

Vladimir Putin is known for being Russia's "accidental president". This might seem like a term fitting to his position, as he came to power remarkably quickly. Achieving his status as Russia's prime minister created a sense of astonishment among the majority of the citizens. After all, it was extraordinary that someone who didn't have much of a background like Putin suddenly had the power to rule the whole country.

However, it appears that Putin's coming to power wasn't because of his good luck. Indeed, he was carefully observed by the former KGB agents. This observation started since he became a part of the mayoral administration of Leningrad. Whether he was loyal or not was tested and the image he had created in the public appearances was carefully evaluated.

Putin's association with KGB agents started way before his time in politics, and his time as the prime minister helped to implement their power in Russian politics. This summary will explore how that situation happened and its effects on both Russia and the West today.

## Chapter 1 - Before his time in politics, Vladimir Putin was among the members of KGB.

Joining the KGB, the secret police force of the Soviet Union, was Vladimir Putin's childhood dream. He wanted to follow his father, his desire to become like his father was so strong that he got in touch with the local Leningrad KGB office to ask if he can be a member before graduating the school.

Putin made sure to follow the directions of the KGB office and chose his programs and classes according to them during his education. He followed these directions meticulously. During this time, he used judo to vent his aggression.

Shortly after becoming a member of the KGB, Putin went to Dresden, East Germany, in 1985. He experienced secret missions, smuggling, and assassination for the first time there.

Dresden was known to be the East German backwater when Putin arrived there. There were only six KGB officers that were on duty there. During this time, East Germany was struggling with bankruptcy, and the ruling Communist Party was facing the risk of collapse.

The KGB issued a secret mission, named Operation Luch, after recognizing these problems. The aim of the mission was to create a network of agents to become members of political circles. If the mission was successful, the KGB would continue to survive in Germany, even if the country became reunified.

Putin's place in this mission is mostly a mystery. However, it is known that he became the main KGB liaison officer with the Stasi, the East German secret police. He was given a Stasi identification card. With this id card, he was allowed to go into Stasi buildings, making it convenient for him to find and employ agents for Operation Luch.

A big part of this mission depended on terrorism. To be more precise, the KGB had relations with the Red Army Faction, which was a Marxist community in West Germany. The Red Army Faction aided the KGB in protecting its interests. At one time, the chairman of the

Deutsche Bank was killed while driving to work due to a grenade that was found in his car. There is a chance that the attack was triggered by a Red Army Faction member since it is apparent that the group knows military detonation techniques thanks to the training camps of the Stasi. After the chairman's death, Deutsche Bank lost its power, and a Stasi-related bank had the chance to gain power.

Such mysterious operations of the KGB and the Stasi were only the beginning of Putin's rise to power.

## Chapter 2 - A community of young business magnates started to become more powerful than the KGB in the 1990s.

During the Soviet Union era, the Communist Party in power and the KGB were quite similar to each other. They conducted numerous financial crimes together.

An example of the crimes committed by the two organizations is the KGB bootlegging millions of dollars to left-leaning groups overseas. The legal way to handle the situation was to transfer the funds from donations to the Communist Party. Thus, the Communist Party members received money from the government. And then the money was transferred overseas via the KB.

The KGB fundamentally had the authority on the finances and economy of the country thanks to the Communist Party. Yet, the age of liberal reforms of Boris Yeltsin changed the dynamics. Boris overthrew Mikhail Gorbachev and became the president in 1991.

In October 1991, President Yeltsin commanded the abolishment of the KGB. He changed the structure of the KGB and separated it into four domestic factions. However, former KGB operatives kept their titles as advisors, were employed in government positions, and supervised the oil sector from the 1990s to the 1950s.

Yet, the agents soon started to lose their power. Yeltsin's sweeping democratic reforms were one of the main reasons behind this loss. These reforms involved the privatization of several industries. Soon enough, young business tycoons begin to gain power. They were later known as the oligarchs.

Although Yeltsin wished to make reforms, his state coffers were drying up. Seeing this, a banker called Vladimir Potanin offered an ingenious scheme. The scheme was known as loans-for-shares privatization. Supporting the Russian government with loans would be rewarded with tycoons receiving stakes in the country's greatest enterprises in oil and other resources.

