

**“Vladimir Putin: A Life” OLLI Spring 2024**

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**Lecture 1: Overview**

# Outline of Course

**April 3: Time-line of career → Images of Putin among foreign observers**

**April 10: His childhood, adolescence, and pre-presidential career: 1952-1999**

**April 17: President Putin, 2000-2008; President Medvedev, 2008-2012**

**April 24: President Putin, 2012-2020**

**May 1: The War Against Ukraine, 2020-present**

**May 8: Possible Russian Futures**

# **Speaking about Putin: The Risks of Being Misunderstood---by both sides**

# Short bibliography

- Philip Short, *Putin* (2023)
- Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar* (2015)
- Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West* (2022)
- Maeve McQuillan, Audible Original (a BBC production), *Deputy Mayor Putin* (2024)
- Quotes from or about Putin in my slides are cited, in case you wish to track down sources and conduct further research of your own. If no author name supplied, the page number is from Short's long biography.

# Key Stages of Putin's Career

**Born October 7, 1952 in Leningrad**

**1970: Enters Leningrad State University to pursue an undergraduate degree in Law Faculty**

**1975: offered and accepts job in KGB in Leningrad, at rank of "junior lieutenant"; trained to monitor dissidents**

**1979-1984: Transferred within KGB to surveillance and recruitment of foreign nationals**

**1985-1990: Posted to KGB station in Dresden, East Germany: surveillance and recruitment of foreigners. Experiences collapse of East German state, November 1989**

- **1990-1996: Returns to Leningrad. Ends up being a high-level public administrator and Deputy Mayor of the city.**
- **1996-1998: recruited to administrative positions in the Moscow bureaucracy, largely focused on negotiating center-regional relations concerning property management.**
- **1998: appointed head of the FSB (successor to the KGB)**
- **August 1999: appointed prime minister**
- **December 31, 1999: Yeltsin resigns; Putin becomes Acting President, pending elections in March 2000.**

- **March 2000: Putin wins presidential election with 53% of vote.**
- **2000-2004: first presidential term**
- **2004-2008: second presidential term**
- **2008-2012: Putin becomes prime minister, Medvedev becomes president (the two flip jobs, due to constitutional limit of two consecutive terms for president).**

- **2012-2018: third presidential term; Constitution revised to provide for six-year terms**
- **2018-2024: fourth presidential term; constitution revised to allow him to keep running through 2036.**
- **2024: Putin “wins” fifth presidential term**
- **All presidential elections except that in 2000 were rigged.**



- Now let's re-review his life, but in photos

# Putin as early teenager

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4970092>



# Putin as KGB officer ~1980 (age ~28)

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4970092>





## 1983, Marriage of Vladimir (age ~31) and Lyudmila

- By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4970134>

Zumapress.com/ Australscope



# Putin ID card in Dresden, 1985 (age 33)

By Ministerium für Staatssicherheit der DDR - <https://www.welt.de/geschichte/article185363524/Wladimir-Putins-Stasi-Dienstausweis-Die-Maskirowka.html>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=116058026>

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**DEPUTY MAYOR OF ST.  
PETERSBURG (age ~43);  
VALIDIMIR PUTIN WITH  
U.S. TEAM WORKING ON  
CONVERSION OF  
RUSSIAN MIL'Y  
INDUSTRY, 1995** Courtesy of  
Harold Smith





# Putin as FSB Director, 1998; age ~46

By Ministerium für Staatssicherheit der DDR -  
<https://www.welt.de/geschichte/article185363524/Wladimir-Putins-Stasi-Dienstausweis-Die-Maskirowka.html>,  
Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=116058026>



# December 1999, Yeltsin leaves office, Putin becomes interim president (age 47)

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5385425>



# With Pope John Paul II, June 2000

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5117081>



# President Putin with Russia's Religious Leaders, 2001



By Kremlin.ru, CC BY  
4.0,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5311072>

