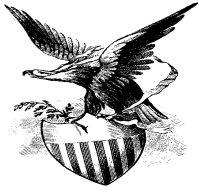


# Light Brings Salt

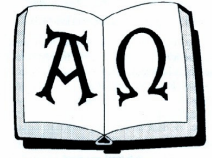
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### WHO IS VLADIMIR PUTIN AND WHERE IS HE LEADING RUSSIA?

By Joel C. Rosenberg

(WASHINGTON, DC, November 28, 2006) -  
- The assassination of an KGB-operative-turned-critic-of-Vladimir-Putin in London by radioactive poison has stunned the West and raised chilling new questions about who Putin is, what he wants, and how far he's willing to go to get it. It's about time.

For the last six years, few in Washington -- including conservatives -- have been willing to carefully assess, much less confront, Putin's increasingly anti-Western rhetoric and actions. But the murder of FSB Colonel Alexander Litvinenko may change all that. The cold hard truth is that Putin is not a friend of the U.S. or the West. He is neither a partner for peace nor worthy of G8 or WTO membership. He is dismantling democracy in Russia, re-socializing the Russian economy, taking over the Russian media, rebuilding the Russian military, forming alliances with radical Islamic nations, arming our worst enemies -- including Iran and North Korea -- and positioning himself as Russia's new Czar.

For a man who was trained by the KGB and at one time was Russia's top spy, Putin has been surprisingly candid about his long-term objectives and his strategies for achieving them, at least to those who are watching closely and listening carefully. In 1999, for example, Reuters ran the following headline: "RUSSIAN PREMIER VOWS TO REBUILD MILITARY MIGHT."

Putin, then prime minister under Yeltsin, had just delivered a speech declaring that "the government has undertaken to rebuild and strengthen the military might of the state to respond to the new geopolitical realities, both external and internal threats." He focused special attention on "new threats [that] have emerged on our southern frontiers." Putin also announced a 57 percent increase in military spending in the year 2000.

No sooner had Yeltsin stepped down than Putin repeated the vow to rebuild his country's badly withered military machine. "Our country Russia was a great, powerful, strong state," he declared in January 2000, "and it is clear that this is not possible if we do not have strong armed forces, powerful armed forces."

Putin has kept his word. Consider 2004, for example.

\* In January, Putin ordered the largest maneuvers of Russian nuclear forces in two decades, scrambling strategic bombers, launching cruise missiles, test-firing ballistic missiles, and sending new spy satellites into orbit, in what analysts described as "an imitation of a nuclear attack on the United States."

\* In February, Putin insisted that Russia "does not have and cannot have aggressive objectives of imperial ambitions." Yet he ordered dramatic improvements in the Russian military to achieve a more "combat-capable army and navy," causing one of China's leading dailies to worry about "the resurrection of the Russian military."

\* In August, Putin ordered a 40 percent increase in Russia's defense budget, including new fighter aircraft, new rockets, and two new army divisions.

\* In December, as the election crisis in Ukraine was still unfolding, Putin ordered the test launch of a Cold War-era Russian intercontinental ballistic missile known as the SS-18 Satan, the first time the Russians had fired such a missile since the Soviet Union collapsed.

With the rebuilding of Russia's conventional military and strategic nuclear missile forces underway, Vladimir Putin then delivered a speech on April 25, 2005, that I believe ranks as the most dangerous presidential address of our times. "First and foremost," he declared, "it is worth acknowledging that the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. As for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory." Putin went on to argue that since the threat to Russia from terrorism was "still very strong," the Kremlin must be strong to eradicate such terror. "The moment we display weakness or spinelessness, our losses will be immeasurably greater." Then he insisted that Russia should remain "connected" to "the former republics of the USSR." He argued that Russia and her neighbors have "a single historical destiny" together, and said he wants to "synchronize the pace and parameters of [the] reform processes" in Russia and those former Soviet republics.

Consider for a moment what such a speech says about the lenses through which the leader of Russia views his country and the world. When Vladimir Putin looks out over the vast expanse of the twentieth century, he is not primarily concerned with the 20 million people who perished under Stalin's reign of terror. Or the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust under Adolf Hitler. Or the 3 million who died in the killing fields of Cambodia under Pol Pot. Rather, he believes

that the disintegration of the Evil Empire ranks as the "greatest political catastrophe of the century" and that its reintegration and synchronization is a matter of "historic destiny."