The loans-for-shares privatizations helped the tycoons to become immensely powerful and influential, leaving behind the influence of former KGB officials. Among these deals was the time when Potanin received a controlling stake in Norilsk Nickel, a company with profits of \$1.2 billion in 1995. Potanin received the stake in Norilsk Nickel for little more than the price of the loan.

The oligarchs had immense authority over numerous industries in Russia. Yet, somewhere near them, in St. Petersburg, KGH agents still had power.

## Chapter 3 - The KGB was able to control St. Petersburg's economy thanks to Vladimir Putin.

During the first half of the 1990s, the Soviet Union began collapsing. Vladimir Putin was commanded to go back to Leningrad since St. Petersburg was known. He inspected the boom of Leningrad's pro-democracy movement. The movement appeared as a high risk to the Communist Party's authority on the politics of Leningrad.

Putin started to act as the connection between the KGB and Anatoly Sobchak in a short time. Sobchak, an attractive law professor, often talked about the benefits of democracy and his rejection of the KGB in public. But behind the closed doors, he is believed to have had unofficial business with the KGB. Before May of that year, Sobchak started his position as the new city council chairman. Putin was his right-hand man.

Soon, Sobchak became mayor. The conditions of the city were not good. The coffers weren't full, shop shelves didn't have anything more than some pickled cucumbers. And policing was lax, thus the situations were perfect for organized crime groups to force themselves on local businesses.

It was complete havoc. The result of this havoc was an alliance between Putin and the KGB. This alliance then helped the organization to control the economy of the city.

The KGB started to flourish with the emergence of a slush fund, also called an obschak. The fund was spent by transferring cash to the KGB for its personal use and strategic moves.

Putin's committee provided \$95 million worth of export licenses to a group of front companies in order to create the obschak. On the surface, these companies brought in food imports. The city was desperately in need of food; however, they didn't receive anything. All the money was used for the obschak instead.

In addition to the obschak, the KGB was in charge of the Leningrad seaport, which was run by Viktor Kharchenko. Someday in 1993, Kharchenko was stopped by the police. They made him get off the train and charged him with stealing. He was able to escape from his charge, but that didn't stop Putin's KGB comrades from assigning someone among them to his place.

Eventually, the KGB was able to control Leningrad's seaport and oil terminal thanks to Ilya Traber. Traber was related to the Tambov organized crime group. Putin and his lieutenant issued licenses to let Traber be in charge of the port and the oil terminal with a member of the KGB, Gennady Timchenko. Along with Putin's presidency, all of the people continued to take senior executive positions in the important assets of the country.

## Chapter 4 - Putin continued to rapidly advance in his position after arriving in Moscow.

In 1996, Anatoly Sobchack lost his campaign to get re-elected as the mayor of St. Petersburg. Completely loyal to Sobchack, Vladimir Putin also resigned and lost his position in the city's administration.

Resigning from his position, Putin found himself invited to Moscow within a month. He was required to work for the position of deputy head of the Kremlin administration. He was ultimately blocked from the position. Instead of that, he became head of the Kremlin's foreign property department, a role that constituted the core of Russia's imperial wealth. Putin had never had such a major promotion.

And it was only the beginning for Putin. He would continue to experience a dramatic rise in his positions.

Upon his promotion, Putin received various other promotions in a short time. First, he started to work as the head of the Control Department. He was responsible for making sure that the president's commands would be carried out within the so-called "unruly" regions. Just three months later, he started his position as the head of the FSB –the security services agency that was the successor of the KGB. After that, on August 9, 1999, an unexpected announcement was received: Putin would become the country's new prime minister.

What was the reason for Putin's rise in the ranks? In hindsight, it appears that he was prompted by the former KGB generals. They had to find a person who would wish to collaborate with them, follow their commands, and seem strong on television. Putin qualified for all these requirements. However, at that point, he still didn't have much reputation among the public.

This situation changed in September 1999. In 1999, three deadly bombings created havoc through apartment complexes across Russia. The whole nation was in a panic.

During this crisis, Vladimir Putin showed himself. He fundamentally became the commander-in-chief of the nation. They blamed the Chechen fighters for the bombings and thus, Putin started a campaign of airstrikes on Chechnya. He vowed to strike back and get revenge for the innocent Russians that lost their lives to the Russian people in a speech he made to the public.

