annoying. For example, on page 37 he mentioned 'Old' Square in Moscow. In Russian language it is 'Staraya' Square. With the same success one could call the Kremlin 'the Tower'. Many pages are filled with author's personal 'disappointments' in Russia from his description of unsuccessful attempts to buy fresh lattice to his accounts of agonizing encounters with Russian traffic police - the feared GAI. A lot of it appears to be a natural frustration of a foreigner, who is just trying to figure out what makes the Russians tick. The most important weakness of this book is its failure to examine Russia on its own terms, not to try to fit it into 'the bed of Procrustes' of Anglo-American model, code of behavior, and virtues of US-style market democracy. Of course, Jack is right then saying that Putin's priority is modernization of Russia, not building a 'democracy that bears more than a superficial resemblance to the variance recognizable in the west.' But the author's attitude, as shown in his choice of words, is quite wrong. Looking at the examples of

countries like Japan and Singapore, how could one say that the Anglo-Saxon way of market democracy is the only way to achieve prosperity and modernization? Why, if fact, it should be desirable in Russia? The message of the book is pedestrian 'Russia in 2008 is likely to be a country in better shape than some now fear, but not as impressive as it might have been had Putin used his potential to the full' (page 339). The tone of patronizing superiority notwithstanding, one doesn't have to go through 350 pages to figure that out. I was impressed with his exercise in semantics when he called Russia a country, which 'is shifting from anarchic liberalism towards liberal authoritarianism', but it really explains nothing. 'Liberal' means different things to different people. In Russia 'Young liberals' is a contemptuous name (even a swearing word) for a group of reformers who carried out 'the shock therapy' of the early nineties. Incidentally, these 'young liberals' have had little to do with liberalism, but were adherents of rightist Thatcherism, standing for massive privatization, withdrawal of price control, trickle-down economics, and general free-market fundamentalism. What is particularly puzzling is Jack's failure to notice a most striking feature of Kremlin's policies. It is not Putin's connection to KGB, which makes him noteworthy, but his Russian version of Gaullism. Like De Gaulle, Putin is a nationalistic, populist leader, insistent on a strong presidency, and determined to actively encourage a 'multi-polar' world, in order to check US dominance. All these have clear earmarks of French Gaullism a la Russe, and, incidentally, and not surprisingly France has been the closest Russian ally in the world. Mr. Jack who was stationed in Paris before Moscow didn't seem to bother to make a connection.

In my opinion Andrew Jack's book has some interesting passages, but the book seems to contain too many factual errors to get a high score. I'll restrain myself to the following example: On page 18 of the paperback edition he refers to the spy-cases of Aleksandr Nikitin and Grigory Pasko, who according to Mr. Jack were two navy journalists who reported on radioactive waste in respectively the Baltic Sea and the Pacific Ocean. They were, says Mr. Jack, "released from prison, but not technically acquitted" (and implicitly not convicted either). In this short passage there is no less than four factual errors. First, Aleksandr Nikitin was not a navy journalist, but a former nuclear engineer/submarine officer, who later was the head of the nuclear safety inspection of the Russian Ministry of Defence, a position he quit in 1992. Second, Mr. Nikitin co-wrote a report on radioactive contamination from the Russian Northern Fleet, which is based on the Kola Peninsula. Thus, his writings did not have anything to do with the Baltic Sea, but rather with the Barents Sea. Third, Mr. Nikitin was imprisoned and charged with treason through espionage in February 1996. He was released from prison in December that year, and acquitted of all charges first by the St. Petersburg

City Court in December 1999, then by the Collegium of Criminal Cases of the Russian Supreme Court in April 2000, and finally by the Presidium of the Russian Supreme Court in September 2000. Mr. Pasko on the other hand was convicted for treason through espionage by the Court of the Russian Pacific Fleet in December 2001, but was released from prison after having served two thirds of his four-year's conviction (including time spent in pretrial detention) in January 2003. I hope for the sake of the book that its other sections contains a little less errors. But I am not by any means convinced.

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