# Putin and Lyudmila in NYC, 2001, at service to commemorate 9/11 victims

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5320439>



- **Has he smiled yet? Maybe a Mona Lisa smile in 1998.....**
- **Russian culture?**
- **Personality?**
- **KGB training?**
- **Circumstances?**

**Occasions to smile:**

# Putin, Berlusconi and Bush, 2002 (age ~50)

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5334419>



# 2005 Victory Day Parade, with foreign leaders

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4921836> (Age 52)





# Putin and Wife Meet British Royalty, 2005

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=103436779>



# **Political Image-Making**

# Putin in Japan, 2000, practicing his judo (age ~48)

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5292499>



# Image-Making: 2005 in Tuva (age ~53)

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4920751>



# Image-Making: Relaxing in Siberia (no date)

By Kremlin.ru



# Driving a race-car, 2010 (age ~58)

By premier.gov.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18607291>



**Getting Serious with the West:  
No point in smiling**

# Putin speech to Munich Security Conference, 2007

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5028047>





# 2007 with Angela Merkl (note dog)

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5540208>





Meeting with leaders of Ukraine, France, and Germany to discuss the Ukrainian situation, October **2014**  
By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=36263746>



Meeting with Obama and teams to discuss Syria and ISIS, 2015

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=43927422>

# 2018 Summit with Trump in Helsinki

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=70906985>



# Video call with Joe Biden, December 2021

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=113155333>

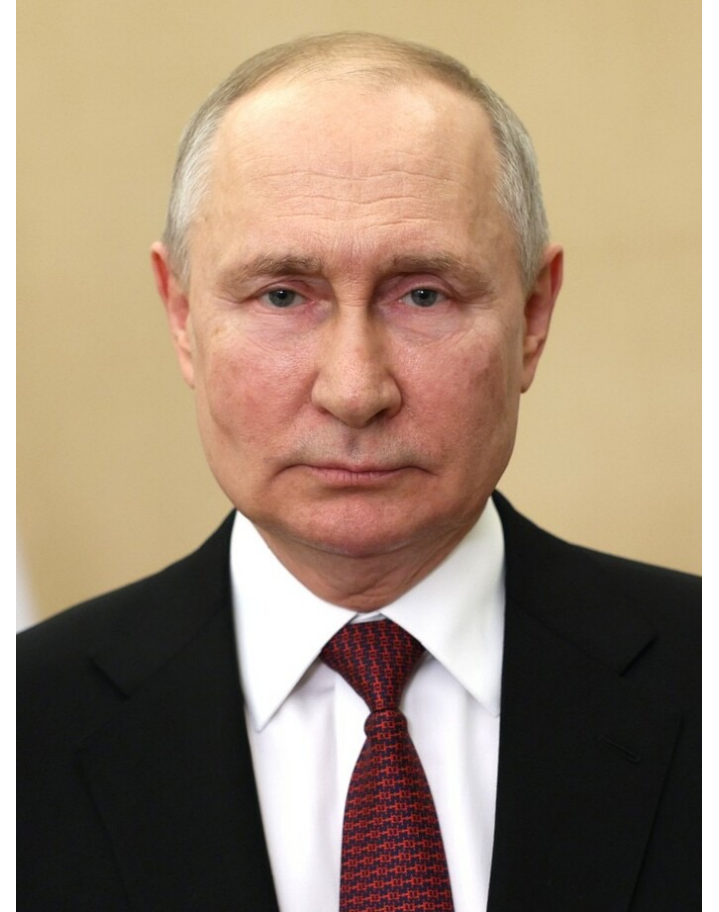


By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=133458398>

**Putin 1998 (age~46)**



**Putin 2023 (age ~71)**



**Prevailing questions to be addressed in this course: to what extent were Putin's domestic and foreign policies as president (2000-present) a product of:**