There are still questions about these events. Some think that the bombings were a strategic move by the FSB. While it is not known whether these rumors are true or not, it is apparent that the event helped Putin to gain support from the public. People saw Putin as a strong and tough leader. Soon he was elected as the president, overthrowing Yeltsin.

## **Chapter 5 - Putin started a campaign to take control of the oil industry upon taking over the media.**

During the initial phase of Putin's reign, some people foresaw the fact that the nation was approaching a state of authoritarianism and kleptocracy.

One of these people was an oligarch, called Boris Berezovsky. He was the owner of a TV channel called ORT in addition to owning other businesses. The channel used most of its broadcasting time to criticize Putin. Once, it continuously showed a video of Putin on a jet ski after a Russian submarine exploded.

Enraged by ORT's attitude, Putin commanded that an investigation on Berezovsky be carried out over theft claims. Not being able to withstand these accusations, Berezovsky escaped from Russia, and Putin took down ORT. This instance was just the beginning of Putin's complete control over Russia's free media and the oligarchs. After seizing the media, he aimed to take control of the oil tycoons.

With the downfall of the Soviet Union, the Russian state was not able to maintain its monopoly over the oil sector. This prompted the emergence of four companies: Lukoil, Yukos, Surgutneftegaz, and Rosneft. Because of Yeltsin's privatizations and loans-for-shares scheme, the oligarchs had control of the oil industry.

After Putin overthrew Yeltsin, oil prices rose rapidly, increasing the fortune of the oligarch as well. This situation motivated Putin to gain control over the oil industry. Rosneft was already under the control of the state. The director of Surgutneftegaz was also linked to the KGB. The remaining two companies to be controlled were Lukoil and Yukos.

Similar to the media incident, Putin's wrestling of Lukoil started with a made-up investigation.

Vagit Alekperov, one of Lukoil's directors, was blamed for tax fraud in 2000. After two years, Lukoil's first vice president got drugged and abducted by masked men with police uniforms. Just a week later, the government declared that Lukoil had accepted to pay \$103 million in back taxes. There appeared to be a deal between Lukoil and the Kremlin: a part of Alekperov's stake would secretly be given to Putin. However, Lukoil has never accepted this rumor to this day.

The last oil company to control was Yukos. However, the owner of the company, also known as the richest man in Russia, was not someone who would be willing to cooperate.

## **Chapter 6 - Taking control of Yukos was a sign that the KGB had an advantage over the oligarchy.**

An oligarch and once the chairman and CEO of Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky believes himself to be an adrenalinischik –an adrenaline addict. He spent his youth rock-climbing without equipment. Later in his life, he was able to sleep peacefully even though he was at risk of attacks any minute.

Therefore, Vladimir Putin's desire to have a monopoly on the oil industry, Khodorkovsky decided he wouldn't go down without a fight. He resorted to executives from the West and drilling equipment manufacturers so that he could transfer the company to Western markets. He was the founder of Open Russia, an organization that aimed to explain the principles of democracy to the Russian youth. The organization also made a presentation that criticized the Russian government for being corrupt. Vladimir Putin was there when the presentation was shown.

Still, Putin was insistent enough for Khodorkovsky's bold attitude to crack.

In the first half of the 2000s, Khodorkovsky spent a fortune in order to provide financial aid to Putin's rivals in politics, including Communist Party members. The shift in his political stance was notable: there were sufficient parliamentary votes to block Kremlin bills from passing.

One evening while having a private dinner, Khodorkovsky was commanded by Putin to no longer support the Communists. Of course, Khodorkovsky resisted. His rejection motivated Putin to start imposing major actions against the oligarch and Yukos.

Yukos's security chief, Alexei Pichugin, was the first one to be arrested by the police, accused of murder. Next, Khodorkovsky's right-hand man, Platon Lebedev was captured. The investigations resulted in the decrease of Yukos's stock. In just a few months, FSB commandos started to heist locations linked to Yukos in Moscow with machine guns. Eventually, Khodorkovsky joined his comrades that were arrested.

Khodorkovsky was kept in a Moscow prison for a long time before his trial. He argued that this was an abuse of power that would lead to dangerous situations. And the court proceedings were controlled by the Kremlin. His arguments were that the trial was hurried, and laws were enacted in a discriminatory way. Khodorkovsky eventually was punished with an eight-year jail sentence due to tax fraud.

