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The Opinion Pages | OP-ED COLUMNIST

# Fake Putin Diary!

David Brooks FEB. 24, 2014

Dear Diary,

I am surrounded by idiots. I create the greatest Olympics in human history. The Russian team I selected wins the medal count. I do all this while propping up Assad in Syria and sexting half the athletes in the Olympic Village. Meanwhile, that tool Yanukovych can't even manage to keep himself in power in Kiev.

Why is it that every autocrat but me is always a day late and a dollar short? They try to be a little nice and a little nasty and they end up outraging everybody while intimidating nobody. Yanukovych was ridiculous with his zoo and his rare goats. His son the dentist won 50 percent of all the government contracts issued last January. People like that give kleptocracy a bad name.

That yutz has created two giant vulnerabilities for me, a regional one and a domestic one. My entire worldview is based on the idea that societies exist in one of two states: centralized control or terrorism and chaos. My life project has been to impose top-down order so Russia can return to its former grandeur.

Regionally, that's meant reconstituting the Russian empire with a Eurasian Union. Domestically, it's meant restoring the legitimacy of autocratic rule.

The bandits in Ukraine have suddenly called both into question. With no Ukraine in my orbit, I've got no empire. I've got no Eurasian project. Meanwhile, it

wasn't nice to see an autocrat get toppled just next door. It sets a bad example for the children (my subjects).

Suddenly, I find myself in a moment of extreme vulnerability. Fortunately, I've got one of the greatest leaders in human history on my side: myself.

Machiavelli was right. Fortune is a woman; only the audacious win her love. That's why my technique has always been to create facts on the ground. Act first, while everyone else dithers. Force them to react to my reality. That's why I alone am Mr. Big on the world stage. Heroes drive history, and I will not be ignored!

The naïve Westerners (forgive the redundancy) think Ukraine is about democratic ideals, or whether the country will turn West or East. Please. There is no room for ideals in my worldview. People are motivated by money and fear.

First, I'm going to evict the Westerners from Ukraine. I liked it better when the West conquered countries with the 82nd Airborne; now they just use the I.M.F. Fortunately, as one expert put it, they always bring a baguette to a knife fight. The West will not actually spend the money necessary to keep Ukraine out of bankruptcy. They won't want to hand it over to corrupt officials who will immediately ship it to London.

I'll just outbid them. Ukraine is out of money, and countries with no money have no choices. They are going to have to put themselves up for sale, and I've shown I'm willing to pay a higher price.

Moreover, the country has the same politico-economic system as Mother Russia. Something like 80 percent of the economy is controlled by the oligarchs. If the current oligarchs don't do what I want, I just replace them with some nice Russian ones. Some politicians are good at organizing coalitions. I'm good at organizing corruption.

Then I'll insinuate myself and manipulate electoral reform law. I can squeeze them with oil and gas supplies. I'm already enlisting Russian troops to preserve the Crimea. If the country threatens to split up, there's always the Georgia solution.

Send in the troops. The West won't like it, but what will they do? If they try to hurt me, I'll stop cooperating on Syria, Iran and the places that really matter to them.

Dealing with my domestic vulnerability just takes a little productive paranoia. I've already shut down civil society step by step. I've even banned independent pollsters and persecuted officials who fought corruption. (Yes, that's right. I've made honesty a crime.) Recent events call for another round of crackdowns. Will my crackdown spark a violent reaction I can't now anticipate? In less deft hands that might happen, but, remember, I am me.

It's easy to govern when you've got the winds of history at your back. I've got the wolves of chaos growling in my face. Capital flight is accelerating. The ruble is devaluing. Social media, the youth culture, the tides of mass protest, democracy and capitalism undermine the authoritarian mind-set.

Yet I impose my will with the beauty of gold and the wisdom of sapphire. I don't "evolve," as everybody suggests. Evolution leads to chaos. I learned that from Gorby!

The events of the 1990s gave the world one narrative, the Velvet Revolution narrative. But I'm going to teach another narrative: that what begins with people massing in a city square ends with a strongman triumphing in a palace. In my own way, I will define this age.

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