- a. Personality formed during 1952-1970?**
- b. KGB training and work during 1975-1990?**
- c. Public administration work during 1990-2000?**
- d. Reactions to circumstances at home and abroad, 1990-present?**

# Basically two images of Putin in Western depictions

- **Few deny he's an autocrat, increasingly repressive at home over time.**
- **But major dispute in realm of foreign policy:**
  - Pragmatic, but increasingly aggrieved, statesman?**
  - Demonic Russian imperialist?**



# Putin speech to Munich Security Conference, 2007

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5028047>

Aggrieved statesman:



- **Found mostly in: *The Nation*, “American Committee for US-Russia Accord,” “David Johnson’s Russia List.”**



**Putin as demonic Russian imperialist**

**[These photos precede the 2022 invasion of Ukraine]**

**Found in: most mainstream media**

**Advocates of the demonic image foreground the cruelty of his autocratic domestic policies, and his thuggish rhetoric and behavior when provoked:**

**Increasingly authoritarian and repressive policies at home:  
Rigged elections; abolish politicized NGOs; kill or imprison  
opponents and critics, at home and abroad; Navalny;  
Prigozhin (Wagner Group); laws against gays;  
Kleptocratic plutocracy; personal enrichment  
Cult of his personality: Mafia don**

# **Evidence invoked for the demonic image, in foreign relations:**

**Interference in US elections of 2016**

**Aggression abroad: in Georgia (2008); Syria, 2015; gas and heat wars with neighbors; crashing of internet sites in Baltics; Ukraine (pressure) → Crimea →:**

**Invasion of Ukraine, 2022 → war crimes in means of prosecution; tacit alliances with Iran, N. Korea and China; fascist-like mobilization.**

**Quote: “The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”**

# **Evidence invoked for the aggrieved statesman image:**

**Tendency to acknowledge but downplay the extent and cruelty of his repression. Treat him as a balancer of interests within the political elite. Or treat him as restoring order after 1990s and after 2002-2004 terrorist attacks. Or suggest that some assassinations were not ordered by him. But still acknowledge that his regime is highly authoritarian and repressive.**

**But in foreign policy, the emphasis is on his reactions to alleged US provocation (“aggrieved statesman”)**

**Seeks US partnership to combat terror already in 2000**

**The many Russian 9/11’s in late 1990s and early 2000s**

**Bush withdrawal from ABM**

**US invasion of Iraq, 2003**

**Bush and anti-missile infrastructure in Poland and Czecho**

**Expansion of NATO into the Baltics, 2004**

# Aggrieved statesman image, cont'd

**Kosovo, 1999 and 2008**

**Libya, 2011**

**Western support for “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine (2004)**

**Western support (2008) for Ukrainian and Georgian eventual membership in NATO**

**Western support for Ukrainian revolution of 2014; Western sanctions**

**Fear of democracy on borders by FSU states (“Near Abroad”)**

**US hypocrisy re own culpability and accountability (“The American Empire of Lies”)**

**Quote: “He who does not regret the collapse of the USSR lacks a heart; he who thinks it can be recreated lacks a brain”**



- **“Demonic Russian imperialist”**: never give him the benefit of the doubt.
- **“Aggrieved statesman”**: often give him the benefit of the doubt.

- **I believe that both images contain some truth. And each of them co-evolved over time, creating the man that Putin is today: a demonic Russian imperialist (based on how he is prosecuting the war in Ukraine). But was he always such? And if not, how did he come to be this way?**
- **So, in coming lectures I will trace the evolution of Putin's personality, beliefs, and (revealed) emotions as his early life, career, and presidencies unfolded.**

- **Note: My “evolutionary” approach avoids the tendency to cite his most-recent outrages and to insist that he was always thus.**
- **But my approach also assumes that early personality and KGB training did strongly influence his reactions to world events.**
- **So the question ultimately becomes a “counterfactual”: had world events been different, would his behavior have been less outrageous?**