Putin and his comrades firmly explained that Khodorkovsky's trial didn't exhibit any power play; the act was necessary to show a deceiving oligarch his place. Still, the proceedings resulted in the Kremlin separating Yukos and taking most of Yukos's assets. Before Yukos broke up, 80% of Russia's oil output belonged to private hands. After the proceedings, it was declined to 45 percent.

## Chapter 7 - Putin used terrorism to strengthen his public image.

Dubrovka musical theater in Moscow was packed with 900 people to watch the tap dancers on October 23, 2003. The theater was just a few miles away from the Kremlin.

During the second act, a shocking event took place. 40 Chechen fighters raided the musical with guns, firing into the air as a warning. They started to equip the place with explosives. Hijab-wearing women with belts full of bombs were among the rows.

The reason for the attack was to put an end to Russia's war in the Chechen Republic. The terrorists gave Russia seven days to withdraw –or else, the theater would explode. But was the event as simple as it appeared?

In three days, Russian security services discharged a gas that was made of the opioid fentanyl into the theater. The gas was critically deadly, the Chechens were eliminated, but 113 of the hostages also lost their lives in the process. Instead of capturing the Chechens to question them, the FSB killed them on the spot.

Why the government handles the event so badly is still unknown. A Kremlin insider accuses the FSB chief, Nikolai Patrushev, of planning the attack to create havoc in the nation and get support from the country for the Chechen war. This event would also benefit Putin, as he emerged as the hero.

It is still a mystery whether the rumors are true or not. But it is a fact that the event helped Putin to gain approbation from global and local leaders. They believed that Putin was influential in making sure that the situation was handled properly. His ratings in Russia had a dramatic increase, the FSB saw an increase in funding. And the military gained approval to advance in Chechnya.

What seemed to be a terrorist attack helped Putin's regime to construct a national identity. It was one of the many tactics used for this purpose.

Another objective of Putin was to revive the Russian Orthodox religion. The Orthodox religion gave special importance to the great sacrifices and hardships that Russia went through. Besides that, Putin wished to make the West appear as villains, thus, he claimed that the Westerners were to blame for the Chechen attack, although he had no proof. While the pro-Western revolutions emerged in the backyard –in Ukraine and Georgia— Putin's attitude against the West continued to surge.

## Chapter 8 - The Kremlin issued a slush fund for its own benefit and to aid operations overseas.

While Yukos broke up and lost its assets to the Kremlin in 2004, Putin continued to gain power by other transactions.

State-controlled Gazprom's company, Sogaz, had its shares sold to three companies for low prices. These companies later turned out to be linked to Bank Rossiya. Bank Rossiya, based in St. Petersburg, was the bastion of Yury Kovalchuk. And as can be guessed, Kovalchuk was a Putin ally.

The transfers from Gazprom helped Bank Rossiya to become a great authority in terms of finances. The Kremlin was free to benefit from it whenever it desired.

The brand-new obschak was mostly used for Putin and his KGB cronies to become richer. It provided them with enough money to build luxurious mansions. Putin's mansion was four thousand square meters large, with three helipads, a marina, and a teahouse.

But personal enrichment wasn't the obschak's only function. It was also used to fund political operations abroad – starting with Ukraine.

In November 2005, a year had passed since the pro-Western candidate Victor Yushchenko won the Ukrainian presidency. Russia was angered and upset by this, so it retaliated. Knowing Ukraine still depended on Russia for gas, the Kremlin threatened to hike gas prices dramatically. That is unless Ukraine agreed to a compromise deal: if Ukraine agreed to purchase more gas through a middleman company called RosUkrEnergo, gas prices would remain cheap.

Ultimately, Yushchenko agreed. RosUkrEnergo was to be granted a monopoly on all gas supplies to Ukraine, plus access to half its domestic distribution market. It would make a profit of potentially billions of dollars for the company's primary shareholder and Putin's crony, Dmitriy Firtash.

Of course, it turned out that RosUkrEnergo was little more than a front company, used to provide kickbacks to Gazprom. More than that, the deal was widely viewed as having compromised President Yushchenko. Soon after, the Ukrainian parliament passed a vote of no confidence in the government. By August 2006, the pro-Russia former presidential candidate, Victor Yanukovych, had become prime minister.