Such fondness for an empire so murderous and cruel would be chilling if it were voiced by the leader of any country possessing 10,000 nuclear warheads. But it is particularly chilling coming from the leader of Russia, a country described in the Scriptures as having expansionist ambitions in the last days.

Yet this was not the first time Putin had discussed such views or such ambitions on the record. In 2000, three Russian journalists-Nataliya Gevorkyan, Natalya Timakova, and Andrei Kolesnikov-published *First Person*, in my view the most important book ever written about Putin. It is important not because the journalists offered their own insights or analysis into Putin but because they let Putin speak for himself. They interviewed the Russian leader six separate times. Each interview lasted about four hours. The book is merely a transcript, and when it comes to understanding Putin's ambitions and approach, it is a goldmine of intelligence.

Putin on his mission in life - "My historical mission," he insisted, is to stop "the collapse of the USSR" (p. 139). To do this, he vowed to "consolidate the armed forces, the Interior Ministry, and the FSB [the successor to the KGB, the "secret police" of the Soviet Union]" (p. 140). "If I can help save Russia from collapse, then I'll have something to be proud of" (p. 204).

On his style - "Everyone says I'm harsh, even brutal," Putin acknowledged, without ever disputing such observations. "A dog senses when somebody is afraid of it, and bites," he observed. "The same applies [to dealing with one's enemies]. If you become jittery, they will think they are stronger. Only one thing works in such circumstances-to go on the offensive. You must hit first, and hit so hard that your

opponent will not rise to his feet" (p. 168).

On the czars - "From the very beginning, Russia was created as a super centralized state. That's practically laid down in its genetic code, its traditions, and the mentality of its people," said Putin, adding: "In certain periods of time . . . in a certain place . . . under certain conditions . . . monarchy has played and continues to this day to play a positive role. . . . The monarch doesn't have to worry about whether or not he will be elected, or about petty political interests, or about how to influence the electorate. He can think about the destiny of the people and not become distracted with trivialities" (p. 186).

On his choice of history's most interesting political leader - "Napoleon Bonaparte" (p. 194).

On his rise from spy to president - "In the Kremlin, I have a different position. Nobody controls me here. I control everybody else" (p. 131).

On his critics - "To hell with them" (p. 140).

Putin has repeatedly promised that he will not attempt to extend his time in office when his second term ends in 2008, and every person I interviewed in Russia in 2004-including every political officer and diplomat I spoke with at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow-told me they believed he would leave peacefully when the time came. Should he really do so, Putin will pass on to his successor executive power unparalleled since pre-Gorbachev times and a dynamic that suggests a future of more, rather than less, centralization of power.

But how seriously should Putin's many pledges be taken? On at least six separate occasions after becoming president, he vowed not to end direct elections of Russia's regional governors and appoint them himself. Yet in 2004, when it suited his purposes, he did just that. Why should his promise to leave office in 2008 be any different? Now in his fifties, Putin is still a

young man, at the top of his game, with no professional experience of any kind other than being a KGB-trained suppressor of dissidents and a rising political leader. What if he wants to change the constitution to allow him to stay? Belarus did it in 2004 (and President Alexander Lukashenko was "reelected" in 2006 with 83 percent of the vote). Other ex-Soviet republics have done it as well, including Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

What if Putin is looking for a pretext for himself to become a new Russian monarch? Would a terrible new series of terrorist attacks-perhaps similar to the Beslan school hostage crisis-be enough? What about an assassination attempt, or attempts at a coup, or new revolutions in the former Soviet republics? What about polls showing that in the absence of Putin, the leading two contenders for Russia's presidency are ultranationalist fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and communist hardliner Genady Zyuganov? Might "the will of the Russian people" suffice? In 2004, only 27 percent of Russians supported a third Putin term (perhaps this is why every expert I spoke with dismissed the possibility). By June 2006, however, the number had shot up to 59 percent.

Bottom line: It is time for the White House and Congress to radically redefine our relationship with Vladimir Putin. He is a Czar in the making and he is leading Russia down a very dangerous path.

### *Thoughtful Quote*

"It's time to abandon the mindlessly repeated mantra that religious belief has been the greatest source of human conflict and violence. Atheism, not religion, is the real force behind the mass murders of history." —Dinesh D'Souza