Russia's network of shady companies and slush funds was just beginning to expand internationally. Its next target was London.

## Chapter 9 - Russia started to invade London with financial strategies.

As oil prices rose, Russia experienced an era of flourishing in the early 2000s. During that time, a middle-class person was able to shop at Western malls without a problem. Restaurants in Siberia served their guests meat from New Zealand and French wine.

Such days helped Russian companies to start listing their shares on Western stock exchanges, specifically in London. The Russian companies earned more than \$4 billion in share sales in the British capital just in 2005. The Russian company had gained a mere amount of \$1.4 billion in all markets after the Soviet collapse; so, compared to those years, Russia was on the rise.

Russians were particularly interested in the London stock exchange. In contrast to the strict requirements that the New York Stock Exchange required, those of London were lax. Western people were in the belief that if Russian companies would adjust to the Western standards, which required transparency, it would put an end to shady financial schemes.

However, what they hoped were proven false as Russian companies' joining in London resulted in infiltrating the West.

This unfortunate infiltration began with the Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich. He rose to an important position in the Yeltsin era, but still showed his loyalty to Putin.

Putin requested Abramovich to go to London and buy Chelsea Football Club, a request which Abramovich accepted without any objections. Putin had cleverly thought that the Russian presence would be established best via the British sport, soccer.

During this time, the government had a 51 percent stake in various important Russian companies. Sberbank and VTB, the former Soviet trade bank were included in these companies. Westerners were able to share the remaining 49 percent of the stakes in all companies.

The cash flow attracted Londoners rapidly. They failed to see the lack of democracy in Russia. Even now, Russian cash in the London stock comes from offshore front companies. Russians keep spending money freely for London real estate brokers while the lawyers and bankers are busy servicing the Russian oligarchs' billions of dollars.

Thanks to the London stock exchange, Russia was able to grow its financial strength in the West. The next move was to start political schemes.

## Chapter 10 - Russia created a proxy war against the West using Ukraine.

Putin's second term came to an end in 2008 and Dmitry Medvedev rose to the status of the presidency. The majority of Westerners wished to see him bring back a free market system to Russia. His cooperativeness with the Western presidents brought the hope that Russia returned to liberalism.

However, the initial period of Medvedev's presidency quickly put an end to these hopes. In August 2008, Russia started a military attack on the republic of Georgia, a Western-leaning former Soviet country. This abolished the chance of joining NATO for Russia. Medvedev also extended the period of the presidency from four years to six years for his successor. These events already signaled the fact that Putin would be the next president of Russia. And he would extend his political power even more.

After Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, he quickly went back to continue his financial plans. But Russia's economy was on the decline. Oil price growth was declining. Businesspeople were hesitant to invest in oil, especially when they were susceptible to be raided, threatened, or jailed at any moment. Instead of making reforms to better the situation, Putin kept following his goal of imperial expansion.

In February 2014, Russia requested that Ukraine reject its pro-Western ideology. Russia threatened to start a war against Ukraine if they didn't comply. On February 27, masked soldiers with no military badges raided the Crimean parliament. A Russian flag was hoisted onto the building's roof. This event resulted in a referendum to decide if Crimea would join Russia. A noticeable majority of Crimean people voted in favor.

Europe and the US forced sanctions that were aimed at Putin's inner circle as the result of Crimea joining Russia. Yet they weren't enough to soothe the conflict in Ukraine, which was spreading to eastern areas as well. Russian soldiers –or "volunteers" as Russia called

them—were working in collaboration with local pro-Russia militants. Putin didn't admit that these volunteers had been Russian troops until the complete annexation of Crimea. The death count from the war was as high as 13,000; a quarter of those had been common people.

The war in eastern Ukraine following the annexation of Crimea was just a proxy war against the West. The events worked as signs that warned the West about the havoc Russia was about to create.

## Chapter 11 - The annexation of Crimea helped Putin to keep funneling money and culture into the West.

During the 2000s and 2010s, Putin and his fellowmen were funneling black money into the West. They did that through complicated money-laundering schemes.

Some of them were via offshore companies, which got their payments funneled via the tycoons linked to Putin. Other schemes included shell companies; they put their signatures on fake loan agreements among themselves. Those agreements were manipulated to flow money out of Russia. Mirror trades helped investors to purchase stocks in Russian rubles while companies who appeared to be unrelated to Russian stocks sold the same amount of stock via Deutsche Bank in London.

With such ploys, Russia funneled cash into the West. But cash wasn't the only thing Putin wished to spread. He also wanted to spread culture.

George Soros's Open Society, along with other Western NGOs, tries to share the principles of liberalism, democracy, and human rights all around the globe. Influenced by organizations like Soros's Open Society, Putin's KGB men started to establish their own NGOs. The difference was: KGB wished to expand the ideology of Russian Orthodoxy. Their organization emphasized the importance of tradition, loyalty to the state, and intolerance of homosexuality.

For this purpose, both official money and unofficial money were used to establish a net of agencies. These agencies were used to promote the Russian language and culture besides supporting the Kremlin's version of global occurrences. The same money was spent for Russian Cossack paramilitary youth camps, a group of bikers named the Night Wolves, and Foundation of Saint Vasily the Great, which aimed to share Orthodox values on the surface. But in reality, they funded Kremlin supporters in Ukraine.

In addition to expanding the specific features of Russian culture via NGOs, Putin's men used the slush funds to aid anti-establishment parties on the extreme left and right in Europe. Particular examples of these were seen in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Austria.

By implementing extremism in the said countries, Russia's goal was to make the European Union lose its strength and to be free from the sanctions against Russia. In a short time, KGB's focus shifted from these countries to bigger Western European countries like France,

Germany, and Italy. In the UK, Russian cash flowed into Tory coffers. Nikolai Patrushev, the security chief of Russia, developed an amicable friendship with Boris Johnson. Johnson was advocating for Brexit, a campaign that would weaken the EU.

Soon, the US started to be the center of attention for Russia with Donald Trump.

## Chapter 12 - Donald Trump became Russia's support system in the US.

Long before Donald Trump expressed his plan to run for the presidency, he had relations with Russians.

His relations began with an antique smuggler named Shalva Tchigirinsky, who was believed to be related to the organized crime group named Solntsevskaya. The two met for the first time at the Taj Mahal in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Tchigirinsky was astonished by the casino's glamorous nature.

There were numerous other men related to the KGB that worked with Trump for money-related schemes. These dealings began in the 1990s.

During the 1990s and 2000s, Trump developed a close relationship with the Russian businessmen who migrated to the US. He met these people in his Taj Mahal casino. Once, emigrants Felix Sater and Tevfik Arif suggested they fund and build a series of luxury developments for Trump. In exchange, they used the projects to get cash into the US.

This led to numerous other people offering projects to Trump, but the majority of them failed to actualize their projects. Still, as Trump announced that he was to run for the presidency, the Russian people worked up their dealings with him. Sater contacted Trump's lawyer, Michael Cohen, to offer to build a Trump Tower in Moscow. Sater wrote: "I will get Putin on this program and we will get Donald elected."

Trump's family started to become involved as well. In June 2016, Donald Trump Jr., Trump's son, was contacted by an English journalist. The journalist told Donald Jr. that he knew a lawyer in Moscow who would be able to find dirt on Hillary Clinton. This caught the attention of Donald Jr. At first, the offer didn't seem to work well, yet, in the middle of June 2016, a group of Russian hackers named Guccifer 2.0 hacked the computer servers of the Democratic National Convention. Just a month before the election, emails that John Podesta, Clinton's campaign chairman, had sent were released by WikiLeaks.

When the Russian parliament was informed that Trump had won the presidency, the entire building was delighted with the news.

Though they were happy that Trump had won the election, it was not as if Russia managed to plan a scheme to put a KGB-controlled candidate in the White House. Still, the fact that Trump had won was a win in itself for Russians. Trump's populism and separatist speeches have created a sense of discontent among Americans; he argued against NATO and he was a supporter of Brexit. Such policies of Trump helped Putin and KGB cronies.

## Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took On the West by Catherine Belton Book Review

The KGB acted as the main controlling force for the Russian economy during the Soviet Union period. In the 1990s, a group of young oligarchs gained power and weakened the force of the KGB. But with Vladimir Putin's presidency, the former KGB agents regained control of Russian business and politics. During his years as the president of Russia, Putin weakened the democratic system by maintaining control over the media and other industries. He aimed to advance in his nation's imperial mission and create an area of conflict in the West.

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